

# CELEBRATING The West Reserve

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*Writers of the West Reserve*, Nov. 6 — On a sunny Saturday afternoon, eleven poets and fiction writers, all who were born and/or grew up in the surrounding villages, were featured in a program of readings, songs, and a video presentation. Participating in various ways were Di Brandt, Lois Braun, Eleanor Chornoboy, Nathan Dueck, David Elias, Victor Enns, Paul Hiebert, Esther Matz, Doug Reimer, Alfred E. van Vogt, and Armin Wiebe. Although two of the authors—van Vogt and Hiebert—have already passed on, and two writers had to send their regrets, they were represented by others reading their work. The afternoon concluded with *faspa*.

L-R: Franklin Rempel, Armin Wiebe, Eleanor Chornoboy, Doug Reimer, Lois Braun, Esther Matz, Paul Krahn, Sarah Ens, David Elias (Photo courtesy of Erin Unger) See stories on pages 3 and 4.



Gerald Friesen, retired University of Manitoba historian, was made a Member of the Order of Canada on December 29, 2021 by Her Excellency the Right Honourable Mary Simon, Governor General of Canada. This is one of 93 such honours and is awarded for those who "changed our nation's measure of success and, through the sum of their accomplishments, have helped us build a better Canada." The Order of Canada is one of our country's highest civilian honours. Its Companions, Officers and Members take to heart the motto of the Order: **DESIDERANTES MELIOREM PATRIAM** ("They desire a better country"). Friesen was born in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and is the author of books about the Canadian Prairies.



# A Community of Communities

*Editorial by Glen Klassen*

The West Reserve, those 17 sections set aside for Mennonite settlement in the 1870s, has been central to the development of Mennonite culture. With its fertile farmland, perfect for the sectional grid, its early construction of railways and railway towns, its creative farmers and business owners, the area has become one of the most densely populated rural areas in the Province.

The growth and productivity of this part of Manitoba has spilled over many times as major population shifts ensued: the migration to Mexico and Paraguay, the diaspora to the west and especially to northern Saskatchewan, and the perpetual move to the big city. "Where do you come from?" "You mean originally? The West Reserve".

How many "firsts" can be attributed to the WR? First major publisher; First Mennonite politicians (C. W. Wiebe, 1932; Siegfried Enns, 1962); first Mental Health Centre (1967); First private high school and Teacher's College MEI, MCI (1889); First Bible School (1925); First MCC Thrift Shop, (1972) as well as major initiative in business and agriculture.

In the 1980s the Reserve welcomed a huge influx of Berghthaler Mennonites from the East Reserve to the eastern end of the WR. There were also pockets of non-Mennonites as well as Jewish entrepreneurs, especially in the railway towns. Then came the Russlaender in the 1920s, who mixed freely while bringing a slightly different religious culture to the area. More recently there has also been the coming "home" of Mexican and other Latin-American Mennonites. The proximity of towns such as Morden and Emerson hastened the assimilation of the Mennonites into Canadian life.

The term "West Reserve" is probably falling out of usage, replaced by Altona/Winkler, much like Hague/Osler in Saskatchewan. It is the bread basket of Manitoba and the source of many progressive ideas and initiatives on the provincial and even on the international scene.

## Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

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# 2021 EastMenn Year in Review

The year began with a Zoom meeting on March 3 which served as both the AGM for 2020 and as a tentative projection for another Covid year in 2021. The detailed plans for the Shantz plaque unveiling, a virtual tour proposal, and the Annual Fall Historical Lecture were all kept on the agenda but no specifics were attached subject to the changes in Provincial Covid restrictions. On September 24 it became possible for some of the committee to work together outside and attach the Shantz plaque to the stone. A public unveiling/launch is expected to be held on Manitoba Day next year when large groups can again meet without safety concerns. Further work on discovering the Shantz cemetery was discussed but relegated to 2022. Restrictions also lifted enough to allow our fifth annual in-person lecture at MHV on Saturday, October 30, featuring digital cartographer Brent Wiebe of Stettler AB, and map displays of all types. About 75 people attended. A final committee meeting took place via Zoom on November 25. Ongoing involvement continues in the Mennonite Memorial Landing Site Association, as Orlando Hiebert transferred his role as "occupier" to Ernest Braun. Representation also continues in the Chortitz Heritage Church, which will be increasingly featured online at the RM of Hanover and MMHS websites as a new initiative, the Peace Trail, slowly takes shape. The mission statement of the Trail is "to help people participate in ecological, spiritual, historical and recreational awareness by travel through Southeastern Manitoba." It would begin at the Mennonite Landing Site and end at the Dirk Willms sculpture in Steinbach. This is envisioned to be a bicycle/walking tour, a virtual tour, or maybe a car/bus tour. The Trail sub-committee met on December 4 to work on a plan which may include a fundraising pilgrimage along the Trail for MHV in fall of 2022. Two EastMenn members, Glen Klassen and Harold Dyck, are also part of the new MMHS Trails Committee. Work is being done to facilitate the digitization of the Carillon photo archive. Glen Klassen continues to serve as editor of *Heritage Posting*. EastMenn committee met twice during the year, both times facilitated by Conrad Stoesz on Zoom.

*Submitted by Ernest Braun,  
Secretary, EastMenn Historical Committee*

## Renewal Reminder

It's 2022! Time to renew your membership in MMHS! It's easy — first check your membership expiry date. It should be on your address label from the last issue. (We will again be mailing the print copy to all members who want it.)

To renew (or subscribe) send your \$20 per year to:

**Sean Goerzen, MMHS Treasurer**

**623 Goulding St.**

**Winnipeg, MB R3G 2S3**

Make cheques payable to MMHS.

or E-transfer to [sgoerzen@outlook.com](mailto:sgoerzen@outlook.com)

And while you're at it why not sweeten the pot with a little donation?



# Poets and Storytellers of the West Reserve

by Erin Unger

"How will Paul Hiebert and A. E. van Vogt appear at this event from beyond the grave?"

This was the amused, tongue-in-cheek question we encountered everywhere upon seeing the online poster

## Darp Days Resume in the West Reserve

by Ray Hamm and Lois Braun

After last year's hiatus, some activities have resumed at the Commons in the historic village of Neuberghthal. The Commons Barn was the scene of four events this past fall, called collectively, Darp Days.

*Jeshijchte en Leeda von Reinlaund*, Oct. 16—This Low German program consisted of stories and songs performed by Al Ens, Armin Ens, and John Zacharias, who took the audience for an imaginary stroll along the Reinland village street gathering up the cows and telling stories from the old days about each family. They brought with them a bugle (*Bloshuarn*) very similar to the one used for alerting cattle when the Ens boys were village cowherds.



— Photo courtesy of Al Ens

*P. G. Hamm Photography Exhibit*, Oct. 23—The work of Peter Gerhard Hamm of Neuberghthal was on display in the barn (on loan from the Mennonite Historic Arts Committee), and curator Dr. Susie Fisher invited the audience to explore the subject matter of each photo, along with its "hidden" background features. The guests appreciated the fuller picture this exercise provided of the early-1900s culture of the village. The photographs are part of a larger project and art book called *Mennonite Village Photography*, which was launched earlier this year.

*Next Stop Heaven*, Oct. 30—Jess Reimer, Jeremy Hamm, and T J Blair performed old-time gospel and bluegrass music, playing mandolin, fiddle, guitar, and upright bass, and singing in tight three-part harmonies. The band has long been a favourite at Neuberghthal events. Jess Reimer is the granddaughter of John and Mary Reimer, a couple who raised their family in the old Altona village (*Aultneiv*) in the 1940s-60s.

*Writers of the West Reserve*, Nov. 6 — See p. 1.

*Jazz Is Comin' to Town*, Dec. 2—Although not officially a part of Darp Days, this program of popular ballads, jazz pieces, and Christmas music was a welcome addition to Neuberghthal's 2021 events line-up. Under the very capable leadership of Gavin Scott Penner on keyboard, the performers consisted of recent alumnae of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, including Emily Bergen, JJ Scherr, and Simon Unger. An audience of over a 100 cheered them on, enjoying the unique stylings and vocals of this young ensemble.

promoting *Poets & Storytellers of the West Reserve*, depicting 11 distinct writers.

This was the final event in Neuberghthal's Darp Days — a series of Saturdays throughout early autumn featuring and celebrating Mennonites of all stripes and connections to the village.

We arrived to find the historic Commons Barn was nicely full of double-vaxxed attendees, and the writers represented in a variety of dynamic ways.

Winkler-born, B.C.-based poet Nathan Dueck appeared, not in person, but via visual wordplay, with selections from his latest publication, *A Very Special Episode*, displayed on tables throughout the venue in anticipation of the faspa to be shared over and around them.

First in person, David Elias read from his most recent book, *The Truth About the Barn*. With his warm voice exuding humour and affection for the farmyard barn.

Next, Di Brandt was not able to attend, so poet Sarah Ens read on her behalf from *Questions I asked my mother*, carrying the barn theme in her choice of poems. Apologetic for her East Reserve roots, Ens defended herself by saying, "I'm allowed to be here," citing her West Reserve "darp credentials" (thus says the pamphlet, and poet herself) as her grandfather attended school in Reinland with Brandt's mother. There's certainly a genius in having a poet read another poet's work, she held us all transfixed. Ens then read us a few selections from her own 2021 publication *The World is Mostly Sky*, with a shift of subject matter from barns to silos, yet still distinctly "prairie".

We were abruptly jolted from this prairie-based world into the decidedly fictional worlds of A.E. van Vogt. Neuberghthal resident Paul Krahn stepped to the mic to read from *Vault of the Beast*. Apparently van Vogt felt the 1979 movie *Alien* was a direct rip-off of this story, which demonstrates his influence. This was my first encounter with van Vogt's writing, and it was weird to hear it after two writers had read about barns, in a barn. Now suddenly about Ixtl, a galactic system, atomic structures, and light years.

Next, continuing the genre fiction theme, we met Esther Matz (*nee* Toews, she explained from the podium). "My novels are basically crime stories," shared the author of the *Pineview Mysteries* series, who upon retiring from her law practice only began writing at the age of 80 when she was "finally able to settle down and write," thus inspiring other late bloomers such as possibly myself.

Lois Braun, whose recent volume *Peculiar Lessons* I loved and reviewed for this publication earlier this year, read a short story that had been published in *Prairie Fire*. It was a delight to hear her read a story in full, in her rich voice. A natural storyteller.

Here, a short intermission.

Poet Victor Enns then appeared via flickeringly fragmented video, representing his own lived experiences with ablism and disablism. A quote: "No one really knows who belongs here but everyone knows it's not us." His many tongue-in-cheek lines elicited chuckles, which ceased abruptly at the final line, "death rattle."

Next, Doug Reimer brought something different with his guitar and lyrical poem style of songwriting. "My family was

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kind of eccentric,” he began, and the audience agreed knowingly. He proceeded to bless us with a sampling of story-songs. A song about his mother (“a wonderful but strange lady,” he reflected), a song about trucking, and most hilariously, a song he called a sort of “Mennonite Baptist Evangelical Hymn – reminds me of Steinbach,” he quipped. Weirdly, he was right! Which makes me wonder, did the evangelical zeal of the 1940s grip the East Reserve stronger than its counterpart *yantzie*d?

Next up was Eleanor Chornoboy, who shared that she grew up in Edenburg, between the Post Road and the American border. She read from her historic novel *Katarina: Mennonite Girl from Russia*. She read the scene where teenaged Katarina tells little Suzy a story to distract her from hunger. In a masterful move, Chornoboy stopped the story short at its most suspenseful moment. Well played. Her next reading was a burial scene in a cemetery.

Armin Wiebe read from his novel *Grandmother, Laughing*. He told us he was becoming “Sush”. Every time I hear Wiebe read from his books, I’m stunned by his ability to effortlessly meld Plautdiestch into English, playing with the order of words, mimicking that familiar dance of Low German and English. The effect is very warm and comforting but the story itself is troubling... in this case, Sush related the talk around the dinner table, which ultimately was gossip about an incestuous family in the fictional community.



**A bearded Franklin Rempel portraying Sarah Binks.** — Photo Courtesy of Marilyn Hamm

Overall, a great variety of perspectives and styles were represented as we spent a rollicking afternoon in the barn with a bunch of West Reserve Mennonite writers and those who admire them.

The writings of Paul Hiebert came to life as Franklin Rempel leapt from hiding, fully garbed as Sarah Binks herself to read a carefully arranged series of poems from Hiebert’s novel from Sarah’s perspective. “I hope you can keep up...” she admonished us. I have to admit I had an impossible time “keeping up” as the falsetto and costume was incredibly distracting, though likely intended to enhance the reading of a maiden pursuing marriage. Certainly a boisterous conclusion to the readings!

Upon that uproarious note, the readings concluded and the faspas began in earnest, alongside much book-buying and author-signing.



**Some West Reserve books on sale.**

— Photo Courtesy of Erin Unger

The event was mindfully organized, as is everything created by the Neubergthal Heritage Foundation. We very much enjoyed ourselves!

## WestMenn Report 2021

The work of the WestMenn Historical Committee continued through another pandemic year in 2021, with some projects being slowed or postponed. The projects that WestMenn members are involved in include the Post Road Trail and Bicycle Tour, the West Reserve Atlas project, the Altbergthal History Project, and memorials at Fort Dufferin and Blumenhof, along with a few other historical projects related to the history of the Mennonite West Reserve. The committee met three times this past year.

The WestMenn Historical Committee also underwent some significant membership transitions in 2021. Graham Schellenberg stepped down as chair of WestMenn, having served the committee in the role since 2019. In October, Andrew Klassen Brown was acclaimed as the new chair of the committee. We are all thankful for Graham’s faithful work and leadership in his role as chair, and we are glad to have him continue with the work of WestMenn.

Additionally, two long-serving members of the WestMenn Historical Committee, Lawrence Klippenstein and Eleanor Chornoboy, have decided to step away from the committee after decades of involvement. We are deeply grateful for their many years of work, study, and research with the WestMenn Historical Committee, advancing the history of the Mennonite West Reserve.

WestMenn seeks to forge partnerships with interested people and groups, and to facilitate connections between them when possible. For more information about the committee, its projects, and to contact, please check out the WestMenn page on the new Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society website: <https://mmhs.org/westmenn-historical-committee/>

Andrew Klassen Brown

Chair of the WestMenn Historical Committee



# Jacob Y Shantz and the Mennonite West Reserve Revisited

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Mennonites emigrating from Russia (now Ukraine) to Canada in the 1870s had never really met Jacob Y. Shantz until he greeted them in Canada. Here they learned the man was a government appointee helping them to settle in their new homes.

They discovered that Shantz was a successful businessman, also a Mennonite, who resided in the province of Ontario representing Canadian Mennonites who would host the newcomers and help them deal with resettling issues of all kinds. The man had a Swiss Mennonite background, so did not speak their variant of the German language but they could manage to make themselves understood.

The story of how that huge task was accomplished after the Russia-German Mennonites began to reach Manitoba in 1874 has been researched and ultimately, in 1888, published in a book written by Sam Steiner of Waterloo, Ontario. It is titled *Vicarious Pioneer. The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz*. The immigration issue gets several chapters in this book, but since it is set out as a biography, it attempts to cover his whole life and attenuates his notes on the immigration aspects of Shantz's work considerably.

What came to be called the West Reserve in the new province of Manitoba gets four references in this volume. They have mainly to do with an exploration trip Shantz undertook in 1875 to see what settlement options the lands west of the Red River might have available as a further land grant when it became apparent the first grant could not make adequate provision for all the Mennonites who planned to move to Canada. As a result of further government negotiations he managed to secure an area just over twice that of the first grant, seventeen townships in total, and make that available for settlement immediately.

This accomplishment is central to the acclaim Shantz would get in the West Reserve, and was so formulated on a plaque unveiled as a tribute to him, in June of 1990, in a village community that had been named Schantzenfeld in the man's honour for his contribution to the establishment of 60 villages on the lands of the second land grant. The village, still active, indeed growing, may be visited even today at a site just south of what would become the railway town of Winkler a decade later.

The unveiling last year of a second Shantz cairn at the site of the first landing of the Russian Mennonite immigrants near Niverville was an event which very appropriately celebrates the immigration work of Shantz generally, but especially the construction of four temporary structures he had built for the new settlers at a place just a few miles from where at the junction of the Rat and the Red River, they actually disembarked at the end of their long journey.

The first steps in organizing a new settlement, dubbed

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Schantzenfeld Cairn

Text on Plaque

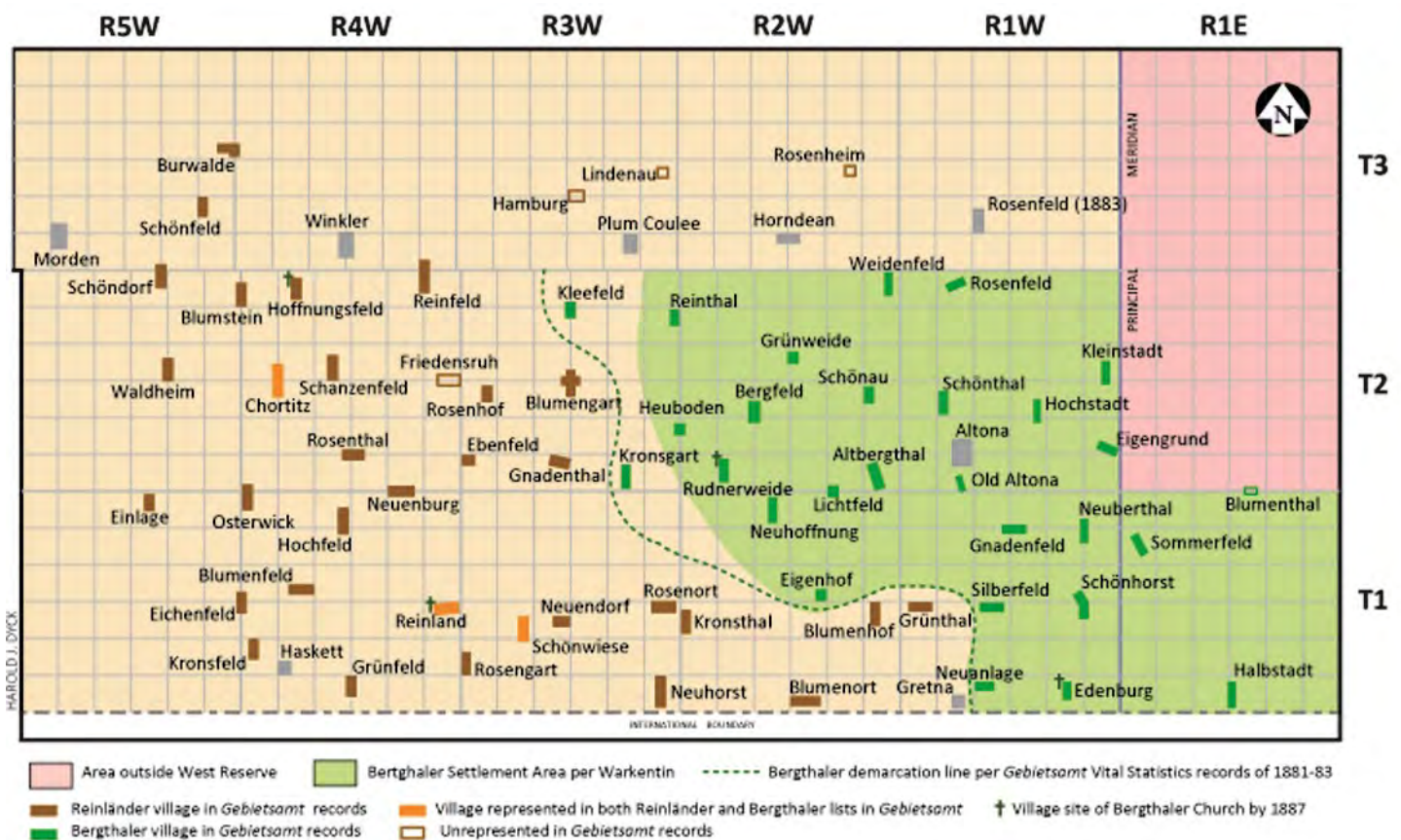
**JACOB Y. SHANTZ**  
(1822-1909)

Jacob Yost Shantz was born to Swiss Mennonite parents in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, on May 2, 1822. He began as a farmer and later extended his interests to include a sawmill operation, construction and industry including the operation of a major button factory.

When Mennonites from the Ukraine inquired about moving to Canada, Shantz was asked by the Canadian government to investigate settlement possibilities in Manitoba. Shantz made a trip to the northwest in 1872 and wrote a report entitled *Narrative of a Journey to Manitoba* which was translated into a number of languages and widely distributed to promote settlement in western Canada.

In the period 1874 to 1880 about 7,000 Mennonites came from the Ukraine to settle in Manitoba. They settled first of all on the East Reserve and then in 1875 and later in the West Reserve. Jacob Y. Shantz was instrumental in many ways in making this settlement possible. He negotiated a loan with the federal government, and with his own church brethren, to assist the settlers in getting started. He also made numerous trips to Manitoba to check on their progress and to bring them provisions.

The villages on Schantzenfeld, lying just west of here, and the former village of Schanzenberg near Niverville, were named in his honor.



## Chortitzer/Bergthaler Migration to the West Reserve

by Harold J. Dyck (From the *Historical Atlas of the East Reserve, MMHS* by permission)

Chortitzer/Bergthaler migration from the ER to the WR less than a decade after initial settlement radically changed the face of the WR. The green-shaded area of this map shows the eastern WR lands dominated by new Bergthaler villages in a pattern first shown by John Warkentin (see *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, p. 55). Within a very short time, the line blurred as "mixed villages" could be discerned on both sides. By 1887, Bergthaler churches had been built in the Reinländer villages of Reinland and Hoffnungsfeld. This map takes particular account of the WR vital statistics record of 1881-83 as kept by the WR *Gebietsamt* (*Reinländer Gemeinde Buch, 1880- Births & Marriages & Deaths*, Mexico Mennonite Record Collection, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1881-1883), in which alternating lists of Reinländer and Bergthaler births, deaths and marriages cast light on settlement patterns through one early 3-year window. While this record basically confirms Warkentin's configuration, its entries from Kleefeld and Kronsgart, villages lying outside his Bergthaler boundary and of probable Reinländer origin, are consistently cited within Bergthaler lists. Reinland, Schönwiese and Chortitz also have one or more entries in Bergthaler lists. The *Gebietsamt* records tell only a part of the story, but, clearly, what the ER lost quickly made a major impact on the WR.

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eventually as the East Reserve, of some 40 villages, presumably took place in these temporary shelters. One of the villages was named Shantzenberg, likewise in honour of Jacob. A cemetery also came into being at this location. Virtually all traces of life at this spot have disappeared by now.

As the East Menn Historical Committee celebrates completion of a Shantz cairn at the site of these sheds, Jacob Y. Shantz has returned, as it were. Also, Hans Werner has now published further information on Shantz ventures in Manitoba, i.e. in Emerson on the Red at the USA border. Details of other business activities remain to be discovered and "shed abroad".

One does wonder about his other experiences in exploring the West Reserve. For instance, is there any written reporting he may have done on his 1875 visit to the area soon to be given this new name? And what about conversations with his Métis helpers on both reserves, so far all unnamed in our documents? There is also still no hint of exactly what route he took on checking out the region west of the Red. More than five dozen letters in his archives file have likely not all been read.

We do well to continue looking for the dirt-covered, and otherwise still extant, tracks of Jacob Y. Shantz in the area that got the name "West Reserve". Perhaps the two cairns can now remind us of a task, arguably not yet really complete.



# Mennonites On The Move



(Screenshot from the MHSC Web site by Barb Draper)

## Historical society moving ahead with centenary projects

by Barb Draper, MHSC

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) is forging ahead with its centenary projects in 2022 and 2023, hoping that the COVID-19 pandemic will not force plans to change. This organization that brings together Mennonite archives, museums and provincial societies met virtually on Jan. 15 and 16, 2022.



**Mennonite  
Historical  
Society of  
Canada**

MHSC has some major projects in the works to recognize that a century ago thousands of Mennonites were on the move. Beginning in 1922, more than 7,000 Mennonites left Manitoba and Saskatchewan, moving to Mexico and Paraguay in an effort to save their traditional way of life. To commemorate this largest migration of Mennonites out of Canada, a story-telling exhibit will be on display at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man. from early summer to the fall of 2022, and then will travel to other parts of Canada. This is a joint project of MHSC, Mennonite Heritage Village and the D F Plett Research Foundation.

In 2023, MHSC is partnering with TourMagination to host a train trek to commemorate the 21,000 Mennonites who migrated from Russia to Canada in the 1920s. This *Memories of Migration Russlaender 100 Tour* will run for three weeks in the summer of 2023, beginning in Quebec City and ending in Abbotsford, B.C., with stops along the way to remember how Mennonite communities in various provinces welcomed the newcomers 100 years ago. The journey is divided into three sections and participants can choose to join the train for one or all of the parts. Space is limited and train travel is expensive in Canada, but the provincial Mennonite historical societies are planning events along the way that everyone is invited to participate in. For more information about the Memories of Migration event, visit the website at [mhsc.ca](http://mhsc.ca).

At the MHSC annual meeting, a recurring theme was that the pandemic has forced organizations to be creative and to offer lectures and seminars online. While personal connections are missing with virtual events, distance is not

an issue and people far away can participate.

Researching online is becoming ever more popular and there is an appetite for more documents to be digitized. The Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) continues to grow and in 2021 added its 15th member. The Mennonite Archives of Ontario has been digitizing materials related to the *Russlaender* commemoration and the Mennonite Heritage Archives is working on digitizing the *Steinbach Post*, to be posted on a new digital platform.

The Mennonite provincial historical societies, archives and other historical organizations value the connections that are fostered by meeting annually as MHSC. The year 2024 will be its 50th anniversary. Conrad Stoesz has agreed to continue his term as president.

## Memories of Migration

### Cross-Canada train tour to commemorate Russlaender centenary

Story and photo by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe (reprinted from the *Canadian Mennonite* with permission)

It's been almost 100 years since 1923, when thousands of Mennonites from the Soviet Union began migrating to Canada. A train tour commemorating their journey will wind across Canada in the summer of 2023 to mark the anniversary.

Ingrid Moehlmann, the event's initiator, remembers her father's final wish that started it all. "On his deathbed, the last thing he said to me before he slipped from consciousness was, would I please do something for this centenary," she says.

His grandfather, David Toews, helped bring thousands of Russian Mennonites, or Russlaender, to Canada after the 1917 Russian Revolution ravaged the country with famine, epidemic and violence.

When dissent arose amongst the Canadian Mennonites on how much to support these immigrants, Toews arranged for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to pay the travel costs, putting the debt for 21,000 people in his own name. He also persuaded Prime Minister William Lyon

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Mackenzie King to allow the Mennonites into the country.

Toews dedicated most of his life to the project — he finished fundraising and paying off the debt six months before his death. “That was a huge, huge thing in our family,” says Moehlmann, who attends First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

The idea of a train tour came to Moehlmann in a dream in 2015, a year after her father passed away, and she’s been planning Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour ever since. Going almost coast to coast, the three-week journey, organized by TourMagination, an Anabaptist-heritage travel company, will start in Quebec City on July 6, 2023 and end in Abbotsford on July 25. The trip is divided into three segments, each roughly a week long; participants can join just one or two sections or all three.

Moehlmann will lead the tour with Henry Paetkau. They are heading up the Russlaender Centenary Committee (RCC), a subcommittee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The tour will make stops in places of key historical significance to the Russian Mennonite migration, from the first landing site and quarantine station on Grosse Isle, an island near Quebec City, to the three earliest Mennonite settlements in the Fraser Valley of B.C.

Along the way, participants can join *sängerfests*, visit museums, tour cities and attend a gala dinner sponsored by the CPR, among many other highlights. In Winnipeg, the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies will host an academic conference exploring themes of war, revolution and migration in the Mennonite experience, led by Aileen Friesen, associate professor of history at the University of Winnipeg and co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

Moehlmann is looking forward to the arrival in Rosthern, Sask. to reenact the moment when the Russlaender got off the train and broke spontaneously into song, singing, “Now thank we all our God” in German. “I’ve heard about that my whole life,” she says.

The tour will celebrate the faith of the immigrants, remember the loss of their former communities, memorialize the challenges of resettlement and acknowledge Indigenous displacement in Mennonite and Canadian history.

“We can tell our story about what took place in Ukraine and there is a lot of heartbreak and tears associated with that, but . . . we need to understand that we came to this land as settlers and therefore we are incorporated into this fabric of settler colonialism that is part of Canadian history. And we cannot get away from that, that is also part of our story and we need to acknowledge it,” says Friesen.

Travellers will explore truth and reconciliation during the tour, as they learn about the displacement of Indigenous peoples that made way for many Mennonite settlements. “We know and understand the damage that has been done through settler-colonialism and it needs to be acknowledged,” Friesen says.

Recently, 450 people attended a history webinar Friesen presented in connection with the tour and people have already begun registering. Moehlmann hopes some of those will be young people. “I’m a teacher, I’m always interested in what can bring history to younger generations.” Travelling by train is expensive, so she’s exploring possible ways to include young people, like



**Ingrid Moehlmann is the instigator of the Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour, a weeks-long train trip across Canada, coming in 2023.**

inviting individuals to sponsor them to serve as train stewards.

It’s important to commemorate the Russlaender’s centenary because the history is fading from many people’s memories, Moehlmann says. “I see the Mennonite world I grew up in sort of crumbling very quickly. People just don’t understand anymore, I think, because they’re many generations removed.”

For many who do remember, this story is deeply personal. Moehlmann’s grandmother and her family could not afford to make the journey to Canada after all the men in their family but one were killed and their livelihood was lost. It was David Toews who provided the funds. “My mother’s entire family, both sides, was directly saved by this travel. It was my dad’s family who did that. . . . So for me, both sides of the story are really significant because there’s no way I would be here if one or the other hadn’t happened.”

“I’m hoping [the tour] makes people reflect on how it is we came to be here and some of the lessons learned along the way,” she adds.

Friesen says although Mennonite identity has changed significantly over the years, “that sense of community still prevails and it’ll be nice to experience that again, to experience all these different elements as a community.”

To learn more, visit [russlaender100.com](http://russlaender100.com).

## **The MHSC Movers and Shakers**

The executive committee is the same as last year: Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Barb Draper, secretary; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

The minutes of the recent meetings are on the website, [mhsc.ca](http://mhsc.ca), if you are interested in knowing who all the members are. No Award of Excellence was given this year.



# Brent Wiebe shows rare maps at MHV

by Glen Klassen

On Saturday, October 30 a capacity audience at Mennonite Heritage Village was treated to a trove of recently uncovered maps relevant to Mennonite settlements in Imperial Russia by Brent Wiebe from Stettler, Alberta. The maps included some from the Russian State Military History Archives. His talk touched on features of the Molotschna Colony that are not well known, such as the broad track through the middle of the Colony for ox-cart trains of merchants with its taverns and other infrastructure. He highlighted the importance of sheep farming in the mid-1800s with very realistic video animations. One of them was a walk-along of a typical Mennonite Village street which kept the audience spell-bound. The event was sponsored by MHV and the EastMenn Historical Committee.



Brent Wiebe

Brent is not yet well known to the Mennonite History community so here is his self-description, prepared for the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta upon his appointment to the Board:

"My name is Brent Wiebe, my wife Marcia Gail and I have four children, aged 4 to 15. We live in Stettler, Alberta, but for five years, from 2008-2013 we called Samara, Russia home. There we served as volunteers with our church's Bible and gospel literature distribution program. While in Russia, we were able to get acquainted with many of the Low-German speaking people living in Siberia, in the Orenburg area. This helped foster an interest in our own background. We are members of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman). My wife's great-great-grandfather Samuel Boese was one of the first two Holdeman settlers to move to the Linden area in 1902.

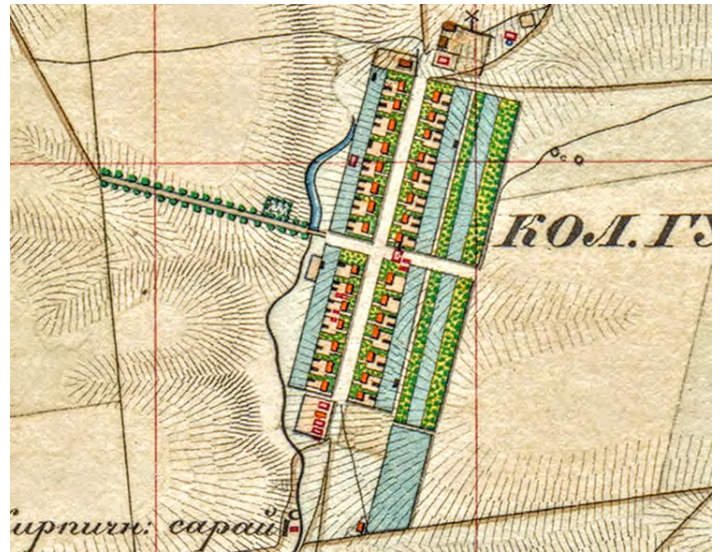
Since 2013 I have worked in building design together with my dad. Much of our focus is on Mennonite and Hutterite churches, schools, and other buildings. I am also interested in a variety of things relating to the historical material culture of the Russian Mennonites, with a focus on architecture and the day-to-day lifestyle of our forefathers. This includes furniture, clothing, farmyards, and village designs, etc. Collecting historical building prints provides an interesting comparison to the modern design we do.

Another hobby is language study and sitting with Russian maps or studying archival documents is one of my favourite ways to unwind. My knowledge of Russian has opened doors through social media to foreign researchers who otherwise would be difficult or impossible to communicate with. I have a weaker knowledge of German as well.

My greatest passion is mapping, and I have recently been able to access some exciting "new" maps of the Mennonite communities in Russia. I believe these maps will be an important contribution to Mennonite historical studies and I plan soon to make them available to the

public. I enjoy modern advancements and hope to be an asset to the MHSA as we adapt to changing times and technologies. I have been inspired by the obvious enthusiasm and willingness to work evident in the board members. My goal is to work together to help preserve our history and making it accessible to all." (The MHSA Chronicle, June 2021, p. 27, quoted with permission).

Brent provided records and maps for an article in the MHSA Chronicle on the 1709 plague in Danzig, written by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, which killed half of the residents of the city.



Detail from a typical map of a Mennonite village from the Russian State Military History Archive

## Book Notes

John A. and Eileen Toews. *Letters From Lena: Part 1 - The Caucasus, USSR 1924-1935*, 2021. The 23 letters are from Lena (Loewen) Becker/Dirks written to relatives in Osler, Saskatchewan during the Holodomor. The introduction includes Loewen Family genealogical material and maps. Translations to English were done by John A. Toews, Rudy Warkentin and Al Hamm. Contact John Toews at [toewsjohn7@gmail.com](mailto:toewsjohn7@gmail.com).

Cornelius and Carol Ens, *Ensium*, self-published, 2021. This book begins with a lengthy discussion of the uses of the name Ens before the founding of the Mennonite denomination. The book then moves into memoirs of Henry Ens (1904-1988) who was born in Nikolaipol, Ukraine, his wife Maria Friesen (1904-1987) and some of their children. Included are photos, names and dates of the descendants. This 344 page book can be obtained from Cornelius Ens (Conrad Stoesz, MHA).

Mark Reimer, *The Four Horsemen*, Friesen Press Editions, 2021, pb. \$12.99 (at Friesens). A family drama illustrating the conflicts in a blended family as it comes to terms with a balance between family and church.



# Treaty Commission Members visit MHV

**MHV Executive Director Gary Dyck talks about historic event**

In the fall of 2021 relations between the Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba (TRCM) and the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) began. As the visitors toured our exhibits and grounds we found many points of connection. In the gallery, they noted how we were forced to be separated from our land again and again. On the grounds, they saw the private school and then as we walked by the public school they commented, "you folks know how it is to be forced to have your children educated by a system you don't belong to." Finally, as we stood in the developing Dirk Willems Peace Garden, we talked about how we both long for good relations and peace in our world.

MHV is starting a new initiative to help our staff and constituency to learn together about our shared history with the indigenous people of Canada. We know that we don't know everything and that we can do better at honouring our indigenous neighbours. We plan to host a speaker series on three or four different topics as well as a half-day Kairos blanket exercise. The more we understand from their perspective, the more we can discuss what attitudes and changes we need to make as a people. Educating ourselves is the first step.

The next step will be to consult with our stakeholders. MHV has over 500 members, is part of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Association of Manitoba Museums and more. People and history are complex and it is good to keep wrestling with our identity and



**The TRCM representatives and MHV Staff. L to R: Kara Suderman, Robert Goertzen, Andrea Klassen, Nita Wiebe, Lorretta Ross (TRCM), Gary Dyck, Elder Bone (TRCM) and Elder Paynter (TRCM).**

— Photo courtesy of Patrick Friesen

responsibilities together. Each speaker session will include a Q&A time which will also be good for evaluative purposes.

The majority of people in our community do not fully know the original intent of the treaties and the profound trauma the indigenous community has faced for centuries and is still dealing with. We look forward to seeing you at these sessions in 2022. To keep up to date, sign-up for our weekly newsletter on our website.



**Cover of a beautiful gift notebook given to MHV attendees by the visitors.**



## MHV wins award for the "Mennonites at War" exhibit

Congratulations to Mennonite Heritage Village for winning the Association of Manitoba Museums Award of Excellence in Institutional Collaboration and Community Programming for their 2021 "Mennonites at War" exhibit. Chief curator Andrea Klassen and her team put together this unique and clarifying exhibit which has drawn attention far beyond the Mennonite community. Gary Dyck is the Executive Director of the Village.

## Mennonite Historian: Coming in March

*Searching the KGB Files of My Grandfather, Nikolai D. Sudermann (1898–1938): Part 2 of 2*  
by Werner Toews

*The Falk Sisters Album* by Mary Neufeld

*The Journey of the Jakob Hoepfner Wallet*  
by Werner Toews



# Book Reviews

Carla Funk, *Mennonite Valley Girl: A Wayward Coming of Age*, Greystone Books, 2021, 282 pp. \$32.95.

**Reviewed by Eleanor Chornoboy**

*Mennonite Valley Girl* is about a spirited and flamboyant teen-ager who wants nothing more than to be independent and away from her small Mennonite town. She pines to break free from the patriarchal norms where her future holds only marriage, babies, the ladies' sewing circle and submission to her husband. She pushes the limits of her religion and questions the rules of the Mennonite culture, but never loses sight of the communal expectations, knowing full-well that she is bumping against the cultural boundaries.

By the end of the first few pages, I felt reassured that Funk was not going to blast the reader with a volley of Valley Girl speak, using "like" or "totally" in every other sentence as was the way of Valley Girls. She also did not use "way" as an adjective or appear to raise the pitch of her voice at the end of a sentence as if posing a question. Instead, Funk used Valley Speak sparingly. Funk is spot-on with 1980s nostalgia from the canary-yellow Sony Sports Walkman, to "Stairway to Heaven" played at the high school dance, to bangs teased and sprayed "into a crusty cloud that would hold until midnight".

From the very first sentence of the book, where Funk describes Flashlight Tag, starting with, "As soon as the summer sky deepened into dusk, we huddled in a circle and set the rules for the night," I knew I was in for a treat of stories that I would be able to follow as if I was inside a picture book.

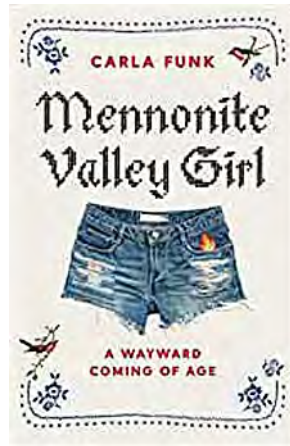
Her authentic voice takes the reader on a delightful ride through her coming of age experiences in 19 biographical small town stories. Each story flows effortlessly from one to the next like memories shared around the *Faspa* table on a Sunday afternoon. As the stories unfold, Funk refers back to earlier incidents and characters, building on them to create a fully rounded story.

The moods shift quickly in the stories, fluctuating from humour to poignancy, reminiscent of a pubescent youth.

Funk's delightful sense of humour shines in her description of her Grandpa Funk lecturing her and her brother on how to clean themselves after using the toilet. He instructs them to use only two squares of tissue by folding the tissue after each consecutive wipe so that the remaining clean side can be used.

She quietly moves to the poignancy of her own mother's dreams to study nursing across the border in Salem. Those dreams ended with a proposal and marriage and, "All the savings she'd (her mother) deposited in her bank account she signed over to her husband, her money now theirs, now his."

Funk's writing is beautifully poetic and honest, which should not be surprising since she is the former poet laureate for the City of Victoria. Her images are so clear and crisp that I felt I was there. Calling home from a leadership camp sponsored by the Rotary Club, she writes, "My mother on the other end, sounded as small as a



thumbnail, far away as a star."

Funk's surprises and humour made me laugh. Following a description of the men "who wore their sideburns long, their square, metal rimmed glasses tinted to keep out the sun...", she slips in, "They slid out their dentures to get rid of a stuck berry seed or fleck of ham."

Her stories trigger memories for readers of any background - teenage heart throbs, hormones that present unspoken urges, trying to be "ever so cool".

A bittersweetness is illuminated when Funk realizes that her father is not just a boorish, chauvinistic, bullying, whiskey drinking logger, but he is also a father who loves her in his own way, but does not have the words.

Funk bravely plunges into her own moments of embarrassment, fantasies, worries, bodily changes, dreams, and silliness, reminding me of my own youth. She pulls up old memories to be re-examined with fresh eyes and captures the anxiety, thrills, joy and disappointments of a teenager pining for an exotic life.

For anyone who remembers their own coming of age in the 1980s and '90s, this book holds many "me toos".

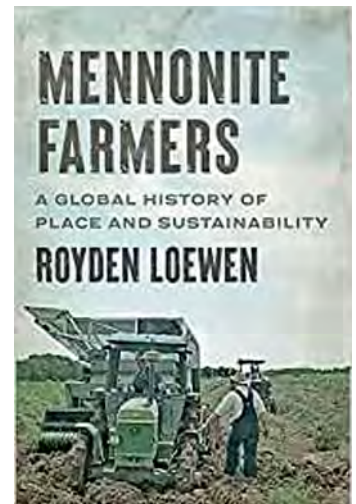
*Mennonite Valley Girl* takes any reader back to their own coming of age — a must read.

Royden Loewen, *Mennonite Farmers: A Global History of Place and Sustainability*, University of Manitoba Press, 2021, 269 pp.

**Reviewed by Edwin (Ed) Klassen**

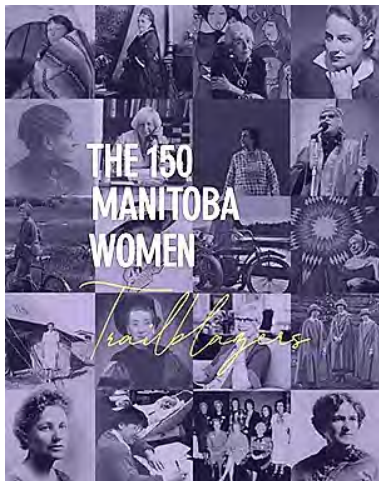
*Mennonite Farmers: A Global History of Place and Sustainability* is Dr. Royden Loewen's account of seven Anabaptist farming communities located around the world and the transformations that have happened since their beginnings. The focus is on Mennonite farmers in Bolivia, Canada, Indonesia, the Netherlands, Russia, the United States, and Zimbabwe. The book is a comparative history based on an extensive multi-year study of these communities, for which Dr. Loewen visited six of the communities and seven student researchers interviewed farmers and researched historical documents.

Loewen lays out a thorough outline of the book in his introduction, setting the stage by telling us about the Anabaptist journey into these places and the path each community took in the twentieth century, each with its distinctive local narrative. Driving the story is Loewen's key two-part question: how do you farm your land and how



(Continued on page 12)

## Altona MCC Thrift Store Founders Honoured



Helena F. Reimer 1905-1993

In 2007, founders of MCC's network of Thrift shops (from left) Linie Friesen, Selma Loewen, Susan Giesbrecht and Sara Stoesz, gathered at a celebration in Winnipeg, Manitoba, to recognize their contributions to MCC. In March of 1972, they opened the first MCC Thrift shop in Altona, Manitoba. (MCC) In 2021 they were the recipients the Manitoba 150 Women Trailblazer Award, sponsored by the Nellie McClung Foundation and the Winnipeg Free Press. Other recipients were Eira "Babs" Friesen CM and Helena F. Reimer, the latter nominated by MMHS. Congratulations.



— MCC photos/Gladys Terichow

(Continued from page 11)

does your farming intersect with your faith?

The book is well laid out in tackling the various themes identified in the introduction. In each chapter, each community is highlighted along with comparisons to other communities in the study. I appreciated the *Conclusions* with which the author ended each chapter. They provided a quick review and summary on the content of each chapter.

The chapter entitled "Women on the Land: Gender and Growing Food in Patriarchal Lands" was a very strong section. Dr. Loewen looked at the women and their roles in five of the communities, and the chapter revolves around the oral accounts by women in these communities. Their lives were intrinsically linked to nature and religion, but very different in many ways because of the cultures they lived in. There are no homogeneous experiences among the five communities. What I found most interesting was the fact that all five shared basic ideas of self-sufficiency, tight-knit community, religious consciousness, and a commitment to remain on the land.

Another chapter that I found very interesting was "Mennonite Farmers in World Scale History." Despite the fact that many of these communities began in order to get away from government control and persecution, and settled in new lands where they could farm, be self-sufficient, and practice religious and social freedom, over time each community encountered the global community, either directly or indirectly. They were affected by world markets, geopolitically determined food policies, global

climate change, and agricultural science. It was fascinating to see how many of these 'intrusions' were accepted and became the norms in their daily lives. Their goal, always, was "to provide food for the world."

The book is dense and is written for an academic audience. A good knowledge of agriculture, world geography, and history will help the general reader grasp the story. Digging in to this detailed examination of these seven Anabaptist communities is worth the effort, as *Mennonite Farmers* is a detailed and thorough examination of the selected Anabaptist communities. In an interview with Lorne Stelmach of *The Winkler Morden Voice*, published on Jan. 13, 2022, Loewen states, "The takeaway is that the question of faith is still a question that Mennonite farmers of the world are asking." And he goes on to say, "I do find it hopeful because these farmers do think about that question, and that's where we have hope for sustainability. If you're not asking that question at all, that becomes worrisome."

In "*Mennonite Farmers*", Loewen has done a marvellous job of using written history and oral history to tell the story of Mennonite farmers from seven different parts of the world who share the common elements of faith, farming, and living in a bigger world.

(Ed Klassen is a former schoolteacher in Southern Manitoba. He taught in Rosenfeld for years and worked for Kroecker Farms afterwards).