

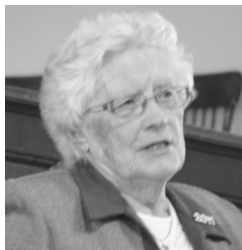


Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XIV, No. 2

June 2011



Irene Klassen

Twenty-five years - Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (1986-2011):

by Irene Klassen, Calgary

Editor's note: Irene Klassen prepared this article for the 2011 MHSA annual General Meeting Report book. It is re-printed in this issue of the Newsletter

In Scripture we read, "Forget the former days: do not dwell in the past. See I am doing a new thing" Isaiah 43 18,19. It's almost contradictory to the passages in Deuteronomy where we are to "tell it to your children", and in Chronicles "Look to the Lord ... remember the wonders He has done..." However we know there is a vast difference between dwelling on the past, and honouring and learning from it. Through Isaiah, God encourages His people to find ever-

(Continued on page 6)

Judith Rempel Sept. 16, 1952–May 24, 2011

It is with sadness that we announce the passing of our friend, our coordinator and our archivist, Judith Rempel. Judi died peacefully in her sleep on the 24th of May, 2011. Funeral arrangements are pending.

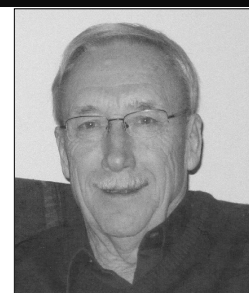
Collecting the Reiseschuld

by John Hiebert, Sherwood Park

Scholars and historians have written about the prosperity our Mennonite ancestors enjoyed after they settled in South Russia. The special privileges granted to them by Catherine II gave them religious freedom, exemption from military service and control of their civic and educational affairs. Under these conditions they were free to live the Mennonite lifestyle, which they were accustomed to.

Eventually, however, Russian reform programs encroached on their independence and threatened their faith and freedoms. In light of these developments many felt that submitting to the changes that were imposed on them violated their convictions. The group that held this view emigrated from Russia to the Americas to seek the concessions they desired. Others adjusted to the change and still maintained a lifestyle grounded in their faith until the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 changed everything. In addition to the hardships that people suffered as an aftermath of the revolution, this period of political restructuring dictated almost every facet of their lives. The agreements made under the Czarist government were dissolved and the Mennonite way of life was facing systematic destruction.

When the Mennonites who had migrated to Canada earlier heard about the suffering their people in Russia had to endure they developed a plan to facilitate a mass migration of Mennonites to Canada. This was not an easy task but under the leadership of David Toews, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization was successful in negotiating the terms of migration from Russia to Canada. The Order-in-Council of 1919, which prevented immigration of Mennonites to Canada, was repealed by the government of Prime Minister Mackenzie King and a financial strategy was developed with Colonel John S. Dennis, Chief Commissioner of Colonization and Development for the CPR to advance credit to the Mennonites to cover transportation costs. While this arrangement solved a major obstacle in the migration process it also created a huge transportation debt or Reiseschuld for which



John Hiebert

FEATURE STORIES

- 1 Collecting Reiseschuld
- 2 Twenty Five Years MHSA
- 3 Editorial Reflections
- 4 Chairman's Corner
- 5 MHSA Annual General Meeting
- 6 In Search of a Homeland Pt. 1
- 7 The Long Hard Road to Canada
- 8 The Mennonite Centre, Highgate Pt. 2
- 9 Gameo, 2011 Meeting
- 10 A Visit to Neu-Chotitz
- 11 Spring At Rockcliffe
- 12 Images of AGM 2011
- 13 Judith Rempel remembered

(Continued on page 3)

Editorial Comments "Who Needs a Vil- lage?"

by Lorne Buhr,
Edmonton



Lorne Buhr

Many of our readers will be aware that Mennonites and other groups tended to live in villages in Europe. This pattern continued in some settlements in North America. Neuberghthal, Manitoba, is the

best preserved single street Mennonite village in North America. It is a National Historic Site. The village pattern suited an agrarian life style. It had other aspects which were both appealing and positive. There was the friendship made possible by living in close proximity as neighbors. These neighbors had much in common including religious values and beliefs. People could depend on each other for support and other help.

Early Mennonite settlements in Manitoba and Saskatchewan had numerous villages. I am not aware that the same pattern occurred in Alberta. Our province has examples of Mennonite settlers living in close proximity to one another but not in a village pattern with houses facing a single street and then land for gardens, crops and grazing in close proximity. You will correct me, I'm sure, if I am displaying my ignorance.

By the time I spent my growing up years in Saskatchewan most of my relatives lived on individual farms or in the growing number of small towns surrounding Saskatoon. I did not have close cousins living in my town. But Sunday afternoon would be a good time to visit relatives at their farms. Much of my time was spent listening to the conversations of the older generation. Not much of it had to do with the "Old Country" as my parents and their siblings had been born in the USA. Nor was there much talk about settlement problems in Canada as that had happened decades earlier. Occasionally, Uncle John would show us something interesting on his farm. The bull with a tin piece laced over his eyes intrigued me and scared me enough to keep a distance from him. Or, I'd get to see how Dad's younger brothers raised beef cattle

in the North Saskatchewan River valley.

If there was a conversation about the past that might center on the US experience. My father came to Saskatchewan in 1906 and returned to Minnesota only twice that I know of. There was at least a 50 year interval between visits. Some of his family had little or no connection with organized religion. I recall a telling comment, in Low German, of course, from one of Mom's uncles - "Church comes along and spoils my Sunday". If we visited at that home we were also visiting my Dad's cousin.

I pen these lines about Mennonite living patterns on the Canadian prairies because there is something in me which yearns for the village type of life there was in Europe and in some other places Mennonites chose to settle. You may think it is very unrealistic to dream of a bygone era and romanticize it. However, as forces conspired to cause our forefathers to take up their tents and hustle to new areas when their values and beliefs were threatened, an era may be approaching when new factors will cause us to organize in groups in new ways. Not long ago, on May 1, a group in our church gathered to learn more about the concept of "Transition Towns". Briefly stated, in response to "peak oil", the end of an oil economy prompted by too much energy demand of a de-

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Send submissions and other
correspondence to:

Lorne Buhr, Editor

(lorne@mennonitehistory.org)

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MHSA

2946 32 Street NE

Calgary, AB T1Y 6J7

403-250-1121

e-mail: queries@mennonitehistory.org

Co-Editors: Lorne Buhr & Dave Toews

Editorial Committee: Dave Toews,
Lorne Buhr, Dave Hildebrand

Layout & Distribution: Dave Hildebrand

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Wes Berg, Edmonton



VILLAGE LIFE

pleting resource, we could see village life and its values coming onto the radar again. We look at past events and wonder about future happenings. ♦

Chairman's Corner

by Bill

Janzen, Calgary



Bill Janzen

It has been a long winter! It helps to observe signs that encourage us such as the longer days, the sun is higher in the sky, the average temperature is getting warmer. Likewise, as we look into the future there are signs of encouragement. At the Mennonite Historical Society I believe we also see signs of encouragement. We have gained in the availability of materials for research and are slowly moving forward in spreading the work out so that there are more people involved. There are also dark clouds that will require attention. We have hope that the Board will be able to make the appropriate decisions for the good of the Society.

The setting for our Annual General Meeting could not have been in a better place. When I stepped into the Gem of the West Museum in Coaldale I was impressed and worried at the same time. With the many interesting displays, how could we keep our MHSA group at the meeting? I believe they all appreciated the setting, the short history of the museum and the comfortable arrangements. I was thankful for the participation and the discussions that took place. The volunteer staff and the supportive Board Members and Area Representatives made the day very worthwhile. The AGM assist-

ed in highlighting issues that must be dealt with.

The afternoon session provided clear background to the migration of the Mennonites from Russia to Canada in the 1870s, then on to Mexico in the 1920s. Ted Regehr clarified the difference in the migration that began in the 1950s with the Mennonites returning from Mexico. Ben and Eva Stoesz, a couple who moved to Canada in 1995, told their story of life in Mexico, the various experiences they had in the Colony and how they made the move to Canada and the experiences of integration here.

There is always a standing invitation for volunteers to join us at the Archives and Library Centre. The process of organizing and re-organizing is always going on. Judith Rempel has informed us that she wants to reduce her workload and we want to help with the transition. If you have not visited the Archives and Library, come and browse to see what we have as well as check out the work we do.

We all know that there is work that must be done and then there is a lot of work that would be good if it could be done. The truth is that whatever information, whether minutes of organizations, family history or community history we have, this information is valuable. When the people who have the story pass on, the stories pass on with them. May we be diligent in recording valuable stories for future generations.

Finally, I want to express my appreciation to the Board Members, Area Representatives and Volunteers, Newsletter co-editors, for their assistance in organizing our Annual General Meeting. It was a job well done. A special thank you to Dave Neufeldt who made all the arrangements in Coaldale for the facility and the lunch, for setting up chairs and assisting during the day. It was much appreciated. To all, have a wonderful summer. ♦



Gem of the West Museum
Coaldale, Alberta

continued from Page 1

the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization assumed responsibility. The expectation was that the immigrants would pay for the credit extended to them after they settled in Canada. A number of people, however, did not clear their indebtedness so the Board had difficulty in fulfilling its commitment. Some had legitimate reasons for not paying while others either neglected or refused to pay. In an effort to liquidate the amounts outstanding the Board made special appeals to the immigrants to fulfill their obligation. To expedite the collection process, representatives were appointed to visit debtors with the intention of collecting the amounts owing or making suitable arrangements to settle their accounts. For some reason the role these men played in the collection process has remained obscure. Little seems to be known about the difficulties they sometimes encountered

In their pursuit of delinquent accounts. In many cases they faced problems in travelling to outlying areas and when they arrived there they sometimes dealt with people who were not prepared to accept responsibility for their debt. My father, Gerhard J. Hiebert, was recruited to serve as a collector of Reiseschuld when he met David Toews in 1935. His story will relate some of the experiences he had in "Collecting the Reiseschuld".



Gerhard Hiebert

Gerhard was born in the Chortitza region of South Russia in 1904. Early in his childhood he moved with his parents to Nikolaipol, Siberia where he grew up in a farming environment. At some point his interests in education led him to enroll in a teacher training institution where he obtained his teaching credentials. His first assignment was in a school not far from where he grew up. Also, during this time his spiritual path became defined, he was baptized in the Mennonite faith and joined the local Mennonite church. A few months later Gerhard was married and continued his teaching career until their freedoms in

Russia eroded. This gave him reason to pursue emigration possibilities.

He was apprehensive about leaving the teaching profession but the political situation was sufficiently troubling that he and his wife Maria decided to emigrate as quickly as possible. The quota for CPR credit passengers had already been filled so the required documents and passage had to be obtained with cash. When sufficient funds were acquired, arrangements were made to leave Siberia under the sponsorship of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. Gerhard's family was to follow as soon as travelling plans were finalized, however, due to migration restrictions that were imposed shortly after my parents left, other family members were not allowed to emigrate.

Gerhard and Maria Hiebert and their three-week-old son left Siberia in October of 1926 and travelled through Moscow to the Latvian port of Riga where they boarded the ship "SS Melita" enroute to Liverpool, England. Here they transferred to the ship "SS Montclair" and arrived in Quebec in November 1926. The family was given final immigration clearance by Canadian authorities and then they were free to settle in their chosen country. After staying, briefly, in Manitoba, they moved to the Macklin, Saskatchewan area where they were able to acquire a farm through the Mennonite Debt Adjustment Board.

The process of getting established in Canada was difficult for the new Mennonite immigrants. In addition to overcoming language and social barriers they had to learn how to work and live in strange surroundings. The most difficult problems were soon resolved and their farming enterprise developed into what was then considered to be a productive system of operation. As the assimilation process progressed Gerhard and his wife had some decisions to make that would affect the family socially, educationally, and spiritually. By this time they had four children and the oldest was of school age. It was essential, they felt, that their children should be exposed to a social and spiritual environment, which reflected attitudes that were

consistent with their Mennonite convictions. In their view, this could only be achieved in a community that held those standards. With this in mind, they left the property near Macklin in 1934 and moved to a farm four miles east of Rosthern, Sk. and located in a Mennonite community with Bergthal School as the educational and social centre. It was here that they became actively involved in a variety of community activities. It was here that my father became acquainted with Seager Wheeler and had frequent discussions with him about farming techniques. Occasionally, his oldest three boys were allowed to accompany him when he visited the Wheeler farm to help Mr. Wheeler with work we understood was related to the selection process in the development of his new variety of wheat. Subsequently he won a world wheat championship. We were usually more attracted to the beautiful orchards that offered plums and apples than the discussions that were taking place. It was at great risk that we ventured to test some of the crop.

This community provided opportunities for social and spiritual development. My father took an active role in church functions in the Bergthal School where ministers from Rosthern, including Rev. David Toews frequently served the congregation. It was likely through him that my father became motivated to become an active participant in the collection of the large immigration debt or Reiseschuld that was owed to the CPR. He assumed responsibility for collecting the immigration debts in various parts of northern Saskatchewan and pursued numerous accounts that remained unpaid.

The long distances my father

had to travel to visit debtors complicated the process. The task became easier when he purchased a motor vehicle, an old Whippet, which enabled him to reach the more outlying communities when necessary. Often he returned to visit debtors numerous times to make arrangements that would encourage people to clear their indebtedness. Sometimes he was not welcome at places he visited, and was advised not to return. Most of the obstacles, however, could be overcome with patience, ingenuity and determination. He had all three of these qualities and he used them in his efforts to help immigrants to settle their accounts. He revisited many places until he received full payment for what was owed.

When debtors were unable to make immediate cash payments he negotiated terms that would enable them to clear their liability. On one occasion a large number of fence posts were delivered to our farm after one of his trips. The irony was that Father apparently had no need for fence posts. We learned later that he had taken these in payment for a transportation debt. On another occasion he accepted some goats as payment for Reiseschuld. His determination to liquidate the debt owed to the CPR seemed to

Schwagerfarm 327

Kroeger Maria / Abram Knecht

1933.		Dr.	Cr.	Balance
Jan 14	Transportation for 30 Oct 30	566.60		
Feb 19	" " " " " " " " " " " "	266.60		
Mar 24	Paid on transportation	776	25-92	107.70
Apr 9	" " " " " " " " " " " "	875	52-92	75.78
May 14	" " " " " " " " " " " "	147	125-92	124.78
Jun 11	Paid on transportation by 27 June 1933		25-92	607.70
Jul 16	Interest till April 30 44	30.35		638.05
Aug 24	Special loss for 2000 sheep	15.75		653.80
Sep 14	Paid on transport notes 189-191 44		350-92	353.80
Oct 14	" " " " " " " " " " " "	92	80-92	273.88
Nov 14	Special expenses	79-		
Dec 16	Interest till April 30 44	28.95		315.94
Jan 14	Paid on transport by 20 Jan 1935		100-92	415.92
Feb 14	" " " " " " " " " " " "	377.9	200-92	715.98
Mar 16	Interest till Dec 31 1935	10.04		826.02
Apr 24	Paid on transport	196.9	900-92	1022
May 14	Paid special expenses	11-		911
Jun 14	Paid on transport	3600	900-	
	Total	1008.00	1008.00	

Kroeger Reiseschuld Ledger.
Abram and Maria Kroeger are the
Grandparents of co-editor, Dave Toews

reflect the model of determination Rev. David Toews exhibited when he negotiated the migration of Mennonites from Russia to Canada.

That resolve took on a dimension of urgency when the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization continued to be in arrears in its payments to the CPR and according to the records considerable interest was accumulating. The depression of the 1930s was slowly giving way to more prosperity and many of the immigrants were able to clear their debt. Some were able to commit a portion of their wheat crop to pay their bill. The Minutes of a Reiseschuld Committee meeting of December 3, 1943 chaired by Mr. G.J. Hiebert refer to a person who could not pay his entire amount

and was offered the option of assigning 1000 bushels of wheat for a debt of \$1062. Records also indicate that Mennonites helped each other by making donations of wheat or money to their local churches for debt retirement. Usually some funds were set aside to help people pay for doctors and hospital expenses.

The task of collecting Reiseschuld was never a pleasant one. My father knew that most of the families had a difficult time adjusting to the new country. He knew of the difficulties they faced in trying to make ends meet. Usually, little or nothing was left to pay for the transportation debt. He was also aware, however, that the debt had to be paid in order for the Colonization Board to negotiate further funding. Sometimes he may have felt that his efforts were futile yet he continued to serve in the collection effort and in capacities where he could help his church and community. He was always hopeful that migration restrictions would be lifted so that his parents and siblings would eventually be allowed to immigrate to Canada. Unfortunately, his dreams for their migration would never be realized.

Despite his involvement in the collection of the transportation debt his farming operation prospered and he continued to be active in community affairs. In 1944 farm property became available near Waldheim, Saskatchewan. With its purchase my parents were finally able to occupy a farm of their own. Its location was favourable to all of the families' activities. The church of their Mennonite faith was located in Waldheim and all of their business and social activities were centred within this community. Here, also, they could guide their children to develop spiritual values with a Mennonite flavour. When my father was urged to enter local municipal politics he was successful in his election bid and served his community as a councillor from 1952 to 1955. During this term of office he was instrumental in lobbying for and procuring electric power for farmers in the local rural communities. Also, during this term he was able to make improvements to roads that provided for better transportation in rural areas.

Eventually, his role as a collector of Reiseschuld for the Canadian Men-



The Whippet that Gerhard used on collection trips

nonite Board of Colonization started winding down and finally, in 1946, the Rev. J.J. Thiessen, who had replaced Rev. David Toews as the chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization reported that all the Reiseschuld was paid. My father accepted this news with satisfaction since he had worked untiringly with "Reiseschuld accounts" from 1935 to 1946. While his role as a collector was completed he continued to be available to expedite matters related to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization and the immigration of Mennonites.

I will always remember Maria, my Mother, for the support she gave her husband. She made sacrifices that frequently went unnoticed. Her tolerance, understanding, and confidence were never questioned. She encouraged Gerhard with a quiet patience. His accomplishments gave her a



Maria Hiebert

sense of pride that quietly reflected her collaboration.

My parents were devoted to the Mennonite principles they believed in and my father's dedication and integrity reflected those principals. It seemed as if his role in the Collection of the Reiseschuld was an expression of gratitude for having had the opportunity of migrating to Canada where he could exercise his faith and freedoms. I am grateful for the qualities that he exhibited and left as an example for us to follow. It gives us reason to reflect on the words of Henry Drummond

continued from Page 1

new ways of remembering the past. That is what we must celebrate.

I remember the excitement of anticipation when sixteen of us met in July 1986 in Red Deer at the then Mennonite Brethren Church.

We realized that the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and Saskatchewan did not meet the needs or interests of Albertans. So we planned to form our own society. We established committees, set goals but soon realized that our hopes for a museum could not be realized at that time. Henry Goerzen, who was the official historian/archivist and collector of Conference of Mennonites in Alberta (now Mennonite Church Alberta) records; Harry Stauffer, Tofield; and Jean Penner, Edmonton were named to the steering committee. People were encouraged to keep records, pictures, and to write their stories. The first newsletter was published.

From there we went forward, though sadly not without interruptions. Henry Goerzen continued to be the official collector of important material and after his basement ran out of space, Mennonite Church Alberta provided a metal granary for him. Later, space was acquired in the Mennonite Central Committee offices, and then on the Mezzanine floor of the Thrift Store. In 2004 we built our own premises above the Thrift Store and made the move to the present location in Calgary.

In order to promote the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta throughout the province, meetings were held in various locations. We took a bus excursion to an event at La Crete. We visited a Hutterite Colo-

ny in Viking. We met with the Holdeman folks at Linden. There have been workshops on genealogy. Judith Rempel and Harold Friesen were and still are wizards at connecting families. Other workshops featured Family-Story telling, how to interview people, and how to collect and preserve old photos. We always encouraged people to write their stories while they still have someone to ask. Often a young person would come into our Library and say, "My Grandmother was Mennonite, she lived in Manitoba..." Sometimes we could help, but often it was too late to find specific information.

At the Annual General Meeting in 2002, it was decided to collect biographies of some of the Mennonite leaders and other folks who had influenced the growth of the Mennonite Church in Alberta. Someone had to coordinate this project and since I had just published my own book *Pieces and Patches of my Crazy Quilt*, I felt an obligation to volunteer. It proved to be much more than collecting and coordinating material that others sent me. I spent a lot of time writing, interviewing, emailing, and coaxing people to complete their research. Then I read, edited, and wrote the final version. It was wonderful to delve into people's history. Judith did most of the technical formatting and indexing work before sending it to the printers. In 2006 *Their Mark Their Legacy* was published. It was to be a perfect book, but sad to say several errors slipped through, as we noticed almost immediately.

Since the opening of the Library Archives office in 2004, it has been a pleasure to process the personal archives that are brought in. Though interesting, reading all the old records of the early years of the development of the churches in Alberta as recorded by their meticulous writers/secretaries would be very time con-

suming. I often read the names of familiar people and what they've accomplished. I've read between the lines of particular incidents I remember.

One afternoon, two couples were researching their roots. While inadvertently eavesdropping, one couple realized that they were researching the same people, and that they were related. The Thiesens were related to the Janzens and didn't know it.

Another day while processing documents, two fragile bits of paper covered in neat Gothic script slipped out. Fortunately, I could still read and translate the Gothic handwriting. There were two poems *Lichtenau* and *Sehnsucht nach Canada* (Longing for Canada) by Daniel Peters. He wrote the latter while the family was detained for medical reasons, Trachoma, at the Atlantic Park Hostel, Southampton, England. My parents had passed through there on their way to Canada. I was also aware that some of the Peters family had been detained. According to the Board of Colonization records, Mrs. Peters and one-year old Herbert had been allowed to leave. Mr. Peters and Susie came five months later and daughter Frieda had to wait another eight months, before proceeding alone. *Lichtenau*, dated 1924, was written when some of the Peters relatives were leaving for Canada. A poignant poem of the situation at the Lichtenau train station where some families were leaving for an unknown future in Canada while others stayed behind in the horrors of Russia. It brought tears to my eyes.

We also have books for sale. One day during the meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Royden Loewen from Manitoba dropped in to buy a copy

of *The Trail of the Conestoga*. He commented that there was no foreword. Disappointed, he took it anyway. Why would he want a foreword, I wondered? Some time later when the local representative of the Eby family brought in a new supply of books, he told us that his grandfather had bought the rights from McClelland and Stewart. The book was now being published by the Eby Family. One bit of information leads to another. Judith and I checked the internet and found an early copy at an Ottawa bookseller. With a swipe of her credit card we were soon the owners of a 1924 issue of *The Trail of the Conestoga*. The foreword was by William Lyon Mackenzie King, then prime minister of Canada. Puzzle solved!

I have been enriched and have grown in many areas. I've learned to sort, file, clean, and remove all the metal and fax paper. Many aspects about computers still baffle me. I've learned to scan and crop old photos, to preserve and even reprint them. There is still a lot to learn, and I am envious of the new technology which, sadly, I will never master – the new way of telling the old stories.

When people say, "I thought you had retired!" I reply, "I have, several times, but curiosity and the love of Mennonite history keeps me coming back". Volunteering at the Library Archives is more than mundane staple-pulling and filing in acid free boxes. It's incidents like the above, the stories, and the wonderful people I've met, that make the days go quickly. ♦

MHSA Annual General Meeting, Coaldale, Alberta - April 9, 2011

by Lorne Buhr

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE MEETING

based on Minutes taken by Ellie Janz

1. Since we were meeting in the Gem of the West Museum it was good to get some background on the building. We are grateful to Helen Toews for doing this. Helen has been very instrumental in the conception of the Gem of the West Museum. She told us how the museum came into being. In November of 1928 the immigrant Mennonite community built their church on this site, adding an addition in 1929 and an annex in 1931. The latter now serves as a blacksmith shop. The church was used for ten years, and in 1939 a second larger church was built and used for 31 years, closing in May of 1971. In 1972 the building was sold to L & D Masonry, and during the next 23 years saw many structural changes. In 1995 the Town of Coaldale bought the building and contracted it to the Gem of the West Museum for 25 years. They had their first volunteer work day on May 6, 1995. Three of the rooms in the basement are still the origi-



Dave Hildebrand working in the new
2004 MHSA facility



Lorne Buhr



Site of the MHSA Annual General Meeting,
Coaldale, Alberta - April 9, 2011

nal Sunday School rooms, now used as a workshop, store display, and butcher shop. This transformation has been possible because of donations received from across Canada, usually from former members, volunteers, professional help when needed, and grants. They are amazed at the trust and confidence they have received from the Alberta government and local societies. Of the many grant requests sent, 24 were approved for a total of approximately \$450,000.

2. Chairman Bill Janzen's Report:

- * 2010 was a busy year of meetings and much learning.
- * four board meetings were conducted - distance is a challenge as is our aging membership.
- * two of our faithful volunteers wish to have their time and work scope reduced.
- * we may need to hire some staff or reduce activity at the Archives and Library.
- * Harold Friesen will conduct a workshop about the GRANDMA database and Brothers Keeper software in May.

3. Treasurer Ellie Janz's Report:

- * MHSA 2010 year end bank balance was \$13,660; and a year end operating surplus of \$3194.
- * the proposed budget for 2011 is higher at \$28,600, compared to \$17,600 in 2010.
- * the \$1200 allocated for office equipment is mostly for computer-related needs.
- * \$3100 for archival equipment and shelves is proposed.
- * Insurance costs rise from \$656 to \$965; rent from \$5400 to \$6000.

* with three issues of our Newsletter there will be increased costs; as also for travel to the MHSC annual meeting.

* Dave Neufeldt and Mary Burkholder volunteer to do a financial review.

4. MHSA Coordinator, Library & Archives - Judith Rempel

* Judith has resigned the Coordinator role position, but continues her other roles. Dave Hildebrand is the new Newsletter publisher.

* The Centre continues to be open one day a week with four or more volunteers.

* MHSA has four networked computers. Visitors may connect to on site resources via laptop.

* The MHSA website has 800+ web pages which may be accessed and lead to a myriad of resources.

* A memorable acquisition in 2010 was a German language edition of *Martyr's Mirror*.

* Irene Klassen has built most of the index to a collection of approximately 1600 photographs. Bill Janzen is working on the next set of images for the index.

5. MHSA Newsletter. Lorne Buhr and Dave Toews, co-editors,

report that they plan to put out three issues this year. Dave Hildebrand has joined the team as publisher. They are open to what readers wish to see as themes for articles.

6. Nominating Committee:

Irene Klassen reported that her committee consisted of Dave Neufeldt, Colin Neufeldt, Vince Friesen and herself. The nominee for Secretary is Katie Harder, Didsbury and for Member-at-Large, Betty Stryk, Calgary. Both

Katie and Betty are elected by acclamation.

7. New Business:

* Membership fees will increase from \$20/annum to \$30/annum as of January 1, 2012.

*MHSA is not registered with the Province. The Board will work on this topic.

*Readers who wish to have their own copy of the Minutes should request these from Ellie Janz. Her e-mail is ellie@janzfamily.com ❖



Ted Regehr

Editor's note:

We will publish the entire text of Ted Regehr's keynote address to the 2011 annual meeting in Coal-dale.

Part 1 is in this issue.

In Search of a Homeland: Mennonite Migrations from Russia to Canada to Mexico to Canada.

by Ted Regehr

If you were a homeowner who was told the foundation of your house has shifted, what would you do? You really like the place. Many happy memories are associated with it. But you no longer have complete confidence that the foundation is still sound. Do you then decide to fix the problem, or to sell the house, perhaps at a much lower price than what it cost you to build it, and build a new one somewhere else? Those are the kinds of questions which have often arisen for Mennonites, albeit involving not only the houses of individuals but the home countries of entire church communities.

Mennonites have never had

their very own homeland. They have, however, lived in many countries which they came to regard as homelands even though, except in specific local communities, they were always an ethnic and religious minority. And they have moved when, for a great variety of reasons, they felt threatened.

Mass or group migrations are most often consequences of wars, revolutions, severe persecutions, expulsions, so-called "ethnic cleansing" or natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. And those seeking to escape such disasters rarely come with significant economic resources. By contrast, the Mennonites in the three migrations to be discussed today were not overwhelmed by such disasters and many came with at least some financial means.

Four factors are often mentioned as being particularly important in Mexican Mennonite migrations. These are:

1. Threats of compulsory military or alternative wartime service.
2. Government interference in the schooling of their children.
3. Economic problems.
4. Leadership priorities and strategies.

I will focus on these four factors, recognizing that there were significant differences in the way each of these concerns affected the three migrations.

The migration of the 1870s.

The specific issues of greatest concern to Mennonites in Russia in the 1870s were conscription for military or alternate wartime state service and government interference in Mennonite elementary schools. The issues, from the Mennonite point of view, were simple. The government was withdrawing special privileges they had been promised when coming to Russia. While most did not understand the reasons for the Russian government's action, they believed that the foundation of their churches and communities had shifted. Some looked for ways to repair the damage; others opted to sell and rebuild on what they hoped would be a firmer foundation.



Life in a Mennonite Immigration Shed

Mennonites were by no means the only people who enjoyed special privileges in Russia. Unfortunately, some of those special privileges could be traced back to medieval times and had made possible the exploitation of the poor, specifically the Russian serfs or peasants. Reform, specifically the removal of a great variety of special privileges, was needed. The most radical was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. But the emancipated serfs and peasants needed equal opportunities with European, including thousands of German settlers who had been invited to occupy and open farming lands taken by Russia from the crumbling Ottoman Empire in a series of wars in the eighteenth century.

In her efforts to attract German settlers, Catharine the Great had offered all German settlers freedom of religion, exemption from military service, control of their schools and a measure of self-government. Mennonites unhappy with their situation in Prussia in the 1780s were late-comers to these arrangements. But, just to make sure the old privileges and concessions still applied, they asked for and received, in 1801, a document which spelled out their special privileges - a document commonly referred to as the Mennonite Privilegium.

Reformers in the 1860s demanded revocation of special privileges granted the grandparents and great-grandparents of settlers who, thanks in part to those special privileges, had become much more prosperous than their Russian fellow-citizens. Rising Russian nationalist sentiment also led to demands that the non-Slavic settlers, after so many years, gain a greater understanding and appreciation of the Russian language and culture.

Many of the earlier German colonists in Russia had accommodated themselves to conditions in Russia to a greater extent than the more recent-



SS. Peruvian

"Photo received courtesy of Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg"

ly arrived Mennonites. Several issues were also much more important to the Mennonites than to other settlers. Most notably, the original exemptions from military service had been granted because the incoming settlers did not want to be compelled to fight against their German kinfolk in any war between Russia and Prussia or Austria. For the Mennonites refusal to render military service was primarily a religious matter; rooted in their Anabaptist theology and heritage.

Close links between the German language and Mennonite religious, social and cultural values and practices were also stronger for Mennonites than for other settlers who had lived in Russia much longer. Mennonites, in any case, felt a much stronger sense of betrayal than most German settlers in Russia. For them, the Privilegium was a cornerstone of church and community life. Failure of the government to honour all the promised privileges shook their confidence and some rejected any compromises offered by the Russian government, notably alternative forestry service in lieu of military service.

There were also good reasons to fear that government demands for more Russian content in the



Riverboat "International" docked at Fort Garry bringing Mennonite immigrants from the USA

schools were only a first step in the government's long-term objectives. Mennonites regarded Russian social, cultural, educational and religious standards, practices and achievements, particularly those of the peasants with whom they came into contact most frequently, as inferior to their way of life. A program of russification in Mennonite elementary schools might thus undermine the religious and social integrity of their communities and pull them down to the lower level of their Russian peasant workers and neighbours.

Limited economic and particularly land acquisition opportunities became a third important reason why some wanted to leave. With their large families, Mennonites had to double their collective land holdings every generation if they wanted to continue a cherished, relatively isolated rural and agricultural way of life. But reform-minded Russian government leaders were no longer willing to grant the Mennonites large tracts of land. Such grants were, however, still being offered on the developing western frontiers of North America. Thus, several entire Mennonite colonies needing more land decided to sell and move as a group to a new frontier where they could get all the land they needed.

There were also leadership issues. Leaders of the original Chortitza and Molotschna colonies were generally open to change and hence negotiations with the Russian government. Specifically, while rejecting all forms of military service, they were willing to accept some form of non-military government service. They also recognized the need to gain some understanding of the language, customs and religion of their Russian neighbours, provided there were safe-

guards for the preservation and promotion of their own religious, social and cultural beliefs, values and practices.

Leaders in several more recently established daughter colonies were less accommodating. Like pioneers elsewhere, they were more concerned with internal issues related to the establishment of new communities. They had not experienced and were suspicious of some of the advances and changed attitudes of leaders in the more established and secure mother colonies. The leaders who opted for emigration were thus more strongly committed to fairly rigid preservation of traditional or conservative Mennonite religious, social and cultural beliefs and practices.

Thus, Johann Wiebe, leader of the Fuerstenland colony, a daughter colony of the Chortitza mother colony, was suspicious and opposed both the changes demanded by the Russian government and some of the changes and internal Mennonite reforms initiated in the mother colonies by Johann Cornies. Wiebe dreamed of establishing a new Mennonite community free of both Russian and Mennonite reforms. And he was successful in promoting the migration of the entire Fuerstenland colony. In Canada he was very effective in developing and maintaining the consistently conservative characteristics of what, in Canada, became the Old Colony Mennonite Church.

Similarly, Gerhard Wiebe strongly opposed reforms and changes and successfully promoted sale and relocation to Canada of the entire Bergthal daughter colony of Chortitza. These leaders, intent as they were on preserving or restoring traditional Mennonite practices and commitments were highly influential in persuading their followers to leave Russia, and in the building of the new Mennonite communities in Manitoba.

These concerns about developments in Russia resulted in a search for a country offering Mennonites better terms. The Canadian government was eager to settle vast tracts of recently acquired prairie lands and promised virtually everything the Mennonite delegates wanted. The immigrants would be exempt from military service, enjoy complete religious freedom, including the education of their children. Large tracts of land would be reserved for the Mennonite settlers where they would enjoy a substantial measure of local self-government. Both the government and Mennonites who had come to Ontario from the United States earlier, offered practical and financial assistance. So about one-eighth of the Mennonites then living in Russia opted to migrate to Manitoba. There, despite major pioneering challenges, they established flourishing churches, villages and communities. And in the 1890s Mennonites obtained two new reserves further west in what became the Province of Saskatchewan. Canada, at least for three decades, offered satisfactory conditions and solutions for precisely those matters that had become problematic in Russia for many Mennonites. But, alas, unlike the conclusion of many fairy tales, they did not live happily ever after. ❖

The Long Hard Road to Canada

by Irene Klassen, Calgary

Ben and Eva Stoesz came to Alberta from Mexico in 1995, and are eagerly learning to accept the Canadian way of life. In remarkably good English Ben told their story to the assembled folks at the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Annual General Meeting.



Irene Klassen



Emigrants boarding the train in Manitoba, bound for Mexico c.1922

In the 1870s four Stoesz brothers came from Russia to North America. Two settled in Mountain Lake, Minnesota, and two went to Manitoba. Ben is the descendant of one of the Manitoba brothers. Several generations later, and a change in Canadian government, their promised privileges, especially regarding schools, were being threatened. So several families decided to move, and their choice was Mexico. They were Sommerfelder. The time period was 1925-1927.

Ben's grandfather with his wife and small son took all their possessions, packed them into a wagon and then transferred all these goods onto a train for Mexico. They also made a long arduous 75 mile trip from the Cuauhtémoc railway station to where they would settle. Arriving at their destination, under an old white oak, they set up a small tent and dreamed of building a home nearby. It was there that their second child, a daughter was born. Their dreams, however were soon shattered when a troop of Mexican revolutionaries rudely informed them that this was their land. The Stoesz's own documentation was of no value against the Mexican. So they moved on. They moved to Campo 75 in the Santa Clara Colony.

Ben's father had a similar experience. His land was expropriated by the Mexicans and no amount of pleading to the Chihuahua government was of any use. Even trying to work with, and befriend the new owner was futile, so another move was made. This time to Paraguay. That lasted only eight months before they returned to Mexico and settled very near their original home.

Eva Loewen's family came from Oregon, but were Canadian citizens. They lived under very poor conditions. They bartered their meagre produce, mainly corn, for other necessities, making the long trip to Cuauhtémoc by wagon. Eva was the oldest of six children.

The Mennonite colonies in Mexico had about 12 - 20 villages each.

Farms were small, 20-30 acres, and it took 23 days labour to buy a sack of sugar or flour.

Each village was led by an elected Dorf Schultz (Overseer of the village), who dealt with government and school matters, like the hiring of teachers. He functioned as a Mayor and also had an elected council. The Dorf Schultz was responsible to the Colony Vorsteher.

Families were large and soon land became inadequate. Irrigation was

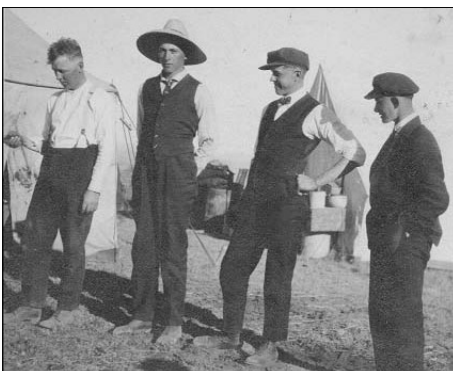


A typical Mexican adobe house

expensive since deep wells had to be drilled. New colonies started up. Some ingenious Mennonites went into manufacturing of machinery and other industries.

Churches and schools were simple. The men and boys sat on one side and women and girls on the other. During recess the children all played together. Children started school at age six. Subjects taught were reading and writing from the Fibel (Primer), and some mathematics. From there they progressed to the New Testament and then the entire Bible. The study and memorization of the Catechism ended their formal schooling at the age of 12. After that the boys and girls were expected to help with the chores at home. They were baptized and joined the church. By age 20 they were independent. Ben and Eva lived in the same village, attended the same school, fell in love and were married in 1971.

"In 1993-4" Ben said, "we bought land to the north. We borrowed money, (\$6000) to pay for the permit to drill a well. The Mexicans came with their documents and gave us two days to get off the



A group of Mennonite men setting up camp upon arrival in Mexico



Ben and Eva Stoesz

land. We lost everything. That's when we made up our mind to go to Canada, to Alberta. When we got here it felt like coming home." Their new home was far from great, but Ben soon got a job and they are eagerly improving their situation. Seven of their ten children have also come to Canada. Their oldest three daughters were married in Mexico before Ben and Eva moved to Canada.

Getting their citizenship has been a convoluted issue. Ben had no problem since his father had Canadian Citizenship. Eva on the other hand had some difficulty. Her parents also had Canadian Citizenship, but were married in church and did not realize this was not valid unless it was registered in Mexico. Therefore, their first three children, and Eva was one of those, were neither Canadian nor Mexican citizens.

Ben and Eva ended their presentation by telling a bit about their method of singing. First the children learn the notes of the scale in numbers 1 to 7, then from another book they learn the words. They sang "Ringe Recht Wenn Gottes Gnade" to demonstrate. ♦

The Mennonite Centre, Highgate

by Peter Penner

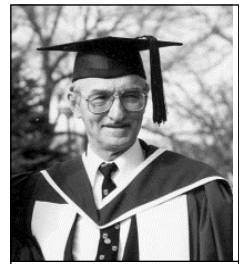
“The Road Between” The University Years 1965 - 1992

From the personal memoirs of Peter Penner, Emeritus Professor, Calgary, AB

Part 2 of 2

Continued from last edition

In the second part, Peter talks about subsequent trips to England and Scotland with his family. The many interesting people they met and places visited. Also reflections on Anabaptism in Britain today.



Peter Penner,
Emeritus Professor
of History

The Summer of 1969

At the beginning of May 1969, I returned to London and the Centre for two more months of summer research, and Justina, Robert and Ruth followed on June 6th for their nearly three-week trip. I was able to get the big guest room at the Highgate Mennonite Centre for us and the family later. I was in the process of planning the three weeks, including a highly recommended bus tour to Edinburgh.

Various other interesting visits arose out of my work, such as dinner with Major General C. Thomason Beckett.^[5] He was helpful in getting me to see other Thomason descendants. In this way I learned to know Clifford Gould, a nephew, who allowed me to come to his flat and put me in touch with his parents who lived in Glastonbury, Somerset, and proved very welcoming.

Of course I could not leave everything until the family arrived. I frequented the Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park. There I heard nearly every African who took the leadership of all those countries claiming independence around 1965, probably Mugabe as well. They were mostly trained in British schools. Moreover, I heard Dr. Soper, minister of the Methodist Church and member of the House of Lords. He was always ready for every challenger. At his church after an evening service, I was able to talk to both him and Lady Soper.

Another person of singular promise was Patricia James. She seemed like an ordinary housewife, and so she said, but she had undertaken to write a biography of Thomas Robert Malthus, the prognosticator of food supply in relation to growing populations. I was of course interested because Malthus, once ordained, taught political economy during his entire career at the East India College, Haileybury. Patricia found that Malthus' principle remained very popular, but little was known of the man. She was determined to rectify that and, according to a review, "succeeded in bringing to life a person of great personal charm and kindness, far removed from what one would expect of one whose writings incited contemporary reference to political economy as the 'dismal science'." ^[6] Later, she even asked my whole family to come for supper and she came to Richmond once to visit and to say, among other things, she had had to leave her husband! Such are the pressures that can arise from total dedication to such a huge work of nearly 600 pages on "Population Malthus."

Meanwhile, back home, Justina was quite busy until she could leave her job for the summer. In due course in a letter I introduced Justina and the children to all the people staying at the Centre. It would be an education to

meet so many from Africa and Asia. Ruth wanted nothing more than to be able to stay at the Centre and play in the rose garden she had heard about.

The Whirlwind

Once Justina, Robert and Ruth arrived at Heathrow Airport, we had a full three weeks of activities. It seemed like a whirlwind. We saw 'Fiddler on the Roof', met everyone at the London Mennonite Centre (LMC) on the first Sunday, went to the British Museum on Monday. On Tuesday, Justina and I had lunch with Thomason Beckett; in the evening we went to hear Isaac Stern in the Concert Hall near Waterloo Station. Wednesday saw the whole family down at Lady Hardinge's for chicken dinner and doing Penshurst Place, 'Granny's Castle'.^[7] Justina wanted to get to Oxford Street for shopping on Thursday. On Friday we did the tourist things, like visit Westminster Abbey, Parliament Buildings, Whitehall, Trafalgar Square, and the National Gallery. Saturday we took in the Trooping of the Colour, India Office Library, Kay Mae Kwan's for dinner at the LMC, and then back to Queen Elizabeth Hall for the London Orpheus Choir.

Monday and Tuesday (June 16-17th) was taken up with our very interesting trip to Glastonbury, Somerset, to visit the Hugh C. Gould family related to Thomason, my dissertation subject. We took the train to Bath, and then used a rented car to get to their home. They treated us like special guests, or so it seemed to us, to lunch, afternoon tea, dinner, tea in bed next morning, and a full breakfast. Back in London next day, we took in 'Oliver' in Leicester Square. Then followed visits to Madame Tussaud's wax museum, the Victoria and Albert Museum, etc. It was a whirlwind.

During the evening we took the Leathermans out to a London Steak House. After that, we finally got around to visiting Norman and Christel Marsh on the Clapham Common for dinner.

Then followed the anticipated three-day bus tour up the west side of England to Edinburgh, Scotland: Chester, Lake Country, and over to the other side. On Monday, June 23rd, we did the 'Golden Mile' from the Edinburgh Castle to Holyrood Palace, and the National Gallery. I showed the children the David Livingstone, Walter Scott, and James Ramsay (Dalhousie) statues, and we felt we had done some of the sights and sounds of Scotland. We came back to London on the Flying Scot on Tuesday.^[8] We travelled home together, having thus ended my six months in London (four months in 1968 and two months in 1969). From there I went back to Cambridge, Mass., to work on my thesis.

Highgate in After years

When the Kreiders returned in 1974 as directors of the Centre, they confessed to having been "profoundly shaped by the Leathermans' witness and ethos, and were determined to foster these." The mixture of English students with counterparts from India, Japan, France and Pakistan "was congenial and spiritually productive." That is how it was when I looked up the London Mennonite Center again during the summer of 1976 and found Walter Sawatsky there. He was with Keston College^[9] and told me about the *Aussiedler* churches in Bielefeld and Lage, Germany.

When in 1975 the LMF "reformed itself, covenanting to be a congregation explicitly in the Anabaptist tradition," there were some "times of turbulent disagreement" between this more disciplined Fellowship and the international student program. The Fellowship grew rapidly; people were drawn

to its worship, and also to the domestic setting of the worship. "In what other church could you worship God, eat a wonderful soup, and then play croquet?" Within several years the worship attendance was overfilling the largest space and suggested the need for a church home outside the Centre. The search ended in 1987, in Wood Green, from which it got its name Wood Green Mennonite Church.

Meanwhile, the Centre's library began to grow, and its "peculiar collection of Anabaptist, Mennonite, radical theological and peace literature was given coherent cataloguing by Janice Kreider, a librarian from the University of British Columbia. Among these books were Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*, and Doris Janzen Longacre's *More with Less Cookbook*. These and others all said, intellectually and practically, that 'no one could truly know Jesus unless they followed him in life.' The Centre started to sell books and an Irish Anabaptist, Mike Garde, founded Metanoia Book Service in order to promote this literature through his itineration.

The Sabbatical of 1979-80

During my next sabbatical, the last extended stay in London, we left early in September and took up residence again at #11, Rosemont Road, Richmond on Thames,^[10] where Vern and Frieda Heinrichs (Marina Unger's sister) were the first to call. They were staying at Claridge's, in Mayfair, no less. We were invited to dinner there with John Dick, Denver, CO, Frieda's brother, just when European Royalty and Burkes Peerage people descended on Mayfair for the funeral of the assassinated Lord Mountbatten.

We reconnected with our

London friends, as well as with Alan and Eleanor Kreider at Highgate, and had a new center of social gravity at St. John's Wood with the residence in London of Jake and Else Koop, Nepean, ON. He had been posted to London by Canada's Department of External Affairs and was one of the first to draw *Mennonite Reporter* readers to the Centre in Highgate. There we met Rudy^[11] and Marie Dick, Chilliwack. We had several parties there, among them one on New Year's Day, 1980, when Fred and Nettie Enns, Edmonton, on sabbatical from the University of Alberta, and Marlene and Alex Redekopp, with the UN in Geneva, were present.

There was an interesting sequel to this when children of the Enns' [Laura and Don Hoyda] came to visit and we were invited to meet them at the Koops. Thirty-seven years later, new friends in Calgary invited us for dinner to meet some surprise guests. There were Fred and Nettie with Laura and Don. The latter had been neighbors of our friends who had learned of that event in St. John's Wood.

We entertained also, by giving a party at the end of 1979. We had invited a mixture of London friends (Norman and Christel Marsh, Roy and Audrey Smith, Lionel and Mary Lynn Anthony), and North American friends (Alex and Marlene Redekopp and Jake and Else Koop, otherwise of Ottawa).

When Judith Lynn (Kehler) Siebert, came to London from Winnipeg to do a concert in Leighton House, Holland Park, I took Judge John and Joy Baker, our near neighbors in Richmond, to hear this good Mennonite pianist on March 28th, 1980, and wrote an article for the *Mennonite Reporter*.

Elsa Koop had a reception for Judith at her house for all the Mennonite folk from Highgate and around, as well as many others. Sixty percent of the guests at the concert were associated with LMC.

The LMC Footprint

For anyone who has ever been touched by the Mennonite Centre, Highgate, in its original form or later formation as a centre of resourcing and discipleship training (including the Bridge Builders conflict transformation program), or the church as it left the Centre and moved to Wood Green, will be grateful for Alan Kreider's historical account of the first fifty years of the London Mennonite Centre, an article readily accessible on the Internet or in *Anabaptism Today* (Issue 32, 2003), published by the Anabaptist Network.^[12]

Postscript

It is possible to add that the author of a very recent and remarkable book on Anabaptism acknowledges that "the London Mennonite Centre brought an Anabaptist presence back into Britain for the first time in 400 years. Its influence gradually permeated British and Irish churches, encouraging Christians from many backgrounds to reflect afresh on issues of community, peace, justice, and discipleship. But only in the 1980s did the term *Anabaptism* begin to be used more widely, and it is even more recently that the Anabaptist movement has really become visible."

The writer of these lines is Stuart Murray from Ireland, teaching in London, and speaking widely in other countries, who wrote perhaps the most important recent book on Anabaptism entitled: *The Naked Anabaptist, The Bare Essentials of a Radical Faith* (Scottsdale, Herald Press, 2010, first published by Paternoster Press in Britain.

Footnotes:

[5] Beckett was commanding general at Malta for part of the War

[6] Patricia James, *Population Malthus, His Life and Times*, from a review in *History Today* (July 1980); copies, now rare, sell for over \$200.

[7] Where the Beverly Hillbillies filmed part of their series

[8] See Pitkin and other souvenir booklets purchased at the time: National Gallery, Westminster Abbey, King Arthur's Glastonbury, Golden Mile in Edinburgh, etc.; we took many slides and pictures during this time

[9] Founded in 1969, Keston Institute [College] in SE London was the "voice of the voiceless" and regularly reported on the situation of persecuted believers in the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe. From its foundation, to ensure the reliability of its reporting, Keston Institute built up an archive of documentation from all the countries it studied

[10] See another chapter on 'the incredible first sabbatical, 1972-73

[11] Rudy was the brother to Henry Dick cited in an earlier chapter

[12] This chapter was read by Alan Kreider, Professor at AMBS, Elkhart, IN, in November 2009. He made several helpful corrections. He wrote: "You tell of your England - and LMC - experiences fascinatingly. You made remarkable connections, and your enjoyment of it all, including the Centre, is palpable. I have read through this and corrected a few points.... Hope this is helpful...." Email, November 7, 2009 ❖





Wesley Berg

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada and GAMEO 2011 Meetings

by Wesley Berg,
Edmonton

The meetings of the Mennonite Historical Society and the GAMEO board took place in January in Bethany Manor, Saskatoon. The Manor was a wonderful place for the meetings, with the archives of the Saskatchewan Society in the basement, a large auditorium just above, and a restaurant nearby. I have to confess, however, that only once was I able to find my way out of the building without asking a resident for directions. It is a large and confusing structure. A highlight of the weekend was a tour to a 100-year-old home in the village of Blumenheim, north of Saskatoon. George and Lynette Janzen explained their renovations of the house and George's father and mother were on hand to enhance and correct his history.

The GAMEO meeting dealt with a number of administrative matters. Richard Thiessen of Columbia Bible Institute will be taking over from Sam Steiner as Managing Editor at the end of 2011. A DVD version of the encyclopaedia has been produced for the benefit of conservative congregations who use computers but not the Internet. Users of the site may notice some cosmetic changes to the Welcome page and a policy that articles in the encyclopaedia are the property of GAMEO, whose editors retain final authority over content, was confirmed. Authors can remove their names but cannot remove the

articles if they are unhappy with the final editing.

Having completed the incorporation of the articles from the printed version of the Mennonite Encyclopaedia, the attention of the Management Board has turned to global matters. Work has begun on a multi-language version of the encyclopaedia. Coordination and cooperation with other web sites like

<http://www.anabaptistwiki.org> and <http://www.mennlex.de> are being explored, as is the question of moving from the umbrella of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to the Mennonite World Conference. ♦

Visit to Neu-Chortitza, Ukraine - Part I

List of the Mennonite men of the village and their fate

by Peter Kroeger, Calgary

Neu-Chortitza. A once quaint Mennonite village was quiet and almost deserted. The weather was drab and grey, cold and rainy, disappointing, but maybe, fitting for the occasion. We had come to the steppes of Ukraine to visit the site where our fathers and mothers were born. They had spent many happy childhood days there, attended church and school, but then suffered severely through a dark period of war, revolution, anarchy, typhoid fever, influenza, famine, communist suppression, and finally the Stalin purge.

Our forefather, Johann Kröger with family, came to the steppes of Ukraine in 1804 with very little, some clock-making parts and tools and his trade, and our grandparents and parents left in 1923 in the same manner. In the interim, they prospered and developed a rich com-

munity and culture that they related with sad longing. Five cousins (and two spouses), grandchildren of Abram and Maria (Wiebe) Kröger, joined the Mennonite Heritage Cruise in October, 2010, seeking to learn more of their heritage and experience some of the sites where our forefathers had lived; a quest for insight, understanding and a deeper connection with family. We boarded a small bus in Zaporizhzhia and embarked for Neu-Chortitza in the Schlachtin-Baratov colony.

We travelled down Main Street to Cross Street. There was an active farm site, several newer houses and some old but obviously still occupied. No one could be seen. Prior to World War I, there were about 550 Mennonites living in this village. Now we were told, none remain. The final exodus occurred in October 1943 with the retreat of the German Army.

We found the site of our parent's birthplace and home. It is neglected, overgrown with weeds and little remained except some half buried bricks delineating the foundation of the house. In the corner of the lot was a heap of broken tile and brick, and we took a broken roof tile as a souvenir. There was no evidence of the magnificent fruit trees or mulberry bushes we had been told about. An eerie chill crept down my spine.

Prior to visiting this village, my wife Irene and I stopped in Hano-ver, Germany, to reacquaint ourselves with our cousins, Peter and Abram, who had remained in Neu-Chortitza with their parents Jacob and Anna [Kröger](#), and had endured many hardships. They described life after 1923, following our grandparents departure, the geography and the subsequent history of



Peter Kroeger



Peter Kroeger sitting on a bench where the former Kroeger home was

the settlement. They explained how, during the night, headlights would be seen entering the village and it struck fear in their hearts. Where would the black cars stop and who would no longer be with them in the morning. One night, early in this purge, the cars stopped in front of our Uncle Jakob Kröger's home and he was taken away.

After the Bolshevik Revolution, uncle Jacob lost their farm as it was amalgamated into a soviet collective. Our uncle was mechanically inclined and made responsible for the electrical generator for the village. Shortly after his arrest by the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), the electrical generator failed. This was unacceptable to the officials of the collective as production ceased, equipment could not be operated and there was no electrical power for businesses and homes. There was no one else in the village with an understanding of the operation of the generator and they demanded



Former home of Abram and Maria Kroger circa 1943

his release. Thus our uncle Jacob escaped the fate that befell so many other men of the village.

To help us locate our grandparent's former home, our cousin Peter Kröger, Hanover gave us a map of Neu-Chortitza. We pondered the map then turned the page. A sobering revelation confronted us. It was a list of names with ominous headings. "This was a list of the Mennonite men of Neu-Chortitza and their fate." Pointing to the first list of thirty-six names, Peter told us these men were taken by the NKVD never to be seen again. Why were they taken? They were "apparently guilty" of treason against the village soviet and the state! Or, as rumored in the village, many were *fingering* by a disgruntled Mennonite from an impoverished, uneducated family; someone who still resented the pre-war economic prosperity of his neighbours. We were told, Mr. Giesbrecht was conscripted by the NKVD under threat of arrest and harm to his family, to 'document' the charges against these men. He was ordered to *record* where these men were taken, tried, and imprisoned. The belief of the villagers was many never made it far beyond the boundaries of Neu-Chortitza. They were shot and buried. Ultimately Mr. Giesbrecht's compliance with the NKVD was to no avail as he was also taken captive.

Neu-Chortitza (Baratow) Victim List

Men abducted by the NKWD (1936-1939)

Bartel, David
Bergen, Heinrich
Braun, David, kl 1.1.38
Braun, David, l 1.1.38
Braun, Johann 4.2.38

Breul, Jakob 4.2.38
Dyck, David 3.38
Dyck, Peter
Fast, Gerhard 1.2.37
Geisbrecht, Johann 9.49
Harder, Aron 11.6.38
Klassen, Jakob 11.6.38
Klassen, Peter, 39.z 4.2.38
Klippenstein, Franz 4.2.38
Kran, Peter 11.6.38
Labun, Karl 1.1.38
Labun, Wilhelm 1.1.38
Lowen, Johann 4.2.38
Michel, Johann 4.2.38
Neufeld, Franz 4.2.38
Neufeld, Johann 4.2.38
Nickel, Jakob 5.38
Olfert, Johann 11.6.38
Patkau, Heinrich 4.2.38
Patkau, Jakob 5.38
Peters, Franz 11.6.38
Peters, Jakob (Arkadak)
Peter, Johann 11.6.38
Peters, Peter 11.6.38
Ruf, Eduard 5.41 (returned)
Schrotling, Emanuel 11.6.38
Thiessen, Jakob 11.6.38
Unrau, Peter 4.2.38
Veer, David, 4.2.38
Winter, Kornelius 1.1.38
Lerch 4.2.38

Fallen as German Soldiers

1944-1945

Ens, Heinrich
Ens, Franz
Epp, Peter
Hein, Robert
Hildebrand, Jakob
Klassen, Jakob, D.
Klassen, Jakob, J.
Martens, Peter, J.
Neufeld, Heinrich, M.

Neufeld, Gerhard, M.
 Neufeld, Dietrich
 Sawatzky, Peter
 Veer, David
 Veer, hans
 Shwarz, Heinrich

Missing as Russian Soldiers

Block, Jakob
 Klippenstein, Peter
 Pauls, Peter
 Wiebe, Peter

Klippenstein, Heinrich, was wounded and imprisoned by the Germans, lives in Hannover.

Immigrated to America 1920-1930

Giesbrecht, Kornelius
 Dyck, Heinrich, (millowner's son) with fiancée Katharina, Isaak, Brazil.

Braun, Jakob
 Thiessen, Peter
 Kroeger, (parents) & Maria, Peter, Lena, Heinrich

Epp, Isaak (Teacher)
 Klassen, Peter
 Dyck, Nickoli
 Neufeld, Peter
 Penner, Johann
 Blocken
 Kroger, Abram (Teacher)
 Kroger, hans

Shot by bandits

Geisbrecht, Bernhard
 Sawitzky, David (Father)

Deported as Kulaks during the 1930's

Bestvater 42 z
 Dyck, Franz
 Breul, Jakob, J.
 Ens, Franz
 Funk, Franz
 Patkau, Peter

Rempel, Johann
 Klassen, Johann (returned)
Trudarmee and FSO
 Bartel, Jakob
 Epp, Paul
 Klassen, David, P.
 Schwarz, Hans
 Thiessen, Heinrich
Following had to herd livestock to the East, August, 1941
 Braun, Hans, D.
 Breul, Jakob, P.
 Dyck, Hans (lives near Minden) returned after a short period.

Braun, Anna (Nutt)
 Graf, Ella

Labun, Alicia

Following had to drive harvesters and tractors East August, 1941

Hildebrand, Franz (returned)
 Patkau, Dietrich

These lists were drawn up by Margarete and Gerhard Winter and if anyone is missing from these lists it is not intentional.

*Victim List confirmed by Dr. Peter Letkeman, Winnipeg, Manitoba, note of April 15, 2011.

A road sign with the name Neu-Chortitza was still there, but not many of the houses on the main street remain. High weeds have overgrown the street and the front gardens. Now these former fertile farmlands are grazed by cattle, they are rarely cultivated and seeded. Livestock grazing is much simpler.

West of the row of houses, the land sloped to a reed bed along a creek tall with cattails. This led to the *Tranke* (reservoir), a popular playground where the young boys fished for carp and crayfish, skated in winter and swam in summer. Now it was quiet; no children playing. It was time to move on.

Peter Kroeger, a retired financial analyst and biologist resides in Calgary, Alberta, with his wife Irene. His pursuit of genealogy and family history led to his decision to venture to Ukraine. ♦

Spring at Rockcliffe

by Anna Neufeld

Anna and Dick

Neufeld recently

re-retired to

"Rockcliffe" a

retirement apart-

ment complex in Ottawa, Ontario. They

are long time members of MHSA and

Dick was most helpful during the facility

build out and was the

editor of the Newsletter from 2001 to

2006. Anna and Dick were regular

volunteers in the MCC Thrift Store.

Anna is an occasional writer and a close observer of the world around her.



Anna Neufeld

A breathtaking, sunny spring morning made brighter by looking through clean windows! A pair of mallard ducks sits in the bright sunshine outside my window. They appear again and again. Will we in due time be seeing ducklings waddling across the grass? Pairs of Canada Geese also meander along the river bank searching for suitable nesting locations.

The cheerful robins are back; the blackbirds occupy space on the Minto Bridges that span the Rideau River entertaining the many walkers with their squeaky call; and the majestic cardinal perches on the tree top announcing that spring is truly here. Other unidentified birds flit from branch to branch announcing their return.

Turtles have been spotted in the river and the brown, furry groundhog once again sits on the river bank enjoying the warm sun.

Perennials, no doubt, are stirring underground waiting for last year's dead foliage to be removed affording them space to break forth and grow.

Early in spring the music of Vivaldi's "Ode to Spring" was delivered to us by Anna Backsheeva, a music student at the Montreal School of Music, on her wonderful violin. Then at a noon concert at the National Arts Centre the orchestra, together with some talented high school students, gave us another rendition of Vivaldi's music. It all came together again in an early morning thunder storm with heavy rain that shook the earth stirring any bulbs that had not yet awakened from their winter sleep. It was the kind of storm that will have inspired Vivaldi to write his wonderful music.

Overnight the grass has turned green, the streets have been washed clean, and the buds on the trees are one step closer to bursting forth.

Spring is the season for rebirth but for us at The Rockcliffe it has also been a season of passing on. We remember fondly those who have left us and wish them an eternal spring. Their memory lives on.

Life goes on and we look forward to the green leaves, the bursting forth of perennials in our back yard, and the springtime profusion of color the tulips will bring to gardens and parks in our city.

Enjoy, anna neufeld/2011 ❖

Images from the MHSA Annual General Meeting 2011 in Coaldale





Judith D. Rempel was born in 1952 in Abbotsford, British Columbia to Bernhard Johann and Irene (nee Peters) Rempel. She has been married to Eduardo Pabustan, Jr. and later Grant Allen Moberly. She attended high school at Mennonite Educational Institute, graduating in 1970. She spent several years in Mennonite Central Committee voluntary service and employment in Akron, Pennsylvania and Winnipeg, Manitoba - as a secretary in various departments (Ex Officio office of Orie O. Miller, Personnel Services, and MCC Canada). She studied at the Universities of Waterloo and Western Ontario, completing a BA and MA in Sociology and got to ABD (All But Dissertation) stage of a PhD in Sociology with a specialization in Social Demography. Thereafter she was employed in the research field with the Manitoba Provincial Gerontologist in Winnipeg, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Research Institute in Calgary, and the City of Calgary. She has contributed many volunteer hours and leadership roles including with the Canadian Population Society (on the Board and as Vice Chairperson), Calgary Horticultural Society (on the Board and as Chairperson), the Alberta Family Histories Society (on the Board and as Vice Chairperson), and the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (as Board Secretary and Coordinator). She contributed many hours to making general and Mennonite genealogical resources available to the researching public through the development of transcriptions, indexes and other finding aids that appear on websites and on compact disks.

NOTE The narrative about Judith Rempel is taken from our MHSA website . In the next issue of the Newsletter we will have contributions by friends and colleagues about Judith's work and endeavours on behalf of MHSA. Editor.