



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XXI Number 2

June 2018

Along the Road to Freedom Calgary Opening Program and Reception

by Marguerite Jack

On February 25, 2018 the Ambrose University Atrium was filled with guests of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. They gathered to listen to stories of women and their families who fled the Soviet Union and Germany during the revolution and WWII. After the program the guests moved to the upper gallery to view *Along the Road to Freedom*, Ray Dirks' exhibit of paintings that depicts these women.



Marguerite Jack

Terry Fach, the Ambrose University chaplain, welcomed the guests. He indicated that there had

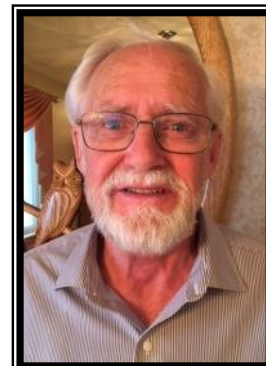
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Our Families' Trek to Freedom

by Dave Dyck

In my boyhood years I felt, as I do now, that we had everything that we needed, everything that was necessary. We weren't wealthy and never had a lot of cash around, but all our daily needs were met: food, clothing, and shelter. Our family farmed in South Central Saskatchewan. We had a church, school, and neighbours nearby. We had aunts and uncles and always a lot of friends our age around. However, one big part of my life that was missing was grandparents. My maternal grandparents (Heinrich and Katharina (Koethler) Reimer) and most of their large family had moved to Langley B.C. in the late 1940s. At that time this was a long distance to travel. The only time I remember meeting them was when I was five, and my parents, my younger brother, and I traveled to Langley by train. At that time I also met my aunts and uncles from both my mother and father's side of the family.

I never met my paternal grandparents. My grandfather Abraham Dyck passed away in Russia in 1920. My grandmother Helena Dyck passed away in Saskatchewan a few months before my parents' wedding in October 1934. However, I was led to explore this part of my family history by viewing Ray Dirks' art exhibition *Along the Road to Freedom* when it was at Kings University, Edmonton. This exhibition consists of paintings and descriptions of Mennonite widows who came from Russia in the 1920s and 40s with their families. My paternal grandmother and paternal great grandmother both came to Canada as widows during that time. Exploring their history led me back to Jacob Bartsch (10) and his son Johann Bartsch (9)



Dave Dyck

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Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta DNA and Mennonite Genealogy 2018 Fall Conference

- Date:** Nov 24, 2018
Place: Lendrum Mennonite Church, Edmonton
Time: 1 PM - 4 PM, Faspa lunch to follow
Featuring: Ernest Wiens MD, Courtney Mowat BSc and Tim Janzen MD

Editorial Reflections:

by
Dave Toews

The first thing you noticed when you took the newsletter out of the envelope today was that our publication has a new name: *The MHSA Chronicle, The Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta*. It's official! At long last we have a name more befitting our publication than simply "Newsletter". Renaming had been on my radar for quite some time. Nine entries were submitted to the contest, and the board and newsletter staff chose *The MHSA Chronicle*. The dictionary defines a chronicle as "a factual written account of important or



Dave Toews

historical events in the order of their occurrence". I, for one, am very excited about this. It's a new beginning in some ways for many of us, or a *grand reopening* as they say in the retail world. (The new name was suggested by a board member, so as per the contest rules no one year subscription to *The MHSA Chronicle* free of charge will be awarded.)

As I write this, the *Along the Road to Freedom* art exhibit is on a truck on the way back home to the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg from Coaldale. This brings to a close the six-month run of the exhibit in Edmonton, Calgary and Coaldale. As the coordinator of this, I want to thank all the people who worked long hours to help make it a reality. Special thank you to the leaders in each location: David Jeffares, Edmonton; Marguerite Jack, Calgary; and Ken Matis, Coaldale.

I want to publicly thank Ray Dirks, Curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and artist, for the time and energy he put into coming to the opening events in Calgary and Coaldale. Ray spoke of how

the idea of the exhibit was conceived and how the content of each painting was developed and finalized with its sponsors. Ray spent time with all interested viewers and graciously signed his book *Along the Road to Freedom* for all his admirers.

Someone asked me, "Dave who works with you to get this publication completed three times a year?" This spawned the inclusion of the "get to know your newsletter volunteer staff" item on the following pages to let readers know who we are. In future issues we may have a "get to know your MHSA board members" in this same format.

In 2010 on the Mennonite Heritage Cruise on the good ship *Dnieper Princess*, I suggested to my roommate, Dave Dyck, that he write his family story as an article for the MHSA newsletter. Some requests take longer than others to come to fruition, but that story now appears in this issue. Thank you Dave.

Thank you to all the other authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated. It is a pleasure to work with you.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at dmttoews@gmail.com. ❖

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Chairman's Corner

by
Dave Neufeldt

Our spring conference in Coaldale in April featured Ray Dirks' *Along the Road to Freedom* exhibit. The exhibit captures the stories of Mennonite



Dave Neufeldt

women who came to Canada with their families without their husbands. Ray shared details of their migration with us, and several local people also told gripping tales of their families' journeys to Canada. Some of the storytellers were young children when their families escaped from the Soviet Union to Germany and Poland during World War II. These were stories of people in desperation seeking to find a safe place to raise their families.

Following the war an agreement between Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt required that all liberated Soviet citizens were to be repatriated to the Soviet Union. While many of the Mennonites who had escaped the Soviet Union were able to go to Canada or South America, many more were sent back.

At the time I am writing this,

the dominant news story is about refugee seekers who have come into the United States illegally. Adults are being arrested and charged criminally, resulting in young children being separated from their families in an unfamiliar place where they do not know the language. The argument that is made is that this will deter illegal immigration.

I am struck by the similarities between the Mennonite stories we heard at the conference and the stories of these current refugee seekers. They are both about people taking risks and not always following government authorities in a desperate attempt to make a better life for their families.

At the conference, we were fortunate to be able to hear first-hand what people went through to come to Canada. When a caravan of refugees was being bombed, most of the people fled to safety in the nearby woods. We heard of a family that remained on the road, huddled vulnerably together under a wagon. One of the daughters was disabled and unable to run to the woods. Rather than leave her alone, the family risked their lives to remain together.

What we heard put human faces to these stories. What are the human stories behind the news reports of people coming into the

United States illegally? Similarly, what are the human stories behind the accounts of those risking the lives of their families and crossing the Mediterranean Sea in unsafe boats?

As a historical society, we try to capture, share, and preserve such stories of our Mennonite people. It is the memories of our own stories that shape how we respond to others who are going through similar experiences. It is my hope that our response will be one of compassion.

On the morning of the spring conference we held our annual general meeting. At this meeting we had the election of board members and executive. Alice Unrau decided not to seek another term on the board. Alice has been a valued member of our board. While we are saddened to lose her as a board member, we are grateful that she continues to be a regular volunteer in our office. We also welcomed two new board members - Sigrid Warken-tin from Calgary and Verne Klassen from Rosemary. We look forward to working with you.

Thanks to everyone who contributes to the success of our society, whether through volunteering, donating, or just attending our events. ❖

Membership Application & Donation Form

- Memberships are due in the fall of each year (\$30.00/yr).
- ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- MHSA Chronicle is published in March, June & October

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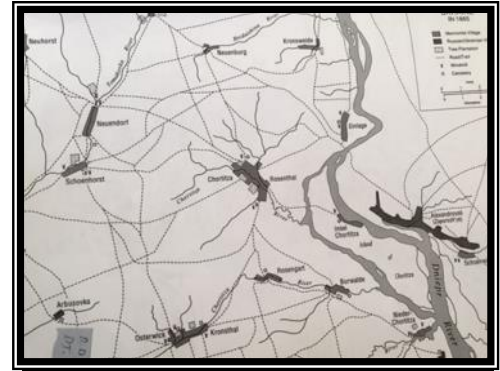
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in Prussia, my sixth and fifth great grandfathers. Their descendants are listed below followed by what I have learned of their story.

Ancestors of author David Dyck

- (10) **Jacob Bartsch** b circa 1725 married
Christina Phillipsen b circa 1735
- (9) **Johann Bartsch** b Sept. 6, 1757 Danzig, Poland married 1779
d Dec. 16, 1821 Rosenthal, Chortitza, Ukraine
Susanna Lammerts b circa 1760 Danzig, Poland
d Nov. 15, 1790 Rosenthal, Chortitza, Ukraine
Magdalena Lammerts married 1791
- (8) **Jacob Bartsch** b Dec. 12, 1797
d May 24, 1877 Rosenthal, Chortitza, Ukraine married
Marie Braun b Nov. 11 1798 d Sept. 29 1864
Chortitza colony Ukraine
- (7) **Abram Isaak** b 1815 Neuhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine married
d 1898
Helena Bartsch b Oct 26, 1817
d Dec. 13, 1864 Rosenthal, Chortitza, Ukraine
- (6) **Abram Dyck** b March 23, 1857 Neuhorst, Chortitza Ukraine
d Feb, 3, 1903 Neuhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine
married Jan 6, 1881
Margaret Isaak b Jan 10, 1859 Rosenthal, Chortitza, Ukraine
d June 13, 1952 Drake, SK
- (5) **Abram Dyck** b July 31, 1885 Schoenhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine
d April 4, 1920 Neuhorst, Chortitza Ukraine married
Helena Dyck b Feb. 23, 1888 Schoenhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine
d July 11, 1934, Swift Current, SK
- (4) **Peter A. Dyck** b Jan. 7, 1911 Schoenhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine
Married d Mar. 10, 1987 Swift Current, SK
Helen Reimer b Mar. 10, 1914 Dunelm, SK
d Nov. 2, 1996 Swift Current, SK
- (3) [Author] **David Dyck** b Nov. 17, 1946 Swift Current, SK
married Aug. 4, 1979
Carol Strang Sioux Lookout, ON b Jan 22, 1950, Toronto, ON
Children:
(2) **Mark Dyck** b Mar. 21, 1981 Edmonton, AB married
Jacqui Fast b Oct. 21, 1981
Children:
(1) **Lyra** b Mar. 27, 2011
(1) **Arlo** b Nov. 12, 2014 Saskatoon, SK
- (2) **Laura (Dyck) Hennie** b July 29, 1983 married
Irwin Hennie b June 10, 197
Children
(1) **Benjamin** b July 13, 2010
(1) **Emerson** b Nov 6, 2014 Edmonton, AB



Neuhorst to Schoenhorst, Chortitza
approximately 6.2km

Jacob Hoepfner was invited by Catherine the Great to scout out land in South Russia for eventual settlement by Mennonites from Prussia. Land was reserved for the group near Kherson, South Russia. However, when the first group arrived there, Prince Potemkin, who wanted to keep the land with its valuable deep top soil (4 feet) for himself, claimed that the settlement would not be safe because the Turk war was still on. As a result, the Mennonites ended up camping in the area of Zaporizhia under an oak tree. (This is where the village of Rosenthal would later be established.) The people felt betrayed as they believed that Bartsch and Hoepfner had lied to them, and the two were excommunicated. The men had not lied to the community, but Bartsch admitted wrongdoing so that he could be readmitted to the church. Hoepfner did not. Hoepfner refused to be buried in the Mennonite cemetery, so when he died his grave was placed on private land.

My grandparents Abraham Dyck (1885 – 1920) (6) and Helena Dyck (1888 – 1934) were married in Russia in 1910. They had 6 children: my father, Peter (4) (1911 – 1987), Tina (1912 - 2004),

(Continued on page 5)

In 1786, Johann Bartsch (9), son of Jacob Bartsch (10), together with

(Continued from page 4)



Abraham and Helena Dyck
1910

Margaret (1913 - 1987), Abe (1915 - 1941), Helena (1918 - 1919), and Helena (1920 - 1921). All of the children were born in Schoenhorst.

Abraham and Helena Dyck were raising this young family at a time of major disruption in Russia. World War I lasted from 1914 to 1918. During the war, many of the Mennonites in Russia participated in the war as conscientious objectors by working as medical personnel and doing other civilian jobs that helped the military but did not require them to act as soldiers. Abraham was drafted and served from 1915 to 1917 in a CO camp as a cook. He did not see his wife and family for two years.

In 1917, there were two revolutions in Russia. The first overthrew the monarchy; the second placed the communist regime into power. This led to a period of instability and chaos in the country. The Mennonite villages were often caught between the Red (communist) and White armies.

Possession of a particular village would change, with the Red army in the village one minute, and the White taking over the next. One story is of a young girl going out to the barn in the morning to find there a pile of dead soldiers who had been stripped of all valuables by the incoming forces.

Sometime after 1917, a band of hundreds of Russian anarchists, followers of Nestor Makhno, was ravaging the Mennonite villages of the Ukraine taking away and frequently killing hundreds of men over 18 years of age. They came to the home of the Dyck family during the night. The children heard the uproar

and ran to the main room of the house. There they found their father being held facing the wall with guns pointed at his back. The children screamed and cried and ran to their father. For some reason the bandits decided to leave Abraham alone and left the house. When the German army pushed back the Russians and entered the villages, there was a period of relative peace. However, The Russian army soon drove the Germans out again. When they left, Makhno came back, and life was chaotic again.

In 1918, Stalin came to power in the Kremlin. While it initially appeared that he would bring peace, it soon became apparent that he did not support Mennonite beliefs and pressured the Mennonites to conform to his communist belief system. Conditions became severe throughout the Ukraine. Famine, lack of proper clothing or sanitation, and overcrowded living conditions were widespread. Like many other members of the community, Abraham contracted typhus and pneumonia. He died on April 4, 1920 at the age of 34. He and Helena had been married 10 years. Their fifth child, Helena, who would die in 1921, had been born just three months before, so Abraham's widow was left with five children under the age of 9.

Conditions in Russia were grim, but help was being organized abroad. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was started in July 1920 by Mennonites in North America. Many of them had relatives in Russia, and they wanted to help the Mennonites who were starving in the Ukraine area of Russia. Without the food and clothing sent by MCC, Helena Dyck (5) and Margaret Dyck (6), the author's grandmother and great grandmother, would not have survived. Many more members of the Mennonite community would have also died during the famine. MCC as The Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization also worked with CP Rail, who extended travel credit to enable Mennonites to flee Russia and travel to Canada.

In 1923 Helena (5), her four remaining children, and Margaret (6), trav-



The Abe Dyck family taken in Moscow, Russia in 1915 while the father was serving at the CO camp during World War I. L-R: Peter A. Dyck, Mother Helena Dyck holding baby Abe, Margaret (Mrs. Jake Friesen), Tina (Mrs. John Wiens.)

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eled by train to a refugee camp in Lechfeld, Germany en route to Canada. They were among the first Mennonites to leave Russia during this unstable post-revolutionary period. Before they left Russia for Canada, Helena sold her wedding ring to buy flour and to make a down payment on the cost of the trip. The buns she baked provided the food for the train trip to Germany. During the trip, her oldest son Peter (4) would get off the train at various stations to get water, but he had to hurry back to the train, so that it would not leave without him. As Canada would accept only those who were medically fit, the family remained in Germany for 3 months to have their medical conditions assessed and necessary treatment done.

Three of the ships that carried approximately 21,000 immigrants to Canada during the 1920's were the *SS Montcalm*, the *SS Montrose* and the *Empress of France*. The families probably travelled as steerage (third class) passengers. We could not find passenger lists except for passengers who were travelling cabin class, and there are no Mennonite names on the lists we have found. Not much had changed for those lower class passengers since the 1870's when the grandparents of my mother Helen Reimer (4) had travelled from Europe as steerage passengers and had buried their two children at sea. On many ships, hundreds of immigrants from many different countries were housed in one large room for the voyage. In articles describing the conditions, the passengers were described as "human cattle". There were many deaths, especially of children.

With help from MCC and with credit from CP Rail, Helena was able to get passage for the trip to Canada from Britain on the *Empress of France*. She was only able to take her daughters Margaret and Tina with her because Peter and younger son Abe had to stay behind in Germany until their eye infections (trachoma) were healed.

Abe was 8 years old when he was allowed to leave Germany, six weeks after his mother. He had a sign around his neck to show what his Canadian destination was to be. We don't have any records for this period, but he probably travelled with other Mennonite refugees who were travelling to Canada at the same time. Peter was 11 years old when he left Germany, six weeks after Abe did. Peter travelled with his 16-year old cousin Isaac Dyck who also had had to remain in Germany for medical reasons. Peter and Isaac traveled on the ship the *SS Montcalm* and arrived in Montreal December 28, 1923. After landing in Canada, the boys travelled by train to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. There Isaac saw his father waiting on the platform. Both boys got off the train, but Isaac's father Peter told him to get back on quickly because his mother was waiting for him in Laird.

Great grandmother Margaret (Isaac) Dyck (6) came to Canada on the *SS Montrose* with her married and adult children about the same time as Helena and her daughters made the trip. They settled in Drake, Saskatchewan.



Drake, Saskatchewan 1945
Peter Dyck (4)
Margaret (Isaac) Dyck (6)

The first few years in Canada were hard. We have very little information about this period but we know that to survive and to pay back the Reiseschuld (travel debt) everyone had to contribute. The family lived in Laird for three years. Their first home was in a granary. Helena worked as a janitor in the Laird Conference Church as



Laird, Saskatchewan 1923
Abe, Peter, Helena, Tina, Margaret Dyck

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well as doing housework at various homes in the village. Margaret and Tina worked as babysitters, and Peter did odd jobs for various farmers in the area. The Reiseschuld (\$653.95) was paid back in five years in March, 1928.

In the summer of 1926, a suitor from Rosenbach, 5 miles north of McMahon in southern Saskatchewan, arrived to see Helena and meet her children. He was Daniel Olfert, a widower whose first wife Helena (Wiebe) Olfert had died the previous June. About a week after his first visit, Daniel returned to Laird, proposed to Helena, and brought her and her family back to Rosenbach. They were married Oct. 17, 1926.

The blended family consisted of Daniel's nine children and Helena's four children. The 13 children, all still at home, ranged in age from a few months to 16 years. On August 17, 1927, ten months after Daniel and Helena were married, a new family member, John, was born. Three years later, another child entered the Olfert home. Helen (Lena) Neufeld was born April 27, 1931 to a neighbouring family. When her mother became ill, the Olfert family was asked to take the baby home with them. Shortly afterward, Lena's mother died and the baby remained with the Olfert family. Being a blended family brought many challenges that needed to be ironed out. For example there were two sisters named Tina (one was called Katie), two brothers named Abe, and two brothers named Peter. All the boys slept in a separate building, the summer kitchen, while the parents and girls slept in the main farmhouse.

All the children attended Iris

school together. This meant a two-mile walk each way. In the fall they were able to take short cuts across the harvested fields. In the winter the neighbourhood men took turns taking the children to school using horses to pull a big bob sleigh.

In the summer of 1934 Helena (Dyck) Olfert became ill. She died suddenly on July 11, 1934 at the age of 46 years. Seven years later on November 25, 1941 at the age of 26, Abe Dyck, Helena's son, died of blood poisoning.

A happy occasion was a double wedding on Oct, 21, 1934, a few months after Helena's death. Anna Olfert, a daughter of Daniel Olfert married Jake Wall, and Peter Dyck (4) married Helen Reimer (my parents).

I am thankful that our ancestors did not give up; they rebuilt their lives and wealth. In Canada we

have never even experienced a shortage of food or shelter, all our daily needs have always been met, and we have never in our lifetime had any threat of war on Canadian soil. Most importantly our ancestors did not give up their faith in God. When you look back and see only one set of footprints, you know that God has carried you through the difficult times.

Only God knows what all these refugee mothers were praying as they were heading into the unknown. We want their story to honour not only our grandmothers but also all mothers who bravely faced extreme hardships to give their children the opportunity for a new start. I cannot even imagine the horror they had to face in their lives in order for us to have a better life in Canada.

My life has been singularly blessed by my Mennonite heritage. We are thankful for that and support all the great work MCC does around the globe. As Menno Simons said: "True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant; it clothes the naked, it feeds the hungry, it comforts the sorrowful, it shelters the destitute, it serves those that harm it, it binds up that which is wounded, it has become all things to all men."



Olfert farm
Summer Kitchen small building on the left

Dave Dyck is retired from the City of Edmonton, Alberta. He lives in Edmonton with his wife Carol. He spends most of his time caring for grandchildren and volunteering at the local MCC thrift store. He enjoys riding his motorcycle, hiking, and swimming. Dave and Carol worship at Lendrum Mennonite Church, Edmonton. ❖

(Continued from page 1)

been very noticeable interest in the exhibit on the part of students and staff, and he thanked the MHSA for lending the exhibit to them.

We heard the emotion in the voice of Hugo Neufeld, grandson of Maria Friesen Neufeld, as he told the story of his grandmother leaving a very difficult situation. Dirks depicted Maria and told her story in one of his paintings. In the painting he included a brooch that is still in the family's possession.

Maiada Issa gave a short story of the journey she and her husband made from Iraq to Jordan, arriving in Canada in November of 2017. They were Christians who were both dentists and had a successful dental clinic. Threats pushed them to depart the country quickly and to leave all their family and friends.

The Foothills Mennonite Ladies Chorale sang a few hymns reminiscent of the era in which the women fled their homes. They also sang a current hymn, *Faithful One*. The hymns noted the presence of our God through very difficult circumstances.

We listened intently as our honored guest Ray Dirks told us of his visits with some of the women in the paintings and their families. He mentioned

how moved he was to tell their stories in art and in block letters incorporated into the paintings. He noted, "I like the fact that yes, these are stories that focus on these women from one particular culture and faith background from a specific place in the world, but they're universal stories".

A time of fellowship and recounting stories was held after the program as guests viewed the paintings.



Ray Dirks explains a painting

AtRtF Coaldale Opening Program and Reception

by Dave Toens

On a beautiful afternoon, April 28, 2018, at The Gem of the West Museum in Coaldale, many of the descendants of the women honoured in the paintings in the Along the Road to Freedom (AtRtF) art exhibit gathered to hear the stories of their mothers and grandmothers. The occasion was the third stop in Alberta of this art exhibition organized by the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Coaldale was the 18th stop of the AtRtF exhibition tour in North America.



Tammy Trelenberg and Katie Harder

Harpist Karin Barg of *Simply Harp* played the prelude and postlude in a rich and vibrant style. MC Katie Harder, well known in her former hometown of Coaldale, introduced the singers and speakers. Tammy Trelenberg welcomed the gathered on behalf of the Gem of the West Museum, noting that they were happy to have the exhibit as the first in the newly renovated art gallery. Mayor of Coaldale Kim Craig welcomed the audience and acknowledged the contribution of the women like those in the paintings who had come to Coal-

Marguerite Jack lives in Calgary, Alberta and works at Mennonite Mutual Insurance. Marguerite worships at First Mennonite Church, Calgary. ❖

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dale and area. The singing group *4Ever Praise*, Grace Matthies, John Regier, Abe Block, Dora Climenhaga, and pianist Maggie Block sang six songs including Nun Danket Alle Gott and the very moving *Wehrlos und Verlassen Sehnt Sich*.



4Ever Praise

Artist and curator of the Menonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Ray Dirks recounted how four people, Nettie Dueck, Hans Funk, Wanda Andres, and Henry Bergen, had come to see him with the request to find a way to honour their mothers and grandmothers. This early beginning eventually developed into the touring exhibit of paintings we had come to Coaldale to see.



Key note address by Ray Dirks

Dirks explained to us how he created the paintings. Once a sponsorship for a painting was in place, he would arrange to meet with family members. They would talk together about the woman to be featured. Dirks asked for the woman's favourite hymns, hobbies, or favourite Bible verse. He gathered as many visual resources as possible, but often these were pretty meager. He would ask for stories, situations that were important

and might have been turning points. Then, he tried to recreate those scenes in as historically accurate a way as possible.

As an example of how this process worked, Dirks referred us to a scene in the Anna Giesbrecht painting. Wanda Andres, granddaughter of Anna Giesbrecht and member of the AtRtF committee, had a photograph of the city, Melitopol, and she knew that there was a market in the Old Alexander Nevsky Cathedral Square there. Dirks found a postcard from the 1930's of that cathedral online and also located images of Ukrainian markets from the era.

Dirks also had a photo of Anna Giesbrecht. He photographed his wife Katie posed as Anna but with an outstretched hand, handing over a ring. Then he put replaced the image of Katie's head in the photo with the image of Anna's head, layered in the various photo elements old and new, cobbled them together in Photoshop and manipulated them until he was happy with the position and perspective. Finally he printed the completed photo-shopped image to use as his sketching resource material.

After meeting with family members again and looking at more resources online and in archives, Dirks came up with the final sketch to tell the story of Anna. He showed it to the family, and once they were all happy with the sketch, he created the final painting.

Dirks mentioned that as a rule just to get to the point of starting each painting for *Along the Road to Freedom* took longer than he usually spends to complete an entire painting. However, he said he did not begrudge spending that time. He felt that the paintings must satisfy the family, be as historically accurate as possible, and tell the story in ways that point out both the uniqueness of each journey and the commonalities between journeys. He wanted to feel that he properly and respectfully honoured the subjects.

In addition to absorbing Dirk's story of how the paintings came to be, members in attendance at the opening also heard stories from various other participants about special women in their own families.



Anna Giesbrecht detail handing over the ring and holding her child in the background



Anna Giesbrecht painting in full with cathedral and market

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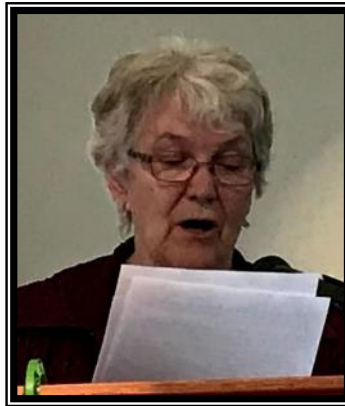
Herta (Epp) Janzen, born in Waldheim, Ukraine in 1937, told how her village bookkeeper father was taken away in 1941. Her only memory of him was waving good-bye to him as he left. Her aunt lifted her up to see him, saying, "Quickly, quickly Herta, there goes your Papa". He died in a Siberian work camp some years later.

Herta told us further how her mother Aganetha Epp and her four children survived the huge difficulties of the trek from Ukraine through Poland to Germany until they eventually came to the MCC refugee depot in Berlin and on to Coaldale in May of 1951.

At one point on the trip the train was ready for boarding but how could my mother Aganetha get aboard with all her children among the throngs of desperately pushing people? Despite their cries, "No room, no room!", she managed to get all of us aboard, like so many sacks of potatoes. The train started moving, fear gripped us, Mother barely climbed in on time. The fear of separation from Mother was a very real one for us at all times. It happened regularly in the chaos of these masses of people moving, moving...

Herta's story concluded with Psalm 103: 1 "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name".

Henry Janzen, related how, as a five-year-old, he had received a small quilt from his grandmother for his birthday. Expecting possibly a toy train, he cried in disappointment. Only decades later would he come to fully appreciate the quilt and realize how special his grandmother was and what she had gone through to come to Canada. He still has the quilt.



Herta (Epp) Janzen

years in Russia, his family left their country.

Just imagine ... my great grandma, my grandma, my mom, my



Henry Heidebrecht

sister Katie (two years old), and I (five years old), all born in Russia, walked away from all we knew and took only what we could carry.

Once in Germany we lived near an ammunition building on the Elba River. When the allied bombs fell in the river, I picked up the dead fish that washed ashore. Our manna from heaven! We were all very sick of fish by the time that ended.

Two soldiers who had served in the same platoon as my dad sought us out to let us know he had been killed. My mom wanted to die when she found out that her beloved Heinz was dead, but my great grandma and grandma insisted she carry on for the sake of her children.

We came to Canada in December 1949. Through hard work and saving Mom was able to buy a house Coaldale, then a better one, and finally a brand-new apartment.

Years later when Mom was able to travel to Germany with a



The blanket Henry Janzen received as a five year old

Henry Heidebrecht talked about how, in January of 1944, after 150

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group from Winnipeg, she visited Dad's grave.

I can use these words to de-

loving. She taught us to work hard and to trust God to take care of us. She had a servant heart.

Listening to all these presentations, the audience was spellbound. Although the program was lengthy, everyone stayed to the end. Then a delicious Faspa lunch was served and people stayed to visit and to view and



Coaldale audience



Viewing the exhibit

scribe my mom; grateful, brave, positive, generous, faithful, and

marvel at the beautiful paintings. Ray Dirks graciously signed his book *Along the Road to Freedom* for his many admirers. ❖

Letter to the Editor

April 23, 2018

Thank you Dave,

It was a pleasure to host this fine exhibit [Along the Road to Freedom] and related event [hosting the Honourable Lois E. Mitchell, Lieutenant Governor of Alberta] Important and powerful stories. Appreciate the partnership with the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta.

Best regards,
Melanie J. Humphreys, PhD
President
The King's University
Edmonton, AB



Dave Toews is presented with a thank you card and note by David Jeffares during the Annual General Meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, April 28, 2018 at Coaldale, for Dave's work in bringing the *Along the Road to Freedom* art exhibition to Edmonton, Calgary and Coaldale in 2017 - 2018



Mennonite Women Enjoy Art Exhibit and Gramma Stories

by Kate Janzen

How exciting to have an art exhibit come to town featuring Mennonite women from Russia who made their way to Canada under impossible circumstances!

The exhibit is at the Ambrose University in Calgary and will be there for another few weeks. There was a reception at the opening of the exhibit in early March, and the artist Ray Dirks was present to give background for his reasons for creating the paintings. This reception also included a choir and a story from Hugo Neufeld who had a direct connection to one of the paintings.

Two weeks later a group of 21 women came from various Mennonite churches in the Calgary area to view the exhibit and share. The event was billed as Gramma Stories. There were presentations from four women. Jeanette Thiesen told the story of Grandma Baerg who endured many hardships. When she and those traveling with her arrived in Quebec after an uncomfortable trip, they were surprised by offerings of sandwiches, cake, and the Gospel of John! Rose Klassen passed on the story of her Grandma Retzlaff who lost many members of her immediate family including two infant daughters during her escape from the Red Army.

Tial Mawi and Hnin Tida, two Chin ladies dressed in their cultural outfits, told us about their modern day trek from the Burma jungles to Calgary. They repeatedly said how their faith and determination got them to the beautiful Canadian country. The Chin congregation joined Mennonite Church Alberta in 2013.

There were other spontaneous stories. Mention

was made of a beautiful pillbox and a manicure set that served the entire Mennonite community in a Siberian camp. Alice Unrau shared her experiences of her involvement in the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). She urged us to become members of the society and to attend the spring and fall conferences that are advertised regularly in the MHSA Newsletter.

The Gramma Stories gathering also included an urban "Faspa". It lacked

Zwieback or Kringle, but the tasty lunch was enjoyed by all!

Kate Janzen is a retired elementary teacher. She lives on a farm west of Calgary with her husband Bob Janzen. Kate is involved with Women's Ministry in her local church. As well she helps to organize the annual Mennonite Church Alberta Women's' Retreat in Sylvan Lake. Bob and Kate attend Foothills Mennonite Church, Calgary. ❖



Kate Janzen



Brenda Tiessen-Wiens and Marguerite Jack



Tial Mawi and Hnin Tida



L-R Bet Lou Reimer, Margaret Roth, Barb Heidebrecht

2018 Annual General Meeting Report

by David Jeffares

On Saturday, April 28, 2018, the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) AGM was called to order at 10:45 AM in the Gem of the West Museum in Coaldale, AB with 26 members in attendance.

Chairman, David Neufeldt, presented the agenda for the meeting, which, after review, was approved. Minutes from the 2017 AGM and from the MHSA teleconference call on April 29, 2018 were approved as corrected. Reports, prepared and received from the chair, the treasurer, the newsletter editor, the archives and library volunteer, and the MAID representative were received and will be vetted for presentation at the 2019 AGM.

The election of officers and

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David Jeffares

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members-at large was conducted in accordance with MHSA by-laws following clarification of some by-law and length-of-term aspects. Officers were declared as follow: Chair: David Neufeldt, Vice-chair: Katie Harder, Treasurer: Peter Dyck, Secretary: David Jeffares, Archivist/Librarian: Ted Regehr, Newsletter Editor: Dave Toews, New Members-at-Large: Verne Klassen and Sigrid Warkentin, and Continuing Members-at-Large: Peter Kroeger, Ken Matis and Ernie Wiens. With regret, the meeting learned that Alice Unrau had resigned thus leaving the position of MAID Representative unoccupied.

The MHSA Newsletter report indicated exceptional quality in content and readability and offered readers wide variation in content. Dave Toews' editorial team was commended for a newsletter that offers superior reference to the history of Mennonites in Alberta. Dave expressed two concerns, we need to come up with effective ways in which to increase readership. And secondly, the name of the periodical should be updated



Dave Neufeldt addresses the AGM

from the very basic name, Newsletter. A contest will run in the March newsletter requesting members to

submit suggested names. The board will make the final decision on the name in time for the June issue.

The proposed 2018 budget of \$24,050 reflects an increase of \$300 over the 2017 budget. MHSA was able to finance *Along the Road to Freedom* with the help of grants from MCC, MMI, and other contributors, but such funding will not likely come again to MHSA once the third exhibit concludes in Coaldale. The 2018 budget for office supplies has been increased to \$3,500 to cover upgrades to systems such as website library cataloguing.

Information was reported from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meeting that had occurred in Calgary shortly before the MHSA AGM in Coaldale.. ❖

Meet the Chronicle Volunteer Staff

Ellie Janz (membership list and mailing)

Eleanore Wilma Janz (Ellie) was born November 2, 1942, the 12th of 14 children to Russian Mennonite immigrant parents Nicholai and Maria (Wall) Janzen. She was raised on a farm at Namaka, Alberta until 1959 when her father retired from farming. Her parents then moved to Calgary with their 3 youngest children, and they started attending First Mennonite Church in Calgary.

Ellie attended the Namaka School for grades 1 – 8, the Carsland School for grades 9-11, and Western Canada High School in Calgary for grade 12. In 1964 she married Henry (Rocky) Janz, and they built their first home on an acreage just west of Calgary. They have two sons and a daughter, who all attended Springbank Schools from grades 1 – 12. They also have five grandchildren plus three they consider adopted grandchildren.



Ellie Janz

Ellie worked in data entry for what was then Pan Canadian (now Encana), IBM, and Alberta Brewers Agents. Later she worked for Ceridian payroll services in their operations department. She is co-treasurer with her son Wayne at First Mennonite Church in Calgary and recording secretary for the church and several other groups. She is currently a volunteer bookkeeper for the Mennonite Historical Society. In addition, she gets the envelopes and labels ready for the newsletter as well as keeping track of memberships.

Ellie still enjoys going camping in her motorhome, keeping score for her daughter-in-law's slow pitch baseball team, 10-pin bowling, and watching the Calgary hockey and football teams play. She still lives on the acreage in Springbank. ❖

Carolyn Wilson (copy editor)

Carolyn is a longtime member of First Mennonite Church, Edmonton. She and her husband, Alvin Lowrey, attend both First Mennonite and Lendrum Mennonite Church, where Al is a member. For many

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years Carolyn was an adult literacy instructor at Nor-Quest College (formerly AVC Edmonton). Now mostly retired, she enjoys spending free time reading, writing, playing flute in various community groups, and keeping up with the activities of children and grandchildren.

Although she does not personally have ethnic Mennonite roots, Carolyn is happy to have an opportunity to read and reflect on the Mennonite stories that cross her editing desk. Her own family tree includes French, Belgian, Dutch, German, English, and Irish roots including ancestors in New York and Quebec as early as 1626 and the 1660's respectively. In the early 1800's these lines converged in Southern Ontario, and Carolyn was born and grew up in Oshawa. The internet has provided her with a wealth of free genealogy information for which she is very grateful. Sifting through this bounty has awakened a new interest in history and a sense that in many ways it really is a small world. ❖



Carolyn Wilson

Harvey Wiehler (layout)

Hartwick Wiehler, usually called Harvey, was born in Germany and immigrated to Canada in 1951 with his parents and older sister. The first few years were spent in Saskatchewan in the Rosetown area. In 1957 they moved to Calgary. He started his public schooling in Rosetown and finished it in Calgary. He attended the University of Calgary for 4 years and graduated with a Bachelor of Science in applied mathematics. Math did not provide many career opportunities, but the fledgling computer industry offered a variety of interesting options. He has travelled extensively for work in North America, England, South America, and Africa. He spent one year working in Germany for Siemens AG and then returned to Calgary to work for NCR. After a few years he started his own software company, which developed and marketed business system software. The software developed by his company was later acquired by Ernst & Young, and Harvey worked for that company for 11 years before spending the rest of his career consulting on software systems.

Harvey and his wife Betty raised 3 sons in Calgary. They attended First Mennonite Church Calgary and the boys spent many years at Menno Simons Christian School. These two organizations offered a variety of volunteer opportunities. He served on the board at MSCS for many years in a number of different positions. At church, he served on the finance committee and as church chairperson. He has also volunteered with other organizations at work and in the community.

Harvey is now retired and enjoys camping, reading, golfing, and playing bridge. He lives with his wife Betty in Calgary and they have 3 sons, 2 daughters-in-law and 4 grandchildren. They still attend First Mennonite Church in Calgary. ❖



Harvey Wiehler

Bill Janzen (printing and distribution)

Bill Janzen grew up on a farm at Rosemary, Alberta with his parents Peter H. and Agnes (Martens) Janzen and three siblings, Robert (Bob), Andrew, and Karen.



Bill Janzen

After 11 years of schooling in Rosemary, Bill went to Rosthern Junior College (RJC) for one year. With so many friends from RJC, Bill chose to attend the School of Agriculture (S of A), at the University of Saskatchewan Saskatoon. With the intention of farming he chose the S of A two year agriculture program. However, as an interim step, Bill won the competition for a position with Farm Credit Corporation (FCC) in Saskatchewan.

Following a three week introduction to FCC, Bill was posted in Saskatoon as a Credit Advisor and given farm loan applications for appraisal and inspection throughout the province.

Two years later Bill joined Co-operative Trust (Saskatchewan) as a Loan Officer, focused on Veteran Loans Act (VLA) loans administration. As the VLA loan business declined, Bill moved to the administration of home mortgages and appraisals. Within a short while, Bill was promoted to Loan Dept. Manager, then to VP Loan Services at Head Office.

For the next 29 years, Bill enjoyed his work with Co-operative Trust Company of Canada. The small provincial trust company

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became a national Trust Company. Bill's employment had him transferred to Vancouver, back to Saskatoon, then to Edmonton to open and manage the Edmonton location. After five years in Edmonton, back to Saskatoon, this time to head up the deposit and registered plans section for the company. Two years later, Bill moved to Calgary to manage the branch there. In the early 1990s consolidation began to take place and Bill was Western Region manager which included Vancouver and Edmonton.

By 1997, this gig was up, as the Trust Company was absorbed into the Credit Union system and Bill was offered a package.

Within the next year or so, Bill began a new career this time with Investors Group (IG) Calgary. Bill had a successful 11 years with IG and then chose to leave and take a new position with Global Exempt Market Solutions (GEMS) a Dealer in the private market. Eventually, GEMS joined forces with Pinnacle Wealth Brokers (PWB) and Bill continues to enjoy introducing alternative or private investment offerings to clients/prospects. Bill is a Dealing Representative for Pinnacle Wealth Brokers an Exempt Market Dealer.

During all those years, Bill was also in partnership with his brothers Bob and Andrew, enjoying the cattle business, as JJJS Simmentals Inc. They sold bulls for 20 years throughout Alberta and at the Calgary Bull sale as a consigner. As a matter of interest, the Calgary Bull sale is the longest running bull sale in North America. JJJS Simmentals with a partner also sold bulls annually in Brooks, closer to their home market. Although JJJS Simmentals

Inc has been dissolved, Andrew's family carries on with a very successful annual bull sale on the farm.

In the past Bill has been Director of the Alberta Simmental Association, Director and Chair of Alberta Cattle Breeders Association (Calgary Bull Sale). Currently Bill is a Board Member of Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, has served a term as Chair and Board Member of the Calgary Christian Retirement Society, and works with the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Bill has served on Foothills Church Council and for a term as Finance Chair of Mennonite Church Alberta.

Bill and his spouse Charlette live in Calgary and attend Foothills Mennonite Church. Their family includes daughter Pamela (Nader Ishaq), sons Brad (Colleen Underwood) and Morgan, and grandson Colby. ❖

Dave Toews (editor)

David Peter Toews was born June 15, 1945 to Russian Mennonite immigrant parents Peter and Helen (Kroeger) Toews in the car on the way to Saskatoon from Dundurn, Saskatchewan. He was raised on a farm at Mayfair, not far from North Battleford. Dave went to school in Mayfair and then went to Rosthern Junior College for grades 11 and 12. He attended the Saskatchewan Institute of Applied Arts & Sciences for two years and night school at the University of Saskatchewan for four years. Dave holds journeymen tickets in commercial refrigeration and air conditioning and also in appliance service. In addition he has a diploma of commerce from the University of Saskatchewan.

Dave worked for General Electric for 30 years in Regina, Saskatoon, and Edmonton as a technician, manager, and technical trainer. After a three-year break to travel, he worked part time for 13 years at the international call centre for Amre Supply. He is now fully retired.

Dave and Marion lived in South Korea for a year and have travelled extensively in many countries including Canada, USA, Europe, Cypress, and Egypt. They have done several adventurous backpack trips. Their first expedition went from Islamabad, Pakistan, over the Karakoram Mountains on the Karakoram highway, and through the Taklimakan Desert to Kashgar, China. After the year in South Korea, they spent eight months backpacking in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Indonesia, Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Mongolia, and Russia (the Russian segment on the Trans-Siberian Railway).

Dave and Marion have two sons and four grandchildren. Jason, Emma, Kishina and Anaya live in Calgary. Everett, Andrea, Zachary and Nathan live in Wellington, New Zealand.

Dave enjoys, reading, writing, history, volunteer work, travelling, grand parenting, and golf. Dave and Marion live in St Albert, Alberta. Dave serves on the board of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and is also the editor of their newsletter. Dave and Marion worship at Lendrum Mennonite Church, Edmonton. ❖



Dave Toews

11th Annual Mennonite Heritage Picnic



August 4, 2018
11:00 am – 5:00 pm
23110 TWP RD 520
Sherwood Park
Alberta
www.mennoniteheritage.com