



# Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XX Number 2

June 2017

## Our Family's Relocation - A Second Start In Canada

*by Ron Taniguchi*

### Family History



Ron Taniguchi

My maternal grandparents, Masajiro and Kayo Takahashi, emigrated in May of 1920 leaving the Kanagawa Prefecture in Japan (south of Tokyo) to settle in Canada. Grand-

father Masajiro was returning to Canada, presumably after getting married in Japan, to return to his occupation of farmer (as listed on

*(Continued on page 8)*

## My WWI Military Service

*by the late Bernhard Janz (1897—1985)*

*Written September 18, 1978*

After 60 years I am writing some of my memories of World War I, 1916 to 1918. I spent this time in trenches with the Reserve Infantry Regiment 253, Seventh Company, First Squad of the army of Kaiser Wilhelm II, of the German Empire.

After completing the basic training in November 1916, I was assigned to the front in Romania at Siebenbuergen and then moved in the direction of Hermannstadt, Kronstadt, Ploesti, and Focsani. After a prolonged march, our transport joined the 253rd Regiment, which was located in a mountainous region. Our first greeting was the artillery fire of the enemy, Romania, then part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The leaders of our transport were glad they didn't have to stay.

We were sent to different companies and led to the trenches. Otto Schoenke, from Neufelde, and I were assigned to the Seventh Company, First Squad. Our corporal, Herr Baehr, was twenty-seven years old. We were the first East Prussians. The other soldiers in our squad came from Southern Germany. They said, "You come from where the world is closed off with boards" (You come from the sticks). Our corporal was a fair, experienced, and respected soldier of the front lines. He already had been awarded the Iron Cross 2nd class. Other soldiers in our squad had also been awarded the Iron Cross. They were 20 years old and had been at the front line for some time while we, the newcomers, were only 19.

The group lived in a low emergency shelter. It was too low to walk upright. The side where the ground was higher served as a bench and bed. The

entrance consisted of a tarpaulin, and we newcomers slept nearest to it. At the other end, near the fire, were the corporal's quarters. The ceiling consisted of thin trees, with brush and dirt on top. Fire was only allowed at night, so the enemy could not see the smoke.



Bernhard Janz  
November 1916  
(Bernhard Janz Family Collection)

### In this Issue

1. WWI Military Service
1. Our Family's Relocation
2. Editorial Reflections
2. Chairman's Corner
13. MHSA AGM Report
16. MHSA Conference Report
18. Menno Simons Genealogy
18. Peter Penner's Memoirs
20. Machno's Wagons
22. Letters To The Editor
23. Coaldale Mennonite Culture
25. You'll Never Forget To Love
26. Peace and War Book
27. Along The Road To Freedom
28. Mennonite Heritage Picnic

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WWI German Iron Cross 2nd Class (Wikipedia)

*(Continued on page 4)*

## Editorial Reflections:

by

Dave Toews

In this edition of the MHSA newsletter, Bernhard Janz repeatedly thanks the Lord for the grace that allowed him to survive two years of trench warfare in WW1. *"It was by a special grace of the Almighty God that I survived the many dangers of World War I. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness. He has been faithful and still is"*.

Ron Taniguchi barely has a harsh word to say about the government of the day that forced the Japanese Canadians to be moved inland and in the process lose all their property. *"How could the Cana-*



Dave Toews

*dian government behave so irrationally and fall back on their promises? This irrational decision still irks me today"*.

These statements tell me a lot about the faith and character of Ron Taniguchi and Bernhard Janz. These men did not let these tragic events in their lives be the reason to lose their faith, and they were not consumed with bitterness and hatred because of them.

"Why are you here?" David Derksen, Chair of the Bergthal Mennonite Church asked in his opening remarks to the group gathered in Didsbury for the MHSA Spring Conference. Katie Harder and Dave Neufeldt have addressed this matter thoughtfully in their respective reports in this issue. Since such a question can nudge us to think on many levels, let me add another dimension to this discussion. If the question can be broadened to mean "Why are we here on this earth?" then the challenge is for each of us to ponder the very meaning of life. Our various answers will be derived from our own philosophical and religious conceptions of God, the soul, the afterlife, free will, and good and evil. Our

social ties, language, and culture will play a part in shaping them as well. "Why are you here?" is indeed a stimulating question.

Thank you to all the authors and contributors to this issue. Your articles are always appreciated.

The MHSA welcomes your feedback, emails, letters to the editor, and articles. Contact Dave Toews at [dmttoews@gmail.com](mailto:dmttoews@gmail.com). The deadline for submissions to the next newsletter is Aug 15, 2017. This deadline is earlier than usual for the fall newsletter because the MHSA Fall Conference in Coaldale is on Oct 14, 2017. ❖

## Chairman's Corner

by

Dave Neufeldt

At the MHSA spring conference at Bergthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury we were welcomed by congregational chair David Derksen. He challenged us with the question "Why are you here?" In thinking about this question it seems that it could be interpreted in many different ways.

One could interpret David's question as being "Why are we holding our meeting at Bergthal Mennonite Church?" We are a provincial society and the population we serve is distributed throughout the province. By holding our conferences in different locations it allows for greater participation by people who are not likely to travel a long distance to attend. For those who will travel, it allows them to



Dave Neufeldt

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(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

learn about the history of Mennonites in various locations.

David's question could also be interpreted as a more personal question directed at the individual attendees. Why did each of us choose to come to the spring conference? The theme of this conference was the history of songfests. Songfests were events that brought Mennonites from across the province together. They played an important role in the building of provincial church bodies. No doubt many people attended the conference specifically because this theme resonated with them as having historical importance.

The question could also be directed at individuals, asking them why they are personally involved in the historical society. For me, my interest in Anabaptist and Mennonite history is somewhat twofold and goes back to my youth. I was intrigued by the stories I heard about the early Anabaptists and how the Mennonite faith became

established. I explored that interest further at university where I took Anabaptist and Mennonite history courses from Walter Klaassen and Frank Epp.

A second source of interest for me was learning about my own family history. My grandfather John E. Weaver had a keen interest in genealogy and had traced our family history extensively. My interest in genealogy is not just in the names and dates but in the stories about who my ancestors were. So much of who we are is shaped by who our families are.

Another interpretation of David's question, and probably the one he was really asking, is why does MHSA exist? What is our purpose? One of our board members recently told me of a conversation he had with a pastor. This pastor was not interested in history, claiming that history was past and the church should only look forward. In my mind this viewpoint is shortsighted and does not recognize the value of history. Every-

thing we do is based on history. Every decision we make is based on our previous experiences. The more we understand about how we got to where we are, the better we are able to determine how to get to where we want to be. We read the Bible, which is the history of how God has worked in people's lives in the past, to help guide us in living our lives in the present.

Mennonite history is full of stories – stories of success and stories of failure, stories of happiness and stories of pain, stories of division and stories of coming together. As a historical society our role is to preserve the stories of the Mennonite people so that future generations can continue to learn from them. We cannot know exactly how the historical material we preserve will impact people in the future. That will be their story to tell. Our role is to ensure that the rich stories of the Mennonite people are not lost to future generations. ♦

## Membership Application & Donation Form

- - Memberships are due in the fall of each year (\$30.00/yr).
- - ***Lifetime memberships are now available for \$500***
- - Newsletters are issued in the winter, spring and fall.

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Tax receipts will be issued for donations for \$20.00 or more.

Donations are especially required to continue archival cataloging of donated historical material.

(Continued from page 1)

Our companions did not appear to be very clean. Their hands were in constant motion due to lice. After a few weeks we were in the same condition.

The very first night, I was required to accompany one of the experienced soldiers to man a listening post. Depending on how near the enemy was, we were posted about 50 metres, in front of the trench. We were to watch for the enemy and issue a warning in case of a surprise attack. We worked in pairs. Our duty lasted all night and, since November nights are long, everyone stood guard for two or three two-hour shifts. This was my introduction to the infantry, and the beginning of many hours as a sentry.

We stayed there only a few days but were under constant enemy fire. One of our reinforcements, a Memellaender, died here. A series of attacks and battles allowed us to progress to Focsani.

By this time I had lost many companions and experienced much. Before a major attack, Lieutenant Giebler would tell us what the plans were and encourage us with a pep talk. Usually we carried our regular full backpack, but on sudden attacks we would have to hand them in. We could only keep the attack pack, which consisted of a blanket, a tarpaulin, a coat, and a mess kit. Attack and defense alternated constantly, and we, the infantry, were always near the enemy. "No man's land" was always directly in front of us.

Until Christmas 1916, we were constantly making advances. We had experienced many battles. There was little action on Christmas Eve. Perhaps the enemy was also thinking about Christmas. Otto Schoenke and I lay



WWI No Man's Land (Google Photos)

in a foxhole covered with bush and dirt. We had received mail from home and were reading in the light of a small candle when I noticed tears rolling down Otto's cheeks. He had received the news that his brother had been killed in combat in France.

The next day we

experienced heavy artillery and machine gun fire. December 31, 1916 was a particularly difficult day. We had to attack in an extended line. The enemy artillery fired at us constantly. It seemed as if any moment one's head would be torn off. Since it had rained all day, we were drenched and covered entirely with mud. On occasions we had to lay flat on our stomachs due to the

heavy fire. When it grew dark, we were finally able to dig foxholes. If the enemy had staged a counter attack at this time, we would have been totally helpless. Our rifles were so full of mud they would not have fired. Sergeant Pfeifer was seriously wounded by a bullet in his stomach. Upon relief by another company, four men carried him on two rifles.

The next day, New Year's Day, we were billeted in a village. We expected several days of rest since we had been in action for some time. We cleaned our rifles and were looking forward to a quiet restful sleep. However, after midnight, the command to get ready immediately and to fall in line in half an hour was issued. Again we marched toward an unknown destination. For my corporal, this was to be his last march. We were marching in a narrow valley that was no more than 200 metres wide. As the day began, it was apparent that it would be a bright sunny day. A lone Russian plane flew over us at a considerable altitude. We were commanded to spread out and get ready to attack. The exact time of the attack was announced. Since we still had some time, Corporal Baehr, who stood next to me on my left side, ate a piece of bread. His calmness encouraged me to also take a bit to eat.

At the prearranged time, everyone ran up the slope, out at the valley, and onto the flat surrounding land. Immediately, we encountered machine gun and artillery fire. We had run about 150 to 200 metres when the command to 'lie down' was given. I threw my backpack in front of my head, immediately began to dig with my spade,

(Continued on page 5)



(Continued from page 4)

and threw the dirt in front of me for protection from the bullets that were hitting the ground all around me. One bullet damaged the butt of my rifle. Suddenly the command to retreat was given. I grabbed my pack, spade, and rifle and ran as quickly as possible back to the shelter of the valley. Corporal Baehr was now at my right and a little ahead of me. I was able to see how he knelt to undo his belt buckle. He was white as a sheet. After dark, his body was retrieved and the following day it was buried. My companion, Weiss, who was also 19 years old and came from my home community, was also killed in this attack.

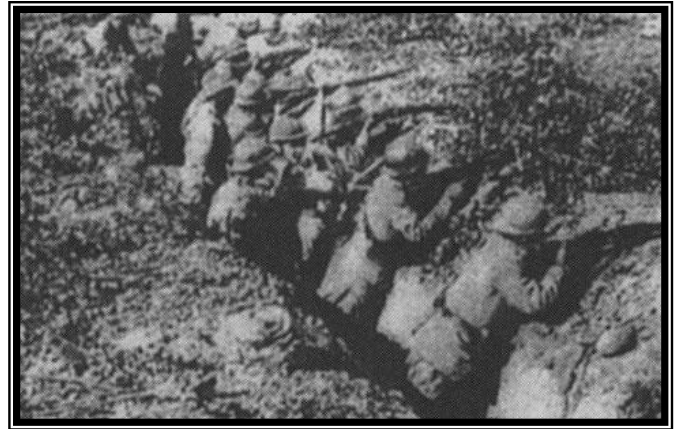
Following this episode, we were moved to another place where one-man foxholes had already been dug at ten metre intervals. It was dark and, although it was winter and I had no roof over my head, I promptly fell asleep. I awoke when a heavy shell landed a few paces from my foxhole. It didn't explode. God had protected me! The shells had been falling for some time, and my companions were amazed that I had not heard a thing. I must have been very tired.

At another place we again were in foxholes. We were preparing to attack the enemy's trenches. After the artillery had fired at enemy positions for one or two hours, we infantry had to advance to attack. At 9:00 a.m. we rushed forward with bayonets attached to our rifles. Prior to the attack, I prayed, "Lord be with me, regardless of the outcome". One fellow soldier, Schmidtke, from the Skaisgirren region, fell backward as he got up out of the foxhole. He died of a heart attack. Immediately, the enemy began to fire at us, and I saw

that several soldiers were hit. I was worried about what would happen to us when we got to the enemy trenches. The Russians were still firing when we were only 30 metres from their trench. Then I saw the Russians stick their rifles into the ground and raise their hands. I was amazed! They were well-built young men. I certainly was happy that they surrendered.

We jumped across the Russian trench while the second line of soldiers took care of the prisoners and wounded enemies. We continued to advance for the rest of the day until we encountered more enemy fire. Then we lay down and dug fox-holes in the darkness.

Sometimes enemy fire kept us in our fox-holes for days on end. The enemy knew where we were, but we also had to know how far away they were. One night I volunteered to go scout the enemy's position with First Class Private Kertzer and another



WWI Trench Warfare (Google Photos)

soldier. We were able to get close enough to hear them speak and move around. Our mission was successful.

When it became impossible to advance, we fought a static war. At times like this we dug trenches and performed guard duty every night. The enemy would often interrupt our work by shooting both heavy guns and rifles in our direction.

On one occasion as we were advancing, the enemy tried to stop our progress by firing shells that exploded at a low altitude and sent down a rain of shrapnel. To avoid being hit, we would throw ourselves to the ground. Suddenly I felt something hit my back. I thought it must have been a large lump of dirt that was thrown by an exploding grenade. As I put my hand on my back, I quickly pulled back. It was hot! It was a piece of shrapnel that had landed on a padded part of my coat.

On another occasion we were marching on a highway. We left the highway to reach a certain village. As we came to the top of a hill, we encountered gunfire, so we had to run over this hill one at a time. Each one drew fire, but no one was hit. About two kilometres from the village, we stopped in a valley, and I received the following mission from Acting Officer Hauk, "Go find out if there are any enemy soldiers left in the village." Since a command cannot be disobeyed, I went, realizing that I was a test soldier. If I were shot at, they would know the enemy was still in the village. As I walked along, I was continually looking for holes in the ground where I could take cover in case someone started to shoot. After walking about a kilometre and encountering only civilians, I returned, reported to the officer, and thanked God for protecting me. No enemy soldiers were found as we later marched into the village. Officer Hauk was killed in action at a later date.

(Continued on page 6)

*(Continued from page 5)*

When the enemy would attack, they would shell our trenches for some time and then their infantry would advance. To repel their attack, we would have to fire as rapidly as possible. On one occasion, Second Lieutenant Mueller was killed when a bullet struck his head. He died a few paces to my left. When we attacked it would usually also result in casualties, both dead and wounded, on our side.

On December 6, 1916, our battalion captured over 1,000 prisoners and the baggage from 300 ox carts in an encounter at Lumponi, Romania. On December 12, our Seventh Company captured over 300 prisoners and the enemy's divisional headquarters.

In order to capture the city of Rimnicul Sarat, we had to cross a high steel bridge. While we were on the bridge, the order to turn back was given because mines had been planted on it, and they could have exploded at any moment. Despite the fact that we were under constant fire, I managed to cross the Seretti River by jumping from stone to stone without getting wet.

The battle at Marasesti, Romania in August 1917 was a terrible experience. A major offensive had been planned, but it failed. We had to relieve a group of older soldiers. It was extremely hot. Water was scarce, and everyone suffered intensely in the heat. The constant noise of the Russian artillery and machine gun fire was unnerving. The sound of the artillery shells was like never-ending freight trains travelling in the air. After three weeks we were relieved, but our company had suffered casualties, both dead and wounded. We were happy to leave that place even though we were put into action at another place after several days. In our trench I met a wounded Russian soldier leaning on a breechless rifle. His leg was injured, and he begged for a drink. I was unable to give him any as there was not even enough for our group.

We moved toward the left in the mountains to the Susita Valley. These were not pleasant days as we were often under artillery fire. We were situated at the base of a plateau from where we launched several unsuccessful attacks. Since we couldn't advance, besides doing normal guard duty we had to work hard every night at building a more permanent set of shelters and trenches. During the day we could sleep in between guard duty. Even though the enemy could not see our tents, sleep was difficult due to artillery fire.

For our nine-man group, we built a shelter that measured four metres by four metres by about two metres high. Digging was very difficult due to the hard ground and the numerous rocks. The roof consisted of one layer of tree stems, which we had to chop down ourselves. On top of that were layers of brush followed by layers of soil, tree stems, and soil. Inside we built a three-level bunk out of tree trunks. This slept 9 men while the corporal had a bed of his own. One could hardly turn around. There was little room between the top bunk and the ceiling. Our shelter provided no protection from heavy shells, although it offered some protection from light trench mortars. Our shelter was hit once, but thank God it did not penetrate the roof.

I experienced many difficult weeks and days in Romania, some of which I have described. Romania was defeated. In December of 1917, a

ceasefire was declared. We remained in Focsani as a precaution. We spent much time drilling and practicing, so we would be prepared in case of a new attack.

On March 1, 1918, we had to go back to the front line. A major offensive had been planned. This caused an immediate change in the mood of the group. Whenever we moved away from the front line, everyone was happy and talkative. This offensive was never carried out, as a treaty was signed between Romania and Germany. War with Romania was over and I was happy again. I thanked God for His merciful help and protection to this point.

Our 253rd Regiment was transferred to France in March 1918. Because of a boil on my right leg, I stayed behind and spent ten days in the hospital. I rejoined my Seventh Company at Meta in Alsace-Lorraine with Lieutenant Schmidt, who had been assigned to accompany those who, for some reason or another, had to stay behind. The trip took nine days. Another day on the train brought us to St. Quentin, and we reached the front lines after a long march.

Upon our arrival we immediately had to relieve the soldiers on duty in the trenches. It was night time, and the tired soldiers left as quietly as possible, so the enemy would not notice them. I was immediately assigned to two hours of guard duty. It's a terrible feeling to be in a strange place in the dark when you do not know where you are located and what your surroundings are. One has to be very attentive. Fortunately, there was little action.

After a few days, we were stationed in foxholes in a small forest.

*(Continued on page 7)*

(Continued from page 6)

We encountered heavy French artillery fire. The trees were broken and splintered all around us, and it was raining. After dark someone had to get food. Corporal Buemiller asked for volunteers. No one really wanted to go because it was dark and raining, and the field kitchen was not always easy to locate. Two men from each squad were assigned to go. Luckily my name was not called, but Olto Sclioenke, who shared a foxhole with me, had to go. Because of the rain, we had covered our hole with a tarp. While Schoenke was gone, a large grenade fragment crashed through the tarp into the ground



WWI Foxhole (Google Photos)

beside me where he would have been had he been there.

On another occasion, when it was my turn to get food, we unexpectedly encountered artillery fire. For protection I jumped into a grenade crater. To my shocking surprise, I landed on a corpse. Needless to say, it didn't take me long to find another crater.

At another location, we were in the second line. I shared a foxhole with Private First Class Walter

Nieselt. Because we didn't have any water, we went 1.5 kilometres to a French village that had a larger pond. It was under fire and deserted. I found a blouse and tore it into rags to wrap around my feet. Then we washed our socks and planned to fill our mess kits with water and return. There was sporadic enemy artillery fire but not close enough to cause us concern.

We never got to filling our mess kits with water. Suddenly, we heard a loud bang! Dirt and dust flew high into the air around us. I stood near a wine cellar and was about to go there for protection. As I turned to go, I saw that half my right hand was missing. At the same time I heard my comrade Nieselt call for help. He too, had been wounded. I told him I couldn't help him as I was also wounded. My face was bleeding, and I had received shrapnel in the upper part of my right arm. At the First Aid Station, the shrapnel was removed from my arm. I reported that Nieselt was wounded. Later his mother wrote that he had been wounded in the area of his ribs. He recovered and returned to active duty.

All this occurred on April 20, 1918. Almost five months were spent in the hospital. My hand looked as if it was torn to shreds. The doctor in charge bandaged the hand. He felt sorry for young people who were injured in the war. When I was wounded and saw that my thumb and forefinger were uninjured, I was thankful to God. The doctor could not say if the fingers could be saved. Later I heard that he (the doctor) was killed in action. The first aid station was located in a mansion. Those that were wounded and waiting to be transported to the hospital were billeted in the mansion. I spent one night there, but due to the pain I could not sleep. I soon realized that the beds were infested with lice.

The next day we were taken to the train station in Red Cross ambulances. During a good portion of this drive we experienced artillery fire. After two days of riding in a boxcar, I arrived at the hospital in Strasbourg, Alsace. As the blood-caked bandage was removed, I almost lost consciousness. A glass of whiskey made me feel better. The next two weeks were the most difficult as I had much pain and a high temperature. When the time came to re-bandage my hand, fear would cause me to perspire.

After three weeks, I was transferred to the hospital in Ansbach in Bavaria. There I met Niepolt, a man from our company who was wounded after I was. I felt considerably better now and was able to get out on passes. From here I received a transfer to the Garrison Hospital in Tilsit, East Prussia. In Tilsit I got my first two-day leave since I entered the army almost two years before. Then I spent another seven weeks in a hospital in Heinrichswalde, which is 16 kilometres from Lakendorf.

On September 12, 1918, I was declared 'healed' by the hospital and was released. My hand was still bandaged. I got to the Relief Battalion in Wiesbaden, where I promptly received three weeks leave to recuperate. From Wiesbaden, I was sent to Hadersleben, which at that time was on the border



WWI German Red Cross Armband (Wikipedia)

(Continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

of Germany and Denmark. The military doctor sent me back to Wiesbaden because of my wounded hand. On November 9, 1918, the German revolution started, and on November 18, 1918, I was discharged. The revolutionary period lasted from November 1918 until the establishment in August 1919 of a republic that later became known as the Weimar Republic.

I spent from July 25, 1916, to November 18, 1918, in the military service of the German Empire in World War I (two years and almost four months). The First World War started on August 2, 1914 and ended on November 9, 1918. In spite of the fact that no enemy soldier was on German soil at the end of the war, it was still an unhappy ending.

It was by a special grace of Almighty God that I survived the many dangers of World War I. In countless dangers God spread His protecting wings over me. I thankfully agree with the Psalmist when he writes in Psalm 107: 6, 8, "Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble. He delivered them out of their distresses. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His loving kindness." He has been faithful and still is!



Flag of the German Weimar Republic  
(Wikipedia)

*Published with permission from the Bernhard Janz Family. ❖*

and cultivate strawberries. Besides farming, Masajiro also did some carpentry and fishing. My mother was born on one those fishing trips in the fishing village of Port Essington near Prince Rupert, B.C. in July of 1921. My mother was the oldest child and had six younger siblings: one sister Alice and five brothers - Ed, Jack, Joe, John, and Henry.



Mom Esther Taniguchi, strawberry field, New Westminster, BC

(Continued from page 1)



Kayo Takahashi May 1920



Masajiro Takahashi May 1920

As a boy, I remember Grandfather Masajiro as a kind soul, agreeing to take me to the local store for candy when I asked. In New Westminster Grandmother Kayo would help Masajiro with the farming, often assisting in clearing the brush from the land. Since she died before I was born, I have no memories of her.

The story of my paternal grandparents, Kizo and Kotoye Taniguchi, is a little more unusual. In the early 1900's Grandfather Kizo left Japan with three friends at age 16 and traveled to Hawaii by ship as a stowaway. After a year in

his passport). He would later obtain some land in New Westminster, B.C.

(Continued on page 9)



(Continued from page 8)

Hawaii the four young men got itchy feet and stowed away again to get to California. In California they felt uncomfortable and hid in barns during the day leaving at night to raid gardens for food. They caught sparrows to eat and were happy to catch the occasional pigeon. Soon they were restless again and traveled up the coast to Alaska and back down to Vancouver. Mr. Nakahama, Mr. Ichino, and Grandfather Taniguchi settled there (Mr. Nakahama started a Udon Restaurant, and Mr. Ichino started a taxi business.) Mr. Sugimoto went to Raymond in Alberta.

Grandfather took a job cutting trees until he was injured. Upon leaving the hospital, he could only find a job setting pins in a bowling lane. After settling down in Vancouver, he decided to write home and ask his family to find a wife for him. Grandmother Kotoye was selected, and the marriage was performed by proxy in Japan. So Grandmother married a man she had never met on the other side of the ocean and then traveled across to meet him and live in a strange country.

My father, Minoru Charles Taniguchi, was born in Vancouver in April 1915. A sister was born in 1918 while my grandparents were on a trip to Japan. The baby got seasick and was deemed unable to travel to Canada, so she was left behind in Japan with family. Unfortunately I have no name for this individual who was my aunt. In Canada, five brothers arrived for my dad - Robert, Satoru, Mas, George, and Sam. Sadly, young George perished in an apartment fire in 1938. Eventually the Taniguchis were able to afford a nice

house on Wall Street in Vancouver, a short distance from Burrard Inlet. Grandma would often catch fish or crab from the inlet to add to the family meals.

My dad, Minoru Charles Taniguchi, and mother, Masayo Esther Takahashi, were married on Sunday, Nov 16, 1941. Their marriage was arranged by a go-between (family friends - the Nakahamas). Three weeks later on Dec 7, 1941 Japan invaded Pearl Harbor. This started a chain of events that affected not only our family but all Japanese living on the B.C. coast.

### The Japanese Relocation

(A good introduction to the historical events preceding the relocation of the Japanese was written by Henry Dyck and printed in the October 2016 edition of the MHSA newsletter.)

The invasion of Pearl Harbor in 1941 greatly changed our future. There was a very strong anti-Asian sentiment existing at that time and a fear of the "enemy alien" Japanese living on the west coast of British Columbia. Many were discriminated against in areas of employment, education and social rights (e.g. voting).

In February of 1942 the Canadian Government ordered all Japanese, including all those of Canadian citizenship, to relocate further inland. Until this time the center of the Japanese community had been on Powell Street in the downtown east side of Vancouver (west of my grandparent's home on Wall street).

Due to the relocation, this vibrant Japanese community, known as Japantown or Little Tokyo, disappeared forever. Properties were seized with the promise they would be returned afterwards. This promise was never kept, and the assets were sold off to pay for the internment. The U.S. govern-



Charlie and Esther's wedding  
Nov 16, 1941



Esther and Charlie Taniguchi  
happier days, Stanley Park

(Continued on page 10)

(Continued from page 9)

ment also interned their Japanese population but returned their properties after the war. How could the Canadian government behave so irrationally and fall back on their promises? This irrational decision still irks me today.

Japanese families had a choice to move to an internment camp in the B.C. interior or to Alberta. Both sides of my family chose Alberta because this option let families remain together as a unit. The Takahashis were sent to a sugar beet farm in the Raymond area south of Lethbridge. During the confusion of moving, my grandmother Kayo was separated from the rest of the Takahashi family. Later she was found by my uncle housed in the horse barns at the Pacific National Exhibition grounds in Vancouver. She may have been separated due to health problems, but this is not confirmed. Grandmother Kayo never made it to Alberta. She was sent to the Sandon hospital in the Kootenay region of B.C., the site of several internment camps, and passed away from cancer in 1945. During her stay in hospital, she kept an interest in growing tomato plants and was proud of her tomato seedlings.

The Taniguchis were sent to a sugar beet farm in the Iron Springs area just north of Lethbridge. Grandma and Grandpa Taniguchi lived with our family during our time. I have no memories of my grandparents during the beet farm years, but my sister Jean remembers Grandma as being very stern. Possibly this happened from raising so many boys! Another loss occurred in 1943 when my uncle Satoru drowned in Henderson Lake in Lethbridge. During a recreational canoe ride he fell overboard and became tangled in the weeds.

Sugar beets were a major agricultural crop in Southern Alberta, and the Japanese provided cheap labour on the farms. Growing sugar beets was a labour-intensive process. My dad and other family members spent long hours in the beet fields hoeing, thinning, and weeding.

At season end the beets needed to be topped by hand before being shipped to the factory that converted the beet sugar to white table sugar for market (there were three factories at that time). Living conditions were very basic with housing consisting of wooden shacks or converted granaries provided by the farmer. However my mother said that the farmers' homes were not much better at that time.

After the war ended, Grandfather Taniguchi made a trip to Japan in



Charlie Taniguchi hoeing beets,  
Iron Springs, AB

1958 or 1959 to reconcile with his daughter who had been left there many years before. I'm sure my aunt felt that she had been abandoned and I'm sure that there were some hard feelings. By this time my aunt had been married twice. Her first husband was killed during the war, and she had re-married. Grandfather asked her to come to Canada, but she declined. Grandma Taniguchi would write letters to her to keep in contact. My Uncle Sam remembered addressing the letters.

When the relocation occurred, my mother and many others thought that it would be just for a few months. Then everybody would be able to return to the coast. The few months turned into years and for us into decades. There was little reason to return following the war as nobody had property or assets to return to. Most of the Japanese stayed where they were relocated, and most of my generation born in the new province eventually married non-

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Fun times, Uncle Jack Takahashi rear, Uncle Ed Takahashi LF, Dad Charlie Taniguchi front center, Uncle Satoru Taniguchi right of Charlie and 2 unidentified friends

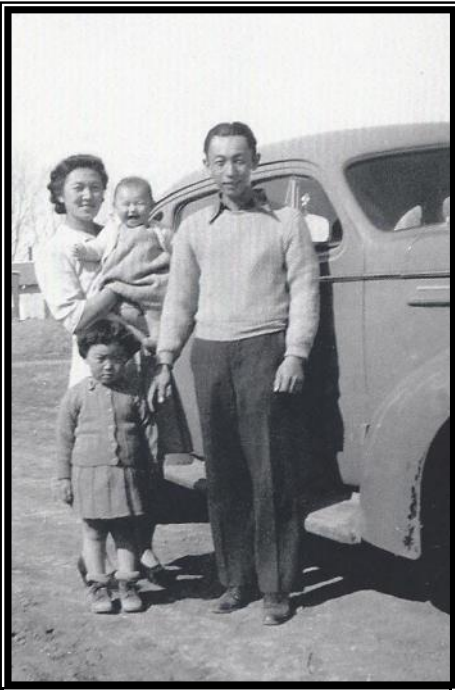


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Japanese spouses. This completed the integration into Canadian society. The old Japanese community that existed before was gone and could not be recreated.

## My Life

I was born in Lethbridge, Alberta in December 1952, the fifth child in a family of six. My sisters Jean, Helen, Norma and Betty all arrived ahead of me. My brother Gordy arrived in February 1958. Our family lived in the small community of Coalhurst about six miles west of Lethbridge on Hwy 3. My sisters, being older, did not play with me at all. My brother and I would play and fight like most brothers, and Mother would discipline us with a wooden spoon. Gordy would be on the business end of the spoon most of the time, but there were times when I ex-



Esther, Helen, Jean (standing) and Charlie on the farm, Iron Springs, AB

pected to get it but didn't. I did not play sports with Gordy until he was about thirteen at which time I found out that he was a much better athlete than I was.

During my growing up years I always felt like everyone else and considered myself "white" like all my friends. It was not until grade eight that one of my classmates teased me by calling me Chinese. This got me riled up which caused more teasing. Eventually I ignored him, and the teasing subsided.

When I was 2 (approximately 1955) our family moved into a small house in Coalhurst with running water but with an outdoor biffy. Dad worked as a carpenter, and I learned carpentry by watching him whenever he built anything at home. Dad was a detailed craftsman who excelled at finishing work and cabinet making. I don't think many of my projects today would pass his inspection. One special memory has nothing to do with carpentry but is rather about bicycling. One day Dad jumped on the older girls' bike and rode up the street and back just to show us he could do it. He never rode a bike before that or afterwards. I was amazed! Like they say, once you learn to ride a bike, you never forget.

Mom was a homemaker and kept everybody organized. She would attend all the school meetings and parent-teacher interviews. My sisters and I would get good marks in school, so there were never any problems with the teachers (my brother was a different matter).

Gordy had many disputes with my mother and threatened to run away from home so often that Mom made him a "hobo" pack with a bundle on the end of a stick and said "Goodbye".

One year Mom decided to take a carpentry course at our high school and made us a toy chest with two compartments and a hinged lid. I was very impressed. We used that chest for many years. Besides working at home, Mom would also work for local market gardeners picking vegetables, hoeing and weeding, or planting bedding plants at a local greenhouse. When she was working away from home, it was my job to cook the rice for supper after school. I can still cook rice today - with an electric rice cooker.

In Coalhurst I went to school up to grade 12 and then went on to the University of Alberta in Edmonton and studied electrical engineering. I graduated in 1974 (much to my relief as the last year was difficult) and started working for Picker X-ray Engineering, which sold medical x-ray equip-

(Continued on page 12)



Ron age 11 and Dad Charlie Taniguchi

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ment to hospitals. I worked in field service and installations and covered territory north of Red Deer and the northeast corner of B.C. This work involved quite a bit of travel. When I left this job, I tried a short stint in real estate sales (where I was a fish out of water) and then studied computer programming for two years at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology. I worked as a programmer for a couple years and eventually switched back into technical work with Trinity Electronics Systems in Edmonton (in custom design and manufacturing). I am currently in my 22<sup>nd</sup> year of employment with Trinity Electronics and will be contemplating retirement soon.

Around 1978 I met a young nurse, Susan Snyder, who was a nursing student at the University of Alberta and had a Mennonite background from Waterloo, Ontario. At this point, I was boarding with my sister, Jean, and her husband David Lefever and had just returned from one of my Picker X-ray trips. Susan was babysitting my niece Marcie and nephew Brian. I remember arriving at the Lefever residence with a pizza in my hand and having to share it with three more people. The kids were thrilled to see me, but Susan was perturbed by this stranger who had arrived unannounced. Later I offered to drive Susan home, but Jean had been preparing for this event by learning to drive their standard-shift car, so I let Jean take her home.

A couple days later I phoned Susan to ask her if she would like to go to a hockey game and was informed that she "hated hockey". To her credit Susan recovered quickly and suggested another activity. After this shaky start, we started dating regularly, and we were married in February 1979.

We have attended Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton since that time.

We have three adult daughters, the first of whom are twins born in October 1980. Erin lives in Vancouver working in the area of fine arts (graphic art and illustration), and Jill lives in Edmonton at an Excel Society group home. As Jill has been hearing impaired since birth and has developmental delays, she needs help with some daily activities. Her current group home has been an excellent environment for support, and the staff provide excellent meals. Our third child is Allison, born in May 1989. She lives in Vancouver also and shares an apartment with her sister Erin. Allison works in computer animation specializing in visual effects. Her studio does a lot of children's programming.

So life has been good despite the difficulties earlier generations faced. My mother and father raised a family of six of whom five went on to higher education. Susan and I raised a family of three, and now I am nearing retirement and get to watch my fill of hockey (on TV). Soon I hope to have time to develop some hobbies. Susan has been retired from nursing for two years, and I see the results of her hobbies in watercolors, stained glass and card making. I hope someday I will have creations to display as well. ♦



L-R Ron, Allison, Jill, Susan, Erin hiking in Lynn Canyon



## MHSA AGM Report April 29, 2017

by Katie Harder

The Mennonite Historical Society held its annual Spring Conference and AGM at the Bergthal Mennonite Church, in Didsbury, AB on April 29, 2017, with David Neufeldt, Board Chair presiding. The Bergthal Church Chair David Derksen in his opening comments of welcome to the MHSA posed the question "why are you here?" to the assembled members and guests, noting that he expected an answer to that question in the next issue of the Newsletter. My answer to David Derksen's question might be "I'm here because I think it's important to pass on our Mennonite history and the MHSA is a good vehicle for that". History appears to have a significant role in the Bible. Genealogies are listed in both the Old and New Testaments, and time and time again God implores the children of Israel to remember what God has done. History reveals God in our midst, in times of celebration as well as in times of adversity. Our lives have been shaped by our history. These stories inform us as to who we are, and they need to be handed down to our children and grandchildren. As Pearl Buck stated "If you want to understand today, you have to search yesterday."

At the 2017 Spring Conference Henry Goerzen, Bergthal Church Historian, added to our collective



Katie Harder

stories from the past by sharing, as requested, the following historical information regarding the Bergthal Church and its people. From 1874 to 1880 families from the Bergthal Colony (Ukraine), the daughter colony of Choritz settlement, emigrated to Manitoba and settled on the east and west reserves. In the 1900's due to crowding in Manitoba and anxious for low-priced land, several families moved to an area east of the town of Didsbury, Alberta. At first, worship services were held in the homes of the settlers, but by 1903 a church was constructed. With an influx of the Sommerfelder people the congregation became a mixture of Sommerfelder and General Conference individuals. In 1910, the church was formally affiliated with the General Conference Church. Sometime prior to the 1920's, the original church building was relocated further west closer to the Neufeld families who comprised the larger part of the congregation. In the 1920's the German speaking Russlaender joined this group. These people were well educated and in 1925 Elder C. D. Harder was hired to be the leading minister. Elder Harder only stayed until 1929, as he only spoke German and the congregation was used to services in both English and German. The church struggled without a minister who could perform baptisms, weddings, catechism, so ministers from other areas were asked to help. Singing always played a key role in the congregation. At first it was led by a Vorsanger, but four-part harmony was always encouraged.

In the following decades there were several changes. In 1946, a new church was constructed when the Alberta Conference purchased the entire churchyard to allow for the expansion of the Menno Bible Institute. In 1947, the use of both the English and German languages became the norm. In 1957 J.D. Harder, grandson of Elder C.D. Harder, was elected as the first lay chairman. Prior to that the church elder had always served that function. In 1967 Werner Froese, a graduate from CMBC, came to Bergthal as its first paid minister.

Bergthal has the distinction of being the oldest General Conference Church in Alberta. In June of 1978 it celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In 2003, shortly after expanding the church building to include a new fellowship hall, it celebrated its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Changes have come to the congregation as well. The once thriving Sunday School program has been greatly reduced. However, the spirit of the reduced faith community remains strong.

Focusing on more recent matters, David Neufeld, our board chair, reviewed the activities of 2016. He made mention of our 2016 Spring Confer-



Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, AB

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ence, which focused on the topic “Mennonite History in light of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission”. The conference was hosted by Holyrood Mennonite Church in Edmonton. David noted that it was appropriate that the event took place in Edmonton since Edmonton is located on Treaty Six Land. Chief Bruneau of the Papaschase First Nation shared how he is seeking recognition for the Papaschase Band and is working to recover and document the history of his people.

David referred to our Fall conference which did not materialize in 2016 due to scheduling conflicts. We are excited to announce that it has now been rescheduled to happen in the Coaldale area in the Fall of 2017. The theme of the conference will be “Interactions of the Japanese and Mennonite People following the Japanese Internment in Southern Alberta.” Joy Kowaga, formerly Joy Nakayama, a teacher in the Coaldale area, will serve as one of the resource persons. Joy’s story is a personal one as her parents were involved in the resettlement program in Southern Alberta. Others, both Japanese and Mennonite, will be asked to share their reflections as to how integration and assimilation into the community have transpired over time.

David also made us aware that the exhibit entitled “Along the Road to Freedom” will be opening on December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017 at the King’s University in Edmonton. In 2018, it will be showing in Calgary at the Ambrose University and finally in Coaldale at the Gem Museum. The exhibit consists of 29 paintings by Ray Dirks telling the stories of women who led their families out of persecution and suffering to a land of freedom and peace.

David paid tribute to Lorne Buhr, former co-editor of the newsletter who passed away in the fall of 2016. He also recognized the work of Lil Bartel who oversees the genealogy project for the Grade 9 students at Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary. Lil brought a few of the projects along to share, and they were displayed in the church fellowship hall for viewing. Lastly, as Board Chair, David acknowledged the work of Katie Harder who has competed six years as Board Secretary and the efforts of the group of volunteers who come in weekly to work at the Archives and Library facility in Calgary.

Our newsletter, which is printed three times a year, is a major success story of MHSA. David Toews, our newsletter editor, expressed his satisfaction with the newsletter articles over the past year. They were well received. Several highlights mentioned were the “Crowfoot Settlement” by Dave Hubert, the article by Harvey Wiehler about “Coming to Canada after the Second World War”, the CO Story, entitled “One Brick” by David Friesen of Edmonton, and the story of the Sawatzky Family Reunion by Elsa Sawatzky. The current distribution of the newsletter stands at 168 including 81 hard copy subscribers, 10 on-line subscribers, 71 Canadian churches and six US organizations and churches.

Volunteer archivist, Ted Regehr, put forward a plea for more volunteers at the MHSA archives, library and office in Calgary. He is very grateful for the group that does come in on the Thursday of every week but notes that occasionally someone gets ill, takes holidays, etc. and suggests that it would be beneficial to have more help. The Archives and Library have nu-

merous duplicate periodicals and books stored in our workroom. As we don’t have a mandate to keep these, Ted is suggesting that the Board come up with guidelines to offer them for free distribution. The Lending Library, which was started a few years ago, has not met with much success.

MHSA Board Member Alice Unrau informed us as to the workings of MAID, Mennonite Archival Information Database, an online catalogue of photos and documents. The MAID organization, which includes the historical societies of BC, AB, SK, MB, Eastern Canada, and MC Canada, is an exciting project with over 10,000 photos already in the database. Alice mentioned that the database is an excellent way to research your family’s history and encouraged all of us to share our photos through this program. Initially Alice suggested that people donate their original photos and receive a scanned copy back, but she later suggested that the donor could simply donate a copy instead if desired. Alice too put in a plea for help. She noted that some of the work of the MAID program can be accomplished at your home computer if that would be preferable to coming into the Calgary office.

In all organizations, board members play a vital role in keeping the organization going, so elections are needed. As Katie Harder’s six-year term as secretary was finished, David Jeffares was nominated and elected by acclamation to take on that position. Katie Harder was then nominated and elected by acclamation to sit on the MHSA Board as a member at large. Board Chair David Neufeld

*(Continued on page 15)*

(Continued from page 14)

remarked that although our bylaws allow MHSA to function with a 12-member Board, currently we are operating with only 11 members.

The Board members are: David Neufeld, chair; Dan Jack, vice chair; David Jeffares, secretary; Peter Dyck, treasurer; Alice Unrau, GAMEO and MAID rep.; Dave Toews, Ernie Wiens, Ken Matis, Peter Kroeger, Ted Regehr, and Katie Harder serve as members at large.

Finances are an integral part of any organization, and so it is with MHSA. We are a small but vital organization, but funding is always a problem. Board members are all volunteers and do not receive any compensation for time and travel to attend meetings. Nevertheless we still need funds to operate. Our yearly office rent to MCC Alberta is 8,040, we pay a yearly membership fee to belong to the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, and postage and printing of the Newsletter is costly. We are also required to purchase insurance. Hosting conferences, an invaluable communication medium for our members and guests, also has a cost. Peter Dyck, our board treasurer, noted that our actual expenditures for 2016 were \$20,185.54, with revenues standing at \$21,041.55. The operating surplus of \$856.01 is a pretty small margin. We have had discussions as to how to increase our revenue, but to date have not come up with a solution. So far our conferences have not required a preregistration

fee although sometimes the verbal maybe's turn into a "no show". MHSA events do not generate very much income after food costs, honorariums, and occasionally mileage or airfare for our resource persons are paid. We are lucky if we break even. We do garner some revenue through the sale of memberships, and there are some private donors that keep us afloat for which we are very thankful. Members voted to accept a budget of \$23,750



MHSA Conference Participants

for 2017. The Finance Committee consisting of Peter Dyck, and Bookkeeper Ellie Janz had originally proposed a budget of \$22,750, but an amendment was made to increase it by \$1000 to include the expenses that might be incurred with the cost of the "Along the Road to Freedom Exhibit." Peter Dyck expressed thanks to Ellie Janz and to Harvey Wiehler for auditing the books.

The work of MHSA is ongoing. Please remember to share your stories, photographs, immigration papers, diaries, and even your sermons, so that future generations can examine and learn from the stories of the past. Sharing our faith stories helps to connect and reconnect members of our Mennonite family and helps to keep our history and genealogy alive.

Announcements included a reminder and a gracious invitation to attend the annual Mennonite Heritage Picnic on August 5<sup>th</sup> at the Ernie Wiens farm at Sherwood Park, AB.

An invitation was extended to attend our afternoon program "Reflections on Songfest Past" with Dr. Wes Berg, Laura Dyck, and Jake and Elsie Wiebe serving as resource persons.

The AGM drew to a close with the singing of the doxology at approximately 12:00 noon. ❖



## MHSA Spring Conference Report

by Dan Jack

The MHSA Spring Conference was held at the Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, AB on Apr. 29, 2017. "The theme of the afternoon was the history of S ngerfest. This history would take us from the Russian Mennonite communities in Ukraine to North America, and more specifically, Alberta."

Katie Harder was the M.C. for the afternoon and opened the meeting with a review of the place of music within the scriptures. We were blessed by a choir of about twenty volunteers who sang four songs accompanied on the piano by Elsie Wiebe and under the direction of Jake Wiebe. Jake and Elsie have a long history with choirs in the Calgary area. Last year, Elsie completed 50 years as the main pianist at First Mennonite in Calgary.

Alice Unrau explained The Mennonite Archival Information Database for all in attendance. Volunteers in areas distant from the Calgary Archives have the opportunity to assist from home by adding pictures to the file. In fact, the possibilities are extensive as this is a global project.

Laura Dyck, who has been involved in most, if not all, of the Songfests in Alberta since 1944, gave a presentation in two parts. First, she summarized a history of songfest to 1987 prepared by Henry Hamm, the choir director at Bergthal for many years. The first Alberta songfest was held at Linden in 1931 (the year Laura was born). This first songfest probably reflected the shared experience of immigration of both Mennonite Brethren and Mennonites from Ukraine during the 1920's. Songfests were held irregularly for the most part until the 70's. Initially church choirs performed their own repertoire. Later, guest conductors were brought in to lead mass choirs in singing at the end of the event.

Then Laura added Songfest history from her own experience. She mentioned the various guest conductors including K.H. Neufeld and George Harder. Alberta Mennonite Youth Organization (the same group that initiated Camp Valaqua in the late 50's) was instrumental in organizing Songfests. When AMYO decided not to plan for Songfest in 1976, the initiative moved to the CMA (the predecessor of MC Alberta). Judy Harder of Bergthal organized a more streamlined version – just choirs without music competitions. The last songfest was held at Olds in 2006. It was hosted by Bergthal Mennonite Church. The guest conductor was Ron Brown of

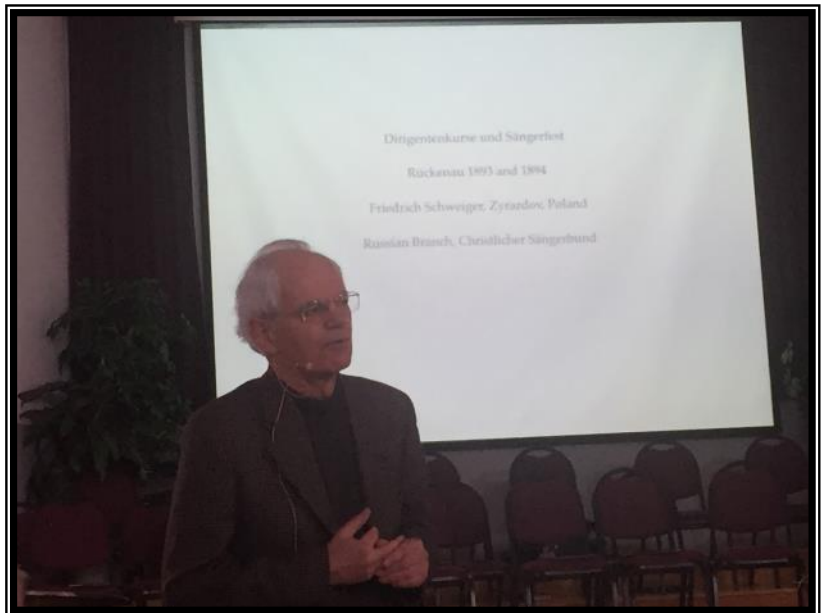
Bergthal, and many remember that the choir from Springridge Mennonite Church sang "How Fragile We Are" led by Jeff Warkentin.

Dr. Wesley Berg, the main speaker for the afternoon, was introduced by Dave Jeffares. Wes' presentation was entitled 'The Mennonite S ngerfest from Davlekanova to Didsbury'. He has written a book on Mennonite choral singing in the Russian Mennonite tradition, and he told us he enjoyed working on this presentation as it had been some time since he finished that project.

Wes gave us much information about the early development of Mennonite singing. He discussed the formation of songbooks and the development of musical notation as far back as 1750. There is some thought among scholars that the 'prayer house – Bethaus' may have changed in design as choirs



Dan Jack



Dr Wesley Berg Presenting

developed. Wes noted that the formation of the Mennonite Brethren after 1860 resulted in more choir activity.

(Continued on page 17)



(Continued from page 16)

The audience of about 75 was engaged by the effective use of video and audio in Wes' masterful account. Recordings were used throughout. One of them was intended to demonstrate the sound of congregational singing without instruments in the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. There was a distinct chanting quality to the music, and the music was slow and had a minor timbre – Wes described this as 'singing as they felt'.

Mennonites began to move to North America in the 1870's. This led to MB songfests in Kansas in the 1890's. The choir directors who moved to North America (G. Neufeld, Franz Thiessen, K.H. Neufeld, Ben Horch) continued the tradition.

The story of Mennonite choral music was summed up by Wes as 'rising to an apotheosis' until the 1990s. Bible colleges took leadership in training for choral singing, and the colleges in Winnipeg held church music seminars from 1975-2000. Choir performances were a part of this event, and in one case Howard Swan was the guest conductor. He was very impressed by this experience and mentioned it to Robert Shaw. Shaw mentioned that he would like to be invited to conduct also, so in 1985 he came to Winnipeg to lead the Mennonite Festival Chorus. He was thrilled

and struggled for words to describe the experience. 'You have a common heritage and so you sing like cousins' was one of his comments. After one dress rehearsal he said, "That was the most beautiful experience of my life." The pinnacle – the apotheosis – came in February, 1989 at The International Choir Festival in Toronto's Roy Thomson Hall. Shaw conducted a Mennonite choir in Beethoven's 'Missa Solemnis', and at the end the hall erupted in shouting and cheering. The Mennonite choir was considered the best.

In February, 1997, Shaw came yet again to Winnipeg to lead the Mennonite Festival Chorus. A reporter asked him why he would come there when he had just had a Carnegie Hall performance. His answer was that this was the best choir – they sang with love

Singing in choirs has declined in recent times for various reasons, and



Jake Wiebe conducting the Sangerfest Conference Choir

we mourn the loss. Anabaptist Mennonites from Russia had a strong sense of communal faith – we worshipped together, and singing together reflected our faith formation. Wes pointed to changes in Bible colleges, conferences, and congregations that have led to this decline. There have been demographic changes as well, and families are smaller now.

As we look to the future of the Anabaptist Mennonite faith tradition we recognize that we may not reach the apotheosis of communal singing again. However, four-part singing by congregations and choirs has not died, and I am certain that we will find other ways as well to express our sense of community. For many, the lyrics of songs are the best ways to express faith. It is said that we have been 'the quiet in the land' – not verbalizing our faith, but I think we have been quite vocal by way of song! ❖

### **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

## Menno Simons Genealogy Project

by Lil Bartel

The Menno Simons Genealogy Project, a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, is part of the grade nine Christian studies course at the Menno Simons Christian School in Calgary. The objectives of the project are for the students to understand their personal history, know where their families originated, and recognize God's goodness and presence in their lives. The assignments are to create a detailed visual family tree, describe a personality from each generation, and show how God has been with them throughout the ages. Students must follow a set of criteria each of which carry separate marks. They are encouraged to find information about their own family however they can - from family members, family records, pictures, etc. There is a monetary prize for the best project.

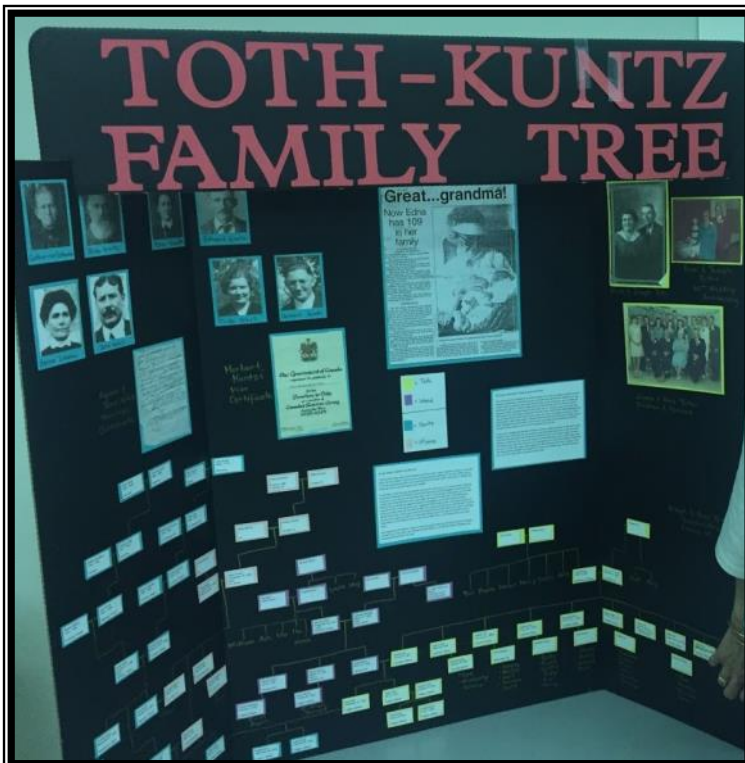
I am the project director on behalf of the MHSA. It is my job to lead the students on their genealogy journey. We start before Christmas so that while visiting over the holidays the students may glean some stories from grandparents, aunts and uncles. I like to start my first class by asking, "Why are you here?"

I see all sorts of facial expressions: questioning, "I don't know, puzzlement, and a bit of terror. What is this person getting at?"

This year's projects came up with some interesting information about origins, and they were so well done that deciding whose project was the best was diffi-



Lil Bartel and Noelle Kuntz



Noelle Kuntz winning genealogy project

cult. We could have had six winners. There were, however, small omissions that left one project standing out from the others. Noelle Kuntz was declared the winner.

I enjoy this time with the students, and my hope is that the information they gain from their research will be cherished by them.



## A Time to be Born *Memoir of a Canadian Mennonite*,

by Peter Penner (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press, 2016)

reviewed by Ted Regehr



Ted Regehr

Peter Penner's time to be born was 7 April 1925. The place was Siberia. That was not a good time or place for most of his contemporaries. Peter's family, however, was able to emigrate to Canada in 1926, settling in Mennonite communities in the Niagara Peninsula.

Peter kept daybooks and letters from an early age and wrote a long and detailed memoir. The published memoir under review here is a significantly shortened version of that much longer manuscript. It documents three distinct and unique periods of life.

The first and longest phase of the memoir, which Peter refers to as his Mennonite years, covers his

(Continued on page 19)

(Continued from page 18)

life up to age 40. He grew up among Mennonites in the Niagara Peninsula, dropped out of school after grade 9 to supplement family finances, and, in 1943, opted for wartime service as a Conscientious Objector. After the war he prepared for ministry in the church at Prairie Bible Institute. He then returned to the Niagara Peninsula to complete his high school studies. There, in 1949, he married Justina Janzen. The couple moved to Winnipeg where Peter studied at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College. During and after his college years he worked in several provinces as a camp director, Bible and high school teacher, home missions worker and pastor. That led to ordination as a Mennonite Brethren preacher and the prospect of a settled occupation in the ministry.

Along the way Peter discovered that he had a talent for and enjoyed researching and writing articles and commentaries for Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren journals and papers. While teaching at a small British Columbia Mennonite Brethren Bible School, he also became involved in such pursuits. Later he was invited to write the history of the West Coast Children's Mission. Peter's talents as a respected writer, commentator, and historian called for further nurture and development.

There were also concerns about ministry in Mennonite Brethren churches and institutions. As a wartime Conscientious Objector Peter had not been comfortable, when a student at Prairie Bible Institute, with some aspects of Fundamentalist theology taught there. He was strongly committed to Anabaptist, Mennonite and Evangelical teachings, but through-

out the memoir he draws a sharp distinction between Anabaptist Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism. And he notes with concern growing acceptance of Fundamentalist teaching and preaching by some Mennonite Brethren leaders.

Thus, in their mid-thirties with two adopted children, the Penners faced critical career questions. In 1960, Peter, with strong support and encouragement from Justina, decided to complete preparatory studies and then enroll in McMaster University's small graduate history program. Appointment as part-time pastor of the small Mennonite Brethren Church in Toronto meant further responsibilities for both of them but helped meet some material needs and resulted in some deep and permanent friendships.

After completing his M. A. degree, Peter became one of the first students to enter McMaster's newly launched Ph.D. program in History. He was, however, only half-way through his Ph.D. program when family and financial exigencies necessitated the search for full-time employment. A position to teach British and European history became available at Mount Allison University in Sackville, New Brunswick. The career change led Peter to request to be released from responsibilities as an ordained Mennonite Brethren minister. It did not, however, end Peter and Justina's continued interest and commitment to their Anabaptist Mennonite heritage.

The move from church ministry in familiar Mennonite settings to academic life in a distant Maritime province marked what Penner called his "second generation." On the family's arrival in Sackville, he noted "everything in Sackville was new and much to our liking." Here, over the span twenty-seven years, Peter established himself as a respected teacher and historian. The family also took an active part in local church and community life, established contacts and arranged meetings with other Mennonites living in the Maritimes, and maintained or established new contacts with many friends.

Peter's major area of study was British Imperial history. His Ph.D. dissertation focused on the careers of several graduates of an influential school which trained several bureaucrats who served in North India. Much of the research and writing still had to be done when he accepted the appointment at Mount Allison University. This appointment provided support for essential research trips to relevant archives and libraries in Great Britain and the United States. Subsequently it also supported a Sabbatical Leave for further research in India. The memoir describes well the challenges and thrills of a Canadian Mennonite from a humble background doing research in the great British and American libraries and archives and meeting family members, friends, and descendants of British colonial administrators. The research and contacts in India also provided excitement and many new learning opportunities, all of which proved invaluable in the writing of the thesis. It was subsequently published in India, and Peter regarded it as his *Magnum Opus*.

When Peter first worked at Mount Allison, it was still a small Liberal Arts college supported by the United Church. There were only about 1,200 students. Peter's memoir provides insights, tinged with notes of nostalgia, about collegial and administrative changes due to rapid expansion and increased secularization. Peter served as Head of the small History Department and compiled a remarkable record of both scholarly publications and numerous articles and commentaries published in Mennonite journals and

(Continued on page 20)



(Continued from page 19)

papers.

Interest in Mennonite and British Imperial interests intersected when Peter Penner undertook the writing of the history of Mennonite Brethren Missions in India. Archival research and interviews in Fresno and elsewhere yielded much relevant, but sometimes controversial, material, which was published after his retirement.

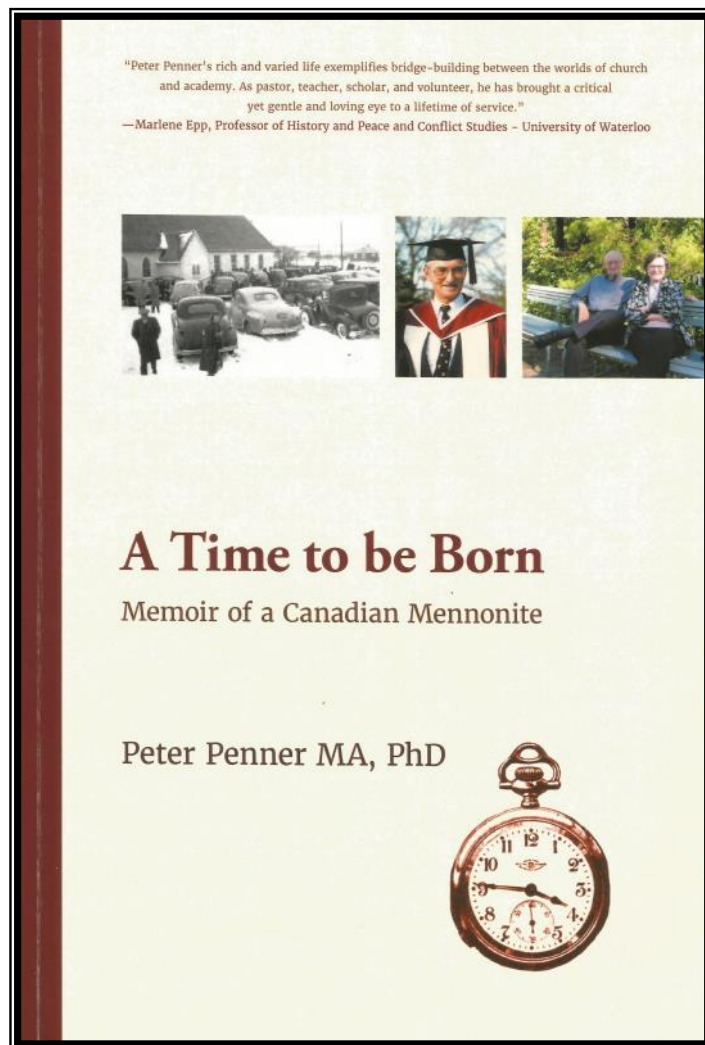
Peter Penner's memoir focuses primarily on his work, but Justina's role is frequently mentioned as well. Numerous family stories are also included. Retirement in 1992 brought the Penners to Calgary, where their son, Robert, was a violinist in the Calgary Philharmonic Orchestra. They have frequent contact with Mennonite friends there but have found a spiritual home in a Presbyterian church.

Once retired, the Penners travelled, taught, and became involved in various volunteer activities.

They also continued writing, publishing, and participating in community organizations. In 2000 Peter was able to visit the place of his birth in Siberia. Peter and Justina continue to spend time with Robert and his family, and visit daughter Ruth who lives in the United States.

*A Time to be Born Memoire of a Canadian Mennonite* by Peter Penner provides both familiar and unique insights into the blending of faith

and learning, of church and university affairs. It is an offering from a highly respected historian who remains strongly committed to his Anabaptist Mennonite heritage. ♦



## By Machno's Wagon: A Meditation on Public Museums

by Roger Epp



Roger Epp

St. Petersburg is a city founded on Russian imperial ambition and filled with the museums to prove it:

the Hermitage, with its throne rooms and art treasures; Peterhof, the summer palace on the Baltic, with its fountains and gardens; St. Isaac's Cathedral, with its malachite columns and pure-gold dome. Built for tsars with all the money and labour that could be squeezed out of a peasant society, they were each meant to make an architectural impression of unchallengeable, magisterial authority.

When guides present them now, they do so with a hint of nostalgia. This is, after all, the time for making countries great again.

There have always been reasons to go to St. Petersburg. In September 1798 my direct ancestor David Epp was one of two delegates sent to the capital by the first German-speaking Mennonite colonists who had moved, by invitation, to conquered lands in the "new Russia." His purpose was to negotiate the terms for further settlement in the south. I do not know where he lived or how he, a modest man, responded to the opulence around him. For two years he negotiated with imperial authorities – and got an audience with Tsar Paul I of Russia – before re-

(Continued on page 21)



(Continued from page 20)

turning to his community on the Dnieper River with a much-cherished Charter and an unshake-

bravely between what it called the “utopia and reality” of the Soviet era, including collectivization, hunger, mass executions, and the gulags. While the Russian text was not always translated into English, the meaning of objects – family photographs, letters home, a pair of thin winter boots – was unmistakable and powerful.



Peterhof

able faith, passed down through generations, in the protective power of tsars.

My own reason for being in St. Petersburg in September 2016 was more mundane: an academic conference, whose organizers had built the city's best-known attractions into the program. On my last day, on my own, I crossed the Neva in search of the State Museum of Russian Political History, which warranted only a single line in the guidebook.

As visitors to the Canadian Museum of Human Rights can probably attest, public history in public museums is always fraught with the danger of encountering painful memories. There is nothing simple about Russian history in particular, certainly not now. But here was a small museum whose main exhibit threaded its way

ing historical assessments. The panel's description was matter-of-fact. But the name was enough to evoke all of the stories still told in the families of those, like my wife's, who came to Canada as refugees in the 1920s: summary executions, rapes, terror-filled nights spent hiding in the fields. And so by Machno's wagon, to paraphrase a book title, I sat down and wept.

Surprised at myself for being so deeply affected, I descend deep into the Metro to return across the river. Of course, I think, I am not the first person to experience so viscerally how the artifacts and trophies of nation building can also be the artifacts of displacement and suffering. All those who remember in their

bones what it means to have lived at the periphery of a nation-building pro-



Labour camp boots

The real emotional sucker-punch, however, was waiting in a corner of the lobby: a *tachanka*, a wagon with heavy springs and a machine-gun mount that was captured from forces commanded by Nestor Machno, the anarchist scourge of the Mennonite villages in the south during the civil war. Machno is a complex figure, the subject of conflict-



Machno's machine-gun wagon

(Continued on page 22)

(Continued from page 21)

ject – or simply in its way – will have learned to approach public museums



Machine-gun wagon wheel detail

warily, expecting a narrative other than their own. But even prepared in this manner, they can be caught completely off-guard by an object or photograph that brings a painful history home.

My point is *not* to argue for trigger warnings in museums (as if it could be possible to anticipate where to

put all of them) or anodyne exhibits (as if risk-free and truthful can be remotely the same). On the contrary, it is to affirm museums of the right kind- not showcases for wealth and power, but places that make possible honest, unexpected encounter. I had such an experience at the State Museum of Russian Political History in St. Petersburg, and I remain thankful for it.

*Roger Epp is Professor of Political Science at the University of Alberta and author of We Are All Treaty People. ❖*

## Letters to the Editor

Apr 4, 2017

Calgary, AB

Dear Dave,

This is a great collection of stories. Good to hear people remember Crowfoot still. The approximately sixty acre parcel of land next to the CPR mainline just west of the former village of Crowfoot is still not identified as a burial site. There are 17 graves presumed to be there. They are indicated by a cairn erected by one of the former child residents. One of the descendants of the Nachtigal clan is now a member of the Canadian Parliament – Chris Warkentin. It would be quite something if something could be done about preserving these graves as his great-great grandmother is one of the persons buried there.

Dan Jack

Dear Dave Toews,

Winnipeg, April 21, 2017

Conrad Stoesz and I edit the *Mennonite Historian* (digitally archived at [www.mennonitehistorian.ca](http://www.mennonitehistorian.ca)) and request permission to reprint the article you ran in the March issue of the MHSA Newsletter by Roger Epp. We found Roger's article to be especially significant for several reasons . . . more on the Conscientious Objector story . . . on Mennonite interaction with Indigenous peoples . . . on political engagement around the refugee question . . . on trans-border migrations . . . and more. There were many links to events that are transpiring today. We would like *Mennonite Historian* readers to have access to this story, too. By the way, we send copies to every Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada, in addition to individual subscribers.

Thank you for considering our request.

(Continued on page 23)

(Continued from page 22)

Jon Isaak and Conrad Stoesz  
Centre for MB Studies and Mennonite Heritage Centre, Wpg

Apr 8, 2017

Winnipeg, MB

Dear Dave,

Delighted to get your superbly well done newsletter, with strong contents – had no idea DNA things were so well fixed in Henry Epp’s mind! I have given up making it something I “need to know about”. Thanks very much.

What struck me in your issue was the work on COs being included in the issue, along with bibliography. It so happens I have just finished a 365 page book on the Mennonite COs of Russia.

Also very glad to see the obit for Lorne Buhr who was also a good friend of mine, and we did meet different times – indeed he and Katherine applied at one time to become directors together of Mennonite Heritage Centre when we were looking for a new director but that did not work out.

Lawrence Klippenstein

## Coaldale Mennonite Culture A Document from the 1930s *by John B Toews*

When my father, Abraham A. Toews, died in 1962 we found a notebook<sup>2</sup> among his personal effects entitled “Minutes and Programs Connected with Youth Work beginning in 1933.” The pages that follow list all of the families associated with the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church in 1933. The record contains the names of 128 young people aged seventeen to thirty-two. Various secretaries appear to have recorded the minutes.



John B Toews

Singleness may have prolonged the status of being young. The presiding scribe apparently felt compelled to add two unique columns in which he listed the converted and the unconverted. Somehow he knew that precisely sixty-one persons on the list were not converted.

Sometime after the document surfaced, I visited several Coaldale Mennonite pioneers residing at the Sunny South Lodge. They identified various families on the list as to their place of origin in the Russian Empire. They were certain of forty-eight families: twelve came from Mennonite settlements in Siberia, another eight were specifically from Orenburg, four originated from the Crimea, and twenty-four came from the Molotschna settlement. Inadvertently I thought of Otto von Bismarck's *Kulturkampf*. Unifying the diverse populations of Germany was perhaps not entirely different from integrating the diverse immigrants attending the Coaldale Brethren Church in the early 1930s.

What sustained these immigrants amid travel debts, farm mortgages, and the onslaught of the Great Depression? The detailed contents of the youth programs may well provide some answers. The horse drawn wagon or the rare family car of 1933 would rarely make a two or five mile trip without a full passenger load. Youth programs were intended for everyone. The so-called “children’s corner” (*Kinderecke*) not only implied the presence of children at these events but perhaps suggested that the events were not always held in the evening. This familiar cultural and spiritual tradition, cultivated in the old homeland, undoubtedly provided comfort when facing challenging new circumstances and sustained morale by providing a sense of peoplehood and belonging together.

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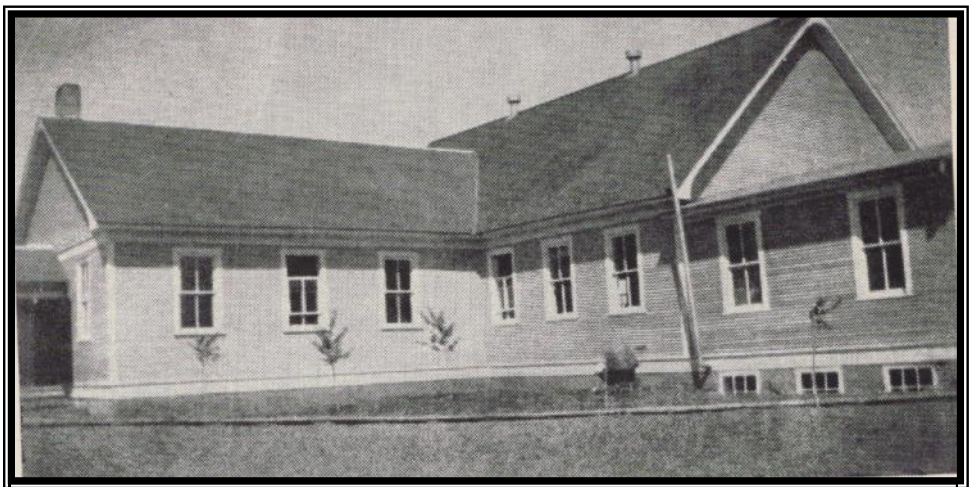
Youth programs meant continuity whether it related to music, poetry, drama or topics designed to educate or provide spiritual enrichment. Judging from the program notes, the new community possessed an impressive array of musical talent. Voice renditions included solos, duets, trios, quartets, small music groups, male choirs, and mixed choirs. Violins, guitars, and even harmonicas were acceptable instruments. Something new emerged in mid-summer of 1935. On July 7 the audience listened to an organ though the type is not specified. When evaluating the performance, the Youth Committee, perhaps lacking a sense of humour, concluded that the organist had not practiced enough. It admitted there were mitigating circumstances. She was not used to (*ungewohnt*) the instrument and had to play from notes [and not Ziffers?]. It was also unfortunate that the organ had been accompanied by guitars, especially Wiebe's Hawaiian guitar. In any case the organist should realize that the instrument "takes time to master" and that she "must persist in her efforts to do so."

In addition to musical numbers there were spoken items variously described by the terms *Gedicht*, *Vortrag*, *Gespraech*, and *Deklamation*. Poetry recitation (*Gedicht*) was very much in fashion. In almost every program five or six poems appropriate to the theme allowed for widespread participation that favoured female rather than male presenters. The lecture (*Vortrag*), depending on the theme, covered diverse topics. On September 2, 1934 H. Kornelsen spoke on "Nature." Earlier that year this same presenter addressed the topic "Interesting Facts about Grasshoppers." Lectures could be devotional, educational, or event related. There were programs celebrating Mother's Day, honouring the aged, featuring missions, greeting the arrival of Spring, addressing animal care, and concerning practical Christian living. On some programs the main feature consisted of a *Gespraech* (panel discussion). Judging from the surviving minutes this type of discourse was usually carefully scripted, and each participant followed a written text.

*Deklamation* in the sense of oratory and rhetoric was occasionally deployed. A *Deklamatorium* on the life of Moses (July 7, 1935) featured twenty-seven items. Twelve appropriate poems, augmented by solo and quartet renditions, caused critics on the Youth Committee to designate the performance as flawless (*tadellos vorgetragen*). The term *Deklamation* was also used to describe the recitations by seven young ladies entitled "The Flowers" (August 18, 1935). Unfortunately this program featured no fixed theme as it also included a lecture entitled "Bees" contrasted by a poem on the sinking of the Titanic. A similar "no

theme" approach may have accounted for topics like "School," "The Keeping of the Sabbath," and "Love your Friends" on the program of September 12, 1935. In all likelihood such lapses of focus reflected the weariness of committee members spending long summer hours on Coaldale irrigation farms.

Even a casual glance at the surviving minutes impresses the reader with the intellectual breadth of the youth programs. Biblical themes like the lives of Moses and Paul, the selling of Joseph, and non-resistance were supplemented by programs examining Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress", the "Glories of the Heavens" and the lives of Jan Hus and Hudson Taylor. One program, presented entirely in the Russian language (February 11, 1934), certainly reflected the bilingual competence of the older immigrant population. Some three months later another program needed interpreters since the languages used included German, English and Russian. The first all English evening (May 27, 1934) allowed a local Anglo-Saxon, Tom Roycroft, to present "Something



Coaldale MB Church 1932 - 1939

(Continued on page 25)



(Continued from page 24)

for the Children” while Alex Neuman, instead of a *Vortrag*, gave a “Speech.” The choir and quartet songs for the evening reflected a decidedly North American hymnody.

Why should the minutes and program outlines of a Youth Committee from a 1930s Mennonite congregation in western Canada be of interest? Some might view the material as illustrative of the survival strategies of an immigrant community seeking to preserve its identity. In what the older genera-

tion viewed as an alien society there was the need to ensure the Russian Mennonite continuity of culture, intellect and spirituality. The records make it clear that this effort was spearheaded by clearly identifiable Old Country teachers trained in the traditions of the *Zentralschule*. This broad-ranging and impressive Christian culture in part enabled the community to deal with the impact of poverty, debt, and new cultural challenges. It also helped the youth, increasingly cut off from the world views that shaped their parents’ generation, to remain better connected. While ultimately the forces of acculturation could not be held back, these youth programs allowed for gradual transitions that minimized inter-generational conflict and allowed their participants to become Canadian but remain Mennonite. ❖

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\* The notebook is deposited in the archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia.

## You'll Never Forget to Love Us

*a grandmother remembers*

by **Selma Berg** (Victoria, BC: Friesen Press 2016)

What better inspiration for a memoir than the request of grandchildren to learn more about their heritage? It was just such a request that led Selma Berg to write her story, starting with an introduction to the history of the Russian Mennonites, her faith community. She draws on a number of family histories to record their harrowing escape from their village Kronstal in Ukraine to Germany during World War II. Stories of her arrival in Canada as a young girl are followed by tales of her life as a farm girl, student, elementary school teacher, librarian, wife, mother and grandmother. A special feature of the book is a substantial account of the year she and her husband spent in Guyana as CUSO volunteers.

Selma Berg (née Krahn) and her husband Wesley live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, where they raised their children and now enjoy the blessings of being grandparents.

The book is available in hardcover, soft cover and eBook from FriesenPress On line

<http://www.friesenpress.com> and a variety of other online sources. ❖



## You'll Never Forget to Love Us!

*a grandmother remembers*



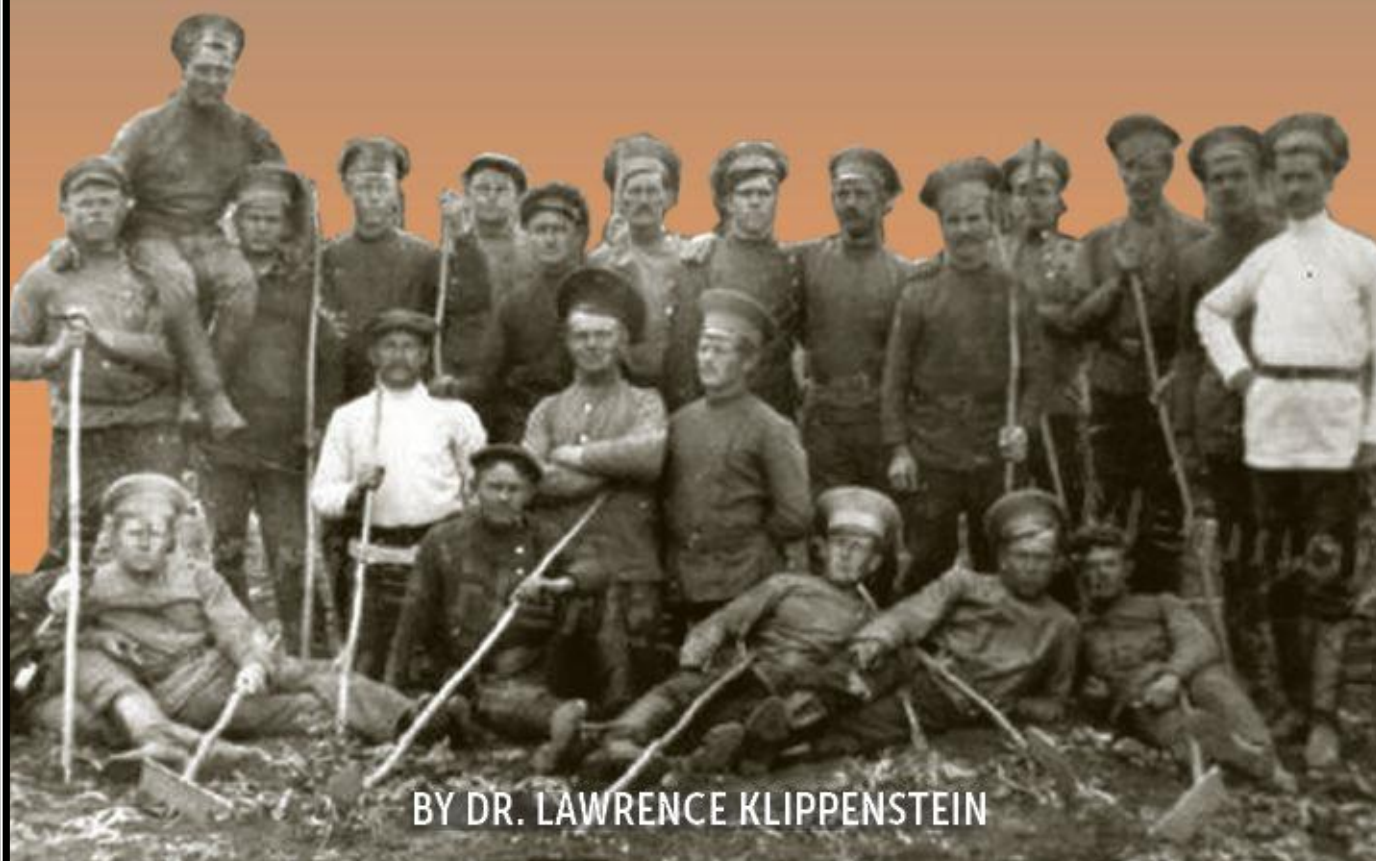

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Selma Berg

NOW AVAILABLE

# PEACE AND WAR

Mennonite Conscientious Objectors  
in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union Before World War II,  
and Other COs in Eastern Europe

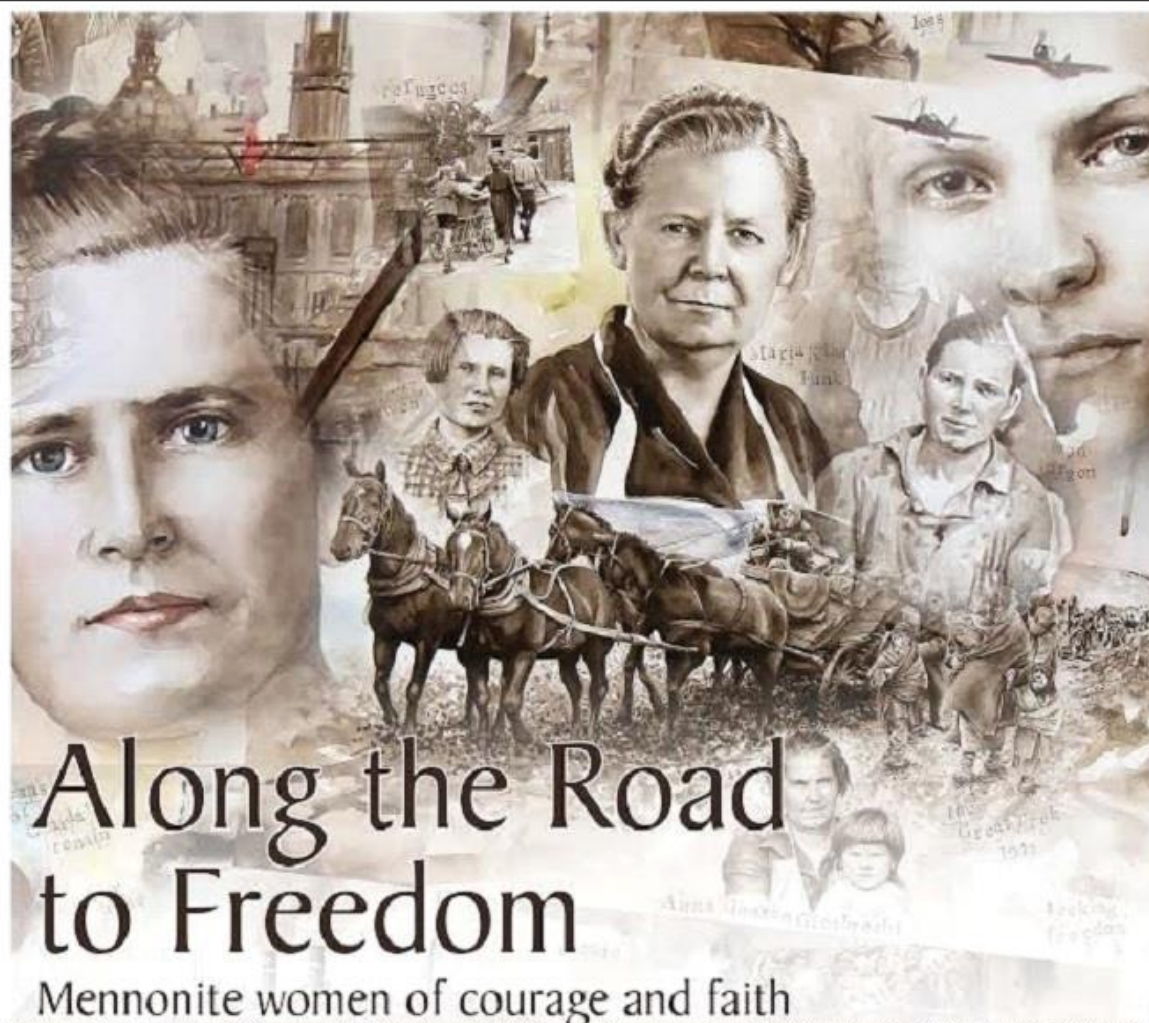


BY DR. LAWRENCE KLIPPENSTEIN

**Mennonite Conscientious Objectors In Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union Before WWII, and other COs in Eastern Europe**, 2016, 367 pp, 25.00 plus postage. In CD or paperback formats. Reviewed in *Heritage Posting*, No. 86, March 2017.

Author: Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein at [lawklippenstein@shaw.ca](mailto:lawklippenstein@shaw.ca) Order from the author.





### **26 paintings by Winnipeg Artist Ray Dirks**

honouring women who brought their children out of the Soviet Union  
to lives of peace and freedom in Canada and Paraguay

#### **OPENING RECEPTION and PROGRAM**

THE KING'S UNIVERSITY ATRIUM

9125 - 50 St NW, Edmonton, AB

Saturday Dec 2, 2017, 7:00 PM

***Program includes:*** Pastor Tim Wiebe-Neufeld

Mennonite Choir & Music

Quilt display by Lendrum Mennonite Brethren Church Ladies

Exhibition viewing, coffee & finger food to follow

**Calgary Exhibition:** Ambrose University Feb 10, 2018

**Coaldale Exhibition:** Gem of the West Museum Apr 14, 2018



# 10th Annual Mennonite Heritage Picnic



August 5, 2017  
11:00 am – 5:00 pm  
23110 TWP RD 520  
Sherwood Park  
Alberta  
[www.mennoniteheritage.com](http://www.mennoniteheritage.com)