



# The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

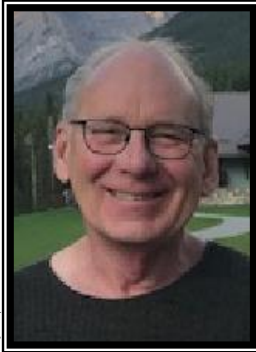
Volume XXVII Number 1

Mar 2024

## A Lasting Legacy

By Deryle Penner

My name's Deryle Penner, and I confess I'm a genealogy nut. That means I habitually scour past issues of relevant papers and publications for anything Penner-related. In that regard, I recently came across a Mennonite Quarterly Review article written by Dawn Bowens, Professor of Geography at Mary Washington University in Fredericksburg, Virginia. The piece was entitled Resistance, Acquiescence and Accommodation: The Establishment of Public Schools in an Old Colony Mennonite Community in Canada <https://www.goshen.edu/mqr/2010/10/october-2010-table-of-contents/>



Deryle Penner

(See Legacy on page 8)

## So You Think I am JUST a Veterinarian?

By Eugene Janzen

Mixed farming, meaning a farm with many different animals and raising a variety of crops, was still common when I was growing up as a “baby boomer”. This preschool experience on the prairies proved a lasting influence that ultimately shaped me in adulthood. I was fortunate to live on the same yard as my grandparents. What I didn't realize then was that my grandmother often became my guardian and preschool teacher when my mother wanted some “alone time”. Now it is almost impossible to think of a world without kindergarten, children's television programming or all other things digital, that are so influential with the children of today. Thus, it is easy to see how a grandmother on the same yard so easily filled that role, teaching many lessons and sometimes not so subtly introducing a preschool farm-kid to the association between humankind and animals. Lunchtime approached and mother asked me to find my dad for lunch. In retrospect, I was probably underfoot, and this was a convenient way of ensuring I didn't further impinge on lunch time preparations. Finding my dad meant I had to cross the barnyard, pass through a gap in the shelterbelt, so common on the flat prairie, and find him working on field equipment. However, as I crossed the barnyard, I provoked the interest of a large Leghorn rooster who not only followed me, but as I began to run, did so as well. This created in my impressionable



Eugene Janzen



Cow and Calf,  
Longview, Alberta

(See Vet on page 4)

### In this Issue

1. A Veterinarian?
1. A Lasting Legacy
2. Editorial Reflections
2. Chairman's Corner
12. La Crete Name
13. La Crete Poem
13. Grandpa Friesen
16. Biography of Jacob Wieler
18. MHSA Board Members
19. Restorative Justice Bk Review
20. Liesbeth Book Review
21. Tribulation Book Review
22. MHSC Press Release

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## MHSA Spring Conference

La Crete area tours & history talks of Mennonites in La Crete, Alberta, and Bolivia.

**Date:** May 31 & June 1, 2024

**Place:** La Crete Heritage Centre, La Crete, Alberta

**Featuring:** Susan Siemens, La Crete & Abe Janzen, Calgary

**See the poster on the back page for more details**

## Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

Shirley Hershey Showalter, author of - *Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World*, commented:

"Visiting places where our ancestors lived ... weaves a gossamer tie to the past."

I was immediately taken with this quote, but what exactly does gossamer mean? According to Merriam-Webster, a *light, delicate film of cobwebs floating in the air in calm, clear autumn weather*. As time passes, the vivid memories of visiting my parents' home villages in Ukraine in the autumn of 2010 become increasingly more gossamer.

Congratulations to our Assistant Editor, Bill Franz. His report on the MHSA 2023 Fall Conference on Wymysle was reprinted in



Dave Toews

the Mennonite Polish Studies Association newsletter of Bethel College, North Newton, KS.

Volunteer articles are like a gift from above, especially at Christmas time! While we were all celebrating Christmas, Deryle Penner of La Glace, Alberta, was busy drafting an article for the Chronicle. On Dec 28, he sent me the story of how his grandfather, Jacob Penner gave their family the lasting legacy of education.

It has been a busy time of planning. Planning for the MHSA AGM on Apr 20 and the MHSA Spring Conference in La Crete from May 30 to June 2. I am also on the planning committee for the 60<sup>th</sup> Grad Reunion of our 1964 class at Rosthern Junior College on the June 22 weekend. I will see a number of you at all of these events.

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 [dmtows@gmail.com](mailto:dmtows@gmail.com) or 780-218-

7411 cell with any questions, suggestions or comments. ❖

## Chairman's Corner

by Katie Harder

On February 18, 19, and 20, of this year I was privileged to attend the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Board Meetings on behalf of MHSA in Winnipeg, MB. It

was an interesting and informative time for me. This is the second time that I have had the opportunity to attend these sessions, and needless to say I enjoyed them more the second time around. While I met new people, I also recognized quite a few from last year, which made it that much more pleasant. In the process of being there, I was able to visit the Mennonite Heritage Archives at Canadian Mennonite University, what an eyeopener. The archives are extensive, a lot of history has been preserved and continues to be well looked after. The campus of the Canadian Mennonite University is quite large, housing offices for various Mennonite components.

Approximately twenty individuals attended the sessions, chaired by Conrad Stoesz. Five of the six provincial societies were present, with Quebec being absent. In addition to the provincial society reports there were various committee reports, and institutional reports. Conrad Stoesz is the current chair of MHSC and has been and con-



Katie Harder

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### MHSA Executive

Chair: Katie Harder, Didsbury  
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Eugene Janzen, High River  
Menno Klassen, Devon  
Jeremy Wiebe, La Crete

(See Chairman on page 3)

(Chairman from page 2)

tinues to be the archivist.

During the round table discussions at the meetings, it was noted that if we want the Mennonite Historical Societies to remain viable, we are going to have to make an effort to connect with other Mennonite groups as well as the new cultural Mennonites churches that now form part of our provincial conferences. It is becoming evident that the churches of the new cultural Mennonites are growing, while some of our mainline Mennonite churches are having to close their doors. Newcomer Mennonites have different stories, and we need to make more of an effort to tell their stories. This phenomenon is happening in all the provincial societies.

At this year's AGM the decision was made to dissolve the Russlaender Committee as well as the Genealogy Committee. With the completion of the 2023 cross country "Memories of Migration Russlaender Tour" the work of the Russlaender Committee was completed. Bert Friesen reported that the work of the Genealogy Committee is finished. The Grandma Committee was part of the California Historical Society, now with the California Society terminating, the GRANDMA organization is now creating a separate society called Mennonite Genealogy Inc. It was suggested that MHSC participate in this new committee. Since Richard Thiessen will be on the board of this new committee he will automatically serve as the representative to MHSC.

This year's 2024 MHSC Award of Excellence was presented to a very worthy recipient, Ken Reddig, from Manitoba. Ken has served as an archivist, historian,

educator, and is a visionary who began his career in the MHSC archives in 1979. Ken has a long and varied list of accomplishments. He is a creative thinker who has a passion for history and storytelling that he has used for the benefit of the wider Mennonite constituency. Ken briefly shared some of his fond memories of working with the archives.

The Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) Program just recently accepted its 16<sup>th</sup> partner from Neuland Paraguay.

GAMEO Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online is re-evaluating how GAMEO does biographies. MHSA just recently had Henry Goerzen's biography published in GAMEO.

Various Mennonite archives are at work digitizing periodicals and other records to make them available to the public.

2022 marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Mennonites leaving Manitoba and Saskatchewan for Mexico and Paraguay. They left their established homes and farms because of new provincial laws requiring children to attend government schools even though the federal government had initially promised them the freedom to educate their children. The Mennonite Historical Society marked the anniversary by partnering with the Mennonite Heritage Village in the production of a traveling exhibit. This exhibit has toured most of the provincial societies. Currently the exhibit is at the Taber, AB Library until February 17, 2024. The Two Hills Adult Learning Council has contacted the Mennonite Archives with the hope of having the exhibit staged at Two Hills, AB. This is exciting news.

While I was at the MHSC Board Meetings, I was also privileged to attend a lecture with Dr. Natalya Venger. Dr. Venger is a professor of history at the Dnepropetrovsk, Ukraine and is a visiting professor at the University of Winnipeg, and Canadian Mennonite University. Dr. Venger has received funding from the Plett Foundation as she takes a sabbatical but is also currently seeking safe refuge from the war in Ukraine. She spoke about the history of the Mennonite sojourn in Ukraine. While in Winnipeg, we also visited the Manitoba Museum, the curator Roland Sawatzky gave us a highly informative tour. On Friday night we were all privileged to be present at the opening night of the exhibit "From Here to There" which celebrates the life and work of Manitoba artist Alvin Pauls. Now in his eighty's, this is his first ever major retrospective of his work, which showcases his diverse artistic skills in painting, clay, and glass media. It featured original pottery and painting artworks as full-scale reproductions.

The Mennonite provincial societies, archives and other historical organizations value the connections that are fostered by meeting annually. 2024 is the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of MHSC.

The MHSC executive includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Lauren Harder Gissing, vice president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to attend the MHSC sessions in Winnipeg, MB. ❖

(Vet from page 1)

### Youngsters learn about animals that lasts a lifetime



Child with Alpaca,  
Saskatoon Forestry  
Farm, Saskatchewan



Girl with fish, caught on the  
Churchill River, Saskatchewan

four-year-old mind the idea that this rooster was a monster and was out to do me real harm. Fortunately, all out of breath, I passed through the gap in the trees and, shrieking and blubbing, ran into my father's arms. When I calmed down, Dad asked; "Why didn't you come with Rover? Then the rooster would have left you alone!" Later, I just couldn't help but commiserate with Mom, who simply said; "Well you ran fast and got to Dad OK. It would actually have been better if you had thought of what Dad suggested." With that, the subject had been dealt with by the adults in my life, or so I thought.

But it hadn't been! That night I had a nightmare of monumental proportions. In my dreams, the rooster turned out to be a "feathered Tyrannosaurus Rex" who chased me up the ladder into the hayloft when I was trapped on the other side of the barnyard with nowhere safe to go, but into the barn. What I will never forget was the moment I tearfully complained to Grandmother, and she said, "Oh, really, do you remember which rooster it was?" Even as a very sheltered youngster, I sensed this could almost be a trick question, given there were many roosters in the barnyard. I hesitated to reply and was relieved to see Grandmother get up, put on a shawl and suggest, "Let's go look for him."

Typically, in pre-refrigeration times on the prairies, farmers would acquire "unsexed" chickens from the hatchery which meant an equal number of male and female chickens lived in the farmyard. So, when Grandmother held my hand and we began to look, there were some three hundred roosters amongst an equal number of laying hens. Of course, to me they all looked alike. Grandmother, probably sensing the grownup task she had assigned to me, led me to the chicken barn. Once inside, she closed the door,

### A Leghorn rooster gives me nightmares!



Leghorn rooster

took a capture device, that looked like a miniature shepherd's staff, from the nail beside the door and reiterated, "Which one was it?" I then knew it was a child's "fish-or-cut-bait" time and I pointed. Deftly, she hooked the feet of the rooster and to my astonishment pulled up the "monster" and grabbed him by the feet thereby hanging him upside-down with the words, "Go get Grandpa!" Without knowing what was to transpire, I crossed that same barnyard unafraid of any rooster. Grandpa purposefully strode into the garage, took a broad hatchet out of the cabinet and beheaded the rooster in preparation for table food on Sunday. Never again in my life would any kind of psychotherapy for any nightmare be so effective. Grandmother became the "go-to" person for almost any issue affecting my young person.

### I observe an "Equine-Powered" doctor's emergency call-out event

Before the time of modern roads on the prairies, transportation in the wintertime was almost exclusively with cutters, sleighs or a covered sleigh, called a caboose, usually pulled by a team of horses. Most of the roads were closed when drifting snows made them virtually impassable for automobiles of the day, given that the heavy equipment needed to keep them open was not available to most prairie municipalities.

I was at grandparents' house in the late afternoon and was likely partaking in Grandma's idea of a sweet interlude, a sugar lump soaked in hot tea, in the kitchen looking out into the barnyard. I saw my father standing in the

(See Vet on page 5)

(Vet from page 4)

doorway of the horse barn, highlighted by the lantern's glow behind him. In the fashion of the proverbial inquisitive child, I asked Grandma; "Why is Dad just standing there and why doesn't he come in?" Unperturbed, my grandmother probably deliberately kept my interest high when she said; "Just wait, you'll see."

In no time, a team pulling an open cutter with a heavily bundled man, circled the yard and stopped in front of the barn doors. My father stepped up to the horses, unhitched them one at a time and led them into our barn. Then, fascinated, I watched Dad lead out our best team, Francis and Nancis, and harness them to the cutter. He barely had time to get out of the way when the man in the cutter vigorously encouraged the freshly hitched team to pull out of our yard.

Curiosity was never stifled at Grandma's house, and I was at her immediately. "Grandma, why did that man take Francis and Nancis away? Who is he anyway? Why did Dad do that? Now what will we do with the "buffalo-coat-man's" horses?" She then explained that Mrs. Niklos had called on the party line and said that Dr. Niklos had to attend to an "about-to-be-mom" across the river. I did not know that would be about fifty miles from town and no team could gallop all the way, but I understood it was far because we never went there in the winter. Mrs. Niklos would use the party line to set up an exchange of fresh horses every few miles so the doctor could go as fast as possible to his patient. Francis and Nancis would be unhitched and stabled at the Huberts, six miles west of our farm. The Hu-

berts would have a fresh team to replace our team and Dr. Niklos could continue his way across the river to the woman who needed help. It did slowly become clear, when Grandma reassured me and said, "Don't worry, Eugene, when Dr. Niklos comes back tomorrow, he will hitch Francis and Nancis to the cutter at the Huberts and then use his own team to get back to town when he gets to our place." With such maximum effort of our animals and the cooperation of the farm families along the "townline", human health care was provided even in midwinter. To me, as a kid, I began to understand the kind of helping that neighbours did and how our animals were a part of that as well.

### Grandma teaches me not to torture an animal

Grandmother didn't always only rescue me or assuage my fears. Sometimes she would take advantage of a "teachable moment" and make it into a profound learning experience. It was a bright summer's day and once again Mom sent me to walk the length of the garden to grandparents' house. It was mid-summer; the ambient air was hot, creating a world buzzing with all kinds of insects. Distracted by insects, I caught a large grasshopper just as I reached the porch at Grandmother's. I sat down on the lower step to inspect and manipulate my captive. Fascinated by the grasshopper, in my manipulations, I began to pull on one of those powerful back legs and in so doing began to dismember the insect.

Grandmother looked over my shoulder and scolded me in German with the almost biblical adage; "Aber Eugene, Qualle nie ein Tier zum Scherz, Es fuhlt das Schmerz wie Du!" Or roughly translated; "But Eugene, never torture an animal for the fun of it. It feels the pain exactly like you!"

Thereafter, I was taken inside, sat down at the dining room table and asked to page through Grandmother's large bible to find the image of Balaam on his burro. When Grandmother explained that the burro balked because of the angel blocking the trail and Balaam beat her, even at that young age, I began to understand about animal cruelty. This



Grasshopper



Angel, Baalam, and his burro,  
from Grousmas's German Bible

(See Vet on page 6)

*(Vet from page 5)*

story would reoccur in my experience repeatedly to this day.

In later years, I would read the Biblical Passage in Numbers 21:22-35 that described in detail what Grandmother had introduced me to so long ago and it would remind me of the current feedlot cowboys I now had occasion to associate with.

The passage describes that Balaam grew agitated when his burro balked on the trail. The burro had encountered an angel, visible only to her, and when she stopped, she rubbed Balaam's leg painfully against a stone wall. Balaam then "smote" his burro which is not unlike what a feedlot cowboy would do when his horse rubs his leg against the gate. Feedlot cowboys don't dismount to open and close the many gates they encounter during their day. A good feedlot horse sidles up to the gate, allowing the rider to pull the latch pin, open the gate, walk around the gate to the other side, and then reverse the procedure. This is done with the rider's leg in close proximity to a heavy wooden or steel gate. I suspect that few feedlot cowboys, unlike Balaam, would have been made aware by their mounts that an angel stood there, and thus critiqued the unsound animal welfare that undoubtedly ensued when his kneecap struck the gate. I'm again aware how that story would have sunk into the psyche of a preschool farm kid.

### **My "Grousma" captivates me with more history**

Another day and mother needed some alone time and sent me to Grandma's house. After the usual around-the-house-inspection by an "eager for experience" preschooler, Grandma finally got to sit me down with a cracker-honey sandwich. Now she had my attention and she proceeded to tell me about when she was a teenager.

As a young person, she was preoccupied with looking after two very young girls. She was surprised when there was a knock at the door. Visitors to the rural homestead usually came with much fanfare so a formal door knock was rarely what neighbours even needed to do. When she finally opened the door, to say she was astonished would be a gross understatement. At the door were two big men and she could see their riding horses in the background. Visitors rarely came on horseback; they came on a buggy or a wagon.

None of the introduction or the obvious questions that followed were understood. Grandma was an immigrant from Ukraine and knew two dialects of German well and could adequately converse in the Ukrainian variant of the Russian language. But there was absolutely no understanding the talking men at the door. Furthermore, Grandma was mortified when one of the men encouraged her with an open hand on the shoulder to follow them. Her deep, deep fear did not diminish one bit as they gently lead her a short distance beyond the edge of the farmstead.

When one of the men began to kick in the earth and point to the strip of plowed ground around the farmstead, Grousma said, "Upeenmol Yink me dot Licht on", or "Suddenly, I began to understand."

The men were suggesting to this teenaged woman that the fireguard plowed around the farm buildings should be free of any debris or dried plants and needed attention.

Then Grandma explained to me that in the very early years of prairie settlement, uncontrolled grass fires were very common and dangerous to the small farmsteads. She went on to explain it was often difficult to determine if the dark clouds to the northwest were thunderheads or actually the dark smoke from a grass fire.

In later years when I asked Grandma about this story, she indicated she thought the two men were actually mounted police, very likely members of the North West Mounted Police (NWMP), that preceded our current Royal Canadian Mounted Police or RCMP, in their role of looking after the safety of the early prairie settlers.

### **Routine animal tasks make them interesting to youngsters**

In the immediate post-war years, our extended family began a dairy in the converted lean-to of a large horse barn. These efforts preceded rural electrification on the prairies and meant the cows were stanchioned in winter and let out for water twice a day. In what we would currently call a technologically-challenged dairy, the cows were milked by hand and at milking time. Often Mom, grandmother and two of my aunts or a combination thereof, would be there to get the chore done. It was then as a child-observer I began to understand that, maybe, even cows had a personality. When the cows would voluntarily come back into the byre on a cold day after being let out to water, Grandmother explained why Ruby wanted the stanchion by the alleyway, "Why, it was her place." Ruby would nudge or even butt other cows away from her stanchion, usually the younger

*(See Vet on page 7)*

(Vet from page 6)

ones who hadn't become attached to a place yet.

As a youngster in elementary school, I was able to personally learn, without anyone pointing it out, how smart horses were. By now, we lived in town and mother would put out two empty milk bottles on the porch and when the milkman went by, those empties would be a sign and would be replaced by full bottles of milk. Usually this happened every day except on Sunday. The milk wagon was a well-insulated covered trailer pulled by a single white gelding. By now, I knew it was a male because when I watched him urinate, it was from under his belly. One day, I noticed he stopped at our house and yet the milkman, in a loud voice, instructed the horse to move on; there were no empty bottles on our porch. The gelding was programmed to stop at our house and didn't understand why he was encouraged to go on without the usual "walk-to-the-porch" interval of his milkman. This probably was the first time I really understood that some animals learn that they too, have a job and appear to love doing it.

### **I cross paths with a real veterinarian for the first time**

In the rural areas of western Canada, agriculture provided many opportunities for part time employment for youngsters in high school. Students were often recruited for tasks such as gathering and stacking hay bales, weeding sugar beets, cultivating summer fallow fields, or mucking out calf pens. Almost old enough to officially have a driver's license, I was hired to help out on weekends at a

dairy farm. Working on a dairy farm not only involved milking and caring for the lactating cows, but also involved feeding the cows, young stock, and unweaned calves. Meanwhile, others attended to the actual milking and subsequent clean-up of the facilities and milking equipment. The week-end workday began early compared to a day during the week, at school. I found myself loading feedstuffs and milk for the very young, onto a cart. After I found the tractor and hooked it onto the cart, I proceeded on to the calf pen with calves of all sizes that were confined in a small paddock at the edge of the farmyard. The youngest calves were to be fed the milk I had reconstituted from a commercial powder. The older calves were fed the best hay on the farm. It was placed in a feeder. Additionally, a premixed ration that was predominately processed barley, was placed in a long bunk that the entire pen could access at once. Therefore, all calves could have access to the hay at the same time, ensuring that no calf would get too much, or none at all. Feeding the young stock meant gathering all the ingredients and loading them on the cart and taking it to the feeders along the fence of the calf pen.

I was mortified when I got to the paddock that morning to see several young calves that couldn't get up, as well as two calves with bloody hind quarters, and four big dogs surrounding the older calves. Blood was streaming down one calf that could barely stand up. I quickly surmised that the four dogs had harassed and severely injured the calves. I instinctively knew I had to do something, so I ran to the house to find a gun. The first one I found, with some ammunition, was a 16 gauge shotgun. Loading the shotgun while I ran to the paddock, I quickly got off two shots before the dogs were scared away by the noise of the shots. They managed to get out of range before I could reload.

That meant I was now left with predator injuries of several calves in the paddock. Two of the calves that were down were unable to get up. In later years, I would recognize the typical injury of a canine predator, whether wolf or coyote, was injury to the Achilles tendon. If these structures were compromised on both back legs the animal would be unable to get up, especially when coupled with considerable blood loss. I destroyed those two calves and, frankly, was at a loss about how to manage the other calves.

Just then, Paul, one of the stock attendants who was a full-time employee at the dairy, appeared and in a concerned voice asked; "What was all that shooting about? Did you get the calves fed?", undoubtedly thinking I might have been shooting magpies instead of getting the calves fed. When he saw the bovine carnage, he too was at a loss managing those injuries but suggested I call the veterinarian in town. So, distraught, I went back to the



Dairy calves in their hutches

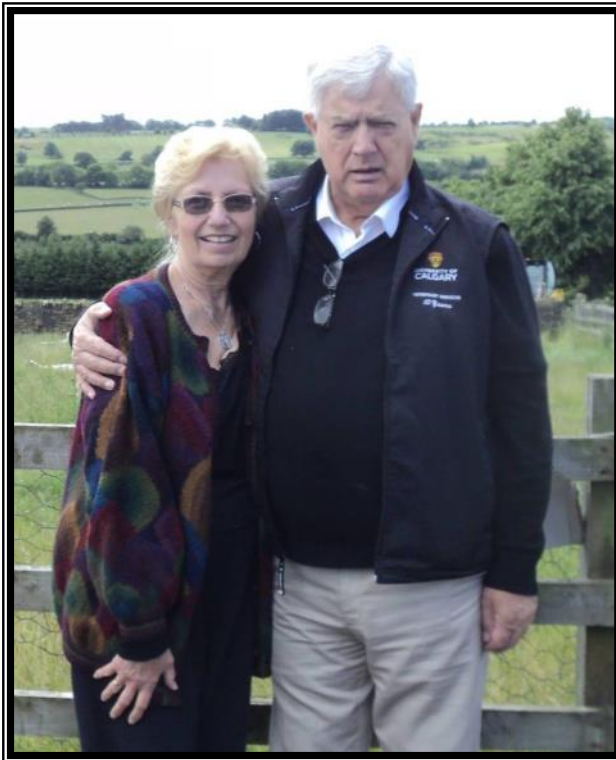
(See Vet on page 8)

(Vet from page 7)

house and called Dr. Kirenbauer. I found it hard to describe to him what I had witnessed. He asked if he should come out and look at the calves, to which I agreed. He also had some suggestions for me to do until he arrived. He commended me on destroying the calves that were unable to get up. It was one of my first experiences with a veterinarian. When he arrived, he treated each calf with an antibiotic and described a treatment regime for each one for me to follow. Some calves received a local anesthetic before Dr. Kirenbauer sutured the gaping wounds. He showed me how to bandage one calf with a lower leg injury and described how I should patch the wound and change the bandage in the future.

But most of all, I appreciated his support for my decision to shoot at the town dogs. When I called him several days later to consult about further treatment, he told me one of the dogs had died. "If dogs pack up and savage your live-stock, you are perfectly justified in sending them on their way, even if it's with a shotgun! Don't let anyone beat you up for that."

Of course, at the time, I did not know that this, as one of my earliest experiences with a veterinarian, would create in me, an interest to become a veterinarian. Many future human/animal experiences followed that further amplified a desire to study veterinary medicine and become a vet myself.



Carol Grier and Eugene Janzen

*Eugene Janzen transitioned as a Clinical Faculty Member at both Western Canadian Veterinary Colleges in 2019 but continues to serve as an Emeritus consultant or lecturer when asked. He currently lives in High River and attends Trinity Mennonite Church in De Winton, Alberta. Eugene has two sons, Mark and Jeremy, and has two granddaughters. His interest in Mennonite History was stimulated by Grandmother Janzen in his very junior years. In addition, his partner, Ms. Carole Grier, also has a special interest in Mennonite history and volunteers at the Manitoba Mennonite Heritage Society (MMHS) archives. He looks forward to more formally participating in further exploration of our Mennonite history in Canada. ❖*

(Legacy from page 1)

Oct 2010 issue 84.

The piece made reference to my grandfather Jacob Geortzen Penner; suddenly, this account written by an American stranger from the eastern American seaboard became very relevant and personal to me.

Before I go on, some history is needed for context. My great, great-grandfather, Heinrich Penner, came to Canada on the S. S. Peruvian, arriving in Quebec sometime in July 1874. The Peruvian was the third ship carrying Mennonites from Bergthal Colony in South Russia at the very beginning of that migration. The trip from Russia was a monumental undertaking, taking roughly seven weeks. During that time, they were on eleven different trains and five ships and travelled two stretches on either wagon or on foot.

The prime reasons for the move were twofold. Bergthal was a small daughter colony of Chortitza established in 1836. By 1874, the common colony problems had manifested themselves; a significant number of landless peasants, punitive government taxes and fees, and policies regarding conscription had many convinced that migrating to Canada would be the solution.

Along with Heinrich Penner on the journey was his family, including my great-grandfather Die-drich. He gave his age as 19 and stated his occupation as a labourer. Heinrich chose to settle in the East Reserve in Southern Manitoba and soon established a small village named Eigenhoff, which means "my own yard." This was the same village where Governor General

(See Legacy on page 9)

(Legacy from page 8)

Lord Dufferin chose to spend the night on his visit to welcome the Mennonites on behalf of the government of Canada. We see in the records Heinrich cancelled his fire insurance policy and left Eigenhoff in June 1882.

Coincidentally, Diedrich's future in-laws, the Geortzen's, including daughter Sara, had also been on board the Peruvian. She was 16 years old at the time, and the two must have enjoyed getting to know each other on the voyage, as several years later, they were married. Long story short, Diedrich and Sara eventually had a family and among their children was my grandfather, Jacob Geortzen Penner.

Grandfather Jacob was born on the East Reserve near Steinbach. In an essay written later in life, he says that at age twelve, he and his older brother Heinrich, age fourteen, had to occasionally herd cattle to Winnipeg. Heinrich "carried the wallet," and Jacob was "the speaker." Going on, Jacob says, "Here it was that the need to know some English became evident. Our homeschooling had been strictly in German and very irregular and at the age of 12, our school days were over".

In 1905, Deidrich decided to leave Manitoba and move to Herbert, in the Province of Assiniboia. (Saskatchewan). This decision was precipitated by various factors, the biggest being the complete loss of the family home, farm buildings, horses, and grain by fire.

A close second was the fact their land was poor. After helping prove up Diedrich's homestead in Assiniboia, Jacob eventually split off to establish one of his own. He

eventually married a woman named Anna Funk, the daughter of another Mennonite immigrant family in the area.

Jacob and Anna had three children and were expecting a fourth when calamity struck. On November 4, 1919, Anna delivered my uncle John; four hours later, she became ill with complications from the Spanish Influenza. She died two days later, leaving my grandfather widowed with four young children, one of them an infant.

Congruent to this time, a woman in the community named Helena Hamm had married a homesteader named Heinrich Driedger. Heinrich brought four children of his own into the marriage; Helena had no children as she had never married.

Not long after Helena became pregnant with her first child, but before she would deliver, Heinrich was struck and killed by lightning while dismounting his horse. Shortly afterward, Helena delivered a baby boy. This left her in a

very difficult situation: a widow with a newborn and four Driedger children related to her in name only.

What was thought to be in the best interest of everyone, Heinrich's extended family removed the Driedger children from Helena, except her own newborn son Jacob Driedger. The family also reclaimed the house, dishes and linens, which essentially left her with nothing.

Grandfather Jacob happened to be a compassion representative for the local Summerfelder church and went looking for Helena one day to see if the church could help her. He found her hiding in a granary, crying. I suppose driven by a mutual need as



My grampa Jacob J Penner in the pancake hat (far left) and his sons, my uncles, on the way to La Crete with the moving truck they took as far as Peace River from Herbert, Saskatchewan, May or June 1940



The summer kitchen was built in late 1940 from local timber stands on Secondary Highway 697 from La Crete heading to the Peace River Ferry

(See Legacy on page 10)

(Legacy from page 9)

much as anything, Jacob later wrote a letter to Helena's father asking him if he would inquire whether Helena would consider marrying him. This would help both their situations, but Helena said no. Sometime later, Jacob asked again by letter; this time, she said yes, and they were married. Jacob's four children, together with Helena's one, plus the ten they had together, rounded out the family. The group included my father, Tobias "Toby" Penner. Diedrich and Sara left for Mexico along with all their grown children and grandchildren in 1923 (the Summerfelder migration), but Jacob and Helena did not, at my grandmother's insistence.

By now, you might be wondering where all this is going. Jumping ahead to 1939, having survived the depression years in Saskatchewan, Grandfather Jacob decided to sell out in Saskatchewan and homestead at Buffalo Prairie near La Crete in northern Alberta. This journey was not as long and difficult as the one his parents made, but it also included some train, riverboat, and horse travel. When they arrived at Fort Vermillion, they were dismayed to find that homesteading had closed during their trip north. However, they found some land to rent and immediately set to building a log house, summer kitchen, and barn. This brings me to the part of this story I really want to tell. In 2022, I went up to La Crete on a business trip from my home in the Grande Prairie area. One afternoon, on a quest, I headed out of La Crete towards the ferry that crosses the Peace River. Eventually, just off the road, I found the old farmyard where the now derelict summer kitchen is falling in on itself. I took a lot of pictures of the joinery on the summer kitchen because I appreciate the skill.

Grampa was an experienced carpenter and innovator. For example, in 1929 in Saskatchewan, he built a new Nelson package home, and he devised a grain handling setup for his farm cut into a hillside so a horse and wagon up top could unload and then drive around to the bottom of the elevated silo to load. The grain could be moved by wagon, all without shovelling.

I had some time to kill, so from there, I went to the La Crete Heritage Centre & Museum to see if they had any information on my grandfather. In time, I found a young man who went to check, returning shortly with some archived documents my grandfather had written to the Provincial government. I had always heard from my dad Toby that Jacob began lobbying the Province for an English school to be built almost immediately after arriv-



My paternal Aunt Helen Penner's wedding to George Brown with Helen's siblings in front of the summer kitchen on Grandpa Jacob's yard in La Crete July 21, 1941



My uncle Benjamin, youngest of Jacob and Helena's children, playing with an antlered deer head; game was plentiful in the area. Also shown are the other buildings in the yard, including a smithy; Grandpa was a blacksmith

ing, but it was always anecdotal.

Here, I could read a progress of my Grandad's actual attempts, a few snippets of some 16 documents I've attached.

(See Legacy on page 11)

(Legacy from page 10)

Fort Vermilion, Alta.,  
October 3, 1940.  
Department of Education,  
Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Sir:

"We have five children of school age ranging from Grade I to Grade 7 with good marks from last exams and from my observation I could say that there could be found between 10 and 12 children in this locality all of school age. Would your Department be willing to assist in establishing a school?"

Jacob G Penner

Fort Vermilion, Alta.,  
December 27, 1940.  
Department of Education,  
Edmonton, Alberta.

Dear Sir:

"In your reply to my inquiry of October 3, you referred me to Mr. T. R. Smith. I have met Mr. Smith, and we mapped out a district similar to the one that had been approved years ago, and later was dissolved. It seems to me as the matter is advancing very slowly, contrary to my desire."

Jacob G Penner

August 24, 1942.  
Hon. Wm. Aberhart,  
Minister of Education,  
Province of Alberta,  
Edmonton Alta.

Fairview, Alberta,

"One of their people who has drawn away a little from the ruling of the colony, one J.G. Penner, advised me that he had endeavoured to organize a school district but had been voted down by his compatriots who apparently hoped to have some kind of a "settlement school" in which the German language would be taught. I regard the situation as very undesirable and would suggest that some action be taken to ensure that proper public schools are instituted in that area".

After nearly two years of lobbying for an English school for his own children and those of his English-speaking neighbours, Jacob was beaten. His concern for a proper education required him to eventually relocate to southern Alberta in the Carstairs area, close to a Bergthal church. Some of his children later went on to college. Now there are Doctors and teachers, missionaries all over, offspring of Jacob G. Penner. I'm personally very thankful for Grandad's foresight and determination to make sure his family was able to thrive and grow in Canada. He gave us a lasting legacy.

*Deryle Penner was born in 1957 at Didsbury, Alberta. He graduated High School there soon after marrying his sweetheart, Wanda Pieper. He graduated from Olds College with a Horticulture Diploma and was employed at the Drumbeller Penitentiary for 12 years as the Ornamental Grounds Instructor. While there, he gained his Red Seal Journeyman Landscape Horticulture designation. (There were five kids sprinkled through this time, including a set of triplet boys) Deryle and the family left Drumbeller and went to a very small, remote Bible School started by the Canadian Arctic Mission in northern BC. After that, he moved to Sexsmith, attended Peace River Bible Institute, and obtained his Bachelor's Degree in Religious Education, Majoring in Pastoral Studies. As a student, he worked for the County of Grande Prairie, staying on; he eventually became the Resource Coordinator overseeing municipal compliance with gas and oil energy development. Deryle is now retired and, together with Wanda, enjoy their acreage, 14 grandkids, and two Bernese Mountain dogs. ❖*

## “La Crete”

By Bill & Martha Neufeld

Have you ever sat and pondered **how La Crete received its name?**  
 How it got to what it is today, and why the people came?  
 It started with a landing, with a river flowing past,  
 The Rivards\* named this area, and forever may it last.  
 From the drought stricken prairies and as far as Mexico,  
 The settlers and their families came, for their wheat to sow.  
 They milled their wheat and sawed their logs, oh what a busy place,  
 And if you lent a helping hand, they'd never forget your face.  
 At first the only business was Unrau's General Store  
 It wasn't much later that Knelsen's built next door.  
 There was an old log building that as a church would serve.  
 The people all were welcome; there was no seat you could reserve.  
 Then of this great White North, the school became a part,  
 A. J. Wieler, our first trustee, really gave his heart.  
 Where homes and businesses have been built, row after row,  
 Louis Tourangeau sold the land so that La Crete could grow.  
 As we think of those brave people and the lives that they did live,  
 It is time to record it, so to the future we may give,  
 Now our pioneers have gone, their stories no longer can tell.  
 We will try our best to print them, so you can sit and read a spell.  
 It will preserve our heritage, our homesteads, and hope.  
 Now if you think that times are tough and wonder how to cope,  
 Just put aside your woes and cares, and open up this book,  
 And find the secret that, you like they, for help to God must look.

\*See the Place Names, pages 367 & 368 immediately below

### La Crete [La Crate].

The original story about the naming of La Crete states that the name came from the Rivard brothers. The Rivard brothers (Ettienne, Ernest, Conrad, and Anasthas) were French Canadians from Quebec. Like many other French Canadian people, they were opposed to being conscripted into the primarily English Canadian Army during World War I. In order to evade conscription, The Rivard brothers fled to Northern Alberta, where they settled on the banks of the Peace River, five and a half miles southwest of Le Crete. Ettienne Rivard laid claim that he and his brothers (Conrad and Anasthas) named La Crete.

"We first arrived in the country in 1914 and built a small

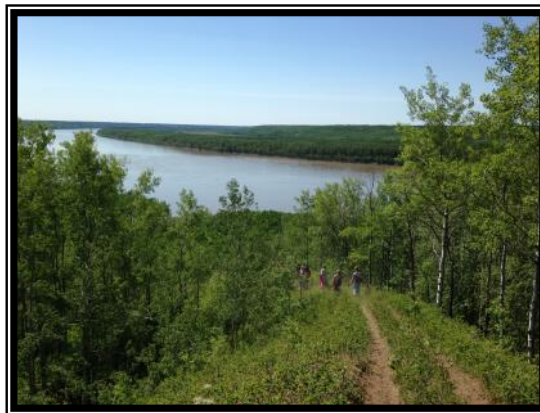
shack at the mouth of a small creek that flows into the Peace River. On the north bank of this small creek is a hogsback or hill that resembles a rooster comb. It was along this hogsback that we had a footpath to the top of the river bank. The French word for rooster is la crete so we referred to the place as La Crete."

While the Rivards were living on the banks of the river, their uncle, Rocque Rivard, would come from Fort Vermilion occasionally and bring them groceries. The rest of the time they would live off of the natural resources available in the area.

As conscription was only enforced as of the beginning of 1918, it is likely that Etna recalled the year incorrectly. It seems the Rivard brothers' attempts to evade conscription were not entirely successful as two of the brothers (Anasthas and Conrad) ended up being drafted. The attestation papers of Conrad show that they were both arrested by military police on Sept 24, 1918 and brought to Edmonton to be evaluated for service.

There are a few pieces of evidence that suggest that this traditional story on the naming of La Crete is incorrect. The earliest reference to the name La Crete that has been found comes from the logbook of the riverboat S.S. Peace River. The entry for May 24, 1906, notes that the boat "passed La Crete 4:30 pm" on its way to the town of Peace River from Fort Vermilion. The name La Crete is also used in the 1914 report on the survey of township 106-15-W5. The report written by surveyor P.M.H. LeBlanc states, "It [a wagon trail from Fort Vermilion]

(See La Crete on page 13)



The view from the Rooster's Comb Hill  
 Photo credit Then and Now  
 The History of La Crete

(La Crete from page 12)



View of Rooster's Comb Hill  
Photo credit Dave Toews

branches south-westerly to La Crete, a portage station on Peace River for Fort Vermilion traffic. While it is likely to be impossible to determine with certainty when the name was first used, it is possible that its origin is related to the fur trade, as there were many French people employed by the trading companies.

Originally the name La Crete was only used to describe La Crete Landing, a boat landing near the Rivards' hiding place on the banks of the river. For many years the people of the area had pronounced and even written the name as "**La Crate**" as can be seen on shipping crates preserved at the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village. The mispronunciation was due to the Mennonite settlers having difficulties pronouncing the French word with their German accent.

The name La Crete started to be used for the community as a whole in 1956 when the post office was established. Three options were submitted for the name of the post office: Lousiville (after Louis Tourangeau who homesteaded the land that the town of La Crete stands on), Reinland (as the area was called by the Mennonite settlers) and La Crete. The postal department chose La Crate but corrected it to the correct French spelling of La Crete. La Crete became the official name of the town when it became a hamlet on Nov 23, 1979.

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Source: Then and Now The History of La Crete. Used with permission. ❖

## La Crete's Good Old Days

By Susan Seimens

The early settlers were poor,  
But they shared resources.  
Material goods were indeed scarce,  
But everyone looked out for each other.  
Travel was by horse and wagon,  
And the pace of life was slower.  
Roads were trails over prairie and through forests,  
But there was no rat race.  
Light came from the woodstove or oil lamp,  
So bedtime came early.

Power was the strength of man and animal,  
Provided they had ample food  
Firewood provided warmth  
Snow, rainfall, and wells provided their water  
Food was sometimes scarce and hard-earned,  
But fathers were at home on the farm  
The menu was simple and there were no cafes  
But mothers were home with the children.  
Help for serious medical conditions was far away  
But people had knowledge of home remedies and midwifery  
They worshipped in log buildings  
And their faith carried them through. ❖



Susan Seimens

## Grandpa Friesen's Story - Biking to Gretna in January, 1900!

By Carole Grier

*(Editor's note: This story was originally published as Biking to Gretna in January 1900! in the Mennonite Historian, Volume 50, No. 1 - March 2024. The MHSA Chronicle appreciates permission to publish a slightly revised version and also the additional information provided.)*

"History is alive" was my mantra to skeptical students throughout my thirty-two year teaching career. We are who we are - because of those who came before us. Look no further than our own family's story. My family owes a debt of gratitude to our patriarch - Grandpa Abraham K. Friesen - as well as those who inspired and influenced him, such as Gerhard E. Kornelsen and Heinrich H. Ewert.

Grandpa was born in 1881 at Lichtenau, East Reserve, Manitoba (just west of Steinbach). His father, Abraham R. Friesen, immigrated on the *SS Prussian* in 1875 with his wife, Agatha Kornelsen, and one young daughter. Great-grandfather A.R. Friesen was a teacher and



Carole Grier

(See Grandpa on page 14)

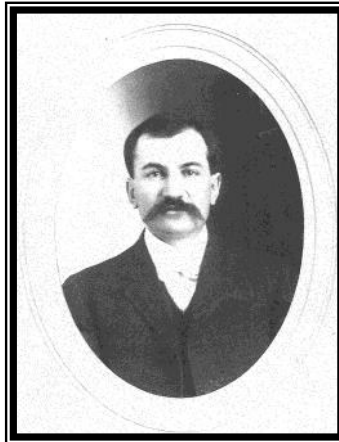
(Grandpa from page 13)

farmer, as was customary then. They settled in Blumenhof where he unexpectedly and tragically died in 1884 at age thirty-eight, leaving great-grandmother Agatha, a widow with four children, the youngest only one month old. Grandpa A.K. Friesen was three-and-a-half years old. Exactly one year later, Agatha remarried, settling with her new husband at Lichtenau close to her Kornelsen siblings. Her brother and Grandpa's uncle, Gerhard Enns Kornelsen, was a renowned pioneer educator and farmer, teaching in Lichtenau and later in Steinbach.

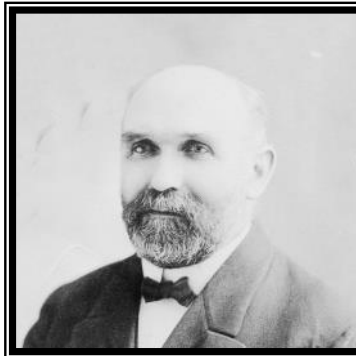
Life did not get easier for the new family. Grandpa started school at age seven in 1888. After just three years of marriage, Grandpa's stepfather passed away leaving Grandpa's mother a widow once more. She married for the third time when Grandpa was ten years old. During this time, as a young boy, it was common for Grandpa to go to the woods with a sleigh and a team of horses, cut trees for firewood, load the sleigh, and drive home. For this, he received 25 cents, presumably from one of his stepfathers. The next day, he would cut the wood with a buck saw, and again be paid 25 cents. Grandpa stopped school in 1894 at age thirteen after only six years of schooling. For several years, he was a teamster and helped at home.

At the time, education standards in village schools were substandard at best. Teachers themselves only received their education in the village schools and were expected to farm as well. A higher education was usually not considered necessary for farming.

However, probably on the advice of his uncle, Gerhard E. Kornelsen, who had also been his teacher, Grandpa would have been encouraged to resume his education. Through word



Abraham K. Friesen (1881-1963) as a young man. Photo credit: Friesen family private collection.



Heinrich H. Ewert (1855-1934). Photo credit: MAID MHC 511-224.0.



The first classroom and dormitory building of the MCI in Gretna, Manitoba, completed in 1908. Photo credit: MAID MHC 166-241.1

of mouth, the Kornelsen family had met the founder of the new Gretna Normal School or teachers' college, Heinrich H. Ewert, who travelled to the East Reserve to encourage continuing education. Ewert founded Mennonite Collegiate Institute (M.C.I.) in 1891 to improve the standard of education for Mennonites in the newly settled East and West Reserves. So it was that in 1900, at seventeen years of age, Grandpa became "the first to go to university from the Eastern Reserve ... (he) rode his bicycle to Gretna to the M.C.I. in January 1900."

Ewert's influence on Grandpa is considerable. Not only did Grandpa travel to Gretna to enroll in teacher training, but Ewert continued to be a very important mentor. Among Grandpa's collection of letters stored at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg are many letters authored by Rev. Heinrich Ewert. There is evidence that Ewert lent Grandpa money to enable him to attend school and also around 1902 when he was teaching in Lowe Farm and preparing to marry Grandma. Ewert was a Bergthaler pastor, but Grandpa was raised *Kleine Gemeinde*. It is significant that Ewert officiated at both Grandpa's baptism in 1901 and his wedding in 1902.

Today's students might be in awe if asked to walk a few blocks to school. Our grandfather so thirsted for knowledge that he overcame improbable odds to attain an education. After only six years of formal schooling, and at age seventeen, he travelled over seventy miles on his bicycle to continue his education. This would

(See Grandpa on page 15)

(Grandpa from page 14)

be no easy task in 1900. Could it really have happened in January, as documented?

Continuing my research, I've found credible evidence that my grandfather's trip in 1900 from Steinbach to Gretna by bicycle could have happened in January. The documented January weather in 1900 shows a pattern of "warmer" weather for January 6-7 and January 18-22 where the daytime highs were above freezing. This same source notes a very low precipitation level for the months of November and December, 1899 and January 1900. The only significant snowfall was 6.4 cm on November 10, 1899 and then 7.6 cm on January 10, 1900 and another 5.1 cm three days later. The roads/trails then would have been firm and passable before January 10.

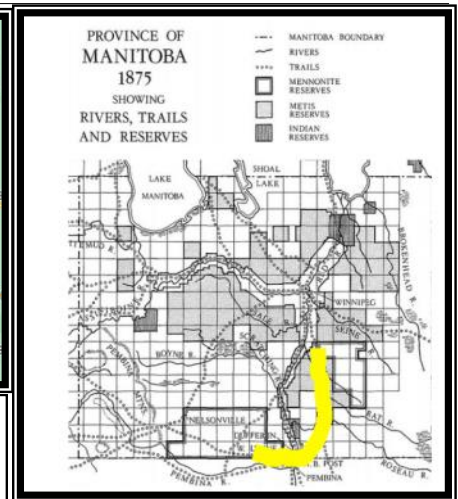
Grandpa said in his memoirs that he worked in K. Reimer's store in December, 1899. Klaas Reimer's store was mentioned in E.K. Francis's *In Search of Utopia* as a large, successful enterprise in Steinbach. It would have been physically possible for my Grandfather, A.K. Friesen, to ride his bicycle on or around the dates January 6, 7, or 8. He would have enrolled in Gretna Normal School in January as is documented.

I have wildly mused about trying to recreate this trip, much as Terry Doerksen has done by travelling by historic Red River Cart and Dawson Trails. If only I had thought of this when I was seventeen years old!

H.H. Ewert was a controversial figure in Southern Manitoba. But our family will continue to appreciate his impact on the lives of the



A possible route today from Steinbach to Gretna covers 83 miles (133 kilometres). Biking on paved highways could take about seven hours. Photo credit: Google Maps.



Manitoba trail map from 1875, with the addition of markers for Steinbach (\*) in the East Reserve and Gretna (\*) in the West Reserve. Photo credit: [https://www.facebook.com/groups/188039766161558/search/?q=province of manitoba map 1875](https://www.facebook.com/groups/188039766161558/search/?q=province%20of%20manitoba%20map%201875).

descendants of his students – especially, our own Grandfather, Abraham K. Friesen.

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*Carole Grier was born in Winkler, MB to Russlaender and Kanadier parents. After retiring from a 32 year teaching career, she pursues her interest in genealogy by travelling to the Ukraine and Western Europe as well as volunteering at the Mennonite Heritage Archives. Please contact her at [carole.grier1@gmail.com](mailto:carole.grier1@gmail.com) if you would like to meet the challenge of biking in Manitoba in January!*

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- Thanks to Ernest Braun for help with the two maps.
- In the summer of 2022, Terry and Patty Doerksen, along with Zik-the-ox pulling their replica Red River Cart, retraced the 800 kilometres of the historic Red River Trail, from Winnipeg to St. Paul, Minnesota. ❖

## Biography of Jacob Jacob Wieler 1865-1956

By Erwin Wieler, son of Franz Wieler, Surrey, BC, 2005

Although I (Ernie Wiens) grew up in Coaldale, and I knew a lot of people, I do not remember Jacob Wieler. In researching my family's genealogy, I came across his name and eventually his genealogy which intersected prominently with my friend's family. Further research revealed that he was an early *Wirtschaft* owner of the village of Podolsk in Neu Samara. In fact he owned at least 4 or maybe even 5 properties in the village. My great grandfather, Isaak Wiens (1855 – 1919) also settled in Podolsk in 1891, so they would have known each other. My grandfather, Jacob Wiens (1880 – 1962) grew up in this village and would have known the family.

I also came across an article written by Reinhard Len Hiebert in 1993 and submitted to the Neu Samara website managed by Dietrich and Nikolaj Tissen from Germany. This article chronicles the journey of his parents (presumed to be part of the Reinhold Hiebert family from #29 and #36 in Podolsk) to Canada in the fall of 1924. It is not clear when the Hiebarts left Elstow Saskatchewan for Coaldale. What is most interesting in regards to Jacob Wieler is the following paragraph which we include without verification:

*"I wish at this time to make a few comments about our grandfather's neighbour, whose name was Jacob Wieler. He bought his land from Grandfather, so Mary (Wieler) Quapp was telling me, and they built a beautiful mansion on it. Mr Wieler was a minister of the gospel. He married our Mother and Dad and also Mr and Mrs John Reimer. In the early Twenties, the Communist authorities had been looking for him. They wanted to arrest him, so he had to go into hiding. He came to my Uncle John Hiebert and said, "You are the only man that can help me." My Uncle John agreed that he would help him. He said, "We will have to shave off your beard, then put down straw in the bottom of the wagon, bed you down in it, and cover you with a blanket. If someone wants to know what have you got there, I would tell them a very sick man." So he took him to the train station of Sorochinsk, and got him on the train so he could make his getaway."*

Jacob Wieler and Isaak Wiens are included in the Ministerium of the Lugowsk Mennonite Brethren Church in Neu Samara, Wieler as a minister and Wiens as a deacon.

Jacob Wieler and Jacob Wiens would have crossed paths again in Coaldale from 1948 to 1956 where they attended the same Church, and are buried in the same cemetery.

Submitted by Ernie Wiens February 2024.

Jacob Wieler was born on July 26, 1865 in Furstenau, Molotschna the youngest child of Jacob Wieler and Elizabeth Loewen. When Jacob was three years old (1868) the family moved to the newly established colony in the Kuban region of the Caucasus. The first fall there his mother passed away on September 8th, 1868, probably due to the initial harsh pioneer conditions and unfit water. His distraught father terminated his business there and took his five children back to the



Jacob Wieler

district of Taurien. The children were divided between the relatives and his father became a carpenter. In 1870 his father married again to Susanna Wedel and raised a new family of three children.

Meanwhile, Jacob passed amongst several relatives and friends, eventually ended up in Tiegenhagen in 1872 as a foster child of the Peter Friesen family, a family that had no children of their own. He remained with them 21 years. Jacob's father, living 75 miles away, was only able to make yearly visits to give comfort and religious encouragement. However that ended when his father died in 1885 when Jacob was 20 years old. Jacob grew up a lonely and poor child. Evenings his pillow would get wet from his tears, longing for some unknown happiness. Over time Jacob struggled also with his soul and found much comfort when as a young adult he joined the Mennonite Brethren Church. In 1892 a friend recommended a certain girl in Blumenheim, Schoenfeld by the name of Elizabeth Regehr who would be the right wife for him. Her parents, Jacob Regehr and Maria Dick, were rich having some 6000 acres of land. Because of Jacob's poor background the parents rejected his courting overtures. Elizabeth's father being sick at the time died shortly afterwards and finally after Jacob's return from spending a year at an Interdenominational Bible College in Chrischona, Switzerland, permission to marry was given and held on June 27, 1896.

For the first while Jacob and his bride Elizabeth along with her mother, lived in the homeplace of Blumenheim, Schoenfeld, which Elizabeth inherited plus two addi-

(See Wieler on page 17)

(Wieler from page 16)

tional farms of 450 acres and 225 acres nearby. Elizabeth's mother with a shrewd business sense and eye for the future purchased in 1899 some 12,000 acres of land in Neu Samara, near Podolsk and divided the land among her five Regehr children. Elizabeth, being the youngest received the smallest share of 2100 acres. Mrs Regehr died shortly after in 1901. Jacob moved to his Neu Samara estate in 1908. At the same time he purchased four smaller farms of about 120 acres in the village of Podolsk where they built an abode to live in. This was replaced in 1913-14 with a large 13 room mansion. Tragically Elizabeth never got to live in it. Pregnant at the time, she died shortly after a sleigh accident, but not before giving premature birth to daughter Anna on January 31, 1913 and passed away two days later on Feb 2, 1913. This was not the only grief father Jacob had to endure, as they had already lost two of their children. Johannes 1906-1911 and David in 1910-1912. Son Peter born 1898 was to die later in 1919 from typhoid fever. Of the nine children born six survived. Jacob born 1897, Franz 1900, Gerhard 1902, Maria 1905, Elizabeth 1908 and Anna born 1913.

To care for his young family, Jacob married a second time on Feb 8, 1915 to the widow, Augusta (nee Klassen) Stoesz, from Saratof.

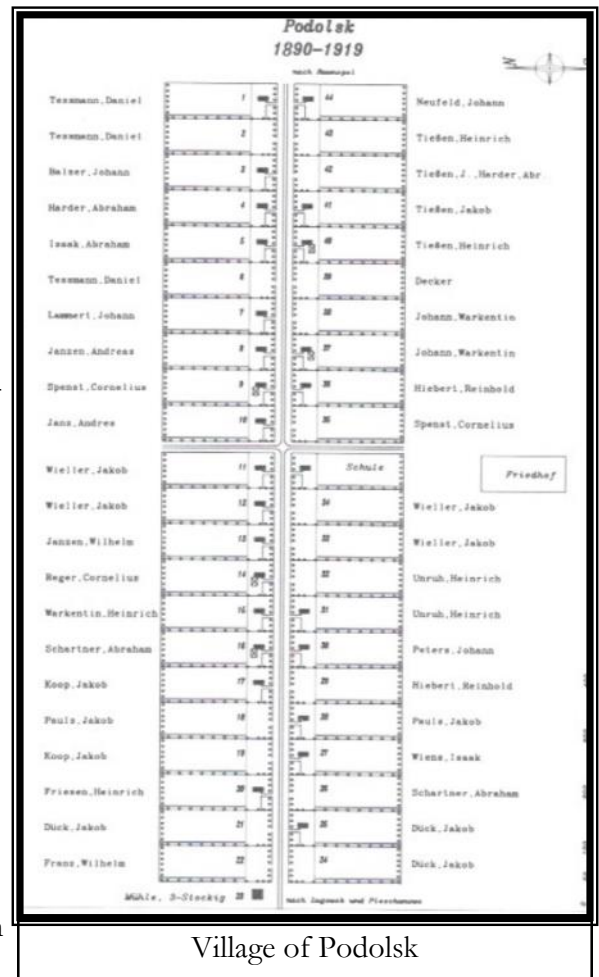
Jacob's strong religious beliefs and schooling in Switzerland led him to dedicate most of his active life to preaching the gospel and serving as one of the three ministers of the Lugovsk Mennonite Brethren Church in Neu Samara. He was always of delicate health

and so preferred to leave the active management of his estate to his wife and hired help. He was also known to be a stern taskmaster and disciplinarian, particularly with his sons.

From 1914 onwards was a tumultuous time in Russia. World War 1 broke out followed by the Bolshevik revolution in 1917. In 1920 his new home was confiscated by the local Soviets for their headquarters. (It still stands now but since the 1970's has been turned into the Podolsk National Museum.) By the summer of 1921 Jacob had to go into hiding when he was warned of his impending arrest. From his hiding place he secretly sold what he could and converted the proceeds into gold. He then arranged to rent a railway boxcar and, with his second

wife Augusta along with Justina, her daughter by her first marriage, plus foster child, Helen Dyck, then his son Gerhard, and his three daughters plus four other families, (Peter Wiens, and the teachers P. Siemens, G. Toews, and Heinrich Wieler (unrelated) ) they were able to flee to Moscow. There as members of the group where preachers and teachers, they were able to obtain papers and permission to proceed to the Wohlynia area near Kiev where there was a shortage of these professions. Where they stayed a number of months while he arranged for the dangerous secret crossing over the Polish border. While in this area, Jacob's second wife, Augusta died from cancer of the liver, in January 1922. He used up most of his gold for bribes and crossing fees. They eventually reached Lager Lechfeld, Germany, with little money left at a time when Germany was wracked by extreme inflation and mass unemployment. Here he stayed until June 1923 when passage was arranged for himself and his three daughters to Laird, Saskatchewan, Canada, He was accompanied by his son Franz and his newly married wife Martha Krause, who went as far as Manitoba. His other two sons, Jakob newly married to Aganetha Braun and Gerhard traveled independently to Manitoba as well.

In Laird Jacob served as a pastor at the Laird Mennonite Brethren Church for three years.. Following glowing reports of opportunities in Coaldale, Alberta, Jacob moved there purchasing a nearby small farm on credit. He also served for a short while as a minister in the Mennonite



Village of Podolsk

(See Wieler on page 18)

(Wieler from page 17)

Brethern Church. On Oct 28, 1929 he married for the third time to the widow Maria (nee Toews) Heese born Dec 18, 1874. The marriage was not a happy one but they lived together long enough to celebrate their 25th wedding anniversary in 1954. Since the early 1930's after selling his farm, Jacob retired and lived a quiet and sparse life settling in Coaldale in a small house, tending his garden and fruit trees. He died there on March 9, 1956 and is buried in the cemetery behind his church. He lived a long and difficult life with many hardships and disappointments but always with a strong belief in God in whom he never hesitated to express his faith.

His son Jacob married Aganetha Braun in Lager Lechfeld in 1923 and eventually settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. Franz married Martha Krause in 1923 in Lager Lechfeld as well and settled in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. Gerhard or George married Mary Epp in 1924 in Laird, Saskatchewan and settled in Burnaby, B.C. Maria married Jacob Quapp in 1927 and settled in Coaldale, Alberta. Elizabeth married Heinrich Gossen in 1927 and settled in Vancouver, B.C. Anna married David Enns in 1936 and settled in Vauxhaul, Alberta.

Erwin Wieler  
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Surrey BC  
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## Getting to Know Your MHSA Board Members

### Chandra Janzen

Chandra (Retzlaff) Janzen was born in 1961 in Calgary and has lived her entire life in the city. She attended public school for all 12 years. Her parents were founding members of Foothills Mennonite Church and that is the faith community that she grew up in. She met her husband at Foothills and so the Mennonite Community has been an important part of her life.

After high school, she attended Swift Current Bible Institute for 2 years. Following her 2 years she returned to Calgary and started taking night classes that took 6 years to become a CGA (Certified General Accountant). During this time, she worked with her father who had his own Chartered Accountant practice. In 2015 all the accountants merged and as a result she now has a CPA (Chartered Professional Accountant) designation.

In 2000, her father sold his practice, and she got the opportunity to be a stay-at-home mom to her 4 children. A few clients followed her and over the years she has continued to grow her accounting practice from her home. This gave her the opportunity to be at home with her children. Initially, her children attended Menno Simons Christian School but then due



Chandra Janzen

to varying circumstances, they ended up in the public system. However, that did not last long, and they all ended up at home being home-schooled. Her children are all adults now and are making their own way. As she still works from home, she has transitioned from caring for her children to being a caregiver to her father. She and her husband believe this to be honoring our parents and an opportunity that most people can't or don't have.

She has served on the boards of Swift Current Bible Institute, Foothills Mennonite Church and Menno Simons Christian School. Serving on any board has been and is a unique and interesting experience. Chandra is also currently involved with the Angelman Syndrome Foundation Canada acting as their treasurer /bookkeeper. This charity holds a special place for her as her nephew has been diagnosed with Angelman syndrome.

Over the years she watched her dad have a keen interest in the history of the Mennonites. Although she doesn't have a lot of time to invest in delving into the history of the Mennonites, she hopes that by being on the board the experience will give her insights that she wouldn't get otherwise.

At present, she along with her husband and children are putting a home onto an acreage outside of Calgary. They are hoping to move this spring and will be taking her dad there with them. Then, hopefully, she will finally be able to have time to get back to reading, quilting, cross-stitching and a new interest in gardening.

(See Board on page 19)

(Board from page 18)

## Menno Klaassen

Menno Klaassen was born February 15, 1952, in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. He went to school at Tiefengrund School, Rosthern Elementary School, Rosthern High School, and Rosthern Junior College. Life and schooling began in German then continued in English starting in Grade 1; his childhood included both farm and town life. Menno now lives in Devon, Alberta with his wife of 50+ years, Lee. They are blessed with two children and five grandchildren. They enjoy travelling together, learning together, and nurturing their family and community.



Menno Klaassen

With diplomas from SAIT in Drafting Technology and Real Estate Technology, Menno has been a business owner and operator in the construction industry for 50 years, first with Associated Drywall Ltd. and currently as a General Contractor. His company, Skil-Tec Inc. has a primary focus of infill housing. Menno has also used his skills and experience to support both his children with their housing and rental projects as well.

A complex and fascinating personal family history has spurred Menno's interest in researching ancestry and genealogy. A lifelong learner, Menno participates in various workshops, reads, and travels – including family and historical travels to Germany, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Poland. He has also been

actively involved in the planning and operation of the quintennial Klaassen family reunion.

Menno has served extensively on many Boards over the years, from small community organizations supporting the activities of his children, to faith groups, to large boards. Menno served six years with Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company and two years as Vice-Chair of Habitat for Humanity – whereby Habitat was brought to the City of Edmonton. He was also Chair of the Edmonton Wood Turner's Guild for six years, supporting his passion/woodturning hobby.

In addition to building houses, Menno is firm believer in the value of building relationships. He intentionally builds and maintaining long-standing business and personal connections. Menno is also an active member of the local Lions Club – further building connections and opportunities for community support.

Menno is pleased to be engaged with the Alberta Historical Society! ❖

## a little more peace in the world: Reflections on my Experience with Restorative Justice

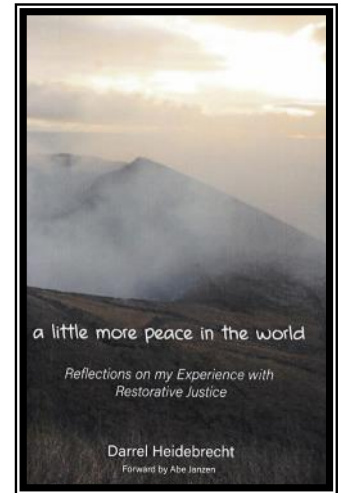
By Darrel Heidebrecht, Forward by Abe Janzen

Reviewed by Bill Franz

It's been about six months since I read Darrel's book, *a little more peace in the world*. Time can help lend clarity to subject matter, to distill into the essential the elements that are the *essence*. I was drawn to reading this book on several levels. Lord knows there's much conflict in the world, both in our own lives and communities and further afield.

On a personal level, I experienced bullying in junior high, which has had a lifelong impression on me. Those of us who have suffered trauma at the hands of others can probably relate to the profound difficulties inherent in forgiving. On a Biblical level, we are admonished to “turn the other cheek” and to forgive those who have wronged us. This can be very hard to do, but not necessarily impossible.

Darrel's book is very much a chronicle of his own experience with Restorative Justice, including with Mennonite Central Committee's (MCC's) M2/W2 Prisoner Visitation Program. His story, of course, starts earlier, and Darrel relates incidents from both his childhood and his early adulthood that caused him to reflect. As a young boy living in Tofield, Alberta, he learned a life lesson from his mother after he picked her a bouquet of flowers. The flowers had been picked from an elderly neighbour's yard after he had hopped over the fence. As Darrel writes, “Little did I know that my life's vocation working in the area of restorative justice would have its beginnings as a child offender, whose mother chose to teach a lesson in accountability rather than simply resorting to punishment for wrongdoing.”



(See peace on page 20)

(peace from page 19)

“What I do remember clearly is walking alone to the neighbour to apologize for stealing her flowers. I remember her bending down and hugging me.”

After the family moved to the big city and Darrel graduated high school, he set out on his own path by attending Swift Current Bible Institute (SCBI) in Saskatchewan. As a participant in the Internship Program, he went to Selkirk, Manitoba, to spend January with a couple who were church workers with Mennonite Pioneer Mission of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. That month was spent visiting a variety of communities in the Interlake region, with most of the people living there being Métis. Crossing frozen Lake Winnipeg in a Bombardier stands out as one adventure. The following January he was sent with another student to a very remote community in north-east Manitoba. Darrel also met his wife Gladys at SCBI. They married young and spent the first several years of marriage working with Native Ministries in Manitoba, at Camp Valaqua in Alberta, and attending school in Winnipeg.

It was at Associate Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana, USA that Darrel was introduced to restorative justice. He volunteered with a local Victim Offender Reconciliation Program (VORP), and then saw a job posting for a young offender group home back in Alberta, a Youth Orientation Unit (YOU) under the umbrella of MCC. Darrel got the job.

Darrel’s work with young offenders and adults was rooted in restorative values, “the importance of acknowledging each person in prison as an individual, with a family, a story, with value.” Most people respond positively to the concept of restorative justice working with youth, in particular. Nonetheless, the work is challenging. Darrel writes as a practitioner, with oodles of case studies chosen to illustrate lessons learned. Now retired, he worked with MCC for thirty-five years, of which the last twenty-two were in Restorative Justice.

Unfortunately, the City of Calgary lost the contract for delivering youth probation services. This meant that MCC literally was the last partner standing in Restorative Actions for Transformation (RAFT), a program that once had four partnering agencies and up to six full time staff, now reduced to one person in one organization. This was not how Darrel anticipated transitioning into retirement.

Darrel remains convinced of the value of Restorative Justice, and that some good came out of their efforts with youth, their families, and victims. He hopes that the lessons they learned will be of value for others pursuing this vision. Others are. Just recently in the Red Deer Advocate, our local newspaper, a headline read “Justice program hires new executive director”. “Rural Red Deer Restorative Justice Program aims to serve Central Alberta.” The program started as a grassroots effort and is now looking to expand and serve more people. Youth and adult cases can be referred by police, the Alberta Crown Prosecutors Office, and schools. Those who are harmed may also contact the program, which aims “to reduce recidivism, lower crime rates, optimize court use, contribute towards a cost-effective

justice program, and help individuals feel safe and connected to their communities.”

This is a book well worth reading. *A little more peace in the world* is available for purchase through the author, Darrel Heidebrecht, who may be contacted at [dgheidebrecht@gmail.com](mailto:dgheidebrecht@gmail.com). The book may also be borrowed through CommonWord Bookstore and Resource Centre. ❖

## Liesbeth: Our Mother

By Guenther Toews and  
Menno Klaassen  
Reviewed by Dave Toews



*Liesbeth: Our Mother* is a chronicle of love, laughter, joy, loss, tragedy, grief, tears, enduring Christian faith and the indomitable human spirit of Liesbeth. Liesbeth is, Liesbeth Staess, Toews, Klaassen, Neufelst. Liesbeth’s two surviving sons, Guenther Toews and Menno Klaassen, tell their mother’s story in chronological order. Guenther and Menno often introduce each other as brothers by different fathers; now I fully understand.

(See Liesbeth on page 21)

(Liesbeth from page 20)

I've known Guenther and Menno for over thirty years and was aware of bits and pieces of their and their mother's lives. But now that I have read all the intimate details, I almost feel as though I'm intruding into their personal space. I was cognizant that they had embarked on the journey to write their mother's life story. Five years in the writing, editing, and publishing now seems well worth the investment of time and determination. It is obviously a labour of love.

The book begins with the Timeline of Liesbeth's life, born on Apr 15, 1915, in Rosenort, Prussia (now Rozewo, Poland) and ends with her Obituary; she passed on Nov 10, 2013, in Duck Lake, SK. In the intervening 98 years, Liesbeth is a happy wife, a loving mother, a seamstress, a cook, a farmer, a refugee, a grieving mother, a volunteer, and a mourning widow three times. She still always kept things in perspective with her positive attitude and cheerful, outgoing personality.

With war and displacement comes tragedy and death. Liesbeth's first husband, Hermann Toews, Guenther's father, died in action in WWI in Russia Aug 24, 1942. Three-year-old son Helmut died May 16, 1945, in the Oksbol refugee camp and lies buried with another boy of the same age in the cemetery together with 1,100 other children under the age of 16.

Liesbeth found happiness in marriage twice more in Canada. With Jacob Klaassen, Menno's father, from Oct 1950 until Nov 1958. And again with Walter Nuefeldt from July 1967 until July

1996.

*Liesbeth was very clear about her longing to pass. She felt both the weight and the joy of having lived a very long and happy life; she was ready.* She passed on Nov 10, 2013.

Liesbeth, our mother, a life well lived.

The book is available for purchase at \$38.50 plus shipping if required; contact Guenther Toews at guenther@shaw.ca. ❖

## Friesen, Leonard G. *Mennonites in the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union: Through Much Tribulation.*

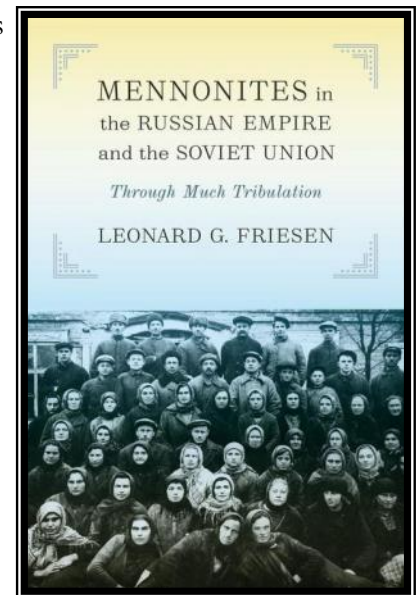
Toronto: University of Toronto Press 2022

A Review by George G. Epp

"I never intended to write this book," is how historian, author and Wilfred Laurier University professor Leonard G. Friesen opens his "Acknowledgements" on Page 3. And given that his subject concerns the dynamic story of Mennonite peoplehood, its grounding in the Anabaptist movement of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and forward—all the way to the current world-wide diaspora—there are many giants to be acknowledged: James Urry, Harvey L. Dyck, Walter Sawatzky, Marlene Epp to name only a few. Having just concluded a first reading, I'm thankful that he *did* write it, never mind his original lack of intent.

But how will I characterize this story? As an amateur historian with a shaky memory for all the anecdotes and chronicles I've read about the trials and triumphs of my people, I mean. True, the controversial "hegemony" of Johann Cornies in the first half of the 1800s, for instance, has merited copious, lengthy treatises elsewhere, whereas here, Cornies is featured in one chapter that took me a mere half-hour to read. Such is the nature of surveys, of course. For me, Friesen's account finally knit together the cause-and-effect dynamics among the many important stages in our past. Our histories tend to be focused on ourselves, our faith and the temporary homes and villages and colonies where we once lived; Friesen succeeds in putting these—our many evanescent villages—into the contexts in which they had their birth, were developed, and then left behind.

For example, the Johann Cornies story is a link in a chain. He brought many improvements to agriculture, gained almost dictatorial power to enforce changes in everything from trade, to education, to manufacturing to housing and village planning. What was also true—as we learn in subsequent chapters—is that the modernization process of Cornies' time was achieved through the opening of doors that introduced a divisive pietism



(See Tribulation on page 22)

(Tribulation from page 21)

from Germany particularly, while a juggernaut of Russification force was impacting colony culture in stages. Call it the secularization of colony politics, if you like.

Several chapters contained what were unique insights to me, though probably not to career historians of the Mennonite saga. The Reformation that I was prone to think of as a stand-alone event heralded by Martin Luther's Wittenberg manifesto is shown by Friesen to have begun well before and in ways and places of which I'd never been aware. He provides both political and creedal contexts for the inroads of pietist influence resulting in the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church and by implication, birthing a kind of traditionalist vs. liberalist division still very much a factor in denominational splintering. The landless question alongside the rapid growth of a capitalist economy on and adjacent to the colonies, sent me back to rethink the life of my great-grandfather, Jacob D. Epp, a landless participant in the *Judenplan* experiment, and whose Diary Friesen refers to on this topic.

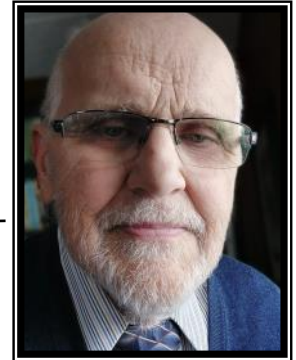
Friesen's overview makes it clear that we Mennonites have selective memories. The July, 2023 commemoration of the immigration of 20,000 Russian Mennonites to North America, for instance, was highly significant; the story of the many who stayed behind and their journey through exile, hunger, "tribulation" and the tenuous survival of their faith is a story that remains largely untold. (I worked in the MCC Europe Office from 1986-1989, in a room where *Umsiedler* Ellie Klassen spent days typing out a Russian translation of Barclay's Commentaries to be sent by special permission to Mennonite pastors and scholars in the Soviet Union. I confess a carelessness that prevented me from learning this story firsthand from Abram and Ellie who lived it.)

Similar threads run through musings on the origins and development of Mennonite faith and culture. Are we an ethnic minority or a church denomination? Have we been and are we still "in the world, but not of it?" Have the essentials of our faith been understood to be communally or individually conceived and practiced? What do we owe to Caesar and what to God? *Mennonites in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union* doesn't answer these questions, but it does shine a bright, new light on them.

Friesen's final chapter is a must-read, seems to me. The dawning of Gorbachev's *Glasnost and Perestroika* efforts toward a more modern, more open Soviet Union heralded an awakening in surviving Mennonite communities. Revivalist fervour ignited at a centennial celebration in the Zapozhzhia (Chortitz) area in August, 1989 and attendance was in the thousands. Meanwhile, general trends toward secularization and modernization continued apace. The implications for Mennonite faith communities of both have been profound, particularly in the West where the appeal of a more "Menno," more ecumenically evangelistic faith and a simultaneous waning of enthusiasm for "churchly piety" have chipped away at numbers, shut down congregations.

Detailed endnotes and an extensive bibliography add to the value of *Mennonites in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union: Through Much Tribulation* as a new resource for contemplating the Mennonite story. It's available to

purchase or borrow from Common Word Bookstore.



George G. Epp

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George G. Epp grew up at Eigenheim (close to Rosthern, Saskatchewan) and spent many years teaching English. He has served the church as MCC Europe Assistant Director, Chair of the Rosthern Junior College Board and is on the board of the Rosthern Museum and Mennonite Interpretive Centre. ❖

## MHSC Press Release

By Linda Klassen

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) held its annual meetings at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA) in Winnipeg from January 18-20, 2024. In spite of a polar vortex that created chaos for some travellers, board members gathered from across the country to hear reports of the past year and to explore ideas for future projects.

The Society's board meeting was held on Friday, January 19, 2024 and the annual general meeting was held on Saturday, January 20, 2024. Each member of the society gave a report that included some accomplishments of the past year along with challenges they are currently facing. It was an opportunity to be inspired by and to encourage other members. A theme of change emerged over the course of the meetings. There are changes

(See MHSC on page 23)

(MHSC from page 22)

in our Mennonite churches and organizations and the question of how to respond to these changes produced a lot of discussion. A committee was formed to examine this in greater detail and to develop ways to reach out to the larger constituency.

The Mennonite Archival Information Database committee reported that they have welcomed their 16th partner to the MAID team. This newest partner is from Neuland, Paraguay and is the second partner from Paraguay.

A highlight of the AGM was the MHSC Award of Excellence which is given each year to a person who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research, writing, organization, or the dissemination of Mennonite historical knowledge. This year's award was presented to Ken Reddig. He is an archivist, historian, educator, and visionary who began his career in archives in 1979 with his appointment at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg. He is a creative thinker who has a passion for history and storytelling that he has used to the benefit of the Mennonite Historical Society and the wider Mennonite constituency. Ken commented that "one of the funnest things I ever did was be an archivist." He acted as a mentor to current board members Conrad Stoesz and Alf Redekopp of the Mennonite Heritage Archives and Aileen Friesen of the University of Winnipeg, something he is especially proud of.

A major project of MHSC in 2023 was the Memories of Migration: Russlaender 100 tour, orga-

nized by the Russlaender Centenary Committee. This event was a cross-country train tour, commemorating the initial journey taken by the Mennonite Russlaender immigrants from Soviet Russia to Quebec City and as far as British Columbia from 1923- 1930. The tour in July 2023 began in Quebec City and made stops in Montreal, QB, Waterloo, ON, Winnipeg, MB, Saskatoon, SK, Didsbury AB and Abbotsford, BC. At each stop, local historical societies planned a series of events and concerts celebrating the faith of the newcomers, remembering the loss of their former communities, memorializing the challenges of resettlement, and acknowledging race and displacement in Canadian history. A documentary of the centennial is being planned.

Along with the tour and celebrations the Russlaender Centenary Committee established the Russlaender Remembrance Fund through Mennonite Central Committee Canada. MCC was originally formed to help Soviet Mennonites in 1920, so this fund has a historical connection to MCC's beginnings. A total of \$103,000 was raised for the general fund and for three special projects: MCC's Indigenous Neighbours program; MCC's Ukraine program; and MCC's International Refugee Settlement program.

Board members were invited to attend several events happening outside of meeting times. One of these was the 2024 John & Margarete Friesen Lectures, held on the CMU campus on January 18, 2024. This year's event featured Dr. Nataliya Venger, Professor of History and Chair of the World History Department at Dnipropetrovsk National University, Ukraine, titled, "Revisiting the Mennonite Experience in Ukraine".

A Friday morning drive through Winnipeg brought the group to the Manitoba Museum where they were given a behind-the-scenes look at the finer workings of the museum. This was an enriching experience, especially for the museum curators and archivists in the group.

Friday evening the Mennonite Heritage Archives hosted an opening of Alvin Paul's art exhibit entitled "From Here to there: a retrospective in paint – clay – glass." On display were a variety of paintings, murals, stained glass, and ceramic pieces representing over 60 years of Pauls' work. A series of eight large stained-glass panels were installed in a prominent location in the main gallery.

Board Members agree that a highlight of the yearly meetings are the connections made over a meal, the shared learning experiences and the spontaneous conversations that arise, which are often the beginnings of a new project!

The executive committee of MHSC for 2024 includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; Bruce Guenther, fifth member. ❖



MHSC Board Jan 2024



# ***MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ALBERTA***

## **2024 Spring Conference**

**La Crete Heritage Centre**

**La Crete, AB, T0H 2H0**



**Saturday, June 1, 2024**

Coffee & Registration 9:30 am

Conference 10:00 am & 3:00 pm

## **La Crete & Low German Mennonite History**

### **Guest Speakers**

**Susan Siemens** - Program Coordinator La Crete Heritage Centre & Agricultural Society. Past Board Member Mennonite Mutual Insurance of Alberta, certified in Museum Studies.

**Abe Janzen** is the former executive director of the Mennonite Central Committee Alberta. Abe and his wife Kathy have lived in Northern Alberta, Bolivia & presently in Calgary. Abe currently works with the Canadian Foodgrains Bank & the Low German Mennonites of Alberta.



### **"Join the companionship on the Bus"**

We have booked a 50-passenger bus departing Calgary at 7 am Thurs May 30, also picking up at Didsbury, Red Deer & Edmonton. Returning Sunday evening, June 2.

**Bus cost per person \$250, must be paid in full by April 10.**

Registration per person for people not riding the bus \$75

The above fees include the local tours & all the meals except breakfast & accommodations & travel day meals. See attached program for complete details.

**To register, email Dave at [dmtnews@gmail.com](mailto:dmtnews@gmail.com)**