



Bert Friesen Reflects on the History of MMHS and His Involvement

The current Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was formed in 1980. A Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) had been formed in the late 1950s by a group of people from the Steinbach area. Their intent was to collect and preserve artifacts reflecting Mennonite history in Manitoba since the 1870s. By the late 1970s another group evolved from the Steinbach initiative. This group wanted to record and publish the history of Mennonites in Manitoba. The two groups separated to form the Mennonite Heritage Village and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. One was a group for artifacts and the other was a group for the word. This was formalized in 1980.



Bert Friesen, Former editor of *Heritage Posting* and Treasurer of MMHS

I joined the board in 1983. This was the beginning of the era of published history for MMHS. The first project chosen was to translate and publish the complete works of

Arnold Dyck (1889-1970). This was chosen, in part, to reflect the origins of the group before they separated. The project selected was rooted in the Steinbach community. My first assignment was to be on the committee that oversaw this project. For a young person beginning my involvement with the writing community, this was challenging. The committee members included Al Reimer (1927-2015), Elisabeth Peters (1915-2011), Harry Loewen (1930-2015), George K. Epp (1924-1997), and Victor Doerksen (1934-2017), a formidable group to join in the early 1980s. The project was completed by the end of that decade and was the beginning of my involvement with MMHS.

Over the years the society has completed many other projects besides publications. Local history workshops were heavily attended in local venues throughout southern Manitoba. I recall meetings in Rhineland, Neuberghthal, Steinbach, and Winkler, among others. For many years these were organized by Adolf Ens and his local history group. They were intended not only to bring local enthusiasts together to share a knowledge base, but also to produce data which could be used for future publications. From these events, many local histories were published, not only by MMHS but by others. An example would be Henry Fast, *Gruenfeld (now Kleefeld), 1874-1910: first Mennonite village in western Canada*. Another example would be the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*: Illustrated, ed. Ernest N. Braun and Glen R. Klassen.

Genealogy workshops were a highlight for many participants, especially before online resources became more commonly available. These workshops were not only

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Mennonites on the Move Again

Belize colony Mennonites look to Peru: New colonies in Peru are tied to thousands of acres of deforestation

By *Anabaptist World* Staff (*Anabaptist World*, Nov. 27, 2020, Vol 1, #4, reprinted with permission)

About 40 Old Colony Mennonite families in Belize are making plans to migrate to Peru, drawn by agricultural opportunities abroad and frustration with government bureaucracy at home. *Breaking Belize News* reported Oct. 31 that members of Shipyard Colony in Orange Walk District could move to *Tres Cruces*, Peru, as soon as borders are reopened. The Shipyard group was considered more conservative than other colony Mennonites in Blue Creek or Spanish Lookout. Shipyard community leader Juan Martinez told *Breaking Belize News* his group was dissatisfied with Belize authorities over COVID-19

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The Annual General Meeting of Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society will take place on March 20, 2021 at 11:00 a.m., by Zoom. The format of the meeting will be communicated to members in a separate email. Please plan to attend! MMHS is looking forward to an eventful year as things return to normal.

Chair: Conrad Stoesz.



Lieutenant Governor's Award for Historical Preservation and Promotion

Their Honours hosted an Award Ceremony and Reception honouring the 2020 Recipients of the Lieutenant Governor's Award for Historical Preservation and Promotion on Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. at Government House. This year's recipients were: Ms. Jean Ammeter; Mr. John Burchill; Captain Gordon Crossley; Ms. Gail Perry, and Ms. Shirley Render.

(From web page)

Hey, MMHS members!

The MMHS Executive will recommend to the membership at the Mar. 20th Annual General Meeting that the membership fee be raised to \$20 annually and that Heritage Posting print copy be sent to all members unless they prefer to receive only the email version. It was felt that readership would be increased this way. It is much more likely that more than one person will read the newsletter if it is present physically in the household than if it is only in an email inbox. The June issue of HP will give you the details and how to respond.

MMHS gives you. . .

- ◆ 3 issues of Heritage Posting: News, Features, Book Reviews
- ◆ Publications (e.g. *Voice in the Wilderness*. *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*)
- ◆ Events (Mostly organized by affiliates WestMenn and EastMenn)
- ◆ Representation in the *Mennonite Historical Society of Canada*
- ◆ Contacts with other provincial Mennonite Historical Societies.

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

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

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lockdowns, crackdowns on informal cattle trade activities and an oversupply of produce in Belize that outpaces local demand. These issues were magnified when Martinez and nine others from the colony were delayed from re-entering Belize for nearly three months after scouting land in South America. They ultimately were assisted by Mexican authorities to travel to Mexico and stay there for nearly a month before negotiating with Belizean officials to cross the border in August. In a separate incident, seven people, mostly pastors, were arrested for violating quarantine regulations Nov. 4 when police visited a Mennonite church in Blue Creek. Amandala reported police said almost 300 people were at the church. COVID-19 regulations limit the number of attendees at a worship service to 10 people. "The calling of God is higher than the calling of this government," said Blue Creek Village chair Abram Rempel. The anticipated move comes as a conservation advocacy group claims other Mennonite groups already living in Peru are deforesting thousands of acres illegally. Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project claimed on Oct. 26 that three colonies started by Mennonites in the Peruvian Amazon rainforest have leveled 8,500 acres over the past four years. The colonies of *Tierra Blanca 1*, *Tierra Blanca 2* and *Masisea* — all to the northwest of where the Shipyard families in Belize could settle — were started by Low German-speaking Mennonites from Belize and Bolivia in the past five years. Satellite images between 2016 and 2020 show uninterrupted expanses of green transformed into a grid of brown rectangles at *Tierra Blanca 1*, where 5,370 acres of forest have disappeared. Monitoring of the Andean Amazon Project reported the Regional Government of Loreto indicated in an Oct. 15 document that the Mennonite colonies do not have any approvals for large-scale forest clearing, and the government is coordinating with the environmental prosecutor's office to investigate the *Tierra Blanca* cases. Such an investigation was already underway with the *Masisea* colony, and a sanctioning procedure has been initiated for "unauthorized land use change" (deforestation).

Deforestation totaling 5,370 acres has taken place between November 2016 and October 2020 at the Mennonite colony of *Tierra Blanca 1* in Peru.

Women Talking to be Adapted for Film

According to the Winnipeg Free Press, Miriam Toews' award-winning novel *Women Talking* will be adapted for film with Frances McDormand (remember *Fargo*) in a starring role and also producing the film. The film will be directed by Sarah Polley, who is also the author of the screenplay. Set on a Mennonite Colony in Bolivia, the story is about alleged midnight rapes of girls and women on the colonies. Miriam is not a stranger to film, having starred in *Stellet Licht*, a tragic story set in Mexico with Low German dialogue. The film will likely be very popular, putting Mennonites in the negative limelight once again.

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occasions for sharing methodologies, but also for sharing data and forming networks for future projects. This activity produced numerous publications including the East Reserve Historical Series, The West Reserve Historical Series. B.H. Unruh's *Research on Mennonite Migration to Russia 1787-1895: A Translation from Part 2 of Benjamin Heinrich Unruh's Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Selbstverlag: Karlsruhe, 1955).

Many people have been involved in these workshops and publications including Glenn Penner, Alf Redekopp, Bruce Wiebe, Richard Thiessen, Marianne Janzen, Al Hamm, Peter Reimer, Mavis Dyck, and Martha Martens among many others. In fact, during the 1980s and 1990s, these were a major activity for society members, so most members of that era could be listed. Both historical series publications were making accessible original source material for genealogical research before online resources became commonly accessible. These have been much used and appreciated.

Prior to the internet era, a major means of communication for MMHS members was the society newsletter. In the early years it was just called the Newsletter, ending with 1998, no. 23. Then, under the editorship of Lawrence Klippenstein, in 1999, no. 24, it changed to *Heritage Posting*. It has continued under that title to the present, serving as a useful tool to connect MMHS members and to inform them of events, publications, and ideas. I worked with Lawrence Klippenstein on the newsletter for a number of years and learned how much effort he has put into this medium over many years. Now into his 90s Lawrence is still contributing.

For over 20 years I was treasurer of MMHS. I followed some distinguished predecessors such as Jacob Rempel (1921-1988) and Alf Redekopp. In the late 1990s and early 2000s MMHS reached a peak in membership of about 200 with membership fees and donations being a major source of revenue. Since then there has been a steady decline as the older generation has not been replaced by equal numbers of the next generation. This has had implications for MMHS's revenue stream. Both membership fees and donations have continued to decline. So, MMHS has tended to work on self-funding projects. Publication projects would usually raise support and funds for the first project, such as Arnold Dyck, referred to above, and then the revenue generated from sales would fund the following project. One of the most successful at using this model was the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve*. The project had some initial funds from previous East Reserve projects such as the publication of the East Reserve Historical Series but also attracted additional funding, and sales have been healthy. Consequently all the substantial costs were covered and funds were set aside for the next project. This model has put less pressure on the generally declining revenues of MMHS.

Another gradually evolving change is the move from paper to electronics as a means of keeping records and doing financial transactions. I suspect the use of electronics will accelerate in the future. This reflects a general trend where Government reports are now filed electronically, both provincially and federally. Going forward, I would consider the financial situation of MMHS to be weak but

stable.

The governance of MMHS has also changed markedly since the 1980s. It was then governed by a large board with many reporting committees. The major responsibility then, though, was fiduciary, and still is now. The many committees have evolved to form two major interest groups that spearhead projects in the former East and West Reserves. In the last ten years there was an attempt to make MMHS a federation of like-minded groups, with a revised constitution and by-laws to make this possible. Not many groups have shown interest in being federated in this way.

Simultaneously many other groups with historical interests have formed in Manitoba. These have been local groups with local projects. Examples would be the Winkler Heritage Society, Altona History Seekers, D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation which was in some ways an outgrowth of local historical societies in the former East Reserve area which Delbert Plett (1948-2004) had initiated. It speaks well for continued interest in Mennonite historical matters in Manitoba.

My years on the MMHS board have been fulfilling. I have met many wonderful people who have enriched my life. They have provided me with facts and insights about Mennonites in Manitoba. I recall one bus tour to the Interlake Mennonite communities. We were in the foyer of this congregation and I was astonished to hear children conversing in Low German (*Plautdietsch*). I learned that this cultural and linguist group lives on among Mennonites in Manitoba. Having grown up in southern Ontario I had not been exposed to this culture and language so this was a unique experience for me, occurring only because of my association with MMHS. I look forward to continued involvement in Mennonite historical matters, both through MMHS and the national Mennonite Historical Society.

Bert Friesen
Autumn 2020

Manitoba 150 Women Trailblazer Award

The Nellie McClung Foundation, in partnership with the Winnipeg Free Press, has received 350 nominations for this award, honouring women who led the way forward. 150 of them will be selected for the award on January 28, 2021. Names of all the nominees and profiles of winners will be published in a book. Mennonite and Hutterite nominees include:

Cindy Klassen
Di Brandt
Eira (Babs) Friesen
Elaine Froese
Helena F. Reimer (nom by MMHS)
Helena Penner Hiebert
Hilda Klassen
Jennifer Hofer
Judy Wasylycia-Leis
Katharina Thiessen (nom by MHA)
Katharine Friesen
Miriam Toews

Maria Vogt (nom by EastMenn)
Myrna Driedger
Ruthanne Dyck
Selma Loewen*
Sara Stoesz*
Linie Friesen*
Susan Giesbrecht*
Shirley Elias
Wanda Koop
Wilma Derksen

*MCC thrift shop group

2020 EastMenn Year in Review

The year began with an organizational and planning meeting in February, with detailed plans for the Shantz plaque unveiling, a virtual tour proposal, and the Annual Fall Historical Lecture. Due to Covid-19, none of that materialized. The plaque for the Shantz Shed project is complete and ready to be attached to the granite rock on site. A public unveiling/launch is expected to be held next year when large groups can again meet without safety concerns. We also submitted a nomination to Manitoba 150 Women Trailblazers: Maria Vogt. Ongoing involvement on the part of several committee members continues for the Mennonite Memorial Landing Site Association, which will be included in a Trans-Canada Trail project; and the Chortitz Heritage Church, which will be increasingly featured online at the RM of Hanover and MMHS websites. [Some brainstorming has been done by individual members of the committee for a new Peace Trail idea that would begin at the Mennonite Landing Site and end at the Dirk Willems sculpture. This is envisioned to be a bicycle/walking tour, a virtual tour, or maybe a car/bus tour. Since the committee itself has not met, this remains simply as an idea, one that may fit into the virtual tour concept or become a committee project once meetings can again be held should the group adopt the idea.] Beyond that EastMenn has been forced to be largely dormant since no public events, such as the unveiling of the cairn or the Annual Historical lecture, have been possible. The committee met once.

Submitted by Ernest Braun, Secretary, EastMenn Historical Committee

WestMenn Activities

by Graham Schellenberg

The WestMenn Historical Committee's work continued throughout 2020, albeit slowed or postponed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

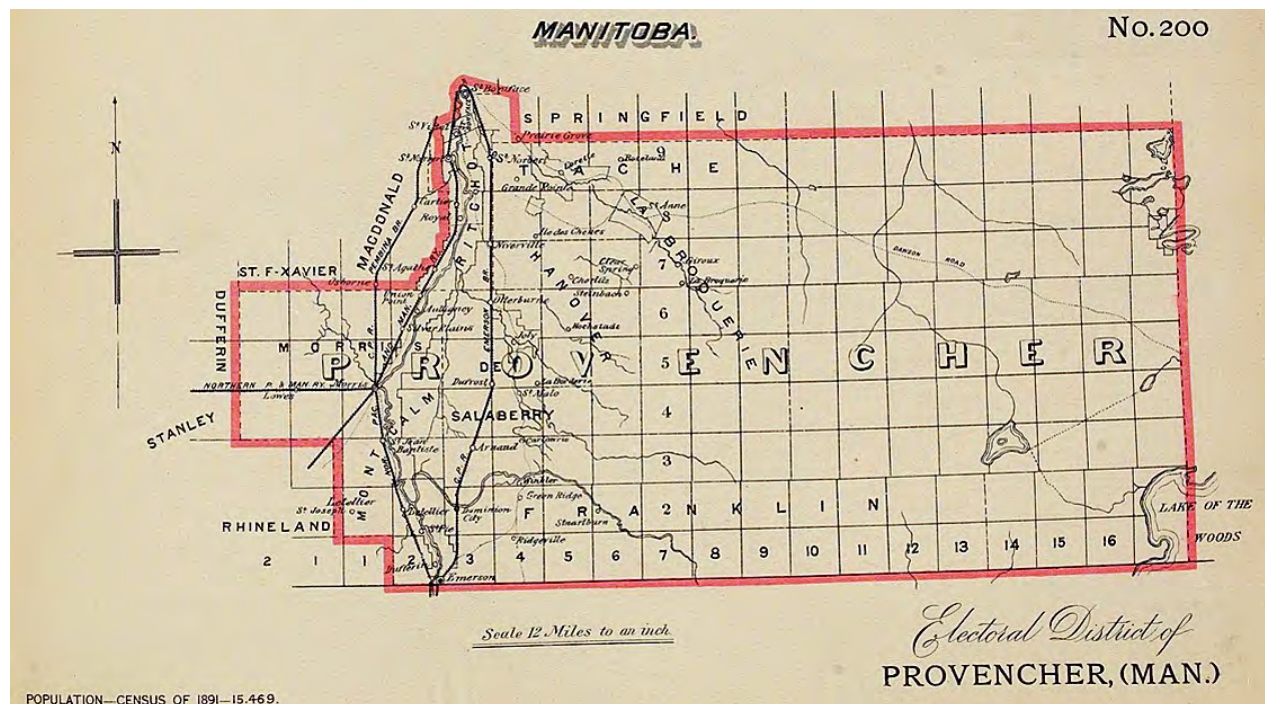
Our committee members are involved in many local projects, namely the Post Road Trail, Post Road Bicycle Tour, Altbergthal History Project, and a memorial at Fort Dufferin, along with several engaging historical studies pertinent to the West Reserve.

An ongoing point of interest for WestMenn is to sustain the ongoing research and presentation of West Reserve village histories and other projects it deems of importance through workshops and publications.

WestMenn is proud to have helped the Mennonite Historic Arts Committee publish *Mennonite Village Photography: Views from Manitoba 1890–1940*, a beautiful collection of never-before-seen photographs left behind by four Manitoba Mennonite photographers.

The committee met twice during 2020, once in February and later that summer in a hybrid virtual/in-person manner while case numbers were low. WestMenn welcomed one new member: Katie Lynch, while Jake E. Peters and Peter Priess departed the committee. We thank Jake and Peter for their many years of service to the committee and the broader Mennonite historical community.

WestMenn strives to forge partnerships with interested people and groups and facilitates connections between them when possible. Information about the committee, its projects, and minutes of past meetings are now available on the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society's website (<http://www.mmhs.org/>)



Darron Rempel has found an 1891 Provencher Electoral District map which shows a site called "Winkler" on the Roseau River east of the Red River. It is probably the property of Enoch Winkler (brother of Valentine Winkler) who lived in Emerson at that time. Further research is on-going. Many other details in this map are of interest to the historian.

What's Happening with the Chortitza Headstone Project?

(Update on the original article that was published in the March 2020 *Heritage Posting*.)

by **Werner Toews**

Chairperson, Ukraine Headstone Project Committee

The following is a short summary and update of the Ukraine Headstone Project which began on July 22, 2019. On that day, Senior Research scientist Max Shtatsky and his colleague, Mykola Anatoliyovych Svydran, from the Khortytzia National Reserve, along with local historian Roman Akbash, started the excavation of a barn foundation in an area now called Upper Chortitza, a suburb located in the city of Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. The goal of the excavation was to uncover headstones that were once located at the former Chortitza cemetery. By the end of November, over 100 headstones and pieces of headstones were identified and transported to the property of the Khortytzia National Reserve.

The work of identifying the headstones and fragments of stones continued over the winter and into the spring of 2020. This took place despite the limitations caused by the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic. The initial list of headstones that could be identified increased and, as of November 2020, 118 headstones had been identified.

In December of 2019, a number of individuals with Mennonite ancestry, which included historians and people



Sketch of the proposed site on Chortitza Island done by Brent Wiebe.

representing various organizations, formed an *ad hoc* committee to assist the Khortytzia National Reserve with this project. The committee, the Ukraine Headstone Project group, has been actively involved in providing assistance to the KNR with fundraising, historical information and the creation of a memorial.

After many discussions and budget considerations with the staff and the Director of the KNR, Maxym Ostapenko, it was decided that 15 stones would be cleaned and restored to create a memorial that will be located on Chortitza Island. The memorial will be located on a portion of property that is part of the KNR and will be monitored by KNR staff. There is ample room for visitor parking and the property is located beside a main Island roadway. The balance of the recovered stones will be stored at the KNR and will be available for viewing by visitors. The restoration of the 15 stones will be completed in the spring of 2021 with site preparation soon to follow.

At this point in time, some of the names on the list have not yet been identified in the Grandma genealogy database. We would encourage anyone that has any information regarding the names without a Grandma number, or those numbers with question marks, to contact our committee. This will also assist the staff at the KNR who will be publishing a catalogue with the names and photos of the headstones sometime in 2021.

As part of our involvement with assisting the KNR with this project, Dr. Roland Sawatzky, Curator of History at the Manitoba Museum, has offered to conduct a historical study of the recovered headstones. Dr. Sawatzky will conduct an analysis of the shapes, symbols, types of stone and written content which will be linked to the dates of the stones. This analysis should reveal certain patterns where we may be able to see changes in the Mennonite concepts of eschatology and the individual's social status in that community.



The hard work of headstone restoration.

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I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the group who have participated in our meetings, discussions and the organizations that they represent. I would especially like to thank all the people who have made donations to this project.

Group Members:

Alvin Sudermann, Friends of the Mennonite Center, Ukraine
Louie Sawatzky, Mennonite Benevolent Society
Conrad Stoesz, Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg
Dr. Roland Sawatzky, Curator of History at the Manitoba Museum
Alf Redekopp, Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg, retired
Olga Rubel, Friends of the Mennonite Center Ukraine
Chris Goertzen, former Mayor of Steinbach, MB
Rob Hessenauer, MCC representative in Zaporozhye, Ukraine
Dr. Peter Letkemann, historian, author
Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, historian, author, Mennonite Heritage Archives Director, retired
Andrea Klassen, Senior Curator, Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach
Dr. Aileen Friesen, Co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg

The following headstone names were added to the original list, with Grandma number.

Braun, Gertruda geb. Loewen 15.05.1837—28.11.1904
#508078

Dyck, Dietrich 1737—1834
#196677

Dyck, Heinrich 18.12.1843—21.12.1843
#353471

Dyck, Helena 08.07.1846—12.02.1848
#353470

Dyck, Julius 03.09.1850—29.04.1860
#353467

Ens, Kornelius 4.10.1819—23.01.1884
#56263

Epp, Aganetha geb. Rempel 05.04.1848—29.08.1892
#12662

Heinrichs, Julius 1893—1893
#458494?

Heinrichs, Jacob 1891—1892
#458494?

Martens, Katharina geb. Braun 08.03.1823—16.10.1891
#349712

Niebuhr, Margaretha 31.05.1885—13.02.1889
#508151

Peters, Helene 25.06.1800---21.05.1853
#311340

Pries, Kornelius Gerhard 29.09.1831---01.01.1863
#341156

Rempel, Aganetha geb. Hamm 04.05.1847—29.10.1891
#518489

This is the Hoepfner grave site. The stone beside the site belongs to a female, Margarina Ludvigovna Padalka, 1878-1934. They do not know who she is. It appears that the pad for the stone is still in good shape.

— Photo by Werner Toews



Workmen at the site.

Niverville Heritage Pavilion and Wind Turbine

by Ernie Braun

Niverville is practically synonymous with the iconic round grain elevator commissioned by Wm Hespeler and constructed by John Wittick in 1879, as the first grain elevator west of Ontario. Now the Niverville Heritage Centre Garden Expansion Committee has erected a scaled-down replica in the Niverville Community Gardens near the Life Lease wing of the Heritage Centre off Second Avenue south. The timberframe structure was built by Cornerstone Timberframe on a circular concrete pad



The Heritage Pavilion inspired by the original Niverville elevator

donated by Perimeter Concrete, and shingled by Ajax Roofing with cedar shakes hand-cut at Mennonite Heritage Museum. It is largely complete, missing only the four stained-glass heritage windows to be installed in spring of 2021. The structure is 26 feet in diameter, rising 12 feet to the eaves, and about that again to the top cupula. Total cost of \$85,000 was covered by fundraising events, local donations, and a Building Sustainable Communities Program Grant. The concept and vision was generated by the original five-person Garden committee, Shirley Hoult and Annette Fast with Niverville Heritage Centre personnel (Rob Manchulenko, George Penner and Steven Neufeld). Annette and Steven have moved on and Roz Krahn has now joined the committee. The umbrella organization, Niverville Communities in Bloom, has supported the project from its inception. Aside from its value as a historical structure, the site will be used for concerts and special events. Note the yellow homemade wind turbine built by Eric Wittick in 1938 which is visible in the background.



Wind turbine: In 1938 Eric Wittick (b. 1901) built his own 32-volt wind turbine that could power all the lights in the house and barns of the Wittick homestead just over 2 Km southwest of the Niverville Heritage Centre where it is mounted now. It was recently restored by volunteers in memory of the contributions of the Wittick family over several generations. It could generate maximum power at a wind-speed of 9 mph (14.4 km per hour). He set up storage batteries which could last for four consecutive calm days. Old car parts were used for the drive train of the turbine. The arrival of hydro in 1949 ended its use by the Witticks, but it remained on the barn for decades.

Niverville Heritage wall being Designed for Main St.

by Ernie Braun

A new 64-foot Niverville Heritage Wall, the brainchild of Shirley Hoult after a visit to the Upper Fort Garry wall, will be erected along the sidewalk bordering the Niverville Credit Union parking lot on Main Street by Niverville Communities in Bloom (NCIB). It will be five feet high, and depict in COR-TEN® three-layered steel a series of vignettes from the pre-European era of bison and First Nations peoples to the Métis and the Crow Wing Trail period, the coming of the European settlers by steamboat and their impact on the landscape with grain growing and with that the iconic elevator, the arrival of the railway, and

the development of Niverville into a modern town. Date of completion depends on the manufacturer, Fusion Industries Inc. of Niverville, and on the weather. The \$37,000 cost was borne by generous donations of community residents and businesses as well as grants from the Town of Niverville and the Manitoba Government. Initial drawing was done locally by Dustin Krahn of Excel Graphics, with final detailing and design by Darren Sakwi of Stainless Concepts, Winnipeg. Vision and fundraising were spearheaded by Shirley Hoult (NCIB) with enthusiastic support from her subcommittee: Henry Friesen, Libby Hanna, and Ernest Braun.

Book Notes

by Lawrence Klippenstein and Glen Klassen

We begin today with two paperbacks edited by John Friesen, former admissions counselor at the U of W, and now resident at Lindenwood Terrace at Kenaston and Lindenwood East.

Both items are quick reads. First came his Mennonite Collegiate Institute tribute, *1955 Graduates 65 Years later 2020*, 65 pages, well-illustrated, and in color, with short life sketches for each entry, out earlier this year (2020).

Most recently again this year, it was followed by *Lindenwood Terrace. Sharing our Stories, Recipes Art and Humour* with dozens of contributions by residents of the Terrace, well-illustrated in color again, in 77 pages.

The MCI grad book was printed at Standard Press, 68 Higgins Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3B OA5, and the scrapbook at Island Blue, 905 Fort St., Victoria B.C. V8V 3K3. For further information on the two books contact editor John at 204 615 2526. To purchase remember, first come, first serve! To purchase, note 15.00 plus postage for the Lindenwood book. The other is out of print.

The December issue of *Mennonite Historian* is off the press. For your personal copy contact editor cstoesz@cmu.ca. Note especially the new feature "Voices from EMC and EMMC", p. 6. The EMC archives at Steinbach were moved to MHA several years ago. EMMC materials began to arrive at MHA not many years after it opened up in 1979.

A study of an important leader among Russian evangelicals in the nineteenth century, Alexandrovich Pashkov, titled *V.A. Pashkov (1831-1902) A Life and Service*, arrived at the MHA and CMBS in a Russian and an English edition recently. Details are available from cstoesz@cmu.ca. The author is Philip Nikitin of Moscow. The founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church is closely related to this movement.

The latest issue of - *Preservings, Issue No 41, 2020*, has now been distributed. It is edited by Dr. Aileen Friesen at ai.friesen@uwinnipeg.ca For further info contact the editor. Aileen is also executive director of the Plett Foundation. My grandparents (LK), Peter and Maria Klippenstein, pictured with their children on the back cover ad of this issue, had 14 children of which four died in infancy. There were 55 first cousins in this family. LK.

Dispelling the Clouds: A Desperate Social Experiment by Wilma Derksen, Amity Publishers, 2020, pb.231 pp. \$23.95. This is a fast-moving account of Wilma's last 37 years trying to negotiate the no-man's-land between victims and offenders.

Seminole: Some People Never Give Up by Tina Siemens, self-published, Seminole, USA, 2019, 376 pp., \$24.50. This is an epic story of Mexican Mennonites and Texans and how some of them ended up together in southern Texas: a true story imaginatively told.

Book Review

Magdalene Redekop, *Making Believe: Questions About Mennonites and Art* (Winnipeg, MB: University of Manitoba Press, 2020)

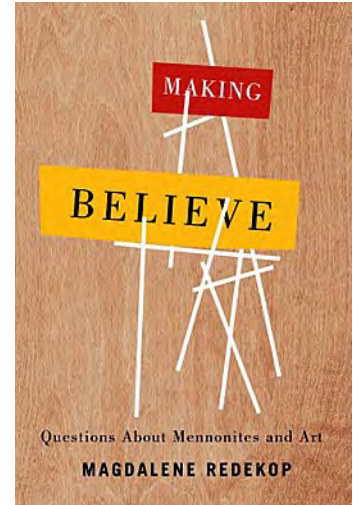
Reviewed by Di Brandt

Redekop's *Making Believe* is a big, sprawling, challenging, entertaining study of the new Mennonite professional expressive arts that suddenly emerged in North America in the late 20th century, in the areas of creative writing, music composition and performance, visual arts, theatre and film. Redekop sets herself the impossible task of trying to survey the whole emergent multidisciplinary field, bringing her formidable skills as a professionally trained literary and cultural studies scholar to bear on its many aspects, and occasionally including examples of her own experimental forays into musical and literary creation and performance.

Woven into this densely researched scholarly, wide-ranging, and occasionally artist-based discussion is a lively personal commentary, rooted in Redekop's own experience as the daughter of *Kanadier* Mennonites of the Manitoba west reserve, *Plautdietsch*-speaking farmers with large families, making do without electricity or indoor plumbing until the mid-60s. By then she herself was leaving the community to seek her fame and fortune in the Canadian academy and the big city.

The widely celebrated Mennonite artistic "renaissance," as Redekop calls it, derived from that unlikely, traditionalist and largely illiterate (oral) southern Manitoba communitarian peasant source, bursting suddenly into life among its young people, who were transplanted more or less *en masse* in a single generation to nearby urban modern Winnipeg, in the 1970s and 80s. It was a dramatic migration, fuelled by shrinking rural land acquisition opportunities, and expanding new urban opportunities in education and modern professions. There were many new Canadian initiatives in professional creative arts development being proffered at that time as well, which enabled and encouraged new expressive opportunities, particularly in multicultural, regionalist and feminist arts contexts, across the country. Thank you, Maggie, for reminding us that this is where and how the Mennonite artistic renaissance truly began.

From the lively multicultural, multidisciplinary welcoming context of Winnipeg, the Mennonite artistic renaissance spread to every church-centered Mennonite community in North America, attracting collaborative attention along the way among a wide range of impresarios, scholars, and audiences around the world. The reception in the churches, still the main locus of community gathering and



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cultural expression in the traditionalist-minded Mennonite communities of North America then, was much less enthusiastic. The artists were undermining the power of the churches to shape and control the Mennonite imaginary and collective forms of creative expression and worship. It's a split that the culture has not really come to terms with yet.

The Mennonite artistic renaissance was, and continues to be, an extraordinary cultural happening, with its intense conflictual internal dynamics for traditionally minded Mennonites trying to cope with rapid modernization in their midst, and its spectacular new multiple award-winning, global, intercultural imaginative reach. Redekop's lively telling of the story adds much new information and perspective to the growing oeuvre of scholarship and creative writing devoted to its emergence and present flourishing.

A wide angled overview like this one can't help being idiosyncratic in its choice of attentions and emphases. By her own admission, Redekop's survey is "peculiar," and highly personally inflected. Readers of all stripes will no doubt want to quarrel with her inclusion of certain works and trends, and exclusion of others, her quick rush over important areas of the renaissance and unusual attention to what others might consider minor or secondary elements. Still, it's a fascinating study, passionately argued, and chock full of information and insights. I warmly recommend this book as required reading for anyone interested in the Mennonite story, in any of its aspects.

Redekop is at her finest in elucidating the creative work of immediate predecessors to the artistic renaissance in southern Manitoba, such as Paul Hiebert's ever popular poetic parody in the figure of Sarah Binks, and the development of the Mennonite classical music radio station CFAM in southern Manitoba by the Friesen family of Altona. (One member of that family, Eric Friesen, became a well known radio host on CBC and elsewhere, and was instrumental later in the development of 107 Classic in Winnipeg). There was also a large initiative to train Mennonites in the art of four-part choral singing, and the fostering of musical excellence in children's piano performance (and to some extent other instruments) through local festival competitions, led by cultural innovators like Ben Horsch, who was Lutheran German by inheritance and joined a Mennonite church in Winnipeg as a young man, marrying the daughter of a Mennonite minister.

(That wife, incidentally, became *Tante* Esther, a much loved children's program host on CFAM, playing wonderful recordings of famous children's stories for us each week, and sometimes inviting elementary school teachers of southern Manitoba to bring their classes to the studio for on air poetry recitations and musical performances. A cherished memory of my childhood, and I regret that Redekop overlooked this significant artistic influence in the community in her survey.)

I'm not sure that Redekop's attempt to fashion a *shtahp*-inflected discursive practice in weaving together autobiographical and scholarly languages and approaches is entirely successful—it's more an awkward crossing over, back and forth, between these very different cultural contexts and codes, but it does make for entertaining reading. The awkwardness itself is, of course, something

all readers who have found themselves having to undergo bicultural negotiations at any point in their lives will instantly recognize.

The book is least convincing, at least to this reader's mind, in its often stern critique of intercultural engagements by non-Mennonite artists and scholars in the development of the Mennonite artistic renaissance. Why Redekop would be so wary of our many brilliant intercultural collaborators is mystifying to me. A talented collaborator criticized by Redekop (for his supposed intercultural opportunism) is Toronto-based pianist and innovative multimedia artist Glenn Gould, creator of the experimental multimedia audio-collage *The Quiet in the Land*, which used documentary footage of Mennonite church hymn singing among its materials.

Redekop's critical list also includes Toronto composer Victor Davies, of *Mennonite Piano Concerto* fame (who contacted Ben Horsch for Mennonite contacts and content in the composition process); Spanish-speaking Mexican filmmaker Carlos Reygadas, director of *Stellet Licht*, the first ever feature length art film spoken entirely in *Plautdietsch* and set in a rural Mexican Mennonite community; anthropologist James Urry who has devoted much of his career to studying the Mennonites on a broad scale; and literary critics Carole Gerson and Tanis MacDonald.

Each of these talented creators and scholars has brought great new interest and a cornucopia of unexpected edgy new insights to Mennonite cultural expression. We ourselves, as a people, have benefitted so much from our own extensive intercultural engagements with the surround (Redekop's own study being a good case in point). Surely it is fitting that the exchange and cross-fertilization go both ways?

There are tantalizing glimpses of Redekop's personal story offered here and there. We find out, for example, that two of her maternal great-grandparents were gypsy orphans, abandoned as infants on different Mennonite doorsteps during a tragic pogrom against the Roma in Russia/Ukraine, and thankfully adopted by the receiving families. Eventually these adopted gypsy Mennonites found and married each other. Which makes me wonder whether the whimsical gypsy motifs in the literary works of Armin Wiebe and Patrick Friesen are perhaps also more factually derived than most of us have previously thought. How many other surreptitiously imported and possibly politically charged bio-ancestries have gone into the culture's making over the centuries, and how are these bio-secrets operative in our midst now?

We are told that Redekop's father, a prominent church bishop, grew up in a family marked by suicides and alcoholism. The family was too poor to send its many children to the nearby church-supported boarding school, Mennonite Collegiate Institute, even though her father the bishop sat on its Board of Directors, so Maggie and her sisters attended public high school instead. (Most church and community work was unpaid in those days. People lived and worked on farms, or owned small businesses. So those holding public office of any kind were incredibly stretched in time and resources.) Maggie herself belonged to an amateur family singing trio in her youth, The Falk Sisters, which attracted local fame and risked being good enough to be regarded as professional—at which point the ensemble threw in the towel. The artistic renaissance was not yet developed enough to support this kind of bold move beyond church sanction for young Mennonite women of southern Manitoba at that time.

Redekop herself married "up," into a German-speaking

(Continued on page 10)

Book Review

The World Is Mostly Sky, Sarah Ens,
Turnstone Press, 2020

Reviewed by Patrick Friesen
Poet, Playwright Essayist

While reading Sarah Ens' startling debut poetry collection, *The World Is Mostly Sky*, Alvin Boyd Kuhn's *The Lost Light: The Interpretation of Ancient Scriptures* came to mind. A Theophist, Kuhn wrote about the four bodies each human has, symbolized by the four elements. We live in these bodies, alternating among them, depending on where we are in life, what our focus is. I get this feeling, in *The World Is Mostly Sky*, of moving among the bodies, particularly water (the physical body) and fire (the spiritual body).

I also think of Yeats in his body and soul dialogues and the Crazy Jane poems. In one of the Crazy Jane poems he writes that "Fair and foul are near of kin." Even the title of Ens' book suggests a similar dialogue of body and spirit. A duality that becomes a third thing, a unity.

"Wuthering" is a central poem in this collection, a poem loaded with physical imagery. The body "seeks sun, craves water/ and also you". There is a yearning toward the spirit/divine, but that divine has to enter the body and live in the body.

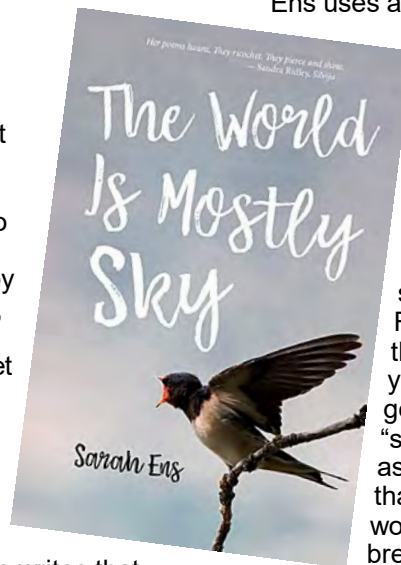
"The body swells an idea:/moving west,/growing in the rain. . ." The idea, the conception of conception, the body growing an idea, a seed growing in the rain, this is the body as source. At the same time the body is doing its more typical physical duties, filling an apartment with plants, etc. Could this interaction of body and idea be called spirit?

"The body squints; a ghost cycles in the garden." Throughout this poem, and the whole book, there is this interaction of the physical and the spirit. Both in Kuhn, with his four bodies which we enter/exit/reenter according to where we are in our lives, and in Yeats' dialogue of self and soul, the body and soul need each other, define each other.

(Continued from page 9)

Russländer Mennonite family, whose interest in higher education and the modern professions was less fraught than in her own more traditionalist-minded *Plautdietsch*-speaking *Kanadier* family. The liaison smoothed the way for her entry into academic life at the University of Toronto, though it discouraged her from developing her inherited exuberantly expressive comedic barefoot *shtahp* sensibility and creative arts leanings, which are still finding their way into public expression in her academic retirement, now.

I know Magdalene Redekop has published several short works of autofiction elsewhere. But I long to read a booklength memoir where these and so many other personal experiences and creative emergencies, deliciously hinted at here, are more fully explored. Na yo, Maggie?



Ens uses a lot of repetition, consonance and vowel sounds. She builds rhythms, beautifully, with such word play. "It helps to say: this body, this blood. To say: me too, me too." The consonance of "body" and "blood", but also the dynamic of repetition "to say", "this" and "me too". Rhythm, as the words sum up the centrality of the body in this book. She works frequently with vowel sounds. Often, several words following each other shift their vowel sounds to create a rhythm. For example, the brief "full snow moon". Say the phrase slowly, feeling the movement of your mouth as it shapes the vowels, and you get a sense of how the motion works. Or, "stick's sharp reach". The strength of vowels as drivers of rhythm is that they are less visible than consonance. They do their work within words; they are the music of the language, the breath.

Other times Ens undercuts rhythm by leaving out a connecting word ("secrets liquid, in her belly"), or by using indentations and broken lines (as in the poem "Of Earth Crumbling"). Occasionally, she shifts the typical use of a word by eliminating part of the word itself. In the example below, we have a line that could mean "she moved eerily" or "she moved into eerie territory", which ends up being an internal move into the desert of contemplation. Both meanings inhere.

"The boyfriend
moved to LA so
she moved eerie,
inward to the desert." ("I, Too, Am the Mountaintop")

It's a very fine poem that weaves in and out of biblical allusions, and a present predicament, offering the reader a lively journey of the spirit. The poem "Eclipse From Mont-Royal" ends with:

"but today, our cheeks sweeten
with peach, moon swings into sun,
& we talk as though the light,
when it flips out from shadow,
will be on our side."

These lines hold the earth of the poem, the physicality, and they suggest the ethereal world within that material world, how it transforms, shadow to light and back again. The constant motion of body and spirit, in and out of each other, this is the thread throughout this marvelous book.

Stories in Mennonite Historian (Dec. 2020)

- * *Notes from Normal School*, by Lorne Brandt
- * *Your Family History: Different Approaches to the Same End?* by Robb Nikkel
- * *An Interview with Royden Loewen: Farmer, Historian, Storyteller* by Robb Nikkel
- * *MHA: Voices from EMC & EMMC* by Conrad Stoesz
- * *Oral Interviews Digitized* by Jon Isaak

Book Review

Once Removed, Andrew Unger,
Turnstone Press, 2020 269 pp.

Reviewed by John H. Peters

I started smiling about half way through the second paragraph of this book and laughed out loud by page 10. Andrew Unger definitely has great comedic skills! To say it's just a funny book, however, would not be totally accurate. It contains a serious dose of satire and tongue-in-cheek skewering of local politicians, of church practices, of Mennonite courtship rituals and several other topics. Followers of Andrew's widely read and popular musings in the Daily Bonnet will certainly recognize and appreciate many of them.

While Unger, in his brief prologue to the book, takes pains to state that the words are totally a work of fiction or "complete and utter dummheit as my ancestors would say", it doesn't take long for the reader to realize that Edenfeld, the setting of the novel, bears a strong resemblance to several modern, progressive Mennonite towns/cities in Manitoba and especially one in southeastern Manitoba.

The protagonist, Timothy B. Heppner, works for Edenfeld's Parks and "Wreck" department, the name given to it by some disgruntled members of the community; more specifically members of the Preservation Society. They are aghast at the town's willingness to destroy all of its heritage buildings in order to make way for a megamart which the nefarious mayor and chief developer, Mr. BLT Wiens, is aggressively promoting in the name of progress. To supplement the mediocre wage he receives as a maintenance worker for the town, Timothy is a ghost writer of family histories and biographies, apparently something in big demand in Mennonite communities. Unfortunately his clients are deserting him one by one and he and his wife Katie are determined to find out who or what is behind this sudden and unexpected loss of income. It soon becomes apparent that there is a coordinated effort by certain individuals to stifle any and all opposition to the great makeover of the town of Edenfeld. Timothy and his allies in the Preservation Society vow to defend the community's heritage.

Unger develops a rich and entertaining group of characters in this work and while some of them are certainly meant to be caricatures of real people, he manages to make them totally believable. His wife Katie, a strong willed feminist scholar whose attire at the baptismal font proved irresistibly seductive to him, his best friend Randall who brews poor quality beer (including an unpalatable concoction of star anise and Rogers corn syrup) in his garage and samples more than a considerable amount of it himself, fellow Preservationist Society member Brenda from the loans department at the Credit Union who has images of Mennonite Martyrs tattooed all over her body, are just a few of the characters who add vibrancy and interest to this story.

Descriptions of the meetings of the Preservation Society

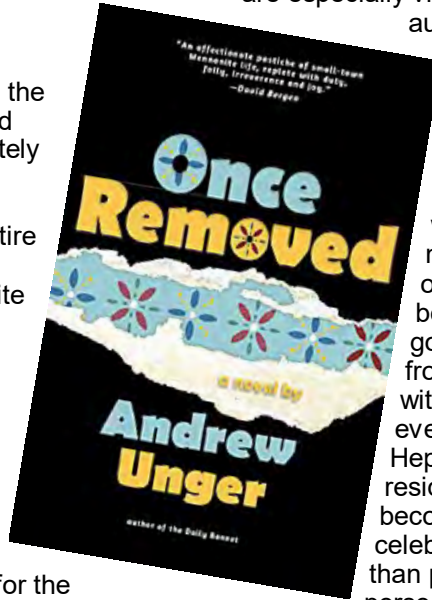
are especially vivid and carry the distinct aura of authenticity, albeit in a very amusing way. It certainly seems that Unger has first-hand knowledge and experience with this type of committee meeting. The Preservation Society is composed of a few individuals who have the courage to stand up to Mayor Wiens and his council whose "progressive" policies are focused mainly on destroying any vestige of the original Edenfeld and transforming it into a bedroom community. The council's ultimate goal seems to be to make it indistinguishable from any large suburban centre complete with plenty of parking lots and strip malls and even going so far as to Anglicize its name. Heppner's idol, Elsie Dyck, is a former resident of Edenfeld who has left the town and become a renowned author of several celebrated books. Legend has it that her less than positive portrayal of Edenfeld led to her persecution and eventual expulsion from the

town by sinister individuals i.e. Wiens and Company. Heppner is afraid that the same effort by the same group is being made to destroy his livelihood and silence him. The description of his eventual meeting with Elsie Dyck at a food court in the Big City where he inadvertently discards her fries and nearly gets escorted out of the mall by security is truly funny. In their conversation she confides that she was not forced out of Edenfeld, at all. She was not cowed by the opposition to her work, she left once she knew that the community had nothing left to offer her. His conversation with Elsie gives him the impetus to finally summon the courage to write a massive volume titled the Unauthorized History of Edenfeld, which is a clear-eyed unbiased recounting of the past, not one imagined or shaped by those wishing to gloss over unpleasant or uncomfortable elements or events.

Unger continues to amuse his readers with several humorous segments as the book draws to its conclusion but there is a real sense throughout that he does value his Mennonite heritage and even while lampooning it, displays an affection for it and a desire to maintain it.

It may well be that even the title of the book is a play on words. Mennonites seem to be inordinately fond of genealogy and in determining who is related to whom. The term "once removed" means skipping a generation so a cousin of your parents is your cousin once removed. Perhaps that is all Unger meant with his title. But despite all the satire and comedy he has so deftly woven into this book, he also shows clearly that once a house barn is removed, once a tradition is removed, once a tree that has stood for 100 years has been removed, it is difficult if not impossible to bring those things back. That is a real loss and one worth preventing.

Yes, this is a funny book, but it is also a thoughtful and insightful one. It is well worth the read.



Mennonites and the Pandemic

An opinion by Glen Klassen

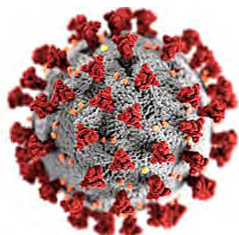
Steinbach, Altona, and Winkler have at least 40 Mennonite Churches. To my knowledge not one of them has publically resisted Provincial guidelines for social distancing, wearing of masks, or conducting non-approved gatherings. However, several protest events have occurred in Steinbach, much to the chagrin of residents of the city.

Southern Ontario, however, has not been spared. There, spurred on by Low German YouTuber Henry Hildebrand, some civil disobedience has occurred in the conservative Mennonite community. The justification seems to be that government restrictions are exaggerated responses to a dubious pandemic and that the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech are threatened. There is the implication that government requirements conflict with God's requirements and that the latter are to be obeyed in preference to the former.

In Belize, a congregation in Blue Creek has acted contrary to government orders and has held large gatherings. Here the justification is even stronger toward obeying God rather than authorities. The police made a heavy-handed attempt to arrest a group of ministers by rifle-wielding officers. Belizean civic leaders reversed the arrest attempt and are looking forward to calm negotiations. A leading minister in Spanish Lookout supported the Blue Creek resistance.

Mennonites have not often resorted to civil disobedience to obey God. Their refusal to serve in the military in Canada cannot be considered to be civil disobedience because they had been given this privilege by the highest authority in Canada. Also, legal compromises were worked out to allow Mennonites to serve in other vital functions during the wars. This included service in forestry, in mental health centres, and for some, in medical corps. In other countries, like the US, similar compromises were made but there were more serious confrontations in countries like Nicaragua (and, of course, Germany).

I think it is reasonable to assume that government officials are not trying to oppress the people and take away their rights; they are trying to save lives. The pandemic is real and dangerous. There is no confusion between COVID and the seasonal flu and there is no controversy about how to defeat an air-borne virus: sanitation, masks, and distancing in well-ventilated places.



Pandemic Prayer

*Our gracious and almighty Father:
We come to you bowed by this pandemic, needy,
weak, and bewildered.
As your battling, suffering church has knelt
before you in ages past,
When war, pestilence, schism, and heresy
drove us beyond
the brink of our knowledge and skill,
We again cry out for mercy as your servants.
Deliver us from COVID 19!
Give help to workers who struggle against it!
Save your church from fighting and division!
Rescue us from lies, half-lies and half-truths!
Lend strength to weary pastors and leaders!
Give abundant love to your church, to
share in the world.
May your salvation be made glorious even now
in the midst of chaos.
Bring us at last to safe harbour,
Carried by your Spirit to our heavenly home,
Where all will be well, and safe, and sound.
For we pray this in the name of
your Son Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

— Layton Friesen