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Mennonite Historian

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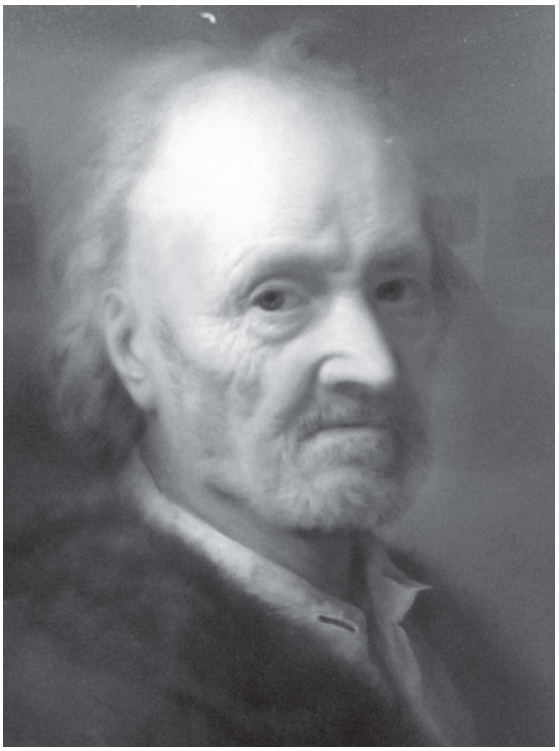

Balthasar Denner, *Old Man*, 1726–1736, oil on copper, Gemäldegalerie, Berlin (figure 1, left). Balthasar Denner, *Portrait of Princess Ulrike Sophie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin*, 1735, oil on copper, Schwerin Castle (figure 2). Photo: Courtesy of Nina Schroeder. See story on p. 2

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Balthasar Denner: At the Intersection of Mennonite Studies and Art History

by Nina Schroeder

In memory of my grandfather, William Schroeder (1933–2013), an inspirational teacher, map maker, and Mennonite historian.

The eighteenth-century German painter Balthasar Denner (1685–1749) grew up in a Mennonite community in Altona near Hamburg, Germany and proceeded to distinguish himself as an internationally acclaimed painter. As a portraitist, Denner was sought after by royalty in a variety of German courts, and in the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and England. He also painted many elite intellectuals and artists, including the auspicious Baroque composer George Friedrich Handel.[1]

Denner was particularly celebrated for his virtuosic character studies of elderly women and men (figure 1). These pictures of anonymous sitters fall into the pictorial tradition of the *tronie*, the Dutch term for "face." Astonishingly lifelike, the *tronies* were prized collector's items, and they fetched record-breaking prices. Denner cultivated two distinct styles for painting the face: the contrast between Denner's character study of the old man and his portrait of Princess Ulrike Sophie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin demonstrates the variability and flexibility in his working style.

He presents the princess with a flawless porcelain complexion, her face is a smooth oval, and her dainty lips curve in a generic but pleasant smile (figure 2). As befits a royal portrait, the sitter is presented in an idealized and flattering manner. As a portraitist, Denner achieved the looser French-influenced style that was popular for court portraits among the elite around Europe. Though these portraits seem somewhat stiff and bland to present-day viewership, the format ascribes to eighteenth-century notions of decorum and the conventions that defined a "good likeness" at that time.

By contrast, in Denner's *Old Man*, he has taken the utmost care to include every wrinkle and capture the way that light plays off of the sitter's eyes, his time-worn skin, and the soft fur on his collar. This painting and his other *tronies* have their origins in modes of painting popularized in Holland during the seventeenth century. With these *tronies* it was Denner's ability to paint the anonymous face with unflinching honesty, and detailed attention to every blemish and flyaway hair, that intrigued royalty and elite intellectuals. Today, Denner's paintings can be found in both major museums and private collections around Europe.[2]

Denner is one of very few eighteenth-century artists to emerge from a Mennonite background. His particularly celebrated status as an artist and his identity not only as an artist of Mennonite origins, but as the son of the well-respected Mennonite preacher Jacob Denner (1659–1746) makes his story all the more unique. As a case study, Denner's career—occupying an intersection in the fields of both Mennonite studies and art history—provides an opportunity to explore the subject of the Mennonite relationship to visual art and artists; it also provides a helpful and fascinating picture of the elite lifestyle that could be attained by successful eighteenth-century itinerant court artists.

Forgotten Artist

Despite Denner's successful career and positive reception during his lifetime, he has been paid very little academic attention either in Mennonite circles or in art historical circles. The absence of scholarship on Denner's art can in part be explained by the broader neglect of eighteenth-century German art within the field of art history. In 1675, the artist and art theorist Joachim von Sandrart noted that due to the ravages of the Thirty Years' War in Germany, "art fell into oblivion and those who professed it, into poverty and shame. Thus, [artists] dropped the palette and picked up the halberd or the beggar's stick instead of the brush."[3] This narrative of a halt to German artistic innovation in the eighteenth century has persisted in art historical literature.

Balthasar Denner, *Princess Ulrike Sophie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin*, 1735, oil on canvas, Schwerin Staatliches Museum, Schwerin (figure 3). Photo: Courtesy of Nina Schroeder.

The largely overlooked status of Denner's *tronies* today is also likely a product of a shift in art theoretical ideology regarding naturalism. The virtuosity of these works was never questioned, but it was interpreted by eighteenth-century critics such as Horace Walpole (1717–1797) and J.B. Descamps (1714–1791) as compulsive attention to detail rather than true genius.[4] As noted by the Dutch biographer Johan van Gool in 1750, Denner's *tronies* earned the nickname of *Porendenner* due to the visibility of every pore and wrinkle.[5] Denner's finely painted *tronies* have perhaps been unfairly overlooked due to a combination of circumstance and changing taste. The available biographical information indicates that these paintings remained exceptionally expensive and coveted works throughout the artist's lifetime.

A variety of scholars engaged in religious studies—and Mennonite studies

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Genealogy and Family History

Epp Diaries Revisited

by Conrad Stoesz

Diaries provide readers with an eyewitness account to times long past. Some diaries have survived many generations, in spite of flood, fire, infestation, and hasty migration. Thanks to families who have taken care of these diaries—and for people with skills to read difficult scripts and translate them—we today are able to catch a glimpse of what life was like long ago.

The David Epp family has a long tradition of keeping diaries. David Epp (1781–1843) and his son Jacob Epp (1820–1890) are some of the oldest diarists in this Epp family, with family diaries spanning 1837–1986. After Jacob Epp's death in 1890, the diaries were auctioned off to family members. Of the seven diaries, only three have survived. Edited translations of these diaries were published by John B. Toews[1] and Harvey Dyck.[2]

Typically, Mennonite diaries contain only short entries that record facts and little else. However, the Epp diaries contain lengthy descriptions, some three or four paragraphs, complete with recorded descriptions, emotions, and opinions. Diaries such as these are an invaluable source of information on a host of issues, including family genealogical history. While the published versions of the diaries are selective,[3] they do give a remarkable window into the Epp family and the larger Russian Mennonite community.

The tedious work of genealogists is a labour of love and, when coupled with generosity, provides others with a wealth of documents and information. Noteworthy in this regard is Glenn Penner, who worked with the David Epp and Jacob Wall diaries in 2002 extracting genealogical data, now available online.[4]

A recent addition to this collection includes a partial extraction of genealogical information from the document known as the "Original Genealogical Register of the Jacob D. Epp Family, 1870–1890 (diary No. 6)," housed at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. The original translation of this slight volume was done by Dennis David Epp, great-grandson to Jacob Epp, in 1996. Research has now been completed to extract a list of close to 200 marriages performed by Jacob D. Epp during the years 1853–1890, while he was living in the Judenplan and Baratov-Schlachtin Colonies.

Other genealogical information in Epp's diary No. 6 stretching from 1750 to 1890 still remains to be extracted. Some of the data is not yet found in the most recent GRANDMA genealogy database, thus making it a valuable resource for genealogists.

This new extraction will be posted together with the listing of the archival materials on the Mennonite Heritage Centre's web site and will be submitted to mennonitegenealogy.com.

Endnotes

1. David Epp, *The Diaries of David Epp: 1837–1843*, translated and edited by John B. Toews (Regent College, 2000).
2. Jacob D. Epp, *A Mennonite in Russia: the diaries of Jacob D. Epp, 1851-1880*, translated and edited, with an introduction and analysis, by Harvey L. Dyck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
3. *A Mennonite in Russia*, 6; see also *Mennonite Historian* 27/4 (Dec. 2001): 6, footnote 3.
4. See http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/new.htm.

Can you help?

Misha Toews is seeking help in finding information on the Toews family. Misha's father was Andrey Jacob Toews, son of Jacob Johan Toews, son of Johann Peter Toews. Jacob Johann Toews and his parents, Johann Peter Toews and Maria Isaak Thiessen, lived in the village of Tavricheskaya, Karassan, Crimea, until 1931, where Johann was a watch maker until 1921 and then farmed. It is suggested that some members of the Toews family were exiled to Altai region. Please contact Misha (mtevs@ya.ru) or contact William Yoder (kant50@web.de) to translate your findings into Russian.

Mystery Picture

Can you identify this couple? The information given on the back of the photo is: D. Epp Chortitza.

Queries

Send queries to Conrad Stoesz, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or email: cstoesz@mennonitechurch.ca

Recent Books

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

Balthasar Denner

(cont'd from p. 2)

more specifically—have focused attentions on Balthasar Denner's father, the preacher Jacob Denner. They have considered his contributions to Mennonite life in Hamburg, his popularity as a preacher, and the content of his sermons.[6] However, Balthasar Denner has, until recently, received little attention in Mennonite scholarship.[7] In 1992, William Schroeder, writing on Jacob Denner, identified Balthasar, and Jacob Denner's son-in-law Dominicus van der Smissen (1707–1760)—also a pupil of Balthasar Denner's—as renowned portrait artists.[8] He further incorporated Denner into Mennonite studies with his 1994 booklet on Denner, and his 2004 article for the *Mennonite Historian*.[9]

In the 1980s and '90s, William and Augusta Schroeder took the opportunity to travel through Europe, where they made an effort to go and see a variety of Denner's paintings in Hamburg, Vienna, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Copenhagen. My own research interests in Denner were inspired by my grandfather's fascination with Denner's art, and his interest in sharing Denner's story with those around him.[10] The process of studying Denner's artistic career has involved retracing my grandfather's footsteps via visits to a variety of museums, as well as visits to additional galleries, art collections, and castles in Europe.[11] Today, some of Denner's court portraits are to be found in halls of succession in remote German castles like Schloss Schwerin and Schloss Ludwigslust, though most are carefully stashed away in the basement storage racks of museum vaults. Meanwhile, Denner's *tronies* generally retain a place of prominent display on the museum walls.

Mennonites and Art

Balthasar Denner was one of very few artists to emerge from a German Mennonite community in the eighteenth century. He grew up in Altona, near the free hanseatic city of Hamburg, which had done well, despite the ravages of the Thirty Years' War. Several Mennonite congregations made up of Netherlandish refugees established themselves there after 1601, and soon became successful business partners in the wider community. The large majority were Flemish Mennonites. This was a designation indicating both nuances of religious views and the group's origins in the Southern Netherlands—though most Flemish Mennonite communities in fact immigrated to Holland and Friesland over the course of the sixteenth century before moving to the Hamburg region.[12]

Denner's own family was a part of the smaller Dompelaar congregation, which practiced baptism by immersion. His father Jacob Denner had been the preacher for this congregation as of 1684.[13] Though many of the rural German congregations were very restrictive in their views on art, all evidence shows that Denner's Mennonite community in Hamburg was supportive of him, and he of them.

Mennonite congregations have historically emphasized simplicity of lifestyle, and they have consistently rejected use of art and images in worship practice. These religious views have been substantiated by biblically-based concerns regarding idolatry and concerns over misuse of funds on unnecessary finery. In many contexts, these beliefs developed into a broader suspicion of visual art, and led to fraught relationships between congregations and individuals who aimed to be painters. For instance, the portrait painter Enoch Seemann Sr. (b. 1661)—a near contemporary of Denner—was banned from his Danzig Mennonite congregation when he did not comply with the church elder's suggestion that he refrain from portraiture and paint only landscapes and other minor décor.[14]

Though it remained rare in the context of German, Swiss, and Russian Mennonite congregations, the success of Mennonite artists is not foreign to Mennonite history. The urban Dutch Mennonites of the seventeenth century—particularly among the more liberal Waterlander factions—provide a precedent for extensive engagement with art. Dutch Mennonites continued to uphold the importance of meeting in simple undecorated churches, but household inventories confirm that many affluent congregation members avidly collected artwork for their homes. During this period, a remarkable number of artists with Mennonite connections and Mennonite backgrounds also attained widespread success.[15]

Some Mennonite congregations in Northern German urban centres also seem to have been relatively supportive of visual art production. Given that Denner's father was a very public figure in the Mennonite community, the fact that Balthasar's activity as an artist did not raise issues supports the observation that artistic practice seems to have been more acceptable in Mennonite communities in the Hamburg region.

Denner's unfinished portraits of the forty-seven members of the court of Christian Ludwig II, Duke of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Ludwigslust Castle (figure 4). Photo: Courtesy of Nina Schroeder.

There is no concrete documentation confirming Denner's church involvements during his adult life; however, his ongoing concern for the welfare of his parents and his home community is evidenced by his involvement in the complicated situation that developed between the Countess Benedikte Margarethe Reventlow and Jacob Denner's congregation. Jacob Denner's preaching was so popular that he attracted large crowds, including royalty and many individuals from different denominational groups in surrounding areas. With such large groups attending his services, Denner arranged for a new church space to be built, and a member of the Flemish congregation, Ernst Pieters Goverts, was an important financial backer for the project along with the Countess Reventlow. After Goverts' death in 1728, Reventlow attempted to evict the congregation and take possession of the building as she was one of Goverts' creditors. She only relented when Denner agreed to paint one portrait of her per year in exchange for his father's ongoing use of the church space.[16] This agreement must have lasted until her death in the 1730s. While Denner maintained positive connections in Altona, his career took him and his family to courts around Europe where he produced and sold portraits, miniatures, still lifes, and genre pictures including his *tronies*.

Denner's Artistic Practice

At age 22 in 1707, Denner enrolled for studies at the Berlin Academy of Art, which was populated mainly by Dutch and French artists. His exposure there to these two distinct art traditions helps to explain Denner's comfort working in his two contrasting portrait and *tronie* styles.

His career as a portraitist was launched in 1709 with his first paid commission from Duke Christian August and his sister Maria Elizabeth, the abbess of Quindlinburg.[17] The Duke proceeded to invite Denner to come to Gottorp-Holstein where he painted a large group portrait including twenty-one members of the Duke's court. Van Gool notes that when Czar Peter the Great passed through the region on a military campaign, he was so struck with this portrait that he attempted to take it with him as a "gift."[18] Following this, Denner retained a steady flow of portrait commissions throughout his life.

As a court portraitist, Denner had a tangible role to play in creating the imagery that reinforced the status of many eighteenth-century royal families, and demonstrated the continuity of their dynastic lines. These portraits were made to sit in distinguished positions in palatial halls of succession. Denner's portraits of nobility generally ascribe to a French-influenced and highly idealized—even unnatural looking—style of portrayal. The German rulers from the smaller Northern courts, who were seeking to assert their power in a politically fractured climate, particularly sought to emulate the art and architecture of Versailles: they built ornate palaces and the portraits they commissioned from Denner often feature the finery and pastel rococo colour palette that had been popularized in the court of Louis XV.[19] By appropriating this style of portraiture, they hoped to associate themselves with existing visual rhetoric that connoted royalty.

Denner was frequently commissioned to paint multiple different portraits of the same ruler, or to paint one portrait and make several copies of it for distribution. These portraits could be used strategically to make political allegiances and provide reminders regarding royal succession. This was the case with Denner's portrayal, in 1740, of the child who would become Czar Peter III of Russia. Denner was invited to Kiel by Duke Friedrich Karl of Holstein-Gottorp to paint two life-size portraits of his son Karl Peter Ulrich and make ten more copies to be sent to courts around Europe. Karl Peter Ulrich's mother was Anna Petrovna, the exiled eldest daughter of Peter the Great; this made Karl Peter the rightful heir to the Russian throne. One of the young boy's portraits was sent to the childless Czarina Elizabeth who had staged a coup and seized power in Russia. Shortly after receiving the portrait she adopted Karl Peter and brought him from Mecklenburg to Russia.[20] As Horace Walpole notes, she liked the portrait of her nephew so much that in 1742 she offered Denner an annual fee of one thousand ducats, and promised to defray the expenses of his journey if he would come to Russia and act as court portraitist. However, Denner's parents were ailing and he preferred to move back to Altona, so he turned down the Czarina's offer.[21]

In his production of portraiture, Denner was not primarily concerned with artistic autonomy or creativity; this work was a secure source of income, and it was a business deal in which the buyer had a collaborative or even dominant role in determining the level of quality and the pose. The degree of refinement in the painted body and background clearly corresponded with payment arrangements between artist and patron.[22] The eighteenth-century travel writer Zacharias Konrad Uffenbach wrote that Denner charged more for miniatures than regular portraits, and he noted Denner's participation in the common practice of charging more for paintings that included the hands of the sitter.[23] Furthermore, Denner generally painted only the faces of his portraits. The bodies, clothing, and background were typically carried out by assistants, or by his two daughters and son.

An example of this variance in quality can be seen in the series of portraits of the four children of Duke Christian Ludwig II of Mecklenburg-Schwerin, commissioned in 1735. That year Denner painted two portraits of each child—one on copper and one on canvas—and, in each case, the portraits on copper are superior in quality to those on canvas. The portraits of Princess Ulrike Sophie provide a characteristic example. She is surrounded by symbols of nobility including an ermine-lined satin mantle, and powdered hair in both cases; however, the painting on canvas, with her hands awkwardly tucked away, is rendered with less finesse, and the body and drapery are inferior to the face (figure 3). Meanwhile, the portrait on copper includes gently poised hands, an outdoor background scene, and columns and curtains; the whimsical rococo colour scheme is also more prominently reflected in her wardrobe (figure 2).

The mysterious case of the forty-seven unfinished portraits of the court and household of Mecklenburg-Schwerin (1635) also vividly demonstrates Denner's specific engagement as the painter of the faces, and identifies the area left for assistants.[24] Now in Ludwigslust Castle, the heads float eerily on an unfinished grey layer of underpainting: each of the faces is carefully executed with unique distinguishing features, though they still retain a sense of decorum and uniformity in order to achieve the standards of likeness and flattery that were expected in portraiture at this time (figure 4).

Compared to the portraits, Denner's *tronies* differed substantially in purpose and intended locus of display. These were meant to be appreciated as masterpieces, and they were not made for palatial halls of succession, but for the intimate *kunstkammern* (also called art cabinets) of wealthy and royal collectors. In Denner's time, collecting was an important social and intellectual pursuit among the elite. Collectors sought to bring together curiosities including art, *naturalia*, and exotic goods. For this setting, the most prized artworks took the form of small paintings that could be closely examined in order to appreciate the artists' virtuosic skill and attention to detail. Adhering to this model for the cabinet picture, Denner succeeded overwhelmingly in drawing out a market of elite and royal buyers.

In 1721, Denner took up an invitation to move to London, where he painted many members of the Hanoverian court. He brought with him an intricately detailed painting of an old woman as a show piece, and news of its lifelikeness spread quickly.[25] Many interested art collectors clamoured to see the painting, and offered to purchase it for high prices, but Denner turned them all down. Ultimately, the Austrian ambassador convinced Denner to send the picture to Vienna where it was purchased by King Karl VI. Van Gool and Walpole both note that the emperor was so pleased with this painting that he purportedly carried the key for the cabinet where he kept the painting with him at all times.[26] Shortly after buying the first head study, the King commissioned a pendant painting of an old man, which Denner carried out in 1726.[27] These works were sold for a record price of 4,700 Imperial Guilders each. This was an enormous sum for a painting. As Vertue notes, it "probably was a higher price than any painter since the revival of that art ever had."[28]

Van Gool, who met Denner while living

(cont'd on p. 8)

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Mennonite

by Olivia Klippenstein

It wasn't until sixth grade that I realized it was possible to be more than just a Mennonite. We had been asked by our teacher to come up with one word that described ourselves, and then to write it on the large piece of lined paper pinned up at the front of the room. To this day I cannot remember what arbitrary word I chose to communicate the essence of my preteen self. Yet what I cannot forget is one of my classmates scrawling "Russian Mennonite" across the large sheet of paper. The phrase leapt out at me, as did a jealousy to be able to claim a cultural identity.

I had always been just a Mennonite, and that was that. But here I was, being informed that all this time I had been lost in an ethnic melee, unaware of where I or my family fit in this startling new world of options. As I recall, my classmate spent the better part of five minutes explaining to the rest of us ignorant peons how exactly he came to be of such a specific breed of verenike-eating, knippsbratt-playing people. Yet ever since, it has stretched into a long series of personal questions satisfied by very few facts.

I know that every year my high school band plays at the Remembrance Day service, and then at the cenotaph memorial service. I know that even though my community is mostly made up of Mennonites, who are famously pacifist, they will pin poppies on their lapels and gather in somber numbers to mourn the lives terminated by war. Again and again, as a new spring breeze shifts the trees circling the cenotaph, the crumpled men appear in dwindling attendance to receive recognition for their service.

And I'm always left wondering at the show of community support on a subject that is otherwise left alone with a greedy silence. When asked, my grandpa speaks vaguely of the disapproval at home of men who chose to fight. Still, few clear answers seem available in a town where those alive at the time are passing on to their final rest without talking to their children, and children's children, about the battle fought at home.

Intimidated by the imposing silence of history shelved only for the access of those who know words like "Russian Mennonite," it took the shove of four years and a practicum placement to push me through the doors of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives. And while it turns out that there is a terrifying amount of paper on the history of the people known as Mennonites, there are more than a few gems hidden in the vault.

For example, who would have guessed that my neighbour's father had served as a conscientious objector during World War II? Before building a successful appliance and furniture business, he quietly memorialized the life of young pacifists through the glance of his lens. A rare break from behind the camera captures this amateur photographer. Standing with his shirt sleeves rolled up past his elbows, he poses casually with his fellow workers in front of a tent nestled in Riding Mountain National Park. The same men who stand alongside him are the fresh faces and lanky limbs that spend hours at the side of the road clearing weeds and that jostle to be caught in the photographer's frame as they stand bareback in the lake, newly-made friends horsing around in the background. These are the men that lie silent beneath our southern Manitoban soil, the unassuming remains of the alternative to the bloody battlefield.

Yet lying next to these powerful pictorial testimonies on the table before me—as I work—is the transcript I am making for the voices of Mennonites that have been muted within their own community. The wives and daughters of men who went against their families' beliefs, who were convinced that pursuing active duty overseas was the best way to bring the war to a close, who established their own church in a town hostile to the idea of physical violence. What of these Mennonite voices, who are nodded to during the required memorial services, and then are lost between being known as veterans and being appreciated as such?

As I spend hours listening to the frayed voices of devoted church women, paging through the yellowed photographs of a C.O. chauffeur, the idea of "Mennonite" grows. It grows in diversity, in tenacity and passion, in God. It becomes more than perogies and bargain-hunting and church politics. To be Mennonite becomes a mouthpiece for what it is to be a human strugg-ling to pursue a way of life that not only satisfies the desire for a roof over your head and bread for your table, but fills that inner longing to be more than just a momentary mortal life. It is more than Russian or otherwise. It is the struggle to be a child of God in the kaleidoscope that is community, both local and global.

Olivia Klippenstein

Yet who will remember the horrors of war? The cost of refusing to fight, and of stopping short at nothing less than fighting? Who will take up the testimonies of this war-weary generation and place it gingerly in the hands of our youth as a writhing reminder of what it means to face hatred and familial love and self-identity? Who will make "Mennonite" more than just a title lost among tired old history books? Will you?

Archival resources are only as rich as the use we make of them. Without them, the faces and the voices lose their stories. The dusty C.O. worker becomes a spineless man who wants peace without fighting for it. The Mennonite soldier becomes an anomaly who, instead of encouraging discussion, ushers in a fidgety silence. There can be little true movement forward if those who came before us stop breathing in our memories, and cease to be the trailblazers of their time. We share the kinship of a fumbling youth with the inhabitants of the past, so let us embrace them.

Remembrance, and more importantly appreciation, for the lives of those who went before us must be maintained and grown, preserving the wisdom which can only be gained by personal experience. Yet this need not only be for those who fought a war. There are innumerable other stories waiting to be discovered. Archivists and archives, as here on our campus and throughout our nation, are bursting with life. Let us hear the voice of the freckled immigrant girl, feel the pain of a widowed housewife, see the sweat of the struggling farmer, and make it matter. Together, let us grow "Mennonite."

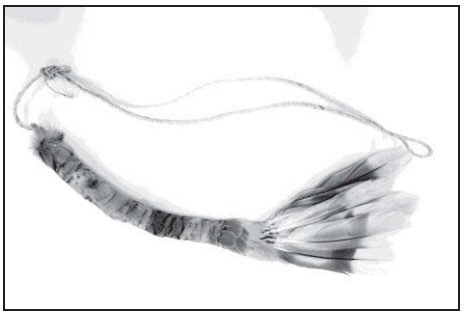
Olivia is a CMU student from Altona, Manitoba, who did a practicum in the MHC archives during fall 2014. This article first appeared in Doxa, the CMU student paper, and is reproduced here with permission.

Artifacts of Honour

by Jon Isaak

In addition to the Moro (Ayoreo) spear that was donated to the Centre in August 2014 (see *Mennonite Historian* 40/3 [Sept. 2014]: 7), the collection of artifacts associated with missionary Ann Klassen Wiens (1930–1988) received a further contribution in January 2015. Family members donated several items that Ann had acquired—items that later came into her family's possession—while she served as missionary, health promoter, and advocate among the indigenous peoples (Enlhet, Nivacle, Ayoreo) living near Yalve Sanga in the Chaco region of Paraguay.

Three items of particular interest are pictured: a warrior-hunter headdress, feathered necklace, and a carving tool. The whole CMBS team got involved in processing the artifacts. In correspondence with Paraguayan archivist Gundolf Niebuhr, CMBS archivist Conrad Stoesz learned that the Ayoreo held their warrior-hunters in high esteem. Only by killing a jaguar would an Ayoreo hunter earn the right to wear a headdress like the one pictured. In many native cultures, the wearing of animal skins or feathers was a way of transferring some of the attributes of the animal to the warrior-hunter. That such a headdress made of jaguar hide, parrot feathers, and falcon feathers came into Ann's possession is likely another indication of the esteem in which she was held by the indigenous peoples.



Three indigenous artifacts acquired by Ann Klassen Wiens and donated to CMBS by the Klassen family: warrior-hunter headdress (top), feather necklace, and carving tool. Photos: Courtesy of Dustin Wiebe.

Archival assistant Kate Regier constructed two special boxes designed to house and protect the feathered artifacts from deterioration. Editor Susan Huebert wrote the text for the upcoming Spring 2015 issue of *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, featuring the life and ministry of Ann Klassen Wiens. In focus are Ann's highly-regarded missionary skills of relating to the aboriginal peoples living near the Mennonite settlements in the Chaco, especially her friendly demeanor, ready laughter, strong faith in God, "can-do" spirit, and tenacious advocacy for aboriginal women and their families.

The carving tool, also pictured, is likely made from the same cast-off steel—left behind by oil and gas explorations in the area—that was used to fashion the sharp spear that came into Ann's possession, one similar to the spear that killed missionary Kornelius Isaak in 1958 (see *Profiles of Mennonite Faith*, No. 19, www.mbhistory.org). There is some evidence that one factor contributing to the hostility directed toward early missionaries was that they were associated with the oil and gas explorations that altered the traditional way of life (see *MH* 35/3 [Sept. 2009]: 1–2).

These artifacts and several others, now appropriately preserved and described, will help keep the inspirational story of Ann Klassen Wiens available for future generations.

Your story, my story, God's story…on the third storey

by Karla Braun

Sesame Street had burst on the scene in colour with short sketches and educational segments: talking heads and flannelgraph wasn't going to sustain children's attention on their television screens.

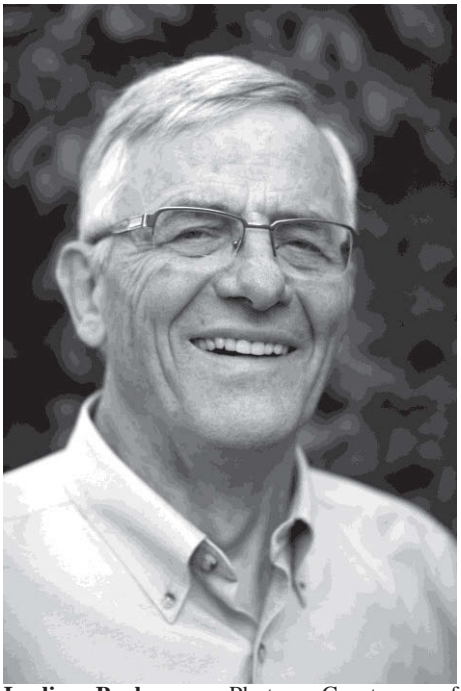
Into this environment MB Communications launched the half-hour TV program *The Third Story* in 1977. Along with a team of musicians, actors and technicians, pastor and cartoonist Lorlie Barkman created and produced 91 episodes for television: seven seasons over 15 years.

During studies at MB Biblical Seminary in Fresno, Cal., Barkman was intrigued by missiologist Hans Kasdorf's account of a culture that spoke with visuals and hand gestures. Hearing Kasdorf's teaching about contextualization through the lens of his passion, visual art, Barkman began to ask himself, *how do you present the word of God visually?*

"I'd tried linear preaching, logical propositions," he says, "but people weren't convinced."

Then he realized the huge role of story in the Bible: "it's only 30 percent propositional," he says, "and some 70 percent image, parable, poetry, history, story."

Each episode began with one word. Barkman and his team would attack it from different angles, eventually finding a science tie-in, a song tie-in, and Scripture to develop the theme. And drawings, of course. Episodes came to include personal stories recorded on the road, and brief interviews on questions related to the subject. *(cont'd on p. 8)*



Lorlie Barkman. Photo: Courtesy of Canadian Mennonite University.

The Third Story

(cont'd from p. 7)

In the early years, the show was targeted for children, using child actors gathered in the titular third-floor playroom of a house, spelling out lessons with the help of troubadour and mentor-figure Harry Loewen. After the third season when Ron Voth came on as host, the target was broadened to family viewing. In the final seasons, Garth Klassen and Phyllis Reimer served as hosts.

"Publicity went to the churches, so we always had a Christian audience—but we assumed we didn't," says Barkman. They wrote accordingly, using the Living Bible to keep Scripture quotations simple and accessible, and explaining Bible stories as though the audience were hearing them for the first time.

"We tried to have diversity in the show appeal to diversity in the audience," says Barkman.

"Jesus was mentioned unabashedly on the show," says Barkman

One of the remarkable things about *The Third Story* was that it was done in close collaboration with a local television station, CKY. Episodes would be recorded over the weekend when the television studio was not in use for regular programming. Over Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights, the *Third Story* team would feverishly record their segments with the help of CKY's camera operators and technicians.

"We had all their technicians's attention!" says Barkman. The show included commercial blocks, but "we never paid a cent for airtime." He recalls having a good rapport with CKY's people.

Barkman cherishes the memory of the diverse ages and abilities that worked on *Third Story*, from the amateur child actors to MB Communications's technically experienced director Neil Klassen, and avid young Barkman and his co-producer Marv Thiessen.

The Third Story also engaged creative people, in ways that weren't necessarily tapped by the regular functions of church. The show connected with students at MB Bible College for their talents, labour and ideas.

The Third Story had a two-year rhythm: one and a half years spent on production, half a year on marketing it to viewers and broadcasters. The crew would go on the road for promotion, to visit churches, and to ask around for affecting stories from real people to feature.

Barkman recalls that church members would sometimes complain about the difficulty of finding the show on television, as the 13 episodes of a season aired up to six times in different slots across the country. At its height, *The Third Story* also aired in the U.S. on the Christian Broadcasting Network.

However, "we didn't worry when our own constituents were confused by the irregular schedule because there was an audience," Barkman says. He estimates that only a quarter of the letters they received were signed with ethnoculturally "Mennonite" names.

Some letter-writers shared heart-breaking family situations; many wrote appreciatively of the comfort and encouragement of the show. "I asked Jesus into my heart," wrote one child; "it felt real good."

But technology was changing. "It was hard to keep the content exciting; harder to keep up with creativity and pizzazz in industry," says Barkman. After 15 years, it was time for something different. He was getting worn out by the demand for idea generation, ready to set aside the grind of television production for an invitation to pastor.

Barkman hasn't set aside his creativity since leaving *The Third Story*. The boy who finished his work early in grade school so he could doodle on the chalkboard has continued to use visual communication, returning to MB Communications, at that point called Family Life Network, to share his broad experience with Grant Hoeppner and other newly developing media ministries, such as Connecting Points for Kids. He also discovered the power of drawing to communicate with opposite ages by drawing out memories for seniors living with dementia.

The course of time ravages the electronic as well as the physical. The 2-inch tape on which *Third Story* was first recorded was obsolete and the ¾ inch pneumatic tape was degrading, so in 2011, the Centre for MB Studies asked Barkman to help digitize as many of the old tapes as possible, preserving them for posterity. That project is complete and 78 episodes have been digitized and are now accessible and part of the CMBS collection.

Karla is the associate editor of the MB Herald.

Balthasar Denner

(cont'd from p. 5)

in London, situates Denner—though German—among the Dutch school of painters in his encyclopedic biography of Dutch artists. He must have included the artist on the basis of his *tronies*, which bear the influence of Dutch art in their theme, technique, and colour scheme. *Tronies* of the elderly were first popularized by Rembrandt (1606–1669), Jan Lievens (1607–1674), and other Dutch artists of the 1620s and '30s. Denner's paintings also draw upon the lifelike and exceptionally detailed approach that is used in the "fine painting" popularized by the Leiden school of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675) and his followers. Also relevant are the many painted studies of apostles, saints, and prophetesses, which gave artists the opportunity to show off their skill in painting the wizened faces of the elderly looking heavenward or bent in prayer.

Distinct from apostle studies, Denner's *tronies* include few details of exotic costume and no attributes indicating any particular narrative or character role. The focus is placed entirely upon the carefully rendered face. While Denner's attention to detail makes these *tronies* fascinating collectables in their own right, there is also space for deeper interpretation. In Germany during Denner's lifetime there was a movement in intellectual and theological circles to reflect on God and spirituality via careful observation and description of the details of the created world.[29] Thus, Denner's paintings of elderly women and men could be understood as sites for spiritually-oriented reflection on the intricate details of creation rather than simply as exercises in virtuosic naturalism. Furthermore, sobering reminders of mortality, known as *memento mori* or *vanitas* themes, permeated many genres of art and also entered into Denner's artistic repertoire. This focus on *vanitas* is evident in a variety of Denner's still lifes and, arguably, it is appropriate to identify this theme in the interpretation of his *tronies*.

The wealthy patrons and collectors of the eighteenth century were evidently satisfied with Denner's ability to create a good likeness, and simultaneously mesmerized by his lifelike *tronies* intended for the context of the *kunstkammer*. The striking story of Balthasar Denner's life demonstrates that he was a business-savvy and artistically

versatile painter. Supported rather than suppressed by his Mennonite context, Denner rose to great acclaim, cultivating a broad patronage network and piquing the interest of elite collectors across Europe.

Nina Schroeder is a PhD Candidate in Art History at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario. Her doctoral research is focused on Anabaptist visual culture and Mennonite engagement with the art market in the Dutch Golden Age.

Endnotes

1. Balthasar Denner, *George Friedrich Handel*, 1736, oil on canvas, National Trust, Sevenoaks, Kent. Handel was also an avid art collector and his will indicates that he owned two other paintings by Denner. After Handel's death, his entire collection was auctioned off, but he took care to bequeath his valuable Denner *tronies* to his friend and librettist Charles Jennens—a fellow wealthy art collector, who collaborated with Handel on many projects including the libretto for Handel's *Messiah* (Thomas McGeary, "Handel as Art Collector: Art, Connoisseurship and Taste in Hanoverian Britain," *Early Music* 37/4 [Nov. 2009]: 533–574).
2. There are Denner paintings in such auspicious galleries as the Louvre (Paris), the Hermitage (St. Petersburg), the Rijksmuseum (Amsterdam), the Berlin Gemälde Gallerie, and the Vienna Kunsthistorisches Museum. His portraits can also be found in private collections and castles throughout Europe and England. There is even one portrait in a reading room in Oxford's Bodleian Library.
3. Joachim von Sandrart, *Teutsche Academie der Bau-, Bild- und Mahlerey-Künste* (Nuremberg: 1675). See also Ernst Scheyer, "Baroque Painting in Germany and Austria: A Gap in American Studies," *Art Journal* 20/1 (Autumn 1960): 9–18.
4. Horace Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (London: 1762), 42; J.B. Descamps, "Balthasar Denner," *La vie des peintres Flamands, Allemands et Hollandois*, vol. 4 (Paris: 1763), 259.
5. Johan van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg der Nederlandsche Kunstschilders en Schilderessen* (1750) (Soest: Davaco, 1971).
6. For further bibliography on Jacob Denner, see Michael D. Driedger, *Obedient heretics: Mennonite Identities in Lutheran Hamburg and Altona during the Confessional Age* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2002).
7. Balthasar Denner is addressed briefly in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, now also accessible via the *Global Anabaptist and Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*; see H. Van der Smissen, "Denner, Balthasar (1685–1749)," *GAMEO* (1956).
8. William Schroeder, "Jacob Denner's Life and Writings," *Mennonite Historian* 18/4 (Dec. 1992): 1–5.
9. William Schroeder, *Balthasar Denner (1695–1749): Portrait Artist*, Booklet (Winnipeg: 1994) and William Schroeder, "Balthasar Denner (1685–1749): Portrait Artist," *MH* 30/1 (Mar. 2004): 1–2.
10. In the field of art history there have been three graduate dissertations written on the subject of Denner. For a focus on the relationship and stylistic disparity between Denner's portraits and his *tronies*, see Nina Schroeder, *Painting the Face: Likeness and Lifelikeness in the Work of Balthasar Denner* (M.St. Dissertation, University of Oxford, Oxford, 2013). For a focus on Denner's *tronies*, see Gail Feigenbaum, *Head Studies by Balthasar Denner* (MA Dissertation, Oberlin College, Oberlin, 1976) and Marc Wellmann, *Balthasar Denners Studienköpfe* (MA Dissertation, Freien Universitat Berlin, Berlin, 1996).
11. This involved field work and photography at galleries and collections in Hamburg, Schwerin, and Ludwigslust.
12. Joachim Whaley, *Religious Toleration and Social Change in Hamburg, 1529–1819* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).
13. William Schroeder, "Jacob Denner's Life and Writings," *MH* 18/4 (Dec. 1992): 1–5. See also Driedger, *Obedient heretics*, on Jacob Denner and the Dompelaar Church, 42–48.
14. See Enoch Seemann Sr., *Offenbahrung und Bestraffung des gergen Hanszens Thorheit* (Stoltzenberg: 1697) and Nanne van der Zijpp, Dirk Kossen, and Harold S. Bender, "Art," *GAMEO* (1955).
15. For instance, a number of artists from Mennonite backgrounds were closely associated with the great painter of the Dutch Golden Age, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669). Rembrandt's art dealer, Hendrick Uylenburgh, was a Mennonite and sold many paintings to a network of Mennonites in Amsterdam and further afield. The Mennonite preacher, artist, and art dealer Lambert Jacobsz., from Leeuwarden in Friesland, also sold works by Rembrandt. Jacobsz. taught Govert Flinck and Jacob Backer—both from Mennonite backgrounds—who went on to be artists within Rembrandt's circle (the former as a pupil, the latter as a peer). Notable among printmakers is Jan Luyken, the artist who produced the artwork for Thieleman van Braght's 1685 edition of the *Martyr's Mirror*.
16. William Schroeder, *Balthasar Denner* (1994) and Driedger, *Obedient Heretics*, 46.
17. William Schroeder, *Balthasar Denner* (1994), 3.
18. Van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg*, 65.
19. Heike Kramer, *Palace Ludwigslust: Staatliches Museum Schwerin*, trans. Frank Hampson and Jennifer Ann Hampson (Schwerin, date of publication not listed).
20. Van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg*, 76. See also William Schroeder, "Balthasar Denner" (2004), 2.
21. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 43.
22. Van Gool, *De Nieuwe Schouburg*.
23. Translation of entry from Zacharias Conrad von Uffenbach's *Merckwürdige Reisen* in William Schroeder, *Balthasar Denner* (1994), 4.
24. These unfinished paintings are now on display in a room at Ludwigslust Castle, a branch of the Schwerin Staatliches Museum in Ludwigslust, Germany.
25. Denner, *Old Woman*, c. 1721, Gemäldegalerie, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
26. Walpole, *Anecdotes of Painting in England*, 43.
27. Denner, *Old Man*, c. 1726, oil on canvas, 37 x 31.5, Gemäldegalerie Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
28. George Vertue, *Vertue Note Books I*, Walpole Society, xviii (1929–1930), 76. See also *Vertue Note Books III*, 33.
29. This is reflected in the exceptionally description-oriented poetry of Denner's acquaintance and poet, the Altona Burgomaster Barthold Heinrich Brockes (Franziska Gottwald, "Skin before the Eye—The Art of Balthasar Denner [1685–1749] at the Intersection of Aesthetics and Sciences in Early Enlightenment Germany," unpublished conference presentation, UAAC, University of Waterloo [Nov. 2, 2007], 3).

A Meeting Date Divides the Mennonite Church of Canada

by Sam Steiner

The Old Order Mennonites in Ontario emerged over a 15-year period, from the 1870s until the final division within Mennonite Church of Canada (as it was called in the 19th century) took place in 1889.[1]

Difficulties steadily increased between Ontario Mennonites who were cautious about accepting influences from revivalist groups like the Evangelical Association and United Brethren, and more assimilated Mennonites who thought these influences were both healthy and necessary to keep their young people from joining other denominations. The sore points included Sunday schools for children, holding revival meetings, permitting evening prayer meetings filled with testimonies by both men and women, and increasing use of English in the non-Sunday morning meetings.[2]

Sunday schools were a concern because the teachers were usually not ordained church leaders, and included women, unbaptized adherents in the congregation, or even members of other denominations. In the early years, the lesson helps were published by non-Mennonite organizations. The prayer meetings also provided women a higher profile than was customary. And increased usage of the English language dramatically lowered linguistic protective barriers against the surrounding culture. Perhaps it's no surprise that the revivalist influences were greatest in areas where the density of Mennonite population was lower—the southern parts of Waterloo County, and the Markham and Niagara Peninsula areas.

Because it had recently suffered a division with a group that eventually became the Evangelical Missionary

(cont'd on p. 10)

Date Divides Church

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Church of Canada, the Mennonite Church of Ontario tried very hard to avoid further division in the 1880s.[3]

The leader in Waterloo County of the more cautious Mennonites was Bishop Abraham Martin (1834–1902). At one time in the 1870s, he had offered to accept evening prayer meetings if the other side would give up Sunday school. This didn't happen.[4]

To accommodate its more cautious member, in 1888 the ordained leaders in Waterloo County tried to tighten the regulations on who could teach in Sunday school (only Mennonite church members in good standing), but the rupture was by then too deep.

The final catalyst for the division is laughable when viewed today. Because Waterloo County had the largest number of churches, ministers from that district prepared the printed *Calendar of Appointments* that outlined where services were held each Sunday, as well as the dates for communion services and the meetings of ordained leaders. By tradition, the annual meeting of ordained leaders was held the last Friday in May.[5]

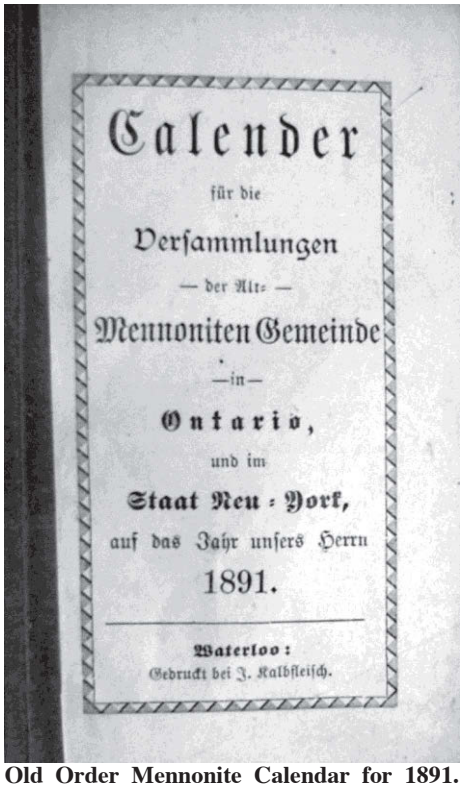
In 1889, however, there was a complication. Ascension Day fell on Thursday, May 30. Congregations held services that day, and the annual conference was scheduled for Markham on May 31. The calendar editors thought this close timing could be difficult for ministers who needed to preach on Thursday and still travel to Markham for Friday morning. So they set the annual meeting for May 24, the fourth Friday in May.

This created the pretext for the two sides to divide, with the ability for each to blame the "other side" for the division. On May 24, three bishops, 16 ministers, and a number of deacons met in Markham for the *Calendar*'s scheduled annual meeting. One week later, May 31, three other bishops (Abraham Martin, Christian Reesor, and Christian Gayman) and most of the ministers from Markham, Cayuga, Rainham, and Woolwich Township met at the same place for their annual meeting, by tradition on the last Friday in May. Old Order bishop Christian Shaum from Indiana met with them, which reinforces the notion that a division had already been planned when the scheduling anomaly became apparent.

As might be expected, each group considered the other to have departed the Conference. Two years later, the less assimilated group published its own calendar using the term, *Alt-Mennoniten Gemeinde in Ontario* (Old Mennonite Church in Ontario) as its official name, although "Old Order Mennonite" soon came into more common usage.[6]

Endnotes

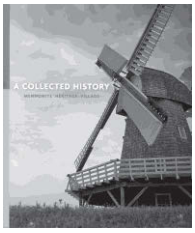
1. The Mennonite Church of Canada changed its name to the Mennonite Conference of Ontario after the Alberta District Mennonite Conference was organized in 1903 by a bishop from Ontario.
2. For a detailed description of the issues and the division see Samuel J. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands: a Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 2015), 144–151. See also Donald Martin, *Old Order Mennonites of Ontario: Gelassenheit, Discipleship, Brotherhood* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2003), 95–106.
3. For the Reforming Mennonites, see Steiner, 129–135.
4. According to Donald Martin, Abraham Martin wavered often on the issues. His brother-in-law, Amos Cressman, another bishop, would persuade Martin to accept the "innovations," but his uncle, Deacon David Martin, would convince him to remain traditional (Martin, 105).
5. Steiner, 150.
6. Steiner, 151.


Calender
für die
Versammlungen
— der Alt= —
Mennoniten Gemeinde
—in—
Ontario,
und im
Staat Neu=York,
auf das Jahr unsers Herrn
1891.
Waterloo:
Gedruckt bei J. Kalbfleisch.

Old Order Mennonite Calendar for 1891. Photo: Courtesy of Sam Steiner.

Book Reviews

Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village* (Mennonite Heritage Village, 2014), 67pp.



Reviewed by Judith Rempel Smucker

How can a pencil box from eighteenth-century Prussia reveal patterns of Mennonite migration? Or a church building describe aspects of Old Colony worship traditions? Or a Fordson Model F tractor explain famine and hardships that drove many Mennonites to emigrate from Russia to North America? Or a sawmill represent faith-driven alternatives to military service?

A new publication by the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, tells such stories of the Russian Mennonite experience through 39 vignettes of collected material culture. In his foreword, museum director Barry Dyck suggests that this book is "an exhibit you can take with you." And indeed it is.

This is not a book that tries to be a comprehensive history; rather, the informative, expanded captions show what can be revealed in the stories associated with these particular museum objects—when those stories are interpreted by knowledgeable historians. As authors Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck state in the preface, the purpose of the book is twofold: (1) to provide a glimpse into diverse collections of the museum, and (2) to share the history of the Russian Mennonites through the lens of material culture.

Two elements, however, could have made the book more well-rounded: (1) Since the word "history" in a title usually suggests a connected narrative—something not present in this book—a simple overview chart, map or timeline and perhaps a short bibliography or list of additional resources available in the museum's fine bookstore would have been helpful. (2) A few more details about the history of the Mennonite Heritage Village as an institution would have been a good addition—its past, its active present, and its future plans. For example, the livery barn restaurant's fresh bread is mentioned as crucial to the presentation of Dutch-Russian Mennonite food culture, but not other ethnic foods associated with these people.

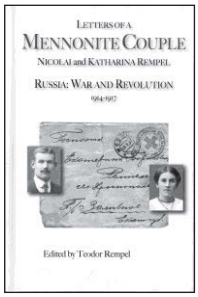
The 67-page, affordable, softcover book, elegantly designed by Anikó Szabó and professionally printed by Friesens, is rich with high-quality photographs illustrating each entry. While a stronger type weight for the text would make it easier to read, the layout complements the content in a fresh, timeless style.

This is a meaningful souvenir for the museum visitor who wants to remember some of the sights from this fascinating collection of Russian Mennonite history at the Heritage Village.

Judith Rempel Smucker is a graphic designer living in Winnipeg.

Teodor Rempel, ed., *Letters of a Mennonite Couple, Nicolai and Katharina Rempel: Russia—War and Revolution*, trans. Teodor Rempel and Agatha Klassen (Center for MB Studies, Fresno, 2014), 243 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein



The unique letter collection in this volume is a fine tribute to the Teodor Rempel family of Samish Island, Washington. The collection leaves the family and the general public a translated and published version of the correspondence to treasure for posterity.

The collection represents personal correspondence between Nicolai and Katharina from the days of WWI, carefully preserved and virtually unopened for rereading since that time and given to us in this form almost exactly a century later. The letters were mostly authored under the stress of medical corps service rendered "for the Tsar" on the part of Nicolai, and by his wife Tina, along with several relatives who remained at home to take care of the family and encourage Nicolai during his time of conscientious objector (CO) service from 1913–1917. A number of family photos (but without maps or an index) are part of the publication. Typos and other publishing glitches are relatively rare.

It is likely that no similar collection exists in print, though this book may help to uncover such collections. Various articles have been written about the work of medical corpsmen, but nowhere else can one find such a detailed account of what their daily work consisted, nor of the emotional and spiritual struggles that individuals went through to carry out their non-violent, pacifist form of service and Christian ministry during the war years.

Nicolai spent his first CO service years working on a hospital train to assist wounded Russian soldiers being transported to places offering long-term recuperation. Completing his term of service in a Moscow administrative office, Nicolai witnessed the breakdown of the government and the developments of the 1917 revolution as the war gradually came to a close.

The letters offer a close-up view of exactly what hospital train service involved, problems encountered with staff leadership, travel difficulties, and—most importantly—how Nicolai's work impacted his family and community back home. These difficulties included finding support for his wife and children, who were left to fend for themselves, and in allaying his family's fears of harm coming to him. Ultimately, the letters demonstrate the couple's plans for resuming normal family life if possible, then making emigration arrangements.

Here we also get a sense of the daily monotony of medical field work, wrestling with health problems, dealing with various dangers—even though they were not in the direct line of fire—and simply maintaining a meaningful sense of service, still inspired by Christian ideals, throughout his time away.

A point not always noted in brief accounts of frontline responsibilities is the tension it could generate in the homes of families who, as in this case, became very frustrated when letters from Nicolai, sent by often-interrupted mail service, would not show up for a long time, and vice versa. Misunderstandings about counsel given to wives and children sometimes became acute. Uncertainties about future developments for the medical service program and for the fate of families at home added much to other growing pressures as the war continued, month by month, and then year by year.

Still underlying all these problems, there remained a love and commitment between Nicolai and Tina, which is part of the enduring inspiration of the correspondence. Their devotion—clearly evident in the writings—is what helped to overcome the desperation that sometimes seemed about to crush both Nicolai on the front, and his wife at home.

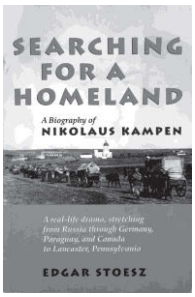
A byproduct of describing medical service life, the letters also show how the revolutionary sentiment that emerged as the war was nearing its end also took the young men right into the surge of wanting change in the country as a whole. This sentiment sometimes led to bad feelings with the people at home in the villages, who could not see the national crisis as a whole as the servicemen did.

A note of recognition is due here to Dr. James Urry and Dr. John B. Toews who added very valuable historical contextual data throughout, and helped to shape the book into the form it has now.

Lawrence Klippenstein was Historian-Archivist for Conference of Menonites in Canada, 1974–1997.

Edgar Stoesz, *Searching for a Homeland: A Biography of Nikolaus Kampen* (Ephrata, PA: Grace Press, 2012), 112 pp.

Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder



Nikolaus Kampen's story is one of many taking place in the lives of Mennonites who lived in Ukraine for almost two centuries before Communism. It begins during a time of upheaval and turmoil. Those who experienced that time and are old enough to remember it would often rather forget about it. That is why most of these stories remain unpublished, unwritten, and untold. We can thank people like Edgar Stoesz, Harry Loewen (*Road to Freedom*, 2000), and Marlene Epp (*Women without Men*, 2000) for insisting that these events are important enough for us to remember and to pass on to the next generation.

Throughout this biography, the reader is aware of Stoesz, the historian. He places Kampen's unique and individual story within the context of the larger Mennonite story. Beginning with the Anabaptist movement in Holland and the ensuing persecution in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Stoesz traces their migrations to Prussia, Russia, United States, Canada, Mexico, and South America. The Kampen family, like many others, elected to remain in Russia until the retreating German army ordered them to leave in 1943. They joined what historians refer to as "the Great Trek." It consisted of 350,000 German sympathisers, ten percent of whom were Mennonites.

Nikolaus was four years old when his

family boarded a train bound for Germany. Upon their arrival in a German-Polish border town, they received German citizenship. Before long, Nikolaus' father, Martin, found himself conscripted into the German army and separated from his wife and family (Nick, his seven-year-old sister, and his baby brother).

The very difficult years that follow the separation of the father from the rest of the family and the subsequent tragedies and triumphs will keep the reader engrossed. It is interesting that, as a young adult, Nick finds himself working for an MCC warehouse in Akron, Pennsylvania. (This same organization helped his family by finding them a place to live in Paraguay and by sending care packages.) In Pennsylvania he meets the love of his life and settles down to raise a large family.

The author, Edgar Stoesz, lived next door to the Kampens. He heard some of Nick's refugee story and, being the storyteller and historian that he is, begged Nick to write it down. Nick was reluctant. However, when he became seriously ill, and Stoesz again offered to write his biography for him, Nick agreed on one condition: "That it be a God-honouring book." Stoesz assured him that was also his intent. Not long after the publication of his biography, Nick passed away, just short of his mid-seventies. He was still able to put his signature in the first copies of the story of his life and thank his friend Edgar for this gift.

In the Afterword to the book, Nick's daughter Rosanne (Kampen) Gingrich writes, "When that trainload of refugees was speeding through the war-torn German countryside, they were facing an uncertain future, but they had faith in God. So we join them in singing, *Nun danket alle Gott* (Now thank we all our God ... who wondrous things has done).

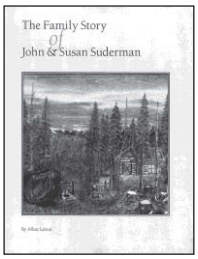
I think Edgar Stoesz would agree with me when I say that this is the reason we continue to tell these stories. The next generation needs to know. It is part of what shapes our children and grandchildren and gives them their identity.

Elfrieda was a few months old when her family took that same train from Chortitza, Ukraine, to Poland and Germany. Her family was on the SS Volendam with the Kampens and spent five years in the Chaco, Paraguay, before immigrating to Canada in 1952.

Book Notes

by Jon Isaak and Conrad Stoesz

Allan Labun, *The Family Story of John & Susan Suderman* (2014), 105 pp.



Allan's book is an annotated genealogy tracing the ancestors and descendants of his grandparents, John Suderman (1868–1950) and Susan Giesbrecht (1873–1948). Both John and Susan arrived in Manitoba as children of Mennonite emigrants from Ukraine in 1874 and 1875 and became part of the Sommerfeld Church. Allan has traced their ancestry back to Polish Prussia to the late 1600s, where they lived prior to migrating to Ukraine. Of special interest is the narration of the pioneering venture that John (then 50 years) and Susan (then 45 years) undertook in Vanderhoof, BC, with their 11 children. The lure of cheap land spelled opportunity. They were part of a Mennonite settlement led by Elder Heinrich Voth, a Mennonite Brethren evangelist. That sojourn was cut short by the influenza epidemic of 1918 that sickened most of the family and killed the Sudermans' oldest son, John. The family returned to Manitoba and settled on a 40-acre farm near Morden. The book includes genealogies, maps, photos, and brief accounts of each descendent.

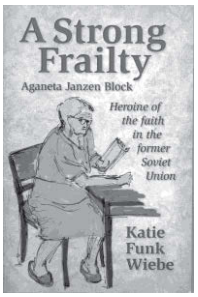
George Klassen, *Gerhard J. Klassen: Collected Memories* (2014), 113 pp.

George's book is a reconstruction of the life of Gerhard Klassen (1914–1950) who died at the age of 35. Gerhard was born in Gnadental, Ukraine, and immigrated to Blumenort, Manitoba, on the Mennonite West Reserve as the youngest child of Jacob J. Klassen (1868–1947) and Margaretha Ens (1871–1958). In 1944, Gerhard married Maria Peters (1920–2007) and they had 5 children under the age of five when Gerhard died. The book tries to offer the reader an understanding of who Gerhard was, sometimes having to rely on circumstantial evidence. Photos, documents, and the recollections of nieces and nephews provide the children and the reader an appreciation of the life story of Gerhard and his context. Contact georgesglass@mymts.net.

Britt Hofer, *Rock Lake Colony 1940s–1950s* (2014), 91 pp.

This is an annotated photo book that provides "a rare glimpse of Hutterite life on the Canadian Prairie in the post-war years." The photographs and accompanying text provide an insider view of daily life in the colony. The Rock Lake Colony was established in 1947 as a daughter colony of Iberville Colony and traces its history back to the Rosedale Colonies in Manitoba and South Dakota. Rock Lake Colony has since established three daughter colonies of its own.

Katie Funk Wiebe, *A Strong Frailty: The Life of Aganeta Janzen Block, 1906–2000* (Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Hillsboro, 2014), 140 pp.



This volume was a long time on Katie's bucket list. It is the story of her Aunt Neta, the sister of her mother, Anna Janzen Funk (1895–1994). Katie visited her aunt in Moscow in 1989 while on tour with a Tabor College group. She had learned to know this aunt through the letters she wrote from Russia to Katie and the family in Saskatchewan. Now Katie finally met her in person. It became clear to Katie that this woman was a born storyteller. Katie left Moscow with a commitment from Aunt Neta to write her story in a series of letters. And so, during the next decade Katie collected over 100 letters from Aunt Neta, narrating the story of her life. Besides living through the anarchy of revolution, war, famine, collectivization, it's the story of a single woman with four children who manages to survive 11 years in the forced labour camps with one goal: to keep her children alive. Katie has turned those letters into a book commemorating the faith, independence, and moral strength of her aunt.