



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XXV Number 2

June 2022

A Forestry Worker Serving as a Sailor

By Ted Regehr

David Harder was conscripted for military service in 1914. He was a 23-year-old married man with two children. David was a skilled carpenter and farmed with his father and brother Jacob. They lived in the village of Schoensee in the Slavgorod Mennonite settlement in southwest-ern Siberia.

As a Mennonite, David claimed and was granted conscientious objector status and joined the For-steidienst (Forestry Service). Little is known about his first year of war-

(See Forestry on page 8)



David Harder
(1891-1926)

Their Works Shall Follow Them

By the late John A. Neufeld

Forward and end notes by niece, Margaret Froese

The three Neufeld brothers, Abraham, Gerhard, and Jacob that homesteaded in the Didsbury district of Alberta, then known as the Northwest Territories of Canada, were the sons of Cornelius Neufeld and his third wife, Elisabeth Neufeld. The older two were born in the village of Schoenthal in the Berghal Colony in south Russia, and Jacob was born after the family moved to Manitoba in 1875. Along with others from this Russia Colony, the family first settled on the East Reserve – the tract of land set aside by the government for the immigration of the Mennonites. Later the family moved to the West Reserve, where the sons grew up and married.

Growing up along with a large second generation of young men, there was less and less possibility of owning farms of their own in Manitoba. Their father, Cornelius, had never owned a farm in Canada but had served as a schoolteacher, so they had no land to inherit. With the coming of the railway, homesteads were offered further west. In the summer of 1900, a group of young men from Southern Manitoba, under the leadership of Mr. Klaas Peters, a land agent from Gretna, headed west. Since a group of Mennonites from Southern Ontario had already settled in the Northwest Territories near Didsbury in 1895, they were attracted to this particular location. The same Jacob Y. Shantz, who had thirty years earlier facilitated the settlement of thousands of Mennonites coming from Russia to Manitoba, now negotiated for these western homesteads as well. Under the Canadian Pacific Railway promotion program, Schantz had already erected an immigration shed to accommodate the settlers coming into that area.

Abraham and Gerhard were among these land seekers and filed land claims in 1900. The following spring, the two young families, Abraham with his wife Elisabeth (Heinrichs) and Gerhard and Helena (Wiebe) with several children, packed their belongings and moved by train across the western prairies. Jacob with his wife Katharina Hiebert followed them a few years later. Approximately twenty young Sommerfelder Mennonite families settled on homesteads east of the developing town of Didsbury, thus

(See Works on page 4)



John A. Neufeld
(1911-2000)

In this Issue

1. Their Works Shall Follow ...
1. A Forestry Worker
2. Editorial Reflections
2. Chairman's Corner
14. Tribute to Rudy Kaethler
14. A Tale of Two Chairs
17. Lindenau Molotschna
21. Oberschulze Isacc Toews
23. Spring Conference Report
24. Correction From Mar 2022
24. MHSA 2021 AGM Report
26. The Farewell Years Review
27. Holocaust Review

"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

Anniversaries of Mennonites coming to and leaving Canada will be remembered and celebrated in the next year.



Dave Toews

The emigration of nearly 8,000 Mennonites from Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, Bergthaler, and Kleine Gemeinde communities left for Mexico, beginning in 1922, and for Paraguay four years later. This event will be remembered with an exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, Manitoba, from May to November 2022.

The immigration of some 21,000 Russlaender from Russia to Canada in the 1920s will be celebrated with a *Cross Canada Russlaender 100 Train Tour* in July of 2023. See the poster on the back page of this publication for information on the Alberta portion of this tour.

information on the Alberta portion of this tour.

In the June 2022 issue of the *Mennonite Historian* Bill Janzen of Ottawa, in his article, *The Effect of the 1920s Exodus on the Canadian Mennonite Scene* talks about how the departure affected Mennonites in Canada in general and his own family in particular. Bill's grandfather bought several quarter sections of land from the departing and thus was able to keep his large family within the community. The available land and farms also gave the Russlaender reasonably good places to live among neighbours of similar linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds. The Russlaender's readiness to set up committees brought considerable change and progress to the more conservative Kanadier in church and daily life.

Both my maternal and paternal families were Russlaender, who came to Canada in the 1920s, but neither benefited from the available land and farms of the departing Kanadier. As I wrote in the March 2022 issue of the *Chronicle*, the Kroegers came in 1923 first to Alberta and eventually settled at Dundurn, Saskatchewan. My Toews family came in three stages, two uncles, Johann and Bernard, in

Aug 1923, grandmother Maria with three adult children, Jacob, Katherina and Heinrich, in Sept 1926 and my father Peter in Dec 1926. The Toews first came to Osler and then settled on farms at Mayfair, Saskatchewan. My father stayed behind to sell the farm in Russia. I wonder how my father was still able to sell the farm in 1926 despite all the upheaval of the Russian Revolution, anarchy and Soviet collectivization. I regret very much that I did not interview my father about what happened year by year from 1914 until he left in 1926.

We invite articles from Russlaender families who came to Alberta and from the Kanadier families who welcomed them into their homes and communities in the 1920s. Tell your story.

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 with any questions or comments. ❖

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle

ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:
Dave Toews, Editor
(dmtows@gmail.com)

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

To join, send payment to:

MHSA
223 - 2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

Editor: Dave Toews

Copy Editor: Carolyn Wilson

Layout: Harvey Wiehler

Distribution: Bill Janzen

Membership List: Ellie Janz

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

MHSA Executive

Chair: Katie Harder, Didsbury
Vice Chair: Dave Toews, St. Albert
Secretary: Bill Franz, Red Deer
Treasurer: Chandra Janzen, Calgary

Members at Large:

Henry Epp, Calgary
Dave Neufeldt, Lethbridge
Brent Wiebe, Stettler
Henry Wiebe, La Crete
Darryl Heidebrecht, Calgary
Eugene Janzen, High River
Menno Klassen, Devon
Jeremy Crete, La Crete

Chairman's Corner

by Ken Matis

The Life of My Church – Music of the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church

Historically the Lord has been especially good to my church in blessing it with the gift of music. Singing has always been an integral part of the worship service. Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church began with one choir in 1926 under the direction of Mr.

(See Chairman on page 3)

(Chairman from page 2)

David Klassen. Two choirs were then formed in 1931, with them merging in 1957. Then in the early 1970s, the former church choir became a Youth



Ken Matis

Church Choir under the direction of Harley Berg. The choir served us Sunday mornings. In the mid-1970s, the Chancel Choir, directed by Walter Goerzen, convened only before special occasions but became a standing choir. The male choir, directed by John Siebert, also began for Sunday morning services. Other choirs had also been formed as interest and occasion warranted, e.g. a ladies choir, a young male choir, and several children's choirs.

In Sunday School, most of us



One of the first musical groups in the church, conductor, David Klassen

experienced the joys of singing as a group for the first time. The young people often would carry the gospel beyond the church walls by singing in hospitals, jails, the Calgary Rescue mission, the Claresholm Hospital, etc. The young people were creative and flexible in their music, forming special groups

and introducing new styles of music to the church.

Another area of music enjoyment within the church was the accompanying instrumentation. The piano was introduced in 1935 to accompany the choir and congregational singing and set the tone for the worship service by providing a prelude and offertory. In 1951, after much discussion and debate plus the church's 25th-anniversary occasion, the organ was introduced to the church. We have also had several orchestras that played to the Glory of God. The first one was led by Mr. David Klassen, Mr. Peter Dick and lastly, Mr. Walter Goerzen.

Congregational singing has provided an opportunity for everyone to be involved in musical programming. At first we used the German "Gesangbuch" which contains some of the most beautiful hymns we know. The English translation was added later, but has since been replaced by new Worship Hymnals and newer songs sung off the screen at the front of the church. There is a great strength and togetherness that we as Mennonites experience when we sing praises to our God.

Some highlights of our musical history include numerous songfests conducted by well-known musical directors. Sometimes our choirs participated separately, but we have also participated in and hosted area-wide songfests. These were enriching experiences, musically and spiritually. Also, the musical programs presented by the Chancel Choirs of the past have attracted large audiences from neighbouring churches and communities. Such oratorios as the Messiah, Christ and His Soldiers, The Gloria and The Crucifixion have been presented. Our past choirs have also gone to other churches within and outside of Coaldale to deliver programs. Visits from other church choirs and musical groups occurred on numerous church service occasions. Some fifty choir conductors gave their time to lead the various choirs in the life of the Coaldale MB Church, with Walter Goerzen being the last, ending the era of choirs in the late nineteen eighties to early nineteen nineties.

In conclusion, as a board member and pre-set chairman of MHSA, I will be retiring this year after nine years of service, which have been a time of growth and enjoyment getting to know fellow Mennonites in Alberta and Canada. I sincerely wish and hope that coming out of the Covid Pandemic, we as a board have persevered and will experience a "Renaissance" of sorts as we welcome new members to the MHSA board. ♦



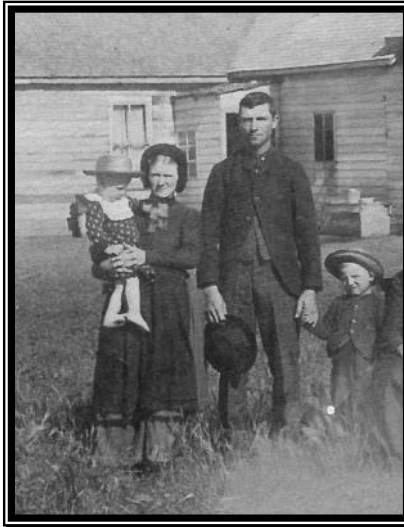
Chancel Choir Front L-R Walter Goerzen Conductor, A. Wiebe, E. Dueck, E. Doerksen, H. Groening, E. Dueck, G. Matthies, H. Thiessen, A. Dick, M. Thiessen. Middle L-R M. Froese, M. Riediger, A. Kroker, D. Siemens, A. Kornelsen, N. Froese, N. Berg. Rear L-R J. Dick, H. Reimer, H. Dick, V. Mensch, H. Berg, H. Siebert, J. Siebert, J. Janz, J. Dueck, J. Regehr.

(Works from page 1)

establishing the community of New Berghthal.

The following article was written by my uncle, John A. Neufeld, the youngest son of Abraham and Elisabeth Neufeld. Along with his brothers, Peter and Abraham, he wrote down a few historical memories which have been passed down to me. Though one of the younger ones, he would still have been part of the homestead experience. Those memories were important to him; however, it was the impact of the arrival of the Russian immigrants in the 1920s that he wished to pass down to the next generation. His parents became the primary hosts during this migration to the New Berghthal community in the Didsbury district. He would have been twelve years old when this migration began. The generosity of his parents marked not only his life but that of the whole family – and so he entitled his memoir **"Their works Shall Follow Them"** as a memorial to the three Neufeld brothers.

This story is mainly of three brothers who came from Manitoba and settled on homesteads east of Didsbury in 1901 and several years later. Along with many other Mennonites, they came here to find land to raise their families. They came from Manitoba, arriving in Didsbury on the 12th day of April. The first years since they came were no doubt quite hard. There were no roads and no cultivated land. Houses or buildings had to be erected by the settlers. Lumber had to be hauled by horses and wagon from 13 miles away. There were no bridges, and creeks were often swollen high from rain; the



Abraham C. and Elisabeth (Heinrichs) Neufeld with sons Cornelius and Peter (Heinrichs) departing Manitoba for their homestead in Alberta spring of 1901

streams had to be forded. Sometimes the water was so deep and swift that even the groceries would be swept off the wagon or buggy.

The older brothers Abraham C [1871-1934] and Gerhard Neufeld [1873-1950] settled close together about 13 miles south and east of Didsbury. Abraham C's building was 50 ft long and 26 ft wide. A ceiling was built into the whole length of the building. About 16 feet of the south end was walled off, which served as living quarters. The other 34 feet of the structure was used to house the horses and cattle. The upstairs of the building was used to store hay and oats for the livestock. A summer kitchen was built about that time, which was often used to prepare meals. Other buildings were built later as the need arose. Dad [Abraham C] had a one-cylinder engine used for grinding feed; many people brought grain to be ground for their livestock. The Gerhard Neufeld residence was shaped a little differently. The barn was not attached to the house. A row of trees was planted north and south between the two houses, and



Abraham C. Neufeld homestead, their first home was the south-facing end of the barn. The white summer kitchen obscures the house doorway, ca 1912



Gerhard Neufeld homestead, ca 1912

a long row of trees was planted a little north of the buildings. Two rows of poplars were planted some six or ten feet apart, and a row of Manitoba maples on the outside. It

(See Works on page 5)

(Works from page 4)

was a real windbreak.

About 1910, another brother of dad's bought the farm just east of ours. His name was Jacob C Neufeld [1879-1928]. The buildings had been built previously by a Mr. Henry Janzen [a relative]. A creek ran between his and our house.

In about 1913, a telephone line was extended from Didsbury to our area. It linked the whole east Didsbury area. This was a great improvement to the community. People were no longer so isolated.



Abraham C. Neufeld
home built in 1916

In 1916 Abraham C (my father) built a new two-story house. It had five bedrooms upstairs and three large rooms downstairs. A lean-to was built on the north side, part of which was the pantry, and the other part was called the coal shed.

When dad and his brother moved onto the homestead, they were required to break at least seven acres each year. But what did they live off in the meantime? Mother raised geese, ducks and chickens to be sold so that a bit of money was made to buy groceries. We also had milk cows. Butter was made and brought to the grocery store in town and traded for groceries.

One of the significant hazards

of the time was prairie fires. A barrel of water and a gunny sack fastened to a long light or thin pole were a must, kept ready for an emergency should a prairie fire get started somewhere.

A school was built sometime about 1903, located about one and three-quarter miles away. Here we all got our education. In spring and summer, we walked to school, and in winter, a horse-drawn sleigh was used.

In 1916 dad and Uncle Gerhard together bought a threshing outfit. The tractor and threshing machine were both made by Case. The tractor was a 12-25 two-cylinder, and the separator had a 22-inch cylinder. They used it till 1923 when dad bought a larger outfit on his own.

In 1923 many Mennonite families came [from Russia] to settle in western Canada. These families had nothing but a few household items. To start with, dad and uncle Gerhard each took in a family. The John Sawatzkys, which dad took in, was a family of nine. The youngest was Henry, who was just a little older than I. They stayed with us for a few days when some of the boys found work at other farms. Dad had a quarter of land about three miles from our home. There were some buildings on that into which the Sawatzkys moved. This served their immediate needs. It was their home base from which they went to find work with other farmers. At the beginning of harvest, work seemed quite plentiful. It wasn't long until many of the men and boys were earning money.

The Sawatzky family lived on our farm for a few years, after which they bought some land and built a new house on it. They then moved out of our farm buildings.

As dad had just bought a new threshing outfit, help was needed to haul bundles. Ten men were employed to operate the outfit. Six men to



Abraham C. Neufeld family
R L-R Elisabeth, Barbara, Maria, Peter
F L-R Cornelius, Abraham, Abraham Sr, John,
Elisabeth with Margaretha, 1915



Gerhard Klassen family L-R Helen, father
Gerhard, Dietrich, mother Helena, Peter, Maria,
Margaretha, Isaac, 1928

(See Works on page 6)

(Works from page 5)

drive the bundle teams, two men out in the field whom we called field pitchers as they helped load the racks, and two of my brothers took care of the threshing outfit. It was a perfect fall, and for fifty days, except for a few days, the machine kept running every day except Sunday.

The family who stayed with uncle Gerhard were Epps. They were a widowed mother, three sons and three daughters. Two of the boys also worked on our threshing outfit. Uncle Gerhard also had a quarter of land with buildings on it which the Epp family moved into.

Uncle Gerhard also gave shelter to another family. The Isaac Epps. Mr. Epp was a minister. They had a family of five or six children. Henry was the oldest, then Cornelius, Martha, Diedrich and Otto. They later moved to a farm about ½ mile north of Uncle Gerhard's place. In about 1926, they moved to Dundurn, Saskatchewan.

A short note of interest. When the Epps moved onto a farm owned by uncle Gerhard, another family (a father with his daughter) moved into Uncle Gerhard's house. This man, Mr. Nickolas Dyck, was an interesting character. He, I understand, had never gone to school. Our farm was east of uncle Gerhards, and our chickens would go and lay eggs in the cow barn adjoining the two properties. Mr. Dyck had the idea that the chickens would go toward the morning sun (east) to lay. Mr. Dyck would gather some of the eggs he thought would be uncle Gerhards. Then he would have eggs. Another thing, we had some gooseberry bushes just west of the cow barn. One day when Mr. Dyck gathered some eggs from the barn, he noticed my mother [Elisabeth] in the gooseberry patch. He hadn't gone any further and later remarked De Ola [the old one] was there, so I didn't get any eggs that time.

My other uncle Jacob C Neufeld also took in a family, Julius Klassens, but I don't know how long they stayed there when they moved to Glenbush, Saskatchewan.

In October 1924, my dad took in another family, the Herman Penners. These stayed at our home place and moved into the original homestead house. Mr. and Mrs. Penner had six children, three boys and three girls. From this home base, the father and the oldest two children found work also on farms. The youngest four being of school age, attended our school.

In 1926 this family moved to a farm near Sunnyslope, where they farmed for many years.

After these Penners moved out of our old house on our farm, dad took in another family, a Mrs. Fast with four children. They moved into this house left vacant by the Penners. The children were relatively young yet and had to go to school also. Where the widow got money to live, I don't know. Likely, dad helped her, and she also had some relatives in the neighbourhood; maybe they helped to support her. They stayed till about 1929.

In 1926 another family, the Gerhard Klassens, whom dad also took in. These he placed on the farm where the Sawatzkys had been for a while. There were eight in this family, three boys and three girls. They stayed for a few years, after which they had the opportunity to buy land and move onto it.

Dad really had a heart for helping people. A Rev. C. D. Harder, a widower, stayed with uncle Gerhard [for a short while until he married]. Then my dad built a small house just north of our yard trees for Rev and Mrs. Harder. How long they lived in this place, I'm not sure.

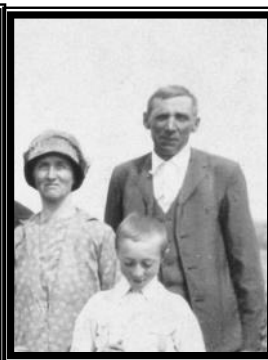
I've heard from another minister that dad bought a new suit for Rev Harder.

These families who were so very poor when they came here are, for the most part, quite well to do now. I don't know whether my dad [Abraham C] and my uncles [Gerhard and Jacob] ever got a word of appreciation for what they did, I don't know.

From all the research that I have been able to do, the five years of the settle-
(See Works on page 7)



Gerhard Klassen family of Orenburg, Russia arrive in Didsbury, via Sedalia, Alberta in Abraham C. Neufeld's car Dec. 4 1926



Gerhard and Helena Klassen with son Dietrich 1927

(Works from page 6)

ment program of immigrant families in the Didsbury area during the 1920s fell to the Neufeld brothers. The relatively small community of Mennonites that had originally homesteaded east of Didsbury had decreased considerably. The hardships of pioneer life had forced many families to abandon their homesteads and return to Manitoba, while others moved to Saskatchewan.

The Berthel Mennonite Church, built-in 1903 at the eastern edge of the fast-growing settlement, was later moved to property donated by Jacob Neufeld. For many years the three brothers provided the upkeep and leadership and made the necessary contacts for preachers to serve them - so that for some years, it had been referred to as the 'Neufeld' church. Without regular pastoral leadership, the group observed communion and baptisms under the leadership of the visiting elder, David Toews of Rosthern Saskatchewan. This connection, no doubt, brought the coming of the 'Russlaenda' to Didsbury when David Toews headed up the settlement program across Canada.

The families that were hosted by the Neufeld brothers were large; in addition to the families mentioned in Uncle John's article, there was a Mrs. Dyck with three children and a George Harder and sister his Mary who lived in the home of Abraham C and Elisabeth for some time. Rev. Harder's widowed daughter-in-law with six children was also in their care. The exact number is unknown, but at least twelve households with as many as forty-five or fifty young people and chil-



Margaret (Neufeld)
Froese

dren were hosted by the Neufeld brothers. In no time, the church and particularly the youth group, doubled in size. Though culturally quite different, the process of assimilation began with the many marriages that soon took place. At least half of the Gerhard Neufeld children married a Russlaenda. The same was true in the Abraham C Neufeld family, where one daughter married into the Sawatzky family, another married a young Henry Peters that came along, and Abraham A, my father, married Maria Klassen.

I grew up in one of these blended families, and though I heard stories of the music and folk dances that were demonstrated by the Klassen young people, we soon learned that these were not acceptable in this more conservative Sommerfelder setting. Nor were we three daughters taught any of the dance steps that we heard had impressed the youth when the Klassens first arrived. In our home, the bedding of sheets and pillowcases were white and had to be intricately embroidered, but when I ever stayed overnight at grandma Neufeld's house, I snuggled up with bright, colourful print pillowcases and a wool comforter stitched between layers of dark floral cotton.

My father was a great storyteller and never tired of repeating the stories of when the Russlaenda came to the community. He was a young man then and had joined the excitement of gathering furnishings for the newcomers along with his father. He spoke fondly of the welcome each new family received and of the groceries that were provided, and how even a cow was selected from the herd to be given to them so that they would have a milk supply. Each family had brought some new dynamics to their household, and lifelong friendships were made.

The dirty 30s followed on the heels of this period of settlement. Everyone, original homesteaders and newcomers alike, struggled to survive those years. No thought was given to celebrations to acknowledge the help given by the Neufeld brothers. But whether in a faint memory of my early childhood or from the images in my parent's photo album, I know that from time-to-time long planks were used to set up tables and seating benches among the shelter belt of trees that had been planted to the north of the Gerhard and Abraham C Neufeld homesteads. Here the church community gathered for fellowship and to celebrate weddings. Whether there were speeches at that time, I do not know, but at all of the wedding celebrations of Abraham and Maria Neufeld's children and grandchildren, my father always asked for a spot on the program to welcome the new person into his family. He knew how to do it well! ❖



Wedding celebration of Abraham A. and
Maria (Klassen) Neufeld [parents of Margaret
(Neufeld) Froese] in the shelterbelt on the
Neufeld homestead July 23

(Forestry from page 1)

time service other than that when he was granted leave in December of 1915, he was serving in or near the city of Tomsk. In 1916, and perhaps already in 1915, Harder, together with many other Siberian Mennonite men, served as a “sailor,” working in and around the river-port city of Tomsk in various camps and on barges and ships. They worked mainly on the tributaries of the Ob River, but also, on the larger Ob River.

David kept detailed and descriptive diaries covering the period from December 19, 1915, to November 1918. They were entered in three scribblers, written in the Gothic script, and brought to Canada by family members. More recently, descendants transcribed and then translated into English those diary entries. They provide unusual insights into a little-known form of alternative service rendered by Mennonites in Siberia during World War I.

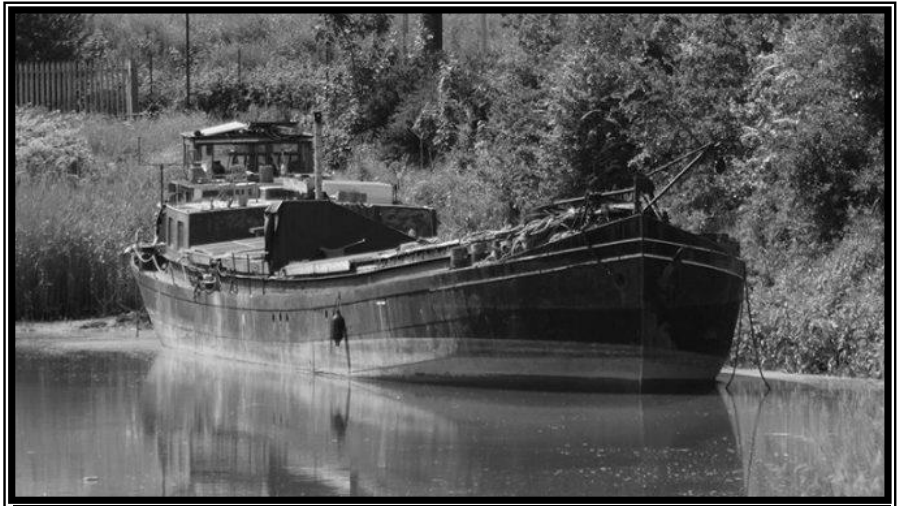
Before discussing the contents of the diaries, some contextual information could be helpful.

Construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway between 1896 and 1906 opened up large tracts of land to settlement, leading to the establishment of numerous new Mennonite settlements. A 60,000 dessiatines (162,000 acres/65,550 hectares) reserve on the Kalundian Steppes, between the Ob and the Irtysh rivers, made possible establishment of what has been variously referred to as the Barnaul or Slavgorod settlement. The name of the settlement, however, is somewhat confusing. About 343 kilometres to the east of the Mennonite settlement, Barnaul was the nearest city when the settlers first occupied some of the land after 1907. Later the city of Slavgorod was established about 16 kilometres from the Mennonite settlement, which then took the name of that city.

The Harder family, including newly married David and Helena (referred to as Lena in the diaries), obtained a farmstead in the Slavgorod village of Schoensee in 1912. They became the parents of two children before David was conscripted in 1914. Also, in 1914, Mennonites established a new Forestry Service camp near Kassyl Kut on the Trans-Siberian Railway between the cities of Omsk and Petropavlovsk. It was hundreds of kilometres from the Mennonite settlement, and there is no indication that David Harder was ever there.

Tree planting was a primary responsibility of the Forestry Service, but as wartime needs and labour shortages increased, camp administrators accepted assignments in various non-combatant positions. They worked on fire brigades, in lumber camps, and in machine and carpentry shops, and many provided medical and ambulance services after the outbreak of the war. In addition, in western Siberia, Forestry administration officials agreed that their men could be assigned to assist the Marine Department in the

handling and transporting bulky river borne freight and, more generally, in the harbour and other maintenance work. The Marine Department’s regional offices were located in the harbour city of Tomsk on the Tom River, just below the confluence of the Tom and Ob Rivers. Tomsk, established as a fort in 1604 and located in a heavily forested area, was the administrative centre for a wide area of Siberia. However, when the Trans-Siberian Railway was built in the 1890s, it crossed the Ob River just over 200 (air) kilometres (259 kilometres by road now) upstream from Tomsk at Novonikolayevs (named in honour of Tsar Nicholas II and later renamed Novosibirsk). A branch line was built to Tomsk. After constructing the railways, Tomsk and Novonikolayev (Novosibirsk) were at the administrative and commercial crossroads



Typical 19th-century European river barge, credit Isle of Thanet News

of east-west rail traffic and north-south river transportation on the Ob River and its tributaries.

On the rivers, heavy, bulky freight was loaded onto barges which could then be floated or pulled downstream or pulled up-

(See Forestry on page 9)

(Forestry from page 8)

stream by steam-powered tugs or ships. On wider and straighter stretches of the Ob River, a tug or ship could tow as many as three barges and, in exceptional cases, five barges.

Mennonite conscripts were assigned the responsibility to “sail” those barges. Equipped with a rudder, winches, heavy tow ropes, a boat and anchors but no sails, they had to navigate sharp twists in the river, circumvent sandbars and shallow parts of the river, and avoid rear-end collisions in narrow fast-flowing parts of the river, or if the towing tug or ship itself ran aground. Inevitably, corrective manoeuvres became necessary if the usual navigational skills failed. There were frequent stops along the way as individual barges were dropped off or picked up at various locations. On the larger barges, there were usually three but sometimes more workers. Most consisted of mixed Mennonite and Russian crews. They worked mainly on the Kiya River, a tributary to the Chulym River, on the Chulym and Tom Rivers, both flowing into the Ob River, one above and the other below Tomsk. They also worked on the larger Ob River, taking barges at least as far upstream as the Novosibirsk area and downstream as far as Narim.

When on the river, the men were responsible for guiding the barges with the help of the rudder, which sometimes required the strength of several men on the larger barges. If the ships and barges were not docked or anchored overnight, at least one of the men had to keep watch during the night.

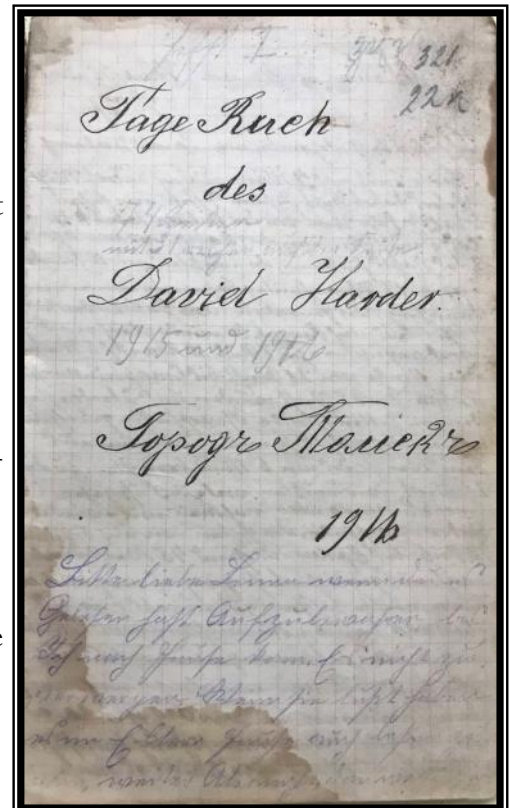
The Mennonite “forestry service” workers received a small sti-



The three original diary scribbles written in Gothic script

pend, referred to in the diaries as “board,” which was apparently paid by the churches but administered locally. They bought their own groceries, did their own cooking, baking, and laundry, and enjoyed considerable freedom to mingle with villagers, shop and take in local sights and attractions wherever they stopped. Fish, either caught by the men or bought locally, is the most frequently mentioned food. Purchases in places where they docked were possible because the men could earn extra money assisting in the loading or unloading the barges and, sometimes, taking up other short-term work. But on at least one occasion, it seemed prudent to boil some of the meat for 24 hours before baking it into a meat pie. And “Schnetke” (biscuits) baked without butter were described as “quite leathery.”

The barges contained a variety of products not described in detail in the diaries. Beyond descriptions of their work, the diaries provide little information about general economic, industrial and commercial river traffic in and around Tomsk. Forestry products, notably railway ties, poles, lumber and firewood, are most frequently mentioned. The workforce was mixed. In addition to the Mennonite Forestry Service workers were salaried, mainly Russian workers, some Austrian Prisoners of War, and professional and other ship captains, officers, and workers. All these aspects of the



Diary of David Harder 1916

(See Forestry on page 10)

(Forestry from page 9)

work are described in considerable detail in David Harder's diaries.

Harder only began his diaries on December 19, 1915, with an account of his departure on leave from Tomsk, together with several friends. On the first part of the journey, they travelled south-westward by slow trains, subject to lengthy delays, at least part-way on the Trans-Siberian railway. They hired local drivers to cover distances without rail service. Several of the drivers got lost or proved unreliable and new ones had to be found.

Unfortunately, the transcriber and translators of the diary had considerable difficulty with Russian place names, many of which, as given in the translated version of the diary, seem to be unknown to Google. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the precise routes taken on this trip or the places where barges were picked up or dropped off later. For Harder and his friends, that trip from Tomsk to their home in the Slavgorod Mennonite settlement took five days. They left on the 19th and got home on December 23, 1915.

The diary contains only a few very brief comments about the time spent with family or the return trip; other than that, Harder and others got back to their camp near Tomsk on February 7 at 4 a.m. There was a small Mennonite community of family members, friends and visitors in Tomsk. Harder noted the deaths of several people, including small children, that occurred while he was on leave.

The work assignments of the men during the winter months are not mentioned in the diaries. David Harder would probably have been working on some carpentry or building project whenever possible. In March of 1916, some of the men were sent to work on the ice around the ships docked upstream on the Kiya River. Some also did spring-time work repairing and sealing and making the barges water-tight.

While working together with salaried Russians and other workers, the Mennonite conscripts retained their own distinct sense of identity. That became evident when they were ordered to work on April 3, Palm Sunday. That, some insisted, should be observed as a religious holiday. A protest petition was circulated, but calmer heads prevailed. Some of the men went to work. Others, including Harder, claimed they were sick that day. They were ordered to come to the office for medication.

Sharply differing lifestyles of the Mennonite and Russian workers came more sharply focused on Easter morning. The men were paid and were given that day off. While the Mennonite men had no church service, they cleaned up and dressed as best they could to celebrate the day. When they ventured outside, however, they were amazed, and Harder describes in amusing detail the utter drunken debauchery of the Russian and other workers "too tipsy to stand up, their knees buckled and they fell in the mud," still shouting "Christ arose," or responding, "He is truly risen."

The attitude of the Mennonite men toward Russian alcoholic excesses was more one of amusement and sympathy than of harsh condemnation. They sometimes also went to a local village tavern, and Harder commented on the harsh treatment of illiterate Russian workers. He thought the Mennonite men were treated better, in part because they were better educated and had a better understanding of their assignments. They also occasionally

engaged in limited and inconclusive theological and pacifist conversations with the Russian workers or visiting priests. Much, of course, changed after the revolution in 1917.

After Easter, with the ice breaking up and water levels rising, the men were set to work freeing barges still stuck in the ice on the Kiya River. Using a large boat and heavy tow ropes, the objective was to create a passage from the still ice-clogged docks to the already flowing main current of the Kiya River. The boats themselves got caught in the ice several times, and progress was very slow and difficult. As they laboured without much success, the Mennonite men began to sing the familiar song of the Volga Boatmen, which they had learned in school. In the song, those in authority are portrayed in less than flattering terms, and some of the Russian workers enthusiastically joined in the singing. The local captains were not amused, but the diaries report no reprisals.

Harder and his men were assigned other manual tasks while awaiting the clearing of ice and reduced high water levels. Heavy long tug ropes weighing up to 800 kilograms and requiring 34 men to carry them were moved into place for service. A barge left loaded with steel, and cast iron was unloaded over the winter. The men had to carry heavy material over unstable ice, and several broke through while others were assigned snow and ice clearing work. Several men were sent across the river to take down an old barn and were temporarily stranded when water levels overflowed the river banks. The Forestry workers earned extra

(See Forestry on page 11)

(Forestry from page 10)

money if they agreed to do extra work.

After a late blizzard on May 1, 1916, several ships which had been waiting for the ice to clear were able to leave while others arrived with new provisions. Also, on board, the arriving ships were several months' worth of mail which had been sent to the post office in Tomsk. There were eight letters for David Harder, including several from his wife.

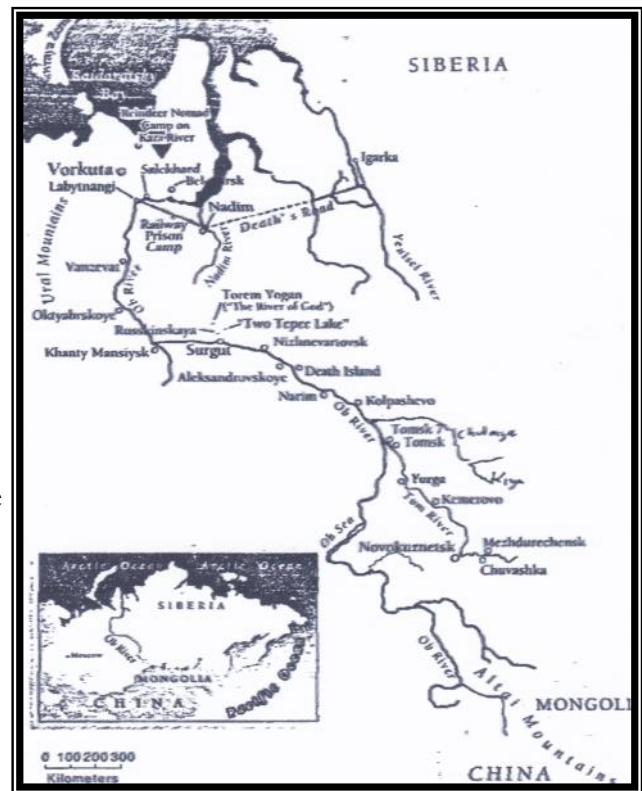
Then it was time to load and move barges downstream on the Kiya River. A small crew, including David, was assigned to take a barge loaded with lumber. There was still much ice in the rivers, but the ships and barges could make their way slowly downstream on the Kiya River to where it emptied into the Chulym River and then down that river to where it flows into the Ob River. From there, they were towed upstream on the Ob, with ships adding and dropping barges at various points between Tomsk and Novonikolayevsk (Novosibirsk). At one point, lacking a suitable place to secure their barge, the men got off the barge and scrambled ashore, carrying the ship's anchor up the river bank and digging it in before going on a quest for food in the nearby town.

They returned, going down the Ob River, picking up large barges taken upstream onto the Chulym and then the Kiya River. Before taking them downstream, the Menonite men helped load more barges with ties and poles at various stops. They worked mainly on barges and ships plying the Kiya, Chulym, Tom and Ob rivers within a fairly wide range of the city of Tomsk. During the summer, they

also went downstream from Tomsk on the Ob River, at least as far as Narym. It is, however, difficult to match the place names of towns mentioned in the diaries with the places shown on the map, which is taken from one of the diaries.

The diaries give no clear indication of the overall traffic flow or the rationale for dropping off or picking up barges at various points. It is less clear what freight was carried when the barges returned. Downstream barge freight on the Kiya, Tom and Chulym Rivers, and then upstream on the Ob River to Novonikolaevsk in the Novosibirsk region, apparently consisted mainly of forestry products. Ties, poles, lumber, sills and firewood are most frequently mentioned.

There were many twists and turns in the rivers, and on May 14, Harder noted that by ship, they were 750 km from Tomsk, but that by wagon road, which was also not built in a straight line, the



Map of Siberia from the David Harder diary



Map of Siberia showing the Ob, Chulym and Tom Rivers, the cities of Omsk and Novosibirsk, credit Ultima Thule Images

(See Forestry on page 12)

(Forestry from page 11)

distance was only 128 km. Sometimes the men walked long distances from where the barge was docked to the nearest village, looking for food and supplies.

The diaries describe many of the changing scenes along the way. In his June 8 entry Harder also noted the different colours of the rivers they worked on. He described the water of the Ob River as milky coloured while the Chulym River is red, and the Tom River is green. It was still possible to see the unique colours a long distance before they fully merged.

The work involved few fixed schedules or long stays anywhere, yet routines were established. Days on the rivers were interspersed with visits to towns, shopping for and preparing food, doing laundry and looking after personal needs and interests. The men could also earn extra money loading their own or other barges while their barge was docked or awaiting another assignment. Contact was made with Mennonite men working on other barges and in other towns and villages. There were indeed challenges, but no serious accidents.

On September 27, 1916, a sharp frost marked the end of the busy shipping season. The men were accommodated in barracks where they had worked the previous winter. Some of the men asked for home leave on October 8. It was denied, but Harder and several others decided to leave without permission. They visited family, friends and relatives in several Mennonite communities. The following day David Harder attended his first church service since Penticost, and later that evening, he and seven others boarded a third-class train.

On November 3, 1916, the men received a telegram ordering all those on leave to immediately return to the forestry camp. Harder and several others left on the 6th and got to their camp late on the 9th. Harder had to pay a fine of 80 rubles because he had left without permission. As a skilled carpenter, he was assigned work in a carpentry shop.

In early December, the weather turned very cold, and on the 7th, a fire broke out in the barracks. The main building and much machinery was destroyed, and two Mennonite men perished in the fire. No relatives were able to come to the funerals. The bodies were buried at a cemetery 20 kilometres from the camp.

Harder and several others were then responsible for dressing some rough lumber so construction of a new building could begin after that; Harder worked on a number of carpentry related projects, although relations with some of the supervisors were fraught with tension when he was asked to do skilled carpentry work but got paid only for manual labour.

News of political unrest in St. Petersburg reached the camp in February of 1917. Abdication of the Tsar early in March undermined the authority of the local government. The city mayor was driven from office by marauding soldiers, but an attempt to set the city on fire was thwarted. There was much confusion. The Forestry Service men did not know who could give them instructions but prepared and presented a petition to the soldiers who had replaced the mayor. They explained who they were and what they were doing. Their petition was well received. David Harder continued to work in the carpentry shop of the camp. He also accepted some small projects on

which he earned a bit of money. He and the others did not return to work on the barges in 1917.

Uncertainty regarding their service obligations prompted many forestry workers to apply for leave. Some were allowed to leave; others were denied permission. But then they could be recalled at short notice. There was often little work for them, but David was happy to spend time in the carpentry shop.

Between March and November of 1917, David Harder was granted leave at least three times, only to be recalled unexpectedly. He thus made the long, arduous trip from Tomsk to Slavgorod several times. He could assist in some of the spring and later harvest farm work at home. He returned to the camp for the last time on November 5, 1917, but was granted leave the following day because the men argued that the harvest had not yet been completed and that they could be of much greater use at home than in the camp.

Disease was rampant in Schoensee when Harder returned the last time. He immediately set up a small carpentry shop in which, among other things, he made numerous coffins. He noted that he earned good money with his carpentry work, but it was mixed with personal tragedy. The Harder's two sons each got seriously sick and David, the second son, died on Christmas Day, 1917. The father built the coffin in which 2-year-old David was buried on December 31, 1917.

David Harder loved carpentry work for which he earned a good income, first in camp and then after his return home. Then, on February 15, 1918, he bought a farmstead without much planning.

(See Forestry on page 13)

(Forestry from page 12)

He planned to continue some of his carpentry work while working on the farm with his brother Jacob who was looking for work. Very shortly after the purchase of the farmstead, David Harder became embroiled in highly contentious land distribution and ownership debates and disputes. In February and March, as a landowner, he attended the village council meetings, which he described in colourful detail.

"There was a national dispute over land in Russia. It seemed to be a problem in all the villages. Some wanted public land ownership, while others wanted to keep things as they had always been. The big land owners wanted more land, but the landless wanted some land of their own. This discussion was also on everyone's mind in our villages. The men returning from forestry service where they had worked for three years felt they had a right to some land too. There were many petitions and resolutions, but nothing came of them. Serious problems were developing between the landless and the land owners. Everyone wanted a say in the decisions as there was no government to set direction. There were many murders. In our immediate area, it was still quiet, but many people were killed further south. We received a lot of news but nothing we could believe...My second council meeting and it was tumultuous. The landless crashed the meeting and cried for land. There were landless family men and single men who screamed the loudest. Each village had the freedom to make its own arrange-

ments with the landless. The next day the council met again to deal with the problem. Some suggested holding the land cooperatively. Others thought it best to subdivide. It was finally agreed to work out a co-op. But one farmer argued against it, but he was against everything. He wanted to be very honest but seldom was...we took a vote on whether we should set up a co-op. The discussion with the landless went well, and there were no quarrels. In some villages, this same discussion had become violent. The landless thought they were much smarter than they really were. They wanted to dominate and control the decisions, but they demonstrated too much stupidity. I could say much about the rubbish that went on, but why waste paper on it? Also, I don't have the time."

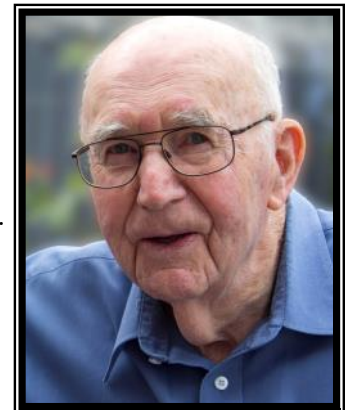
Harder does not explain precisely how their cooperative farming arrangement worked in the diary. The Harder brothers bought their own horses and still worked their own fields, but the village bought an expensive stud, and Harder helped build the barn.

No one in the Harder family was murdered or violently attacked. There was undoubtedly political instability as armed bandits and rival Red and White Army forces fought for control. Still, most of the Siberian Mennonite settlements were spared the rampant, often targeted, violence suffered by the large Russian Mennonite settlements.

The Harder brothers continued their shared farming operations until 1923, although David also continued his carpentry work. In 1923 the family decided to emigrate to Canada. David sold the farm to his brother and took his family to the Caucasus. There he again worked as a carpenter while awaiting the necessary exit visas. In 1925, anticipating the family's imminent departure, David sold his tools and furniture. But when they were denied Russian exit visas, the family returned to Siberia, where they had numerous relatives and prospects of finding work were better.

On October 18, 1926, the Harder family and two other families left Siberia in a railway boxcar, bound for Riga, Latvia. David became ill on the journey. Upon arrival in Riga, he collapsed while moving baggage. He was hospitalized but died on December 7, 1926. The rest of the family was quarantined until July of 1926 because one of the children had trachoma. During that time, Helena gave birth to a son, Jacob. He was the couple's seventh child, two of whom had died before 1925. Helena, as a widow with five children, was able to come to Canada later in 1926.

Family members preserved David Harder's wartime diaries. Jacob Harder, the son, born in Riga after his father's death, worked with other family members to translate the diaries. Jacob was also a long-time member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Family members donated the diaries to the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta after Jacob's death in 2019. ❖



Jacob Harder
(1927-2019)

Tribute to Rudy Kaethler

By Ted Regehr

We were shocked and saddened when informed of the death of Rudy Kaethler. Born on 18 September 1937 in Zaporizhzhiai, Ukraine, Rudy, at age 7, and his mother and siblings made the very difficult "trek" from Ukraine to Germany during the last phases of World War II. Like many other visitors, Rudy first came to the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, looking for information about his family's history. There had been some reluctance to talk about some of the most difficult aspects of the family's wartime and postwar experiences in the family. Rudy wanted to learn more and eventually went to Winnipeg's Mennonite archives. He also made a special trip to Ontario to talk with Marlene Epp, the author of the book "Women Without Men." Marlene documents the very difficult wartime and immediate post-war experiences of women like Rudy's mother in her book. Some members of the Kaethler family were able to come to Canada. Others remained in Russia or migrated to Germany later. Rudy made special efforts to connect with family members who had long been kept apart.

When visiting the MHSA archives, it did not take Rudy long to discover that there were problems with the computers and those trying to use them. As a professional engineer on large construction projects, he had been at the forefront of computerizing operations wherever he worked. He was just the kind of person we urgently needed, and we were very happy when he agreed to join us as a volunteer. He found our computer needs and problems both interesting and challenging, drawing on advice from his computer-savvy sons and local consultants. His work, including the programming of newer computers obtained from MCC Alberta when they upgraded their systems, was very much appreciated. He was friendly, easy to talk to and work with as a colleague. He will undoubtedly be missed. Fortunately, we contacted the local consultant Rudy worked with and shared his knowledge and insights.

On a personal note, Rudy was only two months older than I. We both grew up in Coaldale and went on to study at the University of Alberta. But neither of us could recall that we had ever met before he came to the archives. Our families belonged to different churches, and we went to different schools. I did know the family of his wife, Luella. His brother-in-law, Wilfrid Penner, was my classmate. My father and his father-in-law, Peter Penner, had served in several Mennonite community organizations and programs. Rudy and I thus had opportunities to share and compare memories of the same childhood home community, even though we had not had any contacts there.

Rudy died in Calgary on 2 June 2022. He was predeceased by his wife, Luella, four years ago. He is survived by three sons and three daughters-in-law, Neil and Veronica, Richard and Judy, Stanley and Kirsty; four grandchildren, Alexandra, Daniel, Andrew and Sonya, and his brother Harry, and sister Hilda. ❖



Rudy Kaethler

A Tale of Two Chairs

By Kim Langen in conversation with
Gertie Martens

*From Russia, with love and a gold ring
for a future bride*

This is a tale of a Russian's gold ring (traded for flour), a story of surviving through desperate years of famine, journeying across the Atlantic, and two remarkable chairs that later shift throughout a family's history – finally ending up here in Killarney, Manitoba.

The tale is incredible for violinist Gertie Martens, her family's migration and the two delicate wooden chairs that sit today in her Park Street living room in Killarney.



Gertie Martens, keeper of the heirloom chairs with the Russian's gold ring on her left hand, her grandparents, Peter and Anna Klassen, are pictured in the album photo ca 1890s

"My grandfather, Peter Klassen, was born in Tiegerweide, Mol-

(See Chairs on page 15)

(Chairs from page 14)

otschna, Russia (present day Ukraine)," said Martens. "Peter was orphaned in 1882 when he was five. Peter's mother's sister, his aunt Catherina Fast and her husband raised him. Peter the shepherd and his beloved dog took care of the sheep. But Peter Klassen's life included more than the task of caring for the flock."

"He learned to play the violin his stepmother gave him," said Martens. "Peter fell in love and eventually married Anna Warkentin," the Quaker girl next door. Gertie's grandfather Peter went to university and earned his teaching certificate in Mariupol, Ukraine, in 1888. A year later, he married Anna.

"Peter and Anna moved to the peninsula of Crimea, next to the Black Sea," Gertie said. "He taught in the Mennonite village of Spat during World War I. But it was only part-time, so he opened a music store on the second storey of their house. It soon became difficult to feed their big family or even survive. Peter and Anna had 13 children; my dad, John, was number eight."

"There was a famine just after the First World War," said Martens. "There was no food. So, in 1924, my father's older brother Abraham and two older sisters went to Canada. His brother William went to North Battleford, Saskatchewan; sister Margaret (Klassen) Quapp to Coaldale, Alberta, and another sister Mary (Klassen) Thiessen, to Waterloo, Ontario. Meanwhile, the famine got worse in Russia. Two years later, in 1926, the parents, Peter and Anna, left with the seven remaining children, including my dad,

John. Two of their children had died."

Gertie's dad, John Klassen, had sailed away with his siblings with a long-distance love pounding in his chest and a vibrant gold ring burning a hole in his pocket.

"Before they left, my dad, John, had a girlfriend," said Martens. "He

had had his eye on Gertrude Wall. He was eight, she was five, he met her at her mother's funeral during the famine years, and it was love at first sight, and Gertrude had been John's girlfriend ever since."

Dad, John, was employed at a flour mill during those challenging years and was still unmarried. But events were about to swerve him towards a distant altar.

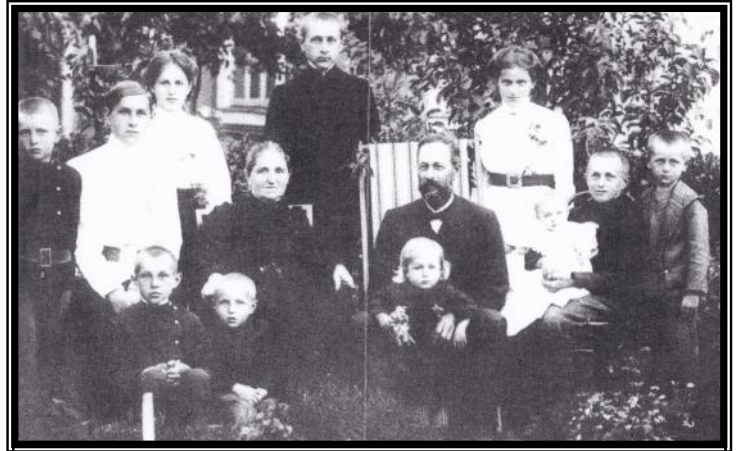
"While working in the flour mill, some wealthy Russians came to barter for the flour, using gold rings," said Martens. "My dad, John 24, took a gold ring in exchange for flour, which eventually became the wedding band. But John wasn't even engaged yet. He was to sail across the ocean, so John and Gertrude got engaged, made plans to meet in Waterloo, Ontario and get married there. The family sailed on October 25, 1925. A month later, Gertrude sailed for Canada with her whole family, to Halifax, then by train to Montreal and on to Waterloo. John and Gertrude planned a wedding for August 15, 1926."

And this is where the *A Tale of Two Chairs* begins.

"The marriage was to occur in Harmony Hall, Waterloo," said Gertie Martens. "The kids were getting married, but there weren't enough chairs. So, Grandpa Peter and Grandma Anna decided to buy two new chairs to use for the wedding. Uncle Dave Thiessen worked at Snyder Furniture, so it is possible that the chairs were made there. They had leather covers added to the seats so that the wedding dress wouldn't catch on the wood."

The family then walked several blocks to the hall, carrying the new chairs with them. "It wasn't a formal church service, but two Mennonite ministers officiated at the wedding," said Martens. "It was at 7 p.m., and that was the first time the chairs were used, by my parents, the bride Gertrude and groom John. That was also when he placed the Russian's gold ring on her finger." After the wedding, the chairs were picked up and carried back to her grandparents' home, said Martens.

But circumstances soon changed, and Peter and Anna moved again, this time to Coaldale, Alberta. "To be close to their daughter Margaret and son-



Peter and Anna (Warkentin) Klassen Family
Standing L-R Abraham, William, Maria (Klassen) Thiessen, Jacob, Margaret (Klassen) Quapp, Peter Jr.
Sitting L-R David, Karl, Anna, Peter Sr. holding Johanna (Klassen) Enns, John holding Elfrieda (Klassen)
Dyck, Spat, Crimea, 1912

(See Chairs on page 16)

(Chairs from page 15)

in-law Peter Quapp, who had an irrigation farm there," said Martens. My Grandpa Peter, born in 1862, died in 1930 in Coaldale. Grandma Anna decided to return to Waterloo; the two chairs were sold to a Jacob Janz family, along with her household goods, at an auction in Coaldale. Anna went back to Waterloo in 1933."

In the meantime, Martens' mom, Gertrude and dad, John, were offered a quarter section of land in Culross, Manitoba, if they agreed to farm with Gertrude's father. They went and worked hard, but they lost the quarter section and went bankrupt. It was the dirty '30s, and times were dicey, said Martens. But John and Gertrude didn't give up. "They rented a farm near Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, for a while and got back on their feet," Gertie said. "They made enough money to buy a new farm. My mom, Gertrude and dad, John, bought a beautiful place on the Assiniboine River near Poplar Point, Manitoba, in 1948. There were six children; I, Gertie, was seven years old at the time. It was so exciting because we didn't have hydro at the other farm, and now we did. It was a huge house, like a castle. It was just this lovely farm, and it even had a grain elevator."

In 1949 her father, now from Poplar Point, went as a delegate to attend the Mennonite Brethren Church Conference in Coaldale, Alberta. John was billeted in the Jacob Janz family home when the unimaginable happened. "John walked into the house and saw two chairs, with the leather on the seats, the same ones from his wedding of 26 years ago," said Gertie Martens. "What was the chance that he would be in that house? He told his host the story, and two months later, he's back home, and there's a big parcel at the post office for him. John knew that it must be the chairs because of the story he told Janz about the chairs. A letter was inside the parcel, saying it was a gift from the couple he billeted with. The Janz's wanted my mom and dad to have the chairs."

In 1951, her parents celebrated their 25th anniversary, said Martens. "The family had a party in the brand-new machine shed at the Poplar Point farm," Gertie said. "And my parents sat in the chairs. In 1954, their oldest son, my brother Art, got married, and they used the chairs for the couple. In 1971, my parents, John and Gertrude, had their 45th anniversary in Winnipeg, and there they were, in the chairs. It had become a family tradition. We have been using the two chairs for all the family anniversaries, for weddings; they have been used many times since my grandparents carried them down the street, from 32 Elgin Street, in Waterloo, Ontario, to Harmony Hall on King Street."

The next appointment for the two lovely chairs is for Gertie Martens' grandson Ben Kroeker and Kelsey Miller's wedding shower. "They are get-



Front-John, and Gertrude Klassen's 45th anniversary, holding hands on the heirloom loveseats, Rear-John's sister Maria and David Thiessen, Winnipeg, 1971

ting married in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, but they have a shower in the morning, and a social in the evening, in Wawanesa, Manitoba, on October 19, 2019," said Martens. "On that night, Ben and Kelsey will be the 26th couple to use the chairs. I think it's amazing."

She added that the family has to ship the chairs to make the special dates across the country. "The chairs go back and forth between Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Ontario," said Martens. "I have become the keeper of the chairs. Sometimes it can cost hundreds of dollars to ship them. On the last trip, they came from Ontario; luckily, someone could drop them off here for us."

And what about the wealthy Russian's ring? "It was passed on to me in 1988 after my mom and sister passed away," said Martens. "I have worn it since then, on the third finger of my left hand. It still bears the inscription of my parents' Gertrude and John's names inside."

The Klassen heirloom wedding chair timeline covers five generations, 35 events, 26 weddings and nine other happenings as of Oct 2019.

The story *A Tale of Two Chairs* is not yet finished.

This article was contributed by David Quapp, Edmonton; David, born and raised in Coaldale, is the son of Peter and Margaret (Klassen) Quapp and first cousin to Gertie Martens.

The article was revised and edited by David Quapp and Dave Toews. Used with permission . ❖

Lindenau Molotschna

By Ernie Wiens

On February 28, 2022, Tim Huber writing in *Anabaptist World*, announced to the *Mennonite World* that "Russian



Ernie Wiens

troops occupy Mennonite ministry." Huber quotes Alvin Suderman: "Russian tanks were seen throughout the town. (Molochansk/Halbstadt) They approached from the south and likely came from Melitopol and passed through all the former Mennonite villages from Lichtenau on to Halbstadt."

My first thought was they drove right through Lindenau (Lyubimouka)!

I have never been to the cradle of Russian Mennonites in Katharine's New Russia, let alone Lindenau, so why react to this news?

Simply, like the pig in the proverbial python, Lindenau is where my Ahnentafel forms a bulge in an otherwise smooth and spreading progression, the same as for hundreds of my DNA relatives that show up in my 23andMe file.

Lindenau was the 6th village in a line of 9, opening up the new Molotschna colony in 1804. It was so named the previous winter by the newly elected "Obershultze" Klaus Wiens for a small village in Prussia. (1)

The Land

The village lay in a northeast to southwest orientation where the nearly straight road jogs to the east

to avoid the marshy area near the Molotschna River. The neighbouring villages of Fishau and Lichtenau lay a few kilometres to the north and south, respectively.

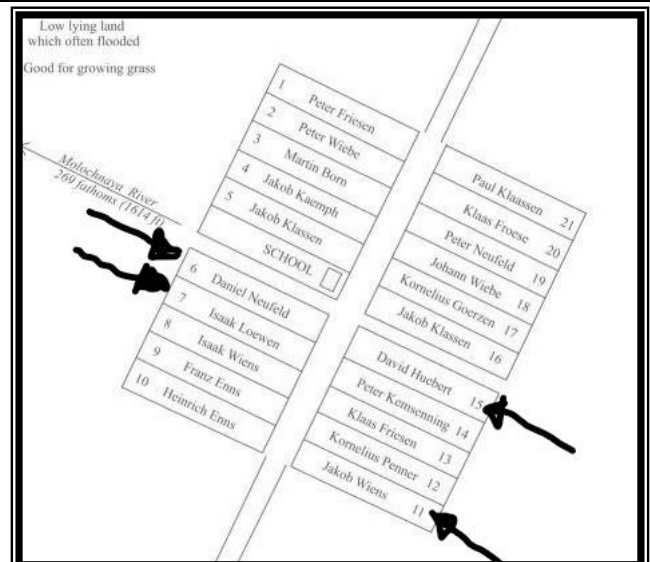
Lindenau was located in a shallow depression about two square kilometres in diameter, just a few hundred meters from the Molotschna River to the west. The shallow valley was bisected by a seasonal creek parallel to the river. The low-lying land was a grassy wetland ideal for making hay, tree plantations, and winter grazing between them.

Initially, there was not a tree in sight, only miles of tall waving grasses.

To the east and the south on the higher terrain was a large Nogai camp. This is where the nomadic Nogai, for centuries, had pitched their felt-covered yurts, tended their flocks and practiced their particular form of the Islamic faith. This camp was moved by government fiat in 1805 to make way for the agrarian minded Mennonites and the glory of Mother Russia



Drawing of a Nogai encampment in New Russia, date unknown, credit RadioFreeEurope online



Original settler families of Lindenau Molotschna.
(Family lots cited in the article are marked)

The People

The list of the first settlers is well known, and their assigned "Wirtschaften" designated by lot. The village had been surveyed into 21 equal farms, 10 plus a school reserve on the west and 11 on the east side of the main road. Building codes and house/barns plans were strictly prescribed and enforced. (1,2). The first settlers of Lindenau arrived from Chortitza on July 15, 1804. Many had arrived in the fall of 1803 and found lodging for the winter in the previously established colony. Here they had studied the village maps, drawn lots for the farms and elected Klaus Wiens from Altonau as the colony's "Oberschulze." Now the time had come to

(See Lindenau on page 18)

(Lindenau from page 17)

work.

The settlers were adequately and probably even quite generously supported both materially and financially by the Russian Government, supervised by the Department of Colonization which also monitored the terms of the Privilegium of 1800.

The rest of the summer in Lindenau was spent in feverish activities preparing shelters for the approaching winter. Wood was hauled in from a

were two parent units, and most had children ranging from infants to late teens. Many were "blended" families. Parental ages ranged mainly from the mid-20s to the mid-40s. The oldest couple was in the 60s. (2,3)

Families of Interest

1. The Isaac Loewen Family

In her Chronicle article "The Loewen Clock," Phyllis Ratzlaff traces her ancestry back to Lindenau and references Isaac Isaac Loewen. This Loewen family occupied farm number 7 on the west side of the road. Daniel Daniel Neufeld's immediate neighbours to the north and the young Isaac Wiens family to the south. The Loewens were relatively late-comers to Lindenau. Like most of their contemporaries, they came from Elbing in Prussia and were of Flemish descent. They



Early Lindenau home sheltering three families for the winter, date unknown

Jacob Wiens Born 2 Jan 1880 Marr 12 Oct 1901 Died 25 Nov 1961	Isaak Wiens Born 19 Jan 1855 Died 24 Apr 1919	Jacob Wiens Born 21 Apr 1813 Died 4 Mar 1893	Johann Jacob Wiens Born 10 Apr 1791 Maria Born Born 5 Dec 1792 Franz Franz Wall Born Abt 1796 Barbara Born Abt 1794 Dietrich Peter Janzen Born 29 May 1791 Katharina Isaac Born 28 Dec 1787
		Katharina Wall Born 17 Jun 1825 Died 1 Sep 1870	Bernhard Jacob Friesen Born JAN 1776 Anna Gerbrandt Born Abt 1769 Daniel Daniel Neufeld Born Abt 1768 Justina Kroeker Born Abt 1776 Peter Thiessen Born 14 Aug 1779 Anganetha Enns
		Peter Dietrich Janzen Born 9 Sep 1822 Died 20 Jun 1888	
		Anna Wiebe Born 25 Nov 1823 Died 30 Jun 1898	
Elisabeth "Liese" Friesen Born 16 Feb 1882 Died 8 Sep 1947	Ida Janzen Born 6 Jun 1855 Died 1887	Thomas Bernhard Friesen Born Abt 1807 Died Bel 1852	
		Justina Helena Neufeld Born 1810 Died 1903	
		Klaas Thiessen Born 16 Aug 1806	
		Maria Penner Born 7 Oct 1809 Died Alt 1858	
	Daniel Thomas Friesen Born 17 Aug 1844 Marr 1867 Died 1 Oct 1909		
	Elizabeth Thiessen Born 4 Sep 1847 Died 1 Feb 1922		

Genealogy of Jacob Isaac Wiens and Liese Daniel Friesen

source 85 kilometres away; the reed thatch was cut along the nearby river. Some built individual sod houses called Semljankas; others built wooden houses to house 2 or even 3 families that first winter. All the roofs were thatch. All but one of the 21 families required government assistance. All

entered Russia at Grodno on July 22, 1804, and departed on July 24. They received financial assistance

(See Lindenau on page 19)

(Lindenau from page 18)

for the two-day stay and for the remainder of their 40-day trip to Chortitza. (4) It is unlikely that the Loewens spent their first winter in Lindenau. They probably did not reach Chortitza until mid-September 1804. Accompanying them were: Isaac Isaac Loewen, age 17 (a son from a previous marriage to Margarita Ens) Jacob Isaac Loewen, age one and a half. Isaac Loewen was 45 years of age, his wife Eva was 44, Isaac was a carpenter back in Prussia.

2. The Jacob Cornelius

Wiens Family The Jacob Wiens family was in a big hurry to get to the Molotschna! They arrived at Grodno on August 15, 1803, and departed on August 20. They were assisted monetarily with living expenses as well as travel expenses for the next 40 days. 5 children accompanied Jacob and Katharina.; Anna 18, Johann 15, Katharina 10, Margarita 7, Jacob 5. Jacob was 45 years of age, his wife Katherina (Loewen) 41. (pg 66 (4) The Jacob Wiens family was from Tiegenhagen in Prussia and was also of Flemish descent. Jacob had also been a carpenter in Prussia. It can be assumed that they were among the first settlers into the Lindenau valley on July 15, 1804. Their farm was number 11 on the east side of the road.

3. The David Huebert Family The David Huebert Family occupied site number 15. Tracing their origin has been difficult. They do not appear in Karl Stumpp's (6) records or Peter Rempel's book (4). They were of Flemish background, and David was a church leader in the "Grosse Gemeinde." Also, they were the only family not requiring government assistance. (2) The

family is best remembered for entertaining royalty. On May 21, 1818, Czar Alexander 1 came for breakfast. The hospitality of the Hueberts, the humility of the Czar and the gracious and elegant speech by Mrs. Huebert have all been recorded for posterity. She was gifted with a diamond ring for her gracious hospitality upon the Czar's departure. (2)

4. The Daniel Daniel Neufeld Family The Daniel Neufeld family arrived in Grodno, Russia, on August 10, 1803, and left with assistance on August 14. They would have arrived in Chortitza in October and likely spent the winter there. They were assigned by lot to site 6. Daniel had been a linen weaver in Prussia (6). According to the 1811 census, the Neufelds then owned: 5 horses, 4 cattle, 4 pigs, ½ plow, 1 set of harrows, 1 wagon, and 1 spinning wheel. Of special interest to me is the addition to the family of 2-year-old Justina. (5). In July 1814, the farm was transferred to Isaac Born. No explanation was given. The Neufelds were now landless and became one of the first "Anwohner" in Lindenau. Little Justina was 5 years old.

Lindenau Prospers

Economically, Lindenau prospered exponentially. In the first decade, the population increased from 90 to 141. There were now 154 horses and 167 cattle. Nearly every farm owned its own plow, harrows, wagon, and spinning wheel. Martin Born owned a loom. Raising sheep for their prized "Spanish wool" had become the primary agrarian focus.

During the next two decades, the boom continued. The government's effort through the Agricultural Society and its "President for Life" Johann Cornies introduced fruit orchards (especially pears), tree plantations and silk culture. Increased wool production continued unabated. While wheat production showed only average yields, it provides the Mennonite staple flour, "Twebak." Individual farmers "...stood in the forefront of Molotschna agriculture." (2). In 1847 Isaac Born had the second largest nursery in the Colony. 1846 Isaac Loewen had the highest silk production. 1850 Jacob Wiens was second in silk production (7). By 1851 Lindenau had planted 126,182 trees!

Social Fabric of Lindenau

Socially, things developed as they had for centuries, even in a new village in a new land. Husbands died, and wives became widows. Since a woman could not own land, she had few options: the eldest son could take over the farm and care for an aging mother. Or, if she was young enough, she could remarry. Since the maternal death rate was so high at childbirth, there were many eligible widowers. Blended families were often the norm and usually arranged in haste. If the wife died of illness or disease, or more often in childbirth, widowers were in dire straits with a large family to feed and clothe, let alone nurture. Hastily arranged marriages with women decades younger and inexperienced must have led to complicated family dynamics and more babies.

Infants became children, and children became teens no matter how scarred. Teens became twenties, married, and the cycle repeated itself.

Johann Wiens married Martin Martin Born's younger sister Maria (half-sister?), and the following year (1813), a new Jacob Wiens was born.

Isaac Lowen waited long for Margarita Wiens to grow up and marry

(See Lindenau on page 20)

(Lindenau from page 19)

her. They went on to have 13 children as well as phenomenal financial success in Lindenau. The village could not accommodate such large numbers of offspring, and by its restrictive rules, many were sent packing. Abraham W Loewen, one of the youngest, emigrated to the East Reserve in Manitoba, as documented in "The Lowen Clock."

And what about Justina Neufeld living with her family in Lindenau as Anwohner? In 1816 Tomas Bernhard Friesen emigrated to the neighbouring village of Lichtenau from Prussia. One thing led to another, and 13 years later, they married. In 1830 they moved to a newer village, Friedensdorf and began having Friesen children. In 1839 they moved to the new neighbouring model village of Landskrone, and here in 1844, she gave birth to Daniel Thomas Friesen, who would become my great grandfather, and little Justina Neufeld became my great great grandmother.

In 1851, when Danny Thomas (Friesen) was 7 years old, his father died suddenly. Resourceful Justina Neufeld Friesen remarried quickly and became Justina Neufeld Friesen Wall. A decade and a half later, the Friesen/Wall family was living in the Crimea

What about young Jacob Wiens, born in Lindenau in 1813? Well, he grew up in Lindenau, married there, and, you guessed it, had two sons: Jacob (1838) and Johann (1840). Then their mother died, and her name isn't even known in my grandfather's Chronicle! Both sons left for the US in the 1870s. A Franz



Family Chronicle compiled by Jacob Isaac Wiens (1880 - 1961) Mimeographed by his brother-in-law Heinrich Daniel Friesen, Coaldale AB



Kleine Gemeinde Cemetery near Meade Kansas. Inset: gravestone of Maria/Wiens/Kornelsen/Friesen

Wall daughter, Katherina, 12 years younger, became his second wife, and the next year Maria, the first of 17 children, including 2 sets of twins, was born. She emigrated to Manitoba, outlived two husbands, and was buried in South Kleine Gemeinde Cemetery near Meade, Kansas. (8) Needless to say, not all 17 children survived, but Isaac and his twin brother Cornelius lived. Isaac would become my great grandfather. Lindenau also had no room for this large family, and it too would disperse. It appears from the Lindenau census that Jacob never acquired a farm in his hometown. His family scattered: To the Crimea in the 1860s, to Manitoba and the US in the 1870s, and to Neu Samara in the 1890s. Jacob continued to move around from place to place and was finally laid to rest in Karasan, Crimea, in 1893.

With time, the Moloschna Colony recognized the problem of landlessness and instigated land reforms, but this was much too late for the first generation of Lindenauers. Large families and restrictive property laws do not bode well for family cohesion! In search of agricultural land, they scattered like dry leaves before the wind and family relations paid the price; many siblings never saw each other again.

Lindenau Prospers

Despite the heavy toll on family relations and economics, the village continued to prosper. By the 1850s, new full farms and half farms had been added. A second "Upper Street" came into existence on the higher ground east of the village, where the Nogai encampment stood 50 years before. The

(See Lindenau on page 21)

(Lindenau from page 20)

tiny cemetery at the north end of town containing most of the original settlers and many first-generation children had filled up and needed expansion. Lindenau basked in the accomplishments of its first half century, totally unaware, nor could they be aware, of the tumultuous and bloody future awaiting them. But we know. The glory and the successes blazed brightly if but briefly engineered by a group of Flemish immigrants in 1804.

And now

So what exactly is Lindenau? A name? A home? A location? Is it the well-watered valley of the nomadic Nogai who for centuries called it "a good place for a camp"? Is it where Mennonites built a flourishing town and turned the surrounding steppe into an oasis? Or is it nothing but a Mennonite Memory?

At present, it is a collection of shabby houses called Lyubimouka. Two functional structures (the school houses) remain to bear silent witness to what was once Lindenau, home to a handful of Flemish ancestors. Some of them are mine.

Lindenau, as we have come to know it, does not exist, nor could the soldiers in their tanks have known its glorious past. The Russian tanks hardly slow down as they take the gentle curves at the beginning and the end of the ragged town in their mad dash for more important destinations farther north: Molochansk, Tokmak, Zaparozh'ye and, of course, the Zaporizhskaya Nuclear Power Plant. As the war with Russia drags on and the economy craters, what

will happen to this glorious Mennonite past? Undoubtedly it will fade. If we're lucky, Lindenau will revert back to the grassy valley 300 meters east of what was once called the Molotschna River; a two square kilometres depression of lush winter pasture and tall reeds by the river. Maybe the nomads will return, but certainly not Flemish Mennonites from Prussia. And maybe, just maybe, the Russian soldiers will go home.

REFERENCES

1. *Molotschna Historical Atlas*, 2003. Helmut Huebert.
2. *Gemeinde Bericht*, 1848, *das Molotschner Mennoniten Gebiet*; Riediger A., Quapp P., Friesen A. *Odessaer Zeitung*, 42, 1904. Nr. 171.
3. *Molotschna Mennonite Settlement Census for October 27, 1806*. State Archives of Dnepropetrovsk Region.
4. *Mennonite Migration to Russia from 1788 to 1828*. Peter Rempel; Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society; Winnipeg, Manitoba.
5. *Molotschna Mennonite Settlement for 1814*. State Archives of Dnepropetrovsk Region
6. *Die Auswanderung aus Deutschland Nach Russland in den Jahren 1788 bis 1862*; 631 D Street, Lincoln Nebraska.
7. *Molotschna Historical Atlas 2003*; Helmut Huebert; pg 156.
8. *Familien Chronic von Jacob Isaac Wiens*; Coaldale Alberta ❖

Oberschulze Isaac Toews

By Dave Toews

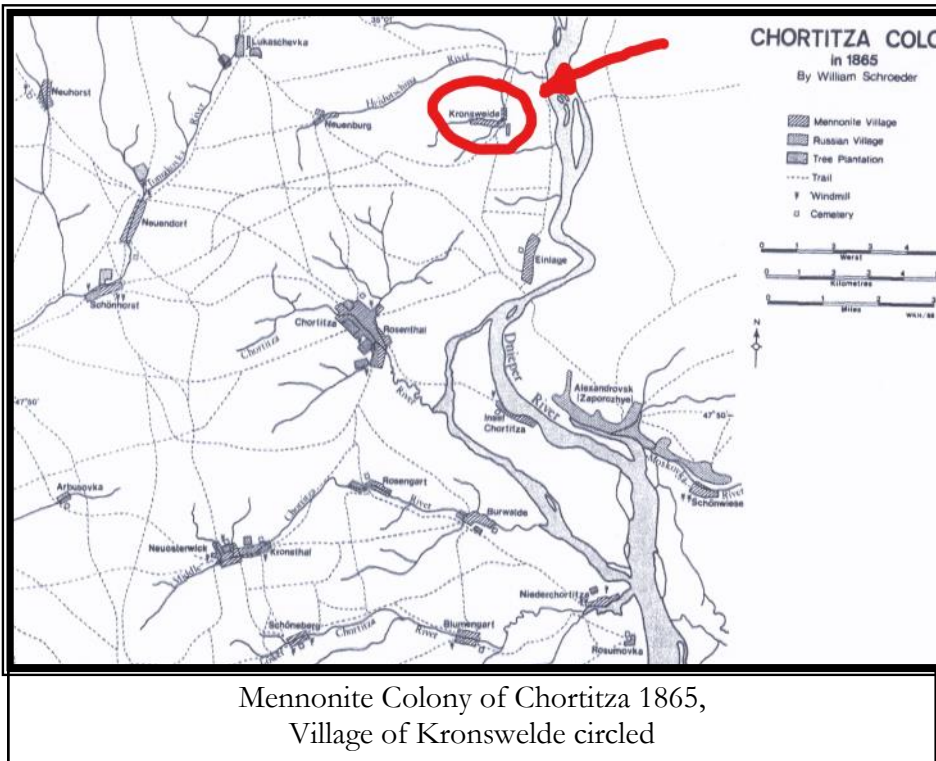
This is an excerpt from the book "Heinrich Heese" by David H. Epp; Isaac Toews (1774-1831) was my three times great-grandfather, known in our family as Isaac II. Toews from the Russian Mennonite village of Kronsweide served as Oberschulze for the area from 1823 to 1826. Isaac accomplished a lot of good reforms and improved methods in many areas of church and daily life. The local Mennonite population very much underappreciated the progress that Isaac Toews cultivated as is borne out in the following. Unfortunately there is no portrait or likeness of Isaac Toews

When the Chortitza Colony settler Isaac Toews, a reasonable and insightful man, was elected as the chief schoolmaster at his instigation, a particularly beneficial time began for the Chortitza district. Under District Mayor Isaac Toews of Kronswiede, Heese's reputation with the authorities increased more and more. In his "Notes" from 1853, Heese writes about that period: "The District Mayor carried out the following happy deeds:

The neglected minister's conference was re-established; the large church debt was paid off, so the church treasury now possessed a nice cash balance; the disorganized communal sheepfold was transformed into excellent working conditions for the purchased breeding rams from Tsarskoye Selo. With careful management of the sheep breeding program, it produced offspring of the highest quality; removed investors from the failed distillery; the vagabond squatters were driven away; abolished the public thievery by merchants and abuse of the community forest; the shepherd Bekker corrupted by abuses was replaced by

(See Oberschulze on page 22)

(Oberschulze from page 21)



expired.

Toews was not reelected. Instead of that, the agitated masses called him to account for his actions at a district meeting, in which nothing but encroachments had been seen, and forced him to make a public apology. Astonishing, an apology, for what? For a whole series of blessings, which they owed to this district mayor! Such an insult wounded the heart of the noble-minded and, at the same time, an honour-loving man so much that he became weak from that hour on and soon died.

An admirable characteristic of Heese is that he does not mention his participation in all the welfare work. Yet he mainly was the initiator, and District Mayor Toews couldn't have accomplished what he did without Heese.

Yet Isaac Toews possessed all the qualities of a man who was exceptionally qualified for the leadership of the community. He was serious, not presumptuous, and thoughtful. Toews examined every matter thoroughly; he was slow but firm in his decisions. He constantly communicated them in short, concise speeches. Pointed answers or speeches never hurt him. The sentence passed had to be carried out precisely according to the regulation. After a parental warning, he required only the signature of the punished person that he would refrain from his wrongdoing. He did not have anyone whipped. His earnestness instilled a reverence for him in everyone. After the meeting was over, he refrained from all useless gossip about the things agreed upon or the people connected with them. If others spoke about it, he kept si-

an orderly, obedient man who restored trust and was not allowed to own a flock of his own; the detention transport, a dreadful practice at that time, was abolished; after long resistance from the authorities, a district carriage was purchased in order to conduct business more quickly and easily; the nightly mischief of ruffians was curtailed; prompt and correct payments, a challenging task, was put into practice; the hitherto unproductive communal pasture, despite significant expenditures, was enclosed and converted at minimal cost to a flourishing and proper condition; everything and anything has been renewed and improved under the blessing of God.

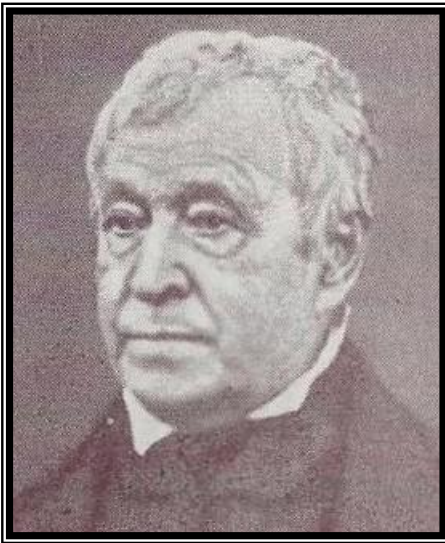
These are results that a district mayor can be proud of. An insightful and grateful community would give him credit. Unfortunately, things were different back then. (And not only at that time!) All these innovations and improvements were opposed and interpreted in the wrong sense by the ill-minded, who needed murky water in order to be able to fish better.

On the contrary, these people and their spokesmen considered every improvement of culture and improved education for the youth, which exceeded a little reading and writing, as dangerous to the community. The authorities became aware of the improved economy of the colony and responded by imposing new taxes! This sly maneuver had a magical effect on the unenlightened mass of the colonists, to which, of course, was added the inertia and dullness inherited from the first settlers. Yes, that was true. Higher efficiency awakened increased demands. But what for? Therefore, fight against every enlightenment and every progress.

Now came the long-awaited time of revenge for the many malcontents and how they took advantage of it! As long as Toews steered the community ship with a firm hand, one had to submit. But he created many enemies for himself, who made him feel all their bitterness when his term of service

(See Oberschulze on page 23)

(Oberschulze from page 22)



Heinrich Heese (1787-1868)

lent. The reenactments of his personal enemies, which he knew quite well, always seemed to weigh on him, but he did not speak about them to anyone. He was not very talkative and did not seek vain applause. With his superiors, on the other hand, he talked about all matters in great detail, without any reserve, just as all his actions bore the stamp of complete openness. Isaac Toews presented it in person wherever a cause had to be represented, which could only help it succeed. He rarely failed to bring a matter to a reasonable conclusion.

In a private company, Toews conducted himself very pleasantly and thoroughly unpretentiously. He never interrupted when someone else spoke, listening attentively and applauding a good cause with a friendly glance. He also loved little jokes, but he would only smile and never respond with a loud laugh. But if someone wanted to distinguish himself by his joke, he turned away from such a buffoon in displeasure. This man must have felt hurt when rewarded for his work

and effort in such a disdainful way. It's a wonder that this wound did not scar over and cause his death.

Heinrich Heese's position under Isaac Toews was enjoyable, and the two men understood each other, strove for the same ideals and sought to implement them appropriately. Unfortunately, Heese had to face new obstacles in his career. ❖

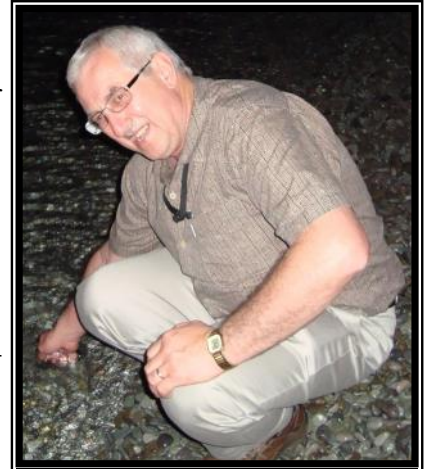
Spring Conference Report

By Henry Wiebe

On Sat, May 14, 2022, we started this conference via Zoom with 46 participants, which increased to 51 during the course of the conference. Many of the participating screens had at least two viewers, so a good number of people enjoyed the session! Not having to travel to the conference cuts down on the overall cost but the refreshments and the visiting in person would certainly benefit everyone. Hopefully, by Fall, we can meet in person!

The MC for the afternoon was Katie Harder, and David Neufeldt provided technical assistance. A big thank you to both!

The conference was opened with some



Henry Wiebe dipping his hand in the Black Sea at Yalta in 2012



introductory comments and a meaningful prayer by Katie. She also read a quote by **Menno Simons**, "*True Evangelical Faith*." (*Goodreads.org* has some great information concerning this quote!). Today there are about 200,000 Mennonites in Canada.

(See Spring on page 24)

(Spring from page 23)

The afternoon's highlight was watching the film *"I Am a Mennonite,"* directed and produced by **Paul Plett** of Winnipeg, Manitoba. This film was released in 2021. You can rent or buy the video on Amazon or iTunes.

Paul produced this film because it is of interest to him; *"where did I come from, where am I, and where am I going."* Looking back and studying our history helps us to answer these questions. A worthy quote from one of the individuals he interviewed *"A real Mennonite not only knows the Bible but lives the Bible!"* In the film, Paul travels back to Ukraine and the Netherlands (I'm not sure why he missed Poland; maybe some other time?!) to search for clues to his own family background as well as the faith and cultural aspects of our Mennonite background. Paul met with some knowledgeable guides in many different places to help him piece together the story. It was evident that He thoroughly enjoyed his "work"!

Q & A Session Paul graciously consented to field a question period via joining us in the Zoom session. His comments and answers were thoughtful and kind. There were a number of questions and some insightful comments from the group. Paul, thank you so much for your personal input into this part of the afternoon!

As we look back on the faith and culture of our Mennonite background, we can be thankful for a great heritage. Our background has strong work ethics, cleanliness, and a great way of creating and serving many delicious and nutritional meals! As I personally reflect again on the teaching of Menno Simons, I think that he would want us to go back to the scripture and that he would say with the apostle Paul, **"follow me as I follow Christ,"** as found in 1 Corinthians 11:1 NIV; *Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.* If we get this one right, many of the other differences in the Mennonite circles *will grow strangely dim in the light of His (Christ's) glory and grace!*

At 4:10, Henry Wiebe made the closing comments and closed the conference with a word of prayer. ❖

MHSA 2021 AGM Report

By Bill Franz

Our 2021 Annual General Meeting was held on Zoom on May 21, 2022. At least 25 members participated in the AGM, and it was appreciated that travel was not required. We are planning that our Fall Conference will be held in-person!

Chair Ken Matis called the AGM to order at 2:08 p.m. He began by playing a song, a Kernlied, On my Pilgrim Journey, translated from the original German. "Our people, your pilgrims, moved many times." Ken then led us in a prayer of thanksgiving for this country and the decisions our ancestors made to come here.

Correction

In the Mar 2022 Chronicle, on page 27 was a photo incorrectly labelled as Kit Carson, American frontiersman, trapper, hunter and soldier. The image was in fact of, General George A. Custer.

Details of the reports are found in the report booklet emailed to all MHSA members. Highlights were presented in the following order:

Chairman's report (Ken Matis): The archives stayed open during the pandemic thanks to our faithful volunteers. We held two virtual conferences in 2021, the streaming of the film Volendam in the spring, and a book launch and a book reading by authors Bill Franz and Agnes Thibert in the fall, followed by commentaries by archivist Ted Regehr. Ken moved that his report be accepted, Dave Neufeldt seconded. Carried.

Treasurer's report (Chandra Janzen): Chandra moved her report be accepted; Dave Toews seconded. Carried.

Chronicle & Media report (Dave Toews): Dave thanked all the authors and the Chronicle volunteers and advised that he is gratified that eight gift memberships were presented this year. He encouraged all MHSA members to consider giving a gift membership to their adult children, friends and relatives. Dave also assists Bill Franz with the MHSA Facebook administration, of which we are now up to 633 members. Dave

(See AGM on page 25)

(AGM from page 24)

Toews moved his report be accepted; Ted Regehr seconded. Carried.

Archives and Library report (Ted Regehr): Ted thanked Jim Bowman and Rudy Kaethler for their ongoing support of the archives. He raised several concerns, the first being what to do with much duplicate material, not within the now-restricted mandate of the archives. There are now 23 banker's boxes of various periodicals that should be deaccessioned. Dave Neufeldt moved that the Archives Task Force be authorized to make the decisions on what material will be deaccessioned; Dave Toews seconded. Carried.

Ted also spoke about the need for longer-term planning. He recommended a focused search for volunteers be based on our needs for specific expertise. He presented his recommendations for how the Plett Foundation grant of \$10,000 be spent, subject to approval by the MHSA Board and then the Plett Foundation. Ted recommended that work on the website continue, that a person be recruited as a volunteer or hired (e.g., summer intern) to enter more material on the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID), and that archival entries be brought into compliance with the Archives of Alberta (ASA) recommendations. Ted moved his report be accepted; Katie seconded. Carried.

Archives Task Force report (Dave Neufeldt): Dave spoke to the need for a long-term plan and that one of our vulnerabilities is an aging group of volunteers. In addition to exploring financial options to sustain the archives, the task

force also helped set policies for the archives, including what materials fall within its mandate. A website subcommittee has been formed, and this work is ongoing. There is a need to have an ongoing committee to support the work of the archives. Katie moved that the Archives Task Force become a standing committee, the **Archives Committee**. Ted Regehr seconded. Carried. Dave Neufeldt moved his report be accepted; Chandra seconded. Carried.

The **Cross Canada Russlaender Centenary Tour** in July 2023 (Katie Harder): Katie advised they are continuing to plan and that preparations are coming together well. There will be a webinar on June 21 for those interested; pre-registration is required. She will forward the information to Dave Toews when she receives it; Dave will forward the same to the members. Dave will also be taking registrations from those wanting to participate in the Alberta events. Katie moved her report be accepted; Dave Neufeldt seconded. Carried.

Elections (Ken Matis): Ken thanked all current and outgoing board members. New candidates for the board introduced themselves: Chandra Janzen, Darrel Heidebrecht, Eugene Janzen, Menno Klaassen, and Jeremy Wiebe. Their enthusiasm and energy will be a welcome addition to the board. Each candidate was accepted individually.

Nominations from the nominating committee for officer positions were presented, and the following were acclaimed:

- Chair: Katie Harder (2022-2023)
- Vice Chair: Dave Toews (2022-2024)
- Treasurer: Chandra Janzen (2022-2025)
- Secretary: Bill Franz (2022-2023)

2022 Budget: Chandra Janzen presented the budget for 2022. It is based on actual expenditures and receipts for 2021, with a small deficit. We will have to solicit additional funds if we want a balanced budget. Chandra thanked Ellie Janz, our volunteer bookkeeper, for her diligence. Chandra moved that the proposed budget for 2022 be accepted, with an anticipated deficit of \$1646.00. Dave Neufeldt seconded. Carried.

New Business: none.

Next board meeting: Katie will send out an email to the board members and will then decide on the date.

The AGM ended at 3:15 p.m. ❖



The Farewell Years: Weathering the Storm

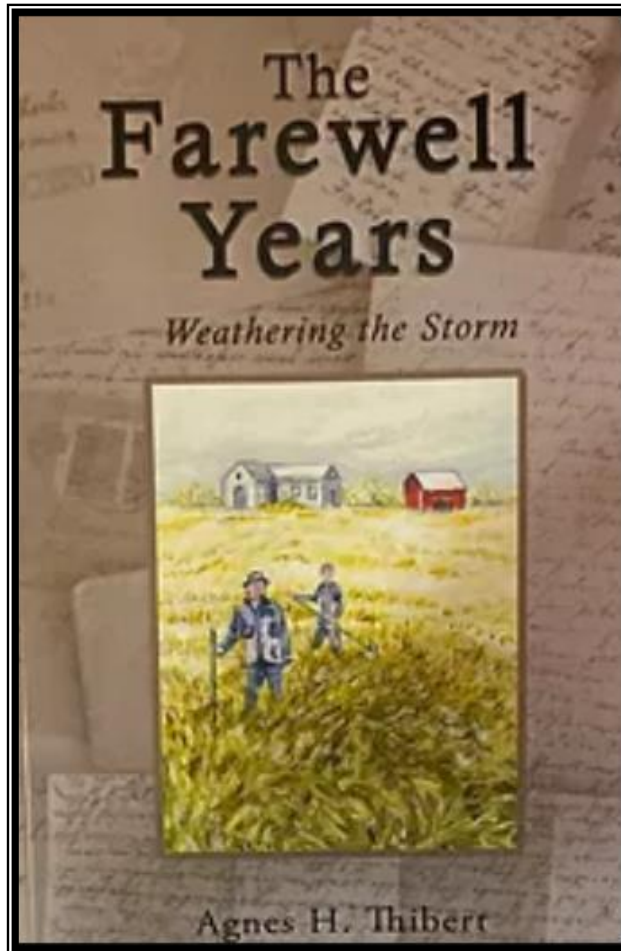
By Agnes H. Thibert. 2021, Self-published. Reviewed by Bill Franz

I must confess reading Agnes's second book, *The Farewell Years*, has been difficult for me. It seems the world has changed, and not for the better, since I read her first novel, *Pathway Through Peril*, A Journey of Hope, last fall. *Dave Toews* reviewed *Pathway Through Peril* in the June 2021 issue of The Chronicle (back issues are uploaded to the MHSA website mennonitehistory.org one year after publication). In the same issue is the article *Brave Beginnings*, by Agnes Langemann Thibert, chronicling the family history that her two novels are based on.

In *Pathway Through Peril*, we read about the fictional Schroeder, Boldt, and Lentz families caught in the middle of warring factions fighting over the fertile, prosperous part of Russia now known as Ukraine. Should they stay or venture into an unknown future in a foreign land? In the last chapter, the young Russian orphan Ivan, now Hans Lentz, asserts on board the ship S.S. Montroyal that he is going to Canada with his family.

The Farewell Years begins with the family arriving in Manitoba in the middle of winter, en route by train to their new home in southern Alberta. The book covers the period from 1926 to 1934 and depicts the struggles of both the Lentz family in getting established in the farming community and also the struggles back home of relatives left behind.

I think Agnes Thibert shines with the emotional depth of the characters in her novels. The characters' struggles are not overstated, but they are instantly recognizable as real-life struggles that people have had to contend with. There are nuances that we can recognize in ourselves and others we know. In particular, I now have a greater appreciation of what my father's relatives in Canada must have struggled with. He had an aunt and uncle (siblings of his father) that were able to come to Saskatchewan separately in the 1920s, his aunt and her children in 1923 and his uncle in 1928. I recently learned that his aunt said of her brothers left behind, "They all passed away in the Gulag."



Probably most heartbreaking of all are the letters received from the old country. These, too, ring true for me. Stories of people scrimping and saving a little bit of money while trying to make a start in Canada, only to hear that the letters and parcels they send only arrive sporadically at their destination, if at all.

Preparations for Thanksgiving (Erntedankfest) and Christmas (Weihnachten) bring back pleasant childhood memories. Descriptions of traditional Mennonite cuisine arouse more positive emotions and memories (e.g., zwieback, pluma moos, and preserved crabapples). I was moved when I read of the traditional paper bag (Papiertüte) filled with peanuts in the shell and an orange (and maybe something else) handed out to the children after the Sunday School Christmas performance.

I don't know if Agnes has a third novel in the works or not, but I think readers would be interested in the next generation of stories from southern Alberta. The prairies are in the throes of the Great Depression, and war clouds are building in Europe. Hans (formerly Ivan) is now a young man of nineteen or twenty, and he's been wanting to purchase a car or a truck forever, or even a new bicycle, a Glider seen in the Eaton's catalogue. Hans also thinks it is time he got out on his own. Baby Katja is now Katie and excels in school, helping her mom, dad, and younger siblings with their English. I hope to read more about this family in the future.

Please contact Agnes at ahthibert@gmail.com if interested in acquiring a copy. ❖

Thoughts on European Mennonites and the Holocaust

By Harold Wiens

European Mennonites and the Holocaust is not an easy read. It is a compilation of research by 14 authors, who describe situations from the 1930s & 1940s, where Mennonites in the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine lived close enough to Jewish people to have gained an awareness of Nazi atrocities. Some Mennonites joined the Nazi party, others benefited from the Holocaust, some became enablers, while a few took an active part in committing horrendous acts usually attributed to the SS. The book is informative and interesting, yet at times highly disturbing.

Rather than dwelling on feelings of revulsion, embarrassment, and disillusionment, the authors attempt to explain why people (including ancestors/relatives) might have acted the way they did. In some cases, Mennonites were simply not aware of the occurrence or the extent of Nazi atrocities. In other cases, Mennonites turned a blind eye to the Holocaust to survive and shield their families from oppression, first by Bolsheviks, then by Nazis. To this, my late mother would have said, "sowas will erfahren sein" (you would need to have experienced these things for yourselves). Then there are horrendous cases of Mennonite perpetrators committing the most unspeakably vile criminal acts. I have no answer for these accounts.

Perhaps the quote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (George Santayana, *The Life of Reason*, 1905) is relevant here. As historians, the writers have excellent credentials.

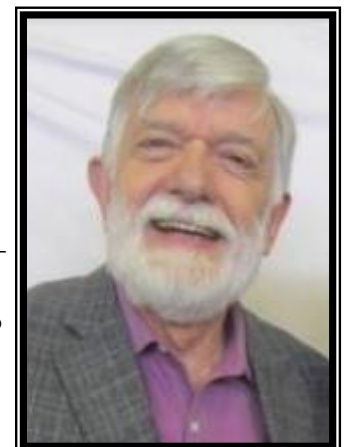
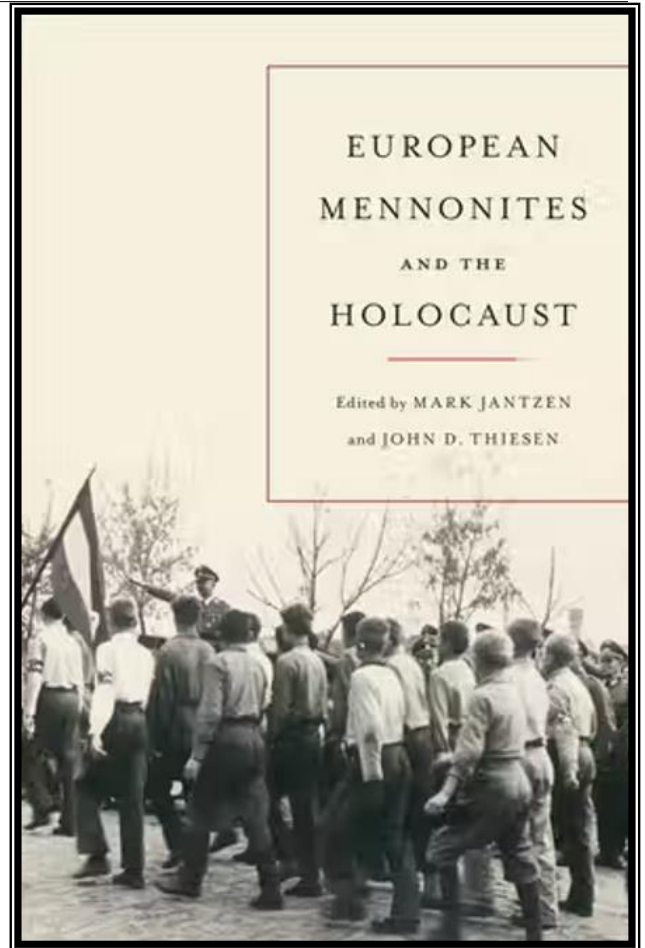
Many hold important positions at international universities and all hold senior degrees from European or American schools. From an academic perspective, it would be difficult to refute the information that they present. That being the case, how does a reader approach or reconcile with this material?

While a graduate student in Germany, whenever the topic of Nazi atrocities came up, I heard German people say, "We did not know." A fellow Canadian once responded, "When does it become a person's moral responsibility to know - to find out?"

My parents arrived in Canada in 1925 and brought with them stories of a once idyllic life in Ukraine that became disrupted by anarchists (Nestor Makhno and company). Later, I learned that part of the Mennonite experiences in Russia were exacerbated by economic inequalities where local people - some of whom were recently freed serfs - did not have the same opportunities as the Mennonites.

How then do we, as Mennonites, reconcile this part of our history? The final chapter written by UBC Professor Steven Schroeder contains a response:

"I have begun to engage in reconciliation work with Indigenous peoples in Canada, and I can say that I did not come to this work as a result of Mennonite teaching. ...truth-telling is a fundamental first step, as is the accompanying act of listening to those who have been harmed - yes, including those who have been harmed by us. In my view, a healthy way forward for us is to acknowledge that the Mennonites have not only suffered harm but also caused harm. Moreover, we should address immediate issues arising from this harm, while also taking the long view of, and being committed to reconciliation work..." ❖



Harold Wiens



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 dmtoews@gmail.com

For complete tour information, see the TourMagination website
<https://tourmagination.com/tour/cross-canada-russlaender-centenary-tour/>