

# Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian



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## Christmas Issue

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*Bob & Bev Wahl's mountain-side home near Klaus, Austria*

## A Christmas Birth in Vorarlberg, Austria

We were to start our mission work in Austria after some time spent in Hamburg learning to speak the German language. I understood some Low-German but very little High German.

When the time came for us to move to Austria I loaded all our worldly goods into our Opel Kapitain, taking out the front seat to give us more room and packed it to the rafters. With this loaded car . . . [cont'd p.4]

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## **Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian**

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## **The Editor's Perspective**

**Ruth Marlene Friesen**

I've been saying how much I've enjoyed working on this Christmas-themed issue. It has been a thrill to get stories from people who otherwise might not try.

And the sheer number of stories that has come in is very gratifying, too! I trust we will have many new writers to count on for the future.

It was supposed to be wrapped up and ready for the proof-readers the end of October. It looked like it would be 24 pages. While I waited for the last two promised articles, two others arrived. I realized that would mean going to 28 pages. However, there was now a gap of about a page.

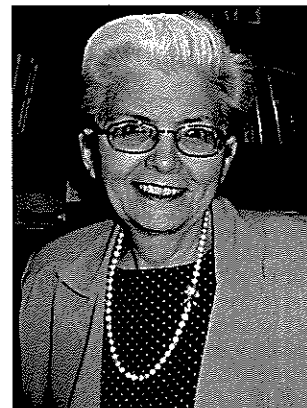
Well, I had a couple of Christmases of my own to write up - just in case - and so I've just had to fit one of those in, to make sure we have a full issue.

These stories will trigger your memories and you will have at least twice as many to tell at your family gatherings this Christmas.

At least two contributors have told me that they would like to buy extra copies to give to family members. This issue is a superb gift idea!

So I've talked to the MHSS President and got permission to order some extra copies. He has even said that you may purchase extra copies at the bargain price of \$2.00 each. (Usual price is \$3.00). They will be going like hotcakes!

We have 17 Christmas stories and articles in this issue, plus two 'in memoriam' notices. Dick Braun doesn't use the word *Christmas* in his article, but it is all about some amazing snow plows built by Henry Peters and his brothers. We all know that often those snow plows allowed for Christmas programs and family gatherings to happen, when weather-wise it looked impossible. Have a Blessed Christmas! Make new memories!



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Schroeder; William & Huebert; Helmut, eds. **Mennonite  
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Mennonites.** Conrad Press. The story of the journey of  
the Volhynian Mennonites.  
222 pp. Pbk. \$5.00

Teichrib; Abram. **Der Weg zur Heimat. Erinnerungen  
meiner Mutter.** (Translated from the German by  
Kenneth Pekau, Waldheim, SK). **The Way to the  
Heavenly Home, Memories of My Mother.** 2012.  
Globe Printers, Saskatoon, SK  
The story of a family living in Russia. Following the arrest  
of the father in 1937, they moved to the Ukraine.  
In 1943, they joined the Mennonite Trek to Poland and  
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The family emigrated to Germany in 1989.  
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Wahl; Bob, **Contending With Horses: An Autobiography.**  
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## **MHSS President's Corner**

*by Jake Buhler*



In the 3rd Century Emperor Aurelian celebrated Fall Equinox as "birthday of the Unconquered Sun". At the beginning of the 5th Century, Christian Emperor Constantine wished to change that and ordered the celebration of the "Sun of Righteousness".

Gradually December 25 became the date on which the mass of Christ was celebrated. Christmas was born somewhere in the early Middle Ages of Europe.

By 1377, Richard the Second and his court celebrated Christmas by consuming 28 oxen and 300 sheep. Christmas became a raucous affair. In England in 1647 the Puritans banned Christmas briefly before Charles the Second restored it in 1660. Indeed, Boxing Day was born in England on the Second Day of Christmas, when peasants boxed up festive leftovers and celebrated the day after December 25.

Over time, pagan customs of the Yule Log and the Christmas Tree blended in with Christian traditions. Mennonites by the 1700s in Prussia knew about Nate Kloas and dee Wiehnachtsmaun as secular parts of Christmas. However, as late as the 1950s, Old Colony Mennonites did not have Christmas trees in their homes in the Hague-Osler area. There was a wide difference in the practice of Christmas.

The 1800s revolutionized Christmas traditions. The classic Christmas music gave way to easy-to-sing carols. Charles Dickens introduced Scrooge and Tiny Tim, and suddenly giving of gifts became popular. Soon merchants saw how they could benefit commercially. And today? You can fill in the blanks.

We are 21st Century people who can now see Christmas as both biblical and secular. We appear to have accommodated both. Perhaps we can do this: we can celebrate the life of Jesus who shared his redeeming life with us and taught us God's love; we can also celebrate unity with family and  
[conclusion on page 7]

## A Christmas Birth in Vorarlberg, Austria - continued from cover by Bob Wahl

I headed for Austria.

I stopped some distance from the German-Austrian border, nervous and stressed to the limit. I said a word of prayer and proceeded to the border.

The guard stopped me, and in a bored tone asked if I had anything to declare. I said "No, nothing to declare." With that he waved me through. As I started up he seemed to wake up to the fact my car was loaded to the hilt and heavily weighed down; I saw his eyes light up and his head jerked up, but I was gone.

I watched in the rear view mirror not sure if he would call me to stop, but he just watched very intently as I drove away. Whew, I just about fainted with relief. I was in.

After I went back and got my wife and family, we moved into a home we had been able to rent on the hillside in the town or village of Klaus in Vorarlberg, Austria; a beautiful place to live. The view from our home was spectacular. Below us the beautiful valley reached up to the town of Rankweil some 15 Ks to the south, and on either side the spectacular Austrian Alps. We were only a few kilometers from Switzerland and from the Principality of Liechtenstein.

Our immediate challenge was to get an "Aufenthaltserlaubnes", a required resident permit. We made the usual application and then waited with bated breath for a response.

But to our consternation we were turned down and asked to move out immediately. The local official was asked to report exactly when we had left the country. These applications were always made locally but were always processed in Vienna, on the other

end of Austria.

The local government official became my friend since I would go to him for help or other matters requiring the filling out of forms Europe seems to specialize in. He helped me with getting my driver's license, registering locally for hydro and telephone and paying various dues. The process of applying for an "Aufenthaltserlaubnes" was always a lengthy one. So when we were turned down I really was upset.

Winter was coming. Bev, my wife, was pregnant. Would we have to move during the Christmas season?

I went back to my government friend and he did not seem concerned at all. He told me I had to learn the Austrian way of doing things and learn a little "Gemütlichkeit".

All we had to do was apply again for a lesser period of time. Instead of 5 years, I think he was going to try for 3 years. He assured me we would be able to stay over Christmas. He could draw out this process for a number of months. So we filled out more forms.

Then just a few weeks before Christmas our youngest son was born. We had a midwife that came to our home to help deliver the baby. It was a cold and stormy night when he was born in our little home on the Austrian mountainside.

Not knowing whether we had to register him, I sought out my government friend. To say I got a reaction out of him would be an understatement.

He couldn't seem to believe me. He kept saying, "You have a baby born here where you live?"

I kept assuring him that was indeed the case,



*village of Klaus, Vorarlberg, Austria below*

not quite sure whether that was good or bad for us. He suddenly said. "That solves all your problems with the *Aufenthaltserlaubnes*. There is no way this country would ever force a citizen out of the country, and he has to have parents to look after him."

He was right. In no time we had our "*Aufenthaltserlaubnes*." With Christmas just around the corner that was a welcome relief.

But not only that, he had more for us. Now he wanted to know if we had been paid the allowance Austria pays to expectant mothers. Did we have other children? Had we been receiving family allowance? No to the first, yes to the second, no to the third.

"Das gibt's doch nicht". That can't be right. "Let's get those forms filled out"

We did.

The next thing we knew we had a visit from the town administrator with all kinds of gifts including crib, baby clothes, blankets and other baby paraphernalia. Then the postman showed up with cash.

That's the way it was done in those days in Austria. We were paid for 6 months prenatal care and 9 months post-natal care plus one year's children's allowance for our two other children. We were in seventh heaven. What a Christmas gift! We had our *Aufenthaltserlaubnes* plus a generous amount of cash. Wow!

But just at Christmas the weather really turned on us. We experienced one of the most difficult winters Europe had had in decades. Europe was in a deep freeze. In the mountains we had serious cold and terrific snow storms.

Christmas was wonderful with all that snow. We took the kids riding with new sleighs down the slopes from where we lived. We would even take the sleds right into the village which was all decked out in beautiful colors for the season.

Our home was heated with coal burned in a furnace in our small basement. Now however, due to unusual cold and snow, fuel suddenly became very scarce throughout Europe. At first I was not unduly alarmed since we had a decent supply of coal and it was still generally available through-

out the country as well as in our village or town. Surely over Christmas more coal would become available.

However as the cold and snow kept coming and the cold increased; demand quickly started to outstrip supply. When our own supply got down to just a couple of weeks' worth, I sought to order some from the local coal dealer, but was informed no supply was available. That was worrisome but it was not yet critical. I kept asking but no coal was getting through.

When we were down to about 2 days of coal, I went to see the manager and informed him I had a young Austrian in my home who was about to get very cold if nothing was done.

That got his attention. Within hours they came to look, established that we really only had coal heat and a day or two of coal left. A little later they were back with several bags of coal that tided us over until supply was again available. It was a gift that was very highly valued.

My focus during our mission time there, was primarily to distribute Bibles and Christian literature. Vorarlberg is heavily Roman Catholic as is all of Austria. During our time there was only one Protestant church group, a Methodist denomination, that I was aware of.

I spoke there a few times. and recall my first Sermon with the topic of "Die Verheissungen Gottes" or "The Promises of God," but the way I pronounced Verheissung was with a heavy Z like in Verheizung. That changed the meaning entirely to "heating or heat of God," rather than the promises of God.

A dear old lady spoke to me after the service, and kindly explained the difference but she assured me they had understood. Foreigners make lots of mistakes.

In a recent conversation with a co-worker who is German and worked with me during that time, I was informed that from that pioneer work of sowing the seed there are now 16 evangelical churches in Vorarlberg. I am pleased with that even though my role was very minor.

*BW*

# Pfeffernüsse

by Dave Toews

"Pfeffernüsse", Dora repeated after me in amazement!

It was November 7, 2003; we were sitting around the pool at Toddy's Backpacker Hostel in Alice Springs, Australia. Nostalgia crept among us, we had wandered far and wouldn't be home for Christmas. Marion and I were discussing our mutual Dutch Germanic heritage with our newly found friends, Lex Evers and Dora Twikler from the Netherlands.

I mentioned that my people, the Mennonites, had taken the culinary Christmas tradition of peppernuts with them when they left Friesland in the sixteenth century. She found it difficult to comprehend how this craft had been carried through Eastern Europe and on to North America over a period of almost 500 years.

Dora marvelled at my German pronunciation, still almost identical to hers. How could this be, after all those years?

The history of Pfeffernüsse/peppernuts is not well documented. Many Dutch Germans simply say that the recipe is from *Oma's Zeit*, which is from the time of our grandmother.



Peppernuts are a special kind of Lebkuchen or German gingerbread. The making of gingerbread is a hallowed process in Germany. It's a tradition taken seriously. As early as 1643 strict rules authorized only certain bakers to make and sell gingerbread. Pfeffernüsse translates directly into peppernuts. The name refers to the cookies' hard

texture, nut-like size and shape and to the Pfefferlaender, the spice-rich countries of the east that supplied the more exotic ingredients for this delectable little biscuit.

Our family recipe calls for Rogers Golden Syrup, sugar and butter complete with spices brought to a boil, cooled, poured over the flour, buttermilk and baking soda, mixed and chilled. The dough is then rolled into ropes, cut into pieces and baked with love to golden brown.

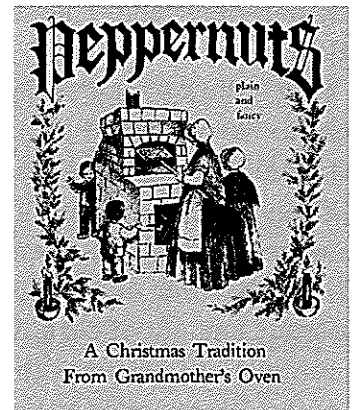
Every year we bake peppernuts for our Christmas celebrations. We especially enjoy making them with our grandchildren Kishina, Anaya, Zachary and Nathan.

We also give gift-wrapped bagsful to family and friends, giving the gift of love.

*DT*

## Treasured Peppernut Recipes - by Ruth Marlene Friesen

This 6x5" book is called, *Peppernuts Plain and Fancy*, by Norma Jost Voth, and is illustrated by Ellen Jane Price with old-style black drawings. It is less than a quarter inch thick, with 26 recipes and their background stories. Most are family classics named after the mother or matriarch who baked them. One was used by a Ladies Aid in Kansas as a fundraising project. Another was repeatedly the prizewinner at a Missions Circle's annual *Schmeckfest Peppernut* contest.



In the early 1980s, living in London, Ontario, and wanting to send some gifts home to my family back in Saskatchewan, I found this little book in the Mennonite bookstore. I persuaded myself it was a suitable gift for Groszmama. She lived in the Warman Altenheim, but I thought the artwork and the recipes would give her pleasant trips down memory's lane.



Years later, when we divided up her few possessions, my gift came back to me.

These last 20-plus years I have had the joy of trying out many of the peppernut recipes. Most of them make big batches. They fill two or three ice cream pails. This adds the pleasure of preparing jars full of peppernuts, and dressing them up as gifts for my friends.



I have even combined ingredients from two or three recipes, to create my own new treats. Some years I have forgotten to write them down and later couldn't remember what made them special. So in more recent times, I've taken time to write my lists of ingredients

out and labelling them by the year.

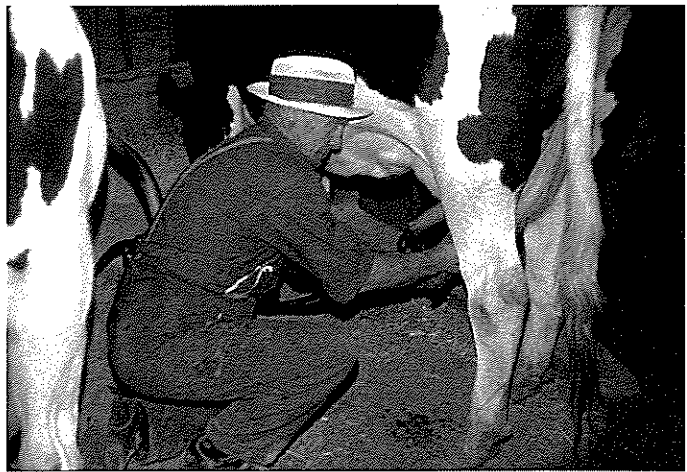
That way if a friend tells me, "We really enjoyed those peppernuts you gave us two years ago," I can look that recipe up and consider trying it again.

Just now I looked online to see if I could tell you where to buy a copy. I was astonished to see that it is so rare that if you can find a site that has a used copy for sale, (ie. Amazon) you may have to pay from \$44 to over \$200 for it.

Now I'm more determined than ever to hang on to my Treasure!

I'll save you the trouble of asking - MHSS does NOT have it for sale! I suggest you ask your grandma or older aunts for their recipes. Dead end? Try asking the older women in your church. This treasure, if not received as a gift, must be earnestly sought.

*R M F*



*Bernhard Buhler - milking cows in 1966*

### **Christmas Eve with the Cows: Grigorjewka Village, South Russia by Bernhard Buhler - as told to Jake Buhler**

I was about 13 at the time, so my story would have happened around 1920. I was helping father feed the cows on Christmas Eve.

I was excited because the next day would be Christmas. I could hardly wait to see what gifts and sweets would be piled around the *Komm* (bowl) that I had set out in the *Groote Schtov* (big living room). There would be halvah, nuts, rakovye-sheyki candy, a wooden toy of some kind, knitted mittens and scarf.

As I was thinking about this, I looked at the cows in front of me, and suddenly I felt sorry for them. They had no reason to be happy like I was. They were just dumb animals.

So I gave each cow an extra oat sheaf. "Now enjoy an early Christmas," I said. And I felt better for the cows who could not understand the joy of Christmas.

*JB*

[As told by Bernhard W. Buhler (1907-1977) of Osler, in Plautdietsch, and recorded by Jake Buhler in English]

#### **President's Corner conclusion:**

friends around food and fellowship, and, finally; we can give of our lives, as Jesus did, to restoring justice and equality all around us.

Do enjoy the wonderful Christmas edition of The Historian that editor, Ruth Friesen, has put together.

*JB*

## Dee Plautdietsche Akj - Daut School Wienachts Prograum by Jack Driedger

Ekj woss enn Bloomenheim opp. Dee Lied enn Bloomenheim wearen entwäda Bajchtola ooda Ooltkolonea.

Wan dee School em Septamba aunfunk, hilden dee measchte Darpslied äare Kjinja soo lang tüss auss mäajlich. An wea daut gaunss eendoont, wan äare Kjinja nijch fälwaut enn'e School leaden. Rajcht jesajcht, wullen see nijch haben, daut äare Kjinja too fäl fonn dee gottloose Welt leaden.

Onnse Ellren wearen een bät aundasch enn däm Stekj. An jefoll daut, wan wie Kjinja enn'e School goot deeden.

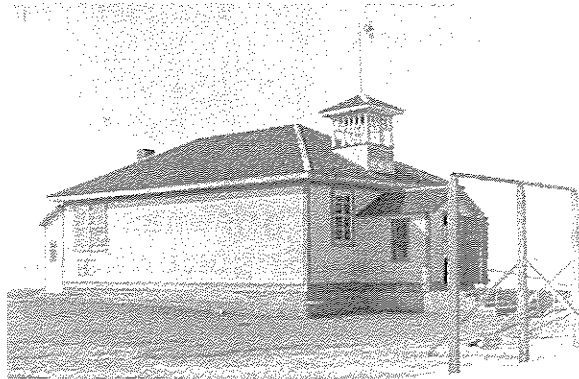
Doa wearen twee haup'sejchtje Uasäaken, wuaromm dee Kjinja daut trigj no School gonen em Hoafst feschlüaden. Eensje Ellren fälden dee Kjinja tüss toom Eifsten onn Draschen, soo lang auss daut noch scheen wea fer'm Winta.

Tweedens hauden dee Kjinja, onn soogoa äare Ellren, kjeene Losst enn'e School wieda too learen. Aulsoo neemen se' jiede Jeläajenheit, fonn'e School tüss too bliwen. Wan daut Eifsten onn Draschen uck aula besorjt wea, doawäajens kjeemen dee Kjinja doch nijch pinkjlich no School, bat daut Schwienschlachten äwa wea.

Em Nowamba fungen dee Kjinja aun ornoa pinkjlich no School too komen. Dan wea daut uck aul Tiet, daut dee Leara aunfunk aum Wienachtsprograum too denkj. Hee socht no paussende Wenschen onn Leeda onn soo wieda soo daut aule Kjinja enn'e Kua sinjen kunnen, onn daut 'n jieda uck noch eene aundre Roll em Wienachtsprograum spälen kunn.

Wie freiden onns, daut dee Tiet komen wudd toom dee School ütstraumen onn onnse Deschen toosied schüwen. Wan wie dan nü boolt e'mol kunnen dee Papiadoosen met dee Schmocksachen, dee wie daut fäaje Joa wajch jelajcht hauden, äwadäl holen! Wie wissten, daut wie

kjeene Schooloabeit mea doonen wudden bat no Niejoa, soo boolt auss onnse Deschen fe daut Wienachtsprograum toosied jeschowen wearen. Fe twee Däag deed wie dan nuscht auss fe daut Wienachtsprograum tooreeden.



Onnse School

Entljich wea dee Owent hia, wua wie no jelüat hauden. Ekj kunn daut meist nijch auflüaren, bat Foda no Owentkost e'mol dee Pead aunspaund toom no'm Wienachtsprograum foaren. Je noda wie no dee School kjeemen, je dolla wea ekj oppjeräajcht auf ekj miene Wensch uck werkjlich üt-

wendijch wisst. Dee Säle'strenj kjlinjaden, dee Schnee kjnirscht onn dee Pead schnurkjsten daut äare Näsen nijch too fruaren.

Auss wie no dee School kjeemen, scheen dee Mon soo kloa, daut doa 'ne Räj Schlädess met dee Pead aunjetäajelt kloa too seenen wea. Dee Pead wearen aula bedakjt fonn dee Kold too beschut-sen, onn dee Rüak fonn dee Kabüssen jinkj sachelkjess jlikj enn'e Hecht.

Daut feeld sikj oba wundascheen woam onn macklich, auss wie enn'e School 'nen jinjen onn dee Mauntellaump jüld onn daut Fia enn däm grooten Owen knostad. Auss wie dän Schnee fonn onnse Steewlen auf trumpften, säd ekj miene Wensch noch ee'mol opp stelless opp, omm sejcha too sennen, daut ekj dee uck wisst.

Dee Kjinja hauden sikj aula schmock dee Hoa jekjamt. Eensje Mejaless hauden soogoa 'n schmocken Baunt enn'e Hoa. Eensje Jungess hauden 'n gaunss nieet Hamd toom easchten mol aun. Wan ekj 'ne Sessta haud jehaut, wudd Mutta daut jajankat haben, ar een schmocken Baunt enn'e Hoa binjen. Oba auss 'n trüjet, ooltkolon-easchet Jemeendenjliet wudd see sikj haben fonn soone weltliche Stot trigjehoolen. Onns Leara haud 'n schmocken jekofften Schlips aun. Daut leet soo, auss wan hee soogoa sien Jesejcht no'm

Putsen jepulwat haud.

Bie dee ooltkoloneasche Kjoakj wea 'n Wien-achtsboom onn 'n Nätklos een Aufgott. Wiels dee measchte Lied enn onnse Ommjääjent Ooltkolonea wearen, docht dee Leara hee haud bäta wan doa kjeen Wienachtsboom ooda Nätklos enn'e School wea. Wie Kjinja haben doa uck goanijch 'mol aun jedocht, daut onns 'n Wien-achtsboom ooda een Nätklos fäld.

Entlijch weess dee Klock daut't Tiet wea, daut Prograum auntoofangen. Dee Leara stunt nü jeduldijch opp daut Plautform bat dee Lied daut e'mol enworden, daut hee reed wea, met daut Prograum aunfangen. Auss dan aulesch stell wort, wisst wie, daut wie nü daut easchte Stekj hearen wudden. Dee Leara musst onns earemol denckjen halpen, daut wie lüda räden mussten, soo daut dee Lied onns hearen kunnen. Too gooden latst kjeem daut, wua wie aula no jelüat hauden. Wie kjrieejen aula 'ne Lusch met aulahaunt Scheens toom äten: Eadnät, Kende, 'ne Aupelssien onn fleijcht soogoa 'ne jekoffte Küak. Onn dan wea daut Tiet, dee kjliene Kjinja auntootrakjen onn onns opp'm Wajch nohüss too brinjen.

Dee Pead drebbelden onen noporren jnietsch nohüss. See freiden sikj aul em fer'üt toom woamen Staul. Soo boolt auss wie bennen wearen, päakad Mutta daut Fia em Owen aun onn läd mea Kolen aun. Auss onns nijch mea soo sea hubbad, rand wie no onnse Baden, trocken onns fekjs üt onn kroopen unja dee woame Wolldakj. Daut diad nuscht bat we faust em Schlop wearen.

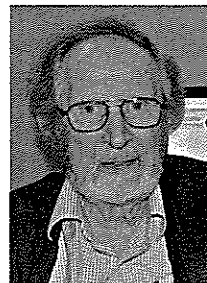
**Note of interest:** Thus far I am aware of only two words that are spelled the same way in both Plautdiestch and English: *school* and *foot*. Although they are spelled exactly the same, they are pronounced differently.

*JD*



## Dr. Harry Loewen: 1930-2015

The first Chair in Mennonite Studies, Dr. Harry Loewen, (Professor Emeritus) died September 16, in Kelowna, British Columbia, after a lengthy struggle with cancer.



Born in 1930 in the Soviet Union, Loewen came to Canada as a refugee after the Second World War and led a life of service and scholarship until his death.

He served the University of Winnipeg as Professor of History and inaugural holder of the Chair in Mennonite Studies from 1978-1996.

He was a founding editor of the Journal of Mennonite Studies, organized annual symposia in the field, and lectured at educational institutions throughout North and South America as well as in Europe during his distinguished academic career.

An accomplished scholar of German, Russian, and Mennonite literature and history, Loewen authored and edited fourteen books, the last of which, a lengthy study of Martin Luther, he completed during the course of his illness. That study was published by WLU Press earlier this year and launched at an event at Mosaic Books in Kelowna.

A memorial service was held at First Mennonite Church in Kelowna on October 9, at 10 am.

Dr. Loewen leaves behind many friends and colleagues, past and present, at The University of Winnipeg.

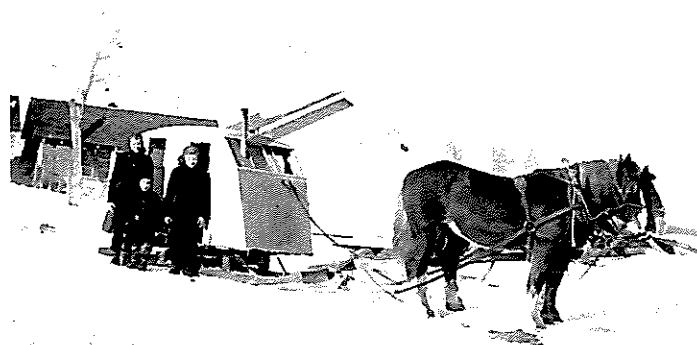
### Reflection by Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg

Harry Loewen (1930-2015), the founding Chair in Mennonite Studies, author of numerous books, a beloved colleague to many of us, and a loving husband to Gertrude and father and grandfather will be missed.

Harry accomplished a great deal in his life, but more importantly he was an inspiration to many young scholars, as teacher, publisher and writer for many decades. His ability to reach both popular and academic audiences has been remarkable.

He has written on a wide range of topics, including comparing 16th Century Anabaptism and Lutheranism, early 20th century work on Mennonites in the Soviet Union, and his own story of coming to Canada with his widowed mother. He also addressed more contemporary topics such as Mennonite literature, and Mennonite identity with his collection, 'Why I am a Mennonite.'

Harry has shown a commitment to scholarship in many other ways: as the founding Chair in Mennonite Studies (1978-1995) he pioneered the idea of teaching Mennonite history in public spaces and as the founding editor of the Journal of Mennonite Studies (1983-1995) he also pioneered a platform for Mennonite scholars in Canada to engage in valuable academic discourse. Harry has always been a friendly and engaging scholar. Perhaps most importantly, he has always been an inspiration to the generation that followed him.



## **The Christmas the Caboose Flipped Over**

**by Helga Loewen**

At Christmas time it was important to visit with our aunts, uncles and cousins. For years any travel we did was with horses and an open sleigh called a cutter. But in 1946 we had a heated, closed-in sleigh called a caboose. It was a nice cream colour, pulled by our two sorrel horses, Punch and Dahl.

We travelled this way to visit Aunt Mary and Uncle Cornelius Beier, who lived nine miles north

of us. We felt so cozy and safe, and spoke gratefully of Mr. Krahn who built our caboose.

We arrived at the Beier's place and visited for a little while, but then it started to snow heavily.

Dad said we had to go home immediately.

He hitched up Punch and Dahl to the caboose, and we were on our way.

Soon it was dark.

Dad held the reins but no longer could direct the horses where to go, because of the storm and the darkness.

Suddenly our caboose flipped over onto its right side. We had ended up on a pile of rocks which were on a field.

The horses stopped. Dad climbed out of the door on the left side, now on top.

Mom, Merv, age 3, Irma, age 9, and myself, age 10, huddled in the caboose while Dad worked to bring it upright again, and onto the sleigh runners.

One window was broken, so it was cold inside.

Dad said, "I don't know where we are. I can't see anything out there in the blinding storm and darkness." So he let the horses go where they wanted, hoping for the best.

Eventually, they brought us back up on the road, and the horses found their way home.

There we entered a very cold house; the coal oil lamp was lit, and fires had to be started again in the stove and the heater.

Dad took the horses to the barn and unhitched them.

We were all so grateful to be home! This was a Christmas adventure we have never forgotten and have often re-told.

Later I learned from Walter Isaak that horses always find their way home. But that scary night I didn't know that.

*HL*

**Do you have family and friends who would enjoy this special Christmas issue of The Historian?** We have had some extra copies printed and are selling them for \$2.00 each. Contact the Archives Monday 1-4:30 pm, or Wednesday 1-4:30 pm. and 7-9 pm.

# Storm-Stayed on Christmas Eve

**December 1950, Hanley, Saskatchewan - by Erwin Patkau**

The congregation of the rural Hanley Mennonite Church still met in the old church building, built in 1929; it had no basement and was fairly drafty. A coal and wood round-bellied "Station Agent" heater stood in the centre near the entrance; in winter people stood around it until the service began. The appointed care-taker had come early to start the fire so that the building would be reasonably warm when the people arrived.

The year was 1950. Things were different then! Many farmers did not have electric power – so no lights to switch on or off, no automatic furnace, no running water. Coal oil lamps or gas-mantle lamps and lanterns were used to light our homes. Wood and coal-burning stoves and oil-burning space heaters kept the homes warm. Water was carried in with pails from a well on the yard which was pumped by a hand-operated pump. Country roads were not built up; they were level with the fields and had shallow ditches.

For years the Sunday School Christmas program always was at 5 p.m. in the evening on Christmas Eve, December 24. The Christmas tree was put up just before Christmas Eve, and everyone came with anticipation for the program.

The lights on the tree were four-inch pencil-thin wax-candles, held in place by tin clip-on holders. Once they were lit they had to be carefully watched and put out when they burned low so that the tree would not catch fire. An adult, equipped with a pail of water to douse the tree should a fire start, sat next to the tree during the program and kept his eye on the candles.

The fragrant pine scent enveloped the whole church. Everything was warm and beautiful when the children and adults arrived.

That day, December 24, was dull with a heavy

overcast sky and the south-east wind was beginning to get stronger towards evening. By the time the people arrived at church it was the beginning of a blizzard.

Most of the families were happy to get there, but those from farther away, from the Elbow district started out, but turned around and went home before the storm became serious.

The program was presented, but some parts had to be left out because not all families were present. The storm increased its intensity and the adults were uneasy.

After the program, gifts and candy bags were handed out.

The question was: do we try to go home or do we stay in church? Some families dressed in their coats, left immediately going north, braving the storm and made it home. Others started out going south, but only went a quarter mile, became stuck in the snow drifts and returned to church. It had taken them an hour to go that short distance.

No one had expected to stay for more than the program, so they had not brought food.

A baby started crying – there was no milk to satisfy its hunger. So several men braved the storm to the nearest farmhouse and after some time returned not only with milk, but with a large bread-kneading bowl full of fresh baking. Hunger needs were supplied.

Children were put to sleep on coats spread across pushed-together benches, or on the floor. Adults sat or stood in groups, visiting. Others kept a watchful eye at the windows on the storm that was raging outside. More coal was placed on the fire to keep it going.

Time went by. About 2 a.m. the moon could occasionally be seen through the fast moving clouds. Gradually the wind began to subside.



*Continued from page 11*

Finally a decision was made. Several men would try to make it to one of the farms to get a sleigh and horses. They succeeded. The horses were hitched and the men returned to the church. By the time they returned the moon was shining brightly and the wind was letting up.

Families were preparing to leave. Some cars had to be pulled through the snowdrifts using the horses.

Each one had their own story to tell. One person's diary record was: "we came home safely by 4:30 a.m. with the sleigh and horses."

Some cars were left behind. Another family arrived home by 6:00 a.m.

Christmas Day dawned bright, sunny and bitterly cold. Needless to say, there was no service on Christmas Day, but there was one on December 26.

The next year the decision was made that the Christmas Eve program would be held in the afternoon. The windows would be darkened for the program. That has been the tradition ever since 1951.

(From Erwin Patkau, one who was there).

*EP*

## **Christmas Music - in Japan** by Jacob Friesen - a former missionary to Japan

The Japanese are notably very good at making good better. There was a time not that long ago, when we complained that they were glibly copying our preferences and then simply selling the product to us for less and making us like it; even owning it!

Less so with Christmas, but even this by some stroke of unintentional genius, has today been recreated and melded into an 'existing cultural given' in a nationally practiced custom of 'obligatory' gift giving! They call it *Ochuugen*.

Towards the conclusion of a year, and as a sort of preparation for the vastly more important New Year celebration, gifts are given to people who have figured prominently in one or more ways during the year.

If the gift is for a surgeon to whom you owe a gift of gratitude for health or life restored, what you give may need to be considerably more significant than what you choose for your gardener!

Since the custom falls directly into the nearly global melee of our western, more holiday than 'Christ mass' practice, Japanese economy-conscious business sharks have dressed it up complete with all that sparkles, with Santas and jingly bells; and with gifts earmarked and professionally packaged for a reason!

Christians and their leadership inevitably get caught up in the glamour of holiday tinsel, but harness what they can, of local mindsets and traditional practice to alert the communities they have concerns for, by bringing attention to the core message of the life-transforming story of Jesus, as heralded in 'the Bethlehem Project'!

In churches, scattered from northernmost Hokkaido to snow-less Okinawa, Catholics, and Protestants of every imaginable denominational stripe, celebrate the birth of Jesus in much the same way as do we.



*Mother & daughter on flute and harp*

Generally, Japanese churches have been loath to change their hymn books. The ably-translated carols we have learned to love, have also become the preferred repertoire of Japanese Christians as well as non-Christians. The influence of 'Mission Schools' in Japan is considerable and hymn singing has been in practice since the early pre-war days of pioneer missionaries.

Because congregations are smaller by western standards, the singing of choral music becomes



handbell choir in a mall

difficult. But many larger towns and cities gather volunteer, would-be vocalists in love with the amazing classical compositions, and following weeks of rehearsals under the direction of well-trained musicians, render choral concerts in concert halls and/or larger church buildings across this music-aware land from north to south. Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" is an every Christmas favourite often sung by believers as well as non-church people who love the composition but struggle with the English; which has them trying to pronounce the multiple 'L's in hallelujah' as R's'!. The harrerujah's in Handel's awesome chorus may be distracting for music critics and linguists to listen to, but the exuberant presentations of the life-changing message of 'God become mankind' becomes a message of promise, hope and future in Japan at least once each year!!

クリシウマスお目出度う御座います！

*JP*

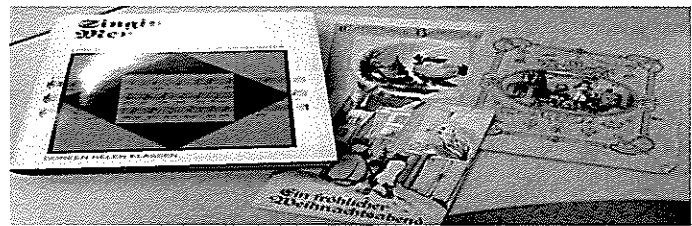
## Visit Your Archives for Christmas Ideas

If you're preparing something for a Christmas program at church; perhaps as part of a banquet, would it occur to you to go looking in our MHSS Archives for your material? No? - Surprise!

I thought there might be the odd Christmas Program Builder, such as we used as Sunday School teachers, so I asked Kathy Boldt who is in

charge of the volunteers at the archives. It did not take her long to locate some thin booklets with Christmas stories in German, and one of those ornately-decorated Christmas Wunschbücher that my mother had saved from her school days. I have some packed away at home too (just not sure where right now).

During the era of the private German schools, the schoolmaster would prepare one of these booklets for each student, asking them to memorize a poem of Christmas blessings to be recited to the student's parents on Christmas Day. These were called *Weihnachtswünsche*. The gift project included learning to write it out in perfect penmanship. If the child simply could not do it well enough in time for Christmas, the teacher would do it for the student.



But the child still had to present the booklet to the parents and recite the poem from memory.

I think in many families these were laid away as beautiful keepsakes. You may have some at your house.

Another surprise Kathy found was a large hardcover book full of Low German or Plautdietsche songs. We discovered a number of original Christmas carols there. Not translations of the English classics we have come to love, but unique in words and music!

Now do you think you would be up to learning one or two of these to present at some Christmas function this year?

If you can't track one down to buy, and if you live in driving distance of Saskatoon, it would be smart to arrange to come into **Your Archives** (on a Monday or Wednesday, or make an appointment for another day) and ask to see this book. You may photocopy pages for your personal use on the photocopier at a very minimal fee.

*RMF*



## **New Clothes from Old Clothes**

**by Nettie Balzer**

It was getting closer to Christmas so Lena and Annie Friesen began pestering their mother about new dresses for the school concert.

"I'm sorry," Helena said, "but we don't have the money for new dresses this year."

1933 had been a hard year. Summer dust storms, hail, and grasshoppers had destroyed crops. There was so little money to cover their growing family's needs and feed the cattle for the winter. As Helena sat nursing new baby Christine, her sixth child, she wished she had the means with which to give the oldest children their desires.

"But my Sunday dress is too small!" Lena complained.

"Mine has a hole in it," added Annie.

Sighing, Helena sent a silent prayer to God for help and said, "We'll see what we can do."

For the girls, this was almost a promise so they walked away hoping that somehow it would happen.

As Jacob climbed into bed that night, Helena lay quietly staring at the ceiling before putting out the lamp light. Sensing something was bothering his wife, Jacob turned toward her. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"The children all need new clothes. The girls are begging for new dresses for the school program and I looked at Jake's and Julius' pants and they're way too short. The children have all grown so much. I need to make new clothes but we don't have money," she said.

After a moment Jacob answered. "I heard a neighbour is going to Saskatoon tomorrow. I'll see if I can go with him and have him stop at the Salvation Army store. They often have big bags of old clothes for twenty-five cents. Maybe there'll be something in the bag you can make over."

"Or maybe there will be some children's clothes in the bag that fit right away. That's a good idea," she said as she turned over to get some sleep. Morning would come too soon and she needed rest.

Jacob caught his ride to Saskatoon and while the children were in school, Helena kept Tena and Julius entertained and the baby looked after while she waited for him to get back.

Just after Lena, Jake, and Annie returned rosy-cheeked from their walk home from school in the cold, their father arrived home, carrying two big bags. The children immediately crowded around to see what he had brought.

Helena moved the farmer sausage she was frying to a cooler part of the stove and watched as Jacob opened the bags. He removed several dresses and coats, and soon the children all pulled clothes out of the bags.

"Look! Here's a blue scarf," Lena said. As they emptied the bags, they found shirts that fit their papa, one that fit Jake, some pants that fit Julius and many adult dresses and pants.

"Red suspenders!" Jake said as he pulled them out.

"There are no dresses for me," Annie said sadly.

"Oh, but there will be!" her mama said as she held up two large cotton dresses. One was red with black trim; the other was royal blue with white trim. Helena could already see these on her girls - in their own sizes, of course. Red for Lena and blue for Annie.

"I can make you children dresses, shirts and pants from a lot of these clothes! But if I am going to get all of that done before Christmas, you children will have to help a lot more with babysitting and chores when you get home from school!"

There were smiles of relief on the children's faces as they promised they would help. After supper dishes were cleared away, the children stood with sparkling eyes as their mother measured them for their new clothes.

Helena, still recovering from the new baby, phoned a relative to come and help with the cooking and cleaning so she could pull apart the seams of the old clothing. When the children were



home from school, Lena sat with her mother and held the seams apart while Helena cut the thread with a razor blade.

The pieces of cloth were washed and dried on chairs near the pot-bellied stove in the living room. Helena heated the sad irons on the cook stove in the kitchen, preparing to iron and then cut patterns from the fabric. It was long, tiring work, but her creative mind visualized the finished product as she peddled the treadle machine.

Finally the dresses were done and Lena and Annie tried them on. One look at their delighted smiles was all the thanks Helena needed.

"Mama - it looks so nice!" Lena commented as she twirled in a circle.

"So does mine!" Annie said, smiling from ear to ear.

On the day of the concert at school, Jacob was very happy with the wonderful clothes Helena had made out of old clothes as he watched his precious children on the stage at the concert. The children sang Christmas Carols as their eyes shone in the light of real candles on the big tree. A man with a candle snuffer stood nearby to make sure the tree did not catch fire.

Jacob and Helena heard their children's musical voices raised in praise of Jesus coming to earth as a baby. Soon the concert was over and the children eagerly waited for their gifts and candy bags.

At home after the concert, the family gathered around the pot-bellied stove in the living room, eating their treats from the candy bags. Helena and Jacob listened to the children's happy chatter.

"Mama, the teacher said my new dress is very pretty!" Annie said.

"My best friend really liked my dress too!" Lena added.

"And you boys were very handsome in your new shirts and pants," Jacob said as he bounced two year old Tena on his lap. "Those red suspenders looked good too, Jake," he added.

That night Jacob stood looking over his

sleeping children with thanksgiving. God had provided again.

Helena reached for her German Bible and sat down at the table, near the coal oil lamp. She came to the seventeenth verse from second Corinthians chapter five, *"Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away, all things*

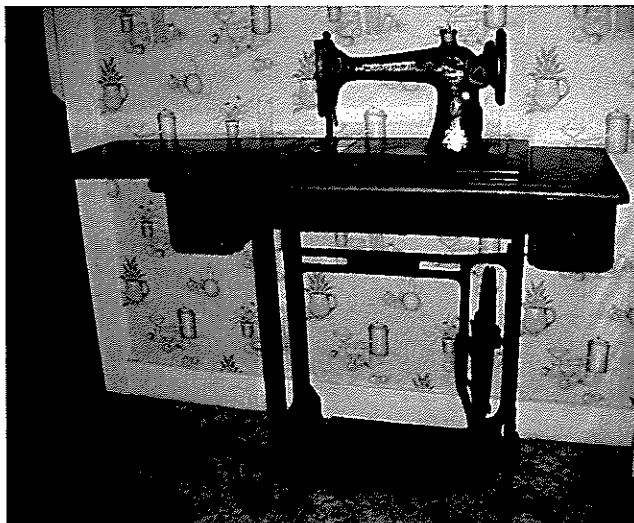
*have become new."*

She smiled as she thought, "God makes us new when we believe in Christ. Our old sins are forgiven and we've been made new. That's what the Bible says. Like what I did - making new clothes out of old ones!"

With a grateful heart, she picked up baby Christine to nurse her one last time before sinking into bed herself. She turned down the wick in the oil lamp and snuggled under the thick wool covers, welcoming rest and sleep.

*NB*

\*\* Adapted from "HELENA - A Peek into the Past", by Nettie Balzer



## Finding the Magi in a New Land

by Jake Buhler

Bangkok, Thailand. December 24, 1981.

It was 30 degrees Celsius and it did not feel like Christmas Eve at all. Outside the bedroom window the banana tree was flowering; there would be bananas in just over a month. The giant mango tree with its dark green leaves was showing signs of flowering. Outside the kitchen window the Som Tam vendor was preparing her delicious papaya salad lunch treat.

There was no Christmas music in the shops. There was no Santa Claus, no Christmas tree, and no sign that the birth of Jesus would soon be celebrated. There was no Silent Night, and it certainly did not feel like a Holy Night was about to arrive!

What to do? Sarah was six and Elizabeth was three. Even they were alarmed that there would not be a real Christmas for this MCC family who were ten thousand miles from their loved ones. But from somewhere in the yard a green plant was found that sort-of resembled a two-foot Christmas tree. It was placed on a rattan trunk under the picture of an elephant, the most highly revered animal of Thailand. A few candles were added. The two girls finally went to sleep having put out their bowls, as had been the custom in Saskatchewan.



*Sarah and Elizabeth playing with dolls*

Early next morning, Sarah and Elizabeth woke up to the calling of the fruit vendor in the little

street next to the MCC house.

There, in the bowls, were two dolls that had been shipped from Canada. There would be Christmas after all. And there was. The girls dressed up in their costumes and played for hours.



*the girls dressing up*

So far my story could have finished very well: a Mennonite family is inconvenienced a bit in a non-Christian surrounding but ends up making it a meaningful Christmas after all! But that is not how it ended.

After lunch I sat my two daughters down and explained how Jesus was born in Bethlehem, and how, after he grew up, showed us God's love by helping the poor and caring for those who were picked on by selfish people. I added that in Thailand there were poor people who needed our help.

The girls went to play in the other room with their new dolls. But there was also quiet conversation. Perhaps an hour later, they returned with their two new dolls.

"Here," they said, "are our dolls. We want to give them to poor children. We can play with our old dolls."

Sometimes the magi are 3 and 6 years old!

*JB*

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Note: Jake and Louise Buhler served with Mennonite Central Committee from 1981 to 1987. They continued to live in Thailand and Vietnam until 2002.

## **Christmas in Japan 1953 - Miyazaki City, Japan**

**- by Esther Patkau**

Christmas was not a national holiday in Japan. School classes ended on December 24 to begin the school break before New Years, and the markets were busy getting ready for the New Year celebration.

My co-worker, Leonore Friesen, and I were two of the only four foreigners in Miyazaki, a city of 180,000. It was our first Christmas in that city.

We lived in a Japanese house that had tatami floors, and rooms that were divided by paper doors that could be removed to enlarge two rooms into one. Tatami is a straw mat about 3 inches thick covered with a finely woven grass covering.

Chairs are not used on a tatami floor. People sit on cushions on this floor.

The house entrance was level with the outside, and quite wide. Inside one stepped up two steps to a wooden-floored hallway that led to the tatami-floored rooms. Shoes were not worn in the house; slippers were used on the wooden hallway, but even they were slipped off when one entered the tatami floored rooms.

We had been receiving regular mail delivery until the first week in December, then the mail became sparse, especially mail from abroad.

Why? Had our family and friends forgotten us? Was there a mail strike somewhere?

December 25, Christmas morning at 8 a.m. the mail man arrived at the door with a large load of letters and parcels. He informed us that they knew about the American custom of opening presents on Christmas morning - they had kept the parcels and letters for us at the post office, so that these 'foreigners' could do what they always did at home in America - open them on Christmas Day!

The forenoon was quiet, reading our mail. We



had not made any plans to entertain guests.

Mid-afternoon there was a commotion at the front door and we heard greetings in Japanese - "Krismasu omedeto!" [Merry Christmas]. There stood a group of about 30 people - young children, mothers and grandmothers and students.

"We know that you celebrate Christmas with your family, and we thought you would be lonely; so today we are your family!" What a surprise!

Of course we welcomed them in. They left their shoes at the entrance, and came in on stocking feet. We seated them on cushions on the tatami floor in the front room.

While one of us visited with these friends, the other one hurried to the kitchen and prepared some green tea. To serve tea is a sign of welcome and friendship.

While the tea was being served the other one ran to the nearby shop for a bag of mikans (easy-peel oranges) and some sembe (a variety of Japanese crackers). Fortunately, we also had some home-baked cookies on hand.

The afternoon was filled with laughter, sharing stories and traditions. With lively conversation, reading of the Christmas story and carol singing, the afternoon passed quickly.

When the guests left around five in the afternoon, we looked at each other - "That was quite the celebration!"

Some enduring friendships were made that Christmas day.

But then came New Year - we learned their traditions. The house is cleaned to every corner; the cobwebs all brushed away. The small space of land around the house is swept. A decorative arrangement of bamboo, pine and straw rope is placed at the entrances of the home and in front of businesses.

There was a flurry of activity – shopping, cooking, and settling financial accounts because it is a bad omen to begin the new year with debts. Special rice is cooked and beaten into a dough-like mass; biscuit-sized pieces are filled with cooked sweet bean paste – this is a specialty food called “Omochi” served at New Years.

The last day of the year (or New Year's morning) the final bath is taken to wash away all grime of the past year.

At midnight the boom-boom of the huge Shinto shrine bell in the city began to toll. 108 times it boomed – to remove the 108 sins of the past year, so that the new year can begin with a clean slate.

All shops are closed. Some individuals go to the shrine at midnight to pay their respects in worship; others do so New Year's morning. Adults, children and young girls, dressed in their best kimonos, boy students dressed in their new school uniforms, would visit the shrine later in the day, and then leisurely stroll the streets or pay a brief visit to the home of relatives, just to extend New Year's wishes.

It is the most celebrated holiday of the year – a holiday that lasts at least three days.

Changes to celebrations have come to Japan since then, but that is the way it was in 1953.

## Christmas in Miyazaki in 1964

What a difference! Changes come!

The Oyodo Church was well established, though the number of members was not large. On Christmas Eve a candlelight service was held at the church, including a baptism service.

Then a group of young people walked the streets close to the church, singing carols, and ending at our house for hot chocolate and refreshments around 10 p.m.

When they had left, Leonore and I headed for midnight mass at the local Catholic church, having been invited by friends.

There, too, there was candlelight and baptism. It was around 2:30 a.m. when we finally headed home. It was a time of rejoicing, time spent with believers.

EP

## A Memorable 1940s Christmas Gift

by Kathy Boldt

What could one expect for a gift from our parents Eva and Peter Wiebe? In the winter cash was scarce. The only weekly income for sure was the cream cheque. And maybe a few eggs to sell.

My brother John and I woke early on Christmas morning and scampered downstairs. Of course, our older sister Liz thought sleep was more important!

To our amazement, there under the tree lay two pairs of skis. But only one set of ski poles.

John said right away, “They are mine.”

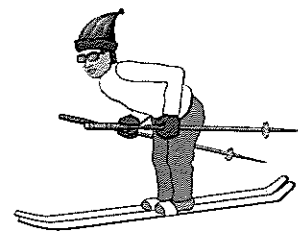
On with the coats, boots, and .... well, never having skied before, we found it tricky. Especially without the poles.

John said, “Here, take these poplar sticks.”

That worked.

For many years, many trips were made, (even by Liz), across the fields to our neighbours, the Jacob Fasts.

Where did the money come from for these unique gifts? Maybe, our Uncle John, or Grandma Janzen, who lived with us.



KB

## Weihnachtsglocken



## Das Weihnachtslied

© 1949

## The Two Sisters' Christmas Tree

by Doreen Snider - submitted by Marg Snider

We didn't expect many presents when I was a girl, because there was no money in the dirty thirties to buy them. There were no coloured lights either, because there were no power lines to bring electricity to the farms.

We never had a Christmas tree at our home, but there was always a tall evergreen tree at our school on the night of the Christmas concert.

Our school was a small one; only one classroom, and only one teacher. The twenty children were all ages from Kindergarten to Grade Eleven but we always had a concert.

We did drills and dialogues and recitations and a pageant with lots of songs like *Silent Night*, and *O Little Town of Bethlehem*.

In the middle of the stage we saw Baby Jesus with Mary and Joseph. That's when we sang *Away in the Manger*. Then the wise men came in and we sang *We Three Kings of Orient Are*, and there were shepherds and angels - all the while the baby slept in his little cradle made of poplar sticks and filled with hay. I like that part best of all.

All the Mamas and Papas, and little brothers and sisters, who were too small to go to school, were there to see us perform.

At last the sound of sleigh bells could be heard and then footsteps on the roof and, sure as shootin', in came old Santa, all rosy and fat, laughing "HO-HO-HO!" He asked each of us whether we had been good all year. Of course, everyone said, "Yes." Then each one got a present off the tree and a bag of candy and an orange. For some it was the only orange they had all year.

This story is about a Christmas tree. It happened the morning after one of those concerts.

The first day of the holidays, two young girls were playing with the fountain pens and water colours that Santa had brought, and they were eating candy and nuts from their brown paper bags

Suddenly the littlest girl asked, "Wasn't the tree beautiful last night?"

Her sister answered, "Oh yes! I just loved all the sparkly tinsel and shiny glass balls, and the red and green streamers. The best part of all was the little wax candles that were clipped to the branches. When Mr. Lepp lit them with a wooden match - that was so wonderful!"

Her sister said, "I can still smell the wax melting. I see the tiny orange flames flicker - and the blue wisps of smoke reaching almost to the ceiling. Can't you almost smell the evergreens?"

The bigger girl sighed and said, "I wish we could have a tree like that at home. But I don't suppose we can. I'd put it right here by the window."

The little one asked, "Why can't we?"

Big sister, older and wiser by two years replied, "Well, Papa always says he doesn't have enough money."

But the little one persisted, "Let's ask Mom if we can have a tree? She might say, 'yes.' Even a little tree would be alright."

The big sister said, "Then go and ask her."

The little one replied, "You do it. You're bigger than me." So they decided to go ask together.

Mama was in the kitchen rolling pastry for the pies they would have when the cousins, aunts and uncles came for dinner. The homemade mince filling was bubbling on the big black stove. The oven was hot.

"Mama, can we have a Christmas tree?" two voices piped as one. "Please?"

"A Christmas tree? We don't have any money to buy a tree. Besides, where would we find one? There are no Christmas trees growing out here on the prairies."

"Papa could go to Watrous and get one. They have lots of them there. Cora said her Papa saw them."

"Did Cora's Papa buy one?" Mama asked, knowing full well that Cora's Papa was hardly able to buy food and clothing for his nine children, so he would hardly buy a Christmas tree.

The girls looked quite sober for a moment,

then answered with one voice, "No. I guess not."

The biggest girl added quickly, "But Papa has only two children so he must have more money."

"Well, you better ask Papa when he comes in from chores in the barn."

Mama slid the mince pies into the hot oven before she added, "Now go hang up your clothes, make your bed, and don't bother me again with such silly notions."

When they heard Papa stomping the snow off his big boots, they rushed to meet him. In a single voice they cried, "Papa, can we have a Christmas tree? Please?"

"A wha- a Christmas tree? We don't have money to buy a Christmas tree, and there are none growing here."

"But Papa, you could drive to Watrous. Cora said they have lots there. You could get--"

"I'm not going to drive my horses 30 miles to get any Christmas tree. If you want one so bad go down to the poplar bluff and cut one." He thought that would settle the matter; he greatly underestimated the determination of his daughters.

They asked, "How can we cut it? Can we use your ax to chop it down?"

"Take the saw beside the window in the driving shed and saw it off. I don't want you chopping the toes of your feet with an ax."

Before you could say, "Jack Robinson," they were in their winter coats and 4-buckle overshoes and out the door.

They took the saw down from the nail beside the window in the shed and were soon wading through deep snow drifts toward the poplar bluff at the foot of the hill behind the barn.

The sisters spent a long time picking just the right one. One was too tall, and another one too short. One was too spindly, and another was lop-sided.

They finally found the perfect one. They pulled the saw back and forth, back and forth. The saw squeaked and bounced. It was hard work and took a long time even though they took turns.

Back and forth, squeak and bounce.

At last the cut was deep enough so they could bend it over and break it off.

How pleased and proud they were as they dragged their precious burden up the hill.

The saw was put back on the nail by the window in the shed. Then they pounded on the door.

Papa and Mama could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the girls with their own Christmas tree.

Papa helped them plant the little tree in a pail full of shiny lumps of coal.

Mama brought some tin foil she had saved from some packages of tea. They cut stars and circles from the silver paper.

They brought out the coarse crepe paper that lined the wooden apple boxes. They cut red and green stripes and pasted them together with flour paste to form long chains.

Mama found some white cotton batting left over from her quilting in the bottom dresser drawer. The batting looked exactly like fresh new-fallen snow, when laid on the bare branches.

Narrow shreds of coloured paper cut from the Eaton's catalogue added a touch of colour to the smaller twigs and among the silver stars and colored chains.

Oh, the tree was a pretty sight!

We were so proud on Christmas day when Aunt Anne said it was surely the very best Christmas tree she ever saw, and when cousin Betty asked her mama, "Can we have a tree like this next year?" Our joy was complete.

*DS*



*The Sisters' tree reconstructed  
by Marg Snider*

## The Blue Spruce Christmas Tree

by Victor G. Wiebe

In the early years of the twentieth century my grandfather, Jakob Jakob Wiebe, and his brother-in-law purchased a dilapidated brick-works and decided to go into the brick-making business. This was in the Russian city of Aleksandrovska on the Dnieper River and they lived in the city's Mennonite suburb of Schönwiese.

Grandfather then traveled to Sweden to buy the most modern brick making equipment. On his return he brought with him some picture books of the cities he visited and a marvelous Blue Spruce seedling. No one in the region had ever seen such a blue tree!

The family planted the Blue Spruce in the front yard to be seen by all passersby. It thrived, grew and became a notable tree in the neighbourhood.

Some years later during a particularly very cold winter the Dnieper River froze over and it became a great skating arena with kilometer after kilometer of perfectly smooth ice.

My father's two older brothers and several of their friends decided that the ice made a wonderful opportunity to visit the government forestry farm many kilometers to the south. So early one morning they laced up their skates and headed south. It didn't take long and they were at the forestry farm.

Now this was a government farm set up to help in the reforestation of that area and it was protected by a government Forester who guarded his trees with a rifle. People sometimes stole trees for firewood or lumber or just to avoid payment for the trees. The boys knew the Forester was watching the approach roads for thieves and not the river so they took the opportunity to cut down some nice looking evergreens for Christmas trees. They then pulled them to the frozen Dnieper River

and they were off home skating up the river with their loot. These trees looked wonderful all decorated for Christmas.

Then tragedy struck! Christmas morning they woke up early as usual to see what treats Santa had brought - candy, nuts, books and toys. All was well during this early time, then someone looked out the front window and was shocked, for their magnificent Blue Spruce was gone - only the mutilated stump stood out from the snow. In anger they resolved to hunt out the thief and get

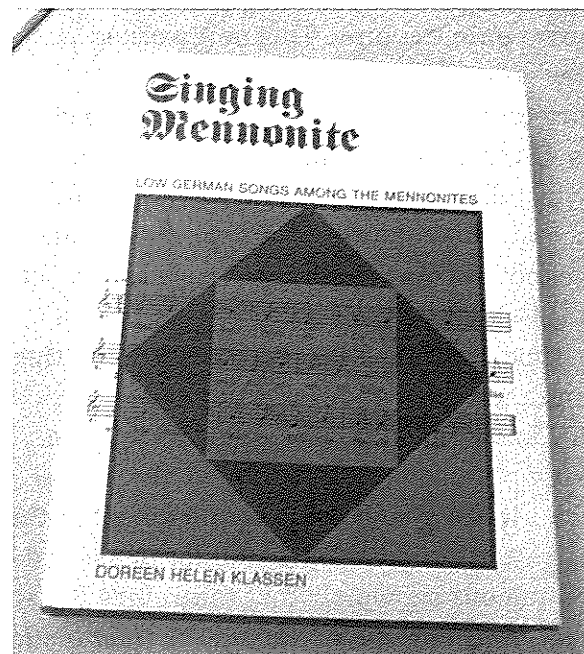
revenge by seeing that he was punished. After all, someone having a Blue Spruce as a Christmas tree could not be kept a secret for long and they would investigate.

NO! Their father answered. That the Blue Spruce was stolen is a tragedy but it is a lesson that God punishes thieves. The loss of their beloved Blue Spruce was THEIR punishment for stealing trees from the Forestry Farm. It was a sad painful lesson for them. They never learned who their thief was.

The next time my father saw a Blue Spruce tree was in Canada.



*WW*





## **Peters' Snow Plow and Hague Osler Warman Snow Club in early 1950s - by Dick Braun**

Henry Peters and brothers – Jake – Bill and John. Henry had a way of thinking things through in his mind and then putting that idea to a test. He was known for this at a young age.

There was the case where a local person came to him with the problem of a broken pipe in a well where the break was a long way down. He asked Henry to build something to retrieve the pipe. Henry had a few ideas but before he even tested them he already could see in his mind that they would not work.

There were a few key things to consider. The first was the inside diameter of the well casing and the next was the outside diameter of the pipe in the well. This gadget needed to fit into that space and be able to grab the pipe. About one week passed and the guy came to ask how it was coming along with his request. Henry could just say that he had some ideas but nothing was built yet.

Then it hit him! He would build a slip unit with a bit of a swivel on one side and that swivel piece was somewhat serrated so that it would be able to grab the pipe. He would slide the somewhat rounded unit over the pipe and after it was on the pipe, he would pull up on it and it would hold onto the pipe. This unit worked well and later was used many times over.

Henry told me about how they used to install heaters in vehicles that did not come with ones factory installed. Using a sawed-off shotgun and a big block of wood on the other side, they would simply shoot holes through the firewall of the car using these holes to put heater pipes through. This method was much quicker than drilling these holes and there was no fire.

BUT I know that I would not have been the one holding the piece of wood!

When I was a young boy, I would go out in the evenings after a snowfall to listen for the sound of the then famous snowplow that the Peters Boys operated. Any big snowstorm and the road behind

the village of Neuhorst would blow shut. I was too small to help but I remember a time when the Peters boys came with their snowplow on which they had now mounted a blower. Many men were needed to help break up snow that was so hard that it needed to be loosened with shovels in order for the blower to be able to move it.



I had the opportunity to visit with Henry Peters one evening. I asked a lot of questions and he seemed to enjoy reworking some of those years back through his mind.

The design of his famous snowplow was no accident, as he told me that it took a lot of tries and thinking outside the box to make the snow fly with the horse power that he had to work with. He tried the flat square blade in the front and then on to a bit of a V with the final one having just the right V shaped blade with the lift and curl 'wing design'.

This all sounds so simple when I write it but I am sure that there were countless hours that went into thinking and cutting and welding before this machine performed in such a the way that Henry was happy.

The truck was an Army Jeep with a flat-head Ford engine in it, and it did have a bottom end torque, and so it was exchanged with a 235cid 6-cylinder Chev engine that drove the truck through a transfer case.



Because the truck had limited power there needed to be someone pushing from the rear with a little Willys Jeep.

When Henry decided to mount a blower in the front he added a rear engine to power it. The next year the blower was not needed and so the rear motor stayed and was coupled to the transfer case with v-belts. Now you really needed two people on board: the person on the right was the driver, and the person on the left operated the rear motor, the plow, and the wing. The rear motor had a straight pipe exhaust so that the operator could hear how much the motor was pulling. It was connected to the drive line by V-belts, and if you gave the rear engine too much throttle, then the V-belts would burn off very quickly.

Henry also described how they found a way to design the lights so that they were able to actually see through the snow. The lights needed to be behind the driver on the cab and with pipe extensions on the front of them to make it possible to see through the snow that was flying around in front of them.



Henry was also known for the V-plows he built for farm tractors. Ben Goertzen recalls that some farmers had a McLeod's Plow and some had a Peters' Plow. The Peters Plow worked so much better as the design was quite different.

The Hague Osler Warman Snow Club was a good organization to manage clearing the snow off the county roads. It had bought the plow from

the Peters' and it was amazing how well people of all stripes worked together in this organization.

There was a committee (two people who were very instrumental in organizing and running the club were Dave Boldt and George Guenther) in which some people were responsible for collecting membership money to run this organization. Then there were many different drivers as it always needed two operators for each shift. Some of the drivers were Rev John Janzen; Dick Sawatzky; Henry Wolf ; Peter Giesbrecht and Abe Giesbrecht.

Dick Sawatzky thought that it was funny how it seemed that they always plowed all night long! This same sentiment was echoed by Peter and Abe Giesbrecht. All the guys talked about hitting the ditch and then shoveling. . . . According to Dick Sawatzky it usually was in the middle of the night and then it meant, shovel till the sun came up in order to drive out of that ditch.

The people were very good to these drivers and would ask them in for a meal or night lunch or faspa.

And I can't forget to mention that this also meant that there were also always two wives home alone all night long (in the days before cell phones).

There are stories of making very unintentional U-turns on the road by lowering the wing a little too far.

There is also a story of a dog coming too close to the plow and it getting lifted up and over the telephone lines. This dog learned never to come close to that Yellow Machine.

Then the Rural Municipality of Warman bought it, and one winter I had the pleasure of operating this machine that I had always admired. I happened to work for the Municipality and my partner was Jake Peters (not the same family). We always tried to drive at about 25-30 miles per hour and if we could make the telephone wires sway ahead of us we knew that the snow was really flying.

The challenge came when we were plowing driveways as most of them had trees beside them so the snow really blew in. Often we were unable

to get up to speed before we got to the big drifts. Then when we lost power and speed it all stopped! When this happened the snow fell in behind the plow and then the shoveling began!

The 14th day of March, 1974, Kathy (my wife) and I were operating the Texaco Service Station at Osler. We were having a major snowstorm that caused the highway to be blown shut by 6 pm., stopping all traffic in either direction.

The Department of Highways workers were on strike and had been for some time so there was no help coming from them.

An STC bus got stuck about where powerline road used to cross Highway #11 (just south of Osler). The driver came to the service station seeking help to get that road open. He was responsible for the passengers and he did not want to spend the night on the road.

It was 11 pm when I called Johnny Peters, and asked if it was possible that he and I could plow to Saskatoon with the famous snow plow. I had to get Johnny from his home (with a snowmobile) but we got the plow going and off we went! This was the most ideal conditions you could image in which to operate this snowplow - highways have no stones sticking out to make the plow bounce! By the time we got to Saskatoon we had a long convoy behind us - many vehicles stuck along the way soon joined us.

At the outskirts of Saskatoon we turned around and widened our swath back to Osler.

It so happened that Peter and Helena Peters from Reinland were expecting a baby, and because of the storm they were proactive and came to Osler.

In the middle of the night the little guy wanted to make his debut, but by this time the road was blown shut again. Bill and Jake were in Saskatoon, and the only way back to Osler was with the C.N.R skunk (single car passenger train), so they arrived home after midnight.

Soon after that, they got the call from the Peters, so they started the snowplow back up and made that second trip to Saskatoon. When they got into Saskatoon, a police car started following them. They continued on to the front of City Hospital, at which time the police officer came to talk to them.



That is the story of how little Larry Peters made his entry into this world in the middle of that stormy night.

In the book, *Osler Bits and Pieces*, it says about Henry, "There's a man that's a mechanical genius."

There is also a report in 1953, of the Saskatoon Star-Phoenix coming out to do a write-up about this amazing man and this machine.

It would be a good project to see how many pictures we could collect of this machine plowing snow.

In one of the pictures that Margaret and Dennis Boldt gave me you can see that the driveway was blown shut and the milk truck could not get onto the yard for pickup. This is when the Peters boys came and opened it up.

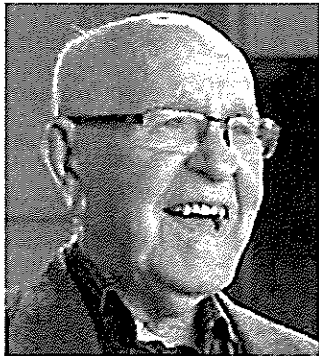
I am sure that there would be many such cases where it was music to the people's ears to hear this machine come roaring down the road.

Eventually this snowplow ended up back in the Peters family, and these days you can see it in the annual Osler Parade.

*DB*

## **Remembering David Schroeder as Part of a Saskatchewan Story**

**- by Jake Buhler**



*Dr. David Schroeder*

This gigantic Bible teacher with a soft voice died September 27 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 5 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 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 Schroeder did what no nuclear scientist could do, it 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*

# Peter Kroeker's Gifts

- by Ruth Marlene Friesen

My mother's brother, Uncle Peter Kroeker, was a restless young man. I don't know what all his motives might have been, but in October 1952, having turned 19, and hankering to go sign up for the war in Korea, he ran away to Regina. His parents, Gerhard and Elisabeth Kroeker, who lived in Chortitz, seven miles west of Hague, had not given their permission. Peter signed up on his own signature.

Knowing my grandparents, I'm now sure that Grandpa fumed and said some angry things, while Groszmama prayed her heart out.

Peter showed up in March, and again just after Easter, to show off his uniform and to inform his family that he was being shipped out to Korea.



I was six when he suddenly showed up for Christmas in 1954.

On Christmas Eve, Peter phoned from the Hague train station to say he was home for Christmas. Of course, Grandpa and Uncle Isbrand hurried off to pick him up.

About all I recall of that Christmas is that I gawked and stared at this very tall man with the dark, wavy hair, and a shy, self-conscious smile while everyone fussed over him. Relatives must have heard via the party line and grapevine, for my grandparents' house filled up with people on Christmas day. They clapped him on the back and talked as if he were some hero, asking him for his adventures.

What seemed the oddest to me was that he had only brought gifts for Groszmama. Such strange gifts at that.

One was a rectangular glass case with a doll dressed up in a red and gold brocade kimono. She had very white, chalky skin, and piles of

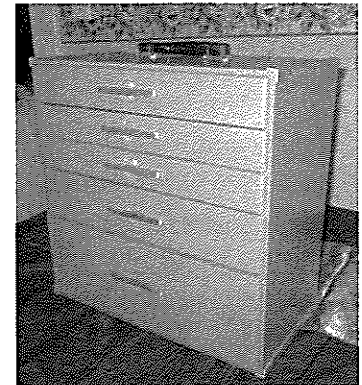


black hair on her head.

I'm not sure Groszmama knew what to do with it, but she made sure we children understood that this was not a doll for us to play with. She had it put up high on top of the red wardrobe in

their bedroom. (Now that wardrobe is in the Hague Saskatchewan River Valley Museum).

The other gift, also for Groszmama, was a green cabinet with many little drawers. She saw that as a more practical thing, and I always remembered Uncle Peter when I saw it upon her treadle sewing machine, with the drawers filled with sewing notions, thread, needles, and so forth.



I am not known to be at loss for words, but when I think of outstanding, unusual Christmases, that one is one of the first that comes to mind. My main memory is staring - probably with my mouth hanging open - and watching this stranger, who, Mom said was my uncle Peter. I had no previous memory of him.

My sister Elsie bought the doll when we had Groszmama's auction sale after she was moved into the Rosthern Nursing Home in 1986. Mom got the green cabinet, and it has since come into my hands. I still use it for sewing notions, just as Grosz'mama did.

*RMF*

## **1967 and 2013: Memories of Christmas in India**

**by Bert Lobe - former MCC Missionary to India**

**That the birth of a child, to a very young and unwed mother, in a barn and in an occupied territory has such a hold of so many in the human community is puzzling and amazing.**

Martha and I have lived in India on three different occasions for almost 8 years. We first went to India in 1966, just married. Our second sojourn was for three years in the late 1970's and the third was in 2013/14. India is for us a defining place, a place where the notion of culture came alive; a place which shaped our vocational choices and introduced us to the diversity of the human family. During our eight years, we were mostly without other ex-patriot friends and it was this reality that helped us develop a deep appreciation for the country, its people and religions. Indeed, we have life-long friends there and the Oraon people remain alive and in our hearts.

Here are two short stories of encounters which left a mark:

**1967 in Bihar State:** Our small village of Tumbagara was 150 kilometres from the nearest market, in heavy jungle, and on the edge of a large tiger reserve. We pedaled 7 kilometers to the post office to get our mail. We lived among the national medical staff of a small mission hospital at a time in which a severe famine devastated a large portion of east central India. We saw too many people hungry, too many die.

Our first child, a boy, was born on December 3, in the village, and was carried affectionately around the village, often missing from his crib.

We killed 4 goats and cooked 4 drums full of rice and vegetables to celebrate that birth right after he, with other children, was dedicated in our small church. Herin, our neighbor's pet deer walked in and out of the service at will. Dressed in bright colors, we sat on the floor; we sang bujans, and then we ate. My mother and father from Saskatchewan joined us during these days. It was memorable, full of joy!

The communion service which followed the baby dedication is etched in my memory. Habil Tirkey, the 6 foot 3 gateman, and I were paired for the foot washing after communion. Habil was an Oraon, very poor and a tribal man with very little status within Indian society. Tribal people are beneath the lowest caste and often looked down on, even despised. Habil was hardworking, simple and quiet. He washed my feet with great gentleness, he was timid; and then it was my turn and I bent down and did the same. I glanced up, and it was never the same between us.

**2013 in Kolkata:** We have a dear friend, a woman who is now a grandmother who worked for MCC for 38 years.

She left her husband years ago because he beat her when she was 5 months pregnant. Neither her family nor her church was supportive of her decision to leave her husband. It was from the MCC India staff that she received understanding and encouragement.

Her husband died on December 24, 2013 and she went to his funeral.

I asked her about it and she commented, "I've forgiven him. You have to leave when you have to leave, and you have to go on. I needed to go to his funeral and my married daughter and I did. It helped me remember the good times."

Our eight years in India reinforced our appreciation for the country and its people, and the Christmas season always brought us back to the story which nurtures and holds together our friends in Bihar and Kolkata. Our upbringing in the church in Osler prepared us well to build friendships among folks that were very different, to cherish the diversity of the human family and that was an important gift.

**That the birth of a child, to a very young and unwed mother, in a barn and in an occupied territory has captured the imagination of so many in India is amazing.** *BL*

# 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 honorees 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 Bahnman

**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)

**Katherine Hooge** († 2001)

**Abram G. Janzen** († 2015)

**John J. Janzen** († 2004)

**George Krahm** († 1999)

**Ingrid Janzen-Lamp**

**Abram M. Neudorf** († 1966)

**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)

## Web Sites

MHSS: [mhss.sk.ca](http://mhss.sk.ca)

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

[freepages.genealogy-rootsweb.com/~skmhss](http://freepages.genealogy-rootsweb.com/~skmhss)

**Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:** (GAMEO)

[gameo.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online](http://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](http://mhss.sk.ca/E-Updates.shtml)

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**MHSS Office and Archives, & SMH Editor**

**110 LaRonge Road, Room 900**

**Saskatoon, SK. S7K 7H8**

or email directly to: [Ask-Ruth@mhss.sk.ca](mailto:Ask-Ruth@mhss.sk.ca)