

Mennonite Historian

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



The former Deutsch-Wymysle Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren church near Gabin now in ruins (Masovian Voivodeship, Poland). See [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Deutsch-Wymysle_\(Masovian_Voivodeship,_Poland\)&oldid=162385](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Deutsch-Wymysle_(Masovian_Voivodeship,_Poland)&oldid=162385) and story starting on page 2.

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How Experiencing History Contributes to Spiritual Formation

by Gareth Brandt, Columbia Bible College,
Abbotsford

Why would a professor who teaches spiritual formation courses participate in a Mennonite history tour to Poland? I do also teach Anabaptist History and Thought but that has sometimes prompted another question because most Anabaptist/Mennonite history courses are taught by historians. How come a practical theologian teaches a history course? Let's make the question even more general. What does history have to do with spiritual formation? How do our experiences of historical places and people form us spiritually? I would like to explore these questions in the context of my recent experience of travelling to Poland with a Mennonite history tour.

First of all, why travel at all? It's expensive, time-consuming, and involves some risk. The perception among academics might be that history tours tend to be of popular and personal value rather than serious scholarly value. Why not stay at home and read books and search the internet? So much is available without leaving home or library. This is

true. I did read a lot of books about the long period of Mennonite history in Poland, but something was missing. I believe that history, even though it cannot be repeated or relived, can be experienced. I can gain all the information I need from books and internet sources, but spiritual formation is not about information; rather, it is about formation, and perhaps even transformation. We can learn about spiritual formation in books, but for it to become real in our lives it must be experienced in body, time, and place. This experience is enhanced by a visit to a historical site, grave, or building where a significant spiritual event or person is recognized.

Why did I decide to go to Poland? I knew that my ancestors came to Canada from Ukraine already in 1874, so my family has been in Canada for at least six generations. I do not have any connections to Ukraine through parents or grandparents as many in my community do. I did do some genealogical research on my family as far back as I could go and found that they had all moved from Poland to Ukraine by 1804. Knowing the devastations of numerous violent conflicts in Poland, it was not likely that I would find any remnants of relatives' graves or markers in Poland because they would have to date back more than 200 years. And I am primarily a 16th-century scholar interested in the origins and early theological ideals of the movement. I would consider myself a supporter of the "Naked Anabaptist" phenomenon that emphasizes spirituality and theology over ethnicity and family, even though all sides of my family have been of Mennonite faith and ethnicity for well over 200 years. As a 16th-century scholar, I have visited most of the sites related to the 16th-century origins of Anabaptism in Switzerland—



Gate at the entrance of a Mennonite cemetery in Poland. Photo credit for the cover image and this image: Gareth Brandt.

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southern Germany, Netherlands, and Austria—and found them to be profound experiences. I have written about some of these experiences on my website at www.garethbrandt.wordpress.com. Could the long and silent chapter of Mennonite history in Poland also come alive for me with a personal visit?

Although I had read a lot of books about Polish Mennonite history and did some genealogical research, I came away from my trip to Poland with new insights, perspectives, and experiences that are in the process of forming me spiritually. I owe this partly to another Mennonite theological and practical distinctive: travelling in community. I had the privilege of travelling with a group of about 20 North Americans ranging in age from 30s to 80s, along with an American Mennonite historian and a national Polish historian. It was all arranged by a Mennonite tour company, Tourmagination, whose very purpose is to facilitate this kind of thing. I would not have had the same experiences had I travelled by myself. Retreats, silence, and solitude are important spiritual disciplines,

(cont'd on p. 4)

Genealogy and Family History

The Spelling of Mennonite Surnames: The GRANDMA Database

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

Many readers of the *Mennonite Historian* are familiar with the GRANDMA database. This database (abbreviated GM) contains genealogical information on well over one million people of Low-German Mennonite ancestry (see <https://www.grandmaonline.org/> and screenshot of the website below). The GM database treats the spelling of first and family names in a rather haphazard way in that a person can be added to the database using any recognized variation of that person's first or last name, irrespective of how that person spelled their own name.

The way GM works is that each traditional name is given a combined first and last name code. For example, Johan Doerksen has the code 051jo. The surnames Doerksen, Derksen, Dirks, Duerks, etc., are all under code "051" and everyone named Johann, Hans, Jan, John, Sean, etc., has the code "jo" assigned.

This means that someone who submits the name of a person to be added to GM gets to decide how the name will be spelled and the GM algorithm handles the diversity. However, this practice has occasionally led to bitter disputes between distant relatives as to how the name of a common ancestor should appear in GM. These disputes may be misguided, since people often do not know how their common ancestor spelled his or her own name (see my earlier column on Mennonite Surnames in the September 2019 *Mennonite Historian*). Sometimes people try to impose on a distant ancestor the spelling they and their close relatives use. Such assumptions may not be correct. However, in terms of searching the GM database, these spelling variations are not an issue, since the ancestor is assigned a name code (e.g., 051jo) irrespective of how the descendent submits the name for entry into the database.

So, how should the name of a person who lived 200 or more years ago appear in such a database? Consider the following hypothetical example: A census gives a man's name as Claes von Riesen, a church register gives the same man's name as

Klaas Friesen, and an immigration list has his name as Nicolas Riesen. None of these lists contain a signature and each of them was written by government or church officials who, in general, were unconcerned about the spelling of the names they recorded. How should this man's name appear in the GM database? And why? It should be noted that all of the above variations are covered by the name code 075ni.

I propose that persons in the database who have traditional first and last names, and were born before about 1820, be given standard versions of their name, unless there is concrete evidence that the person used a different spelling. In such a case, the person above would appear in GM as Nicolaus Friesen. This procedure has several advantages:

- 1) It brings some uniformity to how names are displayed;
- 2) It eliminates all disputes as to how a name appears in the database;
- 3) It solves the problem of what to do when an individual's name appears differently in different documents;
- 4) It eliminates inclusion of obscure spellings, which can be rather confusing; and
- 5) It improves searching when not done through the use of a name code.

There are, however, serious challenges in implementing such a standardization.

- 1) Who decides on the standardized name? How is it decided?

2) What about unrelated surnames that currently have the same code, such as Voth and Vogt, Kroecker and Kroegeer, or Petkau and Poetker?

3) Who will undertake the lengthy task of making these changes? It is unlikely that this is a simple matter of a database administrator changing to a standardized name the names of all people with a given code, born before a given year.

Do you have an opinion on this topic? If you do, I would appreciate hearing from you. Please contact me at <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>.

The Mennonite DNA project is looking for men with the following rare surnames who are willing to participate by doing a Y-DNA test (this is the DNA which is passed down from father to son):

Albrecht, Allert, Arends, Bartsch, Beier, Bench, Brucks, Busenitz, Daniels, Dau, Delesky/Solesky, Doell, Eckert, Fehderau, Goetke, Heier, Horn, Lammert, Langman, Lehrman, Lemke, Meckelburger, Momber, Neustaedter, Plett, Richert, Rose, Schoenke, Schwartz, Siebrand, Sommerfeld, Sprunk, Steffen, Striemer, Suckau, Tesman, Tesmer, Tetzlaff, Thimm, Thun, Wedler, Weiss, Weier, Werner, Westerwick, Wichert, Worms, Zimmermann.

The Mennonite DNA project is willing to pay the costs of the test. If you are interested in participating, please contact Glenn Penner at <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>.

line.org/

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Grandma's Window provides Online access to the GRAnDMA database of Low-German Mennonite Ancestry.

[About the GRAnDMA database ...](#) | [About searching GRAnDMA ...](#) |

Grandma's Window, V 5.4r2; Kenneth L. Ratzlaff, Lawrence, Kansas, 11/2000 - 7/2019
California Mennonite Historical Society Genealogy Database Project

History and Spiritual Formation

(cont'd from p. 2)

but spiritual formation primarily happens in community. My time in Poland was no exception.

People tend to overlook a few significant facts when examining the Mennonite experience in Poland. Did you know that Menno Simons and other Dutch Anabaptists were in Poland as early as 1539? That makes the Mennonite experience in Poland over 400 years long! Most of us, including me, have too often viewed Poland as a temporary stopover between Netherlands/northern Germany and Ukraine, giving less attention to how this period of history has shaped Mennonite theology and life. It should also be noted that although the Dutch predominated, Anabaptist refugees came to Poland from Austria, Moravia, and southern Germany as well.

The country we know today as Poland has seen almost a millennium of political instability, beginning with the conquering and settlement of the Teutonic Knights in the 13th century and ending with the invasion of Nazi Germany in 1939, and then the occupation of Soviet Russia from 1945 until 1989. In between, it was conquered and occupied by numerous powers from Sweden in the north to Hungary in the south. Prussia was the dominant force during many of the years Mennonites lived there. Ironically, in the midst of all the political upheaval, Poland was one of the few safe havens in Europe for religious and political refugees during the Middle Ages and beyond. Not only Mennonites sought safety and new economic opportunity there. Jews from all over Europe also found their way to Poland. Scottish and Dutch merchants also settled here due to the trade route along the Baltic coast. Yet Mennonites were rarely considered full citizens during their 400-year sojourn in Poland. How did this and the constantly changing political realities and multiplicity of other foreign settlers impact the spirituality of Mennonites? Perhaps the answer to this lies as much in our imagination as it does in empirical research. It causes me to reflect on our own changing political realities in North America. How are they affecting our day-to-day spirituality and the formation of our faith?

I went to Poland to better understand

and appreciate the Polish Mennonite story of which my spiritual ancestors were a part. This experiential understanding nurtures my own faith and causes me to reflect on why I am the way that I am. Some people in my travelling community had more direct and personal motivations to search for childhood homes and churches or the graves of their ancestors. They were there to trace family roots. Mennonites have become a mobile ethnic minority group, initially because of persecution and then because of seeking religious freedom and economic opportunity. Perhaps because of this, they have been more obsessed with genealogical matters than some others, but recently the evidence shows that this is a larger human concern. The popularity of websites such as ancestry.com and the proliferation of DNA testing is an indication that people have a hunger to connect themselves to a larger story than their present limited experience. This is a quest for spiritual formation, for self-awareness, for human wholeness.

How does finding this personal history impact spirituality? It is part of the universal quest to answer those important questions of identity and spirituality. Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? Where did I come from? I experienced this vicariously on the trip. Eight members of one family were on the trip to find the house and church they had called home until 1945. (I found out one of them was an alumnus of Columbia Bible College where I teach. The Mennonite world may be global, but it does not take long to make connections!) Almost accidentally, perhaps providentially, they spotted the house and so our bus made a spontaneous stop. The present residents were surprised by a knock on the door but curious and hospitable as they welcomed the family members in. I did not witness their reunion with timber and space, but I'm sure there must have been tears. When their family fled Poland with much anxiety and fear and took a long and complicated journey to a new country and continent, they probably never imagined they would be back 75 years later. It was the journey of a lifetime for those who had been children at the time; and for the next generation with them now, it gave them a sense of where their parents had come from, and thus, where they had come from and who they were. It inspired all of us to reflect on our own journeys of becoming.

A second specific story provides another illustration of spiritual formation through experiencing family roots in historical location. A mother and her two sons were on a quest to discover the Mennonite roots of her father and her sons' grandfather. She knew that her father had left his Mennonite faith and church as an adolescent. As a result, she had grown up without knowledge of this faith background. Now they felt it was time to discover more of the family story. They came armed with ancestry software and open minds. Not only did they discover something about their Mennonite ancestry, they were also welcomed into a little Mennonite community of faith on a bus! Since they were intrigued and curious about my title of "professor of spiritual formation," I was able to attempt to explain the connection between my teaching a spiritual formation course—or as I like to call it "Becoming Human 101"—and being on a history tour that became the precursor for this article. We even found out that if we go back far enough, we have a common ancestor who was a Brandt! (Again, it doesn't take long!) Both history and spiritual formation are about finding ourselves and our location, personally and collectively.

Although finding our ancestry is an important part of spiritual formation, the most poignant connection between history and spirituality is our common spiritual experience across generations, whether we are related biologically or not. One of the traditions on Tourmagination adventures is that members of the travelling community have an opportunity to share their personal pilgrimage. John Sharp, our Mennonite historian, shared the recent experience of losing his son Michael, who was killed while serving on a UN peacemaking team in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I see Michael as a martyr for his faith, standing in a long line of those who proclaim the peace of Christ, in their homes, in their communities, and even in violent international situations. He is connected to Michael Sattler, Helena von Freyburg, Dirk Willems, Nelleken Jaspers, and many less well-known Penners, Pletts, Ewerts, Epps, Boldts, and Brandts who lived out their faith in volatile times in Poland. I am connected to John and Michael Sharp, to my travelling companions, they to me, and all of us to our spiritual ancestors. Experiencing the stories of our forebears inspires us to be faithful in our own time.

Records of the Emigration of Mennonite Refugees from Chortitza (1921–1923) from the Archives of Johann P. Klassen (1888–1975)

by Peter H. Rempel, Winnipeg

The emigration of Mennonites from the nascent Soviet Union to Canada in the 1920s has been substantially researched and narrated by Frank H. Epp in *Mennonite Exodus: The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites Since the Communist Revolution* (1962) and by John B. Toews in *Lost Fatherland: The Story of the Mennonite Emigration from Soviet Russia, 1921–1927* (1967). These accounts are largely based on the collections of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (at the Mennonite Heritage Archives), of Benjamin B. Janz (at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies), and of Abraham A. Friesen (at the Bethel College archives). Some of the original documents were published with introductions by John B. Toews in *The Mennonites of Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents in German* (1975), and by John B. Toews and Paul Toews in *Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage (1922–1927): Mennonite and Soviet Documents in English translation* (2011). However, a collection of documents produced and retained by Johann P. Klassen (1888–1975)*—and recently donated to the Mennonite Heritage Archives by the Abram Vogt family—provides significant additional information from the perspective of the refugees in the Chortitza and related settlements.

Klassen, who trained as an artist in Germany before the world war, became a key recorder and representative of the Mennonites that had found refuge in or become destitute in the Mennonite villages in the Chortitza district of Ukraine after the devastation wreaked by civil war and banditry. He served as secretary for the first gathering of their representatives on January 1, 1922, and their subsequent gatherings, and of the executive committee they elected until his departure for Canada in July 1923. Klassen was also dispatched several times to Charkow, then the capital of Ukraine, and to Moscow, the Russian capital, to obtain information about the emigration prospects and to advocate

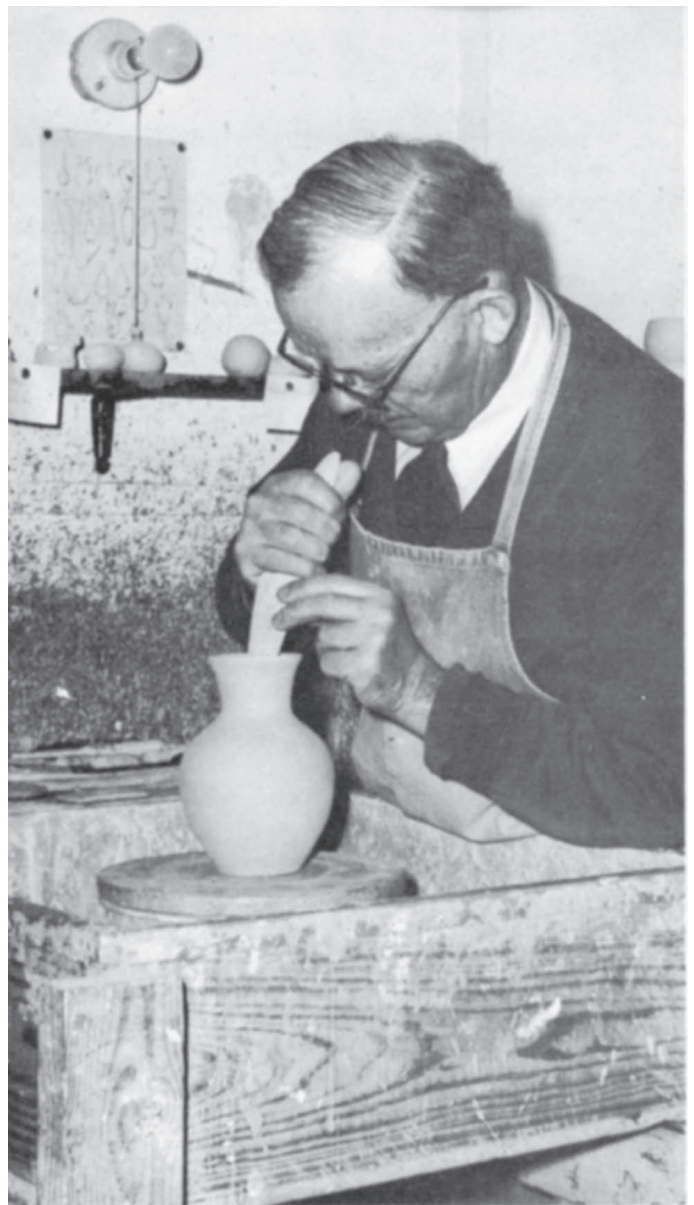
for the transport of the refugees from Chortitza. There—often in tandem with B.B. Janz, the chairman of the Union, and with P.F. Froese and C.F. Klassen, representatives of the Mennonite settlements in Siberia and eastern Russia—Klassen met with representatives of the police, of the Canadian Pacific Railway, and of the American Mennonites.

The J.P. Klassen collection includes meeting minutes of the representatives of refugees from the various villages in the Chortitza district in January and May 1922, and of the committee mandated by the representatives to advocate, plan, and prepare the emigration.

Additionally, the collection includes minutes of several meetings of refugee groups in specific villages (e.g., Krons Garten), and the minutes of refugee groups on the first two trains to embark from Chortitza in June and July 1923.

The information provides details about required documents and preparations as well as signed and countersigned mutual guarantees to repay the travel costs. The collection also includes numerous Russian documents on slips of paper, but, most significantly, also an official Ukrainian government handwritten copy, dated April 24, 1922, granting a number of Mennonite families permission to emigrate. Most illuminating are Klassen's reports on his trips to Charkow and Moscow recorded on several separate pages and in a 60-page notebook.

The previous accounts in the Epp and Toews publications focus on the overarching organizations—the Union of Citizens of Dutch Origin and the Canadian



Johann P. Klassen at the potter's wheel. Photo credit for both of the J.P. Klassen images used in this article: Larry Kehler, "The Artistic Pilgrimage of John P. Klassen," *Mennonite Life*, December 1973, 114–118, 125–127.

Mennonite Board of Colonization—responsible for organizing the migration. However, the J.P. Klassen documents provide glimpses into the advocacy, planning, and preparation for the departure of the refugees grouped in and around the Chortitza settlement. Especially striking are the resolutions recorded at these meetings aimed at insuring that the first set of emigrants include only persons of decent character, who present a positive impression, share commitments to learn the language, and agree to adopt the customs in their new homeland, while trusting that their moral values and freedom from military service would be protected.

(cont'd on p. 8)

MHA Update

by Conrad Stoesz

Since 1992, Connie Wiebe has been a friendly face at the MennoHeritage Archives and the MHC Gallery. In her role as Administrative Assistant, she was a key player in helping the archives fulfill its mandate of collecting, preserving, making accessible, and helping interpret the story of the MennoHeritage experience. She exhibited passion and dedication for her work and her colleagues. As of September 1, 2019, Connie is now retired. She is looking forward to spending time with her family, especially her grandchildren. We wish her all the best in this next phase of life. We are very pleased that Selenna Wolfe has moved from her temporary position as Administrative Assistant to permanent. She, like Connie, will split her time between the archives and gallery programs.



Connie Wiebe, MHA and MHC Gallery administrative assistant, 1992–2019. Photo credit: Canadian MennoHeritage University (CMU).

In October and November, the MHC Gallery hosted the “Voices of Conscience: Peace Witness in the Great War” exhibit from the Kaufmann Museum in Kansas and added art work from fourteen Hutterite communities. Seizing upon this opportunity, the archives organized an evening to hear Dr. John J. Friesen and Ian Kleinsasser talk about the MennoHeritage and Hutterite experiences during World War One. To see the lecture, visit our website <https://www.mharchives.ca/happenings/events/>.

On November 26, we said a formal “thank you” to our volunteers who jointly



Selenna Wolfe, MHA and MHC Gallery administrative assistant. Photo credit: CMU.

have contributed 2,253 hours this year to the MHA program. Their skills in scanning, organizing, writing, editing, interpreting, translating, and research have benefited the archives, its program, and the MennoHeritage community. Thank you very much for all that you do!

In 1979, the MennoHeritage Centre was dedicated as an inter-MennoHeritage memory-keeping institution. Now, 40 years later, we are wondering how to prepare for the next 40 years. On November 14, we hosted people from our constituency who are users of archives, contributors to archives, community leaders, and historically-minded people for their input. Forty people participated in lively discussion. From this consultation a plan will be drawn up to address the physical and digital infrastructure needs.

The MHA has taken two steps forward in the digital world. We have started an electronic newsletter, entitled “MHA E-News: Find out what’s New in the World of Old.” This communication tool helps us stay in touch with our community, offering information about events and happenings in a more timely fashion. If you want to be added to our list, email info@mharchives.ca and put “please add me to the email list” in the subject line.

Our second digital

initiative is our new website www.mharchives.ca/. On it you will continue to access our finding aids for personal papers, congregational, and conference materials. However, on the new site you will also find information about events, news, genealogy, digitized archival content, and research guides.

On November 16, Conrad was the speaker at the MennoHeritage Historical Society of Alberta’s annual conference held at the Gem of the West Museum outside Coaldale, Alberta. It was inspiring to be in the former Coaldale MennoHeritage Brethren Church that was such a force in the province, especially mid-century. Conrad’s lecture focused on the experience of Canada’s conscientious objectors in the Second World War with a focus on some stories from Alberta.



Ian Kleinsasser presenting on the Hutterite WWI experience at MHA in November 2019. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Amidst all these activities, the staff and volunteers at MHA continue to collect, preserve, make accessible, and help interpret the MennoHeritage experience. This year there were over 750 in-person visits to the MHA and many more via email and phone.



Katie Harder and Conrad Stoesz at the November 2019 MHA event in Coaldale, Alberta. Photo credit: Bill Franz.

The Journals of Herman Abram Neufeld (1860–1931)

by Harold Neufeld, Winnipeg

Herman A. Neufeld was a Mennonite Brethren elder in Russia and, after emigration, in Canada and the USA as well. He was a child of his father's second marriage, and the family moved frequently between estates of Mennonites and Russian aristocrats where Herman's father and half-brothers served as millers. When private ownership of their own mill foundered, the family homesteaded in the recently opened Schlachting Colony. This venture also failed and, when Herman's father died in 1875, the assets were seized by creditors. Mother and family were sent back to their ancestral home in Kronsweide, Chortitza, where the older children hired out as labourers and the younger ones were sent to foster homes.

After working for a time for his older brother, Herman migrated to the Klassen/Janzen farm implement factory in Sergejewka, Fuerstenland. In 1883, he married Katharina Klassen (1864–1940) and a year later they were re-baptized and joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. Ordained in 1889, Herman was appointed to serve for several months each year as itinerant minister, while at the same time maintaining his farm in Sergejewka and

continuing his work in the factory. In 1892, he and Katharina bought a farm in the Ignatievo Colony where Herman served as elder until immigration to Canada in 1923.

Herman's journal is a vivid record of his experiences as husband and father, farmer, factory worker, partner in a milling venture, founder of a Zentralschule, and as a relentless traveller across the entire Mennonite commonwealth. His day-to-day records begin in 1897, but he devotes significant space to genealogical records, autobiography, and comprehensive synopses of the lives of each of his siblings and half-siblings—invaluable information for readers like myself who look for details of their own ancestry. (Herman was my grandfather's uncle.)

The driving force of Herman's life was his passion for the welfare of the church. He was intimately involved in its affairs both locally and throughout the entire Mennonite Brethren world, attending every annual conference from 1887 to 1922 and providing leadership during times of controversy. Occasionally, controversy touched him personally, and entries during these times provide insight into the private struggles of a public life: there are confessions of serious depression and admissions of doubt as to the efficacy of his leadership. Most poignantly, he records his feelings of humiliation in having over-



estimated the love and appreciation others had for him and his ministry—impressions endorsed by unambiguous feedback from respected peers.

Throughout the journal, Herman comments on a broad range of subjects: critique of the opulent life styles of wealthy Mennonite industrialists, including his own brother in Fuerstenland; warnings against the seductions of modern entertainments and grief over the reluctance of youth to forsake the world and undergo conversion; observations of the declining political situation in Russia and of local atrocities during the revolution and civil war; misgivings regarding the *Selbstschutz* movement among Mennonites; horror during the famine in the early 1920s when relatives were starving; helplessness at the unceasing requisitions of the Reds, the Whites, and Makhnovites; despair during hyper-inflation when access to basic supplies became impossible; and desperate concern for his children in Orenburg, Sergejewka, and Germany, from whom nothing is heard for months or years.

As the time of emigration approaches, and it seems his long career as elder is ending, Herman takes inventory of the services he has provided during his more than 30 years of ministry—an astonishing number of baptisms, weddings, funerals, and ordinations; and hundreds of thousands of miles travelled from Siberia to Crimea, and from Turkestan to Germany.

Warned of the risks of exposing his writings to border inspections, Herman leaves his papers with a friend, Isaac, who promises to export them to America at a later date. When Herman receives them a year later in Winkler, Manitoba, he is ecstatic, and he begins a final edit of the entire collection. We are fortunate that Isaac succeeded.

Editors' note: Herman and Katrina's son, Abram H. Neufeld, published a biography of his parents in which there are extensive sections quoting from Herman's journals. See Abram H. Neufeld, Herman and Katarina: Their Story (CMBS: Winnipeg, 1984).



Jeremy Wiebe (standing) speaks at the annual Volunteer Appreciation Dinner on November 12, 2019. He is a Mennonite history PhD candidate at the University of Waterloo. Here he is describing his dissertation research on Mennonite identity formation. The dinner event is a way for CMBS to recognize and thank the volunteers who donate many hours through the year scanning photos to MAID, filing periodicals, church bulletins, and obituaries, and mailing the *Mennonite Historian* to churches and individuals. Photo credit: Mary Anne Isaak.

Mennonite Refugees from Chortitza (1921–1923)

(cont'd from p. 5)

Along with many details which supplement those found in the previously researched and published minutes of the Union and the reports of its chairman, the minutes and trip reports from Klassen reveal the increasing dissatisfaction of the leaders of the Chortitza refugees with the work of the Union and its chairperson (Janz), who were based in the Molotschna settlement. For instance, the leaders of the Chortitza refugees sharply criticized Janz for postponing by several months the submission of the list of refugees to the government, for retaining all authority and communications on emigration matters to himself, and for not immediately or sufficiently understanding and/or accepting the reasonable terms already offered by government officials for the emigration. Given their desperation to emigrate and the difficulties of receiving reports from the Study Commission sent abroad in 1919 from the Molotschna settlement, the Chortitza refugees advocated sending another delegation—this time including a Chortitza delegate—to obtain current information from the Study Commission and to investigate and advocate anew for emigration possibilities abroad. However, it seemed to them that Janz stalled and interfered with its appointment and sending out from the Union. They were also concerned that the leadership for the emigration was dominated by Mennonite Brethren.

On a general level, their dissatisfaction with the pace and effectiveness of the Union in advancing their emigration pushed the Chortitza refugee leaders to call

for the creation of a separate section in the Union dedicated to the emigration project. They also insisted and prevailed with their argument that the Chortitza refugee groups emigrate before the Molotschna emigrants because they had compiled their list first.

Other documents in this collection include a number of guarantees of family heads and village refugee groups to repay the travel costs once in Canada; statements regarding four individuals to conduct themselves decently before, during, and after the transport to the new country; certifications of the health status for individual families in several villages (Schönwiese, Kronsgarten, Schöneberg); petitions of the refugees in Kronsgarten and Yekaterinoslav for expeditious action; and a list of the vocations of the refugees leaving on the second train. Strangely, the account of a disturbing attempt by Janz to dissuade Klassen from a mass emigration and from submitting the list of emigrants for approval by the government in the winter of 1921–1922 as recounted in *Mennonite Exodus* (pp. 141–142) and in *Shepherds, Servants, and Prophets* (pp. 220–222) is not included in this collection, though the document is available in the Board of Colonization collection at the Mennonite Heritage Archives and in the



Russian Mennonite refugees ready to emigrate gather at the Chortitza train station in 1923. Photo credit: Arthur Slagel
Collection: MAID CA MHC 665-116.0

John P. Klassen collection in the Bluffton College archives.

In 1963, at the end of a long career as artist and professor at Bluffton College in Ohio, Klassen—who now called himself John—passed these several folders of documents on to his friend and former collaborator in the emigration, Abram Vogt, storekeeper and genealogist in Steinbach, Manitoba (see article on Vogt in the March 2018 issue of *Mennonite Historian*). In 2019, Vogt's daughter, Margaret Kroeker, who had continued the Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., project founded by her father, passed these documents on to the Mennonite Heritage Archives. The minutes in the collection are available in typed version and Klassen's trip reports are available in English translation as well as in typed form.

Endnote

*See also the biographical sketch by Harry Loewen of John P. Klassen in *Shepherds, Servants, and Prophets: Leadership among the Russian Mennonites (ca. 1880–1960)* (Herald Press, 2003), 213–228.



Klassen's bronze plaque illustrating Isaiah 2:4 is on display at Bluffton University (Ohio) and Bethel College (Kansas).

Old Colony Mennonites

by John J. Friesen, Winnipeg

Old Colony Mennonites consist of about 200,000 people in a wide range of churches in the Americas. They are descendants from the approximately 6,000 Mennonites who emigrated from western Canada to Mexico in the 1920s. The main reason for the migration was that the provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, contrary to their earlier promises, closed Mennonite private schools and forced children to attend public English-language “worldly” schools.

In Mexico, where Old Colonists received the privileges they desired, they established three “parent” colonies: Manitoba, Swift, and Durango. The first two, Manitoba and Swift, named after their place of origin in Canada, are situated near Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua. Durango is situated near Nuevo Ideal in the state of Durango.

Many of the basic characteristics of present-day Old Colony Mennonites were shaped during their forbears’ two-and-a-half-century residence in the lowlands of the Vistula River in Poland, plus a century in South Russia. During this time, *Privilegia* were negotiated with Polish and Russian rulers, exempting them from military service. *Plautdietsch* was adopted from their German neighbours in Poland as their everyday language. High German became their language of worship. Elementary schools were developed for both girls and boys. Inheritance patterns (*Theilungskontrakte*) were drawn up and the *Waisenamt* saw to the orderly settlement of estates, ensuring that both boys and girls received an equal inheritance. The *Waisenamt* also served as a local savings and loans bank. Churches had an *Armenkasse* to assist needy members.

During these centuries, churches developed leadership positions consisting of an *Aeltester*, who provided leadership for the whole *Gemeinde* (Church), several assistants called *Lehrer* or preachers (the number depended on the size of the *Gemeinde*), and a *Diakon* (Deacon), who was responsible to care for those in financial need. They also had four to six *Vorsaenger*, who announced hymns and led singing during worship services.

In the 1870s migration to Manitoba from Russia, two Mennonite groups from the colonies of Chortitza and

Fuerstenland joined together to form the *Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde*. In southern Manitoba, they established numerous villages with the characteristics noted above, complete with church and municipal (*Gebietsamt*) organizations. Because the Manitoba government initially did not provide local municipal services, Mennonites were free to develop their own. The *Reinlaender Gemeinde* also insisted that the church control the municipal organization, that is, the *Aeltester* had authority over the *Obervorsteher* who headed the *Gebietsamt*. By the time the *Reinlaender* emigrated to Mexico in the 1920s, and reorganized under a new name, Old Colony Mennonite Church (*Alt Kolonier Mennoniten Gemeinde*), the essential features of their communities had been established.

Old Colony Mennonites were committed to farming as a vocation and lifestyle. Starting in 1948, when the population in the parent colonies in Mexico exceeded the land available, new colonies in Mexico and in other countries were established.

New colonies were also founded when disagreements over how sharply to separate from the world could not be resolved. Disagreements could be about whether to accept rubber tires for tractors, allow members to own vehicles, accept electricity, or modernize their schools. Usually the more conservative faction migrated to a new location. Migrations due to such disagreements resulted in new colonies forming in Belize in 1958, southern Mexico starting in the 1960s, Bolivia after 1967, and Paraguay and Argentina in the 1980s. Today, the majority of the most conservative “horse and buggy” groups reside in Bolivia.

Beginning in the 1940s, primarily for economic reasons, thousands of Old Colony

Mennonites, either individually or in small groups, migrated to various provinces and states in Canada and the United States. Here they did not found colonies but clustered together to form supportive communities and churches. Rarely could they afford to farm, so they took jobs, with many establishing successful businesses. Old Colonists became well known as hard workers, excellent mechanics, and capable technicians.

In the continual search for land, small numbers of Old Colonists have also migrated to other Latin American countries.

Some Old Colonists left their communities because of the desire for personal freedom, evangelical church life, or better education for their children. These people no longer identify with an Old Colony Church.

For 2015, the Mennonite World Conference listed baptized Old Colony members for the various countries as follows: Mexico 34,000, Bolivia 27,000, Canada 14,000, Belize 3,000, Paraguay 2,800, USA 2,000, and Argentina 1,400. Total: 84,200. This results in a total population of men, women and children of about 200,000.

As a result of these migrations, Old Colony Mennonites have created a large interconnected transnational community spanning the Americas. This scattering has attracted more acculturated North American Mennonite conferences to direct mission programs to virtually all Old Colony settlements and colonies, often establishing counter-churches.

Old Colony dress is plain, modest, and mostly homemade. Women normally wear mid-calf length dresses and kerchiefs. Men wear dark, long-sleeved shirts and overalls. Children’s clothes are usually smaller versions of adult clothes. Girls



Farming with steel-wheeled tractors at El Sabinal Colony in Chihuahua State, Mexico, in 2009, modern and traditional. Photo credit: Arlette Kouwenhoven.

clothes are often brightly embroidered. Dress patterns vary from community to community and are modified as members migrate and acculturate.

The language of everyday life in Old Colony Mennonite communities is *Plautdietsch*. Use of *Plautdietsch* separates them from the English- or Spanish-speaking “world” and strengthens a transnational identity and connectedness.

Old Colony Mennonites are hospitable and generous, warmly welcoming both insiders and outsiders into their homes, often with a well-honed sense of humour. In personal relationships, they are humble, rarely asserting themselves. Some of the difficulties Old Colony communities are dealing with are alcoholism, sexual abuse, and delinquency by young people.

Old Colonists believe that control of their private elementary schools is crucial to their future. In most Latin America communities, Old Colonists run their own schools, appoint the teachers and use their traditional curriculum. In Canada and the United States, Old Colony communities are allowed to establish private schools staffed by their own teachers, provided the curriculum meets government standards.

Old Colony Mennonites see maintaining traditions and following rules as the best way to express their faithfulness to God. Despite their commitment to tradition, they do make adaptations in response to changes in politics, agriculture policy, the economy, and climate.

Old Colony communities have grown rapidly due to high birth rates, rejection of birth control, and improved health care. They have retained a relatively large percentage of their young people, and they have shown great resilience in successive harsh pioneer settings where they have made marginal agricultural land productive. They have also created strong, vibrant, faith communities that challenge modernity and model an alternative lifestyle. Finally, they continue to express the early Anabaptist principles of community, *Nachfolge Christi* (following in the way of Christ), nonresistance, and separation from the world. Old Colony Mennonites are an important part of the larger Anabaptist-Mennonite world-wide community.

John J. Friesen is professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite University. He prepared this article in 2019 for Das



The Fehr family from El Sabinal Colony in Chihuahua State, Mexico, on their way home in 2009. Photo credit: Arlette Kouwenhoven, *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration* (Leiden, Netherlands: Winco Press, 2013), 146.

Mennonitisches Lexikon On-Line *where it appears in German translation. This English version is printed here with permission from Das Mennonitisches Lexikon. For Friesen's selected bibliography of books and articles on Old Colony Mennonites, see the MennLex version at https://www.mennlex.de/doku.php?id=loc:old_colony_mennonites.*

The Source of Johann Cornies's “Rules” on Schools and Education

by James Urry, New Zealand

As President of the Agricultural Union responsible for education in Molochna, Johann Cornies in 1846 circulated descriptions of two schools to those involved in education. In the first, dated March 5, 1846, Cornies provided a negative description of a poor school and just over a month later followed this with a positive picture of a school.¹ It has long been assumed that Cornies wrote these himself, especially as his name appears at the end of each circular. But Cornies's

source of these descriptions, in part word-for-word, was a contrast of two schools published in 1821 by Edmund Engelbrecht in Bavaria.² The same source was used by Cornies to formulate his “General Rules” concerning the instruction and handling of children. Most of Cornies's list of rules is taken from Engelbrecht with only slight changes in wording, although Cornies only has 88 rules compared to Engelbrecht's 90.³

Engelbrecht, who died in 1857, was a Catholic elementary school teacher in Holzkirchen and Passau. He wrote a number of educational works, some on history and geography and others on methods to improve elementary education aimed particularly at teachers and administrators. His works are strongly moralistic in tone.⁴ He was an admirer of the educational methods of the famous Swiss pedagogue and philosopher Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746–1827), whose liberal ideas on education were particularly popular at this period.⁵

A more detailed comparison of the writings of Cornies is needed to trace

how far Engelbrecht or those of others influenced Cornies. But there is little doubt that Cornies's written suggestions on education are far from original.

Endnotes

1. See for instance Franz Isaak, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte derselben* (Halbstadt: H.J. Braun, 1908), 277–280; an English version can be found in Peter Paul's translation of David H. Epp's *Johann Cornies* (Winnipeg: C.M.B.C. Publications, 1995), 53–60.

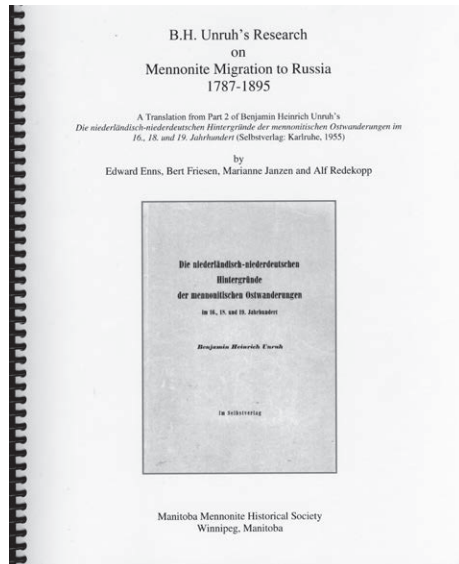
2. "Die Schule zu Finsterthal und die Schule zu Gutenberg im Contraste" in Augustin Edmund Engelbrecht, *Aufsätze pädagogischen Inhalts. Ein Buch für Seelsorger und Volksschullehrer zur angenehmen und belehrenden Unterhaltung* (Landshut: Philipp Kruell, 1821), 249–256.

3. Isaak, *Molotschnaer Mennoniten*, 280–289; Engelbrecht, *Aufsätze pädagogischen Inhalts*, 229–249; see also Engelbrecht's 78 rules, some of which are the same as Cornies's in his *Pädagogische Mittheilungen. Ein interessantes Taschenbuch für Volks-Schullehrer* (Passau: Peter Ambrost, 1828), 61–80. The translator of Epp's *Johann Cornies*, 60–63, has included only 87 rules, as this is all that was given by Epp in the original German edition.

4. Heidrun Alzheimer-Haller, *Handbuch zur narrativen Volksaufklärung. Moralische Geschichten 1780–1848* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004), 521.

5. Engelbrecht, *Pädagogische Mittheilungen*, with front piece illustration of Pestalozzi, 172–184. In this work, Engelbrecht also includes a list of 80 "rules" on teaching addressed from an "old teacher" to "a younger colleague" on how to "live a prudent life," 44–61.

Book Reviews



Edward Enns, Bert Friesen, Marianne Janzen, and Alf Redekopp, *B.H. Unruh's Research on Mennonite Migration to Russia, 1787–1895: A Translation from Part 2 of Benjamin Heinrich Unruh's Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* [Karlsruhe, 1955] (Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2018), 279

pp. Available from the publisher or online at commonword.ca (\$39.00).

Reviewed by Rosemary Slater, Saskatoon

Benjamin H. Unruh's *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert* was self-published in 1955. It was thought so important that, in that same year, it was distributed free of charge by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches to every congregation as well as to their schools and institutions. It has long been a major resource for Russian-Prussian Mennonite genealogical researchers. However, its usefulness has become limited because it was published in German, a language no longer commonly used by the majority of Canadian Mennonites.

In his book, Unruh traces the genealogical origins of a subset of common Russian Mennonite family names found in early 16th-century Flemish and Friesian church records. He continues his analysis through the various Mennonite migrations eastward and, using various sources, ends with lists of the names of Mennonite people found in Russia between 1787 and 1895.

It is these lists of Mennonites in Russia, listed by date and village in Part 2 of Unruh's book, that have been translated into English to make them more accessible. Unruh's extensive comments and footnotes related to the lists and the sources he used have also been translated. The translators also added numerous cross-references to the work of Mennonite researcher, Henry Schapansky, as well as inserted some additional editorial comments. They also added estimated birthdates and included the names of females who were originally identified only by their spouses' names, as well as added other relevant notes. The original 14-page index has been expanded to 44 pages, making it much more complete. The name spellings have also been standardized and some of the village lists have been alphabetized, in which case the original village number assigned to a family has been referenced. This publication is therefore considerably more than a translation of Unruh's book.

The introduction to the translation provides a good summary of who B.H. Unruh was, the importance of his work, and

the process that led to the publication of this volume in November 2018. This is followed by a translation of Unruh's Foreword to Part 2 of the original monograph, in which he reviews the historical background for the ongoing Mennonite migrations, refers to the research resources he has used, and addresses the limitations of his research.

The Table of Contents lists four main sections and each of the first three sections is further subdivided by date. Section A deals with *The Emigration of Mennonite Farmers to 1806* and lists the sources used to document the earliest immigrations to the Chortitza Colony. The identification of Unruh's sources and an explanation of his research approach will be of particular interest to genealogists.

Section B, called *Source Documents*, contains 72 pages and is the largest section of the book. It is further subdivided into lists for 1795, 1802, 1808, and 1814. Each subsection is cross-referenced to the pages in Unruh's original text. Families are listed by village, and approximate birthdates have been added to assist in the identification of specific individuals. Children's names have been supplied and there are many references to Schapansky's work.

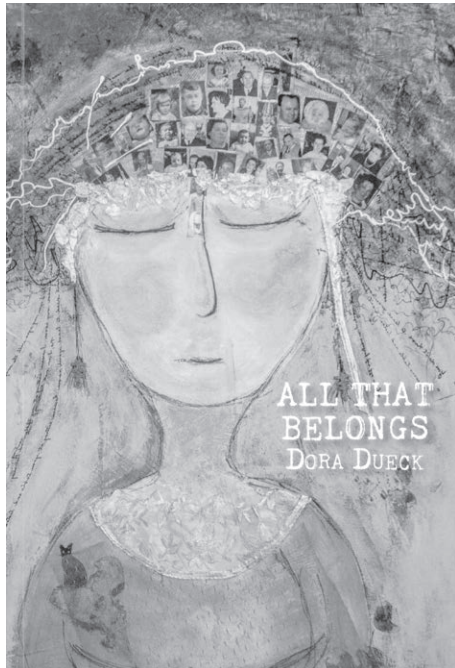
Unruh begins Section C, titled *Immigration Lists*, with a qualifier as to the completeness of the following lists. Fifteen pages of lists of immigrants to Chortitza follow, covering the period from 1787 to 1805. The October 1808 census list for 18 Molotschna villages takes up the next 45 pages. This is followed by the 1811 family listing for the Molotschna village of Rueckenau. Five pages of birth, marriage, and death records for Molotschna villages for the period August 1812 to August 1813 complete this section.

Section D, designated *Emigration (Molotschna 1803–1895)*, consists of the names of families immigrating to Molotschna. These are cross-referenced to Unruh's original work and presented in chronological order by year, beginning with 1803. The immigrations to Crimea in 1867 and the Caucasus in 1889 wrap up this section. Unruh again concludes with an apology for the incompleteness of his work and promises that it is to be continued.

The expanded index is followed by the translation of the Endnotes to Part 2 found in Unruh's original.

This translation by Edward Enns, Bert Friesen, Marianne Janzen, and Alf Redekopp does not replace Dr. Unruh's

work but makes it accessible to the many for whom the German original has become a barrier. The translators have also drawn together the genealogical research that has been done since 1955, continuing the task begun by Dr. Unruh.



Dora Dueck, *All That Belongs* (Winnipeg: Turnstone Press, 2019), 333p.

Reviewed by Jon Isaak

Dora Dueck's *All That Belongs* is her newest work of fiction. The novel—featuring a retired Mennonite archivist named Catherine Riediger, who makes several startling discoveries of her own family story—was launched at McNally Robinson, Winnipeg, on October 5, 2019, with Dora reading excerpts and taking questions.

Dora's fiction has earned critical acclaim. Her novel *This Hidden Thing* (CMU Press, 2010) won the McNally Robinson Book of the Year prize at the 2011 Manitoba Book Awards, and her short story collection *What You Get at Home* (Turnstone Press, 2012) won the 2013 High Plains Award for short fiction. Her novella *Mask* was the winner of *The Malahat Review's* 2014 novella contest. I suspect *All That Belongs* will also be well received.

In the story, Catherine has spent years conserving the pasts of others, only to find her own past reappearing on the eve of retirement. She describes that first year of retirement as “the year of my preoccupation with the dead.” Catherine mines memories

of her difficult uncle Gerhard and troubled brother Darrell, following them from the small farm in rural Alberta to the Mennonite college in Winnipeg and beyond. En route, she discovers through newspaper clippings and letters something even darker at play, reaching back to forebears in Ukraine. She unearths intergenerational trauma that has been passed down through the family, embodied and redeployed, hidden and manifested, until Catherine is finally able to make peace with her past, her grief, her memories, and her pain.

Along the way, Dora has Catherine navigating the streets of Winnipeg, noting the buildings, landmarks, and skylines. These are delightfully rewarding for readers who have spent some time in Winnipeg. And even those who haven't will find stimulating the descriptions of houses, farm life, towns, schools, and meals, as Catherine follows up on hunches that become part of her discovery quest—including a road trip back to the Alberta farm of her youth to check her memories and interview past acquaintances.

The narrative moves at a good pace, alternating between Catherine's youthful memories and the mature experience of her present as a retiree also caring for an aging mother in a personal care home. The sights and sounds are described with vivid texture and feeling. The scenes of tenderness between Catherine and her husband, Jim, are endearing—the descriptions of sexual intimacy, longing and loss, and the seasons of family life rolling through the decades are surprisingly insightful and apt.

There is plenty of perceptive exploration of growing up Mennonite on the prairies during the 1950s through to the 1970s, the challenge of transitioning from German to English, the tension between rural and urban. Catherine navigates the rugged terrain of leaving an isolated and pious church-centred framework for a faith that engages with science, culture, literature, and music. She embraces an Anabaptist theology of love, justice, peace, and acceptance, which is more expansive and affirming, and therefore threatening to the older ways of being Mennonite.

One interaction from the 1970s gives a snapshot of the colliding worlds occupied by Catherine's parents and that of Catherine and her brother, Darrell. Here Catherine defends her brother's (and her own) newly discovered notions of justice and peace in a conversation with her mother.

Mom, I said, it's not wrong to want a better world!

Then Mom apologized for fretting but asked what was wrong with the world as it was.

How to even begin to answer? Or explain what it was like to be our kind of young? The world not airtight as our parents supposed. Her [Mom and Dad's] generation survived the Depression and the War, worked without stopping, founded camps, youth programs, and schools to inculcate their traditions, sacrificed to sustain them, and now expected gratitude but their children weren't grateful enough. They [Mom and Dad] still remembered what the communists had done to our people in Russia; they thought disillusionment with the West was willful and extravagant, this focus on bombs, overpopulation, acid rain, nuclear destruction, segregation.

No, I could never explain (221).

But probably the feature of *All That Belongs* that makes me recommend it the most is that Dora manages to put in the form of story the important topic of intergenerational trauma. Catherine experiences both the dangers of not addressing it and the merits of acknowledging, forgiving, and loving those in our family ancestry living with mental illness, trauma, and suffering. By doing the hard work of facing our ancestors and their trauma, we too have an opportunity to drain the debilitating shame and silence that lodges in our bodies and affects our capacity for intimacy and wholeness.

And the cover art by Agatha Fast is wonderful and clever. The collage on the cover depicts how the lives of our ancestors have an uncanny way of showing up in the way we engage the world: their images stubbornly populate the mindscape of who we are. Catherine's example shows us how it is better to learn to know them and make friends with them, even those puzzling and troubling forebears. Our own health, healing, and wholeness depend on it!

Why read this novel? Because Catherine's year-long quest to make sense of her memories and her family could be useful for your own processing. In the end, Catherine's quest leaves her in a good place, at peace and alive to all that belongs. Perhaps you'll find encouragement to engage in a similar quest of your own.

Thank you, Dora, for sharing with us your meditation of love and how to age with dignity, grace, and strength.