

Mennonite Historian

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



While approximately 4,500 Mennonite men enlisted for active duty during the Second World War, there were 7,543 that applied for and were granted “Conscientious Objector” status (*Mennonites in Canada*, vol. 3, p. 58). The COs served Canadian government interests in forestry, road construction, hospital services, and teaching at Indian Day Schools. In this 1945 photo, Edwin Brandt (1921–2019) stands at the pulpit in the United Church in Oxford House, Manitoba. Following his CO assignment of teaching at the Garden Hill First Nation Indian Day School, he served as pastor in the neighbouring community of Oxford House. Edwin’s story starts on page 4. Photo credit: Lorne Brandt.

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Searching the KGB Files of My Grandfather, Nikolai D. Sudermann (1898–1938): Part 1 of 2

by Werner Toews, Winnipeg¹

My grandfather disappeared in 1937. The search to locate the official records and information of his disappearance started many years ago and continues to this very day. The stories told to me by my late mother, Margarete (Sudermann) Toews, and her mother, Elizabeth (Epp) Sudermann, were the inspiration for this search. Their stories disclosed details of their life in the former USSR—some stories were positive, but often they were filled with sadness and tragedy. The most troubling story was the disappearance in 1937 of Elizabeth's father, Heinrich H. Epp, her husband, Nikolai (Kolja) Sudermann, and his two brothers, Heinrich and Jacob.

Jacob was arrested in 1933 after refusing to be an informant for the secret police in the village of Chortitz, now part of the city of Zaporozhye, Ukraine. In early 1934, Jacob was sent to a labour camp in the far east where all contact with him was lost in October 1937.²

On November 4, 1937, my grandfather, Nikolai, and his brother, Heinrich, were

arrested and taken to the Zaporozhye prison. A few months later, their families were informed that Nikolai and Heinrich had been transferred to another city. After that, all communication with the two brothers ceased.³

Life in the former Soviet Union during the 1930s was a time of terror for many families, including Mennonite families. During this time, and unbeknownst to most of the population, Joseph Stalin was becoming increasingly paranoid. That paranoia reached its zenith during the period called the "Great Terror," 1937–1938.

The fate of many Mennonites, considered to be ethnic Germans and anti-Soviet, was decided on July 31, 1937. On this date, Nikolai Yezhov, the head of the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs, successor to the OGPU, Soviet secret police), signed an order under the direction of Stalin that marked the beginning of mass repression in the USSR. It signalled a large purge of the population, whereas earlier, only smaller operations had been ordered. Stalin's orders now dictated that enemies of the state had to be eliminated, either by imprisonment in a Gulag camp or by execution. These large-scale repressions continued until November 1938.⁴

After the disappearance of my grandfather, life went on. But without the Sudermann brothers, the remaining family members had to adjust and earn a living without the men. There was further anxiety for the families when they learned that the wives of the accused could also be arrested and their children sent to an orphanage.⁵ The following years were difficult, but through hard work and perseverance, my grandmother and her children managed to survive.

German Occupation

When the USSR entered the Second World



My grandfather, Nikolai Sudermann (1898–1938), holding my mother, Margarete Sudermann Toews (1932–2017), circa 1933. Photo credit: Werner Toews.

War in 1941, the Sudermann family faced further danger as the war front quickly progressed into Ukraine and eastward through my mother's village. The family was fortunate to have survived the fighting and bombardment without injury. In August, the German army occupied their village and living conditions started to improve for the Mennonites. The German occupation lasted until September 1943, when the German army started its retreat westward. During this time, the German government offered ethnic Germans the chance to leave the USSR and apply for permanent German citizenship.

Leaving Home

It did not take long for the remaining Sudermann family members to make the decision to leave with the retreating German army. This was a decision that saved their lives. They, along with many thousands of other Mennonites, left their homeland and began a perilous journey to an uncertain future.

The family consisted of my grandfather's sisters, Anna and Katherina, my grandmother, Elizabeth, and the children: Helene, Margarete (my mother), Heinrich, and Louise (daughter of Heinrich Sudermann). They were all fortunate to arrive safely in the city of Konitz (West Prussia, Germany) on October 11, 1943.

(cont'd on p. 4)

Mennonite Historian is published by the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Mennonite Church Canada, Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, and Canadian Mennonite University) and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches).

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Subscription rates: \$17.00 per year, \$32.00 for two years, and \$46.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.
ISSN: 07008066

Genealogy and Family History

Unehelich: Mennonite Genealogy and Illegitimate Births: Part 3 of 3

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

In Part 3, Glenn gives more examples of his genealogical research involving illegitimate (unehelich) births. For Parts 1 and 2, see June and September 2021 issues.

Things get very murky when assessing Mennonite genealogical records from Russia. The main reason is that so few church or civil records from the early Mennonite years in Russia have survived. This is complicated by the many unreliable family legends of ancestors who were born illegitimately. The Mennonite situation in Russia was much different from that in West Prussia in that the Russian Mennonites lived in separate colonies from those of the neighbouring Germans. During this early time, few non-Mennonites lived within a Russian Mennonite colony and few Mennonites lived outside the colony.

In West Prussia, Mennonites lived in the same villages as Germans and Poles. Mennonites who got in trouble with the church could simply join the nearby Lutheran church—and many did. In Russia, the situation was much more stringent. It was not legal, until 1905, to change religions within Russia without government permission.¹ In such a relatively closed and restricted society, it was much more difficult for premarital or extramarital relationships that might result in the birth of an illegitimate child. This is illustrated by a statement found in the document “Description of the Mennonite Colonies in Russia,” written in 1842.² The author states that of a total of 570 Mennonite births reported in 1838, only 2 were illegitimate.

One of the few Russian civil records that has survived is the 1835 Molotschna colony census.³ This was part of the series of Revision Lists carried out by the Imperial Russian government every 5 to 15 years. These revision lists relate every member of the family to the male head. This includes noting if the child is from the 1st, 2nd, etc. wife of the head, and it also notes if a child was born illegitimately.

An example of an illegitimate child in this census can be found in the family of Johann Jacob Hildebrand, who was head of family #10 in Lichtfeld, Molotschna. The family includes son Jacob Johann (age 30) together with wife Agnetha (age 29) and her illegitimate son Bernhard Bernhard Friesen, age 4 (see image below).

The diary of Chortitza colony minister David Epp, covering the years 1837 to 1843,³ gives a rare and fascinating insight into the disciplinary actions of the church. His diary includes several examples of individuals or couples appearing before the church ministry on “Donnerstag” for sexual indiscretions. Some of these involved an illegitimate birth. Of genealogical interest are the following cases:

1) 23 Apr 1839. “Wallman, who had an affair with the daughter of Jacob Dyck of Rosengart (she gave birth to a child), was excommunicated from the congregation.”

2) 7 Jul 1840. “The widow of P. Dyck in Chortitza gave birth to a baby boy. She named the father as David Doerksen of Chortitza. He denied it, affirmed his innocence before the brethren and called on God as his witness.”

3) 2 Jul 1841. “At the end of the month elder Jacob Braun from Bergthal stopped by to see elder Jacob Dyck. He wanted advice. The daughter of Cornelius Friesen had an affair with the young man Siemens and gave birth to a child.” This child died under mysterious circumstances.

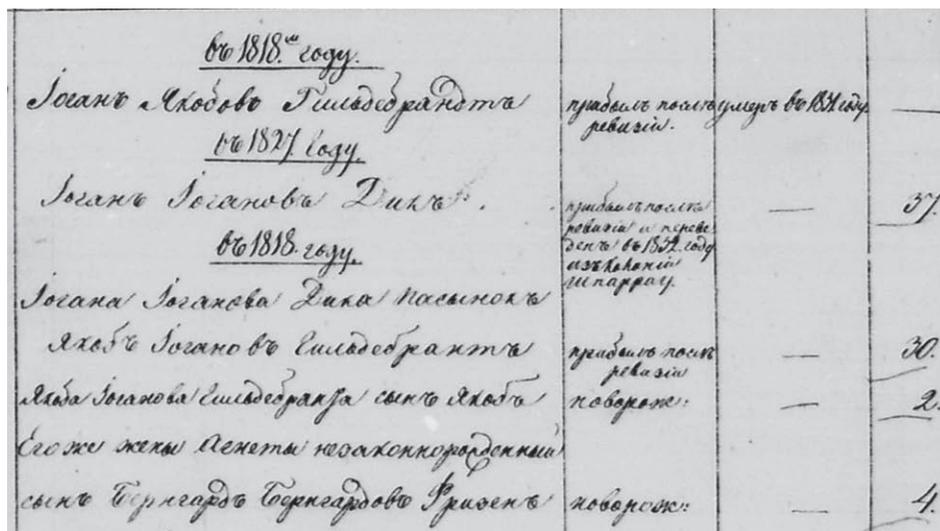
4) 17 Aug 1841. “In Neuendorf Johann Dyck and the widow Tiltzky were excommunicated on August 10 for adultery. Mrs. Tiltzky gave birth to a child.”

5) 15 Nov 1841. “At the request of the Kirchenkonvent, I [and] G[e]biets] Schreiber G. Penner went to Tomakovka to talk with the daughter of Class Krahn in Schoenthal. She had served at Julius Janz in Einlage, carried on with a Russian, got pregnant and gave birth to a son.”

At this point I can only guess as to the exact identities of the children mentioned above.

The GRANDMA database treats illegitimate births in several ways. If the mother is known but the father is not, the child is usually given the surname of the mother, and that’s what appears in the database. The child is given an unknown father and an explanation is included in the notes. If the father is known, he appears as a “spouse” of the mother, but with no marriage date. This is usually also accompanied by explanatory notes.

For many generations, Mennonites followed a set of inheritance rules adopted in Prussia. These rules made no provisions for illegitimate children. To date, I have not found any mention of illegitimacies in the West Prussian property and inheritance records obtained from Polish archives.⁴ In Russia, a common practice was to produce a *Theilungs Kontrakt* that outlined the division of property and named guardians for underage heirs. A few of these from the Chortitza and Bergthal colonies have



An excerpt from the 1835 census of the Molotschna Mennonite settlement for the family of Jacob Johann Hildebrand. The last two lines refer to his wife Agneta’s illegitimate son, Bernhard Bernhard Friesen, who was 4 years old in 1835. Photo credit: Glenn Penner.

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Searching the KGB Files

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Immigration to Canada

From 1943 to 1948, the Sudermann family lived in various refugee camps and later in private residences in post-war Germany. During this time, they were constantly moving to avoid the reach of the Soviet army. They feared that if they were caught, they would be returned to the USSR. This fear was justified as thousands of Mennonites and other citizens of the USSR were turned over to the Soviet authorities by the Allies. This policy was negotiated at the Yalta Conference between the United States, Britain, and the USSR in February 1945. The agreement, designed to reorganize postwar Germany, stated that "citizens of the Soviet Union and of Yugoslavia were to be handed over to their respective countries, regardless of their consent."⁶

How fortunate it was for the Sudermann family when their relatives in Canada agreed to sponsor the entire family in 1948. A new life was starting, but the troubling past would always be remembered.

My grandfather's sister, Anna Sudermann, who was clearly suffering from survivors' guilt, wrote in her memoir, "From the many reports and books written by people who had spent many years in prison camps and labour camps after the Second World War, one can establish a clear enough picture of the life of our relatives in the total isolation camps. And we, the women and children, had survived everything and now lived in tranquility and prosperity in a free Canada. Why? Nobody will be able to provide a valid answer. In my quiet hours of contemplation, a disturbing thought arose, that somehow a certain moral obligation had been placed upon us ... which we did not fulfill."⁷

The First Search

The fate of my grandfather and his two brothers was always on the minds of my grandmother, their sisters, and their children. The only information the family received was in 1938 while still living in Ukraine. One day in the spring of that year, my grandfather's sister, Anna, was "invited" to the local NKVD office. There she received the following information on the fate of her brother Jacob: "For a newly committed crime, your brother has been sentenced to an additional ten years of incarceration without the right to any

communication with the outside."⁸ To Anna this meant total isolation in a camp. No information was provided regarding Nikolai and Heinrich.

The sentence of another ten years without the right to communicate was given to many relatives of those who had been arrested and taken to prison. Many years later, we would learn that this sentence was a euphemism for a much harsher punishment.⁹

After the immigration to Canada in 1948, members of the Sudermann family settled into a new life. Not knowing the fate of her husband weighed heavily on the mind of my grandmother. Sometime in the 1950s, my grandmother contacted the Red Cross for help in locating my grandfather. After waiting many months, she received a reply. The letter informed her that my grandfather had died in a labour camp after contracting dysentery. Many Mennonite families received similar answers on the fate of their loved ones. They were informed that their relative had died in a detention camp.¹⁰ People had to take some closure from this information, whether they believed the official answer or not.

In 1967, my great-aunt, Anna Sudermann, made another request to the Canadian Red Cross Society for information on her three brothers: Heinrich, Nikolai, and Jacob. On September 1 of that year, Anna received a letter from the Red Cross with this answer: "We have been requested by the Soviet Red Cross to reply on their behalf to your direct enquiry for information concerning relatives. The enclosed attachments have been received for transmission to you. It is regretted that more information was not obtainable."

The attachments were two strips of paper stapled to the letter. The attachments had the correct names and birthdates of all three brothers. One attachment stated that Jacob had died on October 27, 1940, but there was no information about the cause of death or place of burial. The information on the second attachment was for Heinrich and Nikolai; it stated, "We were unable to trace them."

This was disturbing information. However, it confirmed what the family had always believed about Jacob. At the same time, the information regarding Nikolai was different than what my grandmother had received earlier. How could the authorities know in the 1950s that Nikolai had died in a camp, but were unable to find

any information for him in 1967? These responses added more to the confusion and uncertainty around the circumstances of their disappearance. It appeared that the Soviet authorities were unwilling to provide anyone with accurate and detailed information on the deaths of their loved ones.

The true fates of the three Sudermann brothers would not be known until 2003. Unfortunately, that news could not be shared with my grandmother and my grandfather's sisters as they had all passed.

Final Search

My search began in November 2002 when I completed an application from the Restoring Family Links Division of the Canadian Red Cross requesting information for Nikolai and Jacob Sudermann. This was the same organization that my grandmother had written to in the 1950s.

In August 2003, I received an official answer regarding the disappearance of Nikolai and his brother Jacob. The letter informed me that both had been executed in 1937 or 1938. In the ensuing months, I also received an answer on the fate of the third brother, Heinrich, and my great grandfather, Heinrich Epp. Their alleged crimes: being involved in counter revolutionary activity against the Soviet Union. Both had also been executed.

Included in the information was that all four of them had been rehabilitated or exonerated in 1989. In essence, that meant that they were innocent of all the charges leveled against them. This was determined through a judicial review, which stated that in many, if not all these cases from 1937–1938, there was no credible evidence to support the charges.

The letter I received from the Canadian Red Cross stated that the information they obtained was from the State Archives of the Zaporozhye Region. The letter contained only sparse information on the fate of my grandfather and his brother and no place of burial. There were, however, archival file numbers in the letter.

I was not satisfied with the insufficient information that I received from the Red Cross and started a letter-writing campaign requesting copies of the archival files from the Zaporozhye archives. My hope was that these files would contain the arrest and court records for all four men. It would be many years before I received copies of the

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CO Experience Sets the Stage for Mission Career

by Lorne Brandt, Richmond, BC

Some readers of the *Mennonite Historian* may have had family members who, as Conscientious Objectors (COs) during the Second World War, served in work camps, making park facilities or roads through forested areas, or served in hospitals. However, it might not be as well known that some also served as teachers and pastors in Canada's Indigenous communities.

How did this come about? When non-CO teachers and clergy joined the military as Canada entered the Second World War, vacancies were left in the church-run schools and missions in northern communities. I had not realized how many COs completed their alternative service obligations by filling these vacancies until a nephew, looking into the issue of Mennonites and Residential Schools, pointed me to the chapter on missions in Ted Regehr's book, *Mennonites in Canada*. I knew my father, Edwin Brandt (1921–2019), was one of these Mennonite COs; he taught at an Indian Day School for two years.

After my father graduated from Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta, he came back to Manitoba, where his parents were living, and worked for the summer at the Canadian Sunday School Mission. During this time, he learned about the possibility of responding to his pending military call by volunteering to go up north as a CO. He knew his call to enlist was coming and, remarkably, he did not wait for his call. He took matters into his own hands and made application for CO status even before his call! It was 1943, and he was 23. I'll let father tell it in his own words.

[Arriving in Winnipeg, I learned that] very likely I would be able to go north. The only hitch in all this was, if I would get my call for the army, I would have to come back at my own expense. But I was told there was a way around that. From the Selective Service Department, I was told to make an appointment at the Provincial Court House for a hearing for 'conscientious objector' (CO) status. As soon as I would have my CO standing, they would have all the necessary papers ready for me to sign, and I would be on my way north.

I made the appointment and had to

come back to Winnipeg the next week. When I was called before three judges, I saw that they had a secretary taking notes of everything. So, I said to myself, I will say no more than asked for. Seeing that all I really wanted was my CO standing, one of the judges got rather angry; one of the others told him to keep his cool. It almost seemed a laughing matter, the way those three carried on. Finally, one said, "What do you plan on doing when you get your CO? We have the authority to do as we see fit." That's when I told them that I was planning on flying north to teach in a school under the sponsorship of the United Church. Then one of the judges said, "Guess that's where I withdraw my membership."

"How are you so sure of going north," they asked. I then told them that the Selective Service had all my papers ready; all they needed was my CO standing. This angered the judges, and one said, "That's not the first time Mr. Brown (he was the chief officer) had put one over them." So, the one who seemed more at ease in the whole thing, took a sheet of 8½ by 11 paper and wrote a big CO on it, gave it to me, and said to go see Mr. Brown. I was relieved and glad to leave the court room. A few others that were there in the court room said that they had never experienced such a case. They marveled



Edwin Brandt in 1943, before heading north for CO assignment at Garden Hill First Nation. Photo credit: Lorne Brandt.



Edwin Brandt in 1945, Mennonite CO teacher at Garden Hill, pictured here wearing parka and mittens made by local Indigenous crafters. Photo credit: Lorne Brandt.

(cont'd on p. 11)

Mennonite Heritage Archives

MHA Announces New Digital Research Tool

by Conrad Stoesz

During the pandemic, many people have relied on online resources in a new, concentrated way. At the archives, we saw people having more time to do research and asking for access to our archival materials, often in digital format.

We are now on the cusp of creating a new Digital Collections project that will provide a greater level of access to materials. First to be posted will be community-published works such as newspapers, magazines, and yearbooks.

PeaceWorks Technology Solutions has been contracted to create this platform. Our goal is to raise \$30,000 to build the infrastructure, but hosting all the digitized content will be an ongoing cost. As more material is digitized and made available, hosting and access costs increase by \$800 a terabyte each year.

We are excited about this digital research tool, but it is a new and ongoing cost that will be above our regular operations.

We invite you to become a supporter of this work on a monthly, yearly, or one-time basis, supporting this project and the ongoing work of the archives. There are multiple ways to give: online, by phone, or by cheque. See <https://www.mharchives.ca/how-to/donate-finances/> for details.

We are already preparing materials to post on the new Digital Collections platform! We are excited by this project and the new research that it will enable.

Watch for further updates!

Readers Write

by Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg

The September 2021 issue of *Menmonite Historian* included a small slice of nostalgia for me. I was one of the students at the Manitoba Normal School in 1949–50, entering a few years after its opening.

It was a one-year program to train teachers how to get “airborne,” and stay up, as it were. Several hundred students attended, a large number of them with Mennonite background, also many Ukrainians and Anglo Saxons, etc. We guys lived in H-huts—mine was Strathcona.

Rooms were rather cramped—a double bunk bed, two desks with two chairs, was it for furnishings—twelve by twelve, the space. It was well heated in winter though, and adequate for studying if you planned to do any. There was much entertainment for those who were not set on studying. They went by the dictum, if you were born to be a teacher, why worry? If not, you would not stay in the profession for long.

The women got somewhat better rooms in the big building to the west of the main building (once used for Air Force officers and staff) and the second floor of the main building (visits from male students were fairly well-controlled)—still, there were a number of marriages right after school closing.

I recall art lessons taking us across what became Grant Ave. (note the bushes to the right in the campus photo, now CMU, south campus). We were to find a flower and draw/paint it on the spot. It was a fenced-in pasture at the time—and I was not fond of the subject!

Dave Voth and I got to know each other better as first cousins, and both of us were hired as teachers right after closing exercises for the year—both for the Greenland S.D. near St. Anne—a



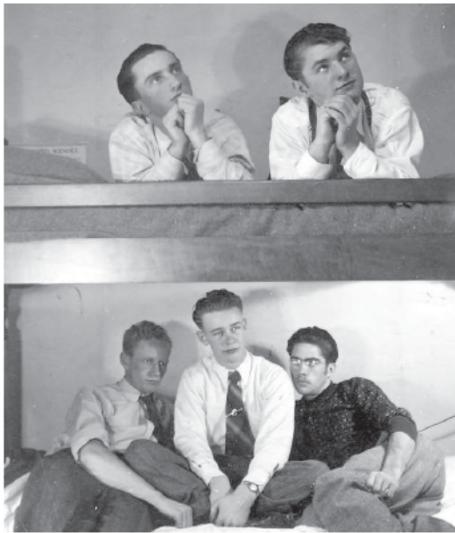
Since April 1944, *Der Leitstern* (see masthead below, right) had served the Rudnerweider Mennonite church well, providing readers their information in High German. Although the paper had undergone a few changes, for the most part, it had continued to be highly devotional in character. In 1959, it was determined to continue publishing the paper with the inclusion of an English youth page. As time moved on, it was felt necessary to launch an English paper, and publish it alternately with *Der Leitstern*. The purpose of this paper was to speak to the needs of the various aspects of the EMMC with a special emphasis on youth work. It was around a kitchen table in Altona in 1964 that *The Recorder* was born. *The Recorder* continues to be published by the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference on a bi-monthly basis and is one of the communication methods used by EMMC.

first year for mission radios in Ecuador and twice that amount in the second year, allowing them to pay for some pews and support youth attending the Steinbach Bible Institute youth retreat. Can anyone help identify the people in the photo?

Voices from EMC & EMMC

“The rows seemed endless,” writes Carolyn Schellenberg in the Truth for Youth section of *The Messenger*, July 23, 1965 (see image at left). “Most of us were unskilled workers, never having hoed beets before.” Among other things, she says, “Every mosquito seemed to know we were there and took advantage of it.” Beet hoeing, Carolyn writes, involved thinning the beets, then checking the rows to see if it had been done properly, and re-doing it where it wasn’t. A few weeks later, they returned, she says, to “cut out the great numbers of weeds that had sprung up since our hoeing.” The Portage la Prairie youth beet project netted about \$200 the





Manitoba Normal School dormitory photo (1949–50), top (l-r): Abe Paetkau and Lawrence Klippenstein; bottom (l-r): Diedrich Gerbrandt, Erdman Kroeker, and Ivan McBurney. Photo credit: David Voth, MAID CMBS NP198-5-8.

Holdeman community—at \$2,500 for the year, if I recall correctly. It went okay, I guess—he stayed seven years and I two.

Dave had a car and one summer took some of us to British Columbia: Abe, Erdmann, and me. And since we needed to travel “on the cheap,” we slept one night in a wheat field on the way down!

I am quite fond of the photo of the fellows on the bunk beds (see image above from the September 2021 *Mennonite Historian*)—a kind of pranks night it was—top, left to right, Abe Paetkau (later a fine physicist working at Chalk River), next “yours truly,” bottom, left to right, Diedrich Gerbrandt (much appreciated pastor and teacher, who suffered many years from a stroke, now deceased), Erdman Kroeker (long-time teacher and superb craftsman in retirement, also deceased, with family later, including three physicians), and Ivan McBurney (no data to hand).

All the best to CMU—a worthy successor to them all!

Book Reviews

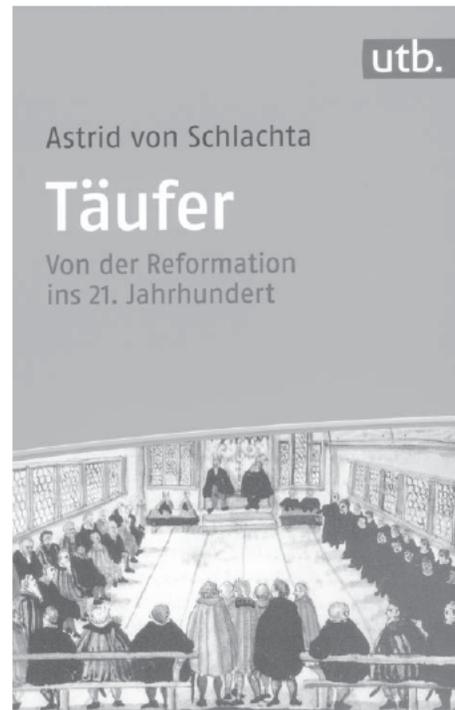
Astrid von Schlachta, *Täufer: Von der Reformation ins 21. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Narr Francke Attempto Verlag, 2020), 431 pp.

Reviewed by Hans Werner, Winnipeg

The simple title, *Täufer* (baptizers), belies the challenge that Astrid von Schlachta takes up in her study of those who came to be called Hutterites, Amish, and Mennonite. The book is a cultural

and theological history of what has been called the ‘radical’ or ‘left wing’ of the Reformation. The author unpacks these terms and aims to explain how an examination of 500 years of Anabaptist history makes clear that “change is normal. The ‘baptizers’ were children of their time” (13). In comparison to other histories of the Radical Reformation, *Täufer* seeks to place more emphasis on everyday Anabaptists and the perceptions of their neighbours and local authorities.

Astrid von Schlachta is the Director of the Mennonitische Forschungstelle in Weierhof, Germany, and Privatdozentin in the Chair of Early Modern History at the University of Regensburg. She has written extensively on Hutterite and Mennonite history. The book is targeted at history and religious studies students and features QR codes that take the reader to sources and related assignments on the publisher’s website. There are also discussion questions and reading lists at the end of chapters. The author makes generous use of quotations from original sources, some of which one has seen only rarely in English language publications.



The book is organized into nine chapters, with the first outlining what by now has come to be the dominant view that Anabaptism had diverse beginnings in the 16th-century reformation. In the second chapter, the focus is on the ‘everyday’ Anabaptist and how they were perceived by their neighbours, authorities,



Mary Anne and I (Jon Isaak) visited our children in Germany this fall, Rianna and Benni Isaak-Krauss, the new pastoral couple at the Frankfurt Mennonite Church. While touring the building, I came across the old MCC food can pictured above, part of the postwar relief efforts in Germany. Recent scholarship has highlighted some of the ways MCC’s humanitarian efforts to help Mennonites from the Soviet Union were entangled in complex ways with National Socialism and its legacy. See Fall 2021 issue of *Intersections*, <https://mcccanada.ca/media/resources/12017>. Photo credit: Mary Anne Isaak.

and other Christians. Here ‘baptizers’ are characterized as pragmatic and their neighbours view of them as varied and not universally negative. The third and fourth chapters, respectively, deal with similarities and differences between various groups and personalities, and the views of outsiders. These two chapters examine the span of theological and church practices on the one hand, and the issues of the political threat presented by Anabaptists and the resulting martyr story and granting of *Privilegia* on the other.

It is only in the fifth chapter where we begin to leave the early reformation period, and the subsequent chapters deal with migration, congregational life and schisms, and integration and acculturation. Although the reformation period is necessarily centred on the core areas of Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, the theme of migration expands the “baptizer map”

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Searching the KGB Files

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files, as they were considered secret and would not be released to family members.

Through my research, I learned that in 1991 the Ukrainian government decreed that the archival documents of the KGB (Committee for State Security) would be passed to the Governmental Archives of the Republic. This signified that the former secret police archives would now be stored in the regional archives of Ukraine.¹¹

I then discovered that a law had been passed in 1994, granting rehabilitated persons or their close relatives the following rights: "The right to familiarize [themselves] with materials of classified criminal and administrative files and receive copies of documents of non-procedural character. Rehabilitated persons and their heirs have the right to receive manuscripts, photographs, other personal stuff, which were kept in files. Governmental bodies are obliged to inform relatives of the rehabilitated about the place of death, if such data is available."¹²

In 2006, I made another request to the archives quoting the details of the 1994 law. This request was answered by a letter that I received from the Embassy of Ukraine in Canada that stated, "Please find attached letter of State Archive Committee of Ukraine informing [you] that the Archives of Ukraine has no information about the place of burial of Nikolai David Sudermann and there is no possibility to provide you with any documents or photographs."¹³

Not satisfied with that answer, I was able to contact an official at the embassy by telephone. During my conversation with the official, he confirmed that it was not possible for me to receive any documents regarding the arrest of my grandfather. He also made the comment that people are trying to put the past behind them and that no one is really interested in this part of history. I assured him that many Mennonite families were still interested in this part of history and were looking for answers on the fates of those who disappeared in 1937–1938.

The only success I had early on in my search was a reply to a letter I sent in 2004 to the Russian archives in the far east requesting information about Jacob Sudermann. Later that year, I received a letter from the Federal Security

Service of the Russian Federation located in the Province of Amur, City of Blagoveshchensk. The camp where Jacob was imprisoned was near the city of Svobodny in the province of Amur. Ironically, the word Svobodny is the Russian word for "free."

The letter contained a report written by camp officials that described Jacob's activities in the camp. The letter also contained his photo when he arrived at the camp in Svobodny. I was glad to have the last known photograph of Jacob, which I included in my book, *Sketches from Siberia*. The book was published in 2018.¹⁴

Success

The light at the end of the tunnel arrived in 2015, when the Ukrainian government enacted legislation that opened the OGPU-NKVD-KGB files for review by relatives and/or scholars.¹⁵

For a description of the files that are available to the families of the Mennonites that were persecuted in the former Soviet Union, please see the article written by Dr. Peter Letkemann for the June 2018 edition of the *Mennonite Historian*.¹⁶

In early 2018, I sent a request to the State Archives of Zaporozhye for copies of the original KGB files for my grandfather. On June 7, after many months of letter writing, I received 20 scans of his KGB files via email.

My journey to acquire my grandfather's files that began in 2003 appeared to be at an end. Finally, I could study the files that contained the investigative documents related to his prosecution and his ultimate sentence. The final hurdle was to have the documents translated as they were written and typed in the Russian language.

I was fortunate to locate a translator, Mrs. Ella Federau, who is from a Russian Mennonite background. The scans contained a few pages of handwritten notes that I thought would be difficult to translate. Mrs. Federau did an excellent job of deciphering the documents and the notes.

The Records

After receiving the translation, I began a preliminary review of the records. It appeared that the documents were scanned in chronological order, which made them easier to understand.¹⁷ There was, however, one exception. The indictment document (formal charges) was scanned before my grandfather's interrogation report.

While working through the records,

I was able to locate information on all the NKVD officers that were involved in my grandfather's arrest and prosecution. I have included their background information at the end of the second part of this article. In 1937–1938, the agency for state security (secret police) was known as the NKVD, then later known as the KGB from 1954–1991.

The first document was the cover page of the case file (Fond 5747, inventory 3, file 5857, Delo 70205) Original #16329 (1937). From the information on this page, it appears that this file had undergone a few file-number changes and reviews during 1941, 1962, 1963, and the 1990s.

The cover page also contained the following description of the file: "Prosecution of Sawatzky, Franz, Sudermann, Nikolai, Pauls, Dietrich arrested and sentenced under Articles 54-7, 54-10 Part 2, and 54-11 of the criminal code of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic."¹⁸

A search of these charges revealed that the criminal code laws of the USSR were identical to the Ukrainian SSR criminal code, with the only difference being the prefix number was 58 in the USSR¹⁹ (54-7: Sabotage or "wrecking"; 54-10 Part 2: Anti-soviet propaganda and agitation; and 54-11: Participation in a counterrevolutionary organization).

The next document, dated November 4, was a type-written form completed by Sergeant Hugo Johann Schultz of the NKVD, requesting permission to arrest and detain N.D. Sudermann at the Zaporozhye prison. The information stated that, after reviewing the materials against Sudermann, the investigator believed there was enough evidence to support a charge under Article 54-10 Part 2: Conducting counterrevolutionary nationalist agitation, praising fascist Germany.

This document appears to be part of the Soviet legal process where an investigator needed to provide the city and state prosecutors office with evidence that would support the arrest and detention of an accused. Before the request was forwarded to the prosecutor's office, the officer had to receive approval from the department supervisor and the director of the NKVD city department. In western terminology, this would be an application to obtain an arrest warrant.

The names and signatures at the bottom of the document show that the arrest was

approved by the director of the Zaporozhye city department of the NKVD, Colonel Igor Boris Shumsky and Lieutenant Joseph Taksar, head of the Counterintelligence Division in Zaporozhye (3rd department). The requirement to seek the prosecutor's approval is outlined in Article 126 of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic Constitution (1937), which states, "No one shall be arrested except in accordance with a court order or with the sanction of a prosecutor."²⁰

The next document, also dated November 4, was another type-written form from the Zaporozhye State Prosecutor, authorizing the arrest and detention of Nikolai Davidovich Sudermann. This is the statement by the prosecutor regarding the request by Sergeant Schultz to arrest my grandfather. "I, the state prosecutor for Zaporozhye, Khant, after considering the submission of materials with respect to Sudermann, Nikolai Davidovich, found that he conducts active counter-revolutionary work directed against the existing system."

Khant then authorized the NKVD in Zaporozhye to "bring him to justice under Article 54-10, paragraph 2 of the Criminal Code of the Ukrainian SSR." It would appear, from the language in the document, that my grandfather was already guilty of a crime before he had a chance to defend himself against these accusations.

Of interest to me was that my grandfather was arrested on November 4 at 5 o'clock in the morning,²¹ which would mean that all the documents should have been signed by the NKVD officers and the prosecutor just before his arrest on November 4, which is something I find highly unlikely. Signing these documents after his arrest would have been in violation of Soviet law.

A preliminary search of arrest records posted on a genealogy website indicated that over 50 men with Mennonite surnames had been arrested in the Zaporozhye region of Ukraine on November 4, 1937.²² If the arrest procedure with all the proper documentation was the same in these cases, it is likely that the documentation was signed on different dates.

The next document was the arrest warrant (#2099), signed by State Security Sergeant Boris Lvovich Linetsky. The warrant directed Comrade Schultz to search and arrest citizen Nikolai Sudermann, who lived at Kalinina Street number 3 in the village of Khortitsa.

The search report followed the arrest warrant and was completed by State Security Sergeant Vasily Afansyeveich Gontarenko, who was named in the document as the investigator. When a citizen was arrested, a search of his or her house was conducted to locate and seize items related to the crime. In the case of people charged with conducting counter-revolutionary nationalist agitation praising fascist Germany, a search was usually conducted by the authorities to look for letters from foreign countries. Prior to his arrest, my grandfather's brother, Jakob, who lived in the same house, had been arrested twice in 1933. During his second arrest, the house had been extensively searched. In the case of my grandfather's arrest, the house was not searched.²³

The search reports stated that the only item seized from my grandfather was his passport. The bottom half of the search report form, dealing with seized property and complaints regarding the search, was left blank. There was a reference to his brother, Heinrich, in the report, which was probably due to an error. My grandfather's signature is on the form, and it appears to have been signed with a trembling hand as it was almost unreadable.

Following the search document was a questionnaire that listed his biographical information. The information includes the names and ages of his wife and three children: my grandmother, Elisabeth Epp Sudermann, daughter Helen, son Henry, and my mother, Margarete.

The information in the form appeared to be correct regarding place of birth, education, and place of employment, the Kossier Kolkhoz (Collective Farm). The Kolkhoz was named after the First Secretary of the Ukrainian Communist Party, Stanislaw Kossier. He was in office from 1928 until 1938, when he was arrested. After his arrest, Kossier was brutally tortured until he signed a confession. Kossier was executed on February 26, 1939, seemingly another victim of the terror.²⁴

A point of interest to me was question 12 on the form, which requests the nationality and citizenship of the prisoner. Written beside that question was the word "German." My grandfather was born in what was then called south Russia and, as far as I know, never travelled abroad, or obtained German citizenship. The ethnicity of the people that were selected to be repressed was a factor during the Great Terror.²⁵

After November 4, it would appear there was no formal contact with any NKVD officers until November 21. That was the day of his interrogation.

It seems that State Security Sergeant Gendelman conducted the interrogation, as his name appears on the formal indictment document. That document was completed after the second interrogation on November 22. Gendelman's name was not found on the interrogation notes; however, there was an illegible signature in the notes that is thought to be his.

There were five pages of handwritten interrogation notes included in three of the scanned documents. Before I describe the details of his interrogation, I will provide some historical context on the conditions to which he may have been subjected while in prison and before his interrogation.

To understand the suffering that all the victims endured during the Great Terror, I was able to locate a book written by Lynne Viola, titled *Stalinist Perpetrators on Trial, Scenes from the Great Terror in Soviet Ukraine*, published in 2017.²⁶ The book focuses on the work of the NKVD while engaged in the apprehension and prosecution of people suspected of anti-Soviet activity in Ukraine. The information that is the basis for the book was taken from the court cases of those officers that were charged with violating Soviet law during the terror years.²⁷

A quote from the book summarizes the activities of the NKVD during the Great Terror: "To prove the fiction of the terror, the NKVD had to provide a vast panoply of enemies who, once arrested, had to confess according to established tropes. Because the charges were fictitious, the NKVD operatives had little choice but to extract confessions through force and to create witness testimony through manipulation and threat."²⁸

One of the chapters in the book focuses on the NKVD officers assigned to the city of Zaporozhye where my grandfather had been imprisoned. "An Excursion to Zaporozhye" begins with an interesting quote by one of the Zaporozhye officers by the name of S.A. Frishko: "Without any exaggeration, I can say that there was not one interrogator who 'honestly' wrote up interrogation records."

The book focuses on events that occurred principally in 1938, which was long after my great-grandfather, grandfather, and his brother were executed.

What occurred in 1938 was no different from the events of 1937, except for a surge of arrests in the summer of 1938. It was reported by one officer that “as many as 4,000 prisoners were held in Zaporozhye between June and September 1938.”²⁹

The Zaporozhye chapter describes the methods used to extract confessions from the accused. One method was the use of a rubber truncheon to beat prisoners into signing a confession. Another method was to place 30–40 prisoners in a jail cell designed only to hold six prisoners, sometimes in the heat of summer. After approximately 5–10 hours, most accused agreed to confess.³⁰ The other threat was that the accused were told that their wives would be arrested, and their children placed in orphanages.³¹ This threat was real as shown by the figures in a NKVD statistical report compiled in 1938. The category of “wives arrested of traitors to the homeland” between the dates June 1937 and January 1938 in Ukraine was 7,181.³²

The notes show that my grandfather was interrogated on November 21 and again the next day on November 22. Judging from these dates, my grandfather was in custody for 18 days before he was interrogated. One can only imagine what kind of torment he went through in those days and nights.

In part two, which is scheduled to appear in the March 2022 issue, Werner Toews concludes with more analysis of the court transcripts he secured from the State Archives of Zaporozhye in Ukraine.

Werner Toews is a retired police officer and a former vice president of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. He is the author of Sketches from Siberia: The Life of Jacob Sudermann (Friesen, 2018) and received the Germans from Russia Heritage Society 2017 Joseph S. Height literary award for his article on the missing records of the first Mennonite settlement in Russia.

Endnotes

1. This article was first published in the *Heritage Review* 51/3 (September 2021): 27–42, a publication of the Germans from Russia Heritage Society (GRHS), and appears here with permission from both the article’s author, Werner Toews, and GRHS.

2. From the unpublished memoir, “Lebens-erinnerungen von Anna Sudermann (1893–1970),” pages 300–303, English translation by Gerald Dyck (Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg).

3. Ibid.

4. See Nicolas Werth, “The NKVD Mass Secret National Operations (August 1937–November 1938),” *Mass Violence and Resistance – Research Page* 10 December 2021 Mennonite Historian

Network, May 20, 2010, <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/nkvd-mass-secret-national-operations-august-1937-november-1938>.

5. August 15, 1937: NKVD Secret Operational Order no. 00486, “On repression against the wives of traitors to the Fatherland and on providing for their children,” <https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/mass-crimes-under-stalin-1930-1953>.

6. “The Yalta Conference” (1945), <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/imperialism/notes/yalta.html>.

7. “Lebenserinnerungen,” 303–304.

8. <https://statehistory.ru/646/10-let-bez-prava-perepiski/>.

9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Without_the_right_of_correspondence.

10. <https://bessmertnybarak.ru/article/poryadok-rassmotreniya/>.

11. https://old.archives.gov.ua/Eng/Access/Archival_Legislation_of_Ukraine_1991-2011.pdf.

12. Ibid.

13. Letter in possession of the author, dated 19 May 2006, from the Embassy of Ukraine in Canada, 331 Metcalfe St., Ottawa.

14. <https://www.sketchesfromsiberia.com/>.

15. <https://old.uinp.gov.ua/laws/law-ukraine-access-archives-repressive-agencies-totalitarian-communist-regime-1917-1991>.

16. <https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/44.2.MHJun18.pdf>.

17. <http://deconstruction.cdvr.org.ua/2018/45/>.

18. <https://veprin.jimdofree.com/документы/статья-54-ук-уцср/>.

19. https://bessmertnybarak.ru/article/statya_58_ukrsfsr/.

20. <https://worldconstitutions.ru/?p=587>.

21. “Lebenserinnerungen,” 300.

22. <https://chort.square7.ch/Pis/Sapor.pdf>.

23. “Lebenserinnerungen,” 300.

24. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanisław_Kosior#cite_note-15.

25. [https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/nkvd-mass-secret-national-operations-august-1937-november-1938.html#:~:text=The Kulak Operation, launched by,Soviet parties”, “former White.](https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/nkvd-mass-secret-national-operations-august-1937-november-1938.html#:~:text=The%20Kulak%20Operation,launched%20by,Soviet%20parties%20%2C%20%22former%20White%20%22)

26. <https://www.history.utoronto.ca/publications/stalinist-perpetrators-trial>.

27. Ibid., 1–9.

28. Ibid., 54.

29. Ibid., 115.

30. Ibid., 131.

31. <https://document.wikireading.ru/17950>. See Operational order 00486.

32. *Poland and Ukraine in the 1930s and 1940s: Documents from the Archives of the Secret Services*, edited by Jerzy Bednarek, Diana Boyko, Wanda Chudzik, et al. (Łódź–Warsaw–Kiev: The Institute of National Remembrance, 2012), 208.

Unehelich Births

(cont’d from p. 3)

survived,^{5,6} and they include the occasional case of an illegitimate heir. If a man acknowledged paternity of an illegitimate child, it was expected (possibly required) by the church that he provide financially for that child. This financial support was negotiated between the father and the guardians of the child.

It is unknown if this church-mediated practice goes back to the days in Prussia.

The author would be interested in knowing about any documented arrangements known to have taken place in Prussia or Russia, beyond what is known from the existing *Theilungs Kontrakten*. Once an agreement was made, the illegitimate child no longer figured in the inheritance of the biological father—where typically, his assets were divided in such a way that the widow received one-half, and the surviving biological children received the other half.

But what happened when the biological mother of an illegitimate child died? A biological child, illegitimate or not, should have received a share of the maternal inheritance. I have yet to find an example of what actually happened in such cases. Consider the following theoretical example—an unmarried woman has an illegitimate son with a man who agrees to provide financial support for the child. At that point the biological father is out of the picture in terms of paternal inheritance. She then marries another, previously unmarried, man and has 4 children with him, who all survive her. When her husband dies, his legitimate children each receive one-eighth of his assets, while she receives one-half. When she dies, does her illegitimate son also receive (one-fifth of) the maternal inheritance, together with her four legitimate children?

Although relatively rare, illegitimate birth among the early Mennonites in Prussia and Russia did happen. In some cases, it is possible to find documentation enabling one to investigate these “non-paternity events.” In some cases, Y-DNA analysis is very helpful in sorting things out.

Endnotes

1. See my continuing series of articles on “Joining and Leaving the Mennonite Community: A Genealogical Perspective,” in *Roots and Branches*, the periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia (Part 1 Feb 2020 and Part 2 Sep 2020). These will eventually appear on the Society Website at: <http://www.mhsbc.com/newsletters.php>.

2. *Opisanie Menonistskikh kolonii v Rossii*. Zhurnal Ministerstva gosudarstvennykh imushchestv, 4 (1842), 1–42. Translator John P. Dyck, Springstein, Manitoba. Transcriber Selenna Wolfe, Mennonite Heritage Archives.

3. *The Diaries of David Epp 1837–1843*. Translator and editor, John B. Toews, Regent College, Vancouver.

4. The collection of West Prussia inheritance documents can be found at: https://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/VI_53.html.

5. Mennonite Heritage Archives, Volume 6311.

6. There are a few examples of the Chortitza colony *Theilungs Kontrakten* that came to Manitoba. They can be found at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, Volume 4180, file 1. I thank Bruce Wiebe for providing this information.

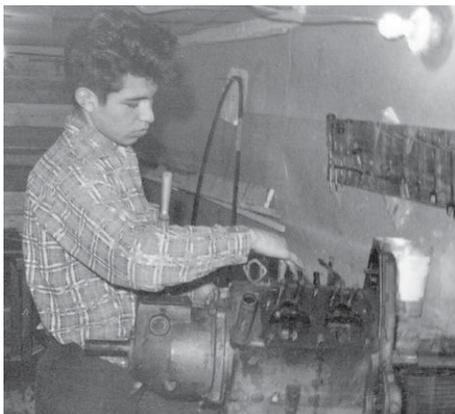
CO Experience

(cont'd from p. 5)

that I had gotten my CO paper. I knew God had ways of doing things and He answered my prayer. So, I went to see Mr. Brown, signed the papers, was congratulated, and left.

Two days later, we got the mail. What do you think I got? It was my call to enlist in the army. What now? Dad said, "You have to go back to Winnipeg and see Mr. Brown." Another trip to Winnipeg and Mr. Brown's office. He was not in, but his secretary said she would look at my papers. She took the whole works and tossed them into the waste basket, saying I should go home and go north, with all her good wishes.

Remarkably, that was all it took. So, in September 1943, my father flew north to Garden Hill, Island Lake, Manitoba, where he taught in the United Church Indian Day School for two years. That led to two years as a United Church minister in neighbouring Oxford House, after which he spent nine years working under the Northern Canada Evangelical Mission in Grand Rapids, followed by ten years



Both of these images come from Edwin Brandt's work with Indigenous youth in 1965 at YOU, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, a skill-development ministry in Winnipeg. Photo credit: MAID MHC PP-738-001 and MHC PP-738-003.



under the Mennonite Pioneer Mission, five of those at Loon Straits on Lake Winnipeg, and five in the city of Winnipeg.

His final project was to open in 1965 a storefront facility in Winnipeg, Youth Opportunities Unlimited (YOU). The aim was to aid Indigenous young people moving to the city for education. Father and other volunteers helped them find work and lodging by providing direction, counseling, tutoring, some practical experience, and even Bible studies (see images below). The mission work Father had begun in the north had now come to the city.

Lorne Brandt is a retired physician who cherishes his roots in the places and experiences of his father and mother. His recollections of his mother, Margaret (Enns) Brandt (1920–1963), appeared in the December 2020 issue of Mennonite Historian. He can be reached at <brandtel@telus.net>.

Täufer: Book Review

(cont'd from p. 7)

only minimally. The succeeding chapters examine internal debates that dominated congregational life and oftentimes gave way to schisms centred on questions of the oath, defencelessness, baptism, communion, and church practices. These chapters also focus on the challenge presented by modernism in relation to the ascendancy of citizenship rather than being subjects of rulers. It is here where the question of pacifism is considered in the context of the emerging role of the Mennonite citizen, a question that culminates in German Mennonite acquiescence to Nazi ideology. The eighth chapter offers a brief survey of the global Mennonite context, and a final chapter provides an overview of Mennonites and the arts, and commemoration. Although placed somewhat late in the book, the longest aspect of the chapter is a critique of how the history of Mennonites has been interpreted by both confessional chroniclers and outsiders. The chapter moves from historiography to commemoration and an abbreviated overview of literature and art.

Täufer is a refreshing look into the Anabaptist story on the eve of its 500th anniversary. While not breaking new ground in significant ways, von Schlachta's weaving together of hitherto sparingly used sources and her emphasis on 'everyday' Anabaptists dealing with

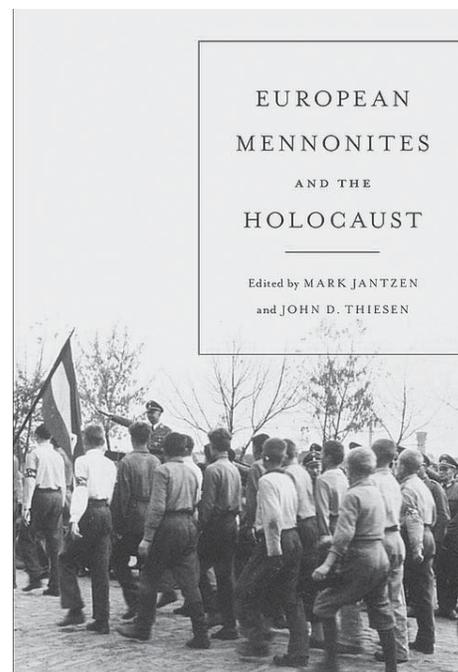
their neighbours and local authorities is a welcome nuancing of our understanding of the Mennonite story. Not surprisingly, von Schlachta's book provides a different 'feel' to Mennonite history when read from a North American perspective. In *Täufer*, the Mennonite sojourn in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, the North American, and global Mennonite stories are framed in relation to how they have emanated

from their European beginnings. For North American eyes, the European experience has often only been the antecedent to our story. Certainly, an English translation of *Täufer* would be an important resource for North American students in history and religion.

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Mark Jantzen and John D. Thiesen, eds., *European Mennonites and the Holocaust* (University of Toronto Press, 2020), 337 pp.

Reviewed by Karl Koop, Winnipeg



In her telling of the last major massacre of Jews in eastern Ukraine in 1942, Aileen Friesen describes a chaotic scene in Zaporizhzhia, of Jews assembled by armed guards under the pretence that they were going to work in the city of Melitopol. Most were walking, although the elderly and the children were transported by trucks. It was the season of Passover, and the Jews had been rounded up just as they were preparing to remember their community's liberation from Egypt. When they reached the outskirts

of the city, they were brought to an anti-tank ditch and told to strip naked. And then the machine guns began firing. “The shooting started at eight in the morning and ended at five in the evening. By the end, more than 3,000 Jews had been murdered. The bodies were carelessly covered, and when the spring rains came, they began to wash away” (229).

Not long after, Mennonites nearby gathered for an Easter Sunday worship service in their church in Khortytysya—the first service in nearly a decade. Under the Soviet regime, the church had been a movie theatre, and public worship had been forbidden. The Mennonites sang “Christ is risen, tell it to Zion,” followed by prayer, a reading of Scripture, and a sermon. While the massacre took place on the outskirts of the city, Friesen concludes, “It is not hard to imagine that rumours about this event drifted to the Khortytysya side of the Dnieper River” (230).

The telling of this Jewish massacre in Zaporizhzhia is found in a recent publication to which over a dozen scholars from Europe and North America have contributed. Several chapters in the volume stem from a conference on “Mennonites and the Holocaust” that was held in March 2018 at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas.

What did Mennonites have to do with the Holocaust? As it turns out, they were not innocent bystanders. Mennonite communities were near key sites of the Holocaust, and it is irrefutable that many participated in the full range of activity related to the atrocities connected to the Holocaust.

In some cases, Mennonites played active roles in killing Jews, Soviet prisoners of War, Roma, and people with disabilities. In several cases, church leaders were involved in supporting Nazi policies. The *Vereinigung der Deutschen Mennonitengemeinden*, the largest and most liberal Mennonite conference in Germany, openly supported Hitler’s National Socialist program. Some Mennonites pledged their allegiance to the *Sturmabteilung*, an apparatus of National Socialism that was notorious for persecuting, torturing, and murdering political opponents. An overwhelming majority of church leaders in West Prussia and Danzig had memberships in the Nazi party. Community leaders among

Deutsch Wymyschle Mennonites in Poland “organized Nazi Party meetings” and helped spread Nazi propaganda, while in the Ukraine, some Mennonite individuals joined killing squads.

Hans Werner notes that “allowing that individuals often fit into more than one category, even at the same time, Mennonites were perpetrators, collaborators, enablers, bystanders, and occasionally rescuers, and they were undeniably aware of the fate that was overtaking their Jewish neighbours” (293). While it is true that Mennonites varied widely in their beliefs and actions, the book suggests “that most Mennonites under Nazi rule, collectively and individually, sometimes consciously, in many cases unawares, through their actions and often their inaction, accepted and supported the Nazis” (4).

The findings, overall, are not new. For more than 50 years, Mennonite historians have contributed publications in the field, discussing Mennonites and their relationship to the Holocaust. But in the past decade, publications on this topic have grown exponentially. This recent publication is distinct in its breadth and depth of scholarship.

The authors in this volume do not set out to condemn. There is little sense that they write with an ideological agenda. Some contributors discuss Mennonites that chose to defend Jews, while others seek to place the broader context in view. Alle Hoekema’s “Dutch Mennonites and Yad Vashem Recognition,” for example, gives attention to those who reached out to Jews and rescued them from their Nazi pursuers, while Colin Neufeldt’s discussion of Mennonite collaboration with Nazism in Deutsch Wymyschle, Poland, gives considerable attention to the broader context with the view to better understand why Mennonites may have acted as they did.

Several authors from Canada and Germany are members of the second or third generation, those whose parents and grandparents lived through the Nazi period. They endeavor to make sense of the trauma memories of their parents and grandparents while trying to come to terms with the growing historical evidence of Mennonite involvement in the Holocaust, thus finding themselves “in a chasm between two largely irreconcilable worlds” (294). In the post-war era in Germany,

considerable attention has been devoted to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, “the process of coming to terms with the past” (294). Many of the authors are clearly inviting readers on a journey of this kind.

Why bother with the journey? Is there not a danger of revictimizing a generation that has gone through so much? Today, many Mennonites living in Germany would say that truth-telling is long overdue. In 1995, they issued a public statement acknowledging their complicity in the face of Nazi crimes against Jews and other victims. In 2015, the *Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein* (the German Mennonite Historical Society) sponsored a conference that made it possible for Mennonites in Switzerland, Paraguay, the Netherlands, the former Soviet Union, and Germany to speak openly about their experiences. For editors, Mark Janzen and John D. Thiesen, and for Doris L. Bergen, a keynote speaker at the conference at Bethel College, “unearthing what we can about what happened, telling the truth about this painful past, and making that knowledge more widely known is an important step both for Mennonites better to know their own history and for understanding the Holocaust” (9).

In the final essay of the volume on selective memory among Danziger Mennonites, Steven Schroeder laments that his own tradition has too often avoided the difficult issues, choosing avoidance over engagement. Schroeder argues that Mennonites, beyond recognizing that they have been harmed, must also acknowledge their wrong-doing. With an eye to injustices done toward the Indigenous peoples in Canada, Schroeder recognizes that he too is a participant in causing harm as a beneficiary of colonialism. But rather than languishing in cynicism, gloom, or denial, Schroeder ends with a hopeful message about moving forward and being committed to reconciliation.

The essays presented in this volume are crucial to better understanding the complex and multidimensional realities of the Mennonite past. A product of groundbreaking research, this publication will be of great interest for those deeply committed to their own history.

Karl Koop is professor of history and theology and directs the graduate program in theology and ministry at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.