

Mennonite Historian

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



Klaas W. Brandt (1876–1954) of Kleine Gemeinde origins, was a reserved, humble, entrepreneur whose behind-the-scenes work on several projects is mostly invisible to residents of Steinbach, Winnipeg, and other Manitoba towns today. This year marks the centennial of one of those projects, the Greater Winnipeg Water District aqueduct from Shoal Lake. In the photo above, a construction worker stands on the aqueduct as it is being built (1915–1919). See story of Brandt’s contribution, beginning on page 2. Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Archives (Mennonite Archival Image Database [MAID] MHC 720-32).

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Klaas W. Brandt: Engineer, Surveyor, Metal Fabricator

by Dan Dyck, volunteer writer at the Mennonite Heritage Archives

A 136 km aqueduct. A hydro-electric power plant. The Ford Motor Company. Airplanes. A church.

These are just a few of the disparate threads that weave together the prolific professional life of Klaas W. Brandt (1876–1954), Steinbach area engineer, land surveyor, and metal fabricator.

Klaas was independent of spirit and motivated to pursue his interests in a technical vocation. He ran away from his home, likely in the Blumenort area, as a teen.¹ Not wanting to farm, he found a job in Steinbach.

With only a grade three education, all in the German language, Brandt took up engineering studies via correspondence from a university in Chicago.²

Water and Electricity Projects

When the city announced in 1913 that it would build an aqueduct to move high-quality water from Shoal Lake, on the Manitoba-Ontario boundary, to Winnipeg, Brandt was intrigued. He began designing a 60-ton³ walking dredge for the project, together with his brother-in-law, Klaas R. Friesen,⁴ in 1914.

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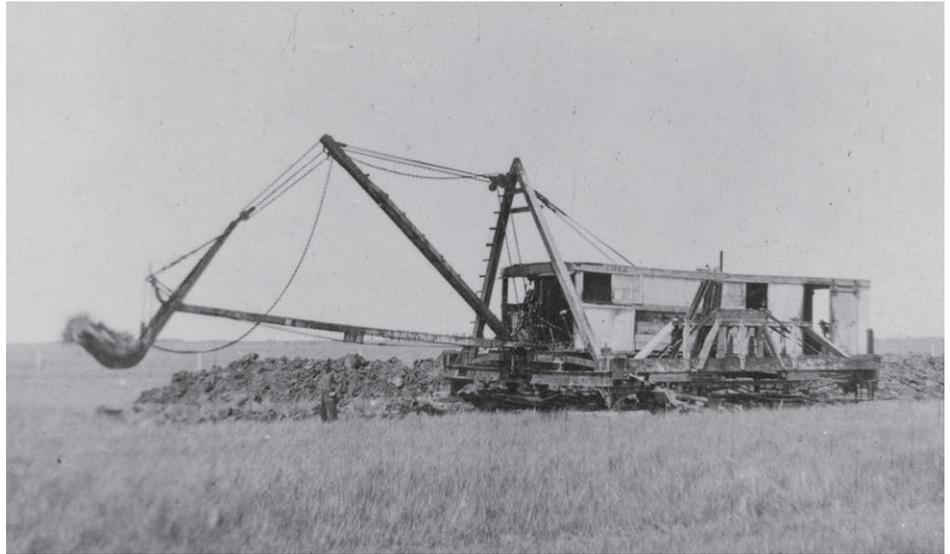
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Brandt designed and built this walking dredge specifically for trenching through muskeg for the Shoal Lake aqueduct, which still serves Winnipeg with high quality water today (City of Winnipeg Archives COWA_F0015_0175_0001_0001_0614_001).

The gravity-fed pipeline route would pass through swampy areas that would mire traditional excavation machines. By means of winches and animated skid-like feet, Brandt's dredge could be moved under power of an onboard, gasoline-fueled engine. Its wide and long feet could effectively float the machine on muskeg that would otherwise ensnare traditional excavation equipment. A large shovel dug a trench in which the concrete duct would be formed. The machine would then crawl ahead on its feet to dig out the next section. This process was repeated for a total of about 6.5 km of unstable, soft ground. Brandt began his section of the route in 1916. It took four years to complete. The first water flowed through the aqueduct on March 26, 1919.

When Brandt's work on the aqueduct was complete, he became a tool maker at the Great Falls power plant development on the Winnipeg River, 24 km north of Lac du Bonnet. The project, begun in 1914, was halted due to the First World War, and resumed in 1919. There is little information on what Brandt's work entailed on this project. However, he was an avid photographer. There are numerous images in his collection of the Great Falls plant at various stages of construction.

By the age of 43, Brandt had already had a hand in bringing drinking water and electricity to Manitoba's largest city.

Surveying the Province of Manitoba

With the aqueduct and dam projects
(cont'd on p. 4)



Aqueduct under construction, showing temporary railway tracks and horse-powered machinery (MAID MHC 720-29).

Genealogy and Family History

Russian Mennonite Church Records: What Has Survived and Where They Are Now

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

Over the last seven decades there has been much speculation on the whereabouts of the many Mennonite church registers that once existed in Russia. During the century or so that Mennonites in Russia kept church registers, I estimate that the total number of registers must have numbered in the hundreds. My crude guesstimate is that during this time period at least a half a million Mennonites would have lived in Russia. All of these people, even those who may have just lived long enough to be given a name, were recorded in one or more of these church registers.

In this article, I attempt to account for all known surviving Mennonite church registers¹ and answer the following questions: 1) where are the originals, 2) where can scans and/or transcriptions be found, and 3) has the information from these registers been integrated into the GRANDMA² database? I do not include here Russian civil records, which some may consider church records but were, in fact, not. I am also aware of many extracts of Russian Mennonite church records, ranging from a page or two to small sections of a register. I have not included these here since they are not church registers.

1. The Chortitza colony

Over its nearly 150-year history, the “Old Colony” must have kept dozens of registers. Only two are known to have survived. These are family registers started around 1890 and continuing to the 1920s. The originals are found in the Zaporozhye state archives in Ukraine. Copies of these registers, written in Russian, and translations can be viewed at the Mennonite Heritage Archive (MHA) in Winnipeg. The data in these records has been incorporated into the GRANDMA database.

2. The Bergthal colony

The Bergthal colony started around 1836 as a daughter colony of Chortitza. A family register (volume A) was started in 1843. Volumes A, B, and C were taken to Manitoba when the colony left for North

America in the 1870s. The originals are in the office of the Christian Mennonite Conference (formerly Chortitzer Mennonite Church). Copies are available at the MHA (vol. 2222). The three volumes have been published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society as the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch* in 1993. These records have been incorporated into the GRANDMA database.

3. Schönhorst, Chortitza colony

There is a family register for the congregation centered at the village of Schönhorst in the Chortitza colony. This register was started in the late 1870s and continues until the 1920s. It was taken to British Columbia in the late 1940s by Peter J. Letkemann. The original is in private hands in the Vancouver area. Copies are available at the MHA (vol. 2238 and microfiche #8) and the information from this register has been integrated into the GRANDMA database.

4. Fürstenland colony baptismal register

The Fürstenland colony started in 1864 as a daughter colony of Chortitza. A baptismal register for the years 1885 to 1926 has survived. It was taken to Canada in 1926. The original is privately owned and its whereabouts are currently unknown. *Anyone with information on the original should contact the author.* Photocopies (vol. 2275, file #5) and a microfilm (#197) are available at the MHA. The information from this register has been added to the GRANDMA database.

5. Alexanderwohl, Molotschna colony

During the years 1819 to 1824, almost the entire Przechowka Old Flemish congregation in West Prussia immigrated to the Molotschna colony in Russia, establishing the village and congregation of Alexanderwohl. In the 1870s, most of this congregation immigrated to Kansas, taking all of their church records with them. The Alexanderwohl records are a mish-mash of births, baptisms, marriages, and deaths recorded between the 1820s and 1870s. The originals are at the Mennonite Library and Archives (MLA) in North Newton, Kansas, and available online.³ Copies are available at the MHA and the information from this register has been added to the GRANDMA database.

6. Busau, Crimea

The originals of the family register for the Mennonite Brethren church centered at Busau are in the Simferopol archives in Crimea. These records were started in the 1880s and were microfilmed by the Mormons (LSD film number 2084337). These records were transcribed by Hermann Schirmacher and posted online.⁴ The data from this register has been added to the GRANDMA database.

8. Orenburg colony

Orenburg was founded in 1892–1893 as a daughter colony of the Chortitza colony. Family registers are available for various village congregations in the Orenburg colony. The original registers are in the Orenburg archives. Scans and transcriptions are available online.⁵ The information from these registers has been incorporated into the GRANDMA database.

9. Memrik colony birth registers

Memrik was a daughter colony of the Molotschna colony and was founded in 1885. I recently obtained two birth registers for the Memrik (Kalinovo) Mennonite church. There is a German register for the years 1902–1920 and a Russian register for the years 1910–1923 (1921–1923 are incomplete). The originals are in the Donetsk archives in Ukraine. The contents of these registers have been extracted and are now available on the mennonitegenealogy.com website.⁶ Images of the originals are available at the MHA. Most of the data found in these registers are *not* in the GRANDMA database.

10. Michalin, Volhynia

The Michalin settlement was originally founded by families from the Przechowka Old Flemish congregation in West Prussia in the late 1780s. Around 1803–1804, these people were displaced by a Frisian group coming from the Montau congregation. The congregation was founded by this group in 1811 and a family register was started. The original is at the MLA. Digital scans are available online⁷ and these records have been incorporated into the GRANDMA database.

11. Heinrichsdorf, Volhynia

Heinrichsdorf was founded by a group of Old Flemish Mennonites in 1848. This

(cont'd on p. 8)

Klaas W. Brandt

(cont'd from p. 2)

complete, Klaas Brandt became a land surveyor for the Province of Manitoba around 1926. During time spent in the city, Brandt was asked to tutor young university students who were struggling with their math studies.⁵

Field work took Klaas to the Central Plains region of Manitoba—McCreary, Plumus, Waldersee, Glenella, to name a few. Because much of Klaas Brandt's surveying career kept him away from family for long periods of time, the family often met in Portage la Prairie, the halfway point for both Klaas and his wife and children. Son Henry would drive the family in the Model T Ford and, upon arrival, all would enjoy a picnic lunch likely of ham sandwiches on Helena's home-baked brown bread.

From age 10 to about 14, grandson Dave Brandt served as Klaas's rodman on land surveys. Together, they surveyed many of the lots in current day Steinbach. Dave's pay at the end of the day was always a Coca-Cola and chocolate bar when they got home, a treat the young boy always relished.

Klaas's family came to equate engineering work with long absences. So, years later when Dave announced his own intention to become an engineer, his aunts expressed their dismay. That there were different engineering disciplines was news to them.

A Better Idea for Ford Car Dealers

When Brandt wasn't solving problems with engineering designs, he was thinking about solving problems with engineering designs.

In 1922, he developed plans for efficient car parts inventory and retrieval systems for Ford car dealers. These ideas became drawings. An overhead track design would ease the lifting and conveyance of heavy parts. The drawings spawned a proposal, and then promotional materials.

The project likely came about due to the close family relations with J.R. Friesen, who opened up the first Ford car dealership in Western Canada.

We don't know if his ideas ever found traction in Ford car dealerships, but it's clear that Brandt aimed high and big. It would have been a significant business coup to supply a burgeoning car dealership network.



Workers pour molten metal into sand castings in the Brandt foundry (MAID MHC 720-05).

From Land to Air

Official historical records are silent on Brandt's role in building Steinbach's first airplane. But detailed drawings of the plane, with particular attention on fitting a Ford engine to the aircraft, are in the donated collection of Brandt's documents at the Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Like many adventurers in the early days of flight, brothers-in-law Frank Sawatzky and William Wiebe couldn't resist the vision of seeing the land from the air. The young duo was excited by an advertisement selling detailed plans to build a Pietenpol Air Camper in a 25-cent magazine called *Popular Mechanics and Inventions*.⁶

Unable to afford the detailed plans, the pair used a magnifying glass to surmise

and decipher measurements from photos of the limited views in the magazine. Many calculations must have filled in gaps. With Klaas's help, they drew up their own plans—quite a feat of *imagineering*.

In the 1930s, Brandt wanted to work closer to home, and a new business, Steinbach Sheet Metal, was born at Friesen Ave. and Main St. in Steinbach. Over the years it grew into a fully-equipped machine shop and foundry.

By the end of the war, Brandt learned of decommissioned aircraft at Manitoba air bases. He determined that the Lysander airplanes in Rivers, Manitoba, with their 890-horsepower aluminum engines, were the best value for the money because they contained the most metal. About 27 planes were purchased.⁷



Brandt purchased surplus Lysander aircraft that were no longer needed by the Canadian government after the Second World War ended. The planes were specially designed to pick up and drop off spies behind enemy lines. The aircraft engines were made of aluminum, and were melted down in the Brandt foundry to cast and machine a variety of parts and components for other companies (MAID MHC 720-04).

The aluminum was melted down in the foundry, then re-cast and machined into new products, mostly for farm equipment applications. The planes were stored in the Brandt family's garden—much to the dismay of wife Helena—and provided aluminum for many years.

“They were marvelous toys for a ten-year-old,” recalled Dave. “We climbed into the cockpits and were flying all over Germany.”

Turning weapons into ploughshares is certainly not an idea limited to the current generation.

Life, faith, character

Small in stature, probably about 5'7", and perfectionist by nature, Brandt is remembered as a hard-working man of few words.⁸

Klaas's high expectations of his workers extended to his grandson, Dave. He didn't accept his grandson's “good-enough” work on the lathe when Dave worked in the shop one summer.

As the boss of the machine shop, Brandt was quiet and not one to offer mere opinions. “Grandpa Brandt didn't speak a lot, and didn't speak very loud, but he was very precise,” said Dave. Everyone had to listen closely when instructions were given.

He was also a very serious person. “I don't remember him telling jokes, or laughing much,” said Dave. He didn't talk much about his faith, but he took those commitments very seriously, if quietly. When he committed to a person or an organization, it was with his whole being.”



Klaas W. Brandt (1876–1954), Steinbach area metal worker, engineer, and land surveyor (MAID MHC 720-131).



The Bruderthaler Mennonite church in Steinbach. Brandt produced the architectural drawings for the building. The Bruderthaler church was a forerunner to the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren Church (MAID MHC 720-96).

While Klaas was baptised as a young adult in the Kleine Gemeinde church, around 1919, the family joined the Bruderthaler church in Steinbach, attracted by its Sunday school and choir. Later, Klaas made architectural drawings for the new Bruderthaler church. Initial drawings are identified in his collection as “Preliminary Plan of Bruderthaler Church Steinbach” and are dated February 25, 1928.

Klaas was always very careful about his weight. In his adult life he developed what was probably Type 2 diabetes, which he controlled with a strictly self-disciplined diet.⁹

Dave recalls receiving a behaviour lesson from his grandfather for his first communion service. Baptized at age 13, Dave needed to prepare for his first communion. These were special services on a Sunday afternoon. Dave received clear instructions to have a clean, white handkerchief to hold the bread until all were served and were instructed to eat together. “He made very sure that his oldest grandson would do it right,” said Dave.

In Klaas W. Brandt's world, precision and accuracy mattered in all things. Whether in design engineering, manufacturing, personal health, or spiritual life, Klaas Brandt's exacting nature defined his character and his life.

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Many thanks to family members Dave Brandt, Arlene Rempel, Ralph Friesen, and John Henry Friesen for generously sharing their time, being first readers, and offering correctives on early drafts. Ralph Friesen's books on local Mennonite history were invaluable. Thanks to Conrad Stoesz, Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, for assistance during repeated visits. The Winnipeg Public Library provided useful books on the history of the Shoal Lake Aqueduct and the Greater Winnipeg Waterworks Railway. Sarah Ramsden at the City of Winnipeg Archives was most helpful in retrieving photos and documents related to the construction of the Shoal Lake aqueduct.

Endnotes

1. Phone conversation, Dave Brandt and Dan Dyck, October 23, 2018.
2. Notes from a conversation between Arlene Rempel and Conrad Stoesz, Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Archives, December 2017. No record of his enrollment exists at the University of Chicago, as per investigation by Stoesz, who surmises Brandt may have studied via another university in Chicago. Grandson Dave Brandt says Klaas may have had a grade six education.
3. Ralph Friesen, *Between Earth and Sky Steinbach the First Fifty Years* (Steinbach: Derksen Printers, 2009).
4. Hilton Friesen and Ralph Friesen, *Abraham S. Friesen Steinbach Pioneer* (Winnipeg: Hilton Friesen, 2004), citing the *Carillon News*, March 13, 1953.
5. Arlene Rempel, email, January 2, 2019.
6. Ralph Friesen, “Entrepreneurial Legacy of A.S. Friesen,” *Preservings*, no. 9 (December 1996): 74.
7. Phone conversation, Dave Brandt and Dan Dyck, October 23, 2018.
8. Phone conversation, Arlene Rempel and Dan Dyck, October 19, 2018.
9. Phone conversation, Dave Brandt and Dan Dyck, October 23, 2018.

Epp Brothers Garage Fire

by Wally Epp, Okotoks, Alberta

Eds. After the "Moment from Yesterday" photo (right) and a request for information about the fire appeared in the June 18, 2018, Canadian Mennonite, Wally Epp wrote this response.

In 1955, my brother Alfred (age 24) and I, Wally (age 19), started a Texaco Service Station at Fiske, Saskatchewan. At the time, neither one of us had any money and we had to borrow \$5 from our fuel supplier to get a gasoline vendors license.

Our first building was a 10x12 feet structure that looked like a fruit stand. The tanks for fuel were dug in by hand, 9x12 feet and 6 feet deep. The power supply was a Kohler generator which was kept outside and started with four 6-volt batteries. In winter time, we would have to assist the starting motor by hand cranking in time with the starter.

In 1957, we scrounged up enough money to erect a 30x40 feet Quonset structure that you see in the burning building fire. The fire occurred after an employee came into the building with an open can of gas, approximately $\frac{3}{4}$ gallon. When the cold air came into the building the furnace kicked in and ignited the fumes from the gasoline. The whole building took less than two hours to burn to the ground. The employee was uninjured. Inside the building, we had a D4 Caterpillar front-end loader with no insurance on it. We subsequently sold the remains for \$800.

We were insured by Mennonite Mutual Insurance of Waldheim, Saskatchewan, and they paid our claim promptly. The only problem was we were underinsured by \$20,000. However, we rebuilt the building, only by that time people had become used to driving by and business was never the same.

At the time of the fire, my younger brother Richard (age 22) was a partner with Wally (age 29). The fire occurred on December 22, 1964, and we were fortunate that we had expanded part of our business



The Epp Brothers service station going up in flames in 1964 (MAID MHC 492-663).

to Rosetown that same year. Wally managed that business and he and Alfred stayed together until 1979 when they sold out to the employees.

Richard left the business in 1969 to farm in the Fiske district and to operate a manufacturing business called Darmani North America. His business is located where the original service station was situated. He is still there today with his wife Darlene.

Alfred eventually went farming and retired in Saskatoon where he resides in Sunnyside Nursing Home after his wife Kay died in 2015.

Wally went farming after selling out the business but returned in 1985 to operate an implement and automotive dealership until 1991. In 1991, his wife Margaret died, and

he stayed on the farm until 1995 when he relocated to Okotoks, Alberta, and he resides there today with his wife Valetta.

Because Wally was in Rosetown when the fire started and only arrived at the end he doesn't know for sure who took the picture. However, there is a good chance that Alfred's wife took it because they lived in the same yard. It remains a mystery to them as to how the picture ended up in your archives. Perhaps people from Fiske who might have been at the fire might know the answer?

Attached is a picture of what the scene looks like today [below]. The buildings you see are now part of Darmani North America Manufacturing operated by Richard Epp and his son Curtis. I hope this clears up some of the questions regarding the mystery photo.



The buildings of Darmani Industries that now occupy the property of the former Epp Brothers service station in Fiske, Saskatchewan. Photo credit: Wally Epp.

Peggy Unruh Regehr: Advocate for Women

by John Longhurst, Winnipeg

Before #MeToo and #ChurchToo—before there even was the Internet—there was Winnipegger Peggy Unruh Regehr.



Peggy Unruh Regehr (1928–2018)

Unruh Regehr, who died September 27, 2018, at the age of 89, was a pioneer in championing the cause of women in leadership in Mennonite denominations in Canada.

Born to Abe and Annie Unruh on November 12, 1928, in Winkler, Manitoba, Unruh Regehr was one of four children who moved to India with their Mennonite Brethren missionary parents in 1935.

In 1942, the family left India due to the threat of a Japanese invasion, returning to Winkler. In 1946, her parents and two siblings returned to India, leaving Unruh Regehr in Canada with her sister, Kay.

After graduating from high school, the sisters attended Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas. It was there Unruh Regehr saw women giving significant leadership in a church institution for the first time—something that left a strong impression. After graduation three years later, she returned to Winkler to teach.

During visits to Winnipeg to visit relatives, she met Walter Regehr. In 1951, they were married.

While raising a family, Unruh Regehr continued to be interested in issues related to women in the church. In the late 1960s, she became interested in feminism. By the late 1970s, the mother of three went back to university to study theology.

A member of the Portage Avenue

Mennonite Brethren Church, she was hired by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada in 1984 to start its new Women's Concerns program. She directed the program until 1989.

Speaking at her funeral at River East (MB) Church in Winnipeg, where she and Walter were members, friend Esther Epp-Tiessen remembered Unruh Regehr as “a middle-aged biblical feminist who believed that Jesus wanted women to flourish.”

She grew up, Epp-Tiessen said, “at a time when women in the church had secondary status and limited roles. She chafed under it, and it sparked a passion to change things.”

Problem was, the world of the Canadian Mennonite church in the 1980s and 1990s wasn't very open to those kinds of changes. Although Unruh Regehr relished the job, she encountered challenges and obstacles right from the start.

As Epp-Tiessen put it: “She knocked on the doors of Mennonite denominational leaders, asking them to open them to women in leadership. They were resistant.”

Reflecting on that experience in the 1990s, Unruh Regehr said: “As I tried to address some of those issues, I found I was treading on toes . . . in fact, I had some personal attacks and criticisms for what I was doing.”

As Epp-Tiessen said: “She paid a price for her outspokenness.”

While her work generated a lot of negative reaction, it was a source of hope and encouragement for many women who wanted equality and full participation in the life of the church.

But while the door to increased involvement in leadership was kept mostly closed, another opened.

During her travels, Unruh Regehr became increasingly aware of the problem of abuse against women and children in Mennonite churches. She was often pulled aside by women who told her about the abuse they were suffering in their families—physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, and spiritual.

Although the stories weighed her down, she always took time to “tap into the secret traumas experienced by women across the country,” as Epp-Tiessen put it. “She validated those women by hearing their stories.”

In response, Unruh Regehr was at the forefront of helping Mennonite churches and MCC respond. One way was by



creating resources for pastors and churches both to make them aware and to help them respond to these tragic situations.

When she met women, who were ready to give up on their faith, she encouraged them to keep at it—despite the personal attacks and her own anger at the church. She told them to persevere; if not for themselves, then for the women who would follow.

In 1989, her work with MCC came to what was, for her, an unsatisfying conclusion when she was let go. She believed her dismissal was because of her forceful advocacy on behalf of women in Mennonite denominations, and also for battling for equal pay for women at MCC. It was a bitter pill that gnawed at her for the rest of her life.

Today, things are very different for women in most Mennonite churches. And Unruh Regehr's advocacy on their behalf, as forceful and strong as it was seen back then, would seem tame in these days of #MeToo.

And yet, as Epp-Tiessen said, the gains women have made would not have been possible without people like her.

“We stand on the shoulders of others who have gone before, people like Peggy,” she stated. “She was ahead of her time, committed to justice and equality for women, and we are deeply indebted to the sacrifice she made.”

As for Unruh Regehr herself, in the early 2000s she reflected on her role this way: “It was a work that I cherished regardless of what I experienced. I do not ever regret having been involved with it. Personally, it sums up a great part of any legacy I may have left for the future. It may have been ever so small, but it was important to me.”

And, as it turns out, it was important to many other women as well.

Eds. A version of this tribute to Peggy Unruh Regehr was originally published in the January 12, 2019, Winnipeg Free Press and appears here with permission from the author.

Church records

(cont'd from p. 3)

group, originally from the Karolswald/Ostrog area founded the village of Waldheim in the Molotschna colony around 1836. Most of this group was dissatisfied with their situation in South Russia and moved back to Volhynia in 1848. Originals are held at the MLA and digital copies are available online.⁸ The data from these records has been added to the GRANDMA database.

12. Karolswald, Volhynia baptism register

There were several settlements in the Ostrog region of Volhynia started by Old Flemish Mennonites around 1801 to 1804. The only church record to survive from this group is a register of baptisms performed by the *Ältester* Tobias Unruh. It is often referred to as the Tobias Unruh baptism register. It covers the years 1854 to their immigration to the United States in the 1870s. The originals are at the Heritage Hall Museum and Archives in Freeman, South Dakota. Digital scans⁹ and a translation¹⁰ are available. The information from this register has *not* been integrated into the GRANDMA database.

Note: I will continue my DNA series in the next issue.

Endnotes

1. For information on the fate of the Chortitza colony church registers, see *Mennonite Historian* 31, no. 1 (March 2005): 1–2, 5, 11.

2. More information on the GRANDMA database can be found at: <https://www.grandmaonline.org/gmolstore/pc/Overview-d1.htm>

3. Scans of the Alexanderwohl register can be found at: https://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/cong_15.php

4. Scans of the Busau records can be found at: <http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/busau.htm>

5. <http://chort.square7.ch/Dat/GEROr1.htm> and <http://chort.square7.ch/spisok.html>

6. http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Memrik_Birth_Registers.pdf

7. Scans of the Michalin register can be found at: https://mla.bethelks.edu/metadata/cong_1.php

8. Scans of the Heinrichsdorf records can be found at: https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/cong_312/

9. Scans of the Karolswald baptism register can be found at: <https://mla.bethelks.edu/archives/elec702/>

10. http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia/Tobias_Unruh_Baptism_Register.html

“The Mennonite DNA Project”

Glenn H. Penner

Monday, May 27, 2019, 7:00 pm

Manitoba Genealogical Society

1045 St. James St., Winnipeg



Over 60 people braved the cold weather on February 11, 2019, to hear Werner Toews speak about his great-uncle, Jacob Sudermann, who perished in the Soviet Gulag in 1937. The event at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg was the launch of Toews's book, *Sketches from Siberia*, detailing the life of Jacob Sudermann (see book review below). The book includes many of Sudermann's paintings, created while he was in prison, plus new information that Toews gleaned from the recently declassified Soviet secret police files (KGB). Copies of Toews's book are for sale at MHA. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Book Reviews

Werner Toews, *Sketches from Siberia: The Life of Jacob D. Sudermann* (Victoria: Friesen Press, 2018), 153 pp.

Reviewed by Alf Redekopp

In *Sketches from Siberia*, Werner Toews presents the story of teacher and artist Jacob David Sudermann (1888–1937), a victim of Stalin's purges in the Soviet Union in the 1930s.

In the first seven chapters, Toews introduces aspects of Jacob Sudermann's early life—his family of origin (born on his parents' estate), his education (private school on the estate, secondary school in the colony, university in several cities), the turbulent times (First World War, Revolution, communism takes control, famine, interrogations), and his interests (art, photography, teaching, architecture). Actually, more than half his life, 30 years, were lived before the Russian Revolution, and another 15 years were lived trying to adjust to changes brought about after the Revolution, before his arrest and sentence to a gulag in eastern Siberia.

The last seven chapters can be broken into two parts—the four chapters that provide the details of the arrests in 1933, the trial and sentence, the letters from the prison camp, the silence after “Jacob is gone” and, the three chapters about how

the family preserved the story and how they struggled to find answers and bring closure to the traumatic 1930s. This section is the result of the persistent and thorough research of the author, working through the Canadian Red Cross to find this “missing person.”

Sketches from Siberia is pieced together from letters, sketches, and paintings done by Sudermann himself during his imprisonment, as well as the unpublished memoir of his sister, Anna Sudermann. She is credited with carrying many of Sudermann's paintings, letters, and photographs in her suitcase when the family fled for Germany in 1943, and subsequently immigrated to Canada.

Many publications tell the stories of people that experienced the impact of the communist experiment of the 20th century, each one with its unique details. The 78 illustrations (not counting the cover), primarily of drawings, paintings, and photographic reproductions of Sudermann's work, alone make this a very unique and creative presentation for this period of history. The translation of over 30 letters and postcards that Sudermann wrote to his family from prison (1934–1937), also add to the uniqueness and draw the reader into the immediate moment of the story.

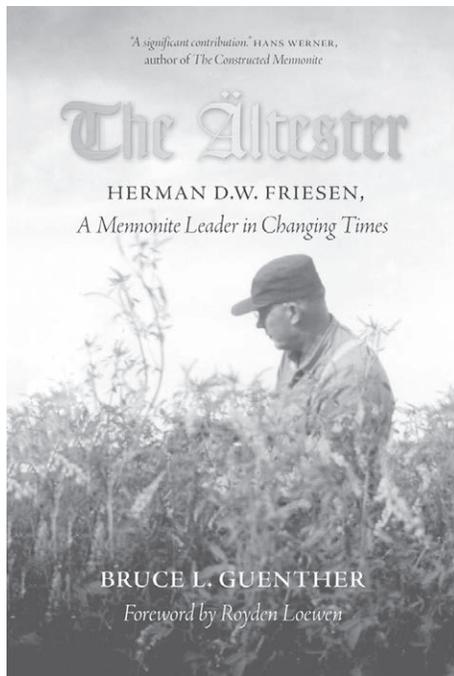
The most moving and chilling part of the book though, is the description of the

day the author received the large, white envelop from the Canadian Red Cross, containing, among other documents, the final details. Jacob Sudermann was convicted on October 15, 1937, for carrying out counter-revolutionary Trotskyism Facist propaganda between inmates and for sympathizing with enemies of the people. Sudermann was “sentenced to the highest degree of punishment.” The sentence was carried out on October 27, 1937.

Toews writes, “I was in shock. I was aware of the possibility that Jacob may have been executed but not fully prepared to see it in cold, typewritten words—shot.” Then after agonizing over the information for several days, came the task of sharing it with his mother, who had only been five years old when both her father and uncle were arrested and not seen again, events that shaped the rest of her life.

The story of what happened to Jacob Sudermann is well worth reading and reflecting upon. May it remind us of the plight of displaced people in the world today that are struggling to survive, with the same kind of courage seen in this story.

Alf Redekopp, former archivist and director of the Mennonite Heritage Archives, living in St. Catharines, Ontario, is an associate editor of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) and on the management group of Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID).



Bruce L. Guenther, *The Ältester: Herman*

D.W. Friesen, A Mennonite Leader in Changing Times (University of Regina Press, 2018), 320 pp.

Reviewed by David Giesbrecht, Abbotsford

The great contribution of this book is its measured account of an often-maligned group and their bishop (*Ältester*). Although the author is the grandson of *Ältester* Herman Friesen (1908–1969), he does not allow the familial link to obscure Friesen’s shortcomings, while still crediting Friesen for his not insignificant contributions in both spiritual and community matters. Guenther introduces readers to a fascinating individual, the strong and often conflicted Mennonite father and bishop. Friesen lived in rural Saskatchewan, a province slowly entering the Canadian mainstream during the mid-20th century, and led a Mennonite community that was often reluctant to enter modernity.

Herman Friesen’s parents were Saskatchewan pioneers. Particularly noteworthy is Guenther’s integrated analysis of both political and cultural developments in this province, which includes Friesen’s own emerging struggle to fulfil his spiritual and family roles in the rapidly shifting times. While an insider in the Old Colony Mennonite Church, Friesen saw little conflict in serving at various times as a councillor in the Rural Municipality of Warman No. 374, on the local public-school board, or as a director of the Hague-Osler Snow Club. Notably, Friesen’s public service “significantly increased his network of relationships within the region” (106) and rendered isolation less attractive. He likely did not anticipate the impact of his public service, for his own children mostly rejected Old Colony Mennonite insularity.

As a further nod to the times, Friesen purchased a piano for the nurture of his family, even if musical instruments were looked on with suspicion by his Mennonite community. And when he became Bishop, he simply let it be known that if he was acceptable as a minister prior to this election, a piano in his home would not be a problem in his new role.

Herman Friesen was a life-long churchman. Already as a young adult, he was selected as the *Vorsänger* (music leader) in his Blumenheim congregation. Among Old Colony Mennonites,

musical instruments were not tolerated in church settings. Congregational singing proceeded in slow, melismatic unison “to symbolize congregational unity” (107). The *Vorsänger* provided a pivotal function in establishing both the tempo and the tune of congregational singing. Further, owing to Friesen’s commitment to church nurture, he supported the introduction of Sunday School teaching during the 1940s.

The mass emigration of Old Colony Mennonites from Saskatchewan during the 1960s, necessitated the election of new leaders. As Friesen’s natural giftedness was well known, the Neuanlage congregation ordained him to ministry on April 3, 1962. Friesen’s lack of training for the task predictably influenced his ministry persona. In his sermonizing, he presented “a humble surrender” to his calling, along with “a joyous obedience to yielding fully to God’s will” (113). While it was not uncommon among Old Colony ministers to read borrowed sermons, Friesen had the confidence to compose his own, often admonishing his listeners to repentance and persistence in their Christian walk. Perhaps wisely, he never sought to resolve hermeneutical tensions. Neither was the frequent admonition to holy living carefully defined. In the ethos of this faith community, obedience to the bishop “served as a test of faith and fidelity to the church” (123). What Guenther might have developed more fully in this narrative is how the bishop meted out church discipline.

While Friesen frequently referred to the *Glaubensbekenntnis der Mennoniten* (Confession of Faith) as a guideline, in his preaching, he simply assumed that the Bible was authoritative.

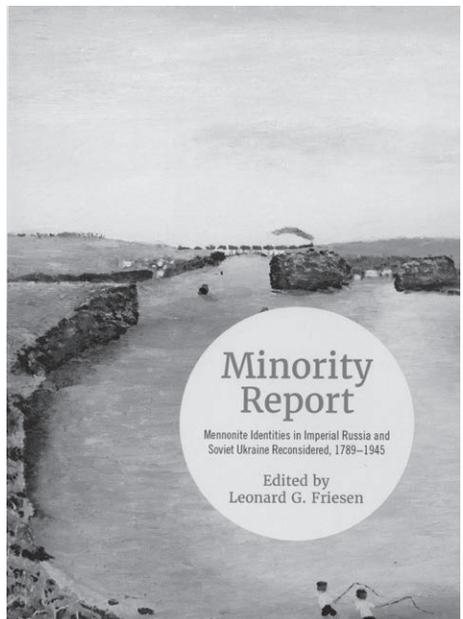
His election as *Ältester* brought with it the inevitable heightened expectations of the community. In this leadership role, he struggled to satisfy obligations to his own large family (12 children), while managing an expanding family farm and simultaneously responding to rapidly multiplying spiritual duties. Between 1962 and 1969, Friesen attended to more than 5,500 engagements (120). Sadly, tensions mounted in his family, as his children were left mostly without a father and certainly with more of the farm work. His wife, Margaretha, was afflicted with

clinical depression, requiring prolonged hospitalizations.

Friesen's untimely death as a result of a being pinned under a tractor on September 26, 1969, shocked Old Colony Mennonites far and wide. His spiritual community eulogized him as "their beloved bishop" (139). Among his own children, memories were less affirming; some of them were indeed harsh and accusatory. Significantly, Friesen's death brought "to an abrupt end the strategy of gradual accommodation among Old Colony Mennonites in Saskatchewan" (138). His successor, Julius Enns, spent little time retreating to the more time-honored conservatism of the denomination.

The book is superbly well-designed, with an inviting cover-image of farmer Friesen in one of his large fields. Royden Loewen's foreword to the book provides a helpful interpretive grid. Throughout, photographs and map insets enrich the reading experience. Extensive appendices illustrate Friesen's amazing pace of ministry, including translations of selected sermons. The font selected makes for comfortable reading; although, curiously, page numbers in this script are difficult to decipher.

The Ältester offers a nuanced portrayal of a spiritual leader and the times in which he lived. Anyone interested in understanding some of that wide diversity among Canadian Anabaptists will be richly rewarded by this read.



Leonard G. Friesen, ed., *Minority Report: Mennonite Identities in Imperial Russia*

and Soviet Ukraine Reconsidered, 1789–1945 (Toronto University Press, 2018), 338 pp.

Reviewed by James Urry, New Zealand

This volume brings together papers written by scholars of Ukrainian Mennonite history working in North America, Russia, and Ukraine. The rather odd title refers to the history of Mennonites as an "ethnic" minority in the multi-ethnic territory of current-day Ukraine. As the sub-title suggests, the particular focus is on issues concerned with Mennonite identity.

Most of the authors draw on both published and unpublished sources in English, German, Russian, and Ukrainian and nearly all use new archival sources especially deposited in Ukrainian collections. Not surprisingly, considering their access to archives and libraries in North America, the American contributors draw on a wider variety of sources than those written by contributors based in Russia and Ukraine. Yet, the latter often dismiss what they call "insider" accounts by Mennonites and English and German writers. This is unfortunate as it means important primary sources are not used and secondary scholarly writings are neglected. Where such sources are used, they are poorly integrated with Ukrainian and Russian sources, published or unpublished. This raises doubts about what exactly is being "reconsidered," as suggested by the title of the volume.

As is often the case in a volume such as this, the papers vary in quality. The best two papers by North Americans are by John B. Toews and Colin Neufeld. Toews, who has made significant contributions to the history of Russian and Soviet Mennonites, presents a refreshing reconsideration of A. A. Friesen, a much-neglected yet very important figure in the immigration movement of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada in the 1920s. Colin Neufeld's paper is a *tour-de-force* and one of the only papers in the volume that fully integrates Ukrainian archival and North American sources to produce a very important analysis of the involvement of Mennonites in the collectivization of Khortitsa and Molochna between the late 1920s and early 1930s. He shows conclusively how some Mennonites worked closely with Soviet officials in establishing and managing Collective Farms (*kolkhozy*).

The third North American contribution is by John Staples and deals with Johann Cornies: namely, his religious beliefs and his aesthetic desire to order the environment and Mennonite community life. However, I remain unconvinced by much of Staples's argument. He suggests that Cornies was influenced by pietism, even though pietism is a far too diverse and nebulous category to assign to anyone. Staples bases his suggestion that Cornies's aesthetics were inspired indirectly by Johann Lavater's writings on physiognomy—an assertion based on a single reference to Lavater in a book written by Daniel Schlatter, a missionary to the Nogai Tatar who associated with Cornies. Staples, however, admits that there is no evidence that Cornies ever read anything written by Lavater. Finally, Staples claims that Schlatter was a pietist, even though it was the Baptist Missionary Society that initially supported his mission work. "Pietism" was just one influence among many in Cornies's expression of religious ideas.

The non-North American contributors to the analysis of Mennonites in Tsarist Russia are the most varied in quality. Svetlana Bobyleva examines the fate of the Borozenko daughter colony, a settlement of interest to the descendants of immigrants to Canada in the 1870s. Her paper, however, concentrates on the fate of the colony after these Mennonites had left for North America. Nevertheless, this is the most focussed of all the papers in terms of a detailed study of a single settlement. Irina (Janzen) Cherkazionova examines Mennonite schools in relation to what she calls "Church-State relations" between 1789 and 1917. Her use of the term "church" is questionable (as it is in other contributions); her view is very much from the point of view of bureaucrats without an understanding of the increasing complexity of Mennonite attitudes to education and the changing structure of Mennonite society. The same comment could apply to the next paper by Oksana Beznosval; she explores the problems that the Russian State had dealing with a Mennonite religious community that lacked a central organization.

The final paper by Nataliya Venger examines the strained relations between Russian nationalists and what she terms "Mennonite Entrepreneurs" in the late Tsarist period. The term "entrepreneurs"

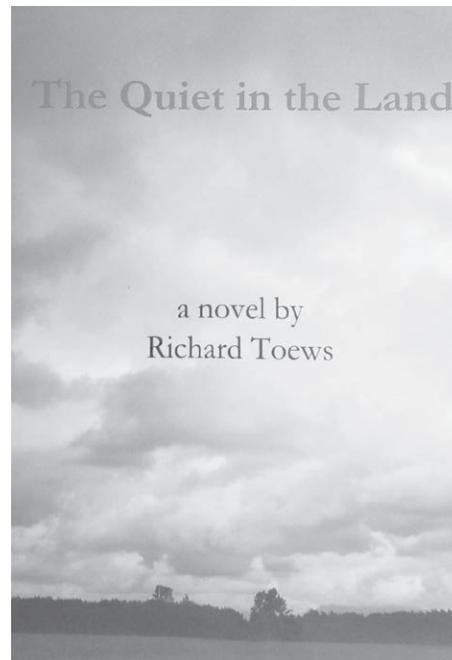
apparently refers to factory owners and millers, but not merchants and the many estate owners who used innovative farming techniques including mechanized farm equipment. The larger economic world in which such Mennonites operated and their business links with other non-Mennonite entrepreneurs are not discussed. However, Venger has tackled some of these issues in her other writings on Mennonites and industry. One important aspect of her chapter, however, involves a detailed consideration of Mennonite relations with the state during the First World War, especially with regard to legislation that attempted to appropriate Mennonite enterprises when a number of these businesses were essential for the war effort.

The last two papers are significant contributions. Alexander Beznosov examines the fate of Mennonites during the disastrous Ukrainian famine of 1932–1935. He suggests that while many Mennonites were victims, a majority did not suffer as badly as other groups due to the support they received from abroad, including from Canadian relatives. He also addresses the sensitive issue of how historical scholarship on the famine has been compromised by recent political tensions between Russia and Ukraine and he calls for more critical scholarship on the issue. The final paper is by Viktor K. Klets on Mennonites and the Second World War. He presents a more nuanced view than has recently been promoted in the United States, one that casually condemns Soviet Mennonites for collaboration with the Nazis and the involvement of a few in the Holocaust. Instead, Klets suggests that Mennonites were “caught between two poles” and the majority tried to steer a path through competing ideologies and policies in difficult circumstances.

The editor, Leonard G. Friesen, provides an introduction and an appendix. The latter justly recognises the organisational skills of Harvey Dyck who helped create and encourage links between North American and Ukrainian scholars. This volume is a measurable outcome of Dyck’s work.

In closing, however, I have to express some criticisms. I found attempts by a number of the contributors to use the idea of “mental/cognitive maps” to discuss issues of “identity” rather odd. The term was first developed to apply to individual psychological states and, although it has recently been applied to collective

categories, it is not a widely accepted approach. Finally, the volume also contains a number of editorial problems: referencing is inconsistent as is the spelling of proper names; straw men are set up and ritually burned down; dubious arguments are constructed on very rickety foundations; the ideas of some persons cited are misrepresented; and a number of important sources are never considered or discussed. Such problems detract from the value of the volume as an advance that extends and enriches existing scholarship.



Richard Toews, *The Quiet in the Land* (Steppenwolf Publishing, 2018), 238 pp.

Reviewed by Ken Reddig, Pinawa

While a well-written history of events can provide the bare bones of an event and a story, it is a novel—a work of fiction—that can best provide the flesh on those bones to help readers remember the event.

Historians shudder at such a thought. I have had many an argument on this subject with other historians. But this is precisely what Richard Toews does in *The Quiet in the Land*, setting his novel in a historical context and frequently moving between the historical record and the story developed in his novel.

It is a story that is repeated often with the nuances of particular family narratives burned into the psychic of many Mennonites of Russian extraction. We know dates, events, and, to some extent, the broad historical sweep of the story—or

do we? How well have we really heard and re-told that story? How have we shaped it with our Mennonite-biased interpretation of revolution and war at the beginning of the previous century? Really, what have we left out? Do we really understand the emotions of the persons involved on the many sides of the conflict?

Using the novel form, Toews brings readers into the village of Nieder Halbstadt. We enter into the lives of two young boys whom we follow over a period of approximately 30 years. Good friends initially, they grow up somewhat naïvely: Johann in the Mennonite village and Piotra in a Ukrainian village on the other side of the Tokmak River.

Beginning with that idyllic village life, the boys are soon immersed in conflicts that Toews follows throughout the story. These not just the political, cultural, and economic (class) differences; but chief among them are the conflicts of a naïve theological upbringing and spirituality on both sides of the river. The over-arching theological questions that dominate the novel are these: what is, and where is, God’s justice? Why do the “just” suffer? Where is God in the midst of revolution and war?

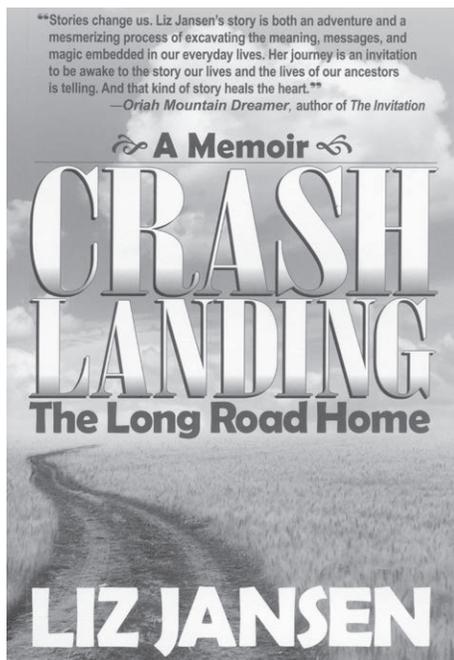
These are ageless questions. Like Job in the Bible, the answers do not come easily. And as in Job’s case, the questions never really go away. So, too, Toews addresses suffering from a variety of situations (actually viewpoints) that subtly drag readers through mud, love, anarchy, and war.

Unlike other attempts to interpret or provide a view of the people who became intertwined in these world-changing events, Toews does not step away from providing vivid descriptions of the interactions between Russians, Ukrainians, poor peasants, and wealthier Mennonites. We follow Piotra, who seems to be a good friend of the Mennonites in Nieder Halbstadt, as he slowly transforms into a person whose deep-seated resentment of class-differences turns him into a revolutionary.

While this is going on, Johann the Mennonite undergoes a significant change as well—he begins to question his faith in a loving, just God. Johann comes to realize the folly imbedded in his theological upbringing where class, wealth, and privilege are seen as God’s grace upon a “faithful” people. Toews’s dialogue drips

with irony as he pits the various points of view against one another, using many scriptural references that challenge not only the characters in his story but also the presuppositions of readers.

When I first began reading this novel, I felt like telling the *Mennonite Historian* editors to find someone else to review this novel as it seemed trite and simplistically spiritual. But as I continued reading, I began to realize that Toews plays with the reader and entices us to engage in the story from the vantage point of our own feelings and theological perceptions. He does a good job at that, rewarding the attentive reader.



Liz Jansen, *Crash Landing: The Long Road Home, a Memoir* (Trillium Wordworks, 2018), 247 pp.

Reviewed by Jon Isaak

A journey memoir of discovery at several levels describes Liz Janen's 2018 book, *Crash Landing*. Liz is an accomplished travel writer specializing in writing for motorcycle touring magazines. She also identifies herself as a "Healer, Writer, Facilitator, and Story Teller," according to her website (<https://lizjansen.com>). This is her third book. She has published *Women, Motorcycles and the Road to Empowerment* (2011) and *Life Lessons from Motorcycles* (2014).

In *Crash Landing*, Liz's skills as a travel writer are evident on every page as she takes readers with her on a seven-week 2016 road trip she calls, The Ancestor Trail. It's a cross-country motorcycle

adventure from the Niagara orchard region of southern Ontario, through the grain farm areas of the Saskatchewan prairies, and into the Peace River Country of northern Alberta. What is she up to?

After a life-time of running from her ethnic Mennonite upbringing, the end of her twenty-five-year marriage, and the departure from her corporate management job, Liz decides to take steps to correct some of the counterproductive patterns in her life. Given her love of motorcycle road trips, she hatches a plan. Liz decides to combine her new interest in Energy Medicine with a motorcycle tour. And, yes, there is a motorcycle crash that is instrumental in the unfolding of her plans.

Liz's recent course work in Shamanic medicine and exploration of Indigenous wisdom teaching brings her to a surprising insight. After seeking out several Indigenous elders, questioning them for counsel on the path to inner and outer peace, she receives counsel that puzzles her at first. Instead of some new meditation practice, she is consistently told that if she wants to re-claim her identity and make peace with the person she's become, she needs to revisit the places where her ancestors have lived. "Their experiences in those places and spaces have shaped you; their energy lives in you, too," say the elders.

So, as an experienced traveler, Liz plans a motorcycle trip to visit each of the places her father's parents and her mother's parents farmed in Saskatchewan and Alberta as Russian Mennonite immigrants to Canada in the 1920s, before settling in the 1930s on a fruit farm near St. Catharines, Ontario, where Liz grew up.

Who are these ancestors? On her father Ben's side, they are Johann B. Klassen (GRANDMA #396550: 1899–1928) and Elizabeth "Liese" Friesen (GR#396521: 1901–1994). Johann and Liese were Bernard "Ben" Johann (Klassen) Jansen's (GR#217994: 1926–2017) parents. Liese married Peter A. Jansen (GR#396552: 1898–1945), when Johann died, shortly after Ben was born. On her mother Margaret's side, they are Gerhard H. Reimer (GR#110050: 1900–1981) and Susanna "Susa" Koop (GR#110049: 1898–1986). Gerhard and Susa were Margaret Reimer's (GR#217991: 1926–) parents.

There are four threads that weave through Liz's memoir: 1) narration of inner

and outer healing with Liz's own mix of non-religious spirituality, 2) appreciation and practice of Indigenous and Shamanic healing ways, 3) travelogue of Liz's two-year journey, interrupted by rehab and healing from "the crash," and 4) re-discovery and embrace of Liz's Mennonite ethnicity.

The Lonely-Planet-worthy travel notes on the various campsites Liz uses on the road trip are a bonus feature of *Crash Landing*. Plus, there is the delightful narration of Liz's "detective" work, tracking down leads (via post offices, museums, archives, cafés, cemeteries, etc.) in towns like Dalmeny, Beaverlodge, Beiseker, Namaka, and Michichi where her ancestors farmed. Good at sleuthing, she hunts down descendants of people who may have known Johann, Liese, Peter, Gerhard, and Susa during their pioneer farming days struggling to establish themselves in a new country. The conversations she reports are touching and heartwarming.

In the end, after spending decades running from Mennonite roots, Liz finally makes peace with herself, her Mennonite formation, and her parents' Christian piety. This book narrates that journey. It is well-written with vivid descriptions, helping readers feel the wind and see the prairie colours, as they ride along with Liz on her journey. I suspect readers will be drawn to review their own life journey, to make peace with some aspects, and to muse about what their healing journey might still entail.

Liz writes: "No longer am I ashamed of my culture. That... has been replaced by profound admiration and respect. Extended kin have supported me and eagerly contributed stories and filled in missing pieces as I've unearthed my family and cultural history.... My blood connection is a priceless treasure. It doesn't mean I need to follow the particulars of their religious beliefs. I have found the way to be true to my heart and my blood. I happened to be born into a Mennonite community, but my lessons have been universal" (232).

Touchingly vulnerable, respectfully written, and well-researched. This is a book that would be instructive to others who, like Liz, are wondering how to make peace with themselves, their Mennonite upbringing, and their family system. While not all will choose Liz's discovery path, hers is one example of choosing peace.