

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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Anna Andres: Mennonite Genealogist Long before GRANDMA

By Verner Friesen



I first became aware of Anna Andres in the mid 1960s. My picture had appeared in *Der Bote* as one of three newly-elected members of the Provincial Conference executive. About a month later I received a letter from Anna Andres in Rheinpfalz, Germany. She wrote, "You must be one of the Friesens from Tiefengrund" and requested genealogical information about my family. She also sent me two pages of detailed, hand-written information, in English, from her genealogical records to show how she was related to me on both the Friesen and Regier sides of my ancestors. My grandmother on my father's side was a Regier. For decades after that, career and family absorbed most of my time and attention, and so genealogy and Anna Andres faded into the background for me.

Continued on page 4

*Johann Friesen war Frachtknecht
With his ship he brought his goods
and other victuals.
Johann Friesen was dead, when his
Jakob Friesen, son of Johann
farmer at Hamminsterberg
+ 19.12.1853 Hamminsterberg
67 years, 5 months, 28 days*

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From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt



Our front-page article for this issue acquaints us with the exceptional genealogical work of Anna Andres, an achievement which certainly deserves more attention than it has so far received. For example, I could find no listing for her in GAMEO.

Then there is the fascinating letter of Cornelius Regier, dating from 1773. It was obviously considered important from the beginning, to have been preserved in the first place by the man who received it, and then passed on from father to son to grandson. Why the grandson felt he needed to make a copy of the letter is not known, nor do we know what happened to the original. However, that copy survives today, as well as the faithful, handwritten transliteration into the Latin alphabet, which was done about 50 years ago, making the letter accessible to contemporary readers of German. That also made it feasible to translate it into English in our own time, and it is that translation which is featured in this issue. The translator, Abram Buhler, mentions that the “flowery language” made it difficult to translate, but I would call that an understatement, because Cornelius Regier also did not adhere to general rules of sentence structure as understood today and apparently did not believe in paragraphs. All that, Abram Buhler successfully dealt with.

We have also just learned of the recent death of one of our “Honour List” members, Jacob G. Guenter. His death date has been added in the list, and his story will be featured in a future issue of the *Historian*. 

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MHSS President's Corner


By Jake Buhler



In 1986 and 1987, when my mother (Maria Pauls Driedger Buhler) was in her 80s, I interviewed her and wrote down some of her stories. I learned of the trauma she went through, being orphaned at age 11, losing two sisters a year later, crossing the Atlantic Ocean as an unaccompanied minor, raising seven children, outliving two husbands, and much more. I put Maria's stories into a small booklet as gifts for my two daughters.

Our archives contain hundreds of books, letters, and stories that people have written and there are photographs and other valuable documents people have saved. These are the things of archives. They tell us how people lived, how they struggled with spiritual matters, how they moved from one country to another, and how they worked to make a living.

Retired Bergthal Mennonite minister, Abe Buhler of Warman, has translated into English a copy of a letter that has been in his family since 1773. Seven generations of Buhlers cared for this letter. It is an example of saved history.

What is in your attic that needs to be saved? Have you written down the story of your life? Have you written the story of your ageing mother? Esther Patkau of Bethany Manor can help you get started if you want to write a short story of your family. Contact her. And today is the right day to donate old photographs and stories to the archives. 

Continued from page 1

A few months ago, I accepted a packet of Friesen family material which my cousin Alfred Wieler wanted to pass on. Included in this packet were several pages of the genealogy compilations of Anna Andres, as well as a letter written by her in July of 1948. She had written it from a refugee camp in Aalborg, Denmark. Near the close of the Second World War, thousands of Mennonites in both East Prussia and West Prussia fled from the advancing Russian armies and ended up in refugee camps in Denmark. Anna, her mother, and some of her siblings were among them. Anna's letter was addressed to Mr. and Mrs. Friesen, likely my Uncle John and Aunt Wanda (Regier) Friesen from Tiefengrund. When our Friesen family moved from West Prussia to Canada in 1894, an older half-brother of my father and Uncle John, Abraham, remained behind in Germany. He is the source of the family information referred to in Anna's letter. The Abraham Friesen referred to, who died in Tiefengrund, was my grandfather.

Here is a translation of part of that letter from Anna Andres:

Since I am distantly related to both of you, I am addressing this letter to both. I received your address from *Ältester* Thiessen of Saskatoon who visited us here in the refugee camp and to whom I expressed my desire to get in touch with the Friesen and Regier families. From your half-brother Abraham Friesen I received some time ago a list of the descendants of his father Abraham (died in Tiefengrund on June 6, 1901) from his two marriages. My subsequent request for a further update of the descendants (children, grandchildren, etc.) of his half-brothers and half-sisters, however, he has not fulfilled. Now I am asking you to provide me with that missing information so I can fill the gaps in my family book.

Anna goes on to say that much of the information about the Regier family is missing from her records, and gives specific details about the missing information. She concludes her letter by requesting that, since she and her family expect to get out of

Denmark shortly, the response be sent to her sister Emma in Bremen. She then gives Emma's address.

In August of 1967 the Friesen clan of Tiefengrund held a large family reunion and after that published a book with the title *Perseverance, Prayer and Progress*. In the introduction to the family genealogy section of the book, Alfred Wieler writes, "A special 'dankeschön' to Frau Anna Andres, Germany, for the list of ancestors of Abraham Friesen". Anna had provided the information for the early family records dating back to the 1700s. Similarly, in a Friesen family book published in Germany in 1998, editor Werner Janzen acknowledges that the work of Anna Andres is the foundation of that book.

The following biographical information about Anna Andres is gleaned from two sources: an article in the book *Die Russlandmennoniten II*, by Horst Gerlach (published in 1995 by GTS-Druck GrabH, Kirchheimbolanden, Germany) and the article "Anna Andres: Ein Gruss zum 85. Geburtstag" by Hans-Otto Fieguth in *Mennonitische Blätter*, February, 1977, page 22.

Anna was born on January 1, 1892 in Fürstenwerder near Danzig. Her parents were Julius Andres (1850–1929) and Anna Ens (1865–1947) who lived with their family in Fürstenwerder. Anna had five siblings: Meta, Otto, Willy, Frieda, and Emma. Willy died at the age of seven in 1901. As a child, Anna was very self-willed and headstrong. A servant girl working for the Andres family later reported that Anna would scream with all her might if she did not get her way. In the time of Anna's youth not many girls went on to further studies, but Anna wanted to study. She had to go away from home to Danzig for that and there she found accommodation with an acquaintance by the name of Mrs. Classen. Here she went to high school and then to a teacher training institution. Anna was baptized on March 24, 1907 in the Mennonite Church in Danzig. After her teacher training she became a teacher in Kalies, Pomerania.

Anna's interest in genealogy seems to have been sparked quite early. From her youth, she had taken a keen interest in her large family and her many relatives and ancestors. A dike-master by the name

Friesen

- [1] Johann Friesen war Frachtschiffer in Palschan gewesen. I suppose that he was a trader. With his ship he brought his goods to the town of Danzig. I saw in such ship corn, cheese, fruit and other victuals.

Johann Friesen was dead, when his son married. The name of his wife is unknown.

- [2] Jakob Friesen, son of Johann, ∞ I 3.9.1822 Renata (Agnes) Eys (Two names are written)
 Farmer at Kemmünsterberg * 5.1.1799 Bänvalde
 + 19.12.1853 Kemmünsterberg + 19.3.1826 Kemmünsterberg
 67 years, 5 months, 28 days 1st marriage She was the widow of Paul Dyck.

His children: 1 Abraham

death date

* 23.7.1823 Kemmünsterberg
 + 26.5.1899 Tiegenhof
 + 15.6.1825 2 Jakob } * 28.3.1825 Kemmünsterberg
 + 12.6.1825 3 Johann }
 + 28.3.1825 4 Peter }

Jakob Friesen

∞ II 21.9.1826

2nd marriage

marriage date

- [3] Abraham Friesen ∞ 25.2.1844

and [2]

Farmer at Kemmünsterberg and at Tiegenhof

The farm at Tiegenhof was an inherited property. The sister of his mother was the testatrix.

birth date

Sara Trocker

* 6.6.1826 Weipshof near Danzig
 + 20.3.1858 Tiegenhof

She is my relative.

Her parents were Peter Trocker and Elisabeth nee Trocker. Peter Trocker is my relative.

Sünder: 1 Abraham

* 4.2.1849 Kemmünsterberg Kreis Marienburg Westpreußen [4]
 + 21.6.1901 Tiegenhof in Canada a, b

2 Jakob

* 25.10.1850 Kemmünsterberg

of Gustav Schultz of Fürstenwerder (Anna's home town) had prepared a genealogical record of his family, which impressed Anna and gave her the idea of doing the same. Anna's family relationships reached beyond the Mennonite church, as her grandmother on her father's side came from an evangelical-Catholic family. Her father Julius joined the Mennonite church only after his marriage to Anna's mother.

Anna's move to Danzig for her education gave her access to the large city archives. From these archives and from church books, Anna began to tirelessly collect birth, wedding, and death dates to compile many genealogy lists. She also contacted many individuals to request personal family information. She

was constantly on the lookout for sources that might produce more family information.

Interestingly, a new vocational challenge presented itself to Anna when she was already in her forties. In the mid 1930s the new German government initiated a project designed to create a detailed inventory of all German citizens. German officials must have been aware of Anna's extensive work with Mennonite genealogy, for they offered her the prestigious task of heading up the Mennonite segment of this endeavour. It was an assignment that fitted nicely into Anna's interests and experience, and so she left her teaching career to take on this new challenge.

Anna's job was to collect and record information about all the Mennonites in East Prussia and West

This is a page of Anna's genealogical notes on the Friesen family, which she sent to Verner Friesen in the 1960s. She had a simple and efficient "shorthand" system for her charts. We have added labels to explain the symbols she used.

Prussia; about individuals and their families, their living conditions, their professions and trades, the property they owned, etc. Ancestry was to be traced back a minimum of two generations, apparently to enable Aryan descendancy (purity of race) to be established. According to Nazi ideology, the Aryan race was a supposed superior Caucasian race without admixture, especially no Semitic strain.

To do this work, Anna was given authority to access relevant statistical information in church records of all confessions, and in court, real estate, land registry, and vital statistics offices. It was a massive undertaking. For close to ten years Anna worked very conscientiously on this project, producing a very comprehensive amount of information. She even went far beyond the official assignment and researched Mennonite ancestry going back many generations.

However, with the German defeat in the Second World War, the project came to an end. It is not known whether Anna's work survived the war. Anna feared that many of the sources of genealogical information might have been destroyed. But she managed to salvage some of her material. So highly did she value this work, to which she had given so much of her life, that she actually took what she could along when she fled her homeland, ending up in the refugee camp in Denmark. The letter quoted above in this article shows that she even continued her genealogy work from the refugee camp.


After her return to Germany from Denmark, Anna lived with her sister Meta in a very small apartment in Harxheim in southern Germany. Apparently, Anna never married. Her mother had died in the refugee camp in Aalborg in 1947 and her brother Otto died eight months later in the refugee camp in Oksboel.

Of the many thousands of Mennonites who had fled from Prussia towards the end of the war, those who survived were now scattered throughout Ger-

many, as well as through North and South America. So, depending on materials that survived the war and on her fabulous memory, Anna committed herself anew to a continuation of the search for Mennonite family information through a world-wide letter exchange. She paid many visits to Mennonite archives, first in Göttingen and Klefeld, and after 1968 in Weierhof, where the Mennonite archives found a more permanent home. In 1969, Anna acquired a small place in Monsheim, which she shared with her sister Meta, and where she had space and time to continue the work which had been her lifelong passion.

When Anna turned 85 years of age, a group of friends and genealogy associates gathered to acknowledge her more than 50 years of genealogy research and thank her for all her hard work. Many people have depended on the work of Anna Andres as the source of their own family information.

In her old age, Anna lived in an old-people's home in Enkenbach in the Pfalz, where in the end she suffered from dementia. She died on May 30, 1981 at the age of 89. When we think of the focus today on using computers and programs like GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) to research and record extensive family information, Anna Andres was far ahead of her time. In her life-long passion for Mennonite genealogy she is said to have collected 40,000 names, all neatly handwritten, and her genealogical compilations were well-organized and lineage-linked. What an amazing achievement!

Her original documents are apparently still in private hands in Germany, but copies are housed in the Mennonite archives in Weierhof, Germany, with microfilm copies available at: Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas; Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Hillboro, Kansas; and Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California. 

German-Language Bibles, High and Low

By Victor G. Wiebe

The Bible in the German language has a long and illustrious history. Many erroneously believe that when Martin Luther published his German translation of the Bible in 1534, this was the first translation into German. This is not correct. The story is older.

The first translation into a Germanic language was made about 350 A.D., when the Gothic missionary and bishop Ulfilas (Wulfila) translated the Greek Bible into Gothic, an East Germanic language that has been extinct for hundreds of years. This was especially notable because it seems that, in order to write in this language, he had to first invent an alphabet for it. His alphabet was based mainly on the Greek alphabet, with a few letters taken from Latin. A beautiful sixth-century manuscript copy of the Gospels translated by Ulfilas is preserved in Sweden.

In the ninth century, the German king Karl the Great (Charlemagne) promoted the reading of the Bible in his own language, the Germanic dialect called Frankish. From then through the fifteenth century, many Bible translations were done in various local German dialects. These were in the years before mechanical printing, so all these Bibles were manuscripts. Many survive in libraries and museums.

Gutenberg printed his Latin Bible in 1455 and then a flood of printed biblical works flowed out to the world. Johannes Mentelin, a German printer and bookseller living in Strasburg, using an old manuscript translation, was the first person to print the Bible in High German. This was done in 1466 and the Mentelin Bible was reprinted 18 times before Martin Luther completed his High German translation in 1534. But just before that, in the years 1525–1529, Ulrich Zwingli, with his fellow preachers and students, worked daily at translating the Bible into Swiss German. In these years Zwingli published separately parts of the New Testament translation as portions were completed, with the final entire Bible published in 1529. It is known as the Froschauer Bible, a name taken from the printer,

Christopher Froschauer, of Zurich, Switzerland. A beautiful copy of this Bible is held in Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario. This German translation is preferred by Swiss Mennonites and many Hutterites and over the centuries they have also reprinted it. In 1975 the 1536 edition of the Froschauer Bible was reprinted jointly by the Old Order Wisler Mennonite farmer and book collector Amos Hoover of Denver, Pennsylvania, and the McMillan Hutterite colony in Cayley, Alberta. In 1983, a facsimile reprint of the 1531 edition was made in Zürich, Switzerland.

For 12 years, beginning in 1522, Martin Luther was also working diligently on translating and publishing Scripture portions as he completed them. It was not until 1534 that Luther published his complete German Bible.

Our Anabaptist forefathers were passionate Bible readers and also participated in translation work, though persecution brought a swift end to most efforts. Ludwig Haetzer, a spiritual Anabaptist, with Hans Denck's assistance, published a translation of the Old Testament prophets in 1527 in the German city of Worms. This translation is known as the Worms Prophets and was popular enough to be reprinted twelve times in the early sixteenth century in the cities of Worms, Augsburg, and Hagenau. Both Luther and Zwingli acknowledged using Haetzer's translations.

In translating, both Luther and Zwingli used the best versions of the Scripture in both Greek and Latin to produce German Bibles better than any before them. Though not first in German, the Luther Bible has had the most impact. Its high impact and wide circulation was such that it facilitated the emergence of Luther's High German as the standard for the German language in government, church, education, and literature and relegated other dialects of German to secondary importance. The complete Luther Bible included the Apocrypha, which was placed by Luther between the Old and

New Testaments. Over the years, Martin Luther's text has been revised a number of times, updating the language and adding insight from ongoing biblical scholarship. For example, Luther used the word "Weib" for "wife"; this has been changed to "Frau."

Also before Luther, several translations of the Bible were published in Low German. The *Kölner Bibel* in the Low German of Lower Saxony was published in Cologne in 1478 and another one in the Rhenish dialect in 1479. In 1494, another Low German Bible was published in the dialect of Lübeck. This is now called the *Lübecker Bibel*. In 1522, the last pre-Lutheran Low German Bible was published in the city of Halbstadt; today we know this as the *Halbstädter Bibel*. Low German speakers did not end their interest in their language just because Luther published his High German translation in 1534. In 1545 Johann Burgenhagen, a colleague of Martin Luther's, translated Luther's Bible into the Low German dialect of Lower Saxony. He had his Bible printed in the city of Magdeburg. It was known as the Magdeburg Bible. This Bible was reprinted at least five times over the next 100 years: in 1569, 1572, 1574, 1614, and 1621.

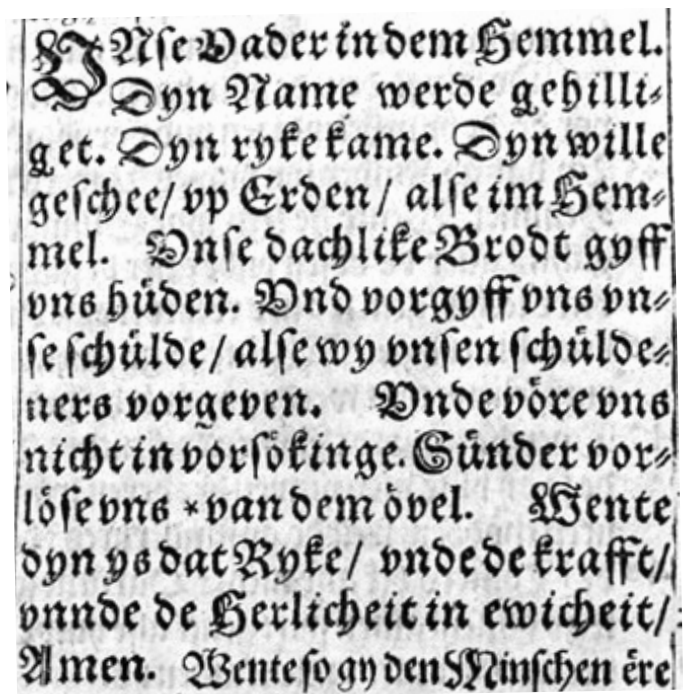
In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Mennonites again began their own Bible translation efforts. The Low German spoken by Prussian-Russian Mennonites is very similar to the dialect of Lower Saxony, but the spelling of many words has changed over the past four hundred years. A new Low German translation of the New Testament, *Daut Niehe Testament*, by J. J. Neufeld, was published under the auspices of the Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1988. In 2003 Kindred Productions of Winnipeg, Manitoba published *De Bible*, a 1,266-page Low German Bible. This book is a revision of Neufeld's New Testament and the Old Testament translated by missionary Ed Zacharias. It is in the Old Colony dialect of Mennonite Low German.

The Bible is the most published book in history. Several billion copies of the Bible have been printed and that would include well over a hundred million in German. However, today copies of these 15th- and 16th-century Bibles are rare. Though Bibles are

a highly prized possession, most copies have disappeared, often because people in the past did what we should be still doing — and that is reading and re-reading them. Our ancestors simply wore out their Bibles through constant reading and study. Nevertheless, because of the enormous number printed, old Bibles are still found in used bookstores, though they are not much in demand.

What would an old Low German Bible be worth in 2013? While a good copy of the Latin Gutenberg Bible has sold for about five million dollars, most old Bibles are generally not very valuable unless there is something special about them. In 2008 a copy of the Magdeburg Bible printed in 1569, but with its title page missing, sold for \$2,500. With its title page it would probably be worth twice that amount.

On the following page is a table of German Bibles published before Luther. The dates list first editions. Over the years many of these Bibles were frequently reprinted.



The Lord's Prayer as found in the 1614 edition of Burgenhagen's Magdeburg Bible. Note the punctuation and the form of the umlaut.

Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/f4/1614BiblePrayer.jpg>

<u>Bible Name</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>City where printed</u>	<u>Printer and/or Translator</u>	<u>Language</u>
Mentelin-Bibel	1466	Strasbourg	Johannes Mentelin	High German
Eggestein-Bibel	before 1470	Strasbourg	Heinrich Eggestein	High German
Zainer-Bibel	1475	Augsburg	Günther Zainer	High German
Pflanzmann-Bibel	1475	Augsburg	Jodocus Pflanzmann	High German
Sensenschmidt-Bibel	1476-78	Nuremberg	Andreas Frisner, Johann Sensenschmidt	High German
Zainer-Bibel	1477	Augsburg	Günther Zainer	High German
Sorg-Bibel	1477	Augsburg	Anton Sorg	High German
Kölner Bibeln	1478/79	Cologne	Heinrich Quentell or Bartholomäus von Unckell	Low German
Sorg-Bibel	1480	Augsburg	Anton Sorg	High German
Koberger-Bibel	1483	Nuremberg	Anton Koberger	High German
Grüninger-Bibel	1485	Strasbourg	Johann Grüninger	High German
Schönsperger-Bibel	1487	Augsburg	Johann Schönsperger, the Elder	High German
Schönsperger-Bibel	1490	Augsburg	Johann Schönsperger, the Elder	High German
Lübecker Bibel	1494	Lübeck	Steffen Arndes/ Meister der Lübecker Bibel	Lübecker Low German
Otmar-Bibel	1507	Augsburg	Johann Otmar	High German
Otmar-Bibel	1518	Augsburg	Silvan Otmar	High German
Halbstädter Bibel	1522	Halbstadt	Lorenz Stuchs	Low German



An 18th-Century Mennonite Faith Story: *Ältester Cornelius Regier*

Translated and with an introduction by Abram Buhler

Introduction

Cornelius Regier (1743 -1794) of Heuboden in Prussia wrote his faith story in a letter to an ancestor of mine, Minister Abraham Buhler, who had been influential in his conversion. It is written in the old German style with long flowery sentences which make translation difficult. The date was 1773.

This letter has been in our family for over two centuries, first copied in 1840 by my great-grandfather Johan Buhler in Neuendorf, Chortitza, and brought by him to Canada. (The original letter from 1773 is presumed lost.) In 1974 my father Abram J. Buhler copied it again, using the English alphabet. Now I have done my best to translate it into English, because I believe it is an important piece of Mennonite history.

Cornelius Regier became the *Ältester* of the Rose-nort congregation at Heuboden. He died in the new Mennonite settlement at Chortitza, Russia, where he had gone to try to arbitrate differences in the church.

As I understand it, his great-great-grandson was Peter Regier, who also became *Ältester* in the Rose-nort church. In 1893 he immigrated to Manitoba and the following year came to Tiefengrund in the Rosthern area and established the Rosenort Church of Saskatchewan.

My father Abram J. Buhler, descendant of the Abraham Buhler in the letter, became the *Ältester* of the Bergthal



A recent photo of the translator, Rev. Abram Buhler of Warman, Saskatchewan

Church of Saskatchewan in 1949, not many miles from Tiefengrund.

— Abram Buhler

Cornelius Regier's Letter

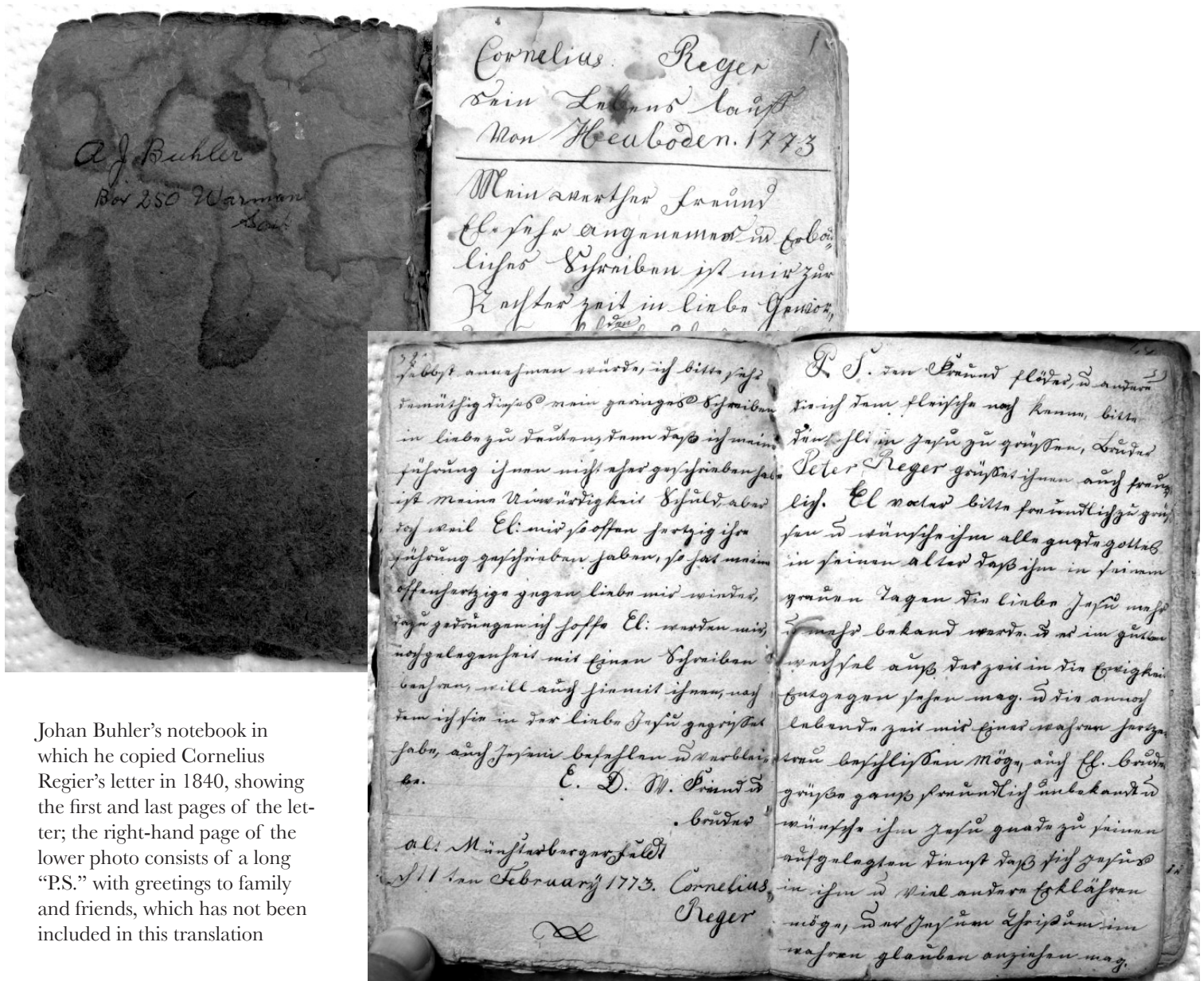
My valued friend Abraham Buhler!

Your loving, very pleasant and encouraging letter has arrived at the right time. In its uplifting contents I have seen with great pleasure and observed the friendliness and love of God which in great measure is evident in your soul. I wish for you that, concerning the things of God and Jesus Christ, you may be faithful unto death, which I truly trust.

Yes, for your account of how the Lord Jesus has at all times led you, and for the good teaching, I say many thanks and I hope to come as far in the ways of the Lord as you have. However with me it is still at the beginning; but I hope that the love of Jesus will not depart from following and enlightening me, since he is the true light that came into this world to enlighten all mankind (John 1:9), which is my wish, prayer and desire.

It has been my desire to write you of the leading of my soul from my youth and to reveal my unworthy condition to you. I declare that I have been led to do so. The reason that I have procrastinated so long is partly due to many troubles and hindrances, but the greatest is the unworthiness I feel. Please interpret this all in love. O Lord, let this all be done to your glory.

When as a boy my parents started me in school, I was wild and knew how to take advantage of situations and behave thoughtlessly in front of the other students. After this had gone on a while and my conscience bothered me, our loving God won my love and revealed his saving grace to me.



Johan Buhler's notebook in which he copied Cornelius Regier's letter in 1840, showing the first and last pages of the letter; the right-hand page of the lower photo consists of a long "P.S." with greetings to family and friends, which has not been included in this translation

With his great friendship and love, he revealed to me that all my worldly friends and deeds were vanity and I had the feeling I must die and woe unto me if I did not accept God's grace, and similar thoughts.

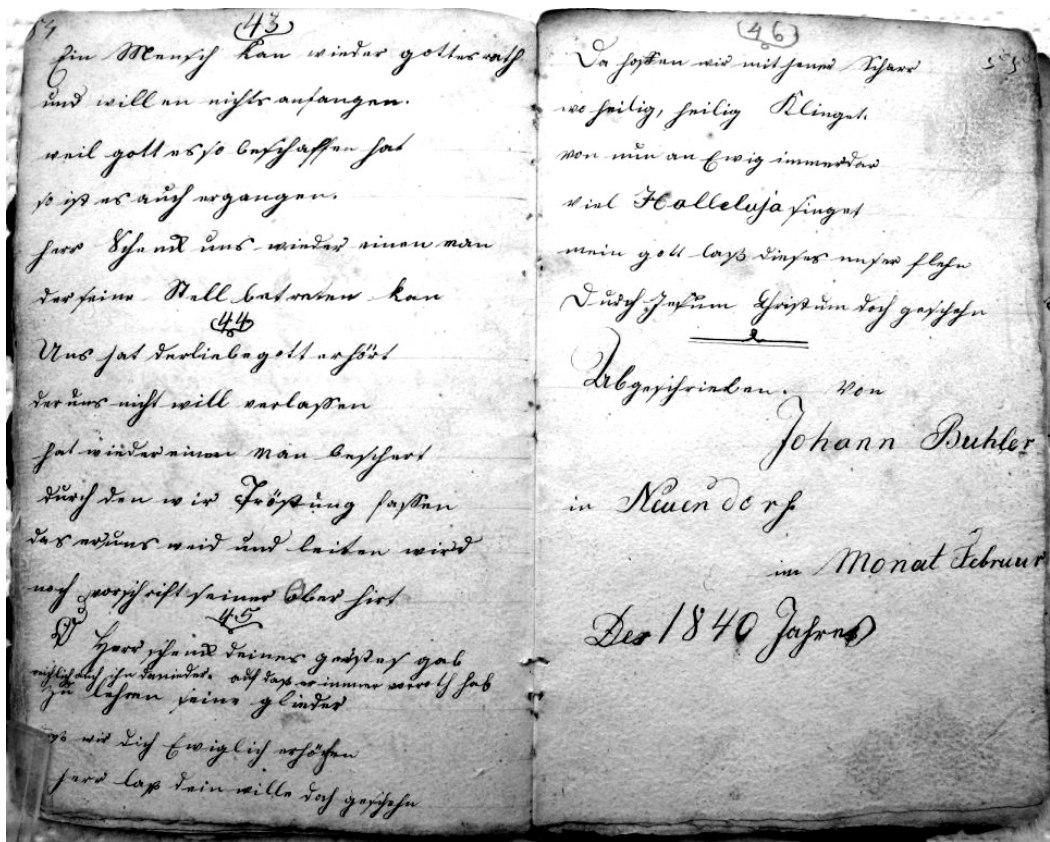
These thoughts kept knocking at my heart's door, even though I tried to ignore them. But our loving God kept on until I couldn't stop them and I had to believe it was the truth. Once I was convinced, my desire was to love Jesus and be like him.

Since my parents lived in Rosenort, it so happened that one Sunday I went to church with them in Rosenort and that Uncle [Ohm] Abraham Buhler preached from the words of Jeremiah 14: 7-9: "O

Lord, though our iniquities testify against us, do it for thy name's sake: for our backslidings are many. We have sinned against thee." ..etc.

Out of these words he presented a very sharp repentance message and this was the first sermon I had listened to with my heart and it was not without fruit. At that time I was approximately 13 or 14 years old and from that time on I had a desire and love for God's word and I especially wanted to hear Abraham Buhler preach and I wouldn't let a Sunday go by without hearing him.

His words echoed so deep in my heart that I wrote pages full of my thoughts and these were



Pages 45 and 46 of Johan Buhler's notebook, showing his note at the end of his transcription of Cornelius Regier's letter

not without effect upon my soul; with God's help it became a driving force in my life. The trivial friends who once gave me pleasure were now bitterness to my soul and when I saw them coming, I would hide in the bake-house in the garden. There I would fill my time in prayer and sing in my loneliness.

Although I was not without doubts that God would hear my prayers, and was still besieged with temptations, yet I had a sweet pleasure with my God, for this was the first love where God blessed me with his kiss of peace and through this revealed his friendship; and I continued in this way for a while.

While I was feeding the cattle one winter's day I determined to read through the Bible. As I was reading in the books of the kings of Israel and Judah, I rejoiced when reading about the wise kings and when I read about a wicked king, I was saddened, just as it also happened with your people.

I finally determined to be baptized and join the church. After my baptism I thought to myself, now you will have to serve the Lord with more zeal. But I fell into depression and instead of becoming more active for God, I became lukewarm and forgot my

first love. I again started to keep company with my old friends from whom I had parted. I had the reputation of a good man but I fell so low that I still haven't forgotten my downfall and often sigh with David: O Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.

In 1764, I was married in our Heuboden [Mennonite] church and since a minister was needed, it pleased our loving God to have me and my brother Peter Regier elected to serve God's word. This brought with it doubts, especially when considering my unworthiness. After three weeks I presented my first message from the words that Jesus preached in Mark 1:15: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ye and believe the gospel."

For the gift of being able to memorize, with which our loving God blessed me, I thank him, but my speaking wasn't with the true Spirit's power. I well knew the way to Jesus, and knew also how to present this way so a poor soul can find grace, but I, myself, was slack in beseeching the Lord in prayer. I was hanging onto both sides, for I had the reputation of having many talents and famed for my sermons, so I was satisfied.

Some members of the Tiegenhoff [Mennonite] church had lost their love for Jesus and this affected some of our members who then came to me for advice. This awoke in me a new stirring so that I again searched for Jesus but not without fear and anxiety until I felt that Jesus would offer me grace; but then even this hope fell away because I had left the first love. During this time of alternating between thunderstorms and sunshine, in 1769 I was encouraged to entrust my sermons and myself wholly to God and not write them out but speak the words that the Lord Jesus would give me at that hour.

This advice seemed good but I lacked faith and confidence in Jesus and couldn't carry it through. It happened that a certain G.W. told me of his experience. He had also felt the spirit tell him to preach the words that Jesus provided at the moment. He had doubted but finally tried it, relying on God's grace, which then had assisted him.

This was a new demand on my heart: won't you also trust Jesus who can help you in small things as well as great things? So it happened as we approached Christmas and it was my turn to preach, that I experienced a soft inner urge to trust Jesus:

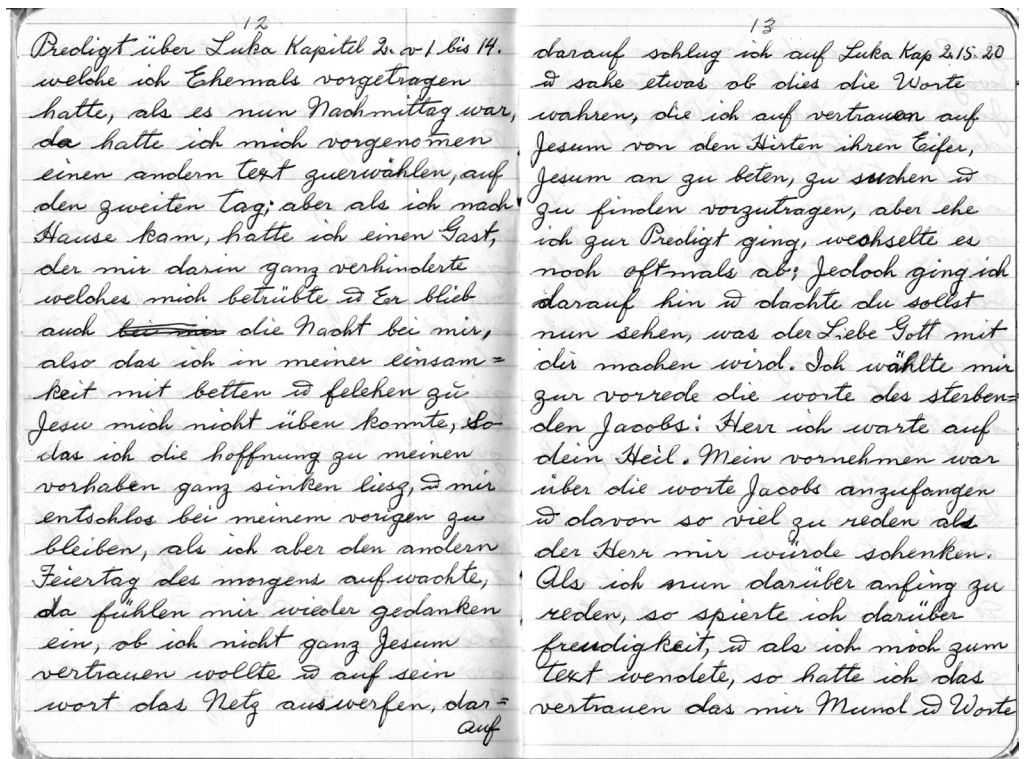
he will supply the words you should speak. Yet, this caused a debate in my soul until the day came. Yes, the first day I took a written message based on Luke 2:1-14, which I had used previously. In the afternoon I determined to use a different text the next day but when I came home I had a guest who hindered my resolve, which saddened me, and he also stayed the night.

With this lonely feeling I could not gain victory in prayer and supplication from

At right, pages 12 and 13 of the transliterated version of the letter, written by Abram Buhler's father Abram J. Buhler in 1774

Jesus; the hope I had enjoyed sank within me and I decided to keep on as before. But when I awoke on the second holiday [day after Christmas], I again was convicted to fully trust Jesus and in response to his word throw out the net. So I resolved to speak on Luke 2:15-20 about the shepherds' zeal to find and worship Jesus. But as I prepared to speak I was still in doubt. In spite of my doubt I went ahead and thought: now you will see what our loving God will do with you. For the opening, I chose the words of the dying Jacob: Lord I wait on your salvation. My intention was to start with Jacob's words and speak as much as the Lord would give me. As I began to preach I felt joy, and when I turned to the text, I was confident that the words to speak would be given to me, that Jesus would grant me success.

On the third day of Christmas, I chose a different text where I again had victory, but after Jesus had brought my unworthy self thus far, Satan sought to rob me and fill me with pride. There now arose in me such proud thoughts: look, now you are someone! Grace such as this God only imparts sparingly and now you are among those who experience special favor. Thoughts like these and others plagued me much and the judgment of those who



spoke of this as a wonderful thing until I became fearful of losing God's grace. I besought my Jesus in humility not to let me fall into this snare but to always keep me humble and small; then I felt his help to rid me of this horrible pride. In this way, the dear Saviour has helped me, so that to this hour, I can in faith trust and rely on him to speak whatever his love demands.

In 1770, it pleased our loving God to gather to himself my father-in-law [delete: through a natural death], who had served our conference as *Ältester* for almost 30 years. This caused me no small anxiety, as I wondered whether this position might fall on me, for which I felt much too small and unworthy. But that summer I was elected *Ältester*. How I felt I can hardly describe, as I was only 27 years old. I fell into depression and lost all courage and trust in Jesus and I was tossed about like a ship in a violent storm with no anchor.

When I returned home I went into my little room, fell on my knees, and prayed to Jesus for his grace. But it seemed the only answer I got was: You are far too great a sinner; this office is for your eternal damnation. Otherwise, you might have received forgiveness for your sins, but with this position you will be lost and there is no mercy for you. While these thoughts were so sharp in my conscience, I was determined to go to the *Ältester* who had led the election, namely Dirk Thiessen, and refuse to accept the role. However, after reaching this conclusion, I felt in my heart as if someone was saying to me: wait a while and ponder this through.

With these thoughts I refrained from resigning; besides, the words of Paul in 1st Timothy 3:2–4 rang in my heart: "A bishop then must be blameless." etc. [the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, not greedy of filthy lucre, but patient, not a brawler, not covetous. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity."] I also remembered the verdict the angel gave to the church at Sardis: you have the reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

So I lived for a time without hope and comfort and had little or no reason to believe that God would

be merciful and forgive my sins. Yes, all the comfort which the Lord had granted, that I should have grace, was now completely gone. When I considered what an example I should be and how faultless, then all my courage sank and I thought that if I didn't have this heavy responsibility I could at least be saved, but not now.

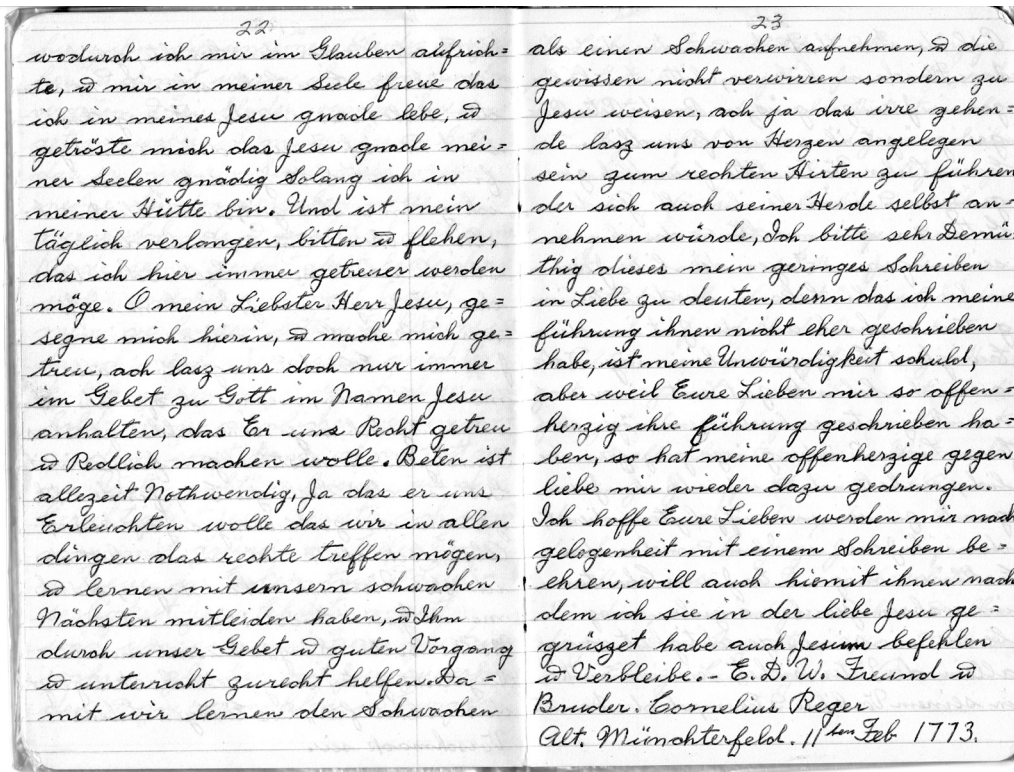
But in God's word I found: As I live saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live (Ezekiel 33:11). Then I thought, I want and God wants all sinners to repent; so I must accept this and say: Dear God, if you don't want the death of sinners, but rather that we poor sinners repent and live for you, then you, dear God, do this to me and make me blessed. I do want your blessing so much, my God. You know my heart and condition better than I can say. If I can't obtain salvation in my position, then please release me from my bishopric. Do with me what you please, my Saviour. I give you my soul, body, and life; make me your own.

This gave me some comfort and having entrusted myself into his care I asked him to mould me to his will. More comfort came to me from Zechariah chapter 3, the account where the high priest Joshua had filthy clothes and the angel told him to remove them and he was cleansed from his sins. Then festive clothes were put on him. I prayed my Jesus to forgive my sins for his love's sake and clothe me with his righteousness, that I might become more like him, which is still my daily desire and prayer.

Oh, if only man would in true knowledge, zeal, faithfulness, and love earnestly seek to become clothed with Jesus Christ; to bind and wed himself with joy and true faith with Jesus in judgment and eternity, just as I have understood from your writing that you are clothed therewith and have joy in your peace with God.

So often when the dark clouds gather and the dark days hover over my soul, I say: I come in misery and pain. O Lord, acknowledge my misery and distress and forgive all my sins, which are ever before me.

I have to confess that very often I could not claim joy and peace with God in my soul but I thank my



The last two pages of the letter, as transliterated into the English alphabet by Abram J. Buhler in 1974

God that I can withstand the tempter through the grace of Jesus.

When I in danger pray and sing,
Then will my heart rejoicing ring;
Your Spirit freely tells me this
will be a foretaste of heaven's bliss.

With this I strengthened my belief and in my soul rejoiced that I lived in Jesus' grace and comforted myself that as long as I lived in this tabernacle, his grace was sufficient for my soul.

This is my daily prayer, desire, and supplication: that I might be ever faithful. Oh, my Lord Jesus, bless me herewith and make me faithful; may we always continue in prayer to God in the name of Jesus that he will make us true and steadfast.


Prayer is necessary at all times; yes, may he enlighten us that we will do what is right in all things and learn to have compassion with our weak neighbor and through our prayers, example, and counsel, help him. That we might learn to receive the weak in his weakness and not confuse his faith but point him to Jesus. Yes, may we from the depth of our heart desire to lead the wandering soul to the good shepherd who will gladly receive him.

I very humbly ask you to interpret my insignificant writing in love. The reason I haven't written sooner was due to my feeling unworthy, but since you so openly wrote of your life, my heartfelt love demands it of me. I hope that you will at an opportune time honour me with a letter.

After greeting you in the name of Jesus, I want to entrust you into his care and remain your friend and brother, Cornelius Reger.

Alt Münchterfeld. February 11, 1773

Note: Rev. Abram Buhler's brothers David, George, and Willy were also ordained ministers in the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. George also served as *Ältester* for many years.

Rev. Cornelius Regier (who spelled his name "Reger") was a much loved *Ältester* in Prussia whose conciliatory skills settled many disputes between Flemish and Frisian Mennonites. One of his many good sermons was given in 1789 to 919 Mennonites from 152 families who were leaving Prussia to go to Russia. See GAMEO for more information. 

Pilgram Marpeck and the Gospels

By Walter Klaassen

Following is the text of the presentation by Dr. Walter Klaassen to the annual general meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, March 2, 2013.

I first met Pilgram Marpeck in the Bodleian Library at Oxford University in 1958. Only two years earlier a hand-written, leather-bound codex, which contained a collection of letters by Pilgram Marpeck, had been discovered. That summer, my wife Ruth and I drove from Zürich, where I was studying, to Berne, where I was able to see the famous volume. I immediately ordered a microfilm to be made of it. In the months before Christmas, 1958, I sat for many hours in the ancient library at the microfilm reader, reading the 19 letters of Marpeck.

Those letters were the most important find of Anabaptist writings in modern times. They have now been published in both German and English. It did not take long for William Klassen, who was at the same time at work on Marpeck at Princeton University, and myself to conclude that we were dealing with the most outstanding theologian and interpreter of Scripture among Anabaptists in the 16th century.

Along with those letters, four anonymous books, which had been known to researchers for some time, were identified as the work of Marpeck. They, too, are all available now in English translation.

This is the group of writings on which I base what I have to say. Marpeck never wrote theological treatises like John Calvin, but, more like Martin Luther, wrote in response to live issues in the Europe of the day and to specific problems which had arisen in the Anabaptist church community. He directed his polemic at Protestants, Catholics, and also at other members of the Radical Reformation. He also addressed his own Anabaptists especially on the question of Christian liberty, strongly rejecting the legalistic church discipline practised by some Anabaptists.

Now to the question of Marpeck's use of Scripture. First I should say that he accepted the Refor-

mation principle of *sola scriptura*, the Scriptures as the sole authority for Christian and church. I did a rough statistical survey of Scripture references in the works cited above, comprising a total of 556 printed pages. The result may surprise you. There are 190 Old Testament citations, 504 from the gospels and Acts, and 1,050 from the New Testament epistles, the bulk of which are from the hand of Paul. So the gospel references comprise less than a third of the total. That information could lead to the conclusion that Marpeck was very much in the company of Martin Luther in his use of the Bible, particularly since Romans is quoted by Marpeck more often than any of the other epistles. But while these statistics may serve the purposes of number crunchers, they serve only a limited purpose here.

Long ago I wrote and had published a little book with the title *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*. It was published 40 years ago and appears still to be in print. I was roundly criticized for it by some ecumenists who judged it not on its merits but because of what they said was its sectarian bias. Others, and by no means only Mennonites, found it useful. While I would say some things differently today, I would still say:

Marpeck's interpretation of Christian faith was different from Martin Luther's, whose central motif was justification by faith, for which his primary authority was Romans and Galatians.

Marpeck's interpretation of Christian faith was different from John Calvin's, whose central motif was the sovereignty of God, in which the Old Testament played a major role.

Marpeck's interpretation of Christian faith was different from the Catholic, where the sacraments were central and the past tradition of the church played a major authoritative role.

So Marpeck's interpretation differed from these three; what was it, then?

His main motif was "the humanity of Christ," "*die Menschheit Christi*", and in his interpretation, the

gospels played the major role despite the statistics given above.

However, Marpeck more than most other Anabaptist thinkers, was very concerned about his own creedal orthodoxy. He entered the Reformation controversy determined to avoid a charge of heresy in order that his interpretation of Jesus would not be dismissed by Catholics and Protestants, because it was on the basis of the Jesus of the gospels that he challenged the Protestant and Catholic versions of Jesus. His interpretation of Jesus began where everyone else's began, the Incarnation, the central Christian affirmation that God had appeared in human form in Jesus. For him, as for them, Jesus was both divine and human.

When he wrote about the humanity of Christ, his intention was to consider Jesus as a person in human history, so that he could be our example. Before we can talk about the glory of Christ in the Holy Trinity, he taught, we have to consider him as a human being, the form in which God chose to make himself known. In Jesus the man, the supreme, almighty, all-knowing God had clothed himself with humiliation, he had emptied himself and chosen human limitation. That language came directly from Philippians 2, where we read that "he emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." The description of that "emptying" Marpeck found chiefly in the gospels.

Jesus' human life, in the power and wisdom of the Spirit, Marpeck taught, is the model for the disciple. He came into the world and lived in it in poverty. He refused the protection of the sword and worldly kingship. He prayed for his enemies. He surrendered to the deep humiliation of trial and crucifixion; he did not resist or retaliate. According to Marpeck, Jesus' deepest humiliation came when, after his death, he descended into hell, a view based on 1 Peter 3:19. This descent was not, as other Christians taught, a triumphal emptying of hell. Rather, it was the rock bottom of his suffering; "he made the descent into hell and dwelled with the condemned ... and with those held by death" (Jörg Maler's *Kunstbuch*, ed. John D. Rempel, Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2008, p. 577. Hereafter *KB*). Only after he had gone to the lowest depth of separation from God, did Jesus rise, and

ascend to the right hand of God. When he ascended, Marpeck wrote, his humanity was taken up into God the Father. It is as the Son of Man that Jesus is the judge. We obey him as Son of Man and Son of God. Marpeck never separated his theology from his ethics, and never, as is often done by Christians today, did he simply turn theology into ethics.

Again and again Marpeck addresses fellow Christians, Catholic and Protestant, with his understanding of the authority of the example of Jesus in his earthly ministry. Never, he argues, did Jesus use his authority and power to dominate or coerce anyone.

I've gathered his appeal to Catholics, Protestants, and Anabaptists under three headings:

- ***Christ did not come to rule nor should his disciples rule over anyone;***
- ***a faith that is coerced is a dead faith; it may never be defended with human weapons;***
- ***there may be no legalistic coercion in the church.***

Instead of attempting to summarize Marpeck's views in my words, I shall now simply present his own words on these topics.

- ***Christ did not, and Christians may not, rule over others.***

"For Christ the highest Lord did not come to dominate, coerce, condemn, nor rule. He will allow no one to be accused before him, and himself accuses no one. Rather, he was himself a servant, and allowed himself to be dominated, violated, accused, condemned, and cursed, and to suffer injustice. That is our mirror in which we can see whether we have the stature of Christ or not.... Christians will never take the liberty to exercise coercion and authority, regardless of how wicked or upright those to be ruled might be. Rather they will allow themselves to be dominated, ruled over, and violated in patience and love to the end of time" (*Later Writings by Pilgram Marpeck and His Circle*, Vol. I, Kitchener: Pandora Press, 1999, "Exposé of the Babylonian Whore," 32–3, 42. Hereafter *Later Writings*).

By service in the growth of the body of Christ, “the weakest, least, and smallest members are strengthened, comforted, led, guided, and pastured by the strong, leading and most able members. Thus they are trained ... and nourished until they reach the full maturity of Christ. For whoever would be the greatest must be the vassal and servant, and not the ruler of all the others.... They do not rule over the heritage of God but become an example to the flock. For it is certain ... that the Son of the Father was not (in his time) sent to rule in order that he should be served. The Lord is a true example for all who are his disciples and servants” (*Kunstbuch*, “Service and Servants of the Church,” 373–4).

“To sum up, I present to the so-called evangelicals and their teachers and preachers no other alternative than the crucified, patient, and loving Christ. Whoever does not preach Christ but rather preaches the opposite is against Christ, regardless of whether he is an old or a new pope or Antichrist. Even if they were to preach as skillfully about God as Christ himself, it will not help unless they preach the gentle, humble Christ who can only be known under the cross, patience, and love” (*Later Writings*, 27).

“It is not very complicated; one needs only to bend one’s back, freely offer it to the cross of Christ following our Lord Christ, and faithfully bear that cross with gentleness, love, and patience as God’s lambs. This cross-bearing is the resistance to the enemies of Christ by which we easily win, not the earthly, but the eternal victory” (*Later Writings*, 29–30).

- ***There may be no coercion in matters of faith; the gospel may never be defended with human weapons.***

“He rules in his own through his Spirit alone also in temporal matters, and distinguishes the spirit of the accusing, vengeful Elijah from the Spirit he gave his own.... When his disciples, who knew and felt this Spirit in themselves, wished to practise the vengeance of Elijah, he reminded them of the difference between Elijah’s spirit and his own Therefore his own, also, may never destroy anyone. Did this accusing, vengeful Elijah also have the Spirit of Christ? If so, according to these prophets, Christ was

wrong to forbid his disciples to exercise vengeance when they appealed to Elijah” (*Later Writings*, 33).

“Human coercion will destroy all who support a human, forcibly imposed faith and all who claim the word of faith but who trust and depend upon human protection and power; like Peter, they will be driven to a denial. Peter also thought that Christ would be a temporal and earthly redeemer who would save them with carnal weapons. Thus Peter pledged that he was prepared to give his life for the Lord. However, he received no help from the Lord in his carnal fighting; Jesus helped the one whose ear Peter had cut off. Then Peter denied the Lord three times and swore he had never known the man” (*KB*, “The Lowliness of Christ,” 595).

“Would to God for their sake that it were not true that today there are worse and even more evil merchants than the Jewish Pharisees, who bought the Lord from Judas.... But today whole lands, populations, and armies (many hundreds of thousands of people, even though they are not good people) are betrayed, sold, and bought by their loans, finance and usury. It is done out of avarice, envy, and hate, an attempt to preserve their earthly pomp, pride, and vain honour. [What is worse is that] all the actions of those who compel faith, both the old and the new, are done in the semblance of Christ and his gospel” (*KB*, “The Lowliness of Christ,” 596).

“The Jews, contrary to Christ and his own, claim to expect a Messiah or Christ who will redeem them from all the power of the Gentiles by means of the human arm and carnal weapons, and lead them into the promised land. The alleged Christians are now blinded by this Jewish error.... They assume that with carnal sword and human arm, Christ will release and redeem them from those who justifiably coerce and frighten them through the appearance of his coming. The old Latin Roman church, which is ruled by imperial power, also hopes the emperor will achieve victory in the semblance and name of Christ against all those who resist her. It will happen in order that all those will be punished who, in the semblance of Christ, suppose that they will decide with the carnal sword and themselves become coercers

of faith, and persecute with the carnal sword those who do not agree with them, and insist on maintaining violence against violence with the carnal sword in the semblance of Christ" (*KB*, "The Love of God and the Cross of Christ," 317–18).

"The whole world imagines that it has Christ living here or there, because of the sectarian, external, coerced religion, by which they deceive themselves. ... How can the coerced and forced faith, or the faith based on old custom, stand before God? ... It is not from God, nor is it taught by the Holy Spirit ... Rather, it is from the generation and will of the flesh of man, who is steeped in his earthly, fallen nature and human reason, sophistry, and wisdom" (*KB*, "The Lowliness of Christ," 604).

- ***Marpeck emphatically rejected legalism in the church because it too leads to coercion and violence.***

"This Jesus Christ is the free Son, of God and Man, and he is without commandment or prohibition against his own, the faithful.... Where there is no sin or wickedness, no command or prohibition is needed; there is freedom from all law. Where commandment or prohibition rule conscience, heart, and even God's law, one is not free but in bondage to sin and wickedness. There is no free grace, peace, or joy in the Holy Spirit but rather the threat of punishment, fear, sorrowing, and anxiety about the vengeance on sin through the coming wrath of God" (*KB*, "Hasty Judgements and Verdicts," 143).


A reason for splits in the church is "lack of understanding, ignorance, anger, hasty zeal for old customs, blood relatives, fellowship based on natural love; for one's own teaching, knowledge, and understanding, which loves to puff itself up and which causes communal strife before it has come to self-knowledge ... presuming in ignorant zeal to be teachers before they have become students of Christ" (*KB*, "Cause of Conflict," 197).

"The glorious liberty of Christ dwells in love, given to no one except to true love in Christ Jesus. Again, the truly free are given no other commandment except to love. This is the bond with which

the liberty of Christ is bound.... to this liberty of Christ all things are lawful.... But wherever something does not serve or promote improvement, love in Christ acts with all her authority, privileges and freedom, and never acts against her own nature" (*KB*, "Hasty Judgements," 157).

"Therefore, even if one is concerned about a lapse or burdened with worry and sees the leaves and blossoms of evil appearance, one ought only to warn and admonish, not judge before the time of the fruit. The Lord does not say, "By their blossoms or leaves," but rather, "By their fruits you shall know them." Whoever, therefore, establishes, commands, prohibits, coerces, punishes or judges before the time the good or evil fruit is revealed, lays claim to the authority, power, and office of the Holy Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ and, contrary to love, goodness, and grace, runs ahead of Jesus Christ" (*KB*, "Hasty Judgements", 154, 153).

"Some true sons of Pilate still ask whether Christ is a king. When ... they are told in Christ's words that his kingdom is not of this world, they say that they want no king whose kingdom is not of this world.... They don't want to be ruled by Christ for he is, in their view, a preposterous king."

And one final quote: "I am surprised that Christ and the apostles, and especially St. Peter, did not elect a ruler to rule over all those whom he converted to Christ and who believed.... The Spirit of God was not wise enough for these prophets who are rightly called the 'new' evangelicals. God have mercy on them" (*Later Writings*, 39, 42). 

Book Launch and Review: *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*

By Ruth Marlene Friesen



The author, speaking
at the book launch
Photo by Susan Braun

Arlette Kouwenhoven. *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*. Leiden, the Netherlands: Winco Publishing, 2013. 264 pp., softcover. English translation by Lesley Fast. Available through MHSS for \$30.

The Launch

About half of the good crowd that turned out on Sunday, June 9th, for the launch of the *The Fehrs: Four centuries of Mennonite migration* raised their hands to indicate they were personally of the de Veer/Fehr bloodline, or had close relatives who were. There was a keen and attentive interest as the author, Arlette Kouwenhoven, visiting from the Netherlands, told the story of how she came to research and write this story. The author is a Dutch anthropologist and publisher, the owner of Kouwenhoven Publishing Services.

Her husband imports yucca from Mexico to the Netherlands, and upon discovering a colony of Mennonites who still refused to drive cars or use electricity, he sent her a message to check this out. She visited the Sabinal colony in Mexico, just south of El Paso, Texas, and met David Fehr and his family. Tracing their family line's migrations led her to research in Winnipeg, where she met very helpful people.

In her book, the author describes the times and mores and religious events at each stage, for the

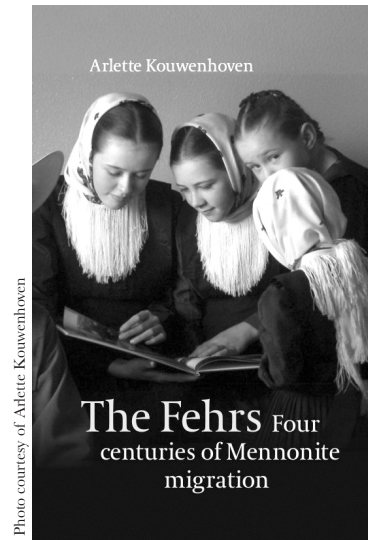


Photo courtesy of Arlette Kouwenhoven

generations who form the ancestors in this particular line of Fehrs. She brings the people to life, so they are not just names on a chart, but take on flesh and personality.

The book launch was sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS), who provided the faspas reception. It began at 2:30 p.m., and was held in the Fellowship Hall of Bethany Manor in Saskatoon. Jake Buhler, president of the society, opened the meeting and Leonard Doell, member of the board of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc., which provided financial support for the book, introduced the author. He also helped her field some questions from the audience.

After the author's talk, various Fehr genealogists compared notes and sought out one another to check for new information. Book sales were brisk both before and after the talk.

The Review

The book describes how, as the author dug into the past to see how the Fehrs were tied to her home country, she made many amazing discoveries. Her research led her to the Mennonite archives in Winnipeg, where she learned that any Fehr who seeks their ancestry will discover that they go back to one man,

Gijsbert Janz de Veer, a 16th-century Flemish grain merchant.

Some of the author's research led her to take down the stories of people right here in our Saskatchewan Valley area, people like the family of Abram Janzen of Blumenheim, who could still recall the David Fehr who had been part of the wave of émigrés who moved down to Mexico in the 1920s, and whose family she met on the Sabinal Colony.

Young members of the Fehr family of Sabinal Colony, as they set out on an outing
Photos this page by Arlette Kouwenhoven



Then she turned storyteller. Arlette has related the four hundred years of history in a very readable narrative. It begins with the time of the martyrs, and the blot of the Münster murders in Anabaptist history. It follows the Gijsbert de Veer survivors of that period to Danzig, in Prussia. William the Great had offered the harassed followers of Menno Simons a tract of land on the delta if they would build up the land so it would not flood so often.

The de Veers lived in the Marienberg Werder for several generations, where, for example, Gijsbert III had a lace-making studio in Alt-Schottland. He and his brothers traded in gold, silver, and silk lace. Their customers were royalty, for the most part.

Naturally, this book review cannot dare to retell the whole series of adventures one after another. I can urge you to read it for yourself, and then when the details grow fuzzy in memory, re-read it again more slowly to absorb some of the historical details.

Of course, this saga will take you through the years in the Ukraine, where many of the Mennonites moved next and stayed, for about 100 years of history-making, and from there on to Canada and the United States.

From here in Canada, issues about being able to educate their children in their own schools and in

their own language led a sizable number to pack up and move down to Mexico, and from there, some on to other Central and South American countries.

The Fehrs is a book of great interest to the very prolific progeny of those earlier Fehrs. We (for I too am one of them) seem to have infiltrated every stratum of life, and many countries around the world. (Like salt?) But this book does a fine job of summing up our history in a very readable and concise way. There are clues for further research for those looking for those things, but the simplicity of Arlette's storytelling will also fascinate those who just want a glimpse of the kind of people that came before.

The book provides a very basic genealogy chart and some simple maps (there is much more available out there if you want to find such things).

The Fehrs was first published in Dutch in 2011 as *De Fehrs, Kroniek van een Nederlandse mennonietenfamilie*. The author gratefully acknowledges the financial support for the translation and publication of this book by Art and Leona DeFehr, Bill and Margaret Fast, and the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.

The last chapter, "Alternate Ways," was added for this English translation. It focuses on the particular branch that became the Defehrs of Winnipeg, well-known for their furniture-making company.

If you have always thought you were just a lowly Fehr, you have many, many distant relatives. Your family line started as de Veer, but includes branches like Defehrs, and perhaps other spelling variations. Now we are a tribe too large to count!



A typical scene on the Sabinal Colony





Book Reviews

By Margaret Ewert

Remember us: Letters from Stalin's Gulag (1930 -37) Volume 1: The Regehr Family, by Ruth Derksen Siemens. Pandora Press, 2007. 407 pp.

In August of 1989 Frank Barga, in cleaning out the attic of his Manitoba home, discovered a box of letters which his parents had stored there. On checking, he found letters from as early as 1930, correspondence from uncles, aunts, grandparents etc; 463 letters in all. This volume includes letters written to Franz and Liese Barga from Jasch and Maria Regehr in the "Gulag" — the northern regions of Russia to which they were exiled when they tried to leave the country.

These letters are not easy reading. The Regehr family had been split up, the older children working away from home. Working conditions were extremely hard, and often work extended to 15 to 17 hours per day. Remuneration was very low, and they could never purchase enough food to satisfy their hunger. Mrs. Regehr was very careful to ration out each one's allotted amount per meal so that everyone would have a little bit of food. No matter how weak they might be, the adults and even the teenage children had to report for work.

The Barga family in Manitoba obviously sent numerous parcels and tried to help with monetary gifts as well, but they themselves were new to Canada, and the Dirty Thirties affected their crops and income; yet they tried their best to help their relatives in Russia and probably invited other relatives and friends to make contributions as well. Reading the repeated requests for help must have been very difficult.

Jasch Regehr did not survive the ordeal and Maria was left to carry the burden of feeding the family. At one point she too is sent to prison, but finally is released after a year and six months and returned to her family.

After 1937, all correspondence stopped. It was not until many years later that a connection was again made with the family. Two of the daughters eventually made their way to Germany, and one was still living when the author was able to visit her in Europe. The book concludes with some memories by Lena and Maria, who were able to emigrate to Germany and in 1987 contacted relatives in Canada.

Although it is difficult to read about those who were unable to leave Russia — and there were many who tried but failed — this provides a look back into part of the Mennonite experience in a country which at one time had provided a safe haven for them from the religious persecution they were experiencing in other parts of Europe. It is estimated that there may have been about sixty million people who perished during the Stalin years, so Mennonites may have been a small portion of those who were martyred. For those of us whose parents or grandparents managed to get to Canada before the really difficult years, we can only be thankful that they were able to come when they did.

The author, Ruth Derksen Siemens, is a first generation Canadian, born in Vancouver, and is an instructor of rhetoric and writing at the University of British Columbia.



Victor Carl Friesen. *Forever Home: good old days on the farm*. Fifth House Ltd., 2004. 228 pp. softcover.

In this well written book of reminiscences, Victor Friesen recounts the everyday experiences of living on the farm in the days of his youth. It is divided into ten sections: Where we Lived, Work about the Home, Farmyard Chores, Fall Activities, Winter Amusements, Other Amusements, School Days, Go-

ing to Town, Getting Away, Growing up.” Growing up in Saskatchewan in the late 1930s and 1940s was very different from the present time, and possibly it will be people in their 70s and 80s who will be most able to resonate with the stories told here.

There are also neat little illustrations appropriately interspersed in the book.

It is a delightful book to read.

Note: *An excerpt from Forever Home, “Our Old Smokehouse,” was published in Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian Volume XV No. 1 (February 2009). — Ed.*



Tena Friesen. *Pushing Through Invisible Barriers: A Canadian Mennonite Story*. Altona, MB.: Friesens Corporation, printers, 2011. 517 pp.

Tena (Neudorf) Friesen, in the prologue to the book, says: “I wrote my life story, initially, with my children and grandchildren in mind, that they might get a glimpse into their heritage, but also that they might understand and learn some of life’s lessons from it — that the world does not owe them anything; that, instead, they may ask the question, “What can I contribute to make this world a better place?”

The book begins with a thirteen-page “overview of Mennonite History” and continues to tell Tena’s story, beginning with her early years in the Hague–Osler area of Saskatchewan (their home was in Osler), also mentioning some of the early history of her parents and grandparents. Her early school years were in a one-room rural school (53 students in grades one to nine). Life on a farm is well described, verbally and with pictures. In 1951 her father bought

land in the La Crete area of Alberta and by 1953 wheels were set in motion to begin the move north.

Life in the La Crete area was a bit more primitive than they had been accustomed to, but they adapted. School work was done by correspondence, and the older girls helped the younger ones with their lessons. In 1958 a school was built, so Tena was able to take her grade eight there, but high school needed to be completed away from home at Peace River. At the conclusion of her grade 12 exams, she was disappointed to discover she was one point short of being eligible for university entrance. She had always wanted to be a teacher. However, Carl Friesen, whom she had grown to love, suggested they get married, and they set a date for August 26, 1962. Carl took over a garage business and she ran a restaurant as well as the bus depot. In August of 1963, she took over running the community post office. Eventually she began working with the teacher-librarian at the local school and then was given the job of librarian when the teacher resigned.

In the meantime they had also started their family, and had three children, but their busy life continued in various directions. In 2004, after retirement, they moved to Tumbler Ridge, B.C.; in the same year, they made a trip to Mexico to visit the Mennonite colonies there. Tena felt that the effort to get away from the world had not served to improve the spiritual life of many of the people there.

This well-written autobiography gives a picture of life in the north, of one woman’s efforts to study and make a contribution to the world. It also gives her family a picture of her background and her faith. She concludes with special comments to each of her children and grandchildren. There are also numerous pictures included.



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 (†2013)
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.

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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:

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

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Gift subscriptions are available.

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

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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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