



The MHSA Chronicle

Official Publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XXIII Number 2

June 2020

For Me, and Whoever is Next: My Family History

by Sarah Regier

My Mother's Lineage: The MacFarlanes

It's May of this past year, 2019, and I'm in the spare bedroom in the basement of my maternal grandparents, James ('Papa Jim') and Joanne MacFarlane. My mum, Cathy, and my two younger sisters, Bethany and Rachel, are with me. We're digging through the closet, looking for the dress Mum wore to her high school graduation. She wants to show us the difference between that and the dress Bethany will be wearing for her graduation in a few days. We



Sarah Regier

(See Whoever on page 12)

My Mother's Journey Aganeta (Derksen) Klassen

Feb. 6, 1905 - Apr. 26, 1980

by Katie Harder

"But there's a story behind everything, sometimes the stories are simple, and sometimes they are hard and heartbreaking. But behind all your stories is always your mother's story, because hers is where yours begin." – Mitch Albom

Thinking and reflecting on my mother's life brings back a multitude of fond memories: memories that cause me to feel fuzzy and warm; memories that cause me to be thankful for the influence and impact she had on my life; memories that celebrate who she was as a person in her own right; memories that bring pleasure and pride; and memories that bring sadness and grief.

My mother passed away of a massive heart attack forty years ago on April 26, 1980. Why then so many years later do her memories evoke such feelings of sadness? It's because she was with me such a short time; her story closed so abruptly. I was only thirty-three years old and there was no opportunity to say "Good-bye" or "Auf Wiedersehn Liebe Mama". There were still so many dreams and



Jacob J. and
Aganetha Klassen
1972

(See Mother on page 4)

My Great Grandfather Pierre Cheri Demasson

by Kathy Dyck

My name is Katherine (Kathy) [Chalmers] Dyck. I was not born of Mennonite heritage. Ethnically, I am half Scottish (as my name would suggest), a quarter Irish, and a quarter French. My journey to becoming a Mennonite was along the religious path. It began when I met and married my Mennonite husband, Peter Dyck. I had never met or known Mennonites before then and knew nothing of their culture or of "Plautdietsch", their Low German language. We attended church with his sister, Mary, and her husband, Dave Quapp, infrequently at first, but gradually more and more. I began to appreciate the qualities of character demonstrated by the people and the church, and I learned the interesting history of their migrations around



Kathy Dyck

(See Pierre on page 17)

In this Issue

1. My Mother's Journey
1. For Me, and Whoever is Next
1. My Great Grandfather Pierre
2. Editorial Reflections
2. Chairman's Corner
3. Letters to the Editor
22. Mennonite Bible Institute
25. Centennial Memories
28. 100th Anniversary Ebenfeld
30. Russlaender Centenary
31. 1918 Typhus Epidemic
32. Mennonite Database

Editorial Reflections

by Dave Toews

There is a Russian proverb that says, "Dwell on the past and you'll lose an eye; forget the past and you'll lose both eyes." Somewhere in between lies a happy medium.

In the March editorial I expressed the hope that by our next issue Canadian cases of COVID-19 would be trending downward, and we would be looking forward to a gradual return to normalcy. Well, it is taking longer than that, and things have turned out differently than I predicted. As of June 3, we are only into phase 1 of relaunching the economy in Alberta.

On page 24 of the March issue, the word CANCELLED, rather than POSTPONED, should have



Dave Toews

been superimposed on the Summerfest ad.

This issue of the Chronicle is exceptional in terms of what is missing due to the virus. There are none of the usual reports from the Annual General Meeting and Spring Conference because the 2020 AGM and Spring Conference scheduled for La Crete were cancelled. The 2020 AGM will be held at a later date this year, possibly by Zoom video conferencing. The AGM and Spring Conference scheduled for La Crete has been tentatively rescheduled there for June 2021.

On the plus side, self-isolation seems to have given authors of all ages a good deal of time to write the family stories and other various articles that you will enjoy in this edition.

We are definitely still in "uncharted" territory (not "unchartered" as I wrote in the last issue, a mistake so ably pointed out by my good friend Jake.) However, we have all been in lockdown and practiced social distancing, and many of us have been to Zoom church. These have all been new experiences, and we are getting

used to them. Perhaps in a year from now there will a vaccine, and life can continue as before or as it will be in the near future.

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 dmttoews@gmail.com with any questions or comments. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Ken Matis

Lessons From Martin Luther in the Midst of the Black Death

In this time of COVID-19, I've been thinking about the response of the early Reformers to the Black Death. Less than 200 years after killing about half the population of Europe, this plague reemerged in Martin Luther's own town of Wittenberg and neighboring cities in 1527. German Christians at the time were in need of strong advice. In his letter "Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague", Luther weighs the responsibilities of ordinary citizens during the spread of the disease. His advice serves us well today as we confront infectious disease outbreaks as Christians.

First, Luther argues that anyone who is in service to another has a vocational commitment not to flee. Those in ministry "must

(See Chairman on page 3)



Ken Matis

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle

ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:

Dave Toews, Editor
(dmttoews@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 from page 2)

remain steadfast before the peril of death." The sick and the dying need a good shepherd who will strengthen and comfort them and administer the sacraments lest they be denied the Eucharist before their passing. Public officials such as mayors and judges are to stay and maintain civic order; moreover, public servants such as city-sponsored physicians and police officers are to continue their professional duties. Even parents and guardians have vocational duties toward their children.

Second, even those without any medical training are to care for the sick. Luther challenges Christians to see tending to the sick as tending to Christ himself (Matt. 25: 41-46). Out of love for God emerges the practice of love for our neighbor. Luther does not encourage us to expose ourselves recklessly to danger. His letter constantly straddles two competing goods: honoring the sanctity of one's own life and honoring the sanctity of those in need. Luther makes it clear that God gives humans a tendency toward self-protection and trusts that we take

care of their bodies (Eph.5: 29; I Cor.12: 21-26). "All of us," he says, "have the responsibility of warding off this poison to the best of our ability because God has commanded us to care for the body." He defends public health measures such as quarantines and seeking medical attention when available. He even proposes that not to do so is to act recklessly. Just as God has gifted humans bodies, so too He has gifted us the medicines of the earth.

Third, what if a Christian still desires to flee the city? Luther affirms that this may in fact be the believers' faithful response provided that his neighbor is not in immediate danger, and that he arranges substitutes who will "take care of the sick in their stead and nurse them." He ultimately tasks "devout Christians ... to come to their own decision and conclusion" whether to flee or stay during plagues, trusting that they will arrive at a faithful decision through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. He reminds us that good works are the outgrowth of a genuine faith in God, and that salvation is not dependent on them. Participation in aiding the sick arises out of grace,

not obligation. Luther himself did not flee in fear. Despite the exhortations of his university colleagues, he stayed behind to minister to the sick and dying. In his letter he urges his readers not to be afraid of "some small boil" in the service of neighbors.

Fourth, Luther reminds his readers that though God's children face earthly sufferings, those who proclaim faith in Christ share in a heavenly promise of freedom from illness and suffering. He expresses the reality of suffering, but recognizes that death and suffering do not have the final word.

In the climate of fear surrounding the present plague let us take guidance from Luther's letter - to take precautions but to give care to individuals all the same. "When did we see you sick?" ask the righteous in the parable of the sheep and the goats, to which Jesus responds, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25: 39-40). If and when COVID-19 comes to our communities, how will we faithfully respond?



Letters to the Editor

Hello Dave,

Apr 8, 2020

Thanks very much for the echronicle it has very interesting content. The story by Ken Matis is of interest where he cites the Mennonite Brethren (MB) interest in our own history. This is a bit of a problem with a lot of our Mennonites. Some years ago the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS) had Dr Harry Loewen as a guest speaker at our AGM. His words were something like this , "Our people the MBs are suffering from Alzheimers, we are wandering around not knowing where we came from and then not knowing where to go". Dr Loewen was not very popular after the meeting with some of the MBs but he hit the nail right on the head. In general it is hard to attract the majority of ministers to a MHSS meeting or AGM. This year we had Abe Janzen do a presentation for us and we invited an Old Colony singing group on Friday evening. This attracted a minister and some other people from the Rheinland Berghthal church. I had some very good conversations with these people BUT I did know them from before just not in the historical context. This is why it is very important to know your history as a people so you know where you came from.

Thanks for all the work you people are doing. Peace, Dick Braun, Osler, Saskatchewan

(Mother from page 1)

confidences I wanted to share with her. I would never again hear her words of love and encouragement, her beautiful soprano singing voice, her laughter as her deep brown eyes filled with pleasure and delight, and her heartfelt prayers in German for her beloved children and grandchildren. Oh, going down memory lane is not for the faint of heart! It has brought tears to my eyes and that deep longing that a person always has for their mother.

I remember my mother as a woman with a strong work ethic who was gracious, loving, compassionate, and warm. She was also the glue that held our family together. While I grew up on the farm, my father was a businessman, and my mother was the true farmer at heart. Daily life revolved around her. The coffee pot was always on, and she was ready at all times to listen to her children, from oldest to youngest. She was the one with whom we shared our joys, our disappointments, our struggles, and current friendships. She reassured us and encouraged us to have expectations of ourselves. She set boundaries and guidelines and gently let us know what acceptable and appropriate behavior was. She was the one to remind us that when we were out and about, we represented the family.

From Ukraine to Saskatch-

ewan - My mother, Aganeta (Derksen) Klassen, was born in the Ignatjevo colony in the district of Bachmut in the Ukraine on February 5, 1905. Her parents were David and Katarina (Rempel) Derksen. She was one of eight children, three sons and five daughters. She attended the village school and then went on to attend the Maedchen Schule. Mother often spoke of her childhood home, the gardens with their fruit trees, and the delicious watermelons. Until the Bolshevik revolution, when bandits marauded the Mennonite homes in the area, she had a carefree youth.

My mother had a love of music and thoroughly enjoyed the youth gatherings in her community. She participated in their village dances, but once she started to date my father, Jacob Klassen, that came to a halt. As Jacob was fairly tone deaf and lacked a sense of natural rhythm, he gently suggested that if she wanted to continue their friendship, perhaps she would be willing to give up dancing. Obviously, she complied because on August 24, 1924 at the age of 19 she married him. Just prior to the marriage she was baptized on the confession of her faith by Elder Henry Funk and accepted as a member in the New York Mennonite Church. On June 30th, 1925, Aganeta and Jacob's first son was born. On October 9th, 1925, this little one passed away from a brain tumor. On November 11, 1925, Jacob's fa-

ther Jacob Johann Klassen passed away from a stroke at the age of 54.

At this point, my parents were living in my father's family home because the extended Klassen family planned to immigrate to Canada. As they were prosperous farmers and hoped that things would improve, Mother's family had no such plans to move. Thus Mother prepared for a journey that would leave all her family behind.



The author's mother Aganeta standing between her parents, David and Katerina Derksen



Jacob and Aganeta Klassen prior to their immigration to Canada 1926

On September 26, 1926, Mother, Father, and the remaining Klassen family left for Moscow. After four days in Moscow, they travelled via train to Riga, Latvia and then on to Libau, a city on the Baltic coast. Next they sailed on the ship "Boltara" to London, England and continued on by train to Southampton. In Southampton

(See Mother on page 5)

(Mother from page 4)

they boarded the eighteen-thousand-ton ship "The Empress of France" to sail to Canada. (My mother rarely spoke of this transatlantic trip but did mention the hardships encountered by mothers and children, and that she was content and thankful that her infant son had been spared the journey.) On October 22, 1926, after being enroute for almost a month, the family landed in Quebec. A final trip by train then took them to Harris, SK, where Grandmother Klassen's brother (my Uncle Peter Hildebrandt) lived.

My family spent their first winter in Harris, and their first Canadian-born son, my brother Jacob J. (Apr. 28, 1927-May 10, 2011), was born there. On May 1, a few days after Jacob's birth, the extended Klassen family purchased three sections of land in Esbank, SK. They shared the land and large house with my family, and it was there, on January 12, 1929, that my oldest sister, Nettie Klassen Hildebrandt, was born.

The Coaldale Years - Because the family spoke little English, the purchase of the land in Saskatchewan had been made through a land agent. The family made their payments directly to the agent, who was then supposed to transfer the funds to the owner. However, this agent pocketed some of the funds for himself. Due to this setback and also due to the drought and the depression at the time, in 1931 the extended Klassen family made the decision to move to Coaldale, AB to hoe sugar beets.

During the ensuing years the family lived in several different houses. At first they rented a home on the Knapp farm east of Coal-

dale. It was during this time that the third child, David J. (Nov. 25, 1931-July 6, 2007), was born. In 1933 my father built the family a small house near town where the Sportsplex now stands. It was later moved onto a farm east of the community, where it served as our home until 1943. Following that, we moved to yet another farm. This one had a spacious house, and with time my father installed indoor plumbing. Eight more children arrived over these years: Daniel J. (Dec. 9, 1933-May 24, 2007); Lydia Klassen Retzlaff (Feb. 10, 1935-Feb. 27, 2020); Amalia (Emily) Dyck; Heidi Retzlaff; Gerald J. Klassen; Henry J. Klassen (Sept. 23, 1942-July 6, 1977); Sara Derksen; and Katie Harder. In 1953 my father purchased a farm three miles west of Coaldale, and that is the place that became home for me and where most of my memories of family life were formed. It was beautifully treed, with many varieties of lilacs, shrubs, and poplars. Father and Mother resided here until Father's death in 1974.



The author's father Jacob Klassen third from left with a group of POWs from the Lethbridge Camp

During World War 11 our family made some special friends in the Coaldale area. In 1942 a prisoner of war camp was established in the Lethbridge area. Due to a shortage of labor, local farmers could employ these men to help with their farming operations. Sometimes a group of men would come out for the day with a guard. It was strongly suggested that these prisoners of war (POWs) eat their noonday meal outside, but when they came to work on our farm, Mother fed them and their guard indoors. These were Germans after all.

Our family actually hosted two young POWs for several months. Upon their return to Germany, these men kept in touch. In later years they both recounted how they had enjoyed their time with our large boisterous family. Being with us eased their loneliness. They were treated with respect and felt valued. Our family benefited from this connection as well. After the war one of these



L-R The author's siblings Jake and Nettie with POW Karl Kurkouski who lived with the Klassens during the war and disappeared in 1962

(See Mother on page 6)

(Mother from page 5)

men moved to Canada with his family. He and visited and stayed in contact with us until 1962, when he disappeared from our lives, never to be heard from again. The other, Helmuth, kept in touch via letters and telephone. In the year 2000, Helmuth, Martha Menny, his son and family came to Canada to visit. They spent time with my brothers and their families in Coaldale and then came to Didsbury to stay with my sister and brother-in-law, Nettie and Willie Hildebrandt. Because Dennis and I live across the road, we hosted them numerous times for meals. There was a lot of reminiscing going on, and Dennis and I felt privileged to be a part of that.

It was also during the 1940's that a family of Japanese internees lived on our yard. They hoed sugar beets together with my older sisters. Occasionally when my sisters reminisce about their growing up years, they still mention the Kobo family, and all their antics together.

A Wonderful Mother and Wife - My mother truly exemplified the woman mentioned in Proverbs 31:28 "Her children arise and call her blessed, her husband also and he praises her."

During all these years, Mother was a busy and fully committed homemaker. She sewed, baked, cooked, and canned, and there were always piles of laundry and ironing to do. Saturdays were especially busy days at our house; the house was cleaned from top to bottom, shoes had to be polished, and baths had to be taken. There were always freshly baked Zwiebach, Platz, and a cake available, and often the food for Sunday was prepared in advance. In those days we had Sunday School homework, and definitely a scripture passage to memorize, and Mother saw to all of that too.

Life on the farm was hard work. Cows had to be milked, chickens had to be fed, eggs had to be gathered, crops needed to be irrigated, etc. Everyone was expected at the breakfast table at 7:00 a.m. in summer and at 7:30 in winter. There wasn't ever any thought of sleeping in unless you were sick. It was Mother who supervised this day-to-day operation, and she was also the main disciplinarian. She was not a hard taskmaster, but she had expectations. Every so often, if you were overtly disobedient, she would dole out



POW Helmuth Menny came to Canada with his family to visit 2000

some form of punishment, often resorting to using German Sprichwörter (proverbs) as a reprimand or a teaching tool.

Mother was thrifty. She didn't buy something if she could make it. For example, she took flour sacks apart, bleached them, and used them as tea towels or even as doilies. Often at night she would sit and embroider while we sat around the table and did our school homework. Of course, with such a large family, she had an extensive garden, and she loved her flowerbeds. She had her idiosyncrasies as well. When she gardened, she always wore gloves, a hat to protect her face from the sun, and light-colored long-sleeved shirt. I can still envision her working there, and to this day, I dress accordingly when I am gardening.

Busy as she was, Mother always had time to share her love of music and sense of fun with us. When my parents moved to Coaldale, the General Conference Mennonite Church had already been established. On January 3rd, 1932 both my parents became members and were active there throughout their lives. Mother joined the choir, which was under the direction of F.W. Dyck. As more children joined the family, she had to curtail those activities, but with time my father purchased a piano, and many an evening after the supper dishes were done, she would encourage us children to gather around the piano and sing German hymns, English gospel songs, and German volkslieder. On winter evenings Mother would take time to play games with us, and when the grandchildren came along, she played table games with them as well.

(See Mother on page 7)



Kubo family (Japanese internees) helping with the sugar beet harvest Jacob on far right

(Mother from page 6)

My parents worked as a team. I never ever doubted their love for each other. They were always openly affectionate with each other and with us. Although Dad spent his day at the office in town, he still oversaw the farming operation done by hired hands or his sons as they grew to be adults. He was home at the farm for lunch and supper every day. Discussion around the family table (supposedly in German but often reverting to English) was always cherished as a means of catching up. Discussions took place around matters such as farm business, church affairs, committee meetings, the Coaldale Community Hospital, the Mennonite Savings and Credit Union, Mennonite Mutual Relief and Insurance (now MMI), and politics.

In 1937 Dad had been elected to a committee to get a cheese factory started in the Coaldale. In 1940 he became the manager. With time, other business commitments and administrative duties added to his responsibilities. Over the years Mother supported him in these endeavors, often hosting committee meetings in our home as a way of helping out.

With so many children, you eventually have built in babysitters. In such a family situation (my oldest brother was twenty years my senior), younger children have to obey their parents and respect their older siblings' supervision as well. It also means that parents can take a bit more time for themselves, and Mother and Father did that when they could.

My older siblings talk about our parents occasionally taking the big truck, covering the box with a

tarp and travelling to Waterton Park for a few nights. Also, I recall that Mother accompanied Father on some of his travels to provincial and national meetings such as the Mennonite Board of Colonization sessions and the annual Conference of Mennonites. On such trips they could be gone for two weeks, and sometimes they included a little extra holiday time for themselves as well. When they returned, the whole family would gather that evening to listen to stories of their travels. They would always bring a gift home for each one of us. Dad was an avid cameraman, and once his photos or slides were developed, we would have an evening of viewing them.

Both Father and Mother loved to celebrate Christmas, and as the season approached, Mother threw herself into preparations. Beginning in early November, she would browse through the Sears and Eaton's catalogues for gifts for the family.

As she didn't have a driver's license, ordering from the cata-

logue was easier than arranging a shopping trip to Lethbridge. (A relative who worked at one of the catalogue offices in Winnipeg once quipped that she often knew in advance what the J.J. Klassen children were getting for Christmas.) There were new outfits for Christmas Eve to think about too.

Much effort also went into preparing for Christmas concerts at school and at church. At the Sunday School Christmas Eve program, which consisted of dramas, poems, and choir singing followed by goodie bags for the children, the large festive evergreen tree at the front of the church was an awesome sight. Thanks to Mother's decorating, our home looked just as festive. She did special baking too; there was always a variety of Kuchen on hand.

Our tree was generally decorated only a few days before Christmas. It made our living room appear so cozy and warm. I only recall electric lights on it, but the older siblings speak of candles that were lit very briefly on Christmas Eve. There were never any gifts under the tree though. Instead, after the church service we would munch on the candies, peanuts, and oranges from our goodie bags, comment on the program, and each put a plate or a bowl on the dining room table with our name on it on a slip of paper. In the morning, our plates would be loaded with Christmas candy and Japanese oranges, and our presents would be beside them. On numer-



25th Wedding Anniversary 1949. L-R rear Nettie, Jake, Dave, Dan. Centre Lydia, Katie, Aganetha, Heidi, Jacob, Sara, Emily. Front Gerald and Henry

(See Mother on page 8)

(Mother from page 7)

ous occasions we children were so excited that we got up at 3 or 4:00 am to open gifts. Dad and mom seemed to get a kick out of this and thoroughly enjoyed the process. Afterwards, we went back to bed as morning would arrive quickly, and chores had to be done before breakfast.

Mother's work, however, had barely begun. Right after breakfast the radio was turned on to listen to the Queen's address to the Commonwealth. Then we had to tidy up because the married children and grandchildren living in the area would be arriving to open their gifts. Then the table was set for the noon meal, which had already been prepared in advance, and we all went to the Christmas morning service at the Coaldale Mennonite Church. This momentous occasion did not include a sermon, but there was lots of singing by various church choirs, small groups, and the congregation, and it always culminated with the singing of "Der Friedensfurst". The choir loft was jam-packed with singers and guests home for Christmas, and the sanctuary and balcony were full as well.

After the service it was time to go home for the delicious noon meal. When I was a youngster the meal consisted of Kotletten, ham, potato salad, jello salads, pickles, Plumi Moss, and generally ice cream and strawberries for dessert. In later years Mother cooked a turkey dinner. Because there were so many of us, we ate in shifts. In the latter years we brought tables home from church and ate in the rumpus room downstairs. In the afternoon we played table games and visited. In between we consumed candy, oranges, a variety of nuts, and of course the traditional Halvah. Our house was extra full because the married children and grandchildren came from a distance came and usually stayed for a few nights. It was good to all be together, but it sure was hectic. I think my mother must have been exhausted at the end of the day!

Reconnecting with Mother's Family - Did my mother ever hear from any of her siblings or ever get to see them again? In the early years in Canada, she received mail from her family, but with time, that dwindled away to nothing. However, she did know that her parents and some siblings had been sent to Siberia, to the Gulag (forced labor camps), and that some of them had passed away.

In the 1950's, it had been years since any communication from Mother's family had come through. Then, one day my father came home all excited. Coaldale had a grocery store owned by the Martens Brothers, and this was where my family shopped. The Martens had received a call from Russia asking if a man by the name of Jacob J. Klassen still resided in the vicinity. The Martens passed on that they knew my father very well, and arrangements were made for another call the next day when Dad could be present. This was thrilling news for our family; it meant that obviously some of Mother's family had survived the Stalin years!

The second call was made, and Father learned from my Aunt Agatha, my mother's sister, that three of Mother's siblings had made it through the ensuing war years, and that some nieces and nephews had survived as well. I was only eight or nine years old at the time, so I can only imagine the joy my mother must have experienced. Looking back, I realize, that I rarely if ever saw her cry. She must have privately, but she always appeared strong

and composed to us.

Once more addresses were exchanged, and letters were sent back and forth. I do remember there wasn't an empty line or space in the letters that arrived; every inch of paper was utilized. After the lines of communication were once more established, my parents sent parcels to Russia periodically to help the family there with their living costs. I remember they often purchased items that apparently had good resale value over there. Eventually things must have improved in Russia because by the early sixties we weren't sending parcels anymore.

In 1967 the Mennonite World Conference was happening in Amsterdam. My father made plans to go and to fly on afterwards to



Aganetha and Jacob tourists in Holland 1968.

Moscow to meet with my mother's sisters, Tanta Anna Janzen and Tanta Agatha Derksen, and my Onkel Henry Derksen and his sec-

(See Mother on page 9)

(Mother from page 8)

ond wife. Dad was not allowed to visit them in the Karaganda and Novosibirsk area where they were now living, but they could come to Moscow to meet him there. They visited frequently with Dad in a nearby park rather than at a hotel because they all felt more comfortable there than in an enclosed space. Apparently, walls could have a built-in microphone or “ears”, and they didn’t want their conversations to be overheard.



L-R Agathe, Aganetha, Anna Janzen Aganetha with her two remaining sisters Moscow 1968

The whole family was at the airport to meet Dad when he arrived back in Canada. We had a family gathering in Carstairs that afternoon at my sister’s farm. What a reunion! So much conversation and visiting happened that day. We learned a lot about Dad’s experiences overseas. However, I suppose Mother must have heard most of the details regarding her family later from Dad when they were alone.

The next summer my parents both made a return trip to Russia.

Again, the visiting could only happen in Moscow. I know Mom and Dad both regretted not being able to visit them in their homes, but at least it was something, and she had seen them with her own eyes. I do recall that upon my parents’ return, Mother’s suitcase was empty save for the necessities and the souvenirs that they purchased. She had left most of her clothes in Russia. For Mother this return trip to her homeland to visit with family was a dream come true.

Life Without Dad - In the summer of 1973 Mom and Dad planned one more trip to Russia to visit family, but alas, it was not to be. For some reason they had trouble securing a visa for the trip and eventually gave up. Dad was also having some stomach issues. Perhaps it was God’s hand of providence that the trip never materialized. That December he was diagnosed with stomach cancer and had surgery a few days prior to Christmas. The family came home for Christmas, but the celebrations were somewhat subdued. He was home in time for New Years Day, and the doctor said his prognosis was good; the cancer had been contained. Dad had retired from most of his commitments the previous year. He was still providing a few people with assistance in their bookkeeping practices for some local organizations, but this was now happening in the comfort of his home. His farming operation was still ongoing with the support of his two youngest sons,



Last family photo 1972

and his recovery was going well.

It was now February 1974, and my parents were making plans for their 50th wedding anniversary in the upcoming summer. They were also immediate plans to attend the wedding of one of their grandsons. Because of his illness, Dad had lost weight and purchased a new suit for this event. Then on Friday, February 22nd, the day before the wedding, Dad was hospitalized with severe pain. Early the next morning, on Saturday, February 23rd, 1974, he passed away. He was conscious almost until the last, and my mother and brothers were at his bedside when he passed. Now there was only a funeral to plan. In the end it was determined that Dad had suffered from an arterial blood clot. Today the medical system would have put him on blood thinner after major surgery, but for him, it was too late.

(See Mother on page 10)

(Mother from page 9)

My mother was devastated, but with her faith in God and the support of her large family, she continued. My parents were devout Christians who demonstrated their faith to their children quietly, by example. We had family devotions at the breakfast table every morning with Dad praying. At the other meals one of us children would recite a German grace. I do know that my parents had devotions every night in their room because I heard them reading scripture and praying out loud. After Dad passed away, when we children were home for a visit, Mother would have devotions with us at night. She would pray in German or in her halting English depending on who was there. Since she did not drive, she had to depend on her sons to take her to church. She loved the fellowship of church but would often watch a religious service on TV if she were home on her own. My mother had lived through enough adversity in her life to know that she needed to trust God for her tomorrows.

Mom was now living alone in an old farmhouse that Dad had originally renovated to accommodate my brother Gerald and his wife when they married. My brothers were uncomfortable with this arrangement, but she was determined to stay there. They still stopped in for coffee and farmed Dad's land, so that meant they were there off and on. Their families and the grandchildren paid her more frequent visits, and she still gardened a bit. It was home, and that's where she wanted to be.

A lifetime of working hard and birthing twelve children takes its toll on the body. Mother's hips had been giving her problems, which necessitated two hip surgeries. Both times she convalesced at my brother Jake's home. She was always grateful for their tender care. With the surgeries came exercises, which she worked at diligently until her dying day. With the second surgery she suffered a lung embolism, and we nearly lost her.

In 1976 my youngest brother, Henry, who was married in 1972 and was living on a farm east of Coaldale, was diagnosed with cancer. He and his wife, Hilda, had two little boys. That following year, Henry had three different surgeries. The last one was at the University Hospital in Edmonton, and he was not doing well, Hilda, with her two little ones were staying in a motel in the city. Mother could hardly fathom having them both so far away. The family made arrangements to bring Henry home to the Lethbridge Hospital by air ambulance. Now Hilda and her sons could remain in their own home, and the family was there to support both her and him. Henry passed away on July 6th, 1977. It was a tough time for all of us, but especially Mother. Hilda and her boys remained in their farm home for another year, but she then decided to rent out the house and land and purchased a new home in town.

Mom and Dad's oldest grandson, Alfred, was getting married in Illinois, and the family urged her to attend. We were all so proud of her when she made her decision to fly out for the wedding. Of course, attending a wedding necessitated a new dress and a new hat. Mother loved wearing hats, and probably purchased a new one for every special occasion. Long dresses were the fashion at the time, so she too purchased a beautiful new long dress. She looked lovely and was quite excited to go. The trip went well, and she was enamored of her new granddaughter in law Patrice. This young

gal was a Christian, but she was English and had not grown up Mennonite. This was new for our family. The new couple had met while studying at Goshen College.

Life went on. Mother occasionally visited her daughters for extended visits. We were all living in Calgary, Rosemary, or the Didsbury area. On one occasion while she was away visiting, her house was broken into. This was alarming for all of us, and we felt she should move to town. She purchased a lot in Coaldale, and my brother Jake built a new home for her across the street from my Uncle Dan and Aunt Sara. The house was built, custom window fittings were installed, and yet Mother hesitated to move. It stood empty for almost a year. Finally, just prior to Christmas 1979, she was persuaded to move, and we celebrated Christmas with her in her new home.

Our family was now too large to be accommodated in a house for Christmas dinner, so this year, as we had done since the year following Dad's passing, we gathered at Ericksen's in Lethbridge instead. Ericksen's provided us with a large banquet room and prepared a delicious turkey and ham dinner with all the trimmings. They provided the coffee, and we could bring in gifts, table games, and food for Faspa. We often stayed there till eight o'clock at night. Those of us from a distance would spend a couple of nights with Mother as well. It was almost like old times except Dad and Henry were missing.

This Journey's End - It was approaching the spring of 1980, and Mother had lived in her new house for six months now. The

(See Mother on page 11)

(Mother from page 10)

Christmas season was over, and life in town had become a bit lonely for her. Her sons popped in for coffee, and she had neighbors close by who looked out for her, but she missed the farm. She missed hearing the tractors in the field. During one visit she shared with us that when she couldn't sleep at night, she found refuge in singing the old hymns. Realizing Mom was lonely, my sister in Calgary made plans to come home for the weekend with her family.

Mom was thrilled. She prepared three pies for the weekend along with other food. Saturday morning, my sister realized they would arrive later than originally planned, and so she proceeded to call Mom to let her know. It was eight o'clock in the morning, and she was surprised that she couldn't reach her. She called my brother Jake and asked him to go check on her. He drove to Coaldale immediately and found her lying on her ensuite washroom floor. She had been washing her hair and had fallen and bumped her head on the vanity. She was still alive, but she was moaning. Jake called the ambulance, but she passed away on the way to the hospital from a massive heart attack. And so, our dear



The family at Aganetha's graveside 1980.

mother's life journey was suddenly completed. She was 75 years old.

Ruhe Sanft, Liebe Mama! You

will remain in our hearts forever. Together with the scripture writer we say, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for His appearing." 2 Timothy 4:7-8.



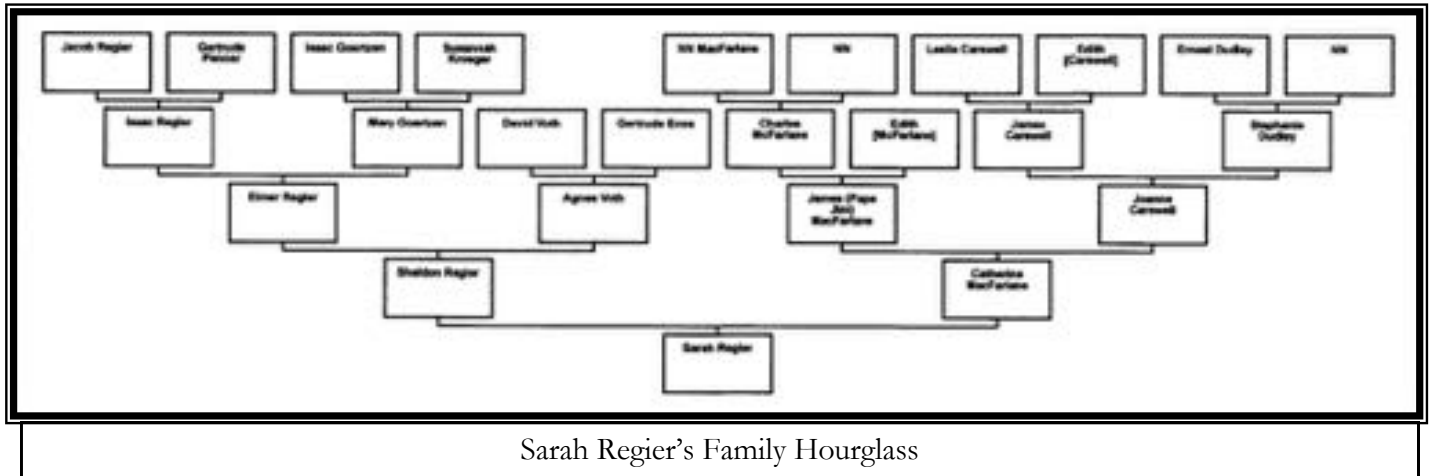
Klassen siblings L-R rear Sara Derksen, Katie Harder, Heidi Retzlaff. Front Gerald Klassen, Lydia Retzlaff (1935-2020) Nettie Hildebrandt, Emily Dyck 2018

Katie Harder and her husband Dennis live on a farm east of Carstairs. She attends the Bergthal Mennonite Church where she is active as a song leader, worship leader, and deacon. Locally she is chair of the Carstairs and District Community Chest. Over the years she has served on various church conference committees and Alberta Songfest. She has been the secretary and vice chair of Mennonite Church Alberta and secretary of Women in Mission. Currently she serves as the vice chair of MHSA. She is an avid reader, loves to garden, and enjoys choral music. She is the mother of two children, Sherry Harder Retzlaff, and James Harder (1974-2002). Katie and Dennis have been blessed with four grandchildren.



Katie Harder

(Whoever from page 1)



find it, light pink and a bit frilly, next to her wedding dress. Mum looks at the wedding dress and then eyes the three of us, all nearly the same size. "I bet this would fit you," she says. It does. And tucked behind even the dresses, Mum finds her old dancing kilt. To our surprise, since this was made for her when she was still a young teenager, this fits me, too. The tartan is a vibrant red, and it's heavier than I expect. I ask my mum if I can have it.

My family hasn't lived in Scotland for a long time, but there's still some connection to Scottish history, like my mum's highland dancing. The family name is MacFarlane, and according to my Papa's family wall hanging, the MacFarlane clan has its historic seat at Arrochar. They lived along the western shore of Loch Lomond. The clan motto is "This I'll Defend".

I'm sitting on Papa Jim and Grandma Joanne's porch at their house in Redcliff, Alberta, eating lunch and taking careful notes of the family history they can tell me. On the MacFarlane side, my family has been in Canada for so long that nobody remembers when we arrived, but that doesn't mean there's no history to be told. Papa Jim talks about his own grandfather, who left New Brunswick, took the train across Canada to Fernie, B.C., and then walked the rest of the way to Cranbrook because the railroad didn't go that far. That was in 1898. My Papa's family never knew why his grandfather left New Brunswick, and he never talked about it. Papa laughs a bit when he says that the family speculated that he must have had the law or a jealous husband after him.

Papa's dad, my great-grandfather Charles, was born in 1902 in Cran-

brook, and it somehow came to pass that the spelling of his last name changed in the process—Charles was a McFarlane, and his father was a MacFarlane. This name changing seems to have been common, and it gets more complicated as the story goes on.



Clan MacFarlane wall hanging



Papa, James (right) and his mother, Edith.



Jim and Joanne MacFarlane

Papa's mother, Edith, was from Ontario. Both her parents died of typhoid in 1905, when she was three years old. She and her siblings were split up, and she and her brother lived with her grandfather, while her sister lived with an aunt. When Edith was ten, her grandfather took her with him to

(See Whoever on page 13)

(Whoever from page 12)

Alberta, where they had a home-
stead outside of Bingville, in the
'British Block'. When her grandfa-
ther died, she moved with her un-
cle to British Columbia, and it was
there that she met and married
Charles.

All 8 of Charles and Edith's
children were born in Cranbrook,
including my Papa, James Edward
MacFarlane, in 1940. You see that
Papa's last name is different from
Charles'— he's back to his grand-
father's spelling. He was the
youngest, and he's the only one of
his siblings to have that spelling. It
makes for charmingly named 'Mc/
Mac reunions'.

Two of Papa's siblings died as
children: his sister Margaret of
pneumonia and his brother Emory
of drowning.

My Mother's Lineage: The Carswells and Dudleys

Grandma Joanne and I talk in
the kitchen, getting lunch ready
while my sister listens in, and my
Papa is outside barbecuing. Grand-
ma has never told me much about
her side of the family. I listen
closely.



Grandma, Joanne (right) and her
Grandmother Carswell.

Grandma Joanne's maiden



James Carswell standing 8th from the right (marked) 1928 Dominion
(Canadian) Champion Regina Pats Rugby Football Team.
Source: Saskatchewan Sports Hall of Fame (Inducted 1974)

name was Carswell. The Carswells came to Ontario from England. They
were in mining and forestry, and lived in a big house on a hill with two
grand pianos in the living room. I'm a bit envious of the pianos. My grand-
mother, who was a nurse and a farmer's wife, speaks of her relatives with a
bit of a storybook tone, telling me about her old great-aunts who, as girls,
went back to England to be educated, and
'never worked a day in their lives'. Grandma's
grandfather, Leslie Carswell, left Ontario and
moved to Regina to be a farmer, but he went
home to Ontario when the farming wasn't
good. Leslie's son, James Carswell moved out
west more permanently and played for the Re-
gina Pats and the Regina Roughriders. There
he met his wife, Stephanie Dudley, who had
moved to Saskatchewan as a teacher. In south-
ern Saskatchewan, James worked for the Prai-
rie Farm Rehabilitation Association, building
dams. Later, he and Stephanie moved to Medi-
cine Hat. They had three children: Barrie, Jo-
anne (my grandmother) and Linda. Grandma
Joanne was born in 1943, smack dab in the
middle, just like my mum would be



L-R: Dorothy, Muriel, and
Stephanie Dudley.

The Dudleys were more recently from England: Stephanie's father,
Ernest, came over and settled in Birtle, Manitoba, near the Qu'Appelle Val-
ley, to farm. A couple of days after my lunchtime visit, my grandmother
brings old photographs over to my parents' house. They include a picture
of her Grandfather Dudley, an old gentleman working outside in his vest
and tie. She tells me about going to visit her grandparents in Birtle for two
weeks every summer, about their huge garden, and about her aunts making
raspberry jam on a hot plate because the old house only had a wood stove.
Even my mother remembers visiting there once.

In 1946, the Carswells moved to Medicine Hat, and this is where my
Grandma and Grandpa met. Papa Jim, laughing on the porch again, tells us
about picking Joanne up for a date on his motorcycle. To demonstrate that
it would be safe, he gave my great-grandmother, Stephanie, a ride around
the block. My mum says, later, that it was probably just a ruse because
Stephanie really wanted to ride the motorbike.

I like even these little stories— I've never heard stories about Stephanie
before. The only Dudley sister I've really been told about is Dorothy, the

(See Whoever on page 14)

(Whoever from page 13)

oldest, because I'm named after her— Sarah Dorothy Regier. She was my mother's favourite aunt. It must be winter of 2018 when I get a call from Grandma Joanne that starts the way these conversations do: '...you know my aunt Dodie?' (always Dodie, never Dorothy). 'Yes,' I say, though I have no personal memories of her. It turns out there's a woman in Edmonton who lived as a little girl on the Dodie's street in Regina. This woman, who remembers Dodie fondly, is now in the hospital. Would I be able to get in touch with her daughter?

'Here's the phone number, and pick up some things from her: two petit point pictures and a doily that Dodie made and gave to her. She's moving out of her house, and she wants to give these back to Dodie's family.'

I'm twenty-one, and I walk down after my classes to the U of A hospital to visit a woman in hospital who remembers the woman I'm named for. I don't stay long, but long enough to hear again that Dodie was wonderful and kind, that her house was always open to neighbourhood children, that she's a good person to be named for. It ends the way these conversations always do: 'that's just how Dodie was, you know?' and I do. I am allowed to keep one of the petit points, the smaller one of a squat blue vase overflowing with poppies, for myself.

My Mother's Side of the Family: Recent Years

Grandma Joanne and Papa Jim both grew up in Medicine Hat, and so did I. There were old class photos of Grandma on the walls of my elementary school, right across from where mine were going up many years later. Driving up the hill to my high school, Papa would motion down to the train track and tell us how he and his friends used to jump on the train at the bottom and ride it all the way out of the river valley up to the flat prairie. Despite the many years, their stories of childhood look like mine; every place is familiar, the family and the city growing up together out of the prairie dirt.

Jim and Joanne married in 1964 and built a life in southern Alberta together. For a while they lived on a farm outside of town. It was where they raised their children: firstborn Jeff, my mum, Catherine (born in 1968), and Mum's younger sister Tannis. When my mum was in high school, the family moved in to Redcliff and built a house. They've lived there ever since, through their children growing up and moving away, through the birth of eleven grandchildren and the death of one. (I am almost twenty-one, and I am crying alone in my kitchen over the piercing realisation that soon I will be older than Émilie ever got to be, crying with the renewed desire to carry forward in myself the things I learned following one step behind her: the love, the bright joy, the music).

Over the years, Papa has threatened to sell the house and move out to live in their cabin

in Elkwater or to sell the cabin and buy a farm again and live out there. But they're still in Redcliff, in the house with the big kitchen and big garden and my mother's wedding dress in the basement closet, somewhere to come home to.

My Father's Side of the Family

It's Thanksgiving, 2019, and we're all gathered in the house of my paternal grandparents, Elmer and Agnes Regier, in Saskatoon. My Dad, Sheldon, is working in the kitchen, and my grandpa has brought out a large framed portrait, a full-body sketch of a man sitting on a simple wooden chair. 'This is my Grandma Agnes' father, David Voth, looking out from the picture at his family, seeming familiar. When my grandma and great-aunt Hilda have confirmed that it really does look like him, we pull out another old photo album, and I sit with Aunt Hilda and we go through it, one picture at a time, old pictures in black and white that I've never seen before, sometimes people I've heard of, and sometimes absolute strangers.

Even later, I go downstairs and wrestle with my grandfather's old computer, where he keeps all his family research. Not everything is on there, or at least easy to find, so we also flip through massive binders, the two of us in the office going through all the piles of papers while I read off the names and Grandpa says 'no, not that one'. Grandpa knows more about our family history than I probably ever will, has probably forgotten more than I'll ever know, and the office bookshelves and the temperamental computer program are the result of many years of work.



Elmer and Agnes Regier

(See Whoever on page 15)

(Whoever from page 14)

My Father's Lineage: The Regiers

My Dad's paternal great-grandfather, Jacob Regier, was born in 1884 in Orenburg, Russia. A note in his profile says that he served as a conscientious objector during World War One. He married Gertrude Penner, and in 1926 they moved with five children to Canada, living first in Winkler, Manitoba, and then settling in Watrous, Saskatchewan, where their youngest child was born.

Jacob and Gertrude Regier's eldest child, Isaac, who was to become my dad's paternal grandfather, was born in 1912 while the family was still in Orenburg. Dad's paternal grandmother was Mary Goertzen. She had been born in Orenburg also, just a year apart from Jacob. Mary was the youngest of the nine children of Isaac Goertzen (born Orenburg, 1870) and Susanna Kroeger. The



Suzanna and Isaac Goertzen
(front) with their younger children.
Mary far left.

Goertzens married in 1896, and in the 1920s, they moved with their younger children to Canada and settled in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Isaac Regier and Mary Goertzen married in Saskatchewan in 1938.

They farmed in Watrous, SK, and had three children: Harold, Elmer (Dad's father, born in 1941), and Marianne.

My Fathers Lineage: Voth and Enns Families

I'm eight or nine, probably, and even though Grandpa Elmer and Grandma Agnes live in Saskatoon, Grandma still works the night shift sometimes in the neonatal ward at the Medicine Hat hospital. When she does, my grandparents stay with us. At night, before Grandma goes to work, she tucks us into bed. Then she tells us stories of growing up in rural Saskatchewan, of school and church and farm life. 'You should remember these,' my mother says, but I am the oldest and still young, and I remember the telling but not what is told.

I'm pretty sure my Grandma Agnes never really told us about her parents, though. Her father, David Voth, was born in 1904 in Memrik, Russia, and her mother, Gertrud Enns, was born in 1910 in Neu Samara. In 1929 they were married, and six days later they left Russia and came to Canada via Germany. The portrait of David that I saw for the first time at Thanksgiving was done in Russia, just before they left.



L-R: Hilda, Mary, Cornelius, Abraham, and William Voth, Grandma Agnes in front of Mary.

In Canada David and Gertrud lived on a farm near Mayfair, Saskatchewan, and had nine children: Mary, Cornelius, Abraham, William, Hilda, Agnes (my grandma born in 1942), Ernest, and Elizabeth, with one stillborn boy between Agnes and Ernie. They didn't go back to Russia except for once in 1975, for a visit. None of Gertrud's family came to Canada, but eventually two of David's brothers, Heinrich and Isaac, did.

I am young when I first begin to understand the weight of this history on my dad's side of the family. My Regier grandparents have a couple of books for a little girl who likes historical fiction, books about Mennonites in the Soviet Union. From somewhere I have the general knowledge that at some point, my family left the Soviet Union and came to Canada. Mum says 'you should write things down, when Grandpa tells you stories'. I am young. I do not. I'm not sure how old I am, out of high school, at least. Then one night my Mum says 'you should really write things down' and my Grandma says that there are things that her family never knew, an aunt who disappeared. I do not write this down, but I remember it, down to the yellow light of the dining room, my grandmother's voice, the strangeness of something you abstractly knew becoming a truth.

It's summer of 2019, late morning. I wake up later than my Regier grandparents, and Grandma has left a place set for me even though they've already eaten breakfast. At the other end of the table sit stacks of papers,

(See Whoever on page 16)

(Whoever from page 15)

letters that I cannot read because I don't speak German. Grandma is translating, bit-by-bit. I can read the one she's working on, from her Aunt Liese in Paraguay to her family back in Russia, telling them that her husband is dead. I eat my breakfast at one end of the table, and Grandma and Grandpa tell me about visiting Paraguay and the relatives they met there, and the letters sit at the other end, light paper and heavy history.

Our Family: The Recent Years

Dad's parents Elmer Regier and Agnes Voth met at Swift Current Bible Institute. They were married in 1963. For a while they lived in Saskatoon, and when my dad was quite young, they moved to Medicine Hat. Grandma Agnes was a nurse, and Grandpa was a social worker. They had two children: my Dad, Sheldon (born in 1967) and Joanne. I can remember the house they lived in Medicine Hat, at least a bit—the breakfast nook in the kitchen, my Dad's old room, the big garden. In 2003, they moved back up to Saskatoon, to split the distance between us and my cousins all the way out in Carrot River.

Dad started dating Mum in high school when she was 16. They dated for ten years before they got married. I like to tell people that—it gets good reactions. Ten years is a long time to date someone before you even get engaged. They were married in 1993, in St. Barnabas Anglican Church in Medicine Hat, and they had four children. I am the oldest, born in 1996, then my brother, Adam (1999), then Bethany (2001), then Rachel (2003). We all grew up in Medicine Hat.

It's Easter 2020, and by some miracle we are all home. Rachel, still in grade eleven, was the only one living at home this school year, but just two weeks before Easter the CMU Outtatown group made it home from Guatemala on a repatriation flight, so Beth is just now escaping her mandatory self-isolation. At the same time, Adam flew home from Victoria, where he was at university. I've driven down from Edmonton in one long stretch, unable to stop in towns for fear of bringing something home with me. I'm thinking about history, about family, about not seeing my grandparents even though they're only twenty minutes away, not seeing any of the church family I grew up with, about people who raised me.

When I ask my Mum how we ended up attending the Mennonite church all my life, she makes it sound a bit coincidental. Perhaps that isn't

too strange. After all, my Papa Jim's family attended the United Church 'because it was the only church around' and then attended the Presbyterian Church. When Papa married Grandma Joanne, he joined the Anglican Church because she was raised Anglican. My mum was raised Anglican, and my parents were married in the Anglican Church. Mum says that at first they went back and forth between the Mennonite and the Anglican church, but eventually they decided to stay at the Mennonite church because they felt more connected there.

Even so, my sense of my faith tradition doesn't come only from my Dad's family. It was Dad who first taught me about Anabaptist history, but Mum who stood next to me at the stove and taught me to make rollkuchen and portzelky. It was Dad who talked me through a teenage crisis of faith, and it was



The Regiers: Back: Sheldon and Cathy. L-R: Adam, Bethany, Rachel, Sarah



"The author, wearing her Mum's kilt at her best friends Tristan and Sofia's wedding, groom Tristan (left) and his brother Joshua

Mum who first taught me about Mennonite traditions and beliefs of non-violence while doing my hair in the morning and telling Adam to stop pretending to shoot people

(See Whoever on page 17)

(Whoever from page 16)

and explaining what it means to 'not believe in war'. I'm Mennonite because of both of my parents.

It's nearly May of 2020, as I sit here writing this. My home in Edmonton is hours away from most of my family, on both sides, but family is always growing. I have a church family and roommates who are as close as family to me. In our house there is evidence of many legacies come together: a Greek Orthodox icon in the dining room, a box of carefully copied Finnish recipes, a kilt in the Ross Hunting tartan, and an Anglican Book of Alternative Services. And there are my own things: my Bible, inscribed by my Regier grandparents; a Book of Psalms from the MacFarlane side; a cross-stitch from Grandma R; Grandma M's teacups; Dodie's petit-point; my cousin's picture tucked into my mirror. Legacies of life, legacies of faith—and my Mum's bright red kilt, now in my closet, for me and for whoever will wear it next.

Sarah Regier graduated from the University of Alberta in June 2019 with a B.A. in English Literature. In her spare time, she enjoys reading, writing, cooking, and spending time with her roommates talking about "Lord of the Rings". She is currently working as a French tutor and preparing to go back to school for a Master's degree at the University of Saskatchewan. For now, she lives in Edmonton, Alberta and attends Lendrum Mennonite Church. ❖

(Pierre from page 1)

the globe. Later, I took baptism classes and became a member of Lendrum Mennonite Church.

Talking to Dave Toews I mentioned that I had no ancestors with such interesting histories as he had published in *The MHSA Chronicle*, the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta's publication. He encouraged me to look more closely because, as he said, "There is always something interesting in everyone's story." I remembered that a relative had done a fair amount of research on my maternal great grandfather, so I decided to tell what we know of his life, which was, in fact, quite interesting. I would say he lived a fairly adventurous life. Our family has some records, dates, artifacts, and anecdotal writings going as far back as the mid 1700's.

My great grandfather, Pierre Cheri Demasson, (July 18, 1839-Jan 9, 1916) was born in La Rochelle, Charente Inferieure, France. Records show that there were several Demasson families there and in the nearby towns of St. Malmo, and Laurient.

Here is a translation of Pierre Cheri's birth certificate:

Certificate N0. 195 - Birth of Cheri Pierre Demasson

At four o'clock, July 18, 1839, Jacques Demasson, a thirty-four year old ship's carpenter living in La Rochelle, appeared before us, Emile Labretonniere, deputy mayor of La Rochelle, appointed by the mayor to act as Vital Statistics officer for the district of Rochelle in the Department of Lower Charente. He presented a male infant, born that same day at one o'clock A.M. in this town on Monnaie Street, of the legitimate marriage of Jeanne Charrier, a 33 year old seamstress living in La Rochelle, and the aforementioned Jacques Demasson. This child's given names were Cheri Pierre, as stated before witnesses, Jacques Louis Hyvon, a 32 year old seaman residing in La Rochelle and Etienne Torigny, a 43-year-old seaman residing in La Rochelle. The declarant, Jacques Demasson and one of the witnesses stated that they were unable to sign; the other Etienne Torigny, however, did sign this certificate after it was read to them.

Signature of E. Torigny

Signature of E. Labretonniere

Pierre had a long, active life which can be divided into about four phases: military, carpentry/fishing, seal hunting, and ranching.

Phase One: The Military

Pierre's first career was in the military, which he entered at the age of 20. He was registered as a French marine and served for about seven years in two different campaigns (approximately 1858-59 and 1865-66). Information about this period was obtained from written family anecdotes and from medals Pierre was given, which are still in the possession of the Demasson family.



Pierre Demasson's Empereur Napoleon III Military Medal
1859 Italian campaign

(See Pierre on page 18)

(Pierre from page 17)

Pierre acquired two of these medals during a period of French imperialism under Emperor Napoleon III, also known as Charles Louis Bonaparte, stepson of Napoleon Bonaparte. One medal, from an Italian campaign, has the following inscription: *CAMPAGNE D'ITALIE, Mondebello, Palestro, Turbigo, Magenta, Mari-gnan, Solterio*. The other medal, from a Mexican campaign, has these words: *NAPOLEON III EMPEREUR, EXPEDITION DU MEXIQUE 1862-1863*. It is likely that these were standard medals for having participated in the military rather than special honour medals for some heroic event. Some family members also believe Pierre had a medal from a campaign in China, but we do not have any evidence of it.



Pierre Demasson's Empereur Napoleon III Military Medal 1862 Mexican campaign

Phase Two: Carpentry/Fishing

We have no exact information about what Pierre did next once his military duty was over, but it is likely that he became involved in the bustling fishing business that was taking place off the Grand Banks of Newfoundland at the time. Small towns on the west coast of Brittany, and the city of La Rochelle itself, provided easy access to these fishing grounds. Tradesmen as well as fishermen were needed, and Pierre's marriage document states that he was a carpenter, and that those who witnessed his marriage (likely friends and coworkers) were a seaman, a ship's carpenter, a settler, a hotel proprietor, and a ship's pulley maker.

However, it is not until February 17, 1869 that we first catch up with Pierre for sure again. He is in the maritime area of Canada known as Acadia, and it is the occasion of his marriage at the age of 29. His nineteen-year-old bride, Elisa Jane Hervy, (Aug 4, 1849-Jan 12, 1925) born in the small fishing village of Codroy, Newfoundland, has been living on the French islands St. Pierre et Miquelon. (The wedding is a civil marriage, which is curious as they are both Catholic. Why is there not a church wedding? They still had banns published as required for anyone wanting to disagree with the marriage and affidavits from relatives still in France as support for the marriage.)

The fact that we have evidence that



Elisa and Pierre later in life perhaps their 40th wedding anniversary

Pierre was in Newfoundland, St. Pierre et Miquelon, and possibly the Isles de Madeleine as well means that I can claim to be part Acadian. That evidence is supported by information derived from my DNA tracking on Ancestry maps.

Phase Three: Seal Hunting

By 1870, Pierre and his wife Elisa had relocated to a French-owned territory on the eastern coast of what is now Quebec. In 1871, he appears in the census of Pointe aux Esquimaux, a small village on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River. The village had been founded around 1857 by a group of fishermen who were originally from the Isles de Madeleine, and who spoke the Acadian dialect. It was predominately a Catholic village, with fishing and logging being the main industries in the early years. The town has since been renamed Havre St. Pierre. Pierre and his family remained there for 13 years. Stories handed down through the family tell of when he hunted seals on the cold Atlantic ice near Greenland. His children remembered, "He often told us the story of men crawling towards the seals and then surrounding them. They killed many of them with mallets, but they also admitted having taken along guns."

While Pierre and Elisa were in Pointe aux Esquimaux, a curious situation seems to have existed. Census records show that a young boy named Joseph Pelletier was living with them. We don't know who he was or how he was connected to the family. Was he an adopted child or perhaps a nephew they took in? It was even ru-

(See Pierre on page 19)

(Pierre from page 18)

moured in our family that he was the illegitimate son of Elisa. In later years he apparently came to visit the farm in Manitoba once but then was never seen or heard from again.

During the years in Pointe aux Esquimaux, Pierre and Elisa's first 6 children were born. Tragically, the first two died early. C. Pierre (Sept. 11, 1871-May 10, 1871) died of unknown causes at only 9 months of age. Ernest (Sept. 29, 1872-Oct. 13, 1892) died in a wrestling match at the age of 20. It was threshing time. They were steaming up in the morning, and Ernest was on his knees making kindling. Another young guy, a friend of his, was wrestling around with him. He came at him from behind and jumped on his back. He put his knee into Ernest's back and either broke it or caused a rupture of something, and he died as a result of that event. Also born in Pointe aux Esquimaux were Ezilda Marie (Lottie) 1874, Pierre Cheri (Peter or Pete) 1876, Rozalie Eugenia (Rosie) 1879, and Euphemia Mary (Phemie) 1882.

Phase Four: Ranching at Boissevain, Manitoba.

In 1884, at the age of 45, with \$45.00 in wages and 5 children ranging in age from 3 to 13 years of age, Pierre and Elisa moved from Pointe aux Esquimaux to a homestead just south of Regent, Manitoba to start a farming and cattle operation. What precipitated this move is not known. Had some relative written to him about the opportunities of the West? Had Pierre been enticed by the government ads offering "free" homesteads? They sounded like an



Demasson women and neighbours inspecting the harvest

offer to good to be true! The farmer could claim the land as his if he built a house on it and had it growing crops within 3 years.

The family travelled with a group of French settlers who would later become their dear neighbours and friends. Among them were the Couture and Turgeon families. The group travelled by C.N.R. train to Winnipeg and then transferred to a smaller local train on the Manitoba Southwestern Railway. The family stayed in Regent, probably with relatives, while Pierre and the other men rode to Cherry Creek (later the town of Boissevain), and then walked the rest of the way to find their homesteads. This quote from the local history book, *Beckoning Hills*, gives us an idea what the journey was like. It was written by a neighbour, Ferdinand Couture.

"They started to walk in a northwesterly direction, arriving in the White-water hay marsh just about dark. There being no where else to sleep, they burrowed into a haystack for the night, continuing on in the morning. During forenoon they arrived at their destination, it being the farm where Zeph Sexton now lives. At that time, Turgeon owned the place."



Aerial view of Demasson farm, Boissevain 1960s

(See Pierre on page 20)

(Pierre from page 19)

Pierre found his land, located on the Northeast quarter of Section 18, Township 4, Range 21, West of the 1st Meridian, and he claimed it. The family then proceeded to establish a homestead under the rules set out by the government. They were very successful. It was a mixed farm having both cattle and other animals as well as grain. In due time, they built a smallish house and then eventually a huge red barn with three dovecots. The barn became somewhat famous in our family. Almost all the pictures we have of that time feature it as a backdrop. It is easy to see the difference in importance placed on the housing for the animals and the people – the animals got the best deal.

The family continued to grow as more children were born: Alexandrine (Sandy) 1886, Jean-Louis (Louie) 1888, and Theodore Albert (Albert) 1890. The farm prospered, and the Demassons became a solid part of the community. Though the settlers spoke French when they arrived, the children were educated in English schools. They were severely reprimanded by the teachers if they used French, and Henry Couture remembers being slapped very hard with a ruler on the hands for doing so in Grade 1. He said he never spoke another word of French in school. All the children ended up speaking only English, so the language of our ancestors was lost to us.

There is a family story about the big red barn. Pierre's son Arthur inherited the farm, and he had a son named Arthur. When he was a boy, young Arthur was given the task of cleaning out the manure from the stalls in the barn, a job that he hated. He remembers how angry he was and that he swore he would not do this for the rest of his life! He made good on his word by becoming the



Demasson Family on a Sunday afternoon
Boissevain, Manitoba



The much photographed big red barn

head of Sony, Canada!

A second story *Beckoning Hills* records a harrowing pioneer event in which the Demassons would have been involved. It is entitled "The Early Snowstorm" and takes place in September 1903 on the north shore of White Water Lake near their homestead. A neighbour who had a lot of fenced land kept other farmers' cattle along the shore of the lake for the summer until the farmers picked them up in the fall. On this cool September night he went to bed after doing chores and woke up to a two-foot snow bank on his doorstep. It continued to snow heavily until noon, at which time he set out to find the cattle. He knew they would go straight downwind toward the lake. He hoped they had found shelter in the tall canes by the shore, but when he found them, his worst fears were realized. He saw animals standing knee deep in the slush and mud churned up by the trampling feet of the herd.

A quote from *Beckoning Hills* tells it well:

"Driven relentlessly by the gale and their own terror the herd had stampeded right into the lake, the ones behind shoving the leaders out into the soft bottom till they went down, to drown in the snow clogged, icy water."

It was a grim sight. In some places the bodies were piled on top of each other. Some had plunged out 5 or 6 hundred yards before they became exhausted and sank down. Many that were mired down but still alive kept up a low terror-stricken bellowing that was like a dirge."

The rancher went to the nearby settlers to get help. They used ponies and ropes to pull some of
(See Pierre on page 21)

(Pierre from page 20)

the bogged down animals to safety, but many of them died even after they were taken out. In total 106 animals died. After the news got around, nearby native tribes and even one from North Dakota came and set up a camp. The men pulled the animals out of the water, and the women cut up the meat into long strips and hung it to dry in the sun. It took many days to clean it all up, but the natives had a good stash of meat for winter and also used the hides. Life had some pretty stressful moments in those days, too.

Joined by a Name

Pierre and Elisa Demasson have many descendants living across Canada and some in the USA. The Demasson family in La Rochelle was large, but not all of them married. Some of them migrated to Australia, and we have been in contact with a branch



The Demasson Family in circa 1900.

Back L-R: Alexandrine (Sandy), Pierre Cheri (Pete), Rosalia Eugina (Rose), Ezilda Marie (Lottie)

Front: Jean Louis (Louis), Eliza Jane (Herve), Albert Theodore, and Pierre Cheri Demasson Senior.

there. One thing seems certain - if your last name is Demasson, we are related.

The name "Demasson" may originally have been spelled De Mason, De Masson or even de Mason. It was most likely derived from some connection with the Masonic movement and Masonic lodges that developed in Europe in the Middle Ages. Previous to the 1800's Masonic lodges had been made up primarily of stoneworkers. However, by the 1800's other tradesmen were being accepted into membership as masons of a lower degree. Perhaps carpenters such as Pierre could also have been associated with the movement and thus with the Masonic name.



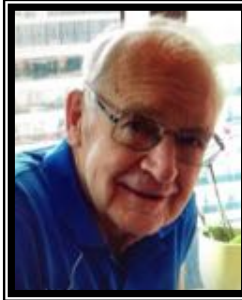
Spring Bursting Forth, painting inspired by a vase of tulips on Kathy's table

Kathy Dyck a retired schoolteacher lives in Edmonton with her husband Peter. Her daughter lives nearby. Kathy has a longstanding interest in genealogy and art. She has researched some of her family's roots through Ancestry.com, as well as by interviewing family members. She discovered the interesting life of her great grandfather and thought it was worth writing about. She enjoys watercolour painting and has taken many watercolour classes from talented teachers in the Edmonton area. She has shown her work at art shows, hospitals, and restaurants. She continues to work at painting and researching on the computer. ❖

Mennonite Bible Institute (Didsbury)

by Herman Neufeld & Katie Harder

The article below begins with Herman Neufeld's account of the origins of Mennonite Bible Institute (MBI) and includes observations on the benefits of the school and some personal memories of attendance there. Neufeld was asked to write this account in recognition of a donation to MHSA a few weeks ago. This donation consisted of funds remaining from a reunion of former students at the school, which closed in 1967. Katie Harder was also willing to contribute to this effort, and she has provided information here about the closure of MBI, the MBI reunion, and the circumstances around the decision to tell MBI's story. It is hoped that this article will introduce MBI to many members of MHSA who have no information or memory of it. Both Neufeld and Harder wish to point out that because the archives are closed at the moment due to covid-19, what they have written is from memory and subject to revision. [Editor]



Herman Neufeld

Historical Details and Personal Memories Herman Neufeld

The General Conference Mennonite churches in Alberta during the early 1930s felt that there was a need for a school to offer studies in Mennonite theology and history, so some informal classes were started in the church in Rosemary. However the conference decided that the school should be formalized, and that it needed to be in a more central area. The result was that an addition was made to the Bergthal Mennonite Church in the Didsbury area. The addition pro-



1951-52 MBI Student Body

(See MBI on page 23)

(MBI from page 22)

vided several classrooms and a common area connected to the sanctuary. An upstairs area became dormitory rooms for students, and the basement was converted into kitchen and dining room. The school was opened in the fall of 1936. I cannot name the first teachers or the class size because I cannot access the archives. From this humble beginning, the school grew. Classes were held in the winter months, starting after harvest and ending before spring planting since most Alberta Mennonites at that time were farmers.

I attended the school in 1952-53. At that time there were 31 students and 3 teachers: Rev. William Pauls; Rev. David P. Neufeld; and Henry Koop. Students came from all over the province since it was a residential school. In those days the school, along with retreats and music festivals, helped very many young Mennonites from different areas get acquainted with one another.

By the time that I was a student, the campus had moved to land immediately east of the church and consisted of two dormitories, a two-story school building, and three houses for staff. Classes were taught in English or German depending on the preference of the instructor. Anyone who knew Rev. Pauls would not be surprised that his classes were in German. Besides theology and history, there were classes in music, and the school choir was well known under the direction of D.P. Neufeld. We recorded a regular Sunday radio program that was broadcast over CFAC in Calgary. We had a cook, but the students did all the work required to operate

the school. My job was to run the heating system for the girls' dorm. It was a coal-fired steam boiler with no automation. I still do not understand how that responsibility was given to someone with no training in steam systems. All I remember is that I had to get up at 4:30 every morning to make sure that the steam was up to warm the rooms and heat the water for morning wash-ups, and to make sure that the system was not over pressurized. There were no showers or bath tubs, and of course no running water.

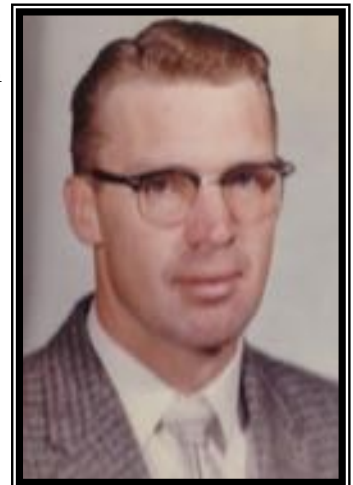


MBI School Building

In the sixties, student numbers were rapidly decreasing as young people were starting to attend university, and the population was on the move as different occupations rapidly replaced farming. In the mid sixties, the school closed, and all the buildings except one house were either moved or dismantled. The newest of these houses is now the Bergthal Mennonite Church manse.

Over the years MBI made a difference. In rural areas at the time, school buses did not exist, fees for residential high schools were beyond the income level of many farmers, and youth were vitally needed to work on the farm in both spring and fall. As a result, many rural young people did not complete high school and also missed out on higher learning. At MBI, however, high school completion was not a requirement, fees were relatively low, and sessions ran only in the winter. Thanks to MBI, many rural youth were able to continue their education while receiving a basic grounding in Mennonite theology and history. As a result, a core of people in most of the General Conference churches had this basic background.

One of the reasons why I was able to write this history is that my Dad, Peter A. Neufeld, was the main caretaker of the building and property from as early as I remember until its closing. I remember many times going with



Herman Neufeld 1950s

(See MBI on page 24)

(MBI from page 23)

him to fix some emergency problem. He was on the provincial committee or board that was responsible for all aspects of the school. Also on the board was David Enns from Rosemary, my wife Lola's father. I actually knew Lola's dad long before I ever met her. There were members on that board from all the major General Conference churches in Alberta, but I cannot remember who the others were.

Herman Neufeld has now been retired for more than 25 years from a career in pharmacy. At various times he was Director of Pharmacy in three different hospitals: Alberta Hospital Ponoka, Royal Alexandra Hospital Edmonton, and then Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton. He designed the Pharmacy Technician program at Red Deer College and taught there for 5 years. Herman and his wife Lola live in Edmonton and attend First Mennonite Church. MDS played an important part in early retirement, and now he plays golf and is looking forward to curling and cycling as soon as the Covid-19 is over.

Closure and Legacy Katie (Klassen) Harder

Over the years, student enrolment at MBI had ups and downs. The year 1961- 62 was the 25th Anniversary of MBI, and it was noted that over 500 students had attended the school since its beginning but only seventeen were currently enrolled. The outlook for the school was bleak. Students just weren't interested in attending Bible School. The school operated for a few more years, but in the spring of 1967, the conference made the painful decision to close it and to liquidate the property. It was suggested that an agreement be made with the Swift Current Bible Institute (SCBI) to encourage Alberta students to attend classes there. The Alberta Conference was prepared to support SCBI financially.

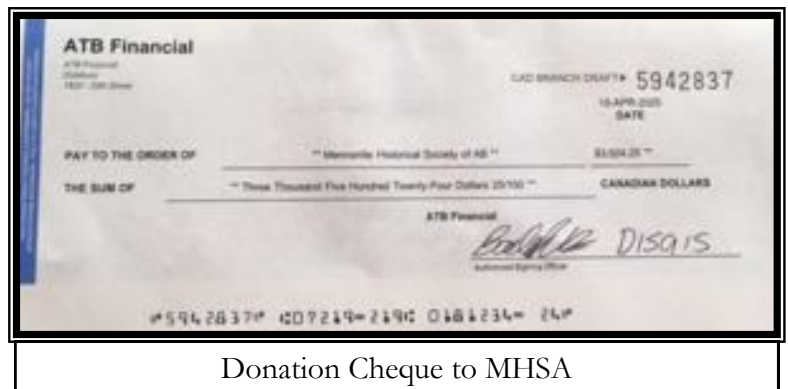
All eleven children of my father, J.J. Klassen, attended MBI. I was there in its last two years of operation, 1965-66, and 1966-67. I also happened to be at the two Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (CMA) sessions where the discussions and motion to close MBI took place. The 1966 CMA sessions were held in Rosemary, and the 1967 CMA sessions were held at the First Mennonite Church in Calgary. I was part of a small group of students who provided music at both of those sessions. There were sad moments for many parents and former students who had loved the school deeply.

In 1991 Henry Goerzen, acting upon the suggestion of former MBI students, approached the Bergthal Mennonite Church about the possibility of Bergthal hosting an MBI reunion. The congregation decided to accommodate this request, and a committee was established to organize and host the event. I was asked to be the treasurer. Upon Henry's request I opened a "Menno Bible Institute Reunion" account at the local Treasury Branch in Didsbury for the purpose of collecting registration and banquet fees. I had signing authority, but Henry's name was also on the account.

The reunion was a two-day event. On Saturday there was visiting and reminiscing followed by a catered banquet in the evening in the church fellowship hall. Attendance was extremely good. Sunday consisted of a morning service as well as an afternoon program. Abe Koop, a former instructor at MBI, was chosen as the guest speaker, and a choir consisting of former students also took part.

With prudent spending, we had funds remaining at the close of the event. Henry requested that I leave the monies in the current account, so that it could be accessed for future writing endeavors. I think it was a dream of his to write a history of the school. However, he never did access the funds, and with time I received permission from him to put the money into a Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) so that it would draw some interest.

Henry passed away in January of 2019. This past April 15th, the



GIC once more matured. I felt it was time to put the money to use, and having discussed this matter with a few individuals, I decided to instruct the Treasury Branch to close the account and to donate the money to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). The total of the bank draft is

(See MBI on page 25)

(MBI from page 24)

\$3,524.25. Why MHSA? Henry Goerzen was one of the founding members of this society, and although he was not active in the last few years, the MHSA was very dear to his heart. The funds will benefit MHSA, and I'm sure Henry would be pleased with the decision that was made. ❖

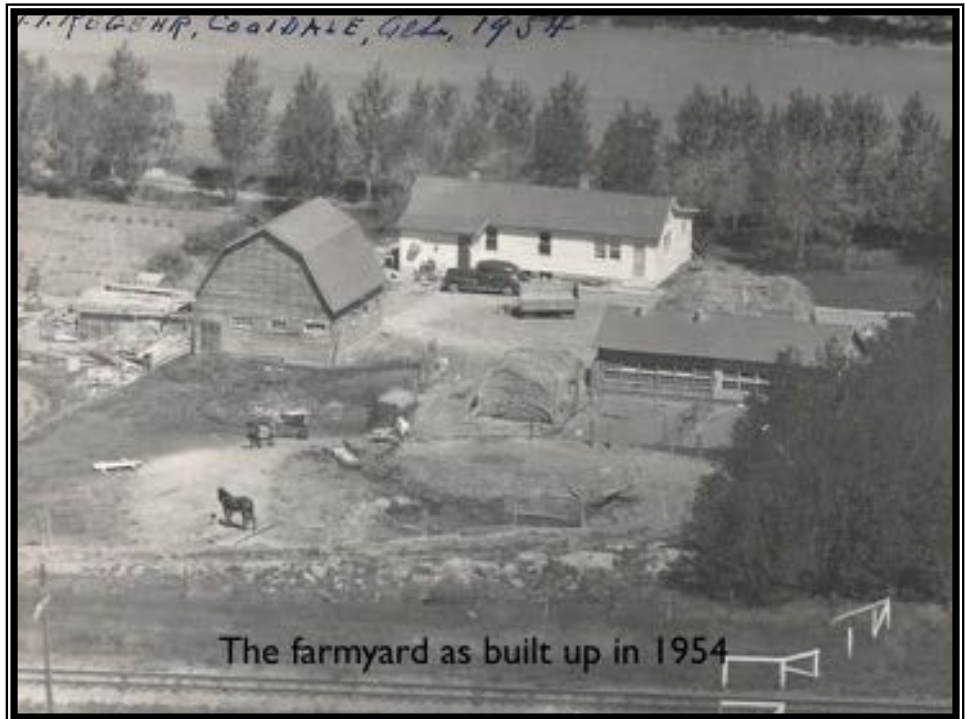
Centennial Memories and Musings (part 2)

by Ted Regehr

In the March 2020 edition of the Chronicle Ted shared some memories and thoughts evoked in him when he attended the recent celebration of Coaldale, Alberta's 100th anniversary of its establishment as a village. In that article he detailed some of the Mennonite religious, social, health care, mutual aid, and economic institutions that were so important to the Coaldale community (and further) for so many years. However, time has moved on, and here Ted provides some musings on some of the radical transformations that have since taken place in order to meet the opportunities and challenges of government regulations and support. [Editor]

The co-operative cheese factory in Coaldale, which provided effective economic leadership for so many years with strong Mennonite leadership, was sold many years ago. Related businesses have also closed or been radically altered. And then there was the transformation of farming itself. Our small mixed family farm on the eastern edge of town, built up slowly over a period of three decades of hard

work and very frugal living is completely gone now, replaced by large warehouses and commercial buildings.



Aerial view of the Isaac and Mary Regehr family farmyard, 1954

The vibrant institutions that Mennonites initiated, together with numerous small farms and private business establishments, served the needs of the pioneer generation. They provided important but only short-term bridges over which the settlers passed from difficult pioneer, depression, and wartime conditions to less sectarian and more prosperous post-war conditions. The small, mixed, labour-intensive farms that were the mainstay of Coaldale's prosperity have been replaced by much larger mechanized, capital-intensive enterprises. Some, including the small Regehr family farm, have fallen victim to urban sprawl. Economic and mutual aid institutions that served the needs of a small mixed farming community have closed or been consolidated by larger outside corporations. Health care and social welfare initiatives have become building blocks for larger and more inclusive government supported programs. Efforts by some Mennonite leaders to save even fragments of the German legacy faltered long ago. These people, nevertheless, left a rich legacy. How should it be celebrated? More specifically, how adequately have I and other historians told the stories of these people?

Going Home

With these questions in mind, I recalled an Alberta Mennonite High School literature class with Peter Barga. In that class we read and discussed Thomas Gray's lengthy and moving "Elegy in a Country Graveyard". And so, with Gray's elegy in hand, I wandered into the now very greatly enlarged and beautifully maintained area of the twin Coaldale Mennonite and Coaldale Community cemeteries. I paused at the graves of many

(See Centennial on page 26)

(Centennial from page 25)

of those who devoted much time, energy, resources, good will, and faith to the promotion, building, and management of Coaldale's above-mentioned transitory Mennonite institutions. In Gray's words, "Each in his narrow cell for ever laid/The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep".

So many untold, or at best only very partially told, stories lie buried here. What were the accomplishments of those who initiated or participated in the building and nurture of the many now defunct or significantly changed institutions? What is their legacy? How accurate

are the small snippets of memory, archival fragments, or incidental mentions of their names by historians?

In my musings, I turned to several additional passages of Gray's Elegy.

Yet ev'n these bones from insult to protect,
Some frail memorial still erected nigh,
With uncouth rhymes and shapeless culture deck'd
Implores the passing tribute of a sigh.

Their name, their years, spelt by th' unletter'd muse,
The place of fame and elegy supply:
And many a holy text around she strews,
That teach the rustic moralist to die.

For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey,
This pleasing anxious being e'er resign'd
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind?

On some fond breast the parting soul relies.
Some pious drops the closing eye requires;
Ev'n from the tomb the voice of Nature cries,
Ev'n in our ashes live their wonted fires.

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate;
If chance, by lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred spirit shall inquire thy fate.



Entrance to the Coaldale Mennonite Cemetery

As a historian I have written and published information about some of the people who lie here, both individually and collectively. I have recorded some of their successes in establishing vibrant new communities and institutions in new settings, supported and sustained by a vibrant Christian faith. I believe that their individual and collective stories are worthy of respect, but any telling of those stories is inevitably incomplete and fragmented.

Historians regard most highly the kind of evidence that is found in official government and institutional documents and publications, correspondence, minute books, and first-hand accounts. Obituaries are great for some factual details but rarely provide an entirely objective account of the deceased person's life. All these sources, however, even when they are carefully footnoted, provide only glimpses of a person's life and work. Even when these glimpses are accurate, they lead to seriously distorted impressions.

I learned a hard lesson in that regard at a book launch when close friends turned to the index of my book looking for references to their grandfather. They found only one, and it merely noted the grandfather's concern about the terms of the very large loan negotiated by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization with the Canadian Pacific Railway. The citation was accurate, but it certainly did not acknowledge the speaker's lifetime of service in the church and in the community, or even, despite his concerns, his general support of the immigration programs.

In another instance, family members expressed dismay about

(See Centennial on page 27)

(Centennial from page 26)

inclusion in my book of harsh and judgemental language their father had used in a difficult church dispute. The quotations were taken directly from letters the man had written and were consistent with recollections of others, but family members insisted that they did not accurately portray what they knew about their father. He was apparently never as harsh or judgemental at home as he was when dealing with church and conference problems. Family members correctly insisted that my account did not provide a complete record of their father.

There were also reverse situations. The public profiles of some prominent leaders about whom I wrote were much more favourable than confidential stories I was told or read about later regarding his treatment of his wife or very harsh

disciplinary measures inflicted on his children.

Only a few of those buried in the Coaldale Mennonite Cemetery will receive even such brief, incomplete mention by historians. Once those who knew them personally have passed away, the surviving record of most people buried in this cemetery will be little more than the inscriptions on their gravestones and perhaps some fragmentary family albums, letters, and written recollections.

Nevertheless these people left both individual and collective legacies. For many of them, the most important component was a simple, unsophisticated, but very strong commitment of Christian faith, hope, and love. That was manifest in a very moving and emotional event at my grandmother's funeral. Although I was 12 years old at the time and remember little about the funeral itself, I do recall vividly that after the service the coffin was carried out of the church. Then it was carried in a slow procession to the nearby cemetery, accompanied by mournful congregational singing of the German hymn "Es Geht Nach Haus Ins Vaterhaus" (We are Going Home). That hymn, I thought, captured the essence of my grandmother's faith and hope, which had sustained her in often very difficult years of a long widowhood.



Elizabeth Regehr at her husband's grave in Herbert, Saskatchewan



Funeral procession for Elizabeth Regehr, 1869-1950

Grandmother had often talked to us, her grandchildren, about heaven. As she imagined it, heaven was a beautiful golden place beyond the clouds. There would be peace, holy quietness, reverential singing of praises to God and, of course, a blissful reunion with her beloved husband and other deceased family members, relatives and friends.

That did not seem to be an entirely appealing or exciting place for a very active, behaviourally and musically challenged and sometimes noisy twelve-year old. Even today, many of us probably do not envision a possible life after death exactly as grandmother did.

Centennial celebrations quite properly highlight all that was built and achieved. It is even more appropriate to acknowledge and celebrate the faith, hope and love which motivated and sustained people in good and in difficult times.

(See Centennial on page 28)

(Centennial from page 27)

Es geht nach Haus zum Vaterhaus

Deutsch

1. Es geht nach Haus zum Vaterhaus,
wer weiß vielleicht schon morgen,
vorbei, mein Herz, ist dann der Schmerz,
und weg die Sünd und Sorgen.

Es geht nach Haus, wer weiß vielleicht
schon morgen,
Es geht nach Haus, zum Vaterhaus.

2. Du müdes Kind, die Straßen sind dort
golden rein und sonnig,
und ewge Freud vertreibt dein Leid,
und Lieder süß und wonnig.

3. Die gläubig flehn, mit Tränen sä'n,
sie sind im Herrn geborgen.
Ins Heim so traut, daß Gott gebaut,
ziehn wir vielleicht schon morgen.

4. O Gnadenpfort, o selger Ort,
wo uns darf nicht mehr schaden.
Da wird viel Freud und Herrlichkeit,
dem, der zum Mahl geladen.

Englisch

1. We're going home, no more to roam,
no more to sin and sorrow;
no more to wear the brow of care,
we're going home tomorrow.

We're going home, we're going home
tomorrow,
We're going home, we're going home
tomorrow.

2. For weary feet awaits a street
of wondrous pave and golden;
for hearts that ache, the angels wake
the story, sweet and olden.

3. For those who sleep, and those who
weep,
above the portals narrow,
the mansions rise beyond the skies—
we're going home tomorrow.

4. Oh, joyful song! Oh, ransomed
throng!
Where sin no more shall sever;
our King to see, and, oh, to be
with Him at home forever!

Dichter: E. W. Griswold, "We're Going Home Tomorrow", 1894

Komponist: Philip Paul Bliss, (1838-1876)

Deutsche Übersetzung: Philipp W. Bickel, "Es geht nach Haus zum Vaterhaus", (1829-1914)

Liederschatz

Zusammenstellung von Egon Herber

Es Geht Nach Haus / We're Going Home



100th Anniversary of the Ebenfeld Massacre

by Harold Wiens

On October 5, 2002 on a bleak, overcast Saturday afternoon, a group of approximately one hundred Mennonites and Ukrainians trudged across a muddy field near the village of Ebenfeld/Ulianovka, Ukraine. Our destination was a small green pasture encircled by mature acacia trees, an area totally out of place on this otherwise flat terrain. To a passing tourist, this gathering would likely have been of little interest. But to us - a group of Mennonites pilgrims according to tour



Harold Wiens



View of the Ebenfeld Cemetery

leader Walter Unger - the significance of this assembly was beyond measure.

As we approached our destination, we noticed several grave-stones poking out above the old sod. "Where are they?" I asked. Someone pointed to a mound of earth that stood out in sharp contrast to the flat landscape and in solemn tones whispered, "There they are." So this was the final resting place of 67 Mennonites, massacred on the cold winter night of December 4, 1919. According to existing accounts several men from nearby villages gathered the day after the massacre to lay the bodies into a hastily dug common grave. There had been no funeral service. Then the following day an additional 54 people from Steinbach, the neighbouring village, were also brutally slaughtered. A total of 143 villagers from what was once Borosenko Mennonite Settlement lost their lives in this cruel manner. As these events took place over several days, one must assume that they were planned, and not merely the result of drunken rampages by out-of-control youths.

Now, 83 years later we had returned to Ebenfeld/Ulianovka to give these people the memorial service they never had. Members of our tour group gathered around

(See Ebenfeld on page 29)

(Ebenfeld from page 28)

an improvised podium located to one side of the mass grave. Local women from the surrounding area occupied the front seats of several rows of chairs. There were no men. The women were well-dressed, possibly wearing their most colourful Sunday-best head coverings. Most of us stood. Several uniformed security guards patrolled the perimeter, easily recognizable as such given their over-sized flat hats similar to those worn by our fathers in old photos from Russia. Why were they here? Did they represent the KGB? Had this force not lost its teeth since the collapse of the Soviet Union? My wife Diana attempted to give one of the security guards a song sheet. It was refused with a sneer.

Many questions crossed our minds. Who were these local women? Were they the daughters or possibly granddaughters of the perpetrators of this massacre? Why had they come? What did they expect from this service? Many brought bouquets of flowers that they later laid upon the tombstone.

The formal part of the service began with reflections offered by dignitaries: Dr Harvey Dyck from Toronto, Svetlana Bobyleva from the Dnepropetrovsk National University, and Margaret Bergen from Winnipeg. Prayers were offered, and the names of the massacred victims were read. Details, including women being raped before death and after death, were freely given. A group of local school children sang. Could these children comprehend what they were hearing?

Yet the tone of the service was one of peace and reconciliation. A large round stone in the shape of a



An Ebenfeld Memorial Service

millstone had been commissioned and was now dedicated. The names of the victims were written on the stone.

A memorial service with Ukrainian and Mennonite people in attendance would certainly include singing. As music director of the Mennonite Heritage Cruise, I was asked to sing "Ich bete an die Macht der Liebe" (O power of love, all else transcending). This hymn by Dmytri Bortniansky (1751 - 1825) with German lyrics by Gerhard Tersteegen (1697 - 1769) is very fa-



Ebenfeld Monument with Flowers

miliar to Mennonites. The hymn was to be sung in several languages, and a language tutor had been assigned to help me purge any foreign accent from my non-existent Ukrainian diction.

(See Ebenfeld on page 30)

(Ebenfeld from page 29)

The last two lines of the second stanza, very familiar to Mennonites, have stayed with me. "Ich will, anstatt an mich zu denken, ins Meer der Liebe mich versenken" - translated into English, read "Instead of reflecting upon myself (my thoughts, concerns, questions etc.) I submerge (perhaps throw myself) into the sea of (Jesus') love. I found these German words to be very powerful. They provide a means for me to process these gruesome events of December 1919. Perhaps that is why this hymn was chosen, and why it needed to be sung in different languages for everyone in attendance to understand.

Harold Wiens is a retired singer and Professor Emeritus at the University of Alberta who continues to teach part-time at the Augustana Campus of the U. of A. Harold and his wife Diana are members of the Lendrum Mennonite Church. Hobbies include singing in the Te Deum Singers, a choir his wife directs, and reading about the Russian Mennonite story. Harold has written a book entitled "Return To Odessa" that explores these interests. ❖

Russlaender Centenary Committee Update

by Ted Regehr

One of the major projects of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, working in partnership with provincial Mennonite historical societies, is a centennial celebration in 2023 of the arrival of the first Russlaender - the approximately 22,000 Mennonite immigrants who came from the Soviet



Arrival of first group of Russian Mennonite Immigrants in Rosthern, Sask. July 23, 1923

Menno Simons Quote

But, as to the alms and support of the poor, I would say, that it is a good and praise-worthy work, and I cordially approve of it. Also, that many pious, gentile philosophers, as Aristotle, Plato, &c., have considered it as right and just. But we contradict that sincere and true repentance, or the true seed and foundation of sincere love, which is a fruit of true faith, consists therein; for we may give in hypocrisy, as well as in love, as may be seen by the Scribes and Pharisees, by the open heathens and daily, yet, by the papists.

Union to Canada in the 1920s. A special Russlaender Committee has been established. It has ambitious plans to sponsor a heritage train trip across Canada, somewhat similar to the very popular Russian Heritage cruises. Some of the same people who worked on the Russian Heritage cruises are involved in the planning of this cross-Canada train trip. Basically it could involve reservations on Via trains, buses, hotels and perhaps other arrangements, for a cross Canada train trip, probably from Quebec City to Abbotsford with one or several day stops in each province along the way. ❖

1918 - 1922 Typhus Epidemic in Russia

by Ernie Toews

A typhus epidemic hit Russia during the Russian Revolution. Complicated by WWI, famine, and lack of modern medicine, it took an estimated two to three million lives between 1918 and 1922. Both sets of my grandparents were living in Russia at the time.

My maternal grandparents, Abram & Maria (Wiebe) Kroeger, were in the small village of Neu-Chortitza, Baratow Schlactin Colony, South Russia (present day Ukraine). Grandfather Abram was one of the ministers there, and his records give us a partial total of deaths in the village during this period. In the first quarter of 1920, he recorded that there were 17 deaths, and that he had conducted the funerals for nine of them. Subsequently, however, he did not record deaths when he was not the funeral officiant. The death of Gerhard Sawatsky for example, does not appear in Grandfather's totals because his funeral, on March 19, 1922, was conducted by Elder Jacob Rempel. Gerhard had been shot while holding the reins of his horses during a firefight between two groups of bandits. The bullet passed first through one of his horses and then through him, killing them both.

Grandmother Maria, as a pas-

tor's wife, was expected to visit and care for the sick. My mother, Helen (Kroeger) Toews, told me that there were times when family members were too scared to care for their sick and yet expected the pastor's wife to care for the family member and even wash the body for burial. Mother said that Grandmother had a very strict rule that

none of the children were allowed to approach her when she came from visiting the sick. She had a place in the "summer kitchen" where she would change her clothes and thoroughly wash with strong lye soap and water before coming in to the family. I don't understand how Grandmother already knew the importance of washing with soap at that time while some people still don't understand that today. Grandmother Maria lived to be 88, finally passing away in 1955 at Dundurn, Saskatchewan.

My Uncle Henry, youngest of the Kroeger siblings wrote:

"My mother Maria firmly believed in home remedies. She helped many people even in cases of 'black pox' [possibly colloquial for smallpox], which were very contagious. She took the utmost precautions in cleanliness coming from the sick, boiling her clothes in a cauldron of scalding water. None of her family ever contracted any of the diseases. Praise the Lord."

Fortunately, Grandfather Abram insisted on immigrating to Canada when the opportunity arose in 1923. Of their seven children, only one married son chose to remain in Russia. Grandfather Kroeger's decision was a wise one. Later, when the Communists collectivized the villages, they would often banish the pastors, teachers, and leaders to the gulags or execute them. Then they would put in their own leadership.

My paternal grandparents, Johann and Maria (Braun) Toews, lived in the somewhat larger village of Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, Russia. Grandfather Johann was a deacon in the church and was expected to visit the sick. He took this obligation seriously, even when other deacons did not. On April 8, 1918, he contracted typhus and died at the age of 52. Fortunately, none of the other family members caught the disease. Prior

(See Epidemic on page 32)



Ernie Toews



Maria (Wiebe) Kroeger



Abram Kroeger



Johann Toews

(Epidemic from page 31)

to his death, Grandfather built caskets for the victims of the epidemic. He was known to lie down in the casket he was building for a nap when he was tired.

In 1926, Grandmother Maria and five of her eight children immigrated to Canada. Two sons had already immigrated in 1923 in order to prepare a place for the family. One married son chose to stay in the Russia, and in 1989 I met him in Germany. I am very thankful that the Toews family chose to come to Canada when the opportunity presented itself.



Maria (Braun) Toews

Ernie Toews is a retired engineer who worked for various public and private oil and gas companies. He continues to volunteer with Partners Relief and Development, an NGO working with oppressed people in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. Ernie and Shirley enjoy living on their acreage west of Calgary and hosting their children and grandchildren. They also enjoy travelling, reading, watching historical and nature documentaries, gardening, and listening to good singing and music. Ernie and Shirley worship with Foothills Alliance Church. ❖

Mennonite Archival Database Gets Boost with Five New Partners

Source: MAID Website

The online Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) is adding five new institutional partners to the existing nine. The newly expanded database features thousands of historic photos and a quickly expanding number of entries describing one-of-a-kind letters, diaries, meeting minutes, travel documents, biographies, audio and video recordings, and more – all accessible to the public.

The new members are Mennonite Central Committee (Canada (Winnipeg, MB) and USA (Akron, PA)), Mennonite Church USA Archives (Elkhart, IN), Bethel College Mennonite Library and Archives (North Newton, KS), Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society (Hubbard, OR), and Goshen College Archives (Goshen, IN). The four American archival collections were featured in the “Mennonite Archival Commons” online project but are migrating their data to MAID.

Jason Kauffman of Mennonite Church USA archives in Elkhart, IN, said, “MAID provides an opportunity to join forces with an established consortium with broad institutional support and a common goal of making information and content from our collections more accessible to the public.”

Chantel Fehr and Frank Peachy of Mennonite Central Committee agrees. “We are thrilled to work together with other institutions that are

committed to preserving the records that document Mennonite history through the Mennonite Archival Information Database.”

The online archive was founded by Canadian partners in 2015 as a photographic database to help archival institutions manage their collections and provide public access to historic material. “When MAID was launched, we dreamed about its potential to include more Mennonite partners. We are thrilled that other archives have also seen this and look forward to collaborating with them to provide an enhanced online service to anyone wanting to explore Mennonite history,” says MAID site administrator Laureen Harder-Gissing of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

With the power of a central database that can link records in multiple repositories together, researchers will benefit from new leads and resources. In a world of shrinking institutional budgets, a cooperative approach that pools financial and human resources is vital. The database is not only for researchers but as John Thiesen of Bethel College hopes “it might contribute to a closer interaction among the North American Mennonite archives and historical libraries.” Kauffman is appreciative of the development of MAID. “I hope that we can build on the amazing work that MAID has already accomplished and eventually share more content from our collections online, including audio records, video, and documents.” Visitors to the site can expect to see MAID's content expand over the next few months. ❖