

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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A Child in the Dirty Thirties

By Irma Gerbrandt



I was born in 1929 in Cudworth, Saskatchewan, the eldest of the three children of Margreta and Henry Toews. That was the memorable year that was the beginning of both the Great Drought and the Great Depression. This is the story of my first decade, coloured by great economic hardship and all that goes with it, but still providing wonderful memories of childhood.

In 1923 the Zacharias family, along with many other Mennonite families, arrived in Rosthern, Saskatchewan from Russia. They were a large family of thirteen offspring, including half-siblings and step-siblings, and my father was one of them. Isaac Zacharias was my father's stepfather.

After a short stay in Aberdeen with relatives, they were put up with the Derksen families in Langham, where there was work. Since my father had attended the *Kommerzschule* in Russia he was able to take some grade 10 classes in Langham. He had no interest in farming. However, he was a good student and also learned English very quickly, so he was able to find work quite easily and in 1928 he became a grocery store manager in Cudworth for the OK Economy stores, a grocery store chain owned by the Schellenberg family. That same year, he married my mother. They had known each other in Russia and had corresponded for four years before mother was able to emigrate to Canada also. So by 1928 he had a job and a wife and he owned a car. I was born the following year.

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From the Editor's Desk

By Victoria Neufeldt



At long last, the “Spring” 2012 issue of the *Historian* is out! Many things have conspired against its preparation this spring and summer, but here we finally are. My sincere apologies to all MHSS members who have been waiting all these months. I hope that you will find the stories and information contained here to be worth the wait. I have been pleased with the contributions and hope that you will enjoy them too.

Our title story for this issue is a child's story; that is, one woman's memories of her childhood during the Dirty Thirties. Of course there are many stories of what people endured here on the Prairies during those years, when the Prairies suffered more than any other part of the country. However, this story is a little different in that it is told from the child's point of view; the things she remembers from the time when she was a young child. Children's point of view can be quite different from that of their elders — they can see beauty and fun where their elders have to focus on caring for their families and themselves.

Our other main story is of a life of quite extraordinary service in a foreign land. It is a truly inspiring tale of courage, determination, and faithfulness in some very challenging circumstances. 

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MHSS President's Corner

By Jake Buhler




We are moving!

Not far, however. The MHSS offices and archives are moving from one side of the wall to the other below the Fellowship Centre at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon. We will more than double our space.

With the volunteer help of Cheryl Haas of Creative Wood in Osler, and the volunteer help of the archives committee — Helen Fast, Hilda Voth, Rosemary Slater, Kathy Boldt, Elizabeth Guenther, Vera Falk — and other volunteers, we are helping to move shelves, boxes, books, and files. Dick Braun is spearheading the building of the secure room, of work tables and desks, and is looking after electrical work.

And is \$\$\$\$ needed? Yes it is needed! And is it coming in? Yes it is. Do we need more? Yes we do. The movable shelves will cost \$30,000, the computers approximately \$7,500. In total we want to raise \$100,000. We are well on the way. In fact we have raised nearly \$40,000!

You can help by completing a form which is enclosed and mailing it back to Elmer Regier, our very able and hardworking treasurer. Elmer will send you a tax-deductible receipt. Donate what you can, and for that the board of MHSS will be thankful.

Our grand opening is scheduled for March 1, 2013. Help us to be ready before that date. 

Irma Gerbrandt *Continued from page 1*

The wedding of Margreta and Henry Toews, 1928
All photos courtesy of Irma Gerbrandt

Life seemed great; however, they wanted to live closer to their relatives, so Dad decided he would open up an independent grocery store in Dundurn. Then in 1930 the Depression struck with a vengeance and no one had any money. Farmers wanted to buy groceries on credit or in exchange for the produce brought to the store. So after a short while the business went bankrupt. During that time, I spent many days with my grandparents, who lived on a farm about four miles south of Dundurn, right next to the old highway. Maybe this was to help my mother out, because she now had another child to look after: my sister Margaret, who was born in 1933, the year I turned four.

I remember once setting out with my father and mother to walk the four miles from Dundurn to my grandparents' farm. My mother was very pregnant with my sister. I remember my father stopping to pick some flowers and giving them to my mother. My dad's half-brother came along soon after we had started out and gave us a ride the rest of the way.

It was about this time that I began to notice my surroundings, some parts of which I remember to this day. I remember lying in bed at my grandparents' house, when I noticed a crack in the double window and I saw how the sand was piling up on the window ledge. Later on I saw hay racks going down the road, piled high with people's belongings. People

came to the door asking for a drink of water and it was explained to me that these people were moving north, looking for better land, where the soil had more moisture and hopefully some rain.

My father was at a loss as to what he should do. Then a relative who had been a miller in Russia persuaded him to join forces and they were able to acquire a flour mill in Buchanan. The plan was for father to buy grain from the local farmers. It would be milled into flour and the flour would be sold back to the farmers. It should have worked. But that year the wheat plants were infected with the rust fungus and the grain could not be used for flour. Somehow, the farmers in this area were not aware that a new rust-resistant wheat (Marquis) had been developed years earlier and was in use in most of the province. I was four or five and I remember Dad talking about the rust in the wheat. So this operation too went bankrupt. Then we were really, really broke. We moved to Saskatoon in September of 1936, using the last few pennies Father had to pay the train fare. I don't know where he got the money for this. I remember this move as a *big* move. We moved into a small white house on Morgan Avenue, on the eastern outskirts of the city, and that same month, my brother Cornelius was born. Ours was the only house on that street.

We had lived in Buchanan for a year. There were some English-speaking people and also a large number of Doukhobors living there. My parents only spoke High German to me, but I learned some

English. The Doukhobor children spoke mostly Ukrainian, so I came to Saskatoon speaking a mixture of languages. By that time the Depression was fully entrenched.

My father had a lot of energy and optimism and was obviously smart (for example, my uncles told me more than once that he was very



Irma's mother and father in the
Cudworth store in early 1929



Irma's early years
Left: around 1930–31, as a toddler,
 with her parents
Right: with her grandmother Schultz,
 in 1933



good at learning languages — useful in his business, because there were a number of different languages spoken in the area), but everything he tried, failed. Try as he might, all his attempts had been unsuccessful, so he was reduced to selling eggs and frozen chickens door to door in Saskatoon. We were fortunate to have relatives and friends who were farmers and were able to help us eke out an existence.

Starting school

It was Halloween night in 1936. That evening, my father told me that in the morning he and I would walk to the Haultain School and I would start grade one. I was very excited and went to bed promptly after supper just like I always did. We lived very close to Eighth Street, so the next morning we walked west along the streetcar tracks that in those days ran all the way along Eighth Street, as far east as Central Avenue, where they turned north to Sutherland. At that time there were no houses east of ours or along the streetcar tracks to Sutherland.

There was a sprinkling of snow on the ground that day. After about a mile walking west, we left Eighth Street at Clarence Avenue and walked south about a block to Haultain School. I was enrolled in grade one and Miss Irwin was my teacher that year. She had black hair, marcelled, with little ringlets at the bottom. The minute I saw her I loved her — she was young and beautiful and school was a joy from

the beginning, and for years to come. My dad left me at school and said he would pick me up after school. I should wait for him in the front hall of the school. He would meet me there and we would walk home together. He was going downtown to buy a pair of overshoes for me since there was now snow on the ground. He did not realize that I would be waiting for him for what seemed a very long time. Not only that, but there was a very stern, very tall lady who walked by on the landing above me, who kept looking at me without a word. This made me very uncomfortable.

Since I felt I knew the way, I walked home the way we had come.

I was home when my dad arrived. “How did you get home?” he asked. “I just walked in your footsteps,” I said. (And that’s what I had actually done, because our footprints from the morning were still there in the new snow and nobody else had walked over them.) Dad had a beautiful pair of buckle overshoes for me and all was well! In the spring I found a path to school through the prairie, parallel to the streetcar tracks. I enjoyed that walk very much and sometimes even found some flowers.

This was probably the most difficult year financially for our family and for many others. The years before had been much more hopeful.

When I was in grade one, the teacher had me draw a picture which was entered in a contest at the exhibition that summer. I don’t know why this wonderful teacher picked me to learn to draw. She must have helped me with the picture. In any case, the next fall, in grade two, I was told that I had won a prize. The prize was 40 cents, which I gave to my father.

I finished grade one with high honours. I just *loved* school.

When I was seven we moved to the centre of town, to Fourth Avenue at about Twentieth Street. This was a larger house; I don’t know how we got it. We

must have moved because my dad had started a wholesale business on Broadway. I remember that he would coast down the Broadway Bridge going home, to save gas.

Because this house had more room, we had friends or relatives coming for a meal, sometimes staying overnight, maybe looking for work.

The public library was within two blocks and I discovered I could borrow books which I could take home to read. We were allowed to keep the books for two weeks. The books for my age were really not very large. I would read a book quickly in the morning and get a new book for the afternoon. The librarian, Miss Clancy, was very kind but she suggested that I should maybe come only once a day. She was in the children's section of the library for many years and everyone loved her. Close to the library, a new Mennonite church had been built that same year.

I took grade two at King Edward School.

The school board building was in the same block as our house on Fourth Avenue. The man who worked there regularly gave me very nice white paper, for drawing or whatever. I always had paper. I remember drawing in grade two; the teacher read stories to us and then we had to draw pictures of the story or tell the story in our own words.

When I was in grade three we moved again, again to a better house, at 915 Avenue F North. There was a park with a tennis court across the street. I went to Caswell school, staying there till the end of grade eight, through two more moves: first to Twenty-eighth Street and then to Rusholme Road at Avenue F. It was the best school I attended. That winter, however, was very severe. It was in that winter that I heard my father say to my mother, "I'm going to apply for relief like other people are doing." My mother finally agreed. Father went out looking for work and when he came home mother reported that a man had come and checked out all the food we had in the house. He even marked down on his tablet that there was one half of a small onion. My father decided then and there that we would make it on our own. So we were on relief for just one month. Mother was able to plant a large garden that

spring which was very helpful. I remember learning that the people who took relief got a barrel of salted fish, probably cod. That's what they lived on.



Members of the Zacharias-Toews family in 1936, on the Dundurn farm, in front of the *Laube* built by her grandfather. *Standing in the back row, third from left, Irma's mother; second from right, Irma's father; Grandmother and Grandfather Zacharias seated in middle; Irma standing at left in front*

During the Depression our mother became a very creative seamstress. She had developed a knack for making garments out of hand-me-downs or she would use small pieces of material or articles of clothing turned inside out to make other clothing. I'm sure I was the only girl in school to wear a coat with "mutton sleeves", which were sleeves that tapered to a tight cuff at the wrist. My mother hadn't had enough material, so she had to make the lower half of each sleeve narrow. Only one girl commented on the strange sleeves. Mother also sewed for other people too, beginning in these years. As we grew older we became very proud of the cloth-



In front of 915 Avenue F North in 1938: *from left: Margaret, little Cornelius, and Irma*

ing she perfected. Often the clothes were beautifully embroidered. We wore home-knitted woollen stockings which were very itchy. On the whole we felt accepted. My friends, for instance, admired our mother's hairstyle, with its beautiful braided bun.

In those years, the late 1930s, many young Mennonite women came to Saskatoon to work as maids. Sometimes the wages were very low. Father had two single sisters who were fortunate to be hired by the Dr. J. S. Thompson family. He was president of the University of Saskatchewan and came from Scotland. I remember hearing that he was nicknamed "Butch" by the students. He and his family lived in the big greystone house on the river bank. I heard that the fieldstone for the house had been brought to Saskatoon from Manitoba and was used for the construction of the president's residence as well as many other buildings on campus. The aunts each received a salary of \$20 per month. This was a large amount compared to some of the other wages for maids. Sometimes our mother was asked to come to the house to help on special occasions, such as large teas.



Irma with her mother, *at left*, her younger sister Margaret, and, *in front*, Cornelius in 1938

She could bring home leftover food from these occasions. Since the Thompsons had family in Scotland, they would go back for a month or so each summer for a visit. While they were away, my sister Margaret and I occasionally were invited by our aunts to come and stay in the big house overnight. For me the most impressive part was to see the daughter's own library of books.

It was around this time too that Rev. and Mrs. Thiessen of the First Mennonite Church opened


their home on Thursday afternoons so the young women working in the city could get together and visit and get to know one another. Many were given time off by their employers to go to church on Sunday. My parents also invited some of these girls to our house or took them on outings when they had a day off. Sometimes in summer our grandparents would invite the young people working in the city to come to a party on the farm. The uncles would clean out a granary and they would play German circle games and dance. Some of the men working on the farms who had access to cars would bring the ladies out from the city and a wonderful time was had by all. Sometimes this happened after the yearly church picnic in the Blackstrap.

As the Depression wore on, some of the young women went further afield looking for work. They usually went to cities where they knew there were Mennonite communities — many went to Waterloo, Ontario to work as seamstresses in the shirt factories. Some went to Vancouver and many never returned to the Prairies.



Irma's father with a team of horses on the Smith farm where he worked a short time before he was married

On looking back I realize we were poor but the people around us were poor too. We often had people staying with us, seeing the doctor, having treatments, or having a baby. More than once, my father rushed someone to the hospital in the middle of the night to have a baby, hoping his car would start!

In spite of being so poor, we experienced many happy times with our friends and relatives. We also enjoyed some benefits, like seeing the movie *Snow White* free through the school, and I think we got free dental care and free access to the swimming pool in the mornings. 

A Life of Service and Adventure: Helen Kornelsen, 1920 – 2012

By Esther Patkau

The year was 1920 — a critical period in both Russian and Mennonite history. World War I had ended, but it had not brought peace to the country. The Peasant Uprising of 1917 (now referred to as the Russian Revolution), ushered in a period of great lawlessness, plundering, burning of villages, and large-scale murdering, all culminating in the establishment of a Communist regime. In the wake of marauding hordes, not the least of which were Machno and his bandits, an epidemic of typhus wiped out whole families and left skeletal villages as grim reminders. Famine stalked the land to add misery and suffering. It was a time of chaos.

Helen, daughter of Johann Jacob and Katherina (Janzen) Kornelsen, the first child of her father's third marriage, was born September 17, 1920, in the village of Kusmitzky (also known as Alexandrowka, more recently as Semenov) in Ukraine. She had four older half-siblings — Isaac, John, Katie, and Margaret — from her father's first marriage. There were no children from the brief second marriage. Seven other siblings would be added to the family later.¹

The famine of 1921–1922 was another series of difficulties. Hunger does not ask what is good or

bad, but only what would satisfy an empty stomach. Added to this the government began to impose Communist



regulations and measures designed to eradicate private ownership of land and other property. Life under Communism was such that economic bankruptcy was imminent with the enforced establishment of communal farming. Every week new levies of grain and money had to be paid until the landowner was totally bankrupt. All possessions, land, machinery, and houses became government property.

In the fall of 1929 the Kornelsen family attempted to emigrate. Her father made a visit to the village council to ask for a statement to allow him to apply for an exit visa in Moscow. That day the office was dense with smoke; the men, in drunken stupor, laughed at his request, but they acquiesced and gave it to him. That night the family left in secret for the train station, headed for Moscow. Thousands of German-speaking people, Mennonites and Lutherans, had assembled in Moscow, with one purpose: to escape from Russia. After a month of hiding in a Jewish home, waiting for passports, always fearful of being sent into exile, the Kornelsen family finally was among the 6,000 who were granted an exit visa, out of 13,000 people who applied. Helen was nine years old.

They left Russia by train. Germany provided temporary refuge. When the weary travellers descended from the train, having passed through the Red Gate that marked the border between Russia and Germany, a great volume of spontaneous praise erupted in song: “*Nun Danket alle Gott*” (Now thank we all our God).



The Kornelsen family in Moscow in 1929, just prior to leaving Russia: *from left*, Margaret, Maria, Helen (*at the back*), mother Katharina (Janzen) Kornelsen, Sara (*back*), Jacob, father Johann Kornelsen

All photos courtesy of Herb and Ruth Kornelsen

The three months in Germany in the army barracks in Hammerstein held both happy and sorrowful memories for Helen and her family. Her younger sisters Maria and Sara died and were buried there. But Helen's discovery of a children's library awakened an exciting new interest in reading which absorbed much of her time, which otherwise could have been very boring.

The Kornelsen family boarded the *S.S. Montrose* in Antwerp and set sail for Canada March 14, 1930. They docked in St. John, New Brunswick on March 23rd. The family arrived, via train, at its destination in Watrous, Saskatchewan on March 27, 1930, where they were met by Helen's older sister Katie and her husband Peter Sawatzky, who had been able to emigrate to Canada earlier. They found a temporary home in an empty farmhouse northeast of Watrous. From here Helen and her brother Jake walked the two and a half miles to Plymouth School. Helen was 10 years old when she started school in the new country. After she learned the English language, school work became mere play and the greater part of the hours in school were spent in reading. In 1935 at age 15, having completed grade six, she was asked to stay at home and help on the farm. Her disappointment was great. She had dreamed of becoming a teacher or a nurse. The next five years were spent on the farm. They were happy years. One of her favourite things was reading, especially books about far-off places. She read everything she could lay her hands on and began writing short stories.

At the age of 18 she took a definite stand for Christ. Her conversion took place under the influence of a visiting minister. She was baptized upon her faith in Jesus Christ as Saviour on August 6, 1939 and received as a member of the rural Bethany Mennonite Church at Watrous. She threw herself wholeheartedly into church work with children and young people. Her hope of attending Bible school was fulfilled, and for two winters (1940-41 and 1941-42) she was able to feast her hungry heart upon the Word of God, in fellowship with other Christian young people of the Rosthern Bible School. During the summer

she taught Daily Vacation Bible School. Helen was happy; life held its hopes and promises once more.

At a Thanksgiving-Missions service in the North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, Helen clearly received a call from God to enter missionary service. This call grew stronger in the months to follow. She felt very inadequate for the task because of her limited education. In the five years in Canada that she had been able to attend school, she had only completed grade 6; she needed more.

In the summer of 1943, Missionary P. A. Penner was one of the retreat speakers at the Mennonite Youth Farm near Rosthern. He promised to speak to Rev. P. H. Richert, who was then the Mission Board secretary, concerning Helen's decision to enter mission work.

The opportunity for further study came when Mr. K. G. Toews, principal of Rosthern German-English Academy (now Rosthern Junior College) invited her to further studies there. He offered to let her begin with grade 10, provided she take grade nine algebra and geometry. Three years later, in 1945, Helen graduated from the academy. The next step was still hidden from her. Where would the funds come from for further preparation?

The Saskatchewan Women in Mission groups were looking for a mission project. Knowing about Helen's call to mission, they promised to financially support her education at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas. (The Saskatchewan Women in Mission continued to support her prayerfully and financially for the 37 years Helen spent in India, until her retirement in 1985.) She was accepted as a missionary candidate for India by the General Conference Mennonite Church Commission on Overseas Mission.

Helen attended Bethel College three years, from 1945 to 1948. During the summers in the United States, she worked in the Cleveland State Hospital and in the Newton Children's Home. She graduated from Bethel College with a Bachelor of Arts degree in social science in May, 1948. A few weeks later, on July 15, 1948, in the North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, she was ordained to missionary service.



Helen Kornelsen's ordination to ministry, held July 15, 1948, at Drake, Saskatchewan

Standing, from left: Rev. Jacob Heinrichs, John J. Friesen (lay minister in Janzen), Rev. John G. Rempel, Rev. Paul Schroeder, Rev. Erwin Bartel, Rev. Abram Warkentin
Seated: Anna Isaac (retired missionary from India; guest from USA), Katherina Kornelsen (Helen's mother), Helen, Johann Kornelsen (Helen's father), Rev. J.J. Thiessen

She left for India on the *S.S. Bantam* from New York on September 11 and arrived in Raipur, M.P., India on October 28, 1948.

Beginning life in India

Hindi language study, priority number one, fascinated Helen. She passed both her first and second year language examinations in First Division. She had begun teaching in Hindi in the Janzen Memorial School in Jagdeeshpur even before she completed her second year of language study.

Before the close of her first term of six and a half years, she was transferred from the Jansen Memorial High School in Jagdeeshpur to supervising more than a dozen primary schools in the surrounding villages. The scarcity of girls in these schools opened her eyes to the need of working with women and girls in the villages. That is where she learned to walk long distances from village to village!

During her first furlough, from March 1955 to July 1957, Helen first returned to Bethel College to earn her teaching certificate, then moved on to Wichita University to get her Masters degree in education. She ended up with a semester of leadership training at Cornell University.²

The second term in India, 1957 to 1962, now shortened to five years, was exciting for her. She was assigned to literature and women's work. This took her and her two Indian lady companions to many villages to meet with the women and to give them



Helen Kornelsen with the executive of Saskatchewan Women in Mission at her ordination, July 15, 1948

Standing, from left: Anna Schmidt, Sophie Krehbiel, Justina (G. G.) Epp; *seated:* Marie (Hugo) Bartel, Anna Isaac (retired missionary visiting from USA), Helen, Katharina Kornelsen (Helen's mother)

Christian teaching. She introduced and developed "Bride Camp" for young girls and offered them a course in Christian home training. Bride camps, usually three weeks in length, were held annually, beginning in 1959, for illiterate girls of marriageable age. The girls studied the Bible, Christian home responsibilities, personal and family health, and cooking. They learned sewing, embroidery, weaving, and broom-making. Some were helped with reading.³

During the rainy season, when the roads were impassable, Helen and her team of Indian coworkers translated the Herald Press Daily Vacation Bible School materials into Hindi. This was followed up by workshops for pastors and teachers to acquaint them with the new curriculum.

Helen's furloughs were characterized by extensive travels to churches across Canada to report on the work of missions in India. Helen also utilized these furloughs for further education. She completed three correspondence courses in writing (journalism, feature writing, and fiction writing) from the Famous Writers School in Westport, Connecticut. In the summer of 1962 she spent six weeks at an International Christian Writers Seminar at Green Lake, Wisconsin.⁴

The third term, 1963 to 1968, was very similar to the second term. Interest in adult literacy provided an opportunity to train high school graduates, mostly young men, to teach literacy in the villages. This



Helen, *left*, and her co-worker Anne Penner, in India

often proved to be a stepping stone for the young men, who then chose to attend a Bible seminary and train for church ministry.

Doing the work of two

For one year, 1965–66, while Jake and Dorothy Giesbrecht were on North American assignment, Helen was assigned to Saraipali. She wrote, “I came to Saraipali with considerable uneasiness. The responsibilities seemed staggering, my abilities far short of expectations. The position I had accepted, I well knew, belonged to a couple. I was a woman and alone. To God be the glory — His grace was sufficient.”

Her immediate responsibilities in Saraipali were to drive the rats out of the bungalow, repair the roof, fix the refrigerator, replace the chimney of the stove, find someone to manage the Basna Reading Room, find a replacement for the evangelist-in-charge, counsel parents waiting for help to send their children to school, and see that patients were taken away. Together with the Christian community, she also faced a year of crop failure, lack of rice, spiralling prices, and unemployment. These problems meant putting in place a program of relief.

She coped with it all, and the list of what she accomplished in a year would be daunting even for a missionary couple. With all this responsibility she also took time to host world travellers and visiting teachers from Woodstock School, bouncing with them in the jeep manoeuvred by her skilful driver to church services in jungle villages.

Her report stated, “In time I will forget the dust and the wind of Saraipal, the rats and repairs, the frustrations and the mistakes, the haunting requests, and my aloneness in coping with decisions. I will forget the countless hours spent in accounts and bookkeeping. I will remember instead God’s enduring faithfulness, a good staff to work with, many

enriching experiences with our village Christians, the opportunities of sharing the truth of the gospel with non-Christian friends, and the ever-widening ministry of Christian literature.”⁵

The fourth term, 1969 to 1974, held an extra challenge for Helen. In 1970 she was invited by Kenneth Bauman, then principal of Union Biblical Seminary (UBS), to share her Christian education experiences of work in the villages of Madhya Pradesh (M.P.) at UBS in Yeotmal, Maharashtra. The experiences she had gained in village Christian education activities were what the seminary was looking for in a teacher to teach Christian education courses. She was asked to bring her practical experience into the classroom — experiences in Sunday school, junior church, children’s Bible club, women’s education, adult literacy, daily vacation Bible school, and more. In 1972–73 and again in 1975, she returned as a visiting professor. In 1977 she was invited to the UBS faculty on a full-time basis.⁶

On the permanent staff of UBS

A brief furlough in the summer of 1974 set her up for another full term, 1974 to 1980. With encouragement from the Commission on Overseas Mission to turn over the work more rapidly to Indian colleagues, Helen became free to accept the seminary invitation to become permanent staff, and served at UBS until her retirement in 1985.

After a year of furlough 1980 to 1981, Helen approached her final term of service in India. She became part of the UBS relocation from Yeotmal to Pune in 1983. UBS had been started in 1953 in central India to train Christian leaders and pastors; in 1976 the decision was made to move it to Pune, south of Bombay, where the seminary would have several advantages over the previous location. The move finally happened March 21, 1983 when the first truck loads made the transfer to the new site, 600 miles distant, during the hot season.

Helen reminisced, “I look upon the years from 1977 to 1985 as the most enriching, challenging and rewarding of my 37 years in India. Words fail to express the joy that there is in training for church leadership the finest of India’s youth — those called of the Lord, those deeply committed to serve the Lord



Helen in India in 1980

through the church.” Many of those who received their training at UBS have served as pastors and leaders in extension education, in the Christian education department of the Evangelical Fellowship of India. The investments made in finances, faculty, and other support have been rewarding, like “bread cast upon the waters”, which has returned in the form of capable leadership in many kinds of Christian ministries.⁷

In 1985, on her retirement from India, Helen was presented with a Hindi hymn book inscribed with the words, “In appreciation for your long and fruitful ministry in the Hindi area among the people of BGCMC [Bharatiya General Conference Mennonite Church] and for multiplying your to the hospital fifteen miles life by training leadership for the Indian church. Already we see much fruit that is remaining and also reproducing. May God richly bless your present and future ministry is our prayer.”⁸

क्योंकि परमेश्वर ने संसार से ऐसा
प्रेम रखा कि अपना एकलौता पुत्र
दे दिया कि जो कोई उस पर विश्वास
करे, नष्ट न हो परन्तु शाश्वत
जीवन पाए।

The Bible verse
John 3:16 in
Hindi

A very active retirement

She retired to her home town of Watrous, Saskatchewan in 1985. On her retirement, as a “Welcome Home” gift, the women’s mission societies of Saskatchewan Mennonite churches presented her with a 60-patch quilt, each patch embroidered with the name of one of the 60 mission groups.

Helen retired from service in India, but not from ministry. She took up active participation in her community. She was elected vice-president of Saskatchewan Women in Mission for a term, served on the Missions Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Saskatchewan, and participated in activi-

ties in her home community, Bethany Mennonite Church, Watrous.

In 1986 Helen remodelled her house in Watrous, joined the local Watrous Mennonite women’s group (ladies aid) activities, including helping to stir home-made soap for MCC, making blankets for MCC relief projects, helping in the Thrift Store in Lanigan, delivering Meals on Wheels, visiting shut-ins, sponsoring mission night and family picnics, baking cookies for Shekinah Retreat camps, and for the Canadian Women in Mission sessions held in conjunction with the bicentennial celebrations of the General Conference in Saskatoon. She attended the Canadian Conference in Waterloo Ontario, the Women’s Conference in Ontario and the Women’s Conference in Saskatchewan. She also entertained former India mission coworkers in her home and nurtured a productive garden.

She also followed up on her interest in researching family history. In 1992 Helen went with a tour group to South America, visiting Brazil, Paraguay, and Ecuador. There she met relatives and was entrusted with the diaries of Jacob Penner, her father’s cousin. These diaries were written in German, in the Gothic script, and she translated them into English on her return to Watrous after the tour. She travelled, kept a large correspondence with friends in Canada and abroad, read books, translated German documents, and participated in a local writers’ group. She compiled and published two family history books, *Our Family Tree — Kornelsen: The Johann Jacob Kornelsen Family 1884–1974* and *The “Baker” Wiebe Family: Johannes C. Wiebe, 1850–1930*. She recorded the stories of many of the Indian church leaders.

She also researched the Kroeker story. Missionary Johann F. and Susanna (Schowalter) Kroeker and Peter A. and Elizabeth (Dickman) Penner were the first two missionary couples to go to India under the General Conference Foreign Mission Board, arriving in Bombay in December 1900. In 1909, after nine years of service in India, the Kroekers returned to Russia, his homeland. For many years no information was available on that family. In 1999 a tidbit of information surfaced and Helen put forth a strenuous effort to find more details. In 2000 she was able



Presentation of the quilt made for Helen on her retirement in 1986 (see preceding page)

From left: Marlene Martens, Katie Wiens, Anne Warkentin Dyck, Mary Ens, Esther Patkau, Anne Friesen, Helen Kornelsen.

to visit the Kroekers' daughter Anna in Germany. She learned that in 1929 Johann Krocker was arrested and exiled. He never returned. It is presumed he died in 1932. The mother and family underwent suffering and hardships and also exile. The mother died in 1938. Helen researched and documented their family genealogy as much as she could.

Celebrating 40 years of service

On October 2, 1988, Helen's family celebrated her 40 years of service in India and in the local church. In her tribute to Helen, Justina Heese, Helen's niece, said, "You have added very much to my sense of personhood.... First, you modelled that it was all right to be interested in academics and learning. And more importantly, it was all right to be female and have those interests! At a time when many felt education was suspect for women, I had a model, a nurturant, high status model, whose life said, 'It's okay; go for it.' Thank you for pioneering in this area; it made it easier for some of us.... It was also important that you had a sense of 'religious call' that sanctioned learning."⁹

Helen, a faithful servant of the Lord, passed away in Watrous Hospital on May 15, 2012. The service of remembrance was held in North Star Mennonite Church in Drake, with interment in the Bethany

Mennonite Church cemetery near Watrous. She has ended her earthly service.

Sources:

¹Kornelsen, Helen. *Our Family Tree: Cornelsen-Kornelsen, The Johann Jacob Kornelsen Family 1884-1974*. Most of the information on her life comes from this book.

²*Through 50 Years at Bethany Mennonite Church 1932-1982*, p. 70.

³Unrau, Ruth. *A Time to Bind and a Time to Loose: A History of the General Conference Mennonite Church Mission involvement in India from 1900-1995*, p. 84.

⁴*Through 50 years*, p. 70.

⁵Unrau, p. 87

⁶From *UBS Contact*, a 4-page periodical published quarterly by Cooperating Home Boards of Union Biblical Seminary Inc., Box 2498, Anderson IN 46018, Vol 2, No. 4, 1985)

⁷*UBS Contact*, 1985.

⁸Notation in the Hindi hymn book.

⁹*Our Family Tree*, p. 129.

The Saga of a "Shelton Stroller" Dress

Written by Helen Kornelsen in 1986.

My name is "Shelton Stroller." My life has been full of adventures, excitement, and great usefulness. I have always felt elegant and admired. In all my travels, and they have been varied and many, and in all my public appearances, which have been numerous as well, I have felt my wearer was appropriately dressed for the occasion. A little gathering in of the hemline, or letting it down, I have been most accommodating to whoever chose to travel with me. I have given to each the utmost comfort, quality, and fashion.

My first overseas trip was in 1960, tucked into Mariam Schmidt's suitcase, to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the General Conference Mennonite Mission In India. I sensed Mariam's excitement to be returning to her birth country. As the daughter of the pioneer missionary, P. A. Penner, she was coming "home".

I, Shelton Stroller, wondered what would happen to me when Mariam would return to the United States. Before leaving India, she made a startling announce-

ment to the ladies gathered around her. "Whoever is due for furlough next, may have this Shelton Stroller." We all looked at Anne Penner, whose smile said it all.

Anne wore me on all of her deputation trips. I took pride in seeing how acceptably she was dressed for her public appearances. (A missionary is always faced with how to dress on furlough — she must not be too fashionable, nor must she be shabbily dressed in clothes she wore seven years earlier.) When Anne returned to India in 1961, I accompanied her back.

I went with her to Landour, North India, for the summer vacation. Instead of staying in the customary General Conference Mennonite Mission Home, Ellangowan, she stayed at Oaklands Cottage, with Melva Lehman, Marie Duerksen, Tina Block, and Helen Kornelsen. What marked this vacation was that Melva's and Marie's cook had come along to cook for the ladies, which made this a real vacation for all. The other thing that happened was not so pleasant: Helen's watch was taken out of her drawer, presumably by the sweeper who came to clean the rooms. It was the watch that the Saskatchewan Ladies Conference had given her — a prized possession because of the relationship to the conference.

Helen's furlough came next, in the spring of 1962. Helen did a lot of itinerary in the churches during her year of furlough. The Shelton Stroller went with her — with the hemline lowered, of course. Every furlough was noteworthy for the new inventions or technologies. This time it was the craze for "skidoos" — a toy for men. Pretending innocence about it in a home she was visiting, she asked the five-year-old child, "What is a skidoo?" Measuring her up and down to see how dumb she might be, the skidoo enthusiast answered in a matter-of-fact tone, "A skidoo is a skidoo!"

On this furlough, Helen had another interesting experience. The man who drove her from Winnipeg to Altona asked her on the way, "How do you like sleeping in a different bed each night?" Helen answered, "It might be well if the hostess would sleep in the guest bed once in a while." Throwing his head back in abandoned laughter, he said, "I can guarantee you a good bed for tonight. You will be sleeping in our bedroom."

That night Helen had an attack of malaria. The doctor was called. She remained in bed all day. She was to be speaking in another church that evening. Manitoba had a kind of "round-robin" mission conference. Four missionaries rotated in four different churches over the weekend. When the host returned from work that evening, he poked his head into the bedroom with a questioning look. Helen explained, "I like your bed so much, I want to spend another night in it."

I, Shelton Stroller, accompanied Helen back to India in the fall of 1963. Since I had been given to Anne, I returned to Anne's closet. Next summer, Anne, Helen, and Esther Wiebe went to Canoor for vacation. Of course, I got to go too. The missionary ladies had many occasions to dress up when they were on vacation.

Anne again enjoyed the Shelton Stroller on her next vacation in 1965. This time Anne and Helen stayed at Mount Hermon in Landour.

The following year Anne decided on a three-month furlough so as not to be away from her work too long. Up went the hemline on the Shelton Stroller, and together they left for Canada. Anne's favourite attire was still the Shelton Stroller.

Anne's next vacation was in 1967 with Helen Kornelsen and Muriel Stephenson in Ootycamund. Not to be left behind was the inimitable Shelton Stroller.

The next Atlantic crossing with the Shelton Stroller was in 1968. It was Helen's turn. Down came the hemline. Otherwise, no other alteration was necessary. The Shelton Stroller adjusted to sizes 12 and 14.

Again, the cross-country itinerary was heavy. Helen's wardrobe did not need much addition for the Shelton Stroller looked as fresh and new as the day Mariam Schmidt had handed it to "the first one going on furlough." Mariam never dreamed about how many and how often the Shelton Stroller would fit that designation. Helen and the Shelton Stroller returned to India in 1969.

By this time Anne had acquired another Shelton Stroller, given to her free for the letter of appreciation sent to the company. Shelton Stroller No. 2 now hung in Helen's clothes closet.

In 1970 Anne took another three-months furlough, taking with her Shelton Stroller No. 2, while Helen took Shelton Stroller No. 1 with her to Kashmir. Irene Funk and Lorraine Schroeder went with Helen to enjoy a restful vacation in a houseboat on Dal Lake.

In 1971 Jake and Dorothy Giesbrecht were due for North American assignment, the new term used for furlough. Shelton Stroller went with Dorothy as its wearer this time. Only slight alterations were necessary. Again, how comfortable and well-dressed Dorothy felt when she would speak to women's groups in Canada.

The Giesbrechts returned to India in 1972, and Anne then proceeded on North American assignment, this time for a whole year. Helen Kornelsen, Marie Moyer, Lorraine Schroeder, and Muriel Stephenson took their vacation in Dalhousie.

By now the Shelton Stroller was quite used to travelling across the Atlantic, first by ship, later by air. The Shelton Stroller noticed the many changes in fashion when in Canada, but somehow always felt in place, in fashion, and well-liked.

In 1974, Irene Funk wanted to go back to Canada for only four months, but did not want to travel alone. Helen went with her, accompanied, of course, by the Shelton Stroller.

The next two vacations, in 1975 and 1976, were spent in new locations. Anne, Helen, Florence Nafziger and Blanche Sell went to Simla in 1975, and the same four went to Kalimpong in the summer of 1976. The Kalimpong vacation had all the characteristics of a great adventure — long delay in acquiring a permit to go to that sensitive area, arriving in Darjeeling on May Day when all the offices were closed, and finally, with a three-day permit in their hands and a night-trip through mountainous areas, Anne and Helen arrived, exhausted and frustrated, at the Missionary Rest Home in Kalimpong. Blanche and Florence had arrived earlier.

Both Anne and Helen decided on a four-month break in 1977. Each was accompanied by a Shelton Stroller.

Helen returned to India to take up duties at Union Biblical Seminary, then still located in Yeotmal, but later to be moved to Pune. However, the following

two vacations were spent together. Anne and Helen went to Conoor in 1978, and to Landour in 1979. They stayed at Edgehill in Landour. It would be Anne's last vacation in India.

The next trip to Canada was via Germany in 1980. Helen's relatives had come from Russia and were living in Germany. Anne stayed in Canada, to retire. Helen returned to India, and to Union Biblical Seminary. Helen became the sole owner of Shelton Stroller No. 1, and took it with her on her following vacations: to Landour in 1982 and 1983 with Doris Hamilton, and to Ootycamund in 1984, again with Doris.

Both Helen and Doris were on the teaching staff of Union Biblical Seminary. Both made the historical move of the Seminary from Yeotmal to Pune in March 1983. Although Helen at first wore a saree to class when teaching, she soon found that European dress was more practical and also acceptable. The Shelton Stroller often went to class with her.

Helen's term in India was drawing to a close in 1985. Should she keep the Shelton Stroller? Should it accompany her once more across the ocean and find use in Canada? She decided to pass the Shelton Stroller on to Vashti Singh, whose husband, Prabha-kar, was a student at the seminary. Both were from the Mennonite Mission in Dhamtari. It would pass from one Mennonite to another.

The Shelton Stroller's journeys have been many, across the ocean, and to various hill stations in India. It has served its wearers well in the 25 years of its life with the missionary ladies of the General Conference Mennonite Mission. Its flowered green colour is as fresh today as it was in 1960, when Mariam Schmidt passed it on to others.

The Shelton Stroller not only crossed the Atlantic many times — 20 times in 25 years — but went with us on annual vacations to Landour, Simla, Kalimpong, Conoor, Ootycamund, Dalhousie, etc. When it was passed on to Vashti, it was still almost as good as new, the colours as fresh as ever.



MHSS Launches Fundraiser for Expansion Project

What can you do?

MHSS is in the process of moving into larger premises below the Fellowship Hall at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon. You can be a vital part of this expansion by volunteering your help or by making a tax-deductible donation. Here are some suggested ways to contribute, together with your family or by yourself: We need all the items listed below.

One complete computer set at **\$1,250** each. We will need six in the next year. **Total \$7,500.**

Six archive storage boxes for **\$50**. We will need 35 sets of six boxes each. **Total \$1,750.**

Two electrical ceiling lights for the secure archives room. **Total \$260.**

Lumber and panels to build a 12 foot by 12 foot secure room. **Total \$1,525.**

Labor to build secure room. **\$400.**

One work station for the volunteers, **\$740**. We will need three workstations. **Total \$2,220.**

Four electrical ceiling lights for the volunteers' work area. Total \$520

Thirty-six feet of moving or rolling shelves for a **total of \$29,920**. We received a \$10,000 donation with the condition that it be matched. About seven donors have put in a total of \$10,000 so we have \$20,000 already. **We need \$9,920 more.** One 15-inch shelf unit is six feet high and seven feet long. Cost is **\$1,240 per unit**. We need eight units for \$9,920.

One desk lamp for **\$40**. We will need three. **Total \$120.**

One scanner for **\$600**.

One telephone unit with extension for **\$125**.

One plug-in plus one electrical breaker for **\$65**. We will need 10 plug-ins. **Total \$650.**

One digital single-reflex camera, **\$480**.

Repair of hallway walls in front of archives double doors, **\$240**.

Painting of hallway walls and ceiling, **\$280**.

Construction of a large bulletin board on hallway wall in front of archives doors, **\$390**.

Construction of a lighted showcase on second wall in front of archives double doors, **\$1,900**.

One set of wired motion sensor lights in front of archives doors, **\$140**.

One LCD mounted projector, **\$1,400**.

One wheeled cart for books, **\$275**.

One vacuum cleaner, **\$325**.

Rent for one month, **\$450**.

One rolling office chair, **\$325**. We will need two. **Total \$650.**

You may also designate your donation as "Where needed most."

Send donations to: Elmer Regier, MHSS, Room 900, 110 La Ronge Road, Saskatoon, SK, S7K 7H8. You will receive a receipt to use for your tax deduction. Tell Elmer which item(s) you want to support.

Thank you for your support!

— Jake Buhler





Here and on page 19 are some photos of the progress of the expansion and renewal of the MHSS archives. More progress in boxing, organizing, and moving is being made every day.

All photos were taken by Susan Braun.



More pictures on page 19

Ernest Henry Baergen, 1932-2012

By Verner Friesen



Ernie was born in Sedalia, Alberta, but spent his childhood in Irma and Vauxhall, Alberta. At the young age of fourteen years he left home to attend the Rosthern Junior College, graduating in 1950. In 1952 Ernie entered the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon to study medicine. He received his medical degree in 1957. From 1958 to 1966 he practised family medicine. Then he moved into the role of the first executive director of the Saskatchewan Medical Association and continued in that position till his retirement in 1992.

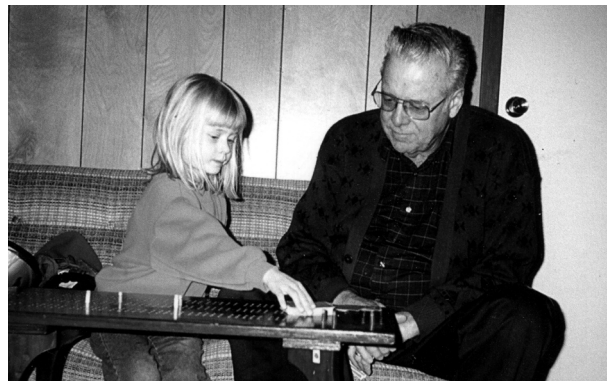
Through his professional years, Ernie acquired the skills of writing policies and bylaws. He helped numerous organizations with his expertise in that area, and this involvement carried over into his retirement years. During his last years living at the Bethany Manor Seniors' Complex in Saskatoon, Ernie helped with the formulation and revision of policies and bylaws there. He had a concern that organizations function in a businesslike manner.

In his retirement years Ernie became very involved with family history and genealogy projects. Among

the publications he produced are the Baergen Family Heritage Album, Peters Family Heritage Album, Family of Franz and Katharina Enns (compiled together with Ernie's brother-in-law, Benno Enns), Gerhard G. Baergen Ancestors and Descendants, Bernard Peters' Ancestors and Descendants, and Our Family Album.

Another retirement project of Ernie's was the GRANDMA program (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry). Ernie upgraded his computer hardware and software in order to expand his worldwide Internet access. He created the most complete indexing for GRANDMA of five centuries of membership records based on names, relationships, and locations.

The GRANDMA genealogy program led Ernie into extensive work on early Prussian Mennonite church records. Ernie worked systematically at learning to read and comprehend the old Gothic script, and to understand the old technical terms used to record births, deaths, marriages, and baptisms. With this knowledge he was able to make many of the old



Ernie Baergen and granddaughter Kathleen Regier playing cribbage, about 10 years ago, when Kathleen was five or six. Cribbage was a favourite pastime in the family.


Photos courtesy of Irene Baergen

church records accessible and of value to contemporary English readers. He spent countless hours at this project.

Ernie's final project was one that he did for his home congregation, Nutana Park Mennonite Church in Saskatoon. He entered all the data from the church records, going back to the congregation's beginning in 1965, onto a membership plus computer program. These records are now available on computer.

What a productive retirement! What a legacy Ernie has left! All of us are greatly indebted to Ernie

for the valuable volumn of genealogical information and family and church records he has left us.

In 1954 Ernie married Irene Enns, whom he had met at the Rosthern Junior College. Irene and Ernie raised a family of five daughters. At the time of his passing, Ernie and Irene had 11 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. Since then, a third great-grandchild has joined the family. Family was always an important priority for Ernie and Irene. 

Archives Expansion Continued from page 17



Report on MHSS Annual General Meeting March 2–3, 2012

The Worship Hall at Bethany Manor was filled on Friday evening and Saturday morning, March 2nd and 3rd, as author and storyteller Rudy Wiebe, spoke about three of his works related to First Nations peoples. His passion and consummate storytelling skills held everyone spellbound, as he talked about the creation of *The Story of Big Bear* and *Stolen Life: the Story of a Cree Woman* and read passages from the books.

Wiebe's journey of research came alive for us as he told us about places where Big Bear had lived during his lifetime. We heard about the vision quest of the young boy when he was given his name and about the Spirit that thereafter directed his life. Big Bear's medicine bundle is now stored in a back room of a museum in New York city, where it is never seen by the public and certainly not by his descendants. Wiebe shared with us his experience at the museum, as he held the bundle and felt the connection with Big Bear's spirit. We heard about this great peace chief, who knew that the treaties were flawed and refused to sign but nevertheless resisted his young braves' desire to fight, insisting that talking was the only way to resolve the dispute between the First Nations and the representatives of the Canadian government. We sensed Big Bear's pain when his young warriors took matters into their own hands and confronted the Canadian soldiers, only to be soundly defeated. We keenly felt the injustice when Big Bear was held responsible and labelled a traitor, and his dread as he gave himself up. Big Bear then spent several years at Stoney Mountain penitentiary, coming out a broken man, near death.

On Saturday, we saw a video on Big Bear, narrated by Wiebe, which had been made by CTV for their Extraordinary Canadians series earlier this year. The video is based on *Extraordinary Canadians: Big Bear*, which Wiebe wrote for the book series.

Then Wiebe spoke about Yvonne Johnson, great-granddaughter of Big Bear. After reading *The Temptations of Big Bear*, Wiebe's award-winning novel about Big Bear, at the Kingston penitentiary, Yvonne contacted Wiebe with her story. Eventually, they collaborated to tell her life story, which so dramatically reflects the impact of the treaties on subsequent generations of First Nations peoples. Wiebe's ability to make the story come alive for us, both in the book and in his retelling of the experience of writing it, moved us deeply.

On Saturday afternoon, we heard a story that is currently unfolding in the Saskatchewan Valley. Chief Ben Weenie of the Young Chippawayan band, Pastor Jason Johnson from the Laird Lutheran Church, and Ray Funk, former resident of the Laird area, told the story of the band whose treaty land in the Laird area was re-appropriated by the government without consultation, after the band had left the area, and subsequently given to Lutheran and Mennonite immigrants. Settlers and members of the band are currently working together to seek, first, government recognition of the land claim and then adequate compensation. Not yet as finely tuned as the stories that Rudy spent years crafting, this story is nonetheless history in the making and needs to be heard. It is one of very few instances in Canada in which First Nations and settlers are working together to right a historical wrong. Perhaps one day someone will make that story also into a book.

In the afternoon, we heard presentations by Chief Ben Weenie, Rev. Jason Johnson, and Ray Funk, also on the theme of First Nations peoples in Canada.

These sessions of the Historical Society prepared us to listen with sensitivity when the Truth and Reconciliation hearings took place in Saskatoon the following June.

— Renata Klassen

MHSS Sponsors Nettie Friesen Balzer Book Launch

On Sunday afternoon, November 4th, nearly a hundred people gathered at Bethany Manor in Saskatoon to celebrate the launch of Nettie Friesen Balzer's book, *Helena: A Peek into the Past*. The board of MHSS hosted the event and served coffee and sweets.

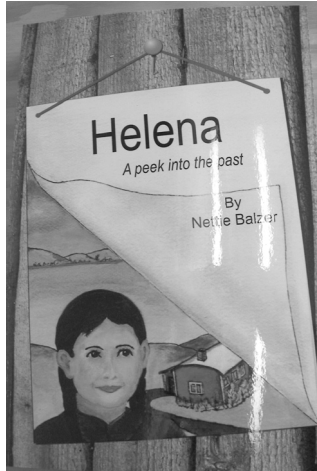
Helena is Nettie's mother. She was born in Manitoba in 1898 and moved to Saskatchewan as a young girl with her parents, Julius and Helena Klassen Banman. The family settled in Aberdeen. After Helena's marriage to Jacob W. Friesen she and her husband moved to Osler, where they had 11 children, three of whom died in infancy. Helena lived to be 102.

The 377-page book is self-published and according to Nettie is a series of fictional stories based on

actual events and stories that Nettie and her sisters told their children about, and it depicts what life was like in the early 1900s. Nettie was fortunate to have the diaries of Helena preserved in notebooks that describe the everyday life (and sometimes death) of a sometimes financially poor fam-

ily growing up just east of Osler. But the family was rich in spirit and valued music, food, and education, all rooted in a strong Christian faith.

The book contains 85 chapters, each one a vi-



nette of a part of Helena's life. Additionally, it contains several maps showing the origins of Helena's family in Russia and their place in Canada. Several dozen photographs enrich the script and provide a fine visual addition to the book.

The photos reproduced here were taken by Susan Braun.

The book can be ordered from MHSS at a cost of \$20 plus shipping.

—Jake Buhler



Mostly about Books

Friesen, Victor Carl. *Birds, Bugs and Beasts ... in verses Apt to Zany*. Cochrane, Alberta, Kingsley Publishing. 56pp. Highly illustrated, paper covers, ISBN: 978-1926832-09-8, price \$10.

Reviewed by Victor Wiebe

On the surface it appears that with *Birds, Bugs and Beasts ... in verses Apt to Zany*, Victor Carl Friesen has written a children's ABC book; rhyming, poetic, and very colourful. The publisher advertises this book as "A book for kids who know their ABC's — and then some!" It is that but it is also a book that is much more intricate. After all, Friesen holds a doctorate in literature and has written quite a number of other books on a variety of topics, including history, literary analysis, folklore, and natural history.

Victor Carl Friesen was both a pupil and then a teacher in Saskatchewan one-room country schools. At the author's book reading, where I bought my copy of the book, he related how he was encouraged, both as student and teacher, to use simple resources to engage in the learning process and that he still retained his precious box of wax crayons.

This is a book that needs to be read by both the eye and the ear. The coloured pages and illustrations are vivid and engaging with wonderful wax-crayon drawings. The words rhyme and flow in the eye and bounce in the ear when read aloud. Even the text in the illustrations needs voicing.

To illustrate the letters of the alphabet, Friesen has usually chosen an unconventional animal, bird, or bug. There is an Aardvark for letter "A", but "Z" is represented by the Zorrino, instead of the expected Zebra. To give an illustration of some of the humour and intricacies of this little book, the rhyme from the famous William Blake poem "The Tiger" is there but it is incorporated into a four-line poem at "J" for Jaguar. The illustration for "C" is labelled Cow Chow and shows a cow inviting her two calves into a wooded area, a place where cows naturally re-



treat to when not feeding. There, the mother invites the calves to a picnic, with a blanket spread out for lunch. The calves are coming, but there is of course no food on the blanket, for the caves have chomped on grass in the field and now are coming to rest and re-chew their cud. Other illustrations also have their own details for the older reader to puzzle and enjoy.

At \$10 a copy, in today's market the book is a rare find.



Lepp, Erna K. *Voyage from Terror to Hope: from Russia to Canada: a history of the Lepp and Willms families*. Self published. Editing, layout, and design by Heather Nickel, Your Nickel's Worth Publishing, Regina, Saskatchewan. 207 pp. Perfect bound, illustrated paper covers. [Available from Erna Lepp or First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, Alberta, \$20.00]

Reviewed by Dave Toews

Erna (Sawatzky) Lepp tells the story here of the family of her late husband, Eric David Lepp. Eric Lepp was born March 4, 1924 and died February 12, 2005. At the age of four months he immigrated to

Canada from Russia with his parents David and Maria, his twin sister Erica, two-year-old brother Henry, and 13 additional members of the Lepp, Willms, and Janz families.

The story is told in 16 chapters, plus preface, prologue, and epilogue in straightforward narration. In the preface Erna thanks her many sources for the material in the book. The main contributor of family stories was the late Ruth (Lepp) [Ernie] Wieler. The prologue tells of how the well-to-do Lepp, Willms, and Janz families lived and prospered in Halbstadt, Molotschna Colony, South Russia (present-day Ukraine). Also shown is each family's genealogical chart, complete with photographs.

Chapters one to six describe the wonderful village life experienced by the Mennonites before the Great War. "*O, das liebe Halbstadt*" (Oh, that beloved Halbstadt) The Russian Revolution brought suffering and starvation to many. The Mennonite Central Committee organized the American Mennonite Relief to bring food and assistance to Mennonites and others in Ukraine. David Lepp held a leading position in Molotschna with this organization. We hear of the hope for leaving, the long and sometimes tense journey to Canada.

Chapters seven to ten talk of the Lepp family's early life at Herbert, Saskatchewan and the move to

Saskatoon, where Eric and his siblings grew up. Eric, the mischievous fun-loving prankster, was to become the love of Erna's life.

Chapters thirteen to sixteen are devoted to Eric and his siblings: Erica, Henry, and Ruth, and their children and descendants. Each person is placed in the family generational context and accompanied by photographs and brief text giving their interests, occupations, and place of residence.

Many of the photos and documents pictured here



Eric Lepp's landing card

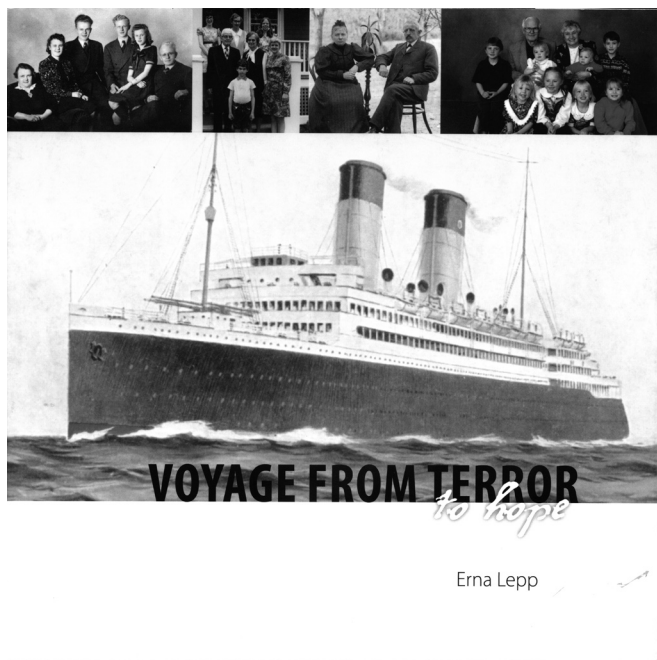
are one of a kind, rarely seen. David Lepp was a collector and kept all the papers and pictures that took him through life's journey. David was a born leader; he led the group of Mennonites to Canada referred to as echelon number two that departed from the Lichtenau train station on July 13, 1924.

Voyage from Terror to Hope will have an appeal beyond the families whose story is told here, because the book provides interesting historical details, documents, and photographs of the Russian Mennonite story.

Erna Lepp was born in Langham, Saskatchewan in 1926 and spent her childhood on a farm near Hershel. She and Eric had four children and lived in Regina for many years. She presently resides in St. Albert, Alberta.

Erna has always been interested in family history and genealogy and has also written a book about the Sawatzky family, *The Longest String*. That book and this, *Voyage from Terror to Hope*, were written so future generations of the Sawatzky and Lepp families will remember their heritage. Erna also wrote *Memories of Eric Kenneth Lepp: 1956 - 1990* after her son, Eric Jr., was killed by an impaired driver.

This review was originally published in the newsletter of First Mennonite Church, Edmonton, Alberta. — Ed



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Honour List

This list recognizes persons who have made significant contributions towards preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. (The date in brackets is year of death.)

To submit a name for the Honour List, nominate a person in writing.

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

Helen Bahnmann
Abram J. Buhler (†1982)
Helen Dyck (†2007)
Dick H. Epp (†2009)
Jacob H. Epp (†1993)
Margaret Epp (†2008)
Peter K. Epp (†1985)
George K. Febr (†2000)
Jake Febr
Jacob E. Friesen (†2007)
John D. Friesen (†2004)
Jacob G. Guenter
Gerhard J. Hiebert (†1959)

Katherine Hooge (†2001)
Abram G. Janzen
John J. Janzen (†2004)
George Krahn (†1999)
Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
Abram M. Neudorf (†1966)
J.J. Neudorf (†1988)
J.C. Neufeld (†1994)
John P. Nickel
David Paetkau (†1972)
Esther Patkau
John D. Reddekopp (†2011)
Ted Regehr

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

Web Sites

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

Cemeteries web site:

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

Mennonite Encyclopedia Online:

GAMEO.org/news/mennonite-encyclopedia-online

Electronic Bulletin Board

MHSS-E-Update@mhss.sk.ca

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

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

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

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