



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XXIII Number 1

March 2020

MHSA Fall Conference 2019 Report

by Bill Franz

A good number of people turned out on Saturday, November 16, 2019 at the Gem of the West Museum (the former Coaldale MB Church). The theme was



Bill Franz

“Alternative Service in the Second World War: Crisis of Conscience, Crisis of Community” with guest speaker Conrad Stoesz of the Mennonite Heritage Archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Katie Harder, MHSA Vice Chair, opened with a reading of John McCrae’s war poem In Flanders

(See MHSA on page 9)

How I Got Here

by Randy Brandt

I am of Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite background. The Kleine Gemeinde had their beginnings around 1815 when they split from the larger Mennonite church in the Molotschna colony, now southern Ukraine. In Mexico and Latin America they are still known by the Kleine Gemeinde name. In Canada since the 1950's, they have been known as the Evangelical Mennonite Church, and in both Canada and the U.S.A their congregations belong to the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC).

I grew up in Mennville, Manitoba, a particularly conservative Kleine Gemeinde community a couple of hours straight north of Winnipeg. My father was Jacob Barkman Brandt (1940 – 2007), and my mother is Mary Friesen Klassen (1940 -). Both sets of my grandparents moved to the Mennville area in the late 1950's. My father's family moved from Blumenort, near Steinbach, and my mother's family moved from Rosenort, near Morris.

Although I grew up mostly in Mennville, I arrived here by way of many other Manitoba towns too: Gimli, where I was born; Riverton, where for



Randy Brandt

(See Here on page 4)

In this Issue

1. How I Got Here
1. Fall Conference Report
2. Editorial Reflections
3. Chairman's Corner
11. Jacob Harder Tribute
11. Centennial Memories
15. Mennonites in Peace Country
18. Places of the Past
19. Schleithem Confession
25. David Jeffares Bio
26. June 1990 MHSA Newsletter
27. Mennonite Heritage Farm
27. Letters to the Editor
28. AGM & Spring Conference

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

AGM & Spring Conference:

La Crete Area & Russian Mennonite History

Date: Saturday June 6, 2020

Time: AGM 10 AM, Conference 1 PM,
Q & A and light lunch to follow

Place: La Crete Heritage Centre, La Crete, Alberta

Featuring:

Susan Siemens, La Crete &
Dr Colin Neufeldt, Edmonton

See the poster on the back page for more details

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

As I write this on Mar 20, 2020 we are experiencing the most uncharted territory of my lifetime! The COVID-19 pandemic has changed almost

everything in our daily lives. Scheduled events, appointments, sports, flights, school and church activities have all been postponed, cancelled until further notice or cancelled altogether. When will the escalation curve of increased cases in Canada start to flatten? In China it took two months with very vigorous curtailment of normal activities. Hopefully by the time you are reading this, Canadian cases will be on the downtrend, and we can look forward to a gradual return to normalcy.



Dave Toews

My Toews and Kroeger families had their own experience with an epidemic. On Apr 8, 1918 my grandfather Deacon Johann Isaak Toews of Osterwick, South Russia (present day Ukraine) died of typhus at age 52 during the epidemic of 1918-1922. That plague took an estimated two to three million lives. Of course, that situation was complicated by WWI, the Russian Revolution, famine, and lack of modern medicine. On the other hand, my maternal grandmother Maria (Wiebe) Kroeger, a lay caregiver and wife of pastor Abram of Neu-Chortitza in the same area, came through unscathed. Maria cared for the sick and dying during that period at huge risk to herself and her family, but by the grace of God they all lived through it. She passed away in Canada at age 88 in 1955. I was 10 years old at her funeral at Dundurn, Saskatchewan.

In sharp contrast to the somber tone of our daily pandemic updates, Andrew Unger, a high school English Language Arts teacher in Steinbach and Oberschulze (Mayor) of the Mennonite satirical news site "Daily Bonnet", is having a field day. In a recent

issue Unger says (and I paraphrase) that Mr. Harder of Ditsied (This Side) is in self-imposed quarantine for the next two weeks after an "international" trip he took to the other side of the river. "I went all the way to Jantsied (Other Side)," said Mr. Harder. "I knew it was risky, but I had *frintschofit* (relatives) who needed visiting and *zoat* (sunflower seeds) that needed knocking (cracking)!" It's not known when the border between Jantsied and Ditsied will be closed, but snowbirds in Jantsied are being asked to get home to Ditsied as soon as possible.

Mennonites who love to laugh at themselves should definitely subscribe to this site at <https://dailybonnet.com/>.

At Lendrum Mennonite Church we were partway through a Saturday morning Mennonite History series when it was postponed for who knows how long due to the virus. This seven-segment series from Pre-Anabaptist times through to the establishment of Mennonite communities in South and Central America was being well received. Also, I had been learning a lot about the period of the Mennonites in Russia as I prepared for my presentation.

Thank you to all the authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated. It is a pleasure to work with you.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at dmtows@gmail.com with any questions or comments. Hope we can all make it to the AGM and Spring Conference in La Crete in June. ♦

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

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

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

To join, send payment to:

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

Editor: Dave Toews

Copy Editor: Carolyn Wilson

Layout: Harvey Wiehler

Distribution: Bill Janzen

Membership List: Ellie Janz

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

MHSA Executive

Chair: Ken Matis, Lethbridge
Vice Chair: Katie Harder, Didsbury
Secretary: Jake Driedger, Calgary
Treasurer: Jake Retzlaff, Calgary

Members at Large:

Ernie Wiens, Sherwood Park
Bill Franz, Red Deer
David Jeffares, Edmonton
Sigrid Warkentin, Calgary
Verne Klassen, Duchess
Dave Toews, St Albert

GAMEO Representative:

Vacant

MAID Representative:

Vacant

Chairman's Corner

by Ken Matis

Recently I was speaking with a pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church, which is my denomination, about Mennonite history in hopes of getting him to come to our MHSA conference. However, he refused to come saying something to the effect that what happened in the past should be left in the past, and we shouldn't be always dragging up the past. Sadly the aforementioned statement reflects the sentiment of many Mennonites, especially Mennonite Brethren. It is said that experience is the best teacher, but our learning would be very narrow if we profited only from our own experiences. Through the study of history we can touch people in other times and places and add what they learned there to our own knowledge.

Such an examination of past



Ken Matis

events is intellectual, but it can be practical as well. It can help us accomplish the work we do. Take, for example, the job of a bank manager. He does not need particular historical knowledge of the philosophy of John Locke to run his bank branch. However, he cannot do his job without writing reports to the bank's president that summarize the branch's financial transactions over time. To write such reports, he must have mastered the skills of historical research: he must gather evidence and then look for patterns in it, analyze and summarize it, and draw conclusions about it.

If business at his bank branch falls off sharply in June, what is the manager to do? Does this mean that the branch should be closed? If he has no records of the bank's past performance, he may not be able to answer that question.

However, since all businesses employ researchers and analysts to look at themselves over time, he will have reports on the level of business done by the bank in years past. When he studies these reports, it may become clear that

business always drops in June because a major depositor, a nearby factory, shuts down that month for retooling.

The lesson is a simple one: no business or organization can operate intelligently without an understanding of its own history. In a sense, office workers in businesses, governments, churches, and institutions operate as historical record-producers and record-keepers. When decisions about policy or future production and investment are to be made, research reports pull these historical records together to help predict outcomes.

It is said that history is the greatest teacher both intellectually and practically. The ability to see the present in relationship to the past is a skill needed not only by academic historians; it is essential preparation for almost any field of endeavor or work. Understanding the past can be its own reward, but it pays off in other ways as well. In fact, people who think that history is irrelevant run the risk of history making that same judgment of them. ❖

Membership Application, Renewal

- **Memberships are due at the beginning of each year (\$30.00/yr).**
- ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- The Chronicle is published in Mar, June and Oct of each year.

Mail membership form and cheque to:

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

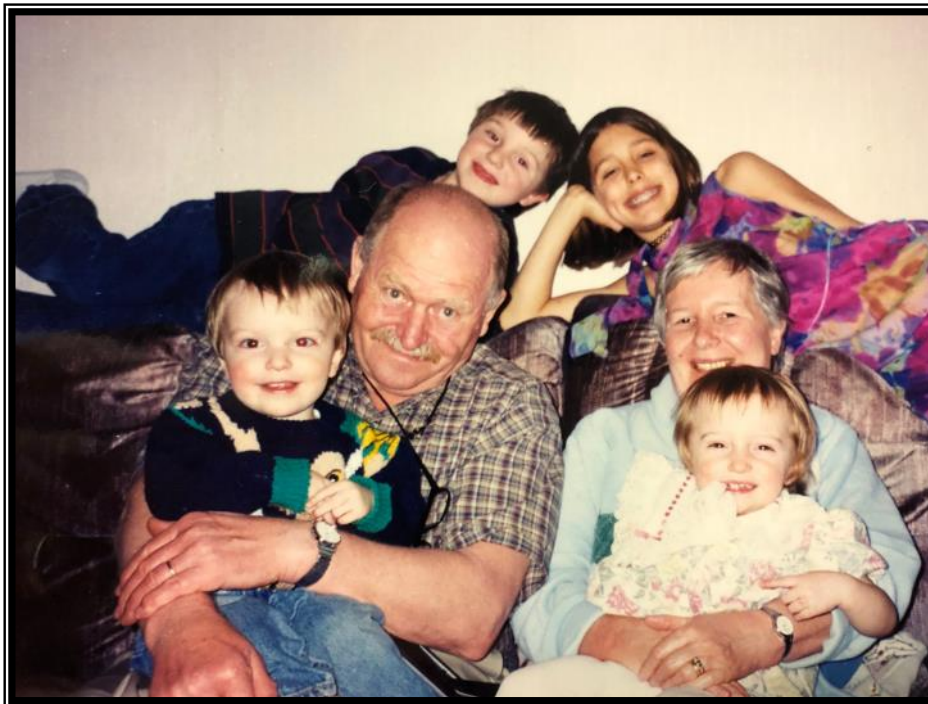
_____ Postal Code _____

Email address: _____ Phone# _____

(Here from page 1)

the most part I went to school; Winnipeg where I went to university; and Steinbach where I worked for almost a decade. Somewhere in there I spent parts of my childhood in small towns in Saskatchewan (Black Lake and Hudson Bay) and Alberta (Brooks, Bassano, and Rosemary). My wife Susan and I raised our children in Steinbach and in St. Paul Alberta.

So where am I from? I'm afraid that I can't give a straight answer to that question. My family history demonstrates how I come by this rootlessness, this not belonging to any particular chunk of geography. In trying to trace where I come from, I thought of one distant and perhaps speculative predecessor King Redbad of ancient Friesland, and one more recent and direct ancestor my great-great-great-grandfather Abraham Friesen Reimer (1808-1892).



The author's parents Jacob and Mary Brandt
L-R Author's children Nick, Russell, Jordan and Jessie 2001

King Redbad of Friesland

Prior to the move to the Russian Empire in early 19th century, many Mennonites maintained historic ties with either Flemish or Frisian communities. If you are an ethnic Mennonite you may be able to trace your family tree through Frisia (Friesland) in what is now northern Holland on the Baltic Sea. Our surnames tell us about these origins. If you are a Froese, Franz, Quiring, or Penner as I am, you have Frisian roots. (Confusingly the Friesen surname is Flemish and does not originate in Friesland.)

Frisians, a Germanic tribe, were in Northern Holland on the Baltic since prehistoric times. The Romans conquered them only with difficulty. They were an independent and rebellious lot.

From about 680 AD to 719 AD, Redbad was King of the Frisians. His



King Redbad declines
to be baptized

position as king apparently included the role of high priest. At that time the Frisians were still pagans, having resisted Christian attempts to convert them for several centuries. The Frisians were noted for their repugnant enthusiasm for human sacrifice. They particularly favoured a ritual in which small children were tied to heavy weights on the seashore at low tide. The tide came in, the water rose, and the children were drowned, presumably taken by the Sea God.

In the early 700's the Church sent Irish monk Willibrod and Irish missionaries to convert the Frisians. Eventually they got to King Redbad and convinced him to become a Christian and be baptised. This was momentous. If King Redbad became Christian, his people would also be Christian.

The baptism was quite an event. Willibrod and the missionaries were there. King Redbad's nobles and warlords all congregated. Willibrod led the king to the font, ready to be baptised a Chris-

(See Here on page 5)

(Here from page 4)

tian. Then at the edge of the font, in the presence of the assembled congregation, as he was about to touch the water, King Redbad paused. He had one final question.

Willibrod was a little impatient but said, "Yes, what is it?"

King Redbad asked, "If I am baptised will I see my deceased relatives and my ancestors the Kings of Friesland in heaven?"

Willibrod replied, "Most certainly not! Your ancestors all died as pagans and so will certainly go to hell. You on the other hand will be a Christian and will live blissfully and eternally in heaven."

"Ok," said King Redbad, "and what about my mortal enemies the Franks? I hate those guys. Will they be in heaven?"

"Yes," said Willibrod. "The Franks have been Christians for centuries. All Christians will experience eternal joy in heaven."

At this point King Redbad withdrew his foot from the font. He called off the baptism. In that case, he said, he would not be baptized. He would much rather be with his ancestors in hell than spend eternity in heaven with his Christian enemies.

King Redbad didn't stop there. He killed a number of Christian missionaries and drove the rest of them out of Friesland. He then led a kind of pagan religious revival. The historical documents are scant and do not record whether this involved tent meetings or altar calls. We do know that as long as Redbad ruled, Christianity made no more inroads into his kingdom.

Reflection

My Grandpa Frank Penner Brandt (1912 – 2003) had a similar

(but slightly more peaceful) set of confrontations in the 1950's. At that time American preachers led revival meetings in southern Manitoba, urging Mennonites to be become "born again". It is by faith that we are saved, they said, not by works. Grandpa Brandt didn't buy this kind of talk. He was known for his bluntness and lack of diplomacy. He said that it was easy to say all kinds of things. He didn't believe in such "dumheit" (stupidity). He took the old Kleine Gemeinde position that what matters is how you behave, and that was that. Grandpa Brandt is said to have scoffed at one of his neighbors, "When the pigs in your barn notice that you are Born Again, then I'll put some stock in it."

I remember my Grandpa Brandt steadfastly refusing to read the Bible in English. He would read aloud Martin Luther's High German translation in Gothic script despite the fact that basically no one in the family (including himself) could understand it properly. Like his distant ancestor King Redbad, he rejected religious innovations and aggressively held on to the old ways until the day he died.

Abraham Friesen Reimer

Abraham Friesen Reimer (1808-1892), my great-great-great-great grandfather, was born in Petershagen, Molotschna in what is now southern Ukraine on February 19, 1808. He was born into a prominent family. His father was the Bishop Klaas E. Reimer (1779 -1837), a religious and political leader in Russia and one of the founders of the Kleine Gemeinde. His mother was Helena von Reisen (Germanicised to Friesen) (1787 – 1846), daughter of the wealthy and influential windmill owner Abraham von Reisen (1752-1779).

Abraham married Elisabeth Rempel (1814 -1893) in 1835 in Petershagen, Molotschna. Elisabeth likewise was from a financially secure land-owning family. Abraham and Elisabeth had a total of 8 children. It is notable that in an era of very high infant mortality, all of them lived into adulthood, married, and had children of their own.

As might be expected of the sons of a respected elder, Abraham's brothers were quite successful leaders in business and in the church. Wealth



The author's grandfather Frank Brandt as a child on the farm west of Blumenort, Manitoba

(See Here on page 6)

(Here from page 5)

and respectability was not the story of Abraham Reimer however. He did not share the practical business skills of his brothers. He was not a successful farmer. Kleine Gemeinde deacon records show that the Abraham Reimer family relied on the church poor fund to make ends meet. They had to rely on charity to get by. Over a period of many years the church assisted them by lending and giving them money from the deacon's fund. In 1847 it was to buy a cow. In 1856 it was to build a house.

In 1859 Abraham was called before the Brotherhood and admonished because of his non-payment of debts. At the same meeting he was admonished because of his 16-year old daughter's "embellishments on her clothes". It seems that his shortcomings were not just financial. In 1860, he was "dismissed" from the church, though he was re-admitted after repenting and in 1861 was advanced further funds to cover un-named debts.

Poverty brought with it the separation of Abraham and Elisabeth from their children. It seems that the girls were sent away at tender ages to work as household servants to the wealthier members of their community. Their oldest son Klaas, born in 1837, was sent away at the age of 12 to learn the trade of blacksmithing. Son Peter, born in 1845, had to leave home for work at 14. Many years later he recalled returning home to visit his parents by skating down a frozen river, terrified by the sound of howling wolves. (Eventually, Klaas became a wealthy merchant in Steinbach, Manitoba, and Peter and his brothers Johann and Abram became successful grain merchants both in Russia and then in Steinbach.)

Things did not improve with time. In 1864 Abraham and Elisabeth moved from their lifelong home in Petershagen to Markuslandt, apparently to live with their sons Klaas and Abram. Some time prior to 1870 they moved to the colony of Borsosenko. In 1874, they moved back to the southern corner of Molotschna, this time to the village of Steinbach.

In the late summer of that year, Abraham and Elizabeth set out in the first wave of Kleine Gemeinde immigration to Manitoba. At that time Abraham was aged 66 and Elizabeth 59. They travelled by train from Molotschna across much of Europe to the great port of Hamburg, Germany. From there they travelled by sea to Hull in the northeast of England and then took another short rail journey straight west across the U.K. to the western port of Liverpool. There they boarded a ship, the S.S. Hibernian.

The Hibernian was owned by a Liverpool company, The Allan Line. It was a kind of hybrid vessel, being equipped with both a steam engine driving a propeller and sails for use during favourable conditions. It was a ship of 1888 gross tons, 351 feet in length with a beam of 37 feet across. For comparison, the Norwegian Pearl, an average sized modern cruise ship, is almost 1000 feet long with a beam of over 100 feet, and it weighs about 50 times as much as the Hibernian.

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society website shows that a large part of what would become my gene pool was aboard the Hibernian at that time. The remainder of my ancestors were on the Austrian, the Nova Scotian, and the Peruvian, other ships which had left Liverpool a few weeks prior.

This was a true family project. Abraham and Elisabeth's sons Peter and

Abram, along with their wives and 9 children, had left for Manitoba 6 weeks earlier. With Abraham and Helena on the Hibernian as they left Liverpool on August 11, 1874 were two of their sons, three daughters, and 21 grandchildren, aged from 3 months to 15 years.

After a quick crossing of only 16 days Abraham and Elisabeth and their fellow travellers landed in Quebec City on August 27. It seems that Quebec City made quite an impression on Abraham. He became so enthralled with frivolous sightseeing in the Old City that he lost track of time, became separated from the group, and missed the train. He was able to take a later train and caught up to the group in Toronto. In Toronto they embarked on a ship once again, this time on the Great Lakes. They landed in Duluth, Minnesota. From Duluth they travelled over 400km by rail to Fargo, North Dakota.

In Fargo, the whole company set out on the last leg of their trip. They boarded a riverboat, the S.S. International, on the Red River. The International was a relatively modern vessel, a steam-driven sternwheeler paddleboat. This leg of the journey took some 86 hours. There were no stops, just endless turns as they followed the current down the slow meandering and muddy Red River.

Abraham and Elisabeth, their family, and their neighbors finally arrived at the confluence of the Red River and the Rat River on September 13. This is near what is now Ste Agathe, Manitoba. A stone marker stands at this spot today. The journey had taken 6 weeks from southern Russia.

At the Red River, Abraham

(See Here on page 7)

(Here from page 6)

and Elisabeth must have been met by their Peter and Abram and their families. From that muddy spot, they travelled by ox cart the last 40km across the dead flat Red River Valley to Blumenort, Manitoba.

Upon their arrival in Blumenort, Abraham and Elisabeth were almost immediately in the midst of their entire extended family. Only one of their eight children stayed back in Russia. The rest of their brood, more than 40 children, in-laws, and grandchildren, settled within a few kilometers, in Blumenort and in Steinbach.

Records show that in Manitoba Abraham once again had difficulty making a living farming. In 1883 in Blumenort, the Reimers owned only 30 cultivated acres of land, one cow, and a small quantity of furniture. One year later, records show that they were now cultivating only 20 acres, the cow was gone, and they owned none of their own furniture. By 1889, Abraham and Helena were no longer even listed on the municipal tax rolls. The family was extremely fortunate, however, that Elisabeth was more practical and industrious than her husband. She was a skilled and industrious seamstress, making all manner of clothing for those in the community and outsiders as well. She was a very much in demand as a midwife, delivering countless babies (including her own grandchildren) in all sorts of conditions. This was of course in addition to giving birth to 8 of her own babies before her thirty-eighth birthday. She was also an undertaker, preparing the deceased for burial in both homelands.

Reflections

My ancestor Abraham Reimer was not a conventionally successful man. During his life he unfortunately gained a reputation as a dreamer and general layabout. At that time nicknames were common. It was a handy way of telling which Henry Klassen or Peter Friesen you were talking about. In his youth, Abraham was known as “Stargazer” Reimer. Later, he was just “Fuela” (lazy) Reimer. Among practical hardworking Mennonites neither of these were compliments.

Many years after Abraham's death, his grandson, the very sober, practical and respectable Aeltester (Elder) David P. Reimer, clearly not full of admiration for his grandfather, said:

Apparently, he prospered neither spiritually nor materially the way his father had. He is supposed to have had a great interest as well as knowledge in the field of astronomy. On the whole he is said to have had a real interest in many areas in which others were uninformed. As is the case with many so-called men of knowledge he too did not always end up on a green twig as we, the younger generation, have been told. He never acquired much in the way of worldly wealth, though as a rule he is supposed to have attempted to redeem the late hours of the day. On the journey from Russia to America this is supposed to have caused him to miss a train connection one time. Fortunately though, he was able to catch up with the others by taking the next train.

Abraham was, however, remarkable for his intellectual pursuits. He kept diaries and journals for many years filled with observations of all kinds – astronomical (as Elder David Reimer alluded to), mathematical and meteorological. He was clearly an observant and richly descriptive writer. In October 1870 for instance Abraham's diary entry included:

On two nights there were very bright northern lights that were so bright that the sky was red as far as one could see; in the North it looked as though it was dawn. Streamers came from different directions and joined with one another above us, but not from the south

Abraham's diaries show Elizabeth constantly being called out to help women in labour at all hours of the day and night and contain many comments that reflect his love, admiration and general affection for her. Moreover they provide an important resource for the study of day-to-day life in Russia and in the pioneer days in Manitoba. He wrote about births and deaths and family feuds. He did not hesitate to document a certain neighbour's drunken excursions to the city. Details were important to him – the straying brother was so intoxicated that he had to be hauled home lying on the bottom of the buggy!

Abraham was also a prolific letter-writer. In 1889 he wrote a letter asking a favour of some relatives in Nebraska. If they were going to the city, he asked, could they buy him a particular German book on horticulture? This is a surprising idea for a ne'er-do-well from Blumenort. In the same letter he wrote of two species of rare flower that he had tried to raise in his garden interest. He may not have been much of a farmer, but it seems that tinkering with exotic plants did pique his interest.

For all of his impracticality and poverty, Abraham and his wife Elisabeth managed to raise 8 children, many of whom became leaders of the community. Their sons became successful businessmen and landowners in the Steinbach area. Several of their daughters and their husbands built successful businesses including the Loewen Funeral Chapel empire, at one time the largest such chain in North America.

(See Here on page 8)

(Here from page 7)

My ancestor Abraham “Fuela” Reimer was clearly not as lazy and discreditable as his contemporaries thought. He seems to have been a man

tunity, he could perhaps have been a successful academic or writer. Sadly intellectual curiosity was of no use in farming.

Further Reflection

Abraham reminds me very much of my own father, Jacob Barkman Brandt (1940-2007). My Dad had wide-ranging intellectual interests in history, politics, and religion and was always interested in learning new things. His questions and curiosity about religion may have been what eventually got him kicked out of the church.

If I brought a book home from school, my Dad would sometimes finish reading it before I did. If a book contained bad words or un-Christian behaviour, I had to be careful about where I left it, or risk a strong talking-to. He too was a thinker who wrote about life going on around him. As I write this I have beside me a stack of amusing and insightful stories written by my Dad. It was just that, because of his time and place, he never figured out a reliable way to make a living.

Though my gene pool includes respectable and reputable citizens, it also includes eccentrics, nonconformists, and the disreputable and misunderstood. In the end all of them is where I come from.

Randy Brandt is a Provincial Court Judge in Edmonton. Before his appointment he practiced law for 25 years in Manitoba and in Alberta. He lives in Edmonton with his lovely wife Susan. Randy and Susan enjoy their children, grandchildren and travelling. ♦



Jacob and Mary (Klassen) Brandt Oct 1963. Due to issues with pride the church did not allow flowers at that time. Mary was unhappy with this, so her daughter had flowers photoshopped in, years later.



Susan & Randy Brandt

living in the wrong time and place. In his community intellectual pursuits and talents of thought and writing were not respected. Given the oppor-

(MHSA from page 1)

ders Fields: "In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row... Take up our quarrel with the foe: To you from failing hands we throw the torch; be yours to hold it high, if ye break faith with us who die we shall not sleep, though poppies grow in Flanders fields."

Katie suggested that we, as Mennonites, may feel conflicted when we listen to stories of war-time. Jesus said to love our enemies, and yet in Romans 13:1 Paul writes, "Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established." Do Mennonites still see pacifism as a core belief?

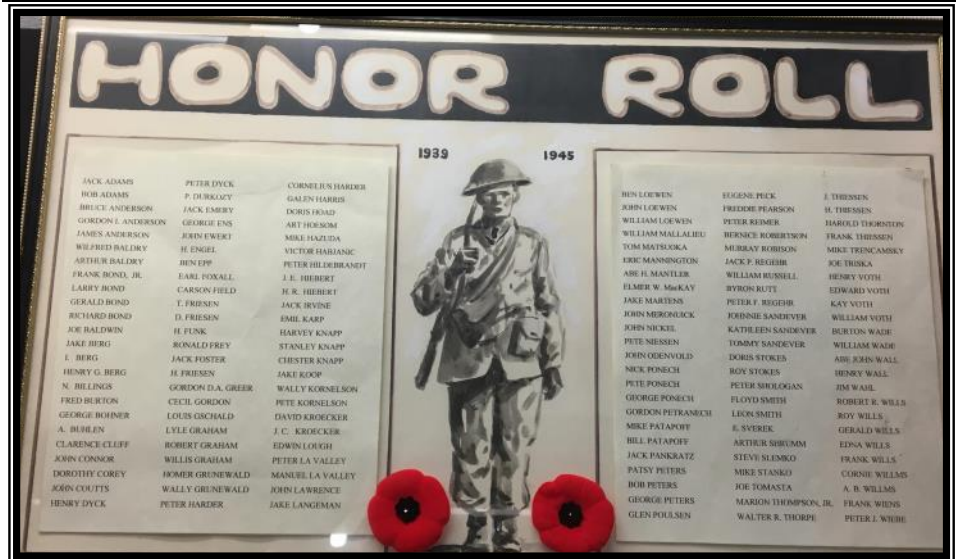
Katie then led us in prayer. The Willi Martens family of Taber followed up with two songs that included the following words: "It wasn't nails that held Him on the tree... it was love that held Him there" and "Er segnete uns" (He blesses us).

Conrad Stoesz led us through the history of conscientious objection of Mennonites in Canada, beginning with the arrival in Upper Canada in 1786 of Mennonites escaping the American War of Independence. In 1793, Upper Canada recognized conscientious objection to war and provided exemption. In the War of 1812, Mennonites were exempt from military service. In 1873, the federal government offered a group exemption from military service to Mennonites if they moved to Manitoba.

In the "war to end all wars" (World War 1), Mennonites were given exemption, but there was a backlash of anti-German sentiment. In response in 1917



Katie Harder and Conrad Stoesz



Out of 144 names on the 1939-1945 Honour Roll 47 are Mennonite, including: Jake Berg, Henry Dyck, George Ens, Ben Epp, H. Funk, Peter Harder, J.E.Hiebert, Jake Koop, John Loewen, Jake Martens, Patsy Peters, Peter Reimer, Jack Regehr, Frank Thiessen, Kay Voth, Peter J.Wiebe

Canada passed the Wartime Elections Act. This disenfranchised groups who did not participate in the war, Mennonites lost the right to vote. Mennonites and Hutterites in the U.S. faced even harsher treatment. Some were jailed or tortured, and a few even died. Thousands moved to Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta in particular), and consequently Canada became concerned with the arrival of even more "undesirables". From 1919 to 1921, Canada banned Mennonites from moving into and out of the country.

(See MHSA on page 10)

(MHSA from page 9)

The advent of World War II brought a crisis of conscience and a crisis of community. While the descendants of the 1870's group of Mennonites asserted they had an exemption from military service, the Russländer (the 1920's group) were prepared to do alternative service as they had in Russia. The two groups came to a common understanding and sent a delegation to Ottawa. They were not well received there, but agreement was reached with the government that individuals seeking conscientious objector status must appear before a judge. This decision meant the burden for seeking such status now shifted from the community to the individual.

Judges were free to interpret laws as they saw fit, and consequently adjudication across the country was not uniform. In particular, some young farm boys found themselves in front of educated judges who saw it as their mission to get as many of these young men into military service as possible. These judges challenged their masculinity, calling them cowards and shirkers. In response, the churches started to prepare FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) in an effort to support their young men. There was also an increase in baptisms to attain full church membership.

Not everyone, of course, sought CO status. Many Mennonites did sign up for military service, and this caused a rift in the church community. Nonetheless, there were 10,851 conscientious objectors in Canada in WWII (3021 in Manitoba, 2636 in Ontario, 2304 in Saskatchewan, 1184 in Alberta, 1665 in BC, and a handful in the other four provinces), and most of them were Mennonite.

So what did conscientious objectors do during World War II? They worked in road construction with picks and shovels and in the logging camps. They planted trees (1.7 million of them contributing \$1.7 billion to the economy). In 1943 they were assigned to fill in for workers in hospitals and mental institutions, essential industries, mines, farms, and educational institutions. Starting in 1943, COs could also enlist as medics. \$2.00 a day was the average pay of a soldier. The COs received 50 cents with the balance going to the Red Cross. This balance raised \$2.2 million (\$20 million today).

By working together, COs helped to break down denominational barriers, built friendships, and learned skills that would provide new opportunities. Their cooperative efforts led to the birth of various Mennonite service agencies such as Mennonite Disaster Service, Eden Health Care, and Mennonite Voluntary Service. The Government of Canada was very pleased with the cooperation

of the Mennonite community and the work performed by the conscientious objectors.

Conrad's presentation was followed up with a Question and Answer session. Then Katie introduced Peter Penner, a 94 year-old former conscientious objector originally from Vineland, Ontario. Peter was 18 years old in 1943 when he got called up. He felt he was a coward for refusing to bear arms but was granted CO status. They gave him a one-way ticket to BC to leave two days before Christmas. He planted trees on Vancouver Island for months and then was sent back to Ontario as farm labour. He finished his alternative service in a meatpacking plant in Toronto, stacking cowhides in the hides cellar. He was discharged in August 1945 and paid \$600 for working fifty-hour weeks for two years. Peter closed his story by saying he had no regrets.

Ernie Wiens, MHSA Board member, then referred to three vignettes at the back of the room that tell the stories of Mennonite boys who enlisted in the armed forces to serve their country. All three have been published in *The MHSA Chronicle*. Ernie encouraged others who served in this way, or family members of such individuals, to contact MHSA if they would like to have such a vignette written.

Are you sharing stories with your children and grandchildren? What stories shape you?

The afternoon closed with a delicious Faspa prepared by the ladies of the Coaldale Mennonite Church. ❖



Conscientious Objectors building mountain roads in the Jasper Alberta area

Jacob David Harder

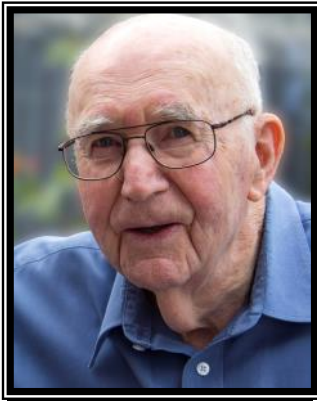
June 3, 1927 - Oct 24, 2019

Remembering a Gentleman of
Many Talents

Jacob David Harder was born a refugee in Riga, Latvia. After leaving a village in Siberia, he eventually settled with his parents on a farm near Carstairs, Alberta. Jacob grew up within the Bergthal Mennonite Church Community in which he served as the first lay congregational chairperson, a position always held before by an ordained minister. In the Bergthal Mennonite Church a few Sundays ago, Eternity Sunday was observed when the congregation, in its traditional way, lighted a candle in honour of its deceased congregant, Jake.

Jake played a part in launching many first-time endeavours and in helping them to thrive. For example, he was a founding member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA), and he remained a faithful supporter of the society until he was called to his final resting place among the angels who always had their eyes on this man of so many talents. Jake recognized the countless skills and varied abilities of others, and he had endless meanings of supporting them, so that they in turn, could be used to support people and places in need.

Jake received many forms of recognition for his many years of



Jacob David Harder

service to persons of all ages seeking success through education and for his practical examples of applied skills. He was awarded one of the Alberta Centennial Medals 1905-2005, a medal that spoke volumes about his many and varied contributions to Albertan communities and to the province as a whole. He was a key figure in meetings of all kinds in many places. He offered intelligent advice and sound education, and he put unstinting energy and "gumption" into the tasks at hand.

Jake and his wife, Hella, celebrated their seventieth wedding anniversary on Sunday, August 11, 2019 among family members, former colleagues, and a host of friends. Over the years, all had been touched by the care that he bestowed upon his family, his encouraging ways, his generosity, his hard work, and his practicality. Jake lived a long life to the fullest.

When writing this tribute to Jake, and thus to his family, narrowing down the accomplishments of Jacob David Harder was indeed challenging but also very special . . . because the task meant that Jake was a gentleman who cannot be forgotten.

Written by an FMC friend, David Jeffares ❖

Centennial Memories and Musings - Part 1

by Ted Regehr

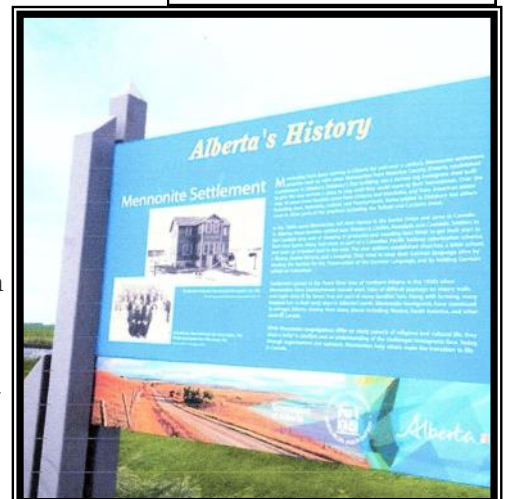
Coaldale, Alberta recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of its establishment as a village. At that time it was little more than a whistle stop on the Canadian Pacific Railway's Crow's Nest Pass Railway, about 11 km east of Lethbridge. It had a resident population of less than 100, with small clapboard businesses and houses strung along a muddy street close to the railway track M and its small railway station.

According to the 2019 municipal census, the town now has a population of 8,691 and covers a land area of 7.99 sq km (3.08 sq mi).

There is no record of any Mennonites living in Coaldale when it was established as a village in 1919, and none are shown in the 1921 census. That changed dramatically in the ensuing years with the arrival of large numbers of Mennonites fleeing desperate conditions in the Soviet Union. Most were rural agricultural people eager to master the challenges of unfamiliar mixed irrigation farming and the cultivation of sugar beets while replicating as closely as possible the religious cul-



Ted Regehr



The Alberta Historic Site marker at the eastern edge of Coaldale.

(See Centennial on page 12)

(Centennial from page 11)

tural and social institutions, traditions, and cherished lifestyles of their lost fatherland. An Alberta Historic site marker on the eastern edge of town celebrates the Mennonite involvement in Coaldale and Alberta life.

Coaldale Mennonite Religious and Educational Initiatives

Mennonites built or acquired two large churches. The General Confer-



The former General Conference Mennonite Church



The former Mennonite Brethren Church

ence church on the left was in town while the larger Mennonite Brethren Church on the right was built on a slight rise half a mile north of the railway track. Membership in the Mennonite Brethren church grew to over 600 in the mid-1950s, making it one of the largest and most influential Mennonite churches anywhere in Canada.

Coaldale Mennonites, unlike some of their coreligionists in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, could not establish their own elementary schools. Most were immigrants who had come to Canada in the 1920s long after the private Mennonite school battles in those provinces. They came with the clear understanding that their children must attend government-approved elementary schools. Those schools, of course, did not provide sectarian religious instruction. For such instruction Mennonites turned to Sunday schools, German Saturday schools, Bible schools and high schools.

Sunday schools had only begun to make inroads in Russian Mennonite

churches due to increased interference in educational matters by the new Soviet government. They had, however, already become quite popular in some evangelical Mennonite churches in North America. Consequently, in Coaldale, both Mennonite churches enthusiastically established their own Sunday schools. Instruction usually consisted of the telling of Bible stories, memorization of scripture verses, and the singing of simple religious or nature songs. Efforts to develop a standardized curriculum initially only achieved very limited success. At first, people who had been teachers in Russia usually provided leadership; later, younger members who had completed some Bible school studies were leaders as well. Some teachers became very enthusiastic, but there were objections if teachers demanded any "work" in class on a Sunday, or even assigned Sunday school "homework" other than scripture readings and the memorization of scripture verses.

No such scruples applied to the German Saturday schools. Vocabulary, grammar, almost all by memorization or rote learning, penmanship, the reading of Bible or other edifying stories, and open-



Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Sunday school students and teachers, 1951



Coaldale Saturday German and Religion schools students and teachers, c. 1936

(See Centennial on page 13)

(Centennial from page 12)

ing and closing devotional exercises comprised the curriculum of these schools although that varied greatly depending on what each teacher deemed most appropriate.

Initially, because settlers lived on quite widely scattered farms, and winter road conditions were often difficult, separate German Saturday schools were established in various districts. In the 1930s, five district German Saturday schools were in operation in Coaldale.

Efforts to establish, or perhaps more accurately to replicate Russian Mennonite language instruction curricula, met with only limited success. However, some of that instruction was provided by year-end programs that brought together students and teachers of all the district schools.

Religious instruction beyond the elementary school level was provided by Bible schools and Bible classes. The objective was to provide general religious instruction and also to prepare students to become Sunday school teachers, lay preachers, choir conductors,

missionaries, and other church workers.

The Mennonite Brethren established their Bible school on the grounds of their church. It drew students from many Mennonite communities. General Conference students were welcome, but many chose instead to attend their conference-sponsored Menno Bible Institute in Didsbury. Instruction was usually offered only during the winter months when work on family farms was less demanding. Rudimentary boarding and noon meals were provided for out of town students.

In Russia the more progressive Mennonites had also established middle and secondary schools beyond the elementary school level. Some Coaldale Mennonites were eager to establish their own high school. Government compulsory school attendance legislation applied only to students up to age



The Alberta Mennonite High School, c. 1952

15. Mennonite high schools had already been established in other provinces. They followed provincial high school curricula but sought to augment them with additional religious and German language instruction.

Efforts to establish a Mennonite high school in Coaldale failed in the 1930s. However, they were renewed after World War II. There were serious difficulties recruiting qualified teachers, and the early facilities were very basic. However, an inter-Mennonite educational society was able to obtain provincial permission and in 1946, it established the Alberta Mennonite High School. The school attracted students from Coaldale and also from smaller outlying Mennonite communities that had no high school. Although the Alberta Mennonite High School was never really a boarding school, it, like the Bible school, was attractive to parents in these outlying areas because it provided accommodation and noon meals for out-of-town students. It also offered the hope of greater supervision and guidance than would be provided in a non-Mennonite high school. Thanks to some exceptional teachers, a surprising number of graduates of the Alberta Mennonite High School went on to distinguished careers in various fields.



The Mennonite Brethren Bible School building, c 1952

Coaldale Mennonite Health Care Initiatives

The Mennonite educational institutions were matched by impressive

(See Centennial on page 14)

(Centennial from page 13)

health care initiatives. People in Canada lived on fairly widely scattered farms. There were numerous childbirth, infant, childhood, and some adult deaths that could have been prevented with adequate access to medical and hospital facilities. In 1928, shortly after the arrival of Mennonite settlers in the community, a Mennonite Health Society was established with the dual objectives of building a small hospital and securing the services of a doctor,



The Coaldale Community Hospital, opened in 1935.

both at affordable prices. Members paid an annual fee that provided secure minimum remuneration for the doctor. In return, members were able to pay significant lower fees for services rendered by the doctor. Similarly, those who became members of a hospital society, whose fees helped pay for the cost of building and operating a hospital, were assured of hospital care at significantly reduced rates. Initially hospital care was provided in temporary facilities, but a suitable building was purchased, moved to a new site in town, modified, and opened in 1935.

Medical and hospital arrangements prolonged the lives of many patients, but the community also laid out a cemetery on the grounds of the Mennonite Brethren Church and es-

tablished a burial society. Members paid a fee that covered their basic funeral and burial costs. These health care mutual aid initiatives followed Russian Mennonite patterns with, of course, some adjustments to meet Alberta legal requirements.

Coaldale Mennonite Economic initiatives

For many years the most important economic co-operative and mutual aid programs were housed in three successive co-operative cheese factory buildings. The cheese factory provided not only a market for surplus milk produced on many small mixed family farms, but also a centre for numerous other economic, co-operative, and mutual aid initiatives and for some ethnic and cultural endeavors as well. These included a cold storage locker plant, egg grading and candling station, credit union, lumber, fuel and other bulk purchasing facilities, and a German lending library.

Mutual aid or insurance arrangements were also made to protect members from catastrophic fire and storm losses. Members paid a relatively small premium that covered minimal administrative costs and small claims. If there was a major loss, there was a special levy payable by all members, proportional to the value of their covered properties. It was the Alberta version of Ontario Mennonite barn raising practices.

A 2019 perspective

All these initiatives undertaken by Mennonites in Coaldale were flourishing when I grew up in the community more than sixty years ago. Returning in 2019 provided

(See Centennial on page 15)



The New Coaldale Co-operative Cheese Factory in the 1950s.

(Centennial from page 14)

Mennonites in the Peace River Country

by Susan Siemens

these initiatives undertaken by Mennonites ... were flourishing ... more than sixty years ago.

opportunities to meet and gather bits of information about the lives and experiences of former elementary and high school classmates, friends, relatives, and acquaintances. A special evening session of former students of the Alberta Mennonite High School in the former sanctuary of the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church (now the Gem of the West Museum) provided further opportunities to renew old friendships.

In many respects, however, it was not, for me, a real homecoming. The two Mennonite churches have both moved into new church buildings in town, built following new architectural plans. The language, styles, and, most notably, the music of worship have changed significantly, and the former Mennonite Brethren Church building, now the Gem of the West Museum, hosts some exhibits that would have been problematic in earlier times.

Other distinctive and once very important Mennonite cultural and religious institutions have closed their doors. The Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Bible School and the Alberta Mennonite High School, both of which trained a surprisingly large number of young people who rose to prominent positions later, were closed in the 1960s. ❖

What is known as the Peace River Country, or the Peace Country, encompasses quite a number of towns and communities in north-eastern BC and north-western Alberta. It doesn't have fixed boundaries and covers between 100,000 to 150,000 square miles. In this article I will attempt to address the reasons Mennonites chose to make the Peace Country home and what kind of a mindset these pioneer folks had.

The Move to the Peace Country

At the present time, there are well over 10,000 Mennonite people living in Northern Alberta. They are still being drawn here today. Reasons vary, but for many it's the job market in the logging industry. When Mennonites first decided to settle in this area it was the "Dirty Thirties" in Saskatchewan that influenced them. The years of drought had impoverished many, and they had to take action to provide for their families. Another key issue was an attempt to avoid the public school system.

I have the utmost respect for these courageous families and commend them for taking action out of their concern for future generations. In their effort to pass on their faith and lifestyle choices, they took a bold step and ventured into Northern Alberta. When they first inquired with the Alberta government about moving north, the government wasn't interested in providing them with land or schools. You had to be an Alberta resident for three years before you would be allowed to homestead. This didn't stop them although over time the public school system followed them, and many ended up moving again and again in order to remain true to their convictions. Those who did remain built up the community, and the area proved to be the haven they had hoped for.

It was 1931 when Mennonites first started showing an interest in settling in Northern Alberta. First to arrive was a Peter Elias family from Manitoba. They ventured out to Carcajou, a small settlement of Cree First Nations and a few other families of Euro-



Susan Siemens



Hudson Bay Co boat Weenusk II (Beaver II) at La Crete Landing 1940s

(See Peace on page 16)

(Peace from page 15)

pean descent. By November 1, 1932 the Elias family had left, but three other families (the Isaac Hieberts, Jacob R. Unraus, and Isaac Wielers) arrived along with two single men, Jake Friesen and Abe J. Wieler. The trip northwest was an adventure indeed. They came by truck as far as the town of Peace River, and that was as far as the highway went. From there, the river was the highway.

Imagine arriving in Northern Alberta in the early winter having taken the last leg of the journey on a river scow and having been dropped off at a river landing with your young family in need of immediate shelter. Thankfully, an empty log house and a 24' x 30' granary, which a local farmer let these newcomers use, aided their survival. Much could be said about their first few years there, the coming of additional families, the hardships and the hunger they experienced, and the interaction and help from the First Nations people, but that is a story for another time.

Four years after their arrival in Carcajou, these first Mennonite families started relocating yet further north to what is now the La Crete area, and by 1948 the last of them had moved on. Reasons for the move included the

families who joined the original settlers were from Mexico. The others were from Saskatchewan and Manitoba. In 1948, homesteading land became more readily available to the Mennonite people moving into the province. This resulted in a rush for farm land that brought many more settlers to the area.

Examples of Mindset and Courage

The lifestyle of our present generation in the Peace Country owes much to the mindset and courage of these early Mennonite settlers. It was through extending grace, sharing, sacrificing, innovating, working hard, living frugally, and doing without, that they survived their first years here. By no means was it an easy start.



L-R Isaac and Sarah Knelsen's house, post office, shop, general store, warehouse and Cockshot dealership, La Crete 1956



Ben and John Peters' caboose ca 1940

need for additional farmland and the need for a location less prone to the risk of river floods. The area was known only as the "Fort Vermilion area" at the time. The local river landing had been called La Crete Landing since 1906 or so. At first the Mennonites referred to the town as "Reinland". The official change to "La Crete" didn't happen until 1956 when they lobbied the federal government for a post office.

In the ten years following the first arrival of Mennonites in the Fort Vermilion area (1937 – 1947), well over half of the fifty or so Mennonite



Breaking the virgin soil Henry J Peters driving the steam engine ca 1940

I wish to mention just a few such noble settlers whom I have greatly admired in my time learning the local history. Please enjoy the following parts of local stories that I believe depict their mindset in action:

Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself: As humans, we tend to notice the shortcomings of others more readily than our own. In one such case, the children of one family living in Carcajou said something negative about another per-

(See Peace on page 17)

(Peace from page 16)

son living in the area. The mother's response was, "That's not right, we should never say anything bad about our neighbors."

Compassion and Sharing: The early settlers went through great hardships and most were very poor. Mrs. Sarah Fehr, already a grandmother, is known to have said, "As long as we have food, you will have food."

Sacrifice from a Mother's Heart: Isaac D. and Margaretha Fehr, after the sinking of one of their scows enroute to Carcajou, lost all of their belongings, and the family arrived very poor indeed. That winter was exceptionally hard. If the children asked for something to eat, they were given crusts. Margaretha would often go hungry, so that the children could eat. Expecting their third child, Margaretha became so malnourished that she got scurvy. Dr. Jackson from Keg River diagnosed her as being short in certain vitamins and fed her tomatoes, potatoes, and turnips to provide her with much needed nourishment.

A Father's Innovation Provides: The sudden rush of Menonites to the Fort Vermilion area created an economic imbalance. The settlers all had the same occupation: farming. They were all trying to sell the same products: butter and eggs. Abram Bergen came up with an idea. He asked his wife to store all their extra cream, and he sent it down the river with the riverboat captain to see if the Peace River creamery would buy it. The riverboat captain was very sceptical, but agreed to try it. Not only was the creamery glad to take it, they asked for more. Thus, began years of cream shipping by the lo-

cals that supplemented their meager income.

Willing Hands: In July of 1935, brothers Peter J. and Jake Friesen left their home in Osler, SK and rode the rails as far north as they could, sleeping in cold damp boxcars on a freight train. Once in Edmonton, they slept under their good wool comforters on the grass. After a few days, they caught another train heading north.

This time they were on a flat car with about thirty-five other free riders. Not too far out of Edmonton the brakeman came and asked if anybody wanted to help unload freight. No one made a move except Jake, and away they went. Because he was unable to handle the freight, Peter was offered a seat in the coach, and thereafter both Jake and Peter were made welcome in the coach and served coffee and doughnuts. At Westlock, all the other hitchhikers were chased off the train by the Mounties, but Peter and Jake were made welcome because Jake had been willing to offer a helping hand.

You gotta do what you gotta do! In 1948, Ben B. Peters, son of a 1937 settler family, found himself on the Hud-

son's Bay river boat helping with the shipping of cattle and hogs to markets further south. On the way, the propeller shaft started to vibrate. After Captain Cadenhead and engineer Slim Heimer gave up trying to fix it, Ben Peters offered to try. They gave him permission, albeit very reluctantly as they were afraid he might let parts drop into the river. Ben hung over the hatch for a few hours with his arms in the cold water up to his shoulders, took off the nut and washers, and removed the 74-pound propeller, all the while very careful to not drop anything. Then he had to take out the bearing, put in the new one, and put everything back in place. Doing this through a small hole in deep cold water was a little more than just fun. But he made Captain Cadenhead ever so happy!



La Crete Landing on Peace River, farmers waiting for the boat to ship their products and receive manufactured goods 1948



Ben Peters hauling cattle to La Crete Landing ca 1950

La Crete Today

The community of La Crete has grown significantly since the pioneering years and now offers all the amenities for a comfortable life except a hospital. Based on the last municipal census, 35.7% of the population are fourteen and under. No doubt, the mindset and abilities of the early settlers

(See Peace on page 18)

(Peace from page 17)

are to thank for the lifestyle we enjoy here today, and no doubt that these qualities will continue to be necessary for our future generations.

Susan (Derksen) Siemens was born in Fort Vermilion and grew up on a farm in Buffalo Head Prairie. She married David Siemens in 1986. They live near the town of La Crete in Northern Alberta and are enjoying their three married children, in-laws, and nine grandchildren. She has worked for the La Crete Agricultural Society since 2008. They manage the community hall and museum village. It was through this job that she got to know her own family's history story, as well as the history of the La Crete community and the origins of the people who made it home. This understanding brought about a great admiration and respect for her Mennonite forefathers who acted on their convictions. She believes knowing our past can help all of us know how to move forward in life. ❖

Places of the Past

by Brent Wiebe

I have been interested in Mennonite history for nearly as long as I can remember. Our forefathers for centuries were people on the move. They spread from one country to another, sometimes settling new villages and sometimes moving into existing ones. One tragedy or another often led them to leave their hometowns and to flee to others. National boundaries changed, and wars and famines ravaged the countries. Many of our ancestral villages in Russia, Ukraine and other places were changed beyond recognition, renamed, or demolished completely.

Trails of the Past is here to help you locate these ancestral places on a zoomable map and view them in detail as they appeared in a variety of different eras. Our map is available online for free access, and you need only enter the name of the village you are looking for in the search bar.

To create the zoomable map, we first



Brent Wiebe



Aerial view in a virtual reality depiction of a wealthy Molotschna full Wirschaft (large farm)

compiled Russian and German maps from the 19th and 20th centuries. Then we chose the "Schubert maps", a highly accurate set of Russian maps from the second half of the 19th century containing details such as windmills, wells, and stockyards, as our primary layer. Then we began the process of laying the Schubert maps carefully over newer maps and aligning them with modern satellite imagery. This process is known as georeferencing.

So far we have processed dozens of maps and hundreds of villages covering a large area and including most of the colonies settled by Mennonites in Ukraine and West Prussia. More work has begun as well on village locations in Manitoba.

A similar map is also available in a mobile application for Android and iOS devices. It's designed to help travellers view their live location on old maps using the GPS on their mobile device.

Trails of the Past also makes beautiful digital pictures of the villages and houses our ancestors built. By carefully studying village maps, photographs, and artwork, and by reading old articles and books, we re-draw the old houses and outbuildings in modern architectural computer programs. Then we place the buildings on sites that we have created using old village plans and topographical information. Trees, flowers, and gardens, are also located on the wirtschafts (farms) according to the Mennonite tradition. Some of this information is hard to find, so any historical descriptions of Mennonite life in the 1800's are very useful to us. 19th century Agricul-

(See Places on page 19)

(Places from page 18)

tural Society chairman Johann Cornies left specific and valuable plans on planting trees and laying out villages.



Horizontal view in a virtual reality depiction of a wealthy Molotschna full Wirtschaft (large farm)

In summary, our mission is to help awaken questions and interest in our Mennonite heritage. We then work at answering these questions using modern technology. We hope this will be interesting and informative for both young and old. So if you're curious about where your forefathers came from, Trails of the Past can help you find it. www.trailsofthepast.com

My wife Gail and I have been married for 16 years, we have four children, ages 3-14, and we live in Stettler, Alberta. Language study has always been a hobby of mine so I have a basic knowledge of German and a fairly decent knowledge of Russian. My wife and I together with our children lived in Russia for five years. This gave us the opportunity to study Russian and to travel extensively among Low German communities in Siberia. We were there as volunteers with our church's Bible distribution program. Since returning home to Canada, I have worked as a building designer. This has given me the skills necessary to make plans of the old buildings and envision

them in 3D. I am looking forward to meeting fellow members of the MHSA and sharing our projects with each other. ❖

The Schleithem Confession of 1527: "We Are United as Follows..."

by Ken Bechtel

In September 2018, my wife Audrey and I, together with my nephew Dale from Switzerland, had the privilege of spending a day in Schleithem, the original homeland of my Anabaptist Mennonite ancestors. This was also the village where Anabaptist leaders had met in February 1527 to craft the first Anabaptist faith statement, the so-called Schleithem Confession.



Ken Bechtel

Schleithem, the Village and Municipality

Schleithem, or Schlaate in the local Swiss German dialect, is both a picturesque village with some 1700 residents, and a 21 square kilometer municipality. The village itself is about a kilometer from the German border.

Schleithem's history is told in three quite different museums - the Gipsmuseum (a gypsum mine which operated from the 1690s to 1940s), Thermenmuseum Juliomagus (the impressive ruins of a 1st to 3rd century Roman spa), and the Museum Schleithemertal. This third one documents the history, geology, and folklore of the area from Roman to recent times. Since 2004, its Täuferzimmer or Anabaptist Room has been home to a rare 1550 print copy of the Schleithem Confession. The Täuferzimmer tells the stories of this document and of the Anabaptists, local and beyond.



The Village of Schleithem, Switzerland, one kilometer from the German border

The Anabaptists

The 16th century Reformation resulted in new Lutheran and Reformed

(See Schleithem on page 20)

(Schleitheim from page 19)

churches. Yet, like the original Roman Catholic Church, these were what we would call state churches. The difference now was that citizens were to belong to whatever church their political powers chose.

It seemed a seamless package. Infant baptism was a way of registering births. The registry provided the state with names of individuals to tithe, tax, or conscript. Church and state supported each other, the church enthroning and blessing potentates and the state using even lethal force to root out divergent thinking or acting from the church. God could be invoked to bless wars, and rulers could demand a God-laced oath of allegiance. This had been the way almost since the time of Constantine (Emperor 306-337). The new Protestant state church simply replaced the Roman Catholic one in certain regions.

As early as 1522, some of Zurich Reformer Ulrich Zwingli's keenest students questioned this package. A public debate took place in Zurich on January 17, 1525, but city politicians decided to uphold the practice of infant baptism and to forbid further meetings of these questioners. Dissidents were ordered to conform, leave the city, face imprisonment, or worse.

Days later, on January 21, 1525, these Bible students gathered illegally at Felix Mantz's house. Conrad Grebel, who had refused to have his infant daughter Isabella baptized, was in attendance. After a time of intense study and prayer, Georg Blaurock asked Grebel to baptize him, and then Blaurock baptized the others. The "Swiss Brethren" form of Anabaptism had been birthed. They called themselves simply brethren (and sisters), but their opponents called them Anabaptists, Rebaptizers, Wiedertäufer, or simply Täufer. This rebaptism was a politically dangerous act. Since 529 AD, Justinian's imperial code had stipulated death for such "heresies".

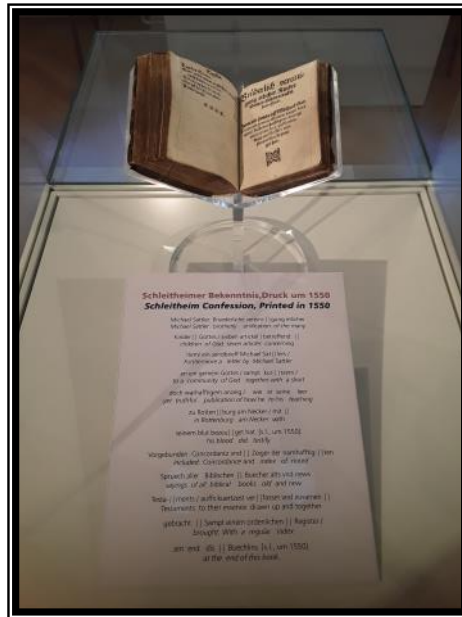
The movement and the repression spread rapidly. Within a few years

there were Anabaptist groups throughout Europe, especially in Switzerland, Germany, Czechoslovakia (Moravia), and the Netherlands. On January 5, 1527, Felix Mantz became the first of several thousand Anabaptist martyrs when he was drowned in Zurich. The hard-pressed Conrad Grebel had already died of the plague in the summer of 1526.

Why Schleitheim?

Google the word "Schleitheim." The first sentence from Wikipedia will tell you its location, and the next will tell you its importance as the place "where the seven articles of the Schleitheim Confession were written." It then describes this Confession as "the oldest creed of Anabaptism, written under the direction of Michael Sattler."

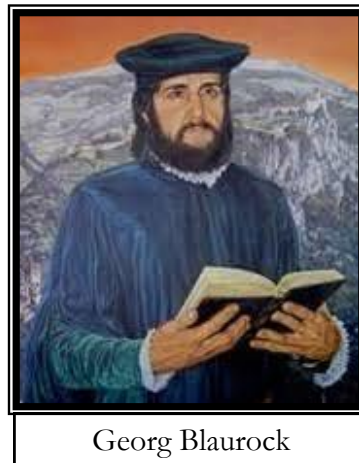
The young Anabaptist movement was in danger of disintegrating under the pressure of violent persecution from the outside and sharp differences of opinion from within. Seven weeks after Mantz's martyrdom, a leadership group



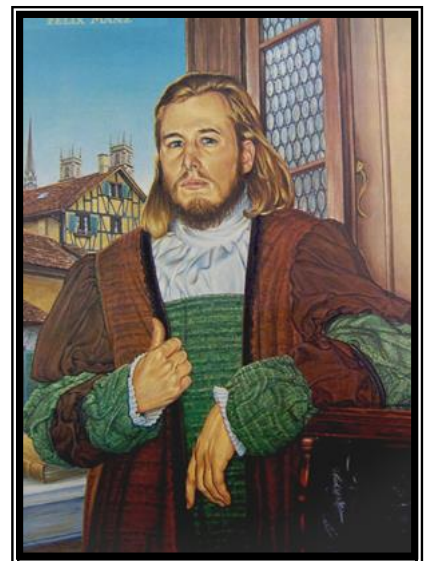
The Schleitheim Confession on display in the museum



Conrad Grebel



Georg Blaurock



Felix Manz

(See Schleitheim on page 21)

(Schleitheim from page 20)

gathered in a house in Schleitheim to discuss basic beliefs. In the town, there was an Anabaptist congregation already, the fruit of Conrad Grebel's February and March 1525 ministry in the nearby city of Schaffhausen. As Schleitheim was 66 kilometers north of Zurich just a stone's throw from the German border, it was somewhat safer than other locations if Anabaptists were pursued.

Two of the movement's co-founders had died, but strong new leaders had arisen. One of these was Michael Sattler. Formerly a prior at St Peter's Monastery, Sattler had joined the Anabaptist group sometime before June 1526. He was apparently the key organizer and writer for the leadership group that gathered in that Schleitheim house. (Though we do not know the name of the host for these meetings, nor the specific house where they met, a 1557 conference of 50 Swiss Brethren leaders meeting in Strassbourg mentioned that one of them was the brother in whose house the "verdragh (agreement) of Michael Sattler" had been made.)

On February 24, 1527, the agreement that we now know as the Schleitheim Confession was reached.

The Schleitheim Confession

As C. Arnold Snyder points out, if we were to ask a 16th century Anabaptist for her statement of faith, she might simply recite the Apostles' Creed. This second century creed did not, however, fully describe the faith and practice of her 16th century community. It is especially striking that in the Apostles' Creed in English, there is

only a comma between "born of the Virgin Mary" and "suffered under Pontius Pilate." Nothing about the life, ministry, and teaching of Jesus so important for these early Anabaptists' understanding of faithful discipleship!

What we call the Schleitheim Confession, its writers called "The Brotherly Union of a Number of Children of God Concerning Seven Articles." Six of these articles begin with "We have been united as follows concerning..." Several of those seven topics spell out specific teachings omitted with that comma.

Article 1: Baptism

The Confession specifically denounces infant baptism as "the greatest and first abomination of the pope," and reserves baptism for those "who have been taught repentance... and desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Article 2: The Ban

Back in September 1524, Conrad Grebel and others had written about forming "a Christian church with Christ's help and His rules, as we find them established in Matthew 18 and applied in the Epistles..." Even an unrepentant deviant "shall not be killed, but regarded as a heathen and a publican, and left alone." The ban's private and public admonitions, rather than the state's lethal force, were meant to purify the church "before the breaking of bread."

While the ban was much milder enforcement than the state churches' use of arrest, torture, and execution, it did become a divisive tool when used by some Anabaptist groups. In 1557, the Swiss Brethren leaders sent a letter to Menno Simons stating their objections to the strict application of the ban by the Dutch leaders. The Dutch were requiring even the spouses of banned members to shun their partners. In reply in 1559, Menno and other Dutch elders banned the entire Swiss Brethren fellowship for a time. In 1693, Jacob Amman's insistence on stricter banning and shunning resulted in the Amish split from the Swiss Brethren.

Article 3: The Breaking of Bread

For Catholic and various Reforming groups, valid communion meant correct beliefs about or correct administration of the sacrament. The Schleitheim Confession locates that validation in the right relationships within the body of believers. Article 2 had connected the ban with the intention "that we may all in one spirit and in one love break and eat from one bread and drink from one cup." Those wishing to partake "must beforehand be united in the one body of Christ, that is the congregation of God... and that by baptism."

Article 4: Separation from Evil

This article urges separation from "the evil and wickedness which the devil has planted in the world." This article asserts starkly, "There is nothing else in the world and all creation than good or evil..." Among the "evils" to be avoided are "all popish and repopish works and idolatry" (i.e. both Catholic worship with its statues and Protestant worship which re-

(See Schleitheim on page 22)

(Schleitheim from page 21)

tained certain Catholic ‘wrongs’). “Church attendance” in such settings is listed side by side with “winehouses” as evil! The final sentence of this article insists that likewise “thereby shall fall away from us the diabolical weapons of violence – such as sword, armour and the like, and all their use to protect friends or against enemies – by virtue of the word of Christ: ‘you shall not resist evil.’”

Article 5: Shepherds

The first demand of the Peasants’ War’s Twelve Articles (**created in 1525 by the Swabian League during the German Peasant's War and considered the first draft of human rights and civil liberties in continental Europe after the Roman Empire**) was that “Every municipality shall have the right to elect and remove a preacher if he behaves improperly.” In that era, some distant Catholic or Protestant government or church authority would appoint the pastor for a given parish. Pastors sometimes won their jobs through their connections rather than through their fitness for this calling. However ill-qualified or disreputable, such a pastor could only be disciplined by that distant office. This was a concern shared widely at the time, including by the leaders at Schleitheim.

Article 5 asserts that pastors must be persons of good repute, be financially supported by the congregation, and be disciplined if they sin. Pastoral responsibilities included teaching, disciplining, and leading in prayer and in the breaking of bread. Especially pertinent in their day was the statement that “If the shepherd should be driven away or led to the Lord by the cross, at the same hour another shall be ordained to his place, so that the little folk and the little flock of God may not be destroyed, but be preserved by warning and be consoled.”

Article 6: The Sword

This is the longest of the seven articles. It may well be that Wilhelm Reublin, who in August 1525 had escaped arrest in Hallau, Schaffhausen, because of the villagers’ resistance, “weapons in hand,” was among the leaders assembled there in Schleitheim. If so, such history would certainly add drama to their quest to become “united as follows concerning the sword.”

The article opposes the use of violence in any circumstance. It contrasts the sword, “an ordering of God outside the perfection of Christ,” with the ban, “the warning and the command to sin no more,” a practice “within the perfection of Christ.” The answer to the question about using force to defend the good is “unanimously revealed” by Christ’s teaching and example. This nonviolence extends even to the role of magistrate. “It does not befit a Christian to be a magistrate” for such an officer rules “according to the flesh.”

More frequently than the other articles, this one appeals to the explicit teaching and model of Christ who “left us an example that we should follow in his steps.” (1 Peter) Near the end, it concludes, “In sum: as Christ our Head is minded, so also must be minded the members of the body of Christ through him.”

Article 7: Oaths

This article defines oaths as “confirmation among those who are quarreling or making promises.” In short, their agreement is that “Christ, who teaches the perfection of the law, forbids His followers all swearing.” In that oaths were such an important part of the context in which they lived, the writers of the Confession go to some lengths to dispute several of the state church objections to their conclusion. Their final sentence is “Christ is simply yea and nay, and all who seek Him simply will understand His Word. Amen.”

The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) notes that “All the Mennonite confessions of faith without exception have included a prohibition of the oath.” Although in January 1527 Georg Blaurock had been severely beaten for refusing to swear an oath on his expulsion from Zurich, the Swiss Brethren came to this understanding somewhat later than to certain of their other convictions, and some of their early leaders had themselves sworn legal oaths. In Strassbourg somewhat later, refusing to swear an oath was deemed a tell-tale sign that one was an Anabaptist.

After February 24, 1527

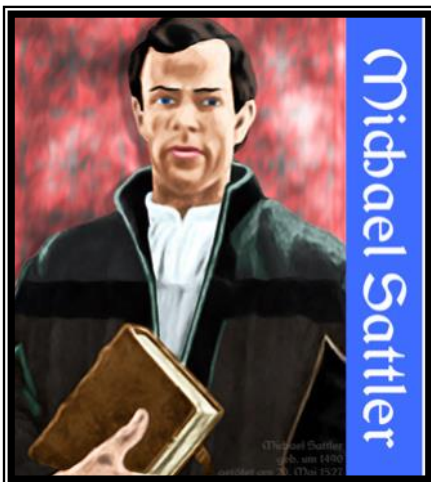
Included with the Museum’s rare 1550 printed copy of The Schleitheim Confession is a book that refers to Michael Sattler. The label on the book, in German and in stilted English translation, states that it includes “a short yet truthful publication of how he to his teaching in Rottenburg am Neckar with his blood did testify.”

(See Schleitheim on page 23)

(Schleitheim from page 22)

Within days of the February 24, 1527 agreement, Michael and Margaretha Sattler were arrested on their return to Horb in southwestern Germany. A copy of the Seven Articles was found on him. The trial was held in Rottenburg with the judge returning the verdict: "Michael Sattler ... shall be committed to the executioner. The latter shall take him to the square and there first cut out his tongue, then forge him fast to a wagon and there with glowing iron tongs twice tear pieces from his body, then on the way to the site of the execution five times more as above and then burn his body to powder as an arch-heretic." This was carried out on May 20; two days later Margaretha was drowned in the Neckar River.

This sentence and Sattler's demeanour evoked powerful responses



Michael Sattler

es among the populace and even magistrates and reformers who opposed his teaching. A court officer wrote, "It was a miserable affair, they died for their conviction." The Reformer Martin Bucer, no friend of Anabaptism, wrote that "We do not doubt that Michael Sattler, who was burned at Rotten-

burg, was a dear friend of God, although he was a leader of the Anabaptists, but much more skilled and honourable than some."

The Confession's Role

Both friend and foe recognized this Confession's importance for unifying the fledgling Anabaptist movement. The Articles spread quickly through handwritten copies, especially among Swiss and South German Anabaptist groups.

This common person's handbook on Anabaptist distinctives contrasted their convictions with what they considered unsound teachings and practices of the state churches and other radicals. As the renowned Dutch minister and theologian, Samuel Cramer, wrote in 1909, "Through their formulation they drew the boundaries of their movement and made it possible that an ordered fellowship, an organization, modest as it was, came into being... Sattler and his fellow elders preserved it from diffusion, helped it through the somber days of bloody persecution, and assured it a future."¹ This document became "a platform from which to resist the bloody persecution of the Christian nations, the well-written slander of their state church opponents, and the deviation of fanatics trying to use the movement to their own ends."²

By summer of 1527, Zwingli had obtained at least four copies of the Schleithem agreement that had been seized from arrested Anabaptists, and he prepared a Latin translation and refutation. That same year, the "Schwertler" (sword bearing) Anabaptist, Balthasar Hubmaier, published his "On the Sword", objecting to this teaching of nonresistance. By 1533, print copies of the agreement were also available. Calvin used a now lost French translation for his 1544 refutation, and by 1560 there was also a Dutch translation. Over the next centuries, the issues addressed became normative for Anabaptists, including Mennonites, Amish, Church of the Brethren, Hutterites and Bruderhof.

Almost 500 years later, we no longer live in their 16th century context. Yet, when the Wildwood Mennonite Church, Saskatoon adult Sunday School class decided recently to spend 8 weeks studying this document and its implications for us, we almost doubled our attendance. Our context and the issues it raises may be different, but this 1527 brotherly and sisterly agreement urges us to explore more deeply our own discipleship.

1 - Cramer, *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, V. 1909, p. 593 as cited by <http://home.mennonitechurch.ca/1527-Schleitheim/footnotes>. Retrieved May 16, 2019.

2 - home.mennonitechurch.ca/1527-Schleitheim/gleysteen. Retrieved May 16, 2019

This article first appeared in the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian* Volume XXV No. 2, 2019. Reprinted with permission. ❖

Summerfest
Handmade Market & Auction
Celebrating MCC: 100 years of relief, development and peace



May 22 - 23, 2020

Millenium Place
2000 Premier Way
Sherwood Park, AB

Full schedule and sale details at: mccreliefsale.com



Membership Application, Renewal & Donation Form

- **Memberships are due at the beginning of each year (\$30.00/yr).**
- ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- The Chronicle is published in Mar, June and Oct of each year.

Mail membership form and cheque to:

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

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____ Postal Code _____

Email address: _____ Phone# _____

Enclosed is my contribution of:

[☐] \$20 [☐] \$50 [☐] \$100 [☐] \$500 [☐] other

- Tax receipts will be issued for donations for \$20.00 or more.
- Donations are especially required to continue archival cataloging of donated historical material.
- Information collected above is done within the rules of the Personal Information and Privacy Act of Alberta. Name and address is required for the purpose of communicating with members through correspondence or the MHSA newsletter. It will never be shared with others or used for other purposes.

Get to Know Your MHSA Board Members Biography of David Jeffares Member at Large

Too many years ago, David Jeffares grew up on a mixed farm eleven miles west of Huxley, Alberta. He was baptized and later

confirmed as a member of St. Hil-da's Anglican Church, Arthurvale. Arthurvale was one of Alber-ta's oldest post office outlets.

David's mother taught him first grade by correspondence. Then he attended two different rural schools, one three and one-half miles away from the farm and the second one four and one-half miles away. After ninth grade, he went to Red Deer Composite High School. Next, attendance at the University of Alberta (Calgary branch) allowed him to achieve a temporary teaching license, and he taught in two successive one-room schools in rural Alberta, Fairbank east of Pine Lake and Arthurville north-west of Trochu.

David moved to Red Deer in September, 1956. He taught for one year at Eastview Junior High School and then became the first principal of West Park Elementary School. In September, 1960, he was appointed principal of the Lorraine Junior Elementary School in France. That school was for kindergarten and primary-grade children of Royal Canadian Air



David Jeffares

Force (RCAF) personnel at #2 Fighter Wing, Grostenquin, a small village near St. Avold where the apartment buildings were located for families with children. In 1963, David returned to Red Deer and was invited to be principal for one year at North Elementary School. He was then appointed as first principal of Oriole Park School which had been built in a newly-formed district in north-west Red Deer. In 1965, he was appointed as first principal of Annie L. Gaetz Elementary School in Morrisroe, another newly-developed district, this time in south-east Red Deer.

In 1967, it was time for David to head off to university. Over time, he completed a BEd, an MEd in school administration and a PhD in curriculum development. He then joined the Department of Education as a consultant in the Early Childhood Services Program (ECS) which, in 1972, was established as the official beginning of elementary education in Alberta. While in ECS program administration, David initiated the Program Grant Unit support mechanism which still funds special program plans for children as young as 2.5 years of age who require special services and treatments for serious delays of various sorts.

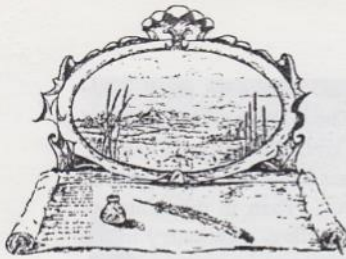
While David was completing his BEd, he met Dolores Joan Fast, a Mennonite who was completing her MEd. Having met several Mennonites in a variety of circumstances, David found making the transition to being an "Anglican-Mennonite" an easy undertaking under the gentle guidance of Menno Epp, at that time the pastor at Foothills Mennonite Church in Calgary. On July 19, 1969, David and Dolores were married in First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon by Dolores' father, Reverend Ben Fast. They have two children and four grandchildren:

Heather and her partner, Christian, and their twins, Alden and Ethan; and, Timothy, his wife, Larisa (nee Wiens), and their boys, Oliver and Lander.

Dolores (Dolly) and David have both retired from their careers in education. They continue to keep their brains engaged in various pursuits. One of these was a two-year commitment in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia, where they taught courses in early childhood education based on the ECS model used here in Alberta. Dolly and David are active members of First Mennonite Church in Edmonton.

One of the numerous interesting connections David has enjoyed the most since retirement has been his involvement in the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). He has taken on several roles including secretary of the MHSA Board. The most interesting event so far for him will be the one scheduled to occur during the weekend of June 5, 6 and 7 when the MHSA Annual General Meeting will be followed by a fascinating Spring Conference in La Crete, Alberta. ❖

WHAT IS GAMEO? It is the Global Anabaptist Mennonite En-cyclopedia Online and an important resource in conducting historical research. Check the website at: www.gameo.org



Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

JUNE, 1990

VOLUME 3, No. 1



Vauxhall MB Church shortly after its dedication in 1949. The building is now used by the General Conference Church.

THE MENNONITE BRETHERN SETTLEMENT IN THE VAUXHALL DISTRICT

By John J. Esau

John Esau, currently of Coaldale, donated a collection of his writings to the historical society. This material included histories of the Mennonite Brethren Conference, the Vauxhall M.B. Church, the Coaldale M.B. Church, and excerpts from his autobiography. The following is taken from his October, 1968 writings on the Vauxhall Church.

There was a large influx of Mennonites from Europe in the years 1922-1929. During this time quite a large settlement sprang up around Coaldale. However, there was a shortage of land available there place Cree

Stavely, Gem, etc. However, with the coming of the drier years and the ensuing crop failures, some of these and others began to look towards the Vauxhall district with its irrigation system, which would ensure a better livelihood.

The very first Mennonite family to arrive were the Henry P. Klassens, Sr. They came from St. Kilda, Alta., and moved onto what was then known as the "Vauxhall Stock Farm", about 7 miles north-east of town. This was in October, 1933. About a month later, 4 more families arrived: the John B. Reimers Sr., David Unruhs Sr., John Esaus Sr., and Jacob Lowens. The first 3 families came from Stavely and the other one from Coaldale.

By the Spring of 1934 another 5 families joined them - the Peter Riedigers, from Stavely, George Dells, DeWinton, Peter Langemanns and Peter

MHSA (newsletter) June 1990 VOLUME 3 No. 1

Note the old logo and the photo of the then Vauxhall MB Church

Index/Contents

- Erna Goerzen at the Calgary Heritage Park display
- MCC History Book announcement
- The New Coaldale Cheese Factory by David Neufeldt
- The Bergthal Sewing Circle by Helen Brown
- Archives Report

Mennonite Heritage Farm

by Ernie Wiens

Covid-19 Plays Havoc With Mennonite Heritage Farm Events

Just when the planned events at the Heritage Farm were coming into focus, along came the Corona Virus Pandemic!



Ernie Wiens



No sign of spring yet

Attendance at the Tuesday Morning Coffee gathering has dwindled. The March 21 Pruning and Grafting Workshop will undoubtedly be a small class. Even

the snow-covered gardens and cold night-time temperatures are challenging the calendar's assertion that Spring is here.

Never-the-less the plans for the 2 acre garden, tree planting, the Heritage Flower Garden and concerts are progressing. Society will dictate cancellations as necessary.

When this heated panic subsides and your vacation plans become more provincial, come and visit us at the Mennonite Heritage Farm. By the end of June the gardens will be growing, the days will be long, and children and grandchildren will need their Nature Deficiency Syndrome addressed.

By the middle of July, the saskatoons and the raspberries will be ripe.. On August 1 the return of the Mennonite Heritage Picnic is scheduled.

If Health directives allow, we will be celebrating Mennonite Heritage Week with a final event on September 12.

We hope to see you all this summer. ❖



Can't wait till June

Letters to the Editor

Hi Dave,

Oct 28, 2019

In appreciation of *A Mennonite Farm* [Oct 2019 Chronicle] by Ernie Wiens. This was a wonderful love-letter to "The Farm" and the Mennonite Heritage Picnic. Ernie has a very poetic style of writing, full of allusions.

Carolyn Wilson
Edmonton



Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta
Annual General Mtg and Spring
Conference

La Crete Heritage Centre
La Crete, AB T0H 2H0

Saturday, June 6, 2020

Coffee & Registration 9:30 am

Annual General Meeting - 10:00 AM

Light noon meal at 12:00 included

Spring Conference - 1:00 PM

La Crete & Russian Mennonite History

Also featuring: The La Crete Drawbangers Comedy Group

Conf Registration: \$20.00 Light Snack and Conversation to follow

For more information email: harderdk@xplornet.com



Susan Siemens

Guest Speakers

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

Dr. Colin Neufeldt - Professor of History at Concordia University of Edmonton and a Barrister and Solicitor. Colin's research is on the history of Mennonites in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. Publications include *The Public and Private Lives of Mennonite Kolkhoz Chairmen in the Khortytsia and Molochansk German National Raïony in Ukraine (1928–1934)*.

"Join US on the BUS"

We have booked a 50 passenger bus departing Calgary 7 AM Friday June 5th, also picking up at Didsbury, Red Deer & Edmonton. Returning Sunday evening June 7th. \$140/person. \$50 deposit for bus trip due May 1. Local La Crete Tours TBD. Call Dave Toews 780-218-7411 or email dmtows@gmail.com For more info see MHSA website <https://mennonitehistory.org/>



Dr. Colin Neufeldt