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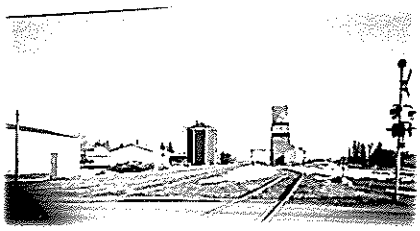
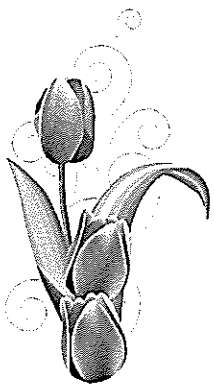


Features & Articles



Saskatchewan Mennonites and the Spanish Flu of 1918-19

by Leonard Doell

An Overview

The present coronavirus COVID19 pandemic has been a catalyst for people searching to understand more about how pandemics and epidemics of the past have impacted people. It is an opportunity to learn from stories of the past about how individuals and communities, including faith communities like Mennonites, survived and responded to the crises around them. This paper shares some stories of how Saskatchewan Mennonites experienced and responded to the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, which contain some interesting parallels to our present situation.

When World War One came to an end on November 11, 1918, a new war had already begun in Saskatchewan. This was the war against the deadly Spanish Influenza. The saying, "After war comes the Plague" held true in this case. [1] The flu epidemic came in three waves: in the spring and in the fall of 1918, and finally, in the spring of 1919. Saskatchewan was hardest hit in the fall of 1918.

(cont'd page 4)

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Readers are invited to submit news items, stories, articles, photographs, church histories, etc., to MHSS at the email or street address below.

MHSS Office and Archives:
110 La Ronge Road, Room 900
Saskatoon, SK S7K 7H8
Email: mhss@sasktel.net

The Editor's Perspective

Ruth Marlene Friesen

I was delighted for the good feedback on the *Historian* when our members sent in their votes for the Annual General meeting - which was handled by mail this year. Thank you for encouraging us with such kind words!

I think you'll enjoy this issue too. Leonard Doell has done an excellent job of giving us a thorough overview of how the Spanish Flu of 1918 affected our Mennonite communites in our Saskatchewan Valley. He has also provided a number of photos. You are bound to recognize some, and maybe someone from your family is among them.

My Mom told me she was to be a Christmas baby, but was born a month early because her mother had just had the Spanish Flu. Mom had no end of health issues all the rest of her life. Yet the stories Leonard tells of what many other families suffered was all new to me.

Barry Teichroeb sent in an article about his ancestor Jacob Hanseveger, an early reformer in the Anabaptist history. When I saw the deVeer name in his article I had to look it up. Wow! The GRANDMA database shows that he is also in my Fehr/De Veer ancestoral line. This may be true for you too, if you are a Fehr with a line going back to the 1500s where the surnames were mostly de Veer.

I think I've mentioned that my plan this year is to rebuild all my old websites. I got to my genealogy site in February. Doing the webpages over only took two weeks, but up-dating my genealogy (so I can provide up-to-date charts and e-books from my site), has taken me six weeks so far and I'm not done yet!

In the last issue I wrote about admiring Katherina (Reimer) Neudorf-Dyck as a result of translating her daily diaries, for her love of reading and books. Do you recall I couldn't find my photo of her? Gladys Christensen emailed me a copy that she said I had given her some years ago!

I'll tuck it into a gap in this issue so you can meet Katharina too. (Okay, she looks like a strong and stern Mama; but remember she loved to read!)

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

John Reddekopp

On January 15th and 16th Jake Buhler and I attended the annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. MHSS, along with Mennonite historical societies from other provinces, and various other organizations is part of this.

When I say we attended I of course mean that we did so in our current context. We were sitting at home and seeing people from various parts of Canada but they were on our computer screens since the meeting was being held via Zoom. This was much different from when we attended the same meeting a year ago. Then we met with the same group of people in-person at a Mennonite Brethren camp in the Laurentian Mountains in Quebec.

Next year our society is scheduled to host this event. What will that look like?

At this point the plan is that this will be an in-person meeting but that will be revisited with the executive from MHSC in September and at that time, depending on what the situation is with the pandemic, it may be decided that it should be another virtual meeting.

Our board feels that it is important to maintain contact with the members of our society which has certainly been a challenge in the past year.

The **AGM** is typically held in the first weekend in March. That, of course, did not happen this year. We still prepared the Annual Meeting Report Booklets as we have done other years. These were mailed out to all our society members. We also included ballots for members to vote on motions proposed by the board.

We thank you the membership for the kind and encouraging comments and for voting and submitting the ballots along with a number of donations!

We had a quorum of members who voted and this resulted in all of the motions being passed. Although most organizations have hosted many ZOOM meetings, we recently held our first one.

On March 3rd we hosted a book launch. Aldred Neufeldt currently lives in Toronto but grew up in Saskatchewan. He describes his growing up years in the Northern part of our province in his book Horse Lake Chronicles.

More than fifty people tuned in for his presentation and judging by the feedback it was thoroughly enjoyed.

In the last issue of *The Historian*, Ken Bechtel wrote a review of this book. In case you don't have a copy of the book, it is for sale on our website.

I wish all of you a happy and healthy spring!

JR

This is the **Katharina (Reimer) Neudorf - Dyck**, I mentioned in the last issue of 2020. I got to know her fairly well when I translated her diaries. She was a very disciplined, organized housewife and hostess, often with the house full of guests. But she took time to read books and German newspapers.

Ruth Friesen (editor)

1927

A young couple with their little boy left their home, family and friends in Russia and came to Canada. They were expecting their second child. They too had a dream.

Only six weeks after their arrival the husband took sick and died. He was 28 years old. The wife gave birth to a second son. She had to go work leaving her children with her mother-in-law. She scrubbed floors, walls, and did laundry, and sewed for other people. It was tough going – living in an abandoned store, with apple boxes for a table and chairs.

This young wife was my Mother.

Maria Funk Schultz Neudorf
(born Oct 18, 1905 – died June 28, 1970)

cont'd from page 1. . .

Maureen Lux observed that, "The influenza spread like wildfire. People were seized by a sudden weakness, headaches pain, fever and a chill, like cold water running down a back. Erstwhile healthy people collapsed on the street or at work. Some were dead in 24 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." (2)

Eileen Pettigrew describes the disease in this way: "No one was exempt from this deadly disease: it caught the rich and poor and good and bad alike. 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." (3)

She continues: "The primary target for the influenza epidemic 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 in the same 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." (4)

She describes the symptoms thus: "The flu often began like a cold, with a cough and a stuffy nose, progressing to a dreadful ache that pervaded every joint and muscle, a fever that shot as high as 104 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 indeed. With no antibiotics to rely on, doctors could only turn to their time-honored cures: rest, liquids and lots of hope." (5)

Mennonites Experience the Flu

The Spanish Flu did not enter the lives of Mennonite people in a vacuum. It was one more event at this time in history that created significant hardship for Mennonite people, in addition to the numerous other things that were happening. World War One had created a big strain between Mennonites and the Government, as well as with their neighbors. Mennonite Church leaders were constantly trying to affirm the Conscientious Objector status for their young men to help them avoid military service. There was also intense pressure for Mennonites to purchase Victory Bonds, which they finally did when they were assured that their contributions would go towards alleviating suffering rather than abetting the war machine. A group of Mennonites moved to Saskatchewan (mainly Eigenheim) from the USA to avoid the military draft; Hutterites also came to Canada at this time. Old Colony, Bergthaler and Sommerfelder Mennonites were being prosecuted through fines and jail sentences for not sending their children to English Public Schools. The flu came at the end of the harvest season, when many workers on threshing crews became sick, which impacted their work and income. Despite all these challenges, there are many stories of compassion, love, care and resilience that are part of this larger story.

In 1918, the Mennonite population in Saskatchewan consisted of pockets of settlers in rural areas. There were two Mennonite Reservations that had the bulk of the Mennonite population; one was the Hague-Osler Reserve stretching from Warman to Rosthern, including Aberdeen; the second was the Swift Current Reserve, with lands south of Swift Current extending to Wymark, including Dunelm. Other Mennonite concentrations included: Herbert, Rush Lake, and Waldeck; Drake and Guernsey; Borden, Great Deer and Arelee; Carrot River and Lost River; Dalmeny, Langham and Hepburn; and the Laird and Waldheim area. Very few Mennonites, if any, had moved into the cities by this time.

Swift Current Sommerfelder Aeltester David Derksen and his wife Maria (nee Friesen). He was ordained as minister in 1909. Between December 1910 and January 1911, they lost 5 children in a span of 13 days due to a diphtheria epidemic. In June of 1911, he was ordained Aeltester of the church. His life experience helped him in extending love and compassion to his flock during the 1918 flu epidemic.

The Annual report of the Saskatchewan Department of Public Health for 1919-20, says that: "Here were 3,906 deaths that occurred in Saskatchewan during the period of October-December 1918.... an additional 1,010 deaths occurred in 1919-1920, as it spread mainly northward. The largest number of deaths were between 20-40 years of age and 59% who died were males, 50% of the deaths occurred in November 1918, twenty months before the epidemic was completely overcome." (6)

Mennonites were particularly hard hit because they tended to live in tight knit communities and had large families. This made it easier to pass along the disease to others. But the positive side is that they were also available to help one another in times of crisis. The flu arrived in the fall, which was the end of the harvest season and the season of social gatherings like pig butchering. It was also the time for celebrating communion in church, which was done with a common cup. It was also the Christmas season and the time for extended family gatherings.

I went through the Old Colony Mennonite and Bergthaler Mennonite Church registers from the Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve, that included the Aberdeen area. I looked for the number of deaths that occurred during the three months of October, November and December 1918 but did not include deaths into January 1919 and beyond. In total, there were 92 people who died during this time, which is one person per day in those three months. I assume that not all of those deaths were the result of the flu, but out of those 92 deaths, at least 76 took place in the month of November at a rate of 2.5 deaths per day. The average age of death was 19 years of age. The majority were young, and single males and females were affected in the same ratio, but they included many young mothers and fathers, who died leaving small children behind. What is not clear is why certain Mennonite villages and certain families were hit harder than others. These statistics do not include Mennonites from other Churches who lived in the area, or non-Mennonite deaths in the local area and towns.

The community of Rosthern was hit by the flu in the middle of October in 1918. The Rosthern Enterprise (predecessor to the Saskatchewan Valley News) reported on October 17, 1918, that the first victim of the flu in Rosthern was a man who had recently returned from Winnipeg, where he contracted the disease. The following week, the paper reported that the Rosthern School had been closed on Octo-ber 23. On October 31, 1918, it reported that there were 150 cases of the flu in the district and that the first death had occurred, namely Henry H. Kinzel. By November, all business places, churches and the school were closed down. While the school was closed down, it was used as a temporary hospital, the front rooms being used for wards for the sick, while the north room was a temporary morgue. (97)

Rev. Jacob and Helena (Guenther) Penner. Rev. Penner was a Bergthaler Church minister who died of the Flu on 23 February 1919. He left behind his wife and seven young children, the youngest being seven months old.

Rev. Gerhard Epp (Conference Mennonite Minister) visited many sick and dying people during this time. In his diary of 1918, he records that he visited the school that had been converted into the hospital on 12 November 1918: There was a large room with two rows of beds where all the severely sick lay, a very sad sight! In one room he found John Janzen from Rosengart who lay on his bed struggling for breath. He recognized Rev. Epp and said to him "I know that I have a Saviour," He died later that evening.

Johan Janzen, a husband and father of a young growing family, died of the Flu in the makeshift hospital in the Rosthern School. He was from the Old Colony village of Rosengard, west of Hague.

The next day John Janzen's brother David came and sought advice from Rev. Epp regarding a funeral for his brother. The funeral was held on November 15th in the home of John Janzen's parents, Abram and Aganetha Janzen at Rosengart. Both of the senior parents were sick in bed as well as other children. Rev. Epp conducted the funeral and John Janzen was buried in the Eigenheim Cemetery, west of Rosthern. (8)

Later H.T. Klaassen wrote: Rev. Epp became very ill during this flu period as a result of which he died in April 1919. He was missed very much by his family and also the church. (9)

In his history of the Eigenheim Mennonite Church, Walter Klaassen talks about the helpful role of the church and in particular Rev. Gerhard Epp during this time. Rev. Epp walked through the immediate neighborhood of the church to minister to the sick in every household. His daughters Judith and Helena assisted in caring for the ill in several homes and then also became ill. In Friedensfeld, where four members of one family died within one week, a trio of men made themselves responsible for dealing with the unprecedented emergency amongst their own people but also among their non-Mennonite neighbors. Johan Andres made the caskets, Bernard A. Friesen arranged for the funerals and minister Johan A. Dueck comforted the sick and dying and saw those who died to the grave. They did many funerals together, remembers Helen Friesen Letkeman. The Eigenheim community seems to have been spared the worst ravages of the epidemic.

Especially touching, continues Klaassen, is the story of the Gabriel family who lived a mile south of the church but were not Mennonite. Mrs. Gabriel had given birth to a baby on November 7th and came down with the flu soon after. Johan Epp did the chores for the family for several days after all the family became ill. Gerhard Epp and his wife gave many hours of help and so did their daughters Judith and Helena, who sat with the sick through the long nights. In the afternoon of November 18th, Mrs. Gabriel died. The Epps took the two youngest children to care for them. Jacob Gabriel tried to carry on but a year later on December 28th, the news broke in the community that he had been found dead on his bed. It was rumored that he had been murdered with poison. But on January 7, 1920, Herman Roth reported finding a note by Gabriel tucked in a book which read that he had himself taken the poison and no one else should be blamed for his death. Jacob Gabriel too was a victim of the great epidemic. The influenza epidemic provided dramatic evidence of how people in the community rallied to help each other as well as their non-Mennonite neighbors at risk to their own lives. Many other examples could be given as well (10)

In his book *Education with a Plus*, author Frank H. Epp recounts how in 1918, the Spanish Flu hit Rosthern and the German English Academy, now RJC. The school was closed for three weeks and the local public school was turned into a hospital. Many people died in Rosthern including one Academy student. One family lost 4 family members in one night and Rev. David Toews was kept busy conducting funerals. Soon he himself was exhausted and confined to bed with the flu. In the turmoil someone's neglect of the Academy furnace resulted in frozen and broken pipes. For one month, classes were conducted in the Mennonite Church, since parts for the furnace had to be brought in from Winnipeg. (11)

On 28 November 1918, the Rosthern Enterprise reported that the emergency hospital located in the public school was closed and had vacated its patients. "The hospital has done its duty, it is creditable to Rosthern that it was opened up and no doubt been the means of fighting the cloud of anxiety off the minds of quite a number, where all or practically all were sick in a home. To all those who volunteered to assist in any ways and those who were instrumental in opening up, a hearty vote of thanks is due from the town and district. The school building has been fumigated and disinfected and it is expected to open again on Monday."(12)

In Waldheim, when the flu broke out, the school was also converted into a hospital. The local hotel was also used to house people. Helene Warkentin said that her parents and family stayed in the hotel and her Father died there of the flu. They had as many as three coffins there at one time with the dead in them, standing in the lobby and waiting for burial. (13)

Communities Respond to the Epidemic

The Henry H. Dyck family moved from Corn, Oklahoma to Waldheim as a result of the USA going to war. They moved by train during the month of October, - everything seemed so strange. "In Waldheim stood a large hotel with about 30 rooms and we moved into several of these rooms on the 2nd floor. We lived there for about three weeks during that time. There were so many people in there who were sick with the flu and many died. Our family was spared of this illness." (14)

The Langham Town History reports that: At a special meeting of the Langham Town Council held on 20 October 1918, in view of the epidemic of Influenza, the council moved that schools, churches and poolroom be closed until further notice. (15) It goes on to say that the school ended up being closed for over three months. (16)

It adds, It was in the fall of 1918 that two tragic deaths came to the Peter C. Epp family. First on November 19th, after being ill for a few days, an illness marked by a high fever, coughing and severe aching, the youngest son, Diedrich Epp died in the prime of his youth, at the age of 18. It was almost more than his parents could bear. Then 5 days later, their married daughter Katherine Wheeler died of the same flu at the age of 32, after a few days of illness. She left behind her husband George Wheeler and 8 young children. Peter C. Epp purchased one of the first plots in the Langham Cemetery and therein laid to rest these two young members of his family. It was a very sad time indeed, but God was with them in their time of bereavement. (17)

In 1904 and 1905, Mennonites from Kansas and Oklahoma came to Saskatchewan to settle in the Drake area. In 1906 they formed the North Star Mennonite Church. The flu hit this community hard and many became ill and sometimes whole families at one point. At the height of the epidemic all the public meetings were forbidden by law and consequently the church was closed. At one point a brief funeral service was held outside the church for three members. Six church members died of the flu. (18)

In Search of Yesteryears reports that, in the spring of 1918, Henry and Katherina Peters with most of their family came from Warman to the Teddington area in northeastern Saskatchewan to farm. Their daughter Anna was quite young when she left home for work. She met and married a young school teacher by the name of Wilhelm Thiessen from Dalmeny. (19)

Der Wahrheitsfreund reported that Wilhelm Thiessen, aged 26, was a young, strong man and a popular, gifted and highly respected school teacher in the Dalmeny community. Thiessen died of the flu in November 1918; after nine months their married bliss was short-lived.

Der Wahrheitsfreund goes on to say that God's ways are often for us as people very dark but someday we will understand. (20)

Anna was also very sick but made it. After a while she married a widower with five small children. To this union were born two daughters, Verna and Alvina. In later years she also lost him. She remarried and lost 3 more husbands. When asked which had been the best husband, Anna replied "The one that's living!" Anna was a hard worker and knew her way around. The church was very dear to her. (21)

Peter Pauls and Maria Reddekopp were married on June 31, 1918 near Hague. He died in November of the same year, leaving behind a young pregnant wife.

A resolution was passed in December 1918 by the R.M. of Excelsior Echoes that joined with the R.M. of Coulee and the Village of Waldeck to establish an emergency hospital at Waldeck, in the Waldeck Hotel. Many people became sick and deaths were common occurrences. Some of the scattered grave sites throughout the municipality were a result of the epidemic.

A quote from Mr. John W. Funk says in remembering the flu epidemic, "In one case they were having a funeral for two children while one was dying at home. In some homes they lost up to five children. None of our children died of the Spanish flu that winter. I remember that in the homes where the flu

Johan Heppner died of the Flu in the fall of 1918. He and his wife Helena (nee Bergen) had 5 children together. After his death she married Heinrich Goertzen, whose wife had also died of the Flu.

was bad there was a very bad smell. You could hardly stand it."[22]

By October 1918, the flu was becoming serious at Herbert and the Town Council came up with a recommendation to close public facilities. Anthony Haughlin was appointed Special Constable to enforce the Quarantine by law.

There were not nearly enough doctors for the Town and the surrounding area and there was no hospital. Dr. Funk who was on the go almost constantly would drive his car into a field somewhere to catch a bit of sleep.

The Town Hall Auditorium became a makeshift hospital for a while. Many women in the area who were considered nurses or midwives were kept busy doing what they could. Since some of the local men were still off fighting in the war while others were sick with the flu, some crops were lost because there was no one to harvest them. Clerks in some stores and offices wore masks to keep out germs and women doing their shopping also wore masks.

Anna and Reinhart Klein died of the flu within one week of each other. They had recovered from the burns they sustained in a 1909 prairie fire which swept across the farm northwest of Herbert. Their daughter Mary had died in that fire. After the flu epidemic had taken its toll, the Klein's had left four children, all nearing marrying age without parents. It was a very difficult year. [23]

Johan and Maria (Bergman) Braun homesteaded at Lost River, Saskatchewan, moving from Manitoba in the spring of 1918. Their daughter Tina writes that, when the flu hit in the fall of 1918, her Dad went out daily making rounds to see if the houses had at least one person on their feet that could make some food and feed the livestock. On one such round he drove in at H.G. Neufeld's, finding Mr. and Mrs. Neufeld flat in bed and not able to feed the baby, Richard, who was then three months old. Dad did all the chores, then made them comfortable with extra wood in the house, fed the baby and bundled him up and took him home to mother. "If you ever saw excited kids, it was us with a little boy among five girls. "When is it my turn to hold him?" I am sure we figured this was the biggest blessing on this side of heaven. Our father Johan never got the flu; he was too busy doing chores for the neighbors.

Mother did not get the flu because she was pregnant. I well remember in February 1919, Anna Neufeld, a ten-year-old girl, died from the flu. Some men were able to make a coffin and I went along with my Mother to see her dress the corpse. I wanted to see what had happened to my playmate.

Houses were left without a mother, the next one without a father, almost entire families wiped out or maybe one small baby would remain. All you need to do is visit the cemeteries, they tell the tale."[24]

John J. Neufeld and Abram S. Bergen were assigned the task of grave diggers. They dug 21 graves in a few weeks' time.[25]

Linda Buhler of Manitoba has done extensive research on Mennonite burial customs. She wrote a three-part series in Preservings on this subject. In the process she discovered that the Greenland Church of God in Christ (Holdeman) burial patterns during the 1918 flu epidemic were different in the way that coffins used at the time were constructed with a glass panel in the lid so the viewing could take place through the rectangular or oval insert. [26]

She adds, the coffins were often fabric-covered and were built with higher sides so that viewing was only from the top...the glass panels being used to permit viewing without opening the coffin. Linda writes that a number of people from the Greenland area remembered these as well, when people had died of infectious diseases. [27]

More research needs to be done to see if the Holdeman Mennonites in Saskatchewan also used the same burial practises.

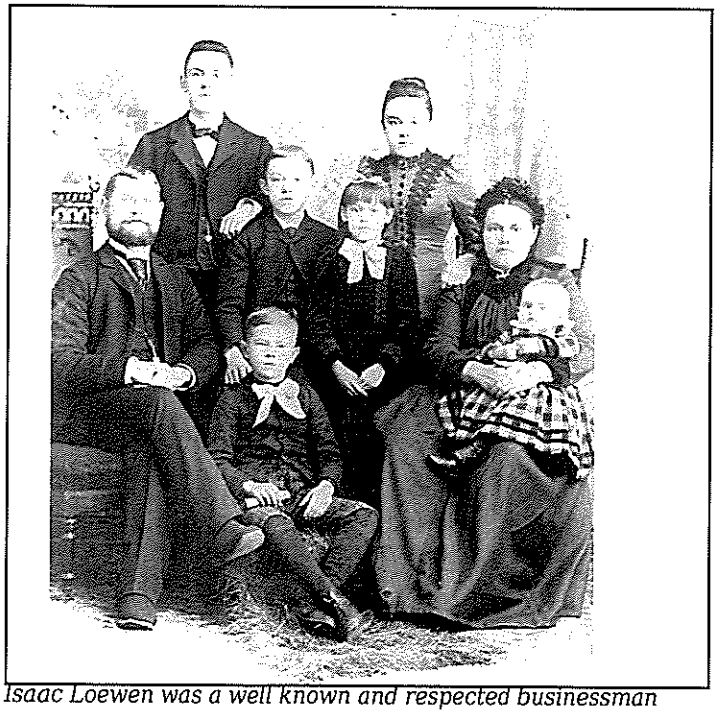
Lingering Effects of the Flu

There were a variety of side effects of the flu, which included the loss of hair. Ben L. Peters was a businessman who lived in the Wymark area south of Swift Current.

In Search of Memories, reports that during the flu epidemic of 1918, he lost some of his hair and remained partially bald all of his life. (28)

It continues, "Another family from the same community had the same experience. Mrs. Jacob Hildebrandt (nee Maria Dueck) lived near Dunelm. Her sister Annie was struck severely by the flu. They feared for her life. She lost all of her hair. Medicine was available and was a help to so many. Those were dark days when death stalked up and down the land. The air was cold and foggy, the earth was bare and brown with no snow.

Anyone with strength was on hand to help dig graves. With picks they chipped away at the hard sod. Sometimes a grave was not even completed before another person died. The men instead of digging another whole grave would broaden the base at one side at the bottom of the grave so that there was enough room to slide a casket into the cave-like hollow. Then there was space for the second casket as well." (29)



Isaac Loewen was a well known and respected businessman from Osler. He died of the Flu on 7 December 1918 at the age of 53. Here he is shown with his wife Susanna (nee Rempel) and their family.

The flu not only took lives, but it impacted families and individuals in other ways with long lasting effects. Gerhard and Anna Dyck from Laird had a total of seven children which grew to be adults. The Laird and District History Book, says that, Johnny, born in 1916. was a special child. As an alert, bright three-year-old, he was struck by the influenza during the world wide epidemic in 1918. He sustained a very high fever lasting 5-6 days. Johnny recovered but he was changed by the ordeal and throughout his lifetime, would require assisted living arrangements. He grew up on the farm, was loved and protected by everyone. Johnny worked in the garden and beekeeping with his mother and helped his brothers and hired men with farm chores. He was physically very strong but cognitively impaired. Johnny attended primary school at Hamburg with his sister Ann and brothers. He would remember incidents, in particular the pranks, recesses, races, school picnics and concerts. Johnny passed away in 2001. (30)

The Search for Home Cures

Lawrence Klippenstein and Julius Toews record that Home cures were often tried but very few of them seemed to be of much help. One cure that was commonly used by Mennonites during this flu period was a recipe of: onions cooked in milk, cooled slightly and then thickened by adding rye flour. It was spread between cloths to form a poultice and applied to the chest as hot as the patient could bear. With continued applications, relief of the congestion was usually achieved in an hour. (31)

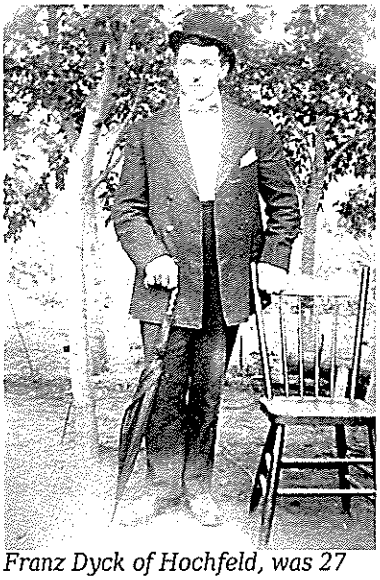
Klippenstein and Toews continue in their account of the Gerhard and Maria (Heppner) Neufeld family that homesteaded at Lost River in the northeast part of Saskatchewan. Though the immediate family was spared death, they were very sick and at times thought that death would surely claim some.

Gerhard was very sick and after four days he announced that he was hungry for fish, so he went to the river, chopped the net out of the ice and came home covered with ice and five fish. After a good fish-feed he regained his strength and was able to do the chores and bury the dead. The ones who were able, went from place to place to help. (32)

The Schmidt family lived in the Old Colony

Mennonite settlement south of Swift Current. During the flu epidemic of 1918, many people in the village died. "Mr. Bernard Schmidt tended the sick people. Once he fell asleep and when he woke up he saw that the poor sick guy that he was attending was dead. People were so sick that many of them could not do their chores on their own or help themselves. Among these sick people were both my husband's and my parents. They were very sick for a long time. My father the same as others, ate nothing. Then one day he craved very much for some homemade noodle soup. This was the beginning of hope and after he had the soup, he was a lot stronger and started recovering."(33)

The Herman and Katharina (Dyck) Unger family moved from Hague to the Great Deer area in 1910 and farmed there until 1919. Their daughter Tina recalls the bad flu in 1918: "My father went out to help people and also helped with the burials which were many. My Uncle Jacob Dyck age 18, died then too. Nobody in our family, the Isaac Dyck family had the flu because we all had to take a good dose of red liniment every night." (34)



Franz Dyck of Hochfeld, was 27 when he died of the flu in November 1918. His widow, Anna (nee Bueckert) was left to care for their four young children.

Good Samaritans Come in Many Forms

Alice Lilia Taylor writes: "Those who did not catch the flu spent the majority of their waking hours caring for the sick around them. The story is told of a School Principal, Peter Gowan, in the Village of Warman, who went around two or three times daily, calling at each home where help was badly needed. He fed the children, some of whom were recovering from the sickness and their mothers were ill; three or more of the fathers of these families were in the Forces overseas. He brought canned milk and groceries for the families, he kept fires going, emptied ashes and slop pails, carried their mail and wrote letters where required. (35)

In nearly every community in Saskatchewan, there were good Samaritans who went around their community helping their neighbors and serving where they could be at risk to themselves. In some cases they were trained medical people but most of the times they were caring lay people.

Johan and Margarete (Flaming) Strauss moved to the Brotherfield area near Hepburn from Kansas at the turn of the century. With the nearest doctor a day's journey away in Saskatoon, health care was a constant worry. Johan and Margarete had lost two children in Kansas and were to lose two more in Canada, Sarah at 17 and Marie at 20. Small wonder that Johan Strauss devoted so much of his time to medical study and treatment. He pulled infected teeth with a pair of tongs given to him by a Kansas doctor friend. He had a supply of homeopathic medicines and several books about human anatomy and health care which he studied avidly. Soon after coming to Canada, Johan was asked to set broken bones and he discovered that he had a talent. The service grew to the extent that he would travel for many miles to help accident victims, people came from far to have their bones set or ailments tended to, some of them to stay at the Strauss home and recuperate.

During the flu epidemic of 1918, Johan and Margarete travelled to many neighboring homesteads, comforting the ill and helping survivors to cope. People fondly called him Doctor Strauss and he asked little in return for his services. Meanwhile Margarete and the children carried much of the responsibility on the farm. (36)

In 1907, The Schellenberg family moved from Manitoba to the Gouldtown district in southern Saskatchewan. "In 1918, we heard reports about the Spanish Flu," writes daughter Anna. "It had been a dry summer and in November the flu made its appearance in Canada. All at once it reached our district and it was a pushover. My three older brothers were away working at three different areas. One day we went to bed feeling alright but several of us could not rise in the morning. We were too sick to lift our heads. My brothers came home that day all very sick. That evening fifteen of our family were down with the flu. If neighbors and friends had not

helped us through these days, we could not have made it." (37)

The Abram Penner family who lived near the Schellenberg's, were also impacted by the flu. Elizabeth Penner Gannon writes that, "my Dad lost three brothers with the flu and our family came down with the flu. My Mother could not look after a little baby so our neighbors, the Frank Funk's Sr. looked after Helen until our family was well again. 1918 was a very dry year and much of the seed did not come up." (38)

An excerpt from *Reflections, A History of Arelee*, reports that, "In 1903, Rev. Luka and Barbara Krowlenko came to Canada from Russia and settled in the Eagle Creek area. In 1927-28, when the branch rail line came through, the community of Arelee sprang up which became their home community. In about 1906, the Russian Mennonite Church was organized, and Luka was elected and ordained to the ministry to serve the people and minister to their spiritual needs. He was the Pastor for 37 years until 1944 when he moved to British Columbia.

In the 37 years as Pastor, he married, buried, cried with and rejoiced with many people. In 1917-18, the flu epidemic was one of the saddest times in his pastoral work. The epidemic seemed to touch most every home in the district. He was called to minister to the sick, to comfort the mourners, to conduct funerals and bury the dead. He related of having people dying in his arms. An incident that he told his family about was going to visit a home and finding the husband dead in bed and the wife too sick to move to care for herself or inform anybody of his death.

Because of so many sick with the flu there were times when there was not sufficient manpower to bury the dead. At times men dug graves and the women helped in filling them. Regardless of how busy Dad was with his farming operation, springtime or harvest when called to some emergency, he never failed to respond. Human life was more important to him than material things." (39)

Ministers conducted funerals daily and spent time comforting the sick and dying. The dead were buried as soon as possible and sometimes more than one person was put into a grave. In the village of Chortitz, Jacob Reddekopp and Peter Fast were buried in one grave and Mrs. Heinrich Goertzen and her nephew Peter Reddekopp were buried together in another. Many volunteers were needed to dig graves in the frozen ground, some of whom were themselves also weak from the flu.

Marie (Hildebrandt) Harms' father, Jacob Hildebrandt, also died of the flu when she was seven years old. Her Father owned a store in Hague called a drug-store, but it had a little bit of everything; china, wall-paper, candy and patent medicines. Her Dad fitted glasses, pulled teeth, set bones and even delivered babies when the doctor was away.

Siblings Maria and Peter Reddekopp from the village of Chortitz, west of Hague. Peter died of the Flu at the age of 16 and is buried in the same grave as his aunt Susanna (Reddekopp) Goertzen in the Chortitz Cemetery.

He was also in demand as a vet and Marie says that she heard him ramble in delirium in 1918, when the Spanish Influenza took him from us. "He talked about Holstein cows. Mom told me what they were, and I'll never forget those black and white beasts. With very little training, Dad, I am told, was always reading and studying. His English was fluent, and he also attempted the French. Belgian farmers settled near Hague and they became good friends of Dad and helped him with his French."(40)

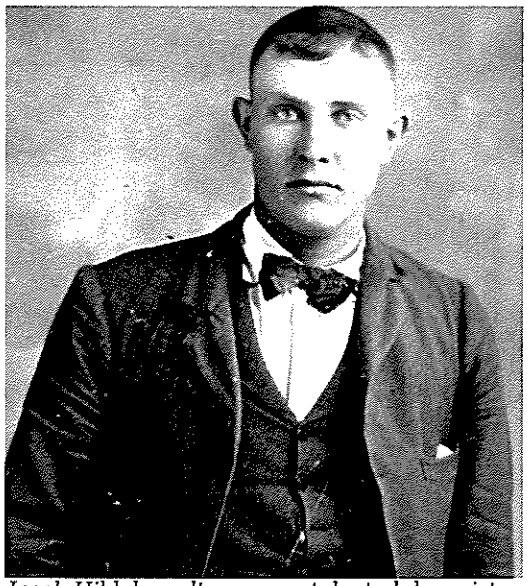
Rev. Heinrich Martens reflected on this period and how it killed so many people that were known to him. One such man was the Hague druggist, Mr. Jacob Hildebrandt, who had been teaching English to Rev. Martens and two other fellows. Rev Martens remembers meeting him at the drugstore a few days before he died. On this particular day Mr. Hildebrandt was waiting for some brandy which was

coming in by train. He had heard that if you drank brandy, it would keep the Flu away. There were also two Klassen brothers who died during this time. Rev Martens was also frequently called on to carry a *Begraebnis Brief* [HG] or *Bejrawfnis Breef* [LG] (funeral invitation) from one side of the South Saskatchewan River to the other. He said that it was late in fall and the ice on the South Saskatchewan River made it very difficult to row.

Conclusion

Most sources state that the Spanish Flu killed 50,000 lives in Canada and fifty million world-wide.

Margaret Lux places the number of deaths in Saskatchewan at 5,000. The incidence of illness was one person in every four... virtually every family in the Province experienced the disease. In Canada, the epidemic spread from east to west on the transcontinental railways. Where Spanish Flu came from and where it disappeared to after it wreaked its terrible destruction are still mysteries. (41)



Jacob Hildebrandt, a young talented druggist and businessman in Hague, contributed much to his community. His death from the Flu was a huge loss to his wife and eight children and the wider community

She continues, The peak of the epidemic came in November 1918 but there were more than 1,000 flu deaths in 1919 and a further 102 in 1920. It took 20 months before the epidemic finally waned. Northern areas unaffected by the 1919-1920 wave were attacked in the 1920s. The effects of the epidemic reverberated throughout the province. There were increased calls for rural hospitals and plans for university classes to train women in nursing and housekeeping. There were demands for more efficient public health care in Saskatoon where the brunt of the fight against the flu was carried by volunteers. Nationally the Dominion Bureau of Health was established in early 1919. (42)

Vanessa Quiring observed that the Spanish Flu mortality rates in the general population of Canada was 6.1/1000. But among Mennonites in Manitoba that she studied the mortality rate was more than double that at 13.5/1000. Saskatchewan figures are similar. Socializing patterns account for the higher rates of deaths among Mennonites. (43)

Rev. Heinrich D. Martens (right), was a Bergthaler Mennonite Minister who cared for the sick, dying and dead during the Spanish Flu. He delivered many Begraebnis Briefe across the South Saskatchewan River by boat during this time. He is shown here with his third wife, Helena Nikkel.

The Rosthern Enterprise records that, "In December 1918, a couple of the Rosthern Churches held Thanksgiving services." The announcement for the upcoming service in the Trinity Lutheran Church that appeared in the Rosthern Enterprise, read that a special festival of Thanksgiving would be held including the Lord's supper. The church was going to be decorated in evergreen and the Pastor expected every member to be present to join the nation in thanks and praise to the Almighty God for the conclusion of the war and restoration of peace. On December I, a special funeral service was also going to take place at 2:30 pm in memory of the 10 members who died of the congregation of the Spanish Influenza Epidemic. (44)

The Rosthern Mennonite Church also held a

service of Thanksgiving on December 1, firstly so that members could again gather in their church for worship. It had been closed for the whole month of November due to the terrible epidemic and secondly that the frightful bloodshed of the horrible war came to an end. Rev. Johan Dueck gave a sermon about 'offering God Thanks,' and Rev. Gerhard Epp spoke on Psalms 46. Rev. Kornelius Ens led the group in a closing prayer; the festival was well attended. (45)

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Leonard Doell,
January, 2021 *LD*

My Ancestor Jacob Harnasveger, (1480-1563): Reformer

by Barry Teichroeb

Barry is a retired financial industry executive who began searching for his Mennonite roots more than 30 years ago. He has been digging ever since. Originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, he now lives in Whitby, Ontario.

Jacob Harnasveger, the son of Nicholas, was arrested in The Hague on July 5th, 1535 and charged with aiding in the attempted escape from Amsterdam of a group of radical Anabaptists caught in the act of plotting to take over the city and establish an Anabaptist administration. He was an armorer by trade and his role in the escape attempt was to provide weapons for the self-defense of the Anabaptist group. They were hoping to make their way to a safe Anabaptist stronghold in the city of Műnster, Germany.

It was the second time authorities had captured him, as he had escaped his first arrest in Amsterdam the previous October when the plot was discovered and foiled. After his first escape, at the age of 55, he had been on the run from the courts.

Holy Roman Emperor Charles V published a decree in The Netherlands in 1521 prohibiting any form of religious worship that did not adhere strictly to the Roman Church's traditions and practices. Anyone violating or even suspected of violating the decree could be condemned to death on the evidence of just two witnesses. Accusers and witnesses were then awarded one third of the convicted heretic's property in gratitude for service to the state. Judges who did not faithfully render the prescribed sentence were, themselves, charged with heresy under the decree to ensure compliance. The state sanctioned brutal torture to induce admissions of guilt, and then executed the victims.

Records are full of stories of neighbors selling out neighbors, driven by fear and greed.

Jacob's case went to trial on October 15th, 1535. He was lucky – while found guilty, he received the comparatively lenient sentence of banishment from Amsterdam for two years. The Prosecutor had requested a sentence of death by beheading.

Jacob is my 13th great-grandfather and possibly one of the earliest identified ancestors in all of Mennonite genealogy. The surname he took, Harnasveger, means "Armor Sweeper" in English.

The adoption of one's occupation as a second name was a common practice at this time in the Netherlands, before formally registered surnames became mandatory. His story and the story of his family's survival is vitally relevant to his many Canadian Mennonite descendants. The potentially brutal punishment he faced for his actions stems from the existential threat to the Holy Roman Empire posed by the Anabaptist movement. The corresponding reaction of a small group of Anabaptists led by Menno Simons forms the origin story of the Mennonite movement.

To understand why such harsh punishments were sanctioned against the Anabaptists, we must go back to the beginning – to the time of John the Baptist, Jesus of Nazareth, and the roots of the Christian church.

The early Christian movement embraced baptism as an important symbol of their beliefs. This followed the practice of John the Baptist, whose religious sect practiced baptism to purify their souls, and who himself baptized Jesus. As the Christian church emerged and grew, so too did the ritual of baptism. In the early days of the Christian church baptism was a symbolic ritual in which any willing adult could participate, and this evolved from the daily ritual practiced by followers of John the Baptist to a one-time symbol of Christian acceptance. Later, adults and entire households could participate, including infants. Over time the baptismal practice continued to evolve, eventually becoming an important sacrament of the Christian church to be performed usually upon infants.

The concept of universality, or the idea of one single form of religious practice and tradition, emerged in the 2nd century around the time of Bishop Ignatius of Antioch. Thereafter all efforts by church officials were oriented to shaping this universal system and weeding out deviations. The church's goal at this time was to spread its teachings by creating a consistent set of rules and practices that could be easily brought to new communities in a

repeatable manner with predictable results. Over centuries this well-organized model enabled the church to accumulate wealth along with social and political influence.

By the beginning of the 3rd Century an organizational model featuring deacons, priests and bishops had evolved and was uniformly entrenched. It was a solid hierarchical structure enabling the church to project power and influence. This complemented the monarchical role of the papacy in which control and decision-making was lodged in the highest strata of the church. The view of the priest's role evolved to be the intermediary between parishioners and God. The path to heaven for one's immortal soul was through the local priest.

Roman Emperor Constantine made Christianity the official religion of his empire in the 4th Century. This event established a political linkage between the Roman Church and the State that would ensure their mutual survival.

The idea of confession and absolution (or forgiveness) was still a central theme of the church's teachings. Before long confession and absolution became a sacrament of the Roman Church and by the time of Pope Basil of Caesarea in the 4th century confession could only be made to an ordained priest and only a priest could grant absolution. With this the Roman Church took communion with God out of the hands of the masses and made Christians reliant on the church and its priests.

During the reign of Emperor Justinian I in the 6th century, religious rules became more rigid and the act of adult rebaptism was forbidden under the law and enforced by the death penalty. This law survived for a thousand years and near the end it was rigorously enforced by the Roman Church operating under the auspices of the state and reinforced by decree of Emperor Charles V.

As time moved on, the Roman Church found itself in need of capital for expansion. The church realized it could package up dispensation for sins and relief from the obligations of penance and purgatory by granting indulgences to hapless sinners - for a fee. By the 11th or 12th century the sale of indulgences was big business. Anyone with money could purchase dispensation from sins and priests were delegated the authority to sell the service and collect the money.

In the 16th century the Roman Church found itself holding monopolistic control over religion in European society, being the sole gateway to the afterlife. It was insinuated in so many aspects of daily life that it was essentially a feature of the cultural bedrock. The Church was State-sanctioned and wielded political power through layers of interrelationships with the governing classes. It was economically powerful and used economic might to political ends. It also stifled cultural and scientific advancement in efforts to protect its societal preeminence.

It was the sale of indulgences that caused Martin Luther to finally revolt against the questionable practices of the Roman Church early in the 16th century.

Martin Luther was not the first critic of the Roman Church. There were earlier critics. For example, in the Netherlands Desiderius Erasmus had espoused numerous reforms in the late 15th century, criticizing the sale of indulgences and superstitious beliefs about saints and relics. However, the tipping point occurred when Luther published his formal list of concerns in 1517, the corrupt practice of selling indulgences being central. The resulting reform movement was of extended duration and geographic expanse, encompassing many smaller initiatives.

Ulrich Zwingli was a parish priest in Zurich and a former army chaplain. In 1522 he defended friends who ate a sausage during Lent in defiance of church rules. Later that year he further defied the Roman Church by getting married, thereby advancing the cause of reform rapidly. The religious tradition that emerged from his work became known as "Reformed." This term referred to any kind of Protestantism that was not Lutheranism. Zwingli's version of protestant worship preceded Calvinism by a few years but the broad conventions and traditions of the two were essentially the same, sweeping out many of the most egregious corruptions, superstitions, and outdated practices of the Roman Church.

An early interpretation of Zwingli's thinking was that baptism must be a conscious act and therefore only adults could undertake this sacrament. This view appealed to some reformers who wished to take

religious practice back to the origins of Christianity and a more direct interpretation of the Gospels, casting aside the ritual and ceremony that had overtaken the Roman Church. A "rebaptizer," or Anabaptist, movement was born, its adherents spurning infant baptism and participating in adult baptism.

The Anabaptist movement is usually considered a stream of the reform revolution but there exists a perspective that it is entirely separate from the Reformation. Certainly, Anabaptist beliefs drew inspiration and then criticism from other reformers. Anabaptists were scripturalists, meaning they preferred to be guided by biblical Scripture rather than by sacramental tradition or Church law, dogma, or decree. In respect of baptism, they held two central beliefs. First, infant baptisms were not prescribed by Scripture. Second, the only valid baptisms were those of adults aware of the commitment they were making. This was enough to threaten the authority of the church. Further, while prioritizing reliance on Scriptural guidance they comfortably ignored secular rules that conflicted with their Scriptural interpretation of the way human affairs should be conducted and with this they were able to raise the ire of the secular authorities as well. In fact, they advocated a strict separation of church and state. In the 16th century this was more than innovative thinking, this was revolutionary.

In consequence, by refuting one of the core sacraments of the Roman Church, Anabaptism struck at its foundation. It was an existential threat that had to be extinguished forcefully. Fortunately for the Church in the Holy Roman Empire, the State was aligned with the interests of the Church, and the ancient code of Justinian invoked the death penalty for rebaptism. The Anabaptist rejection of a role for the state in religious affairs galvanized secular administrators against the movement and encouraged them to apply the law more forcefully.

Emperor Charles V published his decree in the Netherlands upholding Justinian's law against rebaptism and other practices contravening church tradition. Frans Van der Hulst was appointed the first Inquisitor General of the inquisition in the Netherlands, with ratification by the pope. Heretics were sought out and brutally punished until the inquisition was suspended in 1566.

This is where the seeds of Anabaptism were sewn, and where Jacob Harnasveger found himself. In the 1530s groups of radical reformers from the low countries of modern-day Netherlands, Belgium, Northern France, and the Rhine basin converged on the city of Műnster in Germany. There a wave of thousands under charismatic leadership ousted the city council, took over the city and declared the establishment of a New Jerusalem on that spot in 1534. The New Jerusalem lasted only a year before it was suppressed. The ousted Catholic Bishop of Műnster, who was both its political and religious leader, raised an army to recapture the city. The leaders of the revolt were executed, their corpses encaged and hung from the walls to rot.

Nevertheless, the zeal for reform led to the riots in Amsterdam that implicated Jacob Harnasveger late in 1535.

Repulsed by the events in Műnster, both the violent nature of the activists and the bloody official response, a priest named Menno Simons gathered a following of Anabaptists in the Netherlands with a program renouncing violence and secular coercion. If their intentions were to avoid the persecution resulting from events such as the siege of Műnster or the Amsterdam riots it was misplaced. The core aspects of their progressive beliefs - adult baptism, separation of church and state, denial of the state's role in religious practice, and rejection of the intermediary role of the clergy in man's relationship to God - made the group a clear target for the inquisitionists of Charles V.

Jacob Harnasveger returned to Amsterdam in 1537, but he still was not in the clear. He was brought before the courts again, this time for having remarked that the papist regime did not have much longer before it would die out. Witnesses confirmed the story but, in the end, it appears the case did not go further, a lucky thing, as Jacob's family are the ancestors of generations of Mennonites – and rebels.

Jacob predeceased his wife Dieuwertje, the daughter of Jan. She was buried in February 1563 in the graveyard on Koestraat belonging to the Catholic Church of Saint Nicholas, later renamed the Oude Kerk, in Amsterdam. The church was originally a

wooden chapel built around 1213. Later it was replaced by a stone church and in 1306 it was consecrated by the bishop of Utrecht. Saint Nicholas was its patron saint. Over the years numerous revisions and additions were made to the structure to complete the building that stands there today. Following the Amsterdam Revolution of 1578, when the Catholic civic government was replaced by a Protestant administration, it became a Calvinist Church and renamed the Oude Kerk. Today it is a museum during the week and, on Sundays, a Calvinist Dutch Reformed Church.

Dieuwertje was buried in a Catholic cemetery even through it seems clear her husband was a Reformer. Her son Nicholas, who pursued the family trade as an armorer, and his wife Weijn Peters, buried an infant son in 1554 at Saint Nicholas. However, Nicholas was baptized a Mennonite in 1562 at Saint Olafscapel in Amsterdam. This church was built in the mid-15th century and dedicated to Saint Olof, the patron saint of navigators.

Weijn died quite young and Nicholas remarried in 1571. With his second wife, Nicholas had two sons who lived to adulthood, Frans and Jan. Jan, whose wife was Metjen van Zevenbergen, daughter of Heijndrick, was also an armorer. When Jan died in 1611 at the age of 35 his creditors ordered an inventory of the contents of his house on Van Breestraat in Amsterdam. It appears his estate was insolvent. The inventory lists 44 items including maps, drawings, paintings, alabaster carvings, and a stuffed deer's head. Today Jan's street still exists but his house is gone.

Frans took up the challenge of religious activism like his grandfather. By the early 17th century, the reform movement had not only solidified its base in the Netherlands, but Catholicism had been pushed aside. In its place was Calvinism, virtually the state religion. Naturally, within the Calvinist faith there were competing strains of thinking. One of the central themes of Calvinism was that people were predestined to their fate. Essentially every individual was pre-programmed by God to a fiery or euphoric after-life. Those that opposed this element of Calvinism were the Remonstrants, and Frans took his place among them, signing a petition in 1628 questioning the tenet of predestination on the basis that it was not biblically rooted and ran contrary to the God-given will of people to conduct themselves in a godly way to achieve the ends they desired.

Nicholas and Weijn also had a daughter, Deborah, born in 1560. At the age of 20 Deborah married Gysbert De Veer, probably the scion of a wealthy merchant family. Gysbert was born in 1556 in Schiedam, a town not far from Rotterdam. The family name may refer to the town of Veere, located in the region of Walcheren, at the mouth of the Scheldt River. The word "veere" means ferry and the town was named for the ferry established there in the late 13th century when the region was an island. Veere became an important trading port for commerce with Scotland.

There is compelling evidence that Gysbert's father was a man named Jan born in Veere in 1521. Town records, name associations and DNA analysis all support such a conclusion, but realistically this must be considered hypothetical.

Gysbert operated a thriving grain trading business on the northern trading route between the Netherlands and coastal cities on the Baltic Sea and maintained business offices in Amsterdam and Danzig. The family settled in Danzig sometime between 1583 and 1588 and Gysbert was among the first to join the Danzig Mennonite Church. Nevertheless, he retained roots in Amsterdam and returned in 1601 with sufficient wealth to be made a citizen there. Possession of citizenship was useful to take best advantage of the commercial rights and protections guaranteed to those with this status. They returned to Danzig in 1612 and remained there. Their elder son Nicholas was a prominent merchant in Amsterdam in later years, running the Dutch end of the business while his father was in Danzig.

Nearly two centuries later one descendant of Gysbert and Deborah, Benjamin De Veer, made the long trek with his family to southern Russia as an early settler of Chortitza. 228 families joined that first wave of migration in 1788-89. Many people of Mennonite descent in Canada today are descendants of Benjamin. The courage needed to uproot a family and resettle in an unknown foreign wilderness reflects the ancestral courage needed to defend principles and beliefs before hostile religious and secular authorities.

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Correspondence with Odette Franssen, Professional Genealogist, Amsterdam.

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BT

MHSS's First Online Zoom Event

Aldred Neufeldt's book, *Horse Lake Chronicles*, was reviewed by Ken Bechtel, in the last issue. The book was published by *Your Nickel's Worth* and describes Aldred's growing up years in the 1940s north of Rosthern.

President John Reddekopp suggested an online launch might familiarizing more people in Saskatchewan with his book and encourage more book sales.

Initial technical hitches did not prevent the March 3 event. 52 people attended this launch. A significant number of the attendees were relatives of Aldred or people who knew him from his early days in Horse Lake, SK.

Aldred spent the first few minutes explaining that Horse Lake was not named after a lake since there was no lake. He read a page that explained the story.

The author spent some time describing the one-room school where he attended the sparsely equipped grade school. The dedicated teachers were partially responsible for shaping his values.

In one case when a teacher had no place to live, his parents boarded the teacher. It turned his little life upside down! He read another excerpt.

Aldred explained that his family were Mennonites who moved into marginal lands at Horse Lake at a time of poverty. Bush and rocks were difficulties that farmers had to cope with. Horses and small tractors provided the power to break the land. Aldred's parents, Henry and Agatha, built a log cabin. There was no electricity. When someone asked if they were poor, he said, "No... we just didn't have any money."

Aldred read a page that describe his mother's Singer sewing machine that made winter coats for him and his brother Boyce. These were what kept them warm when they walked to the church in winter or when they played outside.

Aldred explained that the book was meant for his children and their children; for them to remember a time long gone, but a time filled with mostly good memories where character was formed and his faith, the Mennonite faith, was developed.

The viewers responded to Aldred in the Q&A time, and complimented him on the presentation.

We consider this first ZOOM meeting a success!

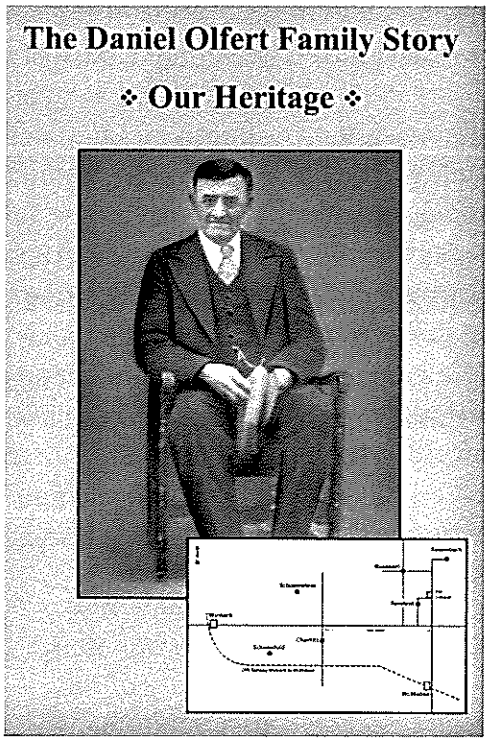
NOTE: Dr Aldred Neufeldt lives in Toronto but has previously worked for the government of Saskatchewan and the University of Calgary as a psychologist.

(This article was created with input from Jake Buhler, Ruth Friesen, Susan Braun and John Reddekopp).

The Daniel Olfert Family Story: Our Heritage

- by Ernest Olfert. (Saskatoon: Self-published, 2020). 110 pages. Paperback.
Book size: 9" x 6". Non-fiction. Printed by Friesens Corporation, Altona, MB.

Book Review: by Jake Buhler

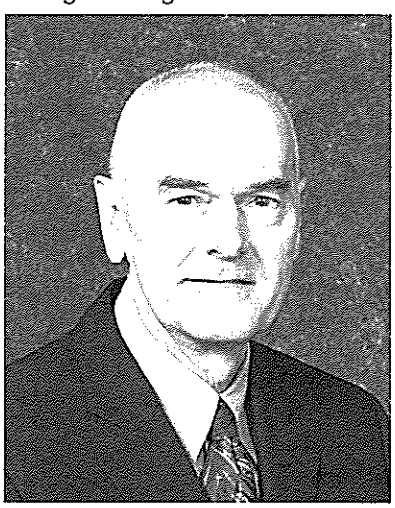


Ernest Olfert is a retired Saskatoon veterinarian. When he decided to write the complicated story of his grandfather, Daniel Olfert (GM 192137), and his 3 wives, and their many children, he got a bit more than he had bargained for. It took him five years to research a complex family history as the information he needed was not readily available.

But Olfert made an early wise decision. He narrowed his focus, and was able to unwind a complex ball of history into a viewable mosaic.

The book is organized into 4 parts: first the Olfert European ancestral history; second, the genealogy and history of Daniel's three wives; third, the Daniel Olfert story from 1902-1948; fourth, the next generation of Olfert families.

If an underlying theme of the book is survival in the midst of tough hardships, then the first example was the journey of ten-year-old Daniel from Chortitza, South Russia in 1891. His mother, Maria Hiebert Olfert, had been recently widowed. With steel determination she took her nine children aged one to nineteen on a two- week journey passing through Poland, Germany, England by horse and cart, rail and ship. Then after Immigration procedures, they took a daunting two-week trip by ship to Quebec, followed by another week's journey by rail and boat to Southern Manitoba.



Daniel grew up in the West Reserve and married Helena Wiebe who would bear 13 children, not all who survived. The move to Rosenbach in 1918 on the Swift Current Reserve allowed the family to acquire land and become independent.

With Helena's early death in 1926, Daniel re-married less than 4 months later to a widow, Helena (Dyck) Dyck, who had 4 children. The blended family had its interesting moments to figure out how to call each other when a number of children had the same first names. Helena and Daniel added a son and a daughter to the marriage. Helena died in 1934, leaving Daniel to raise six children.

Three years later, Daniel, then 56, married a 50-year-old unmarried woman from Herbert. They married in 1938 and raised the 6 children before Daniel died in 1948.

The last part of the book briefly describes the many children, who they married, and shows some of the wedding photos.

The book was professionally printed which allowed even small photographs - 40 of them - to be of good quality. But even so, key photographs are too small to provide needed detail for the reader.

The author added another 30 charts, reproductions of fine calligraphy in the Christmas and New Year's Wuenschen and other documents. Again, fewer items would have had a greater impact.

Ernest Olfert shows us how a short family history can be written well. It was limited to a defined number of generations which allowed for a lucid presentation of the narrative.

The author did a fine job of reproducing his grandfather's preserved and cherished Wuenschen that had been handed down to him. The penmanship belongs to Daniel, but the

poetic contents were very likely copied from the teacher's scribbler.

No where does the author profile himself. Even the cover does not carry his name. Perhaps he has the humble characteristic of his unschooled grandfather who was unlettered but perhaps educated in the Mennonite ways of humility, honesty and spiritual values.

The Daniel Olfert Family Story is centered on Daniel who in many ways was an unusually plain person, but who lived an unusual life filled with untold deaths, untold hardships, complex family arrangements but sprinkled with joys throughout. If Daniel possessed some refined traits, it was surely his penmanship in the *Christmas and New Year's Wuenschen* that he copied. If you want to read a story about a plain man with an unplain story, this book may be what you are looking for.

The Daniel Olfert Family Story can be purchased by contacting Ernest Olfert at 306 250 7929 (phone or text) or by emailing him at *ernest.olfert@sasktel.net* *JB*

Four Gotteshaeuser or "Houses of God" at Eigenheim, Saskatchewan
by Jake Buhler

The purpose of this short photo-essay is not to provide a history of the worshipping community at Eigenheim. Rather, it is to observe that Eigenheim is the only current Mennonite worshipping community anywhere that has had 4 different buildings constructed on one site. Indeed, it is possible that no currently worshipping congregation of any denomination anywhere in Canada is in its 4th building. Eigenheim Mennonite Church is a rural congregation which makes it all the more remarkable after 129 years. A reward is yours if you can find any current congregation anywhere in Canada with a history of 4 buildings.

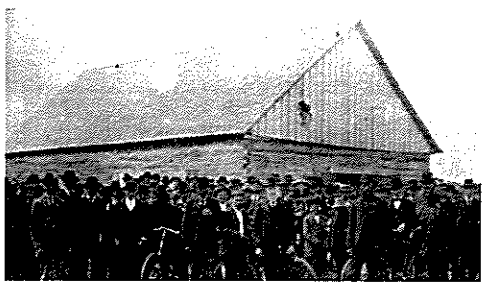


Photo: Eigenheim Mennonite Church. First Gotteshaus (1896-1902). Ministers serving here were: Peter Regier (1894-1913); Abraham Friesen (1894-1901); Gerhard Epp (1894-1919) and; Johann Dueck (1899-1939).

At a time when most Mennonite homesteaders had straw or sod roofs on their homes, the log church they built in 1896 had a shingled roof, an indication of their reverence for their *Gotteshaus* meaning 'House of God.' Located 10 km west of present-day Rosthern, it was the first Mennonite church building in the Northwest Territories. The Eigenheim community began to worship 4 years before their first Gotteshaus was built.

While construction was voluntarily carried out without dissenting murmurs from anyone, few could agree on the name. Put to a vote the following year, Rosenort, meaning place of roses - the name of Elder Peter Regier's church in Prussia - was chosen. A larger frame church was built beside it in 1902, and it assumed the name of the district, Eigenheim which means one's own home, in German.

Walter Klaassen's, *The Days of our Year: A History of the Eigenheim Mennonite Church* Community, extols the congregation's piety, industry and volunteer church labour, but it also tells of "violent disagreements" preceding a major change in 1954:

Photo from MAID. Second Gotteshaus (1902-1954). Ministers serving here were: Peter Regier (1894-1913); Gerhard Epp (1894-1919); Johann Dueck (1899-1939); David Toews (1919-1943); Cornelius K Ens (1911-1923); Jacob Klaassen (1919-1943); Gerhard Epp (1919-1963) and; Henry T. Klaassen (1919-1964).

Photo by Victor Wiebe. Third church building 1954-2010). Ministers serving here were: Henry T. Klaassen (1919-1964); Irvin Schmidt, who was the first salaried minister (1964-1976); Arthur Regier (1976-1977); Werner Froese (1977-1986); Barbara & Wilmer Froese (1988); Walter Braun (1989-1992); Peter Janzen (1992-1995); Benno Klassen (1996-2005) and; Allan Friesen (2006-2017).

the building was extended northward, the pitch of the roof was reduced and a false front was erected. Another addition was built in the 1960s, and a 1974 change replaced the two front doors with one door, the removal of "the last remnant of the gender separation," wrote Klaassen.

Nature, however, had the last word, when a rising water table led to ongoing flooding and mould in the basement. The old church was moved to Rosthern to become an all-purpose building at the Mennonite Youth Farm Camp, and a new church without a basement was dedicated on the original Eigenheim site in 2010.

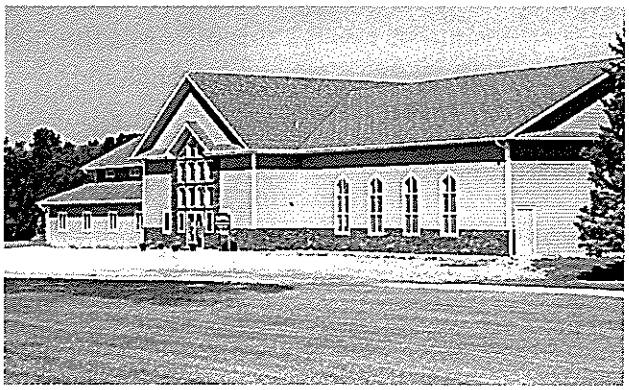


Photo: Jake Buhler. Fourth church building (2010 onwards). Ministers serving here: Allan Friesen (2006-2017); Pauline Steinmann (2017-2020) and; Rachel Wallace (2020 onwards)

*I thank George Epp for providing names of ministers and for explaining the importance of best word usages in translations.

JB

Dutch Naming Conventions

by Victor G. Wiebe

Mennonites in the Americas with a Dutch ancestry have a somewhat complex task in getting their ancestors names correct. Dutch spelling is different from English or German for example: Peter in Dutch is spelled Peeter. Then over time spelling rules change.

My own family name Wiebe started out spelled as Wybe then to Wijbe then Wiebe. All three forms are still in use in the Netherlands.

Before the 19th century Dutch family names or surnames were very different from what we are familiar with. First, only nobility had family names; all others had or used a variety of different forms for their last names.

Then in 1811 the French, who had recently conquered the Netherlands, ordered everyone to select and register a family name. From then on everyone had a first and last permanent names but before that there were an often puzzling set of names.

The usual Dutch family naming custom was to use a patronymic. That is, for a boy taking one's fathers given name as a last name and adding the ending phrase: "-szoon" and for a girl adding "-sdochtor" to her father's given name. This is seen in Menno's name which is properly written as "Menno Simon-szoon." However we encounter it most often contracted to "Menno Simons." Since Simons is not a family name it is why his name in alphabetical lists is always listed under "M" not "S."

Then there were some Dutch people who used their occupation as their name. For example in the article on Jacob Harnasveger. Jacob was in the family armor business so he or an ancestor took the name "Harnasveger" which is Dutch and it means "Armor sweeper." Some used location as a name for example "Van Dyck" means "of the dike" and a few used nick-names. A sibling could take a different name than his brothers and sisters and one could change his names if he thought it helped him. Women did not officially change their name at marriage but there was a tradition of a woman preceding her maiden name with her husband's, and adding a hyphen.

Many of our Dutch Mennonite ancestors moved to Poland, Germany and Russia and in those countries by local conventions they had to have permanent family names. Many converted their patronymic names to family names we know today for example "Peeter-szoon" became "Peters" in the Danzig area. In those countries the clerks registering names often spelled them to conform to German rather than Dutch sounds, spellings and pronunciations. Then in Russia for some the names went through a further change since the Russian alphabet used Cyrillic letters resulting in a surprising change when converting back to Roman letters. Thus the Russian "Винс" for "Wiens" became "Viens" when translated from Russian and my own name became "Veebe."

VGW

Memories of Homer K Janzen: November 15, 1927 to November 21, 2020

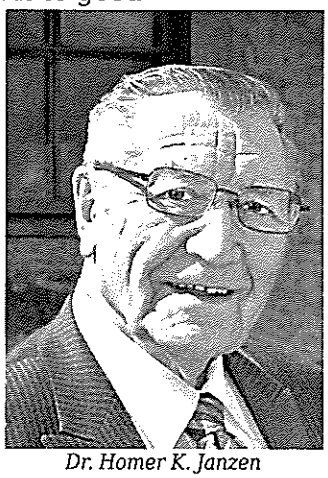
by Bert Lobe

Years ago my good friend Rod Sawatsky suggested that "*gracious Christians are rooted in a natural sense of gratitude and awe, serve their neighbors with love and pleasure, are people of welcome and embrace and understand, at a profound depth, that before gracious Christianity is public, it is intensely personal.*"

These words describe well the Homer Kenneth Janzen that Martha and I were fortunate to know.

We first met Homer when he and his wife Greti served at the Champa and Jagdeespur Christian hospitals in rural Madya Pradesh state, India, for ten years in the late 1960's. What distinguished their tenure was how both the medical staffs in those hospitals and the small and multi religious communities they lived among, was the deep respect and affection which others felt towards their family.

Homer? He knew Hindi well and used it to good effect in communicating the complex and employing it in the interest of humour as well! He was not only a competent and gracious medical doctor; a profound and gentle respect for all of God's creation characterized Homer's work and relationships. Homer's profession may have been medicine but his vocation was service to others and that vocation found him "at the intersection of human need and his own deep inner gladness."



Dr. Homer K. Janzen

Although originally Manitoba folks, Homer's family had a long history in Waldheim, where we learned to know Homer's mother Nettie when I served as Principal of the K-12 public school (1972-1977). We worshipped together at the Zoar Mennonite Church where Mrs. Janzen was a force to contend with: full of life, a fireball really, she was known for her acquaintance with laughter, but she was also deeply serious about and engaged in the work of the church. Martha and I, and our kids, loved her, indeed looked for her! Mrs. Janzen endeared herself to us early, and perhaps especially in late 1972 when we asked to be admitted as members of the Zoar church. There were two families who protested and actually opted not to stand when acceptance was invited.

(Apparently something I said in Sunday School was insufficiently orthodox and a touch provocative). The rejection was devastating! Early Monday morning there was Mrs. Janzen at our door to assure and encourage: "you have to understand those families."

Homer was blessed by gracious and wise Janzen genes and good at empathy!

During the 12 years he practiced family medicine in Rosthern (1974-1986) Homer delivered our youngest son David Joshua in 1980. I stood by Martha ... it was agonizing and there were moments. Homer made a comment that is not repeatable here but it brought laughter!

Later, recovering in a room for two, Martha learned to know an Indigenous woman who had also just delivered a son, and they became friends. Martha was a nurse, and a good one, and she couldn't help but notice how one nurse in particular treated the aboriginal woman, she was demeaning and impatient. When the woman said she would report her, the nurse became indignant. Homer heard about this and addressed the situation directly. That was Homer.

Homer also served for three years (1986-1989) at the Tanzen Hospital in Nepal, and later (1990-1987) in Steinbach as a surgeon. Homer's children remember that "dad thoroughly enjoyed his vocation as a doctor and surgeon."

The Homer I knew and remember was a committed churchman but never a push over! When the Newton offices of the General Conference Mennonite Church/Howard Habegger and others determined to indigenize the church and its institutions on a short timeline, and one which Homer and others deemed unnecessary and unreasonable haste, Homer stood up. What ensued was a spirited but respectful confrontation which went on for a few years. That was Homer.

Henry Glassie and Lao Tze describe well the Homer we knew:

"In the end, the concept underlying this complex of culture and history is that of respect – respect for the unknown that makes the people of Ballymenone deeply religious, a respect for human weakness that makes them compassionate, a respect for life that makes them gentle, a respect for themselves that dignifies them and a respect for the past that allows them to endure."

(***Irish Folk History***, by Henry Glassie)

The sage is square-edged but does not scrape,
Has corners but does not jab.
Extends himself but not at the expense of others,
Shines but does not dazzle.

(Lao Tze in the ***Tao Ti Ching***)

BL

Bert Lobe grew up in Osler. He became an educator and worked with MCC for many years. He currently lives in Kitchener, Ontario.

Hague 1903 - 2003

by Rev. John J. Janzen

1903 was a rather important year for Hague. It was approximately 10 years earlier when Klaas Dyck, George Bergen and a bachelor, George Lovell, settled in what is now Hague. In 10 years, the population had grown to be 175. In 1901, Rosthern had a population of 413, while Saskatoon's population was 113.

The first Sunday School had been started in 1903 and a photo and the names of the 26 children of this group is on display in the museum. At that time, the leaders of Hague also felt there was a need for a school, but in order for this to be obtained, money was needed. In order to receive money, taxes had to be raised, which meant the village needed to be incorporated. The application was made to the North West Territories on June 25, 1903 and two months later, on August 24, 1903, the incorporation was registered.

The first election for an overseer was held September 15, 1903, with Klaas Dyck being elected as the first mayor.

What was Hague like in 1903? It had four elevators, a flour mill and numerous businesses, including two lumberyards.

In Mr. J. E. Friesen's history book, he mentioned that a popular Sunday afternoon entertainment was croquet. At times the competition was so keen that they had to finish the game by lantern light.

Edward Woodcock, a mail carrier to outlying villages to the east across the river, was crossing the railway crossing in February and was killed by a train. In the same year, two 13-year-old boys drowned in Fishers' Lake on a Sunday afternoon. Bernard Penner along with his friend, tipped out of the watering trough that they were using for a canoe and drowned. They were buried in the Blumenthal Cemetery.

The first person to be buried in the old Hague cemetery on the hill south of town was 20-year-old Susie Grabinsky, who died of TB on January 4, 1904.

On August 24, 1934, a local dairy man, Fred Kinzel, was trampled to death by his own bull.

What were prices like in those days? A top buggy with a collapsible top was priced at $50. A discount of $1.50 was given if the money was sent along with the order.

Hague had only short sections of wood sidewalks at the store fronts but in 1907 a wooden sidewalk was constructed along the full length of Railway St.

The beginings may appear to be rather humble to our present mind, but it was a very sound foundation on which they built. What will the Hague residents of 2103 say - if it is still in existence?

In the early years there was drought, grasshoppers, and always a struggle with poverty. There were the first and second world wars that brought hard times. But changes seem to be the result of a modern world. Horse power to gas engine power; running for water to running water; road improved and education opportunities were slowly offered to all.

JJJ

(Used with permission -as it appeared in the Saskatchewan Valley News - September 10, 2003, on a page about the Saskatchewan River Valley Museum celebrating the town's 100th anniversary).

Honour List

This list recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions toward preserving Mennonite history, heritage, or faith within our province. To submit a name for the Honour List, nominate that person in writing, and forward to the MHSS Board.

The date in brackets is the year of death. The profiles of some of the honourees are on our website. *http://mhss.sk.ca/tributes/* (If you can provide the ones that are missing, the editor would be glad to hear from you).

Helen Bahnmann (†2016)
Abram J. Buhler (†1982)
Helen Dyck (†2007)
Dick H. Epp (†2009)
Jacob H. Epp (†1993)
Margaret Epp (†2008)
Peter K. Epp (†1985)
George K. Fehr (†2000)
Jake M. Fehr
Jacob E. Friesen (†2007)
John D. Friesen (†2004)
Jacob G. Guenter (†2013)
Gerhard J. Hiebert (†1959)
Katharine Hooge (†2001)
Abram G. Janzen (†2015)
John J. Janzen (†2004)
George Krahn (†1999
Ingrid Janzen-Lamp
Abram M. Neudorf (†1988)
Johan J. Neudorf (†1988)
Jacob C. Neufeld (†1994)
John P. Nickel (†2018)
David Paetkau (†1972)
Esther Patkau (†2017)
John D. Reddekopp (†2011)
Ted Regehr
John G. Rempel (†1963)
Ed Roth (†2008)
Wilmer Roth (†1982)
Arnold Schroeder (†2000)
Jacob Schroeder (†1993)
Katherine Thiessen (†1984)
Jacob J. Thiessen (†1977)
David Toews (†1947)
Toby Unruh (†1997)
Albert Wiens (†2002)
George Zacharias (†2000)

Websites

MHSS: *mhss.sk.ca*

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

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

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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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