

# HERITAGE POSTING

MANITOBA  
MENNONITE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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## Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

by Conrad Stoesz

Manitoba played host to the annual Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meetings held at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies January 17-19, 2013. In conjunction with these meetings, several related committees also met including the online encyclopedia [www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org) committee. MHSC is made up of member organizations including provincial Mennonite historical societies, Mennonite denominations and other like-minded organizations including Mennonite Central Committee. Participants came from Quebec to British Columbia.

The society has revived an archives committee. This committee, the third year it has met, has undertaken an exciting project of a Mennonite online photo database to help large and small archives manage their photograph collections and provide much enhanced access by the public to the rich photos in Canadian Mennonite archives. The task force was given the green light to pursue the project and seek additional partners and look for ways to cover the estimated \$20,000 cost. Jake Buhler, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan noted that this project will link archival centres large and small across the country like they never have before. While the society has undertaken important projects such as the writing of the three volume set, *Mennonites in Canada*, and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, the photo database is institution-based, designed to help institutions and researchers. The database project testifies to the ongoing good relationships and cooperation among Canadian Mennonite historical societies and their participants.

Other items of business included reporting on the beginnings of a new genealogy web site and the ongoing Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites symposia hosted by the Chair of Mennonite Studies. Society members were pleased to hear that Esther Epp-Tiessen is almost finished her manuscript exploring the role of Mennonite Central Committee in Canada. A 2014 launch date is being planned.

As has been the Society's tradition one block of time was set aside for a learning tour. This year we were privileged to have an interior tour of

the Canadian Museum of Human Rights which is still under construction. Participants donned safety gear and were impressed with the size and architecture of the building which is set to open in 2014. Angela Cassie of the Museum took 20 participants on a 90 minute tour explaining unique materials, symbolism and opportunities the Museum provides to Canadians.

Bill Schroeder of Winnipeg was awarded the MHSC award of excellence for his historical maps, publications and tours of Russia he has undertaken over the past decades. Schroeder was pleased with the award and came to the meetings for the award ceremony. Schroeder has been involved in historical research and volunteering at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies since 1969. *The Mennonite Historical Atlas* that Schroeder co-authored with Helmut Heubert has sold over 7,000 copies and is a mainstay in most Russian Mennonite research libraries. The nomination noted that, "Bill Schroeder exemplifies Mennonite historical research with his quiet tenacity, humble demeanor, and collaborative approach, all the while cognizant of relationships and striving for excellence."

The next annual meeting of the society will again be held in Winnipeg in either December 2013 or January 2014.



Lucille Marr, president of MHSC, with Bill Schroeder, recipient of the MHSC award of excellence, and Augusta Schroeder. — Photo by Bert Friesen

# Historical Workshop at Reinland

## Submitted on request by Adolf and Anna Ens

A day of historical presentations drew about fifty persons to the Community Centre at Reinland on October 27. Knots of friends and acquaintances quickly formed during coffee and registration – a sure sign that interest in things historical continue to appeal to our Society's membership.

The main presentations featured one project completed, one with a lot of work still to do, and one in its final stages.

Henry Unger "completed" his decade-long research into the history of the village of Neuenburg (1875 to the present) and of its public school (Birkenhead S.D. #1998, 1921–1992) and published his findings in a book entitled *The Survival of a Community*. His presentation at the Reinland gathering allowed him to reflect on his findings.

Every community is unique. But how did the village continue when a dozen others in the area, quite similar to Neuenburg, did not? Family ties were deep, with several clans strongly represented. The presence of several ministers, a deacon and for a while a bishop, meant that the nurture of community, fostered by the church, was dynamic.

Even after 23 of the 29 Neuenburg households emigrated to Mexico in the 1920s, the village persisted. Ironically, the government-imposed public school, which was a major reason for the emigration, became a strong factor in the survival of the decimated village – even with the totally alien "English" name of Birkenhead. Lately, like other rural communities around Winkler, Neuenburg has experienced a new influx of settlers, many of them with roots in the same region of Ukraine from which Neuenburg's first settlers came in 1875. A new integration into Neuenburg culture is underway.

Ernest Braun is secretary of the EastMenn Historical Committee and the *de facto* editor of its ambitious project to create an historical atlas of the former East Reserve. A generation ago John Rempel and William Harms published *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages on the East Reserve, Manitoba*. Basically it consisted of maps showing the original homestead entries for all eight townships of the Reserve. A brief sketch of each of the approximately fifty

villages, including a list of first settlers in each, rounded out the information. Village and cemetery locations were entered on each township map.

Since the publication of this (long since out of print) atlas, much additional research has been done by individual communities, much of it under the auspices of the former Hanover Steinbach Historical Society. The fruits of this research have not been compiled and maps have been "corrected" only in bits and pieces. The project underway seeks to remedy this situation. But its plans, some well underway, are looking beyond a compilation of completed research fragments. The final product will incorporate much new information such as land drainage systems, aerial photographs, school sites, maps from outside sources, etc., all to underline the importance of space.

Should our Local History Committee undertake a similar project for the West Reserve?

Following a solid noon meal and a brief business meeting led by Bert Friesen and Eleanor Chornoboy of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) executive committee, Adolf Ens introduced Peter Elias and his memoirs, which span his lifetime (1843–1925). He then read excerpts from the translation he and Henry Unger have completed. The manuscript has been submitted and should be published shortly.

Joe Braun gave a brief up-date on the efforts of an *ad hoc* group in the Altona area to relocate the former Altbergthal school building to Neubergthal. Joe has represented the MMHS on this group.

As at most occasions when the Community Centre in Reinland hosts people interested in history, some at this occasion availed themselves of the opportunity to tour the Heritage Homestead across the street.

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The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society newsletter, *Heritage Posting*, welcomes letters, reports and historical notes from society members and other readers.

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## MANITOBA MENNONITE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

### NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Date:** 2013 April 6, Saturday, 14.00 hr.

**Venue:** R.M. Morris meeting room, Morris.  
Parking on west side of the building.

**Agenda:** bylaw change approval on  
recommendation of the board, reports,  
finances, etc.

Bylaw posted at [mmhs.org/reports](http://mmhs.org/reports)

## Report to the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

by Eleanor Chornoboy

The executive has been working towards making the society structure functional. At a November, 2012 board meeting to discuss the future of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS), several options for the MMHS structure were proposed. The executive was tasked with redrafting the constitution. The new members of the executive interpreted the task to be a major revision of the Society's by-laws. They put forward recommendations for changes to the structure of the organization, which have yet to be ratified.

The Local History committee continues to be active on a number of initiatives. Plans are underway to hold a "reunion" of present and former west reserve school teachers. Interest in bringing photos and other school memorabilia has been expressed. A list of potential invitees with contact information is being developed. Committee members are encouraged to promote the idea and provide contact names.

The Mennonite Studies program at the University of Winnipeg again sponsored a two day workshop. It was entitled *Mennonites and Human Rights: Grappling with State Power in the Past and Present* and was held October 18-20, 2012.

A good deal of work continues to be done in the arena of publishing. The Eastmenn Historical Committee launched a CD of aerial photos describing the early Mennonite villages. It is a comprehensive atlas of the East Reserve (Steinbach area), locating villages, schools, churches, homesteads and more. Aerial photographs taken of the area in the 1940s feature in the CD. Ernest Braun has presented the CD and provided a compelling narrative to accompany the visual presentation.

Ongoing research and labour is moving towards an atlas for the West Reserve. Bruce Wiebe's manuscript on Cass County Mennonites is near completion and Memoirs of the Old Colony diarist Peter A. Elias is at the printing stage. Elias provides one person's insight into church and community issues in Russia and in Canada from the 1870s to the 1920s.

A number of projects are underway. Work on an anthology of articles written by "outsiders" during the early years of Mennonite settlement in the West Reserve has begun. Much material has been gathered for a history on Schönthal, with the intent of publication. Editorial decisions need to be made on the project. A committee is working on a Neuberghthal history book. The Society's web site [www.mmhs.org](http://www.mmhs.org) has been redesigned.

The preservation of the Altberghthal school classroom building, constructed in 1904, has been a project related to the MMHS Historic Sites Committee. The building was moved from its original site on Buffalo Creek about three miles west of Altona to the district of New Hope a few miles further west circa 1962. When its use as a classroom was discontinued it was moved to Altona in 1982, after a group decided it wanted to preserve the building for use as a museum. As such it remained in Altona until last year.

In November, 2012, after extensive exterior

renovations, it found a permanent new home at the National Historic Site of the village of Neuberghthal southeast of Altona. It is being refitted to serve as a field station for a newly-initiated sustainable energy program recently launched at W. C. Miller Collegiate in Altona. The Bergthal School Preservation Board is directly responsible for further development over the next few years. After that it is to be integrated into the National Historic Site program in Neuerghthal. (Reported by Lawrence Klippenstein, chair of the Bergthal School board.)

Heritage Posting, the renamed newsletter of MMHS, has been continuing publication three times a year with eight, and occasionally twelve, pages per issue. Its editor is Maria Falk Lodge, Loren Koehler is the circulation manager, assisted by Lawrence Klippenstein, and Ted Barg, is the layout editor. To order or get back copies contact the editor at [heritage.posting@gmail.com](mailto:heritage.posting@gmail.com)

Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV), earlier known as Mennonite Heritage Museum, was the first major project undertaken by MMHS when it was created in 1958. Its physical construction began in the early sixties. The museum became an independent, free standing and incorporated institution around 1980. In 2014 MHV will commemorate its 50th anniversary. A Jubilee committee is directing plans for the celebration.

Continuing connections with MMHS make this project very important to the society, and to the larger Mennonite constituency. The museum seeks to tell the local and wider Manitoba Mennonite story, and features a special Mennonite Central Committee exhibit in its permanent gallery. It also serves as a venue for various MMHS activities. The *Village Review* is the twice-a-year MHV newsletter.

## Research Study on the Use and Maintenance of German in Manitoba

Notice by Kristin Lovrien-Meuwese, Ph.D. Instructor of German at University of Winnipeg:

Do you speak German and live in Manitoba? Are you interested in how German is used and maintained in Manitoba? If so, we are interested in your opinion! As researchers and instructors of German at the University of Winnipeg, my colleague, Elisabeth Gsell-Dentsoras, and I hope that you will take a few minutes to participate in our research study on the use and maintenance of German in Manitoba.

We have created an online survey for this purpose. We are asking you to participate in this study because you speak a form of German and reside in Manitoba. We sincerely hope that you will take a few minutes to participate in our study. All your responses are anonymous and confidential and we will not share your email address with anyone.

Simply click on the following link to participate: [http://fluidsurveys.com/s/German\\_in\\_Manitoba/](http://fluidsurveys.com/s/German_in_Manitoba/)

# Mennonite Heritage Village Jubilee Committee Report

by *Lawrence Klippenstein*

About a year ago the idea of celebrating a 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary took centre stage on the agenda of the board of Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) at Steinbach. The museum had its beginnings in the early 1960s. At that time a newly-formed Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, organized in 1958, had given high priority to establishing a historical museum for Mennonites in Manitoba and beyond. A local school teacher, John C. Reimer, became a key figure in rallying financial support and the assistance of volunteers to keep things happening here.



Fifty years of growth have made MHV a major heritage preserver and interpreter of Mennonite pioneers and their descendants who have lived in the region since 1874.

Five persons have been appointed to give leadership to preparing a program that will initiate celebrations to peak in 2014. The big event for the occasion has now been set for the end of June that year. In the meantime a series of monthly columns have begun to appear under the heading of **Village News** in **The Carillon**. They will feature vignettes of the way in which the museum came into being and developed as the years went by.

Media advertisements and other forms of “getting out the word” have been initiated and a major CHSM news interview took place some weeks ago. This will be followed by other means of sharing the news locally and beyond the Steinbach community.

At this time plans are projecting a 2014 monthly series of Mennonite Heritage Village events, added to regular festival activities such as **Spring on the Farm**, **Pioneer Days**, etc. which will constitute the celebration. It is anticipated that activities will be organized in other

communities to broaden involvement and interest. We also anticipate that founders of MHV will be remembered and that recognition will be given, as possible, to dozens of board and staff members, hundreds of volunteer workers, myriads of donors, and tens of thousands of visitors who have helped to highlight, and learn from the message and function of MHV.

Additional information will be released to the public in the upcoming months through the media and via personal contacts. The Jubilee Committee has met half a dozen times by now, and funding strategies are being explored. The Committee is considering dozens of suggestions for features and ways of sharing items of interest. The Committee is committed to using available resources to deliver programs that will be of material interest and spiritual significance to people in the ensuing months, and beyond the anniversary year.

For further information watch for radio, web ([www.mhv.ca](http://www.mhv.ca)), facebook, blog and press information. Make special visits to the museum in the months ahead, or contact the museum office at 1-204-326 9661, or via email at [info@mhv.ca](mailto:info@mhv.ca) at your convenience. The **Village Bookstore** is there to serve you. Listings of upcoming events are always available. Hours at MHV for now are weekdays 10 a.m.– 4 p.m. More extended summer hours will begin on May 1.

## Ukrainian delegation welcomed at Mennonite Heritage Centre

by *Conrad Stoesz*

The Mennonite experience in Russia and Ukraine in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century was marked by adversity, including war, revolution, anarchy, collectivization and famine. These same forces affected the larger Russian and Ukrainian communities. On November 23, 2012 Dr. Stanislav Kulchytsky, Deputy Director of the Institute of History of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, and Lesya Onshko, the First Deputy General Director of the Holodomor Memorial Museum, Kyiv, Ukraine, visited the Mennonite Heritage Centre along with representatives from the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. They were welcomed by the Heritage Centre staff, Mennonite Church Canada representatives, and some researchers having an interest in Ukraine. After a brief introduction the Ukrainian delegation noted their reason for visiting the Heritage Centre was to look for materials and people to help them expand the story and understanding of the Ukrainian experience during this difficult time. While the visit was brief they were interested in the documents the Heritage Centre housed and made significant connections with knowledgeable researchers. Arrangements for meetings in Ukraine were also set.

## Our Apology

Please note that an error occurred in our November, 2012 issue of Heritage Posting concerning the sale of the book, *Light the World: The Ben and Helen Eidse Story as told to Faith Eidse*. The Steinbach Bible College is not selling the book, and Len Sawatzky is not the contact person. For the correct information please contact Ben Eidse at [eidseb@mts.net](mailto:eidseb@mts.net). Our apologies for any inconvenience our error may have caused.



## The Mennonite Brethren Herald goes digital

Some four years in the making, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS) recently released a searchable, digital collection of fifty-one years of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. The *MB Herald* serves as the award-winning news magazine for Canadian MB Churches.

"We're excited to be able to offer this resource to churches, schools, libraries, and researchers," says *MB Herald* editor, Laura Kalmar.

Archivist, Conrad Stoesz, came up with the idea of digitizing the collection in order to respond better to the research queries that were coming to CMBS. According to Stoesz, "The digitizing project harnessed the contribution of volunteer scanners and the technical assistance of others in the church office to bring about what may be the first collection of this kind."

Evident in the collection are the ways that the format of the *MB Herald* has changed, lengthening to around 30 pages, dropping to bi-weekly in 1969, then to tri-weekly in 2002, and monthly in 2007. The *MB Herald* was one of the first Mennonite periodicals to publish an Internet edition, with the first issue appearing in February 1996.

"Nothing documents the life and theological thinking of Canadian MBs better than the *MB Herald*. It is amazing to

see the wide variety of issues addressed by the magazine over the years, many of which remain relevant today," says CMBS director, Jon Isaak.

All 1,292 issues of the magazine from 1962 to 2012 are digitized as PDF files and indexed by software, enabling searches by names, topics, Scripture, and so on. The whole collection, with searchable index, resides on an 8 gigabyte USB drive and is available from CMBS for \$30 (taxes and shipping included).

According to Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) managing editor, Richard Thiessen, "The *MB Herald* USB drive is a phenomenal resource for anyone who has an interest in Canadian MB history. Users can search by individual word or phrase, and be led to the precise location of their search results in the PDF scan of an issue with a few clicks of the mouse."

The *MB Herald* digitizing project is just one of several CMBS initiatives aimed at resourcing Mennonite churches and their leaders for the mission of God that we share—through document preservation, research, and publication. For more information, see: <http://www.mbconf.ca/cmbs>.

— news release, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg

## A Biography of Susana Dueck Klassen

by Alyce Klassen, Winkler, Man

First of all I would like to thank Lawrence Klippenstein for the opportunity to write about my mother, Susana Dueck Klassen, and about her Altbergthal connection. It is an honour. The early dates may not be entirely accurate and there may be other inconsistencies, but I have used the best material available to me to create a record of my mother's life.

My great great grandparents Jacob Dueck (1824-1891) and Elizabeth (Derksen) Dueck (1827-1914) were among the pioneer founding families of the village of Altbergthal in 1880. They were from Grunthal in the East Reserve, originally from Schoenfeld, Russia. I know little else about them except that Jacob's father's name was Philip. On a lighter note, I know that Elizabeth had a lot of brooding hens on her yard that scared my mother when she came to visit them as a 3 or 4 year old. An article I read about Jacob Dueck indicates that he walked all the way from the East Reserve to the West Reserve (I presume he crossed the Red River by ferry) trying to find better land for himself and his friends.

Also coming to Altbergthal to settle were Jacob and Elizabeth's son Jacob (my great grandfather) and his wife, Susana (Penner) Dueck. Jacob Dueck was born in Schoenfeld, Russia on January 4, 1853 and Susana was born in the same village on September 16, 1855. They married on May 22, 1877. Jacob passed away November 16, 1935, and Susana on March 25, 1923. I believe they are all buried in Altbergthal. Their son, my grandfather, Jacob J. Dueck was born in Friedrichsthal, Manitoba in the East Reserve on April 25, 1878.

Grandfather's siblings were Susana, Elizabeth, Abram, Anna, Justina, Peter, Maria and Helena. Most of these were born in Altbergthal, and of these Susana, Abram, Anna, Justina, Maria and Helena moved to the Chaco in Paraguay, some in the 1920's and some in the 1940's. Grandfather was from the Sommerfelder Church and when he was a young unmarried man he taught in some of the private Mennonite schools. I know he taught for three years in Blumenhof, and I think also in Sommerfeld. Grandpa married my grandma Elizabeth Rempel of Edenthal on November 24, 1907. Elizabeth was born on June 5, 1885 to Peter S. and Olga Rempel, who had also come from "yantzeed" to the West Reserve where the farmland was not as stony. My grandparents lived in Schoenau for approximately 9 years. My Aunt Olga was born in Schoenau on October 6, 1908 and my Mom, Susana on June 5, 1910. In 1916 the two girls were attending school in Altbergthal and their teacher was Peter Reimer. They moved to Kronsthal and there Jacob J. Dueck passed away on December 2, 1918 at the age of 40 as a consequence of the Spanish flu that was raging at the time. He is buried in Kronsthal. My Mom remembered that her Dad had to sleep sitting up in his rocker because of lung congestion. My grandparents had had 5 more daughters together (two named Elizabeth, Anna, Justina, and Margareta) and all of them had passed away, three of them within 2 weeks' time because of pneumonia.

— To be continued in the next issue of Heritage Posting

## New Exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village

by Jessica McKague

An art exhibit by Ray Dirks entitled *Along the Road to Freedom: Mennonite Women of Courage and Faith* opened at Mennonite Heritage Village on February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013. The works in this exhibit call to mind the lives of Mennonite women who lived under Stalin's 'reign of terror', and their journey to find a new home.

Between 1947 and 1952 approximately eight thousand individuals, mainly women and children escaped to Canada and another four thousand fled to Paraguay, many of whom immigrated to Canada in the 1950s. What characterized this particular group of Mennonite refugees were the high number of female-headed families and the almost universal issue of missing family members. So many men had simply disappeared, or been arrested and exiled in the Soviet Union, or killed in action as conscripted soldiers in the German or Soviet forces. Women had to take on new roles and responsibilities as leaders and providers for their families.

These women were not only victims of their circumstances but agents of change. They were refugees of political upheaval and violence but they fought to find freedom. Drawing from archival photos and the stories of families, Ray Dirks has created a series of paintings with the intention to "honour the faith, love, suffering, and strength of Mennonite mothers who brought their children to Canada as refugees from Stalin's horrors".

Ray Dirks graduated from the Mennonite Educational Institute in Abbotsford in 1973, and studied commercial art and design at Vancouver Community College. He has worked as an artist and curator around the world, with solo exhibitions in Ethiopia, Cuba, India, the United States and Canada, and has participated in exhibitions and workshops in Kenya, Sudan, Trinidad, Cuba, and the Netherlands. He has also been involved with Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) projects such as the exhibit *Just Food: The Right to Food from a Faith Perspective*. Dirks is currently the Curator of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery in Winnipeg.

*Along the Road to Freedom* will be on display in the Gerhard Ens Gallery at MHV until March 15, 2013.

### **Heritage Posting To Your E-mail!**

You now have the choice of receiving your copy of *Heritage Posting* by e-mail in PDF form, thereby giving you the advantage of speedier arrival and full colour. At the same time you would save MMHS postage and handling.

Many subscribers have chosen this option. If you want to receive your next copy in electronic format, please respond by e-mail to our address in the box on page 2. Thank you.

— The editors.

## Book Reviews

Henry Unger, *The Survival of a Community: A History of Neuenburg and Birkenhead School District* (Morden, Henry Unger, 2012), 250 pp.

Reviewed by Peter Zacharias

Henry Unger's book on Neuenburg has been aptly named *The Survival of a Community*. The village was founded by a group of hardy pioneers from South Russia (Ukraine today) in the 1870s. It experienced the struggles and the sheer hardship of many communities on the prairies. Yet it exuded vibrancy. The prairie sod was broken and homesteads were developed. The school flourished. Spiritual life again found its footing. And yet, its early leaders could not have visualized that Neuenburg's very existence as a village community would almost come to an end in the school crisis during and immediately following World War I. Unger informs us that the migration to Mexico left only six families behind. In 1920 the village counted 197 inhabitants; only a few years later that total stood at 46.

Neuenburg was greatly affected by several migrations and Unger chronicles these well. As available farmland was rapidly claimed in the first few decades of settlement, a search for new land led to migrations to what are today the Rosthern and Swift Current areas of Saskatchewan. But it was the much larger emigration to Mexico that threatened to decimate the village completely.

This opened the gateway to the Birkenhead School era. For decades the village itself, though some families moved in, continued in a survival mode. But significantly, the few families that stayed bridged the old era and the new and kept the doors open for prospective inhabitants. Some families did move in soon, including new immigrants from South Russia. And on the fields surrounding the village, new farmsteads sprang up. The potato industry developed. The community took on a different configuration, but its regeneration was unmistakable.

The village itself was to survive the Birkenhead era. The increase in occupied yards and in resident population in the late 1990s and early 2000s, largely due to the influx of yet another wave of European immigrants, has been remarkable. A Neuenburg restoration! Those numbers are more reminiscent of the village of 1920 than would have been the case at any point during the Birkenhead years.

The book merits a high rating on the human interest scale. The rich collection of photographs characterizes not only people as individuals and family members, but also historical eras and lifestyles. Former residents can find themselves in their pupil and teacher contexts. The daughters and sons of Neuenburg! The children of Birkenhead! It's worth taking a journey of discovery through the pages of this book. The chapter "Family Profiles" will be a treasure to many readers.

And thanks, Henry, for including gems like Margaret Penner's tribute to her father, long-time church leader Peter A. Rempel. Humanity shines through. And thanks, too, for the countless hours you have spent in completing this valuable record of a community.

# Book Reviews

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

**Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein**

A recently-published English translation of an original German-language autobiography makes this most interesting life story available to a large audience which could not access the sold-out first printing. It is now part of an ever expanding literature coming from immigrants who made the historic trek out of Ukraine in 1943 through Poland to Germany and Paraguay and eventually to Canada.

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

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

Their relief was brief, however. When the German army was forced to retreat Mennonite families of the Old Colony and others were ordered, offering little resistance, to prepare to leave for Germany with the army. This retreat forms an important component of the first part of the volume, which also focuses on efforts to regroup in western Europe, followed by plans to leave once again, this time for Paraguay. The writer provides a very personal account of the part played by C.F. Klassen and Peter Dyck along with other workers. The book also concentrates on life in the camps where émigrés stayed for various periods of time.

The challenge of beginning again in Paraguay is told from the vantage point of a young man still open to adventure, and somewhat unprepared emotionally to take on the task, important as it seemed. Victor was in a group with his mother, two sisters and a brother. Departure from Germany had begun on February 1, 1947, and ended insofar as the ocean voyage was concerned, with their arrival in Buenos Aires, Argentina almost exactly three weeks later. Some innovative lodging and travel

arrangements following the sea journey are described in the book. C. A. Defehr of Winnipeg had been given the responsibility of taking the group to the Paraguay River enroute to their new home.

Detailed stories of trying to settle down in Friesland colony comprise an interesting part of the final section of the volume. The story ends with the family's decision to move to Canada in 1955.

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

The book may be obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Village Bookstore by calling 1-204-326 9961 or emailing [info@mhv.ca](mailto:info@mhv.ca)

## Review Of Delbert Plett's Seven Volumes on the Kleine Gemeinde

**Reviewed by Dr. Harvey Plett**

Delbert Plett Q.C. (1948-2004), was a man of diverse interests. He ran a successful law firm, was a major landowner in the Rural Municipality of Hanover, was an historical researcher and a prolific writer and publisher. His writing focused on the history of the Kleine Gemeinde, (KG), today known as the Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC).

Delbert's Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series consists of:  
Volume 1: History and Events: Writings and Maps pertaining to the History of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde from 1866 to 1876, 1982, 166 pp.

Volume 2: The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812-1849. 1985, 355 pp.

Volume 3: Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1850-1875. 1986, 337 pp.

Volume 4: Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874. 1987, 312 pp.

Volume 5: Pioneers and Pilgrims: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska and Kansas, 1874 to 1872. 1990, 604 pp.

Volume 6: Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812-1874. 1993, 932 pp.

Volume 7: Dynasties of the Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America. 2000, 767 pp.

The books are a chronological history of the KG. Volume 1 is a somewhat introductory volume focusing on the years just prior to emigration and two years following the migration. Plett quotes the writings of Peter Toews and introduces two ministers, Johan Dueck and Jacob Wiebe. The latter froze to death during the early years. Included

## Book Notes

by Lawrence Klippenstein

A 105-pp. tribute to the parents of author Dr. Abe Dueck, titled *Frank and Tina (Dueck/Nikkel): their story* was published in Winnipeg in 2012. The book takes a family experience from its beginnings in the Orenburg colony in Russia through an emigration to Canada, and a farming occupation in Coaldale, Alberta. Excerpts from family members, travel journals, and many photos provide documentation for the story.

*North America: Seeking Places of Peace*, written by Dr. Royden Loewen and Dr. Steven M. Nolt, and published by Good Books of Intercourse, PA and Pandora Press of Kitchener, ON was released in September, 2012. This is the fifth and final volume of the Global Mennonite History series. As a 400-page paperback this volume with six appendices, many photos, endnotes and index is being translated into Spanish and French. Sale outlets include Good Books, Pandora Press, and Mennonite bookstores across the continent.

Plans for publishing an updated volume of *Martyrs Mirror*, with the sub-title *Bearing Witness*, have been released in the most recent 2012 newsletter of Mennonite Historical Society headquartered in Goshen, Indiana, USA. For further information contact Dr. John Roth of the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen via johndr@goshen.edu or MHL, Goshen College, Goshen, IN, USA 46526.

A series of fifteen columns to appear monthly as **Village News**, on the story of Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV), is being published in **The Carillon** at Steinbach, MB. The first of these columns, noting the origins of MHV, was done in January, 2013. Dr Roland Sawatzky and Jessica McKague, curators of MHV, are coordinating the column. For further information contact jessicam@mhv.ca

Betty Barkman, author of six earlier books, and living with her husband on Joubert Creek in southeastern Manitoba, has now published **THE DASH BETWEEN the DATES on THEIR TOMBSTONES: A compilation of three heart-stirring true stories: Tina's Story, On Jacob's Side, and Never the Twain Should Meet** (Steinbach, MB: Xulon Press, 2012), pb., 136 pp., \$12.99. The book is in the autobiographical creative writing genre. For further information, please contact marigoldp@mhv.ca

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are some 20 maps which are helpful to get a view of the migration and settlement in North America as well as a listing of key events of 1866-1868 and 1869-1872.

Plett's history is a documentary history. That is, he quotes extensively from the writings of the early KG leaders, records various interesting incidents that happened, and then adds commentary. Volume 2 includes a chapter on the history of the church to the Reformation. After looking at the migration to the Molotchna, Plett focuses on the beginning of the KG, quoting Klaas Reimer, the founder, and Heinrich Balzer, an articulate writer to outline the beginning of the KG.

Volume 3 examines the lifestyles of the KG in the Molotchna as well as conflict in the colony including the *Landless* problem. He focuses on Peter Toews writing called "Book 2". The 1866 split in the KG also receives adequate treatment. He concludes the volume by a somewhat negative examination of Pietism and its advocacy of millennialism. In 1870 came the Russification Act. The last part of the volume speaks about the decision to migrate to North America and the migration itself.

Volume 4, in the words of Plett, "This work identifies the almost two hundred families of the denomination emigrating from Imperial Russia during the 1870's, and provides related genealogical, socio-economic and historical reference material." KG readers will be interested to see if their ancestors are listed.

Volume 5 deals primarily with the early years of settlement in North America. Included in the volume is previously unpublished correspondence and writing of the period discussed, some personal accounts and reminiscences of the pioneers, some sketches by the descendants of the first pioneers and genealogies of the first families that migrated.

Volume 6 is a series of articles on the early leaders of the KG. The articles are written by a number of different Mennonite historians. Most of the writers are KG members. It is a volume loaded with information about the leaders. Included in the volume are various personal letters and other writings of these early people.

Volume 7 is a genealogical study of key family trees of the KG.

Delbert has done the KG, now EMC, an invaluable service in writing these volumes. He has made available much primary resource material for the English reader. It will help the KG-EMC get a good understanding of where they have come from.

**Ed. Note:** In light of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference celebrating 200 years of its journey in 2012, it seemed fitting to remind readers of the historical series on the *Kleine Gemeinde* written by the late Delbert Plett, reviewed here by Dr. Harvey Plett.