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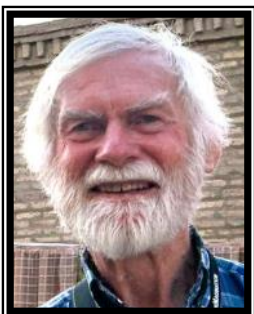
Jun 2024

A Consequence of COVID

By John & Eleanore Woollard

COVID is blamed for many things: Eleanore and I can add Uzbekistan to that list of infractions. You see, if it hadn't been for the interesting Zoom lectures that, out of boredom, we watched during those weeks of enforced isolation a couple of years ago, we would never have thought of venturing to that distant realm.

But the spark was kindled, for we had rashly asked that if another tour were ever arranged, please include us on the mail-outs. When the dates of the 2023 'Silk Road' tour were



John Woollard



Eleanore
Woollard

(See COVID on page 6)

In this Issue

1. La Crete Conference
1. A Consequence of COVID
2. Editorial Reflections
3. Chairman's Corner
11. A Visit to Menno's Backyard
17. La Crete Conference Tour
19. Letters from Siberia
20. Journey to the Molotschna
22. Henry Goerzen Article
23. MHSA Board Members

The Conference of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta at La Crete Leaves Many Great Memories

By Eugene Janzen

It soon became apparent how far it was from High River to La Crete. However, that distance was nuanced to a great degree by the individuals in our carpool. It was the first time any of us had seen each other, and we enjoyed learning a lot from and about each other.

When the highway finally left farming country and became boreal forest, it was rare to meet any life in a vehicle or in the wild. Easily, the biggest surprise of the drive was the island of farmed land at La Crete after some 450 kilometres of dense forest and wetland.



Eugene Janzen

The Highlighted Learning Events on Conference Day 2

The Mennonite Heritage Centre with the attached vintage Village was the venue selected by the local people to coordinate, visit, attend the presentations and gather for meals.

Ms Susan Siemens, in charge of the Heritage Centre, began her learning presentation with a detailed history describing the how the area of La Crete was settled. The original immigration of Anabaptists, now more commonly referred to as Mennonites, to Canada was reviewed. Initially, the prairies were scouted by representatives from South Russia who determined the landscape was much like where they lived. Significant emigration from South Russia began in 1874 with the Federal Government's invitation to settle in the Manitoba East Reserve. By the 1890s, family members from those original Canadian settlements started to



Mennonite Heritage Center Lobby



Mennonite Heritage Village

(See Conference on page 4)

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.



Dave Toews

I have experienced much Christian friendship and love in the last 6 weeks, first at the La Crete MHSA Spring Conference and then at our 60th Rosthern Junior College (RJC) Class Reunion. The La Crete Conference is well documented in this issue, which is why this edition of the Chronicle is late. So, I will tell you about our Grad Reunion, where I think 60 years qualifies as history.

Each graduating class has a reunion every 10 years, so we stay in touch. Our class of 74 graduated in 1964, so we know that every time

the year number ends in 4, we have a reunion to attend.

I was on the planning committee of the June 22



RJC Class of 1964, Station Arts Centre, Rosthern

and 23, 2024 reunion; we organized 4 events: Sat afternoon gathering at the Station Arts Centre for storytelling and visiting, a BBQ supper at the school dining hall, and people could attend the Les Miserables (School Edition) production in the college auditorium. On Sun, we had brunch at the Parktown Hotel in Saskatoon for more visiting and storytelling.

Of our class of 74, 14 have passed away, as have 5 spouses, and 4 classmates are in nursing



Life-long friends: Bob Speiser, Moose Jaw, Henry Funk, Hague, Dave Toews, St Albert, Laurie Bergen, Saskatoon

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homes. A short memorial was held for the 14 who have passed. Time and aging are taking their toll. 34 classmates and about 55 people attended most of the events. Many friendships and acquaintances were renewed. Stories of pranks, mischief, and most embarrassing moments were told, and there was

(See Editorial on page 3)

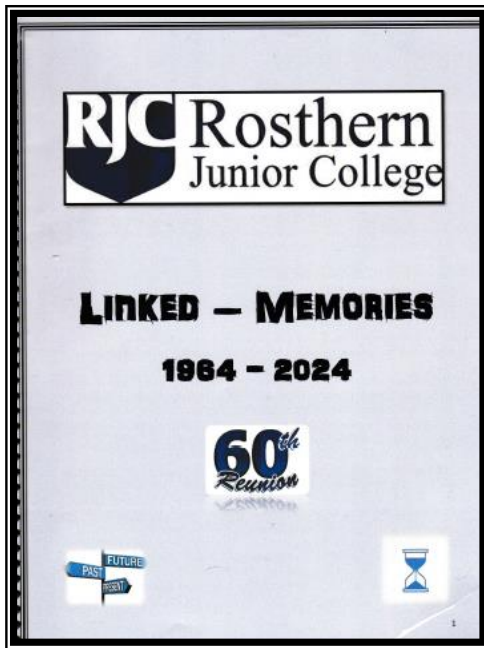
(Editorial from page 2)

Chairman's Corner

by Katie Harder

much fun and laughter, and some tears were shed.

I also took it upon myself to put together a book of Linked-Memories for our class. 36 classmates submitted their stories, 114 pages. The book was emailed to



RJC Linked-Memories 1964 - 2024

everyone, and a few copies were available for purchase. The Linked-Memories book created a lot of interest and conversations.

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 or 780-218-7411 cell with any questions, suggestions or comments. ❖

A few years back, in 2020, MHSA was planning a trip to La Crete, AB. MHSA had visited La Crete back in 2003, and so there was interest in planning another trip. We had hoped to make the trip in the spring of 2020 but then COVID arrived in Canada, and much to our dismay, MHSA had to cancel the trip.

This past May we were fortunate to visit La Crete. What a memorable trip. For Dennis and me, it was an incredible experience. We left on Thursday morning, and shortly beyond Edmonton, the landscape was mostly treed. In the afternoon, the weather changed from windy and cloudy skies to very windy and pouring rain. We found the drive to be remarkably interesting. At one point, a big black bear ambled across the highway, and then we spotted a blue heron on the side of the road; last but not least, due to the horrific wind, a big evergreen fell to the ground. The highway has clearance on each side of the road, so the fallen tree was not a danger to us. As we got closer to La Crete, the rain ceased, the wind decreased, and the countryside opened to beautiful acres of cultivated farmland. What a picturesque drive.

Friday morning, we were off to the Mennonite Heritage Museum and Agricultural Centre just a few miles out of La Crete. From here, we caught a bus and toured the surrounding La Crete area. Susan Siemens every so often provided commentary enroute. Being farmers, Dennis and I enjoyed viewing the beautiful farms and the large, planted fields, some appeared to be 160 acres in size. The farmland was flat and looked to be very fertile. Due to the long hours of sunlight in summer, the crops do well, and farming has become a very productive venture. The bus tour took us to the "Old Bay House at Fort Vermilion," built in 1906-1908; this is the only Hudson's Bay Company Factor's house on its original site. In 2020 the restorations to the house were almost complete when the mighty Peace River broke its banks and flooded the house with three feet of water and did a lot of damage internally. It also caused damage to other homes in the area. The homeowners in that area have been encouraged by the municipality to relocate from the floodplains to three new subdivisions on higher ground.

We went on to visit the Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre and had our lunch on site. The Mighty Peace River at Tompkins Landing, together with its beautiful campground, is a wonderful site to visit. I really enjoyed seeing the Peace River; that particular day, it was calm, and it had a soothing quality to it, that made me feel at peace with God, nature and even myself. This setting recalled the beautiful hymn "When Peace Like a River"; the song always envelops me with comfort and peace. At Tompkins Landing, the weather was warm and sunny and we shared a wonderful fellowship meal, a barbecue supper, and then headed back to the La Crete to view the Heritage Museum.

Saturday was a full day listening to three great presentations, with mu-



Katie Harder

(See Chairperson on page 4)

(Chairperson from page 3)

sical entertainment interspersed. What I found most interesting was the variety of people I met throughout the weekend, all of Anabaptist persuasion. Outside of wanting to maintain a connection with these Mennonites, why were we visiting this place? Do we subconsciously crave a place where life is less complicated than our usual hectic pace?

Mennonites from SK, MB and even Mexico came to the La Crete area in the early 1930s to escape the modernization of the developing world. As was the norm, they were industrious workers and cleared their own land for farming. They established churches and their own schools. The development of roads has connected La Crete to outside influences. Despite the area's constant growth, thus far, they have been able to hold on to their strong culture and spiritual beliefs. With their memories of the past, will they be able to keep their traditions and customs alive and endeavour to share this knowledge and faith across the generations?

I very much appreciated the diversity in the various Mennonite groups I encountered on Friday and Saturday. I was told there were Sommerfelder, Bergthaler, Kleine Gemeinde (EMC) and Old Colony Mennonites present at the event. It was wonderful to see how all of them came together in one room to listen and to enjoy each other's fellowship despite their varied church backgrounds. There was commonality present; all were Anabaptist believers. Most of these people's forebears had left the Soviet Union in the 1800s, and as a result, they did not encounter Communism, or Nazism, which the Mennonites that came in the 1920s and late 1940s had to deal with. I am unsure how they will have processed Colin's passionate dialogue about the life and struggles that the Mennonites encountered who remained in the Soviet Union after the 1920's.

What a treasure trove of memories we made that weekend. It has been noted that memories shape our identity and often guide our future decisions. How will these specific memories enrich the tapestry of our future journey through life?

We look forward to our Fall Conference, hosted by the Wilson Siding Hutterite Colony where we together will explore commonalities, similarities and practices in beliefs. We hope to see you there. ❖

er, tensions about the schooling of Mennonite youngsters and World War I encouraged yet another emigration. In and around the 1930s, the land downriver along the Peace River was explored and considered for immigration, as well as other countries like Mexico and Bolivia. Some twenty years previously, the area at La Crete was officially described as a possible settlement area.

During this time, Mennonite settlers used riverboats on the Peace River from the railway at the south city of Peace River to get to the isolated area at La Crete. During that decade, Mennonites, predominantly from Saskatchewan, Mexico and elsewhere, took advantage of the availability of making a legal homestead around La Crete.

In addition to the complex history of settlement at La Crete, Ms Siemens also described how households were built and maintained and how people made a living. Initially, farming was done with horses. Local transportation was done with horse and even dog teams. The river remained the main method to move produce and products in and out of the community and associated districts.

Education of children remained a cornerstone of the settlers, and within a short 20 years, there were many non-governmental schools in the various districts. To this day, La Crete is still a remote Mennonite community with many Mennonite Churches. The long northern summer sun gives crop production a special advantage. The nearby surrounding forest meant logging became a supplement to the commu-

(See Conference on page 5)

(Conference from page 1)

move elsewhere, like to the Valley of the Saskatchewan, between the two Rivers.

Thus, Mennonites from South Russia became an established population on the Canadian Prairies. Howev-



Peace River

(Conference from page 4)

nity's farming industries.

Mr. Abe Janzen, a former La Crete resident and Executive Director of MCC Alberta, used the passage from 2nd Corinthians 6:17 that admonished the people that settled at La Crete, "Be Ye Separate," to initiate his lecture. To this day, it would appear that the community in and around La Crete has honoured that guidance.

The language commonly used in homes and at many community events, including church services, is still Low German. Mr Janzen corroborated the fact that most La Crete settlers came from communities in western Canada and other countries where Low German was the main language. Even some of the schools use Low German to some degree.

He defined "Low German Mennonites" as a community with a strong Christian Faith and an emphasis on family. Characteristic of this group, as well, is an exemplary work ethic and support for education at all levels.

Professor Colin Neufeldt, historian and lawyer, discussed his past and current studies into the Mennonites "Left Behind" in South Russia, either by preference or lack of opportunity. By 1927, the emigration of Mennonites from South Russia (mostly to Canada) had come to an end. Unknown to me and probably others, 75% of Mennonites stayed behind. In his studies for the last several years, Dr Neufeldt has described what life held for those that remained. For example, by now, Makhno, the man whose band terrorized many Mennonite villages, was gone, and Stalin was the Russian leader.

During this time of the burgeoning Soviet Union, Stalin insti-

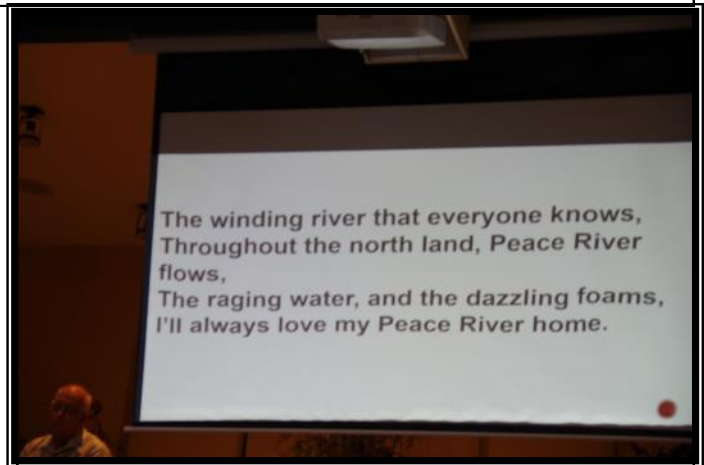
tuted a lot of complicated bureaucracy for districts, villages and communes that involved Mennonites at many levels, ranging from farm labourers to councilmen on the Kolkhoz community governing bodies. The net result was that Mennonites were distributed by choice or force throughout the Soviet Union. As part of this redistribution, familial disruptions were common, creating many degrees of social pain, grief and mental trauma.

The Professor's presentation was a sober reminder of how fortunate we are that our forefathers left South Russia for this country.

After the presented lectures, we were introduced to a time of celebration that ended in a banquet.



Sunset Gospel Group performs



Peace River Home



Sommer Borscht, Wassermelone und Rol Kuchen

(See Conference on page 6)

(Conference from page 5)

Rather than partake of a buffet-style meal, as was the case for our lunch, the evening banquet meant portions of each course were brought to every table. Our hosts, the Mennonites of La Crete and area made sure all attendees (estimated to be 350) were well looked after.



La Crete Conference attendees from away

workaday 'Metro' of Paris. Under the modern streets of Tashkent lurks this network of bright tunnels brimming with mosaics and artwork, elegant columns sprouting into richly decorated ceilings, fancy tile-work lining the walls in place of consumeristic adverts; no point rushing down the escalators – stop and look around! We wondered what would happen if there were another earthquake, like the one that flattened 80% of the city in 1966. Don't worry! That possibility has been allowed for in the planning and construction, with lots of rubber and re-enforcing – or so we were told.

A large motorcoach was our transport across the deserts between the major cities, now connected by smooth, four-lane highways, a far cry from the ponderous trudging and lurching of camel trains of former centuries. Each leg of the itinerary took several hours, even at motorway speed. A special feature that helped tame the monotony was a series of readings by the tour leader, Prof. John Sharp. He included extracts from a

(COVID from page 1)

announced, and we saw that they dove-tailed almost perfectly with our totally separate plans to be in Bulgaria for a family wedding, it was impossible to resist.

Thus, in the second half of September 2023, we ended up in Tashkent with a small but enthusiastic group of Mennos, eager to see for ourselves the spectacular monuments of medieval Central Asia, along with re-tracing the wheel-ruts of Claas Epp and his faithful band of millennialists. Although Uzbekistan is culturally Muslim, since liberation from communist ideology in the 1990s, the government has vigorously determined to avoid extremism and bigotry, by separating religion from political control, by making Education strictly secular, and by allowing freedom of belief. Admittedly, one cannot tell much from a ten-day tour, but judging by how people behaved in the streets, how they dressed, and what little we gathered from conversations, it seems to be generating a free and tolerant society. Certainly, girls were getting educated, women were free to use head-coverings or not, and clearly, many were in paying jobs.

Upon arrival, we were lodged in a simple guest house in the outer suburbs of Tashkent, our rooms surrounding a courtyard brimming with fruit-trees – too bad it was Autumn, with the harvest long gone! It was a special delight to discover that our hosts were Christian; conversations about life in Uzbekistan, the intersection of culture with development, and living out one's faith turned already relaxed breakfasts and evening snacks into wonderful, long discussions. Our hostess gave us a short tour of the city, including a brief ride on the underground. Now that is a marvel to behold: what a contrast to the grubby, tired-looking 'tube' of London, or the garlic-infused,



Samarkand, Registan Square in evening: Ulugh Beg Madrasah, AD 1420 (LHS), Tillya-Kari Madrasah, AD 1660 (C), Sher-Dor Madrasah, AD1636 (RHS).

(See COVID on page 7)

(COVID from page 6)

diary kept by a teen-aged member of Claas Epp's party in the 1880s. This was wonderfully atmospheric stuff, and remarkably sophisticated writing for a youngster. Then, on a more personal note, he shared about his own family's journey with the murder of their son Michael, in DR Congo in 2017, while working for the United Nations.

Our itinerary took us first to Samarkand, with its stunning Registan Square: a formal plaza with magnificent (albeit restored) Madrasahs or Islamic college buildings forming three sides of the grand gathering place, each with a bewildering wealth of intricate tile work adorning almost every surface. On one of the facades were representations of deer and smiling faces cheekily peering out of a sun: echoes of Zoroastrian culture, and quite contrary to Islamic conventions that abhor such depictions.

One of Uzbekistan's iconic heroes is Amir Tamur, a brilliant and brutal general of the fourteenth century, known and feared in the West as Tamerlane. Over a few decades, he pulled together a huge empire, from Delhi (India) to Aleppo (Syria) in the West and including most of Central Asia, Georgia, Persia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq, along with offers of submission from the Sultan of Egypt and the Emperor of Byzantium. He made Samarkand his capital, so he ordered the construction of a mausoleum for himself and his family, and a vast mosque celebrating his favourite wife. Not only did he want this to have a courtyard large enough to hold ALL the inhabitants of Samarkand for Friday prayers, but its portal and formal decorations had to be larger and more

magnificent than anything else in his empire. Started in 1399 and nearly complete by 1404; at that point, the ambitious structure did not satisfy Tamerlane. He criticized the architect for not making arches tall enough, and insisted that portions be rebuilt according to his grandiose dream. They did as he said, of course. Apparently, he was brought, on his litter, to the building site daily to urge on the poor labourers, and even ordered that they be tossed coins and ample meat so that they might work harder. He passed away in 1405, before the structure was complete, and within days, bricks started tumbling from hurriedly completed domes, in mute evidence of over-weening pride. The mosque, understandably, soon fell into disuse, and continued to decay, but recently the main portal has been partially restored, as has one of the domed halls ... with incredibly rich internal decoration, all gold and silver filigree.

That is one example of the recent trajectory of how Uzbekistan is treating its ancient monuments. Many have been partly reconstructed, repaired, and restored, being given fabulous, new but seemingly authentic, decorations and finishes. Where have the funds come from? The country is relatively rich in natural resources, including fossil fuels and uranium, so the economy hums along. Indeed, judging from all the construction we saw in various places, and numerous modern edifices, they are flourishing. Folk in the streets seemed content and busy; restaurants had no shortage of customers (mainly locals, for in many places where we ate, we were the definite minority). One measure of economic progress was how villagers moved around. John Sharp commented that when he was last there, in 2019, there were many donkey-drawn wagons on the roads, as people conveyed goods to market or went visiting. Now, four years later, we saw hardly any, those wagons being replaced by simple, motorized carts and three-wheelers. Clearly, folk have prospered.

We were lodged in a variety of accommodations, ranging from the homely 'Village Guest House' in the outskirts of Tashkent, already mentioned, through comfortable tourist-style hotels to an ultra-modern, most elegant conference centre, complete with exercise facilities, tree-shaded courtyard, and plush corridors wide enough for two cars to pass each other! We asked what the nightly charge was – although we enjoyed the luxury, none of us felt we needed to pay for such sumptuousness. When we were told it was no more costly than the other accommodations we were using, that really got us questioning the economics of that hotel; after all, it certainly wasn't close to being full. In response, we were told that some very wealthy locals just like to own a fancy hotel, even if it loses money! We couldn't help wondering if the rationale wasn't a little more sinister than that: isn't that how drug barons launder 'dirty money'? Be that as it may, a few of us made good use of the swimming pool to "get our money's worth."

One question often asked is, did we feel safe? Absolutely. For example, in Bukhara, during a rare free afternoon, I decided to seek out a little-visited mosque that is off the tourist track, but nevertheless reputed to contain superb frescoes. That outing entailed some exploring of quiet lanes, the wandering down of narrow alleys, regular consultation of the cell-phone map, some back-tracking, cautious peering into walled courtyards, and, of course, enduring a barrage of polite but puzzled looks from locals. But at no point

(See COVID on page 8)

(COVID from page 7)

did I feel threatened or that I was putting myself in danger (and, I might add, the quest was achieved successfully, and to my great satisfaction). Again, one evening, after other activities and dinner, four of us wanted to see what was left of the four-towered Chor Minor madrasah that was said to be beautifully flood-lit. Admittedly, it was not terribly far from our hotel, but it was night, and to get there, we had to traverse uneven side-streets, with no proper lighting, turn several corners, and navigate in the absence of any signage. There were few others in the streets, and what with odd puddles on the ground, countless tripping hazards, stray dogs, and occasional cars whipping by, it felt very daring to be heading off into the mysterious blackness, not knowing a word of Uzbek or if we were really on the right route. But again, there were no blood-curdling encounters, smothered cries, or panicked gasps of air. After a couple of false turns we stumbled on our goal, indeed as pretty as we had anticipated, and successfully re-traced our route in the dark.

Historians will know that Epp's group ended up near Khiva, where they were settled by the Khan, the Muslim ruler of the region, on his brother's estate, at a place called Ak Metchet, meaning 'White Mosque.' Under the Khan's benevolent protection, they prospered, living separately but in peace and acceptance among their Muslim neighbours for fifty years. Tragically, in 1935, they were exiled to a remote region of Tajikistan, in consequence of refusing to collectivize. Many of them perished there, while their original buildings fell into disrepair or were destroyed. We did visit the site of Ak Metchet, where there is now a nice memorial plaque in four languages. A local entrepreneur hopes to make the place a tourist destination, but more imaginative work is needed for that to be attractive. Remarkably, during that half century of living near Khiva, those quiet-in-the-land played a far more important role than they realized.

As today's Uzbek historians examine the recent history of their nation,



Khiva, Mennonite Museum "The Exhibition of Ak Metchet Mennonites".

they cheerfully credit those Mennonites with opening a window to the rest of the world for that traditional society, and being a source of modernization. Thanks to them, new crops were introduced, the Khan got a palace with the latest in elegant decorations, news from the rest of the world was shared, new types of furniture were made available, a hospital and post office were constructed, an electric generator was installed, and the skill of photography was taught to local Uzbeks. As a consequence, there is now a museum in Khiva, celebrating the contribution of the Mennonites. When we visited it, we were privileged to meet the origi-



Bukhara, Chor Minor Madrasah, AD 1807, by night.



Khiva, old photo of Mennonite school teacher, William Penner and his photography 'student', Khudaiberger Devanov "The Father of Uzbek Photography" (from internet).



Khiva, Mennonite Museum, Eleanore with chest donated by her relative.

nal project leader for this museum, now quite elderly, as well as tour

(See COVID on page 9)

(COVID from page 8)

the modest collection of artefacts and poignant photographs. Eleonore was thrilled to see on display the wooden chest that had belonged to one of her second cousins, who had donated it to the museum. Although not at all connected to the Epp group, that cousin had lived in Uzbekistan until 1991, but had not been able to take the chest with her when she emigrated to Germany, so this was a perfect home for her former possession. We also met a lady who explained how her mother had been given a Singer sewing-machine by one of the Mennonites, who gave it away because she could not take it into exile. The family still treasure that gift, and the relationship that must have existed back then.

But amidst everything else, the most memorable aspect of our tour was the visit made to the small village of Zerabulak. This community had hosted Epp's 300-strong flock for eight months over the winter of 1881/2, before they went on to Khiva, and done so most hospitably; thus, it was as a form of homage to that century-old welcome that our group ventured there. Previous tours led by John Sharp had always made short stops there, so we all thought we knew what to expect. We would meet the village headman and other dignitaries, shake some hands, maybe share in some tea or coffee drinking, visit the mosque, greet the Imam, and then be on our way. All in itself very worthy and proper, but not what happened.

As our coach crawled along the dusty street and halted at an open portal, we were astounded to see a small crowd clustered at its front: a cluster of young school children,

gripping posies in their hands, a line of beaming elders, male and female, ready to greet and embrace each of us as we disembarked, and, to crown it all, a raucous village band, piercing the air with drum-beat, plaintive flute, and non-stop braying from an alpenhorn look-alike. How on earth did we merit this attention?

Once we had all gotten off, been hugged, and the din quietened, we were ushered into their dining room, and urged to settle ourselves down around the long, low table, itself a riot of colour with fruit and brimming platters. You will perhaps notice that I didn't say 'seat' ourselves. There were no chairs, only ample cushions on the carpeted floor; it wasn't a stance many of us were used to, so it took a while to coach limbs into unaccustomed positions.

We were invited to lunch, with the added information that later that day there would be dinner too, plus would we not stay the night as well? However, with a hotel already booked farther along the road, we were unable to accept the last bit of that generous offer. So the feasting began: mixed salads, sliced tomatoes, cucumbers, fresh fruit, cups of tea, barbecued

chicken on sticks, watermelon, rice, warm, fresh bread. But how on earth do we do justice to all that food, with no way to work off the calories in between meals? What a quandary! No problem, you can rest in one of the sitting rooms, already prepared for us to relax in! We peeped into those tempting dens, swathed in bright fabric, and heaped with inviting soft cushions, but I don't think any of us actually took a nap there. Rather, after lunch, we wandered freely about the family's compound, and discovered how the whole extended family lived around a small, square field where crops were growing, amidst a few fruit trees. There was even a small barn at the back, where a milk cow was tethered, along with some goats.

All too soon, it was time for dinner, which came complete with the Uz-

(See COVID on page 10)



Zerabulak, welcome group.



Zerabulak, seated around table.

(COVID from page 9)

bek national dish called Plov, a savoury mix of beef, rice, and vegetables, all stewed together until tender. Tradition says this dish was invented so Tam-erlane's army could march day after day without tiring. We were not sure if that was exactly what we needed before getting back into our motorcoach, but it sure was tasty.

We learned that our host, the village headman, was a direct descendant of the very headman who had welcomed those Mennonites long ago, and that hospitality was both an Uzbek tradition and a Muslim obligation. We also found out that in his youth he had been a skilled horseman, and used to compete in a wild, traditional sport called "The Devil's Chase", in which a frantic crowd of riders each tries to seize a goat carcass from who-ever has it, the winner being the rider that manages to gallop away from all the others and cross the line with the goat still in his possession. Our host suddenly produced a saddle in the dining room, mounted it, and then demonstrated vividly how he used to fearlessly avoid the fists, whips, and graspings of others, while wedging the goat (in this case, his overcoat) under his thigh, before racing off triumphantly to win the game. Then they turned on the TV (yes, that was there also in the dining room), and, lo and behold, such a contest was being televising live from Tashkent, so we could see for ourselves the fierce chaos as swarms of riders coalesced in a cloud of dust, dispersed, wheeled round, and re-congealed in hot pursuit of the prey. For this sport, horse and rider have to know each other really well!

From our side, it turned out that we had two direct connections with the Epp group. One was that Donna's husband, whose health sadly prevented him from being present, was the great-great-grandson of a certain 'Widow Wiebe' who had been part of the group along with two of her adult children. The other was Harold, whose great-grandfather had an uncle who had been present on the Trek. This relationship was strong enough to trigger another surprise: Harold had to stand, and then was ceremonially

garbed in a traditional male Uzbek robe plus hat! Wow!

We did finally get to visit the mosque, much later in the after-



Zerabulak, our group outside mosque, with Imam and elders.



Zerabulak, Harold being invested in traditional Uzbek garb.

noon, when the Imam escaped from other duties to meet us, and tell us about their dreams of a new, larger meeting space, before we entered the old building. When the Trekkers were lodged in Zerabulak for eight months, they had been allowed to use the mosque on Sundays for their worship services, to perform baptisms therein, and to hold funeral services, too. Some members of Epp's group did pass away that winter, and their mortal remains still lie in the cemetery there, although all grave markers have been lost. It also happened that the two adult children of 'Widow Wiebe' had been married in a double marriage ceremony in the mosque, when the village headman even contributed a fattened goat for the accompanying celebration. Would you believe it? We, too, were allowed to sing a hymn of thanksgiving in that little

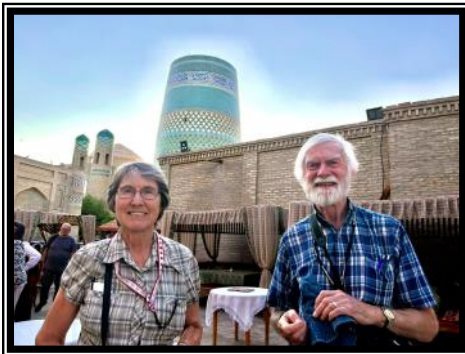
(See COVID on page 11)

(COVID from page 10)

mosque – Mennos can manage a *capella* quite well, and the acoustics were pretty good. But all this pricked our consciences. Every one of us wondered if our congregations or pastors in North America would ever consider such hospitality to wandering pilgrims of another faith.

With dusk approaching, we had to take our leave, reluctantly, and also with embarrassment, for we ourselves had come with not a single gift or present in token exchange for the extraordinary welcome we had received. Then to crown it off, we were all given 'goodie-bags' brimming with nuts, dried grapes, and local almonds, just in case we got peckish *en route* to our hotel. Each gift was neatly wrapped in a bright pink, plastic bag labelled 'Victoria's Secret!' We didn't dare ask the story behind that choice.

So we returned home, with a huge stock of wonderful experiences, many photographs, and a powerful lesson in true hospitality. May we act and speak in the same spirit, such that others can remember us with as much respect and fondness as has been accorded Epp's little flock of the past century.



Khiva, Eleanore and John.

John Woollard was born in England, and after graduation from university followed a call to teach Chemistry at the young University of Botswana. An initial contract of three years became sixteen. Eleanore Rempel was born in Steinbach, Manitoba, and trained as a Medical Lab Technician, before going to Botswana with MCC. They met and married, then moved to Edmonton, where John taught at Concordia University of Edmonton, until retiring in 2016. ❖

A Visit to Menno's Backyard

by Will Loewen

Recently, I've been listening to history podcasts. A podcast is like a radio show you can download onto your smartphone. I like to listen as I drive, do chores, or go for walks. I was waiting for someone to tell the interesting stories of Mennonite history, but nobody ever did. Finally, I decided I would start my own podcast, and I would start with the story of the Anabaptist Kingdom of Münster. As I started digging into the research, I decided there would be no better research than to visit the German city for myself. A seat sale on the plane ticket and a discount at a cheap hotel was all the green light I needed.

Some people use their vacation time to visit warm, luxurious, tropical destinations. Students of church history and genealogy, like me, opt instead to visit out-of-the-way European destinations, where even the locals don't know the stories of what happened there. Wittenberg has statues of Martin Luther, Zurich has a statue of Ulrich Zwingli, and Witmarsum even has a Menno Simons memorial. Münster has visual reminders of what happened there, but it isn't what you would expect.

The cheapest flight was in and out of Amsterdam, so I marked out my route accordingly. I would visit the Dutch capital for a few days, then explore Menno Simons' homeland before settling into Münster for the bulk of my time in Europe, and then return to Amsterdam to fly home.

This wasn't my first self-guided Mennonite magical history tour. In 2002, I visited places with Anabaptist historical significance, including Zurich, where the first recorded baptisms of the Anabaptist movement took place. On that trip, I was mostly visiting places connected to Swiss Mennonite history, but I also visited

Strasbourg, which is now part of France, at various times had been a part of Germany and had even been a Free Imperial City, independent of larger

(See Visit on page 12)



I was lucky to find a carnival happening while I was in Münster. I could ride the Ferris wheel and get a look at all of the old town.

(Visit from page 11)

surrounding kingdoms. That status meant that the city could show more tolerance to Anabaptists than other locations, so it became a haven of Anabaptist leaders and other free-thinking church reformers.

One of those Anabaptist leaders who found freedom in Strasbourg was Melchior Hoffmann, even though he eventually died there in prison. He had some Mennonite beliefs, which we might recognize, like baptism upon an adult confession of faith and an emphasis on following Jesus and living pure lives, while mixing in things we might not sign on for, like calling himself a prophet and making specific predictions about the end of the world. Hoffmann

spent a long time in Dutch territories, where he built a large following of similarly minded Christians who were also re-baptized as adults and were eagerly waiting for the end of all things. Anabaptist Christians like these were executed in the Netherlands for a long time. Some of them were killed publicly in front of what is now Amsterdam city hall. In fact, two etchings from the Martyrs Mirror show the old Amsterdam city hall in the background.

In prison, Melchior Hoffmann declared that Strasbourg was the New



The square in front of the Dutch Royal Palace is full of tourists, vendors, and demonstrations. It used to be the place where Anabaptist Christians were martyred.



This path is full of cyclists and pedestrians, but the old city wall that once stood here was the site of brutal fighting and betrayal.

Jerusalem and predicted that Jesus would return there in 1533 to launch a war against the godless. When the prediction failed to come true, some of his Dutch followers changed the date and the location of the second coming. It would be Easter Sunday, 1534, in the Westphalian German city of Münster.

Münster is a beautiful city. It has a lot of European charm, like cobblestone streets, large cathedrals, and more bicycles than people. It has a few large universities, and it is a shopping destination with various boutique shops. The old city wall is gone, but it has been replaced with a 4 km-long walking and cycling path.

These days, Münster is a popular location for German tourists, but back in those days, they were just trying and failing to stay out of trouble with the local Catholic authorities. They had two problems: one was that there was a new edict meaning that loyal Catholics were required to arrest and execute all Anabaptists, and the second was that they had a priest there named Bernhard Rothmann who had a loyal following who would cause trouble if anything happened to him and who was leaning more and more towards Anabaptist beliefs.

I visited St. Mauritz Catholic Church, the church where Bernhard Rothmann preached. It was a longer walk than my other destinations because it was outside the old town, so it was an inconvenient location for me, but it was quite convenient for Bernhard Rothmann. When he got in trouble with the people in the city, he could hide safely in his church outside their jurisdiction. When he got

(See Visit on page 13)

(Visit from page 12)

in trouble with the authorities in the countryside, he could easily run over and find shelter within the city walls.

I've stood behind many pulpits in my life, and I've often wondered what it would have felt like for those preachers to stand behind them. I didn't research enough to see how old the pulpit was, but the building has been there for almost a thousand years. These days, a pastor can still get fired for a bad sermon or for taking positions that the congregation isn't comfortable with, but at the time of the Reformation, preachers could be arrested and killed for their sermons. Bernhard Rothmann had to say enough new things to keep the crowd's support on his side but not say too many new things that he could get arrested. I have felt pressure when I felt inspired to preach an unpopular sermon, but nothing like the pressure Luther, Zwingli, and Rothmann would have felt.

While Bernhard Rothmann was leading church reforms in Münster, back in the Netherlands, a man named Jan Matthijs appointed himself as the successor of Melchior Hoffman. He sent missionaries to Münster, and in less than a month after they arrived, over a thousand people risked their lives by accepting adult baptism. Bernhard Rothmann was one of the first to get baptized, and then he went around baptizing hundreds more. When word got out about this spiritual revival, more and more Anabaptists started showing up from other parts of German and Dutch speaking Europe. But the arrival of those Anabaptists was cause for concern for the local Catholic bishop, so he hired an army of soldiers

to surround the city, preparing for an attack. The arrival of those soldiers scared away many of the Catholic and Lutheran residents, so when the time came for city council elections, the Anabaptists won in a landslide. Soon after they were elected, they kicked out everyone who wouldn't accept rebaptism.

The soldiers tried to attack, but the city wall was strong, and the new and established residents fought hard to defend themselves. Then, Easter morning 1534 came, and when the predicted apocalypse didn't happen, the prophet Jan Matthijs rode out to fight the soldiers, hoping to initiate it himself and was instantly killed.

Even with things looking bad, people kept arriving in Münster from different parts of Europe, especially Friesland. Before travelling there, these towns were just names in books and dots on a map. Some places were mentioned in the story of Menno Simons, some places were mentioned connected to people that travelled to or supported Münster, and almost all of them show up in the Martyr's Mirror.

As familiar as I was with these names, it had not hit me until I got there how close these places were. I got off the train in Leeuwarden, where Melchior Hoffman hosted a successful Bible

study. I visited a wood-fired pizza restaurant in Pingjum, where Menno Simons started his career. I wandered a greenhouse at a garden market in Witmarsum, where Menno was born. I ate pastries in Bolsward, close to the monastery where Menno's brother probably died. I watched ships navigate



The entrance to St. Mauritz Church, in Münster, where Bernhard Rothmann preached.



Witmarsum has reminders of Menno's presence there.

(See Visit on page 14)

(Visit from page 13)

the canals in Sneek, where the woman I'll talk about next is from. They aren't just places on a map to me anymore. It was raining when I was there, so I used a rental car and the public transit system. If it had been a sunny day, I could have hopped on my bicycle after breakfast, visited all of these places, taken all of the same pictures, and still been back in time for supper.

It struck me as I drove between these places that Menno's congregation, even when he was a Catholic priest, would have been a mix of voices. Among those in his pews and the community around him would have been many people who were like the rest of Europe, happy to dismiss the Anabaptists and the events in Münster as foolishness. However, there would have also been people who were drawn to Münster for bad reasons (i.e. violent revolution), and many would have also been drawn there for good reasons (i.e. tolerance of their beliefs, community of goods, apocalyptic hope). Much like the protests of our day, it would have left leaders like Menno in a tricky place to encourage the good parts and condemn the bad without losing the support of the people.

Hille Feicken is remembered as an example of someone who went to Münster for the right rea-



The cages that held the remains of Anabaptist leaders are still hanging almost 500 years later.



There weren't too many windmills left, but I found a few.

sons. She was inspired by the faithfulness of the people in the city. She was from Sneek. She arrived when the army had already begun to surround the city. She arrived penniless and was immediately given a free place to stay. Soon, she was inspired to do something about the besieging army. At that time, Anabaptists, like most Christians, still read the Apocrypha, the extra books of the Bible still used by Catholics. The Book of Judith tells the story of a woman living in a besieged Jewish city until she is inspired to walk out to the army camp, seduce the general, and then cut off his head with his own sword. Hille Feicken decided she could try the same thing. The leaders of Münster supported her plan, but unfortunately for her, she was discovered before she could carry out her task. The bishop survived, but Hille Feicken did not. She was arrested, interrogated, and executed.

Also, in Friesland, a group of violent Anabaptists took over a monastery as a show of support. They kicked out the monks and said they weren't leaving until the soldiers around Münster abandoned their siege. Historians believe Menno Simons' brother Peter was one of these rebels. But, soon, the monastery too was besieged, and most of the Anabaptists and revolutionaries inside were arrested and killed. There isn't much left of that monastery now, but the people living nearby have worked to maintain the memory of that troubled spot. There is a hut set up with information about it, and they just put up a new monument.

Various things that happened in Münster are remembered as black marks on the entire Anabap-

(See Visit on page 15)

(Visit from page 14)

tist movement. Jan van Leiden took over as the leader of the city after Jan Matthijs died. He was soon declared King, instead of prophet, and not just King of Münster, but since Christ was supposed to return there to rule the world, Jan van Leiden was declared King of the World. Since there were so many more women than men, the leaders instituted and even mandated polygamy. The besieging army soon blocked off the supply of food, and while the people starved, the King and his many wives continued to eat well.

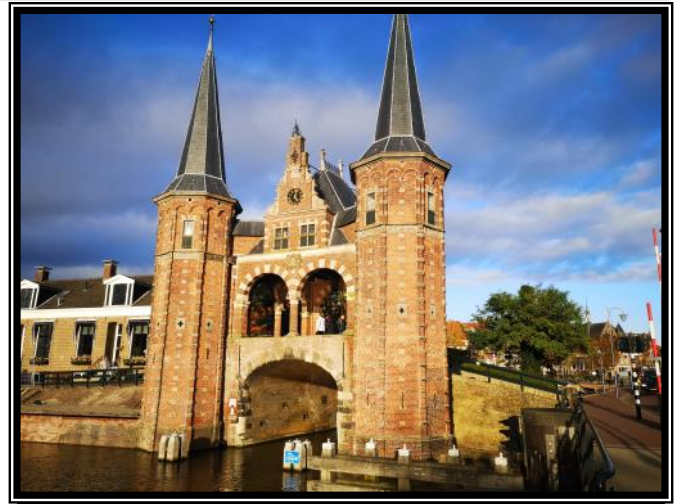
Eventually, a few soldiers guarding the wall betrayed the city and traded their lives for information on how the soldiers could get in. When they entered the city, there was a slaughter of hundreds, maybe thousands of inhabitants. The main leaders were arrested, and after they had been paraded around the countryside for a while, they were publicly tried, tortured, and executed. Their remains were hung in cages from the church tower as a reminder of what happens to Anabaptists. The cages have been there for almost five hundred years. Even when the church tower was bombed by Allied forces in WWII and had to be rebuilt, they rebuilt the church tower and put the cages back up.

One surprise from my trip was a piece of art in Münster that I didn't know about. On the steeple of St. Lamberti's cathedral, the same tower where the cages are hanging, they placed a series of neon lights in the shape of a ladder. There is a matching light inside the building just under the tower. They were installed in September 2023, shortly before I arrived, and

they were taken down in March 2024. The name of the artwork was "Himmelsleiter," or heaven's ladder/Jacob's ladder. As all good artwork does, it inspired a lot of questions, but the cages were directly in between the top of the ladder and the bottom. Are they on their way up the ladder, or are they coming down? The cathedral hosted at least one funeral while I was there. It would have been incredible to see a casket at the bottom of the ladder as the congregation released their departed into the arms of the Father.

It took a long time to erase the damage that the Münster story did to the Anabaptist reputation. Some say that damage is still there. When Menno Simons became the leader of the Anabaptist movement, people could tell that there was a difference between Menno-style Anabaptists and Münster style Anabaptists. That's when we started being called Mennisten or Mennonites instead of Anabaptists because the Münster reputation was so bad and because Menno's reputation was so good.

Menno's hometown of Witmarsum, in Friesland, in the Netherlands, has a few landmarks worth visiting. There are plaques and monuments, and even a replica church. I stayed nearby for a few nights. I got a hotel in Bolsward, the closest town to the monastery I mentioned before. It was a short drive to Witmarsum, and to Sneek, where Hille Feicken came from. There was also a Mennonite church there, sort of. It was explained to me that Dutch Ana-



This is the Waterpoort in Sneek, Friesland, Netherlands.



The monument honours the good and bad history of the monastery, and the writing reads, "On Frisian soil, connected by faith and struggle."

(See Visit on page 16)

(Visit from page 15)

baptists didn't like the idea of elevating a person so high that a whole group would be named after him, so they refused to call themselves Mennisten or Mennonites. They also couldn't call themselves wederdoopers ("Anabaptists") because of the reputation of Münster. So, they instead call themselves "Doopesgezinden" (baptism-minded).

In 2018, representatives from multiple countries and various Anabaptist denominations travelled to Münster to participate in a litany of healing and forgiveness. It is worth asking a few questions. What does an apology now do for something that happened 500 years ago accomplish? How sorry do we need to be? Can those leaders really be forgiven? After all, the cages are still hanging there. As I arrived in Münster, I pondered this question, but it was partly answered as I approached my hotel. Next door to it was a restaurant serving shawarma. So, what does this food have to do with forgiveness? At the time of the Reformation, part of the threat the peaceful Anabaptists posed was that if more Christians laid down the sword, there wouldn't be enough soldiers to protect Vienna. What is now the capital of Austria was then being attacked by an army of Turks and Muslims from present-day Turkey. Shawarma is food that originates in Turkey. I ate at that restaurant one night, surrounded by tourists, immigrants to Germany, and other German-speaking customers. It seemed to me that the Turks had been forgiven, so maybe we could be, too. Maybe the biggest step is to for-

give ourselves. Turks, Anabaptists, and German Catholics already have a place at the table.

William Loewen served as the solo pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church, south of Calgary, for 13 years. He hosts a podcast called "Free Radicals" and has recently released a series of podcast episodes telling the story of the Anabaptist kingdom of Münster. He lives in Calgary with a Brady Bunch, including his new wife, her mother, six kids, and five cats. ❖

Error Correction

On page 13 of the Mar 2024 Chronicle, the photo of the hills in the top right-hand corner was erroneously reported as Rooster's Comb Hill when, in fact, the photo was of the Buffalo Prairie Hills, pictured below. Rooster's Comb Hill is located close to the historical La Crete Landing and is pictured on the right.



Rooster's Comb Hill

La Crete MHSA 2024 Spring Conference Local Tour Highlights

by Dave Toews

On the morning of May 31, 2024, we gathered at the La Crete Heritage Centre to register and board the bus for the local tour. There were approximately 45 of us, 22 from away and 23 from La Crete and area. Susan Siemens and Jeremy Wiebe did a splendid job leading us through the history of La Crete and area. We had five stops on our agenda in Ft. Vermilion: the Old Bay House and the Heritage Centre (Museum), Mennonite Heritage Village, Tompkins Ferry Landing and supper at the Ferry campground. We also had a brief stop at the airport; the La Crete Sawmills tour was cancelled due to wet grounds, much to our disappointment.

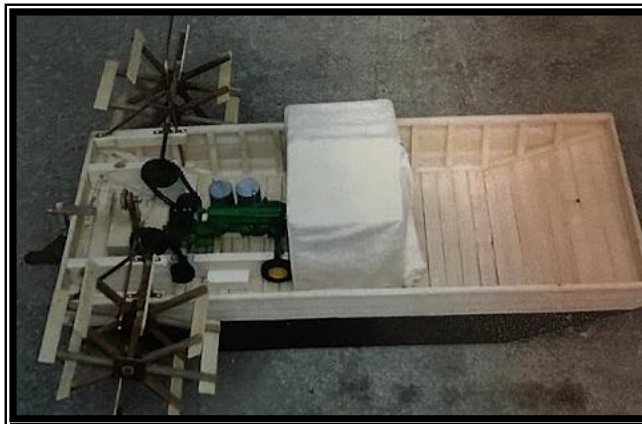
Construction on the Old (Hudson) Bay House in Ft. Vermilion was started in 1906, with no expense spared; some of the features included decorated gable ends, carpets, a piano, a balcony, and even a water closet. The dwelling has hosted many prominent guests, including Governor General Lord Byng, WWI pilot Wop May and Premier Brownlee. In the early 1990s, the house was fully restored, complete with modern plumbing, electricity and appliances, and now serves as a Bed & Breakfast.

Opened in 1995, the Fort Vermilion Heritage Centre is the nucleus of heritage preservation and conservation in the Fort Vermilion area. Boasting

over 16,000 photos, 22,000 archives, 8000 objects, and 2 heritage houses - there is much to explore! Native-born tour guide docent Steven Simpson, who studied acting at Trinity Western, was very articulate and informative in guiding us through the Old Bay House and Heritage Centre. Of particular interest was the Russian Mennonite Na-



La Crete Tour Bus



Model of the tractor driven scow used by the Russian Mennonite Navy



The Old Bay House, Ft. Vermilion



Ft. Vermilion Heritage Centre



Guide Steven Simpson

(See MHSA on page 18)

(MHSA from page 17)

vy (RMN); Michael Raychyba built a boat, a paddle wheeled scow powered by a cleat trac tractor, that transported Mennonite settlers and others from Peace River to Ft. Vermilion. Michael's daughter Marie served meals on the RMN for 35 cents a meal.

The La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village contains over 15 local heritage buildings, a 1910 Case steam engine, the former Tompkins Landing ferry, a flour mill, many pieces of farm equipment, furnishings, and other artifacts. Every year, on the first Saturday in September, there is a Pioneer Day event with a community pancake breakfast, antique parade, equipment demonstrations including shingle making and threshing, cultural food booths and kids' activities. Credit - *La Crete Chamber of Commerce visitor information*.

In 1961, the Tompkins Landing Road, Secondary Highway 697, was completed, and a ferry across the Peace River was established, thus allowing access to the Mackenzie Highway. The original Ferry began operations in 1962, with John Gronvall making the first crossing. During one season of operation, the ferry would make 18,028 trips across the river. It continued operations until a new Ferry was built in 1987, which is still used today. It measures 33.4m long and 32m wide with a load capacity of 95,000kg. Since 1988, from spring break-up until the river freezes in the fall, the ferry has carried countless people, vehicles and goods across the Peace River. Each crossing has saved people and businesses valuable time, kilometres and expenses. In the winter, when the ice is thick enough, an ice road is made to allow travellers to save time & cross the river instead of driving around High Level to get to La Crete. Credit - *La Crete Chamber of Commerce visitor information*.

Mary Quapp stood up in the bus suggested and led us as we sang *Gott ist die Liebe* (For God So Loved Us). And Ken Matis sang a solo in his rich base voice, *Mine Vater Der in Himmel Wohnt* (My Father Who Lives in Heaven). Many of us experienced a moment of nostalgia, remembering bygone days, and there may have been a misty eye or two.

At the La Crete Ferry Campground, we were served a delicious supper meal of barbequed farmer sausage and salads. The warmth and hospitality of the local volunteers was palpable.

In the Tompkins Landing Area, South of La Crete, nestled along the east bank of the Peace River, you will find a historical logging site that has been transformed into a well-maintained campground. The Campground is located next to the Ferry Landing. With beautiful views and access to the Peace River, it is the perfect spot for a getaway, family get-together, day out on the water, or an afternoon picnic. The La Crete Ferry Campground Society operates the Campground under a lease with Mackenzie County. The Campground has seen many improvements in recent years and anticipates many more. Credit - *Mackenzie County Facilities website*. ❖



Windmill at Mennonite Heritage Village



La Crete Ferry at Tompkins Landing



Mary Quapp singing Gott ist die Liebe



BBQ supper at the Ferry Campground

Letters from Siberia

by Bill Franz

(Editor's note: This is a translation of the first letter received in 1956 by Johann Franz in Canada from his mother, Elizabeth, in Siberia, after thirteen years without knowledge of each other's whereabouts. Johann's son, Bill, is working his way through almost twenty years of letters from his "Oma in Russland".

22.4.56 Krivoschtschekowo

My dear dear son,

Actually, I can hardly believe that this really is you, and I'm afraid that this letter will not reach you like the one I wrote to you in 1951. At that time I got the address from the Martinoffs, who had your letter for a whole year before they sent it to us. I've been waiting for a sign of life from you for five years now. Now Aunt Schura sent me your address, which Elly got from her friend, whose siblings are somewhere near you. Or is it someone who has the same name? Well, I'm writing, maybe you'll get this letter after all.

Where should I start? We are still alive, thank God, now in December it will be eleven years that we have been living in Siberia. I'm with Gretchen, who has been married to Adam Mündt since February 18 this year, comes from the Odessa district. They both work in one location, he works as a bricklayer, Gretchen stuccos, she had to pass an exam in her subject, passed with 4. We live calmly and quietly, if you only knew how we longed and still long for you! How gladly, we'd love to be with you!

We don't actually have any of our own here. From Halbstadt is an Epp family here. You once sat on a school bench with their son Heini Epp, he is your age, had to walk the way of thorns in '41, which so many of our people had to walk and has also disappeared without a trace, like so many, they mostly died of

stomach ailments as a result of the war, which took away thousands at the time, our dear papa must have perished too, otherwise he would have found us or we him, how we looked for him, all in vain.

Gretchen got a large group of relatives through her marriage, her husband has his parents, siblings and uncles and aunts here. When we get an answer to this letter, Gretchen and Adam will send you a photo, it is put away for you. Our dear aunt Anna lives too, she is in Kiev with Uncle Kolja and Kolenka, who is now 25 years old. Aunt Anna is still working and will be 64 in October. I'm going to be 62. One has grown old, I can feel my years and everything that one has been through can often be felt. But we have not lost faith in our God and Lord through the cross and misery, no, we have come closer to Him.

Now we would really like to know how you are doing. At that time you wrote to Martinoffs that you were about to get married, we would like to know who your wife is and so on and so on. A lot of letters are already being received from there, and many are sending photos. So we hope for a long, detailed letter from you. Write everything, is Papa's sister Mariechen still alive? Aunt Liese Regebr has to be somewhere, too, and Papa's younger brother Uncle Peter too. Give our regards from all of us.

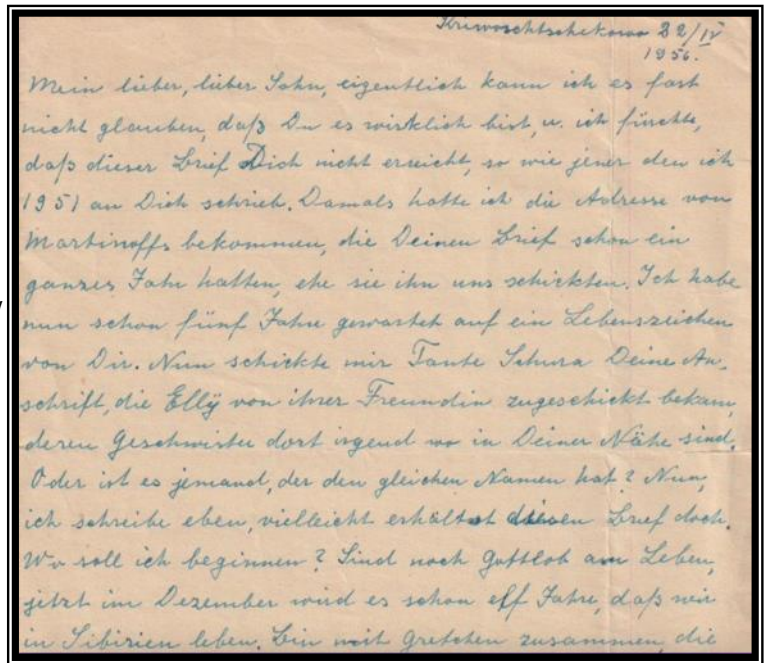
Aunt Schura lives one day's journey with Elly and Hans in Kemerovskaya Oblast. Elly is mostly in hospital, has had lung disease for 16 years, now also heart disease, has been in hospital for months. Aunt Schura is sick too, well, she always has something to complain about. Hans also works as a plasterer, is married, but as Aunt Schura writes, unhappy. Gretchen has found a good, dear companion in life, he is also good to me, I am satisfied that she is happy.

We hope to see you again, God's ways are wonderful, we see and feel that every day. He can still grant us a reunion, everything is in His power. Now live well! I hope you are doing fine, but I would like to know from you. Greet yours, too, how I would like to see you all.

I don't know anything about Anni's children, Andreas turned 18 on April 14th. Walter is in Ukraine, works somewhere as a big boss, but drinks. Got a letter from his mother, she lives in the same town.

Now be greeted and kissed by the three of us. Mother, sister and brother-in-law.

P.S. Where do you work? I've stopped working since 1952, but I miss the job. ❖



Journey to the Molotschna (Milk River, Alberta)

by Bill Franz

(Editor's note: This story was originally published in German as *Reise zur Molotschna (Milk River, Alberta)* in *Der Bote*, Nummer 17, on September 1, 2004 (the author has added commentary for *The MHSA Chronicle*). *Der Bote* was a German-language publication originally published at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, the first issue appearing in 1924. It served the immigrants coming to Canada from Russia after World War I. Because of declining subscriptions, it ceased publication in 2008.)



Header from the front cover of *Der Bote*, September 1, 2004.

“You’re going to starve.”

That’s what my father said to me when I told him that I intended to become a writer. I didn’t always listen to my father, but these words resonated. My father knew something about starvation, having been a young boy during the Holodomor, the man-made famine in Soviet Ukraine from 1932 to 1933. I eventually changed my course of study in hopes of being able to find a job after graduation.

Some thirty years later, we made a trip together down to Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, near Milk River. He asked me to write an account for *Der Bote*, assuring me that they would translate my article into German for the readers’ forum. He didn’t live long enough to see it in print, but one of my sisters read the English draft to him and then he asked her to pass it to him so he could read it himself. I realize now that my father was encouraging me to write, now that I had

obtained an education and turned it into a career to support myself and my family.

In early May 2004, my father (Johann Franz) and I made a trip down to the Milk River area of southern Alberta. We were hoping to travel to Ukraine, to the Molotschna settlement of my father’s youth, but this was not to be. First my mother had battled cancer, and now my father.

Papa had flown from Winnipeg to Calgary, and I had brought him back to Red Deer. It had been several years since he had been able to visit us. Now we headed down the busy Highway 2 in my truck and camper, through Calgary on the Deerfoot and on to



Leserforum

Meinungen unserer Leser

Reise zur Molotschna (Milk River, Alberta)

von Bill Franz
Red Deer, Alberta

Anfang Mai 2004 machten mein Vater (Johann Franz) und ich eine Fahrt zum Milk-River-Gebiet im südlichen Alberta. Wir hatten gehofft, in die Ukraine zu reisen, zur Molotschna-Ansiedlung, wo mein Vater seine Jugend verbracht hatte, aber es sollte nicht sein. Zuerst hatte meine Mutter mit der Krebskrankheit gekämpft und jetzt mein Vater.

Papa war von Winnipeg nach Calgary geflogen und ich hatte ihn abgeholt und zu uns nach Red Deer gebracht. Es waren mehrere Jahre vergangen, seit er uns besuchen konnte. Jetzt machten wir uns mit meinem Lastwagen und „Camper“ auf der vielbefahrenen Straße Nr. 2 auf den Weg. Wir fuhren durch Calgary nach Lethbridge. Das Wetter war für später in der Woche nicht sehr verheißungsvoll, aber an diesem Tag hatten wir leichten Re-

Molotschna oder Molochansk (wie es heute genannt wird) heißt „Writing-On-Stone“ („Auf Stein geschrieben“) ist ein Naturschutzgebiet mit Prärie-Bachbetten und „hoodoos“ (turmartige Gesteinsformationen, die durch überhängende Felsen vom Regen geschützt sind), viel Wild und Steinmalereien und eingemeißelte Bilder, die von Ureinwohnern stammen. Einen herrlichen Hintergrund für „Writing-On-Stone“ bilden die Sweetgrass Hills in Montana auf der gegenüberliegenden Seite der Grenze. Es waren nur wenige andere Leute auf dem Campingplatz und das Wetter war



Johann Franz beim Abstieg von einem Aussichtspunkt über dem Milk River. Foto: Bill Franz

Reise zur Molotschna (Milk River, Alberta).

(Journey from page 20)

Lethbridge. The weather wasn't promising later in the week, but for today we had light rain. We stopped on the banks of the Oldman River, with a view of the High Level Bridge, a CPR train trestle. After making soup in the camper, we headed down Highway 4 to Milk River.

Our destination was Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, but first we stopped at the "Welcome to Milk River" sign. Papa had realized that Milk River in Ukrainian is Molotschna, or Molochansk (as it is known today). Writing-On-Stone is a protected area of prairie coulees and hoodoos (towering rock formations protected from rain by cap rocks), abundant wildlife, and native rock carvings and paintings. A beautiful backdrop to Writing-On-Stone are the Sweetgrass Hills just across the border in Montana. There were only a few other people camping, and the weather was warm but not yet too hot.

We walked about looking at the various hoodoos. Papa named one prominent hoodoo the Sphinx. There were mule deer grazing along the banks of the river, and Nuttall's Cottontail was busy hopping around. We enjoyed a campfire, and later the full moon. The next day was hot and windy, but in the morning we drove up to the Police Post viewpoint. A young rattlesnake was sunning itself on the asphalt! We also saw a Prairie Falcon soaring above the cliffs. We had walked part of the Hoodoo trail the night before, and now hiked the Battle Scene trail to look at the rock carvings depicting a historic battle between the Blackfoot and their enemies. White-

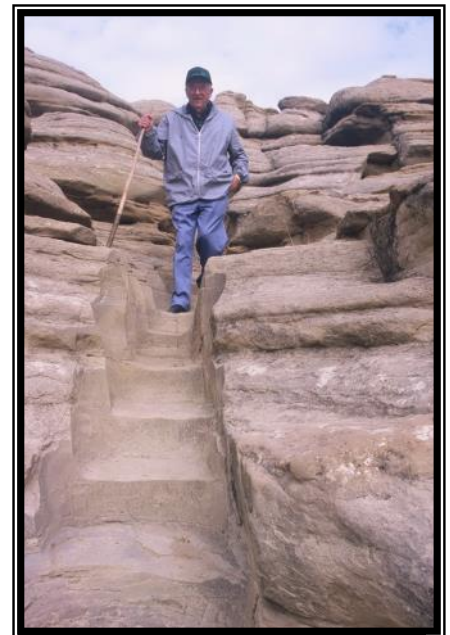
crowned sparrows frequented our camp, and that evening, a flock of white pelicans flew overhead along the river.

In the morning we were to leave for Waterton National Park, but as snow flurries flew, we decided to turn for home. We stopped in High River as Papa wanted to visit Margaret Siemens, the daughter-in-law of his sponsor when he came to Canada. Papa had come to Canada in October 1949 and had spent a couple of months on the Siemens farm near Headingley, Manitoba, before heading into Winnipeg to find work. We were able to have a lovely visit with her.

Papa and I enjoyed our camping trip to the Molotschna (Alberta style), and also the remainder of his visit to our home in Red Deer. It was a special time together.



Bill Franz posing above the Milk River in Writing-On-Stone Provincial Park, in May, 2004.



Johann Franz, Bill's father, descending the steps cut into the sandstone, in May, 2004.

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Bill Franz is a director with the MHSA, assistant editor of The MHSA Chronicle, and currently serves as secretary. His book, Mutti and Papa, A Love Story, was published in 2021. He is a father and grandfather and lives with his wife, Pearl, in Red Deer. ❖

Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) article on Henry Goerzen

by Bill Franz and Ted Regehr

Some time ago, it was brought to our attention that there was not an article in GAMEO (<https://gameo.org/>) on Henry Goerzen, the first chairperson of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). Henry served as chairperson from 1986 to 1999 and then as vice-chair until 2003. Henry's involvement actually started much earlier, as a founding member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta, created in 1974. Henry, along with his wife, Erna, was also active in the life and work of the Bergthal Mennonite Church near Didsbury, the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (later Mennonite Church Alberta) and helped organize the first Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Relief Sale in Didsbury.

The short article in GAMEO includes a bibliography linking to several articles in The MHSA Chronicle, with additional information and photos. Henry and Erna contributed much to the work of MHSA and the Mennonite community in Alberta.

The writing of the GAMEO article benefitted from the contributions of MHSA's GAMEO Committee (which includes Katie Harder and Dave Toews as well as Ted Regehr and Bill Franz).

GAMEO - Goerzen, Henry David 1928 - 2019

Henry David Goerzen: church leader, conference leader, and amateur archivist; born 28 October 1928 near Crossfield, Alberta, Canada, the fourth of ten children of David Peter Goerzen (21 January 1894, Karpovka, Memrik, South Russia – 17 November 1975, Calgary, Alberta) and Suzanna (Wiens) Goerzen (5 October 1899, Peterhof, Russia – 8 December 1992, Calgary, Alberta). Henry married Erna Warkentin, daughter of Herman Warkentin (1888-1952) and Katharine (Neufeld) Warkentin (1896-1984) on 2 November 1952 in Munson, Alberta. Together they had six children: Martin (died young), Irene, Eric, Juanita, Erna, and Albert. Henry died 11 January 2019 in Didsbury, Alberta.

Henry grew up on the family farm in the Rosebud valley and enjoyed roaming the hills, appreciating and drawing numer-



Henry D Goerzen
(1928 - 2019)

ous sketches of the beauty of nature. He attended the local public school and completed grade nine, but was then needed on the farm after his older brother, David, was called to serve as a war-time Conscientious Objector (CO). He continued his studies at the Menno Bible Institute (MBI), located on the grounds of the Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, Alberta, and was baptized in that church on 25 May 1947.

With a basic education, farm experience, and \$20 in his pocket, Henry hitchhiked to Drumheller, Alberta to meet Erna Warkentin, who he had met at MBI. They were married in the Warkentin family home in Munson, Alberta. Henry worked briefly as a coal miner and trucker before returning to Carstairs to settle into farming. After running a mixed farm for many years, he turned it over to his son Eric and purchased a smaller cattle-raising farm west of Didsbury. He fully retired from farming in 2006 when he and Erna moved into Didsbury where they pursued heritage, family, and church interests as well as Henry's artwork.

In the Bergthal Mennonite Church Henry served as Sunday school superintendent, church secretary, and church chair. He was also secretary for six years, and then chairperson for six more years, of the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (later Mennonite Church Alberta). Erna was very active in congregational and provincial Women in Missions organizations. Both worked on the 50th anniversary history of the Bergthal Mennonite Church and wrote short history papers, including Henry's pub-

(See Henry on page 23)

Publications for Sale:

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

(Henry from page 22)

lished history of the Namaka Mennonite Church. They helped organize the first Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Relief Sale in Didsbury. Henry also served on the board of Rosthern Junior College and was involved in local community affairs.

In those positions Goerzen collected conference records, historical papers, and was named conference archivist. He secured the records of Menno Bible Institute and the Swift Current Bible Institute when they closed. He stored these records in his basement, and later in a steel grain bin on the farm. Henry and Erna also collected stories, interviewed and transcribed recollections of old-timers, and translated German historical papers. Henry was fascinated by the work and witness of conscientious objectors. He helped organize and participated in CO reunions and contacted and interviewed most Alberta COs. Original drafts, correspondence, and carefully rewritten copies of these interviews were donated to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta archives, as were other textual records and photographs comprising the Henry D. Goerzen and Erna Goerzen fonds.

Henry was a founding member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta, created in 1974. When the two-province structure proved difficult, he relentlessly promoted creation, in 1986, of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). He served as its first chairperson from 1986 to 1999 and as vice-chair until 2003, and strongly supported the establishment of the MHSA archives and library in a rented space

in Calgary. He also designed the logo of the MHSA. In recognition of his contributions in the preservation and writing of Alberta Mennonite history, Henry received the Award of Excellence of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada in 2018.

Henry, with Erna's support and active participation, left a legacy of service to his family, the Berghal Mennonite Church, the Didsbury community, and the MHSA.

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Authors: Bill Franz, Ted Regehr

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Getting to Know Your MHSA Board Members

Joanne Wiens

I was raised in the small farming community of Herschel, Saskatchewan. This vibrant, warm community that sang together, debated in a lively Sunday School, and cared deeply for each other, would meaningfully influence my involvement in and commitment to the Mennonite church and Mennonite institutions. In my early years, my grandfather, Peter B. Wiens, left the family farm we shared to become the editor of the German church paper connecting Mennonite immigrants - *Der Bote*. Now I was introduced to something beyond farming in the richness of telling a story and preservation of it through print. I was fascinated that my grandfather wrote words for a job! I have a detailed memory of my grandfather closeted in his study, endlessly thinking through his editorials while my brother and I waited quietly for him to emerge and take us for a walk to the railway bridge in Saskatoon. If we were lucky, a train came by shaking the bridge and causing us to smile at sharing this small pleasure together. And just maybe, the shaking bridge shook out the words still simmering endlessly in his head. I now know what it's like to have those endless ideas waiting to spring out.

I attended Rosthern Junior College and then received a B.Ed. and a B.A. (in English) from the University of Saskatchewan. My teaching career began in rural Saskatchewan until I was drawn to Calgary, where I joined the staff of Menno Simons Christian School, first as a teacher and then as

(See Board on page 24)



Joanne Wiens

(Board from page 23)

the principal. Right from the start, I felt connected to the purpose of this place and for the development of the school community to train up children in a faith setting and build a close community. My long tenure included ushering the school through numerous location moves until finally establishing a brand new building at a permanent school site in west Calgary. Some years later we ensured financial stability by becoming an Alternative Program within the public school system.

Looking back, it was exciting to be part of these formative years. Although our location was unstable for over two decades, our community was solid with committed families and staff members who understood the eternal purpose of our school community and sacrificed in countless ways to make it survive year to year. Watching the community grow and become established was an honour. However, the greatest joys were in quiet moments of connection with students, either at the front door each morning, or in my office, or the classroom.

Like many people, the pandemic gave me unexpected time on my hands. I used it to brush up on my writing skills with a couple of courses that required sample writings. That got me going on a project connected to my school years at Menno Simons. I combined editorials I had written, school stories that lingered in my mind, and scraps of ideas I had thrown into a file folder to create the book: *Simply Sacred: Stories from School*. Each chapter focuses on a theme, a smattering of stories connected to that theme, and a scripture passage. It has been heartening to see these chapters used as devotionals, read to the gamut of seniors and children alike, and to have stories pull people back into reflection on their own school years. The book is available through Commonword, or anywhere you order your books. In the last week came an unexpected pleasure: a young lad at my former school was to dress up as a character in his favourite book. On the appointed day he chose to wear his regular school uniform so as to be a character in my book. Priceless, right? But it gets even better. It turns out the other option he was considering was to dress up as Harry Potter. I realized that this would be the only day in my life I would top the literary charts, beating out J.K. Rowling!

This year, Menno Simons Christian School celebrated its 40th anniversary. This celebration was truly a testament to God's guidance and protection of this small but vibrant place. In conjunction with an anniversary event for school families, Dr. Bernie Potvin and I co-authored a collection of anecdotes from alumni students and teachers in a collection called *Menno Moments: the story of that Calgary school on 69th Street*. It was made available to school families at no cost through the school and may be reprinted further down the road for general distribution.

I continue to share my grandfather's passion for fiddling with words. I have a keen interest in preserving historical information, and each year, on my great-niece's birthday, I write her a family history story as a gift. My great-nephew's birthday gift is a children's story that adds a new chapter each year. You can imagine that when I heard there was another baby on the way, my immediate thought after the expressed joy was, "Oh no, I'm going to have another project on the go each year!" My current sideline, in

honour of the Wiens family's 100th anniversary since arriving in Canada from Russia, is working on a video presentation documenting the years 1924-1935. It has been a joy to tell this story, to delve deeply into family history, and to learn new presentation skills along the way.

I am grateful to expand my learning of Mennonites in Alberta through participation on the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta board.

Jeremy Wiebe

Jeremy Wiebe was born in 1995 and has lived in the La Crete, Alberta area for his whole life. He gained a passion for history from his father,



Jeremy Wiebe

who volunteered at the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village throughout most of Jeremy's childhood. After he graduated from high school, Jeremy started working at the La Crete Mennonite Heritage Village as the Collections and Project Manager and has been working there ever since. In 2019, he completed a Certificate in Museum Studies from the Alberta Museums Association. As part of his work, Jeremy assisted in writing "Then and Now: The History of La Crete" and doing all the photo digitization and layout for the three-volume book. Jeremy enjoys reading, history, and photography. ❖