

Mennonite Historian

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

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Jacob G. Epp (1882–1949), champion hop picker of the season (3,000 pounds), with his son, Jacob J. Epp (1921–1983) in 1929. Photo: Courtesy of Esther Epp Harder, granddaughter of the champion. See story on p. 2.



Mennonites in British Columbia: the Early Years (1910–1938) (Part 1)

by David Giesbrecht

What kind of an inner disposition might impoverished, often traumatized Russian Mennonite immigrant families have brought with them when they arrived in Canada in the mid-1920s, in a country they did not understand, and hearing a language they could not comprehend?

Painful immigrant experience

Perceptibly, Mennonite immigrants arrived with memories of searing pain and loss. Some of them had served in the Russian Red Cross, evacuating wounded soldiers from dangerous front-line locations during WWI.¹ Others had fought in the short-lived but ultimately disastrous Mennonite self-defence force (*Selbstschutz*) during the Russian revolution and civil war.² Most had lost all their possessions and property, and personally survived some of the worst excesses with which war, anarchy, and revolution could diminish a people. Historian Henry C. Smith states that: “Never since the [Anabaptist] martyrs have the Mennonites suffered as much as during the twentieth century in Russia.”³

Early settlement attempts

The first organized attempt by Mennonites to settle in BC preceded the arrival of the Mennonites from Russia in the

1920s. Around the year 1910, at Renata—a small town in the BC Kootney Region—a group of Saskatchewan Mennonites from the Rosenort Mennonite Church near Rosthern, eventually numbering 50 families, formed the first Mennonite Church in the province.⁴ Visiting ministers D.J. Unruh and C.F. Sawatsky occasionally brought spiritual nurture to these believers. Between 1935 and 1953, P.P. Dyck from Rosemary, Alberta ministered in Renata six months a year.

The economic base of this community depended on logging and fruit farming. The enterprise came to an abrupt end when, in the 1960s, a giant hydro-electric project, the Hugh Keenleyside Dam, flooded the valley.

A second effort to establish a Mennonite presence in BC occurred in the Nechako Valley near Vanderhoof during WWI. Escaping conscription pressure, a group of Manitoba, Oklahoma, and Minnesota Mennonites settled in the Nechako Valley between 1917 and 1920.⁵

Among these early settlers were Heinrich H. Voth and Sara (Kornelson) Voth and several of their children.⁶ In 1876, Heinrich and Sara had immigrated to the United States from Russia, establishing a farm near Bingham Lake, Minnesota. While in Russia, Heinrich taught school at Klippenfeld for two years, where he experienced a profound spiritual awakening during a remarkable revival at the school. In 1885, he was ordained as a Mennonite Brethren church elder and travelling evangelist in both the US and Canada. His evangelistic trips led to the birth of the first Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada, at Burwalde near Winkler, Manitoba in 1888.⁷

When America entered WWI, Elder Voth’s nonresistant convictions motivated him to move his family, which included two sons of draft age, from Minnesota to Manitoba in April 1917, and in March 1918, to Braeside, 20 miles out of Vanderhoof, BC.⁸ The log-framed place of worship built in 1919 was the first Mennonite Brethren Church in BC. Owing to harsh living conditions and extreme isolation, the ten families who braved this initiative disbanded after WWI and moved back to Manitoba and the US.⁹

Mennonite settlement takes hold in the Fraser Valley

A decade later, Mennonite settlement in BC was established in the Fraser Valley due to new access to arable land. University of British Columbia geo-

grapher Dr. Alfred Siemens, who grew up in the Abbotsford area, notes that Mennonites procured land in the Fraser Valley in one of three ways.¹⁰ The first method was through a land agent or developer. In the early part of the 20th century, land agent Chauncey Eckert owned large tracts of land that he wanted settled. Once a level of trust had been established between Eckert and the new Mennonite immigrants, he became something of a “land spotter” for them, helping many families get onto acreages on very generous terms.

A second method of procuring land came with the assistance of local government. In 1931, the Matsqui Municipality reserved a tract of land for Mennonites in the present Clearbrook/Abbotsford area. Later in the same year, the Municipality offered to sell at a public auction two sections of land in the area between Huntingdon Road and the US/Canadian border. Here was an opportunity for Mennonites to acquire land adjacent to what they already owned. At \$10.00 an acre, it did not take these thrifty, land-hungry pioneers long to realize the potential this represented, even though some local old timers predicted that if “Mennonite settlers were not poor when they moved to Abbotsford, the land they now acquired would soon make them so.”¹¹

Third, like any other settlers, Mennonites could buy land through private purchase. Through such diverse land acquisitions, Mennonites began populating communities like Yarrow, Greendale, Arnold, and Coghlan.

At home in Yarrow

The 26th of December 1927 was a historic day for BC Mennonites. On this Monday, the John Bargens and Isaac Sawatskys, who had recently arrived in Agassiz to scout for new settlement possibilities, were travelling through the Fraser Valley via the BC Electric Railway. As they neared Yarrow, Bargens recounts: “We were so excited about the open land along the Vedder Mountain that we agreed immediately to settle there as the first [Mennonite] pioneers. With bowed heads, we prayed: ‘Our Father in heaven, give us your help and blessing to make this place a Mennonite settlement.’”¹²

Reports that followed in the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and elsewhere stirred serious interest. On 19 February 1928, the first trainload of Mennonites arrived in Yarrow and were quite unceremoniously disgorged at the Majuba Hill siding on the

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Editors: Jon Isaak (CMBS)
Conrad Stoesz (CMBS/MHC)
Associate Editor: Korey Dyck (MHC)
Layout: Alf Redekopp

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

1310 Taylor Avenue
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
P: 204-669-6575
E: jisaak@mbconf.ca

or
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
P: 204-888-6781

E: cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca
www.mennonitehistorian.ca

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Genealogy and Family History

Query

Katherine Sawatzky (8 Dec. 1896–21 Jun. 1965, Gr190389) was born near Gretna, Manitoba, to Bernhard Sawatzky (b. 1858) and Agathetha Driedger (b. 1862), the tenth of their 12 children. Katherine married Jacob “Jake” Krohn (d. 1923) in Dunelm, Saskatchewan, and they had three children: Susan Katherine Krohn (b. 21 Jun. 1921), Katie Justina Krohn (b. 26 Jun. 1922), and Barnard “Barney” Krohn (b. 1923). After Jacob Krohn died, Katherine had two other children in Swift Current, Saskatchewan: Lawrence Krohn (b. 6 Apr. 1927) and Helen Krohn (b. 31 Mar. 1931). In 1933, Katherine married Carl Currence and they had 2 children: Jackie Currence (b. 1934) and Darlene Currence (b. 1936). If you have any information about Katherine Sawatzky Krohn Currence and her family, please contact Sandra Buck, Box 1150, Caroline, AB TOM 0M0 (purenailz@gmail.com).



Katherine Sawatzky Krohn Currence (1896–1965). Photo: Courtesy of Sandra Buck.

Queries: Send queries to Conrad Stoesz, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or email: cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca.



Mennonite Heritage Village (Canada) Inc.
231 PTH 12 N, Steinbach, MB R5G 1T8
Phone (204) 326-9661 Fax (204) 326-5046
Email: barrvd@mhv.ca
www.mhv.ca

Mennonite Heritage Village Celebrates 50 Years

by Barry Dyck

In 1964, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was incorporated for the purpose of conducting and publishing research in areas of Mennonite History, as well as preserving and exhibiting artifacts for the ongoing interpretation of stories and experiences of the Russian Mennonites. While the current name “Mennonite Heritage Village (Canada) Inc.” surfaced somewhat later, we view that 1964 incorporation event as our formal beginning. Therefore we are now celebrating our 50th anniversary throughout 2014.

On March 22, Mennonite Heritage Village recognized the “founders” and “builders” of the organization with an evening of reflection, music, and socializing. Approximately 200 guests came to enjoy music by the Eastman Male Choir; reflections by Eric Friesen, long-time broadcaster and native of Altona, Manitoba; and special recognition given to 22 individuals by historian and former MHV board member John J. Friesen.

Choir director Ed Hildebrand introduced each musical offering with a short story, putting it into the context of the 1960s. Eric Friesen, son of MHV founder Ted Friesen, provided inspiration and encouragement to continue the important work of preserving our history, so that we will have answers when our grandchildren and great-grandchildren ask, “What do these stones mean?” (Joshua 4:6).

After cake and coffee, provided by the MHV Auxiliary, John J. Friesen paid tribute to our MHV founders and builders. Of the 22 individuals recognized, Ted Friesen was the only one able to attend. Three other surviving members were unable to be present. During each tribute, family representatives of these early board members were asked to stand.

The signature event of our 50th

Anniversary celebrations will take place July 5 and 6. The weekend will begin with *Schmeckfest Jubilee*, a fundraising gala featuring traditional cuisine as guests stroll through the Outdoor Village. A Dessert Bar and entertainment by world-class improvisational violinist Rosemary Siemens, originally from southern Manitoba, will be featured in the Auditorium. Sunday will be a day to worship together, enjoy guided tours of the Village, sing together in a traditional *Saengerfest* and eat together around the *Faspa/Vesper* table.

Further celebratory events will take place throughout the year and will be posted in our Calendar of Events on our website at www.mhv.ca.



Ernest Braun of Niverville, Manitoba, received the Lieutenant Governor of Manitoba's award for Historical Preservation and Promotion May 8, 2014 at Government House. The accolade recognizes Braun's 20 years of documenting the history of Mennonites in Manitoba through the creation of an inventory of aerial photographs of the East Reserve, the restoration of the province's first Chortizer church, membership in several local historical societies, and contribution to books on settlements of the East Reserve including a forthcoming volume of maps. Photo: Courtesy of Karla Braun.

Recent Books

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

Mennonites in B.C.

cont'd from p. 2

edge of the future village. A flood of newcomers was not long in coming. When yet another carload of them arrived at the Sumas border crossing, and asked for directions to where the Mennonites lived, the testy guard responded: "You will have no trouble finding them. Turn right after you cross the border. There's already a million of them there."¹³

The aforementioned land developer, Chauncey Eckert, loomed large in the esteem of Yarrow Mennonites, a relationship not without its own peculiar drama.¹⁴ Eckert was dismayed to learn that these Mennonites had brought very little cash with them. When, for instance, one of the new arrivals learned from Eckert that the lowest down payment on a parcel of land would be ten dollars, his face fell. Eckert at once proceeded to offer credit, securing the deal.¹⁵ Eckert also assisted Yarrow Mennonites with acquiring building materials, cattle, and agricultural equipment.

Winfield Fretz, Mennonite sociologist, reports on a 1943 visit to Eckert's home: "It was [my] privilege ... to catch the spirit of this man and his high ethical motives. He sold most of the Mennonites land without any down payment and in addition bought the lumber for them on credit. He bought three tractors to break the ground for them ... When the settlers were too poor to buy livestock and equipment, he frequently bought cows for families so that they would have a milk supply. On one occasion he butchered a large 700-pound hog and gave all the settlers portions of it ... While Eckert is not a member of any Mennonite church nor any other church known to the settlers, he contributed liberally towards the building of local churches and occasionally attends services at one of the two Mennonite churches in Yarrow. No man is more highly thought of in the Yarrow community than Mr. Eckert."¹⁶

The Chilliwack Progress weighed in with the opinion that Eckert "had great faith in the Mennonites and the Mennonites had great faith in God."¹⁷ With a partnership like that, failure was not one of the options that Mennonites contemplated.

These new immigrants had farming in their blood. Novelist Al Reimer gives a rich expression of this love for land through one of his novel's characters, Willie Fast, who says of his father: "Like other Mennonite farmers, Papa believed

in the land in the same direct way he believed in God...Papa believed there was no higher calling than farming...Papa always talked about the land as a living thing, as a bountiful mother who never grew old or died. You gave her your life-long devotion and care. In return she supported you and gave meaning to your existence here on earth."¹⁸

It was therefore natural that Mennonites wanted to continue in this time-honoured occupation. But their agricultural beginnings were an unmitigated disaster. They proceeded to experiment with a variety of crops: asparagus, head lettuce, cauliflower, peas, sugar beets, and green beans. The high soil moisture and unpredictable weather patterns destroyed these crops. The quality of the early bean crops were so poor that one farmer, collecting his earnings after harvest time, netted a grand total of thirty-five cents.

With the introduction of raspberry cultivation during the early 1930s, Fraser Valley Mennonites discovered a more reliable source of income. Yarrow settler Aaron Rempel began importing berry canes from Washington State. In collaboration with the Provincial Experimental Farm in Agassiz, he developed a thriving farm, becoming known as the Yarrow Raspberry King.¹⁹ Markets seemed promising and raspberry cultivation expanded. And then came WWII, resulting in the expulsion of all people of Japanese descent who lived within one hundred miles of the coast. The "evacuation of Japanese berry farmers...created an economic vacuum."²⁰ Enterprising Mennonites did not ignore such a sudden largess.

To manage marketing their crops, Yarrow farmers organized a small consumer's association in 1935 that matured into the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative. By 1944, this Co-operative

operated a general store, a feed and grain buying business, as well as a berry-packing plant. Winfield Fretz notes: "So successful is the cooperative endeavour in Yarrow that future plans are under way for the formation of a credit union, a feed mill, an egg-grading and marketing plant, a creamery, a cheese factory and a jam factory."²¹

In addition to farming, Fraser Valley Mennonites sustained themselves in a variety of ways. Some of them worked in the extensive tobacco fields, then prominent in the Sumas Prairie. During hop picking time, all able-bodied family member were co-opted to harvest the bulging vines. Although ripe hops weigh very little, quick-fingered pickers could earn handsome profits. Curiously, abstemious Mennonites who held a strong aversion to drinking beer, nevertheless gave themselves unstintingly to harvesting the crop, insisting that their pickings were used entirely for the production of yeast.

Besides picking hops, a good number of young Mennonite women became employed as domestic servants in Vancouver, contributing their earnings for family support.²² Men cut firewood at 75 cents a cord (a pile of cut wood, measuring 4'x4'x8'). A few fortunate people found work in road construction projects or sawmills.

Settling beyond Yarrow

The first Mennonites to settle in the Abbotsford area began arriving in 1930. As already indicated, they settled on land set aside for them by the Matsqui Municipality. The typical Mennonite homestead in the Abbotsford area consisted of very simple buildings, set back a good distance from the main road, and built from sawn lumber of trees often coming from their own properties. And with the abundance of cedar trees,



Yarrow Mennonite Church at Good Friday Easter service, 1928. The church included both Mennonite Brethren and Mennonite worshippers. Photo: Courtesy of Esther Epp Harder.

enterprising settlers split their own shakes as roofing materials.

Pioneer farming was a back-breaking exercise. First the stumps had to be removed. Since dynamite was easy to come by, it was much easier (if exceedingly dangerous) to blow a stump out of its nest than to dig it out. The hard work of these pioneers was soon rewarded. By 1946, not yet 20 years after arriving in BC, a senior Mennonite leader, B.B. Wiens, summed the experience of his people in this way: "We were witnesses to the utter poverty of the greater part of [our] settlers... We marvel today when we view the well-established, independent Mennonite farmer of British Columbia... Today each Mennonite settlement in British Columbia is a landmark of unprecedented development. Neither the strongest optimist nor the dreamer would have fancied such stupendous progress."²³

Reactions to Mennonite settlement in the Fraser Valley

As is the experience of other immigrant groups, Mennonites have frequently been misunderstood, or perhaps, understood quite accurately by some observers and not appreciated for their values and traditions. A survey of British Columbia newspapers shows that during the 1930s and 1940s, Mennonites were often the subject of unfavourable media stories. Public media comment was often cruel and condescending.

On 15 December 1927, *The Chilliwack Progress* responded to a report that a colony of some 200 Mennonites was planning to settle on the newly drained Sumas lands. At a public meeting, Chilliwack Dyking Commissioner Bruce Dixon informed his audience that "the gesture on the part of the Mennonites has not gone beyond the proportions of a wish." In summarizing the meeting, the *Progress* editor noted: "The report stirred up a great deal of interest and considerable disappointment was expressed. The assurance that such an eventuality is not at all probable will be well received."

Ten years later this venerable paper condescendingly informed its readers that "these people [Mennonites] who have created such problems in education, politics, labour, and administration in the Chilliwack Valley are gradually taking their place in the general picture."²⁴

In August 1938, the provincial government dispatched Nurse Evelyn Maguire to investigate who these strange

religionists were. She writes: "Public Health Nurses find that a great part of their time and effort is necessarily spent among these people... The Mennonites feel that it is 'up to God' as to the number of children each couple shall have. Birth-control is un-thought of... Much work in the medical and public-health fields has yet to be done among the Mennonites."²⁵

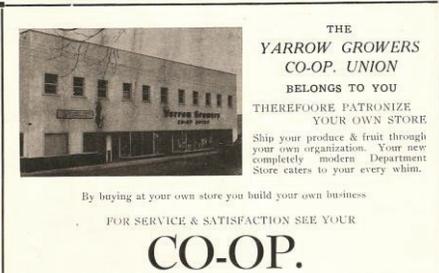
The fact is that for many local citizens, Mennonites represented a quite unwelcome intrusion. For example, in the first few decades of its existence, the community of Yarrow could count on very little government help, especially at a local or civic level. At one point, complaints against Mennonites succeeded in triggering a provincial government Commission of inquiry. Far from finding anything objectionable in Yarrow, George Baerg reports that this Commission commended Mennonites on their courageous beginnings.²⁶

Baerg's report also notes that Mennonites were often the objects of media scorn and even blackmail. A headline in the 20 March 1934 *Vancouver Sun* reads: "Mennonites protested as Valley Evil." The article goes on to quote Gordon Towers of the Fraser Valley Board of Trade: "If it took a Pearl Harbour to get the Japanese out of the coast areas, it will take a similar disaster to influence Ottawa to remove the Mennonites."

Far from dampening Mennonite spirits, such public affronts served as an incentive to create strong and sustaining infrastructure. The once disparaging reputation of Clearbrook as "poverty flats," no longer applied.

Endnotes

1. See Lawrence Klippenstein and Jacob Dick, *Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia: The Story of Abram Dück and His Colleagues 1911–1917* (Pandora, 2003).
2. See John Wittenberg and Richard D. Thiessen, "Wiens, Abram A. (1896–1965)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (2011); and John B. Toews, "Russian Mennonites and the Military Question (1921–1927)," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 43 (1969): 153–168.
3. Quoted in Harry Loewen, "A Mennonite-Christian View of Suffering: The Case of Russian Mennonites in the 1930s and 1940s," *MQR* 77 (2003): 1.
4. See John G. Rempel and Sam Steiner, "Renata (British Columbia, Canada)," *GAMEO* (2009); and Lawrence Klippenstein, "Early Mennonites in B.C.: Renata, 1907–1965," *Mennonite Historian* 7/3 (1981): 1–2 and 7/4 (1981): 2.
5. Marlene Epp, "Vanderhoof Mennonite Brethren Church (Vanderhoof, British Columbia, Canada)," *GAMEO* (1986).
6. See J.H. Lohrenz and Richard D. Thiessen,



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Yarrow Growers Co-Op advertisement, ca. 1948. Photo: Courtesy of Esther Epp Harder

"Voth, Heinrich (1851–1918)," *GAMEO* (2006); and J.A. Froese, *Witness Extraordinary: a biography of Elder Heinrich H. Voth 1851–1918* (Board of Christian Literature, 1975).

7. William Neufeld, *From Faith to Faith: the History of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Church* (Kindred, 1989), 23–27.

8. Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arm's Length: MB church planting in Canada* (Kindred, 1987), 10, 15.

9. Lyn Hancock, *Vanderhoof the Town that Wouldn't Wait* (Nechako Valley Historical Society, 1979), 115.

10. Alfred Henry Siemens, "Mennonite settlement in the Lower Fraser Valley," (MA thesis, University of British Columbia, 1960).

11. Loretta Riggins and Len Walker, *Heart of the Fraser Valley: Memories of an Era Past* (1991), 154.

12. John Barga, "How the Mennonites settled in BC," *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 7 September 1973, p. 12–13.

13. Jacob C. Krause, "How It Once Began, 39 Years ago," 1967.

14. Peter Penner, "Chauncy Eckert, the CCA, and Early Settlement," in *Before We Were the Land's*, ed. Leonard N. Neufeldt (TouchWood, 2002), 129–141.

15. George G. Bearg, *A Brief History of Mennonites in British Columbia* (Mennonite Central Committee, 1967), 4.

16. Winfield Fretz, "Recent Mennonite Community Building in Canada," *MQR* 18 (1944): 15.

17. *Chilliwack Progress*, 16 September 1988, Section D, p. 15.

18. Al Reimer, *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* (Hyperion, 1985), 49.

19. Leonard Neufeldt, ed., *Village of Unsettled Yearnings* (Touchwood, 2002), 226.

20. T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939–1970* (University of Toronto, 1996), 112.

21. Fretz, "Recent Mennonite Community Building in Canada," 17.

22. See Ruth Derksen Siemens, *Daughters in the City: Mennonite Maids in Vancouver* (Fernwood, 2013).

23. Quoted in Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939–1970*, 114.

24. *Chilliwack Progress*, 28 Feb. 1938, p. 1

25. Evelyn Maguire, "The Mennonite in British Columbia," *Public Health Nurses' Bulletin* 2 (August 1938): 2–6.

26. Bearg, *A Brief History of Mennonites in British Columbia*, 6.

David Giesbrecht, Abbotsford, BC, retired as librarian at Columbia Bible College in 2000. Part two in this two part series will focus on the contributions of BC Mennonites, beginning in the 1940s, and how public perceptions of Mennonites have changed in BC.



**Mennonite
Heritage
Centre**

600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

Working at the Archives

by Emily Thornton

When I began contemplating where to do my practicum, I knew that I wanted to work with books, as my ideal profession would involve books in some way. I also had a fascination with history, specifically with my own family history. Since I lived on campus at Canadian Mennonite University, I always passed the Mennonite Heritage Centre on my way to and from classes. I had glanced in the archives occasionally out of curiosity, but had never stepped inside. When my practicum advisor suggested I work there, I knew that this would be a chance for me to explore a side of the literary world that I had not yet encountered.

Over the course of the school year, I worked on several projects. The very first fonds—the archivist’s technical word for a collection—I described was a series of fourteen large scrapbooks made by the late Jacob Schroeder (1917-2011), documenting his life and family. The books were very large and I decided to treat each scrapbook as a separate volume, subdivided by its themes: the various family homes, his childhood in Altona, and the collages he made of his interests, such as painting. Each scrapbook was filled with fascinating insights.

The next project I worked on was cleaning and organizing a donation of glass photo negatives taken in the early twentieth century by Peter Klippenstein (1878-1960), a farmer, blacksmith, and avid photographer from Altberghal, Manitoba. His photographs consisted of family and individual portraits, as well as landscapes of farmland. The glass negatives were housed in several old dusty shoeboxes and my job was to clean them without damaging the photo emulsion, and then place them in labelled plastic sleeves for better viewing and preservation. For the project, I used a small light table, a brush, and gloves. MHC staff are now raising funds for a scanner that can scan these large glass negatives.

Because I worked on the Peter Klippenstein photo negatives, I was given

the opportunity to attend the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada’s annual meetings in Winnipeg. Archivist Conrad Stoesz and I gave a short presentation about the Klippenstein collection of glass and damaged acetate negatives. This took me out of my comfort zone, because until then, my job had been quiet, with very little human interaction, and presentations have never been my forte. I was relieved when they said I did well.

After that, I was given a collection of family letters from the Peter Unger family. The Ungers were one of the last families to leave Ukraine’s Bergthal colony during the wave of migration in the 1870s. They took up farming in Steinbach, Manitoba. Along with the letters, there were a couple of old financial ledgers and a number of CD-ROMS that had several different family genealogies created by various family members. The family letters and ledger books were all in handwritten German Gothic script. These were added to the Peter Unger family collection already in the archives, which included a will and several family registers.

Next, I updated the files of the Carman Mennonite Church, as new donations of correspondences, original typewritten meeting minutes, and ledger books were brought in. After that, my final large project was creating a finding aid for the late Elizabeth “Isby” Bergen (1908-2001), a well-known writer and editor for the *Altona Echo* newspaper. She left behind a collection of correspondences, article notes, draft copies, and newspaper clippings of articles she had either written, or liked. These she placed in a variety of scrapbooks, some by theme, and others simply by date. I also helped catalogue old VHS and audio cassette tapes donated by the Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre, many of which were old youth education tapes and world issues that MCC was working on at the time. These I described, labelled, and entered in the database.

Looking back on my practicum at the archives, I was given a chance to grow and develop in a workplace setting where I find passion and growing interest. I have always enjoyed working with books, and the solitude during working hours was a pleasant change to the team-based jobs I have held in the past. Having time to figure something out, think critically, and problem solve on my own were all skills that I learned and strengthened over the course of the year. The practicum allowed

me to put these skills to practical use and to look forward with more hope to jobs in the literary and archival world. Having this experience and these resources at my side should prove to be a positive reference on my resume.

Building Relationships

The Mennonite Heritage Centre’s staff enjoys building relationships. Two new relationships begun this spring include hosting students from both the Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) and the University of Manitoba. Current CMU student George Dyck comes with skills in photography, math, and computers. One of the projects George is working on is digitizing the *Reiseschuld* (travel debts) ledgers of immigrants to Canada arriving in 1923–1930. These will be linked with the family cards on our website.

Chris Zaste is an MA student in the Archival Studies program at the University of Manitoba. His thesis is on comparing programs that convert digital files in safe formats for longer term storage, and is using Mennonite Church Canada as a case study. We hope to learn from Chris’s experience to help us move forward with our digital preservation plans.



Esther Epp-Tiessen won the Association for Manitoba Archives “Manitoba Day Award” for her recent book, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*, published in 2013 by Canadian Mennonite University Press. The 8th annual award recognizes users of archives who have completed an original work of excellence that contributes to the understanding and celebration of Manitoba history. Her book was nominated by the Mennonite Heritage Centre, where she spent many hours poring over the vast array of MCC Canada files. Photo: Courtesy of Esther Epp-Tiessen.

Archival Theory and Practice

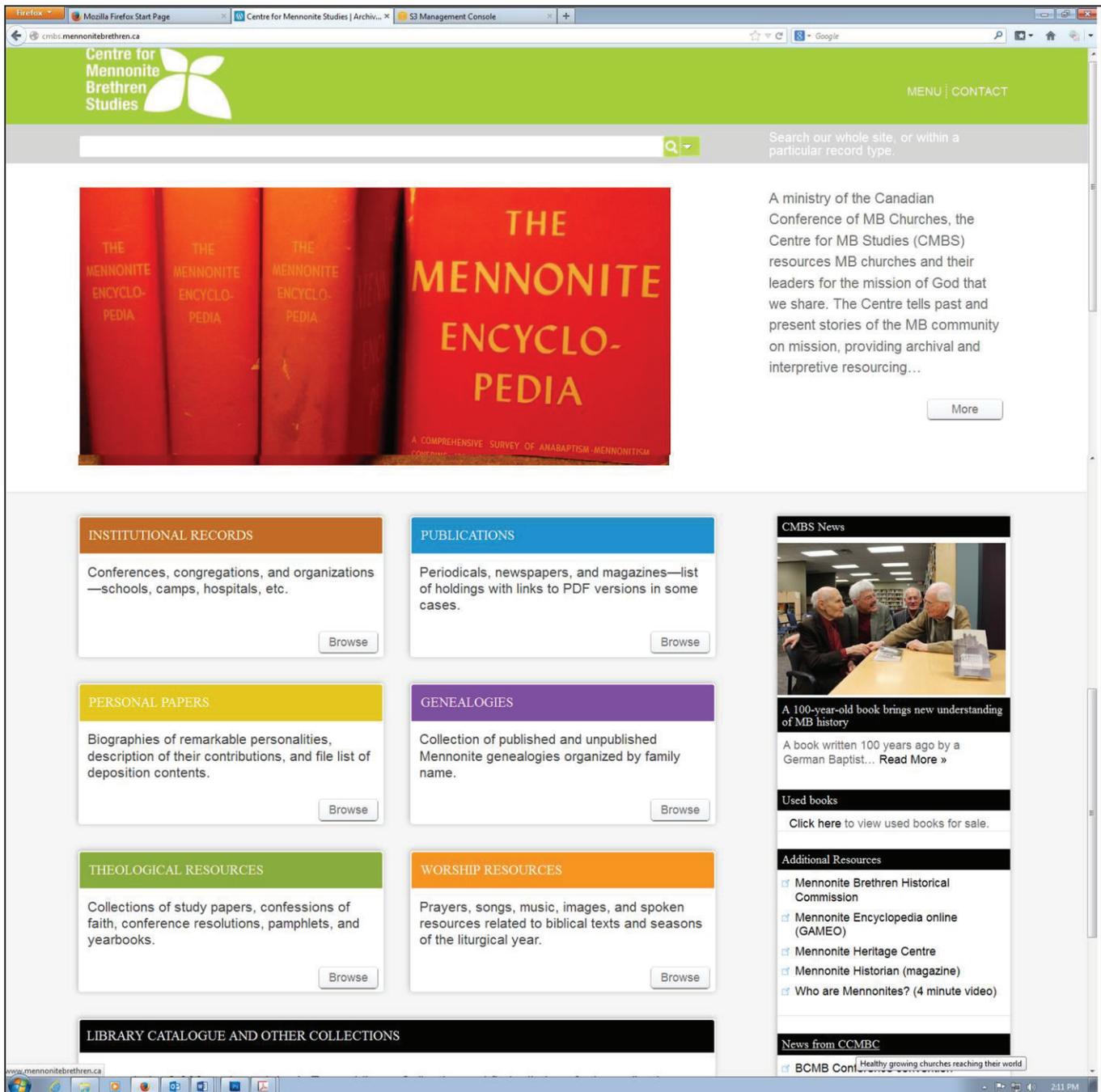
by Kate Woltmann

At the end of April, I was blessed with the opportunity to travel to Edmonton, Alberta and participate in an archives training course through the Alberta Society of Archives. The one-week intensive included training on Rules for Archival Description (RAD) theory,

best practices, and basic conservation techniques. RAD is the handbook that Canadian archivists follow for processing archival materials. Learning the basics of archival theory and practice in one week was a little daunting, but our group was energetic! It was so wonderful to dig deeper into archival processes and to create friendships with other archivists. I am looking forward to applying my new skills to the work of our archives.



New CMBS Website Launched



Two years in the making, the new website, <http://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca>, has improved search capabilities and expanded resources, including genealogies, searchable PDFs of publications, topical worship planning aids, and file descriptions of congregational content stored in the Winnipeg vault. Homepage sidebars pull in news and resources from the wider Mennonite world.

Mennonites and Media

by Burton Buller

Mennonites have traditionally had an uneasy relationship with the media. In their dualistic view of the world, media clearly resided within the worldly kingdom.

An early illustration of this unease occurred when the Mennonites who immigrated to North America decided to translate their beloved *Martyrs Mirror* from Dutch into German. They approached the Seventh Day Baptist printers in Ephrata, Pennsylvania to set the type and deliver copies of the mammoth book. They hoped their youth would have access to the stories that had sustained their strong theology of martyrdom. However, concern arose over whether these Baptists, who worshiped on Saturday rather than Sunday, would infect the translation with their own dubious theology. The galley proofs became a source of contention, as the Mennonite leadership read and reread the pages, looking for any sign of monkey business.

The contested galley proof story reveals the crux of much of Mennonite distrust of the media. We Mennonites are far more comfortable with media that we create. Our penchant for piety puts us at odds with ideas other than our own. We like control. And since media historically sat far outside of our sphere of understanding and influence—it simply was not part of our rural experience—it was impossible to control. So we sought to disengage, so as to avoid wrestling with alternative ideas spread by the media.

Yet, when Mennonites have encountered critical moments of acculturation in North America, they have done what everyone else does: turn to the media as a guide through the morass.

I've had the privilege of working and living among two large Mennonite communities that pioneered the use of media by the church: the Mennonite Brethren around Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the Swiss Mennonites in the Shenandoah Valley that surrounds Harrisonburg, Virginia. It is remarkable how similar in style and substance the two disparate groups are—both turned to media to mediate their acculturation to the English worlds in which they exist.

World War II formed the backdrop for both groups in their moves to accommodate the suspicious English world in which they found themselves.

Being German and pacifist, when the world was at war with Hitler's Germany, was not easy. Both groups experienced pressures to prove their patriotism. Additionally, when young men chose to engage in alternative military service nationally and internationally as conscientious objectors, they found themselves in settings where interactions with different lifestyles could not be avoided. When they returned home, they brought with them different attitudes than those with which they left.

These pressures were so great that in both groups young leaders arose ready to engage in new ways with the world around them. In both cases, it was college students who broke with their church's tradition of shunning media and used media to begin a new dialogue with the surrounding English culture. In both groups, there was stiff resistance from rank and file Mennonites, warning of the evil at the doorstep. But these early adopters of media were also aided by church leaders who encouraged them and even helped them financially.

The first radio broadcast in America was transmitted by Canadian Reginald Fessenden from Massachusetts on Christmas Eve in 1906. It consisted of a violin solo of *O Holy Night* and a reading of Luke 2. My research indicates that it took 30 years for the first radio program by a Mennonite from Canton, Ohio, to hit the airwaves. This was an individual effort and his program was never embraced by the church. Eleven years later, in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a small group of Mennonite Brethren Bible College students decided on their own to purchase airtime on a local radio station on which they would broadcast a half hour of singing. Their first broadcast aired on February 3, 1947.

The real kicker was that this program was in English. Meanwhile, Mennonite church services were conducted almost exclusively in German. Calling themselves the *Gospel Light Singers*, they soon added a short homily and changed the name of the half-hour program to the *Gospel Light Hour*, indicating their ambitions, I suppose, for the future. By 1954, once the program proved to be sustainable and the Mennonite Brethren Conference had gotten used to the idea of English as a spiritual language, the church embraced it as its own.

In an oral history project I began during my tenure as director of *Family Life Network*, the media ministry that grew out



John M. Schmidt recording a radio broadcast of the "Gospel Light Hour" (early 1950s?) from the auditorium of the Gospel Light City Mission at the corner of Logan Ave. and Ellen St., Winnipeg, Manitoba. Recorded after 10 PM to avoid street and traffic noise. Photo credit: CMBS (NP191-01-74).

of the *Gospel Light Hour*, former administrators and participants described how the College administration encouraged them, and how the Mennonite business community rallied around them as they pushed against opposing forces. Both church and business leaders pushed for Mennonites to embrace the language of their neighbours, even if for different reasons. For the Mennonite business community, it was essential for their labour force, mostly made up of Mennonites, to communicate in English. And for church leaders, they recognized the danger of the church holding fast to the German language, while their offspring moved inevitably toward embracing English.

At nearly the same time, March 1951, in Harrisonburg, Virginia, a handful of Eastern Mennonite College students signed a contract with a local radio station for airtime that they filled with a musical program. They called themselves the *Crusaders for Christ*, linking their pacifist leanings ironically to one of the more violent episodes in Christian history. In any case, soon a speaker was added and, as the program sprouted wings, it was embraced in 1953 by the church as its own.

For Mennonites interested in engaging the world, adopting mass communications devices depended on spiritualizing its use

as a tool of the faith and evangelism. It happened in Winnipeg and it happened in Harrisonburg. The issues were slightly different, but the path to acceptance remained consistent.

It works something like this: First, one person charges, "The media is the purveyor of dangerous ideas." Then someone counters, "Yes, but this technology could be used to further God's kingdom." Early adopters jump on the band wagon and eventually the church, including the Mennonite church, follows their lead. However, adoption cannot take place unless the media is first anointed for kingdom use.

In Winnipeg, radio aided significantly in the acculturation of the Mennonite community. It opened up the very tightly-monitored German community to the English language and by extension to English ideas. That in turn led to churches embracing English as the language of worship. Bert Loewen, the original business manager of the *Gospel Light Hour*, recounted how J.A. Toews, a key church leader and college administrator, responded to the critics of English radio with, "Let's not beat the German language to death. Let's let it die a natural death." He meant, of course, that if the church insisted on tenaciously holding onto German, the youth would eventually leave for English services elsewhere. By legitimizing English as a language for worship, the transition to English became less disruptive. At this important intersection of faith and culture, media was there. It played the role of catalyst, offering English as an acceptable language for church use, and by extension, for family and commercial use.

In Virginia, the issue was not so much language—their ads all used English by this time—as it was the use of the medium of radio itself. These Swiss Mennonites, even though they were not the recent Russian immigrants, had managed to isolate themselves from the world around them rather effectively for a very long time.

The topography itself played a role in enabling this isolation. But the strictures on use of mass media played an even greater role. Radio was forbidden in the Mennonite community. So when a handful of Eastern Mennonite College students took it upon themselves to purchase airtime on a local radio station, it raised quite a ruckus.

The radio program these students pioneered began with a quartet singing a



Glorious Gospel Choir (32 voices) under the direction of J.D. Pauls. Speaker: Rev. Henry Penner at the pulpit. Technician: John Heidebrecht at the controls. Announcer: Henry P. Petkau. Picture taken (mid-1950s?) during radio broadcast on CKTB from the main auditorium of the St. Catharines Mennonite Brethren Church, St. Catharines, Ontario (later known as Scott Street MB Church). Photo credit: CMBS (NP037-01-21).

capella music. Soon a homily was added and shortly the *Mennonite Hour*, again a half-hour program, was born. While the broadcast signal of the *Mennonite Hour* was justified as a way to reach the masses with the gospel, it was also announcing to the world that Mennonites were making an intentional effort to break their cultural isolation. Through the *Mennonite Hour*, Mennonites established an identity in the marketplace of ideas. While couched in the language of evangelism, in reality, it functioned to fix the image of Mennonites for the radio audience. It helped define the name Mennonite in the public marketplace. This was an important role, as Mennonites in the United States began to dialogue with the culture around them.

In Winnipeg, those young visionaries, who saw the potential for radio as an outreach tool, spawned a successful ministry that continues to this day with programs in Arabic, English, German, Russian, Spanish, Thai, and Ukrainian.

In Harrisonburg, Virginia, the college students who opened the doors of the church to radio inaugurated a highly successful radio ministry that produced programs in multiple languages also. Pioneering the church's use of the internet for outreach purposes, it eventually entered the arena of faith-based video production, targeting network television. For a decade, it became arguably the largest producer of denominationally-

based television for secular network release of any Protestant agency in the United States.

But what I find so very interesting is how two widely disparate Mennonite groups in two different countries, shaped by very different circumstances, happened to coordinate their moves toward acculturation in such parallel ways. Both used the media to mediate their embrace of the English world in which they found themselves. One cannot help but wonder what history will be written of the era of fractured social media that we are now entering. Will the church have a place in that history? Will young people once again rise up to envision the integration of church and media? Or will we find that media, rather than being an instrument of the church, actually aided in the disintegration of the common churchly narrative? If only one could divine the future!

Burton Buller was the CEO of Family Life Network (now Square One World Media) in Winnipeg (1994–1999) and director of Third Way Media, Harrisonburg, Virginia (1999–2010). Now he is the managing partner of Buller Films, a video production company concentrating on mental illness, substance abuse, suicide, and poverty, issues that deeply affect the well-being of individuals and families. He attends Shalom Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia.

The First Female Preacher in Ontario

by Sam Steiner

People who know that I've been working on a history of Mennonites in Ontario for the past five plus years sometimes ask about the surprising things I've learned along the way. Most typically I mention the "ministering sisters" of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, a church formed in the 1870s and known by this name from 1883 to 1947 (now known as the Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada). This group was deeply influenced by the German-speaking Methodist holiness movement represented by the Evangelical Association.¹

The first woman recognized for congregational leadership was Janet Douglas (1863–1946), a young woman born near Brussels, Ontario. As a teenager she moved with her family to Michigan where she was converted by a Mennonite Brethren in Christ evangelist. In 1884, she assisted a non-Mennonite holiness evangelist and began to lead prayer meetings. She then began to lead revival meetings, and was formally recognized as an evangelist by the Indiana Conference of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ.²

In mid-1885, she visited Ontario and preached in many Mennonite Brethren in Christ centers, including large summer camp meetings. In 1886, Douglas led a revival in Dornoch, Ontario (south of Owen Sound), and remained for a year to serve as its first pastor. The following year she founded another congregation at Kilsyth.

Although never formally ordained, she was accepted as the equivalent of a probationary minister and spoke at minister's conferences. Her ministry decreased after her marriage in 1889 to fellow minister James Hall and their move to Michigan and later the Canadian West. She and her husband are buried at First Mennonite Church in Kitchener.

Endnotes

1. See David R. Swartz, "Woman, Thou Art almost Loosed!" *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 41/2 (2006): 112–141.

2. Sam Steiner, "Hall, Janet Douglas (1863–1946)," *Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online* (2010).



Book Reviews

Jacob A. Neufeld, *Path of Thorns. Soviet Mennonite Life under Communist and Nazi Rule*, trans. by Harvey L. Dyck and Sarah Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 444 pp.

Reviewed by Harry Loewen

Path of Thorns tells the story of Jacob A. Neufeld (1895–1960) and that of many other Mennonites in the Soviet Union in three parts: 1) Five Years in the Gulag, 1933–1939; 2) *Tiefenwege*: Soviet Mennonite Life and Suffering, 1929–1949; and 3) A Memoir-Letter from Jacob A. Neufeld to His Wife Lene (Thiessen) Neufeld, on the Occasion of their 25th Wedding Anniversary. Harvey L. Dyck's Introduction and Analysis (3–50) gives excellent insight to the historical background of the period Neufeld is writing about. The translation of the text into English by H. Dyck and Sarah Dyck reads well, making Neufeld's writings accessible to many more readers.

There are still many readers alive, including myself, who experienced Neufeld's story of Soviet oppression and escape to the West during the Second World War. That story is still very much alive and most personal for many. Having also read the German original (*Tiefenwege*), I have decided not to write a formal academic review here, but merely comment on how Neufeld tells his story. I believe that many children and grandchildren of Neufeld's generation need to read about what their parents and grandparents have experienced during the *schwere Zeiten* (difficult times) of the previous century. This book is one of the best available in English, and interested young readers will no doubt love it.

In the first part of the book, Neufeld tells the story of his five years in the Gulag, 1933–1939. As a Mennonite leader in Ukraine, Neufeld was arrested as an "enemy of the people" and sent to the far east to build railways and then to manage a pig farm in the far north of the Soviet Union. Throughout his ordeal in these years, Neufeld was most concerned about his wife Lene and young family at home,

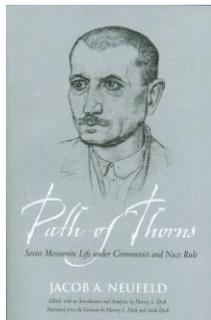
even more than his own trials and difficulties in captivity.

Even a strong and innocent man like Neufeld in the end breaks down under interrogation. Neufeld singles out a clever and cruel official by the name of Litman, a refined and "polite Jew with his mocking countenance" (65) who crushes the resolve of many a prisoner, including Neufeld. While some Mennonites shared the anti-Semitism of the time (some of which stemmed from the presence of many Jews in the oppressive Soviet government), Neufeld also had some good things to say about Jews and helped some of them during the Nazi occupation of Ukraine (48).

In the second part of the book, Neufeld reports on his life in Ukraine: the Mennonite settlements in the Molochna, Second World War, the German occupation, church life in the Mennonite colonies, collapse of the Wehrmacht at Stalingrad in 1943, flight of Mennonites to the West, and his eventual arrival in Celle in West Germany before immigrating to Canada. He kept diaries during the escape and flight and then reported not only accurately on his experiences, but also interestingly about where and how they travelled. I found that Neufeld's reflections on the war were close to how I as a ten-year-old experienced these events.

It is little wonder that Neufeld calls "the German soldiers—our saviours" (320) or says that "our sympathy for the Germans is probably understandable. It is not for us to judge harshly, to condemn, or to cast stones against our [German] rescuers and benefactors" (339). At the same time, Neufeld and other Russian Mennonites saw "the persecution of the Jews, the subjugation of the east with the aim of its long-term political and economic enslavement" (339). I remember my grandmother speaking similarly when the Germans invaded Ukraine, saying that their killing Jews would come back to haunt the Germans.

An important part of Neufeld's story is how Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) came to help Mennonites escape the clutches of the Soviets and to find them new homes in South and North America, including Canada (347 ff.). Neufeld knew that some of these Mennonite leaders had close connections with German government officials, but he also knew that such connections were for the good of Mennonites, helping to shield



them from the danger of being sent back to the “land of terror.”

The third part of the book is a touching memoir-letter from Neufeld to his wife Lene on the occasion of their 25th wedding anniversary. Neufeld summarizes their love for each other, their separation and hardships during his exile, and their reunion and immigration to Canada. Today’s readers might find it surprising that Neufeld would speak of his wife as “not my intellectual equal,” but “a good housewife and a loving mother for our children” (377).

The book includes black and white photographs of Neufeld and his family, including a pencil sketch of Neufeld in prison in 1934 and Neufeld in his German-made wooden wheelchair in Virgil, Ontario. He suffered severely from rheumatoid arthritis derived from his exile in the 1930s.

John B. Toews, ed., *Mennonites in Ukraine Amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917–1920): A Documentary Collection* (Fresno: CMBS, 2013), 198 pp.

Reviewed by Sean Patterson

John B. Toews’ translation of documents relating to the turbulent period in Ukraine (1917–1920) is a critical contribution to the field of Mennonite studies. More broadly this collection provides a pertinent addition to the social history of the Russian Civil War. Documenting in detail the harrowing tale of Mennonite suffering through Ukraine’s years of revolution and civil war, Toews’ documents offer “an inside view” from the perspective of the common Mennonite. The documents themselves have been excavated from a diversity of sources, including memoirs, newspapers, and archives, many of which are previously untranslated and unpublished.

Taken as a whole the collection addresses Mennonite experiences from a wide geographic cross-section of the colonies in southern Ukraine. Arranged thematically according to the major phases of the civil war affecting Mennonites, Toews further subdivides these sections according to colony. By doing so the editor effectively puts into

relief a shared Mennonite experience that went beyond the boundaries of individual colonies. This is most powerfully felt in the section detailing the Makhnovist massacres of late 1919, where despite the particularities of each tragic incident, patterns can be discerned across various accounts. The solidarity in suffering, so widely felt across the colonies, helps communicate to the reader how the events described have become critical to the collective memory of the Ukrainian Mennonite diaspora.

Accompanying the documentary collection is Toews’ incisive introductory commentary. Toews is keenly aware of his sources’ limitations. Toews reminds the reader of the colonies’ cultural isolation within the Tsarist empire, as “an island in a Slavic sea.” On the eve of the revolution, Mennonites largely existed in a “self-contained, self-regulating community,” if not economically then certainly culturally. As such, the documents often reflect this insular worldview, largely ignorant of broader Ukrainian aspirations, all the while attempting to grapple with and make sense of the ensuing chaos. As Toews writes, “Locally they saw only front lines repeatedly criss-crossing their villages, competing armies demanding food and shelter, and bandits robbing, killing, raping” (1).

If the documents communicate anything it is the all-pervasiveness of a complete societal breakdown. The violence described in the documents is relentless and cruelty abounds, making it a difficult read at times. At the same time, the seemingly endless cataloguing of atrocities has a disturbingly numbing effect on the reader. In this way, the reading experience itself provides a glimpse into the desensitizing effect of violence on its subject.

Toews provides the reader with the necessary historical context within which to read and assess the documents. The reader is familiarized with the myriad of official armies and informal partisans of the time period. In particular, looming large over the Mennonite civil war experience is the complex character of Nestor Makhno. As a young farmhand on Mennonite estates, Makhno developed an intense hatred for the ruling classes. During the civil war, his anarchist army repeatedly occupied the colonies, subjecting them to all types of cruelties. While Toews provides a short biography of Makhno, a more detailed sketch may

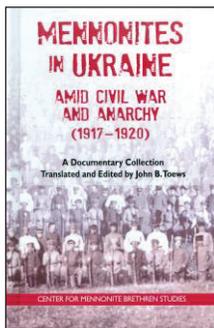
have benefited the reader’s understanding of the Makhnovist movement’s origins and goals.

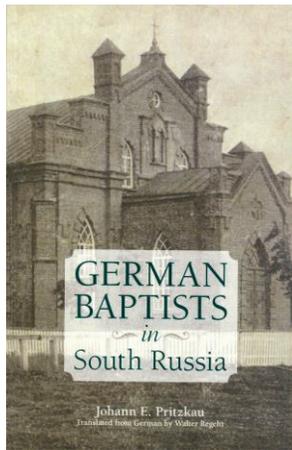
A prominent theme in the documents is the controversial episode of the Mennonite *Selbstschutz*. Organized under the tutelage of the German army in response to the mounting wave of bandit attacks, largely young Mennonites took to arming themselves. The question of how to resist in the face of violent cruelty provoked a profound spiritual crisis within the colonies that struck to the heart of Mennonite identity. Pacifism as a collective stance became untenable for many when confronted by rape and murder. The leadership, unable to formulate a clear guideline for the community, transferred judgment on the issue of resistance to “private interpretation.” The practical implications of this decision only empowered those in favor of militarism. As some of the accounts relate this translated into intolerance for conscientious objectors, including physical harassment.

Documents communicating the pacifist position are deeply critical of the *Selbstschutz*, seeing its existence as a “corporate sin.” Due to its collaboration with the German and the White armies, pacifist authors were quick to blame the *Selbstschutz* for the colonies’ near destruction. Whether the bloodlust of the invading armies could have been abated by the absence of armed Mennonites is ultimately an unanswerable question. As Toews points out, “in the end the documents prove frustrating for they lead to no satisfactory conclusions” (7).

The documents dealing with this struggle between pacifism and militarism likewise present the modern pacifist reader with a discomfiting theoretical question: how would I respond in the face of unimaginable violence? For this, there is perhaps, no answer until one is thrown into the maelstrom.

John B. Toews’ documentary collection is an excellent contribution to the historical record. The detail recorded by the documents’ authors is unique especially for its account of rural life during the revolutionary period. An important insight into a world otherwise unseen is gained through Toews’ editorship. As a meditative reflection on issues of violence, identity, and morality the collection is outstanding in its ability to draw the reader into the civil war landscape.





Johann E. Pritzkau, *German Baptists in South Russia*, trans. Walter Regehr (Winnipeg: Kindred, 2013), 218 pp.

Reviewed by Brian Cooper

It is often counterintuitive to think that the study of historical documents will lead to new insights, and so when it does happen the serendipity is felt particularly deeply. I personally felt a sort of homecoming when I read Johann Pritzkau's chronicle of German Baptist origins in the colonies of southern Russia. The Baptist denomination, in which I spent a good many years, has roots in the revivals that precipitated the rise of a new Baptist movement there, and the surprisingly close relationship between Baptists and Mennonite Brethren cannot help but be of note to students of MB denominational history. Pritzkau's account also clarifies some Mennonite Brethren theological origins in a way that may lead to a somewhat revised understanding of the theological identity of the young MB movement.

German colonization in southern Russia was not restricted to Mennonite settlers; Johann Pritzkau (1842–1924) was from a predominantly Lutheran colony in Alt-Danzig, some 200 km west of the Mennonite colony of Chortitza. Converted in the 1860s, Pritzkau eventually became the pastor of the Baptist church in Alt-Danzig, and was commissioned to write a chronicle of the Baptist denomination. Although his work was published in 1914, it had never been translated into English until this new Kindred edition was completed.

As a historical document, it tends toward hagiography, but it provides valuable perspective into both the origin of this German Baptist movement, and also into the early identity and mission of the Mennonite Brethren leaders who were instrumental in its genesis. Much of the

book tells the tale of persecution at the hands of Lutheran and Catholic authorities who strongly opposed the evangelistic message being proclaimed among them, and chronicles, sometimes uncritically, the triumphs of zealous Baptist leaders who were eager to see fellow community members come to vital Christian faith.

What the book does show, however, is the manner in which evangelical Christianity brought together disparate groups, cutting across denominational, linguistic, and cultural lines to incline Christians to cooperate in mission work. Theological differences over matters such as baptism and nonresistance, though significant, were not enough to prevent cooperation in gospel witness, and different groups demonstrated interdependence along the way.

In this vein, Pritzkau notes with gratitude that it was a pair of (unnamed) Mennonite Brethren ministers who introduced believers' baptism by immersion to German immigrants in the village of Neu-Danzig in 1864, leading to a biblical investigation of biblical baptism that culminated in the establishment of the Baptist church. The missionary work of early MB leaders quite literally birthed an entire denomination. While this is an exciting discovery, it does have a shadow side. Although Mennonite Brethren missionary activity was extending into communities outside the Mennonite colonies, the willingness to formally accept the consequences of this activity lagged behind the missionary zeal of the workers. In some places, new converts were baptized and incorporated into existing Mennonite Brethren churches. Elsewhere, Mennonite Brethren leaders did evangelistic work, contributed to early Bible schools that resourced new churches, and even helped establish churches and provide leadership for them.

Eventually, however, the fear of losing the beloved *Privilegiumsrecht* (the privilege of exemption from military service based on the Mennonite conviction on nonresistance) proved too great, and new churches from outside the Mennonite colonies that wanted to associate with the Mennonite Brethren conference were turned away, and advised to seek fellowship with German Baptists instead. Other churches that had joint membership of Mennonite Brethren and German Baptists believers separated out the two groups. In 1871, a new German Baptist Association was formed. Although

Baptists held joint conferences with Mennonite Brethren and shared very similar confessional commitments, ethnicity and legal standing were allowed to dictate that a new denomination needed to be born in order not to threaten the existing one.

Ironically, it was not purely a theological commitment to nonresistance that motivated the Mennonite Brethren to decide as they did. As Johann Pritzkau notes, there was not a consensus among Mennonite Brethren on nonresistance even in the early years of the movement. Pritzkau notes three main parties within the Mennonite Brethren—those theologically committed to nonresistance, those desiring simply to preserve the *Privilegiums*, and those who saw a legitimate place for military service. The group that became the German Baptists had not investigated the matter previously, and now was presented with a theological decision point. Having been directed toward Baptist connections, they looked to German Baptist confessional resources and settled on the position outlined in the Baptist Confession of Faith. Had circumstances unfolded differently, the Mennonite Brethren community could have grown rapidly, and MB identity could have developed in a significantly different direction.

Those who valued collaboration between MBs and Baptists found that some developments in the Mennonite Brethren community served as a cautionary tale to leaders such as Johann Pritzkau. The later stages of the early fractious behaviour were still unfolding when Pritzkau, part of a delegation of seven leaders seeking teaching and organization for their community, travelled to Einlage to meet Mennonite Brethren leaders there. Encountering disorder and conflict, the members of the delegation found no resources, and instead tried unsuccessfully to bring reconciliation among the Mennonite Brethren. Although this encounter seemed painful, it may have inadvertently strengthened the fledgling Baptist community by forcing it to develop more independently.

In sum, this book is a surprisingly fruitful historical artifact that will prove useful to readers seeking a fuller perspective on both the early Baptist and Mennonite Brethren communities in Russia. Understood as a snapshot of the churches in the late 1800s, it offers a valuable firsthand perspective, and will be a worthwhile addition to many a library.