

Mennonite Historian

Gerhard Johann Klassen, 1903-1965 : Reflections on a difficult life

by John G. Klassen

Gerhard Johann (1903–1965) left a number of handwritten journals and sermons. His son, John G. Klassen, translated one of his father's journals—a red-covered, lined exercise book or "scribbler," numbering eighty-four pages. Recently, John deposited at the Centre for MB Studies his translation and these reflections on his father's life, which he described as "difficult, but significant." Below are some excerpts from that journal and from John's reflections. Editors.

While reading the German of my father's journal from 1936, I found myself on familiar ground, because in my memory, all our communication was in German. Even though this was in written form, I could well imagine him expressing himself orally in these sentences. The person who had written this material was truly the same one I remembered through to 1965. Certainly, he had changed, gradually and moderately, but there was coherence throughout that made him unmistakably my father.

In my reflections on my father's life, I will try to recall events or communications that might augment or clarify the written material that I studied and translated.

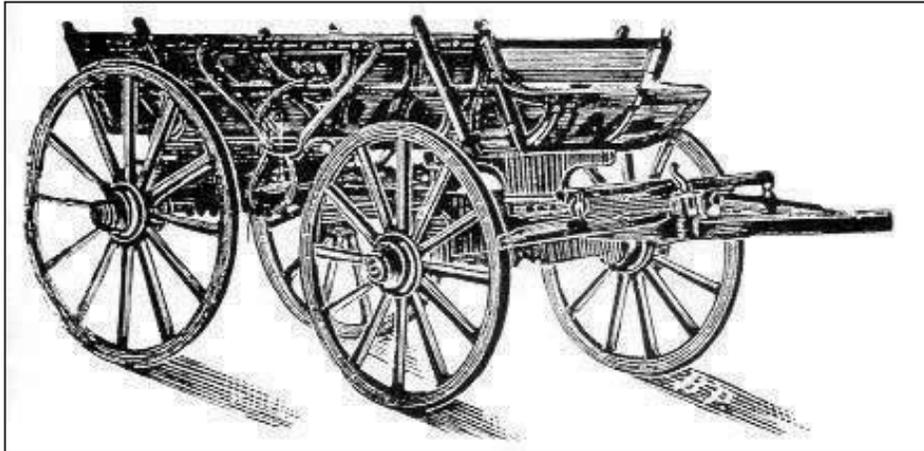
GJK's early years, 1903–1927, were spent in the Russian town of Barwenkovo. He was part of a large Mennonite family; his father was a partner in a manufacturing business. They

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Gerhard Johann Klassen (1903-1965)

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



Russian Mennonite Wagons in Manitoba

by Bruce Wiebe

Our Mennonite ancestors who immigrated to Canada from Russia during the 1870s brought with them some of their prized possessions. It has been noted that among them were Kroeger clocks and wooden chests. Surprisingly however, forwarded by some families in their freight was a most unlikely item of significant weight and bulk, their Russian Mennonite wagon.

It is known that once in Canada many families acquired wagons through Jacob Y. Schantz of Ontario, while others purchased in Manitoba from retailers such as the Hudson Bay Company at Emerson. While shipping their wagon from Russia was not cheap, it was an option chosen by some. Some details are available for 1875 arrivals on the West Reserve. Among those who shipped their wagons to Manitoba from Russia were Jacob Siemens, Abraham Hiebert Senior, Abraham Hiebert Junior, David Wolfe, Jacob Toews, Abraham Enns, Wilhelm Fehr, and Peter Peters, all of Cass County, Dakota Territory, Isaac Miller of Neuhorst and Abraham Friesen of Schoenwiese, both of the West Reserve,

and Jacob Pries of Gnadenfeld, East Reserve. Precise measurements in cubic feet and inches recorded that Jacob Siemens' 2 wagons had a volume of 82 feet 3 inches, David Wolfe's wagon was 39 feet 5 inches, and Jacob Toews' was 41 feet 1 inch.

Freight costs were calculated as follows: From Chortitza to Odessa a standard 6 Ruble 50 Kopecks per wagon, from Odessa to Constantinople 17 Kopecks per cubic foot, and from Constantinople to Manitoba \$1.29 per cubic foot.

Abraham Friesen who arrived in 1875 from Nieder Chortitz, Russa and settled at Schoenwiese, Manitoba was assessed freight for his wagon of \$52.31 from Constantinople plus 6 Rubles 85 Kopecks, from Odessa to Constantinople, and another 6 Rubles 50 Kopecks from Nieder Chortitz to Odessa. Financial accounting by the West Reserve Gebietsamt recorded the above plus the 25 Rubles he prepaid, converted all Ruble entries to dollars, deducted a small rebate for the cubic volume rate, and his actual cost approximated \$57.50.

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Reflections on G.J. Klassen

(cont'd from p. 1)

were no longer in the typical farming life of most Mennonites in Russia.

When GJK began this journal, he was thirty-two years old. He had immigrated to Canada in 1927, had experienced financial hardship, had married Helena Froese (1903–1995) on March 7, 1930, had two children, John and Sarah, and had tried to do evangelization work among Russians in Manitoba with little success. All the while his main interest remained spiritual. At the time that he began his journal, he had shifted his focus from Russian evangelistic work to addressing the spiritual needs he saw in the Christians around him.

From GJK's journal, writing about the events of summer 1933:

I felt inner growth and that the Lord was preparing me for the hardest move of my life: leaving the "Brethren Church." I had earlier learned from material by Rev. Jakob Reimer that the church's rules are not scriptural and result in hypocrisy. This interpretation is opposed by some, but I believe that the Mennonite Brethren Church's stand on rules has become a total fiasco.

In sounding out Bro. A. Peters and other brethren whom I regarded well, I learned that no one supported my stand against the church. I was viewed as a heretic; even my dearest drew back from me. I cannot describe what I went through inwardly, but the Lord stood by me and filled me with a joy I hadn't felt before.

After my attitude toward the MB church had become established in me, I decided to suspend my efforts among Russians and rather visit various churches with my message.

With all of the tumult of that time, my wife became sick. Consequently, we moved to her parents' home on a farm at Manitou on May 1, 1933. She was bedridden for two months. This was a very hard time of humiliation and we learned not to lean on human beings, but to lift up our eyes to the hills for help.

When my wife had recovered to where she could manage the children, we moved to the nearby home of her brother, Peter Froese, and I set out on my previously planned journey. Meanwhile, I had received the reply from my dear friend, I.G. Neufeld, saying that he would not accompany me.

So, then I started out on my bicycle, while my wife cried and the children looked innocently on. The others regarded me coldly. But the Lord filled my heart with assurance and calmness, and I learned in that summer the meaning of Hebrews 11:5, where it says of Enoch, "he had pleased God."

At Morden I met and spoke with acquaintances, Frank Friesen and Braun. They lacked the trust in God to turn from the church and so I departed. I was seen as

one full of wild ideas. Later, in Winkler, I fortunately was able to converse at length with my former teacher, Bro. A.H. Unruh. We both agreed on the end goal, the unity of the children of God, but disagreed on how this might be achieved. He held that it should grow out from within the organization. His words and his influence nearly swayed me, but the Lord helped me and showed me more of the destructive nature of the organization. So, I stated my disagreement and left.

GJK's intense lifelong preoccupation with spiritual things may well have been rooted in several circumstances of his youth. His parents, or his grandparents, experienced a religious upheaval when they joined the Mennonite Brethren church, leaving the larger group of relatives in the *Kirchengemeinde*. The MBs stressed *Bekehrung* or personal conversion as a critical necessity for all, even children. Father later told of being struck with a serious kidney ailment in his early teens. Fearing for his spiritual future, he committed his life to God for devotion and service, if he survived. This commitment never left him. Perhaps his introspective, serious temperament also stems from this time. A much younger nephew recalls seeing GJK in his later years driving along the street. According to the nephew, "Uncle George looked straight ahead, deep in thought."

The Klassen family that immigrated to Canada was headed by an old father and four adult sons, who were now seen as the leaders of the family. The traditional patriarchal mindset was still in evidence.

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The sons all named one of their sons (usually the eldest) after their father, John. The two oldest sons, Jakob and Gerhard, had many arguments over whose philosophy or notion of truth would prevail in the family. Respect for the elders was also the chief reason that father and the older family members insisted on preserving the German language in the home and in the church.

Of the ten Klassen siblings that came to Winnipeg in 1926–1927, most stayed settled in the area. Except for some of the sisters, they married, raised families, and lived the rest of their lives in Winnipeg. They were a harmonious group.

My recollections really only go back to the late 1930s, when father moved us to a farm about 40 miles north of Winnipeg. There we lived during the time of my elementary school years. In my childhood there was limited access to age-appropriate diversions. We were a small family in an isolated location with almost no media presence. I soon acquired an interest in listening in on the conversation of adults, as they talked among themselves. Being a shy person, I found I could learn much about adulthood, a stage to which I aspired, without the risk of participating.

I think I was unique in this (passive) activity, because I haven't seen many with quite the same practice. Still, I gained some memorable quotes from the distant past by my listening habit. Immigrants from Eastern Europe, like father, were quite suspicious of the social "liberty" in the new country. Sometimes, when learning of someone's misdeed, the immigrant would snort, "Ya, it's a free country." Another freedom they didn't really like was the idea that everyone could question everything. Once, when father was referring to education of children, he commented, "when you ask a young person a question, he will always end his reply with the questioning upturn in tone; he knows nothing for sure."

GJK did not have an ebullient nature. Rather, he was serious and appeared almost melancholy. Several factors contributed to his state of mind, I believe: 1) Father lived a life well-acquainted with poverty. Before, during, and after the Great Depression of the 1930s, he lived a life of hard toil and worry about indebtedness.

2) The evangelistic work that he saw as his holy calling was not successful; he had to suspend it in favour of earning a living.

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Mennonite Genealogy Search Engine

Michael Penner has recently launched a Mennonite genealogy search engine at <http://mennotree.com>. This search engine attempts a fairly thorough indexing of www.mennonitegenealogy.com. He writes:

"There is no official way on my site to just hone in on www.mennonitegenealogy.com results (at least not yet), but I put in a backdoor for this, to see how it compares against Google. The biggest plus as compared to Google, is that MennoTree analyzes a web page by isolating individual records, so it won't in general return a result based on one person's first name and someone else's surname."

"There are smaller differences as well. If your last name is Isaac or Abraham, this is the site for you! In general, the MennoTree engine is given enough human instruction to be able to distinguish first from last names, and give much better results than a generic engine."

"MennoTree has grouped results by category (like Ancestry.com), there is a green "Narrow by Category" menu that appears with the search results."

"I went through almost every www.mennonitegenealogy.com page, with the engine reporting lines where it couldn't find surname or first name matches, so over hundreds of web pages, a custom set of soundex codes has emerged, matching how Mennonite names actually appear on the internet. There are over 50 ways on the internet for spelling Sawatzky, many of these variants only found on www.mennonitegenealogy.com."

"The scope of MennoTree, however, is far greater than the www.mennonitegenealogy.com site which represents less than 8% of the names indexed in MennoTree (198,914 out of 2,583,117). MennoTree intends to index the best Mennonite genealogy sources from across the internet."

Send feedback to Michael Penner at pennermi@hotmail.com.

Recent Books

Margarete Pasytsch. [part of] *Schönwiese: Ein deutsches Dorf in Sibirien* (Gummersbach, Germany: Margaret Pasytsch Schmidt, 2010) pages 1-140.

The table of contents of this publication shows that it consists of two sections – one focusing on the Wilhelm Giesbrecht family and the other on the Johann B. Unruh family. What we have recently received, compliments of Glenn Penner, is only the section dealing with the Giesbrecht family.

The author begins the family history with Nikolai W. Giesbrecht (1874-1934) who was born in the Molotschna and later lived in the Mennonite settlement at Ufa. From there he moved to Siberia in 1909 with his children and 2nd wife, Anna Unruh (1883-1919), settling in the Slavgorad settlement, and was one of the founding pioneers of the village of Schönwiese. After his wife died shortly after the birth of another child, Nikolai Giesbrecht married Susanne Geddert, who not only helped raise his 9 children, but also gave birth to another 5 children with Nikolai. This manuscript includes much information about the development of the settlement and this family, including numerous photographs and other illustrations

If you have recently published a genealogy or family history book, please send us a complimentary copy and it will get noted. – ed.

Queries



Can you identify the people in this photo? Contact: Francis Dyck, 10-200 Ronald St. Winnipeg, MB R3J 3J3

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

On The Ancestry of Early Mennonite Brethren Minister Gerhard Wiebe (1847 – 1934)

by Glenn Penner

Gerhard Wiebe (1847 – 1934) was an important leader in the early Mennonite Brethren church in Manitoba. His life has been documented several times. [1] In the past I, and probably several others, have unsuccessfully attempted to determine the ancestry of Gerhard Wiebe. According to family sources he was born in Waldorf, West Prussia. Assuming that this is correct, his family would have been members of the Mennonite church at Rosenort, West Prussia. Unfortunately the Rosenort church records were destroyed in a fire in 1812 and again by a flood in 1855 or 1856. The surviving records were started in 1858, after the death of Gerhard's father (estimated to be around 1851). However, in 1800 the Prussian government required that all Mennonite vital records (births, marriages and deaths) be kept by the state church, which was the Evangelical Lutheran church. The village of Waldorf was in the parish of the Jungfer Lutheran church and some information on the family of Gerhard Wiebe can be found in the Jungfer records. These records were started in 1798 and have survived to this day. [2]

According to these records Gerhard Wiebe was born on March 2, 1847 in Waldorf, West Prussia, in agreement with family records. His father, Johann Wiebe, died on May 24, 1852 in Waldorf at the age of 35 years. This places his birth at about 1817. He was an "Einl. Zimmerman", which I assume means *Einlieger Zimmerman*, a carpenter. He was survived by his widow Sara Martens and children Helena, Johann, Gerhard and Catharina. In these records surviving children are usually listed in order of birth. Interestingly, there is no mention of daughter Sarah who is included in family records. [3] Also added in different handwriting is the word *Russland*, presumably indicating that this family later moved to Russia. The Jungfer records also include the marriage of Gerhard's parents: on 10 May 1840 Johann Wiebe surviving son of Johann Wiebe and Helena Schroeder of Robach married the widow Sara Güre, born Martens, widow of Peter Güre of

(cont'd on p. 9)

Partnership in Congo DRC

by Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

Mennonite mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo has been a partnership from its inception—long before “partnership” was a fashionable missiologistical concept.

The first two Mennonites in Congo were two North American women serving with other denominations. Mathilda Kohm began ministry in 1896 through the Christian and Missionary Alliance and Alma Doering in 1900 through the Swedish Baptist Mission. Returning to the United States on furlough in 1906, Doering met William Sheppard, an African-American medical doctor serving with a Presbyterian mission and a strong voice in exposing the atrocities of Belgium’s King Leopold in Congo. During a sea voyage, Doering and Sheppard spent hours exploring strategies for sharing the gospel in Congo.

Their discussions bore fruit six years later, when two mission-minded Mennonite denominations called Sheppard to a meeting in Illinois, USA,

where he passionately described the need for missionaries in south central Congo and invited the Mennonites to respond.

Both Mennonite churches were led by men of Amish background, who had experienced personal renewal and a commitment to Jesus’ call to discipleship. Henry Egli of the Defenseless Mennonites (today’s Fellowship of Evangelical Churches) and Joseph Stucky of the Central Illinois Conference of Mennonites had already joined hands to reach out to the society around them.

In 1912, following Sheppard’s plea for mission workers, they formed the Congo Inland Mission, commissioning Lawrence and Rose Boehning Haigh, for ministry in Congo. They were soon joined by Alvin Stevenson. The three missionaries threw themselves into hard manual labor to construct shelters and struggled to communicate in the Tshiluba language in two villages along the Kasai River, Ndjoko Punda and Kalamba. The effort took its toll and, before the year ended, Stevenson was buried in Ndjoko Punda, far from his widow and three children in America.

Over the past century, Congo Inland Mission, today’s Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, sent hundreds of missionaries to eight mission stations that laid the foundations for Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCO, Mennonite Church of Congo), the largest of Congo’s three Mennonite denominations.

Aaron and Ernestina Janzen also went to Congo in 1912. After serving two terms with Congo Inland Mission, they moved to Kafumba in the Kikwit area and developed a coffee plantation to help support a new ministry. This became the first of six Mennonite Brethren mission stations, and was the seed from which the Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo (CEFMC, Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo) grew.

Violence erupted in

1960 when Congo declared independence from 80 years of Belgium colonization. Fearing for their lives and under pressure from their embassies, missionaries handed keys to buildings and cars to the Congolese who were being trained for church leadership. Then, the missionaries fled from Congo.

From this emergency transfer of power, there was no turning back. As North American missionaries began to return, Congolese leaders consistently sat on committees and made decisions alongside their North American colleagues. Meanwhile, near the Tshikapa mission station in Kasai Occidental (West Kasai), conflict between long-established “Lulua” people and Luba migrants from farther east, turned bloody.

In contrast, Congolese Mennonites emphasized a message of Jesus’ love that unites all people into one family. That Matthieu Kazadi Lukuna, the first Mennonite Church of Congo president, was of Luba ancestry, leading congregations of many different ethnic groups had not been a problem up to this time of unrest.

Although Kazadi had a wide reputation as a peacemaker, his attempts in the post-independence conflict were unsuccessful. He was eventually forced to lead hundreds of Luba Mennonite refugees back to Mbuji Mayi, the area of their origins in Kasai Oriental (East Kasai).

Though the Luba refugees tried to maintain ties with the Mennonite headquarters in West Kasai, the polarized political climate and the difficulties of travel and communication made this unworkable. By the end of 1962, Kazadi became the president of Congo’s third Mennonite denomination, Communauté Évangélique Mennonite au Congo (CEM, Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo).

Despite the violence of the 1960s, Mennonite educational and medical institutions flourished. During this decade, CMCO’s leaders proposed that since the church in Congo was firmly planted and had able leaders, it was time for North American mission workers to serve within Congolese structures. The fusion agreement became official in 1971.

In 2004, Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission was restructured again to allow for an African locus of leadership, with African, European, and North American church bodies sitting around the decision-making table as equal partners.

Today, Congolese evangelists continue



The three Congolese Mennonite church bodies

Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCO)

(Mennonite Church of Congo)

Membership: 110,000 members in 798 congregations

Headquarters: Tshikapa

Founded: 1912

First national chairman: Matthieu Kazadi Lukuna

Primary mission partner: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission

Mission stations: Ndjoko Punda, Kalamba/Mutena,

Nyanga, Mukedi, Banga, Kalonda, Kamayala, and Kandala

Communauté des Églises des Frères Mennonites au Congo

(Mennonite Brethren Church of Congo)

Membership: 101,600 members in 874 congregations

Headquarters: Kikwit

Founded: 1921

First national chairmen: Kilabi Bululu and Kusangila

Kitondo in 1974

Primary mission partner: MB Mission

Mission stations: Kafumba, Matende, Kipungu, Masemvu,

Kajiji, and Panzi

Communauté Évangélique Mennonite au Congo

(Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo)

Membership: 23,600 members in 96 congregations

Headquarters: Mbuji Mayi

Founded: 1962 by Matthieu Kazadi Lukuna

Primary mission partner: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission

Mission stations: No mission stations, church founded

through Congolese initiatives

to Congo through Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission and its predecessor agencies as he gave an overview of Mennonite history in Congo. He spoke of paternalism, a heavy focus on the spiritual with less concern for conditions that oppressed the Congolese people, and a reluctance to trust the Congolese church with financial management.

However, Komuesa also acknowledged with gratitude these same missionaries, hundreds of them, who were faithful to God's call to share the good news of Jesus—braving sickness, a harsh climate, difficult living conditions, and political instability. Komuesa led the assembly in a moment of silence to remember all who sacrificed their lives in

obedience to Christ's call.

In his concluding address, Komuesa said, "I salute those missionaries who gave of their youth and their lives for our country. I also render homage to their descendants who are still laboring for the welfare of our church."

Missionary accomplishments were only possible because Congolese people worked hand in hand with their brothers and sisters from North America, Komuesa said.

Today, CMCO is a member of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, which brings together eight churches and agencies from Africa, Europe, and North America.

Approximately 400 participants gathered for the final worship service on Sunday, July 22. Many of them held candles lighted in celebration of the event.

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, in the second century that begins today, take care of our church," was Komuesa's wish as the candles were extinguished as a symbol of the end of CMCO's centennial anniversary.

During the week-long celebration, CMCO's story was communicated in many forms—through original songs in the tradition of *griots* (singer-

historians), through a book of short biographies of early Congolese Mennonites, through a picture show presented by François Tshidimu Mukendi, Mennonite pastor and historian, and through many examples in sermons and testimonies.

"CMCO has been doing God's work for 100 years starting in 1912," sang the Chorale Évangélique Mennonite de Dibumba (Evangelical Mennonite Choir of Dibumba). "Today, we are here to thank God. Now, we are many Mennonites. May we work in unity to spread the good news of Jesus."

In succeeding verses, the choir went on to describe how eight mission stations were built.

Although some of the mission station buildings have crumbled into disrepair, the church has thrived. Today, it includes 110,000 members, 798 congregations, 95 schools, and seven hospitals—according to a presentation given by Anastasie Tshimbila, a professor at the Mennonite Bible institute in Kalonda, about eight kilometers from Tshikapa.

The most passionate debate at the celebration centred on the decision to ordain women. Of the three Mennonite denominations in Congo, CMCO was the only one still denying ordination to women. La Communauté des Frères Mennonites au Congo (the Mennonite Brethren Church) ordained its first woman pastor in 2000. Communauté Évangélique Mennonite (the Evangelical Mennonite Church) was preparing to ordain its first woman pastor a few days after the end of CMCO's centennial celebration.

Komuesa was given the mandate for his second six-year term as CMCO president just hours before the centennial festivities began, as the annual general assembly

(cont'd on p. 9)

to plant churches as they migrate during periods of ethnic cleansing, political uprisings, and job transfers. Mennonite churches, once limited to the southwest of the country, have spread from mission centers throughout the country (see map).

Give thanks and acknowledging pain

by Lynda Hollinger-Janzen

Fifty-some young musicians walked nearly 160 kilometers carrying their drums, luggage, and a few babies to attend the centennial celebration of Communauté Mennonite au Congo (CMCO), July 16–22, 2012. For a week, the choir members from Djoko Punda, one of the first Mennonite mission stations in the Democratic Republic of Congo, traveled along rugged paths through forests and savannas, crossing rivers on make-shift bridges and spending nights in school rooms.

Chorale Grand Tam-Tam (Big Drum Chorale) arrived in Tshikapa, the headquarters of the church, to lead Mennonites from three continents in praise for "100 years of evangelization and cultural encounters," the CMCO tagline for the occasion.

In his opening address, the CMCO president, Adolphe Komuesa Kalunga, named weaknesses and failures in the missionary approach of those who came



La Chorale Mile Voix led by Mobutu Bongela welcomes international visitors to the CMCO Welcome Center.



**Mennonite
Heritage
Centre**

600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

MHSC meets in Winnipeg

The annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) occurred in Manitoba this year from 17-19 January. The staff from MHC and CMBS worked closely in hosting this event.

Established in 1968 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series, the Society comprises of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

Several related committees also met at the same time. These included the online encyclopedia (www.gameo.org) committees (GAMEO management board and the GAMEO Canadian Editorial Committee).

This was the third year that a revived archives committee met. It has undertaken an exciting project to create a Mennonite online photo database. The task force was given the green light to pursue the project and seek additional partners and look for ways to cover the estimated \$22,000 cost.

Other items of business included reporting on the beginnings of a new

genealogy web site and the ongoing Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites symposiums hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies.

Society members were pleased to hear that Esther Epp-Tiessen has finished the manuscript exploring the role of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada and a launch date is being planned for December 2013.

The annual MHSC award of excellence was ratified and presented to William Schroeder of Winnipeg (see p. 7).

Participants could also take off one afternoon from the meetings, and have an interior tour of the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, which is set to open in 2014. This was a highlight for many.

Alf Redekopp and Conrad Stoesz

MHC News

After a significant time of discernment, I will be retiring from my role as Director, Archives and Gallery, effective 31 July 2013.

No doubt the next 5 months will be focused on finishing loose ends and preparing for a transition.

I have enjoyed serving the church and wider community in this role.

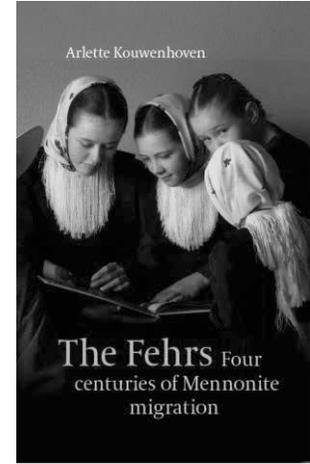
Thank you for all the support you have been.

Alf Redekopp



Mennonite Historical Society of Canada board members touring the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR) in Winnipeg on January 18, 2013. Angela Cassie, Director, Communications and External Relations, CMHR, led the tour through various zones still in a construction zone, thus requiring all participants to wear steel-toed boots and hard hats. Left to Right: standing Angela Cassie, Jon Isaak, Jake Buhler, David Neufeldt, Don Fehr, Richard Lougheed, Richard Thiessen, and Conrad Stoesz kneeling. Photo by Alf Redekopp.

You are invited to a
Book Launch
of



Thurs. June 6, 2013 7:00 p.m.
Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.

There is a great likelihood that people with the name Fehr can trace their name back to the 16th-century grain merchant, Gijsbert de Veer. This Mennonite of the conservative Old Flemish group in Amsterdam and Danzig was the progenitor of thousands and thousands of De Veers, Fehrs, DeFehrs and Defehrs, who now reside in Canada, the US, and South America. The lifestyles of all these descendants are incredibly diverse, with most of them leading modern lives in a rapidly changing world and engaging with the societies in which they live.

This book follows those Fehrs who have chosen not to leave the Old Flemish (later called Old Colony) way of life and who have always had to weigh their options to overcome the challenges surrounding them, continually moving to new countries, with new opportunities and even more obstacles. They have adapted constantly while always remaining true to what they believe is the only way to practise the Mennonite faith.

Arlette Kouwenhoven follows their footsteps, describing their whereabouts in Amsterdam, Danzig, the Polish Werder, the villages in the Russian steppes and later the Canadian prairie, to finally arrive in the Chihuahuan desert, where they live today in one of the last communities that refrains from the use of electricity and cars.

The book describes the necessity of their moves, why they made the choices they did, and the blessings and dilemmas these choices have brought.

The English translation of the original Dutch book includes a previously unpublished essay about the DeFehr branch of the family that took a completely different path and can be seen as representing the economically and socially more progressive members of the Fehr family.

Arlette Kouwenhoven, Amsterdam



Re-shelving books (l-r): Lois Wedel, Susan Huebert, Clara Toews, and Kathy Ewert

Notes from CMBS

During the last quarter, CMBS launched three initiatives that address its two deliverables—archival resourcing and interpretive resourcing.

1. Seventeen and a half additional linear meters of bookshelves were installed to better house the 8,081 volumes in the John A. Toews library collection at CMBS. See photo of volunteers managing the re-shelving process.

2. Sixty-three *MB Herald* USB drives have been sold to date. Initial reports are that the fully searchable drive holding fifty-one years of the *MB Herald* (1,292 issues) is proving to be very useful. Contact CMBS if you would like to purchase one (\$30 taxes and shipping included).

3. The editing and page layout of two new publications are nearing completion. Maureen Klassen's memoir, *It happened in Moscow*, explores the ambiguity and faith that characterized the Mennonite community during Stalin's reign of terror. Johann Pritzkau's history, *German Baptists of South Russia*, tells of the Mennonite Brethren initiative in launching these Baptist Churches and of the narrow thinking that ultimately caused the two denominations to develop separately. Watch for the release of both volumes later this summer.

Jon Isaak, Director CMBS

Letter to the Editor

I enjoyed your article on Heinrich Regehr (HR to us) in the latest *Mennonite Historian*. I remember the dispensational chart well from my time as his grade seven student at MBCI. He seemed to delight in terrorizing us with threats of flames and tribulation. I also enjoyed the references to David Ewert, one of my heroes. I recall an MB conference, during my time as editor of the *Christian Leader*, when dispensationalism came up for discussion. One

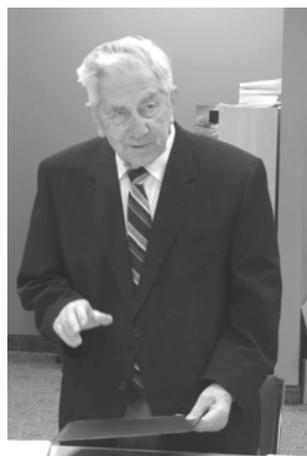
delegate tried to persuade the delegates that dispensationalism had at one time been an official part of MB eschatology, and should be restored to that position. I have never seen anyone spring to their feet as quickly as Ewert did to refute the delegate's contention. Interesting memories.

Always the editor, I have to offer a tiny correction to your footnote #8 on page 9. The co-author of the *Left Behind* series is Jerry B. Jenkins, not Larry Jenkins. Despite our differing views on eschatology, Jerry remains a dear friend of mine from the mid-1970s when he was my boss at *Moody Monthly* magazine. (He is a man of immense humor—when the first movie of his acclaimed book series was screened, he handed out boxer shorts with the book's title printed on the left cheek.)

Wally Kroeker, Winnipeg

William (Bill) Schroeder

Bill Schroeder is one of this generation's giants in Mennonite historical research. While not a professional historian, his works form the basis of many books, articles, and research papers. His greatest impact came with the publication of the best-selling book, *Mennonite Historical Atlas*, which he produced with Helmut Huebert in 1990 (second edition, 1996).



Bill Schroeder



Nearly 7,000 copies have been sold.

The Schroeder maps span the Mennonite areas in Holland, Prussia, Russia, Canada, and Latin America. They represent over 30 years of research. He has generously provided 205 maps to the Mennonite Heritage Centre for distribution via the Centre's web site at: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/Schroeder_maps/.

The atlas is only the "tip of the iceberg" of Bill's contribution. He made eight trips to the former Soviet Union, many of them as tour guide. He authored books including: *The Berghal Colony*, published in 1974 (revised edition, 1986) and *Kornelius Erdmann Buhr, 1826-1885*, published in 1976. In 1992, he translated *The History of the Church in Chortitza: Towards an Understanding of the History of the Church in the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia*, by Johannes van der Smissen.

Bill Schroeder donated hundreds of hours of volunteer labour at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, since the Centre was first opened in 1969. He organized, described, and filed minutes, built shelves, bound and rebound books, enlarged and duplicated photographs, provided research assistance, and prepared the *Mennonite Historian* for mailing.

Bill has volunteered with the Mennonite Centennial Committee, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, and the Mennonite Brethren Historical Committee. He presented at many functions freely exchanges ideas and information with fellow researchers.

Bill Schroeder characterizes some of the best in Mennonite historical research with his quiet tenacity, humble demeanor, and collaborative working style, always cognizant of relational dynamics and striving for excellence.

It was a great pleasure to recognize Bill as this year's winner of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada's Award of Excellence.

Conrad Stoesz

Reflections on G.J. Klassen

(cont'd from p. 2)

His convictions regarding church life were not accepted by most of his fellow MB church members. His stated position was that the leading of the Holy Spirit could override Scripture.

3) His marriage and family life most likely did not develop the closeness that he would have wanted.

4) Further to the last point: GJK left little written communication regarding his feelings about his family. So, I will offer some of my observations.

Soon after his marriage to Helena (Lena), he grew a short beard. I never asked him about his reasons for what was clearly unfashionable at the time, perhaps fearing he might counsel me to follow suit. It is likely that GJK intended to demonstrate his personal authenticity—a repudiation of the cosmetic. I know that his family chafed under this practice of his.

In the community where we lived as children, father was known for his beard, his mechanical skills, and his serious comments. My schoolmates sometimes teased me about him; but I also heard, “Boy, your dad is smart!” Occasionally, I overheard him “witnessing” to someone. His serious communication in broken English didn’t usually meet with an eager response. At the conclusion of such encounters, he often said, “But I hope we’ll meet in heaven.” I remember that this usually brought on a smile, or even the response, “Thank you, me too.”

Some people who knew GJK well have said that he probably had some personality disorder. I can understand that he may have been handicapped by something like mild Attention Deficit Disorder. I know that his personality was a burden for our mother.

From GJK’s journal, speaking about Easter Sunday, April 13, 1936:

I was in the Easter Sunday evening service and was dismayed at the pointless, powerless preaching I had to listen to. Next morning I felt strongly disinclined to go to church. As I earnestly prayed, I became aware that my mistake was in heeding the decision of the leading brethren; rather, the assembly should decide. Recalling what Paul says about self-appointed teachers, I went in. Then, when Bro. Janzen went forward, I also went and turned to the assembly with these words, “Dear brothers, peace be with you. I now ask you publicly, are you willing to listen to what the Lord has given me or not?” Then Bro. Epp stood and said he believed this was out of order. When no one else said anything, Bro. Janzen arose

and told me to step down. I replied that the Lord has said that where our words won’t be listened to, we are to leave. So, then I went out and wiped the dust from my feet.

That afternoon they held a membership meeting where for the first time it was decided that I should not speak.

I blamed myself for not being calmer and less harsh toward Bro. Janzen. I had had a troubling dream that night in which I had caused someone to be crucified, believing the sentence was just. When I went to look, I saw him tear himself loose and free himself again; then I awoke.

In my recollection, father changed gradually over time. He became more introverted and his spiritual pronouncements were milder and less frequent. In the 1950s and 1960s, we moved back to Winnipeg, living again in North Kildonan and participating again in the MB Church. I believe he mellowed over time, something quite normal in a person’s later years. He lived to be sixty-two.

Father naturally loved his two children, but he also saw it as his godly duty to correct their every misbehaviour and to instil self-discipline in them. Thus, nearly every spontaneous expression by a child brought a corrective response from him. I was not a combative, nor a rebellious child; and I soon learned to cope by being silent, so as not to incur reproof. This practice became normative and resulted in our home being very quiet. In teaching self-discipline, he led by modelling self-denial. For example, even though he liked sweets, he seldom indulged in them and never used sugar on his breakfast porridge. I admired this, but I didn’t have the internal fortitude to emulate my father’s feat.

I have never seen a family setting with an ambience like ours. The combination of particular personalities and father’s rigid perseverance in teaching and correction made for a tense atmosphere. Father was surely not satisfied with this outcome and neither was I, but it was inevitable.

In his journal and in some of GJK’s other writings, a picture emerges of one who was solidly grounded in a confidence in biblical truth. He quoted many passages. He was clearly knowledgeable in the biblical texts that refer to the Christian faith, service, and witness. He believed that he should live accordingly. Furthermore, he appeared to think of himself as being like, or striving to be like, the apostles. He seems to have believed that he had the authority by special guidance of the Holy Spirit to dictate directives to others.

On the other hand, he writes about much inner uncertainty and he spent a lot of time in indecision and inner struggles.

Looking back on the span of his life, I remember father as a man who did not have an easy life. I don’t believe he expected an easy life; he felt he was a participant in a larger, cosmic struggle that required much from him. For me, he serves as an illustration of someone who seriously engaged the transcendent, as GJK did when he, as a boy, committed his life to God. Hard struggles could be expected to follow.

In spite of these difficulties, he obviously still had deep confidence in God. I find it very reassuring that he offered this precious hope to others when he said, “But I hope we’ll meet in heaven.”

Also, I see a sort of divine justice in his rather early passing at age sixty-two, when he was still active and before he began a time of retirement and leisure. Father had no interest in many of the “good things in life,” e.g., vacations, trips, and restaurant meals. He participated in none of them. I believe it was a blessing for him to be called home before he had to worry about poor health or how to enjoy himself.

I hope that my observations will reflect the love and respect I hold for a sincere Christian man who had a difficult, but significant life.

John G. Klassen farmed near Riverton, Manitoba, for 25 years, moving to Winnipeg in 1986 to work as a woodworker. He is a member of the River East MB Church.

Russian Wagons

(cont'd from p. 1)

Wagons acquired in Manitoba through Jacob Y Schantz cost \$63.50. West Reserve purchasers at that price included Johan Sawatzky of Gruenthal, David Harder of Eichenfeld, Julius Klassen of Neuenburg, Heinrich Goertzen of Osterwick, Wilhelm Dyck of Osterwick, and Peter Doerksen of Blumstein.

The actual number of wagons shipped from Russia is unknown but in August 1875 it was reported that a portion of the 350 tons of freight brought downriver by the Selkirk and its two barges consisted of such wagons. An observer’s criticism of the entire process was that the wheels were too small for the Manitoba mud and a good wagon could be purchased here for the cost of the freight. The calculation for Abraham Friesen’s wagon supports this latter point and no rebuttal has been

located to prove that said wagons could overcome Red River gumbo. The absence of further dialogue would suggest the matter was a non-issue but research on Manitoba wagon construction and development might reveal a Russian influence. The occasional Kroeger clock or wooden chest may still be found in a Mennonite's living room today, but the Russian Mennonite wagon obviously held no such sentimental value.

Sources:

Anschreibe Buch des Peter Wiens, was die Brueder eingezahlt, bekommen haben, und noch bekommen sollen, und was fuer sie ausgegeben ist und was sie eingezahlt haben, MHCA Microfilm #654.

Gemeindebuch allerlei anschreibungen, MHCA Microfilm #654.

Winnipeg Daily Free Press, August 26, 1875 and July 12, 1876.



Willard Metzger, Executive Director, Mennonite Church Canada attended Communauté Évangélique Mennonite au Congo (Evangelical Mennonite Church of Congo) 50th anniversary celebration from July 23-27.

Congo – Giving Thanks

(cont'd from p. 5)

concluded around 2 a.m. on July 15.

Among Komuesa's accomplishments in his first term was the construction of a welcome centre. The new facilities enabled CMCO to receive 30 delegates from three continents representing eight Mennonite agencies. Because the centre is within walking distance from the airport, CMCO hopes that it can be used as a guest house to generate income for the church.

The welcome centre was a collaborative effort that included Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, CMCO, building teams from Mennonite Church USA congregations and American volunteer, Arnold Harder, who facilitated the construction process.

Executive coordinator of Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, Rod Hollinger-

Janzen, coordinated the international component of the anniversary event. He said that the experience communicated how profound relationships within the body of Christ can be. He was moved by the affirmation that choirs from different ethnic groups—Tshokwe, Lulua, and Pende—gave each other. People who had been feuding a few decades ago were now singing about being brothers and sisters.

“This was one way the centennial celebration became an avenue for CMCO members to reaffirm their unity in Christ, and accept their ethnic diversity as a positive and creative reality,” Hollinger-Janzen said. “Our international delegation was also told in many different ways how important it was that we had come.”

Hollinger-Janzen said that CMCO leaders and members repeatedly expressed the desire to continue to nurture fraternal relationships and to partner with the church conferences and agencies which had worked together to plant Mennonite churches in Congo.

International agencies and churches represented at the centennial celebration included: Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission; Fellowship of Evangelical Churches; Mennonite Church USA; Mennonite Church

Canada; Mennonite World Conference; Mennonite Central Committee; and the Francophone Network (serving the global French speaking Anabaptist community).

Lynda Hollinger-Janzen is a writer for Mennonite Mission Network of Mennonite Church USA. These articles first appeared in the Mennonite World Conference journal, Courier-Courier-Correo 27/4 (2012), and are reprinted here with permission.

Gerhard Wiebe (1847-1934)

(cont'd from p. 3)

Tiegenhof. He was 23 ½ and she was 24 at the time. Güre is actually Guhr, a rather rare Mennonite name. I have been able to find the births of the following children of Johann Wiebe and Sara Martens in the Jungfer records: Helena (14 July 1841), Johann (9 Dec 1843), Gerhard (2 Mar 1847) and Catharina (1 Feb 1851).

The Rosenort Mennonite church was part of a larger congregation, the Gross

Werder Gemeinde. The Gross Werder Gemeinde consisted of 4 churches under the leadership of an *Ältester* who conducted the baptisms. The Gross Werder baptismal register includes the baptism of Johann Wiebe's surviving son Johann of Blumenort in 1837. It is uncertain from these records if it was Johann Sr. or Jr. who was actually from Blumenort. Since the average age of baptism in this congregation was about 20 years, this baptism date is consistent with his birth year estimated from his age at time of death. The 1834 baptism of Sara Martens is also found in this register. She was the surviving daughter of Julius Martens of Krebsfeld. His death is found in the Lutheran records of Fuerstenau. He died in Krebsfeld on March 13, 1828 at the age of 55 years and 5 months. He was survived by his widow Elisabeth Loewen and children Elisabeth (Mrs. Gerhard Braun), Helena and Sara.

I have been unable to find a death record for Johann Wiebe Sr., who would have died sometime between the birth of his youngest daughter Catharina (1823) [4] and the baptism of his surviving son Johann (1837). However, the Lutheran records of Fürstenau include the death of Gerhard Wiebe's grandmother Helena (Schroeder) Wiebe. [5] She died in Blumenort on Mar. 29, 1840 at the age of 53. Her surviving family consisted of Helena, Johann, Martin and Catharina. This would place her birth at about 1787.

So, thanks to the Lutheran records, we have information on Gerhard Wiebe's parents **and** his grandparents, on both sides of the family!

If anyone has further information on the ancestry of Gerhard Wiebe please contact me at gpenner@uoguelph.ca.

References:

1. See for example the Sep. 3, 2007 edition of the *Mennonite Historian* and the Oct. 2007 edition of *Heritage Posting*.
2. Evangelical Lutheran church records of Jungfer, West Prussia. LDS film numbers 208169, 208171 and 208172.
3. GRANDMA genealogical database, California Mennonite Historical Society. Gerhard Wiebe is entry number 134068.
4. Mennonite church records of Rosenort, West Prussia (1858 – 1944). Microfilm copies available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. LDS film number 555794. She is found on pages 17-18.
5. Evangelical Lutheran church records of Fürstenau, West Prussia. LDS film number 208104.

Visit to Ukraine

On our recent heritage exploration trip to the village of Memrik last September, we were hoping to locate our grandparent's family farm.

One clue we had was that our father, David Johann Fast, remembered that the farm had been purchased from a Wiens family in 1907. Apparently both of the Wiens parents were buried in the back of the property and our father recalled tending the gravesite.

Once in Memrik, we asked some of the villagers about this backyard cemetery and several of the villagers knew about it, saying that the tombstones had been bulldozed into the ravine at the back of the property during the Communist regime. They offered to take us.



There, at the edge of the ravine, we found the tombstone of Helena Wiens. The inscription read: **Helean Wiens, geb. Thiessen, Geb. 22 Juli 1836, Gest. 9 Sept. 1891.** We did not have time to explore further for the tombstone of her husband, but on the return walk, we were shown where the cemetery had been located, further confirming that we had found our ancestral land.

Rudy Fast, Strathroy, Ontario

Book Notes

Dunkle Jahre: Zum Gedenken an die Opfer des "Großen Terrors" und der Zwangsarbeitslager in der Sowjetunion (Stuttgart: Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland, 2012) 99 pp.

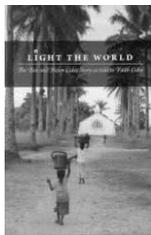
This special publication was produced to coincide with the 75th anniversary of Stalin's reign of terror (1937–1938) and the 70th anniversary of the first mobilization of Germans into Stalin's forced labour camps. Writers such as Alfred Eisfeld, Johann Kampen, Viktor Krieger, Viktor Kirillow, and Edgar L. Born are featured. The artwork is done by Michael



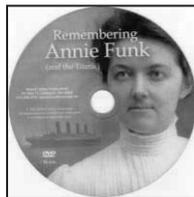
Disterheft (1921–2005) and Viktor Hurr, showing scenes from the Soviet years of terror.

Light the World: The Ben and Helen Eidse Story as told to Faith Eidse

(Vancouver: Friesen Press, 2012) 249 pp. "From the wheat fields and bargain stores of rural Manitoba, Ben and Helen Eidse were the first missionaries sent overseas by their conference. On the African savannah they partnered with the Chokwe-Lunda who taught them language, culture, and proverbs, which Ben used to explain salvation. Helen delivered the leprosy cure, mothered orphans, cared for the excluded, sick, and poor. Their partners helped establish 80 churches, translate the Bible and run 24 clinics. They deepened their faith in spiritual battle against sorcery and corruption. The Eidses sought to empower the powerless and raise a family despite revolution, disease, and disability" (from the back cover).



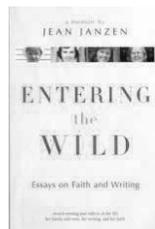
Remembering Annie Funk (and the Titanic) (Branch Valley Productions, P.O.



Box 11, Lederach, PA 19450, 2012) 36 min. A DVD narrating the story of Annie Funk, first female Mennonite Church missionary to

India. Sent by the Hereford Church in Pennsylvania, she sailed to India in 1906 and worked to start a village school for girls. Traveling to America on her first missionary furlough, she was among the 1,500 who perished one hundred years ago in the sinking of the Titanic, April 15, 1912. Annie is reported to have given her place in a lifeboat to a mother and child, when it became clear that there were not enough lifeboats to accommodate all the passengers. The DVD tells her story—a life of choosing to minister to others in the name of Christ. A memorial stone in her town was built to remember her life and legacy.

Jean Janzen, **Entering the wild: essays on faith and writing** (Good Books, 2012) 124 pp. Award-winning Mennonite poet, Jean Janzen, has produced numerous volumes of poetry. This book is her memoir. She tells of growing up in Saskatchewan and in Minnesota, one of a



large family in a preacher/teacher home. Then she is off to college in Kansas, settling in Fresno, California as the wife of a physician. Although she writes in prose here, her poetic voice is clearly present. Janzen narrates her discoveries in a compelling way—negotiating the challenges of raising a family, finding her voice as a female poet, resonating with medieval women mystics, and re-connecting with her Russian Mennonite heritage. *Entering the Wild* is her story of family, music, poetry, and faith.



Elfrieda Dick, ed. **Unworthy but chosen of God: the story of Nettie Berg** (Edmonton: Story Inc., 2012) 172 pp. Nettie Berg was born in Ukraine on January 21, 1923. She immigrated to Canada

with her family and grew up in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, and Coaldale, Alberta. She served as a missionary nurse and educator in the Congo (1952–1970) with the Mennonite Brethren Church. After returning to Canada she wrote Bible curriculum for students both in Congo and in Canada. She was known for her unassuming manner, winsome spirit, and servant heart. Elfrieda Dick edited the volume, compiling excerpts from Nettie's journal, reports from mission and church newspapers, sections from Nettie's biography, and photographs from Nettie's album.

Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church celebrates 50 years, 1962–2012 (ArtBookBindary, 2012) 254 pp.

Lendrum MB is one of several urban Mennonite churches begun in the 1960s. Aiming to be relevant, contextual, and prophetic, it shares with these other 60s-birther churches a fiftieth anniversary marker. For this celebration book, well-known Mennonite writer and congregant, Rudy Wiebe, edited (condensed) sample sermons from each of the nine significant periods in the church's history. Organized into nine chapters, the book narrates the growth, challenges, and structural changes that have marked the church's life. The book is well-made and artistically pleasing with many color photos and essays by congregants and pastors. Each participating family contributes a photo and a brief essay of their sojourn with the Lendrum faith community.



The Origins of Mennonite Heritage Village

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The thought of establishing a Manitoba Mennonite museum may well have come with the first Mennonite families from south Russia who landed in Winnipeg on July 31 in 1874, and the



next day docked at the junction of the Rat and Red rivers to build new villages in the area.

That seed may have begun to sprout during World War II for some Mennonites. It may have happened earlier as East Reserve pioneers celebrated the 50th anniversary of that historic arrival in 1924 and then a 60th in 1934.

It was definitely on the agenda of the 75th anniversary commemorated in both former reserves. John C Reimer, a local teacher, led the organizing of an East Reserve gathering and a “museum committee” was set up for that occasion.

By then a Mennonite Historical Committee, later called a Society, had been formed in the Gretna-Altona area to support preservation of the Mennonite heritage. Peace making concerns, heightened by the conscription issue during the war, had become a part of that design.

The arrival in 1946 of Gerhard Ens to teach at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna brought a strong supporter of such endeavours to the community. Ens sensed that the efforts of several dedicated individuals in this enterprise needed stronger community support and involvement.

In Steinbach such concerns were definitely shared and talked up by John C. Reimer, who began to set up a private museum in 1951. He saw it as a teaching aid to help children appreciate the Mennonite story.

At the same time he was modeling a project for which he already had bigger plans – a Mennonite public museum in the area. His efforts to establish a Manitoba historical society at the time did not succeed, but he was ready to join a larger plan when it came to light a few years later.

In 1957 Gerhard Ens and his colleagues began to call for a strong heritage saving

effort among all Manitoba Mennonites. They met to reorganize their older committee which had published four volumes of Mennonite history written by another MCI teacher, Paul Schaefer. The books were titled **Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!**, commenting on the beginnings and future of the Mennonite people.

With yet another teacher, Gerhard Lohrenz, later from Winnipeg, discussions began to focus on a Mennonite museum among other topics discussed. Ens now began to serve as secretary, a task he carried out for 25 years or more. The other main concern at this point had to do with forming the Mennonite Historical Society of Manitoba (MMHS).

That happened officially in April, 1958, when a larger board came into being, with Ens and Lohrenz leading the fledgling organization. A museum committee was appointed, including John C Reimer and Victor Peters, also a teacher, who read a paper at that meeting in which he shared his vision for museum development. One historian has called these early structurings of 1957-58 “the founding body of Mennonite Heritage Village.”

John C Reimer was given the task of exploring the possibilities of getting such a museum going in Steinbach. A lot of his time and energy was then spent talking to possible supporters of such an idea in that community, while all the while continuing to expand his own private collection.

It would become the prototype of what was being undertaken by the new society, MMHS, brought together from both East and West Reserve, and adjacent regions as well.

Reimer soon brought to the new board several options of property to purchase where a museum complex could be established. A group of men, including Eugene Derksen, quickly caught the vision and others could soon be recruited as well. Some financial support was offered almost right away.

The physical building of museum premises could begin with the purchase of a six acre piece of land, bought for \$500.00 an acre from P.A. Reimer, about a mile north of town. One document speaks of the spot as “north of the slough.”

It was hoped that an original house-barn structure, renovated to period precision, might become the centerpiece of a structural village site, but that did not

materialize. Other options would be followed as time went on.

The MMHS board at that time included the following persons: G. Lohrenz, chairperson, Ted Friesen, of Altona, vice-president, G. Ens, secretary, John A Toews, Winnipeg, P.J.B. Reimer, Rosenort, Jacob Rempel, Gretna, F.H. Zacharias, Plum Coulee, and K.R. Barkman, Steinbach.

The Steinbach Chamber of Commerce in a strong show of support, elected Abe Kauenhoven and John Loewen to serve on the board also. Several years later the election of J.J. Reimer of Winnipeg as chairman of MMHS would give construction of the museum the needed push to give it a permanent place in the community and the province.

The 50th anniversary of the museum will be celebrated in 2014.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 12)

emotionally to take on the task, important as it seemed. Victor was in a group with his mother, two sisters and a brother. The journey leaving Germany had begun on February 1, 1947, and ended on the high seas with arrival in Buenos Aires, Argentine almost exactly three weeks later.

Some innovative lodging and travel arrangements followed the sea journey. In South America C.A. Defehr of Winnipeg had received responsibilities to take the group on to the Paraguay River enroute to their new homes. Detailed stories of trying to settle down in the Friesland colony comprise an interesting part of the final section of the volume. The story ends here with the decision of the family to move to Canada in 1955.

Well illustrated and written in very readable prose, the author has left his family and hopefully many other readers a meaningful document of how the emigrations of Mennonite families during and after World War II could take place. What must have been carefully kept diaries inform the story throughout. Occasional editorial slips do not significantly detract from an account worth commending to current readers.

The book may be obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg as well as the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach.

Lawrence Klippenstein, Steinbach, Manitoba was formerly the director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg.

Book Reviews

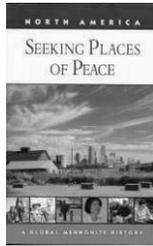
Royden Lowen and Steven M. Nolt. *Seeking Places of Peace; Global Mennonite History series: North America* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press and Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2012) 399 + xv pp.

Reviewed by Dan Nighswander, who has personal history with many branches of the Mennonite family. He is currently the pastor of Jubilee Mennonite Church (MC and MB) in Winnipeg.

There is an abundance of books about the histories of Anabaptist churches in North America. Some are regional, some national, some denominational, some congregational, some individual, some familial, some institutional, and some comprehensive.

Seeking Places of Peace is a fresh telling of the stories. For this fifth and final volume in the Global Mennonite History Series, the authors, Royden Lowen of Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Steven Nolt of Goshen, Indiana, chose to present a social history. So the book does not focus on institutions or their leaders, church schisms, or theology. Instead, it recounts the experiences of people, their migrations, their lives, their struggles, and their faith. This approach, one hopes, will be welcomed by readers from other continents whose histories have already been published in this series edited by John A. Lapp and C. Arnold Snyder on behalf of Mennonite World Conference. For North American Mennonites, it is an accessible and fascinating perspective on “our story.”

Each of the twelve chapters begins with two short stories that represent parallel experiences from different centuries, different parts of the Anabaptist family, or different parts of North America. Chapter 8, Families of Faith, has a story of family tragedy in Pennsylvania in 1952 and a wedding story from Yarrow, British Columbia, in 1947. It talks about the experiences of childhood and youth, including the changing attitudes of the church toward sexuality. Courtship and marriage practices are reported from various communities, as are the changing understandings of gender relationships.



Evolving practices in the care of the aging are also reported. The conclusion notes that there has been great diversity between communities, and over time, but that a common element is that “most North American Mennonites . . . learned their faith from their parents” (p. 219).

While many church histories omit unflattering details, this book is to be commended for frankly acknowledging both positive and negative incidents with indigenous people (33 references in the index), race relations and racism, class divisions and sexism.

Black and white photos are scattered throughout. Most of them picture the activities of daily life and ordinary people. Rarely are they of denominational or institutional leaders, buildings or formal events. Like the stories, the photos present the experiences of ordinary members of the churches. Regrettably, the photos are small and the captions are on a shaded background, making them less attractive and harder to read than they might have been.

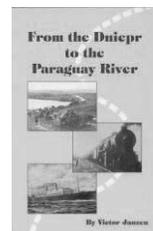
There are six useful appendices. These have a more institutional orientation than the rest of the book. Four of them present membership information arranged by denomination and by state or province. These allow the reader to discover, for example, that in 2001 there were 60,595 Mennonites of all types in Ontario and 10 in each of the following: PEI, Newfoundland, and Nunavut. Other appendices list the universities, colleges, and seminaries (18 of them, three of which combine two or more prior schools) and 19 major North American Mission and Service Organizations. There is also a comprehensive index.

Anyone interested in knowing what life has been like for Mennonites in North America from the 1700s to the 2000s will enjoy and learn much from this book. I was delighted and surprised to find how engaging and compelling it was to read. Church libraries and many home libraries should include this and all volumes in the Global Mennonite History series.

Victor Janzen. *From the Dnieper to the Paraguay River* (Steinbach, MB, by the author, 1995) pb. 178 pp. \$25.00.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

A recently published English translation of an original German-



language autobiography makes this most interesting life story available to a large audience which could not access the sold-out first printing. It is now part of an ever expanding literature coming from immigrants who made the historic trek out of Ukraine through Poland to Germany and Paraguay and eventually to Canada.

Janzen begins his story in the Old Colony village of Osterwick (Neu-osterwick, now renamed Dolinske) in 1929 when he was born. That put him right in the Soviet period of life and government which had begun in 1917. It included school life in the village and for a while regular church life. When organized meetings became impossible, believers gathered occasionally as possible, or sustained faith in their hearts and families as circumstances permitted.

With invasion of Soviet Russia by the German army in June, 1941, came also ultimately the presence of the German army in the Mennonite colonies. Mennonites looked forward to better times, and in some times that did happen. Church life could be renewed, and other forms of public life also resumed. The hoped-for redistribution of land, however, did not happen. A detailed description of what took place when the Soviets ordered evacuation to the east, relates how families gathered to attempt the trip into the unknown, how they attempted in various ways to slow down progress, hoping that the German army driving hard to the east would overtake them, and thus free from their otherwise awful fate. It succeeded. A map shows their slow move toward the Dnieper River where they then were indeed overtaken and thus were able to make their way back to their village.

Soon however their brief relief ended, when the Germans were forced to retreat again and the Mennonite families of the Old Colony and others were ordered (with little resistance) to prepare to leave for Germany with the army. This retreat then forms an important part of the first part of the volume, which then includes efforts to regroup in western Europe and plans to leave once again – to go to Paraguay. The part played by C.F. Klassen and Peter Dyck along with other workers becomes very personal in this account. Life in the camps where émigrés stayed for various lengths of time gets attention also.

In Paraguay the challenge to begin all over again is now told from the vantage point of a young man still open to adventure, and somewhat prepared

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