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Mennonite Historian

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

Lunch at a cafe in Mahachkala, Republic of Dagestan, on May 8, 2016, before driving out to see what is left of the Terek settlement abandoned by Mennonites in 1925. Beverly Doerksen Dunne (right) had long wanted to see the village where her grandparents lived. For travel notes and photos from that visit, see her story starting on page 2. Left to right: tour operator James Willcox, driver Ruslan, and guide Abdullah Bukov.

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Pilgrimage to Terek Colony—100 Years Later

by Beverly Doerksen Dunne, Vancouver

On May 8, 2016, I visited the former Mennonite settlement (colony) of Terek on the Caspian Sea in the Republic of Dagestan (part of the Russian Federation) where my great-grandparents had lived. Although there is little tangible evidence of Mennonites ever having lived there, I wanted to see the landscape, to see what they saw when they lived there. Could they see the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus mountains? Who were the people who raided their farms and villages, causing them to leave, and why? Who lives there now?

My great-grandparents, Jacob John Doerksen (1853–1930), a Mennonite Brethren (MB) minister and *Aeltester*, and Aganetha Rempel Doerksen (1853–1918), lived in Terek Colony from 1905–1912 and raised their family there. I took with me to Terek a photograph of this family (provided by cousin Emma), so in a sense "we" went together to Terek. The photo includes six children, five girls and a boy (my grandfather Jacob). Sadly, two of the daughters in the photograph died in Terek at ages 16 and 17 and the eldest daughter, Justina, died in Memrik at age 26. My aunt Sue told me that when they left the "daughter" colony of Terek to return to the Memrik Colony (Ukraine), her grandparents dug up the coffins of the two deceased daughters and took them along. The remaining three children, Jacob, Agnes Isaac, and Katherine (Tiene) Friesen stayed, married, but eventually immigrated to Canada in 1924.

A photo taken in the village named Nikolayevka (Republic of Dagestan). When the Mennonites lived here (1901–1925), it was also known as village #9 of the Terek colony or settlement, which eventually had 17 villages in total. Evidence that German-speaking Mennonite settlers lived here is visible in the rows of trees, like these pictured here, which Mennonites planted some 100 years ago. Photo credit for the five images used in this article: Beverly Dunne.

My grandparents, Jacob Doerksen (1880–1961), a miller, and Susanna Friesen Doerksen (1885–1971), had a family where at least one of their children was born in Terek in 1911 (my aunt, Susannah Doerksen Elliott). Another uncle, Jacob Doerksen, was born (or possibly his birth was registered) in nearby Khasav-Yurt in 1909.

My great-grandparents and grandparents moved often and their children were born in various places—Crimea, Ukraine, Naumenko, Terek, Ufa, Samara. Likely their frequent moves can be attributed to their vocations as a travelling minister and a business operator, or perhaps to being landless and always on a quest to secure land for their growing families to farm.

Terek Colony was established in early 1901 between the traditional territories of the Nogai and Kumak tribes, a week's journey to the south-east from the Molotschna Colony. About 3,500 Mennonites (500 families) settled there initially in 15 villages, each family receiving about 100 acres to farm. They left in 1918, but about 100 families returned in 1921, after being promised protection from the raiding tribesmen. However, the colony was finally abandoned in 1925 due to constant attacks during the anarchy following the revolution and civil war (1917–1920).[1]

Back to the story of my visit. I had been trying to find a way to visit Dagestan and Terek for a long time. Because of unrest in the region, travel there was not encouraged by the Russian government. Then I found Untamed Borders whose founder, James Willcox, guides small tour groups to South Russia (Ossetia, Ingushsetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan). I signed up for the tour and James arranged a private trip to Terek Colony for me after the tour. And so, on May 2, 2016, I joined a small group of five other adventurers from four countries at the Moscow airport, and flew to Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia to meet James and our local guide, Adbullah Bukov, an Ingushsetian teacher of English.

The tour was unforgettable and we were welcomed and treated well by the local people and officials. The hotels were good and the food was excellent. The details are for another time but, other than keeping a low profile as much as possible, passing through numerous checkpoints,

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Genealogy and Family History

Explore Your Genealogical History: Part One

by Conrad Stoesz

Who am I? Do you ever ask yourself that question? Part of the answer includes where you come from—not only your past but your family's past. It is one of those things we cannot choose but are given; so why not find out more? Here are six tips for exploring your genealogical history.

1. *Start simple.* List when and where you were born. Then list when and where your parents and grandparents were born. At your next family gathering, take the opportunity to ask some questions of your relatives. In many families, there is that one "crazy" aunt or uncle who has done some family research, or is the "keeper" of the family story. No gatherings planned? Consider contacting family members by email. Maybe you have a group email that was sent out when your great-aunt died—use it to get email addresses of family members. Or maybe it's time to telephone that family member you have been meaning to call for a long time and ask how others in the family can be contacted.

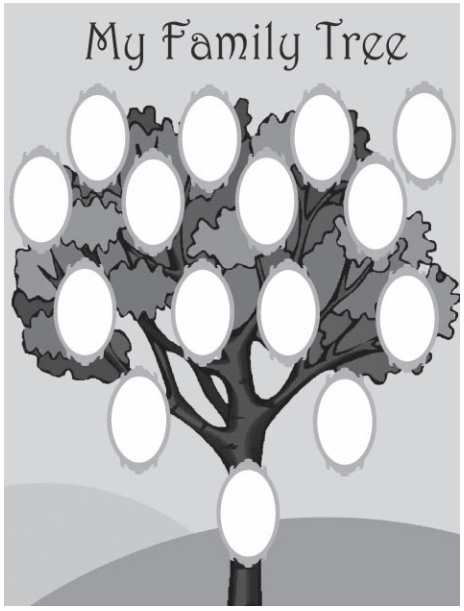
2. *Document your sources.* As you gather materials, be sure to document where your information is coming from. List the source (book, interview, document, etc.) and where that source is located. If it is an interview or conversation, document the date as well. You will be surprised how easy it is to forget where some information came from; and, trust me, there will be a point when you ask yourself, "Now how do I know that?" Or "Yes, I saw that somewhere—but where!?" Listing your sources is crucial.

3. *Gather Stories.* As you are doing your research, you may want to create a family tree—a visual representation of you and your direct ancestors (names of parents, grandparents, etc., including birth, marriage, and death dates). Think of this tree as a skeleton. To bring it to life you need stories. These can be family traditions, supporting documents, obituaries, photos, books, articles, etc.

4. *Keep hard copies.* As people amass materials, some look for help in organizing and sharing their results beyond a three-ringed binder. There are websites and computer programs that can help you. But these e-resources should be seen as a tool, not a replacement for keeping your hard copy information. There is something special about holding grandpa's birth certificate or great-aunt Helen's favourite and badly-stained cookbook. Computer files get corrupted, hard drives crash, files get accidently deleted, website memberships lapse—but a hard copy is more secure and can easily be passed on.

5. *Invest in some tools.* After you've exhausted the knowledge that can be learned from your living family members, continue your research online. You have a number of options. Before you fork over some of your cold hard cash to gain access to any one of the commercial genealogical websites, do some research. Some websites are strong in certain geographic or ethnic groups, but not in others. In my experience, for people doing research on Mennonite families, the large commercial subscription websites have less material and less reliable material than Mennonite-specific websites.

For researching Mennonite families that have roots in Russia, Ukraine, and Poland there is the GRANDMA database. It stands for Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry. It is the product of a community of genealogists and totals over 1.3 million names. It continues to be revised and updated. Online subscriptions can be purchased for $20. See http://www.grandmaonline.org/. If you are looking for "Swiss Mennonite" sources, check this database: http://www.ezraeby.com/. For the Swiss Mennonites in Waterloo, Ontario, consider http://ebybook.region.waterloo.on.ca/. For American Mennonites of Swiss origin, you can consult with the Swiss Anabaptist genealogical Association: http://www.saga-omii.org/. These are only a few websites, but they can get you started. There are many other websites that cater to Mennonite family historians.



Remember, these websites are a tool, not the final word. The genealogical websites provide skeletal information, but you need to do more digging to "put meat on those bones"—to bring it to life! For example, pay attention to the sources provided in the database (e.g., census data, family history books, obituaries, immigration lists, church registers). You can mine these same sources for details that can bring life to your "skeleton"!

6. *Be of good courage!* As you work at your family tree, it may feel at times like a "feast or famine" experience. There will be times when you find so much information that you cannot process it *Fast* enough. And other times, the trail will be *Friesen* or maybe even *Froese* solid. There will be lulls in the action or you may even feel like you have "hit a wall" (No, not the *Wall* family!); and just when you think you have found a lead, you hit a *Wahl* again! And that is all normal. Your friend may be sailing into scads of information and you may think that's not *Fehr.* You can't seem to "buy a lead," even for a boat load of *Nickels!* There is not much *Reimer* reason—the trail just goes cold. Some families are just plain *Harder* to follow. But over time, with new materials, new questions, new insights, and new contacts, the trail can again be picked up—especially if you have documented your materials well. Then you'll say, "*Kuhl!* I'm on the case again."

To be continued …

Conrad Stoesz is the archivist at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He is looking forward to travelling with John Ruth on the 300th Anniversary Swiss-German Mennonite Heritage Tour in August 2017. For more information on this and other TourMagination heritage tours, see https://www.tourmagination.com.

Pilgrimage to Terek

(cont'd from p. 2)

and navigating the heavy police and military presence, everything was normal. There were no other non-Russian tourists there.

After taking the rest of the group to the Makhachkala airport (called Petrovsk until 1921), James, Abdullah, Ruslan, our driver, and I set out on the 1½ hour drive north to Terek area. There is a very good highway (built in 1982, we were told), the E119, connecting Makhachkala to Astrakhan, which passes near the southern-most Terek Colony villages.

Although I was eager to get to Talma (village #3), I asked that we drive through the first village (#6), located just north of the highway to gauge what to expect. This first village was nothing but mud, weeds, tractor ruts, and a few outbuildings (shacks, really), and there was no evidence of any people actually living there.

We quickly moved on to Talma (#3), now called Turzin, which is accessed off a straight road running southwest from the highway. I was interested in this village because the Mennonite Brethren Church (of which my great-grandfather was minister) had been located in this village.

Using photos from Terry Martin's 1990 visit and *Die Tereker Ansiedlung* (The Terek Settlement), driving and walking up and down the road, and talking to different groups of people who appeared, we quickly matched a photo to the remains of a house (half of it left), which looked Mennonite from the brick-work pattern. The house is now used as an outbuilding and a newer small house is built next to it. The woman who currently lives there allowed us to wander around and take photographs. There was a neat stack of red bricks and another neat stack of roof tiles from the demolished building. There is also a new outhouse built from these bricks. I was allowed to take a roof tile with a smile and polite shrug.

This is a photo of the last remaining house—half of it, actually—in Talma (village #3) from the Mennonite period. The identifying feature is the brickwork. The former Mennonite house is now used as an outbuilding and livestock shelter.

Next we were led to the former site of a large Mennonite house that had been torn down in the 1990s, and shown a tree trunk that matched the position of a tree in a photo. The remaining foundations of the house and the barn behind the house also matched this photo. We were told there had been a vineyard next to the house and that the building behind the house had been used for storing the wine, although it was unclear whether this was in the Mennonite era or more modern times. However, given that the people living there now have simple small houses, and nothing is grown, mowed, pruned, fenced, or painted (no gardens, shrubs, trees, fruit trees), it is unlikely that they ever grew grapes or made wine. Besides, they are Muslim and Muslims do not drink alcohol.

More evidence of the Mennonite period: stacks of roofing tiles and bricks salvaged from the demolished homes and buildings made by the "Germans," the name locals use to refer to the Mennonites. The photo shows an outhouse built in Talma from re-purposed Mennonite bricks.

In the late afternoon,

we drove to Nikolayevka (#9), north from the highway on a very bad dirt road (only 8 km, but it took us more than an hour). We drove into the middle of the village—not really a road or main street, a wide space with weeds, wandering ruts, piles of rubble, a few houses around the edge. There were several cow sheds, really just long low sheds with thatched roofs. The cows were coming in by then, and the woman in the barn, too busy to talk, pointed us further down the road into the "village."

A well-dressed man called Usman Yahyayev came over and said he would show us what he had shown the man who had come from New York in 1990 (this must have been Terry Martin). The "man from New York" had said his grandmother lived in this village. Usman pointed out some fruit trees and the foundations of several houses. I asked where the bricks from the houses were and he said they were ploughed into the fields. He also said the bricks were of very high quality, so the villagers often reused them to build stoves in their new houses.

Usman also found some iron from the old houses. When he showed it to me, it turned out to be a round waffle iron top and bottom with heart-shaped sections, just like we still have in Manitoba. This type used to be built into the central cook stove attached to the heating oven (*Tajel Owe*) in Mennonite houses. He gave it to me and I gave it to Abdullah for safekeeping along with my roof tile. They were both too bulky and heavy to take with me as I still had six weeks of travel ahead of me. Usman pointed to where the German cemetery had been. When I asked how he knew where it was, he said they see the bones when they plough the fields.

A local by the name of Usman Yahyayev shows Beverly around Nikolayevka (village #9), pointing out the remains of the former Mennonite village: fruit trees, building foundations, and a cemetery.

Our driver Ruslan commented that the Mennonite villages 100 years ago were more "modern" than the villages are now. And although the people do not seem poor and the surrounding area fields are planted with crops and at least one village had livestock, it was puzzling and even shocking to see the rustic state of the homes and property. However, I tried not to judge the people now living in the former Mennonite villages, but rather imagine their circumstances: forced to move away from their traditional homes and way of life in the mountains, partially nomadic, raising sheep and goats, moving seasonally from winter to summer pasture.

Overall, the local people had quite a lot of knowledge about the "German" people and what had been there before they arrived in the 1930s.

I want to thank James Willcox and Abdullah Bukov, who were my guides and companions for this visit. It was wonderful to share the experience with them; they brought a lot to the conversations with the local people. Their excitement and engagement made a great trip even better.[2]

Usman Yahyayev picks up two heart-shaped waffle irons and holds them for the camera. These waffle irons were built into the stove tops of the ovens used by Mennonites to cook and heat their homes. Now they lie in the dirt and silently bear witness to a previous era.

Endnotes

1. See "Terek Mennonite Settlement (Republic of Dagestan, Russia)" on the GAMEO website at http://gameo.org/.

2. Special thanks also to family members and some wonderful Mennonite writers, teachers, historians, and archivists who helped me prepare for my Terek adventure (Martha Doerksen Toews Griffiths, Emma Martens Lechner, Terry Martin, Rudy P. Friesen, James Urry, Conrad Stoesz, Andrea Dyck, and Nita Wiebe). See also Cornelius P. Toews, *Die Tereker Ansiedlung: Mennonitische Kolonie im Vorderkaukaksus, Entstehung, Entwicklung und Untergang, 1901–1918/1925* (Steinbach, Man.: Echo Verlag, 1945); Terry Martin, "Ein Besuch in die Tereker Kolonie," *Der Bote* (19 Dec 1990); Terry Martin, "The Tereker' Dilemma: Prelude to the *Selbstschutz*" 17/4 *Mennonite Historian* (Dec 1991): 1–2; Terry Martin, "The Russian Mennonite Encounter with the Soviet State, 1917–1955," *Conrad Grebel Review* 20/1 (Winter 2002): 6–59; and the photos on the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) under "Terek" and "photos taken by Terry Martin" (https://archives.mhsc.ca).

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Lawrence Klippenstein Receives 2017 Award of Excellence

by Conrad Stoesz

Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein (b. July 16, 1930) received the 2017 Award of Excellence from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada during its annual general meeting on Saturday, January 21, 2017. Dr. Helmut Huebert was also recognized posthumously as corecipient of the award (see article on opposite page).

A pillar in the Mennonite historical community, Klippenstein has made numerous contributions to Mennonite studies. During his tenure as director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre 1974–1997, he played an integral role in the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada by serving on committees and boards of these organizations. Klippenstein is an avid promoter of the importance of the historical record. He spearheaded numerous commemorative events that have brought history and people together.

A key contribution of interest to readers of this magazine is that it was Klippenstein who began the publication of the *Mennonite Historian* in 1975. He continues to submit book reviews and articles to the magazine.

Klippenstein's long-standing interest is to bring Mennonite archivists and historians together on collaborative projects. An example of one of his initiatives is the NAMAL (North American Mennonite Archivists and Librarians) organization. In addition to his role with the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, he served with numerous other history related boards and committees such as the Mennonite Heritage Village and the Association of Manitoba Archives.

The son of Cornelius D. Klippenstein (1905–1983) and Helen Rempel (1907–1944), Klippenstein grew up on a farm near Altona, Manitoba. After studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba (B.Chr.Ed. 1954) and Goshen College and Seminary, Goshen, Indiana (B.A., B.D. 1962), Klippenstein taught school in several college settings. Graduate studies (1967–1971) took him to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he completed both an MA and PhD in Russian history at the University of Minnesota (dissertation: *Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia: A Case Study in Church-State Relations, 1789–1936*).

In addition to his public history work, Klippenstein has published numerous academic and non-academic articles in books, journals, magazine, and newspapers in English, German, Russian, and Polish languages.

Lawrence Klippenstein receives Award of Excellence (left to right): Royden Loewen, Noreen Janzen, Lawrence Klippenstein, Nathan and Jamie Klippenstein. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

More News from MHSC January 2017 Meeting

Besides honouring two historians with Awards of Excellence at its January meeting in Winnipeg, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) heard reports about ongoing projects from each regional group and archive. As a central place to find historical Mennonite photographs, the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) has continued to grow and soon hopes to expand its offerings beyond images. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) also continues to expand as a multi-language platform.

The news at the MHSC gathering was not all positive. Korey Dyck, director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Gallery in Winnipeg, announced that due to the restructuring and downsizing at Mennonite Church Canada, the relationship between the church and the Heritage Centre would be changing and that his position was ending. While details of the new structure are still developing, Dyck assured the society that he supported it.

"Things are changing," said Dyck, "But this new plan will give [the Heritage Centre] a good life in a different model." He also expressed his regret that this would bring to an end his personal relationship with the historical society.

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, a special conference is planned for October 2018, called "A People of Diversity." The plan is to highlight the growth of diversity of Mennonites in Canada since 1970.

The executive committee of MHSC remains unchanged: Richard Thiessen, president; Royden Loewen, vice-president; Conrad Stoesz, treasurer; Alf Redekopp, secretary; Barb Draper, fifth member.

MHSC news release, February 16, 2017.

MHC Archives & Gallery Get New Structure

The Mennonite Heritage Centre, including its Archive and Art Gallery programs, is being reorganized under a new partnership and name.

Discussions over the last months between Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada), Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), and the Center for

(cont'd on p. 9)

Helmut Huebert Receives 2017 Award of Excellence

by Jon Isaak

Dr. Helmut Huebert (b. February 23, 1935) received posthumously the 2017 Award of Excellence from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada during its annual general meeting on Saturday, January 21, 2017. Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein was also presented with an award of excellence (see article on opposite page). The 2017 award recognized the outstanding contribution to Mennonite studies by both men.

Huebert, who passed away on November 21, 2016, had a long and distinguished career in Winnipeg as an orthopedic surgeon, beginning in 1966. While orthopedics was clearly his vocation, Huebert was quick to call Mennonite history his avocation.

The particular aspect of Mennonite history where Huebert made the largest contribution was in producing maps—a topographical representation of people, places, and events. Together with mapmaker William Schroeder (1933–2013), Huebert edited, annotated, produced, and published the extremely successful *Mennonite Historical Atlas* (1990, rev. 1996).

A total of ten books and atlases involving Mennonite history are credited to Huebert. The first two were published in 1986: a biography of his uncle, Kornelius Martens, and *Hierschau*, the story of the Molotschna village where his mother came from. Other publications include: *Events and People: Events in Russian Mennonite History and the People that made them Happen* (1999), Molotschna Historical Atlas (2003), *Mennonite Estates in Imperial Russia* (2005, rev. 2008), *1937, Stalin's Year of Terror* (2009), *Mennonite Medicine in Russia: 1800–1930* (2012), *Crimea: The Story of Crimea and the Mennonites Who Lived There* (2013).

In the words of Huebert: "These history books and atlases do not represent dry, dusty pages to me, but show the lives and struggles of many people. My motivation is to make sure that their lives are not forgotten" (from "My Story," Vol. 965, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg).

Huebert served on the Historical Committee of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches from 1970 to 2003, much of this time as chair. This committee gave oversight to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg. He was also a member of the Historical Commission of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America, which developed a comprehensive plan for the four archival centres in the United States and Canada (Fresno, Winnipeg, Abbotsford, and Hillsboro).

In 2010, Huebert donated his collection of Russian Mennonite research to the growing Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). This gift is just one example of the many ways, Huebert has generously supported the advancement of Mennonite Studies.

Because of Huebert's extensive contribution to the promotion and study of Mennonite history, the MHSC awarded him the society's 2017 award of excellence. See photo of Dr. Helmut T. Huebert with a note of his passing in the previous issue, *MH* 42/4 (Dec 2016), 12.

Four Grants Awarded

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies

Stephanie Chase, Abe J. Dueck, Zacharie Leclair, and Conrad Stoesz are the 2016 recipients of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission's MB studies project grants. Each award comes with a grant of $2,500. The selection committee chose the four from a strong field of applicants, all working on projects of historical and theological interest to Mennonite Brethren around the world.

Stephanie is an MA student at Briercrest Seminary (Caronport, SK). Her project title is *The Jesus of Whom I Speak: The Reconciliation of Nonviolent Discipleship and God's Violence, According to J. Denny Weaver and Miroslav Volf*. Stephanie's project grows from wrestling with an Anabaptist-Mennonite commitment to nonviolent discipleship and a troubling awareness of Scripture's presentation of God in violent images. The project is a comparative study of the work of Miroslav Volf and J. Denny Weaver, paying attention to how they reconcile nonviolent discipleship

2016 recipients of the Mennonite Brethren Studies Project Grants (left to right): Zacharie Leclair, Conrad Stoesz, Stephanie Chase, and Abe J. Dueck. Photo credit: Carson Samson (Conrad and Abe's photo).

and God's violence. While distinctive, each scholar's Christology, theological lenses, and hermeneutical methods appear significant in the respective reconciliations of the problem. She hopes to leverage her discoveries in order to construct a more robust Anabaptist-Mennonite theology of nonviolent discipleship.

Abe is a retired college professor from Canadian Mennonite University (Winnipeg, MB). His project title is *The Mennonite Brethren Bible College (1944–1992): Competing Visions for Mennonite Brethren Education in Canada*. The MB Bible College in Winnipeg was the primary educational institution of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches for the formative period of the Conference following the massive immigration of Russian Mennonites in the 1920s. As such it prepared most of the leaders, pastors, Bible school and MB high school teachers, missionaries and musicians for most of the period. It was succeeded for almost ten years by Concord College and then by Canadian Mennonite University. A comprehensive history of the MBBC period (1944–1992), one that documents a period that was marked by contested visions for what college, university, and ministry education should look like, has not been written. Abe's project addresses this gap.

Zacharie lectures in US History at the Université de Montréal in Quebec. His project title is *"Unconscientious" Objectors? Woodrow Wilson, Conscription, and Mennonite Conscientious Objectors, 1917–1918*. Zacharie's project aims at understanding US President Woodrow Wilson's response to American Mennonites' objection to war. Although Wilson conceived of the American intervention as an ultimately pacifistic endeavor, waging war against Germany required a complete mobilization of American society. The Mennonite conscientious objectors posed an intellectual, spiritual, and political problem for such a devout Protestant president as Wilson. While discrete and relatively small, their critique and persistent peaceful disobedience undermined the intellectual scaffolding of the Wilsonian justification of the war. By exploring how Wilson handled the Mennonite "problem," Zacharie hopes to find ways to improve the reception of divergent opinions in a society shaped by media culture and to better understand the impact minority groups might have on policy making in contemporary settings.

Conrad is an MA student in the joint program at University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, and an archivist working halftime at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and halftime at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, both in Winnipeg. His project title is *The Creation of Identity: Mennonite Conscientious Objectors in Western Canada through the Lens of Archives, A National Historical Society, and Memoirs*. Using material from historical societies, archives, and memoirs as sources, Conrad plans to trace the intra- and extra-group forces in play and show how Mennonite identity was reinvented according to these contextual forces. His project takes a historical approach but creates a bridge between the disciplines of archives and history. He hopes his research can help contemporary Mennonite faith communities engage their own complex cultural identity, something that is not static, but continually shaped by both societal and group forces.

The Historical Commission is pleased to make these awards, noting that these projects represent the kind of work that it wants to support, encourage, and fund.

In November 2016, the Commission also awarded the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan a $2,000 archival development grant in support of its application to help pay for needed archival supplies. The Society's archive is located in Saskatoon. This is the first year that archival development grants have been offered. The grants are available to Mennonite archives operating in Canada and the US, as well as those operating outside of Canada and the US.

Also, 25 books of historical interest to Mennonite Brethren—books published by the Historical Commission and Kindred Productions—have been moved to a Creative Commons license and converted to online readable e-books. The number of books in the online library, accessible through the Commission's website, now totals 58.

The MB studies project grants, archival development grants, and digital historical library are made possible with support from US and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches. See www.mbhistory.org for information about these awards, grants, internships, and digital libraries, just some of the initiatives provided by the MB Historical Commission.

MBHC news release, January 5, 2017.

The conscientious objectors (COs) of the Second World War were honoured at the Mennonite Heritage Village (Steinbach, Manitoba) on November 12, 2016, with the unveiling of a new monument. Pictured are mayor Chris Goertzen (right) and MHV chair Willie Peters (left). MHV director Barry Dyck reported that eight COs and their families were among the 120 people that gathered for the event. COs did alternative service for their country during the war at forestry camps, asylums, hospitals, and on farms. Photo credit: Matthew Reimer.

Menno Simons Reposted

by Karla Braun, Winnipeg

"Menno Simons, church reformer, 1496–1561." As of Sunday, February 5, 2017, a sign (see photo below) bearing those words again hangs in the courtyard behind the Singelkerk along the Herengracht (Gentleman's canal) in the heart of Amsterdam's famous *grachtengordel* (canal ring).

"This is a beautiful moment in the 400-year history of a Mennonite congregation

in this place, and in the 200-year history of our United Mennonite Congregation (Verenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente)," said church board chair Thijs van Hoogstraten. Following the service, some 40 Singelkerk congregation members gathered in Menno Simons Plein (square) to celebrate the new nameplate with speeches and snacks.

"The sign disappeared a few years ago—nobody knows how," says Joke Rooseboom, secretary to the church board and PR manager for Doopsgezind Amsterdam. "We wanted to bring it back so people walking on the Herengracht can see it." The church purchased and re-erected the sign "to show we are still here."

The cobblestoned terrace re-christened "Menno Simons Plein" serves as an attractive parking lot behind the Singelkerk. The historic complex houses a large sanctuary, kitchen, board room, offices, meeting rooms, and the Mennonite seminary and library.

Times have changed, said van Hoogstraten; the "hidden church" (*schuilkerk*) now wants its presence known. No longer do Mennonites in Amsterdam want to hide, like Menno Simons who famously eluded capture when the passengers in a coach on which he was travelling told authorities he was not *inside* the carriage, said van Hoogstraten. "Now, with three words—Menno Simons Plein—the sign proclaims *there is a congregation here*."

MHC Archives & Gallery Get New Structure

(cont'd from p. 6)

Transnational Mennonite Studies (CTMS) at the University of Winnipeg culminated in a proposal for CMU to assume full ownership of the Mennonite Heritage Centre building, and programming of the faith-based Art Gallery, while the archives will be managed and funded by a three-way partnership of MC Canada, CMU, and CTMS. CTMS is a partnership between the University of Winnipeg's Chair in Mennonite Studies and the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.

Per the proposal, CMU will own and maintain the Mennonite Heritage Centre infrastructure with staff of both the Archives and Gallery integrated in CMU's human resources complement. Operational details within the partnership will be further clarified over the coming months. The proposal was accepted by MC Canada's General Board at a January 13, 2017 meeting. The Mennonite Heritage Centre will be re-named to become "Mennonite Heritage Archives" (MHA) on June 1, 2017, the anticipated transfer date to the new partnership.

To facilitate the transition to the new structure, MC Canada will be releasing the current Archives program's staff. The full-time position of Director is being eliminated, while the archivist position is being expanded to full time as part of the new partnership. Further announcements for re-staffing the new MHA are pending. A committee representing the three partners will provide leadership to the MHA.

The partnership will seek to continue and to deepen the existing mandate of the Archives program, including present and future deposits to the collections of MC Canada and other Mennonite denominations. At the same time, it will expand the focus to include resources that document the transnational Anabaptist experience, including materials related to church communities in the global south, the Mennonite sojourn in Russia, and the Low German Mennonites of the Americas.

The Archives program has a distinguished record of service to the church community by storing and indexing congregational, area church, and national church records. These records, such as baptismal and church membership information, also constitute a primary source of data for church and family researchers and genealogists. The program also receives donations of records from education faculty, church leaders, and others.

The operations of the Art Gallery will be assumed entirely by CMU on June 1, 2017.

The Art Gallery is a bridge between Mennonites and other faith communities, featuring visual arts that share our own faith story within our community as well as bringing the faith stories of other religious groups to the Mennonite community. While the Gallery is based in Winnipeg, travelling exhibits have been featured in congregations, campuses, and events such as MC Canada Assemblies and Mennonite World Conference.

"CMU recognizes the significant value of both the Mennonite Heritage Centre's Archives and Gallery as valuable resources for the Mennonite community," says Gordon Zerbe, Vice President Academic at CMU. "CMU has a strong commitment to deepening the existing and ongoing mandate of these programs."

"The new MHA will continue to serve our congregations as an important depository for their historic records. We encourage the continued and strong support of the MHA, not only through the contribution of congregational records, but also the financial support that makes this work possible," said Coreena Stewart, Chief Administrative Officer for Mennonite Church Canada.

"CTMS is committed to preserving and telling the evolving Anabaptist story," said Hans Werner, Executive Director, D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. "The archives are important in insuring that the rich transnational story of Mennonite faith, life and community can be told for generations to come."

A Mennonite Church Canada news release posted February 9, 2017. During the reorganization, the operating hours until June are: MHC open Monday–Wednesday 8:30–4:30 (closed Thursdays and Fridays); MHC Gallery open Monday–Friday 8:30–4:30 and Saturday noon–5pm.

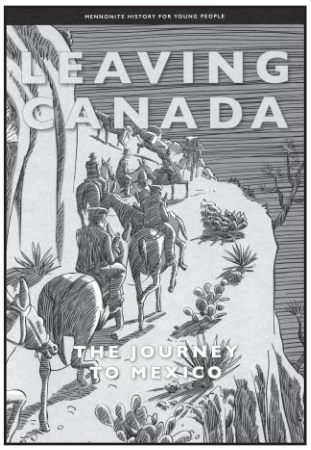
Book Reviews

Rosabel Fast, ***Leaving Canada: The Journey to Mexico,*** vol. 1 of *Mennonite History for Young People* (Winnipeg: D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, 2016), pp. 82.

Reviewed by Elsie Rempel, Winnipeg

As I scoured the front and back matter of this volume to learn about the author and her purpose for writing, I concluded that this must be volume one of a series for both public and private schools with Low German Mennonite students.

I appreciated section one, "Before you read the story," but would have liked an introduction, before launching into the engagingly told history in chapters two to six. For instance, with our world's currently active social discourse about colonialism, a short and basic reflection about how the Mexican Mennonite Colony story fits into that larger conversation would have helped prepare readers to enter the story. It is written at a 9- to 12-year-old reading level, an age when children's minds are mature enough to be curious about their wider social context, and when it is important to establish contexts for learning about one's own cultural story.



With that said, the story reads really well. The combination of letter excerpts, imagined conversations between children, illustrations, and old photos work together for an engaging read. Adding questions that call on varied thinking skills to the end of each chapter would strengthen its usefulness. It is almost a page turner.

When I reached the final page, I did turn it, looking for more. The story just stops, presumably to be continued in the next volume. While I expect that the story will go on in its informative and entertaining way in volume two, adding a reflective paragraph or two about this stage of the Mexican Mennonite story would strengthen it significantly. Can we look for these kind of practical and useful additions in volume two, or in the second edition of the series? I certainly hope so. For the story is otherwise a well-told and informative introduction to the beginnings of the Mexican Mennonite Community.

Peter Letkemann, ***A Book of Remembrance: Mennonites in Arkadak and Zentral, 1908–1941*** (Winnipeg: Old Oak Publishing, 2016), pp. xxxi + 462. Contact MHC for copies, $30.

Reviewed by Jon Isaak, Winnipeg

Ethnic cleansing, state-sponsored repression, and deportation have repeatedly plagued the history of human interaction from biblical times to the present. While sinister and tragic, policies of terror and repression are most "effective" when cloaked in secrecy and silence. It has always taken the bravery, persistence, and ingenuity of uniquely gifted individuals to "out" perpetrators of such crimes against humanity. The publication of Peter Letkemann's *Book of Remembrance* marks him as one of those individuals.

The focus of Letkemann's book narrates the life cycle of two neighbouring Chortitza Mennonite communities—the daughter settlement of Arkadak with its villages and the settlers who purchased the Zentral Estate—during their relatively short life span from 1908–1941. It is a detailed study of the fate of individuals and families caught up in the seemingly endless chain of brutal events that swept over the Soviet Union during the first half of the twentieth century.

Letkemann's interest in Arkadak stems from the fact that his great-grandfather, David D. Letkemann (1863–1931), set up a wheat milling business in the Russian town of Arkadak, near the Mennonite settlement of villages also named Arkadak. One of the miller's sons, Peter D. Letkemann (1886–1955), together with his wife Maria Sawatzky (1893–1947) and their children—one of whom was Letkemann's father, Jacob—managed to flee Arkadak in 1934, back to Chortitza, just before his arrest and exile was to be carried out. Miller Letkemann and all farmers with hired employees were deemed "tight-fisted" capitalists or *kulaks* and targeted to be driven from their homes and villages during Stalin's *dekulakization* program to make way for poorer peasants more sympathetic to communist party objectives. Jacob Letkemann's conscription into the German army as it advanced into Russia during the Second World War ultimately made possible his escape from Russia through Germany to Canada. For Letkemann's grandparents and great-grandparents, the outcome was very different; they were part of the millions who were exiled, starved, or shot during the Soviet reign of terror and repression. Letkemann's *Book of Remembrance* is dedicated to them.

Two events influenced Letkemann's memorial project, a project that has occupied him since the 1980s. The first was his collaboration, starting in 1991, with George Epp on a project to document

the names and other details of Mennonite victims of Soviet repression. At the time of George Epp's death in 1997, the computer database had grown to include 15,000 names. Since then, Letkemann has continued to interview, visit, and correspond with hundreds of elderly Mennonite men and women across Canada and with Mennonite *Umsiedler* now living in Germany, asking them for the names of persons they remember being arrested, shot, exiled, deported, or otherwise oppressed by the Soviet authorities. Letkemann's database of actual names, dates, and other details has grown to over 23,000 Mennonite victims of terror and repression, a number that represents at least one-quarter of all Mennonites that lived in the Soviet Union during those years.

The second event that motivated Letkemann was correspondence with Susanne (Peters) Isaak, a nurse by training who was born in Zentral in 1927 and lived through the traumatic years of the 1930s and 1940s. She lost her father and five brothers to Soviet repression. She was fourteen years old when all the remaining Mennonite settlers of Zentral were deported to Siberia in 1941, far from the war front, and forced to work in the *trudarmiia* or "labour army" camps from 1941–1946. Letkemann reports, "She could not understand why she, her family, and all the Mennonite (German) villagers were being subjected to such inhumane treatment. At that time, she vowed to 'remember' and to tell the story of her beloved Zentral, provided she herself survived" (xxi).

Susanne Isaak did survive. In 1977, she and her family were permitted to immigrate to Germany. Finally, free to speak and write openly, she began her memorial project. The result was a 500-page memoir of her own life experiences and two publications of stories, letters, documents, and photographs from former *Zentraler*, many of whom had come to Germany in the 1980s and 1990s. In 2000, Letkemann began to correspond and visit with her at her home in Meckenheim, Germany. Eventually, Isaak entrusted Letkemann with her entire personal archive of collected Zentral documents and asked him to be the historian to write the book on Zentral that she had been unable to write. Letkemann agreed. *A Book of Remembrance* combines Isaak's collected research on Zentral and Letkemann's life-long research on the Arkadak settlement.

At the outset of the book, Letkemann identifies his threefold aim: (1) to record the actual names, dates, and even photographs, of Mennonite victims and the circumstances of their arrest, interrogation, exile or execution; (2) to attempt an answer to the question: "Why?" asked again and again by victims and their loved ones; and (3) to counter the views of scholars who continue to maintain the myth that the terror of 1936–1938 fell heavily on Soviet political, economic and military leaders, and who also claim that the non-Russian minorities were not more severely hit than the Russians (xxiii). In the 462 pages that follow, Letkemann systematically addresses all three aims with detailed information supported by documentary evidence, and with careful analysis that is impressive and compelling.

A Book of Remembrance is divided into three parts. Part One covers the years 1908–1921 and describes the formation of these two new Mennonite settlements (Zentral and Arkadak) and the upheaval caused by war, revolution and civil war. Here, readers will find detailed descriptions of various land settlement disputes, relations between the Mennonite *Kirchengemeinde* and Mennonite Brethren church, the struggle for nonresistance and alternative military service, and the growing anti-German sentiment as the economic success of Zentral and Arkadak aroused envy and hatred among neighbouring Russian and Ukrainian peasants.

Part Two assesses the impact that the Bolshevik's New Economic Policy (NEP) had on the two settlements (1921–1928). Letkemann details the drought of the early 1920s and the famine relief provided by the American Mennonite Relief agency (AMR), and the All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Association (AMLV) that was designed to work within the new Soviet structure (but which was ultimately liquidated by Soviet authorities), and the resulting emigration fever that compelled one-sixth of Zentral and over one-third of Arkadak residents to leave for Canada.

Part Three documents the extent of the ethnic cleansing that unfolded in three waves, resulting in the removal of all remaining Mennonites from Zentral and Arkadak: collectivization (1928–1933), the terror years (1933–1941), and deportation to Siberia followed by conscription into the *trudarmiia* (1941–1946).

In the end, Letkemann's count is as follows (p. 413): 10,000 Soviet Mennonites *dekulakized* from their property and "resettled" (5x per capita the number of those resettled from other ethnicities); at least 8,000 Mennonite men or half of all adult Mennonite males (including all Mennonite church leaders) "disappeared" in the "Great Terror" (1936–1938), a number which is 5 to 8x higher per capita than for those of other targeted ethnicities and categories of "undesirables"; 28,200 remaining Mennonite men, women, and children disenfranchised and deported from their villages to Siberia and Kazakhstan in 1941 and sent to work in the coal mines and lumber camps of the *trudarmiia*; and finally, 23,000 Mennonites repatriated back to Russia from the occupied regions of Germany at the close of the Second World War, a result of policies adopted at the Yalta Conference.

Letkemann's conclusion: "When reflecting on the high per capita arrest ratios among Soviet Mennonites, one obviously asks, 'Why were so many Mennonites arrested?' and 'Why were so many shot?' Put quite simply, Mennonites were targeted for arrest and execution because they were identified as Germans, and because they were known as a deeply religious and independent minded people opposed to the atheistic, communist agenda" (p. 290).

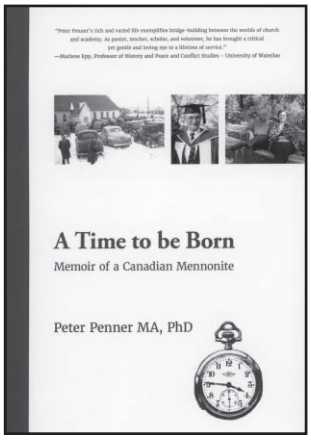
While the pages and pages of names, photographs, arrest/trial narratives, and heart-breaking testimony can be overwhelming and painful, Letkemann's *Book of Remembrance* makes a valuable contribution by making sure these friends, relatives, and fellow human beings are not forgotten.

Hopefully, with continued health and energy, Letkemann will finish the projected future volumes of his memorial project. See more maps and name-lists at http://oldoakpublishing.com.

Peter Penner, ***A Time to be Born: Memoir of a Canadian Mennonite*** (Victoria, BC: FriesenPress, 2016), pp. 278. See http://friesenpress.com for copies, $16.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht, Abbotsford

Nine decades, that's the time span covered by *A Time to be Born: Memoir of a Canadian Mennonite*. By any calculation such a span constitutes a full life; and with respect to author Peter Penner (b. April 7, 1925), this is especially so, given his innate curiosity and love of life.



Peter Penner's autobiography is divided into three tidy partitions: Mennonite Years, University Years 1965–1992, and Retirement Years. As is evident to all readers, life does not easily yield to such artificial compartments. Throughout his narrative, Peter's Mennonite-Anabaptist formation and his scholarly vocation are both very much evident to one degree or another.

Not atypical of Mennonite immigrants from Soviet Russia during the 1920s, the Penner family arrived in Canada in 1926, eventually settling in Vineland, Ontario. They came with hopes of a brighter future, as restrictions on religious freedoms and farm collectivization spread across the Soviet Union following the Russian Revolution and civil war (1917–1920).

It was in southern Ontario where Peter learned something of the sharp demarcation separating General Conference Mennonites from Mennonite Brethren. However, it was also in Vineland where his spiritual journey began, an encounter he describes as being "cleansed by confession and repentance."

As matter of discipline, Peter began journaling at an early age. The practice made possible the inclusion of numerous minute details in his autobiography: descriptions of the family's various dwelling places, the children's schools, their frequent travels, even the concerts they attended, and his service as a conscientious objector during the Second World War.

Following the war, Peter spent two years at Prairie Bible Institute in Three Hills, Alberta. Here, he first encountered what was for him a shrill form of Christian fundamentalism. Having married Justina Janzen in 1949, the young couple was convinced that ministry among Mennonite Brethren would best be accomplished by further training at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg. However, studying in this context was "not entirely liberating in terms of fundamentalism." Still, his MBBC years produced lasting friendships that he continued to cultivate throughout his life.

With college training completed, Peter embarked on what Justina and he presumed would be a long commitment to pastoral ministry, making ordination a natural next step. However, in each of the congregations he served, his tenure was short, soliciting a wry observation, "We did not really fit in too well."

But early in his pastoral work, Peter did discover a talent for critical thinking and writing. A 1957 submission to the *Christian Leader* (the US Mennonite Brethren publication), titled "Faith Healing or Fake Healing," served to alert Mennonite readers to his keen mind. And if pastoral work among Mennonites did not prove to be a good fit, perhaps teaching would.

Accordingly, Peter accepted a teaching assignment at the East Chilliwack MB Bible School in 1957. During his three years in BC, Peter became involved with the West Coast Children's Mission, resulting in a carefully researched study of how BC Mennonites understood and practised evangelism and church planting. The publication of *Reaching the Otherwise Unreached* (1959) whet his appetite for research and writing, an interest that resulted in another publication three decades later, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (1987).

Peter's decision in the early 1960s to make a career of academic research secured objections from some MB leaders, objections which he curtly dismissed as "absurd." While distancing himself from Canadian Mennonites, he embraced Anabaptist theology, claiming: "One does not need to be in a Mennonite church to carry that theological orientation." Having by now earned a reputation as a critical thinker, he was invited to write a series of articles for the *MB Herald* and the *Christian Leader*—both magazines wanted to help university-bound Mennonite students see that higher education was not inimical to authentic Christian faith.

The major part of Peter's autobiography recounts his university years between 1965 and 1992. Launching into doctoral studies at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Peter became one of the first students in a newly minted graduate history program. Four broad concentrations captivated his interests: modern Britain, the British Empire, Canadiana, and Renaissance/Reformation studies.

Peter tells of his research at several British universities (including Cambridge and Oxford), the professors that inspired him, and his contacts at the Mennonite Center in London. Tracking British mercantilism required several research visits to India, which in addition to forming the basis of his dissertation, later occasioned the publication of a history of MB mission work in that country, *Russian, North Americans and Telugus: the Mennonite Brethren Mission in India, 1885–1975* (1997).

Early on in his graduate studies, a history position opened at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. With this appointment, Peter now had a secure income to support his growing family and finish his doctorate. The Mount Allison community was a good fit for Peter. He loved university teaching ("the greatest job in the world") and he and Justina generously participated in the community life for the better part of the three decades.

If Peter on occasion could be severe with his Mennonite audiences, he was no less acerbic at exposing bad university politics or interminable faculty wrangling. On one occasion, Peter's critique prompted a colleague to bare his fangs: "By God Penner … I'll have your life." His colleague was censured. Peter thrived on the cut and thrust of debate.

Dr. Peter Penner has not been idle during his retirement. A lengthy list of publications in the appendix testifies to a rich productivity that has now spanned more than 65 years. This autobiography will be more than a passing interest to his many friends and former colleagues. Taken together, it features a lively, very accessible, and candid account of how one person has occupied the space both inside and outside of the perceived Mennonite milieu.