



The MHSA Chronicle

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Stories and Snippets

By Joanne Wiens

Wild Horses and Wild Ideas



Joanne Wiens

The Story:

I'll let you know two things right off the bat: First of all, this is one of my absolute favourite B-line stories. Secondly,

who knows what the actual facts are?! This is one of those stories where a bunch of us heard the story passed down orally, but details vary, and memories of what we were told are vague. But I hope you'll enjoy the spirit of the story because it's too good to be ignored just for a few potentially inaccurate errant details.

So we left our B-line family last month, writing letters between provinces. The Alberta mining

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Reflections on MHSA Spring Events

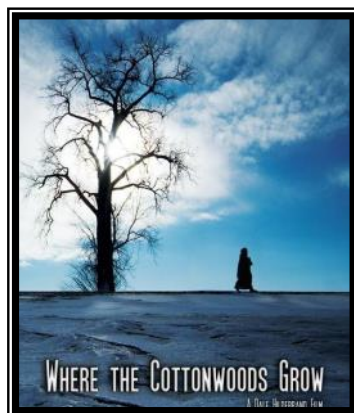
by Darrel Heidebrecht

As I reflect on the MHSA events from May 9 & 10, two words come to mind. These words are "gratitude" and "humility". These were sentiments I felt during the viewing of the movie, "Where the Cottonwoods Grow," on Friday evening and throughout the presentation by Conrad Stoesz at Trinity Mennonite Church on Saturday.

"Where The Cottonwoods Grow" is a movie produced by Dale Hildebrandt about the coming of Mennonites from Russia to Manitoba beginning in 1874. I wondered how many people in the Calgary area would connect with this story and what sort of turnout there would be. The theatre was filled with more than 150 people well before the start of the movie. Some were there because of personal family connections to this migration, but most came because of some other sense of connectedness to this story, or maybe just curiosity. It was gratifying to see this response and this appetite for remembering the story of Mennonites coming to Canada from Russia in the 1870s.

A few things stand out for me from the movie. First of all, the decision

to leave Russia was not taken lightly, as for many it meant leaving the security of a life that had been good but now felt very uncertain. It meant examining faith commitments and seeking the security of a country where they could live out their faith. Social and political pressures in Russia cast doubt on this possibility for many Mennonites in Russia. I found myself pondering how I might have reacted in that situation. I felt humbled by the extent to which these Mennonites, my ancestors, put their commitment to faithful living ahead of personal comfort and security. In total, 7,000 people came to Canada,



and 10,000 to the U.S. This represented roughly one-third of the total Mennonite population in Russia. That number is somewhat overwhelming. What would life have been like for those who stayed? What was the impact on the social fabric of Mennonite communities with this large migration?

The movie depicted the struggle of this decision and the difficulty of the journey to Canada in graphic detail. Families were split because some chose to stay while others left. The hardship of travel resulted in many deaths, seemingly many children, dying en route to Canada. In some cases, the bodies of children had to be left with strangers for burial because a train or ship



Darrel Heidebrecht

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Editorial Reflections

By Dave Toews

Why We Remember

Why we remember "Anabaptism at 500" is that it reflects who we are and why we are here at this juncture in our journey.

In the latest issue of *Preservings*, Andrew Klassen Brown writes: (and I paraphrase) The Anabaptist movement began on January 21, 1525, in Zurich with the rebaptisms performed by Conrad Grebel and George Blaurock in the home of Felix Manz's mother. After this watershed moment, various expressions of Anabaptism emerged from across Reformation Europe. Balthasar Hubmaier, Moravia and Hutterian Brethren under Jacob Wiedemann and Jacob Hutter also in Moravia. Men like Hans Hut, Hans Denck,



Dave Toews

Pilgram Marpeck, Melchior Hoffman, Jan Matthijs and Menno Simons led their own Anabaptist reform and missionary efforts from which the Mennonite tradition grew.

In the Chairman's Corner, our very able and dedicated Chair, Katie Harder, shares *Why We Remember* and how her loving father's example has influenced her lifelong devotion to prayer and volunteerism.

In Darrel Heidebrecht's Reflections on Spring Events, namely *Where the Cottonwoods Grow* and Conrad Stoesz's *Celebrating 500 Years of Anabaptism*, Darrel discusses *Why We Remember*, and the challenges faced by the Mennonites relocating to Manitoba in the 1870s and the polygenesis of the Anabaptist movement in Europe during the 15th and 1600s.

This is a historical publication, and, of course, we always feature articles on genealogy, Mennonite history, and family stories. In addition to *Why We Remember*, the history, I have asked my friend, retired Pastor Jake Froese, to write about "Anabaptism at 500" from a faith perspective, which he has done very well.

The reaction and compliments to my article, "Mayfair Mennonite Church: a history and memoir," in the March issue have been over-

whelming. In addition to the letters to the editor, I have received numerous notes of appreciation and kind words from friends, relatives, former members, and adherents.

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

Chairman's Corner

By Katie Harder

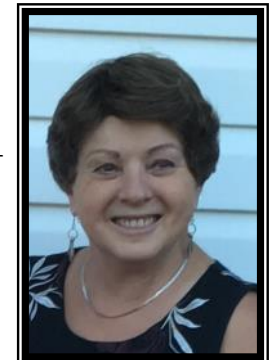
Why We Remember

At the recent MHSA Spring

Conference, our guest speaker, Conrad Stoesz, shared an interesting photo with the caption "Why We Remember."

This moment sparked a profound reflection on the significance of memory and its vital connection to the people we cherish. One memory that stands out vividly for me is of my dad visiting me in the hospital when I was just three years old, bringing me a banana. That image remains etched in my mind, radiating a profound sense of warmth and love, a cherished memory of my dad from my childhood.

Even though my dad, Jacob J. Klassen, has been gone for many years, the love I felt for him contin-



Katie Harder

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ues to occupy a special space in my heart, filled with cherished memories of our times together. As a youngster, I still remember snuggling with him in the rocking chair in our living room. As a teenager, I needed a new winter coat, so Dad took the time out of his busy day to take me to Lethbridge to shop for one. As a family, we always shopped at Eaton's Department Store in Lethbridge. That day, I left with a beautiful green coat featuring a genuine fur fox collar, a testament to his excellent taste and generous nature. But he was not just a remarkable father, husband, and grandfather; he was a pillar in our community. He was deeply involved in Mennonite organizations that nurtured growth and connection in the Alberta Mennonite community and beyond. The Mennonite heritage, with its emphasis on community, service, and faith, was a significant part of his life and continues to influence mine.

As a child, I was captivated by a photograph of Bishop David Toews, a figure my father greatly admired. Bishop Toews epitomized vision and courage, playing a pivotal role in bringing the Russlaenders to Canada during the 1920s—a journey my parents were privileged to be part of. The term “Reiseschuld” resonates with me as well, representing my father's unwavering commitment to collecting this debt in Alberta, given his service as a member of the Mennonite Board of Colonization, which merged with the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council. ‘Reiseschuld’ refers to the travel debt that the immigrants owed for their journey to Canada, and my father was dedicated to ensuring this debt was paid, as it

was a significant financial burden for many. As a member of this committee, my father would meet the new immigrants now arriving from Germany, specifically from the Danzig area, at the train station in Coaldale. (A granddaughter of Altester Johannes Dyck shared with me her memories of how my dad met her family that night and transported them to their place of lodging.) His dedication to community service instilled in me an enduring, firm commitment to voluntary engagement, inspiring me to carry on his legacy.

Reflecting on these memories underscores the profound importance of honouring those who have shaped our lives, our churches, and our communities. My father's extraordinary legacy of service and steadfast commitment to our heritage not only enriched my upbringing but also continues to guide me on my journey of involvement in my church and my community. Each memory serves as a vital thread in the fabric of my identity, connecting me to my roots and reinforcing the values he instilled in me, while also highlighting the significance of service to others whenever possible. His influence is a constant presence in my life, shaping my decisions and actions. It was a comment in an article written about by my father, following his passing, by I.I. Regehr of Coaldale, in the March 26, 1974, edition of “Der Bote” entitled – ‘In the Service of the Brotherhood’- that has impacted my own church related committee involvements. Mr. Isaac Regehr wrote, “Mr. Klassen chaired many, many committee meetings, but I know not of one that ever commenced without a word of prayer.” That comment has impacted my journey of faith and inspired me to adopt a similar practice when chairing committee meetings. This practice of starting meetings with a word of prayer not only reflects my father's faith but also sets a tone of respect, unity, and humility, which I believe are essential for effective committee work. As an adolescent, I greatly appreciated that my father was never preachy or pushy about his faith. Yes, he had definite expectations for his children, but he had confidence that he had taught us well and hoped we had the wisdom to make wise choices. Now, as an adult, I realize the wisdom in his leadership by example, rather than a lot of sermonizing, which has left an indelible mark on my own life.

In essence, our memories act as powerful vessels that keep the stories of our loved ones alive, allowing us to honour their legacies and inspire future generations. As we remember, we uphold their teachings and passions, ensuring that their impact endures and continues to encourage those who come after us. This is not just my responsibility, but ours as a community. Each of us, with our unique memories and experiences, plays a part in preserving and passing on the rich tapestry of our Mennonite faith and heritage. ❖

Isaiah 51:1 "look to the rock from which you were cut"

In the verse above, the children of Israel were told to “look to the rock from which you were cut and the quarry from which you were hewn.” He was telling them to look back to their ancestors: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. There was much to be learned about God by studying how He related to their forefathers.

(Reflections from page 1)

needed to be boarded.

Arriving in Manitoba also presented many challenges and hardships. Sod houses were the only option for the first winter, and come spring, these dwellings began to disintegrate with the thaw and coming of rain. I found myself thinking about the story of the Exodus and how the children of Israel longed to return to Egypt rather than face the hardship and struggle of freedom. I wondered how many Mennonites felt the same way and longed to return to Russia!

Mitigating some of this hardship was help and advice received from Metis people in the area where Mennonites settled. The Metis had a well-developed transportation system using oxen and Red River Carts, which enabled Mennonites to reach their destinations. They held knowledge and wisdom about medicinal practices and plants, which Mennonites learned from. While perhaps a bit understated in the movie, it struck me how significant this support would have been to Mennonites coming to a new land.

In many ways, it seems these Mennonites tried to recreate in Canada the life they had experienced in Russia. Villages were created in a similar style, and social structures were similar as well.

As the movie progressed, I found myself feeling grateful for the courage it took for these Mennonites to embark on this migration. Their decision, while clearly a response to the pressures and uncertainty faced at the time in Russia, was also connected to the early Anabaptist Reformation, which emphasized living in faithfulness to Christ in all aspects of life. This migration grew out of a long history of struggling with what it meant to live in faithfulness to their understanding of Christian faith.

This was the theme of the presentation by Conrad Stoesz at Trinity Mennonite Church on Saturday. Conrad is the archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg. His presentation centred around the 500th year anniversary of Anabaptism.

Using photos from a relatively recent visit to Europe, especially areas where the Anabaptist movement began, Conrad walked us through the complex and often confusing times which gave birth to Anabaptism. He emphasized there was not one place where it began, but rather “popped up” in many places around the same time. He used the word “polygenesis” to describe these events. Conrad covered a vast amount of information in his 90-minute presentation. I want to highlight a few things that stood out for me.

Not all Anabaptists shared a commitment to peace and non-resistance. Thomas Muntzer, for example, engaged in violent resistance to the state and was eventually executed for his actions. Conrad noted that Menno Si-



**Conrad Stoesz
Trinity MC
Saturday, May 10**

mons, who came into the Anabaptist movement a few years later, became a true proponent of peace and non-resistance as hallmarks of the Christian faith and Anabaptism. The actions of Muntzer and disregard for the state church of others caused Anabaptists to be seen as violent and untrustworthy. Under Menno's leadership, the emphasis shifted. Being known as an Anabaptist would have been very dangerous at that time. As a result of the teaching of Menno Simons, many began to identify as “Mennonites” rather than Anabaptists to differentiate themselves from the violence of people like Muntzer. I found it interesting that today there seems to be a trend toward identifying as Anabaptist rather than Mennonite.

Conrad presented an excellent perspective on the socio-economic realities of 16th-century Europe and how these things played into the emergence of Anabaptism. The Peasants' Revolt, for example, played a key role in creating the context for the radical changes represented by the Protestant Reformation generally.

Throughout the presentation, I felt grateful for the courage and commitment it took these early

(See Reflections on page 5)



**Trinity MC Pastor Terry Fach welcomes
the MHSA as MC Katie Harder looks on.**

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The gathered participants

Anabaptists to hold to the path they did. I wondered about what they would recognize about Anabaptism in the 21st century, about ways in which we today understand our faith as somehow counter-cultural and different from the values of mainstream society.

Conrad ended his presentation with a slide with the words “why we remember.” He pointed to the importance of understanding how we have been shaped by the past and how it can inform us today.

The richness of this weekend left me with a different question. That is, “What or who do we become when we don’t remember?” The MHSA is committed to helping Mennonites in Alberta remember! ♦

(Snippets from page 1)

boys are getting discouraged. They work in the East Coulee mine over the winter to support their attempts at farming in the spring. Their farmland is not profitable, however, and their work in the mines is sporadic. So they are considering their options. They have started to talk to their older brother, who, together with his growing family, is still on their original fami-

ly farm in Herschel. Herschel is also where their father and younger siblings now reside after the passing of their mother Elizabeth. So, with the pull of

family ties to the east and the possibility of the mining boys purchasing land together in the same area, they return the East Coulee land to the person who sold it to them. As their youngest brother writes in his memoirs:

The farm, which our family had acquired at East Coulee in 1928, was a failure. The land was hilly and sandy - more suitable to ranching than farming. My three older brothers were forced to take winter employment in the coal mines in order to keep the farm going. Finally, in 1931, we decided to let it go back to the man we purchased it from. I don't know what our investment loss was other than three years of unfruitful labour.

And then comes an errant tidbit in their correspondence. The boys’ oldest sister is getting married in Herschel, and their father, Bernhard, is planning the wedding and inviting people to attend. In writing to his own brother about the wedding, Bernhard drops this line about the mining boys’ arrival for the wedding:

“The boys are thinking of purchasing horses cheaply and riding them here to sell for a profit.”

What? Well, we are in the Depression; everyone is struggling financially. Yet the boys long to purchase land, so they strike up a moneymaking scheme. Here is where the story lines start to diverge and then converge back again. Some of us recall hearing that they hoped to capture some wild horses that roamed in the mountainous areas of Alberta. Others felt the details were more sedate – they would purchase horses locally at a bargain. Nevertheless, once they had their horses, the audacious plan was that they would herd them to Saskatchewan and sell them to the farmers there. The distance? 332 kilometres - on horseback with a bunch of horses along for the ride. Crazy right? But not only do they hatch this plan in their little hut by the Red Deer River, they carry it through. Now is where the details again collide murkily. One cousin recalls that the scheme involved a few horses tied together by rope. Another cousin thinks it was definitely a roaming herd of wild horses because when they reached Rosebud, the horses escaped and had to be rounded up again. We do know that they made it to the wedding, somewhat intact, with horses and riders.

I wish I knew



One of the Wiens boys with a pony near East Coulee, AB, ca 1930

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(Snippets from page 5)

the real story. I wish, when I had sat down over dinner with my great-uncle in Calgary, that I had pushed him on the details. I wonder what it was like to sleep under the resplendent starry sky somewhere between Alberta and Saskatchewan with a bunch of horses grazing and a boatload of dreams for the future. I wonder what their family's facial expression was when the dusty boys finally made it back home with horse hooves on the gravel driveway alerting their arrival. That would have been a supper table I would have liked to pop in on and felt the camaraderie and eavesdropped on the stories. I wonder if the mining boys looked around the table and felt that they were truly home at last. Selling those horses was going to be an investment towards a permanent home; a search that began when they left Russia, when their future was a blank slate.

The Snippet::

In the end, I guess the details don't matter. What I'll take from this story is not the minutiae, but the big thinking: a wild idea, and the chutzpah to go ahead with it. Clearly, no one at home said to them, "Don't be ridiculous boys, just come home." Not to mention that the bond between the brothers was strong enough that they encouraged each other onto the wild side and to see their plan through. Maybe our circumstances are such that we don't dream along the edges enough. We live safely - thanks in no small part to people before us who were forced into big dreams. But just occasionally in life, I think we should step onto the edge, feel the rush, and take an unpredictable audience 332 kilometres away in a new direction. After all, my B-line family and a wild horse chase show us not to dream too small. Sometimes we just have to take a chance to see what adventures and potential new beginnings await. ❖

A Short Treatise on War

By Bill Franz

"Too much war," said Josua, when I asked him where he was from. I always thought our neighbours, kitty-cross the back lane, were from Mexico, but when I finally introduced myself after years of friendly waving, Josua said they were from Colombia. Too much war.

I, too, am a child of war. Although I was born almost ten years after the end of World War Two, it's something I think about a lot, for various reasons. If it wasn't because of WW2, I'd probably be Ukrainian. More likely Russian.

The Mennonites (my ethnic and religious origins) migrated to newly-conquered South Russia in the late 1700s and early 1800s, as Prussia (now part of modern-day Poland) was becoming increasingly militaristic.

It's eighty years since the end of WW2, the largest and deadliest conflict the world has seen. Sixty million people, military and civilian, perished. That war affected many, including my own family. It's the reason I was born in Canada, as my refugee parents from Eastern Europe wanted to get as far away as they could from the clutches of Stalin. And yet I have suffered from German guilt, as my sixteen-year-old father had volunteered with the Wehr-

macht of Nazi Germany, after his father and uncles were deported eastward into forced labour by Stalin (after Hitler ordered the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941).

It's also five hundred years since the founding of Anabaptism, on the radical fringe of the Protestant Reformation. The rulers of Europe at the time recognized the threat these radical Christians posed, what with their refusal to take up arms. So they set about persecuting them, by beheading, by drowning, and by burning them at the stake. And so, just like the early Christians who spread throughout the Middle East and around the Mediterranean in response to persecution, the Anabaptists (including the Mennonites) fled from Switzerland and the lowlands of what is now The Netherlands and Germany into what is now Poland, as the Polish princes were more tolerant and the Mennonites had useful skills such as drainage of wet land for farming.

And now we are in perilous times again. A major war in Europe, as Putin's Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022 to stamp out "Nazis". Territorial ambitions of his no doubt fuel the conflict. And there's the ongoing debacle in Gaza (and the West Bank and East Jerusalem). I have very strong feelings about that conflict and at the risk of being called anti-Semitic I document about it on Facebook.

And then there are Africa and Asia. Ethiopia, Sudan, Congo, Myanmar, etc. Now India and Pakistan are shooting at each other again in Kashmir. And the American President hasn't ruled out taking control of Greenland and the Panama Canal by force. Troubled waters indeed. ❖

The Second Martyrs' Synod, 1925: The Faithful 77

By Ed Krahn

(Editor Bill Franz's note: In March 2025, Edward G. Krahn presented at the Geschichtsseminar (History Seminar) in Worms, Germany. These annual seminars are organized by Viktor Fast of Frankenthal. Ed's presentation focused on the Martyrs' Conference of 1925 in Moscow. Ed is also the manager of a number of Find A Grave Memorials. See <https://www.findagrave.com/virtual-cemetery/1916328>. Eighteen (18) of the 77 delegates to Moscow were able to escape to Canada, and 17 are buried here, including 4 in Alberta. See Ed's article on Abram Peter Willms in the October 2023 issue of The MHSA Chronicle at <https://mennonitehistory.org/wp-content/uploads/Chronicle-No.-3-October-2023.pdf>. The next step is to start to add those 54 delegates who did not get out of the Soviet Union. Most of those are buried in unknown locations. Ed is continuing to work with historians in Germany, Ukraine, and Russia to locate Gulag records, in an effort to locate where their remains might be. This article was originally published in the Mennonite Historian, Volume 49, No. 1 - March 2023. The MHSA Chronicle appreciates permission to publish a slightly revised version.)

In January 1925, these Mennonite church and village leaders from across Russia gathered in



The Faithful 77 (Photo credit: F.A. Bohdanov Studio, Moscow)

Moscow. Their aim was to plan a lobbying strategy, petitioning the new Soviet government to respect their Mennonite religious, economic, educational, and agricultural ways within the new communist framework of the Soviet Union. Their strategy of negotiation and accommodation proved futile. Most of these men were soon arrested, exiled, or executed. For the names that correspond with the numbers in the photo, see <https://chortitza.org/Phf/Konf.htm>. The names are also listed in Gerhard Lorenz, *Heritage Remembered*, p. 88. This meeting came to be known as the "Second Martyrs' Synod," the first being in 1527 in Augsburg.

While the year 2023 marks the start of the centennial of the Russlaender Mennonites' arrival in Canada, the year 2025 is the centennial of the Second Martyrs' Synod. Seventy-seven Mennonite leaders from the Mennonite communities in Russia gathered under the auspices of the *Kommission für Kirchenangelegenheiten (KfK)* in Moscow in January 1925.

The 1925 gathering took place during the turmoil that accompanied the beginnings of the Soviet collectivization of Russian agriculture and industry. The KfK's agenda was to discuss future directions and ways to ensure basic human rights for the Mennonite community (their religious, economic, educational, and agricultural life) within the emerging Soviet Union. It was a pivotal moment for *Russlaender*, as many were deciding to either stay or emigrate.

The iconic photo of those men in the snow of Moscow¹ reminds us of the historical importance of this meeting for *Russlaender*. The resulting repression of the 77 delegates by the State Political Directorate (GPU) resulted in torture, imprisonment in Gulag camps, and execution of most of the delegates who remained in Russia, hence the designation, Second Martyrs' Synod.² Only 23 of those leaders escaped, with 18 of those finding a new home in Canada.

The leaders who arrived in Canada joined existing Mennonite Brethren or Mennonite Conference churches or helped to form new churches in new settlement areas.³ The following years brought many changes to Canadian Mennonite churches, ongoing adjustments to meet the many new challenges, including yet another World War.

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Ed Krahn (centre) with Viktor Fast (left), in Worms, Germany.

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All the KfK leaders, both in Canada and Russia, have passed on, and the memory of this monumental meeting has become faint in the minds of Mennonites today. My aim is to review the events that led to the meeting and to tell the life stories of “The Faithful 77.”

Family connections

In the late 1950s, after my family moved to Manitoba from Saskatchewan, we returned each summer to Saskatchewan to work our family’s farmland. We also visited my widowed grandmother, Maria (Letkeman) Martens (1886–1965), on a farm north of Tugaska that she had purchased in the late 1930s after moving back from Parkerview district. Parkerview was where the Fürstenland wing of the Eyebrow Tugaska church had moved to in 1932 at the start of the Great Depression.⁴

Grandmother pointed out my grandfather, Johann Martens (1885–1935), in the second row from the bottom, the fourth man from the left in the KfK photo (#10 in the numbered photo). She also pointed to other men whom she knew, including my dad’s uncle from Orenburg, Isaak G. Krahn (1882–1941, #45 in photo). She pointed to Jacob Aron Rempel (1883–1941, #38 in photo) and showed me a photo of him in a Gulag blacksmith shop, a photo she had received in correspondence from the family. I overheard her talking to my mother about writing about other wives and families of the Mennonite leaders who had been at the conference, sometimes getting photos in return. In this way, the women knew whom they were praying for in Canada and in Russia.

In 1974, while I was working at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, J.J. Thiessen visited my mother and me at the museum while on a day trip from a Mennonite conference in Winnipeg. He reminisced about my mother’s time working as a domestic in Saskatoon, associated with the Mädchenheim he directed. Apparently, he knew she skipped Bible studies to go to the movies with her sister!

J.J. Thiessen also joked that my grandfather had been known as the Moses of Fürstenland, but then added perhaps he should have been called the Joshua of Fürstenland, as he had been able to enter the promised land while many had not. Upon my grandfather’s death in 1935, J.J. Thiessen and David Toews took the nine children under their wings.⁵ My grandmother continued to write these two men over the years, honouring them by referring to them with the endearment term of *Onkel*.

While the photo showed 77 men at the Moscow synod, not to be forgotten were the wives and families back in their home villages; they also sacrificed for the leadership roles that their men took on.

Pressure increases on the Russlaender

Until recently, Mennonite historians have written from a very ethnocultural- centric standpoint, situating the Mennonites as a people apart, separate from the world events around them. However, the broader world and national events also impacted the Mennonite response to their circumstances. What were those contextual events? Answers to this question will point to the reasons why some Russlaender left for Canada starting in 1923.

The government’s Russification movement had its start in the late 18th century but gained importance in the 1860s through a concerted attempt to assimilate non-Russian speakers and ethno-religious minority groups. Tsarina Catherine (1729–1796) had recruited German-speaking settlers from Europe to populate the areas of conquest, but this nationalized only the administration of these newly acquired lands, tying them closely to St. Petersburg, without Russifying the new arrivals culturally or religiously.

It was under Nicholas I (1796–1855) that the concept of official nationality arose. The thrust of the campaign was delivered through educational changes under the direction of Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of Education. The goals were aimed at creating a modern Russian nation, united in loyalty to the Tsar, guided morally by the Russian Orthodox Church, and speaking the Russian language. The aim was the total assimilation of non-Russian minorities—eventually, the Asian, Baltic, and German citizens were to adopt the Russian culture.

While Alexander II (1855–1861) did bring some reforms, aggressive Russification continued under his successor with the removal of some of the privileges, such as military exemptions, that the immigrants had received for settlement. This development led to the first wave of Mennonite emigration to North America starting in 1874.

The Russian government was concerned with its western border, seeing the unification of Germany under Chancellor Bismarck as a direct threat. The fact that there

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(Faithful from page 8)

were ethnic minorities on the western border that had cultural ties to Germany and spoke German made the issue even more pressing. The feeling was that a united Germany would soon flex its muscles and turn eastward. Therefore, a more Russian-oriented borderland would be better able to defend the country.

The response of those Mennonites who remained in Russia following the 1874 emigration was to look for a united strategy to respond to these pressures, an all-Mennonite response, one that could speak for Mennonites as a whole. This led to the 1883 formal founding of the *Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinde in Russland*.⁶ At the same time, while Russia was concerned about their German “problem,” the Mennonites were becoming more successful, more united, more German, and with that, more visible.

The evolution toward a united Mennonite front can be charted in distinct phases. From 1883 to 1904, there was an attempt to strength and unify from within. The all-Mennonite Conferences focused on establishing hospitals, special schools, and promoting religious education, along with the publication of a uniform catechism, ministers’ manuals, and conferences to discuss common issues. These efforts were designed to blunt Russification by turning to German educational institutions and publications, including special speakers from Germany coming for Bible conferences.

But most important for Mennonites were the negotiations to find a compromise position with the government over alternative

military service via the Forestry Service option. This led to the appointments of camp directors and special camp ministers, along with fundraising to pay for the camps themselves, a condition of the original conscription compromise with the government.

From February 8, 1904, to September 5, 1905, Russia entered a disastrous war with Japan. The two superpowers fought over territorial ambitions. While the war had little direct impact on Mennonites, the resulting 1905 Russian Revolution had a major long-term effect. A wave of political and social unrest spread across Russia as calls for social reform were directed against the Tsar, nobility, ruling class, and foreign influences. While some reforms did occur, they were muted. The seeds for future unrest and revolution continued to grow.⁷

The 1905 to 1909 period was marked by more turmoil and change in Russia, problems that impacted all Mennonites. In response, more Mennonite groups were asked to join with the *Bundeskonferenz* to broaden the unity of the all-Mennonite front. At the 1906 meeting, it was decided to invite the Mennonite Brethren. By 1910, at the Schoensee meeting, the Mennonite Brethren participated in large numbers in the all-Mennonite Conference.

In preparation for the 1910 conference, the list of delegates and the program had to be submitted to the government for approval prior to proceeding, a new requirement. Once approved, the conference was to be attended by government officials, and all minutes were to be submitted in Russian. Special permission was needed to conduct any sessions in German. In response to this increased workload, a *Glaubenskommission* was appointed in 1910, which later evolved into the KfK as a permanent executive committee to deal directly with the government. Work started on a constitution for an all-Mennonite Conference.

Conferences address Soviet challenges

The first conference held after World War I was the *Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress* in Ohrloff, August 14–18, 1917. It turned out to be the first and the last conference, addressing both economic and cultural interests.⁸ A total of 198 delegates came from across the Mennonite commonwealth. This conference addressed political, cultural, legal, and organizational topics. Presentations were made on the Kerensky provisional government, landownership, agriculture, and Mennonite schools. Delegates represented clergy, lawyers, engineers, farmers, theologians, and educators.

It was decided to establish a formal *Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress* to regulate and administrate the civil matters of the Mennonite commonwealth. But it was not to be, as the *Kongress* never convened again because of the civil war following the Russian Revolution.

The KfK had been established in 1910 as the *Glaubenskommission* to deal with the growing tension with the government. After the Russian Duma stripped Mennonites of their privileges and declared them a sect, the KfK became the main lobbying wing for Mennonites between conferences.

At the 1912 conference, the *Glaubenskommission* was renamed the KfK.⁹ It became the executive committee of the Conference, carrying out the decisions made at the conference and responding quickly to the rapidly changing political environment. It had been decided at the 1917 conference

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that, due to the critical issues facing the Mennonites and the need for rapid response, the chair of the KfK should receive a salary and dedicate himself full-time to the work of the Conference.

The Revolution brought about a temporary pause in activities. The first conference after the Revolution was held in Chortitza in October 1922, during the first year of the Russian famine.¹⁰ Since 1920, the interests of Mennonites had been represented in Moscow by P.F. Froese and C.F. Klassen.

In response to more Soviet pressure, a meeting in Alexanderthal (Alt Samara) called for the constitution of a Mennonite religious and economic union, the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*. But under the laws of the Soviet government, this was disallowed. So, the two different wings separated, with the Mennonite community using the KfK to advocate for matters of the church.

The KfK played a major role in the program planning and delivery of the 1925 Second Martyrs' Synod in Moscow.¹¹ The KfK had submitted in May 1924 a petition to the Soviet government to extend basic human rights to the Mennonite communities. At the 1925 conference, they reported on the success of that petition and sought the approval for the agenda of the upcoming conference.

While the conference reported the success of only one of the “rights” they had lobbied for—to publish their own periodical, *Unser Blatt*—many other decisions were made by the delegates during the sessions and during the tea breaks.¹² The biggest conversation topic was “do we go” or “do we stay,” even though this discussion is not reflected in the minutes. During the conference, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization sent a telegram indicating that they were ready to assist those Mennonites who wished to emigrate to Canada.

Following the conference, the delegates returned to their communities and reported on what they had seen and heard at the conference, each with a different lens. What they did not know at the time was that the window of opportunity to leave was narrowing. The leaders returned to their homes with different visions of the future for the Mennonites in Russia.

Leading up to the conference, among the discouraging messages from the Soviet government, there was the odd positive message, suggesting compromise might be possible. The period of famine and starvation was over. The Soviet government had allowed Mennonite Central Committee to coordinate Western relief efforts in Russia. Crops were better. The New Economic Policy (NEP)¹³ and its liberalization seemed to have lifted the most draconian aspects of the post-Revolution period. Bands of marauders and armies were no longer pillaging and molesting. The Soviets had brought law and order back to village life. The White Army had stopped hostilities in the Russian far east, bringing an end to the civil war. Russian governments in the past had been open to compromise; surely, they would do so again. Did they not need the agricultural and business success of the Mennonites?

What they did not recognize was that the NEP had been Lenin's attempt to allow some of the steam to leave the protests of the peasant class, permitting the fragile Soviet government time to gain full control. While meeting in Moscow in January 1925, the delegates did not see fully

how Stalin, following the death of Lenin, was about to bring in the Iron Fist of collectivized agriculture. The full reign of terror was to begin.

Some delegates, having received word that they were under the watchful eye of the Soviets, returned home and quickly decided to leave as soon as possible, leaving that same year. Others returned and organized an emigration group, such as the 300-plus who left with Johann Peter Bueckert (1879–1958, #46 in photo) from Arkadak.¹⁴ Others brought the Colony's church council together to organize a mass emigration, as was the case for Fürstenland.

Still others, like the Orenburg delegates under Ältester Isaak G. Krahn, my dad's uncle, returned home to preach against emigration. In Orenburg, only a small number, less than 400, under Minister Peter P. Dyck (1874–1957), left for Canada in 1926.¹⁵

Some delegates returned ready to leave, only to find that their congregations did not support such action, as things seemed to be looking up. So, they chose to stay with their congregation. And a few saw themselves as too old to uproot and emigrate.

Several individuals took the initiative to leave with their family or in small family units. At the Petrovka estate, eight of the 13 families left for Canada, organizing their own emigration under the direction of Heinrich Peter Loewen (1884–1950).¹⁶

Strategy of accommodation fails

Starting in late 1927, Stalin started his “Revolution from Above,” which included nationalization of industrial production, abolition of the

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market, collectivization of agricultural lands, domination of the Communist Party, and institution of his absolute power.

The reign of terror began with a direct attack on landlords, industrialists, and those associated with the old regime. Engineers, teachers, academics, kulaks (farmers who owned their land), and clergy were identified as “enemies of the state.” Those Mennonite ministers who had been associated with alternative military service were earmarked for early arrest. Delegates from the Second Martyrs’ Synod started to be arrested in 1927. The Soviets knew who the Mennonite leaders were from the subscription list of the Unser Blatt, the only right from their list of petitions that they managed to negotiate in 1925!

The Mennonite strategy of seeking political accommodation through direct negotiations with the government was now dead.

Fifty-eight of the Faithful 77 did not emigrate; they were targeted for arrest, exile, and death. Being clergy, landowners, teachers, and merchants, they had several strikes against them. A few, like Peter Friedrichson (1866–1926, #15 in photo), were fortunate to die in their own beds of natural causes. The rest faced the full wrath of the Iron Fist. Indeed, it was the Second Martyrs’ Synod.

Endnotes

1. Aron A. Toews, *Mennonitische Maertyrer* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1949), 157–159. The Moscow photographer was F.A. Bohdanov. See also <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/all-mennoniteconference-in-moscow-in-1925>.

2. The first being in 1527, when some 60 Anabaptists gathered in Augsburg, Germany, to strategize next steps for the young movement. Most of these participants were also killed for their faith.
3. Gerhard I. Peters, *Remembering Our Leaders: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1902–1977* (Clearbrook: Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, 1982), 14–40.
4. Bert Friesen, “Eyebrow Mennonite Church (Eyebrow, Saskatchewan, Canada), (1928–),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), 2021; and Marlene Epp, “Parkerview Mennonite Church (Parkerview/Fitzmaurice, Saskatchewan, Canada),” *GAMEO*, 1989.
5. J.J. Thiessen, “Obituary of Johann Johann Martens,” *Der Bote*, May 22, 1935, p. 3.
6. Cornelius Krahn, “Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Russland,” *GAMEO*, 1955.
7. Dominic Lieve, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2015), 182–224.
8. Cornelius Krahn, “Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress (Russia),” *GAMEO*, 1955.
9. Krahn, “Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz.”
10. Harold S. Bender and Elmer Neufeld, “Mennonite Central Committee (International),” *GAMEO*, 1987.
11. John B. Toews, *Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1976), 428–438.
12. Ibid.
13. Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 68–98.
14. Peter Letkemann, *A Book of Remembrance: Mennonites in Arkadak and in Zentral, 1908–1941* (Winnipeg: Old Oak Publishing, 2016).
15. Peter P. Dyck, *Orenburg am Ural: die Geschichte einer mennonitischen Ansiedlung in Russland* (Clearbrook: Christian Bookstore, 1951). (Note: This book is viewable online, <https://www.mharchives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Dyck-Peter-Orenburg-Oct-2022.pdf>).
16. Heinrich “Henry” Peter Loewen, Find A Grave Memorial, 131417777, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/131417777/heinrich_henry-peter-loewen.

Edward “Ed” Krahn is a Historian and former Cultural/Heritage worker. His first job while a student in 1974 was as the summer manager of the Mennonite Historical Village in Steinbach, the centennial year of the arrival of Mennonites to Manitoba. In 1976-1977, he became the museum’s first year-round employee as the curator/manager. He became the Director of the Estevan National Exhibition Centre (1977-1981) and then worked for the Heritage Unit of the Manitoba Government. Leaving for Yukon in 1984, he was the first manager of the Museums Program of the Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture. His efforts there were recognized with the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012.

Having moved back to Manitoba, his current major project is the research and recognition of those 77 delegates who attended the Second Martyrs’ Synod in Moscow in January 1925. He continues to document the history of that event, along with writing auxiliary articles related to this iconic conference, held 100 years ago in the snows of Moscow.

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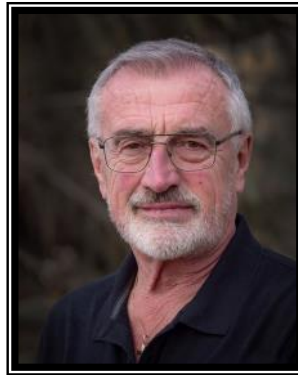
(Faithful from page 11)

Currently, he sits on the Board of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the EastMenn Heritage Committee. Ed may be reached at edgkrabn@gmail.com. ❖

Anabaptism at 500: Know Your Place

By Jake Froese

The occasion of this writing must begin with a little commentary about editors. Editors know that communication is more than words written, a skill that is essential wherever people try to understand one another in whatever medium. A written piece needs to be unique, creative and satisfying for the reader, the writer, and the editor. Yes, it is an art form. The request of me is to write something about Anabaptism at 500. Not only that, our editor knows me well enough to know that historical accuracy and detail might better be provided by someone else. I have been asked to write as a preacher!



Jake Froese

Preachers and People

I am pleased that some preacherly content has been deemed appropriate for this edition of the *Chronicle*, a publication usually in pursuit of stories about somebody's grandma or grandpa. Anabaptism has always had a love-hate relationship with preachers. This is a statement I would not have ventured during the years I was serving as a pastor (diplomacy? job security?). Now with this pointed request, however, and reflecting on my personal experiences and granted the luxury of retirement thinking and reading, *I cannot but speak of what I have seen and heard*. Yes, that is biblical (Acts 4:20). I see evidence of that love-hate all around.

Mennonite history, Anabaptist history - call it what you will - is not a history of preaching. It is a history of history, of emigration, of immigration, of suffering, hard work, successes and failures. (Have you been to the movies recently?)¹ At this anniversary time, it is easy to celebrate the 500 years complete with professional planners, travel agents and tour guides - a time for holidays, perhaps some learning, but not much preaching. This is similar to all churches these years, at least in the western hemisphere. Modern urban Mennonites shy away from any church or fellowship that smells too much of preaching, opting instead for discernment in face of modern-day focuses like being hospitable and/or inclusive or welcoming. If we want preaching, the choice for many is the non-Mennonite option easily available on the other side of town or on television, many still reserving their financial donations for tax deductible 'overseas mission projects' where apparently preaching is still important [Note: Mennonite World Conference today registers 2.13 million baptized believers, two-thirds of those in Africa, Asia or Latin America. No fear of preachers there.]ⁱⁱ A personal friend of mine, now well into his 90s, will tell me every time we visit, "Don't ask me if I am a Christian. Just watch how I live."² Interestingly, this slightly leaning view-

point, after a number of repeats, also sounds like a sermon to me!

Preaching, or proclamation, regardless of modern-day opinion-ating, was there at the beginning in the 16th Century. As most historians will tell us, the Reformation followed on the heels of the printing press, a populace beginning to read for themselves. It was this possibility of information which allowed both the student and the commoner to find information, especially regarding spiritual matters, which to date had been explained and provided by the clergy. Understandably, the eager learners of the day were what we might label as undergrads - a studious young generation, the first to take advantage of new reading material, and making discoveries regarding everybody's interests. It is these discoveries shared with common folk that became the Reformation driving force. That early story already gives a hint of why preaching was important, carefully listened to, and even then bringing on some misunderstandings, and indeed some interesting personalities among the preachers.³ Even among some misguided misunderstandings and personalities, a gentle priest named Menno Simons came along with his considerable gift of pastoral care. A new take on the gospel, a new way to live.

The new way to live was a movement away from the Catholic as well as the Protestant Church. Catholicism is the church which requires the Eucharist and that provided by the priests who also listened to confessions, and of course, determined the after-death status of the faithful as well as the unfaithful. Protestantism railed against this, especially the selling of Indulgences, claiming that salva-

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tion is through none other than Jesus Christ, which must be preached from the pulpit. Anabaptists agreed totally with the Protestants, except that salvation in Jesus is not only a state of being, but also a state of living, and that is available whenever, wherever *two or three are gathered* ... (Matthew 18:20), not only from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. It was this 'third way' which took hold especially among the peasants and commoners. The teachings, group interpretations, and whatever the consequences became the new way. Many New Testament scriptures became the rallying cry. Two samples: One from the gospels, *Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"* (John 14:6); and one from the epistles, *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ* (1 Corinthians 3:11).

Congregational Authority

Now here is an irony. The leaders of this peoples' movement were the ones who had studied hard, prayed hard, and now, along with the commoners, were even willing to die for their convictions. This was very different than the ordered official appointments within the Catholic as well as the Protestant Churches, both cooperating with the political authorities as required in each Saxon. The radical actions of these "*schwaermer*"^{iv} (swarmers) daring to break from political subservience were there thanks to the proclamation of preachers finding their authority not by appointment from the higher-ups but from eager listeners who were hungry for what they were now learning.

Obviously, that early contro-

versial preaching grew out of the study, dialogue, and was then preached by the very ones making the discoveries. Powerful preaching always comes from those who share openly from biblical discovery. Sleepy time preaching comes from those who try to explain complex biblical truths, maybe try to impress the listeners, or because it's a job. The listeners usually fall asleep.

So, although the spoken word is essential in today's Anabaptist churches, the preachers are not dependent on authorization from the higher-ups. The message is more powerful than that! There are many ways of communicating and practicing the Word of God. Within our worldwide fellowship of Anabaptists, there are many practices, including liturgies, preachers still unpaid and with limited education, and of course, many with seminary training, doctorates becoming commonplace, especially in city churches. Anabaptism accommodates this whole spectrum. To me, one of the most endearing qualities of Anabaptism is not only congregational autonomy but congregational authority. Even with assistance from denominational bishops or executive ministers, the people in the congregations make the call. No pastors are required to have the M.Div, D.Min, or other required education. My personal experience coincides with this. I was ordained to pastoral ministry with only Bible School and an undergraduate degree, very shortly after beginning service in a small-town congregation. After only a few years' service in that setting, I felt the need for seminary and clinical training. Thereafter, with further qualifications and years of urban professional ministry, including the successes and failures of it all, I still recognize the divine Call which came from that small town church, Herbert, Saskatchewan, where nobody cared how much education this young minister had or didn't have.

As Anabaptists, our holy life and ministry happen within the gathered community, and our theology forbids any preacher from claiming that s/he is proclaiming the truth. There is, however, a wonderful freedom to "preach it as one sees it."^v The love-hate part comes in naturally because our theology requires preachers to proclaim as servants, a problem for some preachers as well as some congregants. The preacher cannot even pretend to proclaim the truth until the people say "Amen." And the assembled people must have a listening maturity enough to respond honestly on occasions when the word from the pulpit may need a corrective or further discussion, or prayer. That is everyone's privilege and everyone's responsibility. We need only read a few examples of Jesus' ministry in the New Testament to realize his teaching often led to many questions, sometimes outright disagreement, and eventually his death on the cross. *Then he called the crowd to him along with*



Seminary Travels. Verna and the two oldest, Bentley and Adrienne, somewhere in Upper Michigan. 1976.

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his disciples and said:
"Whoever wants to be my
disciple
must deny themselves and
take up their cross and
follow me" (Mark 8:34,
Matthew 16:24, Luke
9:23 NIV).

This overview of early beginnings, somewhat anecdotal (apologies to my friends the historians), indicates the great importance of the spoken word, but always aware of authority among the people, hence the title of this article, which may cause some distraction for the querying reader. The title is an instruction and almost appears a bit directive (bossy)? The instructive tone, "know your place" (2nd person singular or plural) is intentional. Given our understanding that

God's word comes not only via pulpit or altar, the theme of this article is absolute equality for all - not only the preachers and the listeners, but everybody in, as the hockey coaches will say (It's Stanley Cup playoff time). Full equality is not only a theological concept, but an experience which is best understood by knowing your place, again with much biblical support, especially reference to gifts of the spirit as per 1 Corinthians 12, *There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work* (:4-6). The greatest gift of Anabaptism is the level playing field, and the best way to experience that is to take your place when you know your place. "Take your Place at the Table", a folksy tune, comes to mind once recorded by Kim Thiessen, a former employee of Mennonite Central Committee Alberta.^{vi} Anabaptism is a unique contributor as well as a receptor among all.^{vii} We give and we receive!

This year of anniversary celebrations is a call within the community to recognize and claim our individual and our corporate giftedness, not only to fellow Christians, but to all faith communities, including the atheists in our



After worship, Trinity Mennonite, De Winton, AB



Aiden Scherzinger, Associate Pastor, Calgary Foothills Mennonite



Two preachers visiting a factory, Two Hills, AB, April 2024

neighbourhoods, in some of our families and even in church communities. Yup! Know your place, a way of keeping everyone humble and also very important!

It is time to bring this to a conclusion. These words are written to 'us' equally important in our unique brand of the Christian faith. I was born into an Old Colony Mennonite farm family, and with the encouragement of my parents who obviously recognized my interests, most of my lifetime has been among the 'educated and progressive' ones. Now in retirement, I am becoming aware that a great gift to our Anabaptist worldwide presence comes from the most conservative and unassuming members of this, our unique Christian community. I could now spell out many future implications and possibilities, but my good friend, our editor, will not be happy if I were to continue on and on about that. Very briefly, therefore, I conclude with a short list of some seed thoughts for the next 500 years, Lord willing.

1. Anabaptists, among other reli-

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My parents, Peter and Susan Froese, Osler, SK. Trips to and from Alberta, the go-to place for our children always grandma and grandpa.

gions (not only Christian). One enjoyable involvement for me in the last several years has been the Calgary Interfaith Council. I have found here a greater receptivity to my Mennonite identity than any of the ministerial associations I have participated in over the years. The surprise to me has been the easy welcome to my self-identity as Mennonite and evangelical. One friend in this community, aware of an Anabaptist tagline being used these days, “neither Catholic nor Protestant”^{viii}, recently said with tongue in cheek, “both Catholic and Protestant”. It seems to me that, especially in today’s painfully broken world, Anabaptists are much needed in Interfaith fellowships and/or service projects wherever they emerge in our neighbourhoods. No need for expensive touristy mission trips.

2. Evangelism is essential if Anabaptism will continue. Recent meetings in our circles include many consultations with experts and resource persons to help us wisely discern current social issues

like environment and indigenous relations, along with implications for our peace witness and inclusivity, with much emphasis on education and open-mindedness. All this is important, but cannot be at the expense of the invitation to accept Jesus as Saviour and Lord (John 3:3) and be baptized upon that confession. That was a distinctive of our forebears back there in the 16th century.

3. Who can celebrate this anniversary year, 2025? Out of necessity, many of us have had to ignore the publicity and promos set up by organizers and planners, including impressive historical and scenic tours of Switzerland, Germany, and surrounding European hotspots. This celebration is not for those of us with limited income, and also not for our large portion of conservative Anabaptists who do not even know what happened on January 21, 1525.

4. Celebrations in context. I would have appreciated if our anniversary information also provided some reference to other Christian communities celebrating this year. Perhaps it would be good, even after the May 29 ceremony in Zurich, to research other celebrations going on this year. For example, I recently attended a concert in a local United Church. During intermission, I stumbled upon a display informing of an anniversary for many of our Canadian neighbours. June 10, 1925, was the beginning of the United Church of Canada when the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists joined forces. In our multicultural, pluralistic world, and with our ‘community of believers’ mindset, it would be appropriate to exchange greetings with these neighbours, especially in our continuing desire to be a peace church.

5. Mennonite World Conference, also begun in 1925, is a big player in this year’s celebrations. Now this curious preacher has a question for my historian friends. Was there any awareness of the United Church beginning that same year?



Fish Creek Interfaith. Making sandwiches for Mustard Seed at St Paul’s Anglican.



Another Anniversary in the Neighbourhood

Endnotes

1. E.g. Miriam Toews, *Women Talking* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018) now a movie <https://www.en.wikipedia.org/womentalking/> and another

(See *Anabaptism* on page 16)

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movie just out, Dale Hildebrand, *Where the Cottonwoods Grow*, a historical movie <https://www.mmhs.org/cottonwoods/>.

2. <https://www.mwc-cmm.org>.

3. William Loewen, *Free Radicals: A historical story-telling podcast* highlighting events from the radical fringes of church history. <https://www.freeradicalspod.com/>.

4. Thieleman J. van Bracht, *Martyrs Mirror: The Story of Seventeen Centuries of Christian Martyrdom From the Time of Christ to A.D. 1660* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1938).

5. See recent blogpost, "Conviction and Instructions," <https://www.jcfroomthoughts.blogspot.com/>.

6. Kim Thiessen and Darryl Neustaedter Barg, *Take Your Place* (CD to end AIDS, 2010). <https://www.mcc.org/>.

7. "Many Hearts One Rhythm" a recent concert by Concino Chorus at MacDougal United Church, Calgary May 3, 2025, celebrating the contribution of Indigenous drumming circles to a choir concert, including references to the Pentecostal Church's contribution to Christian communication, *Glossolalia*, the gift of tongues. Good reminder, there are charismatics in many Anabaptist communities.

8. Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (Waterloo: Conrad Press, 1973).



Amsterdam Catholic Church with organ

and 1600s, using the organ as part of a worship service was seen as a part of the outward form and symbolism that represented the Catholic church.

Jake Froese is the oldest of twelve in an Old Colony Mennonite family. After college graduation, he was called to pastoral ministry and ordained at age 26, followed by seminary and clinical training, and then pastorates in Saskatoon, Edmonton and Calgary, where he and his wife Verna are now retired. They have four children and two teenage grandchildren. ❖

Organs in Mennonite Churches

by Brent Wiebe

It is a common misconception among Mennonites that most of our practices have always been unique among nominal Christian denominations. This is not true. While some of our ways of doing things seem strange to modern society, it might surprise you to learn how many of those things were once mainstream among Protestant churches. Let's look at one such item.

GAMEO, the online encyclopedia telling the story of Mennonite history, has condensed stories of dozens of congregations. The important events from the life of the church community will often be summarized in a few paragraphs. Outstanding happenings are noted, as well as some membership records, and perhaps a mention of the renovation or construction of a new church building. This article looks at another important event that is often mentioned. This is the installation of an organ in the church.

Sometimes this noteworthy step was accompanied by controversy and division. Other times, it is just seen as a step ahead in the life of the congregation. Today, the presence of musical instruments in churches is the norm rather than the exception, but for many Protestant Christians of the 1500s

The Reformation Era

In the Netherlands, where the theology of reformer John Calvin had led to the establishment of the Dutch Reformed Church, organs had *en masse* been removed from church buildings. Calvin made the following comments on musical instruments.

1557 - "Musical instruments, in celebrating the praises of God, would be no more suitable than the burning of incense, the lighting up of lamps, and the restoration of the other shadows of the law. ... Men who are fond of outward pomp may delight in that noise; but the simplicity which God recommends to us by the apostle is far from pleasing to Him."

1562-1563 "It would be nothing but mimicry if we followed David today in singing with cymbals, flutes, tambourines and psalteries. In fact, the papists were seriously deceived in their desire to worship God with their pompous inclusion of organs, trumpets, oboes and similar instruments. That has only served to

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(Organs from page 16)



John Calvin

amuse the people in their vanity and to turn them away from the true institution which God has ordained. In a word, the musical instruments were in the same class as sacrifices, candelabra, lamps and similar things."

By 1574, the Dutch Reformed Church made the following official statement at the Synod of Dortrecht – "Concerning the play of organs in the church, *one holds that it should be completely removed.*"

Across the Atlantic, the English-speaking Puritans would have agreed with Calvin on this point. They *"held strict views about the introduction of anything "popish" in the ritual, and organs fell into this classification. Many clergymen roundly denounced the organ, and some of the more determined churches remained without organs until the middle of the nineteenth century."*

The same would have been the case among the separatist Puritans known as Pilgrims at the Plymouth colony, where the Mayflower landed in 1620. *"Melodies were mostly caught by ear and caught from an actual singing voice, not from an organ, harpsichord or similar instrument. They were thought of as pure melodies, not as contours of a flowing stream of keyboard*

harmony. And they were amalgamated with actual words, text and tune standing as one indissoluble unity."

Interestingly, the Dutch Reformed Church's powerful opposition to the use of the organ was relatively short-lived. By 1640, we read that their churches again had full-time organists in their employ.



English Puritans - (American Pilgrims)

Mennonite and Anabaptist Voices

During the persecution, hymn singing in Anabaptist-Mennonite meetings was practiced as circumstances permitted it. ... Not until 1765 was a pipe organ placed in a Dutch Mennonite meetinghouse." – GAMEO

Menno Simons

Menno Simons spoke little about the use of musical instruments. In the setting he lived in, he likely had little reason to speak out against the use of the organ, as all around him the reformed were clamouring to rid their churches of these "Catholic" instruments of worship. But in at least two places Menno wrote sharply against those who *"use in their services crosses, ointments, caps, togas, unclean purifications, and have cloisters, chapels, bells, organs, music, masses, offerings, &c., of which there is not a word to be found in the Scriptures."* He also mentioned church choirs and organs when writing of Babylon the Great in Revelations 17:3. *"The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour - in celebrations, churches, bells, choirs, organs..."*

Post-Persecution Years

"After persecution ended, hymn singing was regularly practiced. ... musical instruments, including organs, were not tolerated as being too worldly." -GAMEO

Mennonites also had another concern about the use of the organ. Not only was it Popish (Catholic). It was also *"worldly."*

Organs Enter the Mennonite Churches Acceptance Among Dutch Mennonites

Before long, it seems that most of the concern about the use of musical instruments among Reformed churches began to fade. Something changed



Menno Simons

(See Organs on page 18)

(Organs from page 17)

in the Dutch Mennonite churches as well, and organs were installed in many churches. What exactly led to this is not clear.

“The use of the reed organ and pipe organ in worship was introduced into the Dutch Mennonite churches in the fourth quarter of the 18th century (first case in Utrecht in 1765), but not until considerably later elsewhere.”

The architecture of the churches was forced to take the new instruments into account. This meant a big change for the once plain churches like the one from Zaandam, Netherlands.

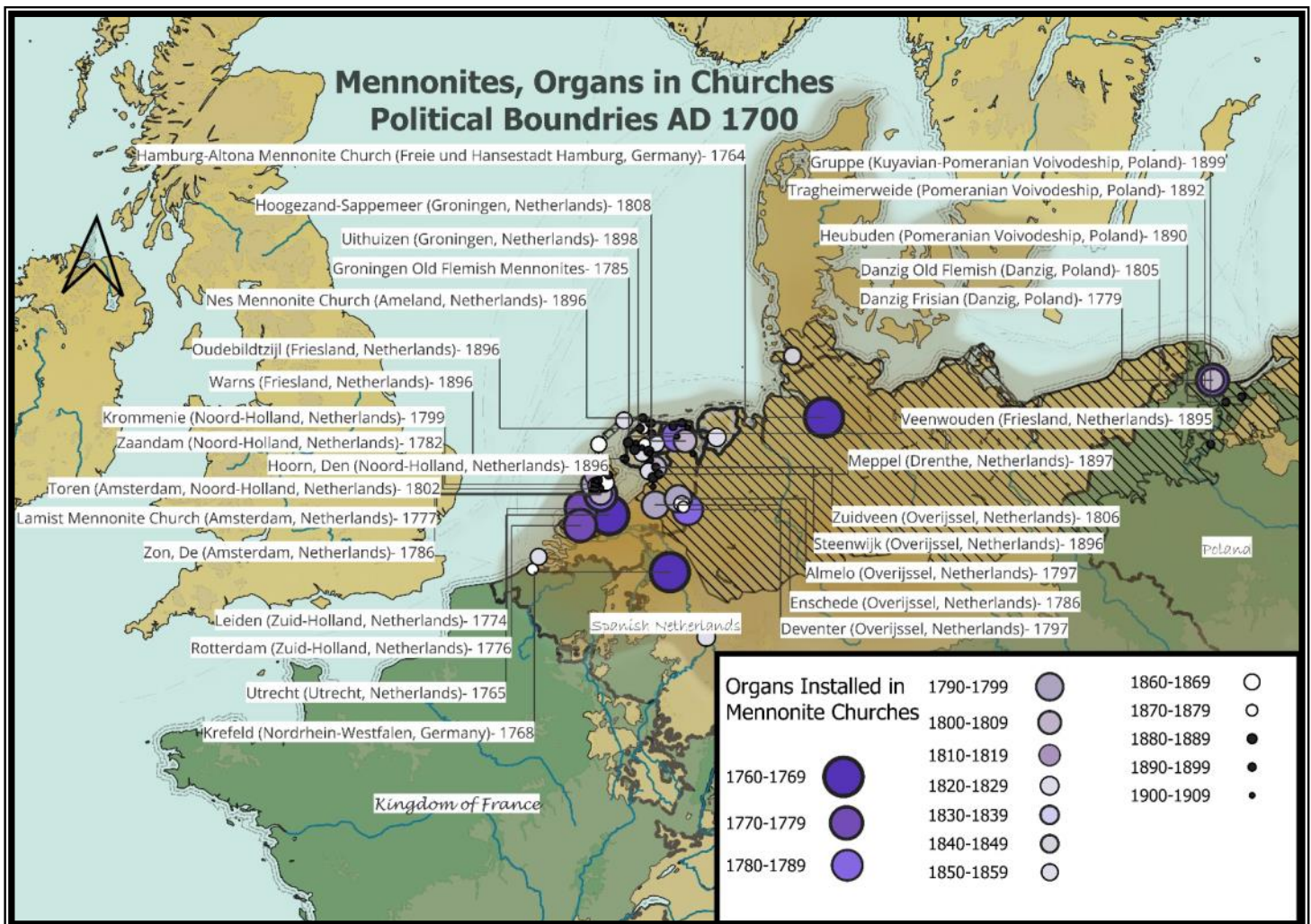
The pulpits and organs were often positioned after the pattern of the Protestant churches. In his



Groenigen Old Flemish Church,
Zandaam, NL – Virtual

book *Music in Protestant Worship*, author Dwight Steere gives a general description of the Protestant churches and the changes that followed the introduction of the organ.

“... the church ceased to be a holy place and was turned into an auditorium. ..., and the pulpit, now become a desk set on a high platform, took ... central place. The ministers' seats faced those of the congregation, so that the clergy could look over the crowd and, in their turn, be in full view of the people. The choir, regarded as a performing unit, was placed on a still higher level, immediately behind the pulpit, where it might be seen and duly admired. Then why not let the people have a lovely view of gilded organ pipes



Map by Brent Wiebe

(See Organs on page 19)

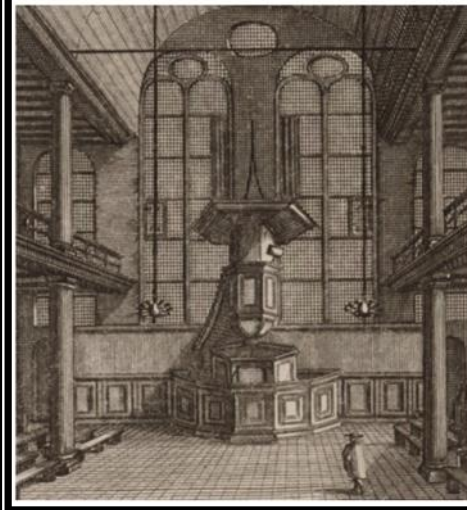
(Organs from page 18)

communion table. Joining the Old Flemish, even from another Mennonite group, required being baptized into their church.

The Frisian Mennonite church of Danzig had already installed its organ some years earlier, in 1779 approximately 15 years after the first Mennonite group in Amsterdam had acquired theirs. This caused some opposition, as was recorded by Frisian Elder Heinrich Donner in his May 5, 1779, diary entry.

"This spring, the Danzig congregation installed an organ in its church building, and it was played for the first time on March 14th, which aroused opposition from several members."

Another disapproving voice expressed opposition in the 1918 publication entitled Montau Gruppe-



Amsterdam Flemish Mennonite Church - before and after the installation of the pipe organ

behind the choir, and what did it matter that the visible pipes were fakes?"

The once strict Old Flemish congregations installed the massive and beautiful pipe organs. These two pictures illustrate the architectural changes that took place in the Amsterdam Flemish Church known as the Church of the Sun. It is clear from the illustrations that the impressive pipe organ was the centrepiece of the church.

Poland

In Danzig, two Mennonite congregations had lived side by side for some two centuries. Through wars, sickness, and changing political scenes, they had each maintained their distinct views of what it meant to be a Mennonite and how they understood the concept of a brotherhood or church.

The Danzig Old Flemish had always upheld a strict understanding of a one true church. Meanwhile, the Frisian Mennonites across the city were somewhat less conservative, especially in regard to admitting non-members to their

*"In 1779, the Danzig Mennonite congregation began to use an **organ** for singing in their house of preaching and prayer, which has been done only out of spiritual arrogance, which hardly promotes devotion."*

25 years later and amid great controversy, the Old Flemish group at Danzig also decided to buy a large organ. A number of other churches followed suit. Shortly after, during the Russian siege of 1813, both Mennonite churches were burned. This may have, in part, led to the unification of these groups as they built one new church together in Danzig and dedicated it in 1819. This was called the United Mennonite Church. This church, which still stands today, was furnished with a large organ. It was around this time



United Mennonite Church, Danzig with organ

(See Organs on page 20)

(Organs from page 19)

that many of my forefathers moved to Ukraine. Klaas Reimer (founder of the Kleine Gemeinde) was ordained as a minister in Poland in 1801 and spoke of the churches in his native Poland as *"sinful Babylon"*. In 1804, he moved to Ukraine, hoping to find a church there more satisfactory to his ideals and in accordance with his beliefs.

Meanwhile, in the Danzig countryside churches, things were different. Not until 1890 would the large 1768 Heubuden Flemish meeting house receive an organ. Like the Danzig church, the organ was installed on the side of the sanctuary, instead of in front and above the speaker.



Heubuden Mennonite Church Poland countryside, with organ

Mennonites in Germany

Many of the first Mennonites to settle in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in the late 1600s were from Krefeld, Germany. Among these were American Mennonite reformer John Holdeman's Dutch ancestors. The situation in Krefeld was much the same as among the Dutch and Polish churches. All forms of music other than congregational singing were



Friedrich von der Leyen (1701-1788)



Heinrich von der Leyen (1708-1782)

frowned on. Then, two Mennonite brothers, Friedrich and Heinrich of the wealthy van Leyen family, donated a portion of their vast holdings to the church for the purchase of an organ and also to fund the education of trained preachers. The organ was installed in 1768, and the congregation continued to become more and more like the neighbouring Protestant churches. The musi-

cal legacy of the Klefeld congregation probably led to what, a century later, turned into a long friendship between the local Krefeld Mennonite families and the world-renowned musician Johannes Brahms.

Puritan Churches - Boston, Massachusetts

Times were changing in America, too, and the Puritan churches felt inclined to add this feature to their worship services. The vote for a new statement of faith allowing this occurred on June 4th, 1786. One month later, on July 17th of the same year, the church voted to pay an organist a salary. This was in the same time frame as when the Dutch and Polish Mennonite churches made the same decision.

John Wesley- London, England

The famous founder of the Methodist church, who lived from 1703-1791 and travelled in many countries, including the USA, was strongly against musical instruments in church buildings. His words had an edge to them. *"I have no objection to instruments of music in our chapels, provided they are neither heard nor seen."*

Mennonites - Russia and North America

While the Mennonite Brethren introduced some musical instruments into their services during the turbulent years of their founding, Gnadenfeld, Molotschna Colony, was the only Mennonite village in Ukraine that eventually installed an organ in their church. That probably explains why those who moved to Canada and the USA in the 1870s didn't initially use them in their church buildings, either.

(See Organs on page 21)

(Organs from page 20)

"[The organ] was little used in Russia at any time, and was still not permitted in the more conservative groups in North America in the 1950s, including, for instance, the Mennonite Church (MC). It came into general use in the other American groups about the turn of the 20th century. About one-third of North American Mennonites in the 1950s used the organ or piano in worship."

This illustration is from the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, Manitoba and



Restored church, Steinbach, MB

shows how similar the buildings constructed in Manitoba were to those in the Polish countryside. The one in Steinbach shows that organs were not installed in these churches.

Alexanderwohl Mennonite Church, Goessel, Kansas

"An organ was first added to the Alexanderwohl worship space in 1943. ... In time, chorister-led congregational singing made way for organist-led hymns..."

The Continuing Controversy

In 1968, the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary in Elkhart, Indiana, was geared for the installation of an organ into its Sermon on the Mount Chapel. In a unique turn of events, an ultimately unsuccessful

protest was held by students who stood against this development. The installation went forward, but for some time, the school newspaper still received and published letters such as the following.

"Organs are part and parcel of the broader, established middle and upper class American Christendom (which is identified with and part of the church-state image). It is from this style of church that the Anabaptists/Mennonites separated themselves over 400 years ago, and from which we have sought to differentiate ourselves

ever since. We feel

that our Anabaptist/Mennonite emphases on simplicity, modesty, brotherhood, discipleship, and stewardship are not in accord with the mainstream of American Christendom nor with an expensive organ." - signed by Denny Weaver"

Portion of a letter to Goshen College Church Music Conference in 1963

It was written in firm opposition to the introduction of pipe organs into Mennonite worship services. *"Change is not always a sign of growth but could also be a sign of shrivelling, death, and decay."*

Dedication Traditions

In many Mennonite groups, over the span of just a generation or two, the organ has gone from being forbidden to being given a special prayer of dedication upon its first use. This 1965 picture from Yarrow, B.C., shows just such a scene.

More Recent Developments

A week or two ago, while browsing in the local MCC thrift store, I picked up a 1993 conference histo-

ry of the Manitoba Sommerfelder churches. Each congregation had a brief summary of their activities and significant developments. I was struck that of the 13 congregations listed, 10 had installed organs in the years 1987 or



AMBS, Elkhart, Indiana with organ



Wes Heinrichs, Yarrow, B.C.

(See Organs on page 22)

(Organs from page 21)

1988. Similar to the Dutch churches in the 1780s, the change was fast. Possibly it had been held back until it came through with a rush.

The Testimony of Architecture

This picture of the former worship building of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite congregation at Winton, California church shows the traditional Dutch architecture that shaped its design. The raised platform and balcony clearly resemble the Mennonite churches pictured in this article. Significantly, the plain church appearance and lack of musical instruments are a testimony to the belief and practice regarding the question of musical accompaniment and congregational singing.

Personal Closing

Thoughts on Congregational Singing

In my experience, a cappella singing as a congregation or with friends has been an important part of my life. One of my earliest memories relating to this was my grandma Violet Wiebe picking the song "Amazing Grace" for me when I was about five years old. (It was my favourite hymn at that time because my mom had just finished reading me a story of the author John Newton's life.) Church was sometimes boring and hard to sit through, but the simple congregational singing was always an enjoyable break. Today, I smile when my young son's clear voice rises from the church benches. The absence of an organ is not felt as old and young, strong and faltering voices blend together in both time-tested and more recently penned hymns.



Former worship building of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite at Winton, CA

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(See Organs on page 23)

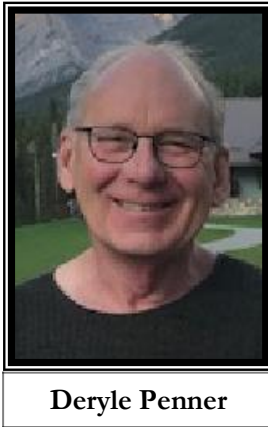
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Barney Hamm, Self-taught Conservationist Who Made a Difference

By Deryle Penner

This is a short snapshot about the life of my great-uncle Bernhard (Barney) Hamm and his extraordinary work to preserve and protect a population of trumpeter swans in northern Alberta.



Deryle Penner

According to the 1901 Canadian census, Barney was born in the Municipality of Rhineland, Manitoba, on July 23, 1900. He was the eighth of twelve children born to Jacob Hamm and Sara Sawatzky, who immigrated from South Russia and arrived in Canada on July 27, 1875. My grandma, Helena Penner (Driedger), nee Hamm, was Barney's older sister; she was the third child in that family.

Barney attended primary school from grade 1 to 3 and then spent an additional few months in grade 5. Reading and writing were all that was required for farming, the expected career choice for a boy at the time. At some point, the Hamm's, like many others, moved

from Manitoba to Saskatchewan. As a child, Barney spent many days wandering the coulees and edges of the nearby Saskatchewan River, fostering a lifelong interest in nature and wildlife. His fascination with animals led him to take up taxidermy, a practice that involves preserving and mounting animal specimens for display and study. He likely did this through a mail-in course.

Where his interest in wildlife and conservation began is a question that has always intrigued and mystified his family. In his growing-up environment, he would not likely have had access to books, literature, or anyone with knowledge of conservation or environmental issues.

One day, when Barney was about twelve years old, he was sent out to bring in the cows before the arrival of a threatening storm. While running through the woods, a branch caught his eye, which resulted in the loss of sight in that eye. The impaired vision did not prevent him from spotting birds when they were still invisible to others, however.

From a dated photograph, by 1932, Barney had already built up a diverse collection of mounted birds. These were displayed in wood cases, which he would take to schools and give lectures on conservation. It's not known whether this work was done from his family home or elsewhere.

Aganetha Dick was the teacher at the Riverdell School (near Swift Current) when Barney came out to give one of his lectures. It must have been love at first sight, because soon after, in 1933, they were married in the Mennonite Brethren Church in Main Centre, where they also became members.

A family came next. Between 1933 and 1939, the Hamm couple had four children, all born in Saskatchewan. Son Harvey recalled that "My father had read about the great Peace River Country for some years and noted that while we had drought in Southern Saskatchewan, the Peace had rain. For quite some time, he had been dreaming about moving to this northern area. During the winter of 1940-41, the seeds of this dream became a reality in March of 1941."

Barney and Agnes, and their four children, eventually left the drought-stricken Saskatchewan plains, arriving in the Peace country sometime in April 1941. They spent the first few weeks with the George Warkentins while Barney worked for some of the local farmers in the area. They lived in Crooked Creek for the first year and then moved to the La Glace area, a small community northwest of Grande Prairie. Here, Barney worked in agriculture during the summer and pursued hunting, trapping, and taxidermy in the winter. What became obvious as time went on was that he had zero practical interest in farming.

According to Harvey, "My father was unable to find work for the winter, so he hunted rabbits which he skinned and then sold the hides for a dime apiece. This was the year of the rabbit. For a large portion of the winter, he would shoot about eighty rabbits a day out of a 15-acre willow patch. They were reproducing so quickly that he did not run out of rabbits. Eight dollars a day was a good wage in those days. Not only did he sell the pelts, but we enjoyed a lot of rabbit stew."

Growing up, I personally heard the odd tale of Barney's marksmanship from my dad, Toby Penner, Barney's nephew. These were always extraordinary, but one in particular was confirmed by Darlene. "We heard the story

(See Barney on page 24)

(Barney from page 23)

of a Sunday afternoon family gathering of the Hamm families in Herbert, where dad was challenged with hitting a coin tossed into the air using a twenty-two rifle. The proof that this had happened became known when a young boy picked up the coin, which had a bullet indent in it, that Barney had gifted to him. Years later, at a Hamm family reunion in Olds, the story was recounted at a talent show where Barney's oldest grandson, Burl, was presented the coin." An amazing talent for a man with only one eye.

There were various moves locally before the Hamm's were able to purchase a more permanent home in 1943 on Saskatoon Mountain. But if Agnes's school was distant, they would "often live in a teacherage provided on the school property during the school term."

In 1944, Barney was hired by Ducks Unlimited to begin a study of the migratory flight patterns of the waterfowl. He continued this until he was assigned to the protection of the trumpeters.

From 1945 to 1948, Barney worked for Ducks Unlimited, banding birds at La Glace Lake. His deep understanding of wildlife led to his appointment as a Migratory Bird Officer for the federal government in 1949.

By the mid-1950s, Barney held the unique title of Swan Guardian of the Alberta Peace River, working to protect the trumpeter swans that nested in the region. His efforts ensured that these majestic birds, once nearly wiped out, had a fighting chance at survival. From April until late fall, he would do what he could to protect the birds and their eggs.

In 1954, a fire destroyed Barney's complete collection of birds of Alberta, and the family moved to Sexsmith, which was to be their last move.

Barney had by now become well-known for his educational outreach, bringing taxidermy specimens into classrooms throughout the South Peace to teach children about nature. His visits to local schools are well-documented:

- **April 25, 1955** – Catholic High School, Sexsmith: *"1:30-3:00 was spent telling the class about our wildlife and what it means to us."*
- **May 4, 1955** – River Top School: *"Spent 1 1/2 hours telling the boys and girls about our valuable wildlife and how they could help to protect it."*
- **May 13, 1955** – Tranquillity School: *"1 1/5 hours stressing very strongly the value of our wildlife. I explained to them the importance of protecting what we have left."*

His records, many of which are still preserved, also reveal an extensive network of correspondence with individuals and conservation groups from across Canada and the United States. His efforts did not go unnoticed. He was called a "self-taught naturalist and woodsman," a "noted guardian of wildlife in the Peace," and was often referred to as "the North's Migratory



Barney Hamm

Bird Officer"—all this despite having less than four years of formal education. He was also a sought-after authority and has been acknowledged in numerous publications. There were often research students, professors, and authors coming and going who would spend time with him. He loved sharing his knowledge and lectured in schools and many civic organizations, and was once invited as a guest lecturer at McGill University.

His passion for conservation extended beyond his official duties. He founded the first Rod and Gun Club in La Glace, believing in the responsible management of wildlife—harvesting, yes, but always with sustainability in mind. Those who knew him recall Barney as a man of the land, often seen driving his little red Volkswagen, a canoe strapped to the roof, heading to a nesting site or a conservation meeting.

His work was seasonal, but he was able to supplement his income with taxidermy and tanning. A pay receipt from the Dominion of Canada held at the South Peace Regional Archives shows that for the month of April 30, 1954, Barney's earnings as a Conservation Officer were \$215.00, slightly lower than the \$238.72 average wage for the same month and year in Alberta.

In 1958, the City of Grande Prairie, affectionately known as "Swan City," was officially declared the "Home of the Trumpeter Swan" when it received its charter.

Barney continued his work until his passing in 1965, leaving behind a rich legacy in conservation. He is best remembered for his tireless efforts to protect the trumpeter swans and instill a sense of stewardship in future generations.

(See Barney on page 25)

(Conservationist from page 24)

Today, the trumpeter swan is no longer listed as a threatened species in Alberta but is still classified as a species of special concern. Alberta remains an important region for trumpeter swans, with the Peace Country—particularly the lakes northwest of Grande Prairie—serving as a designated Important Bird Area (IBA). Barney's work helped establish protective regulations, including:

- Restricted activities within 800m of nesting sites (April 1 – Sept. 30)
- No long-term development within 500m of identified lakes or wetlands
- No timber harvesting within 200m of swan nesting areas.

According to those who knew Barney personally, he was a man whose life revolved around wildlife. He wasn't just a government officer—he was a teacher, a mentor, a friend to nature. People remember visiting him in Sexsmith, where his taxidermy collection filled his home. Every specimen had a story—every bird, every mammal, even a single stuffed salmon.

Barney's life was dedicated to nature—preserving it, protecting it, and passing on its wonders to future generations. His legacy is written not only in newspaper articles and conservation reports but in the wings of every trumpeter swan that graces the Peace Country's skies.

The last word goes to daughter Darlene, who recounted that “one evening Dad was walking past a beer parlour and encountered a large, intoxicated man stumbling out of the door with his fists up and challenging him to a fight. Dad calmly told the man that he did not like to fight, but he could sing. He

began to sing, and the man took his arm, and they walked down the street singing loudly. That was my dad.”

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Grande Prairie Herald Tribune September 23, 1954

Family recollections, personal notes, and correspondence

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Letters to the Editor

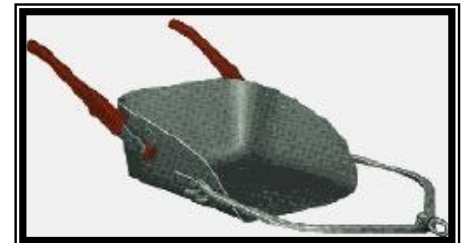
Hi Dave,

Apr 27, 2025

As I read your piece about the Mayfair Mennonite Church, a few questions come to mind...

1) How do you build a basement under a church? *They took the foundation out of one end of the church, crawled under and started with picks and shovels until they had enough room to get a horse-drawn slip/scrapper on a long chain underneath to remove the earth (see photos). Then, they built the forms and poured the concrete for the basement walls. NOT an easy project!*

Does that have anything to do with the church being sloped to the front? *The church floor was built that way for better sight lines from the rear. IE like the Jubilee Auditorium in Edmonton. It had little impact in a small building like that.*



Horse-drawn scraper



Horse and scraper digging a basement

(See Conservationist on page 26)

(Letters from page 25)

2) **Who wrote the sermons your dad read?** *Unfortunately, we will never know the answer to this question. My brother Ernie and I have pondered this long and hard, all to no avail. The book likely went to the Rosthern Mennonite Church library or the MCC Thrift Store in Rosthern.*

3) **Did your church sing in harmony or more like the Mennonites in Two Hills & the Hutterites?** *Great four-part harmony, they were all Russlaender Mennonites (1920s immigrants), some of the same familiar songs (in German, of course) that we sing in English at Lendrum MC today.*

4) **It's interesting that there was strife even in that small church... any ideas what the issues might have been?** *Strife has been with us in almost every church, whether large or small, since biblical times. Issues? The one I quote is the only one mentioned in the source material, where the pastor was criticized behind his back.*

5) **Amazing that they paid off the church so quickly!** *In the early years, growth and enthusiasm were high, and money was more plentiful. However, when people started leaving in the late 1930s, things became more difficult..*

6) **I'm trying to read the verse at the front of the church, but can't... do you recall what it said? /says?**

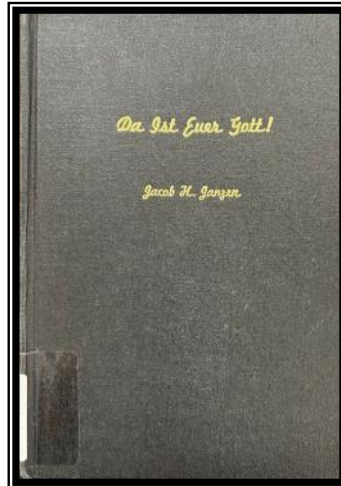
Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. Isaiah 55: v6

7) **You mention when the church got electricity, but when did it get running water?** *To date, Mayfair MC does not have running water or a sewer system; it was deemed too expensive to install, and the building would have to be heated year-round.*

8) **Interesting, too, that they hold/held Mennonite/Catholic services! Is that common across the country?** *In Tofield, we had a Christmas choir night with all churches joining in at the community hall. It was only the Christmas Eve programs, not regular services, that were joint, and I'm not aware that this is a common practice across the country.*

9) **How far did you live from the church? Were you the closest geographically?** *We lived about 2 miles (3.2 km) from the church, and yes, we probably lived the closest, although I had never considered that before.*

Anke (Jessen) Eastwood
Edmonton, AB



Example - German
Book of Sermons by
Jacob A. Janzen

detail of your first imbibing in communion supplies in your parents' basement cold storage room! Irony, your historical interest is a valuable asset in editing and is appreciated by many. My historical interest continues still as a preacher. That is still us as Anabaptists - many gifts but the same Spirit. Thanks for your good work among us.

Question: Who wrote those infamously boring sermons, which obviously still contribute to people sitting for an hour, as you read in my last blog?

Jake Froese
Calgary, AB

Who wrote the 1950s book of sermons for lay readers? *That is a good question. We will probably never know, because Google doesn't know. I haven't seen that book since 1963, which is probably where it belongs in the dustbin of history. Dave*

Dear Dave,

Apr 29, 2025

Mayfair Mennonite Church.
This is a wonderful piece! Thank you for sharing it with me.

I see you are taking after your mother in preparing the communion elements here at Lendrum Mennonite Church. Sadly, we don't have any jugs of wine stashed away for you to find :)

Mayfair Mennonite Church,
what a blessed and beloved community that raised and nurtured you in faith.

Pastor Sherri Guenther Trautwein,
Lendrum MC
Edmonton, AB

Dear Dave,

Apr 17, 2025

Dave, your deadpan humour caught me off guard during our last phone call when you asked about my response to the Mayfair article. I now admit that I got bored after your paragraph listing the Friesens, Froeses, Toews, Pauls, Tessmans, Reimers, Durksens, and others, all the faithful at Hoffnungsfelder Churches near Mayfair, SK. So, at first, I did not get to the

(See Letters on page 27)

(Letters from page 26)

Dear Dave, April 23, 2025

It was with great interest that I read your story of the history of Mayfair Bethel Mennonite Church in the last MHSA Chronicle (March 2025).

As a child, my family and I journeyed to Mayfair many times to visit my Uncle John and Aunt Stella (Justina) Balzer. Aunt Stella was my father's older sister. We loved visiting with them on their farm.

One of these visits was the occasion of their twenty-fifth Wedding Anniversary held in the Mayfair Mennonite Church, in the summer of 1957. This was a memorable occasion on many different levels for me as an eleven or twelve-year-old. For this occasion, their farm was overrun with cousins, aunts and uncles. What fun the cousins had sliding down the haystack, much to Uncle John's dismay! It took much longer to build this haystack than it did for us to demolish it.

I felt so important and "older" to be asked by my cousin Elsie (Balzer) Linning if I would help her make the ham sandwiches for the reception. I can still picture in my mind the whole dining room table taken up with this process. (She became my hero—I wanted to be just like her—even down to the plaid skirt she wore on one of her visits to our place in Regina).

After the church service and reception, one of my older cousins (Jack Balzer?) drove most of us younger cousins to the farm in the back of the truck. I am sure the box had sides on it, as I remember we were all standing for the short trip to the farm.. I also know that my parents did not

know (and maybe never did!!) how we got back to the farm. For a city girl, this was high on the list of adventures.

Elsie and I have kept in touch by phone or email. I love to hear her stories of visiting our grandmother at Osler. Five years ago, she sent me a German songbook (Lieder-Perlen) that my father, George Wedel, had given to her father, my Uncle John Balzer. Uncle John used this to lead the children's singing, as mentioned in your article.

Thank you for this trip down memory lane...and for some Mayfair history.

Regards,
Shirley (Wedel) Holden
Spirit River, Alberta

Hi Dave,

June 17, 2025

Thank you for your recent article and photos on the Hoffnungsfelder (Mayfair Mennonite) Gemeinde that appeared in the March edition of the MHSA Chronicle. I enjoyed this very much and found your article to be both interesting and informative.

I believe it's very important to write down childhood memories. No doubt someday our children and grandchildren will want to know. They will want to hear stories of our parents' generation, those who grew up in relative poverty in the '30's and dealt with traumatic memories of Russia that were still fresh. How did they answer these questions? How did they keep a Christian faith alive?

There are many stories of life in small, isolated prairie communities with tiny rural Mennonite churches that need to be told. What influence did these tiny, isolated congregations have upon the children?

Many parents and older siblings have died and taken their stories with them. Articles such as this help us to dig through our memories and expose interesting information.

Why don't you expand your article into a longer publication and invite others to join with their memories?

Harold Wiens
Edmonton, AB ❖

MHA Launches *Tales from the Mennonite Heritage Archives* Show, April 23, 2025

Winnipeg, Man. — A new weekly radio program and podcast produced by the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg is bringing history to life through storytelling.

A team of four people creates each 15-minute episode using information gleaned from archival diaries, documents, photographs, and interviews.

(See *Tales* on page 28)

(Tales from page 27)

Archivist and team leader Conrad Stoesz said, "The program offers an eclectic mix of stories, music, and interviews that are worth sharing and remembering. I believe there's something for everyone in the stories held at the MHA."

Stoesz had already been creating five-minute micro documentaries called *Still Speaking* that were broadcast on Golden West radio stations in southern Manitoba. In response to positive listener feedback, Golden West offered to support a longer 15-minute format.

People from diverse backgrounds find the MHA indispensable in their work, said Stoesz. They routinely uncover characters and stories in MHA collections that find their way to a wider audience.

"Lawyers, novelists, policy makers, journalists, and historians all use the archives. When these stories are shared, we all benefit from what is preserved here," said Stoesz.

Show host, researcher and writer Dan Dyck voices the program. Dyck has a long-standing interest in the stories that are buried in history. "The idea for Tales was born out of conversations with Conrad starting a number of years ago," said Dyck.

Dyck has previously produced and voiced audio content. "I love to share the riches in stories. Along the way, I get to learn about ordinary people from the past, how they managed the challenges of life in their time, what motivated them, and so on. Once in a while, we discover stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things, or unusual events in unexpected places. There's a lot we can learn from the past."

Caley Dyck also researches and writes for the program. The recent History of Art graduate is drawn to the stories that connect with her own Mennonite background. "I love doing historical research, especially when there's a personal connection. It's exciting to explore the stories in the MHA, and to share those stories."



Caley Dyck and Dan Dyck

Graeme Unrau handles the web and audio distribution side of the project. He manages the Tales web page, posts photos there for each episode, and handles distribution of the program to Spotify and Apple Music platforms.

"I enjoy seeing the process of taking an idea and bringing all the parts together. There is so much work that goes into a

Tales from the MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES



Stories from the people who were there!

Join host Dan Dyck as we feature people, places, and events from Mennonite history.

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Broadcasting on Golden West Radio 950, 1220, and 1250 AM on Sundays at 9:15 am CST. Explore episodes on our website and major podcast platforms.
www.mharchives.ca/tales-from-the-archives/

A listener supported program brought to you by the Mennonite Heritage Archives in partnership with Golden West Radio, Canadian Mennonite University, The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, and Mennonite Church Canada.

Mennonite
Heritage
Archives

project like this one, especially if you want it done well. Collaborating with Caley, Dan, and Conrad on this has been a great learning experience," said Unrau.

Twenty-five episodes are already available for listeners covering topics that range from Flower Annie, who sold crepe paper flowers on the streets of Winkler, to the history of *Der Friedensfurst* (The Prince of Peace) a popular Christmas song with often misplaced origins, to the community of Warman, SK who said no to a uranium refinery, to local celebrity, Aunt Olly and her Children's Party program.

Tales from the Mennonite Heritage Archives can be heard on AM radio 950, 1220, and 1250 at 9:15 am Sunday mornings. The program can also be found on the MHA website www.mharchives.ca, Spotify, Apple Podcasts, and YouTube. A new episode is released each week. ❖