



Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XVIII Number 3

October 2015

Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History

by Esther Epp-Tiessen

(Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2013, 328 Pages)

A Book Review by Barb Draper.

In her history of the first fifty years of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada, Esther Epp-Tiessen repeatedly defends the decision to create a separate Canadian MCC, distinct from the older organization with its headquarters in Akron, Pa. She presents MCC Canada as the "little engine that could," struggling for independence, rather than allowing Canadian efforts to be subsumed by the larger MCC, where decisions were made in the United States.

(Continued on page 8)

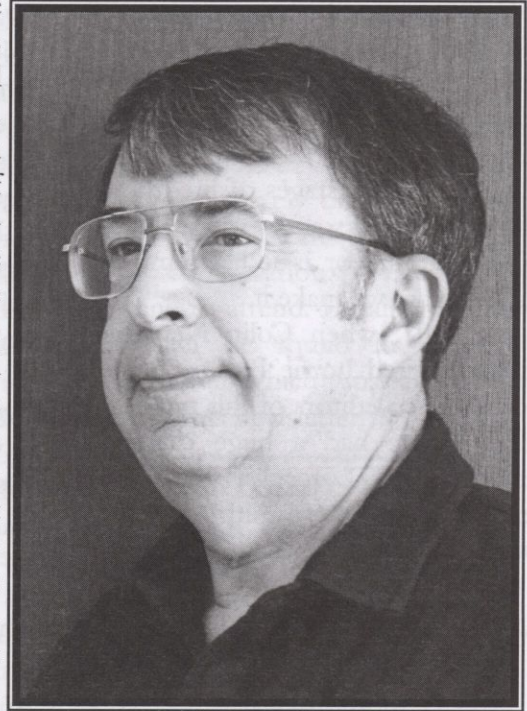
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Mennonites in Marlboro Country

by Glen Kauffman

Nestled in the foothills of the Canadian Rockies 235 kilometres west of Edmonton is the small community of Marlboro, Alberta. It wasn't always a small village. In 1910, during the construction of the Grande Trunk Pacific Railroad, workers discovered large deposits of marl in the area. The combination of easy access to marl, silica (clay), water and coal prompted prominent Edmonton businessmen to create the Edmonton Portland Cement Company and build the first cement plant in western Canada at Marlboro. Promising huge profits supplying cement for Edmonton's building boom, the cement plant opened its production in 1912 employing 300 men. The town prospered with two stores, three hotels, three churches, a school, a post office, a library, a laundry and a water tower. The cement plant itself was an amazing complex with steam turbines to generate the stood 180 feet high with a large steel door imported from Illinois.



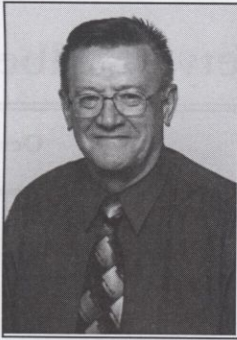
Glen Kauffman

MHSA Fall Conference

The MHSA is pleased to announce that Esther Epp-Tiessen, author of *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*, will be the guest speaker at the Annual MHSA Fall Conference. The conference will take place at Trinity Mennonite Church, 22016-32 Street, Dewinton (Hwy 552 and 232 Ave. W), MD of Foothills, AB starting at 1:30 pm on Saturday, November 21, 2015. Registration is \$20.00 which includes Faspa. Please RSVP to: receptionmhsa@gmail.com

Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews



Dave Toews

Change; we all know and understand that change is constant, change is never ending and change is in all aspects of our lives.

Change can be positive and change can be negative. From the time we are born until the time we die, through all stages of life, there are always peaks and valleys. Is the glass half full or is it half empty? Life is what we make it.

In 2007, when Colin Neufeldt first recruited Lorne Buhr and me to be the co-editors of this publication, Lorne had a huge calming effect on me. Lorne was the more experienced wordsmith having worked as the Legislature Librarian,

an, Province of Alberta, and as a reporter for the *Mennonite Reporter*, forerunner of the *Canadian Mennonite*. In the early period of our tenure, we worked with Judith Rempel, then with David Hildebrand. Both have passed away - changes. My longtime friend Lorne has taught me a lot about writing, editing and life. He was always there with a steady guiding hand and a calm encouraging word.

Now Lorne has had a major change take place in his life. Due to the degenerating illness of Parkinson's, including dementia, he is no longer able to work on the newsletter. Lorne spent some time in the hospital and then was moved to Capital Care Grandview in Edmonton. Please keep Lorne, Linda and family in your thoughts and prayers.

Every edition of the MHSA newsletter is an adventure for me and this one has proved to be no different. In my campaign for articles, there are always surprises, both in regards to what comes in and what does not. I will tell you only about my pleasant experiences.

Sometimes, one per chance article turns into a series; this is most gratifying. In the June 2014 issue, Ed Kauffman wrote, "From Indiana to Alberta: The Wanderings of a Mennonite Pastor." In the June 2015 edition, I wrote David Lefever's story. In this issue, Glen Kauffman has written, "Mennonites in Marlboro Country." In the March 2016 issue, there should be another story or two in this series. What do all of these people have in common? They all came from the US in the 1950s and 60s to do mission work in Alberta on behalf of what later became the Northwest Mennonite Conference.

I'm thrilled that Kathy Ma has agreed to take time out of her busy life to share her knowledge and unbridled enthusiasm for genealogical research in an ongoing column, "Kathy's Korner: Tips for the Amateur Genealogist."

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue. Of special note is Peter Penner's "Some Chose Trees: A Remembrance Day Address," an updated version of a talk he gave in Sackville, New Brunswick, in 1982. The two articles on MCC, courtesy of the *Canadian Mennonite*, are an introduction to this year's MHSA fall conference on November 21 2015 at Trinity Mennonite Church, Calgary. The conference features Esther Epp-Tiessen, author of *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History*.

The MHSA welcomes feedback, e-mails, letters to the editor and

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). To join, send payment to:

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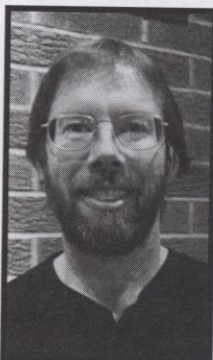
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articles. Contact dmtows@gmail.com. The deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is February 1, 2016. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Dave Neufeldt

In my last "Chairman's Corner," I mentioned that my congregation, together with some other local churches, is in the process of



Dave Neufeldt

sponsoring two refugee families from Syria. I drew some parallels between Mennonites fleeing from Russia in the 1920s and Syrians fleeing their country today. Recently, the Syrian refugee crisis has become a central focus on national news reports. Our local group has also managed to attract a lot of media attention. This has resulted in a huge surge of support from the community at large and we will likely be able to sponsor several more families as a result.

However, not all the responses have been supportive. Our pastor, who has taken on more of the public face of our group, has received some angry responses. It appears that the fear of terrorism is the underlying sentiment in the opposition to increased immigration. Even among Mennonites there is disagreement on how we should respond. A Mennonite woman recently wrote a letter to the local paper in which she first described her own coming to Canada as a refugee after World War II, and then went on to passionately oppose allowing more Syrian refugees into Canada.

This fear of immigrants that seems to be surfacing now reminds

me very much of what I have read about the opposition to Mennonite immigration in the 1920s. In 1929, thousands of Mennonites made their way to Moscow with hopes of coming to Canada. This story is thoroughly described in Frank Epp's book, *Mennonite Exodus*, in which he has included numerous excerpts from letters, both in support of, and, in opposition to, Mennonite immigration. While the federal immigration department wanted to bring in more refugees, the provincial governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan, in particular, were unwilling to receive them. In response to news that the Soviet government was preparing to deport the refugees to Siberia, the United Farmers of Canada in Saskatchewan wrote, "If the Soviet government is threatening to deport them to Siberia, it is probably because they refuse to obey the laws of the country." The German government had agreed not only to temporarily care for the refugees in Germany until Canada could absorb them, but also, to take any that Canada might later reject and deport. These offers were not enough to sway public sentiment. As a result, the doors were closed. The Soviet government then began exiling the Mennonites and others to Siberia where many starved and perished.

It was in direct response to the plight of the Mennonites in Russia that the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) was formed. It initially provided famine relief to those in Russia and later assisted those who migrated to Canada. Since then, MCC has grown in its ability to provide relief to people in need throughout the world. Refugee sponsorship continues to be an important part of the work of MCC. While our local group spon-

soring refugees is comprised of various church denominations, sponsorship is being done through MCC.

The MHSA has close ties to MCC. For most of the association's history, we have housed our archives in MCC buildings. The theme MHSA has chosen for the fall conference this year is the history of Mennonite Central Committee. We are co-hosting this event with MCC. Our guest speaker will be Esther Epp-Tiessen, who recently published a book about the history of MCC in Canada. She has spoken extensively on this subject and we look forward to a very engaging conversation. I encourage everyone to attend. Details for this event can be found in an announcement which appears elsewhere in this newsletter. ❖

MHSA NEEDS YOU!

MHSA needs your help with its historical research projects and its ongoing work to preserve and document the Mennonite experience in Alberta. Please consider volunteering at the MHSA in this effort. If you don't have time to volunteer, then please make a donation to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7. You receive a charitable receipt, as well as the satisfaction of contributing to the long-term survival of Alberta's Mennonite heritage.

GAMEO NEEDS YOU!

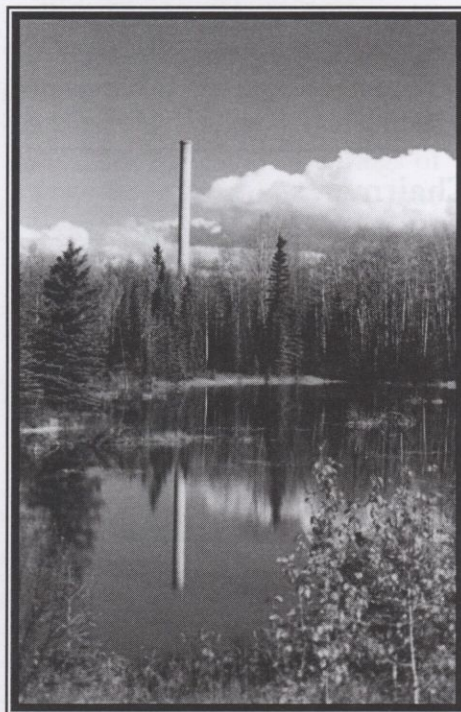
The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online is looking for articles documenting the contributions of Alberta Mennonite leaders and churches. Please help in this important work by contacting Wesley Berg at: w.berg@ualberta.ca

(continued from page 1)

needed electricity, three huge 40-metre-long rotary kilns imported from Germany and three large smokestacks soaring above the treetops. Two of the stacks were made of steel but the third one was poured of concrete and stood 180 feet high with a large steel door imported from Illinois.

However, as a result of cheaper sources of cement and the lack of demand for building materials during the Great Depression, the plant closed in 1932. Much of the steel was shipped away to be used in war efforts, most of the people moved away because there was no work and much of the town's infrastructure faded into disrepair. Later, a lumber mill was opened on the cement plant site, providing some employment for local residents. The school was one thing that did remain operational and over time, numerous Metis families moved from the surrounding countryside into the village so their children would have access to school. The two room school served Grades 1 through 9 and usually employed one or two teachers depending on the yearly enrolment. As was the case in many small rural communities, school districts began closing schools and transporting students to larger centres. By 1960, the Marlboro school had been reduced to Grades 1 to 4, while older students were bussed to schools in Edson.

At that time, several Mennonite families lived in Edson. Among them were Joe and Thelma Garber who were also teachers employed with the Edson School District. Thelma ended up teaching at Marlboro. During the early 60s, Alberta was experiencing a significant teacher shortage and began recruiting from England and the United States to fill vacancies in rural locations. Thelma was instrumental in finding two young teachers willing to teach in Marlboro for at least one year. Alice Deckert and Joyce Stauffer taught there during the 1961-62 school year but the community continued



Marl Pool Reflection - Silent reminder of the history of Marlboro

to be concerned about the long-term prospect for teachers and the possibility of the school closing completely. Joyce and Alice contacted the Mennonite Mission Board in Elkhart, Indiana, to see if a Voluntary Service Unit could be established in Marlboro to supply two teachers for the school. The Mission Board agreed to consider the project and began looking for suitable candidates. Voluntary Service (VS) Units were not new to Alberta as others had been established in remote northern communities such as Calling Lake and Anzac. Ike and Millie Glick from Pennsylvania were among the first to arrive and now served as VS Coordinators for the Alberta Units.

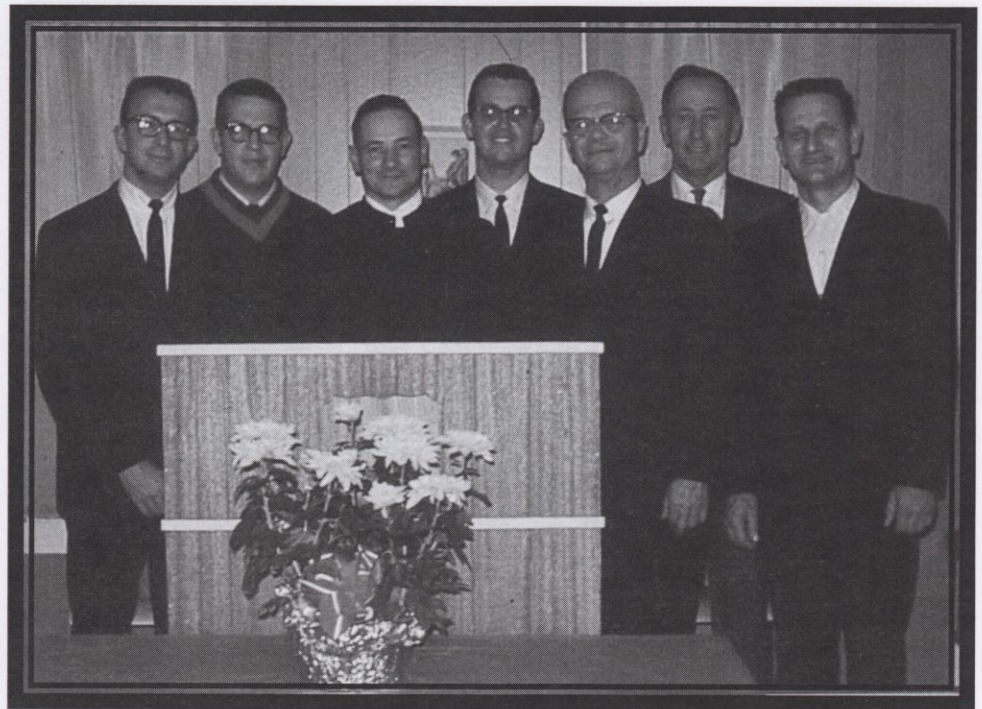
In August, 1962, fifty years after the steel smokestack door came from Illinois, another door was



The Conversion - From Pool Hall to Youth Centre to Chapel

opened as Bill and Doris Lauterbach came from Illinois for a two year assignment to serve as the first Mennonite Voluntary Service teachers in Marlboro. They left the comforts of big city life in Peoria to face the challenges of coal oil lamps, carrying water from a community well and making trips to "outhouses" not just in their little house in Marlboro but at the school as well. It was a big learning curve for this young couple but the community was very supportive and the year went very well. In fact, the Lauterbachs even found time to organize a Boys Club and Girls Club to provide much needed children's activities beyond school hours. The second year of their assignment brought a number of bonuses including the doubling of their personal living allowance from \$10/month to \$20/month, the excitement of having electricity in town and the joy of having another Mennonite couple join them.

That couple was Betty and Sherman Kauffman. Betty was originally from Indiana and Sherman was from Michigan; they met while serving at the Voluntary Service Unit in Anzac, AB in 1962. Following their marriage back in Indiana in 1963, they returned to Alberta where they started a chicken farm at Marlboro that provided employment for community members. In addition to contributing to a variety of community activities, they initiated renovations to the old pool hall/rooming house in Marlboro to make it suitable as a church facility and youth centre.

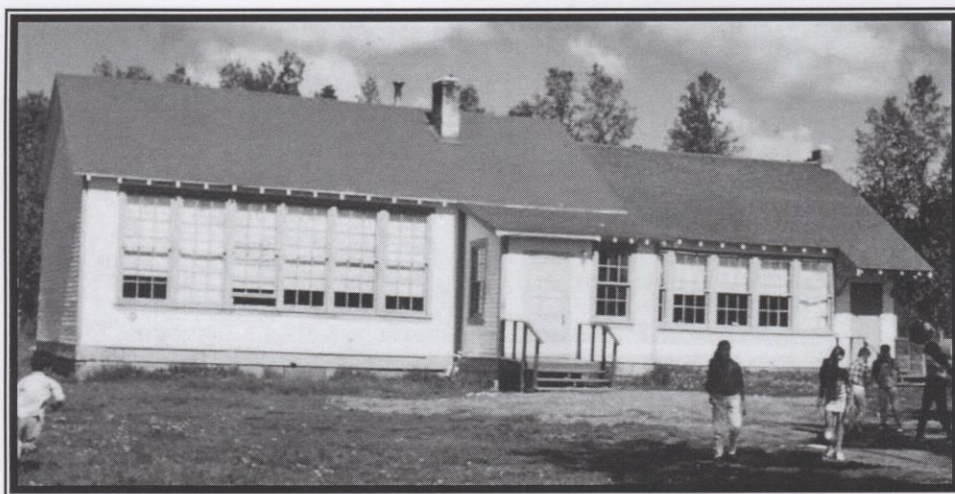


Above: Marlboro Church Dedication (left to right) Glen Kauffman, Willie Helmuth (Robb, AB), Pastor Paul Burkholder (Bluesky, AB), Bill Lauterbach, Pastor Linford Hackman, (Edmonton, AB), Bob Weaver (Peoria, IL), Pastor Paul Showalter (Edson, AB).

Below: Marlboro Church Dedication (left to right) Mary Ann & Glen Kauffman, Doris & Bill Lauterbach, Clara White & JoAnn Mast



With positive support from the community and increased opportunity for local employment, word spread through Mennonite circles about opportunities and another couple, Verlin and Lois Swartzendruber from Kelowna, Iowa, moved to Marlboro country in the summer of 1964. Verlin purchased a farm and started a Bushman's Logging Co-op that provided employment



Marlboro School

for men in the community. Bill and Doris decided to remain in Marlboro after completing their two-year VS assignment. Although student numbers had declined at Marlboro, Doris continued teaching in Marlboro while Bill accepted a teaching assignment at the Junior High School in Edson. Lois helped with the kindergarten program that Doris had started at Marlboro and both Verlin and Lois joined the team of young couples who organized clubs for the youth and social functions for the adults in the community.

In the summer of 1965, Daniel and JoAnn Mast moved to Marlboro from Arthur, Illinois. JoAnn was a long-time friend of Bill and Doris and with student numbers looking better again, Doris had contacted JoAnn to see if she would teach at Marlboro. There was also an opportunity for Daniel to help Verlin with the Bushman's Logging Co-op and for both to be

involved with the increasing number of activities in the community including the small congregation that began to meet in the renovated pool hall on Sunday mornings. Unfortunately, Daniel died in the spring of 1966, following a tragic accident while changing a tire beside the highway between Marlboro and Edson. Only three months before Daniel's death, JoAnn's father passed away, leaving her mother, Clara White, alone in Illinois. Clara, who had suffered mobility issues due to polio as a child, moved to Marlboro to be with her daughter.

1966 brought other changes to the little congregation in Marlboro. Betty and Sherman Kauffman moved to Edmonton to pursue employment opportunities there. Doris and Bill welcomed twins, Danny and Laurie, to their family which meant that Doris would trade her teaching assignment at school for a full time teaching assignment at home. The School District was able to hire a retired teacher from Saskatchewan to fill in for Doris for the year while JoAnn continued to serve as the school's principal and teacher. Mennonite Voluntary Service was able to find another couple, Howard and Anna Beth Birky from Goshen, Indiana, to make up for the departure of Betty and Sherman. Howard continued the renovations at the Youth Centre and Anna Beth started a Heart to Heart Bible study group with ladies in the community. Youth Clubs, Couple's Club and holiday themed parties



Mary Ann's Grade 3 & 4 Class

continued to round out community programs while Sunday School and Daily Vacation Bible School supported evangelical outreach in the community.

With Doris not returning to the classroom and her replacement opting to retire again, Mennonite Voluntary Service was called upon once more to find another teacher. This time, Glen and Mary Ann Kauffman from Middlebury, Indiana, responded to the call. They arrived in Marlboro for their two-year VS assignment on their first wedding anniversary in August, 1967. They were fresh out of university with no teaching experience. Mary Ann joined JoAnn at Marlboro School teaching Grades 3 and 4 in the morning and Grades 2, 3 and 4 in the afternoon while Glen began a teaching assignment teaching Grade 11 and 12 mathematics at the Edson High School 25 kilometres away. They lived in a rented teacherage adjacent to the remains of the old cement plant. They felt fortunate to have electricity when they "burned the mid-night oil" but were still challenged by the lack of running water and indoor plumbing. It was a challenging first year of teaching and the community involvement became even more challenging when Verlin and Lois moved back to Iowa in November to run a large farming operation, and Howard and Anna Beth transferred to another VS assignment where their skills were needed in Texas in December of that year.



Marlboro Mennonite Church Bus

Bill and Doris, Glen and Mary Ann, and JoAnn and Clara developed a very close friendship during the coming year and worked well together to keep all the activities running smoothly. Bill and Glen took turns providing a meditation for the Sunday worship service when itinerant pastor, Linford Hackman, of Edmonton wasn't available. Glen drove an old 1947 Dodge sightseeing bus (that had been retired from Jasper National Park) through the neighbouring communities of Hornbeck and Bickerdike to pick up children for Sunday School. They all enjoyed music very much and the Lauterbachs and Kauffmans often sang as a quartet since their voices just happened to match four part harmony. One particular activity which they remember with pleasure was "Friday night out!" Glen would catch a ride to Edson with Bill on Friday morning and then Mary Ann would bring Doris, the twins and the week's worth of laundry to Edson after school. The entertainment for the evening was eating at the Blue Jay Café while washing and drying clothes at the adjacent Edson Laundromat. Connections remained strong with the small Mennonite fellowship in Edson that included Pastor Paul and Nancy Showalter, Alvin and Ruth Grasse, and Leonard and Alberta Cressman, and their families. In the larger Mennonite circle, they enjoyed annual get-togethers with other VSers from northern Alberta as well as the Alberta-Saskatchewan (now Northwest Mennonite) Conference. No additional VS families were added to Marlboro during 1968 although Willie and Corrine Helmuth along with their two young daughters from Ohio did accept a one year assignment in the small coal mining community of Robb, 50 kilometres south of Marlboro. The Kauffmans enjoyed occasional trips to visit them overnight, ESPECIALLY since their house had running water and a bathtub!

As the end of the VS term came within sight for Glen and Mary Ann, they made a decision in the spring of 1969 to stay in Marlboro for another year. JoAnn accepted a new adventure to teach in Tuktoyaktuk, NWT so

significant changes had to be made at Marlboro School. Once again, Mennonite Voluntary Service was asked for help. The call was answered by Tim and Bonnie Burkey from Friend, Nebraska. Bonnie taught the lower grades and Mary Ann accepted the role of Principal as well as teaching the upper two grades. Tim worked with the Fish and Wildlife Department out of Edson and Glen continued to teach at the newly constructed Parkland Composite High School. Bill and Doris and the twins moved to a larger house in Edson where they could enjoy the modern conveniences of running water and a forced air heating system while Bill continued to develop a strong music program at Jubilee Junior High School.

As Glen and Mary Ann considered thoughts of raising a family, they asked the landlord if running water could be installed in their house in Marlboro. When it appeared that would not happen, they, too, decided to move to Edson. The School District began discussions again about closing the school but Bonnie remained as the only teacher for kindergarten through Grade 3 for the 1970-71 school year. Following their term of service, Tim and Bonnie moved back to Nebraska and the Marlboro School was closed in June, 1971. The Lauterbachs, Kauffmans and Burkeys continued to hold Sunday services at the Marlboro Youth Centre through the 1970-71 school year. However, when there was no longer a resident presence in the community, the church became a target for vandalism and, consequently, transferable assets were moved to the Edson Mennonite Church while the property was returned to the community for its use. The structure was eventually destroyed and the property now houses a modern Fire Hall. Although there is no longer a school, a post office or a Youth Centre, Marlboro has become a well-established community again with new houses, numerous community programs for the young and the old and is blessed with a strong community spirit.

Bill and Doris and Glen and Mary Ann continued to serve as teachers in Edson throughout their working careers and currently reside there. They have been active members of the Edson Mennonite Church since they joined it in 1971. They enjoy retirement and maintain many friendships with the families they learned to love in Marlboro. On more than one occasion the four of them have been known to start a short visit together which somehow turns into "burning the midnight oil" as they reminisce about the "good old days in Marlboro Country." ♦

(Continued from page 1)

Although she makes a good case that MCC Canada has been a worthwhile and successful enterprise, Epp-Tiessen identifies many of the conflicts between MCC Canada and MCC in Akron in ways that make me suspicious there is another side to some of the stories. She writes from the perspective of Mennonites in Western Canada.

On page 84, Epp-Tiessen writes, "The decision to establish MCC Canada's home in Winnipeg was significant for the larger MCC system in that it ensured a different 'MCC culture' than that of Akron or even Kitchener [Ontario]. Surrounded by Mennonites who were of Dutch-German (usually described as 'Russian'), rather than Swiss-German descent, MCC Canada's culture would feel discernibly different than MCC's, though not in easily described ways. The differences would at times contribute to conflict, but mostly they would complement each other."

This comment is almost the only hint she gives that the creation of MCC Canada was a bit of a political triumph of the "Russian" Mennonites of Western Canada over the "Swiss" Mennonites of Ontario. She recognizes that historian Lucille Marr, in her history of MCC in Ontario, described these Mennonites as being reluctant participants in the creation of MCC Canada, but Epp-Tiessen dismisses this argument, insisting that "the Western Canadians made significant concessions to meet the concerns of Ontarians."

It is interesting that Epp-Tiessen can identify that Kitchener had a different culture than Winnipeg, but she hesitates to describe it. Perhaps she has chosen to minimize this "Russian" Mennonite versus "Swiss" Mennonite controversy because fifty years later it has virtually disappeared. She is correct in her comment that the differences in culture of these two Men-

Mennonite Central Committee in Canada

A HISTORY

Esther Epp-Tiessen



nonite groups mostly “complement each other.”

Epp-Tiessen provides good analysis of how the organization has changed in fifty years. She doesn’t get bogged down in too many details, preferring to describe overall trends, now and then zooming in with anecdotes of specific people and situations to illustrate her point. She mentions many individuals, but always within the context of the larger story.

She points out that, although MCC began strictly as a relief organization, it has changed in amazing ways. By the 1960s, MCC was moving into development work. The concept of what it means to be a peace witness changed a good deal in the 1960s and ’70s, and by the 1980s there was new language of “justice.” As MCC Canada grew, it needed to become less “folksy” and more professional. In the 1990s, it deliberately changed its

mandate to be less centralized by giving major responsibility for programming within Canada to the provincial bodies.

MCC today has a very complex constituency and the cultural diversity has grown a great deal in the last fifty years. Epp-Tiessen is not surprised that the Manitoba Sommerfelder Church has withdrawn its support from MCC Manitoba and suggests that it is a bit of a miracle that more groups have not withdrawn. One reason she gives for the widespread grassroots support is that MCC does such a wide range of work that its diverse constituents can always find some project they feel comfortable supporting. She also argues that the hands-on volunteer opportunities have kept people engaged.

Epp-Tiessen has produced a book about a complex organization that is interesting to read without getting bogged down in details. It’s too bad that the many photos are small, as they would be much more effective if they were in a larger format. The research has been very extensive and the author’s many interviews have given her the opportunity to describe some fascinating behind-the-scenes conversations. This review was first published in *Canadian Mennonite* on April 23, 2015. ❖

MCC in Canada Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow

by Evelyn Rempel Petkau

On a cold, windy December day in Winnipeg in 1963, forty men made the decision to form Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada. Exactly fifty years later, a group of people braved another bitterly cold day in Winnipeg to reflect on those fifty years and contemplate MCC’s future.

On December 13 and 14, 2013, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg collaborated to present the 50th Anniversary History Conference of MCC in Canada. The launch of Esther Epp-Tiessen’s book, *Mennonite Central Committee in Canada: A History* kicked off the conference.

“The decision to form a national inter-Mennonite partnership for relief, immigration service and peace was a controversial one,” said Epp-Tiessen, who spoke of “the agony and the ecstasy” in researching and writing this book.

From the stories that Epp-Tiessen uncovered, she presented a mosaic of what MCC in Canada represents, calling it a bridge builder within the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ family. “Today we take inter-Mennonite cooperation very much for granted,” she said. “That wasn’t always the case. Much of that cooperation happens at grassroots levels like thrift shops and relief sales.”

During a discussion that followed, it was pointed out that, although MCC works intentionally to create a sense of unity, the Sommerfelder Mennonites decided last year to withdraw from MCC over concerns about MCC’s direc-

tion and widening theological spectrum. "What does it mean for the future of MCC Canada to continue to be collaborative?" attendees pondered.

"MCC builds bridges across wider divides," Epp-Tiessen pointed out. "MCC is a place of profound learning and Christian formation," she said. "MCC workers have been profoundly shaped and formed by their service experiences. Many have found their faith deepened in the contexts of poverty and need."

MCC in Canada has been a force for social change, an incubator for creative ways of responding to human need and a counterculture lifestyle drawing people to live justly, sustainably and simply. "It has been a keeper and a shaper of the peace, preserving, nurturing and giving of concrete expression to an Anabaptist commitment to peace, non-resistance and non-violence. "At times it has been a vanguard of justice within the church, sometimes pulling the church in directions it didn't want to go," Epp-Tiessen said.

"The 1970s decade was a period when new programs were being created almost every year," Epp-Tiessen said. The organization was fairly bold, with apologies offered to Canada's Japanese and indigenous communities.

"Would MCC make those apologies today? I kind of doubt it," said Epp-Tiessen. "MCC, as an organization, has become much more professional and bureaucratic, and those kinds of things are much more difficult for it to do now. It is much better known in society and concerned about that image. The supporting network is much more diverse and there is concern about the constituency critique," said Epp-Tiessen, who, since completing the book, has become the Ottawa Office public engagement coordinator for MCC Canada.

Paul Bramadat of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society at the University of Victoria provided a context for the challenges facing MCC Canada today. He spoke of the erosion of religion. "Mennonites lost 9.5 percent [of their membership] from 1991 to 2001 and 6.5 percent from 2001 to 2011," he said, adding, "Groups that rely on identification with denominations will need to be mindful of these changes."

"There is an opportunity here, but also a challenge," he cautioned. "An organization can weather these changes, but only if they recognize how massive the changes are. MCC has demonstrated great creativity in facing social changes."

Stefan Epp-Koop, chair of the MCC Manitoba Board, offered a view into the next twenty-five years of MCC Canada. "MCC will grow and mature, built on the energy of its new structure, on a strong, existing donor pool and on the need for the work done by MCC," he predicted, wondering, though, "What will happen as Mennonite churches shrink and as resources continue to be stretched?" With many churches no longer seeing themselves as peace churches, Epp-Koop forecasts an important role for MCC to, "work for peace and be engaged on peace issues in the churches."

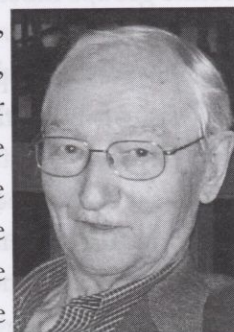
"And, whatever happened to service?" Epp-Koop asked. "Since 1987, the number of service workers in MCC has dropped from 800 to 400, and in MCC Canada that number has dropped from 160 in the early 1990s to 10 in 2011. How can we reverse this trend?"

This first appeared in the *Canadian Mennonite* on January 15, 2014. ♦

Some Chose Trees: A Remembrance Day Address

by Peter Penner

This is the text of an address that I gave in Convocation Hall to a town wide Remembrance Day Service in Sackville, New Brunswick, on November 11, 1982 at the request of, the Rev. George Lemmon, the chaplain of the local Legion.



Peter Penner

On that occasion, I chose to tell my story in the third person. I have done some editing for this generation. The pictures were added later.

While it would be most appropriate to speak to the issues raised by the peace movement of today, I have chosen to remember, with you, what life was like for those who took on a different viewpoint during the Second World War and to tell you what their choice was. As this question of war and peace has interested me, a professional historian of British and European

history, for a long time, I kept a file on four young men of one congregation who turned 18 and 1/2 in 1943. Would they go to war as Mennonites or choose the church's official position of non-resistance (Christian pacifism)? There was the clear option for them to choose the Mackenzie King government's "alternative service." That is, as Mennonites, they could choose military exemption.

The reason for telling about these four fellows and then singling out one is to show that young Mennonite men were divided on the issue of peace and war. Here were four close friends, members of the same young people's group, who needed to decide what they should do!

One joined the RCAF, returned safely and has become a wealthy contractor. Of the two who evaded the issue, one assumed he would be rejected for medical reasons and the other was so certain he would get deferral for farm work that he never declared himself a conscientious objector (CO). Both have been very successful, one in engineering and the other in (fruit) agriculture. At the time, however, I thought their choice was a cop-out!

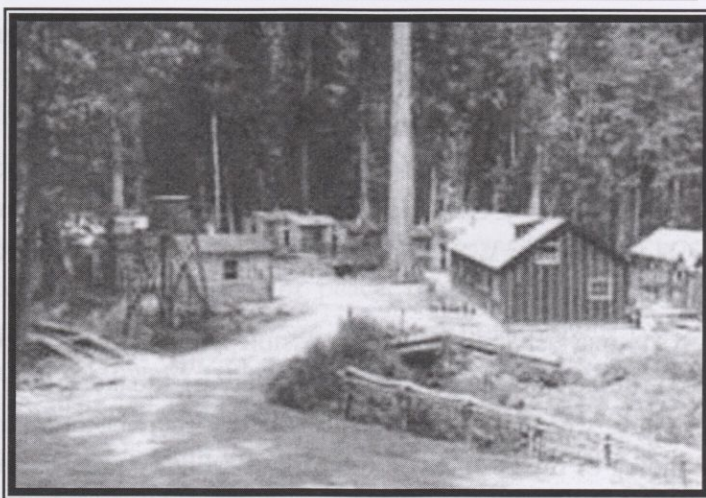
Only one claimed military exemption and awaited his fate. As expected, he soon received a letter stating that he should report to the B.C. Forest Service, Green Timbers, B.C. Enclosed was a one-way CPR ticket from his hometown in Ontario to New Westminster, B.C. When he inspected the ticket closely, he saw it was dated December

23, 1943. When he recounted the story later, he found himself eating his Christmas dinner alone while rolling into Winnipeg on the journey's second day out. Having arrived in B.C., he was soon taken to

Vancouver Island in order to join the firefighting and tree-planting

units, first, at Camp Hill 60 (Duncan), and then at Lake Cowichan (Camp C3). He was outfitted with logger's boots, rubberized outerwear to keep off the rain and a tree planter's pick. Consequently, he chose trees!

The fellows at Lake Cowichan received room and board plus 50 cents a day. When the camps were closed in March, 1944, the men were allowed to work on farms during the summer and in some necessary industry during the winter. The fellow I've been following joined two other young men, already known to him, at Canada Packers in Toronto where they spent the winter of 1944-45. Guess where they were put to work? In the hide cellar!



Lake Cowichan Camp, C-3, 1942-1944, inland from Duncan, Vancouver Island, where I joined other COs at New Year's, 1944



These were some of my fellow tree planters, at a relaxed moment; I am on the extreme right, also in the inset. In this group were Mennonites from three conferences, I remember Froese, Langeman, Reimer, Cressman, two Christodelphians; in the inset, add Plymouth Brethren

All their wages except \$25 a month went to the Red Cross until they were demobilized from Alternative Service.

Those who have recently traveled to Lake Cowichan, the scene of tree planting in the 1940s, tell me that those trees now stand at about 90 feet and will soon be harvested for constructive purposes. It is estimated that COs, during the War years, planted about 17 million trees in various parts of Canada, mostly BC.

One may ask, how was this possible and seemingly necessary for some to do? Mennonites along with the Society of Quakers have always been pacifists and were informed on the issue by their home congregations' understanding of the Sermon on the Mount. Military exemption was part and parcel of their heritage.

In Czarist Russia, where our forbears came from, military exemption was part of the Privilegiu, a designated number of privileges, granted first by Czarina Catherine the Great and confirmed by Czar Paul in 1796, at about the same time as Mennonites in Ontario (Upper Canada) were receiving like privileges. It was the introduction of universal military conscription in the 1870s that brought 17,000 Mennonites from Russia to Canada and the U.S.A. The Russian Revolution and the communist regime drove the families of the four under this discussion and many hundreds of others to Canada in the 1920s.

Between the wars and by 1940 the Ontario Mennonites and Quakers had formed an association known as the Historic Peace Churches. Their representation in Ottawa was acknowledged as valid because they claimed the traditional military exemption given to Mennonites on entirely biblical grounds. Armed with a certificate from that body, any young Mennonite in Ontario could get exemption without a hearing.

In other parts of Canada, provision was made for a non-combatant medical service within the Army and just over 200 Mennonites took this option. This small number is to be accounted for by the fact that the arrangements were very slow in forthcoming. In the USA, the army rejected this form of alternative service.

One may say, given the protected and privileged position of the Mennonites, that they have never come to grips with the issue of war. How wrong that position is! Mennonites, throughout their history, have had to come to grips with war, anarchy, destruction of their property and personal assault in a way that Canadians who remained at home have not.

The Mennonite antiwar stance was made in midst of war during the 16th century. In Frederick the Great's Prussia in the 18th century, the Prussians dwelt in a warfare state and when asked to leave for reasons of state, were welcomed into Russia (Ukraine) where the Mennonite villages lay in the path of Red armies fighting the Whites in the Civil War following Lenin's takeover. The villages were laid waste by the Anarchist, Machno, and his



Three MBs we were, sent work at Canada Packers, attached to a gang of Maltese who worked the hide cellar; Henry Abrahams and Peter Dirksen, St. Catharines, and Peter Penner, Vineland, dressed for church.

roving bands (1917-1919). During those times, there would be the knock on the door, the pistol at the head and the demands, first, for food for the men and fodder for the horses, the villagers' horses, wagons and, eventually, the women. Non-compliance meant the trigger or the tearing away of the father, thus leaving the women defenceless.

Because of these atrocities, Mennonites often faced the question: What would you do if you were attacked? They answered it in two ways: one group said they must organize their own self-defence against the marauding bands. This they did, under the aegis of the White armies, but the results were shattering. They were already too much identified with the wealthy classes and the retaliation was all the more fierce in a war that the Whites lost. The other group said: No, they must not resist the aggressor; they must "heap coals of fire on his head" and they must "turn the other

cheek." Some Mennonites in Canada were more influenced by the second group's thinking while others were influenced by the self-defenders. Among the four to whom I have been referring, two were sons of men who had taken military exemption in Russia and two were sons of those who had fought in self-defence.

The reader may ask, "If everyone took that position, what would happen to our country?" The need to fear would be small for the few who actually took the non-resistant position. Of about 660,000 persons who received deferment in all of Canada on the grounds that they were needed at home, only 4 per cent were COs. In all, there were only about 11,000 COs in Canada (not only Mennonites) during World War II. Almost as many Mennonites joined the Forces as claimed military exemption.

While most Mennonite denominations still hold officially to the peace position, the issue has seldom been raised since the end of the Vietnam War. While many individuals are actively engaged in dimensions of the peace movement such as Project Ploughshares, the denomination to which the four young men belonged in 1943 cannot be said to have been an integral part of today's peace movement.

I can appreciate the position taken by Gordon Stewart at McGill in 1940. He had been minister of Sackville United Church from 1971 to 1981. He suffered expulsion for refusing to take military training. When he joined a firefighting unit,

he discovered there were many fine Christians in the army and many far worse among the pacifists who were judgmental. His criticism is valid. It all adds up to this: That those who, in their personal lives, don't live up to the position they take on biblical grounds have compromised themselves beyond repair.

Today, of course, it is imperative that the Mennonite position be a positive one in service and in the search for peace, but, the time may come when another conventional war will bring the issue home again. As our leading theologian, John Howard Yoder, (Indiana) wrote recently, "The new Mennonite vision as well as the old proclaims far more than the refusal of military service, but at least it cannot be satisfied with less than that."

It is appropriate for me to close my remarks with a poem written in 1944 by School Inspector, Ben Warkentin, when his son, Flying Officer John Howard Warkentin, was shot down over France. Ben is now retired in New Brunswick. He is the son of a prominent Mennonite pastor in Winkler, Manitoba, served in a British noncombatant unit in World War I and was a reservist in World War II. It is a noble way for us to remember those who did not come back. The poem was published in a Grade VI Manitoba reader.

These cold, concise, official words, the letter giving notice of someone
killed in action

Do but convey he fact that he, my son, no longer breathes this air

And that this Mother Earth has taken back the cloak

That some time made him tall, and strong, and passing fair,

He did not lose his life! Say that of those poor souls

Whose blund'ring feet walk here and there, and find no goal.

He did not lose, but proudly gave! His was the wish,

The thought, the will, the daring heart, the steadfast soul.

He is not missing, though his voice will not again

Be heard in instant answer to the bugle's call,

Not missing, no, but missed; in such few years,

He made so many friends; he gave his smile to all.

And who believes him dead? Not you, nor I; we know

His spirit walks among the clouds his feet have trod;

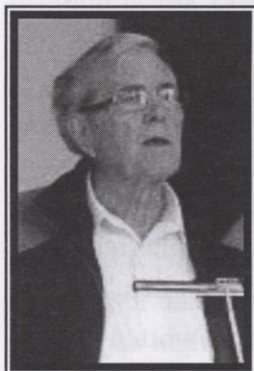
We know he lives, and will forever live, within

The hearts of those he loved, and in the heart of God.

Note: This address was printed in the *Mennonite Reporter* (31 October 1983), 8; it never got into the book published by the Seniors for Peace, Abbotsford (with MCC), edited by A. J. Klassen, *Alternative Service for Peace, in Canada during World War II, 1941-1946*. (1998). ♦

Review of Miriam Toews' *All My Puny Sorrows*, Alfred A. Knopf Canada 2014 .

by Henry M. Dick



Henry M. Dick

About the Author

Miriam Toews was born in 1964, grew up in a Mennonite culture in southern Manitoba and considers herself a Mennonite. She is a descendant of one of Steinbach's early settlers who arrived in Manitoba in 1874 from Ukraine. Her maternal grandfather founded Loewen windows. Miriam has a B.A. in Film Studies from U of Manitoba and a B. Journalism from U. King's College, Halifax. Her father was a school teacher and community activist. He committed suicide after a life of recurring episodes of depression. Miriam's older sister and only sibling committed suicide 12 years later.

Toews' writings as a journalist and novelist have won her significant acclaim and awards, including a National Magazine Award Gold Medal for Humour. She has a gift for writing about serious issues in an earthy gut-level style, but the grief and tears prompted by the large and little tragedies of life are transformed to laughter by the humorous vignettes that often represent the human coping response to stress. Novelist David Bergen puts it thus: "She goes to dark places and yet she comes out leaning to the light." Her writings seem to resonate with non-Mennonite readers. Mennonite readers tend to be more easily offended by the earthy language and the author's characterization of the fundamentalist ethic of the Mennonite church. The author's frequent use of the 'f-bomb,' to many readers, will seem gratuitous. Miriam Toews makes her home in Toronto.

About the Novel

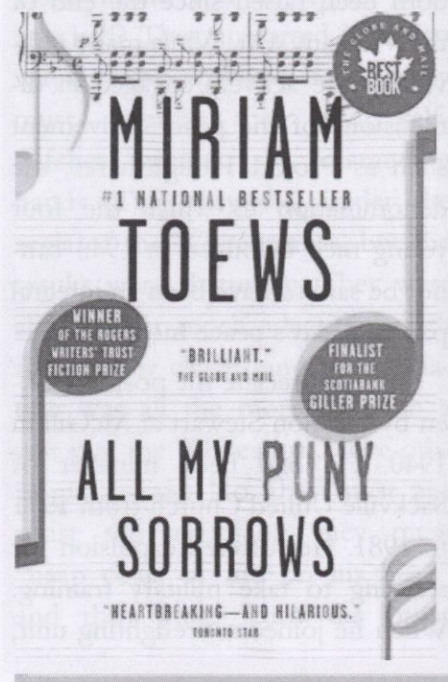
The title of Toews' latest novel, *ALL MY PUNY SORROWS*, is a phrase extracted from a Coleridge poem. "... I too a sister had, an only sister — She loved me dearly, and I doted on her! To her I pour'd forth all my puny sorrows ... (Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 1794).

The stage for the story is set when the Bishop (the "alpha Mennonite") and his "posse of elders" visit the von Riesen home to chastise Lottie for failing to properly discipline her daughters, Elfrieda (Elf), a gifted concert pianist, and Yolanda (Yoli), a writer of "Rodeo Rhonda" books.

Although the suicide issue is central in the plot, the story line takes on other issues as well. Toews is a harsh critic of the fundamentalist ethic. The narrative comes back repeatedly to the church and its misogynous stance and its focus on saving souls rather than nurturing them. The von Riesen's pastor advises that Elf would be made whole if only she would "give her life

to God." A band of "perpetual disapprovers" in the congregation continually finds fault and passes judgement. Lottie is told that a mother who won't apply "tough love" to wayward children cannot expect them to be spiritually (implied mentally) healthy.

The story is also critical of the professionals who presume to understand and seek to provide effective intervention for the mentally ill. The encounters between medical staff and patient, medical staff and family members, is characterized by a complete lack of empathy and constant berating of the patient for not being compliant. The message is that patients who won't "follow the programme" and refuse to follow hospital protocol cannot be helped. The psychiatrist is too busy to attend to a non-compliant patient or to discuss treatment issues with family members. When confronted by the family, he tells them that treatment is compromised because, "Elf is play-



ing a silly game.” The nurses are evasive, not wanting to be involved. Yoli begs the psychiatrist and the nurses for assurance that Elf will not be discharged. Nevertheless, a day-pass to celebrate her birthday provides Elf the opportunity to end her life.

The narrative also examines the evolving relationships as the family crises intensify: the relationship between two sisters, between the sisters and their mother, between their mother and aunt Tina, (the mother’s sister). Each of these relationships is focused on providing support, primarily to Elf, but also to each other. Yoli is consumed with the need to determine what it means to love a suicidal sister. If love means placing Elf’s need before her own, does she help her to live, or to die? Is suicide a sin, an act of evil? Would Yoli be exercising kindness by taking Elf to Zurich (where euthanasia is legal), or would she be committing murder? Does society have a right to force life on those who are weary of life, those who want out? If Yoli denies her the help she needs to die with dignity, will she force Elf to do it by herself in lonely, gruesome circumstance. Readers will be aware that these same questions are being debated in social media and political forums today. The church has not yet entered the conversation but continues to ask parallel questions about sexual orientation.

For the purpose of this review I read the book a second time and, as I was familiar with the plot, was drawn into the heart-wrenching

struggle with the question of what does it mean to love? More specifically, how is love expressed toward an only sibling who is intent to die? What is required of the church and of the professionals who would offer nurturing and healing support? I was frequently moved from tears to laughter by the sagacious homespun quips, often in low German, by Lottie and aunt Tina, as they confronted the inevitability of death and dying.

I concur with those who hold that Miriam Toews is a gifted writer. ❖

In the Ashes of a Prairie House

by Peter Kroeger

We have a small property in central Alberta near the hamlet of Hesketh. It straddles the north slope of the Kneehill Creek valley and displays some geological formations signalling the beginning of the badlands. Standing on the edge of the plain above the valley and looking two hundred meters down to the meandering creek below, the serene vista belies the history that has flowed across this land. The hamlet of Hesketh is but a shadow of its former self. Gone are the grain elevators, the train station, the grocery store and the Chinese laundry. It really is a ghost town although five families still call it home. The school is vacant but still standing, the community hall is still in use even with the musty odor and an old garage is leaning with age. No remnants of coal mining activity are visible except for a possible vent hole on our property that wafts steamy, foul smelling vapours into the air.

Across the creek from the hamlet of Hesketh is what we called “the bowl.” Little did we know that for a long time before we applied the moniker, others had referred to it by the same name. Long before white men arrived in the area, the natives extensively inhabited the site. Then, when cattle were driven north on the prairies in the 1870s/80s, “the bowl” served as a natural stop and resting place. “The bowl” is literally bowl-shaped with the Kneehill Creek flowing through the middle; it has an abundance of grass, offers shelter from storms and was an easy site in which to contain the cattle. The first homesteaders on the property were the Shillam brothers. They quickly recognized the merits of the site: the water, the grass and the shelter from winter storms. In about 1891, they constructed a small shack just east of the bowl. Here they established a small horse ranch and raised some sheep. The land was later acquired by Louise Voison, then became part of the Senator Rufus Pope lease and, in 1920, was acquired by the Jacksons, probably as part of the returned Soldiers Settlement Board. Sometime in the 1890s, a house was constructed kitty-corner to the Shillam shed. This house was constructed of fir logs, interesting in itself, because there were no fir trees in the area. These logs were harvested in the Rockies, floated down the Red Deer River and hauled overland to Hesketh. The Jacksons expanded the house by building a lean-to kitchen/eating area attached to the west side of the house and incorporating the shed. In 1935,



Jim Bacon purchased the property and added another room filling the space south of the house and east of the shed thus forming a nice rectangular bungalow.

It was a hot, humid summer day and I decided to stop by the vacant, derelict old house. As I explored the building, I crawled into the small dugout basement and saw a calf that had recently fallen through the floor and became wedged in the space below the kitchen. I rescued the calf but decided the house had to go as it was such a hazard. That winter we torched the place and it is gone. Sometime later, I kicked about in the ashes and found a charred tin can with a hole in its side. I removed the lid and there was some charred paper inside. Our initial reaction was the possibility of stashed money! The burned paper was intact enough to be recognised as a rolled up sheet of folded paper. This really aroused our curiosity and we contacted a descendant of Jim Bacon who related this following story. Is it fact or fiction!

Jim and his wife farmed the site until their retirement in 1961. After their retirement, Mrs. Bacon suggested they go on a vacation to somewhere warm for the winter. Jim queried about what she had in mind and she suggested, maybe, Florida or California or even Hawaii. She was taken aback by Jim's violent reaction and emphatic, "No, I am not going to the United States!" After regaining her composure, she pursued his sudden and vehement negative response. Eventually, he had gone to the bedroom and returned with a large tin can. Pulling off the lid, he had extracted a yellowing piece of paper with frayed edges. When fully unrolled, it was a wanted poster for three horse thieves, offering a reward for their capture and return to the United States.

Mr. Bacon proceeded to explain that, in 1919, while he was working for Mr. Kirby on an adjacent ranch, he, along with two of his buddies, heard the United States 9th or 10th Cavalry Division, which had posts along the Canadian-U.S. border, was in the market for horses. Horses and donkeys had been used in the Carbon-Drumheller area to work the coal mines; many which had been released when the mines closed had escaped or simply been abandoned. There were many feral horses in the coulees in the area. The three entrepreneurial fellows decided to round up some of the horses, drive

them south and sell them to the Cavalry. Apparently they took them to the border crossing at Chief Mountain or Del Bonita and sold them. As it was late in the day, the Cavalry had offered them accommodation for the night. Next morning, they learned the gate to the corral holding the horses had come open and the horses had escaped. Because they had been paid, they left. After proceeding homeward for some distance, they came upon the escaped horses. An idea tweaked their minds! They would round up the horses and take them to a different outpost and try to sell them again. This they did. During the night at the second Cavalry post, they unlatched the gate and released the horses. They tracked down the animals, rounded them up again, took them to the border crossing south of Cypress Hills and sold them a third time! When word spread among the Cavalry posts, the Cavalry realized they had been duped and they put a bounty on the heads of the three horse thieves.

Even the ashes are beginning to disappear. Timothy (grass) has invaded the site and waves in the wind. The only sounds are the gurgling creek, the chirping crickets and the melodious song of a western meadowlark. The only evidence that this was anything but quiet, virgin prairie are the remains of the old barn and a couple of deteriorating out buildings. ♦

Kathy's Korner: Tips for the Amateur Genealogist

by Kathy Ma

As I sit and reflect upon the people that are part of my Mennonite heritage, I have a lot of unanswered questions. What were their personalities like when they were young? What did their voices sound like? What were their experiences as they rode in the rail cars as the train passed under the Red Gate? Did they fear that the train would stop and that the men in the family would be taken captive and sent into exile? As they travelled onward to the unknown Canadian West, were they poignantly aware that they might never see or hear from their families again?

I will never personally know my great grandparents beyond what I know of them in pictures and stories. If only I could spend an afternoon with my great-grandma Janzen in her kitchen as she cooked for her large family, or sit on the white bench with my great-grandpa Friesen and ask him about his life in the "old country." I will never have the opportunity to ask any of my questions as three of my great-grandparents passed away before I was born and the last died when I was four years old. So, here I am, thirty one years after the last connection to the old country has long since passed, tracing my family lines and footsteps.

Genealogy was first introduced to me by my father many years



Kathy Ma with her daughter Olivia

ago as he started to search for the roots of his father. I "took" over the Mennonite side of my ancestry about fourteen years ago, and since then it has become an earnest and serious passion of mine. I believe that we, as well as, the younger generations and those yet to come, need to know where we came from and I believe that we are obliged to honour the stories from previous generations. They are so much more than just "grandma's story." These narratives will ground our experiences, give context to our past and help inform our future in a technologically complex world.

My ancestors' world was one without cars, computers, phones, selfies and Facebook. Conversely, theirs was a world I will never know or have to experience. Nonetheless, their experiences, including their troubles and trials, run parallel to the perils of our world today. We ask the same questions as they did. How can I provide the basic necessities for my family? How do we live in a world that is constantly threatened by war, famine and poverty? Would my husband and/or son ever be taken away from me and either sent to prison or conscripted in the army?

I learned through my searching that there is a wealth of information to be tapped. It takes desire, diligence, patience, and perseverance to find the answers to one's questions. Each discovery, whether minute or large, is worth the search. Last spring I held a short workshop on how one could begin one's own family research, specifically tailored to finding Mennonite roots.

I am somewhat at a disadvantage in that I am two generations removed from those that came from the old country and I did not grow up in a Mennonite community. Therefore, I only have the stories already written as my starting point and I can only speak about how to retrace steps and provide proof of existence. I do not have any specific stories unless they have already been told. However, these factors had made the search only that much more intriguing.

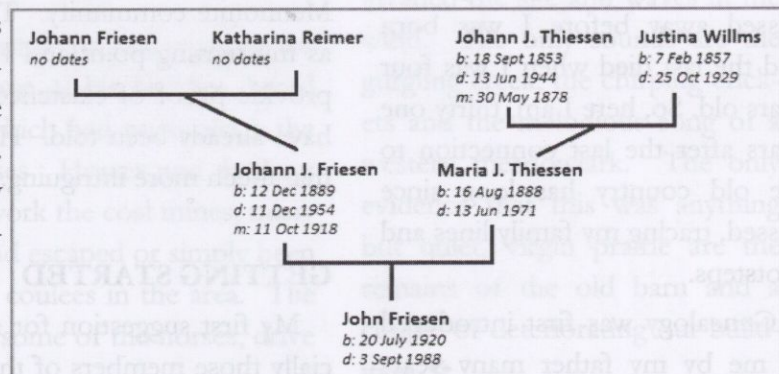
GETTING STARTED

My first suggestion for a beginner is to turn to one's own family, especially those members of the older generations, as they will know the most.

Russian passport Johann Friesen circa.1925

Russian passport Maria Friesen circa.1925

Informal conversations over photos or objects can bring a wealth of stories or snippets of previously unknown information. A grandma's Bible or family ledger will give names and often dates. These will help one to begin building a family tree. Let's use my maternal grandfather as an example:



Family Questionnaire

2.114 Namaka

Das Ehepaar: *Johann Friesen* *der*
Ehefrau Maria Friesen

Namen der Eltern:
 des Mannes: Vater und Mutter-Familiennamen vor der Eheschliessung und
 ihr letzter Wohnort: *Johann Friesen Friesen geb. (Rußland)*
Friedrichthal (Rußland)
 der Frau: Vater und Mutter-Familiennamen vor der Ehe und ihr letzter
 Wohnort: *Johann Friesen Friesen Friedrichthal (Rußland)*

Des Mannes Geburtsort und Datum, Taufort und Datum: *Friedrichthal*
1880. den 12. Aug. getauft in Friedrichthal 1910. den 7. Febr.
 Der Frau Geburtsort und Datum, Taufort und Datum: *Friedrichthal*
1888. den 16. Sept. getauft in Rußland 1919. den 11. Febr.
 Ihre Hochzeit: Wann? wo? und von wem getraut: *1918. den 11. Okt.*
Friedrichthal. getraut von Pastor Friesen

Kinder auch Verheiratete und Verstorbene der Reihe dem Alter nach
 Name, Geburtsdatum und Geburtsort jedes einzelnen Kindes,
 wann getauft wann? und wo?
 wann verheiratet wann? wo? und von wem getraut. *den 16. Nov. in N.*
 wann gestorben wann? wo? und Ursache des Todes. *geb. 16. Nov.*
 Beerdigt wann? wo? und Name des dienenden Predigers.

Hr. Johann Friesen geb. 1880. den 20. Juli in Rußland (Rußland)
" Jakob " 1923. " 30. Nov. in Rußland (Rußland)
" Heinrich " 1927. " 27. Sept. in Rußland (Rußland)
Joseph Maria " 1926. " 13. März in Rußland (Rußland)
Hr. Heinrich " 1927. " 27. Sept. in Rußland (Rußland)
geb. 1946. den 9. Febr.

Information provided by Kathy Ma (2013)

Johann and Maria Friesen Family Registration

Typically, it is easiest to work back about one to three generations. Note that it takes approximately one hundred years from the birth of an individual in question for any restrictions regarding the person to have been lifted from the public record. This means that one should be able to search the records from the early 1920s and before.

Secondly, searches through family records or albums can reveal another good resource, namely photographs. For example, my grandpa inherited his father's green strong box which contained a

treasury of random papers which turned out to produce a wealth of genealogy data. Two very valuable and precious items that were found inside this strong box were my great-grandparents' Russian passports. These documents contain a wealth of genealogical and immigration information. They also contain the only known pictures of my grandfather and his siblings as small children. The information included full names (including maiden names), ages, birth dates for the adults and personal descriptions of the adults. One of the immigration stamps at the bottom is dated January 18, 1926, Riga. This corresponds with all their travel documentation.

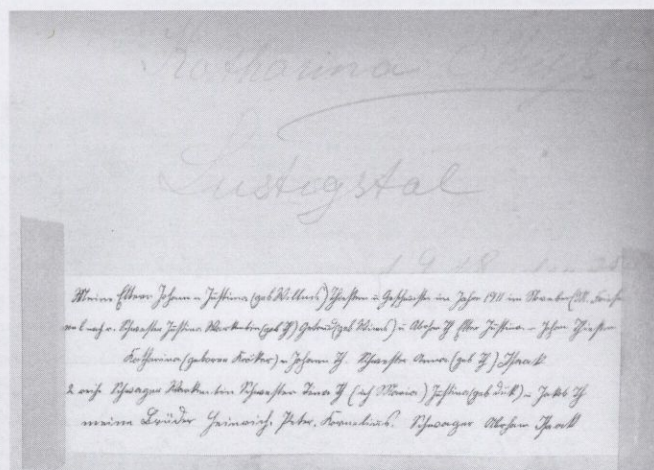
The next paper I found was a family questionnaire that my great-grandfather had completed. Since it was written in German, it required translation and, subsequently, provided a goldmine of information which provided not just the names, birthdates and baptismal information about my great grandparents but also their marriage date, location and the name of the preacher who performed the ceremony in Crimea. In addition, the names of my great-grandfather's and my great-grandmother's parents and their last residence in the Crimea were included. One a special note was written in my great grandfather's handwriting which makes that note very special in and of itself.

There was also letter from the *Ältester* or elder of the Karassan Mennonite Church in Crimea, dated December 19, 1925. Basically, it is a letter stating that, "John and Maria Friesen are in good standing with the church; we wish them well and please allow them to join the congregation in North America." Once again, this document provides names and birthdates of the parents and children. If there are surviving records from the Karassan Mennonite Church in Crimea, it may be possible to find them within the membership records. This will be a search for another time.

Lastly, since photographs can be such an important source of information, it is a very good idea is to create a record or database of these old photos. It is important to identify as many people as possible within the photo as well as the location and approximate date when the photo was taken. Old photos without names or context are meaningless to the younger generation. It is important to carefully remove the photos from the album because there may be writing on the reverse side. For



Above: Thiessen family wedding photo; circa 1911 Russia - front



Thiessen family wedding photo; circa 1911 Russia - back

Letter for Church Membership

(Nur für kirchlichen Gebrauch.)

Bescheinigung.

Es wird hiermit bescheinigt, dass Vorzeiger dieses Johann Johannow Friesen, geb. 1889 den 12. Dezember, & seine Ehegattin Maria, geb. Thiessen, geb. 1888 den 16. August, beide Mitglieder der Karapanner Mennonitengemeinde (Sied.-Rufstaud Krim) sind, & als solche in ihrem neuen Wohnort (Amerika) einer analogen Gemeinde anschließen möchten, wozu auch von seiten unserer Gemeinde keine Hindernisse vorliegen, sondern Hilfe & Segenswunsch mitfolgt.

Ihre Kinder sind: Anna, geb. 1913 den 16. Aug.
Johann, " 1920 " 20. Aug.
Jacob, " 1923 " 30. Nov.

Karapann,
d. 19. Dezember 1925

Altester der Karapanner Mennonitengemeinde: Jacob Lottemann

example, this photo may seem like a picture of an average family from Russia. However, when it is turned over, one sees that someone has provided information regarding the family on the back. I believe it says that the photo was taken in 1911 and it also says the names of the people in the photo. Clues within the picture suggest it was taken at a special occasion such as a wedding. The men's attire appears to be their Sunday best. Note that the two unmarried girls at the back of the picture are wearing corsages. My grandmother once told me that the wearing of a corsage was a way to signify who was "single" at a wedding.

Of course, there are always more tips to share, so stay tuned for the next edition of Kathy's Korner in the spring issue of the MHSA newsletter.

Kathy Ma, lives in Edmonton with her husband Ted and two children, Olivia and Thomas. She is a full-time mom and registered nurse who works in the Coronary Care Unit and Cardiac Recovery Room at the Royal Alexandra Hospital. When she finds time she enjoys quilting, sewing, scrapbooking, making cards and re-

searching her Mennonite roots. ❖

Mennonite Kolkhoz Chairmen by Colin P. Neufeldt

Reviewed by Wesley Berg

There have been two main sources of information about life for Mennonites in the USSR. First there were the memories and memoirs of those who endured, escaped and emigrated. My knowledge is based on and coloured by the accounts I have heard from my wife and her family who made their way from Kronstal to Canada in 1947 by way of the Great Trek of 1943. The hardships they endured are summed up for me in the comment my mother-in-law made one day as she told us about the difficulties they had faced during the Stalinist terror of the 1930s. "*En dann naume se aules.*" (And then they took everything.)

More recently, scholars like Colin Neufeldt have been delving into archives in Russia and Ukraine and have been providing us with systematic, detailed accounts of the lives of Mennonite colonists in the 1920s and 1930s. While chronicling the hardships suffered by those subject to loss of property leading to life on communal farms, or dekulakization leading to execution or banishment to Siberia, Colin has also outlined occasionally disconcerting facts and insights that do not fit so easily with the narratives of victimhood and suffering Mennonites have told themselves in trying to come to terms with their experiences. His research has revealed



Mennonite kolkhoz in Ukraine, 1930. Photo courtesy of The Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

that Mennonites occupied positions of power and influence in the administrative structures of the former colonies and often had to make life and death decisions about their fellow colonists.

An article, "The Public and Private Lives of Mennonite Kolkhoz Chairmen in the Khortytsia and Molochansk German National Raïony in Ukraine (1928-1934)," in the prestigious series, *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and East Europeans Studies*, published by the University of Pittsburgh (March 2015), continues this area of research by focusing on a particular group of Mennonite administrators. The collective farms imposed by the Soviet government on the former colonies were run by chairmen who were chosen from those remaining after most of the experienced farmers and land owners had been dekulakized. The article describes, in great detail, how these men were chosen, what their duties were, and how they fared dealing with the demands of intrusive and often brutal regional and national governments.

The article opens with a mildly salacious story published in the newspaper of a local Machine Tractor Station about a chairman's dalliance with a young woman working in the commune's pig farm. It turns out that the life of a kolkhoz chairman was not all love nests and trysts. While the position may have offered some security and financial advantages for them and their families, the chairmen were at the centre of a complicated and contradictory system. They and their executive committees were responsible for managing the affairs of the kolkhoz, from large tasks like drawing up and implementing a budget and redistributing land taken from exiled kulaks to deciding how much individuals working on the kolkhoz would be paid. They were also theoretically responsible to an assembly of kolkhoz residents who would frequently complain vigorously about the way they were being treated.

They were also responsible to regional and national authorities who often dictated policy or criticized the actions of the chairmen. This was nowhere more apparent than in the management of the agricultural activities of the kolkhoz. Schedules for seeding and harvesting were published in *Pravda* and were expected to be followed whether the fields were ready or not. My father-in-law told me about seeding or harvesting equipment not making it once around a field before breaking down because conditions were simply not suitable.

Life became particularly difficult during the famines of 1932-33. Chairmen were placed in the impossible position of having to enforce the increasingly demanding and arbitrary grain collection policies of the authorities while, at the same time, trying to keep their people from starving. Through the examination of the tribulations of kolkhoz chairmen during this trying time, Colin presents the reader with a detailed and often horrifying story of that difficult time in the history of Mennonites and Ukrainians.

The role of the kolkhoz chairman, unable to resign without permission, was not an enviable one. Colin summarizes it in this way:

"Chairmen were essentially expendable pawns who could be branded as kulaks, *ekspertniki*, counter-revolutionaries, saboteurs, wreckers, class aliens, White Guardists or fascist at a moment's notice."

By focusing on this small slice of Mennonite life in Stalinist Russia, the reader ends up with a detailed and valuable account of how the fates of ordinary folks living on communal farms were determined by circumstances and forces that also turned them into expendable pawns of the revolution.

Note: Colin P. Neufeldt's paper can be read in its entirety with subscription at:

<http://carlbeckpapers.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/cbp/article/view/199>

applied at the Store.

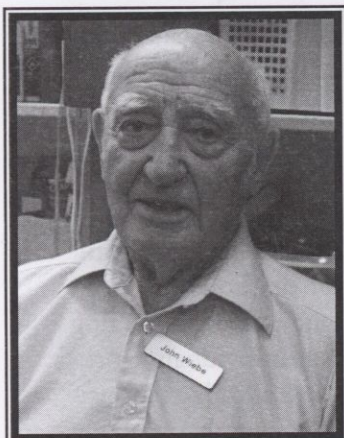
I grew up in a very poor immigrant Mennonite family in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. We always had food on the table, a roof over our head and a bed to sleep in so I did not realize how poor we were. We simply did not have any extra cash, especially, for a child's allowance. If I wanted a few pennies to call my own, I had to develop creative means to earn them. I was a normal elementary school kid and along with my friends, we found out that a local merchant would purchase good, clean cardboard boxes, canning jars and bottles. We would scavenge the neighbourhood and on a good Saturday, I could earn up to ten cents. I have never lost that skill of identifying opportunities and still apply it at my old age.

Some years ago I was sent to a heart clinic to check if my heart was still beating. They put an overnight monitor on my chest. When I returned to the clinic the next day, I watched as the technicians removed the monitor, took out the batteries and dropped them in a large plastic bucket. I suggested the batteries were still good and was informed that they cannot reuse them. I promptly asked what they did with those used batteries and was told they were sent to a

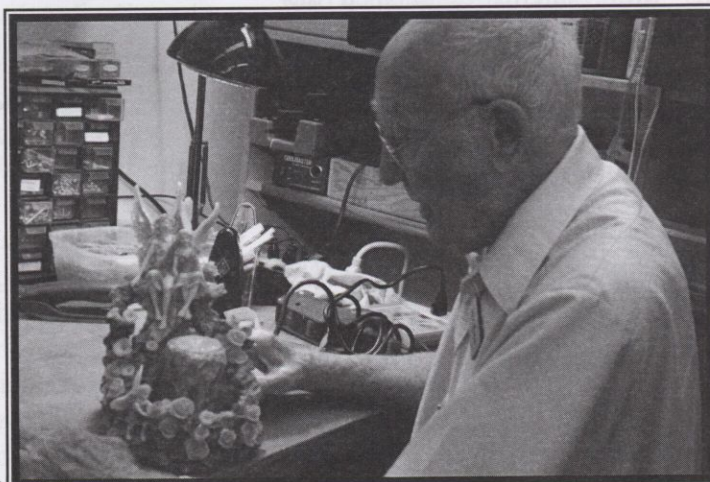
The Battery Man: Innovative Thriftiness

by John Wiebe

The Calgary MCC Thrift Store was planning its annual volunteer appreciation dinner. In preparation for the event, April Hauck, manager of the store, asked several of us to tell a story about how we had developed some of the skills that are of assistance in our roles at the Thrift Store. It occurred to me that my early childhood had instilled in me a sense of frugality and innovative thriftiness that I effectively



John Wiebe



John Wiebe at his Work Bench at
MCC Thrift Store Calgary

recycling unit. I then politely volunteered to be of assistance to help them recycle the batteries. They accepted my offer and I put some of the batteries in a discarded plastic bag and took them to the Thrift Store.

I volunteer in the back of the Thrift Store, checking, sometimes repairing, clocks and some small electronic toys that come in through the back door. We quickly discovered a working clock sells for a higher price and quicker than one without batteries. Now I make regular trips to the Rockyview Hospital to a greeting of, "Here comes the battery man." I have rescued thousands of used batteries from a premature death and it just seemed natural to me to use them at the Thrift Store. ❖

Colin's Picks

by Colin Neufeldt

"Siberia" – for many, the word evokes images of endless forests, frozen taiga, nomadic tribes, and exile settlements. For Soviet Mennonites, the word "Siberia" also evokes these impressions, but other images as well, including land of profitable opportunities, fertile tracts of land, and greater religious liberty. The many and varied Mennonite impressions and experiences of life in Siberia was the focus of a three-day international academic conference that convened in Omsk, Siberia in June, 2010. At the conference, scholars and writers from Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Germany, United States and Canada presented papers on and discussed their latest research undertakings concerning the Mennonite sojourn in Siberia. The proceedings of that conference were published in a number of journals and scholarly



Some of the Conference Presenters near Omsk, Siberia in June 2010

publications, including the 2012 issue (volume 30) of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

The following is a sample of a few of the many intriguing papers that were published as a result of the conference. One of these essays was written by the Russian scholar, Petr R. Wiebe who provides an overview of the Mennonite settlement in pre-revolutionary Siberia in his article, "The Mennonite Colonies of Siberia: From the Late Nineteenth to the Early Twentieth Century" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/viewFile/1446/1434>). Canadian scholars Aileen Friesen and Hans Werner also explore pre-revolutionary Mennonite endeavors to establish roots in the Siberian countryside in their respective articles entitled: "The Case of a Siberian Sect: Mennonites and in the Incomplete Transformation of Russia's Religious Structure" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/download/1457/1445>); and "Siberia in the Mennonite Imagination, 1880-1914: Land, Weather, Markets" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1458/1446>). Pre-soviet Siberian Mennonite educational policies are explored in Lawrence Klippenstein's "Mennonite Education in Siberia: Heinrich P. Wieler in the Classroom, 1916-18" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/viewFile/1459/1447>), while the intriguing topic of Siberian Mennonite midwives is examined in Marlene Epp's, "The Transnational Labour of Mennonite Midwives in Siberia, Canada and Paraguay" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1461/1449>).

A very important essay detailing the role of Siberian Mennonites in the 1929 "Flight to Moscow" is Andrey I. Savin's article entitled "The 1929 Emigration of Mennonites from the USSR: An Examination of Documents from the Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/>

1448/1436). There are also a number of papers that explore the Mennonite experience in Siberian gulags and labour colonies, including the following: Colin Neufeldt, "Reforging Mennonite *Spetspereselentsy*: The Experience of Mennonite Exiles at Siberian Special Settlements in the Omsk, Tomsk, Novosibirsk and Naryn Regions, 1930-1933," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1465/1453>); P. Travis Kroeker and Bruce K. Ward, "Gulag Ethics: Russian and Mennonite Prison Memoirs from Siberia," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1464/1452>); Ruth Derksen

Siemens, "'Writing Through the Flowers': Masked Messages in Letters from Siberian Special Settlements, 1930-1938," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1462/1450>); and Sarah Carter and Mary Hildebrandt's "Overrun and Swept Along by War': The Gulag in the Memoir of Katharina (Hildebrand) Krueger," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1463/1451>).

The academic conference also revealed new and important insights concerning the Siberian Mennonite experience after World War II, a topic that has unfortunately received inadequate attention from scholars. Some of the important papers on this topic include: Walter Sawatsky, "Changing Mentalities: Inter-Relationships between Mennonites and Slavic Evangelicals in Siberia and Central Asia," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1466/1454>); Sergey Sokolovsky's, "The Mennonites of Altai: Marriage Structures and Cultural Transmission," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1449/1437>); Alexy V. Gorbatov, "Mennonite Associations in Siberia in the 1950s and 1960s," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1450/1438>); Iraida V. Nam, "The Mennonite Congregations in the Tomsk Oblast during 'Thaw' and 'Stagnation,'" (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1451/1439>); and Vera P. Klyueva, "The Mennonite Community of the Tyumen' Oblast: A Short History from the 1940s to the 1980s," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1453/1441>).

Three papers that analyze religious issues and challenges of Siberian Mennonite communities in the last half of the twentieth century are the following: Johannes Dyck, "A Root Out of Dry Ground: Revival Patterns in the German Free Churches in the USSR after World War II," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1454/1442>); Peter Epp, "A Brief History of the Omsk Brotherhood," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1455/1443>); and Alexander Weiss, "The Transition of Siberian Mennonites to Baptists: Causes and Results," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1456/1444>).

The conference also included papers that deal with broader Soviet Mennonite topics outside Siberia, including Yulia I. Podoprigora's essay, "The Formation and Development of Mennonite Congregations in Kazakhstan:



Siberian Dancers with Conference Participants

From the End of the Nineteenth Century to the Twenty First Century," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/download/1447/1435>); Konstantin A. Morgunov's paper, "Test of Faith: Religious Mennonite Organizations of Orenburg Region, 1945-1991," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1452/1440>); and Alexander Freund's essay, "Representing 'New Canadians': Competing Narratives about Recent German Immigrants to Manitoba," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/download/1467/1455>).

Finally, those interested in reading a historiography of North American publications on the Mennonite experience in Siberia should consult the article of Royden Loewen and Paul Toews entitled "'Siberia' in the Writings of North American Mennonite Historians," (<http://jms.uwinnipeg.ca/index.php/jms/article/view/1468/1456>).

If you have the opportunity to read one or more of above-noted articles, I would appreciate your feedback concerning the same. ♦