

Mennonite Historian

An editor remembers David Ewert

by Dora Dueck

David Ewert, longtime Bible teacher, preacher, and writer, died Friday, April 23, 2010 in Abbotsford, B.C. I was not a student of Dr. Ewert, but my respect for him as a writer grew out of my interactions with him, mainly during my years as editor/writer at the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. In this capacity, I found him not only willing to serve whenever asked, but wonderful to work with as well. His copy was always on time or early, and so precisely written it needed virtually no editing at all. In 2009, when we asked to reprint an article, “Does the resurrection make a difference in everyday life?” which had first appeared more than 20 years earlier, and said that we needed to shorten it and also update bits of the language here and there, he readily granted permission, and trusted us to make the changes. To my recollection, he said he didn’t even need to see the revised piece, although we sent it to him for his review anyway. He was polite and somewhat formal in his correspondence, but he never failed to include some affirming or grateful word about the ministry of the magazine, and coming from him, this was valued encouragement indeed.



But my larger gratitude concerns David Ewert’s place in the Mennonite Brethren church, where he was known not so much personally as broadly, by almost all of its members, for his many contributions. He was born in 1922, served the Mennonite Brethren and wider church some 70 years: 25 years at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, and also as professor at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in Harrisonburg, Virginia, at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno, California, and as visiting teacher in other schools in North America and internationally. He preached in many churches, and wrote more than 20 books.

According to the short biography of him by Bruce Guenther with Kevin O’Coin, carried in *Leaders Who Shaped Us* (Kindred, 2010), Ewert’s influence and leadership were particularly significant in the transition of Mennonite Brethren in North America out of “their isolated,

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



The main (ground) floor of the museum with displays presenting the history of Germans in Russia during the years up to 1917. The museum itself covers an area of 500m² (5,382 ft²) on two levels.

Official Opening of the new Museum for the Cultural History of Germans from Russia

by Peter Letkemann

Friday, 22 July 2011 marked the official opening of the new *Museum für russlanddeutsche Kulturgeschichte* (Museum for the Cultural History of Germans from Russia) in Detmold, Germany. The date was chosen to coincide with the 248th anniversary of the *Manifest* issued by Empress Catherine the Great on 22 July 1763 – inviting Germans and other western Europeans to settle in Russia, and promising unprecedented privileges for farmers, craftsmen and merchants prepared to do so. This decree formed the basis for the emigration of some 27,000 Germans to the Volga region in the years after 1764 and later the emigration of some 6,000 Prussian Men-

nonite families to Khortitsa, Molochna, Am Trakt and Alt Samara in the years after 1788.

The opening took place before an audience of some 250 invited guests in the new *Aula* (auditorium) of the August-Hermann-Francke (AHF) Schule in Detmold. This Christian private school was founded in the mid-1980s under the initiative of Otto Hertel and other recent *Umsiedler* of Mennonite background from the Soviet Union. Today it is the largest private high school of its kind in Germany, providing a complete education (*Grundschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium*) for several thousand students, 80% of whom come from *Umsiedler* families.

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Tribute to David Ewert

(cont'd from p. 1)

often rural, ethnically homogenous communities" into a more urbanized and outward-looking ethos. He "defined and embodied the convictions of the Mennonite Brethren church," write Guenther and O'Coin, and "helped to move [it] away from both a particular, and often exclusive, German-Russian ethnicity, and from aspects of American fundamentalism that some had found attractive."

Some years ago I read, and enjoyed, David Ewert's autobiography, *A Journey of Faith* (Kindred, 1993). In particular, there are two things that I'm grateful he impressed upon Mennonite Brethren, including me. One concerns his influence in weaning the church away from the dispensational approach to the Bible and into a sounder understanding of the Book of Revelation. No question, he later admitted, this caused much controversy in his experience as teacher and preacher.

This is how Ewert put it: "Having discovered the wonderful continuity of God's saving plan for humankind in the Bible, I lost interest in the eschatological intricacies of the dispensational school. I had disposed of Larkin's eschatological charts long ago.... Since I found no evidence from the New Testament for dividing up the return of Christ into two 'comings' (the rapture and the Day of the Lord), and that, in fact, the 'last days' had begun in the first century, I was spared speculating about which current events might be signs of the imminent return of our Lord. As far as I was concerned, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 had nothing to do with the blessed hope of the believer. However, for such views I was called interesting names. I still have a folder full of letters denouncing my 'heretical' views on eschatology. My book, *And Then Comes the End*, allayed some of these criticisms, when it was discovered that I held to every fundamental teaching of the New Testament on eschatology. What was missing was the nonsense that goes under the guise of 'prophecy' (such as date-

setting, or determining from political, sociological and economic developments how close we are to the end)."

I grew up with those charts too, but was not sorry either to see their demise. A large one drawn on cloth hung for some time on the wall of the archives at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg. Whenever I saw it, I recalled the intensity of this interest in the past. But its being there also symbolized the move away from the "nonsense" that had beguiled and consumed us for a time.

The other item of gratitude I want to mention concerns Ewert's attitude about study and the life of the mind, which may currently be suffering some loss of emphasis in our churches, and of which he wrote:

"I have found that one can bury one's head in a lexicon and come out with the glory of God... It didn't happen overnight but I see it more clearly now than in my younger years, that intense academic efforts do not endanger a person's devotion to God. In fact, I have found the opposite to be true. When one offers one's academic activities up to God as a daily sacrifice, they become a means of grace. My patience tends to wear thin when I encounter students who in the name of piety shy away from the rigors of study."

May the work and memory of David Ewert continue to be blessed among us. *Dora Dueck is an author and editor living in Winnipeg. A version of this tribute to David Ewert appeared in her blog on April 27, 2010 (<http://doradueck.wordpress.com/>).*

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Dr. David Ewert's Personal Papers Donated to CMBS

by David Giesbrecht

Scripture admonishes us to esteem highly those who have faithfully served the church (1 Thessalonians 5:12-13). But how in our age of easy forgetfulness and addiction to instant sound bytes do we remember those leaders who nurtured us with significant teaching, preaching, and writing?

Dr. David Ewert was one of those deserving leaders, not only in the Mennonite Brethren world, but also beyond these denominational boundaries. He began teaching at the Coaldale Bible School in 1944. In a career that spanned more than 50 years, he taught and preached with amazing energy and focus in Canada, the USA, and in many countries in Europe and South America. In the midst of a very full schedule, he somehow found the time to author a continuous stream of periodical articles and numerous books in German and English.

Ewert's English book titles include: *Stalwart for the Truth: The Life and Legacy of A.H. Unruh* (Board of Christian Literature, 1975); *And Then Comes the End* (Herald, 1980); *The Holy Spirit in the New Testament* (Herald, 1983); *From Ancient Tablets to Modern Translations: A General Introduction to the Bible* (Zondervan, 1983); *The Church in Pagan Society: Studies in 1 Corinthians* (Kindred, 1986); *The Church under Fire: Studies in Revelation* (Kindred, 1988); *When the Church was Young: Studies in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Kindred, 1993); *A Journey of Faith* (Kindred, 1993); *A Testament of Joy: Studies in Philippians* (Kindred, 1995); *Honour Such People* (Centre for MB Studies, 1997); *Finding Our Way* (Centre for MB Studies, 1999); *How to Understand the Bible* (Herald, 2000); *Searching the Scriptures* (Centre for MB Studies, 2001); and *Mennonite Country Boy* (Heartbeat, 2004).

Following Ewert's death, his family determined that David's personal papers should be deposited in an accessible archival collection. This wish was honoured on July 12, 2011. That was the day when my wife, Betty, and I delivered six boxes of Ewert's sermons and lectures, together with some prized books from his personal library, to the Center for

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Genealogy and Family History

A Family Story

An Educator's Experiences in Kantemirovka, Russia 1912-1917

by Robert L. Klassen

My grandfather, Cornelius Abraham Klassen (1883-1919), ended his 13-year teaching career in Kantemirovka in 1917 in the context of some very turbulent times.

A native of Kleefeld and a graduate of Halbstadt Zentralschule, he began his teaching career in Crimea in 1904 in Tokultschak (formerly Johannesruh). Through additional training in the city of Tokmak, Cornelius acquired his Tutoring Certificate. At the urging of his friend, A. H. Unruh (later, a prominent Canadian Mennonite Brethren preacher), he went to Barvenkovo where Unruh had gone from Crimea, and taught there from 1907 to 1909. Then he moved to nearby Wassiljewka where he lived from 1910 to 1912. Here he began his family through his marriage to Margaret Funk of Friedensfeld and the subsequent birth of their first child, Gerhard (better known as George Cornelius), my father.

Kantemirovka, nearly 430 miles south of Moscow, was near the Mennonite villages of the Naumenko Colony located in the northeastern area of what is now Ukraine. On the outskirts of the city there was a Mennonite Brethren church which was led by Jacob Wiebe who had been ordained in 1914. Here Cornelius also preached, led the choir, and acted as an "amateur homeopathic physician" and "informal dentist."

The years 1914 to 1917 were salient times to be living in Russia. Cornelius often reflected on current affairs in his diary as he read about the news in the *Friedenstimme*, a periodical later banned.

On the eve of the First World War in August 1914, Russia was a backward country by western European standards. It was predominantly agrarian with 80 percent of the country's population living in rural areas and 60 percent of the population employed in agriculture, as compared to Germany with 40 percent and England with 20 percent employed in

agriculture. Some regions seemed economically paralyzed, especially the provinces of Kherson and Ekaterinoslav.

At the invitation of the Czarist government, Cornelius' parents-in-law moved with their family (2 brothers, a sister and other relatives) to a farm in western Siberia in 1912. At the end of each school year from 1913 to 1916, Cornelius, Greta and George would join the Funk family on the Ljubimovka Estate, a 1,000 miles away by rail, to farm Cornelius' own plot of land, 37 miles north of the Trans Siberian railway in Wiesenfeld. In the summer of 1914 they began building their "dream home" there. However, each August Cornelius and family returned to Kantemirovka, where Cornelius resumed teaching again. Much of the harvesting of the grain on his land had to be done through long-distance contacts!

The disturbances of the new war began to show some impact on their daily activities, but not on the immediate family. Greta gave birth to her first daughter, Liese (later known as Louise), on August 29, 1914 in the friendly environs of Kantemirovka, with the evidence of the newly declared war all around them! For example, the Mennonite men were preparing for medical service (*Sanidatsdienst*) and forestry service (*Forestei*). Up until this time, teachers were exempt from any state service. It turned out, however, that all Mennonite men up to age 45 were to be mobilized. Ultimately about 12,000 men served in this manner. Cornelius' three brothers working on their dad's farm in Kleefeld were also assigned state service -- Abraham, 34, and Johann, 28, were sent to Crimea to serve in the ambulance corp; Jacob, 26, was sent to Minsk as a night watchman in the forestry service. The Mennonite communities also helped the wives of Russian soldiers harvest their crops as part of their service.

In his diary, Cornelius bemoaned the initial Russian army losses, noting specifically that the supply lines had collapsed, that there were food shortages, and also the withering gun fire by the Germans and the Austria-Hungarian armies in the Russian losses of two divisions near Koenigsberg. He noted that

throughout the reported battles, the Russians seemed to take the losses most often! In his school setting, he was ordered not to use German and reported that he wrote his first letter in Russian to his parents in Kleefeld. He also felt he had limited ability to travel, especially to his home village of Kleefeld during the Christmas break.

He noted the fact that it was greatly distressing to the Mennonites to feel the anti-German measures. He regretted that the German language newspapers, the *Friedenstimme*, the *Botschafter* and the *Bote* were canceled. The Mennonites were also forbidden to use German in public assemblies as of November 1914. Annual Mennonite church conferences were banned and itinerant mission visits curtailed. Even some of the Mennonite villages were renamed with Russian names. However despite the signs and effect of war all around, the family continued to grow. Cornelius still taught school, led the church choir, and preached in church.

Cornelius was inquisitive about his surroundings. He recorded that he went to the local train station to see the "Austrian prisoners" go by and that he had sent Greta to visit the wounded Russians in the local hospital. He recorded that the Czar passed through their local train station, but they did not dare to try to see him because of the tight security. He also reported that "the Germans who became Russian subjects after 1870 had 2 years time to dispose of the land; the Germans who came later would have 6 months to dispose of their land." His personal frustration was sensed when he wrote, "Who knows how or where we will celebrate Christmas?"

On the last day of 1914 Cornelius opined that he believed that "circumstances would yet change."

Ultimately, they did change, as he left teaching permanently in 1917 and moved to Siberia to be a farmer.

Robert L. Klassen lives in Falls Church, Virginia.

Recent Books

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

Queries

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

Museum in Detmold

(cont'd from p. 1)

It is located on the grounds of the former British army barracks, which housed hundreds of British occupying troops in Detmold from 1945 until the early 1990s.

In 1996, Otto Hertel became the founding director of the *Museum für russland-deutsche Kulturgeschichte*, a small museum, located on the grounds of the AHF Schule, devoted to preserving the cultural history of these Germans from Russia. The museum was never intended to be a specifically “Mennonite” museum, even though its founders and most of the staff and members of the board are of Mennonite background. Mennonites are regarded as only one part of the larger Russian-German community and it highlights the history of these people.

In 2003, Dr. Katharina Neufeld (originally from Neu Samara and Orenburg), took over as director of the museum and began an ambitious program to expand the archival and library holdings as well as to gather clothing, furniture and other physical artifacts documenting the life of Germans in Russia. The collection soon filled the rooms of the small barracks building and it became apparent that additional space was needed.

The private school also quickly outgrew the available space in the existing British army barracks and several years ago the school's administration undertook an ambitious building program to provide more classroom and office space. It was decided from the start that the new building should include several hundred square feet for the museum and its archival holdings. The building program was spear-headed by the school's business manager, Mr. Peter Dyck, who served as MC for the opening ceremony.

The program was developed under the theme: “Ausgepackt” – indicating that the thousands of recent Russian-German immigrants to Germany had unpacked not only their personal belongings but also their cultural identity and religious heritage, and were now intent on staying in Germany and integrating this heritage into Germany society.

The evening began with choral anthems by Mendelssohn and Hugo Wolf, sung by the newly formed chamber choir of the *Musikcollege OWL* – a recently founded private music school in the region of Ostwestfalen-Lippe with locations in Detmold, Lage and Lemgo [<http://musikcollege-owl.de/>].

The 28-voice choir was led by Johann



Rudy Friesen, Winnipeg and Dr. Katharina Neufeld, Detmold.

Penner (one of the founders of the *Musikcollege OWL* and a current music instructor at the AHF Schule). Johann Penner was born in the Orenburg settlement and later studied at the Franz Liszt Musikhochschule in Weimar and the Musik Akademie in Detmold. The Detmold Music Academy is well known to Canadian Mennonites through the dozens of Mennonite singers and musicians, including Ben Horch, Victor Martens, Bill Reimer, David and Viola Falk, Howard Dyck, Art Janzen, Rudy and Henriette (Cornies) Schellenberg and many more, who studied there beginning in the 1950s. In recent years, a new wave of talented *Umsiedler* Mennonite singers and musicians from the former Soviet Union has begun advanced music studies in Detmold.

Peter Dyck then welcomed Dr. Christoph Bergner, Parliamentary Secretary of State to the Federal German Interior Minister, responsible for matters relating to Russian-German *Aussiedler*. Dr. Bergner, himself a native of Halle (in the former East Germany), the home of the 18th century pietist Lutheran preacher and educator August Hermann Francke (after whom the school is named), served as “*Schirmherr*” (patron and honorary chairman) of the opening ceremonies.

Dr. Bergner noted that more than 2.5 million Russian-German *Aussiedler* had found a new home in Germany since the 1970s, yet this Detmold museum was the first and only one of its kind devoted to remembering and telling the story of these people. What was remarkable and unique, he said, was that the museum had been founded completely through private (not state!) initiative, and that it was the first museum in Germany to be located on the grounds of a private school. He emphasized the importance of this location in informing current students and future generations of their historical past and cultural identity.

Dr. Bergner was followed by a steady stream of politicians from the state government of Nordrhein-Westfalen – one of the largest of the 17 states that make up the Federal Republic of Germany, and the one containing the largest concentration of *Aussiedler* in Germany. The state representatives were followed by various officials representing the region of Ostwestfalen-Lippe, and Rainer Heller, the mayor of Detmold. Words of greeting also came from the directors of two regional state museums: the Lippisches Landesmuseum Detmold and the Lippisches Freilicht Museum.

Rudy Friesen of Winnipeg, board member of the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, brought greetings from the Board of the Steinbach museum and presented Dr. Katharina Neufeld with a plaque containing one hand-knitted baby sock from the MHV's collection. The sock is one of a pair that was knitted by Susie (Heinrichs) Neufeld in 1912 and brought to Manitoba in 1924. The text read: “A friendly relationship is like a pair of socks – it requires two.” The other sock is mounted in similar fashion in the Steinbach museum – the intention is to encourage further cooperation – the pair belong together, just as these two museums belong together.

Following the “political” portion of the ceremony, violinist Anatoly Wedel presented his own composition/improvisation in jazz style on the well-known Gospel Song “What a Friend we have in Jesus.” Anatoly is the son of the great Soviet-Mennonite artist Jakob Wedel, and father of David Wedel, the new concertmaster of the famous Gewandhaus Orchestra in Leipzig.

Following this moving musical rendition, historian Dr. Dittmar Dahlmann of Bonn University provided an illuminating lecture surveying the history of Germans in the Russian Empire to 1917 and in the Soviet Union to 1991. He noted that the history of Germans in Russia goes back to the Middle Ages, when scores of German merchants and mercenaries found employment in the cities of Novgorod, Kiev, Moscow, and later St. Petersburg. At its founding in 1724/25, the Russian Academy of Sciences included over 60 German scholars. By 1897, there were more than 1.8 million Germans (including about 65,000 Mennonites) living in the Russian Empire. Dahlmann highlighted the many contributions of German farmers, millers and factory owners to the agricultural and industrial development of southern

Russia, the Volga region, and later Siberia.

Dahlmann, as well as all of the politicians who had preceded him to the podium, noted again and again the importance of understanding the long and often violent history of repression against Germans in Russia – including the virulent anti-German propaganda during World War I, the brutal years of the Civil War, the brutal years of collectivization and entkulakization, and the years of the Great Terror in the mid-1930s, when – at least in Mennonite communities – up to ½ of all adult Mennonite males were arrested, shot or exiled to the gulag labour camps. He added that the year 2011 marked the 70th anniversary of the brutal deportation of more than 900,000 Germans from the European regions of Russia to Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1941.

The chamber choir ended the evening with a moving performance of Bortnianskii's "Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe" – sung in Russian and German. Many in the audience hummed or sang along quietly to this familiar hymn, and tears could be seen in the eyes of many.

The museum itself covers an area of 500m² (5,382 ft²) and consists of two levels. On the main (ground) floor there are displays presenting the history of Germans during the years of the Russian Empire up to 1917. Appropriately, the lower and darker basement level features the tragic history of Germans during the Soviet period. This level is reached by a long staircase, descending symbolically from light into partial darkness.

The lower level also includes two large rooms housing a library and a growing collection of archival holdings. The library will eventually house the *Nachlass* (books and files) of George K. Epp, Arnold Dyck, Gerhard Hildebrandt, Richard Hertzler, and other prominent scholars and writers of Russian Mennonite background. The lower level also includes a large room for art exhibits – now featuring the wood carvings and bronze sculptures of Jakob Wedel.

On Saturday, 23 July, the celebration continued with several events for the general public – beginning at 11:00 with a worship service and followed in the afternoon by a children's concert (students of the *Musikcollege OWL*) and a performance by the *Russland-Deutsche Theater Niederstetten*. Further details can be found at www.russlanddeutsche.de.

Peter Letkemann, historian, author and organist lives in Winnipeg.

Heinrich P. Wieler in a West Siberian Classroom, 1916-1918

by Lawrence Klippenstein

My decision to attend a June 2010 conference in Omsk on "The Germans of Siberia" is owed in large measure to Heinrich P. Wieler, a teacher in a Mennonite school of that region during World War I. We had no personal connections, to be sure. However, his extensive 1500-page German handwritten journal, taken along to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, when he emigrated to the USA in the 1920s, helped us to get acquainted.¹

A portion of that journal became available to us at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in an English translation provided by Bert Friesen for the current owner of the journals, Arthur Pavlatos of Lancaster, USA. With the help of these writings, and some related documents, I could get a look at the final years of Wieler's teaching career, and learn more about Mennonite education in Siberia, which has not received much research attention so far.

Wieler was born on 12 February 1891, in the Russian Mennonite village of Neuhoftnung in Alt-Samara, to Peter and Mary (Dyck) Wieler. A remarriage in that family led to his adoption by a Johann Reimer family who moved to the Molotschna area where he got his education, including, ultimately, some teacher training at Halbstadt from 1907-1909. He taught at several schools after this but always only for short terms.²

He decided to seek greener pastures and got a position in Neuhoftnung, his birth community, in 1911. Not long afterwards an invitation came to him from a relative in western Siberia. That took him in 1913 to an elementary school in the village of Alexandrovka, not far from Issyl Kul on the Trans Siberian Railway in the Omsk settlement.

At his new school he was asked almost immediately by an administrator, "Where is your wife?" When Heinrich informed him that he was not married, he was told, "We have someone living near here who would be suitable for you. Her name is Suse Nickel, from Neu-Samara." Heinrich followed up on this suggestion. By 1914 he and Suse were married. Their first child, Lily, joined the family a year later.

His first journal entries dated back to

1912, seemingly started with his decision to move to Siberia. Education facilities in Alexandrovka resembled those of other new Mennonite settlements begun in the region around 1900 – no school buildings, a scarcity of teachers and other deprivations. For Alexandrovka that had changed in 1910 when a wealthy landowner, Jakob Janzen, provided a loan of 2000 rubles so a regular schoolhouse could be constructed, and organized classes begun. Wieler served as one of the first teachers in the new school.

The journal entries for this study began with entries for the spring months of 1916. These entries record the ending of Wieler's four-year teaching term in Alexandrovka. He was released from his job at that point. Wieler found the general circumstances of the times distressing and even depressing at times. He wrote at one point, "It is at the same time a serious and a wonderful time. For nearly two years a disastrous war has been raging which daily demands its sacrifices. Blood flows on the battlefields....we also, a very tiny part of the population of Russia (meaning the Mennonites – ed.) have very little good ahead of us..."³

In a March entry of 1916 he noted his desire to leave early one evening. That was the day the inspector chose to make an unannounced visit. "I invited him in," he wrote, "and he saw our woodpile in the aisle. We talked about wood and I gave him some advice on how to acquire wood, and then he entered the classroom. He asked questions, had the students do some writing, looked at their copy books and after a half hour, was gone."

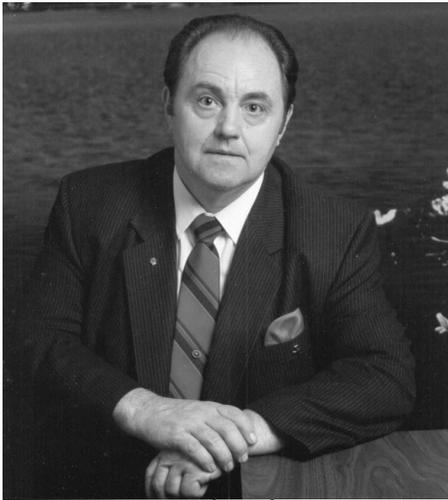
Another inspection followed five days later when several local persons, Bergen and Huebert, probably from the local school council showed up. They listened for an hour to religious instruction, and then hurried on to another visit. Wieler added, "They will probably now make these visits annually, the beginning of a new custom for us."⁴

The inspector ordered classes closed for Easter on 10 April. On 15 April Wieler got his full salary for the first time during his four years at Alexandrovka. Shortage of funds for salaries appears to have been chronic in this community. That had put a lot of pressure on the teacher regarding support of his family. To help along with income Wieler had established a small photography studio business, and Suse had needed to keep up a heavy schedule of medical-related assistance, largely

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Tribute to Peter Paetkau



Peter loved to surround himself with beautiful words, ideas and images. Peter's favorite topics were Mennonite, Canadian, Manitoba, and Ukrainian histories and poetry. In the 1980s Peter was very active in the Mennonite literary and historical circles, attending many events with his tape recorder and capturing the occasion for years to come. In many cases it is the only recording of the event extant. Clothes drying in the washroom. A page three quarters through the type writer. A jug of juice on the counter; evidence of a life that came to a sudden end on August 18, 2011.

Peter Paetkau was born on March 29, 1940 to Abram Paetkau and Lena Schmidt in the Sperling area, east of Carman, Manitoba. He joined the Lowe Farm Bergthaler church in his early 20s and farmed with his father. In 1967 he married Mary Anne Dyck and they had five children between 1969 and 1977. In 1988 the couple separated and Peter moved to Winnipeg where he opened a small gift shop called "Nice Things for Gifts" on Pembina Highway. Unfortunately business was not brisk enough to keep the doors open for very long.

Peter loved to write and worked hard at his writing and poetry skills. He also enjoyed long bike rides and spending time talking with people. Between 1977 and 1984 he wrote 28 articles for the *Mennonite Mirror*, three for *Der Bote* and eight for the *Mennonite Historian*.

Conrad Stoesz

2011 Acquisitions (selected list)

- Four maps showing Mennonite settlements in Paraguay and Bolivia (1969, 1996). Courtesy of the Elizabeth Defoe Library, University of Manitoba.
- Heinrich Bergen's research files related to the history of the Mennonite villages, church and people of Kronsgarten, Kronsweide and Einlage (South Russia).
- Two binders containing the Friesen family letters dated 1921-1938 and 1956-1982. Courtesy of Anne (Braun) Letkeman of Winnipeg. Many of these letters were written to Jacob & Sara (Friesen) Braun from Sara's parents and siblings who remained in Russia.
- Six DVDs containing files from the Board of Guardians for Foreign Settlers (State Archive of Odessa region, Ukraine) (funded through the generosity of Dr. Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon).
- Sermon collection of David H. Rempel (1969-1962), minister of the Hague Mennonite Church and later Hochfeld, Saskatchewan.
- Records from Niverville Community Church from its predecessor congregations.
- The Eyebrow-Tugaske Mennonite Church register book (1948-1964). Courtesy of Ed Krahn, Whitehorse, Yukon.
- Anton Sawatzky's account of *Selbstschutz* activities led by a Peter von Kampen in the Yazykovo region of South Russia ca. 1919.
- A DVD entitled, *Living in a Perfect World*, by Diego D'Innocenzo and Marco Leopard, a documentary about Mennonites living in Mexico and Bolivia first aired on the National Geographic Channel in 2006.
- Four boxes of materials from the Native Ministries Office of Mennonite Church Canada prepared by Neill and Edith von Gunten upon their retirement.
- A DVD entitled, "By God's Grace: A History of Pauingassi" as presented at a Pauingassi Youth Gathering in 2002 by Henry Neufeld.
- Eleven rolls of 35 mm microfilm containing information from the West Prussian Land Census of 1772. Courtesy of Glenn Penner of Guelph, Ontario.
- Wiens family letters from Russia. Courtesy of John M Wiens of Morden, Manitoba.
- Translated materials from the writings of Jacob Klaassen (1867-1948) of Eigenheim, Saskatchewan and other material. Courtesy of Henry Klaassen of Oshawa.
- Books and other research materials related to Mennonites in Manitoba collected by the late John Dyck (1928-1999). Courtesy of Elma Dyck.
- Photos related to Alternative Service in Russia before and during WW I collected by Jacob Dick of Vineland. (See one photo below from this collection.)
- A large collection of Mennonite-related books, audio tapes, files and memorabilia from the estate of the late Peter Paetkau (1940-2011). (See tribute this page).



Can you help us identify this photograph?

Abram J. Dick (1890-1970) is situated on the top left and Jacob Tiessen is on the far right. Who are the others? Where and when was this photo taken? What was the occasion? Does anyone else have a copy? Photo courtesy of Jacob and Helen Dick, Vineland, Ontario.

Initial Reflections from a New Director

It is now two months since I started my post as the Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg. These weeks have been filled with meeting a new group of colleagues, learning a new office culture, and developing a new set of research practices. All of this has been a welcome challenge and, surprisingly, one not unlike what I encountered in my last post as a seminary professor. Collaborating with others on research projects, writing essays on topics of interest to Christian readers, making presentations to encourage others, and tracking down obscure, but significant details of church history, are all things that have occupied me during much of my professional life.

I continue to be amazed at the resources both in personnel and in material (print, video, and photographic) that are located here at the Centre on Taylor Avenue. Archivist, Conrad Stoesz, and a group of committed volunteers keep busy cataloguing new acquisitions and responding to the genealogical and historical queries that come daily from interested patrons of the Centre. The excellent facilities and large holdings make the Centre an excellent resource for Mennonite studies of all kinds. Here are three examples from the last two months:

Two artists came to the Centre looking for photographs of Mennonite women. They were in search of inspiration for a set of paintings to be shown at their next exhibit. The Centre's database of over 18,000 photographs is searchable by key word. They quickly found photographs of interest to them, promising to mention the Centre in the credits at the upcoming exhibit.

A church leader asked me to find out what Mennonite Brethren have written regarding heaven and hell. The buzz from Rob Bell's recent book, *Love Wins* (HarperCollins, 2011), was the instigation. I located relevant study conference papers on the subject and sent on a reply. Actually, anyone can see what has been written, because digital versions of most of the papers presented at Mennonite Brethren study conferences from 1956 to the present are available online. See the "theology" drop-down menu on the Centre's web page at www.mbconf.ca/cmbs.

Another leader asked me to research what Mennonite Brethren have written regarding the atonement. I am working my way through the four Confessions of Faith that Mennonite Brethren have used in their 150-year history (1853, 1902, 1975, and 1999), noting how the saving significance of the cross is articulated. The results of this research will be presented in Kitchener, Ontario at the study conference called, *The Mystery of the Cross* (October 27-29, 2011).

As I think about the Centre, I see its primary role as helping people tell and shape the story of Mennonite Brethren involvement in the mission of Christ, a mission that we are all called to share. Specifically, the Centre aims to add value to the church in mission in two ways.

1. Collecting and preserving Mennonite Brethren church records (board minutes, conference proceedings, publications, personal papers, etc.). The acquisition of six boxes of personal files and papers from David Ewert's estate in July is a good example of the Centre doing its job. (See page 2 this issue.)

2. Resourcing church leaders with research and writing on topics of pertinence to the church. The preparations for the upcoming study conference in Kitchener Waterloo are also a good example of the Centre at work.

Is there anything else? Well, I do have a dream. I wonder about adding "worship resources" as another way the Centre can resource the church. I would like to track and archive a sampling of Mennonite Brethren preaching and worship resources. Over time, these could become an important tool for documenting how the church's theology evolves. The songs that are most popular, the texts most often preached, all give a snapshot of Mennonite Brethren thinking at a particular time. The Centre's webpage could be a "go to" site, not only for historians and theologians, but also for worship leaders, as they plan sermon series, choose worship music, and find prayers and readings for specific occasions.

These are my initial reflections. I expect they will be honed with time and experience. Please contact me, if you have a comment, suggestion, or a research query. I look forward to working together with you.

Jon Isaak, Director
Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg



CENTRE FOR
**Mennonite
Brethren
Studies** IN CANADA

1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6

Linden Christian at CMBS

by Carmyn Campbell

On June 20th, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies welcomed 60 grade five students from near-by Linden Christian School to the archives to learn about Canadian immigration. By studying excerpts of Anna Baerg's diary, they gained an insight into the life of a young woman during the civil war in Russia and the challenges she faced as she anticipated immigrating to Canada. The students' journey was part of a geo-caching field trip, bringing small groups of eight students to the centre for 10 minute visits. The short visit was packed with a few fun facts about the centre including getting a chance to look at the oldest book in the archives (over 400 years). However, the heart of the visit involved sharing Anna's story.

Anna recorded her experiences of living in Russia during the civil war in a diary, documenting the years from 1916-1924. Pulling out the old diary pages recorded on the back of evaporated milk can labels brought on choruses of "oooh"s and "aahh"s from the students, as a number of them stated, "That's really cool!" After asking if all the originals were in German, a few asked curiously, "Is this really her *actual* diary?" After being assured that it was, a hush followed as the students reflected on what they saw and read. A photocopied portion of the translated diary was provided for students to read, after which the group discussed why Anna and her family would want to leave

(cont'd p. 11)



Carmyn Campbell engaging children

Hedi Knoop (1919-2011)[†]



Hedi Knoop, oldest daughter of the well known Mennonite writer, Arnold Dyck, died in Germany on July 13, 2011, at the age of 92 years. An overflow crowd attended the funeral service in Darlaten on

July 19.

Like her father before her, Hedi became popular and beloved as a writer both in the High German and Low German language. She wrote a variety of books including humorous anecdotes of life in the moorland of Lower Saxony in Germany where she lived with her beekeeper husband and raised her 5 children.

Hedi emigrated from Russia to Canada at the age of 4 with her parents and grew up in Steinbach. Her book *Wenn die Erde bebt* (When the ground shakes) gives some insight into her growing up years as the daughter of Arnold Dyck. In 1937 she moved to Germany, first to study music and then received her teacher training in Hamburg. During World War II she taught school in West Prussia. In 1946 she married Wilhelm Knoop. He died in 1996.

Margaret Kroeker

Heinrich P. Wieler, Siberia (cont'd from p. 5)

centered on midwife assistance where needed.

In Alexandrovka the fall term of 1916 began on 1 October. Christmas program preparation began already in November. They all enjoyed the usual celebrations, and Wieler also had increased demand for another aspect of his business, creating painted plaques. Right after Christmas, Suse was called away to her duties. Wieler had experienced difficulty getting supplies for his extra-curricular jobs. The community held a special "Christmas Eve" collection to help the needy of the Mennonite Slavgorod settlement several hundred miles to the southeast of Alexandrovka.⁵

The year 1917 included much that was routine for classroom work but some



changes as well. Some alterations were made in his classroom building to reduce teaching space and thus also heating costs. Wieler was able to overcome some of the friction he had experienced with parents and school officials. Some difficulties about retaining his position developed and a special teachers' meeting at the nearby village of Margenau took up the issue. On 26 April Wieler dismissed the students for the current school term, realizing by then he would likely be terminating his work in Alexandrovka also. He had handed in his resignation earlier, only to discover in talks with higher authorities that contrary to what he has assumed, he would not have had to resign.

When he learned about a vacancy at the nearby village of Hoffnungstal, he offered his services and obtained a new position there. He wrote, "O, God, to you be praise. Away from Alexandrovka. The joy was great on both sides." It had been four years since he came to Alexandrovka, and eight since he began his teaching career.

Hoffnungstal was not smooth sailing all the way either. School books did not arrive on time. Some students were difficult to manage. In January 1918 he got word that he would be welcome for another year. Not much later Russia changed calendars under the Soviet regime. Wieler's birthday would no longer be celebrated on 12 February but on 25 February. He was 27 by now.

Wieler's terms for accepting the position another year were clear but somewhat daunting for the community. He suspected that they would not be accepted. He had in any case decided, as he considered his future under a Communist government that he and his wife would go back to Neu-Samara, the home community of Suse, and look for work there. When they got there he found an opening for teaching religion in the high school at Lugowsk.⁶

At this point Wieler learned that the government planned to take his family away from their home. Almost immediately he began to plan departure from Russia, and made secret plans to emigrate, first to Germany, and then to the USA. His family, including young Harry and John, got to Lancaster, USA by 1924. Here Heinrich and Suse (now Susanna) found new ways of making a living by teaching, some medical work for Susanna, manufacturing of plaques, etc. Susanna passed away in 1967 at the age of 81, and Heinrich in 1984 at the age of 93.

The journal had remained in their possession all this time. In the early 1990s

Harry brought it to light and with the new Pavlatos ownership, discussions about translation and publication began.⁷ At this point new materials from the journal, including Part I, have begun to arrive in duplicate; translation is continuing; and it is expected that more of the journal will appear in published form shortly.

Endnotes

1. The Wieler journal materials utilized here are lodged in the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Volume 4235 in both a German and an English script. They contain the 500 pages of Part II, for which the original remains with the current owner, Arthur Pavlatos of Lancaster, PA. Three hundred pages of Part I have arrived recently, but were not available for the original study of this theme. See also "The Mennonite Schools in Siberia from the Late Nineteenth Century to the 1920s" by Irina Cherkazianova and translated by Dr. Victor Doerksen, *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 20, 2002), 9-26.
2. Much of the biographical data for Wieler is based on Wieler's brief unpublished memoir, "Mennonites in Russia," 1-3, in the author's files.
3. "The Wieler Journal", 4-5 (using the manuscript pagination of the English translation).
4. *Ibid.*, 7.
5. The story of the Slavgorod Mennonite settlement, begun in 1907, is told in *In den Steppen Sibiriens* by Gerhard Fast, 1957.
6. For school life and Heinrich's teaching in Neu-Samara see also *Neu-Samara: a Mennonite settlement east of the Volga* / compiled by Jacob H. Brucks and Henry P. Hooze ; translation by John Isaak; editing and epilogue by Tena Wiebe, 2002, 86ff. Much of the data brought forward here is also found in material published in *The Quiet in the Land : a Volga-German's Christian Journals: Russian Revolution Years 1916-1918* / Henry P. Wieler; edited and abridged by Arthur L. Pavlatos and Michael C. Upton, 2005. Journal entries ceased in 1924 at the time when they got to Lancaster, PA. About 1000 pages remain for further research and publication.
7. Obituaries and other related material shedding light on their American life are in the author's files. Four sons and daughters, Harry, John, Lily and Mary survived the passing of Heinrich and Susanna.

Lawrence Klippenstein, former director, Mennonite Heritage Centre, now lives in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Book Notes

by Harold Peters-Fransen

From the Dniepr to the Paraguay River (self-published, 180 pp.) is the English translation and revision by Victor Janzen of his own book, published in German in 1995. A former co-editor of the *Mennonitische Post*, Janzen tells his personal story of growing up in Ukraine. Born in 1929, the perspective is that of a

younger person than some of the earlier written books of the era. Growing up on the collective farm with its poverty, deprivation, yet still some happy memories of youth, experiencing both the liberation which the Mennonite population experienced at the hands of the German army, and the realization of the dark side of its occupation especially towards Ukrainians and Jews, Janzen continues the story of the retreat with the German army to Poland, and the eventual move to Paraguay including the various adventures aboard the Volendam on the sea voyage to South America. The settling in Paraguay with its hardships and adventures completes the book.

Odyssey Against my Will: the Destiny of a German Expatriate, 376 pages, originally published in German in 1984, appears in this translated edition, 2008, self published by the translators, nieces and nephews of the original author. Born in 1906 in a Mennonite village on the Don River, Ukraine, he became a teacher to Germans within Soviet Russia. Finding the communist regime intolerable, this memoir tells the story of escape to China, Japan, Singapore and the Suez Canal, to Germany. From here he immigrates to Paraguay, first to the Mennonite colonies but then to Asunción. Due to the health issues of his wife, they move back to Germany. Drafted into the German army, Hildebrand serves first as a medic and eventually as a translator on the eastern front during World War II. The perspective of the author is that of a patriotic German, first, and a Mennonite second, although he does come to see the negative sides of the Nazi version of this nationalism. He befriends both Slav and Jew. Interrogated by an American military officer after the war, he is challenged regarding his Mennonitism since he has fought in the war. He answers by referencing that Mennonites in Europe and North America have given up the position of non-participation in war.

Pandora Press has published the proceedings of the annual Goshen College lecture series on religion and science. The 2010 lectures by Noreen Herzfeld, edited by Carl S. Helrich, entitled *The Limits of Perfection* presents her 3 lectures, her homily and extensive notes on participants' questions and her answers. Herzfeld, a professor of computer science and a Quaker, questions both the scientific and faith understandings of perfection. Science must recognize the potentially equal downsides as well as upsides of

technology. In matters of faith, including Biblical faith, perfection is not control, but she challenges the listener/ reader to see the possibility of uncontrolled perfection. She places her faith in the God of struggle.

Victor Kliewer, a retired pastor, has just concluded a Master of Arts (History) thesis for the joint program of University of Manitoba and University of Winnipeg. The title, *Nonresistance or Pacifist? The peace stance of the conservative Kanadier Mennonites, 1874-1945* hints at the basic direction. In the first chapter, Kliewer sets both the wider Canadian context and the more specific Mennonite context of peace, nonresistance and activism and finds the stance of these groups of Mennonites as absolutist. The second chapter highlights three histories of the conservative *Kanadier*, those and their descendants who came to Canada in the 1870s from Russia and settled first in Manitoba and then some moving on to Saskatchewan. Common themes include humbleness, purity of the church and the expectation of suffering. In the third chapter, he examines sermons by six *Aeltester*, (bishops) of the Conservative *Kanadier*. In the sermons there is very little direct mention of the peace position, but because these bishops were involved some in World War I and World War II in insisting with the government that their nonresistant stand guaranteed in the original terms of settlement with the Canadian government be honoured, Kliewer looks and finds the subtler references in the sermons. The fourth chapter tells the story, from available minutes, of the *Aeltestenrat*, the committee of this group that dealt with the government during World War II. Initially, all Mennonite groups met to find a common direction, but this group (which also included more progressive *Kanadier* such as the Bergthaler), felt that they needed to stand alone because their legal status at immigration was different than other groups, though in the end they had no choice but to cooperate with the alternative service regime in the camps, while still refusing, for example, non-combat medical roles in the war, which some others accepted.

Verachtet, Verfolgt, Vertrieben is a reader for middle years German-speaking Mennonite students in Latin America. Originally published by Centro Escolar Evangelico, Cuathtemoc Mexico in 1995, this reworked edition was published in 2008. With 25 stories, all but five from

the broad Anabaptist/Mennonite story, students can read stories about martyrs and other faithful believers. Five stories originate in the *Martyr's Mirror*. All stories are European, and after the Anabaptist period, survey the Dutch/Prussian/Russian Mennonite story. The last story is of Georgi Vins, a leader of the illegal Baptists during the Soviet period. For the students there are a series of questions to answer with each story. A side-bar timeline repeated throughout the book, shows the students the continuity of their own Mennonite community with the earlier periods in Anabaptist/Mennonite history.

Book Notes

by Peter Letkemann

In the March 2010 edition of *Mennonite Historian*, I provided brief book notes on 8 memoirs published since the year 2000 by Mennonite *Umsiedler* in Germany. Since then, members of this group have continued their prolific publishing activity.

One of these is Jakob Bergen, born in the Orenburg Settlement in 1935, who has already published three short books on the settlement and its people. *So lebten wir in Russland. Erzählungen über das Leben in Russland* (Lage: Lichtzeichen Verlag, 2010) by Bergen, originally published in Russian in 2002, provides an honest and detailed description of life on a collective farm in the Orenburg settlement. The author is not an historian, but an accurate observer, not afraid to "tell it as it was."

As an economic and agricultural unit, he writes, the collective farms were a disaster from the beginning of forced collectivization in 1929. People were supposed to join the collectives voluntarily and be in charge of their own collective destiny; but in actuality only communists, most of whom had little or no experience in farming, were placed in charge. Orders from above were followed without question, even if it meant seeding fields covered with snow by hand on the date prescribed by party central planners, who had no idea of local conditions. As a result, no one really cared, since nothing belonged to them; instead they put all of their efforts into fulfilling orders and in tending their own private gardens.

Other chapters deal with the inefficiency and inadequacy of "free" socialized medicine in the Soviet state, the religious persecution of Christians, the difficult years of the *Trudarmia*, and finally the

reasons for emigrating to Germany.

Erwin Rempel relates his family's story in *Frag deine Eltern, was damals geschah... Lebensgeschichte meiner Eltern Peter und Eugenie Rempel* (Harsewinkel: Selbstverlag, 2004). He provides interesting details on the general history of the "Rempel" name, but focuses on the story of his own family – beginning with the great-great grandfather Heinrich Rempel, who settled in Osterwick. From here the family moved to Neu-Rosengart, Kronsweide, Einlage (all in the Chortitza Settlement) and finally to Rosenort in 1943.

The original residents of this Molotschna village had been deported to the East in October 1941; but after German troops occupied the region, other Mennonite and German families were invited to settle here. The family was forced to leave Rosenort shortly afterwards on the long trek westwards with retreating German forces to the Warthegau. Here the family was captured by Soviet forces in 1945 and "repatriated" to special settlements in Siberia – Ojasch and Solikamsk. The family finally settled in Karaganda in 1960, and emigrated from there to Germany in 1990.

The next three books deal with aspects of the Mennonite Brethren in Russia and their descendants in present-day Germany.

Johannes Fast, *Er gibt dem Müden Kraft* (Steinhagen: Samenkorn Verlag, 2004) is a collection of 63 sermons written between 1973 and 1978 by Johannes Fast in Karaganda. Fast was born in Mariental in the Alt Samara or Alexandertal Settlement in 1886 into a large mixed family of 22 children. Baptized into the *Kirchengemeinde* in 1902 at the age of 16, he trained as a carpenter, underwent a conversion experience during his years of alternative service in the Forstei and was rebaptized in Memrik into the MB *Gemeinde* (MBG). After two years of study in Switzerland at the St. Chrischona Bible School (1911-1913), Fast returned to Alt Samara and became a preacher and choir director in the MBG. Because of this, he was exiled in 1931 to the far east, eventually ending up near the Amur Settlement in 1941. After his release from exile in 1954, Fast travelled to Kazakhstan and eventually settled in Timir-Tau. He was 69 years of age. New congregations were started in the years after 1955, but by this time there were only a handful of trained leaders who had survived the decades of arrest and exile

living among them. Until 1966 Fast served as *Reiseprediger*, visiting and encouraging Christians throughout Kazakhstan. Finally he moved to Dshetysai in southern Kazakhstan where he continued to serve as a preacher in a registered Baptist congregation until his death.

This collection of short sermons, each about 6-8 pages in length, reflects the character of his preaching – and that of other MB/Baptist preachers during these years. Johannes Fast died on 28 April 1981 at the age of 95, having served as minister for over 70 years.

Daniel Janzen, *Das Abendrot der Gemeindezeit. Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Donskoje, 1901-2000*. (Warendorf: Neu Samara Verlag, 2011). In an earlier book, *Neu Samara am Tock (1890-2003)* published in 2003, Daniel Janzen and a committee of former residents of Neu Samara (NSAM) presented a survey history of the entire Neu Samara settlement from its founding in 1890 to the year 2003. In this present book *Aeltester* Daniel Janzen, former leader of the congregation, provides reports and recollections on the origin, development and end of the large MB *Gemeinde* in the village of Donskoje in the NSAM settlement.

Each of the 10 chapters is devoted to a decade of events. The first MB church was built in Lugowsk (NSAM) in 1901 – for its time one of the largest Mennonite churches in all of Russia. A third church was built in Donskoye in 1907-1908 to serve both the MBs and the *Kirchengemeinde* – it became known as an *Allianzgemeinde*. Unfortunately, this alliance did not last long, due to conflicts over ethical issues (smoking and alcohol use) and biblical issues (baptism, etc). 1910 marked the founding of a separate MB *Gemeinde*. By the 1980s and 1990s, however, more and more families emigrated to Germany, including Daniel Janzen, who left in August 1989. In 1990 alone, about 200 members left for Germany. Membership sank to less than 100 persons. The last baptismal service was held in the summer of 1992. By the end of 1992 there were only 20 members left. At this time the MB congregation ceased to exist, and the church was sold to a Russian Baptist congregation.

John N. Klassen, *Jesus Christus leben und verkündigen – 150 Jahre Mennoniten Brüdergemeinden – Vorstellung der Gemeinden in Deutschland und Österreich...* (Lage: Lichtzeichen Verlag, 2010) was published in connection with

the 150-year celebrations of the MB churches in Europe and provides a survey of some 134 present-day MB congregations in Germany and Austria. It is based on Klassen's earlier doctoral dissertation, recently published as *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (VTR Verlag für Theologie & Religionswissenschaften, 2007).

All of the MB congregations in Germany and Austria had their beginnings with Russian Mennonite refugees after World War II, beginning with the large congregation in Neuwied-Ringstrasse in 1950 (current membership 396). Two more congregations were started in the 1960s: Neustadt (35); and Lage (350); and six in the 1970s, including the large groups in Bielefeld-Heepen (951); Espelkamp (2050); Frankenthal (659); and Neuwied-Torney (800).

Due to the large immigration boom of *Umsiedler* another 32 congregations were started in the 1980s – including the large congregations in Fulda (1044), Lemgo (1023), Bielefeld-Schillerstrasse (730) and another 53 congregations in the 1990s. Since the year 2000 another 40 congregations have been formed, ranging from Porta Westfalica (317) to Zerbst (3). The total membership now stands at over 26,300 persons.

These 134 MB congregations do not form a single MB Conference – instead the individual congregations belong to a variety of conferences, including AMBD (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Mennonitischen Brüdergemeinden in Deutschland*), BTG (*Bund Taufgesinter Gemeinden*), VMBB (*Verband der Evangelischen Freikirchen Mennonitischer Brüdergemeinden in Bayern*) and BEMB (*Bund Europäischer Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinden*).

Johannes Reimer, *Flucht über den Strom des schwarzen Drachen. Das Leben der Maria DeFehr*. (Marburg: Francke Verlag, 2010). Originally published in Russian, this book on the life of Mia (Maria Reimer) DeFehr – wife of A.A. DeFehr and mother of well-known businessman Art DeFehr (Palliser Furniture) of Winnipeg, provides much new and interesting information on this remarkable woman, especially on her early life in Russia and the episode of the escape across the Amur River in 1930 (at the age of 22). It is thus a welcome supplement to the earlier books by Gerhard Lorenz and Mary Enns, which focus more on Mia's later years in North America.

Ewert's Personal Papers

(cont'd from p. 2)

MB Studies in Winni-peg. See accompanying photo, taken by Betty, showing the Centre's director, Jon Isaak (left), and me with the delivered boxes. In due course these materials will be accessioned and entered into the archival collection.



Friend and biographer, Dr. Bruce Guenther, noted that: "As a highly respected Bible teacher, preacher and scholar, Ewert defined and embodied the convictions of the Mennonite Brethren church." Fortunately, interested persons will now have access to the ideas that shaped much Mennonite Brethren thinking during the more than five decades of Ewert's public ministry.

David Giesbrecht represents the Centre for MB Studies in Abbotsford, BC.

Linden Christian Visit

(cont'd from p. 7)

Russia during the war, and Anna's feelings on the matter. Anna's vulnerability gives the reader a clearer picture of the horrors and turmoil that Anna, her family and community endured at the hands of the soldiers, Bolsheviks and bandits. Anna recounts individuals being murdered, the opportunity to immigrate, followed by the torn emotions of wanting to be safe versus leaving friends and family. The students empathized with the author. "I think it would be hard to decide," commented one of the students. "I think she wants to leave, because she wants to be safe, but she would miss all of her friends if she left." The students reflected on the fact that Anna's story is not unlike stories of today's immigrants who come to Canada in search of a better life, often leaving behind family and loved ones.

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies remains a valuable resource for students both young and old. The Centre is open Monday through Friday, 8:30-4:30 and welcomes visitors of all ages.

Book Review

(cont'd from p. 12)

of what to include? The authors don't say.

Some other areas could have been given greater attention. The Karaganda church's life was directed by the memories of people of what they had known 30 or 40 years earlier. Did this contribute to some of the tensions among the leaders? We don't really know, though it is suggested. The church understood itself to be practicing a "strict" Christian lifestyle. Did this cause some of the intense internal struggles? The book does not help us to know. Why did Heinrich Woelk, who became elder of the Karaganda church after David Klassen, his son Gerhard and their families, together with several others, decide to move away from Karaganda in 1976. We are told the decision cost him "dearly," but again we don't know what led to the move.

Despite the questions, so much about the book is profoundly moving. These were people whose lives had been deeply scarred and impoverished by the Soviets. When they formed a church community they began forming choirs. They created orchestras and taught themselves how to play instruments. Former teachers taught their preachers how to speak better German. They carried on an undercover Bible school. For couples who had only been "written together," they once again introduced church marriage ceremonies. Even marriage and family life had to be relearned, the writers says.

One of the greatest gifts of the book is its 38 biographies. If one wants to learn how faith can persist in the face of huge opposition and suffering, these will provide an answer. There was the deacon Johann Bergen whose wife, newborn child, and two sons died of starvation after he was taken away into the labour army. The biography says he regained a will to live after his conversion and as deacon found a role making home visits and organizing the places for his house church to meet.

Peter Bergmann survived his stint in the labour army because he was made a melon field watchman and could eat all the melons he wanted. In the church he became an able preacher, despite a very poor education. He had an evangelist's passion and led many to faith.

Jakob Friesen was one of three Friesen brothers who contributed much to the life of the Karaganda church. He escaped arrest in the thirties, but was handed a 10-year sentence in 1941 for singing German

gospel songs with his siblings. After two years he was released because he had almost died of starvation. His great gift to the church was in choir leading.

No one probably animated the Karaganda church more than David Klassen. He was first imprisoned in 1936 for "anti-Soviet activity," and released only a decade later. After his release he began meetings in homes, which led to a second arrest in 1949 and after 91 interrogations, a 25 year sentence. From prison he sent poems and songs of encouragement to his family. In 1955 he was released from prison as an invalid and immediately began an active itinerant ministry and assistance in the birthing of the Karaganda church. He became its much loved elder. During the religious repression of the early 1960s, he was once again imprisoned along with two others. After his release he declined further leading roles, though he remained active as a preacher and spiritual guide.

Wilhelm Matthies played a key role in representing the Karaganda Church to authorities and giving content to its documents. He had a good education as a teacher of German, and once would have studied abroad if his money and papers hadn't been stolen. He too was imprisoned and served in the labour army and nearly died of starvation. He was the one who taught the preachers how to improve their German and led an underground Bible school. Late in life he moved to Germany and helped build the church there.

One can read too about the aged Dietrich Pauls, a one-time minister of the *kirchliche* Mennonites, who conducted the first communion service of the German Mennonites and ordained the first preachers of the Karaganda Church. Or of Johann Strauss, who seemed to have a special gift for working among the youth. Of Otto Wiebe, whose exemplary life and death in prison profoundly affected the Karaganda church. And of Heinrich Woelk, the steadfast preacher who became elder after David Klassen's release from prison.

There are many more. *Wasserstroeme in der Einoede* has some gaps. It leaves some troubling questions unanswered. Occasionally there are easily spotted proofreading errors. Yet it represents, as very few books might, the endurance of the church against all odds. They were ones whom the "gates of hell" could not overcome. Today the church conducts its services in Russian.

Book Reviews

Viktor Fast and Jakob Penner. *Wasserströme in der Einöde: die Anfangsgeschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde Karaganda 1956-1968* (Steinhausen, Germany: Samenkorn, 2007) 640 pp. (Along with the text this book has 525 photos and drawings, 65 documents and 6 maps.)

Reviewed by Harold Jantz, Winnipeg.



I was in Alma Ata, Kazakhstan, with a Mennonite tour group led by the late Gerhard Lorenz in the early 1970s when I met David Klassen. Of all the people who greeted us there, he is

one I have never forgotten. David Klassen came from the coal-mining city of Karaganda in Kazakhstan. I was told he had spent some 19 years in the prisons and labour camps of the Soviet Union, yet I remember sensing in the man a remarkable spirit of freedom and peace. He was the first elder and spiritual father of the Mennonite Brethren church in Karaganda.

The book, *Wasserstroeme in der Einoede* (Streams in the Desert), is a kind of “pearl of great price.” This wonderful 640-page account tells the story of the beginning years of the first Mennonite Brethren church to be registered in the Soviet Union during the years of the Soviet empire. It is a beautiful and tragic story. It is a carefully documented record of the courageous struggle of a community of German-speaking Mennonites to have their own church after the Communists had eased their restrictions ever so slightly after the death of Joseph Stalin in 1953. It treats in detail the years between 1956 and 1968. Because it was done in German, the book, unfortunately, will be inaccessible to many Canadian readers.

Viktor Fast, already known to many for his work with the Aquila Mission and journal of Germany, together with Jakob Penner and a team of colleagues, gathered photos, created maps, translated documents out of the Russian, gathered memoirs and wrote and edited the text.

For anyone unfamiliar with the experience of Mennonite believers living in the Soviet Union after the terrible 1930s and 1940s, it is hard to imagine

what it meant for survivors to try to rebuild church and community life. Virtually every man and many of the women in the book are people who had somehow managed to claw their way back from the brink after serving years in prison camps or within the so-called “labour army.” In the latter, victims were forced to work at projects either in the Russian far north or east of the Ural Mountains where they tried to remain alive on the barest of rations and in utterly primitive housing. Large numbers, in many cases the majority, died.

To illustrate. *Wasserstroeme*...has a section with several dozen biographies of leaders of the Karaganda MB Church who survived those years of exile. As I read them, I realized a curious repetition. A remarkable number of the leaders had been bookkeepers. Why was that important? It meant that they had toiled at something while in prison or in the labour camps in which they were unlikely to be worked to death. It saved them.

The book preserves a story that Mennonites now in Germany believe needs to be kept. It provides important background about Kazakhstan, about Mennonite Brethren origins, about the Soviets, and how faith and church life began to be reawakened after World War 2. It tells how the first Mennonites came to this region in the 1930s, usually as exiles from colonies farther west. Beginning in 1931, they even formed small groups for worship, but when six of their men were arrested and sentenced to death for it in 1942, that stopped. It was with the officially registered Baptists that most Mennonite Brethren in Karaganda began to worship. But for many it did not feel like their true spiritual home. They resisted the tight controls exercised by the state religious authorities or by Baptist presbyters, who functioned within the officially recognized All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians Baptists and wielded highly autocratic authority.

The death of Stalin in 1953 began a period that offered some relief from the oppression of the two previous decades. Many political prisoners were released. Families began reuniting and fellowships in small circles began to nurture spiritual renewal. Sermons were circulated by letter and some preachers even started moving about to encourage believers groups. Revivals broke out. The Baptist church in Karaganda grew from 289 members in 1949 to 794 in 1955, and of that number 417 were German

Mennonites. Many of these were the people who began agitating for their own church.

It was a huge struggle. A core group met for the first time in late 1956 to discuss organizing. They met clandestinely as “house” churches in several parts of the city. By 1959, they had 980 members. Despite attempts to keep a good spirit between the registered CECB church and the new group, inevitably there were bitter experiences. At one point a number of families—including leaders—returned to the official church. It felt like a betrayal. Attempts to gain formal approval for registration as a German Mennonite Brethren Church took years and was only finally achieved in April, 1967, after vigorous defense of their position both locally and at the Congress of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists. In between, during a new period of repression under Nikita Khrushchev, three of its leaders—David Klassen, Heinrich Zorn and Heinrich Wiebe—were arrested and served time in prison. Another much loved leader, Otto Wiebe, actually died in prison. Yet the church persisted and grew. When the church finally gained permission directly from Moscow to put up their own building, the members completed the construction in a little over two months. It could seat about 500 people. They shared the building with a smaller *kirchliche* (Church) Mennonite group.

The book is rich in content. Included are 525 photos of leaders and members. Etched on their faces is a great deal of the suffering they endured. Photos are used most effectively throughout the book. Founding minutes, a confessional statement with the founders' signatures, the polity by which the church intended to function, and membership lists, are reproduced photographically. A good many documents from local Soviet authorities have also been included. Newspaper articles that portrayed the Mennonites and their leaders as socially undesirable fanatics are reproduced here.

The Karaganda Mennonite Brethren confession was based on the important 1902 MB Confession of Faith, but with some striking omissions. Missing were statements about work on the Lord's Day, speaking an oath, and refusing to take up arms. The book states this would have simply been too dangerous. In addition, however, a number of other articles were used only in part. What guided the choice

(cont'd on p. 11)