

SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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MHSS Hosts Kroeger Book Launch

By Helen Kruger

In deceptively simple manner, mirroring his straightward writing style, Arthur Kroeger introduced his novel Hard Passage: A Mennonite Family's Long Journey from Russia to Canada at a book launch in Bethany Manor, Saskatoon, on April 23, 2007. The event was sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

Based on thorough research and many new facts from historical files, Kroeger succeeded in painting the stark realities of a family's difficult farewell from horrendous persecution into a strange land of uncertain welcome and unknown living circumstances. Arthur portrayed the transitions of his family to maintain a tradition based on nonresistance and refusal of military service. A wooden box constructed in 1857 by his great grandfather, which contained handwritten documentation of several hundred years of his family's history, provided a whole lifetime of learning for the speaker and gave impetus to understand and believe the reason for being a Mennonite.

The strength of Arthur's story was the record of one Mennonite who situated the Mennonite story into the context of society, not repeating the isolation of Mennonites from society in Russia, but integrating faith into practice, in the world but not of the world.

The Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre was



L to R—Heinz Bergen, Victor Wiebe, Arthur Kroeger

filled to capacity to hear the author's story. Many had parents or grandparents who had also experienced hard passages from Russia, and a few had actually undergone their own trek. The meeting was chaired by Victor Wiebe, archivist of MHSS, who in his introduction of the speaker told of his involvement in the political system in Ottawa; for 33 years Kroeger had been a deputy minister in several departments, contributing leadership, ethics and morals.

The sale of Kroeger's book was brisk. Refreshments were served and many stories were shared. Jake Buhler, President of MHSS, facilitated the evening. The MHSS is to be commended for this venture; a Mennonite people who know their history and are willing to be educated by their experience, increase the possibility of being relevant and contributing to society.

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Honour List

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

Helen Bahnmann
Helen Dyck (2007)
Dick H. Epp
Margaret Epp
Peter K. Epp (1985)
George K. Fehr (2000)
Jake Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen
Jacob G. Guenter
Gerhard Hiebert (1978)
Katherine Hooge (2001)
Abram G. Janzen
Rev. 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
Dr. Ted Regehr
Ed Roth
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)

A Meditation from the Old Testament on Writing and Books

by Victor G. Wiebe

(The meditation below was presented at the 11 April 2007 meeting of the MHSS Board)

If an engineer reads the Bible he will notice and give attention to buildings and roads; if a physician reads the Bible he will notice and give attention to disease and cures. Often these specialists bring interesting insights to Bible verses that I, who am neither an engineer nor a physician, would miss. However, as a librarian and archivist I notice other passages. I have a specialist's interest in verses about writing and books.

I want to read four verses from the Old Testament that deal with writing and books and perhaps we can gain a little more insight about our Biblical ancestors from these verses.

The first passage is **Isaiah 30:8**

"Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever."

I call this passage the archivist's motto. I find it inspiring to know that from the earliest times the prophets stressed the importance of writing down what God is saying to His people, saving the record and then making it known to others – *"as a witness forever."* The record keeping of God's acts and activities and those of His people is so strongly emphasized that it is given as a divine command. This should empower us today to place the same emphases on recording and preserving our witness for God.

The second passage is one of those verses that most would read and pass over without noting any importance in understanding Old Testament literacy. The verse is about Gideon as he and a group of supporters approach the small city of Succoth. The verse is from **Judges 8:14** - *"he [Gideon] caught a young man, one of the people of Succoth, and questioned him [the young man]; and he [the young man] listed for him [Gideon] the officials and elders of Succoth, seventy-seven people."*

"A young man listed for Gideon" -- in this passage the *"listed"* in Hebrew means "wrote down." The interesting feature here is to ask: "what kind of young man" will be out in the country side? Or what is the young man's occupation? In Israel a young man in the country would most likely be a shepherd or a farmer. Here **Judges 8:14** is telling us that a rural young man, likely a shepherd, can write! What does that tell us of literacy or of schools? In the time of the Judges it would have taken a lot of time, resources and energy to become literate and yet in Israel even shepherds have made that investment so they could read and write.

I turn again to Isaiah for my third passage, **Isaiah 8:1** *"Then the Lord said to me, Take a large tablet and write on it in common characters, 'Belonging to Maher-shalal-hash-baz'."*

Another curious passage that no one memorizes and in my Bible dictionary I had to look for "Maher-shalal-hash-baz" and learned it means the ceremonial name for Isaiah's son.

In this passage the prophet is writing in *"common characters."* For the writing to be noted as *"common characters"* there must also be some different characters, some other "uncommon" characters – or Isaiah would not have noted them. What might be the "uncommon" characters?

From a brief overview of world history we know that over long periods of time there arise universal world wide languages. Today, throughout the world, business and science are conducted in English, two centuries ago all diplomatic communication was in French, in medieval times scholars in every country communicated in Latin, and in the time of Isaiah from the middle eastern archaeology we learn that for over 1,000 years all formal communications between nations were in the Akkadian language, also known as Assyrian or Babylonian. From Turkey to Egypt to Palestine to Babylon all

(Cont. From Page 3)

communicated in Akkadian as a common language. Any note of a universal language as given in Isaiah 8:1 will naturally call to mind the story of the Tower of Babel and the power of a universal language.

Now we don't know if Isaiah is calling Hebrew writing the "common characters" for that would have been the writing style of most of his people or is he writing in Akkadian so the diplomats and world nations could read the message. We should now go back and read all of Isaiah chapter 8 and try to comprehend the purpose and audience of this special written message. Isaiah is writing out the message so the people who need to read and understand will get God's message. The inference for us today is to communicate in such a way that the message will have an impact and those who need the message will get

it in a language and form they will comprehend.

My fourth verse is a message to archivists and it is found in **I Kings 11:41**: "*Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did as well as his wisdom, are they not written in the Book of the Acts of Solomon?*"

Well, are they? Today we just don't know. Where is that book? Has anyone read that book? That is the problem. The book has vanished. It's been lost or destroyed many centuries ago. Perhaps it didn't get to the archives or maybe it wasn't properly cared for. There are about half a dozen books mentioned in the Old Testament that scholars today know nothing about. Somehow for some materials the motto to archivists given in the first verse I listed above has been a failure. This verse in I Kings 11:41 is a reminder and an encouragement to archivists to do better and to preserve our records for the purpose of being "*a witness forever.*"

Excellent Talent Displayed at Artisan Show

The Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan held its bi-annual Artisan Show on Saturday, April 21 at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon. Co-ordinators of the event, Eileen Quiring and Helen Janzen, had recruited 22 artists from different parts of the province who displayed an impressive variety of arts and crafts. Included were: sewing, knitting, embroidery, crocheting, quilting, wall hangings, haranguer, loom weaving, woodwork, oil painting and water colour, scrapbooking, photography, candle-making, and hand-made porcelain dolls. We are able to picture here only a small sampling of the beautiful items displayed.

Approximately 150 came to view the excellent work, and to visit and enjoy a lunch served by members of the Society.



Art and Anita Froese of Saskatoon. Art makes a variety of woodwork items and Anita paints Saskatchewan flowers on cards.

Artisan Day Photos

By Jack Driedger



Jim Hingston of Saskatoon displayed a variety of wood carvings he has made.

Frank Block of Borden has done some unique woodwork items, including a replica of the Borden Bridge.



Helen Fast of Saskatoon displays her unique Japanese "Bunka" embroidery.

Penny Neufeld of Saskatoon (formerly Waldheim) makes porcelain dolls.



Nota bene: mark well and observe

Our Reader's Page: Announcements and Questions

Two Major Events planned by MHSS

Over the next six months two events related to family historiography, which combines genealogy and history, are being organized under the auspices of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS). Ed Schmidt of Waldheim, Saskatchewan [ewschmidt@sasktel.net or (306) 945-2217] is coordinator of genealogy for the MHSS Board and is engaged in the initial stages of planning for these two events.

The first event is being organized for the "long week-end" Monday, August 6, 2007 (from 9:30 am to 3:30 pm) at the Herbert New Horizon at 605 Herbert Ave., Herbert, Saskatchewan. Cost - \$15 registration per person, \$25 per couple, includes the noon lunch. Additional donations to the MHSS will be solicited and receipted.

Dr. Tim Janzen from Oregon (<http://www.timjanzen.com>) has conducted many major genealogy workshops for Mennonites across North America. Tim will be making presentations at the August 3 to 5 Fehr Reunion in Wymark, SK. On August 6 in the forenoon in Herbert, Tim Janzen will introduce genetic genealogy and the Mennonite DNA project. Don Fehr will present work in progress on the Reinlaender Gemeinde Project and background on doing Mennonite church books projects. The afternoon will focus on Mennonite genealogy related topics, particularly with an emphasis on Mennonite genealogical materials that have become available in the past ten years.

In the five year period following the First World War of the twentieth century it is likely that there were more than 10,000 souls living in Mennonite households in southwestern Saskatchewan, with only a portion of this number being resident on the Swift Current Reserve. Much of that history has never been identified, collected, preserved, or organized so that it can be accessed for research. In preparation for the August 6 event, Ed Schmidt is actively collecting names (phone numbers, addresses or email addresses) of persons who have already engaged in genealogy, church and community history of Mennonites in southwest Saskatchewan.

The second event is in the planning stages for November 9 evening and during the day of November 10 at the Bethany Manor Fellowship Centre in Saskatoon. The focus at this event will be Prussian Mennonite history. Historians Peter J. Klassen from Fresno, California and Ted Regehr from Calgary, Alberta, will be the main resource persons. Other people, such as Ingrid

Is Your Membership Due?

If your membership has expired, the date on your address label will be highlighted in yellow. 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.

Janzen Lamp, the current and last editor of **Der Bote**, with current experience and knowledge of the Prussian journey of Mennonites, will join in the second half of the afternoon session to round out the dialogue and entertain questions that arise out of the day.

In early Anabaptism and in subsequent renewal movements, pursuing faith-based ethical relationships was perceived as being of greater significance than State legitimized ethical standards.

Politics under God by John H. Redekop (Herald Press @ 2007) is a new publication that seeks to provide a generalized history of the Anabaptist perspective, including current developments.

The Danzig Mennonite Church: Its Origin and History from 1569 – 1919 by H. G. Mannhardt (translated with significant editorial additions by Victor G. Doerksen; co-published by Bethel College of North Newton, Kansas and Pandora Press of Kitchener, Ontario @ 2007) forms a good reference to the 450 year experience in Prussia.

Members of the Mennonite Historical Society have been actively engaged in transliterating and using a family genealogy program to create indexes to available Prussian Mennonite church records from several hundred years ago. It is anticipated that in November there will be presentations and dialogue on themes such as "Lights of Hope on the Vistula". This is a story of several centuries about the land to which Mennonites came in the 16th century; how light from the Vistula radiated across much of Europe.

Prussian Mennonite history demonstrates a movement from living with strong rejection of State political association to being drawn into a deceptively strong compromise of conscience

characterized by an extreme nationalism that culminated in World War Two. This suggests a possible second theme - "The Lure of an Enlightened Culture: Mennonite Faith Meets Prussian Culture".

Der Bote Announcement

By Dick Epp

People often ask about finding obituaries of their deceased relatives. All Der Bote obituaries from 1950 to 2004 are available on the internet, placed there by Erica Suderman of the BC Mennonite Historical Society. The internet address is: www.mhsbc.com/genealogy/bote/botee.htm

Volume 5 of Der Bote index (1992 - 2000) has now been published and is available for sale through the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. Earlier volumes are available as well.

Der Bote will cease operation on March 1, 2008 after 84 years of existence. Its circulation has dropped severely in the last few years. Many of its readers are getting older and the younger people are not subscribing to it. We have at this time 2000 subscribers whereas in the 1970's we had 9000 readers. In South America the Mennonites have started their own paper so we have lost that market as well. It just is not feasible for us to continue at this rate because the costs are too great. I have served approximately 15 years on Der Bote Board which I have enjoyed very much, but reality takes over eventually. It is sad. The 2007 Canadian Conference meeting in Vancouver will have a farewell session for Der Bote.

Correction

On page 12 of the April, 2007 issue of the *Historian*, the person on the picture with Peter Derksen is Ed Wiens.

Our Readers Write

"Pella Church was my church. Mom and Dad are Herman and Anne Schmidt mentioned in the article by Jim Lyding in the Mennonite Historian. I'm on that photo!! Second row from front -middle, white dress! Cheers." Jean Kipp, Edmonton, AB.

"Reuben and I enjoy your publication very much. Personal stories such as the one about Agnes Regier Ewert are especially inspiring". Irmgard Epp, Kelowna, BC.

"It's (the article on Agnes Regier Ewert) a wonderful tribute to Mom and I'm so grateful you printed it. Judging from my reading of the rest of the magazine, the Mennonite Historical Society of SK is a lively and enthusiastic organization". Lorna J. Sawatsky, Waterloo, ON

"I enjoyed the April edition of SMH. I note there are a lot of capable people involved doing a good job". Peter Derksen, Swift Current, SK.

Saskatchewan Says Good-bye to a Respected Statesman Jack Wiebe - 1936 to 2007



Former Lieutenant Governor of Saskatchewan, Jack Wiebe, passed away on April 16 at the age of 70. Mr. Wiebe had been a member of our His-

torical Society for a number of years. Speaking in Saskatoon at the book launch of *Mennonites in Canada, Part III* in September of 1996, Jack Wiebe said that ever since he and his wife had children, Mennonite history had become a very important part for both of them.

He related how his great grandfather, Elder Jacob A. Wiebe, had left the Ukraine in 1874 along with 37 other Mennonite families to settle two miles south of Hillsboro, Kansas. His great grandfather had stayed in Kansas, but his grandfather and family came to Saskatchewan in 1905. They returned to Hillsboro in 1906 to sell their property and then settled in Herbert, Saskatchewan permanently. The reason for settling in Saskatchewan was the availability of more land. Father Wiebe wanted his sons to become farmers.

John Edward Neil (Jack) Wiebe was born in Herbert in May of 1936. He received his education at Herbert Elementary and High School, then at Luther College in Regina and the University of Saskatchewan.

Wiebe's political career, which spanned more than

three decades, began when he was elected in 1971 as a Liberal member of the Saskatchewan legislature for the constituency of Morse. He was re-elected in 1974. At the same time he farmed near Main Centre, and from 1970 to 1986 he was also owner and President of the thriving L&W Feeders Ltd. business. In 1994 he was appointed as provincial Lieutenant Governor and served as the Queen's representative in Saskatchewan till 2000. Following that he was appointed to the Canadian Senate and served as Senator for four years till 2004.

After serving his province and country in the political arena, Mr. Wiebe returned to local involvements. He helped with fund-raising for the local Healthcare Foundation. Joan Meyer, who as chairperson of the Foundation had worked with Wiebe, said of him, "He was a very caring person. He listened well, was a great team player, well-spoken, and he could analyze a situation and determine the best way to get the job done. He had natural leader instincts". Meyer recalled fondly how Mr. Wiebe "would have coffee with people, and those who didn't know him couldn't believe the man was such a regular guy, for hav-

ing been Lieutenant Governor and Senator".

At a state memorial service on April 24, Jack Wiebe was remembered as a man who "could talk to the Queen in the morning and to a hog farmer in the afternoon - and he was the same Jack". Former provincial premier Roy Romanow, who had been asked by the family to speak at the memorial service, said that "despite Wiebe's prestigious titles, he was a man who disliked formality, and preferred to meet and talk in a relaxed atmosphere after having kicked up his feet and loosened his tie". During the time that Romanow was premier and Wiebe was Lieutenant Governor the two had had regular monthly meetings. Of those times Romanow said, "Jack Wiebe was non-partisan, he offered the best of advice - he was just superb". "Wiebe", Romanow added, "was guided by his rural roots and values".

Jack Wiebe's immediate family included his wife Ann, and their daughters Donna, Jackie and Penny.

Editor's note: *We are grateful to Peter Derksen, Swift Current, who submitted most of the information about Jack Wiebe and his memorial service upon which this article is based.*

Binding Sheaves

by Victor Carl Friesen

In my boyhood the binder was the bane of almost every farmer. Those were hard times, so this machine was not traded in on a newer model very often, but instead, was used year after year. Unlike today's swather, the old-time binder was a complicated device, since it cut the crop and also tied it into bundles, or rather, was supposed to.

The trouble was that there was just a lot that could go wrong, what with the binder's buncher and knottter and pusher arm, among other things, apparatus which no swather has. These various parts not only had to work smoothly on their own, but also function in harmony with all the rest. And that seldom

seemed to be the case.

Ours was a particularly old binder even in those days, a forty-year-old, eight-foot Deering, made, I am told, by that company before it joined forces with another implement manufacturer to become McCormick-Deering, a leading name in farm implements at the time. In other words, our Deering binder had had forty years of tune-ups, replacement parts, and improvised repairs to hold it together and keep it in relative running order through annual ministrations each fall before harvest began. Then came the moment of truth - driving it into the ripe crop with mower blade clicking, reel turning and conveyor canvases rolling. Would the bundle-making apparatus work once more?

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One year our binder deposited varying amounts of loose straw with each dump of bundles that the machine's folding wing-like carrier left upon the stubble. After we had stooked the field, my father walked along each row of stooks with a special rake he had made, raking up the loose straw into firm piles, which the bundle pitchers at threshing time could easily fork onto their hayracks as just another forkful of grain. Times were too poor to allow any unbound stalks to be left unharvested.

More often our binder would become temperamental, binding sheaves in regular fashion, but here and there leaving one precise bundle untied for no apparent reason. Then it was our job as stokers to take a handful of stalks from the loose grain, twist it into a thin rope and tie up the loose bundle.

My father had experience in tying up loose grain, having done it when needed, from the time of his first coming to the Canadian Northwest in Rosthern in 1891 as the eldest son in an immigrant family. It was part of the tradition handed down through generations, from days when grain was cut with a reaper, or even a scythe, and had to be bound by hand. My father still liked to swing a scythe, preferring that instrument to keep the grass in the yard trim, laying "the swale in rows", and, like the Robert Frost character in "Mowing", hearing his "long scythe whispering to the ground". His technique in binding sheaves was to clutch a bunch of stalks in each hand and jam the head ends into each other, letting the ears of grain become interlocked, and then twisting the stalks to keep the joint secure. With this double length he bound up the bundle by tying the severed ends together, as one would start to knot a shoelace, but with the ends tucked under.

My mother also had her tradition of tying up loose bundles, which she had learned from her father, who had learned the skill at his former home in Mountain Lake, Minnesota. This method proved to be superior to my father's technique, being faster and producing a more reliable binding. One advantage here was that all the stalks for the "rope" were grasped with one hand at the severed ends this time, leaving the



The author's mother (Anna of The Mulberry Tree), here in her eighties, holds a hand-tied sheaf

one hand at the severed ends this time, leaving the other hand free to begin the knot tying. It was amazing to watch a person skilled in this method just seemingly make a few flicks of the wrists, then enfold the bundle straw with the newly made binding and twist the loose heads underneath the tightened band all in the same motion. Voila! - a solid sheaf.

Whatever the method used, the binding of sheaves by hand was a never-failing method, demonstrating man's superiority to that of a machine, a method to fall back on whenever the crotchety binders of my boyhood resumed their temperamental ways. But it was more than that. Binding a few sheaves each fall gave one a special closeness to basic farming operations and to the land, to distant simpler times when husbandry was a more deeply felt function of body and heart; even to the days of Wordsworth's singing solitary reaper, cutting and binding grain in the Scottish highlands of long ago, or to Biblical Ruth, standing alone in the alien wheat fields of Boaz in ancient Judah. Indeed, the homely act of binding sheaves was a kind of affectionate touch, if you will, and made one feel directly "the goodness of... harvesting at last". (Willa Gather, *My Antonio*)

The History of Laird Mennonite Church

by Wilmer Froese

(Taken from a longer article by the same author and with the same title written for the Laird Centennial History Book to be published in the near future. Used by permission.)

Beginnings: 1892-1910

The story of the Laird Mennonite Church had its beginnings in 1892. It was in that year that Henry Epps, David Bergs, David Friesens, Abram Dycks and Peter Klassens came to settle in the Carmen area between Waldheim and Laird. Later that same year in the middle of July, David Epp and his wife, Justina (nee Wiebe) and brother-in-law Heinrich Warkentin and his wife Magaretha (nee Epp), and David and Magaretha's parents arrived.

In his memoirs, David Epp writes that the decision to come to Canada was made with encouragement from relatives in Manitoba who had come to visit them in Russia. He said he didn't want to force the decision on his young wife, but with her mother's encouragement, Justina also decided it was best to come.



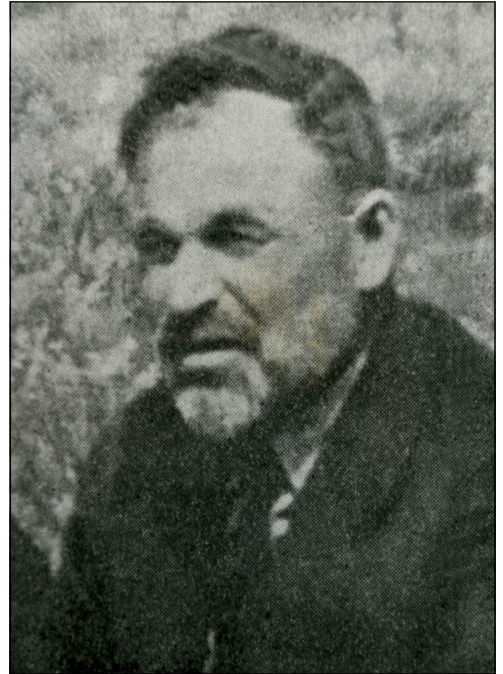
David & Justina (Wiebe) Epp—ordained in 1911, served until 1942.

David Epp writes how he and his family arrived in Rosthern in July, 1892. Rosthern consisted of a water tower, a small shanty with some small wares and a lumber yard. With a pair of oxen, a cow, a wagon, a plow and harrow and some kitchen utensils, all purchased in

their stopover in Manitoba, they made their way across the prairie from Rosthern to the place they would call home, in what became the Carmen district.

David Epp said that one of the most difficult things about moving here was choosing a piece of

land to claim as their own because there was so much to choose from.



Heinrich Warkentin—ordained in 1912, served until 1935.

Their faith in the invisible hand of God was a constant. It gave them an inner hope when outward circumstances might have led them to despair. There was a severe prairie fire that almost destroyed everything they had in July, 1894, but their house and pasture were miraculously spared. David Epp says, "We fell on our knees and thanked God with all our hearts." (*"Remembering and Reminiscing"* by Rev. David Epp)

There were virtually no crops for the first few years. Often they froze. It was in 1896 that they had their first real harvest. It was a lovely crop and the wheat was especially good.

There was renewed hope when the news arrived that a minister and his family had come to settle in the Tiefengrund area, some twelve miles from Carmen. This was Elder Peter Regier who had emi-

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grated from West Prussia. It was learned that he was willing to organize the Mennonite settlers for worship and to preach.

The Henry Epp house in Carmen became the home where they most frequently gathered for worship. As more settlers came, they also gathered in homes in the Springfield and Snowbird districts for worship. With an increase in the number of settlers and with more house churches, there also came a need for more leaders. Elder Peter Regier couldn't do it alone. Heinrich Warkentin, one of the first to arrive, had been chosen as a minister in Russia and so when his abilities were required here he began to preach. He served the church faithfully until his death in 1935.

Jacob Janzen, another settler, was chosen as minister. He also preached God's Word for many years. C.F. Sawatzky moved to the Laird area in 1903 as a young man. He had already been ordained as a minister in the Bergthal Church. He, too, assisted with preaching. When discussion began in 1909 about building a church, Rev. C.F. Sawatzky was one who, upon the urgings of Elder Peter Regier, felt strongly that the church should be built in Laird rather than in the Carmen district. When the church was built in 1910, residents continued to meet in the Carmen School for worship, although officially a part of the Laird Mennonite Church.

The ministers who spoke God's Word in season and out of season had a huge responsibility. Along with their farming duties and raising families they had to prepare sermons and travel long distances through inclement weather by horse and buggy. But the fruits of their labour reaped great rewards as the churches became important parts of the community, nurturing faith and giving hope and strength to many. Their faith became an example to future generations. As a result the church continued to grow and prosper in the decades that followed.

Church Construction

The first several decades were ones of growth and optimism. It seemed God was blessing his people once again as the fertile land around Laird gave forth an abundance of grain and food. Farms were springing up everywhere. Large beautiful homes and long hip-roofed barns were beginning to grace the landscape. With construction and development the community around Laird was beginning to take on a certain sense of permanence. The people were here to stay.

Although house churches had served them well, the need was being expressed for more permanent places of worship. The many Mennonites west and south of Laird expressed this desire as well. Although it seemed at first that the church might be built in the country in the Carmen District, the final decision was made to build in the village of Laird.

On May 30, 1910, the cornerstone was laid for the church building. Many people were present for this event, in anticipation of a new place to worship God. Rev. Jacob Janzen led in prayer and a song was sung.



The first church built in 1910. Notice the separate entrance for men and women.

In the building of the foundation the directors were David Epp, Cornelius F. Sawatzky and Jacob Andres. The building committee members were David Epp, Gerhard P. Rempel and Henry L. Friesen. The foreman was Peter Weberg. In build-

ing the foundation they ran out of cement so C.F. Sawatzky had to go to Rosthern, stay overnight and bring back cement the next morning to finish the basement.

In 1926 an addition was added to the front of the church with only a door in front rather than a door on each side. In 1959 a new and larger entrance was put in its place, adding two Sunday School rooms upstairs.

Early Ministers and Deacons: 1910-1967

The new church in 1910 required more structure and organization on the part of the ministers. Some members continued to meet in homes and schools because of distance to travel, especially in winter, but many met on Sunday mornings in the new church.

Heinrich Warkentin, Jacob Janzen and Cornelius F. Sawatzky, while still attending to the house churches, became the regular preachers in the new church. David Epp was added to their number when he was ordained on February 26, 1911. He served in this capacity as minister until his death in 1941.



C.F. Sawatzky—ordained in 1912, served until 1974.

Being part of the larger Rosenort Mennonite Church, which consisted of twelve churches in the valley area, the Laird Church was served by

an Elder who officiated at communion and baptism. The first elder was Elder Peter Regier. A second elder, David Toews, was later elected to help ease the workload of Elder Regier. Faithfully, all these servants of God preached God's Word. And the people, who usually filled the church to capacity, listened and responded with renewed faith. The authority of the church wasn't questioned and God's Word was revered and respected. The church provided the spiritual sustenance they were hungry for after a week of hard physical work.

For many the church became a hub around which their lives revolved. It was a place where they could meet friends and neighbors after a week of relative isolation. There they found they were not alone in their joys and struggles. Together they shared faith in one God who would guide and sustain them.

With the aging of ministers it was always contingent upon the congregation to select new ministers from within. Rev. Heinrich Warkentin passed away in 1931 and Rev. Jacob Janzen in 1935. On July 16, 1936, Art Friesen and Isaac I. Penner were elected by the congregation as ministers. I.I. Penner was ordained in 1938 and served the church until his passing in 1964. Art Friesen chose to wait for ordination until 1948. During this time Cornelius K. Ens also shared in the pulpit ministry. Formerly of Eigenheim, he spent his retirement years in Laird, preaching some of his best sermons when he was blind. He passed away in 1946. When Art Friesen entered the ministry, he joined Art Pauls (also an ordained minister), as well as Rev. Isaac Penner and Rev. C.F. Sawatzky. The church was served well by these four strong spiritual leaders who took their turns behind the pulpit. Each had his own unique style and emphasis, which had the effect of creating balance and interest. While it was said that Rev. Sawatzky mentioned the return of Jesus in almost every sermon, Rev. Art Friesen preached on the need for salvation and that one cannot "ride the fence." Rev. Penner had well-thought out messages, while Art Pauls always spoke passionately from the heart. His sermons would not be easily forgotten.

(Cont. From Page 13)

The ministers always worked alongside a deacon who played a strong lay leadership role in the congregation. One deacon was David P. Epp who served from 1923 until his death in 1942. He was followed by P.S. Epp who held the position until his resignation in 1967.

Connections with the Larger Church

The Laird Mennonite Church was an integral part of the Rosenort Church and also of the Canadian Conference. This is evidenced by the fact that the Canadian conference was hosted by the church three times: in 1930, in 1932, and in 1941. A large tent was set up for the conferences. It is hard to imagine how a small community could host such a large conference. We can appreciate the dedication and commitment of the women who prepared the food for several hundred people without refrigeration or running water.

In 1954 the Rosenort Church with its twelve member churches was becoming too unwieldy, and to ease the work of the elders it was divided into two separate bodies. Laird, Ros-thern, Osler and Horse Lake came under the United Mennonite Church banner and had Rev. J.G. Rempel as elder. He was later replaced by Rev. J.C. Schmidt.

Laird officially became Laird United Mennonite Church until 1962 when each church became a separate entity. They however retained their ties with the Mennonite churches through their membership in the Saskatchewan and Canadian Conferences.

Two individuals worthy of mention who contributed much to the larger churches were two Epp brothers: Heinrich and Peter P. Epp. Of Heinrich, it is written, "His solid, just character, his clear thought out judgment caused him to be called soon to various congregational tasks." (*J.G. Rempel, "The Rosenort Church in Saskatchewan"*)

He was a long-time secretary of the

"Vereinigtes Mennonitisches Waisenamt von Saskatchewan," today known as Mennonite Trust. He later became its chairman. He was also active in another important Mennonite organization which was Mennonite Fire Insurance and also served as its chairman.

After Heinrich Epp's sudden passing in 1927, his brother Peter, also a very willing worker, replaced him as representative of the Rosenort Church to the Waisenamt, and was chairman from 1932 until his death in 1943. He was also chairman of Mennonite Fire Insurance.

Throughout the years, the church has also been a supporter of Mennonite Central Committee.

God's Faithfulness

The history of Laird Mennonite Church reminds us of several things. First, we are all pilgrims – we are only here for awhile. Secondly, God is faithful. God has blessed the church through a whole century with countless blessings. Jesus promised, "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." Humans will falter, but God's unconditional love will continue forever. May we continue to tell the good news of God's love and faithfulness to future generations.



Wilmer & Barbara Froese—
served Laird Church from 1990—2005

Emilia Wieler and Almighty Voice

by Carl A. Krause

(Part II of the Emilia Wieler story; see page 21, April 2007 issue for part I)

The tragic death of Almighty Voice in May 1897 is well documented. While he, together with two young companions, held soldiers and police numbering close to 200 at bay for about four days, the result seemed inevitable. Almighty Voice and his companions, Little Saulteaux and Dublin, from their position inside a prairie poplar bluff east of Duck Lake, were killed by these combined forces, but not before having killed three police officers and one civilian. Because this unfortunate event occurred near to the newly emerging homestead communities of Rosthern, Duck Lake, Carlton, Fish Creek, and St. Laurent, early settlers heard of it, as did the wider community¹. Over the years the incident has continued to draw periodic attention. A movie has even been made of the events leading up to the death of Almighty Voice². And today authors of several websites continue to discuss their version of these events.

Although we are not certain of the relationship between the early Mennonite settlers of this area and the aboriginal community, we know the story of Almighty Voice touched their lives. For example, Gerhard J. Epp and Heinrich Wieler, among the first homesteaders in the Eigenheim District west of Rosthern, both refer to his death in their respective diaries³. And, because of an interesting set of circumstances, the story of Almighty Voice became an important part of family lore in the family and descendants of Emilia Wieler, at one time a resident of the Tiefengrund area.

In an earlier article, "A Woman of Stamina and Courage", (*Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*, April 2007) this writer described the almost nomadic existence of Emilia (Wiebe) Wieler (1854-1938). Born in Koenigsdorf, West Prussia, her life changed forever when in 1884 moneylenders seized her husband's

family estate for an unpaid debt. This event led to the first series of moves: to Nebraska, to Kansas, to Gretna, MB, and to Tiefengrund (then in the North West Territories). It was here that her husband Isbrand died in 1894, leaving Emilia destitute and with nine children.

More moves soon followed: to Batoche, again to Tiefengrund, to Rosthern, back to Kansas, and then to Gretna, to the Edmonton area, once again to Tiefengrund, and then to Carrot River. She finally came to rest in southern Manitoba where in 1938 she died in Winkler and was buried in Gretna. Suffice to say, hers was a difficult journey, but in the eyes of her granddaughter, the late Helen (Buhr) Regier, Emilia remained remarkably optimistic⁴.

From the spring of 1895 to the spring of 1897 Emilia Wieler and her family lived on what had been a deserted homestead in the Batoche area. It was during this time that she met Almighty Voice, perhaps several times. Almighty Voice was a 21-year-old Cree who lived on One Arrow Reserve south of Batoche. Described as "a lover of women, a hunter who was an excellent marksman, and an excellent runner who was difficult to catch even under the most favorable conditions"⁵, he spent the last two years of his life as the subject of a major police hunt. Judging by events described by Helen Regier, it was during these years that Emilia came to know him, although she may not have known that he was a fugitive.

On one occasion when Emilia and her family were essentially out of food, a young Indian, probably Almighty Voice, came to her rescue. This may have occurred in the spring of 1897, shortly before his death. Regier describes the events in this way:

In desperation grandmother (Emilia)... sent the boys to the nearby Indian Chief for help. The ice across the (South)... Saskatchewan River was already beginning to break up and it would soon be impossible to cross to the Hudson Bay store in Duck Lake. Hearing of

Cont. from Page 15)

the desperate plight of this widow and her children, the Indian risked his life by jumping across the river on the ice-floes and so arrived at the store in Duck Lake. Then with laden arms, he recrossed (*sic*) the dangerous river and brought the much needed supplies to grandmother⁶.

Regier provides a second example, one that may have occurred earlier than the one described above. However, in this illustration, the tables were turned and it was Emilia that provided assistance:

Once when Almighty Voice...had been fleeing from the police, he had stopped at grandmother's (*sic*) cabin for some food. This she had given him – of her little – and so the Indian was quite willing to get some food for her⁷.

With respect to the ultimate confrontation that led to the death of Almighty Voice and his two young companions on Sunday, May 30, 1897, the account as described by Helen Regier is similar to that documented elsewhere. There may be several reasons for this similarity. First, by the time of the death of Almighty Voice, Emilia Wieler was no longer living on the Batoche homestead. She had already returned to Tiefengrund. Only those encounters that had occurred before her move to Tiefengrund were to her first hand. Second, Regier's description is not her grandmother's description, but rather the account as told to her by her mother, Judith (Wieler) Buhr, who, in turn, had heard the story from her mother (Emilia). And, third, Regier indicates that she had read other accounts of the story of Almighty Voice and some of these accounts may have influenced her own retelling of the story.

Regier sheds additional light on the person of Almighty Voice as well as on some of the events that occurred well before the confrontation that cost him his life:

Almighty Voice...was rather a wild young man and at 16 years of age was married for the first time. He soon tired of this wife and was remarried several times after that. The police warned him that this was unlawful but this did not seem to influence Almighty Voice at all and he took his fourth wife.... (Sometime later)...Almighty Voice was put into jail and was threatened with hanging. This he decided would not happen to him and he escaped.... In the fall of 1895 a Sergeant, with an Indian guide, finally was able to locate the general whereabouts of the Indian in the Carrot River country. They found Almighty Voice with his fourth wife, leading a pony. The sergeant continued to draw near to Almighty Voice in spite of the pleas from his guide not to do so. But the Mountie said he had to do his duty. He was shot as he advanced on his horse, and fell to the ground, dead⁸.

As is well known, Almighty Voice fled, and an extensive search was organized for his capture. A bounty was placed on his head for information leading to his arrest⁹. It is generally agreed that Almighty Voice returned to the vicinity of his home and hid. Those who were aware of his being there chose not to report him to the authorities. Regier recounts how on one occasion his wife was arrested and, despite pressure to reveal the whereabouts of her husband, refused to do so:

In need of food, the wife at last went to a trading post where she was arrested. In spite of much questioning, she did not reveal the hiding place of her husband¹⁰.

More than a year went by and Almighty Voice was still at large. As already indicated, it was during this time that he and Emilia Wieler met each other. We can only speculate what she knew of his circumstances. She did, however, have information about his being found out; that is included in Regier's account:

(Someone)...saw Almighty Voice leaving the reserve where his parents lived. In secret he had been going to see them during this whole time.... A Captain and an Indian

guide followed this lead and as they traveled along, they saw two men running into a bluff a quarter of a mile away. These two stationed themselves as guards at this spot until a detachment from Prince Albert arrived the following morning.... This bluff then became the scene of a battle which was to be a tragic one¹¹.

Regier describes the events as the tragedy reached its end. Interestingly, these events occurred on the same day that Helen Regier's mother Judith was baptized in the Eigenheim Mennonite Church¹²:

Some of the volunteers wanted to go into the bush to try to force the Indians out but the officer in charge at first refused. Then when no return shots had been fired for a while, he gave his consent. Several Mounties and volunteers ran into the bluff, firing as they ran. They found the three Indians dead. Almighty Voice had fallen over the body of the first one killed: his skull had been crushed. A cousin of his apparently had been the last to have died and he must have fired his gun until his ammunitions gave out and then was killed by one of the bullets. His body was lying on top of Almighty Voice¹³.

And, so, this story of unusual circumstances and unlikely coincidences ends. Not surprisingly, it is a story treasured by the descendants of Emilia Wieler. It is the kind of story that could well begin with a comment such as, "Did I ever tell you the story of Almighty Voice and my grandmother?"

Endnotes:

1. "Tragical Ending of the Career of Almighty Voice," *Reader Leader* (June 3 1897). Website: <http://library2.usask.ca/sni/stories/her4.html>
2. The film, entitled *Alien Thunder*, did

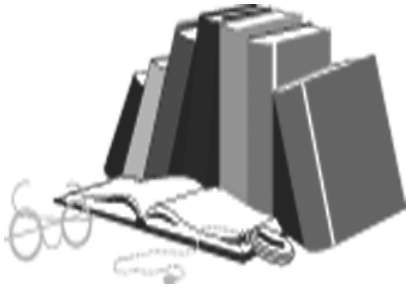
not earn the approval of all who saw it. "Onyx Film a Disappointment," *Saskatchewan Indian* (March 1974). Website: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca.saskindian/a74mar27.htm>

3. Diary of Father Gerhard Epp from 1891-1919. Translated from German to English by Elizabeth Epp, daughter, 1978-79, 1982, p.24. Typewritten. Diary of Heinrich Wieler (1892-1949). Translated from German to English by Ingrid Lamp Janzen, 1983, p.32. Typewritten.
4. Regier, Helen (Buhr). *My Grandmother --- and Her Family*. Self-published, October 1980, pp 29-31. Typewritten.
5. "Almighty Voice," *Saskatchewan Indian* (August 1973, p.6). Website: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/saskindian/a73aug06.htm>
6. Regier, Grandmother, p 12.
7. Ibid. p.13.
8. Ibid. p.14.
9. Although there is some difference of opinion as to the amount of the bounty, most sources cite \$500 as the amount.
10. Regier, Grandmother, p.14.
11. Ibid. pp. 14-15.
12. Ibid. p. 15.
13. Ibid. p. 16.



Horse-drawn van used to transport school children to Colonsay before the Gnadenheim School was built in the rural area

See Gnadenheim Church article on page 25



Mostly About Books

By Victor G. Wiebe

Book Editor

Book Review - by Victor Wiebe

Irene Klassen. Pieces and Patches of My Crazy Quilt. Guardian Books, Belleville, Ontario. 2000, 243 pp. Paper covers. Order from Irene Klassen, 151 MacEwan Ridge Villa NW, Calgary, Alberta T3K 4G3 \$27.50

Pieces and Patches of My Crazy Quilt is a genealogical essay and autobiography of the author, Irene Epp Klassen. She describes her ancestry with brief genealogy charts, with descriptions of her parents and forbears and even with a sample writing from her great-grandfather, the gifted Russian Mennonite teacher Heinrich Franz (1812-1888. Her husband's family, the John Klassens, is similarly described.

Irene Klassen's parents, David and Katherine Unruh Epp, immigrated to Canada from the Ukraine in 1924 and Irene was born in Waterloo, Ontario, very shortly after the family's arrival. The Epp family eventually settled on a farm in the Naco area of Alberta. This dry unproductive part of the Palliser triangle is an area well known to Arthur Kroeger who describes it in his recent book, Hard Passage. Irene, on reaching adulthood, trained in Calgary as a nurse, married John Klassen who became a fireman, and they raised five children in Calgary.

The John Klassen family is quite remarkable, for John's great-grandfather, Jacob J. Klassen (1818-1876), lived his entire life in the Netherlands and only after his death did his widow, Katherine Thiessen Klassen (1826-1897), go to the Ukraine.

After a quarter century in the Ukraine, the Klassens fled to Canada in 1923 and then settled with a number of other Mennonite families on the Wilson Brothers' "Lakeview Farm" near Harris, Saskatchewan. After a few years of difficult co-op farming they left the Wilson farm in 1929 and took up farming in Alberta, first near Countess, then in Irma, and finally moved off the farm to Calgary.

One of the interesting features of Pieces and Patches of my Crazy Quilt is the nice mix of literary formats. Some of the text is written in fictional conversation style, other parts are narrative, describing events in the life of the extended family. To these are added about two dozen of Irene's poems and 21 pages of photographs. Both education and church are important to Irene and she provides absorbing descriptions of rural school life in the 1930's and of the Neukirchner Mennonite Church, Chinook, Alberta.

The interconnectedness of the Mennonite world came again to me as I was very surprised to read on the first page of the text a little introductory story already known to me. This story, told in conversational style, in which a little boy related to his chums that in his classroom in revolutionary Ukraine an explosion blew off one of his fingers. My father had told me of being in the same classroom and observing this same tragedy. Irene Klassen is an interesting writer, and many Mennonites will already have read other articles written by her for she was for many years the Alberta contributor to the Mennonite Reporter. Finally, Irene has a good sense of detail and includes many names and places in her book in a way that makes the description useful to others to connect with her autobiography.

Book Review

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Irmgard Epp, ed. *Constantinoplers: Escape from Bolshevism* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2006), paper covers, 370 pp. \$29.95 CND.

The story of how the Civil War in the Soviet Union ended, with the flight of the last several hundred thousands from the Crimean peninsula to Constantinople, is known to many. But first hand accounts of the fortunate individuals, who managed to save their lives that way, are less readily available. This volume, prepared by the author in tribute to her father, one Cornelius Heinrich Epp, contains several dozen tellings about the experience which reflect with deep pathos the often desperate actions of, and personal feelings about, that traumatic escape.

The first two accounts, by Gerhard Wiens and John P. Unruh, include useful background material to create a context for the story of Mennonite soldiers who fought in the White Army under General Wrangel, and how some of them managed to emigrate from the Soviet Union via Sevastopol and Constantinople. Experiences in army service are dealt with in extensive accounts by Peter Gerz, John J. Dyck, and Peter D. Froese. While these do not provide a systematic account of what happened during the final year and months of White Army resistance to the Reds, they do give significant windows for understanding what Mennonite soldiers had to contend with in military service during that relatively short but fateful, period.

The episode of the so-called *Selbstschutz* (Self-defense militia) is not central to these reports. However it is clearly the most immediate background for Mennonite involvement in the White Army. It was the termination of the *Selbstschutz* which led to a harsh Red Army prosecution of all Mennonites who had been part of the *Selbstschutz*, even though that body intended itself to be an opposing force

only to the Makhno forces, not the Red Army itself. This prosecution led to the flight of hundreds southward from the Molotschna (not only Mennonites fighting with the *Selbstschutz*) to seek the protection of, and with it, for many, enlistment in the White Army ranks retreating into the Crimean peninsula as the Civil War came to an end.

Part Three, titled "The Hollanders' Desperate Flight", begins with an account of a reunion of "Constantinoplers", in Yarrow, B.C., in June, 1952. It was here that that a decision to attempt a collection of written stories about that fateful experience was taken, and the task to get materials together started in earnest. Then follow a dozen more stories, in the course of which one learns also about the refugee situation in Constantinople. Here MCC set up a refugee centre which could serve the escapees for several years, and become a point of gathering to make plans for moving on permanent new homes, some in Europe, but mostly in North America. The oft-told story of the "62", a group young of Mennonite soldiers of the White Army who made it together to the US, belongs to this larger chapter of the story.

The final section of the book brings in accounts of a number of people (not all White Army ex-soldiers) who did not leave via the Crimea, but went first to Batum and then travelled on, also to Constantinople to leave the Soviet Union with the others. The harrowing experiences of delay at Ellice Island in the US form a distinctive part of this experience.

It is interesting to note that the several dozen accounts here do not include much reflection on (though do refer to) the problem, for Mennonites of pacifist background, of going into active military service. It seems fairly clear that the self-defense initiative during Makhno times, once tacitly or even openly sanctioned by leading Mennonite ministers and teachers (see Dr. Abraham Friesen's recent book, *In Defense of Privilege*) seemed to leave the door wide open to take up arms and not question it too severely as a compromise of the Christian faith.

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The material is now at hand to write a more comprehensive history of this part of the Mennonite story, here still much in fragments large and small, but waiting, along with other data (e.g. the story of the refugee home at Constantinople, which is available elsewhere), for an integrated account which will surely come some day. The editor is to be commended for managing an impressive collection of data (not always easy to organize) which is always a major task in itself. Trafford Publishers have done a very creditable job in getting the book out. The inclusion of maps (a useful one right on the cover) and photos- and a very readable type font, is also a plus for the project. To obtain the book contact aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Helen Dyck

April 2, 1915 - April 4, 2007



On the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Historical Society held in February of 1999, Helen Dyck of Rosthern was honoured "for her contribution to the history, heritage and faith of our people". Helen passed away on April 4th, 2007 at the age of 92, and on April 9th she was remembered at a special service celebrating her long and fruitful life. Below are three articles which tell of Helen's life, and pay tribute to her.

Personal Life History

(Written by Helen Dyck)

I was born in the beautiful little village of Jacowleva in southern Russia (now Ukraine) on a Maundy Thursday, April 2, 1915 to Johann and Justina (Unrau) Neufeld. Two and a half years later our father died. Mother married her brother-in-law, Johann Dyck. We were three little girls and Dad Dyck had two little boys (our cousins), so we became a happy family of seven.

The country was at war and Revolution raged around us. We had to leave our village in 1918 and moved to Alexandrowsk (Zaparoze). However, the situation became increasingly more difficult and dangerous for our parents so we immigrated to Canada in 1923.

We arrived in Rosthern and were taken to our home in Canada 2 1/2 miles northwest of Waldheim by Mr. H.H. Dyck. Happy and rich with many blessings were the years of my childhood and youth here - with family, church and youth activities. The family altar was a priority in our home and shared daily among the seven of us.

In 1932 I was baptized on May 22 by Rev. George Buhler and became a member of the Waldheim Zoar Church. In 1936 I graduated from High School during the Depression years when employment was difficult to get. In 1937 I had the opportunity to find work in British Columbia, and after working in Trail, B.C. for two years, I returned to Saskatchewan to attend Normal School, and so I entered a career of teaching, which lasted 35 1/2 years. These were good years - hard work, long hours, but very rewarding. I convened the Music Festival in the

Valley area for ten years - a service I enjoyed very much - encouraging music activities and meeting people from all walks of life.

Rosthern has been home to me since 1949. Here I taught Elementary and High School for 25 years until I retired in 1974 I could devote more time to church and community. On April 22, 1956, I joined Rosthern Mennonite Church and am deeply grateful for the love and support of my church family. I was happy I could serve as deacon for a term. I am survived by two sisters, Mary Dyck at Bethany Manor, Saskatoon, and Erna Fast in Central Haven, Saskatoon; two sisters-in-law, Elsie Dyck, Winnipeg, and Helen Dyck, B.C.; and many nieces and nephews. I am predeceased by my father, Johann Neufeld in 1917, my mother Justina (Unrau) Neufeld Dyck in 1971, stepfather Johann Dyck in 1938, brothers Cornelius Dyck in 1999 and John Dyck, 2005, and brother-in-law Peter Fast in 1975.

Recollections of Helen's Earlier Years

As told by her Sister Mary

Getting an education was important to our parents, so when we came to Canada we had to go to school. Our father registered us at school with his surname, so the Neufeld sisters became Dyck girls.

Work on the farm was plentiful and hard. It was ten miles to the river where the hay was cut, and we sisters helped our father bring it home. Riding on the hayrack, through those steep roads into deep coolies (ravines) and up hills, we were fascinated by the many stories our father told to entertain us on the long trips. In harvest time we were in the fields, stooking grain, making our rounds and when we came to the end, sitting down and reading books - the old classics - books in fine print purchased from the Salvation Army for 25 cents a copy. That broadened our world perspective. Helen always had a book waiting for her at the top of the stairs; she loved to read. I can still see Helen out in the field with the

horses, harrowing or cultivating. She also had to pump a lot of water. Our fields were hilly, and we gave the hills, as well as the horses, each their own individual name. And then there was picking stones - it seemed they grew like weeds in our field. I think that many of the sidewalks in Waldheim are built with stones from our fields.

There were also times to socialize - to attend parties, but our parents did not worry about our behaviour at those events, for the five of us always went together.

"Station Arts" was an important place in Helen's life. Many times she invited me and friends to a meal of soup and brown bread, or a performance there, and always, she paid for the tickets and the tips. Then she invited us to her house. It was like an art gallery with the walls covered in pictures of her students - past and present. She held Bible studies at her house, not only for women, but the men were also invited, and they accepted her for who she was. And who could forget the birthday parties when she served her chiffon cake?

Helen was a historian; she did a lot of research and wrote many articles and collected photos on the life of her family, her church and about the community. She has been honoured by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan for making considerable contributions toward preserving Mennonite history in this province.

Excerpts from a Tribute Presented at Helen's Funeral Service

by Marian Hooge Jones, Family Friend, Former
Neighbour and Student

Miss Dyck was usually at our family birthday celebrations, providing the highest and lightest chiffon cake possible. She knew the local train schedule well, as this was crucial in the chiffon cake baking process. Her tiny house at 310 Railway shook when the trains passed by, so the cakes had to be timed just right, to go into the oven between train arrivals. Rosthern used to have at least 7 grain elevators along the track in those days, so the trains were more frequent than they are now.

(Cont. from Page 21)

While her house was tiny, her garden and her heart were very large. We were always welcome there. My sister, Edith, has a particular childhood sensory memory of one visit to her house around supper time, and getting a thick slice of fresh brown bread with warm hamburger meat on it. I remember the fabulous colourful flower garden and the smell of the roses, and all three of us remember the taste and the image of the huge bunny-shaped cakes she often gave our family at Easter time. This life-sized rabbit on a plate had white fur made from whipped icing and coconut and colourful candied eggs around it.

Miss Dyck was probably the forerunner of "scrap-booking" and enjoyed making albums full of newspaper articles and photographs. She made an album each for at least 25 families in Rosthern, following their school or musical achievements, engagements, weddings, births, deaths, travels, etc. She later gave each

family the album to keep. She enjoyed history and I'm sure her own extended family has benefited from her documentation of history relevant to them. She took great joy in compiling a picture album of our town of Rosthern, and gifted many people with one of these. Until recently, you could find Miss Dyck at every church function and at most community events and fund raisers. When the Good Samaritan Club had their latest annual Shrove Tuesday pancake supper fundraiser here at the start of Lent, she was already too frail to come, but she still had a generous cheque ready to contribute, and gave it willingly and unsolicited from her bed at the nursing home.

Miss Dyck was a hard worker and a respected colleague. I recall how well she cared for her long-time friend and fellow educator, Miss Ruth Newman, when Ruth could no longer care for herself. She also worked hard for the church. I remember her promoting reading, and helping in the church library. Perhaps some of you have already seen the cupboard

full of historical photographs and write-ups she lovingly compiled and put into albums about our church family over the years. These, she has donated to our church. For RMC's (Rosthern Mennonite Church) 100th anniversary celebrations several years ago, she helped to write up the history of our church in Rosthern, at which time many of the albums were on display and enjoyed by many.

Miss Dyck enjoyed nature... birds, flowers, animals... and had a wide knowledge about them as well. I knew that she had a book about prairie animal tracks, and when my son, Ben, and I went to see her one day last spring, she got out her book to help us identify the tracks we had seen, and then suggested we keep the book as well. She was already weakened and starting to downsize her small apartment. I believe she gave away most of her possessions over the years and enjoyed doing so.

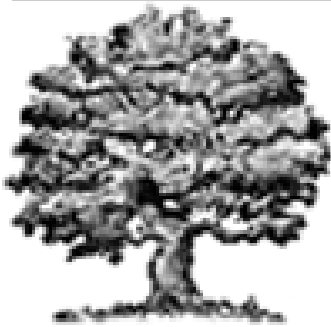
Miss Dyck - your history of a life with us in Rosthern shows that you were not a self-centered person... you made time and space in your life for others... your love language of giving has been noted and you have been an example of a dedicated teacher and faithful friend to many. Had history given you the opportunities available to our young people today, who knows what else you may have accomplished, as your mind was very sharp and your spirit was loving and energetic. But you did what you could, and you did your very best. You loved those around you as you loved yourself, and showed us an example of an abundant life in Christ. We are the beneficiaries of your prayers and of your life well lived. You have left us many fine memories to cherish and to reflect upon.

Garage Sale Frustration

The customer always complains that the price is too high, but then he goes off and brags about the bargain he got.

Proverbs 20:14 TEV

Do you think King Solomon ever had a garage sale?



The Family Tree

Genealogy Editor—Rosemary Slater

Preserving your family history for future generations

A Journey Into The Unknown

By Agnes Peters

Sarah Klassen, daughter of Johann and Helene (Enns) Klassen, lived in Nikolaipol with her family. Her father was Oberschulze of the village, quite a prestigious position. Nikolai Peters, a young man from Griegorievka, came to the village of Nikolaipol and found employment at the local store.

As fate would have it, these two young people met and fell in love. Now, the young Nikolai from Griegorievka came from a poor family. His father, Klaas Peters, had died when Nik was just a young boy. His mother struggled to raise the family so he was not a good suitor for the lovely Sarah Klassen. Her parents did not approve of their getting married.

Love was strong between these two young people so they decided to wait. Then came the revolution with all its atrocities – bands of lawless men roamed the countryside looting and coercing money from the wealthier residents, not hesitating to murder to get what they wanted. A group of them also went to the Klassen residence demanding money and when father Johann said he had no more to give, he was brutally murdered in the presence of his wife and family.

Terrible times ensued for everybody. There was not enough food and no money and because of these poor conditions there were many illnesses. There was also no longer a difference between the ‘had been’ rich and the poor. Sarah and Nikolai’s love had endured through all this turmoil and they were married on July 21, 1921.

After their wedding they went back to Nikolai’s village, to Griegorievka, to begin their married life. They found a few small rooms to live in but food and money were scarce and inflation had reached enormous proportions. People sold valuable belongings to buy a few necessities. Nikolai writes in his diary that he took his fur-lined coat to the bazaar to sell. He had hoped to sell it for 60 million rubles but was only offered 50 million so he didn’t sell it. He brought it back home and wondered if he had made the right decision.

Into all this a baby boy was born to them on October 28, 1922. They were delighted to have a baby and they named him Nikolai. It was not easy to look after a baby when food and other necessary items were so scarce and medical attention was difficult to come by. Nikolai writes further in his diary how the baby screamed for hours sometimes and they couldn’t quieten him – ‘he probably had a pain in his little body’.

They owned a cow and when she calved they had milk for their own needs and were able to churn butter each week which they either sold or traded with people for other necessary commodities. They managed to trade enough butter for wood for Nikolai’s mother’s coffin. Butter was worth 6.5 to 7 million rubles at that time.

They kept in touch with Sarah’s family by letter and in February of 1923 they received a letter asking them if they would like to emigrate to Canada with them, the Klassen family. After a short deliberation they decided to go. They began sorting out their belongings – those that they would take with them

(Cont. on page 24)

and those that they would try to sell. By the 4th of June they were ready to leave for Nikolaipol to join the family for the trip.

Having settled Sarah and the baby with her family, Nikolai went back to Griegorievka to make the final arrangements. He asked his brother Johann to bring their items to 'Losowaya' where they would pick them up on their journey out of Russia. He then bade farewell to his siblings – three sisters and two brothers and to his beloved home, Griegorievka. His brothers emigrated to Canada at a later date but he never again saw his sisters.

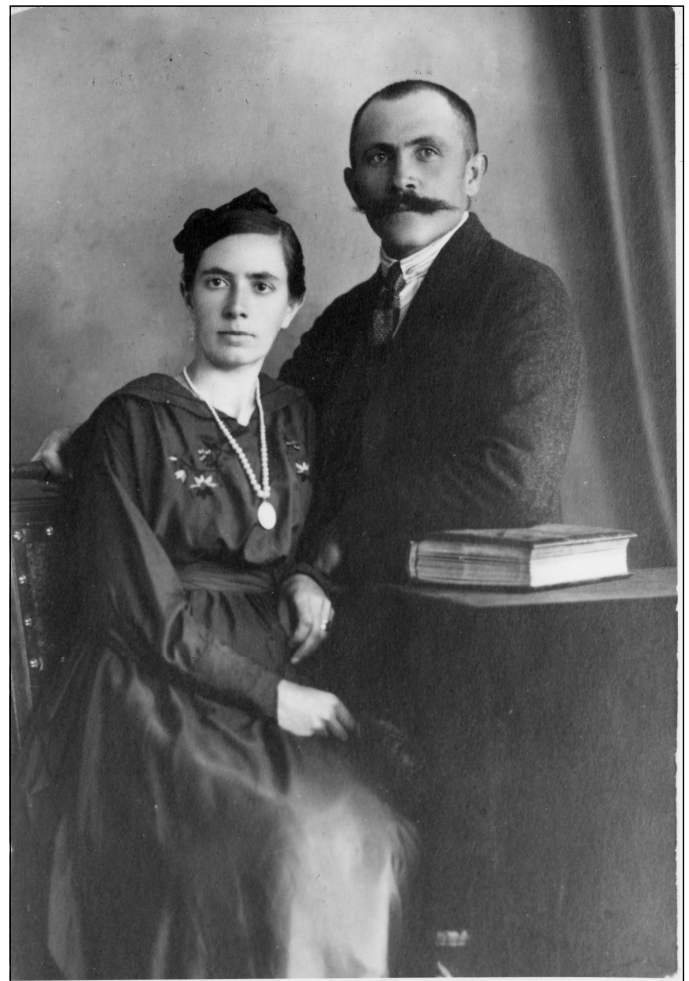
When he arrived back in Nikolaipol he helped his brothers-in-law with the final preparations and on July 17, 1923 they all left for the station in Alexandrowsk to begin their journey to a new home, a new life. At the station there were many tearful farewells and he writes how he carried his little son around in his arms as they were saying final good-byes.

They were loaded into cattle cars for their trip and this was definitely not very comfortable. The train stopped routinely at stations and people used these stops for bathroom breaks and, since some people had brought their samovars, they would use this time to make some tea. They weren't too long into the trip when baby Nikolai seemed to have a slight fever. There was no medical help available and at first it didn't seem to be too serious. They still took him out, when the train stopped, for fresh air. Gradually the fever rose and the baby became quite listless. They anxiously watched over him as his fever worsened. When they arrived in Smolensk on July 25 he was burning up with fever and at three in the afternoon, the little one died.

At first the officials wanted them to give up the little body immediately but finally they did allow the parents to wash the body, put on clean clothes and place him in a box (makeshift casket) and nail it shut. This was then handed over to the authorities to be taken to a 'Tucobner' and the train left.

I can't imagine how the trip must have been for Sarah and Nikolai after this. They probably went through all the motions necessary for such a life-changing trip. Sarah washed when necessary and when there was water and she prepared food as best she could.

When they got out of Russia and into Germany they had their first medical examination in the free world. It was here that Nikolai was diagnosed with trachoma. This meant that they could no longer continue their trip with the family but were detained in Lechfeld, Germany till his eyes were cured. They were overcome with a great loneliness and it was only the fact that there were others in the same predicament that kept them going. From Nikolai's diary I get the feeling that he tried very hard to make Sarah's life easier and to cheer her up. He even took her to Tegegon See, a spa south of Munich, to give her a pleasant outing.



Nik and Sarah Peters, Lechfeld, Germany, 1923

It was August when they arrived in Lechfeld and on December 28th. they were given permission to leave for Canada. After a very stormy crossing of the Atlantic, they arrived in St. John on January 5th. and then by train in Herbert, Saskatchewan on January 10th, 1924.

Here they met up again with the other families and it was a joyous reunion. The men found work on the farms and the women helped in the farm homes. They continued to look for land of their own and found some west of Hanley, Saskatchewan. They arrived in Hanley on August 9th, 1924 to truly begin their new life in Canada.

On October 22, 1924 another son was born to them and they named him Nikolai, too. Three more children, Henry, Edward and Elfriede also arrived in this family. Sarah and Nikolai were always thankful to be in a peaceful country, they were happy that they had made the move.

Note: We believe the photo of Nikolai and Sarah (Klassen) Peters was taken in Germany during their stay there and we've always felt that her face reveals the pain of the loss of her child.

Gnadenheim School and Church

By Cornelius Nickel

In 1925, 11 Mennonite families who had come to Canada from Russia a year earlier bought five and a quarter sections of land from Mr John Cheasley of Colonsay Sask.. Colonsay is about an hour's drive south-east of Saskatoon on highway 16. When you get to Elstow, watch on your right for a windmill and a campground. Right across from the campground is where Gnadenheim School stood, just about in the center of the parcel of land which this group had purchased.

For the first 3 years the children had to go to school in horse drawn vans to Colonsay. Another challenge in those early years was not

knowing the English language. During those years worship services were held in the homes.

In 1927 the community applied to the Department of Education to have a school district established and a school built. The application was approved and on July 13, 1927 the school district #4707 was formed and given the name Gnadenheim (which means "a home through God's grace"). When the school was ready for use, it also served as a worship centre on Sundays.

The first elected Secretary Treasurer of the Gnadenheim School was Henry P. Fast. Others who served on the Board during the 22 years the school was in operation were: Henry Balzer, John Penner, Abe Wiebe, George Poetker, Gerhard Berg, Henry J. Loewen, John E. Nickel, Aron Mathies, George Berg, Abe Nickel and Oswald Graae. The first teacher was Pearl Bargonier. Other teachers who taught there were: Frank Epp, Rudolf Penner, Irma Dyck, Waldemar Schroeder, Henry R. Sawatsky, Frank Schellenberg, John Klassen, Hilda Warkentin, Elisabeth Kruger and Irene Friesen.

I can remember that my brother and cousins talked about the annual sports day organized for all the schools in the community. The school receiving the most points in the various events was given a shield. A school winning the shield three years in a row could keep it permanently. Gnadenheim with fewer than 20 students had to compete with the larger schools, including the school at Colonsay with 100 students. Gnadenheim won the shield three years in a row. What happened to that shield no one knows.

The Mennonites used the school and church till 1949 when almost all of the Mennonite families sold out and moved to B.C. and Ont. For 22 years the Gnadenheim School served that community. In 1951 the school building was moved to Allan. I attended the Gnadenheim school till Grade 4 and then in the fall of 1946 my family moved to British Columbia.

Today you would not know that at one time there was a thriving Mennonite community in the Colonsay area named Gnadenheim.



1. Gnadenheim church gathering about 1931-32

Back row: George Berg, George Balzer, Abe Nickel, Pete Voth, John Loewen

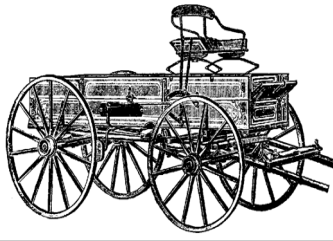
Second row: Henry Loewen, Aron Mathies, Henry Balzer,

Third row: Ben Balzer, George Fast, Henry Fast, George Poetker, Rev. John Klassen

Fourth row: Abe Loewen, Aron Loewen, Louise Balzer, Agnes Poether, Katherine Nickel, Katy Loewen, Emily Fast, Katy Bergen, Louise Fast, Mary Nickel, Emily Poetker, Sara Balzer, Anne Poetker.

Fifth row: Tina Berg, Mary Nickel, Mrs. Helen Loewen, Freda Loewen, Mrs. Poetker, Mrs. Fast, Mrs. Agnes Loewen, Mrs. Balzer.

Sixth row: John Nickel, Corny Balzer, Pete Loewen, George Berg, Dave Loewen, John Loewen, Dave Balzer



From the Past

The best of prophets of the future is the past...Byron

Annie (Hamm) Klassen's Souvenirs of her Homeland in South Russia.

By Esther Patkau

In the Mennonite settlements in Russia and also in the early settlements in Canada, it was tradition that school children write a Christmas and a New Year's greeting, in their best penmanship, to give to their parents as a gift at Christmas. The teacher provided a beautiful cover to enclose the greeting. Henry B. Klassen (1906-1986) wrote these greetings for his parents in 1913, 1914, and 1915.

Herzliche Segens und Glückwünsche zum heiligen Weihnachtsfest 1913 und zum Neu Jahr 1914 den lieben Eltern dargebracht von ihrem dankbaren Sohne Heinrich.

Weihnachtswunsch

1 Ich merk's, das heute Weihnacht ist, denn alles freuet sich.

Erschienen ist der heli'ge Christ, erschienen auch für mich.

2 Drum komm' ich, Jesuskindlein, und bring mein Herz zu dir;

Es will so gern beschenkt sein; ach, schenk' dich selber mir!

3 Dann hab' ich alles was ich brauch' für Zeit und Ewigkeit

Und bin auch bis zum letzten Hauch zu deinem Lob' bereit.

4 Beglück' die Eltern und ihr Haus, sei uns mit Segen nah'!

Nimm uns, wenn wir einst ziehen aus, zu dir! Halleluja! Amen!

Neujahrswunsch

1 Was es recht bedeute, weiss ich selber nicht,

Doch man sagt, daß heute uns ein Jahr anbricht.

2 Nun, mir ist nicht bange vor dem Neu Jahr heut;

Denn ich hab' schon lange meinen Wunsch bereit.

Heartfelt blessing and happiness wishes for the sacred Christmas celebration 1913 and for the New Year 1914 presented to my dear parents from their grateful son Heinrich.

Christmas Wish

1 I notice that today is Christmas because everyone is happy.

The Holy Christ has appeared, appeared also for me.

2 Therefore, little Jesus Child, I come and bring my heart to you;

It so earnestly wants to be blessed-oh, give your self to me!

3 Then I have all I need for time and eternity, And 'till the last breath I am ready to give You praise.

4 Bless the parents and their house, be near to us with your blessings.

And when we will leave from here, take us to Thee! Hallelujah! Amen!

New Years Wish

1 What this really means I myself do not know, But we are told that today a new year begins for us.

2 But I am not afraid of this New Year today; For I already long ago had my wish prepared.

(Cont. on page 28)

(Cont. from page 27)

- 3 Schenk Euch Gott Gedeihen, Eltern,
allezeit!
 Mög Euch einst erfreuen ew'ge Seligkeit
4 Doch ich eil' zum Schlusse, sonst wird's
gar zu lang,
 Nehmt mit diesem Kusse eures Kindes
Dank. Amen!

In the Mennonite homes in South Russia, it was quite common to have a cloth wall hanging, referred to as "Wandschoner" (literally, 'wall protector'). Annie (nee Hamm) Klassen's grandfather, Abram Hamm was a flour miller in Alexandrowka, Russia. For her grandparent's 25th wedding anniversary in 1875, they received as a gift a "Wandschoner" made by the workers in his mill. The words embroidered on it are: "Herr, bleibe bei uns denn es will Abend werden" (Lord, abide with us, for it is nearly evening, Luke 24:29).



It was brought to Canada when they immigrated in 1923 and has been in the hands of relatives since then. Last fall her cousin passed away in B.C. and the "Wandschoner" has now been passed on to her as the last living family member of that generation.

Annie Klassen's parents (John A. and Elisabeth Hamm) brought this hand-crafted picture from Russia when they came to Canada in 1923.

3 May God send you prosperity, to you parents,
all the time!

 May in the future you rejoice in eternal salvation.

4 But I must hurry to close, or this will be too long,

 And with this kiss receive your child's thanks. Amen!



Annie Klassen

