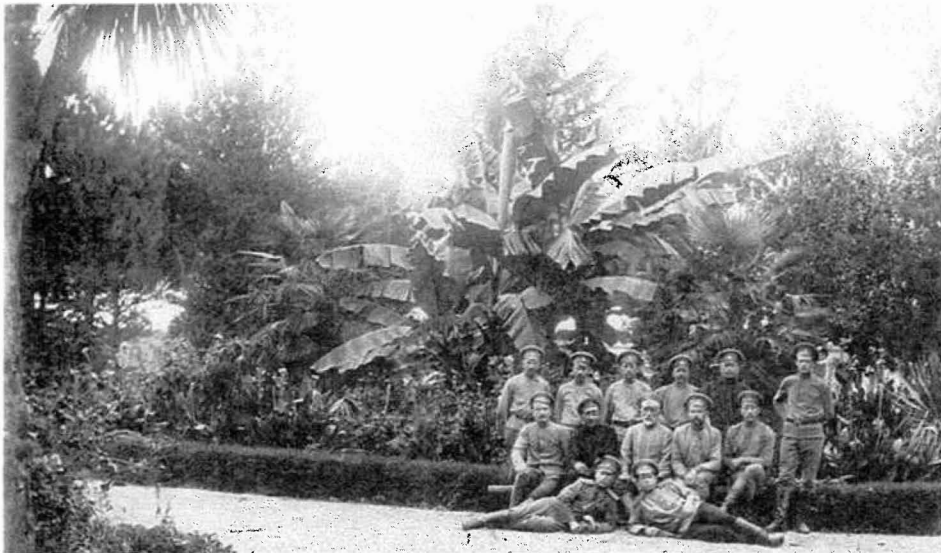


# Mennonite Historian

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



Mennonite medical workers in the Tbilisi Botanical Gardens during World War I.  
(Photo: Courtesy of Jake Dick, Vineland, Ontario)

## Old Photos come to life in Tbilisi, Georgia, 2002

By Jacob N. Dick

*Our feature on Tbilisi, Georgia, takes us back to universal military service in Russia, introduced in 1874, and the Mennonite response to its demands. Negotiations with the Russian government of Alexander II led to an alternative form of state service, first in forestry camps (known then as Forsteidienst), and during World War I, involvement in the medical corps of the Russian army. These recruits were known as Sanitaeter.*

*Abram Dueck and several of his friends were assigned to serve as medics on the Caucasus front, an experience which has recently been written up and prepared for publication by Abram's son, Jake Dick and Lawrence Klippenstein. Jake's recent trip to Tbilisi (then called Tiflis) provided some interesting connections between past and present, as we see in the article below.*

My Father, Abram J. Dick, was born in 1890 in Schoenfeld, Ukraine. In 1911 he was 21 years old and required to report to the local authorities for service to his country "die Losung". He was found to be fit and required to serve his time at the Forestry Azov (Azov Forstei), near Melitopol. In 1914 when World War

One broke out he volunteered to serve with the Medical Service (Sanitaets Dienst). He therefore served his country for six years.

Although the pain and stench of caring for the wounded must have been difficult, a good bond developed between the Mennonite men. My father had many

interesting stories to tell and the fact that he brought a beautiful embossed photo album to Canada, with some ninety pictures and post cards, speaks for itself.

When growing up and wondering what to do on restless Sunday afternoons, my Father would suggest that if we would quiet down we could look at the red photo album. The album eventually fell apart from so much use, especially by us young children.

Over the years friends of mine have commented on the unusual collection of photos and they encouraged me to write a story around the pictures.

My father always spoke about the beautiful city of Tiflis (now Tbilisi), which served as a regional office for the Medical Service. He also had post cards of Tiflis which have left a beautiful imaginary city in my mind.

It was thus unbelievable to me when in November of 2001, I received a letter from CESO (Canadian Executive Services Organization) inquiring whether I would be interested in going to Tbilisi for two to three weeks to help plan a water bottling operation for a business. I thought that no matter what, I had to make this work. On 25 January 2002, at approximately 1:00 a.m., my wife and I arrived in the beautiful city of Tbilisi.

Our hosts were wonderful to us. One was a younger man who spoke English, and another was an older man who spoke Georgian with some Russian words thrown in. We soon became aware of the fact that the Georgians are very nationalistic and are also paying considerably for their independence from Russia. This was also reflected in the character of these two men. The older man was still steeped in the Soviet traditions while the younger man wanted no part of it.

We were frequently asked, "What would you like to see?" I related my father's story and told them I would be interested in seeing the railroad station and the hospital. I showed them copies of photos and asked them whether they could identify them. An old fortress referred to as Ksanka, with many of the Mennonite men standing in the most precarious places, was soon recognized by our friends as Ksani. The next day we were on a 2 ½ hour trip on the highway from Tbilisi to Batumi. I also recognized the fortress there.

(cont'd on p. 2)

## Chortitza Colony Documents Shed New Light

By Glenn Penner

Many readers of the *Mennonite Historian* are aware that Mennonite materials in various Russian archives have been microfilmed. One project that is currently underway and will continue over the next few years is the microfilming of the Mennonite records of the *Guardianship Committee for Foreign Settlers in Southern Russia (1799 – 1876)*, currently held by the Odessa State Archives. This winter the films of Fond 6, Inventory 3 (1852–1856) were distributed in North America.<sup>1</sup>

It goes without saying that these microfilms contain invaluable historical information on the former Mennonite Colonies in South Russia. They also contain a tremendous amount of genealogically useful data, such as voters lists (e.g. Chortitza and Bergthal colonies for 1852 in file #14602), lists of heads of households (e.g. Chortitza for 1853 in file #16449), transfers of households (e.g. #16102) and inheritance records (e.g. inheritance by Simon Schroeder of Schoenfeld, Bergthal colony from his

(cont'd on p. 6)

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Tbilisi Botanical Garden, 2002. Photo: Courtesy of Jacob Dick, Vineland, Ontario.

### Tbilisi, Georgia (cont'd from p. 1)

Within the city of Tbilisi was a wonderful botanical garden, some 200 years old. Although in a neglected state, it was so easy to recognize it's past glory.

One afternoon my wife and I decided to go to the local museum. Again to my amazement, we found a section in the museum dedicated to the Medical Services of World War I. I saw several photographs there that were in my father's collection. This was unbelievable! I did

not know how to react. The next day, after some contemplation, I returned with some of my photos and tried to catch the attention of the museum personnel. One woman recognized my intention and soon I was introduced to Lika, who speaks excellent English. We had a wonderful exchange. I asked her whether they had any photos of the old railway station. She took me to the archive storage area and in no time she pulled out three photos from old weathered envelopes. She suggested she could e-mail me copies, which I gladly accepted. When we arrived back home in Vineland, the photos had preceded us.

I have made copies of all my father's photos and submitted them to her for her examination and hope that maybe some of my father's photos will be part of the Tiflis (Tbilisi) exhibit.

The museum representative, Lika Mamasashvili, has now suggested that maybe an exhibit of photos of the Medical Services during World War I could be exhibited, first in Georgia, and later in Canada.

*Jacob Dick lives in Vineland, Ontario.*



Mennonite men at the Ksanka ruins near Tbilisi, ca. 1916. Photo: Courtesy of Jacob Dick.

# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Recent Books

Francis A. Dyck. *Genealogy of Abram Unger Feb. 27, 1857- Jan. 4, 1917*

(Winnipeg, MB: by the author, 2002) 54 pp.

This compilation traces the descendants of Abram Unger (1857-1917), the 13<sup>th</sup> child of 22, of Peter Unger (1812) listed in the Berghthal Gemeinde Buch (A 10). Abram came to Canada in 1876 with his parents and was baptized a year later by Bishop Gerhard Wiebe of the Chortitzer Church. He first married an Aganetha Wiebe (1861-1887). His second marriage was to Helena Goertzen (1871-1891) and his 3<sup>rd</sup> marriage was to Maria Neufeld (1872-1951). After the death of Abram Unger in 1917, his third wife married Heinrich Bergen in 1919. Abram Unger was buried on his farm just north of Plum Coulee. Contact: Francis A. Dyck, PH16-200 Ronald St., Winnipeg, MB R3J 3J3 or phone 204-897-1031

Peter & Eunice Stobbe. *Four Countries One Family: The Johann Stobbe Descendants* (Saskatoon, SK: by the authors, 2001) 228 pp.

— *The Epp Sisters: Their Times Their Families Their Faith* (Saskatoon, SK: by the authors, 2001) 297 pp.

A significant legacy for their family has been left by the compilers of these two books. *Four Countries One Family* contains the family history and genealogy of the descendants of Johann Jakob Stobbe (1859-1937) and his wife Helena Wiens (1871-1942) who lived in Krassikov, Neu Samara, Russia. This history includes stories of their children who immigrated to Canada in the 1920s and those who remained in the Soviet Union and whose descendants now live in Germany. Many photographs have been included which help flesh out the family story.

The second book, *The Epp Sisters*, features the story of Augusta Epp (1894-1966) who married Peter Stobbe (1892-1956) and her sister Magdalena Epp (1899-1924) who married Nikolai Thiessen (1887-1959). Augusta settled in the Boissevain Manitoba area where she had 12 children (10 reaching adulthood). Her sister Magdalena died at the birth of

her second child who also died. Her widowed husband married his brother's widow Justina, who also had one child. This family also immigrated to Canada and settled in BC in 1936. Contact Peter Stobbe, 422 Keeley Way, Saskatoon, SK S7J 4B2 or phone 306-955-2767.

Jeannie Hiebert. *The Printer Friesen Family: Jacob Schellenberg Friesen (Dretja Friesen)* (Winnipeg, MB: by the author, 2002) 27 leaves.

— *The Hiebert-Huebert Family* (Winnipeg, MB: by the author, 2002) 26 leaves.

The compiler of these two brief family histories is a great granddaughter of Jacob S. Friesen (1862-1931), founder of the printing company that was responsible for *Steinbach Post*, and is a granddaughter of "Printer Friesen's" daughter, Margaretha Friesen (1897-1982) who married Heinrich H. Hiebert (1886-1947). Besides the helpful ancestry charts at the end of each compilation, the compiler has assembled the stories of pain and survival. For example, the marriage of her grandparents, who originated from different Mennonite traditions, resulted in their excommunication by the bishops from both churches – an experience which left hurt and bitterness for years to follow. Contact: Jeannie Hiebert, 110-1075 Henderson Hwy., Winnipeg, MB R2K 2M2 or phone 204-663-4061.

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## Queries

**Redekopp** - Looking for information on Anna Redekopp (b. 9 Apr. 1862) married in Oct. 1885 to Johann Rempel (b. 18 Oct. 1842) who lived in Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, South Russia. Their children were: Helena (24.08.1886-16.10.1964), Bernhard (08.03.1888-18.01.1938), Abraham (09.02.1890-20.06.1979), Gerhard (03.04.1892-18.01.1938), Aganeta (03.04.1834-02.08.1975) and David (11.09.1896-19.01.1973). Who were the parents of Anna Redekopp? Contact: Nikolai Rempel, Hagenschke Str. 13, 32791 Lage-Lippe, Deutschland, e-mail: V\_Rempel@gmx.de

**Boese** - Looking for the descendants of Maria Boese (b. 1874 in Molotschna Colony, probably Schoensee). She migrated to Gretna, Manitoba in 1893 with her father Samuel G. Boese (1832). She married Abraham Klassen and had 8 children: 1) Anna m. Aron Klassen, 2) Abraham m. Margaret Friesen, 3) Katharina; 4) John; 5) Maria m. Henry Wall; 6) Samuel; 7) Elisabeth m. H.J. Siemens and 8) Helena. The family lived in Gretna at the time the Gottlieb Boese "wheel" chart was crafted in 1931. If you are a descendant, or know any descendants, please contact Helmut A. Epp (a descendant of Samuel G. Boese's brother Heinrich), 7 Concord St., Box 1016, Fonthill, ON L0S 1E0; phone 905-892-4534; or e-mail helm.epp@sympatico.ca.

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## New Genealogical Resource

By Lawrence Klippenstein

Ed Brandt and Adlabert Goertz are virtually household names among East European genealogists today. They have now collaborated to publish *Genealogical Guide to East and West Prussia (Ost und West Preussen)*. Its subtitle describes its focus well: *Records, Sources, Publications and Events*. It includes several very helpful maps tracing the geographical evolution of the Prussias, a number of other background appendices, extensive bibliographical material, chronological outlines, etc.

It is mainly an inventory of sources from various countries, centres, archives, etc. which can assist genealogists working in Prussian-related genealogy. Mennonite sections are part of a wide-ranging number of references that will help other groups, such as Volhynian Germans as well. Sources have fairly detailed descriptions that help readers assess the relative usefulness of a particular source to a particular search.

The book sells for \$42.50 US (ca. \$65.00 Cdn) and may be obtained from Mennonite Books, on the web at [www.mennonitebooks.com](http://www.mennonitebooks.com) or by phone at 1-204-668-7475. The first edition is virtually sold out but a second edition is expected to be off the press shortly. A personal presentation of the volume by Dr. Brandt, to the Manitoba public, is being planned for late June. Contact Lawrence Klippenstein at 204-895-4421.





## Mennonite Heritage Centre

600 Shaftesbury Blvd Winnipeg MB Canada R3P 0M4

### Russian Mennonite Workshop in Winnipeg

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Twenty or more persons met at the Canadian Mennonite University on Saturday, June 8, to discuss a number of Russian Mennonite research projects underway in Winnipeg at this time. Several dozen such projects are being undertaken currently, mostly connected with work done at the Centre for MB Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Ten persons were invited to make presentations at this gathering, and guests were asked to join freely in discussion of the topics covered in the two-session meeting. The a.m. portion included treatments of dekulakization in the Khortitza raion in 1929-30 by Peter Letkemann, investigating the Mennonite experience in Ekaterinoslav by Werner Toews, discussion of delegate Jakob Hoeppner's alleged criminal actions at the time of the 1789-90 emigration to New Russia, by Ed Hoeppner, and an analysis of what the recently-completed *Bote Index* can contribute to Russian Mennonite studies, by Helene Friesen.

In the afternoon themes discussed included Russian Mennonite estates in Imperial Russia, by Helmut Huebert, Russian Mennonite alternative service studies, by Lawrence Klippenstein, plans for an exhibit on the art of Jakob Sudermann, by Werner Toews, information on the new Mennonite Family Centre in Zaporozhe, by Rudy Friesen, Peter Rempel sharing data on Mennonite and other mission efforts in present-day Ukraine, and Harold Jantz speaking on letters from Russia as a source for family studies.

All project presenters suggested ongoing work on their themes, including possible publication of articles and books. It is hoped that a similar workshop can be planned in the fall. Further information about the proceedings can be obtained by emailing [klippensteinL@aol.com](mailto:klippensteinL@aol.com).

### Summer Projects at MHC

This summer is proving to be busy at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. In addition to a busy schedule for regular staff, additional people will be working at the Centre.

Joanne Moyer is processing the large I.I. Friesen collection made up of textual records and photographs. Friesen was a long time member and minister in the Bethel Mennonite church, Winnipeg and also teacher at Canadian Mennonite Bible School. This project was made possible through a Control of Holdings grant from the Canadian Council of Archives.

Trevor Stoesz was hired through a Career Placement grant from the Federal Department of Human Resources. He has been doing a variety of projects including migrating photograph descriptions from an old computer program to integrate with the newer photograph database.

Megan Wiebe has been hired through a Career Placement grant applied for by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society's Genealogy Committee. She is entering information from the former Berghaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba church registers as well as indexing the EWZ

files. These files contain information about people fleeing Russia and entering Germany during and immediately after World War Two. For more information see *Mennonite Historian* September 1998 and March 2000.

Bert Friesen is continuing to work half time at describing congregational records housed at the Heritage Centre. These descriptions are then placed on the Heritage Centre's web site and the CAIN site (Canadian Archival Information Network). He is also spending some time indexing current issues of *Der Bote*.

Retired professor Adolf Ens has been working on a history of the former Conference of Mennonites in Canada. He plans to move his office to the Heritage Centre this summer to continue his research and writing.

Our regular staff (Alf Redekopp (director), Connie Wiebe (administrative assistant), Ray Dirks (MHC gallery curator) and Conrad Stoesz (Archivist)) look forward to working with these individuals as they help us maintain our holdings and make them more accessible to the public.

CDS



Three Summer Project workers posing in the lobby of the Mennonite Heritage Centre around a Russian Samovar, brought to Canada by Rev. David H. Rempel (1869-1962), an ancestor of Joanne Moyer on the left. The others are Megan Wiebe and Trevor Stoesz. Displayed in the background are a Kroeger clock dating back to 1833, a clock face once stomped upon by the Russian anarchists in 1919 during a raid of a Mennonite home, and a plaque commemorating the 75 anniversary of *Der Bote*. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.



Wedding at the first Brotherfield Mennonite Brethren Church, 1902. Photo: Courtesy of David I. Bergen of Waldheim, SK.

## Brotherfield Memorial Chapel Dedicated

A group of former Brotherfield Mennonite Brethren Church (Sask.) members have formed a historical society and have erected a memorial chapel on the former site of the church. The chapel was dedicated on Sunday, June 9, approximately 100 years after the church began. The purpose, as stated by the society, is to "serve as a memorial to God's faithfulness in the past and a witness to his salvation in Jesus in the present. It is the hope of the Society that, although the church is closed, God can continue to minister to people who stop in here, as they did when the church was there..."

This appears to be the first such chapel sponsored by a Mennonite Brethren group. The Brotherfield Mennonite Brethren Church was located six miles west of Waldheim and began with a group of settlers from Minnesota and North Dakota in 1898. The first building was completed in 1902. In 1988 the church amalgamated with the Waldheim Mennonite Brethren Church. The building was sold and moved to Martensville in 1995 where it was renovated into a home.

The records of the church are housed at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## Announcement

### The Philadelphia Mennonite Brethren Church Watrous, Saskatchewan

will be celebrating its 75th anniversary

August 2-4, 2002

Registration begins at 6:30 p.m. Friday, followed by a praise and worship service. Other events include a mass choir, a historical review, children's features, Prairie Café, memorabilia displays, golf tourney, youth events, missionary moments, talent night, etc., and will end after lunch on Sunday. For detailed information or to register, contact Jan Dick at (306) 365-4742 or email [wayne.jan@sk.sympatico.ca](mailto:wayne.jan@sk.sympatico.ca)



CENTRE FOR  
**Mennonite  
Brethren  
Studies** IN CANADA

1-169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R2L 2E5

## Summer Staff

Several students have joined the regular staff at CMBS this summer.

Donovan Giesbrecht returned to continue a project which he began last year and is funded by the Canadian Council of Archives under the Control of Holdings programme. The project involves the cataloguing of about 3,000 Mennonite Brethren Herald photographs in a collection which is estimated to total about 16,000 photographs.

The Centre was able to purchase print preserves and other supplies for the collection as a result of a Preservation Management Grant of \$980 received from the Canadian Council of Archives.

Donovan will also be processing a collection of documents from the Christian Education department of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. This project is also funded by the CCA.

Leslie Wiebe has begun work as an Archival Assistant funded by the Career Placement programme of Human Resources and Development Canada. She will be involved in a variety of tasks, including statistical data entry of information sent by congregations from across Canada. A report will be prepared for the Canadian convention in July.

Bert Friesen is also working at the Centre on a part-time basis. One of his projects is funded by the CAIN (Canadian Archival Information Network) programme of the Canadian Council of Archives. It involves processing of materials pertaining to the provincial and national Mennonite Brethren conferences and placing the descriptions on line.

Bert is also beginning work on indexing the *Mennonitische Rundschau* for the decade from 1910 to 1919. Volumes 1 to 3 (1880 to 1909) and 1A (Author Index) were completed by Bert some years ago under a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada grant.

Volumes 5 and 6 (1920-39) were indexed by students in an abbreviated form as well.

## Chortitza Documents

(cont'd from p. 2)

parents Bernhard Schroeder and Maria Westerwig of Prussia in file #14715). Unfortunately the archives where these microfilms are deposited are not always conveniently located. Further, many researchers are unable to read the Russian or the Gothic script in which all of these records are written. Because of these and other factors several people have made the effort to translate or transcribe the most genealogically useful of these documents into English and posting them on the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society web site.<sup>2</sup>

Two such documents from Inventory 3 have recently been posted on the MMHS web page. The first contains the 1852 property transfer records for the Chortitza Colony, found in file #16071. These records (and other property transfer documents found in the collection)

provide valuable information on the movement of Mennonites within the colony. This document gives the "Wirtschaft" or property number, the name of the former owner of the property, village, date of transfer, reason for the former owner giving up the property, name of the new owner and where the new owner was registered in the 1850 census. This last entry often names the father of the new owner. There are a total of 35 property transfers for the year 1852. For example, Wirtschaft #21 of Nieder Chortitz became available on Sept. 27, 1852, after the death of the owner David Redekop. On Oct. 28, it was transferred (sold) to Peter Penner, who was registered in the 1850 census under his father Peter Penner (family #18) of Rosengart.

The second document (file #15751) is the most important Chortitza Colony document in the Inventory 3 microfilms. It is a census of those families living outside the colony in 1852. The document lists 184 families with a total of 962

individuals. *In other words, about one eighth of the Chortitza Colony's approximately 7,800 people were actually living outside the colony on temporary passes!* The census is divided into family units and provides such information as the names and ages of all individuals, the year they began living outside the colony, their place of residence, the occupation of the head of the family and the family under which the family head was registered (including family number and village) in the 1850 census. The families are grouped according to which village was considered their permanent residence. According to Harvey Dyck's introduction to his translation of the Jacob Epp diary, Epp joined a group of about 50 families to found the Judenplan Colony in 1852. This census indeed lists 52 families living "in a Hebrew Colony of the Cherson Territory". The census includes Jacob Epp and his brother Dirk.

Other interesting files in Inventory 3 include a list (including place of origin) of those who founded the new villages of Paulsheim, Molotschna Colony (#14910) and Friedrichthal, Bergthal Colony (#14914), a list of Chortitza and Bergthal Colonists who were fined (#15814) and the 1852 lists of those living outside the Bergthal and Molotschna colonies (also #15751).

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Microfilm copies of the Board of Guardians Records from the Odessa State Archives are available for viewing at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg; British Columbia Historical Society Archives, Abbotsford; and the Centers for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno and Hillsboro.

<sup>2</sup> The MMHS web site can be found at: <http://www.mmhs.org/mmhs-gen.htm>

## Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 8)

to Pennsylvania. Financial aid to some came from Mennonites in Holland.

Mennonites began to move to Canada during and after the revolutionary war in the United States. As early as the 1820s Mennonite communities were formed in the Waterloo area. There were a number of meeting houses, but one body of believers. Ministers rotated from one Sunday to the next according to a list published every year, starting in 1836. One of these appointments or meeting places was formed near David Eby's homestead. Bishop Benjamin Eby was a



**Neufeld - Nickel** - Does anyone recognize this photo or any of the people and names associated with it? It is believed that the photo was taken in 1905 or 1906 in Kronsthal, Chortitza, Russia and shows my great grandmother Helena Neufeld (nee Nickel) with her surviving children and grandchildren sometime after the death of her husband Abraham Neufeld, my great grandfather. However missing from the photo is my grandfather, Jacob A. Neufeld (1871-1937) and his wife Helena (nee Dueck) who had migrated to Canada. In fact, the Jacob A. Neufeld family had migrated to Canada for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in May 1906 where they settled in Aberdeen, Saskatchewan. Jacob A. Neufeld and family were summoned by his mother to return to Kronstal from Canada when his father died sometime after 1903. The first two times Jacob and Helena left Kronstal were 1900 and 1903/04 when they arrived in Gretna, Manitoba. The photo shows the widow Helena Neufeld (nee Nickel) with a married daughter to her right who was married to a Siemens. Behind the widow are the two sons Abraham and Herman. The other people on the photo include a daughter-in-law and grandchildren. Contact: Wilmer Neufeld, 2316 Cascade Street, Abbotsford, BC V2T 3G3, phone 604-850-1886 or e-mail [wilneufeld@shaw.ca](mailto:wilneufeld@shaw.ca).



capable leader who saw the body of believers grow and enjoy relative harmony. In 1851 a new meeting house was built to accommodate the worshippers on David Eby's land which was on the corner of Erb's road and Hallman Road. This is considered the founding date of the Erb Street Mennonite Church.

The church grew and weathered many adversities such as influences which taught "only conversion, and are silent about being disciples...." In 1902 a new church was built in town. In this building men and women still sat on opposite sides, but the pews were curved and ornate. Everyone faced the speaker, doing away with the C-shape seating arrangement. The church was also equipped with electricity and had a basement, which was the most talked about feature.

In the 1870s members of the Erb Street church extended help to Russian Mennonites moving to Canada. In 1924 they continued their helping tradition when on July 19, more than 800 Russian Mennonites arrived in Waterloo after a four-week journey. They disembarked at the corner of Erb and Caroline Streets and walked several blocks west to the Erb Street Mennonite church.

The church has always had strong and capable leadership, allowing the church to remain strong and flexible. Since 1902 the building has received at least two additions and the congregation is contemplating a third. In 1986 the Waterloo North Mennonite church was formed as a church plant of the Erb Street church. Today the Erb Street Church is a healthy congregation with a good mix of generations.

This book is very well written and not only gives the facts but also analyzes the events to help the reader understand the importance of the facts. The author helps the reader to understand both the story of Erb Street Mennonite Church and Mennonite theology through his commentary and analysis. The author has chosen to print the documents in colour and the photos with the sepia tone rather than just in black and white. This gives the old pictures warmth and character. The Erb Street Mennonite Church has attempted to be relevant to society and yet separate from society. This book details this attempt in an enjoyable fashion.

## Book Notes

By Adolf Ens

*God's Orchard: Fruits of the Spirit in Action* is a slim booklet (120 pp.) of story devotionals illustrating the Spirit fruits listed in Galatians 5:22. The author, Helen Lepp Friesen, grew up in Manitoba and the Paraguayan Chaco, but her stories cover a much broader range of cross-cultural experiences from Afghanistan and the Middle East to Arizona. A trained writer, Lepp Friesen skilfully combines social justice issues with a warm piety (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2001). pb. \$10.99.

Three modest books with a common theme – terror and exile in the USSR – are included in this batch of book notes. The most professionally done of these is that of Agnes Loewen, born 1912 in Osterwick, Chortitza, Ukraine. Translated and co-authored by Helen Grace Lescheid, it was published as *Lead, Kindly Light* (Belleville, ON: Essence Publishing, 1999), pb. 192 pp., and is now in its second printing. The three sections of the book outline Agnes' story: "An Alien in My Home Country (1912–1943)," "A Refuge in Europe (1943–1949)," and "From Immigrant to Citizen of Canada (1949–1997)."

During a two-year term of service among *Aussiedler* in Germany in the mid-1980s, Elizabeth Enns visited many widows who had experienced harsh years in Soviet prison camps. *Weeping may last the night ... but joy comes in the morning!* (Winnipeg: by the author, 1996), 78 pp., recounts some of those horrific stories of suffering and courage which she heard and recorded.

*Where Is My Homeland?: Memoirs of Johanna Jenn* (Elmira, ON: Leonard Freeman, n.d.), 8½ x 11, Sirlux binding, 85 pp. The author, a descendant of Kornelius Toews (1802-1915) and Helen Wiens (d. 1920), was born Johanna Fehderau in the USSR in 1925. The *Memoir* recounts the wanderings of her family from 1900 to 1998, including the very difficult years of Soviet exile. Freeman has earlier published memoirs of Johanna's cousin-uncle, Henry Wieler.

Arrangements between Pandora Press (Kitchener) and Pandora Press (USA) with Herald Press in Scottdale, PA, have resulted in a significant increase in the number of new books on Anabaptist and Mennonite themes. Utilizing new

technology, which makes short press run books economically viable, the independently owned Pandora companies gain access to a wider North American market by co-publishing certain types of manuscript with Herald Press. Two recent volumes of this kind are noted below.

The *Biblical Concordance of the Swiss Brethren, 1540*, translated by Gilbert Fast and Galen A. Peters, is the second volume in the *Anabaptist Texts in Translation* series (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), pb. 227 pp. Scholars will find this book helpful in studying the range of themes around which the *Concordance* groups biblical texts. Several indexes are most helpful in this kind of study. Ordinary readers – the originally targeted readers were "ordinary" Christians in the Anabaptist "lay" reformation – may find this guide to the Scriptures as edifying as the 16<sup>th</sup> century readers did.

A *Festschrift* in honour of E. Morris Sider, prominent church historian and biographer of the Brethren in Christ in the US and Canada, is a much different volume. David Weaver-Zercher, ed. *Minding the Church: Scholarship in the Anabaptist Tradition* (Telford, PA: Pandora Press USA, 2002) pb. 280 pp., consists of 14 essays from scholars in 14 different disciplines (including rhetoric, economics, music and political science) and three responses. The provocative promise of chapter titles such as "Select Your Mother Carefully," or "Anabaptist Visions at the Library of Congress (and Other Tales from the Edge of Evangelicalism)" does not disappoint.

Helen Janzen's translation of Gerhard Wiebe's, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America* has been reprinted (2001) by Eastern Mennonite Publications of Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA. It is in the identical format in which it was originally published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in 1981. Pb, 73 pp.

The doctoral dissertation of Hans Werner (Department of History, University of Manitoba, 2002, 376 pp.) has recently been deposited in several academic libraries in Winnipeg. Readers interested in the post-WWII immigrations from the USSR will find much useful information in this volume, entitled: "Integration in Two Cities: A Comparative History of Protestant Ethnic German Immigrants in Winnipeg, Canada and Bielefeld, Germany, 1947-1989."

## Book Reviews

Sandra Birdsell, *The Russländer* (Toronto, ON: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2001) 352 pp.

Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder of Kitchener, Ontario.

Sandra Birdsell's latest novel, *The Russländer* (McClelland & Stewart, 2001), meets all the criteria of a great read. Like her other novels, it made me laugh and it made me think, but more than her other books, it also made me cry. That is because I am one of the *Russländer* and it stirred something within me that had been dormant for a long time. Just before Birdsell's novel I read Harry Loewen's documentary account of Mennonites suffering during World War II (*Road to Freedom*, Pandora Press, 2000), and together these two books impacted me profoundly.

Although the roots of the Canadian-born Birdsell are part Mennonite, this is the first novel in which she focuses on that aspect of her heritage. From her aunt, Katherine Vogt, she heard the story of Vogt's growing-up years in Russia and her family's subsequent flight to Canada.

Birdsell's novel is told from the perspective of the young Katherine Vogt, called Katya by her family and friends. It covers a time span of approximately ten years in the life of Katya, beginning in 1910. These years start out as peacefully as the novel but are filled with sorrow and heartache by the time Katya becomes a young adult. The setting of the novel is Privol'noye, a Mennonite estate in Russia during the years leading up to the First World War and the Russian Revolution. It was owned by Abram Sudermann and its overseer was Katya's father, Peter Vogt.

As in one of Birdsell's previous novels, *The Chrome Suite*, the protagonist is a somewhat lonely child. She quietly observes life and writes her observations in her notebook, aware of the close ties formed and broken by others around her. Katya watches, somewhat wistfully, the intimate friendship developing between her older sister Greta and the estate owner's youngest daughter Lydia. The two friends act like twins, and, in typical Birdsell style, the author describes them as having one head because they tie their braids together to show everyone how close they are.

Greta eventually falls in love with Lydia's brother Dietrich, the second youngest son of Sudermann. This too is

communicated to the reader through the innocent and child-like observations of Katya. The relationship ends when the class difference becomes a problem for Dietrich's father. However, the close friendship that exists between Katya's father Peter and David, one of the older sons of the estate owner, lasts in spite of class differences.

Birdsell skillfully interweaves theme and structure by dividing her novel into three parts that reflect the contents of Psalm 23. She then gives her readers very touching examples of how the meaning of this psalm affects Katya.

"In Green Pastures," the first section of the novel, describes life on the opulent Sudermann estate during Katya's early years. This part of the book moves rather slowly, but already there is a foreshadowing of what will take place in the second segment, "In the Presence of Enemies." Much of the content of this section is revealed through letters exchanged between Katya and Greta, Greta and Dietrich, and Peter and David. In the third section, "Surely Goodness and Mercy," Katya must deal with overwhelming grief and loss. Birdsell very realistically describes the grief process as Katya moves through denial and anger and finally to acceptance of what has taken place; she is in severe shock and is sent to a doctor who suggests prayer as a method of healing.

Katya cannot pray but she is reminded of the time when, as a child with a temper problem, her father had given her a small square of sheep's wool to carry in her pocket, with the advice to hold it in her hand and recite the 23rd Psalm whenever she lost her temper. She now picks up this practise.

Although the arrogance of the Mennonite estate owner and his mistreatment of the people who work for him are not glossed over, Birdsell never allows them to become the focus of the novel. Rather, *The Russländer's* central theme is that of love and its ability to conquer evil.

This theme already emerges in the first section of the novel through small losses experienced by Katya. For example, the four little brass bells on her boots were very special, and losing them was traumatic for the child. "She was eight years old and knew that thunder followed lightning, that if a sow had more piglets than she had teats, the smallest piglets would starve, that a hand held too close to a flame would soon feel its heat. But she

had never known loss, and to lose something was incomprehensible. Oh, for the goodness of love, she cried out. . . ." (30). Much later she discovers, through a confession by her one-time teacher, that the brass bells were not lost but taken away deliberately.

As the novel progresses, Katya loses infinitely more than the brass bells on her boots. In danger of losing her sanity in light of the horrific events she endures, she slowly begins to live again and recognizes that love and laughter still exist for her in spite of loss. For Katya's wedding, Lydia Sudermann, who is reduced to poverty like everyone else, gives her a green cashmere dress and a pair of silk stockings with a note:

Dear Katya,

I found this verse in the Song of Solomon, and I thought it could fit any occasion, and especially yours today: "Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it."

Love prevails, yes? And it can never be taken from us. We have that promise. In the name of our Father who has saved us, and keeps us strong, your sister, Lydia (342-343).

Signing herself as "your sister," the estate owner's daughter acknowledges that there is no difference between them.

Birdsell's skills as a storyteller and her realistic portrayal of characters and their emotions save this novel from shallow sentimentality. She allows her readers to participate in an era almost lost to this generation of Mennonites, and she does this with astonishing warmth and depth of feeling.

Karl Kessler, *Path of a People: Erb Street Mennonite Church, 1851-2001* (Waterloo, ON: Erb Street Mennonite Church, 2001) 166 pp.

Reviewed by Conrad Stoesz of Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The year 2001 marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Erb Street Mennonite church in Waterloo, Ontario. This occasion was marked by a banquet, a new cookbook (*Be Present at our Table*), a new opera (*The Tree of Life*), and a history book by Karl Kessler.

*Path of a People* begins by summarizing early Anabaptist history and moves into telling the story of some of the early Mennonites emigrating from Europe

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