

Features:

- Jake Buhler (with RMF) . . . 1

- Agnes Rempel Wall 5

- John B. Toews 7

- Part of the Saskatchewan
Story - *Jake Buhler* 15

- Justina Wiens Peters . . . 16

- Justina Wiens Peters . . . 17

- Cornie J. Sawatsky . . . 20

Andrew Brown - Recipient of MB
Historical Internship, 2016 . . . 6

Two MHSS Board Members
Retire & Board Photo 26

A collage of historical images related to the Titanic. At the top center is a portrait of a woman with dark, curly hair. To the right is a tilted document, likely a shipping manifest or passenger list, with the heading "Department of State - United States". Below the portrait is a large, dark, grainy image of a ship, possibly the Titanic, at sea. To the right of the ship is a photograph of a large, multi-story building, possibly a hotel or office. Below the ship is a photograph of a group of people, including men and women, standing together. At the bottom center is a small, dark, rectangular object, possibly a piece of luggage or a box. The entire collage is set against a background of a cloudy sky and a body of water.

Justice was involved in the removal of the Equestrian Monument from the old County Jail, and was active there until her death in the hundreds of hours in the New York State is prominent in the Equestrian Monument. The monument was placed in 1912 and the last corner was set in 1912.

This wonderful series of paintings, with short biographical notes on the right, is in the John Diefenbaker Canada Centre on the campus of the University of Saskatchewan. The Exhibition opened February 16

Cont'd ...page 4

Photography & Art at the
AGM of MHSS 27

Honour List 28

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The Editor's Perspective

Ruth Marlene Friesen

It has been a pleasure to get articles submitted well in advance of the deadline for this issue. It meant I started layout early in January and need not push at the end with such long, late nights.

I find no published MHSS guidelines for authors, so I'll use this space to offer some tips.

The most ideal submission is by email, either in the body of the email, or as a plain document. Then I can highlight, copy - switch to the Scribus program and paste it in. Presto! Then I just need to format it and insert photos, etc.

When necessary, I'm willing to retype a piece written, or typed out on paper, but it takes time.

We're mostly modest Mennonites. But it is really better to include your contact information. In this issue you'll see an article sent in by Sylvia Regier to the archives. It was written by her uncle who passed away in 1988. I would have liked to write or phone Sylvia to ask about some changes that I felt I needed to make, but I had no clue where she lives or how to reach her.

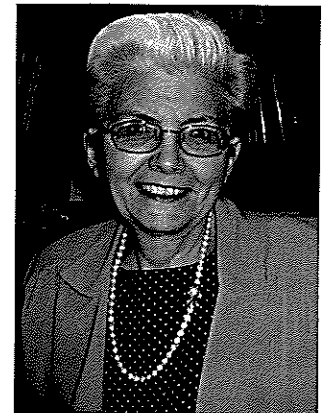
Sylvia: I sincerely hope you are satisfied with how I fixed it up.

I'm open and friendly and easy to dialogue with, but if I have no way of contacting you, dear writer, I either have to make editorial decisions on my own, or ignore your submission. - Let's work together, okay? A flood of submissions means I can pick and chose which ones fit into an issue, and have a stash to select from for the issues ahead! So keep 'em coming!

I want to thank Jack Driedger for his '*Plautdietsche Akj*' stories. He has decided to retire now at age 90. I wish you all God's best, Jack!

R M F

(P.S. Note: a proof-reader has just provided Sylvia's contact info to me.)



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MHSS President's Corner

by Jake Buhler



If you go to the Diefenbaker Canada Center (DCC), on the University of Sask campus, you will see an exhibition-tribute to Mennonite women who endured hardship and suffering caused by conflict and conscience.

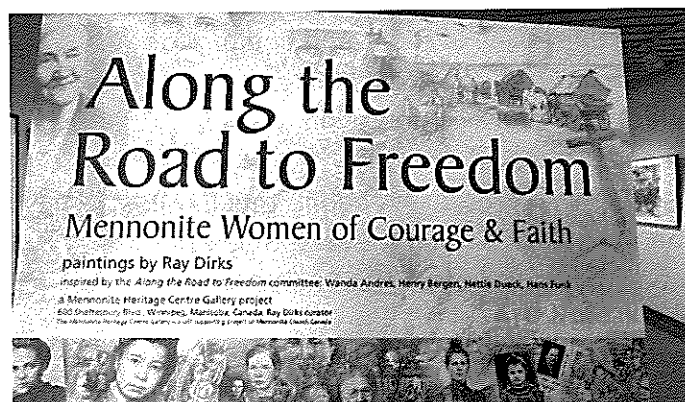
On display are 26 paintings, and several displays of artifacts describing the lives of courageous women. The exhibition (free admission) will run until June 19.

By the time you receive this message, Alf Redekopp will have trained a half dozen or more volunteers on how to scan and archive photographs which will become available to all.

Do you have valuable photographs of baptisms, weddings, old elevators, churches, homesteads and more? Contact us.

In this mailing, you will find a request for financial support for our, and your, historical society. Do what you can do to help.

JB



*An Excellent Exhibition - worthy to see (free admission)
- at the Diefenbaker Centre until June 19.*

Along the Road to Freedom

by Jake Buhler (with Ruth Marlene Friesen)

continued from page 1. . .

with a formal opening on Sunday March 6.

The lobby was packed to standing room only. An hour and a half program had speeches from dignitaries, and four songs by the a capella quartet, Sine Nomine, who sang four German songs.

Ray Dirks, the featured speaker, told stories of the women featured in his unique collages in the gallery.

This very worthwhile exhibit continues to hang in the Diefenbaker Centre until June 19th and we encourage everyone to make time to go see it. Admission is free.

The John Diefenbaker Center is hosting this touring display honouring Mennonite women, but the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS), and Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) are participant sponsors.

A parallel Exhibit at the same time features more Saskatchewan content, and complements the Ray Dirks' displays very well. It includes a large blanket made by Mennonite women with appropriate photos and descriptions.

Three local women were highlighted with their stories of flight and coming to Canada in *Flight and Resilience*, in the gallery, and in a booklet given to each attendee.

Along the Road to Freedom, this Exhibition, could not be more timely. Since December thousands of new refugees from Syria have arrived.

Many Mennonites have memories stirred up of other migrations over the past centuries. Around 1800, thousands of American Mennonites made their way into

Ontario. In 1874 thousands of Mennonites arrived from South Russia, before the coming of the railroad.

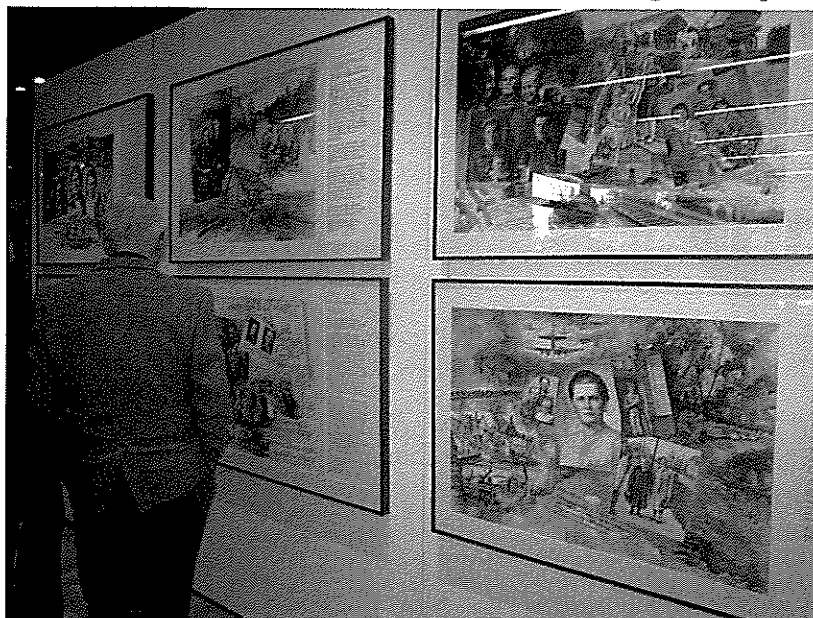
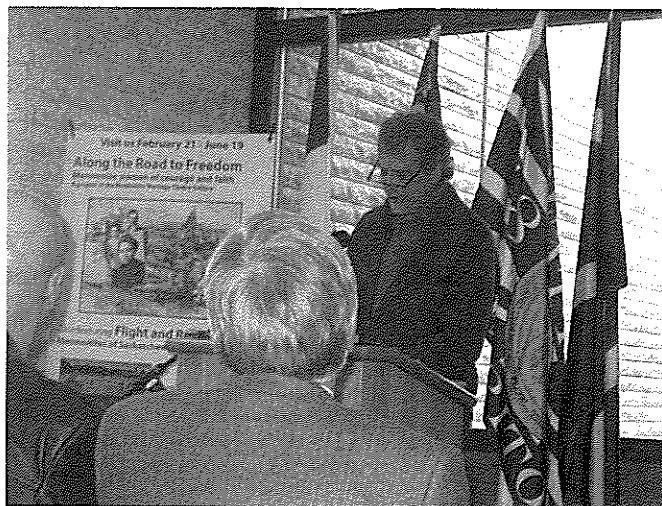
In the 1920s, 20,000 Mennonites from South Russia arrived in Canada. More arrived after the Second World War.

What some may not know is that from 1979 to about 1987, MCC coordin-

ated full sponsorships for 5,000 Vietnamese, Lao and Cambodian refugees to Canada. Claire Ewert Fisher (until recently Director of MCC Saskatchewan) worked at the Phanat Nikhom Refugee Camp during that time, and Jake Buhler, President of MHSS, worked in Thailand during that time. MCC also had a worker at Songkhla, where the boat people arrived.

Mennonites are fairly well all refugees, or the sons and daughters of refugees. Every family has some "coming to Canada" stories, even if we have to go back two or three generations in some families.

JB/rmf



Lest We Forget

by Agnes Rempel Wall, daughter of Rev. J. G. Rempel

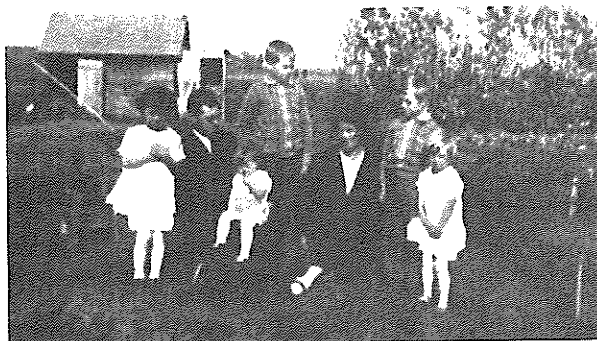
The recent plight of the Syrian refugees and their immigration to Canada, has prompted me to remind my generation (the few that still remain) and our children and grandchildren, that it compares to the immigration from Russia (Ukraine) to Canada of our parents and grandparents in the years 1923-30.

During those years, 21,000 Mennonite immigrants managed to leave their war-torn land with the turmoil and suffering, and find a haven in Canada. But it was not accomplished without the help of many people.

First of all, after WW1, the reputation of the Mennonites living in Canada (probably resulting from their pacifism and their German language and culture) was not too favourable and the government had issued an order-in-council, prohibiting the immigration of Mennonites. Even some of the established Mennonite families in Canada were opposed to the influx of their brethren, as they would be responsible for their welfare.

What is the approval rate of the Syrian immigration?

My parents, John G. Rempel and Susanna Rempel, lived in the village of Nieder Chortitza in Ukraine. My dad was the 6th or 7th generation of Rempel in the village and by the 1900's their village and the other Mennonite settlements were thriving. My dad and his two younger brothers, David Rempel and Jacob Rempel, were teachers, and others (like Lepp and Wallman) were industrialists and many were estate owners. But then came WW1 and the war with Germany, as well as the fall of the Czarist regime in 1917, the Civil War (Red Army vs. the White Army) and the takeover by the Bolsheviks. There was no law or order and roaming bandits plundered and killed



*John G. Rempel family in Langham, Sk. 1930
Standing: John, and Gehard (Git) Front: Hilda, Dad
(Agnes on lap), Mother, and Alma*

and raped at will. Then came the famine of 1921-22 and the people were, literally, starving to death.

As with the Syrians, our people were looking for someone to save them.

Then, along came our 'Moses', (as he was sometimes referred to), by the name of David Toews. A

new Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, was elected Liberal leader (1921) and the doors began to open for a refuge for our desperate people.

David Toews, along with some others, went to Ottawa and were able to get the order-in-council rescinded and from there, work began on the formidable task of finding funds and transportation means for our penniless parents.

It was the Canadian Pacific Railroad (CPR), who finally consented to take the risk and loan the money, with the promise that it would all be paid back in time (granted, the CPR were anxious to settle their lands in the Prairies and were looking for hard-working and honest farmers, but one must give them credit, as there must have also been humanitarian reasons.)

A Board of Colonization was set up in Rosthern, SK, to collect the money from the immigrants for their transportation costs (Reiseschuld) and David Toews spent the rest of his life (along with his many other duties), concerned about his obligation (he had done the signing) to have the debt repaid. It took until 1947, while he lay on his deathbed in Rosthern, that Rev. J. J. Thiessen could give him the good news that the transportation debt had been paid off. This brought tears to both their eyes.

Will the Syrians assimilate into our culture? Of course they will! Look at all the Mennonites participating in our Provincial and Federal

politics! To say nothing of the Mennonites involved in sports, from speed skating at the Olympics to playing professionally in our national sport of hockey! (My dad was a great hockey fan.)

In conclusion, it is always our first impressions that make us jump to conclusions. We are judged by our dress and outward appearance. When my dad and mother arrived at the train station in Saskatoon, SK in Nov. 1923, my dad could have probably passed as an Arab. His thick dark, wavy hair may not have been cut for the 5 months that they were on 'the road' (I am not sure) but he does write, that he had a beard, not having been able to shave on a moving train (probably using a straight razor.) They had two small sons (my brother, John, was 2 years old and brother, Gerhard, was 5 months old) and one wonders what a new mother does about diapers and trying to wash and dry them. How would my mother have been dressed?

What is the future for these new immigrants? One of their first obligations is to learn the English language and that is not an easy task, especially with the pronunciations of some of the English words. The Mennonites, including my mother, had a hard time with the 'th' sound, and then, to her consternation, when they finally got a telephone put into their home in Rosthern, SK, wouldn't you know ...the telephone number was 33 (trree, trree).

As with all adversity in life, if one can only maintain a sense of humour, one can adapt to many things. The Mennonites continued with their traditional Sunday afternoon get-togethers (faspa) and, invariably, there was always the good storyteller, eliciting uproarious laughter from the gathered guests.

The stories would go like this: there was the Mennonite hired man, who was out back, chopping wood for his employer, when someone from the house called to him 'dinner'. He took this as a command 'thinner' and so he cut the wood thinner. Again, the call came 'dinner', so he cut the wood even thinner. Finally, after the third call 'dinner', he had had enough and he put down his axe and in Low German, muttered "If this isn't

thin enough, I quit!"

My parents never took their escape from Russia to Canada for granted, nor did many of the other immigrants (we voted for the Liberal party for years.)

However, my mother always felt somewhat inferior to 'the English' and growing up in a town (Rosthern), surrounded by British residents, we, as children, tried to hide our ethnic background and not speak German (mostly Low German, as High German could be learned in schools.) Our parents had to keep reminding us to answer their questions in German and how grateful we are now, to have that advantage of knowing a second language.

When my dad arrived in Langham, SK (where they first lived), the local school offered a course in English to the immigrants and, thus, my dad quickly picked up the language.

The Syrians will also have this opportunity and that is not to say, they can't keep up their own language and customs (providing they do not interfere with the laws of our country), but they should never forget that it was the country of Canada which gave them and their children a new lease on life.

ARW

Andrew Brown - Recipient of Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission's Summer Archival Internship for 2016



Winnipeg, Manitoba - The selection committee chose Andrew from several strong candidates from various universities and colleges.

Andrew Brown As intern, Andrew will spend a total of five weeks visiting each of the MB archival centers in North America (Fresno, Hillsboro, Winnipeg, and Abbotsford) during the months of May and June. In addition to discovering the unique character of each of these Mennonite archives, he will explore the stories and images housed in them, especially pursuing his interest in the MB experience of World War II in the US and Canada, and with North American politics in general.

MB release

The Seminary That Never Was

by John B. Toews

For Mennonites settling in South Russia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, freedom of religion was guaranteed by the so-called *Privilegium* of 1800 granted by tsar Paul. It specifically exempted them from any state or military service. They were also at liberty to implement a religious governance system of their own choosing. Most of the migrants came from agricultural, self-enclosed villages in Prussia and brought with them customary land-tenure practices which needed some adaptation to the drier southern steppes of Russia. Religious customs, on the other hand, arrived intact and needed no alterations.

Prussian models of church organization were immediately put into practice. The insecurities of frontier settlement often contrasted sharply with known and reassuring patterns of Christian piety and practice. The jurisdiction of the elder (*Aeltester*) encompassed a geographic area known as a *Kirchenspiel*, a notion somewhat equivalent to the English concept of a parish. It usually included a number of villages in one of which a central church building would be erected. The elder was assisted by a number of congregationally elected ministers traditionally called *Lehrer*. Both elders and ministers served together in an ecclesiastical council known as the *Lehrdienst* in the earlier decades or *Lehrstand* in the later nineteenth century.

Though all clergy were congregationally elected and answerable to that constituency they constituted something of a professional elite. After all, they controlled baptismal and communion rites as well as preaching privileges. Viewed as guardians of Christian morality they defined acceptable lifestyles and, where this was lacking, recommended discipline. Records of the All-Mennonite Conferences of the late nineteenth century confirm that Mennonite clerics occupied all key leadership positions and largely determined conference agendas.¹ While commanding considerable authority, most, with the occasional exception of elders, were unsalaried. The majority

depended for their livelihood on farming. Within the village setting the minister was also a neighbour and a friend. While respected and assigned key ecclesiastical roles, he was not separate or remote from his constituency. Everyone knew what he did during the week.

During the last decades of the nineteenth century time-honored Mennonite ministry patterns experienced considerable discomfort. The most significant long-term pressure of altering the clerical paradigm originated in the 1870s when the tsarist government demanded some form of state service from its Mennonite citizens.

Alarmed church leaders dispatched a number of delegations and petitions to St. Petersburg, all to no avail. Even the migration of more than 18,000 Russian Mennonites to America failed to lessen tsarist demands. In the end Mennonite state service became compulsory but was restricted to forestry work. It was free of military jurisdiction but entirely paid for by Mennonite funds.

The new reality demanded an expansion of the roles traditionally assigned to Mennonite ministers. On June 14, 1879 elders from various settlements in the Russian Empire met in Neu-Halbstadt (Molotschna Settlement). They petitioned Governor-General von Todleben for the right to provide spiritual nurture for the young men, in the camps. This and other concerns resulted in an 1882 meeting of elders in Halbstadt, Molotschna² that led to the founding of the All-Mennonite Conference which first convened in Halbstadt in January, 1883.³ Initially the Mennonite Brethren were not included. At every subsequent gathering there was concern with appointing resident chaplains and exercising discipline in the forestry camps. Away from the confines of the village for the first time in their life the youngsters were often not the best models of Victorian propriety. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries delegates at the conference gatherings heard of the misdemeanours perpetrated in the various camps.

What has all this to do with "The Seminary

That Never Was?" Judging from the surviving records the forestry chaplaincy appears to have demanded a disproportionate amount of attention at the All-Mennonite Conferences. It certainly required an expanded definition as to what it meant to be a Mennonite minister. But there were other challenges. The Russian Mennonite world was confronted by increasing complexity. What of the increased sophistication of Mennonite educational institutions? An awakening social conscience brought with it hospitals, a special school for the speech and learning impaired, not to mention a renewed interest in home and foreign missions, publications and even a mental hospital. All the while there was an increased flow of theological literature from Germany and a notable incursion of Russian learning and culture.

Perhaps persons who raised the issue of founding a "theological training school" at the first conference in 1883 were seeking to respond to this brave new world. The minutes recorded that the question "remains unresolved at the present time."⁴

The hesitancy of the 1883 Conference virtually defined both conference and constituency response to the question of a "*theologischen Bildungsanstalt*" (theological training institution) for more than three decades. The 1884 Conference record simply noted that the "question is postponed."⁵ In a surprise turnabout the 1887 Conference accepted the idea of a "theological institution for the education of Mennonite ministers" in principle.⁶ The subsequent Conference (1888) again postponed the question "since the majority of the churches are against it."⁷ The seminary question resurfaced in 1893 when it was reported that the commission elected in 1892 to look into the matter "has not done anything."⁸ A new commission was elected to draft a plan for the institution. By 1896 the Conference decided that the *Predigerschule* should stand as a separate institution. A special commission was elected to draft the statutes for the school.⁹ Two years later the All-Mennonite Conference decided it was "not yet the time" to pursue such a venture.¹⁰ At the 1900 Conference which convened in Alexander-

wohl (Molotschna) delegates learned that some constituencies were sending young men to Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, for further ministerial or missionary training and "if we can't get our own Seminary more young men might be sent."¹¹ The Gnadenfeld gathering in 1901 was informed that relevant applications regarding the seminary had been made to state authorities and that it was essential to make this a matter of prayer.

Delegates were then to "calmly await the outcome as to how the Lord will lead."¹²

Other priorities occupied the All-Mennonite Conference during the next four years: foreign missions; Bible societies; the Muntau hospital and the nursing/deaconess training school connected with it. The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 added another agenda - caring for Russian wounded and supplying "provisions for the poor families of soldiers on active duty."¹³

Representatives at the 1905 Kalinovo gathering learned that there was still "no unified resolution" as far as the proposed seminary was concerned.¹⁴ When they returned home delegates should try to awaken interest in their constituencies and clear up misconceptions.

Apparently they were not too successful. It was only in 1911 that delegates were again urged to consider "the establishment of an appropriate institution" for the preparation of ministers.¹⁵ Yet a curious document, drafted in 1905, has survived as File 3470 in the Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive (1803-1920) discovered by Harvey L. Dyck in the State Archives of the Odessa Region, Ukraine.¹⁶ It is translated as an appendix in this essay. Though the chairperson noted that the "statutes and curriculum are being conveyed to our dear fellow ministers so that they might acquaint their congregations with this project, the seminary question was not raised." The matter resurfaced in 1912 only to be "postponed until the next Conference."¹⁷ Finally at the Rudnerweide gathering in 1913 a study paper by David Epp proposed the establishment of a three to four year seminary. The Conference, while recognizing the importance of "higher theological

training," decided that *Predigerkurse* (ministerial courses) sufficed for the time being.¹⁸ Thanks to the outbreak of World War I no further Conferences convened until the Neu-Halbstadt Conference in June, 1917. Some one hundred and fifty ministers and elders were in attendance. In a resolution drafted in response to minister D. H. Epp's paper focusing on church revitalization, the Conference affirmed the importance of ministerial courses, libraries, and conferences.¹⁹ There was no mention of a possible seminary. The question was briefly raised at the Lichtenau Conference in 1918, the committee reporting it had been unable to meet because of transportation difficulties.²⁰ The Seminar issue may have been raised at the All-Mennonite Conference held in Khortitsa (October 11-12, 1922) but apparently the minutes have not survived. The Commission for Church Affairs was probably active throughout this period but to date records of its reports to the Conference only surfaced late in 1924. In its October 16-November 1 report the Commission noted that "the government is not opposed towards allowing a theological school" but stipulated it must be located in a provincial city, not a village.²¹

Thanks to government pressure the next All-Mennonite Conference met in Moscow (January 13-18, 1925). It was suggested that collections be taken for an "All-Mennonite Bible School."²²

Earlier in October, 1923 the Commission for Church Affairs addressed a lengthy petition to the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee requesting greater religious freedoms including the right to conduct "Bible courses to train and enrich our ministers in God's Word."²³ At what became the last All-Mennonite Conference in Melitopol (October 5-9, 1926) it was briefly reported that "due to unfavourable circumstances" encountered over many years it became impossible to found "the school."²⁴ Not long after the Moscow Conference the Commission submitted a petition to the Commissariat of the Interior requesting permission to open a Bible School in Ukraine.²⁵

In 1927 the Commission reported that "we have received permission to open an All-Mennonite

Bible School in Moscow," then noted that they "sent a petition to the Ukrainian Commissariat of the Interior" to have it located in Melitopol.²⁶

By now almost three decades had passed since the Seminar question was first raised at the Conference level. Why were the Russian Mennonites with their wealth and genius for organization unable to establish a theological institution? Answers are difficult to find. One century-long factor was possibly a traditional apprenticeship system by which congregations elected ministers, who were then expected to develop their preaching and leadership skills. In many ways their spirituality and performance was geared to congregational expectations.

Theological broadening may have occurred at periodic ministerial conferences where they were instructed by those of like persuasions or otherwise by self-study. Historically their position and rank was affirmed by traditional church polity and by the authority granted them by the congregation. Early in the Russian Mennonite story a local governance council (*Lehrdienst*) was not only a body defining public morality but also offered some protection against congregational caprice against elected ministers. Longevity as a Mennonite minister depended on leadership talents, public approval and personal integrity in life style rather than formal academic credentials. Such a system, at times characterized by rigidity and inflexibility, generally worked well amid the rural isolation of the Russian steppes.

In part delaying actions on the *Seminar* question may have been an unconscious attempt to preserve the tried and true patterns of the past. As mentioned in the introduction to this essay, Mennonite piety was well defined by traditional corporate and local ecclesiastical organizations. While unsalaried, the clergy constituted something of professional elite. It usually controlled baptismal and communion rites as well as preaching privileges. While Brethren and Mennonite churches may have differed on conversion theology and requirements for church membership, the profiles of governance and clerical training were amazingly alike. Why change what

seemed to be working?

In the last paragraph of H. Unruh's *Seminar* proposal (1905) he notes that the material related to statutes and curriculum was being "conveyed to our dear fellow ministers." In the very first paragraph he states that the governance of the proposed institution would in part be in the hands of the Molotschna and Khortitsa Church Councils (*Kirchenkonvent*). While the curator of the Odessa Teaching District and the Ministry for Public Enlightenment exercised supervisory roles, the Church Councils and the so-called Pedagogical Council determined the inner pulse of the projected Seminar. None of the proposed subjects were in any way controversial and the need for new ministerial talent was constant. Why was the ecclesiastical leadership, at least judging by their constant postponement of the issue, uneasy about a *Seminar*?

Perhaps because the purpose and function of such an institution was unknown in their life experience. Its usefulness was not clear to an ecclesiastical establishment comfortable with its current structure and the theological content of its belief system. Yet upon reflection it seems a trifle ironic that a church that was comfortable with vast material wealth, fostered medical and educational endeavours, erected public welfare institutions on a grand scale and even advocated the need for Bible courses and a Bible school, would repeatedly postpone the Seminar question.

There was a structural dimension favouring continuity rather than change. The high level of self government granted the Russian Mennonites also meant a Mennonite civil administration co-existing with the church and, more often than not, allied with it. The Mennonite state, given to time-honoured bureaucratic procedures and governance practices, was inherently as reactionary as the church. Such a comprehensive conservatism in state and church almost instinctively conspired against anything new and innovative. Even the Mennonite Brethren, who vigorously protested against the old-style piety in 1860, did not demand new requirements for ministerial education and training. Select Mennonite

students sent abroad for theological training in Germany or Switzerland in the early twentieth century were easily absorbed into the existing matrix upon their return and rarely impacted the status quo.

There were possibly additional factors contributing to the ongoing procrastination on the *Seminary* question. Mennonite ecclesiastical leaders were largely uninformed as to what a *Predigerseminar* really was. After all there had been no need for such an institution during the last century. Yet there must have been some unease stemming from new expectations on the nature of Mennonite ministry. There were new roles related to the forestry service, new expectations from an increasingly well educated youth and substantial numbers of Mennonite intellectuals capable of digesting religious literature imported from Germany. This expansion of the Mennonite religious horizon was somewhat typified by the early twentieth century incursion into Ukraine of a German renewal movement known as the *Blankenburger Allianz*. Focussed more on devotion and personal spirituality rather than theology, it made its presence known through literature and special conferences. Several Mennonite estate owners not only sponsored such gatherings on their properties but also paid the expenses of ministers and teachers attending. Might this "estate piety" promoted by high-powered German evangelicals teaching on the Ukrainian steppe lessen the need for an indigenous Mennonite *Seminar*? Did this activity fill the need for so-called ministerial courses often recommended by the conferences?

The second issue may also involve Mennonite estate owners. It has been estimated that well over fifty percent of the support for a broad array of Mennonite benevolent institutions stemmed from "estate generosity." These were mainly individuals given to a practical, hands-on type of Christianity. Whether fervent or nominal in their faith journey their orientation related more to the construction and maintenance of physical plants delivering humanitarian services. Their management skills were focused on the here and now and

the supervision of their inherited wealth. They were usually not given to abstract contemplation nor eager to understand the somewhat rarefied atmosphere of theological education. Enthusiastic support for a Seminar might be difficult to obtain from such potential benefactors.

We could be misinterpreting the language used in discussing the Russian Mennonite "Seminary question." The vocabulary used by church leaders to define the projected theological school may suggest a more advanced program of studies that was actually intended. Advocates used terms like *Predigerseminar*, *Predigerschule*, and *Predigerkurse*, but probably had little knowledge of the structure and curriculum of actual seminaries elsewhere. At the dawn of the twentieth century they were acquainted with institutions like St. Chrischona in Switzerland, the *Allianz* Bible School in Berlin or the Baptist training center in Hamburg. The composite profiles of these institutions resembled that of a Bible School rather than a Seminary, especially in the North American sense of the word. As their thinking became more crystalized in the early 1920s Seminar advocates spoke of the necessity of an All-Mennonite Bible School rather than a Seminary. Two regional institutions had emerged by 1923, the so-called Mayak Bible School in Davlekanovo, Ufa, and the Tschongrav Bible School in Crimea.²⁷ The latter was initially referred to as a *Predigerseminar*. Might this not have been the thinking of the proponents of a Seminar since 1883? Perhaps "The Seminary That Never Was" conceptually constituted a Bible School. Until the 1920s such schooling best fit the ministerial requirements of largely rural congregations in Russia.

Similarly the mass migration of Russian Mennonites to Canada soon generated a number of short and long term Bible Schools, some surviving until well past the mid-twentieth century. Did these North American schools reflect an extension of Seminar thinking that evolved in Russia decades earlier? Such widespread enthusiasm and support amid the rural Mennonite diaspora could not have emerged in a vacuum.

Footnotes:

- ¹ Heinrich Ediger. *Beschlüsse der von den geistlichen und anderen Vertretern der Mennonitengemeinden Russlands abgehaltenen Konferenzen für die Jahre 1879 bis 1913.* (Berdjansk, Heinrich Ediger Verlag, 1914). On the history of the All-Mennonite Conference see D. H. Epp, "Zur Geschichte der Bundeskonferenz der russländischen Mennonitengemeinden," *Unser Blatt*, 1926, No. 1, 17-19; No. 2, 39-41; No. 4, 101-4.p
- ² Ediger, pp4-5. Rather than citing location and time of each conference, references will be by page numbers only.
- ³ *Ibid.*, 6-10.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, 8. On the question of expanding Mennonite culture and education see Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education in Russia," in John Friesen (editor), *Mennonites in Russia (1788-1988). Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, CMBC Publications, 1989), 75-97.
- ⁵ Ediger, 15
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 25
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 30
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 52
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 65. On the question of expanding Mennonite culture and education see Adolf Ens, "Mennonite Education in Russia," in John Friesen (editor), *Mennonites in Russia (1788-1988). Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg, CMBC Publications, 1989), 75-97.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 75 The gathering did authorize the compilation and publication of a ministerial handbook. *Ibid.*, 76-77.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 88
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 91
- ¹³ *Ibid.*, 104
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 109
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 145
- ¹⁶ Ingrid I. Epp and Harvey L. Dyck. *The Peter J. Braun Russian Mennonite Archive, 1803-1920. A Research Guide* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1996).
- ¹⁷ Ediger, 150
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 153
- ¹⁹ *Protokoll der Allgemeinen Konferenz der Mennonitengemeinden Russlands im Bethause zu Neu Halbstadt am 6., 7. und 8. Juni 1917.* in *The Mennonites in Russia, 1917-1930. Selected Documents*, (Winnipeg, Christian Press, 1975), 397.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 423
- ²¹ Report of the Commission for Church Affairs in Moscow from October 16 to November 12, 1924. A.A. Friesen Collection, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.
- ²² See the printed minutes in the *Mennonites in Russia, 1917-1930. Selected Documents*, 438-439.
- ²³ "To the All-Ukrainian Central Executive Committee from the Authorized Representatives of the Mennonite Churches in Ukraine, Kharkov, October 20, 1923." A.A. Friesen Collection, Mennonite Library and Archives, Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas.
- ²⁴ Minutes, *Selected Documents*, 444.
- ²⁵ Report of the Commission for Church Affairs, March 21

to June 1, 1925, *Der Bote*, Vol. 2, no. 30, 6.

²⁶ Report of the Commission for Church Affairs from October, 1926 to March 1, 1927, *Der Bote*, Vol. 4, no. 18.

²⁷ Karl Friedrichsen, "Die Allgemeine Mennonitische Bibelschule," *Unser Blatt*, Vol. I, no. 11 (August, 1926), 280-284. The author noted that the projected school would be similar to St. Chrischona in Switzerland. He cautioned against admitting women since they "would only complicate matters" and be distracting for the men. Its Crimean counterpart admitted women yet according to one reporter women might find theology difficult, and also find it hard to secure a vocational assignment, though a few might become a minister's Frau. See Nikolai Siemens, "Ein schmerzhaftes Begräbnis eines lieben Kindes," *Unser Blatt*, Vol. II, no. 4 (January, 1927), 117-119.

Appendix I

[Proposed] Statutes for a Mennonite Seminary (*Predigerschule*)

I The Purpose and Admission Regulations of the Seminary

1. The purpose of Mennonite Seminary is to provide an adequate spiritual training for those already elected to the ministry and offer them the possibility to expand their knowledge so that they can more successfully fulfill their obligations as ministers. [It is also there to train] ministerial candidates of the Mennonite Churches in *Gubernias* of Kherson, Taurida and Ekaterinoslav. The school is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry for Public Enlightenment and is under the immediate jurisdiction of the curator of the Odessa Teaching District with the co-operation of the Molochna and Khortitsa Church Councils in the governance of this institution.

2. In the Seminary young persons of Mennonite Confession eighteen years and older can be accepted. There may be circumstances under which the administrators of the institution may make exceptions to this rule. Some may have finished the courses in a Mennonite Secondary School (*Zentralschule*) or passed the acceptance examinations in Religion and German Language in these schools and got a first-class standing in Russian language. Furthermore persons already in ministry will be admitted free of charge. Those entering the Seminary must give evidence of a

living faith in word and deed have a healthy body and not carry any communicable disease.

3. The number of students accepted, with the exception [of ministers] admitted free of charge, will be determined by the needs of the Mennonite Churches and the funds made available to the institution by its head (president?). Students are accepted once a year but "free listeners" can be admitted at various times depending on circumstances. Because of the initial lack of rooms at the institution, students at the seminary will have to find private accommodation.

4. The cost of the yearly tuition will be determined by the Pedagogical Council with the approval of the Molotschna and Khortitsa [Church] Councils.

5. The yearly tuition mentioned in paragraph four must be paid six months in advance.

6. If available finances allow, several students without means can be admitted free of charge with the approval of the Pedagogical Council and the Church Councils.

7. Every free vacancy can also be applied to two students each receiving half for their education and maintenance.

II Instruction

8. Except for Sundays and Statutory State holidays the students have the following holidays: June 1 to August 15; December 20 to January 7; Good Friday and Easter week.

9. The curriculum of the seminary is spread over two years. The subjects are as follows:

1) Religion 2) Spiritual practice in fulfilling ministerial obligations. 3) Hymnody 4) Russian and German Language. In addition the students must engage in gymnastics and other daily bodily exercises. In the summer they can work outdoors, in the orchard or the apiary.

10. More specifically the curriculum of the Seminary includes the following.

A. Religion

- a) Bible Knowledge b) Exegesis
- c) Dogmatics and Ethics d) Homiletics and Catechization e) Church History.

In Bible knowledge familiarity with the main

content of the various books of the holy Scripture is required. This will include the important events in the life of the author, the time it was written and the time of its acceptance into the canon. Who were the first readers of the individual books and the purpose of their composition?

In Exegesis it is essential to understand the Psalms, portions or even entire books of the Old and New Testament.

In Dogmatics and Ethics a thorough understanding of the Mennonite Catechism and Confession of Faith is required.

In Homiletics and Catechization the preparation of sermon outlines and subsequent public preaching is essential. Catechization will be practiced with fellow seminarians.

Church History will require knowledge of the development of the Christian Church supplemented by material from Mennonite History.

B. The student is to be acquainted with the obligations of a Mennonite minister both theoretically and practically.

C. In Hymnody knowledge of the Mennonite choral book is required.

D. The program of the Seminary in Russian language is the one prescribed for the state schools in 1872.

E. German language study requires written essays in order to facilitate accurate, smooth flowing presentations.

11. The instructional language is German.

Russian is only used for the [actual] teaching of the Russian language.

12. The [various] subjects will be apportioned according to the following schedule.

Subjects	Number of Weekly Instructional Hours	
	First Year	Second Year
Religion	22 hours	22 hours
Ministerial Practicum	2 hours	2 hours
Hymnody	1 hour	1 hour
Russian Language	3 hours	3 hours
German Language	2 hours	2 hours
Total	30 hours	30 hours

III The Administration of the Seminary

13. The administration of the Seminary is entrusted

ed to a Pedagogical council consisting of seminary teachers and the chair of a committee whose members are elected from the Mennonites on the Molotschna and Khortitsa Church Councils for a three year period. The hiring or dismissal of teachers is the task of the aforementioned Council subject to the approval of the curator of the Odessa Teaching District...

14. The Pedagogical Council will be convened as needed. Its tasks include the following: the financial governance of the Seminary; securing its prosperous development; the expulsion of students; examination of the graduating students and the presentation of the [necessary] certificates.
15. The Pedagogical Council reports yearly on the status of the institution to the Molotschna and Khortitsa Church Councils and the curator of the Odessa Teaching District.
16. The most senior teacher supervises the instruction and care of the students and the practical aspects of the Seminary. This position must be held by a person who has completed the course of the Mennonite theological faculty in Berlin or has graduated from a theological seminary. He is assisted by a teacher capable of instructing in the Russian and German languages and is in possession of a certificate qualifying him as a [private or house] tutor.
17. The teachers of the institution receive free housing including heating and light and are paid a salary determined by the [Church] Councils.

IV The Finances of the Seminary

18. 1. Tuition
2. Private one-time or periodic contributions.
3. Yearly collections for the seminary in the Mennonite Churches in the Taurida, Ekaterinoslav and Kherson Gubernias.
4. Interest from the endowment of the seminary.

The statutes and curriculum are being conveyed to our dear fellow ministers so that they might acquaint their congregations with this project and

elicit their views on it. If possible the next All-Mennonite Conference will formulate a binding resolution with respect to this question.

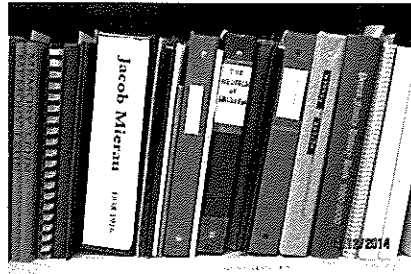
Muntau, June 23, 1905.

President of the Commission
H. Unruh

JBT

Use Your Archives Read Short-run, Self-Published Family Histories

Justina Peters and her husband, Herbert (deceased) have self-published many family histories, as have many others.



Such books might simply fill a binder, be cerlox-bound, or - if their clan can afford it, it may be a handsomely bound, hardcover tome.

The archives seeks out such family histories and genealogy books, and has quite an impressive collection. If you are doing research, you will find these books a treasure trove of information. The staff may also be able to give you the names of the authors or family members still alive, so you can interview them and confirm data.

Are you working on a history-genealogy for your family? Many start and then give up. Perhaps overwhelmed, or for lack of direction. Sometimes you just need encouragement from someone who has done it.

There is talk of a workshop this year, by MHSS to help struggling historians see what to do next. Those who have completed this achievement may get a chance to display their books.

It will help the organizers, however, if you let us know of your interest, your burning questions, and whether you might come. Would you contact a Board member - Susan Braun in particular, to let us know?

One of the purposes of the MHSS is to promote the study of our Mennonite history, including the publishing of our findings.

RMF

2016 Historical - Mennonite - Events to Note on Your Calendar



Feb. 16 - June 20 - "Along the Road to Freedom" - Diefenbaker Centre, Saskatoon

March 5 - 9:30 a.m. - MHSS Annual Meeting @ Bethany Manor, Saskatoon

March 6 - 2 p.m. - "Along the Road to Freedom" Grand Opening @ Diefenbaker Centre

March 11 - 12 - MC Sask Annual Delegate Assemble @ Osler Mennonite Church

June 10 & 11 - MCC Relief Sale, Saskatoon



June - Canadian Food Grains Bank Auction Sale @ Gruenthal

July 6 - 10 - MC Canada Session, Saskatoon - Mennonite Tours

July 24 - Swift Current Watermelon Day @ Museum

Exact Dates to be Announced:

August - Hague Museum Heritage Day

August - MCC Spruce River Folk Fest

September - Hague Threshing Day

Remembering David Schroeder - Part of the Saskatchewan Story

by Jake Buhler

This gigantic Bible teacher with a soft voice died September 27, 2015, in Winnipeg. Born in 1924 in Altona, Manitoba, he was called up to serve in WW2.

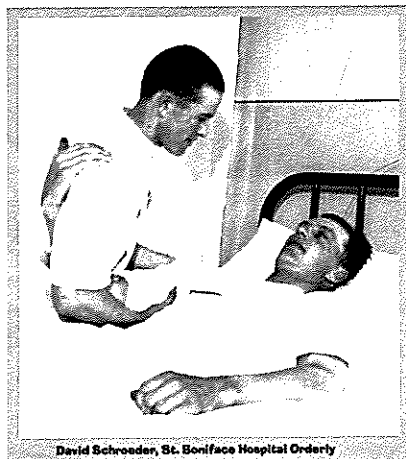
Rather than have the Aeltester represent him, he faced the judge to testify that Jesus' message of love was his reason not to enlist in the army. He went on to receive advanced education and taught at Canadian Mennonite

Bible College (now Canadian Mennonite University). Pastors and students sought him out. One pastor said of Schroeder, "his master was Jesus the Christ, the Word made flesh."

What was his Saskatchewan connection? A number of people will remember David Schroeder for an unusual event that took place in the Warman area of Saskatchewan.

In 1975 Eldorado Nuclear announced it would build an enormous uranium hexafluoride refinery east of Warman. A local group that eventually had a membership of 500 opposed the plan. For five years there was a struggle during which Eldorado pulled out all the stops to win over the hearts and minds of town councils, city councils, RM councils, all levels of governments and community leaders. They flew hundreds of people to Port Hope, ON., to see how safe the nuclear industry was. Eldorado acquired the necessary lands east of Warman (nearly two thousand acres). All was ready. Only the federal environmental hearings remained. These federal hearings consisted of a panel of 10 experts. In total three sets of hearings were conducted. During this time the Warman group stepped up and testified their opposition. Hundreds spoke.

The panel had a problem. They sensed strong opposition. But they also determined the nuclear industry was safe. At the urging of the Warman and District Concerned Citizens Group, David Schroeder was called in to explain who the



David Schroeder, St. Boniface Hospital Orderly

Mennonites were, their history, and their views. The Group was led by Ernie Hildebrand, pastor of Osler Mennonite Church. Later it was led by Edgar Epp. The panel was very interested in the quiet demeanour of Schroeder and they trusted him. He was brought back again to speak to the panel later.

Schroeder was never the only person who made a difference.

Hundreds of others, including many experts and ordinary people, spoke. But what Schroeder did that no nuclear scientist could do, was to convince the panel that before any nuclear facility was built, it had to study the people of the area. Indeed in spring of 1981 when the panel released its report, they said that before the nuclear refinery could be built, it would have to do a "people" study. Eldorado, sensing that would not be in their interest, pulled out and abandoned their plans.

The committee that led the group consisted of Ernie Hildebrand as chair, Edgar Epp, Nettie Wiebe, Gary Boldt, Leonard Doell, Sam Rempel, Jake Buhler, Wilf Friesen, and several others. The testimonies are recorded in detail in federal government documents.

Here are several examples (there were many). Kathy Boldt brought several jars filled with milk and wheat. She showed them to the panel and said "this is who we are. We are food people, not nuclear people."

Ben Buhler, dairyman, got up and said, "On behalf of my many cows, heifers, my calves, my dog and my cats, I oppose this industry." His mother Maria Buhler testified in German that the nuclear industry could lead to weaponry. Peter Froese testified that Mennonites were friendly people and he welcomed the Eldorado people to settle in the Warman area. But, he said, they would have to leave that "nuclear stuff" behind.

JB

Mother's Reticule

by Justina Wiens Peters



Helena J. Wiens

My mother, Helena J. Wiens, used this macrame reticule as a young girl, growing up in the city of Omsk, Siberia. Inside was a drawstring closure for her handbag.

Mother's father was a dealer of farm machinery for the International Harvester Company. He also had a German Book Store. Mother,

the eldest child in their family enjoyed being a clerk in the store. She often chafed at only having five years of schooling. In the book store she supplemented her education by reading.

In 1914 World War I began and the German-speaking people in Russia fell out of favour. Imported goods were no longer available. Her father sold what he could, closed the store and in 1916 he moved his family to Slavgorod.

Mother was 19 years old when her father asked her to accompany him on a trip to Omsk to visit his ailing sister, Mother's Aunt Helena. Mother's aunt was also my father's third mother. During that visit mother was impressed at how their son Johann tenderly cared for his parents. The two young people, my mother and father, renewed their acquaintance, which led to courtship and later marriage.

(Both father's parents died and were buried at Omsk).

In 1919 my mother, Helena J. Wiens married my father, Johann J. Wiens, at her parental home in Slavgorod. Goods for a wedding gown were not available so she wore the same black dress that had been her baptismal dress. Fortunately, Father had been able to buy two gold rings on the black market in Omsk.

They had hoped to stay at home for a while in Slavgorod before taking the train to Omsk and then on to Nova Pokrvosk where Dad lived. Father went to buy their tickets, but came back

without them.

The military had taken over the station and all the roads. These were revolution times with Reds and Whites vying for control of the government.

Father came back to mother's home. He asked where he could buy a horse and wagon. He bought a small horse and a Russian style wagon without springs. Mother's mother promised to pray for their safety as they packed up their things and fled across the open steppes of Siberia, often wondering if they were going in the right direction.

At night they hobbled the horse and let it graze while they slept under the wagon.

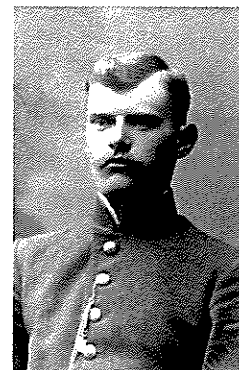
It was a relief when father recognized a familiar village.

They arrived at Novo Pokrvosk during the night of September 2. Father got out and tied up the back wagon wheel to act as a brake. The hill down to the shores of the Irtysch River was very steep. The flour mill and home were on the banks of this huge river.

What a welcome they received! Soon they were surrounded by family and mill workers. They were given food and bedded down.

Mother, the bride, remembered how soft the bed and pillows felt after having camped out for two weeks. They were thankful for the Lord's protection on their perilous honeymoon.

Mother's reticule travelled with her. It was her



Johann J. Wiens

remembrance of finer days.

My parents came to Canada in 1926 with three children. Five more children were born in Canada.

Growing up in Canada, I recall bringing home the book, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Mother had heard about this book and longed to read it. By the dim light of a kerosene lamp we read together with tears streaming down our cheeks. I had to promise not to return the book to the school library until she had finished it. It's a precious memory!

In 1973 mother was preparing to move into a cottage near the nursing home at Morden, Manitoba. In her basement she put out the things she needed to part with. I picked up this antique reticule, still beautiful and unique at 100 years of age!



Herbert & Justina Peters visited Nova Pokrovsk with cousins

A Trip to the Old Places:

Nova Pokrovsk is about 100 km north of the city of Omsk. My cousins, and Herbert and I made a pilgrimage there in 1992. The people of the village still recollect the stories about the honest miller who had lived there on the banks of the Mighty Irtysh.

My cousin Peter Wiens took us to see the place where our grandparents are buried in Omsk.

JP

ED: We can get both sides of her parents' story, for Justina has provided another article about her father and his work as a mill owner on the Irtysh River, which follows.

The Mill on the Irtysh

by Justina Wiens Peters

Caught on an Ice Flow

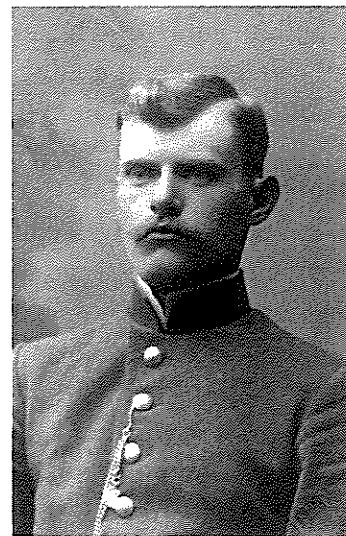
My father, Johann J. Wiens, or Hans, as he was called, grew up on the banks of the Irtysh. Each spring the river became treacherous when the ice broke up.

One day a man attempted to cross but was stranded on an ice flow. The village people gathered on the bank praying and making the sign of the cross, yet none dared to rescue the man.

Hans saw what was happening and was appalled at their inaction. He quickly got a boat and at great

risk to his own life, he skillfully maneuvered his small craft through the huge floes. The gathered watchers cheered as Hans brought the man to safety.

Upon reflection, Hans felt that what he had done was unreasonable and reckless. He was convinced that his success was due to God's marvelous protection.



Johann J. Wiens

The Mill

My grandfather, Jacob J. Wiens had built the flour mill on the Irtysh River at Nova Pokrovsk about 100 km north of Omsk, Siberia. In 1910 the mill was destroyed by fire. His two adult sons, Jacob and Johann, promised not to leave him in the lurch.

Grandfather was given renewed hope when on the Sunday after the fire the village council sent a delegation to encourage him to rebuild the mill. They said, "God is good. We don't have money, but we are willing to help in every way we can by hauling lumber and bricks, with laying the foundation and whatever is needed."

They backed up their words. A day was design-

ated for the hauling of lumber from a lumber yard 22 km away across the frozen river. Ninety-nine teams and sleds showed up. By evening all the necessary lumber was on site. Within a week 30,000 fired bricks were brought. All timbers for floor joists and framework were hand-sawn, shaped and planed.

It was evident these people sincerely wanted a local flour mill. All trips and jobs were recorded and reimbursed at a later date. In six months time by Aug. 20, 1910, the mill was again operating.

Alternative Service

In 1912 father was conscripted into Forestry Service in South Russia. World War I began in 1914 and his term was extended. He served on the trains between Moscow and Leningrad for two years. In 1917 he had time off during which time Jacob and Johann (my father) bought the mill from their father. The next morning his father made an announcement to the mill workers, "From now on my sons will be in charge. I am retiring." Grandfather and grandmother both with failing health, moved to Omsk. Their son Johann went back to finish his term. In 1918 he was released from service.

There was a change in government during that time, from Red to White. Father went to his parents home in Omsk and stayed to care for them since they were both sickly. His mother died in Dec. 1918, and his dear father died forty days later on Feb. 8, 1919. They are buried in the same plot in Omsk, where they rest until the resurrection.

Marriage

On August 10, 1919 my father, Johann J. Wiens, married my mother, Helena Wiens at her parental home in Slavgorod.

After the wedding father went to the train station to buy tickets. He returned without tickets. He had seen military everywhere. Mother's only brother had been taken by the Whites

and never was heard from again.

Father had already served the government in service for five years. In mother's story I tell how they fled and arrived at Pokrvosk and home near the mill.

A Neutral Stance -

From Father's own story.

"In November a military front went by without a shot being fired. We closed the mill for a few days, but a watchman reported seeing Red soldiers in the bunk house.

On Monday the Head Commissioner presented his credentials asking whether we would mill grain for the army. We answered, "Yes," reminding ourselves of the Scriptures, *"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you..."* Matthew 5:44-47.

Soviet Control

As mill owners we were required to deliver one tenth of all grain milled to the government. Later that was raised to 15%. How was the poor farmer to survive? In compassion for their survival father had juggled the books. In spring of 1920 father's brother Jacob moved his family to Trussowka because of their educational needs.

Facing the Firing Squad

Suddenly word got around that the men of

Nova Pokrvosk were being rounded up to face a firing squad. The village women ran from their homes to the place of impending slaughter. They surrounded father. The leader asked why they were protecting this one man?

They replied, "You can't shoot him. He's a good man. He has milled our grain for free to keep us alive. If you kill him you might as well shoot all of us, because we will surely die."

In a rare moment of compassion, father, their miller, was released.



Helena J. Wiens

The Mill is Nationalized

In father's story he writes that in 1921 the mill was nationalized by the Soviets. Father was given permission to rent his own mill for three years. However, father had read the Communist Five Year Plan. He knew that they would not be able to survive in Russia. Things were very difficult.

In 1925 orders came to vacate the mill and his home on the Irtysch. They had two weeks notice. Father and mother with three children moved into a two-roomed log house in the village of Nova Pokrvosk. It was their last winter in Russia.

Mother no longer had her large cook stove but she baked bread every day to feed the hungry children who came to her door.

She used a Russian oven called a "peeche" and the bread was made with uncleaned grain that still had weed seeds in it, but it fed the hungry.

Immigrants

In 1926 father and mother with three children, Mary, 6, John, 4, and Helen, 2, came to Canada. How grateful they were to come to Canada. Five more children were born here. They came with mother's parents and relatives.

Epilogue

I recall how they cried over the letters that came from Russia. They sent parcels to father's family as long as they were able, fasting to feel with those who were suffering and hungry. Many were sent to hard labour camps. Father's brother Jacob died in labour camp.

Rev. Frank Friesen told the story of "the Ice Flow" at my father's funeral at Morden MB in 1971. He was a close family friend.

Cousin Ruth Neufeld Wiens told of "Facing the Firing Squad" at my brother John's 90th birthday at Morden, MB. Aunt Mary Wiens Neufeld told the story to her children and grandchildren. They didn't tell our family because it might have embarrassed my father and mother.

Herbert and I visited Russia and Siberia in 1992. We made a pilgrimage to Nova Pokrvosk.



Justina & Herbert have picnic with cousins, near Omsk

The mill was gone, but the people were still telling the story of the "honest miller" who had lived there. What a legacy!

JWP

Stories of Peace & other Occasional Papers

Sunday afternoon, November 15, we listened to four individuals tell their stories of peace.

Mae Poppoff, a Doukhobor elder, shared the story of the burning of the guns in Russia, just before 1900. A group of their elders sang for us.

Walter Klaassen - talked about how his family members moved to Canada from the US during WW1 for their pacifist beliefs.

Lyle Stucky - shared his experiences about being called up to serve in the US military during the Vietnam War. He had to do alternative service.

Leonard Doell - told us about diaries from Holdemann families, who had family members go to jail because they would not register.

Leonard's material, once the diaries are fully studied, will likely become a book. However, the other three presentations are now available as an *MHSS Occasional Paper*. Ten copies are for sale in the Archives for the nominal fee of \$2.00/each.

We have other **Heritage Night Presentations** there as **Occasional Papers** as well. A complete list is at the end of the Authors book list on our website, mhss.sk.ca/books/

RON F

Word-Picture Keepsakes of an Emigrant

by Cornie J. Sawatzky - (in 1988)

submitted by niece Sylvia (Sawatzky) Regier

Uncle Cornie J. Sawatzky wrote the following when I asked him in 1988 to write his life story. My Dad, who was 3 years younger than Uncle Cornie, had died in 1988. Uncle Cornie, his wife, Aunt Georgina and their family, at least the younger ones, lived up at Vanderhoof, B.C. *SSR*

The land where I was born, to me was the best land in the whole world. The hills and dales with many varieties of wild fruit, more than one would think of, we had it - talk of the wild violets, - the scent was so sweet and strong, you could smell them miles away. Then in the town, we had flowering acacia trees

planted along the side walks. In our garden there were early cherries, apples, pears, mulberry and many other trees and shrubs.

Chortitza was nestled in a low valley next to Rosenthal, near the Dnieper River. The Dnieper River was in walking distance of our home. For us boys, this was a good place to be if you enjoyed swimming and fishing. That's where you would find us.

In the spring, the lower town Rosenthal would experience flooding - then you could catch fish from your doorstep.

If you were looking for tranquility, you would go out to the countryside to hear the birds sing, like the lark. The skylark would deliver a loud, clear warbling song for as long as five minutes while hovering in the air above its territory - sometimes at great height. The bush lark tended to have a shorter song associated with more aerial acrobatics, and the swallows and other birds took insects.

Across the main road from our home, on top of the flour mill on a high roof, was a stork's nest. They fed their young frogs and small snakes, etc. The storks were protected by the town. They were also of value in the control of animal pests such as mice and grasshoppers.

As you can see, we were always busy doing something for Mother and Dad. Planting in the garden was one of my favourite jobs, but I dreaded school. Now I know how important it is to have a good education.

One thing I will never forget about in my early days, - we had a very small dog named Fedelchen, a very happy little fellow. One day, my brothers, Jake and Peter, were told to herd the

geese in the open grain field, just after harvest, with all the broken heads of grain and grass for the geese to feed on. We had to go past our neighbour's place. They had a large vicious black dog on a long chain over a wire, so that he could run back and forth for exercise. Just when we came around the corner with our barking dog and our noisy geese this big dog came running so fast and with a loud growl he came to the end of the wire and the chain broke. He grabbed little Fedelchen and shook the daylight out of him. We carried Fedelchen home, and he died on the way.



Johann Sawatzky family. Back: Katharina, a cousin. Left: Abraham, Peter on mother's lap, Justina, Johann, Jacob on father's knee, and David. (Cornelius and Henry not born yet).



Cornelius, 1907 & Heinrich, 1910

My first funeral followed, with a lot of crying.

I never went near the neighbour's place for a long time after that.

Henry was still small and could not walk very well yet. Whenever he went outdoors, the gander was watching for him. With much hissing and wing-flapping, the gander would run after Henry and grab the seat of his pants. Henry would fall and cry. I came running with a stick and chased the goose off.

Not long after this, the time came for us as a family to move to Omsk, Siberia. Father was to work as a Superintendent in a factory to manufacture farm machinery. His assignment was for three years.

We rented a large house with many rooms in a small town near Omsk, called Isselcool. We soon found out the place was infested with rats. They entered the woodshed and other buildings, coming in colonies in trash dumps, hollow walls and sewers.

Some rats, especially males, are known to stake out territorial claims and breeding goes on all year. They are very cunning and can withstand poison and traps and have been known to attack man.

Now, how to get rid of them? Many different ways were tried. Finally, Mother and Dad purchased some ducks because they make a steady noise if they have food and water. They squeak and squawk all day long! That was one noise the rats could not stand. They left and no one knew where they went.

At this time, Henry was learning to talk, but had problems saying the letter "r" so mother wanted to teach him to say it. Henry and I played together all day. Often I sounded out the "r" and had Henry try it too. Lo and behold, by evening he had mastered it.

I started school, but only for a short while. We found out that I had a tape worm. I could only eat certain food. I couldn't eat oranges for one. I had nausea, nervousness and irritability, even high fever.

Mother tried all sorts of treatment, but all to no avail. Then we tried pumpkin seeds, but I was

unable to eat them. I tried again and again. Then one day I was outside playing in the warm sunshine, and I thought I should go and try pumpkin seeds again. I ran into the house, and into the pantry. I took a handful of seeds and gulped them down. That was the end of the tape worm. After that I gained weight and could eat most everything.

I remember when Father took us to Omsk to see a silent picture show. We had to cross the frozen Irtysh River in 40 below weather. The taxi was a horse-drawn sleigh, but what a terrible-looking horse pulled it. It had a sway back like I've never seen before. But we were comfortable, sitting on some straw, with plenty of blankets. When we arrived in the city, the other children made fun of our sway back horse. I can remember feeling very shaken.

The show was about some African hunters who had gone tiger-hunting, and showed us the hides to prove they had actually shot the tigers.

One day, while still living in Siberia, John, my brother, decided to make a rocket. He had a pattern and followed the instructions carefully. Finally, he had it altogether, with blasting powder and all!

We boys were all curious to see how it would work. John tied the rocket to a fence post and ignited it. Off went the rocket high into the air, only to come down onto the neighbour's straw roof. The straw caught fire! There was much scrambling for a ladder and some water to put the fire out.

Mother was very cross and upset.

Shortly after this incident, the time came for the Sawatzky family to get ready to move back home to Chortitza.

When we arrived in Chortitza we had to stay for a time at the Jake Sawatzky's in Rosenthal until it was time for our renter, Mr. Katz, to move out of our home.

Due to the unrest in the labour movement, Mr. Katz decided we should move into part of the house, while the Katz family lived in the other part. They left before the rental agreement was up.

We found however, that life in our dear home would never be the same again. It became evident that a revolution and civil war was in the making. The Ukraine in particular became the theater in which this huge social struggle between the Bolsheviks and the Red Army, and also the White, or Volunteer Army, happened.

The Volunteer Army was a collection of Anti-Bolsheviks led by General Deniken. The most clever and feared of these leaders was Nestor Mahkno, causing a reign of terror through much of Southern Ukraine, including the main Mennonite Colonies like Chortitza and Rosenthal.

Chortitza and Molotschna had vast land and had built factories. We had our schools and churches. I believe we had too good a time and forgot the Lord to some extent. There was self-satisfaction and prosperity for many, making them proud, so I suppose we had some of this coming.

I was too young to realize what was really going on, playing war with the other boys - making explosives and guns was the thing to do. But the real killer was the outbreak of typhus and small-pox, which spread over our town by the occupation of troupes and bandits. In Chortitza and Rosenthal, during three years, 4000 died in a short time. We all had typhus. My sister Tina just about died; she lost all her hair.

Father never got sick. When he was cutting up a beef for someone in town, he accidentally drove a sharp knife into his leg. By the time he came home he was nearly too weak to walk. The doctor claimed the reason that Dad didn't get sick with typhus was because he had lost a lot of blood, and his body had replaced it. So he had the stamina to withstand illness.

Father was an excellent nurse; he nursed all of us back to health.

Our Dad also took care of an elderly Red Army officer when the officer was ill. When the officer began to recover he put his arm around Dad and kissed him many times.

The army came to take the man to the hospital, but the officer refused to go along. He picked up his revolver, which he always had by his pillow, and told the army personnel, "I'm staying here

until I recover." So he did. Before he left, he again put his arms around Father and promised he'd come back and visit sometime.

The political situation looked quite uncertain. Rumors were that Lenin and Trotzke were dead, and that many people were arrested and sent away. Things were happening that only God was aware of; it is difficult to say how many lives were lost due to that civil war.

Different times we ran out of food, or very near to it. When the MCC was finally allowed into the country with its feeding program, special kitchens were set up in the Ukraine in March of that year. Over 40,000 people were able to get a daily ration of food in the American kitchens. Children quickly regained their normal weight. But many children had died during the winter when food was so scarce.

Our mother was very wise in the way she fed us. We all received some food, but not too much at once. When there was nothing to eat but sunflower cake, sister Justina would come along with a little sack of dry toasted crusts, saved from part of her ration, one piece for each of us. It was a very difficult time for the parents, being so concerned for their children.

The MCC also sent clothing for needy families.

Sometimes the soldiers would leave behind a sack of flour or large jars of alcohol. Father used the alcohol to wash his hands with, also to rub us down with when lying in bed, to prevent bed sores as well as skin irritations, warding off infection.

I remember one evening some soldiers came and knocked on our door with the butt of their rifle, demanding to stay overnight. The night was cold and they had been drinking.

When they left the next morning, Father went to see what the room looked like. These soldiers had been drunk and to keep warm they had built a fire in the middle of the double oak floor. The fire had burned through the first layer of the floor and gone out. The room was a real mess to clean up. But again, they had left more alcohol.

My brother John was in the Selbstschutz and had to flee with the rest when the Red Army came into town. They were able to get away to America.

There, John worked for a farmer in Nebraska. He sent us a package of food, canned milk, sugar, flour, cocoa. We were very thankful, giving thanks to God for His watchful care over us in Russia.

Many people were interested in emigrating to America, or Canada. Many others were beset with fears and doubts about going to another country.

I was glad and excited, but it was also a very strange feeling to leave this beloved place we called home, including the river and friends, the lovely countryside, where we had enjoyed so many wonderful days.

In the fall of 1923 we received the good news of a possible exodus to Canada. We were filled with joy, but also with fear and doubt at the prospect of going to an unknown country. Things began to happen - we were told to get ready quickly.

Medical inspections took place; we were all given a clean bill of health and received a certificate from the doctor to show to the authorities. Father sold our home to Dr. Theodore Holtmann.

It was a very difficult time for many.

Finally, there were 762 emigrants that were to leave by rail from Chortitza via Latvia. We were ready; the train was whistling and waiting. There seemed to be an endless stream of wagons on their way to the station.

I told my friend, Peter Fast, that I would never cry. Yet I looked around, and the thought of leaving this beautiful country forever, as well as my friend, Peter Fast, and others, including our Uncle Redekopp, - well, it was hard to bear. Handkerchiefs were waving and wiping eyes. There were also waving hats everywhere. We were leaving home forever, travelling into the unknown future.

Just before we left, I ran into the garden to pick a bag of apples which were not ready to eat. I also picked different kinds of flowers to press in a book. These things were picked to take to Canada so that I could remember my home.

Later, other groups followed, but the socialist government had become antagonistic toward this movement; they were losing too many good

farmers. In time it became more and more difficult for others to emigrate.

At last the day came when we arrived in Canada. What a joy to meet brothers and sisters in Christ when we arrived in Swalwell, Alberta.

George and Abe Neufeld and others from Didsbury, came in their model T cars to take us all the way to Didsbury. This was the first time in my life I had the pleasure of riding in an automobile.

We stayed at Abe Neufelds' for the night. Later we moved into an empty house on the Abe Neufeld farm.

The grain harvest was in full swing. I got a job at George Lantz's, stooking barley. I knew next to no English. I worked very hard that first day, but that night a strong wind blew most of my stooks over. I felt very bad, so Mr. Lantz wanted me to milk a cow. Again, something I had not done before. He did not know that, but in no time at all, I learned to milk quite well.

After this I worked for Henry Reimer that fall and winter. They treated me like their own son.

The next fall I worked for Alex Schmick. In the spring of 1925 I started working for Sid Bouck - a job that lasted 4 ½ years.

Shortly after this time, I rented 160 acres from Ezra Siebert. My older brother Abe rented 160 acres from Mr. Levi Siebert. Now we were farming for real!

Many more things happened after that. I was baptized on May 27th, 1927 by Elder C.D. Harder, in the Bergthal Mennonite Church, and became a naturalized citizen of Canada in the fall of 1930.

It was at the Mennonite church in our district I became acquainted with a lovely young lady, named Georgina, the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Brown. We were married on November 26th, 1936 at the home of the bride's parents.

Georgina loved singing; I have often thanked the Lord for that.

We were blessed with seven children, fourteen grandchildren, and one great-grandchild.

Written in 1988 by Cornie J. Sawatzky

CJS

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) Presents Award of Excellence in Abbotsford, B.C.

Meeting at the new Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, B.C., gave the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) the opportunity to see this new facility that tells the faith story of Mennonites in the Fraser Valley and is also the new home of the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. Representatives from Mennonite historical societies and organizations from across Canada met on Jan. 13-16, 2016.

Among the many reports was a success story about the first ten months of the Mennonite Archival Imaging Database (MAID). This collaborative project gives the public greater online access to photos held by Mennonite archives and has brought publicity and interest to these collections with 41,000 unique visitors to the MAID website and 160 images purchased in ten months. A new member of the MAID project is the Mennonite Library and Archives, Fresno.

This year the MHSC Award of Excellence was given to Hugo Friesen of Abbotsford, B.C., and Ted Regehr of Calgary, Alta. Friesen, a teacher and principal before his retirement, was involved in the early attempts to organize a Mennonite archive in B.C. and became the first archivist for the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C., serving from 1993 to 2005. He coordinated all the activities of the archives in its early years and has continued to work as a volunteer.

Ted Regehr worked at the Public Archives of Canada from 1960 to 1968 after which he taught history at the University of Saskatchewan. He has contributed much to the preservation of Mennonite history in Canada, serving as president of the

MHSC in its early years, writing many books and articles including *Mennonites in Canada* Volume 3, and working with the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and its archives and library. Regehr mentioned that it was Frank H. Epp, his pastor when he lived in Ottawa, who got him involved in Mennonite history.

The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), which began 20 years ago in 1996, continues to grow. Sam Steiner reported that it is difficult to keep the statistics up to date, especially congregational information that needs to be done at the grassroots level.

Among the discussions about future projects was how to do more digitization of books and periodicals. Accessibility and search ability are enhanced when these things are in digital form, but it is labour intensive to put them online. The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies reported

that the Christian Leader magazine has been digitized and is ready to be released on a USB stick.

MHSC is proposing "A People of Diversity" project and has applied for a grant to help celebrate Canada's 150th anniversary in 2017. If the grant is approved, there are plans for an oral history project and a conference that would recognize how diverse the Mennonites in Canada have become since 1970.



Hugo Friesen (left) and Ted Regehr received Awards of Excellence from Lucille Marr, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. In background is a painting from the "Along the Road to Freedom" exhibit on display at the new Mennonite Heritage Museum in Abbotsford, B.C.

The MHSC executive for 2016 includes Richard Thiessen as president, Royden Loewen as vice president, Alf Redekopp as secretary, Conrad Stoesz as treasurer, and Barb Draper as member-at-large. (Photo by Richard Thiessen).

From: *MHSC release*

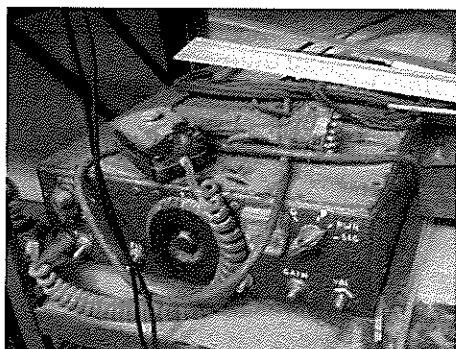
James Friesen, Inventor, of Rosthern

by Dick Braun

Mr. Friesen is no stranger to the people of the valley area as we have been seeing parts of his picture collection in the Saskatchewan Valley News for many years. What we have not seen is the vast amount of talent that this man has.

When the discussion about radios came up, it turned out that he had built a ham radio in the 1940s. He was so intrigued by the ham radio that in 1963 he got his certification of Morse Code. In the early years of the radio there was a crystal (diode) you could buy and make a radio with it. James had one of them and he talked about how the little wire with the pin at the end of it was called the cat's whisker. With this wire you would find the station that you could listen to. This all worked without batteries.

Without any training he understands the working of the different electrical waves to make up a radio wave so it turns into a receivable



frequency so we can hear it, also the value of tubes in a radio which boost the power. He says that he cannot remember a time when there was no radio in their house.

The snow plane was another mode of transportation that he played with, and he ended up building one in 1980.



The picture he gave me of the snow plane that he had built also tells us that he is a deep

thinker. The whole idea of gliding over the snow instead of through the snow like a car does, is something that has intrigued people for many years. We did that with horse drawn sleighs. On a snow plane you have a propeller pushing the sled forward on skies. James tells of how he carved the propeller out of birch wood.

The engine was air-cooled as he thought that it would be lighter. He says that it is important to keep the machine as light as possible for easier moving on the snow.

He had seen the snow plane that the Flath brothers of Rosthern had built in 1955.



They had also used the idea of keeping it light, and the power of the engine balanced with the size and pitch of the propeller. The Flath snow plane is still on the family farm.

He also built a few model airplane engines, and a fairly big model airplane on which he mounted a 35MM camera on; making it automatic, so it would find the film. He designed a body-mounted camera holder so you would keep the camera from shaking when taking a picture.

In his house you can see some wonderful pictures that he took from the air with that plane and camera he built many years ago.

Another invention was building a boat with a wind propeller to drive a prop in the water so that the boat could go against wind without a motor or sail. He did this to prove that it was possible to drive a wind-driven boat against wind.

He talked about playing in a band, The Fascinators. I asked, "Which instruments did you play," and he said, "The clarinet and guitar."

"And did you build a Clarinet," I asked.

He answered, "No, but I did build a guitar."

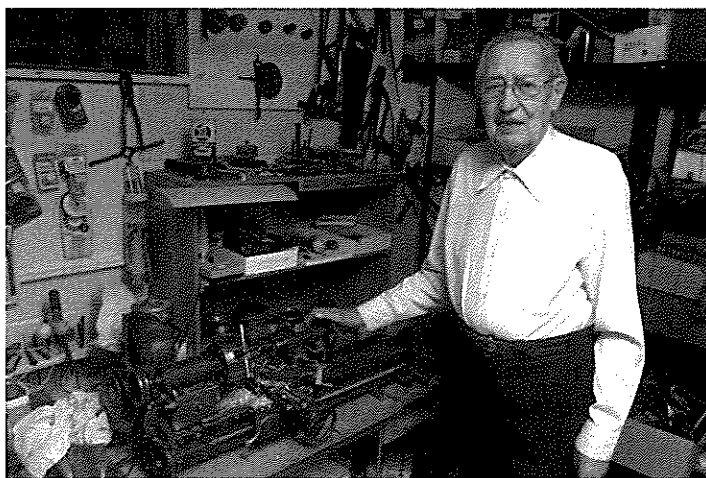
It was Victor Friesen, his cousin, the writer, who was on drums in this band.

For the last 8 years, we have seen his handy work at building an igloo in the front yard of his house in Rosthern. He says that you have to be a bit of a building engineer to construct it so it keeps its shape and does not crumple together.

He was already 71 when he decided to build a steel lathe to machine metal.

I asked, "Where did you find all the right gears for it?" Well, I should have known.

"I made them myself," was his answer. First he made blank pieces of steel, and then machined them into gears. The picture shows that it is a well-built, usable tool for small projects.



It seems that here is a person who would build a tool to make a tool, or enhance a project. James is a true inventor or designer of tools, parts and machines.

It seems like, from a very young age, he was thinking and building things to make the job easier and better. I wonder how many nights of sleep he has missed over the years, trying to figure out the solution to a problem?

He says that he comes by this curiosity honestly as his father was like-minded.

James has been part of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan for six years. We have really appreciated him there, as he is a true historian, and has a good memory of the past.

DB

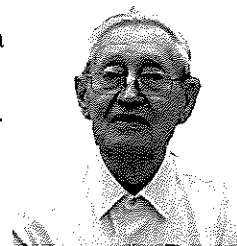
Two MHSS Board Members Retire

Erna Neufeld has been a loyal board member of MHSS since 2010. She attends Nutana Park Mennonite Church, and together with husband, Elmer, volunteered to mail the Historian to some 350 members three times a year.



On occasion she has acted as secretary for MHSS. Her gentle demeanor and her good judgment made her a valuable and much-appreciated board member. The board thanks her, and wishes her well in new endeavors.

James Friesen is a member of the Swedenborgian community in Rosthern. In his six years on the Board, his knowledge of Mennonite history in the Valley area benefited MHSS very much. He has written articles on the early period of Rosthern's history in several papers. Jim has always been a team player, and his input on the Board will be missed. Our Board thanks him, and wishes him well in the future.



JB



The MHSS Board as of November 2015

Back row: Susan Braun, Elmer Regier, Leonard Doell, Vera Falk, Dick Braun. Front row: Jake Buhler, Erna Neufeld, Elizabeth Guenther, James Friesen, and Kathy Boldt.

(At our March AGM: Erna Neufeld and James Friesen retired, and John Reddekopp accepted a position on the Board).

Photography and Art at the Annual General Meeting of MHSS **by Ruth Marlene Friesen**

The Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS) had its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, March 5, 2016.

John Reddekopp told stories of the years when softball was very important in many small Mennonite communities. He was both a player and a coach for teams in Osler and Warman, and at schools where he was a school teacher. He asked why there are so many Mennonites even now in softball? He showed softball games as metaphors, for living in a Body, or community.

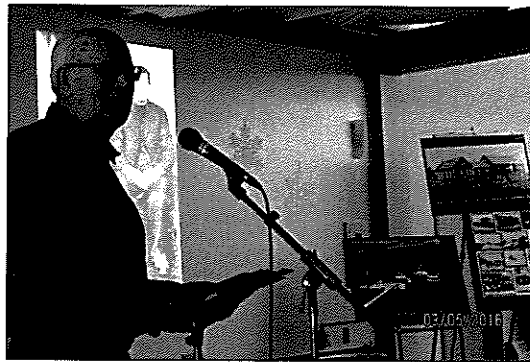
After John's invitational prayer, Jake Buhler led the business portion of the meeting, calling on various people for their annual reports.

Victor Wiebe shared an enthusiastic report on the MAID program; a national online collection of historical photographs, to which many provincial historical societies are contributing. It can be accessed online by anyone.

Susan Braun, Board member, led the elections. Two Board members, Erna Neufeld and James Friesen, have finished their terms and were not ready to let their names stand again. John Reddekopp was willing, and was quickly elected as a new Board member.

After a coffee break, Henry Harms, a life-long photographer, showed us, with stories and a slide presentation, many of the high quality photos he has taken over the years. He also had a display of framed photos to the right on the platform, and a table full of albums, which we were welcome to browse over lunch.

After a lovely lunch of chicken noodle soup with kringle and cold meats, and a choice of three kinds of fruit plautz, we reassembled to hear Korey Dyck, Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre in



Winnipeg, tell us more of their archives and gallery.

It is several times the size of our archives, yet he explained how all archives are like water in a sponge; the more you squeeze the more comes out. Again, like water, we really can't do without them.

Our archives are memory

institutes, and as the Baby Boomer generation downsizes, our archives get more STUFF! So we need to raise more money to care for it all.

The artist, Ray Dirks, had the rest of the afternoon. He told us how he became both a curator and an artist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

He gave us his background stories and how he came up with the idea for the art collages featuring Mennonite women who, often with the loss of husbands, or other men in their lives, had to struggle to keep their children together, and they came to Canada. Families who wanted their mother or grandmother honoured in this way donated funds, which was how he was able to fund the project himself.

Ray described the process of interviewing the families and gathering the resources they had to define and illustrate each woman's life and values. The last painting was just finished on the Monday of that same week!

We were invited to pick up coffee and cookies, and then stay to watch Ray Dirks demonstrate his

art. We were allowed to stand close by to see better. The artist handled this well, for he paused often to explain why he chose certain brushes, how his method was to do water-colour painting but in layers to get the sheer lifelike look and attention to fine detail. (for more detailed report go to the website: mhss.sk.ca/reports/)



Honour List

This list recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions toward preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. To submit a name for the Honour List, nominate that person in writing, and forward to the MHSS Board.

The date in brackets is the year of death. The profiles of some of the honourees are on our website. <http://mhss.sk.ca/tributes/> (If you can provide the ones that are missing, the editor would be glad to hear from you).

Helen Bahnmann

Abram J. Buhler († 1982)

Helen Dyck († 2007)

Dick H. Epp († 2009)

Jacob H. Epp († 1993)

Margaret Epp († 2008)

Peter K. Epp († 1985)

George K. Fehr († 2000)

Jake Fehr

Jacob E. Friesen († 2007)

John D. Friesen († 2004)

Jacob G. Guenter († 2013)

Gerhard J. Hiebert († 1959)

Katharine Hooge († 2001)

Abraham G. Janzen († 2015)

John J. Janzen († 2004)

George Krahn († 1999)

Ingrid Janzen-Lamp

Abram M. Neudorf († 1988)

J. J. Neudorf († 1988)

J. C. Neufeld († 1994)

John P. Nickel

David Paetkau († 1972)

Esther Patkau

John D. Reddekopp († 2011)

Ted Regehr

John G. Rempel († 1963)

Ed Roth († 2008)

Wilmer Roth († 1982)

Arnold Schroeder († 2000)

Jacob Schroeder († 1993)

Katherine Thiessen († 1984)

J. J. Thiessen († 1977)

David Toews († 1947)

Toby Unruh († 1997)

Albert Wiens († 2002)

George Zacharias († 2000)

Websites

MHSS: mhss.sk.ca

Cemeteries: Transitioning to the above site, but still available at:

freepages.genealogy-rootsweb.com/~skmhss

Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:

(GAMEO)

gameo.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online

E-Updates Ezine (announcements email):

Subscribe by entering your email on our website page: mhss.sk.ca/E-Updates.shtml

Be sure to let us know when you change email addresses.

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The Treasurer, MHSS

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Saskatoon, SK. S7K 7H8

Make cheques payable to MHSS

Memberships: \$35 for one year; \$55 for two years; \$90 for three years.

Gift subscriptions are available.

Membership fees and donations to the Society are eligible for tax receipts. Extra copies are available at the Archives for \$3/copy.

Send in Feedback & Stories

You are cordially invited to send in feedback, news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc., to be considered for publication.

The editor is willing to help polish it up so it looks professional. See contact info to the right -->

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