

# Mennonite Historian

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



Mary Brieger Klassen (left) and Mary and Jakob Reimer (right)

## Mary Klassen (1891-1976)

by Jon Isaak

Mary Martha Brieger was born on 7 June 1891 in Riga, Latvia. Her parents were Louis Christopher Brieger (1852-1910) and Clara Gertrude Goeschel (1862-1917). She was the middle child between two sisters, Erika and Irmgard. She was confirmed as a young woman in the German Lutheran church in Riga on 31 May 1909.

On 22 May 1915 she married Jakob J. Reimer (1891-1937), whom she met in Riga. Jakob, a Russian Mennonite from Karassan, Crimea, was an electrical engineer trained at the Thüringer Institute (Ilmenau, Germany) and working in Riga at the time. During WWI, as the German army advanced, the couple moved to St. Petersburg, Russia. Mary worked as an accountant (Malcolm and Sons) and Jakob as an engineer (Mantel and Co.).

Eventually, the couple became part of a small Mennonite community in Moscow

trying to find a way to maintain their Mennonite faith and values during the upheaval of the Russian Revolution and civil war. Mary worked as a secretary to Alvin Miller, director of the American Mennonite Relief (AMR) office in Moscow, and Jakob worked at several alternative service assignments during wartime (e.g., ambulance train medic and driving instructor for the Red Cross) and as an engineer after the war. A son, Harold (1923-1996), was born to them. In 1925 the couple divorced.

On 11 September 1926 Mary married Cornelius Franz (C.F.) Klassen (1894-1954), bringing Harold with her into the new family. CF was working with the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein* (AMLV) or Agricultural Union, which also had an office in the same building housing the

(cont'd on p. 2)

## Family secrets

by Randy Klassen

Randy offers a response to Maureen Klassen's new book, *It Happened in Moscow* (Kindred 2013). Randy, the son of Harold Klassen, is a grandson to the woman Maureen writes about, Mary Brieger Klassen and her first husband Jakob Reimer. See p.7. (Eds.).

“I will open my mouth with a parable,” sings the psalmist, “I will teach you lessons from the past . . . We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next



generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.” But apparently not all deeds can be brought into the open. Even the psalmist recognized that some wonders might remain hidden: “How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?”

Grief, trauma, and exile often lead to concealment, to family secrets. This has been a strong theme in the emerging literature of the Russian Mennonite story, from *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (Rudy Wiebe, 1962) to *This Hidden Thing* (Dora Dueck, 2010). But it is more than a mere Mennonite quirk. Indeed, it is intrinsic to the human condition. Or why would Adam and Eve be hiding in the garden?

My father, Harold Klassen, first told me his secret when I was thirteen. It was a junior-high homework assignment: find out about your family tree. I pulled out an old black family Bible that was tucked away on dad's bookshelf, and was excited to find all sorts of information about C.F. Klassen's family, his relations, and indeed even about his wedding: the anniversary date (11 September), who preached, sermon texts, and so on. But behind the date, the *year* of marriage was missing.

I asked my dad about this. He was evasive—and I was puzzled. How could someone with as keen an eye for numbers as my dad (who was a quintessential “bean-counter”: accountant, church treasurer, and inveterate “pacer-off” of any new room or yard he chose to visit)—how could someone like him not know when his own parents were married?

I pushed back, and he eventually told me that his parents were married in 1926, just before his third birthday. He offered me a few details (the few that he knew) about

(cont'd on p. 2)



CF, Harold, and Mary Klassen

## Mary Brieger Klassen

(cont'd from p. 1)

AMR office where Mary worked. The Agriculture Union's mandate was to negotiate with the Bolshevik government a way to reconstruct Mennonite agricultural life within the new communist reality (1923-1928).

After the Bolshevik government closed the AMLV in 1928, Mary and CF were able to secure exit visas for their family, which now included another son, Walfried (1927-2013). They, along with some 21,000 other émigrés, felt the prospects of maintaining their Mennonite way of life and values in the new Bolshevik society were swiftly becoming untenable. On 30 November 1928, Mary, CF, and their boys left Liverpool on the CPR steam ship, *Duchess of Atholl*,

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arriving in St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, on 8 December 1928 (Canadian Board of Colonization card #4972).

Mary and CF and their family joined several of CF's siblings and their families already living in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Mary helped CF in his new role collecting the travel debt owed by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization to the Canadian Pacific Railway (approximately 2 million dollars). Full repayment was completed in 1946. Three more children were born to them: Herbert (1929-), Tinalie (1931-1933), and Irmgard (1931-1979).

On 4 August 1935 Mary was baptized in the Assiniboine River (Winnipeg). Minister C.N. Hiebert officiated at the baptism and Minister Jakob Epp gave the message. That evening both CF and Mary were welcomed as members of Winnipeg's North End Mennonite Brethren Church, CF by transfer and Mary by baptism.

In 1948 the family moved to Abbotsford, British Columbia. During the post-war years (1945-1954), CF traveled back and forth from Europe to Canada helping to organize passage of Russian Mennonites out of Europe to North and South America. He died unexpectedly in 1954 while on assignment in Europe.

Mary was best known for her courage, sense of humour, resourcefulness, and trust in God's faithful provision. In 1971 a debilitating stroke severely curtailed her abilities. She died five years later at Menno Hospital (Abbotsford) on 6 December 1976 at the age of eighty-five.

According to Maureen Klassen, "For some, Mary was the woman who had stood tall *beside* her husband in his role as respected leader of his people. To others, she was the woman who was always there *behind* this great figure in the Mennonite story. For her children, she was all too often the woman who was left behind *without* him, to take care of the family as he responded to the demanding challenges of his responsibilities with various Mennonite organizations" (*It Happened*

*in Moscow*, p. 1).

For more information on Mary Brieger Klassen, see Herb Klassen and Maureen Klassen, *Ambassador to His People: C.F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1990), Maureen Klassen, *It Happened in Moscow: A Memoir of Discovery* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 2013), and Mary Brieger Klassen family fonds at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg (Vol. 1000, File #34).

## Family Secrets

(cont'd from p. 1)

his birth father, but I wasn't interested—or maybe, ready—to hear it at the time. I certainly didn't want to hear the man's name. The only detail that stuck with me was that dad was to have been called "Harold Paul Klassen" at his birth, but the Communist authorities had newly forbidden second names as bourgeois. And so I assumed that dad's birth father was named Paul. All other details remained a secret.

Grandma (Mary Brieger Klassen) was still alive at the time; it would be only a matter of months before she would be released from her paralysis, after years of being bed-ridden, and see the Saviour she had served her whole life. Communication with her was difficult, at least for us grandchildren, somewhat intimidated by her suffering and immobility. She knew those secrets, had held them close to her heart all those years.

(cont'd on p. 6)



Wally, Herb, Army, Mary, and Harold Klassen

# Genealogy and Family History

## Ocean Arrivals (Form 30A), 1919-1924 now on Ancestry.ca

This data collection contains individual declarations of passengers arriving at various Canadian ports between 1919 and 1924. The declarations were a standard pre-printed form called Form 30A. This form was officially in use between 1 June 1921 and 31 December 1924 and was regulated by the Department of Immigration and Colonization. A form was to be completed for each passenger, including children. Exceptions were for passengers in transit to the U.S. The forms were then submitted to immigration officers upon arrival at the port of destination.

During its time in use, Form 30A was to be used in place of the large sheet passenger list manifests. However, not all immigration offices began using the form at the same time. Some began using it as early as 1919, while others didn't begin using it until 1922. Over the course of its short lifetime, Form 30A changed slightly, recording some different pieces of information on the earlier version of the form than in the later. Following the discontinuation of Form 30A at the end of 1924, the large sheet passenger list manifests were brought back.

Information listed on the form generally included: Ship, Port of departure, Arrival date, Port of arrival, Name of passenger, Age, Gender, Birthplace, Marital status, Present occupation, Intended occupation, Race, Citizenship, Religion, Object in going to Canada, Whether intent to live permanently in Canada, Destination, Name of the nearest relative in country from which they came, and Passport information.

These records originate from a microfilm collection held by Library and Archives Canada. The forms were originally

microfilmed in a semi-alphabetical order by surname. This semi-alphabetical order has been preserved in this database and will help you locate an individual when you are sorting through images.

--From www.ancestry.ca.

*Ancestry.ca*, is a membership/subscription-based family history website launched in 2006 that hosts historical record collections reflecting Canada's multicultural heritage. *Ancestry.ca* is part of a global network of *Ancestry* sites, which includes *Ancestry.com* in the U.S., *Ancestry.de* in Germany, and a number of other countries.

A.R.

BOOKING OFFICE OR EXCHANGE OFFICE TO FILL IN THIS SPACE.

In passenger's ticket cash or prepaid **SPECIAL CONTRACT**

Date of issue of ticket .....

Place **LIBAU** Name of Agent .....

If prepaid order, give following information regarding exchange of the order.

Place .....

Date exchanged .....

Name of agent .....

**CERTIFICATE**

Passport No. .... Serial No. ....

Issued by **CENTRAL ADM. of DUTCH DESCENDANTS IN UKRAINE**

Date of Issue .....

Passport designates holder a national or citizen of **UKRAINE**

**EMPIRE OF FRANCE.** 31/1000

**DECLARATION OF PASSENGER TO CANADA**

1. NAME **STILMAN GERHARD** Age **44**

2. Sex **M.** Are you married, single widowed or divorced? **M.**

If married, are you accompanied by husband or wife? If so give name of husband or wife **Edith**

3. Present occupation **FARMING** Intended occupation **FARMING**

4. Birthplace **UKRAINE** Race or People **German**

5. Citizenship **Russian** Religion **Mennonite**

6. Object in going to Canada **To settle**

7. Do you intend to remain permanently in Canada? **No**

8. Have you ever lived in Canada? **No** If you have, give Canadian address .....

9. Port of first arrival in Canada .....

10. Port of last departure from Canada .....

11. Why did you leave Canada? **300**

12. Money in possession belonging to passenger **YES** What language? .....

13. Can you read? **YES**

14. By whom was your passage paid? **Mennonite Church Canada**

15. Ever refused entry to, or deported from Canada? **No**

16. Destined to **Rosthern - Sask.**

(Left) This is a copy of Form 30A for my grandfather, Gerhard J. Thielmann (1878-1949) who arrived in Canada on 12 August 1924 aboard the Empress of France. The age is as of the date of their travelling document prepared two years earlier. This was consistent for all four people travelling together with the Thielmann family. New information for me was the amount of money in his possession -- \$300.00. By whom was the passage paid? Answer: "Mennonite Church Canada" (obviously an expression for the Mennonites in Canada, that had founded the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, based in Rosthern, Saskatchewan). The reverse side (above) indicates that the ticket was prepaid by "Special Contract" and that the passport was issued by the "Central Adm. Of Dutch Descendants in Ukraine." The passport holder being a citizen of "Ukraine."

Alf Redekopp

## 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.



**Mennonite  
Heritage  
Centre**

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## Reflections and Thanks

As briefly noted in the March 2013 *Mennonite Historian*, I am anticipating saying good-bye to the Mennonite Heritage Centre by the end of July, after 19 years. I have been the director for the past 13 years and worked as the half-time archivist for 6 years before that. My first day in the office was August 1, 1994. I have enjoyed serving the church all 19 years and can say it was the best job I've ever had.

As I reflect, I am struck by how fortunate the Centre has been in having very little staff change over the last four decades. This has definitely made my job easier. I am very grateful for the administrative assistance of Connie Wiebe who has worked here 21 years, and for the archival work of Conrad Stoesz (half-time), with whom I have worked the entire time that I've served as director. Ray Dirks, MHC Gallery curator has also been my colleague for the entire duration of my directorship. Often taken for granted, these are the people that have kept the Heritage Centre a first class institution.

I also want to thank another group of supporters -- those who served in a similar capacity before me. They are Lawrence Klippenstein (director from 1974-1997), Ken Reddig (with whom I worked at the Centre for MB Studies (1987-1990) and here at the MHC (1997-1999), and Peter Rempel (who first encouraged me to apply for the assistant archivist job which he was vacating in 1994).



**Simon Hamm, a math major at Canadian Mennonite University is fulfilling his CMU Practicum Placement at the Centre this summer. Here, he is seen working at completing an index for the *Canadian Mennonite* for the years 1953-1971.**

Then, there was Dennis Stoesz (now of Goshen, IN), who served as acting director at the MHC (1984-1986), whose understanding of the archival profession I cherished and whose work in Winnipeg and later in Goshen inspired me.

Those that served on committees or those who were hired or commissioned for specific projects, are another group of people that I enjoyed working with. They include Adolf Ens, John J. Friesen, Hans Werner, Helmut Harder, Esther Epp-Tiessen, Anna Ens, Helene Warkentin, and Bert Friesen. Some of the most special volunteers include Margaret Kroeker, Edward Enns, John I. Friesen, Jake I. Friesen, and the late Jake K. Wiens.

There were also CMU student archival assistants each year, students who completed their practicum placements at the Centre, and special project archivists who were hired as grant funding became available. It was a privilege to work with so many people over the years. Thank you to those named and the many that I have not named.

Not only does the end of July mark the end of 19 years of service at the Centre, it also marks the end of 26 years in archival work. When I began, in August 1987, personal computers were relatively new in offices. Typewriters were still in use for many tasks. For example, at the Centre for MB Studies, we had one computer which was shared by the regular and part-time staff. By the early 1990s we began to learn about networking and through the installation of a dial-up modem we could begin to communicate with people "instantly" from around the world, and we could begin to access university libraries who had already been using large main frame computers to store catalogued records. Not long after that we became familiar with the world wide web and the protocol of how it could be used to link and make accessible information. By 1997, offices were installing local area networks with high speed internet access and gone were the dial-up modems. At the Heritage Centre I launched its first website in February 1996. By 1999 we had added the description and inventory of 200 congregational collections held at the Centre. The next decade saw only more information become accessible through the web. It was enjoyable, challenging and quite fulfilling to have been part of this big change in communication and accessible information.



**Alf Redekopp chatting with Ken Reddig (on right, former MHC director) at a celebration event on May 29, 2013 in recognition of Alf's 26 years of service to the Mennonite community. Photo credit: Moses Falco.**

My personal interest and avocation in Mennonite history began through the pursuit of genealogy and family history. Twenty years before beginning to work in Mennonite archives, a public school teacher encouraged me to include a 4-generational pedigree chart with an autobiographical writing assignment. This Grade 8 assignment began my pursuit of tracing every ancestral line and compiling the descendants of every known ancestor of mine. Many hours spent with a 90-year old grandmother and hours of enjoyment documenting familial relationship, was a teenage hobby that few people knew about, or that I would ever have imagined would lead to a career and a calling to support the Mennonite church and its historic witness. Through the lens of genealogy and family history, I began to see the story of a people, the expressions of faith in God, and the challenge of learning from the lives of all who had gone before. I thank God for the passion he gave me for this work; I pray that he may use my contribution to his glory; and that I will be judged mercifully for what I have left undone. We archivists call that the growing "back-log"! Thanks be to God and Lord have mercy!

*Alf Redekopp*

## CMBS update

At the Winnipeg Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies this spring has seen a number of transitions and developments—five in particular.

First, we said goodbye to Yvonne Snider-Nighswander. Yvonne retired from her role as archival assistant after almost two years with CMBS. She made a large contribution by processing archival donations (sorting, describing, filing, and indexing).

Yvonne's cheerful and efficient presence added much value to the Centre and its ministry. We wish her much joy as she continues on to her next adventures.



Yvonne Snider-Nighswander

Second, the Centre announces the appointment of Kate Woltmann to the position of archival assistant. Kate worked with CMBS last summer, sorting and describing two donated collections of personal papers from Roland Marsch and Reuben Baerg. She also programmed the search feature for the *MB Herald* on USB drive.



Kate Woltmann

We look forward to Kate's involvement in the ongoing work of the Centre: resourcing MB churches and their leaders for the mission of God that we share.

Third, Amanda Bartel is this year's recipient of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission archival internship. The selection committee chose her from a strong field of candidates from universities and colleges in the U.S. and Canada.

Amanda will spend one week at each of the four MB archival centers (Hillsboro, Kan.; Fresno, Calif.; Abbotsford, B.C.; and Winnipeg) during May and June 2013. In addition to experiencing functioning archives, she will gather stories and images that promote the mission of church archives.

Amanda is a student at Bluffton (Ohio) University. The internship is made possible in part by support from the Katie Funk Wiebe fund. For more information, go to [www.mbhistory.org](http://www.mbhistory.org).

Fourth, the Centre was also busy hosting two events during the weekend of June 7 and 8, 2013—the book launch for Maureen Klassen's book *It Happened in Moscow* (Kindred, 2013) and the Annual General Meeting for the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission. The members of the Commission include: Don Isaac (Hillsboro, Kan.), Dora Dueck (Winnipeg), Valerie Rempel (Fresno, Calif.), Abe J. Dueck, (Winnipeg), Julia Reimer (Fresno, Calif.), and J. Janzen (Abbotsford, B.C.). The ex officio members include: Peggy Goertzen (Hillsboro, Kan.), Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Kevin Enns-Rempel (Fresno, Calif.), and Jon Isaak (Winnipeg).

Fifth, are you curious about what was donated to the Centre in the last months? Accessions include:

- Material related to Gerhard J. Klassen (1903-1965): 1 photo, 1 photo of sermon page, 12-page translation of his journal, and a 3-page reflection on the journal's content (#2013-01, 2013-04).
- Church Ministries, Canadian Conference of MB Churches, office files: correspondence, human resources, and reports (1988-2012). This office grew from Church Health, to R21-01 (Regenerate 21-01), and included Evangelism Canada, to finally become Church Ministries. The office was closed in 2012. Its mandate is being picked up by Leadership Development (#2013-03).



Amanda Bartel

- 21 documents and one CD of photos (67 images) referenced in Maureen Klassen's book, *It Happened in Moscow* (#2013-05).
- Photograph of North Kildonan MB church building committee at the site of the future McIvor Avenue MB church (1976) (#2013-06).
- 4 folders of writing by J.H. Quiring (1913-2004): sermons, reflections on married life, devotional messages, and stories from prairie life (#2013-07).
- Autobiography by Jake Balzer (1918-) (#2013-08).
- Autobiography by Shirley Penner Bergen (1935-) (#2013-09).
- 3 file folders of personal correspondence from MB missionary Ruth Klassen (1937-): letters, field reports, program evaluations, and meeting minutes; one folder from each of her fields of service: Columbia, Spain, and Mexico (#2013-10).
- 12 wire recordings of church events from the 1940s, 1950s (#2013-11).

If you have correspondence, church meeting minutes, journals, sermon notes, photographs, or old books, please contact us to arrange for an assessment and/or donation arrangement. If you want to see an index and description of the Personal Papers in the Centre's archival collection, go to [www.mbconf.ca/cmbs](http://www.mbconf.ca/cmbs).

--Jon Isaak

## Family Secrets

cont'd from p. 2)

Perhaps there was for Grandma a comfort at not being able to speak them anymore, even if it came at the cost of hardly being able to speak at all. In any case, on a dreary day, 16 December 1976, exactly fifty years, twelve weeks and two days after she pledged herself to CF in Moscow, Grandma breathed her last, and took her secrets to the place where there are no secrets, and all is mercy.

Dad was content to live with the unknown—or perhaps the word is *resigned*. I have no doubt that these unknowns, these uncertainties, shaped his character and his life's journey in profound ways. And if his, then also mine and my siblings, and on through all other family and friends who were touched by our father's life.

And so it is that the remarkable, providential journey of discovery chronicled in Maureen's book *It Happened in Moscow*, is a book for all of us. Remarkable that Maureen and Herb would move to Moscow in the 1990s. Providential that Erika's lifelong passion to find her brother would bear fruit while he was still alive, and that dad was able to have two years to process his newfound identity before the cancer returned and he was, as the biblical phrase goes, "gathered to his fathers."

Maureen has done us all (but especially those of "the tribe of Harold") a great service in crafting this memoir of discovery: probing the life and character of a man who was virtually unknown to his firstborn son, outlining the grace-filled contours of one woman's extraordinary life. But above all, uncovering the fingerprints of the divine hand during some of the most ominous upheavals of the twentieth century.

This tale is a story of secrets revealed, yes. But perhaps the greatest revelation is that in the midst of an ever-changing world of revolution and war, suffering and exile, migrations, marriages broken and renewed, there is One who endures as Emmanuel, which is "God with us."

Randy Klassen is a Bible instructor at Bethany College, Hephburn, Saskatchewan.

## A Rare and Unique Find

by Peter Letkemann (Winnipeg)

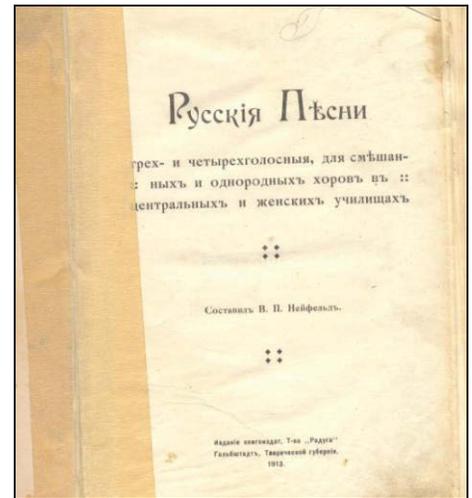
The Mennonite Heritage Centre recently received a copy of a rare and unique Russian-Mennonite song book entitled: *Russkia Pesni – trekh- i chetiiryekh-golosnia, dlya smishannikh' i odnorodniikh' khorov' vy' tsentral'nikh' i zhenskikh' uchilishchakh'* (Russian Songs [in] 3- or 4-parts, for mixed or equal voice choirs in Central- and Girl's Schools). This collection was prepared by the well-known teacher and conductor Wilhelm Peter Neufeld (1854/56?-1923) and first published in 1896 in Halbstadt by Neufeld's father Peter Neufeld. Wilhelm Neufeld taught in Gnadenfeld from 1881-1898 and in the Halbstadt *Zentralschule* from 1898-1911. He was also an ordained minister and choir director in the Gnadenfeld congregation. [1]

There is no known copy of this first edition in existence – the only information we have is a short advertisement in the back of the *Choralbuch*, also edited by Wilhelm Neufeld and published in 1897. Now we know that a second edition of *Russkia Pesni* was printed one hundred years ago in 1913 by Raduga Publishing House in Halbstadt (Molochna). It is a copy of this second edition that was donated by Mr. Harry Giesbrecht of Winnipeg, along with other used books, to Sam's Place in Winnipeg. Manager James Neufeld recognized the value of the small book and forwarded it to Alf Redekopp for deposit in the MHC; Alf in turn asked me whether I knew anything about this publication.

I first learned of the *Russkia Pesni* almost thirty years ago, while researching my dissertation on "The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia," [2] At the time I found no existing copy in any Mennonite archive in North America or Europe.

The book contains 45 short 3- and 4-part choral settings by well known Russian composers such as Tchaikovsky, Anton Rubinstein, Arkhangelsky, and the well-known "Unser Vater" attributed to Bortniansky, as well as Russian translations of German songs by Carl Maria von Weber, Franz Abt, Karl Zelter, Konstantin Kreutzer and Gustav Pfeihl.

The book belonged to Heinrich Gerhard Doerksen, father-in-law to Harry Giesbrecht. Heinrich Doerksen was born in Petershagen (Molochna) on 17 November 1900. He studied in Halbstadt at the *Zentralschule*, the *Kommerzschule* and



finally at the *Lehrerseminar* [Teacher Training Seminar]. He taught briefly in the early 1920s but his teaching career was cut short by the atheistic policies of the new Bolshevik government in Soviet Russia. His parents immigrated to Canada in 1924 and Heinrich followed in 1926. He settled in Pigeon Lake and became a farmer. He was baptized in the Winnipeg North End MB Church, attended the Springstein MB Church and later the Central MB Church in Winnipeg. He served for many years as choir conductor and later as a deacon. Doerksen died on 5 December 1980. [3] We are grateful to the Doerksen and Giesbrecht families for preserving this precious book and making it available to the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

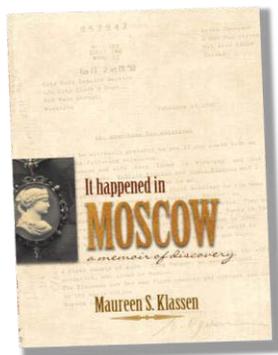
The Neufeld collection forms an interesting companion to the songbook *Sangesblüten. 205 der schönsten und beliebtesten Lieder in Ziffern für die deutsche Elementarschule in Russland*. This collection was prepared by Lehrer Jakob Froese on behalf of the Chortitza Teacher's Society and published by Raduga in 1914. In addition to 144 German songs it also contained 61 *Russkia Pesni*. Together, these two song collections show Russian Mennonites on the eve of World War I trying to foster their Russian heritage and demonstrate their loyalty to the Russian Imperial State.

### Endnotes

1. Peter Letkemann, "Russian Mennonite Choral Conductors: Medley of Opportunities in the New World," *California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin*, No. 45 (Fall 2006), 1-8. P.M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood*, 737-738.
2. Peter Letkemann, "The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1915," Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985.
3. [Obituary] "Heinrich G. Doerksen," *Der Bote*, 14 January 1981, 6.

**Mennonite Brethren Historical  
Commission  
and Kindred Productions**

announce release of:



“This is a riveting story of a family, a secret that spans Revolution and World War, and a stunning discovery. **Maureen Klassen** leads us beneath and beyond the story recounted in her earlier book, *Ambassador to His People: C.F. Klassen and the Russian Mennonite Refugees*, which she wrote with her husband, Herb.

“In *It Happened in Moscow*, Maureen’s writing gives life to a Russian woman seeking her brother in Canada, to an intrepid man arrested by the KGB and never heard from again, and to the amazing woman at the heart of this story, her mother-in-law, Mary Brieger Klassen. This memoir attests to our human impulse to recover the truth and it demonstrates the grace to sit with the silence of the past.”

—**Connie Braun**, author, *The Steppes are the Colour of Sepia*

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**Book Notes**

by Jon Isaak

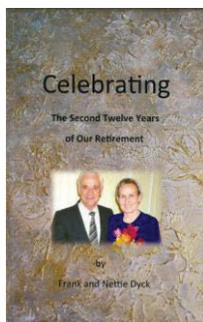
Darlene Klassen, *What Kind of Goodbye?* (whatkindofgoodbye @ sasktel.net, 2012), 28 pp.

The fruit of personal experience and time spent in ministry with children and families, Darlene’s book is a resource to help children, and those who care for them, walk through the difficult journey of grief. When a parent,



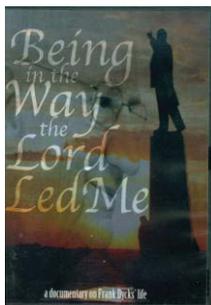
grandparent, or other loved one dies, a child will grieve deeply, but often differently than an adult. Paintings by prairie landscape artist, Samantha McRorie, adds to the beauty of this book. In thoughtful and invitational ways, the text and the pictures create a space for children to record treasured memories of the person who is gone.

Frank and Nettie Dyck, *Celebrating the Second Twelve Years of Our Retirement* (Sportswood, 2012), 102 pp. This book narrates the ministry of Frank and Nettie Dyck in Ukraine and Armenia from 2000 to 2012. In addition to



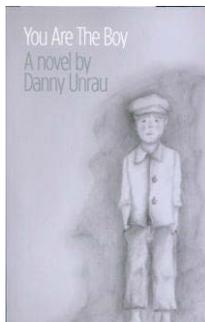
teaching short Bible/theology courses, Frank was involved in several construction projects. In Bolkovoe, near four former Mennonite villages (Gnadenau, Alexanderwohl, Furstenwerder, and Rueckenau), Frank managed the construction of a new church building using Ukrainian materials and construction trades. The first service at the Evangelical-Mennonite Church of Bolkovoe took place on December 21, 2003. In Zaporozhye, Frank helped with fundraising for the construction of new buildings at the Zaporozhye Bible College and Seminary. Already known for helping to re-establish “houses of prayer” in the former Soviet Union in the late 1990s (see Frank Dyck, *The Kutuzovka Church: A Modern Day Miracle* (MennoMedia, 2001), these two additional construction projects attest to the living legacy of Frank and Nettie Dyck.

*Being in the Way the Lord Led Me: A Documentary of Frank Dyck’s Life* (Skeleton Key Films and Vanishing Light Productions, 42 min, special features). This DVD tells the story of “Frank [see previous book] Dyck and his faith in God throughout a period of world history that witnessed incredible changes, terrible suffering and pain. After many years of living in Canada, Frank and his wife Nettie made themselves available to be used by God to bring a message of hope to a people who believed they had been abandoned and forgotten. Frank’s story is an encouragement to all of us that the



‘needy will not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the afflicted perish forever’ (Ps 9:18). Directed by film maker Mike Klassen (Frank’s grandson) with incredible cinematography by Nick Matthews, this film is a creative, compelling piece, with a beautiful story as told by Frank himself” (from the DVD jacket).

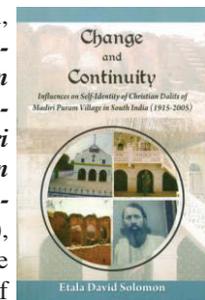
Danny Unrau, *You Are the Boy* (Friesen Press, 2012), 206 pp. This is the first novel by the Mennonite story-telling preacher. Noted for his previous books of short stories *Saints, Sinners & Angels* (1997) and *Rogues, Rascals & Rare Gems* (1999), this novel traces the journey of Pastor Ben from Canada to Russia to Jerusalem. A page-turning drama that weaves through Mennonite history, Jewish-Christian relations, a German Nazi concentration camp, family systems theory, and DNA research. Danny Unrau manages to pull off an intricate plot spanning 125 years, while at the same time offering provocative insights into the formation of human identity and the challenges of inter-faith dialogue. For example, at one point, Ben at a café in Jerusalem says to another, “I’d say it’s unfortunate that we have come to talk about Christianity and Judaism as two faiths, rather than a variant on one. I would submit that they shared something absolutely remarkable right at the outset, to be positive, and what’s more, to be negative, both present-day orthodox Judaism and orthodox Christianity are sorry shadows of their intended selves. That much they have in common” (p. 116).



Etala David Solomon, *Change and Continuity: Influences on Self-Identity of Christian Dalits of Madiri Puram Village in South India (1915-2005)* (ISPCK, 2012), 225 pp. This is the published version of E.D. Solomon’s 2008 PhD dissertation from Trinity International University (Deerfield, IL). An ethnographic study, Solomon uses interview questions to study a particular peasant church (Mennonite Brethren) of Dalits (formerly classless or untouchable)

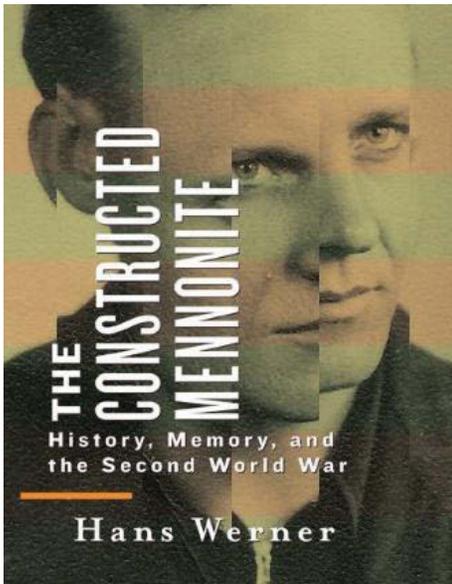
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Change and Continuity: Influences on Self-Identity of Christian Dalits of Madiri Puram Village in South India (1915-2005)



Etala David Solomon

## Book Reviews



*The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory and the Second World War.* By Hans Werner. Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2013. Pp. 205 \$ 27.95.

Reviewed by Colin Neufeldt, Associate Professor of History, Concordia University College of Alberta.

Those interested in understanding the conflicted responses of Soviet Mennonites to Stalin's terror and World War II should read *The Constructed Mennonite*. The book is the biography of the author's father and namesake, Hans Werner, and tells "the life story of an otherwise ordinary person who experienced the upheavals of the twentieth century in the form of war and totalitarianism from a unique perspective" (3f).

The author subdivides his father's biography into four major periods. The first period, when the author's father was known as "Hans," begins in 1917 with his birth and childhood in the Mennonite colony of Slavgorod, Siberia. The author goes on to describe the impact of the death of Hans' father, Hans' relationship with his mother and his life with an abusive stepfather, his family's flight to Moscow in 1929 and their attempt to escape Soviet Russia, the family's forcible return to Slavgorod, and his stepfather's subsequent suicide. The second period focuses on Hans' life as a teenager and young man, when he was known as "Ivan." This period commenced during Soviet collectivization in the early 1930s, when Ivan began working on a collective farm and eventually found employment in a Machine Tractor Station.

In 1938 he was drafted into the Red Army and trained as a tank driver. He served during the Winter War in early 1940 and the first days of *Operation Barbarossa*. The third period of Hans' life begins shortly after his capture by the German *Wehrmacht* in June 1941, when Hans came to be known as "Johann." Because of his ethnic German heritage and language skills, Johann worked as a translator for the German *Wehrmacht*. He also served in the German army as a soldier, truck driver and Zugmaschine driver. Johann survived many harrowing and life-threatening experiences before being captured and interned by the Americans as a German POW. Johann was eventually released, but still had to endure the hardships that came with being a displaced person ("DP") in post-war Germany. Life improved for Johann when he married Margarethe Letkemann (a Soviet Mennonite refugee from Khortytsia, Ukraine), and the two eventually emigrated to Canada. Life in Canada initiates the fourth period of Hans' life, when he became known as "John" after he and his family settled in southern Manitoba. To illustrate these four periods of Hans' life, the author relies on stories the author heard and interviews he conducted with his father and family members, research in German civilian and military archives, and secondary sources on relevant topics.

*The Constructed Mennonite* is also an investigation of the nature of autobiographical memory. Throughout the book the author asks probing questions about how and why we remember specific incidents from our past, why our memory discards or ignores historical events, and why it constructs and invents "facts" and stories to define our past identities. Using the research of leading scholars in literature, the neurosciences, psychology and oral history, the author finds clues about how to interpret and understand his father constructed narratives. In retelling his father's life story, the author is really reconstructing the constructions and inventions of his father's memories.

While many of the accounts in *The Constructed Mennonite* are credible, some seem implausible: Johann's dramatic parachute jump from a burning plane and subsequent rescue by a German submarine in the Mediterranean push the boundaries of believability, as does his attendance at the Nuremberg Trials where he ostensibly witnessed Hermann Goring's sentencing. Not surprisingly, the

author has trouble squaring these fantastic constructed narratives with his father's military deployments during the war. The author is also surprised by secrets and disconcerting facts that his father never disclosed to him in person: one such fact was that his father had been married at least twice prior to his marriage to the author's mother, Margarethe Letkemann.

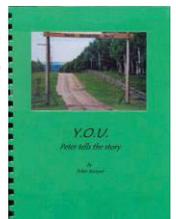
From this reviewer's perspective the book does have one shortcoming: the chapter dealing with the early life of the author's mother and her escape from Soviet Ukraine seems rushed and incomplete. Overall, however, the book is well-written and coherent, and helps to fill some lacunae in this period of Soviet Mennonite history. For these reasons *The Constructed Mennonite* is a "must read" for anyone interested in Soviet Mennonite history and the reconstruction of historical memory.

## Book Notes

(cont'd from p. 7)

in Madiri Puram village (pseudonym), South India. When the Christian gospel entered the village it brought remarkable changes in faith, community life, health and hygiene, social dynamics and education. Yet in several ways Christian Dalits of this village continue to practice former traditions, social and economic statuses, split morality, and follow a Panchayat way of governance (elder council). Solomon explores the riddle of the continuance of traditional practices despite a century of Christian presence.

Peter Rempel, *Y.O.U. [Youth Orientation Units]: Peter tells the Story* (Mennonite Central Committee of Alberta, 2010), 97 pp. A commemorative book, with photos and letters, narrates the formation and contribution of the Y.O.U.



program in Warburg, Alberta. In the ranch country near Edmonton, Peter Rempel and several others realized a dream to build a rural work setting for young offenders between 16 and 20 years of age. The idea was to provide young men, who were serving criminal sentences, an opportunity to build character and to learn occupational skills so that they could reorient toward being productive members of society. For Peter, Y.O.U. gave real life expression to the Christian gospel. See also Urie A. Bender *Stumbling Heavenward...*, about Peter Rempel (Hyperion, 1984).