Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XVI Number 3 October 2013

Russian Mennonite Immigrants and "Socialized" Medicine in Coaldale, Alberta (1929-1945)*

by John B. Toews

John B. Toews

Looking at early endeavors of immigrants settling in Coaldale, one is tempted to speculate if Russian Mennonites were not genetically programmed with exceptional organizational talents. Thinking more realistically, it may be better to argue that such skills were historically acquired by a peoplehood that had to fend for itself for over a century in tsarist

(continued on page 4)

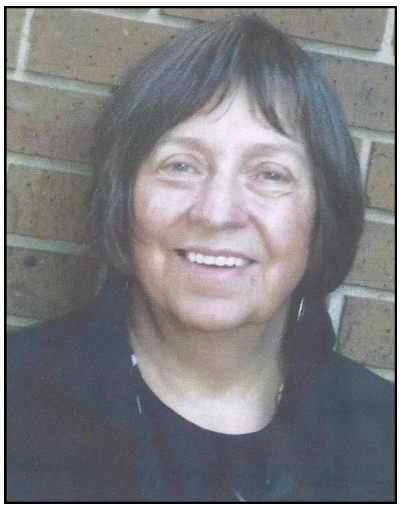
In this Issue

Content for the next edition may be submitted to Lorne Buhr at llbuhr@shaw.ca by January 15, 2014

"Healing Ancestral Wounds" — Writing my Thesis and Engaging with Sean Patterson's Work

by Margie Koop

In 2008, my sister Evelyn, my husband Rudy, and I gathered with many others to make the sojourn to Ukraine to further explore our Mennonite roots. The Mennonite Heritage Cruise became that shared journey with one another and many of you.



Margie Koop

I was studying at St. Stephen's College in Edmonton at that time and was focusing on choosing a thesis topic to complete my Master's of Theological Studies. During our travels to the places of our ancestors, their lives and experiences became alive for us. A big mosaic was taking place inside my soul as I tried to piece the threads and colors into a weaving that spanned the many years that these places had been the beloved homeland of so many Mennonites. Pondering their historic experiences I envisioned how insidiously the rich wonderful years vanished into the horrors of war, revolution, famine, illness and death. Great compassion and empathy poured out of my heart and soul as I placed myself into their experience and wept as I thought of how I would feel if people invaded my beautiful home and took

(continued on page 8)

MHSA FALL CONFERENCE —Saturday, Oct. 26, 2013

The MHSA is very pleased to have **Dr. John B. Toews** as its guest speaker at the Fall Conference to be held at the **Gem of the West Museum (1306, 20th Street, Coaldale) on October 26 starting at 2:00 pm**.

Topic: Mennonite Pacifists in Ukraine Amidst Anarchy (1917-1920). Mennonites leaving Prussia and settling in Russia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries were protected by a bill of "rights and privileges" known as the *Privilegium*. They were exempt from all military and state service. Yet in the 1870s, the tsarist government demanded some form of state service which, after lengthy negotiations, took the form of the forestry service. For Mennonites in Russia and Ukraine, this became the accepted expression of pacifism until the outbreak of World War I. During the war many young men served in the non-combatant medical service on Red Cross trains taking wounded from the front lines. Rather suddenly the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and the resulting Civil War destroyed the existing social order and plunged Ukraine into chaos and anarchy. Was an historic, institutionalized pacifism capable of addressing the crisis? This lecture will seek to address this question.

Please RSVP to Ken Matis at kenmatis@gmail.com or phone: 403-345-3570. Light lunch to follow presentation. Donations for event and lunch are much appreciated.

Everyone is welcome.

Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

Dave Toews

It has been said, he who has no past has no hope for the future. Enjoy the good days and the not so good days.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future". Jeremiah 29:11 NIV

It has been a great summer and even a better September. As I write this farmers in western Canada are harvesting what may be an all time record crop. Rain fall has been abundant, this is the second consecutive summer we have not had to turn on the lawn sprinkler.

As in our lives, changes at the MHSA are the only constant. Dave Neufeldt is our new chair and there are several new board members. We are now a volunteer staff of six at the MHSA newsletter: Colin Neufeldt does layout and online distribution, Dave Hildebrand printing and hard-copy distribution, Karen Bock and Myrna Belyea continue as proofreaders, Lorne Buhr and I carry on as editors.

After years of struggling, campaigning for newsletter content has become for me a pleasant and satisfying task. We have a regular contributors, archivist Jim Bowman and book reviewer Henry Dick. We also have a revolving list of possible articles and writers, some more eager than others, the writers that is.

Jim Bowman continues to be an inspiration to me, with great articles, helpful suggestions and comments. Jim had his article, *Four Options: Young Mennonite Men in the Second World War*, (MHSA June 2013) reprinted as the feature article in the Mennonite Historian [Winnipeg] (September 2013). Congratulations Jim!

We have the opportunity to celebrate a fine young writer and an outstanding student, Naomi Gross. Naomi wrote the extended essay, *A Historical Comparison of Anabaptism to Anarchism*. for her grade 12 International Baccalaureate studies at Victoria School of the Arts in Edmonton, Alberta in 2013.

Henry Neufeldt's review of *Mennonites In Ukraine Amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917-1921)* edited and translated by John B. Toews is very timely as Dr. Toews will speak on this theme at the MHSA Oct 26 conference in Coaldale.

As always I am grateful for all the willing contributors to this edition of the newsletter. Deadline for submissions to the next issue is February 1, 2014. See you all in Coaldale.❖

Chairman's Corner

by Dave Neufeldt

Dave Neufeldt

I have been thinking for a while now about what I should write in my first article for the Chairman's Corner. Like most MHSA members, I am not a historian by profession. My background is in engineering. History is, however, a strong passion of mine. I think it began when I was about twelve years old and my older brother compiled a genealogy of my grandmother's family. Since then I have also been exploring my family history. One of the things that particularly interests me in tracing my family history is its investigative nature and the excitement that comes when, after years

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter
ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:
Dave Toews, Editor
(dave.toews@mennonitehistory.org)

Subscription is through membership in the MHSA. Cost of membership is $30 per year. To join, send payment to:

MHSA
2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7
403-250-1121

e-mail: treasurer@mennonitehistory.org

Co-Editors: Dave Toews & Lorne Buhr

Copy Editors: Karen Bock and Myrna Belyea

Editorial Committee: Dave Toews, Lorne Buhr, & Colin Neufeldt

Layout & Distribution: Colin Neufeldt

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

Publications for Sale:

- Coaldale Hospital Memoirs ($25)
- Among the Ashes ($25)
- Seeking Places of Peace ($15)
- A Canadian Mennonite Story ($30)
- Nuggets of Gold ($15)

of searching, I finally make a connection that takes my ancestry back a couple of generations. But besides simply finding names and dates, I also enjoy discovering the stories that come out about my ancestors. Some of these stories are inspiring, while others are controversial or even embarrassing. They reveal the differences between my Russian Mennonite ancestry on my father's side and my Swiss Mennonite and Amish ancestry on my mother's side. They tell something about me and the influences that have made me who I am.

My interest in history beyond my own genealogy developed in university where I had the privilege of taking courses in Mennonite and Anabaptist history from Frank Epp and Walter Klaassen at Conrad Grebel College. It was also during this period that I saw an announcement in the Mennonite Reporter about the formation of a Mennonite historical society in Alberta. I was intrigued and attended the inaugural meeting in 1986 in Red Deer. To varying degrees I have been part of this society ever since.

Much has changed over the past 27 years. The society has moved several times and has accumulated a sizeable collection of material. One thing that has not changed is our dependence on the help of volunteers. We have been fortunate to have a core group of dedicated individuals who have volunteered countless hours helping with the work of the society and we are extremely grateful for all that they do. This includes managing the basic operations of the office, maintaining the library, responding to email inquiries, and assisting visitors to the archives. Like all of us, this group of people is aging and some of them are no longer able to dedicate as many hours to MHSA as they have in the past. We are looking for more people to help us out. If you think this might be something of interest to you, give the office a call or come down some Thursday and spend a couple of hours there to find out what happens at MHSA.

One of the things we do as a society is hold spring and fall conferences at different locations across the province. This year we are excited to have Dr. John B. Toews speaking at our conference at the Gem of the West Museum in Coaldale on October 26. Dr. Toews will be talking about his recent book "Mennonites in Ukraine amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917-1920)", which explores the struggles of Mennonites following the Bolshevik Revolution. Look for details of this event elsewhere in the newsletter. ❖

MHSA Website Under Renovation *by Leon Janzen*

Leon Janzen

I've been building websites for about 9 years, first as the web editor for MCC for 3 years, then with a website company based in Winnipeg for 4 years, and most recently for my own company, Vanadium.

This summer I have been working with the former chair, Bill Janzen, and other staff and board members to update the MHSA website. I will be updating the design, as well as the method used to update the content. We will also be sorting through the existing website content to eliminate any outdated material. The goal is to make it possible for staff and board members to instantly add and change the content on the website, without having to rely on the limited time available from 3rd party webmasters like myself.

Once the new site is complete, my role will be less of a webmaster, and more of a technical advisor, helping keep the site running, but letting the staff and board members manage the content. This should help keep the content more up to date and make the website an even more valuable asset for staff, volunteers, and visitors of MHSA.❖

Mennonites in Politics

by Jim Bowman

Jim Bowman

The traditional view of Anabaptists, in accordance with the *Schleitheim Confession* of 1527, is that true Christians should withdraw from worldly institutions, including political office. Hutterites, Old Order Amish, and Old Order Mennonites do not swear oaths administered by secular agencies, accept political appointments, or run for political office; and most do not vote in political elections.

By the mid-16th Century, a significant segment of Dutch Anabaptists was permitted to hold political office not involving administration of capital punishment.(1) In an age of absolute

(continued on page 7)

(continued from page 1)

Russia. When they left revolutionary Russia in the 1920s they brought with them a broad ranging administrative ability related to local government, church structure, schools, hospitals and benevolent institutions. Since abject poverty confronted them as they settled on the Canadian prairies, a reconstruction of all that had been was out of the question. Their first priority was naturally health care, especially when confronted with the high cost of private medical services in southern Alberta. Fortunately the co-operative models that worked so effectively in the old country were easily transferable, as was a tradition of volunteerism in public service.

On January 1, 1929, twenty-five immigrants signed a one-page document establishing the Coaldale Medical Service Society. This bold venture was undertaken by a community confronted by farm mortgages, travel debts and the onset of the Great Depression. This Society, usually called the *Gesundheitsverein* in most available documents, proposed to offer a medical insurance plan to the new arrivals at a cost of nine dollars and twenty-five cents per year. An "insured" family had unlimited access to the local physician but was restricted to office visits only. The Society was open to persons living within an eighty-mile radius of Coaldale. It signed its first contract with Dr. Galbraith in Lethbridge, who received a monthly salary from the Society.(1) Subsequent contracts were signed with two Lethbridge hospitals, the Galt (1932) and St. Michaels (1933).(2) Future stability was assured when the *Gesundheitsverein* contractually employed a Mennonite doctor, David L. Epp, who arrived in Coaldale with his wife Rosella on November 2, 1933. In the years that followed, his office provided day-to-day health care for a community whose population was steadily increasing.

Possibly energized by the presence of a permanent doctor, Coaldale Mennonite immigrants embarked upon another venture: they organized a *Hospitalverein* (Hospital Society). A temporary hospital was set up on the ground floor of what had been the local Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce building. The second storey served as both the office and residence for Dr. Epp. The hospital opened in February, 1934. Meanwhile, the Society purchased an unused hotel in nearby Hardieville, moved it to Coaldale and remodeled it. By February, 1935 it was ready for occupancy. Insured Hospital Society members paid a yearly fee of six dollars and twenty-five cents and one dollar per day for actual hospitalization.(3)

Administratively, the Coaldale hospital was entirely dependent on the fiscal management skills of its Board. It received no government assistance and was forced to pay local property and school taxes.

Available Statistics, Coaldale Hospital Society **

Year	1934-35	1936	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943	1944	1945
Patients	132		214	278	321	318	242	305	393	372	435
Major Surgeries	48		24	33	36	51	18	43	76	63	59
Minor Surgeries			59	71	145	81	53	68	88	117	140
Medical Patients	37		66	89	97	112	91			151 (146)	154
Births	47		60	83	70	74 (77)	74	90	85	69	82
Hospital Patient Days			1,545	2,008	2,060.5	2,228	1,644		2,656	2,500	2,600
Members			166			154					
Deficits						$982.37					

Available Statistics, Coaldale Hospital Society **

Year	1935	1937	1938	1939	1940	1941	1942	1943
Office Visits					1,314	1,794	1,938	2,301
Home Visits					54	68	106	161
Tooth Extractions					134	316	393	622
Sprains & Bone Fractures					13	9	33	
Doctor's Wages			$2,311.07	$1,922.18	$2,099.54		$2,388.99	
Membership	215			274		247(280)	285	288

Upkeep and maintenance costs were minimized thanks to the broad ranging skills of community volunteers that even included the care and weeding of a large vegetable garden designed to lower kitchen expenses. While low staff salaries helped balance the budget, patient caprice did not. Some people only joined the Society when hospitalization seemed imminent. Non-members sometimes used the hospital but refused to pay when discharged. When the Hospital Society decreed a non-admittance policy unless the old debt was paid, these patients often went to Lethbridge hospitals, only to increase their indebtedness. Little wonder that budget arrears stood at $1,748.39 in 1940.(4) Both the Health and Hospital Societies were open to non-Mennonites, though relatively few seemed to have joined.(5) Two large hospitals in nearby Lethbridge, as well as intense anti-Mennonite sentiments during World War II may have played a role.

The story of the Coaldale hospital was also a story of a generous community willing to give what it could. Though still beset by debts, it contributed farm produce to the kitchen in the form of poultry, eggs, cream, butter and canned goods. Butter was especially significant since patients often did not bring their wartime food rationing cards with them when admitted to hospital. There was another kind of generosity: the annual *Gabenabend* (gift evening). This event, usually held in the local Mennonite Brethren Church in January, not only reported on hospital activities to Society members, but also encouraged them to give cash donations for needed hospital items. Surviving handwritten reports to the annual gatherings from 1940 to 1942 requested monies for mattresses on two occasions, and in 1942 appealed for funds ($84.00) and trucks in order to gravel the muddy road leading to the Coaldale hospital. The Society also reported that it had rented a freezer and would welcome all gifts of beef, chickens, geese and ducks – provided, of course, that good Mennonite farmers could not sell such surpluses in Lethbridge.(6)

Like the Hospital Society, the *Gesundheitsverein* encountered ongoing problems. Both societies found that the annual insurance premiums were at times difficult to collect. Furthermore, a fixed premium rate did not take into account the impact of inflation on salaries, the cost of utilities, or the specialized labour services needed to keep the doctor's office and the hospital functioning. Each society also had to deal with problem individuals who joined on a "need-for-service" basis. Some, pressed for cash or simply having other priorities, paid one dollar to join the *Gesundheitsverein,* but waited until a needed visit to the doctor before paying the required dues. Others waited until the end of the year to pay their eight dollars and twenty-five cents, and in the process ensured a deficit in the Society's account. Often it could not pay the doctor his full monthly salary.(7) The problem was resolved in March 1943, when the *Gesundheitsverein* decreed that all dues must be paid at the beginning of the year. Inflation had also taken its toll. Prices for major and minor surgeries, as well as hospital and home births were raised by up to 30%.(8)

The successful implementation of both the Hospital and Health Societies' agendas ultimately depended on the physician they employed. Dr. David L. Epp's arrival in late 1933 ensured long-term stability. Sympathetic to the goals of both societies, conversant in German and at ease amid a Russian- Mennonite culture, he was highly respected by the immigrant commu-

nity. The vital role he played was graphically illustrated when the good doctor somewhat informally announced his desire to go to India as a medical missionary. In the end, wartime conditions prevented his departure, but before this became apparent he left for a six-month tropical medicine course in New Orleans. This, combined with Dr. Epp's personal belief that he would soon be allowed to leave for India, generated a frantic search for a replacement that proved complex and largely unsuccessful. Sensing abandonment, both the community and the board registered a degree of frustration with the doctor whose long-term co-operation had ensured the success of the Coaldale Mennonite "socialized" medical scheme. Fortunately, Dr. Epp's return from New Orleans on April 9, 1942 meant normalization of services for both societies. Sadly, his office had been destroyed by fire on January 23, 1942, but was soon rebuilt.

The health services experiment of the Russian-Mennonite immigrants would probably never have succeeded except for Dr. Epp. As a recent medical graduate he chose to work in a largely rural setting and unreservedly shared his skills with the Coaldale community. He bought a home and built an office in Coaldale, returned ten percent of his salary to the Health Society and offered his surgical skills at substantially reduced prices. Available information pertaining to office visits, hospital patient numbers and operations performed suggest an exhausting workload. In his lengthy report to the *Gesundheitsverein* on January 27, 1941, Jacob B. Janz noted that Epp never demanded to be paid according to the schedule of medical fees approved by the provincial medical association: "He never pressured us or manipulated circumstances to his own advantage."(9)

In one-and-a-half decades, Mennonite refugees from the Bolshevik Revolution inaugurated a health care system that may have been the first of its kind in Alberta. Though almost exclusively Mennonite in its early stages, it was gradually embraced by the larger Coaldale constituency in the mid-twentieth century. Besides providing local medical services it also served as a unifying catalyst for a diverse ethnic population featuring as many as twenty nationalities. Perhaps some of the doctors who succeeded Dr. Epp – McFetridge, Okamura, Oshirio and Backman – were indicative of the process.

As the twentieth century progressed the inauguration of universal health care and the move from local to regional hospitals gradually eliminated the need for the type of medical and hospital insurance inaugurated during the 1930s and 1940s. Yet for the early decades, the determined initiatives of the few benefitted the many. Here was a practical goodness not given to abstract theories. It consisted of action taken, of implementing a kind of horizontal ethic based on the needs of the community. The surviving reports of both societies are free of any romantic sentiment or language of saintly piety. Their boards consisted of persons who accepted responsibility and opened doors for the victims of disease. There were naturally many difficulties related to adequate facilities and sufficient operating capital for the physician and hospital. Yet in the end, their sense of duty and commitment to human decency made for an extraordinary story of altruism.

Notes

* Materials relating to the stories of both the Coaldale Health and Hospital Societies can be found in the printed minutes of the annual meetings of the Russian-Mennonite settlers in Coaldale between 1939 and 1943. There are also reports in the available minutes of the inter-Mennonite Alberta *Vertreterversammlungen* (Representative Assemblies) held during the 1930s and 1940s. Several handwritten reports (1940-42) presented to the members of the Hospital Society at their annual *Gabenabend* (gift evening) supplied additional information. All these materials can be found in the Jacob B. Janz file in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.

(1) Dr. Galbraith agreed to donate one percent of his salary back to the Society for every ten members joining the plan. The arrangement was acceptable to his successor and by 1940 the fund amounted to $1,700.00. No members contributed to that fund. Jacob B. Janz report printed in *Die Mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Coaldale, Alberta, 1941*, pp.3-13. The publication also contains the bylaws of the Mennonite Medical Services Society, pp. 21-24.

(2) According to notes left by Jacob B. Janz of Coaldale, Alberta (Jacob B. Janz file).

(3) "Report of the Coaldale Hospital Society to the *Gabenabend*, January 16, 1941." (Jacob B. Janz file) In 1939 a good number of members must have felt they made the right choice. Of the 154 who joined, 118 were in fact hospitalized. Ibid. The old hotel was acquired for $290.00, the cost of moving the 52- by 26-foot structure was $280.00. See Agnes Hubert, "History of Coaldale's First Two Hospitals," in Coaldale, Gem of the West (Altona, Manitoba, Friesen Printers, 1983), pp. 187-88. In 1935 the *Gesundheitsverein* informed persons attending the Alberta *Vertreterversammlung*

(Representative Assembly) in Swalwell that the Society had existed for 5 years and had 215 members who could visit Dr. David L. Epp free of charge. There were nevertheless some additional fees: major surgeries cost $7.50; minor surgeries $5.00; immunizations 50¢; teeth were pulled free of charge; house calls made by automobile cost 25¢ per mile. *Die fuenfte Provinziale Vertreterversammlung Mennonitischer Siedler Albertas in Swalwell, Alberta am 23 und 24 July,* 1935, pp. 37-38.

(4) "Report of the Coaldale Hospital Society to the *Gabenabend*, January 16, 1941." (Jacob B. Janz file).

(5) In 1941only eight of the 280 members were non-Mennonite. Jacob B. Janz, "Report of the Committee to the Health Society, February 12, 1942," in *Die Mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Coaldale, Alberta, 1941*, pp. 16-18. Of some 318 patients admitted in 1940, 235 were Mennonites. In 1945, 150 of the 435 hospital patients were non-Mennonite.

(6) Reports to the *Gabenabend*, 1940-1942 (Jacob B. Janz file).

(7) In his January 31, 1944 report to the *Gesundheitsverein,* Jacob B. Janz reported that in 1938 the deficit stood at $662.50, in 1939 at $856.83, in 1940 at $939.58. By 1944 it had been reduced to $385.51. He also noted that Dr. Epp generously donated 10% of his salary back to the Society. Minutes of the annual meeting of the Coaldale *Gesundheitsverein* January 31, 1944 in *Jahresversammlung der Mennonitischen Siedler bei Coaldale, Alberta, 1943*, pp.8-14.

(8) Minutes of the annual meeting of the Coaldale *Gesundheitsverein*, March 11, 1943 in *Die Mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Coaldale*, *Alberta, 1942*.

(9) Cited in Jacob B. Janz's report to the annual meeting of *Die Mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Coaldale*, *Alberta, 1940*, p. 10.

** Considerable statistical information was gathered from the minutes of the Alberta-Mennonite Representative Assemblies for 1935, 1939, 1944-1945. Most of the information, however, came from the reports of both societies to the annual meetings of the Mennonite settlers in Coaldale. The Health Society contract provided for free tooth extractions and it appears that frugal Mennonites availed themselves of this service. If a notation from 1940 is any indication, major operations usually involved appendectomies in 25 out of 34 major surgeries, whereas tonsillectomies accounted for 23 of 35 minor surgeries. This may have reflected a stage in medical opinion and practice where it was felt that both organs were best removed lest they become inflamed. ❖

(continued from page 3)

monarchies, most office-holders were appointed by higher authorities, not elected. The *Dordrecht Confession* of 1632, which was accepted by most Dutch (and eventually, "Russian") Mennonites, and later by North German and Pennsylvania Mennonites, prohibited swearing of oaths. It encouraged Mennonites to "render unto Caesar those things which are Caesar's", but it did not specifically prohibit political activity.

In Russia, the relatively liberal czars of the early 19th Century permitted Mennonite settlers to elect democratic governments of local communities and even of larger regions such as Chortitza and Molotschna. There, many Mennonites honed their political talents prior to the first wave of emigration to North America of the 1870s.

In Waterloo County, Ontario, heavily populated by "Swiss" Mennonites, members of the faith got involved in politics as early as the 1850s. Most notably, Moses Springer (1824-1898), served successively as a school trustee, the first reeve of the Village of Waterloo, first mayor of the Town of Waterloo, member of the Legislative Assembly of Ontario, and Sheriff of Waterloo County.(2) In western Canada, the earliest notable political Mennonites were Russian immigrants Gerhard Ens, MLA for Rosthern, Saskatchewan, 1905-1913; and Cornelius Hiebert, MLA for Rosebud, Alberta, 1905-1909.(3)

Notes

(1) John H. Redekop, "Politics", *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1990, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Politics&oldid=100718 retrieved September 8, 2013.

(2) Early Mayors: Moses Springer, 1824-1898", City of Waterloo, http://www.waterloo.ca/en/contentresources/sources/early_mayors_moses_springer.pdf retrieved September 8, 2013.

(3) Redekop ❖

Will your church history be relegated to the "Dustbin of Oblivion?" To stop this terrible tragedy from happening, contact Wes Berg (GAMEO rep) at: wberg@ualberta.ca

it as theirs or destroyed it. My thesis question arose out of those ponderings as I questioned the threads that are woven through the years from their lives to mine and I wondered whether the terrible things that happened to them might also still be impacting my life today. I wondered if perhaps the process of being a compassionate presence to both the beauty and the terror of my ancestors could, in someway, heal wounds in multiple generations? That became my research project.

Janzen Silberfeld Estate Russia, circa 1910

I began by studying the history through a multitude of books and resources and of course the wonderful *Heritage Cruise.* We are also fortunate to have diaries of two of my great grandfathers and I poured over their lives and tried to put the many pieces together. Most of all I entered into their lives with my imagination. I learned of their traumas, their wounds, as well as the strengths that carried them through their lives. Three themes came bubbling to the surface, each of them connecting to my own life today. The first was the tragedies of all the multiple deaths of babies and mothers, both before and during the revolution. This touched a deep cord for me, as my history is full of these kinds of losses. The second was related to my ancestors' responses to the loss of property, finances, violence and hunger. The third related to a sense of unworthiness and the belief that suffering is in direct proportion to our sinfulness. I carry residue that weaves through all three of these themes. The journey to be present to this menagerie of feelings was both a harrowing and a haloing sojourn and was rich with difficult challenges and wonderful inner healing for me. I believe this is, after all, the purpose of our lives. I concur with Anne Caroll's words in her thesis when she says that; "To heal oneself is to bring healing to others and hopefully to the planet as a whole." (2013)

I felt the support of my ancestors through dreams, memories, the sense of their presence; I felt like I honored them by being present and remembering; and I felt their gratitude. Jung's words encouraged me when he said that, " it is the ancestors for whom the work is done". In his own autobiography he says, "It is the dead of long ago, stretching down the long hallway of time, who ask us to linger in the moment and who solicit from us this turning." It is this turning that was the work of my thesis. I know that this experience is yet another step on the healing journey of knowing myself and filling my life with love and compassion and my thesis is, that this work can be healing for multiple generations.

Time has passed since then and I have encountered a young man named Sean Patterson. He was working on his thesis, has now completed it, and has entitled it, *The Makhnos of Memory, Mennonites and Makhnovist Narratives of the Civil War in Ukraine, 1917-1921.* In the research phase of his work he contacted my sister Evelyn and myself because of his interest in the years when the young Nestor Makhno worked on the estate of Silberfeld, the place of our father, Henry Janzen's birth. He was studying the stories of Nestor Makhno through the mirrors of the various narratives that have been written about him and was curious that the Mennonite narratives varied significantly from Makhno's memoirs and the writings of fellow anarchists. Patterson repeatedly draws our attention to the fact that in Makhno's memoirs, there is no mention of Mennonites, only of German colonists and the inequality that the *Kulaks,* the *Pomeshchiks,* the *Exploiters,* and the *Bourgeoisie* had created. His conflict was with the rich landowners and he was striving to free the oppressed and create equality for the working class. We, as descendants of the many prosperous estate owners, must acknowledge that land ownership was extremely disproportionate and that there were many landless Mennonites, Ukrainians, and Russian people. (None of which justifies murdering one another.)

Strangely enough our family spoke of a friendship between Makhno and my grandfather. They spoke of how Makhno had spared my widowed grandmother and her

two small sons during a raid of their small home years after my grandfather had died and they had been forced off Silberfeld. This story seemed in sharp contrast to Makhno saying that there had been unkind treatment of workers on the Janzen estate. As I read Sean Patterson's work, I found it difficult to see the very thorough research and his exceptionally well-written thesis, because my emotions flailed in many directions. I found myself defending my ancestors and speaking of the amazingly kind man that my father was. A small child at the time of the revolution, he remembered only the horrors and hiding in basements and living in fear. All my emotions surrounded that vulnerable little boy and I could not read the thesis with a clear mind. I didn't want to hear Makhno's side of the story. Does a murdering bandit deserve an audience and a voice? In our conversations with fellow Mennonites we have often spoken of the possibilities that there might have been some arrogance within the Mennonite population and my father often said that the inequalities between people in south Russia was one of the causes of the terror that was the revolution and the following Makhnovist raids and exploits. I heard these acknowledgements during my growing up years and the recognition of our humanity, but reading the words of a murdering bandit speaking harshly of my grandfather/great grandfather/or my uncles, without any way of hearing the other side of the story seemed to take my breath away as all of it felt deeply personal.

It took many months before I was able to reread the thesis, this time with a clearer, more peaceful heart and mind that might be able to hear the many voices. The world is full of conflicts and it is one of our greatest struggles to attempt to give some airtime to another's voice. I know that even when one has conflicts within the smaller nuclear family, the narrative of one person's story will vary greatly from the other. Usually we create our story to comfort ourselves. The villain and victim roles reverse and travel back and forth very easily and we must acknowledge that we have within each and every one of us the capabilities to do great things and the darkness within to do great evil.

Patterson quotes a murderer's description of what happened inside when he was in a destructive rage. On page 145 of his thesis he tells the story of a Ukrainian tent missionary questioning a Makhnovist, who with his comrades had massacred a family of German people; "why?" The Makhnovist acknowledged the ferocious beast that took over their actions, "in those moments of bloodshed there is neither pity, nor thought of consequences, but only the thirst for blood and still more blood, although now I can speak and think and reason." He pondered if perhaps someone would have spoken a few quiet reasonable words to calm them, and whether that might have made a difference. He did express some pity and sorrow over what they had done.

Abram & Maria Janzen, circa 1910

In situations of family conflicts, anger can also become obsessive. A family member can rant, seemingly out of control, and then later barely remember what they might have said or done. There is no doubt that rage can take over and create devastating consequences, both in intimate family relationships and bigger country dynamics. There are multiple layers of toxicities, traumas and unending wounds that exist in both revolutionary times and in our relationships with family and friends. These can carry on for generations unless we are willing to listen to another's story and take personal responsibility for our feelings and responses.

Nestor Makhno's memoirs speak of his ideology of anarchy where all people are equal and no one is oppressed. He was a poor Ukrainian peasant who lost his father at a young age, was the youngest of five, who all lived in abstract poverty. By the age of 17 he was involved in revolutionary activities. Again, none of that justifies unending murder and devastation, but it can give us a glimpse into a troubled man's life.

Ultimately if we are ever going to be able to free ourselves from

the oppressions of conflict we must find ways to heal ourselves and usually that involves some kind of engagement with the oppressor in ourselves and in others. I appreciate two quotes from Patterson's thesis. The first one speaks to the Anarchists/ Makhnovists, as he quotes Alun Munslow; "Makhnovist historians will need to abandon the fairy tale of unfailing firm-but-fair revolutionary chivalry and acknowledge the undeserved violence endured by some Mennonites."(p 37) It is clear that the Makhnovists fight for justice grew into excessive violence.

Henry Janzen (age 11) in Canada

Patterson also addresses the gaps and perceptions in our Mennonite narratives quoting Nick Heath:

"If there's to be any rapprochement between Makhnovist and Mennonite histories, the latter will need to abandon the myth of the Mennonite community's special martyrdom." (p 38) We must look at our part in the historical journey, not from the perspective of blame, but from the realm of learning about ourselves, reflecting on how we have engaged with the world and how we can learn to live more kindly with ourselves and one another.

Margie Koop is a retired nurse and recreation therapist. She is the author of *The Wounded Wing*, has recently completed her Masters Degree in Theological Studies and continues to embrace her love of writing. Margie lives in Sherwood Park, Alberta with her husband Rudy. ❖

CORNELIUS HIEBERT: ALBERTA'S FIRST MENNONITE POLITICIAN

by Jim Bowman (1)

Jim Bowman

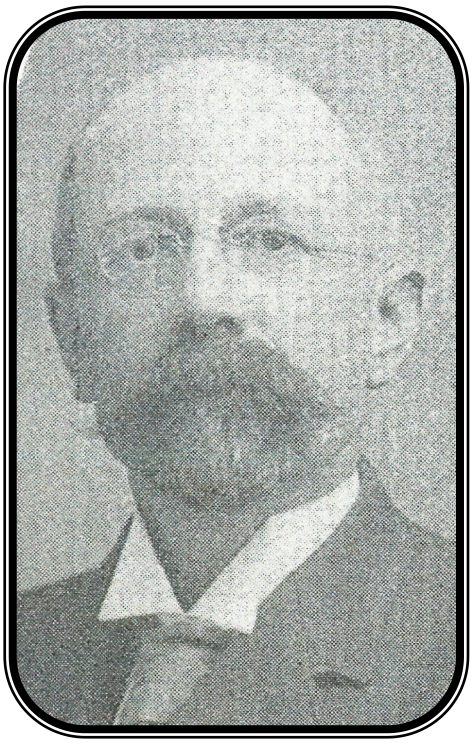
About fifteen years ago, due to car troubles, I was stranded in Didsbury for seven hours. I had to occupy my time by drinking coffee in coffee shops and walking around the town. I was astonished to discover on the edge of town a three-storey brick mansion, with bay windows, a large keyhole-shaped leaded-glass window, and a spacious verandah. It was the type of dwelling you'd expect to find in the Glenora or Mount Royal neighborhoods of Edmonton or Calgary, but not in an agriculture-based town like Didsbury. I was even more astonished this year when I discovered that the house was built for a Mennonite.

I usually think of Mennonites as modest, plain, communitarian, steadfast folk, and Cornelius "Don" Hiebert certainly didn't fit that mould. He was ambitious, restless, independent, risk-taking, and ostentatious. His choice of a mansion as a home somehow flies in the face of Mennonite traditions, and his membership in the Freemasons was definitely against the doctrines of the major branches of the Mennonite faith.(2)

Hiebert was born on August 2, 1862, in the village of Schoenfeld, in the Bergthal Mennonite Settlement, now part of Zaporizhia Oblast, Ukraine. In 1876 his family, along with nearly all members of the Bergthal Settlement, moved to Manitoba. He farmed with his family near Altona on the West Reserve, and at the age of 21 began to apprentice with a general merchant in Gretna. He became the owner or part-owner of several general stores in succession, in Reinland, Pilot Mound, Gretna, and Altona, and operated a grist mill in Holland, Manitoba. He got his first taste for politics when he was appointed Secretary-Treasurer for the Rural Municipality of Rhineland. In 1888 he married Aganetha Dick, and they had three children who survived early childhood: Anna Helen, John Cornelius, and Metha "Meta".

In 1900 or 1901 the Hiebert family moved to Didsbury. The community began in 1891 as a stop on the Calgary and Edmonton Railway, and by 1894 became the focus of a colony of members of the "Old" Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, mostly from Waterloo County, Ontario. There was an economic depression in the mid-1890s, and Didsbury was slow in getting started. Hiebert opened its second general store, and was instrumental in getting it incorporated as a village.

With the village's post office



Cornelius Hiebert

located within his store, Hiebert's business thrived, and soon expanded into sales of hardware, farm implements, and lumber. By 1903 he had sold out the businesses to take his family on a six-month vacation in the United States. Upon his return he bought back the lumber business, and expanded it again by adding hardware and implement lines. In 1905, with a partner, he built the first grain elevator in Didsbury.

He served as the Overseer of the Village of Didsbury from 1901 to 1904. Under the North-West Territories *Village Ordinance* an Overseer was elected at a ratepayers' meeting, and was responsible for collecting taxes, expenditure of village funds, supervising public works, and inspecting premises to ensure compliance with health regulations. It was a difficult job, with no separation between administrative responsibility and political oversight.

Alberta became a province on September 1, 1905, and the first provincial election was on November 9. The Rosebud constituency was in the shape of a narrow strip extending from the British Columbia border almost to the Saskatchewan border. Most of the population was concentrated around Olds, Didsbury and Carstairs, the only communities served by a railway – the rest of the riding was sparsely-populated mountains or rangeland. According to the 1901 census, about 65% of the Didsbury district's 555 residents had "Mennonite" surnames, as did about 50% of the 166 residents of the Carstairs district. The Olds district had 1235 residents, with only a few Mennonites.(3) Hiebert, running as a Conservative, was narrowly elected with 589 votes, against 545 votes for the Liberal and 126 votes for an independent candidate. (4) He was one of only two Conservatives elected in the province. His seat-mate, A.J. Robertson from High River, was chosen as the Leader of the Opposition.

When the Legislature convened in the spring of 1906, the first order of business was to select a capital city for the province. Edmonton, a stronghold of the Liberal party, won by 16 votes versus 8 votes for Calgary. Hiebert was a supporter of the southern part of the province, and undaunted, moved that Banff be chosen as the capital. His motion was defeated.

With party politics in its infancy in Alberta, the only major Conservative policy was its objection to the Laurier government's retention of the province's natural resources. During his maiden speech in the legislature, Hiebert moved an amendment to the Speech from the Throne which would demand the transfer of crown lands, mineral rights, water rights, and fisheries to the province. it was seconded by Robertson, and of course it was defeated by the overwhelming Liberal majority. Another major issue for Hiebert was the slow progress of construction of railways in the province, and the failure of provincial and municipal governments to tax them. He went so far as to advocate direct government ownership of railways.

Hiebert was the first MLA to come out in favor of the temperance cause. In 1907 he moved, unsuccessfully, to increase the liquor license fee from $200 to $400. In 1908 he introduced a bill to prohibit liquor sales, ex-

Cornelius Hiebert house in Disbury

C. Hiebert Lumber Yard

Hiebert Store

cept for medicinal, scientific, or industrial purposes. It failed, and later in the session he proposed the creation of a government-owned liquor dispensing system, which also failed.

Hiebert's performance in the Legislature has been described as "spotty". At times he could be a brilliant, hard-hitting debater, but at other times he rambled on about seemingly trivial matters like school textbooks, the bounty on coyotes, and the number of weed inspectors. He spoke in the Legislature more frequently than his party leader Robertson, and it appears that a rift may have developed between the two toward the end of the legislative term.

Never enthusiastic about the adversarial party system, perhaps Hiebert was worn down from being part of a vastly outnumbered Opposition. Toward the end of the 1909 session, he stood on the floor of the Legislature to say that "it would be unfortunate for the present government to be defeated and replaced by a Conservative administration." (5) Knowing he would never be re-nominated as a Conservative, he ran as an independent in the 1909 election. He was soundly defeated by another Mennonite running as a Liberal, Joseph Stauffer, and came in third in the polls behind Conservative Samuel Scarlett.

Didsbury Musical Band in front of the C. Hiebert Elevator

The Legislature met only for a few weeks every spring, allowing Hiebert plenty of time to expand his business interests. His magnificent three-storey mansion was built around 1906 or 1907. It was one of the first houses in Didsbury to feature running water and sewage systems, an intercom system to communicate with servants, and double brick walls with an air space between them as insulation.(6) By 1907 he owned a 35,000-bushel grain elevator and a livery barn. Following his electoral defeat, he continued to operate the hardware business, elevator, and barn. He joined a real estate firm and became a member of the King Hiram Lodge No. 21 of the Freemasons. By 1910 he was a member of the Calgary Grain Exchange(7) and owned the first automobile in Didsbury, a Buick.(8)

With his investments heavily leveraged, Hiebert's business em-

pire collapsed around the time of the 1914 recession. He lost his mansion, which later became a hospital during the1918-1919 influenza epidemic. He tried his hand at homesteading with his son in the Peace River country, then established a lumber business in Saskatchewan. He returned to Didsbury and attempted to re-establish himself in the real estate business. Stricken with cancer in 1918, he had one leg amputated. He succumbed to his illness on March 20, 1919 at the age of 56. His funeral was conducted "by the Russian Mennonites".(9) His gravestone in the Didsbury Cemetery bears the Masonic emblem.

Hiebert's capacity for embarking on risky business ventures, his hedonistic enjoyment of luxury, his civic boosterism, and his membership in the Freemasons as a method of business networking, were departures from traditional Mennonite values. They were prescient of the transition from a simple agrarian way of life to a more complex industrial society which most Mennonites faced following the Second World War. Though there is not much evidence that he was ever very devout, he was apparently never shunned or otherwise disciplined for his worldliness. As a legislator, his distaste for the adversarial nature of the party system may have come from a deeply-held preference for cooperation rather than competition, and this in itself is a Mennonite value.

Notes

(1) I am grateful to Lorne Buhr for sharing the article he published in 1980 (available from him in a slightly revised version) and to Joyce Heidebrecht of the Didsbury Museum for pictures, articles, and insights. The major sources for this article were: Lawrence Klippenstein, "Cornelius Hiebert: MLA (1905-1909)", *Mennonite Historian,* vol. 1, no. 1 (September 1975); Lorne R. Buhr, "Cornelius Hiebert in the Alberta Legislature (1905-1909)", *Mennonite Life,* vol. 35, no. 4 (December 1980); John Gilpin, "Cornelius Hiebert, M.L.A.", *Alberta History,* vol. 30, no. 4 (Autumn 1982); and Didsbury and District Historical Society, "Echoes of the Past: 1. Politician Cornelius Hiebert First MLA for Rosebud Constituency in Alberta, 1905", *Virtual Museum of Canada* [2011], http://www.museevirtuel-virtualmuseum.ca/sgc-cms/histoires_de_chez_nous-community_memories/pm_v2.php?id=exhibit_home&fl=0&lg=English&ex=757 retrieved 26 May, 2013.

(2) John C. Wenger, "Secret Societies", *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online,* 1959, http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Secret_Societies&oldid=77704 retrieved 15 September, 2013.

(3)"1901 Census of Canada Indexing Project", *Automated Genealogy, http://automatedgenealogy.com/census/* retrieved 15 September, 2013.

(4) "Rosebud (provincial electoral district)", *Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rosebud_(provincial_electoral_district)* retrieved 15 September, 2013.

(5) "Around the Town", *Didsbury Pioneer*, February 24, 1909.

(6) Phillip Jang, "Historic House Still Has Charm", *Calgary Herald,* April 15, 1986.

(7) *Glenbow Archives*, description of photograph no. NA-813-46.

(8) Lloyd Chandler, "My Memories of Mr. Hiebert", *Mennonite Historian,* vol. 9, no, 1 (March 1983).

(9) "One of Didsbury's Early Pioneers Passes Away", *Didsbury Pioneer,* March 26, 1919. ❖

Book Review: *THE FEHRS - Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration* *Reviewed by Henry M. Dick, Edmonton*

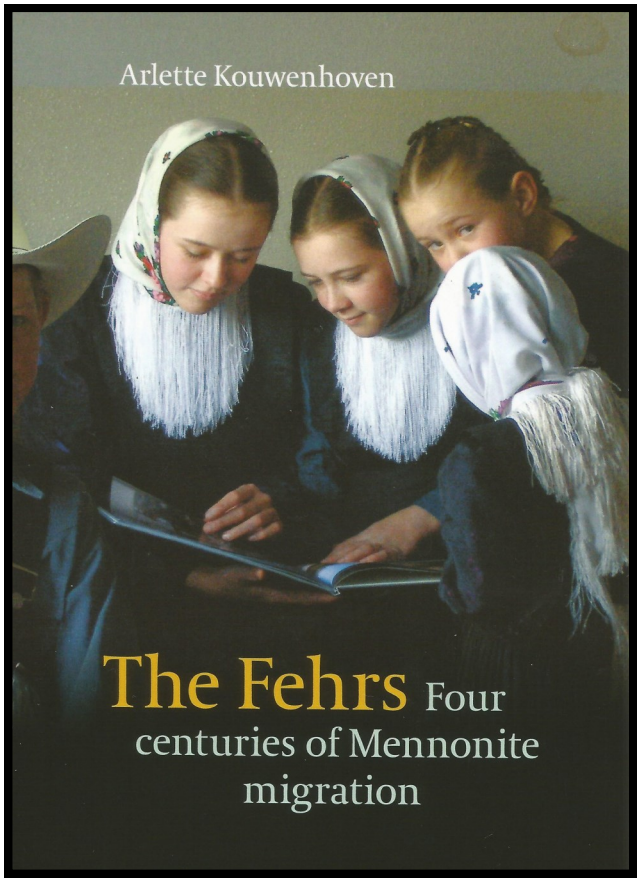
Arlette Kouwenoven, *THE FEHRS - Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration* (The Netherlands: Winco Publishing of Leiden, 2013) 264 pages ISBN 987 90 802656 08

Henry M. Dick

The Fehrs have made their mark in Canada. If you have purchased Palliser Furniture (in its' time the largest furniture manufacturer in Canada) or Willmar Windows you have done business with them. CA DeFehr helped found MBCI, MBBC, served on the Mennonite Board of Colonization and was instrumental with MCC in resettling about 12,000 Mennonites from Russia and Germany to the Chaco. The author makes the point that these DeFehr's and Defehrs (German versions) are of the same genealogical line as the Dutch de Veer's and

the North American Fehr's, and that the hypothesis that all the Fehr's are related to each other has not been disproved by researching "Grandma".

The Fehr family is traced back to 1556 with the birth of Gijsbert Janz de Veer in Amsterdam. The family tree and maps at the beginning of the book are helpful in placing the names, places and events of the story in context. The "Introduction" provides an overview of the roots of the 'Old Colonists' (Flemish Anabaptists), their lifestyle and how it is informed by their faith and beliefs. The author traces the Fehr family, under chronological headings, from these beginnings to the Old Colonists currently living in Mexico.



The story begins with Gijsbert, a member of the Old Colony "Gemeinde" in Amsterdam, an ultra conservative group as compared to their more liberal Frisian Anabaptists. He has just arrived in Danzig, Poland, having left several sons in Amsterdam to continue the family businesses there. In Danzig Gisjbert establishes a business focusing on the Baltic grain trade. As other Old Colonists settle in the Danzig region they establish many successful businesses and prosperous farms. Despite their conservative lifestyle one of their most successful industries is the brewery. "Danziger Goldwasser", was a brandy favored by the Polish Counts as well as the Russian Tsarina. The Anabaptist founder of the brewery became so highly regarded that he was allowed to buy his Danzig citizenship (Anabaptists were denied citizenship) and locate his brewery within the city limits.

The economic prosperity of the Anabaptists in Danzig suffered a serious downturn after the Polish king died and the Russians became unhappy with his successor. They declared war. The bombing of Danzig, including the factories and farms of the Mennonites, resulted in a major downturn in the local economy. The Polish citizenry became irate that they were being excluded from the faltering country's economic opportunities because the Anabaptists did most of their commerce with their Dutch trading partners in Amsterdam. In response the king ruled that the Mennonites henceforth would buy all their raw materials from local sources (vs from Dutch traders), they would pay taxes for military exemption, and Mennonite membership in the trading guilds would be denied. Over a period of time other privileges were eroded and by the end of the 1780's it was time to look for other opportunities. The invitation from Katherine the Great to come to Russia provided such an opportunity.

Katherine promised free land, freedom of religion and education, 10 years exemption from military taxes and freedom from military service. The Old Colonists were among the immigrants. However when they sought to establish their "*Gemeinde*" under the traditional authority of the elder they encountered government resistance, and the "*Schultze*" (mayor) and "*Oberschultze*" (administrator) became the village authorities. The application of the ban in church discipline was also obstructed by government.

Nevertheless, over time and with the zeal and vision of Johann Cornies the Mennonites prospered as farmers and industrialists. The technological changes and resulting economic prosperity made it increasingly difficult to maintain the traditional ways of thinking and behaving among the Old Colony. The authority of the elder shifted to the Brotherhood. The government gave Cornies authority over the educational system. He expanded the curriculum and established the "*Zentralschule*" as a teacher education institute. Local teachers were dismissed, removing the church's control over the education of their village children. The new teachers introduced choirs and 4-part harmony singing. The *Zentralschule* came to be regarded by the Old Colonists as a breeding ground for worldly ideas. The many reforms were deemed to be eroding the ethical and moral values of the community and lead to serious divisions in the church. Many accommodated to the changes and prospered. The rigidly conservative looked for a new homeland and in 1875 left for Canada.

They settled on the West Reserve in Manitoba and established themselves as the Reinland church.

Jacob Fehr II was chosen *Schultze* and organized the settlement of the many new Old Colonists arriving from Russia. An elder was chosen and a church building erected. The elder wanted to continue the ban as a way of encouraging church discipline but this had lost favor with the Brotherhood. As the farms became larger the traditional arrangement of the farms radiating out from the village became impractical and became replaced by the prairie family farmsteads on individual land holdings.

As the West Reserve prospered the conservative traditions of the Old Colony became compromised. Also, large families and immigration lead to acute land shortage. Some Old Colony families boarded the train and headed for Saskatchewan, where they established the village of Neuanlage north of Saskatoon. Again they sought to be "a people apart". This meant German language education under the authority of the church, no 4-part harmony, strict dress code, no cars, no doing business outside the colony. A new church building was financed by the West Reserve Old Colonists whose elder administered baptism and communion from time to time. In the ensuing years tractors and cars began to appear among the Old Colonists causing divisions in the church. Some of the Fehrs joined the moderates who did not see technology as a threat to their faith. Others remained with the conservatives. When the 'School Question' (pages 175 - 184) put education completely under the control of the government the Old Colonists from Saskatchewan and the West Reserve sent a delegation to Mexico and South America to explore relocation opportunities.

Mexico was prepared to extend the sought after privileges so most of the Old Colonists from Saskatchewan and about 2/3 of the those from the West Reserve emigrated to Chihuahua state. The harsh conditions they encountered caused many to give up and return to Canada. Those who stayed and embraced technological changes in order to succeed economically moved to colonies less rigid.

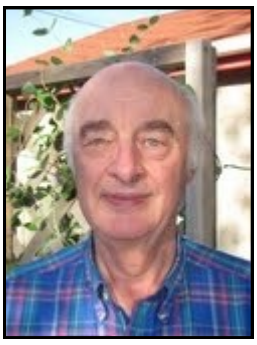
In 2011, of the 50,000 Mennonites in Mexico only about 2000 belonged to the Old Older Colonists. They still use steel-wheel tractors, refrain from tying into the grid for their electricity, restrict the education of their children and seek to keep their people and commerce in the village or at least in the colony. But things are changing. In recent years some Old Order Colonists have permitted their children to take advantage of off-colony educational opportunities. Thy have invited MCC and other Christian aid workers into their communities, resulting in changing attitudes and outlooks.

Danzig, 1726. A young, vain balding Old Colony brother decides to wear a wig. The church council deems the wig an 'adornment' and the elder refuses to serve the brother communion. The brother challenges the ruling. The elder appeals for support from the mother church in Amsterdam. Amsterdam rules that wearing a wig is not cause for denying communion. The elder ignores the advice. Nine years later the issue remains unresolved and 24 brothers in the Gemeinde ask Amsterdam to send an elder to Danzig to serve them communion. Other congregations join the fray and call on the Danzig authorities to intervene. The church council is summoned to city hall and the recalcitrant elder is jailed. He is released when the wig-wearers agree that they will in the future absent themselves when the now 80 year old elder is officiating.

The Fehrs is written in an engaging style. The many vignettes and historical side-bars about village and church life bring to life a story of human endeavor driven by a literalist understanding of scripture, a belief that God wills events to be as they are and that He watches over his people in good times and bad. The motto "Nothing for now, everything for later" gave the Old Colonists the determination and strength to accept the temporal austerity of their lifestyles for the sake of the promised eternal heavenly reward.❖

Following My Fehr Ancestors through Poland

by Albert Fehr



Albert Fehr

Over the years I wondered about my heritage, since I'd never learned much about it. About a decade ago I started to research it. I soon found my Mennonite history most interesting, and I was eager to learn more. I soon discovered that Poland is of special interest for those of us of Mennonite heritage; my ancestors lived there for about two hundred years. In my quest for knowledge about my ancestors, I joined the 2013 "Seeing Poland Through Mennonite Eyes" tour, sponsored by the California Mennonite Historical Society. I found the tour rewarding, and Poland a fascinating place to visit.

Gdansk, formerly Danzig, is a good example of how difficult it was to be a Mennonite in the early years after the Reformation. Mennonites arriving at Danzig were fleeing the Netherlands as refugees to avoid persecution, and possibly death; while Poland was more tolerant, Mennonites were not accepted as equals. They were generally not allowed to settle in the city itself, and instead settled in communities just outside of the city, such as Alt Schottland and Schidlitz. It was here that my first known ancestor, Gysbert De Veer I (my ninth great grandfather) arrived, sometime after 1580. We do not know to what extent he experienced persecution in the Netherlands, but he would have been aware of it. He was a grain trader, buying grain in Poland and selling it in the Netherlands – even at that time, some European countries weren't growing enough grain to feed their own people. On the banks of the Motlawa Canal in Gdansk, we saw the remains of granaries that date back centuries and were destroyed during the Second World War. It is possible that Gysbert I might have shipped grain through here. I understand he bought grain from Mennonites farming in the Polish lowlands, then shipped it to Danzig in river boats, and there it was transferred to ocean vessels for transport across the Baltic Sea to Amsterdam.

Above: A former Mennonite House and Barn in Poland
Below: The former Elbing Mennonite Church, circa 1590

We toured many of the former Mennonite villages in the lowlands between the Vistula and Nogat Rivers, which I found most interesting. The lowlands are a good example of an activity Mennonites excelled at: turning unproductive land into productive farmland, a significant contribution to the world's bread basket. It seems Mennonites had a good "development model" that served them well wherever they went. The Teutonic Knights had built dikes along the Vistula and Nogat Rivers in the fourteenth century, which had deteriorated, returning the area to marsh. Mennonites, who had gained expertise in reclaiming land from the sea in the Netherlands, were accepted in Poland in the sixteenth century for their ability to return the marshes to farmland. They soon accomplished this, and we saw the results as we passed by the fields with good crops growing. I found it interesting to see the dikes along the rivers, and to realize that the land we were driving on was up to 2.6 metres below sea level. It was almost nostalgic to see some typical Mennonite houses with attached barns that still remained in Poland – they reminded me of the house with attached barn in which my grandparents lived in southern Manitoba. The Mennonites were good builders! We saw a number of former Mennonite Churches; some were used by other denominations, one was now an art gallery, and we were told one was used for tractor storage. We saw numerous former Mennonite cemeteries that were being somewhat maintained.

Mennonites also excelled in the textile industry, which they had

learned in the Netherlands; this, too, was made more difficult for them, as they were not allowed to join the related guilds in Poland. They operated outside of the guilds, and must have been competitive and productive, since the guilds tried to have them shut down. However, stopping them would have harmed the economy and the Mennonites were allowed to keep operating. Gysbert De Veer III, my seventh great grandfather, was a gold-lace maker; it seems he made the trim for fancy clothing worn by the wealthy.

A place of special interest to me was the Rosenort cemetery near Elbing, which is called Elblag today. The Rosenort Mennonite Church, which no longer exists, was once located beside the cemetery. It was in this church that my third great grandfather, Isaak De Fehr (the family name changed in Poland), was baptized in 1785. Isaak's father, Benjamin II (my fourth great grandfather), was born in the neighbouring village of Klein Mausdorf. It seems that his parents had moved there temporarily – they may have feared political unrest in Danzig after the death of King Augustus II, who had always supported the Mennonites, in 1733. The family soon returned to Danzig, but by 1780, Benjamin II and his family had moved back to Klein Mausdorf. The Mennonites came under Prussian rule during the three partitions of Poland, beginning in 1772. This led to fears that they would lose the privileges they had been granted by Poland: there was now pressure on them to participate in the military which, to the Mennonites, was not acceptable. It was also difficult for them to acquire more land. At this time, Russia was looking for settlers for territory they had just conquered, and the conditions offered by Russia led to some Mennonites deciding to immigrate there. The first group departed in 1788, and Benjamin II and most of his family left for Russia in 1789.

The most sobering site we visited was the former Stutthof Concentration Camp, which is museum today. Our guide here had been a prisoner in a concentration camp himself, which made the tour more meaningful. We were told that 65,000 had died in this camp; some from illness, some from starvation, and many were killed in the gas chamber. I noticed that one of the documents displayed included the name Heinrich Otto Penner. Since my mother's maiden name was Penner, this caught my attention. The document was in Polish, but our Polish tour guide told me it stated that Heinrich Otto Penner had been rented to a company to work for them. Although my mother's family had left Poland before then, it meant that someone with my mother's name had been a prisoner there, and might have been a distant relative. That evening, as I made some entries in my travel journal, I had trouble coming up with words to describe what I'd seen. First of all there were the horrors that those who had been imprisoned there were subjected to, but in addition, I couldn't understand the mentality of those who operated this repulsive camp.

The tour aroused a range of emotions. Being able to visit the places where my Fehr ancestors had lived, which I had eagerly looked forward to, was a memorable experience and one that I will cherish. Touring the places where the Mennonites had lived, and seeing what they built, I thought of how difficult it must have been, considering that they were subjected to both social and economic discrimination. I left Poland with a deeper appreciation of my ancestors and my Mennonite heritage. Finally, if I would have been born in Poland, instead of in Canada, my family would have been forcefully removed from Poland after WWII in 1945, along with the other remaining Mennonites. This was a painful example of the harsh consequences of war suffered by many.

Albert Fehr was born in Winkler, Manitoba. He is a retired accountant and lives in Edmonton, Alberta with his wife Alison. Retirement has given him the time to pursue his interest in family and Mennonite history.❖

Albert Fehr at former Mennonite village of Leske, (Laski) Poland

A Historical Comparison of Anabaptism to Anarchism:

To what extent do the Swiss Brethren Embody the Ideals of Spiritual Anarchism?

by Naomi Gross

Introduction

Many historians and philosophers studying the historic roots of classic anarchism consider certain Anabaptist groups as forerunners, containing specific elements of anarchism. Studies in Anabaptism in this respect have generally focused on the Anabaptist leader, Thomas Müntzer , or on the violent takeover of the city of Münster, Germany.(1) The Swiss Brethren, on the other hand, who adhered to many of the same tenets, albeit with a commitment to nonviolence, have not been carefully studied through the lens of Spiritual Anarchism.(2) While in this regard there is sometimes mention of the peaceful Anabaptists in passing, the focus always returns to Thomas Müntzer and the Peasants' Revolt of 1525. At the same time, historians who come from the Swiss Brethren tradition have failed to discuss Anabaptism through the anarchist lens. This could be because anarchism has tended to be associated with violence, and the heirs of the Swiss Brethren, namely the Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites, have remained opposed to violence. This essay therefore explores the question: *To what extent do the Swiss Brethren embody the ideals of Spiritual Anarchism?* On the basis of three primary source documents, this essay concludes that Spiritual Anarchism serves well as a model, reflecting to a high degree the structure and spirit of the earlier Swiss Brethren's vision of their faith within the context of their social structure.

Exploration of Spiritual Anarchism and the History of Anabaptism

The term "anarchism" comes from the Greek word, *anarchia,* which was used during the Middle Ages to describe God as "without a beginning." The word in its modern definition was first claimed in the 1800s by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Some principles that generally link anarchist values are: the view of human nature as good; critique of the existing order; the vision of a free society (and a way to achieve it); and the rejection of the state. A modern definition of anarchism is "the condition of a people living without any constituted authority or government."(3)

There are many different forms of anarchism, one of which is Spiritual Anarchism. "Spiritual Anarchists see humans as primarily spiritual beings capable of managing themselves without … external government…. [They] reject man-made law in favour of … the law of God."(4) Spiritual Anarchism comes closest to reflecting given elements, as found in one Anabaptist movement, the Swiss Brethren, during the 1520s.

Anabaptism grew out of the Radical Reformation, in an effort to reclaim pre-Constantinian Christianity. After Constantine began the process of converting Rome to Christianity, and with that, his whole empire, the church became a hierarchical institution that legislated faith and traditions which ensured control of the entire population.(5) During the Renaissance, institutions of learning became interested in probing history critically, and through research, rediscovered the form, spirit and substance of the early church before it became institutionalized. The early church had many characteristics of grass-roots egalitarian and anarchical structures, especially in its refusal to identify with and defend the nation-state or empire.

Through the centuries most general historians, when mentioning the Anabaptists, know only about the Münsterites, a revolutionary group that violently took over the city of Münster, in Westfalia, Germany. The Münsterites believed in defensive warfare and fought bitterly to maintain their political establishment. In this regard, they were the exception and not the rule, since the groups that evolved into the modern day Mennonites began with nonviolent principles and continue so to this day. These early Anabaptists called themselves the Swiss Brethren, and grew out of a fertile social/theological context in Zurich, Switzerland, in the early 1520s. They worked as a collaborative group with no one individual having authoritative power. The symbol for this egalitarian approach was their refusal to cooperate with infant baptism. Rather, they re-baptised each other as an act of voluntary commitment to their faith. The group that eventually referred to themselves as the Swiss Brethren began as a group of theology students under Ulrich Zwingli. They observed many of the principles emerging during these early Reformation years. When it became obvious that the state was not going to allow for a full separation of the church from the state, the group of students went its separate way, forming the beginnings of what became the Swiss Brethren. One of these students was Conrad Grebel, whose letters are discussed below.

The ideas of this new group resonated with many others, and the movement spread to other parts of

Switzerland. The ruling powers and religious institutions viewed the practices of this new movement as heretical, and responded with violence, killing many Anabaptists through drowning and burning at the stake. Though the state tried to eradicate the Anabaptists, the movement kept spreading throughout Switzerland and into other European countries.

Many letters and manifestos that articulate the beliefs and values of the Swiss Brethren have been preserved. We shall look at several of the earliest: two letters of Conrad Grebel to Thomas Müntzer, composed in 1524; the Schleitheim Confession, compiled in 1527; and the transcript of the trial of Michael Sattler, also in 1527. Together, these writings depict the values of the Swiss Brethren community. These writings at the same time portray the basic values of the later Spiritual Anarchists, and can be viewed to some degree as their historic roots.

The 1524 Letters

In 1524, Conrad Grebel and other Swiss Brethren penned two letters to Thomas Müntzer. Historian and theologian John Howard Yoder explains that these letters, together, are "the first extant document that demonstrates the independent existence of the group that later came to be called the Swiss Brethren, the first structured form of the Anabaptist movement."(6) These letters show that the Swiss Brethren viewed Müntzer as being, potentially, part of what would emerge as the Anabaptist fold, in that he was working toward the same vision when it came to many aspects of the proto-Anabaptist approach to faith.(7) They differed on one point however: Müntzer was not opposed to violence as a means of achieving God's kingdom on earth. Grebel and those of his community therefore challenged him on this point, encouraging him to be true to nonviolence. The brethren held an absolute belief in nonviolence, as modelled by Jesus. While Müntzer believed that protection through using the sword was acceptable, the brethren believed in using neither "worldly sword nor war," and adherents to the gospel "are not to be protected by the sword nor [should] they [protect] themselves."(8) Such pacifism is also a major tenet of many anarchist philosophies, because by killing someone, you are giving yourself more power than those whom you fight. The Brethren believed that by following Christ's nonviolent example, fighting was thus un-Christian, and a "plague," a view which also fits with the anarchist philosophy. They "took a global stance, in which Christ's model, and the choice between the sword and the ban" dictated how they conducted their affairs.(9)

These letters capture what the Swiss Brethren believed, and how they differed from Münzter's thought. Though Grebel was the scribe, he was not the sole writer of the letters. The letters are written with a communal voice. Six people signed the first letter, seven signed the second letter, and five signed both. Both letters indicate an even broader voice when they mention "other brethren." Within the first sentence, the brethren refer to Müntzer "without title" but rather "as a brother."(10) This places all the brethren (including women) and Müntzer on equal footing, with no apparent hierarchy. This is also a key tenet of Spiritual Anarchy, but it is prevalent in many writings of the Swiss Brethren as well. The Swiss Brethren also believed that "Jesus Christ, who offers himself as the only Master and Head" is the one leader. Another defining aspect of Spiritual Anarchism is placing God and Jesus as the sole leaders.(11)

Beyond capturing the relationship between the Swiss Brethren and Müntzer, these letters serve as indirect documentation of the orientation toward a Spiritual Anarchist perspective, contrasting to that of the Catholic Church. One example is the Anabaptist view of the Lord's Supper. The Swiss Brethren differed in their understanding of the Lord's Supper from that of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead of believing in transubstantiation, they believed that "by faith it is the body of Christ and an incorporation with Christ and the brethren." The Lord's Supper through this understanding becomes a symbol and expression of egalitarian community, with Christ as head. This belief was a large part of the Swiss Brethren's belief system, and shaped their other ideals. Another key aspect of the Swiss Brethren practice expounded in these letters was their view of Jesus. They took the focus away from worshipping Jesus, and instead focused on following Jesus in life. This placed everyone on equal footing, because everyone had access to the same stories contained in the Gospels of how Christ lived. And finally, the Swiss Brethren did not agree with many teachings of the Catholic Church because of the method through which the word of God was proclaimed. The Roman Catholic Church used Latin as the language of the church, which the common people did not understand. This contributed to ensuring that the hierarchy of the Roman

Catholic Church was always intact. The Swiss Brethren believed that the church should "act only in accord with the Word, and proclaim and establish the practices of the apostles with the Word." This dissolved the hierarchy of the Church, and made the Word accessible to everyone. One key aspect to Swiss Brethren thought is adult baptism. This suggests a voluntary commitment to God and to the church. The community challenged Müntzer to remain a voluntary community: "Press on in earnest with common prayer and fasting, in accord with faith and love without being commanded or compelled."

The second letter from Grebel (and his brethren) to Müntzer was "written in haste." They found out that Müntzer "preached against the princes, that they should be combatted with the fist."(12) This was not in accordance with the beliefs that the Swiss Brethren held. Müntzer's goal was to spread his faith, defending it with violence if necessary – which he did as one of the major leaders in the bloody Peasants' War. The Swiss Brethren had a problem with his tactics because Müntzer made the faith conversion coercive, rather than a voluntary act, in line with the understanding of the early church as contained in the book of Acts. They believed that "the way to reform the church is by observing the rule of Christ(13), not by getting city council votes or episcopal rulings."(14) The goal of Müntzer seemed to be to grow his movement in large numbers. To achieve this, he had in mind legislating the new faith – the very thing the Swiss Brethren were reforming against. The Swiss Brethren community was made up of "not even twenty who believe[d] the Word of God."(15) Though this was a small number of people, they all believed that "Christ must suffer still more in his members, but he will strengthen them and keep them steadfast to the end."

The Schleitheim Confession

The Schleitheim Confession was written in the Swiss town of Schleitheim in 1527, and was the first blueprint of the Swiss Brethren. In an introduction to a translation of the document, Anabaptist historian Leonard Gross explains: "Brethren converged upon Schleitheim, worked through fundamental disagreements, and emerged from the meeting agreeing about seven points of faith which they commonly affirmed, with complete consensus."(16) These seven articles dealt with issues of practice and belief, many of which were an expansion of the main points of the 1524 letters discussed earlier. On the topic of the Schleitheim Confession, German historian Hans J. Hillerbrand says that "the confession establishes a dualism of two distinct realities that are incompatible with each other."(17) One is the worldly structure of the state, and the other is the structure of the kingdom of God. The Swiss Brethren interpret it from the Gospels and the book of Acts. The latter has as its head Jesus Christ, but it is otherwise a flat structure of voluntarily committed believers who all have equal authority.

The main scribe, and a contributor to the compiling of the Schleitheim Confession was Michael Sattler. Sattler and the other contributors who, according to the introductory cover letter to the document, included women, began the confession with an explanation of the importance of following Jesus in life (in German, the word is "*Nachfolge*" which translates literally as "following after"). What follows is a synopsis of the Confession:

Article One: "Notice concerning baptism" (18)

Baptism for the Anabaptists represented the most challenging departure from sixteenth-century traditional church practice, from the perspective of the state-church. The Catholic Church practiced infant baptism, in part to ensure salvation for the newborns, and in part to register newborns as citizens. The Anabaptists challenged the idea of infant baptism, calling it "the greatest and first abomination" of the Catholic Church.(19) Instead, they advocated for believers' baptism, "given to those who have been taught repentance and the amendment of life,… and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ..."(20) This is in sharp contrast to the Catholic emphasis on the Crucifixion. "Walking in the Resurrection" captures the shift from being always in sin and redeemed solely by the death of Jesus, to claiming the promise of the resurrected Christ which is an invitation for everyone to follow in the path he laid in his life, bringing to fruition the kingdom of God on earth.(21) Baptism is therefore a symbol of the practice of voluntary commitment to a community and willingness to be held accountable.

Article Two: "We have been united as follows concerning the ban"

Although the ban has often been cast as an extreme form of exclusion, the ban is, in fact, a careful process of accountability and reconciliation. When those calling themselves "brothers and sisters ...

still somehow slip and fall into error and sin,… the same shall be warned twice privately and the third time, be publicly admonished before the entire congregation according to the command of Christ (Mt. 18)."(22) The article implies but does not state that if this process fails, the individual in question is then excluded or banned from the community. But the hope is clearly that reconciliation will be the outcome of this process.

According to John Howard Yoder, for the Anabaptists, the alternative to the sword is the rule of Christ: "What Christians are to do with conflict in the church is to talk about it: go to the brother or sister with the intention of forgiveness."(23) This method of reconciliation was used instead of capital punishment, and served as a way of keeping congregations as pure as possible. The outcome of reconciliation and forgiveness is crucial for an understanding of the goals of this process. This is also important within the anarchist vision, because there is no judge or one person to decide the fate of a person, but rather, the whole community agrees to the verdict.

Article Three: "Concerning the breaking of bread" (24)

Communion, according to the writers of the Schleitheim Confession, symbolizes the commitment that members have made to their faith in God and to the community in which they practice their faith: "That whoever does not share in the calling of the one God to one faith, to one baptism, to one spirit, to one body together with all the children of God, may not be made one loaf together with them…."(25) This illustrates the principles of Spiritual Anarchism as well, where traditions undergird the equality of the members who all share their allegiance to a higher power.

Article Four: "We have been united concerning the separation that shall take place from the evil"(26)

This article summarizes the identity of the new community through characterizing what their members are separating themselves from. The state is seen as inherently evil in its promotion of nationalism and defence through violence: "Thereby shall also fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence – such as sword, armour, and the like, and all of their use to protect friends or against enemies – by virtue of the word of Christ: 'you shall not resist evil.'"(27) This complete separation from worldly governing structures is the cornerstone of the Anabaptist anarchist principles. Because joining this community is voluntary, and because there is collective decision making, the vision in this article shows a pathway to create a free society.

Article Five: "We shall be united as follows concerning shepherds in the church of God"(28)

A leader was chosen by the community through consensus. The role of the leader was to "read and exhort and teach, warn, admonish, or ban in the congregation…."(29) If the leader was found to err, there needed to be two or three witnesses, at which time the leader would be publicly reprimanded. In the event that the leader was found out by the authorities and apprehended, a new leader will be chosen on the eve of his departure/death "so that the little folk and the little flock of God may not be destroyed…."(30) Although there is a leader, he/she has no authority over the group, but presides or officiates on behalf of the group. Furthermore, the leader is more vulnerable to getting killed. If one connects this article with Article One on baptism, it is clear that there is no hierarchical structure of decision-making. Rather, all members hold the same access to truth and thus contribute equally to the workings of the group. The Swiss Brethren held the doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers, and this influenced their church structure, especially with respect to understanding the Bible.

Article Six: "We have been united as follows concerning the sword"(31)

To be true followers of Jesus, there is agreement that no one can claim to be a Christian and fend with a sword: "As Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through him…."(32) This tenet adds a new dimension to Spiritual Anarchism in that this form is committed to nonviolence at all costs. In the study of Anarchism as well, there is a subcategory called "Anarcho-Pacifism." Italian Anarchist Errico Malatesta's viewpoint can be summarized as: "the attraction of pacifism to anarchists is clear. Violence is authoritarian and coercive, and so its use does contradict anarchist principles."(33)

Article Seven: "We have been united as follows concerning the oath"(34)

The issue of swearing the oath is crucial to Anabaptism. Swearing the oath symbolizes participation in the government structures. For a people separate from the world,

and for a people who are committed to living a life of honesty and integrity at all times, the swearing of the oath was contrary to how they believed, in that it suggests that honesty is only present under oath. Furthermore, Jesus commanded his followers not to swear the oath. As the Anabaptists put it, "we cannot perform what is promised in swearing, for we are not able to change the smallest part of ourselves."(35)

Summing up the parallels between the Swiss Brethren's Schleitheim Seven Articles and Spiritual Anarchism, the thought and practices of the latter are captured both in the way that this Schleitheim document came together, and as regards its contents. Schleitheim's Introduction indicates participation and input from all present. This denotes an absolute rejection of hierarchy within the community. This conscious renunciation of hierarchy resurfaces in all seven articles, the most obvious and radical being a commitment to the rejection of the sword and the oath. In this way the Swiss Brethren were rejecting the hierarchies around them as well.

Michael and Margareta Sattler, and the trial of Michael Sattler

One important leader of the early Swiss Brethren movement is Michael Sattler.(36) Sattler had taken vows of celibacy as a monastic monk. Disillusioned with the hierarchy of the church, and drawn by the new Anabaptist ideas he was hearing, he left the monastic life and joined the Anabaptist movement. He met a woman named Margareta whom he married, who had belonged to the Beguines, a lay Catholic community. The Beguines were a non-hierarchical women's movement, each community being autonomous from the other as well. They did not belong within the formal structures of the Catholic Church. Margareta, too, was drawn to the Anabaptists and left the Beguines. Both Michael and Margareta played a significant leadership role in articulating the tenets of the Anabaptist movement contained in the Schleitheim Confession. Because of the Sattlers' prominence in the movement – especially since Michael's name was on letters and documents – he and Margareta became the target of legal action. Michael was put on the stand and burned at the stake as a heretic on May 21, 1527, and Margareta was tried and drowned two days later.(37)

The trial of Michael Sattler is very important in understanding how the Swiss Brethren lived. The letters written in 1524 and the Schleitheim Confession all detail in some depth how the Swiss Brethren intended to live out their faith, but do not illustrate such intentions with corresponding actions. The trial on the other hand demonstrates concretely how the group's leadership was shared. Michael Sattler might have been the individual on trial, but he was representing his whole community. The trial began with reading the points of accusation against Sattler. Some accusations included that he went "against imperial mandate; he taught, held, and believed that the body and blood of Christ are not in the sacrament; infant baptism is not conducive to salvation; and he would not wage war" against an enemy.(38) Some of these accusations made by the state were correct, and Sattler's reasons for breaking these laws are all in accordance with the message in the Schleitheim Confession and in the 1524 letters. Michael Sattler did not outright defend himself on his own, but instead asked to first have a "consultation with his brothers and sisters."(39) This showed that he was not the leader of the Swiss Brethren but rather part of the community, and did not, in and of himself, have authoritative power to interpret faith. This is further demonstrated by his opening statement: "Concerning the articles which have to do with me and with my brothers and sisters."(40) Also aligning with Spiritual Anarchism is his stand against an allegiance to the state, desiring instead to be self-governing. Sattler states that "we hold that one should not swear allegiance to the government."(41) During the final argument, Sattler stated that "we cannot consent to any legal process" (42) because we "have not been sent to defend the Word of God; we have been sent, instead, to bear witness to it."(43) In testament to the nonviolent position of the Swiss Brethren, he said that "we should not defend ourselves against the Turks or our other persecutors."(44) All of these statements of defence demonstrate, yet again, the close parallels between the principles of the Swiss Brethren, and those of the Spiritual Anarchist.

Conclusion

It is clear from the three sources explored above that the foundational principles, held by the Swiss Brethren during the early days of their evolving as a group, closely paralleled those associated with the later movement known as Spiritual Anarchism. It is high time that historians recognize the close parallels between Spiritual Anarchism and the Swiss Brethren, and the staying power of this social model through the centuries as exemplified by the heirs of the Swiss Brethren: the Mennonites, Hutter-

ites, and Amish – and later, reflected, knowingly or unknowingly, in Spiritual Anarchism. The Swiss Brethren were consequently Reformation-era forerunners in reclaiming ideals of social equality inherent in the early church, that later took root in subsequent movements such as Spiritual Anarchism.

Notes

(1) The takeover of the city of Munster was in 1534-35.

(2) The Swiss Brethren began around 1520 and following.

(3) Peter Marshall, "The River of Anarchy." In *Demanding the Impossible, A History of Anarchism* (Hammersmith, London: Fontana Press, 1992), 3.

(4) Ibid., 6.

(5) Circa A.D. 3l3.

(6) John H. Yoder, *Christian Attitudes to War, Peace, and the Revolution* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 1983), 153-6.

(7) The actual birthdate of Swiss Anabaptism is January 21, 1525, when the group initiated believers' baptism.

(8) L. Harder, ed. (1985). *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism, the Grebel Letters and Related Documents*. (Scottdale, Pennsylvania: Herald Press, 1985), 285-96.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Marshall, 3.

(12) Harder, 285-96.

(13) Matthew 18:15-20.

(14) Yoder, 169-82.

(15) Harder, 285-96.

(16) Leonard Gross, "Discerning Our Common Faith." Edited by Daniel Hertzler. *Gospel Herald*, 22 February 1977, 151.

(17) Hans J. Hillerbrand, "The Anabaptist View of the State." *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* (April, 1958), 98.

(18) Daniel Hertzler, ed., "The Schleitheim Text." John H Yoder, trans. *Gospel Herald*, 22 February 1977, 153-6.

(19) Ibid.

(20) Ibid.

(21) Ibid.

(22) Ibid.

(23) Yoder, 169-82.

(24) Hertzler, 153-6.

(25) Ibid.

(26) Ibid.

(27) Ibid.

(28) Ibid.

(29) Ibid.

(30) Ibid.

(31) Ibid.

(32) Ibid.

(33) Anon. *An Anarchist FAQ*. Vol. 1. Oakland, California: AK Press, 2008.

(34) Hertzler, 153-6.

(35) Ibid.

(36) Gustav Bossert, Harold S. Bender, and C. Snyder. n.d. "Sattler, Michael (d. 1527)." Accessed January 26, 2013. http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S280.html#Arrest.

(37) Leonard Gross, trans., "Michael Sattler's Epistle." In *Golden Apples in Silver Bowls*, (Lancaster, Pennsylvania: Lancaster Mennonite Historical Society, 1999), 52-7.

(38) Ibid.

(39) Ibid.

(40) Ibid.

(41) Ibid.

(42) Ibid.

(43) Ibid.

(44) Ibid. ❖

Book Review: Violence in Peaceable Villages. Images and Impressions from *Mennonites in Ukraine Amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917-1920)*.

Reviewed by Henry Neufeld

John B. Toews, *Mennonites in Ukraine Amid Civil War and Anarchy (1917-1920)*. Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California, 2013. Pp. XVI, 198.

Editor and translator John B. Toews, in compiling these documents, provides personal insights into the turbulent and tragic times experienced by Mennonites in Ukraine. Many previously not translated, these documents provide an on the spot view of the horrors of that era of Mennonite life in Ukraine.

Martens'… wife was concerned about his safety... This time she persuaded her husband to hide in the garden in the back of the farmyard. … The burning houses, the scream and tumult made him restless. Slowly he crept toward the house... before he reached it, he stumbled over a body. It was his wife. His heart cried out. Suddenly he thought of his children. Horror of horrors! All five mutilated bodies were scattered throughout the room." (p. 134)

Diaries and journals are accounts written by individuals in moments of inspiration, in times of hardship or as part of a daily routine. They record events - personal as well as what happens in the world around them - and are valuable in historical research.

Few historical texts are as compelling to read as this collection; the intimate detail, insight, and commentary are painfully honest. These are personal, not private texts. One writer simply recorded the names of men murdered in

Blumenort so they would not be forgotten.

For many years Mennonites in Ukraine were known for their agricultural productivity and innovation. Conscription in the 1870's resulted in almost one-third of Russian Mennonites leaving their country. With the 1917 Bolshevik revolution and collapse of the Czarist regime, Mennonites were often seen as wealthy oppressors and foreigners who kept to themselves. And they spoke German.

The civil chaos that followed the 1917 upheaval resulted in Mennonite villages being pillaged by bandits and armies. The complex military and political events produced lawlessness and disorder. The new Soviet government was weak, inexperienced, and not able to maintain law and order in the large Russian empire.

Ukrainian anarchist Nestor Makhno took advantage of this situation and organized bandits who robbed, raped, and murdered at will. Mennonite estate owners and villages were frequent targets. Mennonites faced unprecedented violence.

There was a loud pounding at the door. Grandfather opened it and some twenty bandits stormed in. The robbing began… Grandfather said 'take everything.' Uncle Willy held the lamp for the robbers… Grandfather knelt and prayed loudly. Two shots were fired... Both were shot in the head. (pp. 22-23)

There was a lull in this carnage when German troops arrived in spring 1918. "*They were our saviours… a respite sent by God.*" They brought law and order. German theologians had preached in Ukraine, bringing spiritual renewal with German nationalist overtones. The German troops were welcomed by the Mennonites.

The Germans arrived in our village Eichenfeld. The question of non-resistance was a non-issue. The German army left many weapons…. Some 250 men served in this Selbstschutz (p 147).

The *Selbstschutz* did not emerge from a lot of discussion and prayer: circumstances rapidly thrust it to the forefront. *We did not count on God. We relied on ourselves… and that gave birth to the Selbstschutz.* (p. 167).

The response to the wanton rape and killing led to the establishment of the *Selbstschutz,* an armed Mennonite self-defense militia. Trained and armed by the German soldiers, one battalion had 4000 Mennonites and Germans. "*The Mennonites took weapons… and rode in splendid uniforms, rifles slung over their shoulders.*" (p. 160)

Raids by the Mennonite militia resulted in swift retaliation: Machnovites left 146 dead in a number of villages, 84 in Muensterberg.

The 400-year old belief in non-resistance was suspended in the name of self- protection. Those who promoted non-resistance were ridiculed, mocked and sometimes beaten.

In one situation starving Russians came at night to a Mennonite village for food; they were shot by Mennonite militia men. Some lay wounded until morning when Mennonites came and killed them.

The German soldiers were recalled in November 1918 and left a power vacuum; Makhno's bands returned with greater violence. They sought to avenge the alleged injustices peasants had suffered at the hands of Mennonites. One writer observes that God did not leave the Mennonites unpunished for their violence.

The bandits arrived at a village, demanded that all weapons be turned over, searched every house, and took fresh horses and buggies at will, demanded money, jewelry, and foodstuffs. They shot resistant people took a few prisoners, set homes and barns afire, and left.

At a time of unprecedented civil disorder, violence and terror, many saw the *Selbstschutz* as essential to protect lives and possessions. The prophetic voices of the spiritual leaders weakened as many joined the new militia. This was unusual behaviour, but these were unusual and disturbing times.

Some believed things would have been much worse without the *Selbstschutz.* B.B. Janz saw it differently: *We have sinned … all the murders… all the conflagrations, all rape resulted from Mennonite armed resistance.* (p. 118) Abraham Kroeker wrote: *Many a… poor servant and Russian neighbour have rightly complained about our selfishness and God heard their complaint…. We have not sought God's kingdom….* (p. 171)

John Toews does not comment extensively on these documents, rather, and wisely, they are allowed to speak for themselves. The depictions of what our people did when faced with unbridled violence forces us, rather than judging our forefathers, to consider our reaction in similar situations.

Copies of this book can be ordered from: Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., 211 – 2825 Clearbrook Road, Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 6S3 or by email: archives@mhsbc.com.

❖