

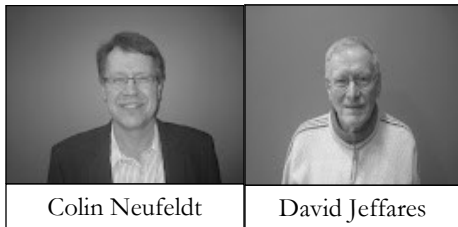


Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XVI Number 1

March 2013



Colin Neufeldt

David Jeffares

Reflections on the 2012 MHSA Fall Conference

*The Joys and Challenges of Writing
Mennonite History and Biography.*
by David Jeffares and Colin Neufeldt

MHSA members were treated to three guest speakers at the 2012 MHSA fall conference that was held at First Mennonite Church in Edmonton on October 27, 2012. The first speaker, Peter Rahn, is a retired Classics professor from Surrey, British Columbia. Peter shared the challenges that he encountered in preparing and publishing his book, *Among the Ashes*. In the Stalinkovo Kolkhoz (Kontinusfeld) 1930-1935. The book is a compilation of letters and postcards that Peter's father

(Continued on Page 5)

What Not to Wear?

*The History and Art of Mennonite
Sewing*
by Rita Dahl

What Not to Wear is a popular T.V. show for clothes horses. There are two clothing consultants who give a client \$5000 to shop in New York. They then offer suggestions as to what will suit their particular figure types.

During the early thirties – the Depression years – our mothers were not so concerned about what not to wear. They were worried about what to wear. Theirs was a survival mode. Where would they get materials – wool, shoes, winter clothing, outerwear and undergarments? Each item was a major concern for my mother who had seven growing children to clothe.

My mother had sisters who worked as domestics for wealthy doctors and professionals in Saskatoon. They would send boxes of used clothing. There would be dresses, overcoats, skirts and blouses. Mother would carefully

(Continued on page 3)



Rita Dahl

MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF ALBERTA

SPRING CONFERENCE

FIRST MENNONITE CHURCH CALGARY

2600 Richmond Road SW

SATURDAY, APRIL 27, 2013 9:30 AM

Please pre-register to help the food committee plan for the noon meal

10:00-11:30 AM ANNUAL MEETING

11:30-12:00 Noon Introduction to the Conference Theme: HISTORICAL
ROOTS OF MUTUAL AID AS PRACTISED AMONG MENNONITES

12:00-1:00 PM LUNCH AND CONVERSATION Take Time to See
Books and Other Exhibits

1:00-3:00 PM PANEL DISCUSSION featuring speakers on topics including: Vertreterversammlung der Mennonitischen Siedler Albertas, Reiseschuld, Sterbe Kasse, Hilfswerk, Mennonite Mutual Relief and Fire Insurance, The Evolution of Present-day Mennonite Mutual Insurance, Faspa and Safe Travelling Home

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River

Content for the next edition may be
submitted to Lorne Buhr at
llbuhr@shaw.ca by May 1, 2013



Dave Toews

Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

I trust everyone had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New

Year's celebration.

First, I would like to wish David Jeffares; MHSA board member, reporter and tireless conference organizer a speedy recovery from triple by-pass surgery in December.

2012 is now history, the first quarter of 2013 is in the rear view mirror and the first issue of the MHSA Newsletter has already been deposited in your mailbox. History stops for no one.

Professor John Sharp from Hesston College, believes knowing our history is important. "We do well to build consciousness to understand who we are, where we

have been and possibly where we are going," he says, "If we have no historical consciousness we are vulnerable to any theological, political and social wind that is blowing." He also thinks being familiar with our ancestors' story helps us see that we are part of "a stream of history" that did not begin with us.

These are exciting times at the MHSA as we go from one excellent conference to the next. David Jeffares and Colin Neufeldt have so ably described here the happenings of Oct. 27, 2012, "The Joys and Challenges of Writing Mennonite History." And you see the announcement on the front page that on April 27, 2013, we will explore the "Historical Roots of Mutual Aid as Practised Among the Mennonites."

John B. Toews, has submitted "*Alberta Inter-Mennonite Co-operation During the 1930s*", a timely article that meshes very well with the conference topic.

Our feature article "*What not to wear*" by Rita Dahl is the first in a series by Rita and friends. These will

also include articles on gardening, Ladies Aid, food preparation, recreation, singing, music and drama.

I want to thank all the other writers for their highly valued contributions to this publication.

As always we welcome your letters to the Editor, comments and contributions. The deadline for submissions for the next issue is May 1, 2013. Contact information is at the bottom of the page. ❖

Chairman's Corner

by Bill Janzen

MHSA stores many precious books and documents. The information is waiting for someone to come do re-

search and further the understanding of Mennonite people in Alberta and beyond. When we read or hear about the challenges of the past and how people dealt with the challenges, we begin to understand the "why" people responded in certain ways, helping us to check on how we are dealing with our own challenges.

One of the challenges facing MHSA is the changing situations for volunteers. Talking with other charitable, volunteer organizations, there



Bill Janzen

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Lorne Buhr at lbuhr@shaw.ca

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- Settlers of the East Reserve (\$30)
- GRANDMA 7 (\$35)
- Nuggets Of Gold (\$15)
- Pushing Through Invisible Barriers (\$30)

is a common trend in our time. People no longer volunteer as freely because they are occupied with other meaningful options which at one time did not exist or could not be afforded. The majority of volunteers would prefer small projects that they love doing. So the reality for MHSA is that if we want to remain an active Archive and Library for people who are doing research, we will have to make some changes. We have worked now for one year with a paid archivist who has sorted much of the backlog we had accumulated over the years. It is fair to say that the archivist is being paid four days a month but contributes many volunteer hours of his time moving the work of MHSA archives forward. Historically, MHSA started in 1986 and during the 1990's was not active with some of the people involved quietly gathering information and storing it for the future. We hope that by reorganizing how we operate, we will attract more volunteers for specific tasks.

We have had a seniors group and some individuals come for a visit to see what is taking place in the Archives and Library. We have a small space but if we are notified before the day the group wants to come, we will arrange for the group. While we are open on Thursday of each week and the second Saturday of the month, we would make arrangements if there was a group that would like to visit on another day. Each visit provides our volunteers with encouragement

The Newsletter co-editors are

finding interesting articles that should be preserved and are preparing them for publication. They welcome stories of interest to our constituency and would like you to contact them with possible articles.

In addition, funding is a concern and the annual membership fee pay mainly for the Newsletter. We are fortunate to have some very generous donors. We must continue to preserve valuable information for future generations. To move forward we need to have a stronger donor and volunteer base. I hope that we can discuss this matter further at our Annual General Meeting in April. See you on April 27, 2013.. ❖

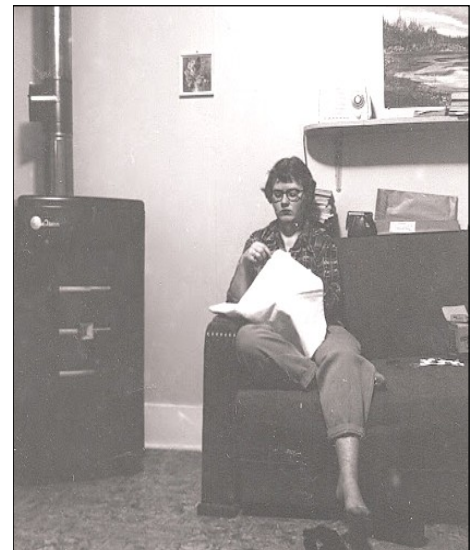
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examine each item, and then discern what could be recycled into appropriate children's wear. Where there was enough fabric, items would be taken apart and re-invented -- becoming dresses, skirts and overcoats to fit each child.

Christmas time and spring were the only times we would get new clothing. The Eaton's catalogue was



Eaton's Spring & Summer catalogue 1942



Rita embroidering a pillow case

the resource centre. New fabric would be ordered to make dresses for we three sisters. We usually had fabric which was the same, and each would be made using the same pattern since this was more economical.

Another source of fabric was the flour or sugar sack. We would use one bag of flour a month. So, at the end of the year, twelve sacks were washed, bleached and placed under the snow banks all winter to remove any of the remaining logos which hadn't bleached out in the washing process. Then they would be ready for use.

Flour sack items became undergarments, slips, pillow cases, sheets, table cloths, aprons, dresser scarves, doilies, and tea-towels. The tea-towels, pillow cases, table cloths and aprons would then be embroidered and hem-stitched. (Hem-stitching is an ornamental trim, done by pulling out threads and then stitching the remaining threads to make an attractive border.) When the flour sack items

wore out they became rags. Rags were used for dusting, and the longer ones were cut into strips that we used to make rag ringlets.

Winter items like scarves, mittens, toques, socks and stockings were usually hand knit. Mother would spend many evenings working at these much needed items.

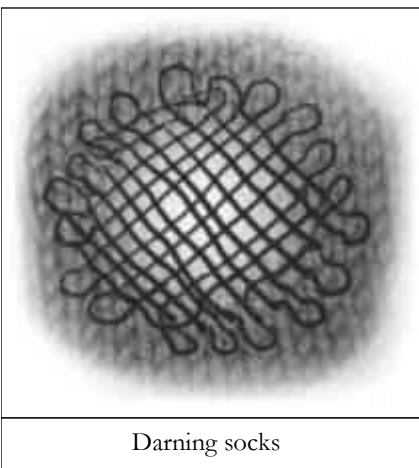
When my younger sister arrived in 1939, it was the beginning of World War II and the economy started to recover. My mother wanted to knit a baby dress for my sister. Our neighbour's daughter, who was a knitter, helped her figure out the feather and fan pattern. She created a beautiful pink knit dress with scallops along the edge that were formed by the pattern. I thought no baby was ever so elegantly attired. Knitted items were often un-ravelled, and they were then knit into smaller items, such as vests, scarves and socks.

In spring we would study the Eaton's catalogue again, and we would choose a fabric for our summer dresses. I remember a mauve floral voile dress (voile is a thin cotton material) that Mom made with an a-line skirt, tucked bodice, puffed sleeves, and a small collar. When we went to church on Sunday in our new matching dresses, we almost felt like royalty!

We only sent two orders a year to Eatons – one in spring and another in fall. In addition to fabric, we would get new shoes. To order shoes, we would trace around our feet and send the measurements in. Miraculously, the shoes usually fit.

As we became older, mother taught us to knit, sew and embroider. I made my first dress out of crepe paper for my sister to wear at the Christmas concert when I was in Grade 7. I designed the pattern and it was made to measure. I thought it looked very nice.

Quilts were also made out of scraps of like fabrics that were pieced together into squares and then stitched together. If a pattern developed, that was a bonus. Mostly, the result was just a colourful blanket. In their retirement years, women often used their needlework skills to make other more decorative items for charities. These activities now became their leisure pursuits.



Darning socks

Another task, which has now become a lost art, was darning. In summer, after all the weeding and hoeing was done, we would darn socks. This was a painstaking task which involved creating a basket weave of threads, woven both vertically and horizontally across the holes until they were covered.

When we three older sisters graduated from Rosthern Junior College, mother



Rita with friend sewing buttons on her brothers shirt

made our dresses. Some of the girls had bought dresses, but ours were all home made. How we yearned to have a bought dress. Little did we realize how much love and care went into each of those dresses. My dress was a sleeveless powder blue organza gown with a flocked design, a sheer fabric inset in the neckline, and matching sash. This elegant dress later became a costume for Madame Camelia in a Christmas play during my teaching years.

In conclusion, I would say we started with hand-stitching, went to the treadle sewing machine, and then progressed to electric and even computerized machines. And so sewing has evolved, as has everything else. It is no longer practical, economical, or efficient to construct hand-sewn garments when

items can be bought much more cheaply. When one considers the cost of patterns, notions and fabrics, it is no longer even prudent to be making one's own clothing. What have we lost as a result of all of this? Perhaps pride in one's work, and the satisfaction of completing an item from start to finish, as well as the joy of making a "one of a kind" item, which no one else has. Some of the other lost arts are decorative hand-stitching, embroidery and other sewing techniques. We no longer turn collars on men's dress shirts, nor do we do invisible mending. We are a throwaway society. Most of us would not want to go back to the time when constructing everything we wore was a necessity. But, sewing was a skill and an art form. Many women expressed themselves artistically in this way. They were creative, resourceful, and gained much satisfaction from their creations which were both beautiful and essential.



Continued from Page 1

received from family members living in the Mennonite village of Kontinuisfeld, Molochansk, Ukraine during Stalin's collectivization of the USSR in the 1930s.

Peter took it upon himself to translate the letters for the benefit of his family and those interested in Soviet

et Mennonite history. One of the most daunting challenges that Peter encountered was deciphering the often illegi-



Peter Rahn

ble Gotische Schrift – the Gothic cursive alphabet that Russian Mennonites used in their personal correspondence. In some cases, the authors of the letters wrote illegibly into order to confound Soviet censors; in other cases, the authors used code words and abbreviations to convey important information without arousing the suspicion of Soviet authorities.

Another challenge that Peter encountered in preparing his book was the publication process. To his surprise, Peter discovered that the publisher of his book did little to proofread the text before it went to print. As a result, the final version of his publication contains typographical and editing errors that Peter thought the publisher would have caught.

The second speaker at the conference was Walter Braul, a distinguished Edmonton lawyer who is currently writing a book entitled *Russian Mennonites, a Broken Path to Civility*. Braul has a unique perspective on the Russian Mennonite experience: he argues that the Mennonite community in Ukraine often behaved in a "tribalistic" manner during the 18th and 19th centuries. In Braul's opinion, the often harsh and isolationist Mennonite responses to the surrounding Ukrainian community make sense if one recognizes that Russian Mennonites often behaved like a tribe that was surrounded by larger, unsympathetic Ukrainian tribes. According to Braul, Mennonite societal practices and community prohibitions were essentially tribal responses to a threatening world.



Walter Braul

Like Rahn, Braul has also encountered challenges in the final editing work of his book before it goes to print. He is relying on the assistance of friends and colleagues to proofread and correct the text, a process that has not always been easy. Braul admits that he has not incorporated all of the proposed suggestions of his proofreaders, but he does acknowledge that their comments have improved the final version significantly.

Wes Penner, an Edmonton psychologist who recently published his autobiography entitled *Growing Up, a Report on My Life, Faith and Spirituality*, was the last presenter at the conference. Penner's primary objective in writing this memoir was to share his life story with his family and friends. Penner revealed that the writing process, which took more than 2 years, was not only psychologically and emotionally therapeutic, but also helped to clarify his theological perspectives on many issues.

Penner acknowledges that he should have devoted more time to editing his book prior to its publication, but he has no regrets. Penner also shared some important tips for those interested in writing their memoirs/biography, including some important resources for writing biography, the necessity of being honest when describing past events and persons, the importance of summarizing text whenever possible, and the all-important task of proofreading the text before sending it to the printers.

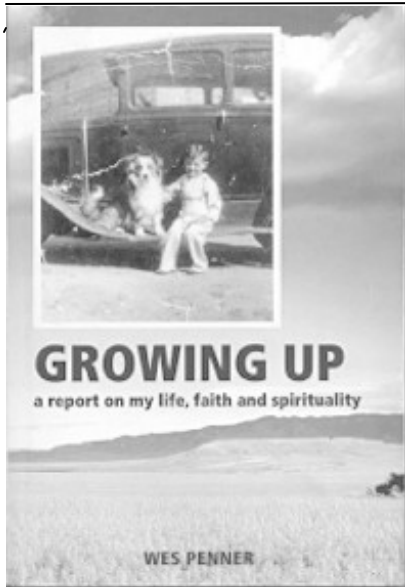
Rahn, Braul and Penner not only entertained conference participants with their research and insights, but also provided helpful and practical suggestions to anyone thinking of writing their own book, biography, or autobiography. The presenters also invited would-be writers to contact them with any



Wes Penner

questions that they might have about the writing process.

"Not long after the fall conference, I suffered a heart attack. Once I got home on New Year's Eve after receiving a triple by-pass accompanied by a number of complications, I realized that completing the reflections on my own wouldn't happen so I asked Colin to come to my rescue! My notes from the sessions together with Colin's expert word smithing have resulted in a succinct set of reflections for which I thank Colin very much!"
David Jeffares ❖



Title: GROWING UP

a report on my life, faith and spirituality

Author: Wes Penner PHD

Publisher: Pioneer Press Ltd., Edmonton Alberta

Reviewer: Henry M. Dick, Edmonton

I should have paid more attention to the title before I read this book. I was anticipating an evening in my lounge chair enjoying an autobiography, an engaging sketch of a life lived; or a memoir, a more deliberate reflection on one's life and achievements. Penner's book is all of this, and more. It is a carefully crafted retrospective "report" on his quest for discovering the essence of who he is, and then living

a life in harmony with that discovery. It requires that the reader approach it with a clear mind, and sitting in a straight-back chair.

The book is divided into 8 chapters with 178 pages including notes and references. Photographs are used sparingly. Chapters 1,4,6 and 8 are largely autobiographical. In exploring his "beginnings" the author has the advantage of his mother's diary entries during his growing up years in rural Saskatchewan. Wes is the youngest of 6 siblings and grew up in a loving home and a church that taught and lived by the tenets of "conservative evangelicalism". Even in his early years he became uncomfortable with literalistic understandings of scripture, more inclined to see the Bible as 'story' and it's intent more descriptive than prescriptive.

Chapter 4 provides a sketch of his wife's family history and recounts the Mennonite experience under Bolshevik Russia. An engaging part of this chapter seeks to outline the sources of our children's values. Throughout the book Penner acknowledges that because we are human we are capable of advancing both positive and negative influence, and this limitation is reflected both in our parenting and in the responses observed in our children. Nevertheless there are some general guidelines that are effective in rearing children who are loving, respectful, generous, aware of beauty and demonstrate pro-social behavior. Christian values are best learned from parents and mentors who demonstrate these values in everyday life. Faith lived is more effective than faith taught.

Friends and friendship are held in high regard by the author and the meaning and characteristics of friendship are discussed at some length in chapter 6. I found it instructive to reflect on his description of the various types of friendships in which we engage, e.g. camaraderie, friendships between couples, between men and women, between adults and children. The

loss of friends, at times through death, and the associated emotional cost is also discussed.

Chapter 8 traces the early influence of the faith of Penner's family and church on his own faith, and how his early thinking and believing has been challenged under the influence of his education, his professional career and his life's experiences. His attempt to make sense of life as he experiences it required a considerable rethinking and relearning of the fundamentals of his faith.

Before articulating his personal faith position the author summarizes the history of Christianity, starting with Constantine and ending with a description of where the ongoing search for a more pure theology and doctrine has taken us. The literalist approach to understanding scripture gives rise to a "fundamentalism" that is too much in tension with the realities of the complex and diverse multicultural communities in which we live and work. In the context of a counseling psychologists encounter with clients in therapy these tensions can be at the root of some serious mental health issues.

The author worked the major part of his career as a counseling psychologist. Chapter 5 sketches his career as teacher in the public school system, graduate studies to the Ph.D. level, Director of Evaluation and Supervisor of Employee and Family Assistance Program with the Edmonton Public School Board, an elected term on the St. Albert School Board, Assistant Adjunct Professor, University of Alberta Dept. of Educational Psychology. Towards the close of his professional career Penner establishes a private practice counseling and consulting service.

In chapter 7 Penner addresses

questions about what counseling is and what a counseling psychologist does. What are the personal qualities required of a counselor and how does the counseling psychologist's role fit in with other health care professionals? To what degree is it an art vs. a science? Are the outcomes measurable? The chapter concludes with a number of case studies - "narratives" of clients, their clinical symptoms, the counseling offered and the outcomes.

Chapter 2 could serve as a course summary for Counseling Psychology 101. The various schools of thought applied to the science and art of psychotherapy are summarized and the characteristics of human nature is discussed. Contrasts between humanist, existentialist and ecclesiastical thinking are explored, as are relationships between God and man, God and nature, the church and state. Into these discussions the author weaves his own theology and that of the early Anabaptists

Chapter 3 is a study of "others". A countercultural archetype representing "otherness" is the hippie community. The author's fascination with hippies is rooted in their freedom to search for and live by their own truth; a search driven by questions concerning who defines the individual - the culture, the church, the state?

Police Officers represent an "hero" archetype. They are the "other" by virtue of their authority, their uniform and the mantra by which they define themselves - "doing the right thing". The author describes the methodologies and outcomes of a number of studies of these "others" and how the insights gained helped him to better understand and communicate with clients from minority and counter-

cultural groups.

I found Dr. Penner's "report" a thoughtful, informative and thought provoking book. Not only does it provide insight into the nature of clinical psychology, it also portrays the personal struggles and challenges the author faced and overcame as he sought to bring his faith into line with what he came to understand about human nature and the world that is his reality, and thus to live with integrity. ❖

In the October 2012 issue of the newsletter, Donna wrote about her childhood in Vietnam, about her Mother's family, her Father's family and the struggles encountered during the war years of the 1970's. Finally they made it to Canada in May of 1980. Donna ends that first installment of From Vietnam to Canada: My Story describing their lives in Edmonton in the early 1980's

Continued from October 2012 issue

FROM VIETNAM TO CANADA: MY STORY

by DONNA DANG, DUNG THI NGO August 22, 2012

With the assistance of Doreen and Hugo Neufeld

10. Meeting My Husband

After several years my sister took over the store, and in 1986 I went back to school to upgrade my high school at what is now Alberta Vocational College in Edmonton

In June of 1986 I went to a Vietnamese Church retreat at Camp Nakamun, near Edmonton. Vietnamese people from churches all over the province were present. I had met Chau Dang, a young electrician, on a few other occasions, but this time he showed special interest in me. I was still strongly



Wedding day, July 4, 1987

pursuing my promise to serve God throughout my life, so I told him to be alert to the fact that I was convinced that God wanted me to become the wife of a pastor.

We were married on July 4, 1987 and settled in Calgary. Because of the recession, Chau got laid off only a month after we were married. After two attempts, he got his master electrician's license and opened his own business. The recession was still on, so the first two years were extremely difficult, especially since our family was growing, but in 1990 things began to improve.

In the summer of 1993 two people came to Chau, telling him, "You are wasting your abilities. You should be a pastor. You have the potential."

One day when Chau came home from work he said, "I don't want to work as an electrician anymore. I want to go to Bible College." We knew this would entail a move to Regina. Immediately we sat down and prayed: "If it is your will for us to make this change, let us know. If it is not, please stop us. Please show us a sign if you want us to go ahead."

We felt that a sign would be if we were able to sell the business, as well as the rental properties we owned. One day we received a call from Edmonton. The voice on the line said, "You have stolen the name of our company. We will sue you if you do not give up the name." Yet when we had applied for the name, "Standard Electric," the search process gave us clearance to use this title. We agreed that this phone call was a sign. This was further confirmed by the fact that, though the business could no longer be sold, we were able to sell three of the four houses we owned at the time. We kept one for continued rental income. In Regina we were able to purchase a house with the cash received from our sales. The rental income helped with

other economic needs.

Today we are both very happy in the pastoral ministry God has given us. We have three daughters, Sarah, Laura and Christine, three sons, Matthew, Nathan and Andrew, and one son-in-law, Ian Paloma married to Sarah.

11. Concluding Comments

After several very difficult years, it was an amazing feeling to settle in Canada. It was such a wonder to have complete freedom of worship, and to have the means to serve God. Though worship had not been forbidden during the last years in Vietnam, after our forced move out of Saigon it was physically impossible to reach a church in less than six hours. Though I was new in Canada and had many adjustments to make, I was free to do whatever was in my heart.

And in many ways my heart was still and continues to be in Vietnam, where the people today are suffering persecution and poverty. The needs of my people are ever before me. As Hebrews 13:3 reminds us, "Remember those who are in prison as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured as though you yourselves were being tortured." Though I am deeply, deeply thankful to be in Canada, I will not forget my people.

God's wonderful leading in my life has seen the fulfillment of three dreams:

1. As a child I dreamed of being an overseas visa student, something others in my country before 1975 had modeled for me. That dream died with the war. Yet, becoming a permanent resident in Canada, where I continue to take courses, is to me the fulfilling of



Top L to R Matthew, Christine, Sarah, Laura
Bottom L to R Andrew, Donna, Chau, Nathan
Missing from family picture Ian Paloma married to Sarah

that dream

2. I had long dreamed of doing something for the people of our world who live in poverty. Now I am able to help the many bothers and sisters with few resources who are in Vietnam, both directly and through organizations, like Samaritan's Purse. Others overseas, like the people in Africa, also receive my help. In addition, I am able to assist those who have needs locally in my community here.

3. In keeping with my promise to God, I had dreamed of becoming a pastor's wife. I am happy to be in that position today, and want to keep on doing God's work for as long as God gives me life and breath.

God has done amazing thing in my life. God's name be praised! ❖

MHSA Genealogy

Project

*for Grade Nine
students at Menno
Simons Christian
School*

by Lil Bartel

We are encouraging

young people to explore and document their family histories. This project has long been a thought of mine and I'm hoping to inspire their curiosity as to where they came from and who their ancestors were. They will learn of the decisions and the impact these had on their present day life.

The object is to create a family tree with vital statistics on each member and then back about 5 generations or more if possible. Included in the information should be several interviews with grand-

Why? Why do we collect our geneology information?

- ask the questions now and not later when it is too late



Lymburn Mennonite Church near Grande Prairie, Alberta in the 1930s.
There is no Mennonite Church there today.

parents or senior members of their family. These would be converted in short stories about family activities, occupations, church and family events.

This project will be part of the Christian education course taught by Byron Thiessen, ending in mid March and we will be presenting two prizes of \$50, and \$25 for the winners. ❖

2013 MHSC GAMEO Report

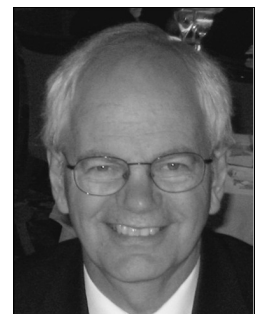
by Wesley Berg

The meetings of the GAMEO Canadian Editorial Committee and the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada were held in Winnipeg this year. As usual, Manitoba presented us with third week of January temperatures that rarely rose above -25 degrees, accompanied by corresponding wind chill figures. The meetings were held in the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in a new building on Taylor Avenue.

There have been some significant developments in GAMEO since last year. The encyclopedia has been moved out of the confines of its MHSC home and now exists under the umbrella of the Mennonite World Conference Faith and Life Commission. In keeping with the desire to build a flexible multilingual research tool the encyclopedia is migrating to a new software platform called MediaWiki. Conversations about the integration of GAMEO with the Global AnabaptistWiki site have continued with John Roth of Goshen College. Global AnabaptistWiki will be the location for primary documents like confes-



Lil Bartel



Wesley Berg

sions of faith. Once the migration has taken place further moves in the direction of linguistic expansion will begin to take place. Watch for developments in the next six months

One of the highlights of the MHSC meetings was the report from Esther Epp Tiessen on the successful completion of her book on the history of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada. Her work has been supported by the Society over the past two years and it was interesting to hear about some of the issues and challenges that arose during the research and writing of the manuscript. There will be an official book launch in December and the Society may hold its meeting to coincide with the event.

There was a report from the genealogy committee on its plan to establish a platform for consolidating the genealogy records of the provincial archives. The archivists had their third annual meeting and suggested establishing a national database of photographs held in the various provincial archives as a top priority, although the technical aspects are challenging. These are projects that should be very useful to researchers into a variety of subjects.

Three other items that caught my fancy were the report from the EMC archivist that they had stitched together detailed aerial photographs of Manitoba taken shortly after WWII and were now making them available on a CD; the triumphant display of a thumb drive containing seven gigs worth of MB Heralds from 1962-2012 by Jon Isaac, the MB archivist; and the account by Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, of "Sean Patterson's innovative MA thesis on Nester Machno, the controversial Ukrainian revolutionary (seen as a national hero in Ukraine and as a terrorist and uncouth bandit by Mennonites)." By the sound of it, the thesis will challenge firmly held beliefs about Machno and one can only hope that it will soon be published.

Finally, the Society awarded the MHSC Award of Excellence, given last year to Irene Klassen of Calgary, to William Schroeder, best known for his maps of Mennonite villages in Russia. ♦

The MHSA is a Legal Entity

by Colin P. Neufeldt

A few years ago Ralph Dahl asked me to review the bylaws of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA). In preparing my review I undertook a corporate search at Alberta Corporate Registry, and to my surprise I discovered that the MHSA had never been incorporated as a society in the Province of Alberta. As an unincorporated body, MHSA had no legal rights or powers, and it was essentially no different in its legal status than your local women's sewing circle or men's coffee club.

I was asked to provide a legal opinion of some of the options available to the MHSA and to outline the pros and cons of each option. After considering my analysis of the options, the MHSA board instructed me to incorporate the MHSA as a charitable society. I drafted new bylaws and



Colin Neufeldt

incorporating documents, and these were subsequently reviewed and approved by the MHSA board and membership at the MHSA Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Calgary this past spring. The proposed bylaws were then submitted to the Charities Branch of the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) for review, and the CRA ap-

proved them on May 29, 2012.

In early June the proposed MHSA incorporation documents and bylaws were delivered to the MCC sale in Didsbury for execution by MHSA board members. I then forwarded the signed incorporation documentation to Alberta Corporate Registry in Edmonton. On July 6, 2012 Alberta Corporate Registry incorporated the MHSA as a society in the Province of Alberta. CRA subsequently registered the newly incorporated MHSA as a charity on September 17, 2012.

What are the benefits of incorporating as a society? The Societies Act of Alberta lists a few of them as follows:

- A society may acquire and take by purchase, donation, devise or otherwise all kinds of real estate and personal property, and may sell, exchange, mortgage, lease, let, improve and develop it, and may erect and maintain any necessary buildings.
- For the purpose of carrying out its objects, a society may borrow or raise or secure the payment of money in any manner it thinks fit, and in particular by the issue of debentures.
- For the purpose of carrying out its objects, a society may, subject to its bylaws, draw, make, accept, endorse, discount, execute and issue promissory notes, bills of exchange and other negotiable or transferable instruments.
- No member of a society is, in the member's individual capacity, liable for a debt or liability of the society.

It was decided to hold the first AGM of the newly incorporated MHSA on the same day as the fall MHSA meeting at First Edmonton Church on October 27, 2012. The individuals who signed the incorporating documents and bylaws in

early June were deemed by the Society's Act to be the first members and board members of the newly incorporated MHSA, and therefore only they were permitted to vote on motions presented at the AGM.

Those in attendance at the first AGM of the newly incorporated MHSA included Henry Goerzen, Dan Jack, Lorne Buhr, Dave Neufeldt, Wes Berg, Katie Harder and Colin Neufeldt. These individuals passed the following four motions at the said AGM:

1) All honorary members of the unincorporated MHSA as well as those members who paid the 2012 membership fees of the unincorporated MHSA are accepted as members of the newly incorporated MHSA.

2) The 2012 elected board members of the unincorporated MHSA shall become the board members of the newly incorporated MHSA; the 2012 area representatives of the unincorporated MHSA shall become the area representatives of the newly incorporated MHSA.

3) Bill Janzen (chair) and Ellie Janz (treasurer) shall have cheque signing authority for the newly incorporated MHSA.

4) The newly incorporated MHSA shall accept the assets of the unincorporated MHSA. These assets shall include the following: archival documents and library materials, archival and library equipment, existing leases and contracts, improvements to the leased premises in Calgary, the MHSA logo, the MHSA bank account, the MHSA newsletter, the MHSA website and databases, all computer equipment and software, and all other assets of the unincorporated MHSA.

The next AGM for the newly incorporated MHSA will take place

in spring 2013. Those individuals who have paid the 2013 memberships will be allowed to vote at the next AGM.

If you are interested in reviewing a copy of the incorporation documents and bylaws of the newly incorporated MHSA, please contact the MHSA secretary. ♦

A Brief Chronological History of the MHSA

by Irene Klassen



Irene Klassen

From humble beginnings at a meeting in Red Deer on July 12, 1986 to the spacious well organized office and archives on 32 Street in Calgary the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta has seen much progress throughout the years. From July 12, 1986 until May 22, 1999 the MHSA held 16 executive, board and annual general meetings. Starting on July 31, 1999 the MHSA has usually held two events per year, one in spring including the AGM and the fall event.

This is a record of these meetings and a brief highlight of events:

July 31, 1999 Duchess. Special display of Family Histories, some complete and some in process. Study of genealogy and pedigree charts with Harold Friesen and Judii Rempel.

October 16, 1999 Abbotsdale Church, Calgary. Speaker Ken Reddig. Visit to Glenbow Museum.

October 21, 2000 West Zion Church, Didsbury. Discussion of the upcoming centennial of West Zion, and also Bergthal Church, Didsbury. Helen Friesen and David Dyck shared their stories of coming out of Russia. As well as stories by Harry Stauffer and Henry Goerzen.

May 5, 2001 Highland MB Church, Calgary. Facilities Development Committee consisted of Henry Goerzen, Peter Penner and Bill Janzen. Colin Neufeldt spoke on Russian Gulags.

October 13, 2001 Salem Church, Tofield. Cena King spoke on early settlers in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Willie Wideman on an early Mennonite settlement at Mayton, Alberta. Don Kauffman on settlers coming from Nebraska, Ohio and Oregon to Ontario. Margaret Boese on coming to Canada and being welcomed by the Kauffman family. Ted Regehr on moving from Salem to Holyrood. Anne Harder's book *The Vauxhall Mennonite Church* was for sale.

May 10, 11, 2002 Coaldale. Harry Loewen talked about his book, *Road to Freedom, Mennonites Escape the Land of Suffering* and on writing biographies.

October 5, 2002 Ribbon cutting was held at the new MHSA offices on the mezzanine of the MCC building in Calgary.

April 26, 2003 Gem MB Church. Jessie and Larry Kehler were the speakers. Local contributors: Jake Wiens, Countess; Henry Retzlaff, Rosemary; George Paetkau, Gem; Linda Lauber, Duchess; Irene Klassen, New Gem and Jake Doerksen on cooperation among the early churches. A Silent auction was held.

September 27, 28, 2003 the fall meeting was held at LaCrete, participants toured a saw mill, other local enterprises and went for a boat ride to Carcajou, where the first Mennonites settled.



Home of The Historical Society of Alberta

April 23, 24, 2004 FMC, Edmonton. Guest speaker was John B. Toews. Ed and Edna Barleycorn were interviewed by CBC in an interesting skit. Lorne Buhr spoke on (PIPA) the Personal Information and Privacy Act, Tena Wiebe on Neu Samara.

September 25, 2004 FMC, Calgary. Sheila Johnstone discussed researching family history; Jake Harder, heirlooms and writing family histories; Dave Wiebe Neufeldt, photograph preservation and Dave Jeffares, publishing family histories.

April 15, 16, 2005 Holyrood Church, Edmonton. Visited Viking Hutterite colony.

November 26, 2005 Bergthal Church, Didsbury. Bruce Guenter spoke on Bible Schools in Alberta.

June 3, 2006 Gem of the West Museum, Coaldale. Celebration of the 80th anniversary of the arrival of Mennonites in Coaldale, including a tour of the historical Coaldale Mennonite cemetery.

January 19, 2007 FMC, Calgary. Author Arthur Kroeger; spoke on his recent book, *Hard Passage*. Entertainment was provided by the Corpus Christi Male Chorus. The MHS provided a short report at this Mennonite Historical Society of Canada meeting

May 24 2007 Riverwest Church, Edmonton. Speaker Glenn Penner explained the DNA of Prussian and Russian Mennonites.

October 20, 2007 Seniors Centre, Linden. Rev Jake Boese and Cornie Wiebe spoke on Holdeman history and Lloyd Retzlaff and Nick Wiens on the Linden MB Church history

June 1, 2008 FMC, Edmonton. Book launch of *Remember Us*, by author Ruth Derksen Siemens

October 18, 2008 FMC, Calgary. Author Peter Letkemann, talked about his book, *The Ben Horch Story*. Irene Klassen spoke on choir leaders in Alberta.

May 30, 2009 FMC, Edmonton. Chris Cox spoke on the use of Low German and Wes Berg on Ethnomusicology.

April 10, 2010 Abbeydale Church, Calgary. Author Eleanore Woollard discussed her book, *Consider the Threshing Stone*, Dave Pankratz, the Diaries of his parents and author Ted Regehr, *A Generation of Vigilance*.

November 20, 2010 FMC, Edmonton. Four speakers talked about their recent

journeys; Vince Friesen on Paraguay, Dave Toews on Ukraine, Menno Klaassen on Uzbekistan and Colin Neufeldt on Siberia.

April 9, 2011 Gem of the West Museum, Coaldale. Author Ted Regehr and Mennonites from Mexico, Ben and Eva Stoesz, all spoke of the book, *In Search Of A Homeland: Mennonite Migrations from Russia to Canada to Mexico to Canada*.

October 29, 2011 Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury. 25th Anniversary Celebration of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Jim Lore discussed, Mennonites as seen in the Community Mirror. Author Tena Friesen held her book launch for *Pushing Through Invisible Barriers*.

April 14, 2012 Vietnamese Mennonite Church, Calgary. The Vietnamese; stories of their history and faith

October 27, 2012 FMC, Edmonton. The legal transfer of MHS (Alberta and Sask.) to MHS took place. Three authors discussed their books; Peter Rahn, *Among the Ashes*, Wes Penner, *Growing Up* and Walter Braul's, upcoming, *Russian Mennonites*.



Errata

There were errors that crept into Jim Bowman's article "*Discovering Alberta's Mennonite Pioneer Family*" in the last Newsletter:

In paragraph 4 (page 6), change "east of Aldersyde" to "west of Aldersyde. In paragraph 9 (page 7), change "west of Okotoks" to "east of Okotoks". In footnote 7, change "Guengrich" to "Guengerich". ❖

Photo Gallery of 2012 MHS Fall Conference

(Opposite Page clockwise from top left): Walter Braul, some of the members, Katie Harder and Ellie Janz, Peter Rahan, Board Meeting, Colin Neufeldt

(Page 14 clockwise from top left) Dolly and Lynette, Faspa Conversation, Peter Rahan, Wes Penner, Walter Braul, Faspa Is Served. ❖





Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO)

GAMEO needs your help. Please go to <http://www.gameo.org/> and see if the article/history about your church, your church leaders and your town or city is up to date. Many of the articles are 50-60 years old and require an update. If you would like to work on updating an article, know of a subject that should be included, or know someone who would be interested in such a project, get in touch with our Alberta GAMEO representative Wesley Berg at wberg@ualberta.ca ❖

Letters to the Editor

- our readers wrote

Greetings in Christ. It was useful to look through the Oct. 2012 MHSA newsletter. There is such a sad exclusivity in some materials (Faspa talk about Mennonite potatoes) and an inviting inclusivity in others (the stories of Donna Dang and Dung Thi Ngo). I doubt if Menno Simons was being hunted for his wife's recipes; for him, there was much more the concern that Jesus would be declared and honoured throughout the world. The tension between so-called, wrongly named Mennonite ethnicity and Anabaptism as theology continues as a major stumbling block within the inner mindset and outreach of many Mennonite churches.

Terry M. Smith (Rev.)

Evangelical Mennonite Conference, Manitoba

Born and raised in Alberta, an EMC member since 1979 and a minister since 1985. ❖

Alberta Inter-Mennonite Co-operation during the 1930s

by John B. Toews

Between 1923 and 1929 approximately 20,000 Mennonites, seeking to escape the devastation of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, arrived in Canada. The majority settled in the prairie provinces. Alberta played a significant role in this relocation. In part it was the misfortune of others during the first two decades of the twentieth century that allowed for the agricultural absorption of some of the migrants. Drought, the collapse of cattle

and grain prices and even the exodus of English ranchers to serve in World War I made for greater land availability in Alberta. Then too, in an act of apparent generosity, the Canadian Pacific Railway had extended substantial credits to the newcomers. Realistic economic considerations undergirded the altruism of the railway company, especially when it came to Southern Alberta. Co-operating with other companies the CPR sought to enlarge already existing irrigation networks to one time

ranches and dry lands. In addition to the transportation credit granted to the destitute Mennonites, the CPR now sold the newly created irrigation farms to them on a crop share basis. The crop in question related mainly to sugar beets, possibly the best cash crop during the Great Depression. Even so debts would only be repaid gradually.

Mennonite immigrants settling in Alberta faced significant challenges. Known Russian village structures and land use patterns were not transferable. Later nineteenth century Canadian system of ethnic land reserves as practiced in Manitoba and Saskatchewan no longer existed. Migrants settled on private farms subject to municipal jurisdictions and sent their children to public schools run by the province. Furthermore they had to settle where farms became available. Invariably a peoplehood used to living within sheltering systems was scattered over a large geographic area. Yet communities in new irrigation districts like Gem, Rosemary, Vauxhall or Coaldale managed to achieve a critical Mennonite population mass that enabled them to recreate some aspects of the old social and economic structure. During the 1930s these constituencies were able to address a two-fold task: they needed to preserve a sense of Mennonite identity while ensuring economic survival amid the debt-ridden Great Depression. A well developed sense of public service and volunteerism ensured that poverty did not mean a neglect of known



John B. Toews



Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church Congregation
1929

religious, cultural and societal values. In Russia church, school and village were equal to the task. In Canada that responsibility fell mainly on the church. Yet the Russian Mennonite church, historically often co-extensive with the ethnic community, easily involved itself in the broader issues facing the newly arrived immigrants.

In November, 1929, Mennonite delegates from newly established settlements met in Coaldale, Alberta and organized the so-called *Vertreterversammlung der mennonitischen Siedler Albertas* (Representative Assembly of Mennonite Settlers in Alberta). They discussed agricultural questions as well as what then was an overwhelming problem, the *Reiseschuld* (travel debt), incurred when migrating to Canada. This would be a recurring agenda item. A second gathering in Coaldale in 1931 elected a Provincial Committee as a kind of executive for the *Vertreterversammlung*. The organization met for the third time in Gem, Alberta.

There was a new agenda item: support for Mennonite mentally ill at the Mental Hospital in Ponoka.

When delegates gathered in Swalwell in 1935 they deliberated upon what had become a standard issue. Jacob B. Janz from Coaldale opened the convention and reminded delegates of the 400 year Mennonite faith story noting that it had brought with it spiritual, cultural and even economic benefits.

Included in this heritage was a social conscience that cared for the widows, the orphans, the sick and the old. Yes, there were theological differences, yet Mennonites were “a unified peoplehood of brothers.”¹

For most delegates in attendance Janz’s comments were self evident truth. In the Russian world they had left they viewed all of life activities as an extension of their religious values – schools, hospitals, care for orphans and widows as well as service to the state. Such common obligations minimized religious differences or at least placed them in perspective. Inter-Mennonite co-operation was a necessity. In many ways the *Vertreterversammlung* that convened in Alberta as well as other provinces was an instinctive, historical response to the needs of the larger community.

The assembly, which tried to convene annually, played a crucial role in sustaining a sense of peoplehood among the geographically scattered migrants. Confronted by extreme poverty and indebtedness as well as



First Coaldale M.B. Church, First Service Jan.25 1929
Construction Start Dec.1928, Thirty-two by Fifty-two Feet

language and cultural barriers, they needed reassurances from the old world in order to survive in the new. Face to face contact and verbal communication generated a strong sense that they still belonged to the larger whole. Familiar concerns united them whether these pertained to fire and crop insurance, care for the mentally ill or the repayment of their travel debts to the Canadian Pacific Railway. Large portions of the agenda were allotted to the often detailed district reports. Delegates listened patiently as between eighteen and twenty-four Mennonite districts provided their narrations. These might focus on good harvests, drought conditions, spiritual nurture, population migrations or the formation of a local health society.

There was one dominate theme in the deliberations of the conventions during the 1930s – the Reiseschuld (travel debt). Delegates were deeply aware of the massive CPR credit extended to Mennonite immigrants who were now confronted by the Great Depression. Little wonder that elder David Toews, in many ways responsible for the migration loan, addressed the meetings whenever possible.² In response to the report presented by Cornelius F. Klassen in 1935 the assembly called on all Reiseschuld collectors to approach every farmer “shortly before the harvest” to determine “how many bushels he would pledge or how much money he would pay towards reducing his

travel debt.” Following the harvest the collection agents should make sure such persons kept their promise.³ When the Vertreterversammlung met in Gem, Alberta in 1937 it heard about the “unsatisfactory situation” with respect to the Reiseschuld. Delegates responding to the reports of elder David Toews and C.F. Klassen observed that “as long as our constituency owes a single dollar not one of us is free.” Every effort had to be made to remove this “disgrace” (Schandflecken). Ministers were to sharpen the consciences of their congregants. A fundamental change in attitude with regard to Reiseschuld was needed. By July, 1937, only half of the debt had been paid.⁴

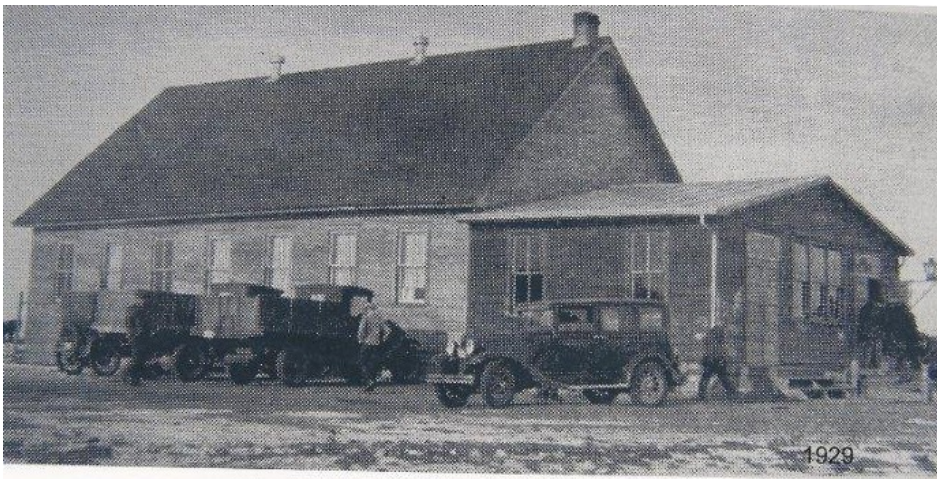
Whatever good intentions the delegates expressed in 1937, many immigrants were economically helpless in the face of the Great Depression and the disastrous droughts and winds characterizing the “dirty thirties.” Reiseschuld was again the dominant topic of the convention meeting in Rosemary, Alberta in 1938. Debtors were classified as those without prospects (Ausichtlose), those without means (Mittellos) and those who were unwilling to pay (Boeswillige). Whatever the classifications, the larger constituency was responsible for their debt.⁵

Relatively few of the delinquencies were intentional. Some immigrants had settled on large farms in the so-called Alberta “dry belt.” Originally ploughed in response to satisfactory moisture conditions and

high grain prices between 1910-1920, the lands reverted to a cycle of wind and drought in the 1930s. Such Mennonite families, far from paying their travel debts, needed assistance to relocate to new settlement areas.⁶ Yet in general the few rather than the many created the Reiseschuld dilemma. The Provincial Committee which acted as a kind of executive for the Vertreterversammlung, together with the appointed Reiseschuld collection agents, managed to pay off the debt by 1945.⁷

Whatever anxieties were expressed at the conventions concerning Reiseschuld did not dampen the goodwill and compassion among assembled delegates. District reports cited ongoing church activities such as youth programs, short-term Bible schools and Bible conferences. There were cultural activities related to libraries, German language Saturday Schools and choirs. Other concerns focused on support for the mentally ill in the provincial hospital in Ponoka, fire and crop insurance, as well as, the medical and hospital societies organized in Coaldale. There was even a proposal for organizing a burial society. It seemed the memories of what had been possible in Russia still lingered.

Russian Mennonite immigrants settling in Alberta belonged to three religious groups, the Mennonite Church, the Mennonite Brethren emerging in 1860 and the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren organized at the beginning of the twentieth century. What had been



Coaldale M.B. Church South End Addition
Twenty by Thirty-two Feet With Basement

important theologically in the past mattered less amid widespread poverty, the difficulties of new beginnings and the vast geographic distances that separated them. If faith commitment was to be preserved mutual encouragement was essential. Regional reports in the

minutes of the early Mennonite Brethren Conferences in Alberta stated that Coaldale immigrants “of all persuasions” met in the local school as did those in Namaka.⁸

The six conferences that followed recorded similar events. In 1929 the Mennonite elder Cornelius Harder and the Brethren leader B.B. Janz were to outline a plan for a joint Bible Conference and send it to all districts.⁹ Delegates also proposed a ministerial conference embracing all Mennonite groups. It was held in Namaka the following year. Immigrants scattered in a forty-mile east-west and ten mile north-south region (Sedalia, Naco, New Brigden) in 1931 worshipped together. Peter Peters from Gem reported that he was unitedly proclaiming the Word with ministers of the Mennonite Church. In Countess the new settlers held joint services in the local school. There were also plans for ministerial courses.¹⁰ When Brethren ministers visited Hussar they found that all the inhabitants belonged to the Mennonite Church,

yet “we felt so comfortable among them.” They concluded that “we should visit there more often.”¹¹

In 1932 the Brethren church in Gem informed the Conference that “after Sunday School there is a sermon by the preachers of our congregation or from the Mennonite Church. We have worked together until now and celebrate communion with all believers on the second Sunday of the month.”¹² Similarly Johann Peters from Tofield stated that six Brethren and six Mennonite Conference families met for worship and that each group had a minister. They met in homes and sang in four part harmony.¹³ At the 1933 Conference delegates learned that the Brethren, the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren and the Mennonite Church had jointly collaborated on an itinerary for Bible Conferences. It was also noted that the Mennonite Church would dispatch several brothers for evangelistic purposes.¹⁴ The Bible Conference held in 1933 featured speakers from all three groups.¹⁵

In the later 1930s there was a gradual loss of commonality as congregations in the more heavily settled regions like Coaldale, Gem or Rosemary were able to build their own churches. Apparently growing prosperity and increasing Mennonite population density had its disadvantages. Fortunately the inter-Mennonite nurture to smaller and geographically scattered congregations in Alberta continued. In Russia the term *innere mission* (internal missions) referred mainly to the use of the itinerant ministry as the most



Mennonite leaders like B.B. Janz were also farmers. All participants in the *Vertreterversammlung* were unsalaried.

effective method of unifying adherents separated by vast distances. It was usually taken for granted that all Mennonite groups utilized this ministry and that the recipients of such spiritual nurture did not worry about the denominational credentials of the participating clergy. Reports from individuals participating in such Missionsreisen (missionary travels) suggest the strategy worked well on the Alberta plains, at least judging by the minutes of the 1935 Mennonite Brethren Conference.¹⁶ When that convention ended on July 20, delegates left for the fifth provincial Vertreterversammlung meeting in Swalwell to discuss the broad ranging issues confronting all Mennonite immigrants in Alberta. At the Swalwell sessions they listened to a lecture entitled "A Word Concerning the Cohesiveness (Zusammengehoerigkeit) of the Mennonite People." The speaker argued that Mennonites, irrespective of church affiliation, had common interests in such areas as education, health, social welfare and agriculture. Religious faith naturally undergirded all such concerns. Attending representatives drafted a resolution affirming the contents of the presentation.¹⁷ Obviously the concerns of the Brethren conferences were not that widely separate from those of all Alberta Mennonites.

Emigration from Russia had meant a new language and culture and even lands that demanded different farming techniques. Yet there was a deep sense of community rooted in common religious values. During the 1930s Mennonites found it easy to celebrate a known ethnicity and collaborate on issues related to settlement difficulties and the common obligation of the



Johann and Margaretha Toews. A well known itinerant minister and Bible Conference speaker during the 1930's

Reiseschuld. Somewhat later the stress exerted by World War II on a pacifist minority ensured ongoing cohesiveness. Ultimately the pressures of an assimilationist society combined with outside religious incursions, urbanization and professionalization substantially modified the Alberta Mennonite paradigm. Yet during the 1930s and even the 1940s, the old world they had left provided a sense of togetherness for the immigrants. Amid want and deprivation, cultural and religious boundaries seemed somewhat trivial in the face of survival in a new land. Formal gatherings combined with many innere mission visitations by ministers from all three Mennonite groups provided hope and inspiration for families scattered over a wide geographic area. For many immigrants mutual accountability and support eased the often confusing process of gradually becoming Canadian. ♦

Footnotes:

- 1 *Fifth Provincial Vertreterversammlung*, July 23 & 24, 1935, pp. 3-4. Subsequent references will simply use V V and the date of the convention.
- 2 Based on the 1935, 1937 and 1939 V V minutes.
- 3 V V Minutes, 1935, pp. 8-9.
- 4 V V Minutes, 1937, pp. 7-8.
- 5 V V Minutes, 1939, p. 20.
- 6 V V Minutes, 1937, pp. 13-14.
- 7 As late as 1941 the V V stated that individuals who purposely did not pay their travel debt were committing a sin and that the sin should be dealt with in the churches or, if they could not do so, by the respective conference. V V Minutes 1941, pp. 12-13.
- 8 *Protokolle der ersten Distriktkonferenz der Mennoniten Brudergemeinden in Alberta, bei Coaldale, Alberta am 29 Okt. 1928 (Buch I, 1927-1940) pp.7-8.* The original minutes in Book I have been paginated and all subsequent references to various conferences are by page numbers only.
- 9 *Conference Minutes*, pp. 20, 26-28.
- 10 *Ibid.*, pp. 33-35.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 43. The 1930s surviving minutes of the rather prominent Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church provide ample illustrations of the "ministers without borders" practices of Alberta Mennonites.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.57 The Gem Brethren minister conducted special Bible studies with the Mennonite elder Cornelius Harder. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
- 13 *Ibid.*, p. 58.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 83.
- 15 *Ibid.*, pp. 86-87.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 168-169. 17 V V Minutes, 1935, pp. 4; 12-14. ♦



Lawrence
Klippenstein

From the Dnieper to the Paraguay River

Victor Janzen, From the Dnieper to the Paraguay River (Steinbach, MB, by the author, 1995), pb. 178 pp. 15.00.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

A recently-published English translation of an original German-language autobiography makes this most interesting life story available to a large audience which could not access the sold-out first printing. It is now part of an ever expanding literature coming from immigrants who made the historic trek out of Ukraine through Poland to Germany and Paraguay and eventually to Canada.

Janzen begins his story in the Old Colony village of Osterwick (Neu-osterwick, now renamed Dolinske) in 1929 when he was born. That put him right in the Soviet period of life and government which had begun in 1917. It included school life in the village and for a while regular church life. When organized meetings became impossible, believers gathered occasionally as possible, or sustained faith in their hearts and families as circumstances permitted.

With invasion of Soviet Russia by the German army in June, 1941, came also ultimately the presence of the German army in the Mennonite colonies. Mennonites looked forward to better times, and in some times that did happen. Church life could be renewed, and other forms of public life also resumed. The hope-for redistribution of land, however, did not happen. A detailed description of what took place when the Soviets ordered evacuation to the east, relates how families gathered to attempt the trip into the unknown, how they attempted in various ways to slow down progress, hoping that the German army driving hard to the east would overtake them, and thus free from their otherwise awful fate. It succeeded. A map shows their slow move toward the Dnieper River where they then were indeed overtaken and thus were able to make their way back to their village.

Soon however their brief relief ended, when the Germans were forced to retreat again and the Mennonite families of the Old Colony and others were ordered

(with little resistance) to prepare to leave for Germany with the army. This retreat then forms an important part of the first part of the volume, which then includes efforts to regroup in western Europe and plans to leave once again – to go to Paraguay. The part played by C.F. Klassen and Peter Dyck along with other workers becomes very personal in this account. Life in the camps where émigrés stayed for various lengths of time gets attention also.

In Paraguay the challenge to begin all over again is now told from the vantage point of a young man still open to adventure, and somewhat prepared emotionally to take on the task, important as it seemed. Victor was in a group with his mother, two sisters and a brother. The journey leaving Germany had begun on February 1, 1947, and ended on the high seas with arrival in Buenos Aires, Argentina almost exactly three weeks later.

Some innovative lodging and travel arrangements followed the sea journey. In South America C. A. Defehr of Winnipeg had received responsibilities to take the group on to the Paraguay River en route to their new homes.. Detailed stories of trying to settle down in the Friesland colony comprise an interesting part of the final section of the volume. The story ends here with decision of the family to move to Canada in 1955.

Well illustrated and written in very readable prose, the author has left his family and hopefully many other readers a meaningful document of how the emigrations of Mennonite families during and after World War II could take place. What must have been carefully kept diaries inform the story throughout. Occasional editorial slips do not significantly detract from an account worth commending to current readers.

The book may be obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Village Bookstore by calling 1-204-326 9961 or emailing info@mhv.ca ❖

New column starting in the next issue:

LIFE IN THE PAST LANE

Will focus on vignettes designed to help us remember experiences of our ancestors. If you have any of these gems that you would like to share, please email me, Dave Hildebrand at davenkayh@shaw.ca ❖

