The MHSA Chronicle

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MHSA 2019 Spring Conference Report Mennonites, Nazis and the Holocaust

by Ernie Wiens

Ernie Wiens

On April 27, 2019 the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta gathered at the Highland Mennonite Brethren Church in Calgary for the Annual Meeting and Spring Conference. Minutes of the annual meeting are available.

The words of the Conference title, uttered at 1pm, could not have been more provocative: Mennonites;

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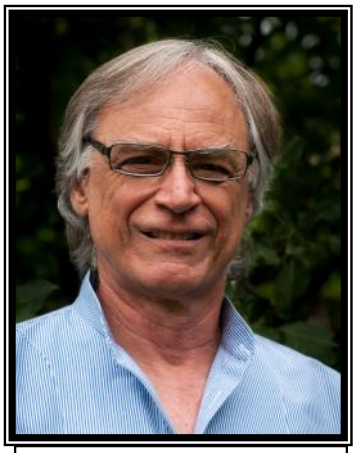
The Shaping of Jacob Abram Dyck (1906 - 2005): A Landscape of Memories

by Ronald J. Dyck



Ron Dyck

I heard a knock … the office door opened … and a tearful colleague entered. Overwhelmed by a story her patient had just revealed about his village in Poland during WWII, she needed a moment to process the events and the associated emotions. Knowing that my family had also experienced hardship during the revolution in Russia, she hoped that I could help her to better understand what she was experiencing.

Later, I reflected on the fact that I knew less than I wanted about the life of my father, Jacob Abram Dyck, in Russia (Ukraine) as he only shared a few glimpses during my growing up years. What was his village of Eichenfeld like? What did he see, experience, and feel on that terrifying day of October 26, 1919? How did the family survive? How did he experience Canada in those first days after arrival? How did all of his early life experiences affect and influence him as a father, husband, grandfather, and friend? From my own research at the time into group and family therapies, I understood the incredible impact that early childhood experiences can have on the development of a child/adolescent and their impact on relationships and interactions in adulthood.

Jacob A. Dyck

That afternoon in the mid 1970's, I penned a letter to my father asking him if he would write his life story from his earliest memories in Russia to making a life here in Canada. Many months later and wondering if he would respond, I received a brown manila envelope in the mail. There it was in his own handwriting, his life story or at least as much as he was prepared to share. Over the next years, my father began to tell more of his stories, some of which were recorded, others that were extracted through lunchtime conversations with grandchildren, and yet others obtained through more formal, interview-type conversations. These stories form part of a landscape of memories, perhaps not always reflected accurately yet interpreted through the haze of remember-

(See Dyck on page 4)

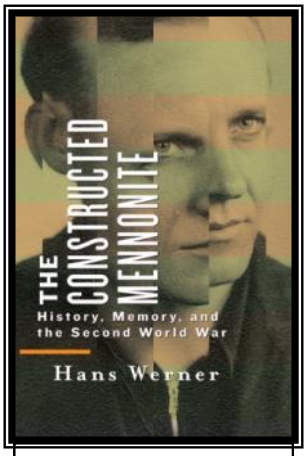
Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

Dave Toews

Are you are the child or grandchild of Russländer Mennonites? If so, how has this shaped who you are and how you relate to your family, friends, and the world around you? How does this affect your worldview? Our ancestors' lives, secure and prosperous in Russia, changed into lives of losing almost everything including family members and necessitated a new start in Canada. We have inherited the aftermath of this trauma and upheaval. How has this affected me? I'm not sure but I have started to contemplate this a good deal. Do you have a story to share with us?

Two of our friends have recently been honoured with major awards! Author Rudy Wiebe received the Pax Award from Canadian Mennonite University. The award honours people who lead exemplary lives of service, leadership, and reconciliation in church and society. David Hubert was honoured with the Salute to Excellence Award and inducted into the Edmonton Community Service Hall of Fame as a Leader/ Builder for his leadership of a good number of nonprofit organizations. David and Rudy are both fellow parishioners and are also in the same book club that Marion and I attend. They are two men of remarkable knowledge and insight. Both of their stories appear in this issue of the Chronicle.



The Constructed Mennonite

In *The Constructed Mennonite, History, Memory, and the Second World War*, the author Hans Werner tells the life story of his father, John Werner. John Werner was a survivor. Born in the Soviet Union just after the Bolshevik Revolution, he was named Hans and grew up a German-speaking Mennonite community in Siberia. As a young man in Stalinist Russia, he became Ivan and fought as a Red Army soldier in the Second World War. Captured by the Germans, he was resettled in occupied Poland where he became Johann, was naturalized, and was drafted into Hitler's German army. There he served until he was captured and placed in an American POW camp. He was eventually released and then immigrated to Canada where he became John. The author worked diligently to make his father's stories fit into the historical chronology of world events. This was no easy task as John often tailored his stories to fit the audience.

Hans Werner's second purpose in writing this book was to explore the nature of autobiographical memory. Autobiographical memory is a combination of recollections of personal objects, people, and episodes from an individual's life at a particular time and place (episodic memory) and general knowledge and facts about the world (semantic memory). What did my father, Hans Werner, remember, how did he reconstruct those numerous memories into stories, and how did they relate to history? These are questions I ask, and they are questions that have appeared and reappeared throughout this book.

Hans does an excellent job of putting this all together for the reader. I highly recommend this

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Dave Toews, Editor
(dmtoews@gmail.com)
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MHSA
#223 - 2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Editor: Dave Toews
Co-editor: Vacant
Copy Editor: Carolyn Wilson
Editorial Committee: Dave Toews, 2 vacancies
Layout: Harvey Wiehler
Distribution: Bill Janzen
Membership List: Ellie Janz

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book in order to understand this difficult story. Hans Werner was one of the guest speakers at the MHSA Spring Conference, see the other articles in this issue of the Chronicle regarding Hans Werner.

Thank you to all the 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 dmtoews@gmail.com with any questions or comments.❖

Chairman's Corner

by Ken Matis

Ken Matis

The following are ideas from the book *A Student's Guide to History* by Jules R. Benjamin and my own personal thoughts.

Everything that exists in the present has come out of the past, and no matter how new and unique it seems to be, it carries some of the past with it. The latest hit recording by the newest group is the result of the evolution of that group's musical style and of the trends in music and society that have influenced them. Perhaps their style developed from earlier rock styles associated with the Beatles, or perhaps they are taking off from even older folk themes used by Bob Dylan. Well, Dylan in turn was influenced by Woody Guthrie whose songs in the 1930s grew out of his contact with the heritage of American folk music from the nineteenth century. That heritage in turn had come in great measure from earlier music in England and Scotland, some of which has origins in the Middle Ages. So you can see that "the house of the present is filled with windows into the past."

The car you ride in, although it may have been designed only a few years ago, carries within it the basic components of the "horseless carriage" of the turn of the century. Your car works because people who knew how to make carriages, bicycles, and engines put their ideas together in a new way. The knowledge necessary to make the carriages and bicycles came, in turn, from earlier inventions. Some, such as the wheel, go back into the antiquity of human history.

My own home, built by my father and grandfathers in 1959, demonstrates the reliance we put on building conventions of the past. Until the seventies, garage doors and structures were still being built to fit small model A and model T cars. In the fifties and sixties, we had to drive our larger model cars very carefully through our tight-fitting garage doors!

Everything has a history. At least part of the answer to any question about the modern world can come from studying the past circumstances that led up to it. The problem is to find those past events, forces, arrangements, ideas, or facts that had the greatest influence on the present subject that one has questions about. The more you understand about these past influences, the more you will know about the present subject to which they are related.

Most people are curious. Children are always asking their parents the "why" of things. When we grow up we continue to ask questions because we retain our fascination with the mystery and complexity of the world we live in. Because everything has a history, most questions can be answered, at least in part, by historical investigation.

What are some of the things you are curious about? Have you ever wondered why women's skirts in old movies are so long, or why Frenchmen often embrace one another whereas Englishmen almost never do? Perhaps you have wondered how the Kennedy or Rockefeller families became wealthy, or why the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. Have you thought about why most of the peoples of southern Europe are Catholic whereas most northern Europeans are not? In many Asian cultures, people bow when they greet one another, yet we shake hands. The questions could go on forever; all the answers, however, are written somewhere in the record of the past.

The record of the past is not only contained in musty documents of a library or archive; it is all around us in museums, in historical preservation sites, and in antique furnishings and utensils found in almost every household. Our minds also are living museums. Ideas we hold such as democracy, freedom, equality, and a competitive market have come down to us by way of a long historical journey. Though we are usually unaware of it, the past is always with us. History is always at our finger tips. It can help us identify who we are today. ❖

(Dyck from page 1)

ing, perception, and the feelings generated. They shed light on what gave shape to my father as a person and what contributed to a clarity of values that guided him throughout his life: Work hard and earn your pay; be kind; be forgiving.

Early Beginnings:

My father, Jacob Abram Dyck, was born on August 15, 1906 to Abram and Helene (Penner) Dyck in Eichenfeld. He lived there until the age of 5 when new opportunities for his father and the family arose. They moved to a peasant village along the Saksagan River where his father co-owned and operated a flour and seed mill.

However, Abram loved farming, so he sold his share in the mill and they moved to Gerhardstal where he bought an 80-acre farm. Then the family moved once more, this time returning to Eichenfeld in order to help Abram's in-laws (Penners) on the family farm, which he later inherited. Living in these various places, Jacob not only worked with his father, but he also attended school. Upon the family's return to Eichenfeld, he was placed into grade 4. His parents wanted him to be a teacher like his uncles in Steinfeld. But Jacob's grandfather Penner, having other priorities and values, stated clearly that no grandchild of his would *"be other people's shepherd"* - Jacob's future would be on the farm.

Abram Abram Dyck and Helene Dyck with son Jacob, Eichenfeld, circa 1908

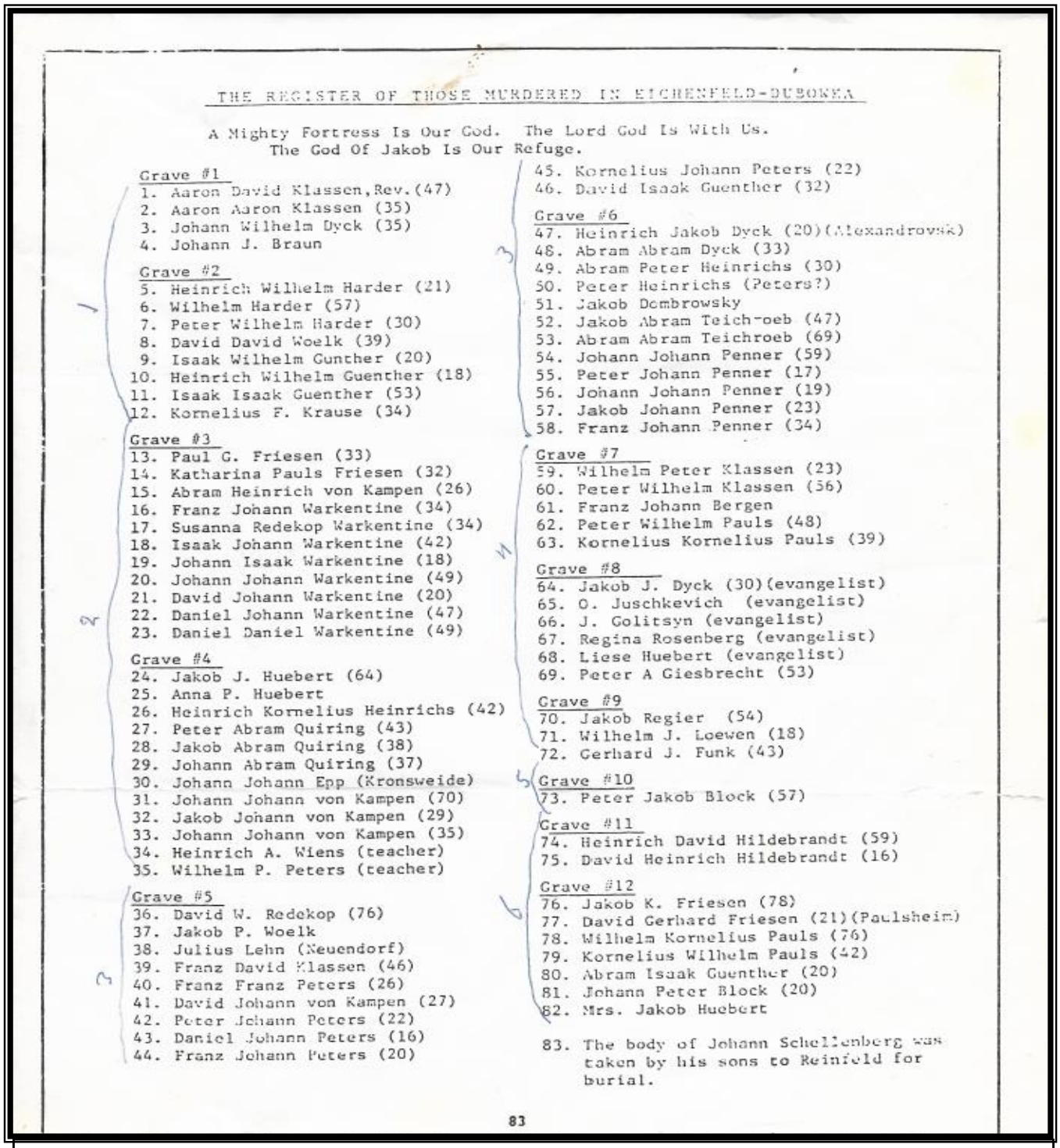
During these years, Jacob was continually given increasing levels of responsibility such as looking after his father's prized horses, seeding and harvesting, and caring for the many fruit trees on the farm. Indeed, working hard was something that he fully understood given that his father repeatedly recited the verse: "By the sweat of your brow shall you earn and eat your bread" (Jacob's loose translation of Genesis 3:19). Growing up was not a time for play but for work and supporting the family and others. But his father was also a very caring man. When he was asked to look after a family suffering from typhoid, he did so with a sense of mission and commitment to others. Even when asked by his wife whether there wasn't anyone else to care for this family, he persisted.

Abram and Helene Dyck, Eichenfeld, circa1918

While work was always primary, family times in the evening were special. Jacob's mother and father each had an accordion, and they would gather the children in the *somma stove* (summer kitchen) and play and sing together. Songs like *"Oh suender wass wirst du tun wenn er kommt"* (Oh Sinner What will You do When He Comes) or *"Niemand ist so gut wie du, meine seele*

(See Dyck on page 5)

(Dyck from page 4)



THE REGISTER OF THOSE MURDERED IN EICHENFELD-DUBOWKA

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. The Lord God Is With Us.
The God Of Jakob Is Our Refuge.

Grave #1
1. Aaron David Klassen, Rev. (47)
2. Aaron Aaron Klassen (35)
3. Johann Wilhelm Dyck (35)
4. Johann J. Braun

Grave #2
5. Heinrich Wilhelm Harder (21)
6. Wilhelm Harder (57)
7. Peter Wilhelm Harder (30)
8. David David Woelk (39)
9. Isaak Wilhelm Gunther (20)
10. Heinrich Wilhelm Guenther (18)
11. Isaak Isaak Guenther (53)
12. Kornelius F. Krause (34)

Grave #3
13. Paul G. Friesen (33)
14. Katharina Pauls Friesen (32)
15. Abram Heinrich von Kampen (26)
16. Franz Johann Warkentine (34)
17. Susanna Redekop Warkentine (34)
18. Isaak Johann Warkentine (42)
19. Johann Isaak Warkentine (18)
20. Johann Johann Warkentine (49)
21. David Johann Warkentine (20)
22. Daniel Johann Warkentine (47)
23. Daniel Daniel Warkentine (49)

Grave #4
24. Jakob J. Huebert (64)
25. Anna P. Huebert
26. Heinrich Kornelius Heinrichs (42)
27. Peter Abram Quiring (43)
28. Jakob Abram Quiring (38)
29. Johann Abram Quiring (37)
30. Johann Johann Epp (Kronsweide)
31. Johann Johann von Kampen (70)
32. Jakob Johann von Kampen (29)
33. Johann Johann von Kampen (35)
34. Heinrich A. Wiens (teacher)
35. Wilhelm P. Peters (teacher)

Grave #5
36. David W. Redekop (76)
37. Jakob P. Woelk
38. Julius Lehn (Neuendorf)
39. Franz David Klassen (46)
40. Franz Franz Peters (26)
41. David Johann von Kampen (27)
42. Peter Johann Peters (22)
43. Daniel Johann Peters (16)
44. Franz Johann Peters (20)
45. Kornelius Johann Peters (22)
46. David Isaak Guenther (32)

Grave #6
47. Heinrich Jakob Dyck (20)(Alexandrovsk)
48. Abram Abram Dyck (33)
49. Abram Peter Heinrichs (30)
50. Peter Heinrichs (Peters?)
51. Jakob Dombrowsky
52. Jakob Abram Teich-oeb (47)
53. Abram Abram Teichroeb (69)
54. Johann Johann Penner (59)
55. Peter Johann Penner (17)
56. Johann Johann Penner (19)
57. Jakob Johann Penner (23)
58. Franz Johann Penner (34)

Grave #7
59. Wilhelm Peter Klassen (23)
60. Peter Wilhelm Klassen (56)
61. Franz Johann Bergen
62. Peter Wilhelm Pauls (48)
63. Kornelius Kornelius Pauls (39)

Grave #8
64. Jakob J. Dyck (30)(evangelist)
65. O. Juschkevich (evangelist)
66. J. Golitsyn (evangelist)
67. Regina Rosenberg (evangelist)
68. Liese Huebert (evangelist)
69. Peter A Giesbrecht (53)

Grave #9
70. Jakob Regier (54)
71. Wilhelm J. Loewen (18)
72. Gerhard J. Funk (43)

Grave #10
73. Peter Jakob Block (57)

Grave #11
74. Heinrich David Hildebrandt (59)
75. David Heinrich Hildebrandt (16)

Grave #12
76. Jakob K. Friesen (78)
77. David Gerhard Friesen (21)(Paulsheim)
78. Wilhelm Kornelius Pauls (76)
79. Kornelius Wilhelm Pauls (42)
80. Abram Isaak Guenther (20)
81. Johann Peter Block (20)
82. Mrs. Jakob Huebert

83. The body of Johann Schellenberg was taken by his sons to Reinfeld for burial.

83

Listing of people who were placed in the different graves. Jacob Dyck was very clear about who was in which grave, his pen markings can be seen connecting the various graves to which people were buried where. Number 48 in grave #6/3 is 33 year old Abram Abram Dyck, the author's grandfather.

jauchst dir zu" (No One is as Great as You, My Soul Rejoices in You) were always favorites.

Day of Terror: October 26, 1919

(See Dyck on page 6)

(Dyck from page 5)

While much has been written about that day of terror in Eichenfeld on October 26, 1919 and the events leading up to it, my father's memories as a 13-year old boy were more personal and embedded in a context of family terror. As he described the day, he and his father woke up early in the morning on Saturday the 25th to do the chores as always. But during the day, "strangers" (the Makhnovtsy) began riding into their village and entering people's homes. Jacob remembers that about 15 men came into their house and started smashing things of personal value and demanding all valuables such as jewelry, gold, watches, and money. They took six horses, removed the cows from their stalls, demanded food for themselves and their horses, and demanded beds to sleep in.

These demands continued to the next day, when the killing of men 16 years of age and over began. Late that afternoon, Jacob's father heard three shots from across the street and went to investigate. Upon crossing the street he was immediately captured, interrogated, made to kneel by the wall near the front door of their house, shot, and dragged to the back. The family being too afraid to venture out of the house to see what had happened, remained in the house hiding. The "strangers" entered the house again and took Jacob's mother Helene, who was 7-months pregnant with her 7th child, to the bed and began raping her; her two eldest boys were under the bed, hiding, listening, hearing their mother's screams from the inflicted pain, and yet too paralyzed from fear to move.

In other parts of the village, men were being shot or killed by machetes and cut to pieces, and women of all ages were being raped. Truly a time of terror.

The next morning, Jacob and his grandfather Penner went outside to see the carnage: neighbours shot and left in the street, bodies that had been cut to pieces, women and children crying and some in shock. When they returned, it was decided that the whole family would walk to the end of the vil-

(See Dyck on page 7)

This is the first monument that I designed for Ukraine. It is situated at a mass grave site where all of the inhabitants of the village of Eichenfeld were buried, after they had be killed during a one night massacre, in the period of anarchy that followed the Russian revolution. Because of the suddenness and unexpectedness of their death, and the absence of survivors, they were denied the dignity of a proper burial. My guiding image for this monument is that of a coffin set out for viewing, resting on short supports, tilted upwards at the head-end. It becomes the 'viewing' that these people should have had. One of the images includes the local stone workers who actually made the monument.

Source: Paul Epp and http://www.paulepp.com/row-mennonite.php

(Dyck from page 6)

lage where 50 others had also gathered for comfort and protection. Over the course of the next 5 days, Jacob and other village boys along with a few men from neighbouring villages began to gather in wagons the bodies of those who had been murdered. Large holes/graves were dug. There was no washing of the bodies as was the tradition, and there were no funeral services; bodies were simply wrapped in blankets or sheets if any could be found, laid side-by-side, and covered with earth. Jacob's father was placed in a grave of 23 men.

Days after the burials, people from other villages organized a short memorial service, but this did not alleviate the loss and grief. For some of the survivors, it served to increase the pain and guilt of not having buried their beloved husbands, sons, grandfathers, and several women in the "Christian" way.

Survival Years in Russia – 1919-1923

After remaining in the village for several days, people began to scatter. Jacob and his family walked 5 miles to the nearby Russian village to stay with his mother's sister and her Russian husband. However, typhoid fever followed the family as it did others. Of the 18 people who lived in the house, 16 developed typhoid fever at the same time. Only Jacob and his cousin were able to remain healthy. In fact, they looked after the 16, washing them, boiling water for drinking, and cooking what little food was available. Peter, Jacob's youngest brother, became very ill with the fever and over the course of a few days became weaker and weaker until no heartbeat and no breath were detected. They "pronounced him dead" and Jacob carried him outside to the porch laid him gently down on the wooden floor, covered his body with a sheet, and wept. Several hours later, those who had recovered somewhat and were sitting at the kitchen table heard the porch door open. Peter stumbled in and announced that he was hungry and wanted something to eat – back from the dead, how to explain it but that his rising from the dead was truly a miracle. Unfortunately, others were not so "miraculously saved' as young Peter. Jacob's grandfather Penner passed away first, and within one week, two more relatives in the house died. Deaths from typhoid were so plentiful that people were again buried in mass graves.

In March (1920), Jacob's uncles from Steinfeld arrived and took the family home by wagon. Here they were able to start a new life. Jacob's mother and siblings moved into a small two-room house while 13-year-old Jacob had to work to support the family. A farmer offered him a job with room and board earning 80 pounds of wheat per month working 15 hours a day. After 18 months, he moved to another farm where he worked for 200 pounds of wheat per month. In fact, this farmer was so pleased with Jacob's work and attitude that he and his wife wanted to adopt him. But Jacob's mother said an emphatic "no" to that idea.

1921 – 1922 were very difficult times not only for Jacob and his family but for others as well. Crops had been very poor, and food was scarce. Jacob's job became work for room and board only. People were starving; beggars and thieves were coming through the villages all the time in search of food or money in order to buy something to eat. Dogs and cats were non-existent as they were caught, killed, and eaten. Jacob's uncle went to the forest in search of firewood, but his horse stumbled and broke its leg. He left the horse and sleigh for about one hour to get help, but by the time he returned, the horse had been killed, skinned, cut to pieces, and taken by the many starving people.

With half a slice of bread and a little potato for the family per day, Jacob's family became weaker and weaker. Owing to necessity and ingenuity, Jacob and his younger brother Abe would go to the pasture near the village to trap gophers and mice. Then they would take them home to be skinned, cleaned, boiled for broth or fried, and served. It was a time of survival by any means possible.

But help finally arrived. President Hoover supported the setting up of American Kitchens across southern Russia to help those who were in dire need. The Kitchen provided one bun and one glass of cocoa each day to each person who came. Because Jacob's mother worked in The Kitchen, each day she received one additional bun and one additional glass of cocoa; these she took home to share with her children. This extra food, together with what could be scraped together at home, enabled the Dyck family to survive these very challenging times.

Farewell to the Homeland

With everything looking increasingly desperate, Jacob's mother applied

(See Dyck on page 8)

(Dyck from page 7)

to immigrate to Canada in 1921. But applying to immigrate and obtain the necessary papers required money. Having only her children, a small vegetable garden, and two cows, she was left with only one option of raising the necessary cash – sell one cow. Finally, in 1923, she received notification that the paperwork had been approved, and that she and her family were accepted to immigrate to Canada. Happiness and excitement together with sadness and anxiety permeated the family, and in July they left their homeland to begin a new life.

She and her family were accepted to immigrate to Canada.

But their journey difficulties were only beginning. They went to the train station at the appointed time and were loaded with 600 other refugees into boxcars to begin their long journey to Latvia. These boxcars had no facilities for cooking food, no water for washing, no bathrooms, and no places to sit or to sleep. In fact, when the train stopped in various stations to get fuel, often there was no wood or coal to be found. Wood doors and door and window frames from the stations were taken as fuel instead. Yet the passengers were happy as the end to their years of terror and starvation was coming, and new beginnings were in sight.

When the train arrived in Riga Latvia, passengers were taken to a building, asked to remove all their clothing including underwear, and required to take showers with a very strong soap in order to kill any lice and/or bacteria that they were potentially carrying. Their clothes were put through a sterilization process to ensure no disease would be carried. Next came the examination by doctors. As it turned out, Jacob and his younger brother (now 16 and 12 years old, respectively) were deemed healthy and were approved to continue on to Canada. Their mother and the rest of the children were not cleared because of trachoma and other diseases and consequently were put on trains to Hamburg, Germany for treatment.

This separation raised considerable anxiety as the paperwork had the names of mother and siblings on only one visa, not separate visas. How could Jacob and Abram, who were approved, continue their journey? Through the help of one of the organizers, Jacob and Abram were told to just get on the ship with the others and if they made it onto the ship, all would be well!

While their mother and brothers and sisters left by train to Hamburg, Jacob and Abram boarded the SS Bruton, a CPR ship that was to provide passage from Riga to Southampton and then on to Quebec City. Their initial excitement in traveling to a new country and their relief that the long journey by boxcar from Alexandrovsk to Riga was over were now overcome by a sense of sadness and loss. They had said goodbye to their mother and siblings with no assurance of where, when, or if ever they would be reunited. They remembered saying goodbye weeks earlier to their grandmothers Dyck and Penner and their uncles and aunts. They remembered the farewell hymns and words by the villagers: "God be with you; God bless you; we will see you again if not here on earth then in heaven above". Most difficult of all was saying a final farewell to a land where their father had been shot, killed, and placed into a mass grave without a Christian burial. Questions of why did their Papa have to die, why did they kill him, haunted these young boys as they saw the harbour fading into the horizon. Where was God in all of this pain and suffering? The tension between the excitement of something new and different and the loss of family and homeland was almost too overwhelming.

One way of dealing with that tension was to turn to what was familiar – WORK. Once on board, the boys decided that they would find work to pass the time and, more importantly, to obtain extra food. It took mere hours before they were hired to work in the kitchen, setting and clearing tables, washing dishes, and doing other odd jobs. Payment was indeed extra food to eat, which would allow Jacob, standing 5 foot nine and weighing less than 100 pounds, and his emaciated brother to regain some weight and their strength.

In Southampton, the SS Bruton boarded an additional 200 Jewish refugees, now making the total count on the boat of about 1000 people. The 18-day crossing to Quebec City was uneventful except for many of the passengers suffering severe seasickness. But Jacob and Abram survived without becoming sick – this being attributed to the "special soup" that the kitchen prepared for them.

Canada: A Welcome to Remember

(See Dyck on page 9)

(Dyck from page 8)

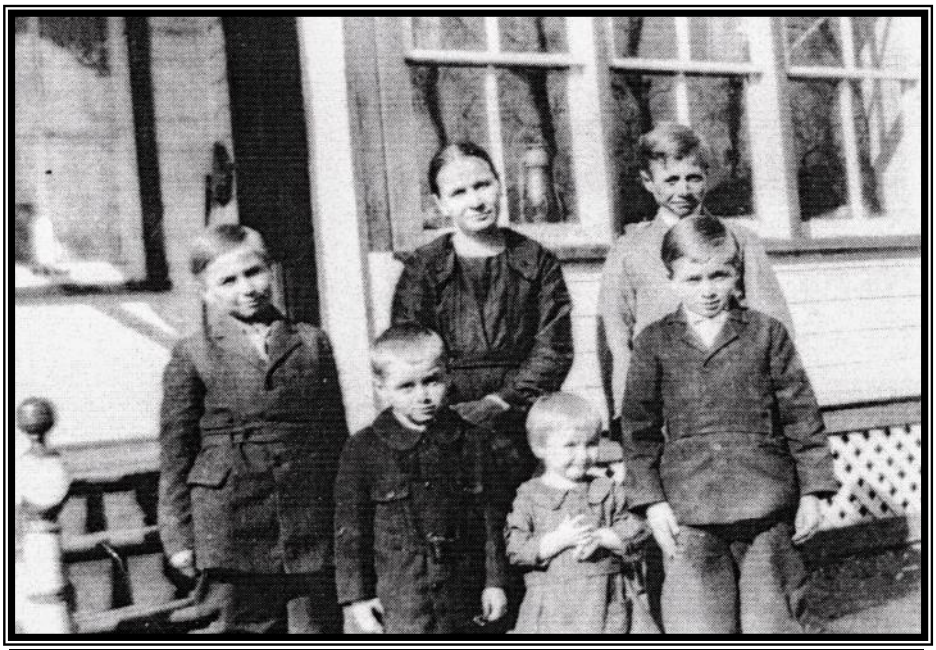
Excitement and nervousness grew rapidly as they saw Quebec City on the horizon. Questions about this new country, the people, where they were going to live, ran through their minds. What they did not expect were the actions of immigration officials who immediately upon disembarkation put the young boys along with some other passengers into what was described as "iron monkey cages" on the docks. Hours later, doctors arrived and checked the boys for disease and other possible illnesses, and eventually they released them into the hands of one of the refugee organizers. Together with other Mennonite refugees they were then transported to the train station and put on a train to Winnipeg. With only one loaf of bread and one can of sardines given to sustain them for 3 days, they traveled to Winnipeg.

Arrival was remarkable. Hundreds of people were at the station to welcome these refugees. Shortly after disembarking from the train and receiving directions that they were to continue on to Winkler the next day, Jacob and Abram were approached by a seemingly kind and gracious Jewish man. In fact, he wanted to take the two young boys home with him. When he was told that that would not be possible as they were destined for Winkler, he asked if he could at least take them for a short time and give them a gift. With approval provided, this kindly gentleman took Jacob and Abram to his Winnipeg clothing store and outfitted each one with new shirts, coveralls, socks, shoes, and warm jackets and gloves for the winter. Jacob and Abram were astonished by the generosity shown to them by this total stranger who clearly wanted to be contributing to the wellbeing of these Russian refugees.

But this expression of generosity was not to be Jacob and Abram's experience again for some time. The next day, they arrived in Winkler where their welcome was much less hospitable. Getting off the train, the refugees were placed in a line-up where people, some of whom had contributed money to help them escape from Russia and now wanted a "return on their investment", were waiting to check them out. It was not unlike what may have taken place in slave markets of the past. Were they capable of working hard? Were they strong enough? Were the families too big?

Eventually, Jacob and Abram were selected by a farm family from Myrtle, Manitoba. Clearly, the boys were young and capable of working long hours even though they still appeared emaciated. No sooner had they arrived at the farm than Jacob was put to work harvesting crops. But with only a little bread and a can of sardines to eat over the past few days and the near-starvation diet that they had been on in Russia, he lacked strength and energy to do the required work immediately. He tried, but it would take time to rebuild his strength. Nonetheless, the boys had to work in the fields, milk cows, and do other chores as required from 5:00 in the morning to 8:00 at night every day. On Sundays they were allowed 2 hours off to attend church, but then it was back to work. All this was for $150 per year for Jacob and $50 per year for Abram, along with room and board. As Abram was only 12, when the local school board found out he was not attending school, they sent a letter demanding that he begin immediately. Although he would attend school, he was still expected to do the chores before and after school and on weekends in order to earn his keep.

In late 1923 and early 1924, Jacob's mother and her other children ar-



Helene Dyck with her 5 (of 7) children after arrival in Canada, Winkler, MB, circa 1924 (Jacob is in top right)

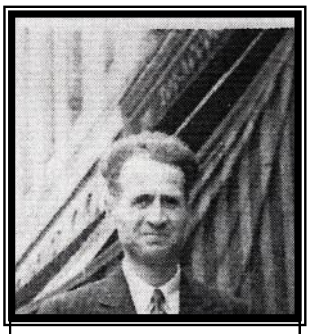
(See Dyck on page 10)

(Dyck from page 9)

rived and settled in a small house in Winkler. As "luck" would have it, a visiting preacher from Herbert, Saskatchewan got to know Helene quite well, and after asking if she was ready to get married again, he arranged for a Mr. JJM Klassen from Turnhill, Saskatchewan, a widower with 7 children, to meet her. Not long after, the two agreed to marry and form a union with 14 children.

To Jacob and Abram's surprise and disgust, they were not allowed to attend their mother's wedding as their "owners" stated emphatically that they were required to work! The next day, Helene and her new husband came to the farm to take their boys back to Saskatchewan with them. It was clear that the "owners" were not allowing it. They stated clearly that if the boys went, they would not be paid, and they would have to leave all their clothes that had been purchased at the farm. (There are some discrepancies as this story unfolds. Either Jacob and Abram left with their parents right after the wedding, or they remained on the farm for a while longer, then stole away in the middle of the night across the fields and jumped trains to join them. Regardless, the boys ended up with their mother and stepfather in Redfield, Saskatchewan, and there were now 16 people around the table. Within several years, Helene gave birth to two more children making a family of 18 – two baseball teams.

Jacob Dyck and Mary Sawatsky wedding, Mullingar, SK., October 26, 1930



Jacob, Vancouver, BC, circa 1943.

While there is still much to tell about Jacob's continuing experiences in Saskatchewan, his marriage to Mary Sawatsky on October 26, 1930 in Mullingar (a date carefully chosen for its double significance), and their move from the Mullingar area to Yarrow and eventually to Vancouver, these stories will have to wait for another time. Clearly Jacob's early life had an indelible impact on how he expressed and lived his life and touched the lives of many others. In later years, he often lamented over the loss of his father. Jacob's eldest son, Harold, transformed that lament into the following poem.

A Lament

"The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me from the ground"
(Genesis 4:10)

Your lonesome voice is pained and shrill
And heard by haunted souls who seek and still
Can't find a restful thought to right
Mass butchery and terror on that grim night
When Cain rose up in Eichenfeld.

Let not your plaintive voice be faded
In winds and plains, by theories and by history.
The Russian soil which took your blood
Has cursed your slayers to cruel misery,
As prisoners of their own dark treachery.
Cry your sad steppes' sepulchre lament
From a brother's grave, dug shallow by your trembling child
Intent, midst carnage, rape and human gore, to tribute death with dignity.
Your epitaph – an anguished widow's weeping prayers;
Huddled orphans' noble bent – your silent elegy.

Cry on, kind father, o'er feather-grass and lavender
To us who never touched your face, your heirs,
That we might know your dreams, your faith and gentle cares
And not forget our loss that tragic night
When Cain rose up in Eichenfeld.

(See Dyck on page 11)

(Dyck from page 10)

Since obtaining a Ph.D. in psychology, Ron Dyck has provided leadership to governments, academia, agencies, communities, and companies. During a career in executive and senior management positions that has spanned more than 40 years, he has focused on public service, particularly in areas of innovation, science, health, mental health, suicide prevention and intervention, and refugee and immigrant services. Ron and his wife, Carol, live in Edmonton and attend the Lendrum Mennonite Church. ❖

(MHSA from page 1)

Nazis; Holocaust. Each of these words eschews narrow definition. Each is cloaked in connotation, revisionist history, and personal narrative based on experience and community. We can agree on two "facts". The time period was 1939 - 1945, and the location was Eastern Europe. The rest is "story".

Two experienced and well-credentialed historians, Dr. Colin Neufeldt, Associate Professor of History at Concordia University of Edmonton, and Dr. Hans Werner, retired Associate Professor, Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, artfully and expertly avoided ambiguities, potential disagreements, and biases as they unpacked the Conference title.

Colin Neufeldt

Dr. Neufeldt presented the plight of the Polish Mennonites who had not emigrated to Russian Territories in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. By the beginning of the Second World War, these Mennonites had been "prussified". They had lost their objection to military service. They had developed their own Low German accent. Furthermore, groups such as Danzigers, East Prussians, and West Prussians had become geographically separated. All had become marginalized as foreigners due to the rise of Polish nationalism.

Using the compelling and personalized story of his mother's extended family in the small Mennonite enclave of Deutsch Wymyschle in west-central Poland, Dr. Neufeldt chronicled the bewildering events overtaking their ordered lives. From the arrival of the confident and proud German soldiers and arrogant administration in early 1940 to the frantic and chaotic retreat of the Germans in early 1945, these Polish Mennonites endured a cultural Blitzkrieg.

Using academic and logical analysis, Neufeldt listed several factors that contributed to a Mennonite - Nazi alliance in a few short years: euphoria upon the arrival of the German "liberators", implementation of the Hitler Jugend (Youth): exhilarating youth, school, and community activities; and administrative and economic opportunities. These inextricable elements led to covert and sometimes overt cooperation, then to some collaboration, and finally in a few cases to full participation in Nazi atrocities.

Dr. Werner painted with a much larger brush the more complicated picture of Mennonite - Nazi interaction in the Southern Ukraine from 1941 to

Conference participants listening intently

(See MHSA on page 12)

(MHSA from page 11)

1943.

During the Russian Revolution (1917 - 1919), some of these Mennonites had bought into the utopian dream of global socialism, and they had fully collaborated and participated in dekulakization, collectivization, and Stalinization with its associated atrocities.

When German liberators arrived in the Ukraine, some Mennonites still held allegiance to Bolshevism. Others, in contrast were euphoric at the ending of Stalinist repression, oppression, and frank persecution. Intra-Mennonite tensions, rivalries, and outright hostilities were inevitable. The euphoria of the second group led to silence when word of atrocities against their Jewish neighbors surfaced. Once again euphoria led to inaction if not overt collaboration or participation.

Corpus Christi Male Chorale

Then in 1943 defeat at the Eastern Front led to a chaotic German retreat to the annexed Warthegau region of Poland. By now, having identified with the occupying Germans and having experienced so much of Stalin's brutality, the Mennonites (Russian and Nazi sympathizers alike) saw no alternative to flight. So began the Great (Mennonite) Trek west. History tells us that of the 35,000 Mennonites who left the Ukraine, only 12,000 found refuge in the crowded refugee camps of Western Europe. Perhaps these numbers point to a "Mini (Mennonite) Holocaust".

So ended Catherine's experiment with Mennonites. So ended the Mennonite fantasy of peace, prosperity, and apartheid.

Dr. Werner left us with a personal story as well. Starting in Osterwick, Ukraine and ending on the Saskatchewan prairie, it helped to humanize the wider Mennonite story of catastrophe and redemption.

One could ask: What is the purpose of history? Must a story always be a Greek tragedy or pathos before it ends? Does a story ever end? Or, as one Conference goer asked, "How long is one a Mennonite?"

Hans Werner

Obviously these questions cannot be answered empirically, and one must not try to do so. Perhaps conversation of this nature is better suited to a more metaphysical approach: in association, in identity search, in extraordinary people, in family, in culture and ethnicity. Maybe "stories" have their value in dreams, in fantasies, in imagination, or in dopamine-mediated nostalgia.

As the 2019 Spring Conference demonstrated, a well-planned "story" with academic rigor and scholarship presented by credentialed and motivated speakers will find an audience. Add to such an event the harmonies of the Corpus Christi Male Chorale, and one could even evoke the concept of "Mennonite Music". The final two songs, "Speed the Journey" and "It is Well with My Soul", provided a suitable and probably very adequate ending to our gathering.

Except it didn't end there.

(See MHSA on page 13)

(MHSA from page 12)

Faspa. !!!! - that Mennonite word which does not translate adequately into any language. A return to reality, to groundedness. Renewing old acquaintances, meeting new ones, comparing DNA and genealogy, coffee, buns, meat and cheese, platz ..... It doesn't get any better!

Once again, a meeting well planned, a provocative topic discussed with scholarship, credibility, personal poignancy, and courage. A society delivering its mandate. ❖

Rudy Wiebe Honoured with CMU Pax Award

by John Longhurst

Fifty-seven years ago, a young Mennonite author published a book that turned the Canadian Mennonite world upside down.

That author was Rudy Wiebe, and the book was *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the first novel written in English by a Mennonite about Mennonites in Canada. The book, which offered an honest and pointed portrait of Mennonite life on the Prairies during the Second World War, provoked a great deal of anger and pain. "It was hard on them," says Wiebe, now 84, of how it impacted some members of his denomination. "It was a tough story."

In the book, Wiebe explored how Mennonites in the fictitious community of Wapiti, Saskatchewan opposed the war while at the same time their church was divided by conflict and broken relationships. "It was difficult for the older generation to handle," he says of the book, which he once described as a "bombshell" for many Canadian Mennonites. "They didn't speak English, they weren't accustomed to reading fiction, and they didn't share insider problems with the outside world," he shares.

Rudy Wiebe
photo credit - Dave Toews

The publication of the book was hard on Wiebe, too. At the time he was the new editor of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, the official English-language publication of that denomination. As the criticism mounted, Wiebe knew he couldn't stay editor of the *Herald*. "I wasn't fired, but I resigned before they would have fired me," he says. "There was no question. I couldn't continue."

That decision led to a distinguished 25-year career as a professor of English at the University of Alberta and as an award-winning author of 33 books, anthologies, and collections of essays about faith, life on the Canadian Prairies, and western Canada's Indigenous peoples. Along the way, Wiebe was a two-time recipient of the Governor General's Award for Fiction; he also received the Writer's Trust Non-Fiction Prize and the Charles Taylor Prize for his memoir of growing up in Saskatchewan. In 2000, he was named an officer in the Order of Canada.

On April 4, Wiebe received another honour when he was given the Pax Award from Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). The award, created to honour people "who lead exemplary lives of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society," was given to Wiebe for how "his works have been critical in exposing societal concerns," and

Rudy Wiebe, left, receives the 2019 Pax Award from CMU president Cheryl Pauls, right, and English professor Sue Sorensen, centre. (CMU photo) photo credit - J.D. Sloan

(See Wiebe on page 14)

(Wiebe from page 13)

for "the patience and empathy his works awaken," according to CMU president Cheryl Pauls.

For Wiebe, the award from CMU was "particularly welcome" since it is coming from his own faith tradition. "I have received many other awards, but to get an award like this from my own community is really important to me," he says.

While the award is called Pax, meaning "peace," he notes that when *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was published, "it destroyed peace for many." But, because of it, "I have never been able to stop writing, not for the rest of my life."

A Christian writer

Despite how some Mennonites responded to *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe never became angry with the church nor lost his faith. Although the mainstream writing world is a quite secular place, Wiebe is quite happy to call himself a Christian writer. "That means I'm a believer and a follower of Jesus Christ," he says. "I try to look at the world in the way Jesus tried to teach us."

That doesn't mean he has faith all figured out or that he lives perfectly as a Christian. Living faithfully is "sometimes

(See Wiebe on page 15)

Letter to the editor, MHSA *Chronicle:*

Hello Dave,

I wanted badly to come to MHSA spring meeting, especially since it was so close at Highland Church this time, but now that I have given up the car and driving and using a walker and a cane, I need the right kind of ride. Perhaps there are not many choices so I called no one. There were also no offers of a ride so I guess I have become truly passé at age 94.

Your theme this time round interests me a great deal, but I assume you will be including the Neufeldt and Werner talks in the next *Chronicle.*

The previous issue was well read by both Justina and me and we thank you for your good work.

Greetings, Peter

Hello Dave, April 22, 2019

Our copy of the MHSA Chronicle arrived and I want to thank you for your important role as editor. I especially appreciated the Waldemar Janzen entry. Like Janzen I, too, am a survivor of that period but unlike him I have no memories. I was born August 1942. This article explained to me something I have never fully understood. Why did our people open their arms and homes to these German soldiers and place so much faith in them, I have wondered. Yes life under Stalin was brutal but these were, after all, Hitler's men. Janzen explains. I also appreciated his critical comments about Ben Goossen's work.

Keep up the good work.

Selma (Krahn) Berg
Edmonton

(Wiebe from page 14)

hard to maintain," he says.

His understanding of his faith has also changed over the decades. "We live as Christians in a world that keeps changing," he says. "You just can't go plodding along thinking I know what's right and what we've been taught for the last 500 years or something like that is the only right thing. The world changes, and you need an imagination to understand that. You can't just say that certain practices today are out the window because they didn't they didn't exist in Jesus' time. This is where the imagination and spiritual discernment are important."

As for whether being so open about his faith has ever hurt him as a writer, Wiebe says no. "People kept publishing my books," he says, noting *Peace Shall Destroy Many* has never gone out of print and is still taught in high schools.

"There was never any question about what my approach to the story was, and they didn't object to my philosophy in life. Nobody objected to me [about my faith] in terms of the publishing world."

This article first appeared in the Canadian Mennonite online, April 17. 2019. ❖

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- ***Lifetime memberships are now available for $500***
- The Chronicle is published in Mar, June and Oct of each year.

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Enclosed is my contribution of:

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- Information collected above is done within the rules of the Personal Information and Privacy Act of Alberta. Name and address is required for the purpose of communicating with members through correspondence or the MHSA newsletter. It will never be shared with others or used for other purposes.

Get to Know MHSA Board Members Biography of Dave Neufeldt (Past Chair)

Dave Neufeldt

David Neufeldt was born in Coaldale, Alberta in 1962. His father, Ike Neufeldt, was born in Kubanka, Orenburg, Russia and came to Canada in 1926 at the age of five. In 1931 Ike's father set up an anvil in a cowshed in Coaldale and started John J. Neufeldt and Sons Blacksmithing. This business later evolved into Neufeldt Industries, a metal fabrication business operated by Ike and his brother Jake.

Dave's mother, Eleanor (Weaver) Neufeldt was born in Goshen, Indiana and came to Canada when she married Ike in 1958. Eleanor's background was Amish and Swiss Mennonite. Her family valued education. Both of her parents earned master's degrees, her mother being one of the first Mennonite women to do so.

The third of four children, Dave spent all of his growing up years in Coaldale, working part time in the family business from an early age. After two years at Swift Current Bible Institute Dave went on to attend the University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel College, graduating with a degree in Systems Design Engineering. He later received an MBA degree.

Beginning in his teenage years Dave developed an interest in Mennonite and Anabaptist history and in genealogy. Being at Conrad Grebel College allowed him to pursue that interest, taking courses from Frank Epp and Walter Klaassen. Dave was a founding member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta in 1986. He has chaired the MHSA board since 2013.

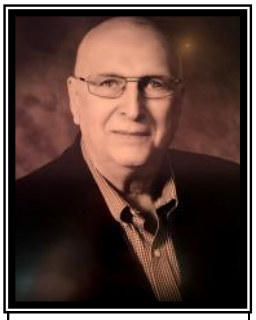
Volunteering has been an important part of Dave's life. He worked with Mennonite Disaster Service in Texas, Mennonite Voluntary Service in Chicago, and Mennonite Central Committee in Ontario. He has also served on the boards of the Lethbridge Mennonite Church, the Lethbridge Ten Thousand Villages store, and the Lethbridge Soup Kitchen.

In 1985 Neufeldt Industries evolved into Haul-All Equipment Ltd. which manufactures garbage collection vehicles and bear-proof garbage containers. Another division of the company manufactures construction heaters under the name Sure Flame. Since 1993 Dave has been working full time at Haul-All where he is a partner and manages the Sure Flame division.

Dave has two adult children (Joel and Nathan) who live in Ontario. In 2017 he married Marie Moyer. They live in Lethbridge where they just built an accessible, energy efficient home with geothermal heat and solar panels. Dave and Marie are members of Lethbridge Mennonite Church. ❖

David Hubert Honoured with The Salute to Excellence

by Dave Toews



David Hubert

David Hubert was honoured with the Salute to Excellence and inducted into the Edmonton Community Service Hall of Fame as a Leader/Builder at the Francis Winspear Centre for Music, June 10, 2019 by His Worship Mayor Don Iveson and a number of other Edmonton dignitaries.

From the Salute to Excellence 2019 posting. Look at the early days of some of Edmonton's not-for-profit organizations and you are likely to find Dr. David Hubert's name among the founders. Habitat for Humanity Edmonton, the Edmonton Recycling Society, the Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, the Vietnamese Friendship Centre, Canadian Peacemakers International, The Avenue of Nations, and the Alberta Plastics Recycling Association are among them.

There is a common thread to the fifty plus years of service David Hubert has committed to community boards and committees. He grew up as part of a Mennonite community in Coaldale that fled Russia and was resettled in Western Canada. In his early 20s, with a new wife, he started his first teaching job as principal on the Goodfish Lake Reserve. Since then, he has never hesitated to create new models for whatever was needed

(See Hubert on page 17)

(Hubert from page 16)

to improve the lives of Aboriginal people and immigrants to Canada. Along the way he helped lay the foundations of Keyano College and organize Portage College, and he spent four years building NorQuest College. He also worked four years with the Alberta Government, during which time he introduced the General Education Diploma (GED) program, which has since spread across Canada. He is currently taking a new model for providing computer-based education for Junior High School students in Honduras to the United Nations and Global Affairs Canada. "One of the problems I've had in life is I can't hold a job," he laughs.

David added, "Honors like these focus on the individual, but there are always others who should share in these honors. For example, Martha, my wife of almost 55 years, has been the bedrock of keeping our household rooted and has been the primary caregiver for our daughters, Angele and Laurel. In organizing Habitat Edmonton, Elise and Jack Klassen and Brent Faber did all the spadework. Thanh Qui Nguyen was indispensable in helping lay the foundation of the Edmonton Mennonite Center for Newcomers. Without Leo and Bonnie Jantzi, the work of the Edmonton Recycling Society would have looked much different. So many, many people should be recognized along with the award recipient." ❖

MHSA Annual General Meeting Report

by David Jeffares

David Jeffares

The 2019 Annual Meeting of the MHSA was held in the Highland Mennonite Brethren Church in Calgary, Alberta, on Saturday afternoon, April 27, 2019. The meeting was chaired by Dave Neufeldt. Following the usual welcome to the meeting, the agenda was approved, the minutes of the 2018 AGM were approved, and reports were given by MHSA Board Members responsible for the 2018-19 activities outlined in the reports as they were given.

Chairman Dave referred to Along *the Road to Freedom* and the three successful showings of the Ray Dirks paintings in Edmonton, Calgary, and Coaldale. He also referred to the two conferences held in 2018 and the renaming of the MHSA Newsletter to *The MHSA Chronicle*. Reference was made to the death of Henry Goerzen and the exceptional contributions he made to the establishment of the MHSA and its maintenance through the years. Finally, Dave expressed gratitude to all board members, especially archivist, Ted Regehr and bookkeeper, Ellie Janz.

Bookkeeper Ellie presented the Treasurer's report on behalf of Peter Dyck. The books were found to be in good order by Ron Janz. Harvey Wiehler had assisted Ellie in the production of spreadsheets when required. MCC invoices MHSA for postage when the postage machine is used. 2018 office expenses came to $4,417.27. This included $2,870 for website and library software updates, which are two expenses not expected to repeat in 2019. The proposed MHSA 2019 budget was approved at $21,250.

Chronicle Editor, Dave Toews, explained how the new title came about, reviewed his volunteer staff, described how he obtains articles for each issue, and outlined the distribution of 176 copies, 71 of which go to Canadian churches and other organizations. Dave expressed his concern about 16 MHSA memberships that have been in arrears since 2017. He spoke about the advantages of the purchase of lifetime memberships and of gift memberships for prospective members.

Archivist/Librarian, Ted Regehr expressed sincere thanks to Alice Unrau who recently retired after years of dedicated work with MAID and as webmaster. Ted then recognized the work done by a small group of regular volunteers under his direction who does as much of the MHSA-related work as possible. Ted described the work that has been done since the death of Judith Rempel, and he emphasized the need to obtain the skills of someone trained in library science who could also manage the map collection and the archival library.

Vice-Chair Katie Harder recommended that altering approved by-laws regarding length and responsibility of board membership be an ongoing agenda item for the MHSA Board during the remainder of 2019. The board members and their present terms are presented in the following chart:

(See MHSA on page 18)

(MHSA from page 17)

2019 MHSA Board Members, Positions and Terms of Office

Chair	Ken Matis	2019-20	1 year
Vice-Chair	Katie Harder	2019-20	1 year
Secretary	Jake Driedger	2019-20	1 year
Treasurer	Jake Retzlaff	2019-22	3 years
Member-at-Large	Ernie Wiens	2019-22	3 years
Member-at-Large	Bill Franz	2019-22	3 years
Member-at-Large	David Jeffares	2019-20	1 year
Member-at-Large	Sigrid Warkentin	2019-21	2 years
Member-at-Large	Verne Klassen	2019-21	2 years
Editor	Dave Toews	2019-21	2 years

All proposed agenda items not covered during the AGM were deferred to the MHSA Board to be considered during future board meetings.

NOTE that a detailed version of the AGM minutes, complete with motions, will be available to all MHSA members at the 2020 AGM. ❖

Mennonite Domestics, Calgary circa 1938, photo by Lane's Studio

text by Dave Toews

The above photograph was submitted to The Chronicle by Dave and Martha (Goertz) Hubert of Edmonton. We would like to enlist the help of the Chronicle readership to identify the young women in this picture. Identify the subjects using this numbering system, rear row left to right, R1 through R7, middle row M1 through M7 and front row F1 through F8. Submit your replies to The Chronicle at dmtoews@gmail.com.

We have identified two of the women: F5 is Anne (Baerg) Thiessen, and M1 is Susie (Martens) Goertz of Crowfoot, Alberta, mother of the aforementioned Martha (Goertz) Hubert. Susie came to work for the well-to-do Buchakin family as a replacement for her sister Katie after Katie got a large splinter in her hand while washing the floor. When Susie was cleaning the large living room she always enjoyed listening to the young Buchakin boy play the grand piano. Susie hoped that one day when she had children of her own they would have such a piano to play on. When Susie's father, Pastor Abraham Martens, passed away, Susie used her inheritance to buy a Spinet piano. And this is the piano that Martha learned to play so well on as she still does at Lendrum Mennonite Church in Edmonton today.

To learn more on this subject read *Daughters in the City* by Ruth Derksen Siemens. This book chronicles the remarkable stories of these young women and the hundreds who followed them. From archival records, interviews, and historic photos, Derksen Siemens assembles the history of two Girls' Homes (Mädchenheime) established to support and protect the working girls.

These indomitable young single women were pioneers of their community: they broke through the barriers of the "evil city," the English language, and the upper-class British culture. Significantly, they shaped the settlement patterns not only of Vancouver, but also of Calgary, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. With careful scholarship and fond respect, this book pays tribute to their impact and their long-lasting legacy.

Sources - interview with Martha Hubert, Gameo and other online resources. ❖

Mennonite Collaboration with Nazism Two Speakers Tell a Difficult Story to Menno Simons Christian School Junior High Students

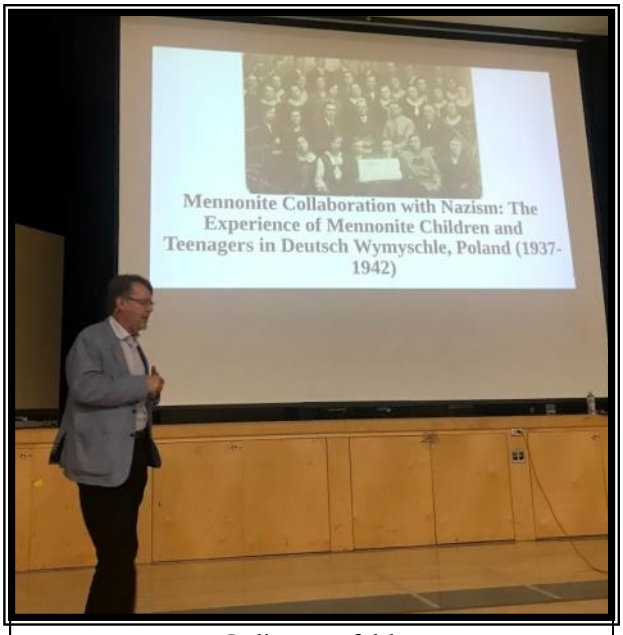
by Dr. David Jeffares

Meghan Brown introduced the MHSA and the two guest speakers

On Friday afternoon, April 26, 2019, Dr. Colin Neufeldt and Dr. Hans Werner spoke to the Menno Simons Christian School junior high students about the experiences relatives of both gentlemen had endured during the political upheaval that occurred in the late 1930s and early 1940s in Poland, the Ukraine, Russia, and Germany. Both speakers included specific references to hardships suffered by children similar in age to the students who sat before them to hear the stories they told.

Dr. Neufeldt lives in Edmonton, is a prolific writer, and thoroughly enjoys his work in Concordia University. Dr. Werner is a senior scholar and retired professor and a prolific writer as well. Both speakers had chosen to uncover vast truths about the unfathomable hardships suffered by Mennonites in all four regions mentioned above. They had both spent much time researching the historical truth of how their relatives ended up in Canada.

Dr. Neufeldt chose to focus his remarks on children and teenagers who lived in the Mennonite village called Deutsche Wymyschle in Poland from 1937 through 1942. The village consisted of 40-45 properties. Another village called Gabin was situated seven kilometers south. The first village was inhabited primarily by Mennonites, who were often seen as German, whereas the second village's population was half Jewish along with other groups including Roma (Gypsies).



Colin Neufeldt

At first, when Hitler encouraged the Nazi movement, Mennonites believed that apparent protection offered through Nazism was a blessing considering what they had suffered under the local Polish citizens. However, they soon realized that the disappearance of Jews and the sudden availability of Jewish businesses, homes, and land was a short-lived benefit. Gross mistreatment of the Mennonites themselves followed as they were conscripted into the military, sent to concentration camps, and forced to remove God from their lives. Fathers were forced to wear uniforms and sent off to war, families were raised by grandmothers or aunts, and children learned that after their fathers were killed, their bodies were never sent home. Hitler initiated youth groups that indoctrinated boys and girls so that they would further his dream of firmly entrenched Nazism.

After Germany was defeated and World War Two ended in midsummer 1945, survivors were forced into hard labor in Siberia. The Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) intervened, however, and, with difficulty, was able to arrange citizenship for many Mennonites who were destitute.

Dr. Werner, in his story to the junior high students, concentrated on life in the Ukrainian districts of Chortitza and Molotschna. In many ways his story paralleled the horrific events told by Dr. Neufeldt. In the Soviet areas that Dr. Werner described, children and teenagers were indoctrinated through the Young Pioneers (red scarf) organization. This indoctrination wiped belief in God out of their lives and replaced faith-based life skills with skills they would need to serve in the Red Army. Some Mennonites were drafted into the Red Army; Dr. Werner's own father was one of these until he was captured and conscripted into the service of Hitler's armies. Many Mennonites, however,

In many ways his story paralleled the horrific events told by Dr Neufeldt.

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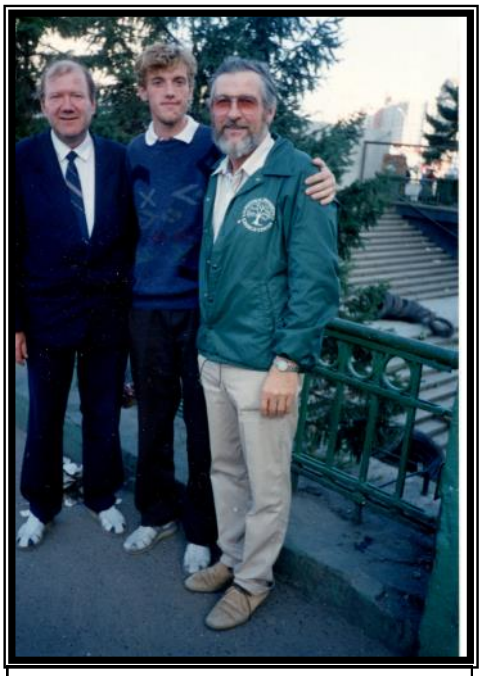
were removed from the front before the German attack and sent to Stalin's work army.

When the Germans occupied Russia, Mennonites in the colonies were earmarked as Germans. They were overjoyed about receiving support and respect from Germany until they gradually realized the true nature of Nazism and the impact of its Master Race ideology not only on Jews but also on themselves. Mennonite youngsters found the tension between Mennonite values, Bolshevism, and the Nazism to which they were forced to adhere during the German occupation very difficult. Getting over the war years was hard, but youthful resilience did help them bounce back and seek new vitality after immigration to other nations or settlement in European countries that were at peace once more.

Hans Werner lectures to the MSCS students

Dr. Neufeldt and Dr. Werner delivered a wealth of information that would certainly add an interesting and probably little-known dimension to anything the students might have studied in conjunction with World War Two and its place in history. A short question and answer time brought insightful enquiry to the floor. Dr. Neufeldt and Dr. Werner were thanked for their interesting presentations, supported throughout by Power Point emphases skillfully handled by students. ❖



R: Minister Willi Peters and his son Andrei with Ben Falk, MCC volunteer at Neudachino, Siberia (1993). Photo credit: Lawrence Klippenstein

Willi Peters (1940 - 2016), Siberian Mennonite Pastor

by Lawrence Klippenstein and William Yoder

Drawing on various resources, this article focuses on the life of Willi Peters, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Novosibirsk, Siberia. Writings by Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein set the stage by presenting the history of Mennonite settlement in Siberia and the establishment of the Novosibirsk congregation. Material from Dr. William Yoder, Gvardeysk/Moscow, reveals Willi Peters' personal journey to Novosibirsk and his work as pastor there and reflects on recent developments in the Russian Mennonite movement. Editor's note

Mennonite Settlement in Siberia and the Establishment of the Novosibirsk Congregation

The Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonite settlements in New Russia became the so-called "mother colonies" of all the subsequent settlements in New Russia (later Ukraine). The total population of these subsequent settlements reached about 110,000 by the end of World War 1. Mennonites spread out widely in Central and southern Russia and began to look elsewhere in the search for more land.

As far as we know, in western Siberia, Mennonite settlement did not begun until 1897 when the J.J. Hildebrand family settled in Omsk and founded an agricultural machinery business there. Families seeking land for farming established settlements westward from Omsk along the north and south sides of the Trans -Siberian Railway. To the southeast, another cluster of villages was set up, first oriented toward the old city of Barnaul and later toward the closer and newer city of Slavgorod, which

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was located on a southward stretching spur of the Trans- Siberian Railway. A later expansion of these village settlements took some thousands of persons to an area on the north bank of the Amur River around Blagoveschensk. A settlement at Pavlodar west of Slavgorod sprang up also.

Eventually all these areas came under Soviet control. During WWII, the larger villages remained relatively free of physical damage, but hundreds of persons were forcibly resettled in northern prison and work camps. Many died there, but others managed to return south, some to be reunited with their families, and some not.

In the process of resettlement in Siberia and Central Asia following the war, many moved to new and former urban areas to attempt more permanent resettlement and community reorganization. One of the sites that acquired a large new congregation of over 400 Mennonites was the city of Novosibirsk. Bernhard Sawatzky was an early pastor of this congregation in the 1970s. It belonged to the so-called *kirchliche* (lit. church) branch of the larger Soviet Mennonite body in the USSR.

Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein

Rev. Willi Peters (1940-2016) Novosibirsk, Siberia: His Life and Reflections on Recent Developments in the Russian Mennonite Movement

Willi Peters was born in the Ukrainian Mennonite colony of Chortitza on April 30, 1940. Times were highly volatile, so Willi had little chance of growing up in Ukraine. After the massive German attack of June 22, 1941, an edict of the Supreme Soviet, issued on August 28 of that year, decreed that all ethnic Germans in western USSR would be deported eastward away from the approaching *Wehrmacht.*

By 1942, the year after the German attack, Willi's family found itself in Central Siberia in Tayshet, an important junction of the Trans-Siberian Railway 245 miles east of Krasnoyarsk. Willi's father, Jakob, had been forced into the *Trudarmee* (forced labour camp) and was working as a logger in that region, a situation that continued for years. The family was exceptionally fortunate in one respect: Jakob's wife Maria (nee Toews) and their children were allowed to live with him.

The family remained subject to the Soviet military regime (*(kommandatura)* until its dissolution in 1956. At that time the family was permitted to move southeast-ward to the industrial city of Angarsk, founded in 1948 near Irkutsk. It was there that young Willi received his education as an electrician. He was to remain an electrician for the rest of his life.

Willi's future wife, Maria Gunther, was also born in Chortitza in 1941. Her family was among the 313,000 Germans overtaken by the German army moving into the Soviet Union before they could be evacuated eastward. In 1943-44, Maria and her brothers and sisters fled westward along with the *Wehrmacht*, now in retreat. Maria's father had disappeared during the course of WWII and was never found.

According to the agreements at Yalta signed early in 1945, the USSR was permitted after the war to repatriate former citizens of the USSR from refugee camps in Western Europe. The 200,000 ethnic Germans forced to return eastward again included Maria's family who had been waiting in a refugee camp in Yugoslavia. They were relocated to Berdsk, not far south of Novosibirsk where Maria's mother was forced to eke out a subsistence living for herself and her children working as a maid for military officers.

By the late 1950s, the Mennonites of Central Siberia knew about the whereabouts of many members of their faith in the region. In the early 1960's Willi Peters began a search for a spouse, and ended up making repeated treks to Berdsk. In October 1967, he and Maria married and immediately moved back east to Angarsk. Their three children were born there: Anna in 1967, Andrei (Heinrich) in 1970, and Katarina in 1974.

Mennonites in Angarsk only had house gatherings for worship, so in 1976 the Peters family moved to Berdsk. Almost immediately they joined the large Mennonite congregation meeting in Novosibirsk. It was here that Bernhard Sawatzky (savadskii) was the pastor. Willi first became involved in the congregation by singing bass in the choir. (His son Andrei joined the choir in 1983.)

The Novosibirsk congregation had been registered since 1967. Its nearly 400 members met in the chapel of a renovated private house at Ulitsa Proyektnaya 13 on the western fringe of the city. Church services in Novosibirsk took place on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The group was connected to 40 smaller gatherings in Tomsk, Berdsk, Barnaul, and other sites throughout the region. Mennonite Brethren congregations were strong to the west of Omsk, but Novosibirsk was by far the largest gathering of

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kirchliche (lit. church) Mennonites in the area.

In 1986, however, emigration to Germany went into high gear. Retired seminary professor Walter Sawatsky has pointed out both positive and negative results of this development.

On the one hand, emigrants formed numerous relief/mission agencies and church associations which would become the primary Mennonite support for those left behind. However, on the other side, 90% of Russia's Mennonites, roughly 100,000 persons, moved to Germany during the last great exodus, and for the Russian Mennonite movement that was a nearly fatal blow for an ongoing presence.

The situation in the Novosibirsk congregation was no exception. In 1988, the leading pastor, who was also the choir director, left for the west. He was succeeded by Jakob Dirksen, who served for two years, accepting the call to leadership with some reluctance as he was already perched on packed suitcases. In early 1990, Dirksen departed, and in May of that year 50-year-old Willi Peters was ordained and commissioned as the new leading pastor. Since Willi had only begun preaching in 1986 and had not previously served as a pastor, his appointment was not entirely without dissent.

In the same year that he was ordained, Willi's firm collapsed. He stopped working as an electrician, but family and church members who had settled in Bielefeld, Germany provided support. Willi was able to travel and visitied Germany several times. In January 1997, he made a memorable trip to the Mennonite World Conference sessions in Calcutta, India with Nikolas Dueckman from the Evangelical /Mennonite Brethren congregation in Marianovka near Omsk.

The end began to arrive for Willi Peters when he suffered his first stroke. Consequently, on September 29, 2000 his son Andrei, who had been assisting him pastorally since 1997, was ordained as a second pastor. Two additional strokes and a heart attack followed. Willi could fulfill his pastoral duties less and less, but he continued to meet people in a friendly manner as he was able. Quite unexpectedly, on April 20, 2016, he passed away. His funeral took place two days later in Novosibirsk, and he was buried in Berdsk where his parents were also interred.

Through deaths and emigration, *kirchliche* Mennonite ministries have shrunk considerably in Siberia since 1990. Willi's entire family, however, has remained in Russia.

His son Andrei continues to serve as leading pastor in the local congregation at Novosibirsk, attempting at the same time to maintain ties with other smaller groups in Artyemsk, Barnaul, Grishevka, and Orsnyak. An even smaller group in Neudachino lost its leading pastor, Gerhard Neufeld, when an entire family of two dozen or more persons also moved to Germany. This group is totally independent. It has virtually no official contact with the Novosibirsk congregation, and it does not relate significantly to the local Evangelical/Mennonite Brethren congregation. A member of the congregation reads *kirchliche* sermons from a book to the small remaining congregation.

When the Novosibirsk house caretaker moved to Germany in 2005, Willi, Maria, and Andrei had moved into the former church quarters. Willi's daughter, Anna and her two children have also moved from Berdsk to the Novosibirsk church home. As of 2018 only daughter Katarina, who is single, remains in the family apartment in Berdsk. Willi's sister (a second Maria Peters) and Maria's sister, Anna Gunther, now reside in Bielefeld which directs a *kirchliche* Mennonite mission outreach in the Orenburg area of the Urals region.

That the entire Peters family should have remained in Russia to maintain the mission of the church and to serve as a beacon for Mennonites who are seeking contact with brothers and sisters in Siberia is a very rare phenomenon.

Why did Willi and Maria not join the trek westward? "We saw staying as God's calling," Andrei explained briefly. "My parents were convinced that we had been called to remain here and serve others who had not left. We were not called to be where life was most comfortable, but where God wishes to use us".

Andrei believed that his father was called because of his wide acceptance as a convinced Christian. He thought it was easy for his father to get close to his people. He was a gifted counselor and knew how to converse with people. People felt the love of God in his presence.

Willi Peters' devotion to his church, his Christian integrity, his sense of duty in good times and in periods of illness and adversity, and his refusal to abandon a Mennonite remnant of believers remain the lasting testimony of his life.

(See Peters on page 23)

(Peters from page 22)

Dr. William Yoder, Gvardeysk/ Moscow

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NEWS RELEASE—April 6, 2019

From: **The Russlaender Centenary Committee (RCC)**, a subcommittee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

The largest Mennonite immigration in Canadian history took place in 1923 and following years. During these years some 20,000 so-called Russlaender Mennonites arrived in places across Canada from war-torn Soviet Union.

To commemorate this migration, a national Russlaender Centenary Committee has been finalized. It is charged to provide leadership in the national reflection on this important event in Canadian Mennonite history. The committee consists of 11 representatives, at least one from each of the six provinces that constitute the members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. They include: Richard Thiessen and Cheryl Isaac from British Columbia, Ted Regehr from Alberta, Jake Buhler and Judie Dyck from Saskatchewan, Ingrid Riesen, Aileen Friesen and Royden Loewen from Manitoba, Marlene Epp and Henry Paetkau from Ontario, and Luke Martin from Quebec.

An inaugural meeting of the committee was held on November 15, 2018 in conjunction with the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada AGM. The committee at that point chose the name Russlaender Centenary Committee (RCC), and spoke about the vision for the 2023 commemoration.

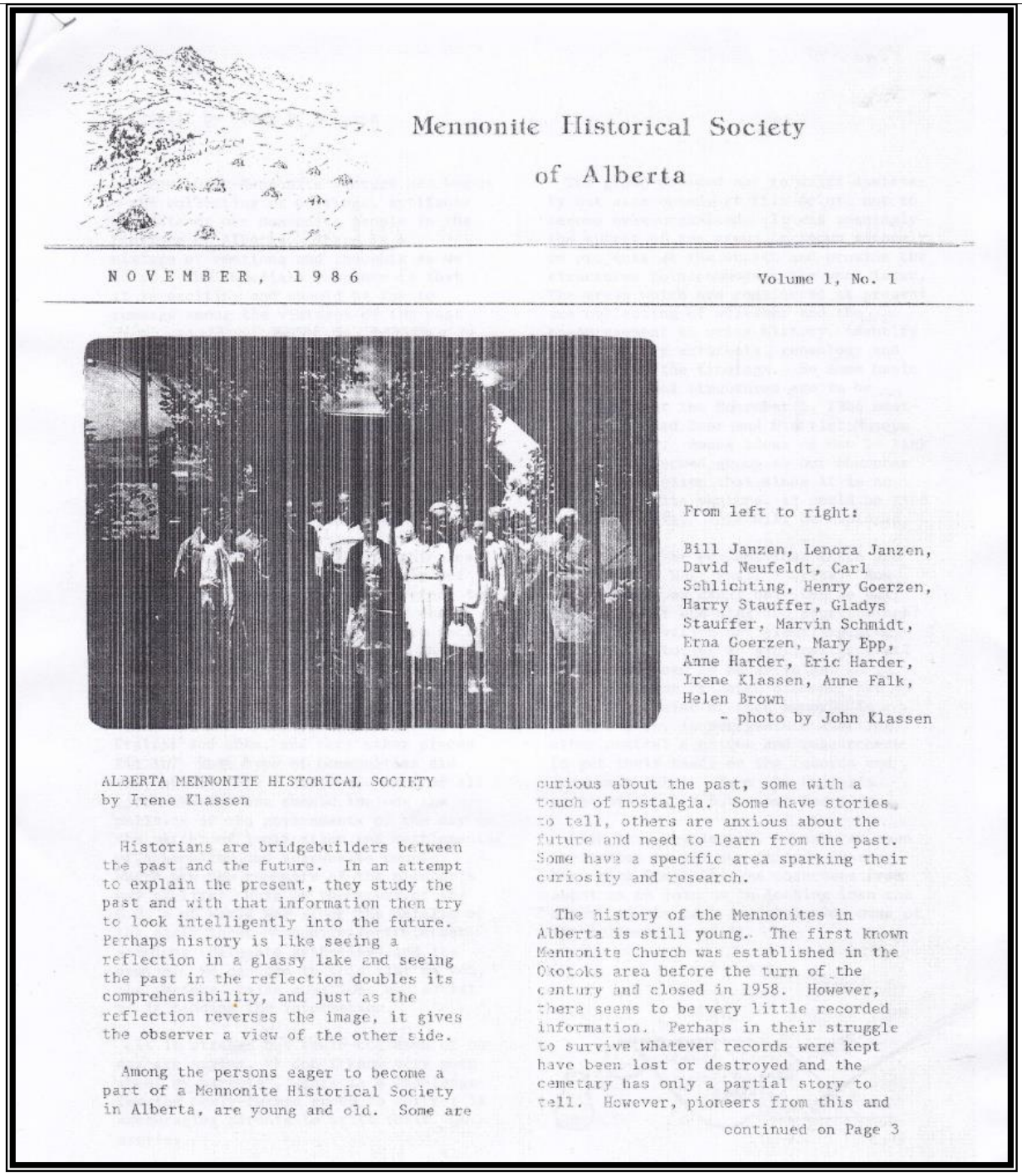
The RCC at that point committed itself to remember this migration in all of its dimensions. Those aspects include the suffering from war and famine, the horrific uprooting and stress-filled transplantation, the reliance on and testing of religious belief, the joy of finding a new homeland. But the committee will also consider this migration with respect to Canada in the 1920s. This will mean an acknowledgement that the immigrants came as settlers and thus farmed lands once the homeland of indigenous nations. It will also mean an acknowledgement that other would-be immigrants – African Americans, Chinese, Jews – were not welcomed at the time. Finally, the RCC will also remember those who stayed behind in the Soviet Union and endured the terror and uprootings of the 1930s and 40s.

The RCC will give oversight of events in 2023 from across the land, with events planned for places such as Montreal (Quebec), Vineland and Kitchener (Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), Rosthern (Saskatchewan), Taber (Alberta), and Abbotsford (British Columbia).

The Committee, under the leadership of Ingrid Riesen of Winnipeg, plans a special train trek from Montreal to Rosthern, with stops in Ontario and Manitoba, and a possible extension to Abbotsford. Initial conversations have been held with VIA Rail, and future talks are planned with CPR on how to operationalize this historic re-enactment. Talks have also been held with MCC Canada on how to use this year of celebration as a way of paying forward, with a special linked campaign for MCC's refugee program.

The RCC's next meeting will take place in Montreal in January 2020 on the occasion of the AGM of the Mennonite Historical Society.

Royden Loewen, interim RCC chair ❖



Mennonite Historical Society
of Alberta

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From left to right:

Bill Janzen, Lenora Janzen, David Neufeldt, Carl Schlichting, Henry Goerzen, Harry Stauffer, Gladys Stauffer, Marvin Schmidt, Erna Goerzen, Mary Epp, Anne Harder, Eric Harder, Irene Klassen, Anne Falk, Helen Brown
- photo by John Klassen

ALBERTA MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
by Irene Klassen

Historians are bridgebuilders between the past and the future. In an attempt to explain the present, they study the past and with that information then try to look intelligently into the future. Perhaps history is like seeing a reflection in a glassy lake and seeing the past in the reflection doubles its comprehensibility, and just as the reflection reverses the image, it gives the observer a view of the other side.

Among the persons eager to become a part of a Mennonite Historical Society in Alberta, are young and old. Some are curious about the past, some with a touch of nostalgia. Some have stories to tell, others are anxious about the future and need to learn from the past. Some have a specific area sparking their curiosity and research.

The history of the Mennonites in Alberta is still young. The first known Mennonite Church was established in the Okotoks area before the turn of the century and closed in 1958. However, there seems to be very little recorded information. Perhaps in their struggle to survive whatever records were kept have been lost or destroyed and the cemetary has only a partial story to tell. However, pioneers from this and

continued on Page 3

Glimpses of the MHSA Past

by Dave Toews

The cover of the very first issue of the MHSA newsletter (Nov 1986) features a photograph taken by John Klassen and an article by Irene Klassen. The first meeting was on Nov 1, 1986 in the District Museum in Red Deer. The people in the photo are indistinguishable but the names are clear on the right. Some of the organizers of the MHSA are diseased and others still very much involved. The four page edition also includes an editorial by Henry Goerzen and an article by John Dyck regarding the beginning of the Highland Mennonite Brethren Church, Calgary. Henry closes his editorial like this, "With this newsletter, we make an open invitation to all our friends in the Mennonite community and observers from about us to join us in looking into the mirror of the past and observing some of the reflections of it". This invitation still stands today. If you have stories about the early days of the MHSA, please feel free to share them with us. ❖