The MHSA Chronicle

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My Nomadic School Days

***B**y Mary Quapp*

Mary Quapp

A class reunion can trigger a plethora of activities and thoughts. Over coffee one day, Dave Toews regaled the group with the wonderful response he'd received from his classmates of 1964. He was spearheading the reunion celebrating 60 years. Of the 74 classmates, 36 planned to attend. WOW!! I expressed that I had never been invited to a high school class reunion. As I told him some of my story, the cogs started turning and with a little arm twisting, he persuaded me to share my journey.

My father, John L. Dyck, was born and grew up at Morden, Manitoba. Over time, his family migrated

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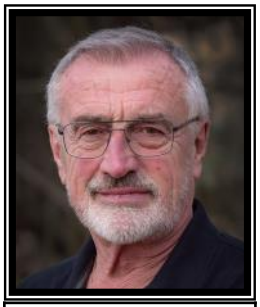
In this Issue

DOUBLE A: Trailers for Everything

By Jake Froese

Abe Martens

"Conqur Industries." That spelling on the sign at the front entrance immediately caught my attention as we drove up. "Interesting word," I thought to myself. "Did somebody forget a vowel in there somewhere?" That question disappeared, however, the moment we walked up to the door. We were visiting the place where Double A trailers get made. We were met by a friendly gentleman, Mr. Abe Martens. We had been expected; you could tell by the looks of the receptionist and other office personnel, as well as a youngish manager getting up from his desk to join our group. Obviously, Mr. Martens had communicated that we were coming. Our host was peaceful and friendly, an air of respect all around him. Even by virtue of these first impressions, I understood why, on this second tour of Two Hills and surrounding community, our tour guides wanted us to meet this man and what he was about.[i]



Jake Froese

We were invited to have a quick tour, "and then we will meet in the coffee room to talk." We never made it to the coffee room. The tour was too fascinating. Who would want to sit in a coffee room when you can watch it all close up and personal right before your eyes? The fabricating area was almost as relaxed as the front office, each worker fully focused and occupied but ready with a smile or hello. A recent blogpost puts it this way, *"We visited a factory; owner and C.E.O. with minimal education, but incredible qualifications and confidence. He knows his business, knows what needs fabricating and, why and how to do it and who should do it. Our tour started with this hospitable owner… and many welders and cutters and, painters and foremen and office personnel. I saw no Union or Health and Safety (H.S.R.) representatives – seemingly unnecessary when everybody is on same page about best and safest way to get things done."*

Cutting torch, Conqur Industries, Two Hills

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Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews, Editor

Dave Toews

Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding, Albert Einstein. If two countries (or people) don't understand each other's values, motivations, likes and dislikes, there is little chance of peace. Peace cannot be accomplished by forcing one's will against another, as we can see in many places in today's troubled world.

An embarrassment of riches! This issue has been an absolute joy to work through. Everyone so willing to write it has become a lengthy issue.

I am grateful Joanne Wiens accepted my invitation to write a regular column. As we know from her bio in the June issue, Joanne is highly qualified from her life's work as an educator and, more recently, an author of several books. Joanne will write *Stories and Snippets* from her family's history and life experiences.

I typed Mary Quapp's story from a handwritten manuscript; then, we went back and forth many times before we got all the details correct. I wish I could have included all the little stories and vignettes that hit the cutting room floor that Mary confided in me as we worked through her winding school days.

Jake Froese reluctantly accepted my request to write the Double A Trailer story, but as he visited, wrote and rewrote, I think now he is pleased to have gained many new friends in the Martens family and businesses.

Letters to the Editor are always encouraging, making this all worthwhile; it's good to hear from our readership. The Woollard's article triggered John Martens' memory of a trip he took with his wife and other family stories. An appreciative note from 98-year-old Justina Penner is heartwarming and causes me to reflect on my own mortality.

Our Chair, Katie Harder, again demonstrates her many talents as she steers the fortunes of the MHSA, writes her regular Chair Report, and here has chronicled the happenings at our Wilson Siding Hutterite Colony Conference that she so ably emceed.

Chronicle volunteer staff transitions: We want to thank Harvey Wiehler for his many years of dedicated service as the Layout Editor and welcome Wally Friesen aboard as his replacement. See more on this, further on in this issue.

As always, I would like to thank all the authors and contributors to this issue that I haven't mentioned above. 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 dmtoews@gmail.com or 780-218-7411 cell with any questions, suggestions or comments. ❖

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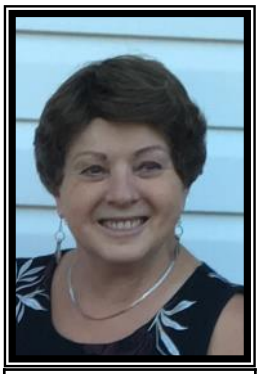
Chairman's Corner

by Katie Harder

Wilson Siding Hutterite Colony Fall Conference Oct 19

"Boy, that conference worked well beyond my expectations. The people and the kids we met and visited with were unexpected and an additional enjoyment. The tours of all the shops were a big surprise to me. No wonder the kids don't pressure about going to high school. Building such a beautiful saddle is not unlike a PhD thesis. A tough act to follow." - Eugene Janzen, Profes-



Katie Harder

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sor Emeritus, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine Calgary

Almost two weeks have passed since our memorable Fall Conference at the Wilson Siding Hutterite Colony. As I reflect on that day, my heart is filled with gratitude to God for his blessings on that

Wilson Colony entrance

event. It was not an easy conference to plan as there were so many unknowns and so many things that had been difficult to pin down. For several years, we had thrown around the idea of having a conference at a Hutterite Colony. Ken Matis, our former MHSA chair, had suggested numerous times that we have a conference at a colony south of Coaldale. In a work-related capacity, he had visited the colony and had engaged in several tours of the place. He was fascinated by the productivity at the colony, as well as the genuinely interesting people. Well, needless to say, he convinced us to give it a try.

At the end of July, the planning committee for the Fall Conference drove out to the Wilson Siding Colony to visit with Rev. Joe and Rachel Wurz to seek permission for MHSA to have a joint conference with the colony members on their premises, to both tell stories about our Anabaptist roots, our shared sojourn in Ukraine, and our immigration to North America. Initially, Rev. Wurz suggested we do the tour only, but after the visit and our conversation about why we wanted to share an informal dialogue together with them, he conceded his point and agreed that he was open to this type of session. He pointed out that harvest and funerals were a priority and would take precedence over an event such as ours. At the end of the visit, most goals were met: we mutually set the date, they agreed to provide a tour, to serve and share an authentic Hutterite noon meal to both parties, to provide a number of group songs, and we would both tell our stories followed by a question and answer period. In the meantime, both Ken and Eugene visited the colony numerous times to make sure the event was still a go.

What made the day so special? God had blessed us with a beautiful sunny fall day, with clear blue skies. Since we were going to participate in an outdoor tour at the colony, having mild weather was a bonus. The tour of the colony at 10:30 a.m. was a revelation and a learning experience for everyone. Upon arrival, we were quickly divided into five groups; each group had two young gals as leaders to show the forty or so of us around the colony. First impressions, a very expansive newly gravelled yard, well maintained, large modern out-buildings, family dwellings with pristine walkways and manicured lawns, the large, well organized, immaculate kitchen, with rooms containing various ovens, fridges, freezers, the spacious dining hall with large windows, the school, and chapel. Oh, and then the numerous shops, with all their tools for producing - saddlery, broom-making, furniture, clocks, shoemaking, welding and mechanical shops, dairy barn, and the list goes on. The people and children at the colony personified friendliness, warmth, energy, kindness, and intellectual minds with a sense of curiosity.

Large machinery repair shop complete with overhead crane

I happened to be in the dining room in advance of lunch and placed my notebook and jacket at one of the tables on the side near the audio equipment. One of the ladies present politely asked me to move my things to a table across the way. I was informed that the men sat on that side and the women sat on the opposite side. At 12:00 noon we

Broom binding machine and finished brooms

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had a delicious meal consisting of meatloaf, mashed potatoes, corn, buns and a delicious pumpkin cream pie for dessert. Water was the beverage of choice. A lot of visiting was happening between our people and the colony people. As I was visiting at the table with one of the colony ladies, she noted how noisy the dining hall was today. With all the conversation and laughter happening at the tables, it was loud. She said, "It's all good, but our mealtimes are generally much quieter."

Colony inner courtyard and living quarters

Once lunch was over, dishes were quickly removed, and by 1:30 pm, we were ready to begin our afternoon session in the dining hall, with the men seated on one side and the ladies on the other. There were children, young adults and adults present for the program. As I was serving as the MC for the afternoon, I was offered a chair at the back, on the men's side, behind the last table, Rev. Wurz, much to my surprise, came to sit there as well. His married daughter had asked to sit beside me, and her unmarried aunt, whom I had met in July, chose to sit there as well. Mrs. Wurz sat on a barstool on my other side next to the microphone and, from time to time, discreetly prompted her husband as he shared. When Mr. Wurz and I were discussing what the format for the afternoon would be, I casually mentioned that I would have a brief word of welcome and a word of prayer and then introduce our reason for wanting to spend the afternoon together to hear each other's stories. I suggested that he would be the first speaker. He was momentarily quiet and then commented that in their tradition, it was always the men who prayed. Not the women. God was honoured that afternoon with three prayers. Mr. Wurz prayed first in German, then in English, and I, of course, prayed in English.

Classroom bright and orderly

Colony church, pews with padded seats and backs

The Hutterites have a rich and long history. This Anabaptist group has persevered for well over four centuries as a radical experiment in communal living. Rev. Joseph Wurz, the head minister since 2010, is a kindly, courteous man, but he does have a commanding presence. In his presentation, in which he read from a very old little book, he very briefly alluded to the fact that they traced their roots to the Reformation in Switzerland. Jacob Hutter established the Hutterite colonies on the basis of the "Schleitheim Confession of Faith." Hutter, a Christian martyr, was burned at the stake in 1536 at Innsbruck, Austria. One of the basic tenets of faith for the Hutterites has always been nonresistance, forbidding its members from taking part in military activities.

Because of persecution, the Hutterites embarked on a series of migrations through central and eastern Europe. With time, just like the Mennonites, they migrated to Ukraine in 1770, and about a century later, they migrated to North America. In 1859, in the Ukraine, in a village called Hutterdorf, near the Molotschna Colony, Michael Waldner reinstated the idea of the value of holding the community of goods in common. He became the founder of the Schmiedeleut. Also in Ukraine, at the other end of Hutterdorf, in 1860, Darius Waltner founded the Dariusleut. In 1877, a preacher, Joseph Wipf, established a third group with communal living, the Lehrerleut. All

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three branches share the same heritage and doctrine, styles of dress differ slightly, and some are more conservative than others in different areas.

In 1864, the Primary Schools' Bill made Russian the language of instruction in schools; then, in 1871, a law introduced compulsory military service. These led the Mennonites and Hutterites to make plans for emigration to the United States. The Hutterites initially settled in the Dakota territory. In 1918, during World War 1, the United States chose to rescind their military exemption for a time, and thus, the Hutterites once more embarked on immigration to Canada. Most Hutterites now live in Canada. Rev. Wurz told us the story of the four Hutterite men who were subjected to the military draft but refused to comply; they were imprisoned and physically abused. Initially, they were sent to Alcatraz. Two of the four men, Joseph and Michael Hofer, were transferred to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where two weeks later, they died. Rev. Wurz put emphasis on the fact that when they were returned to their families, they were wearing military uniforms in the coffin. He explained that this had been a "real slap in the face" to the Hutterian Brethren. The Hutterite community said the men died from mistreatment; the U.S. government claimed they died of pneumonia. The death of the brothers contributed to the decision to begin emigrating to Canada in 1918.

Rev. Wurz emphasized that their belief in communal living is based on the apostolic church, from Acts 2:44-47 and Acts 4:32-35. The incentive is to work for the common good and to follow the apostles' teaching to share everything they have so there are no needy persons among them. Family life is important, and religious beliefs permeate daily living. Every day, they worship as a group at 6:00 pm with a one-and-a-half-hour service on Sunday. Clothing, food, housing and childcare are all provided by the colony. The colony is very self-sufficient; they produce the vast majority of fruits, vegetables and meat that they consume. They also make all their own clothing. Following Rev. Wurz's story, the members of the Wilson Colony Siding performed several songs of the faith. This was exceptionally well done. Small children, youth and adults all participated from their seats and sang heartily. The songs were lengthy, and the little children seemed to know all the words and really belted them out. What an amazing and refreshing experience. A young ladies' group then came forward and sang several familiar gospel songs in harmony again very well done. All the singing was done a capella, and they did not go out of tune (notes that are sung at the wrong pitch). You might ask, did the Mennonites do any singing? Yes, a trio favoured us with two old, beloved, familiar hymns, one in English and another in German.

Saddle workshop, saddles start at $750

Following the singing, we were going to have a presentation from the well-known Mennonite historian Ted Regehr. Due to Ted's absence, David Toews, editor of the MHSA Chronicle, shared excerpts from the paper "Shared Hutterite and Mennonite Experiences." Regehr noted (and I quote) "that Hutterites and Mennonites follow different lifestyles, but they share some important religious teachings. They both rejected military service; both were concerned about and wanted to control or at least significantly influence the education of their children." Like the Mennonites, the Hutterites practice adult baptism.

Dining hall with overhead hat hangers where lunch was served and the conference was held

Following the reading of Regehr's paper, Eugene Janzen came forward and favoured us with a witty and charming story about growing up in a Mennonite settlement in Saskatchewan, spending considerable time at his "Grousma's Haus" (grandma's house).

The session ended with a question-and-answer period. ***Question 1***. *What is the population of the colony before a daughter colony is formed, and how do you decide who moves to the new colony and who stays behind?* **Answer:** When a colony reaches between 120 to 140 persons in total including children, a daughter colony splits from the original colony. To start a new colony, the existing colony needs to save enough money to pur-

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chase land and build a new colony. The lot is cast as to who goes and who stays with the current colony. ***Question 2***. *At what age do children leave school?* **Answer:** Usually, children in Alberta are allowed to leave school at the age of 15. The school is built on colony property and staffed by the local public school board**.** ***Question 3***. *What style of clothing do the Hutterites wear?* **Answer**: The goal is to wear modest, simple clothing in uniform style. For the women, the style of dress is a blouse and an ankle-length skirt, with a kerchief. Even young girls wear head coverings. Men usually wear dark trousers, suspenders, and hats. The boys wear black homemade caps. Both men and women usually wear dark jackets or coats.

When the formal questions were over, several younger men came forward to speak at length about their beliefs and about colony life. Their comments were well thought out, and they were well-spoken.

To close the sessions, we together sang the German hymn, "Gott ist die Liebe" and then closed by reciting the Lord's Prayer together. After the session was over, all were invited to share a traditional Faspa, a cup of coffee together with Platz, cheese squares and chocolate brownie cookies. Again, the visiting around the table was lively and all were engaged; no one was left out. A lot of questions were asked over the meal. At Faspa, I was delighted when Rev. Wurz asked me to join him for a cup of coffee; it felt as if we had crossed a line.

At the end of the day, as we were leaving, Rev. Joe Wurz's son Daniel met Ken, and me and he commented on the good day. He said, "Perhaps we should do this type of gathering every five years." I felt that comment was an endorsement of a wonderful day. Thank you to the Wilson Siding Colony.

Some takeaways from the day:

• the significance of religion and family life. Their religious beliefs continue to structure the way they live. - Family is important and children are seen as a gift from God. The children I met and observed were curious and lively but well-behaved. These children are raised with ample care and attention and are not left to fend for themselves. They are exposed daily to deeply religious parents; they are thoroughly educated in the Hutterian way of life.

• Work is a shared responsibility with shared benefits. This colony was extremely modern in terms of equipment.

• Women's roles are traditional. The men make the formal decisions on the colony, but on my first visit to the colony, I found the women do influence the men's thinking to some degree. Rachel, the wife of Joe, was present at our first meeting in their home. She certainly made suggestions as to our plans for the fall conference, and Rev. Wurz seemed to accept them. At the end of that meeting, Mrs. Wurz, a very gentle and kind woman, showed me around their dwelling. She showed and emphasized to me the copy of "The Martyrs Mirror." It was a treasured book and looked like it was well-read.

Thoughts to ponder: Have you and I lost some of the values that the Hutterites hold dear? Have the pressures of North American life wiped out our customs and made us forget our roots? Mennonites used to be known as the "Die Stille im Lande" ("The Quiet in the Land"). Are we in danger of falling in line and conforming to society? ❖

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Visitors from Edmonton watch a worker put the floor on a trailer

Edmonton and Calgary visitors at Conqur Ind Apr 2024

Beginning

Abe Martens and his wife Eva both grew up in Ojala Yegua, in the neighbourhood of Manitoba Colony, along with other Mennonites in Ciudad Cuauhtémoc in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Abe is the youngest of eight in the family of Abram and Katharina Martens; their 100 acres half cultivated and half pasture similar to others in the traditional village style, all regulated by the Church under the oversight of an *Oberschult* (village manager). Abe describes his growing up years as orderly, their farming operation a modest and healthy way of providing for all of them, his father being careful with finances, "did not like to have too much debt."

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This, Abe says with a smile, probably thinking of the loans and initial investments required in the early stages of this enterprise now in operation before our eyes.

In March of 1984, Abe and Eva and their oldest four children moved to Taber, Alberta.

Double A Trailers

Each of my queries about the beginnings of Double A Trailers is met with a story.[ii] The reason for the move to Canada is a story. There is no commentary or philosophizing about Mexican limitations or perhaps Canadian opportunities, no hint of political or religious stressors or discontent. It was a medical issue. One of Abe and Eva's daughters required medical attention which would best be availed in Canada. That was the reason. They moved, they found the right doctors, and now they are here! Shortly after arrival, their young family relocated to Vauxhall, where the jobs would be.

Early employment was farm work along with other Mexican Mennonites, the employer a Japanese farmer named Nobby Yamashita,[iii] immigrant helping immigrants. In about a half dozen years the inclination to new business opportunities and self-employment could not be denied to this young couple. In 1993, they took the plunge, and it might be described as a deep dive - farmer, trucker, welder. They purchased their first Canadian home on a quarter section of land - $96,000 they remember clearly. To help "make ends meet," Eva and the older children were out there "hoeing potatoes." And to really make ends meet, this was the beginning of "Precision Fencing." Abe landed a contract to build fences alongside the hundreds of kilometres of irrigation ditches serving the farmers of southern Alberta. Fence-building was done with four "outfits," as he calls them, each composed of a truck, a trailer, a bobcat, post pounder and "2 or 3 men", obviously a rigorous investment of finances and people management. This was no 8-hours-a-day job; many an evening likely spent fixing or maintaining equipment!

In 1997 Aaron Giesbrecht comes on scene. This is story about an old friend. By now, Abe and Aaron and families both living in Canada, but considerable distance between the provinces of Alberta and Ontario. I do not hear details about nature of this long-distance friendship, except "they are good friends" and both "doing well." Perhaps a partnership? That idea at first seems a little far-fetched. Abe is not interested in Aaron's fabrication and repair shop work; Aaron has no interest in Abe's fencing. They are, however, friends, and different interests need not prevent friends from forming a partnership!

That is how Double A was formed. I ask about "why trailers" and other details of those first several years. That answer must wait until I hear about how the partnership got its name after they were already "doing it," building trailers, accountants and lawyers working at early details. The Registries Office needed a name. A.A. was suggested as a possibility. Neither Abe nor Aaron liked that much. Then the receptionist doodled on her notepad; Double A? "That's it," they both laughed and agreed on the spot! That was 1999; trailers already being built when the official name appeared!

Double A, Abe and Aaron both begin with A

Now, on to my question, "Why trailers?" Note, the answer actually waited until my second interview (everything in its time), after I had already visited two factories, the one at Two Hills and a new one presently under construction in Vegreville. By now, I have seen many trailers and totally fascinated with the fabrication, but still, my question: why trailers? The answer is another story. "Aaron left Mexico a few years before I did. In Ontario, he worked on a tobacco farm as a mechanic and handyman, working with all the equipment. He could not help but notice a need for trucks and trailers designed for local work. Trailers were needed for mobile welders, for tools, pumps, equipment and materials transfer for many farm and industry applications. Big rigs obviously needed for the long hauls but not the local work. The two friends kept visiting, talking ideas and business and, eventually, a plan.

The partnership was solidified in 1998, with trailers already coming out of the *Schmaed* (machine shed) on Abe's farm near Vauxhall. My guess is that in those first several years, he was eating, sleeping, and dreaming business every day after the fencing employees had already gone home! The Alberta initiative comes from the entrepreneur immigrating from Mexico; trailer ideas via the friend from Ontario. Interesting what friendships can do. In the year 2000, Double A and the Martens family made the move to Two Hills.

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This being a people story, it is but the beginning. Fast forward to 2007, when Aaron Giesbrecht sold his shares to Abe Martens; thereafter, this continues as a family enterprise.

Additional Outlets

Shortly after agreeing to write this article, I was able to meet with Abe on one of his business trips to Calgary, where I live. The first meeting was at a truck stop (home territory for me once upon a time). My head was already full of trailers and *nesheah* (nosey boy full of questions, as my dad used to say). I was hungry for a second 'visit' and readily agreed to head north again, further opportunity to taste and see.

Vegreville was the place for the second meeting; this coordinated with Abe's schedule, many things on the go for him that day. The place for this meet up was a somewhat aged building with a fresh look to it. Easy to find, right beside the 16A, "You can't miss it," said Abe on his cellphone that morning. Indeed, impossible to miss, **Double A Trailers**, a big new sign on the ample front. Even with sign in place, what appeared to be main entrance was locked. I entered via a side door, greeted by several employees just coming out of a break room (Abe had been detained so I was first at our meeting point). Not yet in operation; this place is under construction, or renovation. Unlike most construction projects with successive phases performed by different 'trades,' the cavernous interior of this building was dotted with the same blue coveralls I had seen in Two Hills.

There was action everywhere: electrical panels almost finished with wires coming and going, carpentry, plumbing, welding, and a state-of-the-art powder-coat paint shop "almost finished." Overhead is a newly installed conveyor from which trailers will hang as they move station to station in the fabrication process. This will be an improved version of the Two Hills factory.

And then the big surprise for this touristy preacher. Double A is not only factories and trailers! It's time for another story. Sitting at a restaurant across from this new factory, Abe tells a little more about the beginning. In the first several years of fabrication they had delivered completed trailers to a distributor in Edmonton. After a while, with trailers of high quality and fetching a good price, decision was made to become their own distributor.

Abe Martens in conversation with employee

Another outlet, a distributor! This also I needed to see, so stop-off on the way home. **Capital Trailers**, Sherwood Park, is right beside Highway 16. There it is, a full-service dealership selling Double A, plus Stealth, Nordtek, and Bravo. Different, very different actually, with glass doors and service counters complete with

Overhead conveyer installed at Vegreville factory

computers and customers. Just around the corner are the commanding service doors facing a yard filled with ready-to-deliver trailers, samples of all the makes and models. This is a trailer lot, not just a place to pile finished product, more like a car lot outside the showroom of a car dealership. It is neat and tidy, orderly.

The service shop fine-tunes trailers according to customer requirements, plus maintenance and safety inspections. **Capital**: the sign cannot be ignored. This is full participation in the retail market, not only selling Double A at their price but ready to supply whatever brand may best serve the customer's needs.

Even in this different environment there is a similarity. Customer service, sales, management and secretarial, all provided by modestly dressed Mennonites! Apparently the other brand manufacturers are pleased to be part of this, and customers are coming every day. Did I mention the manager of this place is Abe's youngest son?

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Afterward

Two things of note. One, this is a business built on a work ethic, a quality with deep roots in the Mennonite community, obviously present in the original partners, and now family-owned since 2007. The employees, mostly immigrants and not only Mennonites,[iv] seem peacefully focused on the job at hand.

Custom trailer for floral shop mobile display, Ben Martens, Capital Trailers, Sherwood Park, AB

Secondly, Double A trailers is a place of cutting edge business acumen, much of it possibly beyond the grasp of individual factory workers, and also this numbers-challenged writer. Martens is conversant in all of this, including the name **Conqur Industries**, Newly Upgrade Automated Name Search (NUANS) approved after the 2007 ownership change, and, of course, the decision to market their own product in cooperation with other manufacturers. This latter development requires the best, not only in planning, but in management, accountants, welders, technicians and others in this market, all supported by computer experts for website and advertising. https://doubleatrailers.ca/

Something old and something new. Something borrowed, something blue.[v] This old English wedding couplet comes to mind. Double A Trailers is new, offering the best product along with old-fashioned customer service. Ironically the creators of this 'new' are children of those who moved to Mexico in the 1920's because they were cautious of worldly things, seeking to retain the old. Old schools, Low German language, modest dress and legalistic church regulations characterize the people. This is a story about one of those, obviously with a gift of administration along with the commonly held commitment to hard work. He has made some proactive decisions about what needed doing. Surrounded by a discerning community and supportive family, this enterprise is now profitably providing employment for many. Loyal workforces emerge in places like this. Interestingly, this old -new circle is now well-received in the conservative province of Alberta.

In the Old Testament of our Bible is the theme of moving. In Genesis 12, the patriarch Abram is instructed to take his family, his flocks and their people *to the land that I will show you* (:1), and new challenges will come along the way. It is important for God's people to be aware of this, S*ee, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?* (Isaiah 43:19), and of course, in the New Testament that is included in the instruction of Jesus before he ascends to heaven, *"…you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the eartch* (Acts 1:8). Old Colony Mennonites have a history of moving.[vi] They are sojourners, people of faith always facing new things even among old standards.

Double A operates with traditional values family values. Since the ownership change in 2007, it is now a family business: eldest son John, plant manager of the factories; middle son Abram Jr., development planner and purchaser; and, as already noted, Benjamin, the youngest, at the Sherwood Park dealership. Family businesses can be burdensome, as is well-illustrated with modern examples of failure in this regard, perhaps one reason in today's corporate world for the endless regulations for safety, human resources, workforce inclusiveness, etc. When motivation wanes, then regulations are multiplied. Corporate growth is often at expense of personal work satisfaction. Albeit after only limited conversation with a controller, a few office personnel, several foremen and technicians, just walking through the peaceful atmosphere is palpable (cf. blog quote above). Much could now be written on business and corporate analysis, certainly beyond scope of this article. Suffice it to say, the thoroughgoing family involvement here is a noteworthy way to discern what to work at, and what not to work at.[vii]

Even beyond this enterprise and this family, there are traditions, an economy, and always a political environment. New challenges, as well as opportunities, this by now quite clear among the young people growing up in still large Mennonite families finding jobs and education in these Alberta communities. "Changes are coming very fast," said one clear-eyed Mennonite preacher in one of the Two Hills Churches.

Back to our host. How does one from the old facilitate this business in this place, first as a partnership and now as family? Looking for a clue, I asked Abe **what he enjoys most** about all this. The answer with the smile, and this time, he put it this way. "You need so many pieces and ideas to make a trailer that you don't need to go on vacation." My interpretation?

(See Bouble A on page 10)

(Double A from page 9)

This business is so intriguing, so complicated, requiring so many business trips everywhere (like U.S., Mexico, China), still so satisfying that it provides the freshness and even the rest that one needs. His rest is in his work! And what does he **like the least**? The answer comes promptly also with the smile, "Meetings." Yes, I can relate. To sit and talk about concepts, to communicate vision to those who may not immediately understand or perhaps not wish to understand, and, of course, to comply with regulations, that is work. That is probably why he spends lots of time "on the floor," listening, talking with employees, hands-on. Many of us who have lived a whole lifetime attending meetings eventually need to retire! I have not asked Mr. Martens when he plans to retire.

Jake Froese and Abe Martens in conversation at new location under construction, Airdrie, AB

Among the new challenges and opportunities of Mennonites landing in Alberta, Conqur Industries, Double A, and Capital Trailers are working at what needs working at.

[i] First tour described in a blogpost, Froese, Jacob. "Overlap of History" Thoughts from my Room. https://www.jcfroomthoughts.blogspot.com. 3 May, 2024.
[ii] Much to my enjoyment, these stories are the story-line for this article.
[iii] Japanese Canadians had been moved East from British Columbia after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, many adjusting to their adverse circumstances acquiring farmland and of course needing workers readily provided by other immigrants.
[iv] The Welcome hostess at Wal-Mart across the street from new Vegreville factory refers enthusiastically to Double A also employing recent immigrants from Ukraine.
[v] From the Victorian era, Lancaster County, England.
[vi] An Introduction to Mennonite History, Cornelius J. Dyck, ed. (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1967, 1981).
[vii] This is not a new topic, as well illustrated in a very old book found in one of my uncles' bookshelf several years ago. It details a turn of the century revival which hit Chicago and surrounding areas, many citizens discovering the importance of following more closely the life and teachings of Jesus, "What would Jesus do, WWJD?", an old book testifying to a continuing challenge. Charles M. Sheldon, In His Steps (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1896).

Jake Froese grew up the oldest of 12 in an Old Colony Mennonite farm family near Osler, SK. After college graduation he was called to pastoral ministry, ordained at age 26, then seminary, and then service with Mennonite Church Canada in Saskatoon, Edmonton, and Calgary where he and his wife Verna are now retired. The last 20 years of his working life were long haul trucking all over Canada and U.S.
❖

(School from page 1)

to Saskatchewan, somewhere near Aberdeen. Here, at the advanced age of 37, he met and married my mother, Sarah Bergen, 13 years his junior, in 1931.

Mother and Father were among the eldest in their respective families. They grew up speaking *Plautdietsch* (Low German) and had, at best, two or three years of German education provided by their Old Colony Mennonite Community.

Dustbowl conditions in Saskatchewan during what is known as the "Dirty Thirties" gave rise to severe prairie drought. Farmers experienced the lowest wheat prices in Saskatchewan's farming history. Eggs were 3 cents each, a loaf of bread 9 cents and a gallon of milk 50 cents. In late May 1938, I was born into this environment. My parents, poor subsistence farmers, owned little more than a few head of cattle, 3 or 4 horses, a sheep, and a few chickens that freely roamed the yard and hoped for a better future.

Mother, with her very limited education, worked tirelessly to feed and clothe the family. There was always milk, cream and butter. Chickens and eggs were a natural. We bought flour in 100-lb bags. She baked great bread and, on occasion, pie or cake. She directed the children as they worked alongside her. And occasionally, she

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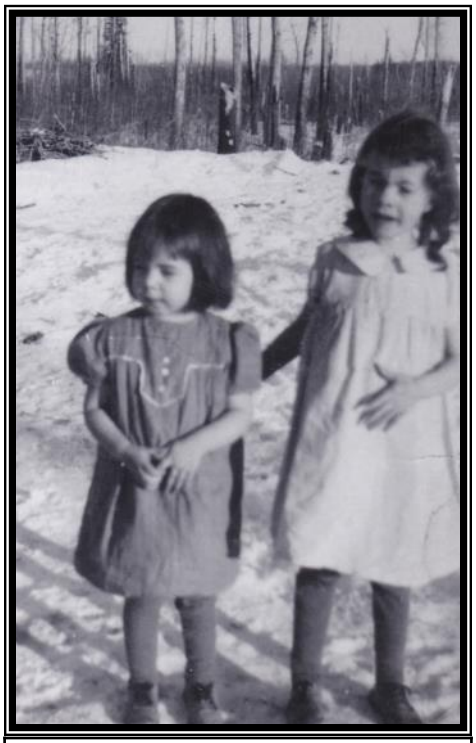
found time to play with the children.

As Mother was not a seamstress, our clothes (with the exception of warm woolly socks which she knitted for winter) all came by mail order from Eatons or Simpson Sears who issued big catalogues annually. At a very young age, I was filling out catalogue orders for my mother and adding up columns of figures to total the price of the order. (Flour and sugar sacks were used as pillowcases or tea towels.) From Eatons, you usually got what you ordered – from Sears, there were more substitutions. How we gloated over the special Christmas catalogue!



Author Mary (Dyck) Quapp, age 4, and sister Helen, Northern Pine, SK, 1942

Father, intelligent and inquiring, said he'd taught himself English by reading Zane Grey novels and wanted his children to do well in school, mastering the 3 Rs. So wherever we lived, as children, we trundled off to the local public one-room school; where teachers had, at best, a few months of teacher-college education and only stayed for six months or, at best, a year. Mary Letkeman was one of these teachers. By chance, I met one of her sisters, Martha (Letkeman) Shire, while on the Mennonite Heritage Tour in Ukraine and in 2023, on the Russlaender Tour, I met Martha again and her brother Rick Letkeman. Mary (Letkeman) Unrau (now 96) has moved to Kelowna with her children and suffers from arthritis.

Since I had four older brothers, Alfred, Bill, Peter, and John, as well as a sister, Helen, I was in a position to get a head start in a local one-room Northern Pine School in 1944.

My first school memories are in Northern Pine, SK, 253 km north of North Battleford, in the boreal forest within walking distance of what is now Meadow Lake Provincial Park, where we would go to pick blueberries.

Martha (Letkeman) Shire , Mary Quapp, Rick Letkeman, Russlaender Tour, Ukrainian Cultural Heritage Village, Edmonton, 2023

I was about to start school in September, 1944 while WWII was raging. There was some arrangement whereby next year's beginners came to school at the end of June for a few days, a brief initiation - the teacher could assess newcomers but also to raise awareness in children - ABCs were expected as was the ability to count and enumerate. I remember being there and feeling sorry for a poor child who could not recite the alphabet.

As I remember it, we lived on a dirt road about 1 - 1 ½ miles from the one-room school. The school building had windows on one wall, a big potbelly stove in the middle of the room, a 2- or 3-gallon jug of water with a tap and a common cup for all. A black, oiled wood floor and rows of desks: small to large to accommodate ages 6 - 15 or grades 1 - 9. Coat hooks near the door with a shelf above for lunch boxes. Dustbane, a sweeping compound, was used on the floor, which, I think, got a daily sweep by one of the older students. Wood for the potbelly stove was stockpiled outside against the windowless side of the school and brought in as needed by whichever student was assigned that task for that week.

Lunch boxes were either lard or Roger's Golden Syrup pails and sandwiches with butter and maybe egg salad or Grieven Schmult (cracklings [bacon bits] in lard).

I progressed from grade 1 to 4 in this school. If you were able to read the list of words at the back of the reader flawlessly you progressed to the next level.

Titles of some of the textbooks I probably used: *High Roads to Reading, Fun With Dick and Jane, Our New Friends, Looking Ahead, Climbing Higher, Up and Away, Exploring Science, Adventures in Science, and Everyday Science*. We al-

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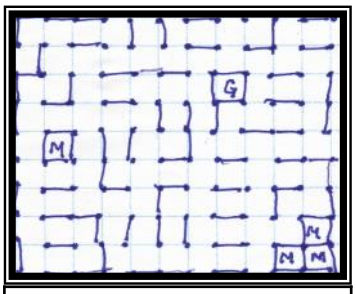
Mary squatting, front 3rd from the left, grade 3, sister Helen front far right. Teacher Mary Letkeman, rear far right, Northern Pine School, 1946

ways had math flashcards for addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, as well as flashcards with words from our readers. In science, we used a textbook, and there were usually questions at the end of each chapter with the correct answers at the back of the book. There was much emphasis on farming and agriculture, to know the breeds of cattle, horses and sheep, etc. Some knowledge of the universe was expected, as were Canadian explorers and Canada's westward expansion and the fur trade. Though, this was more at the grade 5 - 6 level.

Father, with his very limited formal education, was a leader in the church, and the school community and was secretary of the local school board. The minutes were recorded in his phonetic spelling. At church, he often preached the sermons, read the scriptures and led the prayers - unscripted!

We lived in relative isolation and had little contact with the outer world; there was no radio, but we had newspapers. Keeping us abreast of Canadian and world news were the Free Press Weekly, Prairie Farmer, the Country Guide and the Steinbach Post. The Free Press Weekly had comics we enjoyed: Blondie, Archie, Dick Tracy, Katzenjammer Kids and others. Sometimes, an architectural drawing of a house was included, and I would dream of someday living in a house like that!

Moving through grades 1 – 4 at Northen Pine School, I have a few memories. Finishing lessons rarely took me the allotted time so I was often helping other students or entertaining myself. There was no library, so what were the options? Playing X and Os - Join the Dots - a game one made up; if you can close the square with 1 stroke, you get to put your initials in that box, and the person with the most squares with their initials at the end wins.



Join the Dots Game

Mostly, I was a good kid, but I remember one bratty experience – in grade 3, we had a lady teacher, the previously mentioned Mary Letkeman, whom we were aware was being courted by a local bachelor. For our spelling lessons, there was always an assigned exercise. "Write a sentence with each of the 10 words in this week's list." What did I do? I wrote each sentence jointly using the teacher's name, Mary, and the suitor's name, Jake. My teacher was not impressed with my cleverness, and I was strapped! But … under that same teacher's leadership, I was in almost every item in that year's Christmas program. Where at the end of the evening, Santa appeared, and every child received a gift and a bag of treats and goodies.

To supplement our meagre income, my father would go winter ice fishing on Cold Lake (which was only 25 or so miles away), and my mother would can quite a lot of the fish which was always appreciated. We enjoyed eating the fried fish eggs (caviar maybe?!)

Then, in the spring of 1948, there was a big move for the family. Lock, stock and barrel, we moved to Lymburn, Alberta. Some relatives, a small group of like-minded (?) Mennonites. My oldest brother Alfred, at 17, went ahead to scout out the situation. Maybe, being the dreamer he was, this would be a good move. Father and brother Bill loaded some animals and furniture on a wagon and drove the cattle to the nearest train station, which may have been Goodsoil, SK. Off to Lymburn, Alberta!

Meanwhile, Mother and 7 children aged 3 to 14 were passengers in a car driven by a Mr Abe Wiebe. The road we travelled was probably gravel; however the roads were at that time, we got as far as Athabaska the first day. Mr. Wiebe found a room in a hotel while Mother and 7 kids slept in the car

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Rear L-R Helen, Peter, Mother Sarah, Father John, Alfred, Bill; Center John. Front L-R Fred, George, Abe, Mary, age 10. It seems we always wore stockings! Arrival at Lymburn, Alberta, 1948.

or under a tree in the great outdoors. We had our own food. No hotels or restaurants for us. It must have taken some organization! Day 2 meant our arrival at Lymburn, where our Aunt Annie, Uncle Dave Thiessen, and 1 cousin greeted us. One child! That wasn't even a family! Brother Alfred, with the help of my aunt and uncle, had found a vacant farmhouse we could rent, including the yard.

Here, I began grade 5 a little more than half a mile along a dirt road. Again, a one-room Preston Lake School for grades 1 - 9. This time, 2 other girls in my grade 5 class were also at the top of the class, so I sometimes became 2nd and sometimes 3rd in the class.

This location was short-lived. We moved 5 or 6 miles north, where we rented the whole farm – and we moved into that 1-½ story house, which was not quite as nice and necessitated a change of schools – another 1-room, Ray Lake School for grades 1 - 9.

For the first time, we were 6 Mennonite kids, the only Mennonite kids, in the school. Here, the school was about 5 miles from home, located close to a gravel highway and next to the Northern Alberta Railway track. The shorter route to school was along the tracks where, in spring, we saw the first flowers, and before the end of June, we picked our first strawberries. Stepping along the track tie by tie or often skipping a tie was a challenge. If a train should come along while on our way to or from school, the engineers or conductors always waved and called out to us.

Morning devotions were always had around the breakfast table, and we were expected to be there. The scripture was selected according to daily prescriptive reading from the *Lektionsheft* (Lesson booklet). Sunday School lessons also followed this guide. How I learned to read the German, I do not recall; we all took our turn around the table reading a verse or two**.** We never started until everyone was at the table. We couldn't leave for school until devotions and breakfast were over. At this stage, as an early riser, I also began getting up to stoke the fire, heat the water and pack the school lunches. I could slice the bread in nice, even slices but there were not many options as to what went into those lunch pails.

Using the *Deutsche Fibel* (German ABC book), I taught myself to read and write the Gothic script. At this point, I can still write my name, but beyond that, there is no guarantee.

I also took on cutting my brothers' hair after watching my father a few times – What could be so difficult about that? Once, I snipped off a bit of Brother Bill's ear, and another time, I snipped off a bit of my knuckle. Very dense coarse hair on some heads was more challenging than the moderately heavy and not-so-coarse! I definitely needed sharp scissors and no fine-toothed comb.

Another change of schools occurred when my father made an arrangement with the county. We lived at the northern boundary of the Lambert School District. It was agreed we would drive (wagon or sleigh) and pick up the Robertsons' 3 kids en route; we were remunerated for this. The local school bus? There was a barn on the schoolyard to stable the horses. The roads were sometimes challenging, especially the winter snow drifts. We did this for 3 years while I completed grades 7, 8 and 9. That brought an end to compulsory education. In my mind, I had determined very early that I was not going to live like this; I wanted to continue schooling. Here, again, was another move to the Spirit River, Alberta area nearer homestead land at Silver Valley. But from where we lived, there was no access to a high school.

Father knew about Peace River Bible Institute (PRBI) in Sexsmith, Alberta and arranged for me to attend; tuition and gratis work required. Every morning with 1 or 2 other students, I peeled potatoes for 80 or so while in grade 10; when I think of those potatoes …. how the quality deteriorated by the end of the school year! I found out many years later that the tuition had not been paid when, 2 years into my teaching career, I got a bill from PRBI for about $200. Which I dutifully paid.

In the meantime, there was another move. Homestead had no dwelling, so where to? We wound up some distance from Wembley, Alberta, in a very humble dwelling along a school bus route to the high school in Wembley. I completed grade 11 there in a consolidated school with grades 1 - 12. All of us who were still in school rode the same bus. The bus driver lived about a

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mile down the road from us, so I would occasionally babysit for them at $1.00 for the evening. In this way, I earned enough to buy my first pair of jeans - probably my first independent purchase.

Summer came, and another move out to the homestead (definitely mosquito country), which cemented my determination to "not live like that." Brother Peter had just finished grade 12 in Beaverlodge, Alberta and knew a family who would welcome some help with their 6 children 8 years and under. There was my opportunity!! This devout Catholic family lived in the country on a school bus route. With 2 of their children, I was off to Beaverlodge School to finish grade 12. While here, my teachers recognized potential in me and encouraged me to pursue further education. But how? It's impossible to dream about things you don't know --- and what did I know ---? I could be a teacher. With help from these teachers and my boarding-family mother, arrangements were made for a bursary with the county of Grande Prairie. This would obligate me to return to teach there for 2 years – Doable!

Between finishing grade 12 at the end of June until university started in September, I was somehow connected with a job as a telephone switchboard operator for Alberta Government Telephones in Grande Prairie as well as to a family where I could board in return for help with housework and child care. The first job assigned to me was to bake an angel food cake from scratch. Something I'd never done, but with directions and an electric eggbeater, I managed!

Then, one major move to Edmonton, the big city and the U of A, where Peter had already completed one year of studies. Again, now I would need a place to live. My Grande Prairie family knew of a university professor who needed someone to stay with her mother whenever she travelled – I was in luck. Responsibilities were few. It was a long walk to the education building, but this was easy street! Everything was new - a new world, a new life-! I was on my way.

Author Mary (Dyck) Quapp and brother Peter, U of A,

I moved numerous times with the family, and over my growing-up years, I attended 7 different schools, mostly in different communities. With so many moves, I never really put down roots anywhere. For me, unlike for Dave Toews, an invitation to a class reunion has never been received.

Mary Quapp grew up in northern Saskatchewan and northern Alberta. After graduating from the U of A, she taught grades 3 and 4 for the obligatory 2 years in the friendly community of La Glace in the County of Grande Prairie, where she and brother Peter joined the community choir. For 48 years, she and her engineer husband, David, lived at the same address in Edmonton and attended Lendrum Mennonite Church; she sang in the choir for many years. After retiring from their city jobs, they farmed very successfully at Silver Valley, Alberta, in the summer and travelled extensively for 3 to 4 months of the year, often volunteering with Wycliffe Bible Translators. They have a daughter and 2 very grateful, loving, internationally adopted grandchildren in Ottawa, and when there, they attend Ottawa Mennonite Church.

With God from East Germany to LaCrete

By Ruth Quiring Heppner

An article similar to this previously appeared in the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian in 2015, Vol. 22.

Ruth Quiring Heppner

We were one of several Mennonite families who lived in Mulmke (Werigerode am Hartz). I was the second youngest in a family of 7 children to Erika and Erich Quiring. East Germany quickly became a Soviet socialist system, and at school, the teachings were what good role models Stalin and Lenin were. Our parents did not want us to be brought up in that kind of environment. When three Mennonite families escaped in 1951, the police started watching our property.

Mom writes, “God’s ways are different from our ways,” and in January of 1952, a tailor who sewed a suit for our grandfather had ties with the Russian patrol. We paid the tailor a large sum of money and were to also give him a working cow (1), and his deal was

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to tell the Russian patrol to turn his back when we crossed the border into West Germany. There were 9 of us now – and in order not to be spotted when crossing the border, we divided into 4 separate groups. My oldest brother, Reinhard, aged 17, left first by bicycle several months earlier. My younger sister Inge and I, aged 4 and 5, were the second group to cross the border with our Grandparents, Otto and Marie Bartel. My siblings, Walter, Annemarie, and Dorothy, ages 9-11, were in the third group, and my mom, dad, and thirteen-year-old brother Otto were the fourth and last group to leave our home in East Germany.

My mother says that on the morning of our escape, they found the daily Bible verse on the calendar to be Acts 18:10, "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you." Our parents were deeply thankful for the assurance that the Lord gave us. My mother praised the Lord for this and kept repeating this verse softly to all those near to her during the escape.

On the day of the planned escape, my older siblings attended school in the morning as usual, came home for lunch, said their goodbyes and walked to the train station to take the train as far as it went to the last East German station. They purchased return tickets so as not to be noticed as wanting to escape. When they got on the train, to their dismay, their 3 teachers from school sat right across from them. The teachers asked where they were going? My brother, Walter, replied to, "The city", and that is exactly the place where the teachers had a conference. At Wernigerode, Walter, Annemarie, and Dorothy exited the train with the teachers, but quickly got back onto the same train.....only a different rail car.

At the final East German train station of Stapelburg, my siblings were met by a lady (a prearrangement where each was also told what the other would be wearing so they could identify each other). This lady, who lived right on the border, did not want to be followed too closely, so she told Walter, Annemarie, and Dorothy to window-shop while she started to walk to her home in the forested area. My siblings were invited into her kitchen until she had established that the East German guard finished his shift and before the new guard came on duty. She then took my siblings to a shed and pointed the way to go, through a creek and then to turn left to where the guard station was. This last distance for my siblings to cross over to West Germany was about 500 yards. There was a log across the creek. Walter and Annemarie balanced their way across the creek, but Dorothy fell in. Walter helped her back out and comforted her not to cry. It was January, my siblings were cold and wet but happy to get across safely to Eckertal, West Germany. Here they were to meet our parents in a restaurant. But our parents did not show up…

My parent's group was delayed because our father had to deliver our working cow for ransom money. My dad and the cow were picked up at a disclosed area. However, the truck driver, being an alcoholic, stopped at every pub along the way, thus causing a big delay in getting the cow to its final destination. My dad did not tell the trucker the urgency of the matter. When Dad returned home, he, together with my mother and Otto, were able to leave our home in East Germany. The laundry was left on the line, the animals fed, and the house lights were left on. Down the road, they met up with Uncle Rudy, Aunt Elsbeth, Aunt Irmgard and Uncle Paul. They only went a short distance together when my brother's bicycle chain broke, so they all had to push their bikes to the prearranged destination where a truck was to pick them up. The truck driver took them for a good bit of the way and then told them from here on, they were on their own. He pointed them in the direction to go. However, the direction was wrong, and they encountered deep snow, the end of the road, and a forest. Thankfully, they saw a light in the distance and checked it out for further directions. Praise God they could walk the rest of the way to cross the border without being caught.

The author Ruth Quiring's passport picture, Refugee Camp Gronau/ Westphalia, 1952

My sister, Annemarie, continues her story: "At eight o'clock, the guard station was closed. Dorothy, Walter and I were taken to a bus depot – but at midnight, when it closed, we were put on a bus to the next stop, Gosslar. There, at the train station, we were handed over to the West German police. Our uncle and aunt lived in Seesen, and that was the destination we took. At 6 a.m., our train left, and we were happy when the West German police officer shared some of his breakfast sandwich with us.

When our train arrived in Seesen, we were told that our parents had made it over the border safely and had asked us to remain at the train sta-

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tion until they arrived to get us. Later that morning, we were reunited with our parents. It was Sunday. Our first priority was to attend a church service to thank and praise God for his guidance and deliverance, just as He had promised the morning of our escape. Acts 18:10, "For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you." Our joy, as you can imagine, knew no bounds."

The author's brother Hans Otto Quiring and Grandmother Marie Bartel. Front: Partents Erika and Erich Quiring, Refugee Camp, Gronau, Westphalia, 1952

During our six months in West Germany, we were in a refugee camp in Gronau. God protected us. Then, with the help of MCC, we sailed to Canada on June 28 across the Atlantic on the Beaverbrae.

Mom reports that early on on the ship, she was not feeling well, so she withdrew to lie down. Mom ended up having a miscarriage. She was 39 years old. She continued to find comfort in scripture, such as: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil, for thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." Ps. 23:4. She says this has indeed been her experience. As mom lay in the ship's hospital with terrible headaches and fever, she prayed: "Dear Lord, should you decide to take me, then I am ready. However, if possible, spare me for the children's sake, for I know, from personal experience, how difficult it is to grow up without a mother." On July 7, the day before landing in Quebec City, my mother was released from hospital. She was delighted. And the phrase, "God will be with you," was her solace.

Rear L-R: Walter, Dorothea, Aunt Helene Quiring, Annemarie; Centre: Grandma Marie and Grandpa Otto Bartel, father Erich and mother Erika Quiring; Front: Inge and Ruth. Our first home on the farm, Agassiz, BC, 1952.

Canada-Chilliwack/Agassiz

From Quebec, our family boarded the train on July 9, 1952, to Canada's west coast, Chilliwack, B.C. The East Chilliwack Mennonite Church welcomed us, and Jake and Mary Barg gave us free housing for one year. My siblings and parents worked picking hops, strawberries and raspberries. After paying our "Reiseschuld," Wilhelm Rempel from church co-signed for my parents to purchase an 80-acre farm in Agassiz.

Shortly after signing for the purchase of the farm, my father sustained a bad stroke, so that he was unable to work anymore and subsequently died in 1956. Two of my older brothers cut their education at grade 8 and took turns going to school and working on an Experimental Farm to help pay bills. I'm thankful for learning good work ethics on the farm. We had the opportunity to work in the raspberries by picking and keeping the raspberry patch clean, as well as other jobs in the barn, etc. In the absence of our father, our family was helped with advice and borrowing of farm equipment from our uncles (my mother's cousins).

Calgary to Waldheim/Rosthern

But once my older brothers married in B.C., my mother made the decision for the rest of us to move to Calgary, where we would be closer to more immediate family, and that is where I finished my High School. After a semester in Bible School and a year at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, I worked in the secretarial field in a number of places, including MCC, as a Cardiologist's office assistant and church secretary; when I was 50, I was blessed to join widower Oliver Heppner in marriage, which meant a move to Saskatchewan. I became an instant mother to three

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married adult children and grandmother to four grandchildren. We enjoyed gardening together as well as involvement in ministries of our local church in Waldheim and visiting at the Penitentiary in Prince Albert. Oliver passed away in the summer of 2018 from injuries suffered from a fall.

LaCrete

Another chapter opened up for me when widower Peter Janzen from La Crete (formerly from Blumenheim, Saskatchewan) and I met and subsequently married in October, 2022. We are blessed with a combined family numbering 53 (as of September). Peter and I are involved in the local EMC church close to where we live in the country; as well, I enjoy volunteering at the local Thrift Store. We also enjoy making trips and cherishing the larger family relationships.

Ruth and her late husband Oliver Heppner at her mother's funeral, Rosthern, SK, 2002

Notes

1. Distance of our escape from Mulmke (Wernigerode am Harz) to Germany was about 50 or 60 km (according to my brother, Walter).
2. Working cow: We had 2 cows and later on a horse. So, during the day, my father hitched the cows to a wagon to haul manure or do some harrowing. Once we had a horse, one cow and one horse were hitched to the wagon. My brother, Walter, said that a cow produces more milk if she does some physical work or exercise (2 - 3 hrs) in the morning.

Sources

1. "Unsere Flucht im Januar 1945 von Daubel-Westpreussen" by Erika Quiring, October , 1971
2. "Three Chapters from the Life of Mrs. Erika Quiring and Family," translated by Walter Quiring August 2001 ❖

Ruth and her current husband, Peter Janzen, LaCrete, AB, 2024

Shared Hutterite and Mennonite Experiences

By Ted Regehr

Early History

Mennonites and Hutterites have a shared history of migrating many times. All Anabaptists faced severe persecution, and in the 16th and 17th centuries, most were driven out of the three large European Empires. The so-called Holy Roman Empire, the French and the Spanish Empires all had Roman Catholic Emperors. Many religious dissenters fled to smaller, more remote, less developed regions where the ruling nobles, rulers, and governors were more tolerant. It often helped if the religious refugees could do useful work, or provide services which local people were unwilling or unable to do. That often happened in countries which had so-called wastelands in need of drainage, improvement and settlement.

Most of the early Mennonites and Hutterites were not rural farm people. Jakob Hutter, for example, was a hat-maker, although he later did other work. Menno Simons was a priest in a small town, and some of the most influential Anabaptist leaders were urban intellectuals. Migrations, however, often took them to remote and challenging rural/agricultural frontiers.

The Hutterites, after several moves, settled for a time in eastern Hungary while many Mennonites settled in the marshy Polish/Prussia lowlands of the Vistula and Nougat River deltas. There, and later on other settlement frontiers, they were able to secure religious concessions, including exemption from military service, control of their own schools and access to farmland, because they contributed significantly to the economic development of the country.

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New Frontier Settlement Opportunities

The discovery of America and the loss by the Ottoman Empire of large, unsettled tracts of land in south-eastern Europe opened up new agricultural frontier settlement opportunities for Mennonites and Hutterites.

Jacob Hutter ca 1500 - 1536, GAMEO

In North America, in 1681, William Penn, a Quaker, together with others, was granted a huge tract of land to which he hoped to attract thousands of settlers. Those who responded were promised grants of land and religious freedom in what became the Commonwealth and later the state of Pennsylvania. Included among those who responded to Penn's invitation were numerous Mennonites coming mainly from Switzerland and southern Germany. Mennonite settlements subsequently spread to other territories of what became the United States of America.

Mennonites were not conscripted to fight in the revolutionary American wars of independence, but many had to pay fines which paid for substitutes or provide supporting services, notably food, shelter or transportation, as rival armies marched across their lands. Mennonite refusal to enlist led to suspicions that they favoured the British cause. Others, particularly those with large families, simply needed more land.

After the American Wars of Independence, Lt. Governor Simcoe of Upper Canada, in the name of the King, invited settlers to come to Canada and offered grants of land and religious freedom, including an exemption from military service and freedom to organize their own schools. That promise was extended to American and other Mennonites who arrived later and settled in Ontario and on the prairies.

Hutterites were not involved in these early migrations from Europe to North America. They, together with many Mennonites from Prussia/ Poland, were attracted to a different agricultural frontier.

In several wars, but most notably the Seven Years War, 1756-1763, Russia gained control of large tracts of mostly unsettled land which had previously been part of the Ottoman Empire. That prompted Catharine the Great, Tsarina of Russia, to issue a manifesto inviting people from all German-speaking territories to settle on those large tracts of land. The settlers were promised exemption from military service, freedom of religion, a 30-year exemption from taxes, land at no cost, and government payment of travel and start-up expenses.

Hutterite Family, Erhard's Historia woodcut illustration 1588, GAMEO

Hutterites, then living in Hungary, were among those who responded quickly to that invitation, with about 60 settling at Vishenka in 1770 and a smaller group settling at Radichev a little later.

Mennonites living in Poland and Prussia responded more slowly. Most lived in areas which became part of Prussia after the partitions of Poland in 1772-1792 and 1795. In Prussia, conscription was linked directly to land ownership. Landowners, when conscripted, either had to serve in the military or pay for a substitute. Mennonite land acquisitions also roused opposition by both Roman Catholic and Lutheran church leaders because that reduced their membership and, hence, their financial income. There were also other discriminatory measures which made it very difficult for Mennonites to become land owners. Consequently, in 1789, Prussian Mennonites established their first Russian Mennonite settlement at Chortitza. There were, however, problems and ambiguities, and in 1801, Tsar Paul I was persuaded to issue a new manifesto defining more clearly the terms of religious freedom for Mennonites and Hutterites, including exemptions from military service, control over their schools, and more generous government help in establishing a second Mennonite settlement next to the Molotschnaya River. The Hutterites from Vishenka and Radichev eventually relocated to settlements near those two large Mennonite settlements. In the process, however, some of

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those who settled near the Chortitiza colony abandoned the Hutterite practice of community of goods and joined the Mennonite Brethren church. As a result, the number of Hutterites living in Russia remained small.

Changing Circumstances

Russia suffered a significant military defeat in the Crimean War of 1854-56. Mennonites and Hutterites were not conscripted for active military service in that war, but they had to provide important transportation and other support services and supplies. After the war, there were demands for military reforms, including removal of a great variety of special privileges and practices which had become problematic during the war. That included proposals to limit or withdraw the special privileges granted to all Germans who had responded to Catharine the Great's invitation and settled in Russia.

Mennonites and Hutterites, unlike most of the other German settlers, regarded the exemption from military service as a fundamental religious and not merely a civic issue. A compromise was eventually negotiated whereby Mennonites and Hutterites could provide alternative service, mainly in forestry camps and medical support services. That was accepted by some Mennonites in Russia but rejected by Hutterite leaders and by almost half of the approximately 45,000 Mennonites in Russia. Those not willing to provide alternative service then explored the possibility of migrating to North America where, as already indicated, Mennonites from southern Germany and Switzerland had secured guarantees of religious freedom, including exemptions from military service.

The Mennonites and Hutterites in Russia faced a second problem when, in 1861, Russia emancipated the serfs. Under earlier feudal practices and laws, the peasants or serfs were bound or attached and could not leave the land. As a result, they became virtual slaves of the landowners. After emancipation, the serfs, like the slaves in the United States after their emancipation in 1863, were free to move as they pleased. Unfortunately, no provision was made granting them land to earn a livelihood. Much of the best land was, in fact, held by German, including Mennonite and Hutterite settlers. That resulted in demands for sweeping land reforms to achieve more equitable land ownership and distribution. As a result, Mennonites and Hutterites were finding it increasingly difficult to acquire more land for their often very large families. There were also fears that they might lose some of their land.

The 1870s Migrations from Russia to Canada

Changing Russian policies regarding military or alternative service and land reforms resulted in the migration in the 1870s from Russia to North America of all 1,265 Hutterites then living in Russia and of approximately 18,000 Mennonites. The Hutterites and approximately 10,000 Mennonites emigrated to the United States. However, only about 400 of the 1,265 Hutterites established colonies with community of goods. Approximately 8,000 Russian Mennonites emigrated to Canada in the 1870s.

Both Canada and the United States had a history of granting conscientious objectors exemptions from military service. In practice, however, such exemptions, at least in the United States, were subject to conflicting national, state and local responsibilities. Mennonites migrating to Canada in the 1870s asked for a large land grant, explicit promises of exemptions from military service, and the right to establish and run their own schools. The federal Canadian government obliged by passing an Order-in-Council, which also granted the Mennonites two large reserves of land in the then very recently created province of Manitoba.

The Hutterites, of course, wanted to establish communal colonies while the Mennonites hoped to replicate on their reserves in Canada their Russian Mennonite colony and village settlements.

World War I

When war broke out in 1914, neither Canada nor the United States had well-defined policies regarding conscription for military service. Canada, as part of the British Empire, was in the war from the beginning. French Canadians, however, regarded the war as a struggle between rival European imperialist powers. It was not of interest or concern for them, and they opposed any compulsory military service. But then, as the casualties mounted, demands for conscription increased and was eventually introduced late in the war. Canadian Mennonites were not conscripted in World War 1, but their failure to support the war effort roused the ire of those who most strongly supported the war and made great sacrifices.

The situation in the United States was different. For most of the war, the United States tried to remain, in the words of President Woodrow Wilson, "neutral in thought and deed." Pressure mounted, particularly after the

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sinking in May of 1915 by the Germans of the British passenger ship Lusitania, in which many American passengers perished. The United States declared war on Germany in April of 1917. That resulted in very intense propaganda campaigns and some aggressive conscription initiatives. Promises or guarantees for conscientious objectors were not well defined, in part because responsibility for military recruitment was split between local, state and the federal government. The result was very uneven treatment and the conscription of several Hutterite young men. When two of them refused to serve, they were forcibly inducted into the army, and when they refused to obey commands, they were tortured and murdered.

The 1918-1919 Crisis

The murder of the two Hutterite men led to a decision by Hutterite leaders to emigrate, as an entire community, to Canada. In Canada, however, there was opposition from those who had strongly supported and sacrificed much during the war. Conscientious Objectors who refused to provide military service were not welcome. In addition, there were charges that the Hutterites were communists because they lived communally. After the Russian revolutions, many feared communism would spread world-wide, and some uninformed American critics alleged that the Hutterite were part of a world-wide communist conspiracy. Then, as now, the Americans were susceptible to unrealistic conspiracy theories. So, when large numbers of Hutterites began to arrive in Canada, the federal government passed an Order-in-Council barring the immigration of Hutterites, Mennonites and Doukhobours. That seriously disrupted but did not completely stop Hutterite or Mennonite immigrants, and the Order was rescinded in 1922.

Joseph Hoffer - Martyr, grave marker, Rockport Colony, S Dakota, Plough online

The Mennonite School Crisis

In addition to exemptions from military service, Mennonites and Hutterites wanted effective control of the schools their children attended. That created a crisis for some Canadian Mennonites when the provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan passed legislation requiring children to attend a school taught in the English language following an approved curriculum which included patriotic exercises. Nearly 8000 Mennonites who refused to send their children to an approved school and migrated from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay.

Some Mennonites and the recently arrived Hutterites found a different solution. It was impossible for their children to attend an approved school if they moved to isolated and remote districts where no local schools existed. Their home school or other arrangements, including their own schools, were possible. Those schools were more likely to be tolerated if there was some flexibility. Specifically, the basic expectations were that the children would learn the English language and gain a basic knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic. Beyond that, there were few restrictions on additional material that could be added locally. It was, as I understand it, a variant of this approach which made possible the establishment and operation of schools in the Hutterite colonies.

World War II

Neither Canada nor the United States had peacetime military conscription. In both countries, exemptions from military service for conscientious objectors had been granted at various times, but there were no well defined policies of what other wartime service the government could or might demand of those eligible for an exemption from military service.

As the threat of war increased in the late 1930s, Canadian and US leaders of the various historic peace churches met to work out a proposal all could accept. That, as it turned out, worked better in the United States than in Canada.

The American Mennonites rejected military service and alternative service with any agency or organization with military links. They were, however, willing to provide a great variety of health care, social service, and reconstruction work provided that it was not administered or linked in some way to the armed forces.

There were also separate meetings of historic peace church leaders in Canada because the situation there was more complex.

Canadian Mennonites in Ontario with close links to Mennonite communities in the United States supported the American Mennon-

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ite position.

The Hutterites and Mennonites, who had left Russia in the 1870s, pointed out that they had rejected the compromise negotiated when the Russian government demanded that they provide alternative forestry or health care services. The descendants of the 1870 Mennonite immigrants insisted that the Order-in-Council they had received from the Canadian government exempted them from any and all wartime service.

That position was challenged by Mennonites who had migrated from the Soviet Union after World War I. These people had provided very valuable wartime ambulance and medical services. Some, including my father, had been conscripted and undergone full arms military training but then obtained transfers to serve as orderlies in veterans hospitals or provide other essential ambulance, medical and support services. My father thus served as a private in the Russian army throughout the war, but mostly as either an orderly in a veteran's hospital and then, because of his business school training, as a bookkeeper in the Russian Red Cross. Other Mennonites served as volunteers on specially operated and, in part, Mennonite-financed ambulance trains which ministered to wounded soldiers and brought many home from the battlefront. Those services, of course, had to be coordinated with the military authorities, but most of those involved felt they had served their country well in a time of desperate needs. Thus, leaders like B. B. Janz hoped and expected that they might perform similar services in close cooperation with the Canadian army. These were people who were willing to serve in the army on the front lines, provided their service would be restricted to medical and dental care. They wanted assurances that they would not be compelled to fight and kill enemy soldiers in the battles. Such proposals were not acceptable to Canadian military leaders. They insisted that, particularly in the heat of battle, commanders must have authority to order any members of the forces to do whatever was necessary.

WWII COs building road in Jasper National Park, MB Historical Commission

In the ensuing negotiations, the position of the 1870s migrants, who established their own Aeltestenkomittee, was rejected by the Canadian government and by most members of the other historic peace churches. Government officials pointed out that acts of Parliament, such as the Military Service Act, took precedence if they were in conflict with Orders-in-Council. Therefore, the terms of the 1873 Order-in-Council were superseded. Historically, exemptions from military service did not preclude other forms of non-military wartime service by conscientious objectors. As a result, Mennonite and Hutterite young men were called up for military service. If they qualified as conscientious objectors, they could be assigned to do alternative service work, the terms and conditions of which were subject to negotiations and changing needs.

Food production was critically important during the war, particularly after the Nazis occupied most of northern Europe and cut off vital food supplies to Great Britain. As a result, it was often deemed more relevant to the war effort if Mennonite and Hutterite young men with the farming experience worked at home or wherever they were needed. Alternative service workers could also volunteer or be assigned to work in support positions in mental hospitals, jails and even as teachers in remote indigenous communities. Many, however, worked, at least for some time, in forestry and national park camps.

Late in the war, when manpower shortages were acute, provisions were made for a restricted medical and dental corp. A number of Mennonites served in it, but the restricted medical and dental corps was not promoted by military leaders, and only about 200 men were able to serve in that way.

Hutterite men were conscripted and served as conscientious objectors, but I'm not aware of any Hutterite men who were conscripted and served in the Canadian armed forces during World War II. By contrast, about 60% of conscripted Mennonite men served in various alternative service work, while about 40% were conscripted or volunteered for military service.

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Concluding Comments

In many respects Hutterites and Mennonites follow different lifestyles, but they share some important religious teachings which have, at various times, brought them together. Specifically, they rejected military service, were concerned about and wanted to control or at least significantly influence the education of their children. In addition, as long as they were primarily agricultural people, land grants and secure land ownership provisions were important to both Hutterites and Mennonites.

Hutterites tended to take a unified, quite literal and conservative stance in all these matters. The most conservative and traditional Mennonite groups have often taken positions similar to those of the Hutterites, but the strategies and responses of other Mennonites were more varied and flexible.

Commitments to cherished teachings, principles and beliefs have not precluded practical interpretations and adjustments in changing circumstances. Thus, while the immigrants of the 1870s rejected Russian alternative service requirements, their descendants worked as alternative service workers in Canada during World War II. Similarly, commitments to a set German or Low German school curriculum has been adjusted by adding English language instruction and commitments to teach basic academic subjects of reading, writing and arithmetic in private elementary schools. And while most Canadian Mennonites are no longer farmers, Hutterites committed to the establishment of farming communities have had to navigate a variety of outside demands.

It is, I think, beneficial to consider carefully the values, ideals, teachings and beliefs of our parents and ancestors, noting that they, like we, struggled to apply what we believe in rapidly changing times. ❖

The Chronicle welcomes Joanne Wiens as a regular contributor with "Stories and Snippets" from her family's history, life's journey and time as a teacher and principal. Her talent comes naturally inherited from her grandfather, Peter B. Wiens, former Editor of the German language periodical Der Bote. Joanne will continue here to share her grandfather's passion for fiddling with words. [Editor's note]

Joanne Wiens

Stories and Snippets

By Joanne Wiens

For about the last two years, I have been immersed in a video project to commemorate our family's 100th anniversary since arrival in Canada from Russia. I am excited to use this column to highlight some of the stories I gathered and also share a snippet of thought over what I gleaned from my ancestral family.

The production I worked on was called *B-line: The Movie*. *B-line* is a reference to our particular branch of Wienses. Bernhard and Elizabeth Wiens, my great-grandparents, gave the middle name Bernhard to the two sons from Bernhard's first marriage, to the eight living children Bernhard and Elizabeth had in Russia, and their three children who died in infancy. With several separate strains of Wienses in the prairie town of our roots - Herschel, Saskatchewan - to keep everyone straight, *B-line* as a moniker emerged. *The Movie* is perhaps a grandiose title, but I started referring to the production I was working on as *The Movie* when my media-savvy cousin hopped on board as my co-collaborator. His technical talent, video and drone footage, and creation of some Russia footage brought it all up a notch in class!

The Story: There are seemingly endless stories to tell, but I want to begin with the story of our matriarch, Elizabeth. Elizabeth has a relatively brief appearance in the Wiens' story compared to other family members, but it was pivotal and it gives a brief overview of the first Canadian decade for the *B-line*. In addition, since it seems that our matriarchs often get the short shrift in our historical narrative, I thought it was honouring to begin with her. Elizabeth was the second wife of Bernhard. They raised their eight children in Friedensdorf, Russia, until, as we know, circumstances became difficult, anarchy reigned, poverty and starvation were rampant, and some 21,000 Mennonites made their exodus to Canada.

Bernhard and Elizabeth began their journey to Canada in November, 1924. Bernhard would leave first and go to Moscow to arrange for all travel documents. That sounds like a simple sentence, but consider what it means: this left Elizabeth, plus eight children between the ages of 3 and 18, to make the journey on her own, not

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only with an entourage of children but all of their belongings. Not to mention, they were each also carrying their collective emotional angst and trauma over leaving family, friends, the horrors they'd experienced, and all that was encompassed in leaving 'home.' First they went by cart and horse to the train station, then a couple of train rides before they were reunited with Bernhard. Then it was onto the Red Gate checkpoint in Latvia, where their documents and belongings were inspected, before the ship *Baltara* took them to Southampton. In Southampton, Bernhard and Elizabeth had a seemingly inconceivable decision to make: one of their daughters did not pass the health inspection and needed to remain behind until her trachoma healed. At first, it was Elizabeth who was going to stay behind with her, but Bernhard felt it was "too great a burden" to leave without his wife. Eventually, the family left behind two of their teenagers – the eldest son and middle daughter. How Elizabeth must have worried about how those two would handle recovery from illness and an ocean crossing on their own.

Elizabeth was terribly seasick throughout the crossing on the *Marburn*. Bernhard wrote how Elizabeth could not keep anything down and was mainly confined to her bed, surviving on dried bread and coffee. Their cabin, he wrote, was cramped and a pigsty. They were more than anxious to arrive on solid ground in their new country, believing they would be going to Ontario. But another surprise game changer occurred when a representative from the Mennonite Board of Colonization greeted them at the port and informed them that they were instead going to Saskatchewan; in particular, they would be in a group of ten families who would divide a portion of land in the town of Herschel. They acquiesced, and after a stay in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, for a time, the family - all intact now - arrived in Herschel in the brutal cold with -30 degree temperatures in February of 1925.

They walked again behind a horse and cart from the train station, up the valley, to a number of outbuildings that would become home. For a year, they would live and farm communally with the ten families until, at last, a portion of the land was allotted to Bernhard and Elizabeth. They moved a summer kitchen as their dwelling place for a family of ten and also a hip-roof barn using 40 horses to their new land.

Elizabeth Wiens and her youngest daughter, Mary, outside their first home, Herschel, SK, ca 1927

Unsure that this location would be sufficient for his family, Bernhard wrote back to the Mennonite Colonization Board to see if more land would be available. The Willow Creek area of Alberta was identified as being a possibility and leaving their eldest on the Herschel farm, Bernhard and Elizabeth moved the rest of their family to the Drumheller region. This would be a failed experiment, but for a few years, they attempted to farm and the boys worked in the coal mines, and the girls worked out as hired help. But most significantly, it was here that Elizabeth was unwell, developed breast cancer, and, on December 29, 1929, succumbed to her illness. She had been in Canada a brief five years. In January of the new year, again in brutal weather, her casket – anchored by the boys hanging onto it - was driven in an open Touring car down the hills to the Drumheller cemetery. As one of her sons in his memoir wrote poignantly, "There Mother rests all by herself."

The Snippet: I've thought about Elizabeth a lot in the last two years. Dying at 52, with young children and teenagers who still needed her, she seemed to have been short-changed on the fullness of Life. But perhaps Life isn't only measured in its number of days. In Elizabeth, I also see a legacy of planting a seed that would grow beyond what she could have possibly imagined. Elizabeth was instrumental in getting her family out of Russia. She provided for them in their early Canadian years in primitive accommodations; perhaps, just when she thought she was settled, she had to uproot again in hopes of securing her children's future. She started her family's roots in a new country and set the course for future generations. However, Elizabeth never saw that end game: her children's successful adaptation to Canada. Neither did she witness the considerable growth and closeness of her expanded family. Far from being insignificant, Elizabeth is the reason hundreds of us live in safety and security today. Elizabeth planted our *B-line*

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with a firm faith and deep care for her family.

Sometimes, when I drive the road between my home in Calgary and my Saskatchewan roots, I take the slightly longer route via Drumheller. I don't always stop at the cemetery, but I slow down, take in the scenery that would have been her final home, and think about Elizabeth. I honour her memory. I am grateful for the giant steps into the unknown future she took for her family. I thank her for giving us all a start in this peaceful land. And I tell her out loud that right now, just for this little bit of time on my drive, I am close by as her great-granddaughter, and she isn't all alone. Not at all. She is in my heart, and it is filled with love from the very seed she planted. ❖

Thank You Harvey Wiehler

By Bill Franz

Harvey Wiehler

A big thank-you to Hartwick (Harvey) Wiehler, who faithfully volunteered as layout person on the Chronicle for eight years, from June 2016 to June 2024. Harvey would take the edited articles and photos and lay out the Chronicle for publication, in print and online. Harvey was born in Germany and emigrated to Canada with his family, initially settling in Rosetown, Saskatchewan and then moving to Calgary. His family story, *Coming to Canada: Hans and Charlotte Wiehler*, was featured in the October 2016 issue of the Chronicle (available at https://mennonitehistory.org - see newsletter (The Chronicle) on the home page for back issues). In his work, Harvey's expertise with software allowed him to travel much of the world. The Chronicle staff very much appreciated his dedication to the task and also his willingness to mentor others. We wish you rest, relaxation, and recreation in your "retirement," Harvey! ❖

Welcome Waldemar (Wally) Friesen

Wally Friesen

I was born in St. Catharines, Ontario and raised in a family with four children. My parents had grown up in Mennonite colonies in Ukraine during the early years of the Communist regime in the Soviet Union. They lived through the Ukrainian famine (the Holodomor) in 1932-33 and the repression of the Stalin regime. As young adults, they made their way to Germany during World War II and emigrated to Canada in 1948. My mother was sponsored by her uncle in Ontario, whereas my father landed in Alberta, where he worked for one year as a labourer on farms in Eckville and Edmonton to repay his travel debt to the Canadian government. In 1949, he moved to St. Catharines, where he met and married my mother.

My parents became deeply involved in the St. Catharines United Mennonite Church, which was composed primarily of post-war immigrants like themselves. For many years, services were conducted in both German and English. Although low German (Plautdietsch) was the language of conversation between my parents and their peers, high German was the spoken language between parents and children in our home. Parental discussions to which the children were not to be privy were conducted in Russian.

After graduating high school, I studied physics at Brock University and the University of British Columbia. Then I joined the federal Department of Energy, Mines, and Resources (later to become Natural Resources Canada) as a scientist at the Devon Research Centre. Following a 32-year career, I retired in 2014. My wife, Irma, and I have two adult children, one grandson, and no pets.

I have previously served as a volunteer director on the boards of the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, the Northern Alberta chapter of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, and Canadian Peacemakers International. Currently, I am a director on the board of the Sombrilla International Development Society, which is focused on helping educate people in Latin America. I also volunteer with the Edmonton MCC Thrift Shop.

My interest in Mennonite history is very personal, in that it is concerned with finding out the stories of my parents and forebears. To my regret, I missed the opportunity to delve extensively into my family background before my par-

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ents passed away, so now it is a matter of playing catchup. I feel it is important to pass on as much as I can to my children so that they can retain some sense of their Mennonite heritage.

An important question for me concerns the fate of my maternal grandfather, who was arrested by the NKVD during the purge of 1938 and languished in prison for a year before disappearing. Was he exiled to Siberia or was he executed? My grandmother firmly believed the latter was the case, but I have found a geneological record indicating that he died in Sverdlovsk, U.S.S.R in 1966. The definitive answer may only be available in NKVD archives in Ukraine. ❖

A Favourite Teacher
Dr. David Jeffares

By Bill Franz

Sometimes, you meet a person who appears to be held in great respect by others. I met David Jeffares once as he was hanging up his hat as secretary of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. This would have been over five years ago, at the 2019 Annual General Meeting and Spring Conference. David had also served as a director of the MHSA, and on the editorial committee of The MHSA Chronicle. This was before my time, but afterwards I would keep hearing David's name from a relative of his, Moira Jackson, who obviously was fond of him.

I belong to a local writing group, Inkblots, whose members are mostly retired teachers. One brought a copy of the Summer 2024 edition of News & Views, The Magazine of the Alberta Retired Teachers' Association, to our recent meeting. An article, Kudos to a Favourite Teacher, inspired this member to write a story about her favourite teacher. She wrote about this teacher at the beginning of his career, who was lured back to the district where he came from, near Huxley. He taught for two years at Arthurville School, the one-room schoolhouse that she attended. These were formative years for this young girl, who was inspired to also become a teacher. One particular incident impressed her greatly. Her teacher had pulled aside three young students to have a talk about inappropriate behaviour. The girls came out of the room looking crestfallen and chagrined. Our young teacher-to-be informed their teacher that she was going to be a teacher and needed to know what he had said in that room. The wise young teacher told her to come back and see him when she had a class of her own.

David Jeffares went on to have a long and remarkable career as a teacher and administrator in Alberta, France, and Australia. He earned his PhD in 1973 and then, as a director with Alberta Education, was instrumental in the development of the early childhood program and the integration of special needs children. David and his wife, Dolores, also an educator, were subsequently invited to Australia. At the University of New South Wales's College of Advanced Education, David developed the Early Childhood program for New South Wales, which was subsequently adopted in the rest of the country. David was an adjunct professor at the University of Alberta until his retirement in 1998. In 2005, David received the Alberta Centennial Award for his outstanding contributions to education.

David Jeffares

David Jeffares (recently)

In recent years, David suffered a stroke and now resides in supportive living in Edmonton. He has, without a doubt, had a long-lasting influence on those he taught and with those who have had the privilege to get to know him. David is quoted in Kudos to a Favourite Teacher:

"Take the time to see a child as he unfolds. Sense his needs, what'er they be, and what the future holds." - David Jeffares (1977)

(see Teacher on page 26)

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Sources:
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3. Kaye Rechner, email message to author, August 30, 2024.
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Letters to the Editor

Dear David, July 25, 2024

The story by Eleanor and John Woollard of their trip to Uzbekistan brought back a lot of memories of the trip my wife Jane and I took to the Soviet Union in 1984.

My mother, Cornelia Martens, had passed away in January of 1981, and I had inherited her correspondence that she had had with her two sisters, who had stayed behind when my mother and father migrated to Canada in 1925.

I wrote to the aunts about my mother's passing and thus began a correspondence with Aunt Liese and Aunt Anna, who had been forced to eke out an existence in Kazakhstan. This culminated in our decision to make a visit with them in the summer of 1983. The two aunts lived in the village of Shymkent, Kazakhstan, 13km from Tashkent, Uzbekistan. At that time, the easiest way to travel there was by making a group tour of Russia, making sure that Tashkent was on the itinerary. Throughout our tour from Moscow, Bratsk (Siberia), Irkutsk, Lake Baikal and finally Tashkent, we had an English-speaking young lady who kept us well informed about the geography and culture of Russia but with very little about its politics. In Tashkent, she allowed us to stay a few days, missing out on some nearby city tour, but with a chance to see my aunts. The meeting was unbelievable! Aunt Anna looked like my mother, and Aunt Liesa sounded like her. With the two of them and a couple of cousins, we crowded into an old Lada and drove across the border to their home. There, in an old house with dirt floors and noisy pigs in the back yard we were treated with great hospitality, staying the night. Poverty was evident everywhere in Russia at that time. To us, Russia and the Russians looked as if they were one step away from having survived WWII.

We went on to visit Samarkand, well described in the article by the Woollards. Forty years ago, from what I have seen from recent pictures and videos of Russia, the changes in their economy and the people have been radical.

From Samarkand we travelled to Bukhara, to the Black Sea, to Sochi and to Leningrad before going once again through Moscow customs and home. It was one crazy trip!

I continued to correspond with my aunts, and this intrigued my older sister Martha to suggest that she might want to visit them as well if I were to go along as a "guide." Martha was more fluent in Plautdietsch than I was and would make a real asset on a visit.

This time, I bought one of the first Kodiak 8-mm movie cameras for the trip with a special itinerary for just the two of us with the intention of staying longer with our kinfolk. So, in the summer of 1985, we took a 3-week holiday. However, the Russians, still trying to maximize their tourist dollar, made us take the obligatory visits to Moskow and Leningrad before we were able to get to Tashkent. Since we weren't on a regular tour, we were ferried to hotels and airports by car, a couple of times in one of those black Russian cars reserved for diplomats and important visitors. In Tashkent we were booked into their expensive Intourist Hotel and met later by our aunts and a cousin still driving his old Lada.

I convinced my two aunts to do an on-camera interview in which I tried to get them to relate some of their history. They were somewhat reluctant as they thought it might compromise themselves and me if the film was confiscated.

Later, in the '90s, the whole clan, including my very old aunts, were able to migrate to Germany, and we visited them several times before their passing.

Sincerely,
Frank Martens, Summerland, BC

Dear Dave Toews, Oct 13, 2024

Thank you for keeping in touch with me. The planned trip to the Wilson Siding Hutterite Colony will be an interesting experience

(See Letters on page 27)

(Letters from page 26)

for the MHSA members.

As I am living in a senior's Home and do not drive, it will not be possible for me to attend the meeting. My thoughts and prayers will be with you.

Peter and I enjoyed being members of MHSA and appreciated the programs we attended. I would appreciate receiving news of MHSA. When I pass away (I am 98 years old), you will be notified and would then discontinue sending notices.

Blessings to you as you continue to keep Mennonite history alive. To God be the glory.

Justina Penner, Calgary, AB ❖

Giselle Goes to School

By Katie Doke Sawatsky

Editor's note: *Rita Dahl is a lifetime member and supporter of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, as was her husband, Ralph. The MHSA Chronicle congratulates Rita on the publication of this highly entertaining, colourful, very popular children's book. The book is in its third printing.*

Rita Dahl
(credit Ruth Bergen Braun)

When Rita Dahl was a child, the bottom third of the family's kitchen door was her canvas. The top sections were for her older sisters to draw on.

"We were products of the Depression, and we couldn't buy a lot of paper, so our mother let us draw on the kitchen door," she said. "We used chalk that the teacher had thrown out, the little stubs, and . . . drew pictures every day. Then we washed the door off, and the next day, we did it again."

Growing up in Fiske, Saskatchewan, Dahl, 92, went on to study art in Emma Lake and continued creating while raising four kids with her husband, Ralph, a doctor from Edmonton. She was a teacher for 10 years and was actively involved in church choirs and Sunday school. She saved colourful inserts and envelopes for collages and, over the years, gave away most of her artwork.

When her husband of 66 years died in 2023, and Dahl was "in a bit of a slump," her eldest daughter found a picture of a striped giraffe under her mother's bed and told Dahl she should do something with it. Dahl returned to painting, and the story of Giselle the giraffe was born.

"I know about discrimination, I know about non-acceptance, rejections, intolerance," said Dahl. When teaching grades 1 and 2, she saw that "kids can be quite cruel." She decided to write out of that experience. "Write about what you know," Dahl told herself.

In the 28-page, self-published book *Giselle Goes to School,* Giselle doesn't fit in because of her stripes. After trying to cover them up, she meets other giraffes with different colours and learns to celebrate difference.

"Mom has done all of the artwork, either with fingerpainting, watercolours, markers, crayons, collages, just everything," said Diane Summers, Dahl's daughter.

Dahl's son, who studied English, wrote the text to accompany Dahl's 14 illustrations. All of the book's artwork is made out of recycled material, something Dahl attributes to living through the Depression. "We keep everything," she said.

Some of the pages feature paper from a calendar mailed to her from a man in Korea, whom Dahl corresponded with in the '50s and '60s as part of her work with a women and missions group.

"[The calendar pages] are very beautiful, brilliant colours," said Summers. "She didn't want to throw them away."

Dahl, who now lives in Calgary, had a book signing at First Mennonite Church in November 2023, where she sold 66 books. She's also sold 30 books to people at her living complex. Sales from the first 200 books raised $2000 for Mennonite Central Committee and other charities.

Dahl said it's important that the arts are encouraged because "people like me who are not skilled at many things thrive on the arts." It also builds up confidence and "helps children to feel good about themselves," she said.

"She's worked all her life with art," said Summers. She said it is a way to recognize her mom as well as other seniors or people who have a passion that can be shared with others.

Dahl said one thing about using your imagination is that it spills

(See Giselle on page 28)

(Giselle from page 27)

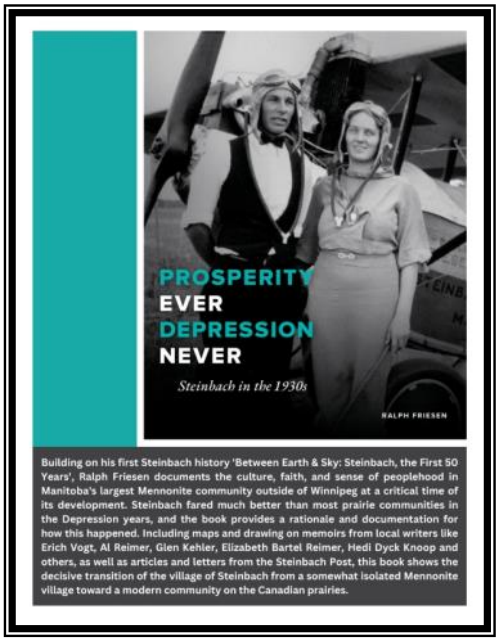
into other parts of life. "I decorate my meals. My radishes become roses, and everything looks nice," she said. "I think there's a place for beauty."

Giselle Goes to School can be ordered by contacting:
ritadahl26@gmail.com.

A similar article appeared in the July 5, 2024, issue of Canadian Mennonite. Reprinted with permission. ❖

Prosperity ever, Depression never: Steinbach in the 1930s

By Ralph Friesen, 2024, The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.
Reviewed by Bill Franz



Where to begin? *Prosperity ever, Depression never* is an impressive tome with a large glossy format, soft cover, many photos, and is impeccably researched and written. When I was approached to write a book review on behalf of the Chronicle, I thought, "What do I know about Steinbach?" Turns out I do have several connections, from personal experience and from having read several books by local authors. What does the artist say? This book, by a well-known author, is written from an outsider's perspective, although Ralph clearly has deep roots in the community.

I was fortunate to attend online the Subjects, Settlers, Citizens conference subtitled The 1870s Mennonites in Historical Context, hosted by the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. Ralph Friesen was part of a panel discussion where authors read from their works, followed by a Q and A session. One person in the audience said (and I'm paraphrasing), "The organizers really know how to ruin a good conference. From including the Indigenous to talking about the Nazis…". I don't recall what answer was given to that "question"! I also attended the online book launch at McNally Robinson Booksellers. The inaugural book launch had been held at the Mennonite Heritage Village near Steinbach. Ralph Friesen is just as comfortable with an audience as he is on the page; his wit and intellect shine through.

The book's first chapter, The Creek *Stony Brook*, captivated me. I did struggle in the next chapter, Main Street *The Backbone*, through no fault of the writer or the material. It's just that I have little connection to the people and places described. This chapter makes up about one-third of the material. But I did find myself referring back more than once to confirm my understanding of the story. Power *A Century of Progress* at first surprised me, as I was anticipating perhaps a chapter on electrification, street lighting, etc. But no, it was a far more interesting chapter on power balances in the community, among the churches, the Board of Trade, individual businesses, the Village Council, the Hanover Municipality Council, and to some extent, the school board and the newspaper. This chapter concludes with the acknowledgement that women had minor roles, if any, in the power structures.

The following chapters are Economy *No Unemployment*, Religion *On Fire for the Lord*, Aviation *A Bird's-eye View*, Education *The Maple Leaf Forever*, and Arts and Sports *Steinbach Will Go Far*. I found the chapters on Economy, Religion, Education, and Arts and Sports enlightening. Particularly poignant are five stories shared in Religion, of outsiders (individuals) not fitting in with the expectations of church authorities, or even those of the general population.

The Hospital *Mission Work* chronicles perhaps Steinbach's crowning achievement. How the community came together to build the Bethesda Hospital is a story of an ecumenical movement that brought citizens together as nothing had before, and nothing would afterward.

The final chapter, Identity Shift *No Longer Mennonite*, details the changes from the 1870s immigrants to the 1930s, from the Low German language, which they all had had in common, Anglicization in the school, British and Canadian nationalism, and an unfortunate flirtation with Nazism. This changed with the advent of World War Two.

This is an impressive work that, in my opinion, will stand the test of time. ❖