



Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XV, No. 1

March, 2012

MHSA Fall Conference And 25th Anniversary At Bergthal Mennonite Church Didsbury, Alberta October 29, 2011

by Ellie Janz

The women in the kitchen provided coffee and muffins while people were arriving and getting registered. A total of 73 people registered and attended the morning session. Katie Harder very fittingly used Matt. 1:1-17, the genealogy of Jesus, for her opening and prayer. This was followed by Henry and Erna Goerzen doing some background sharing. Erna spoke about the community of Didsbury and the surrounding area. The first settlers coming to the Didsbury area were from Waterloo County in Ontario in 1894, becoming the forerunners of today's Zion Evangelical Missionary

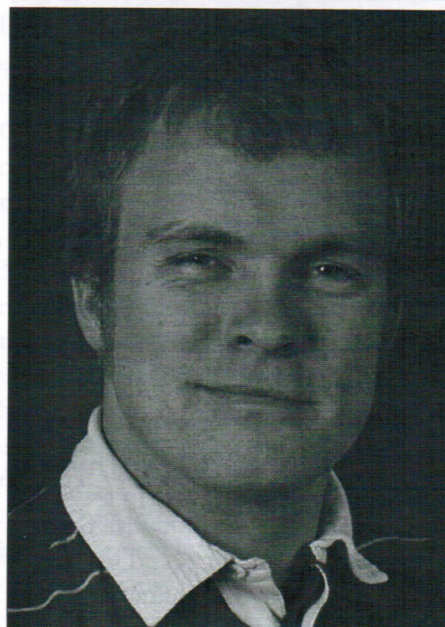
Continued on Page 5

Living with a Stranger

by William Loewen

William James Loewen was born May 7, 1978, the sixth of ten children. His ancestors were part of the 1870s migration, with his father John's side settling in Manitoba then moving to the state of Chihuahua, Mexico in the 1920s, and his mother Elizabeth's side settling in Saskatchewan before moving to the state of Durango, Mexico in the 1920s as well. John and Elizabeth Loewen both migrated to Canada as children in the 1960s. They met, were married and had all their children in Canada and continue to live in Aylmer, Ontario where all of the children grew up. When he was 5, William and his family left the Old Colony Mennonite

Church over a conflict and settled in the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, where many of the family still attend. Unlike other children from Mexican Mennonite families, William and his siblings were encouraged to pursue further education. William attended the University of Waterloo and Conrad Grebel College, where he studied statistics and religion. While in Waterloo, Will was hired as a youth pastor at Tavistock Mennonite Church. He later met Ana Fretz who grew up in a Swiss Mennonite family and the two were married in 2005. William and Ana wrote a full length musical on the subject of Mennonite history which was put on soon after their wedding. Together they travelled to South Korea for two and half years on a volunteer service assignment. Upon returning, William was invited to apply for the position of pastor at Trinity Mennonite Church in



Will Loewen 2011 photo by Derek Janzen

(Continued on page 4)

Current Contents

1. Living With A Stranger and MHSA Fall Conference
2. Editorial
3. Chairman's Corner
9. Mennonite High School
12. Ancestors-Real or Myth?
15. Blake Friesen Tribute
16. MHSA GAMEO Report
17. MHSC Press Release
18. The Mennonites of Siberia
19. Photos from the 2011 MHSA Fall Conference

MHSA Annual General Meeting

The 2012 Annual General Meeting/Spring Conference of the MHSA will be held at the Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite Church, 167 Whitefield Drive NE on Saturday April 14 starting at 9:00 am.

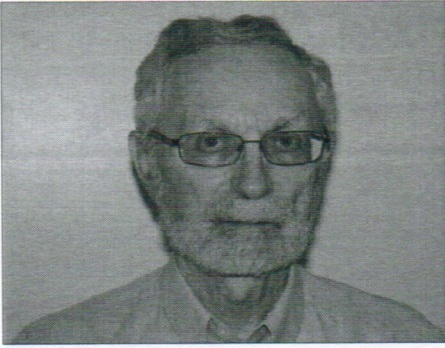
Schedule of Events:

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 9:00 a.m. to Noon | Registration (\$10.00 includes lunch)
Business annual report and by-laws review and acceptance. |
| 12:00 | Lunch |
| 1:00 pm | Vietnamese tell their story and meeting ends with closing comments, coffee and visiting with old and new friends |

Please RSVP to Irene by April 7th email irene824@shaw.ca or call 403-250-1121 on Thursdays. Everyone is welcome.

Editorial Reflections:

by Lorne Buhr



Mennonite: One among Many?

It just occurred to me that my reflections this time might be part two of a series I began several years ago. At that time my editorial was prompted by our experience of widening horizons made possible by attendance at the 2009 Mennonite World Conference held in Asuncion, Paraguay. Being there with 6000 other Mennonites told us in no uncertain terms that we were "one" or several, among "many".

In October 2011 we made another trip south, much shorter, but with some of the same results. Linda and I had the privilege of doing a brief voluntary service (VS) assignment at the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS) in Elkhart, Indiana. For some obvious reasons the setting and people were not a big surprise to us – same continent, no language variations, religious practice not much different from what we did back home. Besides, Linda is a seminary grad and I had visited the campus a few times earlier. And the weather was almost as summery as back in Alberta! And it is a fact that some students and faculty come from countries other than Canada and the United States.

Our VS tasks were fairly straight forward. Our day to day contacts were wonderful and life giving and soon we felt that we had been briefly adopted into the AMBS family.

It was the final week of three and we were assigned a fairly mundane task of stuffing folders for an upcoming Mennonite Global History conference, sponsored by AMBS and Mennonite World Conference (MWC). Soon it be-

came very apparent to the signals our antennae were picking up that this was no ordinary gathering of 170 people! And this is where the "one of many" theme came to mind. We learned that these global histories were unique. First and very crucial was the change in which history of Mennonites on other continents was being written – by the local people! Not by fly-in North Americans doing the research and the writing. Now I can see some North American Mennonites being shy to move away from their own type of history which usually begins and ends with Mennonites moving from an oppressive setting to one which is more in line with Mennonite values.

Next to the USA, the Democratic Republic of Congo is home to the greatest number of Mennonites in the world. To come up with a local approach to history collection local researchers were given bicycles and tape recorders and encouraged to travel the country side and interview Mennonites for an oral history.

The Global Histories project got going 16 years ago. In 1994 it became apparent that 51% of Mennonites and Brethren in Christ lived in Africa, Asia and Latin America. A tipping point had been passed. There was a need for a new kind of history, based on local stories and gathered by local research-

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Newsletter ISSN 1916-6966

is published three times a year.

Send submissions and other correspondence to:

Lorne Buhr, Editor
(lorne@mennonitehistory.org)

Subscription is through membership in the MHSA. Cost of membership is \$30 per year. To join, send payment to:

MHSA
2946 32 Street NE
Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7
403-250-1121

e-mail: treasurer@mennonitehistory.org

Co-Editors: Dave Toews & Lorne Buhr

Editorial Committee: Dave Toews,
Lorne Buhr, Dave Hildebrand

Layout & Distribution: Dave Hildebrand

Visit our Website:
www.mennonitehistory.org

Executive

Chair: Bill Janzen, Calgary
Vice Chair: Ralph Dahl, Calgary
Secretary: Katie Harder
Treasurer: Ellie Janz, Calgary

Members at Large:

Henry Goerzen, Didsbury
Dave Wiebe-Neufeldt

Area Representatives:

N Alberta: Suzane Braun Hanser
Edmonton Area: Colin Neufeldt
Tofield Area: Vacant
Calgary Area: Irene Klassen
Eastern Irrigation District Area: Mary Burkholder
Carstairs/Didsbury Area: Vacant
S Alberta: Hilda Heidebrecht

GAMEO Representative:

Wes Berg, Edmonton

Publications for Sale

- Generations of Vigilance (\$30)
- Settlers of the East Reserve (\$30)
- GRANDMA 6 (\$35)
- Pushing Through Invisible Barriers (\$30)
- Alfalfa To Ivy (\$35)
- Through Fire And Water (\$20)

ers and writers. John A Lapp, an American Mennonite historian has been shepherding the project since the beginning. The first four books are those for Europe, Latin America, Africa and Asia. North America is to come out this year. Lapp says that the stories told are ones of survival not of triumph. But stories which give hope. There is an emphasis on story not on analysis. The stories speak for themselves.

Of course there were many conference attendees who had worked on other continents in church and community development and their reminiscences added to the ambience and impact of the sharing and recollection of past experiences.

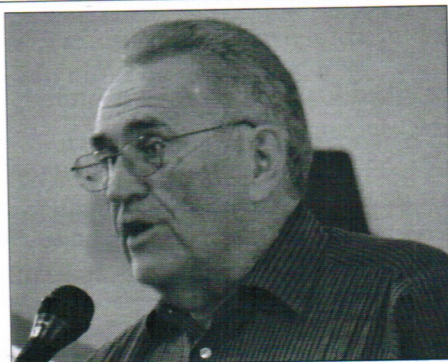
I wanted to bring this occurrence to our attention as readers and writers and makers of Mennonite history. I see this slice fitting in with our Annual meeting this year, particularly where we will be meeting in the Calgary Vietnamese Mennonite church and we will have opportunity to learn more about this congregation and how their values and mission are carried out. My reflection began with an unexpected happening in Indiana.

Thank you to AMBS staff who assisted me in getting my thoughts organized. Ironically we were scheduled to fly out of South Bend the final day of the conference, so I had to rely on secondary sources for what happened on that day, and to let the inspiration gained be shared with the good folk of Alberta. Sometimes it becomes obvious that a good experience is even better if it is shared. ❖

Chairman's Corner

By Bill Janzen

In this, the beginning of the year 2012, we wish each one a Happy New Year and we seek di-



Bill Janzen

rection and support for the work of Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and its related Societies throughout Canada. Many stories and valuable documents have been gathered but there are many more that should be recorded. We solicit your help in gathering and then making available information that will result in a more complete understanding of our Anabaptist Mennonite history in Alberta.

I appreciate the encouragement we received at the Fall Conference. We had good attendance and participation. The Didsbury congregation provided us with a wonderful welcome and served us elegantly. Thank you to all involved in making the day so memorable. Especially, I want to thank Henry and Erna Goerzen for their efforts in planning and organizing the event.

As Chairman of MHSA, I attended the Annual General Meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada held in Vineland, Ontario and included in the meetings were the sessions for archivists and for the GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online) Committee. The interaction and sharing was informative and stimulating. Each province has somewhat different circumstances but many of the ideas that were shared will be helpful to us all. Wesley Berg, our

GAMEO representative from Alberta was also in attendance. He has placed a number of articles onto the website and is working at collecting information about people in the Mennonite constituency of Alberta, who have made contributions to the life in their communities and churches. I must admit that surfing the net is not my strength but when you Google GAMEO, there is an abundance of information about our history.

I want to thank the Board Members of MHSA for their work at meetings and for a number of them that have also faithfully volunteered their time at the Archives and Library. We engaged Jim Bowman, an archivist, to assist us with the donations of materials that require preparation for archiving. Many items have been taken care of. However, there is still a large amount of material that needs to be sorted and decisions made about what to do with them and where to place them. We are thankful for the donations we receive. The work of responding to "queries" and taking care of the day to day activities has been carried on and it is my hope that in the coming year we may see additional interest in the use of the materials. We are opening the Archives and Library one Saturday a month on a trial basis to give opportunity for working people to come to the Archives and access information.

The Board of MHSA has been working on the By-Laws. We found out that we are not a registered Society. Colin Neufeldt has been working at revising and updating the By-Laws we were following and the Board has now completed reviewing the document and will make it available on our website as well as send a printed copy to each member with the March Newsletter. We thank Colin for the time he has taken to

prepare the by-laws. The members will be asked for their comments on the by-laws as proposed at the Annual General Meeting.

We hope to see many of you at the MHSA Annual General Meeting on April 14, 2012. To assist the people preparing the lunch, it would be appreciated if you could let us know if you intend to come to the meeting. Send an email to mhsa@mennonitehistory.org or phone us on Thursdays at 403-250-1121 ♦

Continued from Page 1

Calgary and he was hired May 15, 2011. They have two children; a daughter Ruby was born in October 2008 during the family's time in Korea, and a son Sebastian was born April 2011 in Alberta. They currently live in Okotoks, AB. William continues in his role as pastor and is nearing the completion of a novel.

As an adult, I saw some statistics from the elementary school in Southern Ontario I attended as a child. I was surprised to find that kids like me,



Will Loewen, front centre, parents John and Elizabeth and family, 1990 Aylmer Ontario

children from Mexican Mennonite immigrant families, represented 60% of the school's entire population. A quick look over old class photos from the early 80s confirmed that those numbers were more or less accurate. So I began to think back to my memories of those years. There were always large groups of Mennonite kids playing together on the playground. There were certain days our school administrators called "German holidays" because on those days a Mennonite exodus meant that some classes would be almost half empty. We "German" kids called those days by their proper titles, Pfingsten, (*Pentecost*) Himmelphart, (*Ascension*) and Hölige Drei Könige (*Epiphany*). Of course my parents still sent us to school on those days despite the dramatic protests of my younger brother. If ever someone would utter a colourful Low German expression, chortles of laughter would erupt all around the classroom. But despite all these demonstrations of our large numbers, I can't help but think that we all still felt like minorities.

There was no Mennonite and German themed material in our curriculum and there were no Low German speaking teachers on staff, but I can't fault the school for not seeking out those difficult to find resources. Although, in fourth grade we did read "Amish Adventure" by Barbara Smucker, which I suspect was included as a nod to the Mennonites in the classroom. While we enjoyed the book, we likely felt just as much cultural affinity with our "English" classmates as we did with our reclusive Amish neighbours.

To further enhance our sense of being minorities, at the end of the year, we Mennonite kids

were chronically under-represented in the list of athletic and academic award winners. Each year three students were recognized for their academic achievement, and in the seven years I attended there, I can't imagine there were any more than half a dozen Mennonite students taking home the coveted sixth grade awards of excellence. Again, I'm not accusing the teachers and administrators of discrimination (but I still don't understand how I was left off that list).

The problem more likely stems from the fact that "we" did not covet those awards as much as the other kids (and/or their parents) did and the athletic award winners were always kids whose parents enrolled them in sports in town or other such worldly endeavors.

ANABAPTISTS AROUND THE WORLD,

August 30, 2011*

Source: Mennonite World Conference

By Continents:

Africa	627,429(37.8%)
North America	519,956(31.4%)
Asia & Pacific	272,106(16.4%)
Latin America	74,066(10.5%)
Europe	64,269(3.9%)

By Countries:

United States	387,488
Congo (Dem. Rep.)	220,444
Ethiopia	205,515
India	152,118
Canada	132,468

*Number of baptized Anabaptists worldwide: 1,657,826 ❖

We also likely felt like minorities in a social sense, although now I can't imagine why. Somehow, even though our circle of friends was bigger, we always labeled the other kids as the popular ones. Even though our cultural connecting points resonated through the whole classroom it was easy to label their culture as dominant and ours as inferior. I have since learned to embrace many of our Mennonite cultural distinctive (and maybe throw off a few others).

Many of those Mennonite former classmates have since spent a lot of time and energy trying to distance themselves from their Mennonite cultural identity, but the more I think about that group of boys (and the girls who sometimes thought we were worth talking to) the more I realized that we had one central characteristic that was very un-Mennonite. We were at that time a very united group.

Among my schoolyard friends, we or our parents had been born in at least half a dozen different regions (Ontario, Manitoba, Chihuahua, Durango, Oklahoma, Bolivia, etc.), some of our parents had factory jobs, others were farm labourers, while others were entrepreneurs, some of us lived in homes our parents owned and some lived in rented, substandard housing. More surprising perhaps is that we represented over half a dozen different church congregations, including a few that were mostly full of ethnic Mennonites but were proudly non-Mennonite in their theology. Despite these differences, differences that prevented our parents from being close friends and might have prevented us from trying to marry into those other families down the road, differences that would eventually help to break up our friendship as we schoolboys aged, we were, at least until the end of sixth grade, a united group of friends.

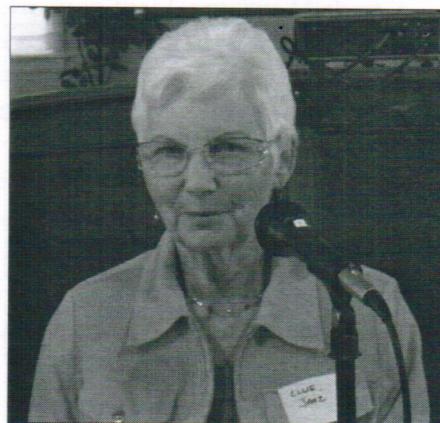
Our sense of humor, our cultural and linguistic connecting points, and our perception as minorities united us. It's a shame that we couldn't let that unity continue when our theology, education, wealth and acculturation threatened to divide us. ❖

Continued from Page 1

Church. Other Mennonite settlers from Ontario and the United States came to the Westcott area and founded the West Zion Mennonite Church, northwest of Carstairs.

In 1901, Mennonites from the East and West Reserves in Manitoba came to the area east of Didsbury, starting the New Bergthal Church in 1903. This marks the beginning of the present Bergthal Church, which celebrated its 100th Anniversary in 2003, making it the oldest church in Mennonite Church Alberta. Further migrations from Soviet Russia in the years 1924-1926, and after World War II brought more Mennonites to the Didsbury and surrounding area, making it their home, or it was a launching pad from which they branched out into all of Canada.

Henry Goerzen started his intro-

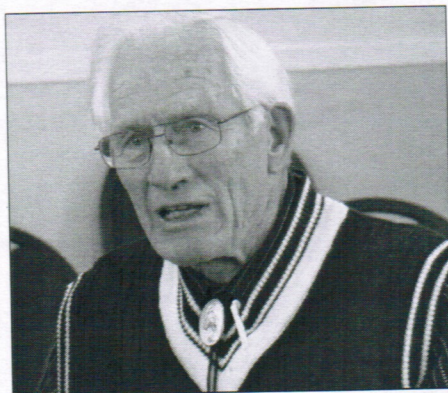


Ellie Janz



Bergthal Mennonite Church

duction of Bergthal with the arrival by train of the young couples from the East and West Reserves of Manitoba. The Canadian Government and the Canadian Pacific Railway were looking for folk with agricultural experience. The men, by nature of their work came to integrate with the broader community almost unnoticed. They built the schools, the Neapolis cheese factory and store, and did a lot of construction in the community. They also regularly took produce to the market place, a way of keeping informed of things happening in the greater world. A unique characteristic of their faith package was to abstain from being involved with the military and war issues. Also there was not an aim for higher education. However, there were forces from the inside and the outside of the Bergthal church that would hasten a spiritual maturation and also lead to higher education. The coming of the "Russlaender" in the 1920s brought with it educated folk and church leadership persons. A dozen years later there were house schools in numerous areas of the province and these led to Menno Bible Institute and the Coaldale Bible School, and a High School at Coaldale. Rosthern Junior College, also a high school, began operation in 1904 following an earlier wave of Mennonite immigrants. Students from these schools, colleges and university would soon replace retiring church leaders. It would also bring women to the fore in church meetings and decision making.

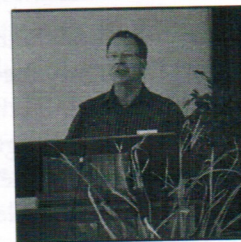


Henry Goerzen

The Mennonites were invited as peace loving folk and folk able to tackle the job of breaking the sod and changing it from prairie grass land to cultivated grain farming. While they did it with all diligence, they did not stand out in any special way among the rest of the settlers coming in.

Henry then introduced Jim Lore, a well known community man, to give us some feedback on how the Mennonites have fit into the pioneer and on-going community and farming

life in the area. Jim is a very observant person, has a very analytical mind and has the "bravado" to take on difficult



Bob Peel

subjects and discussions. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in Agriculture, is well known in the agricultural industry and served in various capacities therein. Unfortunately, due to recent open heart surgery, he was unable to attend and do his presentation. However, a good friend of his, Bob Peel from the Carstairs United Church, graciously agreed to read Jim's prepared presentation. He can't speak from the same perspective as Jim, but he does have a connection with Mennonites. His niece married a Mennonite, and a neighbour of his is a Mennonite.

Jim first became aware of Mennonites when he started grade one in 1937, as Billy Wiens, the youngest son of the only Mennonite family in the small community of Latham was in his grade, and since they were the only two in grade one, they became fast friends. The family did not enter into any community activities save those which were associated with the school, such as the Christmas Concert and the school picnic. The family went to church in a community about 20 miles away. Billy was an entrepreneur, and his mother must have been a very good gardener. In the fall Billy would come to school with his arms full of cantaloupe, which he sold for 5 cents each. Jim never knew if his mother knew what he was doing, but he built up a good business.

Mr. Wiens rented some pasture from Jim's father, but as far as he knows, that was the only busi-

ness he had in the community except being part of the threshing outfit in the fall. The Wiens children all left school when they completed grade eight and it was legal to do so. Jim always thought that there was a Mennonite thing against education as the children at Clemenceau and Gem seemed to quit then as well.

In 1939 World War II broke out and Canada declared war against Germany. This was after about nine years of very difficult economic times. A number of men were happy to join the army for a dollar a day, plus room and board and a uniform. Because the enemy was Germany, it was natural that there was suspicion, and feelings against people of German descent. Jim recalls a butcher in the town of Bassano whose name was Heine Heffner. He went out to farms and bought cattle, or in some cases did custom slaughtering. He had a 22 calibre rifle which he used for killing the livestock. The RCMP confiscated his rifle, reducing him to killing his livestock with an axe and a knife. In retrospect, this seems silly now, but at the time, Hitler's war machine was over-running Europe and there was fear even in Canada of any one of a foreign background. The Mennonites, many of whom had German names or spoke German were among those.

It was purported to be a short war, however, it was not, and as it went on, it was deemed necessary to conscript men for the army. It was at that point that the pacifist philosophy of the Mennonites and other denominations, created some hard feelings. This was especially true for families who had lost a family member in the war.

Those who had religious inhi-

bitions about war were called conscientious objectors (COs). It was a difficult time for Mennonites. The decision to enlist in the armed forces, or to be a CO was made by each individual according to his conscience. Many joined, feeling that the Nazi forces were evil. Canada had opened its doors to the Mennonites and therefore was worthy of protection. There was certainly discrimination against the COs. The philosophy of pacifism was by far the greatest difference between the Mennonites and the surrounding non-Mennonite communities.

In 1954, Jim moved to the Midway district. What he understood as a "philosophy of segregation" among the Mennonites had pretty well waned by that time and the Mennonites were active in Home and School, work parties, the Curling Club, and the skating rink. C.D. Harder was a staunch supporter of Home and School. He had a remarkable sense of humour, and if a situation ever arose where there was tension building, Cornie seemed to be able to crack a joke to diffuse the situation. There were a number of Mennonites who held the office of president in the Home and School organization many Mennonites were members of the Farmer's Union of Alberta, some served as officers, and delegates to the Provincial Conference held in Edmonton each December.

According to Andrew Friesen of Carleton University in Ottawa, the Mennonites, "historically made the attempt to segregate themselves from the host country, its governing body and its affairs. But as they settled in Canada, their traditional ideology of segregation began to diminish and they were soon in the process of discovering and interacting with Canadian Society."

In Jim's experience, the Bergthal Mennonites have always voted, and have been politically active. It is his information that Cornelius Hiebert, a member of New Bergthal, was elected as MLA in the first Alberta Legislature. However, some of the more conservative brethren in the Linden area have eschewed anything to do with politics including voting. This segregation was not unanimous as Raymond Ratzlaff was elected MLA in the Three Hills constituency in 1967 and served until 1971. There have been a number of Mennonites who have served at the county level as well as on the hospital boards.

Traditionally, the ideal livelihood of a Mennonite family was the family farm. This became impossible, as splitting the family farm created a unit which was too small to sustain a family. The practice resulted in some of these small farms becoming specialty farms in livestock. There are a large number of chicken, hog and dairy farms in the Linden area. Some Mennon-



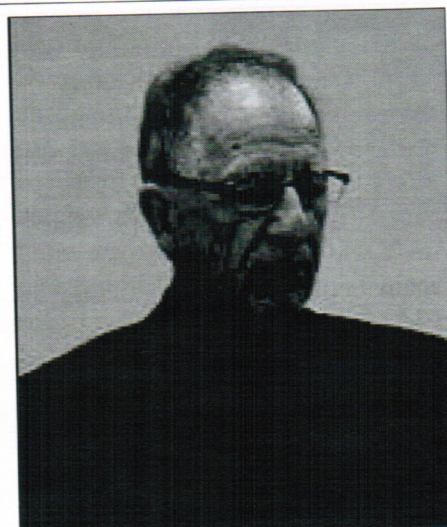
Irene Klassen

ite men broke with tradition and went into business. Carl Isaak built a substantial machinery and steel fabricating business known as Linden Machine. Pete Baerg set up a feed mill to supply the specialty farms in the area, and Walt Regehr established an electrical business that became a specialty farm equipment supplier with offices in Linden and Clearbrook, BC. Jim has done considerable business with all of these men, and can speak very highly of the service they provide as well as their ethics. However, he understands that they took some flack over their departure from tradition.

The most important factor which makes a democracy work is the participation of the individuals who live in that society. This is why patriotism is important to our way of life. We don't need to be told about the terrors and injustices which occur in non democratic societies. Thus, the segregation ideology of Mennonites was seen by non Mennonites as a significant difference. It was seen as not carrying their fair share of the burden of government. While the Bergthal Mennonites have not practised the segregation policy for most of the century, some of the more conservative groups have, and everyone gets tarred by the same brush. For Jim personally, he has many good friends who are of the Mennonite faith, has had a number of business associates also of that faith, and has never had a bad experience with them.

There was a question and answer and comments time. Henry Goerzen led this section of the program. On the controversial topic of participation in the military it was noted that about 50% of Mennonite young men served during World War II.

In the afternoon session, Irene Klassen led the Memorial Service, reading parts of Psalm 90, about our days being numbered, and though we, and the Lord have a different perspective of time, our days are meant to be used well, that our tiny span of time on this earth is meant to count for something. Seven persons involved in some way with MHSA have passed away. Helen Brown of Didsbury, a writer; Harry Stauffer of Tofield, a great story teller; Richard Harder of Carstairs, deeply involved in the writing of the NWC history; Ben Geddert a faithful visitor at the office, working on and sharing, especially his father's music, which he transcribed from ziffern to digital form; Gerhard Bartel always interested in the preservation of Men-



Dave Pankratz

nonite history and a generous supporter financially; Herta Anderson another regular, a gentle person who had a passion for preserving her father's letters and early writings; Judith Rempel whose passion was Mennonite history, and she gave it her all. She left a huge empty space in MHSA. We miss her many gifts. May the Lord bless their memory in the legacy they left us.

Bill Janzen did a power point presentation of some 101 pictures depicting the 25 years of MHSA.

Then Tena Friesen did a power point presentation to launch her new book called, *"Pushing Through Invisible Barriers, a Canadian Mennonite story"*. Tena was the first person in the entire LaCrete district to graduate from high school, doing some studies by correspondence,



Lunch -What Mennonites do best!



Author Tena Friesen

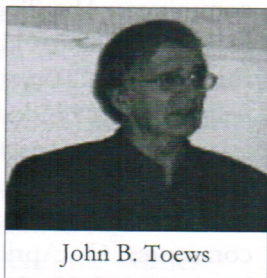
and then going to Peace River to graduate. Their family were not accepted by the community because they spoke English, had an education, and didn't join the Old Colony Church. Dr. Dick McLean, says this about her book. "This book is not just for Mennonite readers however, it is also helpful for those of us who want to understand these unique and wonderful people in a clearer way".

The MHSA gathering concluded with fasha and 25th anniversary cake. ❖

Some Events and Dates Related to the Founding of a Mennonite High School

By Heinrich Kornelsen
(1890 – 1974)
with an Introduction

by John B. Toews



John B. Toews

On March 8, 1946, P.H. Regehr and B.B. Janz reported that the Alberta Minister of Education, Mr. Ansley, had somewhat reluctantly promised to allow Mennonites in that province to establish a private school. Written confirmation followed in July. By September of the same year a somewhat inadequate physical plant with two classrooms received its first students. The achievement was a somewhat stunning display of Mennonite organizational talent and practicality.

Some years before her death in November 2000, Anne the daughter of Heinrich Kornelsen, gave me a manuscript her father had written in pencil. In

my usual careless fashion I mislaid it only to rediscover it some years later. It is a brief, factual account. Kornelsen mentions some of thinking behind the venture, then details the energy and co-operation needed to establish a school by an immigrant community just emerging from long-term farm and travel debts. Though not dated the document was probably composed in 1955 or 1956.

The founding of the Alberta Mennonite High School (AMHS) coincided with similar ventures in Abbotsford and Yarrow, British Columbia. Historians seeking to explain the motivations for establishing these schools may well agree that Russian Mennonite immigrants in both regions felt threatened by assimilation. Many Mennonite churches, confronted by a pluralistic society, sought to preserve a historic spiritual identity by clinging to the German language. Most were unsure how to resolve the tension between a known faith and a new culture. In a unique way Mennonite High Schools offered the possibility of a viable compromise. It was a setting wherein youth might embrace a new language and a new culture under controlled conditions. Cherished values were gradually integrated into an ever encroaching alien society. Whether the courageous founders envisaged it or not, Mennonite private schools eased the transition from self-enclosed communities into the larger world. Persons advocating such institutions were often products of similar Mennonite schools in Russia or Ukraine. These dedicated individuals probably never anticipated that the attempt to partially recreate their own past would ensure a bright future for their offspring in Canada.

The founding story of the Alberta Mennonite High School can be found in the 1946 minutes of the Alberta Mennonitischer Schulverein (Alberta Mennonite Educational Society).

During the 1930s the brothers Jakob B. Janz and Heinrich Kornelsen were members of their local school boards, Jakob B. Janz in Coaldale, and Heinrich Kornelsen in Readymade. While engaged in this activity we became convinced that Mennonite youth needed a Mennonite high school. Why?, someone might ask.

1. The government schools were irreligious.
2. No German was taught in the schools.
3. Mennonite identity was gradually being eroded.

At various meetings and conferences these brethren again and again advocated for a Mennonite high school. They reiterated the above reasons and added others. For example: In the future we need people who know our story. We need people who are positive Christians. We need people who



Alberta Mennonite High School

understand our people and will be true to them. We need people with appropriate education who, on occasion can represent us before government. In short we need a high school.

The first individuals who responded to our admonishment were brother Aron Toews, Namaka, brother B. B. Janz, Coaldale, and brother P. Doerksen, Gem.

At the Vertreterversammlung (Representative Assembly) held in Rosemary in the fall of 1944 and representing all [Mennonite] denominations, brother Aron Toews included this item on the agenda. There was spirited debate but the question was not resolved. In November, 1944 the Mennonite Brethren Conference meeting in Namaka again discussed the question. A provisional committee was elected to conduct a preliminary study. The following brethren were elected to the committee: Abraham Toews, Bernhard Dick, Heinrich Kornelsen, Gerhard Friesen, Gem, B. B. Janz, and Aron Toews, Namaka. This committee with H. Kornelsen as chairperson and Bernhard Dick as secretary began the preparatory work. What did this consist of?

A) Did the law permit the existence of a private high school? In this regard the advice of our representative in the provincial legislature, Mr. Roy Lee, was sought. He promised to help. Thereupon B. B. Janz travelled to Edmonton and negotiated with the minister of education. He gave his approval and so nothing stood in the way of building our own school.

B) Finding a location. Brother P. Redekopp was in the process of moving to BC. He offered his ten acre farm to the committee for \$3,500. The farm was purchased in April, 1946.

C) Was the school to be run by the conference or by a society? In his report to the Alberta Mennonite Brethren Conference (pp.19-20) brother Kornelsen reported that, through consultation, the majority of the churches supported a conference school. The conference however decided (p.9 of the Minutes) that the school should be run by a society within the context of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. Membership was set at 50 dollars per person. This was accepted at the founding meeting on March 8, 1946.

D) The members of the Readymade district, all of whom were moving to BC. offered us their church (24 ft. by 36 ft.) for \$700. Wood and cement was difficult to obtain in those years [because of post-war shortages]

so we saw this as the leading of the Lord. On May 20, 1946 our treasurer Abraham Toews reported that both the farm and the church building had been purchased and paid for.

E) How was the farm and house paid for? These were lengthy negotiations with the Bank of Nova Scotia, who provided a loan. This required that the statutes [of the society] be drafted and that the school be incorporated.

F) The preparation of the statutes required much time and rewriting until they were acceptable to the government.

G) The founding meeting was held on March 8, 1946. As already mentioned it became a school run by a society operating within the context of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. The following brethren elected to a new committee: Abr. Toews, B. Janz, H. Kornelsen, David Pankratz, G. Friesen, Aron Toews and Cornelius Toews, Linden.

H) The Teacherage. The loan, the statutes, and the registration reflected the work of the new committee. On April 15, 1946, brother Jakob Huebert, who wished to build a new house, offered us his old house for \$750. A new house would have cost us \$2,500. Since we were short on funds we purchased it. Both buildings [the school and the house] were moved by a Lethbridge company for \$700-\$800.

I) Foundations needed to be poured for these buildings. We needed 300 sacks of cement. None was available. We visited all the dealers in Lethbridge, drove to Barnwell, Taber and Vauxhall. Nothing was to be had. In Vauxhall [we received] a tentative promise that some might be available in 14 days. Discouraged we drove



Orchestra

home. We had been working for about an hour when the telephone rang. The Citizens Lumber Co. (Coaldale) informed us that they had received a shipment of cement and that we could have 300 sacks. What an answer to prayer! God be praised! A drag-line made necessary preparations and the foundations could be poured. Unfortunately no volunteer help was available since it was harvest time and we could not pay anyone. Then the Lord sent us a lovely rain and we always had enough volunteers. It was amazing how all the materials including gravel and sand arrived.

J) Teachers We wrote here and there searching for teachers until we finally found Henry Thiessen and Jakob Regehr. B. B. Janz carried on this correspondence between all his travels. He also made most of the trips to the various government offices.

K) Students. When one reads the minutes of that time one is surprised that the school began with 41 students. Several announcements had to be made to recruit them and get them to register.

L) There were little worries like obtaining a stove for the cook. Blackboards were borrowed from the local congregation. Five sample desks were made by the local carpenter H. Klassen. Later seventeen more were ordered, each one seating two students. There was the question of finding accommodations for the students. Initially meals were served in the basement and instruction took place in the two classrooms above.

M) The school finally opened on September 9. How scanty and impoverished everything looked. There was no library. Dr. Epp provided some items for the laboratory. Yet everything worked out. The students passed their exams. As



Mixed choir

Jakob confessed to his God "I had only my staff when I crossed this Jordan, but now I have become two groups". (Gen. 32:10)

Until now ten teachers have taught at the school. In a ten year period 653 students have attended our school. In addition to the secular subjects they have attended many a chapel service. Some have found the Lord as their Savior. The students receive good instruction in music and singing from brother Peter Dick. Some of the students have become competent teachers and nurses. Our former students are also active in other professions. What began as a small, impoverished effort is today an asset worth \$90,000 to the society. The 653 students necessitated an expenditure of about \$150,000. We ask was the price too high? No, for according to God's Word a student's soul is worth more than the whole world. Yes, until now God has helped.

During the early years the Society had 80 members with 110 shares. Some members became discouraged and withdrew so that today we have 60 members. Members assessed themselves 10 dollars per year and occasionally twenty dollars. The first four years brother Kornelsen served as chairperson and one year he was secretary-treasurer. Since 1949 until today B. B. Janz has served as chairperson. Today he is an honorary member of the committee. In 1949 brother Dietrich Matthies joined the committee and has been secretary-treasurer since then. We want to honor him for that.

All photos of AMHS taken from AMHS yearbooks of 1955 and 1958.

Student photos on Page 14 ♦



Myrna Belyea

Ancestor's –

Were They Real or a Family Myth?

by Myrna Belyea

We heard the stories, my cousins and I, from our parents over the years yet somehow the people were not real so neither were the stories. We knew our parents were honest good folks yet somehow, for us, the people in the stories had never existed. There was our grandfather, Jacob Loewen, who died in 1934 long before any of us were born so he was a name only – not a person to any of us. The family was never sure about the date or where he arrived in Canada by himself from

southern Russia. Then there was the story about two of his brothers, Abe and Peter. They had apparently arrived with Peter's wife, Suzanna, and two children, about six months later. Abe, only 19 at the time, made it to Saskatchewan alone not knowing what had happened to Peter, Suzanne and the children. The story said that months later a letter came which said they had been sent back to Russia then Siberia because Suzanna had trachoma. Again to us, names but had the people really existed? Were the stories about their arrival and being sent back to Russia myth, fact or somewhere in between? Our parents believed the stories – they had at least known Jacob and Abe but that wasn't enough for the cousins so I was tasked to "find" them.

Where to begin – I decided to try to find Jacob's arrival time – that then would give me a time frame to look for Abe, Peter and Suzanna. The dates for Jacob's arrival, so the family believed, was either 1901 or maybe 1903 or was it 1905? We knew from our grandparent's marriage certificate, dated August 25, 1907, that it was likely before 1905. I decided to start by checking the homestead records in Saskatchewan to see if they gave any information. I had the legal description from my mother's birth certificate. The application said he was naturalized in 1904 and the certificate of naturalization was attached – except it wasn't. At first disappointment but at least we now knew his arrival had to be before 1904. That left searching ships records from 1901 to 1903. I first checked all the online data bases that had recorded the arrival of "Mennonite" ships or other ships that arrived during that time – nothing. I decided to try to find the ships records myself. It took several trips to the Calgary Public Library, after they brought the microfilm from the National Archives, to go through page by page, some readable and some not, many different ships manifests. I was hoping that his name was not on one of the faint and unreadable pages. For some reason I just had to know when he came to Canada. Finally one day on page 23 of the record for the ship SS Lake Ontario which sailed from Liverpool on March 29, 1903 and arrived in St. John NB on April 10, 1903 I found the name of a passenger – it said Jacob "Loewen", age 26, checked as a pas-

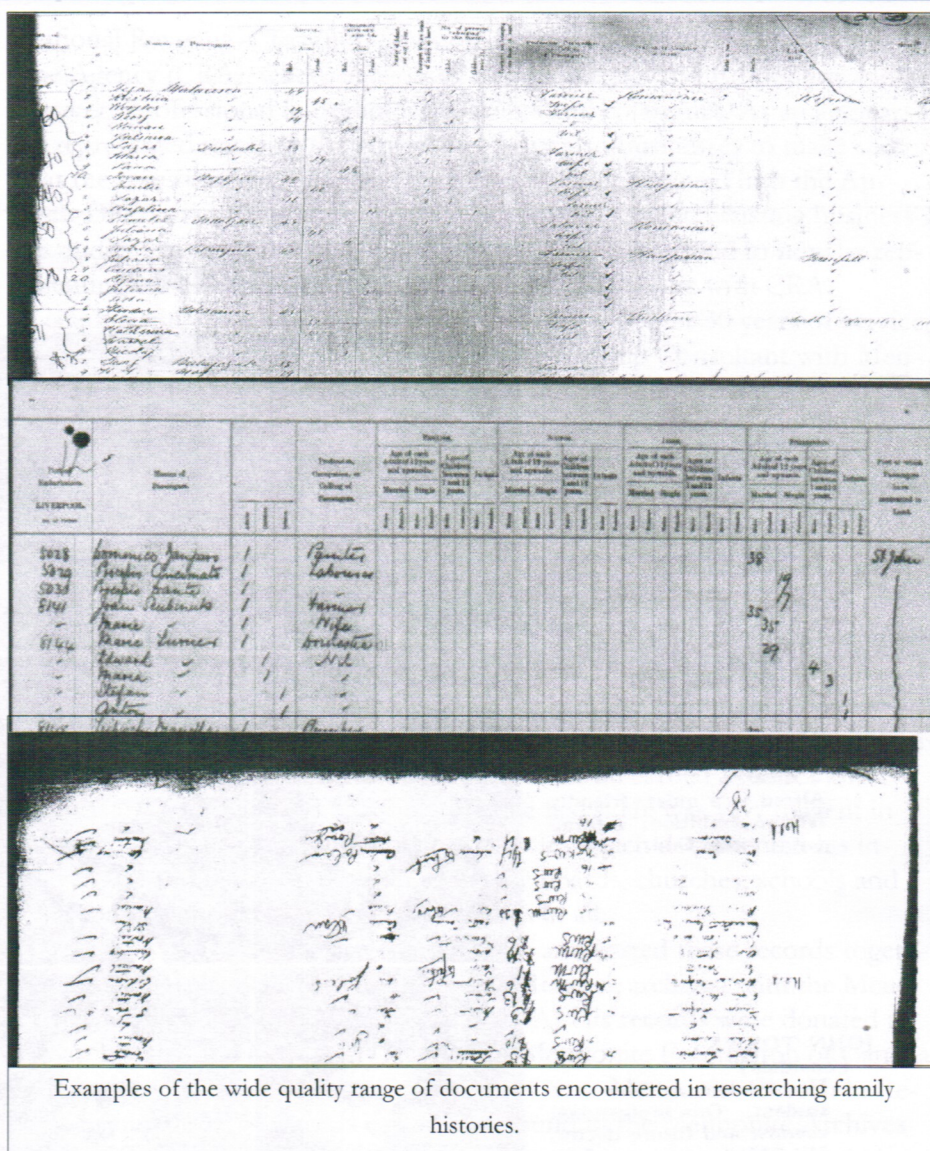
senger not belonging to any family on board, occupation farmer, then under Nation or Country of Birth it said "Dutch" (I had initially scanned the pages for those from Russia only) and place of ultimate destination – Rosthern, Saskatchewan. I can still feel the sense of elation and relief – grandpa was real, not just in family stories but also in public records.

Now I had a time frame to use to look for Peter and his family. I found their names on page 6 of the ships manifest for the SS Lake Manitoba which sailed from Liverpool on December 8, 1903 and arrived in St. John NB on December 29, 1903 and under Country of Birth it said "Germany". These records were harder to read but there was no mistaking the word beside the bracket around Peter, Susanna and the 2 children's names – "held". My heart sank. How must they have felt? How did this happen? They had travelled for months, likely with the last of their money, to a land where they did not speak the language and they were stopped from entering. What was the story behind this? How did it happen?

This started another journey that took many months. I knew our family had no more information then the stories we had heard so where to look? My mother had remained in contact with a cousin, Mary Fehr (whose family had come over in 1926) and I had visited her once after mom died so I called her to see if she knew of anyone in the family who might have ancestor information. She said her sister Elizabeth would know. I called Elizabeth and had a wonderful conversation with her – but acquired no new information.

One day a light dawned. Try to find some of Abe Loewen's

family – they might have more information since Abe was the one who traveled with Peter and Suzanna. I went to the Grandma database and started looking for descendants names that just might be findable. Abe and Maria Loewen had nine children – one Hannah had married a Frank Boldt and they had remained in the Hepburn / Osler area of Saskatchewan. They had a son named Clifford Boldt. I searched the Internet for a C Boldt in Saskatchewan – nothing. So then I just searched the name Boldt and found two names in the Osler area – so I called one and asked the lady who answered if she knew a Clifford Boldt. She said you need to talk to my husband – turned out Dan was Clifford's cousin – said they had lost touch over the years but he thought Cliff lived in Victoria. I searched the Internet for a C. Boldt in Victoria – found one – called – on the message machine was a young voice – knew it wasn't the right person so did not leave a message (later discovered that Colin was Clifford's son). So back to Dan with more questions. This time he told me Clifford was a retired school teacher but he could not remember what province he had taught in. What to do? – Well, I decided to call the Retirement Teachers Associations for B.C., Alberta and Saskatchewan. I knew they could not provide me with any information but just maybe they would pass my message on. I also decided to search the Internet for a C. Boldt anywhere in B.C. and found a C & M Boldt in Union Bay on the Island. I called and left a message. One Saturday morning about 10 a.m. my phone rang – the voice said "Hi, I am Clifford Boldt and I understand you are looking for me". WOW – what elation – now I



Examples of the wide quality range of documents encountered in researching family histories.

would find out something about Peter and Susanna and how trachoma had affected their lives. When I told Clifford that I understood he had family ancestry information and what I was searching for the elation disappeared. Sorry, he really was not into family history – but he would send out an email to his cousins and see if any of them knew more than he did.

The next morning the phone rang and the voice said "Hi, I am Stan Loewen, and I understand that you are looking for information about my grandfather Abe and Peter and Suzanna – well I have a story that my father David wrote about grandfather Abe and Peter and Suzanna and their trip to Canada. I had my secretary type it exactly as father wrote it – what is your email address and I will send it to you". At last – I would know. See the next newsletter for that story.

Myrna Belyea lives with her husband Carl in Calgary. Though not raised in the Mennonite culture or denomination, (she is and was raised a Seventh-day Adventist) as she began to lose her parents and relatives she started to realize how their Mennonite heritage had influenced her life. So about ten years ago she started searching, and was fortunate to find Judii Rempel and Irene Klassen at the MHSA, and finds the journey of discovery of family history is never ending. ❖

Graduates

HEIDI SCHMIDT

(Coaldale)

Neat and sincere. A quiet student who minds her own business, and works hard, but has a good sense of humor.



RITA LANGEMANN

(Coaldale)

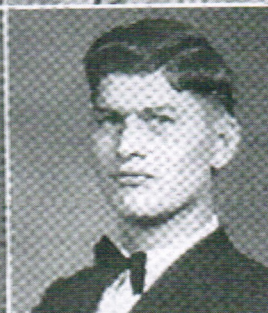
A great asset to the school choir with her leading soprano voice. Well known for her radical views. Ambition - psychiatric nurse.

Under

ALFRED DICK

(Coaldale)

Alfred is a quiet, friendly fellow. Ambition: a farmer? - ask Dad.



JOHN PAULS

(Coaldale)

Making good progress with violin and vocal lessons. Ever-ready smile for everyone. Our sports editor.

JOHN TOEWS

(Coaldale)

Has marked abilities as a student. Our professional chemist and future doctor. His greatest sin at school is doing Algebra.



RUDY WIEBE

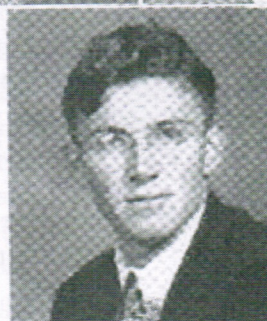
(Coaldale)

Our class joke pot who talks too much. Present occupation - editing "The Pilgrim" and "Quo Vadis". Weakness - Can't bear to see others studying and manages to bother those who try.

WALTER WILLMS

(Pincher Creek)

Our professional student. Well launched in a career as butcher and school van driver. The person in Grade XII who talks the least for his size.



Grads

A Tribute to my Dad Blake Friesen

by Gary Friesen

How can I best describe my father? He was positive, honest, trustworthy, and hard working. He was patient, kind, generous and hospitable. Dad was a very good listener and he could make people feel good about themselves. He had a charming and calming presence about him.

He presented himself well. He was always well dressed with polished shoes and a good haircut. Whenever I meet his former colleagues with the Federal Government in Edmonton, or board members from Rosthern Junior College and Mennonite Foundation and even during his last years in the Newport Harbour Care Centre, Dad was referred to and will be remembered as a real gentleman.

It was these qualities that his mother and father, farmers who emigrated from the USA to homestead and settle in the area of Langham, Saskatchewan stressed and taught their eldest child. His parents supported Dad's desire to get an education rather than staying on the farm and becoming a farmer. In Dad's memoirs, he recalls that before he left home to attend high school in Langham, his mother quoted an old autograph verse to him.....**"The future lies before you like paths of pure white snow. Be careful how you tread it, for every step will show"**.

He lived by these words. His work, his relationships with colleagues, and the friendships he developed while living in Regina, Clearbrook/Abbotsford, St. Albert, Edmonton and Calgary are a testimonial to his life of careful and dedicated servant hood.

Dad worked for the Department of

National Revenue – Taxation Division, known today as the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), where he worked in both Regina and Edmonton. He was very professional in dealing with clients and colleagues. As an auditor, he represented not only the government, but also businesses to make sure that the taxes paid were fair and equitable. When he moved into the Appeals Division in Edmonton, he was truly in his element, assisting business tax audits that went into the appeal process. Dad was proud to now be representing businesses through their appeals of tax matters with CRA.

It is interesting to read in his life story that in 1978 after 30 years of service, he retired to a nobler second career as a Stewardship Consultant with Mennonite Foundation where he moved on to be the National Manager.

Dad liked to keep busy. Some of the Committees and Boards that Dad served on from 1955-1998 include Rosthern Junior College, Alberta Cultural and Heritage Council, Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Mennonite Heritage Society of Saskatchewan, Mennonite Industry and Business Associates, and Mennonite Historical Society in B.C. We cannot forget that Dad was also one of the main founders of Grace Mennonite Church in Regina, and the National Manager of Mennonite Foundation of Canada in its formative years.

As an accountant, Dad had a talent for detail and he kept meticulous records. He kept everything, including his first income tax return in 1943 from Superior Lumber in Fiske, Saskatchewan where he earned \$408 for five months of work and paid \$35.89 in income taxes. He was very diligent in keeping copies of correspondence and articles which documented his involvement and responsibilities in the many boards, churches, schools and other organizations - 9 boxes full of papers in all.

In 2009, my wife Anne and I went through and sorted these records together with Mom and Dad and the late Judith Rempel, archivist with the Mennonite Historical Society Of Alberta (MHSA). His records were donated to the archives of the MHSA in Calgary, the Mennonite Foundation of Canada in Winnipeg, Rosthern Junior College and Grace Mennonite Church in Regina. Some of Dad's records can also be found in the Mennonite Archives in Ontario. You can view an outline of his archives on the MHSA website. Dad felt that family history was important as well. His correspondence shows that he and Mom were particularly passionate that the contributions of her father David Toews to the welfare of the Russian Mennonites be recognized. He and Mom encouraged the publication of the book *David Toews Was Here*, both financially and by providing the author, Dr. Helmut Harder, access to their personal memoirs.

Dad was a very encouraging father and whenever we had problems he would listen. I admired him for his patience and skill in dealing with challenging bureaucratic and family situations. In turn, Dad was always very grateful for help with household and vehicle maintenance and repairs, not his strong points, and for the care that my wife and I provided for him and Mom. Due to his work with Mennonite Foundation, Dad was very concerned that we knew how to proceed with estate matters and was very diligent in keeping his records current until his last years. Even in the nursing home, a discussion on his finances was sure to get his full attention. He put a high value on Christian education and he and Mom made many sacrifices so that their sons could attend private Christian schools and colleges.

He was a fair and engaged grandfather, who loved his grandchildren very



Blake Friesen 1918-2012

much and was always amazed by and proud of their many accomplishments. Dad dearly loved his wife Louise. When they lived in the Harbours residence, he did his very best to help her. They were inseparable and were a very strong team which helped them to stay together as long as they did until Mom passed away. They gained strength from each other and were often seen holding hands at the dining room table and in their residence. Dad was a comfort to Mom, even though in their later years, he had cognitive challenges. During the last year of my moth-

er's life, she was preparing Dad for her passing and when I would talk about this with them during our visits, he would say that he wanted to go at the same time.

In the last few days of his life, he made every effort to communicate his love to us and to the people who cared for him at the nursing home.

"The future lies before you like paths of pure white snow. Be careful how you tread it, for every step will show". Dad left very clear footprints in his life of dedicated service to his family, his church and his community. We are proud of our Dad and his mother and father would have been very proud of their eldest son.



MHSA GAMEO Report 2012

by Wesley Berg

I travelled to Vineland, Ontario, 19-21 January 2012 to attend the meetings of the GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online) Canadian Editorial Board and the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The meetings had been scheduled for Winnipeg but were moved to Ontario, and Vineland in particular, because of the celebrations of the War of 1812 that would be taking place in the area. We met in First Mennonite Church, Vineland, a church established in 1801 with a cemetery directly behind the church that dates back to those times. The Friday afternoon tour, that is always an interesting feature of these



Wesley Berg

gatherings was led by Leonard Chester, a Brethren in Christ (BIC) archivist, who took us through the back roads of the Niagara Peninsula to several BIC historic sites and a spot across the road from an old BIC church where various monuments had been established, including the BIC marker to commemorate the Mennonites who had lived through the period of strife before and after 1812. Other Mennonite groups have done similar things elsewhere in the province. We were taken to see a BIC school building bought from the Buffalo mafia in 1938 and ended up at the Jordan Historical Museum of the Twenty (<http://www.niagaraheritageguide.com/jordan-museum/index.shtml>). Here we saw a display dedicated to the experiences of various Mennonites and their families during the war of 1812. That evening we heard a presentation by Dr. Jonathan Seiling on that same topic. GAMEO will be undergoing significant changes during the next few years. A multilingual format is being developed in coordination and cooperation with Global Anabaptist Wiki (<http://>

www.anabaptistwiki.org/), *Men-nonitsches Lexicon* (www.mennlex.de), and most recently the *Paraguyan Lexicon* (<http://www.menonitica.org/lexikon/>). Final funding for the multilingual software requirements is currently being sought.

With the increased emphasis on the global aspect of its mandate, GAMEO will also be moving out of the MHSC and under the wing of Mennonite World Conference. This is seen as especially important in fund raising efforts so that any hint of parochial bias is eliminated. The Canadian committee will become one of a number of regional editorial groups, but will continue to serve the GAMEO board as a sounding board, giving advice on editorial matters.

My own work has gone slowly this year, but the one article I did produce—"Reynold Siemens"—is an unusual one and you may find it interesting. I have talked to Bill Janzen about developing a formula for biographies that would make it possible to provide all of the information necessary without necessarily have to write the final article, something I am happy to do if I have the information at hand. More of that in the next few months.

Finally, it was gratifying to be able to vote for the motion to present Irene Klassen with the MHSC Award of Excellence. A well deserved recognition of many years of faithful service to the Alberta Society. Well done! ♦

Press Release

Mennonite Historical Society Explores War of 1812

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC), hosted by

the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, held its annual meeting on January 21, 2012 at The First Mennonite Church in Vineland, Ontario.

Two special events highlighted the meeting otherwise focused on ongoing projects of the Society. Prior to its meeting board members toured local Mennonite and Brethren in Christ historical sites, including recently installed plaques commemorating the conscientious objection of the peace churches who refused to serve in the militia during that conflict. Dr. Jonathan Seiling, a Mennonite historian who is preparing a manuscript on the War of 1812, recounted to Society members a number of specific accounts of how young Mennonite men and women responded to the demands of the military through their claims for losses during the war, and through the oral accounts preserved in a number of family histories.

The Society's Award of Excellence for 2012 was given to Irene Klassen, a founding member of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). She has served as the editor of the Alberta society's *Newsletter* for 16 years, and has been the organization's secretary for many years. She has been a regular volunteer at the MHSA's Archives and Library located in Calgary. Klassen has published several books, including *Their Mark: Their Legacy*, a compilation of biographies of significant leaders in the history of the Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (now Mennonite Church Alberta).

The Award of Excellence is given annually to persons who have made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history by way of research and/or writing.

In its work on Society projects, the MHSC heard that Esther Epp-Tiessen's history of Mennonite Central Committee Canada is on schedule, with publication planned for 2013. The text will take a chronological approach, and include substantial analysis of Canadian Mennonite relief efforts prior to the formation of MCC Canada in 1963. The working group preparing a new national Mennonite genealogical website reported half of the required funds were in place, with the balance to be raised in 2012. The site will make digitize primary source documents, with transliteration and translation from German if required. The Archives Committee of MHSC spent a profitable half-day discussing policy manuals and mission statements. The group plans to spend a day on preservation and classification of photographs at next year's meeting.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was established in 1968 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series by Frank H. Epp and Ted D. Regehr. Its membership is composed of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

The 2012 executive is Lucille Marr (Montreal, Quebec), President; Roy-



Irene Klassen

den Loewen, (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Vice-President; Alf Redekopp (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Secretary; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Treasurer; and Maurice Martin (New Hamburg, Ontario), fifth member. ♦

The Mennonites of Siberia

Part 2: Waldheim (Apollonovka) near Omsk

By Lawrence Klippenstein

The first Mennonite villages in Siberia were established around 1898-99 just west of the city of Omsk. Chunaevka was one of them. It was named after a landowner, Chunaev, who sold land to Mennonite families wishing to buy land. Later others came to join the group and when some felt unhappy about the name, they divided the village and called one half Ohrloff. The other remained Chunaevka. Very quickly other families arrived and new villages were added further west as far as Issyl Kul, also on the Trans Siberian Railway. Many more sprang up to the north and to the south of the railway in



Girl's School at Ohrloff Siberia

this area.

Our Omsk conference touring schedule took us to one of these villages. It was originally named Waldheim. Today it is publicly called Apollonovka after another landowner of the area. Local Mennonite residents still use the original name. The bus needed about two hours to travel from our Omsk hotel to the Waldheim church where we met for a Sunday morning service on June 6. The service was conducted in Low and High German, with some Russian songs from a 40-member very excellent youth and children's choir. Four preachers spoke during the service, some in Low German, others in High German. In regular services, we learned, when foreign guests might not be present, more of the service was held in Russian which, of course, everyone understood except perhaps below school age children who learn Low German at home as in many cases Mennonite families only begin learning Russian after starting school.

The village includes many Russian families along with 75 or more Low German speaking families. The church is part of an Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Bap-

tists, though very largely made up of families with a Mennonite background. This is true of many of the churches in this area.

After the service our group of visitors was invited to attend a picnic in a forest about a half mile away from the village. Long tables were set up there with much delicious food spread for all to eat. Everyone had enough – rice pilaff, meat, fruit, etc. and there was much left over.

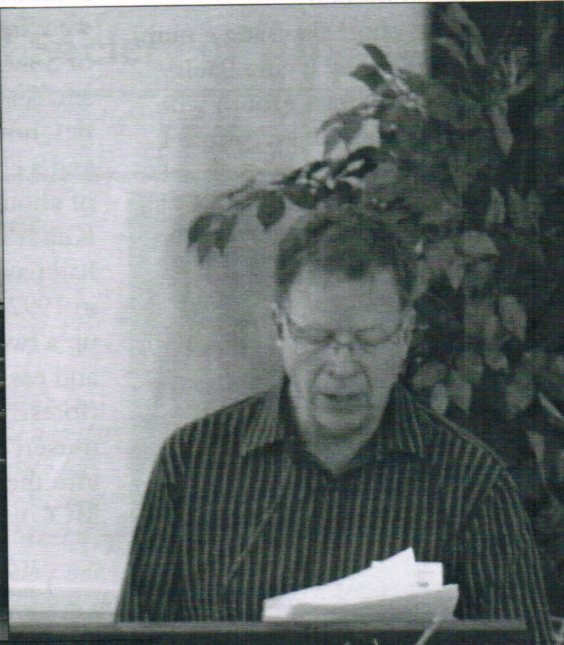
After the meal two choirs presented parts of a program which included a talk by Hans Toews, a minister retired in this village who had spent many years in prison during Soviet times. The music groups included a brass band of a dozen or more members. Two young men had returned from the army some years ago having been allowed to keep the musical instruments they had used in an army band. After they got home they heard of a place which had a large number of various brass instruments unused that were to be disposed of. Some Waldheimers got them and soon a very fine brass orchestra could play regularly in the services and elsewhere

Continued on Page 20



Lawrence Klippenstein

MORE PHOTOS FROM THE 2011 MHSA FALL CONFERENCE



Photographs are from MHSA archives



Continued from Page 18

in the community.

A children's choir also sang a number of songs led by Heinz Pauls (his son led the brass group) who was a part of this congregation. I learned while driving to the meal that his mother was a Klippenstein and I was soon able to find out they were in fact distant relatives of my family, descended from my great grandfather's Chortitza colony brothers who did not come to Manitoba in the 1870's. After moving around a good deal they eventually got to the Slavgorod region of Siberia (exile and otherwise). This Heinrich Pauls family in Waldheim was connected to Slavgorod great great grandparents, Johann Klippenstein. A younger Johann Klippenstein, we learned, had served as minister at Waldheim for a while, till he was executed by the Communists.

Here we also learned to know Walter and Anne Willms who retired from farming in northern B.C. and decided to spend part of each year giving assistance to farmers in Apollonovka. From this joint effort had come a flour mill, several new homes, better road maintenance and plans for a new bakery and a large new hog barn. The main street remained rather rough because it was the road (very muddy when it rained) for cows going to pasture in the morning and returning at night. We sensed the last part of the road we took coming into the village from the main paved road would not have been passable if it had rained a lot. As it was, dried now, we had no trouble getting the bus in and out of the community. In a recently-published history of Apollonovka we learn about many other features of modernization, quite remarkable for this time and place.

About 15 miles south and somewhat west of Waldheim were located the large village of Solnsovka (once three smaller Mennonite communities, now with two churches) and a city with a population of about 50,000 called Issyl Kul. It is also on the railway. I had passed through Issyl Kul in 1992 when I helped some Mennonite Central Committee volunteers take up a two-year assignment in another village called Neudachino to the south and east of Omsk. I remembered that during World War I a Forstei (forestry camp) had been established a few miles from Issyl Kul. That was a nursery location where Mennonite young men could serve instead of going into the army. I will say more about this city, the forestry camp and the MCC workers in later columns.

Lawrence Klippenstein, with his wife LaVerna, served as Mennonite Central Committee country representatives in Moscow, Russia, in 1992-93. Presently they reside in Steinbach, Manitoba ❖



A Mennonite children's church choir performs in a birch forest in the village of Apollonovka, Siberia

Mennonite Villages in Siberia Tour

May 27-June 13, 2013



**For more tour details, registration, visa processing
and initial tour deposit, please contact your tour host:**

Len Loeppky

14 Springwood Bay

Steinbach, Manitoba

R5G 2E8

Email: aloeppky@mymts.net

Phone: 1-204-326-2613

Deadline, Dec. 31, 2012