

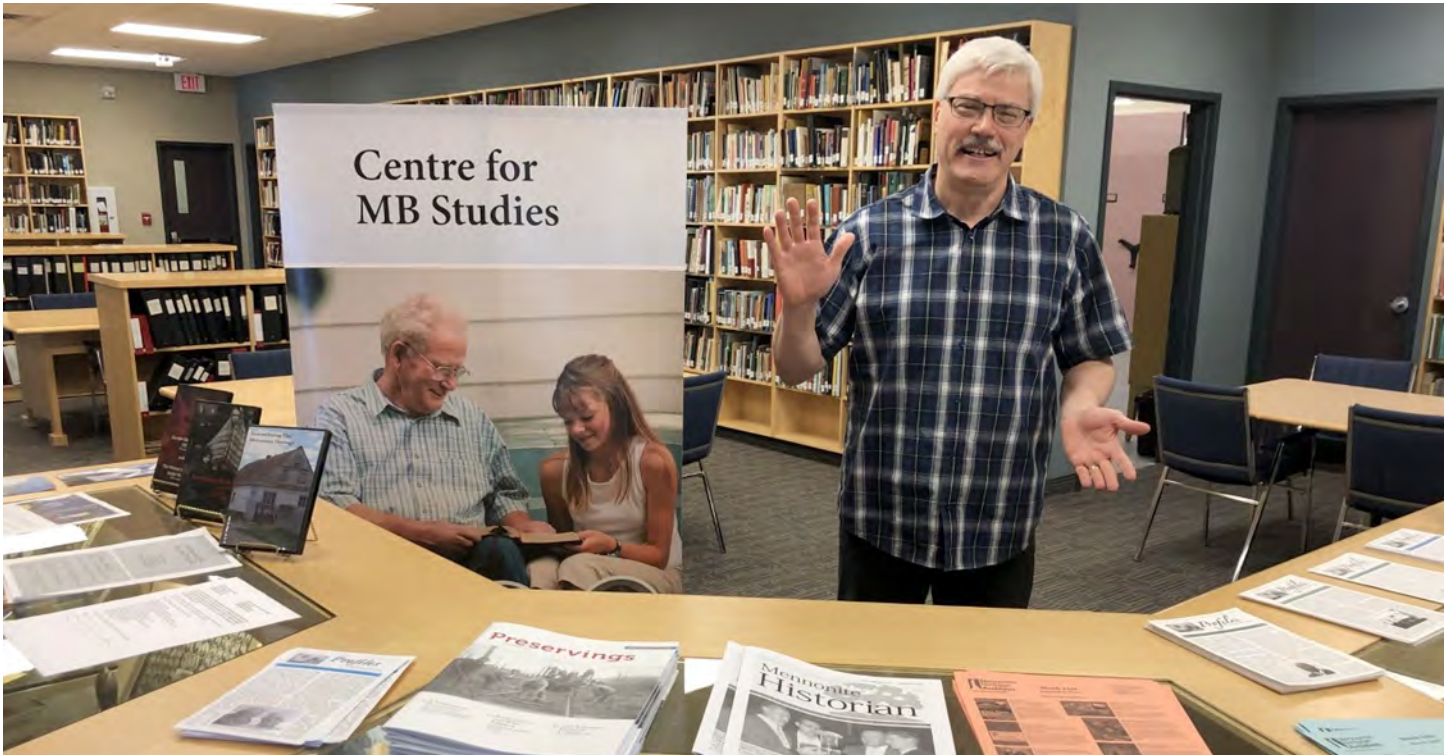
HERITAGE POSTING

MANITOBA
MENNONITE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 96

June 2020



Greetings from the Centre for MB Studies and from Jon Isaak!

I've kept busy cataloguing new acquisitions, writing file descriptions, scanning photos, editing encyclopedia articles, and responding to genealogical and historical queries from users. My COVID-19 adaptation in March and April has been to work mostly from home, but still go to the archives each week for a day or so. I work alone at the archives, so physical distancing isn't difficult; but, yes, the Centre for MB Studies is closed to the public, until further

notice. However, since many are spending more time online these COVID days, I want to highlight one of the many Mennonite online resources available for historical research, the *Mennonite Historian*, a quarterly publication I co-edit. In the March 2020 issue of *Mennonite Historian*, Canadian Mennonite University professor David Balzer presents his study of the beginnings of Mennonite radio broadcasting — its character, tone, and rhetoric — featuring the radio ministry of John M. Schmidt and Frank H. Epp.

The Chair in Mennonite Studies Has a New Occupant

by Royden Loewen

The Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg is pleased to announce the appointment of Dr. Ben Nobbs-Thiessen as the new Chair in Mennonite Studies, effective July 1, 2020. Ben, who was born and raised in Port Coquitlam, BC, holds a BA and MA in history from the University of British Columbia, a PhD in history from Emory University, and has held post-doctoral fellowships at the Arizona State University and Washington State University. His MA thesis focused on MCC's work in Paraguay in the 1950s, his PhD on Mennonite settlers in eastern Bolivia, and his post-

doctoral work on Mennonite migrants from Mexico in Texas and Ontario. Ben's new book, *Landscape of Migration: Mobility and Environmental Change on Bolivia's Tropical Frontier since 1952*, published by University North Carolina Press, is scheduled for release this April. Ben will teach 'Latin America and the Mennonites' this fall and 'Mennonite Studies II' in the winter term. Ben is married to Karen Nobbs-Thiessen and father to Avery, 4, and Dylan, 2. Ben replaces Royden Loewen who retires on June 30, 2020.

Issued by Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg



Dr. Ben Nobbs-Thiessen



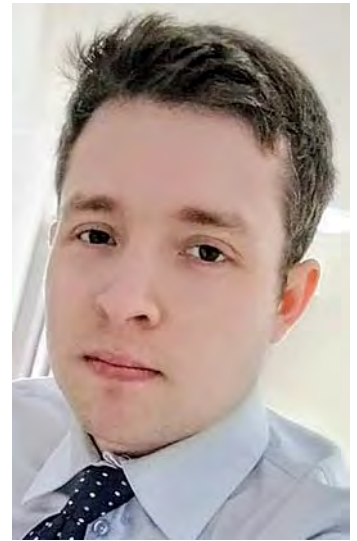
Conrad Stoesz



Andrea Dyck



Hans Werner



Sean Goerzen

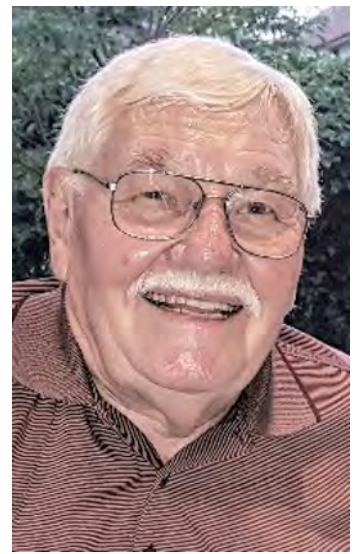
The MMHS 'AGM' for 2019-20

by Eleanor Chornoboy

This has been a year with a difference. Our AGM and Council meeting was scheduled to be held in Altona on March 14, but due to the Covid-19 threat, the meeting was postponed and ultimately cancelled. However, we still needed to have an election so the new board could move forward with business. We circulated the slate of officers to the membership and invited additional nominations. No additional nominations were received. The new board now consists of Conrad Stoesz, Chair, Andrea Dyck, Vice-Chair, Hans Werner, Secretary, Sean Goerzen, Treasurer, Peter Priess, Jake Peters, and Andrew Klassen Brown. Bert Friesen, a long time board member and I stepped down. There was a joint meeting with the old and new board via Zoom, to make the transfer from the old board to the new board, and subsequent to that meeting, the new board met.



Peter Priess



Jake Peters

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

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Andrew Klassen Brown

Highlights of the 2019 AGM Reports

You can read all the reports at <http://www.mmhs.org/sites/default/files/2019%20Reports.pdf>.

Here are some highlights:

MMHS Board - The anniversaries of the *Russländer* influx and the migration to Mexico are coming up. Recommended that the Plett Family History Essay Contest be expanded to include local history projects. Membership is up (with 102 paid-up members and 176 copies of Heritage Posting going out to individuals and institutions in either electronic form or in print. Ed).

EastMenn - Work on the Shantz Immigration Sheds cairn near Niverville is nearing completion. Dedication will occur as soon as the current restrictions are relaxed. Maria Vogt (1881-1961) was nominated for the *150 Women Trailblazer Award*.

WestMenn - A history of Altbergthal is in the works as the Bergthal School Committee is being reimagined. A plaque is also planned for the school building. Susie Fisher is involved in the publication of a coffee-table book of historic photographs.

Heritage Posting - Three issues with a total of 44 pages published in 2019. More feedback would be welcome.

Genealogy Committee - Part II of the the English translation B.H. Unruh's massive "*Ostwanderung*" book was published and is now sold out.

CMBS - 32,450 images from the archives have been uploaded to MAID. Also 80 books have been digitized and uploaded to <https://archive.org/details/@jonisaak>.

Peace Exhibit (MHV) - Plans are being made for landscaping around the Dirk Willems sculpture. More fund-raising will be required to complete the pavilion.

MHV - The Museum looks back at an eventful year with some staff turnover, including a new Executive Director (Gary Dyck). A highlight was the award-winning *Russländer* exhibit, with great attendance. (The Association of Manitoba Museums Award of Excellence, 2019). A program success was the collaboration with a number of school divisions.

Mennonite Heritage Archives: A new sign on the building will read "Mennonite Archives and Gallery". Access and communication are the main concerns addressed this year. A new website has been launched: www.mharchives.ca. Visits are up at the centre and many public events have attracted large audiences. Interested stakeholders have gathered to consider the future of the Archives.

Treasurer's Report - Donations were up from \$790 in 2018 to \$1816 in 2019. Membership dues were down from \$450 in 1918 to \$230 in 1919. EastMenn has a reserve of

more than \$16,000 and has been depleting it slowly, accounting for some deficits. MMHS has total assets of more than \$35,000. The 2020 budget calls for income of \$5,239 and expenditures of \$10,401, with a deficit of \$5,162. More donations are needed and the membership fee should probably be reviewed.

(Note about the Volendam Project: If you have looked at the Treasurer's report you will see a reference to the Volendam Project. MMHS established a media committee that was set up to help people making films by offering tax receipts for donations. If a film fits the MMHS mandate it could become a MMHS project and if people donate to the project they can get a tax receipt. *Volendam* is produced by Refuge 31 Films about the rescue of Mennonites in Europe and their transport to Paraguay after WWII. The film was premiered at the Winnipeg Reel to Real Film Festival in February, 2020. But since COVID it has not been shown anywhere else. By the Editor with information from Conrad Stoesz).

Pandemic Thoughts

by Glen Klassen

For the past two months we have experienced a new life-style. I've even lost a few pounds.

We have lived with fewer distractions as we have obediently distanced ourselves from others. This way of life was probably not too painful for the introverts among us other than it put new pressure on our carpal tunnels and our bleary after-midnight screen-scanning eyes. For the extroverts it must have been excruciating.

Our ancestors lived with far fewer distractions than we normally have now-a-days. Was our recent experience a little bit like theirs? Their main relief from work was to visit relatives and friends. Just go without phoning. Drop in for *Faspa*. Go to *Yantsied* and stay for night. The more the merrier. Always enough buns and *Of* -- fresh buns, not resurrected from the freezer. No, they did not social-distance, even during *their* pandemic.

But their life-style certainly was less hectic than ours. No hockey tournaments, youth retreats, ballet lessons, Canadian Tire, the cottage, the car wash, the pedicure. Time to sit and think, read the *Rundschau* from front to back, *knack* some *zote*. In a way the Pandemic feels like freedom. Free to procrastinate, to think long-term. Some say that creativity is a direct result of laziness. My great-great grandfather was dubbed "Fuella Reima" because he had time to fool around with exotic ideas. I guess he had a lot of spare time.

So as the pace quickens and the price of oil rises and the air becomes a bit thicker maybe we should ask ourselves how much of our old life-style we really want back. Is it time to 'down-size' and smell the holly-hocks? Is it time to pay much more attention to the people we love and forget about some of the other trappings?

Duo to update *Mennonites in Canada* form 1970-2020

Canadian Mennonite University Announcement

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is utilizing the resources of Mennonite universities in Canada to research and write an updated history book on the history of Mennonites in Canada from 1970-2020. They have invited Conrad Grebel University College Archivist-Librarian Laureen Harder-Gissing to co-author this book with Brian Froese, Associate Professor of History at CMU..

"Some of us may find it hard to believe that the 1970s are now considered 'history,' while others will regard that decade as the ancient past," reflected Harder-Gissing. "Many remarkable changes have occurred among Canadian Mennonite communities in the past 50 years. I look forward to hearing and telling these stories."

"How should Mennonites negotiate change in everything from theology to technology to culture? How have concepts and concerns regarding 'worldliness' changed? Or reading the Bible? Or the meaning of Mennonite?", asks Froese. "It will be exciting to sift through scores of accounts, reflections, and influences that have impacted Mennonite beliefs and practices over the decades."

Since the construction of the Mennonite Heritage Centre over 40 years ago on what is now the CMU campus, Mennonite history has been a treasured complement to academic programming and a resource to the university's constituents.

Home to the Mennonite Archives of Ontario, Conrad Grebel also has a long tradition of partnering with the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada on researching and writing Canadian Mennonite history. The first two volumes of MHSC's "Mennonites in Canada" series (1786-1940) were authored by Frank H. Epp, who was researching the third volume at the time of his death. (The third volume, covering the period 1939-1970, was written by T. D. Regehr.)

Harder-Gissing and Froese will collaborate on the project over the next few years.



Mennonite Archival Database gets 5 new Partners.

The online Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) <https://archives.mhsc.ca> is adding five new institutional partners to the existing nine. The newly expanded database features thousands of historic photos and a quickly expanding number of entries describing one-of-a-kind letters, diaries, meeting minutes, travel documents, biographies, audio and video recordings, and more — all accessible to the public.

The new members are Mennonite Central Committee [Canada (Winnipeg, MB) and USA (Akron, PA)], Mennonite Church USA Archives (Elkhart, IN), Bethel College Mennonite Library and Archives (North Newton, KS), Pacific Northwest Mennonite Historical Society (Hubbard, OR), and Goshen College Archives (Goshen, IN). The four American archival collections were featured in the "Mennonite Archival Commons" online project but are migrating their data to MAID.

The online archive was founded by Canadian partners in 2015 as a photographic database to help archival institutions manage their collections and provide public access to historic material. "When MAID was launched, we dreamed about its potential to include more Mennonite partners. We are thrilled that other archives have also seen this and look forward to collaborating with them to provide an enhanced online service to anyone wanting to explore Mennonite history," says MAID site administrator Laureen Harder-Gissing of the Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

With the power of a central database that can link records in multiple repositories together, researchers will benefit from new leads and resources. In a world of shrinking institutional budgets, a cooperative approach that pools financial and human resources is vital. The database is not only for researchers but as John Thiesen of Bethel College hopes "it might contribute to a closer interaction among the North American Mennonite archives and historical libraries." Kauffman is appreciative of the development of MAID. "I hope that we can build on the amazing work that MAID has already accomplished and eventually share more content from our collections online, including audio records, video, and documents." Visitors to the site can expect to see MAID's content expand over the next few months.



QR Codes - Shortcuts to menu items within web pages.

If you open your QR Code Reader app on your smart phone and point the camera at the bit of gobbledegook above, you should instantly get the URL of the page in the MMHS web site that lists back issues of Heritage Posting. You have to tap the URL that comes up and that should get you straight to the HP page. There are many free QR Code readers. I like ML SCAN although the ads are a bit of a pain.

What's the main useful application for QR Codes? We are planning to use them to design self-guiding tours of the East Reserve. Each site (Landing Site, Shantz Cairn, Chortitz Church, etc.) will have its own description on the MMHS web site and will be instantly accessible on the tourist's cell phone. Also, the Codes might be useful in a museum where much more optional reading material can be offered for each exhibit.

Try it!

Winkler Heritage Society Celebrates 20 Years

1999 - 2019

by Dora Hildebrand, Winkler Heritage Museum curator

Then . . .

It was in 1999 that Margaret Penner paid a visit to Grace Schellenberg to discuss the need to preserve the unique history of Winkler. It was met with great approval and interest and the two ladies extended invitations to the first meeting of what was to be "The Winkler Heritage Society" (WHS). Attending the first meeting on April 20, 1999 in Julianna's Restaurant in the Kroeker Farm building in Winkler were: Margaret Penner, Grace Schellenberg, John J. Elias, Ben Rempel, Naomi Bergen, Ellie Reimer, David Wall, Gloria Dyck, Peter & Margret Krahn.

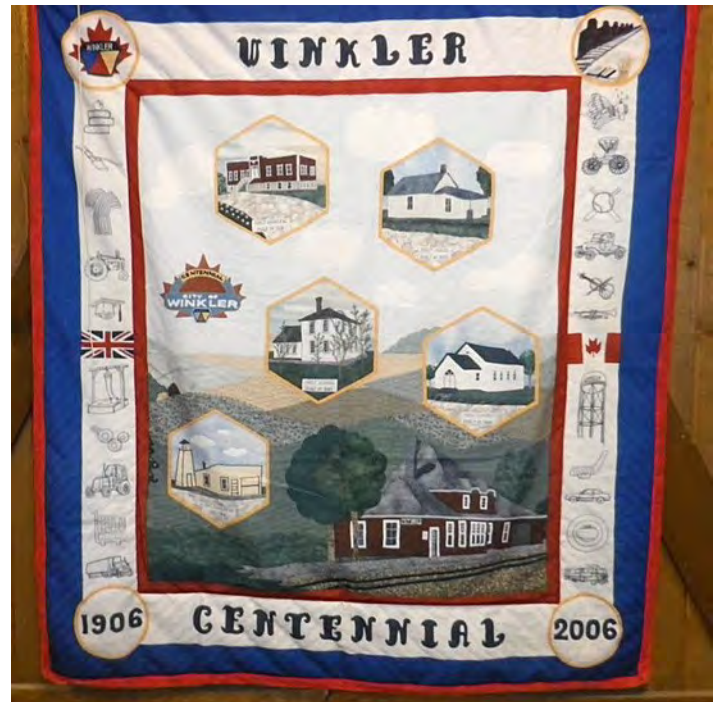
At their second meeting on May 11, 1999, newcomers were Ed Falk, Bruce Wiebe, Erna Elias, and Marie Doell. The committee was then formed with Grace Schellenberg as chair and Gloria Dyck as secretary. In the meetings following the initial ones, John Zacharias agreed to be their treasurer and Bev Suderman the vice-chair. Ann Klassen also joined the active membership. They were now ready to move ahead. Projects for the Winkler Centennial year, 2006, were a Centennial quilt, a pictorial calendar and a pictorial history book.

During the early years the Society was busy with erecting cairns to honour the past people groups of Winkler with the first one being the 1876 settlers of Hoffnungsfeld in the year 2000, followed by the Jewish settlers' cairn in 2002 and the German settlers' in 2006. The cost of the cairns was usually paid for by the descendants of the names on the cairn. At the suggestion of Irvin Kroeker that the Society have a newspaper, the Legacy Links was born in January of 2002 with Sally Harms as the first editor. Erna Elias made the Centennial quilt and Ken Loewen made the Centennial book, *Living Between Worlds* by Hans Werner, happen. Other projects were printing a number of series of place mats with pictures of Winkler and its people, and benches were added to the parks.

Slowly some of the goals and objectives of the first Society meeting were realized. In January of 2007 the Winkler Heritage Archives (WHA) was formed and made its home in the new Winkler Centennial Library in a room of about 800 square feet. The first archivist was Ed Falk working along with committee members, Grace Schellenberg and Marjorie Hildebrand. "The Role and Mission of the Archives was to serve the entire population & district by protecting information and archival media of fundamental significance in establishing, maintaining and developing community identities".

The *Stones & Stories* project was initiated in 2010 with Arnie Neufeld at the helm. They were a collection of pictures of headstones, with pictures of the corresponding deceased and the obituaries and then assembled in alphabetical order into binders. They would include people of Winkler and the surrounding area who are buried in the two Winkler cemeteries – Winkler Cemetery and West Ridge Cemetery.

It was at the November, 2010 meeting that the Winkler Heritage Society "voted unanimously for the committee of Arnie Neufeld, Bill Siemens and Deb Penner to proceed to establish a museum within the city of Winkler." The



The Centennial Quilt

committee met many times to discuss the future location and at the March meeting of the Society the group voted unanimously to rent space in the Southland Mall to finally bring a museum to Winkler! A space of 752 square feet was rented for \$800 a month. Abe Suderman, Shirley Banman and Dora Hildebrand were added to the committee in May of 2011. A small "Museum Artifacts Display Committee" of Hilda Fehr, Alyce Klassen and Dora Hildebrand as co-ordinator was also appointed and they set up the displays in the museum and also catalogued them. In 2012 the catalogued items were given numbers for easy identification. The Winkler Heritage Museum (WHM) opened in August of 2011 with the Mission Statement: "The Winkler Heritage Museum exists for the purpose of preserving and presenting the cultural heritage of Winkler and region". It was open 10 hours a week working only with volunteers.

The Society was asked to fill 6 display cases at the Civic Centre in preparation of the city's centennial in 2006. This was the responsibility of Marjorie Hildebrand and Dora Hildebrand. They continued to do this, changing the displays at suitable intervals.

. . . and now

Today we see the Winkler Heritage Society as strong as ever meeting in the boardroom of the Winkler Centennial Library with Randy Rietze as chair, Tonille Peters as secretary and now also taking over the work of the treasurer from Ed Zacharias who filled the job faithfully for many years. Members meeting in the boardroom on regular monthly bases are Randy Rietze, Ed Zacharias, Ed Falk, Tonille Peters, Marjorie Hildebrand, Dora Hildebrand, Marie Doell, Helen Falk, Grace Schellenberg, Alyce

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

Klassen and Jean-Paul Dorst.

The Society's paper now has a new name and editor. Marjorie Hildebrand has been the editor of *Heritage Happenings* for a number of years and Helen Falk heads the committee who look after mailing or delivering the paper four times a year. Albums showing the life of the Society are still kept up to date by Dora Hildebrand and the displays at the Civic Centre are now cut down to two besides the window displays at the Museum. The shop keeper at the Museum, Joanne Bergen, looks after the Facebook site. The website is presently being revamped and Gerry Caines, the 'new kid on the block' who hails from Peterborough, Ontario, is working on keeping it interesting so look for it in the coming weeks.

The Winkler Heritage Society has a budget of about \$30,000 annually and it relies on donations from private people and business corporations. Grants are also very desirable and the chair, Randy Rietze (and before him Ed Zacharias) has been doing the time-consuming job of filling out the applications.

The Archives has seen very little change as the staff still meet and work in their comfortable space in the Centennial Library with Ed Falk as the archivist and committee members Grace Schellenberg and Marjorie Hildebrand. They now have a volunteer, Esther Penner coming in to assist with the computer work. The Archives holdings include: 1003 photos or groups of photos on file, (This does not include the George Sawatzky collection!) 2026 files of historic material, (many of which contain dozens of individual items such as newspaper clippings) 135 maps and charts, copies of the Winkler/Pembina Triangle from 1950 to 1999 (52 weeks per year), and file boxes of family or business records. The Archives is open to the public on Wednesdays from 3 to 5 pm or by appointment by calling Ed Falk.

Randy Rietze heads the work of *Stones & Stories*, but the museum's shopkeeper, Joanne Bergen does all the computer work. She has spent hours during her time in the museum collecting, sorting and retyping the hundreds of obituaries and setting up the pages for the binders. These completed files can be seen at the Archives or Museum. Obituaries and information from cemeteries in the surrounding villages and school districts are being collected, but work on them will not start until the Winkler cemeteries are caught up.

The Museum has seen the most change through the years. It moved to a much bigger space in the Southland Mall, but is again crowded with its well over 4,000 cataloged artifacts. It has over 2,000 visitors each year. Part-time shop keeper, Joanne Bergen was hired in June of 2013 and is still much at home in the Museum where she works 20 hours a week.

The current Museum committee consists of Ed Zacharias as chair, Helen Reimer as secretary, Abe Suderman as treasurer and Dora Hildebrand as curator. Other members are Jerry (who had been chair and



Winkler Heritage Society fashion display at the Winkler Harvest Festival in August, 2017 celebrating Canada's 150 birthday.

secretary in the past) & Marjorie Hildebrand and Merv Reimer. Due to death, illness and other complications, the committee dwindled and now the shopkeeper and curator mostly manage the affairs of the Museum, but planning and concerns are discussed at the regular Society meetings.

Recent volunteers hosting the Museum on Thursday nights are Irina Braun, Karen Krueger, Sharon Krueger, Connie Caines, and Hank & Dora Hildebrand; on Friday nights they are Henry & Carol Thiessen, Abe & Tina Friesen, Irvin & Evelyn Enns and Merv & Helen Reimer; and on Saturday afternoon are Ed Zacharias, Marie Doell and Alyce Klassen.

The Museum is open Tuesday to Friday, 12 to 4 pm, Saturdays 10 am - 4 pm and 7 to 9 pm on Thursday evenings. Work is being done to revive the Fridays open evening from 7-9 pm.

Update: Alyce Klassen has joined the group working in the Archives; Joanne Bergen now heads *Stones & Stories* with Frank Unrau and Connie Caines helping with the typing the stories of the surrounding villages. The Museum no longer has a committee and the Friday nights at the Museum have closed. Joanne Bergen will take over the position as curator from Dora Hildebrand on July 1, 2020 and Brian Dyck has joined the Society's committee. We now have an Endowment Fund with the City of Winnipeg Foundation. (From the *Winkler Times*, 2019)

For Your Information

Note of Thanks: Thanks to Jake E. Peters, who has faithfully distributed the print copies of *Heritage Posting* for many years. We really appreciate your rarely acknowledged contribution.

Jenna Klassen has reported on the celebration of **Mennonite Heritage Week** last September in the current issue of *Village Voice*, p. 6. https://mennoniteheritagevillage.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Village_Voice_Fall-2019-V1-Reduced.pdf. It is interesting that Robert-Falcon Ouelette, MP, spoke in Parliament about the Mennonites, comparing their history to that of the indigenous peoples.

#museumathome

by *Andrea Dyck, Curator, Mennonite Heritage Village*
(From *The Carillon, Steinbach*)

When I see a Winnipeg transit bus with its electronic sign flashing the phrase “practice social distancing” pass me, I catch myself thinking wistfully how much I will enjoy the time when phrases like “social distancing” are dropped by the wayside because they are no longer necessary. I think with nostalgia of all the times I have gathered with large groups of people in the past in meaningful settings like church services, weddings, funerals, or hanging out with friends on a weekend. I long for those times to return.

However, I catch myself in those moments too and remind myself that life in this “new normal” (also a phrase I won’t be sad to see drift from our collective vocabulary) goes on and that I have a role in it. I have watched with interest, and been inspired by, how people have reached out to one another in these unique times. A common thread that I’ve seen woven through some of these tremendously creative responses has been that people simply use what they have, be it resources, talents, or other gifts, to make a difference: a cartoonist and children’s author that I follow on Instagram (@LizClimo) offered free colouring pages to her followers; someone dressed up in an Easter bunny costume and paraded down my neighbourhood’s streets from the open back of a hatch-back car, tooting the horn the whole way, on Easter Sunday morning.

Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) closed to the public on March 19 due to COVID-19. It was a sad day and it has continued to be a curious and challenging time as we navigate this situation as a museum. But as the Senior Curator, I started to wonder what I have that I can offer during our closure to help ease the burden of this difficult time, to raise spirits, to provide something to think about beyond the daily litany of COVID-19 news. I have a unique and privileged job in caring for the museum’s collection of 16,500+ artefacts. And behind each of our artefacts are stories that tell us something about who we are as people, where we’ve come from, what we aspired to in the past, how we dealt with difficulties, and what we hoped and



dreamed about. I think I have the best job around because my job is, essentially, to tell these stories and to shape them into something that is educational, beneficial, interesting, relevant, and captivating for people today.

With this in mind, I decided that MHV should join the #museumathome movement that was started by museums around the world to bring their collections and their work to the public during a time when the public is unable to come to them. Throughout the month of April, MHV’s social media channels (see below for more details) have focused on highlighting stories from our collections of artefacts and heritage buildings, allowing the public a sneak peek into the role of a curator in shaping these stories and caring for the collection, and hopefully offering our followers content that inspires curiosity, widens the museum’s community of supporters, and promotes wellbeing in our community. Check us out on Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube throughout the coming months, as we strive to bring the museum to you! In this small way, I hope MHV too can also inspire others to use what they have, to make a difference to those around them.

(MHV will be open according to pandemic protocol as of May 13th.)

MHV Welcomes New Board Members



John Fehr

Three new members joined the Mennonite Heritage Village Board at their Annual General Meeting on May 19th at the Museum: John Fehr, Steinbach businessman; Carlee Friesen, Director of Finance for MB and SK MCC; Erin Unger, creative writer with Golden West. The meeting was held via ZOOM. The new Chair is Doris Penner; Vice-Chair is Glen Klassen; Secretary is Wally Ens; Treasurer is Allan Kroeker. More information at: <https://mennoniteheritagevillage.com>



Carlee Friesen



Erin Unger



Why Mennonites can't go inside at the Mennonite Village Museum!!

E. Penner & Co. — From the Archives

by *Graham Schellenberg*

The life of Erdmann Penner (1837-1907), a prominent businessman, politician, and community leader among early Manitoba Mennonites, is an intriguing story — involving far too much information for only one article. His stores, known throughout the West Reserve as E. Penner & Co., were well-known, popular places to shop for dry goods and other products, except alcohol.

Penner immigrated to Manitoba in 1874 with his children and wife, Maria Eidse (1840-1901), after renting part of an estate along the Sea of Azov from a Russian nobleman where they farmed extensively. Their daughter, Helena Penner (1874-1970), recalled her parents planned to purchase the rented portion before deciding Erdmann (who served as local Magistrate and had experience with matters of banking and finance) would accept an important request to help the Bergthal Colony immigrate to Canada and the family could return to Russia if their new home was unsatisfactory.

Upon landing in Manitoba, Erdmann was dissatisfied with the potential the small new province offered. “After looking about a bit and spying out the lay of the land, Father did not even want to unpack boxes and valises,” Helena writes. Although they often made important decisions together, while Maria was content with Manitoba, Erdmann toured through the midwestern United States — wherever German-speaking groups lived — seeking a better place for his family to settle. Unable to find an appealing home, the family decided upon and remained in



A photograph of Gretna from the Ritz elevator, 1890. E. Penner & Co. is located in the southwest corner of the photo, at the intersection of Montcalm Avenue and Seventh Street (currently the location for Axsen Auto, south of Nora’s Diner). — (163-1.0), Mennonite Heritage Archives. A163-1.0.



Erdmann Penner and Maria Eidse, 1890s.
— Catherine Brown Photograph Collection (517-109.0),
Mennonite Heritage Archives. MHA 517-109.0.

Winnipeg, where he entered the business world.

Sutherland’s General Store hired Erdmann, who brought many Mennonites to Winnipeg from the East Reserve to do business with its Low-German speaking clerk. It wasn’t too long before he began a store with his coworker, a German immigrant named Otto Schultz, located north of the University of Manitoba. Penner and Schultz soon moved their brief partnership to Tannenau (near Mitchell) in the East Reserve, and another store followed in Niverville.

With strong competition from rival businesses, Erdmann regularly made trips to Montreal, his stores carrying stock brought to the prairie from eastern Canada. As Gretna historian F. G. Enns writes, he keenly anticipated buying trends and “maintained a reputation for the best in silks, even if these were primarily in the traditional Mennonite black.”

Upon relocating to the West Reserve in 1881, Erdmann temporarily set up shop in Neuanlage before relocating to Gretna, an upstart town complete with a railway connection. During the first years in Gretna, his store represented a (gendered) community hub. Helena writes that “for the townspeople, especially the men, it was sort of a gathering place in the evening where they would sit around the stove with their feet upon on the nickel-plated railing of the heater. They would swap stories and tell of the doings of the day.” It was in Gretna that E. Penner & Co. thrived, his retail empire expanding to include several locations scattered throughout the West Reserve.

Regardless of what people thought of him, his wealth, the views he held and the considerable influence he exerted, Helena emphasized Erdmann’s good character and generosity as a person and businessman: “His riches did not lie in the money he had in the bank, they consisted in what he did with his money, and there, I am sure, he would rank pretty high. The number of people whose lives had been made a bit smoother through his existence I

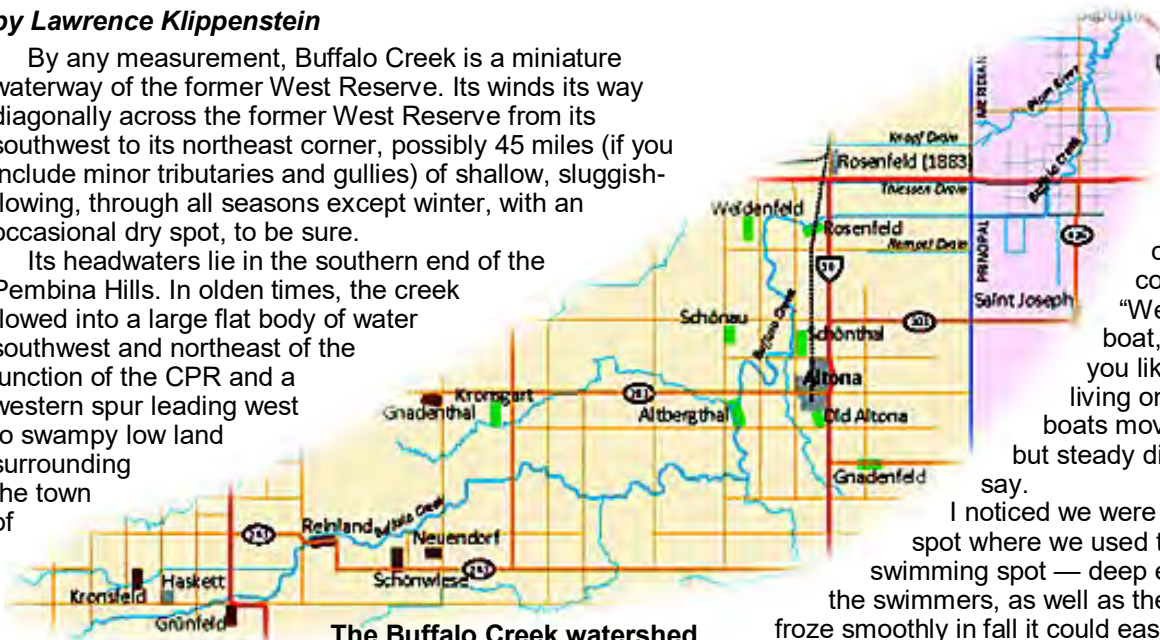
(Continued on page 10)

My Buffalo Creek Summer Tour

by Lawrence Klippenstein

By any measurement, Buffalo Creek is a miniature waterway of the former West Reserve. Its winds its way diagonally across the former West Reserve from its southwest to its northeast corner, possibly 45 miles (if you include minor tributaries and gullies) of shallow, sluggish-flowing, through all seasons except winter, with an occasional dry spot, to be sure.

Its headwaters lie in the southern end of the Pembina Hills. In olden times, the creek flowed into a large flat body of water southwest and northeast of the junction of the CPR and a western spur leading west to swampy low land surrounding the town of



The Buffalo Creek watershed.

— Map by Harold J. Dyck

Rosenfeld at the time of its founding around 1875. No one seems to know how the flat water and its main feeder got their names, Buffalo Lake and Buffalo Creek, respectively. Buffalo had indeed roamed the area, people have always assumed, but who fixed names is unclear.

About three miles of this stretch more or less cuts into half what would become the Mennonite village lands of Bergthal and Lichtfeld ca. 1879-80. The homesteaders of this stretch moved there from the East Reserve at that time. Sixteen of the new families settled along the east bank of the creek, while another eight settled in a line parallel to the creek opposite the northern half of the creek-dwelling farmers.

As far as we can tell, when the village of Bergthal (later known as Altbergthal) broke up and some owners moved to their separate land quarters, one of them ended up just south and slightly west of the village, a home separated from the others.

That became the farm where I grew up after my grandfather obtained the property and rented it to my mom and dad. As it happened our farm now had a stretch of water running south to north right across our acreage on a quarter mile segment of the waterway. It gave us a water lot in the same way as the remaining homes, a dozen or more in Bergthal alone, got their lots further north along Buffalo Creek. The Lichtfelders managed on their own until they merged with Bergthal later on.

A cousin of mine and his family settled years ago in a home on the west shore creek bank about a quarter mile from our home. When we talked one day, he said, "You know, you have not seen the place where you grew up 80 years ago (yes, 80). Would you like to take a little tour of the spots we used to enjoy as small children, just for old times sake?" I was free to go and nothing on my schedule so agreed to join him in a week or so to take a ride down the creek on a motor boat, which I had never done before.

I immediately recalled how we used to call across the

creek (my grandpa's farm was almost directly opposite ours, but on the east side of the creek) near our home for someone to bring a boat so we could cross to fetch our cows for milking.

"We will take my motor boat," he said, "See how you like it". In my years of living on the creek bank, all boats moved with rowing — slow but steady did the trick, shall we say.

I noticed we were boarding almost at the spot where we used to have a favorite swimming spot — deep enough to challenge the swimmers, as well as the wanna-be ones. If it froze smoothly in fall it could easily convert to an outside hockey rink, and sometimes did. Boys from Altona used to join us for swimming sometimes, and dare I say, for a bit of bullying of their younger country cousins! In summer the nearby bushes sometimes yielded wild plums and wild chokecherries.

I knew we would not see any farm animals on shore anywhere — they were with us long ago, but now are long gone. That meant the clear low water banks would be gone too, since those areas were now occupied by five foot high reeds along almost the whole distance of our trip. Alas those weeds also cut off all vision of onshore changes — and that included what we always had felt was an

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Gary and Lawrence Klippenstein setting out on their boat trip down Buffalo Creek. — Photos by Gary Klippenstein

(Continued from page 9)

interesting profile of our farm from the creek side when we boated by, It was the cattle that kept all weeds from growing tall along the shore.

We also could not see the several large watering ponds constructed both by dad and grandpa in the days of high farming life of their day. The ducks were all hiding in the reeds, and muskrat season was over and there was no trace of frogs, crabs, snakes, etc., which we used to play with if the poor creatures felt like it.

Many other stories abound. It was like travelling in another world, really. I wondered as I left, "How much more of this exotic prairie Buffalo Creek world will have vanished if we should try this again in twenty years?"



Heading north along Buffalo Creek with the Altbergtal school yard in the distance.

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have heard was just incredible. Every old lady in that reserve who thought she needed it could have tea, coffee, and sugar [for] free. Every old man could have all the tobacco he wanted. If he'd see so and so come into the store he'd tell the boys that so and so was coming to shop and to give her what she wanted but not to charge for it."

In the 1890s Erdmann entered the political realm, serving as Gretna's first mayor and in 1892 running as the provincial Conservative candidate in Rosenfeld — though he lost to Enoch Winkler, a Gretna businessman. An important interest of his concerned education in the West Reserve, and of his and Maria's children (the latter having attended 'high school' and received higher educational training in Russia as a young woman). The Penner family could facilitate such an education. Erdmann financially supported the Mennonite Educational Institute, and several of the Penner offspring received higher instruction, including Helena, who was among the first women to graduate from a Manitoba university.

In failing health by the late-1890s, Erdmann increasingly divested himself from the business around the turn of the century before his death in 1907. Maria Eidse Penner predeceased him in 1901.

You could buy a Car of 'Any Color' as long as it was BLACK!



My father Peter Barg at the wheel and my uncle Abram Barg are proud of their father's brand new 1930 Model A Ford. A classy car for that era. It even had venetian blinds for the rear windows. It was in the family until the early 50s'
— Photo submitted by Ted Barg

The Sample Restoration in "Chortitza" Begins

Werner Toews reports that a restoration project for the newly-unearthed cemetery stones, led by Max Shtatsky, has been initiated. Shtatsky is reporting on progress via Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/chortitza/>). Some new names have been found, bringing the total to 115. Toews says that the dilemma is how to display the stones and how many should be the focal point of the memorial. Max Ostapenko is working on a plan and will advise them when the plan is complete. A fund-raising effort may follow.



Pictured outside E. Penner & Co., this is a photo of Penner siblings (left to right): Henry Penner, Erdman Penner, Tina Stephenson (Penner), Helena Hiebert (Penner) with her husband Gerhard Hiebert and father Erdman Penner Sr.

— Catherine Brown Photograph Collection (517-105.0), Mennonite Heritage Archives. MHA 517-105.0

Memories of the Steinbach Royal Bank - 1945-1951

by Linda Peters

February 19th, 1945 was a very cold winter's morning. As a seventeen year old teenager I walked into the Royal Bank of Canada to keep an appointment with the manager Mr. Michael Kissuk. What was I doing here? As a grade eleven student at the Steinbach Collegiate I was taking matriculation subjects to become a teacher. However, I also took the business subjects: typing, shorthand, and business arithmetic. One day during classes Mr. Seb Rieger, who taught the business subjects, offered me a job in the Royal Bank if I was interested. Mr. Rieger had been contacted by the Royal Bank in Steinbach to see if he had any students who might have qualifications fit for a banking position. I had never thought of being anything but a teacher. Because the war in Europe was still raging and all the eligible men were conscripted in the services, the world of employment for women opened up. The Department of Education offered a grade eleven student the option of a permit teaching position somewhere in the boonies for \$75 a month. You had to pay your room and board out of this. The bank offered a grand sum \$50 a month and you lived at home. So at seventeen I had to make up my mind very quickly as to what my future career would be. This interview would determine my whole future! Mr. Kissuk hired me on the spot and I was told to be at work the next morning at nine o'clock.

And so at seventeen I became an official employee of the Royal Bank. My first job was to deliver drafts to the various businesses along Main Street. As early as 1945 there were already five car dealerships located along Main Street: J.R. Friesen (Ford), Loewen Garage (Chev), Pontiac Buick Olds, Penner Dodge, J.E. Regehr Plymouth and Engbrecht Garage (Studebaker). Other businesses included C.T. Loewen (bee supplies), Steinbach Flour Mills



T.G. Smith might have been a professional baseball player had not a baseball accident when he was 21 robbed him of that opportunity. Instead he became a bank manager and a non-playing participant in all kinds of other sports. In this 1965 picture he is winding up to pitch the ball that opened the season for minor baseball in Steinbach, an organization he founded.



The old original bank building on the corner of Main and Friesen in Steinbach.

(Prairie Rose flour), two implement dealers, four grocery stores: P.A. Vogt, Vogt Bros., P.B Reimer and Sons, Centre Store, Tourist Hotel with a Men's Beer Parlor, Steinbach Creamery affiliated with Modern Dairy and a Cold Storage business. There were only three non-Mennonite businesses: McBurney's Drug, the clinic with doctors Whetter and Hodgson and Kreutzer Blacksmith Shop. There were two restaurants: Pete's Inn and Fruit Store owned by Aaron Toews who also owned a franchise of Nickelodeon music machines placed all over rural Manitoba that played patriotic songs during the war. Then there was the R.M. of Hanover office, the Steinbach Telephone Exchange (you could phone to get the time), a brand new Post Office (corner of Reimer and Main built by the Federal Government), Penner Electric (beginning of rural electrification), C.T. Kroeker Imperial Oil Gasoline Sales and J.D. Goossen, Notary Public.

Probably the largest payrolls were generated by the Hanover School Division and the newly expanded Bethesda Hospital when it opened in 1949 with the help of a government grant. By this time the hospital had a staff of four doctors, thirteen nurses, an x-ray technician and nine domestic staff.

Soon I was promoted to the teller position. The teller was actually in a cage, very similar to something you see in the movie "Jaws". The bank was open six days a week closing at one P.M. on Saturday. All the finances that transpired in Steinbach (except for a very minimal amount generated by the Credit Union locally) were transacted through the Royal Bank. The Credit Union had no clearing house and any cheques drawn on a bank had to be cleared through the Royal Bank. This meant they paid an exchange fee on all the cheques, which was a great bone of contention to the Credit Union.

On May 8, 1945 the war was over in Europe and it was declared a great holiday!

Meanwhile, Mr. Kissuk went on holidays and Mr. T. G. Smith from the main office in Winnipeg came on relief duty.

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When the war started in 1939 the ravages of the depression were still evident and the years 1939-1945 were war years so that it was almost impossible to make a loan at the local bank. The business people in Steinbach were an ambitious lot and they needed money to grow financially.

Because of the difficulty of getting a loan the local Credit Union was born. Ambitious local people like C. T. Loewen found a source of finances from old Mr. James Steel, one of the Clearspring settlers who had money to spare at an interest rate of 3%. Another church related lending institution was "Der Waisenamt Der Gemeinde Chortitz", managed by a Mr. Enns, a rather demanding sort who needed immediate attention when he came to deposit money to the church's saving account #W25. These funds were available for loan to their members in the Chortitz-Mitchell area.

Mr. Smith heard complaints of turned down requests for loans from a large number of business clients. He went back to head office and in a very short time Mr. Kissuk was transferred to Newdale, a very small Ukrainian town in western Manitoba and Mr. T. G. Smith was installed as the new manager of the Steinbach Royal in 1946. The population of Steinbach in 1945 was 1800 and by 1946 the year of the town's incorporation it had increased to 1900. By 1956 it had increased to 2698. In 1956, thirty-one resident building permits were issued at a value of \$180,000 and eight commercial buildings at \$63,000. By 1959 building permits for residential dwellings had increased to forty-eight at a value of \$449,000 and nine commercial buildings at a value of \$280,000. The post-war boom was very evident in Steinbach with great financial help from the bank.

Average family income in Steinbach in 1960 was \$4085, compared with Manitoba at \$4728.00. So in 1946 Steinbach income was much lower than that of the average Manitoban. As soon as Mr. Smith arrived things began to change. The cage was removed and a more customer-friendly wicket was built. We still had only one adding machine on wheels, hand cranked (not electric). No washroom, only a wash basin, water pitcher, a piece of pumice soap and a community towel on the steps leading to the attic. If we really needed to use the washroom an arrangement with J. R. Friesen Garage was made to use their indoor facilities.

In 1945 the war was over and men who had left to serve in the armed forces began to return and the bank reinstated all their positions. Mr. Joe Schmidt, a paymaster in the air force came to Steinbach as our assistant manager. In the next year Mr. Reg. Sanders, a returned army vet who had seen action on the Italian front, was transferred to Steinbach, He smoked a pipe and when he lit it he shook very noticeably with post-war nerves. He was a super guy in adjusting to civilian life. The men all smoked at work and often the small quarters in the office were quite blue with smoke. We now were a staff of seven; three more female employees were added from 1946 -1948.

I was promoted to the accounting department and Mr. Joe Schmidt taught me how to prepare the BIG financial statement at the end of the month. He did me a great favour because this 'know-how' helped me tremendously later in life when I started to work for Hawkins Ferguson Chartered Accountants at their rented office in the Credit Union basement from 1963-1971. The Royal Bank Balance days were the 8th, 15th, 23rd and end of the month. Often at the end of the month we worked well past midnight, hand posting

current account pass books and balancing the liability ledger, current account ledgers and preparing returns for head office. All of these were hand posted in PEN and INK!!

Greater change was coming. A new building was in the offing and in 1947 and construction began on a two storey building on the corner of Friesen and Main Street. To make room for construction the old building was moved back next to Friesen Machine Shop. We moved into this palatial new building in 1947. It had a grand vault and a fabulous washroom with indoor plumbing. What a great transformation for the customers as well. The bank grew in great proportions in accordance with the economy. It was Mr. T. G. Smith and the Royal Bank in the years that followed that provided money to finance five of the largest business ventures, namely Penner Tire and Rubber, Reimer Express Lines, A. K. Penner and Sons, Penner Foods and Steinbach's Garment Factory. When Mr. Smith was asked how he would compare the borrowing habits of Steinbachers with those of other places he replied "Well the people of Steinbach are prone to borrow rather heavily. My claim is that they don't spend all day Sunday going to church, they spend part of it thinking up the ideas to present to the bank manager Monday morning." (from the Book *Steinbach, Is there any Place Like it?* by Gerald Wright).

In 1945 Mr. Smith got married to his secretary and in 1947 he and Betty moved into the suite on the second floor of the new bank building. I remember the day he came downstairs with this new baby and how proud he was when he introduced us to "Robert Prescott Smith". Today we know him as the astute lawyer Bob Smith, a partner with Smith Neufeld Jodoin. How proud Mr. Smith would be of his son today. Mr. T. G. Smith more than any other *one person* can take the credit for the early financial success of many of the Steinbach's entrepreneurs. It is only fitting that the local arena bears his name: a very small tribute to a Great Man!



The original Royal Bank interior. Staff, L to R: Rose Barkman, Marie Kroeker, Anne Pankratz, Joe Schmidt (Asst. Manager), Linda Peters (Teller), Reg Sanders (Accountant). Customer (left): John K. Schellenberg, later Sec-Tres. of Hanover School Division.

CO's Experience in a World War II Work Camp

by Lorne Brandt

My maternal uncle, Frank Enns, would have been in his early twenties when World War II struck. Like most good Mennonites who hold to non-violence, he chose Alternative Service rather than enlisting in the military. Of course, it wasn't always that simple to do so; sometimes you had to defend your case, prove that you qualified as a Conscientious Objector (CO), before a judge. It wasn't always that simple to be in a CO work camp either.



Frank L. Enns

Uncle Frank was sent from his farm community north of Winkler, MB, to work in Riding Mountain National Park. He wrote many letters home, some to the family and some just to my mother, the next youngest in the family, who was at the time in Normal School (Teachers College) in Winnipeg. I came into possession of some of them a while back and have now read them. I am going to give them to his children, my cousins, who should have them. So, I want to summarize them first. Incidentally, I was impressed by his great penmanship!

I have eight letters from the time after he arrived, from December 1941 to March 1942, when he seemed to have hopes of going home. I don't know if this was for good or just for Easter. Overall, his communication does not suggest he had a particularly difficult time. It does reflect times of loneliness, missing home and his mother's cooking. He spoke of how the men all looked forward to letters. On one occasion, he remarked that some of his companions had girlfriends to write to and he wished he had someone special to correspond with.

Apparently, Frank was with some other young men he knew. He spoke and behaved well, so earned the respect of the crew leaders. Once he records being reprimanded, although indirectly, for speaking "Dutch." This was a common euphemism among Southern Manitoba Mennonites for "German". It was obviously not popular to be identified with the enemy. He does talk of the cold and, at least to begin with, not having adequate clothing. Then again, he complained of their 'fireman' overheating their quarters at night. They seemed to work long hours too, but, coming from the farm, Frank notes he was more used to that than some others. Indeed, his letters often have questions about what was going on at home on the farm. He asks about the livestock, other farm animals and crops, throwing out some opinions on what to do in the spring when seeding time would come. He also had some advice for his younger brother about getting sheep but that never happened. Brother Marvin was more into machinery than animals.

What they were doing was first of all clearing wood. This meant cutting some very large trees. Frank relates how it took the better part of a work day just to deal with one big tree. They had cabins to stay in, not tents. Once the trees

were cut, they built things like bunkhouses, a dining room, and powerhouse for a more permanent 'camp.'

I was also impressed with the freedom of communication they had. They wrote home. They could order personal items with what money they had. Some of his companions bought radios to help pass the spare time. One even ordered a gas washer. It was a little tricky to get gas, as things were rationed. They needed a special pass to go out for some. It certainly was not prison-like. Men who became ill were sent out, even home it seems, for treatment.

My uncle speaks favourably of the food. Indeed, I would not mind eating what he describes. He spoke of taking his 'sweet time' to enjoy the food versus some of his mates who just wolfed it down. He writes in one letter of meat and potatoes, raisin and cherry pie, cinnamon rolls, doughnuts and cookies. They were also able to have 'devotions' and church services, so could gain some spiritual nourishment as well as physical.

We got to enjoy our uncle for many years after this experience of his. He was generally a positive person who loved to joke and tease. He liked country music and was not above doing some yodeling when the occasion suited. He remained faithful to his Lord. . . although he did sometimes use colourful language! Did he learn that at the camp? He did mention that it would be heard there — among both COs and the staff.

Frank also loved horses and always had some on the farm he acquired just 2.5 miles from where he grew up. Unfortunately, he was too suddenly taken from us. My wife and daughter and I were on holiday in Europe in 2006. Wi-fi was spotty in Hungary where we were then. When visiting a museum, I remarked to my wife — I'm going to take a photo of these sleighs and horse tackle to show Uncle Frank. A few days later we learned that on the very day when I said those words, he and our Aunt Josie were in a motor vehicle accident that took her immediately and him three days later.

May his example continue to be a light for us to honour him and his fellow COs by following in Jesus' path of nonviolence every day, not just when war comes.



Frank Enns with his sisters Margie and Marian in 1943.

Book Reviews

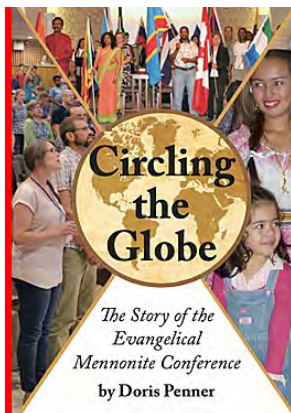
Penner, Doris. *Circling the Globe: The Story of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 2020). pb., 256 pp.

Reviewed by Alf Redekopp, St. Catharines, Ontario.

The writing of this book was a project that was initiated by the General Board of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference. They selected the author and created the History Book Committee that worked as the overseers of the book. The hope was that readers would see how looking back with eyes of faith would continue to move them forward in faith, feeling “the warm hand of the Father’s gentle guiding.” (p. 5). The initial chapters certainly would lend themselves for such inspirational reading. They would be an excellent resource for use with a youth class preparing for baptism, or simply for learning about the specific story of God’s leading in this denomination.

The book begins with the birth of the Christian Church, following Jesus Christ’s ascension into heaven and the coming of the Holy Spirit. This is when the Church received its mission to make disciples of all nations (i.e. circling the globe). The book moves quickly to the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement in Europe during the 16th century, where severe testing solidified and purified beliefs, and where a strong faith spread rapidly, often as believers fled persecution. Then, the book follows the Anabaptist thread from the Netherlands under the leadership of Menno Simons, through Poland and to South Russia, where a small renewal group, called the *Kleine Gemeinde* (small church), formed in 1812. Chapters 2 and 3 explore both the internal and external challenges that they faced in their desire to be a pure church. The next two chapters follow the challenges in North America starting in 1874. The immigrants were not always prepared for how difficult pioneer life would be in Canada; going there nevertheless continued to be spiritual growth. A current reader might find it interesting to read about the issues that their spiritual ancestors felt they needed to address in the area of life style that acknowledged their full commitment to Jesus Christ; for example, no making of portraits or taking photographs, no singing in harmony, no attending of weddings (making a distinction between a marriage and a wedding), etc. (ministerial resolutions of 1899), or statements against purchasing life insurance and statements affirming women wearing head coverings. This is all part of the story and it is commendable to see it described with context and understanding.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 is where the author relates how a renewed vision resulted in a new name — first being called the Evangelical Mennonite Church and then Evangelical Mennonite Conference. These chapters trace how the denomination went from a conference of 5 congregations in Manitoba in 1953 to over 60 congregations in 9 regions



across Canada by 2020; how the vision for outreach in Canada and in distant lands developed — through their own Board of Missions and relationships with many like-minded agencies, in which EMC members ministered. These chapters are filled with names, places, projects and agencies — a lot of data that might have been presented better in several charts and tables, instead of the narrative style. Nevertheless, a liberal use of photographs continued to make it interesting.

In the final two chapters, the author summarizes and reflects on some of the challenges which the church still faces — women in ministry, maintaining unity amidst a variety of worship styles, strong central leadership versus congregational autonomy. We do learn that as we look back with eyes of faith we can also move forward in faith.

Fields of Light and Stone, Angeline Schellenberg. University of Alberta Press, 2020.

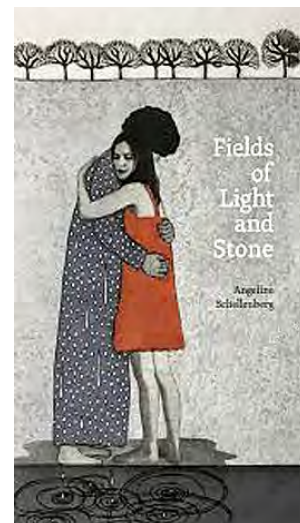
Review by Sarah Ens

Little Secrets, Whole Stories

In her second full-length book of poetry, Angeline Schellenberg pulls from old day planners, love letters, funeral speeches, and other archived family mementos to elegize her grandparents in tender and lyrical snapshots. Ranging from scenes of starvation in Ukraine to tractor rides through Manitoban fields to bedside vigils in care homes, *Fields of Light and Stone* is an evocative and perceptive tribute.

Broken into four sections, *Fields of Light and Stone* grieves each grandparent individually, examining all the ways their distinct relationships with Schellenberg impacted and influenced the poet’s ideologies and identities. “What chases us/ down a family tree?” Schellenberg asks, and, in exploring the answers, discovers memories that she carries as a “puff of air inside her/ like a seed” (“Generations” “He Made Me Promise to Remember Arkadak”). The collection incorporates the correspondence between Schellenberg’s maternal grandparents, interweaving the voices of Abe and Margaret with her own childhood and adult recollections. These letters modulate between the documentation of everyday Mennonite life (“I went to tend to my twelve precious/ piglets”) and intimate confessions (“I anew/ give you all my love”) — often all on the same page (12, 13).

This blend of profound and mundane imagery and language is consistent throughout the collection. Margaret’s stillborn son is described as “round and/ cold as her father’s/ buttons” (“Closure”). “[C]louds above canola” are “unfinished prayers” and in Abe’s day planner, “Canola Day in Souris” is followed directly by “Ascension Day at Grace” (Grandpa’s Day Timers). When Abe is in a care



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Sleeping Like A Herdsman In Neubergthal

by Erin Unger

Reprinted from *Mennotoba*

We were in Neubergthal with friends who are not Mennonites. We saw photos from 100 years ago of fashion-plate women, posing sassily at the front of a group. We saw the fancy lattice-work lining the second balcony of the Friesen housebarn. We saw the patterned floors. We glimpsed inside the Herdsman House. . . a riot of colour and pattern, warmth and imagination. My friend exclaimed, "Everything I thought about Mennonites is being challenged!" To those who only know Mennonites to be a people of suppression, repression and dour expressions, Neubergthal is a surprise.

Me, being a Mennonite, I'm not so much surprised... it's more like relieved, that this atmosphere is being maintained somehow. Neubergthal's atmosphere reminds me of the farm of my childhood, and ignites my memory with flashes of my great-grandmother's farm, too.



I first heard of Margruite Krahn when I stepped inside the summer kitchen at the Mennonite Village Museum in Steinbach. Its vivid floor pattern arrests your attention. I read the accompanying write-up, and thus learned this was the work of Margruite. She has taken note of these floor patterns, and has restored them in the Herdsman house, recreated them for the MHV, and these patterns have inspired her art moving forward. And right now 'til the end of December,

you can see her exhibit at the Winnipeg Art Gallery.

Our stay at the Herdsman House felt kind of like a dream. So different from everyday life. . . yet so comfortable and strangely familiar. The bed was wonderful, we slept so well. The fire in the Russian Bake Oven was lovely. We hung our socks near the wall and they were warm in the morning. The kitchenette and bathroom have been added for more comfort, and there is a claw foot tub! In the morning, we prepared for ourselves farm-fresh eggs. We ground coffee in the antique coffee grinder that's attached to the wall.

I have an inclination to keep this place a wonderful secret. . . but the truth is, anyone can reserve a stay at the Herdsman House. If you're an artist or if you cycle there, you get a reduced rate. To plan your stay, visit <http://www.herdsmanhouse.com/herdsman-house/>.

(Continued from page 14)

home with dementia, Schellenberg remembers time spent together with a tone of reverence: "[W]e sat side by side on/ the combine./ Our lungs still sparkling with chaff" ("This Is His Body"). With Schellenberg's deft touch, chaff, canola, thread, yeast, and buttons all unveil the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Schellenberg draws on embodied, sensorial details to compose these moving and personal portraits. In "There Is the Old Brick House," oatmeal "massag[es] [her] cheeks/ from the inside." In "Are you sewing, Mom?" Margaret "twines/ her fingers through hospital sheets" and explains that she is planting marigolds. Other times, the poems centre around direct but resonate statements. Schellenberg revisits a childhood diary and realizes that "went to Oma's house/ fills every page" ("In My First Five Year Diary"). In church with her grandmother Elsa, Schellenberg sits quietly, understanding "I must be still/ and know whose I am" ("Oma's Girl"). "We lay down/ so we wouldn't feel our hunger./ Potatoes the size of hazelnuts"

come the descriptions from Elsa's mother's memoirs of her life in Ukraine ("As We Left They Sang"). In the same poem, she says, of the trauma of being forcibly displaced from her home, simply: "everything dear to us stayed back."

In a letter, Schellenberg's grandmother Margaret writes, "I must let you in on a little secret" (4). This declaration leads readers into the collection and into all of the little secrets that make up four remarkable, complicated lives. *Fields of Light and Stone* reveals the hidden shame, grief, doubts, and desires that all four of Schellenberg's grandparents carried and passed down to their descendants, but it also illuminates the depth of love, and the faith in that love, that defined their lives. Beyond letting us in on little secrets, these poems offer whole stories found within "the books our ancestors/ have yet to write" ("The First Trees").

Sarah has just published her own book of poems, "The World is Mostly Sky", Turnstone Press, 2020.

Book Notes

by Lawrence Klippenstein and Glen Klassen

It seemed like a big dream once — to publish three volumes on the life and letters of Johann Cornies, the Mennonite reformer of 19th century tsarist Russia, published by the U of Toronto. It is assumed some thousands of copies of this very professionally-done opening volume of this project went to readers.

Now, in 2020, the second volume of this trio has arrived — again titled *Transformation of the Southern Ukrainian Steppes: Letters and Papers of Johann Cornies*. This time covering the period 1836-1842. Through the creative editorship of Dr. Harvey L. Dyck, and Dr. John R. Staples and the translation by the late Ingrid L. Epp, an inspiring hardcover edition of just under 700 pages has been produced. It has to be dubbed “very impressive”, indeed again, as before, a publishing coup. The University of Toronto publishers, the premier press of Canada, along with the progenitors of the work, have put it all together in exemplary fashion. Reviews will be appearing shortly, this is but a note to herald its coming. It is available in major Canadian bookstores, and no doubt elsewhere also. The topic has always stood at the centre of the Mennonite story in tsarist Russia, and while it is quite a task to read through, the volume is ongoing success in telling the story.

It may be proper sequence here to mention, though more as a major footnote, that the work of this reviewer (LK), *Peace and War. Mennonite Conscientious Objectors in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union Before WWII, and Other COs in Eastern Europe* (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 2016), pb., 358 8½ x 11 pages) remains available online free of charge as a salute to persons like Cornies, who was among the shapers of the Mennonite community of Imperial Russia in their day. Contact <http://bit.ly/2jcwJS1> to obtain a copy if interested.

Among reprints one can now find also a so-called “scrapbook” of a Canadian part of that Russian story, here known as the West Reserve in southern Manitoba. It is offered in a loose leaf edition, again of 8½ x 11 inch pages, forty in total. The title is *140 - Windows on the West Reserve*. A second edition has been assembled containing old and new photos, maps, charts, sketches, historical narrative, etc. It is available from Lawrence Klippenstein by enclosing a cheque for \$10 made out to me and mailed to 222-490 Lindenwood Dr. E, Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0Y5.

From recent news releases we gather that plans to close down nearly two dozen smaller local newspapers will also include the Red River Valley Echo. Begun under the auspices of D. W. Friesen and Sons of Altona in the early 1940s, and known as The Altona Echo, it has rendered a valuable service for the region it served in southern Manitoba. This is then the time to thank all those hundreds of persons and the publishing firm for giving

more than 75 years of weekly efforts to keep people of the area informed about events of the day. The MMHS has gained much from the steady flow of historical material from the first editor, David K Friesen and history reporters like the late Elizabeth “Izby” Bergen, Elmer Heinrichs, Victor Penner, and of course its most recent editor, Lori Penner. For further information on the history of the paper, and specific issues feel free to contact the Mennonite Heritage Archives at its office at 1-204-560-1998. Locally in Altona the Altona Regional Library and District Archives stand ready to help at 1-204-324-1503 or 1-204-324-5001.

A new book of personal stories collected and edited by Syd Reimer, Glen Kehler and Ernie Doerksen of Winnipeg and Steinbach respectively has been published. With its simple title, *A Collection of Stories*, a 2020 issue in 250 (8½ x 11) pages, this ring-bound volume is destined to gain a great deal of interest with the reading public. It sells for \$30 plus postage and is well compiled with a number of maps, photos, charts, sketches. John Henry Friesen was cover artist. It can be ordered at 1-204-254-6015 or by mail at 202-490 Lindenwood Dr. E. Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0Y5. Watch for further titles in this series.

Lydia Loewen has published an autobiography and family history entitled *Under the Linden Tree* (Self-published, pb. 208 pp. \$28). It is a companion to Eddie Loewen's book, *They Called Me Eddie* (2018).

Dr. Dennis Hiebert has published his second book entitled *Rationality, Humility, and Spirituality in Christian Life* (Cascade Books, 2020, 222 pp. \$34.64 at Amazon)

Sean Patterson has just published *Makhno and Memory Anarchist and Mennonite Narratives of Ukraine's Civil War, 1917–1921* (University of Manitoba Press, 2020, pb, 216 pp. \$27.95). This book will be reviewed in the next issue of HP.

Menno Moto: A Journey Across the Americas in Search of My Mennonite Identity By Cameron Dueck, has recently won a place in the Winnipeg Free Press list of bestsellers. (Biblioasis, 2020, 328 pp. \$22.95 at Amazon)

David Bergen's new novel, *Here the Dark* (2020), a book of short stories, concludes with a novella called *Here the Dark*. It is the heart-rending story of a contemporary young woman who falls out of favour with her sectarian church and is excommunicated and shunned, even by her husband.

Darryl G. Klassen has written *The Anabaptist Evangelical Puzzle: Discovering How the Pieces Fit*. Available at Amazon and at the EMC head office in Steinbach. (\$20).