



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

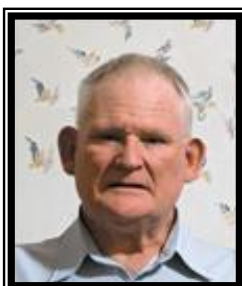
Volume XXIV Number 1

Mar 2021

During COVID 19, Remember How Our Ancestors Struggled Through Other Pandemics

By Robert Proudfoot

The Novel Corona Virus COVID 19 has shadowed the world for one year, and caused havoc to societies everywhere. In Alberta, where over



Robert Proudfoot

1,500 people have died and thousands more have been hospitalized at the time of writing, we all do our part to fight the spread: space ourselves at least two metres apart and wear masks in public; stay home when ill; live within our small co-

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Hand Grenades in Grade Two, Peter Harms Story

As told to Ernie Toens

I, Peter Harms, was born April 20, 1934 to Jacob and Maria (Penner) Harms in #3 Leonidovka in Ignatyev Colony, South Russia. The following is one of a few pictures I have of my parents. I had three brothers, Jacob and John who were older than me, and Abram who was two years younger.

In 1889, my maternal grandfather, Johann Penner,



Maria (Penner) & Jacob Harms with oldest son Jacob 1928

was four years old when his parents, Johann and Maria (Friesen) Penner, moved from the Chortitza Colony to the Ignatyev Colony. In 1938, I was four years old when my father, Jacob Harms, was taken one night by the Soviets, never to be seen or heard from again. My mother, Maria (Penner) Harms, was not able to provide for four boys, so my brother John went to live with Mother's youngest sister, Aunt Anna Wiens, and I went to live with Grandmother Harms with Grandfather Johann Penner appointed as guardian. Mother wanted us all in the same village so by the end of the year, John and I were living with Grandfather Penner in the Russian town, Nikitovka. He had a stand

(See Grenades on page 4)



Peter Harms

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta invites you to the

2021 Virtual Spring Conference

Date: Saturday, Apr 24, 2021

Time: 2 PM

Volendam: A Refugee Story - directed by Andrew Wall—84 min film
Commentary and Q & A to follow with Historian Ted Regehr

See back page for more details

2021 MHSAGM Virtual AGM

Date: Saturday, May 29, 2021, 2 PM

More details to follow by email

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

"He who insists on hiding the past will unlikely be in harmony with the future," Alexander Tvardovsky.

How do we confront our past? Accept that it happened, explore the effect it had, take action to make peace with the past, forgive and change behavior. That is a rather simple schoolyard solution.

Confronting, understanding and dealing with our Russian Mennonite history however is much more complex. How did it happen that some of our people became Nazi sympathizers, Kolkhoz chairmen and perpetrators of the worst kind?

In the Mennonite History Mini-Series on Zoom, Feb 11 to Apr 8 2021, I spoke on Mennonites in Russia, the experience of my Toews and Kroeger



Dave Toews

families 1794 to 1980. This series is part of the Lendrum Mennonite Church Adult Education program under the direction of the Discipleship Commission. The presenters are mostly "amateur historians" like myself with a keen interest in Mennonite history.

My presentation generated a lively discussion during the question and answer session. The fact that I named some of the Nazi sympathizers, Kolkhoz chairmen and perpetrators tended to bring out strong opinions both for and against confronting our past in this way. We didn't solve all the problems by any means but talking about it is better than silently sweeping it under the carpet. We need to confront and own our past. "I don't want to judge these people, I don't know what I would have done in those excruciatingly difficult circumstances".

Another issue full of good articles and life goes on in spite of all the changes the virus has brought to our lives. I have had my first vaccination shot, with the next one due in April. Life is good, we have much to be thankful for.

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 dmtows@gmail.com with any questions or comments. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Ken Matis

The Radio Ministry of Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church

For five years of my life I worked in Christian television broadcasting ministry. This got me thinking about the media history of my own church, Coaldale Mennonite Brethren, and their vibrant radio ministry from 1952 to 1973



Ken Matis

On a Sunday in August of 1952, with great excitement, people tuned in Station CHAT out of Medicine Hat to hear our very first "Gospel Bells" program. It was sent out from our church at a cost of \$22.00 per half hour. As time went on CJOC Lethbridge picked up the program, and in 1961 Dawson Creek began airing it as well. Directors of the "Gospel Bells" programs included Bill Schmidt, Abe Regier, Henry Nickkel, and a number of the Coaldale Bible School teachers.

The thought of a radio mission program had really originated with the young people in 1949, and it

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had been fully supported by the church. It was the youth committee that began the preliminary work of contacting radio stations and organizing programs. On October 17th, 1960, acting on the recommendation of the youth committee, the church took over the full responsibility for the radio ministry, and a radio committee was elected to oversee it.

Over the years, changes were bound to occur, and improvements needed to be made. The church met all financial needs that were not covered by donations.

To produce better recordings, a new recording machine was acquired, and acoustic tile was installed in the main Coaldale Bible School room. In 1958, a second recorder was purchased for \$102.00. Then in April 1962 a full-fledged studio was built at a cost of \$1,115.

On December 13th 1960, the addition of a German program, "Brot des Lebens" (Bread of Life), became another milestone in our church's radio ministry. This program, with David Pankratz as the director, aired over Station CHEC Lethbridge until 1968. Then it was picked up by the Camrose station at a cost of \$51.30 per half hour. This move proved to be a good change as many German listeners responded from the area. That same year, the program also began airing in Drumheller. The cost there was \$30.00 per week.

On November 17, 1968, "Gospel Bells" was discontinued because a suitable broadcast time could not be found at CJOC, and radio time elsewhere was not available. On November 25, 1973, "Brot des Lebens" was discontin-

ued by both Camrose and Drumheller. However, Drumheller picked up a new program instead. This program, "Licht des Evangeliums" (Light of the Gospel), was sponsored by the church that came from the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Communications organization in Winnipeg.

"Gospel Bells" and "Brot des Lebens" were broadcast continuously for seventeen years and thirteen years respectively. Many letters to both programs testified to the blessings received. By initiating this radio ministry, the youth of Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church youth showed their zeal for church unity. Coaldale Mennonite Brethren was truly a trail-blazer in finding ways to spread the gospel.

Today all that is visibly left of the radio programs is the master control room next to what was a recording studio in the church basement. This space now acts as our records/archive room. Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church has seen many other changes over the years too. Membership totals have decreased steadily: 600 in the 1950's; 400 in the 1970's; and 202 at the present time. A good number of members moved to Clearbrook - Abbotsford B.C. to retire. Some prominent founding families left when the church moved inside town. Other former members became involved in building Lakeview Mennonite Brethren Church and College Drive Community Church, both in Lethbridge. The closing of the vibrant Coaldale Bible School has further decreased numbers. Much talent has been lost.

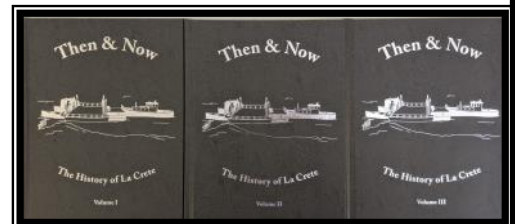
Today our church is down from five choirs to two worship teams and from fourteen pastors to one pastor for Sunday morning worship. In light of the pandemic, worship services went onto Zoom as soon as possible with about 60 members able to still worship physically in the church building. The church has just invested in a further media program that will allow the church to do much more. It may even allow us to rebroadcast the old radio programs via the Internet.

My, how times have changed! Change is a constant, and so the church must adjust to stay relevant in these times. ❖

Then & Now, The History of La Crete

After many years of research, collecting information and photos, the La Crete Agricultural Society published a three-volume community history book titled, *Then & Now, The History of La Crete*.

A total of 1500 sets arrived in La Crete on December 22, 2020 and they were all sold by the end of February 2021. A decision has been made to place another order of 500 sets and these should be available sometime in May. You may preorder your set by calling (780)928-4447 or by emailing: lcheritagecentre@gmail.com. The books will be available for \$150 and shipping within Canada is about \$25.



Susan Siemens, Program Coordinator, La Crete Ag Society

(Grenades from page 1)

there near the train station selling bread and drinks.

In 1941 the Germans invaded the Soviet Union, and the Russian army started moving German and Mennonite peoples east before the Ukraine was overrun. My mother, Jacob, and Abram were transported to the Ural Mountains area. The living conditions were very poor there, and Mother and Abram both died of starvation in 1944.

In 1941, however, we were still living with Grandfather in Nikitovka. He arranged for a Jewish family to take John and myself and hide us, so we wouldn't be displaced. (Grandfather had sold his two steam-engine-driven flourmills to this family during WWI. He was in alternative service as a medic at the front when the transaction was completed, and the 100,000 rubles in gold from the sale were deposited in the bank. All of this was confiscated when the Bolsheviks nationalized the banks after the revolution.)

After the German army took control of our area, the local commander, Hauptmann (Captain) Hackstein, appointed Grandfather as the mayor of Nikitovka. The picture shows my grandparents Johann and Valentina Penner with some of the German military officers in our town.

John (9 to 10 years old) was required to be a translator (Russian to German) at the police station, and I (7 to 8 years old) was a translator at the hospital. We had a good relationship with the German forces, and they made uniforms for John and me as shown.

A very tragic part of the German occupation was that all the Jewish people were identified and had to wear the yellow star. Then a special Nazi SS unit



L-R Hauptmann Hackstein (district officer), Valentina & Johann Penner Peter's grandparents, Lieutenant Fuchs (brought Peter & John to Germany), unknown, sitting unknown. German Occupation 1942



Peter (Left) and brother John Harms in their new German Army uniforms. Belt buckles with swastika and "Gott mit uns" 1941

came in and rounded up the Jews. Grandfather pleaded for the lives of the family who had hidden John and myself, and the local German commanders agreed to spare their lives. However, the SS troops wouldn't allow that. They dug a deep trench with a bulldozer, lined the Jews up in front of it, and machine-gunned them all. The SS forced Grandfather to watch the execution. He never got over that event. The Jewish family had saved his family, but he wasn't able to save them.

Colonel Hans Wolfgang Schoch wanted John and myself to have the opportunity for a proper German education. In 1942 when Lieutenant Fuchs was going on



Grandparents Johann & Valentina Penner, John (Hans) and Peter Harms, Nikilovka, Russia 1942

furlough to Germany, John and I were sent with him. We took this family picture before leaving for Germany.

When we arrived in Berlin, we

(See Grenades on page 5)

(Grenades from page 4)

were immediately given German citizenship. We were placed in an SS Heimschule in Niederalteich, Lower Bavaria. The school was in an old cloister (Benedictine Abbey) and was being used for boys whose parents wanted them safe from the bombing in the cities and for immigrant boys like us. There were some blonde, blue-eyed Polish boys who had been taken from their homes and were being indoctrinated and not allowed to speak Polish. If caught speaking Polish, they were severely punished. John and I were encouraged to speak Russian to each other to keep our language fluent.

In grade 2, I was taught how to throw hand grenades. I can still hear the teacher instructing us to pull the pin, count one thousand one, one thousand two, and then throw the grenade on one thousand three. That way the grenade would be in the air on four and explode in the target area on five. In thinking back on it now, the boys were being trained to be "cannon fodder" in the war effort.

In 1943 Grandfather Johann and his second wife, Valentina, came to Germany with the retreating German army and went to Munich where he had business connections. He remained in Munich until 1948 when we all immigrated to Canada.

In 1943, John and I were fortunate to be "adopted" by Colonel Hans Wolfgang Schoch ("Uncle Hans") and his wife Liese Lotte ("Tante Lotte"), and we moved from Berlin to their 2½-story lakeside summer house in Schellerhau, Saxony. Uncle Hans, was trained in mountain guerrilla warfare and was posted to Greece to

combat the Greek patriots. Tante Lotte was from a very wealthy family and had a lot of property in Dresden and other places. This was her second marriage, and she had one daughter, Gerda, from her first marriage. Tante Lotte was Lutheran, and we were taken to a Lutheran church to be baptized as she was horrified that our baptisms had not already taken place. The picture shows us in the carefree days we had in Schellerhau.

On February 13 to 15, 1945 we experienced the Allied bombing of Dresden. Schellerhau is about 30 km straight south of the center of Dresden, so in the night sky we could see the glow of Dresden burning and feel the trembling of the earth as the bombs exploded. Uncle Hans happened to be home on leave when this happened. The day after the bombing he took me to Salzburg, Austria to be safe and then returned to Greece. The rest of the family fled on foot to Munich where Tante Lotte had property. Once in Munich, John was reunited with Grandfather Penner.

I stayed in Salzburg for about three months. The people treated me well. Towards the end of April, the woman of the house explained that with the war ending, Austria and Germany would be separated. With a border between the two countries, it would take a year or two to be reunited with my brother and grandfather. I was welcome to stay or to leave for Germany now with their maid, who was going to be with family in Bavaria. I decided to go.

The woman wrote a letter of introduction to her aunt who lived in a small village in Bavaria, and the maid and I were on our way on foot. After a day and a half, at a fork in the road, the maid informed me that I was to continue west, and she was going north. We parted.

At dusk, I stopped at a farmhouse and asked permission to sleep in the hayloft. The family put me up in the house, and gave me a big supper, breakfast the next morning, and a blessing to send me on my way.

The day promised to be a long, lonely, and tiring one. Around noon, a courier from the German army on a motorcycle stopped and asked my destination. "I'm passing close by; climb on and hold tight," he said. I obeyed with pleasure. For maybe half an hour the countryside flew by. At another fork in the road, he informed me that a one-hour march would take me to the village.

Making sure it was the right village, I was told that the woman I was looking for lived in the last house. The closer I came, the slower I



John & Peter Harms rafting, Schellerhau, Saxony 1943.

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(Grenades from page 5)

walked, wondering what kind of reception awaited me. With my heart in my throat, I knocked on the door. A smiling woman and two girls, one older and one younger than I, were very curious who I was.

After reading the letter from her niece, the woman gave me a big hug and took me in. I asked how I should address her, and the younger girl said, "Call her Mutti."

Now I had a mom and two sisters. Mutti took care of me like one of her own family and even managed to find some boy's clothes. On my third day in the village, the American army came in. It was the end of the war for us.

Life in the village was wonderful in the daytime. I made friends who were eager to teach me the Bavarian dialect and show me good swimming places and the art of catching fish. They warned, "Don't get caught!" Fishing was illegal.

Nights were difficult and long. Suddenly waking, I would wonder how my grandfather in Munich had survived the heavy bombing raids, and whether my older brother John and others had successfully fled the Russian occupied territory. Where were they now?

In the beginning of October, Mutti's younger brother came to visit from Munich, a city of 800,000. After being informed who I was, amazingly he realized that he knew Mr. Penner, my grandfather, that he was searching for me, and that my older brother was there, too. It took three weeks for travel papers to be ready, and then Mutti's brother came to take me to Munich to my family. The goodbye from Mutti and the girls was tearful.

During that period, I never questioned if I would get back together with my grandfather and brother. Even though I felt lonely, deep down I knew I was not alone.

Following the war, Grandfather Penner began to explore immigrating to Canada. He knew that his youngest sister, Sara, and her husband, Gerhard Klassen, had done so in 1926, but he didn't know where they had ended up. In 1946, he sent a letter overseas addressed "Gerhard & Sara Klassen, Canada". The Post Office sent the letter to Winnipeg and it was given to a mail carrier who had a lot of Klassens and Mennonites on his route. The carrier showed it to a Gerhard Froese who recognized the name and asked if he could forward it to Gerhard & Sara Klassen in Coaldale, Alberta. With God's intervention, siblings Johann and Sara were in contact again.

Sara and Gerhard applied to sponsor Grandfather Johann, Valentina, John, and myself. In Germany Grandfather filed the immigration papers. It took until 1948 for all the paperwork and health and political checks to be done. Canada needed assurance that the applicants were not Nazis. On August 25, 1948 we arrived in Quebec City aboard the Dutch freighter MS Tabinta. After a three-day train ride, on August 28 we were finally with our family in Coaldale.

Gerhard and Sara also sponsored Grandfather Johann and Sara's sister Katharina to come to Canada. Her husband, Abram Unruh, had perished in the war and their three sons had perished also. Grandfather and Abram had

not only been brothers-in-law, but also very good friends. They had done alternative service together as frontline medics in WWI.

My grandfather's heart issues caught up with him at 65, and he passed away in Coaldale October 15, 1950. After a number of years, his second wife, Valentina met a Norwegian farmer from Saskatchewan who had retired to Coaldale. They were able to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary before he passed away in 1981 and she in 1992.

My education was interrupted many times with our moves and the war turmoil. I managed to complete the four years of Volksschule (public school) and 1½ years of Uberschule (secondary school) in the academic stream. In Canada I was focused on earning money, and so I only attended grade 7 for a couple of winter sessions. I took a lot of different jobs. I worked for farmers and beekeepers and did



L-R Back: Donald, David,
L-R Front: Christine, Serena, Peter, Cyndi, Harms Family 1982

milk delivery. In summer I primarily worked on road construction driving trucks, caterpillars, and DW21 earth movers.

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(Grenades from page 6)

I also attended a couple of winter semesters at Menno Bible Institute in Didsbury, AB. It was here that I met the love of my life, Serena Sawatzky. She came home from her grade 12 studies at Rosthern Junior College for her brother's wedding in February 1956. It was love at first sight! Serena and I were married on February 22, 1959, and by the time you read this we will have celebrated our 62nd wedding anniversary. We have been blessed with four children: Christine, David, Donald, and Cynthia. We also have 13 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. They are spread far and wide now, from Calgary to Didsbury to St. Thomas, Ontario, to Kamloops, BC, and to Denver, Colorado. The picture shows us with our children in 1982.

Serena and I spent our first year of married life in Kamloops, BC. I worked as a milkman and at a service station. In the fall my father-in-law offered me a job trucking straw to the Stramit plant in Innisfail, AB where he had a contract. After that, I worked as a milkman in Calgary until 1963 when I started a meat-cutting apprenticeship with Safeway stores. In 1974 I joined the CO-OP, and I continued cutting meat until my retirement in 1995. I enjoyed being a butcher, and it provided a good income for our family.

Since I retired, Serena and I have enjoyed travelling and visiting our family across Canada and into the US. We have made trips to the Caribbean, South America, Europe and Asia. A few years ago, we downsized to a condo and are enjoying the lifestyle.

My oldest brother, Jacob, sur-



Peter explaining meat cutting to a friend visiting from Russia.



Harms Family reunion after 47 years of separation brothers John, Jacob, Peter and Aunt Anna Wiens, Russia 1989

vived the Soviet era. In 1989, John and I were able to visit him for ten days at his son's place near St. Petersburg, Russia. After 47 years, we were reunited!

On the same trip, I visited Mutti and the older sister in the same village. We had so much to talk about.

In 1990 we arranged for Jacob and his wife to come to Calgary for two months. Sadly, Jacob had a massive heart attack after only three weeks here and passed away. His wife was very concerned that her pension wouldn't meet the payments on their flat, and that she would lose it. John and I purchased as many electronic items as she could carry back to Russia. In Mos-

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cow her sister helped her sell those items on the black market, and she was able to keep the flat.

In 2017 my brother John passed away, and now I am the last of my generation.

I have been truly blessed by God to have been a refugee for only 6 years and to have had the opportunity to live since the age of 14 in this great country of Canada where there is peace and opportunity. My story is mirrored by the difficult and tragic story of so many other refugees throughout history - people who have gone through painful experiences and lost those close to them; people who need someone to notice them, to go out of their way for them and help them find safety, education, and a new life. There are currently 80 million refugees and internally displaced people in the world due to war, persecution and natural disaster. This is a lot more people than when I was a refugee. ❖

(COVID from page 1)

horts; forsake international travel or large public gatherings; and exercise at parks or ski hills rather than inside ice rinks or fitness centres, even as we anticipate receiving our own long-awaited vaccines. Government-mandated precautions have led businesses to lay off workers and severely curtail operations, a discouraging development in an economy that has floundered since 2015.

I have never before experienced such a lethal pandemic. However, I do know that AIDS and treatable diseases like measles, whooping cough, and tuberculosis are still ravaging populations world-wide, and that thousands of Canadians continue to die each year from various influenza strains. I remember the panic and mask wearing that occurred during the SARS outbreak in 2003. I also have some personal knowledge of malaria. During three years of Mennonite Central Committee service in Nigeria, I suffered through six bouts of that disease, and an MCC colleague died from it in West Africa during the early 2000s due to his inability to obtain timely treatment.

Our suffering in Canada in this time of COVID 19 is legitimate. However, other pandemics affected our country during the lifetimes of my MacDonald grandparents, Olive MacDonald (1888 to 1970) and George MacDonald (1890 to 1986) and during the lifetime of their children, including my mother Norma and her older brother my Uncle Gordon (1921 to 1953). Those epidemics also caused great suffering, but meeting them helped us mature as a nation. Could I but discuss with my grandparents and parents our struggles with COVID 19 today, they would stoically remind me that this is not Alberta's 'first rodeo' with serious diseases. They lived through our current problems and solutions many times before.

Early Epidemics in Alberta

My Alberta ancestors knew about tuberculosis (TB) sanatoriums that treated patients for long terms in isolation from the general population into the 1950s, but did they know that TB ran rampant in church-run Indian

Residential Schools during the early 1900s? Did they know that smallpox, unintentionally brought to Canada by European newcomers, decimated indigenous peoples who had little immunity during the 1860s to 1870s? That smallpox outbreak led to the establishment of the Saskatchewan District Board of Health, which immunized indigenous peoples, and inspected furs, robes, and leathers prior to transport. Similarly, when another smallpox epidemic broke out in 1892, a permanent Edmonton Board of Health (EBH) was established in response. It legislated inspection and disinfection of incoming trains of immigrants and quarantines for any sick.

Throughout the early to mid-1900's, outbreaks of small pox, typhoid or scarlet fevers, diphtheria, tetanus, and typhus in Edmonton's growing population encouraged immunizations, treatments, and many new preventative measures. These preventative measures included:

- establishment of isolation hospitals and district health clinics
- public works construction of treated water and sanitary sewer systems
- promotion of personal hygiene, nutritious eating, and healthy living
- inspections for tainted meat, unpasteurized milk, and spoiled fruits or vegetables at grocery stores and restaurants
- regular garbage pick-up and burning at incinerators
- removal of shantytowns
- relocation of open dumpsites to beyond city limits
- banning of overcrowded rooming houses, livestock quarters, and home latrines

(See COVID on page 9)

(COVID from page 8)

- provision of additional wash-rooms
- public health programs led by nurses and dentists
- chest X-ray technology for detection of TB.

Diphtheria was another serious challenge many Albertans encountered in those early days. In January 1929, a heroic vaccine delivery by air prevented an outbreak of diphtheria at Little Red River Reserve. Pilot Wilfred “Wop” May, a former Canadian World War I flying ace, flew 1,200 miles between Edmonton and Fort Vermilion in -40 °C weather in an open biplane to make that happen. A Campaign for Diphtheria Prevention, conducted during the 1930s, showed excellent results for controlling this lethal respiratory disease.

Many other dangerous contagious diseases were common also. Numbers of students suffering from measles, rubella, scarlet fever, whooping cough (pertussis), streptococcal infections, and polio were consistently noted in Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) records from 1927, 1935, 1941, 1954 and 1964.

Spanish Influenza

Almost one hundred years ago exactly, Spanish Influenza became a world-wide scourge. It was dubbed the worst epidemic since the plague of Black Death in the 1300s. With no vaccine to stem the tide, some 25 to 100 million people died from this fast-moving illness, including 50,000 in Canada during the fall of 1918. 450 Edmontonians were among the victims.

During World War 1, battle-field trenches had incubated the Spanish influenza virus. By the

time that the Armistice ending war hostilities was signed on November 11, 1918, the disease was already spreading around the world enabled by mass movements of people by boat or train. Public health services, hobbled by care for wounded soldiers and war-depleted resources, could not deal with proliferating numbers of flu patients. Widespread unemployment, labour strife, rising prices, and shortage of peace-time goods added to the rapidly declining situation.

Prior to the end of the war in 1918, initial cases had already been recognized in Calgary by October 4. By October 18, forty-one cases were reported in Edmonton. By Halloween the number of cases has grown to 2000, and 44 Edmontonians had died. By November 11 the number of dead rose to 262. By the end of 1918, 30,000 Albertans had caught Spanish Influenza, and 3,259 deaths – 1 in 10 – had been reported.

Spanish flu attacked one's lungs and caused high fever. Many died quickly. One day the victim complained of a headache and felt sluggish. The next day he was delirious and could die. Many young adults - providers and mothers - were cut down. Yet many were spared. The disease seemed indiscriminate; whole families came down with it, but it was rarely fatal to all members.

In November 1918, Charles Anderson attended a skating party at Edmonton's Borden Park. He and two friends contracted a light version of the illness there, but three other young skaters died. Anderson's mother was severely attacked but survived, in part by drinking whiskey on her doctor's order since alcohol poisoning was known to counteract the virus. Anderson



Armistice Day Parade during the Spanish Influenza Epidemic, Jasper Avenue, Edmonton, Nov 11, 1918. Photo credit Archives EA-10-655.

remembered that there were not enough undertakers to embalm or bury the dead since people were dying 'like flies'.

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The EHA divided the city into districts, each under supervision of a trained nurse. Schools like Grandin, Victoria, Oliver, and King Edward were used as convalescence clinics. All available volunteers, including many teachers, were allotted to help out. Grace Duggan Cook's father was a driver for the soup kitchens, and her mother volunteered as a nurse's aide. Grace's husband, Alex Cook, acted as an orderly at Pembina Hall, the University of Alberta Women's Residence, which has being utilized as a temporary hospital. Cook removed seven bodies one night.

Many measures were taken to reduce the Spanish flu's spread. Alberta Board of Health (ABH) closed all schools, churches, theatres, picture shows, reading rooms, poolrooms, dance halls, and cabarets. All unnecessary gatherings of people in stores, street corners, or other public places were banned from October 18, 1918 until as late as end of May 1919. Jubilation or ceremonies marking the Armistice were muted. As shown people wore surgical masks and warm woolen overcoats for protection as they celebrated war's end and the return of their loved ones. People without masks were refused access to public services like buses, stores, banks, and schools. Jeffrey Brown remembered that these gauze masks were soaked in eucalyptus oil.

I have tried to imagine to how my grandmother Olive Macdonald felt in Edmonton during the decade of the Spanish flu. From 1914 to 1919, she taught elementary students at Oliver, Beverly Central, Colonel Farquhar, and Queen's Avenue schools. Both Colonel Farquhar and Beverly were "rough and tumble" institutes that didn't last. Colonel Farquhar was constructed in 1915 on swampland with a shallow water table. It suffered chronic flooding in the basement, broken stairs, and a leaky roof throughout its three years of operation; plaster often fell from ceilings and walls, and windowsills came apart. Grandma taught Grades 1 to 3 together at Colonel Farquhar, and she was the only teacher there. She lived in downtown Edmonton and walked (or ran in winter) 1.5 miles daily through bush, swamp, pasture, or farmland from the end



Front L-R Ethel Field, unknown, Olive Webster the author's grandmother, Myrtle Field, Beverly School, Edmonton 1915

of the streetcar line to the schoolhouse. Beverly Central, a two-storey cube, served as four classrooms from 1913 to 1955. It was also used as a community centre despite having no electricity or running water and inadequate coal-and-wood-fired heating.

How disappointing it must have been for this plucky, young teacher to leave rugged Beverly school in September 1918 and arrive at the more polished Queen's Avenue building only to find her workplace closed from October 18 to January 2 due to the epidemic! That her future husband, Lt. George MacDonald, who had worked as a carpenter and policeman in Edmonton from 1906 to 1915 before fighting with the Canadian army in the World War I trenches of western Europe and being wounded and chlorine-gassed in battle, would not have eased Grandma's anxieties.

The Polio Epidemic

Alberta's first polio patient was diagnosed in 1908, but patient numbers and deaths, and occasional outbreaks were noted in Edmonton Board of Health (EBH) and EPSB records until the mid-1960s when vaccines finally brought the disease under control. In 1952 to 1953, polio hit Edmonton particularly hard. With 1,552 cases and 111 deaths province-wide, it was called Alberta's worst pandemic since Spanish flu.

Polio is a disease caused by the *poliomyelitis* virus, which can permanently damage nerve cells that control muscles, most noticeably those for respiration or movement. Without some exposure in infancy or counteractive medicine, children failed to develop immunity and

(See COVID on page 11)

(COVID from page 10)

remained susceptible to more virulent strains of this 'infantile paralysis' or 'crippler' well into the 1950s.

In 1937, some 4,000 cases were recorded across Canada, with 2,546 cases and 119 deaths in Ontario alone. That year only one iron lung existed in Canada, but doctors and engineers saved a young polio patient's life at Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children by building him a temporary breathing machine from plywood and an experimental respirator used to treat premature infants. Subsequently, some 27 iron lungs were quickly built to help patients breathe.

In Edmonton, EPSB records in 1927, 1935, 1937, 1941, 1943, 1944, 1948, and 1953 indicate that schools opened late in September, which was considered the traditional time of year for peak contraction. During the 1935 epidemic, major department stores did not list children's apparel, and retail merchants dissuaded children from gathering in stores until the peak danger of polio had passed.

Between 1949 and 1954, polio left an estimated 11,000 Canadians paralyzed. In 1953, the epidemic peaked as 9,000 polio cases and 500 deaths were recorded across the country. One of the victims was Tommy Harries aged four. Tommy's mother Joyce wrote about how he died six nights after going Hallowe'en trick or treating in the neighbourhood while already experiencing heavy breathing and chest and neck pains. Tommy's three younger siblings did not contract polio despite sharing their Hallowe'en candies.

During the peak year in Edmonton, 415 polio patients entered the Royal Alexandra Hospital's iso-

lation unit, over 100 required a respirator to breathe, and 43 passed away. Some doctors and nurses were stricken themselves with paralysis and/or death. Iron lung breathing machines were airlifted from USA. As there was not yet a public health care system in Alberta, the provincial government paid the medical bills of recovering patients. AHA closed swimming pools, playgrounds, clubs, Sunday schools, movie theatres, and schools to children under the age of 16 as young people were thought to be polio's main target. Families of the infected were also quarantined. Edmontonians were advised to avoid physical over-excursion and exposure to damp and coolness. Sharing drinking utensils and engaging in personal contact behaviours such as kissing became taboo.

In 1954, Dr. Jonas Salk developed a successful polio vaccine, and in spring of 1955 Alberta began mass immunizations. By 1965, numbers of polio cases and deaths had fallen dramatically. The Sabin oral vaccine was developed in 1962 and subsequently administered to thousands of students. It officially brought polio under control in Canada by the early 1970s. In 1994, we were certified as "polio free". Today however, some former polio patients still continue to experience lingering effects such as muscle weakness and pain, severe fatigue, and/or joint pain.

Polio also left its mark on my family. We became victims of the 1953 epidemic without even contracting the disease! My uncle Gordon gave up his own life to help a seriously-ill polio patient in need of iron lung treatment, a tragedy that continues to haunt my extended family.

Uncle Gordon, my mother Norma's older brother, was raised one of four children on a Wanham-area farm. In 1919, my MacDonald grandparents, Olive and George, had been thankful to leave Edmonton to farm in NW Alberta's pristine frontier. Their four children were educated in one-room rural schools at first but had to board in Grande Prairie to complete high school. Gordon, although a bright scholar and a good farmer, joined the Royal Canadian Airforce at the age of 18 when World War II broke out. He became an able bomber aircraft pilot and gunner and flew in 119 sorties as a squadron leader with the Allied forces against the Japanese over south-east Asia. In 1944, Flight Lieutenant Gordon MacDonald was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC).

When the war ended, Gordon wanted to return to civilian life, but he was unable to settle into farming or other jobs. Instead, in the early 1950's, he went back to flying, this time commercially in northern Alberta for *Gateway Aviation*.

On November 22 1952, Gordon flew a *Gateway Aviation* Cessna 180 passenger plane on a routine flight from Edmonton to Grande Prairie. He was asked to bring a severely ill polio patient, Lloyd Williams, and his medical doctor, Don Wilson, back to Edmonton that same day. Mr. Williams, a road construction contractor, had contacted the contagious disease at work only days earlier and needed emergency iron lung treatment. Gordon, seeing the desperate need and wanting to help, quickly converted his small passenger plane into an ambulance for the evening 'mercy' flight. He knew that a blizzard was rapidly blanketing the Peace Country with snow, but as my cousin Judy recently stated, her father was a brave and experienced pilot who would not risk the elements if he did not believe he could successfully complete the flight. After all, this same Flight Lieutenant MacDonald DFC

(See COVID on page 12)

(COVID from page 11)

had faced worse enemies than weather during the war: he had once safely landed a damaged bomber with one engine on fire. Judy's father's regularly flew aerial advertising banners with *Gateway* – keeping them straight and away from the rudder was no easy task!

Shortly after take-off, Pilot MacDonald radioed that he was returning to Grande Prairie because his aircraft was icing up. A few minutes later, he decided to resume course towards Edmonton, flying below the storm clouds. Nothing more was heard. Later that evening, the aircraft was reported as overdue in Edmonton. It was not until nine months later after one of the largest search and rescue missions ever performed in western Canada, that the wreckage of the plane was found in the boreal forest approximately 15 km north of Whitecourt, right on course! All three men on-board had been killed upon impact; aged 28 to 33, they left behind widows and small children to carry on.

The crash site of Uncle Gordon's airplane, initially quite inaccessible



Flight Lieutenant
Gordon Webster
MacDonald, DFC.
Circa 1946.

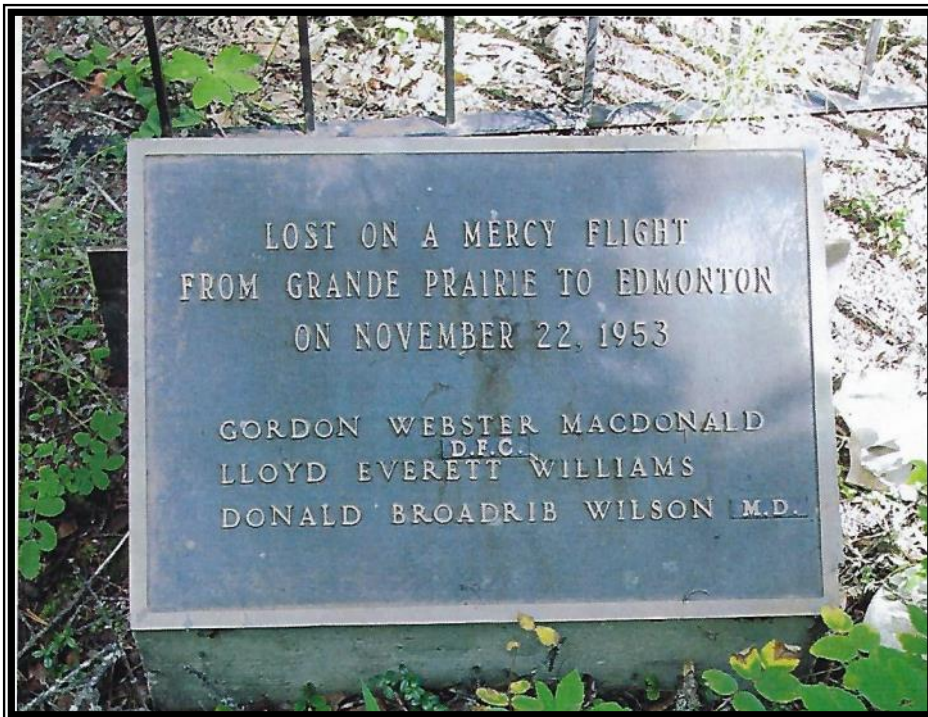
1970s that I joined to install a plaque commemorating the crash victims and my grandparents' grave stone, around which a small wrought iron fence was erected. The victims' families regard this quiet and sad, yet inspiring patch of forest as a graveyard. Forestry and oilfield companies operating nearby knew about the crash but respectfully left its resting place alone, as did passing hikers, hunters, or the members of the *Whitecourt Trailblazers* snowmobile club, who occasionally painted or repaired the fence surrounding the monuments.

In July 2017, Alberta Environment & Parks staff cleared the area of metallic debris without notifying the families until after the fact. They reasoned that it had become an unsafe eyesore in the pristine forest, which was becoming more accessible to the general public due to industrial development nearby. The victims' families expressed their outrage at this perceived desecration and duly received an apology from Alberta's then Agriculture & Forestry Minister and local MLA, Oneil Carlier.

After Uncle Gordon's death, deep and inexplicable loss was felt by his wife Phyllis, my mother Norma, and my MacDonald grandparents. To blend with her three older children whose father had been lost, Aunt Phyllis adopted three orphaned children with her second husband Palmer. My cousin Judy felt that her mother's sadness was so profound that she could not share it, yet she loved orphans as her own.

Gordon's sister, my mother Norma, moved to Edmonton during the mid-1940s to complete her B.Ed. degree. She taught elemen-

(See COVID on page 13)



Plaque at Whitecourt, Alberta-area crash site commemorates victims Gordon Webster MacDonald, (pilot); Lloyd Everett Williams (patient); and Donald Broadribb Wilson, MD. 2010.

except by walking for hours over snow-covered, frozen muskeg and deep woods, was left undisturbed for nearly 65 years except for occasional visits by extended family. One such visit included a winter adventure during the

(COVID from page 12)

tary school to rural students near Peace River until settling into married life in Edmonton in 1953. My six siblings and I all suffered, unvaccinated, through childhood diseases like measles, rubella, mumps, and chicken pox, but were immunized for other life-threatening illnesses such as small pox, polio, TB, diphtheria, pertussis, and tetanus that were still around.

The Novel Corona virus is a tenacious foe that is still going strong a year after outbreak and is mutating into even more virulent UK and South African strains. People around the world must continue to stay vigilant and work together with their health authorities, governments, and fellows as we begin vaccinations yet maintain our personal health protocols previously established. We are resilient! We care for this world and one another. We volunteer to assist when need arises but also try to stay safe and healthy as we trust medical science and rely on God's help. Our ancestors understand our dilemma, and they root for us to make it through this current pandemic boldly.



Crash site with scattered wreckage before it was removed in 2017. Photo credit Postmedia

Robert Proudfoot is an Edmonton-based environmental consultant and also a professional writer, editor, and tutor. Robert attended high school and university in Lusaka Zambia during the early 1970s. From 1988 to 1991, he and his wife Valerie served with Mennonite Central Committee in Nigeria west Africa as agro forester and public healthcare nurse, respectively. Robert is currently a director on the Mennonite Central Committee Alberta (MCCAB) Board, and he serves on the Operating Council of the MCCAB Thrift Store as well. Robert, Valerie, and their daughters Annora and Alicia attend First Mennonite Church in Edmonton

References available upon request ❖

MHSC Conference Highlights, Jan 15-16, 2020

By Ken Matis

One of the biggest accomplishments of the year for the **Mennonite Historical Society of Canada** has been the digitization of Volumes I and II of the Mennonites in Canada Series - posted on the Milton Good Library website of Conrad Grebel University.

Group discussions as to what has been happening across the

country is as follows:

The BC Mennonite Heritage Museum has now fully erected a new housebarn on their campus and hopes to open it once the pandemic has passed and they are allowed to open again.

Canadian Mennonite University will offer a new course on *Mennonites in Canada since 1970*.

A plaque of recognition has been placed on the site/sheds that the Mennonite immigrants left from to get on the "Volendam" ship.

The BC phone-a-thon to members lead to great donations and reestablished connections.

Most provincial Mennonite Historical Societies had to cancel any kind of public gatherings and are adapting to online gatherings.

The Russlaender Centenary Train Tour committee is coordinating with provincial societies in planning activities for the various stops. An itiner-

(See MHSC on page 14)

(MHSC from page 13)

ary is in the works. A down payment is required two years in advance, no price has yet been determined. It is hoped that the CPR will also be involved in some way.

The Canadian Mennonite Emigration Commemoration Committee together with the Mennonite Heritage Village is working on a traveling exhibit across Canada showcasing the emigration of Mennonites to Mexico in 1922, with a coffee table type of book to follow.

The Genealogy Committee reported that much of their material comes from other archives or organizations which raises the question of who owns the records, further discussion is to follow on this.

Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) had a very good year in that it doubled its records to 200,000.

Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) is also strong and growing and is one of the top five religious internet sites.

The financial statement of all accounts together equals \$66,699 dollars which has all been allocated. ❖

MHSA 2019 AGM Report Nov 14, 2020

By Bill Franz

Our Annual General Meeting was held by ZOOM because of public health restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This worked well, with 25 dial-ins, allowing members to participate without having to travel.

Chair Ken Matis opened with Deuteronomy 32:7, *"Remember the days of old, consider the generations long past, Ask your Father and He will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you"*.

Following approval of the agenda and the review of the minutes from the April 27, 2018 AGM, Vice Chair Katie Harder reviewed the need for a bylaw change to allow directors that are interested in extending their two terms of office to be eligible to do so. The suggested revision was as follows:

Article 10 item 10.2 Subject to any vacancies on the board, which may be filled in accordance with this bylaw, one-third (1/3) of the members of the board shall stand for election in each year and each member of the board shall be elected for a three (3) year term. Directors may be elected for more than two (2) consecutive terms. Katie moved to adopt this motion, which was seconded by Dave Toews, and carried.

Reports were presented: Chair Ken Matis reported on the previous year's activities.

Treasurer Jake Retzlaff presented the Financial Statement: Annual revenues were \$14, 671.37 versus expenditures of \$18,466.23, with a year-end

bank balance of \$13,639.44.

Thanks were expressed for our faithful bookkeeper, Ellie Janz.

Chronicle editor Dave Toews reported on highlights of the past year, including articles that were well received. He expressed his appreciation for the authors and for the Chronicle volunteer staff: Carolyn Wilson, copy editor; Harvey Wiehler, layout; Bill Janzen, printing and distribution; Ellie Janz, membership list and mailing; and Dave Toews, reporter and editor. There were 108 current members, with 190 copies of the Chronicle distributed including to Canadian and American churches and organizations. In addition, the MHSA Facebook group administered by Bill Franz and Dave Toews already has 337 members.

Archivist Ted Regehr reported on the MHSA Archives and Library at the MCC Alberta office in Calgary. MCC had upgraded their computer system and donated their surplus computers to MHSA. Rudy Kaethler, one of our MHSA volunteers, played an integral role. Jess Willard of Valiant Hosting is now hosting the MHSA website, taking over from Leon Janzen of Vanadium. Ted thanked the faithful volunteers that come in on Thursdays.

Upcoming events: Katie Harder gave an update on the Russlaender Trans Canada Train Trip being planned for 2023, to celebrate the 100-year anniversary of the Mennonites that arrived in Canada from the Soviet Union. The train trip is planned for July 1 to July 16, with a stop in Edmonton. Planning is underway for an excursion to the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Didsbury, with a supper in Linden. The planning

(See MHSA on page 15)

(MHSA from page 14)

committee consists of Katie Harder, Chair; Vice Chair, Dave Toews; Secretary, Ken Matis; and Brian Hildebrandt, Gary Friesen, and Ted Regehr.

Elections: Existing board members were re-elected and/or confirmed with Ken Matis as Chair, Katie Harder as Vice Chair, Jake Retzlaff as Treasurer, Bill Franz (now as Secretary), David Jeffares, Dave Toews, and Ernie Wiens. New board members elected are Henry Epp, James Friesen, Dave Neufeldt, Brent Wiebe, and Henry Wiebe.

Treasurer Jake Retzlaff presented the 2020 budget, projected to be a balanced budget of \$18,700.

The AGM was adjourned, followed by a short business meeting of the new board.

Prepared for The Chronicle by Bill Franz, Secretary, with the assistance of the minutes of the AGM from Jake Driedger, former Secretary. ❖

The Janzen Makhno Connection

By Margie Koop

My mother was Nettie Zacharias; my father was Henry Janzen. The Zacharias clan wrote things down and kept wonderful historic records. I studied and treasured the life journeys and stories that were recorded.

On the other hand we knew so little about the Janzen side. There were really only snatches and pic-



Margie Koop

es of oral history that were passed on to us. This created in me a deep sadness and a longing to know more. When both our Dad, Henry Janzen and his only surviving brother Dietrich Janzen passed, my sister Evelyn Roden and I decided to write a

small tribute to our Grandmother Janzen and the two sons who survived and came to Canada with her and her father. We wrote as much oral history as we remembered, a picture of Grandma with Dad and Uncle Dick, and submitted it to Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian (SMH). The article was published in the October 2010 issue. With the submission of this tribute, all thoughts of it seemed to leave our minds, until we saw the publication in writing. It pleased us to read and remember.

Shortly after this article was published, Evelyn received an email from a young man named Sean Patterson, who was studying at the University of Manitoba. [Sean Patterson is the author of the book *Makhno and Memory*, published by U of M Press]

He had already done much research on Russian and Ukrainian history and was at that time working on his Master's Thesis. This research focused on the years from 1917 – 1921, the revolution, Mennonites and the Ukrainian Anarchist Nestor Makhno. He was curious about the varying dialogues about this man. Some writers glorified him as a savior of the peasants and the Mennonites and others saw him as the devil himself. Patterson's interest in our family came from the knowledge that Makhno had worked on the Janzen estate of Silberfeld, when he was very young. So began my journey with Sean Patterson as well as our first real knowledge of Janzen history. In the following weeks and months I remained in contact with him as he provided historic information of the Janzen family and their



Dietrich (Dick) and Henry Janzen ca. 1941



Dick, Maria Janzen the author's grandmother & Henry ca. 1918

(See Janzen on page 16)

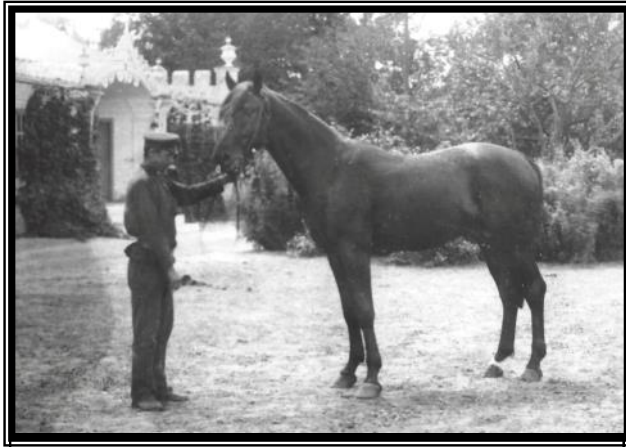
(Janzen from page 15)

estate of Silberfeld.

Meanwhile Evelyn received two more emails connecting to our Janzen ancestry. One came from a Janzen descendant named Irina, a historian living in St. Petersburg Russia. A second communication came from her brother Willi Janzen who lives in Germany. They had both read the tribute to our Grandma Janzen in the SMH publication. They recognized Maria and were also anxious to connect with their Janzen relatives. They told us that their great grandfather Wilhelm Janzen was an uncle to our grandfather Abram Janzen. We were overjoyed. Janzen ancestry and historic research was unfolding before us and we began trying to document all the new things we were learning about the Janzen family. Communication with our relatives in Russia and Germany continues into the present. From this we recognized the importance of writing our stories, our family histories. Through this short article in the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian we connected with relatives in Europe and furthered my involvement with Patterson.

Riding along with the excitement of new family information came the emotional turmoil of the shadows of ancestral history. Autobiographical writings by Makhno, as well as writings by those who supported anarchy and his cause to free the oppressed, portrayed a man with some sort of a moral compass. This was totally in opposition to anything I had ever been told about Nestor Makhno. An inner battle raged within me, a type of revolution. I was looking into a mirror of questioning all.

I was both grateful and resistant to gentle guidance from Patterson as he provided information on many levels to my flailing mind and heart. Most difficult for me was Makhno's own description of mistreatment

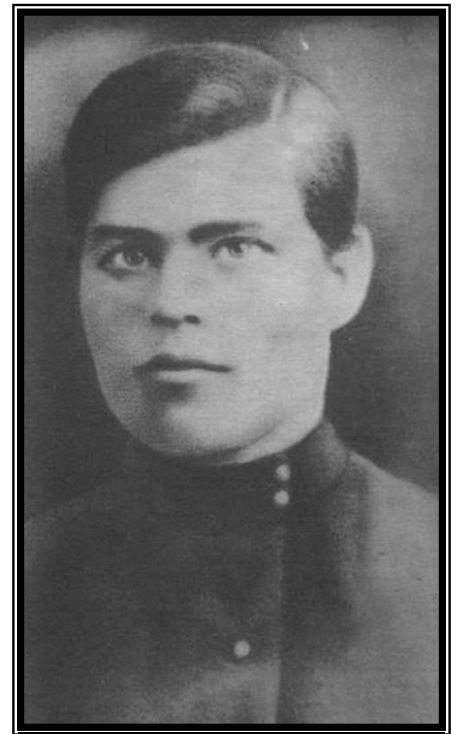


Silberfeld Estate Manor House,
horse and trainer

by the Silberfeld overseers abusing and beating him when he was only a child. My heart was breaking and questions flowed over me in this mirage of feelings.

"Did cruelty on the estate of Silberfeld play a part in creating the rage and monstrous behaviors that unfolded in him as he got older? What part did our ancestors play in creating such violence in this boy/man?"

"On the other hand, is his de-



Student Nestor Makhno
age 18, 1906

scription of what happened accurate? I can't ask the overseer for his explanation of how the story unfolded." I know that perceptions vary greatly when different people describe events.

"What about the stories we had been told about Makhno and our grandfather Abram Janzen being childhood friends. This seemed possible since Gulyai-Polye, (Makhno's home) and Silberfeld,

(See Janzen on page 17)



Grandparents Abram and Maria
(Friesen) Janzen Apr 9, 1909

(Janzen from page 16)

(our grandfather's home), were only a few kilometers apart. We were told of how a raid was halted by Makhno when he recognized Grandma Janzen hiding out in a house the family had escaped to. I remember Uncle Dick speaking with drama that Makhno had said in a loud clear voice, "Don't take anything here and don't hurt anyone." What about that story? That's what we were told! Does a child remember accurately?

My thoughts felt like a river overflowing, but eventually, I did acquire the courage to begin to dwell with the many layers of this story. As my interactions with Patterson evolved so did my trust in his diligent research and his passion for accuracy in everything he wrote. Certainly this was part of becoming more equipped to sit with the dichotomies of those years with a little less resistance.

It is easy to skip over the larger historic events, almost forgetting them in good times. We live our lives assuming things will always be as they are, until terrible things begin happening and we ask WHY?

Patterson writes in his book *Makhno and Memory*, the book that flowed out of his original thesis and was published in 2020, and takes us back to the early events that brought colonists to South Russia:

Catherine the Great's invitation to the Mennonites seemed like a godsend in the face of Prussian persecution. In New Russia, an "empty" frontier was found where separation from the world could be

maintained. However, in this very drive to avoid the secular world and create a peaceable community, the Mennonites found themselves embedded inside an imperial system that had imposed serfdom and perpetuated stark socio-economic inequalities. The wealth and land acquired by Mennonites over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries uniquely positioned them to draw the enmity of the neighbouring land-hungry peasant population.

(*Makhno and Memory*, Sean Patterson, pg150)

My father was only nine years old when they faced the turbulent sea to come to Canada. He spoke very little of those days but did say two things, one was that we should always be careful when there were inequalities, "because," he said, "this would eventually lead to revolution."

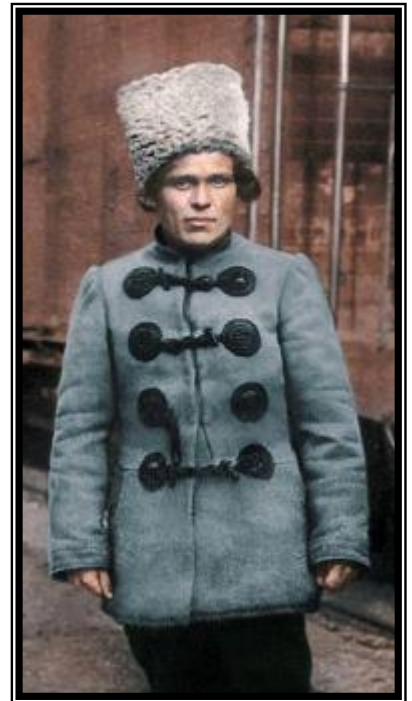
The second was that his main memory of Russia was of hiding in basements, covering his ears so as not to hear the gunshots, and fearing who of his family might be dead now. He never wanted to return to this place in the world and he never did. Evelyn, Rudy and I visited Ukraine only after our father's death.

Sean Patterson and his wife moved to Edmonton to continue his doctoral work and publish his book. It was good to be able to meet in person after much communication over phone and emails. I welcomed the invite to provide a book review. [Margie Koop wrote a book review on *Makhno and Memory* for the Oct 2020 *Heritage Posting* No.97] In that review I wrote:

The strength of this book is related to the courage of the author to explore and engage in telling a difficult story from various perspectives and experiences. This requires much patience, flexibility, and openness. A great divide keeps creeping into the hearts and minds of all who are trying to understand and know at least pieces of the truth of those revolution years.

Patterson writes in the introduction of his book (the quotes below), *Makhno and Memory, Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine's Civil War, 1917-1921*:

My research into Nestor Makhno and his movement's conflict with Mennonites of southern Ukraine has led me to confront a multitude of competing histories, memories, myths, and legends all jostling to assert their own unique perspective. (Introduction pg1)



Anarchist Nestor Ivanovich
Makhno ca. 1918

(See Janzen on page 18)

(Janzen from page 17)

On page 2, he goes on to describe that his personal relationship with this topic embodies this narrative divide. He was fascinated by the philosophical writings of Russian Anarchist Peter Kropotkin and the potential good in such a movement. As he spoke with Mennonites and heard their stories he says on page 3, that:

“I was forced to quite radically recalibrate my assessment of Makhno’s movement, but I also wanted to understand the motivations behind the attacks.” (Introduction pg 3)

Therein unfolded his desire “to tell a difficult story from two sides.” (Introduction pg 1)

The author’s ability to open his heart to listen to all the conflicting stories compels the reader to do the same and invites us to embrace the strength and bravery of our ancestors as well as the depth of sorrow, tragedy and human frailty. It is all part of life and I am deeply grateful to those who went before us and showed us both the dark and light of our humanity.

Patterson states, "My father, of Protestant Irish-Canadian heritage, converted as a young adult and later pastored at a Mennonite Brethren Church. My mother, from a German Baptist family, in 1915 were deported from Ukraine to Siberia where they were taken in by a sympathetic Mennonite family. While I don’t identify as a “Mennonite” per se I do have a deep personal history with and respect for Mennonite culture, faith, and history." (source Mennotoba.com, Aug 17, 2020)

Margie Koop is a retired Registered Nurse and Recreation Therapist. She is also a wife, mother, grandmother, and great grandmother, roles she will never retire from. Margie returned to school at St. Stephen’s College in 2004 and attained her Master’s of Theological studies. She wrote the book called “The Wounded Wing,” which was published in 1993. She continues her interest in writing as well as doing ancestral research. Margie is married to Rudy Koop, they live in Sherwood Park Alberta. ❖

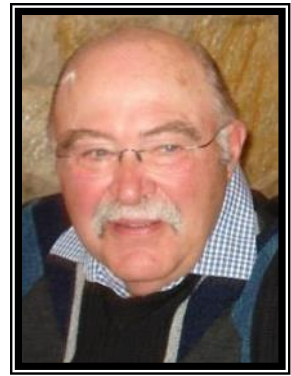
Peter Gerhard Kroeger a Tribute **Dec 10, 1943 - Oct 20, 2020**

Peter was born in Dundurn, SK to Peter and Louise Kroeger and spent his early years on the family farm. He attended school in Dundurn and graduated high school from Rosthern Junior College. He completed the Renewable Resources Technology program at SIAST (now Saskatchewan Polytechnic) and later received B.Sc. and B.Com. degrees from the Universities of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

His work career spanned many years with the Federal Government in various departments: Agriculture Canada, Environment Canada, and finally Parks Canada, where he was a financial officer.

Peter had a lifelong passion for Mennonite and family history and genealogy. At

Kroeger family reunions he was always front and centre with his family tree charts and knowledge of genealogy dating



Peter Kroeger

back to the 1500s. In 2010 he went on the Mennonite Heritage Cruise in Ukraine to walk in the footsteps of the Kroeger family where they had lived until the early 1920s. Upon his return he wrote a number of articles for the MHSA Chronicle on the Kroeger family’s sojourn in Russia and journey to Canada.

Peter was dedicated to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta where he served in a number of capacities as well as being a long time member. He worked as a volunteer with Judith Rempel when the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization records were put online and was also a long time board member of the MHSA.

He was a photographer and a traveler, making many trips across Canada, the US, Europe and Asia. His photography collection included pictures of almost all remaining grain elevators in Saskatchewan. Peter loved the outdoors: fishing, camping, hiking, and enjoying nature. He had a special enthusiasm for annual hunting seasons.

Peter will be missed at MHSA events and family gatherings for the camaraderie and memories he created and shared.

By Dave Toews, cousin, friend and fellow pilgrim. ❖

Quo Vadis - Ubi Eras

By Ernie Wiens

It is cold outside. The last time I looked it was -28 C (Feb 11, 2021). It's been that cold all day. Not much accom-



Ernie Wiens

plished today, but there really was no good reason to do so. I feel old and useless; well, maybe just redundant.

Before me are two books. The first is a yellow soft cover edition with the title Quo Vadis and the date 1960. The second looks more elaborate, white with an embossed hard cover. The title is the same. The year is 1961. These are the yearbooks from the two years I spent at the Alberta Mennonite High School (AMHS). At the end of June it will be 60 years since the class of '61 graduated. Quo Vadis seemed so appropriate back then. "Where are you going?" Today it seems so redundant, and Ubi Eras, "Where have you been?" seems more meaningful. I open the first book, the yellow one, and the clock spins back to a time when life lay before us, and there was no need to look back beyond the year that just was. I turn the pages gathering memories until page 38, my favorite page - The Basketball Team - and lose myself in the events of that year and that team and how it was that I came to the AMHS. But first a prelude.

For many High School Students, Grade 10 was an epiphany of sorts, maybe even a kind of Rubicon crossing. Classes had num-



AMHS Basketball Team 1961, Ernie Wiens 2nd from Right

bers: Math10, Science10, Typing10. All were prerequisites to something coming, something more advanced. Schooling suddenly had a purpose, something important, almost urgent, three more years! At the same time many other things were also happening: body and hormone changes, the advent of self-consciousness, embarrassments, body odor, sexual identities, and attractions.

And then there were high school sports teams, and in Coaldale winter meant Basketball! What a total wonder when three Grade 10s were chosen. "We must think of the team's future" was Coach Charlie Bryant's explanation. We were the RI Baker Gophers, and we were good! Or so we thought. Coach Bryant had higher aspirations; he had set his sights on the Southern Alberta Playoffs in spring. Maybe even the Alberta Playoffs? Maybe the Alberta High School B League Championship? And so he worked us, and he worked us hard! In order to make us want to get better, he arranged for a number of exhibition games with the vaunted "A" League.

Full of bravado we boarded the bus on a Friday afternoon for the hour-long trip to Stirling, a town much smaller than Coaldale near the US border. We learned how to lose that night! When the final buzzer sounded, they had doubled the score on us; we were never really in the game. On the seemingly endless trip home and for many days to come, I could think of only two names, Jimmy Eaves and Richard Nelson, and how two individuals could so completely dominate a basketball game, and be so much better than us.

Jimmy Eaves was small, my size, but he was fast and quick, agile and

(See Quo Vadis on page 20)



Ernie Wiens 1961

(Quo Vadis from page 19)

smart - a total fast-break specialist. He alone scored nearly half their points.

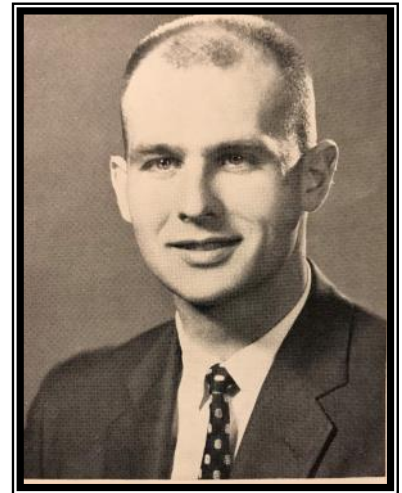
Richard Nelson was tall (6 ft) and athletic, and could he jump! Our center was 6 ft 2 inches, but Richard out-jumped him by 8 inches. There was no contest. He ruled the backboards, both on offence and defence. On offence he had little trouble out muscling and out jumping any of our centers. It seems to me he scored the rest of the points. On defence he would come down with the rebound and fire the ball up court without even looking while Jimmy was already streaking for the basket.

Before the season ended, I knew what I had to do. Starting in fall I was going to be on the starting five of the RI Baker Gophers, and I was going to be the fast-break specialist. The model was crystal clear. I would follow the pattern exactly.

We did get to the Southern Alberta B League Finals that spring and seemed to have the upper hand in the qualifying game. With five minutes left to play, the Cardston Kittens started to hiss and then to growl and finally to roar; the Gophers had no response and backed down. Our lead dwindled, and then we were tied. At the buzzer, a corner shot went in. Cardston went to Edmonton to play in the Provincials. The RI Baker Gophers went home.

I never got to play another game with the Gophers, and Charlie Bryant had to find a fast-break specialist elsewhere. In the fall I started Grade 11 at the Alberta Mennonite High School. I did however get to play against my nemesis and idol Jimmy Eaves and his cousin Richard Nelson. I did not enjoy the meeting or the game. This is how it happened.

As I look back at the assembled team on page 38, I smile at the memories it provokes - the way they ran, their favorite shots, their enthusiasm, their weaknesses. Missing from the picture is our coach Jake Hubert, and there in lies the story. In retrospect it's quite probable that the team was not very good, but we didn't know that. Our facility was not that good either, basically a Quonset with a cement floor! The cement finishers had done a wonderful job, but it was just not hardwood. I didn't quite know what to make of Coach Hubert's practices. They certainly were not like Coach Bryant's. What I didn't know was that Coach Hubert had taught in Warner the previous year, a stone's throw from Stirling, and had some kind of a position managing the Warner School basketball team. I was not aware



Coach Jake Hubert

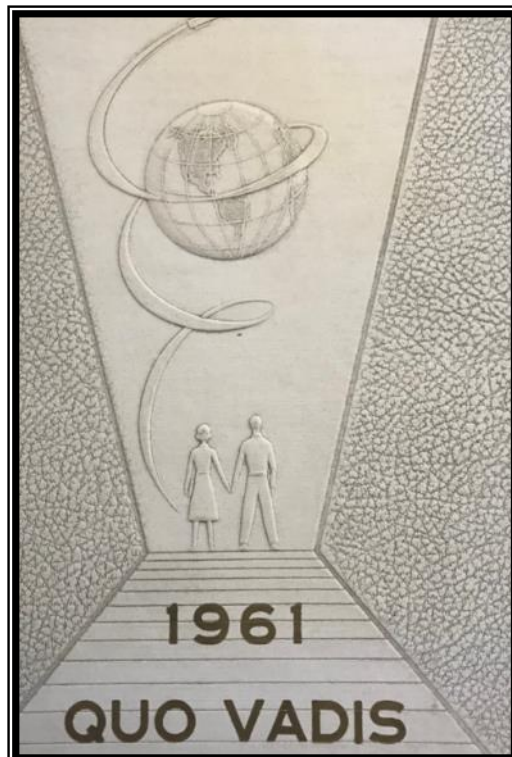
that Coach Hubert knew the Stirling coach very well.

My surprise was total when Coach Hubert announced that our first game would be against Stirling. I was not ready, my ankle cast had just come off the week before, and I knew intuitively that the team was not ready. But Friday came anyway. My initial premonition that we were going to get "killed" proved factual, but they were quite nice about it. At the opening jump ball, Richard out jumped our center by ten inches, as he knew would, and tipped the ball up-court where the streaking Jimmy had an easy lay-up. They got even better after that. I don't know for sure what the final score was, but 93 to 21 seems to ring a bell. But like I said, they were quite nice about everything. They made no comments about our skill level. They did not mention our gym. They failed to acknowledge the lack of cheerleaders.

Getting "killed" in a basketball game is not the only memory that my yearbook affords. It was quite traumatic at the time, but it does have some perspective now.

There are many, many more mem-

(See Quo Vadis on page 21)



Quo Vadis Year Book 1961

(*Quo Vadis* from page 20)

ories, and all of them are better. Some are even wonderfully romantic, but then what does a seventeen year old know.

My story however has an epilogue. In the early 1990's, my office manager teased me that my fame was spreading, and that we had a referral from a surgeon in Lethbridge. When I asked who that might be, she said she would look it up. When I subsequently asked the patient's name, she said, "Mrs. Eaves from Stirling."

Before long, I once again met my former idol and his wife. When the professional issues had been dealt with, I invited the Eaves into the office, and we had a very nice visit. After high school Jimmy started farming. He married his wife, who was quite a bit younger, and "yes" they had a large Mormon family, and "yes" some of them had played high school basketball. He himself played some recreational sports but nothing very competitive. I asked about Richard Nelson. He said Richard was fine and also still lived in Stirling.

Finally I asked Jimmy point blank, "Why were you and Richard such good basketball players in high school?"

He gave a self-deprecating laugh. "As you know we are Mormons and Mormon children have to go to church all day on Sundays. At the Stake House (Mormon house of worship) we had a gym, so we played basketball every Sunday afternoon for as long as I can remember. We taught ourselves some tricks and plays, and then when we got to high school we brought them to the team."

I was flabbergasted. "No high-

powered coaching? No driven parents? No innate need to succeed?" Jimmy laughed again "No," he said, "we were just having fun."

The Mennonite Heritage House library is looking for donations of year books (all years) from the former Alberta Mennonite High School [Quo Vadis] and the R.I. Baker High School [Milestones] both in Coaldale, Alberta. R.I. Baker became a middle school only in the mid 1960s. If you have books to donate contact Ernie Wiens at elwiens@yahoo.ca. ❖

Saved from the Russian Famine in 1922

By Dave Hubert

Starting in 1921 and continuing into 1922 and 1923 there was a massive famine in Russia. This famine was brought on by massive mismanagement of the economy by the new communist government headed by Vladimir Lenin. The famine resulted in an estimated 5,000,000 people starving to death in European Russia. My grandfather, J.B. Janz, told me that in an effort to feed the restive urban populations of Moscow, Leningrad (St. Petersburg), and other large cities, the communists demanded that the peasants bring their horses and cattle to the railway station during the winter months. The cattle were needed for providing milk and calves for the people in the Molotschna, and the horses were draft animals to pull the farm machinery to prepare the seed beds for the spring planting and bring in the harvest. The animals were brought to the railway station, slaughtered, and stored in frozen piles during the winter months, but they were not transported to the cities. In spring, with the return of warmer weather, the carcasses rotted.¹

Similarly, the communists demanded that all the stored grain and potatoes be brought to the railway station. When the peasants protested that some of the grain and potatoes were needed for spring seeding, the communists, who were urban people and did not understand agriculture, seized the grain and the potatoes. My mother, Agnes Janz, reported that in the winter of 1922, hungry people would peel and eat the potatoes, saving only the eye and a small bit of the potato skin around the eye, for planting in spring.

After the winter and the confiscations of 1920 and 1921 many peasants who still had seed grains planted only what they thought their families would need and hid what they harvested. They did not grow any wheat and barley for sale. Predictably, by 1922 there was a famine throughout Russia,



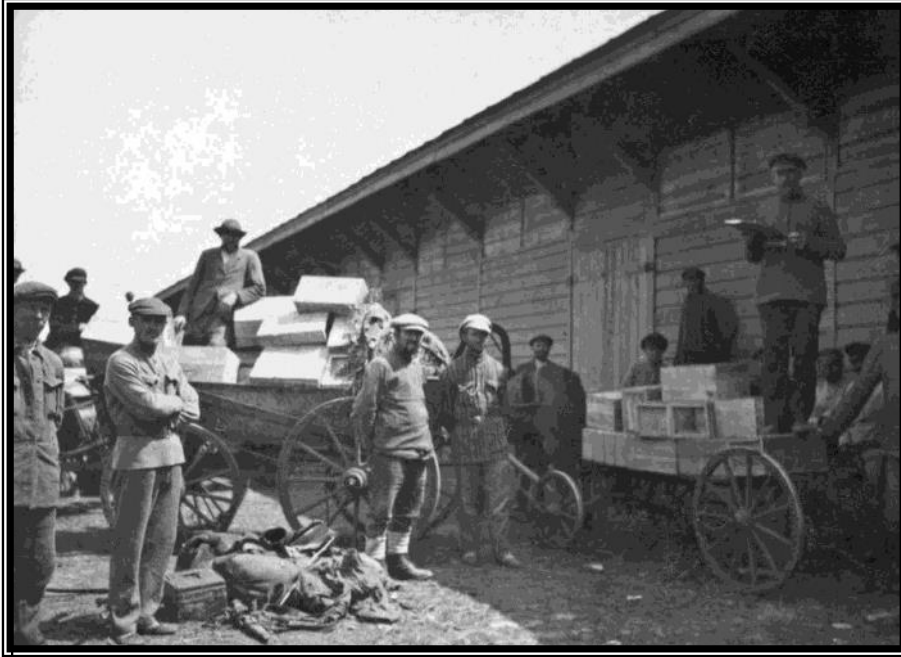
Agnes Janz and her sister Helen shortly after arriving in Canada

(See Famine on page 22)

(Famine from page 21)

and as time went on, this famine intensified.

In addition, when the communists took over, they issued new currency, and the old currency, which featured such notables as Peter the Great and



Unloading relief packages in Halbstadt

Catherine the Great on the bills, became worthless. This caused further financial hardship as people lost the purchasing power of any of the Czarist money they had saved.

When North American Mennonites heard about the terrible conditions in Russia, they organized a relief effort to feed their brothers and sisters in the faith and, in many cases, their own extended families, in this time of terrible suffering. This relief effort gave birth to MCC.

By the summer of 1922, Mother's family was experiencing severe hunger. My Uncle Jake, who was nine years old when the first of the famine relief arrived in September 1922, was the family member worst affected by the hunger. He already had a distended abdomen, one of the symptoms of severe malnutrition.²

By September 1922 all the arrangements to set up MCC feeding stations in Molotschna were in place.

My grandfather gave me four "Delivery Orders" (vouchers) that he used to get food from the "American Mennonite Relief agency—Food Remittance Department." The first two, both for \$10, are dated September 23, 1922 at Aleksandrovsk. One was a donation from a C. E. Classen from Newton, Kansas, and the other was from an H. Sudermann from Hillsboro, Kansas. Both were signed by Peter Nickel, Halbstadt.

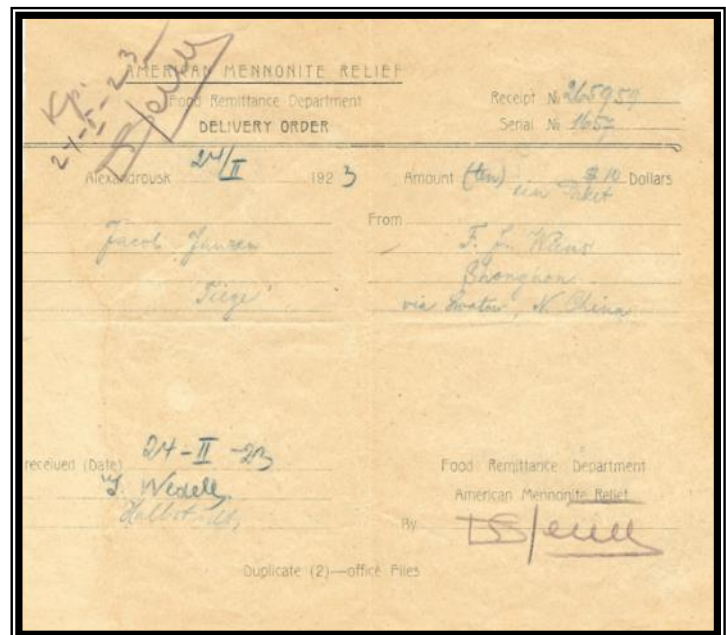
The third "Delivery Order", dated October 16, 1922, was as a result of a \$10 donation from Rev. F. F. Wiens, Hillsboro, Kansas. It was signed by W. Toews, Halbstadt.

The fourth and final "Delivery Order", also for \$10, but designated "ein Paket" (one package) was from F. F. Wiens, Shangkon, via Swatow, North China. It is dated February 24, 1923 and signed by G. Wedel, Halbstadt. The contents of the "Paket" were listed on the back of the "Delivery Order": 27 ½ lbs. cornmeal; 15 ½ lbs. sugar, 10 lbs. lard, 10 lbs. flour, 1 lb. tea, and 19 cans of evaporated milk.

You can see the "Delivery Order" is yellowed with age.

F.F. Wiens was my grandmother's cousin and a missionary in China. Apparently, he made the first donation when he was preparing to go to China and the second after he had arrived in China.

These four "Delivery Orders" represent food that saved Mom's



American Mennonite Relief, Food Remittance Department, Delivery Order

(See Famine on page 23)

(Famine from page 22)

family from starvation and death. In 1924, Grandfather Janz and his family left “dies Land der Shrecken” “this land of terror” and emigrated to Canada.

I also received from my grandfather several Russian banknotes. These include a 500-ruble bill and two 100-ruble bills of Czarist money, dated 1912 and 1910, respectively. The 500-ruble note is pictured. At the right side of this note is a blank section. If this section is held up against a light, watermarks that are an exact replica of Peter the Great's image on the left side of the bill, appear. These watermarks made counterfeiting more difficult.

Pictured also are three other banknotes. These notes offer another interesting historical tale. The larger one is a 10,000 ruble note issued in 1918 by White Army counter revolutionaries who were trying to restore the Czarist government. The 10,000 ruble denomination of this note is evidence of runaway inflation.

The 500 ruble note was issued by the communists. It is truly revolutionary money and on its face is propaganda in seven languages, stating “WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!” “PROLETARIER ALLER LAENDER VEREINIGT EUCH!” “PROLETARIER ALLER LAENDER VEREINIGT EUCH!”.

The third note is an undated 5 kopek bill that, like the money issued by the counter revolutionary white army, features the Romanov double eagle. With the exception of the 500 ruble note issued by the communists, this money was all worthless when my family left Russia in 1924.

(See Famine on page 24)



Czarist 500 Ruble note with blank section on the right 1912



White Army 10,000 Ruble note 1918



Communist 500 Ruble note with Hammer and Sickle, undated

(Famine from page 23)



5 Kopeck White Army note, undated

- 1) Grandfather didn't tell me which railway station this was, but I presume it was the station at Lichtenau in Molotschna.
- 2) The Janzes have a longevity gene. My mother lived to 103, her sister Lydia to 102, and her brother John to 98. Uncle Jake died at 86, and I have always attributed his relatively early death, at least partly, to the hunger he suffered when he was a child. ❖



Authors mother, Agnes Janz, taught school at Fox, Alberta 1931 - 32

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta 2010-2020 a Decade of Change and Continuity

By Dave Toews

Any change, even change for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomfort.

Arnold Bennett

Even before this decade started, change was happening at Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). In May 2009 the decision was made to have the Calgary office open from 10 AM to 4 PM on Thursdays instead of Saturdays to allow the volunteers to have the weekends off. In the ten years since, MHSA has seen many more changes, some of which have involved substantial shifts in perspectives, personnel, and initiatives. Sadly, we have lost several good people along the way, but throughout there has been a steady and optimistic exploration of the possibilities that new ventures

may bring.

Such changes have been noticeable in the MHSA Newsletter (now The Chronicle), of which I am currently reporter and editor. As Russian Mennonites (Russlaender) we tend to be very aware of our history (some would say obsessed) and somewhat inward looking. After a prospective author declined to write an article about his family's experiences explaining, "That's just for you Russian Mennonites," a deliberate decision was made to be more inclusive. The Newsletter staff would solicit more stories from Mennonites by Choice (MBCs) and others.

This change in direction brought a wealth of articles and new perspectives from a variety of people of different origins: the Jeffares (Irish, English) and Fuhr (German, Galician) families; Irish cowboy poet Doris Daley; Chou Dang (Vietnamese); Will Loewen (Mexican Mennonite); Eun Hyun Gee (graduate from the Mennonite Vocational School after the Korean War); David Lefever (Huguenot); Glen Kauffman and Ike Glick (mission workers from the US who later made Canada their home); Ron Taniguchi (Japanese); Kathy Chalmers Dyck (French); Cathryn Heslop ("Tale of a Black Canadian Female"); and Alvin Lowrey (New England colonial roots with ties to the Mayflower).

In addition to articles on family history during this decade, we also had a short series on home-making consisting of "The History and Art of Mennonite Sewing" by Rita Dahl, "Gardening Through the Ages" by Laura Dyck and "The History and Art of Mennonite Cooking and Baking" by Kathy

(See Decade on page 25)

(Decade from page 24)

Peters. All were all well received.

On May 24, 2011, the sudden passing of Judith Rempel, MHSA office coordinator, archivist, and newsletter layout editor, began a series of losses of other key newsletter personnel: layout editor David Hildebrand died Jan 20, 2015, co-editor Lorne Buhr died Oct 2, 2016, and co-editor Dan Jack died July 17, 2017. (Subsequently, a number of people approached for these positions turned them down as it appeared accepting them could be fatal!) Since 2017 things have been fairly stable, however. Currently working with me on the Chronicle are Carolyn Wilson (copy editor), Ellie Janz (membership list and mailing), Harvey Wiehler (layout editor), and Bill Janzen (printing and mailing).

Change has been noticeable as well this decade in the makeup of MHSA itself. We lost two outstanding founding members and supporters with the deaths of Henry Goerzen (Jan 11, 2019) and Jake Harder (Oct 24, 2019). Henry was a man of faith and many talents. He was a farmer, collector/archivist, artist, leader, and organizer, and he had a passion for Mennonite history. Jake was also a man of faith, many gifts, and gumption. He was a carpenter, educator, director, and builder, and he shared Henry's passion for Mennonite history.

Several persons of vision, strength, and commitment have stepped up to chair our organization this decade. Vince Friesen, an educator, education administrator, and lay church worker, was soft spoken and well organized. Colin Neufeldt, a history professor, lawyer, and plumber, was efficient and

effective. Bill Janzen, an educator, administrator, and MCC mission worker, worked endlessly and had the difficult task of reorganizing the Calgary office after Judith's sudden passing. Dave Neufeldt, an engineer, manager, business partner, and founding member of the

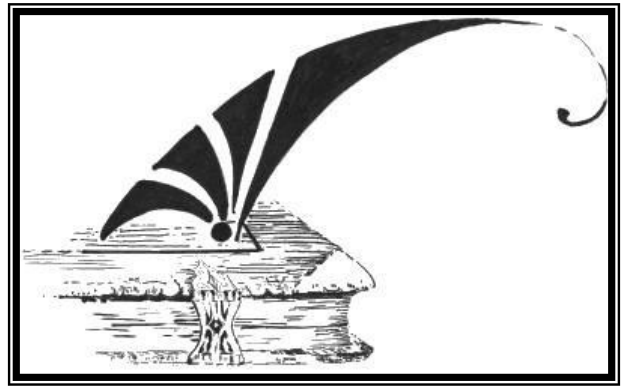
MHSA, was quiet and persevering. Our current chair is Ken Matis. A telecommunication professional, traffic librarian, and refugee settlement practitioner, Ken is conscientious and steady.

2017 and 2018 were particularly challenging yet exciting years MHSA took a major initiative to bring the *Along the Road to Freedom* art show to Alberta. It toured Edmonton, Calgary and Coaldale and was well attended in each of the three centers. In the paintings and words of Winnipeg artist Ray Dirks, the show took us along on the journeys of mothers and grandmothers, mostly widowed, who led or attempted to lead families out of the former Soviet Union to peace, freedom and safety in Canada, primarily during the chaotic aftermath of the Russian Revolution and in the midst of World War II.

The bi-annual spring and fall conferences of MHSA this past decade expanded horizons too with some challenging themes: Conscientious Objectors; DNA and Genealogy; Mennonite Sangerfests; Japanese and Mennonites of Southern Alberta; Mennonites, Nazis and the Holocaust; and Truth and Reconciliation. Conference attendance hit an all-time record high in Coaldale at the opening of the *Along the Road to Freedom* exhibit as Coaldale is home to many of the children and grandchildren of the women who came to Canada on this journey.

Behind the scene, in the MHSA archives, library, and office, Judith Rempel's death, the retirement of Irene Klassen in 2013, and the more recent retirement of Alice Unruh, who provided office computer tech support, did input for the Mennonite Archives Information Database (MAID) and was the MHSA webmaster, all left positions to fill. Archivist Ted Regehr ably stepped up to man the office, archives and library with the assistance of Peter Dyck, Jake Retzlaff, and Ingrid Thiessen. Archivist Jim Bowman worked part-time to help alleviate the huge backlog that had accumulated and continues to volunteer. Rudy Kaethler moved into Alice's role as computer tech support, and Bill Franz became the new webmaster. Technological changes happened during this period as well. The website host was changed from Vanadium Web Design to Valiant Hosting & Security, and all the computers were replaced with very good used units donated by MCC Alberta. Amidst all this change we are grateful to know Ellie Janz is in the office to answer the phone, act as bookkeeper and assists treasurer Jake Retzlaff with the payment of invoices, deposits, and monthly financial statements. (Ellie also served as treasurer from 2008-2014.)

From a personal perspective I have enjoyed and continue to enjoy all aspects of my involvement with the MHSA in the past decade and more



(See Decade on page 26)

(Decade from page 25)

despite the challenges that come with change. As reporter and editor of the Newsletter/Chronicle since 2007, I have met and talked to all of the authors and contributors of the stories and articles. I have also enjoyed board and committee work and organizing the *Along the Road to Freedom* tour.

To quote Dr. Royden Loewen from the Dec. 2020 Mennonite Historian, "*History is the story that makes you who you are. I am never bored talking to anyone, that is, if they allow me into their stories. Every person has a story that is complex, consequential and compelling.*"

Change is the only constant; we are always evolving. ❖

Menno Moto: A journey across the Americas in search of my Mennonite identity

By Cameron Dueck

Reviewed By Harold Wiens

How does one explore one's traditions, question "who I was" and search for one's Mennonite identity while travelling across the Americas straddling a Kawasaki motorcycle?

This is what author Cameron Dueck, whose journey takes him from Canada to Argentina visiting Mennonite settlements, sets out to do. The extent to which the presence of a motorcycle would encourage local people to respond to a writer's probing questions is in itself a challenge. In Paraguay, a bike would be an acceptable means of transportation, whereas in Bolivia and Argentina where separateness is highly valued, a motorcycle would represent too easy an access to an already encroaching world. In southwestern Ontario in the '50 and '60, a Mennonite on a motorcycle could be considered an *auffefollna*, (one who fell away).

Cameron Dueck, the writer, is a professional. The book is very well written and informative, presenting at times information not easy to hear yet always interesting. The material based on a journalist's personal observation is also seen through the eyes of a Mennonite who knows the background of his subjects very well. At times, his probing questions (Paraguay) hint at potential sociological problems the hosts appear to be unaware of; at other times (Mexico), the writer clearly describes threatening situations where the scarcity (or abuse) of water threatens Mennonite economic stability, while in Bolivia, the breakdown of ethical standards has allowed corruption by locals and Mennonites alike to create a situation the writer doesn't even attempt to address.

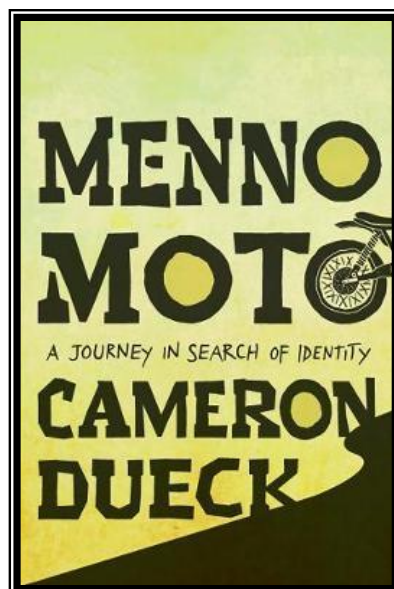
What habits, values, cultural practices could contribute to the discovery of one's

Mennonite identity? Perhaps the use of *Plautdietsch* (Low German), the language still common among most Mennonite groups. Food, just the mention of *Borscht* (cabbage soup), *Zwieback* (buns) would summon nostalgic, warm memories. Add *Schmaunfatz* (cream gravy) to the *Glomms Vereneke* (cottage cheese perogies) and you've got a real winner. In Guatemala he responds to a suggestion to try a sausage bun, and to his surprise discovers *Foarma Worscht* (farmer sausage). This unexpected surprise allows him to discover and connect with a Mennonite group he didn't know existed. On other occasions he orients himself by following men who wear *Schlaub'betje* (overalls with bibs). The universal hospitality he finds, even to a motorcycle rider is gratifying.

They "...took me into their homes, gave me a bed to sleep in and food to eat. They guided me to hotels and negotiated discounts on my behalf. They helped me back to my feet after I crashed, offered local remedies for my maladies, and pointed men in the right direction. They lent me tools and fixed my bike for me. On the colonies, they did all these things even as I kept asking uncomfortable questions, badgering them for insights into their lives".

Assimilation with local culture versus isolation from the outside world are conflicting ideas encountered by the writer. Even where limited assimilation had taken place the impression is left that Mennonites are different, better(?) than locals - in one instance, the ugly term racist is even used. Nowhere is this tension more strongly apparent than in Belize, where the Spanish Lookout Colony that promotes education and assimilation even allowing intermarriage

(See *Moto* on page 27)



(Moto from page 26)

between Mennonites and local people, is sharply contrasted to the neighbouring Lower Barton Creek Colony that attempts to escape modern society, and eventually hell, and restricts education to bible memorization, hymn singing, basic arithmetic, reading and writing. Electricity, cars, and modern conveniences are also forbidden. "The less a child learned, the fewer questions they asked and the easier it was to ensure they followed tradition".

The reader is left to answer the question of what happens now?

Could problems encountered by Mennonites (e.g. Mexico) have been avoided?

When the going gets tough, do Mennonites simply move on in search of "more land, more cattle, more wealth" and seek another *Privilegium*, a negotiated agreement with a new government guaranteeing certain privileges (e.g. pacifism and a degree of isolation from indigenous people)? On the one hand, Mennonites have drained swamp land and made marginal soil fertile. They have certainly improved agricultural practices thereby expanding food production. On the other hand, were concerns of indigenous people sufficiently considered, have environmental issues been addressed? Also, what impact have cleared land and modern agricultural practices had upon wildlife?

This book was very enjoyable to read. The lifestyle of several groups (Argentina) appears idyllic to anyone prepared to fit into the local way of living and adopt their practices. Unfortunately, all too frequently the lifestyles and values of the people described in this book have led to problems for which there are few, if any, easy answers. I look forward to reading the next book by Cameron Dueck. ❖

Letters to the Editor

Hello Dave,

Dec 18, 2020

Thank you for the fine publication that you are editing. I read with pleasure the October issue with Cathryn Heslep and Alvin Lowrey on the front page. It piqued my interest as to what they would share. And there is more to read from Anne Friesen and Abe Janzen etc... It is very interesting. And yes I found it under the heap of important stuff on my desk cleared because of COVID restrictions to stay home! Many projects are being done. There are more to go in January.

Just wanted you to know that it is appreciated to have other histories than the Russian Mennonite connection although that is my historical connection and I have done the Ukrainian Trek in 2004 for the 200th anniversary with the large contingent from Lendrum Mennonite Church.

Blessings to Marion and you as you celebrate Christmas in your own domicile. We will do the same.

Helena Fitzsimmons

Edmonton

Hi Dave,

October 2020

Thanks for encouraging me to write for the *MHSA Chronicle*. It was a challenge, a pleasure and an honour to be invited to write about my non-ethnic background as a Mennonite by Choice.

I spent last evening reading about 98% of the current issue and found it quite interesting, especially the parallel article by Kathryn Heslep beside mine. I met her late husband, Rick Garn, playing weekly concerts in the Saginaw Summer Band together in Michigan the year before either of us came to Canada. This was a professional band that also held workshops for high school band students throughout the summer.

It was such a surprise meeting by chance and discovering that we both had accepted jobs in Edmonton! Fond memories, especially when we both ended up attending Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church (now Lendrum Mennonite Church) and occasionally playing together with the church choir.

Sincerely, Al Lowrey

Edmonton

Mennonite Heritage Farm Update

Even though the Farm is resting somnolently under a blanket of snow, the calendar says spring is just around the corner. The Mennonite Heritage farm, Sherwood Park, Alberta, is ready.

This year we will be focused on gardening because of Covid -19. Our garden –plot rental pilot project was hugely successful last year, and we hope to expand it this summer.

More than 20 inquiries are being processed and the garden plots are ready and waiting.

Alberta Open Farm Days are scheduled for August 14 and 15 this summer. We were overwhelmed last year when over 1000 visitors came. Now knowing what to expect, we are prepared.

Check us out on the website [Alberta Open Farm Days](https://albertaopenfarmdays.ca) and save the dates. When the Covid restrictions are eased, give us a visit anytime.



Ernie Wiens (Farm manager)

780 991 7822 elwiens@yahoo.ca

Volendam: A Refugee Story

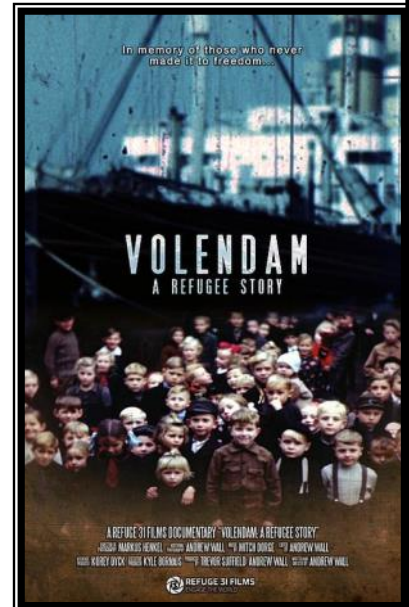
directed by Andrew Wall, DVD, 2020, 84 min

A feature documentary examining the story of the Russian Mennonite refugees who fled west with the retreating German Army during World War Two, desperate to escape the horror of Stalin's Soviet Union.

The Mennonites, with nowhere to go, would end up stranded in refugee camps throughout Holland and Germany in an unfolding two-year saga. Eventually, a risky plan, involving the American Military, multiple governments, aid organizations and the Queen of the Netherlands would come together. It all would hinge on an old transport ship called Volendam...

Told through personal interviews, reenactments and never before seen archival footage, production began in 2018 and included travel to the Volendam and Neuland Colonies in Paraguay.

WINNER: Best Feature Documentary at the Winnipeg Real to Real Film Festival – Feb 20 – 23, 2020



2021 Virtual Spring Conference on Zoom

Date: Saturday Apr 24, 2021

Time: 2 PM

Commentary and Q & A to follow with Historian Ted Regehr