

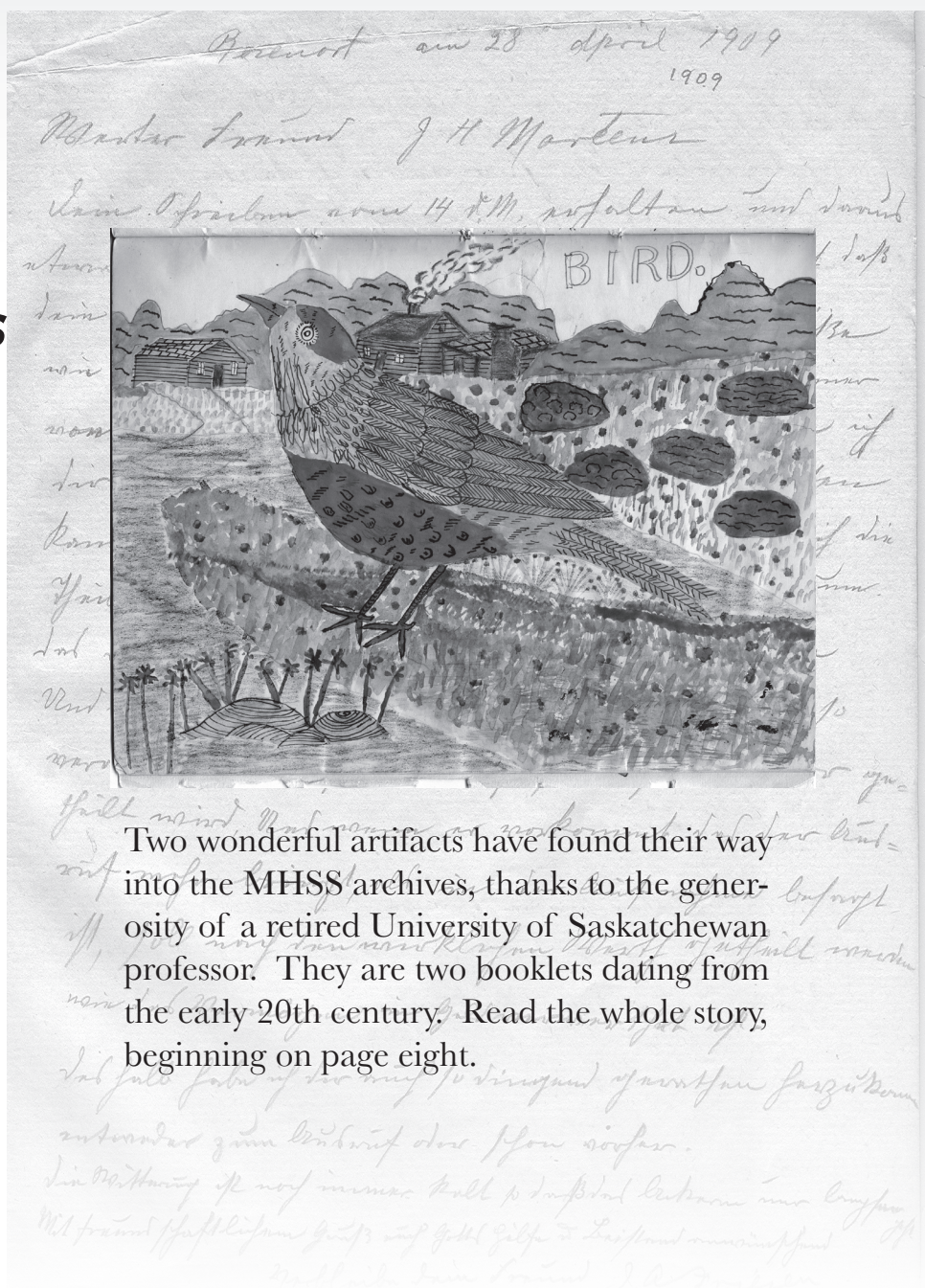
# SMH Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

Official periodical of the Mennonite Historical Society of  
Saskatchewan, Inc. Volume XVI No. 3, October 2010

## A New Treasure for the Archives

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Two wonderful artifacts have found their way into the MHSS archives, thanks to the generosity of a retired University of Saskatchewan professor. They are two booklets dating from the early 20th century. Read the whole story, beginning on page eight.

# Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

Volume XVI No. 3 October 2010

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**ERRATA:** In the previous issue (July), in the Laird Church centennial article, the two churches pictured on p. 6 are incorrectly identified. The top photo is of the original church with the two-storey addition of 1959, and the lower photo shows the current church, built in 1985. In the Syl Funk article, p. 16, the coach of the Rosthern Wheat Kings is incorrectly identified. His name was Gordon Ellis Goble. We apologize for the errors.

## From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt



There are some surprising stories out there. The one that I most recently became acquainted with is the one which has delayed this issue an extra month, and which is introduced on the first page. In this case, the surprise is not just in the quality of the artwork produced by a 10-year-old and the preservation of 100-year-old manuscripts, but the peculiar way the artifacts have survived to end up at MHSS Archives. The picture itself tells us that we have something special here. I am tickled pink to be able to introduce this visually outstanding find to MHSS members. The archives thrive on such personal artifacts and we are grateful to those who choose to ensure their protection and availability to future generations by donating them to the collections. These two century-old booklets are noteworthy for their excellent condition, even though part of the history of their journey through time is unknown.

Also of interest in this issue is a short article that draws our attention to one, largely unsung, aspect of the role women have played in our church; namely, in organizing bazaars! I wish you good reading. 🍁



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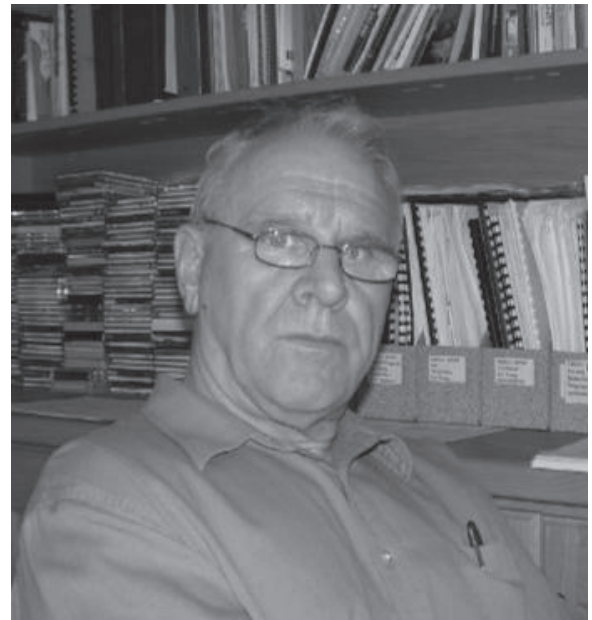
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## MHSS President's Corner

By Jake Buhler



When I was young, I was intrigued by the drawing of the Anabaptist martyr, Dirk Willems, who in 1569 rescued his captor from drowning, and was rewarded with a cruel death later. Clayton Kratz was killed in Russia in 1922 while trying to alleviate starvation in that country. In the mid 1980s I visited Ban Me Tuot, Vietnam, where Daniel Gerber, an MCC volunteer, was abducted in 1962 in broad daylight and was killed. My own uncle, Jacob Wiens, disappeared in Russia in 1939, likely shot. Perhaps the last Mennonite to die violently for his faith was Glen Lapp who in August of this year was killed in Afghanistan. While doing some work on the Miller family, I learned how Peter Miller, an Austrian Catholic who became an Anabaptist Hutterite, was tortured with hot irons and killed in 1769 in Romania. Hundreds of Prairie Mennonites are direct descendants of this martyr. Read about his story in the Miller/Mueller article in this issue.

If you know of stories like the ones above that have not been told please let us know. These witnesses of faith are important to all of us. 

# ***Eight Generations of Millers/Muellers (1665–1916)***

***By Jake Buhler***

## ***Introduction***

In this article I want to briefly trace eight generations of Millers/Muellers. For the most part, they share daring leadership qualities in the areas of faith and business. This story begins with the Austrian Catholic Miller family in 1665. They converted to Hutterite Anabaptism in 1750 in Romania, and later joined the Mennonites in the Ukraine in 1818. The last of the Millers mentioned here died in Saskatchewan in 1916. It is a pity that we know very little about the women.

There are hundreds of Prairie Mennonites who are descendants of these families. To help you determine any family relationship, I have given a GM number for each person mentioned. GM stands for GRANDMA (the Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry). Contact anyone who has the GRANDMA program to see if you are related. For example, my wife's maiden name is Wiebe, but she is a direct descendant of the Millers. She is surprised, as are my daughters, to learn that they carry a bit of Hutterite lineage and that they have an Anabaptist martyr in their ancestry.

## ***Generations 1 and 2: Michael Miller and Peter Miller — Loyal Catholics***

Austria was largely unaffected by the 16th-century Reformation led by Martin Luther, and the Anabaptist movement of the same century did not reach into Austria. The Hapsburg Empire was ruthless with dissenters. Austria was very Catholic. Into this milieu was born Michael Miller (GM 187258) in 1665. His wife's name was Maria (GM 187259) but we do not know her family name. We know of one son, Peter (GM 139470), who was born in the village of Unteramlach, Spittal, Austria. He married Dorothy Santner (GM 95). These Millers likely attended mass every week, confessed their sins to a priest, and had their children baptized as infants. They were

ordinary village folk doing what devout Catholics should do in the 17th and 18th centuries.

## ***Generation 3: Peter Miller — Catholic becomes Hutterite Martyr***

Peter Miller (GM 145) was born November 20, 1721 to Peter and Dorothy in Carinthia, Austria. He was likely baptized by the village priest shortly after his birth. Empress Maria Therese was very Catholic and did not tolerate dissidents. We know little about Peter's early life. Why did he delay marriage until age 42? From the little we know, Peter Miller was a day labourer. When Peter was in his early 30s he became involved with 689 dissidents who were dissatisfied with the practices of the Catholic Church. They protested so much that they were exiled in 1755 to Transylvania in Romania to live with the Lutherans. But Peter's search for spiritual renewal led him to make contact with Hutterites who had several small congregations there. The Hutterites under Jacob Hutter had had their Anabaptist origins in Moravia in 1525.

Peter Miller led 58 Catholics to join him, and in Alwinz, in 1762, at the age of 41, he was re-baptized into the Hutterite faith. A year later he married Elizabeth Innerwinkler (GM 146), also an Austrian dissident, who was 16 years younger. They had three children. But persecution of the Hutterites by the Jesuit priest, Johannes Delphini, forced them to flee under cover of darkness on October 3, 1767 with 78 other Hutterites to Prisiceni, Wallachia, near Bucharest. It was an arduous journey as they had to cross the Carpathian Mountains. They joined a Hutterite community there. But on November 27, 1769, mercenaries destroyed the colony and tortured five Hutterites, including Peter Miller, using hot irons. Peter died a painful death. Five months later his wife Elizabeth Innerwinkler and their three children joined 66 other Hutterites in their escape to Wischenka, Russia.



#### ***Generation 4: Peter Miller — Hutterite on the Move***

Peter Miller (GM 149) was born January 18, 1768 in Romania. Following his father's death as a martyr, his mother, Elizabeth Innerwinkler, fled with the two-year-old Peter to Wischenka, Russia in April of 1770. With 66 others who fled, a Hutterite colony was established at Wischenka. Peter grew up in the colony and at the age of 14 was baptized upon his confession of faith. For ten years he was the chief tailor. In 1791 at the age of 22 he married 25-year-old Susanna Stahl (GM 398), who had also come from Romania. They had seven children. In 1802, the colony was dismantled due to disputes over communal ownership of goods. A new colony was established at nearby Radichev and it was there that both Peter and Susanna died in their 40s, leaving a young family behind. Peter and Susanna lived out their Hutterite Anabaptist convictions faithfully. Their children followed in their footsteps.

#### ***Generation 5: Andreas Miller — Hutterite becomes Mennonite***

Andreas Miller (GM 401), born July 9, 1798, was only 10 when his mother Susanna died in 1809. Three years later his father, Peter, died. We do not know who looked after the seven young orphans. In 1818, a blacksmith shop in Radichev caught fire and destroyed the entire colony. The land was sold and distributed among the 25 Hutterite families. Some moved to a new village called Neudorf where each family was allowed to have 10 acres. In 1820, at the age of 22, Andreas moved with his brother Mathias and several of Abraham Knels' children to Chortitza (350 miles south). There they joined the Mennonites. Three years later, in 1823, Andreas married Katherina Lehn (GM 187232). They had three children. Only Isaac survived childhood. Isaac was born in Chortitza, Russia on June 19, 1824, and was just four when his mother died and 12 when his father died.

#### ***Generation 6: Isaac "Kaiser" Mueller — Mennonite leader in Southern Manitoba***

He spelled his name Isaac Mueller (GM 229170) and his leadership skills rival those of almost any Mennonite. By age 12, as noted above, he was an orphan

and again we do not know who raised him. At the age of 19 he married 18-year-old Gertruda Wall (GM 229171). She was from the village of Neuhorst and that is where they settled. Eleven children were born to this union.

Isaac and Gertruda frequently visited a relative in nearby Neuendorf named Johann Wall who owned a windmill used to grind grain. The energetic Isaac bought the windmill for 2,100 rubles — a huge purchase for someone at the tender age of 26 — and became a miller. It is likely that Isaac became an *Oberschulze* (overseer of a number of Mennonite villages), as he had demonstrated much business sense and considerable leadership. More research needs to be done on Isaac's public life in Chortitza.

By the early 1870s Russian nationalism was threatening the privileges Mennonites had enjoyed. In 1873 the Molotschna, Bergthal, and Borosenko communities sent delegates to North America to seek resettlement options. A year later the Kleine Gemeinde at Borosenko and the Bergthal Colony began to emigrate to Manitoba. Many Molotschna Mennonites emigrated to the midwestern United States.

The Chortitza leaders did not send delegates to America, hoping that an alternative service to military conscription could be worked out with the Russian government. Chortitza faced an additional problem; namely, the poverty of many Mennonites who were living and farming on rented land. The future right to rent or buy land looked bleak, especially in the daughter colonies. By 1875, Isaac had organized a group of 198 persons to move to Manitoba. Their first stop was in Hamburg where 268 Bergthal Mennonites joined Isaac's group. They landed in Quebec City on July 20, 1875 on the *SS Quebec*. Isaac took them by train to Collingwood, Ontario, by steamer to Duluth, Minnesota, by train to Moorhead, Minnesota, and finally by riverboat to Fort Dufferin, Manitoba.

Upon arrival in Fort Dufferin not all was well for the 1,500 Mennonites who had come the year before. And for the 2,400 who had arrived just ahead of Mueller's group, the land issue had not been resolved. They waited in barracks until 17 townships were promised to the Mennonites along the United States border.

*Ältester* Johann Wiebe was busy reminding the new immigrants that the Mennonite Church in Russia had lost its spiritual focus and that reform was necessary. He proposed, at a meeting in the barracks, that a civic administration would work together with the *Gemeinde* to establish new purity in the church. Only biblical discipline would be practised. At that meeting, Wiebe's Russian *Ältester*-ship was renewed by a vote of confidence. Isaac Mueller was elected *Ober-vorsteher* (= *Oberschultze*), who would head all civic duties. Mueller set to work at once organizing villages, building a church, establishing schools, managing a loan fund, and setting up a local governing system.

By the late summer of 1875, sixteen villages had been established by the *Gebietsamt*, which was a settlement administration set up by Mueller, Peter Wiens, and Franz Froese. About two dozen families were assigned to each village. It was a risky initiative because the Dominion Lands Office did not give formal approval for the homesteads until 1876.

Isaac Mueller was a sort-of transplanted Johann Cornies, who gave instructions for the election of *Waisenamt* (social welfare department) positions, the collection of fire insurance fees, the plowing of fire guards, the ordering of a census, and the building of roads. On the road named the Post Road, which stretched from Emerson to Winkler, Mueller ordered farmers to mark the road by digging in posts every 250 feet. There was confusion over the C.P.R.'s right to own the odd-numbered sections. It was Mueller who finally advised the Ministry of the Interior that the Mennonites needed a block assignment of land. The government took his counsel. For 12 years Mueller was in charge of village development and was given the nickname "Kaiser" by the non-Mennonites.

If *Ältester* Wiebe was concerned about spiritual matters, it was Kaiser Mueller who built the first church structure. In February of 1876, from his home in Neuhorst, he ordered each farmer to bring a planed 30-foot timber measuring 6x8 inches. He compared it to the building of Solomon's Temple and said the Lord would have pleasure in it.

Mueller and Wiebe ensured that each village would have a school by the fall of 1876, which children

aged six to thirteen could attend. The 3 R's (reading, writing, arithmetic) would be integrated with the Hymnal, the Bible, and the Catechism. The East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites accepted government funding to broaden education. The West Reserve Mennonites did not. The disputes would linger until the 1920s, when a mass exodus of Mennonites to Mexico took place.

The transition from the *Gebietsamt* to municipal government on the West Reserve was contentious. The 1880 Act established the R.M. of Rhineland, which encompassed most of the West Reserve. In the first scheduled election there were no candidates. Mueller was accused by the Manitoba Free Press of wanting to line his pockets. But at an annual salary of \$200 for being *Obervorsteher*, that was hardly the case. By 1886, after 12 years of leadership, Mueller stepped down. The struggle between *Gebietsamt* and municipal governance abated. However, Mueller never strayed from his position that the church voice in governance should always be there. The *Reinländer Gemeinde* agreed.

Kaiser Mueller arranged loans of \$50,000 from the Ontario Swiss Mennonites and \$100,000 from the Federal Government to assist with early settlement costs. These funds were used for the purchase of implements, garden and grain seeds, construction materials, and animals.

Mueller died in 1912 at the age of 88, almost a forgotten person. He might have wanted it that way — to be buried without a monument as a servant of God. Two non-Mennonites did honour him. One was Duncan Matheson, the Hudson Bay merchant with whom Mueller had had many dealings. The other was Michael Salwedel, a writer for the newspaper *Nordwester*.

### ***Generations 7 and 8: Peter Mueller and Isaac Mueller — Saskatchewan Mennonite Entrepreneurs***

Several of Kaiser Mueller's sons, including Peter Mueller (GM 229177), moved to the Hague-Osler Reserve. Peter was born in Chortitza, Russia in 1860. He took the *SS Quebec* to Quebec City along with his parents in 1875. In 1878 he was baptized in Manitoba and later in the same year married Maria Doerksen (GM 229208). They had 12 chil-

dren. They moved to the Hague–Osler Reserve and took out a homestead in 1900 on the quarter-section that borders Osler. It was rocky land and Peter was unable to break as much land as was required by the Homestead Act. Ottawa threatened to take away his land. The exchange of letters between Peter and Ottawa is colourful. Peter did not mince his words when he told the Land Office they had no idea about breaking land that was full of rocks. Ottawa relented. But perhaps Peter was not so interested in farming. He owned a small Massey Harris dealership in Osler. On his rocky land he built a 60-foot barn and fenced in 140 acres of slough and pastureland. There he kept horses and cattle to sell to new settlers. By 1910 he had wearied of rocks and horses. He sold the quarter to Johann and Katharina Driedger who passed it on to their son Cornelius, who at age 34 married the young (19-year-old) Maria Pauls who had just arrived from Russia. Following Cornelius' death in 1939, his widow Maria married Bernhard W. Buhler. Their sons Wilfred and Ben farm that quarter today.

But back to the Muellers. Peter Mueller's son, Isaac Mueller (GM 229209), had acquired his father's flare for commerce. Isaac was born in 1879 in Manitoba. In 1901 he married Maria Vogt (GM 229281). They had only one son, Peter, born in 1902. In 1903 Isaac and Maria moved to Saskatchewan and three years later settled in Warman. In 1906 Isaac opened Miller, Friesen and Co., General Merchants. By 1908 he was selling real estate and insurance, and offering loans. In 1908 he was on the first Warman school board, and sat on the Warman Board of Trade. He also managed the Saskatchewan Trading Company, which sold farm equipment. At that time Warman was vying with Saskatoon to become a key centre. In time, Warman's lack of water tipped the scale in favour of Saskatoon.


Isaac ran headlong into trouble with the church. The end result was excommunication from the Old

Colony Mennonite Church. In 1910 Isaac and Maria moved to British Columbia where, in 1916, at the age of 36, he was killed by a falling tree. His wife Maria returned to Saskatchewan to live in Warman. She died in 1970 at the age of 88. Why did his father Peter not get into similar trouble? It is possible that he did get into trouble but by selling his businesses in 1910, he capitulated. Strangely enough, the person he sold his Osler farm business to, Johann Driedger, was excommunicated. Peter likely moved to a second farm he had near the river northeast of Reinland.

### Conclusion

If certain traits are inherited and passed on to the next generation, then the Miller/Mueller case would demonstrate that in at least six generations there was a willingness to explore the road not taken and forge ahead into the unknown. The Miller/Muellers were daring pioneers of sorts in their search for spiritual meaning to the point of martyrdom. They exhibited great leadership in resettling thousands of Mennonites in Manitoba. They pushed forward in business to the point of exclusion from the church community.

I became interested in the Muellers because of a small rectangular hole that existed on the farm at Osler where I was born and grew up. The depression is still there. When I read the homestead records, I learned that a Peter Mueller (generation 7, above) had homesteaded there in 1900. He likely built a small earthen root-cellar under his house. One thing led to another and before long I was able to link the many generations.

The resources used for this story are: articles by John Dyck, Adolph Ens, and Conrad Stoesz, in *Church, Family and Village*; Evan Eichler in *A Brief History of the Hutterian Brethren*; conversations with Leonard Doell; The Saskatchewan Archives; GRANDMA 5 Genealogy Program; *Reinländer Gemeinde Buch*. 



# Century-old Booklets Donated to MHSS Archives

By Victoria Neufeldt

On Wednesday, 25 August 2010 MHSS Archives was visited by Duff Spafford, professor emeritus of political studies of the University of Saskatchewan, to donate to our archives two wonderful old booklets relating to the Friesen family of Hague. The books were acquired by him about 1995 from a flea-market seller who had come to Saskatoon from British Columbia.

One of these artifacts is an ordinary school scribbler of the time, called a "Gretna Scribbler", 18.5 by 25 centimetres in size. The 37 leaves of its text contain copies of letters of the merchant Johan (John) A. Friesen, covering the period from May 1907, when he still lived in Manitoba, to March 1922, when he lived in Hague. In this book are copies of Friesen's correspondence and business documents.

The second is a child's drawing book dated 1910, about the same size as the "Gretna Scribbler." Its 30 leaves are filled with wonderful, colourful drawings by Eva Friesen, daughter of Johan A. Friesen, when she was 10 years old.

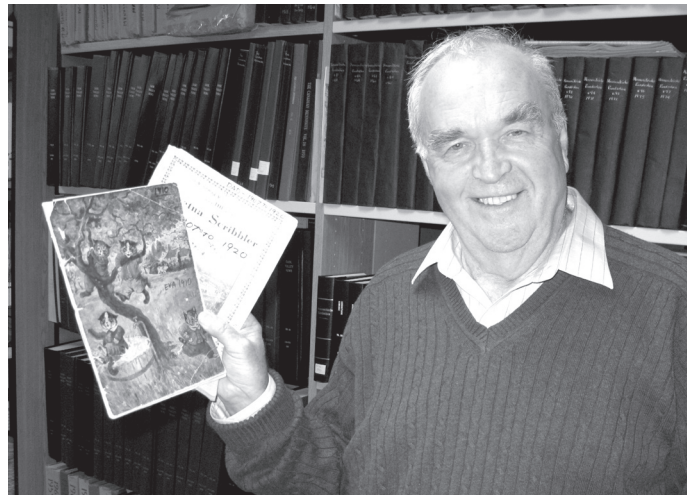
The story behind these two artifacts was pieced together from information gleaned from a number of different people. MHSS archivist Victor Wiebe first told me about this acquisition. Eileen (Friesen) Epp, niece of Eva and granddaughter of John A. Friesen (her father was the older son, Abram) filled me in on the family. Leonard Doell, who knew Johan A. and his son, Jacob E., told me about the father's and son's collections. And Rev. Esther Patkau read parts of the "letter book", providing valuable information about the man behind the artifact.

How these two particular items came to be among the wares of an itinerant antiques dealer from British Columbia is a mystery. However, from what is known of Johan Friesen, the letter book is part of what was originally a large personal file.

Johan A.'s letter book tells us that the family were merchants in Rosenort, Manitoba and gives important information about the nature and extent of their business. It also informs us that in 1911 the Friesen family

moved from Rosenort to Hague, Saskatchewan, where Johan bought another business. Jacob E. Friesen, Johan's son and Eva's brother, later became a well known Hague merchant and historian.

Johan A. Friesen kept copious written records of his life, including letter books such as the one now in the possession of the MHSS archives. He also kept a journal and detailed accounts of his business dealings. All of this material accumulated in his house and fell to his son, Jake E. Friesen, after he died. The son



Duff Spafford at the MHSS archives, displaying the books he has donated; the top one is the art book (the picture on the cover is the printed cover of the book) All photos for this article by Victor Wiebe

himself was an avid recorder, continuing the habits of his father, and in addition, he collected many antique objects. Leonard Doell, who knew both father and son, says that Jake Friesen had a virtual Mennonite museum in his basement. In his later years, he began to sell this material (his own and his late father's), holding many garage sales. Antiques dealers came to know of him and much of the material was sold in this way. How Johann A.'s daughter's picture book came to be put together with his letter book, remains a puzzle. Perhaps Eva had left the book behind in the parental home when she grew up and it happened to be gath-

ered up with some of her father's books for one of those garage sales. At any rate, it and her father's letter book ended up, via British Columbia, at a flea market in Saskatoon, in the mid 1990s. This is where the browsing Spafford happened to see two scribbler-type notebooks in a plastic sleeve, for sale for \$20. Spafford says he idly looked through the picture book and came upon the drawing entitled "bird" (shown at right, reduced in size; the original is about 18 by 25 centimetres). On seeing this lovely drawing, he immediately bought the package. He hung onto these books over the next 15 years or so, pondering what he might do with that picture. Then recently, in beginning his own downsizing, he took the books to the University of Saskatchewan archives, thinking that after all, they should be preserved intact. At the university, he was advised that the best place for them would be the MHSS archives, so he contacted Victor Wiebe. And the rest, of course, is history.



Victor Wiebe says that while the quantity of materials in this Spafford donation is not large, the donation is important. Eva's drawing book tells us what interested a 10-year-old Old-Colony Mennonite Prairie child of a century ago, and the artwork itself is notable. As for the letter book, again, it provides important and interesting historical information. Wiebe reports that he has had an evaluation done for income tax purposes and the two works are "quite valuable: the one as a work of early Prairie folk art and the other because this type of letter-book information is rare and the details in the book would be valuable in understanding the early history of business and community in the Prairies."

### ***Eva's book***

Eva's book is something of a mystery. Eva was 11 years old when the family settled in Saskatchewan. She must have treasured her book, to take it with her when the family moved. However, as far as we can tell now, that seems to have been the end of it for Eva's artistic endeavours.

Eileen Epp was surprised to see this book and more surprised at the quality of the artwork, because she had never heard of her Aunt Eva drawing or painting or having any interest in art. Eva's mother, on the other hand, whose name was also Eva (nec Peters),







was known for her artistic talents. It is possible that the young Eva was helped by her mother in the compiling of this artistic record. Or perhaps her brother Jake, who was known as an artist, worked with her on the book. Eva's book suggests an intensive period of artistic endeavour, perhaps over the summer holidays in 1910. Some of the drawings look as if the outlines were traced and then coloured in with watercolour or crayon. The illustration shown above is an example of what could be a traced image. This same page also is decorated with what we used to call transfers — that is, small readymade pictures or designs that you could burnish onto a sheet of paper. Such designs are found around the edges of most pages in Eva's book. As in this example, they seem in general to have been chosen more or less at random, rather than for any relation to the subject of the drawing.

Shown on the preceding page is the title page of Eva's book, the first page inside the cover; it is charming for its decorative quality and the obvious care taken in the forming of the letters and numbers (even though the '9' is backwards!). This page too is decorated with transfers. The "cats at play" page, above right, is more like the "bird" drawing, in that at least parts of it were probably drawn freehand.



A notable thing about all the drawings is the brightness of the colours, which, unfortunately, we cannot show you in this publication. The colours are amazing, after 100 years. Even the transfers have retained their colour. Undoubtedly, the book has spent most of the years stored away from light.

### **John A.'s book**

We know that in 1911, Johan A. moved with his family to Hague, first settling on a farm near the North Saskatchewan River, seven miles east of Hague. After a few months, they moved to the village of Hague, where Johan bought a general-store business. This transition to Saskatchewan is documented in his letter book, which begins in 1907, when the family still lived in Manitoba.

As is immediately evident, the notebook is written in the old Gothic hand script, making it inaccessible to most people today. However, the Saskatoon Mennonite community is fortunate to have a few people for whom this handwriting is still readable. One of these is Rev. Esther Patkau, who very kindly agreed to take a quick look at the book to gauge its contents. What she found is intriguing, and makes one hope for a future translation of the entire contents.



Patkau commented that this type of book is not unique, but neither is it common. She has seen several others and has translated one of them. She notes that MHSS archives may be singularly fortunate in this acquisition, because she does not know of any others in archives. They were probably just discarded as workaday paraphernalia that the next generation would not value and would not be able to read anyway.

Following is some of the information Patkau gleaned from the pages she looked at.

The opening page of the book has brief information on the death of a Peter Penner, aged 80 years, 7 months, and 17 days.

Next is a letter, dated 30 May 1909, to a cousin describing the weather, crops, and other family matters.

A couple of pages on is a letter to somebody about the death of his father, probably a relative of the writer.

The letter describes plans for and details of the settling of the estate and what the son might do.

Most of the letters seem to be to family members, but they have names and dates and details of the life of the writer, who is obviously a good observer and is concerned about crop conditions, business issues, land prices, and so on. Sometimes, the writer is quite philosophic as in one letter, the lower one shown at right, in which he looks out of his second-storey window and sees the "South River" (the South Saskatchewan) flow on much like a person's life flows on. He then comments on life and faith and the future.


Several entries are about business items of a kind that one might find in a business file. For example, one letter, presumably to a bank, is about the payment of \$500 and the writer's

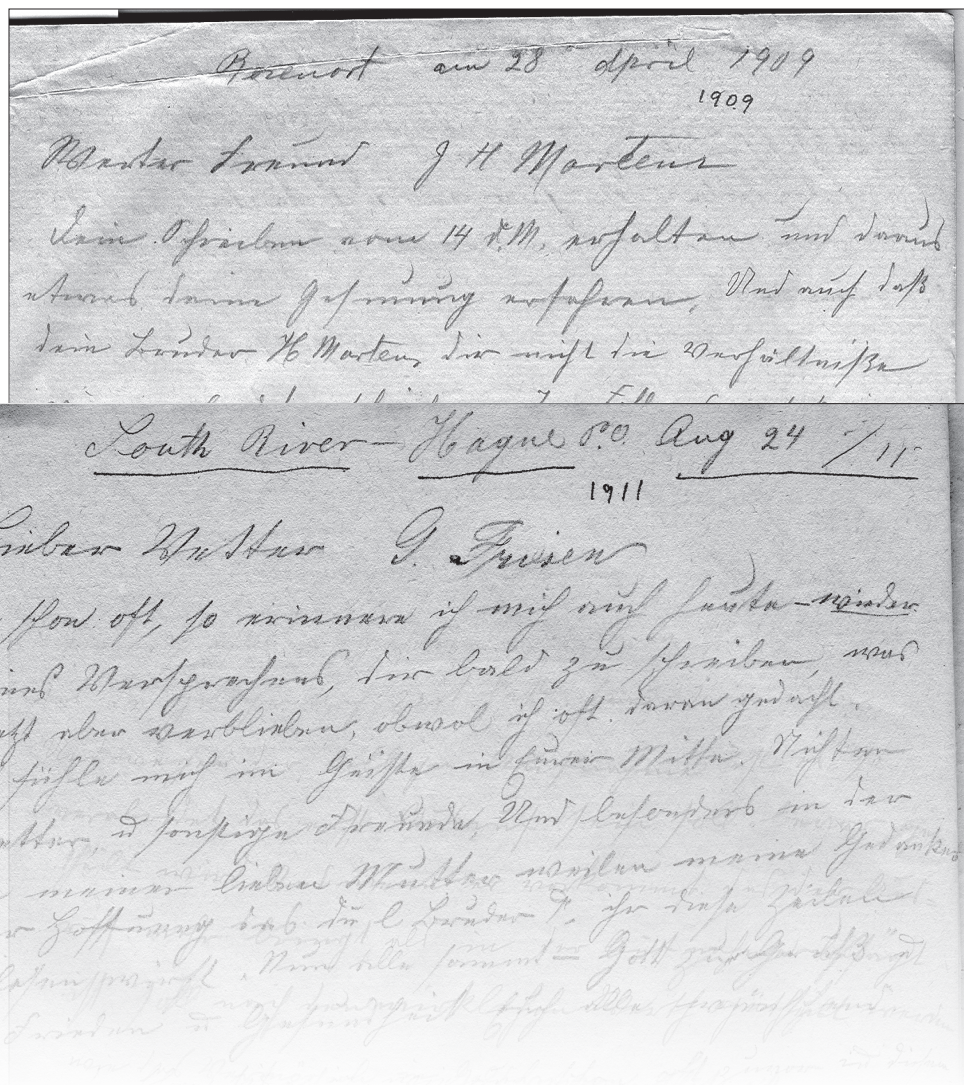
concern over a mortgage payment. Friesen then asks the bank for more blank cheques.

One letter is a short but compassionate rejection of an offer to purchase land from Friesen, saying that the offer was too low.

In the portions Esther Patkau read, there is no mention of the church, but faith is commented on in several letters.

Two pages are copies of contracts for the renting of Friesen's land to others. They are not long but still hold details like the paying of taxes, the use of clean seed, dealing with wild oats, municipally required road work, and the delivery to the elevator and payment of rent in the form of a portion of the crop.

One page is a notice of the opening of their store in Hague and that they will run a cash-only business at the start. 



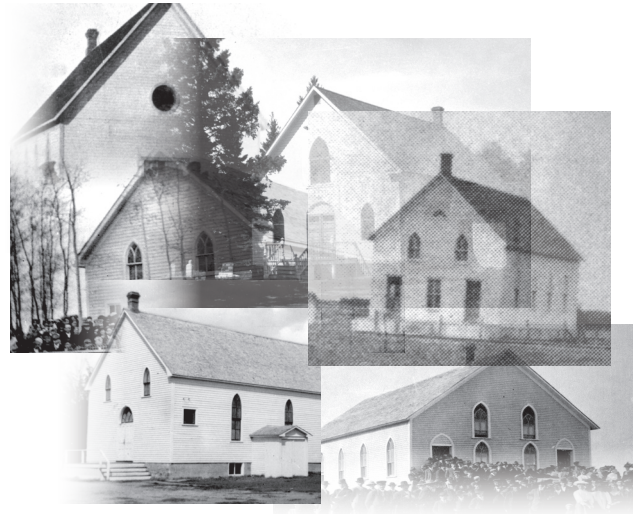


## A Summer of Celebration and Thanks Reports on the Centennial Anniversary Celebrations of Saskatchewan Mennonite Churches

*The following article was compiled and edited by Victoria Neufeldt. The Aberdeen report was put together by Verner Friesen from information solicited from Leonard Doell, Harvey and Kathy Klassen, and Nettie Thiessen. Abe Buhler sent in the report on Langham. The write-up on Tiefengrund is by Victoria Neufeldt. The Laird story was condensed and edited by Verner Friesen from Henry Patkau's article as published in the Canadian Mennonite. Unfortunately, we were unable to get reports from the Hepburn MB and Waldheim Zoar churches before we had to go to press. — Ed.*

The past summer proved to be a momentous and memorable one for Saskatchewan Mennonite churches, as six of them celebrated their centennials. The celebrations were notably successful, with people coming from far and near, in many cases filling the pews to overflowing — a wonderful happening.

The six celebrations were nicely spaced over three months, the first one (Aberdeen) in early June and the last one (Laird) at the end of August. Histories of all six churches and notices of the upcoming events were published in the two previous issues of the *Historian*. This, then, is a report on what actually



happened at the celebrations. A good number of people probably attended more than one event, but even allowing for such duplication, there were probably about 1,000 people altogether who converged on the church sites over the summer. As you read through the accounts, you will not be surprised to note that, true to Mennonite form, delicious food played a big part in all the celebrations. There was also entertainment, with a bit of hi-jinks thrown in — all appropriate! Taking them in chronological order of celebration, we'll begin with Aberdeen.

### *Aberdeen (June 5–6)*

Present and former members of Aberdeen Mennonite Church gathered on June 5 and 6, 2010 to celebrate 100 years of God's faithfulness. The event began on Saturday afternoon with a tour of former church sites and area cemeteries. Leonard Doell, who has a gift for making local history come alive, led the tour. At present, Aberdeen Mennonite Church is the only Mennonite church in the community. At one time there was a Mennonite Brethren church southeast of town, a Bergthaler Mennonite church north of town, and an Old Colony Mennonite Church in the village of Edenburg northwest of town. There are a number of cemeteries in the



**Photos:** this page, from left: Aberdeen Church choir, rehearsing in the sanctuary, with Harvey Klassen directing; a composite image of the original buildings of the six centennial churches; opposite page, left: Pastor Vern Ratzlaff offering Communion; right: the new Aberdeen Church sign, with, from left, Dave Neufeld, Ally Fehr, and Dave Klassen

Aberdeen area. The last stop of the tour was to be the site of the former Mennonite Brethren Church, but rain forced the cancellation of that part of the tour. Arrangements were made for Reg Krahn to do his presentation on the history of the Aberdeen Mennonite Brethren Church at a later date. Forty-five people took part in this very informative heritage tour.

Faspa was served in the basement of the church while a lot of visiting and renewing of acquaintance happened. After that, 34 singers gathered for a choir rehearsal under the direction of Harvey Klassen in preparation for the Sunday worship service. The singers ranged in age from 18 to 93; most of them were former choir members of Aberdeen Mennonite Church. When the pianist scheduled to accompany the choir was forced to spend the weekend in hospital, a guest from British Columbia, Emma (Bergen) Janzen, volunteered to play for the choir. Emma is the daughter of long-time members Isaac and Anna Bergen. Anna spent many years playing organ for the church. On Sunday morning the choir called the gathered congregation to worship and sang two more numbers during the service. Many of the singers expressed joy and gratitude for the opportunity to sing together in this way.

Leonard Doell served as worship leader for the morning service. Former pastor Verner Friesen shared a meditation using Psalm 100 as his text. This psalm is a call to rejoice and praise God for his goodness and steadfast love and for the prom-



ise of his continuing faithfulness in the future. To conclude the service, present pastor Vern Ratzlaff fittingly brought our thoughts back to the foundation

of our faith and the fount of our thanksgiving in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. A full house of 185 people attended the service.

Upon leaving the sanctuary, the congregation met briefly in front of the church for the unveiling of a new church sign. The metal sign, designed and built by Greg Unruh of Warman, reads: "Aberdeen Mennonite / Church / 1910–2010 / God is faithful to all / Generations." Another former pastor, David Neufeld, led the unveiling proceedings.

The local hall committee served a delicious catered meal in the community hall. During the meal and in between sessions there was always a lot of enthusiastic visiting as many former members had come home to renew acquaintance. After the meal, opportunity was given for sharing of memories.



The emphasis of the weekend was on gratitude for 100 years of God's grace and faithfulness. Also, it was a time to gain a new appreciation of the rich heritage of faith and family with which God has blessed the people of Aberdeen Mennonite Church.

### *Langham (July 16–18)*

The theme of the celebration of Langham's Zoar Mennonite Church was "one hundred years of blessings". The theme idea was accompanied by a delightful cookbook published for the occasion, entitled *100 Years of Good Eating*.

A lot of hard work done by many hands set the table for the event. Friday night was registration at the community hall, with pie and coffee served. We were delighted with the presence of long-gone





The Langham church celebration: *above*, the Saturday auction; *below*, the three rooftop pastors: *from left*: Gary Janzen, Herman Wiebe, and Abe Buhler

church family members along with community friends coming for the celebration.

Saturday morning the community hall was our breakfast room, feeding around 200 with some pretty fine farmer's sausage and pancakes. The featured event of midday was a traditional missions auction sponsored by our First Ladies Aid (the elder women's group). Pitched under a large white tent was a lovely display of baked, canned, knitted and crafted goods along with other valuables to be auctioned. After a scrumptious *rollkuchen* and watermelon feast, a senior/junior pair of auctioneers entertained the crowd and encouraged good giving. The proceeds went to a Mennonite church in Recife, Brazil with whom we are partnering. Throughout the afternoon, events were held for young and old, including a horse-drawn wagon offering tours

through our town, face painting, treasure hunts, and clowns celebrating the day.

Then it was back at the community hall for a great roast beef supper followed by great entertainment: modelling the fashions of the decades, including wedding gowns and fortrel suits, along with great debates, music, fun, and laughter.

It was as if the grateful eating and visiting and remembering came to a glorious climax in our Sunday morning worship service. Our sanctuary was packed out, with 237 people. Our choir loft was filled with vibrant, thankful voices. Our service involved people young and old, voices from the past, voices pointing to the future. Herman Wiebe and Gary Janzen, both former pastors, shared memories of blessings at Zoar.

Gary Janzen, during his time here in the nineties, apparently had declared that if Zoar ever had 200 people present for worship he would eat his lunch on the roof of the church. So up on the roof went Gary, also making room for Herman and Abe. Our celebration was a time of good eating and visiting, great worship, and many good laughs, and we'll always remember how we sang.

### ***Tiefengrund (July 24–25)***

More than 300 people came to the Tiefengrund Rosenort celebration, justifying the decision of the organizers to go with the large tent rather than the smaller one. The weather cooperated too: perfect weather on the Saturday, and on Sunday, cloud, cold, wind, and rain during the morning church service, but beautiful both before and after.

The weekend began with a memorable meeting in the original Tiefengrund church, now at Horse Lake, on Saturday afternoon. After a short service, led by Marianne Harder, with Walter Janzen, pastor of the Horse Lake church, giving the message, people were asked to contribute memories — and they did! Agnes Ewert, age 103, told the assembly that 77 years ago, she and her husband Elmer “walked down this aisle”. She still plays piano and consented to play two songs for the assembly. Abe Funk, who joined Rosenort Church in 1935, claimed bragging rights as the oldest member. He told of being born



“on the Indian reserve, three miles west of where the church used to be.” He told how Rev. John Regier had helped him over the years — married him, baptized him, and helped him with his conscientious objector status. “We gave each other haircuts too. I charged ten cents.”

Some other memories: Reena Kroecker: “I remember so vividly that I found the Lord in this church. There was strong preaching — in German, of course.”

Lorene (Janzen) Nickel: she and her husband Arnie were the first couple to be married in the new church. She was the first bride to be walked down the aisle by her father; “very radical! And Dad didn’t like it one bit!”

Menno Fieguth: his father was on the building committee for the first church. Menno said he still has his father’s level from that time.

Guenther Harder told the story of one of the fathers in the balcony reprimanding noisy boys during a service: “Jungens, seid mal still; ich kann nicht schlaffen!” (“Boys, be quiet; I can’t sleep!”)

The remainder of the celebration took place at the “new” church. The historical displays in the church included Agatha (Friesen) Regier’s wedding dress and veil, from August 18, 1911, when she married Arthur P. Regier. This was the first wedding in the church. Also on display were many, many photographs, beautifully arranged by Sylvia Regier.

After supper, attendees were treated to an evening of excellent entertainment, with Russ Friesen as emcee. The evening included wonderful music and much laughter.

Sunday morning saw the huge tent filled to overflowing again for the worship service. Guest speaker was Waldemar Regier. Current pastor Lorne Epp was worship leader. Again, beautiful music and congregational singing formed an integral part of the service.

A DVD with historical photos was produced by Rudy Dahl of Winnipeg; video footage from the weekend was added to this, for a complete record of a wonderful event. A delightful booklet of “Greetings & Memories” was another souvenir to take away and treasure for years to come.

### *Laird (August 28–29)*

On August 28 and 29 members of the Laird Mennonite Church, along with former members and adherents, came together to celebrate, to remember the past, to anticipate the future, and to renew acquaintance. The motto for the centennial celebration was: “Celebrating 100 Years of God’s Faithfulness and Many Blessings.”

The celebration started with informal visiting, followed by a delicious banquet. Congregational Chair Gordon Nesdoly led the Saturday evening service. The emphasis of the program was on those who had been shepherds of the Laird congregation. The exhortation was “Remember those who have spoken the Word of God among you; whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct” Hebrews 13:7. Leonard Enns, Verner Friesen, Henry and Erna Funk, Benno Klassen, Wilmer and Barb Froese, and Gary Giesbrecht all shared memories



Congregation gathered for the unveiling of the Laird Mennonite Church plaque





#### Unveiling the plaque:

*Above, from left, Don Regier, former deacon; Stuart Epp, deacon; Jerry Buhler, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Conference Pastor; Renata Klassen, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan Moderator; Gordon Nesdoly, Congregational Chair*

*Left, close-up of plaque*

of their experiences and brought greetings. Wilmer and Barb, who were co-pastors in Laird for 15 years, did an imaginary flashback, looking back from the year 2040 to envision what might have happened from 2010 to 2040. Gary Giesbecht presented a slide show under the title "Creation Calls".

The church also honoured former pastors by distributing a collection of tributes to them, written by various church members. The tributes were to Cornelius F. Sawatzky (one of the founders of Laird Mennonite Church), Art Pauls (ordained in 1935), Isaac I. Penner (ordained in 1938), Art Friesen (pastor in the 1950s), George Dueck (pastor from 1971 to 1977), and Irvin Schmidt (pastor from 1982 to 1989). These have all passed on to their eternal reward, but are still remembered.

Enthusiasm and exuberance of faith were expressed in the Sunday morning worship service. An adult choir, children's choir, men's group, and special music, as well as hearty congregational singing, brought forth praise and thanksgiving. Bruce Jantzen, present pastor of the church, was worship leader. Peter Funk, a former pastor, used as his text Joshua 3:4, "You have not gone this way before," emphasizing that the future will be different than the past.

Obedient faith is significant for a centennial. Pastor Bruce Jantzen recognized the sacrifices made by the forefathers in their desire to serve God faithfully; their footsteps are hard to follow. But there is hope for the future; God will carry through with what he has in mind for the church.

The whole congregation assembled outside in front of the church for the unveiling of a memorial stone. The inscription reads:

*Laird Mennonite Church, 1910 - 2010*

*100 years of God's faithfulness and blessings*

*1802 brought the first Mennonites to the area in search of religious freedom. Desire to worship together began in homes under the guidance of Peter Regier, Bishop of the Rosenort Mennonite Churches. Later services were held in the Carmen School.*

*By 1910 men like Cornelius F. Sawatzky envisioned and encouraged the congregation to build a church in the new village of Laird. Additions to the church were done in 1926 and 1959. The present church was built in 1985.*

*May the door be opened to share the good news of Jesus Christ so that generations to come may glorify the greatness and goodness of God.*


*"For no foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ". 1 Corinthians 3:11*

*Dedicated August 29th, 2010*

At the noon meal there was more sharing of memories. Laird Mennonite Church is a welcoming church, hospitable to friends and strangers. Many who have moved to the village of Laird have found a welcome church home here.

A total of 270 people were registered for the weekend event. The church was filled to capacity for both the evening and morning services, with overflow crowds spilling into the adjoining fellowship hall.

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Altogether, for the six celebrating churches and Saskatchewan Mennonites in general, it has been a unique summer. 



# Bazaars: One Role of Women in the Church

By Ray Fast

Mennonite history and literature is replete with stories and documents of men involved in the work of the church. Men were ministers, deacons, board members, and decision makers. Women, while they played supportive roles to their husbands, were rarely featured in leadership roles in the church.

This brief anecdote serves to remind us that women were indeed significantly involved in promoting the Mennonite ministry. I recall a period in the 1960s and 1970s when my mother, Mary Fast, arranged for kiosks in the shopping malls where they would raise thousands of dollars for MCC by selling quilts and other handiwork.

This involved a great deal of work. First, the painstaking and skilled work of quilting, sewing, crocheting, and knitting items such as blankets, towels, and doilies had consumed hundreds of hours. Then arrangements had to be made with the administration of the shopping malls to have their bazaars in the malls. Many a day, my father would load the car

with these products for delivery, all the while hoping that there would not be much to take back in the evening. Mom would then arrange for the staffing of the kiosk and the pricing of the articles. Some of her volunteers were Elfrieda Harder and Justina and Susie Neudorf.

These bazaars were frequently held prior to the Christmas holidays, where shoppers would purchase their gifts. Bazaars were also held during the summer, which attracted not only local people but tourists as well. Over the years thousands of articles were sold and the Mennonite Central Committee received a very significant amount of revenue to serve the needy around the world.

History should record that women have always played vital roles in the church — some as missionaries, some as authors, and also some as leaders in fundraising.



A Christmas bazaar held in Saskatoon in the mid 1970s. *In the upper left photo, from left: Justine Neudorf, Susie Neudorf, Elfrieda Harder, and Mary Fast; the same four ladies can be seen in the other two photos* Photos courtesy of Ray Fast



# The Story of Aberdeen Mennonite Brethren Church

By Reg Krahn



While the first major migration of Mennonites from Russia to North America took place between 1874 and 1880, the continuing erosion of the Mennonites' privileges, especially their exemption from military service, continued to be a significant motivation for emigration. I once asked why our relatives had decided to leave Russia and was told that my great-grandmother Sawatzky said, "Things are going to get a lot worse before they get better. We need to leave." In hindsight that was quite a prophetic statement. It was with this mindset that our forefathers made the long, arduous trip across the Atlantic to make a new beginning and to preserve their beliefs and religion.

The story of the Aberdeen Mennonite Brethren Church begins with the immigration of seven families who arrived at Rosthern in May of 1903. They gave their membership certificates from Russia to Jacob Wiens of Ebenfeld (Laird). Without having access to the church records I can't say for certain who these families were but there seems to be no doubt that the majority of them were Sawatzkys. These included my great-grandfather Gerhard J. Sawatzky, five of his married sons, Gerhard G., Peter G., Abraham G., Aaron G., and Heinrich G. and their families, and three sons — Bernhard, David, and Frank — who had not yet married. Great Grandfather's only daughter Aganetha and her husband came in 1904. One more son came in 1924; two sons never came to Canada. Gottlieb Kruger, grand-

father to Archie Kruger, and Peter von Niessen also arrived in the Aberdeen area in 1903. They obtained homesteads southeast of Aberdeen, and at first these early settlers gathered in the home of Gerhard J. Sawatzky, who had been a deacon in Russia, for their regular church services.

With the arrival of other families in the following few years, a new school division was created with four elected trustees: Aaron Sawatzky, Abraham Sawatzky, Peter Niessen and Peter Sawatzky. In 1905, New Steinbach School was built on the SW quarter of section 34 township 38 range 2 west of the 3rd. This is the quarter south of where Shawn Letkeman lives now. In March of 1919 the school burned down and was rebuilt one mile east on the SW quarter of section 35 township 38 range 2 west of the 3rd, and was just recently torn down to make way for a new yard for the present owner, Don Nykiforuk.

With this brand new building in the area, the Mennonite settlers began holding regular services in the New Steinbach School. The first baptism took place in 1905. Six candidates, two of whom were my grandfather, David Sawatzky, and his brother Bernhard, were baptized by brother Jacob Wiens of Ebenfeld. In 1906 Gerhard Siemens from Russia led



**Photos this page:** left: the original church in the country, built in 1909

Above: interior of the church, with hanging gas lamps (no electricity)



the group in further organizing their congregation. Under his leadership, Gerhard J. Sawatzky, who had been a deacon in Russia, was given responsibility as congregational leader; procedures for congregational life and practice were also established. The membership in 1906 was 22.

A music program was begun in 1904 with a choir consisting of 13 singers. The first director was Aaron Sawatzky who served as conductor for 12 years. W. Niessen took over for one year and when he moved away Aaron Sawatzky led the choir for four more years. David Sawatzky took over from his brother and carried on with the choir work. He also led a church band in later years. However, he sold many of his instruments in the 1930s when money was needed for other things. Other choir leaders included Nick Bauman and Archie Kruger.

It should be mentioned that Aaron Sawatzky has the distinction of being the most prolific of all Mennonite composers both in Russia and North America, with over 100 songs to his credit. His songs would often come to him during the night while he slept. He would wake up in the middle of the night and tell his wife to quickly get some paper so he could write down what had just come to him in his sleep. His last known hymn, "Mein Heim," was composed just months before his death in Shafter, California on 17 November 1935, and was sung at his funeral. The MHSS Archives has a hymn book containing a number of Aaron Sawatzky hymns.

Sunday school for the children was started as soon as possible. At first it was for the children, but as the congregation grew, the adults participated as well. To further support missions, Sunday school offerings went to support missionaries in India.

In the fall of 1908, the congregation decided to build their own house of worship. Work was begun in early spring of 1909. The work proceeded in a brotherly fashion, each member contributing as he was able. The building was finished by the first Sunday in June and on that Sunday was dedicated to God. It was located on the SE quarter of section 29 township 38 range 2 west of the 3rd. In the next year all the bills were paid, so by 1910 the congregation had no debts from its building project. In 1909

Gerhard J. Sawatzky retired as the congregational leader and John Siemens succeeded him. Also in 1909, a Christian Youth Endeavour program was started. These evenings of music and instruction not only gave the youth an opportunity to gain experience in the worship of the church but also provided music for the congregation and brought blessings as people participated. The Aberdeen Mennonite Brethren Church was a member of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, Rosethorn District.



Aberdeen MB Church choir, 1935–1937:

*Back row:* Nick Bauman (choir leader), Joe Klassen, Harry Sawatzky, Archie Kruger, Frank Sawatzky, Abe Krahn, Walter Sawatzky, Allan Sawatzky, David Sawatzky, Dave Niessen, Bill Niessen.

*Front row:* Frieda Klassen, Eva Sawatzky, Mary Letkeman, Esther Sawatzky, Alvina Kruger, Elsie Sawatzky, Helen Letkeman.

The following years saw the membership of the church grow dramatically. During the years following the First World War and the Russian Revolution, many Mennonites were scrambling to leave the carnage in Russia for the relative safety of Canada, the U S, and Mexico. With help from men like David Toews, many were able to escape to Canada, my father and his family included. By the mid-thirties the membership of the Aberdeen MB church was well over 100. In August of 1938, 12 young people, including my mom and dad, were baptized. It was said the crops were not good that year but the crop of new souls was good indeed. In accordance with the Mennonite Brethren tradition of baptism by immersion, baptisms took place at a place known as Kruger's Fill, which was a body of water located southeast of the church. My mother's uncle Ben Sawatzky, minister in the church at that time, also conducted a Bible school for two years (1938-1939)





Baptism of Esther (Sawatzky) Krahn, Aug 14, 1938;  
Henry S. Rempel officiating

during this time. It was held in his home during the winter months.

Ladies Aid was also started in the church. This provided the ladies of the church an opportunity to meet, socialize, and also contribute to the coffers of the missions that the church supported. They would at first walk to various homes in the area, then drive buggies, all the while enjoying each other's company. Many sewing projects were undertaken and later sold by auction to other church members. All the money raised was sent to the overseas missions supported by the church.

The Mennonite Brethren Church has always had a special urge to do foreign mission work. Beginning in the 1890s, the Russian MBs sent missionaries to India. This eventually led to the establishment of missions in southern and western China, Republic of Congo, Paraguay, Brazil, and Colombia. By 1955, 137 missionaries had been sent by the MB Conference. The Foreign Missions financial statement for the year ending 1 October 1948 shows the total receipts to be \$256,602. Much of this financial support came from the grassroots level, including the Ladies Aid groups and the Sunday School collections.

The Aberdeen MB Church also had connections to the mission field. My mother's cousin, Mary Letkeman, was sent to Colombia to work in the mission field there. She attended Bethany Bible School in Hepburn. There she met John Dyck, whom she later married. Together they spent 11 years in Colombia working in the mission there. Their work unfortunately came to a tragic end when they were killed in a plane crash in the Colombian mountains. Because of the rugged terrain, it was impossible to bring their bodies down from the mountains. They were both buried in a shallow grave with part of the plane wreckage as a grave marker. The name "Dyck" was carved into a tree trunk as a marker for the grave site. Memorial services were held in many churches, including one in the Aberdeen MB church.

By the mid 1930s, the membership of the church was over 100. By 1960, however there were only 18 members left. There are a few factors that contributed to this decline. Just as immigration had earlier brought many new members to the Aberdeen church, in the forties and fifties emigration saw many members leave. Most of these people left for the warmer climates in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia or California. In the forties and fifties farm mechanization saw a drastic decline in the number of people needed to operate a farm. As people moved away, individual land holdings increased and as a result fewer people were needed to farm the land. Simply put, there were fewer people farming the same land. Children no longer needed to or were able to stay on the farm and as a result many left for other jobs in the city or elsewhere.

In an effort to revitalize the congregation, the church building was moved from its rural location into the town of Aberdeen sometime around 1958. This however did not stop the decline in membership and

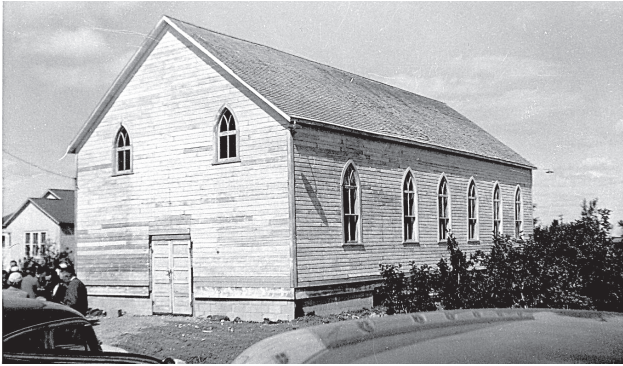
*At right:* Bible school at Ben Sawatzky's, 1939.

*Back row, from left:* Ben Sawatzky (teacher), Abe Krahn, Jack Sawatzky, Frank Sawatzky, Henry Fehr, Harry Sawatzky, Allan Sawatzky, Bernie Sawatzky.

*Front row:* Esther Sawatzky, Eva Sawatzky, Mary Letkeman, Mary Sawatzky.

Photo by student Henry Klein.





The church after it was moved into Aberdeen;  
photo taken about 1959

in 1960 the church closed. Many of the remaining 18 members joined MB churches in Saskatoon. The church was used in 1961 for two funerals: the funeral of Mrs. Henry H. Sawatzky was held in January and the last service to be held was the funeral of Mr. George K. Sawatzky, Wilmer's father. To my knowledge, he was also the last person to be buried in the church's rural cemetery.

Pastors in the church were: Gerhard J. Sawatzky (1906–1909), John P. Siemens (1909–1921), Henry G. Sawatzky (1921–1931), Ben L. Sawatzky (1932–1941), Johann Kruger (1942), H. W. Niessen (1943–1944), George K. Sawatzky (1945–1952), and Archie Kruger (1953–1960).

In 1964 the building was used for church services by the Aberdeen Mennonite Church. They were renovating their church and needed a suitable place to

hold their church services until their renovation was completed. After that the building was sold to the Plymouth Brethren who used it as a meeting hall for a number of years. Eventually Walter Kurmey bought the building and it was dismantled for the lumber.

The church cemetery is no longer in use. The cemetery itself was located some distance from the church building in order that it would be on higher ground. The cemetery is now marked with posts and chains and all the headstones have been moved to one location in the corner of the cemetery. A cairn has been erected with all the known names inscribed on it. There is also a plaque with this inscription on it: "This plaque is erected in loving memory of the early settlers of this district by the relatives of the Mennonite Brethren Church."

Although the church building itself is gone, the legacy of the people it served remains. From its humble beginnings in 1903, the seven families that brought their faith with them started an organization that flourished, saw many changes and fulfilled a vital role in the community it served. Although the building has been destroyed you cannot destroy the faith it inspired in so many people. Whether it be through personal witness, revival meetings, missions, or just solid family values, the Mennonite Brethren Church of Aberdeen has provided a legacy of Christian faith for the descendants of the many families that called it their home church for its 57 years. 🍁



## **Henry H. Funk, 1923 – 2010**



Photo courtesy of the Funk family

Henry was born on May 23, 1923 to Henry and Anna Funk at Rosenfeld, Manitoba. He was the fourth of six children. As a child he attended the Reichenbach country school, then went to Rosenfeld for Grades 9 to 11 and Altona for Grade 12. After completing high school Henry was called up for military service, but was granted conscientious-objector status and served three years of alternative service in a psychiatric hospital in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba. He continued to work for a time as a hospital orderly after the war ended.

Henry then felt the Lord's call, and in his baptism at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg he committed his life to Christian ministry. He began his studies at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, then transferred to the newly opened Canadian Mennonite Bible College and eventually attended the University of Manitoba. He obtained his Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Theology and Bachelor of Pedagogy degrees.

While studying at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Henry met Katherine Klippenstein, who would become his life partner. Henry and Katherine were

married on July 15, 1951 and together they had three children, Robert, Christine and Joanne, who greatly enriched their lives.

Henry's first ministry assignment was to help the Carman Mennonite congregation in Manitoba to organize and become a church. After six years of ministry there the family moved to Winnipeg to serve the St. Vital congregation and to teach in a high school. After six years in Winnipeg the call came from the Rosthern Junior College in Saskatchewan to be on staff there. Henry enjoyed the challenge of working with young people in a private residential school. However, after four and a half years, he followed his heart and returned to pastoral ministry again, this time to the nearby town of Waldheim. The family spent nine happy years in Waldheim, then moved to Drake, Saskatchewan, where Henry pastored for fourteen years, putting down deep roots, never to move again. Henry concluded his years of ministry by serving as Saskatchewan Conference Minister for the next three years.

Henry enjoyed his forty continuous years of church work. His strength was relating to people of all ages and vocations. He had the privilege of baptizing each of his children and officiating at their weddings as well as the wedding of his oldest granddaughter.

After retirement, Henry and Katherine spent four months in Mexico where Henry taught in a Mennonite Bible school. He also did pulpit ministry in the Bethany Church near Watrous for one year. His traveling consisted mainly of attending various conferences in Canada and the United States and camping at the same time; this became their family vacation time.


Henry lived a full life, giving freely of himself, his gifts, his time and his money for others. He touched many lives.

About five years ago Henry's mental capacity began to fade. Slowly his dementia increased and life became very difficult for him and his family. He moved to Lanihan Central Parkland Lodge on August 22, 2009. Although he was given compassionate care, he desperately longed to come home. He lost much weight and his physical health also failed during this time. God granted him an easy and peaceful death on September 11, 2010 in the arms of Katherine, his faithful wife of 59 years.

He leaves to cherish his memory, his three children and their families: Bob and Sylvia Funk and their children Garrett and Alanna; Chris and Vic Bergen and their children Malisa and Doug Thomas and Emily, Kade and Anwyn, Jesse and Heather Bergen and Ty, Mark, and Melissa Bergen; Joanne and Quinton Bartel and their children Dustin, James, Erica, and Mitchell. Remaining in Henry's extended family are one brother Ed (Hilda) Funk and two sisters-in-law: Teenie Funk and Margaret Funk; on Katherine's side of the family, in-laws Vic (Doreen) Klippenstein, Margaret (Herf) Telke, John (Marie) Klassen, Anne Andres, Grace (Robert) Toews. A celebration of his life was held on September 17 in North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, Saskatchewan.

— Compiled by Verner Friesen  
from information in the funeral bulletin

*Margaret Ewert of Drake, who appreciated Henry Funk as her pastor during his years in North Star Church, shares this tribute:*

Rev. Funk was a well-loved and respected pastor of the North Star church for fourteen years. He was soft-spoken; he didn't raise his voice very often. His sermons were well thought out and well delivered. He was a kind, gentle, faithful shepherd of his flock, willing to listen to what others had to say. He did a lot of reading, as his large library indicated, and he tried to keep in touch with what was going on in the larger church. He supported the work of the Conference on the provincial, Canadian and North American level, and faithfully attended Conference meetings as long as he could. Another parishioner made this comment: Henry frequently quoted the verse from Romans 8 that states "nothing will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord". 

## Addendum to the Laird Church History

*In the story of Laird church published in the last issue (July) of the Historian, two people who are important in the history of the church were inadvertently omitted by the authors. The following account, sent by Don Regier, is meant to rectify that omission. — Ed*

Rev. John Regier, Uncle John as so many called him in Tiefengrund, was the son of Anna and Peter Regier. He was born in Westpreussen, Prussia in 1881 and immigrated with his family to Gretna, Manitoba in 1893. The move was inspired by imposition of military conscription. In 1899, at the age of 19, he was baptized by his father and received into the Eigenheim Mennonite church. Already in his youth he felt the urge to labour for the Lord. In 1906 he married Erna Adrian. They raised a family of four boys and three girls while homesteading northwest of Laird. His ministry talents were soon recognized and in 1911, at the age of 30, he was elected to be a preacher for the Tiefengrund church. His work called him to the scattered Mennonite settlers across northern Saskatchewan, as many as 350 homes. Under his wing were also Horse Lake, Garthland, Wingard, and Laird, after his election as assistant elder to Bishop David Toews.


Because of his Biblical knowledge and humble and willing spirit, Rev. Regier was able, with the Lord's help, to bring many souls into the fold. He is in pictures of baptismal candidates in Laird Mennonite church for the years 1932, 1933, 1935, and 1938. In 1938 he per-

formed the ordination for preaching of Isaac I. Penner and Arthur Friesen at Laird.

When Bishop David Toews resigned in 1945, Rev. Regier became the sole leader of about 11 churches. His spiritual guidance was strong, as evidenced in the many baptisms, communions, and weddings he performed. In 1946, he and his wife moved to British Columbia for his wife's health.

George Dueck was born to Gertrude and John A. Dueck in 1921 in the Eigenheim district near Rosthern. He was baptized at the Eigenheim Mennonite church, where, in 1945, he married Luella Rickman. During the Second World War, he served as a conscientious objector in a meat plant in Moose Jaw.

His interest in the Lord's vineyard began when he helped Rev. H.T. Klassen produce a religious radio program called "Wings of the Morning". His hardware experience brought him to Laird together with his brother Art, to operate Dix Hardware. He immediately got involved in the community as councillor of Laird Village and later as administrator.

He and his wife were active in the Laird Mennonite church. He was elected deacon and later, chairperson. He was pastor of Laird Mennonite from 1971 to 1977. He and his wife later served as house parents in the Rosthern home for the aged. He died in 1986, at the young age of 65. He is buried in the Laird cemetery. 





## Mostly about Books

Victor G. Wiebe, Book Editor

Theron F. Schlabach. *War, Peace and Social Conscience: Guy F. Hershberger and Mennonite Ethics*. Herald Press, Scottdale, Pennsylvania & Waterloo, Ontario. (Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History #45). 2009. 723 pp. US\$39.99.

**Reviewed by Margaret Ewert.**

Guy Franklin Hershberger (1896–1989), the subject of this biography and critique, was born near Kalona in southeastern Iowa to Ephraim and Dorinda Hershberger, members of an Amish Mennonite Church. Guy began as a rural school teacher in 1915 at the age of 18, but after his marriage to Clara Hooley (also a teacher) in 1920, they both enrolled at Hesston College in Kansas. In the academic year 1923–1924 Guy taught Bible courses at Hesston, while Clara served as dean of women and taught a remedial class in algebra. The following year Guy attended the University of Iowa, where he received his MA in history in 1925. He then taught at Goshen College for a few years before going on to complete his PhD in Iowa in 1935.

Early in his career he became concerned with establishing an alternative service option for young men who might be of draft age, and when it became obvious that there was likely to be another war, he was instrumental in establishing the Civilian Public Service (CPS), which was organized in late 1941–42. For a time Guy was education

director at a CPS camp, and throughout the war he visited various camps.

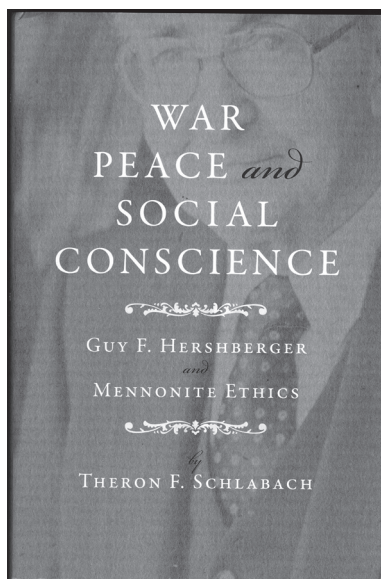
Hershberger's first book, *War, Peace and Nonresistance*, published in 1944, offered a Biblically pacifist way to think about social questions. "The great achievement of War Peace and Nonresistance was to offer a platform of biblical pacifism from which, sooner or later, Mennonites and others could move out to broader and broader social and political witness." (p. 118)

After the book went to print he wrote a great deal about establishing a Mennonite Mutual Aid organization. Early on his idea was to establish Mutual Aid to help returning CPS men. Schlabach says "Of all the legacies of Hershberger's Mennonite Community vision, Mennonite Mutual Aid was the major one, at least as a lasting, substantial, growing institution." (p. 265)

During his long term as professor at Goshen College he was a leader for integrating Christian faith and liberal arts education, particularly the social sciences. Hershberger emphasized that the church should let women help make important decisions, to put them on important boards and committees, and make ample use of their gifts — long before the women's movement began.

From the late 1950s and through the 1960s, the struggle for civil rights and the activities and thought of Martin Luther King Jr. influenced Hershberger profoundly and he worked hard to lead his church and to urge the government toward justice for African Americans. Martin Luther King Jr. actually spoke at Goshen College in March, 1960 and Hershberger attended King's funeral in 1968. Hershberger thought King's example should cause Mennonites to "take a thorough look at what we mean by nonresistance".

Theron Schlabach, writer of this voluminous treatment of Hershberger's life and work, is a scholar



trained in American social history. He is the author of books and articles in social welfare history and of Mennonite history and thought. From 1965 to 1998 he taught American history at Goshen College, where he began soon after Hershberger retired. Schlabach's book is a very detailed study of Hershberger's life and work, that also includes his own and others' critical comments, but one is left with the feeling that Hershberger was a man of integrity, a thorough worker who for the better part of his life tried to show how Mennonites should apply Christ's teachings in their daily lives.

One of the minor problems in the book is the frequent use of abbreviations; however, they are explained in two pages at the back of the book. The work is very well documented, with notes (pp. 523–644) and a bibliography (pp. 645–674), as well as an index. It is not a work that one will manage to read in one sitting.



Dirks, Sylvester. *The days were ordained for me: the autobiography and memoirs of Sylvester Dirks: pioneer missionary, pastor and Bible teacher*. Abbotsford, British Columbia. [Published by the author 314-2491 Gladwin Road, Abbotsford, B.C.] 2004. 219 pp. Cerlox binding, paper covers.

**Reviewed by Victor Wiebe.**


This book is just what the subtitle declares it to be — an autobiography by Sylvester Dirks, missionary, preacher, and Bible translator. He tells his story in a forthright and honest manner. In the foreword, he states that from 1941 on he kept a diary. This must have been a detailed recording of his daily activities, for this book, *The days were ordained for me* is full of names, places, and dates. These important details are often missing from autobiographies but here they add authenticity and even some drama to the text.

Sylvester Dirks (1916–2007) and his wife Matilda (Matty) nee Epp (1919–1997), from the prominent missionary family of Heinrich M. Epp, were both from the Salem Krimmer Mennonite Brethren Church, Waldheim, Saskatchewan. They served as missionaries to the Asháninka Original Americans

in the jungles of Peru for 21 years between 1946 and 1967, and then pastored in half a dozen Mennonite Brethren congregations in Saskatchewan, Kansas, Alberta, and British Columbia. Throughout his life Sylvester was a restless and irrepressible traveller. Apart from the family's two decades of mission work in Peru, the Dirks family never stayed anywhere long. Even in Peru, Sylvester was constantly travelling. In personality Sylvester Dirks was warmhearted, vigorous, and energetic. He exhibited great curiosity and often visited museums, zoos, and historic sites. Both Sylvester and Matilda had pioneering spirits and constantly improvised as needed. Sylvester reports on how he found great joy in meeting other Christians of any denomination anywhere in the world and relentlessly proclaimed Christ's good news to everyone he met.

The text uses 68 chapters, most of them about three pages long; this form works quite well. Sylvester enriched the text with many small photos. Though most have no caption I found that his text provided sufficient information to clearly interpret the content of the photos. The only improvements I might suggest is that adding a good map of Peru and perhaps of other places where Sylvester pastored would have enhanced the account. Also in a few places where Dirks gives events by day and month, I began wondering about the year. I found myself writing the year to the top of many pages to keep track of this information.

*The days were ordained for me* is a wonderfully written autobiography that is both interesting and very readable and should be read by those interested in Saskatchewan or Mennonite mission work.

Because this book was self published, it is hard to find. However, the University of Saskatchewan library has two copies (call number BV3705.D57 2004) and I have my own copy of the book, which interested readers could borrow. 



# The Family Tree

**Rosemary Slater, Genealogy Editor**

## **Janzens: from Tragedy in Russia to a New Life in Canada**

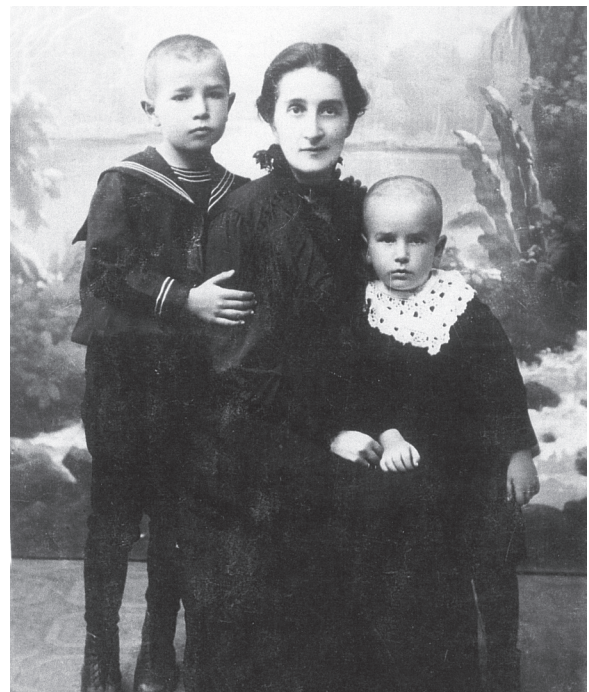
**By Evelyn Roden & Margie Koop, daughters of Henry Janzen**

Our Uncle Dick Janzen passed away in March 2010, in his 100th year. He was our father Henry's only brother and it saddened us to think of that generation being gone. Our father had died in May, 2003. Uncle Dick's death rekindled memories of what they had told us of their childhood experiences. We pondered the impact of these events; how they shaped and moulded the brothers' lives. There is no written record of the historic journey of the Janzens so we have only stories told and brought down through oral tradition. Those stories are what we have put together for this article.

Our paternal grandmother, Maria Friesen, was born in 1885. The Friesen family had built up a successful estate farm which employed up to 60 servants to help handle the huge cattle/land work and *Kindermädchen*, as needed, to care for children and household responsibilities. Sadly, though, Maria's mother died in the first year of Maria's life. Her grandmother cared for her until her father remarried nine years later. Her early days were spent in private schools, where she was educated and learned the art of decorative handwork. Life on this estate farm seemed very idyllic and likely would not have prepared her for the difficult years that lay ahead.

By 1907, Abram Janzen was a regular visitor at the Friesen farm, courting the eldest of the family and on April 21st, 1909, he and Maria were married. Maria received a dowry of 100 hectares, and this became the estate of Silberfeld. This land was lush and fertile so that gardens, orchards, and crops grew abundantly. Here they began their short married life together. Maria enjoyed her role as a wife and homemaker, while Abram tended the farm operations. In 1910, they were blessed with their first child, Abram, but their joy was short-lived when this wee baby developed diarrhea in the first months of his life. Maria did not have breast milk and she tried to nurture him with boiled cow's milk, but this wasn't successful, and the baby passed away. She again conceived and on March 6th, 1911, Uncle Dick was born. Again facing the prospect

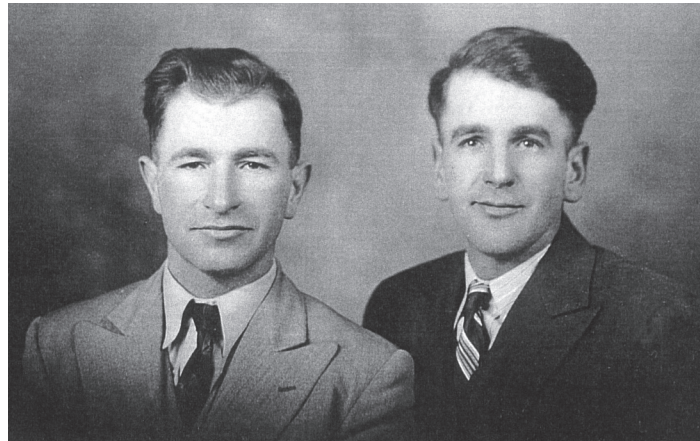
of an inability to nurse her infant, they hired a wet nurse (this is a woman who has just had a baby). Uncle Dick thrived with this nurturing but the wet nurse's baby died. Maria was overwhelmed with guilt related to her sense of inadequacy in her ability to nurture and feed her children. This was coupled with a sense of the injustice of the fact that because she had money, her child lived and the poor woman's baby died. She felt so trapped. What was she to do? After their third child Maria, was born in 1913, she again tried the



Maria Janzen with sons Dick (left) and Henry, taken in Russia about 1919. On the facing page, the grown-up brothers, with Dick at the left, in a studio photo taken about 1938. Photos courtesy of the authors.


cow's milk and they were drawn back into the horrific shadow of losing another child to diarrhea; her beautiful little daughter dead after one month of life on this earth. How does one move forward in almost impossible situations? But courage and hope continued to inspire them and on Feb. 14th, 1915, our dad, Henry,

was born. He was a small Valentine's baby. Seeing the challenges of this wee infant, they decided the best chance of the baby's survival rested with hiring a nursemaid. Thankfully, both babies survived in spite of our dad's frail health. He struggled with digestive problems and was near death at the age of one and a half. However, with love and nurture, both he and Uncle Dick grew into boyhood and eventually into manhood.



bags and to leave this house without taking anything or harming anyone. But hard times continued. Our dad's only memories of Russia were those of terror.

When the decision was made to try to leave Russia, this family wondered whether they would be among those who could leave. Both Dad and Uncle Dick had trachoma, a con-

tagious disease of the eyes. They tried everything to cure them. Our dad's eyes healed before the date they were scheduled to leave Russia, in 1924. As the day of departure drew near, many conflicts confronted the family. Uncle Dick would not be able to leave because of his eyes. What a decision for Grandma to make. We can't imagine the agony that she suffered with the thought of leaving her 12-year-old son behind in a war-torn country, not knowing if they would ever be reunited. One of Grandma's brothers and his wife, Uncle Dietrich and Tante Lena Friesen, decided they would stay behind, hoping that they could leave the next year. The scene at the Lichtenau Station was one of a family being torn apart. The two brothers needed to be forcibly pulled from each other's arms. Thankfully the families were reunited a year later, when Uncle Dick came with Uncle Dietrich and Tante Lena Friesen, but the agony of the separation took its toll on both mother and sons. It took great courage for Grandma to make the decisions that she had to make, decisions that felt almost unbearable at the time but that also created opportunities for a new life for her sons in a country that offered peace and freedom. Both Dad and Uncle Dick never stopped expressing gratitude for their life in Canada. The last words that we heard from Uncle Dick before his passing were, "We are so lucky to be in Canada!" 

Our grandfather, Abram Janzen, who had often struggled with asthma, had a severe attack and died in their home on Aug. 28th, 1917 at the age of 32. Dad and Uncle Dick were two and six. There was Grandmother, alone with two young sons, as the winds and clouds of revolution were storming in the horizon.

Suddenly everything around them was crumbling and the wonderfully rich and happy era of life as they had known it was coming to an abrupt end. The long reign of freedom of religion, self-government, happy family times, and prosperity ended, never to return. Those who were rich and owned large estates were the first to lose property and lives. Where there was bitterness and anger, people were murdered without mercy. The various factions of fighting revolutionaries created great confusion as one never knew who the attacking party was. Nestor Makhno, a long time anarchist/bandit created terror for the Mennonite people, as he gathered thousands of men who left behind them many trails of murder, rape, and pillage.

However, he too was once an innocent child who lived close to the farm where our grandfather, Abram Janzen, was a boy growing up. They were friends and spent many evenings playing together.

After our grandfather died and because of the unrest, the family had to leave the estate and move to Landskrone, a small village farm. There is a story that we have heard numerous times that Nestor Makhno and his men broke into their home. When Makhno realized that this was the widow and children of his old friend, Abram Janzen, he ordered his men to drop all the precious belongings they had already put in their



## The Back Page

### Honour List

This list recognizes persons who have made significant contributions towards preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. (The date in brackets is year of death.)

To add a name to the Honour List, nominate a person in writing.

For information on the members of the Honour List, see the web site: <http://mhss.sk.ca>

*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. Febr* (†2000)  
*Jake Febr*  
*Jacob E. Friesen* (†2007)  
*John D. Friesen* (†2004)  
*Jacob G. Guenter*  
*Gerhard Hiebert* (†1978)

*Katherine Hooge* (†2001)  
*Abram G. Janzen*  
*John J. Janzen* (†2004)  
*George Krahn* (†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*  
*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 web site:* <http://www.mhss.sk.ca>

*Cemeteries web site:*

<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~skmhss/>

*Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:*

[GAMEO.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online](http://GAMEO.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online)

### Electronic Bulletin Board

MHSS-E-Update@mhss.sk.ca

Use this electronic bulletin board to post information on upcoming events, programs, and activities, and other information that will be useful to everyone interested in Mennonite history, culture, or religion.

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Please make cheques payable to: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan or MHSS.

Memberships are \$30 for one year; \$55 for two years; \$75 for three years.

Gift subscriptions are available.

Membership fees and donations to the Society are eligible for tax receipts.

### Send Us Your Stories

Readers are invited to submit news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc., to be considered for publication. Send them to us at the e-mail or street address given at right.

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