

SASKATCHEWAN MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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Park Valley Church: A Short but Important History

The following account was put together by the editors from information provided by Peter Funk and Jake Bergen and information found in the MHSS archives. — Ed.

This is the story of a little church in a remote rural community. It's a short history, but one that illustrates notable faith, courage, inventiveness and commitment.

The story of Park Valley church begins in the 1920s, when Mennonites began to move north into the Lake Four school district from the Great Deer area, which lies just southeast of Redberry Lake. Lake Four is about 25 kilometres southeast of Big River, very near the southwestern corner of Prince Albert National Park. In the 1920s, these northern settlers were still homesteading.

Family names of early homesteaders were Thiessen, Giesbrecht, Bueckert, Reimer, Unruh, and Veer. Later, people named

Dick H. Epp, 1927-2009

As we were about to go to press, we learned that Dick Epp, longtime active MHSS member and original editor of the *Historian*, died in the early morning of June 28, 2009.

A full obituary will appear in the October issue of the *Historian*.

Note that this issue contains an article written by him in late 2007.



Bethel Mennonite Mission: the original log church. Photo courtesy of Peter Funk.

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From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt



The two main articles in this issue are the story of Park Valley church and the account of MHSS's annual general meeting, with its special presentations on the Bergthaler church. The presentations on the Bergthaler church included historical accounts that are important for us all to know. The story of Park Valley is an inspirational one, in spite of its sad ending. The people who persevered in sustaining that rural church community over a good number of years in difficult circumstances are wonderful examples of faith expressed in works.

MHSS's annual meeting was my first, and an interesting and educational experience it was. I was only able to attend on the Saturday, but it certainly was worth the trip out. Not least among the things I took away from the event was what you might call an introductory appreciation for the Valley Christian Academy, which I had not visited before. It is a broad and imposing edifice out there on the Prairie, and the amount of activity taking place on a Saturday morning, besides our own event, was wonderful to see. (I had entered by the wrong door and so got a look at more than I would have otherwise!)

As always, I urge members to let me know what you would like to read in this journal. I welcome comments, quibbles, and suggestions, all with a view to making this as good a journal as it can be.

A happy summer to all. 

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MHSS President's Corner

By Jake Buhler



Johann Driedger (1859-1920) was a most remarkable person for his time. Born in Chortiza, Russia, he travelled with his parents to Manitoba at the age of 15. He became a Schult (overseer) in the village of Blumenfeld before moving to Saskatchewan in 1904. He settled onto the farm where Ben and Wilf Buhler now operate a dairy. It would be five years before he was excommunicated by an Old Colony Mennonite Ältester for driving a car, running a store, and operating a post office at Clark's Crossing. He even bought 350 lots in Saskatoon that included the area where Mount Royal Mennonite Church is located. He lost them all when the boom in Saskatoon came to an end. This volatile entrepreneur was not easily kept out of the Church and made many attempts to become reunited with it. The papers and some one hundred letters of Johann Driedger have been donated to our Mennonite Historical Society by Leo, Otto, and Irvin Driedger, grandchildren of Johann. They are a valuable addition and provide a rare insight into a clash between an entrepreneur and his Ältester. 🍁

Park Valley continued from page 1

Hildebrandt, Bergen, and Zacharias came from the Rosthern and Osler area.

Beyond the family names of some of the early settlers, little is now remembered of the beginnings of Bethel Mennonite Mission, now generally referred to as Park Valley Mennonite Church.

However, we have enough information from two former pastors, Peter Funk (who served from 1959-1963) and Cornelius Boldt (1963-1970), and a former resident of the area, Jake Bergen, to put together a short history, enough to give a good picture of the birth and death of a small rural church, which demonstrates how hard it must have been to maintain a viable church community in such relatively remote areas as this.



Day of ordination of Peter Funk; *from left*, H.H. Penner; Cornelius P. Funk, Peter Funk's father; Peter and Justine Funk; Peter G. Sawatzky, pastor of Mayfair Mennonite Church.

The first church building was a log structure erected about 1942. A two-acre parcel of land was donated by Henry M. Thiessen in the northeast corner of his farm for a church and cemetery. The people called their church Bethel Mission, after the Bethel Mennonite Church of Great Deer, where the first settlers had come from. Jake Bergen writes that the first leader was Jacob G. Giesbrecht, grandfather of Jake's wife, Maria. Another early leader was Dick Thiessen. There were also many visiting speakers. Jacob G. Giesbrecht's son, Jacob Giesbrecht Jr, served as pastor in later years, with help from others.

Peter Funk writes, "In the mid forties, through the influence of the newly formed Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization and the Bible schools, young people began to respond to the challenge of ministry in remote areas. Ella Heppner of Waldheim, a graduate of the Swift Current Bible Institute, responded to the call to serve the Bethel Mission at Lake Four. Also, young Christian public school teachers were making themselves available to teach in what were then remote northern areas. Leona Heppner, Ella's sister, joined Ella at Lake Four and taught in the public school there. When Ella left her position at Lake Four, Dick Thiessen from Waldheim served in ministry there."

Sometime in the fifties or the late forties, the Lake Four store and post office closed, so the mailing address and identity of the Bethel Mission Church changed to Park Valley, the school district south of the Lake Four school district.



The Park Valley Mission church in 1959, shortly before this original log building was replaced with a new building.

At that time, the ministry of the Bethel Mennonite Mission was supported by Saskatchewan Mennonite Youth Organization, Canadian Mennonite Conference Home Mission, and Mayfair Mennonite Church in Saskatoon.

On the Victoria Day weekend in 1959, Peter and Justine Funk, members of Mayfair Mennonite Church in Saskatoon, were ordained at this church. The ordination service took place in the community hall, beside the Lake Four school.

Peter Funk describes the community as a mixed one. There was a fairly large group of Norwegian families,

he writes, ten German families of Mennonite background, a few German families of Lutheran background, and a few English families.

"The church," he says, "was very plain with short slanted pews. There were no Sunday school rooms, so we began with two classes, a children's class that met in the foyer and an adult class that met in the sanctuary. For the foyer, we installed a small, air-tight heater for heat and in the sanctuary, at the side, we had a forty-five-gallon barrel with legs for heat. The mice had made use of most of the fibre in the pump organ for nesting, so it did not have the best



Park Valley old and new churches: the old log church is at the right; the new one, unfinished, is at the left.

of sounds. It was a joyous gift when we were able to receive a different pump organ from a family who lived in a village north of Saskatoon. We conducted regular Sunday morning services with an average attendance between forty and sixty people. We also had Wednesday evening Bible studies and we had a youth choir with ten singers."

Those were the good years, when the future must have looked bright, for the year the Funks began their ministry, a decision was made to build a new church. The log church was deteriorating and it was very cold. A new church became possible through the generosity of several people and organizations. The Park Valley storekeeper, who was a Catholic,

donated a thousand board feet of new lumber; a gift of \$500 from the SMYO provided a large truckload of third-grade lumber from the Big River lumber mill. The Home Missions Board and Mayfair Mennonite Church also made contributions.

The new lumber church was completed and opened in 1960. Peter Funk reports that during his ministry, they had two funerals and four weddings. Jake Bergen remembers that the first funeral was that of Diedrich R. Bergen, on February 17, 1961, and he believes the first wedding was that of Jake Bergen and Maria Giesbrecht, on September 2, 1962.

When Peter and Justine Funk left in 1963, Cornelius and Maria Boldt came to serve the church. Cornelius Boldt was a retired school teacher and an ordained minister from Osler Mennonite Church. The circumstances were beginning to change for Park Valley church by the mid 1960s. Rev. Boldt's annual reports to the Canadian Conference Mission Committee show a gradual slide in membership from a strong beginning in 1964. The reports give us a clear picture of increasing struggles to sustain it.

Some excerpts:

November 17, 1964

Bethel Mennonite Mission has a membership of 18, but attendance at Sunday services is from 30 to 40. Sunday School attendance ranges from 25 to 32. Seven persons are attending Catechism classes. Daily Vacation Bible School attendance in summer was 17.

Sunday evening services or youth fellowship programs are held every other Sunday. A 16-voice choir, age 12 and up, sings Sunday mornings and on other occasions. Weekly Friday evening meetings consist of choir practice and Bible studies. A ladies aid meets monthly.

In addition to the work at Park Valley, Sunday afternoon services are held every other Sunday in a school classroom in Big River, a town with a population of 1000. Attendance is from 5 to 12 persons; usually half of those attending are not of Mennonite background.



Park Valley church in 1960

October 23, 1965

Two families have moved out of the community. Average Sunday School attendance is 20, church attendance from 35 to 40. Ladies aid members are contacting homes of non-members to draw in new people. J. C. Schmidt from Rosthern has served with evangelistic services and Communion.

May 16, 1966

In and around Big River we have 12 homes where we visit and have devotions. Worship attendance was poor this winter due to severe weather. On May 8 the roads opened up from the north, so attendance has improved. Thirty people from 9 families in the Park Valley district are attending.

1968

Resident membership is down to 13. At present 9 families are attending, with Sunday morning attendance of 20 to 30, including children. The Henry Zacharias family with 5 children has moved to Rosthern. Other young people have left for work and studies.

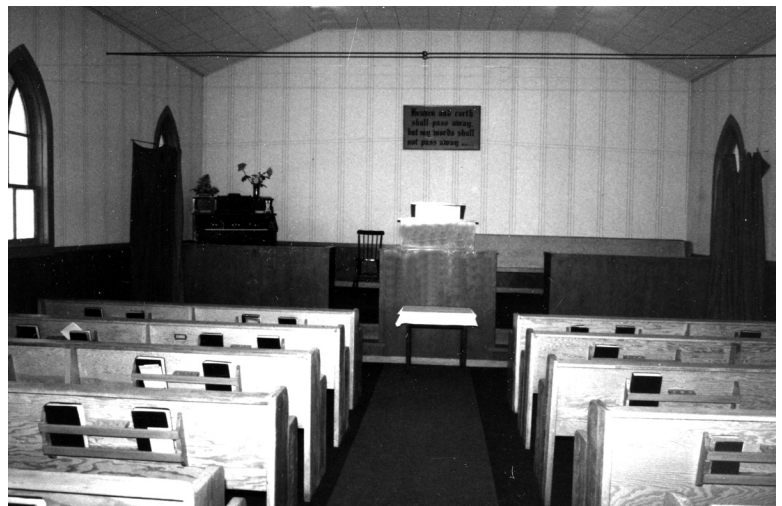
In and around Big River we are trying to keep in contact with 12 Mennonite families. Our meetings consist of house visitations and devotions only. Many people of various denominations do not attend any church. My wife and I visit many such

homes and also make visits to the hospital. The local elementary public school at Lake Four closed last summer. Consequently all school children are conveyed by bus to either Big River or Debden.

December 1, 1969

Our church membership stands at 15. Attendance in Sunday School and weekly meetings is very low. The participating families are: Jake Bergens, Abe Bergens, Henry Thiessens, Jake Giesbrecht, Mrs. A. Bergen (Sommerfelder), Henry Rempels, Abe Reimers, P. Hildebrands (Sommerfelder), and Abe Thiessens. Some others come occasionally. We endeavour to keep in constant contact with many families, including non-Mennonites, through devotions in their homes. Once a month we have resumed Sunday afternoon services in the home of [the] John Hieberts, 5 miles west of Big River.

We are happy to report that many guest speakers from Saskatchewan churches



Interior of Park Valley church in 1985.

are willing to serve at Bethel Mennonite. The financial situation in this area is next to disastrous. For several years wheat, coarse grain and hay have been in very short supply due to early frosts and poor moisture conditions.

August 1, 1970 will mark the end of the 7th year of our ministry here at Bethel

Mennonite Mission. I herewith give notice of our wish to terminate our ministry here at Park Valley on August 1, 1970.

On October 8, 1973, representatives from the Canadian Conference and Saskatchewan Conference met with some members of the Park Valley Church.

Some options suggested:

- 1) On some Sundays have a Bible study instead of a worship service.
- 2) Share a pastor with Grace Mennonite in Prince Albert.
- 3) Relocate the church to Big River.
- 4) Ask Jake Giesbrecht, the current leader, to be full-time pastor, while some of the farmers help him with his dairy farm.

Consensus reached was:

- 1) Continue on as at present with Jake Giesbrecht in charge. Encourage Jake to preach every second Sunday in winter, and every third Sunday in summer.
- 2) Ask the Church Board to take the initiative in arranging for guest speakers and in providing activity for the children.

3) The two levels of Conference will continue to provide financial support as at present, and the local congregation is encouraged to also continue with the present level of support.

In August, 1970, Cornelius and Maria Boldt ended their ministry at Bethel Mission.

After the Boldts left, the church was served for some years by the Conference of Mennonites of Saskatchewan Missions Committee, until they discontinued their support. Jacob Giesbrecht, Jr. served as the local minister from 1971 – 81. Abe Bergen helped in 1982. Others helped until the church closed. The last meeting was held May 18, 1990.

Peter Funk reports that ownership of the church building was given to “what was then known as the ‘Sharonite Group’, people of Norwegian descent.” The graveyard is being maintained by the community and still serves as a burial place for the people of the community.

An update fromn Jake Bergen tells us that the church building is gone, but that the graveyard has a large new sign and there is a metal sign at the road where the church was. 🍁



The Park Valley church in 2007.

Historical Society Weekend Focuses on Bergthaler Mennonite Church

By George Dirks and Verner Friesen

On March 6th and 7th, 2009 the Valley Christian Academy near Osler was the scene of weekend meetings sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan. Valley Christian Academy is a private school begun in 1986 by the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in Saskatchewan. Classes are offered for Kindergarten through Grade 12. The weekend sessions focused on the Bergthaler Church story and included the Annual General Meeting of the historical society.

Friday evening



To begin the Friday evening session, MHSS president Jake Buhler welcomed a full house in the auditorium of VCA. We heard fitting tributes to two bishops (Ältester) who had served the

Bergthaler Church. First, David Buhler presented a tribute to his father, Abram J. Buhler. Abram Buhler was elected as minister in 1948 and as bishop only nine months later. He could relate to, and was appreciated by, all ages. In addition to faithfully



serving the Bergthaler churches in the Valley area, Bishop Buhler took the initiative in bringing together like-minded churches in Western Canada for joint conferences and helped with planting new churches in the western provinces and in Bolivia. In his 27 years of ministry he preached 1,751 sermons and baptized 1,016 people.

Next, Linsay Martens (grandson) and Frances Saggs (daughter) gave tributes to Bishop John D. Red-

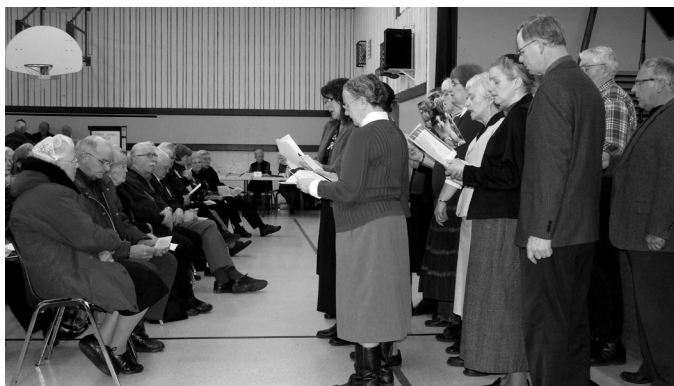


dekopp. John Reddekopp was elected as a minister in 1968 after a number of years in business (Weldon's Concrete and Hague Hardware). He gave up his business pursuits in order to devote himself to the responsibilities of church leadership. He was elected bishop in 1975, replacing Abram J. Buhler. In his role as bishop he guided the church through the German-English struggle, convinced that the language change had to be made for the sake of the young people. Reddekopp also had the vision

Photos this page: Left top: MHSS president Jake Buhler. Left bottom: David Buhler, presenting his tribute to his father, Abram J. Buhler. Right: Frances Saggs, daughter, and Linsay Martens, grandson, of John D. Reddekopp, presenting their tribute.

All photos for this article by George Dirks.

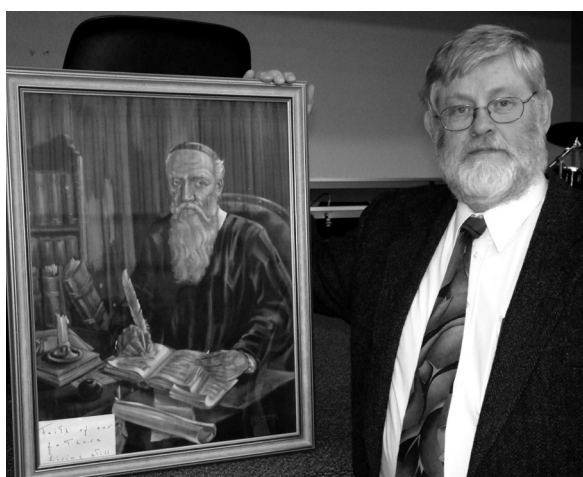
of starting a private Christian school, which came to fruition after many meetings and a lot of prayer and hard work. Valley Christian Academy is that school. John Reddekopp retired from the ministry in 1996. (See the articles on Abram J. Buhler and John D. Reddekopp in the February 2009 issue of the *Historian*.)



The Friday evening program further featured several well-received numbers by a singing group from the Bergthaler Mennonite Church in the village of Blumenheim, near the South Saskatchewan River east of Osler.



A slide presentation, prepared by Leonard Doell and Abe Buhler, portrayed many of the leaders who had served the Bergthaler churches in the Valley area over the years.



Saturday morning

On Saturday morning, Rev. Martin Wiebe, a pastor from Blumenheim, led us in a devotional based on Joshua 24.



Annual General Meeting

The annual meeting of the historical society followed. The year 2008 was again a busy one for our Society. One highlight was a historical event in November that featured presentations and a video on the 1880 – 1884 trek from the Ukraine to Turkestan. New information emerging from diaries, letters, and recent visits to the area is throwing a new and positive light on that event.

Victor Wiebe, our archivist, talked about and displayed some interesting recent acquisitions in our archives. Plans are underway for a major expansion of the archives to provide much needed additional space for our growing collection and to improve the display and activity areas. The archives continue to function solely through the work of volunteers under the direction of Kathy Boldt. Our official publication, the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*, has again put out three issues and was distributed to 350 members. We are thankful that Victoria Neufeldt of Saskatoon has taken over as the new editor.

Photos this page: Left top: singing group from Blumenheim Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Left middle: Leonard Doell. Left bottom: Victor Wiebe displaying the painting of Menno Simons recently donated to MHSS by Paula Dyck. Right: Martin Wiebe.

The development of our online web site at www.mhss.sk.ca, under the direction of Ruth Marlene Friesen, is ongoing.



Three Board members, Abe Buhler, Ed Schmidt, and Margaret Snider, asked not to continue serving on the Board. Re-elected were Kathy Boldt and Vera Falk for three-year terms each, and new members elected were Erna Neufeld and Elmer Regier. (See page 12 for profiles of the new board members.)



Our guest speaker was Conrad Stoesz from Winnipeg. Conrad is archivist for the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre, working half-time for each centre. He shared the story of the early beginnings of the Bergthal Colony in Russia in the 1830s and the circumstances that prompted the whole colony to move to North America, most of them to Manitoba, in the years 1874 to 1880. In Manitoba, some ousted Old Colony members were accepted into the Bergthaler June 2009

Church. Various outside groups (the Holdeman Mennonites, Mennonite Brethren, Swedenborgian, as well as General Conference home mission workers from the United States) made inroads into the life of the Bergthaler Church, and this became a major reason for friction and division. The Sommerfelder and Rudnerweider groups were formed, as members broke away from the Bergthaler Church.

Saturday afternoon

After a tasty lunch of soup and pie served by the women of the Bergthaler Church, Leonard Doell continued with the Bergthaler story. He shared about the big challenges which the Bergthaler faced due to language (changing from the German to the English), conscription, education, and the shortage of land in the Hague-Osler Reserve. Many of the Bergthaler people migrated to remote parts of Saskatchewan and Alberta (e.g. Mullingar, Swan Plain, and LaCrete) and to Paraguay and Bolivia as well. Leonard Doell is the author of the book, *The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan*, published in 1987.

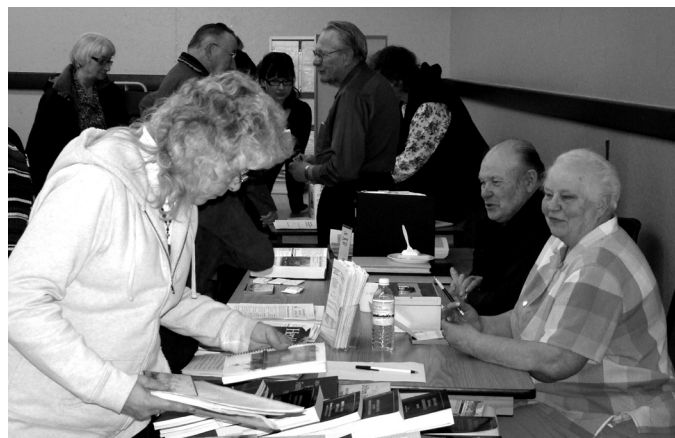


The weekend sessions concluded with a brief presentation by current bishop George Buhler on the subject of his vision for the future of the Bergthaler Church. Bishop Buhler would like to see

Photos this page: *Left top:* the three outgoing board members: from left, Ed Schmidt, Margaret Snider, Abe Buhler. *Left bottom:* Conrad Stoesz. *Right:* George Buhler.

the Bergthaler Church continue to promote missions at home and abroad, as well as support the Canadian Food Grains Bank and Mennonite Disaster Service. He sees the need for expansion of the Seniors' Home in Warman and the establishment of a Christian FM station in the Valley area. He prefers bridge building to creating boundaries in relation to other Christian groups.

This March weekend was indeed an inspirational time of bridge building between the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan and other Mennonite groups in the area. The Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan is pleased to have been able to facilitate that bridge building.



Photos this page: *Top:* enjoying the books and magazines on display during a break. *Middle:* Victor Wiebe presents a certificate of recognition to members of the Reddekopp family: from left, Linsay Martens; Susan Reddekopp, wife of John D. Reddekopp; Frances Saggs; Victor Wiebe. *Bottom:* Victor Wiebe presents a certificate of recognition to members of the Buhler family, all sons of Abram J. Buhler: from left, George Buhler, David Buhler, Victor Wiebe, Abram Buhler. All photos for this article by George Dirks.



New MHSS Board Members: Brief Profiles

Erna Neufeld



Erna Neufeld was born in Winnipeg. When she was nine, her family moved to Rosthern. She is a graduate of Rosthern Junior College.

Erna and Elmer Neufeld were married in 1950 and moved to Saskatoon. They started out as members of First Mennonite Church but left to become charter members of Nutana Park Mennonite Church.

Erna worked in the Royal Bank for a couple of years, and later, after receiving a permanent teaching certificate, taught kindergarten for a few years. Then she again went back to school, receiving a Bachelor of Social Work from the University of Regina. In 1979, she became the first full-time School Social Worker in Saskatchewan, working in the Saskatoon West School Division. She retired in 1989 and worked part-time in family counselling with the Family Service Bureau.

Erna has a history of volunteer work in her church and other organizations, including indexing obituaries for MHSS.

Erna says, "I became interested in family history while quite young," when her father showed her a picture of his great uncle Peter F. Suderman and told her how "Uncle Peter" came to Kansas with his grandmother at age two. "This prompted me to think deeply about the meaning of family relationships," she says. In 2008, she and her husband edited a book about her mother's family, *Toews Family History: The Story through the Generations*. "Working on this book has been a real highlight of my pilgrimage to date with genealogy." 🍁

Elmer Regier



Elmer Regier is originally from Watrous. He and his wife, Agnes, are retired and now live in Saskatoon, after 32 years in Medicine Hat, Alberta. They have two children: Joanne Weighill in Carrot River, and Sheldon in Medicine Hat. Elmer and Agnes are graduates of Swift Current Bible Institute and Elmer also graduated from CMBC (1965).

He served as interim pastor at Mount Royal Mennonite Church in Saskatoon in 1965 – 1966, while Waldemar Regier was completing his studies at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. After that, he completed a four-year BA-BEd program at the University of Saskatchewan.

This education led to his career in marriage and family counselling. He was executive director of Medicine Hat Family Services from 1978 – 1997. From 1997 – 2003, he was in private practice in counselling and mediation.

While in Medicine Hat, Elmer and his wife were actively involved in the Crestwood Mennonite Brethren Church. He served on the board for about 20 years, including 13 years as treasurer. He also served as a lay minister for most of their time there. (They maintained their membership in Mount Royal and were associate members in Medicine Hat.)

He states that he and his wife are both deeply committed to their faith and their Anabaptist heritage. He has been "fervently working" on their genealogies. They have been to Germany twice to meet hundreds of their relatives, and have also met relatives in Paraguay. 🍁

The Glenbush Years

By Dick Epp

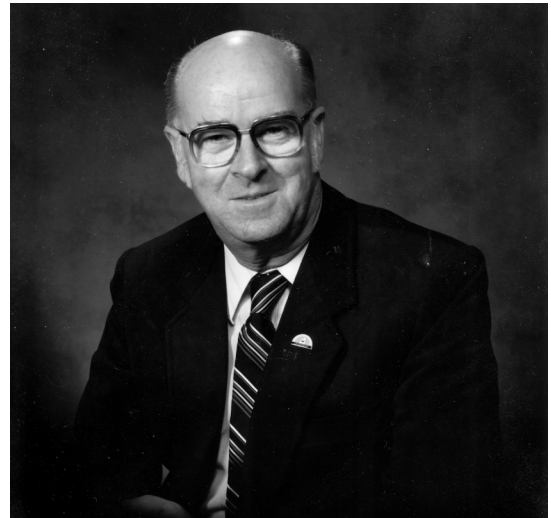
Dick Epp wrote this story of his childhood in Glenbush, Sask. in December, 2007. The photo, courtesy of Betty Epp, is from December, 1985. — Ed.

My parents moved from Rosthern in 1927 when I was just a few months old. The eight cows and four horses were shipped in a C.N.R. boxcar to Glenbush and Father drove there with his Model T along with Mother and me. We stayed at the H.P. Neufelds for the time it took to make a 14 x 14 house, which became the core of the rest of our home. The Neufelds had homesteaded in Glenbush a year earlier. Father moved the house to our farm with his Case tractor. When they arrived they dug a cellar and a well and also built a barn.

Then the C.N.R. came and laid their rails right through our yard, so Father had to close the well and move all the buildings. For this inconvenience he received \$500 from the C.N.R. Years later Father said that he should never have accepted only \$500, because it did not cover the time nor the cost to dig a new well, that did not have water as good as the first well, nor did it cover the costs of moving all the buildings and digging a new cellar for the house. But that is the way it was. Father had a new well dug but it did not have good water, so he really lost out on this deal.

For 15 years or more he hauled water from Gordon's Lake for our cattle twice every week in summer and on a daily basis during the winter. It was a distance of approximately two miles. He usually put five barrels on his sleigh or wagon and covered them so the water wouldn't splash out. This was a lot of work and it took time to drive the two miles daily to the lake to get water.

Within a year, the railway came and built another line through our farm including a whye which came right behind our yard. We were now enclosed by two rail lines plus a whye between the two rail lines. The whye was used by the C.N.R. to turn their trains around when they needed to return to North Battleford by a different route through Rabbit Lake instead of Sandwith. Our farm now had



about 12–15 acres on each side of the two tracks. This meant that each time we wanted to leave the yard we had to open the railway gates, cross and close them so that our cattle would not get on to the track. The whye cut off most of the land on the northwest of our quarter. There was just a very small piece of grassland left, which we never fenced and it was often used by the gypsies when they came around in summer to dig seneca roots. (Seneca roots were used to make medicinal products.) They found this a good place to camp and they always loved to come to get milk and water from us, conveniently just across the tracks. Very often, Mother would give them some fresh baking when they came. The gypsies loved our little camp spot.

The two rail lines and the whye that cut through our farm reduced our 160 acres and divided it into several awkward pieces, which required more fences and gates to prevent the animals from getting into the grain fields. Although on two sides the railway had built good fences, we always had to open gates and cross the tracks to get to either piece of land on the other side of the tracks. To move farm equipment across the railway tracks was not always easy. I recall the times that Father moved the threshing machine across the railway; we had to be careful of the telephone wires so they would not get caught on the threshing machine. The railway crossings were not level; they were built up about five to six feet so it

meant going up and over and down, and with Dad's Case engine and threshing machine it was always a scary event.

Our 160 acres were totally covered with poplars, so the road onto our yard and all the fields had to be cleared before the land could be broken or used. I recall vividly the big fires after Father had cleared some land and when he burned the roots and branches of the trees to get rid of them. The trees when freed from the branches became our firewood for heating our home in winter and cooking our meals. Father would use a big share plow and break the ground to make the soil ready for the crops. To clear ten acres took a long time and a lot of work. Add to this the fact that there were tons of stones in the ground so that before the land could be cultivated the stones had to be removed. Nor should I forget that there were also many roots to pick. It was pioneering at its worst. In spite of this, they carried on. It was part of life. It was definitely a hard start.

The other main job that Father had was to build fences to keep our cattle in. Thank goodness, on two sides we could take advantage of the railway fences. But every field where crops were planted had to have fences to protect them from the farm animals.

During this time Father added to our 14 x 14 ft. home. He first added a shanty to the north, which became the kitchen, then a shanty was added to the west side, which became the parents' bedroom. Then a 14 x 14 addition was added to the east side, which became a living room. The centre part became the dining room. After the twins were born, another shanty was added to the kitchen, which became the boys' bedroom. Architecturally, it was quite a sight, but it served a purpose: five children were lovingly brought up here. And we never felt that we were poor or suffering. It was just the way it was.

Early in January, 1933 (I was five), I got up at six o'clock in the morning, packed myself a lunch in a syrup pail, and in the dark hiked along the railway track one mile south to the Aaron Enns', our neighbours. When I got there Mr. Enns was just lighting the fire in their kitchen stove. He was surprised to see me so early in the morning. When he asked me what I wanted I told him that I wanted to catch

a ride to school. Seeing that I had a lunch pail he thought that perhaps my parents had sent me, but he was very suspicious, since he had not heard that I was starting school in January. However, after I ate breakfast with them, they took me along to Avery School. But when he returned home he thought that he should go and visit my parents. Much to their surprise they had not missed me. So Father came to Avery School to talk to Miss Dolan, the teacher, and to take me home. I wasn't eligible to start school until I was seven years of age.

However, to Father's surprise, I put up a big struggle to stay at school and I refused to come home. So there was a long discussion of which I remember nothing, except that when it was all over they had agreed that I could stay. Their thinking was that this novelty of mine would wear off and I would willingly stay home after this stressful morning. However, they were wrong. I stayed in school for the balance of the year and many more.

Years later after Bill and I had been teaching for many years, Miss Dolan retired in Ruddell, Saskatchewan, and invited Bill and me to be guest speakers at her retirement banquet. We accepted gladly, and I told my story of my first encounter with school and with Miss Dolan, my first teacher. It was a wonderful experience. Miss Dolan was my teacher for three years. She had not forgotten Bill and me. Our time at her retirement was a highlight of my life. The audience, too, was excited about my anecdote about my first day in school with Miss Dolan in Avery School.


When Miss Dolan left Avery, William MacRobert Fish became our teacher for four years. He was a handsome young man who owned a Model T Ford. When Avery School had a ball game against another school, the ball team would pack into Fish's car and they would drive off gallantly to play their game.

During Mr. Fish's term at Avery several interesting things happened. The big boys, and I was not one of them, built a big slide out of poplar trees. The slide was about twelve feet high and we got up by means of a ladder at the back. In winter the slide was in much use. The boys put snow on the runway, packed it down and sprinkled it with water. This made the

surface slippery. Then students took turns going up and sliding down on a piece of cardboard or just on the seat of the pants, although it was awfully hard on the pants. There was a railing about a foot high on each side, so it wasn't a slide you wanted to stand going down. It only lasted one season; then the poplars started to give way and it became more of a hazard than a safe slide. It was taken down and the poplars probably were used for firewood in the school during the next winter.

I do not recall a skating rink at Avery School because I don't think the well on the grounds had enough water ever to keep a skating rink going. As a matter of fact, I believe the well was eventually closed and water was brought to the school by one of the farmers nearby. Water was used only for drinking and washing hands. However, that didn't keep the boys from creating a "shinny court". The snow was soon trampled down and became slippery enough for a good shinny game. I am sure there were many sore shins by the end of the day. Very few boys had the official hockey sticks. Many made their own, often using a heavy branch with a curl that served as a stick. Most boys trimmed these branches and made them into semi clubs referred to as hockey sticks. Then there were guys who made their own hockey sticks from boards. It wasn't until my Grade Eight year that the official hockey sticks became available at Jack Harrison's store. After this the home-made variety soon disappeared from the rinks.

I still remember when Willie and I got our first hockey sticks for Christmas. We got up in the middle of the night to see what we had received. When we saw the hockey sticks we took them to bed and Willie and I placed them between us and we tried to go to sleep. That was a very exciting time. We now had "store-bought" hockey sticks. Our parents reprimanded us for getting up in the night. However, that soon was forgotten after we had gone outside to try our new hockey sticks on our own rink. Peter probably became the best hockey player in our family and he actually made the Rosthern Junior College Team years later.

Now at eighty years of age the nostalgic times bring back wonderful memories of my youth. What a great experience it was! 


Saskatchewan Hansard Records MHSS Event

On March 9, 2009, Cam Broten, MLA for Saskatoon Massey Place, made the following speech in the Saskatchewan Legislature about MHSS paying tribute to the two Bergthaler Mennonite leaders at the Society's annual general meeting this year. Thanks to Leonard Doell for the information. The text of the speech as it appears in Saskatchewan Hansard is quoted below. — Ed.

Mr. Speaker, on Friday I had the pleasure of being invited to attend a Mennonite Historical Society event at Valley Christian Academy in Osler. The event focused on the history of the Bergthaler Mennonites and paid tribute to Bishop Abram Buhler and Bishop John D. Reddekopp. Leonard Doell and Reverend Abe Buhler presented the remarkable history of the Bergthaler Mennonites, a people who came here to flee persecution and to have the freedom to live out their faith as pacifist Christians.

Reverend David Buhler paid tribute to his father, Abram Buhler, who led the Bergthaler Mennonites from 1949 until 1975. John D. Reddekopp, who served as bishop from 1975 until he retired in 1996, was honoured by his daughter, Frances Saggs, and grandson, Linsay Martens. Bishop Buhler and Bishop Reddekopp led their faith community with great distinction, and their legacy lives on.

Bishop Buhler helped establish the Warman Mennonite Special Care Home. Bishop Reddekopp founded Valley Christian Academy, a kindergarten-to-grade-12 school that educates hundreds of students each year. And both bishops had a profound impact on their communities.

While listening to their stories, I was reminded of our provincial motto: "from many peoples, strength". Our province is great because of the strength and resilience of our people, people like Abram Buhler and John D. Reddekopp. I ask all members of the Assembly to join me in acknowledging the exceptional contribution of these bishops and the Bergthaler Mennonites in making Saskatchewan a better place. Thank you. 

Reflections on a Century of Life: Katie Sawatzky

By Helen Kornelsen

"As I am getting older and older, I think of how God deals with his people." Surrounded by family and siblings, Katie Sawatzky (nee Kornelsen) celebrated her 100th birthday on December 28, 2008 at Manitou Lodge, Watrous, Sask., where she has been a resident for twenty years.

Katie Kornelsen was born December 28, 1908 in Ukraine. She grew up, married, and had her first child there. On November 19, 1928, Katie and her husband, Peter Sawatzky, with their six-week-old son, Peter, set out for America from the village of Kusmitzky. In Canada, the family spent its first winter with Katie's aunt and family, the Jacob Regiers, in Watrous.

In April, 1929, the family moved onto a rented farm near Manitou Lake, Sask., together with Peter's sister and family, the Jacob Wiebes. The two families had travelled together from the same place in Russia. They settled into a house in the ravine now called Dellwood and partitioned the house to accommodate both families, each with a baby.

In the spring of 1930, Katie's parents, with a family of four, arrived from Russia. "We had nothing to be able to accommodate our parents when they arrived," Katie wrote in her memoirs. "We had nothing but a bare floor to sleep on, with mattresses of straw-filled sacks, and only rags [for them] to cover themselves with. Heating, too, was scarce. The wood was wet and green and had to be dried in the oven before it could be used. It was a very difficult time for everyone."

A number of immigrant families, who had come from Russia between 1923 and 1930, settled in the Watrous area. They had come from different places in Russia and were now scattered on lonely farms.



Katie Sawatzky, in a recent photo.
Photo courtesy of Helen Kornelsen.

Three needs emerged: there was a need for bonding to solidify their relationships; a need to share a spiritual renewal; and a need to find a permanent place to worship in. Initially, the group met alternately in the homes of the Abram Dycks and the Jacob Ennses, with Jacob Klassen as minister.

An invitation was sent to Rev. I.P. Friesen of Rosthern to hold a series of revival meetings. These were held in the Sawatzkys' home, despite the restricted space they could provide. In addition, Katie and Peter also hosted the speaker. Katie reminisces with a smile: "Mr. Friesen wasn't used to such impoverished living as

we had. Because fuel was costly and scarce, we were frugal with night heating. We had given him our bed, while we slept on the floor with our two children, Johnny being only two months old. After the first night, Mr. Friesen asked for a scarf to tie around his head to keep warm."

Following these meetings the group organized itself into a congregation, with the help of Rev. George Buhler of Waldheim, Sask. Again, this took place in the Sawatzky home. On March 14, 1932, twenty-one people signed as charter members, called on Rev. Jacob Klassen to serve as their pastor, and named their congregation the Bethany Mennonite Church. Of those charter members, only two are left: Katie Sawatzky and her sister, Margaret Pankratz. The Wurtz school became their first church.

By 1950, Katie and her family had saved enough money to build a new home. They did it themselves, with the help of their three sons, Peter, John, and Jacob. It was here that Margaret was born. The joy was great. All too soon, before she reached the age of two, she joined the angels in heaven. The loss has

remained a life-long sorrow. Katie often recalls how Margaret enjoyed playing with three buttons. These three buttons were later cemented into the headstone on her grave.


At Katie's 100th birthday celebration, her grandson, Grant Sawatzky, wove the theme of these three buttons into his homily, naming them *Bitterness*, *Boldness*, and *Blessing*, to represent Katie's many sorrows and hardships, her faith and courage throughout life, and a long life of God's blessings.

After the Second World War, Katie and her husband were able to sponsor Peter's brother's family to come to Canada. Later, the brother himself was located and could come to Canada to be reunited with his family.

"We did not need to get rich like so many of our acquaintances. We just needed to be there to be used of God, to be of service," Katie explained. "When my parents were led out of Russia, God first provided for them in Germany. They could not come to

Canada unless they had close relatives as sponsors. Despite our extreme poverty, we were able to sponsor them. Others had to go to Uruguay, Paraguay, or Brazil. God had sent us ahead to be able to help them."

Katie continued her train of thought: "Then, after World War II, we were able to locate Peter's brother's family with the help of the Red Cross and Mennonite Central Committee. We sponsored them and they could come to Canada, my sister-in-law and her four children. Later we also located Peter's brother, just released from prison. He was able to join his family just before Christmas 1951."

With the radio beside her, the TV in front of her, Katie now spends her days knitting for MCC — slippers, tuques, mittens, scarves, knee warmers — while remembering the past. She rejoices in the fact that God has led all the way. "I can see how wonderfully the Lord has led us. We just needed to be there — to be of service to others. Praise be to God, the Lord." 


Saskatoon Street Names with a Mennonite Connection

By Victor Wiebe

In John Duerkop's book *Saskatoon's History in Street Names* (Saskatoon, Sask., Purich Publishing Ltd., 2000), information is given on the naming of all Saskatoon's 865 streets. Three have a direct Mennonite Connection. **Epp Avenue, Court, and Place** is named for William H. "Bill" Epp (1930-1995). At the time of his death, Epp was Saskatoon's most eminent sculptor. **Goerzen Street** is named for the Goerzen family, of which Cornelius Abram Goerzen (1890-1984) was the most prominent in business. Goerzen was born in Ukraine, came to Canada in 1928, and settled in Saskatoon. He was employed at Robin Hood Mills (flour milling) and was a charter member of First Mennonite Church. **J.J. Thiessen Crescent, Terrace, and Way** is named for Ältester Jacob John "J.J." Thiessen (1893-1977), the founding pastor of First Mennonite Church, Saskatoon. Duerkop's account of the Thiessen name does not

comment on the use of initials in the street name, but Thiessen was always known as "J.J." and the street name got it right.

There is also a Ewart Avenue, which is not Mennonite, however; it was named for a land surveyor of Scottish background. Eby Street is an interesting name, chosen in remembrance of the Methodist and Temperance colonist James Morley Eby (1844-1921). James Eby was the grandson of Samuel "Saddler Sam" Eby (1790-1878), one of the Mennonite pioneers of Waterloo County, Ontario.

The City of Saskatoon receives suggestions and requests from all citizens for street names. Should you want a street named for a special person, place or event, contact City Hall. The process of getting a new name to actually be adopted is lengthy and somewhat political. 

Rev. J.J. Nickel in the Aberdeen Mennonite Church

By Menno Nickel

Menno Nickel presented this account to the Aberdeen church on Sept. 10, 2007, on the occasion of the church's 100th anniversary. — Ed.

Our parents left the villages of the Neu Samara, a district about 450 miles east of Moscow, Russia to escape the horrors, terrors, and persecution of the Bolshevik Revolution. They arrived in Halifax, Nova Scotia aboard the ocean liner The Empress of Scotland and then travelled by C.N.R. train to Aberdeen, Sask., to arrive there on Nov. 22, 1924.

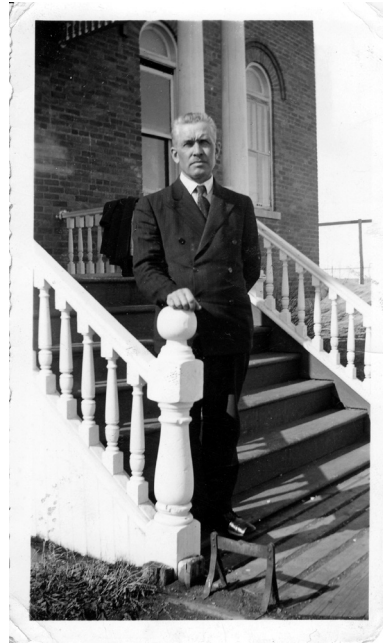
Mennonite Church leaders under Elder (Ältester) David Toews of Rosthern had requested that Dad be allowed to go straight to Aberdeen to become the pastor there. They were hosted by the Jacob J. Heinrichs family in their spacious home for a few days and then moved to a suite of rooms above the Heinrichs Hardware Store. Some time later they moved out to the Cornelius Boschman farm to work there from a nearby house. Our parents, Jacob and Anna (Wiebe), were married in 1907 and now with a family of six children, preferred the rural setting.

Dad was able to get some employment working with the contractor building the new large brick school in Aberdeen. He told me the first words he learned in English were "Hurry up, Jake, more bricks!"

In about 1928, Dad was able to buy a farm complete with horses, equipment, and some cattle from Henry P. Dyck, about 6 1/2 miles north of Aberdeen. The children, Jake, Frank, Art, and Lil enrolled in Lily School. The eldest daughter, Justina, married Jacob Boschman and moved up to the Carrot River area.

Dad began to serve the Aberdeen congregation in December of 1924. Rural ministers were not salaried in those days and farming was not very profitable either, but mother was a very efficient and effective home manager and so they were able to get along reasonably well.

Our parents celebrated their silver wedding anniversary in 1932. At that time the congregation gave them a beautiful silver wall motto, **Eben-Ezer**. We



Rev. Nickel in 1933, on the steps of the German English Academy in Rosthern, where the Bible School was located. Photo courtesy of Menno Nickel.

still have it today. They also received a full set of dinner dishes. The congregation further showed its appreciation of their services by giving mother a new McClary kitchen stove on the occasion of her birthday on May 5th one year. This help from the congregation was greatly appreciated.

In 1932, Dad was given leave to teach at the Ros-thern Bible School during the winter months.

Peter Koop took over the preaching duties during these absences.

It was in August of 1937 that the church council from Zoar Mennonite Church came to visit our parents to invite Dad to come to Langham to serve as full-time minister there. After some deliberations and discussions they decided to accept the invitation on one important condition. Mother absolutely insisted that arrangements be made so that she could take her favourite cow, a beautiful Jersey named Nellie, and some chickens with her. This was done and so they moved.

Isaac Schellenberg had a big two-ton farm grain truck. Everything that Mother wanted to move was packed into its box. A "Schlop-benk" (sleeping bench) was set on top across the load. Mother and Anne sat in the cab with Mr. Schellenberg while Dad, Mary, and I sat on the "Schlop-benk". Seat belts had not yet been invented! Thus Dad left the farm to Art while we moved to Langham. Because the river at Clark's Crossing was too low, the heavy

truck had to go over the bridge at Saskatoon. We must have been quite a sight sitting up on top driving along the city streets! But we made it safely.

The cow Nellie and the chickens followed some days later.

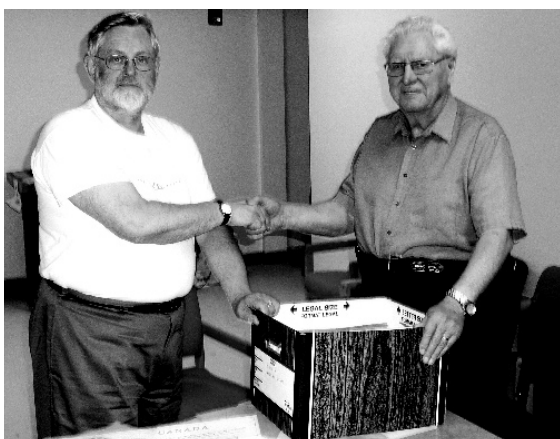
Dad and Mother had served the Aberdeen congregation for not quite 12 years. Many permanent friendships were made. Even at the risk of missing some, I must mention Heinrichs, Thiessen, Bergen, Koop, Hamm, Neufeldt, Klassen, Dyck, Wiebe, Schellenberg, Graham, Neudorf, Harder, and Fehr.

Friendships are made and friendships endure.

To God be the Glory! 

MHSS archives receive collections

The photos below show Victor Wiebe, archivist, receiving the Old Colony church records from Leonard Doell (top photo, at left) and the Driedger papers from grandson Otto Driedger (bottom photo, at right). See the article on page 21.



Report on Visits to the Cemeteries Web Site

By Al Mierau

This report covers the period from March 4, 2008, to March 4, 2009.

The number of visitors is down 7% from the 12-month period prior to March 4, 2008. Over the past 12 months there have been 3,244 visitors. These visitors viewed 12,567 pages of the web site; 2,541 were new visitors and the balance were returning visitors.


Traffic sources overview by percentage of total:

- referring sites 61.25%
- direct traffic 22.81%
- search engines 15.91%
- other .03%

With respect to the referring sites, the major ones are given below:

- 740 visitors came in from direct sources (not specified)
- 532 visitors came in from a link on the saskgenealogy.com pages
- 419 visitors came in from a link somewhere on the google organic engine source
- 260 visitors came in from mennonites.ca web site
- 197 visitors came in from mennonitegenealogy.com web site
- 166 visitors came in from islandnet.com web site
- 106 visitors came in from cyndislist.com web site
- 99 visitors came in from mhss.sk.ca web site
- 60 visitors came in from rootsweb.ancestry.com web site
- 54 visitors came in from canadiangenealogy.net web site

I find it interesting that the referring sites far outweigh the search engines, a complete change from when the site was relatively new.

The site has now been in operation for close to ten years. 

Cemeteries Project: Help Wanted

By Helen Fast

Mennonite cemeteries in Saskatchewan have been listed and recorded since the early 1990s. Various church districts or communities would list their cemetery and then forward this information to the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan. The cemetery listings were put on the web (<http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~skmhss/>) to be used as a research tool. We invite you to check your cemetery listing on the web site for date of original entry; it may need updates and if it does, please forward them to my e-mail address:

rhfastlane@shaw.ca.

Many genealogists from all over the world have found this site useful for connections to their family tree. However, we are still missing many cemeteries, and would encourage our readers to search the following community names, all of which are as yet unlisted, and contact me at the above e-mail address if you would be willing to list a cemetery in your community for the web site. I have standard forms for assisting with the listing of cemeteries.

Aberdeen — Dyck/Brown Cemetery	<i>Aberdeen RM</i>
Arlee Cemetery	<i>Eagle Creek RM</i>
Beaver Flat Friesen Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Blaine Lake MB Cemetery	<i>Blaine Lake RM</i>
Blumenhof — Neuhoffnung Cemetery	<i>Lac Pelletier RM</i>
Blumenhof Cemetery	<i>Lac Pelletier RM</i>
Blumenort Cemetery	<i>Lac Pelletier RM</i>
Cabri Mennonite Cemetery	<i>Riverside RM</i>
Capasin Cemetery	<i>Spiritwood RM</i>
Carrot River — Bergthal Cemetery	<i>Moose Range RM</i>
Chortitz — E.M.C. Cemetery	<i>Swift Current RM</i>
Chortitz — Sommerfeld Cemetery	<i>Coulee RM</i>
Church of God in Christ Cemetery	<i>Swanson RM</i>
Dalmeny — Ebenzer Cemetery	<i>Corman Park RM</i>

Debden — Bethel Cemetery	<i>Canwood RM</i>
Fairholme — Kroecker Cemetery	<i>Parkdale RM</i>
Fairholme — Speedwell Cemetery	<i>Parkdale RM</i>
Flowing Wells-Gnadenau MB Cemetery	<i>Lawtonia RM</i>
Gouldtown Sommerfeld Cemetery	<i>Morse RM</i>
Hague — Sommerfeld Cemetery	<i>Rosthern RM</i>
Herbert — Lichtfeld MB Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Herbert Greenfarm Cemetery	<i>Morse RM</i>
Heron Evangelical Mennonite Cemetery	<i>Maryfield RM</i>
Langham — Evangelical MB Cemetery	<i>Corman Park RM</i>
Main Centre — Capeland	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Main Centre — Lobethal Sommerfeld	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Main Centre — MB Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Main Centre — Turnhill Bethania Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Mayfair Cemetery	<i>Meeting Lake RM</i>
McMahon — Rheinfeld Cemetery	<i>Coulee RM</i>
McMahon Old Colony Cemetery	<i>Coulee RM</i>
Mistatim Bergthal Cemetery	<i>Bjorkdale RM</i>
Morse Schoenthal Cemetery	<i>Morse RM</i>
Nipawin — Pontrilas Cemetery	<i>Nipawin RM</i>
Peesane — Bergthaler Cemetery	<i>Bjorkdale RM</i>
Petaigan Cemetery	<i>Moose Range RM</i>
Quinton Mennonite Cemetery	<i>Mount Hope RM</i>
Rabbit Lake — Hoffnungsfelder Cemetery	<i>Round Hill RM</i>
Rosenbach/Ginther Cemetery	<i>Rushlake RM</i>
Rosenhof Cemetery	<i>Coulee RM</i>
Rush Lake — Krimmer Friedensfeld Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Rush Lake — Rosenbach/Ginter Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Rush Lake — Ebenezer Cemetery	<i>Excelsior RM</i>
Warman — Bergthal Cemetery	<i>Corman Park RM</i>
Woodrow Gospel Chapel Cemetery	<i>Wood River RM</i>



The University's Loss is MHSS's Gain: Victor Wiebe Retires

The following is from Novum in Librariis, newsletter of the University of Saskatchewan Library. Used with permission. — Ed.


On January 1st 2009 Victor Wiebe retired from a 30-year career in the U. of S. Library, following a couple of years at CISTI, the Library of the National Research Council in Ottawa. We enjoy his continuing presence as Librarian Emeritus.



"I truly enjoyed my work — especially answering questions on the Reference Desk," remarked Victor over a pleasant lunch. "I miss the routine of going to work and I miss the people." He never lost his engaging curiosity in the questions, the answers, and the people who asked them, which form the stuff of library work. Victor was Head of the Engineering Library at the time of his retirement, having previously served every public service department except Law and Technical Services. Victor probably worked in more areas of the Library during his career than any other employee.

He now spends a few days a week in his tiny Librarian Emeritus office and enjoys having coffee with library colleagues while being free from deadlines and committee meetings. He is currently sorting through fifty boxes of accumulated papers, winnowing out those which will be of value to the University Archives.

Victor is now sharing his expertise. He is the Archivist for the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan. He also serves on the Canadian Editorial Board of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online, <http://www.gameo.org/>. Recently, he completed an article for the encyclopedia on Colonel John Stoughten Denis Junior and his role facilitating settlement of the dispossessed Russian Mennonites in the 1920s.

As well as these responsibilities and research projects, Victor is enjoying more time with family and the opportunity to travel around some of the more remote parts of Saskatchewan. He continues to accumulate wonderful stories and observations which we hope he will always share with us and perhaps commit to writing. 

Important Collections Acquired by MHSS Archives

On Wednesday, 24 June 2009, a ceremony was held at the Archives of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan (MHSS) to receive two important collections of materials relating to the Old Colony Mennonite Church.

Deacon Henry P. Wiebe of the Saskatchewan Old Colony Mennonite Church had given Leonard Doell permission to photocopy their complete church register, which has the formal title of: "Kirchenbuch in der Mennoniten Gemeinde zu Neuanlage, NWT 6 November 1903". This *Kirchenbuch* lists all family members of that conference from the inception of the register in 1903 until 2009. The Old Colony Mennonite Church has been very helpful and generous in opening up their records to people interested in getting accurate family information. This church record book will be available to be consulted in person at the Archives. Researchers will be permitted to copy information by hand.

The second collection consists of the personal and business papers of Johann Driedger (1859-1920) of Osler, Sask., a controversial entrepreneur and farmer. The papers were donated by Otto Driedger, retired professor at the University of Regina, and grandson of Johann Driedger. They contain, among a number of other documents, more than a hundred letters written by Driedger and others, following his excommunication from the Old Colony Mennonite Church in 1908.

See page 19 for photos of the presentations. 



Mostly about Books

By Victor G. Wiebe
Book Editor

Raymond G. Gordon, Jr., editor. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 15th Edition. 2005 1,272 pp. ISBN-13 978-1-55671-159-6. online access:

http://www.ethnologue.com/show_country.asp?name=CA

The reference book *Ethnologue: Languages of the World* has been published in 15 different editions for over 50 years. The book gives basic information on the world's living languages and is considered the authoritative list of world languages. It gives information on 6,912 languages, including about 80 for Canada. The 80 languages are mostly First Nations but also of special interest to Mennonites are Hutterite German, Pennsylvania German, and Plautdietsch. *Ethnologue* gives the following information about these three languages:

Hutterite German has 34,200 speakers of which 29,200 are in Canada.

Pennsylvania German has 100,000 speakers in only two countries of the world, USA and Canada, with 15,000 speakers in Canada, mostly in the Kitchener/Waterloo area.


Plautdietsch has a total of 401,699 speakers worldwide. This includes about 20,000 as second language speakers. The number of speakers in some countries is given in the table at right. The number of speakers is taken from a variety of sources, such as national censuses and estimates by linguists and experts on ethnic peoples. Also, the information has been gathered at different times. For example, the USA numbers are from their 2000 census but Brazilian numbers are from 1985.

Plautdietsch speakers have texts such as the complete Bible, stories, dictionaries and other materials in their language. Now that several churches are using Plautdietsch as the medium for preaching, the language seems secure for the next several generations. However, as it is becoming limited to isolated and disbursed communities in different continents, it will no doubt undergo significant changes as, for

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example, Spanish and Portuguese words are absorbed in Latin America, Kazakh and Russian in Kazakhstan and Russia, and English by Canadian speakers.

<u>Country</u>	<u>No. of speakers</u>	<u>Regions where spoken</u>
Belize	5,763	
Bolivia	28,567	
Brazil	5,955	
Canada	80,000	Southern Canada: Ont., Sask., Man., Alta., B.C.
Costa Rica	100	Sarapiquí area.
Germany	90,000	
Russia & Kazakhstan	100,000	various places, including Alma Ata near China border beyond Tashkent, and Kazakhstan.
Mexico	40,000	Chihuahua (Cuauhtemoc, Virginias, Buenos Aires, Capulín), Durango (Nuevo Ideal, Canatlán), Campeche (Chávez, Progreso, Yalnon), Zacatecas (La Honda, La Batea).
Paraguay	38,000	Chaco & E Paraguay; towns of Filadelfia, Menno Colony, Loma Plata, Neuland.
USA	11,974	Hillsboro, Kan.; Reedley, Calif.; Corn, Okla.
TOTAL	360,399	

The Internet, with its lack of borders and rapid and fluid communications, may have a profound future impact that is yet unknown. For example, the world's largest online encyclopedia is Wikipedia and many people will be surprised that Wikipedia has 14,094 articles (as of 10 March 2009) on many subjects in what they call Plattdütsch! However, most of these articles are in North German Plattdütsch, which is different from Mennonite Plautdietsch. 

GAMEO — The Mennonite Encyclopedia Online

The following article is from the GAMEO web site (see the back page for the web address). GAMEO is a project of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee, Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission, Mennonite Central Committee, and Mennonite World Conference. — Ed.

Richard Thiessen recently reached an important milestone, but his celebration was muted. That's because everyone was asleep.

From his home in Abbotsford, B.C., on Feb. 20, 2009, at 11:44 p.m., Thiessen posted the 14,160th and final article from the print version of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* onto the website of the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). The URL is www.gameo.org.

"You wish you could wake up everyone in the house and say, 'Guys, I'm finished'," said Thiessen, who is also GAMEO's associate managing editor. Instead, he said, he just went to bed.

His final post, an article about the Alsatian Amish-Mennonite community of Rauschenburg, concludes 12 years of work by Canadian and American volunteers. They have now scanned, edited, and put on the GAMEO web site the entire five-volume *Mennonite Encyclopedia* — from **Aachen** (city in northwestern Germany) to **Zwolsse Vereniging** (Dutch Mennonite congregation) — so it can be accessed from anywhere by anyone with an Internet connection.

By day, Thiessen is library director at Columbia Bible College in Abbotsford, but is a self-described night owl. He would do his GAMEO work after 10 p.m. and stay up as late as 2 a.m. "Our home is quite active with three growing boys in the family. By 10 p.m. my wife and the boys have gone to sleep and I have a nice quiet house to work in for a few hours each night. That's when I find I am the most productive," Thiessen said.

GAMEO was started in 1996 by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada as a project to put Canadian Mennonite information online, including pertinent *Mennonite Encyclopedia* articles. The Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee and the

Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission soon joined as the project expanded to make the entire encyclopedia available on the Internet.


Now that it's completed, GAMEO is moving into a new phase. The first four volumes of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia* were published in the 1950s, and a supplement came out in 1990. So the push is to update existing articles and add new ones.

To do that, GAMEO is working with regional organizations to generate new biographical and congregational history material about their particular areas. In Canada, that is being done through the five provincial Mennonite historical societies. In the United States, the first participant is a group organized through the Lancaster (PA) Mennonite Historical Society. There also have been conversations with groups in Indiana, Kansas, and Oregon.

About 1,000 new articles have already been added.

Another new initiative in process is to make the encyclopedia available on DVD, particularly for Amish, Mennonites, and Hutterites who use computers but not the Internet. "We hadn't particularly thought of them," said Sam Steiner of Waterloo, Ont., who volunteers as GAMEO's managing editor. "But when we started talking to a few groups they expressed interest in that."

Also under consideration is posting articles in other languages. "We had assumed we'd just be an English-language thing for a number of years," said Steiner, retired librarian and archivist at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. But Mennonites in Quebec expressed interest in French-language content. So GAMEO is now exploring the technological and financial requirements to make that happen.

Overseeing GAMEO's work is a management board that includes representatives from Mennonite Central Committee and Mennonite World Conference as well as from the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, Mennonite Church USA Historical Committee, and Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission. 

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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.)

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

Helen Bahnmann
Abram J. Buhler (1982)
Helen Dyck (2007)
Dick H. Epp (2009)
Jacob H. Epp (1993)
Margaret Epp (2008)
Peter K. Epp (1985)
George K. Febr (2000)
Jake Febr
Jacob E. Friesen (2007)
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
John D. Reddekopp
Ted Regehr

John G. Rempel (1963)
Ed Roth (2008)
Wilmer Roth (1982)
Arnold Schroeder (2000)
Jacob Schroeder (1993)
Katherine Thiessen (1984)
J.J. Thiessen (1977)
David Toews (1947)
Toby Unruh (1997)
Albert Wiens (2002)
George Zacharias (2000)

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.

Web Sites

MHSS web site: <http://www.mhss.sk.ca>

Cemeteries web site:

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

Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:

GAMEO.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online.

Send Us Your Stories

Readers are invited to send 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

June 2009

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.

Electronic Bulletin Board

<MHSS-E-Update@mhss.sk.ca>

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