



# Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XVIII Number 1

March 2015

## MHSA 2014 FALL CONFERENCE REPORT

by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

With cotton-g l o v e d hands, the curator carefully held up a small white shirt for everyone to see. It seemed to be an innocuous bit of fabric until she pointed out how un-



Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

blemished it was. She said the shirt represents "the history that wasn't."

(continued on page 19)

## CANADIAN MENNONITES IN WORLD WAR TWO

by Anne Harder

The Second World War was the catalyst that would change the way Mennonite youth saw themselves as Canadian citizens. Whether as soldiers, conscientious objectors or women taking up the heavy work that their male family members were no longer available to perform, the war brought new insights and experiences that would transform these immigrant communities from insularity to full social engagement. The process was not straightforward or smooth, as the debate over pacifism and

military service clearly attests, but the debate over non-resistance would compel new and deeper understandings of Mennonite teachings, just as the various wartime experiences unavoidably drew Mennonites into Canadian society.

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Anne Harder

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## MHSA AGM & SPRING CONFERENCE

Sat. Apr 25, 2015

The Annual General Meeting/Spring Conference of the MHSA will be held at the **Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church (LMBC), 11210 59 Ave NW, Edmonton.** The Annual General Meeting will start at 11:00 a.m. light lunch to follow and the celebration of the work of **Peter Rempel** and the Youth Orientation

Units (YOU) at 1:00 p.m. Guest speakers Peter Rempel, former pastor of LMBC and other YOU workers. YOU was a residential farm work program designed to assist in the rehabilitation of young adult offenders in order that they may lead normal healthy lives. A special presentation will be made to those directly involved with YOU. A Faspa lunch will follow the celebration.

**Please pre-register by April 11 at [receptionmhsa@gmail.com](mailto:receptionmhsa@gmail.com)** or leave a message at the MHSA office (403-250-1121) to help the food committee plan for the meals. Co-sponsored and promoted by MCC Alberta.

Admission \$20.00. Everyone is welcome.

## Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

It is with heavy hearts that we mourn the passing of our friend and fellow MHSA volunteer member, Dave Hildebrand. Dave helped build this organization in many ways as is so ably described in the tribute by Irene Klassen. Dave's latest MHSA position was that of publishing and distribution of the newsletter. A number of our members were able to attend the funeral. They mentioned that although there were tears there was also laughter. The family had asked for one-word descriptions of Dave and incorporated these into a slide show with appropriate photos. This was very well received. We miss you Dave — go in peace.



Dave Toews

Dave recently resigned from the newsletter due to ill health, and so a transition was already in progress. Bill Janzen has agreed to take the position of publisher and distribution.

Bill Janzen, a farm boy from Rosemary, works with his clients in the private financial and capital markets. Bill, his wife Charlette, daughter, two sons, their spouses and his grandson all live in Calgary. He is active in the community; currently on the Board of the Stockmen's Memorial Foundation, Finance Chair of MC Alberta and Treasurer of Calgary Christian Retirement Society.

Welcome to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Bill. Bill and I have a long acquaintance; we graduated from Rosthern Junior College (RJC) together in 1964. This past June we celebrated our 50th RJC Graduation Reunion.

I'm also excited about the prospects of a new MHSA venture, a travelling/lending library. The first proposed location is at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton.



Bill Janzen

Thank you to all who contributed to this issue. Of special note is Anne Harder's well researched article on Mennonites in World War II. We also appreciate first time contributors; Kathy Peters, Mennonite Cooking and Baking and Ken Ritchie, the History of Mennonite Mutual Insurance of Alberta.

We welcome your feedback, emails, letters to the editor and articles. Contact [dmtows@gmail.com](mailto:dmtows@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is May 1, 2015. See you at Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church, Edmonton Apr. 25, 2015 for the MHSA Spring Conference. ❖

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### MHSA Executive

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Lil Bartel, Calgary

**GAMEO Representative:**  
Wes Berg, Edmonton

## Chairman's Corner

by Dave Neufeldt

I am writing this article midway between attending the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada annual meeting in January and our Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta annual meeting in April. I always enjoy attending these meetings. Both societies rotate their meetings such that they are hosted over the years by a variety of communities or congregations. Visiting these different host communities gives me an opportunity to learn about



Dave Neufeldt

### Publications for Sale:

- Coaldale Hospital Memoirs (\$25)
- Among the Ashes (\$25)
- Seeking Place of Peace (\$15)
- Nuggets of Gold (\$15)

the history of local congregations or groups.

The MHSC meeting this year was held in Waterloo, Ontario. The organizers included a tour to an Old Order Mennonite church and school. Deacon and school teacher Amsey Martin shared with us about who they were, how they worshipped, and some of the reasons for their choices in how to live. It was the latter that I found particularly interesting.

On the surface it may appear that many of the rules that the Old Order Mennonites follow are simply about not adapting to new things as a way to maintain separation from the world. What I learned was that many of their practices are designed to strengthen their community. For example, worship services at a particular church are only held every other Sunday. On the alternate Sundays you are expected to go to one of the other churches. When services are being held in your church you expect that guests will show up at your home after the service for lunch. Building connections between people within the community is integrated into their structure.

The Old Order Mennonites do not utilize insurance. We are all familiar with stories of barn raisings carried out by the Old Order Mennonites as a communal response to individual tragedy. Amsey Martin explained that these things do not just happen spontaneously. There is a well-defined system in place to assist those who have experienced a loss. The person experiencing the loss and the church leader each choose a representative. These two people then choose a third person and the three of them become the committee to organize the assistance. Everyone

in the community is expected to help each other.

One of the tour participants shared about another group of conservative Mennonites that would allow the use of tractors, but only up to a particular horsepower. On the surface this seemed like a rather arbitrary rule and it did not make sense to me. The reason, however, was enlightening. It is precisely the limitations of what can be accomplished with a small tractor which cause community members to rely on each other for help. With a larger tractor, individuals become self-sufficient and no longer need to work together.

I very much enjoyed this tour. Most of my maternal ancestors were Amish, so I have an interest in groups that choose greater separation from mainstream society. This tour helped me to understand some of my background. Perhaps those of us who live more in mainstream society have some things to learn from our Old Order brothers and sisters about the importance of community and how to create community.

On April 25 the MHSA will be holding its Annual General Meeting and Spring Conference at Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church in Edmonton. The topic of the conference is the Youth Orientation Unit that operated in Warburg, Alberta between 1969 and 1991. This was a program that worked to rehabilitate young offenders. Some of the people who spearheaded this program are members at Lendrum and I look forward to hearing their insights into this program. I would encourage everyone to attend to learn the history of and meet some of the people who were instrumental in this organization. ♦

## Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Annual Meeting

by Dave Neufeldt

About 25 people from across Canada came together on January 13-17, 2015 to participate in the annual meetings of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) at Con-



Dave Neufeldt

rad Grebel University College in Waterloo, Ontario. Wesley Berg and I represented the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta at these meetings. The membership of MHSC consists of the six provincial Mennonite historical societies (from British Columbia to Quebec) plus representatives from some of the Mennonite church conferences and institutions. The focus of this society is to work at larger projects relating to Mennonites throughout Canada.

A major project initiated by the Archives Committee was the creation of the web-based Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID). This is a central database containing scans of the photographs located in the various Mennonite archives across Canada. MHSA is a partner in this project and will be adding its photographs to the database. The official launch of the database is expected to occur by the time this newsletter goes to publication. A training session was held which allowed us to get a feeling for how it works. We will be looking for people to assist in the uploading of the MHSA photographs into the database.

Another project of MHSC is a genealogy database designed to provide access to scans of original documents such as census and church records. This project was delayed due to lack of funds but there is hope that a beta site will be functional by 2016.

Each of the provincial societies and other MHSC members reported on their activities. These activities included hosting conferences with guest speakers, sponsoring book launches, publishing newsletters, and maintaining archives. Some of the societies are also heavily involved in translation projects and the indexing of periodicals. Several of the societies either have or will be expanding or moving to new homes. Mennonite Archives of Ontario has just completed a major expansion and we were fortunate to have a tour of their impressive new space. The Saskatchewan society is currently in the process of moving into larger premises, and the BC society will be moving into a larger space later this year.

The Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM) is a committee of MHSC that hosts academic conferences on current issues of peace and justice. In 2014 a conference on the theme "Ex-Mennonite / Near Mennonite" heard the faith / ideological journey of some who had grown up in the Mennonite church but were now affiliated with other faith groups, or no faith group. There is currently a 2016 DVCM conference being planned on "Mennonites, Land and the Environment"

Each year the MHSC presents an Award of Excellence to someone who has made a significant contribution to the advancement of Canadian Mennonite history. This year the award was presented to Sam Steiner. Sam has played key roles in both the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario and the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. He managed the Mennonite Archives of Ontario for 34 years and has published several books on the history of Mennonites in Ontario. He was also instrumental in the creation of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO).

In addition to the meetings, the hosting group organized a bus trip to visit an Old Order Mennonite church and school. The trip concluded with a meal at an Old Order home.

The entire event was very well organized and was a very rewarding experience. ♦

*((continued from page 1))*

## Context

Pacifism was a central principle of the theology developed by Menno Simons in his founding of the Mennonite faith in Holland, more than 400 years ago. As a consequence, Mennonites established communities in regions where they were not compelled to bear arms in time of war. They lived in religious/ethnic enclaves and married within their closed societies. When their faith and way of life confronted intolerable restrictions and persecution, they sought alternative sites of refuge that would allow them to live according to their beliefs. Their longest sojourn, of about 240 years, was in Prussia/Poland, and, over the course of many generations in Prussia, they came to regard themselves as German. They continued using the German language after immigrating to Russia in the late 1700s.

The first wave of Mennonite migration to Canada occurred in 1873, with settlement concentrated in Manitoba. The Government of Canada had promised these pacifist migrants freedom from military service in exchange for their work in settling and farming the Canadian west. However, when the second wave of Mennonites arrived in Canada, fleeing the Russian civil war and the imposition of communism in the 1920s, this privilege of military exemption was not repeated. Moreover, as plans for the war effort in WWII were underway, the 1873 promise was lost in negotiations between Mennonite leaders and Canadian government officials.

In the years of peace between WWI and WWII, the topic of bearing arms or the prospect of alterna-



**Board Members and Friends of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada at the Annual General Meeting in Waterloo, Ontario**

tive service was seldom if ever discussed with the younger generation. The over-riding concern, of course, was how to ensure survival during the years of the Great Depression. Throughout this period, the immigrant generation remained committed to their Mennonite culture of living apart and speaking German, a form of social organization that was reinforced by their isolation on prairie farms and the difficulties of learning the English language. Mennonite immigrants paid their taxes, and voted, primarily for the Liberal party, since the Liberals had allowed them into Canada, and, they sent their children to public schools.

### Contemplating Service

As the drums of war grew ever louder, it became clear that the Mennonite commitment to pacifism was going to require discussion, elaboration and reinforcement within Mennonite communities as well as with the federal government and the Canadian public. The leaders of the three major Mennonite Conferences - David Toews of Rosthern, Saskatchewan, Benjamin B. Janz of Coaldale, Alberta, and Jacob H. Janzen of Waterloo, Ontario - fully expected young Mennonite men to extend their peacetime community service to Canada during wartime, as **conscientious objectors**. Ontario had reactivated the Non-resistant relief organization, and in the west, Mennonites were raising money for the Red Cross; the well established Mennonite Central Committee was offering relief services of many kinds in Europe and North America.<sup>2</sup> In 1940, the three aforementioned leaders and other Mennonite spokesmen met a number of times with federal officials in Otta-

wa regarding the contributions that pacifist Mennonites could make to Canada without having to take up arms; but, no clarification or decision came out of these meetings.<sup>3</sup> The Government was consumed with war preparations.

With regard to engaging the Canadian public, David Toews explained to the public, via the media, that Mennonites may be German in a cultural sense, but their loyalties were firmly tied to Canada.<sup>4</sup> He also thanked the Canadian Pacific Railroad for transporting the Mennonite immigrants across Canada's vast lands. In Alberta, B.B. Janz wrote a letter to the Lethbridge Herald in which he praised Canada's leaders for their commitment to freedom and to upholding a democratic structure in which security and religious liberty was available to all Canadians.<sup>5</sup> He repeated these laudatory sentiments at every opportunity.

### The Onset of War

The Second World War began in September, 1939, when Germany invaded Poland on September 1. On September 3, Britain and France declared war on Germany with Canada joining them on September 10. The Canadian government immediately began enlisting volunteers to serve in the forces. While many Canadians outside of Quebec supported conscription, Prime Minister Mackenzie King was wary of the policy, given the negative history of conscription during WWI. Despite this reticence, King did introduce the *National Resources Mobilization Act* in mid 1940, which established a national registration of eligible men and authorized conscription for the defence of the home front.<sup>6</sup> Conscription requiring overseas service was not implemented until November 22, 1944.<sup>7</sup>

The Mennonites were anxious to negotiate with Ottawa to set out the terms for the kind of alternative service they were willing to offer. Prime Minister King was familiar with the Mennonites in Ontario and assured them that there was sufficient time to work out an arrangement that would accommodate their pacifist beliefs. In truth, the need for such a plan became urgent and its terms were not easily established.

Approximately 15,000 Canadian men of Mennonite heritage were eligible for military service in 1939. Just over half these men would serve as **conscientious objectors**; about 4,500 would join the armed forces, a few would join the navy and the remainder would be needed on Canadian farms.

The men who enlisted for military service felt they owed Canada a debt. They regarded their service in the military as the quid pro quo for Canada's willingness to receive them (and/or their parents) in their time of need. Of course, they had other reasons as well. For some, military service was the means to citizenship in the fullest sense of the word. They did not relish the thought of the discrimination they would encounter from non-Mennonites after the war and the negative sentiments that were meted out to military-aged men who refused to sign-up in the early stages of the war. These factors had their own disciplining effects. Some were skeptical of the Mennonite commitment to pacifism, feeling that they hadn't seen it played out in their congregations. Many didn't like the restrictions and even the intoler-



Jake Kroeker of Abbotsford, British Columbia with his Platoon

ance that was sometimes evident in Mennonite communities. Still others were simply game for adventure.

### Conscientious Objectors

In 1940, the first letters and calls were received in Mennonite homes from the Canadian Defence Department asking the named recruits to report for duty with the Canadian Armed Forces. The church leaders and the parents wanted the young men to serve as **conscientious objectors** (COs). However, in order to claim this status, the men were required to make individual statements of conviction. The procedure began with a medical examination by a local doctor, and if the young man was found to be fit for duty, he was required to appear before a judge or other registrar to undergo a rigorous interview regarding the beliefs undergirding their conscientious objection. Usually a minister would meet with the young man in advance of the interrogation to assist him in preparing his answers to the expected questions. Rev. B.B. Janz of Coaldale went further, assembling a large group of young men to school them in the history of Mennonite beliefs.



Conscientious Objector Work Camp



Mennonite Soldier

Of course, some of these young men were in full intellectual command of the rationale for their convictions and felt confident expressing themselves. But most of them were unsophisticated farm boys who found it difficult to articulate their beliefs. Moreover, whatever religious teaching they had received was in the German language, further complicating the expression of their values to the English-speaking registrars. Others knew only that they didn't want to carry a gun, but did not understand the broader commitments of non-resistance. Some were afraid to go to war, and some wanted to please their parents, and many felt all of these fears and desires at once. It was a conflicted situation for many of them.

The registrar expected the young men to articulate genuine reasons for their conscientious objection to war. Some registrars aggressively challenged the applicants, lecturing them on their patriotic duties. If the young man could not withstand the heated questioning, he did not "pass the test," and he would be directed to military



Jake Kroeker of Abbotsford, British Columbia with his Platoon



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training and army service. Other registrars were more congenial, permitting some of the young men to serve their time on the family farm, where their labour was desperately needed. Still others were granted a postponement but could be required to provide noncombatant work for the military at any time.

By May, 1941, the Government had arranged for COs to engage in service through work in the National Parks, upgrading the work camps of the depression era for the men. The first camps supported highway and road construction north of Sault Ste Marie, Ontario, near Riding Mountain National Park in Manitoba and in La Ronge, Saskatchewan. Men aged 21 to 24 were initially obligated for a four month term, but soon thereafter were recruited for the duration of the war.

In Alberta, the men were required to report to the camps, of which there were five, in Jasper National Park. Their work involved building roads and fire trails. At first they were required to work with pick and shovel, despite the obvious presence of a bulldozer, grader and a tractor. Some of the men regarded this affront as sufficiently offensive to compel them to leave and join the army. Their supervisors would eventually relent, giving the COs permission to use the machines once they recognized how conscientious and hard working the men were. The COs bulldozed brush and trees and began building the westward leg of the Yellowhead Highway. They also repaired the road to Miette, near Jasper. They built the road from Banff to the Columbia Ice Field, a walkway for tourists and a road to the ice field tea house. While the work was extremely physically de-



CO Road-Work Crew

manding, the beauty of the mountains, the high quality of the food in the camps, and their religious convictions helped to sustain them.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour in 1941, fears arose regarding the possibility of a Japanese attack on Canada's pacific coast. Envisioning the possibility of incendiary bombs being used to destroy vital forest resources, many Alberta men were relocated to Vancouver Island to train as fire fighters, then fight fires, plant trees and upgrade campsites. Their supervisors were impressed with the consistent hard work and accomplishment of the COs and the Victoria Times reported that the COs firefighting service was the best they had ever experienced.<sup>8</sup>

Reforestation was necessary after large fires. First the snags (standing dead trees) were removed and cut into cordwood. Then the men worked in crews planting 800 to 1000 trees per person per day. Crews were set up with 15 men in a line, spaced six feet apart.<sup>9</sup> Each man would plant a seedling, and then advance six feet forward. They labored six days a week, as committed to their work as to their faith. Their work ethic also served as their Christian witness.

The COs organized Sunday worship services for themselves and even began the working day with a song and a prayer. It was a rare spiritual treat to have a minister at these services. The long distances and rough roads undoubtedly contributed to the COs lack of contact with the churches. By contrast, Mennonite farm women proved adept at maintaining their ties with their CO kindred. They provided material aid with "care packages" and letters. As well, a number of married women, some with small children, moved close to the camps to facilitate a more normal domestic life.<sup>10</sup>

The COs were paid \$15.00 per month, just a portion of their wages, with the remainder of their pay donated to the Red Cross. The meager pay posed a daunting challenge for many of the farm families who relied on these monthly cheques for their subsistence. Between 1943 and 1945, the

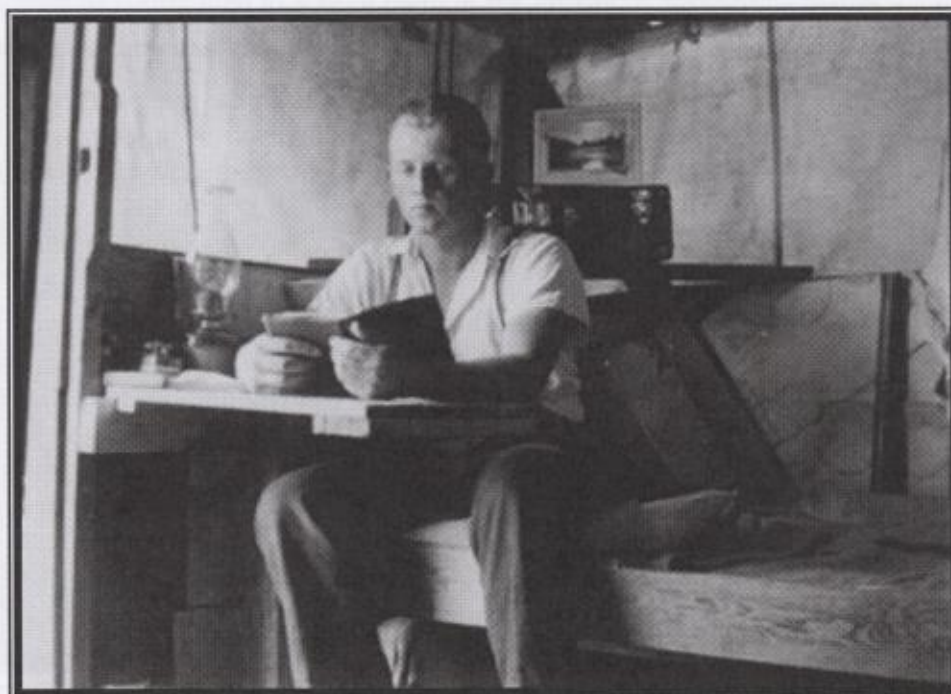


COs Hitching a Ride Back to Camp

Red Cross received more than \$2 million from CO wages.

By contrast, the men in the armed forces received their full wages, a veteran's pension, and priority access to jobs and education as a reward for their military service. During the war, military chaplains provided spiritual support.

In addition to the CO service in work camps, a September, 1943 Order in Council enabled COs to enlist in the Medical and Dental Corps, without basic military training.<sup>11</sup> Rev. B.B. Janz had repeatedly proposed this form of contribution, drawing on his prior knowledge of this work from his experiences in Russia. This new opportunity motivated some Manitoba COs



CO Walter Martens Reading His Bible

to work in the Selkirk, Manitoba Mental Hospital, as well as at Brandon and Portage la Prairie hospitals and in a military hospital in Kingston, Ontario. In Selkirk the COs were shocked at the degrading treatment that was visited on patients by the staff.<sup>12</sup> He was an opportunity for Christian service that was soon very much appreciated by the patients and their families. Ambulance service and hospital orderly work was available, and offered a welcome alternative to those who did not feel well suited to forestry service.

It is clear from even this brief description that the COs did important work, that their contributions were recognized, though modestly, at least at an official level, and that their efforts greatly benefitted the Canadian nation. Further, the constant interaction among the men, as well as with the broader Canadian population during the war, expanded their perspectives and gave them more liberal views; they became more accepting of others. They learned to communicate and empathize with people outside their own insular communities. They maintained their religious faith, but, felt free of the rigidity of the pre-war moral and social strictures. This experience was even more acute for the men who served in the armed forces.

### Women's Wartime Experiences

It should also be noted that, in Canada, approximately 55 Mennonite women enlisted in the armed forces: some served as nurses; others worked in factories and offices; and, many rose in the ranks in recognition of their excellent service.<sup>13</sup> Their church communities were, evidently, less impressed

Their wartime contributions were not acknowledged in their faith communities and nothing was said about them after the war.

On the farms many women assumed the roles of their husbands, fathers and brothers, becoming the breadwinners, as well as caring for the children and the household. Women learned to drive tractors, seeded and harvested the crops, raised chickens and hogs, while also doing the banking and other business in town. Their financial burdens were heavy since they received very little money from their male family members, and particularly so, as I've noted, if the men were COs. In 1944, the Federal Government introduced the Family Allowance, a small monthly stipend paid directly to mothers thus providing a great help to many struggling families.

Eventually these new skills and modest financial autonomy resulted in some positive changes for the women. Their world expanded, they had acquired valuable knowledge and developed confidence in themselves. They, too, had interacted with many non-Mennonites. Until the war, women had almost universally worked at home, but now they were able to find work off the farms if necessary or desired. They also discovered they were not the only Christians in society, and many secular people also shared their morals and principles. Society was less evil than they had been led to believe.

### War's End

The Mennonite leaders, B.B. Janz, David Toews, Jacob Janzen and J.H. Enns (Minister of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg) were all loving and accepting of the men who had served, whether as

COs or in the armed forces. However, some of the Mennonite churches exacted an extreme price from Mennonite men who served in the armed forces, banishing them from their church communities through excommunication. Many of these men would join other denominations, particularly the United Church, where they were warmly received and served their adopted faith communities very diligently.

In marked contrast, all Mennonite churches welcomed the return of the conscientious objectors. Many COs, however, did not return to farming having learned new skills and found other work. In some cases the farm families had managed without them for a number of years, and did not need their help.<sup>14</sup> The men soon took part in community organizations and activities and a few joined political parties. The war had greatly changed their perception of their communities, their country and their place and responsibility in it.

In reflecting on this remarkable moment in Canadian Mennonite history, it is clear that church leaders and church members ultimately concluded that we owe Canada our participation in times of peace as well as in times of war. In this age of individualism, we will each determine our duty to the state in terms of our own interpretation of religious teachings, notwithstanding the tension some of our choices may hold for our pacifist peace churches.

### Endnotes

1. My interest in this subject comes from personal experience. I had one brother who served as a CO (**conscientious objector**) in Jasper, Alberta as well as in B.C. A second brother enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force and was stationed in Glasgow, Scotland. He was a mechanic, repairing fighter-bombers that were damaged in the air war over Europe. This work was very traumatizing since every sortie resulted in the loss of friends and colleagues. During the war, my brother and I exchanged letters regularly, and years later we chatted on the phone every other week until his death, but we never spoke about the war. It was simply too painful for him. I also have a brother-in law who served in the army. He was sent to the Aleutian Islands off the Alaska coast, where, after the debacle of Pearl Harbour, his unit was assigned to prevent the Japanese from invading the U.S.

2. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 575.

3. T.D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: A People Transformed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 42.

4. Ibid.

5. "Canadian Mennonites Loyal to New Fatherland Leader Coaldale Colony Declares," *Lethbridge Herald*, 1 June 1940, 14.

6. Canadian War Museum. "Canada and the War: Politics and Government: Conscription." Online: [http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/conscription\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/newspapers/canadawar/conscription_e.shtml). Nd.

7. Ibid.

8. Regehr, 52.

9. Elizabeth Suderman Klassen, "Alternative Service Work as Reflected in The Beacon" in *Alternative Service for Peace in Canada during World War II*

1941-1946, A.J. Klassen ed. (Abbotsford: Mennonite Central Committee (BC) Seniors for Peace, 1998), 26.

10. Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008), 205.

11. Ibid., 54.

12. John Derksen, "A Costly but Influential Counterculture: A Review of Four Works on War-time Pacifism" *Journal of Mennonite Studies* 25(2007): 164.

13. Regehr, 58.

14. Ibid. 59.

Note: Photos used with permission by Mary Ann Janzten, MHSBC. ❖

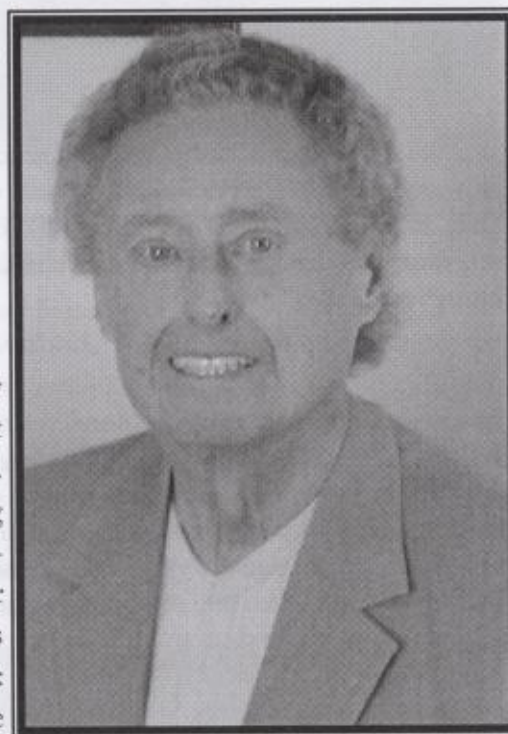
## OBITUARY for DAVID HILDEBRAND

(July 19, 1938 –  
January 20, 2015)

Courtesy of the *Calgary Herald*  
dated February 2, 2015

David passed away peacefully with his loving family by his side at the Peter Lougheed Hospital. Dave was a devoted and loving husband, father, father-in-law, uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather and friend. He is survived by his wife Kay, their three children: Gordon, Donna, and Ina; five granddaughters and seven great-grandchildren. Although we feel the pain of loss, we take comfort in

knowing his warm laughter and humour lasted until the end; he had no fear and asked his family to be happy and love each other. We now reflect on the happiness of a life well lived. A Celebration of Life Service was held on Saturday, February 14, from 11:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the Calgary Inter-Mennonite Church, 1308 Edmonton Trail NE, Calgary. If desired, a donation in Dave's memory may be made to the Scleroderma Society, Calgary.



Dave Hildebrand

### MHSA Lending/Travelling Library Coming Soon!

Pending MHSA Board approval, a MHSA Lending Library will soon open at First Mennonite Church in Edmonton. Kathy Ma will assume the volunteer librarian position. If you are interested in serving as a volunteer librarian in a new lending/travelling library in the Coaldale or Lethbridge Mennonite Church, please contact Lil Bartel.

## TRIBUTE TO DAVE HILDEBRAND

(1938-2015)

by Irene Klassen

Dave walked into the office of Mennonite Historical Society (which was at that time located on the mezzanine level of the MCC Thrift Store) looking for help with finding out about



Irene Klassen

his ancestry. Of course, Judith Rempel always helpful, was able to tell him what to do and to show him where to look. A few weeks later, he came again, and one thing led to another. He seemed to sense that we needed help in the construction of the facility and soon he was volunteering his own expertise. He built shelves and desks and always had helpful suggestions.

When construction began on the new phase, he got huge sheets of plastic, tacked them up like curtains in front of the book shelves so the books were still accessible but protected from the dust. He worked well with other volunteers helped with the painting and the flooring and wherever else needed. When the vault was ready and the mobile shelving was installed, he procured the metal sheets to build a cover over them thus protecting the historical material against possible sprinkler damage.

He built the time capsule which we filled, sealed and tucked away in the wall of the vault.

Always the handyman, he, with others, built the table to hold the

filing cabinets and attached casters so it could be moved wherever convenient.

Under Judii's supervision, he learned to do the layout for the newsletters, found the best printer, and, later helped stuff and mail them.

When Dave moved out of town, working at the MHSA office wasn't so convenient but he still visited regularly and continued to work with the newsletter.

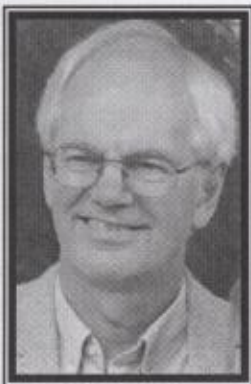
Dave suffered several bouts of illnesses but he kept bouncing back, was always cheerful and ready to go on. He was modest and never really acknowledged his many gifts and abilities.

Dave Hildebrand was a quiet, gentle man who helped build the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta through his works and his faith. ❖

## GLOBAL ANABAPTIST MENNONITE ENCYCLOPEDIA ONLINE (GAMEO)

by Wesley Berg

The meetings of the GAMEO Canadian editorial committee, on which I represent the MHSA, and of the MHSC that Dave



Wes Berg

Neufeldt and I attended, took place in Kitchener Waterloo this year. The GAMEO meeting occurred a day earlier than usual

because of the training sessions scheduled for the photo database project (MAID) to be described later.

The transition of GAMEO's financial operations to the Mennonite World Conference has gone smoothly and negotiations with other historical societies in the United States and elsewhere, as well as other encyclopedias in Germany and Paraguay continue to move ahead. There is talk, for example, of sharing articles with the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*, although a brief discussion of one article that had already appeared in the *Lexikon* revealed some issues of editorial policy that will have to be resolved. GAMEO will have a booth as part of its presence at the Mennonite World Conference sessions in Pennsylvania this summer.

The task of the Canadian editorial committee increasingly provides templates for prospective article writers. My task for this year's meeting was to produce a template for writing about musical compositions. Along with that, I wrote a sample article on the Mennonite Piano Concerto which many readers will have heard. The template can be found under the Help section on the left hand side of the home page of the website and the article can be found in the usual way for those interested in seeing what I have done.

Dave will report on the Canadian Society meeting but I will mention that I took part in the training sessions for the new photo data base, MAID (Mennonite Archival Image Database). It is a really impressive achievement, with thousands of images already in place, and it should be a very interesting site to explore when it opens in the next month or so. Check the HMSC website for dates.

This year, the Friday afternoon tour took us to an Old Order Mennonite meeting house, where, in an unheated room at -18 degrees Celsius, a deacon introduced us to the principles of *Gelassenheit* (humility) and *Gemeinschaft* (unity and community) that undergird the Old Order Mennonite way of life. The deacon then put on his school teacher hat and spent an hour with us in his classroom talking about the goals and methods of an Old Order Mennonite parochial school education. One display of essays and art work on the wall that captured the contrast between his students and the average Canadian student showed the students writing about and illustrating the most wonderful invention. Manure spreaders, balers, intelligent hoes and a Super Dooper Cleaner Upper that would tidy up the yard, including what the horses had left behind, were in stark contrast to the flying car that my grandson told me he would invent! An Old Order family then served twenty of us a feast of homemade sausage, shoofly and raspberry pie along with garden mint tea.

I invite anyone interested in local history to check the articles in GAMEO that deal with people, towns, congregations or institutions in Alberta that might be of interest. Many are short and incomplete, especially when drawn from the print version of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. If you wish to help rectify those shortcomings, please get in touch with me at [wberg@ualberta.ca](mailto:wberg@ualberta.ca) and we can work together to make the encyclopedia better. ❖



## The History of Mennonite Mutual Insurance Company and Mutual Aid in Alberta

by Ken Ritchie, FCIP, General Manager and CEO, Mennonite Mutual Insurance Co. (Alberta) Ltd. and Mennonite Insurance Agency LTD.

In 1960, the provincial legislature of Alberta passed into law *An Act to Incorporate the Mennonite Mutual Relief Insurance Co. Ltd.* (MMRIC). That legislation began by stating:

Therefore, Her Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Legislative Assembly of the Province of Alberta, enacts as follows:

1. Jacob J. Klassen, Manager, Abraham Nikkel, Farmer, H.H. Siemens, Farmer, all of the town of Coaldale, in the province of Alberta; George I. Penner, Farmer and Dietrich Dyck, Farmer, both of Rosemary in the Province of Alberta, together with such persons as become policyholders on the mutual system in the company, are incorporated under the name of "Mennonite Mutual Relief Insurance Co. Ltd." hereinafter called "The Company."

2. The persons named in Section 1 of this Act shall be provisional directors of the Company.

3. The head office of the Company shall be in the Town of Coaldale in the Province of Alberta.

Thus began the legal incorporation of the company that, today, is Mennonite Mutual Insurance Co. (Alberta) Ltd. (MMI) which also owns a



Ken Ritchie

subsidiary company, Mennonite Insurance Agency Ltd. However, mutual aid among the Mennonites of Alberta began long before 1960. Among the company's records are documents dating back to 1918 from the Didsbury area. The original, handwritten ledgers and receipts for premium payments were all in German and remained that way until gradual use of English entered the records, interspersed with German, throughout the 1940s to 1970s. In fact, one document from December, 1960, written by a representative from one of the Mennonite churches, included his words:

"Having ... applied for a release of my duties as local representative of the Mennonite Mutual Relief Insurance Co. Ltd. .... It would be to the advantage of our locality to have a person who has the ability to express himself in the countries language, to represent us on interim and annual meetings." This letter was carefully typed, no doubt with the assistance of someone who was fluent in the country's language.

While the incorporation indicated the first Head Office as being in Coaldale, pockets of mutual aid had been operating for decades before 1960 in various places where Mennonites lived around Alberta, including Didsbury, Castairs, Rosemary, Gem, Acm, Calgary, Edmonton, Three Hills, Linden, Pincher Creek and Tofield as well as some small Mennonite settlements such as Namak, Sunnyslope, Hoadley and Swalwel. Mutual Aid was also practised in La Crete in the years following 1960 until their local organization also joined the provincial company in 1975.



George I. Penner  
Rosemary

J. J. Klassen  
Coaldale

H. Thiessen  
Grassy Lake

H. H. Siemens  
Gem

1960

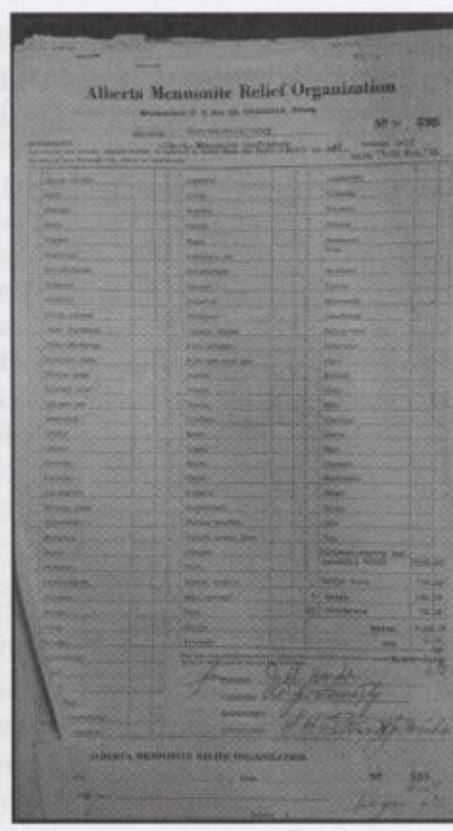
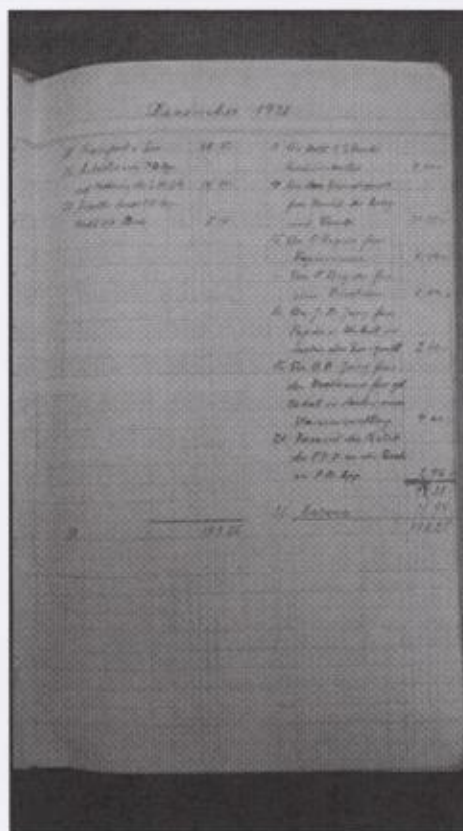
MMI Board in 1960

In the years before the incorporation of MMRIC, the organization was known as the Mennonite Provincial Relief Committee of Alberta and had its headquarters in Coaldale, AB. Although there was no office as such, and business was conducted by the committee members from their homes or businesses. In the earlier decades (1940s and before) the organization was referred to as "*Mennonitischen Feuerversicherung*" in German and was also simultaneously known as "Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance" in English.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the local fire insurance representatives in Carstairs and Didsbury also collected premiums and paid claims from Mennonites who lived in parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba where, in the early years, there were similar small Mennonite mutual aid organizations scattered throughout. Eventually all of those groups consolidated into either the Saskatchewan company known as Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company, which today is based in Waldheim, SK, or Red River Mutual, which is based in Altona, MB.

Since 1960, MMI has been incorporated only in Alberta and has only placed insurance on properties in this province. In recent years, our subsidiary, **Mennonite Insurance Agency Ltd.**, has become licensed to write business, as a broker, in British Columbia and Saskatchewan.

For many years there was a Mennonite Burial Aid Fund. That fund was presumably available to assist those families who were hard pressed financially to deal with the loss of a loved one. At the combined MCC/MMRIC annual meeting in 1974, which was held at the Rosemary Mennonite Church, a motion was passed stating, "That



Early MMI Ledgers

the plan be allowed to phase out" and "The local churches be responsible for determining the need of the person or family and refer those situations requiring financial support to the MCC Executive." However before that motion was passed after the discussion period, it was noted that, "...we should perhaps think of the Coaldale area where there is a large number of older people."

From the earliest days, the work of MMI and its predecessor organizations has been marked by the volunteer service of representatives from the member churches. In the early years, correspondence was always done directly with the church representative and the name of the "company" was rarely even mentioned. Much of the correspondence, including premium payments, was done by mail and some of the correspondence included personal notes, such as comments on the weather. For example, "...it has been too cold for my liking" or, "...please increase our limit of insurance by \$10, as we purchased a bathtub this year" or, a combination of business and personal such as, "...their ten month old son is the sunshine of the home. Enclosed you will find the \$2.60." (That, incidentally, was one person's annual premium in 1960.)

MMI's history has also had a strong component of financial donations to both Mennonite Central Committee (Alberta) as well as the MMI Compassion Fund, a fund which allows the company to partner on a 50/50 basis with member churches to assist people with special needs in their own communities. In recent decades, the donations to MCC have been calculated at 20% of the profit earned by MMI in each year if there has been a profit. The Compassion Fund has been established as 1% of accumulated capital of MMI per year. Since 1975, MMI has donated a total of more than

\$2,500,000 to MCC and the Compassion Fund.

Today, MMI policyholders continue to be served by volunteer treasurers and adjusters in many local church congregations as well as a volunteer board, the only such board in any Canadian insurance company. However, the technical challenges of competing in the modern financial services sector are changing MMI's traditional way of doing business. Today we deal with the increasing importance of automobile and commercial insurance products, the use of advanced technology in managing our business, strict and detailed financial reporting and analysis, as well as the rapidly expanding role of government authorities in the regulation and oversight of all of our operations. In the past decade these changes have made it increasingly necessary for MMI to employ skilled professionals in many aspects of our company's operations.

As we enter 2015, we look back with some satisfaction on 2014 which saw strong growth and profit from our operations and the potential for a significant donation to MCC early in 2015. Today the company has a clearly defined target market that serves evangelical Christians in Alberta. While the scope of who we can accept as a policyholder has broadened beyond strictly church members, the governance of MMI remains with the member churches. The churches send delegates to the MMI Annual General Meeting and it is those delegates who elect the company's board and which sets the strategic direction for Mennonite Mutual. ❖

## Review of Roger Epp's, *We Are All Treaty People- Prairie Essays*, The University of Alberta Press, Ring House 2, Edmonton, 2008

*Reviewed by Henry M. Dick, Edmonton*



Henry M. Dick

The ten essays written over a period of about fifteen years have two main themes. The first is a personal quest to discover what the author terms, identity for "belonging," and for "place" on the land with which he identifies and which has shaped him. Having grown up in a rural prairie setting the author, with newly minted PhD (Political Science), accepts a faculty position in a small-town university surrounded by settled prairie - Treaty 6 land - near an inconsequential river. It is land bearing the legacy of the Cree hunting parties, the Metis settlements and the white ranchers who first occupied these lands. It is in this setting that the author discovers for himself a sense of "home."

The feeling of 'homelessness' is a familiar experience in the author's family history. Mennonites who escaped Stalin's Bolshevism lost their land, their identity and their citizenship. The fortunate ones found a new home on the 'unoccupied spaces' of the western prairies - land taken from its previous owners by treaty-breaking.

These Mennonite settlers had been "populist" in the way they ran their villages in Russia and, in their new home, were attracted to the agrarian

populist movements that resisted the capitalists (railroads, banks, grain companies) that threatened to take control of the prairie agrarian economy. However, when such movements (United Farmers of Alberta and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation) became politically organized and included in their platforms agrarian land reform, placing control in the hands of community co-operatives instead of state forms of social ownership (reminiscent of Stalin's land collectivization), and when the 'enemy alien' label was again being applied to conscientious objectors during the war years, they abandoned these agrarian populist movements and looked to established government (Liberal) to protect and defend their negotiated privileges and exemptions.

The second theme is "land" - to whom does the land belong? Who determines how it is to be used? What are the historical versus modern cultural characteristics of agrarian communities? What are the politics affecting the ownership of land and the agrarian economy? What is the current status of the farmer and what are his concerns for the future? The serf who tilled the land at the behest of the king in 14th century England had by the 20th century advanced to producer-citizen status with the capacity to participate in making farm policy. The prairie farmer today, increasingly dependent on complex chemicals, genetically modified seeds, high tech machinery and partnership arrangements with multinational corporations and banks, is seeing his influence on decisions affecting his welfare being eroded. Additionally, the urbanization of western society has led to political decision-making processes giving preferential consideration to urban

versus rural interests. Some farmers fear that these realities may eventually return him to 'bio-serf' status.

One cannot discuss "land" issues without reference to the troubling history of the treatment of the Aboriginal peoples. Apologies relating to past suppression of their culture and dispossession of their traditional lands, and verbal commitments to a future new relationship have not yet translated into action plans. The author, in suggesting a way forward, feels that Mennonites, having in their history experienced dispossession, being sensitive to their complicity in treaty breaking and as settlers on lands bearing the legacy of the Aborigines, should be well equipped to participate in fostering a new relationship based on understanding, respect and neighborliness. Only as we begin to address the "settler problem" vs the "Indian problem" will it be possible to move from "Truth and Reconciliation" conversations to a healthy coexistence with the first nations people in our communities.

The author's descriptions of the place he came to recognize as "home" rekindled in this reader a nostalgia for past times and places and the rural prairie home that seemed simpler and more wholesome than today's complex urban jungle. The review of prairie politics and social/demographic dynamics that have transformed, and continue to transform, the prairies and prairie life, provide an important foundation for understanding our collective "place." The notion that "We Are All Treaty People" challenges each of us to think more carefully about the land we occupy and to honor those whose legacy is so intimately linked with our own. ♦

## The History and Art of Mennonite Cooking and Baking: What I Learned in My Lifetime

by Kathy Peters

### Tweebak for Faspa

In an Edmonton high school on a Friday afternoon a few years ago my granddaughter exclaimed, "We are going to the farm to see grandma and grandpa and we will have *Faspa*, with *Tweebak*, *Plantz* and more." Her teacher said, excitedly, "*Faspa?* *Tweebak?*" It turned out they both had "Mennonite" heritage, although they did not have typical Mennonite names.

That weekend at the farm, they received their repast of *Tweebak* (double-decker butter buns) which were a "must" at grandma's house when the grandchildren arrived. Some years later when my granddaughter was at University in Ottawa, a message arrived that she had a yearning for buns, she scanned the Internet and requested the recipe for Grandma's buns, up came a recipe for *Zwieback*. And so, she baked buns.

My family is now the fourth generation to bake the double-decker butter buns in Canada. My mother-in-law's recipe called for six cups of whole milk, one cup of farm cream and one pound of butter. The recipes were brought from Russia and one story I heard was that the double-decker buns had originated in the Molotschna. If they were made double height the buns were too big for the Old Colony visitors to stuff into their pockets when they were going home!



Kathy Peters



Peters' Family Saying Grace before Celebrating a Meal Together

The *Tweebak*, when not all eaten right away, were cut up, roasted and eaten as rusks (*Reeschkje Tweebak*) dunked in coffee. Rusks kept well and were a vital food for people when they travelled. Stories abound of sacksful prepared for the trip out of Russia on the way to America. Apparently the emigrants had to supply their own food up to the German border. Rusks are still a favorite with some of our family members.

*Faspa* was a common meal for busy Saturdays and quiet Sundays. It was a light lunch that took the place of supper, the evening meal. As mentioned *Faspa* consisted of bread, butter and jam. In summer *Plautz* was a very popular dessert that had a dough base which evolved from various recipes. The base is covered with a layer of fruit, sprinkled with sugar, cinnamon and covered with "Rubels" (coarse crumbs) of butter, flour and sugar. Oh how yummy! In our home the summer *Plautz* was usually of rhubarb, but mother and others made it with whatever fruit was available in season such as Saskatoon berries and apples.

### *Paska* and *Portselkje* for Special Days

In our home, rich buns were baked for special occasions like Christmas and Easter. They were served along with brown and white bread "*Bulch*" for *Faspa*. The buns were not to be spread with butter as they were rich enough. I do remember having jam and often peanut butter mixed with syrup. Sometimes cheese was added to the meal but the addition of meat came later in more affluent times. Mother would often add a treat when she prepared the buns. She would roll dough into thin ropes between her hands and keep rolling until they were in a tight knot, then baked. The resulting *Kringel*, were very crunchy.

Desserts were not common in our home. Easter's specialty was *Paska*. My parents and in-laws came to Canada in 1924 and brought this custom with them, but my friends whose forebears came in the 1870s migration

were unfamiliar with *Paska*. The Easter bread is a Russian and Ukrainian custom. When my sister and I visited Russia in 1987 we saw *Paska* in cemeteries placed at the headstone in the same manner we place flowers for our loved ones.

*Paska* is a sweet yeast bread that contained a lot of eggs. The dough was set to rise in decorative syrup or peanut butter containers. The dough would rise and bubble over the edge to make the bread look like giant mushrooms. After baking, the bread was cooled iced and colorful decorations sprinkled on top.

At Christmas, sweets were cookies. There were Ammonite cookies (I believe my mother iced them) and several kinds of jam-filled honey cookies. One Ammonite cookie recipe called for the dough to be cured in the basement for a few days before it was baked, cooled and covered with cooked icing. Date-filled oatmeal cookies continue to remain a favorite in our home. These recipes were common among my parent's people but I am not sure if all of the recipes came from Russia. Mother also made a rich layered walnut cake at Christmas.

Another seasonal food which has endured for many generations in Canada is New Year's dumplings or fritters (*Portselkje*). Sweet yeast dough with raisins deep-fried in hot fat then rolled in sugar.

### *Rollkuchen* and *Vereneki*

Other dough recipes included "*Rollkuchen*." Mother-in-law's recipe was: three eggs, three heaping teaspoons of baking powder and three quarters of a cup of rich



July 22, 1956 wedding reception of Kathy (Goerzen) and Ed Peters

farm cream. Soft dough was rolled out, cut into small strips and cooked in hot fat. *Rollkuchen* and watermelon were a lunch time favorite from way back in the old country where the stories of delicious watermelons from the *Bes-taun* (melon patch) abounded. In our home, *Rollkuchen* were also made when the supply of bread ran low. I have read that this menu was so common in Paraguay during certain seasons that the people became malnourished from lack of a balanced diet.

Apple and other fruit dump-lings deep fried in fat, were popular for lunch. *Vereneki* were common. These were squares of dough filled with cottage cheese, boiled and served with cream gravy. They could also be filled with fruit such as Saskatoon berries or damson plums (*Kriekle*) which were my father-in-law's favorite. They were acquainted with the damson plums from Russia.

With a name like *Vereneki*, I am sure that it was a food adopted from the Russians. Mother-in-law had an anecdote from Russia about *Vereneki*. As a young girl, she was sent into the kitchen to assist the maids in making these cottage cheese pockets. The family was expecting company and the maids said that they needed to impress the guests so they made extra dainty *Vereneki*. They proceeded to make miniscule pockets. My mother-in-law later realized the maids had pulled a fast one on her.

### *Pflintzen and Kielke*

Pancakes could be made thick and big or very thin ones, called *Pflintzen*. They would be filled at the table with jam, fruit or a sauce and then rolled up and eaten.



*Faspa with Uncle Nicolai Wiens visiting from Russia in 1969*

Our gardens provided a lot of the family food. Potatoes were a staple and were served mashed, baked or pan fried. They were used in most soups such as green bean, butter soup or borscht all seasoned with garden herbs like parsley, dill and summer savoury.

To make a special meal of potatoes, mother would make *Kielke* and mix them with cubed potatoes and smother with gravy. *Kielke* were big soft noodles. They are not the same as egg noodles which were made from many eggs and flour then rolled thin and cut very fine. Egg noodles were commonly used for chicken noodle soup.

### *Fruit and Schmoorkohl*

Not much fruit could be grown in our area of Alberta around Didsbury. Besides rhubarb we had wild fruit such as Saskatoon berries and chokecherries. Mother would can Saskatoon berries, make them into pies and Plautz or we would eat them fresh with cream. Chokecherries were difficult to eat raw as they were very tart. They were cooked, strained to remove the pits and cooked for jam but the product would not jell. So we used the chokecherry sauce as pancake syrup. Further south, around Rosemary and Coaldale apples and raspberries could be grown.

The areas in Russia from which our people came had a lot of fruit, they must have really missed the fruit in Canada. I know our people were very involved with drying fruit when in season. In our home, dried fruit was purchased in large boxes and used during the winter. A common use was in "*Plume Mousse*" dried fruit cooked in water, sweetened and thickened as

necessary. I remember eating this for special occasions such as Christmas. Mother also cooked cabbage and added sliced fruit. This compote was left to simmer on the back of the stove and was called "*Schmoorkohl*." Fruit was purchased in limited quantities in summer, canned and served on Sundays for *Faspa* when company was present.

### **Borscht and Beets**

In summer we had green onions, radishes, kohlrabi, carrots, peas and turnips eaten raw or cooked. Every fall, sauerkraut was made, which provided our vitamin C. Green bean soup with a ham bone base was flavored with summer savoury. Cabbage, potatoes and onions were always a part of the meat based *Borscht*. Tomatoes were always added to soup. Summer *Borscht* also had a ham bone base and consisted of fresh, cubed potatoes and greens from the garden. Soups were a common meal and easy to make when the garden was producing.

Beets were used in beet borscht, pickled or pan fried with onions or cooked as Harvard beets. Cucumbers were eaten raw and greatly desired for dills. In Canada they were dilled in jars and crocks, but could also be put up in barrels. Barrels were also used for pickling small watermelons.

### **Chickens, Liver Sausage and Graewe Schmort**

Chickens and ducks would be stuffed with fruit dressing and roasted, a common meal often prepared for Sunday. In the early years on the farm our parents had sheep. Mutton had to be served piping hot or it was difficult to swallow. My sister Susie says that mother would cook a very tasty mutton soup with a recipe from Russia, called "*Solauntche*".

Pork was the staple and butchering methods used in Russia were brought to Canada. Butchering day was a big event to which other families were invited to help. Often the helpers would come for breakfast. The day started with the slaughter of a big sow, scalding it and then removing all the bristles with big, sharp knives. The animal was eviscerated and the heart and liver saved, the latter for liver sausage. The intestines were cleaned, turned inside out and scoured. They were put aside to be stuffed with ground pork mixed with some fat and salt. The sausage was cured and preserved in the smoke house. The fat was cut up, ground and rendered in a big kettle or cauldron (*Miagrope*). Pork ribs were added and cooked until done. They were placed into a crock and covered with rendered fat to be preserved.

The lard was cooked and strained into a bucket. When the lard had cooled it was transferred to smaller containers. The bottom residue in the cauldron consisted of very fine crackles or cracklings (ground bacon) and lard, called "*Graewe Schmort*" or crackle lard. We got this tasty spread for our school lunches while it lasted.



**Peters' children: Diane, Bruce, & Delores making Kielbasa**

The liver sausage and strips of skin were cooked along with the pig's feet. The cooked pig's fat was put into crocks and covered with whey to be eaten cold or fried. The skin was ground up along with bits of meat and cooked in stock. This was placed in a container and left to jell in a headcheese, later cut up and alternately covered with whey to be preserved. Headcheese was served cold or fried with potatoes. The hams were salted down and left for some weeks, then cured in the smoke house.

In the years when our houses were poorly insulated and we did not have warm clothing, our bodies did well on this diet. Times have changed, butchering pigs is no longer done on the family farm but some of the sausage recipes are still used in commercial meat markets today.

My daughter, a nurse in Stein

bach worked for some time with a Mennonite doctor and quoted him as saying; "*De Mennoniten frauted sich roll schweenflesch en dann äten se bovagret to Freeschtick en dann balanced dant ut*". [Mennonites voraciously eat pork, then oatmeal for breakfast to achieve a balanced diet]

The one meat that we do not remember well is beef. Surely they used it in Russia but I have no stories. When freezers became common, so did beef, because it could now be kept frozen. Earlier, my mother canned what could not be eaten right away or temporarily kept it cold in the ice cellar.

### Giving Thanks

Every meal began with giving thanks. Our parents never forgot that food was not to be taken for granted and that God was the giver of all good things, especially our daily bread. Many of our generation had parents who experienced famine and revolution following WWI and many had relatives that stayed back when our parents came to Canada. Those relatives got to experience the starvation years during and after WWII. There was a tradition of thanksgiving. A story in our family was that great grandmother always insisted on an empty chair at the table . . . a chair for an invisible but ever present Christ.

Kathy Peters, a retired nurse and farmer lives in Olds. Born and raised in Rosebud Coulee she farmed 57 years with her husband Ed at Didsbury. Kathy enjoyed hiking in the Rockies and now quilts items for the MCC Sale. ❖

(continued from page 1)

The baby for whom it was made for was born in Russia in 1927 and lived for only twenty-three days. The condition of artifacts and the family stories accompanying them poignantly tell tales of the hardships and joys faced by Mennonites who emigrated to Canada from Russia in the late 1800s and early 1900s.

On November 1, 2014, Andrea Dyck, curator of the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, was the guest speaker at the fall conference in First Mennonite Church Edmonton of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Dyck displayed a number of small artifacts and photos as a way to viscerally connect her audience to the stories of their Russian Mennonite ancestors. "Contact with these things helps people remember their own stories," she said. Among the artifacts were baby clothes, hand stitched items from a hope chest, a family Bible, a few coins and many stories. "Looking at objects like these . . . I often think of the emigration stories that the objects can tell . . . in

many instances, these things are just the stuff of everyday life. What on earth might the original owners think of all of this?"

As time goes on and the original immigrants age and pass away, stories are in danger of being lost. "The distance between the pioneer existence and the kids who are ten years old is a lot different than it was in the '60s," Dyck commented. The museum's mission statement is: "To preserve and exhibit, for present and future generations, the experience and story of the Russian Mennonites and their contributions to Manitoba."

Of the approximately forty people who attended Dyck's presentation, only a few were under the age of sixty. Asked why younger people do not seem to be interested, MHSA chair, Dave Neufeldt (one of the "youngsters") was thoughtful. He did not assume that younger people were not interested in their history. "It's an interesting thing. It has to do with your time of life. When you have young kids, history can wait,"



Curator Andrea Dyck displays Historical Artifacts



Kathy Ma and Ellie Janz Enjoying the Conference

Neufeldt said.

Kathy Ma, the youngest attendee, has two small children, aged three and ten months. She is intensely interested in history. "What does it mean to be a Mennonite? How do people of my generation honour the people who came before us and their experiences?" Ma asked. "How do we pass that along to our children in a world of me, myself and iPods?"

Dyck's excitement about the artifacts and stories of Russian Mennonites was infectious. Many personal stories were exchanged among participants during fasma served by the First Mennonite Church hostesses. Dyck is passionate about helping people remember their stories. She wondered aloud, "What are the things that sum up Mennonite history and life in 2014? If you know the answer, please come talk to me!"

This report first appeared in the November 24, 2014 issue of the *Canadian Mennonite*. ❖

## Ravenhead Remembered

By Dave Toews

*(This is a continuation of an article that first appeared in the October 2015 edition of the MHS.A Newsletter)*

When my mother came to visit me, she could only look through the window in the door; a painful, tearful experience for a young boy. When she later returned to take me home, there was a big snow storm and the train had to be rerouted through Saskatoon. We stayed in a hotel and ate in restaurants, quite an adventure for a six year old farm boy. The trip took

two days rather than two hours.

It's clear from my report card that English was not my mother tongue. My

language grades; oral, printing and spelling improved slowly throughout that first year. My sister Anna Marie, two years ahead of me, had brought English home to us, and had had a bit of practise. Under "Character and Citizenship" part shows that I may have been somewhat of a reluctant student, and first few years.

Our teacher Mr. Mike Shklanka, two years out of Normal School, lived with his parents on a neighbouring farm and drove his new 1951 Ford to school everyday. He was very proud of his car; it is visible in the school picture. He was able to contact Mike in December 2010. At 80 years of age, he is long retired after a 36



Mr. Mike Shklanka

year teaching career. When I called him, he knew immediately who I was and inquired about my siblings Anna Marie and Ernie by name. I asked Mike if he would write about his experiences of teaching at Ravenhead. Unfortunately he declined; he was busy writing his memoirs. He mentioned I had recently returned from Ukraine. Later in an email he noted "I too was in Ukraine in the summer of 1973, as a member of



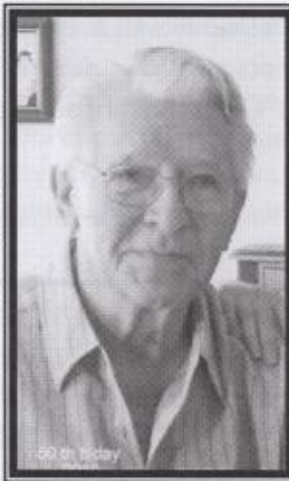
David Toews

group of Teachers of Ukrainian in Canada studying at the Kyiv Taras Shevchenko University. (Those were the Brezhnev years! We had lots of surveillance.)"

Some of the best times we had were going to and from school. Always an adventure. Running barefoot through spring rains, crunching over fall leaves and skiing in the winter over the crystalline snow. All we had were basic wooden skis, with homemade leather harness straps over our boots. We walked south along the dirt road to Louie Johnson's corner, where Anna Marie and I met our cousins Elizabeth and Hilda and continued past Johnson's slough. Along the winding path and up the steep treed hillside beyond, down Mike Pyra's big hill and through the fence we went into the schoolyard.

We were not a pampered lot, through rain, hail and sleet, through snow storms and sub-zero temperatures we endured. Our parents warned us to be careful, but we were never driven to school. There were some dangerous times; being chased by a bull, lost in a snow-storm and fording swollen creeks during spring run-off. Fortunately no one was ever seriously hurt!

The school, a one room building covered with red asphalt brick siding, heated with a 45 gallon barrel heater was constructed in 1914 at the cost of \$1365.00. The horse barn/wood shed cost \$120.00, the teacher's resi-



Mike Shklanka in 2010

dence was added in 1930. The enrolment peaked in the 1930s at 29 and had dwindled to 13 when the school was closed in 1954 after my grade two year. For the start of my third year we were bussed on Freddie Prystupa's bus to the Mayfair town school. It was the beginning of school centralization in Saskatchewan. And a whole new world opened up to me.

Ravenhead School was at the hub of our lives for ten months of the year. There were exciting games to be played at recess and noon hour; prisoner's base, hide and seek in the bush and barn, and of course softball. In winter we ate frozen lunches huddled around the blazing heater, drinking hot cocoa from our thermoses. The Christmas Concert was the highlight of the first half of the year. The temporary stage was of planks set up on sawhorses, with bed sheets for curtains strung up with safety pins on a wire. All the students were in several plays and skits. Mr Shklanka stood behind the curtain prompting us as we stumbled through our lines. People came from miles around, dressed in their Sunday best. The Ukrainian ladies all had fancy fur coats, much to our mother's chagrin. And of course Santa came at the end of the evening to hand out Christmas goody bags and a few presents. There was always the smell of a strange brew on his breath, much to our parents disapproval. Along with the passing out of report cards, the July 1 sports/field day signalled the end of the school year. I don't remember any success at sports at that time, it wasn't until I was 12 that I blossomed as an athlete.

Today the school site is a canola field farmed by my cousin Stuart

### Dave Toews' Report Cards