



# Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XIX Number 2

June 2016

## Rethinking Mennonite History in Light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

Holding the stone hammer head my father found while cultivating, my imagination runs wild. I wonder who lived on the family farm east of Didsbury before we did? Who used this tool to break bison bones, or to pound in pegs to hold down the hide covering for a tent? What were their hopes and dreams as they stared up at the big



Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

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## The Crowfoot Settlement

by  
Dave Hubert

“What is life? It is the flash of a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in winter-time. It is a little shadow that runs across the grass and loses itself in the sunset.” Crowfoot, Chief of the Blackfoot nation.

In September, 1925, a small group of Mennonite refugees from Russia arrived in Mazeppa, south of Calgary, to begin a new life in Canada. These Mennonites, who had come to Canada via Southampton and Quebec City, came from various places in Russia—Crimea, Molotschna, and Neu Samara were all represented. In Mazeppa, they were taken in by a small community of Swiss Mennonites, a community that has since disappeared.

The Mennonites came with the assistance of the CPR and most, but not all, owed Reiseschuld to the CPR for the money advanced to bring them to Canada.(1) They came to Canada planning to settle in the new community of Crowfoot, one mile north of the CPR line on land that straddled what later became Highway 56 where the road intersects with the Trans Canada Highway, some 70 miles south east of Calgary, on prairie land purchased from the CPR by the Crowfoot Farming Company (CFC). The land had no improvements. A ferry crossed the Bow River a mile and a half south of the settlement.

Annie Nachtigal—later Annie Warkentin—born in Crimea, recalls living in a granary to start her life in Canada. The family had brought along

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Dave Hubert



Crowfoot Ferry crossing the Bow River

## Editorial Reflections:

by

*Dave Toews*

Papaschase Chief Calvin Bruneau concluded his talk stating, "Building bridges and telling stories that don't fit the paradigm, that's what it's all about."

Helping to organize the Spring Conference gave me the opportunity to get to know all four conference speakers: Roger Epp, Ike and Millie Glick and Calvin Bruneau. It also increased my knowledge regarding the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I have not always been a great advocate of social justice but one thing I want



**Dave Toews**

to be sure of is to be part of the solution and not part of the problem. I want to help build those bridges.

Newsletter staff changes occur as we continue to evolve. I want to welcome Harvey Wiehler as the new layout designer for the newsletter.

Hartwick Wiehler, usually known as Harvey, was born in Germany and came to Canada when his parents immigrated in 1951. He attended school in Calgary and completed a Bachelor of Science in Applied Mathematics from which he launched a career in developing computer business systems. He had his own software and consulting business for many years.

Harvey is mostly retired and enjoys camping, reading and golfing. He lives in Calgary with his wife Betty, they have three children and three grandchildren. Harvey has served in a variety of volunteer positions at First Mennonite



**Harvey Wiehler**

Church (where they attend), Menno Simons Christian School and other organizations.

We are thankful for Colin Neufeldt's years of service as layout designer and member of the editorial committee. Colin's experience in history, research and as an author has done a lot to raise the standards of this publication.

In this issue we have the Crowfoot Settlement story by Dave Hubert and Rudy Wiebe's interesting Belize travel narrative. Eleanore Woollard takes us with her on her journey to Marienhof and Beyond and Ken assures us that Bechtel is a Mennonite name. Thank you to all the regulars whose articles enrich this addition of the newsletter.

The MHSA welcomes 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 Sept. 1, 2016. Have a great summer!. ❖

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## **Chairman's Corner**

by

*Dave Neufeldt*

I just filled out the 2016 Canada Census a few days ago. One of the questions was whether I agreed to make my information public after ninety-two years. That got me thinking about how I have made

### **Publications for Sale:**

- Letters of a Mennonite Couple-Nicolai & Katharina Rempel \$25.00
- On the Zweiback Trail \$30.00
- Kenn Jie Noch Plautdietsch \$18.00
- Through Fire and Water \$25.00

use of records like the census while researching my family history.

With an increasing concern about identity theft, I have generally become more cautious about what information I share about myself. But when I filled out the census, I made sure to allow my information to be made public. I have frequently made use of census information in researching my family history and I want to make sure my information is available to future generations.

My research into my family has included census records, church records and school records. What I have observed is, that historically Mennonites have been quite meticulous in their record keeping. These records were quite helpful to me in researching my family history. For example, no one in my family knew the name of my great great grandmother. After searching for many years in various records trying to find this information, I finally came across a church record of my great grandfather. Although his mother was never a member of that church, his record listed his mother's name, including her maiden name! With this information, I was able to trace my family back three generations further on that line.

I have been thinking lately, that perhaps our churches today have lost much of their thoroughness in record keeping. There are two aspects of this about which I am concerned. First is in the recording of data itself. In this age of computers, we certainly generate a lot



**Dave Neufeldt**

more data than we were able to years ago. With such a volume of data, it is not realistic to keep everything. So, are we making conscious decisions on what materials are important and worth preserving?

My second concern is how the data are stored. Almost all our data now is generated in electronic format. Much of it remains in that format and is never transferred to paper. Most correspondence is now by email. Even things like church membership registries are probably being maintained on a spreadsheet. One of the risks of electronic-only data is its vulnerability to being lost if a hard drive crashes or it is hacked. The risks can of course be mitigated with thorough backup and security procedures. Perhaps, the biggest risk will be technological change. In ten or twenty years, we may no longer have the software on our computers to read the data we are generating today.

I don't have all the answers dealing with these concerns; there are likely many options as to how we approach these concerns. One of the things I think we can do is to ensure that we have assigned people in our congregations to act as church historians. The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) is committed to helping congregations preserve their records. The MHSA can provide resources on how to carry out this task. I would encourage readers to check if your congregation has a historian, and, if not, perhaps someone needs to take on that role. Contact the MHSA for advice and/or assistance.

Completing the Canada Census caused me to think about the future of creating and preserving his-

torically significant records. ❖

## IMPORTANT NOTICE!

Do you want to make a contribution to Alberta Mennonite history, but do not have the patience to write history or volunteer in the archives? Do you want to support Mennonite historical research projects or help in the long-term preservation of records that document the Mennonite experience in Alberta? Then please consider making a donation to the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Our address is:

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Not only will you receive a charitable receipt, but also the satisfaction of contributing to the long-term survival of Alberta's Mennonite heritage.



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a large chest of clothes and house wares, and this chest became Annie's bed(1). Annie, born in 1922, came with her parents, David and Anna. Another daughter and a son, Mary and Henry, were born in Crowfoot.

The family men would stay in Mazeppa only a few days before they left for Crowfoot, fifty miles distant the way the crow flies. There they would build their homes and village under the supervision of two carpenters—Fred Fairburn and Nels Forestgreen. They travelled from Mazeppa to Crowfoot on horse drawn wagons, provided by the Crowfoot Farming Company (CFC) on credit and stayed in boxcars on the Crowfoot siding while they were building their houses



**Abraham Martens' children's swing**



**Jacob and Anna Loewen homestead**

and barns. For Christmas the menfolk from Crowfoot returned to Mazeppa to be with their families but in January they returned to their building. In spring 1926 the houses and barns were built and the families all moved to Crowfoot.

The building materials were also provided on credit. Four small settlements—Ost (East), Centrum, Vest (West)—were built first and a couple of years later Steinfeld was added with two families—the Abraham Martens

and the Jacob Klassens. The three original settlements each consisted of four houses and two barns built around large communal yards. Although the community was started in 1926, families kept coming until 1929 when immigration to the community stopped.

In addition to the house for each family, two families shared a barn in which the horses, cows, pigs and chickens were sheltered in the winter and where the cows were milked and the chickens roosted. In the first years of the settlement, before the drought, each family had a garden in which vegetables and flowers were grown. Vegetables were canned and potatoes and other root vegetables stored in an underground root cellar for the long winter to come. The root vegetables were kept cool by huge blocks of ice covered with straw. The ice was cut from the Bow River, a couple of miles south of Crowfoot and hauled to the settlement on horse drawn sleighs.

The CFC provided a team of horses for each family and a couple of cows, along with chickens and pigs, all on credit. Machinery included a harrow, disc, six foot seed drill, and plow for each family and a Minneapolis Moline tractor and a threshing machine for the entire settlement. David Nachtigal, Annie's father, was in charge of the tractor, threshing machine and the one cylinder motor at Centrum that pumped water from the well when there was no wind to turn the windmill. The field work was done with horses. Wheat and oats were the principal crops grown. The wheat was sold to the local grain elevator company and the

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**Two man straight combining operation with early Model 5 Massey Harris combine and Hart Parr tractor (no power take off or hydraulics!)**

oats fed to the livestock.

Because there were no trees in Crowfoot the settlers planted caraganas. As indicated, water was pumped from wells by wind power or a one cylinder motor attached to a pump. This water was used for domestic consumption and watering the livestock. Sometimes water overflowed the trough, and the children loved to walk barefoot in these puddles. One year Mrs. Nachtigall made small ditches from these puddles along which she planted vegetables. When there were comments that the Nachtigalls were taking advantage of their position by growing these vegetables, the practice stopped.

Cows were grazed on a communal pasture a mile south of the settlement, with families taking turns leading the cows to the pasture, herding them for the day, and then leading them back to the settlement for milking and night care. The first thing the cows would do when coming back to the settlement was to drink from the trough into which the windmill had pumped water. Then the cows were milked by hand, and the milk

separated with mechanical separators so the cream could be used to make butter. The skim milk was fed to the pigs or left to stand until it turned sour after which it would be used to make cottage cheese for vereneka, or converted into "dikke Milch" or yogurt. The cream was churned by one of the girls of the household to make butter. The butter was fished out of the churn and placed into a one pound wooden mold where any remaining buttermilk was pressed out of it, then wrapped in waxed paper to be used for baking, breakfast or sold. The families could drink the buttermilk left from butter making or they could use it for baking. Once a month, Mr. Nachtigal would travel to Bassano, 10 miles to the east, where he would sell the butter and eggs which were not needed by the families in the settlement.



**Aaron Baergs, Abraham Martens and Jacob Loewens butchering pigs in Steinfeld**

Sometime in fall, a pig was slaughtered by almost every family on the settlement and for this the uncles and aunts and all the cousins got together

for the day. At the end of the day, lard had been rendered from the inside of the pig skin and farmer and liver sausage had been made along with schwarten Magen (something like haggis), pork hocks, head cheese and hams, bacon and salt pork. The entrails of the pig were cleaned and used as sausage casings. The stomach was used for the schwarten Magen. The schwarten Magen was cooked in the Meergroppe (a large caldron) used to render the lard. The ribs were also cooked in this caldron to remove most of the fat by the boiling lard. After the Rippen Schper (ribs) was taken out and cooled it became a delicacy when eaten with honey mustard. After the lard had all been strained and stored in jars, the cracklings (Grüben) were placed in jars to be eaten for breakfast to provide a lot of energy on cold winter days. What was left after the lard, cracklings, ribs and schwarten Magen had been removed was the Grüben Schmaltz which was also poured into jars to be spread on bread or sandwiches to be eaten as school lunches. A few days after the pig had been slaughtered, the farmer sausages, bacon and hams would be cured by smoking them in a specially constructed 4'X4'X6' smokehouse by burning wet straw. So they would keep until they were eaten in winter or spring. In the absence of deep freezes, hams and locally caught fish were also stored by burying them in the wheat in the granaries where they would stay cold even when chinooks blew in.

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Annie Warkentin was ten years old when her father asked her to take a load of wheat to the elevator a mile and a half south of the settlement. After giving Annie detailed instructions about how to manage the horses and wagon, the wheat was loaded into a tank wagon with heavy number ten steel shovels, the horses harnessed and hitched to the wagon, and Annie took the reins and off they went to deliver the wheat. When she got to the elevator, Annie drove the wagon into place so the front could be hoisted up so the wheat would run out of the back of the tank wagon. After the front wheels were in exactly the right place, Annie unhitched the horses, and led them away so the tongue of the wagon would not get tangled in the harness when the front of the wagon was hoisted up. After all the wheat had run out of the wagon, Annie backed the horses up, hitched the tongue of the wagon to all the right places on the harness, snapped the reins over the horses' backs to let them know that it was time to go, and pulled the reins in the direction she wanted the horses to go and took the horses and empty wagon back home to



**Abraham Martens with visitors from USA**



**Anna and Jacob Loewen family  
L to R Rear Mary, John, Peter, Abe, Beth  
Centre Anne, Anna, Jacob, Lena  
Front Susan, Jake, George**

Crowfoot. A few weeks later, her father would go to the elevator and get the check for the wheat from the elevator agent.

Family groupings settled in the three small settlements. The families of Peter Goertz, Jacob Loewen, Cornelius Baergs and Isaac Wittenbergs lived in Ost. Cornelius Dirks, John Martens, Mrs. Catherine Penner(2) (a widow), George Thielman and David Loewens lived in Vest and the Corney Klassens, David Kroekers, John Klassens, David Nachtigals lived in Centrum.

Peter Goertz, Jacob Loewen and David Loewen(3) had all married Franz sisters and all of them had large families. Some of their children were born before they came to Canada and the younger ones born in Crowfoot. There were ten children in the family of Peter and Maria Goertz, fourteen in the family of David and Elizabeth Loewen and eleven in the Jacob and Anna Loewen family.(4) That's thirty-five children among the three sisters! In addition, at least eight other children in these families had died, some in Crowfoot.

Most of the settlers in Crowfoot were Mennonite Brethren but some were Allianz. The Allianz Church was an attempt by Russian Mennonites to build bridges between the breakaway MBs and the larger Grosse Gemeinde (Big Church) in Russia and such outstanding leaders as P.M. Friesen were part of this group. One of the prominent Allianz leaders in Canada was Aron A. Toews, the father of historian and Professor John A. Toews and also the author of the book Mennonite Martyrs. Aron

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Toews first settled in Namaka, about 33 miles from Crowfoot, and officiated at the wedding of David Goertz (son of Peter and Maria Goertz (Ost) and Susie Martens, (daughter of Abraham and Agnes Martens, (Steinfeld) in the Crowfoot school on a blustery, snowy Easter Monday, March 25, 1940. There were twenty-three guests in attendance. Twelve of these were from the family of Jacob and Anna Loewen, who didn't leave Crowfoot until 1942 and at least four were from the Abraham Martens family who were the last holdouts in Crowfoot and stayed until 1950.(5)



**Crowfoot string orchestra**



**Mennonite Young Peoples group at Crowfoot**

Goertz had all been called to the ministry in Russia. There was no formal Sunday School for the children, but there was a special children's feature every Sunday, with George Thielman and Jacob Loewen telling a Bible story after the memory verses had been recited. Annie remembers clearly the excitement and animation that Jacob Loewen brought to his story telling. In addition to preaching and teaching, the preachers were called to preside over a number of funerals. Church music was prominent with a choir and an ensemble of stringed instruments—guitars and mandolins and at least one auto harp and violin. The choir and stringed instruments were part of Sunday morning services. (6)

There was no church building in Crowfoot so the school served as the meeting place for Sunday morning services. Church affairs were discussed during the week in the homes of the settlers. Ann Loewen (Jacob Loewen's Ann) recalls also meeting in the home of Abraham Martens in Steinfeld for church. The community was not lacking for preachers as Abraham Martens, Cornelius Klassen, David Kroeker, Jacob Klassen and Peter

With the many children in the community, it was imperative that there be a school. The school was a public school and was located a mile and a half north and two miles east of Centrum. The school consisted of one room where students from Grade One to Grade Eight studied. There Annie Nachtigal completed Grade 8 and that was the extent of her formal education. From Ost to Vest was four miles and, in the absence of school buses, the students travelled to the school on horse drawn buggies in spring and fall and sleighs in winter. There was a new teacher almost every year, but one teacher, Miss Spicer, from Duchess, stayed for three years. One of the memories of Ms. Spicer was that she taught nice Christian songs. With the exception of one year, there was no German school. That one year, a Miss Hintz gave German lessons after the end of regular classes in the school.

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Music lessons were provided by Agnes Martens on her pump organ. Annie took lessons on this pump organ and it was agreed that there should be some payment for the lessons. In discussing this matter, Annie's father and Abraham Martens agreed that the weaner pig previously given to Martens by Nachtigal would constitute payment.

There was a doctor in Bassano but most of the medical needs of the community were attended to by two mid-wives—Old Mrs. Baerg and Agnes Martens, who had been trained in Germany. Dr. George Loewen, who spent his first nine years in Crowfoot, reports that Mrs. Martens delivered nine babies for the Jacob Loewen family. The absence of adequate medical care was one of the causes of the growing number of graves in the cemetery. For example, in November, 1936, three year old Catrina Nachtigal died of a ruptured appendix in the Bassano hospital. She was scheduled to go to Calgary for treatment, but died before she could be taken there. She was not the only child in Crowfoot to die of a ruptured appendix.

Financially, Crowfoot started with a lot of optimism. In the late twenties, the crops were good, enabling most of the families to pay off much of the Reiseschuld and also the money advanced to buy the building materials, machinery and livestock needed to get the community launched. There was even enough money for some of the settlers to buy automobiles.

The settlers did a lot of business with the Louis Conn Store in Bassano. Conn provided credit to the settlers and the bill was periodically paid by bringing in butter, eggs, beef and pork when times were good and pigs and cattle were still raised at Crowfoot. The men of the community also earned some money by working on what eventually became the Trans Canada Highway by moving earth with horses and fresnos. Some of the younger women earned money working as maids in the homes of well-to-do Calgaryans. Most of the money earned this way went to keep the family financed and pay off Reiseschuld.

There was a small store at Crowfoot at which a limited number of things could be bought. The siding at Crowfoot was a stop for CPR passenger and freight trains where the steam locomotives were resupplied with water.

After the Crash of 1929 and the onset of the Great Depression, the early optimism turned to gloom. Drought and grasshoppers took a terrible toll, and crops failed year after year. Settlers were unable to keep up their payments to the CFC; it went bankrupt and its assets were taken over by the CPR. Added to this was the fact that farm products like wheat, eggs and butter lost their value, with wheat falling to \$0.19 a bushel in the depth of the Depression. By 1936, the horses were skeletal because the only feed they had was straw.

The government made relief payments so settlers could buy food. Baled hay was also provided to keep animals alive. All of this relief was put onto account and when better times came, had to be repaid.

For the Nachtigals, like many of the other settlers, the end came after another crop failure in 1937. The Nachtigals loaded their machinery and

household goods into two boxcars provided at no cost by the CPR,<sup>(7)</sup> and moved to Ryley, Alberta. Their family car was hitched to horses and made the five day trip to Ryley as a Bennett buggy. Gasoline and repairs cost too much, and besides, there was no room in the two boxcars for the three horses, one of which was a mare with a colt. The settlers turned the titles of their land back to the CPR and walked away from eleven years of hard work. In 1937, the Peter Goertzes also moved, to Lindberg (also in the Tofield area) to homestead a second time in twelve years. Dave Goertz told stories later in life of how he chopped down poplar trees with an axe in 30 below weather to clear the land for cropping. Some settlers moved to Gem, some to Vauxhall and some to Coaldale. Some, like the Jacob Loewens persevered until 1942 when they, too, moved to Gem.

One day in 1950, when Martha Goertz was in Grade 2 in Coaldale, there was a knock at the classroom door. When Mrs. Pickering, the teacher, responded, Martha was told to pack her things and go with her parents. Her Grandfather, Abraham Martens, had died and they were going to bury him. His funeral was conducted in Gem at the MB Church and he is buried in the church cemetery there. The Martens were the last of the Crowfoot settlers still farming there. After the funeral, his widow, Agnes Martens, the midwife and organ teacher in Crowfoot, moved to Coaldale and all that was left of the settlement was the cemetery. Later a cairn was erected to commemorate the community that had once been there.

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Abraham and Agnes Martens (Steinfeld) and recollections of Martha (Goertz) Hubert's parents, David and Susie (Martens) Goertz, who both grew up in Crowfoot.



Present day Crowfoot cemetery cairn

When Martha read Arthur Kroeger's book, Hard Passage, which described the struggles of the Kroeger family at Sedalia, some one hundred miles northeast of Crowfoot, she said, "That's dad and mom's story" and insisted that we get a copy of Kroeger's book for her folks.

**References:** Interviews with Mary (Nachtigal) Schierling, Annie (Nachtigal) Warkentin, George Loewen, (Ost and later Vest) John Hubert, Agnes Heidebrecht and Ted Martens, (grand children of

out of the first farm the family homesteaded in Crowfoot, a move to Ryley and six years later to Tofield, and then, after marrying John Warkentin, moving into the Peace River Country, where she helped give leadership for the development of a large and truly prosperous farming operation, and raising a large family, (her Grandson Chris Warkentin is the Member of Parliament for the Peace River constituency) is now retired in Grande Prairie. When I commented on the tablet on her table, she explained that she does not have a computer, but she uses a tablet. From Crimea in 1922 to tablet user in 2016, this charming and gracious matriarch of a large and respected family constitutes a fascinating story of perseverance, commitment to virtue and success, dedication to family and friends, and leadership to the community.

(2) There was some movement during the lifetime of the community with some houses being occupied serially by more than one family. This list was compiled to the best of Annie Warkentin's recollection but she said she wouldn't vouch for its absolute accuracy.

(3) The David Loewens had originally settled in Rabbit Lake Saskatchewan, but moved to Crowfoot in 1929 and stayed for less than two years be-

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fore moving on to Gem, where they settled down more or less permanently before moving to Calgary in 1955. Their daughter, Mary, born in March 1930, is buried in the Crowfoot cemetery. (John Hubert, interview, March 1 & 15, 2016; John married Anne Loewen, third youngest daughter of David and Elizabeth, and lives in Bow Island.)

(4) Five other children in the Jacob Loewen family died in Russia in the typhus epidemic that followed the civil war and famine. In the Peter Goertz family two children died in infancy and at least one child in the David Loewen family (Mary) is buried in the Crowfoot cemetery.

(5) Story told at the 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary of Dave and Susie Goertz. Dave Goertz brought his share of the Reiseschuld along with him into the marriage, a source of significant annoyance for his new bride at the time, and for many years thereafter. The author heard about this grievance more than once after he married Martha, the oldest child of Dave and Susie Goertz, in 1964.

(6) When George Martens (Steinfeld) married Erna Goertz, (Ost) in Tofield in 1939, the bride left the side of her groom and joined three of her brothers in a quartet in singing "Cling to the Bible My Boy". This quartet was part of the wedding service. As they sang, each singer held a Bible aloft. (A recollection of Mary Petker.) The father of the bride, Peter Goertz, officiated. The next day the bride cleaned the house of her parents one last time. This was much appreciated as her mother had a three month old infant (Henry Goertz) to care for. After spending most of the morning cleaning, Erna and her new husband left for his home in Crowfoot. Part of the "gift" she brought into the marriage was her share of the Reiseschuld. (Ted Martens interview, March 8, 2016)

(7) Did the CPR provide the boxcars to the settlers in exchange for the titles? Annie Warkentin, 15 years old at the time, didn't know, but thought that might have been the arrangement. The people who would have known this have all passed on. ❖

family history didn't account for the Cheyenne people who had survived Custer's attack. My family arrived in the land rush that followed. I didn't know, until I was in the county museum looking at a map, that my ancestors owned land in the checkerboard right next to Cheyenne land," Epp recounted. This part of his history didn't fit the story as he had understood it to that point. "There is a Christian gloss on the settler paradigm that is dangerous, where the land stands in for the 'promised land.' How easy it is to insinuate ourselves into that story of Exodus. Who gives a thought for the Canaanites when one is taking possession of the promised land? We know this cannot be disentangled from the dislocation and deliberate starvation of indigenous people."

Epp described Canada's residential school history as a "monstrous experiment of social engineering." It left communities with no children and children without parents. There were twenty-five schools in Alberta (AB) alone and many were within easy driving distance of Mennonite settlers. The TRC's acknowledgement of what indigenous people experienced provides a critical opening for a rethinking of the way Mennonites talk about their history in Canada. What deep prejudices do we still need to encounter? How do we tell our stories differently once we recover pieces that were left out?

"There are no innocent stories anymore, and I guess I'm here to say that is a good thing," Epp concluded.

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Alberta sky? But most of all, why am I not aware of their stories?

The theme of the April 30, 2016 meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) at Holyrood Mennonite Church, Edmonton was *Rethinking Mennonite History in Light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* (TRC).

The first speaker, professor of political science at the University of Alberta, Roger Epp, was an honorary witness at some of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission gatherings and is author of his recent book, *We are all Treaty People*. Epp told the crowd that many of our Mennonite settler histories need to be examined again so that the places where they intersect with indigenous history can be recovered. Epp experienced an epiphany of sorts a number of years ago while visiting a museum in Oklahoma. "Our

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The second presenters, Isaac and Millie Glick, saw the destructive results of residential schools first hand and tell their own stories from a lifetime of working alongside First Nations people. Ike began by saying, "A few of us recently, on a visit to Blue Quills, (a former residential school, now a First Nations University near St. Paul, AB), heard that if we want to walk in another person's moccasins, we must first take off our shoes." Glick and his wife, Millie, walked alongside First Nations people from 1955-1973. On behalf of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), they helped communities develop successful school, health, garden and other programs while they coordinated over 100 Mennonite Voluntary Service workers. In both Sandy Lake and Chipewyan Lake, the Glicks helped with schools. "The success at Sandy Lake surprised officials. The children asked why they couldn't have school on weekends, too! Later, in the Northlands School Division, children would return home every second weekend, a deliberate departure from residential school practice," Glick said.

The Glicks experienced a people used to being pushed down, pushed back and ignored but mutual respect quickly occurred when they were treated with respect. "We knew very little about *Indians, residential schools and doctrine of discovery*. Our assignment, as a one liner, was to see what could be done to help people help themselves," Glick said.

Living among the people with whom they worked, the Glicks have many stories to tell. Millie told of being alone with small chil-

dren in a cabin filling with smoke because of a blocked roof vent. Pregnant at the time, and not wanting to climb up on the roof and leave the children alone, she took aim and shot the vent open! Other stories included: being on the spot to help with first-aid when hospitals were far away; helping families with funerals; and, even managing to work with others to scrounge enough white material and sew a dress so that a family could honour its deceased loved one as they wished. Ike and Millie's stories are recorded in their new book, *Risk and Adventure*.

Chief Calvin Bruneau, of the Papaschase First Nation, presented a first-hand account of the ongoing story of his people. He told of the struggle to uncover and reclaim the history and identity of the Papaschase people who were defrauded of their land and scattered in the late 1800s.

Born in Bonnyville, AB, Bruneau's grandmother married a non-status Metis, and, in accordance with the *Indian Act*, lost her status and had to leave the reserve. Bruneau moved to Edmonton in the 1980s and grew up in the city, loving hockey. In 1995, he found out from relatives, that his family is descended from Chief Papaschase. He began attending meetings and engaged in the long process of recovering history, identity and culture on behalf of his people. On the band council since his early 20's, Bruneau spends many hours working to recover and share the stories of the Papaschase. "(I've spent) lots of time in archives trying to learn and absorb the history and talking to elders." Bruneau said.

Bruneau was heavily involved in the struggle to have the Rosedale burial ground recognized and protected when plans to expand the power plant were threatening to destroy it. The site, at 101 St. and 96 Ave. in Edmonton, is now a memorial where thirty-one Papaschase ancestors, as well as other early inhabitants of Fort Edmonton are buried.

In addition to his work uncovering and sharing lost stories, Bruneau seeks to connect the Papaschase people with each other and with city organizations to do things to end homelessness. "I've found 121 Papaschase elders buried in the Edmonton area," Bruneau said. He told about the various ways his people were oppressed and pushed aside in the past, including Sir John A. Macdonald's withholding of promised food aid in order to starve indigenous people into submission, crooked land agents, the residential school system, the pass system (people not allowed to leave the reserve without specific permission), government red-tape, invalid methods of agreement (such as having too few representative to sign agreements) and, more recently, the discovery of burials that are kept secret.

In a July 14, 2015 article for the *Aboriginal Peoples Television Network*, reporter, Brandi Morin, quoted Chief Calvin Bruneau, saying, "All three levels of government have to acknowledge the moral and legal wrongs committed against the Papaschase people. People are living on the stolen land; that has to be addressed. Have to start developing an understanding; you need to understand the history. A lot of people out there just don't know. We need understanding between each other."

Bruneau concluded his talk saying, "Building bridges and telling stories that don't fit the paradigm; that's what it's all about."

One story, told by Roger Epp, helps to put Mennonite settler history

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**Chief Calvin Bruneau, Roger Epp, Isaac Glick, Millie Glick conference speakers pose with a model canoe and Native made jams**

arm in arm with Indigenous history and challenges common assumptions and stereotypes. Almighty Voice is a name many Alberta schoolchildren (including this writer) remember from social studies lessons. Those lessons told of a young indigenous man who was accused of stealing a cow, shooting a police officer, escaping prison and leading the North West Mounted Police on an eighteen month manhunt which resulted in Almighty Voice and two of his relatives being cornered by over one hundred policemen, shot at with cannons and killed in a copse of trees near Duck Lake, Saskatchewan, on May 30, 1897. When the story is retold, with more pieces coming to light, the picture of the young man changes. The cow in question was not stolen, but was slaughtered against government rules so that Almighty Voice could feed his family. The government was not coming through with promised aid for the starving people. He would have been released from jail within a day. However, an officer at the jail taunted him by saying he would be hanged. Almighty Voice believed the officer and es-

caped. Convinced his life was in danger, he shot another officer who refused to listen to his warnings not to approach. After that, he was on the run until his death. The Mennonite connection is a woman from Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan, named Amelia Wiehler. She was a friend to Almighty Voice. He once risked his life to get groceries for her, traveling across ice in winter. She, in turn, provided a safe place for him to stay.

In the light of stories told by the TRC, the time to rethink Mennonite history. The MHSA encourages anyone with family stories, pictures, and memories, possibly like that of Amelia Wiehler, to get in touch with the society. Epp encouraged the group to think about things they may have heard from grandparents, such as *Drumming and Fasta on Top of Stony Hill*. "These are Mennonite stories. Maybe there are stories like that in Alberta too. Those of us who are attentive to our own Mennonite stories of loss and displacement, those of us whose ancestors were very much outsiders, were attracted to this country because there seemed to be space for differences," Epp said.

Participants left the 2016 MHSA Spring Conference encouraged to rethink their own settler histories and to recover stories and relationships alongside First Nations people. ❖

## Annual General Meeting Report, April 30, 2016

by

Katie Harder, Board Secretary

*"O my people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth.  
I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things from of old.  
What we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.  
We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power and the wonders He has done.  
He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel,  
Which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children,  
So the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born,  
And they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God  
And would not forget His deeds but would keep his commands."*

*Psalms 67:1-7*



Katie Harder

In the Psalms we are encouraged to share the experiences we have had with the coming generation. The stories in the Old and New Testament are an encouragement to deeper faith and a foundation on which to build character that is pleasing to God and of benefit to mankind. The next generation needs our stories of God's guidance, goodness, grace and protection to draw them to God.

I see Psalm 67:1-7 as a word of encouragement to continue on with the work of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). Our stories and experiences need to be told, our children and grandchildren need to be made aware of how God has moved in the lives of their forefathers, how they struggled in this new land to make it a homeland for themselves and those who would follow after them and, despite the challenges that life threw their way, they persevered and continued to move forward.

The MHSA Annual General Meeting on April 30, 2016 at the Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton, saw a small group of faithful adherents come together to deliberate and to share the ongoing work of MHSA.

The church graciously provided refreshments for those coming to the event which generally enhanced the well being of those coming from a distance. Most people, especially Mennonites, enjoy a good cup of coffee, goodies and visiting. Ellie Janz and Katie Harder were set up in the foyer of the church to register the members and guests upon arrival. A lot of those registering for the event took the opportunity to renew their memberships which continue to be \$30.00 per year per member. This entitles members to receive three issues of the Newsletter which arrive in March, June and October. Of approximately 75 MHSA members, only 22 members were present for the AGM that morning.

Our able and personable chair, David Neufeldt from Coaldale, took us through the morning proceedings. After the welcome, opening prayer and officially calling the meeting to order, the gathering dealt with the annual board reports. The chair stated that MHSA focuses primarily on three areas which includes hosting the Fall and Spring Conferences which usually deal with a timely topic of interest emerging from past significant church organizations, school achievements and events arising from congregations in Alberta. These conferences rotate throughout the various regions of Alberta. The other two areas of focus are publishing the newsletter and the operation of the MHSA library and archives in Calgary.

David acknowledged the work of GAMEO representative, Wesley Berg, who carried this position for six years. Alice Unrau from Calgary will replace Wes in this capacity. David also acknowledged Ellie Janz who has completed a six year term as treasurer. Ellie has agreed to continue her work as bookkeeper for which the society is very grateful. Ted Regehr was recognized as having received the Award of Excellence at the January Annual Meeting of the MHSC in Abbotsford. David also recognized Lil Bartel for her work with the Family History Pro-

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ject that the MHSA sponsors at the Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary.

David drew attention to the MAID project, Mennonite Archival Image Database, that is now up and running. This is an on-line catalogue of the photographs held in the various Mennonite archives across Canada. MHSA is a partner in this venture to which Alice Unrau from Calgary is the Alberta representative.

At the end of 2017 and in early 2018, the MHSA will be hosting the Ray Dirks' art exhibit, *Along the Road to Freedom* which will be showcased in Coaldale, Calgary and Edmonton. The exhibit honours the journeys of Russian Mennonite women who came with their children to Canada, mostly in the 1920s and 1940s to occupy a new homeland. The MHSA is looking for sponsors to help with transportation costs associated with the three relocation of the exhibit while it is in Alberta. Because the society wants as many people as possible to view this exhibit, admission will not be charged.

David commented that MHSA continues to work with a relatively small base of support, both financially and with volunteers; however, that support base is dedicated and generous for which the society is thankful. The MHSA would, of course, welcome any and all donations, both financial and physical.

Ellie Janz, treasurer, reported that the total income for 2015 was \$21,068.18 which resulted in a shortfall of \$2,532.00 in the proposed amount to \$23,600. The society did, however, meet all its expenses which came in at \$19,377.61. For 2016, the MHSA again set the proposed budget at \$23,600 which was approved at the meeting. Ellie thanked Jake Retzlaff

for auditing the books. He has provided this service free of charge for numerous years; the motion was made and accepted to ask Jake to continue the auditing service again in 2016. Ellie does a fine job of maintaining the books which once more passed the audit. Thank you, Ellie, for agreeing to provide the book keeping service for the MHSA treasury which function under the auspices of Peter Dyck.

Dave Toews, newsletter editor, mentioned that 2015 has been an eventful and satisfying year. The three issues of the newsletter were well received. Dave welcomed Dan Jack as the newest member of the editorial team; Dan replaces Lorne Buhr who retired due to ill health. Currently the team distributes 62 hard copies, 13 online copies, 71 copies to Canadian churches and other organizations and 6 copies to the US for a total of 152 copies per issue. In his report, Dave acknowledged the various people who regularly contribute articles. Not only was Dave, the editor, pleased with the work of his teammates, it was evident that he derives much satisfaction and pleasure from overseeing the work involved with the newsletter.

Ted Regehr, the volunteer archivist, spoke of the on-going work at the library and archives. Every Thursday from 10 AM to 4 PM, a small group of six individuals continues to process the accumulated backlog of earlier accessions; smaller and newer accessions are completed in their entirety. Ted was pleased to share that this past winter, the MHSA received a very new and noteworthy accession from Alfred Klassen, Coaldale, AB who has transcribed



MHSA Conference registration

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and translated 55 letters and notes from the German Gothic script. The items were received by members of Alfred's family from relatives in the Soviet Union during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Ted also shared that the MHSA Board recently made the decision to purchase additional shelving which has now been installed; this purchase will provide much needed space for incoming accessions.

Alice Unrau explained how she became part of the MAID management team in January, 2016. Alice loves compliments which seemed to be coming her way at the meeting in Abbotsford where she was duly convinced to take on the position. Alice is very enthused about the MAID project and encourages all of us to share our relevant photos and bring them to the MHSA Archives for safe keeping and to be uploaded onto the MAID website where they can then be viewed and be of assistance to people doing research.

MHSA would not exist as an entity without having a group of committed board members. David Neufeldt from Coaldale was once again elected as Board chair and incumbents, Ted Regehr (Calgary), Peter Kroeger (Calgary), Ken Matis (Coaldale) and David Jeffares (Edmonton) were re-elected as members at large. Dr. Ernest Wiens, Sherwood Park, AB was elected as a member at large to complete the two year term vacated by Peter Dyck, Calgary, who has replaced Ellie Janz as treasurer.

Chairman David closed the meeting with the announcement that all present were invited for lunch. David also announced that the afternoon session would begin

at 1:00 PM with the topic, *Rethinking Mennonite History in Light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission* with Roger Epp, Millie and Ike Glick, and Chief Calvin Bruneau serving as resource persons. The morning was drawn to a close with a hearty rendition of the doxology, *Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow*. ❖

## A Brief Visit to Blue Creek, Belize

by

Rudy Wiebe

Photos—Tena and Chris Wiebe

Our family loves to travel, together. This inflection of travel may have started in 1966 when four of us circled through South America and lived for several months with relatives in Fernheim, Paraguay. Or, perhaps it began even earlier: in 1958, Tena and I were married in Germany (and Switzerland), 8000 miles from any known relative. In any case, as the years passed, our numbers and travels grew: at one point five of us toured Europe; then six visited Chile; seven Guatemala and nine Cuba. Now, in 2015, we were eleven; where should we go? It had to be over Christmas-New Year because of the students and teachers in the family – but where?

Someone said, "Why not avoid the worn snow-bird tracks and go to Belize? Warm, tropical beaches, fantastic barrier reef for snorkeling and no tour buses." Someone added, "Also Mayan ruins, English as the official language, and Mennonite colonies!" Of course! A friend had often talked about the Blue Creek Colony in Belize where her father taught school as she was growing up. The internet revealed a Hillside Bed and Breakfast Motel at Blue Creek run by John and Judy Klassen.

In the picture, the motel overlooked an enormous



Rudi Wiebe



John and Judy Klassen in their Blue Creek Hills garden overlooking the Rio Hondo Valley

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green valley and then a wonderfully Canadian-English Klassen voice on the phone convinced us. The four of us in Ottawa and the seven in Edmonton would meet in Belize City on December 17, 2015, rent a van and drive north.

After some usual airline hassles, we actually do arrive at Belize International within an hour of each other. The air is bright and blazing hot. Driving into Belize City, we notice the name REIMER on a large building. It looks like the huge flour-mill in Molotschna, Ukraine. Our hotels are in the old English settlement of Fort George. Next morning, after a hike along the sea wall to the lighthouse and the dazzling blue Caribbean Sea, we pile into the rental van and find the highway leading to Orange Walk Town.

Before it achieved independence in 1981, Belize was British Honduras, a Crown colony. This English connection began in the late 1500s when English pirates raided the passing Spanish fleets for their gold and silver and then hid among islands in the shallow water behind the Barrier Reef. Eventually English settlers, escaping slaves and local Mayans developed a business with England of cutting the jungle logwood, a valuable source of black textile dye and mahogany trees for furniture. The results of this centuries-long devastation is obvious; most land is covered in low, tangled jungle brush with rarely a tall tree visible anywhere. The people live in what look like shanty settlements while small market stalls line the roadway.



Welcome sign to the Blue Creek Mennonite Colony

Belize has an area of 22,500 square kilometers (Alberta: 681,000) and a population of 347,000. Of these, about 12,000 (3.5 %) are Low German speaking Mennonites.

We are driving the main north highway. It is paved, narrow and without

a centre line; the white lines are on the outside edges, emphasizing “no shoulders.” When a tanker truck (the chief Belizean export is oil) rumbles towards us, we drive the right edge even more carefully. And just before we reach Orange Walk (87 kilometres), we see a one-horse cart (cabrio) crossing the highway; it carries three children and a bearded man wearing a wide-brimmed hat, white shirt and suspenders. The cabrio has excellent half-hoop steel spring suspension and two small wheels rimmed with rubber, but not inflated tires. Yes indeed, we are coming to Mennonite country.

In the early 1950s, the thirty-year-old colonies in northern Mexico needed more land and, in the usual Mennonite way, sent a search delegation to various Central America countries. They eventually recommended a jungle area southwest of Orange Walk and in 1958 the first Old Colony settlers moved there. Today, three thriving colonies use the town as a business center: Little Belize (conservative Old Colony, with a population of about 3000), Shipyard (Old Colony conservative, c. 3800) and Blue Creek (*Kleine Gemeinde*), which is evangelical and has a population of 500.

John and Judy Klassen were a young couple in that original 1958 migration. They are in their eighties now like Tena and me. Immediately we seem like old acquaintances. They show us all the tropical garden behind their large two-story house high on the Blue Creek hills, and their magnificent view: to the north are the Rio Hondo hills of Mexico and the twisting river border between the

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two countries; to the east, great flatlands of roads, of sorghum and corn and sugar cane and rice fields; long pig, chicken and dairy barns, houses, farmyards and the distant smudges of towns; and, to the south, where the hills curve and the runway of an airport points at us. It was built by a Blue Creek business man, the Reimer we noticed earlier and he owns four planes. He can get you to Belize City in fifteen minutes!

John gestures wide.

"Everything here was jungle when we came. We cleared it with machetes and axes," and he laughs, remembering. "But now, we drive bulldozers!"

The Klassen family owns three ranches with 1800 hectares of land, over 1000 head of cattle, and numerous home sites, stores and businesses, including the motel higher on the hills where we will stay. Judy explains that they have ten children, all with grown families. Eight live here in Belize, two in Canada, and when they all gather to celebrate, as they do every few years, there are 68 of them now, with more expected.

"Children are so good," Judy says of her ten, "but then the Lord said, 'That's enough!'" Now another grandson wants to go to Canada. He's finished high school here and work pays so good there. He says, he'll send money back and dollars *veschlohn* (multiply their worth) lots more here, maybe we can't talk him out of it."

"Do you want to?"

"Canada's very good ... but so big ... not much *Jemeenschauff* (believer community)"

It is the Sunday before Christmas, December 20, 2015, and the



Blue Creek Evangelical Mission Church

bulletin of the Blue Creek Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church pictures a baby asleep, wrapped in a white blanket. Its skin is dark, its hair black, and the red banner draped over it declares: "**Immanuel** GOD WITH US." We can all sit on one bench in the congregation of about 300, and the carol singing is led by Stewart Dyck's team, three voices and piano. Pastor John (Krahn) introduces his sermon with a summary in Low German, then preaches on, "The Face of Love" in unaccented English. The announcements tell us there will be a violin recital in the church that afternoon and on Wednesday evening the Youth and Young Adults will go caroling in Orange Walk.

The church is full, people in casual modern clothes sitting together as families. Most women have curled hair, only a few older women wear head coverings or the men wear beards. I fit right in. Prayer meeting and Sunday School have taken place before the worship service and after the benediction our family is warmly welcomed, both in the church and in the foyer. Everyone who talks to us seems to have relatives in Canada; one family's married daughter runs the MCC Thrift Store in Portage la Prairie, Manitoba. We all, even those of us who don't often go to church, feel easy and at home.

After lunch, which we prepare ourselves at the motel and eat on the veranda while contemplating the rain-washed valley, we pick up Judy for a colony tour. We've already seen the Linda Vista School (Grades 1 – 12), the cemetery below the church, the Travellers Restaurant where Nettie Froese Rempel has cooked us breakfasts and suppers and the Linda Vista Mall which offers everything from gas to auto repairs to hardware, clothing, groceries and even a few mystery novels (no murders) with Belizean settings.

The great sprawl of the colony, the scattered farmsteads and businesses, the wide fields and roads winding over the hills: Judy knows them

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all. She sits in the middle of the van and explains as we ask endless questions. There is a mahogany sawmill (the Belize owner gets the enormous tree trunks, but the Mennonite business keeps the huge branches to process for lumber); the community ambulance and nursing station; the rectangle of huts where university students from Texas live every year while they dig Mayan archeological sites (Judy cooks all their meals); the modern rice mill, a plot of jungle with a worn caterpillar tractor resting beside it; earthen termite nests glued to trees or fence posts.

We see no discernible villages. People live on their farmsteads or businesses (trucking, construction for example). We see not a single horse or buggy. There are plenty of vans, pick-ups

and large trucks on the colony roads plus a few cars. Judy explains that the Blue Creek hills were too difficult for the conservative "horse-and-buggy" people; they all built settlements on the flatlands of the larger Shipyard and Little Belize Colonies, and also those west of Belize City like Spanish Lookout (population of 2500) and Lower Barton Creek (population of 250). Clearly, geography can have a powerful influence upon the Mennonite practice of faith but I don't interrupt Judy's stories to mention that.



**The village of Edenthal (Eden Valley)**



**Zebu cattle thrive in the tropical heat on Mennonite ranches**



**View from the Blue Creek Hills west over jungle, pasture and fields to the far mountains of Guatemala**

Everywhere, from behind barbed wire, herds of large white Zebu cattle with their distinctive shoulder humps and drooping ears watch us pass in the tropical heat. Flocks of great white birds (cormorants?) cluster along a creek; the jungle-covered hills and crags may still be hiding undiscovered Mayan ruins. Our van carries us over the last ridge and, straight as any road allowance in Canada, the road sweeps down into the valley, across open grass and rice fields and river into the western mountain mists of Guatemala. Magnificent!

Then we reach Edenthal, the farthest settlement in Blue Creek Colony. Here is a true row village with one and two storey houses built parallel to the centre street and a few remnants of barns still attached behind them. But the houses are very widely spaced, with pastures and flourishing trees between them.

We pass two girls walking in long Sunday blue-flowered dresses, with their braided hair neatly coiled under black head coverings. At the centre of the village, beside

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the school, small boys are playing soccer. Definitely not Old Colony!

“There’s not enough land any more, even here,” Judy explains. “Half our people don’t farm; they work at other business. Many have moved to Bolivia so they can farm or they go back and forth to work in Canada.”

Even so, with only 3.5 % of the population, the Mennonites produce most of the eggs, poultry, pork, beef and almost all the dairy products in Belize. All in all, they produce (according to iPhone Google) as much as 40 % of the country’s economy.

We have a fine Mennonite supper at the Blumenthal Café; we arrange the tables together and the owner, Dave Klassen, serves us. The chicken noodle soup is especially good. Dave tells us about the nine months he worked in the oil patch out of Grande Prairie, Alberta, Canada, and his plans to build his store and café bigger.

The Belize tropical night falls as quickly as we remember it from fifty years ago on the other side of the equator in Paraguay. The sun rises at 6:15 am, and by 6:15 pm it is gone. Sudden sheets of rain pour down and then, just as suddenly, it stops after which, there is the enormous full moon of Christmas, rising out of the horizon and over the Hilltop Motel! The valley below us spreads into a distance of blue and silver mist. We find the constellation Orion, as brilliant as at Strawberry Creek, Alberta. Where is the Big Dipper, the immovable North Star? It seems the heavenly Great Bear has no direction to offer us, not even at Blue Creek, Belize. ❖

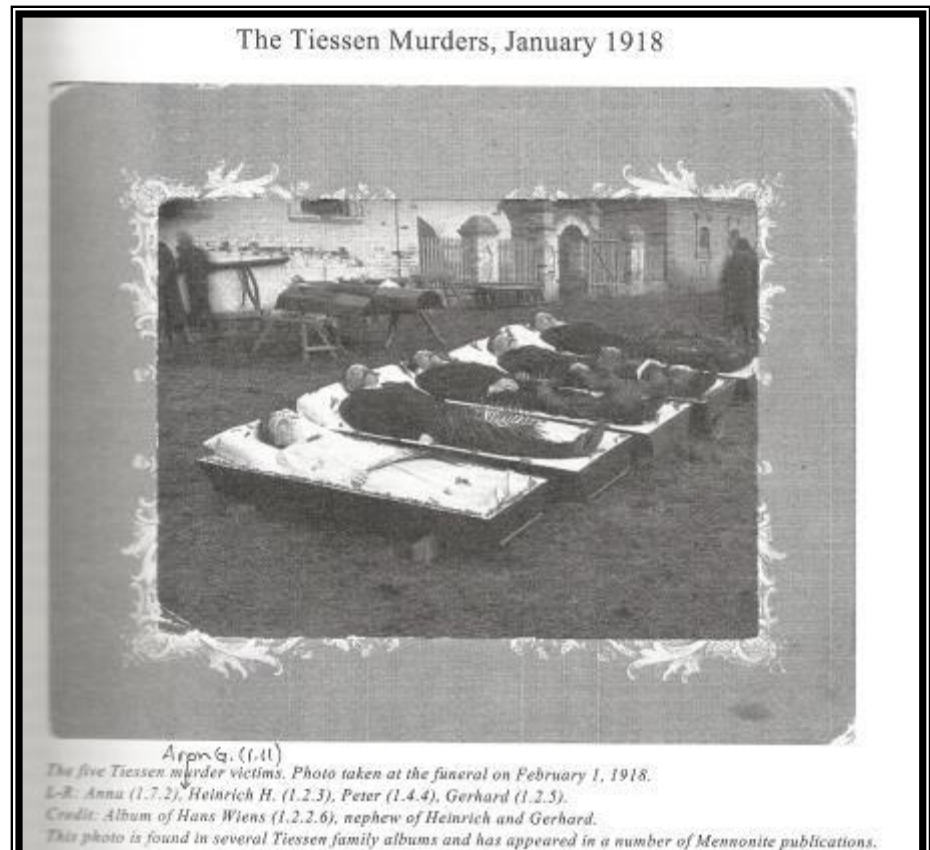
## ‘Marienhof and Beyond’: Thoughts and Feelings

by  
Eleanore Woollard

When I think of how it all began, I realize that a little curiosity can lead one into very unexpected places. My project began with curiosity about a photo in my parents’ album, a photo which has been used in a number of Mennonite publications, as well as in the movie, “And When They Shall Ask,” in the Mennonite Museum in Detmold, Germany, and on a historical display wall in Filidelfia, Paraguay, amongst others. However, the only place I have ever seen this photo with the victims identified was in an old issue of ‘Der Bote.’ Yet those in the photos were all members of our family and I felt a strong pull to learn more, especially how, exactly, the five victims in the coffins were related to us. I knew one of them was my



Eleanore Woollard



The Tiessen murder victims; L-R Anna, Aron, Heinrich H, Peter, Gerhard

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grandmother's brother. I learned soon afterwards that two of the other victims were the only two uncles of my dad's second cousin, who I knew. But how did the other two in the photo fit in? And, so it began.

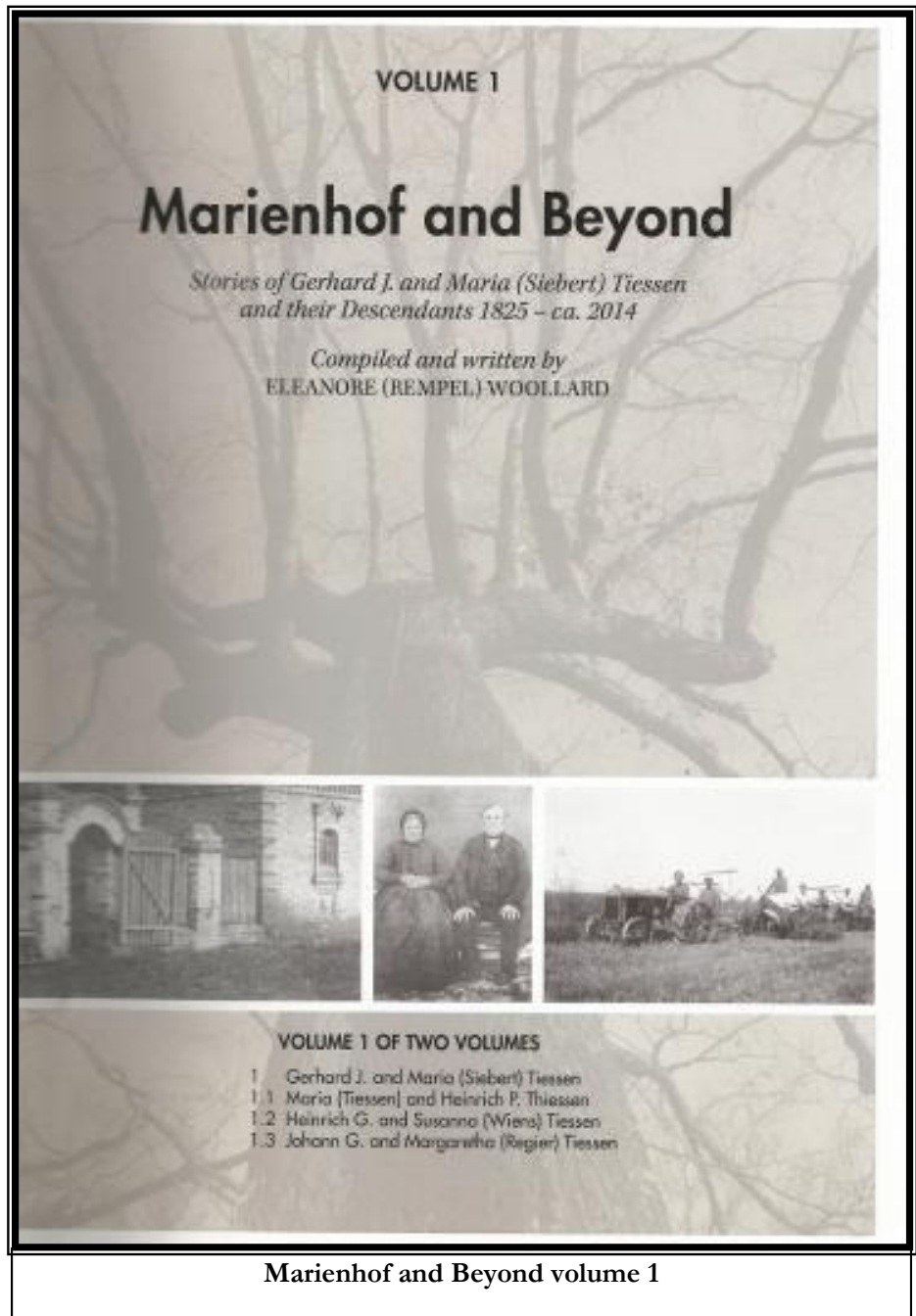
I had no idea how big a family with whom I was working. As the project mushroomed, I began to feel way out of my depth and to wonder how or why I got myself into this. I often felt like giving up - it was all too much for me, and seemed to demand skills I didn't possess. But, countering this was the excitement of the chase, the intrigue of fresh snippets of information and the sense, that once I had started, I ought not give up. I began to feel that I owed it both to the informants who had given me information and to all the members of my rapidly expanding family. At the same time, the project became an exercise that felt much like I was working simultaneously on three major theses - Mennonite History, Russian History and Russian Geography.

The unexpected discoveries were exciting. For example, I discovered that I had gone to high school with a third cousin of mine and that I had worked with another one in Botswana. In neither situation was I aware of a family relationship at the time. There were many more amazing coincidences and discoveries. But there was also pain and disappointment when people showed interest, even enthusiasm, initially, and then I received no help. To compound those feelings of frustration, some of these later grumbled about their entries. By contrast, members of my immediate family, though not all equally interested, were enormously supportive and very appreciative of the end result.

I also felt enormously privileged to have received trust and help from numerous older relatives. I was always nervous when I telephoned someone out of the blue to ask for information. But, so many times, after initial hesitation, my distant relative would open up and fill me in with a wealth of information. We became friends and I treasure those long conversations. Sadly,

a number have since passed away. I am so thankful I didn't delay the project any longer.

Now that the project is done, I look back with mixed feelings. Yes, there is satisfaction, even exhilaration, at having completed such a monumental task, at having compiled what I hope is an informative and rich history of a



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family where there was little before. On the other hand, I sometimes feel that I have lost, even wasted, eight years of my life, eight years when I forewent other activities and interacting with people, to sit hour after hour in front of a flickering screen.

I have also learned two lessons. One is the value of family records, memoirs and family photographs, even ones with no names on the back. I shudder when I hear of families who have thrown some of these valuable things away instead of passing them on to the archives, where there are people who are able to assess their archival value. And, the other lesson? That I never want to do another project like this on my own again.

Eleanore (Rempel) Woollard is a 'retired' genealogist. Previously she has worked as a medical lab technician and as a preschool music teacher. Active at First Mennonite Church in Edmonton, she is currently also serving on the Advisory Committee for Donna Entz, witness worker in Northeast Edmonton Ministries with Mennonite Church Alberta. Together with her husband, John, she enjoys hiking and canoeing in the summer, cross-country skiing in the winter and travelling, the most recent trip having been a cross-cultural tour to Turkey.

Note: 'Marienhof and Beyond' was put together for the people in the book and is not for sale to the general public. ❖

## Bechtel, A Mennonite Name?

by  
Ken Bechtel

Bechtel: is that a Mennonite name? I have come to enjoy hearing that question during the half of my thirty-three year pastoral ministry spent in prairie churches of Dutch, Russian or Prussian background. The question has allowed me to respond with answers like, "only since the 1640s for sure." Bechtels also have some history on the prairies as my widowed grandfather homesteaded in Alberta and later sent for his boys.



Ken Bechtel

The question about my surname has allowed me to recount my own earlier confusion. When I moved from our little rural thirty-three student one room schoolhouse to the big city high school with over 1900 students, I heard with horror the announcement about "compulsory cadets." What was I as a pacifist Mennonite to do? I looked around for other Mennonites, but there were no Burkharths, Martins, Beavers or O'Krafskas (common names in my home congregation). Finally I stumbled on another Mennonite with, what I assumed, was a non-Mennonite name – Enns! We were able to go together to explain our dilemma to Vice Principal Hunsperger who stood, shook our hands, stated that he was also a Mennonite and explained our CO alternatives.

I come from a long line of Anabaptist Mennonites, tracing back to at least 1640. Along that line, many another surname has been added to the pedigree. My great grandfather, Jacob Woolner, the British lad taken in by a Mennonite family when his mother died of cholera, became a Pennsylvania German speaking Mennonite preacher. Then my Methodist reared mother added Reaman and Farr to that tree.

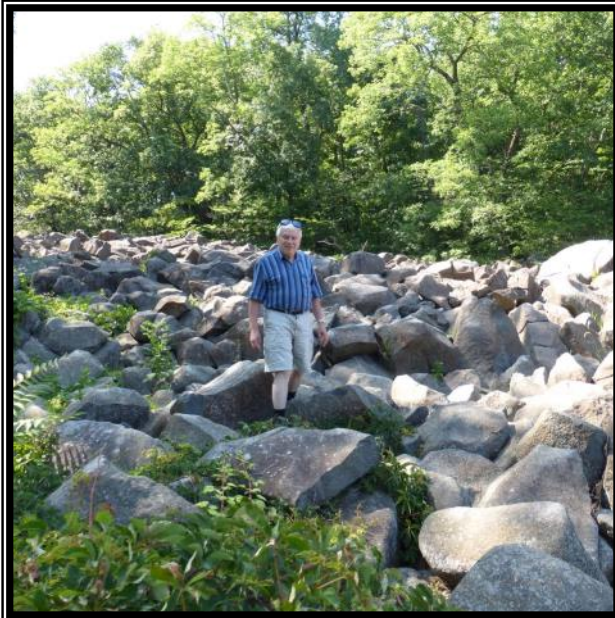
The earliest Bechtel ancestor of whom we know was Christian Bächtold from Schleithem in the northernmost Swiss canton of Schaffhausen. The Mennonite Encyclopedia reports the various measures government officials took to try to eradicate the Anabaptist movement. Among these was a military occupation of the municipality in the 1640s. "In 1640, an ultimatum was issued for their conversion. It was fruitless. In 1641, the village was again occupied by the military. All the men who were Mennonites were taken to Schaffhausen and placed in irons. Five of them broke out, but were caught and put into a chain gang, the chains being provided with bells. Christian Bächtold was whipped with the lash." (i) Apparently our ancestor was deemed some sort of ringleader, whether a leader just among these escapees or within the congregation. We know little more than this about Christian who fled to the German Palatinate a few years later where he was joined by his son, Christian Bechtel (note the spelling change, though spellings remained fluid for a few generations, including Baechtcl and even Beghtly).

One could say that Bechtels have a reputation for shutting down and

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opening churches! That same article in the Mennonite Encyclopedia recounts the continued severe repression of the Mennonites in Schleithem. Finally, in 1680, Nikolaus Hess' widow, "Margaretha Bächtold, with two children, immigrated to the Palatinate where her seven children were living, leaving one son in Schleithem. She was probably the last Mennonite of Schleithem. The struggles of the congregation had lasted 150 years." (ii)



**Ringling Rocks on Hans Jacob Bechtel's farm  
Pottstown, PA**



**Coventry Mennonite Meetinghouse and cemetery  
Chester County, PA**



**Butter Valley Community Church (est. as Hereford Menn Ch)**

My Bechtel ancestors remained in the German Palatinate for parts of three generations. Christian Bechtel's son, Georg (1658-1750), was born and died in the Palatinate. Two of his three sons (Hans Jacob and Samuel) emigrated to Pennsylvania where they served as Mennonite preachers. We believe that Hans Jacob was already a preacher in the Schaarhof area near

near Pottstown in 1720. The farm was named for the unique out-cropping containing rocks that make a clear ringing sound when hit with a hammer. The rockpile is now part of a public park. He and his son, Martin David, also ran a ferry across the nearby Schuylkill River. This ferry went to Chester County and the meetinghouse and graveyard in East Coventry. This region, the eastern part of modern day Berks County was dubbed the Manatant or Manatawny church district.

Hans Jacob Bechtel is listed as the first and founding preacher for the Hereford (now Bally Mennonite and Butter Valley Community) congregations. He also apparently served other "Manatawny" (Berks and Chester Counties) groups that became the Vincent and East Coventry churches.

In 1725, Hans Jacob joined



**Bally Mennonite Church (retained Franconia affiliation)**

Mannheim, Germany.

The preacher grandson from Georg's third son likewise emigrated and served in Pennsylvania.

In 1717, my ancestor, Hans Jacob Bechtel (1680-1739), emigrated to Pennsylvania, purchasing his 360 acre Ringling Rocks Farm

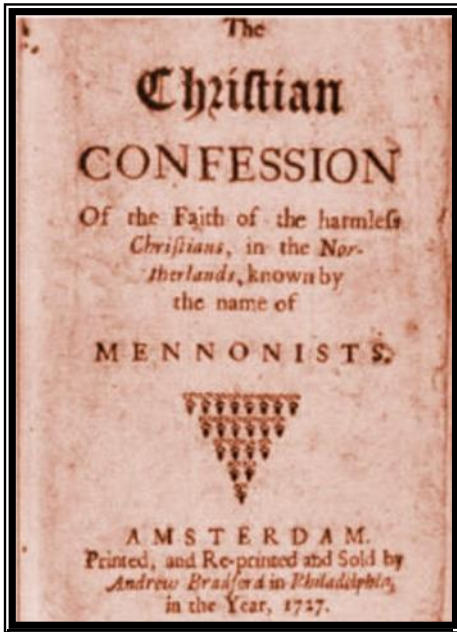
Bishop Jacob Gottschalk and 15 other bishops and ministers in signing an English translation of the 1632 Dordrecht Confession, adopting this confession and agreeing to send it to the government in Philadelphia. This was to show that they were peace-minded Mennonites, not revolutionary Muensterites.

"We the hereunder written

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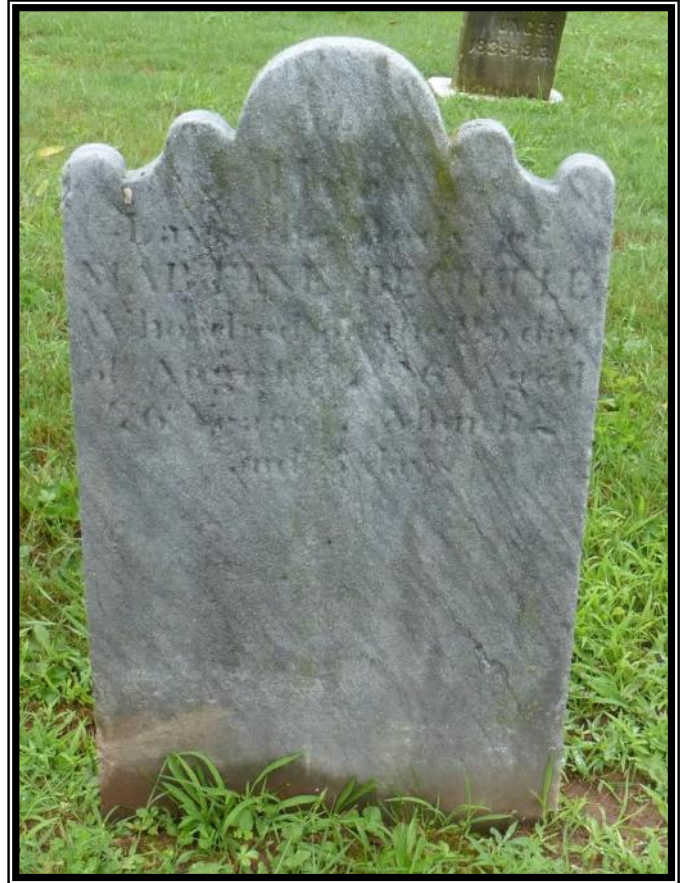
**Dordrecht Confession (1712 English translation)**

Servants of the Word of God, and Elders in the Congregation of the People, called Mennonists, in the Province of Pennsylvania, do acknowledge, and herewith make known, that we do own the foregoing Confession, Appendix, and Menno's Excusation, to be according to our Opinion; and also, have took the same to be wholly ours. In Testimony whereof, and that we believe that same to be good, we have here unto Subscribed our Names." (iii) He signed as "Jacob Beghtly."

Hans Jacob's eldest son Samuel preached at the Rockhill Mennonite Church (1764-1802); this congregation was variously dubbed Bechtel's or Gehman's, though not necessarily because of his role. Hans Jacob's middle son, Bishop Martin David (1709-1786) took over most of the farm and the ferry business upon Hans Jacob's death in 1739. Martin was ordained as preacher in 1739 and as bishop in 1758, serving the Vincent and Coventry congregations.

Martin David and Elizabeth Rickert had ten children, the youngest of their seven sons being Joseph. Though Hans Jacob and Martin David had second names, their children (and the next 5 generations) were known by their first names and the initial of their mother's surname. This was the common practice among Pennsylvania (and Ontario) Mennonites.

In the post Revolution late 1700s, many Pennsylvania Mennonites were again on the move. Available land was becoming harder to buy, the new Revolutionary government was erratic in its respect for Mennonites' scruples about war and Upper Canada was offering lands under the more trusted British Crown. Deacon Joseph R. Bechtel and his wife Magdalena Allebach, joined the early migrants to Waterloo Township, Ontario in 1802, along with their six children (a seventh was born three years later). In 1804 Joseph R. was ordained the first Mennonite preacher in the Grand River region, Waterloo Township. He preached primarily in the communities that became the Wanner and Preston Mennonite Churches in Cambridge, Ontario.



**Martin David Bechtel gravestone East Coventry cemetery**

We know rather little about preacher Joseph. To quote E. Reginald Good's introduction to this letter found in the Jacob Moyer Bible, "he was quickly overshadowed by Benjamin Eby when he was ordained." (iv) Eby was ordained preacher in 1809 and bishop in 1812.

Thanks to some papers kept in Vineland preacher Jacob Moyer's Bible, we do have this one 1822 letter in Joseph R's hand. It includes greetings to various Mennonites in the Vineland community, mentions his partial recovery from illness so that he has "occasionally been able to attend meeting," and alludes to some controversies "about the road... because many have been offended by it." He wishes for them "God's grace and blessing, the attendant power of His Holy Spirit – as protector and comforter in affliction, as teacher and guide through the desert of this world." (v)

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Joseph and Magdalena's son Samuel A. returned to Pennsylvania one winter and returned with his bride, Barbara Baumann. And so the line continued. Samuel and Barbara (Baumann) begat Solomon B. who with Hester (Clemens) begat Noah C. Noah C. married Hannah Woolner and their second eldest of five sons was Irvin W., my father.

Noah C. served as recording secretary for the Wanner Mennonite Church during the 1890s. The congregation's transition from German to English is evidenced in his notes and in the 1892 ordination of the new preacher from the congregation, Absalom B. Snyder, who preferred to preach in English.

In 1907, Hannah and their eldest (10 year old) son, Henry W., fell victim to typhoid. In 1911, Noah left his four remaining sons with relatives and moved west. He bought a farm near the present hamlet of Herronton, Alberta. He soon joined and became active in the Mountview Mennonite Church, 8 miles NE of High River, Alberta. Family lore recounts his role as song leader and his choosing to bike the miles to church so that his horses could rest on Sunday. Sometime later, he had his boys join him in Alberta. Three of them remained in Alberta but my father, Irvin W., soon returned to Ontario. My father never explained that move except for hints about being homesick for Ontario and perhaps tension with the widow lady down the road who in 1917 was to become his stepmother, Sarepta Fox. When Grandpa Noah died in 1942, he was buried in the Mountview cemetery. The Mountview church closed in 1974 and the cemetery is now used and cared for by the Trinity Mennonite Church of Calgary.

My father became a member of the Wanner Church near Cambridge

(Hespeler), Ontario but none of his brothers ever joined the Mountview Church. Their explanation was that the Mountview Church was much more strict with things like dress codes than the more open Wanner church back in Ontario. One of my five Alberta cousins did for a time belong to an Evangelical Missionary Church (formerly the Mennonite Brethren in Christ) until they moved out of that church's region.

And so it was that Irvin W. married the Methodist-reared Ada Reaman, and they gave their seven children first and second names. I, child number five, Kenneth James, was the one who became a preacher, the first direct paternal line descendant of preacher Joseph R. to be ordained by the Mennonite Conference. (There have been others through maternal lines, and some Bechtel descendants ordained in other denominations.) I sometimes joke that we don't know much about what Joseph may or may not have done, but they didn't repeat the mistake until recently!

I have not carried out the "family tradition" of opening or closing churches like Barbara (Bächtold) Hess, Hans Jacob Bechtel or Joseph R. Bechtel. My closest would be my helping a congregation wind up its affairs during my term as Intentional Interim Conference Minister (Saskatchewan). It has, however, been my privilege to serve as an Intentional Interim, Transitional or Resource Pastor in congregations in Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. These have included congregations whose backgrounds were so called "Old" and



**Ken and his siblings at Grandpa Noah C. Bechtel's grave Mountview Mennonite Cemetery High River, AB**

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“Amish Mennonite” and 1870s, 1920s and 1940s migration Dutch/Prussian/Russian Mennonites. In Alberta, I have served First Mennonite (Calgary) and Bergthal Mennonite (Didsbury), and am currently serving as part time Resource Pastor at First Mennonite (Edmonton).

Bechtel is a Mennonite name, as Mennonite as Enns, Goerzen and Mierau (my wife's surname). As Mennonite, in fact, as Beaver or O'Kafka or whatever other surname we may have, we who choose to be Mennonite! Thanks be to God for our various godly heritages!

#### My Bechtel Family Line

- Christian Bächtold (Anna Meyer) 1595-ca 1655 Fled from Schleithem, Switzerland to German Palatinate 1648.
- Christian M. Bechtel (Anna Moyer?) 1622-after 1685 Born Schleithem; died Zuzenhausen, Germany
- Georg Bechtel (wife ?) 1658-ca.1750 Born & died in Germany. [3 sons with descendants in PA-Rev. Hans Jacob; Rev. Samuel(1683-1731); David (1690-1753)]
- Rev. Hans Jacob Bechtel (Elizabeth Rickert) 1680 - 1739 Born in Germany, emigrated to Pennsylvania ca. 1717)
- Bishop Martin David Bechtel (Elizabeth Reiff) 1709-1777 Born in Germany, died in Pennsylvania
- Rev. Joseph R. Bechtel (Magdalena Allebach) 1761-1838 Emigrated to Canada 1802 as Deacon, ordained first preacher in Waterloo Township 1804

- Samuel A. Bechtel (Barbara Baumann) 1791-1861 Born Pennsylvania, died Ontario.
- Solomon B. Bechtel (Hester Clemens) 1828-1897 Born & died Ontario
- Noah C. Bechtel (Hannah Woolner) 1865-1942 Born Ontario; died Alberta
- Irvin W. Bechtel (Ada Reaman) 1901-1958 Born & died Ontario
- Kenneth Bechtel (Audrey Mierau) 1945 – Born in Ontario.

Ken Bechtel is a semi retired pastor, working part-time at First Mennonite Church, Edmonton. After teaching High School English for ten years, he studied at AMBS in Elkhart and served in Ontario before taking further specialization in Intentional Interim Ministry. Ken has served as interim pastor, Conference minister, consultant and taught fellow pastors. Ken enjoys his “three quarter retirement” by spending time in Saskatoon with his wife Audrey Mierau, reading and researching Mennonite history (including the Dutch/Polish/Prussian/Russian stories), his hobby of raising canaries and commuting monthly to Edmonton.

(i) Wenger, John C. and C. Arnold Snyder. "Schleitheim Confession." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. 1990. Web. 28 Apr 2016

(ii) Ibid

(iii) Dyck, Cornelius J. , *An Introduction to Mennonite History* (Herald Press, 1981), p.214

(iv) E. Reginald Good, “Jacob Moyer's Mennonite Church Records: An interpretative sketch,” *Mennogespracht: Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario*, Vol.3, No.1., pp.4-5

(v) Ibid. ❖

## Archives and Library Report

by  
Ted Regehr

Members of the team of archivists I led at the Public Archives of Canada (now the National Archives of Canada) were sometimes called hearse chasers. Whenever a cabinet minister, prime minister or a senior bureaucrat left office we were dispatched to ensure that all historically valuable material in his or her office be preserved. All items received by virtue of the office held by the individual was the property of the government and, unless it was needed for the continuing operation of the office by his or her successor, must be transferred intact to the Public Archives. We also strongly encouraged such indi-



Ted Regehr

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viduals to make arrangements to donate, at their discretion, their private or personal papers.

Mennonites, of course, are not that legalistic, but we all know that much valuable historical material is destroyed when individuals leave office or die. And the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) has no program to send archivists to retrieve historically valuable material when leaders leave office or members die with no directives on what should be done with their papers. I am therefore very grateful and want to highlight two recent accessions, transferred to the archives by family members who saw continuing interest and value in papers left by deceased family members. This is also an appeal to others to consult with archivists before disposing of old family papers whose value, perhaps because of the language change, descendants are unable to assess.

A recent accession of this kind, received by the archives of the MHSA consists of a quite large package of somewhat water-damaged, detailed, typewritten sermons by Peter Schellenberg, the long serving pastor of the Coaldale Mennonite Church. Peter Schellenberg, like almost all the members of his congregation, had come from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. They had endured great suffering during and after the Russian Revolution and the Makhno terror. Peter Schellenberg's mother, stepfather, their brothers, one step-sister and his step-brother were murdered by the bandits, and three of the children of Peter and his wife Justina died in infancy. How can such a person become a preacher proclaiming the good news of salvation? How does he, together with his devoted wife, provide spiritual guidance, comfort and support to many other members of his congregation who have shared in those experiences.

Peter Schellenberg's carefully written or typed sermons appeared at the door of the archives shortly after the death of Peter Schellenberg's son, John. Family members, perhaps unable to read the German and looking at the quite unimpressive and slightly water-damaged sermons, might have decided just to throw them in the garbage. At the archives these sermons now offer unique insights into the religious challenges of people who had suffered great loss.

We have also received, recently, from a member of the Klassen family in Coaldale, a collection of original letters and notes from relatives still living in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Almost all are written in the Gothic German script, often on paper of very poor quality. Anyone unable to read them, and judging them by their fragile condition, might have decided, after the death of immediate family members who had received the letters, that they were of no further interest. But Alfred Klassen, a younger family member, saw the value of these letter and notes and devoted many hours to transcribing and then translating them. He recently donated the originals, the transcripts and the translations to the archives of the MHSA.

My objective in this report is simple: before disposing of, or destroying old family papers, perhaps written in a strange script or language, check with an archivist or historian to assess their relevance and value in promot-

ing an understanding the history, experiences and theology of the many different groups of Mennonites with many diverse experiences, in Alberta. So, when in doubt, invite us to be hearse chasers when deciding what to do with possibly very valuable historical remnants (Nachlass) of deceased parents and grandparents. ❖

## MAID Training and Project Update

by  
Alice Unrau

The Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) project has been progressing at a slower pace than we had hoped. In March, we had Alf Redekopp from Ontario



Alice Unrau

spend a week with us, training four volunteers and three board members. The scanning is actually the easy part; providing the descriptions is more difficult. Ideally, we want the person or studio who took the picture, location where the picture was taken, the occasion and the names of the people in the photo. This is not always possible and our hope, is that if there are pictures on the MAID site where names are needed and someone



Alf Redekopp

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them how they can search for people. We are also unable to identify people at times. If the reader recognizes someone in a photo that we have identified incorrectly or not at all, the MHSA would appreciate your contacting us.

MAID has been operating for only a year and already has over 80,000 photos on it. I noticed that one photo I had uploaded had, within one day, 35 hits; people are interested. With Fresno and Germany joining, I can see where there will be much more interest. ❖



**MAID training session**

recognizes the people, we will be contacted so we can add the information to the photo description.

We have 250 pictures uploaded and descriptions on a majority of them. We are very fortunate that Austin Janz has joined our group; his specific role is scanning the photos. He is doing much more than we had originally asked him to do and is putting archival names on each photo and the computer file. Because this work is very time consuming, we are so grateful for his skills. We lack the manpower to move more quickly. I have been spending at least two days a week and often more just trying to keep up with the descriptions of the scanned images.

We need to get the word out to people so they will bring their photos into the society. The only way we can do this effectively is to speak to people personally so they understand what happens to pictures. The MHSA would appreciate the help of its newsletter readers in this respect. It may be helpful if readers could show them how to access the MAID site, [www.archives.mhsc.ca](http://www.archives.mhsc.ca), and show

## Menno Simons Christian School Genealogy Project

by  
*Lil Bartel*

Once again the grade nine students at Menno Simons School in Calgary have completed the genealogy project as a component of their religion class. Most met the criteria set out by Mr. Thiessen and it was difficult to get a single student for third place. All projects were well done.

The students this year had many good stories, pictures and some had documents of their families' trek to Canada.

The last day of the project, we had them tell us from where each family had arrived and found there to be at least twenty former home countries. Once again, this emphasized the diversity in this school's student body. The students also shared stories of events and people in their families.

It was my pleasure to work with principal, Byron Thiessen, again, as well as the students, I appreciated the input from their parents and families. My hope is that this project will spark further interest and that they value their family histories.

The winners of a small monetary award were Tiffany Chueng, Alexa Braun and Matt Pearce. ❖



**Lil Bartel**



**Lil Bartel with students Tiffany Chueng, Alexa Braun, Matt Pearce**



# 9th Annual Mennonite Heritage Picnic



July 30, 2016  
11:00 am – 5:00 pm  
23110 TWP RD 520  
Sherwood Park  
Alberta  
[www.mennoniteheritage.com](http://www.mennoniteheritage.com)