

# HERITAGE POSTING

MANITOBA  
MENNONITE  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 104

March 2023



## Early Water Challenges

In this issue we explore the sources of household and farm water and how it was accessed by the early settlers. Although most wells were dug into shallow aquifers at first, the early adoption of professional well-drilling technology made it possible to exploit vast deep underground sources. However, potable ground water was not available in all areas settled by Mennonites and many had to rely on creek water or rain, ice or snow.

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An early well drilling rig at Friesen Drillers in Steinbach.



MMHS

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

April 29, 2023  
1:00 PM - 4:30 PM

Commons Barn  
Neubergthal, MB

Meeting at 1:00 PM

Free admission  
Donations welcome

Keynote (2:00 PM):  
Revisiting the West Reserve  
Bergthal Split, 130 Years On

Conrad Stoesz, Archivist  
Mennonite Heritage Archives



Screening (3:00 PM):  
Conform: The  
Mennonite Migration  
to Mexico

and discussion  
with

Andrew Wall,  
Director



## What has our Asst. Editor been up to?

A little over a year ago, in the midst of the pandemic, I began my doctoral studies in Anabaptist history and theology with the International Baptist Theological Study Centre (IBTS) through the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. The PhD program is centred around the writing of a dissertation, which allows me the flexibility to continue in my studies on a part-time basis, remain in my current job with MCC, and do all my studies from my home in Winnipeg. A fun little bonus of the program is that each year in late January, everyone in the program, from all over the world, travels to Amsterdam to get together and share our research, network, and worship together in a rigorous theological academic community during an intensive, week-long research colloquium. Given the limitations the pandemic put on travel and in-person gatherings, this was the first research colloquium in many years. It was really exciting to have the opportunity to get to know the other people in my program, present on my research, and receive valuable feedback from other scholars in my field. At first, I was quite nervous to be the sole Mennonite in a room full of Baptists, but my nerves were soon eased as I was able to carve out my own identity among the group as the (Ana)Baptist! The research colloquium in Amsterdam was a fantastic opportunity for me to get to learn from the experiences of other PhD candidates, explore the beautiful city of Amsterdam, and set out on my studies in Anabaptism in one of the places where the movement was active almost 500 years ago!



**Andrew Klassen Brown**

## Editorial

Christmas morning, 1980, on Menno Colony in the Chaco. The year had been a year of stifling drought and water was precious. Then it came — a huge downpour of rain — pouring off the roofs and filling the tajamares (dugouts) to the brim. Finally the exhausted cattle could drink and the households didn't need to account for every drop. Life was revived and the people rejoiced as never before during that difficult year. What a Christmas gift! \*

Availability of water has always been central to any settlement initiative. In this issue we explore the various challenges encountered by Mennonite settlements and how they were met. I have always innocently taken good water for granted. In Ebenfeld (ER) we lived next to a natural spring and enjoyed cold clear water from our inexhaustible artesian well. My wife, who grew up in Rosenort, has a completely different story to tell.

Mennonites have always been intimate with water, from the polders of Holland, the swamps of the Vistula Delta, and the mighty rivers of Imperial Russia. In Manitoba and in Latin America they would face both feast and famine, learning to live with both.

\*As remembered by Maria Toews, Steinbach.

"We thank Iris and Bernie Toews for labeling, stuffing and mailing the print copies of this issue."

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If joining for the first time please include your mailing address and your email address.

## Please also make a generous donation to MMHS!

MMHS is a registered charity and will issue tax receipts for donations above the \$20 annual fee.

MMHS needs the support for its program of book publication, membership in the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Heritage Posting, educational activities and other projects.

## Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4  
1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6

**Editor** — Glen Klassen

**Assistant Editor** — Andrew Klassen Brown

**Layout Editor** — Ted Barg

**Distribution** — Email: Andrew Klassen Brown

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# Saskatchewan historian receives Award of Excellence

*Press release from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada*

**Jan. 30, 2023**

When the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada wrapped up its meetings at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Sask., on Jan. 22, the freezing rain had started. Dick Braun loaded up the 15-passenger van with people going directly to the airport, but it was too late. The laneway at Shekinah was too slippery and he could not get up the long hill. But no one missed their flight back home. John Reddekopp and Jake Buhler packed as many as possible into their four-wheel drive vehicles for the one-hour trip to Saskatoon and one of them made a second trip.

Twenty people met at Shekinah on the weekend of Jan. 20-22 for these historical society meetings, representing Mennonite museums, archives, educational institutions and provincial historical societies from across the country. After two years of meeting online, the group appreciated making personal connections. The exchange of ideas among these Mennonite historical organizations is invaluable as it encourages inspiration and collaboration.

This year the Award of Excellence went to Leonard Doell, a Mennonite genealogist, oral historian and collector of community knowledge who has written a number of books and articles. He has also researched local Indigenous land claims and has developed invaluable connections with local First Nations communities.

Doell was deeply appreciative of the award and pointed out that he was able to build on what others have done before. He thanked the historical society for their work saying, "Keep up the good work in preserving our history and seeking ways to make it relevant to today's world."

Along with other members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Doell was a knowledgeable tour guide as the group visited the original Old Colony Mennonite church in Neuanlage, the museum at Hague, and Stoney Knoll, a place that acknowledges that land sold to Mennonite settlers was actually a reservation of the Young Chippewyan First Nation. The group also stopped in Rosthern to see the former train station where 100 years ago, hundreds of Mennonites arrived from the former Soviet Union.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada has been working on two commemorative projects. Over the past



**Conrad Stoesz, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada presents the Award of Excellence to Leonard Doell.**

— Photo by Graham Schellenberg

year an exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Man., has told the story of the large migration of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico and Paraguay 100 years ago.

Thanks to the hard work of curator Andrea Klassen, this exhibit is now being prepared to travel across

Canada. It will generally work its way west through 2023 and go to Ontario in 2024.

The other big project happening this summer is commemorating 100 years since thousands of Mennonites arrived in Canada from the former Soviet Union. Henry Paetkau, the chair of this centenary committee was happy to announce that there are nearly 60 people signed up for each of the three legs of the train trip from Quebec City to Abbotsford, B.C. Generous donations have allowed them to subsidize about 30 young adults on the trip.

"This is very exciting, and it will impact the dynamics of the tour," said Paetkau. "There will be some young adults on each leg of the tour and that will enrich the conversations."

Other on-going projects supported by the Canadian historical society are the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Various Mennonite archives are also work at digitizing periodicals and other records to make them available to the public.

The executive committee of MHSC includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; Bruce Guenther, fifth member.



**The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada met at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Sask., Jan. 20-22, 2023.**

— MHSC photo

## Permission to Hope: Imagination in Miriam Toews's *Women Talking*

by Andrew Unger

Sarah Polley's Oscar-nominated film *Women Talking*, based on the Miriam Toews novel of the same name, begins with the statement: "What follows is an act of female imagination." This had me wondering, though. Whose imagination does this refer to? Polley's? Toews'? The Mennonite women in the attic who, through their conversation, are imagining a better life? For a film based on a novel which, in turn, was inspired by horrific real life events, it's a bold statement to suggest any degree of imagination was involved in the telling of the story. That is, of course, only if one views "imagination" as some sort of betrayal or dishonesty. Unfortunately, this is too often how some people choose to read this film, the book, and much of Toews' work.

I will not say that this skepticism towards imagination is exclusive to Mennonites, but there's no doubt that it exists among us. In *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Katie Funk Wiebe writes that some Mennonites have historically discouraged "the telling of tall stories ... or any made-up story told as being true," while some groups "prefer true stories to fiction" (Funk Wiebe). While few Mennonites today prohibit the reading of fiction, echoes of this attitude can still be found in some circles, particularly in the assessment of Toews' work and other authors. Toews' books, almost all of which are novels, are sometimes judged as if she's writing text books or autobiographies. One reader was quoted in a 2019 *New Yorker* profile proclaiming "Miriam Toews tells lies!" (qtd. in Schwartz *The New Yorker*), which suggests to me a very different understanding of fiction than the one I hold.

At the same time, she's also accused of being too forthcoming in her descriptions of small town Mennonite life. Like Rudy Wiebe and Di Brandt before her, she's been accused of "airing our dirty laundry in public." I find it more than a little ironic that the same author can be criticized for both telling lies and telling the truth. I explore this notion in my novel *Once Removed*, where the fictional town of Edenfeld has ousted renowned local novelist Elsie Dyck because her books make the town look bad and, according to the mayor are "bad for business." Whether seen as too imaginative or too honest, Mennonite authors like Miriam Toews can get criticism either way.

I wonder, though, whether there are some alternative, more productive, ways of reading literature this like. For starters, we could let fiction be fiction. Even if inspired by true events, a novel has no obligation to "stick to the facts." That is the job of historians like Royden Loewen. Good fiction, on the other hand, tells a different kind of truth. Not literal empirical facts. But existential truth. Emotional truth. Spiritual truth, perhaps? Regardless of their religious or cultural background, people read Toews' books because they relate to the teenage angst of *A Complicated Kindness*, the family dynamics of *Fight Night*, or the mental health issues discussed in *All My Puny Sorrows*. Maybe some of us read Toews' books because she often writes about Mennonites, but I suspect the vast majority of her



fans don't care that the characters are Friesens and Voths and Nickels; they read her books because the characters are human and the issues are universal. What, too, if we viewed imagination not as a dangerous wandering away from reality, but as an exploration of another way that an event could have happened? Imagination is not about veering away from truth, but about providing hope where there is no hope. In *Swing Low*, Toews writes about her father's mental illness and death and acknowledges that she includes "things that she knew Mel could never have thought, but that she wished he might have thought one day" (Toews qtd. in Schwartz). I wonder, then, about the conversation in the barn loft in *Women Talking*. In real life, this conversation never took place, but as in *Swing Low*, Toews is wishing and longing for these women. We can choose to focus on all the ways she deviates from the facts or, and here is where I wish we could all find ourselves, we can read Toews' writing and allow ourselves to be immersed in the hope, the longing, and the beauty of her imagination.

## The Russlaender Mennonites: War, Dislocation and New Beginnings

July 14–15, 2023

IN-PERSON AND LIVESTREAMED

A Conference Hosted by  
the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies  
at The University of Winnipeg

Between 1923 and 1929 some 21,000 Mennonites from the Soviet Union left a land decimated by violence, famine, and epidemic. They found shelter in far-off Canada, where government, church communities, and private businesses supported their immigration. These migrants, popularly known as the Russlaender Mennonites, made Canada their home. For the past hundred years, they have influenced the shape of Canadian Mennonite communities through their family networks, churches, economic pursuits (as labourers, professionals, and entrepreneurs), and in the world of politics, faith, arts, and service.

This centenary conference has invited papers from a variety of disciplines that explore the development of the Russlaender, from late imperial Russia, through war, revolution, and upheaval in the early Soviet Union, to their relocation to Canada. Papers might address factors that drove their immigration to Canada, and the inter-generational evolution of their identity and communities in Canada.



# Water for the Mennonite Settlement Areas

by Glen Klassen with the help of Jason Friesen and Henry Fast

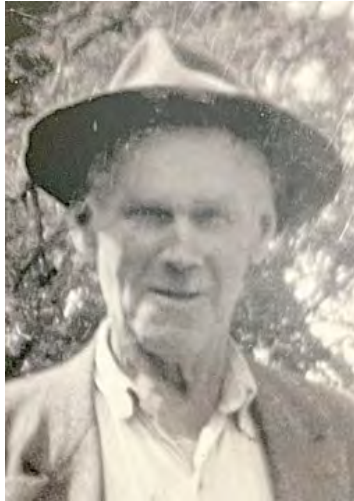
When the Mennonite immigrants of the 1870s decided to settle in Manitoba they probably did not realize that they were in the *Red River Basin* of the *Manitoba Lowland* and what this meant for their access to drinking water. Nor did they appreciate the very significant difference between "Ditsied" and "Jantsied" with respect to water. The settlers in the East Reserve happened to become the most water-blessed farmers in the entire province. (the only regions that came close were the west shore of Lake Winnipeg, which was to become New Iceland, and the indigenous communities along the Fisher River. Both of these communities were not part of Manitoba in 1870.) In the ER both shallow and deep wells yielded cold, potable water which often required no pumping: the deep wells especially were mostly artesian.

Did David Klassen, 1873 delegate and leader of the Heubodner Kleine Gemeinde immigrants, realize, when he settled his flock around the Scratching River near Morris in 1875, that he had given up easy access to water? There were aquifers there too, but all of them, shallow and deep, were contaminated by brine deposits lower down, from which they were replenished. Potable water was not to be had below the surface. They had to rely on rain water, freshly collected from roofs or flowing in nearby rivers. In winter river ice, or melted snow, were often the source of household water.

## Aquifers

An aquifer is an underground reservoir of water.

Shallow aquifers are generally "lenses" of sand or gravel saturated with water. These occur all over southern Manitoba and can be tapped by digging or "drilling". They can be artesian if they are replenished from a region with a higher water table. Natural springs, which occur in abundance just north of Steinbach, are an example of this, however, most shallow wells in southern Manitoba are not artesian, the water must be drawn up in pails or pumped. Although ground water is generally available anywhere in the region, it is not always potable. The water



**Cornelius K. Friesen,**  
founder of Friesen Drillers

under the ER is replenished from the east and so is fresh. The water under the regions west of the Red River (Niverville is the dividing line) is replenished from brine deposits lower down and is not potable.

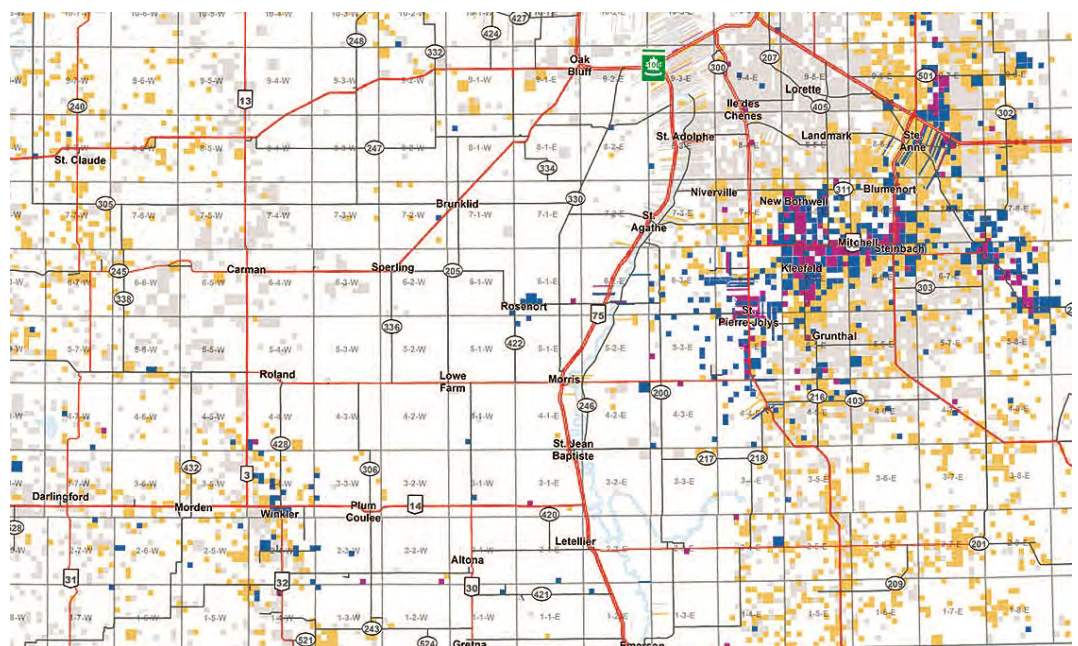
The exception in the WR is the Winkler aquifer, a narrow North-South deposit of sand and gravel which is replenished from Dead Horse Creek, and thus potable. Winkler is directly on top of this deposit which gives the community limited access to good water. Morden and Plum Coulee are not as fortunate. In later years, water from shallow wells was always tested for bacteria such as *E. coli* and excess nitrate, which is harmful to infants.

Deep aquifers consist of fractured (porous) limestone or sandstone bedrock usually more than 100 ft below ground level in southern Manitoba. The required depth increases from east to west. These must be "drilled" professionally and may, like the shallow aquifers, be fresh or saline. The divide in southern Manitoba is roughly the same as for the shallow wells. East of Niverville, deep wells, artesian over large portions of the ER, yield good water suitable for all household and farm use, although it is "hard" water and requires softening for some purposes. These deep wells virtually always produce safe water. West of Niverville the deep aquifers are much deeper and are contaminated from brine deposits much deeper down.

## Tapping the Aquifers

When the immigrants finally arrived at the landing site where the Rat River flows into the Red they had nearly exhausted the food supply they had brought from Russia. Not only did they have to worry about food, more immediately they needed safe drinking water. At the Shantz immigration sheds they were about six miles from the Red and the Rat rivers and three and half miles from Tourond Creek, a dubious source of drinking water, and too far away to haul daily water requirements by pail. Local ponds and

(Continued on page 6)



**Drilled wells in southern Manitoba (Purple: >3m above surface; Blue: up to 3m above surface; Yellow: 3m < surface; Grey: more than 3m below surface)**

Credit: Province of Manitoba, Dept. of Natural Resources, Water Resources Branch



(Continued from page 5)

puddles were quickly exhausted. It is surprising that Mr. Shantz had not fully anticipated this problem, although he thought there would be enough water in local ponds. Of course, the water had to be boiled to be safe to drink. Some of the immigrants were angry with their leaders for bringing them to this apparently uninhabitable land with no ready water.

The immediate cause of the discontent was a near-tragic accident at the sheds. Two men were digging a well near the sheds when the unstable glacial till collapsed upon them. Had it not been for the presence of Peter Reddekopp, an Old Colony outsider (the immigrants were mostly Bergthalers and Kleine Gemeinders), they would have died. He had himself lowered on a rope and was able to dig the men out at great risk to himself.

We now know that they would have had to dig about 60 feet down to get not-so-good water. In Niverville, Whitehead had to dig 69 feet to get water. No wonder they felt somewhat betrayed by their leaders. However, when Reverend Heinrich Wiebe arrived in the next boatload he was able to reassure almost everyone. They were about to find abundant good water at their village destinations. Meanwhile they could get water from the Metis, who hauled it from the river with their ox carts.

The first things the settlers did after arriving at their chosen village sites were to build a rough shelter (this was August, and the winter was coming), dig a well and buy some food. Usually the villages were settled along a creek so that animals could easily be watered.

The settlers quickly learned how to safely dig a shallow well. In an 1888 diary there is an account of such an

endeavour in Steinbach by Isaak Plett Sr. It seems that they prevented cave-ins by installing cribbing made of slabs, essentially sawmill waste. Then there is mention of "*Borm steeting*" (well ramming). Although this is often named "well drilling", rotary drilling did not come into general use in Manitoba until the 1960s.

In 1892 Cornelius Klassen Friesen, 1877-1953 (*Cyka Friese*) began to "drill" wells commercially at the age of 15! ("Well-Driller Friesen" Glenn Kehler, *Preservings* No. 15, p.138). The company, now known as "Friesen Drillers" is under 3rd generation management. I thank Jason Friesen for discussing with me the technical aspects of "well-drilling" in the days of his grandfather.

The technique was basically simple. A heavy bit made of cast iron was raised about two feet above the potential well site and then dropped into the soil again and again, deepening the hole. An engine and a large lifting wheel was used to repeat this procedure. The dimensions of the bit determined the calibre of the well. When they created the Steinbach town well they used a 16-inch bit. Much smaller bits were used routinely for farm wells. At a certain depth, a long tube was inserted into the hole to collect mud or gravel from the hole. When it was brought up, note was taken of the contents, thus creating a profile of geological layers. This is what the tall derrick was for. Another use for the derrick was to insert the well casing into the hole to contain the water. Sometimes the outside of the casing was sealed with grout to prevent water from coming up outside the casing, thus preventing flooding and also preventing the loss of water pressure as the deep water soaked into the shallow layers instead of coming up through the pipe. This was Friesen's own invention and he held the patent for it.

When the bit encountered a hardened layer (hardpan or a rock or bedrock), a stick of dynamite might be dropped into the hole to break it up. Orlando Hiebert tells of an incident near Heuboden where Cyka decide to drop two sticks of dynamite to solve an especially difficult rock problem. Nearby a pious farmer was reading about the Second Coming. The blast temporarily confirmed his greatest hope (or fear?).

Many wells in the ER, especially the deep ones penetrating the top of the limestone or sandstone bedrock, turned out to be artesian, sometimes spouting water many feet above ground level. These 'wild-cat' wells had to be controlled quickly to avoid local flooding. Of course, these free flowing wells were a great blessing to farmers and townspeople.

#### Water-borne Disease

Space does not permit the discussion of the prevalence of water-borne disease such as typhoid fever. The disease was sporadic and endemic but was not a big worry for deep wells or even for roof-water. When ditch water was used there was a much greater danger due to contamination from farm sources. Dugouts were normally fenced to prevent animal entry.



**The 16-inch bit used to drill the Steinbach well.**



**A flowing well in the Kleefeld area.**

— Photos courtesy of Friesen Drillers

# Household and Farm Water Challenges Without Potable Ground Water

by Ralph Groening

Good quality water for home and farm use was a major limitation for settlers in the Rural Municipality of Morris. Early attempts to find water resulted in a very saline product. My great grandfather dug a well when he settled on 21-4-2w south of Kane/Lowe Farm in 1897 but the water was very saline and was only used in emergencies to feed livestock. The community of Rosenort and Riverside wisely chose to establish homesteads along the Morris River and were able take advantage of this source of water to build their communities.

The response to this water challenge was the construction of a 'water pond'. Establishing a farm site always included the removal of clay and soil from an appropriate site using horses and a scoop. These depressions in the soil collected rain water in the summer and snow in the winter. This water was primarily used for the support of farm animals but also occasionally provided water for domestic use. Distributing water to feed farm animals was a difficult task especially in winter. Many farmers would make efforts to construct a pipeline from pond to barn. Many early farm yards also used wind mills to assist movement of water. Improvements in water purification systems and water pond construction in the 1970s provided new domestic potable water options for many rural homeowners. The quality and safety of this water was often in some question but these systems did allow for modern conveniences like flush toilets and washing machines. The same technology was used by the communities of Lowe Farm and Rosenort to provide piped safe potable water for residents. This project required both communities to approve a 25 year municipal debenture at the rate of 14% interest.

Many homes had a water storage cistern in the basement or concrete cistern located outside of the home. The source of water for these cisterns was either rain 'run



My great uncle's farm and water pond in the RM of Morris.

off' collected by eaves trough and channeled into the cistern, or ice blocks carved out of the Red River or other river channels. Snow blocks were also occasionally used to supplement the system. Bulk water was also available for sale in some of the local communities that had water purification systems or artesian wells. I remember my father driving to Morris, St Pierre and even Winnipeg to pick up bulk water. This process involved considerable expense. Water was a valuable commodity. Flush toilets were virtually unknown in rural farm homes. Weekly baths on Saturday using a bare minimum of water were a personal hygienic reality.

Water ponds were a useful and available source of water for the creation of skating rinks in local communities. Local volunteers organized and constructed these skating rinks and became our heroes as we anxiously waited for the completion of their work. Occasionally ponds were used for recreational skating and hockey. During the summer

months ponds were used for swimming. Communities like Lowe Farm had two ponds used for swimming.

Water supply in communities was often provided by dray men who delivered 'pond water' to residents for a fee. Many urban homes did not have a cistern and were limited to collecting eave trough water or snow water in a 45 gallon barrel as a supplement to water provided by the dray man. Ice houses were not common. CN rail built an ice house in Lowe Farm that was available for use by their employees but most farm yards did not have an ice house.

Fire protection was a serious challenge and there are many tragic stories of homes and lives lost



Ice harvesting on the Red River.

(Continued on page 8)



## Interview with Kennert Giesbrecht about water issues in Latin America

Glen Klassen: As the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society we are very interested in our friends who moved to various places in Latin America. Once there they had to adjust to the environmental realities that we faced earlier in Manitoba. One of the most urgent was how to get water for drinking, cooking, washing, fire control, animal watering, and even recreation. We would like to learn more about their solutions. As in Manitoba, the problems were vastly different in different settlement regions. What were the main early settlement regions for Manitoba emigrants?

Kennert Giesbrecht: In the early 1920s Mennonites from Manitoba migrated, firstly, to Chihuahua, Mexico, and then a bit later to Durango, Mexico. Both states have an arid climate. The further north or northeast you go in Chihuahua the drier it gets. Some of those regions only get 150 to 200 mm of rain per year. A few years later another large group of Mennonites moved to the western region of Paraguay, also called Chaco. This region has a subtropical climate, with lengthy dry spells often lasting 4 to 6 months.

GK: Did the emigrants anticipate water problems when they decided to resettle?

KG: I don't think Mennonites were prepared for the lack of water they would encounter when they moved to northern Mexico. And since large scale irrigation wasn't a feasible solution in the earlier decades, it became a real challenge for the farmers. Water was often seen as luxury, that not everyone could enjoy. Shallow wells were drilled for use in their homes and gardens, but that was about it.

GK: How did farmers in environments with little or no useable ground water (similar to Morris and the West Reserve) cope?

KG: In the Paraguayan Chaco not nearly every village had enough good ground water. Yes, you could maybe find enough water, but it was so salty that you couldn't really use it for anything. Very quickly they realized they had to gather as much water from rainfall as possible. They would set up barrels but very soon started building larger underground cisterns. Water had to be used with great caution. In the homes you never had running water. When showering, you would use as little water as possible. The

*(Continued on page 9)*

*(Continued from page 7)*

because of fire. Fire protection was limited and I do not know of any organized system that was in place to support residents in the event of fire. Fire protection in the RM of Morris was established by local and municipal authorities in the 1950s. Rosenort, Lowe Farm and Sperling all established modest fire departments to protect their communities. The establishment of an urban water system assisted the development of this public safety initiative.

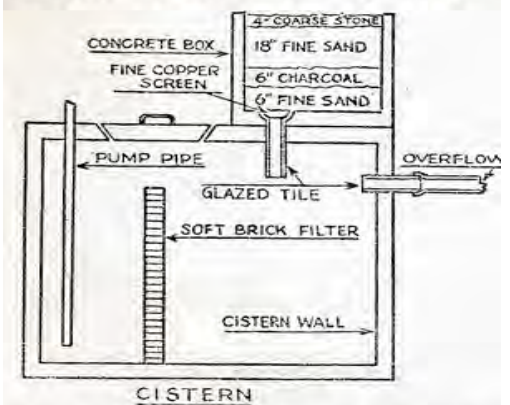
The RM of Morris initiated a water quality study in the late 1990s. The municipality tested water samples from farm cisterns and submitted the results to the province of Manitoba. Both the federal and provincial governments took up the challenge to improve the safety of water, not only in the RM of Morris but in all of Manitoba. Major infrastructure work resulted in the establishment of water pipelines throughout southern Manitoba and the creation of the Pembina Valley Water Co-op. The Red River is the major source of water for the Co-op although the Winkler aquifer, Morden dam and Stephenfield dam also contribute. ninety-seven percent of all homes and farms and businesses in the RM of Morris are now serviced by safe potable water.



Dad getting his truck ready to pick up water.

### Cistern Water Filter

Care should be taken that the washings from the roof and gutters are sent out the waste pipe when it starts to rain. Once they have been washed clean, the water should be directed to the cistern through a sand filter. The filter consists of a box about 36 inches square and of equal height. It is placed over the cistern which it drains into. Fine copper screen is required at the outlet from the filter to prevent sand from passing through.



Over the screen are layers of sand, charcoal, sand and gravel or stone.

Where all traces of color and taste are to be removed from the water, a soft brick filter should be built in the cistern just like a dividing wall. The soft bricks should be laid on their sides and cemented together with a rich mortar to a height just below the level of the overflow pipe. Occasionally the bricks will have to be cleaned with water and a stiff brush.

—F.H.L.

Plans for a Cistern filtering system.

— from the *Country Guide*



(Continued from page 8)

family would use the same water all day to wash hands and face. And at the end of the day the plants would get that water. Very soon ranchers and farmers started digging larger holes called 'tajamares' to accumulate water during downpours.

GK: What is the current situation in Northern Mexico and the Chaco?

KG: In Mexico Mennonites were soon able to dig some wells. Often these were shared wells by neighbors in the same village. Water from these wells was used in the household, on the yard, and to irrigate small gardens and orchards. No large-scale irrigation systems were set up in the early decades. In the 1960s and 1970s farmers started drilling deeper wells. At these depths there was an almost unlimited source of good drinking water. It was then that they started irrigation at large-scale. But as they have also found out, underground water is limited. Wells are drying up; wells need to be drilled deeper to continue irrigation. In more and more areas of northern Mexico farmers must cut back on irrigation, or even move all together.

In the Paraguayan Chaco, with the explosion of cattle ranching in the 1980s and 1990s, ranchers were forced to find a reliable supply of large quantities of water. They started digging larger and deeper water holes, often 50 m wide, 100 m long and 5 or 6 m deep. When a hole that size would fill up during the summer months, they were pretty much guaranteed that they had enough water for 5 to 6 months of drought. In the far-west of the Paraguayan Chaco there are also deep wells with a good supply of underground water. The Paraguayan government has also built a pipeline from the Paraguay River to the center of the colonies. Water from the river is being treated and is to be distributed in the many communities in and around the colonies. Sadly, this pipeline is having continuous technical issues, and has rarely functioned as hoped. All in all, farmers and colonist in general still heavily rely on rainfall for almost all of their water needs.

GK: Is the situation in Southern Mexico, Belize, E Paraguay, and Bolivia similar to the East Reserve here, where there is abundant potable ground water?

KG: Many colonies in Belize, all of Mexico, East Paraguay, and Bolivia have water in abundance. Wells are often only 10 to 15 m deep. Most of the colonies in these places have abundant rainfall and do not rely on irrigation. Most, if not all, also have enough potable water out of the ground.

GK: Are you aware of the existence of commercial well drillers in these locations?

KG: Most colonies that rely heavily on ground water will have commercial well drillers. The biggest of these companies would be in the Cuauhtémoc area, where farmers heavily rely on water for irrigation, and where



**A field being irrigated in La Honda, Zacatecas, Mexico.**

abundant underground water is often several hundred meters under the surface. Wells need to be drilled, cleaned, and deepened there constantly. So over the decades you will have seen large drilling companies develop in the Cuauhtémoc region. "Riegos Cuauhtémoc" is just one of them.

GK: Do you know of cases of water-borne disease in the early days and at present?

KG: No, I'm not aware of any. I know of people in certain colonies in northern Mexico have dental coloring because of the well water they drink over the years. But that's about it.

GK: Do you have any further comments?

KG: Because Mennonites are farmers wherever they have settled and founded new colonies, the reliance on water has been instrumental in their survival. They need an abundance of rainfall, or lots of underground water to keep their farms running. Often they acquired land in very hostile and dry regions, and that was often because land was cheaper there. In the recent past I have observed that more and more are also willing to pay more for land, if they have more water security. That is maybe why we are seeing colonies being started in Colombia, some regions of Argentina, in southern Mexico, and other countries.

## Tour of Remembrance

There are still a few seats available for the third leg of the **Memories of Migration: Russlaender 100 Tour**. (July 20-25, <https://tourmagination.com/tour/memories-of-migration-russlaender-100-tour-3/> ) Take in the Rocky Mountains along with author Armin Wiebe, song leader Henry Engbrecht, and tour leaders Henry Paetkau, Ingrid Moehlmann, and Aileen Friesen. Enjoy a reflection from renowned writer Rudy Wiebe and learn more about the experiences of the Russlaender in the Soviet Union and Canada. The tour will conclude with a lively concert highlighting music of the "old country" and the new lands where the Russlaender Mennonites settled, and a gathering with the Indigenous community from the Fraser Valley to acknowledge the displacement of the Stó:lō Nation caused by the draining of Sumas Lake.

Join us!

— Aileen Friesen co-director, CTMS

**P.S.** There is also one space left for each of the first two parts of the tour (July 6-12 and July 12-20).



**Man-made dugout for cattle ranching, in Paraguay.**



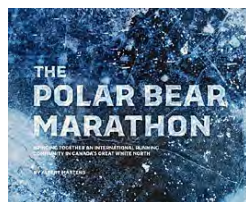


# Book Notes

by Erin Unger

*The Polar Bear Marathon*  
by Albert Martens

Extreme running enthusiast Martens has been organizing the annual Polar Bear Marathon in Churchill, Manitoba, for a full decade. Filled with photographs and marathon history, proceeds from the sale of each 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary book goes to support charity in Churchill.



*Come Now, It's Time to Go*  
by Gina Giesbrecht

After spending twenty years working as a nurse on a palliative care ward, author Gina Giesbrecht has many precious stories to share about the people she met over the years while serving in this remarkable role. It's a book about death. . . and life.



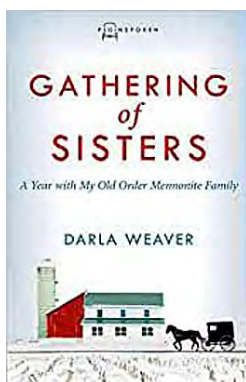
*Don't Cry:*  
*The Enlhet History of the Chaco War*  
by Hannes Kalisch and Ernesto Unruh

Mennonites have heard other Mennonite perspectives on life in the Chaco – it's time we listened to the people who were there first: the *Enlhet*. In this book, the *Enlhet* share their experiences of the war between Paraguay and Bolivia, in accounts translated from the *Enlhet* language, and given alongside valuable anthropological history.



*Gathering of Sisters:*  
*A Year with my Old Order Mennonite Family*  
by Darla Weaver

Old Order Mennonite author Weaver gets together with her mother and sisters every Tuesday. They laugh, share, eat, and enjoy the antics of their children. And you're invited to join them, as you sit down with this book (inspired by Albom's *Tuesdays with Morrie*), in a community where faith comes into play every day.



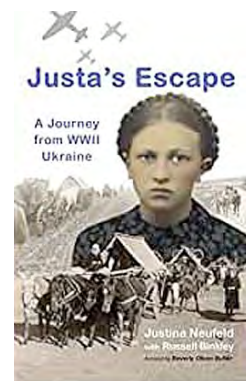
*A Mennonite Draft Dodger in Canada:*  
*A Memoir*  
by Samuel Steiner

Follow Steiner's path from a small Mennonite community in Ohio, to his political radicalization at college in the 1960s, to life as a draft resister in Chicago, to his decision to move to Canada on the advice of the woman who would one day become his wife.



*Justa's Escape:*  
*A Journey from WWII Ukraine*  
by Justina Neufeld and Russell Binkley

When authorities seize the fathers of her neighbours, she can't help but wonder if her own beloved papa would be next? As armies approach, there's only one thing to do – flee. Will the family stay together and escape to safety?



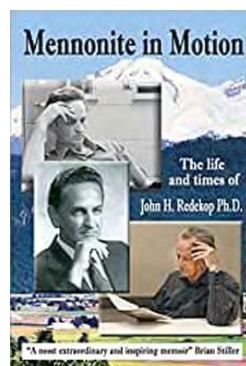
*These Songs We Sing:*  
*Reflections on the Hymns We Have Loved*  
by Carla Klassen

The result of a year-long project, wherein Klassen created a piano arrangement of one hymn, wrote about the music and text, and posted it on a blog. Over time she's expanded and developed her ideas into the book you may well be holding in your hands very soon.



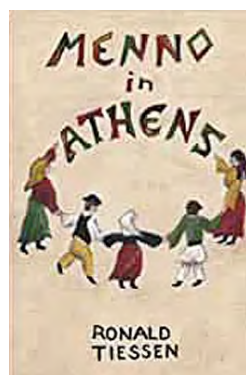
*Mennonite in Motion:*  
*The Life and Times of John H. Redekop*  
by John H. Redekop

This epic autobiography follows the author from his life in Depression-era Saskatchewan where he was born, to the forests of British Columbia, and beyond.



*Menno in Athens*  
by Ronald Tiessen

Part memoir and partly meditative travelogue, "Menno" (the narrator) takes the reader on a journey through Greece, where he visits sites of sages and philosophers. While on his quest, he unexpectedly finds himself confronting his own Anabaptist roots.



These are household fire extinguishers — glass globes filled with water. In case of a stove or chimney fire you would hurl these objects at the fire.

## Barefoot

Do your feet remember, shedding shoes in summer, running barefooted in the backyard, from the garden to the lawn to the driveway, and back again, their bottoms turning the colour of the dirt, rinsed clean beneath a hose in the grass? Days spent unrestricted by footwear, feet wearing only the marking of days in the full sun?

Bare feet, unboxed  
First touch of greening grass  
Coming to life

The earth was speaking, then, through the lush life pressing out of the ground, the cool concrete's calm, mud squishing between toes.

When the new school year began, we pulled on socks and shoes, slowly sliding fabric like velcro over their calloused skin, shoes somehow having become too small to contain months of memories written into their soles.

Green grass  
Watered each morning  
Cold on the foot



**From *Morning Rounds*, 2021,  
by Brent Manke)**