



Newsletter

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta

Volume XIV, No. 3

October 2011



Olive (Janzen)
Yonge

Trachoma And It's Ef- fects On Mennonite Emigrants

by Olive (Janzen)
Yonge

The effects of ill health on travel, particularly when they led to the denial of entry into a country, are a common theme in Mennonite accounts of immigration. A single family member being designated 'unhealthy' in Russia or another European point of departure might force an entire family to delay

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Judith Rempel, an Appreciation.

by Peter Penner

For a Mennonite society to have a person of infinite capacity for co-ordination and achievement who is also considered somewhat controversial is unfortunate, but perhaps not too surprising. For some members, not all, this has been a question intermittently with Judith Rempel. Though this brief account cannot do her justice nor be too detailed, it will attempt to understand and to recognize the quality, significance, and magnitude of her achievements and contributions.

Her obituary tells that Judith Dianne Rempel died peacefully at the home in Calgary that she shared with her husband Grant Moberly. She was only 59 years (September 24, 1952-May 24, 2011). She grew up in the Fraser Valley family of Ben and Irene Rempel, and graduated from Mennonite Educational Institute. She took courage at age 18 to go to Akron, PA, to volunteer at Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). After two years she went to work in Winnipeg for MCC, Canada. These experiences suggest a potentially significant growth in knowledge of leading Mennonites and of world needs in the 1970s. After that she attended the University of Western Ontario where she earned a Masters in Sociology and also entered upon a doctoral program which remained incomplete. In subsequent years she worked in the field of Health in Manitoba, changing to Social Planning in

(Continued on page 3)



Judith Rempel

FALL CONFERENCE: Saturday, October 29, 2011 MHSA 25TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Keynote Speaker **Jim Lore, Alberta Historian**

Theme: ***Mennonites as seen in the Community Mirror***

Location: **Bergthal Mennonite Church, Didsbury, Alberta**

If you have questions, please call **MHSA 403-250-1121 on Thursdays**

Registration deadline **October 15, 2011**

10:00-Coffee and Opening
10:40-Henry and Erna Goerzen
11:00-Jim Lore Presentation
11:45-Question Period
12:00-1:00 Lunch-\$10.00

1:00-Memorial Service for Judith Rempel and
for Harry Stauffer.
1:15-25th Celebration Powerpoint Presentation
2:15-Tena Friesen Book Launch
Pushing Through Invisible Barriers
3:00-Closing followed by Faspas

Editorial Reflections:

by Dave Toews

"History is a living horse laughing at a wooden horse. History is a labyrinth of sliding doors". Carl Sandburg



Dave Toews

Much has occurred since I wrote my last editorial for the March 2011 newsletter.

Dave Hildebrand has joined the newsletter editorial committee, he also does the layout and distribution of the newsletter. He has proved most worthy of these tasks.

We had a very productive Annual General Meeting in Coaldale, April 9, 2011. Ted Regehr related how a group of Mennonites travelled from Russia to Canada to Mexico and back to Canada in search of a homeland. Mennonites from Mexico, Ben and Eva Stoesz, told us their personal family story of this same long and arduous journey.

Most shocking and difficult to comprehend was the sudden passing of our co-worker and colleague Judith Rempel. Judith was, to quote Victor Wiebe, Saskatoon, "intelligent, complex, energetic, interesting and controversial all at the same time". I can endorse that fully. Judith and I had our differences, but she always had the best interest of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta at heart. I learned a lot from Judith in the past five years, about Mennonite history, genealogy, copyright, writing, editing and the publishing of this newsletter. Judith's passing leaves a huge hole in our organization and it will take several years to recover. Tributes to Judith are written very ably on these pages by Irene Klassen, Marty Ann Grams and Peter Penner.

Also in this publication we have the continuation of two stories from the last issue; Peter Kroeger's, *A Visit to Neu-Chortitz* and Ted Regehr's, *In search of a Homeland*. Dave Hildebrand has penned the story of his relatives, Isaak and Elizabeth (Wolfe) Hoeppner of Manitoba. Included also is Lorne Buhr's, *Great Trek Revisited* - an Interview with Menno

Klaassen.

We welcome your comments and contributions. The deadline for submissions to the next issue is February 1, 2012. I close with Judith's favourite salutation.

In Kinship,
Dave Toews❖

Chairman's Corner

By Bill Janzen



Bill Janzen

Change is ever with us! At the Mennonite Heritage Society of Alberta (MHSA) we have experienced some drastic changes in the last months. Not only have we lost a competent volunteer, Judith Rempel, but a lot of background information that brings meaning to the information collected at the Archives and Library. We are thankful for the assistance we have received in beginning to put the puzzle together again. Irene Klassen has been most helpful. The Board of MHSA has been supportive during this time of learning.

MHSA has continued to reach out to the membership and Alberta Constituency. We had Glenn Penner come to the Archives and Library, he brought presentations on the deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) projects and a presentation on Mennonite Myths and Legends. It was an interesting afternoon enhanced by people mingling, sharing stories and visiting with each other over refreshments.

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GAMEO Representative:

Wes Berg, Edmonton

New Publications for Sale:

- Generations of Vigilance (\$30)
- Settlers of the East Reserve (\$30)
- Through Fire and Water (\$20)
- GRANDMA 6 (\$35)

MHSA set up a display at the Alberta Mennonite Central Committee Summerfest and Auction in Sherwood Park. Ellie Janz displayed some of the materials available, some people came to browse, some people bought books and paid their membership. It was a valuable day to increase the awareness that MHSA exists. Dave Toews set up our MHSA display at the Mennonite Heritage Picnic at Ernie and Linda Wiens' acreage at Sherwood Park. I took along the MHSA materials for a display and an evening in La Crete.

We all realize that change has to happen. At our Annual General Meeting we discussed the possibility of having to hire someone if we do not have volunteers come forward. We are waiting at present to see if anyone would come to volunteer as coordinator, or receptionist, or data entry clerk, or as communications coordinator. We need assistance from the constituency or else we will be left with the option to reduce the services available or to hire someone to accept the responsibility for the work. Of course, it is clear that we will have to do more fund raising to pay wages to employees. The only comfort that people are giving me is that we are not the only organization that is looking for volunteers and can't find them. Such comments explain the problem but offer little consolation.

It was a summer with many Family Reunions, School Reunions and travel. Listening to the older generation talk about their experiences over the years reminds us all how important it is that we record those stories so they are preserved for our descendants. Begin with short stories exchange ideas with your friends or come to share your stories at the Archives and Library.

We are all looking forward to an interesting Fall Conference in Didsbury. It will give us an opportunity to interact with our constituents. Such occasions are always worthwhile because of new information about our history with the renewing of acquaintances and catching up with the latest happenings among our members. But we are not limited to such occasions. The MHSA Archives and Library is open every Thursday from 10 AM to 4 PM and we would like to have visitors whether individuals or groups, people wanting to come to do research and people wanting to donate books and historic materials for safe keeping. The volunteers will be pleased to show you what we have and what we do.

See you at the Fall Conference. ❖

An appreciation continued from Page 1

Calgary. She has worked in various City departments as a Researcher since 1987.

Note regarding her name: I have always called her Judith, but I learned that many thought of her as Judii. You will see both names in use here.

Judith the Specialist

I met her first at the 1995 Convention of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (AHSGR) being held in Calgary. She was there as a volunteer from the Alberta Family Historical Society (AFHS) in which she was known as a specialist in genealogy. Around then we learned to know her in the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA).

She soon developed her genealogical specialty into "JR Solutions," with which she won a New England Society's Excellence Award for her work on a huge genealogical registry in conjunction with AFHS. More importantly for us, she began creating websites which helped Tim Janzen and his associates in Fresno develop and add data for successive issues of The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA) (now hosting over 1,000,000 Mennonite names).

In 1999 Judith spearheaded the MHSA's acquisition of a copy of the 36 reels of microfilm preserving the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBoC) records. As I remember this, she claimed that she and volunteers in Calgary had the capability of extracting the family-history information from them into many small databases and compiling them into one big database [where others could have, but had not yet done so!] and see their inclusion in GRANDMA. This was a daunting task, but over a period of months and years and encompassing the assistance of 37 volunteers from West to East, this was accomplished.

Here we cannot enter into how privacy laws impinged on this work, nor how some complaints arose when Judith had difficulty sharing her results more freely than only with Alf Redekopp at Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC) and Ken Reddig at Centre for Mennonite Biblical Studies (CMBS). One cannot however take away from the sheer magnitude of this project - the reading, data entry, indexing, correcting, linking and proofreading steps.

But that was Judith the specialist!

Judith had a fertile mind

I remember when Judith began hosting a Special Interest Group (SIG) in the Bowness home which she shared with her first husband Eduardo Pabustan. Such keeners in Mennonite genealogy as Harold Friesen and Ron Siemens came for some time. Occasionally the scene would shift to Ann Rempel's in Bankview where we had a sumptuous repast prepared by Ann and Judith. But Ann was elderly and this could not last.

This SIG ran monthly on Saturdays for many years. Once we were in our present location above the MCC Thrift Store, SIG veered into broader interests. It was no longer entirely genealogy and many lost interest - and some never came back. As the attendance lost more than gained, Judith had to give these up. She was the last to do so, and wondered where we had all gone - and why?

But her fertile mind never stopped, hardly ever ran in low gear. Along the way she created a website CAN-MHSA to which anyone who did not sign off could read how others responded to her projects and could themselves make contributions. And this continues...

Judith stayed the course

Once Judith had met Henry and Erna Goerzen, and saw the collection of books and artifacts in their farm home west of Didsbury, she became quite interested in re-awakening the MHSA from a somewhat moribund state of things. About this time there was a meeting of members in Red

Deer and I was prepared in 1998 to do two newsletters for the Society. In February 1999 the Tofield Conference supported the spending of \$4,000 for a steel grain bin whereby Henry Goerzen could remove the collection that had severely crowded their farm house for some time. Judith assisted with that somewhat unusual substitution for a well-heated building.

Let me abbreviate the subsequent MHSA removal sequence: the contents of the grain bin soon found temporary housing in the lower level of the MCC building near Golden Acres Garden Centre; then in the level above its newly-acquired Thrift Store on 32nd NE, Calgary just across the street from Costco. There, on Saturdays Judith, Irene Klassen and other volunteers organized the growing MHSA Library. There, looking over and protected only by a railing, we saw the growing sales activity in this large capacity building. When MCC decided to construct another floor and two floors of offices out front, MHSA was promised a large space too.

This was in April 2004 and Dave Hildebrand remembers Judith helping with that though she could not tolerate the dust that was created. Meanwhile, Judith crowded the Library accumulations into a cubby-hole-like space for some months.

But even before that, Dave said "she was the designer of the new facility. Later, Judith supervised the move in, helped in the design of some of the work stations, sourced, purchased and oversaw the mobile shelving in the vault and later the mobile shelving in the library that Harold Friesen brought from Manitoba. What I remember most about her involvement during



Judith planned the location and use of the vast shelving system at MHSA

this time is that the whole project was Judii's vision. She knew every detail of what was going on and what was going to happen and if anyone had any questions, she had the answer".

The names Dave remembers and their involvement in approximate descending order are: "Judii Rempel, Henry Goerzen, Dick Neufeld, John Dyck, Dave Pankratz, Colin Neufeldt, Dick Klippenstein and Harold Friesen helped out as Trinity Construction and additionally as an individual."

When this was all done, there was space for a workroom, an area for researchers, and for Irene Klassen's wish to make the best Mennonite books available for sale. Judith, a genealogist, then took steps to 'master' archival methods, standards, quality control, building a library with what we had, enlarging the newspaper, newsletters, journal collections and adding others.

What was emailed in eulogy:

The passing of Judith of apparent heart failure was a severe shock and brought a multitude of responses. Myrna Belyea: "Many of you may not know that Judii had a heart condition from birth and always seemed to know she would not have a "normal" life span. ...I personally cannot describe how much of a void will be left in the hearts of those of us that knew her." Leona Gislason, Toronto, wrote to say she was heartbroken "She has left a significant legacy that will continue into the future." Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon: "This is shocking and unfortunate news. I have worked with her closely over the past 15 years or so. Judii did a huge amount of work as

a webmaster for various organizations, for example to GRANDMA; Judii was always someone that I could look to for advice in web site management related issues." Dave Hildebrand, "I will miss Judii as a knowledgeable and competent person to work for, as an energetic and motivated person to work with and as a person eager to try new tasks...." Victor Wiebe, Saskatoon, "Judith was intelligent, complex, energetic, interesting and controversial all at the same time. I don't know what MHSA will be without her but you have many others - dedicated and talented." Alf Redekopp, Director, Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC), Winnipeg, Judith was "an incredible organizer and Mennonite history enthusiast. She will definitely leave a huge vacuum in the MHSA archives program."

Personally, I was deeply touched to know that about eight hours before she died, Judith tried to answer questions I had raised about a week earlier. She prefaced this with these words:

"Oh dear – I let this sit around. Sorry, Peter. I've had a tough couple of weeks (was in the hospital for a cardiac procedure that they chose not to do after all, but pulled me off an assortment of meds that left me high and dry ... just today starting to feel "normal").

I am most interested in the MHSA receiving all the items you mention below and anything else you think is pertinent to Mennonite history. ..."

Bill Janzen as Board Chair wrote all List Members: "Life throws curve balls at us at unexpected times ... I believe Judith herself began to realize that she had not prepared anyone in the MHSA Centre with vital information and in an email she informed me of the in-service she wanted to conduct this coming Thursday [June 2, 2011]. Well, it won't happen.

The Celebration

There was a Celebration of Judith's life in Grant Moberly's home on June 4th when the house was filled with friends, including Judith's sister Dorothy and Dorothy's husband Harold from Langley BC. Speaking for MHSA, Irene Klassen accented Judith's persistence, nay, passion, for MHSA, even if these traits sometimes created some tension and misunderstanding:

"The MHSA was her passion, and typically, she gave it her all. Judii was brilliant and a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge. What she did not know she would diligently research....She was not trained as an archivist or even librarian, but here was a challenge to learn something new, and she set about to learn...

She was quick. If she wanted something done it was sometimes easier to do it herself than to teach someone.... She could skim over a printed page in a short time and know what it said. She would ask a question and expect an immediate answer... well, some of our minds don't work quite that



Judii on Vacation

fast....”

I would have been disappointed if Judith passed into history without recognition and sorrow in a suitable MHSA manner. I don't know what it was that kept her in a state of some tension with the people she loved for their culture and traditions. Though I was not there very much in the last years, she occasionally shared her feelings with me and I found she wanted badly to be loved, secured, and valued.

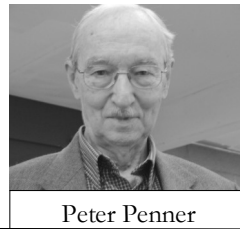
We may never know fully what troubled her. There was a family tragedy in December 1984 when her only brother Bradley James was killed at age 22, according to Dorothy Kroeker, by a drunk driver. He was married to Kimberley and worked as a cabinet maker.

She may not have wanted to talk of what we call a spiritual nature; she wanted nothing to do with organized religion, yet she famously allowed for a degree of kinship with all Mennonites. At the end of April she commented significantly on my post entitled “Where do I belong?”

“The challenge before us now, as we make Mennonite history, is to define ourselves by our values, not by our appearance or backward preferences. Also, that Mennonites are ones who are faith-based or culturally-based. And, of those who are faith-based, they come from a multitude of cultural backgrounds. This makes an enormous challenge for Mennonite organizations to be meaningful to the constituency, who are no longer a closed community and directly accessible.”

Could we have expected more?

Peter Penner, Member of MHSA since 1995 ❖



Peter Penner

Trachoma continued from Page 1

their voyage.

Rempel, Shmucker and Woollard (2008), in their book *Consider The Threshing Stone* on the writings of Jacob J. Rempel, include a short note stating, “later [Dr. Erich Tavonius] helped their daughter Anna obtain a cure for trachoma, an eye disease that had prevented the Rempels from emigrating in June. The cure was successful and they left Russia in July” (p.93). Older family members might be left behind, to re-join the family once they had medical clearance to immigrate, but additional health inspections could lead to detention upon arrival in the new country. This concern is described in the diary of Willy Penner: “this afternoon we were again examined by Canadian doctors before we were given approval for entry into Canada. Papa had a terrible tooth ache but he had to hide it for fear of being turned back, so he tried to smile and he looked ridiculous (Jacobsen, Finlay-Young, & Brandt, 2007, p.133).

My own family history led me to become interested in trachoma, an infection of the eyes. My uncle, Peter Janzen (then nineteen), his parents and siblings were detained in the Netherlands because he had ‘some sort of eye disease’. Having already sold all their possessions in Tiegerweide, the family were stuck in Europe while they waited for Uncle Peter to heal. Presumably, his eyes were infected with certain subtypes of *Chlamydia trachomatis* (the bacterium causing trachoma) and treated with copper sulphate, as was com-

mon until the 1940s (Kumaresan, 2005), or perhaps his eyes had to be scraped. In a journal entry dated June 20, 1922, Anna Baerg wrote, “I have been dreading this day because I believed we would have our eyes treated. How cowardly I am when it comes to pain. But they say it is terrible, particularly the part where the doctor scratches out the inflammation” (1985). Trachoma is currently treated with antibiotics, although repeated infections can lead to more serious complications requiring surgery, such as inverted eye lashes that constantly scratch and irritate the eye surface. Figure 1 shows an upturned eyelid criss-crossed with white marks, the scar tissue from repeated infections.

Mennonites hoping to immigrate were also faced with increasingly strict entrance standards in North America. The United States Immigration Act of 1891 forbade entry to “all idiots, insane persons, paupers or persons likely to become public charges, [and] persons suffering from a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease” (National Library of Medicine). In 1897, the US Treasury Department declared trachoma a menacing disease and closed all Atlantic seaports to infected immigrants. Canada, slower to develop and enforce similar legislation, became their alternative destination. In 1902, owing to the increased number of cases, resulting work loads, and pressure from public opinion, the Canadian Parliament amended the Immigration Act to exclude immigrants and visitors suffering from loathsome, dangerous and infectious diseases. Enforcement was somewhat lax until



Figure 1 Upturned Eyelid

the administration of Dr. J. D. Pagé, Canada's first Chief of Immigration Medical and Quarantine Services, who introduced a system of medical inspection at all ports of embarkation; by 1927, trachoma sufferers were routinely turned away (Byers, 1932). Tidings of these laws and their enforcement filtered across the ocean to Russia; on June 15, 1922, Anna Baerg wrote "today I had my eye examined, for as we have heard, the authorities are very careful who they let across the border. No one with trachoma is allowed to emigrate to America. I, for one, most likely have the disease" (1985).

Trachoma sufferers doubtless experienced feelings of guilt and self-depreciation—why me, why now—to say nothing of the anxiety of facing health authorities and stalling their families' dreams of a new life in North America. For my grandparents, already in their fifties, the delay brought on by their son's illness would have been onerous, but they chose to wait until my Uncle Peter healed, despite the fact that he was already a young adult. How did Uncle Peter and the family manage this? I can only guess my grandfather would have read scriptures in German and found a lesson in the experience, while Uncle Peter would have said "Jetzt spielen wir," (now we play) just as he did during our Saturday night family gatherings playing checkers, crib, and "kjnijsbrat" (crokinole). Later in life he would suffer tuberculosis, the loss of a kidney, and the pancreatic cancer which eventually claimed his life, but he maintained his positive spirit through every adversity.

About the author:

Dr. Olive (Janzen) Yonge was born in Rosthern, Saskatchewan. She earned a BSc

in Nursing, as well as an MEd and PhD in Educational Psychology from the University of Alberta. She has been the Associate Dean in the Faculties of Nursing and Graduate Studies and Research, and the Vice-Provost of academic programs. Olive is currently on academic leave, she lives in Edmonton, Alberta.

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Tribute to Judith Rempel (1952-2011)

by Irene Klassen

Judith Rempel loved Mennonite History, its traditions and culture. The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA) was her passion, and typically, she gave it her all. Not only was she the coordinator of the organization, she drew the plans for our facilities at 32 St NE, Calgary, she physically worked at its building, and the well-organized move from the previous location.

On June 24th (2011) - Let me share in part what Bill Janzen, Chairman of MHSA, said in an email to all of us. "Life throws curve balls at us at unexpected times. This morning we heard that Judith Rempel had passed away in her sleep. I believe Judith herself realized that she had not adequately prepared anyone at MHSA and had planned an in-service session next Thursday. Well, it won't happen."

The word went out and tributes came in –"How devastating, I'm wordless." Mary

"Judii was a competent person to work for, energetic, motivated, eager to try any new tasks, even helping to put up drywall when we were doing the building." Dave

"I will certainly miss her in the field of Genealogy. I hope you can start some sort of memorial." Frank

"I am so sorry to hear this news, she was so energized in her genealogical work for all to know, to absorb stories and facts about our ancestors." Eileen

Judii was brilliant and a walking encyclopaedia of knowledge. What she didn't know, she would diligently research. She set up a staggering Website for MHSA. When queries came, and they came from many places like Germany, Japan, Russia, sometimes poorly translated, it was often a challenge to find the answer. I would tell her, "We don't have to have all the answers." "But we have to try, or at least point them in the right direction," she'd



Irene Klassen



Judii and Irene hard at work with Irene's new book *Their Mark: Their Legacy*

counter.

I'm not sure whether it was her interest in genealogy that sparked it, but MHSA grew. She wasn't trained as an archivist or even librarian, but here was a challenge to learn something new, and she set about to learn. In the learning curve she/we made a few mistakes as we documented files before she'd enter them into the computer, and had to redo some of them (luckily everything is written in pencil and we used good erasers). Sometimes I would object, "Oh Judii not again!" and she looked at me to see how upset I was, and might drop the subject, temporarily. When I wasn't looking she did it herself.

Visitors came into our place asking for information, sometimes as vague as "My grandmother was a Mennonite – I think she came from Manitoba," and within minutes Judii would have a stack of reference books in front of them, or she'd have them at the computer and be searching for ancestors on the Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA) program.

"I never knew Judith personally, but we became connected through our research for family lineages. She will be missed." Helen

"Although I met her only briefly, her online resources are important to my research. She has left a significant legacy." Leona.

A longer tribute came from Tim Janzen, "I have worked with her closely over the past 15 years, Judii did a huge amount of work as a webmaster for various organizations. She made the MHSA website a major repository for Mennonite genealogical material. She compiled a large database of mate-

rial for the GRANDMA program. She was always someone I could look to for advice."

Of course there were other interests and skills besides those focused on genealogy. When Jake Balzer translated a book about Paraguay, from German into English, she typed the translation and got it ready to send to the publisher in Paraguay. Jake was quite surprised to think that it could be done electronically. Closer to home, she also prepared my manuscript for my book of biographies, *Their Mark: Their Legacy* and readied it to send to the printer.

Jake Harder a former chairman of MHSA, wrote, "I worked with Judii for four years. She was aggressive but always had the welfare of the Society in mind. She will be greatly missed as she was one of the main actors in the history of MHSA."

Another challenge was working with photographs. Scanning old photos and trying to improve them, sorting, cataloguing, identifying if possible, and filing photos in specific acid-proof boxes was a significant project.

Sandra Lynn wrote, "corresponding with her was a pleasure. I asked her if she recognized anyone in some unidentified photos, and next day she had not only improved the photos, but started a photo query page online."

Judii was generous with her information, with what she knew. Granted, sadly, sometimes she dispensed it faster than we could absorb it. It was our loss.

"Judii was a giver. I am so thankful I had the opportunity to be influenced by her incredible gifts of passion and her immense knowledge of Mennonite history. Thank you Judii for being a mentor



Judii at a MHSA booksale

to me.” Jim Glenn wrote – “[this news] will take some time to sink in, I have been corresponding with Judii over my visit to Alberta this summer, she talked to me about giving a short informal genealogy related presentation. Could someone contact me?”

In spite of a serious heart problem she had since childhood, she pushed herself hard. She was quick. If she wanted something done it was sometimes easier to do it herself than to teach someone else to do it. She could skim over a printed page in short time and know what it said. She would ask a question and expect an immediate answer. Sadly, some of our minds don't work quite so fast.

Judith was Judii to most of us. She explained that in high school there were three Judiths in her class, one Judith, one Judy and she became Judii.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta will continue, a bit differently, without Judii, but it will go on. Frankly it would be an insult to Judii's memory to just give up on the work that she so passionately worked at, and the legacy that she has left us. ❖

The Great Trek to Central Asia

Lorne Buhr interviews Menno Klaassen

Lorne - What prompted your interest in going on the second Great Trek to Central Asia re-enactment in 2010?

Menno - Over the years my reading about the Great Trek had built up to a fascination with the event. In planning the Klaassen family reunion for the summer of 2011 it occurred to my wife, Lee and me, that a theme centering on the Great Trek could be very appropriate. Then when it became possible to join a tour group following the Great Trek route and events we saw this as adding to the nudges we were feeling. Some Klaassen cousins joined us on the tour. Another highlight was having the wealth of information on the Trek brought along by John Sharp, an American scholar who has studied all the materials available.

Lorne - For the benefit of our readers who may know little if anything about the Trek of 1880 could you tell us a bit of how this event came to be?

Menno - My grandfather Klaassen's diary is a good place to start. He notes that already in Prussia before the Mennonites moved to Russia there was a thread of millennialist thinking. This is the idea that Christ will come again and in that time it was thought He would come to Central Asia. A second factor was that Mennonites had been given notice that military exemption would end. Thirdly, the language of instruction in schools would need to change from German to Russian. Warnings of the changes came in the 1870s. Our people were very committed to their faith and they peti-



Lorne Buhr



Irene, Menno and Elizabeth overlooking Ebenezer Valley

tioned Moscow to re-consider the changes. Moscow was deaf to the pleas.

It should be added that there was a strong feeling throughout Europe that something of momentous proportions was to happen to the East. Adding to the fever among Mennonites was a very popular book written by Jung Stilling and called "Heimweh". Stilling used Biblical books of Daniel and Revelation as background materials.

Lorne - The failed prophesy of Claas Epp regarding Christ's return is tied in with the stories of the Great Trek. It seems sometime to be the main factor involved. New research brings some other factors into the mix. Were some of these stories recounted during your growing up years?

Menno - Other leaders took the initiative for the first group going east. Although Epp sent letters to encourage the travelers he was in the last wagon train east. It is important to keep in mind that some of the Trekkers were landless and the trip east was not only millennialist but a search for settlement land. Initially scouts were sent out to scope out the possibilities. They received assurances from General Konstantin von Kaufman, an Austrian who was appointed governor over an area in Turkestan of available land and sweetened the offer with military service exemption for 15 years.

Sadly, Kaufman died before the wagon trains arrived and his successor was not prepared to keep these promises.

Lorne - Can you tell us about the involvement of your ancestors in the Great Trek. Later they came to North America settling first in Oklahoma and then in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

Menno - My Great Grandfather Martin Klassen, his wife Maria (nee Hamm) and children Michael, Jacob and Helen went on the Trek. Jacob was my grandfather. The family was landless. Martin was a teacher at Koeppental and he thought somewhat highly of millennialist ideas. The



Claas Epp Jr.

possibility of settlement land along with military exemptions were attractive to him. These factors prompted them to go along with other relatives. Their commitment to the faith principles seem unbelievable. Many Mennonites who were rescued to Canada from Russia in the 1920's will recall the role of David Toews. David and his father Jacob were on the Trek. Jacob Klaassen, my grandfather, married Katherine, sister to David Toews. It is surprising how many of the people on the Trek became significant church leaders in North America.

Lorne - Your Great Grandfather, Martin, died on Nov. 24, 1881, while on the Trek. Did you learn more of the details of his passing? Is there information on how many travelers succumbed?

Menno - It is recorded that Martin died and is buried at Ebenezer. We were there. Some of the Mennonites had been allowed to build a small settlement but overnight it seems the authorities came and knocked down their buildings. So the people had to leave the very day that Martin died. Time only allowed that he be



Ceremony in the Ebenezer Area where Menno Klaassen's Great Grandfather Martin Klaassen is buried.

wrapped and buried in a shallow grave. We put up a little makeshift cross and had a memorial service for Great Grandfather. Ebenezer is in a beautiful setting - one could see for 30-40 kilometers easily. Anyone would have wanted to live there to enjoy the wonders of the place.

A lot of people died on the Great Trek. The very young and the old were especially vulnerable. Going against the advice of the locals, a number of young men died of heat exhaustion by working through the midday heat at a quarry in Tashkent. They needed to earn some money.

Lorne - Did your tour bus actually travel through the same desert as did the Trekkers?

Menno - We did. From north of Bukara to Khiva we travelled where they travelled. On camels - either 312 or 450, depending on which diary you follow. Wagons were disassembled and hung on the camels. Baskets made of reeds were placed on other camels for women and children to ride. The men rode horses, which could walk in the sand. Wagons got bogged down. Most travel was at night; sometimes without water. Our travel was via an air-conditioned bus on an asphalt road. The trip took 8 hours covering a distance of 300-400 kms. Some sand dunes needed to be navigated. Outside the temperature, even for early June, was boil-

ing hot, upwards of 40 C.! How the people survived sometimes without water and cooling is beyond me.

Lorne - Am I correct in assuming that you travelled what is called the Silk Road?

Menno - Yes. It is a well travelled route used for centuries. Such a large group in the 1880s led to a lot of curiosity on the part of the locals. Russian control in the region was only in place for about 8 years. The Mennonites looked so much different e.g. - fairer complexion. Border crossings were difficult. Not knowing the languages and local customs were also impediments. The Trekkers had to petition the Khan in Bukara to continue their travels. His throne was in a central place in the city called the citadel, an area the size of a football field. We were there. The Khan's throne was at one end and they could approach him walking but protocol was that they had to get on their knees and crawl out backwards. This happened three times; finally Claas Epp led a delegation and the Khan relented.

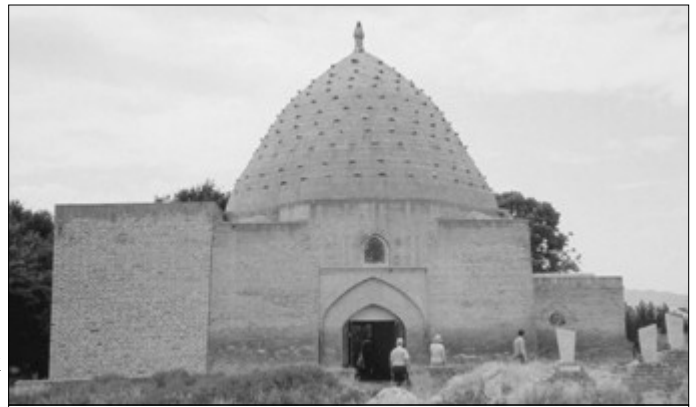
Lorne - What impressed you most about the original Trek?

Menno - A 'good news' story I enjoy telling happened the winter of 1881. The travellers needed a place of shelter against the cold. They were in a Muslim community and allowed to pitch tents and park their wagons near the mosque. The mosque was available to the Mennonites to conduct Sunday worship. We sang "*Great is Thy Faithfulness*" in that mosque! We spoke via a translator to the current Imam, and presented him with a handmade bowl as our way to thank the Muslims for their hospitality 130 years ago! He was aware of the history and stated that given identical circumstances hospitality would be extended again! Likely this was the mosque where my grandfather was baptized. Our Uzbeki guide told us more of the peaceful tenets of the Muslim faith. How refreshing when we tend to hear only what extremists believe and do.

Lorne - What surprised you most of what you heard, saw and learned?

Menno - We became aware that our people had introduced eggplant, tomatoes and cucumbers to this area. We noted the groves of mulberry trees which are so essential for silk worms and the silk industry. An amazing 2000 sq. ft. parquet floor was built by our folk in a summer palace of one of the Khans. It was a way to earn some income. Each piece of the floor would have to be hand planed. The workers would have had to use geometry to get the right angles. Today the floor is still absolutely gorgeous. We walked on it.

Lorne - In the DVD "*Through the Desert Goes our Journey*" (2008) we learn that some of the Mennonite settlements in Central Asia were not touched by Communism until the 1930s. In a sense this is a fulfillment of Claas Epp's apocalyptic prediction that it would be safer to move East.



Kyk-Ota Mosque at Serabulak
(Photo Courtesy of Jim Juhnke)



Mennonites on Great Trek



Mennonite Settlers at Aulie Ata in the late 1800s

Menno - You are talking of Ak Metchet, the location of Claas Epp's 'Bridal Community' termed such in the book of Revelation. They refused to collectivize and rather lived 'under the radar'. This carried on until around 1935 when the folk were all sent to Siberia. Epp had passed away by then. There are a few remaining signs of settlement - a well that can be used and a few apricot trees. One of the current inhabitants told us of a samovar and bits of furniture left by the Mennonite settlers.

Lorne - From what you have said so far I'd have to conclude that you were very happy to have made the Trek?

Menno - We really saw and learned far more than we expected to learn. We visited a lot of mosques. We learned a lot about Muslim culture. We saw one of the four oldest Korans in the world. Totally unbelievable.

Besides being at Ebenezer, where Great Grandfather passed away we also got to see Lowsan where our ancestors decided to turn back and eventually they came to North America. Lowsan was a turning point. Here bandits came and stole their horses, tried to steal their women and cleaned out their gardens. This stopped when the Mennonites hired Cossacks to protect them. They weren't prepared to take up arms to protect themselves but they realized by hiring Cossacks they were compromising their principles of non resistance.

Menno
Klaassen

We never heard of how the women and children survived the Trek. The story is always told in the voice of men. It is also mysterious as to how they funded their vagabond existence for a number of years. There are some examples of working for income. Visiting the mosques certainly was a highlight. And, how our people survived the desert, I'll never know. If you had the misfortune of getting sick along the way you would have no

desire to live through that. You know, the people exemplified remarkable faith and courage.

Lorne - I enjoyed our conversation Menno.

Contact co-editor, Lorne Buhr, at lorne@mennonitehistory.org, if you wish to consult other resources on this topic. This interview has been edited and condensed. ♦

Life and times of a 20th Century Mennonite Family

By Dave

Hildebrand



Dave Hildebrand

Introduction:

Last winter my web site containing my family history was visited by a distant relative who acquainted me with some interesting stories in his family's tree. I became interested in one particular family and "Life and Times" is based on what was written about them in various publications.

Isaak A. Hoepfner was born in Manitoba in 1884. He had a lively personality and he enjoyed mixing with folks from various ethnic groups. His religious philosophy was appreciated by Mennonites, as well as by his Scottish and Anglo-Saxon friends and neighbours.

Elizabeth Wolfe was born in Manitoba in 1885. Elizabeth was known as a quiet but a deeply caring person. While Elizabeth attended to the needs of her own family, she accepted many other needy children during her lifetime.

Isaak became acquainted with Elizabeth at the home of his maternal grandfather, Mr. Isaac Hildebrand, where Elizabeth was em-

ployed as a housemaid. After just four visits to the Hildebrand home Isaak proposed and Elizabeth accepted him to become her husband. Due to his affection for Isaak, his grandfather provided financial assistance which enabled the young couple to settle on Anton P. Hoepfner's farm.

On July 10, 1903, following the Sunday morning worship service family and relatives attended the modest, simple Mennonite wedding ceremony when Isaak A Hoepfner and Elizabeth Wolfe were united in marriage, at the home of the bride's parents, Mr. & Mrs. Jacob Wolfe. The bride wore a traditional black, floor-length dress, featuring a high neckline and long sleeves. The groom was attired in a Hack wool suit which had a coat-tailed jacket trimmed with matching braid.

In 1911, the Isaak A. Hoepfner family moved to a farm owned by Jack Borthwick. This farm was situated in the Glencross district (south of Morden, Manitoba) and they were to live here for

the rest of their lives. Mr. and Mrs. Hoepfner's five sons and eight daughters received their education at the Mountain City School during their younger years. They were transferred to the Glencross School where it was possible to learn both the German and the English language. All the sons of this family became farmers and they all resided in the surrounding Morden district. Family worship was an important part of the children's daily life. Mr. Hoepfner presided at the family worship both morning and evening. The worship including reading of Bible scripture, singing of favorite hymns and closing with prayer. His daughter Katherine relates, "Father taught us memory work in the German language. Each one of us had to recite Bible verses and hymns until we really knew them from memory; we know them to this very day."

As long as they remained at home, the older children of this family were expected to work on the farm. At the age of 21, a daughter was presented with a cow and entitled to a portion of the cream cheque thus giving her a modest income as she grew older. A cream cheque was the form of payment earned by farmers when delivering cream to the local creamery. Loaded in the back compartment of a horse-drawn buggy the heavy metal cream cans were delivered to the creamery, usually by the farmer's wife herself. A 21 year old son would perhaps acquire a horse and receive a small share of the harvested crop as payment for labour on his father's farm. Following the marriage of either a son or a daughter, the couple resided at their parental home for a period of one year; the couple then moved to their own home situated on a farm in the vicinity of Morden. Mr. and Mrs. Hoepfner presented the married children with a table, two chairs, one bed, two feather filled pillows and a quilt containing carded, fluffy sheep's wool. Gifts of food supplies consisted of flour for one year, pork, smoked hams, home canned jam and preserves. Feed for the cattle, as well as 10 chickens and a rooster were given to the young farmer. The housewife's income was dependent on the number of eggs laid by the chickens. She took the carefully crated eggs to the general store and traded the eggs for staples such as sugar, spices, cloth and threads.

Isaak and Elizabeth Hoepfner were noted for their warm hospitality and their generosity to anyone in need. During the depression years of the 1930s, when many neighbours and friends were in danger of losing their homes and farms, the Hoepfners assisted these destitute farmers by co-signing notes for thousands of dollars. However, the bankers supported him during these trying years until most of this debt was repaid. Following World War II, the Hoepfners sponsored and assisted with the emigration of Mary, Susan and Agatha Klassen who were Mennonite refugees from Russia. After Elizabeth had passed away, her family kindly provided a home for teen-aged Susan until she was married four years later. It is evident that many a person found solace with the Hoepfner family in spiritual and in material comforts.

Elizabeth Hoepfner, the mother of 14 children, was a dainty, energetic lady slightly more than five feet in height. She had a reserved personality, as well as a great love for the outdoors. Tending a large vegetable garden and fruit tree orchard, she also found time to help in the fields. During harvest time she would operate a binder with a team of four horses. In later years, she learned to drive a 1918 Model A Ford car which had side curtains in-



Formal Mennonite attire circa 1900



An Old Homestead

stead of glass windows. During the years when Isaak A. was an ordained minister, he was frequently absent from home. Since there were no salaries for ministers of the church, Elizabeth and the children had to operate the farm, with many a sacrifice and long days of hard work. Elizabeth was critically ill for many weeks following the birth of her last child. However, she recovered and went on to lead an active life for 25 more years. Following the death of the parents, their four daughters, Katherine, Helen, Anne and Susan, remained in the family home nestled in a grove of oak trees. The Pembina Hills in the background make a picturesque farmyard with an orchard, a weathered red barn, and a dignified farmhouse, the yellow bricks mellowed with age. This house was built in 1900 at a cost of about \$3,000. The house was equipped with a coal burning furnace and had a roof of sturdy wooden shingles. Seventy-five years later, the old roofing had to be replaced with asphalt shingles. Since this home can be heated with wood logs obtained from the surrounding oak trees, heating costs are minimal. In spite of recently installed conveniences the original simplicity has been preserved, resulting in a spacious, attractive home, which is happily occupied by the four daughters.

. Life went on as usual until young Kaye and Mary Braun arrived and the four sisters accepted these four and nine year old youngsters as their own. Kaye and Mary were educated at the Glencross School, Morden Collegiate, and the Winkler Bible Institute. Both girls were provided with formal church weddings and are happily married. Once again life goes on as usual with Katherine and Helen taking responsibility for the household and the farmyard, while Anne and Susan commute daily to Morden where they are employed at the Morden District Hospital. Their brother, Peter, lives across the road and assists with the farm work. The Hoepfner Sisters are active in their church, the Glencross Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, which their father, Isaak, had founded 40 years ago. ❖

Visit to Neu-Chortitza, Ukraine (Part II) *My Grandfather's Church Register -* *by Peter Kroeger*



Peter Kroeger

The main street of Neu-Chortitza was deserted, save for our tour bus and fellow pilgrims. We retraced our steps on the Querstrasse (Cross Street), the road leading to the cemetery and the village of Marjanowka. The Mennonite church once stood on the south-east corner of this intersection but it was now a cultivated field. There was no evidence it had existed. It was a church until 1932 and then transformed into a school. When the soviets made the decision to demolish it, workman set about to tear it down and salvage the bricks. It proved to be such a solid structure, explosives were required to blow it apart. It resisted the initial explosion and more force was required before it finally succumbed. Mud clung to our shoes as we followed the footsteps of our grandfather, Abram Kröger. The funeral service had ended, he had led another entourage to the cemetery. How many funeral processions had he shepherded since this dark era that begun in 1916? Forty-eight! There was evidence the cemetery was still active as there were fenced grave sites with flowers. Most of the cemetery was heavily overgrown with tall grass, shrubs and trees. In the field lay remnants of monuments and grave markers. The field had been cultivated and the equipment had left scars on the stone markers. We were told many grave markers and tombstones had

been removed and used as building material. We stumbled into another depression; in fact, it was difficult to walk without stumbling into more hollows. Grave sites had collapsed everywhere. As we pushed aside the tall grass and bushes we found grave stones and grave markers but no names were discernible.

I stared at my father, Peter's, copy of grandfather's church notes. We found nothing to connect to these people save the unmarked depressions in the ground. I reviewed these notes again and came to the realization that ten percent of the Mennonite population of this village had died within five years! What a burden it must have been for our grandfather to have led these processions.

Reverend Abram Kröger's Church Register

1910

Oct. 10 - Drove to Miloradowka with Johann Penner. In the morning preached in the name of our Lord, Romans 8, 31 -37, then in



Abram and Maria Kröger

Dundurn, Saskatchewan circa 1940

the afternoon, married Abram Dyck from Miloradowka and Sarah Hiebert from Grünfeld. Wedding text Psalm 30, 20 – 22.

1916

Mar. 9 - Funeral service was held at Peter Klippenstein's. We drove from Jesikowa during the day and in the afternoon officiated at the funeral at Klippenstein's with the sermon text based on Luke 18, 16 – "Let the little children come to me...."

Apr. 10 - Kornelius Giesbrecht's daughter Katarina interred. Funeral text based on Jeremiah 29,

Apr. 11-12 - "For I know the plans I have for you."

Apr. 28 - Johann Klassen's son Gerhard was interred. Funeral service was held in the church. My funeral sermon was based on 1 Peter 1, 24-25.

Apr. 29 - Funeral at Peter Pätkau's, daughter Maria died and for a text I chose John 11, 28; "The Master is here", she said, "and is asking for you."

May 14 - Johann Klassen's son Johann interred. The funeral service was held in the church. My service was based on Jer. 31, 3, and 1 Samuel 3, 18, died May 12.

May 15 - Engagement of Peter Peters to Maria Froese. Engagement sermon based on Matthew 7, 7, "Ask and it will be given."

May 16 - Wife of Julius Kampen interred. Funeral service held at the cemetery. Died of typhoid fever. Funeral sermon based on Isaiah 57, 3 (?) and Rev. 21, 4. Died May 15.

May 26 - Married Peter Peters and Maria Froese. Wedding text Psalms 33, 21-22.

1919

May 12 - Officiated at the wedding of Jakob Klassen and Maria Funk.

1920

Jan. 14 - Jakob Braun. Nowo-Kowna, buried. Rev. A. Kröger*

Jan. 18 - Bernhard Wiebe, Neu-Chortitza, 53 years old. Rev. Is. Epp

Jan. 20 - Peter Peter Neufeld died, 60 years old. Rev. A. Kröger.

Jan. 23 - Peter Peter Neufeld buried. Rev. Is. Epp

Jan. 21 - Widow Jak. Neufeld, Neu-Chortitza died, 77 years.

Jan. 25 - Widow Jak. Neufeld, Neu-Chortitza buried Elder Jak. Pätkau.

Jan. 21 - Jak. Peter Neufeld, Neu-Chortitza died, 31 years old.

Jan. 24 - Jak. Peter Neufeld, Neu-Chortitza buried. Rev. A. Kröger

Jan. 25 - Mrs. Abram Ens, Neu-Chortitza buried. Rev. Is. Epp

Jan. 26 - Kath. Peter Schellenberg, Neu-Chortitza, 2 years old buried. Rev. A. Kröger. Died Jan. 22.

Feb. 2 - David Veer, Neu-Chortitza, died, buried Feb. 5. Rev. Is. Epp

Feb. 7 - Widow Abram Froese, Neu-Chortitza, 72 years old died. Buried

Feb. 9 - Elder Jak. Pätkau



Unknown grave- marker
NeuChortitza Cemetery, October, 2010

Feb. 10 - Widow Julius Friesen, 71 years old died, buried Feb. 12. Rev. Is. Epp
 Feb. 23 - Dietrich Braun's daughter Maria died.
 Feb. 24 - Mrs. Peter Klippenstein died, buried. Jakob Klassen
 Feb. 28 - Peter Schellenberg's daughter Katarina died.
 Mar. 3 - Elder Jakob Pätkau died, interred Mar 6. Rev. A. Kröger
 Mar. 5 - Heinrich Neufeld's son Heinrich died.
 Mar. 7 - Mrs. Jakob Pätkau died, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Mar. 8 - Mrs. Jak. Bräul, Neu-Chortitza died, interred Mar. 11. Rev. A. Kröger.
 Mar. 11 - Mrs. Herman Klassen died, interred March 14. Rev. A. Kröger
 Mar. 13 - Mrs. Kornelius Ens died, 36 years 6 months old, interred the 15. Rev. A. Kröger
 Apr. 17 - Johann Klassen's daughter Aganeta died.
 Jun 14 - Jakob Klassen's daughter Maria died.
 Jun. 18 - Jakob Johann Klassen's son Jakob died.
 Jun. 26 - Gerhard Braun's daughter Helena died.
 Jun. 30 - Peter Wiebe's son Peter died.
 Jul. 11 - Married widower Abram Ens, Neu-Chortitza and Sarah Juliusowna Friesen. Wedding text, Psalm 33.
 Jul. 26 - Johann Gerhard Thiessen's daughter Olga died.
 Sep. 1 - Heinrich Froese's son Heinrich died.
 Sep. 1 - Peter Klassen's son Johann died.
 Oct. 9 - Johann Pauls' son Peter died.
 Nov. 20 - Johann Rempel's daughter Margareta died.
 Nov. 23 - Martin Neufeld's son Heinrich died.
 Nov. 30 - Kornelius Giesbrecht's son Peter died.
 Dec. 30 - Margarete Peter Wiebe died, 2 years 10 months old.

1921

Jan. 1 - Margarete Peter Wiebe interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 May 8 - Married Heinrich Veer and Helena Klassen, Isa. 41, 10. Rev. A. Kröger
 May 29 - Gerhard Martin Neufeld, 3 years old interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Jul. 18 - Married widower Jakob Bräul and Eva Klassen, nee Siemens.
 Aug. 22 - Married Peter Jakob Bräul and Justina Heinrich Funk. Joh. 21, 16.
 Sep. 17 - Mrs. David Klassen died, interred Sept. 19. Rev. A. Kröger
 Nov. 10 - Jakob Loewen died, 63 years old, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Dec. 10 - Widow Maria Neufeld died, 47 years old, interred Dec. 13. Rev. A. Kröger.
 Dec. 26 - Justina David Veer died 7 weeks old, interred Dec. 28. Rev. A. Kröger

1922

Feb. 23 - Old widow Elisabeth Bräul died, 83 years old, buried Feb. 26. Rev. A. Kröger
 Feb. 24 - Gerhard Gerhard Thiessen died, 60 years 4 months old.
 Feb. 27 - Gerhard Gerhard Thiessen died, 60 years 4 months old. interred. Rev. A. Kröger



Neu-Chortitza, Mennonite Church (Circa 1920)

Feb. 27 - Maria Dietrich Braun died, 2 years old, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Mar. 19 - Mrs. Helena Rempel died, 64 years old, interred Mar. 21. Rev. A. Kröger
 Mar. 19 - David Gerhard Sawatsky shot, interred Mar. 22. Elder Jak. Rempel
 Apr. 17 - Helena Heinrich Block died, 8 years old, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Apr. - Widow Kornelius Giesbrecht died, interred Apr. 4, 79 years old. Rev. A. Kröger
 Apr. 27 - Dietrich Peter Pätkau died, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 Apr. 29 - Peter Peter Berg died, interred Apr. 30. Rev. A. Kröger
 May 8 - Anna Georg Krahn died, 5 months old, interred. Rev. A. Kröger
 May 15 - Johann Gerhard Thiessen died in Werchne dneprowch.
 May 17 - Johann Gerhard Thiessen buried in Neu-Chortitza. Rev. A. Kröger
 May 25 - Married Abram Peter Pätkau and Aganeta Heide, wedding text 2. Cor. 13, 11.
 Jul. 21 - Elizabeth Johann Rempel died, interred July 23. Rev. A. Kröger
 Sep. 3 - Georg Isaak Krahn died, interred Sept. 6, 32 years old. Rev. A. Kröger.
 As I perused these notes again, I realized grandfather had officiated at only six weddings during this period and some were unions of couples who had lost a spouse during this same era. Not many happy moments during those difficult years. This probably weighed heavily in favour of their decision to immigrate to North America. The afternoon waned and the skies were threatening. Dark clouds sprinkled us with a light drizzle and we retreated down the gentle slope deep in thought. Was this the end

of our quest? Was this the grail we were seeking?

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

*Reverend Abram Kröger is also the grandfather of co-editor Dave Toews.❖



Ted Regehr

In Search of a Homeland (Part II)

by Ted Regehr

The Mennonite migrations from Manitoba and Saskatche-

wan to Mexico in the 1920s.

A story, perhaps apocryphal, is told about a fairly prosperous Mennonite farmer and the father of several school-aged children, who appeared in a Saskatchewan provincial court. He was charged because he had broken a law requiring that he send his children to a government approved school. He had already twice been found guilty and fined for the same offense. This time he brought along his bank statement and land title and told the judge he would not comply even if the court took everything he had. Both the judge and the premier of the province were disappointed but also relieved when, soon thereafter, the family, together with 5,960 other Manitoba and Saskatchewan Mennonites left for Mexico. Why this stubborn resistance, especially since Canadian Mennonites had come through World War I relatively unscathed? No Canadian Mennonites were conscripted for military or alternative wartime service and there was no threat of conscription in the

foreseeable future. Mennonites, moreover, had benefitted from higher prices for agricultural products during the war.

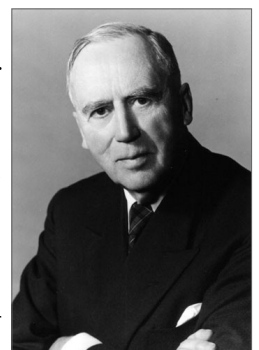
Other Canadians had suffered enormous losses. On a per capita basis, Canada had lost more men killed and injured than any of the warring European countries. Anglo-Canadian citizens had been particularly hard hit, in part because many immigrants from eastern Europe had not responded as enthusiastically or enlisted in equal numbers as those of British/Canadian ancestry. That generated strong support for policies and educational programs designed to instruct and guide immigrant children so they would become good, productive, patriotic Canadian citizens. Properly equipped public schools with qualified teachers, following an approved curriculum, were regarded as the most effective means whereby immigrant children could become informed about and assimilated into Canadian society.

Parents and leaders in many immigrant communities cherished and hoped to retain aspects of their own religious, cultural, and linguistic heritage. They were reluctant to send their children to government approved schools which had an assimilationist agenda. The Manitoba and Saskatchewan governments responded by passing compulsory school attendance legislation. New schools were established in communities in which private or separate schools did not meet the new requirements. Parents who refused to send their children to an approved schools were subject to fines and, in rare cases, imprisonment.

Mennonites protested that they had been promised complete freedom in 1873 to educate their children in accordance with their religious practices, only to be informed that education was a provincial, not a federal responsibility. The federal government had promised something it did not have the authority to deliver. Once again, as in Russia in the 1870s, a formal promise by a government had been broken, and it resulted in the migration of almost 6,000 Mennonites from Canada to Mexico.

Mennonite perspectives on this migration have been carefully and extensively documented. I became more familiar with government perspectives when, in anticipation of the 2005 Saskatchewan centennial celebrations, I was asked to write the biography of William Melville Martin, who was Premier and Minister of Education in Saskatchewan at the time of the Mennonite school crisis.

Premier Martin was the leader of the Liberal party which depended heavily on what today we would call "the ethnic vote." He worked tirelessly and with considerable success in explaining to immigrant leaders the benefits of learning the language, customs, values, ideals and practices of their new homeland. He was also a devout churchman who believed that a good basic education need not interfere with the differing religious beliefs and practices of the many immigrant groups. He pointed out that locally elected school boards enjoyed considerable latitude in the running of the schools if the basic objectives were met. That made it possible for school boards controlled or strongly influenced by reluctant immigrant groups to mitigate some of the assimilationist elements of the approved curriculum. That was a compromise which most of the Men-



Saskatchewan Premier W.M. Martin
1916-1922



Lost River, Saskatchewan Mennonite Church and congregation in 1926 typical of Old Colony rural Churches

nonites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and all Mennonites living in other provinces eventually accepted. But a minority rejected any restrictions on their freedom to establish and run their own schools as they saw fit.

In the legislature and in the press Martin was harshly criticized by members of the Conservative opposition for not dealing decisively enough with immigrant parents who did not send their children to an approved school. Protestant church groups, veteran's and patriotic organizations accused him of not enforcing the school legislation with sufficient vigour. As a committed Presbyterian, the Premier was particularly embarrassed when the Presbyterian Synod of Saskatchewan passed a harshly critical resolution endorsing the more aggressive policies advocated by the Conservatives.

More important for Martin, however, was his fear that parents in many other immigrant communities, including many Mennonites who were complying with the compulsory school legislation, would demand equal treatment if the non-conforming Mennonites were granted exemptions from the provincial school legislation. In that regard he made a clear distinction between what he called the "Old Colony Mennonites" and all other

Mennonite and other ethnic immigrant groups. While he was willing to give people time, the court incident mentioned earlier, and unsuccessful mediation efforts by people, including some Mennonites, close to the "Old Colony" people, convinced the Premier that it was not possible to work out an acceptable solution with the "Old Colony" people. So he opted for a policy of relentless pressure. That only reinforced Mennonite resistance by reminding them of earlier persecutions and migrations in their Anabaptist history. So they left. Premier Martin resigned before the Mennonites actually left. Neither he nor his successor tried to stop them, although Martin was convinced that most would return shortly after experiencing the hardships of pioneer life on barren patches of Mexican land.

The departing Mennonites knew that the move would likely carry high economic costs. Land prices inevitably fell when many farms were put up for sale at the same time. And there were unexpected losses as a result of dubious arrangements with agents who handled some of the land transactions in Mexico. The acquisition of more land in Mexico made it possible for at least the short term benefits. They certainly did not leave for economic gain.

Strong leadership was needed in the 1920s since only a relatively small minority of Canadian Mennonites chose to leave. Leaders resorted to fairly strong coercive measures to persuade some members of churches to join the migration. The people, moreover, needed leadership in religious and also in diplomatic and economic matters. And the economic problems undermined more general support for the leadership. It is obviously

beyond the scope of this short address to discuss in detail the often strained relationships between those providing leadership in church and civic affairs, particularly in communities in which Mennonites enjoyed not only religious freedom but also a significant measure of civic self-government. Changes and adjustments which those most concerned with economic matters demanded were sometimes rejected by more traditional church leaders. Those tensions were fairly intense as a result of the economic mishaps of the migration and were never fully resolved. Evidence of that was the fact that, almost from the beginning, some who joined the migration soon decided to come back to Canada. The fact that those who left early did not surrender their Canadian citizenship merely strengthened that impression.

In summary, the 1920s migration was almost entirely a reaction to the government's determination to enforce compulsory attendance of all school-aged children at government approved elementary schools. There was no serious threat of compulsory military service. The financial costs were significantly higher than the financial benefits. Leadership, somewhat divided in Canada, became more autocratic as the church leaders sought to maintain their authority, especially when dealing with de-



Typical Mennonite schoolhouse of the prairies in the 1920s

mands for economic and civic adaptations.

The Migrations from Mexico back to Canada

In 1954 Johann Fehr, a Mexican Mennonite, sent a letter addressed to "Beloved Gentlemen in Ottawa." In it he wrote: "Beloved gentlemen, would you still be able to make it possible for us to come to Canada again which was once so dear to us? We would come as farm workers, weak as we are, as defenceless German Mennonites. We number 18,337 souls. Pray, gentlemen, accept mercifully this request from your weak servant. We left Manitoba, Canada, to settle in Mexico. Again I ask you, grant my request, weak as its foundation may be."

I could find no evidence that any Mennonite church leader in Mexico had authorized Fehr to write such a letter. It certainly did not express the sentiments of all Mexican Mennonites. And Fehr received no encouragement from Canadian government officials. But thousands of Mexican Mennonites nevertheless returned to Canada after World War II. This migration, however, differed from the earlier ones in several critically important ways.

It was, first of all, a piecemeal or individualistic rather than a coordinated group migration. Far from providing leadership, almost all the Mennonite church leaders in Mexico were opposed to the return migrations. Migration chains were certainly established, but these depended on family and friendship links and critically important assistance by MCC officials when dealing with government officials to resolve complex immigration problems. The important point here is simply that this migration was not

initiated or led by Mexican Mennonite church leaders. The migrants had to reconstruct or build new religious institutions and practices on their own or with outside help.

The driving force in the return migrations of Mennonites from Mexico to Canada was economic. There had been, from the beginning, a significant movement of people between Mexico and Canada since many of the migrants had left close friends and relatives behind in Canada. They were therefore keenly aware of the enormous economic disparities between those who had left and those who had remained in Canada. Wartime conditions restricted these contacts, but they resumed after the war and were greatly intensified by disastrous drought conditions in the 1950s. It was possible, however, for those in severe economic distress to return temporarily to Canada as seasonal farm labourers. Entire families could find work in the labour intensive fruit orchards and vegetable and other row crop fields. Initially most returned to their homes in Mexico for the winter months, thereby avoiding pressure to send their children to Canadian schools. But superior year-round economic prospects made it very tempting for some of the re-

turning Mennonites to stay in Canada.

The returning Mennonites benefited from ambiguities regarding their legal status. Very few had applied to become Mexican citizens and could still make some sort of claim of Canadian citizenship. That meant that they did not have to meet the usual requirements in obtaining immigrant status.

There was little dispute that those born in Canada who had not become citizens of another country retained their Canadian citizenship. Likewise children born abroad whose married parents were Canadian citizens also retained their Canadian citizenship if they did not become citizens of another country. Then, in 1947, the Canadian government passed a Canadian Citizenship Act which allowed children of married Canadians living abroad to be registered as Canadian citizens following an appropriate application. The legal status of Mexican Mennonites was nevertheless uncertain. Very few second or third generation Mexican Mennonites had applied for either Mexican or Canadian citizenship. Nor had they registered and thus legalized their marriages which had been solemnized only in church services. William Janzen, the MCC representative in Ottawa, has described the many hours he spent trying to sort out the resulting citizenship problems. Suffice it to say here that legal status of most of the returning Mexican Mennonites was recognized and they did not have to join long lines of those waiting for clearance to become landed immigrants. To that extent the petition of Johan Fehr was granted.

The country to which the Mexican Mennonites returned was a very different place than the one



Canadian Mennonite school circa 1947

they had left in the 1920s. Educational, religious and cultural policies had changed. The clearly stated objective of the school reforms of the 1920s was assimilation. Today provincial governments, most notably in Alberta, permit much greater latitude in educational matters. Choice has become a basic policy in Alberta. I served, for example, for six years as chair of one of the charter schools in Calgary. Charter schools were established to test and evaluate new and different approaches in teaching. These schools must still meet basic standards but must also demonstrate that they do some things differently than the large public school boards. In a number of Mennonite communities private schools have been established in the last 30 years and there are small schools in Hutterite colonies. Schools and social agencies still try to assist and teach children, as well as their parents, so they can become useful and productive citizens. Basic language, literacy and numeracy skills obviously enhance employment opportunities, and facilitate access to civic, health care and welfare services. But there is now more consultation, and thus opportunity to influence the design of government programs.

Returning Mennonites soon realized that inadequacies in their Mexican schools made it very difficult for the children to get find good and well-paid work in their new land. Without more education they were consigned to a life of poverty. Happily, as already mentioned, Canadian schools had changed and prospects of getting a better education became a drawing card where in the 1920s Canadian education policies were the primary reason for the emigration. A second important change in Canada

is a far greater openness to preservation and promotion of ethnic, cultural linguistic and religious diversity. The narrowly defined, war-induced Anglo-Canadian super-patriotism which promoted some educational zealots in Saskatchewan to name new public schools in Mennonite districts after key World War I military battles, and to appoint former military persons as teachers, no longer has a place in Alberta schools. The objective no longer is assimilation where all Canadians must adopt the same values, ideals and practices. Instead there are efforts to help minorities to become integrated so they can participate in Canadian society while preserving their own cherished values and ideals. It is interesting to speculate whether the migration of the 1920s would have happened at all if today's educational, social and cultural and religious policies and attitudes had been in force then. And it may explain why those who have returned face challenges and opportunities that differ significantly from those which prompted their ancestors to seek new homelands in Canada in two very different eras.

Conclusion:

Historians of human migrations have noted some interesting developments in the development of new immigrant communities, particularly where people migrate as a group under strong leadership. During the first years in a new country, the immigrants unpack and use not only the clothes and tools they have brought along; they also rely on the religious, cultural and social assets they have brought along. Priority must be given to the immediate requirements of survival and of getting established. There is little time or energy for innovations not directly linked to that struggle.

So there is what some have called a "freezing" of religious, social and cultural traits. That is particularly true in cases where the leaders of the emigrating group left, at least in part, because they were unhappy with some of the changes in their home communities. As a result immigrant communities a generation after the migration still look quite a bit like the old world communities they left. Meanwhile those in the old homeland sometimes change quite dramatically in response to new developments there. Thus, in the 1920s, the Mennonite communities in Manitoba and Saskatchewan still looked and functioned more like the old Russian Mennonite colonies than the Chortiza and Molotschna colonies in the Soviet Union. That became very evident when thousands of Russian Mennonites came from the Soviet Union to Canada in the 1923. The so-called "Kanadier" were misnamed. In the 1920s they were more like the Russian Mennonites of the 1870s than the so-called "Russlaender." That process was repeated in the migration from Canada to Mexico.

This stands in marked contrast to the experiences of most migrants who come alone or in small groups without strong leaders. Such persons tend to be integrated and assimilated into the host society very quickly, especially if the host society is perceived by the individual immigrants as being friendly, more prosperous and holding similar or superior religious, social and cultural values. If a new country is to become a true homeland immigrants must make some accommodations and adaptations appropriate for their new environment, but do so without giving up their most cherished values, ideals and practices.

When the foundation of their homelands shifted many Mennonites migrated to a new country. When moving into a new house or a new country, some of the old ways of doing things and certainly some of the furniture will no longer fit. But to feel really at home the migrant must bring along and find places for the things and practices he or she cherishes most. The challenge facing immigrants, including the Mexican Mennonites is to find an appropriate balance between preservation of a cherished heritage and adaptations to make it relevant in the circumstances of the new homeland. ❖

A tribute to my good friend Judii Rempel

by Marty Ann Grams

My acquaintance with Judii was just a few short years. I first met Judii when I stopped by the MHSA office to buy a Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRANDMA)/Brothers Keeper program to keep my personal family records up to date.

Immediately I was encouraged to come back for extra learning and benefit from all the available resources there. Which I did. I was very grateful for the assistance I received from Judii. I soon realized the exceptional talent Judii had. She had a passion for the Society



Marty Ann Grams

and worked hard to keep it up to date. She generously gave of her time and energy. Often she told us of her very bad health. She had been told her

life would be short.

Judii and I soon were good friends. Many times we would see that we were on the same page, "Hey, we jive". At one point she said we would make a good team. My dismay was that we lived so far apart. However she did make a few trips to visit me to help me out of some technical dilemma, when over lunch we had time for some great conversations.

I was often blown away by her optimism and confidence in me. Amazing how she had a positive suggestion to renew my energy to try again, as she helped me with my family website. She was not about to give up on me. It was her nature to see the best in people and their positive attributes. She was proud of the staff at Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta (MHSA), and was pleased about the progress that was happening.

Judii spent many years at university to study research methods, archival courses and a lot of Mennonite history. She seemed to know the geography of any little village in southern Russia. She had the opportunity to gain more knowledge by working with Mennonite organizations in the United States and Canada. She had also served on various volunteer assignments. She had the gift of knowing our Mennonite heritage so well. The importance of the preservation of history was very real for her. She said, "Maybe in a hundred years my grandchild will come searching to verify some detail". Every document was important.

I remember volunteering at the MHSA sorting incoming material. I was caught licking my fingers. Oops, that was a "no no" - it leaves spots on archival documents. I soon learned to do things



Judii addressing MHSA meeting

right, as it should be. Judii was a perfectionist and it was a good thing. Do it right the first time. Her passion for detail was not always appreciated by volunteers.

My personal communication with Judii, was a delightful exchange of books, ideas, recipes on cooking plus various other topics, via many emails. We exchanged and shared jams, jellies and goodies. She enjoyed experimenting in the kitchen. She and Grant were a team, cooking together. They were so fond of each other.

The day before she passed away she sent me a delightful email about the marvels coming up in her garden: pink creeping phlox, periwinkle, wood violets, Siberian squills and the bleeding heart. She did not forget to mention the spreading May Day tree, and the beautiful ornamental crab, blooming in a royal, radiant magenta colour. We talked about the much needed sunshine, but her usual positive response, was, "We need the rain too". She said she was a "west coast duck". What did I know about rain?

Her various interests gave her relaxation, a healthy diversity from her constant research and helping

folks find their ancestry, plus numerous other duties in which she was involved. Judii was an exceptionally talented lady. Personally I found she was a wonderful warm, sincere genuine friend with a refreshing optimistic personality.

None of us really know when our last day on this earth will be. Most of us have much we still wish to accomplish. So it was with Judii, she had plenty on her agenda to prepare the Society for when she would not be there to help. As we all know, who was really expecting that her death was so imminent? There is always unfinished business, when someone passes away. At age 59, there is still much more on everyone's agenda.

The folks at the MHSA will sincerely miss her as will the larger historical world. We celebrate her legacy of dedicated devotion to the preservation of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. Her work building websites and documenting data records for Mennonite research was amazing. Her computer skills were exceptional, just what our Society needed. When I received the phone call from Grant the morning of the 24th of May, I was in shock and total disbelief, my heart was crushed. How we all will miss her.

Personally I will miss her as a true and generous friend. ❖



Judith Rempel



Celebrating 150 Years:

the Mennonite Brethren around the world

(KP, 2010), 391 pages, some sections have photographs.

What if I had another chance?

Thirty years ago I was in Winnipeg researching a book on MB church planting in Canada.[1] While there I met the late Peter Hamm, a good friend and he told me I was probably the right person to undertake the global history of the MB mission that he thought was needed. As a member of the current mission board he 'officially' asked me to prepare a proposal as to how this could be done and how much it would cost, something he would take to the board. When I worked this out with the prospect of a second sabbatical, Peter's su-

perior turned the proposal down, arguing that he could not divert any funds to such a history project. Instead, during that sabbatical, 1988, I used the funds I had to initiate the MB India story, published in 1997.

What I did not know is that his superior was actively arranging for a high level meeting of Mennonite Brethren to convene in Curitiba, Brazil for the purpose of steering a new course in mission from within the MB church.

Recollection of that discussion with Peter Hamm came to me swiftly when I picked up *Celebrating 150 years: the MB around the world* (KP, 2010). A whole generation has come and gone, a wholly different mission has been created calling for a new kind of narrative history. My methodology and critical approach applied to India would not have fit, nor be welcomed. Perhaps another whole generation (2040) will be needed to give persons the necessary sources and critical acumen.

Though I became aware of the 1988 MB mission conference held in Curitiba, Brazil, and that this was profoundly meaningful to my cousin Hans Kasdorf, Fresno misanthologist (1928-2011), who delivered a paper there, much of its significance passed me by since I was actually in Fresno, deep into researching the denomination's 90 years of work in Andhra Pradesh, India. The publication subsequent to Curitiba edited by Victor Adrian and Don Loewen, a first attempt to articulate the birth of a new structure for the world-wide MB family, had long been forgotten by many. [2]

In the next two years under the chairmanship of Edmond Janzen the MB initiated what became

ICOMB, the International Committee of Mennonite Brethren. Over the next decade this was transformed into the International Community of MB, bringing twelve national conferences together united by a common Confession of Faith. This divestiture of the General Conference of the MB church in favour of ICOMB represented a profound shift for an organization that had lasted a century. As Victor Wall explained: "One of the main arguments supporting divestiture was the existence of ICOMB, which was seen as an appropriate organizational umbrella for offering space to all national conferences to relate to each other and to the larger body of the Mennonite Brethren community in a meaningful way." [3]

This Victor Wall was chosen as executive secretary of the new ICOMB. That he comes from Paraguay indicates a vast growth in maturity and ability of the worldwide church to support such a structure. His job would be to coordinate the fourfold purpose of ICOMB, as stated in its By-Laws:

- 1) To articulate and promote a vision for internationalization of the mission and ministries of the Mennonite Brethren Church on a global basis;
- 2) To facilitate inter-conference communication and information flow, thereby enhancing spiritual unity and brother/sisterhood among Mennonite Brethren Churches of the World;
- 3) To provide a framework (regional and/or global) for the exploration of mutual conference concerns such

as the Confession Faith, pastor-church relationships, calling out leaders, leadership and lay training, ethical issues, publication of Christian literature, evangelism and church planting, etc.;

- 4) To develop a forum for mutual encouragement - a cooperative church (conference)-to-church (conference) partnership that transcends ethnic, cultural, and language barriers and that celebrates our oneness in Jesus Christ. [4]

Perhaps the preparation of the global Mennonite history,[5] written by nationals rather than persons like myself doing India, strongly suggested a global MB history written by nationals. This volume *Celebrating 150 Years*, the MB Church around the world, was edited by Abe Dueck, a senior historian and archivist of the Center for MB Studies, Winnipeg.

He explained that "the writers come from various backgrounds; some have been trained as historians and theologians while others have been pastors and missionaries. All have been involved in the life of the church. Wherever possible, writers have been selected from the national churches in consultation with national leaders. While some consistency in style and content has been sought, there is considerable diversity, which in itself may provide a more authentic picture of the nature of the church in the respective countries. [6]

In my view ICOMB should not be seen as a rival to Mennonite World Conference. There is no discernable triumphalism in Victor

Wall and Abe Dueck. Some exceptionalism here and there, yes; but one must admit that the MB have carried their objectives a long way. Abe Dueck left the reader with some important questions: "What is the future of the Mennonite Brethren Church around the world? Do denominations matter in today's world and is there a need for a distinctive witness which the Mennonite Brethren denomination is uniquely able to provide?"

Personally, I am left with the question how could a person like me, much younger of course, even consider undertaking a 'formal academic history' of the subjects of this volume? Is it necessary?

For me it has been enough to have written reviews of two of the special MB volumes [7] produced during that celebratory year of 2010.

Footnotes

[1] In a footnote to my post entitled "A most unforgettable project, 1981-1987" I make mention of meeting Peter Hamm, a member of the mission board of the time.

[2] *Committed to World Mission: A Focus on International Strategy* (KP, 1988); Hans Kasdorf, *Design of my Journey* (CMBS, Fresno, 2004), 319

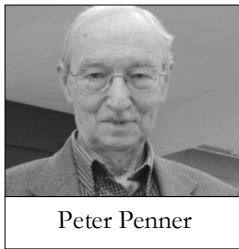
[3] Victor Wall, "ICOMB, its vision and history," in *Celebrating 150 years*, 366

[4] Victor Wall, "ICOMB, its vision and history," in *Celebrating 150 years*, 363-364

[5] When Wilbert Shenk and John Lapp convened a first meeting in Elkhart, IN, in 1995, to initiate such a global history, I was asked to represent the MB conference. The papers given at that conference were printed in a special issue of the *Conrad Grebel Review* (Winter/Spring, 1997): "Toward a Global Mennonite/Brethren in Christ Historiography."

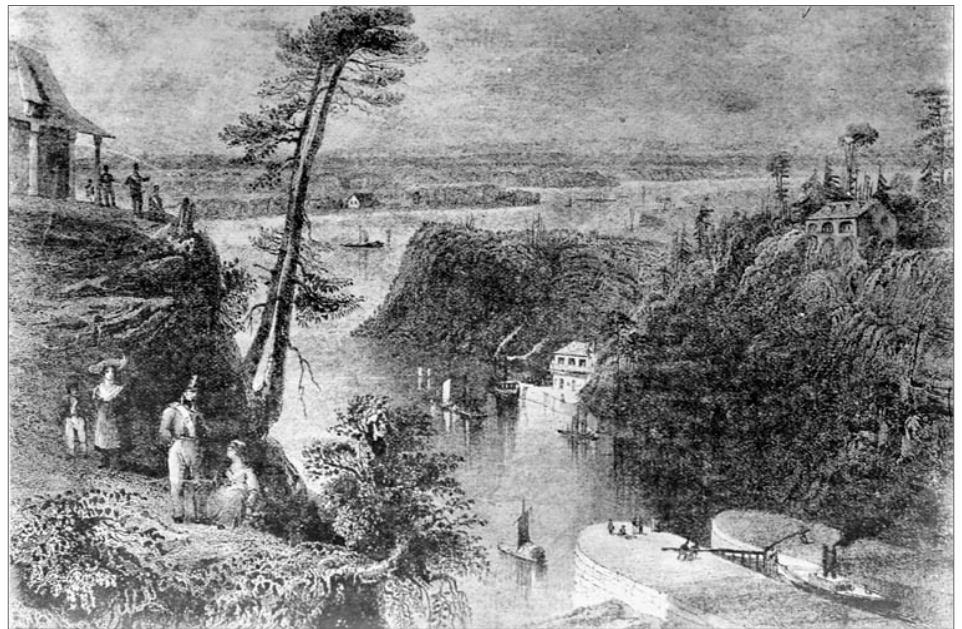
[6] Abe Dueck's Preface to *Celebrating 150 years: the MB around the world* (KP,

2010), 11; the 12 conference ICOMB consists of Angola, Brazil, Canada, Congo, Japan, Colombia, Germany, India, Paraguay, Peru, United States, Uruguay.



Peter Penner

[7] Review of *The Voice of a Writer, Honoring the Life of Katie Funk Wiebe*, edited by Doug Heidebrecht and Valerie Rempel (KP, 2010) in Newsletter of the MHSA, XIV, # 2 (Fall, 2010)
A Review Article: *Leaders Who Shaped Us: Canadian Mennonite Brethren, 1910-2010* edited by Harold Jantz (Kindred Productions, 2010), 323 pages, in Newsletter of the MHSA, XIV, # 1 (March, 2011), 10-14 ❖



Rideau Canal Locks in the 1800s

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Anna Neufeld

Cruising the Rideau Canal – Ottawa to Kingston.

by Anna Neufeld

The Rideau Canal with its 40+ locks was completed in the year 1832. It extends 202 kilometres from Ottawa to Kingston. The Construction of the Canal was funded by the British Government in the event of war with the USA as a supply route. Fortunately it was never used for that purpose. For a time it was used as a major transportation and trading route. Later on it was used as a recreational resource and a tourist attraction. Finally in 1967 it was declared to be of national historical significance and placed under the care of Parks Canada.

Lieutenant-Colonel John By, a British military engineer, was hired to build the canal. He began construction in 1826. The original estimate for the construction was

200,000 pounds. The cost increased fourfold to 800,000 pounds and Colonel Bys was recalled to England where he died in disgrace.

Today Ottawa has many memorials etc. named in John Bys honour. I received a new appreciation for Colonel Bys' remarkable accomplishment in the Herculean task of constructing the 40+ locks in the canal from Ottawa to Kingston.

Dick and I took this cruise in May 2011. It is a leisurely trip through some of Ontario's most beautiful landscapes. Trees, shrubs, and flowers abound with geese, ducks, blue herons and other birds in abundance.

The locks are impressive structures. We spent considerable time sitting in the lock watching the lock

master physically turn the crank to open and close the gates. Alternately we could disembark and walk the paths surrounding the locks and enjoy the well manicured lawns etc. while waiting for the ship to be ready to resume its journey. On one occasion a storm on the lake prevented us from navigating that particular lock. The ship anchored at the lock site where we spent the night to wait out the storm. It was an area without street lights. I have not seen such a canopy of stars in decades.

The early spring cruise, beginning in mid May, is ideal for observing the new life in the waters along the way and on the shorelines which are often in close view. Whether good or bad, cabins and mansions line the shores of the canal route and later rivers and lakes through which we sailed. On board we were served healthy, satisfying meals in the presence of good company.

On your next trip to sunny Ontario take the time to enjoy this cruise or any of the many canal cruises available. It is well worth it.



In 2007 The Rideau Canal was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage