SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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INSIDE

The Great Mennonite Trek to Turkistan: an Enlightening Event

Members and friends of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan were treated to an enlightening and provocative two-day history lesson at Bethany Manor last November. The subject was what is known as the Mennonite Great Trek to Turkestan, undertaken by Russian Mennonites in the 1880s. The theme was a rethinking of the facts of the trek and its significance for us today. Presenters included historian John Sharp, professor at Hesston College in Kansas, formerly director of Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and Archives in Goshen, Indiana; Walter Klaassen, author and descendant of a Trek participant; Jerold Gliege, also a descendant, who performed on his violin; Art Priebe, who sang gospel songs and hymns for the audience; and Albertine Speiser, a descendant, who read from her grandmother's recollections of the Trek.

The featured item for Friday night was the newly released documentary, *Through the Desert Goes the Journey,* about the original trek. It was directed by Walter Ratliff, who travelled to Uzbekistan with researchers and descendants to retrace the journey.

See reports, stories, and photos on inside pages. The photo below shows Albertine Speiser regaling the audience with her grandmother's stories. All photos from this event were taken by Henry Harms.

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Monday: 1:30–4 p.m.
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From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt

In this, my second issue, you will note that I am still experimenting with design and layout, with a view to achieving perfection. Ever the optimist, I am convinced that the perfect union of aesthetics and readability is just around the corner. Sort of like spring!

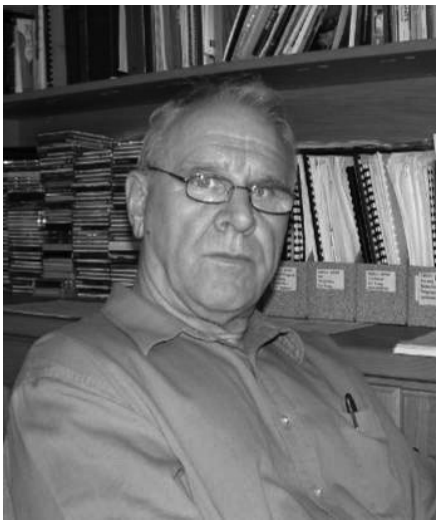
Well, we will see.

In this issue, we are reporting on a memorable weekend of re-education about the Mennonite Great Trek to Turkestan. Among other things, we also have a delightful pair of articles on The Polish Connection for Mennonites. The articles on Ältester Reddekopp and Ältester Buhler are offered as a foretaste of the treat that is in store for us at the annual general meeting of the MHSS, March 6th and 7th, which you are all strongly encouraged to attend if at all possible. See page 27 for information on the entire event. The selection from Victor Carl Friesen's *Forever Home* is sure amuse and enlighten: "Our Old Smokehouse". We also have a story of a unique and particularly poignant send-off for emigrants to America, from Osterwick in Russia and a story on the "Family Tree" page of a remarkable family reunion in a strange land, Canada, as well as a report of a well-deserved honour awarded to Esther Patkau. You are invited to read and enjoy and ponder.

MHSS Board of Directors, 2008

MHSS President's Corner

By Jake Buhler



As this issue of *The Historian* is going to press, our society is preparing to honor two Ältester from the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Abram Buhler was the last Ältester in the old tradition of that conference; John D. Reddekopp was the first Ältester in the new Bergthaler Church. Both men were faithful in their calling to lead the church in the way that God would be pleased.

The word *Ältester* does not easily translate into English. Some use the term *elder* while others use the word *bishop*. Neither does full justice to the German word. *Elder* refers to an older person, while *bishop* reminds people of an appointed prelate of the church.

An Ältester, in the Mennonite tradition, is the most senior minister of a church or group of churches. The Ältester carries authority beyond that of a minister. But true to Anabaptist tradition, the Ältester is a servant of the people. The Ältester is not appointed, but called by the members to lead them. Ältester Buhler and Reddekopp understood the difference between power and authority. Neither abused their position of influence, but used their skills to seek paths along which their congregation should tread.

Join us on March 5 at Valley Christian Academy to pay tribute to two fine Ältester.

Rethinking the Great Trek to Central Asia

By Arthur Wiens

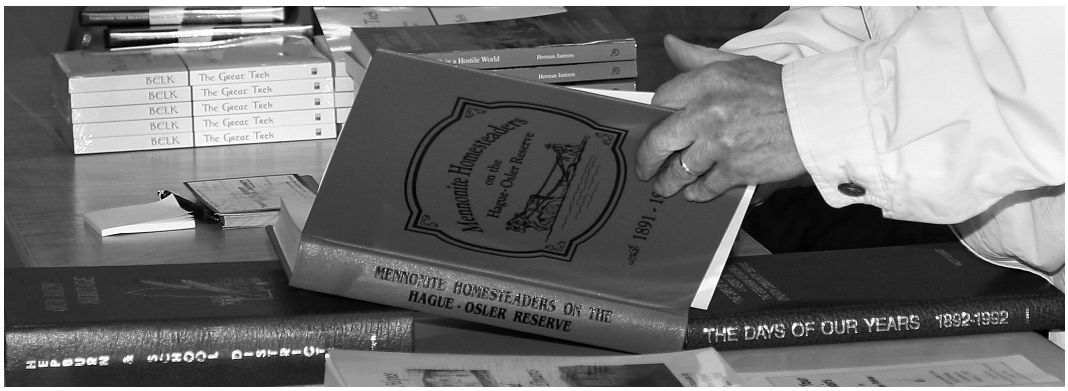
Walter Ratliff's one-hour documentary, *Through The Desert Goes our Journey*, and the presentations by John Sharp enlarged and corrected my understanding of the great Trek to Central Asia. A tour group retraced that trek in 2007 and made valuable observations.

The original migration consisted of five wagon trains, three of them leaving in 1880 and two leaving in1881. Four wagon trains came from the Trakt settlement and one from the Molotschna colony. I came to the sessions with a limited background of the trek. I had read Fred Richard Belk's book, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia 1880–1884*. I had also read some other material and had formulated a negative evaluation of the whole episode. Uppermost in my mind was that a charismatic leader, Claas Epp, had influenced his followers to a vision that Christ would return in the east. His followers were willing to experience monumental hardships in pursuit of that vision. My negative evaluation of the Trek changed during the presentations and I recognized that there was much that was positive about the Trek. The Trek left a legacy that goes beyond the fanaticism, dissension, and hardship that has been documented by previous writings. The tour group encountered a great deal that was positive and I will attempt to list some of the things the tour group encountered.

The motivation for the migration was more than the pursuit of an apocalyptic vision. In the decade of the 1870s eighteen thousand Mennonites had moved to North America in order to escape Czarist military conscription, find new economic opportunities, and to continue managing their own affairs. These concerns were also shared by this group of people who felt that God was calling them to go east instead of west.

It was also drawn to our attention that the spirit of the times (Zeitgeist) nurtured an apocalyptic vision. The influence of Jung–Stillung and others was very strong in the Mennonite community and beyond. One of Jung–Stillung novels, entitled *Heimweh*, includes Mennonite contacts. It is a novel that consists of fiction, Scripture, and history. His writings received wide circulation. Class Epp was a product of this spiritual climate. The spirit of the times created the man, not the other way around. We were also told that his leadership was not as prominent as is reflected in other literature covering this event.

In addition to the physical hardships that they encountered, they were also threatened by marauders. When they camped for the night, they always parked their wagons in a circle, to provide at least some protection. It was at a temporary settlement at Lausan that they experienced the violence of these people and the situation became desperate. Some of the younger men felt they needed to get arms to protect themselves. The others in the group said that they had started this journey to escape militarization, and that they needed to remain consistent with that



conviction. Their confidence in God did not waver.

Their chiliastic hope to meet the Lord was not laced with military thinking, as is the case with a lot of current prophetic literature. But their peace theology was tested at many places and compromises were made, like hiring Cossack guards in one situation.

As they moved further east they encountered a new culture and new languages; but they adjusted very well, cultivating beautiful relationships of respect and friendship.

At Serabulak, on the border of Bukhara, the Muslims invited the Mennonites to use their mosque for Sunday worship services and other meetings. Twenty-one young people were baptized and two couples were married in that mosque. One of the women married in the mosque was a great aunt to one of the tour members. The Mennonites also made agricultural contributions to that community. During their stay in that community they raised vegetables, such as tomatoes and potatoes. They introduced dairy cattle and the production of butter and cheese. They also engaged in missionary activity.

At Ak Metchet, a settlement was established which lasted till the l930s, when forced collectivization was responsible for its dissolution.

The name Ak Metchet means white mosque. The Mennonite church was white and the Muslims always referred to it as a white mosque. Good relationships were established between this community and the Muslim authorities in Khiva. Herman Jantzen and Emil Riesen were gifted in the area of languages and served as translators in the Khan's court. In 1909 they became naturalized as Khivan subjects. The tour group learned that the settlement was still remembered for its contributions as craftsmen and agriculturalists. For instance, even today, at the beginning of each planting season, a man comes to what was once a Mennonite cemetery and offers prayers of blessing for the seed and a prayer for good crops. After more than 70 years, the Mennonites in that community are still remembered for their contributions. When the Khan of Khiva built a palace, Mennonite woodworkers were invited to build a parquet floor like the one in St. Petersburg at the palace of the Czar. William Penner is remembered for having introduced photography. The Mennonites are also remembered for other technologies they brought to the area. They were also given credit for resisting collectivization for many years. The Soviet Union wanted to enforce collectivization at the beginning of the Stalin era but, due to the non-cooperation of the Mennonites, it did not happen till the late 1930s. Plans for a Mennonite Museum are underway in the community and contributions to the project will also come from interested Mennonites. These plans speak of a remarkable relationship. Where else in the world are the artifacts of Mennonite craftsmen celebrated in a Royal Museum?

In 1934, the Mennonite community celebrated the 50th anniversary of their settlement. A three-act drama was prepared that told their story from Prussia, to Russia, to Khiva. It is interesting to note that the name Claas Epp is not mentioned in that story.

It also needs to be said that the larger part of the group did not stay in the settlement. Many returned to Russia in 1884 and from there, migrated to the United States. Many of those became prominent leaders in Mennonite communities.

Margaret Ewert and Hilda Voth, manning the extensive book table at the Trek event.

Opposite: close-up of some of the titles on display. All photos accompanying the articles on the "Trek" event are by Henry Harms.

Jacob Klaassen, Trek Participant: His Stories

By Walter Klaassen

On the Saturday afternoon of the event, Walter Klaassen shared some memories of the stories of his grandfather, Jacob Klaassen, who had participated in the Trek. Below is Walter's summary of his presentation.

My grandfather's stories about the Trek, told to us children, were stories of adventure, for he was a teenager during those years. Claas Epp, whom they had nothing to do with, he insisted, did not much interest us either. Later, he shared with us his embarrassment when they arrived in Beatrice, Nebraska, because people regarded them as deluded.

It was my grandfather's experience with militarism that was behind his inflexible demand prior to World War II that Mennonites refuse all cooperation with the draft, including alternative service. They had had to move from Russia to Central Asia, then to the USA, and in 1918 to Canada, in each case fleeing militarism. He had had enough.

The Trek story and my own family's part in it stimulated me to write the books *Living at the End of the Ages* (1982) and *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* (1999), both concerning the end times and interpreting what the Scriptures say about them.

Several years ago, historian James Urry made available to me photocopies of letters written in the years

1882 to 1884 by an unnamed participant of the Trek. These were sent to Cornelius Jansen in Beatrice, Nebraska, translated by him, and published in the Quaker journal *The Friend*. The letters contain much detail about the Trek.

Walter autographing a copy of one of his books for Reg Rempel.

Elisabeth Unruh Schultz, Trek Participant: Her Stories

The audience was thrilled to hear some of the stories of a person who participated in the original Trek as an adolescent and recorded her experiences in a memoir. Her name was Elisabeth Unruh Schultz and her memoir has been kept and treasured by the family ever since. Entitled "What a Heritage", it is due to be published in the near future. Albertine Speiser, a granddaughter of Elisabeth's and herself now in her nineties, regaled the audience with lively readings from her grandmother's book, describing the time of the trek and her later life in the United States.

Elisabeth Unruh Schultz was born October 7, 1866 in Heinrichsdorf in southern Russia. When she was eight years old, at a time when many Mennonites were emigrating to America, her family moved "farther into Russia, to Molotschna". Some years after that, her family joined the group that was emigrating to Asia, to Turkestan and then to Bukhara. "In Bukhara, in the Himalayan mountains," Elisabeth writes, "I accepted Jesus as my personal Saviour, at the age of sixteen years."

"Our whole family moved. We were in middle Asia over four years. I was nearly eighteen years old when we were among those that were going to America. In our wanderings in Asia, we trekked eighteen weeks by wagon until we came to Tashkent, a big city in Kasakhstan. As we couldn't stay here, we moved on for another five weeks until we were stopped by sand. Then we traveled by camels for five days, and also a few weeks on paddle wheeler boats called kujaks on the Amurdarja River until we reached Luwa. We stayed there for two years. Robbing and murdering were all around us, so finally we left for America."

Albertine's readings were so well received that at the end of the last session, she was invited to share more memories — a fitting finish for the whole event.

Ed Schmidt, master of ceremonies, at the microphone.

Historian John Sharp of Hesston College, Kansas, featured speaker for the Saturday session. He has done extensive research on the Great Trek and in 2008 conducted a tour to Uzbekistan, with Ed Epp of TourMagination. Another tour is planned for spring 2009.

Art Priebe moved the audience Friday evening with a number of gospel songs and hymns. Below, his wife, Clara, accompanying him on the piano.

Jerold Gliege, accompanied by his mother, Selma Gliege.

Thoughts on the Trek Event

By Jerold Gliege

Being of Mennonite heritage and also a great-grandson of Elizabeth Schultz, I was not surprised to find myself with several hundred people my age and older, gathered in the Bethany Manor auditorium, to participate in an evening of "Rethinking the 1880 Mennonite Trek to Asia". Ed Schmidt, whose interest in all things genealogical jumps at you when he talks, had asked that I come as one of the descendants of Elizabeth, to play my violin and share in the information of the evening.

I had previously read "What a Heritage", the journal of my great-grandmother, which included her recollections of that historical trek to Asia, of which she was a teenage participant with her parents. Because of my commitment to be at the presentation I had read it again. As a result of my reading, the presentation of the DVD, "Through the Desert Goes our Journey", the musings of Ed Schmidt and the very interesting and concise presentation by John Sharp, my interest in this part of my heritage grew and I left the evening session with the hope that some time soon I could pursue the subject in greater depth.

I am grateful for the Mennonite Historical Society and its effort to uncover and preserve the gems of the past. God knows all of us are very concerned about life as it unfolds but Jesus himself stated that a wise person in the Kingdom will always hold treasures both old and new. My weekend in Bethany Manor with my Mennonite relatives and friends opened the treasure chest of the past.

The Life and Times of Bishop John D. Reddekopp

By Linsay Martens

At left, Rev. John Reddekopp. At right, with his wife, Susan. All photos in this article courtesy of Leonard Doell.

Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. And Self-control. The Apostle Paul identified these as the evidence by which one can measure the work of God in one's life. And these are the qualities that have characterized so much of the life of John D. Reddekopp. His has been a life of passionate commitment to serving God, to working in the church, to reaching out to the world, and to loving his family. We who are privileged to be a part of his life are so grateful for his demonstration of the fruits of the Spirit, for his wisdom and his courage, his authenticity and his humility, his strength and his graciousness, his laughter and his tears. We have been blessed through him. We continue to be blessed through him.

March 24, 1925 was the day that John Reddekopp made his earthly debut in the small Saskatchewan village of Blumenheim to proud parents William and Anna. John grew up with the perfect balance of two brothers and two sisters. He was taught from Grade 1 through 8 in the small Renfrew School. During this pivotal period in his growth and development, two Christian teachers had a profound influence on his life. His parents took him to church every Sunday and taught him the importance of living for God. Through his parents and the two teachers, the seeds were planted early in his life, seeds of the Gospel, seeds which would bring forth much fruit in the years to come.

At the age of twenty-three, the cross-river courtship which John had with Susan Fehr of Aberdeen culminated in marriage. The childhood song, "O Susanna" was a familiar refrain in their home over the years — not only has John always loved to sing, but he has always sought to show his love to this "Susanna"…

> "O Susanna, don't you cry for me
> 'Cause I'm going to Louisiana,
> My true love for to see."

The pitter-patter of little feet also became familiar in the Reddekopp home. Six girls and one boy made for a busy place. Frances, Joan, Barbara, Shirley, Marlene, Karen, and Stanley have always been incredibly important to John. His love for his children was expressed in a multitude of ways — warm smiles, big hugs, mischievous joking, and even the occasional farm animal sounds (he was especially talented at mimicking the moos of the dairy cows). As his children grew and married, and grandchildren came along, John's resources of love were never exhausted; he always seemed to have room in his heart for more. We are so grateful. We are so blessed.

A strong work ethic has always been something that has been crucial to John. He started working for his neighbours in the village at the young age of fifteen. For just a few dollars a month, he would care for their animals and their basic farm needs. At twenty years of age, he went to work in the big city at Weldon's Concrete Products in Saskatoon. His hard work in the plant paid off when, six years into the job, Mr. Weldon asked him to transfer into the office. John was reluctant at first, feeling intimidated by the prospect of office work, especially since he had only a grade eight education. Through encouragement from Susan, John realized that an office job would be much less physically demanding than the exhausting heavy work in the

plant. Susan knew that John would rise to the challenge of the new job and her faith in him inspired him to accept the promotion. And rise to the challenge he certainly did. A few years later, several heart attacks left Mr. Weldon in a position in which he could no longer carry on with his duties. John became the full-time office manager. He enjoyed his work greatly, especially the opportunity to work with people on a regular basis. John has always been a hard worker and a people person. He was well suited for this new position.

With the new job, John and Susan determined that they no longer needed to operate the dairy farm east of Warman that they had purchased in years previous. They sold it and, not long after, Mr. Weldon offered to sell his business to John and several of his coworkers. Along with Bill Reimer and Lloyd Phillips, John bought Weldon's Concrete Products. The three of them successfully owned and operated Weldon's for several years before mutually agreeing to sell it.

By this time, John and Susan had bought a farm south of Martensville, where they could raise their family. To support the family and to keep busy, John bought Hague Hardware. He had the store for five years and during this time he was called into ministry with the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. John was overwhelmed that God would call him to such a great task. He wasn't sure he was capable of helping to lead a large community of faith. But just as he had risen to many challenges before, John rose to this challenge. He poured his life into the church and worked tirelessly to advance the gospel of Jesus Christ.

John sold Hague Hardware so he could devote himself to his responsibilities within the church. Several years later, yet another tremendous challenge was placed before John. The membership of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church elected him as their bishop. John would take over the duties of bishop from Ältester Abram Buhler who could no longer carry on his leadership responsibilities due to several heart attacks. What a tremendous challenge to be called to lead the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. But with God's help, and with the guidance of Ältester Buhler, with whom John was so pleased to work closely, John again rose to the challenge. Jesus said, "You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things" (Matthew 25:21). John's faithfulness to God in the little things had been a reality for many years. Now John was called to be "faithful in much," to be the leader of an entire community of faith.

John was not spared from the difficulties of leadership. Right from the beginning, it was apparent that drastic changes needed to be made in the church. One such issue was whether to change from German to English; so many of the younger people could no longer understand German. Very soon after John had become bishop, Ältester Buhler urged him to have a vote in the church to see how many members would be in favour of services in the English language. The pastors decided that the outcome of the vote would have to be 70% in favour, in order to bring in English. The vote was held and the percentage of positive votes did not quite reach the bar set by the leadership. A year later, Ältester Buhler again encouraged John to have another vote on the issue, as he could see that it was a great need for the church. This second vote was overwhelmingly in favour of English. Throughout this process, there were many sleepless nights and many tears shed as John wrestled with big decisions. The positive vote did not prove an end to the difficulties surrounding the language issue. There was a sizeable and vocal contingent that strongly opposed bringing English into the church. One of the pastors had already left the church after the first vote on the language issue and, following the second vote, there was a major split in the church. This grieved John greatly. Life was difficult for him at this time but he always sought to be cheerful and never to hold grudges. Even during such dark times, the fruits of the Spirit were so evident in his life.

Not long after the great storm over the language issue, John saw the need for a Christian school in the area. Since most of the Bergthaler members were behind him in his vision, he began to work towards making it a reality. Along with Bill Janzen and Bill Neudorf, John studied some private school curricula but was not overly pleased with what he found. Rather, he wanted the widely accepted government curriculum with a Christian component added. Many meetings were held with the school board and they often came away discouraged because there was no agreement on how to proceed. However, in spite of their discouragement, they went to the church to pray after every single meeting and John always said that he felt the Lord pushing them on in this vision, so they could not give up, despite all of the road blocks in their way. Finally,

Bergthaler ministers. *From left: back row*: Rev. Martin Friesen, Deacon Henry Harder, Rev. Abram W. Buhler, Rev. Cornelius Peters, Rev. George Buhler, Rev. Abram Buhler, Rev. Ed Martens, Rev. Bill Janzen.
Front row: Rev. Herman Janzen, Rev. John D. Reddekopp, Rev. Jacob D. Peters, Rev. Abram Thiessen, Rev. David Buhler.

after much effort, the school board agreed to allow a Christian school to come under its umbrella, which was music to John's ears. The government would pay for the teachers and staff and the church would pay for the building. John's vision was about to become a reality. He always said this school was to be a mission field in the local area and it has definitely proven to be so. John is also pleased that the school,Valley Christian Academy, has turned into a launching pad for missions to other parts of Canada and the world, with teams of young people going out on a yearly basis. God gave John a vision and John worked hard to turn that vision into a reality.

John retired from ministry at the end of 1996. He led the church during the most difficult period of its history and he did so with incredible grace and faithfulness. He preached the Word of God with clarity and intensity. He challenged people to be true disciples of Christ, to live out the Gospel, to reach out to the world and to make the world a better place. He advocated for peace, and publicly challenged government officials to rethink the extent of Saskatchewan's involvement in the nuclear industry. He had a passion for missions, both at home and abroad. He was a visionary. He was uncompromising. He was faithful. We have no doubt that some day John will hear the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant!" (Matthew 25:21).

John turned 80 years old last year. He is a man advancing in years with the sweetness and sincerity that has characterized so much of his life. But as his health begins to deteriorate and as he moves ever so slowly into the fog of memory loss, we who know him grieve. But we are so grateful for the man we have known, the man whom we love so much. We are grateful for so many memories, so many smiles, and so much laughter. We are even grateful for the tears. On the occasional dark days, we are reminded of the words penned by Henry Lyte back in 1847 as he struggled with tuberculosis, and we imagine them as John's prayer today:

> Abide with me, fast falls the eventide:
> The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.
> When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
> Help of the helpless, O abide with me.
>
> Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
> Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
> Change and decay in all around I see;
> O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

We are grateful that, even with deteriorating memory, John continues to exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in so many ways. Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control still permeate the very core of his life. In the same way that John always chose to end the "Come Lord Jesus" mealtime prayer, we say, "We thank you, Lord! Amen."

Linsay Martens is a grandson of Bishop Reddekopp. Originally from Osler, he is currently a student in Vancouver. He wrote this article about his grandfather in 2006.

Abram J. Buhler, 1903–1982

By Abram Buhler

Abram Buhler of Warman, Sask., son of Ältester Buhler, wrote a biography of his father for the June 2003 issue of Preservings, *a publication of the Flemish Mennonite Historical Society, Inc., Steinbach, Manitoba. This account of Abram J. Buhler's life is a shortened version of that article, adapted by Verner Friesen, with the author's permission. In his introductory paragraph, Abram Buhler, the son, explains that his purpose in writing the story of his father was both to "preserve memory of his role as a spiritual leader" and to "portray him...as an ordinary man, husband, father, neighbour and farmer".*

— Ed.

Abram J. Buhler, in a passport photo. All photos in this article courtesy of Abram Buhler

Abram J. Buhler was born in Manitoba on March 5, 1903, the second youngest of eleven children of Jacob and Anna (Klassen) Buhler. Both Jacob and Anna migrated to Canada from the Chortitza Colony in Russia in 1876 as teenagers with their families. The two families settled in Kronsthal, West Reserve in Manitoba. Anna married Jacob as a very young widow. The couple set up farming near Plum Coulee. They endured severe hardship and tragedy in their lives, losing several children to disease and accident. In 1905, the family took up a homestead at Aberdeen, Saskatchewan.

Abram went to the typical Mennonite church school as a child, learning to read and write German, the basic math, and progressing through the Fibel, New Testament and Bible classes. As a teenager, he was fortunate to have two winters of English schooling, attaining grade three reading and writing skills. Even though he learned to converse in English, he never lost the heavy German accent.

His son recounts some special skills that his father developed. One was boxing; he also was a tremendous shot with a .22 rifle and a shotgun. Abram also loved practical jokes.

Courting the neighbour's daughter meant a three-mile ride on horseback. Abram married Aganeta Peters on December 27, 1925 in the Sunday morning worship service. To begin with, the young couple lived with his parents, farming together. Soon, however, a nearby house became available and they appreciated the privacy of living on their own.

Their first son, Jacob, was born in October of 1926. A daughter, Nettie, followed in October of 1929, then two more sons, David and Abram, in 1933 and 1937. Another daughter, Betty, joined the family in 1942.

As the depression years came to an end in 1940, the Buhlers were able to purchase a half section with house and barn from his father just half a mile to the north. Up to that time Abram had farmed with horses, but in the early 1940s he bought a Ford-Ferguson tractor.

In 1933 Abram was elected as board member of the Waisenamt (agency for orphans), a cooperative that acted as guardian for orphans, handled estates, and invested money until the heirs were of legal age. During his tenure with the Waisenamt, until it was dissolved in 1952, Abram travelled throughout the Bergthal areas of Aberdeen, Rosthern, Hague, Osler, Warman, and beyond and became well known to the Bergthaler members.

Both Abram and Aganeta became involved in the

community in various ways. Both took part in the Jugendverein (youth society), Aganeta joined an interdenominational Nähverein (sewing circle), and they had a Sunday School in their home. Aganeta taught the youngsters and Abram the older children. Abram was also elected to the school board and later became chairman of the local Lily School Board.

Abram Buhler with close friend, Abram Dyck

During these years God had been quietly preparing Mr. and Mrs. Buhler for a greater ministry. After Bishop Cornelius Hamm passed away in 1947, the decision was made to have an election for two ministers and a deacon. Any married male was eligible to become a minister or deacon, though education was very limited. The lot fell on Abram J. Buhler and his nephew, Henry A. Dyck, while Henry H. Siemens was elected as deacon.

Son Abram relates that when his dad brought home the news of what had happened at the election he was very downcast, feeling keenly the heavy responsibility God was laying on him. He realized his lifestyle would be a hindrance in the ministry. He frequently enjoyed having a beer with a Scottish neighbour and other friends. In a sermon years later, he related his feelings upon being elected. He had yielded to God's call but wondered what his answer would be when invited to have a beer. "They never asked me again," he explained.

As Abram settled into his routine as a minister he also struggled with his tobacco addiction, and it was some time before God graciously gave him victory over that habit.

Abram and his fellow ministers served not only Aberdeen but also Bergthaler congregations across the river at Rosthern, Reinfeld Schoenwiese, Gruenthal, and later Warman and Martensville. Farther afield, they visited groups of believers at Sonningdale and

Aganeta and Abram Buhler in the mid 1950s

Mullingar. These itinerant ministers received no salary nor travel allowance, and often travelled in severe weather to serve perhaps only a handful of worshippers. At times they would take the train, making it a three-day round trip.

In February of 1949 there was another call for prayer as the Bergthaler Church decided to elect a bishop from the group of ministers. This was only nine months after Abram had been elected to the ministry. As he returned home from this election, the look on his face said it all. Grandfather (Jacob) Buhler asked, "Well, who was elected?" Abram replied, "I was." Son Abram writes in the *Perservings* article, "I can still see that moment, with Dad's head bowed, Grandfather placing his hand on Dad's shoulder to encourage him." Abram J. Buhler was ordained as bishop on February 22, 1949.

Many things changed in the Buhler home when Abram became Ältester of the Bergthaler Church. Mr. and Mrs. Buhler took seriously the Apostle

Paul's admonition in Titus 1:6-9 about the high moral standards expected of a bishop and his family.

At left, Abram's parents, Jakob & Anna Buhler, at their 65th anniversary. Above, Abram with his sisters, at their parents' anniversary; from left: Anna, Helena, Aganeta, Elisabeth

Son Abram writes, "Since we were now the bishop's children, it was expected of us that we be an exemplary family. For example, since many people had reservations about sports, we made the sacrifice of refraining from participation in sports. In time we learned to accept this way of life."

Three more children were born to the Buhlers — George in 1949, Anna in 1950, and William in 1952. Responsibility for much of the farm work fell to David, the second oldest son, since Dad Buhler was gone a lot or was sitting in his study. For a man of action to sit, study and prepare messages took a lot of discipline. Many a time in his office, preparing a Sunday morning message or funeral sermon, Abram longed to be working outside.

Under Abram's leadership, Sunday Schools were started in the churches. Weekly singing evenings were begun, and slowly Bible study was integrated into these evening meetings.

Beyond the local Bergthaler churches, Abram established relationships with the Sommerfeld churches in Manitoba, Swift Current and Vanderhoof, B.C., as well as with the Rheinland Church in Manitoba. In 1952 he invited bishops and deacons of like-minded conservative churches to meet to discuss issues of mutual concern. A second such conference was held at Swift Current in 1955. Abram was asked to go and serve communion to the group settling in La Crete, Alberta, and returned later to help establish a Bergthaler church there. Busy as he was with church work and unable to pay full attention to the farm, the Lord blessed the Buhler family with good crops and somehow they managed season after season.

Abram's messages were personal, with frequent illustrations from everyday life to make a point. He spoke dramatically, making the Bible stories meaningful to his hearers. It was not uncommon to hear sniffling sounds and to see handkerchiefs used discreetly. Today many people can still see him behind the pulpit, forelock of hair hanging over his right eye, gazing earnestly as if into each person's heart, pleading on Jesus Christ's behalf. He felt very keenly the need for personal salvation for his members. Son Abram writes, "We still hear people from far and wide expressing their love for him and remembering his messages."

One of the special gifts God had given Ältester Buhler was that of being an arbitrator. He was called to various places in Saskatchewan, as well as in Manitoba and Alberta, to deal with grievances and restore peace. At the local brotherhood meeting he expected an orderly meeting. Items on the agenda were explained and then the floor was asked for advice. After various ideas were tossed out, invariably someone would ask, "What do you think we should do, Brother Buhler?" After he shared his opinion, it usually was adopted. But he would not give his views until the membership had had a voice.

In 1969 the Buhlers decided to sell the farm and move to Warman, which was more central in the church community. In 1968, Rev. Buhler gave his support to the establishment of the Warman Mennoniten Altenheim, a retirement home for seniors.

continued on page 17

Our Old Smokehouse

By Victor Carl Friesen

Only one log building remains standing in our farmyard — the smokehouse. It served our family for many years. A five-by-six-foot structure, eight feet high at the peak, it shows little sign of decay, the smoke-darkened logs as sturdy as ever. But the mud-and-straw plaster that once coated the outer walls has fallen off, and the shingled roof is covered with moss. It has not been used since 1950, when my father died.

The building is of special interest to me, for it was built the year I was born. It was constructed with care: the logs, fifteen on a side up to the eaves, were notched on the underside only, so that rain would run off and not soak into the wood. The doorway is purposely small — barely wide enough to squeeze through in an otherwise stout wall — and its two-and-a-half-foot opening begins three logs up from the ground. The door, of fine-grain boards, is fastened with rusty hinges and closes with a swivel.

Inside are two short hoists, seven feet high, with five spikes nailed into each of them. From these the curing meat would hang, and a half-dozen wire meathooks still are looped over a nail on an inside wall. A small wooden chimney, extending through the peak, now serves as a little "skylight". When the sun is overhead, its rays come down to reveal the top half of a steel barrel sunk into the center of the earth floor. In it are ashes from long-ago fires.

In the years before this smokehouse, my father had rigged up a six-foot-high crossbar out in the open from which to hang hams for smoking. But a cross-wind might blow the smoke away from under the meat, and the open fire would be more difficult to control.

On one occasion, when everything seemed to be fine, Dad strolled over to the neighbors on the next farm, leaving the hams from two butchered pigs curing in the smoke. Not long after his departure Mother glanced out the kitchen window and saw the eight hams dropping, one by one, into the suddenly flaring-up fire underneath. She called for my father, but when he did not come, she quickly telephoned the neighbors. He came running down the trail as fast as he could and salvaged that summer's meat supply. Only a little charred meat needed to be trimmed away.

Another kind of contrivance and another near disaster occurred just a mile away at my grandparents' home when my mother's folks first settled in Canada from Minnesota. They smoked meat in a large wooden barrel, with both ends removed. Pieces of meat were suspended within the barrel, which was then placed over the short stovepipe-chimney that protruded from their sod-roofed house.

This time, the barrel, with hams inside, caught fire, and Grandmother ran out of the house, waving her apron and hallooing loudly to attract the attention of Grandfather, who was plowing in the field. He came running, too. A neighbor from a short distance away who had noticed the flames also came running, bringing two sloshing buckets of water, and the two men put out the fire without further damage.

These incidents occurred in spring, for that was the season to smoke hams. Pigs of three to four hundred pounds were butchered in late fall, and the hams were cooled and salted down — rubbed generously with salt and then liberally sprinkled with it. By spring the salt had impregnated the meat sufficiently so that the hams were ready for smoking. (Farmers' sausages, however, were smoked following the pig butchering, while goldeyes from the South Saskatchewan River could be smoked any time during the summer. With red-cored willows as fuel for the fire, these oily fish took on a true "Winnipeg goldeye" flavor when smoked.)

Several days were needed to smoke the big hams properly. Care had to be taken to keep the fire smoking, with greenish wood, but not to let it give off much heat. The hams were to be smoked, not cooked! There was a real art to mastering the whole process. Then came the finished product — hams cured to a smoky-tan outward color — tasty even

Smokehouse *continued from page 16*

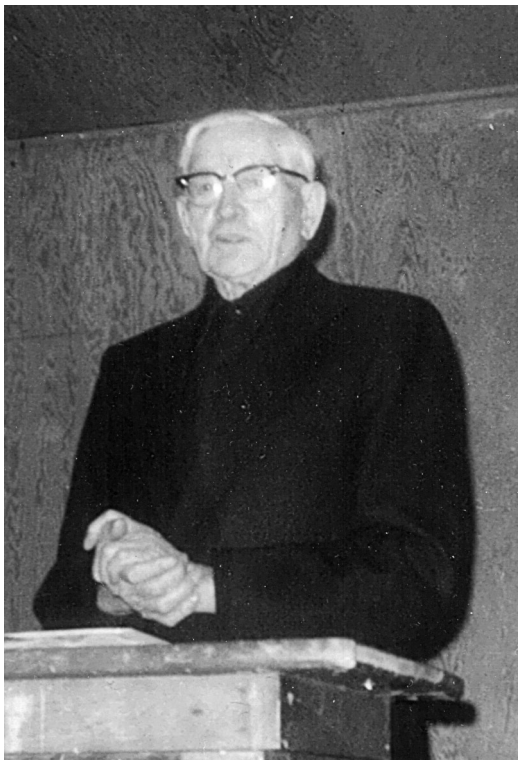
when raw but delicious when fried and served with hash browns. The smoked hams were hung in a cool outbuilding, such as a granary, for the summer — some neighbors stored them within the grain itself. Thick slices were cut from them almost every day for as long as they lasted.

During the Depression we sometimes were forced to sell hams like these to obtain ready cash. At eight cents a pound, one spring's sale paid the fee my sister was charged to write her grade eleven examinations in town after a winter of home study by correspondence courses. Our log smokehouse certainly paid for itself in more ways than one.

Buhler *continued from page 15*

With failing health, Ältester Buhler asked the church to elect a new bishop and worked towards transfer of responsibility to the new bishop. Rev. John D. Redekopp was elected and ordained as bishop on November 22, 1975. They worked together well in the remaining days of Buhler's life. From 1969 on, Abram Buhler had suffered a series of heart attacks. He died on June 13, 1982 at the age of 79 years.

The Apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 4:1-3: "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation to which you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." That was Abram J. Buhler's aim in life.



Abram Buhler at Buhler reunion in 1980

A Musical Farewell: from Osterwick, Russia to America

Music had become an important part of Mennonite cultural and religious life in Russia, and it played a significant role in the departure of one group of emigrants in November of 1923. This group consisted members of the extended Zacharias family.

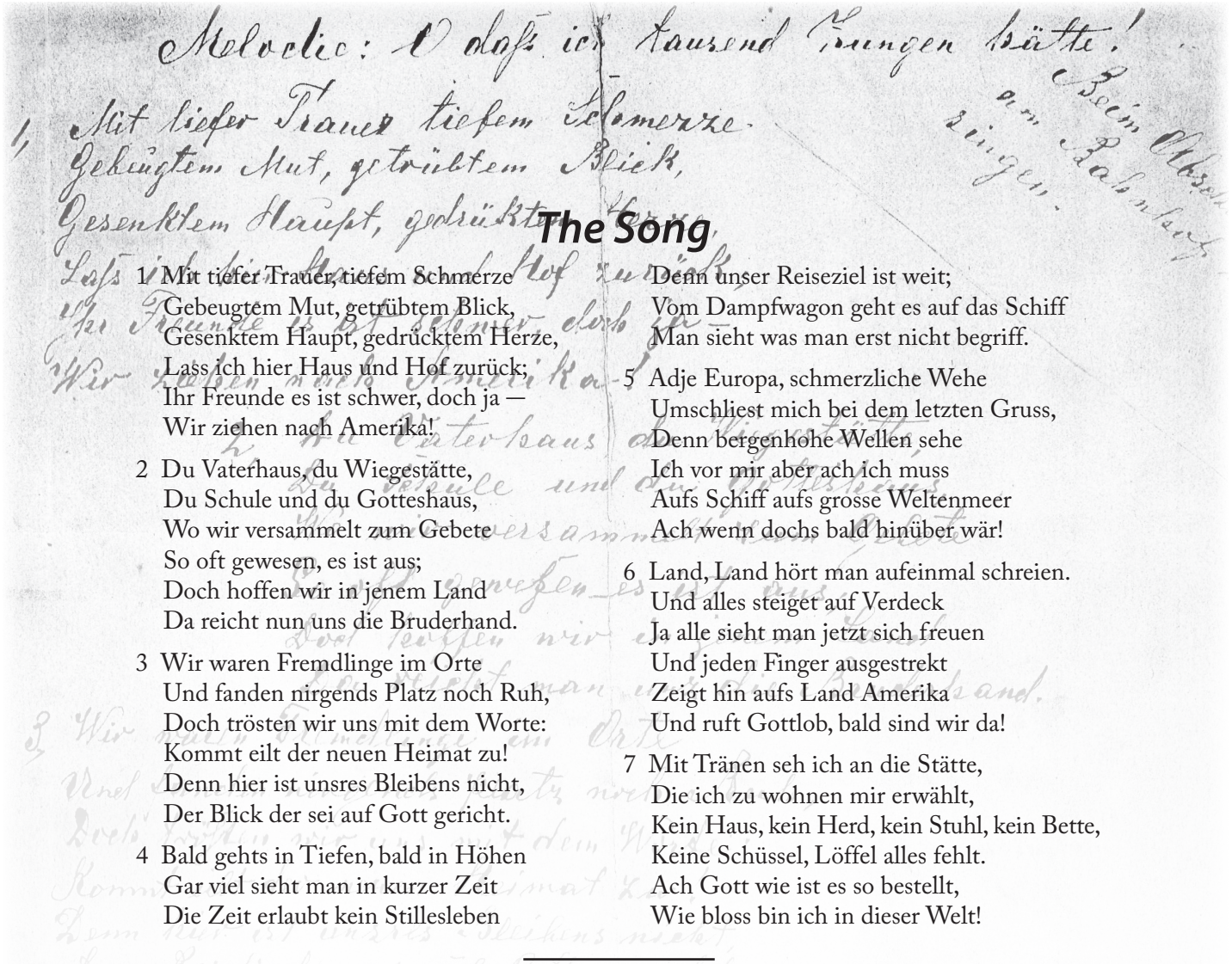
The family had had an estate, Zachariasfeld, near Chortitza, established in 1864. During the years of the war and revolution, life had become progressively more precarious. Bandits harassed them repeatedly and when a bandit was killed on one such raid, the family knew they would have to leave, because the bandits would come back and exact a terrible revenge.

So on the night of November 18, 1918, at 3 a.m., they let all the cattle go, took as many of their possessions as they could in three wagons, and fled. They settled in Osterwick, and remained there until the further upheaval that resulted in brothers Isaak and Gerhard Zacharias and their families departing for America in 1923. On their departure by train from Osterwick, they had the bittersweet experience of being sent off with a beautiful but hauntingly sad song, whose words were written especially for the occasion by Peter P. Klassen, to the tune of "O dass ich tausend Zungen hätte".

In Canada, their first stop was Rosthern. The Isaak Zacharias family were taken in by a Derksen family in Langham. They found land near Dundurn and settled there in 1929. They were the maternal grandparents of Agnes Peters of Saskatoon, who supplied the information and documents for this story.

Isaak wrote a diary of the trip. He had kept a diary for years in Russia, but burned all his old diaries the night before they left. He then reconstituted his recollections in Canada, ultimately leaving a memoir in German of 900+ pages, which includes little stories from Russia and Canada.

Osterwick choir before emigration in 1923. Partial identification, counting from the left in each case: ***back (fifth) row***: Peter Schultz (7th from left); ***fourth row***: Dietrich Schulz (7), Heinrich (or "Henry") Toews (8); ***third row***: Greta (Isaak) Zacharias (2), Greta Schulz (3), Maria (Isaak) Zacharias (5), Lydia Toews (7); ***first row***: Maria (Funk) Schulz (2), Katherina (Gerhard) Zacharias (10)



The Song

1 Mit tiefer Trauer, tiefem Schmerze
Gebeugtem Mut, getrübtem Blick,
Gesenktem Haupt, gedrücktem Herze,
Lass ich hier Haus und Hof zurück;
Ihr Freunde es ist schwer, doch ja —
Wir ziehen nach Amerika!

2 Du Vaterhaus, du Wiegestätte,
Du Schule und du Gotteshaus,
Wo wir versammelt zum Gebete
So oft gewesen, es ist aus;
Doch hoffen wir in jenem Land
Da reicht nun uns die Bruderhand.

3 Wir waren Fremdlinge im Orte
Und fanden nirgends Platz noch Ruh,
Doch trösten wir uns mit dem Worte:
Kommt eilt der neuen Heimat zu!
Denn hier ist unsres Bleibens nicht,
Der Blick der sei auf Gott gericht.

4 Bald gehts in Tiefen, bald in Höhen
Gar viel sieht man in kurzer Zeit
Die Zeit erlaubt kein Stillesleben
Denn unser Reiseziel ist weit;
Vom Dampfwagon geht es auf das Schiff
Man sieht was man erst nicht begriff.

5 Adje Europa, schmerzliche Wehe
Umschliest mich bei dem letzten Gruss,
Denn bergenhohe Wellen sehe
Ich vor mir aber ach ich muss
Aufs Schiff aufs grosse Weltenmeer
Ach wenn dochs bald hinüber wär!

6 Land, Land hört man aufeinmal schreien.
Und alles steiget auf Verdeck
Ja alle sieht man jetzt sich freuen
Und jeden Finger ausgestrekt
Zeigt hin aufs Land Amerika
Und ruft Gottlob, bald sind wir da!

7 Mit Tränen seh ich an die Stätte,
Die ich zu wohnen mir erwählt,
Kein Haus, kein Herd, kein Stuhl, kein Bette,
Keine Schüssel, Löffel alles fehlt.
Ach Gott wie ist es so bestellt,
Wie bloss bin ich in dieser Welt!

The words were written by Peter Klassen to the tune, "O dass ich tausend Zungen hätte". An English summary of the words of the song, by Agnes and Ron Peters, follows:

1. *With deep sorrow and heavy hearts we leave our homes. Oh friends, it is hard, but yes, we're going to America.*

2. *Our childhood home, our school, our church, where so often we gathered for prayer, is now behind us. We hope to find brotherhood in that new land.*

3. *We have been strangers in this world and found no place for rest, but we trust in the Word. Let's hasten to a new home, for we cannot stay here, and let's keep our eyes fixed on God.*

4. *Soon there will be valleys and hills and much will happen in a short time. Our destination is far, by rail and sea, and we will see things we never imagined.*

5. *Adieu Europe, the painful parting envelops me with the last farewell. I see mountainous waves before me but I must cross this vast ocean. If only I could make the crossing quickly.*

6. *Suddenly someone yells "land". Everyone rushes to the deck, happily pointing their fingers toward America. Thank God we'll soon be there.*

7. *With tears I look upon the place where I have chosen to live. No house, no stove, no chair, no bed, no bowl or spoon, we have nothing. Oh God, why have things turned out this way, how naked I am in this world.*

At the end of the song sheet, Peter Klassen wrote: "Gewidmet meinen guten Freunden den Auswanderer von Peter Petrow Klassen Neu Osterwick 1923. [Dedicated to my good friends, the emigrants, by Peter Petrow Klassen New Osterwick 1923]".

Poland and Mennonites: A Wonderful Surprise

By John E. Harder

Poland has held a fascination for me for many years. Well, not Poland so much as the old city of Danzig. Our Harder family has known for many years that somehow we had a connection there. The copy of an old portrait of family buildings at Emaus, near Danzig, was a constant reminder of our heritage. A heritage which was, and still is, filled with many questions and mysteries.

The old city of Danzig on the shores of the Baltic Sea has an important place in our family heritage, as it does for most of us Mennonites living in Canada. This is true whether we trace our Mennonite ancestors through Russia, through the United States, through Germany or through Paraguay. You will have a connection to Poland and likely to Gdansk, formerly Danzig.

In the case of my Harder forefathers, this connection was likely for a period of at least 500 years as there were Harders in northern Poland going back to the 1300s. A forefather left the Danzig area in 1840 when he, like many of our Mennonite forefathers, went on to Russia.

For most of you, your forefathers' connection with the Danzig area would likely have commenced in the late 1500s when many Mennonites, as a result of religious persecution, chose to leave the Netherlands for the more tolerant Polish lands. The Mennonite exodus from Poland commenced in the late 1700s. Your families are therefore likely to have at least a 200-year history in Poland. This connection, in all likelihood, is also to Danzig or to an area within 60 kilometres of Danzig.

My interest in the Danzig area was heightened when, five years ago, I was able to determine that my ancestor Hermann Harder, who had immigrated to Russia, was the only member of our family to do so. I then also learned that two brothers had remained at Danzig and that this line of our family had remained there until 1945 when they, like most Mennonites in the area, fled to the safety of western Germany before the advancing Russian army.

In 2003 I was able to meet with the new-found relatives living in Germany. Their stories were rich with family history, all of which was previously unknown to us here in Canada. It also revealed their love of Danzig as it once was. I then became fascinated with the old city as I learned of its history, its importance to the area, its German traditions and its connection to our Mennonite ancestors and very specifically to my family.

Tour group in Danzig. From left: Kasia, tour guide; John Harder; Ela Tujakowska, tour guide; Irma (Koop) Gibbons; Leona Klath; Dennis Klath; Edith (Koop) Krahn; Velma (Dyck) Harder; Eric Harder; Trudy Harder; Norma (Southam) Harder; Bonnie (Harder) Wyse. This photo and Danzig street photo on p. 23 courtesy of John Harder.

For years, going back to childhood, we have heard that our Mennonite history included Russia, Prussia, and the Netherlands. The details, for me at least, seemed of little consequence until recently when, whether through age or whatever, it became important to better understand who we were. I soon found a wealth of information, most of which was readily available from numerous sources. A major revelation was that my Harder family, and my other related

Mennonite families, all had connections to a very small area in northern Poland. It took just a little effort to, first, identify where the various Mennonite families were from and, second, to locate these places on old German maps and on present Polish maps. My Harder forefathers, although having lived at Danzig, had also lived at Altebabke and Marienburg. In researching the other sides of my family, I quickly learned that the Klassens had lived at Dammfelde, the Friesens at Krebsfelde, the Sudermanns at Heubuden, and the Wiens family at Stolzenberg near Danzig. All of these places were in close proximity to one another.

A trip to Danzig and area then became a dream. There followed a consideration of travel options in the hopes of putting together a family tour of the area. A meeting with family members indicated that there was sufficient interest to pursue the matter. We quickly identified the many villages and locations where we had family history. We learned of the Dyck connection to Poppau, the Regier connection to Fuerstenwerder, Rueckenau and Heubuden, the probable Koop connection of Neustaedterwald, and the Paetkau connection to Tiegenhagen. The November 2007 seminar on Poland, hosted by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, introduced us to Peter Klassen of Fresno, California, who was one of the presenters. He confirmed our hopes that it was very feasible for us, as a very small group, to travel to Poland on a "family" tour.

In September there were 10 of us who enjoyed a wonderful five days of sightseeing in Danzig and area. It was grand. We were busy. We had prearranged daily tours with a Polish guide who was very knowledgeable of Mennonite history. A modern 20-seat bus with a Polish driver was perfect. The bus and driver were with us from first landing at the Gdansk airport until we ended our Poland journey in Krakow. The hotels and restaurants were more than adequate. We visited all of the places of interest to our several families. We felt safe at all times. We were up early and returned to our hotel exhausted. We dined well and enjoyed the splendours of the Baltic coast, including the fabulous Grand Hotel at Sopot. We enjoyed a memorable organ concert at Oliwa Cathedral, strolled the grand Royal Mile in Danzig, had an unbelievable tour of the castle at Marienburg, saw the arcaded homes of our Mennonite forefathers in the countryside, experienced a Sunday morning church service at the Mennonite church in Danzig, where our forefathers would have attended and, on the last night in Danzig, participated in a farewell supper at Pod Lososiem — the restaurant founded by Mennonites in 1598. Danzig has narrow cobblestone streets, beautiful buildings, marvelous cathedrals, endless shops, bakeries with delicious poppy seed cake, and wonderful sidewalk cafes. We were all sad to leave, because there were many more things to see and enjoy. We ended our Poland trip with a stay in the medieval city of Torun, a visit to Auschwitz, and several days in the absolutely marvelous city of Krakow.

Many have asked us why we chose to go to Poland before choosing to go to Ukraine. My answer is simple: my Harder family had a much longer sojourn in Poland that they did in Ukraine. In addition, in my family's case, we know so many more things about our time in the Danzig area than we do about Ukraine. Yes, a trip to Ukraine is, hopefully, also in the future and it will undoubtedly also prove to be a trip of a lifetime.

One of our surprises was that Poland is a marvelous country. It has become very modern and is very quickly shedding the image of a dreary, Communist-bloc country. It has a fascinating history. The Polish people are rightfully proud of their country. The many Polish jokes are as misplaced as the Mennonite jokes that we all hear. We left Poland in awe and are now very proud that Poland is part of our family history.

The area around Danzig was German, in terms of language and customs, for hundreds of years. This was possible only with the blessing of many Polish rulers through the years. Mennonites were fortunate to have been part of this history. Many of us will always look back with a fondness for what once was,

to when Danzig was German. The city continues to be part of Poland and it is, after some 700 years, again known as Gdansk as it was when it was first founded 1000 years ago.

I hope to again, someday, walk the narrow streets of Gdansk. Another trip will again be filled with thoughts of old Danzig but it will also be to enjoy a truly beautiful city and country, as it is today.

I highly recommend that you consider Poland as a travel destination — but be sure to first research your family history as you will be amazed at what you find.

More on Poland: Why I'd rather be Polish

Many of us here in Canada are descendents of "Russian" Mennonites. But what is our true nationality?

My dictionary defines *nation* as "a body of people having the same traditions, language or ethnic origin" — so maybe we could say that our nationality is "Mennonite". Except that the definition goes on to say "... and potentially or actually constituting a nation". And "nation" is defined as "a body of persons associated with a particular territory and possessing a distinctive cultural and social way of life". So no, that's not us either, even though my English wife would be the first to say that we have our own "distinctive" culture, but I am always confused as to how she emphasizes her words.

Now in applying the above definitions and also considering Mennonite history, as best I know it, I expect the closest we've ever come to being a nation, in terms of having our own territory, is when my forefathers lived in Chortitza and in Molotschna. But none of us who are descended from the Mennonites who lived there are now claiming that our nationality is "Chortitzian" or "Molotschnian". Which is probably just as well, as I will always remember my relatives arguing whether it was better to have been from Chortitza or from Molotschna. Who knows where we'd be, had this rivalry had more time to simmer — perhaps under the protection of the U.N.

When asked by others, I have, on occasion, attempted to explain my nationality in terms of being a Mennonite. I now know that this approach is incorrect, given the above definitions. This is just as well, as any claim to a Mennonite nationality was always met with a look of utter confusion by anyone who was foolish enough to ask. My going on to provide even a condensed version of Mennonite history would always be met with a moment of complete silence followed by my new acquaintance either suddenly changing topics or turning away in search of more interesting people to talk to.

Yes, we are all now Canadian, of which we are very proud. But saying you are of Canadian nationality is not yet acceptable in a historical context. I think it has something to do with the fact that, to date, there is no such thing as "an old Canadian man". We all know of lots of old English men, perhaps also some old French men and maybe even some old Russian men — but "old Canadian men" just don't seem to exist anywhere.

So I can't claim my nationality to be Mennonite or Canadian. What am I then? What are the other options? Russian, German, and Dutch all come to mind.

Russian — well, not likely. This is the last thing many of my ancestors would ever lay claim to being. Our ancestors lived there for only a short period of time and didn't we try to keep ourselves separate from the Russian people? And wasn't it the Russians who caused our people so many horrors at the end of World War I? Didn't they then try to prevent us from leaving, just so they could torment us even more? When most of us did manage to leave, didn't they then, at the end of World War II, seek out our distant Mennonite cousins still living along the Baltic Sea and inflict horrors on them?

German — well, maybe. Being German now has a good feel to it. And yes we have many German traditions and yes we can, in many cases, speak the language. Even better, we can often speak two German languages, which you would think would only be possible for true Germans. But we've never lived in Germany as it has been known for many years.

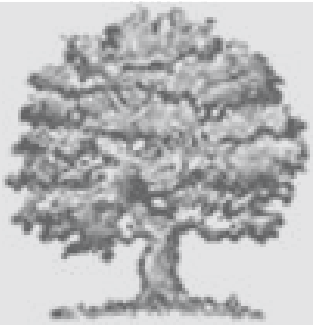
Prussia yes, but not Germany. So although we may now wish to call ourselves German, it just doesn't fit with who we are, or with who we have been. Besides, I grew up after World War II in an English-speaking community where I often thought that our "German" background was a cause of suspicion for our neighbours.

Dutch, then. Yes, Dutch is probably the best that most of us Mennonites can lay claim to. But isn't it too bad that we just don't feel Dutch? Most of us don't know a single word of Dutch, we don't have a favourite Dutch dish, we can't hum a Dutch tune, we don't own a pair of wooden shoes or even have a strong fondness for windmills. Besides, history does show that the Dutch were not exactly fond of the founders of our faith. This detachment from all things Dutch is probably why we don't openly boast of our Dutch nationality. However sadly, we must confess that our true nationality is likely Dutch.

But this is where I have it over most of you. I, on behalf of Harders everywhere, am now laying claim to being Polish. It is felt by many historians that the Harder name may not have originated in the Netherlands, because it has been found in northern Europe for many centuries preceding the arrival of Mennonites in Poland. It has also been documented that the Harder name was found at Marienburg castle, in Poland, during the period of the Teutonic Order of Knights in the 1300s.

I may be the first Harder of Mennonite faith to openly boast of this Polish nationality. And why not? The Polish people have been an enlightened people through the centuries. Didn't they provide refuge to all of you Dutch people as you fled from your boring homeland? Didn't the Polish allow their country to become home to many of German origin and to allow them to continue with their German ways, which were then adopted by you Dutch Mennonites at the earliest possible convenience? Have they not always been one of the most religious people anywhere in the world? Was Poland not the home of astronomers and inventors? Did they not, with their Solidarity movement, bring about the first major crack in the Soviet Union? And what's more, Poland has never started a major war with anyone.

So I am proud to claim Poland as our Harder homeland. The fact that I also have Friesen, Klassen and Wiens ancestry, all with documented ties to the Netherlands, is by the way — as is the fact that we can't speak one word of Polish. I extend an invitation to all of you Reimers and Froeses out there, to make the same claim to Poland, because you appear to have a history similar to us Polish Harders. As a group, we will then seek to be recognized in history as the Polish Mennonites similar to the status now given to the Swiss and the lowly Dutch Mennonites. An added bonus is that we don't have to wrestle with all the consonants that are found in so many other Polish names — no c, k, y, or z for us.



The Family Tree

Genealogy Editor Rosemary Slater

Preserving your family history for future generations

Led by God's Hand

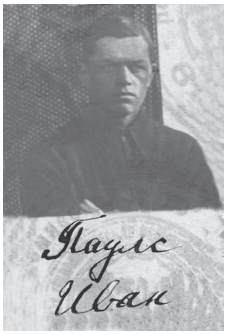
By Rosemary Slater, as told to her by her father

My father, John A. Pauls, turned 20 on June 2, 1926 and received his call to the Forstei. His parents, Abram and Helena (nee Dyck) Pauls, were very concerned. They were planning to immigrate shortly to Canada from their home in the village of Suvoroka (#13) in the Ural Mountains of Russia near the city of Orenburg.

Abram, John's brother, ten years older than John, had already completed his three years of service in the Forstei. He had been extremely ill with typhus due to poor and unsanitary living conditions while in service and John's parents feared that John's health, impaired by malaria as a child, would not stand up to the rigours of life in the Forstei. As well, once in the Forstei, John would not be permitted to leave Russia until his three years of service were completed.

Thus it was decided that Abram (the brother), with wife Tina and three young children, Tina (4), Abram (2) and Margaret (7 months), would take John and proceed immediately to Canada where the rest of the family, father, mother, four sisters and two brothers, would join them six weeks later.

On September 9, 1926, Abram Pauls with his young family and his brother, John, in tow, left Russia forever. They arrived in Southampton, England on September 29, 1926 with a very sick baby. The following day, September 30, John boarded the Montrose for the last leg of the trip to Canada but Abram and family had to stay in Southampton with gravely ill baby Margaret. Unfortunately, in the flurry of arriving at Southampton and being told he could not continue the journey with his sick daughter, Abram hadn't had the opportunity to tell John what he should do and where he was to go when he got to Canada.



John Pauls in his passport photo, age 20. Both photos courtesy Rosemary Slater.

John Pauls' brother, Abram, and his wife Katharina, with their three children, Tina, Abram, and baby Margaret, taken before they left Russia for Canada.

On October 8, 1926, John arrived in Quebec, having spent most of his voyage seasick in his cabin in the lower part of the ship. Not knowing what else to do, John followed the crowd of Mennonites as they got off the ship and onto a train in Quebec. He thought he would get off when the rest got off and go look for a job although he didn't know a word of English.

In due time, the train arrived at Rosthern, Saskatchewan where John followed the crowd off the train to a large hall where a crowd had assembled, awaiting the arrival of the newcomers. A man at the front of the hall called out names of the newly arrived passengers and one by one, families and friends came forward to collect the parties they had arranged to meet and take home.

Finally there was no one left but John. The MC looked at him in puzzlement and said, "Na, vaeh vell dizzem?" (Well, who wants this one?) A certain Mr. Funk from Brotherfield near Waldheim who had come to watch the proceedings spoke up. "I have only girls at home. I could use someone to help with the choring for the winter."

Mr. Funk, being of a sociable nature and well versed in the exercise of the activity now commonly known as "The Mennonite Game", soon discovered that John had one aunt in Canada, that this aunt was a Mrs. Jacob Klassen who had come to Canada with her family in 1923, and that, unbeknownst to John, that very person was now living on the farm next to the Funks.

On November 29, Abram and his family, having left little Margaret in a grave in Southampton, arrived in Canada. As per previous arrangements, they immediately headed for the Jacob Klassens at Brotherfield and began to make enquiries about John. Much to their relief and delight, they found John safe and sound with the Funks, who had cared for him like a son and who sent him off to rejoin his brother most reluctantly.

The rest of the family didn't follow in six weeks. On November 27, 1929, Abram and Helena Pauls with their remaining five children and the three orphaned children of Abram's sister, Anna Isaak, left Russia and arrived in Brazil in February, 1930. But that's another story. To his dying day, John marvelled at the wonderful way God had led him and protected him on that frightening journey into the unknown.

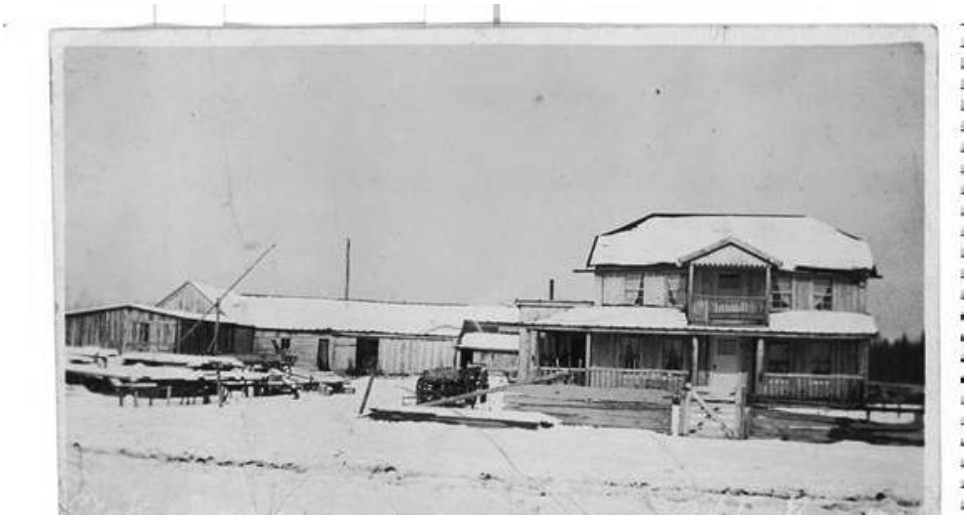
CMU Award for Esther Patkau

At the Canadian Mennonite University Homecoming Banquet on the weekend of September 27 and 28, 2008, Esther Patkau of Saskatoon was given the CMU Alumni Blazer Award. This award is given annually to four Alumni of CMU, Mennonite Brethren Bible College/Concord College, and Canadian Mennonite Bible College. The goal of the award is to celebrate and honour alumni who, through their lives, embody CMU's values and mission of service, leadership and reconciliation in church and society.

After graduating from Canadian Mennonite Bible College in 1950, Esther served as a missionary in Japan for twenty-three years. Following that, she returned to Saskatchewan and served as a pastor and chaplain in Saskatoon. Currently she is Coordinator of Spiritual Care at Bethany Manor, a large seniors' complex in Saskatoon. She also continues as a steady volunteer at the Cancer Clinic in Saskatoon, providing care and comfort to child patients and their families.

Congratulations, Esther! Thank you for a lifetime of dedicated Christian service.

Can You Identify This Farm?



The above photo comes from Nelly Rempel, who sent it to MHSS, hoping that it could be identified. She believes the farm is in Saskatchewan, possibly Lockwood, Drake, or Laird. On the back is written, in Gothic German script: "Angesiedelt 6 Mai 1925 / [some unreadable text] 1929 / Mein lieber cousin zu Erinnerung".

Margaret Ewert of Drake says it does not look familiar to her. She showed the photo to a life-long resident of the area, who said that she did not recognize it as any building in the Lockwood or Drake area.

Any help would be appreciated, by Nelly Rempel and by us at MHSS, in identifying this very interesting-looking site. Please send any information or suggestions to MHSS. See p. 2 for the address.

MHSS Annual General Meeting, March 6-7, 2009

Special presentations: "Appreciating the Bergthal Mennonite Church History"

Where: Valley Christian Academy, west of Osler (see below for directions to the school)

When: Friday evening, March 6th and Saturday, March 7th

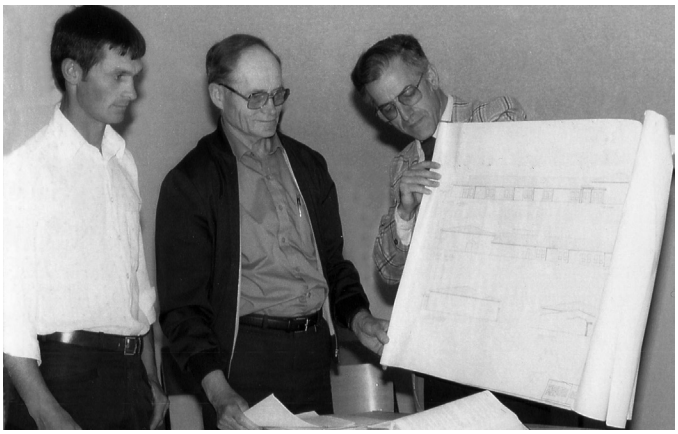
The event is sponsored by Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Contact Jake Buhler 244-1392 or Abe Buhler 931-2512 for more information.

Friday, March 6, beginning at 7:30 p.m.:
•Special tribute to Ältester Abe Buhler (led by Rev. David Buhler)
•Special tribute to Ältester John D. Reddekopp (led by Linsay Martens and Frances Saggs)
•Music by the Blumenheim Singing Group
•Slide presentation on the Bergthaler Mennonite Church by Leonard Doell and Abe Buhler

Directions to Valley Christian Academy:
From the south, take Highway 11 north to first Osler turnoff. Turn left and continue straight west about one mile. The school will be on your left. (There is a railway crossing about halfway to the school.) From the north, turn right at the second Osler turnoff and continue west to the school.

Bus transport from Bethany Manor:
Friday, 6:45 p.m. and Saturday, 8:45 a.m. Cost $10. Call Elmer Neufeld at 975-0554.

Saturday, March 7:
9:30 a.m. Annual General Meeting
11 a.m. Coffee break
11:15 – 12:15 Guest speaker Conrad Stoesz from Winnipeg, on the relationship between Bergthaler and Sommerfelder churches
12:15 – 1:30 Lunch served by Bergthaler Church Ladies Group
1:30 – 2:30 History of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan, by Leonard Doell
2:30 – 2:45 Coffee break
2:45 – 3:15 Future of Bergthaler Mennonite Church, by Bishop George Buhler
3:15 – 3:30 Summary and closing



Looking over the plan of Valley Christian Academy. From left: Rev. Bill Janzen, Rev. John D. Reddekopp, Bill Neudorf (teacher). Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell.

At right: ministers and church leaders from Sommerfelder, Bergthaler, and Chortitzer churches, at a ministers' gathering held in Saskatchewan in 1955. Photo courtesy of Leonard Doell.

The Back Page

Honour List

Persons who have been recognized for making significant contributions towards preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. To add a name to the Honour List, nominate a person in writing. (Year of death is given in brackets.)

Helen Bahnmann
Helen Dyck (2007)
Dick H. Epp
Jacob H. Epp (1993)
Margaret Epp (2008)
Peter K. Epp (1985)
George K. Fehr (2000)
Jake Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen (2007)
Jacob G. Guenter
Gerhard Hiebert (1978)
Katherine Hooge (2001)
Abram G. Janzen
John J. Janzen (2004)
George Krahn (1999)
Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
J.J. Neudorf (1988)
J.C. Neufeld (1994)
John P. Nickel
David Paetkau (1972)
Esther Patkau
Ted Regehr
John G. Rempel (1963)
Ed Roth (2008)
Wilmer Roth (1982)
Arnold Schroeder (2000)
Jacob Schroeder (1993)
Katherine Thiessen (1984)
Rev. J.J. Thiessen (1977)
Rev. David Toews (1947)
Toby Unruh (1997)
Albert Wiens (2002)
George Zacharias (2000)

Call for Volunteers

Volunteers are needed for processing donated material at the Archives. Come join a group of enthusiastic, friendly people who enjoy Mennonite History. Contact Victor Wiebe, Archivist, or Kathy Boldt, Archives Committee.

Now on the Web Site

Old issues of the *Historian* are available on the MHSS web site: http://www.mhss.sk.ca

Send Us Your Stories

Readers are invited to sent in news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc. to mhss@sasktel.net or to the MHSS street address below.

MHSS Office and Archives:
110 La Ronge Road, Room 900
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8

Is Your Membership Due?

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,
Room 900-110 La Ronge Road,
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8
Please make cheques payable to: Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan or MHSS. Memberships are $25 per year; $40 for a family membership. Gift subscriptions are available for friends and family members. All membership fees and donations to the Society are eligible for tax-deductible receipts.