

Mennonite Historian

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



Pictured above is Margaret Enns (1920–1963), standing with three other teachers in front of the Burwalde School, near Winkler, Manitoba (ca. 1942). Margaret is at the far right. She was completing a two-week practicum at the school as part of her teachers' training program. The photo on the right is Margaret Enns's 1941 Normal School photo. Her story starts on page 2. Photo credit for all four images: Lorne Brandt.

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Notes from Normal School

by Lorne Brandt, Richmond, BC

Readers of this periodical might remember reading about the experience of young, single Mennonite women working in the city. As the educational level among these women increased, there were also those young women raised on the farm who found themselves in a new urban environment as students. My mother was one of those.

The descendent of 1876 immigrants from Chortitza, South Russia, Margaret Brandt (nee Enns)—Margie to most—was born in Greenfarm, Manitoba, northeast of Winkler, to Frank and Maria (nee Loewen) Enns. However, from the age of three, she grew up farther west on a farm in the Burwalde School District.

Teachers and family appear to have realized that Margie was not destined to become a farm homemaker. Her father arranged for her to complete high school by taking Grade XII while living in residence at the Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) in Gretna, Manitoba. She graduated in 1939 and, that same spring, was baptized on confession of her faith by Bishop J. Pauls in the Morden Bergthaler Mennonite Church. She had put her faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Master of her life at the age of thirteen. Early in life,

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she decided to try to enter the teaching profession.

Teachers' training at the time appears to have been a two-year proposition, on which mother would have then embarked in 1940. She moved to Winnipeg and attended the Central Normal School at 442 William Avenue. Our mother unexpectedly and suddenly passed away in 1963, so we have never been able to review these years with her. I am not sure our father, Edwin Brandt, would remember those years either, but, with his passing in December 2019, that door for exploration also closed. However, I was fortunate to come across last year a collection of diaries and notebook journals our parents left behind.

The diary on which this article is based is a 72-page spiral bound notebook covering the last term of mother's Normal School training and first month of teaching experience, January to October 1942. She turned 22 during her first month of teaching.

The quotations below from the diary reproduce her writing exactly: spelling, grammar, and phrasing. The diary gives insights into mother's character, her faith, and her experience as a student in the city.

Margie was a maturing young woman who was acutely aware of the cost and possible sacrifice her education meant for her family, as she indicates in comments in her diaries. It is also evident from her accounts that she had many friends, too.

Anyone who has kept a diary knows that it takes work to do so. Margie comments on this at the outset of 1942, but not until January 6. *Dearest diary, for a long time before the end of the year which is just behind us I had planned to begin you on the very first day of this New Year and do unto you faithful and justifying duty every day. Once again I have failed—my willpower must be exceedingly small.*

On April 23, after not entering any notes since March 30, she castigates herself again. *Dearest diary! I have been very unfaithful to you for what seems a long and eventful month. Again and again I wanted to tell you a few things but was always to tired when night time or sleepy time came.*

Perhaps Margie points to why we keep diaries when she writes further, along comparable lines, on June 5, after another gap of over three weeks. *Dearest diary! I have been neglecting you for a long time again (5 days less than a month) but as a*

true friend indeed, I always turn to you in need.

This suggests that for her, as I think for many diary keepers, a journal or diary fulfils a need to unburden ourselves by what we express there. We do find such expressions in her diaries.

Mother's devotion to her family and the sense of indebtedness referred to earlier comes through in places like her entry from January 3. She was able to limit those costs to the family by being at home to begin the last term of her second year, doing a practicum in her home school.

Having just gone to a *Jugendverein* with her father and sister, she writes, *I felt pretty bad because I hadn't let mother go in my place. She has to stay home so often already and make the countless sacrifices. Cried myself to sleep last night because of several different worries. The Lord has been far, far better to me than I deserve. I have very much to be grateful for (realize my fortunate life thus far too) but sometimes it does seem a perplexing problem and I wonder just how far I'm doing what I should do or not. I know that I could help a lot at home and perhaps make things a little easier. Now I'm entirely dependent above all the rest.*

About that practicum in her home school, she writes on January 5, *I'm supposed to do two weeks of observing and practicing teaching now after the Christmas holidays. We didn't go to school today because it was too dreadfully cold and we said we'd rather celebrate Epiphany Day at home.*

She probably felt guilty about that, but still confessed when she did go, *I am learning a few things but find it rather "langweilig" sitting there all day. The devotion to home and family evident here also appears in this entry two weeks later: Two weeks of observing and practice teaching are over now. In 2 days and I'll probably be back in the city "cooped up" again—i.e., if time goes on and nothing happens. It's been an enjoyable and interesting time for me in school but what weighs heavily on my conscience is that I didn't get anything done during my time at home. How I dread going back again!*

After being back in the city for three days, she notes, *How I dreaded and hated leaving home this time! It all seems so uncertain these days—one never knows what may happen.*

(cont'd on p. 4)

Genealogy and Family History

Your Family History: Different Approaches to the Same End?

by Robb Nickel, Winnipeg

We have all seen it, the ad on television encouraging us to check out our family history via a simple DNA test. Find a long-lost relative in a country you did not realize was part of your ancestry. If you are like me, my library contains at least half-a-dozen self-published or professionally published books describing some aspect of our family background, be it a family tree, a family story, or a photo album carefully put together with names and dates below black-and-white photographs.

However, with the advancement of research via the internet, new possibilities for discovering and compiling your history, these wonderful stories, have become possible.

Louella Klassen has an interesting approach. Put simply, she is publishing online the genealogical information she has gathered as an alternative to the paper-and-ink approach. When I asked her how her interest in family history was triggered, she said, "I grew up listening to my mom, Helen Reimer, and my grandmother, Helena (nee Martens) Giesbrecht, tell me stories about Ukraine. My mom was born in Georgstal, Fürstenland, Ukraine, a village near the Rogatchuk River. My mom shared many of her childhood memories with me. One memory that caught my attention as a child was the one where my then five-year-old mother watched her grandmother say goodbye to her two sons in the middle of the night just before they boarded a boat on the Dnieper River with their families to begin their journey to freedom."

Louella went on to say that she has and is learning a great deal about the history of her people who emigrated from Danzig to Ukraine, about their courage and determination in the face of almost insurmountable odds. She gave me the following reason for launching her website: "One of my goals is to include on my family tree members of the Zacharias family related to Wilhelm Zacharias born in 1700 in the Gross Werder area,

Danzig. So far, I have been able to trace 700 families and 3,040 persons who are descendants of Wilhelm Zacharias born in 1700." She is also collecting family histories, photographs, journals, and letters written by family members.

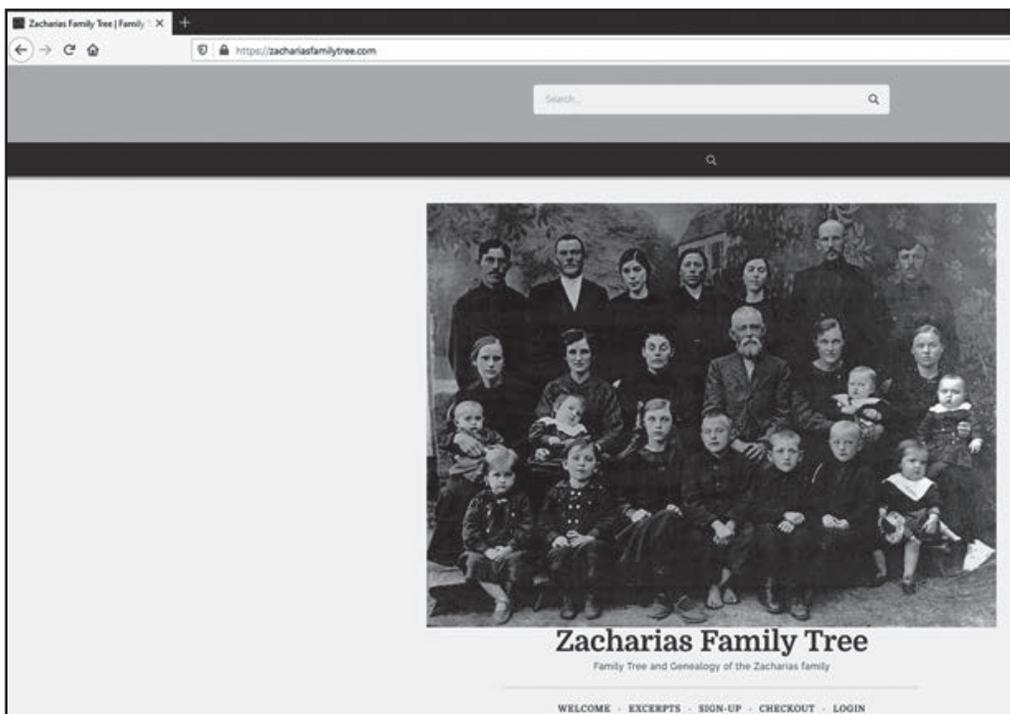
Here is why Louella is publishing her material on a website: "Never in my wildest dreams could I have imagined 40 years ago that there would be a medium such as online publishing available to me at such a moderate price. When one publishes a book, one is restricted to how much information and how many pictures one can add. When publishing online, these restrictions do not apply. I can continue to add material without the extra expense of publishing another book." Louella Klassen encourages readers to check out her website, <https://zachariasfamilytree.com/>. (See a screenshot of her website's landing page below.) For a modest subscription fee, viewers have access to all the information Louella has published online.

There are many options besides the Klassen website when it comes to doing online research. Online sites, like myheritage.com, provide a platform to upload data, photos, and videos of family members. You can view the family tree and personal profiles. It is like a family tree scrapbook, but the free version is limited.

A different kind of online project is the Mennonite DNA project, <http://www.mennonitedna.com/>, administered by Dr. Glenn Penner and Dr. Tim Janzen. Penner works out of the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg. On the opening page, he states, "The information provided on this page is dedicated to a group of Mennonites known as the Low-German Mennonites. This is part of a larger Mennonite DNA Project which includes all Anabaptist groups of Dutch, German, or Swiss descent. These include Amish, Hutterites, Old Order Mennonites, and others. Anyone who belongs to the other groups and is interested in the DNA project should visit <https://www.familytreedna.com/groups/menno/>." His work is extensive and bears checking out.

The above websites are just a few examples of the kinds of research going on and available on the internet. There is much fascinating material out there, and you are encouraged to check it out. Maybe it will encourage you to do some digging on your own. Just remember, there is lots of help available, and a great resource is the Mennonite Heritage Archives on the campus of Canadian Mennonite University, www.mharchives.ca.

Robb Nickel <salrobb@mymts.net> is a retired broadcast journalist who loves birdwatching and nature photography. He also loves spending time with his two grandsons, Simon and Aaron.



The screenshot shows a web browser window with the address bar displaying <https://zachariasfamilytree.com>. Below the address bar is a search bar with the text "Search" and a magnifying glass icon. The main content area features a large, black and white group photograph of a large family, including men, women, and children of various ages, posed in several rows. Below the photograph, the text reads "Zacharias Family Tree" in a large, bold font, followed by "Family Tree and Genealogy of the Zacharias Family" in a smaller font. At the bottom of the page, there is a navigation menu with the following links: "WELCOME", "EXCERPTS", "SIGN-UP", "CHECKOUT", and "LOGIN".

Notes from Normal School

(cont'd from p. 2)

Her faith and conscientiousness of religious practice shows up in comments like this, referring to preparations to return to the city: *Was busy all day Saturday, January 17 trying to get my things ready but must confess that I did a lot on Sunday afternoon yet.*

Once back in the city, she makes this entry: *How I feel my own iniquities and short comings—one wishes to become more perfect (even as our Father in heaven is perfect) but when one tries to do it with his own power he only goes down instead of up.*

That fall, already half-way through her first month of teaching, her diary entry reflects further on her feelings about the Sabbath, as well as her struggles with the career she had embarked on: *Wanted to prepare my lessons for Monday real well this week-end, but I haven't done anything so far and I don't like the idea of working on Sunday. Believe there should be rest and time for meditation as life will soon lose its real purpose if so little time is allowed for the Lord. How I wish and long for a truer Christian life, where I would read my Bible at least daily, pray for and follow "his leading" with greater earnestness and effort. It seems as if I have left things get me the down and the wrong way. Try to teach with-out any knowledge of "how" and "why."*

Dear God! was this my calling or have I run ahead of you in choosing my pathways! Everybody else tells me not to be discouraged (they all seem to like it just fine) and I always thought I would too, but now - - -.

One can see here also the seeds of the Christian commitment that later came to fruition in her 17 years of missionary service in Northern Manitoba.

Remember also that this was war time. Margie's older brother, Frank, to whom she was very close, was in a Conscientious Objector's camp at Riding Mountain National Park. On February 1, she writes, *In these days we feel that the end is drawing near rapidly but God alone knows how much will happen to us till then. Professor Cragg said to us in our psychology class on Friday that people were trying to pull God into these situations of today—to help in the terrible wars whereas we the people had brought it upon ourselves in the worst way.*

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Studying with friends, ca. 1941. Margie is 2nd from right.

I think I hear a hint there of doubt as to whether the professor's interpretation of the state of affairs was correct. This comment about some military personnel that she encountered at a school social event can be seen to reflect her thoughts on the enlisted men she encountered and their alcohol consumption: *Talked with a few half decent sailors but ended up by being terrible sore at some who had been in the canteen too long.*

Later, she writes, *Have quiet a mixture of feelings tonight --. Wrote a letter to Frank since I am or seem to be the kind of person who is never able to keep anything to himself. I have already humbly expressed my gratitude and thanks to the Almighty for having endowed me with this position and if time goes on till next September I shall try my level best to begin and complete each days work by His Grace.*

Mother, like many young people when first in the city and away from the home church, did try out different churches. She talks of going to Bethel Mission Church, which would have been closest to what she was familiar with. However, she also went to Central and South End (Sud-end she called it), now I believe the Portage Ave. Mennonite Brethren Church. This is not surprising, as the community she grew up in had a strong Mennonite Brethren element. Indeed, for years on Sunday morning, both Conference and Brethren members of the community attended the same Sunday School (as well as Youth, Women's, and Missions Sale events in the evenings) held in the local school before

heading off to their own churches in Winkler! Mother also went to *Zion-Kirche*, which I believe was reference to Lutheran, Calvary Temple (Pentecostal), and Elim Chapel on Portage Avenue. This church attendance was not inevitable though! She does also admit to sleeping in on Sunday morning. One Sunday morning, she even refers to staying home to clean and describes items she ironed.

Mother did not only attend church for worship. She went to Women's meetings and also joined a choir. The last led to her being part of a Palm Sunday service: *Today was "Palm=Sonntag" and the beginning of the "Leidenswoche." Now what would be the right word for that in English? Dorothy Wiebe and I went to the Knox United Church on Edmonton St. at 7.45 this morning. In fact I got up at 6.30 A.M.—earliest ever since I came here after Christmas. We had been for the Combined Choirs practice hour on Friday and today we had the Sunrise Service in that cathedral. It was sponsored by the Christian Youth Federation with representatives of seven different denominations. The girls all wore a white gown, with long white sleeves. Reverend Crossley Hunter spoke on the "conquering Christ." If that was not enough, she went in the evening to a choir program at the South End MB.*

Teachers' training included professional as well as academic training, as this article on the subject suggests: "In its 1924 report, the Educational Commission

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An Interview with Royden Loewen: Farmer, Historian, Storyteller...

by Robb Nickel, Winnipeg

Dr. Royden Loewen, recently retired Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, comes by his passion for Mennonite history honestly, having grown up in the Mennonite community of Blumenort, north of Steinbach, on the East Reserve of Manitoba. He attended the Blumenort Evangelical Mennonite Church (formerly *Kleine Gemeinde*) when it still had its German Sunday and no piano. The pastor—his uncle John—led the services without a tie, and he remembers that his older sisters were chastised for not wearing head coverings.

His grandparents, Isaac and Maria Loewen, moved to Mexico in 1950 with most of his uncles and aunts, and he has visited Mexico in every decade of his life. Royden says, “That Mexico connection—and that we had *not* moved—was part of my identity. My father was the rebel—the true evangelical Christian does not run from the world—so, he doubled down to make sure we would assimilate. He expanded the farm and sold the cows, pigs, and horses, and we specialized in poultry. My mother ‘dressed to the nines,’ and we children were not allowed to speak Low German. Dad would have been so pleased if we had all married non-Mennonites and non-white Mennonites at that!” Royden quipped that he also rebelled by studying Mennonite history and marrying a Mennonite!

Mennonite history became his narrative and *Blumenort* became his MA thesis, and a history of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, his people in Nebraska and Manitoba, became his PhD dissertation. His newest book, in press right now at Johns Hopkins University Press, is based on the Seven Points on Earth project—an environmental history of seven Mennonite farm communities from around the world. Environmental history is the result of a life-long interest that Royden has had exploring the narratives of people. And he states with emphasis, Mennonites are his people.

Dr. Loewen took over the Chair in Mennonite Studies about 25 years ago. The department has seen changes that Royden attributes to different areas of focus. “My predecessor, Dr. Harry Loewen, was an

expert in Reformation studies and German literature, and my own focus was in Canadian social history, and my successor is an expert in yet another subfield of Mennonites. So, the changes of note are those at the nexuses of generational succession.”

“My own interests have also changed somewhat—perhaps from issues of ethnoreligious identity to those of power and nature. But, at the foundation, they have always been about the everyday expressions of culture and faith, seeking to understand how people put their local worlds together. My abiding interest, and the things I have written about, relate to everyday religion, gender relations, and generational succession (inheritance, mythology, lore, personal narratives such as diaries and memoirs). At heart, I think I’m an anthropologist. I wonder about how people order their worlds in the chaos of life and create symbols of meaning.”

The Mennonite Heritage Archives at Canadian Mennonite University is integral to the study of Mennonites. According to Loewen, “The Mennonite Heritage Archives is crucial in these pursuits. Historians can only write about stuff they can know about. I have chatted with Conrad Stoesz, and before him, Lawrence Klippenstein, and the other directors, on a regular basis over the years. The role of the archivist is an absolutely crucial role for any community. The archivist is the custodian of the record of knowledge. And the historian’s job is to interpret and mobilize that knowledge.”

Storytelling is intimately tied to the role of a historian. Over the years, Dr. Loewen has assisted many people in the work of telling their stories, be they students or family historians. Royden states emphatically, “I loved editing the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and working with the 300+ individuals who published in it over the 24 years that I was editor. I enjoyed developing new courses—and to the final year, gained satisfaction in developing an Indigenous-Mennonite



Royden Loewen. Photo credit: Robb Nickel.

relations course that I never got to teach [because of retirement]. I have always found peace in the act of writing and much enjoyment putting together a variety of history narratives in book form.”

“I gained a great deal of satisfaction in working with various groups of scholars in creating and delivering the annual (October, usually) Mennonite studies conferences. I loved teaching at all levels and rousing the curiosity of Mennonite history in students. I enjoyed working on ‘the bones’ of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies (CTMS) and negotiating with the U of W administration. I felt great satisfaction in working with colleagues, and they are too numerous to enumerate, but Hans Werner, Andrea Dyck, and I were for a long time on the team at CTMS, and in more recent years, it was Aileen Friesen and Jeremy Wiebe. Even the process of working at handing off to Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, my successor, has been satisfying.”

Dr. Loewen speaks fondly about education and the process of finding out who one is as an individual. He says, “Education is to know yourself within a wider context, to build an identity, to learn how you are rooted in that context. History is the story that makes you who you are. I am never bored talking to anyone, that is, if they allow me into their stories. Every person has a story that is complex, consequential, compelling.”

“And I have my own story. I talk easily about my grandparents moving to Mexico and my grandfather, Isaac Loewen, opening an English language bookstore once he got there. I grew up in a happy

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Mennonite Heritage Archives

Voices from EMC & EMMC

by Conrad Stoesz <cstoesz@mharchives.ca>

The *Mennonite Historian* is embarking on a new initiative, “Voices from EMC & EMMC” (see page 10). For the next issues, photos and captions will be supplied by the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC). Three copies of the magazine will be sent to all EMC and EMMC congregations, joining Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Brethren congregations in receiving the *Mennonite Historian*.

Each of these two Mennonite conferences has its own unique history, and this is one way of giving voice and a platform to the telling of denominational histories. Both EMC and EMMC are national bodies that have their headquarters in Manitoba and use the Mennonite Heritage Archives as their official archival facility.

The EMC began in 1812 in the Molotschna Colony in Russia under the leadership of Klaas Reimer who advocated for a return to more traditional values. This group was part of the 1870s migration of Mennonites to North America. Initially known as the *Kleine Gemeinde* (small church), it anglicised its name in 1952

and settled on its current form in 1960. Its headquarters are in Steinbach, Manitoba.

The EMMC began in 1937 in Manitoba. Leaders such as William H. Falk emerged within the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church and wanted to adopt newer forms of worship. Initially known as the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church, the name was changed to the EMMC in 1959. Its headquarters are in Winnipeg.

EMMC and EMC authors and history are not strangers to the *Mennonite Historian*. Full length and shorter articles have appeared in the pages of the *Mennonite Historian* but including the conferences is new. We look forward to continued collaboration.

If you have photos and stories to share or would like to receive the *Mennonite Historian* at home, please contact one of the editors.

In other news, thanks to a partnership with Ontario-based TourMagination, the Mennonite Heritage Archives was featured for a second time in round two of “The Anabaptist Story Lives On: Virtual Museum & Archive Tour.” In spite of being on the same day as the American presidential election, 220 screens were logged on to watch my 30-minute presentation and 15-minute Q&A session.

In this second virtual tour entitled “Keeping our memories alive,” I explained the importance of context for understanding the past, showed a diary with a secret code,



and described one of the most important documents preserved at the MHA. If you are now curious as to what that document is, visit the MHA website to view the “Keeping our memories alive” video, <https://www.mharchives.ca/happenings/events/>. A screenshot of the video link is pictured below.

In “Keeping our memories alive,” I also interviewed film maker Andrew Wall. He spoke about the importance of the archives for the work he does, producing documentaries like *Volendam* and *The Last Objectors*.

At the MHA website, you can also find a link to the first presentation I did for the TourMagination “Virtual Museum & Archive Tour” that took place on May 12.



Oral Interviews Digitized

by Jon Isaak <jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca>

Recently, I completed a media preservation project. It involved the digitization of audio recordings from analogue cassette tapes to digital mp3 files.



This is a photo from the 1930s, showing a group of women from the Mary Martha Home, Winnipeg, posing for a photo in their uniforms. Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NP066-01-20.

In 1987, Frieda Esau Klippenstein interviewed 34 Mennonite women for an oral history project, documenting the experience of Mennonite domestics associated with the Mary Martha Home in Winnipeg. The interviews ranged from 60 to 75 minutes each. These women—usually for a year or two, but some longer—had worked for wealthy Winnipeg families in their homes during the 1920s through to the 1950s—cooking, cleaning, and child minding.

For many years, the women were under the supervision of Anna Thiessen (1892–1977), matron of the Mary Martha Home, a house at 437 Mountain Avenue and ministry of the Mennonite Brethren Church of Manitoba.

The Mary Martha Home functioned as an employment agency and living quarters for the women between or during jobs. It was also a place for the women to gather

on Thursdays, when their employers gave them the afternoon off. The women were mostly young, new to the city, and from recent immigrant/refugee families, all doing what they could to help their families resettle in Canada.

When the Mary Martha Home closed in 1959, more than 2,200 young women had benefited from its services.

The digitization of the interviews ensures that researchers will be able to access all 34 interviews, even as the original cassette tape recordings deteriorate with time.

To listen to a 3-minute excerpt from one of Frieda Klippenstein's interviews, see <http://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/oral-interviews-digitized/> and follow the prompts. There, you will also find links to photos and other documents related to the Mary Martha Home.

And if you are interested in digitizing your own cassette tapes, this can be done quite inexpensively. See the setup I used in the photo below. Here are five steps I followed. 1) Connect a basic cable from the headphone jack of the cassette player to the microphone jack on the sound card of a computer. 2) Open the Audacity software program that you have installed on your computer. The program is free (<https://www.audacityteam.org/>). 3) Start the tape player (set the levels) and the Audacity recording software at the same time, and let them run for the duration of the cassette. 4) Use the "noise reduction" feature in the "effects" menu of Audacity to take out some of the "hissing" sound. Essentially, you select a section of the playback with

only hissing (no voices), save it, and then get Audacity to strip that frequency from the whole digitized recording. 5) Export the cleaned-up tape as an mp3 file to a folder on your computer, and you have a digital copy of your analogue cassette tape. For more information, send me an email.

I am happy to have the digitization project done. Last year, in pre-covid times, there were two CMU students that came to listen to Frieda's Mary-Martha interview cassettes for a social history research paper. In future, students will be able to listen to the mp3 files. The interviews are now preserved, even if the original cassettes get damaged or degrade.

In other CMBS news, Shirley (Penner) Bergen sent in a donation of some family history writings relating to Sarah (Enns) Peters (1903–1994). Shirley's mother, Ida (Hiebert) Penner, roomed with Sarah while the two young women attended Normal School (teachers' training) in Manitou, Manitoba, in 1921. The collection of papers includes diary excerpts, describing Sarah's first year of teaching in Rosenbach, Manitoba. There are also glimpses of life in the 1920–1930s recorded in two articles narrating Sarah's life with John J. Peters (1901–1995), one presented at their 50th wedding anniversary and the other at their 60th. The papers are now preserved at the CMBS archives (Acc. No. 2020-06, Vol. 941).



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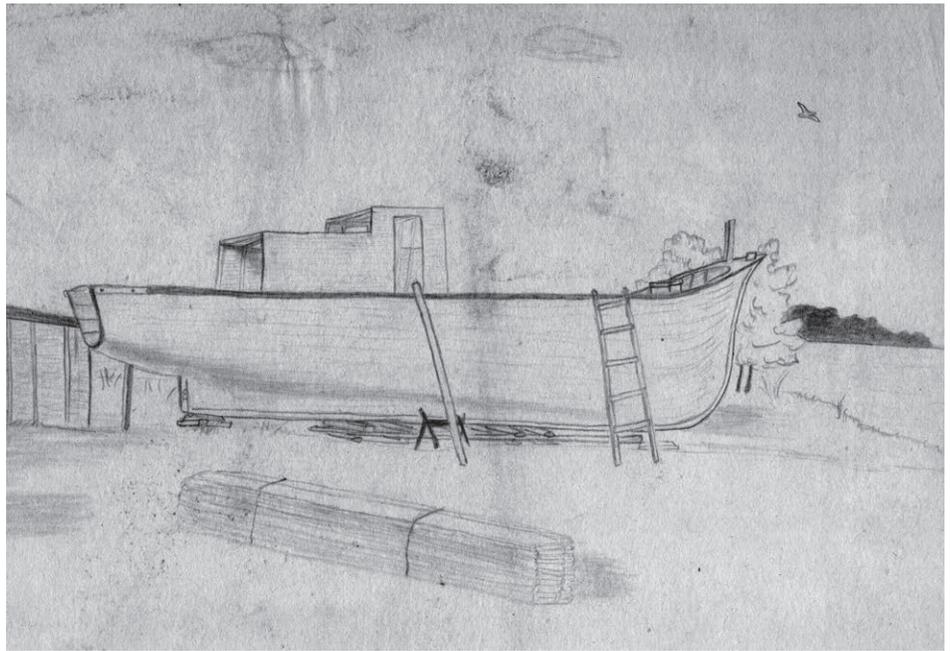
Notes from Normal School

(cont'd from p. 4)

recommended in addition to the abolishment of the third class certification ‘that as soon as conditions permit the term of training leading to a teachers certificate of the second class be lengthened to two years [from 40 weeks], and that the course include academic as well as professional training.’”¹ The latter likely referred to classes such as the following: *We had our second guest speaker at school today during our Special Period (of Tuesday morning). Miss Mildred Murray spoke on Personality and Poise. Seemed a charming lady and knowledge of her topic. I gathered she must be a lawyer or some advisor—now President of the Children’s Welfare. Last week we heard a certain Dr. Hunter from the Knox Presbyterian Church. He spoke on “How’s your appetite?” Meaning more spiritual one than the physical and I think I enjoyed his talk even more than today’s altho’ both were good. Only those are able to enter and partake of the feast of Life (good literature, music, art, etc.) who are ready.*

If you are getting the impression that mother had quite an extracurricular life, I believe you are right. Besides attending these different churches, she went to a display of tropical butterflies in the T. Eaton Annex, to see movies such as “Laddie,” and to hear a well-known speaker at the Civic Auditorium, a certain Mr. Brockington, whom she described as being *considered about the best speaker in the Dominion and has just recently returned from a visit to England*, which was what his talk was on. He was actually the first head of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.^{2,3}

Prior to graduation, some of the faculty and the students spent some time at a Gimli campsite. Of that experience, she records mixed feelings: *Is very enjoyable here at times—too good to be true; but tonight I am rather gloomy and see a lot of undesirable things in this life. We have most of our classes out in the open and there certainly is grand scenery. There are about 9 or 10 sleeping huts and 24 people in each hut. Upper and lower berths and me in an upper bunk. What an awful lot of nonsense one must put up with in these places—(not that I don’t make far too much of my own!). We’re really getting to know each other down here, and sometimes by the sounds and looks of some people I just*



One of Margie’s sketches from the Gimli art class.

feel they should never be allowed to join the teaching profession.

It’s simply too marvelous for any words to express my feelings of these lovely warm June days when we go out for walks on Nature Study hikes or Social Study excursions, etc. To watch the “beautiful white soft clouds” sail by, on top of the lovely dark green pines the big fields of dandelions and other wild flowers; the lake and it’s different faces are all that make Life worth living.

Leaving the camp brought this more negative note: *The whole Normal School Body (both Wpg. and Brdn.) had left our camp on the 7 o’clock-train in the morning. Had a real big supper the night before we left, with gift presentations to all the teachers, speeches and treats to all. After that they danced in the pavilion till 12.30, ate a light lunch and came to bed—but with very little or really no sleep at all that night. I may have got as much as 1½ hours altogether. The boys and girls (teachers-to-be) raided huts all night. What an awful night! Long time before I’ll forget it. Had to get up before 5 to pack our bedding and get breakfast before we left dear old Gimli with all the pleasant memories (and sad ones too!).*

On June 15, waiting for the end of her schooling, Margie writes, *If nothing very serious happens now we may be home in 10 more days. How I wish that time were here already!*

Then, what mother had been working for was finally completed, as she writes to

her diary, modestly claiming no experience when she had a couple of practicums behind her already: *Dearly beloved Diary! I received my teacher’s certificate by mail today and does it ever result in a queer nice feeling. At last I have arrived at the long hoped-for destination. I haven’t any experience at teaching yet but at least now I know I’ll be able to if nothing very serious happens before school is to begin again.*

After this, she still had to wait for word as to when to begin teaching. She had been given a position at a school near her home. In the waiting, she writes this odd note when she was finally given a start date: *Haven’t decided to join the army after all, even though I threatened too for the last few weeks—and chances of marrying are too far and in between to!!!!?*

She was on her way in her chosen career path.

Lorne Brandt is a retired physician who cherishes his roots in the places of his mother’s origins. He can be reached at <brandtel@telus.net>.

Endnotes

1. Thomas Falkenberg and Jon Young, *Understanding Curriculum: The History of Initial Teacher Education in Manitoba*, [https://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~falkenbe/Publications/Falkenberg_Young_\(2018\).pdf](https://home.cc.umanitoba.ca/~falkenbe/Publications/Falkenberg_Young_(2018).pdf).

2. *Winnipeg Free Press*, May 30, 1942, <https://archives.winnipegfreepress.com/winnipeg-free-press/1942-03-30/page-3/>.

3. Leonard Walter Brockington, *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1988), 285, col. 2, <https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/leonard-walter-brockington>.

Interview with Royden Loewen

(cont'd from p. 5)

home, was close to my father, respected him, came to know my mother well after my dad died, hearing her stories of growing up in very poor circumstances. I admired their commitment to non-violence.”

“My world expanded at MBBC [Mennonite Brethren Bible College, one of the founding colleges of CMU], which, in the 1970s, had discovered and embraced the ‘Anabaptist Vision’ as well as critical thinking. I found in Mary Ann a soulmate, and we have travelled a parallel intellectual pilgrimage of finding meaning in a poetics of faith and locating ourselves within community—in the various church communities we have been members of or even churches we have attended fleetingly on our various sabbaticals—Chicago, Victoria (BC), Guelph/KW, Cambridge (England), Santa Cruz (Bolivia). It’s been humbling and life-giving and redemptive.”

Dr. Loewen is excited about the future. “I feel really good about leaving the Centre in place with talented, energetic, committed young scholars. I have told both Aileen and Ben that I will gain a great deal of pleasure watching to see how they grow and develop the CTMS program. I’m not easily given to sit back (for better or worse), and I will continue to do things.”

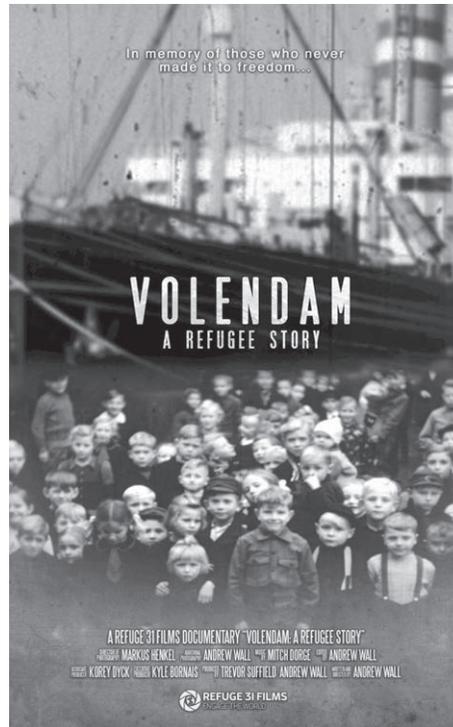
“I have two lovely grandchildren—Remy and Kay—who live a 10-minute bike ride from our house. I talk to each of my own children—Becky, Meg, and Sasha—regularly and often, and I am challenged by their own aspirations and the big questions they ask. I love being with Mary Ann (cycling, talking, drinking coffee, planning). We have a large garden and a dozen chickens at Millview, our acreage near Steinbach.”

“And there is our Millview Grain, Inc., a certified organic farm from which I gain a great deal of satisfaction. Organic ag is more work and more involved, but it’s much more interesting to me than conventional or chemical-based farming. The crops we grew on the farm this year are all now safely tucked away in granaries. And I look forward to final fall tillage, preparing the seed bed for next year, tending to drainage and fertility. Building on this, I serve on the Manitoba Organic Alliance board. And of immense importance, my partner on our farm is our son, Sasha, who is studying agriculture in Montana and using our farm program as part of his dissertation.”

Summing up the last quarter century, Royden expresses joy in helping people learn and tell their story. “There was a lot of joy helping to provide people with a story of who they are. I come back to helping people find the stories that root them, tending to the curiosities of who they are and who their neighbours are.”

Robb Nickel <salrobb@mymts.net> interviewed Dr. Royden Loewen in October 2020 soon after his retirement.

Film and Book Reviews



Andrew Wall, *Volendam: A Refugee Story*. Refuge 31 Films, 2020. 84-mins. DVD. For sale at the Mennonite Heritage Archives, \$25.

Reviewed by Andrew Klassen Brown

In his latest documentary film, *Volendam: A Refugee Story*, writer and director Andrew Wall tells the story of the suffering of the Russian Mennonites in Soviet Ukraine before the Second World War, their flight west on the Great Trek, and how the Mennonite Central Committee helped nearly 4,000 Mennonite refugees escape to Paraguay on the Dutch passenger ship, the *Volendam*. Loaded with solid archival footage, lively dramatizations, and some deeply emotional testimonies from survivors, *Volendam* is well-researched and incorporates professional film techniques that give it a high production value.

Wall is sure to spend a lot of time

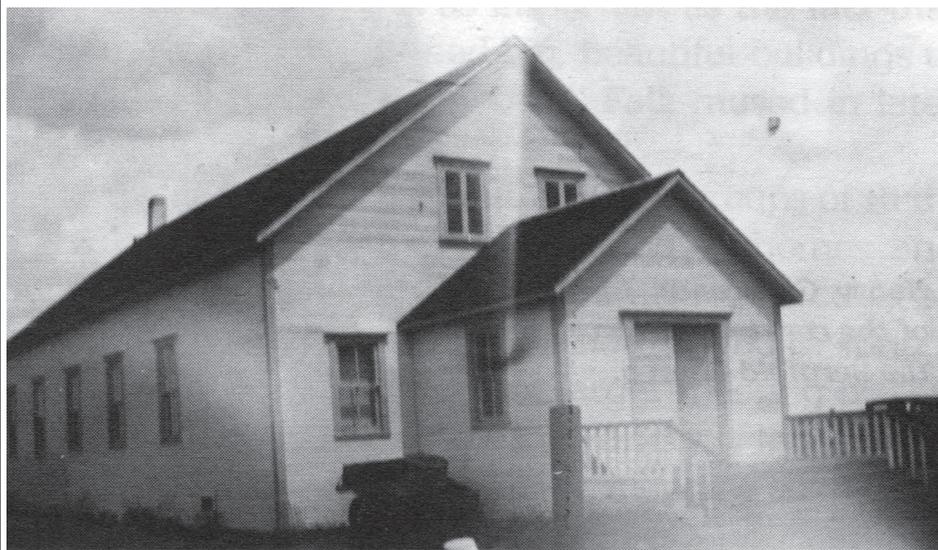
covering the necessary background and contextual information required to properly understand the stories of these refugees, but it may still be a little too fast-paced for a viewer unfamiliar with this particular Mennonite story to keep up. To be fair, this is the hardest part of telling this sort of story to an audience that may have differing levels of prior understanding, while still needing to keep the film a watchable length. In this case, the compromises made were just about right for my level of comprehension of the story, but my friends who have less background knowledge in Mennonite history were left asking a lot of questions of clarification.

My main critique, however, is that it consistently fails to seize upon the strengths of the narrative that it is trying to cultivate. There are several points where it seems like the film is building up to making a significant point on a hot-topic issue, but then it fades away instead of directly addressing it or seizing the opportunity to provide nuance. This can be seen in the discussions on the perceptions of the Mennonites benefiting from, or collaborating with, the Nazi regime, a topic that is hinted at and deserves a nuanced explanation but is not really addressed. I would have also loved to see the film expand more on the dynamic of these refugees being almost exclusively women and children, a demographic often underrepresented in history and our society. Addressing the settlement of Friedensheim, or “Frauendorf,” in the colony Neuland—where all 147 of the original adult inhabitants were refugee women from the *Volendam* who worked hard to settle land in the Chaco—would have added an interesting feminist lens to this refugee story. This discussion could naturally lead into the dilemma of European refugees fleeing for their lives only to settle on the land of the displaced indigenous people of the Chaco. However, properly addressing these issues would have added significantly to the already long run-time.

In conclusion, I found *Volendam* to be a very well-done documentary with a timely message, not only for Mennonites, but for everyone, everywhere. Today, at a time when world refugee numbers, according to the UNHCR, are higher now than after the Second World War, support and care for refugees and internally displaced people is needed now more than ever. I hope that the testimony from Henry Dahl in the film can encourage and remind us in the Mennonite



In 1817, Klaas Reimer was ordained after leading a breakaway group focused on renewal since 1812. For generations, the Kleine Gemeinde in southern Russia and then in Canada selected leaders together. Since the 1940s, starting with Prairie Rose, local churches have selected their ministers. From 1812 to the 1960s, ministerial members were of Dutch-German culture and raised in Mennonite church circles. However, within a few years of this 1962 photo of the EMC ministerial at Kleefeld, Manitoba, the first pastor of non-Mennonite culture and church background entered the EMC through the work of Western Gospel Mission, a home missions society: Edwin Wright, of Welsh culture and Christian and Missionary Alliance background. In the past 60 years, many ministers have entered the EMC, and many ministers, both of Dutch-German descent and beyond, have been raised within it. Currently, the EMC is grappling with how men and women can work together in ministry. Photo courtesy of EMC Archives and reprinted from Doris Penner, *Circling the Globe: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (2020).



The Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC) was formed on July 1, 1959, from the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church, which had been organized in 1937 as a result of division from the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church. The Rudnerweider Mennonite Church was led by four ministers, William H. Falk (1892–1976), Peter S. Zacharias (1893–1957), Gerhard J. Froese (1901–1947), and Isaac A. Hoepfner (1884–1955). These four had been inspired by the revival meetings held by Isaac P. Friesen in Reinfeld, Manitoba in 1934.

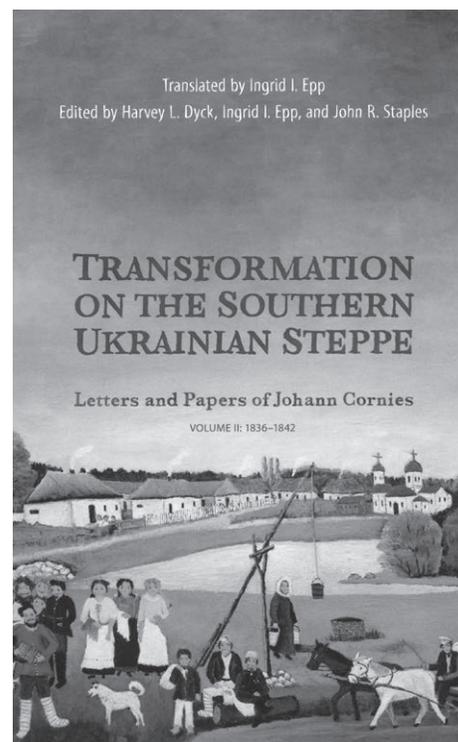
During the winter of 1937, groups of Rudnerweiders could be found meeting in homes and schools—any place where a large warm room could be found. In spite of the fact that fellowship was sweet in these temporary facilities, everyone realized that church buildings would have to be acquired in short order. At a major Brotherhood Meeting on June 19, 1937, it was decided to build the first Rudnerweider church at Bergfeld, a district northwest of Altona. This would become a central meeting place for all living in the vicinity, hosting mission festivals and other important events.

On September 12, 1937, a great throng gathered for the dedication of the building (pictured above). It was constructed at a cost of \$1,800 on land donated by Henry Penner. Photo and text courtesy of Lil Goertzen.

community of our connection to the global refugee story: “I feel very much about refugees. Why? I was once too.”

4 out of 5 stars.

Andrew Klassen Brown is a graduate student at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. He also works as the Records Manager and Archivist for Mennonite Central Committee Canada.



Harvey Dyck, Ingrid Epp and John Staples, *Transformation on the Southern Ukrainian Steppe: Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies, Volume II: 1836–1842* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2020), 686p.

Reviewed by Glenn H. Penner, Winnipeg

This is volume 2 of what is expected to be a three-volume series. The series so far contains the translations of well over a thousand (536 in Volume 1 and 721 in volume 2) documents, mostly letters, written to and by Johann Cornies. The translations are preceded by a lengthy introduction (36 pages) by John Staples and followed by several useful appendices and a very good index. The documents themselves are separated into Part 1, containing correspondence, and Part 2, containing archaeological excavation reports.

Johann Cornies was a man of immense energy with a wide range of interests, and

his correspondence reflects this. One of his interests was the mounds, or Kurgans, found in the Molotschna region. Part 2 contains reports on these. The correspondence (710 documents in total) is presented in Part 1 without any commentary or integration. I personally find this to be the best feature of the book. Cornies was, and still is, a controversial figure, and the reader is allowed to form his or her own opinion while reading the letters. I read the letters first and then compared my analysis with what is written in the introduction.

That being said, the reader should not expect 710 documents full of conflict between Cornies and those who were unhappy with his activities. There are hundreds of letters of a routine nature. For example, there are 42 letters regarding the planting, growing, and harvesting of potatoes. There are numerous letters providing insight into the workings of the Molotschna colony, including such topics as education, administration, and, above all, agriculture. There are also many letters related to Cornies's interest in the neighbouring Kalmyks, Nogai, Doukhobors, German colonies, and Hutterites. There is also a lot of correspondence regarding his private land holdings and their administration. This is a dominant theme throughout the correspondence.

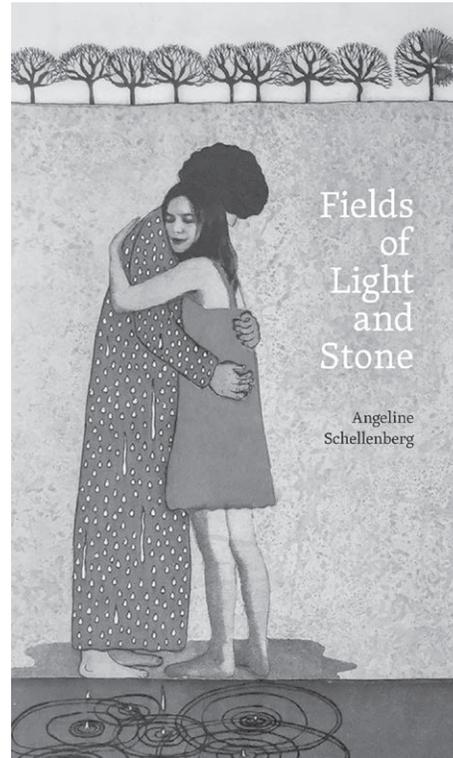
Although Cornies frequently gives his opinion of a wide range of topics, theological issues are very rarely discussed. Genealogists are accustomed to finding genealogical information buried in letters, particularly in letters between relatives. This is certainly not the case with the Cornies letters. Most of his correspondence with his immediate family relate to the family business—the Yushanlee estate.

Space limitations do not allow me to report on all of the varied topics covered in the documents contained in this book. Those who have specific interests or do not have the time to read all 721 documents should consult the excellent index.

Glenn H. Penner is a Mennonite genealogist who relocated to Winnipeg in 2017, following retirement as a chemistry professor at the University of Guelph in Ontario. He now devotes his time to his avocation, Mennonite genealogy. He has arranged to work out of the Mennonite Heritage Archives on the Canadian Mennonite University campus in

Winnipeg. If you have a genealogical query, he is open to corresponding with you. He can be reached at his University of Guelph email address, which he still maintains, <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>.

Glenn, together with Tim Janzen of Portland, Oregon, manage the Mennonite DNA project, <http://www.mennonitedna.com/>. If you are interested in doing a DNA test and participating in the Mennonite DNA Project, contact Glenn.



Angeline Schellenberg, *Fields of Light and Stone* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2020), 90pp.

Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder

The familiar saying “Don’t judge a book by its cover” occurred to me when I first held this gem of a book in my hands. I was immediately attracted to its contents because of the illustration on the jacket (*Last Embrace* by Miriam Rudolph)—two people with their arms around each other in a field of gray, tears and raindrops falling on them; the only colour is the bright red dress that the young girl is wearing. It makes me want to read the book, display it on my coffee table.

Between the covers are poems that sing of love and loss. The introductory poem, *Everything There Is to Say*, ends with the same words as the title of the last section of the book (about the author’s paternal grandfather): “What the Aspens Whispered.”

The first section (“In Some Reminiscent Hour”) is about Schellenberg’s maternal grandparents. The grandfather, a pastor and a farmer, was a conscientious objector in Ontario and the grandmother lived with her family in Boissevain, Manitoba. The letters her grandparents exchanged at that time alternate with the author’s memories of them.

In the second section (“Fields of Light and Stone”), Schellenberg focuses on her paternal grandparents, their living and their dying and her relationship with them through it all.

The author’s depiction of her loving bond with her grandparents at times moved me, a grandmother of eight, to tears as well as to laughter. In all of the dying, there is this other side of loving and laughing and of living life to the fullest!

Schellenberg’s playful use of words is evident throughout, beginning with the title *Fields of Light and Stone*.

Her paternal grandparents came from the Molotschna Colony, Ukraine. Her grandmother was born in *Lichtfeld* (Field of Light) and her grandfather in *Steinfeld* (Field of Stone), and as the poem *Fields* (54) reveals “They found themselves / in the Strait of the Spirit” (“a translation of the word *Manitoba*, which is believed to have come from Cree or Ojibwe,” as the author notes on page 86).

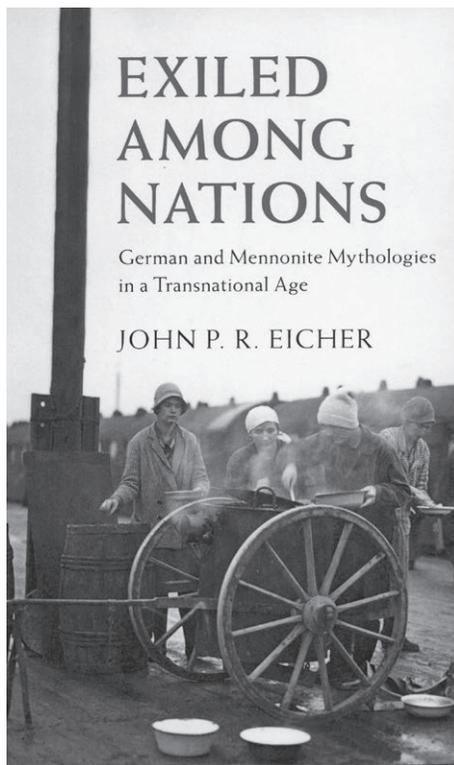
In another poem, *Under the Shadow of Your Name* (73), Schellenberg plays with the name of her paternal grandparents, “Falk,” using English, Latin, and Germanic derivatives to compare them to a falcon, a pruning hook, a beak, or fallow.

Trees serve the author as a metaphor throughout the book. The Froese grandparents are compared to the evergreen and the Falk grandparents to the aspen. Schellenberg’s final poem, *The First Trees*, speaks of the aspen as trees that are first to recover. An aspen stand “47,000 trunks strong” is “the weightiest living thing on earth.”

This book will resonate with those writing memoirs or translating old letters and will perhaps inspire others to do so. Not that long ago, I sat with the boxes of correspondence my parents had left behind after they passed away. Many of the thoughts Schellenberg expresses in her creative, poetic style went through my mind at that time and they linger still. She has left a tribute to her grandparents that will stand the test of time.

As she writes in her last poem: “Lighter than oak or regret, aspen crates are perfect / for carrying the books our ancestors / have yet to write.”

Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder was born in Chortitza, Ukraine, just before the German invasion and the consequent flight of her family to Poland and Germany. Her family spent five years in the Paraguayan Chaco before immigrating to Canada in 1952. She and her husband lived many years in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly Zaïre, ex-Belgian Congo), returning to Canada in 1984. They moved from Ontario to Manitoba in 2008. Elfrieda received her PhD in German Language and Literature in 2001. She is a translator, freelance writer, and grandmother of eight. You can read more of her writing on her blog at ens-intransit.blogspot.ca/.



John P. R. Eicher, *Exiled among Nations: German and Mennonite Mythologies in a Transnational Age* (Washington, DC: German Historical Institute; and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 337pp.

Reviewed by John D. Thiesen, North Newton

This is a book where I found myself saying at almost every couple of pages, “Yes! Exactly!” and “Yes, but...” Readers coming to it expecting a new narrative of the early Mennonite experience in

Paraguay will not find that, although there may be a few new details added here and there.

Eicher uses the histories of the Menno and Fernheim Mennonite communities in Paraguay not in the stereotypical sense of history as a coherent argument or narrative about some events in the past but steps back to explore these groups’ mythologies or collective narratives and how their collective narratives clashed or meshed with the collective narratives of others with whom they interacted—other Mennonites and political units. “A collective narrative is therefore a curated assembly of myths, events, and identifications that offer a tidy and meaningful alternative to the clutter and chaos of history. It may be substantiated in part by scholarship but finds its most robust articulation as the story of a distinct culture” (26).

Thus, the book explores the interactions among the collective narratives of German, Soviet, US, and Paraguayan states, German and North American Mennonites, and the Mennonite groups that became the Menno and Fernheim colonies. Eicher also wishes to make a distinction between the nationalist narratives of the states and the “transnational” Mennonite narratives that resist or diverge from the nationalist narratives. This seems more convincing for the “separatist” Mennonites (Menno Colony) than the “associative” Mennonites (Fernheim, MCC, Harold S. Bender, Benjamin H. Unruh).

The focus on collective narratives privileges the statements of the groups’ leadership, men who wrote or spoke for public consumption, a fact which Eicher recognizes (29). How these narratives were understood and misunderstood by average members of the groups could vary enormously. There is also a risk of seeing these groups as unitary actors, when, instead, each group and its actions—especially at the level of states and nationalism—were the result of a chaotic mess of competing and incompatible interests of various sub-groups and individuals, some with more power than others.

There is also a risk of taking the statements of leaders about their collective narratives too much at face value—for example, Harold S. Bender’s apparent comments about creating some kind of Mennonite territorial enclave (which started well before there was any idea of

MCC involvement in Paraguay). Many of these propagandistic statements were just rhetorical flourishes meant to set a mood, rather than to put forth any kind of plan of action to carry out in practice.

It seems a real stretch, beyond reasonableness, to imply that the reason for MCC’s existence was to implement a particular vision of Mennonite identity; this seems exactly backwards. MCC originated when Russian Mennonites asked North American Mennonites for aid in 1920; the idea of transnational Mennonite solidarity goes back centuries. Bender’s and MCC’s collective narrative propaganda was elaborated to motivate the practical efforts, not the other way around.

A brief review does not do justice at all to the in-depth detail of this book. I found many stimulations for further thinking and further questions—also quite a few details to quibble at (for example, dentist George S. Klassen was not an agent of the US government, he was a pompous, immature wannabe). The main contribution of the book for Mennonite studies is to de-naturalize the idea of a Mennonite “essence,” the idea of Mennonite solidarity, or the idea that all “Mennonites” have some kind of natural obligations towards each other.

Mennonite historiography has been plagued by ongoing searches for precise definitions of “Anabaptist” or “Mennonite,” with Harold S. Bender as the prime 20th century example. But such a precise definition is simply not possible; language and linguistic categories do not work that way. There are many different ways of being “Mennonite” (or “German” or “Anabaptist”) and some of these ways are sharply incompatible with each other. Rather than using these categories as a power play to say who is a “good” or “proper” Mennonite (Bender, Unruh), this book can prompt us to explore and unpack what is happening when someone calls themselves “Mennonite” or when we call someone “Mennonite.”

John D. Thiesen is archivist of the Mennonite Library and Archives and co-director of libraries at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. He is the author of Mennonite and Nazi?: Attitude Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933–1945, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History 37 (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 1999).