

# Mennonite Historian

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



Otto Klassen Productions available through a minimum \$30.00 donation to the Text to Terabytes Project. (See further details on p. 2.)

## Text to Terabytes – Collaborating Mennonite Archives Launch New Project

By Conrad Stoesz

The Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMCS) have launched a new joint fund raising project dubbed Text to Terabytes. The fund will help fund the intake of archival records in a vast array of ever changing digital formats, so that stories important to the

Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren history can continue to be preserved.

Technology is rapidly changing. Archivists the world over are struggling to know and predict the best practices, standards, equipment, and formats in which to preserve material. Some experts speculate that the last few decades will be

some of the poorest documented periods of history because the information created or the media it resides on will not stand the test of time.

At the centre of this fund raising project is a generous gift of films by internationally respected filmmaker Otto Klassen of Winnipeg. Klassen has spent a lifetime documenting Mennonite history through the lens of a film camera. The two denominational archival centres that serve Mennonite Church Canada and the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches together with a private donor are providing funds to make distribution copies of seven titles of Klassen's works. For a minimum donation of \$30 to the Text to Terabyte project, donors can receive one title of Klassen's works.

Klassen, a Russian-born Mennonite and self-taught film producer, has over 50 films to his credit in his 35 plus years as a film producer, many of which contain rare archival footage from European archives. His goal has been to preserve and give access to some of the amazing stories of the Russian Mennonite people.

Klassen's films cover the Russian Mennonite story in Prussia, Russia, Canada, Mexico and Paraguay. His best known film is the two-part *Great Trek*, documenting the flight of Mennonites out of Russia to Germany during the Second World War. He has worked in several languages including English, High German, Low German and Spanish. In 2007 he received an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Winnipeg for his work.

Klassen lived through the devastating Ukrainian famine of 1932-33, the horror of war in Europe and survived the hardships of pioneer life in Paraguay. He witnessed the Soviet propaganda films of the 1930s and the German military creating documentaries during the Second World War. At an early age, he understood the power of story told through motion pictures. He also saw how film could be used to tell the truth or to cover up the truth.

After arriving in Canada he worked as a brick layer but continued watching, observing, and analyzing motion pictures and their structures. Today he uses some of the most up to date digital technology in his ongoing story telling endeavors.

Klassen's drive to preserve and provide public access to the archival records aligns with the core mandates for the two Winnipeg based national Mennonite archival centres. But in today's digital

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## Text to Terabytes

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world preserving and providing access is becoming more complicated. Creating and providing digital versions of archival materials offers convenient access to rare materials. However managing and preserving the digital version along with the original format demands more human and material resources. Digital storage space, staff time, and equipment are needed. Increasingly, inquirers are asking for and expecting prompt service, with digital results to be sent electronically.

In addition, the Centres are also receiving records in native digital format and need to access technologies and devise durable practices to ensure retrieve-ability of such information in the future.

For these reasons the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies have strengthened their partnership and embraced the gift of the Klassen films for the Text to Terabyte project. Plans are also in the works to give the Centres a more national profile through this project. We encourage you to contribute so that together we can strive to provide long term solutions to keep our history accessible.

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## Otto Klassen Productions Available in DVD format

For a gift of \$30 or more ask for one of the following Otto Klassen titles and support the Text to Terabyte project. Other titles available upon request.

**Remembering Our Mennonite Heritage** traces the origins of the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement and the migration of the persecuted Anabaptist believers to Polish-Prussia in the 16-th Century. 250 years later, over one half of these Prussian Mennonites respond to an invitation of the Russian Tsars to settle in southern Russia (in what is now Ukraine) in the years 1789 to 1836; and in central Russia from 1853-1870. Here, Mennonites established prosperous agricultural villages with their own administrative and educational systems, their own hospitals, welfare and insurance programs. The "golden years" of this Mennonite Commonwealth came to an end with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. 2007 production, 45 minute DVD.

**Prairie Pioneers: The Mennonites of Manitoba (1874-1974)** is Klassen's first full length film produced in 1974. The film recreates various aspects of pioneer life, such as the building of sod huts (*zemlin*), and the arrival of Russian-Mennonite settlers at the junction of the Red River and Rat River in 1874. It also includes footage of Manitoba Centennial Celebrations of 1970 in various Manitoba Mennonite communities, including the first ever visit of members of the Royal Family – Queen Elizabeth, Prince Philip and Prince Charles – to a Mennonite village in Canada and the visit of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to Steinbach. Other Centennial events presented in the film include a hymn sing and choral festival in Winnipeg's Centennial Concert Hall, a large Mennonite gathering at the Winnipeg Arena, and celebrations in Altona and at the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach. 1974 production, re-mastered in 2007, 43 minute DVD.

**Remembering Russia 1914-1927: War and the end of Mennonite Tranquility.** The Mennonites in southern Russia, present-day Ukraine, had become affluent. They worked hard in their tight-knit communities, bound by a common language and faith. The level of cultural and social achievement had surpassed their Russian neighbours. For most Mennonites, life was what they made it, largely undisturbed by national or international events. That all changed with the beginning of World War I in 1914. Political, social and economic events in Russia had eroded the authority of the Tsarist regime in the year's leading up Russia's entry into the war. Dissatisfaction with the regime and Russia's military performance in the war eventually led to the 1917 Russian Revolution. A bloody civil war followed, churning through the country and ending the Mennonite's way of life. Farms, enterprises and churches were expropriated and families died at the hands of marauding anarchists. As their world crumbled

around them, thousands of Mennonites fled to Canada. 2006 production, 43 minute DVD.

**Remembering Russia 1928-1938: Collectivization and Mass Arrest.** This DVD documents the spiritual battles and sufferings of Mennonites in Soviet Russia from the introduction of the first Five-Year Plan in October 1928 to the end of The Great Terror in 1938. Soviet plans for the complete collectivization of agriculture, the elimination of so-called 'kulaks' and the closing of all churches struck a hard blow to the traditional Mennonite way of life. Thousands fled to Moscow in a desperate attempt to leave the Soviet Union; others risked the perils of crossing the Amur River into China in order to escape the 'Red Paradise.'

Some 6000 Mennonites were able to leave the Soviet Union. Of those who remained, many suffered the fate of exile to the forests and mines of Northern Russia, Siberia and Kolyma, where they provided cheap, unpaid slave labour for the state. Life in the collective farms was a constant struggle. Hundreds died during the terrible famine of 1933. Thousands of men and even some women were rounded up by the secret police and exiled to labour camps or simply shot. 2007 production, 52 minute DVD. Note: also available in German **Erinnerungen an Russland, 1928-1938: Kollektivierung und Terror.**

**The Great Trek: Part 1 (1939-1943).** Winnipeg film-maker Otto Klassen uses rare archival photographs and film footage from the German Bundesarchiv to document the effects of the Soviet-German Non-aggressive Pact (August 1939), the German invasion of the Soviet Union (22 June 1941) and the subsequent two-year occupation of Ukraine on Soviet-Germans and Ukrainians in general and on the Mennonite villages of the Khortitsa and Molochna Settlements in particular. 1992 production Re-mastered in 2007, 35 minute DVD.

**The Great Trek: Part 2 (1943-1945).** Winnipeg filmmaker Otto Klassen uses rare archival photographs and film footage from the German Bundesarchiv to document the westward retreat of over 350,000 Soviet-Germans and Mennonites in Fall of 1943, their resettlement in German-Occupied Polish territory, and their eventual flight from advancing Red Army forces in the early months of 1945. 1992 production, re-mastered in 2007, 39 minute DVD.

Make donation cheque payable to:

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or  
Mennonite Heritage Centre  
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.,  
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4

# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Queries

**Reimer** - Seeking information on a D. G. Reimer, a teacher in southern Manitoba likely in the 1950s and then highly involved in the co-op and credit union movement. Contact: Elmer Heinrichs, e-mail: eahein@mts.net.

## Johann Epp (1920-2009): Researcher and writer

By Margaret Kroeker

Johann Epp, an avid researcher and writer of his Mennonite roots and the beginnings of the Mennonite Brethren Church, died on March 22, 2009, in Bielefeld, Germany. Johann



was the son of Jakob Epp, born 1890 in the village of Nikolajewka (No. 5), Ignatjewka Colony, Russia, and Katharina Schellenberg, born 1891 in Reinfeld, Jasykowo Colony. The Epp family moved to Omsk, Siberia, where Johann was born in the village of Iwanowka on October 14, 1920. He graduated with distinction from medical school in Omsk, in spite of an interruption in his studies from 1941-1946 when he was held as a political prisoner. Johann dedicated his heart and soul to his medical profession which required him to travel to the surrounding villages to battle epidemics and provide other medical service in the worst weather conditions of cold and ice. In his book, *Und nun, Herr Doktor?*, Logos Verlag, 2000, Johann Epp relates how God carried him through his many hardships and difficulties during his 34 years as a medical doctor in Krutinka, Issylkul, Omsk, and Bendery.

In 1949 Johann married Anna Isaak, daughter of Peter and Aganetha (nee Friesen) Isaak. They had three children, Eleanore, Viktor and Katharina, all presently living in Germany.

After the death of his mother in 1964, Johann's desire to preserve the memory of his forefathers grew and he managed to compile a thick scribbler of family records, which he took along to Germany

when they left Russia in 1983. He was successful in getting these papers across the border by entrusting them to the German Embassy in Moscow, from where they were forwarded to his address in Germany. In his new home, he dedicated himself to documenting all the new data that became available to him. All those in Germany, Canada and elsewhere who shared records with him, learned to appreciate Johann's diligence and his generous nature.

His published family registers, under the title *Gedenke des ganzen Weges* Vol. 1 - 2, Logos Verlag, 2000; include the descendants of the following: Peter Epp 1690, Kornelius Froese 1792, Peter Lepp 1733, Peter Unger 1753 and Gerhard Priess 1764 (Volume 1; 492 pp); and, Johann Goossen 1859, Franz Pauls 1779, Daniel Peters 1794, and Bernhard Schellenberg 1759 (Volume 2, 409 pp.) His wife's family includes the following lines, in the unpublished book, "Das Stammbuch Isaak": Martin Friesen 1848, Phillip Isaak 1694.

These compiled records are enhanced with family trees, many excellent photographs, village maps and lists and indexes for persons, subject and locations. One of Johann Epp's last projects was a German translation of the 1835 Molot-schna Census, *Die Volkszählung im Molot-schnaer Mennonitengebiet von 1835*.

Johann Epp also had a keen interest in the teachings of the founders of the Mennonite Brethren Church. He studied their legacy of strong faith, and emphasis on assurance of salvation, clean, moral living and a loving relationship to one another. His book *Erwecket euren läuteren Sinn*, Logos Verlag, 2003, tells the story of Abraham Unger, 1825-1862, founder and first Ältester of the first Mennonite Brethren church in the Chortitza Colony in Russia.

Johann Epp's writings are filled with enthusiasm and optimism about the return of the Mennonites from Russia to Germany in the last decades and the revival this has brought both to Germany and Russia. Although integration is taking place, he believed their staunch faith will continue to prevail as it did during the most difficult times in the Soviet Union.

## Lorna Bergey (d. 2009)

Lorna Lucille Bergey (nee Shantz) died peacefully at Cambridge Memorial Hospital (Ontario) on Saturday, March 22, 2009, in her 88th year.



Lorna Bergey was a founding board member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario in 1965, and subsequently served as secretary of the Society for 32 years. She also served as secretary of the Mennonite Bicentennial Commission, and was historian for the Mennonite Conference of Ontario for many years.

When the Brubacher House museum was opened on the University of Waterloo campus to depict a Pennsylvania German Mennonite home in the second half of the 19th century, Lorna took a lead role in furnishing the house and acquiring donations of items for display in the house.

Lorna Bergey was the first archivist at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario when it located at Conrad Grebel College.

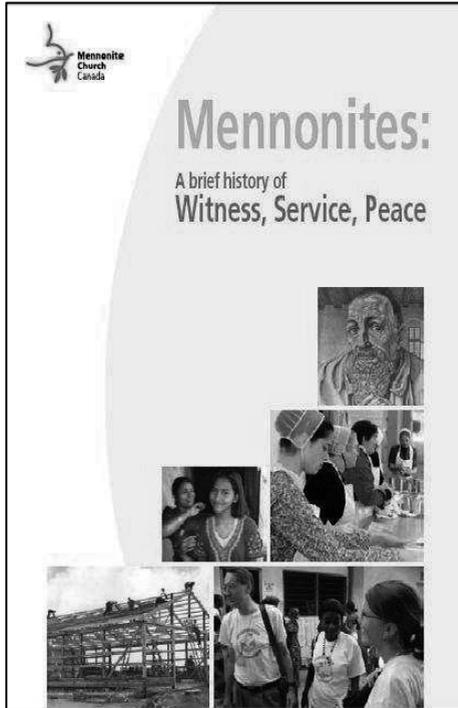
Lorna wrote numerous historical and genealogical articles for *Ontario Mennonite History*, *Pennsylvania Mennonite History*, *Mennonite Life*, *Pennsylvania German Folklore Society of Ontario*, *Waterloo Historical Society annual volume*, and the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*.

## Hedy Janzen (1928-2009)

Hedwig (Hedy) Janzen, nurse and home care worker for many years, passed away on 18 May 2009 in Winnipeg. During her retirement years she



began to research her Janzen genealogy and family history. This activity gave her opportunity to travel across the world and discover relatives in places like Europe and South America. She first published *Our heritage: The Descendants of Heinrich P. Janzen* in 1990 and an *Addendum to...* in 1995 but she continued to dig for new information and prepare updates. It was always a pleasure to have her visit the Mennonite archival Centres in Winnipeg.



### Anabaptist Display Booklet Available

In December 2008, the MHC dedicated an 8-panel display entitled “Mennonites: Witness, Service and Peace” in its gallery space, which tells the 500 year history of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement, starting in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century up to the present. The text was written by Dr. John J. Friesen and Artist Ray Dirks designed the display. The Centre has now published the text, photographs and maps in a 40-page souvenir booklet.

The booklet can also be used in small groups and for personal reference and study. Copies can be ordered for \$3.00 (plus GST) directly from the Centre or on-line at Mennonite Church Canada Resource Centre

([www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/28/11775](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/28/11775)).

AR

### All back issues of Mennonite Historian now On-line

In May 2009, the two archival Centres (MHC and CMBS) launched a new website containing all previously published issues of their quarterly newsletter called the *Mennonite Historian*. The address is simple to remember: [www.mennonitehistorian.ca](http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca). Check it out!

The *Mennonite Historian* was first published in September 1975 by the History-Archives Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. The chairman of the committee was John J. Friesen and the editor of the first issue was Lawrence Klippenstein. Lawrence was the newly-appointed Conference Historian-Archivist.

The first issue stated that the publication was designed to meet a number of objectives. These included to:

“become a medium for sharing materials of historical value to the general reading public...not intend[ed] to duplicate scholarly periodicals; rather...to publish letters, pictures, shorter articles, excerpts from diaries, genealogical information, and other suitable material... to provide a forum for the various people involved in some form of Mennonite research to present their findings... [and to] become an important vehicle of communication between the groups and individuals who are interested in the various aspects of Mennonite experience both past and present...”

With the exception of 1975 and 1976, there were 4 issues published each year, resulting in 133 issues (1975-2009) that are now available as downloadable and text searchable pdf-format files.

In March 1987 the *Mennonite Historian* became a joint publication of the Centre for M.B. Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre. The respective directors of these archival Centres have been co-editors of publication since that time. AR

### Brochure: Who are the Mennonites?

The MHC receives hundreds of visitors each year who may be encountering Mennonites for the first time. Visitors may come from across Canada or even from other parts of the world. Sometimes their perceptions of Mennonites are vague. Sometimes they have misinformed notions. Sometimes they are just curious to learn and understand something about their own history and current place in society.

The MHC has recently published a brochure containing the basic answer to the question “Who are the Mennonites?” in three languages – English, French and German. Although the brochure was designed to introduce newcomers to Mennonites at the MHC, it can be a valuable resource in other settings. Multiple copies may be ordered for \$.40 (plus GST) from the Centre directly or on-line at:

[www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/28/11776](http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/resourcecentre/ResourceView/28/11776).

AR

## Gaining True Appreciation for the Past

by Janelle Hume

Growing up, I never really had an understanding of the involvement of Mennonites in the history of my own community. The limited knowledge I had of Mennonites came from my brief summers spent at Winkler Bible Camp where I learned that my mom's maiden name, Friesen, connected me to several of the other campers. Little did I know that this name connected me not only to these fellow campers, but also to larger story in the history of my very own city.

Over the years I have developed a very evangelical heart and am encouraged by the work several ministries are doing in the inner-city of Winnipeg. However I never knew the incredible presence and influence Mennonites had in the beginnings of this city. It was 3 years ago that I applied for a summer position to work at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. My motivation for applying was simply the fact that I needed a job and this seemed like a good opportunity. What I did not expect to learn that summer was the intriguing story of my Mennonite brothers and sisters in the history of Winnipeg and surrounding areas. In fact I had quite the opposite view of Mennonite history when I began this archival position. In my ignorance, I thought Mennonites were overly reserved and kept to themselves.

What a pleasant surprise to find out that many of the ministries and churches that

exist today in the inner-city of Winnipeg are in some way connected to the Mennonite community. This revelation came during one of my first assignments. I was asked to skim through the book *The City Mission in Winnipeg* by Anna Thiessen (Winnipeg: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1991) to find the address of the first Mary Martha Home in Winnipeg. However, in doing so, I discovered not only the address of this ministry, but a heart for ministry and outreach in general. Our Mennonite ancestors took the passage in 1 John 3:17-18 quite literally: "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." They saw a broken world around them and were moved into action; helping women, children and families in need. Ministries like the Mary Martha Home started in 1925 in response to the increasing number of immigrant girls needing a job and a community as well as other homeless women needing not only physical provision but spiritual nourishment, speaks of this deep care and concern. In fact, as Anna Thiessen mentions in her book, the city mission of Winnipeg was the oldest missionary work of the Canadian Conference. There was no shortage of need for the gospel and the founding community of Mennonites in Winnipeg took notice and responded.

Therefore, as I continue to work at the Centre for MB Studies and learn about the history of Mennonites, I am proud to be able to identify myself with this active, evangelical faith tradition. Also, I am



encouraged to continue to be a part of ministry and outreach to the least of these here in Winnipeg and wherever I may go. Our Mennonite ancestors have set a good example of what it means to show the love of Christ to others and we must remember that the purpose of our faith is not simply to gather together and encourage one another, but to reach out in Christ's love.

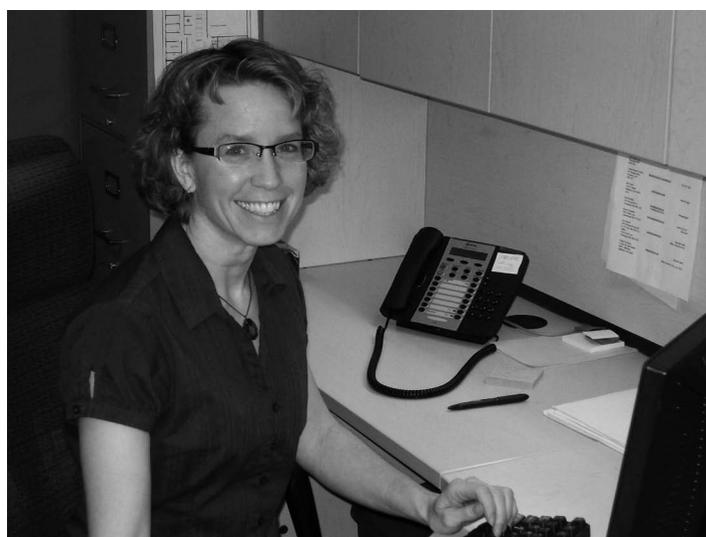
## Tamara Dyck Appointed Archival Assistant

On March 24, 2009 Tamara Dyck began her part time permanent position with the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. She brings with her experience in processing archival collections. She also works as a library technician at Canadian Mennonite University, where she has been employed for the past 12 years. At the Centre she will be working with the annual conference statistical survey and other archival collections. She is a welcome addition to the Centre's staff.

CS



Janelle Hume. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.



Tamara Dyck. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

## Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Two recent congregational histories demonstrate widely differing styles. Karl Dick, *Worship at 'George Street' – a history of transitions, 1924–2008* (Waterloo: Waterloo-Kitchener United Mennonite Church, 2008) is a 270-page hard cover volume largely written by the author-editor, complete with index. Reg Lowndes et al., *"Trinity's Journey": A Reflective Look at the first Twenty-five Years of Trinity Mennonite Church* (Calgary: Trinity Mennonite Church, 2008) is a coil-bound volume without page numbers, written by at least two dozen members and compiled by a 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary committee.

Both books feature one image of the title as guiding structure for the table of contents. The 'George Street' volume uses a *worship* liturgy, beginning with "The Prelude" (1918-923) as chapter one and concluding with "Preparing for Service" (1981-1995) and "Auf Wiedersehen," (1996-2008). Trinity's train *journey* uses chapter headings like "Our Stations" to chronicle the congregation's various places of worship, and offer's reflections by its various pastors in a chapter on "Conductors." Both are informative, enriched by photos and other graphics, and lead readers (especially members) to the kind of reflection on their past that is helpful for their future direction.

The 4<sup>th</sup> edition of Margaret Loewen Reimer's *One Quilt – Many Pieces: A Guide to Mennonite Groups in Canada* (Waterloo: Herald Press, 2008) [139 pages] is not only up-dated since the previous one was prepared in connection with the Winnipeg sessions of Mennonite world Conference (1990), but also improved – again! As the only publication providing a short profile of all Anabaptist-related groups (including Amish, Brethren in Christ and Hutterite) and current membership numbers, it is an essential book for all denominational offices and educational institutions, but one which pastors and educators will also find very helpful.

Biography and family history are often of interest well beyond the descendants and extended family of the author, especially when well-written. Gertrude Enns Froese was a good story-teller, and in retirement showed that she was a good

writer as well. Her *An Abundance of Love: Memories of Family Life* (Ottawa: John H. Froese, 2008), 165 pages, published by the family after her death, recounts pioneer life of a Russian immigrant family in Speedwell, Saskatchewan, showing a remarkable eye for detail and reflecting mostly happy memories of difficult times.

*Henry Dyck: This Is My Journey* as told to and narrated by Waldemar Janzen (Winnipeg: by the author, 2008) is a slim (111 pages) volume that tells the story of a post-WW II refugee-immigrant from Yazykovo Colony in the USSR. While Dyck had expertise in construction, he felt that he was not a writer. The relationship with Waldemar Janzen, who had recently published his own autobiography, seems to have worked very well. Dyck does not lose his "voice" in this interesting, well-crafted and generously illustrated biography.

Academic papers are sometimes not very interesting reading material for generalist readers. A 2006 thesis prepared for the University of Manitoba, while meeting academic criteria, is nevertheless easily understandable and quite practical in its approach. Tina Fehr Kehler, daughter of Low German immigrants from Latin America, explores "The Preservation and Transmission of Culture and Religion among Dietsche (Low German) Mennonite Returnees to Southern Manitoba." Her desire to guide her children in adapting to Canadian culture and adopting aspects of it while at the same time separating from aspects of traditional "Low German" culture is an experience common even to parents whose transition has been less dramatic than a move from Latin to English America. So also is her parallel wish to have her children be both culturally and religiously Mennonite as they grow up. Verbatim quoting from interviews with numerous returned Low German mothers provide a mirror into a range of strategies for parenting with those two goals in mind. A copy of the thesis is deposited at Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

The just published *Ons ieeschtet Wweedabuak* is in fact the first the Low German dictionary that is fully in Low German. Earlier dictionaries provided English or High German equivalents of Low German words, or explanations of their meaning in English or High German. This 450-page *Wweedabuak*, compiled and published by Ed. H. Zacharias, is available for \$20. With over 17,000

words, including the entire vocabulary of the Low German Bible on which Zacharias served as one of the translators, this dictionary is also probably the most comprehensive in its coverage of the vocabulary in current use among *Kanadier* Mennonites. A number of Low German speakers claim that the spelling used in this dictionary is the easiest to read. Scholars who have promoted earlier spellings are disappointed.

Hans Kampen, ed., *Von der Autonomiegründung zur Verbannung und Entrechtung: Die Jahre 1918 und 1941 bis 1948 in der Geschichte der Deutschen in Russland* (Stuttgart: Dr. Alfred Eisfeld, 2008), 287 pages, is a volume (*Sonderband*) of the series of "Heimatbücher der Landsmannschaft der Deutschen aus Russland e.V." As the title indicates, this series deals with German-Russians generally and with Mennonites only incidentally. The years covered (1918 and 1941-1948) were critical for Mennonites and this volume provides much helpful detail. One brief memoir on the last years of Germans on the Dniepr is by Johann Kampen of Rosenthal-Chortitza. The index indicates mention of many other Mennonites, particularly those in leadership positions.

Otto Luchterhandt and Alfred Eisfeld, ed. *Die Russlanddeutschen in den Migrationsprozessen zwischen den GUS-Staaten und Deutschland* (Göttingen: Der Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 2008), 216 pages. This 519<sup>th</sup> publication of the Göttingen work group celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Several of the chapters deal with more recent emigrants (*Spätaussiedler*) from the former USSR. Among other observed trends is the increase in immigrants indicating no religious affiliation or no report (12.1 and 2.3% respectively, compared to less than 1% as late as 1992). Proportionately the numbers of Orthodox faith are increasing, while the *evangelisch* (Protestant, presumably including Mennonite) category has declined to under 45%.

*Martyrs of Magadan: Memories of the Gulag*, is a collection of forced labour camp memories of 18 gulag prisoners, collated by Fr Michael Shields, edited by John Newton and Terry Murphy and published 2007 (257 pages) by Aid to the Church in Need (UK), Sutton, UK. This is a powerful book. The contributors describe in simple and bare terms the injustice of their sentence (most were "rehabilitated" in the 1990s) and the brutality of their work in the hard winters

of Siberia. But they also exhibit an amazing faith that moves one to tears. Maria Ivanovna Vatsyn writes of her barrack members preparing to celebrate the release of a fellow prisoner who had only a few hours left to serve. Before the festivities could begin the camp commandant walked in with the head of the former prisoner on a tray. "I have no idea why they did this. Perhaps it was to create fear," she writes. Yet she concludes her memoir regretting only that age and health prevent her from doing all the good things she still wanted to do. "I only want to do good," she says, "My heart sings. It always wanted to sing. God has helped me not to be embittered by my deprivations and taught me to live."

Agnes Martens, *Der Maulbeerbaum in unserm Garten: Meine Geschichte* (Basel: Brunnen Verlag Giessen, 2008), hdc, 192 pages, is the story of a family in Einlage, Chortitza, USSR, whose father/husband was taken by the NKVD in 1936 and never seen again. With the help of MCC, the family made it to Paraguay. The author, who became a teacher in Menno Colony (Loma Plata), ends her story at the time of her marriage. Not a typical "refugee" story, Martens' book provides interesting observations on adapting to a new land and to "Menno" culture.

*Adolf Ens taught Mennonites Studies for many years at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and its successor Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg.*

## Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 8)

layout of the present publication is chaotic, with no actual table of contents to guide the reader through the maze of materials he has selected from the three different manuscript sources. For example, the incomplete sentence at the bottom of p. 81 continues on p. 117 (with no explanation given in the text). The text at the top of p. 82 is in fact a continuation of the text from p. 116.

From pp. 1-81 the original text is provided in a modern computer layout; inexplicably, the text from pp. 82-116 is merely a photocopy of Rempel's original manuscript. At p. 117 Bergen returns to a modern text layout, followed at p. 134 by a curious juxtaposition of photocopied and newly typed pages. Rempel's description of "Das Religiöse Leben in Einlage" – given as a photocopy of the

original mss. on pp. 88-90, is repeated verbatim in modern type on pp. 151-153. The 'Dorfplan' on p. 159 is actually the continuation of a 'Dorfplan' given later on p. 180. These and other problems of page-sequencing, together with the inexplicable repetition of other sections makes it a real challenge for the reader wanting to follow Rempel's historical narrative.

[The book is available for \$10.00 plus GST, shipping and handling from the Mennonite Heritage Centre. --ARJ]

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David J. Rempel Smucker, editor. *Consider the threshing stone – Writings of Jacob J. Rempel, A Mennonite in Russia*. (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2008).

Reviewed by Peter Letkemann

This book contains several autobiographical writings of Jacob J. Rempel (1886-1980), translated by his granddaughter Eleanore (Rempel) Woollard and her brother-in-law David J. Rempel Smucker. The writings relate to Jacob Rempel's life in Russia from 1886 to 1924, and provide important insights for English readers into Russian Mennonite life in these turbulent years.

Chapter 1 is a short memoir written in 1964 that gives details of Rempel's childhood and schooling at the Rempel estate Tiegenhof (located in the Schönfeld-Brasol Settlement) and his subsequent high school education at the *Zentralschule* in Halbstadt to the year 1906. These memoirs were first published in four instalments in *Der Bote* in 1964 (30 Jun, 7 Jul, 14 Jul, 21 Jul) under the title "Erinnerungen, 1924-1964."

On p. 27, Rempel refers to singing from the songbook *Evangeliums-Lieder*. This refers to a collection of American Gospel Songs in German translation published by Walter Rauschenbusch and Ira Sankey in 1895. For many years this popular songbook was one of the "unofficial" hymnbooks of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia and Canada. The illustration on p. 28 incorrectly shows the *Evangeliums-Lieder* songbook published by the German-Methodist evangelist and singer Ernst Gebhard, and should not be confused with the Rauschenbusch/Sankey publication.

Chapter 2 is a composite translation of three documents, previously published in

*Volksfreund* (March 1918), in *Mennonitische Volkswarte* (1936), and in the book *Onse Tjedils* (1966). These writings describe Rempel's experiences of alternative service as a medic in World War One. This is probably the most interesting chapter in the book, since there are no other English language sources available describing the details of this medical service aboard hospital ships operating in the Black Sea from April 1915 to December 1917.

Because it is a compilation of three sources, there is a certain degree of overlap and unnecessary repetition within the text, which could have been avoided with more judicious editing. The text is complimented by a good selection of previously unpublished family photographs and maps (courtesy of Helmut Huebert).

Chapter 3 is also a composite of two different, and previously unpublished, documents. They describe the years from December 1917 to the summer of 1924 – years of uncertainty for families on the Schönfeld Estates, marked by revolution, civil war, anarchy, brutal murders, and famine. The Rempel family eventually fled to the Molochna Colony and settled for several years in Petershagen, prior to emigrating to Canada in July 1924.

As part of the emigration process, Rempel had close dealings with Phillip D. Cornies, who served as secretary of the *Verband der Bürger holländischer Herkunft*. In a footnote identifying Cornies (fn. 123, p. 129), Smucker incorrectly states that Cornies died in the Uchto-Petchorski labour camp; in fact, Mr. Cornies (who, incidentally, was the grandfather of the well-known soprano Henriette Cornies Schellenberg) survived the labour camps and ended up living in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, where he died on 17 February 1962.

Numerous other editorial errors in the footnotes detract somewhat from what is otherwise a well-annotated book. The translation is generally good – but at times it does read too much like a translation, with unidiomatic English expressions and syntax. Smucker provides a helpful introduction and a brief biographical sketch of Jacob Rempel's life, together with a complete list of illustrations and maps. The appendices provide a helpful chronology and several family trees, along with two indices of persons named and an index of place names.

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## **Book Reviews**

Linda A. Huebert Hecht, *Women in Early Austrian Anabaptism, Their Days, Their Stories* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2009) 281 pp., photographs included.

*Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder*

As a young child of seven, I have a distinct memory of sitting with a huge book I could hardly hold, and looking with horror and fascination at pictures of people being put to death in various most gruesome ways because of their faith. This book called *Der Märtyrer Spiegel* (*Martyrs Mirror*), had a great influence on my early faith formation.

Today I hold in my hands a book that informs me there were many more martyrs than those I saw in that fascinating book. Huebert Hecht tells us that in the original *Martyrs Mirror* one third of the martyrs were female but they were mainly from The Netherlands. Only one Anabaptist woman from Tyrol was included. However, years of painstaking and meticulous research done by Huebert Hecht, in which she studied original court records using information compiled by Grete Mecenseffy, a pioneer in Anabaptist studies, revealed over 400 profiles of Tyrolean women from the period 1527-1531.

As Huebert Hecht began collecting and translating the biographies of these sixteenth-century Austrian Anabaptist women, she realized that here was a source of information in addition to the *Martyrs Mirror* to be shared with those interested in Anabaptist history. (She has previously co-edited, with Arnold Snyder, *Profiles of Anabaptist Women: Sixteenth-Century Reforming Pioneers* [1996], which featured biographies of women from all parts of Europe, contributed by various experts on Anabaptist history.)

Huebert Hecht's purpose in writing this book is two-fold: "First of all, to name each of the individual women involved in [the Austrian Anabaptist] movement, including unnamed women who do not appear in Mecenseffy's index [a footnote states that there are 58 unnamed women in Huebert Hecht's book], and secondly, to bring to light some untold stories of women who were believers, martyrs, lay missionaries, and lay leaders in the Austrian Anabaptist movement, commemorating and illustrating their profound faith, courage, and sacrifice."

In a discussion I had with Huebert Hecht, she said that it was her hope that many laywomen in the church would read the book and be inspired by what ordinary women in the sixteenth century sacrificed in order to have the freedom to express their faith, as they understood it. However, the book is not an easy one to read. The theme in itself (martyrdom) is a heavy one. The author's research is impressive but there is too much detailed information in the Preface and the Introduction for the layperson to digest, and how many readers will wade through the dry and detailed court records in each of the five chapters? The starkness of these records, however, does reflect the bleakness of these women's lives as they face torture and death.

This book is an excellent resource for academic research and the average reader will have to wait for something more palatable. Huebert Hecht herself states in her preface that she originally wanted to tell the stories in the form of a *Book of Days*. Perhaps this could become a future project.

The cover of the book, although attractive, is somewhat misleading. It is an illustration taken from the *Martyrs Mirror* depicting a young woman chained to a prison wall. An explanation tells the reader that this is a young slave girl executed in Carthage, North Africa; the book, however, is about *Austrian Anabaptist women*.

The Epilogue is the most interesting part of the book and should have been a Prologue because it inspires the reader to turn to the individual stories.

Most frustrating for this reviewer was the lack of a bibliography. Even though the footnotes for each chapter are very detailed, a bibliography for a book with this much information is indispensable.

In a footnote to her introduction, Hubert Hecht quotes Adriana Valerio: "When women have a historical memory they no longer need to create their history and identity anew in each generation." We owe Hubert Hecht a debt of gratitude for introducing us to these courageous women who played such a significant role in the Anabaptist movement of Austria.

*Elfrieda received her PhD in German Language and Literature in 2001 and is a German instructor, translator, English language tutor and freelance writer. She has recently moved from Ontario to Manitoba.*

Heinrich Bergen, editor and compiler. *Einlage, Chronik des Dorfes Kitschkas, 1789-1943 – Johann David Rempel*. (Regina, SK: Selbstverlag, 2009), 195 pp.

*Reviewed by Peter Letkemann*

This is the second publication dealing with the history of the village Einlage that Heinrich Bergen has published in the past two years (see review of *Einlage/Kitschkas 1789-1943* in *Menno-nite Historian*, Sept. 2008, p. 12). Bergen's current book is a compilation, based on a series of three manuscript histories of Einlage written by Johann David Rempel (1887-1963), a former village school teacher, in the years between 1944 and 1946.

The earliest manuscript, (68 pp.) which Bergen labels 'K' [Krefeld] is in fact located not in Krefeld, but at the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle, Weierhof, Germany. It was written early in 1944, after Rempel and the entire population of Einlage had been evacuated to West Prussia by retreating German forces. Bergen characterizes it as "more radical, pro-German in it's view" but provides no details of what he understands under this provocative description. After the War, Rempel apparently created a "more politically correct" version of his village history (83 pp.), which somehow found it's way to the Mennonite Library & Archives at Bethel College, where it is erroneously labelled as an "autobiography." Finally, Johann Rempel prepared a third, expanded typescript (117 pp.) which remains in possession of the Rempel family in Winnipeg.

The Johann Rempel manuscripts provide an interesting collage of short historical vignettes, loosely organized in chronological order, providing details of the settlement's agricultural, economic, social, educational and religious history. Especially interesting are sections dealing with more recent events during the period of the 1917 revolution, civil war, collectivization and the German occupation of 1941-1943. Many details would have been lost had Rempel not preserved them in this form.

Heinrich Bergen is to be commended for his dedication to making material on Einlage available to modern readers, but it would be good if he did so in consultation with professional historians, editors and book designers. The organization and

(cont'd on p. 7)