

Mennonite Historian

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



The Sharon Mennonite Church in Guernsey, Saskatchewan, is a church with over 100 years of history. It documents the life and ministry of a rural Mennonite congregation on the Canadian prairies. While the church was formally closed in 2004, Alvie and Will Martens saw potential in the building, both to honour the spiritual legacy of the past and to give witness to creative repurposing, something that also speaks to an understanding of God's character. For an account of how Alvie and Will, and their daughter, Heidi, went about reimagining and renovating the Sharon Mennonite Church into a functional, family home, suitable for large family gatherings and everyday living, see story beginning on page 2. Photo credit: The 1948 image of the church at the top left is from the Mennonite Church USA Archives (HM4-134 Box 1 photo 010.8-31). The other images for this story are courtesy of Alvie and Will Martens.

Contents

The Sharon Church Reimagined	2	Jacob Loewen (1872–1938): Delegate #43	5	Book Notes & Reviews:	
Adam Wiebe and the Early Mennonite		Archives Tell Us Who We Are	6	<i>Faspa from the Mennonite Table</i>	11
Wiebes	3	Helen Toews: A Practical Life	7	<i>Come Out from among Them:</i>	
A Very Short History of Mennonite Low		<i>Onnmaalijch aus Kjielkje uet ne</i>		<i>Separationism and the Believers'</i>	
German or <i>Plautdietsch</i>	4	<i>Kruck ate(n)</i>	11	<i>Church Tradition</i>	12

The Sharon Church Reimagined

by Alvie and Will Martens, Guernsey,
Saskatchewan

In 2003, the difficult decision was made to close the doors of Sharon Mennonite Church, located near Guernsey, Saskatchewan. The final service was held on 27 June 2004. The church building was decommissioned and the congregation disbanded. Most members joined one of the other churches in the area. But what would happen to the church building?

The beginning of the Sharon Mennonite Church can be traced to a group of Mennonites from Kitchener, Ontario, who moved to the area in 1905 to settle homesteads in the newly surveyed territory known as the Quill Lake Mennonite Reserve. Eli S. Hallman was chosen as the group's spiritual leader, and shortly thereafter, a Sunday school was organized by Israel Cressman. In 1908, the fledgling congregation hosted the Alberta Mennonite summer conference in the newly built Waterloo schoolhouse and became a member of the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference.

In 1911, a church building, measuring 30 x 40 feet, was constructed with volunteer labour. The congregation experienced peak membership in 1965 with 156 members

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Renovations underway at the former Sharon Mennonite Church, transforming the country church into a family dwelling. The main sanctuary became a large, open living area, with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a kitchen.

and held steady at just over 100 for several decades. A potash company bought up several farms in the area, forcing some families to relocate. When young people found employment elsewhere, and when grain elevators, stores, and schools closed, the congregation's membership steadily declined until it closed in 2004.

In 2005, the church was sold to Arnold Janzen for \$2,300, the same amount that it had cost to build in the summer of 1911. Attached to the church was the former Waterloo School, which had been moved there from its location one mile east of the church. The Janzens' dream to renovate and use the church and the attached schoolhouse did not work out. The buildings stood empty for several years.

In 2013, Ben and Lisa Martens Bartel bought the buildings at auction, with the intention to move the schoolhouse to their

farm, which they did several years later. That left seven acres and a church waiting to be reinvented.

It was at this time that our work came to an end at Camps with Meaning, the Manitoba Mennonite Church camp near Winnipeg. Since our grandchildren all lived in Saskatchewan, there was a strong motivation to buy some property in Saskatchewan. In the fall of 2016, we looked at the Sharon Church for the first time and tried to imagine the potential of what it could become. It felt like a renovation project that would be a fun challenge, one that we could tackle together. Our daughter, Heidi, thought it was a great idea. And so it was that the three of us started planning and designing blueprints for the best way to make the church a functional, family home.

(cont'd on p. 4)

Genealogy and Family History

Adam Wiebe and the Early Mennonite Wiebes

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

Adam Wiebe was a Mennonite Engineer who worked for the city of Danzig during the mid-1600s. There are many claims that he was the common ancestor of the Mennonite Wiebes. Some genealogists claim direct descent from Adam Wiebe. This article investigates these claims in a systematic way, using documented sources.

Origin of the Wiebe surname

The origin of the Wiebe surname is simple. Wiebe was, and still is, a well-known Dutch Frisian first name. There was a Wiebe Janzten recorded in Altefähr near Danzig in 1612.¹ The Danzig Flemish Mennonite church registers record the death of 66-year-old Wieb Woelk in 1720.² The Dutch Mennonites who settled in Prussia in the 1500s were in the process of switching to permanent family names. Hence, first names—such as Jan, Gert, Derk, and Klaas, as well as rarer names such as Wieb, Wien, Lewen, and Eppe—became surnames. In those days, the surname had several spellings: Wiebe, Wibe, Wybe, and Wijbe. Each of these variations are also found without the “e” at the end.

What do we really know about Adam Wiebe?

At present, the birth date, or even birth year, for Adam Wiebe is unknown. Several years ago, an exact birth date appeared on the internet.³ The source of the birth date is given as, believe it or not, a work of fiction in which the author creates a fictitious birth date, location, and family background for Adam Wiebe!⁴ That date has become incorporated into the Wikipedia page on him with two birth date references, *which themselves do not provide the birth date!*⁵ An attempt to find a birth record or date was made by a Dutch researcher in 1997 without any success.⁶ We also do not know his exact death date. He died sometime between 22 March and 27 December 1653 in Danzig.⁷

Much of the biographical work on the life of Adam Wiebe contains errors and speculation, which seem to have spread from one article to the next. Some clarification is required. There has been speculation about Wiebe’s arrival in

Danzig.⁸ At present, we have no record of Adam Wiebe being in Danzig before 1616. In three different letters to the Danzig city council, he indicated how long he had served the city. Each implies that he started around 1616, which is consistent with a record of him being given a contract in March 1616.⁷ However, we do not know when he arrived.

We also do not know when Adam Wiebe was married, the birth and death dates for his wife, her surname, or the birth dates for his children. He is known to have come from Harlingen in the Netherlands, but we do not know where he was born. Given that this surname was also a very typical Frisian first name and that his point of origin was Harlingen, in Friesland, he was likely of Frisian background. There is no evidence—none whatsoever—that he was accompanied by any family members, or that any family members preceded him or later joined him in the Danzig area.

Several articles and web pages have invented a brother or cousin of Adam Wiebe, who also allegedly lived in the Danzig area.^{9,10,11} Some have also invented children, without any supporting documentation.^{3,11} The GAMEO article implies that he may have fled persecution.⁸ This is highly unlikely since persecution of Mennonites in the Netherlands had ended by the 1600s. Except for a stint in Warsaw (1624–1625), he worked for the city of Danzig from 1616 until his death in 1653. During this time, he was a hydraulic engineer (*Wasserbaumeister*). His life’s work is documented in a well-researched 1911 German publication by K. Schottmüller.⁷ Other biographical works provide less reliable information on his life and family.^{5,6,8,9,12}

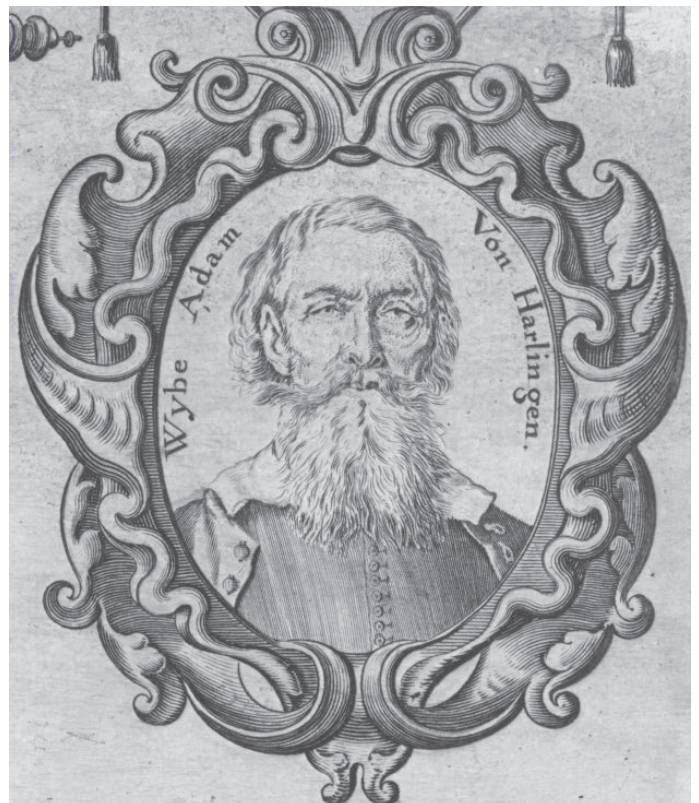
Was Adam Wiebe the ancestor of any contemporary Mennonite Wiebes?

A key document addressing this question is the *Erbvergleich* (hereditary settlement) dated 18 September 1659. This document was found in the Gdansk archives by Hermann Thiessen and published in 1995 in a rather obscure genealogical journal.¹³ This short entry makes it crystal clear that his surviving family included *wife Margaretha and children Michelina, Margaretha, Abraham, Sara, and Cornelius*.

This document shows that Adam Wiebe was survived by only two sons: Abraham and Cornelius. Some information is available for Abraham. He is known to have succeeded his father as an engineer. This is mentioned in a letter from Abraham to the Danzig city council.¹⁴ In 1660, son Abraham converted from the Mennonite to the Lutheran religion.¹⁵ He was nearly 40 years old at the time. It does not appear that he was married or had any children. What happened to Abraham after 1660 is unknown.

I have not been able to find any information on son Cornelius. Adam Wiebe’s children would have been born between about 1620 and 1650. In 1623,

(cont’d on p. 8)



A sketch of Adam Wiebe from the well-known copper engraving by Willem Hondius (also known as Willem Hondt). Since Hondius was a contemporary of Adam Wiebe, and also lived in Danzig from 1641–1652, this is likely a true image.

The Sharon Church House

(cont'd from p. 2)

The church had been vacant since 2004, with no heat or sealed windows. This created a perfect home for mice, birds, and all manner of creatures. The building, though 100 years old, seemed solid. It had a good roof and foundation, access to power and gas. It seemed to us like it was calling out to be rescued and repurposed!

After evicting the critters, the work of turning this 2,000 square foot sanctuary into a home began. The plan was to keep as many original aspects of the building as possible. So, all the wooden paneling was carefully removed, allowing for the walls to be insulated and new windows installed. Then the original paneling was reinstalled. We kept the original swinging doors into the sanctuary and the front stage area.

The biggest expenses included new ducting, gas furnace, plumbing (we hired contractors for that), and rewiring the entire building. The renovation took about two years of part-time labour. The hardest jobs were putting in a pine ceiling, gutting the whole basement, pulling out many nails, and getting rid of the smell from old mouse nests. Many gallons of paint were applied. The church had oak floors, which we rescued from under the 1970s orange carpeting. After scraping and sanding off the old carpet glue, the oak floor could be refinished.

The main sanctuary became a large, open living area, with three bedrooms, two bathrooms, and a kitchen. The little library became a toy and games room, and the pastor's room became a pantry. The stage became a great place to curl up with a book in big, easy chairs, and the balcony became a sewing studio. The basement has a small suite for guests, as well as a workshop.

In the summer of 2020, during the height of the pandemic, we said goodbye to Manitoba and moved into the Sharon Church house. Old churches make wonderful homes. They are big enough for large family gatherings and for out-of-town visitors. Plus, there is a good feeling of accomplishment, knowing that this fine, old church on the prairies has been rescued and repurposed. Hopefully, it can still be here in another 100 years!

We learned from many former church members who have stopped by, that this place holds a special place in their hearts, and we have tried to honour that. We

welcome all visitors who want to have a tour, or just stop by and say hello.

Alvie and Will Martens served as camp managers at Camps with Meaning in Manitoba (2003–2008, 2012–2015) and now call Saskatchewan home.

A Very Short History of Mennonite Low German or Plautdietsch

by Jake Buhler, Saskatoon

When Mennonites fled persecution in Holland and Belgium and migrated to the Vistula Delta of Poland in the mid-1500s, they took their Dutch, Frisian, and Dutch Low Saxon dialects with them. Their spiritual leader was Menno Simons, who lived from 1496 to 1561 in Holland and eventually died in Germany. But in Poland, over time, Mennonites mixed in East Low German dialects learned from their Lutheran neighbours. For the most part, they worshipped in Dutch. But over the next 250 years, a Low Prussian dialect emerged that is today called *Plautdietsch* or Mennonite Low German (MLG). By the time they migrated to Russia in 1789, there was no Dutch language used—only High German (for worship) and Low German (for everyday speech). Also note that by that time Prussia had taken over Poland.

In Poland, when Mennonites first settled in the Vistula Delta around 1550, they were tolerated but not always accepted. They drained the wetlands of the Vistula Delta and became excellent dairy farmers. They learned many trades and were held up as the hardest working class in Poland. They had their own schools and kept their non-military beliefs strong. This was not always tolerated by Polish and Prussian rulers. The house-barn combination had its beginning in Poland.

In 1789, thousands of Mennonites migrated from Prussia to South Russia (Ukraine), having been invited by Czarina Katharina. Mennonites thrived and over time numbered over 100,000 people, living in 400 villages clustered in groupings called colonies. Two dialects of *Plautdietsch* developed in Russia: *Molotschna* and *Chortitza*.

When Russia began to enforce Russian language study and army enlistment, about 17,000 Mennonites migrated to Canada and the USA between 1874 and 1880. One group, mainly the *Molotschna*

Plautdietsch speakers, went to Kansas and other Midwestern states. A smaller group of *Molotschna* also moved to Canada. A much larger group of the *Chortitza Plautdietsch* speakers moved to Manitoba and settled in the East and West Reserves. In 1895, several thousand moved to the Saskatchewan District of the Northwest Territories, establishing their communities in the Hague-Osler and Swift Current Reserves. From there several thousand moved to Mexico after 1922, and later to several other South American countries. In the 1920s, more than 20,000 Mennonites arrived in Canada from the Soviet Union.

The *Plautdietsch* or MLG language spoken by Mennonites from Prussia and Russia is a language with its own form, structure, and rules. There are several spelling conventions. Jack Thiessen's *Mennonite Low German Dictionary* describes *Molotschna* speakers best. *Molotschna* speakers spell "Kindergarten" as *Tjinjagoade*, whereas the *Chortitza* speakers would spell it as *Kjinjagoaden*. "Blue" would be *blau* for the former and *bleiw* for the latter. Ed Zacharias's *Ons Ieeschtet Weedabuak* describes the *Chortitza* (Old Colony Mennonite) speakers who add an "n" to some endings. To say, "children eat," they would say, *Kjina äten* and not *Tjinja ate*. Herman Rempel's *Kjenn Jie Noch Plautdietsch?* sits in the middle. While most of Rempel's spellings follow *Chortitza* conventions, he does not use the final "n." All conventions agree that all nouns begin with an upper-case letter, like High German.

MLG proverbs, sayings, and expressions are often concrete. English proverbs, sayings, and expressions are often abstract. MLG *Weissheit* (proverbs) contain distinct images that can be pictured. This is why it is possible to attempt to do a project like this one in the *Mennonite Historian*: publish a series of illustrated *Plautdietsch* proverbs (see page 11 and the next several issues).

Some sayings are funny, and some are not. While *Plautdietsch* is not a funny language, it can be, even as English can be humorous. At certain family gatherings, there may be uproarious laughter when members use *Plautdietsch* or MLG expressions. In some cases, these members are not fluent speakers, but they still do thrive on the humorous expressions.

Jake is a longtime Plautdietsch speaker.

Jacob A. Loewen (1872–1938): Delegate #43

by Edward G. Krahn, Lorette West, Manitoba

Jacob A. Lowen, delegate #43 in the 1925 photo of the “Second Martyrs’ Synod” (see December 2022 issue of *Mennonite Historian*), was born on 5 February 1872 in Muntau, Molotschna Colony, Ukraine, the ninth child of ten born to Abraham Abraham Loewen (1829–1877) and Anna Schmidt (1832–1897).

On 30 December 1895, in Lichtenau, Molotschna, he first married Margaretha Baerg (1875–1899), the first child of eight born to Isaak Wilhelm Baerg (1839–1912) and Sara Enns (1854–1928).

Tragically, on 1 September 1899, during the birthing of their twins, his wife and newborn son, Johann, both died due to complications. After taking care of the surviving twin, Peter, and his other young children for two weeks, he made the difficult decision to place Peter in the care of the Peter Mantler family in Tiege.¹

On 4 January 1900, in Ladekopp, Molotschna, Jacob married Anna Boldt (1879–1961), the first of two children born to Jakob Boldt (1846–1885) and Anna Penner (1854–1885).

Early Years

Muntau was a well-maintained village of flowers and brick fences with wide gateposts of brick. It was the Loewen family’s ancestral home in the Molotschna Colony.² Family tradition says that Jacob’s grandfather had also been the minister who had officiated at his parents’ wedding. Jacob’s grandfather had a large farm, consisting of 175 acres. But because the family included six sons, Jacob’s father had also to learn a trade. The family lived in a small house in the yard of the grandparents. Upon the death of the grandfather, the large farm became the property of Jacob’s great-uncle, Heinrich.

Jacob had a challenging life, losing his father at age five on 18 May 1877 due to consumption. The family was left in poverty. Katharina, the eldest daughter, was sent to serve as a maid at the family of a cousin of her father. The oldest brother, Abraham, a gifted and a diligent student, attended the Teachers College at the *Zentralschule* in Halbstadt. Maria, age eight, was sent to serve as a maid to her mother’s sister in Schoensee. Jacob and his mother moved to a smaller house on the

property they rented, while brother Peter took up a trade as a painter.

After elementary school, Jacob followed his dream of becoming a schoolteacher like his older brother. With the new teacherage that came with his position, Abraham had been able to move his mother and youngest siblings in with him. Abraham also sponsored the young Jacob’s education.

After two years, Abraham was offered a teaching position at Tiegenhagen, where he spent 25 years teaching. He was also a musician of note, teaching music in the village. He taught Jacob to play the violin.

Early Adulthood

Following in Abraham’s footsteps, Jacob attended the Teachers College in Halstead. Eldest sister Katharina, who had been a maid at the home of Heinrich Wilms, met Jacob Eckert, who also worked there. Following their courtship and marriage, they went to work for Jacob Dick at the Brodsky estate. After a few years, they moved to the Apanlee estate, where they worked for David J. Dick. A house was built for them close to the carpentry shop. Besides tending to woodworking at the estate, Eckert ran the chicken operation.

The family’s ties to the estate were because Jacob’s mother, Anna Schmidt, came from wealthy estate families. The Dicks and Schmidts owned estates at Brodsky and Steinbach.³

During a religious revival in Molotschna in the 1880s, Abraham experienced a “religious awakening.” The fervour of the visiting ministers from the German *Allianz* Movement impacted the whole family, and 17-year-old Jacob had a conversion experience.

Jacob’s sister, Maria, writes in her diary about working at a large estate where she was teaching the young girls fine handwork. Her last position was at the Willms family in Halbstadt, where she was exposed to their library and collection of religious and theological writings. Through the *Allianz Journal*, she became aware of the *Allianz* conference in Germany.

The Dick and Schmidt children had been sent to attend *Allianz* youth conferences in Germany. After nine years of employment at the Willms, Maria left for Germany and Nursing School at the Baptist Bethel Hospital.

By this time, Jacob had secured a teaching position in Lichtenau, establishing a home with his wife whom he had met

there. He was a teacher in Ukraine for approximately 17 years. As was the case with many of the Mennonite churches in Russia at the turn of the century who tended to elect teachers as ministers, Jacob was elected as a minister of the Mennonite Church on 10 April 1904.

But Jacob had a further calling. It was a time of great awakening in Molotschna. The revival in Lichtenau began with communion and footwashing occurring in private homes served by the believers. Some 28 members of the “Old” Mennonite Church attended these twice-a-week meetings. The only ordained minister in the group was Jacob. They continued to attend the regular church but did not participate in communion, the examination of baptism candidates, or in excommunications. The group followed the Blankenburg *Allianz*, which only had two ordinances: the Lord’s Supper and Baptism. They highlighted an inner spirituality instead of conventional ecclesiastical structures, including having *Aeltesten*. In a few short years, however, hierarchy became evident as elder positions were established,⁴ despite the movement’s belief in the equality of all believers.

The new group started to expand by contacting believers in other villages, and soon several house churches were formed. In 1905, this loosely organized group formally structured themselves as the *Evangelisch-Mennonitische Gemeinde*. This “third way” rejected the lack of religious fervour of the Old Church and the rigid, legalistic approach of the Mennonite Brethren.⁵ The formal establishment of the *Bruderschaft* occurred when David Dick invited the various house churches to the Apanlee estate in 1906. The *Evangelisch-Mennonitische Bruderschaft* (EMBG) was born.

Jacob’s role as a teacher and as the itinerant preacher for this expanding group soon became too heavy for him, and he resigned from his schoolteacher role. In 1907, the family, including the four young children with his second wife, Anna, moved to Fuerstenau, where they established a branch of the *Allianz* church. After five years, the family again moved, this time to Neu-Salbitadt to give the eldest sons the opportunity for furthering their education. Here, too, the local congregation had built a *Vereinshaus* (Community Hall style church), which became the norm for the *Allianz* church architecture.

(cont’d on p. 9)

Menno Heritage Archives

Archives Tell Us Who We Are

by Conrad Stoesz

This year marks the MHA's 90th year of serving Mennonite communities by collecting, preserving, and helping to tell the Mennonite story.

When the Mennonite archives in Russia was confiscated by the Bolsheviks in 1929, archivist Peter J. Braun wrote to his Winnipeg friend, Bernhard Schellenberg, and asked whether he would take up the project to build an archives in Canada. Schellenberg's presentation to the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in 1933 was a call to action—by forgetting the past, people risked showing ungratefulness for God's provision. The Conference agreed to start a program and named Schellenberg as archivist. Today, the MHA serves many constituencies and responds to over 100 research requests a month.

And there are more anniversaries coming. In 2024, we mark the 150th anniversary of Mennonites in Manitoba; 2025 is the 500th anniversary of Anabaptism; and 2026 is the 100th anniversary of Mennonites in Paraguay.

Congregations, conferences, families, and communities are encouraged to find ways to mark these important events. Consider planning a special service or reunion, producing a publication, website, drama or play, establishing a cairn or plaque. For more ideas, visit our website at <https://www.mharchives.ca/how-to/churches/#bringing>.

Commemorating anniversaries helps to preserve and develop a community's identity. Anniversaries provide an opportunity for community members to come together, reflect on the past, and consider the legacy they wish to leave for future generations. They also help to keep the memory of key moments and individuals alive; they are sources of inspiration and pride.

Community commemoration can also serve as a way of educating and engaging the public and can be an effective tool for building stronger and more connected communities. Overall, community commemoration is an essential aspect of

preserving and celebrating the heritage and identity of a community.

The work of collecting, preserving, researching, and promoting history is central to who we are as libraries and archives. Consider the ongoing war in Ukraine. This war is not only about land and resources, but it is also about ideas about the past and who gets to define it. President Putin's goal is to reconstitute the lands that once made up the Soviet Union. He claims that Ukraine and Ukrainian identity should be part of a powerful and expanded Russia. As part of this effort, cultural sites in Ukraine—including libraries, museums, and archives—have been targeted because they are powerful institutions that shape identity. According to a December 2022 report, since the start of the war, more than 300 state and university libraries have been destroyed.¹

And Russia's targeting of archives has continued. According to a March 2023 report, "More than half of the documents from the fonds of the State Archive of the Kherson region were stolen by Russian invaders and taken out of Kherson. The region contained key documents of the National Archival Fund of Ukraine from the end of the 18th century to the present day."²

It is a reminder of the importance of the work that we do in our historical societies, archives, libraries, museums, and institutes. We may be facing challenges—such as a lack of volunteers, increased costs, and reduced income—but we must remember that the work we do is essential to the communities we serve. Together, we play a foundational role in shaping our communities' understanding of themselves, and we are creating the tools for our communities to move into the future.

We are not just collecting dusty books, torn documents, or broken furniture; we are helping our communities to define and understand their identity—our identity.

Adapted from my 2023 Mennonite Historical Society of Canada president's report.

Endnotes

1. To read more, see Stephen Marche, "'Our mission is Crucial': meet the warrior librarians of Ukraine," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/dec/04/our-mission-is-crucial-meet-the-warrior-librarians-of-ukraine>.

2. "Kharkiv Tribunal: Nuremberg 2022," March 27, 2023, <https://www.nurnberg2022.org/en/post/russia-in-ukraine-stole-state-archive-documents-and-destroyed-kgb-archives>.

Voices from EMC & EMMC



On December 5, 1975, Tee-Mobil (Tea-Mobile), a ministry of Youth for Christ, pulled into a reserved spot in the centre of Seesen, Germany, to serve tea and counsel visitors. Levi and Elizabeth Reimer reported that most guests (1,000 in ten days) were young people from the streets, including a 16-year-old who returned several times while on the run from the police—something unknown to the hosts. Levi and Elizabeth began service in Seesen in December 1975 as part of a new EMC church planting effort in Europe. The work was initiated in 1974 upon the report of Ben Friesen and John Reimer. The EMC work in Seesen continued for 17 years and was then transferred to the German Baptist Conference. Text and photo credit: Erica Fehr.



In the early years, EMMC business sessions at the annual convention were generally reserved for the men. The women were able to sit in and listen, but they were not included in any of the discussions. At the 1964 Morden convention, pastor Died Gerbrandt observed the women sitting and visiting during the business sessions. He encouraged them to organize themselves as a women's ministry. For over four decades, the EMMC Women's Ministry went through name changes, but their overall objective remained the same. They were responsible for the annual Women's Day at the convention, organizing speakers, presentations, missionary reporting, fundraising projects for missions, and devotionals (the above photo is from 1982). Times change. Eventually, it became evident that women's ministry was becoming more of a local responsibility. Plus, women were more engaged and involved in the sessions at the annual conference-wide meetings. The Women's Ministry Committee disbanded in spring 2005. Text and photo credit: Lil Goertzen.

Helen Toews: A Practical Life

Written by John B. Toews, Clara Toews, and Esther (Toews) Redekopp

As refugees from the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, Abraham and Helena (Janz) Toews arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba, just days before the birth of their daughter, Helen, on October 6, 1926. The family moved to Coaldale, Alberta, the following spring and settled on a farm. Helen completed high school in Coaldale and entered nurses training in Lethbridge. Subsequent studies took her to the Mennonite Brethren Bible College and University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, as well as a year of French language studies in Quebec. Over the next two years, she completed her midwifery qualifications in Belgium and studied at the Tropical Medical Institute in Antwerp.

Her plan to work as a medical missionary under the MB Mission Board in the Democratic Republic of Congo was put on hold due to civil unrest in the 1960s, resulting in a move to Brazil. She worked at the Evangelical Christian Hospital in the city of Curitiba for three and a half years. In 1965, she travelled to Kajiji in southern Congo to teach nursing at the Kajiji Hospital and direct the maternity ward. Helen trained many young midwives, who carried their skills throughout Congo long after she had completed her assignment at the hospital.

Helen was especially interested in improving access to healthcare among underserved people in the region. Family members who visited Helen in Congo recall her capacity for incredibly hard work, alongside her missionary colleagues. During a particularly demanding three-month period, she was called to the hospital every night.

Helen was not daunted by the various challenges she faced: inadequate medical supplies, bad roads, poor communication with the outside world, conflicts between staff, negotiations with army personnel, or threats from rogue armed men to name a few. The dangers on the way to the hospital on dark, moonless nights did not dissuade her, despite the possibility of meeting a snake or even a leopard on the path. She narrowly escaped serious injury on more than one occasion when her home was struck by lightning. Her practical resourcefulness came into play in fighting bush fires, repairing fridges, or facing medical crises. Her own writing reveals times of fear but always accompanied by the strong conviction of the Lord's presence.



Helen Toews (1926–2022)

Praying “Help us Lord” and thanking God for assistance was a daily practice.

Kajiji's proximity to the Angolan border resulted in some alarming misadventures during the days of the Angolan civil war. One night, the mission was warned of an imminent attack, with the Kajiji hospital being the most likely target. The immediate concerns were practical, including the protection of their precious gasoline supply. Helen and several Congolese proceeded to secretly bury a barrel of gasoline in her garden at night, trying not to giggle at the absurdity of the situation.

Helen's memories also reflect a true appreciation for the people whom she served. She genuinely loved and respected her nursing students and colleagues, noting their generosity toward one another. She writes with respect about participating in a Congolese ceremony of reconciliation following a period of serious disagreement in the community, and the joy that the Christians had in celebrating their faith in worship, especially at Christmas. She loved the landscape surrounding the village—particularly the magnificent view of the valley stretching south from her home—and expressed concern about the loss of natural habitat during her years there. She marvelled at the gardens of mango and papaya trees, banana plants, and varieties of vegetables and flowers.

Upon returning to Canada (1991), she retired in Coaldale, Alberta, to care for her aging mother. Following her mother's death in 1993, Helen devoted a great deal of time and energy to the Gem of the West Museum in Coaldale and helped to establish it as a significant small-town museum in Southern Alberta. Helen took pride in local community developments, such as flourishing businesses and the



establishment of a public school aimed at meeting the needs of newly immigrated Low German-speaking Mennonites.

Helen also engaged with life in other new and rich ways. She swam regularly, participated in painting classes, took an interest in nutrition and cooking, and loved sharing her garden produce with those nearby. She is remembered by her family as deeply loving, kind, unfailingly hospitable, and nonjudgmental. She was interested in the lives of all her nephews and nieces and their families, hosted them generously, and prayed for each one. She enjoyed being surrounded by family and listening to their conversations. She had a gentle sense of humour, both perceptive and forgiving of human foibles. Helen also read with enthusiasm, particularly books on Mennonite or local history.

Helen shared some of her Congo experiences on paper and in person but remained deeply private about many of her thoughts on the mission experience. She sometimes found it difficult to look back on her 33 years of service among people she had genuinely loved. The unrest in Congo had destroyed the physical structures of her work, including the hospital and nursing school. She sometimes questioned the impact of her contributions. Communication with friends and coworkers in Congo became difficult due to disrupted infrastructure. Helen was also aware that attitudes toward Christian mission had changed both in the countries served by missionaries and in the sending communities.

Helen believed in a practical Christianity, regardless of where she lived or what she was tasked with. Her warm, gentle presence and loving kindness will be dearly missed by all those who had the privilege of knowing her. She was a tireless, often inconspicuous worker, concerned with the greater good of the community and the advancement of God's Kingdom. She passed away on April 30, 2022, at the age of 95.

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Adam Wiebe

(cont'd from p. 3)

Adam Wiebe wrote to the Danzig Council requesting a license for a water draining device so that he, his wife, and their children could benefit financially from this invention. This would indicate that he was married with children before 1623. Since no documentation providing information on these two sons after 1660 has ever been found, it is simply *not* possible to connect any contemporary Wiebes, Mennonite or not, to Adam Wiebe. And since there is no evidence that Adam Wiebe had any brothers, cousins, or other relatives, it is simply not possible to connect his family to any contemporary Wiebes.

One of the most compelling arguments against Adam Wiebe being the ancestor to all the Mennonite Wiebes is that there were simply too many of them to all be descended from the two sons of Adam Wiebe (assuming Abraham even had children). For this reason, some genealogists have created additional sons, apparently out of thin air. As the list below shows, there were Wiebes living in the Danzig region while Adam Wiebe lived in Danzig. In order to account for all these Wiebes, one would have to create not just additional sons, but also multiple brothers, cousins, or other relatives.

I should point out again that there is no evidence that Adam Wiebe was related to any of the other Wiebes in the Danzig area. The list below is certainly not complete. It is taken from those documents which have survived wars, fires, floods, and other destruction over a period of almost four centuries. Adam Wiebe began his work in Danzig nearly three generations after Mennonites first appeared in the Danzig region. The list below is much more consistent with the Wiebe family being part of the early, large influx of Mennonites into the Danzig region in the early 1500s. By the mid to late 1600s, one might expect a dozen or two Wiebe families to be in the area (see below).

Documented Wiebes who were likely born before Adam Wiebe died:

- Abraham: lived in Einlage in 1640^{1, p64}
- Abraham: lived in Platenhof in 1627^{1, p48}
- Conrad: lived in Bohnsackerweide in 1642^{1, p31}
- Hermann: lived in Jankendorf in 1647^{1, p38}

- Isebrandt: lived in Schöneberger Fähre in 1676¹⁶
- Jacob: lived in Elbing area in 1648¹⁶
- Jacob: lived in Einlage (or possibly same as above) in 1640^{1, p64}
- Johann: lived in Tiegenhof in 1685¹⁸
- Johann: lived in Tiegenort in 1687^{1, p26}
- Siemon: baptized in Danzig in 1677 and died there in 1679¹⁷

During the first two centuries of Mennonite settlement in Poland/Prussia, the average life expectancy was low and infant mortality was very high. During this period, many Mennonite family names disappeared. The average Mennonite family was lucky to have a few surviving children. If one assumes that each man might have two sons who would survive him and go on to have children of their own, and that there was an average of three generations per century, by the time of the 1772 West Prussian census¹⁹ or 1776 census of Mennonites²⁰ in West Prussia, one might expect there to be about 16 Wiebe families ($2^4 = 16$) descended from Adam Wiebe. This is far short of the approximately 90 Wiebe families accounted for in these census lists. If, on the other hand, we assume that the first Wiebe man was born about 1500, we get a predicted 128 ($2^7 = 128$) families. Although these are very crude estimates, they show clearly that there were too many Wiebes in West Prussia by the 1770s to have all descended from Adam Wiebe.

A question which arises is whether all the Wiebes in Prussia were Mennonites. This can be answered by a careful comparison of the 1772 census of West Prussia and the 1776 Mennonite census. The 1776 census does not include the regions known as “Amt Danzig” and “Amt Danzig Territ” in the 1772 census. After removing these families as well as duplications, we arrive at a total of 69 Wiebe families. The 1776 census gives 67 families. Although such a close agreement is fortuitous, it does illustrate that essentially all the Wiebes living in West Prussia in the 1770s were Mennonite. This may not strictly apply to Danzig. It is known that the Danzig (and other urbanized) Mennonites were more likely to switch to the Lutheran church.

Do the Mennonite Wiebes have a common Wiebe ancestor?

This is a question that no historical document can answer since such

documentation has never existed in the first place. The only way we have, at this point, to investigate this possibility is through Y-DNA testing of Wiebe men.²¹ Y-DNA is passed down from father to son, and so follows family names that have also been traditionally passed down from father to son. If there was a common Wiebe ancestor to all the Mennonite Wiebes, the Y-DNA of all male Wiebes of Mennonite background should match, except for a few minor mutations. This, of course, assumes no non-paternal events (illegitimacies) occurred. So far, the results for 27 Wiebe men are available. These men belong to 16 unconnected Wiebe families. Ten of these families can be traced back to Wiebe men who were born over 200 years ago (about six generations back or more). All these 27 Wiebe men are a match to each other. This is strong evidence that there was a common Mennonite Wiebe ancestor or *Stammvater*.

Conclusion

The conclusions of this investigation are that: a) Adam Wiebe is *not* the ancestor of all contemporary Wiebes of Mennonite descent; b) It is highly unlikely that Adam Wiebe is the ancestor of any contemporary Wiebes of Mennonite descent; c) There is *no* documentation allowing us to connect Adam Wiebe to *any* later Wiebes, beyond his own two sons; d) There is likely a common Mennonite Wiebe ancestor; and e) That Wiebe ancestor was probably one of the many Mennonite refugees who travelled from the Netherlands to the Danzig area early in the 1500s.

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Endnotes

1. Horst Penner, *Ansiedlung mennonitischer Niederländer im Weichselmündungsgebiet von der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn der preussischen Zeit* (Weierhof, 1963), 16. For a list of all early Wiebes and other land leasers in Prussia, see http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/West_Prussian_Land_Leases_1600-1770.htm.
2. Danzig Mennonite church records. Deaths of Members, 1667–1807. See scan at https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_310/bdms17/0229.jpg.
3. <https://wc.rootsweb.com/cgi-bin/igm.cgi?op=GET&db=updi&id=I12615>.
4. Rudy Wiebe, *Sweeter than all the World* (Toronto, 2001), 78–79.
5. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adam_Wybe
6. Gerry Kuiper, “Wybe Adam van Harlingen,” *Oud Harlingen* 12 (1997): 12.
7. K. Schottmüller, *Mitteilungen des Westpreussischen Geschichtsvereins* 10/4 (1 Oct

1911): 76–93. Schottmüller cites many original documents found in the Danzig (now Gdansk) archives.

8. See the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO) article at [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Wiebe,_Adam_\(d._1653\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Wiebe,_Adam_(d._1653)).

9. See <http://www.godutch.com/newspaper/index.php?id=1251>.

10. Also see, for example, Horst Penner, “Die Wiebes,” *Mennonitische Jahrbuch* (1951): 14–20. Penner, unfortunately, does not cite any of his sources.

11. See, for example, the various family trees on www.ancestry.com and www.familysearch.org. I do not provide specific links since these websites require membership.

12. H.C. Bosscha, *Mededeeling omtrent Wybe Adam, Nederlandsch ingenieur der XVIIde eeuw* (’s-Gravenhage, 1895), 5.

13. Hermann Thiessen, *Altpreussische Geschlechterkunde* 25 (1995): 559.

14. Abraham Wiebe letter to the Danzig city council, December 1653. Abraham’s statement referring to his late father is quoted in reference 7.

15. *Ostdeutsche Familienkunde*, Band 10 Heft 3 (1985): 417. The original, found by Hermann Thiessen, has yet to be located.

16. Horst Penner, “Einiges zur Geschichte der Wiebes,” *Der Berg* 6 (1939): 7–9.

17. Danzig Mennonite church records. Baptisms, Marriages, and Deaths of Members. Scans are

available at https://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/cong_310.php.

18. Wilhelm Crichton, *Zur Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Königsberg, 1786). See also http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Tiegenhof_1685.pdf.

19. For an index to the census, see <http://www.odessa3.org/collections/land/wprussia/>.

20. See http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1776_West_Prussia_Census.pdf.

21. For more information on the Mennonite DNA Project, see <http://www.mennonitedna.com/>. For a description of the use of Y-DNA in Mennonite genealogy, see <http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/44.4.MHDec18.pdf>.



Photo of the participants at the 1902 Summer Bible Course led by Prof. E.F. Stroeter and hosted on the estate of David J. Dick at Apanlee, near Steinbach, Molotschna Settlement, Ukraine. For the names of the participants, see MAID CA CMBS NP076-01-2 (<https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/teachers-course-at-apanlee-near-steinbach-molotschna>). Jacob A. Loewen is standing in the top row, at the very far right.

Jacob A. Loewen (1872–1932)

(cont'd from p. 5)

Jacob often travelled with Jakob Thiessen (later of Dalmeny, Saskatchewan), also a former teacher, on evangelistic outreach trips to churches, even to Mennonite Colonies in the north of Russia.⁶ He remained an itinerant minister until 1914, when the First World War broke out. Their two oldest sons were drafted into the army as medics at the start of the war. In May 1916, Jacob was also drafted into the *Forstei* at Alt-Berdjamer near Melitopol. Later, he was sent to work in the Crimea in forestry and road construction.

He finally returned home on 25 April 1917. During the Revolution, he had been unable to continue his itinerant evangelistic

work. But now his teaching experience came into play. He got a teaching position in the village of Lindenau, where the family lived until 1924, when they moved to Liegenhagen.

From the Revolution until 1925, it was a time of further challenges and tribulations. While two of the older children married and moved out on their own, two other children died. Son Abraham, age 19, in his eighth year of trade school, suddenly died, and their eight-year-old daughter died of typhus. Following the years of civil war, famine gripped the region, but finally help was allowed to arrive from MCC in America. However, many began to see that the future looked grim for Mennonite communities under the Soviets. In 1924, three trains from Molotschna left

with 3,000 passengers bound for Canada, including one son and his wife.

Looking back, it is not a surprise that Jacob would be involved with the formation of the EMBG in Ukraine. The family connections to the wealthy estate owners had exposed them to the emerging *Allianz* movement from Germany. The movement looked to reform the existing Mennonite and the Mennonite Brethren churches. The strongholds of the movement were found with the young, well-educated leaders of the Steinbach, Apanlee, Taschenack, and Brodsky estates.

The message of the *Blankenburger Konferenz* soon spread through Russia by means of travelling itinerant ministers like Jacob. The wealthy estate owners, like David Dick and Peter Schmidt, not

only attended the conferences in Germany, but also sponsored Mennonite ministers to attend, ministers like Jakob Reimer and Jakob Kroeker. Mennonite students aspiring to become ministers also started to attend the *Allianz* Bible School in Berlin.

Professor Ernest F. Stroeter of Germany had a major impact in the establishment of this new movement. His publications were widely read in Russia, and he was a keynote speaker at all-expense-paid, week-long retreats at the Molotschna estates. These Summer Bible Course events were especially directed at Mennonite ministers and schoolteachers who might be convinced to join the *Allianz*.

The photo on the previous page is a photo from one such Summer Bible Course led by Professor Stroeter at Apanlee in 1902. Many of the future leaders of the EMBG attended this meeting, including Jacob Loewen and his older brother, Abraham. Abraham and his music skills fit right into the sessions of these Summer Bible School programs of music, Bible study, fellowship, and networking.

Immigration to Canada

Jacob attended the Second Martyrs' Synod in Moscow (13–15 January 1925), where three of the seventy-seven delegates represented the EMBG. The small number of delegates speaks to the smaller and more recent development of that group. Yet Jacob was one of those chosen to take minutes for parts of the meeting.⁷

Shortly after his return from the conference, Jacob and Anna celebrated their 25th anniversary. He even missed the actual date to attend the conference. What Jacob had heard at the conference ensured that emigration was on his mind, as the very existence of the Mennonites in Russia was at risk. Jacob was proven right, as the Soviets under the leadership of Stalin moved to dismantle the EMBG in 1926, along with all other religious organizations.

The Loewens left Tiegenhagen on 3 October 1925, travelling to Riga, where they left on the *Baltriger* for Southampton, England. From here, they sailed on the *SS Melita* for Quebec City, arriving on 1 November 1925.⁸ They travelled westward by train, and their youngest son, Andreas, was born on 4 November 1925 in Fannystelle, Manitoba. Their son, Jacob, who had immigrated the previous year, picked them up at the train station.

Canada

In February 1926, they moved to their own farm near Moore Park, Manitoba, just north of the town of Justice.

With no other adherents to the EMBG in the area, they became part of the group that formed the Justice Mennonite Brethren Church.⁹ The church was formally founded in 1930 by *Russlaender* arrivals in the area in 1927. Jacob Loewen is considered the founding leader of the church. This band of new Russian immigrants met in homes and rented facilities during its early years.

The farming conditions around Moore Park were marginal, given the drainage problems and mixed soil conditions.¹⁰ Along with the drought of the Dirty '30s, it was difficult for the newly arrived *Russlaender* to pay off their travel debts. The Mennonite Board of Colonization Financial Records show that the Loewen family had acquired a debt of \$439.05 for the transportation costs.¹¹ The poor crops and Jacob's health impacted the ability of the family to pay off the debt. At one point, the family was able to send only two dollars towards the debt. Final payment of the debt was made by Anna and son Andreas in 1943.

On 18 October 1929, following a Thanksgiving celebration in the area, Jacob wrote a letter to Bishop David Toews in Rosthern. In the correspondence, he indicated that the group had raised ten dollars "for those in need in our old homeland, Russia." He indicated that he had also included an additional ten dollars, requesting that the money be forwarded to his son, Peter, still living in Tiege.¹²

Jacob's long-term health issues were related to a major accident that happened while working in the stable in 1928. He fell from the hay loft to the floor, breaking ribs and puncturing his lung. Later, he suffered a blood clot in his leg. Following a lengthy hospital stay, the family travelled to Reesor, Ontario, where he convalesced at daughter Agnes's home.

After four months, the family returned to Manitoba to live with son Jacob on his new farm at Moore Park. The following years were difficult for Jacob. He had operations in Brandon and Winnipeg to try and address the health issues. He was a broken man who no longer could work on the farm. Yet he continued the ministry. When he started to lose his eyesight, a member of the church read the sermon's

biblical text, and Jacob preached. In 1937, he was totally bedridden and his wife, Anna, attended to his care. As he was dying, he faced a crisis of faith. Yet as his wife noted, he also struggled through this crisis to regain a strong faith once again. On 3 May 1938, he passed away.¹³

In an ironic twist of fate, while Jacob was bedridden and dying, son Peter from his first marriage was arrested on 24 November 1937 during Stalin's Year of Terror in Fuerstenwerder, where he had been the *Oberburgermeister*. He was never heard from again. In 1943, Peter's wife, Anna (Krueger) Loewen (1903–2001), and family fled to Poland. Following the war, they were finally able to immigrate to Canada in 1948 and settle in Abbotsford, B.C.

While Jacob A. Loewen was not one of the martyrs who died in the Gulag camps of Russia, Aron A. Toews recognized his sacrifice and life-long service by including him in his list of martyrs who had suffered for the faith. Jacob's wife, Anna, submitted the story of her husband's life to Toews for inclusion in his important book.¹⁴

Jacob left a legacy for his family and his church. While Jacob followed the calling as a minister as his grandfather had, so have others in the family followed the tradition, including his son, Jacob J. Loewen, who served as minister of the Justice Church from 1938–1955.¹⁵

May his memory be a blessing!

Edward Krahn is a semi-retired museum program manager and Mennonite historian. One of his current projects is to research, document, and preserve the history of the 1925 Second Martyrs' Synod. He is grateful to the extended Loewen family for providing background information for this article. If you have information related to any of the other delegates, please contact him at <edgkrah@gmail.com>. See also Ed's December 2022 Mennonite Historian article on the Faithful 77.

Endnotes

1. Anna Loewen, translated by Alvin Enns, "Obituary of Jacob A. Loewen" (email from family). Note: The German obituary was published in the *Mennonitishe Rundschau*, 1 June 1938, translated 2020.

2. Maria Loewen, translated by Alvin Enns, "Autobiography of Maria Loewen," unpublished manuscript, date unknown, translated 2011.

3. Maria Loewen, "Autobiography of Maria Loewen."

4. Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789–1910)*, revised 2nd edition, translated from the original German 1911 edition (Winnipeg:

Christian Press, 1980), 918–925. Note: Jacob Loewen is mentioned on page 921.

5. John B. Toews, “Russian Mennonites and Allianz,” *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 14 (1996): 45–64.

6. Loewen, “Autobiography of Maria Loewen.”

7. John B. Toews, *Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1976), 428–438.

8. Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Records for Loewen, Jacob Abr. Family #3151, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

9. Richard D. Thiessen, “Justice Mennonite

Church (Justice, Manitoba, Canada),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, March 2012.

10. “Soils and Terrain: An Introduction to the Land Resource,” *Rural Municipality of Elton Information Bulletin* (Lands Resource Unit Brandon Research Centre, 1996).

11. Mennonite Board of Colonization Family Index Fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

12. Jacob A. Loewen letter to Bruder D. Toews, 18 October 1929, Mennonite Board of Colonization,

Immigration Correspondence Fonds, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

13. Anna Loewen, “Obituary of Jacob A. Loewen.”

14. Aron A. Toews, “Jacob A. Loewen,” *Mennonitische Maertyrer* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1949), 460–463. Note: His wife, Anna, living at that time in Port Rowan, Ontario, with her son, provided Toews with the basic story of Jacob’s life.

15. For an accounting of the Jacob Lowen genealogy, contact the author.

Onnmaalijch aus Kjielkje uet ne Kruck ate(n)



Imagine a *Grootmutta* (Grandmother) who has gone to help her *Dochta* (daughter) and *Grootkjind* (grandchild) in the village to make blankets. They are stitching squares together to make a *Dakj* (blanket). A mistake has been made on one side; the squares are of different sizes! The *Grootkjind* says, “*Daut pausst nich*.” (That does not fit.) Her mother tries to stretch the squares to make them fit, but to no avail. “*Daut schauft bloos nich*” (That just does not work), says the mother. After the *Grootmutta* has tried and given up, she says, “*Daut ess aus onnmaalijch aus Kjielkje uet ne Kruck aten*.” (That is as impossible as eating noodles out of a jug.) They all have a laugh at *Grootmutta*’s wit and begin to undo the stitches to make a proper blanket.

Many Mennonite Low German (MLG) sayings are concrete in nature. They come out of an agrarian tradition where the images and metaphors refer to animals, birds, water wells, kitchen utensils, food, farming tools, and more (see article on page 4).

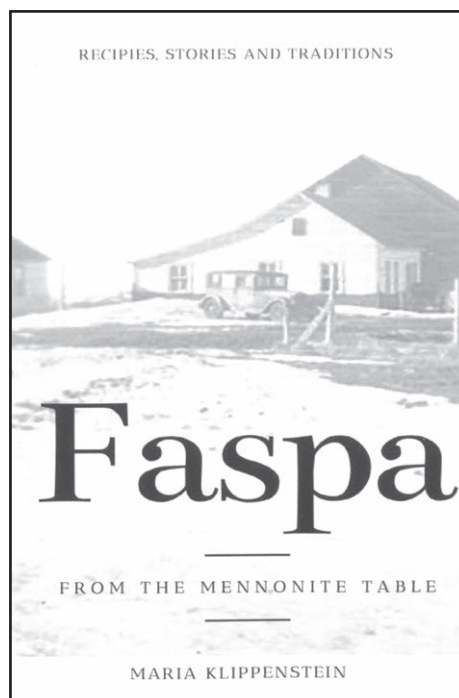
Text by Jake Buhler and illustration by Lynda Toews.

Book Notes & Reviews

Maria Klippenstein, *Faspa From the Mennonite Table: Recipes, Stories and Traditions* (self-published, 2019), 250 pp. Order from Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Noted by Conrad Stoesz

Maria Klippenstein’s *Faspa From the Mennonite Table: Recipes, Stories and Traditions* is not only a cookbook, but also “a story of a way of life.” It describes how the author lived in southern Manitoba with a “wealth of family, neighbours, church and school.” The book is a personal memoir of sorts, meant to educate others about food, folkways, and personal and family history. Maria Klippenstein (1940–2019) was born Maria Neufeld to Gerhard and Suzanna Neufeld and grew up in the Steinbach area. She married John Klippenstein in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church in Chortitz, Manitoba.



The book combines recipes, history, and full-colour photos of ingredients (see next page), dishes, preparation, family photos, and artwork created by Klippenstein. The recipes include desserts, breads, herbs and spices, vegetables, pastas, canning, meats and meat processing, and holiday traditions.

The book’s many nuggets of knowledge illuminate the food, beliefs, and practises of a Mennonite way of life. Like making food with a grandparent, stories often come along with food preparation, kernels of wisdom and insider knowledge. For example, chicken noodle soup was traditionally made for new mothers, sauerkraut soup was for its healing properties, and *Lusche* or paper bags with peanuts and oranges were for school Christmas programs.

Faspa succeeds in passing knowledge and understanding to the next generations.

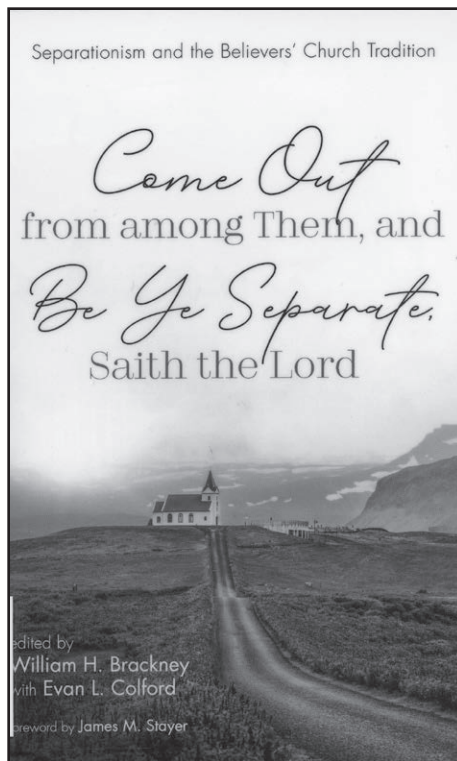


Above: Parsely: (Petaa Seij) used in mostly soups and sauces



Above: Summer Savoury: (Pepa Grout) Garden Fresh or Dried used in fresh vegetable soup and dried bean soups

Parsely and Summer Savoury pictured in Klippenstein's *Faspa* book (page 86).



William H. Brackney and Evan L. Colford, eds., *Come Out from among Them, and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord: Separationism and the Believers' Church Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019), 256 pp.

Reviewed by Andrew Dyck, Winnipeg

North American Mennonite churches, like many other denominations, continue to experience separations between individuals and congregations, congregations and denominations, and between denominations. Many recent separations have resulted from

disagreements about same-sex marriage and about pandemic restrictions.

The 17th Believers' Church Conference, held in 2016 at Acadia University, explored the tendency of believers' churches to separate from older Christian traditions and within themselves. The conference's papers have been published as *Come Out from among Them, and Be Ye Separate, Saith the Lord: Separationism and the Believers' Church Tradition*.

I will review this book by sampling its essays for significant findings, and highlighting three essays whose insights are especially illuminating for today's Mennonite churches.

To begin, Martin Rothkegel emphasizes that Mennonites separated from the traditional churches because they saw themselves as the true church, where salvation is. William Brackney argues that the tendency to dissent and separate is inherent to Baptist ecclesiology—whether separations are theological, ethnic/racial, for social reform, polity-driven, or caused by iconic individual leaders. In chapter three, Colin Godwin looks to believers' baptism and eschatology to invite ethical separation rather than schism of churches.

Historian Douglas Foster presents a 19th-century church unity movement that ironically became separationist. He raises perennially important questions. When Christians cooperate, can separation into denominations be avoided? Who decides on Christianity's unifying essentials? Is the Bible a collection of facts to master intellectually, or a means by which the Holy Spirit works on human hearts? Is the Bible's silence on topics freeing or restrictive? Ought unity to be based on doctrines and practices, or on shared faith, salvation, and submission?

Historian John Roth's chapter "Without Spot or Wrinkle" deserves a careful reading by Mennonite readers. Roth shows that the early Anabaptists and Mennonites were not only separationist by nature, but their many separations were also spurred on by their convictions about authority, ethical transformation of believers, and the visible church. Paradoxically, Anabaptist-origin churches have therefore "maintained the unity (or 'purity') of the church by dividing" (74). As an alternative, Roth proposes a unity based on "many small points of connection, [by which] the presence of the living Christ is made real" (81)—as demonstrated globally by the

Mennonite World Conference. Such unity requires radical patience.

The following chapters give accounts of separationism in practice. Karen Smith tells of 17th-century non-conformist Baptist women in Britain who "came out" from the world and their church tradition by preaching with their testimonies, prophecies, hymns, and deathbed testimonies. David Goatley writes that African-American Baptists have had to create their own church associations and institutions to escape and survive racism. In chapter eight, Russell Prime tells of the almost successful union of Baptists and the Disciples of Christ in Canada's Maritimes.

Theologian Allison MacGregor presents Newfoundland Pentecostals as a "come-outer" tradition. Having themselves come out of Methodism, they also sought to come out of the world by upholding taboos against worldly activities (even picnics), and by rejecting creeds in favour of practices—trends that Mennonites can recognize. Yet MacGregor suggests that, in turn, another Christian tradition may one day come out from these Pentecostals.

In the final two chapters, Eileen Barker reframes cults and sects as "new religious movements" that have separated from the church and the world; and Teun van der Leer suggests that the believers' church movement may in fact offer the way forward that is needed for church unity everywhere—that is, for ecumenical engagement.

Considering that contemporary churches face strong impulses to separate, this book offers a significant interplay of history and theology: of what was (separations) and what ought to be (unity). Having recently heard a local pastor request a theology of separation, I find myself considering three questions raised by this book. How might church unity be upheld if separation was reconceived as ethical instead of intra-church? How might many small points of relational and spiritual connection restore unity among separated churches? What will it take for believers' churches to practice a unity that encompasses not only the local church, but also the church across denominational lines?

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