



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

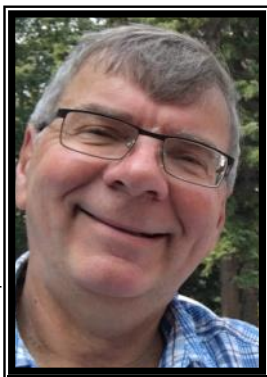
Volume XXII Number 1

March 2019

A Journey in Time

by Bill Franz

In the fall of 2018, I made the journey of a life-time to the Ukraine and Poland with my sisters Margaret Wonko, Ingrid Pawlosky, and Monika Franz-Lien and brothers-in-law Richard Pawlosky and Jeff Franz-Lien to explore the lands and family history of our parents and grandparents. I had wanted to go to the Ukraine with our parents Johann Franz and Ella (Weber) Franz years ago but this was not to be. Instead, we made



Bill Franz

(See Journey on page 6)

MHSA Tribute—Henry David Goerzen

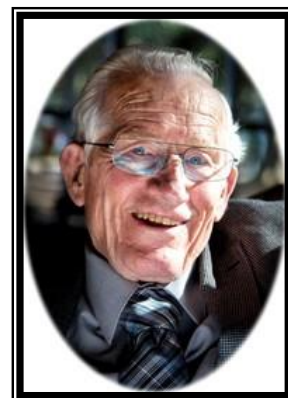
by Katie Harder

Saturday, January 19, 2019 the Mennonite community east of Didsbury, AB and friends from the surrounding area and various points in Alberta gathered at the Bergthal Mennonite Church to mourn the loss and to celebrate the life and work of Henry David Goerzen. Henry was a devoted husband, father, grandfather, and a friend to many in the local community and beyond.

Henry's life's vocation was farming, and he described himself by saying, "I was always a man of the land". However, he served his community and the broader constituency in various other capacities as well. Church, conference, and community involvements added many more facets to this man.

Henry David Goerzen was born on October 28, 1928 to immigrant parents David and Suzanna (Wiens) Goerzen, who had settled on a farm in the Rosebud Valley in the Crossfield district. Henry grew up as the middle child with nine siblings. Growing up on his parents' farm he learned the particulars of farm life. He often mentioned, too, how he enjoyed the freedom of roaming the hills and valleys of the Rosebud and developed a deep appreciation for the beauty of his natural surroundings.

Unfortunately, Henry's education at the rural Rodney School ended in grade nine due to World War II. His older brother was called to conscientious objector service, and Henry was needed at home. The war and thoughts of his brother serving as a conscientious objector caused Henry to evaluate his own faith. He decided to continue his studies at the Menno



Henry Goerzen

(See Goerzen on page 4)

In this Issue

1. Goerzen Tribute
1. Journey In Time
2. Editorial Reflections
3. Chairman's Corner
13. The Groenings and Simpsons
15. MHSA Fall Conference
15. MHSC Report
16. Eye-Witness
18. Board Bio—Ted Regehr
19. Chosen Nation
20. Village Forsaken
21. Russian Steppe to Canada
23. Letters to the Editor
24. AGM & Spring Conference

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

2019 AGM and Spring Conference

- Date:** Saturday, Apr 27, 2019
AGM: 10 AM - Light lunch available
Conference: 1 PM - Faspa and visiting to follow
Place: Highland MB Church, Calgary
Featuring: Dr Colin Neufeldt and Dr Hans Werner

See the poster on the back page for more details.

Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

When I last spoke to you in this space I was just preparing for a learning tour to Honduras, which went well. In December and January, Marion and I went to New



Dave Toews

Zealand, Tasmania, and Fiji. We spent three weeks with our son and his family in Wellington, a week in Hobart, and two weeks in Fiji. We saw family, the kiwi, the devil, Port Arthur, and Fiji. A great vacation bucket list filler!

Thank you to all the authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated. It is a pleasure to work with you.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave

Toews at dmttoews@gmail.com.

Mennonites, Nazis, and the Holocaust. Some people have asked, "Why are you having a conference on this subject? Why are you bringing up these negative experiences from the past? Are you trying to establish blame? I think the answer, at least in part is, "The past is always with us and we have to own our past." Theodore Roosevelt said, "I believe that the more you know about the past, the better you are prepared for the future."

Professor Doris Bergen, Chancellor Rose and Ray Wolfe Chair in Holocaust Studies, University of Toronto, said the scholar's job is "to break apart the myths. . . . Many groups are confronting and breaking the myth of their own innocence or non-complicity in the Holocaust. This can be enormously liberating."

There have been three major conferences on this subject in the last four years, listed below.

Sept 2015, MÜNSTER, Germany *Mennonite World Review* — In the city infamous as the site of an attempt to establish an Anabaptist kingdom by force in 1535, more than 100 people participated in a

conference on "Mennonites in the Era of National Socialism".

Joachim Wiehler, who grew up in Tiegenhagen, read excerpts of letters by his father, who served as a highly decorated officer in the *Wehrmacht*. Those documents repeatedly affirmed that Germany's cause was part of a divine plan in which Hitler was a kind of German savior. Ortwin Driedger shared childhood memories of a long series of trains and wagons going by his house, transporting Jews to a nearby concentration camp at Stutthof.

March 2017, FILADELPHIA, Paraguay *Religion News Service* — Violence tore through this traditionally pacifist community on the night of March 11, 1944. All the more remarkable, its perpetrators and victims were all Mennonites. And they all belonged to rival Nazi factions.

Cut off from Germany, Fernheim's residents disagreed about how best to maintain Nazi loyalty. A power struggle ensued that focused on colony administration, control of the German-language schools and access to return transportation to the Reich. Young men gathered whips and clubs, and they severely beat six competitors. The unrest prompted intervention from U.S. diplomats and the Paraguayan military, ultimately leading to the banishment of several ringleaders. Ben Goossen, author of *Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era*.

March 2018, Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, *Contemporary Church History Quarterly*, Conference Report by Doris Bergen, University of Toronto, Scholars, students, community and church leaders, and members of the general public gathered in mid-March

(See Editorial on page 3)

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle

ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:

Dave Toews, Editor
(dmttoews@gmail.com)

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

To join, send payment to:

MHSA
2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Editor: Dave Toews

Co-editor: Vacant

Copy Editor: Carolyn Wilson

Editorial Committee: Dave Toews,

2 vacancies

Layout: Harvey Wiehler

Distribution: Bill Janzen

Membership List: Ellie Janz

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

MHSA Executive

Chair: Dave Neufeldt, Lethbridge
Vice Chair: Katie Harder, Didsbury
Secretary: David Jeffares, Edmonton
Treasurer: Peter Dyck, Calgary

Members at Large:

Ted Regehr, Calgary
Peter Kroeger, Calgary
Ken Matis, Coaldale
Ernie Wiens, Sherwood Park
Sigrid Warkentin, Calgary
Verne Klassen, Duchess
Dave Toews, St. Albert

GAMEO Representative:

Vacant

MAID Representative:

Vacant

(Editorial from page 2)

2018 at Bethel College for two intense days of presentations and discussions on the subject of "Mennonites and the Holocaust."

Colin Neufeldt's paper, on "Jewish-Mennonite Relations" in the Masovian Voivodeship, shifted attention to German-occupied Poland. At least twenty Mennonites, including Neufeldt's grandparents, left their village of Deutsch Wymyschle to take over properties from which Jews had been expelled in nearby Gąbin. Papers by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast and Pieter Post identified Mennonite theologians in Germany and the Netherlands who embraced and propagated National Socialist ideology.

This is just a small sample of the discussion that is happening on this subject in periodicals, conferences, foyers, and on the internet. Type "Mennonites, Nazis and the Holocaust" into your internet search engine and see what comes up. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Dave Neufeldt

In January the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta lost its founding chairman. Henry Goerzen passed away on January 11.

Henry was passionate about the history of Mennonites in Alberta and concerned about the preservation of historical records. Long before the MHSA archives was established Henry was actively col-



Dave Neufeldt

lecting records from the Conference of Mennonites of Alberta and of individual churches and institutions. Henry recognized the value of these records.

The importance of archives was reinforced for me when talking to a friend recently. In 1937, when my friend's mother was 10 days old, her father was arrested by the NKVD in Ukraine. They did not hear from him again. The family managed to escape from Soviet Ukraine to Germany, then to Paraguay, and eventually to Canada. Although the family assumed that their husband/father had eventually died, they had no confirmation of this.

During the late 1930's hundreds of thousands of people were arrested in Ukraine, including at least 9000 Mennonites, many of whom were executed. These arrests and executions were documented and those records have been preserved in Ukrainian archives. A couple of years ago these previously locked files were opened up to the public. With the current hostilities between Ukraine and Russia, there is a desire in Ukraine to expose the atrocities committed by the USSR against the Ukrainian people. The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies in Winnipeg is working to get copies of all of the Mennonite arrest records. There is concern that access to them may be cut off again at some point.

Within the last couple of months my friend learned about the availability of these records and obtained a copy of his grandfather's file from a Ukrainian archives. After over eighty years of not knowing, they finally have confirmation of his final days. Within two weeks of his arrest he was tried, convicted and executed. The

document includes his grandfather's signed confession. This was likely a forced confession, and the shakiness of the signature lends credence to this.

While finding this has provided some closure for the family, it also opens up some wounds. Within the family it was thought that the Mennonite overseer of the village had played a hand in the arrest. The document has now confirmed that. The overseer and two other Mennonite neighbours signed affidavits testifying against my friend's grandfather. The story is still not complete. This was a chaotic and terror-filled time. What led these people to turn on their neighbours? There are still more questions.

While we will never be able to fully understand the events, these archival records are incredibly valuable in providing a much clearer picture. The arrest and execution of my friend's grandfather has no doubt had an impact on this family that will last generations. And they are not unique. A large number of Mennonite families in Canada had very similar experiences. Hopefully they too can finally find out what happened to their loved ones through these archival records.

While not everything of our past will be pleasant, it is important that we accurately preserve our history. We cannot truly understand our past if we do not have the full picture. Through our archives, the MHSA is working to ensure that our Alberta Mennonite stories are not lost. We are following the journey Henry Goerzen embarked on many years ago.. ❖

(Goerzen from page 1)

Bible Institute (MBI) located on the Bergthal Mennonite Church grounds. Four years of study at Menno Bible Institute brought a lot of clarity to his faith journey. In 1947, with the encouragement of the local lay pastors, he was baptized upon his confession of faith at the Bergthal Mennonite Church and then became actively involved in local church activities. On November 2, 1952 Henry married Erna Warkentin at the family home in Munson, AB. Henry had met Erna while studying at MBI.

After marriage, Henry did a short stint of working in the coalmines of Drumheller and then came back to the Carstairs area and settled into farming. Henry and Erna were blessed with a family of six children: Martin (d. 1955), Irene, Eric, Juanita (d. 2012), Erna, and Albert. Henry realized the importance of spiritual nurture for himself and his family. This was cultivated through family devotions and attendance at Bergthal Church.

God was gracious and gifted Henry with organizational skills. He also loved debating and reasoning things out. This stood him in good stead in various leadership roles. At Bergthal he served as Sunday school superintendent, church secretary, and later church chair. At the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta level, (later Mennonite Church Alberta) Henry served a six-year term as secretary, followed a few years later by a six-year term as conference chair.

While on the conference executive, Henry became aware of the importance of recording and keeping records of actions and events in the Mennonite story. His interest in Mennonite history led him to become a collector of old records and artifacts. When Menno Bible Institute (MBI) closed its doors in the spring of 1967, he was there to collect and store the school's records. He initially stored all the material, quite an accumulation, in his basement.

Working with Henry at the conference level was very comfortable. He had high expectations, but I never found him unreasonable or demanding. In 1984, when I was conference secretary, Henry asked me to help him sort through the former MBI records. He established a few guidelines. We would begin about 9:30, take a break for lunch, and stop for the day at around 4:30 pm. Over time, most of the MBI material ended up in a steel grain bin on Henry's farm. The archives in Alberta had very humble beginnings.

During the 1980's, CMA flourished with 18 member congregations and over 2000 members. Attendance at Camp Valaqua was on the upswing, the new lodge there was completed, and the Missions Committee was busy helping establish new Asian churches in Calgary and Edmonton. Every May or June, Songfest was held in various localities across the province, and large numbers participated. The Alberta Mennonite Youth Organization was a vibrant organization with numerous activities happening throughout the year and across the province. Henry was always keen to oversee all aspects of the conference operations during those exciting years, and he did so ably.

After Henry's second term as chair, he became the official archivist for the conference. He always reminded outgoing committee members to hand over their material, so that records would be preserved for future genera-

tions. I remember him lamenting that committee minutes were not being maintained in the manner that he was accustomed to. Often they were being stored on the computer, and some were deleted.

In 1974 the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta had been created with Henry as a founding member. When maintaining the two-province organization proved difficult, Henry advocated relentlessly for Alberta to form its own society. In 1986 Henry was once again a founding member as the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) became a reality and joined the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. He served as MHSA chair from 1986 to 1999 and continued on as vice-chair until 2003.

As time went on, Henry felt that the grain bin that the Conference had initially purchased to save archival material had served its purpose, and he worked hard to persuade MHSA to establish a more suitable location. Eventually, space was rented from the Mennonite Central Committee office building in Calgary. As before, Henry participated in creating an archive from a bare space. Staffed entirely by volunteers, we now have a facility that is recognized as probably the best, small church/conference archive in the province. Henry also designed the logo for our MHSA Library and Archives. This logo is now found on the MHSA newsletter "The Chronicle" as well.

Henry enjoyed the details of the archiving process. He had his own way of arranging and listing material, but once reasons for professional archival procedures were

(See Goerzen on page 5)

(Goerzen from page 4)

explained to him, he accepted them. He was also a writer. He wrote "The Namaka Story", edited sections of the "Bergthal History", and contributed numerous stories of Alberta WWII alternative service workers to A. J. Klassen's "Alternative Service for Peace".

At the secular level Henry also had many years of engagement. He was involved in the Midway Home and School organization, Calgary Power transmission line negotiations, land use forums, and the condominium association in Didsbury. He took a run at politics in the waning Social Credit era. He was instrumental in organizing the first MCC Relief Sale in Didsbury. Along the way he also served as a Rosthern Junior College board member.

In later years Henry became less active in MHSA matters. Happily, his work was given special recognition at the 2018 annual meeting in Calgary last year of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. This tribute has been published in both the MHSA and MHSC societies' newsletters.

At Bergthal he still maintained an interest in church affairs and always attended congregational meetings. Henry and his wife Erna both attended adult Sunday school until two years ago when his hearing difficulty became an issue. He was 88 years old at the time - quite a record.

Henry's love of art, perhaps fostered by roaming the hills and valleys of the Rosebud as a youth, sustained him in his retirement years. In school he was often pre-occupied with doodling on the margins of his schoolwork, and as an adult he continued to doodle on the back of the church bulletin

during the service. For several years, Christmas murals that he painted as backdrops for Christmas Eve Sunday school programs were much appreciated. When Henry and Erna left their retirement farm on the Dog Pound Creek west of Didsbury to move into town, Henry developed the basement of their condo into an art studio.

Many happy years of retirement were spent in the Didsbury condo, but due to health reasons, in 2018 Henry and Erna made the decision to move into Aspen Ridge Lodge. Henry packed up his studio and written material and carted all the boxes either to their new apartment or to his fifth wheel holiday trailer. Being very independent by nature, he mostly did this on his own, a task that proved to be very hard on his almost 90-year-old back.

After moving into the lodge, Henry and Erna ventured out infrequently to Bergthal for Sunday morning services. Local churches took turns providing Sunday evening services and those attending with them became a fellowship group. Henry and Erna did, however ask for hard copies of Pastor Anna Lisa's sermons, and passing these along provided me with an opportunity to visit them. Henry was not used to being idle, but eventually he found his niche at the lodge. He set up a small art studio in the lower level of the lodge, and later he set up his material in the small public sitting room adjacent to their apartment. On my latter visits he seemed quite content and at peace.

A week before his 90th birthday Henry was hospitalized with severe back pain. This was a difficult time as he was so used to being strong and independent. However, he was still grateful for God's goodness to him. This past November I was present in the hospital room that Henry and my husband were sharing when one of Henry's grandsons came to visit. What a blessing to behold! The rapport was obvious on both of their parts as they caught up with each other, read scripture, and shared thoughts together with a time of prayer. Thank you, Nate, for bringing God's peace and presence into the room for your grandfather but also for us.

And now dear friend it is time to bid you a fond farewell. You have worked diligently at various endeavours, and we as a Bergthal congregation, Mennonite Church Alberta and the Mennonite Historical Association of Alberta, have benefitted from your labours. We hold you in high regard, and will miss your presence and wisdom. It has indeed been our privilege and pleasure to share some precious moments of life's journey with you. "Rest

(See Goerzen on page 6)



Henry receives the 2018 Award of Excellence from Richard Thiessen, L-R
Erna Goerzen, Henry Goerzen,
Richard Thiessen

(Goerzen from page 5)

in peace – Ruhe Sanft”. *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” 2nd Timothy 4:7.*

Katie Harder is the vice-chair of the Mennonite historical Society of Alberta. ❖

(Journey from page 1)

the journey as siblings, and this was very special. Afterwards, to close the circle, I travelled on to Russia alone.

We siblings met in Toronto and flew on to Vienna and then Lviv. Lviv is the largest city in western Ukraine and was formerly known as Lemberg, Lwów, and Lvov (in Austro-Hungarian, Polish, and Soviet times). We had a week arranged in the Lviv area with a local Ukrainian guide, Galyna. Most of the historical centre of the city survived Soviet and German occupations, and its old buildings and cobblestone streets are a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Lviv was founded as a city in the 13th century, but the area has been settled since the 5th century. I could imagine myself living in Lviv if WWII hadn't happened!

The Family of Our Mother Ella (Weber) Franz

Being in the area of Lviv allowed us to search for the family of our mother, Ella (Weber) Franz. In Lviv itself my mother's parents, Amalie

(Schreyer) Weber (later Rupp) and Wilhelm Weber had a corner store. Our sister Ingrid Pawlosky has Amalie's papers, which include the addresses of the corner store and the apartment that Amalie and Wilhelm had nearby. There was a Mennonite boys' school on the same street, and we think our step-grandfather Johann Rupp (Amalie's second husband) attended it or the adjacent Mennonite church. Using Street View in Google Maps, I was able to pre-view these buildings beforehand.

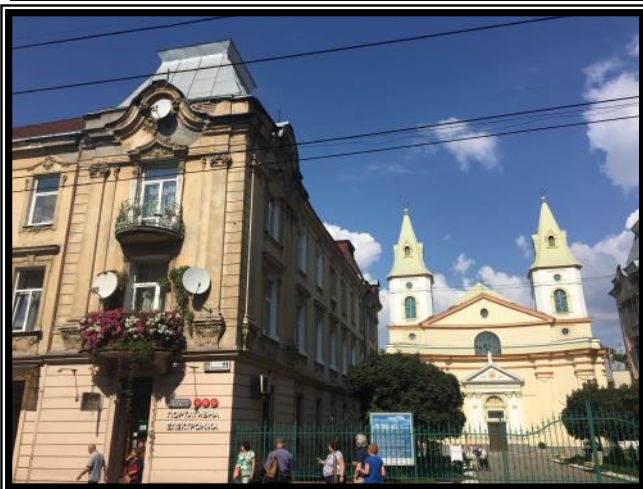
The corner entrance to the store is blocked off, but we were able to gain entrance to the inner



Weber corner store on Kostia Levytskoho Street, Lviv, Ukraine.



Amalie Schreyer (L) and Wilhelm Weber (R) with Willi and Ella (the author's grandparents, mother and her brother) in the mid 1930's.



Apartment and former Lutheran Church on Zelena Street, Lviv, Ukraine.

courtyard of the building, which now houses apartments and a travel agency. A block away, in very good condition, is the apartment building where Wilhelm and Amalie and their children Ella (our mother, born 1929 and her brother Willi (born a couple of years later) lived. Finding the corner store was moving as our grandfather Weber had suffered a stroke inside the store, stepped out for some air, fallen, hit his head on the stone step, and died later that day. Next to the apartment building is the former Lutheran church where

(See Journey on page 7)

(Journey from page 6)



Amalie Weber (nee Schreyer), the author's maternal grandmother and Johann Rupp on their wedding day in Lviv, 1939.

Amalie was married by a Mennonite pastor to Johann Rupp after Wilhelm passed away in 1936.

It was also special to gain access to the church where they were married (now a Baptist church) as our step-grandfather Rupp was the only grandfather we knew growing up. Grandfather Rupp was born in 1904 in the village of Krowica Sama, Poland. We were able to take a day trip to Poland to visit this village as well as several of the four places that our brother-in-law Richard Pawlosky's grandparents had come from. Richard is of Ukrainian and Polish descent.

Many traces of our mother's family were evident in the village of Dornfeld, about 20 km from Lviv. Dornfeld ("Field of Thorns", now known as Ternopil'ya), was founded by German Lutherans in 1785. Seven generations of our mother's maternal ancestors lived in Dornfeld until the beginning of WWII, and our grandmother Amalie was born there in 1907. Dornfeld appears not to have changed much from the Plan drawn up in Winter 1914-1915 by Bürgermeister Jakob Bechtloff (source *Pfälzerwandern Dornfeld Chronik*) [*Palatinate Migrations Dornfeld Chronicle*]. We

found the restored village school flying a pennant with the date 1929 (our mother's birth year), a new Orthodox Church on the site of the former Lutheran Church, and the several village lots that were owned by our ancestors. We also found the ancestral home of our mother and grandmother, an extension now added on as confirmed by the current owner.

In addition we discovered the abandoned Dornfeld cemetery. Although it is overgrown with nettles and cow parsnip, it survives intact because it is fenced. I speculate that we are related to at least half the people buried there. On our grandmother Amalie's side we found the grave of our great-great-grandfather Wilhelm Schreyer, born in 1854. However, we were unsuccessful in finding the grave of Amalie's father, our great-grandfather Georg Schreyer, born in 1881. Georg was stabbed by a drunken Czech soldier (name unknown) on May 19, 1916 in nearby Mohylany as he intervened to protect a woman at the village well. The soldier was Georg's friend, and when he sobered up, he was overcome with remorse. Our grandmother Amalie saw Georg briefly when he died later that day and remembered also walking in the procession from the church to the cemetery. As we walked on the path to the entrance of the cemetery, I spontaneously raised my hands as if I was one of the pallbearers carrying his coffin.

In the Dornfeld cemetery we were also unsuccessful in finding the grave of our grandfather Wilhelm Weber, our mother's father. Not as much is known about the family on his side. We do know that our grandfather Weber was born in 1889 and served as an officer in the Austro-Hungarian army in WWI. When he was decommissioned, he became



The author and his sisters (L to R Ingrid Pawlosky, Marg Wonko, Bill Franz, and Monika Franz-Lien), Dornfeld (Ternopil'ya) cemetery, Ukraine.



Wilhelm Weber (the author's maternal grandfather) in the Austro-Hungarian Army in WWI.

(See Journey on page 8)

(Journey from page 7)

the manager of an estate in Mykolaiv, Lviv Oblast owned by the Catholic Church. Grandfather Weber's first wife (name unknown) and child died in childbirth, so when he married Amalie in 1928 he insisted that a midwife attend the birth of their children.

The Family of Our Father, Johann Franz

To begin our search for more information about the family of our father Johann Franz, we flew from Lviv to Kyiv (Kiev) to join TourMagination's "The Mennonite Story & Highlights of Ukraine" led by Len Friesen. After sightseeing in Kiev, we travelled by train to Dnipro (formerly Dnipropetrovsk) and then on by coach to Zaporizhye (formerly Chortitza). Zaporizhye was to be our base for the next several days to explore the former Mennonite colonies of Chortitza and Molotschna and visit many of the villages.

Our tour group consisted of 30 people from Canada and the United States. All had family connections to the Ukraine. Many of our ancestors had left the Ukraine for North America in the "First Wave" of Mennonite emigration in the 1870's, with smaller numbers leaving in the 1920's and during the Second World War. Our family fell mostly into the latter category. This made for interesting conversations on tour as those whose ancestors had left earlier and had not endured the difficulties of revolution, world war, civil war, Communism, and famine had perhaps a more difficult time in understanding decisions made by our ancestors in their attempts to survive and to maintain their faith.

Nonetheless, we got along well as a group, and there were many heartfelt connections to this land and our direct ancestors. Individuals shared very moving personal experiences of their grandparents and parents in the 1920's and in later years.

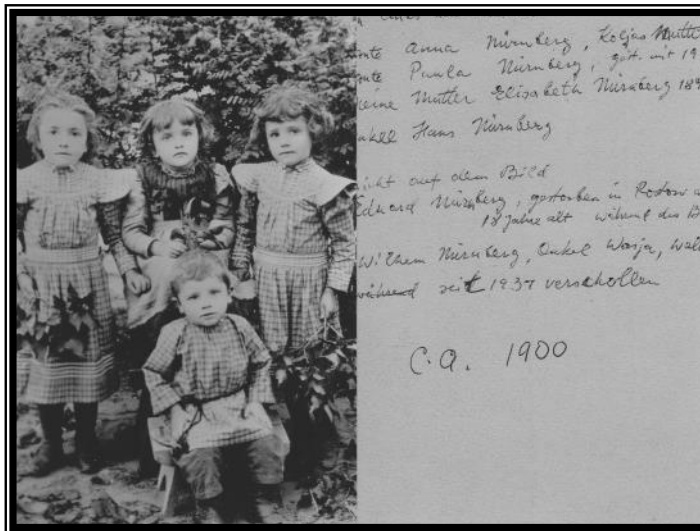
The earliest known ancestors of our father Johann Franz are the family of his mother Elisabet (Nürnberg) Franz who was born in Kankri-nowka, Dnipropetrovsk in 1894. Elisabet's ancestors arrived in the Molotschna in 1804. The Nürnbergs had emigrated from the Württemberg area in SW Germany and settled in Hoffenthal, which is directly across the river from Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt). It was quite the experience to sit in

the front passenger seat of the bus, drive over the bridge from Halbstadt to Hoffenthal, and view in the east the Colonist Hills that the first colonists crossed. The villages on the west bank of the Molotschna River are considered to be German, not Mennonite, and so I speculate the Nürnbergs may have been originally Catholic or Lutheran (or even Swiss-Mennonite). We did see at least one building in the Mennonite (Flemish) style.

Our father's paternal family, on the other hand, did not arrive in the Molotschna until 1835. They left the Groningen area of the Netherlands in 1540 for Przechovka, Prussia (now Poland) on to Brenkenhofswalde, Brandenburg, Prussia in 1764 and then in 1833 left for the Molotschna. Our great-grandparents on this side of the family were David Franz and Katharina Fast (deceased 1937, Nieder Chortitza). Our great-great-grandparents were Heinrich Franz (deceased 1880) and Maria Unruh (born in Prussia 1821; deceased 1872). Maria Unruh was the 4th child of Martin Unruh and Sara Voth who, with their eight children, were one of the founding families of Gnadenfeld. Interestingly enough, Martin and Sara both passed away later in nearby Sparrau, which is the site of the co-operative farm where we had lunch at on our tour! I discovered this only recently while researching on the Genealogical Registry And Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA)

Our father's father David Franz was born in 1889 in Steinbach, Molotschna. He and our grandmother Elisabet Nürnberg were married in 1912. They had six children of whom our father Jo-

(See Journey on page 9)



Nürnberg children (4 of 7), c.a. 1900.
Elisabet Nürnberg (the author's paternal grandmother) is on the right.

(Journey from page 8)



Engagement photo of David Franz and Elisabet Nürnberg c.a. 1912 (the author's paternal grandparents).

hann was the second youngest and his sister Margarete was the youngest. The first three children died young, Anna (fourth born) married

Andreas Volk; she died in 1944 at age 28. Only our father and Margarete lived to reach old age.

Our father Johann was born in 1925 in Chornozemne (formerly Andreburg) on the estate of his maternal grandparents Eduard Nürnberg and Pauline Hilz. He lived there with his parents and siblings and with the family of his mother's brother, Hans Nürnberg. The site of the estate is off the road to Tokmak, NW of Molochansk. Our local guide Olga remarked that she had never been asked to go to Hoffenthal or Chornozemne before! We drove up the main street of Chornozemne and spotted one residence of the Mennonite (Flemish) style and also the buildings of a collective farm in the distance. We took a family photo by the road sign marking Chornozemne.

In 1930, the Nürnberg family estate was seized as part of Soviet collectivization, and the Franz family relocated to Halbstadt. They also lived in Tiegenhagen for a couple of years. Although we don't know where exactly in Halbstadt they lived, on the tour we saw the Boys School (Deutsche Mittelschule) there which our father attended. He would have gotten a kick from the Pirate Ship set up in front of the school as part of a midway as he had ambitions of a career in the Merchant Marine when Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941! While in Halbstadt our group also had lunch at the Mennonite Centre which is the former Girls School (Mädchenschule) now restored.



David Franz (the author's paternal grandfather) in the middle with his brother Nikolaus Franz (R) and Peter Franz (L). Nikolaus (a medic) and Peter served in the Imperial Russian Army in WWI. David and Nikolaus died as a result of forced labour in Kazakhstan during WWII. Peter emigrated to Canada in 1928 and died (in Saskatchewan) in 1937.



David Franz (R), the author's grandfather with two friends (names unknown) in Russia c.a. 1912.



Boys School and Pirate Ship in Molochansk (Halbstadt), Ukraine.

(See Journey on page 10)

(Journey from page 9)

In the fall of 1941, Johann, then 16 years of age, was away at school in "Saporoskie" (likely Zaporizhye). He was able to contact his father David and ask him what he should do because the students were to be evacuated to Krasnodar in the Kuban. David said that he should come home as for certain they would be relocated, and at least they would be together. Johann came home without papers and went into hiding because the Soviets were rounding up all the men of German descent between the ages of 16 and 60 to press them into the "Trudarmee" (forced labour). He was able to say a quick goodbye to his father who was being allowed home briefly. Who would have thought that this goodbye would be forever? Our grandfather David and one of his two brothers, Nikolaus Franz, were deported to Kazakhstan where they were in adjoining labour camps. Both perished.

I had wanted (but was unable) to see the train station in Halbstadt from which David Franz was deported that sad day. However, our tour group did visit Lichtenau, further down the Molochnaya River, where Mennonites left to emigrate to North America in 1924 and where those who remained were deported to Kazakhstan in 1941. Our tour leader Len Friesen led us in singing "So nimm den meine Hände" (O Take My Hand, Dear Father) and we were all moved deeply. We also stopped at the Stulnevo train station on the Tokmak Railway as this is the main line on which so many Mennonites (and other German colonists) were shipped to the east. I looked west towards Halbstadt and east to Kazakhstan, although all I saw was open fields and pastures with the tracks running off to the horizon. It was here where I said "goodbye" to our grandfather David.

As the Soviets prepared to relocate the residents of Halbstadt to the east, our grandmother Elisabet Franz prevailed on our father to accompany her and his younger sister Mar-



The bunk of Johann Franz (the author's father) in the MCC refugee camp at Backnang, West Germany in the late 1940's (photo by Johann Franz).



Railway station in Backnang, West Germany in the late 1940's (photo by Johann Franz).



Wooden barracks in the MCC refugee camp at Backnang, West Germany in the late 1940's (photo by Johann Franz).

garete. He did not want to, but her tears won him over. When the NKVD officer returned to their door the second time that day, Elisabet said her son Johann had just come home from school and asked if he could go with them. The officer asked how old he was, and she answered "15". "All right," the officer replied. "He can go with you."

Those who had been rounded up for relocation were waiting in the holding camp near the police station in Halbstadt for several days. Suddenly the Soviet soldiers

(See Journey on page 11)

(Journey from page 10)

ran away. The German front had arrived, and the family returned to their home. Two weeks later our father Johann Franz volunteered with the Wehrmacht as a "Dolmetscher" (translator) and was assigned to a field hospital.

Our tour group finished in Odessa, and I imagined myself living here as it is likely that our father would have moved to this major port on the Black Sea (near Kherson) if he had been able to realize his dream. Instead, his unit in the Wehrmacht (the First Mountain Division) tried to get over the Caucasus Mountains but did not succeed. They were sent to Yugoslavia, then to Greece, and then back to Yugoslavia where two weeks before the war ended he caught some shrapnel from a Soviet plane. The Yugoslav Partisans weren't taking prisoners, and my father accepted the offer from the

Wehrmacht to be transported by hospital train to Linz, Austria, where he convalesced in a military hospital. He had to learn to walk again.

Our father walked out of that hospital pretending to have papers and made his way to the MCC refugee camp in Backnang, West Germany as he had heard there were people there from his area in the Ukraine. This is where he met our mother Ella Weber and her family. She and her family had been relocated to Łódź in Poland and had fled from there to Germany in 1945. In 1949 Ella and Johann, who by then were engaged, were able to emigrate to Canada. Ella left first. She was followed by Johann, her mother Amalie Rupp, her stepfather Johann Rupp, her half sister Lydia (Rupp) Dyck and her half-brother Bernard Rupp.

Meanwhile, in October 1943 our father's mother Elisabeth Franz and his sister Margarete (Franz) Mündt fled to Poland as part of the Great Trek. In January 1945 they fled to Germany, and subsequently they were "repatriated" to Siberia.

The Mündt family were able to emigrate from Siberia to Germany in 1992 thanks to Gorbachev's Glasnost and Perestroika policies (openness and restructuring). Aunt Margarete had passed away, but my sisters went to Germany at this point to visit our uncle Adam Mündt and cousins that were able to emigrate there also. I had visited a couple of times already so did not accompany them.

Fifteen of us carried on to St. Petersburg and Moscow on the "Russian Extension with TourMagination to sightsee and understand more of the history of Russia and the Ukraine. Then I carried on solo from Moscow to Novosibirsk in Siberia to meet my first cousin Anna (Mündt) Achmetchanowa and her family for the first time. Visiting the



Holding area at MCC camp in Gronau, West Germany prior to sailing for Canada in 1949
(photo by Johann Franz).



Ella Weber and Johann Franz (the author's parents) engagement photo in the MCC refugee camp in Backnang, West Germany in December 1948. Ella sailed several weeks later from Cuxhaven for Canada.



Wedding day of Ella Weber and Johann Franz (the author's parents) in Winnipeg, Canada in June 1950. (L to R) Johann Rupp, Bernhard Rupp, Ella Weber, Johann Franz, Lydia Dyck (nee Rupp), and Amalie Rupp (nee Schreyer, then Weber).

(See Journey on page 12)

(Journey from page 11)

grave of our grandmother Elisabet Franz, the apartment block the family first moved into in 1960 after living in wooden barracks for almost 15 years, and the apartment block that they moved into 40 years ago was very moving. I never got to meet my grandmother Elisabet Franz or talk to her on the phone (they had no telephone), but I have cards and letters that she sent me for my birthday.

Although time and distance and geopolitics separate us, family is still family. It was very special to meet my cousin Anna, her husband Rinat Achmetchanowa, their children, and their grandchildren. For me, it closed the circle between our mother and father, our grandparents and ancestors, and the current generations.

This journey truly was the journey of a lifetime. It has given me much to ponder and to be grateful for.



Weihnachten (Christmas) 1957 in Winnipeg, Canada. (L to R) Johann Rupp, Bernhard Rupp, Bill Franz (author), Amalie Rupp (nee Schreyer, then Weber), Ingrid Pawlosky (nee Franz), Lydia Dyck (nee Rupp), Ella Franz (nee Weber), and Margaret Wonko (nee Franz).

Photo by Johann Franz



Elisabet Franz (nee Nürnberg) and David Franz, the author's paternal grandparents. Photo of Elisabet taken in the Warthegau (Poland) c.a. 1944. Photo of David is undated (the blood on the photo is that of the author's father, Johann Franz).



Bill in Red Square with St. Basil's Cathedral, Moscow, Russia.



Bill at the grave of his paternal grandmother, Elisabet Franz (nee Nürnberg), Novosibirsk, Russia.

joys nature and their grandchildren. Bill is writing a family history book about his parents Johann and Ella (Weber) Franz.

All the photos used in this article are the property and are under copyright of the author Bill Franz. The photos cannot be used without the expressed written consent of the author. ❖

Bill Franz is a retired public servant with a career in water management in Manitoba, BC, and Alberta. He is originally from Winnipeg. His parents were Mennonite refugees from the Ukraine who met in a MCC camp in West Germany and were able to emigrate to Canada. Bill is a volunteer worker with his wife Pearl in Red Deer and en-

The Groenings, *The Simpsons* and the Mennonites

by Dale Suderman

The Simpsons is the best satire of contemporary American culture. For those interested in Mennonites involved in mass culture, it is also a case study of a family morphing from immigrant Mennonite experience to pop culture celebrity in four generations.



Dale Suderman

For two decades *The Simpsons* cartoon show on the Fox network has made people laugh and groan at the antics of the most dysfunctional, but ultimately loving family in America. Homer and Marge Simpson and their three children, Bart the brat, Lisa the child genius, and Maggie the pacifier-sucking infant, along with Grandpa Abraham, live in the mythical city of Springfield.

The creative genius of the show, Matt Groening has been coy about Springfield's location, even suggesting it might be Winnipeg, Manitoba, since his father was Canadian born. He has alluded to the Mennonite and German language origins of his family. Matt Groening has recreated his own family tree in the names of his cartoon characters. Most obviously, his real life parents are Homer and Margaret Groening, and he does have a sister named Lisa(1).

The show is preoccupied with religious, - and some might say also sacrilegious - themes. From Reverend Lovejoy, of complex denominational identity, to Ned Flanders, the born-again Bible-believing

neighbor, Groening wrestles with complex issues of faith and meaning in all his characters.

When Bart's tree house burns down, the Amish show up for a barn raising. Marge says, "Oh, those Amish are so industrious, unlike those shiftless Mennonites," and the scene shifts to "Mennonites" shooting dice and smoking cigarettes. In-jokes like this go over the heads of most viewers.

Reconstructing the genealogy of Matt Groening, one finds a fascinating saga.

The story begins in the 1870s when Abraham Groening emigrates from Ukraine and becomes a leading member of the Gnadenau Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church located southwest of Hillsboro in Marion County, Kansas. He is a school board member of a one-room school district and hires his 16-year son, Abram Abraham Groening (soon to be known as AA Groening) to teach a room full of youngsters, most of them his siblings.

In 1908, AA Groening is among the first 39 students in the newly opened Tabor College, meeting in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Hillsboro. Seven years later he graduates, begins some graduate work at Kansas University, and teaches part-time at his alma mater. He is what is known as a promising young lad.

But there is a shadow on the horizon. War fever is breaking out with the looming conflict with Germany. The Groenings speak both High German and the Plautdietsch dialect. They are pacifists by religious convection. A draft notice is sent to AA Groening.

Vigilante groups in Kansas are out to prove their patriotism and protect America by kicking some German pacifist's butt. One night they pick Abraham Groening as their target. He gets wind of this and drives his family to his brother-in-law's house. John Siebert hides the car in the barn and the Groenings in the attic, and tells his family to keep quiet. (The youngest child was later told she almost suffocated as her sister held her hand over her mouth to keep quiet.) The vigilantes come on horseback with torches and guns, circling the house but not entering. Shortly thereafter on September 18, 1918, the *pater familias* Abraham Groening has a quick farm sale and moves his family to Hepburn, Saskatchewan. Apparently they later relocate to Main Centre, Saskatchewan.

According to Investigative Reports of the Bureau of Investigation, 1908-1922, roll #705, an agent from the Bureau of Investigation (the predecessor of the FBI) comes to Hillsboro looking for AA Groening. He interrogates John Siebert rather firmly. Siebert claims he does not speak English so good, does not recall ever discussing religion or politics with Groening, and believes that Groening went to Canada because he thought farming would be easier near the Arctic Circle.

The draft-dodging AA Groening marries in Canada, begins a family, and has a son named Homer. When the war is over he does more graduate work at the University of California, and he returns to Tabor College as a professor in 1920. By 1930 he is Dean of Tabor College and instrumental in starting the athletic department. His parents have also returned to Hillsboro and retire there.

In 1930, AA Groening and family, including his ten-year-old son, Homer(2), move to Oregon where AA teaches at Albany College - later known as Lewis and Clark College.

(See *Groenings* on page 14)

(Groenings from page 13)

Homer marries Margaret Wiggam. He has strong aesthetic interests and works in advertising but also makes films, writes poetry, and draws cartoons. He fights in World War Two as a pilot.

Homer and Margaret have a son Matthew Abram Groening born in 1954. Matt remembers his father's encouragement for sketching and cartooning. Matt graduates from Evergreen State College (3), gets a slacker job in a record store, and begins selling his cartoons known as *Life in Hell* from the front counter. He gets an offer to do a cartoon series, and *The Simpsons* begin. The pop icon names his son Matthew Abram Groening - the fourth generation to use this biblical name(4) .

In 1972, AA Groening returns to Tabor College to receive a distinguished alumni award. He and his wife walk through the old church building where he first took college classes.

In the 1980s Homer Groening returns to Hillsboro and takes assorted cousins and relatives to lunch at the old Iron Kettle Restaurant, the hangout of townspeople and farmers. He thanks them for their kindness to his family.

This inter-generational saga of the Groening family can be summed up as follows:

Abraham Groening is an immigrant from Ukraine to central Kansas and part of the larger Mennonite migration. He is a leader in the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church, a group somewhat more conservative than even the pietist Mennonite Brethren. The motivations of faith that prompt him to relocate his family again, this time to Canada to avoid the drafting of his sons into the military, are complex and unknown.

Abraham's son Abram Abraham (AA) Groening is a complex man who bridges the gaps between different worlds. He goes from teaching in a one-room school at age sixteen to a doctorate in science with time at Kansas University, the University of California (probably Berkeley) and the University of Chicago. Somehow he is able to return to his Mennonite Brethren alma mater as faculty and even briefly as Dean without controversy. He moves on to Oregon and continues a distinguished career. His religious affiliation later in life is unknown.

AA Groening's son, Homer crosses a bridge of his own, this time to the world of advertising, media and illustration. The fact that he is a World War II veteran no doubt produces some interesting dialogue with his father.

Homer's son, Matthew, creates *The Simpsons*. How much of the similarity between the Groening family saga and *The Simpsons* saga is correlation, and how much is simply due to the whimsy of the show's creative genius? Is *The Simpsons*' "Grandpa Abraham" a mere coincidence presented by his scriptwriters as some have suggested? Matthew Abram Groening certainly

knew the story of his family and retained control of names used in the show. The matter remains open to discussion, but one suspects that a more careful examination of the life of AA Groening as the bridge figure would solve part of this puzzle.

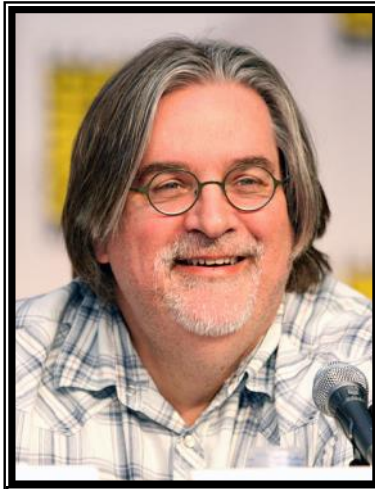
Footnotes interpolated by Robert Martens (*Roots and Branches*)

- 1) And a sister Maggie. (www.en.wikipedia.org)
- 2) "Homer, born in Main Centre, Saskatchewan, Canada, grew up in a Mennonite, Plautdietsch-speaking family." (www.en.wikipedia.org)
- 3) In Olympia, Washington. Groening describes it as "a hippie college, with no grades or required classes, that drew every weirdo in the Northwest." (www.en.wikipedia.org)
- 4) Matt Groening has another son Homer, who goes by the name of Will. (www.en.wikipedia.org)

A modified version of this article was published in the August 16, 2007 Hillsboro Free Press in the "View from Afar column" written by Dale Suderman, with thanks to the entire staff of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Hillsboro, Kansas) and other townspeople for their assistance in researching this article.

Daniel Born of Chicago writes, "Dale was a regular columnist for the Free Press until his stroke left him unable to write. I should add that he wrote for a number of other publications as well. Dale's personal papers are archived at Bethel College, where they are sealed for

(See Groenings on page 15)



Matt Groening at the 2010 San Diego Comic-Con.

Photo credit:
Gage Skidmore, Wikipedia

(Groenings from page 14)

twenty-five years after his death, at his request. I can tell you that Dale was a brilliant conversationalist and a truly original writer and thinker. He received his B.A. from Tabor College and a Master's in theology from AMBS in Elkhart".

Reprinted with permission from author Dale Suderman, with Tim Nafziger and Daniel Born acting on his behalf. ❖

DNA and Genealogy - MHSA Fall Conference Report

by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

On November 24, people with a passion for tracing family lines took a deep dive into learning what it takes to uncover and interpret the tiniest building blocks of history. DNA and Genealogy was the theme for the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta's fall meeting at the Lendrum Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

Dr. Timothy Janzen, a family physician from Portland, Oregon, is a prolific contributor to the Mennonite and Germans-from-Russia family history community. He is a member of the California Mennonite Historical Society committee that oversees the Genealogi-



Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

cal Register And Database of Mennonite Ancestry, known as GRANDMA. In two dense sessions, Janzen presented an astounding amount of information as well as tracing specific names to illustrate research techniques. He provided the 68 registered participants with a 29-page listing of where to find genealogical resources such as immigration records, church records, family and village registers, census data, and cemetery records. The afternoon session featured a presentation of 3 types of DNA analysis and what information can be gleaned from each type. A description of the pros and cons of 4 popular DNA testing companies rounded out the workshop. Janzen again provided participants with a detailed 20-page handout with all the information he had covered.

At the end of his presentation, Janzen remarked; "Hopefully you've gotten at least a little drink out of the fire-hydrant today!" Janzen encourages those with Low German and Russian Mennonite backgrounds to have their DNA tested as a way of adding more information to the available database.

❖

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada meets in Winnipeg

by Dave Neufeldt

The annual meetings of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) were held in Winnipeg from November 14 to 15, 2018. Typically held in January, the meetings were moved up to November to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the society and the conference "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada since 1970."

Representatives from each of the six provincial societies as well as from church conferences, museums, and other historical societies were in attendance. The meetings allow the various societies to share ideas and work together on major projects.

There are several ongoing projects of the society. The Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites project has resulted in a series of conferences, of which "A People of Diversity" is the latest. The Archives Committee continues to support the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) which makes archival photographs available on-line. There are now over 45,000 images in this database. The Genealogy Committee is working to make original source materials available on-line and is ready to enter a beta test phase.

Several new projects are being explored. A fourth volume of the *Mennonites in Canada* series of books is being considered. This volume would likely focus on the diversity of Mennonites in Canada since 1970. There are plans for a commemoration of the 1920's migration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada. This may include a train trip across Canada re-enacting that migration. A committee has also been struck to commemorate the 1922 migration of Mennonites to Mexico and Paraguay.

Each year the society honours individuals who have made a significant



Dave Neufeldt

(See MHSC on page 16)

(MHSC from page 15)

contribution to Mennonite history with the MHSC Award of Excellence. This year there were three recipients – Abram (Abe) Dueck, Adolf Ens, and John J. Friesen. All three honorees were long-time, influential history teachers at either Canadian Mennonite Bible College or Mennonite Brethren Bible College.

The People of Diversity conference that followed the MHSC meeting included 33 presenters from across Canada. Marlene Epp gave the keynote address. In it she used a cookbook metaphor to highlight the diversity that is now found among Mennonites in Canada. Other speakers discussed topics including the role of women in the church, ethnic diversity among Mennonites, indigenous relations, LGBTQ relations, education, and social activism. The conference highlighted how a Mennonite identity is not as easily defined as it once was.

The next meeting of the MHSC will be held in Quebec in January 2020.



Recipients of the MHSC Award of Excellence (left to right): John J. Friesen, Abe J. Dueck and Adolf Ens, 15 November 2018 in Winnipeg.

Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

An Eye-witness Account of Nazi Occupation

by Waldemar Janzen

At the age of 85, I am probably one of the few survivors of the German occupation of Ukraine/Russia from 1941 to 1943 who still have clear personal memories of that time.

When the German army occupied Chortitza, Ukraine, where I lived, we Mennonites were exuberant. I remember vividly the euphoria of being liberated from the brutal Stalinist regime. Churches were opened again, friends could meet in groups, Christmas could be celebrated, and the Soviet secret police needed to no longer be feared.



Waldemar Janzen

If Nazism movements developed in the 1930s and '40s in Brazil, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands and Paraguay, why didn't they develop in Ukraine? Because the Mennonites there—including me at a young age, but also the adults around me—had heard only vaguely whispered rumours about the developments in Germany. All news in Stalinist Soviet Russia was strictly censored.

From our perspective, we welcomed the Germans as our deliverers with open arms, not the Nazis. For the adults around me, the term “Germans” evoked memories from the “good old days” before the Russian Revolution, the anarchy, and the rule of communism. They recalled the German literature they had studied in school, German stories, poems, and folk songs; the German Luther Bible, which could now be taken from hiding; and familiar German hymns. They remembered also places in Germany and Switzerland where many leaders had studied theology, literature, medicine, engineering, midwifery, and more. This choice of German-language universities and schools was due to their knowledge of the German language and culture; it had nothing to do with the Aryan race or German nationalism.

Such associations must be recognized as the first of two major components essential for forming a correct interpretive context for understanding our welcoming of “the Germans.” The second major component is the terror and cruelty of the Stalinist regime, which had robbed almost every Mennonite family of several members, mostly men, but also many women. We would have welcomed al-

(See Witness on page 17)

(Witness from page 16)

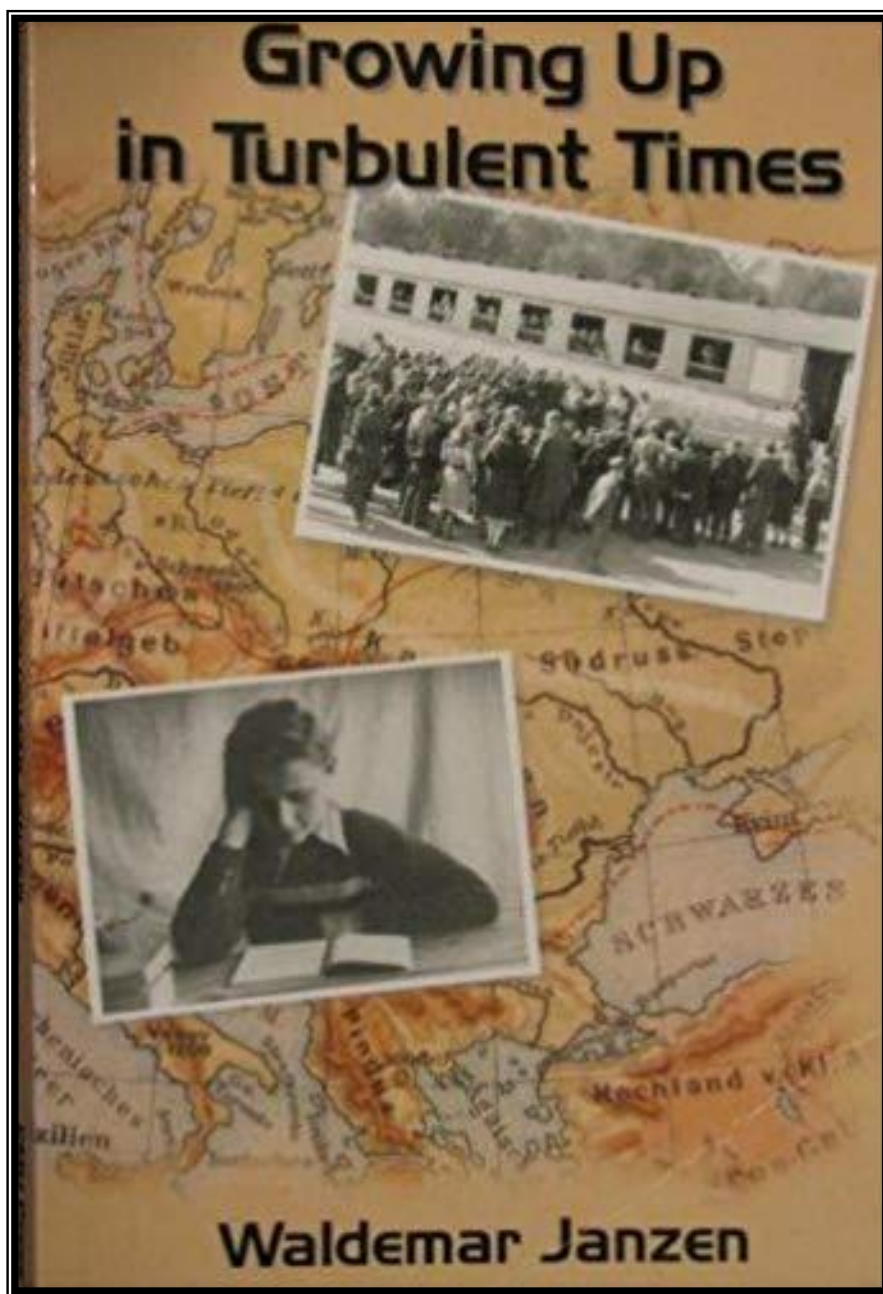
most any power that had come to deliver us from that brutal rule.

With all his wealth of research, Ben Goossen, the author of *Chosen Nation: Mennonites in the Global Era*, missed both of these and replaced them with a hermeneutic of suspicion that characterized all Mennonite connections with Germans and Germany by tarnishing them as complicity with Nazism.

The term “Nazism” in this context is not historically descriptive, but pejorative. It is the term that the Western Allies and their countries are wont to use when referring to the Hitler era by its most heinous crimes, foremost among these the Holocaust once its full extent had become known. To lump terms like “German,” “*Heimat*” (home country), and “*Vaterland*” (fatherland) together under “chosen nation” and “Nazism” is a gross misunderstanding of the connotations these terms we Mennonites held then and also carry generally in the German language. Goossen is not cognizant of how hurtful such use of “Nazi/Nazism” is for people like me, and he probably can’t be expected to be.

Did we, then, side with Germany and fail to recognize the Hitler ideology for what it was eventually shown to be? Our disappointment grew gradually during the two years of German occupation.

The killing of Jews in Ukraine became known, sooner by some Mennonites and eventually by more and more. After the German army came, the party-based civic administration gradually showed us the true nature of the regime: the full extent of the murder of the Jews and the notion of racial superiority including the downgrading



of Ukrainians and others as inferior races. This process took time—although two years is not a long time in the course of history—and occasioned much disappointment among Mennonites.

The older adults, most of them women with young children—the husbands having been imprisoned, exiled, and often executed—suffered severely under the burden of disappointment as did countless Germans in Germany itself. And yet we were deeply grateful to the retreating German army for making every effort to help us escape from the Red Army to Germany and to the German people who accepted us refugees into their defeated, devastatingly bombed and impoverished country.

In later years, I have read more than 50 books authored by eye-witnesses of the events I am describing or by their immediate family members. But in Goossen’s register of names I find almost none of these authors. Not all of them were scholars although many were, but most were

(See Witness on page 18)

(Witness from page 17)

eye-witnesses. Goossen's cavalier disregard of them is akin to a "historian" of the Holocaust who would disregard the testimonies of Holocaust survivors!

I do not question his diligence and sincerity, but I find his work seriously deficient in understanding of, and empathy with, the Mennonites in Ukraine and their descendants as he attempts in his book to awaken them from their supposed "Nazi denialism."

Waldemar Janzen is a professor emeritus at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg and the author of "Reminiscences of My Father: Wladimir Janzen: Teacher, Minister, and Gulag Survivor", published in September 2017, and "Growing Up in Turbulent Times".

This article was first published by Canadian Mennonite April 9, 2018 p. 14. Reprinted with permission. ❖

Get to Know Your MHSA Board Members

Biography of Ted Regehr

Ted Regehr was born on 23 November 1937 in the Coaldale, Alberta, Community Hospital.

He was the eldest son of Isaac I. and Mary (Dick) Regehr. He grew up and learned the benefits and challenges of irrigation on the small 23 acre mixed sugar beet, grain, hay, dairy, poultry and vegetable family farm. He attended the Coaldale public school for grades 1 through 7 and then took grades 8 through 12 at the Alberta Mennonite High School, also in Coaldale. He went on to earn a B.A degree at the University of Alberta in 1959, an M.A. at Carleton University in Ottawa, and a Ph. D. degree specializing in the history of western Canada at the University of Alberta in 1967.

Training and work at the Public Archives of Canada from 1960 to 1968, led to a promotion as head the Government Records Section. Ted left the Public Archives of Canada in 1968 to accept an academic appointment at the University of Saskatchewan. In addition to his regular teaching responsibilities he served on numerous boards and associations, including Head of the History Department, Chairman of the University of Saskatchewan Faculty Association, President of the Saskatchewan Association of University Teachers and Vice-Chair of the Saskatchewan Heritage Advisory Board. He retired in 1996.

Ted is the author of 9 books, 4 dealing with aspects of Canadian business history and 5 focusing on aspects of Mennonite history. Among the latter, his most frequently cited work is Mennonites in Canada, 1940-1970:



Ted Regehr

A People Transformed, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996). He is also the author of numerous articles in scholarly journals, chapters in books, encyclopedia entries, biographies in the Dictionary of Canadian Biography and many book reviews. In addition, he served as Canadian Associate Editor of the Encyclopedia of the Great Plains published by the University of Nebraska Press.

As a trained archivist, Ted now works one day a week as a volunteer archivist in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Recent archival work projects include the sorting, describing and preparing of finding aids for large collections of records received from Mennonite Central Committee, Alberta, and Mennonite Church, Alberta. That work is now almost complete, leaving a backlog of only some smaller acquisitions. Much work on the significant photographic collections and our comparatively small map collection still awaits.

Last September, in Winnipeg, at the 50th anniversary of the founding of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. Ted presented an invited paper on his recollections of those early years. He participated in the early discussions and subsequently served for many years as chairperson of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. He was also involved in the organization of what was then the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta. He was invited to present a paper at the 2019 Annual General Meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan to set the framework and provide significant relevant historical information as plans

(See Board on page 19)

(Board from page 18)

are made for the centennial celebration of significant events in Saskatchewan Mennonite history in the 1920s.

In Mennonite church and community work, Ted has served as congregational chairperson of the Ottawa Mennonite Fellowship, Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, First Mennonite Church in Calgary, the Westmount Charter School in Calgary and the University of Calgary's Advisory Council for the Chair of Christian Thought. He was also, for many years, Vice-Chair of Mennonite Publishing Service and later a member of the Board of Governors of Canadian Mennonite Bible College/Canadian Mennonite University.

Ted and his wife Sylvia (nee Ratzlaff) live in Calgary. They are the parents of Sonya Regehr who is a medical doctor in Calgary and Paul Regehr who is an occupational therapist in Edmonton. They have three adult grandchildren. ❖

Publications for Sale:

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

Chosen Nation: Mennonites and Germany in a Global Era. **Benjamin W. Goossen. Princeton University Press, 2017, 266 pages.**

Reviewed by Barb Draper

Mennonite-Nazi connection unconvincing

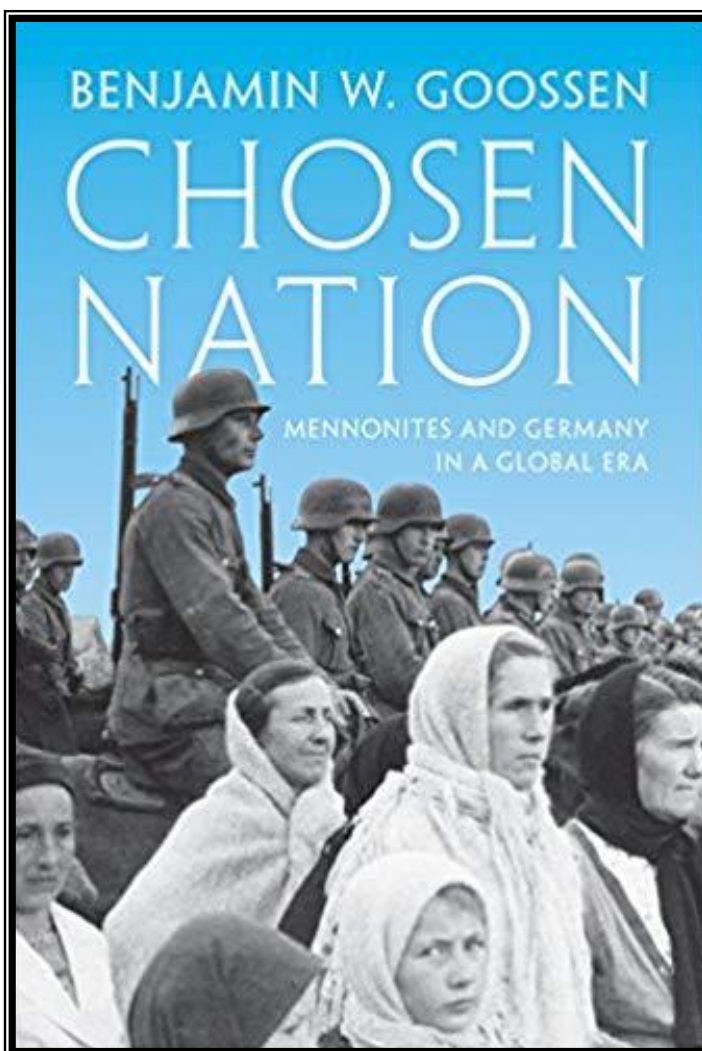
Ben Goossen argues that German-speaking Mennonites of the 20th century had a sense of Mennonite nationality and that this concept of Mennonites as a "chosen nation," a people with a distinctive heritage, culture and ethnicity, was influenced by the racist ideas of the Nazis. He says he began this study in an effort to understand his grandfather, a retired Mennonite minister from Kansas, who was devoted to the church but who also identified himself as a "proud Prussian."

The 20th century was a time of global connections with the formation of Mennonite World Conference and international Mennonite publications. Goossen sees this as evidence of a cohesive peoplehood and the concept of one tribe. He also points to the growing interest in preserving a Mennonite heritage, suggesting that genealogical studies, family reunions, historic atlases, and church directories prove that Mennonites were interested in preserving their ethnicity and racial purity.

He quotes Peter Dyck of Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), who worked with refugees in the 1940s, as saying, "These Mennonite refugees are neither 'Russian' nor 'German,'" and that Mennonitism is not just a religion but it embraces "all that



Barb Draper



(See Chosen on page 20)

(Chosen from page 19)

which culture, language, tradition and a distinct way of life implies.”

Goossen argues that because MCC accepted an ethnic definition of Mennonite when it resettled refugees in Paraguay, ethnicity was profoundly important to Mennonites.

Probably most disturbing is Goossen’s suggestion that Mennonites were Nazi sympathizers. While he acknowledges that the Amish and traditionalist Mennonites had little admiration for Hitler, he points to various individuals who were overtly pro-Nazi. He declares that especially between 1941 and 1943, when the Germans had taken over Mennonite villages in Ukraine, Mennonites widely benefited from Nazi rule, sometimes receiving goods that had been taken from murdered Jews. He points out that some Mennonites joined Nazi killing squads while others joined the German army, and many became naturalized German citizens.

I appreciated the first part of Goossen’s book as he describes how Mennonites in Germany responded to the rising nationalism of the German states in the 19th century. He gives a vivid picture of how the Prussian Mennonites were more urban and educated than Mennonites from the southern German states. They were also more militaristic and were the first Mennonites in Germany to drop pacifism. Whether or not to join the regular army was considered a personal choice, not a basic principle of the faith.

The latter half of the book was more disturbing. It caused me to consider deeply whether Goossen could be right and my experience of the Mennonite world was just a rose-coloured illusion. Could he be right that if Mennonites “strip away the ethnic trappings of their faith, they are left not with a core of values, but with a process”?

In the end, I found his arguments unconvincing. While he obviously has studied a lot of European Mennonite history, too much of his argument involves the turbulent years between 1941 and 1943. He gives lip service to the profound anti-Soviet feelings of Mennonites in Ukraine but seems overly eager to see their actions as pro-Nazi.

While I have a deep fascination with genealogy and recognize that I come from a distinctive religious culture, those things are not the basis of my faith. In my Mennonite tradition, what binds the tribe together is the foundation of Jesus Christ, not culture or ethnicity, and certainly not race.

I would encourage others, especially historians and theologians, to read this book and carefully consider their own response to Goossen’s argument.

Barb Draper is the Editorial Assistant with the Canadian Mennonite.

This article was first published by Canadian Mennonite Aug. 28, 2017 p. 31, reprinted with permission. ❖

A Village Forsaken, The Story of Peter Schmidt and Anna Foth

**By Andrea Goertz, 135 pages:
Friesen Press**

Reviewed by Dave Hubert

Andrea Goertz does a fine job of preserving the memory of her grandparents, Peter and Anna (Foth)



Dave Hubert

Schmidt and her mother Mathilde (Schmidt) Goertz. Her mother is the primary reference for this story, for her mother undertook the monumental journey from Deutsche-Wymyschle in Poland to Germany, to Paraguay and finally to Canada with her parents.

The story begins in a hospital in Warsaw where Peter is recovering from a logging accident that resulted in the loss of his lower leg. Anna is recovering from a gunshot wound resulting from a robbery gone wrong. The bullet, lodged between two vertebrae in her neck, could not be removed for fear of doing serious damage to her nervous system. (Living with this bullet was perhaps an indication of the tremendous resilience that would characterize the rest of Anna's life.) The armed robbery had occurred at the home of the people for whom Anna was serving as a maid. Peter and Anna met while convalescing, and being from the same German agricultural background, they fell in love and got married. Both were ambitious and

(See Village on page 21)

(Village from page 20)

willing to work, and soon they were owners of a small farm.

That all ended with the defeat of Germany in 1945. Being part of the losing side had consequences. The German Mennonites were dispossessed and had to get out of Poland on short notice. One of the unforgettable stories is of the young family of five travelling on a crowded train toward refuge in Germany. The train had no amenities. When it finally stopped to give the refugees a few minutes to relieve themselves, Anna first attended to the needs of her three children, who then got back into the car with their father. Without warning the train started off without some of the passengers, including Anna. In a panic she raced after the train and, before it gained too much speed, managed to grab a railing on the last car. She pulled herself up to the car and made her way to the car where her terrorized family was afraid they had lost their mother and wife.

The family escaped Poland and deportation to Russia, but in the German refugee camp, the two youngest children, Luci and Johnny died. Grief stricken, the family had to move on, leaving their children in unmarked graves in a strange land. After a brief time with a sympathetic farmer in Bavaria, the family moved on to the refugee camp in Gronau, hoping to move from there to relatives in Canada.

Try as they might, even with the help of MCC, Canada was beyond reach, so they embarked to Paraguay on the Charlton Monarch, a decommissioned troopship. After six weeks of harrowing voyage across the Atlantic, becalmed twice by mechanical failure, the 758 passengers finally disembarked

in Pernambuco, Brazil.

What had begun as a family of three in Bremerhaven had become a family of four when a son, Edmund, was born while the ship was becalmed off the coast of Brazil. However, after disembarking in Pernambuco, their journey took them to Asuncion, to Fernheim, where they buried this baby boy.

Eventually they came to Colonie Neuland, and the challenges and tribulations of pioneering in the Chaco. Three more children, Mathilde (the author's mother), Herb, and Irene, were born in Paraguay. Here, among all the difficulties of heat, stubborn oxen, snakes, locusts and crocodiles, Peter finally again had his farm, even if it meant learning how to grow new crops like cotton, peanuts, kaffir, bananas, watermelon and papaya.

Anna, on the other hand could not bear the oppressive heat, and when their family in Canada again invited them, Anna and Peter moved to Canada with Mathilde, Herb, and Irene. In April 1957 they arrived in Edmonton, and in 1960 their son George was born. Anna and Peter managed to live out the rest of their lives in peace and quietness with their growing family, the relatives who had sponsored them to come to Canada, and their friends in the Lendrum Mennonite Church.

Their granddaughter, Andrea, has done a magnificent job of capturing this remarkable couple's faith, courage, persistence, resilience, grit, and devotion to each other and to their children.

Her book is available at the library of the Lendrum Mennonite Church in Edmonton, and a copy will be archived with the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives in Winnipeg.

Dave Hubert was born in Coaldale. He and his wife Martha live in Edmonton, Alberta. Dave enjoys reading, grandparenting, and volunteering. He currently works as the Executive Director of Canadian Peacemakers International. ❖

From Russian Steppe to Canadian Range

By Isaac "Ike" Brown, 135 pages: Friesen Press

Book review by Dave Toews

From Russian Steppe to Canadian Range by Isaac "Ike" Brown, 1985, EMF Press, Three Hills, Alberta, out of print.

Why would anyone do a book review on a 1985 out-of-print book? There is a story behind this. So before I do the review, let me tell you the story.

On Dec 16, 2018, Marion and I visited with my cousins Art and Dorothy (Toews) Talbot of Tees, Alberta. Art, semi retired, spends some time at the Olds (Alberta) Auction Mart in the miscellaneous section looking through boxes of old books for volumes on area history. Five years ago, he spotted this book and thought, "Hmmm



Dave Toews

(See *Steppe* on page 22)

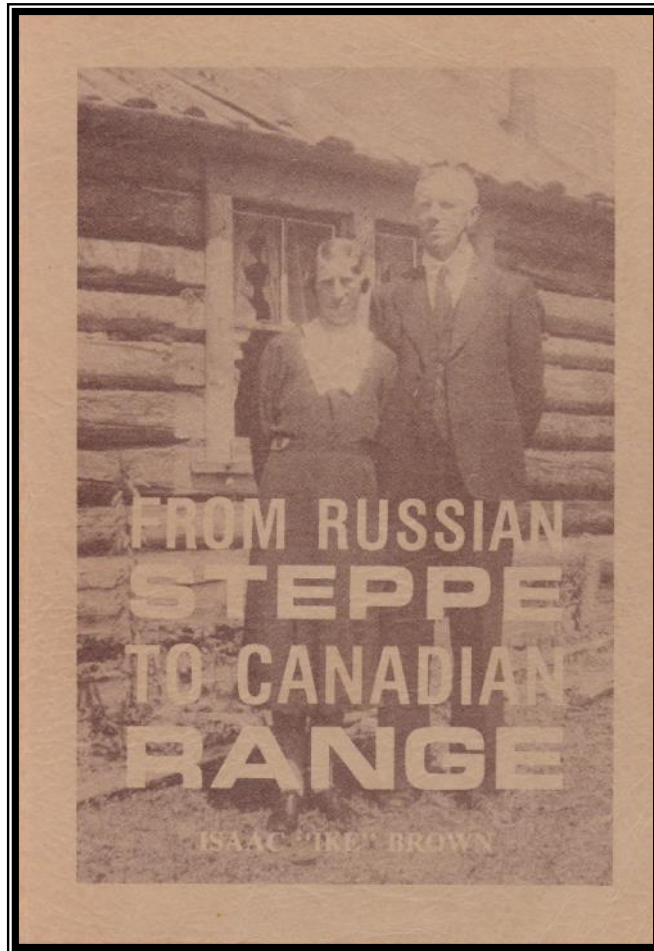
(Steppe from page 21)

Dave Toews might be interested in this one... appears to be a book on Mennonite history".

So, he handed me the book. I didn't think I was too interested. Then perusing it, I saw Acme, Didsbury, pictures of Mennonite cowboys, and the familiar names of Eugene and Lois (Hamm) Huk, fellow church members. Now I was interested. Once I started reading, I couldn't put the book down.

The book, written in 80-year-old Ike Brown's folksy style, is a generational memoir of the Braun family. Chapter one tells the story of Ike's great grandfather Jacob the first (1834-1903). Chapter two focuses on Jacob the second (1859-1929). In chapter three we read about Ike's dad, Jacob the third (1882-1963) and about Ike himself. The book concludes with a chapter profiling Jacob the fourth (1946 to present), who is Ike's son. I applaud Brown for preserving a piece of anecdotal history valuable not only to his family but to the Mennonite community as a whole. I'm disappointed, however, that he mostly tells the men's stories but not the women's.

"Brown" or "Braun"? Ike sheds some light on this on the second last page of the book: "My father spelled his name Braun. When I got my birth



"In 1925 I did some buckarooing," Ike Brown

certificate it was Brown, as the registration clerk heard it, I suppose."

Eleven members of the Braun family arrived in Manitoba from Chortitza, South Russia in July of 1875. In 1901 they moved to the Didsbury - Sunnyslope area (part of what was then known as the Northwest Territories). By then there were three generations of Jacob Brauns, and they all filed for homesteads on the same section of land. The Brauns were hard working, industrious farmers, and there are a lot of stories of wheeling and dealing in horses, machinery, land, buildings, and businesses. Ike's words were, "There was very little consideration given to slackers. The name of the game was 'get cracking'".

There is little reference to church life although Ike does mention he went to Sunday School with the children at the Lone Pine Hall in 1926. In 1963 his father, Jacob the third, died and the family received permission from the Church of God in Christ Mennonite, to have the funeral there. Ike says, "My brother spoke to me for the first time about my spiritual condition. I was a ready listener. The grim reaper speaks positively". (He may have meant "speaks clearly"?)

In the third chapter, Ike describes his life from age 9 to 39 when he married Alta Chadbourne at age 37. Ike worked on the family farm from an early age and went to school intermittently. He does not say what grade level he achieved. He had his own farm for a while and also worked for various farmers on threshing bees, breaking land, herding cattle, hauling grain and lumber, and breaking horses. He also worked in New

(See Steppe on page 23)

(Steppe from page 22)

York State for a period of time crushing rocks, milking cows, cutting and splitting wood, gathering maple sap, and constructing roads.

In addition, Ike was a part-time cowboy and rodeo bronc rider. In 1923 at the Sunnyslope Sports Day he competed against the future Canadian and World Champion Bronc Rider and Pro Rodeo Hall of Famer Pete Knight. Ike and Pete became friends and spent time together at the Calgary Stampede several years later.

The fourth chapter is very short, Brown does not elaborate on his life after his marriage, stating only that he and Alta had four children including the youngest, Jacob the fourth. This Jacob went to bible school and university. In 1985, at the time the book was written, he was a bachelor and an educator in Australia. Ike claims there will be no Jacob the fifth. ❖

Letters to the Editor

November 26, 2018

Dear Dave,

Regarding the Saturday, November 24, 2018 Fall Conference

I would like to say Thank You to all involved in providing the very informative information that was presented about Genealogy. Dr. Tim Janzen, as speaker, gave an interesting talk along with written details of websites to search. This was extremely helpful in continuing my years of interest in my Mother's family (Cornies) in the Molotschna and Siberia.

Thank you again for a wonderful day.

Rosalind Sirman (Plehnert)

Membership Application & Donation Form

- Memberships are due in the spring of each year (\$30.00/yr)
- ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- MHSA Chronicle is published in March, June & October

Mail to::

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

Personal Information:

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Enclosed is my contribution of:

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

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

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



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

at **Highland MB Church**
4018 Centre B St. NW
Calgary, AB T2K 0W2

Saturday, April 27. 2019

Coffee & Registration 9:30 am

Annual General Meeting - 10:00 AM

Light noon meal available at 12:00

Spring Conference - 1:00 PM

Mennonites, Nazis and the Holocaust

Also featuring: The Corpus Christi Male Chorale

Registration: \$20.00 Faspa and Conversation to follow

For more information email: harderdk@xplornet.com

Guest Speakers: Dr. Hans P. Werner and Dr. Colin P. Neufeldt



Dr. Werner

Dr. Werner - Professor Emeritus, Mennonite Studies; Co-director of Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies; Executive Director, D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. Author of *The Constructed Mennonite: History, Memory and the Second World War & Imagined Homes: Soviet German Immigrants in Two Cities*

Dr. Neufeldt Professor of History, Dean of Graduate Studies, and Assistant Vice President Academic at Concordia University, Edmonton. Colin's research - history of Mennonites in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Publications: *The Public and Private Lives of Mennonite Kolkhoz Chairmen in the Khortytsia* and *Molochansk German National Raiony in Ukraine (1928-1934)* and "Collectivizing the Mutter Ansiedlungen: The Role of Mennonites in Organizing Kolkhozy in Molochansk, Ukraine. National Districts in Ukraine.



Dr. Neufeldt