The MHSA Chronicle

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My Research Interests

by Tim Janzen MD

Tim Janzen

Since I will be coming to speak in Edmonton in November, Dave Toews suggested that I write an article that would provide additional background about my research interests, particularly for the benefit of those who don't know me very well. When I am not practicing medicine, I spend a high percentage of my free time doing genealogical research. In particular, much of my research involves genetic analysis and linking DNA segments to specific ancestors on my family tree. My father's ancestry is Low German Mennonite. My paternal grandfather Gustav Janzen's ancestors were from the Molotschna Colony and my paternal grandmother Margaretha Peters' ancestors were

(See Research on page 10)

A Letter from Kazakhstan

by the late Manya Sawatzky (1911 - 1989)

In 1980, Manya Sawatzky daughter of Heinrich Heinrich Sawatzky (1875-1927), sent a letter from Kazakhstan to her aunt Agatha Koop Sawatzky, who was living in Rosemary, Alberta. Agatha and her husband George had emigrated from Russia in 1926, and Agatha had done her best to keep in touch with the surviving Sawatzkys left behind in Russia. Manya's letter eventually made its way to Agatha's daughter Hilda, and then, in copy form, to Agatha's granddaughter Valerie Jensen, who is Manya's first cousin, once removed. Valerie was grateful to receive it and has submitted it to us for publication. Full of heartfelt

Manya Sawatzky
1911–1989

Sina, Sascha and Manya Sawatzky, Karpovka, Ukraine 1926

(See Kazakhstan on page 4)

In this Issue

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Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Fall Conference: DNA and Mennonite Genealogy

Date: Saturday, Nov 24, 2018
Time: 10 AM - 4 PM, Faspa lunch to follow
Place: Lendrum Mennonite Church, Edmonton
(formerly Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church)
Featuring: Tim Janzen MD, introduction Ernie Wiens MD

See the poster on the back page for more details.

Editorial Reflections:

by
Dave Toews

Dave Toews

As I write this I am also preparing for my trip to Honduras to go on a two-week learning tour with Canadian Peacemakers International (CPI). We have started and support computer-assisted learning schools and village building (modeled after Habitat for Humanity) in remote mountain villages in Honduras. This is not a travel log, but I will keep you informed of our comings and goings now that we are fully retired.

You our readers have requested that we make it easier to find where an article is continued on a following page. We will now use the method that most newspapers use, the "keyword" method. For example in *A Letter from Kazakhstan*, instead of writing (Continued on page 4) we will write (see **KAZAKHSTAN** on page 4) and on page 4 we will write (**KAZAKHSTAN** from page 1). I hope that helps.

A Letter from Kazakhstan is a long article, but we thought it was important to print it all in one issue. It is remarkable that the letter survived and was passed down in the Sawatzky family, and we are fortunate to have Valerie Jensen contribute it to Chronicle.

The story in this letter is close to my heart in that it somewhat mirrors the story of my relatives although they ended up in Kyrgystan rather than Kazakhstan. My Uncle Isaak and Aunt Tina Toews' and my Uncle Jacob and Aunt Anna Kroeger's families stayed behind in Russia by choice when the rest of the families emigrated to Canada in the 1920s. They went through all the horrific difficulties and trauma encountered by families such as the Sawatzkys: Stalinization, collectivization, dekulakization, purges, and WWII. After a trek to Germany, they were caught by the Soviets and returned to a labour camp/ gulag in the Vologda Oblast north of Moscow. In 1960 they were finally allowed to leave the camp and thereafter made their home in Kyrgystan. The miracle is that not one of them died through violence! Although one of my Toews cousins died of natural causes, everyone else survived through the Grace of God. This story will one day appear in this publication.

In *An Unusual Rural Mission and Resettlement Strategy,* Ted Regehr talks about four visionary preachers and leaders; Linford Hackman, Clarence Ramer, Paul Voegtlin and Willis Yoder. They set out in a Model A Ford, "the Salt Shaker" to check both missions and settlement opportunities in northern Alberta.

Halbstadt Tunnels by Alvin Suderman describes an amazing discovery. I was in Halbstadt in 2010 with the Mennonite Heritage Cruise and was completely unaware that these tunnels existed. It would interesting to go back there to explore.

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.

See you at the Fall Conference in Edmonton on Nov 24. ❖

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www.mennonitehistory.org

Chairman's Corner

by
Dave Neufeldt


Dave Neufeldt

Reflecting on the activities of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta over the last couple of years I am very proud of our recent accomplishments (or at least as proud as a Mennonite would admit to being). Attendance at our conferences has been increasing and we have been able to include some highly gifted speakers. Last fall's conference with authors Rudy Wiebe and Joy Kogawa probably set a record for attendance with about 200 participants.

Another success is our excellent newsletter, The MHSA Chronicle, which is published three times a year under the editorial leadership of Dave Toews. He is assisted by a team of people who look after the production and distribution. Dave ably solicits interesting articles from writers across the province. We are grateful to Dave, the publishing team, and the writers for making The MHSA Chronicle a success.

Other events over the past year include hosting the Along the Road to Freedom art exhibit at three venues in Alberta over about a seven-month period. In January we hosted the annual meetings of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada in Calgary. Thanks to everyone who helped with these events.

Although we have had good success with our conferences and The MHSA Chronicle, we have been less successful at recruiting new volunteers to help out in the archives and library. We have a core group of about five dedicated people who come out every Thursday to work in the archives. While this group continues to do a great job, some are giving indications that they may be "retiring" soon. Most are in their eighties with at least one approaching ninety! One project with which we could use help is in cataloguing our collection of maps. Another is in helping to organize the library. If you have an interest in either of these things, or if you just want to find out what is happening at the archives, come and spend some time there on a Thursday. The few times I have managed to get up to Calgary on a Thursday, visiting the archives has always been an enjoyable experience. Going through the material you will almost always find something interesting. There's also sure to be some stimulating conversation around the table. I encourage anyone interested to come and hang out there. We don`t need you to make a commitment. Just check it out. ❖

Letters to the Editor

Hello Dave, July 30, 2018

I read the Chronicle's main article on Dave Dyck and your editorial. Great work in harvesting memories and showing these ancestor's lives in perspective to ours.

I liked the bio at the end. Quite the adventurers you an Marion make!

Sincerely,
Emma Souriol

(Kazakhstan from page 1)

longing, and detailed reminisces back and forth in time, the letter has been edited somewhat in format and phrasing for inclusion in The MHSA Chronicle, and a few elements which are unclear in the narrative have been omitted. However, the words in italics below remain essentially Manya's.

Manya's father Heinrich Sawatzky
1875–1927

Although the letter recounts events from 1941 to 1980, Manya writes:

I have already filtered out the unimportant events and left only the truly important. I am talking about the war in 1941.

In 1941, Manya was living in the village of Karpovka in the Memrik Colony in the Black Sea area of Ukraine with her two children, her mother, whose name is not stated, and her sister Sina. Manya's husband had died in 1937, and his name and thus her married name remain unknown. Several months previously, her brother Sascha had been forcibly taken away to work in the labour army or 'trudarmee'. In addition to recounting her own experiences, Manya refers often to the events in the life of Sascha, his wife Liese, and their children .

Our beloved brother Sascha worked as a teacher in Donetsk (former Yuzovka, later Stalino). His first child Lili died at the age of one and a half years old. She was frail and beautiful, like an angel, and Mama always said that this child was not made for this world and so the angels took her one night. Two months later, little Klara was born. She was a strong and healthy child, but she died when we arrived in Kazakhstan.

We were working in the kolkhoz, plucking geese, when Aunt Lena came and told us that they took our beloved brother and sent him to the labour army (Trudarmee). I was devastated. I went behind a hut and wept bitterly. A fellow worker saw me, sat next to me, and cried with me without ever saying a word. A sorrow shared is a sorrow halved. Liese moved to her relatives in Alexanderhof.

In October of 1941, Manya, her remaining family, and the other Mennonites in Karpovka were ordered into cattle cars for a two-month journey to Kazakhstan.

Sina and I were working on the kolkhoz when we were informed that we had two days to get ready to leave. A few days before, the army had come through the village and camped in the nearby Memrik forest. On October 1 we slaughtered a pig from which the kolkhoz commission confiscated one quarter. We cooked borscht in the cauldron and, even though the neighbours helped themselves to some, we still had some left. We alone were five people who had to eat, so we packed ham and lard to take with us. Mama, Sina, and I had to bake and pack all day and night. We also had to bring the cow to Peter Wiens' stable. We were instructed to bring all livestock there. We prepared the stall with fresh straw for our cow.

(During the two months on the road, Manya lost her wallet with all her important papers, including the receipt for the cow.)

On October 2 early in the morning many trucks arrived from the nearby Russian villages to take us away to Shelanaja. We let the chickens out of the chicken coop and put out feed for them. The cat was sitting on the stove. We had to leave everything as it was. Two Russian men were waiting in front of the house for us to leave. I said to them: "Just go in already!"

The Russians stood at the side of the road watching us leave. Many were crying; some were pleased. Half the village was occupied by the Russians. They sat in German houses and gardens. It was like a funeral procession, our hearts breaking with grief, but we held our heads high.

While leaving the village, we heard a loud bang. Everybody looked for planes. We knew the sound of planes well. Many nights we would sleep in our clothes -- just in case. Our whole house would shake whenever bombs were dropped in the city of Stalino. Fire and loud noise all around us! It was the stable housing all the livestock! The stable had collapsed with all the German farmers' livestock inside.

Once we got to Shelanaja we slept outside the train station for two nights. We tried to make the children as comfortable as possible. We ate, watched and listened to the noise of war around us, and sang and prayed.

On October 4, we were put in a

(See Kazakhstan on page 5)

(Kazakhstan from page 4)

cattle car. Amongst all the women and children, there were also two men in our car: Heinrich Jacob Sawatzky and Isaak Born. One of the cars was bombed twice and completely destroyed. At first we were only moved at night, and during the day we waited at some railway station, but once we were far away from our village, the train moved day and night. Many times enemy planes flew very low over the train, forcing the train to stop. Then we would all run outside and scream with fear. As soon as the enemy saw the many women and children, the planes left. The train conductor would shout, "Wagonom," meaning "all aboard" and we continued our journey.

We were only fed at night. When we stopped at a train station, Heinrich Jacob Sawatzky and Isaak Born would pick up the food and distribute it among us. The children were always hungry. They supplied us with small iron ovens for cooking. We took turns to cook for ourselves and our children.

In November 1941, the Mennonites arrived in Pavlodar, Kazakhstan.

We were ordered to leave the train by either one side or the other. We had to sleep in the snow with our old mothers and small children without shelter for days during this cold November month. In the mornings, we were covered by a thick layer of snow, so we shook the snow off and waited for what would happen to us next. These horrible conditions affected my children's health. They started to get sick with diarrhea caused by contaminated water, malnutrition, freezing and so on.

One night they asked us to get on a boat, and I am at a loss of words to describe such misery. During the boat ride on the river Irtsch, we almost froze to death. The children, suffering from diarrhea, could not go to the toilet. Where would they go in order to use the toilet? The boat was overcrowded. We sat and stood like this throughout the night. At sunrise they ordered us to disembark.

Oh dear God, what a picture of misery!

O dear God, what a picture of misery!

We met people who had lived without shelter for more than a week; their teeth were chattering from the cold. They were black all over because of the coal they burned for warmth as they huddled next to the railroad tracks. We could only see the whites of their eyes and their teeth. It got a lot worse. The children were crying from the cold, and we also felt cold to the bone since we were not equipped with proper snow boots.

Several trucks passed us. There were so many people that the trucks could not take them all. With money, one could get onto a truck faster, but we had none. The drivers screamed at us that we should let them take the elderly and the children to the village and that we should stay with our belongings. Oh, but my Jascha screamed and cried: "Mama, I am staying with you! " But we were helpless, so they took the children and threw them onto the truck as if they were pieces of firewood. Mama and Aunt Lena with her two children went ahead on the truck, but Sina, myself, and many others stayed behind without knowing if we would ever see our loved ones again.

We were starving and built a coal fire to prepare a simple meal in a frying pan. We had some flour and combined it with the melting snow. I tried to form the dough, but it kept freezing to my hands, so we filled the pan with snow, added salt and flour and cooked flour porridge. We had to keep moving constantly throughout the long November night so that we would not freeze to death. Frau Peter Wedel was also there with her two children (one of her sons was mentally challenged). Everything on their bottoms was frozen solid and both children froze to death that night. We feared that all the children might die that night from the bitter cold.

We spent many nights worrying about our sick children and mothers. Then suddenly Aunt Lena appeared and asked: "Why are you not coming?"

"How are we supposed to leave if they are not taking us? " we replied.

"Your children are crying all through the night," she said. "They do not eat nor sleep; they are already very weak."

Suddenly Sina stood up and said to me, "Go to your children. It does not help anybody if both of us freeze to death."

So Aunt Lena and I took some food and started walking. It was almost sundown, and I was too exhausted and frozen to walk any further. Aunt Lena, on the other hand, was a strong walker. Whenever I complained and wanted to stop, she yelled at me, so I was quiet and kept walking. It was dark, and there was snow everywhere. Suddenly we saw the headlights of a truck in the distance. Aunt Lena ran in front of the truck and screamed loudly. The driver stopped and asked: " You dumb women, why are you on the road in the middle of the night? I am surprised the wolves did not get you yet." Oh God, that was another thing to worry about! There were a lot of hungry wolves in Kazakhstan.

"Follow this road,'" the driver of the truck told us, "and you will reach a small village." We followed his advice and reached a village at dawn. Unfortunately, it was not the village where we had hoped to find Mama and the children. We rested for a while and, once it was light out we continued our walk and reached our destination.

When I entered the house where Mama and the children were, I wanted to scream. They looked terrible! All the other people in the room cried and told me that they were so relieved that the mother of the little ones had finally come. My poor sick children were lying, or rather sitting since it was too crowded in the room to lie down, and had to go outside in that terrible cold to go to the toilet (it was not even a toilet). My poor son

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asked me: "Mama, what will happen to us?"

We were sitting in this room for several days. Suddenly, the authorities came and told us to get ready. *We sat on a crowded truck and travelled with severely sick children for 40 kilometres in -40C weather. The children had lost consciousness when we finally reached a small crowded house filled to the brim with people. We laid the children on sacks with our belongings, only to experience real misery -- the lice almost ate us alive.*

My Minka so silently left us during the night, taken away by angels to be with God. But my dear little Jascha, oh how he fought until the end. Before nightfall, God stopped his suffering and took him also in his arms.

Since we had been forced from our home on October 2, we had not heard from Sascha. Now we mourned our father, my husband, and our small children whom we had to bury under the snow along the way.

Life in Kazakhstan continued to be extremely difficult for those who had lived to reach Pavlodar. Nonetheless, the survivors gradually began to build a new community in their new situation, and new friendships began to be formed.

Once we ate all the food and had nothing left to eat, so we exchanged my father's clothes and my children's clothes for food. Every time I saw the Kazakh children running around in my children's clothes, my heart bled with sorrow and pain. The Kazakhs showed empathy and did not insult us. When we cried quietly, an old Kazakh woman and her seventeen-year-old daughter would sit and cry with us.

Other German men and children lived with Kazakhs as well: Frau (Mrs.) Hammsche, Gerhard Blerk and his daughter with her two children, and Aunt Tina with Sincha. So we were not alone amongst all the Kazakh families. We were able to get together and communicate, sing and play games.

We also found some joy among all the misery. One day, we were very sad and our hearts were bleeding from the sorrow when suddenly a corpulent woman stood in front of us and said: "Hello did you hear the news, more Germans have arrived?" That was a wonderful surprise and we were full of joy. The corpulent woman came in the evening with her children Gerhard, Marie and Jakob, aged 18, 15, and 10. She explained to us that they had lost everything. The daughter, Marie, looked at us and said to her mother: "Such beautiful girls with their long braids." We sat together and shared our sorrows and suffering. This woman played guitar, and her youngest son played the balalaika. It moved everybody to tears when he started to play. (We were very poor, but this woman, our Aunt Dick, whom we nicknamed 'Aunt Corpulent', always supported us. She was very courageous and lived for over 20 years in Pavlodar. She was a terribly big woman, barely able to stand or walk. She kept herself busy with needlework.)

When March of 1942 arrived, Manya and her family concentrated on trying to find out what had happened to her brother Sascha since he was taken into the labour army.

Soon spring arrived and March 1 was a beautiful day. Frau (Mrs.) Hammsche came to see me and we comforted each other with long talks about our loved ones and the evilness in this world. We saw many starving people dressed in rags begging the Kazakhs for food, so we went outside and asked them where they were from and if they were German. They told us that they were Germans from Alexandrowka, our neighboring village. I asked the young men if they knew Alexander Davidovich, and if he was still alive and what about Sascha. They nodded their heads and told us that both were on their way. Oh, what a joy, he was alive!

It was lunchtime and the meal was prepared, but we wanted to wait for Sascha. We stood in the middle of the street and waited for him. It started to get dark, but there was no sign, so we ate and went to sleep with heavy hearts. If he was at all as thin and weak as the boys we saw earlier that day, then he might not make it.

We had informed the Kazakhs that we were expecting our brother any day, and so our house was always full as they wanted to share the joy and happiness with us. The old Kazakh woman whose house we shared kept on telling us that she would fatten our brother up so that he would become strong again. On the evening of March 2 there was still no sign of our beloved brother. We were very worried because it was a stormy night.

*On March 3 the storm got even worse. We had lost all hope and cried with grief. The Kazakhs felt our deep pain and sorrow and cried and grieved with us. Suddenly, Frau (Mrs.) Hammsche came running. She ran so fast and had to catch her breath before she could speak. "What are you doing out in this kind of weather?" I asked. She only replied: "Get dressed and come with me!" I fo*llowed *her and saw two men standing in the middle of the road. They seemed lost. The storm was so strong that we had to lean into it in order to be able to walk.*

When I turned the corner, I almost ran into somebody. Dear God, it was our Sascha with Johann Hans Sawatzky. My heart jumped with joy and I said to them: "Hold on to me. I will guide you to our Kazakh's home." When we arrived at the house, my long-lost brother saw my mother and screamed: "Mama!" The Kazakh men started to cry and shared our happiness.

Sascha was very happy to be home and said: "Yes we made it home but there are so many on the roads and they are without shelter and food." I got

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(Kazakhstan from page 6)

dressed instantly and went outside only to come back with three boys who we knew from our old neighbourhood. The young men and ourselves were overjoyed, but now we had to feed them and we had barely enough for all of us. However we still had a few things that we could exchange for food, so Sina went and tried to find something to eat. It was not easy since the Kazakhs were very poor themselves. Sascha had some potatoes that he found on the side of the road in his backpack. They were frozen, but we made a soup out of them and added some beets. This soup tasted delicious even without parsley, bay leaves, or onions. After the meal, we brought some hay and fell asleep. (We were full of lice, but we did not have as many as the Kazakh families.)

Manya pieces together details gleaned from Sascha about his journey by train from the trudarmee and about how he discovered the family's whereabouts.

He had to board a crowded cattle car in Sverdlovsk. Everyone stood next to each other as there was no room to sit. When they reached a train station, women would greet them with potatoes and other produce, whatever they could carry.

When he and a small group of young men were leaving the town of Pavlodar, they noticed a sleigh coming towards them, and it was none other than Isaak Born. He was from our village. He had heard that weak and hungry people were on the road, so he asked his supervisor for a sleigh and a sack of bread He greeted all of them warmly, gave them each a piece of bread and asked if they would be able to walk to his house. He gave them directions and told them that his wife was waiting for them. He then continued in his sleigh to find more people along the road. When the group reached his house, his wife had a fire going and a kettle with hot water for tea was waiting for them. They ate and sat by the fire. Isaak Born arrived with more people, fed them, and when the morning came, gave them each a piece of bread, so that they could go and find their loved ones. (We were all very touched by that story and asked ourselves: Was that Jesus' doing? I was naked and you gave me clothes. I was hungry and you gave me food.)

The little group was already on its way when they met Heinrich Sawatzky's wife, Sara. Sascha asked: "Are my loved ones all dead?" "No," she replied. "Manja's children died but yours, Mama, Sina and Manja are alive."

Sina, Sascha and Manya Sawatzky, Pavlodar 1967, with Sascha's grandson Sascha

Manya relates that Sascha recovered slowly from his ordeal.

He seemed like he was not there at times, somewhat in another world. It was all too much for him and the past months of despair and misery took their toll. He slept sitting up, showed signs of swelling in the face and hands and did not talk. We were devastated and heartbroken, especially Mama. I told her to be patient and to give him time. He would soon be himself again. The old Kazakh woman fed him day and night and slowly he recovered.

After two weeks, he remembered that he had a wife, so even though we wanted him to stay with us, we had to let him go. We gave him some food to eat on the way, and he left with his walking stick in one hand and a bag of food in the other. When we saw him leave to go to his home that was 50 kilometres away from us, we felt as if we were saying good-bye forever.

But then, just two weeks later, we were looking out the small window overlooking the steppe when we noticed somebody walking towards us. The person was coming closer and closer. Oh, what joy! It was our Sascha. Liese was tall, thin, and her face and arms were black from the coal fires.

Now together again, Manja and the family turned their attention again to the difficult demands of everyday life.

We were forced to get food by working or by exchanging whatever we could spare. Sometimes they gave us something to eat during our work and other times not. Then we just got tea and some milk from a milk can that was passed around. They were very stingy with their bread.

We cooked twice a day. It was my job. The Kazakhs owned two big round stone plates with a hole in the middle. We had to sit on the floor with the plates between our legs. The wheat was poured into the hole. We had to turn the top stone plate and flour would pour out from the stone onto a cloth. We took turns and worked day and night to get some wheat, millet, or sometimes just bran as a reward. We would roast the wheat, grind it into coarse flour, add some milk, and then we cooked kasha. I must say it often tasted better than roasted chicken.

I had to distribute the little food we had evenly between all of us. I always gave an extra spoonful to Sascha (sorry but I have to cry when I think about that). I would also

(See Kazakhstan on page 8)

(Kazakhstan from page 7)

give him the casserole and he would scrape it clean.

Soon the family began to work on the kolkhoz and were no longer living with the Kazakhs.

Manya, Sascha and Sina 1969

Sascha started to work by getting loads of hay for the livestock with two oxen and a sleigh. Whenever he finished delivering the first two loads, he came to eat with us. He was always cold and hungry. I always left a small bowl out for him at night, and every morning the bowl was empty He needed more than just a small bowl of food; he needed some fat in his diet. We had a fire going and had coffee and porridge ready for him. We put his shoes and socks on the stove to dry. It was a joy to watch him sitting in the corner on a bed of hay, eating and feeling completely content. He never complained and was always friendly and kind.

We often went out in the field to collect weeds for fuel. Some days Sascha brought home dried manure from the livestock since it burned well. One day the Kazakhs wanted to bring a dead horse into the house so that it could defrost. Sascha went outside and convinced them otherwise. He spoke kindly and politely with them, and I could almost read their minds. They must have seen us in a different light and realized that we were just people like them, hungry, cold and desperate. The same evening, their brigadier general came and informed us that they would not put the body of the horse in our house because Sascha had asked them so nicely not to do it.

As spring sowing time approached, the family were ordered to live on the steppe.

Mama was not able to move; she had muscle pain. Sascha led the cows with Mama lying in the cart. There was still a lot of snow on the ground. Liese, Sina and I walked alongside the cart. When we arrived at our destination, the small hut was flooded with melted spring snow. We carried buckets of water outside, but it did not make much of a difference. Sascha went to the local blacksmith and asked if we could stay there. The blacksmith shop had no windows and the door was missing so it got quite cold at night, but it was dry. First we took care of Mama, making sure that she was comfortable. Then we all lay down on the floor and slept. The next morning, Sascha had cleaned our little hut on the steppe in the meantime, much to our relief. He also built a fireplace for a cauldron he got from the Kazakhs.

Manya and Sina Sawatzky their house, Pavlodar 1964

Sooner or later, the Kazakhs arrived on the steppe too with their families. Sowing time was a sort of festivity for them. Many lived in small primitive cottages, others in Semljankas (earthen huts). They sowed the seed by hand, returned to their villages when sowing was done, and came back at harvest time.

Life was good. Sascha, Liese and Sina had to work in the fields with the oxcart from morning until nightfall. When they left, I took a bucket and a sack and collected wheat ears, and God gave us many ears that spring. My face and hands were covered with mosquito bites, but I had to keep working and when the bucket *and sack were full, I went home. Did I just say "home"? Was it really my home?*

Next, I threshed the ears, made flour and prepared food for when the others came back from the fields. The stove was a simple hole in the ground with iron bars across it so that I could place the cauldron on top. Dried manure worked great as fire starter. There was plenty of it on the steppe since a lot of cattle were grazing there. When it got dark, I could hear Sascha and Liese singing, and I was so happy to see them. Liese said that they would not have found their way home in the dark without the glow of the fire.

Meanwhile, Mama, Aunt Tina and Sinchen were in the village protecting their cottages against looters. We sent

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(Kazakhstan from page 8)

them some wheat from time to time. Mama and Sina were knitting for the Kazakhs in exchange for food. Sina was suffering from a bad toothache and there was no doctor to help her. She rinsed her mouth with whey every night and it got slowly better.

Manya and Sina Sawatzky their house, Pavlodar 1971

In 1943, Manya and Sina were taken away to serve in the labour army, and the family was broken up again. The two sisters did heavy construction work in a gulag near Archangel in the far north of the USSR.

In 1943, Sina and I were forced to join the labour army (Trudarmee) . When we left, our beloved mother walked behind the cart on which we were travelling and cried bitterly. It was like a funeral procession. Fortunately, Sascha and Liese, who was pregnant, stayed with her. At first we were comforted knowing that Mama was not alone. However, Sascha had to leave in the month of August, and then Liese decided to go and live with her mother. Then Mama had to live amongst Kazakhs without any provisions.

The journey to Arkhanagelsk took Sina and I 14 days. It is hard to describe how much we suffered in the Trudarmee those first few years. The first two years, Sina and I worked at Plant 5 (Zavod). I was then transferred to Plant 1 (Zavod). We had to unload large heavy wooden beams and saw them into boards. On construction sites, we had to carry bricks and heavy brick clay up to the second floor all day long. That is very hard labour that is done by cranes and heavy machinery nowadays. We suffered from constant hunger and dampness, swollen limbs, and the worry about our poor mother who was forced to beg and whose health was also declining.

Baptist church choir Pavlodar 1970
Sina front row, second from left

I stayed seven years and eight months in Arkhangelsk, and Sina stayed 12 years. I was finally discharged from the labour army on the June 28, 1950,and, from there, I went home. I saw Mama six months before she died suddenly of a heart attack in January, 1951. Sina was discharged from the labour army (Trudarmee) in 1955.

In 1960, Manya and Sina moved into a small cottage Manya had bought, and the two of them lived there for the rest of their lives. Manya recounts that in 1970 Sina was a member of a Baptist church choir, which suggests that worship in the Mennonite faith was not easy to achieve. Sina died in Kazakhstan in 1988, and Manya died in 1989. Sascha worked as a teacher in Tschernajanka. He lived with a Russian woman. They owned a cow and pig and had a comfortable life.

Manya's funeral, Pavlodar 1989
Hans Sawatzky standing

Manya ends her letter to Agatha with this haunting summary of her experience:

In the year 1937, on December 22, my beloved husband died. On October 2, 1941, we had to leave our home, and this was followed by a two-month trek into the unknown. On November 20, the same year, my two children, Jascha age 10 years and 3 months and Minka aged 8 years and one and a half months died. Both on the same day.

Since the ground was too frozen for digging, we had to bury them under the snow without a coffin, without words spoken, without songs of grief, but with bleeding hearts, we said good-bye. The sun disappeared at the horizon, but grief and sorrow stayed with us. In four days, we had to leave this place to never return. The wound would eventually heal, but the scars will stay forever.

(See Kazakhstan on page 10)

(Kazakhstan from page 9)

There is a grave in Astrakhan deep in the desert. And when I think about it, I fear my heart will break. For my children lie there so young and beautiful and I will never see them again. God took my children, away from this life of pain and sorrow. They will live on with him until all eternity. They are calling to us from above, "Come join us in our sweet repose!" My pilgrim tent was built on solid rock with the most lovely decor. So in my dream, God came and took the rock from underneath me, leaving me behind in despair. Dear God, you break my heart. Take me with you, with you towards heaven. Reunite me with my loved ones. Let them be my rock. Let me be with them until eternity.

Sleep well until all eternity, my beloved. God is your saviour and has your well-being in mind.

Our ever-gracious God shields us with his wings of love in our time of sadness and sorrow. Now we are old and weak and lonely, longing for our loved ones, but God never left us before and will not leave us now. He promised to lift our spirits and to carry us, even when we are old and grey. A promise we believe even after seven years in the Northland. Even though we were naked, starved, bruised and full of lice, God's words were clear and made us forget our misery. God is our saviour; God helps us in our time of need. Dear God, I beg you through the blood of Christ, please help us also in our last hour.

Valerie Jensen, the contributor of "A letter from Kazakhstan – the Life of Manya Sawatzky", was born in Brooks, Alberta in 1951. Her father Philip Jensen was a grain farmer, and her mother Agnes Sawatzky Jensen was the daughter of Agatha Sawatzky to whom Manya wrote her letter in 1980. Valerie's family would frequently visit her grandmother Agatha and grandfather George at the Sawatzky farm in Rosemary, Alberta. Valerie lived on a farm until age 17 when she left to attend the University of Calgary. ❖

Valerie Jensen

(Research from page 1)

from the Chortitza Colony, so I have personal interest in both of the two major mother colonies where Mennonites lived in South Russia. If you would like to review my father's ancestry in the Grandma database, my Grandma number is 234160.

My mother's ancestry is almost entirely from Great Britain. I also have one Native American ancestral line. If you are interested in reviewing my maternal grandparents' family tree in the FamilySearch Family Tree, feel free to review it at https://www.familysearch.org/tree/pedigree/landscape/L853-3HJ. Particularly exciting for me recently was the discovery of the maiden name of one of my mother's great-great-great-grandmothers, Elizabeth Meeker (b. ca 1793). This discovery in conjunction with both autosomal and mitochondrial DNA data allowed me to trace Elizabeth's lines back an additional five or more generations on almost all of her ancestral lines.

I have a strong interest in many areas of science, particularly ornithology. I particularly enjoy birding trips where I try to see or hear as many bird species as feasible in a single day. I am a member of the Oregon Birds Records Committee that reviews all of the rare bird sightings in Oregon.

In the area of Mennonite genealogy, I particularly focus on Russian Mennonite genealogy. I have a website at http://www.timjanzen.com that contains links to many different Mennonite genealogical resources. I particularly enjoy helping acquire new genealogical materials from archives in Russia and Ukraine and extracting the most valuable genealogical data from those records. You can see many of the extractions and transcriptions I have done over the years at http://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/russia. I am also a strong supporter of the Grandma database and have entered much data into that database over the years. In particular, I added the vast majority of the ship passenger list data into the Grandma database for Mennonites who immigrated to the United States in the 1870s and 1880s.

There is a lot happening currently in the field of genetic genealogy. I am trying to apply my knowledge of genetics to the field of Mennonite genealogy as much as feasible. Glenn Penner and I coordinate the Mennonite DNA project at www.mennonitedna.com. We have been trying to recruit people

(See Research on page 11)

(Research from page 10)

to do Y chromosome and mitochondrial DNA testing for genealogical purposes. We are particularly trying to find male representatives of relatively rare Mennonite surnames to do Y chromosome testing.

In addition, I am collaborating with Tony Isaac on a large Low German Mennonite autosomal DNA project. See https://mennonited-na.azurewebsites.net for the website that we are developing. We have over 500 people with Low German Mennonite ancestry in that project at this time. New members are always welcome. The goal of these projects is to further our knowledge of our Mennonite origins. For the Y chromosome project, my goals are to determine the areas of origin in Europe for each of the Mennonite surnames and to determine how many progenitors there were for each surname. For the autosomal DNA project, my goals are to verify the genealogical linkages in the Grandma database for all of the participants as much as that is feasible and to make new genealogical discoveries based at least in part on the autosomal DNA data. ❖

An Unusual Rural Mission and Resettlement Strategy

by Ted Regehr

Ted Regehr

We have in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta a large 120 cm x 80 cm poster documenting an unusual Mennonite rural mission and resettlement initiative. The poster contains pictures and commentary of a trip to northern Alberta in the winter of 1946 by four visionary preachers and leaders: Linford Hackman, Clarence Ramer, Paul Voegtlin, and Willis Yoder.

As members of what was then the Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference (later renamed the Northwest Mennonite Conference) and as teachers in Winter bible schools, these men were concerned with rural mission. Questions had been raised in the schools about Christ's missionary mandate for those Mennonites in remote rural settlements who were committed to a theology demanding separation from various "worldly" influences, practices, and activities.

Three of the explorers who travelled to the Peace Country in 1946. C.J.Ramer, Willis Yoder, Paul Voegtlin, Lindford Hackman took the picture

The four men were also concerned with how young Mennonite men returning from alternate service in the war would find jobs or to earn the necessary resources to buy and equip their own farms. Military manpower, armaments, and food requirements had temporarily ended conditions of the Great Depression. However, there were fears that the economy would revert back to those desperate conditions when the soldiers returned and war industries closed their doors. Those who had done alternate service for which they received minimal salaries would find it more difficult than most to rebuild their lives.

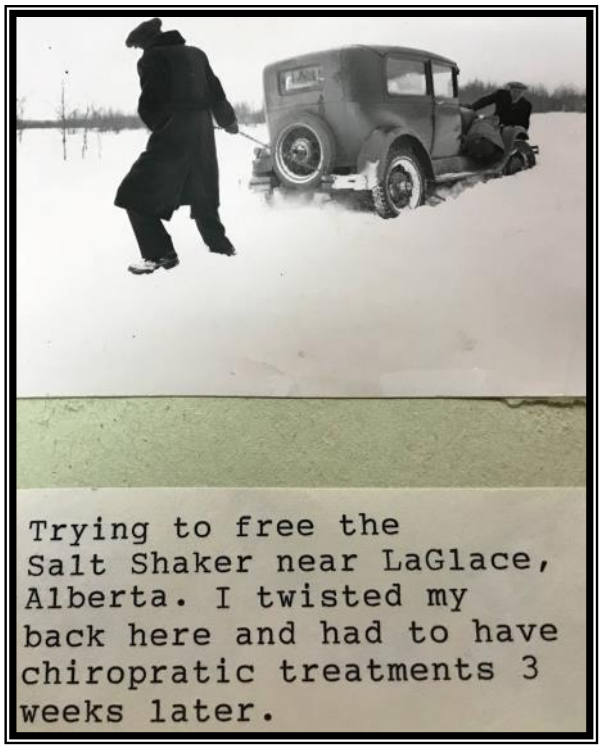
Land was apt to be scarce too. In earlier times, Mennonites and others

(See Mission on page 12)

Publications for Sale:

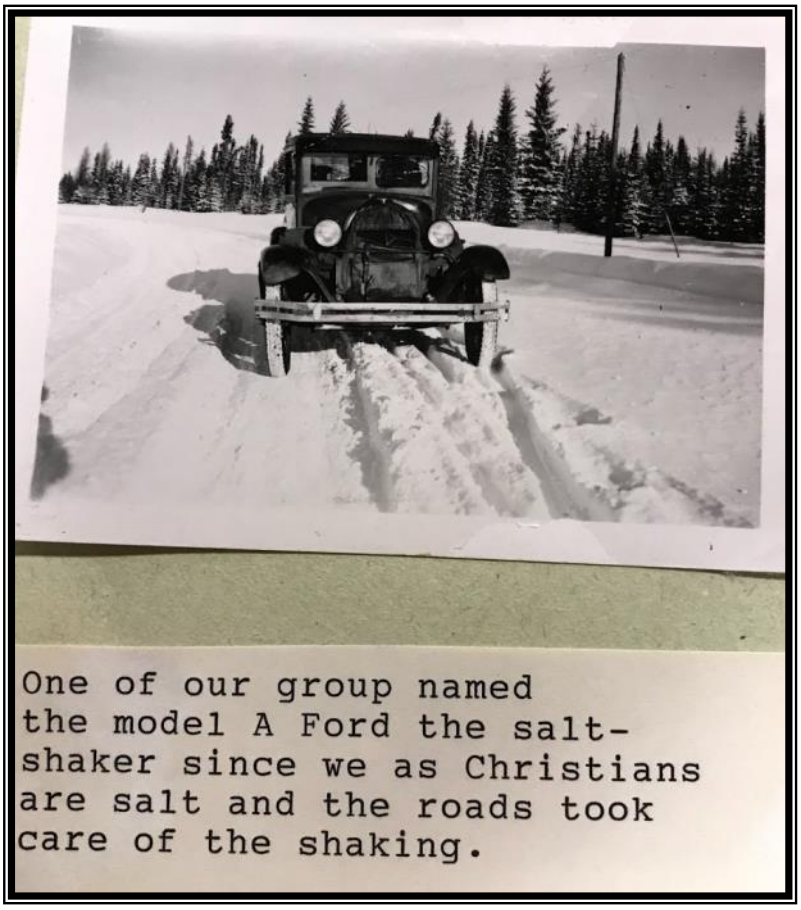
- Letters of a Mennonite Couple-Nicolai & Katharina Rempel $25.00
- On the Zweiback Trail $30.00
- Kenn Jie Noch Plautdietsch $18.00
- Through Fire and Water $25.00

(Mission from page 11)



intent on preserving an agricultural lifestyle had settled on a series of western settlement frontiers south of the border. However, in 1893 the American historian Frederick Jackson Turner had declared that the era of open land on western frontiers in the United States was over, and Mennonites, like many other American settlers, had turned northward to Canada where open land was still available. By 1946, however, it was clear that there were no longer large tracts of open land in Canada either where Mennonites could secure new reserves on which they could build their traditional communities.

When the war ended, where colonization lands were still available, governments gave priority to the colonization and resettlement of returning veterans rather than those who had done alternate service.



There was not much help for this situation coming from Mennonite sources either. In 1943 The Mennonite Central Committee, based in Akron, Pennsylvania, had commissioned J. Winfield Fretz, then a young university trained Mennonite sociologist, to report on prospects for new post-war Mennonite colonization projects. His report advocating land settlement initiatives based on mutual aid programs was fairly optimistic, but little came of it. In similar fashion, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization provided very little help. It was more interested in promoting the migration and settlement of desperate post-war refugees from the Soviet Union who had been evacuated by retreating German forces in the last year of the war.

There was thus good reason for Mennonite leaders to worry about the prospects of Mennonite young men returning to their Alberta-Saskatchewan Mennonite Conference congregations. There were, however, reports of some settlement possibilities in northern Alberta. As a result, Hackman, Ramer, Voegtlin, and Yoder set out in a Model A Ford in the depths of winter to check both missions and settlement opportunities there.

The men envisioned a program that would combine settlement of returning Mennonites with an innovative missions outreach. They did not look for places where church members could form their own churches and communities with as little contact as possible with outside "worldly" influences. Instead they travelled to some of the most difficult unchurched communities, where Christians could illustrate in their everyday lives the benefits of wholesome and supportive Christian living.

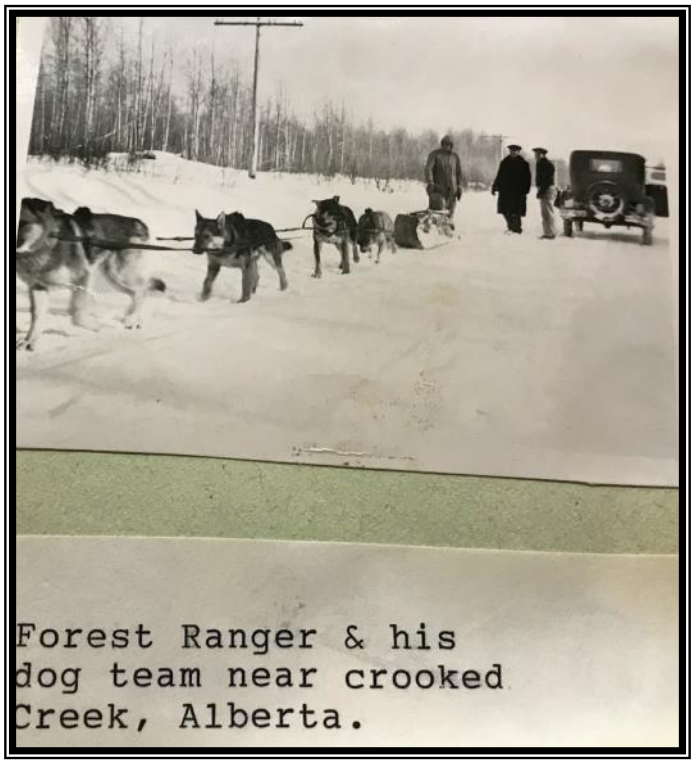
(See Mission on page 13)

(Mission from page 12)

Fellowship, teaching, preaching and the establishment of churches would, of course, enhance the effort.

This approach stood in sharp contrast to earlier Mennonite settlement and colonization ventures and to the initiatives of some other evangelical Christian groups who sent evangelists to troubled communities in the north on short-term missions to preach fire and brimstone sermons, bring as many listeners as possible to a quick conversion experience, collect generous offerings, and then move on. That left too many of the abandoned new converts confused and disillusioned. A Christian witness would be more effective if Christians lived with the local people, shared their burdens and hardships, provided help and support as needed and, when asked, offered advice, guidance and shared their spiritual beliefs and commitments.

A significant number of potential pioneers from the established Mennonite settlements in Alberta took up this challenge to settle in various tough northern communities. Most took up whatever work they could find while meeting initially in small Christian teaching and fellowship groups. Some organized, taught, or became school administrators. Daily Vacation Bible Schools were organized, often supported by volunteer workers from the south in search of northern experiences. For many the move into needy northern communities became a long-term commitment.



Arrangements were also made whereby young men subject to the American military draft could discharge their alternative service obligations teaching, working as social workers, or providing other essential services in needy communities and institutions. Many caught the spirit of exemplary living and chose to remain long after completing their alternative service obligations.

The result was the establishment of numerous teaching, preaching and fellowship centres . These included Bluesky, Eaglesham, Calling Lake, Our Mile Creek, Culp, Smith, Grand Prairie, Imperial Mills, Ansac, Marlboro, Edson, and Robb. Many grew, prospered, and became established churches. ❖

Correction: June 2018 issue of The MHSA Chronicle

On page 5 it states -

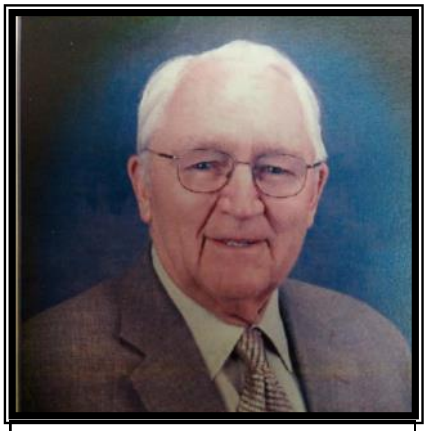
In 1918, Stalin came to power in the Kremlin.

See correction below.

Stalin was appointed general secretary of the party's Central Committee in 1922. He subsequently managed to consolidate power following the 1924 death of Vladimir Lenin through suppressing Lenin's criticisms and expanding the functions of his role, all the while eliminating any opposition. By the late 1920s, he was the unchallenged leader of the Soviet Union. He remained general secretary until the post was abolished in 1952, concurrently serving as the Premier of the Soviet Union from 1941 onward. Source: https://worldhistoryproject.org/topics/joseph-stalin

Christmases I Remember

by the late Helmut Janz (1930—2016)
Written December 25, 2004



Helmut Janz

Although it is probably hard to imagine even old people like me were little children once and we have memories of that time. Let's go back about 65 years or so. We, the Janz family, consisting of father, mother, grandmother, six boys and some hired help lived on a farm in East-Prussia, Germany.

The days before Christmas the older boys were eagerly trying to memorize a poem to recite on Christmas Eve. You see, the main Christmas celebration was always on Christmas Eve, December 24th, and the following two days were kind of anti-climactic, at least for us children. On Christmas Eve (Heiliger Abend) we children were sitting in the living room impatiently looking at the French door with lace curtains to the adjoining room. We were not allowed to go in there because the Christmas tree was being set up and decorated. Once in a while we heard the tinkling of bells and ornaments as they were hung on the tree, or when the door was quickly opened and closed we got a whiff of that wonderful fir tree scent. Then after a while we could see the electric light in that room turned off, and one after another the glow of wax candles as seen thru the curtains, until finally the door was opened. We could enter and could see, smell and experience the Christmas tree.

On a table nearby were a number of so called "Bunte Teller", plates with goodies, one for each person, mostly home-baked cookies, some marzipan, maybe a few store-bought candies. There was also a present for everyone. At this time we were allowed only to stand and look. We had an old gramophone, which was wound up. A scratchy record of "Stille Nacht" and "O du Froehlich" sung by a very high soprano voice was played. Dad then read the Christmas story and we sang a few Christmas songs with mother leading. After that is was the boys turn to recite their poems, hopefully flawless without prompting or stuttering, and we were handed our present and our "Bunte Teller". That plate of goodies had to last throughout the whole Christmas season. Oranges were not as abundant as here, only very few were bought.

Dad then pulled out his pocket knife, ceremoniously peeled one orange and each boy got a segment or two. The gifts consisted of either store bought toys, hand-me-down toys from other relatives, homemade spun and knitted woolen stockings, not socks, and sweaters that Oma had knitted. We boys did some scroll-saw work for each other and for our parents.

On Christmas Day we gathered as a family for devotions, as it was too far, 20 km. and too cold to drive by horse and carriage to our church in winter. We sang the old Christmas songs and then Dad read a sermon from a thick sermon book. As we grew, the older boys were allowed to read the Christmas story and the sermon as well. I remember the Christmas sermon well, taken from Luke 2:11. "For unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord", and then each word was expounded upon.

These were memories of a child in expectation, awe and wonderment. Let's refresh some memories of a teenager thrust into the turmoil of war.

Exactly 60 years ago when we were refugees. In October of 1944, we had to leave our home and farm and were now unwelcome guests in two little upstairs rooms in a farmhouse far away from our own place. Dad was not with us. He had to serve in the Volkssturm, a kind of civil defence unit in the last stages of the war. So there was Oma, mother and the six boys ranging in age of 5 to 14 years. We still wanted to celebrate Christmas, but we needed a tree. So the three oldest of us set out to a forest, a fair distance away, equipped with a hatchet to cut down a tree. To us it was quite an adventure. For once, we were doing dad's job. Secondly, it wasn't exactly legal to go into somebody's forest, and thirdly, it was rumored that Russian partisans had been parachuted into the area. We found a little tree, chopped it off, almost got lost on the way home, took it up to our little attic room, planted it in a pail of sand, tied it down with string so it couldn't fall down. We always had to move it around at bedtime to make room for us to sleep. But we celebrated Christmas without dad, with a Charlie Brown tree, and a few small presents. But the message was the same: "For unto you is born this day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

A third memory comes to mind and I see myself as a young

(See Christmas on page 15)

(Christmas from page 14)

man looking into an unknown future in a new land. Fifty-three years ago, in 1951, after a 16 day long, stormy ocean voyage, we had landed in St. John, N.B. on the 23rd of December. On Christmas Eve we were on a CPR train in a special so-called colonist car, heading west, destination Coaldale, AB. My diary on December 24th reads something like this, translated from the German: "Now we see Canada all covered in snow. Dad is train sick already. We are passing a lot of little villages with small cottages, the land is flat, with large pastures. Today we celebrated Christmas on the train. We did light a few candles, sang some Christmas songs and gave each other gifts of apples and chocolates. We drove thru Montreal and bypassed Ottawa". We arrived in Coaldale on December 27th.

Three different Christmas memories from long ago. Since then we have celebrated a lot of Christmases with our families, with our children and now even our grandchildren, all because: " For unto us was born that day a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord". ❖

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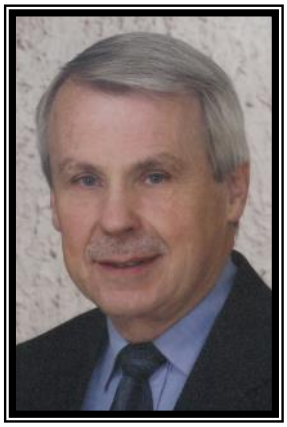
Halbstadt Tunnels

by Alvin Suderman



Alvin Suderman

The "footprint" left by Russian Mennonites in Ukraine is still discernible 100 years after the upheaval of revolution and war that marked the 20th century. Part of that footprint consists of buildings and villages vacated by Mennonites when they emigrated or when their homes and properties were expropriated by Soviet authorities.

For example, the current inhabitants of Molochansk (called Halbstadt in pre-revolutionary times) are generally aware if they are living in a home built by Mennonites. They have learned to recognize the brick pattern (Flemish bond) that Mennonites used in construction. While they may be fuzzy about some of the details of the original owners, they are happy to share rumours about the "Mennonite times" with tourists passing through the area today looking for evidence of their Mennonite forebears.

One of the rumours in Molochansk is that a wealthy Mennonite businessman by the name of Heinrich Willms had a tunnel built to connect his mansion located in Neu-Halbstadt with his seven-storey flourmill located in Alt-Halbstadt. This tunnel supposedly ran through the Mennonite Credit Union building, located about half way between his house and his business.

My wife Mary and I learned of this rumor in October 2016 during the weeks we spent in Molochansk working with the Mennonite Centre, the non-profit humanitarian aid agency located in the renovated former Mennonite Girls' School. The tunnel rumour piqued my interest, and I began to make some inquiries about the Halbstadt tunnels.

Mennonite Credit Union building in Molochansk (Halbstadt), now a Sports School, showing repaired stairs.
Photo credit for all four images: Alvin Suderman.

The excuse to start an investigation into the tunnels began quite innocently. We were off to the Molochansk Sports School to look at some completed projects that had been financed by the Mennonite Centre and to talk to them about some pending requests for assistance. Mennonite Centre has been a sustaining sponsor, enabling many of their athletes to attend major sporting events. Even though the Sports School has equal numbers of boys and girls in their program, their funding requests have often favoured the boys. We wanted to encourage them to give equal opportunity for girls to attend major sporting competitions. In the process, we got to see the repaired steps that we had helped pay for as well as an energetic workout by a gymnastics class. In this class, I recognized the daughter of Tanya, one of the centre's employees. After many years of working for us, Tanya reluctantly acknowledged that she had a Mennonite grandmother with the surname of Peters.

The Molochansk Sports School is located in the former Mennonite Credit Union. The tunnel rumours always focus on this building, and we took advantage of our visit to ask if we could examine the basement to see if there was any sign of them. The staff was quite obliging and went to get the keys for the basement doors. We toured every room in the dark basement and heard many stories from the staff about why the tunnel entrances were now bricked over.

After our tour, I decided to get a sense of the distances between

(See Tunnels on page 17)

(Tunnels from page 16)

these buildings. Using the Mennonite Centre's van, I drove from the old Franz and Schroeder machine factory (now a furniture factory and very close to the Willms mansion) to the Credit Union (Sports School); the odometer showed 0.8 kms. I kept driving and reached the Willms flourmill (now a milk canning operation); the odometer showed the total distance travelled to be 1.9 kms. That is a long tunnel!

The story from the staff at the Sports School was that many tunnels converged on the Credit Union building. There definitely was one that came from the former Mennonite Boys' School across the street. It was big enough for a carriage to pass through. The staff told us of an incident in 1982 or 1983 when some young boys decided to explore these tunnels. The tunnels had already been filled with sand, but the boys found a way of digging through the sand. One boy got lost and was not found for some hours. After that, the local authorities decided to get rid of the potential problem. The tunnel entrances in the Sports School were sealed with a brick wall.

The Sports School staff told us of another tunnel entrance that was built as part of a Mennonite house. It had its own unique gate and entrance. It was common for Mennonite homes to mark the entrance into their yard with large pillars or even a brick gate. A large ornate gate gave some indication of the wealth of the individual residing at that residence. This residence had an old brick gate marking just the entrance to the tunnel.

Our guide ran off to get the lady of this house to come and unlock the gate. She soon appeared

Tunnel entrance in the basement of the old Credit Union building, showing an opening in the bricked-over section.

with her key, but the old large padlock would not budge. This was not seen as a problem as they summoned a man from another residence, and he came with a large set of pliers. He gave the rusty old lock a couple of whacks, and soon the key did its job, and the gate was open. We stood there at the top of the stairs wondering who among us would be the first to venture down into this crumbling infrastructure.

I figured I was the most expendable and was the first to venture down the staircase. When I looked back, I could see that others were also curious. Soon everyone else in our group followed. Nobody wanted to miss this unique opportunity.

The stairway led to several large warehouse rooms that were totally underground. They were completely lined with brick, even the ceiling. One room had a sort of chimney that we were told functioned as an "elevator." Goods could be directly raised or lowered into the underground warehouse by rope and pulley. We did not explore every room, and I cannot say with certainty whether the underground warehouse led to other tunnels, but I suspect it did not. What amazed me was the expense the owner had gone to in creating this underground storage space. The large rooms were dry with no sign of flooding. It was an amazing discovery.

The underground warehouse was not a secret room. The entrance is not hidden and stands facing the street. Also, the actual construction could not have been done in secret; it required the excavation of the hole in which the warehouse was built. Probably, the excavation was done in stages. After the area spanning the circumference of the warehouse was cleared and partially dug out leaving a large mound in the center, an archway of bricks was placed on the mound of dirt. Then, once the mortar between the bricks had set, the earth under the bricks would have been excavated and placed on the archway, leaving an underground chamber ready to have the brick floor and walls installed. In the days before mechanized excavation, it would have been a labour-intensive undertaking.

(See Tunnels on page 18)

(Tunnels from page 17)

Gated entrance at street level to stairs leading down to an underground warehouse.

What was most amazing about our exploration that day was the cooperation of the local people in Molochansk. When the Mennonite Centre opened 15 years ago, we were met with suspicion and some hostility. Not so anymore. The lady who owns the former Mennonite house on the property we were exploring was very open. She claimed to have documents for the house going back to 1905. I asked to see these and hoped it would give some clue as to who had lived there. At one time, this request would have been met with the suspicion that we were trying to reclaim the house. Now she just went to get her papers. Unfortunately, she could not find them, but promised to show me, if she did. She did mention that she believed the house had a connection to the Herman Neufeld family that owned the local brewery.

Inside the underground warehouse, showing passageways to several rooms and daylight from the "chimney" visible at the top.

On our walk home from this discovery, we met Vitally, the former maintenance man at the Centre. We told him of our exciting adventure, and he started sharing his own stories of tunnels. He told us of two former Mennonite homes that were located beside the Mennonite Centre but have now been demolished and replaced by a large apartment building. These homes had been connected by an underground tunnel. He told us of a tunnel connecting the Willms mansion and the nearby former Franz and Schroeder factory and said that he had walked this tunnel himself.

So, is there a tunnel running from the Willms mansion all the way to the Willms flourmill 1.9 kms away? I still do not know for sure, but I am developing a theory. I suspect that there were several tunnels connecting houses along the route from the Willms mansion to the Credit Union building and then on to the flourmill. Even the Mennonite Centre, which is on that route, has a tunnel-like structure running under the building and parallel to the roadway. This could at one time have been connected to adjoining buildings. However, I am beginning to think that maybe there were so many tunnels that the locals began to exaggerate.

I would love to understand why these Mennonites made this large investment in underground structures, tunnels and warehouses. Was this also done elsewhere in Ukraine? There are many

(See Tunnels on page 19)

(Tunnels from page 18)

questions still to be answered. Since I left Molochansk last fall, more information on potential tunnels has come to light. During my next visit to Molochansk, September through November 2017, I plan to invite the townspeople with some knowledge of the tunnels to the Mennonite Centre for an information-gathering meeting. I'd like to invite the Mayor of Molochansk, too. He is a strong supporter of the Mennonite Centre; maybe, with his authorization, I'll be able to explore further the network of tunnels said to stretch from the Willms mansion to Willms flourmill.

Alvin Suderman, is retired from a career with the Manitoba Government, having worked in the areas of information technology and business development. He lives in Winnipeg Manitoba with his wife Mary. He enjoys travelling, reading, grand parenting and dabbling in history. Alvin and Mary have served for six terms as volunteer North American Directors at the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt) Ukraine. Alvin is also a board member of the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine (FOMCU) and currently serves as the board chair. Alvin and Mary worship at the River East Mennonite Brethren Church. [nephew of the late Vic Suderman, Edmonton]

If you have information about the "Halbstadt tunnels," Alvin would like to correspond with you. He can be reached at <asuderman@mymts.net>.

This article previously appeared in the Mennonite Historian, a publication of the Mennonite Heritage Archives and The Centre for MB Studies in Canada. Reprinted with permission. ❖

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Fall Conference

DNA & GENEALOGY

Lendrum Mennonite Church
11210 - 59 Ave NW
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Saturday, Nov. 24, 2018

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1:00 - 4:00 PM and Q& A
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Introduction: Ernie Wiens MD

Guest Speaker: Tim Janzen MD

Tim Janzen is a family practice doctor at South Tabor Family Physicians in Portland, Oregon. He has had an interest in genealogical research for over 35 years and has particularly been involved in Mennonite genealogical research for the past 20 years. For the past 13 years Tim has been using DNA analysis to help complement traditional genealogical research. Glenn Penner and he are the co-administrators of the Mennonite DNA project at www.mennonitedna.com. Tim has a strong interest in many areas of genetic genealogy, particularly in regards to phasing and autosomal DNA analysis. He is a consultant to many genetics companies regarding their features related to autosomal DNA. Tim helps lead the advanced genetic genealogy classes in Portland, Oregon for the local International Society Of Genetic Genealogists group and has given many presentations at genealogy conferences about genetic genealogy.