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From southern Manitoba to the Big Screen: a movie for the intelligent heart

by Eleanor Chornoboy

How does a Mennonite boy from Halbstadt and Edenburg, Manitoba come to move from the beet fields of southern Manitoba to the big screen cinema? It all happened years ago when Dale Hildebrand met Jil Amadio at York University, fell in love, married, and became a part of her extended Italian family. He was so affected by their stories of immigration, that the film *Road to the Lemon Grove* began to formulate in his imagination.

Dale Hildebrand

Dale Hildebrand, born and raised on the West Reserve, moved from the family farm to accepting international awards for his independent film*, Road to the Lemon Grove.*

Hildebrand wrote, directed and produced the heartwarming comedy about an old-world Sicilian father who tries to negotiate his way into heaven. However, the only way in is to go back and repair his relationship with his reluctant son, get him to reunite their feuding family, and help all find love in places they never imagined.

Starring in the film are Burt Young (Rocky), Nick Mancuso (Ticket to Heaven), Rossella Brescia (Italian TV star and Italy's Prima Ballerina), Charley Chiarelli (Sicilian-Spalding Grey), Manitoba born Loreena McKennitt (Multi-Platinum Recording Artist) and Tomaso Sanelli (Titans, Cicada 3301).

The film is a comedic yet touching look at the loss of culture and identity that can only be rekindled by reconnecting with the heart of who we are. The story is familiar to any culture that has adopted a new country. It will resonate with newcomers from every corner in the world. They all identify with stories about children translating for their parents who could not negotiate in the language of their new country, often resulting in unexpected or comic outcomes.

Among the awards won by *Road to the Lemon Grove* are Best Comedy Feature of Edmonton International Film Festival; the Cirs Award at the Taormina Film Festival for Best in Cultural and Social Achievement in Sicily; the Best in Italian-Canadian Cinema at the Italian Contemporary Film Festival; and the Excellence in Performance Award at the Italian Contemporary Film Festival.

Historians and genealogists will be interested to know that Dale Hildebrand is a great-grandson of the Sommerfelder Bishop Abraham Doerksen.

Road to the Lemon Grove is opening in 16 cities across Canada on the Labour Day Weekend. In Winnipeg it will be playing at the Cineplex Polo Park Theatre starting on Friday, August 30, 2019.

Dale Hildebrand with actor Nick Mancuso.

The Russlaender Centenary Committee inaugurated

by Royden Loewen

The largest Mennonite immigration in Canadian history took place in 1923 and following years. During these years some 20,000 so-called Russlaender Mennonites arrived in places across Canada from war -torn Soviet Union.

To commemorate this migration, a national Russlaender Centenary Committee has been finalized. It is charged to provide leadership in the national reflection on this important event in Canadian Mennonite history. The committee consists of 11 representatives, at least one from each of the six provinces that constitute the members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. They include: Richard Thiessen and Cheryl Isaac from British Columbia, Ted Regehr from Alberta, Jake Buhler and Judie Dyck from Saskatchewan, Ingrid Riesen, Aileen Friesen and Royden Loewen from Manitoba, Marlene Epp and Henry Paetkau from Ontario, and Luke Martin from Quebec.

An inaugural meeting of the committee was held on November 15, 2018 in conjunction with the

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What's Happening at WestMenn?

by Lawrence Klippenstein

As I write this, we have just commemorated Manitoba Day, which came just after we learned that Helen Ens, a retired long-time missionary in Mexico, had just launched a published memoir on her work. She lives in Winnipeg, and we are now awaiting details on the publication.

The recently published book on Rosenfeld is now being distributed in its second printing. We had no plans for celebrating Manitoba Day in our committee, but members were encouraged to come up with small projects in their own bailiwicks. Mine was to get over a small shut down due to illness and marvel at a very old map of the province which one of my fellow residents here at Lindenwood came up with. I had not seen it in the ER *Historical Atlas*, so must check that – was an issue for school children rescued from wreckage of a school near Dauphin years ago.

The bad news was that snow clearing damaged a bridge our committee erected over a ditch at the Post Road Memorial Trail site on Highway 75. Repairs are underway. A bicycle touring trip is being planned for early summer. If interested let me know (lawklippenstein@shaw.ca).

Work on a proposed revised atlas for the West Reserve is proceeding. Several recent versions of a new map of the whole area drawn up by David Harms of Altona were displayed at our meeting of May 11. Gary Klippenstein of Altbergthal has taken over management of cemetery care in the community. We are still looking for the original sites of the villages (school areas?) of Neustadt and Sparrau. Any suggestions?

Evelyn Heide of Steinbach is undertaking a major study of schools in the WR. Interesting new material is showing up for the study of the village of Altbergthal. A Cornelius Bergmann (Lichtfeld) short bio is in the making. Altbergthal is NOT a vanishing village. In fact the opposite is happening — it is growing. A search is on for more old photos. Anything to offer? Let me know. Thanks much.

Discussions on doing a genealogy workshop in Winkler this summer or fall are underway. If you have comments on that, again, let me know. The Winkler Heritage Society has a new chairman, Randy Reitze. A museum and archives have begun operating there in recent years. Ed P. Falk is director of the archives.

Our committee has ten members at the moment. New terms will be announced shortly.

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

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The Russlaender Centenery Committee L-R, Royden Loewen, Jake Buhler, Richard Thiessen, Marlene Epp, and Ted Regehr.

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Mennonite Historical Society of Canada AGM. The committee at that point chose the name Russlaender Centenary Committee (RCC), and spoke about the vision for the 2023 commemoration.

The RCC at that point committed itself to remember this migration in all of its dimensions. Those aspects include the suffering from war and famine, the horrific uprooting and stress-filled transplantation, the reliance on and testing of religious belief, the joy of finding a new homeland. But the committee will also consider this migration with respect to Canada in the 1920s. This will mean an acknowledgement that the immigrants came as settlers and thus farmed lands once the homeland of indigenous nations. It will also mean an acknowledgement that other would-be immigrants — African Americans, Chinese, Jews – were not welcomed at the time. Finally, the RCC will also remember those who stayed behind in the Soviet Union and endured the terror and uprootings of the 1930s and 40s.

The RCC will give oversight of events in 2023 from across the land, with events planned for places such as Montreal (Quebec), Vineland and Kitchener (Ontario), Winnipeg (Manitoba), Rosthern (Saskatchewan), Taber (Alberta), and Abbotsford (British Columbia).

The Committee, under the leadership of Ingrid Riesen of Winnipeg, plans a special train trek from Montreal to Rosthern, with stops in Ontario and Manitoba, and a possible extension to Abbotsford. Initial conversations have been held with VIA Rail and future talks are planned with CPR on how to operationalize this historic re-enactment. Talks have also been held with MCC Canada on how to use this year of celebration as a way of paying forward, with a special linked campaign for MCCC's refugee program.

The RCC's next meeting will take place in Montreal in January 2020 on the occasion of the AGM of the Mennonite Historical Society.

Exploring the Low German Language — with Jack Thiessen

by Ernest N. Braun

On April 17, Mennonite Heritage Village hosted an evening with a Low German emphasis, including a launch of the reprint of Dr. Jack Thiessen's monumental Low-German dictionary, first published in 2003 but out of print for years. Low German (LG), a Lower Prussian dialect spoken by thousands of Mennonites in southern Manitoba and across the Prairies, has in the more recent decades received significant attention with the publication of several dictionaries, as well as a LG Bible, LG lyrics and collections of LG short stories, as well as a significant presence online of LG novels, and even LG grammars. Emcee Gary Dyck, MHV director, welcomed Dennis Reimer who began the program with several LG songs, one dedicated specifically to Jack Thiessen, and others familiar to the audience from the *Heischratje & Willa Honich* repertoire. Margaret Wiens of Grunthal then read one of Thiessen's short stories, *Daut Bruttjleed* (the wedding gown), and Jessica Buller gave a sample lesson of how Low German might be acquired, in the first of such lessons which MHV plans to host over the next while. Then Wilmer Penner, who sponsored LG evenings in Steinbach for several decades, gave a tribute to Jack Thiessen, who then addressed the audience himself, expressing his appreciation for the recognition of his life's work, and in the process demonstrating his prowess as a raconteur . The formal part of the evening ended with the emcee's reading congratulations from Professor Gerhard Ens who together with Ernest Braun of Niverville took the initiative in the reissuing of the dictionary. At that point, the entire audience of about 170 people delighted Jack with a surprise "Happy Birthday" rendition in Low German led by Dennis Reimer, and everybody was invited to share the birthday cake provided by wife Audrey Thiessen over coffee and *plautz* (fruit pastry provided by the ladies of the Grunthal Elim Church). Afterwards Jack stayed to sign his dictionary for any who wished, and chatted with his supporters and new friends, while entertaining questions about Low German.

The 550-page soft cover *Mennonite Low German Dictionary/Mennonitisch-Plattdeutsches Wörterbuch* itself has two main parts as well as an introduction and appendix. The first part lists the entries in Low German, with definitions in High German and English. The second part lists the entries in English, with definitions in Low German. The Introduction has a history of the language, a pronunciation guide, and a basic grammar. The appendix includes LG nursery rhymes, short proverbs and some longer LG pieces and sayings.

Ultimately LG is a Lower Prussian dialect, with its roots in the ancient IndoEuropean out of which Old Saxon and later a Low Saxon version arose in the northern German states. Of course the Niederdeutsch Prussian dialect we adopted here had many Dutch loan words due our own origin and not a little due to the Hanseatic League which dominated the trade in the area until the time of Martin Luther.

Like any other language, Low German is the expression of a people's world: its values, culture, and life-style.

Gary Dyck, Executive Director of MHV, Jack Thiessen, Audrey Thiessen. **— Photos by E. N. Braun**

From the simplest childspeak, to basic vocabulary, idiom, or even the most profound proverb, every word or phrase provides a little glimpse into that world. For example, a dog in childspeak is *Hoowa* - a delightful term that gets to the level of the child and amuses with the onomatopoeic pronunciation, in which the howl of the dog can be heard. The same is true for horse, which in ordinary LG is *Peat*, but in childspeak is *Hiescha*, where again one can hear the sound of the neighing.

LG is the language of an agrarian people, and therefore the dialect has multiple variations of common farm terms. For example the standard word for cow is Kooh for cow, but should we want to disparage the poor animal, it becomes Tjlemp. The same for horse which then is not a *Peat*, but a *Schrugg*. As a rural people we pay attention to the weather, and have a special word for drizzle - *Sodda*, and when it persists, it is a *dree-doagscha Sodda* (3-day drizzle). We were subsistence farmers who ate the simple food we produced ourselves, so *Tjlieta-moos* would be the most basic fare, clumps of dough cooked in milk, representing the two most common ingredients of the Mennonite farm. Also another very simple dish that is today glorified by the name French Toast was known to us as *Oama Ritta.* Literally the term means "poor knight", and likely dates back to the fare of poor itinerant knights of the middle ages.

Mennonites were also a migratory people who lived in many countries and picked up words from each: many loan words from the Dutch survive: e.g. pienijch - very quick and focused, coming from a word that means "agonizing". Most words have their roots in German of course, but some have unusual etymologies: *Tjeadel* - fellow (often to be reckoned with) derives from German Kerl, a word that through the name Kardel connects to Charlemagne. Since French was almost an unofficial language in Russia, it is not surprising that our word for cinnamon is Kerneel, almost identical to the French. We spent two centuries in Poland, with the result some words hark back to Polish, as does *Püdel*, which derives from the Polish word for crate or container "pudlo". In LG *Püdel* can mean a number of things most of them relating to containers but one of them means "jalopy", which is a cross-lingual pun since in English the Polish word means "crate". Many words,

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particularly for food, have their roots in Russian/Ukrainian. The most distinctive is probably *Wrennetje*, the word for perogies which actually means "jam" in Russian. Another is *Borscht*, from "Borschtsch", a term so common it has also entered English. More recently Spanish words have entered the language. An example is *Palanka*, meaning influence or even clout in both languages. An unusual import is the Swedish word *Feebastang* which denotes the fork-type drawbar used for a one-horse sleigh. There are scattered words from Yiddish (*meschugge* - crazy), from Portuguese (*Ladrong* - thief)), from Arabic (*Burnuss* - overcoat), from Persian (*Schemmedaun*- suitcase) and from various other European languages.

Low German expressions reveal the inner mindset of its speakers. For example, there is no expression for brash "hey, you". LG has a much more genteel expression: *Heeja* - something you say by way of familiar address to someone close. As a quiet-in-the-land people, even gossip is communicated in a non-assertive passive way: we say *Etj leet mie vetalle/saje* - a phrase that literally means - I let myself be told that… In a way we have our own "wisdom literature" which may have grown out of our peculiar circumstances. We say *Wea daut tjliene nich eaht,/Ess daut groote nich weat* (Whoever does not value little things is not worthy of important things). Although we are a hard-working people, we have the wisdom to value moderation: *Aules met Mot* (everything in moderation). Our idioms also give an insight into the mentality of Mennonites: of an intrusively inquisitive person we say: *hee frajcht daut Jäle ütem Hamd* - literally, he asks the yellow out of one's shirt. A person who is incompetent is described as someone who is not worth five homemade noodles: *hee ess nich fief Tjieltje weat*.

Like every other language we have nonsense rhymes and counting out rhymes. One involves counting on one's fingers: for example,

Tjliene Finga -little finger
Gold Rinja - ring finger
Lang Hauls - long neck (middle finger)
Butta-letja - butter licker (index finger)
Lüstje-tjnetja - lice cracker (thumb).

Most new words in LG are created in response to new technology, so when the bicycle arrived, it was called a Weppstang, literally a see-saw bar, referring to the motion of the pedals. My personal favourite for bicycle is Gum-esel meaning rubber donkey. Another is Flitzepee from the French, and Moatastang - martyr's rod - I don't understand the connection. Parts of the internal combustion engine also necessitated some ingenuity: so, a spark plug becomes a *Fieastoppsel* - literally, a fire cork. A tractor is a *Tjätel* - a kettle, referring to the earliest steam-engine tractor. A traffic jam is a *Strudel*!

We even have an expression for the end of something:

Aules haft enn Enj;
Bloss nich de Worscht;
Dee haft twee Enja

Everything has an end except a sausage: it has two ends.

Jack Thiessen's dictionary is not only a Low German lexicon, but also an encyclopedia of LG culture, and as such is unique in the publishing world.

Jack Thiessen (centre), with Andrew and Erin Unger who were volunteer Low German learners for the evening.

Opinions...

Is Anabaptism Still a Good Word?

by Lawrence Klippenstein

"In the beginning" this word did not exist. According to one biblical writer the word then was "God" and the word was God. And from the beginning some people somewhere in the world held to some of the central ideas of those who would ultimately be given the name "Anabaptist".

As many women and men read history today, the word accrued the capital "A" and a certain cluster of concepts more definitively about 500 years ago. Many people in the Christian community at large who would later identify themselves as "Mennonites" are included in this group. Hundreds of thousands (millions?) of individuals and communities in this group still do so today. Millions of others in this group intentionally do not - you could say, would not hold it to be a "good" word nor what it generally stands for, a good idea.

As we enter the orbit of a celebration in a few years (2025 to be exact) of the five hundred years Anabaptism has been something more "alive" in the world, this question will be asked and considered worthy of thought, "Is it still a good word?"

Space here does not allow much comment. But there is room to ask the question and will be room somewhere to give it at least a brief moment of contemplation. One can in fact safely predict that millions of words will be written (perhaps these among them) and spoken, or at least "thought" in response to that question.

Will you, dear reader, (as used to be the journalistic term) be among them? No pressure here, just a thought.

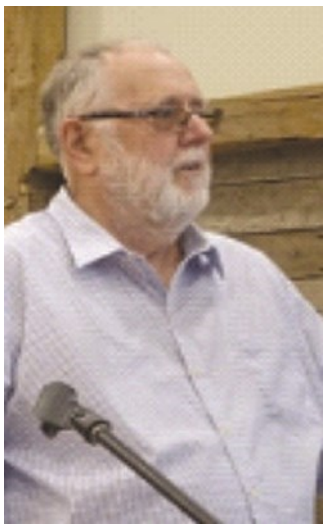
A few years ago (in 2017) it was about Luther. Today it is very much about the word Catholic, or Pentecostal, or Evangelical, and, yes, also Mennonite, to name only a few.

Right here the question asked remains for the moment, Is Anabaptism still a good word?

Something new in Neubergthal: *Plautdietsche Tietvedrief*

by Jack Klassen

On three consecutive Saturdays in March Plautdietsch enthusiasts gathered in the Commons, Neubergthal village to enjoy stories, conversations, local performers and presenters. The main organizer for this event was an Altona man who is also one of the organizers of the History Seekers which is held in The Gardens. This year Joe Braun was kept very busy since he was involved in both events.



Joe Braun chairing the event.

On the first Saturday, March 9th, we were treated to a selection of Plautdietsch Evangelical songs by Diedrich and Nettie Friesen. He accompanied the singing with his guitar and she played the keyboard. The D'Friesens are quite well-known for taking their musical family on tours to all parts of the Mennonite world such as Paraguay, Mexico Bolivia, etc.

Cleo Heinrichs read a poem and short story to us in Plautdietsch after which Joyce Friesen read another story.

We were treated to a session on language exploration led by Joyce Friesen and Ray Hamm. This consisted of giving the audience various phrases and comical expressions in Plautdietsch which they could respond to. One example of this would be "He who persists will succeed" which is translated to "Dee Aunhoola jewennt".

During the March 16th session Lorraine Friesen Brackston entertained us with folk/pop type songs in the style of Shania Twain or Dolly Parton. They were sung in Plautdietsch and quite hilarious. "Naijen bot Fief" was one of the songs (Low German version of Dolly's "Nine to Five").

Two humorous pieces were next read to us by Sean Goertzen who aquired his Plautdietsch when he hadn't had much exposure to it as a child. He pursued his goal to learn it well and traveled to Paraguay where he stayed for six months and mastered it albeit with a pleasing yet with a slight high German accent.

Three people presented their village histories next. Joyce Friesen did a detailed social history of village of Neubergthal with many hilarious anecdotes of the residents' interaction with each other including how one person dealt with a Peeping Tom.

The Silberfeld story was told to us by Mary and Benno Loewen who gave us some interesting details about the developments of the village and the churches. Also how the government helped with local chicken and egg production and sales.

Jake Rempel gave a brief review of the history of the Halbstadt area, especially of the formation of the school districts over the years. He also touched on when the U.S. had horses pull warplanes across the border near Halbstadt to help with the war effort in the second world war.

Mary and Benno Loewen sharing their story.
— Photos by Jack Klassen

Marlene Plett read an interesting Plautdietsch story written for her by a friend. It told how a farmer who, inconsiderate of his neighbors, learned, after being injured and having neighbors do all the farm work for him, that being kind and considerate with others paid off.

The last session, March 23rd was introduced by the music of Phyllis and Dennis Reimer with Phyllis playing the keyboard and Dennis playing the guitar. Dennis sang some songs from their "Heischrackje" collection, the highlight of which was the song "Dit Sied, Jannt Sied". This song led right into the panel discussion which asked for the different ways of saying words and phrases in different parts of the Mennonite world. Serje Kanke represented the way people expressed words in the Russian community. Terry Gunther represented Belize, Ed Zacharias represented the West Reserve and Jack Klassen represented the East Reserve. One example was "jacket". The different answers were a "Jack" "Waums", "Wannickj". Another one was "toilet" for which the response was "Sekjreet" or in days past "Beckjhüss". The audience was able to contribute as well.

Several Plautdietsch readings followed with Jack Klassen reading a chapter from his "Trajchtmoaka" novel. He had published the English and Plautdietsch versions simultaneously.

Next followed several readings by Ed Zacharias who had translated the entire Bible into Plautdietsch and also co-authored a Plautdietsch dictionary together with Loren Koehler. Ed read a piece from the "Song of Solomon" and from "Ecclesiastes".

The attendance for all three sessions was very good. The first session was held in the Altbergthal schoolhouse with roughly 60 people attending. The second and third sessions were held in "The Commons" with about 100 people attending the second one and about eighty people attending the last one.

At the end of each session Karen Martens served dainties and coffee.

The Mennville Settlement

by Arden Thiessen

(Based partially on notes supplied by Ed Reimer)

Around 1950 there was a restlessness in some *Kleinegemeinde* (later Evangelical Mennonite) communities of southern Manitoba. The traditionally-minded members had been moving to a new home in Mexico from 1948-50. Others, to whom the exodus to Mexico did not appeal began to discuss other options.

The continuing restlessness was caused by two factors: shortage of agricultural land for expansion and an interest in expressing their growing vision for missions on the local scene. The first such outreach +settlement was at Riverton, then others were begun at Kola, Morweena, Treesbank, and Fisher Branch (not necessarily in that order). The Mexican emigration was an effort to get away from the dangers of the "world." These settlements were an effort to get into the world as witnessing people. In their discussions they often used the buzz word, "evangelization by colonization."

Initially, the interest in moving out to start a new church community was centered in Blumenort (ER). Rev. Peter P. Friesen gave it the first push. On September 5, 1949, at a meeting in Blumenort, a Land Search Committee was elected. This committee considered available land at Swan River, Mafeking, Virden, and Riverton, and decided that the Riverton location looked most promising.

An intense forest fire had denuded a large swath of crown land from a point four miles north of the town to Sugar Creek, about fifteen miles further north. The Manitoba government had dug drainage ditches and constructed some basic roads throughout this area. The idea was that this land would be made available for war veterans who wanted to start farming. They would have first choice once the tendering started.

The interested Mennonite farmers had a unique idea; they would form a co-op to buy the land and start the clearing. The nascent Washow Bay Land Company had thirteen initial members. Of those, only six eventually settled in the new community. The Company bid successfully on 21 quarter sections, for $900 to $2000 per quarter. Most of the better land was taken by the veterans. However, some of these later sold their land to Mennonites. Some of this land was flat, treeless swampland, some quarters consisted of black spruce bog, which had not burned and was still useless for any agricultural purposes, and some higher land had stony grey clay soil. It was mediocre agricultural land at the best. A major reason why so much marginal land was purchased is that the Company worked with the "colony" concept. They wanted a solid block of land for their people without any "outsiders" in their midst. This later gave rise to many discussions about the wisdom of the original Company members.

Abe G. Penner and David G. Plett cooking breakfast before a day of clearing land

— Photos courtesy of Arden Thiessen

Homes of the K.B. Reimers and the Frank Schultzes. These were the first homes built on recently purchased land

In the spring of 1950 the Company bought a TD9 International bulldozer. Klaas B. Reimers and Frank Schultzes moved to the land, built small, simple houses, and started farming. In the summer of 1951 the Land Company dissolved itself and all their land was picked up by individual farmers, who came from Blumenort, Rosenort, and Prairie Rose. The major source of support for the settlement was the Blumenort church, which received regular reports about the progress of the new group, and appointed Peter P. Friesen to provide spiritual guidance to the group. The Friesens lived in the community only temporarily.

In the summer of 1952, with a good deal of help from Blumenort, a school building was constructed. Some families lived on the east side of the community, others on the west side. In between was a mile-wide spruce bog. But since there could only be one school it was placed right in the middle of the swamp. The Manitoba Department of Education accepted the school and allowed the community to name it Mennville. The school doubled as the weekly place of worship for several years.

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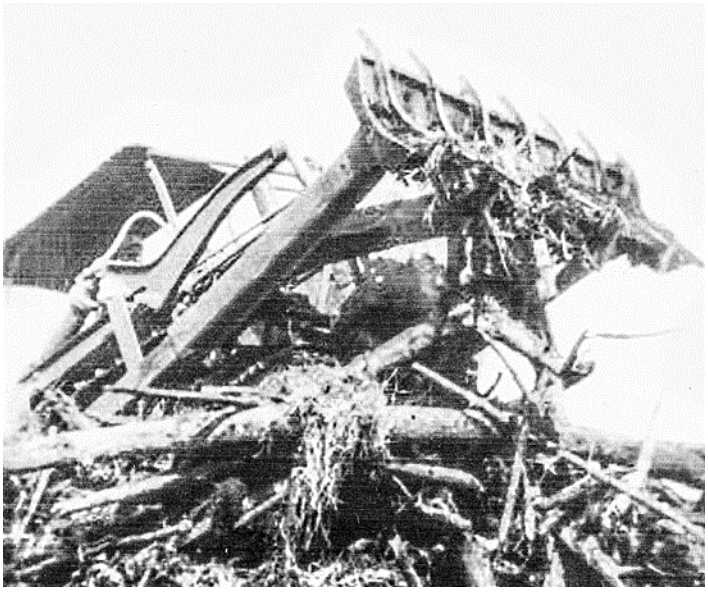

Ed Reimer at the controls of the TD9 International, breaking new land **— Photo courtesy of Ed Reimer**

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During the winter of 1953-4 a delegation from the settlement approached David P. Thiessen, one of the Blumenort ministers, about moving to the settlement to provide spiritual leadership for the growing community. David Thiessen had been a member of the original Company and still owned a quarter section of largely useless land. The Thiessens accepted the challenge, bought a half section of land from one of the veterans, and moved north in the summer of 1954. This served several needs; the Thiessens could expand their farming operation and the church received pastoral leadership for free.

In 1956 the congregation built a new church, a mile west of the school, on higher ground. Around that time a local store keeper was able to establish an official Canada Post Office, named Washow Bay.

What has happened since then? Initially there was an influx of ambitious farmers into the area. Some gave up after a few years, although the farmers who remain have prospered. Most of the young people who grew up in the community have left for higher education and then for employment elsewhere. The community has been noted for the large proportion of its youth who moved into Christian ministry positions. The school was eventually incorporated into the larger regional school division. This prompted the community to start its own church-owned school, which has already closed down too. The store and post office have also closed; the Washow Bay address is no more.

The Christian outreach into the surrounding areas was for many years pursued quite aggressively. Already in 1952, Ed Reimer, one of the early bulldozer operators, was assigned to conduct Vacation Bible School in the town of Riverton. This expanded into a VBS outreach to Hecla Island, Homer S.D., and Minerva S.D. Occasional Sunday evening services were held in the dilapidated old Unitarian Church in Riverton. In the early sixties, the Mennville church constructed its own chapel building in town. Growth was slow at first, but eventually the Riverton congregation built a larger, more functional church building, and the congregation is today a member congregation of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. Mennville, the mother church, is still there, but with a dwindling membership.

The 1926 Census of the Prairie Provinces

by Glenn H Penner

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The Canadian government conducted its first nation-wide census in 1871, just 4 years after confederation. The year coincides with the national census of the United Kingdom, as opposed to 1870, when the US census took place. Censuses were conducted again in 1881, 1891 and 1901. By the turn of the century the population of what are now the prairie provinces was rapidly increasing and the federal government decided to conduct a separate census of Manitoba and the new provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1906. This separate census was conducted again in 1916, 1926, 1936 and 1946. Beginning in 1951 (3 years after Newfoundland joined confederation) a national census was conducted every 5 years.

In Canada complete census results can be opened to the public 92 years after the census (in the US the duration is 72 years). Although the June 1926 census of the prairie provinces was technically open as of June 2018, the census data was not converted into digital form and indexed until early 2019. The 1926 census can now be searched online.[1] The census can be searched by first and last name and the search can be narrowed down to province and census district. When searching the census, it is important to note three things. First, the census takers did not always take names down correctly. Second the people who indexed the census have made mistakes (sometimes due to poor handwriting in the original). Third, this census shows the beginning of the anglicization of the names recorded in the census (for example, some Mennonite men named Johann in the 1921 census are John on the 1926 census). These three factors can cause problems when searching the database since the search engine does not have a soundex, or "sounds like" feature. Spellings must be exact. I found this out the hard way while searching for a Sawatsky, which could have one of a dozen different spellings. Fortunately, there is a wildcard capability, which allows one to search for Sawa* and get all surnames beginning with Sawa. Similarly, searching for Joh* will give you all Johns as well as Johans and Johanns.

This census is interesting from a Mennonite historical perspective in that it was the first census since the emigration of thousands of Mennonites to Mexico and the immigration of thousands of Mennonites from Russia. Happy Searching!

1. See: https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1926/Pages/default.aspx

The Making of *FLIGHT*

(Joe Braun's notes from a talk given to History Seekers in Altona)

by Harold Jantz, former editor of MB Herald and Christian Week

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Neoma and Harold Jantz

How this book came about:

* Was working on another project — partly family, partly village in Russia from which my parents came, always trying to place the story into a wider context — revolution, civil war, famine, disease, faith, emigration. I've been especially interested in the faith history. A great-grandfather, Jacob Jantz, was an early leader in the Mennonite Brethren movement in Russia.

* Got to late 1920s, realized my sense of what was happening wasn't strong—had already written half dozen or more chapters.

* Decided to start reading the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. This was a paper that everyone in the older generation of Mennonites from Russia knew, even if young Mennonites today don't. It had a long history — beginning in 1878 in Nebraska as the *Nebraska Ansiedler*. The key thing to know about it was that it was always the paper of the Mennonites from Russia. When a second large wave of Mennonites began arriving from there in 1923, the *Rundschau* was published from Scottdale, Penn.

A newcomer from Russia, Hermann Neufeld, started writing for it, was invited to move to Scottdale to help edit it and soon thereafter bought the paper and brought it to Winnipeg. Mennonites throughout Russia knew the paper and often wrote explicitly for it, even after the 1917 Revolution. During the 1920s, some 20,000 Mennonites came to Canada from the Soviet Union, the parents, grandparents or great-grandparents of many of us. All of these had family and friends who remained behind in Russia. There was a tremendous amount of correspondence back and forth. Another paper becoming known to many was *Der Bote*, published out of Rosthern, Sask. Since it only had its beginning in the 1920, after its editor came to Canada, it did not have the role that the *Rundschau* had.

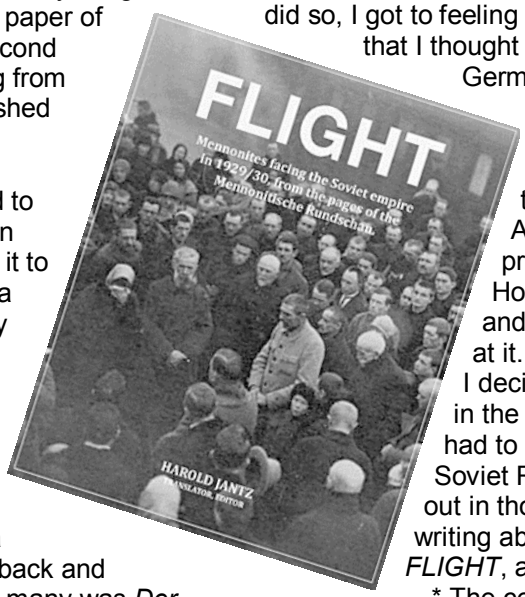
Much of the corresponjdence found its way into the Rundschau, and I suspect that there would have been very few papers anywhere that could have given you a better insight into what was happening on the ground in Soviet Russia than the *Rundschau*. This is important for us to understand.

* By the end of the 1920s, a crisis was beginning to develop in Soviet Russia. Josef Stalin was effectively taking control. He started out by creating the impression that he would take a softer approach to imposing the goals of the revolution, but when he had taken control, he actually took the harsher approach.

In the debate around what direction to take after Lenin's policy of easing up on the goals of the Revolution with what he called the New Economic Policy, Stalin introduced a Five Year Plan that carried with it very harsh realities:

- it began forcing people on the land into collectives and assumed that any who had been prosperous or even middle income farmers would be counter-revolutionaries and were therefore labeled “kulaks”.
- Many kulaks were sent into exile, imprisoned, or even executed. Campaigns were launched against people of faith.
- A five-day week was instituted, making gatherings for religious services very difficult.
- Large demands were made on the farm economy to deliver the produce of the land, and when farmers weren't able to deliver it, they had their properties inventoried and they would be auctioned off. Such grain was often sold abroad while people who had grown it were literally starving. Much of this was done in a totally arbitrary way.

* I had come to a point in my writing where I felt I needed to know more and so I began reading the *Rundschau*. As I did so, I got to feeling that so much of this was material that I thought a generation that can't read the German should have access to. So I began — initially at least — summarizing some pieces. It didn't take long, however, for me to feel that I should try to do more than this. At first I had the feeling I could probably do this in a year or so. However, I've actually spent time on and off for perhaps a half a dozen years at it.



I decided to take everything that appeared in the *Rundschau* in 1929 and 1930 that had to do with the experience of people in Soviet Russia as well as with those who got out in those years, or even if they were writing about getting out earlier. The result is *FLIGHT*, as I entitled the book.

* The centrepiece of the period covered by the Rundschau in these two years are the circumstances in the summer and fall of 1929 that led to as many as 13-18 thousand people gathering around Moscow, hoping to get out (some actually say it was 30 thousand). It generated wide interest and was reported in papers around the globe. As people became aware of the crisis developing in

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Russia, the *Rundschau* gave much more space to events there. The 1930 *Rundschaus* carried nearly two and a half times as much material about events and their aftermath there then the 1929 issues. Incidentally, the *Rundschau* during this time was a weekly 16-page tabloid. So it had lots of room for copy.

While some 6000 Germans got out of Russia in 1929 — Mennonites, Catholics and Lutherans — though most were Mennonites, many more did not. Those who did come out were helped in the short term by the intervention of Germany, which made large shelters in former military barracks available to them, and then helped them on their onward journey — to Canada, but also to Brazil and Paraguay. Initially all of the refugees would have wanted to come to Canada.

FLIGHT has many letters that come from people who've been sent into exile. One of the most notorious of these places had once been a monastery on the *Solovetski* Islands, on the White Sea, which empties into the Berents Sea and the Arctic Ocean. It was a kind of mother camp for what became the Soviet Gulag. But it was only one of over 450 such prison camps scattered over the entire Soviet Union, many of them with smaller camps within them.

One of the very interesting structures the Soviets created to fight against religious belief was called—and I'm not making this up — the League of the Militant Godless. The Rundschau carried quite a bit of copy about their actions and instructions. They were quite religious in their fervour.

It is clear, reading the *Rundschau*, that there were a number of church leaders that were greatly loved and respected by the Mennonite community in Russia, and had stayed there during the 1920s but in 1929 were ready to leave because of the pressures on the church and the barriers that had been created to any kind of public worship and teaching of children. Two of these were Jakob Rempel, an Aeltester of the Mennonite Church and Johann Toews, a preacher and teacher of the Mennonite Brethren. Names of both come up frequently in the *Rundschau* — Toews at least 28 times.

We can read an excerpt from a news story written by a reporter for a Hamburg paper who attended the Christmas celebration for the Moscow refugees in the refugee camp in Moelln, Germany. The celebration took place in 1929, but the item was carried in the last issue of 1930 and turned out to be the final item of the book — a wonderful ending in my estimation. The event clearly engaged the imagination of the unnamed writer.

During 1929 and 1930, there were several story lines that appear again and again in the *Rundschau*

- the impacts of Stalin's first Five Year Plan/ collectivization of Russia's farm economy, attack on moderate and prosperous farmers (kulaks), requisition of much of the produce of farms, move to a five day week, attacks on faith communities
- the bad harvests and requisitions--many appeals for help
- the effort to get out of Russia and the onset of an emigration panic when a small group won the permission to leave in 1929
- the debate in Canada around receiving more immigrants
- the stories of those who got out and those who were sent back home
- the many letters of those who were sent into exile
- the settlement of the refugees in Paraguay, Brazil and Canada
- the Mennonite World Relief conference of 1930 in Danzig in response to the crisis in Russia

When we read the accounts by or about the people who went through what was happening in the Soviet Union in 1929 and 1930, one soon gains a sense of the dark period that would be facing Mennonites and many other people during the 1930s under Stalin's dictatorship. It professed to be a “paradise” for the working man. In reality Soviet Russia became one giant prison, inflicting great hardships on the whole population and during the worst years of that decade, taking the lives of millions. For Mennonites it was tens of thousands whose lives were lost. And for Mennonites elsewhere, there was little they could do for them but pray and hope that some of the letters to and from them could travel safely across the border.

Coming Events

MENNONITES AND ANTHROPOLOGY: Ethnography, Religion and Global Entanglements. October 25-26, 2019. A Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies Conference, University of Winnipeg, Convocation Hall, 2nd Floor Wesley Hall.

Journey to a New Homeland: Stories of Migration Past and Present Mennonite Heritage Village, Thursday, June 13, 2019 7:00 pm Free Admission Everyone is Welcome.

Abandoned Manitoba: An Evening with Gordon Goldsborough Mennonite Heritage Village, Thursday, November 7, 2019. Free Admission. Donations accepted.

Note to non-members of MMHS

This is your last free issue of Heritage Posting. Please take out a membership. It's easy and cheap! Simply send the $5 annual membership fee to Bert Friesen, Treasurer, MMHS, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. E-transfers accepted at *bfrie64@gmail.com.* Donations to MMHS will also be gratefully accepted and receipted.

Willi Peters (1940-2016), Siberian Mennonite Pastor

Introduction

by Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein

The Chortitza and Molotschna Mennonite settlements in New Russia became the so-called ”mother colonies” of all the subsequent settlements in New Russia (later Ukraine).

Their total population by the end of WWI is said to have reached about 110,000. They spread out widely in central and southern Russia and began to look elsewhere in the search for more land.

They did not actually begin to settle in western Siberia until 1897. The first to do so, as far as we know, was the J.J. Hildebrand family which moved to Omsk in that year. They founded an agricultural machinery business there. Families seeking land for farming then followed and to make a long story short, began to establish settlements westward from Omsk along both sides, north and south, of the Trans-Siberian Railway, and to the southeast in another cluster of villages that were at first oriented toward the old city of Barnaul. Then they settled to the east and south shifting their attention more to the much closer and newer city of Slavgorod which was located on a southward-stretching spur of the Trans-Siberian Railway. A later expansion of these village settlements took some thousands of persons to an area on the north bank of the Amur River, around Blagoveschensk. A settlement at Pavlodar west of Slavgorod also sprang up.

Eventually all these areas came under Soviet control, but the villages of these communities remained relatively free of physical damage resulting from World War II. Hundreds of persons were however forcibly resettled to northern prison and work camps during the war, with many dying there. Others managed to return to warmer southern communities, some to be reunited with their families, while others were totally deprived of reunions..

In this process of resettling, many found themselves in Siberian and Central Asian new and former urban areas and were expected to form more permanent resettlement and community reorganization. One of the sites which acquired a large new congregation of Mennonites, with membership ultimately over 400, was the city of Novosibirsk. In the 1970s Bernhard Sawatzky was an early pastor of this congregation. It belonged to the so-called *kirchliche* (lit. church) branch of the larger Soviet Mennonite body in the USSR.

Minister Willi Peters (1940-2016) Novosibirsk, Siberia

by Dr. William Yoder, Gvardeysk/Moscow

Willi Peters was born in the Ukrainian Mennonite colony of Chortitza on 30 April 1940. Times were highly volatile so Willi had little chance of growing up in Ukraine. After the massive German attack of 22 June 1941, an edict of the Supreme Soviet issued on 28 August that year decreed that all ethnic Germans in western USSR would be deported eastward away from the approaching *Wehrmacht.*

L- R: Minister Willi Peters, Andrei Peters, both from Novosibirsk (1993), and Ben Falk, Ontario, MCC volunteer from Neudachino , Siberia. Photo credit: Lawrence Klippenstein

By 1942, the year after the German attack, Willi’s family found itself in Tayshet in Central Siberia. This city is an important junction of the Trans-Siberian Railway 245 miles east of Krasnoyarsk. Willi’s father, Jakob, had been forced into the *Trudarmee* (forced labour camp) and consequently spent years as a logger in the forests of Tayshet region. But the family was exceptionally fortunate in one respect: Jakob’s wife Maria, nee Toews, with their children, were allowed to live with him in Tayshet.

The family remained subject to the Soviet military regime (*(kommandatura)* until its dissolution in 1956. At that time the family was permitted to move southeast-ward to the industrial city of Angarsk, founded in 1948 near Irkutsk. It was there that young Willi received his education as an electrician. He remained an electrician for the rest of his life.

Willi’s future wife, Maria Gunther was also born in Chortitza in 1941. Her family was among the 313,000 Germans overtaken by the German army moving into the Soviet Union, before they could be evacuated eastward. Maria, along with her brothers and sisters then fled westward along with the *Wehrmacht* now retreating, in 1943-44. Maria’s father had disappeared during the course of WWII and was never found.

According to the agreements at Yalta signed early in 1945, the USSR was permitted after the war to repatriate former citizens of the USSR from refugee camps in Western Europe. The 200,000 ethnic Germans forced to

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return eastward included Maria and her siblings who had been waiting in a refugee camp in Yugoslavia. Maria's mother was then forced to eke out a subsistence living for herself and her children working as a maid for military officers in Berdsk, south of Novosibirsk.

By the late 1950s, the Mennonites of Central Siberia knew about the whereabouts of many members of their faith in the region. In the early 1960's Willi Peters began a search for a spouse, and ended up making repeated treks to Berdsk. Willi and Maria were married in October of 1967; the couple immediately moved back east to Angarsk. Their three children were born there: Anna in 1967, Andrei (Heinrich) in 1970 and Katarina in 1974.

For Mennonites, Angarsk had only house gatherings where they could worship, so the family chose to move to Berdsk in 1976. Almost immediately the Peters joined the large Mennonite congregation meeting in a renovated private house at Ulitsa Proyektnaya 13 on the western fringe of Novosibirsk. Here the minister at the time was Bernhard Sawatzky *(savadskii).* The congregation, registered since 1967, had nearly 400 members meeting in its chapel. The group was connected to 40 smaller gatherings in Tomsk, Berdsk, Barnaul, and other sites throughout the region.

Church services in Novosibirsk took place on Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays. Mennonite Brethren congregations were strong to the west of Omsk, but Novosibirsk was by far the largest gathering of *kirchliche* (lit. church) Mennonites in the area.

Willi first became involved in the congregation by singing bass in the Novosibirsk choir, with his son Andrei joining in 1983. After the choir director's emigration westward in 1988, Jakob Dirksen succeeded him as leading minister, in Novosibirsk. But the emigration to Germany had been in high gear since 1986, and Dirksen who was already perched on packed suitcases, accepted his new calling with reluctance. But after Dirksen's departure in early 1990, 50-year-old Willi Peters was ordained and commissioned as the new leading minister in May. Since Willi had only begun preaching in 1986, and had not previously served as a minister, his appointment was not entirely without dissent.

Why did Willi and Maria not join the trek westward? "We saw staying as God's calling," Andrei explained briefly. "My parents were convinced that we had been called to remain here and serve others who had not left. We were not called to be where life was most comfortable, but where God wishes to use us". Andrei believed that his father was called because of his wide acceptance as a convinced Christian. He thought it was easy for his father to get close to his people. He was a gifted counselor and knew how to converse with people. People felt the love of God in his presence, Andrei pointed out.

Retired seminary professor Walter Sawatsky has pointed out that 90% of Russia's Mennonites, roughly 100,000 persons, moved to Germany during the last great exodus. For the Russian Mennonite movement that was a nearly fatal blow for an ongoing presence. Sawatsky added at the same time that immigrants to Germany formed numerous relief/mission agencies and church associations for Russia, which could become the primary Mennonite support lasting until present times.

Sawatsky noted further that Mennonite church bodies in Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and MCC had long tried to walk along with persons who could not leave Russia. The Peters family had served also as a lightning rod, drawing Mennonites who were seeking contact with brothers and sisters in Siberia.

Willi stopped working when his firm collapsed in 1990. After 1990 his family received support from family and church members who had settled in Bielefeld, Germany. He visited Germany several times after 1990. In January 1997, Willi made a most memorable trip when he and Nikolas Dueckman from the Evangelical /Mennonite Brethren congregation in Marianovka near Omsk, attended the Mennonite World Conference sessions in Calcutta, India.

The end began to arrive for Willi when he suffered his first stroke. Son Andrei had been assisting him pastorally since 1997 and was consequently ordained as a second minister on 29 September 2000. Two additional strokes and a heart attack followed. Willi became less and less able to fulfill his ministerial duties. He continued to meet people in a friendly manner as he was able, but passed away quite unexpectedly on 20 April 2016. After his funeral in Novosibirsk two days later, he was buried in Berdsk where his parents were also interred.

When the Novosibirsk house caretaker moved to Germany in 2005, Willi, Maria and Andrei had moved into the former church quarters. As of 2018 only daughter Katarina who is single, remains in the family apartment in Berdsk. Anna and her two children have also moved from Berdsk to the Novosibirsk church home.

Through deaths and emigration, *kirchliche* Mennonite ministries have shrunk considerably in Siberia since 1990. Andrei continues to serve as leading pastor in the local congregation at Novosibirsk, attempting also at the same time to maintain contact with other smaller groups in Artyemsk, Barnaul, Grishevka and Orsnyak.

The even smaller group in Neudachino lost its leading pastor, Gerhard Neufeld, when that entire family of two dozen or more persons moved to Germany also. This group remains totally independent, having virtually no official contact with the Novosibirsk congregation, and it does not relate significantly with the local Evangelical/ Mennonite Brethren congregation. The sermons of the remaining *kirchliche* small group are read from a book by a member of the congregation.

That the entire Peters family should remain in Russia to carry on its life together, and maintain their mission as was possible, is a very rare phenomenon. Willi's sister (a second Maria Peters) and Maria's sister, Anna Gunther, now reside in Bielefeld. A *kirchliche* Mennonite mission outreach ministry, directed from Bielefeld, remains active in the Orenburg area of the Urals region. Willi Peters' devotion to his church, his Christian integrity, and sense of duty in good times and bad, and periods of illness and adversity, and his refusal to abandon a Mennonite remnant of believers, remain the lasting testimony of his life.

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VIETNAM AND LAOS:

Legacies of the American War and Peacebuilding for the Future

MCC LEARNING TOUR – *APRIL 28 – MAY 13, 2019*
by Leroy Penner

After months of anticipation and preparatory research, the day of our departure to Vietnam/Laos finally arrived. Once we arrived at the Hanoi airport, we were warmly welcomed by MCC Connecting Peoples Coordinators for Vietnam, Beth & Josh Kvernen. The first night spent at the air-conditioned and beautiful Sammy Luxury Hotel in Hanoi was much welcomed.

Jetlag was intense due to the 12-hour time difference, but it did not stifle our excitement the next morning. The sensing walk, in the rain, to the MCC Vietnam Office, kept us alert and energized. It was during this first morning that our taste buds were introduced to a wide variety of delicious Vietnamese fruit: namely, jackfruit, durian, avocado, guava, papaya star fruit, mango, dragon fruit, and the very tasty banana, to name a few. For us coffee drinkers, nothing is as delicious as their coconut coffee and egg coffee.

Vietnam has a rich cultural identity. This was very evident when we visited the Imperial Citadel of Thang Long and the Museum of Ethnology.

A visit to the Hoa Lo Prison ('Hanoi Hilton'), made us keenly aware of United States' involvement in the American War. It is here that Senator John McCain was kept after being shot down in his Skyhawk Dive Bomber.

Throughout the American War, MCC provided relief to people displaced by the conflict and spoke out against the suffering of innocent people.

Today MCC continues to work with vulnerable populations in Vietnam to repair the damage inflicted upon Vietnamese civilians as a result of war, especially those affected by exposure to Agent Orange. MCC partners with local agencies to provide medical services and livelihood assistance to victims of the dioxin. We witnessed this firsthand.

While staying in beautiful Quang Ngai City, we had the opportunity to go swimming in the very warm Eastern Sea.

A somber experience was visiting the My Lai Memorial. It was here that a company of American soldiers brutally killed most of the people in the village of My Lai on March 16, 1968.

Xieng Khouang, Laos, very typical of the beauty in Vietnam/Laos **— Photo by Leroy Penner**

There was constant evidence of the beauty of Vietnam. Hoi An is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a South-East Asian trading port dating from the 15th to the 19th century.

The Laos trip was as interesting and informative as the one to Vietnam. During the American War (1964–1973), more than two million tons of explosive ordinance were dropped on Laos, making it, per capita, the most heavily bombed country in the world.

We had the opportunity to visit the COPE centre in Vientiane. COPE's mission is to help people with mobility-related disabilities move on by supporting access to physical rehabilitation services in Laos. We visited the Mines Advisory Group (MAG). MAG has been clearing unexploded American bombs since 1994. MCC Laos supports all of these projects, along with projects promoting conflict resolution in the villages and peace among its young people.

We found the people in Laos to be charming, polite, and hospitable. Our flight to Xieng Khouang involved a visit to the Tham Piu Cave. In this cave, an American missile killed all 374 residents of a village who took shelter here on November 24, 1968.

A delightful way to end our trip in Laos was a visit to the famous Plain of Jars and the interesting Mulberries Organic Silk Farm.

Much thanks goes to the organizers of our trip, Joanna Hiebert Bergen (MCC Manitoba), and Wendy Kroeker (CMU).

(Continued from page 11)

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Correction

The date for the print copy of HP #92 should have read March 2019. (Not November 2019)

Russländer Tribute Evening at MHV, May 25th

by Glen Klassen

Es schaut bei Nacht und Tage dein holdes Bild mich an
und legt mir vor die Frage, ob ich dich lassen kann.

The painted ceiling boards of the old Lichtenauer Church at MHV reverberated with the voices of a full house of congregants as the old hymns rang out. There was a deep feeling of unity and commitment:

Mein Gott, ich bin entschieden. Auf ewig bin ich dein.
Ich kann ja ohne Frieden und ohne dich nicht sein.

The hearty singing was followed by an unprecedented ceremony of reconciliation. Believe it or not, it was between the *Kanadier* and the *Russländer* communities! I don't think anything like this has happened before. After 95 years of coexistence we finally acknowledge that there is something to confess and something to make right.

On behalf of the *Kanadier*, Gary Dyck, Executive Director of MHV, apologized for our attitudes of resentment toward the newcomers, who didn't seem to fully appreciate the *Kanadier's* sacrifice and accomplishment in taming the prairies. We misunderstood their respect for education and culture as superciliousness. Sincere regret was expressed.

Mel Letkeman, pastor of Grace Mennonite Church in Steinbach, spoke on behalf of the *Russländer*. They were too quick to accept the benefits of 50 years of back-breaking work by the *Kanadier*, and although grateful for *Kanadier* help at a traumatic time, tended to look down on them both culturally and spiritually.

The congregation sat in shocked silence, but when Mel and Gary shook hands and embraced, there was a great feeling of relief and blessing. With that, Pastor Rick Neufeld led us into a traditional communion service with more singing, led by the Russländer Singers:

So nimm denn meine Hände
Und führe mich
Bis an mein selig Ende
Und ewiglich.
Ich mag allein nicht gehen,
Nicht einen Schritt;
Wo du wirst gehn und stehen,
Da nimm mich mit.

After that we were all invited to the opening ceremony of the Russländer exhibit in the Gerhard Ens Gallery. Wow! I didn't think they could top last season's antique clock exhibit, but by Menno, I think they did it.

"I've never trashed a room before!" (senior curator Andrea Dyck)

I couldn't find the famous trashed room at first but then realized that it was tucked in behind the hugely enlarged photo of Mennonites just after having crossed into freedom at the Red Gate in Riga. What a powerful image! The violated room expressed horror in a perfectly ordinary setting. Could this really happen to peaceful and self-satisfied people? Apparently, and much worse. I was glad that there was no blood on the floor. Although that would have been perfectly realistic, it would be more than we were prepared for.

Curator Andrea Dyck stands in front of the "trashed room" which captures the trauma of home invasions after the Russian Revolution, endured by the *Russländer*. — Photos by Glen Klassen

The evening program included more singing by the Singers (*Muss I' denn, Am Brunnen vor dem Tore,* etc.) a Liar's Club game, and bacon-wrapped asparagus. With regard to the Liar's Club game, which I won, I must reassure you that I did not get the answers before-hand. It was largely luck. Doris Penner, Sid Reimer and Ernie Braun did an excellent job of imaginative lying.

Have you ever attended a banquet, complete with pork tenderloin and wine, to fix a roof? This is also unprecedented. Andrea Dyck told us how difficult it is to run a museum in the rain. Where will it leak next? Certainly not on top of Klaas Reimer's bible! Or any on the other thousands of priceless artifacts. We were also reminded that the flat roof(s) of the artefacts building are 30 years old and that the original construction was part of a very extensive fund-raising campaign at the time.

MHV pens were clicked and cheques were written as we went once more to see the Exhibit, which we had not fully appreciated because of the wall-to-wall crowd.

Mel Letkeman, representing the *Russländer* and Gary Dyck, representing the *Kanadier*, enact an historic reconciliation between the two groups of Mennonites.

Interview with Author Betty Barkman

Editor's note: Rather than publishing a book review I thought we should do an author review for a change. Betty Barkman, who lives in Pansy, Manitoba, has written seven books and is reportedly working on more. Here is the record of a visit that my wife, Betty Klassen, and myself had with her recently.

Glen K: So what got you going? How did you get into this writing career?

Betty B: It's been a lifelong passion of mine except that I didn't own it or didn't know it as a kid, but I can remember dreaming up books as a child upstairs in the loft was where I slept. I couldn't sleep at night. I would write them in my mind but I never told anybody.

Betty Barkman

Glen K: How did you actually get started and when?

Betty B: When I tried to go to high school I wasn't allowed to do so by my very strict father. He didn't believe in education. But anyway, finally I got my father persuaded to let me try. When I took English in Grade 10 I had a teacher who would leave comments at the bottom of my returned assignments such as "You have a gift make sure you use it. I can't wait to see your stories".

Glen K: Who was the teacher?

Betty B: I have no idea. I never got to meet her. God was using her to and I kept that hidden away in my mind. Then when I when I wanted to go to school further, my daddy didn't allow it because I also wanted to have a boyfriend. He said that you can't have both. If you have a boyfriend you have to stop going to school. So then okay I stopped going to school because I wanted my boyfriend. I've always regretted that because I would have had the gift of getting an education if I would have had the opportunity or if I would have been smart enough to pick that.

Betty K: Where was your mother?

Betty B: She was a good mother, but she didn't offer opinions, she just left it to Dad.

Glen K: Did you ever consider writing your own story?

Betty B: That's the hardest one to do.

Glen K: Tell us about your first book. How did that go?

Betty B: It was a hard story to write because we knew the people. They had five little ones and four of them died of a rare heart disease. Well, that was my first book: *Four Buds in His Bouquet*.

Glen K: How did it go? I assume it was self-published. Did you sell a lot of them?

Betty B: A couple of thousand. They had to be reprinted.

Glen K: Did you get some feedback?

Betty B: Yes a lot of feedback.

Glen K: So what did that confirm your calling as a writer?

Betty B: Yes, but it was always just like a sideline. I would have wanted to get into them into the market but was deterred by my lack of education and my lack of confidence. I wrote a novel and I tried hard to get it published commercially but it just maybe wasn't meant to be I guess.

Betty K: Well, I think you like writing about real people.

Betty B: Yeah, that's it. My favorite thing has been to write about real people real places.

Glen K: So then what happened after that?

Betty B: There were some people who asked me to consider writing their story. When somebody asked me I was always happy to do the work. Some of these specifically asked because they saw my previous work

Glen K: How does your faith relate to this? Are your books meant to build people's faith?

Betty B: I can't write any other way; to me faith is very important. For me it is a base-building thing. My books are not religious books *per se*, but the faith comes through and I'm not ashamed of that.

Glen K: Just for my own interest, who designs and prints your books for you?

Betty B: I hire a publisher they do the work. They take care of all publishing details such as the cover design. I've tried different companies, but it doesn't seem to make

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Betty Klassen and Betty Barkman in Barkman's back yard at Pansy, overlooking Joubert Creek.

— Photos by Glen Klassen

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much difference one way or another. The Lord kept showing me that I'm supposed to be content with a small thing.

Glen K: It's probably not great money-making work.

Betty B: No, no. No, I always dreamt I that I would be able to make some money on it, but it's not much. Of course, when someone asks specifically for a certain book they also pay for it. It's a couple of thousand dollars.

Glen K: So what kind of advice would you give to somebody who has a yen to write?

Betty B: I would encourage them to start the sooner the better.

Glen K: But is you started at a a somewhat older age. Maybe there's an advantage to that

Betty B: age middle-aged? And

Glen K: actually [00:16:55] maybe there's an advantage to that.

Betty B: Well, it gives you perspective.

Glen K: And you're probably more realistic about what you can achieve.

Betty B: Who wants to buy a lot of books these days? The more we get into modern technology, the fewer the books.

Glen K: But I think that the printed book will never disappear.

Betty B: No, I don't think it will disappear.

Glen K: The big advantage I see in the printed book is that you have it lying on your coffee table, right? And then somebody comes in and reads some of it. If it was just on your computer, you're the only person who would ever read that. Now what do you want to write about?

Betty B: I have just been writing someone's story. I hope to encourage someone with the story because very often we need encouragement from one another.

Glen K: Because I used to be a microbiologist I was interested in your narration of the typhoid epidemic in Prairie Rose in your book, *Laina*.

Betty K: Which was historical.

Betty B: That's my husband's family story. He was the pastor of our church and for the community for about 50 years. The story was about his mother, a very dear mother-in-law. I loved telling her story.

Betty Barkman' s Books:

Four Buds in His Bouquet: Ed and Tina Reimer's Incredible Story, 1980

Anna: A Life of Stubbornness Made into Joyous Service. Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1985.

Tangled Threads: An Inspirational Novel. 1st ed. Lima, Ohio: Fairway Press, 1992.

Laina, 2006.

Annie: Through It All. Reimer Family, 2008.

The Dash between the Dates on Their Tombstone, 2012.

Willie and Elizabeth: Their Story, 2018.

Soviet "Utopia"

by Harold J. Dyck

Speaking to a crowded house at the University of Winnipeg May 30, Dr. Colin Neufeldt, Professor of History at Concordia University of Edmonton, sketched a picture of widespread Mennonite participation in Soviet collectivization efforts in the years 1920 to 1924.

Against a backdrop of ongoing warfare with World War I and the Red/White Civil War of the early 1920s, the catastrophic loss of industry, and the demand that peasants surrender their produce for the support of the armies, Mennonites, too, were carried in the tide of change. While some were more sympathetic to the Whites, others were drafted into the Red Army and their families received support and payments from the Reds. Cooperation with the Reds increased as it became apparent they would win. This was especially the case with Mennonites who were landless or poor. Indeed, the Soviets had early regarded the Mennonites as potential allies, Neufeldt said, perhaps because they already had cooperative tendencies and may have seemed Tolstoyish to them.

Few played as prominent a role as Peter J. Berg of Chortitza, but documents show Mennonite participation in the Red Army, Soviet Communist party cells, government bodies and especially, at the local level, in the Committee of Poor Peasants. These committees, or *Komnesams* were formed to collect grains for the state, to confiscate land holdings and combat anti-communism. They were allowed to keep 25% of what was confiscated and collected. Officers of these committees were elected, and in many cases, they show mainly or only Mennonite names.

Factors in Mennonite participation, besides war-weariness were, of course, benefits for the landless, realism about the realities of the Red Army's triumph, the need to create normalcy, a desire to take as much control of their villages as the situation allowed and fear of the frequently ruthless *Cheka.*

The *Komnezam* also participated in organizing collective farms. Although an order went out in 1921 to collectivize farms, the actual arrangements were voluntary at this stage, and could take the form of a pooling primarily of land (a *TOZ*) by as few as 5 households or more than 20. Instances increased rapidly in the Spring of 1922, when famine became a factor. Neufeldt's extensive list of such arrangements in Chortitza showed the largest such *TOZ* at 44 households in Blumengart. All 16 villages in Chortitza were represented and many consisted of Mennonite households only. A second, somewhat tighter, arrangement was the *artel*, in which more equipment and stock as well as land were shared. Fewer examples of these were given. A third model, the full commune, did not really have Mennonite participation. Perhaps surprisingly, almost all of these early experiments lasted only a few years. With Lenin's death in 1924, the country was soon consumed with the struggle for leadership.

Asked whether the land arrangements should be called co -operatives rather than collectives, Neufeldt maintained that the term for the later state collective (*kolkhoz)* was already part of the order that went out in 1921 to unite agricultural holdings. He did not wish to address issues such as participants' status with the church of the time, as this had not been part of his research.

The lecture was the fourth in a series of Spring Lectures of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

Book Notes

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Ed Loewen, *They Called Me Eddie* (Winnipeg: privately published, 2018), pb., 187 pp, $24.95, An autobiography very ably published, well- illustrated, some black and white, some in colour, truly a family project done together. The author is resident in Winnipeg, originally from the Steinbach area. Can be purchased from the author at 214 - 490 Lindenwood Dr. E, Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0Y5 and at MHV.

On hand now is the latest issue of the Mennonite World Conference publication, *Courier/ Correo/ Courrier,* edited by Karla Braun, Winnipeg, MB, and dated April, 2019. A very fine collection of stories, meditations, statistics, etc from various national congregations and conferences. Strong emphasis on introducing members doing important church work in many different places of the world. Includes a significant map of where Anabaptist groups, large and small, are located today, along with membership numbers for regional areas in all continents. Another one of the local contributors to this issue is Elsie Rempel, of Winnipeg, MB. Membership totals for 2018 are listed as follows: Africa, 776,562; North America, 649,903; Asia and Pacific, 438,671; America Latina y el Caribe, 202,603; Europe, 63, 360. Total 2,131,099.

The 500th anniversary of the founding of the Anabaptist fellowship will be commemorated world-wide in 2025. For further information contact: MWC, 50 Kent Ave., Suite 206, Kitchener, ON, N2G 3R1, Canada, or email *info@mwc-cmm.org.*

Dr. Janis Thiessen, *Necessary Idealism: A History of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2018) pb., 247 pp, $24.99. A well- researched academically-oriented history of an important Mennonite educational institution located in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The author has strong credentials in research, publishing and teaching, presently as associate professor of history at the University of Winnipeg. The book is available at *Commonword*, a bookstore at the Canadian Mennonite University, c/o *arlynfriesenepp@gmail.com.*

A somewhat belated notice hardly makes up for not noting the earlier very well- assembled work called *Celebrating 75 Years of Growth 1941 – 2016,* an upbeat Steinbach Credit Union telling, superbly illustrated with detailed information, the story, (in 2016) the "eighth largest credit union in Canada" with assets now totaling well over $ 6,000,000,000.00. It is a hardcover (also soft cover) edition of 96 fact-filled pages researched, written, designed and edited by Joyce Reimer, an SCU employee for 43 years. Friesens of Altona did a superb job of printing the volume, and many dozens of persons of the community, and some outside of it, are given tributes in this volume. For further information and ordering contact the Steinbach Credit Union at www.scu.mb.ca or 1-800-728-6440.

Widely distributed regularly is an MCC Canada publication titled *A Common Place* which has recently come off the press in a new issue, dated Spring/Summer, 2019. It is a soft cover 20- page newsletter which comes out of 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba at R3T 5K9.. Its purpose is to view various development and other helping projects of MCC Canada in different parts of the world. The editor-in-chief is Cheryl Zehr Walker, with managing editor Marla Pierson Lester assisting. Rick Cober Bauman is executive director of MCC Canada. Many MCC volunteers are featured in the stories of these projects. Gift donation forms are always enclosed. Subscriptions are available upon request free of charge.

Syd Reimer has published *Coming Back Stronger: Life Stories* (2018) as a 161-page paperback volume. The author is formerly of Rosenort near Morris, and now of Winnipeg. A number of family members have contributed sections of the book. It is illustrated in black and white and well-edited for easy reading. You can reach the author at 204-254-6015.

Interpretative shelter

The Chortitz Heritage Church Committee (East Reserve) has erected a new interpretative shelter on the grounds of the old Chortitz church in Randolph. The building, constructed by committee member Jacob Harder of Blumenort, will contain brochures, a guest book and poster style images and text giving background about the Municipal Heritage Site. A bench will be installed to encourage quiet enjoyment of the site.

— Photo and text by Ernest Braun