



The MHSA Chronicle

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Han Un Trigj

By Vic Wiens

This article has been in the making for some time now, and when I last chatted with Dave Toews, he once more encouraged me to write a brief story of my family's immigration story to Canada. Unfortunately, my grandparents and parents are gone, so I need to write from memory, with no resources left to get exact dates. But I guess the exact timing is not as important as the events that transpired over a period of about 30 years. The article's title, "Han un Trigj, simply means "There and Back" It's a story of my family's



Vic Wiens

(See Han on page 9)

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A Journey Under God's Providence (part 1)

By Dave Loewen

Abraham Loewen was born in Schoenhorst, Chor-titza in 1874. His father, Jacob, died when he was two years old and his mother, when he was nine. Abraham went to live with his uncle and aunt, Jacob and Katharina (Loewen) Schellenberg, in Heuboden, Borozenko. Here is where he grew up, was baptized, and married to Maria Eitzen, daughter of Johann and Helena Eitzen of Schoenwiese. In 1904, Abraham and Maria Loewen, along with three young children, moved to Pretoria in the Orenburg Colony, where they farmed until 1926, when the pivotal decision was made to emigrate to Canada, along with nine of their 11 children.¹



Dave Loewen

A New Home

The SS Montrose arrived in Quebec City on 8 October 1926, and the following day the Loewen family disembarked. After another physical examination, they were greeted by Isaac Zacharias, a member of the Mennonite Board of Colonization, who had arrived with six railway cars ready to take the group, led by Peter P. Dyck, to Winnipeg.

Unlike the first leg of their journey, members of this immigrant group were now able to travel in regular



Abraham & Maria (Eitzen) Loewen family, 1926, in Russia
Back, l-r: Martin, Abram, Helena
Middle: Mary, Isaac, Henry
Front: Tina, Maria, Anna, Abraham, Daniel

(See Journey on page 4)

"Save the Dates"

Cross Canada Russlaender 100 Tour

July 2023

See the poster on the back page for more details

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

*Happy the man who fondly thinks of his forebears,
Who likes to tell the willing listener the tale
Of their achievements and greatness, and is glad
To see himself as a beautiful link in the chain.*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1837)

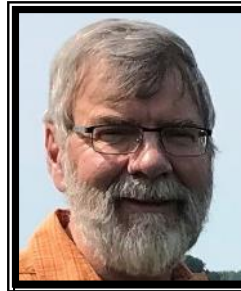


Dave Toews

First and foremost, let me tell you how happy and thankful I am that Bill Franz has volunteered to come on board as a member of the Chronicle staff. I had considered asking Bill to work on the Chronicle with us, but I'm glad I didn't. He has volunteered, which means he really wants to be here! Bill is a published author, belongs to a local writing group, and has recently started writing children's stories. When Bill still had a day job, he was a water management specialist and contributed to publications on topics relating to soil and water management. Bill has all the credentials.

Chronicle Staff Announcement

Welcome aboard to The MHSA Chronicle team, Bill Franz! Bill is no stranger to Chronicle readers, having contributed articles, a book review, and letters to the editor. Bill is a director with the MHSA, currently serves as secretary, and administers our Facebook group and website. He is a published author, belongs to a local writing group, and has recently started writing children's stories. Bill lives in Red Deer and will serve as Assistant Editor to Editor Dave Toews.



Bill Franz

On a more sombre note, it is my duty to report Carolyn Wilson's retirement from the Chronicle's volunteer staff. Carolyn did a yeoman's service as the copy editor of the Chronicle for the last seven years. Carolyn was especially astute at picking up what Mennonite writers take for granted. When we talk about the seven-hundred-year-old oak, we all know where and what it is and all it has meant to Mennonite people over the last 230 years. Carolyn said, "But what about us Englishers? We don't understand all those connotations." So, a light went on, and we changed our way of writing to be sure everyone understands what we are writing about. Thank you, Carolyn, for your years of dedication.

As always, I would like to thank all the authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated. It is a pleasure to work with you. The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at dmttoews@gmail.com or 780-218-7411 cell with any questions, suggestions or comments. ❖

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Jeremy Wiebe, La Crete

* Deceased

Chairman's Corner

by Katie Harder

The start of a new year is a time for reflection and remembering, holding memories close as we enter into another adventurous year ahead.



Katie Harder

For all of us, this past year was eventful; it had its highs and lows, conflict, celebrations, and many varied experiences; some faced loss of lives, while others would consider the year 2022 one of the best.

To each of us, 2022 will evoke different emotions. We finally had a year totally free of Covid restrictions, free to celebrate holidays and special events with no limitations. We could also mourn losses with our loved ones. We saw gasoline prices and inflation rocket, but in the midst of this all, God has been faithful.

Over the last year, MHSA has mourned valuable volunteers and board members, beginning with Rudy Kaethler in June, Peter Dyck in July of 2022, Irene Klassen and Ralph Dahl, both in January of 2023. All four significantly impacted MHSA, and their contributions and insights will not be forgotten.

Our spring conference once again took place over Zoom, and we viewed the film *I am a Mennonite*, Paul Plett's personal experience, exploring his Mennonite roots and faith from the Netherlands, Ukraine and finally, in Manitoba with over 100 viewers present.

We also celebrated the fact that we could once more meet in person this past fall. We were delight-

ed and encouraged that the Linden Holdeman community agreed to sponsor our Fall Conference. It was a wonderful day. Our main presenter, Brent Wiebe, really captivated the audience with his narratives and the virtual reality computer creations of the 19th-century Russian Mennonite story. Coffee, home-baked goodies, and a lot of fellowship completed an encouraging and uplifting day.

Due to Covid, we had to use our ingenuity to meet with board members and our wider community. Since our board members and constituents are scattered across the province, travel is always a concern; thus, learning to host these events online has been advantageous for us. Attendance at board meetings has increased, and hosting some events online has exposed us to a broader community. Having said that, we are thankful that the restrictions have come to an end and that meeting in person for conferences is once more acceptable.

While MHSA is small in numbers compared to the other provincial historical societies, we are an active board that is always thinking and planning ahead. This July, we will host the centenary Russlaender Tour with stops at the Ukrainian Village east of Edmonton; we will visit the Bergthal Mennonite Church, east of Didsbury, the oldest Mennonite Church in the province, and then travel on to Linden, where the Holdeman sponsored the Mennonites that came to Canada, and Alberta in the 1920s. We hope that many of you will take the time to come to the local venues to share the experience with us and the larger group from TourMagination.

Our Fall Conference in Edmonton will be reflective, telling the story of the Wymyschle Mennonites in Poland. Then in June of 2024, we are planning to pursue the long-awaited bus trip to La Crete. We also were informed recently that the Mennonite Heritage Village in Manitoba will be sponsoring an exhibit entitled "Leaving Canada: The Mennonite Migration to Mexico." This exhibit will be featured at the library in Taber, Alberta. More news will follow as to when that is happening.

In Deuteronomy 4:9, we are left with the reminder: "Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade away from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them. ❖"

Publications for Sale:

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

We are not makers of history. We are made by history.

Martin Luther King Jr.

(Journey from page 1)

passenger cars, a privilege not shared by all immigrant groups arriving in Canada that year. The family of Martin Loewen's future wife, Sara Neumann, who arrived later that year, would make the train journey to Saskatchewan in a boxcar. Food for the journey was provided for them in baskets.

On arrival in Winnipeg, the immigrants were met by a group of people representing the Mennonite churches, the Canadian Pacific Railway and the Canadian government. The authorities asked if anyone had relatives or friends they wished to join. Arrangements were made for these people to travel to these destinations. As Abraham Loewen had no relatives to go to, he asked where in Canada the best opportunities for work were. He wanted to go where there was work so that he could earn money immediately. He was told that there were Mennonites in Acme, Alberta, who were desperate for help harvesting their crops. An early snowfall had delayed the harvest, and now that the crops were dry, the farmers desperately needed help.

So the Loewens got back on the train and headed west to Calgary, some 900 miles away. When they reached Calgary, they were transferred to another train that took them to Acme, where they arrived on Wednesday, 13 October, on a sunny afternoon with daytime temperatures near freezing. The train stopped at Acme at 1 p.m. "The Holdeman farmers were waiting to take all the men to the field, and by 3 p.m. they were tying bundles," wrote Henry Loewen, one of the sons. Abraham Loewen and his three eldest sons, Abram, Martin and Isaac, were taken by some farmers first to a store to buy suitable clothing and then directly to the fields to harvest the grain.

The women and younger children were first taken to the Abram Klasses in Swalwell, where they were given a light lunch. They (the Wiens, Froese, Redekop and Loewen families) were then taken to various families who provided food and shelter until after the harvest. "My parents, Henry, myself, Dan and Annie," writes Tina Loewen, "were driven in a car (my first car ride) to D.D. Toews. We stayed here for a month. We lived in a small house in the Toews' yard. The others worked for various people in the area. Mother helped the Toews family with milking.

The Toews also helped the Loewens find a house to rent, about half a mile from Acme. They gave them a cow so they could have milk and butter, and that is where they lived during their first winter in Canada - Abraham and Maria Loewen and their five youngest children: Mary, Henry, Tina, Dan and Anna.

First Winter in Canada

After the harvest, the four eldest set out to find work, which they did, and it was with their employers that they lived that first winter. Henry, who was only a young boy but big and strong, got a job ploughing, as did his

brother Isaac. Henry was paid 50 cents a day, but Isaac received 53 cents because he had the added responsibility of harnessing the horses, because he was older and taller. In future years, Henry would always jokingly offer Isaac 3 cents if he would harness his horses for him.

That first winter my father, Martin, stayed with a couple where the husband was sick in bed. Martin was hired for \$10.00 plus room and board. His job was to milk the three cows and feed the other young stock, which he considered very little work. He remembers that he had quite a time with the horses, as he didn't speak English and the horses didn't understand Russian. The winter evenings were long, and as there was no radio (and certainly no television) on the farm, Martin spent his time learning English from the lady of the house, who seemed to be quite knowledgeable and well-educated.



Eagle School (near Acme), likely in the 1980s - the 5 youngest Loewen children were enrolled in 1926

Martin would point to an object, and she would give him the Eng-

(See Journey on page 5)

(Journey from page 4)

lish word for it. He would then write it down, along with the German and Russian words. It was a long winter for an 18-year-old.

Meanwhile, the five youngest were enrolled at Eagle School near Acme. "It was quite an experience, coming to a strange country and not knowing a word of the local language," Daniel Loewen wrote, "but we made faster progress than the older brothers and sisters.

In his memoirs, Henry Loewen describes his first day at school:

"Mary, Tina, Dan, Anna and I arrived at school to find that the teacher didn't speak German and couldn't speak to us. She gave us a seat and after giving all the other children their work, she asked us to come forward and gave us our first lesson in English. She pointed to her nose, eyes and hair and said the word and we had to repeat it. Then she wrote numbers from one to ten on a piece of paper and told us to keep writing to find out what we knew. When she came back to check, I had written about 200 and she said something like 'very good' or something. I couldn't quite make out what she was saying, but it sounded like she was pleased."

Their teacher bought a German-English dictionary for the Loewen children and their progress in learning their new language began to accelerate. According to Henry, most of the English he learnt at school took place during recess.

Language was not the only challenge the Loewen children faced. Daniel Loewen recalls that one winter when he and one of his siblings rode to school on horseback, they arrived to find that their

clothes were frozen to the saddle. They had to wait in the barn until the thaw allowed them to dismount.

At the age of 15, Henry's formal education was coming to an end. He was expected to provide more labour on the family farm, so his last two years of formal education - grades 7 and 8 - took place between the end of the harvest and planting time in the spring.

Abraham Loewen worked wherever he could find work - sometimes for the railway and sometimes for farmers as the need arose. In those early years when he worked on the roads to earn some extra money, he was lucky enough to be able to collect coal from the landing where it was unloaded from the wagons onto the carts. Those in charge of unloading the coal were a little careless and some of the coal ended up on the ground. Abraham had made a little sled, which he pulled behind him, and on his return from work Abraham would walk past the landing, pulling the sled as he did every day, and some days he would collect a whole sack of coal, and some days a little less. In any case, he was able to collect enough coal to heat their home and cook their meals that first winter.



Loewen children, c.a. 1929, on the Simons Valley farm: Back, l-r: Henry, Martin, Abram; Middle: Tina, Mary, Helena; Front: Anna, Daniel

A Permanent Home in Simons Valley

In 1927 the Loewen family was able to move onto their own farm. There were no buildings on it, but there was a fence around the property. It was located about 18 miles northwest of Calgary and was mostly virgin prairie land. About 100 acres had been ploughed in 1926, but nothing else had been done to the land.

Abraham Loewen and Frank Wiens had purchased this section of land in Simons Valley from a party named J. Fisher Williams and Alex Newton. Of the land purchased $\frac{1}{4}$ was for Wiens and $\frac{3}{4}$ for Loewen.

Abraham and son Martin, Frank Wiens and Jacob Loewen, a carpenter from Acme, travelled to the property in March. They found baled hay to make a shelter to live in while they built the first building, a granary (16 X 20 feet). They built just the shell with a roof and then a barn (20 X 60 feet),

(See Journey on page 6)

(Journey from page 5)

after which they returned to get the rest of the family. All their belongings were loaded onto two wagons that Williams and Newton had bought for them. When loaded, the wagons held two families, all their furniture and a stove, and were accompanied by a cow and two horses.

The one night they were on the road, they asked an unknown farmer for permission to sleep in his barn loft. They had to walk through the pigsty to reach the ladder to the loft. Helena Loewen recalls that her mother was afraid of being trampled by the pigs and, at the age of 51, had to climb a vertical ladder to find her bed for the night. It took the family two days to travel the 60 miles. Daniel writes: "*We were glad that our days of travelling were over*".

The newly built granary had two bunk beds. The Loewen parents had one lower bunk and the Wiens parents had the other lower bunk - the two separated by very crude curtains. The children had the top bunk and at first the older boys had to sleep outside in shelters made of bales of hay. The rest of the room was used for a long table, a stove, a bench and some apple crates to sit on. "*When it was cold or raining and we had to come in, we took off our shoes and climbed into our bunks,*" Henry recalls. When they came in, they were either in their bunks or helping with work - otherwise they knew they had to stay outside.

Water for the household was carried half a mile from a spring in the field. A well was soon drilled and the barn was completed, albeit only as a shelter. Williams and Newton, from whom the farm had been purchased, bought 12 cows, 12 horses and some old machinery for them, as the Loewens had no money with which to start a life on the prairies, and so they began farming in Canada.

In the early summer, Frank Wiens built another granary (of the same size) and moved his family into it, giving the Loewen family much more



Martin, on Colpitts Ranch, 1927

space. The Wiens family, however, continued to occupy a part of the Loewen family's life.

They had decided not to put their full trust in the medical expertise available at the time, so all their children were born at home with Mr. Wiens's help. During the delivery of their fourth child, Mrs. Wiens developed an infection and had to be rushed to hospital in Calgary, where she was given a slim chance of survival. But she pulled through. While in hospital and for the next year, Maria Loewen and her two girls, Tina and Anna, took care of the second youngest. She was only about three years old at the time. After a year with the Loewens, she returned to her family, but the bond between the Loewens and the child had grown strong. Tina had made clothes for her and having a young child in the home had been a positive experience.



Martin with threshing crew on Colpitts Ranch, c.a. 1928;
Martin is 2nd from left (blond)

(See Journey on page 7)

(Journey from page 6)

Katie Wiens, the eldest and the one who had shared the first room on the farm with her parents and the Loewens, went on to become a missionary in the Congo and later in Brazil. She retired from missionary work to return to Lethbridge, Alberta to care for her ailing mother. Tina corresponded with her throughout her life.

An Immigrant's Loneliness

After the Loewen family settled on the farm, Lena, Abram and Martin had to find work elsewhere to support the rest of the family. Martin worked on a farm six miles east of the Loewen home. The Colpitts, who owned this farm, were alone except for their two daughters who came home on weekends. One was attending high school in Calgary and the other was a teacher.

Martin had to milk eight cows before breakfast and then work the land during the day. He milked the cows again in the evening. He also did garden work in the landlady's garden - turning the sod, digging up gooseberries, treating the soil with manure and planting vegetables. He remembers that he didn't have much free time except on Sundays - a sad time. After breakfast he would clean up and get dressed to go to church.

The people he worked for took him to their church, where he was greeted warmly by the pastor. He did not understand anything except the music. At this point, he was not yet a Christian, so he didn't care much about attending church. He had nothing to wear except his Russian 'costume' with its high Russian boots, which drew stares from everyone. To them he was a

DP (displaced person). On Sunday afternoons, if it was a fine day, he would go out into the field and think of the wonderful days he had spent among the youth of Pretoria. In his memoirs, Martin wrote:

Every Sunday afternoon we boys would get together and get into mischief. In the evening, at 6pm, the boys and girls would get together and sing folk songs, play games and dance - what a good time it was! We young people would sit in the large living room, while the parents of the house would sit in the small room and make sure that nothing got out of hand.

Memories of those golden days of youth and the "special" friendships that once were, would come flooding back to him on Sunday afternoons, when he was homesick for Russia, on that barren Alberta prairie.

"I often fell to the ground and wept bitterly. Then, after I had cried myself dry, I would get up, walk across the prairie fields and begin to sing many of the songs I knew from my youth in Russia. I would sing so loudly that the farmer I worked for would wonder what was wrong with me.



Loewen farm, Simons Valley, early 1930s

The other members of the family would also have felt this loneliness, each in their own way. In 1930 this loneliness was eased somewhat by the arrival in Alberta of the Eitzen cousins from the Soviet Union - three families of 9 adults and two small children.

They were Maria Loewen's nephews and nieces - Peter and Mar-



Building house on Loewen farm in Simons Valley, c.a. 1930

garetha (Driedger) Sawatzky (with Abram), Abram and Minna (Klassen) Eitzen (with Helena), and the Peters siblings - Anna, Helena, Willi, Henry and John (their parents had died in Russia). They were among the few who gathered in Moscow in the late autumn of 1929 and managed to 'escape'. They had left behind parents, siblings, cousins, uncles and aunts, whose lives would be forever changed for the worse.² They wanted to settle in Sas-

(See Journey on page 8)

(Journey from page 7)

katchewan, but the government wasn't allowing any immigrants because of the Depression. They were told that if they had relatives elsewhere, they should go there instead, so they settled in Alberta. Abraham Loewen immediately dispatched the men to the foothills, about 32 miles west of the farm, to help with the winter logging and to work on the roads. They quickly found work on other farms, so the problem of overcrowding at the Loewen home was short-lived.

Abraham and Maria Loewen had sponsored the newly arrived family members, ensuring that they would not be a burden on the Canadian government during their first year in Canada. This was not the last time Abraham and Maria Loewen would sponsor or assist new immigrants.

First Years—Difficulties Amid Blessings

In the years following the purchase of the Simons Valley farm, buildings were steadily added to the farm. Lumber was cut from trees felled about 15 miles to the west. Tina recalls that her parents and some of the boys would pack a week's worth of food and trek into the bushland for their 'logging expedition'.

Henry writes,

"The first year we were on the farm we had a really good crop, but an early frost killed it. All the grain had to be cut, bundled and hauled to the Burns plant in Calgary for feed. It was a big job, and my brothers spent all winter doing it. They would load it early in the morning and it would be late in the evening before they got home. This was our only income that year, although anyone in our family who had a job elsewhere gave their earnings to my parents."

With the onset of the depression years, farming became even more difficult. Unable to afford a truck (1932) to haul cattle to Calgary, Abe and Henry, and on some occasions Daniel, drove the cattle to market. Abe would drive the wagon in front of the herd and Henry would follow on foot. It was a two-day job, stopping for the night at a farmer's place just outside Calgary, and then starting again the next morning. As they got closer to the abattoir, the herd grew as other farmers joined the drive with their cattle. They drove their 26 head of cattle down Centre Street to 16th Avenue and then east to Edmonton Trail, past the General Hospital to the Burns Plant. At the time, the best price for cattle was 4 cents a pound; the Loewen cattle averaged about 2.5 cents a pound.

It was during this time that Martin became impatient with this way of making a living and left the farming to his father and brothers and set off for Calgary to find a vocation more to his liking. (TO BE CONTINUED)

Dave Loewen is a retired high school teacher and principal. He has volunteered with MCC in the Congo and has served on numerous local, provincial and national church boards and committees, as well as the MCC-BC board. He has been an elected councillor for the City of Abbotsford since 2005 and is a member of the local Rotary Club of Abbotsford.

Dave & Grace worship at Level Ground Mennonite Church. Dave and Grace have two married sons and seven grandchildren. Dave enjoys travelling, swimming, snowshoeing and cycling, and has a keen interest in family history and genealogy, both of which occupy some of his spare time, both researching and writing.

1, *Their oldest son, Johann, had been conscripted into the Red Army during the Civil War, and died of typhus in Sochi, en route home. The family would not learn these details until 30 years later. Their second oldest son, Jacob, elected to remain so that he could complete his university studies. Historical events prevented him from ever leaving; he lived out his 99 years in the Soviet Union. His story, "The One Who Remained Behind", can be found in **Preservings, Issue #39, pg. 47**, or at: <https://daveloewen.com/articles/>.*

2. *Maria's younger sister and family, Abram & Margaretha Driedger (except for one daughter), were among the thousands at the "Gates of Moscow" who failed to get out in the fall of 1929. Maria's oldest brother and family, Johann & Maria (Loewen) Eitzen, were also in Moscow at that time. Only their son, Abram, with spouse and child, succeeded in emigrating. Johann was arrested and along with his family, sent back. The stories of these two families, "A Survival Story", and "Johann Eitzen; Estate Owner and Minister" can be found at: <https://daveloewen.com/no-more-sundays/>.*



(Han from page 1)

journey from the Paraguayan Chaco to Canada, back to the Chaco, and finally to Canada to stay. So here goes.

Historical Context

Let me first begin with a brief look back a little further into history to give this story some background.

Both my parents emigrated from Russia to Paraguay, but their stories of how they came to Paraguay are as different as night and day. This story is about my family from my dad's side.

My Great-grandpa, Jacob Wiens, and his family lived in Russia. As a last attempt to escape the ever-overbearing Russian Communist Government, the family moved to southern Siberia, where the long reach of government had not yet come. However, it did not take long for that to happen. It finally became evident that if they wanted to have freedom of religion and self-determination, they would have to leave Russia.

In May of 1928, Grandpa Isaac Wiens confided to his wife that he felt led by the Lord to leave Russia. Reasons for this were the youth were being influenced to join the Communist Party and led away from the church, and also, men were being bribed to become informers (traitors) against those in the village who worshipped God. In trying to create a perfect society, Communist leaders tried to erase all Christians and thereby be in control of everything. Rumours were that other families had left their village and crossed the Amur River to China. Through conversations with trusted friends, Isaac soon felt he was to lead his entire

village to freedom. This was no small undertaking and would prove to be very risky.

In November of 1930, Isaac and a friend made an exploratory trip into China to see the possibility of this trip. The escape had to take place in winter to allow them to cross over the frozen river. Some Chinese men they had met earlier agreed to help their escape. Both Isaac and his friend knew they risked their lives but were willing to pay that ultimate sacrifice.

December 18, 1930, at 1 AM, the message went out to villagers that they had 2 hours to collect whatever they needed and meet at the school-house. The temperature that night was -40 degrees. Each family was told there would be no talking, no babies crying, and all horse harnesses were muffled with sacks. Isaac was desperately praying as their sleighs slid over the snow. He knew the whole village depended on him. Everyone knew this trip would lead to either freedom or death. After several scary incidences, the entire village slowly made their way into China by sunrise. Eventually, they made it to Harbin and stayed there for 15 months.

Attempts to emigrate to North America proved fruitless, so they sailed on ships, rode on trains, sat on riverboats and rode on oxcarts to get to Paraguay, South America. The initial trip that took them from Shanghai through Singapore, the Bay of Bengal, Ceylon, the Red Sea, Suez Canal to LeHavre, France, took 34 days. This last summer, my wife and I went on a riverboat cruise from Paris to the beaches of Normandy when I realized, as our ship docked in the estuary of the Seine River across the harbour from LeHavre, France, that this was the place where my grandpa and his family left the European continent for good.

They boarded a ship across the Atlantic Ocean four days later to Buenos Aires, Argentina. For the next eight days, they were on a small riverboat going up the Paraguay River to Puerto Casado, then railway and the last three days on oxcarts to arrive at Filadelfia, Paraguay, on May 16, 1932; 17 months since they had left their village in Russia at 3 AM one cold winter's night. So that is a brief explanation of how my forefathers ended up in Paraguay.

My Great-grandma, Anna Wiens, still yearned to immigrate to Canada, and upon her constant urging, plans were made to uproot the family once more and move to the land they had initially wanted to go. Sadly, she died before the last immigration could be made.

My dad Abram, the oldest son of



Vic's Grandpa Isaac Wiens' family in Paraguay before immigrating to Canada ca 1947
Rear L-R Jacob, Elizabeth, Abram
Front L-R Helen, Liese (Neufeld) Wiens, Erwin, Isaac, Ernest

(See Han on page 10)

(Han from page 9)

Grandpa Isaac, met my Mom, Elizabeth (Liese) Penner; they were engaged to be married and made plans that she would travel with the Wiens family to Canada and get married there. However, immigration officials would not let my mom travel with my father's family if they were not yet married. Well, the simple solution was to get married. So in May of 1948, my mom and dad were married in Asuncion, Paraguay, en route to Canada. Finally, in 1948, Grandpa Isaac and his family were on their way to the "promised land."

My Story Begins

I, Vic Wiens, was born in Coaldale, Alberta, on April 9, 1950. I attended the Davidson school, knowing very little English, as my parents and extended family only spoke High German and Plautdietsch (Low German). But, as youngsters typically do, I picked up English quickly and am mostly fluent in English to this day. Unfortunately, I have lost some of my fluency of speaking in German and Plautdietsch. I still understand both languages, but speaking is a problem. I think in English, and when I try to speak German and think in English, "dan chempt daut avarausch no hinje root." (It comes out backwards). It frustrates me when this happens, but I guess that's what happens when one does not use or have the opportunity to use German and Plautdietsch regularly. When I am gone, my family will have lost the German language.

Han - There

My dad Abram began working in construction in Lethbridge soon after they arrived in Canada and became a journeyman carpenter. He could not take the written test because of his limited English, so officials allowed him to take the test orally. He passed with flying colours in his broken English. Even though he was very good at carpentry, working in the harsh cold of an Alberta winter was not to his liking. Having grown up in the Chaco, he loved the life he had there, helping his father with a large cattle ranch. Dad was a vaquero (cowboy) through and through, and he longed to do that again. Finally, in 1959, he and mom decided that they would move back to Paraguay so that Dad could realize his dream of owning a ranch in his be-



Four Generations
Rear L – R Father Abram Wiens,
Grandpa Isaac Wiens
Front L – R Author Vic Wiens,
Great Grandpa Jacob Wiens
Coaldale, Alberta, 1958, before
moving back to the
Chaco, Paraguay

loved Chaco. By that time, there were three boys in the family, me being the oldest. My sister Betty was born there in Paraguay in July of 1959.



Vic's father, Abram Wiens, on his horse in the Chaco he loved ca 1946

I do not remember the exact dates, but I must have been nine when we first arrived in Paraguay. I attended school and struggled some, being totally immersed in a German-only school. After three years of English school in Alberta, I had learned how to read and write in English, but not in German, even though I spoke both High and Low German fluently.



Vic's Grandpa Isaac drinking Mate with a bombillia [drinking straw] Vic's father Abram on the far left. Drinking Terarah (Yerba) when drunk with cold water, it was Terarah; with hot water, it was Mate

By the end of the school year, I had mainly caught up with reading and writing in German. It helped that my dad's cousin, Ernst Eitzen,

(See Han on page 11)

(Han from page 10)

was my teacher and spoke some (very little) English.

We lived in the Paraguayan Chaco in Filadelfia, Fernheim. I remember we had a large yard, big enough to have a cow, which we milked daily. The calf got what we did not need. After the morning milking, the cow was turned loose on the street, and she would go into the bush on the outskirts of town to search for grass to eat. The cow would get a portion of bumwohl (cottonseed meal) every evening. This tasty treat, and of course her calf, brought her home every afternoon.



Paraguayan outdoor clay oven much like the one Vic's Mom Liese used

My mom had a wood-burning oven in the yard where she baked bread. She must have had a steep learning curve, having lived in Canada for ten years with modern appliances. Here there was wood to chop for the oven. An aboriginal Paraguayan named Kaseekaneitah would come every day and chop enough wood for the day; for his work, mom gave him some food. An old aboriginal lady named Malia came every day to beg for food. She had learned to say in Plautdietsch, "I am very hungry, bread, buns, meat" (Mutzeh hunget Malia, blout, tweiback, fleesch). She

couldn't say brout, so she said blout, which of course, means blood in Plautdietsch.

Well, life was good for me. The school was out at noon (because of the heat), and my brothers and I had all afternoon to play. We would go to the town watering hole, get some wet clay and make mud balls for our slingshots. We would dry them in the hot sun and have rock-hard ammunition for our slingshots. When it rained (and it could rain in the rainy season), the ruts in the street overflowed with water, and huge bullfrogs would come out. The streets were all sand, and the ruts were from the horse and buggy wheels, which was the main means of transportation. There may have been the odd vehicle, but by far, the most common form of transportation was horse and buggy. Remember, this was 1959.

My mom would send me to the town slaughterhouse with a galvanized pail to pick up the meat. The aboriginals, who lived in their own village on the outskirts of town, would be there, not for the meat but for the cows'



Treating a cow in the Chaco, Vic's Grandpa Isaac centre, his father Abram on the right



Vic's father Abram, second from the right, with his companions in a village near Filadelfia, Fernheim Colony

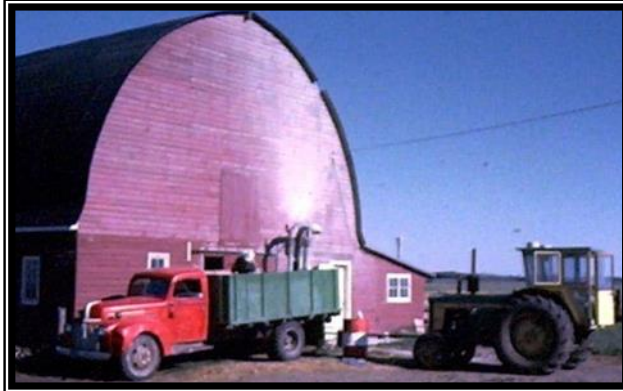
stomachs (tripe) and other internal parts of the animal. The butcher would cut a piece of meat from the carcass, plop it in my pail and off I would go. I probably went two or three times a week as we had no fridge to keep food cold. I still remember the smell, and there were flies everywhere. I know it's kind of hard imagining life like that, but that's how it was in that part of the

(See Han on page 12)

(Han from page 11)

world back then.

I remember David Friesen, my dad's uncle (he was married to Grandpa Isaac's sister Liese), who lived in one of the surrounding villages of Philadelphia. Each village had their own slaughterhouse, and he would haul the raw hides from his village to the tannery in Philadelphia. I would go along with him occasionally as he leisurely drove from his village to the main centre and back with his team of horses. Even though the distance was not that far, it was an all-day trip there and back. He was a tall, gentle man, and I was impressed with how he treated his horse team, giving them a short rest every so often.



Grinding grain (chop) for the dairy cows with the John Deere 820 on the farm at Tofield, Alberta. It took Vic 1.5 days to cultivate 100 acres with a 14 ft cultivator and another half day to harrow with a 30 ft harrow

Un Trigj - And Back

Life was good for me, but the stay in Paraguay would not be permanent. For whatever reason, plans to purchase a ranch were unsuccessful, and things in the Chaco were not the same as they were before they had immigrated to Canada 11 years earlier. So once more, mom and dad packed up the family and moved back to Coaldale.

I remember being in 4th grade and getting a very low grade on a test. Not sure what subject it was, but in the short time we were in the Chaco, I had apparently lost much of my English skills. However, once again, good fortune was with me as my teacher was a Miss Penner, who spoke German and was able to tutor me until I regained my ability to speak English.

But once again, the Wiens family would soon be on the move. Grandpa Isaac was restless, as working for a farmer was not what he had in mind. He wanted to be his own farmer, but land prices were high in Coaldale. Land was found near Tofield, Alberta, and in 1960, Grandpa Wiens moved once more. A year later, all of his children followed, and the Isaac Wiens family was together again. Getting started all over again was very hard work, but life was good.

We lived on a mixed farm 3 miles east of Tofield, and when I think back on my growing-up years, I have nothing but fond memories. We three oldest boys had chores to do every day. When dad was in the fields in spring, the boys, along with mother's help and urging, did the milking and whatever else

needed doing taking care of the animals. We would go swimming in a dugout during the summer months when school was out. We had to cross Hwy 14, then the main CN rail line, to get to the swimming hole. We built a home-made diving board, and we were set. Imagine mom letting us go swimming in a deep dugout without supervision. Our ages would have been 15, 12 and 9. Oh, how things have changed!

I was old enough to drive a tractor, so I spent days on a John Deere (JD) 820 working the summer fallow field. We also had a JD 60, which was used for chores around the yard and haying. Dad would send me out to cut hay with a seven-foot sickle mower. Then a few days later, with a ten ft. rake. After that came the baler with a ten-bale stooker behind the baler. Stooking was hard work, but not as hard as getting the bales into the loft of the dairy barn without an elevator. Dad would throw the



Vic's first job after high school on Al Oeming's Game Farm was cleaning the meat eaters' cages and feeding them. In the afternoon, he took Packy the Elephant out to give the public rides; his sisters Betty and Esther are on the elephant
1968

(See Han on page 13)

(Han from page 12)

bales from the hay rack into the loft, and we boys stacked them in the loft.

We are now well beyond "Han un Trigj," so time to end this story. I'm sure many of you readers have similar stories growing up in the prairies. I don't know about you, but we had a great time as a family, making a living in freedom and peace.

War Through the Eyes of a Child

By Henry Penner

I've been asked to share my story of leaving Russia on various occasions and places, including Christian Businessmen's luncheon, church gatherings, a Christmas banquet, elementary and high school classes and school Remembrance Day services.



Henry Penner

My story begins, in a small house, at the edge of the small Mennonite village called Konteniusfeld in southern Russia, north of the Black Sea.

My life began just before WWII and spanned those turbulent war years in Europe. It was a very dark time in Russia politically, physically, socially and spiritually. Stalin reigned with ruthless terror. Many fathers and young men disappeared during the night—never to be seen again, dead or alive. And so, it also happened at our little house. On the night of Mar. 21, 1938, my father, Peter Penner, was ruthlessly arrested and taken away

Vic & Esther are retired poultry farmers from the Bardo district; they now live near Lindbrook, Alberta, where Esther grew up. Married in 1972, they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary in June 2022. They have two children and seven grandchildren. Vic and Esther are "snowbirds" and spend the winter months in Yuma, Arizona. Vic's like his dad; he's had enough of Alberta winters. ❖



Vic and Esther Wiens

by the NKVD, never to be seen again. My mother's name was Susanna (Kliewer) Penner. (In this article, I have used dates, places and specific information from my mother's personal records of these events.) My parents had six children; one son and five daughters. Mother was about six months pregnant. So, into this turbulent time, I was born on Jul. 2, 1938, and was named Henry, a boy who would never in his life see his father, and my father would never see his son.

Providentially, in Russia, at this time, social assistance was given to families with seven children or more. We all survived those years, albeit through great difficulties! I'm told I was a very sickly child in my infancy, being close to death. At least three times, my mother was called from her work on the Collective Farm to come home quickly because "Hein stoaft!" (Henry is dying!)" The rest of the family could probably be saved from starvation if Henry could be kept alive. As you can see, God was faithful!

Our mother, along with most of the women in our area, was forced to take over much of the hard work on the Collective Farms, as they were then called, leaving the small children to be cared for by siblings and the elderly.

In 1941 our family and thousands of others made an unsuccessful attempt to leave Russia by train. However, the train tracks had been blown up, so there was no way of leaving now. It was discovered that Moscow had sent a pilot with a cargo of poisonous gases to kill us all at the train station. However, the German Army shot it out of the sky, thus preventing a great tragedy. God was watching over us again.

In 1943, because the Russian Army had defeated the German Army, it retreated to Germany. The German Army had a policy that anyone who spoke German had to return to Germany with them. Since we were German-speaking Mennonites, we were told to fix up a wagon, pack our belongings on the wagon and follow the German Army back to Germany. A cover was built over the wagon, so we would be sheltered from the wind, rain and snow.

So, according to mother's records, we left our "Hof" (yard) on the morning of Sept. 12, 1943. On the night of Sept. 19, 1943, we all attempted

(See War on page 14)

(War from page 13)

to cross the Dnieper River on a temporarily constructed pontoon bridge built by the German Army. Unfortunately, not everyone made it across safely. Together with thousands of others, we left Russia in these horse-drawn covered wagons on "The Trek."

Christmas 1943 was spent in a Russian Village of Potschapins with a Russian family, who lived at one end of the house and allowed us to live at the other.

Here we could enjoy a Christmas tree, with real little candles clipped on its branches. Gifts, I don't remember, except perhaps, baked Christmas cookies. I have some vivid snapshots of memories of life during these times

when even I, as a child, was consciously aware that only God could keep us alive in the midst of war and death. Survival was the only thing that mattered. We stayed in this village from Dec. 2, 1943, until Mar. 5, 1944. Then we were on the move again.

We were on our way to Warthegau, an area in western Poland occupied by the Germans since 1939. In Litzmannstadt (Lodz), we were disinfected/deloused and settled temporarily in Grillensee. The German method of disinfection and delousing took several forms. One was that disinfecting powder was sprayed onto our bodies and inside our clothing. Another method was cleaning the body and disinfecting the clothing with extreme heat. At one end of this large public shower room, we stripped off all our clothing, which was then put into these huge ovens where they were disinfected with heat. We then had to pass through a large public shower room with many shower heads on the ceiling. So we walked from one end of the room to the other, washing ourselves as we walked along. As a seven-year-old boy, I made sure I clung to my mother and did not get lost in this sea of women and girls. Upon exiting this public shower room, we waited in the nude for our disinfected clothing to arrive. We dressed and moved out to where we would be staying. We younger ones, Gertrude, Elizabeth, Hilda and I, could attend German school temporarily. The others had to work hard.

Mother worked in the gardens, and Tante Tina Kliever, my mother's sister, worked with other workers outside in the fields. My oldest sister Susie, age 19, enrolled in a vocational school some distance away, studying as a nurse. Sister Gertrude, age 13, had to take care of the geese while they were out feeding on grass. Peter, my brother, age 15, enlisted in Hitler's youth, called Landjahrlager.

From here, mother, with her other five children and her sister, were on the road again and sent to Kaisersfelde. When mother said goodbye to her third child, she was very apprehensive and worried. Would she ever see her three oldest children again? The Scripture verse that came into her mind was, "Was Ich jetzt tu weist du nicht, wirst es hernach erfahren." (You do not know now what I am doing, but later you will understand) She writes,



Mennonites on The Great Trek 1943
photo credit Google Images

"und so kamm es auch." (and so it happened) Sister Mary, age 17, had to enrol in a Vocational school, some distance away, where she worked and studied Economics.

We experienced a certain amount of freedom in these last two places; however, this freedom did not last very long. We had to hit the road again by horse and wagon because the Russian Army was pushing towards Berlin. The Russian tanks caught up to us, and we had to clear the road, or we would be run over or forced off the road! At one point, we quickly drove onto a farmer's yard and hid in the barn. There were a few other families huddled together and praying! Since we suddenly had to leave again, we did not know what had happened to Susie, Mary, and Peter. The Lord protected us again!

On this flight, however, we lost contact with our relatives and the rest of the Mennonite group. We found ourselves with "Wolhyniendeutsche" (Volhynian Germans), whom we did not know, but we all had one thing in common; escape from the Russians. We were still in Poland but trying to get into Germany. We were again riding in the covered wagon, pulled by horses, with mother at the reins. Since we had become separated from our relatives and other Mennonites, we found ourselves lost in the darkness of the night! Not knowing where to drive and how to find the right way was difficult. A man suddenly appeared beside our wagon. [During wartime, men were feared by women and girls]. The man asked where we were going. His voice seemed kind. Mother said she did not know, hoping to go in

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(War from page 14)

the right direction to get us toward West Germany. He promised he would show her the way if she gave him the reins. Mother very reluctantly gave up the reins and let the man drive the wagon. The man then gave her the directions where to drive, that she would enter a small village which would be friendly to her. They would let us stay there for the night. As suddenly as the man had appeared, he disappeared into the night. Mother drove along, and it happened just as the man had said. Had he been an angel sent by God? God surely was with us.

Because the Russian and German armies were still battling it out, the boundaries of countries and territories became very fluid and indistinct even in Germany's retreat. It was sometimes difficult to know where you were. Somehow, we were pushed out of German-controlled territories and back into Polish-controlled territories. Eventually, we came to the Polish village of Grilevo (Groelensee).

I remember being herded into a school gym with many other Germanic fleeing families and told to eat and fill our empty bellies because tomorrow, they would send us all out into the open field to be shot. Fear, terror and anxiety filled my mom's heart and the hearts of all of us present. But God's timing was right. That evening the Russian soldiers caught up to us and didn't allow the Polish people to shoot us because they said we were their property. After all, we had come out of Russia and, therefore, were to return to where we came from. We were kept alive, and God's faithfulness again became a reality.

We were held back in this Polish village of Grilevo for about two and a half years (Jan. 24, 1945, until June 26, 1947) and did not understand why we were not allowed to leave. Since the Polish people hated the Germans for all the atrocities the German Army had inflicted on Poland, and we were German-speaking, things were not always easy. We prayed that God would help and protect us.

Everyone had to work very hard! Being German, I was often bullied. I was not allowed to go to school. During this time, I was seven, eight and nine years old, so for me, it was a great holiday, although not always. The Lord did hear our prayers, though.

One day we received a special visitor. Mr. Hunsberger, from the MCC (A Worldwide Mennonite Relief Agency), was trying to locate the lost and scattered Mennonite people in Poland. He talked and prayed with my mother and said he would send us documents so we could leave Poland legally, come to West Germany, and travel to Canada. What a ray of hope for us from God through this man!

When the papers arrived, however, the officials opened the letter and saw that it contained documents for our emigration. Now there was trouble! The magistrate of this collective farm accused my mother of trying to sneak away secretly, so he got a drunk policeman to manhandle her and one of my sisters. Mother told the magistrate that we would not have escaped in secret and would have come and asked them about it. But he just shouted at them and said that mother could leave, but the children could not because they belonged to the state. Mother said, "No, all my children must come with me. My God will get us out of your hands." But the magistrate just scorned her and said there was no God that would help her.

When my mother and sister came home and told us of their terrible experience and that they were slapped around and beaten, my little nine-year-old heart filled with anger and hatred toward these Polish people! This anger felt like a dagger in my heart. How could they dare to treat my mother like that? Even in that young heart, I began to harbour hatred and revenge, which, thankfully, God later helped me deal with through forgiveness.

Shortly after my mother's rough incident, a Polish wagon was sent to our little house. We had to load our few belongings, and we were "sentenced" to a highly secured concentration camp, Denbitz Pur, at Posen, Poland, where the only exit was Siberia. There were six armed soldiers at the big gate and two armed guards at every barracks door. An older man told mom, "Hier kommen wir nie raus." (We will never get out of here!) Mother answered, "Ja, ich hatte die Gewissheit vom Herrn." (I had the inner conviction/assurance from God that we will get out of here!) We were led to one of the barracks where many other people were huddled together in groups or families on piles of straw, which were their places to sleep. Guards were seen all over the place.

The custom of the guards was that when new refugees were brought into this concentration camp, they would go around to loot and steal things while the refugees slept. That is what they did that first night we were there. That night before trying to fall asleep, we all huddled together on the straw, and as we did, whenever possible, sang softly together some of mother's favourite hymns and prayed. The guards asked the older man from our bar-

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rack what kind of people those two women and four children were. What we didn't know was happening; while we slept, my mother was told a few days later. He said that they were just ordinary refugees. The guards insisted that there was something strange about them because when they tried to steal from those people, they could not. It was like a strong hand/force pushed them back and prevented them from stealing any of their few belongings. God was there, again protecting us, even while we slept!

In time this camp emptied; people were all sent to Siberia, and only we remained. In all this turmoil, mother still had the document with only her name on it. This meant that she could be released, but the rest of us could not. This was unthinkable to mother. Mother wrote in her diary, "... Dann haben wir gebetet, 'Herr hilf.'" (Then we prayed, Lord help) So, she repeatedly went to the office and asked to have her children's and sister's names added to the document, so we all could leave together. But, of course, they wouldn't.

One day she came into the office and realized they were looking for a fountain pen and a red and blue marking pencil. These were important to check off official documents. Providentially, mom carried in her purse these two items! So she told them that she had a fountain pen and a red/blue pencil and that she would gladly give them in exchange for having the names of her four children and her sister's added to the document. Since they were in dire need of these particular items, they agreed to do it. What joy mother had when she received the document with all the names printed on them. Now she could legally register us to leave this camp instead of being sent to Siberia!

The day actually came when we were scheduled to pass through a line of inspectors before leaving. As we passed through the inspection line of many officials who examined us and our papers, one said to the other, "*Even a blind man can see that this is a forged document.*"

Now what! The other official turned to him and said, "Hold your mouth. Let these people go!"

And so we were permitted to proceed.

Miraculously we survived fur-



Final inspection of the Penner shipping crate before embarking on the ship General Stuart Heintzelman bound for Canada, Bremerhaven, 1948. Henry's mother, Susanna, in a kerchief standing in the centre

ther refugee camps, crossed the border into West Germany and finally arrived by train in Gronau, Westfalen. Here we were welcomed into the MCC Refugee Camp, where my mother finally met her two daughters and her son – after two and a half years of waiting and hoping. To add further joy to this, Wiedersehen (reunion) mother heard from her three children that they had become believers in Jesus and had been baptized upon their confession of faith in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord. Mother writes, "Es war ein Wiedersehen was ich nie in meinem Leben vergessen werde. Dem Herrn den Dank und Anbetung fuer alles was Er an uns und fuer uns getan hat." (It was a reunion I will remember for the rest of my life. We prayerfully thank the Lord for all He has done to us and for us) Here in Gronau, while we were waiting for our documents to be processed, we were well-fed and taken good care of by the MCC

(See War on page 17)

REFUGEE/DISPLACED PERSON STATISTICAL CARD		
1. Surname PENNER	7. IRO Eligibility Status N	10. Country of Citizenship or Birth Origin UNDETERMINED
2. Christian Names HEINRICH	8. Reason for evacuation or leaving Camp CANADA	11. Country of Last Habitual Residence UKRAINIAN
3. Sex (Male female)		12. Religion MENN 10
4. D.P. Identity Card No.		13. Place and Date of Birth KONTENIN SIBEL/UKRA 2. 6. 38
5. Family Status. Family Head Family member Unaccompanied member of Unattached DP and one of Family member girl. Name of Family Head PENNER	9. Date of Origin of Card	14. Present Location. D.P. Camp CPLO CPWS German Economy (If in D.P. Camp state Assembly No.) 2515
6. If Family Head, state number in Family		15. If in Hospital, Home, Foster Home or Centre other than a D.P. Camp state place name.

Henry Penner's Displaced Person Statistical Card, Fallingbostell, Germany, 1948



Nine-year-old Henry Penner's passport, Fallingbostell, 1948

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Peter Penner's Arrest, Trial, Execution and Exoneration Document

Received, Nr. C-80

Administration of the State Security of Ukraine, District of the Saporoshje

January 12, 1996

169701 Russia

Settlement Krasnyj Jag

Nr. 10/S80/II-12496

Republic of Komi, County Petshori

Selivanova, E. D.

Upon your request, we inform you, that according to the documents in the archives with regard to Penner, Petr Petrovic, born 1897, German, Citizen of the UdSSR [Soviet Union], born and resident in the colony [village] of Konteniusfeld, County Tshernikov, district Saporoshje, collective farm worker, was arrested on March 21, 1938, and by the districts area of the NKVD Rotfront on suspicion of anti-Soviet propaganda and upon the decision of a special three-man commission (committee) of the UNKWD of the Soviet Union, was on October 6, 1938, according to articles, numbers 54- 10 part 2 and 54 - 11 of the UK USSR, sentenced to death by shooting. The execution took place on October 19, 1938, in the city of Melitopol.

Upon instruction of the district of Saporoshje of December 9, 1965, Penner, Petr Petrovic, was rehabilitated on the basis that there was no evidence of his guilt.

On the day of his arrest there were the following family members of Petr Petrovic:

Wife - Susanna Petrovna - 35 years of age.

Maria - 12 years of age

Elizabeth - 3 years of age

Son - Peter - 9 years of age

Daughters - Susanna - 14 years of age

Gertrude 5 years of age

Hilda - 1 year of age

With regard to obtaining a document of rehabilitation, we recommend that you turn to the district court of Saporoshje [330033 Saporoshje, Street Lenina 162]; and for a birth certificate to the registry office of the County Tshernikov, district of Saporoshje.

Director of the administration: Signed, /N.M. Schama/ Official stamp.

Note of the translator:

The names Penner, Peter, son of Peter are spelt in German.

This [German] translation corresponds with the ISO norms of transliteration for Slavic - Cyrillic writings [ISO/R9].

It is affirmed that this translation is in agreement with the original document I was given.

The original document existed in Russian.

Translator [into German] - Maria Bahn and stamp.

Neuwied, March 11, 1996.

Translator from German into English - Dr. Harry Loewen, Kelowna, BC, June 1: 2014.

Peter Penner's Arrest, Trial, Execution and Exoneration Document

from Aug. 20, 1947, to May 12, 1948.

Then, until Sept. 6, 1948, we spent time in a refugee camp in Fallingbostell, still waiting for our

emigration papers to be processed. It was here that my mother helped me ask Jesus to forgive me all my sins, come into my heart and make me His child. How happy I was that I didn't have to fear going to hell! I was now God's child bound for heaven!

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At last, on Sept. 6, 1948, we had to appear before another commission/inspection and then were granted permission to leave Germany for Canada. Sept. 14, 1948, we arrived at Bremerhaven, where at 5 pm, we boarded the ship, General Stuart Heinzelman, bound for Canada! On Sept. 23, 1948, we arrived in Halifax, Canada. Four days later, on Sept. 27, we were welcomed by my mother's younger sister Liese and her family in Coaldale, Alberta! We were provided with a small house in which to live. We worked in the sugar beets as a family to pay off our Reiseschuld (CN travel debt) of \$1688. Our hearts were overwhelmed with gratitude to think that God had proven Himself so faithful throughout our lives, and now we could settle down and enjoy peace and freedom.

As we transitioned into this new country called Canada, we continued to experience God's care and faithfulness. But we were still always hoping and praying that we would get to see our father and mother would get to see her husband.

The Mennonite Brethren Church in Coaldale welcomed us, and it became our spiritual home. How we enjoyed the freedom of being able to fellowship together with other children of God!

It was a scary, sometimes sad, exciting time! Now there were so many new things to learn and experience! We now had to learn a new language, and we tried our best to pronounce the "th" sound correctly, as that sound was not found in the German language.

Update on my Father

In 2011, through a series of events, I received a Russian document together with its German translation, which stated that my father, "Peter Penner from Konteniusfeld, was arrested on Mar. 21, 1938, on suspicion of anti-Soviet propaganda and sentenced to death by shooting. The execution occurred on Oct. 19,

1938, in the city of Melitopol. A city not very far from where we were still living at that time. I must say that receiving this news caused me to feel personally assaulted and inwardly violated; my heart felt stabbed, leaving me numb. My father had actually been shot dead! I believe life is sacred, and this was horrible! And I cannot minimize this tragedy, but hear me right. I have since realized that perhaps even in this, God was gracious. We know



Henry, his aunt and his siblings: Rear L-R Hilda, Tante Tina Kliever, Peter Front L-R Liese, the author Henry Penner. Happy, free and with enough to eat, taking a break from hoeing sugar beets Abram Toews farm Coaldale, Alberta 1950

that many, many men sentenced to Siberian Labour Camps suffered through horrific years of hard cold Siberian labour, starvation, inhumane treatment, and eventually death. So my father was spared those years of hardship and cruelty. "Upon instruction of the district of Saporoshje, on Dec. 9, 1965, Peter Penner was exonerated/pardoned posthumously, on the basis that there was no evidence of his guilt."

As I now think back over my childhood and life, as a child who could never see his earthly father, I can honestly say that God has been very kind to me and faithful. At least I always had a Heavenly Father Who would look after me and to Whom I could come anytime with anything! His promises are found in Psalms 68:5, where David says, "God is a father to the fatherless, the defender of widows."

Since coming to Canada, I was privileged to go to school, Sunday School, become part of the young people's group, join the choir, grow in faith, be baptized upon



Seventeen-year-old Henry standing behind Rev Jacob Siemens at the head of the incline Coaldale MB Church baptism 1955

(See War on page 19)

(War from page 18)



Sitting behind conductor Peter Dick is Henry playing the alto horn with the Coaldale MB Church orchestra Sunday evening Christian Endeavour, Agnes Dick on piano 1956

and 12 great-grandchildren, they number 40. How blessed they feel! With Esther, Henry does Christian Counselling as part of his voluntary ministry in his church. Henry enjoys reading, personal studies, grandparenting and helping his children with various projects. They live in Grande Prairie, Alberta and worship at Westpointe Community Church (EMC).



Alberta Mennonite High School graduation class, Henry a grateful tuition recipient from an anonymous donor far left back row, principal Harold Dyck rear centre in black glasses.

confession of my faith in Jesus and become a member of the MB Church in Coaldale. I attended the Alberta Mennonite High School and graduated with my high school diploma. I went on to study at the Universities of Lethbridge, Calgary, and Edmonton (BEd, MEd), the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (BTh) in Winnipeg, and Fuller Theological Seminary (in summer), to train as a Teacher, Guidance Counsellor, and Minister of the Gospel.

Henry Penner is retired from a varied career as an Educator, Guidance Counsellor, Junior and Senior High School Teacher, Instructor and Dean of Students at Bethany Bible College and pastoring various churches as Interim Pastor. On Aug. 18, 1961, at 23, he married a wonderful Christian girl, Esther Ratzlaff. (How special it was for Henry now he had a man in my life whom he could call dad for the first time!) The Lord blessed their marriage with two sons and two daughters. As Henry writes this article in Grande Prairie, Alberta, their four children are married, and together with them, their 18 grandchildren

All photos are from the private collection of the author unless otherwise stated. ❖

Migration from Ukraine to China (part 1 of 3)

By the late Lena (Wiens) Sawatzky

Translated from German by nephew Hartmut Wiens

Zagradovka – From Prosperity to Destitution

My grandparents from my mother's side were Abram and Katharina Fast (nee Boldt). As a young married couple, they came from Molochnaya, where they were born. They were landless and settled in poverty in the new settlement of Zagradovka. Grandpa Fast said how difficult it was for them to settle with small children and little capital. The harvests were good because the soil was very fertile and the climate favourable. With the help of the old colony in Molochnaya, things improved gradually. Their grain was threshed with the flail and stone. But after just a few years, there was an upswing. They had good men in the colony administration. The men looked after 18 villages and built an orderly colony. Grandpa Fast, as a young farmer, also helped build all the branches of the colony. My grandparents had five children; sons Abram and David, daughters Katharina, Agata, and Anna, my mother.

When my mother (then Anna Fast) was 12 years old, her mother died of cancer. Grandpa Fast was left as a widower with five motherless children. After a short widowhood, Grandpa Fast married an elderly spinster, Suse Unrau. From this second marriage, there was a daughter Susanna and a baby who died. Grandpa Fast received more capital with this second mar-



Lena (Wiens)
Sawatzky
(1920-2015)

(See Migration on page 20)

(Migration from page 19)

riage, and their economic situation expanded greatly. So, he became a wealthy man. Already with his first wife, they came to faith in God, were baptized, and joined a small Mennonite Brethren Church in the colony.

The years passed. Johann (Julius) Wiens lived in the same village (No. 14), Steinfeld. His family belonged to the Mennonite General Conference church. He had a big family too. Their sons were Johann, Franz (later to be my father), David, Heinrich, and Abram. The daughters were Susanna, Liese, and Tina. The sons and daughters grew up and thought of getting married. There was a friendly relationship between the youth of these two families. Franz Wiens made a marriage alliance with Anna Fast. These were my parents. Then Abram Fast (my mother's brother) married Susanna Wiens (my father's sister). And Abram Wiens (my father's brother) married Susanna Fast (my mother's sister from the second marriage).

Franz Wiens and Anna Fast, who became my parents celebrated their green wedding (got married) in 1912. After the marriage, they moved in with Grandpa and Grandma Fast, my mother's parents.

My grandparents decided they wanted Franz Wiens, their son-in-law, to live with them on their big estate because they had only one daughter left at home by now. They wanted my father, Franz Wiens, to manage their estate when the grandparents got older. My grandpa Fast was so pleased with his son-in-law (my father) that they agreed to live together as one family and would have everything in common. His motto was "What is mine is also yours." Soon the last daughter, Susanna Fast, born to the second marriage, was to marry. My parents, Franz and Anna Wiens, joined up to become one family with my grandparents, grandpa and grandma Fast. In this family, Grandpa Fast was the head, and my father, Franz Wiens, was an advisory member of the family. Grandpa could rely on my father. Because he was hardworking and skillful, he was highly regarded by Grandpa. This aroused envy among the other children of Grandpa and Grandma Fast in Siberia, where two of his sons and the oldest daughter lived with their families.

In 1914 the first son, Johann, was born to Franz and Anna Wiens. In that same year, 1914, the world war erupted, and our father was conscripted to serve in the forestry service. Grandpa Fast had to manage the estate with a Russian worker during this time. On January 6, 1916, while the political



Threshing as referenced in the story (photo credit *Vater Abram, Ratzlaff 2004*)



Abram Fast family. Arrows point (L to R) Anna Fast, Susanna Fast and Abram Fast Jr. Zagradovka, Ukraine 1909 (photo credit *Vater Abram, Ratzlaff 2004*)



Abram Fast with his second wife holding daughter Susanna. Between them is daughter Agathe from his first marriage. Second marriage brought wealth to Abram Fast, he became known in Zagradovka as "Rikja Faust." (Rich Fast) Zagradovka, Ukraine 1909 (photo credit *Vater Abram, Ratzlaff 2004*)

situation in Russia was worsening, a daughter, Suse, was born to my parents.

When the Russian Emperor was overthrown in 1917, there was anarchy in Russia, and our ancestors' good and pleasant days were over. After 150 years of life in an empire where the Mennonites had become prosperous, the entire empire of the Romanov family collapsed. Now two parties formed in the country, red and white. The reds were the communists, and the whites were the democrats. During this time, bands of robbers emerged, inflicting great terror and harm on the Mennonite settlement of Zagradovka, which suffered badly. Terrorist captain, Nestor Makhno, was the one who, with his gang, brutally robbed and murdered the inhabitants in 1919. My grandparents, my parents, and

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(Migration from page 20)

their small children left everything and fled from the robber gangs into the surrounding fields, where they stayed for the night. When they returned to their farm in the morning, the gang had withdrawn, and there was temporary calm. Again, one night another gang came into their farmyard, smashed windows and shouted that they should open the doors immediately. That caused them great shock, and grandma and my mother cried out in fear. When the doors were opened, armed men came in and demanded money. Because there was no money, grandpa and father had to stand facing the wall. A bandit had turned to mother with his gun, and mother then screamed as loud as she could out of fear while the bandits ransacked the whole house and took away valuables. In the morning, my mother lost her voice and couldn't speak a word. Her hair was also a good deal greyer.

(Lena's explanation summarizing some of the details from Lohrenz pp.93-97) When the imperial government fell in March 1917, and then in November 1917, the Bolsheviks came to power, and the good days with peace and security were over. The surrounding Russians demanded and received land, horses, and farm implements. Every Mennonite farmer had to give up some of their belongings and land. That wasn't easy. For a while, the young people stood watch day and night to keep the bandits out of the settlement. But it got harder and harder. In the Spring of 1919, bandits kept coming into the villages and robbing them. The gang had grown big and strong, and in the summer, they

invaded villages and took horses, clothes, buggies - in short, everything they wanted. The people of Zagradoŭka always went to bed in fear. Life was very insecure. Armed gangs roamed the countryside, robbed and murdered with impunity. The worst of these was the Makhno gang. The days of greatest horror in the settlement of Zagradoŭka were on November 29th and 30th and December 1, 1919. In November 1919, a part of the gang raided six villages in this settlement.

As a result of this, many became widows and orphans. The whole village of Munsterberg (No. 11) and 75 estates in other villages were burned to the ground. All around, the sky glowed red. Also, one could hear gunshots and the devilish screams of the terrorists. Finally, the fiends left the village of Tiede (No. 8) and moved on to another village. In the morning, when it was light, people went around shouting fearfully. Only then did they discover the terrible reality: many residents in Tiede (No. 8) had been brutally murdered. Besides murder, arson and robbery, numerous women and girls 12 and over were shamefully raped. Often, they were then also brutally killed. This all happened in Tiede (No. 8) on the first night of terror, November 29, 1919. Finally, after a seemingly endless night, the morning dawned overcast, and they saw more clearly the devilish marks of devastation. In Tiede, the best estates were incinerated. Now the people believed that the gang had withdrawn from this area satisfied. But they returned from the surrounding villages early on November 30. Countless wagons came to pick up loot. The post office in Tiede was robbed, the cash register broken into, the telegraph machine destroyed, and much more. After this, homes were looted, and the wagons brought along for transport were loaded high with loot. Besides money and valuables, flour, grain, food, and clothes, more than 40 horses were taken from Tiede. On December 1, a large number of stragglers came to Tiede to continue with their predatory activity, while a large group of them moved on to Schoenau (No. 13), where they also burned, robbed, and murdered. Six villages were affected by this historic disaster: Gnadenfeld (No. 12), Reinfeld (No. 16), Orloff (No. 6), Tiede (No. 8), Münsterberg (No. 11), and Schoenau (No. 13).

These six villages similarly experienced the atrocities. Most terrifying, however, was the diabolical devastation in Munsterberg and Tiede. From the evening of November 29 on, the fire raged there; almost all residents, from children in their cradles to the life-weary older people, were butchered, and a large number burned – over 100 people. The whole village with belongings and lots of live cattle was torched. Of the more than 100 dead, it was only possible to bury 37 corpses in a mass grave; the rest were incinerated. (Lohrenz p. 96) During the nights of the murderous rampage, Samagonka (home-brewed brandy) was being brewed continuously for the gang in the village of Schesternja. Finally, finally on the evening of the third day of the murderous rampage, December 1, the robbers in Schesternja were frightened by the flashing of a spotlight coming from the local defence forces with the approaching "cadets" (Denikinzy). [Lieutenant General Aton Denikin's volunteer army] (Lohrenz p. 96)

An eyewitness describes this moment: the robbers were immediately signalled to leave, and in a wild escape, the fiends left the village of Schesternja and thus also our broken community. From here, they headed in a southeasterly direction to Kronau and from there to Nikopol. (Zagradoŭka by Lohrenz pp. 93-97) Rumour has it that most of the terrorists were killed by the pursuing cadets on December 1, 1919.

What follows is about my grandpa and grandma Fast, my parents,

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(Migration from page 21)

Franz and Anna Wiens, and my uncle and aunt, the Abram Wiens family. This is what I heard from the older generation. My parents lived with Grandpa and Grandma Fast in their summer room, and my uncle lived nearby, in the village of Steinfeld (No. 14). In such troubled times, nobody can take their life for granted. So it was that Grandpa and Grandma Fast, my parents with three small children, and our Uncle and Aunt with a baby sometimes had to leave their homes, hiding somewhere. They had to hide somewhere out in the fields at night, and during the day, they spent their time in the cornfields as long as the gangs were in the village. One night the gang came into the yard and smashed the windows with a long pole. There was the flashing of light and loud crashing, a lot of scary feelings. Then they threw a hand grenade through the window into the room. My Father threw it back out as fast as he could, and then it exploded. Another time Mom was about to bake bread. The dough was ready to be baked. The fire in the stove was also ready. Then came the announcement that the gang was approaching our village. Everyone tried to get to safety as quickly as possible. Mutti then quickly put the bread in the oven and ran out into the cornfield, where the family was.

Here is an explanation: at the end of every village, there was a guard on horseback. Because there were open fields around the village, they had a broad view. So, when such a gang was approaching, word was passed from house to house. My grandpa and grandma Fast and parents often had to escape, sometimes in great danger. They lived in fear day and night. During this difficult time, my parents had three young children (five, three, and a one-year-old), which was very difficult. TO BE CONTINUED

Hart Wiens is retired from a career in Bible Translation. He served 20 years with Wycliffe Bible Translators in the Philippines and another 20 years as Director of Scripture Translations at the Canadian Bible Society. Hart now lives with his wife, Ginny (Wichert) Wiens, in Waterloo, Ontario. Hart and Ginny enjoy reading and grandparenting their 15 grandchildren. Hart also enjoys driving an airport shuttle, where he has plenty of opportunities to engage in conversation with many interesting people. Hart has served on Church Leadership boards, the Wycliffe Bible Translators board chair, and Shalom Counselling and Community Justice Initiatives. Hart spent most of his year in COVID lockdown writing his Memoire - "Anna's Son: Joyfully Following Hært to Hært," - Self published in Amazon: <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B0918LTK7Y> ❖



Couples (L to R) Anna & Franz Wiens, Susanna & Abram Fast, Susanna & Abram Wiens Zagradovka, Ukraine 1926 (photo credit Lena Wiens Sawatzky)

“Are You a Mennonite?”

I asked

By Bill Franz

Wayne Dueck's article, "Are You a Mennonite?" got me thinking. I'm usually the one asking the question. I remember waiting in the Edmonton airport to catch a flight and asking that question of a woman sitting next to me wearing a head covering. Of course, I self-identified as well.

Last summer, we were camped near Hinton, Alberta, and a fellow camper came over to check out our new pop-up canopy. A light rain was falling, so he stood under the canopy with us and chatted for a while.

When I heard a slight hint of a Low German accent in his voice, I popped the question, "Are you a Mennonite?" I added, "I'm one." He was surprised but said that he was and that German had been his first language. I said, "Mine too." I had found out he was from Coaldale, another hint.

Eventually, he asked me my name, and then I asked him his. He said, "Dave Epp." Dave Epp*! Dave took a step back, clearly surprised. My friend Alan and I stepped closer to him and stuck out our hands.

Alan and I worked with Dave about twenty years back, although we were in different locations. He didn't remember me at first, but he soon remembered Alan as they had had more interactions. Alan had been trying to place him but couldn't quite.

The next morning Dave came over again and said that, yes, he now remembered me. Small world!

*Dave Epp is a pseudonym. ❖



Hart Wiens

Are You a Mennonite

By *Wayne Dueck*

As one whose Dueck/Adrian/Sawatsky heritage is solidly ethnic Mennonite from Ukraine dating back to the Danzig area, I was, and still am, honoured to be asked ... Are you a Mennonite?

It's a loaded question. My Roth/Scheel/Dittmer heritage is solidly Moravian from Utica, Minnesota, going back to Vestenbergsgreuth, Germany.

1966-67 was spent living in Europe as part of the InterMenno Trainee Program. Weekends and holidays were spent travelling throughout Europe, visiting Mennonite churches (Doopegezinde Kerk and Mennonitische Kirche) and historical spots significant to my Mennonite and Moravian heritage. I lived in Friesland, almost walking distance from Witmarsum.

In 1966, Wally Roth and I contacted my Grandfather Herman Roth's cousins in Vestenbergsgreuth and asked whether we could spend time with them at Christmas. After driving past the farm the Roth family had owned for generations, we located the home of widow Margaretha Roth. Her husband was killed in WW II. Standing in the doorway was a man, Margaretha's brother-in-law, who looked strikingly similar to grandfather Herman Roth. Not only was he stocky with a large girth, but he also wore wide suspenders and a floppy felt hat. After talking to him, it struck me how much his voice sounded like the grandfather I'd known since birth. We remained for the night sleeping in the cold attic on a bed perhaps 4 feet in length, covered up with a thick goose-down blanket.

Unusual daily experiences were

recorded in a diary. On January 21, 1967, as I neared the Manz home in Zurich, Switzerland, where Manz, Blaurock and Grebel baptized each other 442 years earlier, a storm raged, and I doubted whether the home would be found. (GPS was not yet available.) Eventually, the home was located. A while later, when leaving the home, the sun shone brightly. The storm had ended.

Are you a Mennonite?

Yes ... proudly so. Do you want a quick answer? How much time do you have?

In the fall of 2019, I made arrangements to practice trumpet in St. Michael's & All the Saints Anglican Cathedral, Kelowna, BC. On a Wednesday morning, a church employee, who unlocked the door to the sanctuary, commented Dueck Dueck. Are you a Mennonite? Yes, proudly so. Well, he commented can I tell you that my mother's families are Friesens and Loewens, who immigrated to Canada from Ukraine in 1923? Amazingly, my wife Carry (Friesen) Dueck's mother was one of Elder Daniel Loewen's daughters. The church employee and I determined that we weren't knowingly related.

Experiences of a similar nature often occur in Kelowna.

Last year I registered in the Gym at the H2O Centre in Kelowna. After giving the receptionist my name at the desk, an individual next to me commented that his surname was Klassen. He told me his primary school teacher in Yarrow years ago was Vern Ratzlaff. Klassen spoke about the positive influence Teacher Ratzlaff had on his life. I told him Vern was our former pastor at Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon.

Son Gregory, Medical Oncologist in Kelowna, has commented that sometimes patients ask about his heritage.

Recently a mother at Costco apologized to me as one of her active children ran into me while exiting the building. We introduced ourselves. Are you a Mennonite? She said she'd grown up in a loving Mennonite home north of Saskatoon. So did I.

A fellow with the surname Unruh told me he knew he was of Mennonite origin but knew absolutely nothing of his heritage. He asked for a Mennonite History Session 101. What a rewarding experience.

A staff member at a farm supply store in Kelowna saw my surname on my Visa card and asked ... Do you know anything about the Mennonites? Are you a Mennonite? Do you know anything about Pfeffernusse being made at Christmas? I know my grandmother came from Russia. We found



Wayne Dueck holding a spokeshave carved replica of the yoke his grandfather Reverend Johann Dueck made in May 1893. Only days after arriving in Rosthern, NWT, Johann's first purchase was a pair of oxen for \$110 from Henry Enns. Last year the yoke was donated to the Rosthern Museum and Mennonite Interpretive Centre.

(Mennonite from page 23)

a recipe online, and she told me she planned to make Pfeffernusse at Christmas this year.

Today, a resident in Glenmore Lodge, where Carry is also a resident, told me her mother's family were of Swiss Mennonite origin from the Waterloo, Ontario area. We chuckled as we realized we were not related and might not be able to understand each other's language.

This is a journey which provides endless opportunities to meet new people, many of whom have a faint idea of their Mennonite heritage. It's a privilege to spend time together with them. I think Grosspapa Reverend Johann Dueck would approve of such connections being made.

Wayne Dueck is retired from a brief career in social work practice and teaching and a lengthy career in business in Saskatoon. Wayne enjoys photography, classical music, tree planting, studying Mennonite history, carpentry, gardening and grandparenting. Over the years, Wayne has been on several boards and committees. Wayne lives in Kelowna, BC. His wife, Carry, is a resident of Glenmore Lodge, Kelowna and caring for Carry is a priority at this point. ❖

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

Press Release Jan 30, 2023

When the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada wrapped up its meetings at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Sask., on Jan. 22, the freezing rain had started. Dick Braun loaded up the 15-passenger van with people going directly to the airport, but it was too late. The laneway at Shekinah was too slippery and he could not get up the long hill. But no one missed their flight back home. John Reddekopp and Jake Buhler packed as many as possible into their four-wheel drive vehicles for the one-hour trip to Saskatoon and one of them made a second trip.

Twenty people met at Shekinah on the weekend of Jan. 20-22 for these historical society meetings, representing Mennonite museums, archives, educational institutions and provincial historical societies from across the country. After two years of meeting online, the group appreciated making personal connections. The exchange of ideas among these Mennonite historical organizations is invaluable as it encourages inspiration and collaboration.

This year the Award of Excellence went to Leonard Doell, a Mennonite genealogist, oral



Conrad Stoesz, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada presents the Award of Excellence to Leonard Doell. (Photo by Graham Schellenberg)

historian and collector of community knowledge who has written a number of books and articles. He has also researched local Indigenous land claims and has developed invaluable connections with local First Nations communities.

Doell was deeply appreciative of the award and pointed out that he was able to build on what others have done before. He thanked the historical society for their work saying, "Keep up the good work in preserving our history and seeking ways to make it relevant to today's world."

Along with other members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Doell was a knowledgeable tour guide as the group visited the original Old Colony Mennonite church in Neuanlage, the museum at Hague, and Stoney Knoll, a place that acknowledges that land sold to Mennonite settlers was actually a reservation of the Young Chipewyan First Nation. The group also stopped in Rosthern to see the former train station where 100 years ago, hundreds of Mennonites arrived from the former Soviet Union.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada has been working on two commemorative projects. Over the past year an exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man., has told the story of the large migration of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico and Paraguay 100 years ago. Thanks to the hard work of curator Andrea Klassen, this exhibit is now being prepared to travel across Canada. It will generally work its way west through 2023 and go to Ontario in 2024.

The other big project happen-
(See MHSC on page 25)

(MHSC from page 24)

ing this summer is commemorating 100 years since thousands of Mennonites arrived in Canada from the former Soviet Union. Henry Paetkau, the chair of this centenary committee was happy to announce that there are nearly 60 people signed up for each of the three legs of the train trip from Quebec City to Abbotsford, B.C. Generous donations have allowed them to subsidize about 30 young adults on the trip.

"This is very exciting, and it will impact the dynamics of the tour," said Paetkau. "There will be some young adults on each leg of the tour and that will enrich the conversations."

Other on-going projects supported by the Canadian historical society are the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Various Mennonite archives are also work at digitizing periodicals and other records to make them available to the public.

The executive committee of MHSC includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; Bruce Guenther, fifth member. ❖

Tribute to Peter Dyck

Peter Dyck of Calgary passed away peacefully on Sun, Jul. 17, 2022, at the age of 93; Peter was born in Saskatoon, SK, on Feb. 18, 1929. Peter is survived by his loving wife Laura of seventy years, four children and four grandchildren. He is also survived by his siblings, Walter (Coralee) Dyck and

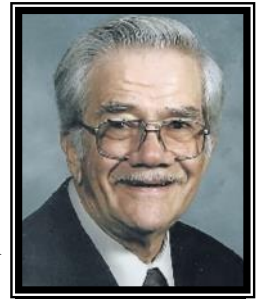
Irma Dyck, and predeceased by his sisters, Helena Dyck Coop and Sadie Dyck Janzen. Peter will be sadly missed by many.

Peter's strong integrity was evident in all that he did. In his early years, he worked as a grain elevator agent, then moved on and worked in the construction and insurance industries for most of his life. Peter was a proud business owner of Boulder Insurance Services Ltd. and a long-time member of First Mennonite Church in Calgary, where he served as a Deacon. He was also a dedicated volunteer at MCC throughout his life and a refugee sponsor.

Peter Dyck was a highly respected member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta for many years. He served as a member of the board of directors, treasurer and volunteer in the Archives and Library. Peter worked as a volunteer at the MHSA archives until illness made that impossible in the last year of his life.

The MHSA invites its members to make donations in Peter's memory to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 210 - 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Funeral Services were held at Calgary First Mennonite Church on Jul. 28, 2022. ❖



Peter Dyck

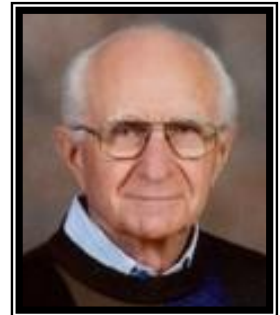
Tribute to Ralph Dahl

Ralph Dahl was born in 1931 to Gerhard and Katharina (Peters) Dahl in Didsbury, Alberta and passed away on Jan. 9, 2023. Remembering Ralph are his wife, Rita, four children, five grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. Also mourning his loss are his sister and numerous nieces, nephews, and in-laws.

Ralph enjoyed a successful medical career but truly loved spending time at the family farm. Following his retirement, he spent many wonderful hours there – maintaining a large garden, tending to the trees he planted, and enjoying the peace of the countryside.

Active and athletic, Ralph played hockey into his 70s and often cycled for miles. He and Rita also travelled extensively, exploring Canada and the world together. He retired from medicine in 2006 at the age of 75. Ralph was also active in various volunteer organizations, including the Rosthern Junior College Board, the MHSA and the MCC Thrift Shop in Calgary.

Ralph was a highly esteemed member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta for many years. He served in numerous aspects of the MHSA, including on the board of directors and in the Archives and Library. When asked to write an article for the Chronicle, Ralph thought long and hard before he agreed. He wrote, "It is often said that everybody has a story to tell, but I never thought that applied to me because I am not a storyteller." But he had his own memories, could draw on the memories of



Ralph Dahl

(See Dahl on page 26)

(Dahl from page 25)

surviving old-timers, reread some records and papers left by his father (who had served and provided leadership in the early days of his home community), and gather additional information from relevant sources available in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. That enabled him to pen an excellent piece entitled *Telling Our Stories: Stories From the Burns Ranch*, June 2014.

The MHSA invites its members to make donations in Ralph's memory to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 210 - 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Funeral Services were held at Calgary First Mennonite Church on Jan. 24, 2023. ❖

Tribute to Irene (Epp) Klassen

Sadly, we announce the passing of Irene Helen (Epp) Klassen on Monday, Jan. 2, 2023, at the age of 98. Irene was born in Woolrich, Waterloo County, ON, on Aug. 12, 1924, a month after her parents immigrated to Canada. For the past eight years, Irene resided in Independent Living at Evanston Grand Village in Calgary. Her husband, John, of 66 years, passed away in 2016. Irene will be lovingly remembered and deeply missed by her four children, six grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, extended family, and many friends.



Irene Klassen

Irene Klassen was a highly valued member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta since its inception in 1986. She served in many capacities; Secretary, member of the board of directors and volunteer in the Archives and Library. In addition to the above, Irene was the author of six books and many articles and served as the editor of the MHSA Newsletter (now the Chronicle) for a number of years. When MHSA collected the stories of Mennonite leaders who have shaped Alberta, Klassen spearheaded the project; *Their Mark Their Legacy* was published in 2006. Irene donated the proceeds from the book to the MHSA. In 2013 the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada awarded Irene the MHSC Award of Excellence. After archivist Judith Rempel died, she came in less regularly because she didn't have a ride. She depended on her husband, John, to drive her. That, and for a time, less supervision after Judith's death and before Ted Regehr began there as a volunteer, resulting in fewer visits. Office volunteer Alice Unrau and Ted still consulted with her on specific matters, notably the identification of persons on photographs, until quite recently.

The MHSA invites its members to make donations in Irene's memory to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 210 - 2946 - 32 Street NE, Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

A Celebration of Irene's life was held on Sat, Jan. 21, 2023, at First Mennonite Church, Calgary. ❖

What's in a name?

By Bill Franz

I confess I have, on occasion, driven my wife nuts. I have a penchant for saying, "That's a good Mennonite name." What do I mean when I say that? Those of us who have played the "Mennonite game" will probably recognize that I'm usually referring to the more commonly-known Mennonite surnames.

What has prompted this reflection is several coincidental events, initiated by Glenn H. Penner's article in the October 2022 issue of *The Chronicle*, **Tracing your Low-German Mennonite Family Name back to the Netherlands - don't count on it!** Glenn asserts "that unless your surname is Fehr (Defehr) or one of the very rare Danzig surnames, you are highly unlikely to be able to reliably retrace your Low-German Mennonite family name back to the Netherlands."

On Glenn's list of known Anabaptists who moved from the Netherlands to the Danzig area is a Thomas Franzen, who moved from Utrecht to Danzig in 1583. Glenn references Henry Schapansky's book, *Mennonite Migrations and the Old Colony*, published in 2006, as a starting point for this list.

Is Franzen close enough to Franz? Possibly, but it's a bit of a leap. Closer to home, I state in my book *Mutti and Papa, A Love Story*, that my father said that our ancestors came from Groningen. Family legend, yes. Proof, no, although there is perhaps a bit of corroborating evidence.

Recently, Rod Ratzlaff, a member of the Mennonite Genealogy

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and History Facebook group with a special interest in Poland, questioned some of my assumptions about Brenkenhofswalde. It is here where I have documented evidence (thanks to Richard Thiessen) of my ancestors, Martin and Sara Unruh (née Vogt), who emigrated to the Molotschna in South Russia. Their daughter, Maria, married a Heinrich Franz, who also apparently emigrated from Prussia (Poland). According to Rod, Martin Unruh's father, also a Martin Unruh, owned plot number 11 at Brenkenhofswalde and was likely one of the original settlers at Brenkenhofswalde in 1765. Aha, one more (partial) generation back to enter into my personal genealogical record.

Rod Ratzlaff states we can attach Martin and Sara Unruh to the Groningen Old Flemish congregation at Przechowka but that this congregation is not tied to Gro-

ningen in a genealogical sense. Rather, it associated itself with the sect sometime after 1628, although Przechowka, as a Mennonite village, had been established somewhat earlier. Rod further advises that "unique to Vistula valley Mennonite settlements, Przechowka included a certain number of Swiss-Moravians, and both the Unrau and Voht names (Unruh and Vogt) should trace their origins to these Swiss-Moravians."

As for Heinrich Franz, my earliest known Franz ancestor, Rod guesses he was not from Brenkenhofswalde and certainly not from Karolswalde, where the Unruhs lived for a time (perhaps) before migrating on to the Molotschna.

How about Franzthal, in the Netzebruch area in the Neumark (near Brenkenhofswalde)? That sounded promising at one time. I mean, who wouldn't want to assume that the Franzes founded a community in the valley named after themselves? But no, it seems that the name Franzthal was taken in gratitude to Franz Balthasar Schoenberg von Brenkenhoff.

So the mystery continues. A Google search indicates that the Franz surname is German, but it could be French, Czech, Austrian, Hungarian, etc. On an earlier search, I seem to recall that the surname was of Bohemian origins (now Czech), originating in the late 1400s.

This is all great fun, but I think I need to keep in mind that there are a lot of ancestors back in time. We have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, 16 2G (great-great-grandparents), 32 3G (GGG-grandparents), 64 4G (GGGG-grandparents) and so on. So with my earliest named ancestor on my father's side, Martin Unruh (Sr.), there are another 63 ancestors of mine who are also my great-great-great-great-grandparents. That's going back six generations. It kind of puts things in perspective, I think. As for Franz, I'll keep searching. ❖

Letters to the Editor

Hello Dave,

I want to congratulate you on the publication of the Oct 2022 issue of the Chronicle magazine. It is the most wonderful information that I have seen. I was unable to attend the fall conference in Linden. My parents lived in Coronation, and we often visited Swalwell and the Barkman family there many years ago. I was very pleased to read about Brent Wiebe's presentation regarding his newly discovered maps and Abe Janzen's article on the Low German Mennonites and the histories of their churches. I have found the website of Brent's Trails of the Past; very interesting. And thank you for the information from Menno Klaassen about donating my boxes of books and papers to the archives; that will be helpful for my son when I can no longer enjoy them. I enjoyed the Lendrum Church presentation on DNA a few years ago. I purchased quite a number of books in the past few years and contacted a fellow Cornies in Germany for 200 pages of family history online. My mother was a Cornies, born on the estate of Jushanlee, Ukraine, in 1901, moved to Mennonite settlements in Russia until the Second World War, then to Germany and on to Canada. It is sad today to hear of the fighting in Bakhmut and Kherson, Ukraine, where so many of our ancestors lived.

Again I want to thank all of your group for such a wonderful Chronicle this month; it was very much appreciated.

Rosalind Sirman
Edmonton
Nov 29, 2022



Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

presents the Alberta portion of the

Cross Canada Russlaender 100 Tour - July 2023

in partnership with the

Canadian Mennonite Historical Society and TourMagination



Thurs. July 20, 2023 - 4:00 PM tour arrives at the Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village east of Edmonton for a tour, authentic Ukrainian meal, plus a discussion with Mennonite and Ukrainian historians

- 7:30 PM tour departs for overnight stay in Red Deer

Fri. July 21, 2023 - 11:00 AM arrive at Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, for lunch, Russlaender sponsorship accounts, map of Mennonite Churches of Alberta today, posters showing when various Mennonite settlers first came to Alberta and heritage piano selections



- 4:00 PM tour arrives at the CC Toews (Evergreen) Farm, Linden, for sharing Russlaender sponsorship stories, entertainment by Cowboy Poet Doris Daley and a western barbeque supper

- 7:00 PM tour leaves for Edmonton for evening departure to Abbotsford, BC

All locals are invited to purchase tickets at each location and participate "Preregistration is required" email DaveToews at dmtows@gmail.com

For complete tour information, see the TourMagination website

<https://tourmagination.com/tour/cross-canada-russlaender-centenary-tour/>