

HERITAGE POSTING

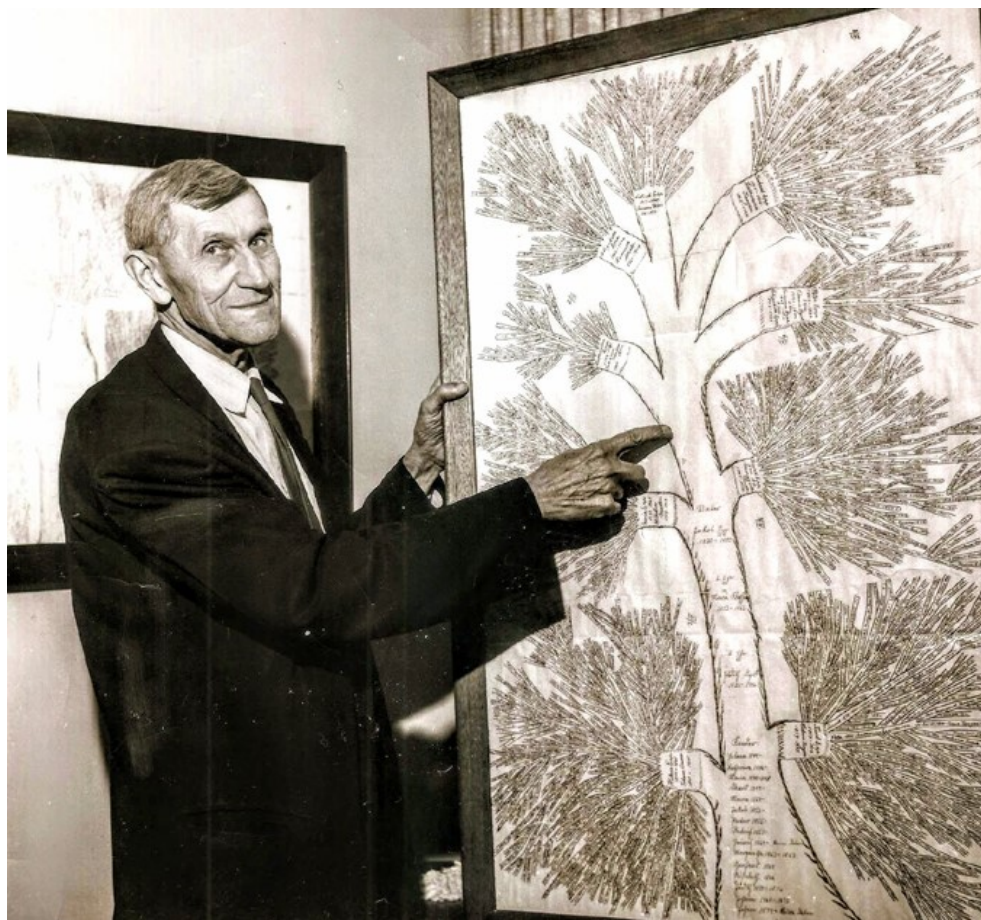
MANITOBA
MENNONITE
HISTORICAL SOCIETY



No. 105

June 2023

ABRAM A. VOGT — Creation of the "Kartei"



Genealogist par excellence Abram Vogt.

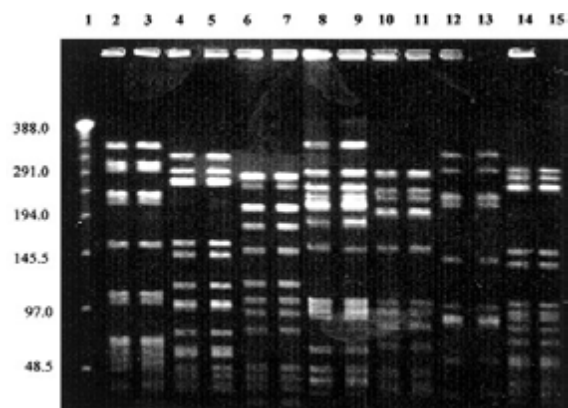


Image above shows DNA bands in a lab gel. Patterns of bands are unique for individuals. See Glenn Penner's article on Pages 5, 6.



Richard Thiessen describes GRANDMA on Page 7.

by Margaret Kroeker

It was in 1967 that my father; A. A. Vogt, took the big step to design a building to house the genealogical material he had accumulated in the last years. He bought a piece of property on Creek Road in Steinbach and before long the brick building was ready for a grand opening. Rev. J. Epp congratulated Vogt on his endeavors, while Mayor Leonard Barkman cut the ribbon. He was honoured by visits from the well known archivist Cornelius Krahn, 1902-1990, from the Bethel College Archives, and other historians like Adalbert Goertz who was the expert on Prussian records. Unfortunately, Vogt succumbed to cancer a year later and the family had to find a way to keep the genealogical library open.

Abram Hildebrand of Steinbach had worked together with Dad in the early years and he was very helpful to me when I ventured to assist researchers. The library was registered as a charitable organization: "Mennonite Genealogy Inc.", with his family and friends as shareholders. In the 1974 centennial year of the Mennonite pioneers' arrival in Canada, we prepared a huge display, featuring the pictures and stories of these families. This was displayed at the Mennonite Heritage Village and at the annual Art & Music Festival in Polo Park and provided interesting information for genealogists.

I was fortunate to become acquainted with Glenn Penner in these early years in Steinbach and later in Winnipeg, and always looked forward to August when he would come home to Manitoba for his holidays. We had so much fun studying a variety of names, dates

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Editorial

by Al Hamm

Many years ago I had occasion to attend an event at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. There I saw, for the first time, an Ancestral Fan Chart. I bought one and began to fill it in with the idea that perhaps my family would someday be interested in the pursuit of their family history. Little did I know at the time, that this chart would be the spark that would lead to an interest in, not only genealogy but, also in Mennonite history. I started with information from my family and relatives and information available from sources at that time.

For many years this project was at a standstill, but thanks to professional genealogists and computer programs, my own family history has now been greatly developed. My interest in Mennonite history has taken me on heritage trips to Holland, Germany, Ukraine, Poland and



Al Hamm

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twice to Paraguay. This interest has also given me the opportunity to volunteer at the Mennonite Heritage Village museum in Steinbach for many years. The most satisfying part has been the sharing of ancestral information now available on the GRANDMA program. Over the years I have heard many interesting stories and helped many individuals researching their own family history. I continue to spend a lot of time during my retirement submitting genealogy information to the GRANDMA program from church records, family tree books, and individuals who want their records updated. I feel a sense of responsibility to preserve our heritage for future generations, and I believe my participation in genealogy is a small contribution to do that.

Here are some quotations that may be of interest.

"A people who have not the pride to record their own history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording: and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great" (Jan Gleysteen, Dutch-born Mennonite historian)

"In all of us there is a hunger, marrow deep, to know our heritage — to know who we are and where we come from" (Alex Haley, author of *ROOTS*)

"Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past, ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you". (Deuteronomy 32:7 NIV)

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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.

MMHS Hosts Successful AGM, Attracts History Enthusiasts

by **Graham Schellenberg**

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) hosted its Annual General Meeting (AGM) on April 29, 2023, at the historic Commons Barn in Neubergthal, Manitoba. The event garnered significant attention, attracting around 85 history enthusiasts and visitors.

During the AGM, MMHS President Conrad Stoesz reflected on the society's activities in 2022, highlighting the exceptional contributions made by member organizations, committees, and individual members in preserving and promoting Mennonite history.

Stoesz proudly shared some notable accomplishments from the past year, including the unveiling of a monument south of Niverville, Manitoba, on May 12, 2022. This monument, a large stone adorned with a full-colour plaque, commemorates the buildings constructed by Jacob Shantz to shelter Mennonites when they first arrived in Manitoba.

He also emphasized the significance of upcoming historical anniversaries and encouraged congregations, conferences, families, and communities to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Mennonites' emigration from Russia to Manitoba.

"Commemorating anniversaries and important events within a community is crucial for preserving and understanding the shared history and values that shape its identity," Stoesz said. "It provides an opportunity for community members to come together, reflect on the past, and consider the legacy they wish to leave for future generations. It also helps to keep the memory of key moments and individuals alive, which can be a source of inspiration and pride."

"Additionally, community commemoration can also serve as a way of educating and engaging the public, and can be an effective tool for building stronger and more connected communities," he added.

Attendees were treated to a thought-provoking screening of the documentary film, *Conform: The Mennonite Migration to Mexico*. Directed by Andrew Wall, the documentary explores the challenges faced by Mennonites in Canada and their subsequent journey to Mexico after World War One. Wall was on hand to answer questions, providing deeper insights into this significant chapter in Mennonite history.

Conrad Stoesz, serving as the keynote speaker, also transported attendees back 130 years to the split of the West Reserve Bergthal Gemeinde in Manitoba. Based on extensive research, Stoesz provided captivating insights into this pivotal time in Mennonite history, shedding light on the formation of the Bergthaler and Sommerfelder churches in the 1890s.

MMHS Board of Directors:

Conrad Stoesz (chair),
Andrea Klassen (vice chair),
Sean Goerzen (treasurer),
Hans Werner (secretary),
Graham Schellenberg, Ed Krahn,
Andrew Klassen Brown (website administrator).



To access the AGM meeting package and read detailed reports, please scan this QR code or visit <https://mmhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/MMHS-2022-AGM-Reports.pdf>



Winnipeg poet and educator Di Brandt has been awarded the 2023 Manitoba Arts Award of Distinction. The \$30,000 award, granted by the Manitoba Arts Council, recognizes artistic excellence and contribution to the development of the arts in the province.

CTMS CENTRE FOR TRANSNATIONAL MENNONITE STUDIES

The documentary *Conform: The Mennonite Migration to Mexico of the 1920s* is now freely available on YouTube. Produced by Refuge 31 Films and the Plett Foundation.

Conform tells the story of the nearly 8,000 Mennonites who left Manitoba and Saskatchewan for northern Mexico in the 1920s, leaving their established farms and communities for life in a new country that offered rights and freedoms they considered critical to the exercise of their faith and their traditional way of life.

Written and directed by Andrew Wall, *Conform* won the prize for best documentary feature at the Winnipeg Real to Reel Film Festival earlier this year.

Aileen Friesen Executive Director,
Plett Foundation Co-director, CTMS

(Continued from page 1)

and locations and putting it all together with very interesting and sometimes quite unexpected results. When the Mennonite Heritage Centre was opened in Winnipeg in 1978 the MGI records were moved to this campus. This turned out to be a unhappy work relationship and we were grateful when we were offered suitable space in the basement of the newly built Autumn House (1981) without charge! This turned out to be a convenient location in many ways. Some of the tenants donated many hours of cataloguing and organizing the filing cabinets and book shelves containing family histories, published books, periodicals, newspapers and other archival material. Some of the workers were Hanna Rempel, Diane Neufeld, Helen Falk, and Peter Wiebe. As the years progressed we had 10 part-time volunteers. Giving one year randomly as an example of the work accomplished -- in the years 1994-95 we had 111 visitors and answered 88 research letters.

The *Kartei* (card file) was the heart of the genealogical collection. Researchers found it easy to trace their ancestors in the *Kartei* system. Pertinent information entered on the cards was date and place of birth, death, marriage including locations if available. Children were listed on the reverse. The Wall diary, Schoenhorst Church records and Bergthaler Church records were just a few of the holdings which were integrated into the *Kartei* and proved to be very helpful. At the time when we returned from Autumn House to the Heritage Centre, there were 199, 432 cards in the *Kartei*.

Besides the above-mentioned manuscript and documents, Vogt also received a valuable collection of 255 photographs taken by A. W. Slagel, when he worked for the American Mennonite Relief in Russia in the years 1920-23, the beginning of MCC. On Nov. 4, 1922 Slagel appointed Abram A. Vogt as President of a Committee to receive relief supplies for distribution in Schoenwiese, NeuSchoenwiese and Lindental according to AMR instructions. Vogt had to resign from this position when he joined his friend Johann P. Klassen who was dedicated to the negotiations of emigrating to Canada. Besides the AMR photographs, there are wonderful pictures of the emigrants at the train station as they leave for Canada. These photographs can be seen at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and also in the MCC library.

In 1963 Klassen sent Vogt a valuable and important collection of his immigration papers. They included a variety of documents, health records, village reports, etc. He describes them as follows: " They are frail papers, but they will be of value for researchers. As an example, for each



A. A. Vogt at his makeshift desk.

family wanting to emigrate they contain health records with the doctor's signature with name and age. There are reports of my trips to Charkov and Moscow and the difficulties that appeared, not from the Russian government but when B. B. Janz started playing politics and lost interest in the whole matter of emigrating. If the Chortitzer hadn't formed their own organization, nothing further would have happened. I should have written down a lot more. But as I was travelling a lot and working and as the conditions were I couldn't do much more. The main points have been saved. For us who have experienced it, we will not forget it, but for our children in the future, that is something else." These valuable papers are now stored in the Mennonite Heritage Archives. Peter Rempel will be presenting them during the Centenary celebrations in Winnipeg in July or maybe at another appropriate occasion.

Extracts from Requests Received by the Family History Department

"I would like to find out if I have any living relatives or dead relatives or ancestors in my family."

"The wife of #22 could not be found. Somebody suggested that she might have been stillborn — what do you think?"

"Enclosed please find my grandmother. I have worked on her for 30 years without success. Now see what you can do."

"This family had 7 nephews that I am unable to find. If you know who they are, please add them to the list."

"We lost our grandmother, will you please send us a copy?"

"I do not want you to do the research for me. Will you please send me all the material on the Welch line in U.S, England and Scotland. I will do the research." (request from a 14-year old)

(Thanks Margaret Kroeker)



Your Y-chromosome (if you are a male) tells you who your REAL father, or grandfather, or great-grandfather was. Sometimes (rarely) men are surprised to know the truth. The DNA sequence on the double spiral molecule 'spills the beans'.

The Mennonite DNA project

by Glenn Penner (gpenner@uoguelph.ca)

The Mennonite DNA project was started in 2005 by Amelia Reimer of Neah Bay, WA and me (Glenn Penner, Guelph, ON at the time). Currently, the administrators of the project are Glenn Penner and Tim Janzen (Portland, OR). The purpose of the project is to use DNA testing for genealogical research. A more detailed overview of the project can be found in the series of Mennonite Historian articles I wrote in 2018.¹ I should also make it clear that the Mennonite DNA project has nothing to do with inherited medical conditions.

There are 3 types of DNA used in genealogical research: 1) autosomal DNA, 2) Y-DNA and 3) mitochondrial DNA. There are briefly described below.

1) Autosomal DNA. This is the DNA test often advertised on TV. It looks at the DNA that we inherit from both parents: on average 1/2 from each parent, therefore 1/4 from each grandparent, etc. This test can be done by men and women. We do not inherit one big chunk or string of DNA from each parent. The DNA gets mixed up and we inherit many smaller segments. We also share autosomal DNA with our relatives: 50% (1/2) with a sibling, 12.5% (1/8) with a 1st cousin, 3.1% (1/32) with a 2nd cousin, and 0.8% (1/128) with a 3rd cousin. The genealogical DNA companies use the length and number of these identical segments to predict the relationship between genetic relatives.

What segments of autosomal DNA you inherit from each parent is determined by a random process. There are two results of this randomness that have important consequences from a genetic genealogical point of view. First, there is the possibility that some of your relatives, including your siblings, may not inherit the same segments of autosomal DNA as you. This has occasionally led to some confusion. Second, very distant relatives may inherit the same segments of DNA from an early common ancestor, giving the impression that they are more closely related to you than they really are. This explains why you may have many matches with "3rd cousins," who are really much more distantly related, or may not have any Mennonite ancestry at all! In other words, the connection between you and that person may predate Mennonites.

Ideally, the Mennonite DNA Project would like to be able to track these segments and figure out which distant ancestor each segment came from. There are, however, three problems to overcome. First, we need many thousands of people with Mennonite ancestry to participate in the Mennonite DNA Project. Anyone who has done this kind of test, even if they are only 1/16 "Mennonite," should consider joining the Project. At present, we have autosomal DNA results for about 1123 people. We need a database of at least 10 times that many in the Project!

2) Y-DNA This type of DNA is passed on from father to son, just like traditional European family names. Only men have Y-DNA and can do a Y-DNA test. Since Y-DNA follows surnames, it is very important from a genealogical perspective. Unlike autosomal DNA Y-DNA is not scrambled. Each son inherits his father's Y-DNA intact. The genealogical usefulness of Y-DNA comes from the fact that there is a small probability that a mutation can occur from one generation to the next. If this were not the case all men would have identical Y-DNA and Y-DNA testing would be

pointless from a genealogical perspective. There are Y-DNA results for 1075 men of Low-German Mennonite paternal ancestry in the project.

3) Mitochondrial DNA. This is commonly called mtDNA and is the DNA we all inherit from our mothers, which they, in turn, inherit from their mothers. Anyone can do an mtDNA test. However, this test has limited genealogical use. There are three reasons for this: 1) the surname usually changes with every generation as one goes up one's maternal line, which complicates the situation; 2) many early genealogical records do not provide the surnames of married females, so tracing a female line may be very difficult; and 3) the mutation rate for mtDNA is so slow that if you have a match it could be through a common female ancestor anywhere from 200 or over 5,000 years back. If you are going to investigate a maternal line genealogical connection using mtDNA, you must order the Full Sequence in order to get any useful results. Although mtDNA is not as genealogically useful as autosomal or Y-DNA, a few interesting relationships have come out of analyses of mtDNA matches.

To summarize: 1) Autosomal DNA is inherited from both parents, who inherit theirs from their own parents. Anyone can do an autosomal DNA test. It can be used to find relatives who are 3rd cousins or closer. 2) Y-DNA is inherited by men from their fathers. Because of this, it follows traditional surnames and is very genealogically useful. Only men can do a Y-DNA test. 3) mtDNA is inherited from one's mother, which she inherits from her mother, etc. It follows the maternal line but is of limited genealogical use. Anyone can do a mitochondrial DNA test.

Some comments: One should always be aware that DNA testing might yield surprising results. Mismatches in Y-DNA results for men with the same surname may be the result of an illegitimate birth in the past. We now have several cases where this is also well documented in old Prussian church registers. Autosomal DNA testing could lead to unexpected half-siblings, nephews, nieces or 1st cousins. Although such situations are relatively rare, they do happen.

Where to order DNA tests:

Autosomal DNA tests can be done with the following companies and cost about \$80 to \$120:

FTDNA (Family Finder) - <https://www.familytreedna.com/products/family-finder>

23andMe (Ancestry Service) - <https://www.23andme.com/en-ca/>

Ancestry.com - <https://www.ancestry.com/dna/>

Living DNA - <https://livingdna.com/ca/>

MyHeritage DNA - <https://www.myheritage.com/dna>

There is only one company I recommend for Y-DNA testing. The cost is usually about \$120 to \$150. This is also the company recommended for mtDNA testing (about \$220):

FTDNA - <https://www.familytreedna.com/products/y-dna>

Note that many of these companies have deep discounts for Christmas, Mother's Day, Father's Day, and

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other special occasions.

Those interested in participating in the Mennonite DNA Project should contact the author at gpenner@uoguelph.ca

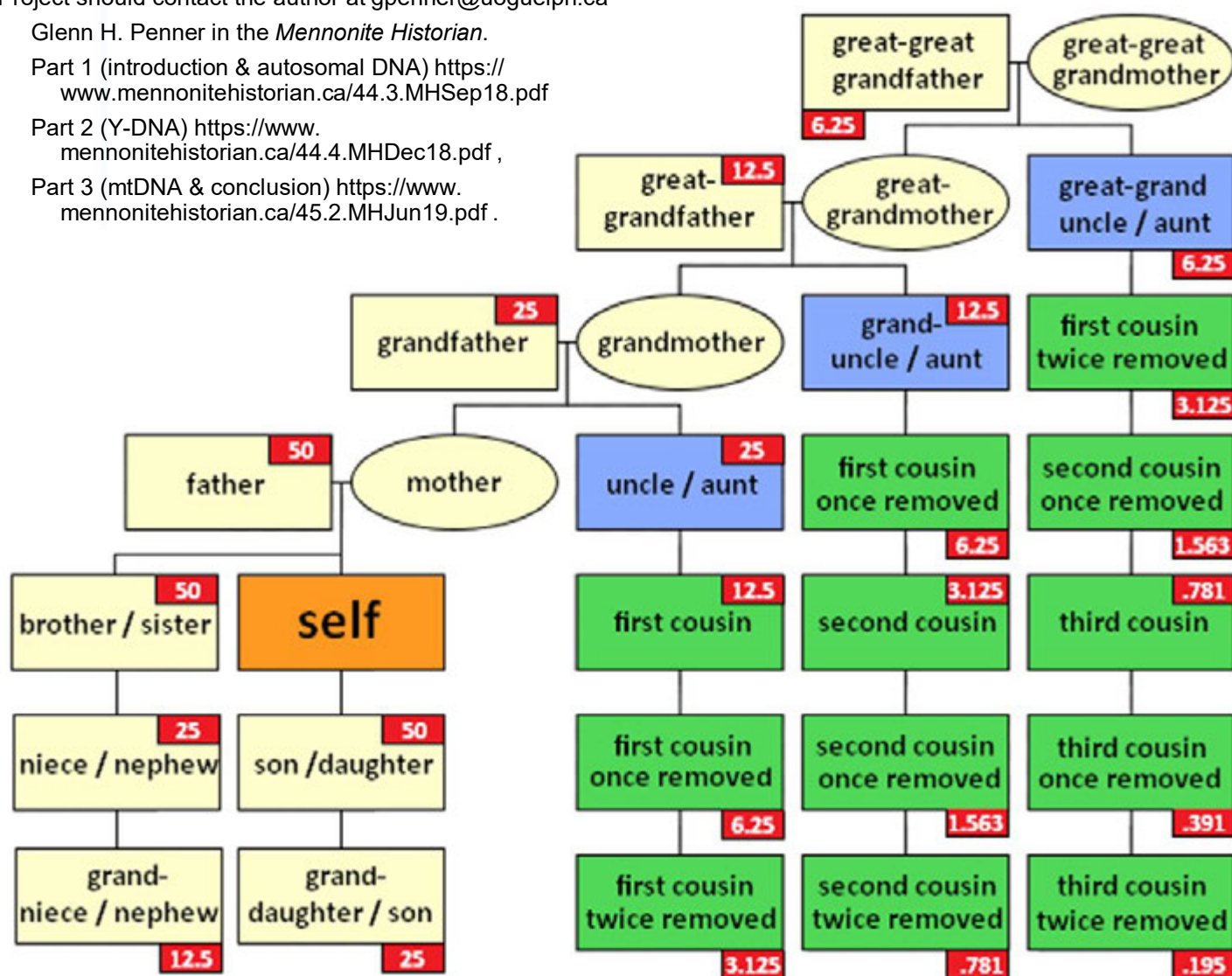
Glenn H. Penner in the *Mennonite Historian*.

Part 1 (introduction & autosomal DNA) <https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/44.3.MHSep18.pdf>

Part 2 (Y-DNA) <https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/44.4.MHDec18.pdf>,

Part 3 (mtDNA & conclusion) <https://www.mennonitehistorian.ca/45.2.MHJun19.pdf>.

A chart showing the average amount (% , in red) of autosomal DNA shared with various biological relatives.



Other Resources for Genealogists (By no means exhaustive)

(GRANDMA may not be complete or up-to-date)

Ship Lists (Many in the *Bergthal Gemeinde Buch*)

The Old Colony (Chortitza) Of Russia, Henry Shapansky

Reinlaender (Old Colony) Gemeinde Buch 1880-1903 (MMHS)

Sommerfeld Gemeinde Buch: Registers of the Church at West Lynne 1881-1935 (MMHS)

Bergthal Gemeinde Buch (HSBS)

Die Niederlaendisch-niederdeutschen Hintergruende der Mennonitischen Ostwanderungen, B.H. Unruh

Family Search Website - Free Service of the Church of Latter Day Saints

Manitoba Vital Statistics (On line)

Church Records

Diaries: Some have lists of all the people in their community that died that year (*Sterbe Liste*)

Family Bibles

Hundreds of Family Genealogy books -- Many available at MHV Library or Mennonite Heritage Archives

The GRandMA Database

By: Richard D. Thiessen

Executive Director, Mennonite Heritage

Museum, Abbotsford BC

Member of the Genealogy Project Committee

For most people, the word “Grandma” conjures up memories of the mother of one of their parents. For me I remember things like chicken noodle soup, home-made grape juice and peppermint cookies, shapeless floral dresses, and interesting hats on Sundays. For those whose ancestry stems from the Dutch-Polish/Prussian-Russian stream of Mennonite history, the word “Grandma” can have another meaning. Mennonite genealogists often talk about Grandma, and one would think that they are talking about their Grandma or Oma, but more often than not, they are talking about GRandMA – the **Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry** (<https://www.grandmaonline.org/>).

On 1 May 2023 GRandMA contained 1,519,491 individual records and had a total of 3,684 subscribers from around the world, including: 3,457 who subscribed to the online version, GRandMA OnLine (GMOL); 172 who subscribed to the downloadable Brother's Keeper version; and 55 who subscribed to the GEDCOM version that can be imported into any genealogy software program.

GRandMA has come a long way from 1991, when the California Mennonite Historical Society announced that it had recently formed the Genealogical Project Committee (later known as the Genealogy Project Committee). The goal of the committee was to create a computerized unified genealogical database of Prussian-Russian Mennonite and Hutterite families. Alan Peters of Fresno, California, had a large collection of index cards that formed the nucleus of this project (for the history of Alan's database, please see <https://grandmaonline.org/gmol-7/gwhelp/petersHistory.asp>.) These records were entered into a database and merged with records collected by Jane Friesen and Kevin Enns-Rempel, also from Fresno. Jay Hubert and Bob Friesen provided the technical expertise needed to organize the database, Jeff Wall provided legal assistance, and Jane Friesen and Carol Friesen spent many hours on data entry.

It took several years of planning and implementation, but on 6 September 1996 GRANDMA Volume 1, a CD-ROM version of the database, was released that contained information on 135,482 individuals along with digitized copies of some Prussian and American source records, ship passenger lists, and maps. The software program recommended by the Committee was *Brother's Keeper*.

It should be noted that during this time, a Manitoba group had been formed, chaired by Bert Friesen, to explore creating a similar genealogical database using dBase, a database management system for PCs. Development on this project was set aside once GRandMA became established, and the Manitoba database was merged with the GRandMA database.

Subsequent CD-ROMs of the GRandMA database were released every few years, along with additional source material, including primary records such as various Prussian church registers and other records. The 2013 release of GRANDMA 7, containing 1,250,285 individuals, was the last CD-ROM issued by the Committee. In subsequent years, many GRandMA subscribers began to

transition away from the CD-ROM, first to a subscription that allowed for the downloading of the database, and in more recent years, to a subscription to an online or “cloud” version of the database. Today most GRandMA users access the database online – GRandMA OnLine 7 (GMOL), a site that is managed by Ken Ratzlaff from Kansas.

In 2000, Ken joined the GRandMA project. He had participated in the Mennonite Heritage Cruise along the Dnipro River in 1999, where me met Alan Peters, one of the founders of the GRandMA database. At that time, Ken already saw the limitations of a database distributed by CD-ROM, and suggested that the database could be made available online. Ken provided the programming required to develop an online version of GRandMA in 2001, initially called *GRANDMA's Window*. The online version of the database did not contain information on living people to comply with privacy laws, but it could be updated much more frequently than the CD-ROM.

As stated earlier, GRandMA OnLine is now the preferred format for most database subscribers. Like *Brother's Keeper*, GRandMA OnLine can provide basic genealogical reports such as ancestry charts and *Ahnentafel* reports, descendancy charts, family group sheets, and relationship reports. In addition, GRandMA OnLine provides several additional reports, as well as search options.

GRandMA Online can generate some very useful reports about one's ancestors. For example, it can generate reports that tell someone the average lifespan or the average family size of all their ancestors, generation by generation, or it can generate a report of the average age of their ancestors when they first married. It can generate a migration timeline or an ancestor map. It can even generate a report that tells someone which of their ancestors in the database have had their information changed, and when that change took place. Many of these reports can be downloaded as Word documents.

One of the most powerful search options is the Two-person Search. Unlike *Brother's Keeper*, users can search for a husband-wife pair, a parent-child pair, or a sibling pair. For example, you might have an ancestor named Jacob Dyck or Dueck who was married to Helena Schellenberg. You do not know anything else about them, such as dates or years of birth. Searching for all the Jacob Dycks married to a Helena Schellenberg in GRandMA would take quite a while using *Brother's Keeper*, but you can locate this couple in a few seconds in GRandMA OnLine. Another example is the sibling search. You might have the names of two brothers – Andreas and Wilhelm Enns, and that's all the information you have. Using the sibling search gives you five pairs of siblings with those names, literally in a few seconds. This is a search that you probably could not even do with *Brother's Keeper* or many other genealogy programs. Another search is the Quick Search, where you can search for women by their maiden name or married name. These are just some of the reasons why so many users of GRandMA now choose GRandMA OnLine.

If you have submissions or corrections that you wish to make, you can do these on the GRandMA OnLine website. At this point in time, GEDCOM files can not be submitted.

The GRandMA Store is now located on the

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Winkler Heritage Society Report

by Ashleigh Viveiros

From the Winkler Morden Voice

It was a return to normal, for the most part, for the Winkler Heritage Society in 2022, members heard at the agency's annual general meeting this spring. Chair Randy Rietze in his formal report shared they were able to relaunch many of their activities as pandemic restrictions eased, including various fundraisers and outreach events like the fall crokinole tournament after a few years' pause. "The banquet did not happen last year, but we hope to get back to it this year," he noted of the annual fall heritage banquet, which hasn't been able to go ahead since 2019. As always, the focus of the society is on the preservation of historical artifacts and records relating to Winkler and area. It houses those items at its museum in the Southland Mall



**Winkler Archivist
Ed Falk**

and the archives room at the Winkler Centennial Library.

The museum saw its visitation numbers return to something more akin to normal in 2022. They welcomed 557 people — way up from the 166 of the year before. Curator Joanne Bergen shared in her report that they received many donations to the collection, including two windows from the former Mennonite Brethren Church building (which is now the concert hall) and an array of items related to local policing over the years, among other artifacts. The museum's

collection has now reached 5,385 items either on display or in storage. The archives room, meanwhile, had a quieter year due in part to the after-effects of the pandemic and staffing challenges, though archivist Ed Falk noted he has continued his work translating documents into English and they continue to welcome people looking to research local and family history.

Falk took a few moments at the meeting to reflect on the society's function in the community and how it may grow in the years to come. "First of all, we are not the Mennonite heritage society — we are the Winkler and District Heritage Society," he said, stressing their mission is to preserve the stories and artifacts of all the cultures who built the community into what it is today. "If you walk into the civic centre you'll see the flags of the people who have come to this community, and there are hundreds of them." Looking to the future, Falk noted the museum's lease is a year-by-year agreement, and there is some question as to whether the space will continue to be available to them long-term.

The Winkler library, meanwhile, has asked the society to find another location for the archives in the year ahead, as they intend to use the room for their own programming. "So we will have to find a new space," Falk said. The society has been putting some money aside for a few years now for a standalone location that could house both the museum and the archives, but it still has quite a ways to go to see that dream become a reality. "We need all of you and many more to help us in dealing with the local heritage," Falk stressed, urging history buffs to get involved with the society. "If people don't help, then we're stuck. "If you have any ideas, don't hesitate to talk to any of the executive."

The society's membership totals around 100 people. They're always looking for more volunteers to join the board (which currently has a couple vacant positions on it) or help out at the museum or the archives. Financially, the society ended the fiscal year with a deficit of \$6,329. Access to various pandemic-related government grants saw the agency's revenue drop significantly in 2022, while expenses such as wages increased. Secretary-treasurer Tonille Peters presented a 2023 break-even budget of \$85,000.

The evening also included a presentation from Regional Connections Immigrant Services on their programming for newcomers and detailing the assistance they've provided specifically to the Ukrainians who have moved to the area over the past year in the wake of the war with Russia.

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grandmaonline.org website. A two-year subscription to GGrandMA Online is \$20 US. If you wish to download the *Brother's Keeper* version or a GEDCOM version of the database, a two-year subscription is \$40 US.

Currently, well over a dozen volunteers from North America make regular contributions to the database, working nearly around the clock. In recent years the GGrandMA database surpassed the limits of the software being used to manage it, and the Genealogy Project Committee was forced to move the database to a software platform that could accommodate its size but had other limits. For example, GEDCOM files can no longer be properly imported, and only one person can be logged into the database at a time. A new software for the database is currently in development, relying on the dedicated work of programmers who are volunteering their time and expertise. Once completed, the database will allow for simultaneous edits by multiple volunteers and the importation of GEDCOM files with a sophisticated merge feature so that each record can be compared to a match in the database before it is imported.

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Unless we know where we came from We won't know where we are going

by Martha Martens

I find genealogy very interesting, it has helped me to discover what my family's past was like. My introduction to collecting information about my background came from my father. He collected a lot of names of relatives, their birth, death, baptism and marriage dates. Only after he died did I find that he had also written many interesting articles about his growing-up years. This led me to start my own search, not only for names and dates but also the stories of their lives.

My mother did not write her stories so I had more digging to do for information. I knew her grandmother's brothers, the Neufelds, had moved to Didsbury, Alberta and started a Bible School, but I didn't know what happened to their families or whom to contact.

One Saturday, just before closing, a young man came into the grocery store and asked for a certain graveyard. After chatting a bit more I realized he was a Neufeld from southern Alberta. This fascinated me as I knew I had relatives there but were they connected? I invited them to our home. Over coffee that evening we figured it out – we were related. He was a descendant of those brothers that had moved away. He was on his way back to Ontario after visiting his parents in Didsbury. His parents had asked him to stop in southern Manitoba to look for his great-grandparents graves. Many stories were exchanged. Now I knew what had happened to those brothers. If I had just brushed him off at the grocery store I would not have found this fountain of information.

Years ago I worked with many of our Mennonite people who were returning to Canada from Mexico. At that time if their grandparents were born in Canada it was easier for them to get Canadian Citizenship. One couple stopped by while visiting in the area and wanted to know if I could tell them where the husband's great-grandparents had lived before moving to Mexico. Even though their grandparents were born in Mexico I could still give them a printout of their family. To my surprise, a year later, I received a phone call from the citizenship office in Windsor, Ontario, asking if I had more information about the young man's great-grandparents. As the staff person was telling me who was in her office she welcomed me to talk in Low German, since she knew *Plautdietsch*. Their office had my contact information and I had other inquiries after that. Interesting how things develop.

Another thing I find interesting in searching and collecting genealogies is how the facial resemblances show up in the third or fourth generation. When our friend's first son was born, the comment was made that he sure looks like his grandpa; but the grandpa was a stepfather to the mother and not related. Upon further searching, the father of the child turned out to be a relative to the step-grandpa. In many cases it seems the resemblance is stronger in the third or fourth generation.

Psalm 78:4 says, "We will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done." Let's also tell our children the great things God has done.

Let's give our children and grandchildren our stories as well.



(Above) Klaas and Margaretha (Neufeld) Gerbrandt are buried in AltBergthal cemetery.

(Below) Their monuments were restored by Al Shritt, a great-grandson.



Mexico has issued a 20 peso coin to commemorate the Mennonite Centennial in the country. Actual size: 3 cm dia

Book Review

MaryLou Driedger, *Sixties Girl*,
Wandering Fox, Vancouver, 2023

Reviewed by Betty Koop

When I saw that "Sixties Girl" was geared to 9-12 year-olds, I had a little smile to myself that the Editor had asked me, an 83-year-old to read and review this book. Maybe I'm in my second childhood? But I was very pleasantly surprised when I read it.

The book is so well written, as would be expected from Driedger, holding your interest throughout.

It recounts how Will, a young 12-year old, has to go to his grandmother's house every Wednesday after school. His parents, who both work late that day, insist he is too young to stay home alone. And *he* insists just as stoutly that he is old enough to stay on his own. However, the parents win, as usual. Grandma Laura is a noted author of many children's books.

At a previous school he was mercilessly bullied by some classmates when they discovered his grandmother's writings. Now he is determined that even his close friends should not know about her. So he comes up with many flimsy excuses as to why he cannot meet to hang-out with them on Wednesdays after school, as has been their habit. He very much enjoys these two friends, and is afraid to do anything that might cause them to turn on him.

His visits with Grandma Laura are actually a delight. She grew up in the '60s. An old suitcase of memorabilia in her office gives rise to many fascinating stories she tells about her adolescent years.

I did find it interesting that Laura's stories are set in "Rocky Creek"; maybe a take-off on "Steinbach"?

The stories range from memories of Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip's visit to Winnipeg in 1959 to Laura's graduation from High School in 1971. Each one has a unique, impactful lesson for the young girl who lived them.

Her experience of being an outsider as the only Protestant in a Catholic school in Grade 1 in 1960 is painful to read, but so comforting when her mother reassures her with love. Then when mother and daughter discuss her treatment by the nuns further, the little girl does admit that sometimes nuns do good things as well. Then in 1971 echoes of the same theme come out in her high school graduation events. Here she is forced to admit that she and her friends are guilty of the same treatment when they ignored and did not really accept immigrant students in their classes.

The blizzard of 1961 when she saves her little brother's life when the power and telephones are down brings back memories of blizzards that probably some of us can remember.

Historic events in 1962 describing the fear during the Cuban missile crisis and the shock of John F. Kennedy's assassination in '63 are well described. They are juxtaposed with the intense sadness at the accidental

deaths of her dear grandparents at the same time.

Encounters with a deer in 1964 and another in 1970 bring out Laura's great respect and caring for our four-footed fellow pilgrims.

And the recurring theme of the old German lullaby, *Schlaf, Kindlein, Schlaf*, (Sleep, Little Ones, Sleep), sometimes sung in some most unusual circumstances, is so comforting.

These are just a few of the life experiences she shares with her grandson. There are so many more poignant and honest stories that you will want to read them for yourself, even if you are not in the 9-12 age group.

And how does Will make things right with the dear friends he has been lying to every Wednesday? Again, Driedger does not gloss over difficulties that these young folk experience in their growing-up years.

My verdict: well-worth reading!

* * *

Dora Dueck, *Return Stroke: Essays & Memoir*,
CMU Press, 2022.

Reviewed by Erin Unger

"I did not realize that I had become a biographer," Dora Dueck confesses nearly immediately in her personal essay *Return Stroke*, for which this collection of essays and memoir is named.

I first encountered Dueck at the Mennonite/s Writing conference in 2017. She stood on the stage at the University of Winnipeg and told of her efforts to know her father-in-law, who had passed away before she had joined the family.

She elegantly reveals devastating details, such as the bolt of lightening that nearly killed him as a young man... and did in fact kill his mother in that same strike. This collection is named for that incident:

"The electrical discharges that strike the earth are called *strokes*," writes Dueck. "And the bright light seen in the flash is called a *return stroke*."

In *Mother and child*, she lovingly, gently recounts her daughter's coming out to her and her late husband: "... it was the feel of Andrei Rublev's *Trinity*", she recalls, "each head tips downward and toward each other. . ."

In *Burial grounds*, Dueck reveals her exquisite thoughts and reflections on Winnipeg's Elmwood Cemetery and what had always drawn her to this city. And I think to myself, is this why I love the writing of Dora Dueck so much? Her unabashed love of the Manitoban prairies — though born in Alberta and living in British Columbia, I feel that she sees and loves what I see and love.

Though our ages differ by several decades, we share experiences. Might these be cultural phenomena? For example, in *Reunion* the reader discovers her true thoughts



(Continued on page 11)

(Continued from page 10)

upon visiting biblical sites. The joy of walking where the Sunday school stories of our childhoods were set. We share these embarrassing truths. And she writes of them so unflinchingly. So. . . cozily.

Note number nine in *Notes toward an autobiography* gives me particular pause, as Dueck settles in the Paraguayan Chaco and observes the women's culinary competitiveness, musing "what she hated most was the limited range self-esteem could be drawn from."

In *How I got old*, she does not pretend to be young or deny what is happening. She faces it, declares it, owns it, delights in it. In the lightness of aging, a letting go. . . "a quality of lift and ease."

As he lay dying explores the loss of her husband to cancer. In Dueck's skilled hands, this devastating revelation is honest, love-filled, light-filled, peaceful: "The last breath is an exhale."

The longest piece, the memoir of this collection, *In the house of my pilgrimage*, explores the intimate details of her family taking on a role with MEDA in the Paraguayan Chaco, training the Enlhet people to work on Mennonite colonies. I had not known of this organization at all until I began attending CTMS conferences at the U of W, where the voices of the indigenous communities impacted by Mennonite settlement are beginning to be heard. It is a gift to peer into Dueck's experience at the time in the 1980s.

Through it all, Dueck's word-crafting skills are vivid, imaginative:

"My heart was a helium balloon."

". . . the azure vault of sun and clouds and sky."

". . . the sun sliding out of sight like a shining globule of blood."

In teasing out the reasons for her pilgrimage to the Chaco, she suggests that she may have been seeking "the customs and structures and language of community life — of my grandparents and great-grandparents which, oddly enough, seemed more accessible to me in the Mennonite Chaco. . ."

Dueck questions the motivations and complications behind writing a memoir: perhaps a performance, or perhaps "a reminder and pleasure in having existed." And, how to include those whose stories are intimately tangled with our own, while affording them some privacy.

Referring to her "discomfiture a writer feels over earlier writing" Dueck resolutely reflects on her first novel, set in Paraguay. Almost a critique of her own early novel but not entirely. . . a confession, but not entirely.

In *The knot at the beginning*, Dueck examines her relationship with the written word, exploring her very earliest memories and the books that hold them. It's a little meta, as I have allowed myself to become immersed in reading the very book discussing becoming immersed in reading.

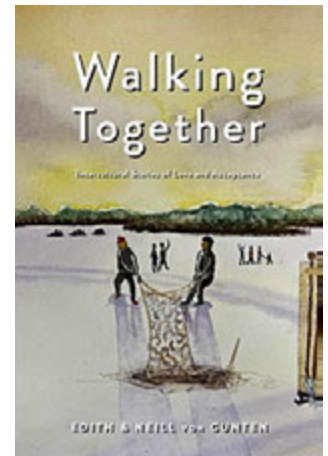
I truly love sitting with any writing by Dora Dueck. We haven't had the same experiences. . . but her writing makes me feel like we have. That is the genius of Dora Dueck's autobiographical writing.

Book Notes



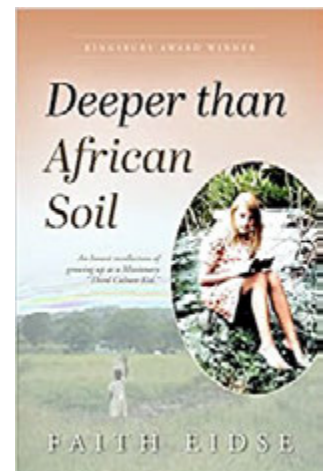
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A Russian Nobleman and a Mennonite Maiden

by Tony Wagenhoffer

Just over a hundred years ago, in a Mennonite village in Arkadak Russia, there lived a young Mennonite girl named Helena. She was the youngest daughter of a nature-loving Mennonite educator, poet, writer, photographer and preacher. Like her father, the mystery of the outdoors, the majesty of the forest, the symphony and sounds of birds and crickets, and the calmness and serenity of the lake continuously beckoned her. As the day drew to a close, after all responsibilities had dissolved and faded into leisure, and the tranquil call of the outdoors could be heard over and above the bustle of the village, one of her greatest pleasures was to walk to the lake, which was more akin to a reed infested slough, get into the family boat and row to the deeper areas to fish, while singing to herself. She loved to be under the blue, gold fringed canopy of heaven with the shimmering waters beneath, to sing with the larks and nightingales that soared above. After all, why not pour out one's heart under a sunlit sky with the rapture of birds when there is no one to criticize or correct.

On one of these excursions while fishing, she noticed a Russian nobleman standing on the bank some distance from her beckoning to her. Oblivious to the dangers a young girl could face in such circumstances, she pulled in her line and slowly rowed to where he stood. Once within hearing distance, he asked her if she would give him a ride in her boat. She consented, rowed to where he stood and docked. After lowering himself into the boat he asked her if he could take the oars. She consented and moved from her seat as he seated himself. And so, at his request, she was given a tour of the reed infested lake in a boat rowed by a Russian nobleman. After some time he returned to the spot where he had stood, docked the boat, thanked her for the ride, and went on his way, while she returned to her fishing. When she had finished fishing, she docked the boat, gathered her fish and walked up the reed-infested path to her home. Days later, following a boating trip by her older sisters, they commented about the strong odor of perfume that still lingered on the oars. The source of that odor remained a mystery until Mother confided the story to us half a century later.

This young girl was my Mother, Helena (Loewen) Wagenhoffer, the youngest daughter of Gerhard and Maria (Derksen) Loewen. Helena was born in Einlage Russia on January 28, 1904. In 1910, the family moved to Arkadak Village Number 5 where her Mother died in 1913, followed by the Marxist Revolution which destroyed their desire to remain in the land which they had loved. They migrated to Canada in 1925 and arrived at Altona in the autumn of that year. Mother's Father, Gerhard Loewen, got a job teaching German and Religion at the Mennonite Education Institute which burned down in 1946 thereby destroying most of the family's possessions and keepsakes which they had



The Remnants of the hydroelectric dam that Johann F. Toews built at Stuartburn early in the twentieth century. The person on the extreme right is my Grandfather Gerhard Loewen. The other one I do not know. This picture was taken in the thirties. The dam and the sluice are still visible. I am almost certain that the hub of the water wheel is silted under on the west side of the river. The land where the people are seated is our property, west of where we live.

brought with them from Russia. Her Father then taught for a period of time in Saskatchewan while she and her two single sisters, Sara and Katja, took turns working as maids in Winnipeg while their brother Henri was a farm hand. In the early 1930's, they, together with their Father, purchased 79 acres of land with a house and barn along the Roseau River in the center of the hamlet of Stuartburn, where they, together with their Father, lived and farmed. In 1936, Helena married Nicklaus Wagenhoffer, a German immigrant from Austro-Hungary and moved to his farm 2.5 miles west and south of Stuartburn with him. It was here that their first five children were born. In the Autumn of 1944, they together with her father who lived with them until his passing in 1946, moved to Stuartburn. There, they farmed together until 1956 when her husband Nicklaus passed away. She continued to farm with her oldest son until she died because of a vehicle pedestrian accident while on her way to Church. The mother and father I knew, were godly, loving, honest and kind people whom we as children loved and appreciated.