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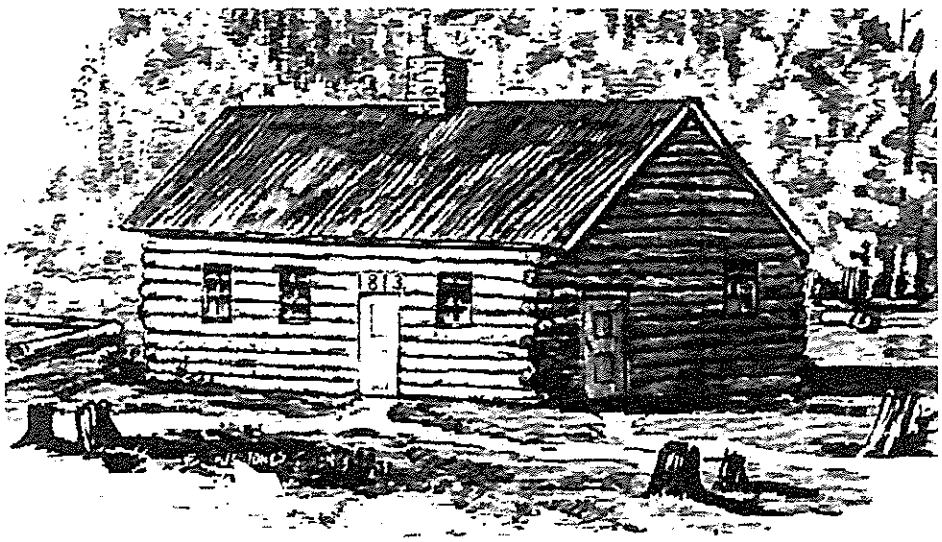
Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

Features & Articles



The First Mennonite Church in Waterloo County, Ontario, Canada.
Erected in 1813, and known as Benjamin Eby's Meetinghouse

Mennonites on the Move - Part 3

To Upper Canada
The Swiss Mennonite Story

Thus far in this series, we have recounted the journeys of some early Swiss Anabaptists from Switzerland to southwest Germany and then to Pennsylvania. There my ancestors spent 85 years, or parts of three generations, before heading north to Upper Canada (Ontario).

A Time for Moving

The late 1700s and early 1800s saw Mennonites of both Dutch/Prussian and Swiss origins considering yet another move. The militaristic Prussian government was restricting land purchases by nonresistant Mennonites and threatening their military exemption. Russia's Catherine the Great offered land and a Privilegium guaranteeing freedom from military service. Beginning in 1788 and continuing for several decades, thousands of Mennonites from Prussian-ruled Poland emigrated to Russia's Ukraine.

Beginning in 1786, some 2,000 Mennonites from Pennsylvania began moving north to the British-ruled Upper Canada (Ontario). *(cont'd-page 4)*

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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The Editor's Perspective

Ruth Marlene Friesen

So... have you and your family made it safely through this COVID-19 pandemic?

I was born after World War II, so I do not recall what it was like during the war years, but it would almost seem that these last three months have been like living with a dark global cloud hanging over us as I imagine war time may have been like. We can still eat and sleep and do ordinary household things.

I spent four months of Saturdays this winter downsizing my basement "stuff."

I've managed to make a garden and re-did some flowerbeds, all because... well, traditional gardening habits die hard. However, my back whines and begs to go sit down inside after about an hour and a half.

This is an extra bonus-filled Historian! Special grace was granted to go to 32 pages with this issue, so as to include more of the great submissions received at this time.

It has an article, by Bill Janzen of Ottawa, about his Grandfather Wiebe. Note: that Bill is also the William Janzen, author of the book, *Advocating for Peace: Stories from the Ottawa Office of Mennonite Central Committee, 1975 -2008* - which is reviewed by Jake Buhler.

Ken Bechtel has provided another article in his series on Mennonite Migrations; this time about the Swiss Mennonites moving from Pennsylvania to Ontario, Canada.

Not just one but three short articles about the Venice School near Blumenthal, give us a more rounded perspective of that country school.

One piece reminisces about Christmas Concerts in the Osler school a generation or two ago.

We put out a call in the previous issue for stories or memories of the Spanish Flu Epidemic. Verner Friesen submitted one, and I looked around for other reports to use as fillers. What? Suddenly this issue is Full!

RMF

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

John Reddekopp

I am a member of a Facebook genealogy group. Recently a member suggested that perhaps we think that this period of 3 months of having to isolate and take various precautions related to the flu pandemic feels like a long time. He then asked, "What if we're only halfway through?" He goes on to describe a group of Mennonites and their trek from Danzig to South Russia in 1788. After 3 months and many difficulties along the way they were only halfway there. No doubt it must have seemed like a long time.

We have all been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic in one way or another. Some have suffered loss of employment. In many instances there are those who were able to work from home.

Some have dealt with related health issues, even the loss of loved ones during this time. Parents have been required to become much more involved in their children's education.

Our churches and how we worship as a community have greatly changed. Somehow we have learned that we can come together for meetings and worship services virtually. Many people I have talked with indicate they really miss the coming together in person; that virtual services and meetings are good but don't replace the real thing.

Meanwhile, Mennonite organizations like MCC have also felt the impact and have been forced to make program and personnel cuts.

How has the pandemic affected the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan? Our archives at Bethany Manor were declared off limits to everyone, including our board and volunteers. The board has communicated mostly through email.

We did have one *Vaspa meeting* at the home of one of our board members, Dick Braun, in late May. Dick and Kathy have the room to practice social distancing. Overall we have been able to carry on the business of the society. Also, just recently we were informed that those volunteers who are residents at Bethany Manor may do work in the archives on a limited basis.

How will we remember the pandemic? For me personally it has been a time of sorting, organizing, and discarding items including many pre- -->

Events of Interest to Mennonites

On page 31 we have a report on the Annual Meeting of all the Mennonite Historical Societies across Canada, held in January before most of us had heard about the corona virus.

There, a presentation was made which we could not fit onto that page, so we'll share it here.

Laureen Harder-Gissling (right) presents the 2020 Award of Excellence to Lucille Marr at the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) meetings held at Camp Peniel in the Laurentians on January 18, 2020.

President's Corner - continued....

digital photos. It was a time to reflect on what is important in keeping the memory of my wife and indeed in preserving our family history. It has been an emotional and enriching journey. I am thankful that I had the time for it.

Brenda Tiessen-Wiens is the moderator of Mennonite Church Alberta. In a recent edition of *Canadian Mennonite* she wrote about plague columns. These structures were erected in town squares in the 17th and 18th centuries as reminders of disasters that had been experienced. Wiens writes, "Whether attracting to God's mercy or repelling from a horrible fate, plague columns are a reminder that the source of salvation is God. Their prominence makes me wonder what acknowledgments we'll make when the risks of this pandemic are over."

In the aftermath of the so-called Spanish Flu a number of changes resulted. There were countries that adopted more scientific health methods and it gave a boost to the concept of socialized medicine. Many are wondering what changes will come as a result of the current pandemic or even how, or if, it will be remembered. The Spanish Flu was the worst disaster of the twentieth century. It resulted in the loss of many more lives than either of the world wars but is certainly not remembered in the same way. How will this pandemic be remembered?

JR

(cont'd from page 1)

While some Amish had first arrived in Pennsylvania in the 1730s, it was a fresh migration of Amish Mennonites from Bavaria and Alsace-Lorraine who settled in Wilmot Township starting in the mid 1820s. They were leaving behind the warfare, militarism and forced conscription of the Napoleonic era.

Travel routes from Pennsylvania to Canada. John Ruth, The Earth Is the Lord's.

Push and Pull Factors

The move from Pennsylvania to Upper Canada, or Ontario as we now know it, involved some powerful push and pull factors.

During the Revolution, Pennsylvania citizens and government sometimes honoured but frequently disregarded Mennonite scruples regarding swearing the oath and military service. Though they may have been allowed to affirm their rejecting allegiance to the Crown in favour of the "rebel" government, Mennonites felt bound to honour their earlier affirmation of loyalty. In 1792, the newly appointed Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, John Graves Simcoe sent word through the British Consul in Philadelphia that in Upper Canada Quakers and similar groups would be accorded exemption from militia duties under conditions similar to those allowed previously by the British government.

The second powerful inducement was the availability of cheap arable land. Whereas scarce farmland in Pennsylvania was now costing $100 per acre, fertile wilderness land in the Beasley tract was selling for less than a pound sterling, £, per acre. If a pound sterling was worth $4.44 in 1800, that's over 20 acres for the price of one in Pennsylvania.

On the Move

The very first self-identified Mennonites arrived in Niagara in 1786. The "Twenty" near Vineland, the earliest continuing Mennonite settlement, was named for the Twenty Mile Creek, twenty miles from Niagara Falls. What are now Welland and York Counties also attracted Mennonites. The largest settlement was in Waterloo Township, starting in 1800.

Depending on their route, Waterloo Township was perhaps 800 kilometers from Pennsylvania in those days long before Pennsylvania Turnpikes and 401s!

Coming to Canada

My distant cousin Jacob Bechtel travelled to Upper Canada on a land prospecting tour in the spring or summer of 1799. Disappointed with lack of spring-fed creeks in the Vineland area where his travel companions were settling, he found an Ojibwa scout who led him to a locality with good spring water, good land and good timber. This was in Beasley's Block No.2. On his way back, he told Joseph Schörg (Sherk) and Samuel Betzner about his finding. Sherk and Betzner spent the winter and then pressed on to the Grand River where they too found the land much more promising.

In his 1896 Biographical History of Waterloo Township, Ezra Eby describes the journey of Jacob and Elizabeth Bechtel and several other families in 1800, 32 people including 9 children:

"There were nine teams in this train, two of them having four horses. All the wagons were covered. They were often obliged to stay in the woods over night while on their journey, but they were prepared to protect themselves against all kinds of weather as they had in addition to their covered wagons moveable tents which rendered the most

useful and valuable services. They also brought a number of milk cows with them which supplied the company with milk while on their way. The most extraordinary difficulties, however, beset them while crossing the Allegheny Mountains with their heavily laden teams. They found it necessary to unload a considerable portion of their baggage and goods, and pay for their conveyance, their own teams being utterly unable to bring all across. They crossed the Niagara River on what was called the "Flats." There was no accident or sickness on their trip. The time required in coming from Montgomery County to Waterloo County was ten weeks, including the two weeks at 'Hornings' on the "mountain" while the men in the company worked on the road through the Beverly Swamp, making it so that horse teams in some way could be taken over it. There was no settlement between Hornings and Waterloo. After this road was improved, the company left Hornings for Waterloo with their teams. George Clemens drove the first horse-team that ever came through the Beverly Swamp. When they arrived at the end of their long journey, they found the country as they had expected. All woods except for a few clearings made by those who had come here a short time previously."

Ezra Eby names a number of families who made the trek to the Grand in early 1802. He then adds a brief description of the trek made by my ancestor Joseph Bechtel:

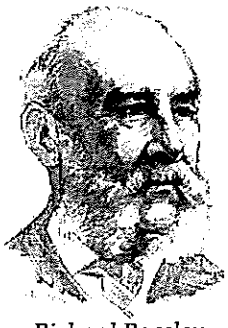
"A few weeks later than the above families came Joseph Bechtel (who became the first Mennonite minister in Waterloo County) with his family, John Bricker and family, and Samuel Bricker who afterward became the leading man in the formation of the German Company, came from Cumberland County, Pennsylvania to this County. They had two four horse teams and were four weeks in making the trip. The Beverly Swamp was in a most fearful state when they came through it. The road was almost impassable and caused them the greatest trouble in getting to Waterloo."[i]

These early settlers included some Tunkers (Brethren in Christ) like Witmers, Grohs and Gingrichs, first generation converts from Mennonite backgrounds.

Securing their Land

Readers may be familiar with the story of the first emigrants to Russia. Authorities told them that the highly desirable lands selected by scouts Jacob Hoeppner and Johann Bartsch were inaccessible due to hostilities with the Ottoman Empire. Instead they were offered land near the Chortiza River, much drier, less fertile and further from markets. The settlers turned their disappointment into accusations against Hoeppner and Bartsch, subjecting them to serious personal, church and economic consequences. Mennonites from Pennsylvania and the somewhat later Amish from Europe also faced issues in securing title to the lands they were promised in Upper Canada.

The Beasley Affair



Richard Beasley

My ancestors settled on the Beasley tract, paying for what they thought were clear deeds for lands. In 1798 magistrate and elected politician, Richard Beasley, and partners, had purchased this 92,000 acre tract of Six Nations' lands in the Grand River Basin through Joseph Brant. They signed a bond for payment of a £17,774 mortgage in April, but failed to make the payments. The agreement spoke about an annual interest to be paid, funds much needed by the somewhat destitute Six Nations.

At the historic Brubacher House on the University of Waterloo campus, a placard reads in part, ***"Beasley made no initial down payment, and stuck with a six percent annual interest on the principal (which he also did not pay), and a binding stipulation that the tract not be subdivided before paying the full purchase price."*** Then "In 1800, Beasley illegally (and deceptively) sold over 8000 acres of the mortgaged land" to the first twenty-six Pennsylvania German Mennonite immigrant families who were "under the false assumption of gaining clear land titles."[ii]

When the Mennonites learned about the mortgage and their not having clear title to their lands, they contacted the government trustee and were finally able to negotiate an agreement to finalize this purchase of 60,000 acres for £10,000. The

settlers made contact with relatives in Pennsylvania and in April, 1803, a joint stock company was formed in the home of "Hannes" Eby. Cousins Jacob and Daniel Erb were thus enabled to deliver the final payment in May, 1805, and the deed was executed that June.

Richard Beasley has commonly been viewed as the villainous shady dealer in this saga. E. Reginald Good, who has done extensive research into primary documents, comes to more nuanced conclusions.

In July, 1800, Joseph Brant had written William Claus, the newly appointed deputy superintendent-general of the Indian Department, that the Mennonites "of whom I made mention to you when at York [present-day Toronto,] are now come forward with cash enough to pay the original purchase[r] for about Six thousand Acres of Block No. 2 whenever the encumbrance on the said land may be removed. I shall conceive myself much obliged to you if you will exert yourself in obviating this difficulty which I have reason to believe may be easily done, as these persons are now waiting here till I receive your answer to this."[iii]

Instead, Claus forwarded this letter to lieutenant governor Peter Hunter who had received instructions from the colonial secretary that "the interests of the state were best served by depriving the Six Nations of any benefit arising from their land sales, in order to undermine Brant's authority as land agent and make the Six Nations accept the Crown's terms for surrendering 'further Tracts of Land, as may be necessary for the Public services of the Province.'" Hunter then directed Claus to *'open the Eyes'* of the Six Nations to *'their real Interests'* and enable them 'to see through Brant's self interested motives in selling Six Nations' lands. Claus then was to wrest control from Brant of all aspects of Six Nations' land sales and land sale proceeds, under the guise of protecting Six Nations' property.

When that money was paid and the deed executed, Good reports that Claus distributed £513 "to the Chiefs of the Six Nations" on 18 September, 1805, "being so much Interest in hand on the Sale of Block No.2 ..." and siphoned off almost £2,000 in expenses from the principal amount, in violation of Executive Council instructions that "the trust money is not to be loaded with any Expence [sic] whatever." The balance he then took to England to invest in annuities on behalf of the Six Nations. The lack of accounting is a factor in the twenty first century ongoing land claims against the Canadian government.

This purchase was to become just a small part of the process by which the Six Nations soon ended up with less than 5% of the 950,000 acres originally deeded to them "to enjoy forever" by the 1784 Haldimand Treaty.

Our Amish Mennonite Faith Cousins

The 1693 Amish schism had divided the Swiss Brethren derived Mennonites into two groups. A significant minority joined Elder Jacob Ammann in demanding a stricter discipline, including the Meidung (shunning). The majority, like Elder Hans Reist, parted ways with Ammann and the two groups referred to each other as Amish and Reistleut. Only in Alsace did the majority side with Ammann.

The Canadian Amish story began more than a century later. As early as 1736, some Amish had found their way to Pennsylvania. In 1821, Christian Nafziger set out from his farm east of Munich to seek a better life for himself and fellow European Amish Mennonites. In Amsterdam, a Mennonite gave him a voucher on a ship sailing to North America. In Pennsylvania, he was advised to seek cheaper lands in Upper Canada. Waterloo area Mennonites received him warmly and advised him to contact the Governor about the Crown and Clergy Reserve lands in Wilmot Township.

Governor Maitland offered each Amish family 50 acres free in return for cutting the trees on the road allowance and a further 150 acres at a low price. He gave Nafziger letters to deliver to the Colonial Office in London.

While there, just to be sure, he met with King George IV who assured him of this offer's reliability. A local newspaper article published at the time of Nafziger's death in 1836 claimed that the king, himself of German descent, pressed a few gold coins into Nafziger's hand as they parted.

Waterloo Township Mennonites struck a com-

mittee to oversee the settlement in Wilmot Township and Governor Maitland gave orders for this "German Block" to be surveyed. Two hundred acre plots were laid out along extensions of three Waterloo Township roads.

In 1825 the European Amish began arriving, While the men built their cabins, their wives and families were hosted by Mennonites. The agreement was that after a seven year residence in the country, by clearing the road allowance and ten acres of land, plus building a dwelling, the settlers were to receive patents for the 50 acres that fronted the road. They were then to have the option to purchase the remaining 150 acres.[iv]

In the summer of 1828, they learned that the rear 150 acres had been deeded to King's College (the forerunner of University of Toronto) as an endowment. The Amish could purchase the land but at almost double the price they were expecting to pay. Eventually the settlers did reach an agreement with the government and university, though Nafziger himself failed to persuade them to grant him a deed for services rendered. Upon his death in 1836, he had received title only to the front 50 acres.[v] Some settlers were so unhappy with Christian's choice for a settlement site that they left for Ohio.

The War of 1812

The Military Act of 1793 stated that Quakers, Mennonites and Tunkers were not required to perform military service, but for this exemption, they were to pay a fine of twenty shillings a year in peacetime and five pounds sterling in time of war. This was similar to provisions that existed in the British pre Revolutionary colonies.

Within barely a decade, this understanding was put to the test as Britain and the United States braced for war. The 1809 Act for Quartering and Billeting spelled out in detail how settlers needed to host soldiers, and how officers had the right to "impress" wagons, horses, boats etc. In 1810, Mennonites successfully petitioned the government to recognize their unbaptized sons under 21 as also exempt. In 1811, Mennonites reprinted an English translation of the Dordrecht Confession.

Those in the Niagara Peninsula were most significantly impacted as they were in the direct path of the fighting. Mennonites in York, Welland and on the Grand River paid their fines and allowed their horses and wagons to be used to transport supplies, sometimes with their sons as drivers. In 1813, 20 young men from the Waterloo region were conscripted to haul supplies for the Battle of the Thames near Chatham. When the British forces were defeated, these twenty successfully fled, mostly by abandoning their horses and wagons. Twenty Mennonite and Tunker families later made claims for their losses.

There are a few stories of modest resistance by Mennonites. Cornelius Pannebecker took the wheels off his wagon, but his son and horse were impressed. Elizabeth Gabel, wife of Deacon Jacob Bechtel, had her son hide their two yokes of oxen in the woods. When the Redcoats tried to yoke the young steers in the paddock, up went their heads and tails and the soldiers returned to Preston in disgust. Hearing then that they had been tricked, they returned, reinforcing their demand for the oxen by hacking at the cupboard behind her with their swords. Henry Wanner Jr (later the donor of the land for Wanner Church and cemetery) was 24 but unbaptized, and so was conscripted. During an engagement in the Niagara, his officer was surprised that he didn't need any more ammunition as Wanner said he "didn't see anything" to shoot at.

As an obituary note put it, "Fearing that he might hurt somebody, he fired at once and all that time in the air." He later took sick with camp fever, was released and soon after was baptized.

The Year without a Summer - 1816

The cold summer of 1816 saw frost every month, including seven heavy ones in June and July. Though they wouldn't have known the cause, this was a "volcanic winter" triggered by the massive 1815 volcanic eruption of Mount Tambora in what is now Indonesia. On June 1, men and wagons could cross frozen mud puddles without breaking through. June 21 saw a heavy snowfall. Wheat prices soared, and the only hay to be had was from coarse wild grass on the riverbanks, marshes and beaver meadows. Their potato crops failed and some families resorted to living on soup made of bran. As Ezra Eby put it, "Food for both man and

beast was at starvation prices. The hardships these early settlers had to endure during this cold and inclement year are almost indescribable."

Relations with First Nations

In his *In Search of Promised Lands*, Sam Steiner points out that "The area the Mennonites began to settle in 1800 was not wilderness. The Grand River Valley was often the location of Ojibwa summer villages for hunting and fishing." Ojibwa (Mississauga) would tap the maple trees in the spring and harvest corn, beans and potatoes in the fall, often followed by festivals of celebration. These celebrations continued for several decades into the 1800s.

Mennonite sources often report positive stories of interaction between the Mennonite settlers and the Ojibwa. They tell of children playing together, their parents bringing venison to trade for a loaf of bread, the gift of a handwoven doll cradle made from black ash wood for a baby girl, and Indians coming into the cabin on a cold winter's night to lie on the floor with their feet to the fire. Peter Jones, Ojibwa chief and Methodist minister, tells about a chief who accepted a lesser price for a piece of land from a Mennonite rather than a "Yankee stranger;" Mennonites were a people who had never cheated the aboriginals.

Ezra Eby praises "Indian Sam Eby" for spending "much of his time among the Indians and (teaching) them many good things, in fact he was their law-giver, minister, interpreter and peacemaker."

Thomas McGee, however, wrote in 1829: "I used to live here de Waterloo - all time get drunk - I go some times on dis road in the night, some times midnight - go up de river to Still house, after de whiskey. You know up to Sam Aby's Still-house. Me was very poor, me hungry, me naked...."[vi] When stills like "Indian Sam Eby's" became notorious for their impact on First Nations neighbours, many Mennonites signed an 1808 petition to limit the trade in alcohol.

Life on the Grand

These settlers brought livestock, seeds, basic tools and agricultural equipment for working with soils similar to those they had left. They initially built log homes ranging from eight foot by ten foot, to twenty-two feet square. Perhaps ten years after arrival, they began to build bank barns, larger and more versatile than other designs. They planted their crops around the stumps of the trees they had felled.

In addition to the various pioneer risks, homebound women faced the further challenges of childbirth and child-rearing. There are stories about Mennonite women killing dangerous snakes, saving the family's food from wolves or using a hickory stick to drive a bear away from the family's pork supply. There are also accounts about their role as midwives and their use of herbs for healing.

Newly arrived teenager Esther Stauffer married the Beverley Swamp horse team driver, George Clemens in 1805. Four of the five children born during their first seven years of marriage died of disease in 1813. Three of their next thirteen children also died in infancy, and their youngest was only nineteen months old when Esther died at the age of forty five.

Church Life

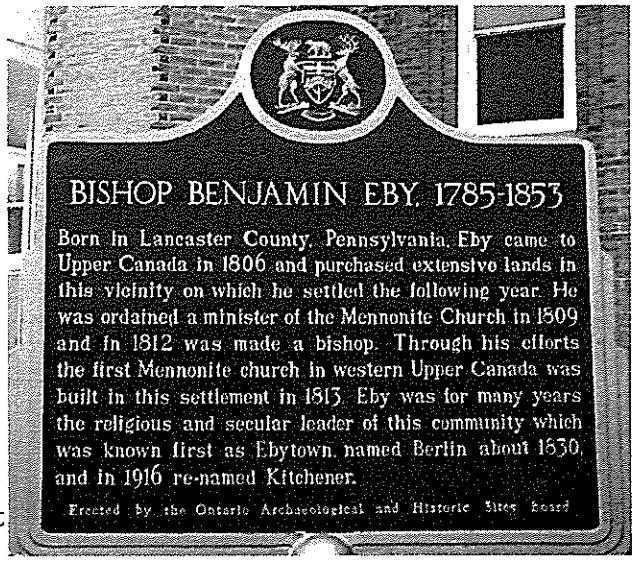
In the first years, worship gatherings were in houses or barns. If there were as yet no ordained leaders, they would read from Mennonite books such as the Martyrs Mirror or Menno Simons' writings. Prayers were probably read from one of the prayer books of the time, as unordained people did not normally lead in extemporaneous prayers.

There were at least two deacons among the early settlers on the Grand, Jacob Bechtel and Joseph Bechtel, my ancestor. Though we don't know how or by whom, Joseph was ordained as preacher in 1804, the first preacher of any denomination in Waterloo Township. Benjamin Eby was ordained as minister in 1809 and as bishop in 1812.

One difference from Pennsylvania was that Upper Canada did have an established or state church, the Anglican. When John Groh and Susannah Wanner wanted to get married in 1811, they went to the local Justice of the Peace, who wrote in their certificate of marriage "There being no parson or minister of the church of block two living within eighteen miles of either of them, they have applied to me for that purpose." The "church" referred to is the Ang-

lican for which the law reserved special privileges including marriage and erecting church buildings.

As groups grew too large for their houses, Mennonites and other groups got around the law by building so called union meetinghouses. Such buildings often also served as schoolhouses and for public meetings. The first of these in the township was the brick meetinghouse John Erb financed in 1813, a building "for all denominations" near Preston (now Cambridge). Benjamin Eby added a frame annex to the 1811 schoolhouse in Berlin, on the property of what is now Kitchener's First Mennonite. Samuel Bechtel donated land for a later union meetinghouse and burial ground near Hespeler (now Cambridge); its first trustees were all Mennonite or Tunker. An informative plaque now marks this otherwise abandoned site.



It was only in 1828 that the law forbidding dissenting sects from holding legal title to land and church buildings was changed. Three years later dissenting ministers were allowed to perform marriages. After years of meeting in homes, barns or union buildings, Mennonites began erecting purpose-built meeting houses. Benjamin Eby's congregation built a new frame building in 1833-34.

Hespeler area Mennonites built their first meetinghouse on the Wanner farm in 1837. Meetinghouses were usually identified by the farm where they were located. Mennonites viewed themselves as members of the larger congregation that alternated its meeting places, rather than as members of the local group.

Church Changes and Challenges

Mennonites in Canada faced the same challenges as their stateside counterparts.

Combining some Mennonite doctrines with revivalist understandings, "Reforming" and "New" Mennonites began emerging in the late 1840s. In 1875, "New" and "Reforming" Mennonites joined in Bloomingdale to start a process that, with further mergers, became the Mennonite Brethren in Christ (later Evangelical Missionary). They stressed personal conversion experiences and opposed alcohol and tobacco consumption.

Meanwhile the Mennonite Church of Canada was trying to walk a middle course, allowing some of these innovations while trying to appease the more conservative element. By 1889, in reaction initially to Sunday Schools, prayer meetings and revival preaching, Bishop Abraham Martin of the less anglicized Woolwich district withdrew, seeking to hold to the old Ordnung (i.e. Old Order). Over the years, they became much more distinctive as their oral Ordnung specified dress codes and resisted such other innovations as the automobile.

In Amish circles, the initial dividing issue was meetinghouses. In 1883, some larger Amish congregations began erecting buildings for worship.

Traditionalists objected, and soon there were "Church Amish" and "House Amish." The "House Amish" were more commonly know as the Old Order Amish. The "Church Amish" became the Ontario Amish Mennonite Conference and then the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference before joining hands with the Pennsylvania and Russia derived groups to form the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada in 1988.

Not all of these Pennsylvania derived Mennonites or European Amish stayed put in Ontario. Their heirs relocated to places like Saskatchewan, Alberta, Michigan or Ohio. My own widowed grandfather joined those homesteading in Alberta in 1911. Others served as missionaries or MCC workers across the globe.

Especially near the conservative end, there have been multiple divisions. There have also been some areas where even rather conservative and more modern Mennonites have been able to work

together.

Already in the 1870s, a joint Russian Aid Committee included an Amish bishop, a Mennonite businessman and Jacob Y. Shantz of the Mennonite Brethren in Christ. Mennonites of all stripes briefly hosted these immigrants on their way to Manitoba.


Jacob Yost Shantz

The World Wars led to the creation of inter-Mennonite responses - the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, the Committee on Military Problems, the Conference of Historic Peace Churches, and shared support for the alternative service work camps.

The plight of their faith cousins in Revolutionary Russia led to the founding of the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), yet another inter-Mennonite effort. Its original goal was to provide food for Mennonites starving in Ukraine.

The Liberal victory in 1921 allowed the rescinding of the Conservative's 1919 Order-in-Council prohibiting Mennonites, Hutterites and Doukhobors from entering Canada. Almost immediately, Canadian Mennonite leaders started a further process for assisting Russian Mennonites. Ontario Mennonites of various types hosted some of these 22,000 immigrants.

Throughout our history, Mennonites have often had to be a mobile people. Despite our strong connections with whatever soil, our faith convictions frequently put us at odds with state church and militaristic authorities, and we found ourselves once again a pilgrim people. Mennonites, whether wealthy settled Dutch or pioneering Pennsylvania derived Swiss, have extended a hand to other beleaguered believers on the move, even those of different backgrounds and confessions. To be Mennonite has often meant to be on the move, and to assist others in their moves!

Footnotes:

[i] Ezra Eby, A Biographical History of Waterloo Township (Berlin, 1896), pp.4-5

[ii] Geoff Martin, "From the Banks of the Grand," *https://tnq.ca/from-the-banks-of-the-grand/* Retrieved March 17, 2020

[iii] E. Reginald Good, *"Lost Inheritance: Alienation of Six Nations' Lands in Upper Canada*, 1784-1805" in Journal of Mennonite Studies (Vol. 19, 2001), pp.96 - 99.

[iv] Ann Hilty and Lorraine Roth, *"The Settlement of the German Block in Wilmot Township, Upper Canada"* in Ontario Mennonite History, Vol XIV, No. 2, September 1996.

[v] Roth, Lorraine. "*Nafziger, Christian (1776/78-1836).*" Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. April 2002. Retrieved March 17, 2020.

vi Samuel J. Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands* (Herald, 2015) p.68 and Sam Steiner, "Mennonite and First Nations Relations at the Grand." Retrieved October 30, 2018.

KB

The Flu of 1918:

Excerpt from Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve 1895-1995 - by Leonard Doell

While World War I came to an end November 11, 1918, a new war had begun in the Saskatchewan Valley. This was the war against the deadly Spanish influenza. The saying, "after war comes the plague" held true in this case. The flu epidemic came in three waves: in the spring and fall of 1918 and the spring of 1919. The Saskatchewan Valley was hardest hit in the fall of 1918.

The influenza spread like prairie fire. People were seized by a sudden weakness, headaches, pain, fever and a chill, like cold water running down the back. Erstwhile healthy people collapsed on the street or at work. Some were dead in twenty-four hours. In Saskatoon there was a civic ban on all public meetings, the schools were closed and church services were cancelled indefinitely. Touring salesmen and touring theatre companies were stranded. The city was closed.

No one was exempt from this deadly disease; it caught the rich and poor, the good and bad alike.

(cont'd on page 16)

Wilhelm R. Wiebe 1870 - 1932, My Maternal Grandfather

by Bill Janzen, Ottawa, May 15, 2020

Wilhelm R. Wiebe died just before his first grandchild was born, but eventually there would be 122 grandchildren. A majority live in Canada, from Ontario to BC, but a good number live in Mexico, from Chihuahua to Campeche. A few live elsewhere. Some have died.

From time to time they have asked about their grandfather. Unfortunately, since he died so long ago, current knowledge about him is limited. However, I have now written up this story, relying on notes from conversations with my parents, on the several sources mentioned at the end, and on input from his other grandchildren who read an earlier draft of this story. I trust that it will help all of us who claim him as a forefather, as well as other interested people, to understand him and his time, even though there will have been much more to his life than is told here.

Wilhelm and Gertruda Wiebe, in their living room in Blumenheim around 1929

The parents of Wilhelm R. Wiebe were Jacob P. Wiebe (1840-1916) and Katharina, nee Rempel (1847-1926). Both were born in Ukraine, which at that time was often referred to as South Russia. Jacob P. Wiebe's parents were Peter Wiebe and Justina, nee Nowitsky. (Justina's father was Jewish.)

My uncle, Jacob B. Wiebe, when I visited him in Mexico in 1980, told me that his grandfather, Jacob P. Wiebe, had been very poor. Jacob P's father, Peter Wiebe, had died when he was fifteen, so he had begun working for others in the community. One job had involved running a flour mill. Farmers would bring their grain to the mill and he'd grind it into flour, that is, if there was enough wind to drive the mill. The uncertainty about the wind had always been an issue. When the wind would come, they'd hurry out and run the mill, never knowing when it might stop.

Jacob P. Wiebe married Katharina Rempel on June 17, 1869. The children came quickly: Wilhelm, born June 29, 1870, was the first. Anna, Katharina, and Jacob came next. In 1879, Jacob P. and Katharina and these four children, sailed for Canada. After reaching Quebec City on July 6, 1879, they got on a train and headed for Manitoba.

At that time this will have meant going through the USA. The railway from Ontario had not yet been built but one from Minnesota to Winnipeg opened in 1878.

The Wiebe family settled in the village of Schoendorf, near Morden, where they had three more children, Heinrich, Justina and Bernhard. Schoendorf was on the western edge of the Mennonite West Reserve. (The reserve system meant that the government had agreed to set aside townships for the exclusive settlement of these Mennonites.) Perhaps land was more readily available here on the edge of the reserve. But settling there also meant being closer to English speaking settlers with whom there were certain tensions relating to timber and water rights as well as bound ary issues. These are referred to in Henry A. Friesen's account, and in other sources.

Henry A. Friesen also says that the tax records of the Schoendorf village indicate that the Jacob P. Wiebes were poor.

Given these tensions and the poverty, it is understandable that the Jacob P. Wiebes sought a new home. Eventually they found one in Blumengart. Since this village had several Friesen families, it is not surprising that Wilhelm's sister, Anna, born in 1872, married a David Friesen (1870-1941) in 1892, and that some years later his sister Justina, born in 1886, married a Jacob Friesen (1884-1956),

who was related to David.

We do not know what work Wilhelm R. Wiebe did in the 1890s when he would have been in his twenties. We know from his later life that he was hard-working and gifted as a carpenter. Perhaps he used these gifts to support his parental family; after all, his parents were poor and he was the oldest child.

We also know that on June 6, 1892, he was baptized into the Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde, commonly called the Old Colony Mennonite Church, almost certainly by Aeltester Johann Wiebe.

Though the village of Blumengart may have been a better place for the Wiebes, it did not become their permanent home. During the 1890s, a number of the Mennonites in Manitoba became interested in settlement opportunities further west, in what was then the Northwest Territories (NWT). Indeed, in 1895, the Manitoba Old Colony Mennonite church arranged with the federal government to create another reserve in the Hague-Osler area of what, in 1905, would become Saskatchewan. People from the Wiebe family were not the first to move west but gradually they all did move.

(Interestingly, years later when many of the remaining people in Blumengart, Manitoba, moved to Mexico, it became the site of a Hutterite colony.)

The first member of the Wiebe family to move west was Wilhelm's sister Anna. The father of her husband, David Friesen, who was also a David Friesen (1839-1911), wanted to move to the Hague -Osler area, but he did not want to settle inside the new Mennonite reserve there. Instead, he, that is, David Friesen Sr. purchased land just south of the reserve. (The southern boundary of the reserve was where Renfrew school was built in 1919.) He purchased it from a railway company which will have acquired ownership of it in return for building railroads.

David Friesen Sr. then divided up the land he'd bought into smaller lots for individual farms. These would soon constitute the village of Blumenheim. A number of David Sr.'s children then settled there, including David Jr. and his wife Anna, (nee Wiebe). Reportedly, the fact that Blumenheim was established outside the reserve displeased the Old Colony Aeltester, Rev. Jacob Wiens.

The house and barn in Blumenheim, Saskatchewan, built by Grandfather Wilhelm in 1914

In all likelihood, Wilhelm will have been looking for land in order to start farming on his own. Now, with his sister Anna and her husband planning to move, it was more natural for him to move too. Fortunately, a quarter of land about a mile southwest of Blumenheim was available as a homestead. (That quarter would remain in the family for nearly a century.) By getting land on a homestead basis he did not have to purchase it.

But then, when Wilhelm wanted to build a more permanent house and barn, his sister Anna persuaded him to settle in the village of Blumenheim, on a lot near the east end, right next to where she and David Friesen Jr. were building their place. One good aspect of this location was that when he dug a well he found a plentiful supply of water. That well continued to serve for generations.

Wilhelm still had some interests back in Manitoba. According to my parents, he had noticed Gertruda Bueckert before he moved west. Gertruda was born in 1882, in Ukraine, and had only come to Manitoba in 1899. Her family, the Herman Bueckerts, had also settled in Blumengart.

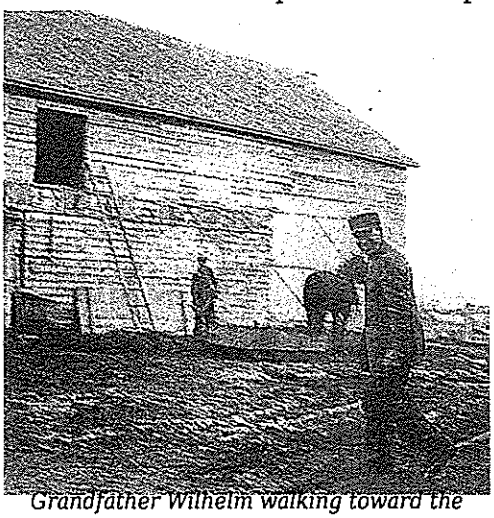
After Wilhelm moved west, he and Gertruda corresponded and he made several return visits. They were married in Manitoba on December 28, 1902, after the regular Sunday morning worship service as was common at that time. (Wilhelm's brother, Jacob R, would later marry Gertruda's sister, Maria.)

The morning after their wedding, Wilhelm and Gertruda were on the train heading west. They will have stepped off the train at Osler. Perhaps Wilhelm's brother-in-law, David Friesen Jr., met them at

the Osler station and took them by horse and sleigh to Blumenheim, where Wilhelm had a small house ready. Soon they had children: Jacob, born on September 9, 1903; Katharina, on February 12, 1905; and Herman on December 23, 1906. Ten more would follow. In addition, three boys died in infancy. Only Peter, born May 24, 1929, is still living.

The early years in Blumenheim will have been busy for Wilhelm. In addition to raising a large family, there was a great deal of farm work, including the basic work of breaking sod, seeding and harvesting, all done with horses. He also had to get milk cows as well as pigs and chickens. And having all these animals meant that he had to gather a good supply of feed for the winters. Further, various farm buildings had to be constructed. Getting supplies meant going by horse and wagon to town, the nearest one being Osler, ten kilometres away.

Also, a village school had to be built and run, meaning that the villagers had to find and pay a teacher. And there will have been various issues that had to be discussed and regulated, such as the common pasture and fire insurance. My parents once wrote: *"Wilhelm was a hard-working and diligent farmer, a good carpenter and a lover of horses. Before long he also became a community leader, one on whom others relied for many kinds of advice."* As for loving horses, reportedly they responded to his voice in exceptional ways, even for difficult backing-up manoeuvres.



Grandfather Wilhelm walking toward the barn, perhaps in the 1910s

In 1909, Grandfather Wilhelm built a large barn and in 1914, the year my mother, his sixth child, was born, he built a large house attached to the barn. The house was the first one in the area set on a cement foundation. Until then houses had been built on stones. In 2009, when my brother George and his wife, Lynette, moved into that house, they undertook various renovations. While doing so they found remarkable signs of beauty in the original woodwork. George came to see these as signs of love, as if "the house was Grandfather Wilhelm's love letter to his wife."

He also built a large clay furnace into the center of the house, with one section of the wall of the furnace being exposed into every room. That way the heat from the furnace would get into all parts of the house. My mother talked of how her father would sit by this furnace in winter evenings and put wood and bricks of dried cow dung into it as fuel. (Coal was not yet commonly available, nor was oil and natural gas, or modern insulation for the walls of the house.)

Preparing the cow dung was one of the summer jobs. The Wiebe children would have to stamp through the cow dung to give it an even texture. Then it would be pressed into bricks and left to dry. A picture of the press on Grandfather Wilhelm Wiebe's farm appears in the Doell book, p. 247.

Wilhelm's parents, Jacob P. and Katharina Wiebe, had also left Manitoba and moved west, perhaps in 1902 already, together with the three youngest children. But they settled in the Aberdeen area, on the east side of the South Saskatchewan River. Blumenheim was on the west side. Maybe land was more readily available on the east side. Also, it appears that their daughter, Katharina, and their son, Jacob R. Wiebe, had settled in that area. (Katharina had married a Heinrich Wiebe, and Jacob R. had married Maria Bueckert, a sister of Wilhelm's wife Gertruda.)

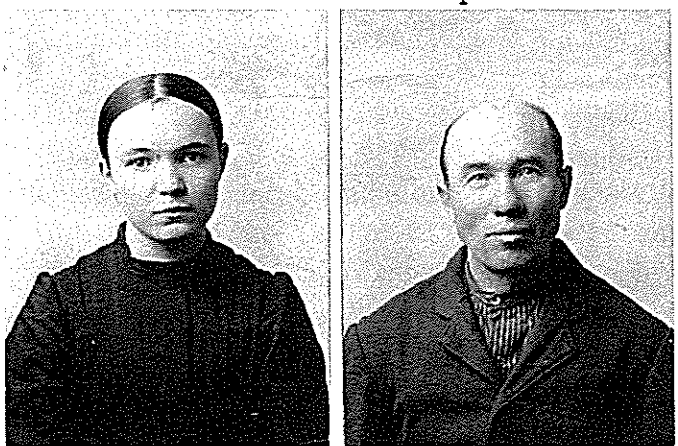
Jacob P. Wiebe did break sod and plant crops and build a small house in the Aberdeen area. But he was not really healthy. In 1903, he suffered a bad shoulder injury. By 1914, Jacob P. and Katharina Wiebe had moved to Blumenheim. It was here that Jacob P. died in 1916, in the newly built house of Wilhelm and Gertruda. (Reportedly, Grandfather Wilhelm's son Wilhelm, who was then only six years old, had wanted to show his grandfather, Jacob P. Wiebe, a picture of a horse that he had just drawn, only to be told that his grandfather had just died.) The widow of Jacob P, that is Katharina, who was Wilhelm's mother, lived another ten years. She

would stay with Wilhelm and Gertruda for a few weeks or months and then move on to one of her other children. She was known for doing a lot of knitting in these years. She died in the Aberdeen area.

In these years notable hardships came into Wilhelm's life, in addition to the responsibilities of being the eldest son of his widowed mother. One hardship was related to his daughter Katharina. In 1914, when she was nine she began to have sores on her right leg that festered and would not heal. The nearest doctor was in Warman. Some years ago I found a 1915 medical bill/receipt given to Grandfather Wilhelm by the doctor in Warman. The bill was for $25.00. It stated that he paid $15 in cash and $5 in butter and another $5 in eggs.

Later he took Katharina to a doctor in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, and eventually to Winnipeg where she was hospitalized for ten weeks. Grandfather Wilhelm stayed with her during this time. When my parents were still living, I found several letters in their closet that Grandfather Wilhelm had written to his wife and family in Blumenheim while he was with Katharina in Winnipeg. I recall that he spoke about Katharina's severe and ongoing pain.

Despite this substantial treatment effort in Winnipeg, Katharina's leg did not heal. The doctors then recommended that she be taken to a special clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. This would require finances; the family had already used what money they had and now, reportedly, they were not able to borrow enough to proceed. The medical costs for Katharina also meant that other improvements that Wilhelm had hoped to make had to be dropped. One was a water pump in the kitchen. They had begun to dig a well in the basement underneath the kitchen for this purpose but the idea had to be abandoned.



Katharina Wiebe and Grandfather Wilhelm, probably taken late 1910s to get passports when they hoped to go to Minnesota for medical treatment for Katharina's leg.

Also significant during these years were the deaths of two siblings. First was his brother, Jacob R., who lived in the Aberdeen area. He died in November, 1918, at the age of 41, of the Spanish Flu. His widow, Maria, who was a sister to Wilhelm's wife, Gertruda, was left with seven children. In February, 1920, she married a widower, Johan Klassen, who had eight children from a previous marriage.

The second sibling to die was Wilhelm's sister, Anna, wife of David Friesen Jr. She died in 1921, at 48, and left eleven children of whom eight were still at home. Four months later, her husband, David Friesen, married a widow, Katarina Janzen, who had ten children, of whom seven were still at home.

This meant that suddenly there were two large "blended" families, but according to my mother the children did not "blend" very well in either case. She talked about hardships that some of her cousins had faced; some of them had left home, even at the age of 16, and made their way in the world as best they could. Wilhelm will have worried about his nieces and nephews in these situations.

There was also the controversy about whether to send children to the new English language public schools that the government was building in the various Mennonite villages. Until now every village had had a church-run school, operating in the German language. My parents say that grandfather Wilhelm had favoured a compromise of half English and half German. His time in the hospitals with his daughter Katharina may well have convinced him that people needed some English. But it appears that neither the church nor the government was open to a compromise. To send one's children to the public schools could lead to a rejection by the church and community; not to do so could result in being fined, under a new provincial law. For several years, Wilhelm did pay these fines for some of his children, including my mother. But it appears that after the mid-1920s his children attended the English school, named Renfrew, that the government had built one mile north of Blumenheim.

Eventually, the school issue led to a migration to Mexico. At least a quarter of the Mennonites in that area moved in the 1920s. This included: Wilhelm's sister, Katharina, and her family; his wife's sister Sarah, whose husband, Jacob Peters, was a minister in the reserve at Swift Current; and even Wilhelm's son, Herman. Herman had recently been married and his wife's family moved, so he and his wife moved, too. Would Grandfather Wilhelm have taken his family to Mexico if they had not become poor due to Katharina's medical costs? We do not know, but these issues will have been very stressful for him, as they were for most people in these Mennonite villages. (His widow, Gertruda, and seven of his children, were in the smaller group that moved to Mexico in 1948-49, though some of them soon returned to Canada.)

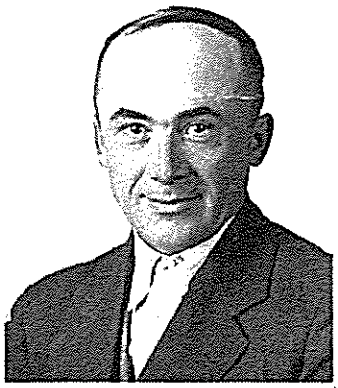
My general impression is that Grandfather Wilhelm R. Wiebe was intelligent, hard-working, devout, and that he had a sense of grace. To start that farm and construct those buildings required intelligence and courage. To work so hard to find a cure for Katharina's medical problems took a lot of determination. To have earned the respect of the community reflects generosity and wisdom. And the fine woodwork he did on the family home, and the way he loved horses and related to them, suggest a certain grace and a sense of beauty. (Several of his children had artistic inclinations.)

He was committed to the church and community. My mother said that he'd often pay above his allotted amount into the teachers' salary fund, so as to ensure that teachers would get their full salary. She also said that often on Sunday mornings he would fast, that is, he would not eat breakfast, because he wanted to feel a certain hunger when he went to church to worship God. But his support for the church was not uncritical. He was open to having his children learn English, in addition to German, and reportedly he wanted the church to have more activities for young people.

At times his readiness to help others may have gone too far. When farmers wanted to borrow money from the church-run Waisenamt, they needed guarantors. Thus, people would ask Grandfather Wilhelm to sign on as a guarantor. In one instance, when his health was already declining, grandmother had been so opposed to him signing that she'd tried to take the pen away from him, fearing that he might die and that she and the children would then be stuck with that other person's debt. Reportedly, grandmother's fears were borne out during the severe hardships of the 1930s.

As Grandfather Wilhelm's health declined in the late 1920s, he had several stays in a Saskatoon hospital, but he died in grandmother's care in Blumenheim, on December 3, 1932. My mother said that as the end neared they would hear her parents in their room praying and singing certain hymns. He was buried in the Blumenheim cemetery. His oldest son, Jacob B. Wiebe, then devoted his life to caring for the family, particularly his mother and his sister Katharina who, because of her leg, would always need extra support.

Notes on the siblings of Wilhelm R Wiebe, with information from Henry A. Friesen's account.



Uncle Jacob B Wiebe, probably taken to get a passport for his travels to Mexico in the late 1940s

Wilhelm married Gertruda Bueckert, as described above. Their 13 children, and 122 grandchildren are mentioned in the booklet, *The Life Story of Mrs. Gertruda Wiebe, 1882-1965*

Anna, (1872-1921) with her husband, David Friesen, had eleven children: Elizabeth married Peter Guenther and moved to Mexico in the 1920s; Maria married a David Janzen and moved to La Crete, AB; Heinrich had a store in Blumenheim until the 1960s; Herman, in Kronsthal, became the Old Colony Aeltester, but died tragically in 1969; others lived in the Blumenheim-Osler-Saskatoon area. Anna's son Jacob, had a son, Jacob, who became a missionary in Japan.

Katharina (1875-1947) married Heinrich Wiebe, a widower with two children. They settled in the Aberdeen area, had ten children, and moved to Mexico in the 1920s. In the 1950s, their son Peter was the leader in arranging for Mennonites from Mexico to settle in what is now Belize. Several of Katharina's children, including Peter, eventually returned to Canada.

In 1977, after Peter had become a widower, he married Aunt Elisabeth, the widow of Uncle Henry Wiebe, Grandfather Wilhelm's son. Peter and Elisabeth Wiebe lived in Hague. Katharina's son, Heinrich, also returned to Canada. Later, Heinrich's son, John, became a missionary in Colombia.

Jacob (1877-1918) married Maria Bueckert, a sister to Wilhelm's wife, Gertruda. They lived in the Aberdeen area and had seven children. My mother said Jacob was exceptionally hard-working, but he died in 1918 from the Spanish flu. Fifteen months later Maria married a widower, Johan P. Klassen, who had eight children. Maria and Johan had three more. Most of Jacob's children lived in Saskatchewan. One daughter settled in St. Catherine's, ON. Jacob's son, Jacob, served in the Canadian army.

Heinrich (1884-1960) married Helena Kroeker and lived in Neuhorst, north of Osler. They had eleven children. Their daughter, Maria, married a Heinrich Wall and they moved to Mexico in 1948 but returned a few years later. In the 1950s, four of Heinrich Wiebe's youngest children became active in the Rudnerweider-EMMC renewal movement. Bernhard became a missionary in Haiti and George in Mexico. Peter moved to BC. David was a teacher in Renfrew school in the 1960s and later in northern Canada.

Justina (1886-1954) married Jacob Friesen and had eleven children. They moved to a farm by Rosenhof near Swift Current in 1918. In the 1940s, a number of their children moved to Vanderhoof, BC. Justina and Jacob followed them in the early 1950s. Their oldest son, Jacob, became a minister in the Swift Current area. One daughter, Helena, married Cornelius Banman, and moved to Belize. Justina's son, Henry, is the father of Henry A. Friesen whose research has been very helpful to me in writing this story.

Bernhard (1887-1970) married Maria Petkau. Their one child died in infancy and they were not able to have more. Bernhard's moves took him from Manitoba, to the Aberdeen area of Sask., to Rosenhof near Swift Current, to Burns Lake, BC, and, in the 1950s, to Blumenheim, Sask. His wife kept a diary all her life but the day after her funeral it was cast into a fire, to my father's great disappointment.

Sources

1. *"Jacob Wiebe (1840-1916) and Katharina Rempel (1847-1926)"* a nine page document written by Henry A Friesen who now lives in Regina.

2. *"The Life Story of Mrs. Gertruda Wiebe, 1882-1965"* written by Abram and Gertrude Janzen, in 1998.

3. *"The Hague-Osler Mennonite Reserve, 1895-1995"* a 730 page volume, compiled by Leonard Doell and others, published in 1995.

4. *The Aeltester, Herman D. W. Friesen: A Mennonite Leader in Changing Times*, written by Bruce Guenther and published by the University of Regina Press in 2018.

BJ

The Spanish Flu (cont'd from page 10)

It affected almost every populated area of the world and is thought to have killed between 20 and 22 million people in just a few months.

The primary target for the influenza was the young adult, making the onslaught tragic, both in personal terms and in terms of the strength of the country, coming as it did right on the heels of so many deaths in that same age group during the war. One doctor noted that in many households he visited where there were three generations, he found the grandparents and the children doing well and the parents very ill.

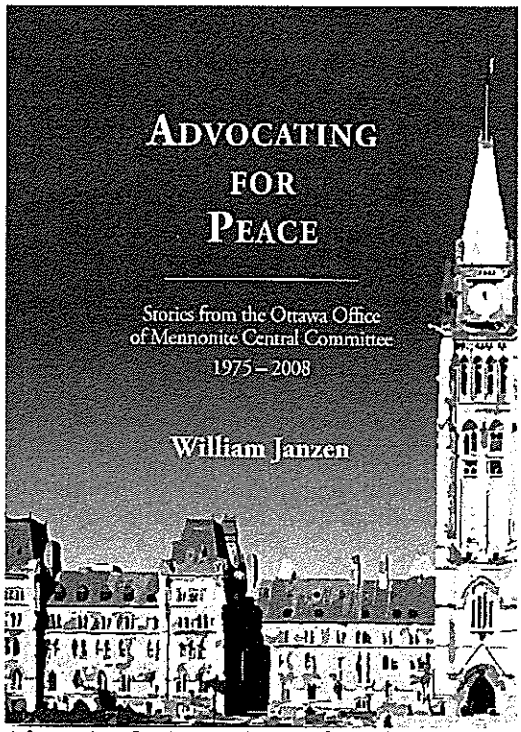
The flu began often like a cold, with a cough and stuffy nose, progressing to a dreadful ache that pervaded every joint and muscle, a fever that shot as high as 103 degrees and a marked inclination to stay in bed. If it stopped, the patient was usually back to normal in a week, but when it developed into pneumonia, the outlook was grave indead. With no antibiotics to rely on, doctors could only turn to their time honoured cures: rest, liquids and a lot of hope.

LD

(The whole article covers pages 333-338 and includes 2 1/2 pages of names of people who died in the Sask Valley).

Advocating for Peace: Stories from the Ottawa Office of Mennonite Central Committee, 1975 -2008 - by William Janzen. (Pub. Waterloo: Conrad Grebel College University College, in cooperation with the University of Waterloo, 2019). 170 pages. Soft cover. Non-fiction. - Book Review by Jake Buhler

When Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) set up an Ottawa office in 1975 to monitor government policy for both its Mennonite and Brethren in Christ constituencies, it employed William Janzen to carry out that role. The position would also advocate for MCC's national and international programs.



Advocating for Peace: Stories from the Ottawa Office Office of Mennonite Central Committee, 1975 -2008 - by William Janzen, Ottawa, ON.

Janzen was an appropriate candidate for the job from the start: he was the son of Abram Janzen from Blumenheim, Saskatchewan, who had served the Old Colony Mennonite Church well, in the Waisenamt, to advocate for the poor. William learned many lessons from his father.

Janzen would go on, after attending CMU, to study in Ottawa obtaining two masters degrees and a Ph. D. This made him the scholar that he is. But that is not what people remember him for; they remember his humble approach and his ability to understand complex issues, to empathize, and then to advocate.

The book is a collection of stories that Janzen tells, taken from 18 topics, from Capital Punishment to Abortion, and Amish Milk Cans to Palestine and Israel.

Janzen was integrally involved in the development of the 1979 Master Agreement that permitted the sponsorship of Indochinese refugees to Canada, by groups like MCC.

Some of his finest and most difficult work was to help Canada's Immigration Department work out various systems that would allow Old Colony Mennonites from Mexico to have rights to return to Canada. It is a complex matter, which our own Leonard Doell and Dick Braun have worked on.

This reviewer's work in Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and North Korea over more than two decades was influenced by the work of William Janzen.

Members of Parliament and Senators, ranging from (small c) conservative to (small l) liberal persuasions, sought Janzen out for his counsel on issues. When the Canadian Senate honored William Janzen in 2019, Senator Peter Harder said of him, "You have been pivotal in making Canada the inclusive and compassionate country it has become...you are a nation builder."

For people who want to read about what effective advocacy is about with a New Testament grounding, they should read *Advocating for Peace*.

The book can be purchased from MHSS for $28.00. Contact Susan Braun at 306 239 4201.

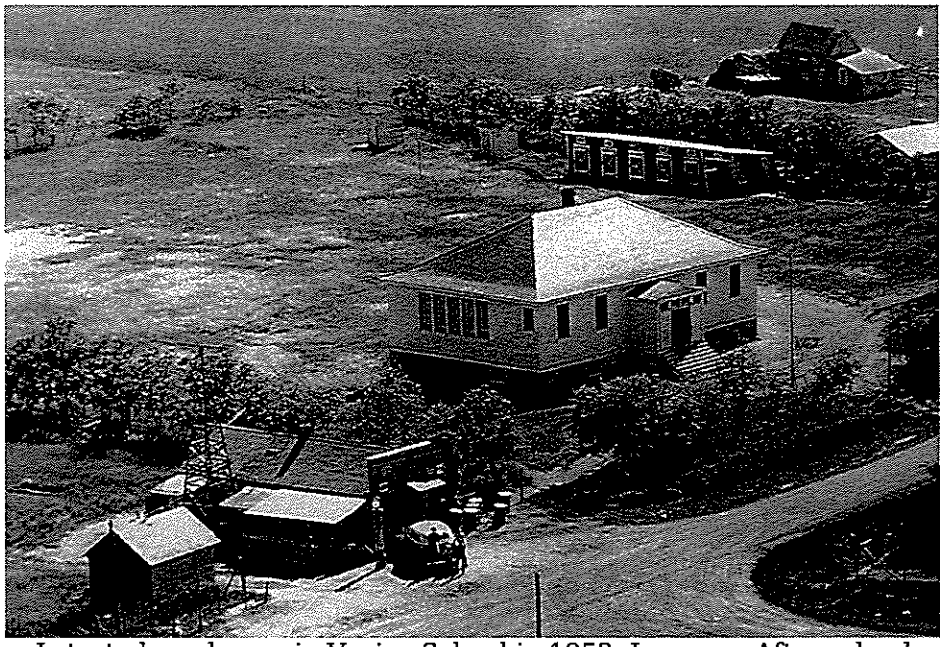
JB

ARE SPECIAL EVENTS Happening After All...?

Many annual events are cancelled or on hold. If you should hear of events of interest to Mennonites, that are happening after all - perhaps on a different date, may I suggest that you let me, or one of the Board members know?

The fastest way we can notify people in our Mennonite readership is to send out an ***E-Updates email.*** Unfortunately, that doesn't reach those who don't have electronic devices or email, or are not subscribed to our (free) mailing list. Still it will get the word out to about 300 people.

I, Ruth Friesen, the editor, am the one who sends out the E-Updates so you also may phone or email me with such information. 306-956-7785



VENICE SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 4117

by Erna Loewen-Rudgers

Harold Loewen adds to his sister's memories by interviewing **John Berg** about his memories - and then, adds his own memories from the last years the Venice School was open.

I started grade one in Venice School in 1952. I did not know a word of English. Neither did any of the other students in grade one. Almost immediately I learned the rule; no German must be spoken on the school grounds. It was enforced so strongly, sometimes with slaps of a ruler on the hand, that I was sure it was a rule in schools all over Canada.

I was quite a lot older when I finally realized that German and English were not the only languages in the world and that Mennonite was not the only church.

It was a very big school with two large rooms and two teachers! Grades one to four were in the junior room and five to eight in the senior room. A large hallway separated the rooms.

In the hallway was a water fountain and monitors were assigned to keep it filled from a well outside.

A doorway led to the basement, a rather dusty, scary place which was used by the teachers to store things and for corporal punishment of students.

One student always got into trouble and was punished often. During one of those times he padded his behind and bit the teacher in the leg while he was being strapped. It was a story often retold.

Another doorway led to the living quarters of the junior room home. As I recall, those teachers were always single. I was intrigued. How could a teacher live in a school?

After school we raced with the other children to Miller's Store, just outside of the school grounds. That is where our dads parked. They gathered in the store and visited while waiting for the students to be let out of school.

One day we did not see dad's truck. He was not sitting on one of the barrels in the store, either. Mr. Miller said he did not know where our dad was. Christina and I went back to the school, we sat on the front steps and waited. Dad would get us. He always did.

Much later, the junior room teacher, Miss Erica Dyck, came outside to dust the chalk brushes and saw us sitting there with our lunch kits in our laps.

She invited us into her place behind that closed door in the hallway. That was exciting even though we still worried that something had happened to our dad.

There was only one room but it was beautiful. Pictures of exotic places decorated the wall, a bright patchwork quilt covered the bed on one side of the room, a small table covered by a lace tablecloth and two wooden chairs were on the other side. In the corner was a wood stove. We sat on the bed and she gave each of us a cookie and a glass of milk. I needed to use the bathroom and because it was already dark outside, Miss Dyck lit a lantern and walked with us.

It was a long walk from the school to the toilets which were also used by the students. I wondered if

Miss Dyck was ever scared to live alone in that big school and walk to the toilets in the dark. But I was afraid to ask her.

When dad finally came to pick us up, I had fallen asleep on that patchwork quilt and dad carried me to the truck.

At recess we could play outside; hide and seek, tag or dodge ball in the younger grades, softball in the older grades in the summer, football in the winter. Sometimes the big girls from the senior room would come and play with us. That was really exciting. But when the teacher stood on the steps and rang the bell, everyone, young and old, ran inside.

There was always a long line-up at the water fountain when it was hot outside. But when the senior room teacher opened the door and told us to get back to our seats, we all ran.

We did not call them bullies in those days. They were just big mean boys and girls. There were two boys that liked to fight during the lunch hour when no teachers were supervising. The rest of us would watch as they beat each other up. Some people cheered. Christina and I always kept as far from the fight as possible.

The older boys loved teasing those in lower grades, often picking on the weakest, making them do things they did not want to do, say things they did not want to say, take punishments they did not deserve.

The mean girls were different. They did not have physical fights. A strong leader would have her 'gang' of followers do as she directed. She always picked on the weak ones who would be called names, be the brunt of bad jokes and false rumours and be left out of games. Because girls were afraid of being the next victim, they were easily manipulated by their leader. And because there was no supervision during recess or lunchtime, the mean boys and girls thrived and ruled.

Teachers also treated some students unfairly. There was only the schoolboard, made up of three men, to put a stop to their behaviour if it became too outrageous.

Some of the students lived in Blumenthal, a small village near the school. It still exists today. Those students walked to school year round. They could even go home for lunch.

Others, like us, lived on farms some distance from the school. In the winter snow drifts would block the roads and horse and sleigh became the means of transport.

When we were old enough to go by ourselves, we made a fire in the little stove in the sleigh and a horse pulled our sleigh the 2 1/2 miles to the school. There we put the horse into the barn behind the

Back row: (L-R) Loewen boy, Abe Zacharias, Peter Klassen, Teacher: Mr. Dave Friesen, Wilfred Loewen, Jake Ens.
2nd row: (L-R) Harder girl, Margaret Berg, Mary Unruh, Mary Wall, Susan Fehr, Helen Peters, Mary Klassen, Nettie Miller.
3rd row:(L-R) Mary Loewen, Susie Fehr, Ann or Tina Giesbrecht, Tina Zacharias, Mary Thiessen, Mary Peters, Justina Fehr, Margaret Harder, Tina Peters.
Front row: (L-R) Miller boy, Corny or Dave Unruh, Klassen boy, Jake Braun, ? , Dave Fehr.

school during the day, with hay to munch on.

All students in the entire school were loaded onto the back of several pick-ups and we were taken to the Warman Sports Day towards the end of June. The wind whipped through our hair as we jostled to keep our footing.

Schools in the area competed in ball games, races, high jump, broad jump and many other sports events.

More exciting was the school picnic at the end of each school year. Dad would give us 25 cents to spend on anything we wanted. I remember getting a soft drink, an ice-cream cone and a chocolate bar with that money.

At the picnic we ran different races; three legged races, sack races and regular races. We played ball and just generally enjoyed ourselves. One year my mom and dad ran in a three-legged race. Mr. and Mrs. Heinbigner were ahead of them, but Mr. Heinbigner kept looking back to see if my parents were gaining. He lost his footing and my parents ran by them and won; everyone cheered.

But I think for me the most exciting time was Christmas. About two weeks before Christmas, the stage was set up in the senior room, desks were shoved into the hallway and into the junior room and the real practice for the Christmas songs and plays began. I loved that time because we had no lessons but often I became very bored hearing the same songs and plays during those constant rehearsals.

But it was a magical evening when the time came to perform those plays, those songs, those poems. Dressed in our new clothes, we lined up in front of so many parents sitting on those benches, staring up at us, smiling encouragement.

Afterwards we would each get a paper bag filled with peanuts, candies, a box of Cracker Jacks and an orange. On the way home mom and dad would tell us how much they enjoyed the program and how well we had done our part.

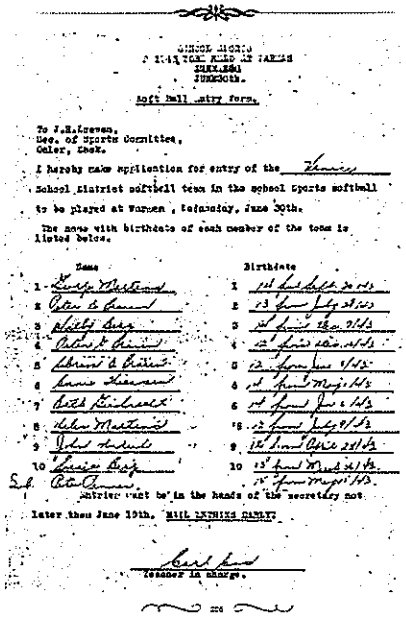
Those years seem very long ago now and some of the memories have dimmed with age. But there are those memories that will stay forever with me. Memories of a different time, my childhood.

* * *

EL-R

The champs of 1946; the only year they won the trophy!

Top (L-R) Carl Ens
Ann Braun, Helen Harder,
Ann Fehr, Peter Braun,
? , Henry Martens,
Henry Unruh,Henry Berg,
Bill Thiessen, Frank Zacharias.



[Form (right) is enlarged & printed below]

SCHOOL SPORTS

June ? , 1943, TO BE HELD AT WARMAN

JUNE 30TH.

Soft Ball Entry Form

To J. H. Loewen,
Sec. of Sports Committee,
Osler, Sask.

I hereby make application for entry of the Venice School District softball team in the school Sports softball to be played at Warman, Wednesday, June 30th.

The name with birthdate of each member of the team is

listed below.

Name	Birthdate
1. George Martens	1 14 from Sept 30/43
2. Peter B. Braun	2 13 from July 29/43
3. Willy Berg	3 14 from Dec. 7/43
4. Peter G. Braun	4 12 from Dec. 12/43
5. Abram B. Braun	5 12 from June 9/43
6. Annie Thiessen	6 14 from May 1/43
7. Bill Giesbrecht	7 14 from Jan 6/43
8. Helen Martens	8 12 from July 9/43
9. John Unruh	9 12 from Apr 25/43
10. Susie Berg	10 13 from Mar 26/43
sub. Pete Penner	15 from May 15/43

Entries must be in the hands of the Secretary no later than June 19.

MAIL ENTRIES EARLY!

Carl Ens

Teacher in charge

John Berg Remembers Venice School

I (Harold) talked to John Berg about his experiences at Venice school. John was born in 1937 and started school in September 1944.

John attended Venice school for all his schooling. (See the back cover for a photo of all the students one year).

John's parents lived 3.5 miles from school. He had Carl Ens as a teacher from grades 5-8 and his wife, Genevieve Ens, Mrs. Froese, Dick Friesen from Rosthern, and Dick Epp, for his grade 1-4 years. He indicated that Dick Epp was a really good teacher, (he had no favorites), unlike some of the other teachers. Some of the teachers lived in the teacherage; Carl Ens and others lived in the school.

Ed Hildebrandt, a teacher at the school always walked to Hague in the evening and to school in the morning. He also remembered one teacher coming to school with a snow plane.

John remembers playing sports in school and playing football and winning against Hague. He stated that although they did use a horse and buggy in summer and a caboose in winter, in winter their father often drove the children, four sisters and John, to school and picked them up in the evening.

In school some teachers had pets. John was part of a group with John Bartsch, and John Penner; they were not the teachers' pets. This group did get into trouble and was at times threatened with a strap. On one occasion, John, with support of his two friends, hid the strap, and he did not get caught.

One of his memories was of a trip home from Hague in a terrible storm. The horses lost the tracks and his father said, "John find the tracks." He did, and they made it to Blumenthal where they stayed at Frank Zacharias's for night. The next day John walked home from Blumenthal. His mother and sister were home and had done the chores.

Sometimes the youth in the school split wood to heat the school. John cut a train car of wood for the school, and got $7, with which he bought a jacket.

Farmers often grazed cattle in the ditches. When John would walk home from school he had to walk past Heinbigner's cows and their Holstein bull. He had to be very careful when walking past the bull.

At home, his family had 15 cows; they milked 13 cows by hand and everyone had to milk. They shipped cream, and had pigs and chickens. Every year they butchered 2 pigs and sold a few. They had 2 horses and used a tractor on the field, a John Deere. It pulled a 4.5 foot one-way, and it took 2 days to work 30 acres.

John summarized going to Venice school as generally a good time. He also stated that growing up on the farm was a good experience. His father liked farming, and John also enjoyed it.

JB/HL

My Memories of Venice School the Last Years Before it Closed (1961 to 1967)

by Harold Loewen

I'm thinking about my experiences in the Venice school. It was a two-room school, grades one to four in one class; grades five to eight in the other class. I attended Venice school for grades one to six.

I have memories of the favorite maple tree that we played around at recess, the soccer games on the west side of the school, no matter what the weather. The hockey rink was on the south side of the school; we would lace up our skates even if only for a 15 minute recess. The baseball games were

against Pembroke school, or Gruenthal school.

When I started school I did not speak English or Low German (the other children mostly spoke Low German). I spoke High German; I could understand English but was not all that good at speaking English. For example: I was questioned about an incident and asked if it was on purpose. I was adamant that it was not on purpose. That was because I thought that "on purpose" was on the east side of the school, and the incident occurred on the west side of the school.

Other memories from school include a teacher from Manitoba who changed her last name to Mrs. Zacharias, a teacher who took kids onto her lap if needed. One time she threatened to spank me. (I was really scared; must have had it coming.) The fear was also that if I got in trouble at school, I would get into even more trouble at home. I remember a classroom in which I was the only boy, so I always played with boys from other grades.

Another teacher was Miss (Eva) Neudorf, (my uncle's sister), who came over sometimes in the evenings.

In grades 5 and 6 our teacher was Mr. Harms, who had unique teaching methods. He would ask you to come to the front of the class and put his arm around you and ask questions.

I went through a period when I really hated school. I acted sick and tried everything to avoid going to school. My parents saw right through it and I did not get to stay home one day.

I never did catch on to the new math that Mr. Harms taught.

When Mr. Harms was injured in an accident in the United States, a substitute teacher, Mr. Bullyah, came to Venice School. He had unique ways of keeping order in the classroom. (Everyone was good at ducking their heads, trying to get out of the way when he snapped his fingers at you.)

I'll always remember the transportation to and from school, when in the lower grades; it involved a horse and stone boat. On Saturdays this was what we used to get manure out of the barn; in winter during the week this was how we got to school. My memories are of us three brothers sitting on a bale placed on the stone boat. My oldest brother handled the reins sitting on one side, and I, being the youngest sat in the middle, and my other brother sat on the other side of the bale.

We also went to school with a horse and buggy. One time my brother and I were sitting in the back with our legs dangling over the end of the buggy. The buggy slowed down and stopped. We looked around to the front, and the horse was way down the road running home. We walked home.

The main mode of transportation I remember was the two-wheeled cart with a "Diestel." This was one pole on each side of the horse, attached to the harness. Many an exciting trip home was had on the cart. Nancy, our horse, would spy an empty beer carton or bottle in the ditch, (no shortage of those in our area). She would react in terror, running sideways and trying to get into a wild gallop. My brother Dan, usually controlled her, so it did not get out of hand, but was still exciting.

However, he was not always successful. At these times Nancy would gallop into the ditch. The straps for the Diestel would either break or come off its bindings and the back of the cart would be hitting the ground, with the Diestel way up in the air. We would, of course, fall off the back, and Nancy would run in sheer terror with that two-wheeled cart behind her, with the arms (poles) in the air, hitting her rump every so often, until the harness would break, and then she would run home. We would walk home.

On very cold days in winter we went to school or evening programs with the horse and caboose. My brother made a mixture of diesel and sawdust so he could light the little wood stove quickly.

The reins went through their own holes in the front of the caboose right under the window, the jingle of the harness as the horse pulled the caboose, the smell of the horse, and the warmth in the caboose. Getting to school was an experience.

I attended Venice right until it closed in 1967.

Many Saskatchewan residents gained a basic education in this environment. The one/two room schools were closed when vehicles became the main mode of transportation. Prior to this, the schools had to be close together because the means of getting to school were slow, often involved walking or taking a horse.

40 Years Ago Canada Got Something Right!

by Victor G. Wiebe

Forty years ago the Saskatchewan government, through its Crown Corporation, SEDCO (Saskatchewan Economic Development Corporation), and the Canadian government, through its Crown Corporation, Eldorado Nuclear, desired to make its uranium refinery home on nine quarter sections of beautiful productive Saskatchewan Valley farm land near the town of Warman.

The Canadian federal government asked everyone in Canada through its Environmental Assessment Panel if this was a good plan. The Panel hearings were on the 8 to 24 January, 1980, and 336 people appeared, plus written submissions. Then the Panel published its Report[i].

The Panel's Report No. 13 gives prominent place to quotations from submissions given by ordinary Saskatchewan people. Here are three of those quotations:

1. From a dairy farmer:

I am hoping our farm will be handed on to the third generation in good condition, where pure milk and uncontaminated grain will continue to be produced. But who wants to saddle the future generations with the leftovers of the uranium refinery? I don't! I believe this is one legacy that our future generations do not wish to have passed on to them. (*Kathy Boldt, Report p.16*)

2. From a housewife:

Finally, my final question is: given the information that I as a Mennonite share the views of many of the individuals that have spoken at these hearings; given the fact that I live within a mile of the site, and given the fact that I am deeply committed to the protection, preservation and beautification of the river banks and valley of the South Saskatchewan River, and given the fact that vigilance is not my idea of freedom, could Eldorado please give me one way in which their refinery would improve my living space, my health, my relationship with people, my moral and ethical beliefs, my cultural ties, and the prairie agricultural landscape that I enjoy? (*Louise Buhler, Report p.16*)

3. From a construction worker:

If a refinery was built here it would stand as a symbol of destruction to our people for generations to come. (*Leonard Doell, Report p.39*)

What did the Panel recommend and what did Canada do?

The Panel stated "...***that the potential impacts on the community were too important to be ignored.***" Canada through Eldorado Nuclear Ltd and the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources, accepted the Panel decision and abandoned the project entirely.

Sometimes it is worth remembering that through words and prayers from us ordinary people we can help Canada to do things right!.

(i) Eldorado Environmental Assessment Panel [John S. Klenavic, chairman.] Eldorado Uranium Refinery R.M. of Corman Park, Saskatchewan: Report of the Environmental Assessment Panel. Ottawa, Ontario. Federal Environmental Assessment Review Office, No. 13. 1980.

VGW

Reflecting on the Spanish Flu (1918) and the Current COVID Pandemic of 2020

[Victor and Erna Wiebe walked through a cemetery at Bethany Church, Lost River SK, and were moved to see the graves of nine children who died from the Flu of 1918.]

As a historian it is important to note words, objects, and markers from the past. Cemeteries are an important place for these reasons. Importantly, they remind us of the communities, their faith and also limits to life.

Today many people and communities are coping with our 2020 plague and we should be recording it for future generations. Saskatchewan has been blessed with few deaths and our current cemeteries are not places where it is recorded. Though these are times of trouble, I have hope, for: *The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusts in him, and he helps me. My heart leaps for joy, and with my song I praise him.* (Psalm 28:7) VGW

U. S. Draft Dodgers Perform Unplanned Alternative Service

by Verner Friesen

(as told by Goldie Horne Friesen)

When the United States entered the First World War in 1917, two Horne brothers were among a number of American Mennonites who decided to avoid the military draft and head north to Canada. The Hornes were from Oklahoma, each of the brothers was married, and one couple had a two-year old son. The five of them travelled by car and tented along the way. Their destination was the Mennonite community of Tiefengrund in Saskatchewan. They were aware of this community through relatives, but likely did not personally know anyone there.

They travelled for almost two weeks before arriving in Tiefengrund. It was a cool autumn evening when they pitched their tent just south of the Tiefengrund church on property of the Peter P. Neufelds. The Neufelds saw them and invited them to come out of the cold into their warm home for the night. Learning who these strangers were, where they were from, and why they had come, meant finding a temporary home for them.

Fortunately, Mrs. Eliese Neufeld was aware that her brother and family, the C. W. Regiers, had just moved into their new house. The Regier family, upon settling on their homestead, had built a barn first and arranged for temporary living quarters in one corner of the new barn. Now the living quarters in the barn were available, and the two Horne families were very pleased to be offered this accommodation.

So it happened that as the Horne families had settled in the Tiefengrund community, the Spanish Flu (so-called) hit this community. Many families were affected; some families experienced severe illness. A 13-year girl, the only daughter of the Peter P. Neufeld family, died of this flu in November of 1918.

The severely affected families needed help to do the daily farm chores.

Through the providence of God, the Horne brothers remained healthy, were available and called upon to do the chores for a number of the farm families. In lieu of serving in the military, they performed some much-needed alternative service on the farms in the Tiefengrund community.

When the war ended in the fall of 1918, the Horne families returned to Oklahoma, surely grateful that they had been able to give something back to the community in return for the gracious hospitality extended to them during their stay.

VF

Pacifist Mennonite Experiences World War II

by Verner Friesen

Colin Friesen was born in 1922 and grew up in the Laird, Sask., community. His father, Abraham, was for many years the postmaster in Laird. His mother, Eliese, was a daughter of Rev. Abraham and Margarete (Regier) Friesen of the Tiefengrund community.

As World War II broke out a number of the Mennonite young men, and a few women too, from the Laird community felt it was their duty to their country to enlist in the Armed Forces. Colin Friesen enlisted in the Air Force.

Following is an abbreviated version of Colin's account of some of his experiences during the last weeks of the war. He also opens up on the guilt feelings he lived with as a result of having been involved with so many destructive bombing raids. (From the Laird and District History Book, 2007, used by permission)

Operation "Faust," the Allied food drop and convoy in the last days of World War II saved thousands of lives in the most populated area of the Netherlands. They were on the brink of starvation.

As Pilot Officer Bombardier in No. 150 Squadron of British Bomber Command our crew had completed about twenty-six bombing missions, and we were relieved to be called upon, together with a number of other crews, to join Operation "Faust."

The first food drop mission we flew was on April 29 and took us over The Hague. Our second food drop was just a day later, also over The Hague, and by that time word must have spread that we were coming, because we could see hosts of people gathered on the ground, and from the one thousand foot altitude at which we were flying, we almost felt we could hear their shouts of welcome. As the missions

went on, we saw that every barn over which we flew had painted on its roof the words, "Thank you, Canadians". We found this very touching because, up till then, we were people involved in a process of destruction. I was so relieved that I no longer had to be destructive.

In the spring of 2005 my wife and I holidayed in Portugal. On the first afternoon we were sitting on the terrace of a beautiful estate in the town of Sintra.

We were both attempting to get into our novels when a couple approached us and said they wished to make our acquaintance since they were staying at the same hotel. After mutual introductions, I asked the gentleman, whose name was Eli Asser, where he came from. He told me that all his life he had been living in Holland. Upon hearing this and realizing that he was about my age, I asked whether he was there when food parcels were dropped in 1945.

His response was amazing - he showed me how he had raised his hands in order to catch the food parcels.

As our conversation developed, we learned how in 1943, he and the girl who subsequently became his wife had escaped as the Nazis were rounding up medical staff and patients from an asylum to take to the gas chamber.

We agreed to dine together that evening in a nearby restaurant. I do not remember the dinner but what I do recall was our fellowship.

As we left the restaurant we walked down the cobblestone road to our accommodation. I looked at Eli and said, "All my life I have carried with me a guilt complex - you see I am a Mennonite and therefore also a pacifist and being destructive has bothered me."

He looked at me for a moment, put his arm around my waist and said, "Colin, I don't want you to feel that way; you saved my life and the lives of many others like me."

That night in bed I reflected on what had happened that day and wondered how it was possible that, after all these many years, Eli and I should have met.

I decided it was not just a coincidence but our meeting had been guided by a higher power. It was difficult for me to go to sleep that night, but I do recall a tear running down my cheek, and then I fell asleep.

CF

A School Christmas Concert, circa December 23,1953, at Osler School, Osler, SK

by Jake Buhler

What Actually Happened at This Long-Anticipated Event Two Nights Before Christmas?

Always first were the grade ones and twos who did the Christmas Acrostic. Margaret was first and she boldly held out the "C." "C is for the Christ child, born that morn so long ago," she said crisply. The concert was off to a fine start.

Harold was next, and during practice, he had had some difficulties with his line which was simply, "H is for King Herod who slew the Hebrew boys." Harold looked confident. "H is for King Herold who slew the Hebrew boys," he offered unsteadily, as giggles followed. The R, I, S, and T went off well. But Peter had traded his "M" letter with Tena's "S", and before Miss Janzen could correct the mistake, the final word boldly spelled C-H-R-I-S-T-S-A-M. For some time after that, Peter was called Sam.

The grades 3 and 4 pupils were next and had practiced their choreographed Santa Claus drill for weeks. But before the program began, the red and white crepe paper uniforms were fitted onto the pupils. All of us looked wonderful. We were ready. Miss Janzen put the needle arm onto the record player, and the March music started from the 78 rpm disc. I was a 4th grader and led half the boys in the parade. Henry was the other leader, and the other half followed him. After the first routine all looked well. But in the second routine, Bob stepped on Henry's foot which brought down his pant costume. But he continued on bravely. In the next crossover, Harry hooked Henry's Santa coat, and it tore away and then dragged behind him. After the last routine Henry was totally without a Santa suit. But as we lined up for the bow, Henry got the loudest cheer of all as he nervously held fast to his Santa Toque, fearing it might yet come off.

The senior students did the dramas. In one play there was a very poor boy who was wandering in the village on Christmas Eve without proper clothing. He was hungry, with no Christmas presents. Someone noticed the orphan boy and invited him inside. As he entered, a voice said, "Come in and warm yourself here by the fireplace." It seemed to me that every year there was a drama where someone was invited inside to warm themselves by the warm fireplace which was made of red and brown crepe paper. Next, the poor orphan boy was asked to take a gift from the stocking above the fireplace. The stocking idea was strange to me because in our home we had bowls or *Kommen*. And then the orphan was given food, and everyone was happy.

The Choir then sang, "Here we come a wassailing, among the leaves so green." No one said what "wassailing" meant but I found out later that it meant, "singing, or caroling."

Eleanor read the Christmas story from the Bible. She read well, especially the part about the angels telling the shepherds not to be afraid. I thought about the angels and wondered about them being real or not. We had figured out earlier that Santa Clauses were made-up people. But as there were no Santas in the Bible, we figured the angels must have been real.

There was a recitation where all the lines rhymed, but I cannot recall what the subject was all about. Words like Isaiah, and the Messiah, and the Christ-child were part of the poem. My cousin, Edna, recited it from memory.

Mr. Neufeld, the senior room teacher, then announced that we would sing "Joy to the World," while Santa was unhitching his sleigh outside the two-room school. And sure enough, in came Santa Claus, who we could see was really Mr. Wieler; he was the board chairman. He was carrying a *Radna Sack* as was Mr. J.C. Giesbrecht who managed the McCabe's Elevator and was the local black-smith. They called out "Ho Ho Ho" before they opened the two sacks containing dozens of brown bags of goodies. I remember so clearly that the bags contained peanuts, a Jap Orange, a big 10 cent chocolate bar, possibly some *Stroohnaeten* that were really almonds, or some hazel nuts that we knew as *Hausselnaeten*, and even a few large nuts that we called *nigger toes* (see note #2 below). We did not know that they were really Brazil nuts. And there were a few sweet hard candies.

Then we put on our overshoes and parkas and woolen mittens and walked home. Mother and Dad, Irvin, Ruth, Wilf, and 2 year-old Benny. The warm breath created white frost build-up on our woolen scarves.

There were stars out that night, and I could easily make out several constellations that my older brother Leo had pointed out to me earlier. I wondered if the North Star was the one that had stopped over Bethlehem. No one had ever told me which star it had been.

As I walked home, I felt so good because Christmas morning was just two sleeps away. I had a feeling inside of me that I could not express. A feeling that something special was happening and I never wanted it to go away.

As we turned off the dirt road and walked over a snowbank through our garden, I remembered a poem we had studied. I liked the opening lines: "I walked on a snowbank that squeaked like leather, or two wooden spoons that you rub together."

What had gone on behind the scenes to make a country school concert possible?

Preparation for the Osler School Concert was quite an undertaking. In the second week of December, the senior room of the two-room school belonging to Osler S.D. #1238, was readied for the concert. The school board had made arrangements with Irvin Abrams of the Monarch Lumber Yard, that he would loan out 16-foot planks that would serve as the stage for the concert. The older boys were sent to collect the planks. Saw-horses were collected on which the planks were placed. Someone toe-nailed the planks together. A wire was fastened onto hooks that had been put there when the new school was built in 1949. From the storage room came blue curtains that had come from the WW2 training airport half a mile east of the school. They had been curtains in the classroom where pilots had been trained. Bill and Reg were the curtain openers and closers. Sometimes after they had closed the curtains they would peek through the curtains and make a face at us.

As a 4th grade pupil I imagined the classroom to be huge. It contained the stage, and benches made of planks so that all the parents could be seated. The pupils sat in the front rows or waited in the junior room for their parts in the concert.

In the two weeks before the concert was held, there were no classes, or very few classes. We were practicing. When we were not practicing, we could do as we pleased.

Some of us read from that big grey box that held the most welcome of all books that we called the Traveling Library Box. It came from Regina.

Some of us did spool-knitting. Garry Guenther and I were accomplished knitters each doing more than a hundred feet one year. These were made into rugs. My father made my spool-knitter by carefully nailing 4 finish nails into one of Mother's spent sewing machine spools.

.....

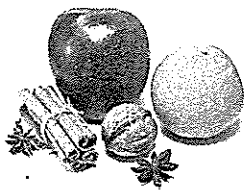
C: Notes

• The term, *Jap Orange*, today is totally unacceptable. Jap was a derogatory name used by victorious troops in Japan after 1945. Oranges from Japan, were called Jap oranges.

• When I was a young child, we did not know the name for the Brazil nut. We called that nut a *nigger toe*, a most unacceptable word. The term is so abhorrent, that I hesitated to use it. But it was part of my past. That term was used throughout North America. By 1960, that kind of language had almost totally disappeared in Canada.

• In our recollection of how things "used to" be, the events usually occurred when we were between the ages of 7 and 17 or so. These are our formative years and the memories from that time are indelibly etched in our brains.

JB



Meet Elva Braun, a Volunteer at the MHSS Archives

Elva and her husband, Jack, are retired and live in Bethany Manor after living in Saskatoon, Regina, Hepburn, and now back in Saskatoon. They have three daughters, 10 grandchildren, and two great-grandchildren.

Jack worked with the Public School Board, and Elva worked in the church office of the Parliament Community Church. During their years in Regina they also went to Sao Paulo, Brazil, and worked at the Pan American Christian Academy for missionary children and other international students.

Presently, though retired, Elva also volunteers with the seniors at their current church, West Portal MB Church in Saskatoon.

Elva enjoys coming down into the Archives to look after certain tasks, and is available to help out wherever and whenever needed.

Her main responsibilities involve cataloguing the Serials. That includes published magazines and newsletters. If they are taken out to read or study, she returns them to their proper places. Elva also files the Mennonite history, community and family history books that come in, donated or purchased by the Archives. She first enters them in the computer catalogue. Our archives has one long shelving unit full of these books where they are noticed as soon as someone enters the archives. (Many researchers are looking for exactly these resouces).

Elva is experienced in doing research in the GRANDMA database which has over a million names on the archives computer. If someone is wanting to research their own family genealogy and they have some names and dates for their ancestors, she can look them up for them. She can print out charts for them, also.

If someone emails or phones in to ask questions in this line, she will take down notes and research for them as well. But since this can take some time, they may have to wait for her to email or phone them back, perhaps a week or two later. *RMF*

Memoirs of Peter J. Braun (Written in early 1970s)

(a Great-uncle of Alan Hildebrand, of Rural Osler, SK)
(Edited/submitted by Laura Hildebrand)

It's been nearly a century since my grandparents, their family, and some neighbours with their families, decided to leave the old country of southern Russia and strike out for Canada. Travel was somewhat primitive but after a hazardous three-week trip across the Atlantic followed by land travel and another boat, they finally landed on the banks of the Red River at Emerson, Manitoba in July, 1875.

Peter is the boy in the centre

After securing supplies and means of travel (a horse and an ox hitched together, while those who could walk, did so), they pitched tents where Canada Customs is now located. They built sod shacks and dug in for the winter. Conditions must have been rather discouraging, considering the tall grass and mosquitoes, because the following spring one of the men slung his spade over his shoulder and set out on foot northwest until he reached what looked like a suitable spot to probe for well water. He was successful in this venture and returned to share the good news.

Subsequently, the entire group moved to this new location and that was the birth of the village of Osterwick. (Laura's Note: The group moved a distance of 35 miles. Today it is a well-established village.)

According to my dictionary, the definition of an early settler is: "Thus, a pioneer; one who goes before, preparing the way for others to follow." I might also add, "One who goes before, never looking back."

My father's family, the Brauns, consisted of five sons and four daughters, aged 2 to 20 years. All were sturdy individuals, and as rural life would necessitate, they could tackle any chore indoors or out as the need arose. Early education in private schools was rather limited and my father was very eager to learn the language of the land, so he hired himself out to English-speaking neighbours to pick up the local vernacular. He was quite succcessful in learning to communicate in English.

On my mother's side, the Hoeppner family consisted of five sons and two daughters. They were very serious minded in their approach to life, as well as shrewd and honest. This family settled near the village of Waldheim, which has nearly disappeared by now. The distance between Osterwick and Waldheim was only about 5 miles, allowing for plenty of social interaction. Before long there were several intermarriages between these two families, including that of my parents.

My parents were Johan and Anna Braun (nee Hoeppner). They were blessed with five daughters (one of whom passed on at the early age of 10) and two sons, myself included. Having four older sisters might explain why I wore dresses until I became of school-age. Surely mother hadn't hoped for another girl! Despite being hand-me-downs, they were comfortable and convenient. However, I was completely ignored by boys my own age.

Grandpa Braun was a very efficient farmer. He was also a blacksmith with no mean ability. My father was also a smithy, but his abilities were less expert. In fact, when he sharpened plough shares for our own use, they rarely fit, and his custom work was such that his customers rarely returned.

Choosing to look on the positive side, my father took satisfaction in knowing that at least his plough shares remained sharp! Logical reasoning.

My parents' first attempt at farming on their own was on the NW quarter of Sec. 11-2-5, comprised primarily of heavily-textured gumbo soil. It was so solid that it was well suited for striking bricks. Working this land always required extra horsepower which was not readily available at that time. Needless to say, their first venture did not prove successful. Later they purchased a portion of the SE quarter of Sec. 16-2-5 which was made up of light sandy soil with gravel and rocks thrown in for good measure.

It wasn't long before the N half section of 10-2-5, situated just southeast of Section 16-2-5, became available. The owner at the time was Mr. Edward Wiebe who had purchased this piece from the original homesteader, Mr. James Stodders. His name was synonymous with the early name of the district, Stodderville. Later, when the school district became established, it became known as Glencross, named for Glencross, Scotland, from which the early group of settlers in the Pembina Hills originated.

The buildings were situated on a rather high ridge with no protection during winter storms. It was not really an ideal place to settle, but this homestead became my birthplace and home. My early recollections, albeit vague, are of a log house, a large log granary, and a barn of board construction with a hayloft, lean-to's, etc.

The log house had a wooden floor – quite unusual at the time – and an attic which served as sleeping quarters. There weren't any other conveniences, but our home did serve as the Glencross Post Office and it was included in a weekly delivery route from Morden to Wakeham or Haskett. Of course, the volume of mail wasn't nearly what it is today. All currency was sent by registered mail, which meant that loose coins had to be pasted onto cardboard before sending – a practice that was carried out for many years. The rate of postage was 2 cents for letters and 1 cent for cards, quite a contrast with today's prices. This postal service was discontinued around 1907 when the Midland Railway was extended to Morden from Fargo, North Dakota, providing daily service from Morden to Haskett. Our district thus became known as Glencross via Morden.

Because our homestead was heavily surrounded by bush and trees, with a large ravine to the immediate south, very dark nights felt eerie. It was on these nights that numerous coyotes, running rampant, held powwows of yapping and howling that were spine chilling. I remember the feeling of panic and wanting to run away but having nowhere to go. Our family dog felt the same way and begged to be allowed indoors, scratching and whimpering at the door. My mother would always allow him in and he'd dive under the nearest bed. There was nothing for me to do but duck in after him. Only the strong and the brave dared to venture outdoors those nights.

The log buildings were ideal for insects and bugs - frequent inhabitants due to a lack of screen doors and windows. Those pesky flies came in an assortment of sizes - house flies, little flies, barn flies, nose flies, bull flies and face flies that were constant companions in the summer months. The mosquitoes at night were enough to take the joy out of living.

Although I do not recollect seeing bison roam the prairies, nor do I recall oxen hitched to Red River carts or covered wagons, there were plenty of horses and buggies. The two-horse team was quite common and four-horse teams – either abreast or tandem – were necessary for heavier field work.

Signs of agricultural progress slowly became evident. The first of the early farming implements that I remember was the very popular two-furrow gang plough which no farmer could be without. It was comprised of three wheels, each of a different size. The landside wheel was the large one and the front furrow wheel was the medium one, while the rear furrow wheel was the smallest. Should they ever decide to squeak simultaneously, it created quite a loud and interesting mix! This reliable tool was usually pulled by four horses, if soil conditions allowed, and it was very durable and efficient.

The first semi-modern seed drill with dust-proof bearings was something else. It was very efficient for a day or two, but by that time dust had worked its way into the bearings, resulting in the discs seizing. The farmer had to remove the discs, clean out the dust and fill them with oil before he could resume. This is what was meant by "dust proof."

The first self-propelled power was of the steam variety. It was very reliable and durable but cumbersome to operate, gradually giving way to the early oil and gas tractors. These early tractors tended to be monsters with drive wheels up to 7 ft high and weight that made them so clumsy they were unsuitable for fieldwork. A positive feature was that they were guaranteed for life. However, I was unsure as to whether that meant my life or the tractor's, however, because it tended to die when you turned it off for the night, and had to be revived in the morning.

I began attending Glencross School at the age of

6 – it was an old stone structure built during the late 1890s's. My first teacher was the late Mr. John R. Walkof, who was approximately 17 years old at the time. He taught for many years and became well known and remembered by many.

Some of the family names of my classmates were Schultz, Fehr, Harder, Zade, Hoeppner, Brown, Shaventoski, Warkentin, Wall, Boyle, Boehlig, Neufeld, Thornton, Miller, and Willie Blag. Despite being such a diverse group, there was no discrimination. Well... hardly any... some... very little... nothing worth mentioning... After all, we were all born equal, but some were born more equal than others. It was quite possible to pick up a nickname or two which could be damaging to one's pride and good character.

Life and living conditions in the early 1900s were rather humble and low-key. A day's work in which to earn your daily bread extended from sun-up to sundown, with several hours added at each end. But the desire to get ahead was uppermost in the minds of early pioneers and every effort was put forth to achieve this.

By the time I approached my teen years, conditions had improved to some degree, especially in the way of travel. By then I had seen my first horseless carriage, known as an auto buggy. It had buggy wheels with solid rubber tires, no windshield, and a centrally located steering wheel. I am not certain about the power train and cubic inch displacement, but the speed range was approximately 8 to 10 mph. This vehicle was owned and operated by my uncle, Mr. J. J. Loewen, a local businessman and the only uncle not directly involved in agriculture.

With prosperity just around the corner, clothing styles underwent a noticeable change and a new look became evident such as boys' knee pants giving way to long pants and ladies' dresses shortened from floor length to mini (but not as mini as today's style). High button shoes gave way to high heels and large floral hats were converted to pillboxes. Those floral hats were certainly very pretty to behold.

About the time that everybody was ready to sing *"Good Times Are Just Around The Corner,"* disaster struck in the years 1914-18 with the First World War, followed by the Spanish flu pandemic in the late fall and winter of 1919. These events left empty chairs in many homes, and in some cases, entire families were wiped out.

The Roaring 20s followed and young people were singing again. This time it was *"Happy Days Are Here Again," "You Are My Sunshine," "Redwing,"* and many others. The older generation hummed such favourites as *"Home on the Range," "When You and I Were Young,"* and *"Home Sweet Home."*

The after-effects of the war meant inflation and a drastic upswing in markets unlike anything we had ever experienced. Wheat was selling for as much as $2.05/bushel with a final payment of $.48. Flax was selling for $5.00/bushel with speculation that it would eventually reach $7.50. It didn't happen. Markets began to drop steadily so that by the end of the 1920s we had reached bottom and financial disaster along with it. The Dirty Thirties had also arrived, bringing drought, dust, grasshoppers, grief, sweat, toil, and tears, and nobody was singing anymore. These conditions continued until the late 1930s, when conditions began to improve gradually.

From very humble beginnings 40 years prior, our parents had acquired 1600 acres of farmland as well as real estate in town. More importantly, I am pleased to say that our grandparents, parents, uncles, and aunts all contributed to the betterment of Stanley Municipality and to the community as a whole.

My father, interested in public affairs and education at the local level, had the pleasure of serving as councillor of Stanley Municipality around 1909, as well as trustee and chairman of Glencross School District for many years. Following retirement, he served as mayor of the (then) village of Winkler but after some years he returned to the farm, serving as reeve of Stanley RM for a period in the 30s.

Many more memories come to mind as I reminisce of the good old days and their ups and downs, I would rather dwell on the good memories. However, if asked whether I'd care to relive those years, making some improvements the second time around, the answer would be "no."

PJB/LH

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

Annual Meeting - January 2020

***Participants at the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada 2020 AGM**, Camp Peniel, Quebec. Left-right: Gary Dyck, Richard Lougheed, Richard Thiessen, Henry Paetkau, Jeremy Wiebe, Jon Isaak, Selenna Wolf, Conrad Stoesz, Andrea Dyck, John Reddekopp, Laureen Harder-Gissing, Brian Froese, Jake Buhler, Ted Regehr, Lucille Marr, Barb Draper, Alf Redekopp, Linda Klassen, Cheryl Isaac and Royden Loewen.*

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) met in Quebec on Jan. 17 and 18, 2020 and discussed several new projects, including a history book of Mennonites in Canada since 1970 and a cross-Canada celebration of the centenary of the arrival of Russian Mennonites in 2023.

Building on MHSC's November 2018 history conference "A People of Diversity: Mennonites in Canada Since 1970," the Society invited Brian Froese and Laureen Harder-Gissing to co-author a book on Mennonites in Canada from 1970-2010. Froese teaches history at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, and Harder-Gissing is Archivist-Librarian at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo.

Plans are proceeding for the Russlaender Centenary project. The main feature of the commemoration is a cross-Canada train trip in 2023, beginning in Quebec City with stops and events planned across the country. Participants can choose to be on all or any of the segments of the journey, or be involved when the travelers arrive in their part of the country.

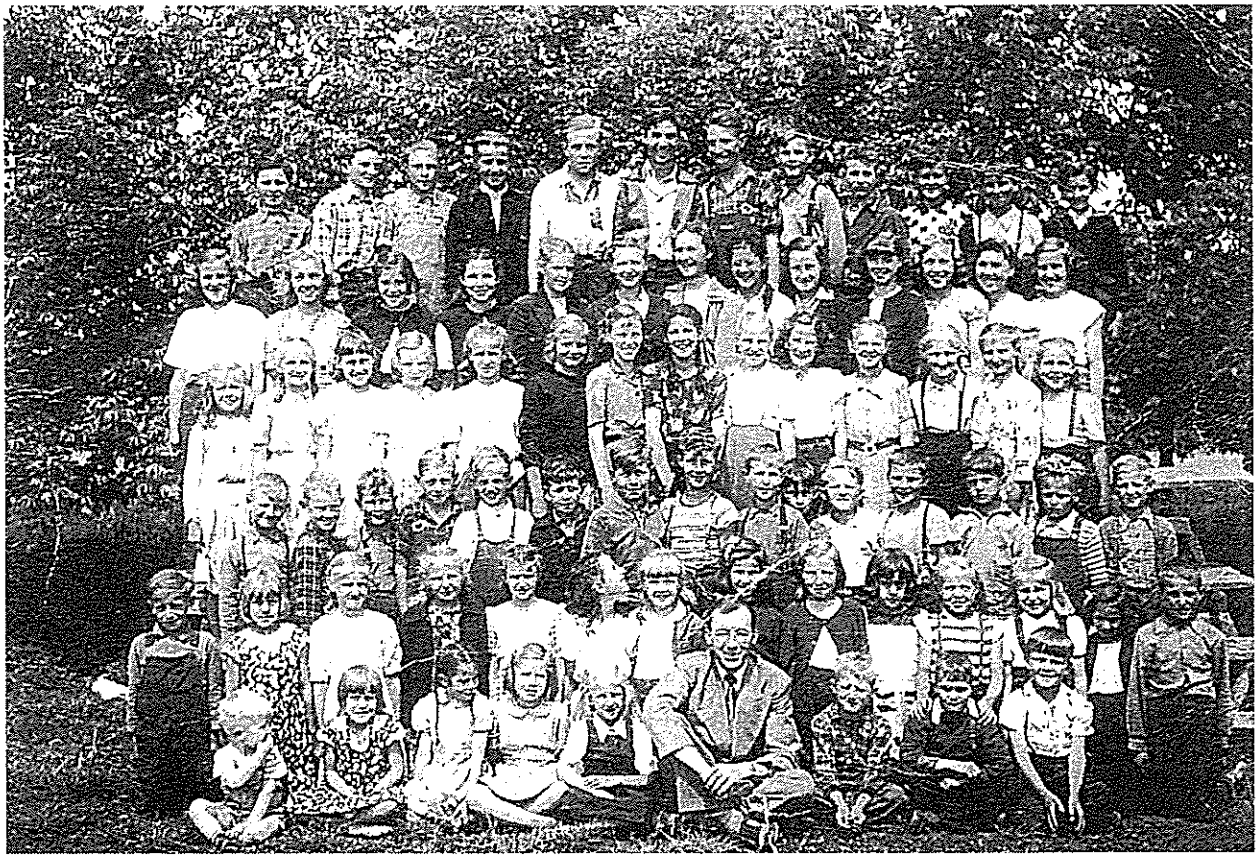
MHSC also chose to recognize the migration of Mennonites from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in 1922, the largest ever emigration from Canada. Events, exhibits and a conference are planned for 2022.

This year the MHSC award of excellence was presented to Lucille Marr in recognition of her contribution in research, writing and teaching about Mennonites and Brethren in Christ in Canada, her work on the executive of the MHSC and her role in the founding and ongoing work of the Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec.

The Mennnonite Historical Society of Canada brings together representatives of Mennonite institutions, archives and provincial historical societies to learn from each other and plan projects together. The Gobal Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) and the Mennonite Archival Image Database (MAID) are two projects that have come out of MHSC providing excellent resources and dealing with the history of Mennonites in Canada. Upcoming conferences include *"MCC at 100: Mennonites, Service and the Humanitarian Impulse"* to be held in Winnipeg Oct. 23-24, 2020 and *"Mennonite-Indigenous Encounters in Time and Place"* in Waterloo in May, 2021.

The MHSC annual meeting in January 2020 was hosted by the Société d'histoire Mennonite du Québec at Camp Peniel north of Montreal. The camp in the Laurentians is owned by the Mennonite Brethren churches of Quebec. MHSC members participated in the "Great Winter Warm-Up," Mennonite Central Committee's comforter project by knotting a prepared comforter.

The new executive of MHSC includes: Laureen Harder-Gissing, president; Conrad Stoesz, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer, Barb Draper, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, member-at-large.



This is a photo of both Venice School classrooms. We do not know the year, or names of the students. If you recognize yourself or others in the photo, would you let us know? This will help us to file it away with real names for future reference. We believe the teacher (sitting centre front) is Mr. ..... ?

Websites

MHSS: mhss.sk.ca

Cemeteries: *mhss.sk.ca/cemeteries/*

Mennonite Encyclopedia Online: (GAMEO)
gameo.org/news/mennonite-encylopedia-online

E-Updates Ezine (announcements email):
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You are cordially invited to send in feedback, news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc., to be considered for publication. The editor is willing to help polish it up so it looks professional. See contact info to the right. -->

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