VOLUME 44, NO. 1 – MARCH 2018

Mennonite Historian

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

Queen Elizabeth II visits Milltown Hutterite Community (Elie, Manitoba) in 1970. The Queen walks with (l to r) Jacob "Uli" Waldner (Huron Community, Elie), Michael Waldner (Milltown Community, Elie), and Jacob Kleinsasser (Crystal Spring Community, Ste. Agathe, Manitoba) who passed away on August 8, 2017. See page 2 for a tribute to Jacob Kleinsasser. Photo credit: Ian Kleinsasser.

Contents

In Memoriam: *Ältester* Jacob Kleinsasser (1922–2017)

by Kenny Wollmann

On August 8, 2017, Hutterite *Ältester* Jacob Kleinsasser passed away at his home in the Crystal Spring Hutterite Community (Ste. Agathe, Manitoba). He is remembered as a husband, father, minister, and elder. His wake and funeral were heavily attended and viewed via live-streaming technology by Hutterites in the U.S. and throughout Manitoba.

Jacob Kleinsasser was born on January 2, 1922, in the Milltown Community (Elie, Manitoba), four years after the mass-migration of Hutterites from the United States to Canada. That migration was precipitated by the harassment directed at Hutterites because of their refusal to participate in America's war effort during the First World War and by the associated deaths of two Hutterite conscientious objectors. [*Editors' note: see Roger Epp's description of that event in "Remembering the Flight from Oklahoma," in the December 2017 issue of* Mennonite Historian*, pp. 2, 4–5, 8.*]

In the year he was born, Jacob's parents—Jacob and Katherina (Waldner)—moved to Blumengart, Manitoba, the former Mennonite village converted into a Hutterite community. In 1938, his family moved to Sturgeon Creek Community, near Headingley, Manitoba. His childhood was marked by poverty and other challenges that typify the early experience of Hutterites in Manitoba.

Jacob was abruptly ushered into adulthood when he was appointed to the role of community carpenter at the unusually early age of 18. During the Second World War, Jacob was summoned for alternative service as a conscientious objector. However, due to familial circumstances and community responsibilities, he was granted two postponements that out-lasted the war.

Upon the confession of his faith, Jacob was baptized on Palm Sunday 1942.

On December 1, 1944, Jacob married Katherina Hofer, also of Sturgeon Creek. They had ten children, two surviving to adulthood—Edward and Dora—and an adopted daughter, Emma. On January 1, 1984, Katherina succumbed to complications due to diabetes. Jacob married Maria Hofer on April 1, 1984; their marriage was characterized by exemplary mutual support and devotion.

Through the traditional combination of election and drawing of the lot, Jake Vetter ("Vetter" is a Hutterite term of respect typically used for uncles, older men, and community leaders) became a *Diener des Wortes* (minister) in October 1946 for the Sturgeon Creek Community. Following a probationary period, he was ordained in his call to service in June 1954. That same year, Sturgeon Creek established Crystal Spring Community near Ste. Agathe, Manitoba, and Jacob moved with his family to serve as senior minister of the new community.

In addition to serving his community as minister, Jake Vetter became increasingly active in matters of the larger Hutterite church, especially assisting *Ältester* Joseph Kleinsasser from Sunnyside Community (Newton Siding, Manitoba). In the 1950s, Jacob was instrumental in formulating the *Constitution of the Hutterian Brethren Church*, providing all three Hutterite *Leut* (communities) with a unified, and therefore amplified, voice to address the Canadian government in response to anti-Hutterite legislation tabled on the floors of Manitoba and Alberta Legislatures.

When Joseph Vetter passed away in 1978, Jacob was elected to the eldership of the Schmiedeleut Conference of the Hutterian Brethren with communities in Manitoba, North and South Dakota, and Minnesota.

During his tenure as *Ältester*, Jake Vetter initiated diverse projects linked by his broad vision for the betterment of larger Hutterite society. These include personally collecting genealogical records that laid the foundation for modern Hutterite genealogy, translating historical documents into English—especially 17th-century teachings still used in daily worship—and establishing church institutions to help Hutterite communities contend with economic challenges such as prohibitive interest rates during the 1980s. These institutions include Hutterian Brethren Mutual Insurance, Hutterian Brethren Credit, a loan board, and Providence Christian Services, the outreach arm of Schmiedeleut (Group 1) Hutterites.

Jake Vetter assembled a collection of documents constituting the foundation of a third volume of the *Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, a tradition of recording history from the Hutterite perspective begun during the second half of the 16th century.

In his preaching, Jake Vetter exhibited a warm piety that spoke of Christ as friend and saviour. He was grounded in the Anabaptist notion of *Christi Nachfolge*: Christian action testifying to Christian belief. Unusual for his time and inspired by the convictions of his predecessor, Jake Vetter was keenly interested in mission, both of a spiritual and a material nature. This resulted in a cautious working relationship with the MCC that eventually developed into a "Hutterite Fund," active during the 1980s, supporting mutually agreed upon projects.

Evidence of Jake Vetter's willingness to reach beyond Hutterite boundaries was his efforts to renew the relationship with Bruderhof communities. These communities, founded by German theologian Dr. Eberhard Arnold in the 1920s, had united with all Hutterite *Leut* in 1930, but the bond came to an end in the mid-1950s. Largely due to Jake Vetter's efforts, this relationship was restored in 1974, leading to two decades of interchange with generally positive impact, still discernable in many Manitoba Hutterite communities. For example, there was increased discussion and emphasis on the joyful aspect of community life, greater consciousness of discipleship issues such as a simpler lifestyle, and a striving for

(cont'd on p. 8)

Mennonite Historian is published by the Mennonite Heritage Archives (Mennonite Church Canada, Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, and Canadian Mennonite University) and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches).

Editors: Jon Isaak (CMBS)
Conrad Stoesz (MHA)

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

1310 Taylor Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
204.669.6575
jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca
or
500 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2
204.487.3300 ext. 345
cstoesz@cmu.ca

www.mennonitehistorian.ca

Subscription rates: $17.00 per year, $32.00 for two years, and $46.00 for three years. Individual subscriptions may be ordered from these addresses.
ISSN: 07008066

Genealogy and Family History

Abram Andreas Vogt (1887–1968): Inspiring Genealogist

by Edward G. Krahn, Lorette, Manitoba

Well before there were computers and Mennonite genealogy resources online,[1] Abram Vogt maintained a card index of family names and family books, all carefully organized in a purpose-built genealogy centre in Steinbach, Manitoba. A trailblazing genealogist, Abram Andreas Vogt (December 16, 1887–September 26, 1968, GRANDMA ID: #267741) is remembered as a friendly grandpa, as well as teacher, businessman, philanthropist, and hospital founder.

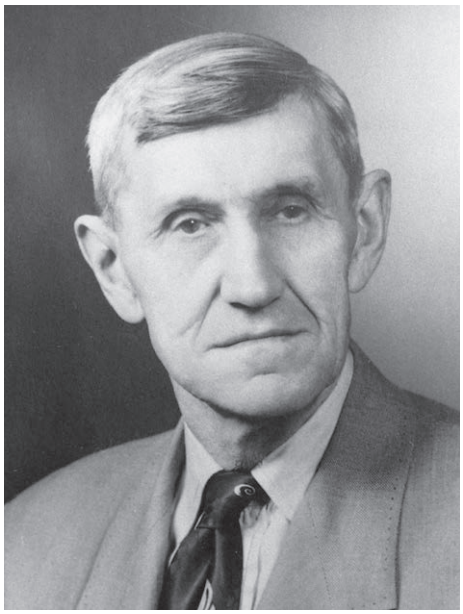
As a 13-year-old boy in 1967, Mr. Vogt introduced me to his genealogy collection. I watched with great attention as he opened the index drawer and pulled out the index cards that held my family records. He had obtained the information from my uncle John on visits to Steinbach, records of family members I did not even know. The experience helped instill in me a desire to learn more. He helped get me started on my future career in cultural heritage. His zest for Mennonite history inspired others also to research their family history, look for genealogical data in family Bibles, ask questions of elders, search for relatives, record the stories at family gatherings, and research historical records at Mennonite archives.

Abram A. Vogt was the fifth child, and the second son of a family of ten: five boys and five girls born to Andreas Vogt (1854–1914, #267722) and Aganetha (Block) Vogt (1857–1930, #267736). He was born in Schoenwiese, Chortitza Colony, where his father was a teacher, a merchant, and a minister of the Schoenwiese Church of the Kronsweide Mennonite Church.[2] His siblings were Aganetha (Vogt) Kampen (1879–1955, #267737), Maria Vogt (1881–1961, #267738), Anna Vogt (1883–1975, #267739), Andrew Vogt (1885–1919, #267740), David Vogt (1890–1920, #267742), Helena (Vogt) Penner (1892–1973, #163820), Katharina (Vogt) Dyck (1894–1966, #267743), John Vogt (1897–1956, #267744), and Peter Vogt (1900–1989, #116897).

Following the death of his father in 1914, the horrors of serving in the medical corps during the First World War, the Russian Revolution and civil war (1917–1921), and the death of two brothers to typhus, he and his new bride, Elizabeth Epp (1899–1938, #267781), left with his mother and the family clan for Canada in 1923. It was his mother who saw that things were not going well in Russia for her family. She promoted the family's immigration.

Widow Aganetha negotiated the sale of the family property. She was well-suited for this role, as her husband's duties often had called him away from home, leaving Aganetha to manage the family business, run the household, and raise the ten children. She was the one who encouraged her sons towards an education and professional careers; and she also encouraged her daughters to pursue professional careers, which was very unusual for the time.

Under the leadership of the family matriarch, Aganetha,[3] they left Schoenwiese on July 2,1923, travelling by cattle car to Libau, Latvia, where they embarked on the SS Bruton (originally known as the SS Sicilian).[4] The ship was launched in 1899 for the Allan Line but was soon put into service hauling troops for the Boar War. She again served that role during the First World War. In 1917, the vessel was acquired by the Canadian Pacific Line and renamed Bruton to be used for immigration transport. In 1922, she was hauled up and converted to haul freight with limited passenger service, which was how the Vogt family found her when they immigrated to Canada in 1923.



Abram A. Vogt: a trailblazing genealogist.

To provide some idea as to the condition of the ship, she was scrapped for metal in Italy in 1925. The family travelled from Libau on July 14, 1923, arriving on July 17 in Southampton, England. Ironically, because of delays in obtaining passage, the family once again found themselves on the SS Bruton travelling from Southampton on July 25, arriving in Quebec City on August 17.[5] From there, they travelled via the Canadian Pacific Railway to Winnipeg and on to Giroux, Manitoba. Their final destination was Steinbach, Manitoba, where a number of families from different Mennonite congregations took the family in.[6]

The newlyweds had met at a teacher's convention, where the beauty of Elisabeth Epp, the daughter of Heinrich Epp and Ida (Peters) Epp from the nearby village of Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony, had caught the eye of the 35-year-old bachelor. They were married by *Ältester* Johann P. Klassen in the Schoenwiese Church during the Christmas holidays of 1922. Following the wedding, traditional Mennonite circle games were played by their many friends. To this family, were born Andrew Vogt (1923–1989, #267782), Louise (Vogt) Thiessen (1926–1983, #267783), Hanna (Vogt) Rempel (b. 1934, #150736), and Margaret (Vogt) Kroeker (b. 1936, #267785).[7]

Upon arrival in Canada, Abram and Elisabeth were taken in by the Heinrich Klippsenstein family that lived in the village of Chortitz, west of Steinbach. Shortly afterward the family moved to Gretna, Manitoba, where Abram enrolled in the Mennonite Collegiate Institute for English studies. It was here that their son Andrew was born in 1923.

In 1924, following the completion of his school course work, Abram was offered a teaching job in a small rural Mennonite community. While the position had been offered, it was later withdrawn. Abram became discouraged about getting a teaching job, especially as it related to improving his English proficiency this late in adulthood. He took odd jobs wherever he could find them and, for a short time, rented land near Stonewall to try his hand at farming.

However, Abram did not see himself as a farmer. In 1928, the family moved

(cont'd on p. 8)

Peter Siemens (1765–1847): First *Oberschulze* of the Chortitza Colony

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

Peter Siemens was the first *Oberschulze* (district mayor) of the Chortitza Colony and the longest serving *Oberschulze* in the century-and-a-half history of the Chortitza Colony. His tireless work during a critical period in the Colony's history has been largely overlooked.

Peter Siemens was born on March 16, 1765, in the village of Gross Brunau.[1, 2] At that time, Gross Brunau was in Polish territory and part of the Danzig district. This region did not become part of the province of West Prussia until the 2nd partition of Poland in 1793. He was the son of Jacob Siemens.

Very little is known about Jacob Siemens. He was born sometime before 1740, presumably in the area commonly known as "Prussia." His wife's name is unknown, but based on the names of their grandchildren and the traditional naming pattern used at the time, it seems likely that her name was Margaretha. Jacob Siemens is known to have fathered six children between 1760 and 1774.[1]

I have been unable to positively locate Jacob Siemens in the 1772 Prussian census, which includes Gross Brunau.[3] Sometime between the 1776 census of Mennonites in West Prussia and the baptism of his children Peter and Catharina in 1784, he moved to the village of Zeyersvorderkampen (commonly known as Zeyerskampen or Zeyerschekamp at the time). He is recorded as being deceased by 1790 (the year of Peter's marriage). During their time in Gross Brunau, the Siemens family would have belonged to the Bärwalde Mennonite congregation; and during their time in Zeyersvorderkampen, they were known to be members of the Rosenort congregation.[4]

Peter Siemens, together with his siblings Jacob and Catharina, was baptized into the Gross Werder congregation in the church at Rosenort on June 20, 1784, by *Ältester* (elder or bishop) Dirk Thiessen.[5] The family was living in Zeyersvorderkampen at the time. On Sunday, October 3, 1790, *Ältester* Gerhard Wiebe of the Elbing-Ellerwald congregation married Peter Siemens and Catharina Klassen in the church at Ellerwald. Catharina (1768–1843) was the daughter of Julius and Catharina Klassen.[6]

There is no actual immigration record for the Peter Siemens family. He first appears at the end of the 1795 Chortitza Colony census under the 1794 list of Flemish immigrants who had not yet been assigned a homestead.[7] Here he is listed as 28 years old with his 26-year-old wife Catharina, daughter Catharina (2 years old), his mother-in-law, Catharina [Klassen] (63), and [her] children: Johann (24), Cornelius (20), and Maria (20).

There seems to be a bit of a mystery regarding Johann and Cornelius. Their ages match those expected for Peter's brothers. However, the list implies that they were sons of his mother-in-law. Also, they do not appear in any subsequent Chortitza or Molotschna Colony records either under Siemens or Klassen. In a list of homesteaders for 1797, he is still not assigned to a specific village. At this time, his family consisted of two males and three females. He owned two horses and four head of cattle.[8] Sometime between 1797 and 1800, he was given the Schönhorst property of the recently deceased Martin Wiebe.[9]

In 1800, Jacob Hoeppner and his brother Peter were sent to jail (see below). Subsequently, Siemens took over Peter Hoeppner's property in Chortitza,[10, 11] in exchange for paying off Hoeppner's fines and debts. He gave his Schönhorst property to Johann Loeppky.[9] In 1801, he and his family were living at Chortitza village #8. Staying with the family was servant Johann Langermann (25 years old) and maid Elisabeth Penner (15). Siemens owned 4 horses, 17 cattle, 10 sheep, 3 pigs, 1 wagon, and 1 spinning wheel at the time.[12] The family still lived there in 1807,[13] 1811,[14] 1814,[15] and 1816.[16]

In the 1811 census, the 18-and-a-half-year-old colony secretary (*Gebietschreiber*) Gerhard Penner was living with the family. By 1814, Siemens's economic situation had improved significantly. In May 1814, he owned 7 horses, 22 cattle, 84 sheep, 5 pigs, 2 wagons, and 3 spinning wheels. In addition to his income as a farmer, he was making money as a carpenter and receiving a salary as *Oberschulze*. It appears that Peter Siemens carpentry activities included building the church at Orloff in the Molotschna colony in 1809.[17]

Siemens started his work as *Oberschulze* at the end of a very rough time for the Chortitza Colony Mennonites.[18] The first immigrants were held up in Dubrovno over the winter of 1788–1789. That spring they were told that their desired settlement site was not available and were ordered to go to the less desirable Chortitza region. Much of what was promised by the Russian government did not materialize—there were problems with locals stealing horses and wood, and, worst of all, the death rate was extremely high. Added to this was the fact that this group was not accompanied by any ministers. This contributed to considerable turmoil, since, according to Mennonite tradition, only an existing *Ältester* could conduct the election of an *Ältester* and ordain the elected *Ältester*. That *Ältester* could then oversee the election of the *Lehrer* (minsters or preachers). Only an *Ältester* had the authority to perform baptisms and administer communion.

The front of the silver medallion presented to former *Oberschulze* Peter Siemens in 1839. The back of the medal is pictured on the next page. Photo credit: We are grateful to Peter Siemens of Los Gatos, California, for permission to use these photos and to Ron Siemens of Bragg Creek, Alberta, for providing copies.

There were irregularities in the *Lehrdienst* (ministerial) elections and it did not take long for the minority Frisian group to split off from the majority Flemish and establish their own congregation. The West Prussian Mennonite community finally took action, sending Cornelius Regier (*Ältester* of the Heubuden congregation) and Cornelius Warkentin (*Lehrer* of the Rosenort congregation) to investigate complaints against the co-*Ältester* David Epp and officially ordain Epp and Johann Wiebe as co-*Ältester*. To make matters worse, the first two Directors of the colony,

both Germans appointed by the Russian government, were either incompetent or corrupt, or both. They ran the colonies in the typical dictatorial Russian fashion. Jacob Hoeppner was often used as a middleman through whom the Director would issue orders. Those who disobeyed the Directors faced corporal punishment.

It appears that much of the day-to-day running of the Colony was initially done by Hoeppner, and this eventually led to conflict with the newly established *Lehrdienst*. An investigation into Hoeppner's dealings resulted in charges against Jacob Hoeppner and his brother Peter. They were fined by the Russian government. Unable to pay the fines, they were imprisoned, and their movable property was sold in order to pay these fines.

In 1797, the office of director was eliminated and the Guardianship Committee of Foreign Settlers (henceforth referred to as the Guardianship Committee) was established. Under the new system, the Colony would have an *Oberschulze* and two *Beisitzer* (administrative assistants). These were elected positions and the *Oberschulze* was to be elected every three years. The first election for a term starting in 1801 took place in 1800. Siemens was elected for the 1801–1803 term. His term was extended for an additional year with near unanimous support from the landholders. Klaas Krahn, also of Chortitza, was elected for the 1805–1807 term.[19] After that, Siemens served for five consecutive three-year terms.

There has been some question as to when Peter Siemens became the *Oberschulze*. This is based on document descriptions of the Odessa archival collection, which imply that Siemens was issuing colony directives as early as 1799.[20] A look at the actual documents clearly shows that these documents were not signed until 1801. In a footnote, historian Peter M. Friesen quotes a traveller through the colonies as stating that, in 1809, Siemens had already been the area administrator for 17 years. In a related footnote, he is said to have been in that position for 22 years in 1819.[17] This is simply not true and is probably the result of misinformation given to that person. It should be noted that during the early years of the Colony, Siemens was referred to as *Über Schulz*, *Oberschulze*, *Gebiets Vorsteher*, and *Gebiets Schulz*.

A brief and well-researched biography of Peter Siemens is provided in the book *The Good Stock* by Mary R. Dueck.[20] Unfortunately, this is written as a first-person narrative, attributing words and thoughts to Siemens that he may never have said or thought. This makes it very difficult to determine what he actually wrote or thought and what is imagined by Dueck. Fortunately, the Guardianship Committee records found in the Odessa State archives contain hundreds of documents issued by him as *Oberschulze*.

Siemens certainly did not have an easy job. The Mennonites themselves occasionally got into trouble.[21] Indeed, the first documented action on the part of Peter Siemens was dealing with non-payment of debt by a Peter Wiebe.[22] The local Russians often tried to take advantage of the Mennonites.[23] One series of events that Siemens and the *Lehrdienst* had to deal with, and try and keep out of the Russian court system, had to do with Johann Schroeder (1763–ca. 1827). In 1813, Katharina Kasdorf, the first wife of Schroeder, committed suicide. The circumstances were suspicious in that Schroeder didn't wait long to marry their maid, Katharina Olfert.[24] In addition to this, before the investigation was even complete, Schroeder and his neighbor Cornelius Banman nearly beat Martin Siemens to death. In 1803, Peter Siemens and his administration had to deal with the founding of two new villages (Burwalde and Nieder Chortitza), followed by the task of accommodating the huge wave of new immigrants from Prussia.[25]

In 1814, Peter Siemens and *Beisitzer* Abraham Leycke were accused of misappropriation of funds.[26] This accusation seems to have been instigated by the recently dismissed colony secretary Heinrich Heese,[27] *Anwohner* (landless resident) Isbrandt Friesen, and Neuendorf Schulz Jacob Loewen. After a brief investigation by a Mr. von Lau of the Guardianship Committee, the pair was found not guilty. Not surprisingly, upon re-election in 1816, Siemens was unwilling to accept another (1817–1819) term.[28] Unfortunately, the relevant file in the Odessa archives is lost and all we have is the file description, which does not describe why he was unwilling and how he was eventually convinced to take on another term.

It is interesting that on December 28, 1816, right around the time Peter Siemens was re-elected while voicing his unwillingness to serve another term, the Guardianship Committee recommended him for a silver medal in recognition of his work.[29] Unfortunately, he was not awarded the medal at this time. He may have regretted this decision to stay on, since, once again, he and his administration had to deal with another wave of new immigrants from Prussia. The number of files in the Odessa archives related to Peter Siemens drops off significantly during this time period and much less is known about his activities during his last two terms.

Very little is known about Siemens after his retirement. In 1839, he was awarded a silver medal for his activities as *Oberschulze* (see photo).[20, 30] Chortitza Colony minister David Epp preached at the funeral for Siemens's wife Catharina (Klassen) on February 22, 1843. In his diary, Epp mentions that the Siemenses had 10 children (3 of whom had died), 54 grandchildren, and 6 great-grandchildren, with 70 descendants attending the funeral.[31] The diary of Jacob Wall of Neuendorf has the following entry for December 1, 1847: "Old Peter Siemens in Chortitz died at 12:30 in the morning."[32]

Endnotes

1. Lutheran church records of Tiegenort, West Prussia, LDS film number 208424. Transcribed by Adalbert Goertz and Glenn Penner: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/TiegenortBirths.html

2. See GAMEO article on Gross Brunau: http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Gross_Brunau_(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland)

3. West Prussian Land Census of 1772. For an index by family name, see: http://pixel.cs.vt.edu/library/land/wprussia

4. See GAMEO articles on Bärwalde and Rosenort: http://gameo.org/index.

(cont'd on p. 9)

Mennonite Heritage Centre

610 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2

Archives in Society

by Conrad Stoesz

As an institution with a broad collection mandate, one that stretches over a wide geographic range, MHA works hard at providing access to archival information. The number of people personally visiting the archives is on par with other years, with a monthly average of 48 visits. Considering in-person visits, requests by phone, and email, a conservative estimate puts at 140 the number requests for information we respond to each month. This is not counting the new- and used-book sales or the 233 photos sold via MAID (Mennonite Archival Image Database) this fiscal year.

The MAID project continues to be a source of great energy and joy. Currently, volunteers Johann Wiebe, Alf Redekopp, and Barry Heinrichs are working with our photos. Each week more photos are scanned, uploaded, and described. The project now encompasses nine partners and houses 90,000 descriptive records, of which 35,000 have been paired with digital images. These numbers grow each week. The MAID website is averaging 170 visits each day with users staying an average of six or minutes per session.

MAID is one way of providing access to archival sources and increasing the public's awareness of archives. Understanding about archives is low in Canadian society. For archives to maintain and increase support, the public needs to be engaged, so that awareness, understanding, appreciation, and support for archives can be built. Some of the recent initiatives to increase public engagement include speaking at community events in Manitoba and BC, partnering with Refuge 31 Films to produce "The Last Objectors" documentary, posting regularly to the MHA Facebook page, and being part of classroom discussions at Canadian Mennonite University.

In February, a portion of the youth group from First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg came to visit MHA. I got to share with them some cool stories from the vault and we explored old photographic technology! I explained that archives preserve the evidence for the facts and themes found in the history books. And archives also hold the stories that are the exceptions to those themes!

First Mennoite Church (Winnipeg) youth group visits MHA, February 2018. Pictured (l to r): Robyn Bock, Aiden Bock, Rick Unger, Michelle Dyck, Sara Dyck, and Conrad Stoesz. Photo credit: Erika Enns Rodine.

Henry Goerzen (left) receives Award of Excellence from MHSC president Richard Thiessen at the society's annual meeting in Calgary on January 20, 2018. Photo credit: Bert Friesen.

Henry Goerzen Receives Award for Preserving Alberta History

by Barb Draper, Elmira, Ontario

Henry D. Goerzen of Didsbury, Alberta, received the Award of Excellence from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) when the society gathered for its annual meeting in Calgary on January 20. He was recognized for his work in preserving the history of Mennonites in Alberta. A farmer by vocation, Goerzen worked as a volunteer archivist for the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta for more than 25 years; he helped organize and served as the first chair for the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA).

In the early years of the Alberta society, the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) building provided space to store archival material, but when that space was no longer available, Goerzen set up a steel grain bin on his farm, carefully sealing it against moisture and rodents, and housed the material until 2001, when space became available in the new MCC building in Calgary.

In the 1990s, Goerzen travelled throughout Alberta, documenting the stories of conscientious objectors. He sometimes spoke to school groups or to the press, believing that expressing his convictions about peace was an important witness to the larger society.

"I was not afraid to put my hand on the cenotaph," he commented about a public event remembering the war. "I also want to

(cont'd on p. 9)

Two Archival Awards Extend Historical Enterprise

by Jon Isaak

The Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission announces the award of two archival grants: the 2017 infrastructure grant and the 2018 summer internship.

1. Mama Makeka House of Hope was awarded a $2,000 archival infrastructure grant in December 2017 to outfit the newly-constructed library/archives room at the Mazala Center for Professional Resourcing in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo. The money is earmarked for a scanner, computer, printer, video recorder, hard drive, and archival storage boxes and supplies—tools needed to preserve, describe, and make accessible the historical records relating to the development of Congolese Mennonite churches.

2. Emma Sorensen is the summer archival intern for 2018. The selection committee chose Emma from several strong candidates from various universities and colleges in the US and Canada.

Emma Sorensen

As a summer intern, Emma will spend a total of five weeks exploring each of the MB archival centers in North America (Fresno, Hillsboro, Winnipeg, and Abbotsford) during the months of May and June 2018.

Emma's focus interests are Mennonite relief & development initiatives and migration patterns—the theological promptings that shaped them initially, the ways they have changed over time, and the prospects for shaping Mennonite communities of faith today.

A third-year history student at Fresno Pacific University in Fresno, California, Emma's home congregation is the Rosedale Bible Church, a Mennonite Brethren church in Bakersfield, California. The internship comes with a stipend of $2,000.

Both the infrastructure grant and the summer internship are made possible with support from US and Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches. For more information, see www.mbhistory.org.

Peace, Protest, and Patriotism: Muted Voices from the First World War

by Zacharie Leclair, Montreal

At first it seemed ironic to me: I was taking part in a symposium on the history of conscientious objection (October 17–19, 2017) held at a museum exhibiting artefacts of the First World War in Kansas City, Missouri. It was a gathering of all sorts of people—historians, activists, archivists, representatives of various organizations, church people, independent researchers and many more. All had a common commitment to peace.

Zacharie Leclair speaking at a conference: "Muted Voices: Conscience, Dissent, Resistance, and Civil Liberties in World War I," Kansas City, Missouri (October 2017). Photo credit: Nan Macy.

Though the mood was generally cheerful, a general distress seemed to permeate the symposium, especially among those from the United States. After I presented a paper on President Woodrow Wilson's response to Mennonite conscientious objectors during the First World War, to my surprise, people appeared more interested in asking me about my perspective—as a French-speaking Mennonite Brethren presenter from Canada—on the current political situation in the U.S.

The social and political climate in the U.S. feels more tense and sharp, more polarized than ever. Many Americans wonder why their people seem to become more prone to violence and less united. Armed massive killings are now frequent, as well as protests and even public displays of extremism.

Football star player Colin Kaepernik launched a movement recently to express African-American discontent with police abuse and injustice by sitting, then kneeling, during the U.S. national anthem. Kaepernick attracted much contempt and criticism from some politicians, attention which might even have prevented him from securing a new contract as a free agent. Others wanted to see in him a beacon of justice reminiscent of the 19th-century great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, because Kaepernik had sponsored a worthy and important cause through peaceful means. Strikingly, this issue polarized the public opinion along traditional racial lines.

Back at my conference, I was questioned as to what extent patriotism was historically a cause of division instead of unity. I offered an audacious answer.

I was born and raised in the province of Québec, a fundamentally nationalistic society. The social and political life revolves around the deeply-felt necessity of preserving and promoting its French heritage through artistic as well as political patriotism, in the face of a perpetual risk of cultural dissolution into the larger North American English-speaking world. Yet one can hardly think of a more peaceful, less

(cont'd on p. 9)

Jacob Kleinsasser

(cont'd from page 2)

genuine community. However, the Hutterite-Bruderhof connection was painfully severed again in 1996.

Perhaps the most significant legacy that Jacob Kleinsasser leaves behind is his embrace of education as a positive force in community life. With his encouragement and considerable ecclesiastical support, numerous key personalities contributed to improving educational programs for Hutterite children. For Jake Vetter, this was a return to Walpot-era ideals, when Hutterian education in Europe was advanced beyond that of mainstream society.

Today a quality high school education has become the norm for Manitoba Hutterites. During his eldership, over 60 Hutterite teachers received their qualifying credentials and are teaching in the communities. Jake Vetter also recognized the importance of creating opportunities for Hutterite youth to express themselves in positive ways. To that end, he was a strong proponent of choral group singing, wholesome recreational/sports activities, and youth experiences beyond the boundaries of their communities via mission and study trips.

Much of the progress that Jacob Kleinsasser supported and espoused, however, led to the tragic 1992 division of the Schmiedeleut Conference. Differing visions of what it meant to be faithful Hutterite Christians and accusations against Jake Vetter's leadership resulted in the formation of a fourth Hutterite Leut.

Many Hutterites are thankful for the progress made, but also lament the disunity that resulted from conflicts about change in Hutterite church polity. Consequently, Jacob Kleinsasser's memory as a person of vision and creativity is tempered by the reality of a division that still awaits healing. Indeed, it was Jake Vetter's hope that this would happen.

On August 30th, the results of a conference-wide election were tabulated and a new *Ältester* for Schmiedeleut (Group 1) Hutterites was confirmed: Arnold Hofer of the Acadia Community (Carberry, Manitoba).

Kenny Wollmann is a member of Baker Hutterite Community (MacGregor, Manitoba). He is a student in the biblical and theological studies program at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. This article was written with files from Ian Kleinsasser and Dora Maendel.

Abram A. Vogt

(cont'd from page 3)

to Steinbach, where he joined two of his brothers in business. The brothers had bought out the former Andreas Blatz store, located on Steinbach's growing Main Street. Eventually, after some tensions between the three brothers over how to run the store, John and Abram started another store on Main Street with the same name, Vogt Brothers. Brother Peter kept the original store, which he renamed the Economy Store.

On December 27, 1933, Abram became a naturalized Canadian citizen[8] and in 1936 moved to Winnipeg, where he purchased several small stores. During this period tragedy struck. His helpmate Elisabeth developed a brain tumour that took her life on July 27, 1938, leaving Abram with four young children. He relocated the family back to Steinbach, moving in with his sister Maria. Abram once again entered into partnership with his brother John and they worked together on several business ventures, including a trucking business, South East Transfer.

Earlier, Abram had helped his sister Maria establish the Invalid Home in Steinbach. His commitment to the community and continued philanthropy made him a major player in the Mennonite Benevolent Society, which established the Bethania Home in Winnipeg. He was also a founding member of the Westgate Mennonite Collegiate in Winnipeg.

At age 71, in 1959, he married Maria Derksen (Unger) (1889–1977, #126951), the widow of an old family friend, Gerhard S. Derksen, of Derksen Printers.

Abram Vogt accomplished much in his lifetime, but his greatest achievement—the one for which he was most proud—was the establishment of the *Mennonitsche Familienforschung*. When his genealogy archives outgrew his home in 1967, he constructed a building to hold the collection. His Mennonite family research collection of books and names stored on index cards held information on more than 150,000 individuals.

Following his death in 1968, daughters Margaret Kroeker, Hanna Rempel, and Louise Thiessen continued his important genealogical work. In 1978, the records were moved to the newly built Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg, where they were stored until moved to the lower level of Autumn House in Winnipeg. During the 1980s, the Mennonite Genealogy organization was incorporated

Opening of the remodeled Vogt Brothers IGA grocery store in Steinbach. A.A. Vogt stands at the new-style self-serve checkout till in 1958 with staff (l to r): Irwin Toews, Edwin Harder, Mary Blatz, and Jake Kroeker. Photo credit: *The Carillon* photo archive.

as a registered charity and the work was continued by volunteers, with expenses covered by investment funds established for this purpose. In April 2005, plans were initiated to move the collection once again. On October 5, 2007, the decision was made to close Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., and transfer all its assets back to the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University.[9]

Today the collection remains a rich resource for genealogists. There are still untold mysteries and hidden family stories to be found in this collection. Even with so many online databases and search tools, only about 10% of the recorded information is found online—the rest resides in the holdings found in museums, historical societies, and archives.

Abram Vogt is buried in the Pioneer Cemetery Steinbach, next to his first wife, Elisabeth, and a short distance away from his mother, Aganetha.[10] It is a restful place next to a large tree, a fitting spot for a man of his stature.

How can family historians honour the legacy of Abram Vogt? One way is to spend time, as he did, with 13-year-old youths, patiently helping them learn to use the available genealogical resources to research their families' story. With such encouragement, young genealogists of the next generation will be off to a good start.

Endonotes

1. For example, see Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA); https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm

2. *A Vogt Family History: The Descendants of Andreas Vogt (1854–1914) and Aganetha "Block" Vogt (1857–1930)*, edited by Margaret Kroeker, 1994.

3. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), "Vogt, Aganetha Block (1857–1930)"; http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Vogt,_Aganetha_Block_(1857-1930); and Frieda Neufeld, "Aganetha Block Vogt" (1857–1930), *Preservings* No. 9, Part Two (December 1996): 28.

4. SS Sicilian/SS Bruton; http://www.norwayheritage.com/p_ship.asp?sh=sicin/

5. Index to Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization Records Registration Forms (1923–1930), Abram Vogt, # 438; http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/organizations/CMBoC_Forms

6. Roy Vogt, "When Hanover Opened Its Heart," *Preservings* (December 7, 1995): 6–7.

7. Kroeker, ed., *A Vogt Family History*.

8. *Canadian Gazette*, January 27, 1934, p. 1581; http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/citizenship-naturalization-records/naturalized-records-1915-1951/Pages/introduction.aspx#b

9. See Mennonite Genealogy, Inc. fonds at Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

10. Find a Grave: Pioneer Cemetery, Steinbach, Manitoba; https://www.findagrave.com/cemetery/2427931/steinbach-pioneer-cemetery

Henry Goertzen

(cont'd from page 6)

honour those killed in the war."

Goerzen also played an important role in translating letters into English and he was valued for his ability to read and write the German Gothic script.

"I wrote my first love letter with Gothic," he said. In receiving the award, Goerzen was quick to recognize the help he received from his wife, Erna.

Among the reports presented at the MHSC meeting was one from Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). This online resource began as a project of MHSC in the 1980s and continues to grow. Among the new articles in 2017 was the first article from Africa, written by a historian from Kenya. In the past year, editorial oversight for the project was moved to the Institute for the Study of Global Anabaptism at Goshen College, although volunteer editors from Canada remain involved.

An upcoming project for MHSC is "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada since 1970," to be held November 16 and 17, 2018, hosted by the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. This conference will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Canadian society.

A Mennonite Historical Society of Canada news release.

Peace, Protest, and Patriotism

(cont'd from page 7)

militaristic place than Québec. The usual correlation of patriotism and militarism, as a root cause of so many wars and conflicts, does not stand.

To my audience's surprise, I added that I liked to conceive of protest movements as patriotic deeds. If patriotism means to love one's country, in my Christian and French-Canadian perspective, the command to love your neighbour as yourself should encompass loving one's own people.

Avowedly Christian himself, Kaepernik publicly stated his support for his own Black people in a peaceful and eloquent way by reminding everyone of the principle of equality contained in the American constitution. Out of love for his own, for his country, even for the constitution, he protested injustice. I concluded by saying that we should consider Kaepernik as a patriot, and his protest as signs of solidarity not signs of disunity.

As a historian interested in conscientious objection, I believe that if leaders of the past could have conceived of war resisters as democratic heroes rather than as traitors or cowards—if they could have heard their voices instead of muting them—then the last century might have avoided some or all of its darkest hours.

Zacharie Leclair works with MCC Quebec. He holds a PhD in U.S. history from the Université du Québec à Montréal and is also the author of Charles R. Crane and Wilsonian Progressivism (2017). This article first appeared as an MCC blog post on November 29, 2017.

Peter Siemens

(cont'd from page 5)

php?title=B%C3%A4rwalde_(Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland); and http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Rosenort_Mennonite_Church_(Rosenort,_Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland)

5. Baptisms of the Gross Werder congregation in West Prussia (1782–1840). Transcribed by Adalbert Goertz and Glenn Penner: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Rosenort_Baptisms_1782-1795.htm

6. Diary of Gerhard Wiebe, *Ältester* of the Ebling-Ellerwald Mennonite congregation. Transcribed by Adalbert Goertz: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Elbing-Ellerwald_Marriages_1779-1795.htm

7. Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der Mennonitischen Ostwanderung im 16. 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe, 1955), 244.

8. Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migrations to Russia* (2007). The 1797 list can also be found here: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_1797.htm

9. Unruh, *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe*, 248.

10. Ibid., 247.

11. Russian State Historical Archives (RGIA), Fond 383, Opis 29, Dielo 162, file 68.

12. 1801 Census, Chortitza Colony, South Russia Odessa Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 67. Extracted by Tim Janzen: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_September_1801.pdf

13. November 1807 Chortitza Colony census. Transcribed by Tim Janzen: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_November_1807.pdf

14. May 1811 Chortitza Colony census. Transcribed by Richard Thiessen: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1811.pdf

15. May 1814 Chortitza colony census. Transcribed by Richard Thiessen: http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Chortitza_Mennonite_Settlement_Census_May_1811.pdf

16. Dnepropetrovsk Archives, Fond 149, File 498, which contains an October 1816 census for the Chortitza Colony. Transcription in the possession of the author.

17. Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches,

1978, 1980), 847, 997.

18. Henry Schapansky, *Mennonite Migrations and the Old Colony* (2006), chapter 7. Much of my summary of this period is derived from this chapter in Schapansky's book.

19. Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, file 42. Contains much material on the elections in the Chortitza and Molotschna Colonies from 1800 to 1812. Microfilmed and scanned copies of the Odessa records are available at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg.

20. Mary Regehr Dueck, *The Good Stock: Siemens, Peters, Regehr, Korolkov* (2009).

21. See, for example, Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, files 23, 97, 711, and 818.

22. Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, file 6.

23. See, for example, Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, files 59, 60, 91, 288, and 577.

24. Glenn Penner, "The Bergthal Colony Schroeders, Part II," *Heritage Posting* (April 2005). See: http://mmhs.org/sites/default/files/u3/pdfs/hp48.PDF

25. Russian State Historical Archives (RGIA), Fond 383, Opis 29, Dielo 183, files 78–80 and Dielo 179, files 1–3.

26. Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, file 850.

27. Cornelius Krahn, "Heinrich Heese (1787–1868)," *Mennonite Life* (April 1969): 67.

28. Odessa State Archives, Fond 6, Inventory 1, file 1026.

29. Odessa State Archives. Fond 6, Inventory 6 file 18.

30. Odessa State Archives. Fond 6, Inventory 1, file 4385. This document dates the decision to give him the award as 1836, while the actual letter accompanying the medallion is dated 1839.

31. John B. Toews, trans. and ed., *The Diaries of David Epp 1837–1843* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000).

32. Diary of Jacob Wall, Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony (December 1, 1847). See Mennonite Heritage Archives, volume #1086.

What To Do with Grandpa's Bible?

by Wally Kroeker, Winnipeg

As I was leaving a religious assembly, someone at the exit thrust a New Testament at me. When I politely declined, the thruster seemed confused. Why would I turn down the Word of God? I mumbled, "I have so many Bibles at home."

I wasn't kidding. I have accumulated Bibles since childhood. I still have the leather-bound *King James Version* my parents gave me when I was 10.

When I was baptized at 15, my church gave me a German Bible, which I still have. I wonder why it is so ragged and dog-eared; certainly not from over-use.

When my wife and I married, we decided to get with the times and acquired a *Revised Standard Version*. Other readable translations followed, like *Good News for Modern Man* and *The Living Bible*, the paraphrase written by Ken Taylor on the same commuter train that I would later take from Wheaton to Chicago. And in due course, we had to have a *New American Standard Bible* and then a *New International Version*.

In seminary I was urged to get a *Jerusalem Bible* for its Catholic inflection. And more recently the gender-sensitive *New Revised Standard Version* became obligatory.

When my dad died I came across a pocket New Testament he took along when travelling overseas to sell lentils. I page through it now and muse about underlined passages that presumably edified him far from home.

Recently, when a friend edited a new version titled *God's Justice*, with dozens of global experts commenting on justice themes, I of course had to have one.

How many do I have, altogether? More than a dozen, at last count.

I have parted with some. During the glasnost era, I gave a chain reference edition to a pastor in a former Soviet republic who, through a translator, pressed me to explain an obscure passage in Hebrews. Whatever answer I gave did not satisfy him. But the Bible did, though he spoke no English.

Now, having exceeded three-score-and-ten years, it is time to prune my shelves. (I hesitate to say de-clutter because that seems irreverent.) I have been nudged by Margareta Magnusson's *The Gentle Art of Swedish Death Cleaning*, which urges disposing of belongings now rather than leaving a burden to family and friends.

Many books are easy to cull and send to the thrift shop, but Scripture—so precious with underlinings and margin notes—belongs in a different class. Can I blithely abandon a Bible that nourished Grandpa for decades? Couldn't I keep at least that one as a souvenir? Or is it disrespectful to let it lie idle in a drawer of paper clips, pencil stubs, and desk debris?

Archivists looked glazed when I mentioned my Bibles, as if to say, "another Baby Boomer with old books to offload." Said one, "There is little historical need for the glut of family Bibles out there. If the Bible that nourished Grandpa for all those years isn't important enough for the family to keep, you can be pretty sure it won't mean much to anyone else."

Exceptions he cited were a volume that might be "really old, like from the 1700s," belonged to a historic figure, or lists vital family records. Likewise, a notated and underlined Bible that a scholar might have used to research a significant theological tome.

A stack of Bibles. Photo credit: Google Images.

In any case, my 1961 German edition—so inexplicably dilapidated it looks like a club sandwich with the toast askew—wouldn't merit retention.

Is there a respectful way to dispose of an old Bible? One website suggests burying it—returning to the earth—after a suitable ceremony. Another says simply to burn it or put it in the recycling bin.

My disposal dilemma won't endure beyond me. With multiple translations/versions instantly available on digital gizmos, who still buys published Scripture? The problem will vanish with my generation.

But what about now?

My religious tradition (Mennonite) revered "the Word." Growing up we often heard, "Was sagt das Wort?" ("What does the Word say?") I know that "the Word" springs alive and gets legs not on the page but in the heart and daily walk. And yet, having spent half a century in the periodicals business, I can't resist honouring "revelation" that is printed, folded, collated, glued, trimmed and bound into a form that can be carried and cracked open, even if it is then slammed shut and placed on a shelf.

So, for now, I will skim these Bibles once more and reflect on their inspirational provenance.

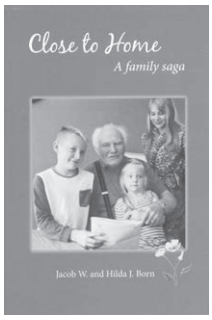
Then I will reach for a match ... or a spade.

Wally Kroeker recently retired from a career editing religious magazines.

Book Notes

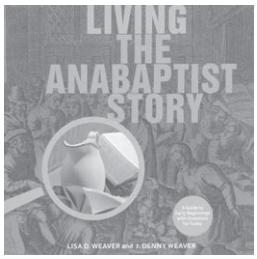
by Jon Isaak

Jacob W. and Hilda J. (Klassen) Born, ***Close to Home: A Family Saga*** (2017), 200 pp.



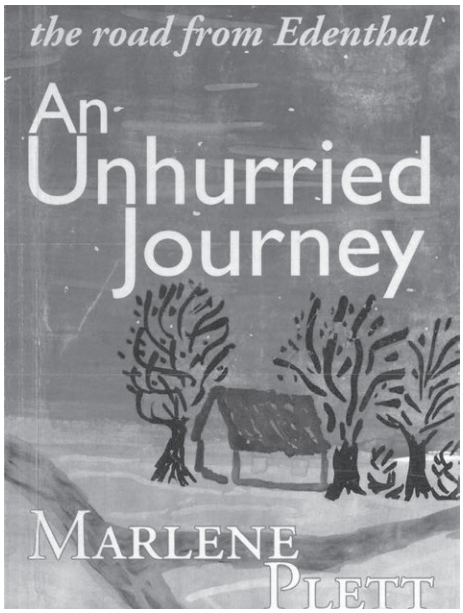
This is a family book, chronicling Jake's (b. 1927) and Hilda's (b. 1930) rich family history from immigrant beginnings on the Canadian prairies to a dairy operation in BC's Fraser Valley. They situate their story in Jake's forebears (Wilhelm J. Born [1897–1969] and Katerina [Dueckmann] Born [1907–1986]) and in Hilda's forebears (Johann F. Klassen [1901–1960] and Maria [Martens] Klassen [1900–2005]), each of whom emigrated from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Themes of Christian faith and family togetherness artfully fill the pages. The book includes pictures and genealogical data relating to their children (David [b. 1954], Teresa [b. 1955], John [b. 1956], J. Bryan [b. 1962], and Matthew [b. 1966]), children's spouses, and grandchildren.

Lisa D. Weaver and J. Denny Weaver, ***Living the Anabaptist Story: A Guide to Early Beginnings with Questions for Today***, illustration and design by Judith Rempel Smucker (Telford: Cascadia, 2015), 112 pp.



This is an attractively designed, brief introduction to the Mennonite-Anabaptist representation of Christianity. Colourful photographs, charts, timelines, maps, and concise articles give an outline of the 16th-century beginnings as well as an accessible invitation to living out contemporary expressions of Anabaptist faith. Each chapter has engaging discussion questions and ideas for extending the learnings of the chapter. A great resource for middle school and high school students. Useful also as a primer for first-generation Mennonites and as a textbook for baptism and new members' classes.

Book Reviews



Marlene Plett, ***An Unhurried Journey: The Road from Edenthal*** (2016), 366 pp.

Reviewed by Eleanor Chornoboy

In *An Unhurried Journey: The Road from Edenthal*, Marlene Plett narrates her life story since her birth in 1934. However, to establish her place in history and to locate it geographically, she fills in details of her home farm with information of previous owners and the lay of the land, long before her birth. Plett creates a detailed scene of the family farm in Edenthal, a district in southern Manitoba, where she was born and grew up. Critical to shaping her life were her parents and her husband, along with a multitude of family members, her children, friends, teachers, and more.

Her father, David Wall, was born in Crimea and, in 1922, arrived in Canada as a young man after he had been a part of the Self-Defense Unit formed to protect the Mennonite villages from lawless terrorist gangs. Plett's mother, Mary Janzen Wall, was born to immigrant parents in Strassberg, Manitoba; she met David when he came to work for her father as a farm labourer.

After her separation from her husband, John B. Plett, who was also an immigrant, Plett asked him to tell her some of his life's story. She retells his childhood stories: of leaving Ukraine near the end of the Second World War ahead of the German army, of conscription into the German army at the age of fifteen, of hunger, of immigration to Canada, and of working as a farmhand for her father, David Wall. All this sets the stage for eventual love, tension, understanding, and forgiveness between characters who immigrated to Canada at different times and who carried emotional baggage from very different life experiences, even though they shared the same faith base. The immigrant experience theme is a constant thread in Plett's memoir.

However, her story is not one of Mennonite history, but the story of one Mennonite woman's personal journey. Her memoir is laced with sweet childhood stories on the farm, traumatic and frightening experiences, wedded bliss, family tensions, and joys. She writes in her introduction, "This story describes the days and seasons of my life, my successes and my failures, the positive and the negative scenes. Both parts are necessary for a fully rounded life, and woe to me if I omit one or the other." Vignettes depicting her life's constantly changing path are woven into a carpet of innocence, pain, anger, confusion, struggles, and celebrations.

Although often minimized by challenges, Plett collects tools along her journey to build a life of courage and strength, frequently unavailable to women of her era. Expectations placed on women of her time made it impossible for many women to develop the fortitude required to face exceptional and unexpected circumstances. Plett grows from her troubles, making pivotal life-altering decisions and emerging as an independent and self-assured woman.

Plett bravely and honestly tells her story like a young artist—describing her baby sister's "plump face and sparkling blue eyes" as precisely "what was needed to warm my frostbitten soul." She takes the reader along with her to where she attended high school at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna; to her marriage; to the gifts of her children; and through the confusion of a troubled marriage, family tensions, and the process of acceptance and forgiveness.

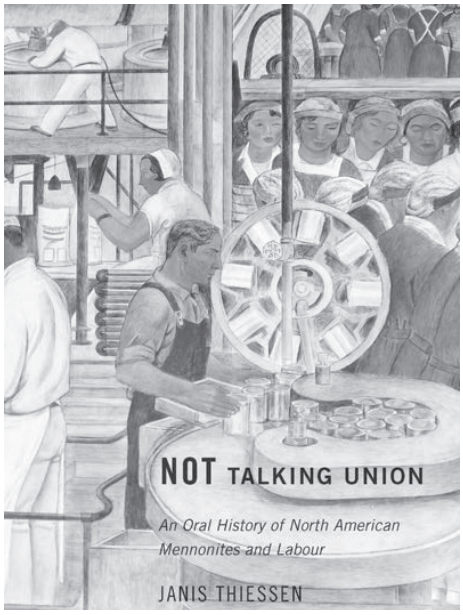
Ultimately, Plett's journey brings her to a place of spiritual and emotional health and forgiveness, as evidenced by her final words: "When gentle night breezes waft across my face, I am filled with a spiritual joy."

To give an additional context to her characters, Plett has provided ten pages of photographs, including pictures of her

family farm, her parents and siblings, friends, picnics, and arrivals of new babies.

Plett concludes her unhurried journey with detailed and loving biographies of her father, David Wall, her mother, Mary Janzen Wall, and her late husband, John Plett. Each biography is complemented with a page of photographs. While she says the biographies are for her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren—so that "they will come to know and understand a little more about their ancestors"—they are also helpful for readers to gain more insight into the characters that were instrumental in molding the writer's character.

I found *An Unhurried Journey* to be refreshingly candid. I appreciated the way Plett told her story with love and courage, not covering up the blemishes, but speaking of them openly from her heart, and with her heart.



Janis Thiessen, ***NOT Talking Union: An Oral History of North American Mennonites and Labour*** (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2016), 230 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

Janis Thiessen, history professor at the University of Winnipeg, explores why workers reject supporting or participating in labour unions in *Not Talking Union*. She is particularly interested to highlight the role religion plays in the reasoning of those interviewed.

The book is an analysis of over a hundred oral interviews conducted by the author in a period of post-doctoral research during 2009–2014.

Thiessen focuses on the Christian tradition, specifically three groups of Mennonites in North America: the so-called Old Mennonites, the Mennonite Brethren, and the Mennonite Church USA. Interviewees were selected from persons known to the author, along with a dozen or more acquaintances and friends who offered additional suggestions.

The research breaks new ground, as labour history, including unions, has all too often deliberately failed to take religious factors into consideration. She maintains religion is an important aspect of worldview for many, perhaps most people in the labour force. To ignore this reality omits an important piece of decision-making open to workers.

It is interesting to get a better look at the reasons given by those who are not in favour of joining unions. However, there was also a segment, the author reports, that was not opposed to joining unions, or at least did so but continued to struggle with that decision.

The reasoning given by those not favouring unions often included biblical quotations seen as undergirding a negative assessment of joining unions. The question of how the Bible is interpreted and applied to these union situations can be challenged, of course. Unions, as such, are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, so the process of discerning certain applications requires extending meaning from particular biblical texts to contemporary situations like unions and the labour movement. Such conclusions are often disputed.

Thiessen does make one key finding: There is marked difference between what the churches (Mennonite here) say in official statements on the topic, and what their individual members say for themselves.

The content of book is set out in six chapters. Chapter 1 deals with the character of religious belief, in an attempt at making clear the methodology used for the research, especially as it relates to religious belief (and not only Mennonite faith). Chapter 2 surveys the prevailing attitudes toward unions, with excerpts from the individual interviews conducted for this study.

Then the book works its way through two case study settings in Chapter 3 and 4, picking up the labour situation in California among Mennonites and migrant workers. This is an area where a good deal of conflict has arisen over the years with regard to labour relations, where Mennonites have found themselves "tested" in their beliefs. Interviewees addressed topics like the things people make public regarding their views and the tenuousness of employment ("it is easy to lose one's job if remarks are carelessly made").

Chapter 5 deals essentially with the cases of four Mennonite persons who conscientiously objected to join unions. The terminology calls to mind, of course, conscientious objection to military service, which could offer some interesting comparisons, but is something not pursued. Nevertheless, it is already very clear that the whole subject is not only complex, but very difficult for individuals to deal with, to find a clear path forward, and to process emotionally and psychologically.

"The Faith Based Workplace" is the title given to the final (6th) chapter, followed by a conclusion summarizing Thiessen's analysis. She affirms that "the silence on labour unions is now ended." This is a true statement. The discussion has been cracked open and there is the hope it will continue fruitfully.

Here the author restates her case for the importance of using oral history to look at levels of the labour relations, a topic that has been traditionally overlooked or devalued. The views of "ordinary" people should not be ignored. Labour relations history, she maintains, interconnects many levels of life experience. Among these, religion plays a vital, if often invisible or unarticulated, role.

She underscores her conviction that people, Mennonites above all, should get involved actively in dealing with labour relations issues and not seek to downplay, sidestep, or even to hide them.

However, the small sample of a relatively small portion of the Mennonite population of North America does raise some questions. The sampling passed over the great majority of Mennonites—those typically referred to as "conservative"—whose views would also have been worth probing. Still, the way in which Thiessen's research ties into the larger question of "conscientious objection" is of specific interest to this reviewer. A wide-open door for follow-up on this feature certainly does invite further exploration.