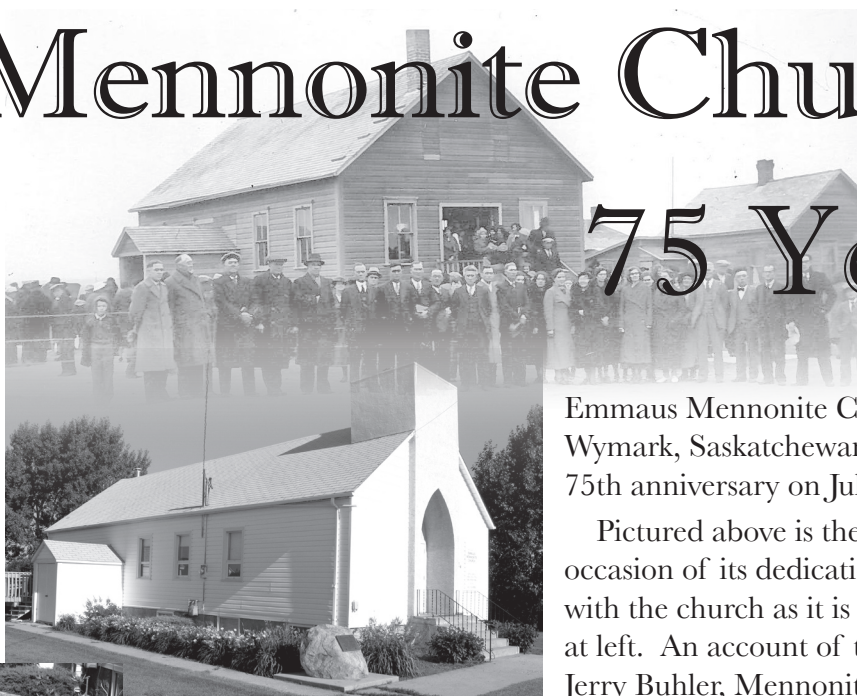


Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

*Official periodical of the
Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Inc.*
Volume XIX No. 1 2013

Emmaus Mennonite Church 75 Years



Emmaus Mennonite Church of Wymark, Saskatchewan celebrated its 75th anniversary on July 29th, 2012.

Pictured above is the church on the occasion of its dedication in 1938, with the church as it is today pictured at left. An account of the event, by Jerry Buhler, Mennonite Church Saskatchewan area minister, follows:

Photos this page courtesy of Lorna Wiens

A lovely sun and refreshing wind matched the celebrative spirit at Emmaus Mennonite Church in Wymark, Saskatchewan, as people gathered to mark the church's seventy-five-year anniversary. Visitors outnumbered the local congregants in both the morning and afternoon worship services. Between the two services, those in attendance enjoyed



Continued on page 4

≡ CONTENTS ≡

Emmaus Church 75th Anniversary, by J. Buhler & L. Wiens	1	Nick Peters, Dam Builder & Problem Solver, by A. Peters	12	First Mennonite in Russia, by V. Wiebe	17
Teaching in a Hutterite Colony, by L. Kroeger	8	MB Herald goes digital	16	Book reviews: <i>Zwieback Trail</i> ; <i>Päpä Nüt</i>	18
		MHSCanada AGM 2013 report	16	MHSSask AGM 2013 report	20
				Closed Churches & Camps	23

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

Volume XIX No. 1 2013

Published three times a year by the Mennonite
Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS)

Editor: Victoria Neufeldt

Advisory Committee: Esther Patkau, Jake Buhler

Pictures Editor: Helen Fast

Proofreader: Verner Friesen

Columns:

Book Page & Archives Page: Victor Wiebe
contact info: 934-8125 victor.wiebe@usask.ca

Genealogy Page: Rosemary Slater
contact info: 955-3759 r.slater@sasktel.net

Distribution: Erna & Elmer Neufeld

Mailing list: Hilda Voth

Printer: University of Saskatchewan Printing Services

Readers are invited to submit news items, stories,
articles, photographs, church histories, etc. to MHSS at
the e-mail or street address below. For material related
to either the book or genealogy page, please contact the
respective editors; see above for contact information.

MHSS Office and Archives:

110 La Ronge Road, Room 900

Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8

Tel: 306-242-6105

E-mail: mhss@sasktel.net

Archives hours:

Monday, 1:30–4 p.m.

Wednesday, 1:30–4 p.m., 7–9 p.m.

Erratum

Previous issue (2012 #1, page 8, right column, near
the bottom: the Red Gate marked the border be-
tween Russia and Latvia, not Russia and Germany.
Our apologies for the brief brain lapse.

From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt



Well, the year 2013 has started out all right, in that
we have already produced one issue of the *Historian*.
Again, we are grateful for the story ideas that the peo-
ple have come up with, to delight the readers of this
magazine. We are also grateful for the authors' willing-
ness to deal with the various stages of editing and their
patience with yet another call or e-mail from the editor,
asking for another detail or verification of a spelling!

For this issue, we have the celebration of another
milestone church anniversary to report on. Our con-
gratulations to Emmaus Church in southern Saskatch-
ewan for 75 years of faithfulness.

Two other very different but memorable stories
are about a rewarding teaching career on a Hutterite
colony in Saskatchewan and about a man of quite
remarkable creative gifts and skills, who used them not
only in his chosen profession of civil engineer, but also
in his personal life.

This issue also contains a report on the annual
general meeting of MHSS, which featured excellent
presentations, as well as the regular business meeting.

We wish you all a pleasant read.



MHSS Board of Directors, 2012

Jake Buhler, President

836 Main Street

Saskatoon, SK S7H 0K3

Tel.: 244-1392 jakelouisebuhler@sasktel.net

Dick Braun, Vice President

Box 184, Osler, SK S0K 3A0

Tel: 239-4765

dkbraun@yahoo.com

Vera Falk, Secretary/MC Sask Archivist

Box 251, Dundurn, SK S0K 1K0

Tel: 492-4731 Fax: 492-4731

Elmer Regier, Treasurer

142 Haight Street

Saskatoon, SK S7H 4V9

Tel: 373-0606 earegier@sasktel.net

Kathy Boldt, Volunteer Coordinator

Box 152, RR #4

Saskatoon, SK S7K 3J7

Tel: 239-4742

Susan Braun

Box 281, Osler, SK S0K 3A0

Tel: 239-4201

Leonard Doell

Box 364, Aberdeen, SK S0K 0A0

Tel: 253-4419 ldoell@mccs.org

James Friesen

Box 381, Rosthern, SK S0K 3R0

Tel: 232-4977 jamesfriesen@sasktel.net

Elizabeth Guenther

18 – 130 LaRonge Rd

Saskatoon, SK S7K 8E5

Tel: 979-0605 candeguenther@shaw.ca

Erna Neufeld

222 – 305 Pinehouse Drive

Saskatoon, SK S7K 7Z4

Tel: 975-0554 cwn.esn@sasktel.net

Other Positions

Archives Committee: Kathy Boldt, Vera Falk, Helen Fast, Elizabeth Guenther, Rosemary Slater, Hilda Voth

Cemeteries Project — Helen Fast, coordinator

Tel: 242-5448 rhfastlane@shaw.ca

Cemeteries Project web site — Al Mierau, webmaster

almierau@shaw.ca

MHSS web site — Ruth Friesen, webmaster

MHSS President's Corner

By Jake Buhler




The Plains Conservative Mennonite Church is known informally as the “Whitecaps” church. The nickname is given because women members wear prayer caps. Our historical society at its March annual meeting took an in-depth look at this Mennonite conference that has just two churches in Saskatchewan but 40 churches scattered throughout North America. We are grateful to Chester Steiner and his group of two dozen friends who spoke and sang for us.

Our objective over the past years to highlight Saskatchewan Mennonite conferences has included Old Colony Mennonites, Bergthaler Mennonites, the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church, the Mennonite Brethren Church, and now, the Plains Conservative Mennonite Church. Mennonites are indeed a people with many ways to express the good news of Jesus Christ.

Dr. Walter Klaassen in his one-hour lecture on the 16th-century Anabaptist Pilgram Marpeck, pointed out that he was one of the first to teach that Jesus had both human and God-like qualities. To this day Mennonites see the four Gospels as central books in their faith expression.

Esther Patkau provided a very fine one-hour in-service by teaching us how to write church histories as well as how to write biographies.

The archives expansion is well under way. We hope to have the grand opening later in 2013. 

Emmaus: continued from page 1

The tent, as set up for the afternoon service

an extra plenteous potluck meal that well represented the warm hospitality of the congregation.

Using imagery from the story of the Exodus journey, Jerry Buhler encouraged the congregation that it is “the dwelling place of God in this neighbourhood... evidence in this neighbourhood, that God is with us.”

The afternoon service was held outside under the shade of tents supplied by Camp Elim. Congregational chair Lorna Wiens offered an inspiring account of the early formation of Emmaus, and former pastor Fred Heese reflected on his experience of the accepting nature of the congregation. Co-pastor Ray Friesen told the story of the Emmaus road as a children’s feature and then addressed the theme, “We’ve only just begun,” in a sermon. The afternoon service included music from a trio of accordions.

Following the afternoon service, a quilt, created by the women’s group in 1969, was auctioned off. The celebration ended with coffee and dessert.



— Jerry Buhler

All photos on this page by Jerry Buhler



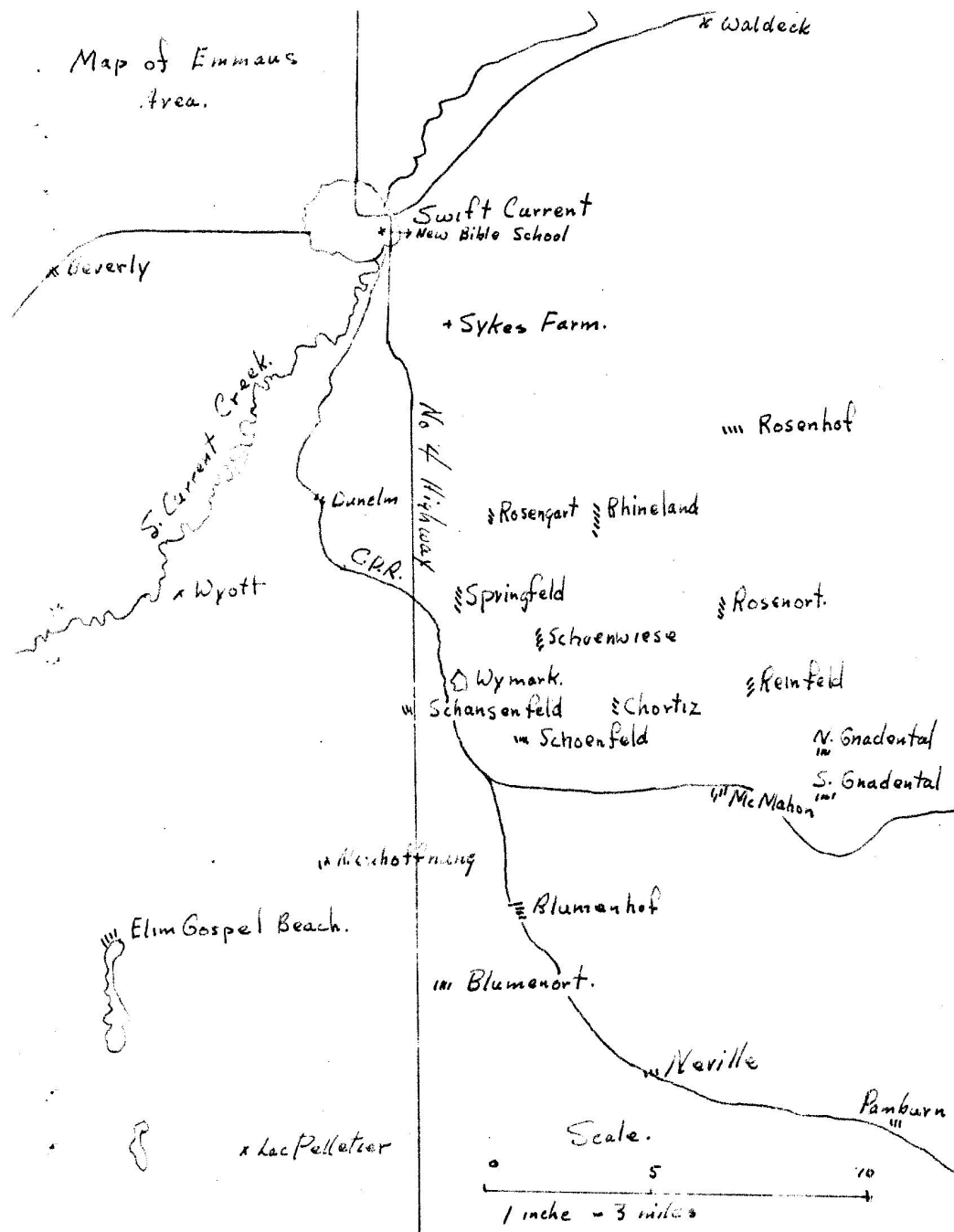
History of Emmaus Church, 1937–2012, by Lorna Wiens

In 1900, a group of Mennonites from the Sommerfeld and Old Colony settlements in Manitoba and central Saskatchewan founded a reserve south of Swift Current and began settling here. Originally, the settlement consisted of at least 15 villages, the majority being the Old Colony Mennonites.

The first Mennonites emigrated from Manitoba primarily because the English language was threat-

ening to become compulsory in their school system. They saw the assimilation of this language as the first in a series of influences in Canada which would endanger their faith and way of life. The movement from Manitoba to Saskatchewan would be considered their protest.

In 1916, school attendance became compulsory in Manitoba and in 1922, Saskatchewan passed an act



Map of the Emmaus area, from "The history of the Emmaus Mennonite Church of Swift Current and South," by H.S. Bender, 1961

requiring the use of English in schools. Many Mennonites saw this as being the writing on the wall. In their minds, what had happened in Russia was about to happen again. Delegations were sent to South America and Mexico to look for new land. Success was found in Mexico, where the president guaranteed military exemption and complete religious freedom. In 1922, about 1,000, mostly Old-Colony, Mennonites left for Mexico. All of their ministers went with them.

From this point, the few remaining Old Colony Mennonites did not retain their separate identity, but joined the Sommerfelders.

The General Conference Mennonite Church was organized in 1902. The first minister they sent out to serve this area was a Rev. Epp. He covered Swift Current, Neidpath, Neville, Blumenhof, Wymark, and Goultdown, where Mennonites were located. Services were held about once a year in private homes.

In 1916, the first meeting house was built near Neville, which was later called Pella.

Visits from the General Conference ministers gradually increased to twice yearly. One minister reported back to Conference that he was concerned because the families were so scattered and the solidarity of the Russian setting was lost in the new environment.

He suggested the Conference should keep itself informed and pray much. Workers should be designated for the various areas and the people organized into congregations, and financial aid should be given to these churches to help them get started.

This concern, hard work, and numerous visits resulted in the organization of the Emmaus Church in Blumenhof in 1928. In 1929, the Emmaus Mennonite Church of Swift Current and South was founded.

Overall, this was a large area to service. One winter Sunday in particular, the Blumenhof minister, Rev. Isaac Wiens, walked 18 miles for a morning worship service and back to his home church for a service in the evening. On another Sunday he had two regular services with a wedding and a funeral sandwiched in between.

In 1923, another conference pastor, Rev. Benjamin Ewert, was appointed to visit scattered families. News of his coming always created joyful anticipation.

Farmers would often leave pressing work to attend a weekday service when they had this rare opportunity.

By 1931, there were several stations in the Swift Current area under the direction of Rev. Wiens, including Wymark, Blumenhof, Neville, and McMahon. The entire area was known as Emmaus Church. At one point in time, there were also sister churches in Gull Lake, Tompkins, and Cabri.

In 1936, in the midst of the Depression and unemployment, the Swift Current Bible School was opened under the authority of a board made up of Emmaus Church people. Financial aid and some teachers came from the Conference.

In Wymark's early years, the school boards of the day made every effort to hire teachers who also had an interest in promoting the word of God and a heart for doing church work. Valentine Nickel was one such hire in 1929. The growth of the church in Wymark can be directly attributed to his efforts and leadership. He held services in the school almost from the beginning of his stay there. In July, 1938, Mr. Nickel was elected as minister by the Emmaus Church in Wymark.

That same year, the Emmaus church building was constructed in Wymark. The basement was dug by hand, using a scoop and two horses. The records show Peter Sommerfeld and the brothers John and Pete Braun as being initiators and involved with the construction. Non-church community people were also involved with the construction, because they too thought it would be good to have a church in the town.

Around 1940, summer activities such as daily vacation Bible school, camps, and retreats became one of the greatest missionary arms of the church, especially in Sommerfelder and non-Mennonite communities. Various locations like "the seventeen-mile bridge" and "Gowan's Grove" were rented for these activities, until in 1945 the land known as Elim Gospel Beach at Lac Pelletier was purchased by Emmaus Church. Thus, they would have a permanent location, which remains to this day and has become a year-round operation.

In 1942, Rev. Hans Dyck was called to the Swift Current area. It was thought that he understood the needs of the church very well and he is quoted as saying, "The very life of our church depends on the theme, Youth."

Now, this is where it gets really interesting.

From the interviews I held with church attenders of the day, I learned that Rev. Hans Dyck was a very colourful man. However, as much as he was for youth, he was also quoted as saying the following:

Schools are teaching pernicious philosophy, disrespect for settled opinions is prevalent. All that a teacher can do is supervise the self-expression of the student and this has resulted in self-pleasing, self-exalting and self-asserting attitudes, which are carried over to the spiritual realm where all want to be free without shouldering responsibility.

In spite of Rev. Dyck's strong words on where the world and church were headed, he was also of the mind that the church was to "face the facts squarely with courage and vision, making adjustments and adopting new methods where necessary, even if they cut clean across lines of tradition."

During the years 1940–1950, some people recall that the word "Mennonite" was almost never mentioned and the reason given was that it hindered the church's witness. It was also during the forties that church services transitioned away from the German language in order to be more inclusive of others.

I believe in later years we have taken on a new pride in the name as we do our part to make the word "Mennonite" synonymous with world-wide peace and justice.

Emmaus Church in Wymark served the larger community early on in her life. During the Second World War, in this very church basement, the men and women of Emmaus canned meat that was sent overseas to feed people suffering from the war, who were hungry and homeless.

The women of the church formed a mission club and raised funds in a variety of ways to be a support to God's missions away from home.

A note of interest is that rarely is any woman's name mentioned in historical print as being part of or helpful in the development of the whole Emmaus Church.

However, deserving of special memory among the long-term members of Emmaus is Ann Quiring. Ann was a very devout and creative woman who travelled out weekly by train from Swift Current to the communities of Wymark and McMahon.

In the fifties, tensions began to build in parts of the whole Emmaus Church. Primarily, this happened as it would in any family. As each church station grew, they needed their autonomy to make relevant decisions for their different mindsets and locations. One by one, churches left to go their own way. Eventually, this left only the church in Wymark to bear the original name of Emmaus.

Emmaus has had its share of successes and failures. Its roots were in a frontier situation. People did their very best with the knowledge they had at the time. There was never a great master plan; the people proceeded by experimentation, continually seeking God's guidance.


To sum up: if these walls could talk they would tell you that in 75 years,

- Emmaus has been served by 12 regular ministers or minister couples
- over 70 families have been connected to Emmaus by more than just a brief encounter
- at least 375 people have sat on these benches as part of someone's family
- there was a time when chairs had to be set in the aisles to accommodate the crowd
- there have been approximately 73 Christmas concerts and 66 Sunday school picnics
- there have been events of every kind: weddings, funerals, anniversaries, dedications, and baptisms

These walls would tell you that although God's word has not changed, he has allowed our interpretation to evolve in order to be relevant to the times we live in and to meet the ever changing needs of the people.

Church is not somber and heavy as it once was. Emmaus Church invites us to come together to discern the word of God and then to live out these findings in our everyday lives.

What I know for certain is that Mennonites could always sing and now we can dance with lightness in our hearts.

Condensed from Lorna Wiens' presentation at the afternoon anniversary service; her chief historical source was "The History of the Emmaus Mennonite Church of Swift Current and South," by H.S. Bender, 1961 — Ed 

Teaching in a Hutterite Colony

By Laura Kroeger

My first morning at Hillcrest Colony School near Dundurn, Saskatchewan: I walk into the classroom shortly before 9 a.m. The German-school teacher has his back to me, writing on the blackboard, which reaches across the entire north wall. I proceed into the room along the aisle between church pews to the children's desks at the front. About ten students, mostly kerchiefed girls, turn while I smile a greeting. The teacher turns as well and asks, "Do you know what these are?" pointing to the beautifully lettered German Gothic script alphabet in the left hand corner. I reply, "Yes, the German alphabet. My father taught it to me before I learned the English." Right answer!

The children were near the end of their morning German study when I arrived that morning; their routine was to come to German school shortly after their breakfast to recite their Bible verses. Another verse would be assigned for the coming evening. A short recess allowed time for them to run home for a snack and to prepare another snack for midmorning recess. Then back to English school at 9 o'clock.

I learned there were seven students: a grade eight girl, two boys in grade six, two girls in grade five, one in grade four, and one in grade three. Three of the girls and one boy were siblings. The youngest in that family, a girl aged five, was lonely at home and at a loss. So she entered school a few days later, bringing the enrolment to eight students.

That first morning, we spent a few minutes introducing ourselves. It was January, 1970. Hillcrest was a new colony, which had branched out from Leask Colony and was just now getting organized. The students had a few texts and exercise books which they had used at the school in the previous colony, but they had not been attending school for some time, as they had planned to come to school at Hillcrest much earlier in the school year.

I had stopped teaching full-time when I got married about 10 years earlier. During those 10 years I had been a substitute teacher in the Saskatoon East School Division, teaching all grades, from kindergarten to grade 12, in urban and rural schools. I had wanted

to get back to full-time teaching and had applied to Hillcrest Colony, which was located near our farm. I was hired in September of 1969 but the school was not established until the following January.

On this, my first day at the school, I got out the school-division register and entered the name, age, and grade of each student. Following this, I asked if there were any questions. The first was of obvious importance. Would they be able to complete their grades by June, in spite of the school days they had missed? I replied that I had no idea, as I didn't know the school-unit regulations regarding absenteeism, or what work they had covered, or their abilities. Other than that, as far as I was concerned, it would depend on how hard they worked. These students wanted to keep up with those in their respective classes at the earlier colony. As it turned out, they worked diligently and made their grade!

Girls at the colony leave school at age 15, boys at age 16. Sometimes these students do not attend past their birthday. However, these Hillcrest children had missed so much of the school year that they attended till the end of June.

This enthusiasm and industry set the tone for the following years. Beginning that first year, the children and I planned many interesting and even exciting events for the months preceding the summer break. The children and I always worked together.



Pupils in the classroom in the 1970s; the classroom was also the worship centre

Photos by Laura Kroeger, except as noted

Enrolment increased in coming years with the advent of more five-year-olds. I had set a precedent, teaching kindergarten. This proved an advantage to the younger students and me. The students learned English as they recited nursery rhymes, learned songs, and listened to English stories. The older children practised English as they helped the younger ones, by teaching reading, recitation, singing, the alphabet, and more.

Five years later, I acquired a part-time unofficial teaching assistant. This was Ruth, a student who had finished grade eight and stayed on to help me. She



Ruth, Laura's unofficial assistant teacher, and Laura; photo taken on a class field trip to Batoche in the 1980s

Photo courtesy of Laura Kroeger

spent as much time as she could at school, while keeping up with her colony duties.

A natural teacher, Ruth was asked to be the teacher's assistant at the colony into which she married a few years later. She considered it seriously, but decided to remain a part of the women's working group on the colony.

The numbers completing grade nine correspondence classes increased and the number of primary students rose. By the mid 1980s, enrolment was up to the mid 20s. Saskatoon East School Division assigned a teaching assistant to Hillcrest. She was Joan Falk,

whose background was partly British. Our superintendent, who called most often on "steak" days, when we had steak for noon lunch, was amused when he detected a faint English accent in the English the students had picked up from Joan.

The way the Hillcrest Colony school day was arranged, Joan of necessity learned much about how to teach. She was enrolled in education classes at the University of Saskatchewan, where she attained a teaching degree and in addition the well deserved and prestigious Bates Award for Excellence in Student Teaching.

One year, I was invited to apply for a national weekend institute in Thunder Bay for teachers in "unique situations". It was a wonderful experience! My students did a fabulous job of preparing a box of things for me to take along, including a history they had written of the colony, dolls they had dressed in clothing worn by boys and girls on the colony, and a variety of colony artifacts. With all this material that the children had worked so hard to prepare, Hillcrest and I stole the show!

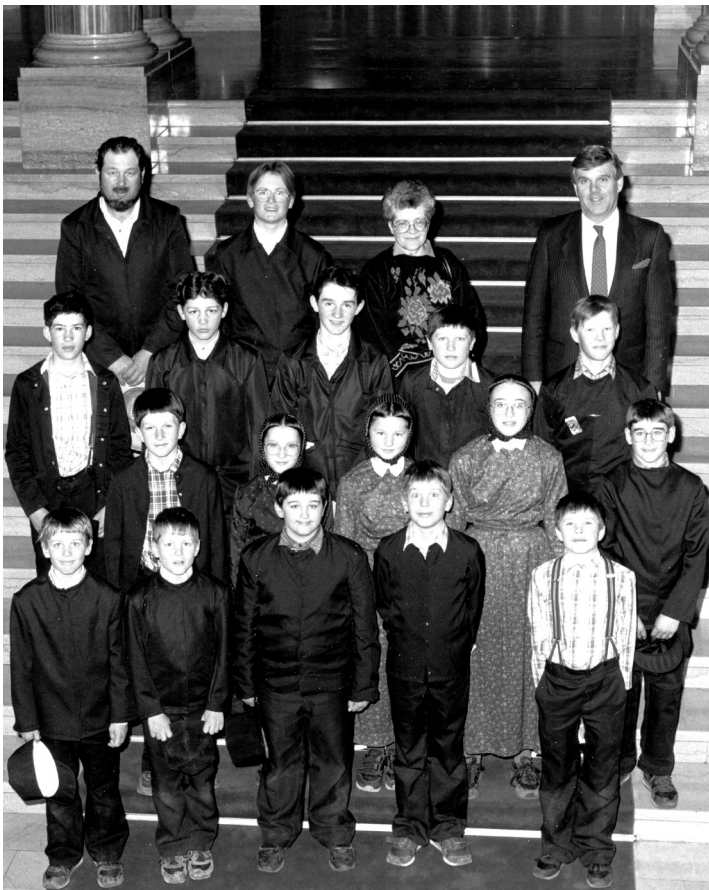
It was around this time, in the 1980s, that the province moved to the "whole language" method of teaching reading, as well as adopting a number of "new" learning techniques and, for the school division staff, introducing the planning of teaching units by theme. Ruth was still a valuable asset to our school body. Joan Falk and I attended all the introductions to these new approaches to teaching that were put on by the school division. We were enrolled in education classes at the University of Saskatchewan and we implemented many of the ideas suggested there. I was careful to inform the German-school teacher of these innovations. He was in charge of the children's education on the colony and I felt he needed to know what was happening in the school. He looked unimpressed, saying that many of these methods were not totally unfamiliar.

An example of the new approach was the planning of a unit of work around a theme. I felt the introduction of the theme — providing reading material on the topic for all levels, brainstorming questions which arose, and having the children be a part of the planning of the unit of study — was an effective method. Grouping the children for cooperative learning was a new process which needed careful planning and was seen by the children as a new method to be tried (after all this was English school!); but although it was an

effective method, it was not that efficient, being very time consuming.

The children were grouped to include members of each grade level in each group. They would be given words and phrases to learn as facts about the topic assigned. Their questions, which they chose themselves, needed to be answered, and the sources of this information documented. Each student had to be able to perform these assignments as appropriate for his or her level. Considerable preparation time on the part of the teacher and the students was necessary, and was a part of the learning objective. The groups were graded as groups and as individuals. The older students had a rather hard time accepting the grading as a group, but it taught them to work cooperatively in school. A party, with parents invited, completed the theme. The children planned the presentation of the study. By then the parents had been involved as well and were pleased to attend.

I loved this way of teaching — they were learning so much! And we learned much as teachers, as well. While we didn't run out of ideas for a theme, as a rule, we learned to limit the time frame to about a month.



The units worked best for social studies or science themes, although book studies were popular as well.

During my first years at Hillcrest, there were many visitors to the colony. Hillcrest was the first colony in the area and as more persons became aware that visitors were provided with lunch and a tour, visits became popular. And the visits started at our school! We learned to prepare: assigning older students to welcome the tourists, asking the visitors questions, fielding their questions and, when the visitors left, assessing our welcome and introduction and how well we had answered the visitors' queries. I felt it was an excellent opportunity for the students to practise being gracious hosts, to practise English, and to prepare questions for the guests. Some of these could be related to a current theme study. The children learned to tell the history of Hutterites.

One morning we were informed that the premier of the province, Grant Devine, was planning to visit the colony that morning. We had been alerted that, as usual with colony visitors, he would begin his visit at the school. The children were excited and instead of settling down to the regular order of classes, we brainstormed questions we would like to ask the premier of our province. We had followed the local paper and the newscasts so the children had no problem. It was necessary to pick a few from the many questions they came up with. The children were to choose which of the brainstormed questions would be asked. One that was chosen was, "How do you feel when you hear yourself criticised on the news?" His answer was, "I don't mind for myself but I feel sorry for my family, to have them put up with this." Since his visit was a campaign stop, another question was, "If you aren't elected, what do you plan to do?" The answer came without hesitation: "Go on a long holiday on a boat!"

There were many more questions from the adults, and he stayed for the noon meal. His group continued on to Hanley, where he told of the excellent questions the colony children had asked!

When I was first offered the teaching position at the colony I was told I was considered because I was familiar with the German language, had experience teaching in a multi-graded classroom, had substitute

The school on a field trip to the Saskatchewan legislature in 1987; Laura is in the back row, next to MLA Ray Micklejohn; at left, back row, is the colony chauffeur
Photo courtesy of Laura Kroeger



Joan Falk in the classroom

taught in various grades in the Saskatoon East School Division for many years, and was familiar with the new provincial curriculum.

The last half hour of the school day was devoted to stories, poems, and songs in both English and German. I found the informal learning that happened during this time was valuable. The children told of their choice

of reading material, asked about words and phrases, as they were describing the stories, in both languages. Much translation occurred. Both the German-school teacher and I were pleased with the language education happening. Word of this reached the school-district office and at a school-board meeting it was agreed that this was to be discouraged; after all, I had been hired to teach English, not German! The superintendent was to inform me of the decision. Both the superintendent and I were disappointed, as we felt it was a valuable learning time of day, enjoyed by all.

There were conventions held in the province with teachers from more than one division meeting together. English teachers on colonies would gather as a group at these meetings. As we became acquainted, we soon understood our teaching situation was in many ways unique: English as a second language, often limited resources, children who had limited sports facilities, often an enthusiastic German-school teacher. Most challenging were curricula designed for individual grades that had to be applied to multiple grades. We agreed we would benefit more if we English teachers on colonies met as a group. A planning meeting was set up, including the ministers and German teachers from the colonies, who agreed to become a part of the association. They suggested what arrangements might prove helpful for both the English and German teachers in the classroom. The German-school teachers also attended the meetings as a group when the annual Saskatchewan Hutterian Educators' Association (SHEA) met! It proved of benefit to all concerned.

In 1993, after 23 years as a teacher at Hillcrest, I retired from classroom teaching. SHEA had agreed that

our experience as teachers needed to be written up to assist new teachers on colonies. I knew I required the discipline of the university to manage this and enrolled to do the work as a thesis. My mentor suggested that describing the combined work of the consultant of our school division, my teaching assistant, and myself in a multi-grade situation would be of most value to the field of education as a thesis. As one of the founding members of SHEA, I was aware of how helpful a concise reference for new English teachers in Hutterite schools might be. Two publications became a part of my two years' work at the University of Saskatchewan, titled, respectively, *Planning Thematic Units of Study* (published by the University of Saskatchewan) and *The Theme is Community* (published by SHEA).

Planning Thematic Units of Study became a part of every intern's preparation materials at the University of Saskatchewan's College of Education for many years. *The Theme is Community* was given to each English teacher on a colony and each intern attending a practicum at a colony school.

SHEA conventions became an annual meeting place for both German and English teachers on colonies. Manitoba and Alberta teachers of colony schools, even some from the United States, arranged their assigned professional days to attend. Eventually, provincial associations modelled on SHEA were formed. One of the major advantages resulting was the communication among the school-division administration, the English and German teachers, and even the provincial colleges of education!

Those of us who planned and initiated this interaction and cooperation in colony children's education feel gratified with its continuing success.



School children playing on the colony's frozen dugout



Nick Peters: Dam Builder and Problem Solver Extraordinaire

By Agnes Peters

Nick Peters was a civil engineer whose entire career was with the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA). Once, when some of the men who worked under Nick were talking to me about him, one of them said, "Nick is a real bugger, but a fair one." I took that as a compliment.

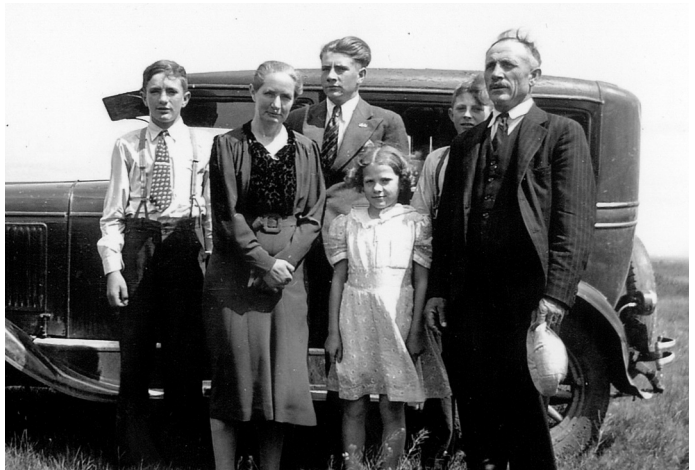
His coming into this world was very special for his parents. After the hardship of losing their first-born to meningitis on the train out of Russia in the summer of 1923 and then being detained in Lechfeld, Germany because of trachoma, Nicolai and Sarah (Klassen) Peters finally arrived in Canada in January, 1924. A few months later, they landed on a farm near Hanley, amid extended family. On October 22, 1924, Nickolai was born.

They had come to Canada with nothing, as did many others, but were happy to be in a free country. Nick's parents worked hard and created a wonderful home for him and the three other children who were born to them.

Nick attended Sheldon School. He was a good student, who loved to learn and was fascinated with books.

The 1930s were, of course, difficult years. Nick recalled walking over the parched fields with his father and expressing his dream to someday see water for these fields in the form of irrigation.

It was also in the 1930s that his father had a breakdown and was hospitalized for several months. Nick, at thirteen years of age, had to take on the role of "man" on the farm. One night during that spring, he and his mother heard water running into the cellar from the overflowing creek. They frantically carried sacks of potatoes and other vegetables, plus all the jars of canned goods, up the stairs before the cellar filled with water. Actually, the entire yard was under water so he had to look after the animals too. Spring seedling was also his job that year. He developed a great sense of responsibility through this experience. (He



The Peters family in 1942, posing with their first car, on the occasion of Nick's graduation from the German-English Academy

From left: Edward, Sarah, Nick, Elfriede Henry, Nicolai

All photos courtesy of Agnes Peters

got the reputation among the adults that he was always so *jescheit*, so sensible, which he didn't really like.)

After he finished grade 10 in Sheldon school (the last two years by correspondence), he begged his parents to let him go to the German-English Academy in Rosthern. Money was scarce and they didn't know how they would pay for it, but eventually he managed to persuade them to let him go. It was a great experience for him.

Although he wanted to become an engineer, he opted instead to go to normal school to become a teacher, because it would take only one year.

He started normal school in the fall of 1942. His practice teaching took place in King George School. (Gordie Howe and Helmut Dueck were two of the students in the class.) Here he got the reputation for being a good disciplinarian. After Christmas break at normal school, he was called into the principal's office and was told they were sending him up north to White Poplar School near Veillardville, just west of Hudson Bay Junction (now Hudson Bay) to teach. There were 54 students, grades one to nine, in a one-



Nick, *right*, in his RCN uniform, with his cousin John Riediger, who was in the RCAF, in Vancouver about 1943

room school, who needed a teacher who could keep discipline. It was very hard work.

They hired him back in the fall but when his call came for military duty, he thought anything would be easier than what he was doing, so he joined the navy. (He found out training was hard too and war was insanity.)

He served in the navy for 22 months, in both the Atlantic and Pacific oceans. At war's end his discharge came quickly, because he had expressed interest in attending university. He enrolled in the college of engineering at the University of Saskatchewan and graduated as a civil engineer in 1949.

I met him at a party after *Gemeinde Fest* (the congregational picnic held each summer at Blackstrap by the Nordheimer churches) when he had finished his first year of engineering.

While at the university, he got summer jobs with the PFRA and spent each summer at the St. Mary River dam project in southern Alberta. This was the first of several big irrigation projects undertaken by the PFRA. (Many letters went back and forth between Dundurn and Spring Coulee, Alberta.)

After the St. Mary dam was completed, the plan was to dam off the Bow River next. Nick was put in charge of both the pre-drilling, to find the best location for the dam, and the test installations for what became the Travers Dam. The test installation involved placing instruments deep into the ground to test the stability of the dam structure as the construction progressed.

While our wedding plans were being made for July 29, 1950, he was in Champion, Alberta, north of

Lethbridge, with his test-pit crew, looking for the most suitable location for the dam. He had strict orders not to leave there before the drill arrived. He finally disobeyed orders and came to Saskatchewan on July 26th. (You can imagine what his absence did for the reading of the wedding banns and the pre-nuptial medicals.) The drill only left for Alberta when we did, after our honeymoon.

Traverse Dam was completed in 1954. In the fall of that year we moved to Saskatoon. By then we had our first son, who was almost two years old.

The next project he worked on was the Gardiner Dam in southern Saskatchewan. It was a huge project, built for both hydro and irrigation. He was again in charge of the test installations.

Eventually he became chief of the geotechnical division of PFRA, in the Saskatoon office.

This position involved some travel. In 1971, he travelled to Tanzania for the Canadian International Development Agency. They were looking for drinking



Top: Nick with son Gerald at Travers Dam in 1954

Bottom: Nick at entrance to Travers Dam resort in the early 1980s

water for the villages. In 1982 he went to Bangladesh to check out the possibility of building a dam on the Feni River to keep out the salty sea water at high tide. The dam was eventually built by hand — thousands of Bangladeshis carried the soil in buckets on their heads. They were paid one dollar a day.

Nick retired from PFRA in 1984 and spent the next few years consulting.

He was very involved with the church, especially Nutana Park Mennonite Church, of which we are charter members. He was frequently voted in as worship deacon, a daunting task when we were without a pastor.

Together, we transcribed my grandfather Isaak Zacharias' memoirs and with George Zacharias, he compiled and published the Is. Zacharias genealogy.



Nick by his delphiniums, in his beloved garden

When the Bethany Manor building complex was started, Nick was the first chairman of the building committee. They were all pleased when the first phase was completed; he would be astounded to see what has developed since.

As a family we ended up with four children: three sons and a daughter. He was a wonderful, caring husband and my very best friend. He was a loving father

and sometimes even the neighbourhood kids would call to see if he could or would come out.

Nick also loved to garden. When he'd come home from the office he would take off his shoes and socks, change into comfortable clothes, and go work in the garden barefoot. It was in the garden, during his days of chemotherapy, that he heard a voice say to him, "*Lass dich an meiner Gnade genügen*" (my grace is sufficient for you): 2 Corinthians 12:9. He was deeply touched by this and I believe it brought him great peace at his end.

Nick spent five weeks in palliative care at St. Paul's Hospital in Saskatoon. On one of his last days, he recalled what his mother had said on her deathbed: "*De Lied saje daut stoave es schwoa. Daut es goa nich.*" (People say that dying is hard. It isn't at all.) Nick didn't think it was either, and he died peacefully on May 25, 1998.

The Ultimate Recycler?

On Labour Day weekend in 1960, we moved into our newly built bungalow at 2613 Munroe Avenue South. It was so much larger than the little two bedroom house we had been living in on 8th Avenue, that we felt we would never run out of space.

Our new home was a well built house with a full foundation, even extending under the attached garage. When the contractor asked if we would like to keep this space empty, we said he should just backfill it.

We were quite comfortable in our three-bedroom house, even when a little girl joined her three brothers to complete our family. When our oldest son became a teen, he no longer wanted to share a room with two kid brothers so he fashioned himself a room in the basement. Beyond this basement room was our cold room where we kept our vegetables, all the canned goods, and even wintered our roses in the earlier years.

In the early 1980s, Nick began to plan for his retirement. He wanted to do some engineering consulting and would need an office. To make this possible he devised a five-year plan.

He remembered that space under the garage that was filled with dirt; he would start there, to create a storage room. In fall of 1981 he rented a jackhammer and carefully cut out a piece of concrete in the middle of the floor, leaving the garage fully functional, and began digging out the dirt. After supper

he would go out, dig several wheelbarrows full out of the space and dump them in the now bare garden. He kept this up during the winter and as the dirt pile grew, he had a parade of curious neighbours looking over the fence in the alley, wondering what in the world was going on at the Peters'.

The house, which faced west, had a small study behind the garage. Nick began to plan its enlargement. The room would be extended to take up half the garage and the garage would be built forward to the same distance as the northwest bedroom.

In this enlarged room behind the garage, he planned to build a wood-burning fireplace. He took his university-aged sons out to the Blackstrap or Hanley rock piles to split rocks for this new venture. He thought his sons could get rid of study frustrations and they would amass a wonderful collection of rocks for the fireplace. They would come back from their adventure with the old Dodge car hanging low with the weight of the rocks.

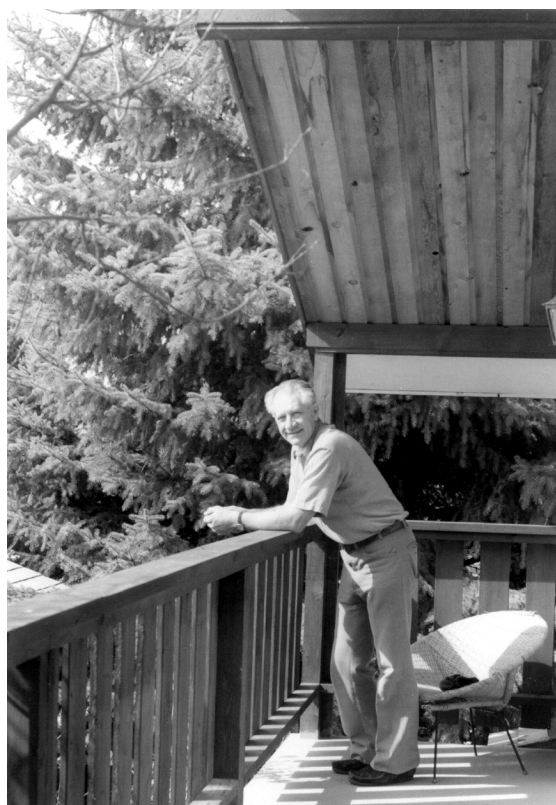
He began the fireplace on the south wall, on either side of the existing wall that separated the study from the unheated garage. Finally, it became necessary to take out that wall to finish. (You can imagine the building inspector being perplexed by all of this.)

It was time now to recycle half of the concrete garage floor into the basement to be the floor for part of the dugout space.

He drilled three small holes at various places in this concrete, and sent me off to ironworks shops to get small metal plates with threaded holes to fit under the slab and threaded rods to go through these holes. He separated this piece of concrete from the walls and one Saturday morning it was ready to go. He and son Ron were on top of this concrete and by slowly turning these rods, lowered the floor into the basement.

His brother-in-law came over with his camera to photograph this catastrophe. They visited while this was happening and he was so surprised when all went well that he forgot to get a picture.

Now Nick needed only to mix up a bit of concrete to seal the edges of the floor and wall. Done! We now had a large storage room. Beyond that, the part under the rest of the original garage was dug a bit deeper. It became the root cellar, affectionately




Nick on the balcony of the room with the turned roof; taken about 1990

dubbed the “dungeon”. To bear the weight of the car above, he fashioned Romanesque arches in this room.

He took out the wall upstairs, put in the new one, built the floor, and finished the rock work on the fireplace. He especially loved this work, because he was fascinated by the rocks and marvelled at their creation.

Now it was time to build a bedroom above the garage. After careful measuring and planning, he decided that the west side of the original garage roof would fit perfectly on the east side of the new room. It only needed to be successfully turned. He spent hours determining the exact centre of this roof, rented a jack, and lifted it up so it would have room to turn.

He would have managed it quite well on his own, but the branches from our chokecherry tree prevented it from turning, so, while he held back the branches, I had the pleasure of turning the roof. Once on the right side, he lowered it into position. It worked well and he was satisfied. The result of all this labour was a beautiful new bedroom with a balcony. 

Mennonite Brethren Herald Goes Digital

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS) in Winnipeg has released a searchable, digital collection of 51 years of the *Mennonite Brethren Herald*. The *MB Herald* is an award-winning news magazine serving Canadian MB churches.

"We're excited to be able to offer this resource to churches, schools, libraries, and researchers," says *MB Herald* editor Laura Kalmar.

Archivist Conrad Stoesz came up with the idea of digitizing the collection in order to respond better to the research queries that were coming to CMBS. Stoesz says, "The digitizing project harnessed the contribution of volunteer scanners and the technical assistance of others in the church office to bring about what may be the first collection of this kind."

The *MB Herald* was one of the first Mennonite periodicals to publish an Internet edition, with the first issue appearing in February, 1996.

"Nothing documents the life and theological thinking of Canadian MBs better than the *MB Herald*. It is amazing to see the wide variety of issues addressed by

the magazine over the years, many of which remain relevant today," says CMBS director, Jon Isaak.

All 1,292 issues of the magazine from 1962 to 2012 are digitized as PDF files and indexed by software, enabling searches by name, topic, Scripture, and so on. The whole collection, with searchable index, resides on an eight-gigabyte USB drive and is available from CMBS for \$30 (taxes and shipping included).

According to Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) managing editor, Richard Thiessen, "The *MB Herald* USB drive is a phenomenal resource for anyone who has an interest in Canadian MB history. Users can search by individual word or phrase, and be led to the precise location of their search results in the PDF scan of an issue with a few clicks of the mouse."

For more information, see:
<http://www.mbconf.ca/cmbs>.



Adapted from a press release from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, January 29, 2013.

The digital MB Herald is accessible in MHSS archives. — Ed 

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, 2013

Manitoba played host to the annual Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meetings held at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, January 17–19, 2013. In conjunction, several related committees also met, including the online encyclopedia (www.gameo.org) committee. MHSC is made up of member organizations including provincial Mennonite historical societies, Mennonite denominations and other like-minded organizations, including MCC.

The society's recently revived archives committee has this year undertaken an exciting project of a Mennonite online photo database, designed to provide much enhanced access to the rich photos in Canadian Mennonite archives. Jake Buhler, president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, noted that this project will link archival centres large and small across the country like they never have been linked before. The database project testifies to the on-going good relationships and cooperation among Canadian Mennonite historical societies.

This year we were privileged to have an interior tour of the Canadian Museum of Human rights, which is still under construction. Participants donned safety gear and were impressed with the size and architecture of the building, which is set to open in 2014.

Bill Schroeder of Winnipeg was awarded the MHSC award of excellence for his historical maps, publications, and tours of Russia he has undertaken over the past decades. Schroeder has been involved in historical research and volunteering at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies since 1969. The *Mennonite Historical Atlas* that Schroeder co-authored with Helmut Heubert has sold over 7,000 copies and is a mainstay in most Russian Mennonite research libraries.

The next MHSC annual meeting will be held in Winnipeg, in either December 2013 or January 2014.

Adapted and shortened from the report written by Conrad Stoesz, Archivist, CMBS. — Ed 

The First Mennonite in Imperial Russia

By Victor Wiebe

Before I describe Nicolaas Bidloo, I have to justify my claim that he was the first. In the seventeenth century, Mennonites were very active in the busy and profitable trade between the Dutch Republic and Russia. It is very probable that Mennonite merchants settled in Russia before Nicolaas, but there is little research on those who were involved with this trade. However, there is good information on Nicolaas, so I am claiming him as the first! I would be pleased to receive more information on other early Mennonites in Russia.

In the seventeenth century, the Dutch Republic, which was the seven northern provinces of the Netherlands, treated Mennonites with toleration, but the ten southern provinces, now known as Belgium, were under Spanish domination and very Catholic, and Mennonites were severely persecuted there. In the Republic, Mennonites excelled in agriculture, business, art, science, mathematics, and medicine. It was in this last discipline, medicine, that several members of the Bidloo family gained high repute.

The Bidloos were conservative Mennonites. Nicolaas Bidloo was born in Amsterdam about 1673 or 1674. His father Lambert Bidloo (1638-1724) was a deacon in the conservative Mennonite Zionist congregation. Lambert mastered many languages and was a distinguished apothecary. He wrote a Latin treatise on botany and several works on the inter-Mennonite squabbling that dogged Dutch Mennonites in the seventeenth century. Nicolaas's uncle, Govert Bidloo (1649-1713), was a distinguished anatomist and author of one of the most famous anatomy texts of the age; he was the personal physician of the *Stadholder*, later King William III of England. Nicolaas studied medicine under the world-renowned physician Herman Boerhaave at Leiden University, where his uncle Govert was professor of practical medicine. While studying medicine, Nicolaas became an accomplished painter, especially of portraits. In January, 1697, he received an advanced doctorate in the medical sciences.

In 1702, Nicolaas agreed to serve as personal physician to Tsar Peter I, The Great, for a period of six years, at an annual salary of 2,500 Dutch guilders, an unusually high pay for a physician at that time. He arrived in Russia with his family in June, 1703.

Bidloo accompanied Peter the Great on his travels, but found himself with very little to do, as the tsar was in excellent health. However, Nicolaas was induced to stay in Moscow all his life.



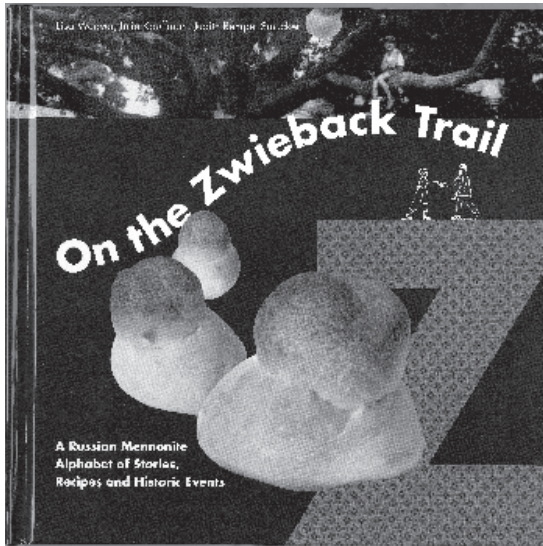
Sculpture of Nicolaas Bidloo and Tsar Peter I, commissioned to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Russia's first hospital; it stands on the hospital grounds

Peter the Great gave Nicolaas a large tract of land in the German Quarter on the bank of the Yauza River, which was on the northeast edge of Moscow, and it was there that he and his family lived. On this land in 1706-1707, he built Russia's first hospital and established its first medical school. In addition to administering the hospital, Nicolaas became an outstanding teacher, instructing students in anatomy and demonstrating surgery. In 1710 Nicolaas wrote and published the first Russian textbook on medical studies, a 1,306-page manual of surgery, which was republished in 1979 in Moscow. By 1723, Nicolaas's school had trained at least 73 Russian physicians.

Nicolaas was also acknowledged as an outstanding director of music and an accomplished architect and horticulturist. On his allotted land he used his considerable artistic skills in designing and building extensive Dutch-style gardens, including ponds, dams, channels, and islands, which still exist today, as well as triumphal gates. To highlight Nicolaas's work, a special exhibition, "Nicolaas Bidloo: history of a Dutchman in Russia" was opened in Moscow in 2011 and scheduled to continue to 2013. 



Mostly about Books



Lisa Weaver, Julie Kauffman, & Judith Rempel Smucker. *On the Zwieback Trail: A Russian Mennonite Alphabet of Stories, Recipes and Historic Events*. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canadian Mennonite University Press, 2011. 72 pp. Highly illustrated, hardcover, ISBN: 9780920718926, price \$25 (\$20 each for six or more copies, if ordered directly from CMU Press).

Reviewed by Helen Kruger

This book tells the Russian Mennonite story by means of illustration and text. The authors have based it on the alphabet, where A stands for Anabaptist, B stands for Borscht, and so on. Written in easy-to-read style, it is nevertheless profound and comprehensive in picturing and explaining the Mennonite faith as a way of life, with customs, persecutions, glory days, and treks. It ranges from joy under the huge oak tree in Russia to refugees arriving in a new country, trusting God that they may be received and given a new start in life.

What do a Zwieback recipe (at Z) and a Kroeger clock (at K) have in common with Mennonites? They are all parts of the way of life that emerged for the community of faith when a group of 16th-century believers came to the understanding that baptism was a conscious decision: while babies were safe, each individual believer could make a public confession of faith

to receive baptism. Each of the Anabaptist reformers was re-baptized, all claiming their voluntary membership in the community of faith. Therefore they were breaking the tradition of Christendom of being baptized into state and church simultaneously. Consequently they were persecuted by both state and church. The many treks to various countries are well illustrated in the book. As well, an individual's decision to oppose military conscription could lead to the death sentence by hanging, or at least being given a jail sentence or having to flee the country. In this book, we learn that in this way, began a completely new way of life among Christians — the Anabaptists (rebaptizers). Eventually it led to taking the name “Mennonite”, under the leadership of a former Catholic priest, Menno Simons, who embraced this new understanding of individual Christians who read and studied the Bible and held to the way of peace.

To proclaim the way of peace and discipleship it was necessary to have the support of a community of believers. And while there was nothing sacred about *Verenike*, or *Rollkuchen* (both featured in this book), they were a few of the customs of the group to which these believers belonged, that helped them feel accepted and at home.

This very attractive book, in relatively few pages, with remarkable photography and symbols, manages to outline our Christian Anabaptist beliefs, customs, and history, by date, pictures, and explanation. It appeals to the heart and head and is treasured in the spirit. This book is one that every child (and adult) in our faith community should read to understand “where we come from”, to foster a dedication and desire to belong to a group of believers who give all for their beliefs, a message for all main-line churches as well. It is well-written, contains pictures on every page, and has a clear and accurate date line of the Russian Mennonites. An excellent gift for Christmas or any other occasion.

Two of the three authors — Julie Kauffman and Judith Rempel Smucker — are of Russian Mennonite heritage:

one grew up in Ohio, and the other in rural Manitoba. Lisa Weaver, the main author, is of Swiss Mennonite background and is a graduate of Goshen College.



Jacob M. Fehr. *Päpa Nät*. (Swift Current: Self Published, 2012) 75 pp.

Reviewed by Jake Buhler

Päpa Nät is an attractive, self-published paperback that brings together 75 Low German “short-short” stories and poems selected from Fehr’s ten previously published works.

The title *Päpa Nät* comes from the culinary delight by the same name, which Mennonites bake during the winter season, especially near Christmas time. Fehr insists that the crisp *Päpa Nät* baked without yeast are his favourite, but he allows that each of us is entitled to a favourite without having to quarrel over whether to use baking powder or yeast!

At age 86, Fehr, who lives in Swift Current, is one of the few remaining writers who can write effortlessly in a language that remains a favourite among a number of people. Fehr has used his own method to spell *Plautdietsch* words (*Plautdietsch* is the kind of Low German that Mennonites use). The masters of standardized *Plautdietsch* spelling are Reuben Epp, Herman Rempel and Jack Thiessen. Fehr has developed his own hybrid methodology that reflects the *-en* endings of the *Alt Kolonie* (Old Colony) speaking traditions that developed in southern Russia.

Fehr chooses common everyday topics and exploits their simplicity through poetry: *Stuk, stuk, han un trigj, dee velusde Stuk Maschien*, (Bump, bump, back and forth, that lousy washing machine). The verb *stuk* is repeated and supported by *han un trigj* which prolongs the action, and as the action heats up is given a final onomatopoeic interjection, *velusde*. The reader can hear the sound of the thumping of the manual washing machine, while at the same time feel the disgust of the operator who must toil but does not want to.

Most of Fehr’s poems use a simple pattern: each verse is a quatrain (4 lines). But his rhyming patterns are exciting and varied. Some are a-b, a-b with word endings like *finnja, kjand, kjinja, velang*. Others are a-a-b (Launt, Saunt, bekaunt, rein), and one even has an a-a-b-b form using words like *Prips, Jips, Jast* and *Kjast*.

Fehr’s poems are not only about common items on the old farm. In *Hundat Joa Von Nu* (A Hundred Years From Now), Fehr asks how things will be in the future. In the last verse he concludes, *Hundat Joa von nu, woat Gott noch rechten* (a hundred years from now, God will still be ruling).

The short little narratives are delightful pieces that often begin with a small problem, but all problems are resolved at the end. In Fehr’s retelling of the creation story, God is lonely. By the end... *Gott freid sikj, daut wia aula goot waut Hee jemaakt haud* (God was happy with all he had made). In a humorous account of a renowned *Trajchmaaka Dikj* (Chiropractor Dyck), Fehr describes a wealthy businessman from the huge city of Saskatoon who flies a plane to Chortitz to fetch the chiropractor to set the bones of his eight-year-old daughter. The chiropractor is successful and is introduced to the family doctor who was unable to help the little girl. The doctor asks Dyck what his secret was: Dyck tells him he must dress as Dyck does, in overalls (*Schlaubekjsen*) with a red handkerchief in the back pocket. The story ends with the wealthy businessman visiting a McDonalds (*Mc Stua*) and seeing the doctor dressed up like Chiropractor Dyck!

Päpa Nät is an easy-to-read collection of stories and poems for the beginning reader of *Plautdietsch*, which will equally delight the fluent reader.

Available at MHSS for \$10 plus \$2 shipping.



Report on MHSS 2013 Annual Meeting

By Victoria Neufeldt

The Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan held its annual general meeting this year in the Fellowship Hall at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon, on March 1st and 2nd.

Friday evening: the Plains Conservative Mennonite Church

Friday evening was devoted to a presentation by members of the Plains Conservative Mennonite Church, the group often referred to as “Whitecaps” (a name which they accept, because it helps to identify who they are). Chester Steiner gave a talk on the history and practices of their denomination.



Chester Steiner of the Plains Conservative Mennonite Church, speaking at the MHSS annual meeting
All photos by Ruth Friesen

Their group, located near Osler, is part of a larger church group known as the Nationwide Fellowship Churches. They began in the late 1950s when a number of bishops in the Mennonite General Conference left the conference, along with their families, because they “had a desire to keep a number of practices that the conference church was beginning to phase out and drop,” Steiner said. Three bishops Steiner mentioned were Mervin Baer, Wayne Wenger, and Paul Landis. Among the practices they wanted to keep were “the Christian woman’s prayer veiling, maintaining uncut hair for women, feet washing at communion time, and the straight

cut suit coat.” They also rejected the conference churches’ acceptance of radio and television, insurance against loss, “increased young people’s activities,” competitive sports, and musical instruments.

There are 22 Fellowship Churches in Canada. They are spread from the Pacific to the Atlantic coast: three in British Columbia, seven in Alberta, two in Saskatchewan, three in Manitoba, six in Ontario, and one in Nova Scotia. Altogether, there are 115 Fellowship churches around the world.

Another group, the Eastern Pennsylvania Mennonite Church, started about eight years after the Fellowship Church, when a number of bishops “were officially released from their positions and responsibilities in the General Conference Church.” The main difference between the Fellowship and Eastern churches is that the Eastern church continues “the conference style administration”. The two groups “work together and often share in church work responsibilities.”

The church at Osler began with a request to come and set up a congregation. A few investigative trips were made and a church was established, with the first family moving here in June of 1981. Steiner noted that the people who initially seemed to have the strongest desire for a church never became members; however, they did send their children to the school for a number of years.

The church observes seven basic ordinances: baptism, communion, feet washing, devotional prayer covering for Christian women, the Christian salutation (holy kiss), anointing with oil, and marriage. The three ordinances common to all professing Christians are baptism, communion, and marriage. He explained that their observance of feet washing was based on John 13:1-17; for devotional covering, they use 1 Corinthians 11:1-15; for Christian salutation, Romans 16:16 and 1 Peter 5:14 (this is only men to men and women to women; between sexes,



A musical contribution to the Friday evening event:
the Whitecaps singing

only a formal handshake is permitted); anointing with oil, James 5:14, 15 (this is left up to the individual with an affliction to request it: “We believe in giving God His rightful place in relation to controlling our health, yet we also believe that God has allowed doctors to attain to a level of wisdom that enables them to also be of assistance in this.”)

All their churches provide schooling for their children, from grades one to ten. Higher grades can be taken by correspondence. The teachers must be members in good standing. They are not certified, “but must be able to communicate lessons to the students so they get good grades.”

The question of how many of their young people stay with the church “is an honest question and deserves an honest answer.” Steiner said he did a “rough count” and found that the average is around 96 percent. He continued, “This average was a little difficult to determine because many families who came into the church already had married children who chose not to follow their parents’ way.”

As part of their outreach actions, the Osler group have a monthly service in the Regional Psychiatric Centre in Saskatoon. They also sing once a month at the Warman Special Care Home, Spruce Manor Special Care Home in Dalmeny, and Central Haven Special Care Home in Saskatoon.

After Steiner’s talk, the families who had accompanied him to the event sang several hymns in harmony, a capella.

The presentation was followed by refreshments and visiting.

Saturday morning: the AGM

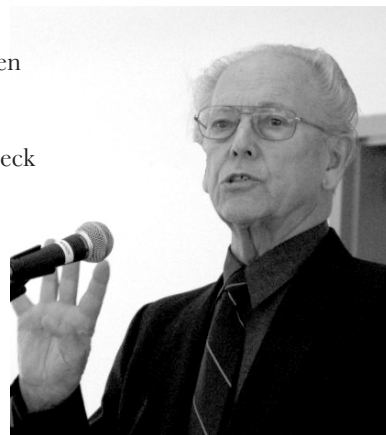
The morning began with a devotional by Rev. Cornie Guenther. The text of this devotional, slightly condensed, is printed on the pages 22–23.

In addition to the general business of the association, including reports and the election of board members, the first part of the morning included an announcement of a book launch on June 9th (*The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*, by Arlette Kouwenhoven). Victor Wiebe provided a description of some of the features of the enlarged archives, such as the new secure room, designed to house items whose use is restricted for one reason or another.

Dr. Walter Klaassen

After a break, the audience was treated to a lecture by Dr. Walter Klaassen, titled “The Importance of Pilgram Marpeck and Why Mennonites Are Neither Protestants Nor Catholics”.

Walter Klaassen
at the lectern,
speaking on
Pilgram Marpeck



Pilgram Marpeck was an early Anabaptist theologian. He is not well known, Klaassen said. Klaassen had discovered his writings in an Oxford library. Marpeck was unique in that his focus was on the humanity of Christ.

Saturday afternoon

Following the lunch break, Rev. Esther Patkau gave a workshop on writing biographies and church stories. She provided a handout for each type of project. Her presentation included advice for people who want to contribute entries to the GAMEO web

site. People are being encouraged to add to the database of information on Mennonite people and institutions.

The annual meeting event ended with a tour of the archives, led by Victor Wiebe. He explained the progress that has been made and what it still to come. Although great strides have been made, the project is not complete. A dedication service for the new space is planned, but the date has not been set.

Saturday Morning Devotional: When They Shall Ask (Joshua 4:6)

By Rev. Cornie Guenther

Joshua said, "Go over before the ark of the Lord your God into the middle of the Jordan. Each of you is to take up a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of the Israelites, to serve as a sign among you." In the future, their children would ask what the stones meant and would be told the story of the parting of the waters.

These stones were to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever. They were to remind the Israelites of the One who had shown His power to them.

We too need to gather physical reminders of our past, so that our children too will ask. That should be the reason we collect books, journals, obituaries, pictures, church records, etc.

Let us look at some questions they will ask.

First: what kind of stories did our forefathers tell?

All those who have gone before us had stories to tell. In writing them, they would come to a crossroads in their life which changed their course for better or for worse.

Here they were faced with hard decisions, what to do and where to go and they used words like "but" or "if only", which changed the direction of their lives. These stories can help us to not make the same mistakes they did. Their choices can also encourage us in our struggles and they can affect the choices we face.

Scripture tells us "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls." (Jeremiah 6:16)

For instance, the story is told of my great-grandfather, who was 16 years old when his parents moved from Russia to Canada. When they were sailing on a big boat across one of the Great Lakes in Canada, it became very cold and, because the ice became so thick, the boat came to a complete stop.

The people became afraid that they would starve to death on the boat. As the days passed and the boat wouldn't move, the people started to pray very earnestly. Then one night God sent a heavy thunderstorm, which broke the ice; and the boat began to move and they thanked their God for His deliverance.

Others wrote stories which related to a time when there was great prosperity and peace in their land. Then the political rumblings came across the land. There were rumours of war. Then some of our people made hard choices: should they stay or should they move on? Some decided to sell all they had and move to another country. Later some other stories were written with the words, "if only". There was regret and despair in their stories, as they admitted that they had waited too long, and the time came when it was too late. They realized it was too late when the police would knock on the door and the father or husband was taken out of the home and never came back.

Therefore I believe our children need to hear the right answers to their questions.

Another question they will ask: what kind of family tree did I come from?

Does it really matter? On the other hand, some would like to know more about their own family tree. What kind of branches are there in my tree? Were there some grafted in, or were some cut off?

For instance, one young man phoned the archives, inquiring about a certain woman who he believed was his mother. Apparently she had given him up for adoption after his birth. He wanted to know if their records would confirm this. He was phoning from Alberta and this information seemed to be very important to him. Well my wife worked feverishly on her computer for a few days and soon she could phone this young man and tell him who his mother and his father were. She also could send a picture of his mother to him, because one of the books that

were in storage here had her picture in it. Well, when this young man heard these words, he was ecstatic.

Due to neglect or shame, some family tree branches were broken off and probably were never grafted back in.

I remember one man once told me that he “wished that he had been as lucky as his wife had been in their marriage.” He never elaborated why he thought himself to be unlucky.

A third question: Are there records of where my family is buried? And a fourth: Do you have records of my family’s obituaries?

When we were in the Ukraine we visited a graveyard in the former village of Osterwick where our Mennonite forefathers were buried. Many headstones had an embossed anchor with a Scripture verse taken from Hebrews 6:19 “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure.”

The last question that will be asked is, when can we start asking questions?


Many questions have already been asked and many have also received their answers. Many more will be forthcoming in the years to come. Many more answers could be given, after the major moving of the archives and the present construction is completed. Much has been done and much will be done!

Let me throw in a word of caution: The establishing of a memorial is always significant. Whether it is a big building or maybe just a bronze plaque, it draws attention to some important person, place, or event. In Joshua’s day the triumphant march across the Jordan riverbed was marked by setting up 12 stones to commemorate God’s mighty act of holding back the waters, but eventually it became a shrine which they bowed down to and worshipped, and God was not pleased.

Let’s not make the same mistake. We must never let the blessing steal our soul’s adoration and worship from Him who gave it.

But on the other hand if we are drinking from this deep well of information, let’s never forget the people who dug the well and are still digging. We need to thank them.

We have a very good committee; I would like to challenge them to become a great committee. What makes the difference between a good hockey player and a great one? Both usually score many goals, but a great one has also many assists. I also would like you to adopt my favourite slogan. “I don’t have it all together but together we have it all.”

May God bless you as a committee and may He go before you! Let us ask Him to do that! 

Memories Wanted of Closed Churches and Camps

A researcher is looking for information about closed churches, old daily vacation Bible schools, summer camps, and other small rural churches.


If you attended any of the small Mennonite churches in Saskatchewan that have closed since the 1960s, such as Capasin, Park Valley, or Great Deer or if you just have information about them, please contact Carol Janzen, whose contact information is given below.

She would like to get your memories, stories, and photos from these churches and other rural churches, such as Mayfair, Glenbush, Rabbit Lake, Rapid

View, Superb, Fiske, and Horse Lake that date back 50 or more years. Please also send memories, stories, and photos of Rosthern, Elim Gospel, and Pike Lake camps. Carol would also like to hear from you if you taught daily vacation Bible school at any of the above churches during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s.

She is collecting these stories to submit to the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

Carol Janzen Tel: 306-225-4606 (8 rings);
e-mail: cjanzen@yourlink.ca

Carol Janzen is a former teacher-librarian and daughter of John and Nettie Janzen, who lived at Neuanlage, SK. — Ed 

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 submit a name for 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 J. Hiebert (†1959)

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 (†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 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

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.

MHSS Membership

If your membership has expired, the date on your address label will be highlighted. To ensure that you will not miss the next issue of the *Historian*, please send your membership fee promptly to:

The Treasurer, MHSS
 110 La Ronge Road, Room 900
 Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8

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.

MHSS Office and Archives, SMH Editor
 110 La Ronge Road, Room 900
 Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8
 E-mail: mhss@sasktel.net