



# Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XX Number 1

March 2017

## Lorne Richard Buhr

(Mar 25, 1942—Oct 2, 2016)

Librarian and Church Worker

by Victor G. Wiebe



Lorne Buhr

Lorne Buhr was my brother-in-law, friend, and co-worker. It was in 1970 while studying chemistry in Ontario that I was introduced to him by his sister-in-law Erna Klaassen, my girlfriend and later wife. Lorne was in Toronto with his wife Katherine (Erna's sister) and their infant son Patrick. He was studying librarian-

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## Mennonite DNA Surprise

Henry Epp



Henry Epp

During the last decade or so, personal DNA analysis focusing on locations of origins has become available to everyone. I am one of the people who has taken advantage of this opportunity. What do such analyses mean to our Mennonite genealogical studies and our history as well? This paper addresses the meaning of DNA locational analysis to Mennonites interested in their historical and genealogical background, using my own analysis as an example. My background as a biologist helps in this regard.

One observation important to this discussion is the slow Germanization of Mennonites dating from their migration from Holland to Poland and East Prussia in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and to the Ukraine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This Germanization process continued into the first half of the twentieth century. I, for example, grew up believing that ethnically I was German with some Dutch ancestry. This was taught to me by my father, who firmly believed it to be so. My first language was Low German, but my second language was regular or High German, spoken in church because the Bible we used was written in

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## Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Annual General Meeting and Spring Conference

Date:	Saturday, April 29, 2017
Time:	Annual General Meeting - 10:00 AM
	Spring Conference - 1:30 PM
At:	Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury Alberta

### Featuring:

- Wes Berg: "The Mennonite Sngerfest from Davlekanovo to Didsbury".
- Laura Dyck: Reflections on "Songfest Past".
- Jake and Elsie Wiebe: Choir director & Accompanist - Songs from previous Songfests

See the poster on the back page for more details

## Editorial Reflections:

by

Dave Toews

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) a self-replicating material present in nearly all living organisms as the main constituent of chromosomes. It is the carrier of genetic information.

(English Oxford Living Dictionary Online)

Henry Epp has written of his *Mennonite DNA Surprise!* Surprised that his DNA analysis indicates that he is 60% Scandinavian but only 22% Dutch German, also 12% English, 5% West Asian, and 1% East European, in his well-researched article. Henry goes on to speculate how this may have



Dave Toews

come about in his well researched article.

My surprise may have been even bigger than Henry's when I received my analysis from The National Geographic Genographic Project. The analysis shows that I am 43% British Irish and, like Henry, only 22% Dutch German. I am also 22% Scandinavian, 6% Asia Minor, 5% Siberian Russian, and 1.1% Neanderthal. My wife Marion, who is of Germanic Catholic heritage, much to her surprise is more Dutch German than I am. (48% Dutch German, 24% Scandinavian, 22% East European, 5% South European and 1.2% Neanderthal).

I think there are several things we have to keep in mind here. DNA analysis is not genealogy, and our known Mennonite history and genealogy is only about 500 years old. According to my National Geographic DNA analysis my paternal ancestry reaches back more than 100,000 years. That leaves a lot of room for speculation.

Victor Wiebe and David Jeffares have written fitting memorials honouring our longtime friend and

colleague Lorne Buhr. Of all the generosity that Lorne displayed during his lifetime there is one that has not yet been mentioned, and that is that Lorne regularly gave the gift of life. He proudly wore the lapel pin of a longtime blood donor.

Roger Epp has written his family's story of coming to Canada from the US amid the turmoil of WWI and of the abuse of conscientious objectors at the hands of the US army. Roger goes on to warn us that we should not allow ourselves to be drawn into the current political campaigns that give permission to draw hard lines between those who are insiders and those who are not.

Henry Dick has penned of his personal boyhood experiences with German POWs during WWII. Peter Penner has ably reviewed Katie Funk Wiebe's memories of her father and Alice Unrau has reported on both the MHSC and the MAID meetings.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor and articles. Contact Dave Toews at [dmtows@gmail.com](mailto:dmtows@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is May 1, 2017. See you in Didsbury on April 29th.



### Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter

ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

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Subscription is through membership (\$30.00/year or \$500.00 lifetime).

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### MHSA Executive

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### 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

## Chairman's Corner

by

*Dave Neufeldt*

This year Canada is celebrating its sesquicentennial. I enjoy celebrating occasions like this and look forward to the events that will be happening this year. One of my earliest childhood memories is of going to see the centennial train that travelled across Canada fifty years ago. I have a distinct image of the train at the Lethbridge train station. Unfortunately I don't actually remember much from inside the train. What I remember is standing in line forever waiting to get into the train.

Sometimes our memories of events are not completely accurate, especially those of a four year old. My memory was of standing in the hot sun, but some quick research



**Dave Neufeldt**

told me that the train was in Lethbridge in March. I was probably standing in the cold wind rather than the hot sun. I was uncomfortable, but my memory of the reason for my discomfort became distorted over the years.

In thinking about the sesquicentennial and the centennial train I wonder how our interpretations of history have changed in the last fifty years. Would the things selected for the centennial train still be things we choose to highlight today? Although history is based on facts, it is really our interpretation of those facts that we record as history. We make choices in what we consider to be of historical significance. As a historical society, we make those choices in selecting which things we preserve in our archives, or which things we include in this newsletter.

At our spring conference last year we chose the theme of "Rethinking Mennonite History in Light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission". The residential school story is probably not something that was included in the cen-

tennial train. Even though we now recognize the great historical significance of the residential schools, would we choose to include this story in a sesquicentennial train? So often we choose to ignore or even hide the darker aspects of our history. It is important to include the less positive parts of our history if we are to learn and grow from it.

This year our spring conference is being held at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury. The theme of the conference is the Mennonite Sangerfest history. Wesley Berg and Laura Dyck will provide reflections on the history of songfests. Jake and Elsie Wiebe will lead a choir for the event. I don't know if there are any darker undercurrents of the Songfest history. Regardless, I'm sure it will be a very interesting event. Please join us in Didsbury on April 29. ❖

## Singers Invited to MHSA Spring Conference

Singers are invited and encouraged to come out on Saturday, April 29 at 12:30 pm to practise the songs listed below with Jake and Elsie Wiebe and perform at the afternoon MHSA program.

Come Christians Join to Sing – Mueller/SATB

Be Strong in the Lord – Tom Fetke/SATB

Children of the Heavenly Father Arr. Edwin Liemohn/SATB

Blessed are They – David Haas/Choir/Congregation

Ein Reines Herz – arr. Esther Wiebe SATB

**See poster on back page for more details.**

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that language. I developed a feeling that holiness could be properly expressed only in High German. Eventually I had to make adjustments as did other Mennonites.

So, what is DNA? It is short for deoxyribonucleic acid. What is that?



**DNA Symbol**

Simply put, it is a double helix molecule of nucleic acids, two strands wound around each other with connecting links like a spiral ladder. The links are ladder-like rungs of four nucleotides, adenine (A), cytosine (C), guanine (G), and thymine (T). These nucleotide rungs, along with the entire double helix, are capable of splitting down the middle, each half replicating a mirror image basic reproduction in which a DNA strand duplicates itself. The arrangement of the nucleotides influences the ability of messenger RNA (ribonucleic acid), a simpler molecule, to direct the production of proteins in cells, creating the building blocks for life's processes. The purpose of DNA in life forms, then, is to store, replicate,

and transmit *information*, the very beginning of life's processes. The arrangement of the nucleotides connecting the nucleic acid spirals constitutes the information base, different arrangements catalyzing different proteins. Changes that arise over time in the arrangement of the nucleotides are called mutations.

Where is DNA found in the human body? It exists in the body's cells, and is so small that an electron microscope rather than a light microscope is required for details to be seen. Each human body cell, with the exception of the red blood cell, has the full complement of the individual's DNA. Accumulations of DNA molecules are mostly lumped into rod-like bodies called chromosomes, which exist in the nucleus in the centre of the cell. Smaller accumulations of DNA form inheritance units called genes, often not easily physically defined. DNA also occurs in the cell mitochondria, the very small organelles that control metabolism (the slow burn of glucose sugar releasing energy).

Chromosomal DNA is inherited normally via an egg cell from the female and sperm from the male, each of which contains half of the DNA in a normal body cell. Mitochondrial DNA is inherited directly from the female only, with no separation of the DNA into two reproductive cells.

In each human cell there are 46 chromosomes, 23 pairs. The genes in the pairs are exactly alike with some mutational exceptions except for the XX and XY pairs. The female has two X chromosomes, while the male has an XY pair. When reproductive cells are produced via a process called meiosis, the parent cell divides without chromosome duplication. Instead, one of each pair forms the nucleus of the reproductive cell, which means that each such cell has half of the parental chromosomes. Hence, when the reproductive cells get together to form a fertilized egg or zygote, the new cell, which is the beginning of a new person, has the full set of 23 pairs of chromosomes, half from each parent. Important for DNA analysis is the fact

that Y chromosome DNA is inherited only via the male parent, just as mitochondrial DNA is inherited only from the female parent.

One genetic fact that makes some genealogists nervous is rapid loss of a person's genetic materials over a few generations. Any person's mother or father has 23 of his/her chromosomes. A grandparent likely had one-half of 23, which is 11 or 12. Great grandparents had no more than half of that, 5 or 6 chromosomes. Any fourth generation back in time ancestor had at maximum only 2 or 3 of a contemporary person's chromosomes, and any fifth generation ancestor had only 1 or 2. Six generations back, you are lucky if any of your ancestors had even one of your chromosomes. Given an average of 30 years per generation, we are looking here at no more than 180 years. In other words, any person listed in a genealogy longer ago than that shares almost no DNA with the descendant in this generation doing the investigating.

Given no surprises, future and past generations are reasonably certain of having and having had your Y chromosome if you are male and having and having had your mitochondrial DNA if you are a woman. The same does not hold true for regular chromosomal DNA. Hence, if a genealogist goes back into family records 5 or 6 generations, the chances of the contemporary person sharing any of that person's genetics are very limited, with these two exceptions. This information is very important to internalize when trying to decipher the meaning of a DNA analysis.

At this time, let us turn our attention to commercially available

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family DNA analyses. What can we learn about ourselves from such analyses given the fact that actual genetic relationships vanish very quickly over just a few generations? One of the most useful results of such a personal DNA analysis is points of origin, where on the map of the world one's DNA has come from originally. DNA analysis in this regard concentrates on identifying what are called genetic markers, chromosomal and mitochondrial individual characteristics that are easily identified across populations. If the vast majority of the genetic materials bearing a special marker occur in one particular spot, say Yorkshire, England, then you can be pretty certain that that is the point of origin of that genetic mutation, and at least a portion of your ancestry comes from there. Locational loci for genetic materials are identified in percentages, so if 40 percent of your DNA shares markers with those found most frequently in Friesland, you can be certain that a good portion of your ancestry originated there.

Early in 2015 my wife Lois had my DNA analyzed by a commercial firm. The results constituted one of the great surprises of my life. With some exceptions, my genetic background was not even close to anything I had ever imagined it to be from what I had been taught by my parents. My father was dead wrong — I am not even close to being mostly German.

So, what am I, genetically speaking? Here are the background percentages and a few other facts:

- 60% Scandinavian
- 22% Western European (Dutch, Western German, the two not being distin-

guishable)

- 12% English
- 5% Western Asian (Turkish, Uzbek, and the like)
- 1% Eastern European (Polish/Ukrainian)
- Mitochondrial DNA: extremely average European Y chromosome: seems to have originated somewhere in the south-central part of England.

When extrapolating from one individual's DNA profile, such as mine, some generalizations regarding the European Mennonite ethnic community are possible:

- European Mennonites are far from ethnically uniform. They are clearly a mixture of many peoples, not even all of them European.
- How can I be 60% Scandinavian when I don't look remotely like one? The answer may lie in my 5% Western Asian genetic background. From the time I was a child I often wondered if some of my ancestry did not come from outside of Europe, given my permanent tan and jet black hair (not now). How this genetic material got into my ancestors obviously is a mystery, and any explanation can be only speculation. We do need to remember, however, that a hundred and more years ago, abandoned and orphaned children were often picked up by established families, as there were no state-run institutions to look after them. Such children would become regular members of families and marry into the general population.
- Where could the Scandinavian DNA have come from? Well, Denmark isn't really far away from Holland, my more immediate ancestral location according to records. I would guess that the Dutch population at large likely has a lot of Scandinavian DNA common knowledge is that the Vikings really got around.
- Yet there is another possible explanation for the preponderance of Scandinavian DNA. I am 12% English, with an English Y chromosome. A possible explanation for this apparent anomaly is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England persecuted Anabaptists, sometimes killing them. We know that some English Anabaptists escaped to Holland and became members of Mennonite communities and eventually families. However, England was heavily occupied by Danes for centuries, so it is entirely possible that some of my Scandinavian DNA actually comes from England.
- It comes as no surprise to me that I have a considerable infusion of Western European, Dutch and German, DNA. That is simply what I had expected. Since my family name is Flemish in origin, it is not a stretch to consider that most of that 22% is actually of Dutch rather than German origin. I may be more Asian genetically than the German I always thought I was!
- The 1% Eastern European is a bit of a surprise too. Given where my ancestors lived for hundreds of years, I would have thought there would be more, but the figures don't lie. Very little intermarriage with Polish and Ukrainian neighbours must have occurred in my extended family at least.

How does this information relate to other Mennonites? I don't really know, as most haven't had their DNA analyzed. A good guess would be

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that I am fairly typical. Several conclusions are possible.

- Mennonites of European ancestry tend to be quite varied genetically. We are less Dutch-German than many of us would have guessed.
- The Germanization of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and the first part of the twentieth century was a cultural, not a genetic, phenomenon.
- Mennonites have tended to incorporate refugees and needy children into their communities.
- Mennonites have tended to be ethnically inclusive, not exclusive, while demanding adult baptism as a requirement for community membership.

*Henry Epp is a retired environmental manager and interdisciplinary scientist with an avocational interest in history and archaeology. Henry has numerous publications in these fields of endeavour. He lives in Calgary with his wife Lois where they attend Trinity Mennonite Church. Henry has served on the executives of the Alberta Society of Professional Biologists and the Saskatchewan Archaeological society.* ❖

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ship. Lorne and I became friends, and later I also switched to librarianship. Upon graduation Lorne began his career at the Murray Memorial Library at the University of Saskatchewan (SK) and a few years later I joined him, and we worked there together.

Lorne had an amazing rapport with co-workers. He was an effective listener, and I often saw staff seeking him out for advice or simply to sound out life issues with him. He was very observant of people and their interactions with others and sought cooperation and understanding. He made the workplace more pleasant and effective.

This talent for observing and interacting with people made Lorne an active contributor to the many organizations he joined, and he joined many. For example, in the early 1970s he served as Secretary to the Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan. He was Secretary of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (now Mennonite Church Canada) from 1974 to 1976. He also served as co-editor of The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter for several years, wrote a number of articles, for the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, and served for a long time on the Board of that organization. It is safe to write that if Lorne joined an organization, he served it with vigour and skill.

In the political arena Lorne was fascinated with politicians and always ready with comment and debate on them and on issues. This interest, I think, was an important feature in his choice of career. Working first as Government Publications Librarian at the University of Saskatchewan and then as Alberta's Legislative Librarian, he became an expert on information published by governments. He wrote two pamphlets: *Alberta Cabinet Ministers 1905-1989* (Edmonton, 1989) and, with Catherine Jenner, *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms: Sources of information* (Edmonton, 1982). In 1982

he also taught a government publications course at the Faculty of Library Science, University of Alberta.

Writing captivating articles was a particular talent of Lorne. He carried out effective research when needed and had an instinct for truth and accuracy, overcoming prejudice and self-interest in reporting, in commenting, and in writing. Perhaps his journalistic outlook of observing, talking, and writing was begun early in the early 1960s, when he worked as copy editor of *Der Kinderbote* (Rosthern), and he later wrote many articles for Mennonite periodicals. He was very effective and entertaining with short pieces such as personal letters, letters to the editor, and analyses of current events. I think he saw his mission as helping and informing accurately.

Lorne had many interests including music (he was a singer), travel, and history, but his life was anchored in two profound passions. One was for the church and its faith in Christ. He was baptized in the Zoar Mennonite Church, Langham, SK, the church of his birth family, and later held active membership in the Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon and First Mennonite Church, Edmon-

ton. The second passion was his family: his wife Katherine, on her passing his wife Linda, and his three sons, Patrick, Andrew and Michael. He was never



Victor G. Wiebe

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far from them took delight in their development and particularly enjoyed following the lives of his two grandchildren. He held great joy in the family's ongoing accomplishments.

Good-bye Lorne, brother-in-law, friend, and co-worker. I live in the hope of seeing you again.

*Victor Wiebe is a retired University of Saskatchewan librarian. His interests include Mennonite history and analytic bibliography related to Anabaptist-Mennonite publications. He writes articles for GAMEO the online encyclopedia and has served on the Board and in the Archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan. Victor and his wife Erna worship at the Mount Royal Mennonite Church, Saskatoon. ❖*

## Remembering A Learned Champion Of History And Fact

by David Jeffares

Early on Sunday morning, October 2, 2016, an exceptional friend of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA), Lorne Richard Buhr, completed his journey of life on earth and joined the members of his extended family and circle of friends who had preceded him to their everlasting home in Heaven. Lorne, who was 74 years of age, had been struck with Parkinson's disease, but he refused for the longest time to let it interfere with his thinking and interest in life.

Lorne was predeceased by his parents, Cornelius and Anne, his siblings, Donald, Florence, Alvin, Louis and Bunny and, finally, his



Lorne Buhr

first wife, Katherine. He is survived by his second wife, Linda, his three sons, Patrick (Evelyn), Andrew (Cari) and Michael, and his two grandchildren, Thomas and Natalie. Lorne's funeral service, which took place in First Mennonite Church on Saturday, October 15, 2016, was an ample attestation to the amazing degree of esteem in which Lorne was held by each and every one of the mourners who journeyed to the service to say good-bye to an extraordinary gentleman and to offer prayerful support to the family, relatives and friends

he had left behind. As the quote said in his funeral brochure, "There is no tragedy in the completion of a life well-lived. But, there is loss." Lorne's loss is felt by so many, not the least of whom are those who worked with him while he enthusiastically supported the value of keeping Mennonite heritage alive and well.

A combination of creative writing and scholarly commentary was always a hallmark of anything Lorne wrote. His study of librarianship acquired in Toronto was put to lasting use when he was Government Publications Librarian at the University of Saskatchewan and later when he became Alberta's Legislative Librarian. When I worked in the Alberta Department of Education, I remember well how thoroughly Lorne monitored the use Members of the Legislature made of the library and the extent to which their research did or didn't measure up! To cite certain current meanings attributed to fact, Lorne would never have tolerated "alternative truths!"

Lorne exhibited an uncanny ability to attune himself to all manner of events that were going on locally, provincially, nationally, and the world over. His strongly held Christian faith allowed him to debate, contemplate, and challenge the best of thinkers. He was able to analyze human behaviors and help bewildered politicians and church leaders in their quests for understanding, and the outcomes he accomplished were often not those that were expected!

Even though Lorne loved to sing and had deep interest in fine music, enjoyed travels, and was firmly anchored in the wonder of history, two principal passions always rose to the fore in his life. One was his faith, anchored in the Mennonite churches of which he was a member. Even more pronounced in the way he lived his life, however, was his family; every member occupied an important place in his day-to-day life. Lorne's way of life was exemplary, a way we, the readers of this tribute, might do well to emulate.



David Jeffares

*David Jeffares, who has retired from a career of teaching and school administration, lives in Edmonton with his wife, Dolores. He enjoys grandparenting, antique cars, volunteering and serving on the MHSA board of directors. David and Dolores worship at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton.*

❖

## “The hand of our power should close over them at once”: Remembering the flight from Oklahoma

By Roger Epp

*The following article is adapted from the talk given at a Klaassen family gathering in Saskatchewan on August 6, 2016.*

### I

In 2018, our family will mark 100 years since my grandfather, his brothers, and their father arrived in Canada. We can easily take our family story for granted, something so well-rehearsed that it contains no more surprises. Or we can treat it as a kind of *Heilsgeschichte*, the salvation history of a faithful remnant, set apart, when instead it really discloses so much of what still makes for suffering in our world – if no longer for us, then for others. For our story is not just our story. It is inseparable from the story of war, nationalism, dispossession, and migration. We should resist the urge to sentimentalize or limit its reach in our own times, especially after a U.S. presidential election that unleashed the kind of menacing anti-foreigner rhetoric our people and others experienced at the outset of World War I. Now, of course, we have blended com-

fortably into mainstream North America. We are not a threat to anyone. But we once were. In the country where our family landed in 1884, in a harbour watched over by the Statue of Liberty, the minds and bodies of Mennonite sons would be subjected to intense and brutal forms of abuse within a generation. Not all of them survived. Otherwise we wouldn't be here.

### II

Because we are a family unusually rich in memoirs, diaries, other documents and retellings at reunions, the Klaassen family's quarter-century

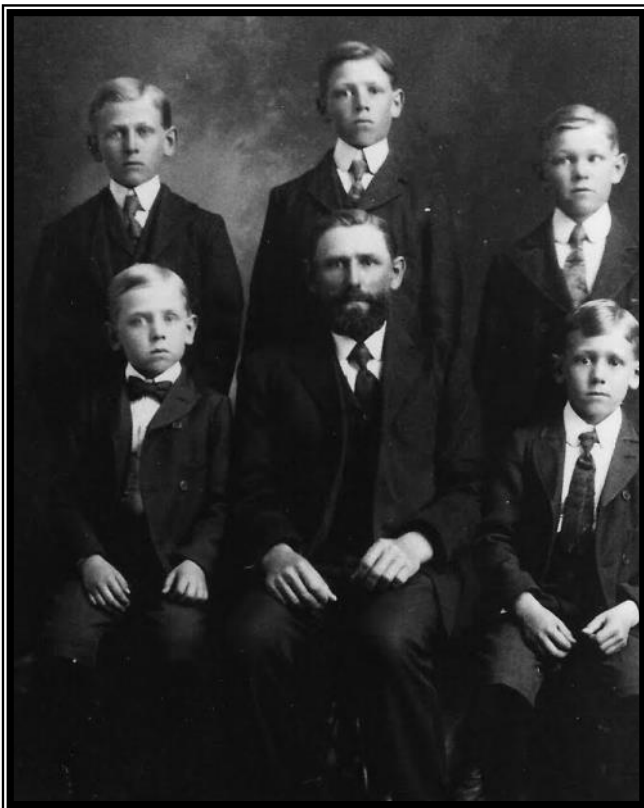
in southwestern Oklahoma and then our flight to Canada are familiar enough. We know that Jacob Klaassen, my great-grandfather, claimed land near the Washita River as did his brother and his mother Maria, born in what is now Poland and widowed on the Great Trek to Central Asia. Jacob married Katharina Toews from Kansas, built a farm, and preached in the Herold Church in the country, in whose cemetery his wife, an infant daughter, and two sons, one killed beneath a grain wagon, lie buried. We do not relate so often, however, that the Oklahoma homestead came available for settlement in the first place because the U.S. Congress had passed legislation taking away “excess” land from the Cheyenne who had settled near the Washita after being displaced in 1864 and 1867 by two of the most discreditable episodes in frontier history. Nor do we acknowledge that as a result the farming district between the towns of Bessie, Cordell, and Corn was a checkerboard of Mennonite and Cheyenne land.

We know that Jacob's nephew Johannes, who'd grown up on an adjacent quarter-section, was one of the first group of three draftees from the community who reported to Camp Travis in Texas. Court marshalled and sentenced to twenty-five years' hard labour at Fort Leavenworth, Johannes, to his father's great distress, was sent home in October 1918 in a coffin dressed in an army uniform. We know that Jacob had already instructed his oldest sons, Jacob and Martin, to board the train in Clinton under cover of night in the direction of Canada, and that relatives in Montana coached them

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Roger Epp



Roger Epp's great-grandfather Jacob Klaassen, by then a widower, with his five sons, clockwise from left rear, Jacob, Martin, Henry, Gus, and John, circa 1910.



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across the border. We also know that Martin, my grandfather, lack-

I say manufactured because war and conscription were not greeted with enthusiasm in the Oklahoma countryside. In the months and years leading to 1917, rural Oklahoma had been a hotbed of political activism and agrarian radicalism.<sup>2</sup> There is no evidence that the Klaassen family, steadfastly



School photo from the rural district east of Bessie, Oklahoma. Jacob's brother Michael, father of the young man Johannes in the article, is the teacher (with the beard).

apolitical, was involved in any of it, but they could not have missed the copies of the *Sword of Truth* newspaper and the posters in Washita County that warned landlords against mistreating tenant farmers and sharecroppers. These farmers and sharecroppers, a major force in organized movements to stop rent-gouging and stabilize land tenure, were often supported as well by holiness preachers of the kind depicted in John Steinbeck's novel, *Grapes of Wrath*. In the 1916 national election, the Socialist candidate for President, Eugene Debs, got one in six votes in Oklahoma and almost 40 per cent in a county neighboring the

ing any official papers, was taken from the train in Moose Jaw to prison until his Uncle David Toews could intervene for him.

We know how war disrupts lives and disperses families.

But we also live in North America, where we are tempted to place ourselves inside a powerful settler mythology in which this continent becomes the final destination in the search for freedom – what the historian Tony Judt calls the “narrative of geographical emancipation: escaping the wrong places and finding our way to better ones.”<sup>1</sup> If we see ourselves thus it will be hard to accept the anti-foreigner hysteria that was manufactured nationally and in Oklahoma in 1917 around the declaration of war.

Klassen homestead.

When war was declared, members of a loose coalition of farmers, Seminole-Muskogee and Creek peoples, recent immigrants, African Americans, and “Wobblies” – advocates of One Big Union – led a brief uprising mostly on the eastern side of the state. The uprising took its name, the “Green Corn Rebellion”, from a Muskogee sacred harvest ceremony. The uprising was ill-planned, and its objectives were unclear, and the combination of war and rebellion provided a pretext for the political establishment in the towns to crack down indiscriminately on a much wider circle of their opponents. In each county the state established a Council of Defense comprised of some of the towns’ leading citizens. The Councils hired thugs and vigilantes to do their most violent work.

The real war, in other words, was often a local one in Oklahoma. A farm leader in Bessie was tarred and feathered. A newspaper editor, insufficiently patriotic, was shot on the steps of the Washita County courthouse in Cordell. A church was burned. German place-names were altered (Korn to Corn); German-language schools and newspapers like the local *Oklahoma Vorwärts* were forced to close. By war’s end, the Ku Klux Klan was a major force across the state.

In Oklahoma in the summer of 2000, I asked our Schmidt relatives about any lingering local feelings from the war. The conversation got very

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quiet. A woman described how, not long ago, she had been afraid to speak at work in defense of Mennonite conscientious objectors when the subject came up; her boss was a woman connected to one of the old notable families in town. Her husband said people still avoided talking about the war in order to get along.

Oklahoma's wartime intensity may have been exceptional, but the same popular feelings could be found throughout the Great Plains. They were amplified politically at the national level. President Woodrow Wilson, who had been re-elected in 1916 promising to keep the U.S. out of the war, also seized the moment to target so-called hyphenated Americans. He had already prepared the ground for such a campaign with these chilling comments in his Third Address to Congress in 1915:

There are citizens of the United States, I blush to admit, born under other flags, but welcomed under our generous nationalization laws to the full freedom and opportunity of America, who have poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life. . . . *The hand of our power should close over them at once.*<sup>3</sup>

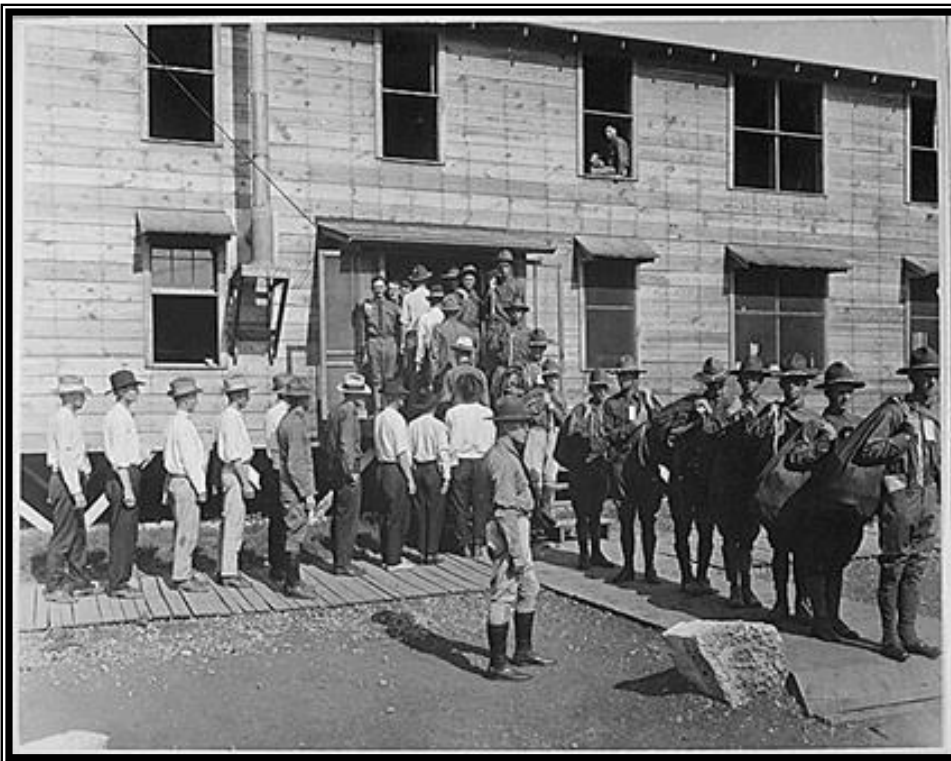
The construction of national identity is always about defining who is inside and who is outside – who is not *one of us*. A serious and significant intelligence report prepared at the time for the War Department identified Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites as dangerous, unpatriotic people, communist in practice, possibly part of a pro-German conspiracy to undermine

the war effort.<sup>4</sup> The truth didn't matter. All members of those communities were automatically under suspicion, and often monitored by the citizen Councils of Defense. At one point close to 200 Mennonite leaders were threatened with sedition charges for signing a joint letter on the subject of war bonds. Although in that case the Justice Department did not proceed with persecution, at other times the law joined the mob. A Mennonite pastor in Montana, for example, narrowly escaped lynching at the hands of local notables led by the sheriff. How quickly the public mood could turn – and turn against neighbors.

For President Wilson, conscription served the larger purpose of creating a unified nation. *The Selective Service Act* of 1917 required all able men aged 21 to 30 to prepare for call-up. Sociologically the war effort was a melting pot for young men drawn from immigrant enclaves, rural and urban, by the new draft lottery. They were sent to one of 16 large camps across the country, mostly in the West, which presumably had more recent immigrants to integrate. There they were issued the same U.S. army *uniform* – a word that bears reflection.

The *Act* made provision for conscientious objectors to choose non-combatant roles but unlike Canadian legislation it required those who were drafted to report *as soldiers* to the designated military camp and request an alternative assignment.<sup>5</sup> The *Act* left the meaning of non-combatant service to the President to define, but no such definition had been given when the first trains filled with young men arrived at the camps.

(Continued on page 11)



Drafted men reporting for service, Camp Travis,

<https://research.archives.gov/id/533730>

(Continued from page 10)

Physical and verbal abuse of declared COs began on the trains and



**Solitary confinement cell for COs at Fort Leavenworth, Swarthmore College Peace Collection, <https://wwwonline.org/articles/conscientious-objection-during-world-war-i/>**

continued in the camps, whose commanding officers intended to uphold military discipline by dealing resolutely with pacifists. Uncooperative COs were welcomed with repeated near-drownings, beatings, sexual humiliations involving guns and sticks, and, in at least one case, at Camp Funston in Kansas, a mock execution.<sup>6</sup>

The culture of permission came from the top. Despite assurances given to the Mennonite leaders who travelled to Washington, politicians who had set fire to the popular mood had little room to grant special privileges or show sympathy in public.

About three million men reported to military training camps during the course of the war. Of

the three million, about 20,000 arrived in camp with CO certificates extracted from local authorities like those in Cordell. Of that number, about 4,000 continued to affirm those declarations despite intense pressure. Some chose non-combatant service such as duty in the medical corps. Some got farm furloughs.

About 450 were court-martialed and sentenced to hard labour for terms as long as 30 years for refusing to wear uniforms or perform specific duties. Among them were not only Mennonites, Amish, and Hutterites but also Quakers, Jehovah's Witnesses, Doukhobors, liberal Christians, secular Jews, socialists, anarchists, and atheists. It was a melting pot. At Camp Travis there were more court-martials than anywhere else, not to mention the disciplinary practice of confining men for days in the stockade without protection from heat, sun, or rain.<sup>7</sup>

Of the 450 court-martialed COs, at least 27 died in military prison. One of them was the nephew of my great-grandfather, the cousin of my grandfather.

### III

In his recent book, *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites During the Great War*, Duane Stoltzfus gives a fascinating, troubling, and very relevant account of the targeting of the bodies and minds of young men. The book follows in close detail the story of four Hutterite men – three of them Hofer brothers from a colony in South Dakota -- who were drafted and reported to Fort Lewis although they were married with children and might have sought exemptions. They were soon court-martialed for non-cooperation and sentenced to hard labour in Alcatraz Prison, long before it became a tourist attraction in San Francisco Bay.

When the Hutterites refused uniforms and work assignments, they were confined to isolation cells in the prison basement. Dressed down to their underwear, they slept on damp concrete and went without food for days. In the deepest row of cells they saw no light other than what entered when the door opened. Sometimes they were manacled hands together to the bars above their cell doors, so high that only their toes touched the floor and their limbs ached when they were released. Sometimes they were lashed at the same time.<sup>8</sup>

In November 1918, just after Armistice, the four Hutterites were shipped by train from Alcatraz to Fort Leavenworth with its 40-foot walls above the Missouri River and its Special Disciplinary Barracks where COs were housed. From the train, they were marched together in chains suitcase in one hand, bibles in the other, through the streets of the town and up the hill. Though official reports later discounted it, others recalled that they ran a gauntlet of soldiers prodding them with bayonets. Finally they stood outside on a cold November night waiting for the camp commander.<sup>9</sup>

The isolation and manacling resumed. Within two weeks, two Hofer brothers were dead. Their families were alerted of their failing health by telegram; their father, wives, and children arrived in time to say their farewells. One brother died that night. When his wife demanded the next morning to see his body, she found him in a coffin dressed in an army uniform. When

(Continued on page 12)

*(Continued from page 11)*

the brother died days later, his family appealed successfully to prison officials not to dress him in a uniform for the train trip home for burial.<sup>10</sup>

Though we know less of what Johannes Klaassen endured at Leavenworth, all of this has a very familiar ring. Likewise the official cause of death: influenza. Certainly there was a global pandemic in late 1918, helped by the disease vectors of troops moving across oceans and continents. But, as Stoltzfus notes, a place like Leavenworth presented optimal conditions for the spread of influenza: crowded, cold, damp, poorly ventilated cell-blocks, poor diets, and populations of young men, a highly susceptible demographic.<sup>11</sup>

In the last days of the war, both Jane Addams, Chicago campaigner for world peace, women's suffrage and the rights of immigrants, and 1931 Nobel Prize winner and the National Civil Liberties Bureau investigated conditions at Leavenworth.<sup>12</sup> (Needless to say, friendship from these sources would not have been what Mennonites from Oklahoma or Hutterites from South Dakota expected; but then support from the rest of Christianity was not forthcoming – certainly not from those who had begun to call themselves fundamentalists nor from many in the mainline Protestant denominations) The Bureau's report used a blunt word, "torture," to describe the treatment of prisoners. The U.S. government's response was dismissive: the COs were radicals. The families received no apologies. Before the last surviving COs were released from prison in 1919 and 1920 – against public demands that they should serve their full sentences – some of the Hutterite families had moved to Canada.

#### IV

This is a powerful, dark story. It is our story too. We wouldn't be here in Canada otherwise. The story comes from a time when it mattered a great deal to the U.S. government and all of its agents at every level to claim the bodies, the tongues, and the undivided loyalties of young men for a war effort it had disavowed only months before. When that loyalty was stubbornly refused, those bodies could be abused unto death though they represented no threat whatsoever to the national security of the United States. They had no secrets to divulge.

The story comes from a time, too, when those young men bore a disproportionate share of the burden for upholding the historic faith of non-resistant communities displaced to a new continent in a time of war. Conscription put them front and centre. Their own leaders had been caught unprepared by the war, the public mood, and the government's response; they could not find a common Mennonite position. The young men often felt left to themselves to negotiate a gauntlet of abuse and propaganda. But imagine the parental and community expectations in places like the Herold Church, especially where the identity of defenseless Christians was taken so seriously.

We are now far removed from the circumstances that ripped the Klaassen family out of Oklahoma. We do not worry for ourselves in that way. The daily political news on our troubled continent, however, contains plen-

ty of distressing reminders of 1917. Our story is not just our story. For others, it is far from over.

If we remember our story, it is not hard to imagine a country and some of its noisiest political – and Christian – leaders swept up in anti-foreigner hysteria. It is not hard to imagine people and places of worship monitored and attacked simply because of the religious identities they represent. Surely they must be connected to the international enemy. It is not hard to imagine that recent immigrants can get reported and arrested for speaking in their first language in public – say, in an airport lounge – even if they are expressing everyday things, or holy things. If they want to avoid suspicion, they should speak English!

Let me risk one more step. The more I have learned about the events of 1917 and 1918, especially about the treatment of COs in American military prisons, the more I am struck by the echoes in what has happened more recently at Abu Ghraib in Iraq and at Guantanamo naval base. In fact Guantanamo was chosen over Leavenworth as the place to house prisoners swept up in an indiscriminate global dragnet after 9/11; for it was thought to be beyond reach of either international or domestic law. I am not suggesting exact parallels here. But the culture of permission was much the same. So was the enlistment of rank-and-file soldiers in a familiar catalogue of cruelties: isolation, exposure, sexual humiliation, simulated drownings, and manacled.<sup>13</sup> The prisoners were less than human. They deserved what they got.

My point is that if we are true to our story, then we also know

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enough to refuse enlistment in the political campaigns that now swirl around us – the campaigns that give permission, that draw hard lines between those inside and those outside. For we have been outsiders longer than not. We have felt the hand of power, in those chilling words, close over us. That's the story we know. That's why we are here. Let it not happen to others.

<sup>1</sup> Tony Judt, with Timothy Snyder, *Thinking the Twentieth Century* (New York: Penguin, 2012), p. 24. Judt is describing the various east-to-west migrations of his own Jewish family.

<sup>2</sup> In these paragraphs I am drawing partly on what I have written in *We Are All Treaty: Prairie Essays* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008), esp. ch. 6, and on the historical sources indicated there.

<sup>3</sup> Woodrow Wilson, Third Annual Message to Congress, December 7, 1915, The American Presidency Project, at <http://www.presidency.ucsba.edu/ws/?pid=29556>. The emphasis is mine.

<sup>4</sup> See Allan Teichrow, "Military Surveillance of Mennonites in World War I," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 53 (1979): 95-127; and "World War I and the Mennonite Migration to Canada to Avoid the Draft," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 45 (1971): 219-49. In the latter article, Teichrow writes: "For a man of German ancestry who happened also to be a conscientious objector, America was in some ways the worst of all possible places in 1917-18" (pp. 227-28) – especially Oklahoma, where "mob violence . . . always lurked beneath the sur-

face" (p. 246). He notes that Mennonite group emigration was greatest from Oklahoma.

<sup>5</sup> Duane Stoltzfus' *Pacifists in Chains: The Persecution of Hutterites during the Great War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), provides a very good recent overview of the circumstances in which Mennonites as well found themselves. See also Melanie Springer Mock, *Writing Peace: The Unheard Voices of Great War Mennonite Objectors* (Cascadia, OR: Pandora Press, 2003); Gerlof Horman, *American Mennonites and the Great War: 1914-1918* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1994); James C. Juhnke, "Mennonites in Militarist America: Some Consequences of World War I," in *Kingdom, Cross, and Community. Essays on Mennonite Themes in Honor of Guy F Hershberger*, eds. J. R. Burkholder and Calvin W. Redekop (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1976); and Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Civil Disobedience: An Encyclopedic History of Dissidence in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 195-97. Three valuable online sources of documents and oral histories are the Bethel College Library World War I Oral History Collection at <https://mla.bethelks.edu/ww1.html>; the Swarthmore College Peace Collection at <https://www.swarthmore.edu/library/peace/conscientiousobjection/co%20website/pages/HistoryNew.htm>; and the Home Before the Leaves Fall Project at <https://wwionline.org/introduction>.

<sup>6</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, pp. 36-38.

<sup>7</sup> The Bethel Oral History Collection contains an interview with Peter Quiring, who had enlisted with Johannes Klaassen from the Herold Church and whose family had also been on the trek to Central Asia. The audio files are available at [https://mla.bethelks.edu/audio/ohww1/quiring\\_peter\\_j1.mp3](https://mla.bethelks.edu/audio/ohww1/quiring_peter_j1.mp3) and [https://mla.bethelks.edu/audio/ohww1/quiring\\_peter\\_j2.mp3](https://mla.bethelks.edu/audio/ohww1/quiring_peter_j2.mp3). See also John W. Arn, *The Herold Mennonite Church, 1899-1969* (Newton, KS: Mennonite Press, 1969), which provides local details of the war at pp. 13-17. Transcripts from the court-martial of a Quaker CO at Camp Travis can be found at <http://civilianpublicservice.org/sites/civilianpublicservice.org/files/HarryLCharles.pdf>.

Camp Travis was also the site of the infamous court-martial and hanging of 13 black soldiers in December 1917 and another six in September 1918 as a result of a fatal, racially-charged riot in Houston.

<sup>8</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, ch. 5, especially pp. 117-21.

<sup>9</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, pp. 159-61.

<sup>10</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, pp. 172-74.

<sup>11</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, pp. 174-75.

<sup>12</sup> Stoltzfus, *Pacifists in Chains*, ch. 8. The NCLB report by David Eichel was released in December 1918 under the title *What Happens in Military Prisons. The Public is Entitled to the Facts*.

<sup>13</sup> Confidential reports prepared by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and leaked to newspapers in 2004, for example, identified the use "humiliating acts, solitary confinement, temperature extremes, use of forced positions" – each "a form of torture" – against prisoners at Guantanamo, as well as similar abuses at US military prisons in Iraq. See Neil Lewis, "Red Cross Finds Detainee Abuse in Guantanamo," *New York Times*, November 30, 2004, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/11/30/politics/red-cross-finds-detainee-abuse-in-guantanamo.html>; and "Red

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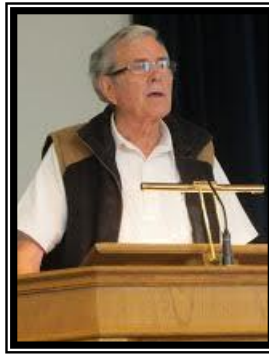
Cross report details alleged Iraq abuses, “*The Guardian*, May 10, 2004, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/may/10/military.usa>.

*Roger Epp is professor of political science at the University of Alberta and author of *We Are All Treaty People*, an exploration of what it means to live in the prairie West with a sense of memory, care, and obligation. Four generations of his ancestors are buried on Treaty 6 land at Eigenheim cemetery, Saskatchewan. ❖*

## German POWs In Alberta

By Henry Dick

Karl Kessler was a stocky 20-year-old male with blue eyes and wavy blond hair hired by my father in 1943 to work on our farm. He was one of a dozen or so WWII German prisoners of war (PoWs) who were hired out to farmers in the Rosemary area for \$2.50 per day, less room and board, payable to the Red Cross. Karl lived with us as one of the family. He was minimally supervised and had access to the farm truck as necessary. He was cooperative, well mannered, and a good fit in our family of seven children. He liked to accompany us to church on Sunday mornings so dad bought him a suit, ignoring the rule that PoWs were to wear the PoW uniform (denim shirt with a large red insignia sewn on the back) when in the community. Frequently on a weekend evening the PoWs in the area would gather at the home of one of their



Henry Dick

hosts and cook up a big meal of German specialties. Periodically they received care packages, which included chocolate and cigarettes from Germany. Karl preferred to smoke Player cigarettes, so he passed the German ones on to us boys. When the war ended the PoWs were repatriated to Germany - many against their wishes. Some families hosting PoWs later sponsored their return to Canada. There were 26 PoW camp locations spread from New Brunswick to Alberta housing 35,000 prisoners. Included in this number were 7,000 enemy aliens and PoWs relocated from British camps when German invasion of Britain be-

came imminent. Also included were civilians (mostly Germans and Italians) demonstrating fascist sympathies rounded up by the RCMP after war was declared in 1939. The largest camps were in Medicine Hat and Lethbridge (camp 133), housing 12,500 prisoners each.

The camps (prisons?) were surrounded by barbed wire and supervised by the Veterans Guard of Canada, comprised mostly of WWI veterans. The Guards left the PoWs to organize and supervise themselves within the camp. Recreational and educational facilities were provided within the camps, so a variety of team and individual sports, educational programs, orchestras, bands, choirs, and gardening and fitness programs were commonplace activities. Craft shops provided opportunity for woodworking, painting and all manner of other crafts. PoWs were permitted to wear their military uniforms and insignia within the camp and were provided appropriate winter wear. They were provided kitchens and groceries and cooked their own meals. Guards complained that, given wartime food rations, their prisoners ate better than they (some said because the Germans were better cooks.)

In 1943 Canada's Minister of Labour authorized off-camp employment of PoWs. In Ontario and Kananaskis the logging and bush camps were glad to provide the PoWs employment opportunities. About 22,000 worked in the sugar beet fields around Lethbridge, usually leaving the camp in the morning and returning at night. There were only occasional attempts at escape. Indeed, the degree of trust

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Denim Shirt With Red Insignia

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## MHSC Annual Meeting Report

By Alice Unrau

that was placed in the PoWs is well illustrated by the story of the Veteran Guards in an Ontario bush camp loaning their rifles to some avid PoW hunters for the purpose of hunting wild game in the surrounding bush.

Of the 35,000 PoWs, 137 died while in Canadian custody. Most deaths were due to natural causes or accidents such as logging and lumber mill mishaps. Several PoWs were murdered by fellow prisoners. On the instruction of the German government all remains were eventually buried in the War Graves Section in a Kitchener Ontario cemetery, and a suitable headstone was erected to mark their place.

1. The introductory paragraph is accurate only to the degree that my memory's recall of these events is reliable.

2. *The Traitors Of Camp 133* by Wayne Arthurson (printed and bound in Canada by Friesens for Turnstone Press, 2016) is a murder mystery that portrays in detail and is consistent with published historical accounts the of the PoWs in Camp 133 in Lethbridge.

3. The photograph was taken from the Google website: <https://legionmagazine.com/en/2012/03/the-happiest-prisoners/> This article also provides some personal accounts from local people about their experience with the PoWs.

4. The statistical information is available from the Google website: <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/prisoner-of-war-camps-in-canada/> ❖

I had the privilege of attending the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) annual meetings in Winnipeg, January 19-21, 2017. They were held at the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS) on the 21<sup>st</sup>. The Archives Committee met on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>.

I am on the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) management group, so I also attended the MAID training and meetings prior to the Archives meetings. Taking the training with me were two people from the Mennonite Historical Society of BC (MHSBC), two from CMBS, one from the Plett Foundation, who are very generous in giving grants toward training for MAID, and one from the Evangelical Mennonite Church, who have just become new members. Alf Redekopp was the instructor. The MAID project is getting very good reports from all the societies. Over 10,000 images with descriptions were added in the past year. Paraguay has sent a lot of images to the MHC in Winnipeg for input.

A request came from MHSBC to include archival records on the MAID



Alice Unrau



**Back Row:** Don Kroeker, Bert Friesen, Dave Neufeldt, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Richard Loughheed, Alice Unrau, Barry Dyck, Bethany Leis, Laura Unger, Korey Dyck, Karl Koop  
**Front Row:** Conrad Stoesz, Alf Redekopp, Jon Isaak, Royden Loewen, Barb Draper.

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site, so that when a researcher is looking for a family, all the information is in one place. The MAID management team researched the cost, and since it was negligible it was decided to move ahead with the information feature. MHSBC needs to move forward since their contract with the current company has been terminated. MHSBC will be the first to adopt the information feature on MAID.

Reports were heard from all of the historical societies. It was encouraging to hear how dedicated volunteers are and to get positive feedback. The new Mennonite Heritage Museum in BC has seen traffic increase dramatically since its opening a year ago. They have a total of 45 volunteers under the leadership of Richard Thiessen. The cafeteria is now in operation and serves very popular traditional Mennonite desserts.

The Alberta report highlighted gradual growth and the addition of two new volunteers, Ingrid Thiessen in the library area and Austin Janz who is photocopying the photographs to be put onto MAID.

Saskatchewan reported that the "Road to Freedom" art display painted by Ray Dirks had been featured at the Diefenbaker Centre in Saskatoon for six months. It was believed to have been the second most attended display ever featured in that centre.

Manitoba was instrumental in creating the video on Conscientious Objectors. It has now been released with numerous requests for showings. It was also nominated for the Best Feature Documentary at the Views of the World Music & Film Festival in Montreal this summer.

MHC expressed concern about what the Future Task Force would decide regarding the centre's future. Some staff have already been laid off.

The MAID project was nominated for a Governor General's Award. Although it did not win, it was shortlisted. An excerpt of the letter received states, "Your project was strongly considered by our judges and was shortlisted, I regret to inform you that your project was not selected as a recipient for this year's award. Our judges were very impressed by the excellent work accomplished by the MAID project. Given the number and quality of applications we reviewed this year, this is quite an accomplishment and something your organization can be proud of". MAID also received an award from the province of Manitoba. The website, archives.mhsc.ca now has translations added for the static (an image of a page from a book) pages.

Quebec reported that although they are small they are getting archival material from various organizations. They have been to French-speaking countries to encourage them to add information to our archives but have received a cool reception. They are in the process of writing a book on the Mennonites in Quebec in both French and English.

The next MHSC meeting will be held in Calgary, January 19-20, 2018. ❖

## IMPORTANT NOTICE!

Do you want to make a contribution to Alberta Mennonite history, but do not have the patience to write history or volunteer in the archives? Do you want to support Mennonite historical research projects or help in the long-term preservation of records that document the Mennonite experience in Alberta? Then please consider making a donation to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Our address is:

Mennonite Historical  
Society of Alberta  
2946 - 32 Street NE  
Calgary, Alberta  
T1Y 6J7

Not only will you receive a charitable receipt, but also the satisfaction of contributing to the long-term survival of Alberta's Mennonite heritage.



## MAID Update

By Alice Unrau

MAID (Mennonite Archival Image Database) [ARCHIVES.MHSC.CA](http://ARCHIVES.MHSC.CA) is a website

where photographs of archival value are stored. This site is for all Mennonites, so you will see photographs from the Amish, Old Order, Mennonite Brethren, Evangelical Mennonite Church, General Conference, and more. It is a global site where we have the US as a partner. We have also received a lot of pictures from Argentina.



Alice Unrau

2016, our first full year in operation, was a significant year for MAID. The success of our project is based on the cooperation between our partners. This cooperation is being recognized by our constituencies. Our project was short listed by the Governor General's Award of Excellence in Community Programming. Additionally, the Canadian Mennonite continues to publish a "Moment from Yesterday" column, and The Mennonite Brethren Herald includes a "Memory from MAID" column in each issue.

Our website's success depends upon you, the people. You help the archives become a useful tool for researching genealogy, and you even provide a vehicle for people to find family members they may be looking for. We ensure that your photos will be preserved forever. By bringing them to the His-



torical Society you are guaranteed they are in a safe, fire proof, temperature-controlled vault. We understand it can be difficult to give up ownership of your photos, but consider the alternative. Are you sure the next generation will preserve them? We would be happy to provide a CD of the scanned pictures, so you will still have a copy from which prints can be made.

Each archival photo should meet at least one of the following criteria:

- A. Includes people, some of whom can be identified
- B. Tells something about the time period (i.e. clothing styles, vintage cars, etc.)
- C. Is a significant event

When you submit your photographs, please supply us with as much of the following information as possible: the event, names of people, the location where the photo was taken, and the date (or an approximate date). We will then scan the picture, put it on the website, and add the information provided.

*For more information please contact Alice Unrau at MHSA- 403-250-1121 or email [receptionmhsa@gmail.com](mailto:receptionmhsa@gmail.com). We can then arrange how to get the pictures to us. Thank you in advance for your participation in this project. ❖*

## Gift Membership Form

Dear MHSA Member,

Enclosed with this issue of the newsletter is a Gift Membership Form. If there is someone you know, a friend or family member that is interested in Mennonite history but is not yet a Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta member, you may consider giving them a one year gift membership. Simply complete the Gift Membership form with their name, address, email address and telephone number. Also complete the lower portion with their name, your name, attach a cheque for \$30.00 and mail to the MHSA office in Calgary.

Thank You

## Katie Funk Wiebe, *My Emigrant Father: Jacob J. Funk, 1896-1986, a Memoir* - Book Review

By Peter Penner

*Kindred Productions, 2015, 311 pages. Pictorial, C. \$30*

This remarkable, very readable book is the story not only of Katie Funk Wiebe's father but also of her beautiful and gifted mother. Beginning with Catharine the Great's well-known invitation to Mennonites (1765), Katie sets the stage for the Funk family to migrate from Prussia to the promised land on the Dnepr river.

Katie demonstrates her style and penchant for detail in telling the story of getting settled in Rosenthal (Chortitz) not far from the 700-year oak tree, and ultimately of getting unsettled by the Bolshevik Revolution, Makhno's raids, Civil War (1918-1921), famine, and the scourge of typhus.

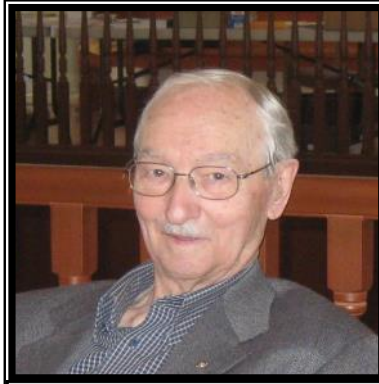
Jacob Johann Funk (called Jake), like other Mennonite youth, served as a medic in the White army, which was trying to hold back the Red army. When he was able to walk away from that, he joined the staff of Bethania Hospital for the mentally ill. There he met the auburn-haired Anna Janzen, the hospital's baker. Caught in the middle of the back-and-forth Civil War, Anna was once forced to feed a bunch of Red Army soldiers, one day and White army soldiers another day. Despite the turmoil of the situation, Jake and Anna fell in love there. They were married on March 31, 1920, her uncle, Jakob K. Janzen, administrator of Bethania, officiating.

Not long after their marriage, Jake went in search of his wife's sister and family who had been displaced, perhaps lost, in the war. He found them, barely existing near the city of Odessa, a rocky outcropping on the Black Sea. Jake's resourcefulness in bringing this family back to Sagradovka, a 200-mile journey under the worst civil war conditions, was astonishing.

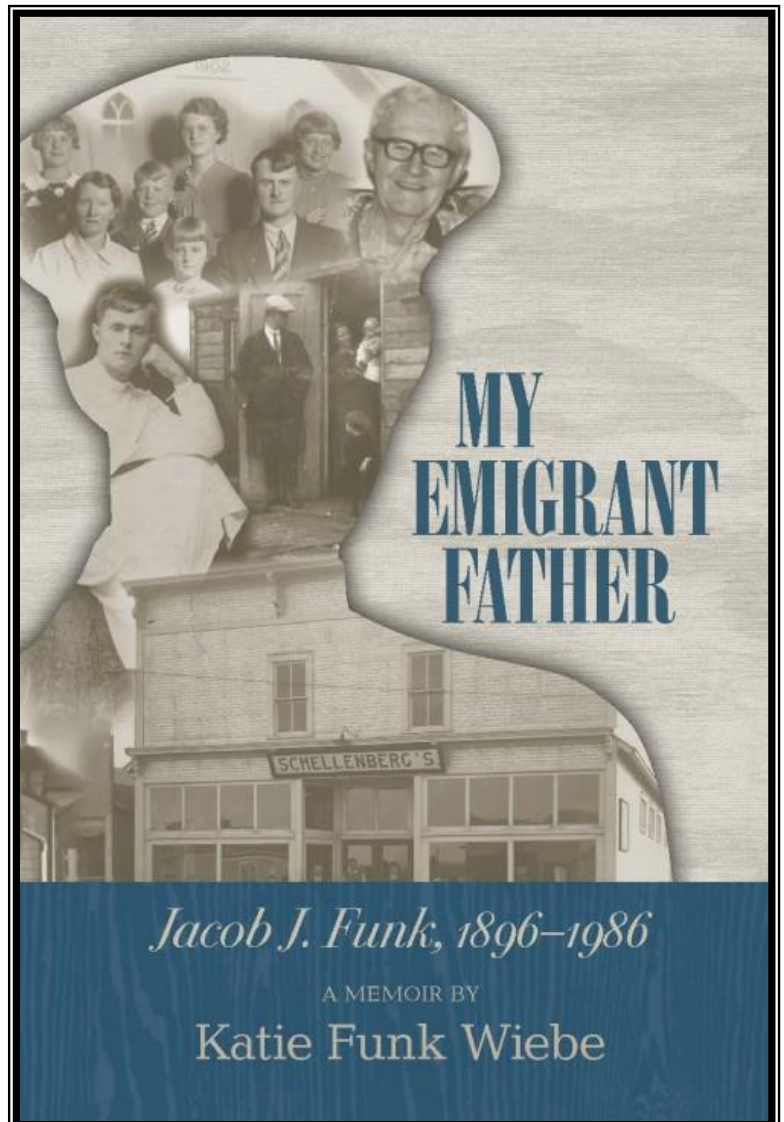
In chapter 7 Katie introduces the life and business acumen of Abram D. Schellenberg, Jake's uncle. Driven by premonition, Schellenberg left his home, sold his business in Kronsthal in 1912, and went to Canada with five sons. The family joined the *Kanadier* Mennonites at Laird/Osler, Saskatchewan and soon developed

a grocery business named OK Economy. When Jake and his relations arrived as *Russlaender* emigrants a dozen years later, Schellenberg had jobs for these relatives in his rapidly expanding chain of stores.

In spite of the crash of 1929, the Depression of the 'thirties,' and the Second World War, life in Canada seemed like an escape from hell. Jake and Anna were fortunate to find a home in Blaine Lake on the north side of the North Saskatchewan River. Jake loved managing the OK Economy store and making friends with



Peter Penner



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Doukhobors as well as a mix of others: Chinese, Jewish, Scottish, British, German, Slavic, Metis, and many more. Jake knew Russian and German, and he was learning English. He competed well in the grocery business as he gave good service and a congenial atmosphere. And Anna was always there, looking after her four daughters – Katie being the third oldest – and one son, and waiting for Jake who came home when ‘the last customer left.’

Theirs was an interesting religious mix. The kids attended the United Church Sunday School. Meanwhile the family helped form a Russian Baptist/Mennonite congregation, which provided a satisfying worship centre during winter months. Katie wrote: “We Funk children benefitted from living with this broad spectrum of cultures in ways we would not have experienced had we lived in the Mennonite settlement across the river.” Once spring came, the family used the ferry to drive to the Mennonite Brethren church at Laird. With reluctance Katie added a chapter (20) on the “Turf Wars” between the leaders at Laird and Jake’s friends and associates in the Blaine Lake congregation. Of her father, Katie wrote: “His soul was Russian, not German-Mennonite.”

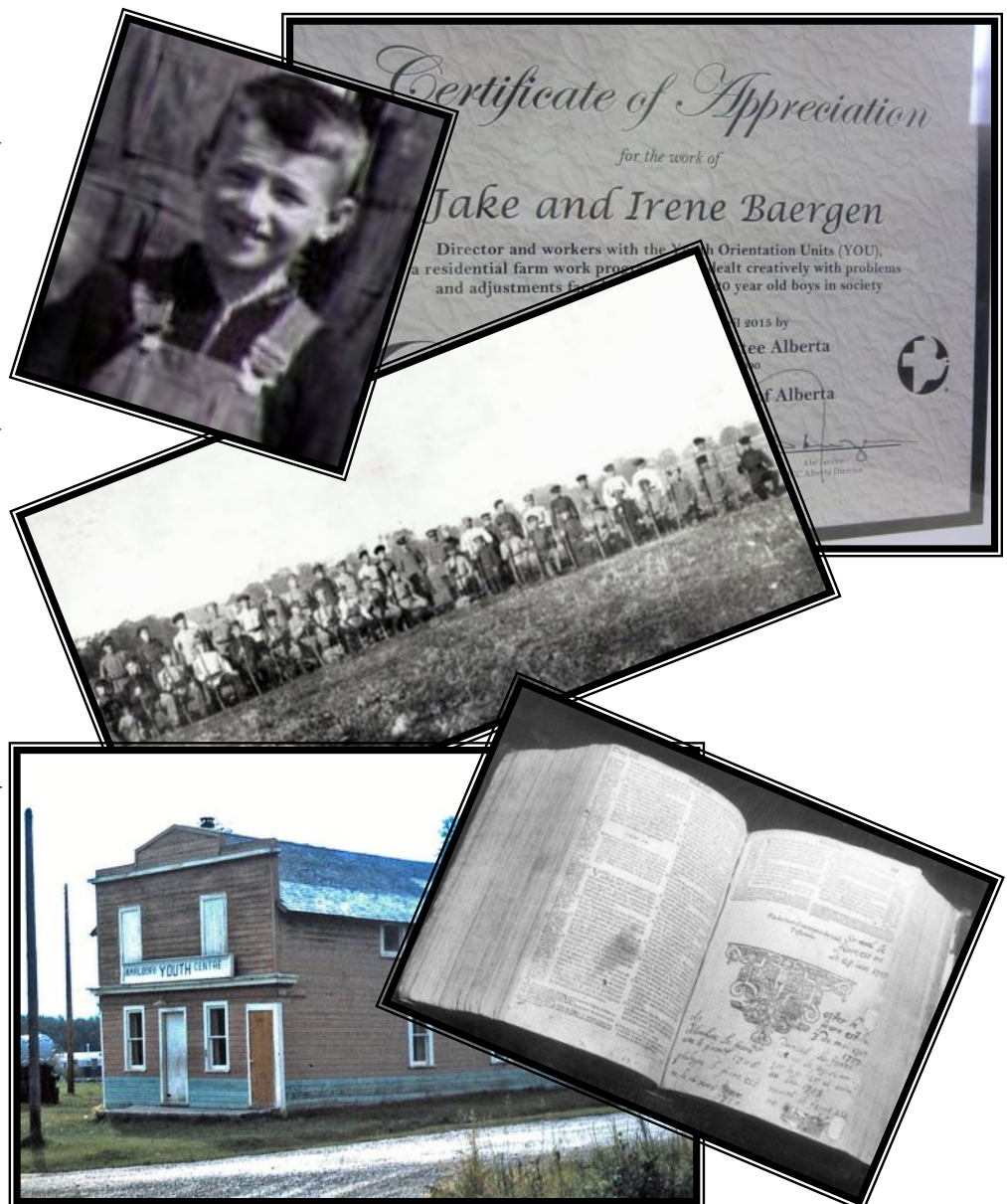
As life progressed, and the children grew up, the somewhat restless Jake wanted to join the exodus to BC. However, Kelowna proved unfavorable for a business investment, and Abbotsford was not much better at the time. Fortunately, Abram Schellenberg proved a saviour once more by offering Jake the purchase of the Blaine Lake store. Jake jumped at the chance, for now he had new hope of mak-

ing it to a satisfactory retirement. Even Anna came around once again to feeling that Blaine Lake was home.

In 1966, after a total of forty-five years in Blaine Lake, Jake and Anna retired to Abbotsford. Though they found a church and made some friends there, in 1984 they accepted an invitation from their eldest daughters, Frieda (Schroeder) and Anna (Kroeger) to move to Edmonton. Having their last home near family members seemed ideal for the aging parents. In Edmonton, Anna proved to be the stronger, healthier, one, outliving Jake by eight years.

This reviewer’s one criticism might be that the book is somewhat over-written, but then Katie is one to keep the reader’s interest with fascinating detail in her conversational style. And now that she is gone, we will not soon have another like her. We should be glad she gave us this account of her parents – her last major work.

*Peter Penner is a retired university educator, he lives in Calgary with his wife Justina. ♦*



## Letters To The Editor

In appreciation for *The Crowfoot Settlement* article by Dave Hubert in the June 2016 issue of the MSHA newsletter.

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Dear Dave Hubert,

Nov 3, 2016  
Winnipeg, MB

It was so good to get this story on Crowfoot. When I got it, I devoured it immediately. I was born in the Basano hospital--the first modern baby --in 1938 and lived in Crowfoot until 1942 when my parents moved to Coaldale. My brother Rudy and I have collected as many stories of those early Crowfoot years (1926-1942) as possible. This document will enhance that limited history considerably. Thanks to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta for publishing this document.

Bill Baerg  
Professor Emeritus  
Canadian Mennonite University

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Dear Dave Hubert,

Aug 6, 2016  
Sherwood Park, AB

My cousin (Marg Siemens) forwarded last months' edition of the MSHA newsletter which included the article on Crowfoot. Excellent article, thank you. I mentioned to Marg that it was too bad our dads were not around to contribute, they had lots of stories of spending part of their growing up years in the Crowfoot area. My dad (Abe Wittenberg) died only 2 years ago, just 2 weeks short of 94 years. His mind was still sharp and recalled at times some of the things he did together with the Goertz boys.

I did notice one error, although quite minor. On page 8 it mentions that the Goertzes homesteaded at Lindberg in the Tofield area. That should be Lindbrook. The church that was started there is gone but the cemetery where many of the pioneers lie, is still used today.

Thanks,  
Gordon Wittenberg

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## Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives & Gallery To Continue Under New Structure

**Joint News Release By:** *Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies (CTMS), CMU and MC Can. Feb. 9, 2017\**

The Mennonite Heritage Centre including its Archive and Art Gallery programs, is being reorganized under a new partnership and name.

Discussions over the last months between Mennonite Church Canada (MC Canada), Canadian Mennonite University (CMU), and the Center for Transnational Mennonite Studies (CTMS) at the University of Winnipeg culminated in a proposal for CMU to assume full ownership of the Mennonite Heritage Centre building, and programming of the faith-based Art Gallery, while the archives will be managed and funded by a three-way partnership of MC Canada, CMU, and CTMS. CTMS is a partnership between the University of Winnipeg's Chair in Mennonite Studies and the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.

Per the proposal, CMU will own and maintain the Mennonite Heritage Centre infrastructure with staff of

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both the Archives and Gallery integrated in CMU's human resources complement. Operational details within the partnership will be further clarified over the coming months. The proposal was accepted by MC Canada's General Board at a January 13, 2017 meeting. The Mennonite Heritage Centre will be re-named to become "Mennonite Heritage Archives" (MHA) on June 1, 2017, the anticipated transfer date to the new partnership.

To facilitate the transition to the new structure, MC Canada will be releasing the current Archives program's staff. The full-time position of Director is being eliminated, while the archivist position is being expanded to full time as part of the new partnership. Further announcements for re-staffing the new MHA are pending. A committee representing the three partners will provide leadership to the MHA.

The partnership will seek to continue and to deepen the existing mandate of the Archives program, including present and future deposits to the collections of MC Canada and other Mennonite denominations. At the same time, it will expand the focus to include resources that document the transnational Anabaptist experience, including materials related to church communities in the global south, the Mennonite sojourn in Russia, and the Low German Mennonites of the Americas.

The Archives program has a distinguished record of service to the church community by storing and indexing congregational, area church, and national church records. These records, such as baptismal and church membership information, also constitute a primary source of data for church and family researchers and genealogists. The program also receives donations of records from education faculty, church leaders, and others.

The operations of the Art Gallery will be assumed entirely by CMU on June 1, 2017.

The Art Gallery is a bridge between Mennonites and other faith communities, featuring visual arts that share our own faith story within our community as well as bringing the faith stories of other religious groups to the Mennonite community. While the Gallery is based in Winnipeg, travelling exhibits have been featured in congregations, campuses, and events such as MC Canada Assemblies and Mennonite World Conference.

"CMU recognizes the significant value of both the Mennonite Heritage Centre's Archives and Gallery as valuable resources for the Mennonite community," says Gordon Zerbe, Vice President Academic at CMU. "CMU has a

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strong commitment to deepening the existing and ongoing mandate of these programs.”

“The new MHA will continue to serve our congregations as an important depository for their historic records. We encourage the continued and strong support of the MHA, not only through the contribution of congregational records, but also the financial support that makes this work possible,” said Coreena Stewart, Chief Administrative Officer for Mennonite Church Canada.

“CTMS is committed to preserving and telling the evolving Anabaptist story,” said Hans Werner, Executive Director, D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. “The archives are important in insuring that the rich transnational story of Mennonite faith, life and community can be told for generations to come.”

*Mennonite Church Canada is made up of over 33,000 baptized members, 225 congregations and 5 area conferences. For more information, contact Dan Dyck.*

*A Christian university in the Anabaptist tradition, Canadian Mennonite University offers undergraduate degrees in arts, business, humanities, music, sciences, and social sciences, as well as graduate degrees in theology, ministry, peacebuilding and collaborative development, and an MBA. For more information, contact Kevin Kilbrei.*

*The Center for Transnational Mennonite Studies is a Centre of the University of Winnipeg and partnership between the D.F. Historical Research Foundation, Inc. and the Chair in Mennonite Studies. For more information contact: Hans Werner.*

\*printed with permission ❖

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## Membership Application & Donation Form

- - Memberships are due in the fall of each year (\$30.00/yr).
- - ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- - Newsletters are issued in the winter, spring and fall.

Mail membership form and cheque to:

MHSA  
2946 - 32 Street NE  
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

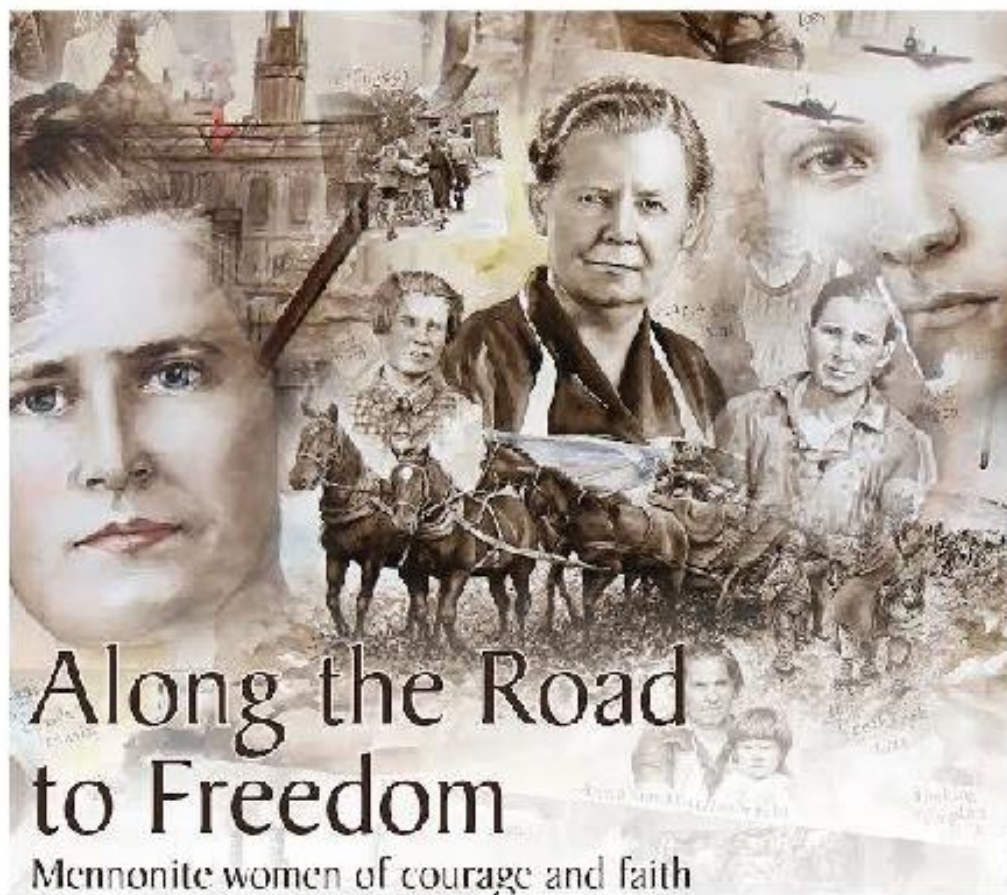
### Enclosed is my contribution of:

[    ] \$20 [    ] \$50 [    ] \$100 [    ] \$500 [    ] other

Tax receipts will be issued for donations for \$20.00 or more.

Donations are especially required to continue archival cataloging of donated historical material.

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.



# Along the Road to Freedom

Mennonite women of courage and faith

## **OPENING RECEPTION and PROGRAM**

**THE KING'S UNIVERSITY ATRIUM**

**9125 - 50 St NW, Edmonton, AB**

**Saturday Dec 2, 2017, 7:00 PM**

**26 paintings by Winnipeg Artist Ray Dirks**

honouring women who brought their children out of the Soviet Union to lives of  
peace and freedom in Canada and Paraguay

***Program includes:*** Pastor Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

Mennonite Choir & Music, Quilt display by LMBC Ladies

Exhibition viewing, coffee & finger food to follow

**"Calgary and Coaldale exhibition dates to be announced"**





**Mennonite Historical Society of  
Alberta - Annual General Meeting  
and Spring Conference**

at **Bergthal Mennonite Church**  
**Bergthal Rd, Township Rd 310**  
**Didsbury, AB T0M 0W0**

**Saturday, April 29, 2017**

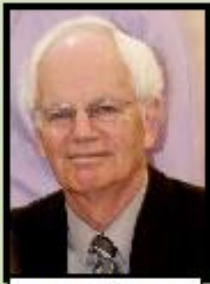
**Annual General Meeting - 10:00 AM**

Light noon meal available at 12 noon

**Spring Conference - 1:30 PM**

Registration: All Day \$20.00, PM only \$10.00

Faspa and Conversation at about 4:00 PM



**Wesley Berg\***

Mail pre-registrations to: MHSA #223-2946-32 St NE, Calgary, AB, T1Y 6J7  
For more information call 403-250-1121 or email [receptionmhsa@gmail.com](mailto:receptionmhsa@gmail.com)

Wesley Berg's presentation will be on  
*"The Mennonite S ngerfest from Davlekanovo to Didsbury"*

Laura Dyck will share her reflections of *"Songfest Past"*

Jake Wiebe will direct and Elsie Wiebe will accompany a *"Choir of former Alberta Songfest Singers and all who enjoy singing"* Call Jake 403-242-7370 for more information

\*Wesley Berg: Associate Diploma in Piano Performance (Western Board of Music), BA (University of Manitoba), BMus (University of Alberta), MMus (University of Alberta), PhD (University of Washington). PhD dissertation published as book: *From Russia With Music: A Study of the Mennonite Choral Singing Tradition in Canada* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1985). Research and publications on Mennonite music making, Old Colony Mennonite music, music in Edmonton, and music on the prairies. Three decades as a professor of music history and theory in the Department of Music, University of Alberta. Active at various times as a choral conductor, chorister, pianist and organist at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton.