

Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian



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David Toews Credit:
MHSS Archives

Bishop David Toews and the Russlaender Emigration from Ukraine^{xv}

by Gary Friesen

Bishop David Toews is known primarily for his contribution to the transportation and re-settlement of close to 21,000 Russian Mennonite immigrants and refugees from Soviet Russia to Canada between 1923 and 1927. But David Toews was also a loving father and husband, an excellent teacher, a devoted church minister, a defender of the Mennonite reputation, a conference chairman, a determined and unselfish leader, a promoter of peace, a fundraiser, and a humanitarian relief coordinator.

During the 1920s, one hundred years ago, Mennonite refugees and immigrants from Russia found new homes in Canada. They were suffering great hardships resulting from the Bolshevik Revolution and the aftermath of WW1. David Toews helped persuade Prime Minister Mackenzie King to facilitate the political process and secure a loan from the CPR to allow entry into Canada of these thousands of Mennonites. Toews had strong opinions and didn't hesitate to promote them, but he also believed in community ownership and mutual accountability. His colleagues at the *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization* looked to him for encouragement and counsel. C.F. Klassen, a member of the *Board of Colonization* who worked closely with Toews, spoke of him as a humble, dedicated man, a true patriarch of the Mennonite Brotherhood.

Lawrence Klippenstein writes, "Toews was there – at the turn of the century, in the teens, the twenties, thirties, and forties – positioned among all of those who shared the Canadian Mennonite experience with him. It is important to recognize this and to ponder the significance of his efforts."

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The Editor's Perspective

Jake Buhler



We are witnessing a horrendous show of violence in Ukraine where a neighboring country is trying to take over that sovereign nation. Ukrainians are suffering. MCC is collecting money for food, medicine and shelter. You can help. donate.mcccana.ca/ukraine.

Gary Friesen, the grandson of David Toews, has written our leading story in this edition of the

Historian. Beginning in 1923, 21,000 Mennonites would make their way to Canada fleeing the tyranny of the Soviet Union. David Toews and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization were the architects who worked with the Canadian Government to make that happen. Gary Friesen tells us the story of Aeltester David Toews. Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta is publishing the same story this month, and we thank them for making it possible for us as well.

In this summer's edition of the Historian, we will tell the story of the 1922 exodus of Old Colony Mennonites to Mexico. Our storytellers will be William Janzen, Leonard Doell, Dick Braun, Abram Janzen and Richard Friesen.

After August, I will give over my temporary duties as editor to Ken Bechtel, who will take over as the permanent editor. George Epp is the copy editor. Diana Buhler and Kathy Braun are doing layout and design. We thank outgoing editor Ruth Friesen for her 8 years of work.

For the 2nd year in a row MHSS has not been able to conduct its annual meetings face to face because of COVID. You will be getting an envelope with exciting news about what your society has been up to. You will be able to read a package full of news and information.

All the best as we move, this year, from elbow hugging to real hugging. Please remain healthy.

President's Corner

John Reddekopp

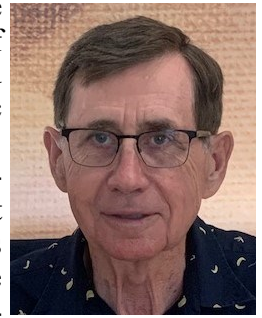
In some ways there have been few changes in terms of the operation of our board and our society since the Pandemic started almost two years ago. Once again, our Annual General Meeting (AGM) will not take place in person which is the same as last year. The AGM of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was conducted via ZOOM in January as was the case last year as well. Our Society is currently scheduled to host this meeting in January, 2023. We are hopeful that this will be an in-person meeting and that we will be able to show members from across the country that a Saskatchewan winter can be beautiful and enjoyable.

There has been limited access to our archives in the last two years. We are fortunate that we have some very dedicated volunteers who have kept things going when they have been able to go into the archives. In the past we would honour the volunteers with a banquet in November. Perhaps we can do so again in 2022. Meanwhile as a board we have conducted much of our business virtually. When we have met in-person we have held them in places where we are able to practice social distancing.

There have certainly also been changes. We need look no further than this edition of the *Historian*. It is the first edition that is totally organized and edited by volunteers as was mentioned in the previous edition. We have been so fortunate to have had Ruth Friesen work as our editor the past eight years. We were also fortunate that we were given a grant from the Plett Foundation in December. The purpose of the grant is to assist us in improving our archives. Speaking of the archives, our twenty-year lease for the space at Bethany Manor ends this coming October. We have had some preliminary discussions about extending this lease but there are certainly some challenges that will have to be overcome.

Recently I came across an article from an unpublished book by Grant Seibert. It is called *Vaccinations at the Elder's House in the Russian Mennonite Village of Karolswalde*. It describes the

(cont'd on page 12)



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David Toews made the difficult decisions that needed to be made during the development of the 20s immigration plan. The rescue of the Russian Mennonites had become a personal mission for him. In his capacity as Elder of the Rosenort Church, Toews negotiated with numerous people outside the Mennonite world, including holders of high public office. He developed a respectful working relationship with Prime Minister McKenzie King and Colonel John Stoughton Dennis of the CPR, both of whom considered Toews the Mennonite Bishop of Canada with "lived experience" and the Mennonites' trusted spokesman. The involvement with Mackenzie King and Colonel Dennis was crucial in expediting the immigration process.

David Toews faced opposition throughout his Eldership in the Rosenort Church. Winning the support of the churches and their members proved to be a significant part of his struggle to push the immigration project to completion, particularly when it came to signing a promissory note agreeing to pay off the transportation costs of all those refugees.

Before David Toews reached adolescence, his parents uprooted from their home in the Russian Mennonite colony of *Am-Tract* to join others on a dangerous spiritual journey into the unknown territory of Turkestan. Promises by Turkestan that they would be welcome and that there would be an exemption from military service, proved hollow.

This disastrous "Great Trek" resulted in horrendous suffering during its four years of desert heat, extreme thirst, scarcity of food, disease and death, breakdowns of wagons, and raids by bandits. Along the way, 15 to 20% of the total group perished.

In 1884, the Jacob Toews family seized the opportunity to emigrate to the USA, where they settled with relatives' help in Newton, Kansas. David enrolled in the local school at 14 years of age. His first task was to learn the strange new English language. After a year in elementary school and a summer or two as a farmhand, he enrolled in the *Halstead Fortbildungsschule* in the teacher training stream, graduating in 1888.



Halstead (Kansas) Seminary Graduates (1893), David Toews – front row, second from left. Credit: MAID

After eight years in Kansas, David Toews boarded a train to Gretna, Manitoba, joining his mentor, Heinrich H. Ewert. Here Toews taught for five years and served on education committees, presented teaching principles and methods, and led discussion groups. He completed another 2-year teaching course at United College, which eventually became the University of Winnipeg.

After five years in Manitoba, David Toews, perhaps lured by homesteading possibilities on the western frontier, trekked further west to Saskatchewan. At 28 years of age, David arrived in Tiefengrund in the summer of 1898, where he found a welcome reception, the chance to acquire some good farmland, the opportunity to continue his teaching career and much more, including his dedicated life partner, Margarete Friesen.

On August 18, 1901, David Toews was ordained as one of the ministers of the *Rosenorter Mennoniten Gemeinde*. The Gemeinde had its centre in the Eigenheim area where the first meeting place had been constructed, and where home meeting places in about 10 locales in and around Rosthern were established. On top of ministerial responsibilities, David was chosen to be Chairman of the *Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada* in 1914.

The Mennonite community eventually decided to establish its own school near Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Toews would promote the idea of

the school and collect funds for the start-up operation. The purpose of the school would be to preserve Mennonite values and the German language as well as preparing teachers for the many public schools being established. Classes began in rented facilities in 1905. The German-English Academy was constructed in 1910, forerunner to the present RJC High School. Toews was so actively involved with the school's affairs as a teacher, principal, secretary-treasurer, and Chairman of the Board that the school's very existence seemed to depend primarily on his continuing involvement.

In the meantime, the Mennonite communities in Canada began hearing reports of gruesome murders, rapes, burning of villages, the slaughter of entire families, of Mennonites either murdered or sent fleeing by bandits and harassment by agents of the Bolshevik regime. On top of the chaos and loss, letters to families in Canada reported widespread food shortage.

This suffering made a deep impression on David and others in Canada and the US, and the question of what they could do to help became ever more pressing. At a meeting of the Rosenort Mennonite congregation, Toews indicated, "We must bear in mind that these our brothers and sisters, stripped of all resources, will want to immigrate, and we should begin to gather resources to expedite their rescue from this slavery." Toews traveled to congregations far and wide to present the need and organized MCC collections delivered to Russia.

The task of delivering food in Russia was monumental. Food supplies were stored in *American Relief Administration* warehouses, often as far as fifty miles from the starving villagers, making their trips to receive relief rations dangerous. Still, the food supplies made the difference between life and death. Relief workers prepared tens of thousands of meals in soup kitchens for both Mennonites and Russians.

Back in Canada, a general election was scheduled for the fall of 1921. The leader of the opposition Liberal party, William Lyon Mackenzie King, gave guarantees to a Mennonite delegation that the order in council to keep Mennonites out of Canada would be rescinded should the Liberals win. King was the MP for Prince Albert, Saskatchewan constituency and knew about David Toews and the Mennonites.

The delegation also consulted with CPR railway officials in Montreal.

Upon their return, the delegation decided that an immigration commission should be formed, and on May 17, 1922, *the Canadian Mennonite Board*



Executives of the 1935 Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization: Standing: R.J. Harder, C.A. DeFehr, J. Derksen, J. Gerbrandt. Seated: B.B. Janz, David Toews, C.F. Klassen, J.J. Thiessen. Credit: MAID

of Colonization chaired by David Toews was formed. Board member B.B. Janz worked tirelessly in Russia and risked his own safety in negotiating with the Communist government to allow exit visas for Mennonites. Special mention should be made of Kaethe Hooze, Secretary of the Board of Colonization.



Kaethe Hooze, Secretary of Board of Colonization. Credit: MAID

Kaethe was a gifted young woman who spoke four languages. Upon her arrival in Canada, she gave up her dream of becoming a doctor. Instead, she worked diligently at filing and managing a mountain of correspondence for the Board of Colonization. After David retired, she continued as office manager for J.J. Thiessen who took over as Chairman of the Board of Colonization in 1946.



David Toews at the Immigration Office in Rosthern, SK in 1920. Credit: MAID

The Liberals won the election in 1921, and Mackenzie King became prime minister. David Toews' duty as Chairman of the *Board of Colonization* was to take the initiative—and to act quickly. He arranged a delegation to Ottawa to meet with the Prime Minister, the

Minister of Immigration and the Minister of Agriculture, who were all well informed about the plight of the Mennonites.

On June 2, 1922, the Order in Council was repealed, and the door was open for the Mennonites to enter Canada. The Mennonites had to promise that the immigrants would have sponsors in Canada until they could support themselves. They also pledged that the immigrants would not become a public charge for five years.

The first order of business for the *Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization* was to find a way of financing the immigration project, which would require an immense financial commitment. David Toews' first duty as director was to send a telegram to Col. Dennis of the CPR in Montreal asking him to send a draft of a transportation contract to Rosthern. Col. Dennis informed Toews that the CPR was prepared to proceed with the contract. The agreement was sent and presented during an annual session of the *Conference of Mennonites in Canada* in Winkler, Manitoba. But who would take responsibility to sign it? Toews put this question before the delegates of the Conference, and everything was quiet. No one would answer the question, no one stepped up to

take on the responsibility of signing. He asked the question a second time, and there was no response. He asked a third time with no response.

A good leader will act when decisive action needs to be taken. This was one of those times when a decision had to be made. At that moment, the CPR was putting pressure on Toews to get the contract signed without delay. The CPR, which had offices in Moscow, knew what was happening to the Mennonites in Russia.

With the CPR putting pressure on David Toews to sign the contract, Toews stated that for the time being, he would sign the contract with the backing of the Rosenort Church until the other churches could join in. Some detractors asked Toews how he could sleep at night after being known as the million-dollar man with a contract with Col. Dennis of the CPR. Toews replied that he would not have slept at night *had he not signed* the contract knowing what was happening to the Mennonites in Russia.

Despite the opposition, David Toews offered a hand of reconciliation to everyone who, in sincerity, wished to work together for the rescue and well-being of their brothers abroad. It was not a matter of changing their minds but convincing the opposition to come on side. Toews reiterated, "The rising generation of Russia is being lost. There is yet a chance to save many, if only there were a united effort to utilize the opportunities offered, the possibilities for effective work would be unlimited. I doubt if ever in Mennonite history such opportunities were offered. The door of refuge is open, the means of conveyance is furnished, the way to get out of Russia is found; the only indifference is many of our people in America and the open hostility of others." viii

Early in July of 1923, approximately 750 immigrants boarded the train at Chortitza (present day Zaporizhia, Ukraine) and set their faces and hearts in the direction of Canada. The immigrant ship that carried them docked in Quebec City on July 17, 1923. While there would be other possibilities, such as Kitchener or Winnipeg or Saskatoon, it made good sense to bring the first travelers to Rosthern. This town housed the offices of the *Colonization Board* and its executive staff. Toews and his staff prepared for their reception in Rosthern.

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At five o'clock in the afternoon of July 21, the



*Arrival of Russlaender Mennonites in Rosthern on July 21, 1923.
Credit: Mennonite Brethren Studies*

first immigrant train, comprised of ten passenger cars and three baggage cars, pulled into the Rosthern station where Mennonites from near and far had been gathering. They came in cars, buggies, wagons, and hayracks, prepared to take their assigned families back to their homes.

Gerald Brown, a reporter for the Saskatoon Star Phoenix, described the gathering: "A great hush fell upon the assembled thousands and to the ears of the Canadians attending the event came a soft, slow chant, "Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren, (Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, King of creation.) Softly the chant arose and fell, seeming to be a musical expression of the great tragedy and heartbreak of the Mennonites in Russia. Then the Canadian Mennonites took up the song, and the tone increased in volume, growing deeper and fuller until the melody was pouring forth from several thousand voices. When the song's first note burst upon the air, the Mennonites removed their hats, and the others paid like tribute. Many in the crowd sprang from other ethnicities, but the significance of the song was manifest to them when they saw their Mennonite friends bare their heads and when they saw grown men, whom they had known for years, burst into

tears.' ix

Frank Epp describes the event: "There was crying, and there was hearty rejoicing." He reports that it seemed as though public opinion among Canadians and the Canadian Mennonite population had undergone a remarkable change. Almost all the former resentment was gone. Among those who stood in tears were prominent non-Mennonite citizens and former soldiers. The reception was beyond the expectations of Bishop Toews and his colleagues. The same was true in succeeding years, and until 1928 almost no opposition was heard from Anglo Saxon Canadians.x

A sense of success for what happened in 1923 and a sense of urgency on the part of the Mennonites in the Soviet Union motivated the Board to enter further negotiations with the CPR for a second wave of immigrants in 1924. The contract specified the transport of 5,000 credit passengers and 2,000 passengers who would pay their way. Toews planned a meeting in 1924 with S.F. Coffman of Vineland, Ontario, to accept 1,340 Russian Mennonites. Mennonites and Old Order Mennonites took these *Russländer* into their homes in the Waterloo, Welland and Vineland areas of Ontario.

Meanwhile, repayment of the debt, known as the *Reiseschuld*, was becoming increasingly difficult as it grew: immigrant families were struggling to meet their daily financial needs. Toews and his colleagues knew very well that to bring in more immigrants depended entirely on how the *Board* lived up to its financial commitments to the CPR in the early phases of the movement.

A disastrous night occurred in Rosthern in the early morning of December 13, 1926. The home of David Toews with seven people in the house burned to the ground with the temperature hovering around -30° F. Several injuries occurred within the family. David Toews was hospitalized for several weeks, and the youngest child, Irene, died from her burns. The fire and Irene's death were a terrible blow to the family. News of the December fire spread quickly across Canada and the Mennonite world. Major newspapers in Canada carried the story, and letters expressed sympathy and encouragement. Monetary contributions poured in from Canada, the US, and Europe, including Russia.

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David Toews Family in 1917: Rear: Maria, Benno. Front: Elsie, David with Louise, Dorothy (Dora), Elma being held by Margarete, Margaret. Credit: Louise Friesen collection.

1926 was the last year for significant numbers of Mennonite immigrants to arrive on Canada's shores since the obstacles to further immigration were becoming formidable. If it had been up to the *Canadian Board of Colonization* and its visionary leader, David Toews, the immigrant flow would have continued. The CPR was willing to continue its cooperation, even though it had already advanced \$1,500,000 in travel credit, of which only \$500,000 had been paid back. Xi

In Canada, the citizenry was increasingly raising its voice against the immigration policies of the Liberal government. The biggest obstacle preventing the mass movement of Mennonite refugees to Canada was Canadian Immigration Law. Immigration policy was geared toward reinforcing an Anglo-Canadian norm and preventing entry to people at odds with that norm.

By 1930, hope for the movement of large numbers of Mennonites from Russia to Canada was all but abandoned. In the Soviet Union, the situation was becoming urgent as the economic and social conditions worsened. The government had substantially increased the cost of exit permits and the sentiments of the Soviet government and the Russian people were turning against the exit of Mennon-

ites. B.B. Janz and C.F. Klassen barely escaped the Russian authorities. They managed to arrive in Canada and assumed further responsibilities for the welfare of their Mennonite brothers and sisters in Western Canada.

Within four months, January to April 1933, the Rosthern office of the *Board of Colonization* received over 7,000 letters from persons in Russia begging for help. Many more letters went to immigrant friends and relatives.

The response was an extensive relief program through food parcels.



David Toews and J.J. Thiessen. Thiessen provided a lot of support for Toews, especially in his declining years.

Credit: MAID

Life for the Soviet people during the 1930s was tragic. That the world at large turned deaf ears and indifferent hearts to cries for help coming from the Soviet Union compounded the tragedy. Toews traveled within Canada, the USA, and Europe, appealing to government officials in London, Washington, and Ottawa. He wrote letters to Ramsay MacDonald of Great Britain, President Herbert Hoover of the US, and Mackenzie King on behalf of the *Board of Colonization* and the church. One wonders how he found the physical and emotional strength to continue in all his roles during the '30s and early '40s.



David Toews outside his home in Rosthern in 1946.
Credit: MAID

In 1946, David Toews resigned for health reasons as Chairman of the *Board of Colonization*. As 1946 slipped away, Toews gradually weakened physically. Eventually, he became confined to his home, where he was cared for by his daughters. His thoughts moved away from concern with the outside world. He turned inward, and because of pain, spoke little, was restless and had trouble sleeping.

One bright spot among others in David Toews' diminishing world of comprehension and awareness was his relationship with a fellow member of the *Board of Colonization*, J.J. Thiessen, who took over the Board chairmanship from Toews. Just as Thiessen had cultivated a relationship with Toews in their working years, so now he devoted himself to Toews in his final days. Thiessen knew that Toews was pre-occupied with the past, so he focused on pleasant memories and relationships gone by. Xii

On November 19, 1946, Thiessen reported to Toews that the *Reiseschuld* was finally all paid off—\$1,947,398.68 (including the principal of \$1,767,398.68 and interest of 180,000 that was settled before 1930). Close to \$1,000,000 in interest payments was forgiven by the CPR.

Thiessen writes: "Toews stares back with a wide-eyed gaze. I look straight back at him and repeat loudly and clearly: Brother Toews, it has happened; you have not been disgraced with your guarantees. Malice has not won the day. This important chapter of our history has come to a satisfying conclusion." J.J. Thiessen reported, "His eyes were fixed on me. He was thinking of the difficult unfounded accusations, of heartless criticism. I called out loudly to him: *"Es reut mich nicht"* (I have no regrets). He continued to look at me, but then he broke down and wept. He had borne the burden of the unpaid *Reiseschuld* as a heavy weight for many years. We pray to God. His face becomes mild and soft. He rejoices. God be praised! Faith is the victory." xiii

In February 1947, 3 months later, David Toews suffered a massive stroke, and on Tuesday, February 25, he died peacefully at his home in Rosthern. The memorial service was held on February 28th with J.J. Thiessen giving the main funeral sermon. The many guest speakers included the chief commissioner of the CPR. Thiessen emphasized that leaders do not become great overnight. Toews' pathway to maturity consisted of the arduous journey to America

via central Asia, the pioneer years in Kansas, his service as Elder of the *Rosenorter Gemeinde*, the 26 years of leadership in the Conference, the 35 years of service on the Mission Board, his 24 years of leadership in the inter-Mennonite work of immigration and settlement, and the 23 years of wrestling with the transportation debt. Xiv

David Toews was buried in the Rosthern cemetery next to Margarete and their daughter Irene. The inscription on the headstone is Toews' favorite passage from Romans 14:7. "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. If



Tombstone of David and Margarete Toews in Rosthern Cemetery. Credit: Gary Friesen

we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's."

To this day, there are signs in abundance to tell future generations that "David Toews Was Here." This tribute wouldn't be complete without the addition of a few anecdotes:

- In December of 1937, David Toews received an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree from Bethel College in Newton, Kansas.
- On June 3, 1939, David and Margarete were introduced to King George VI and Queen Elizabeth during their tour of Canada.

- In 1957, a new administration and classroom building on the campus of Rosthern Junior College was dedicated to the memory of Rev. David Toews.
- In 1964, a body of water in northern Saskatchewan was named Toews Lake in honour of Bishop David Toews, "who gave dedicated service to his fellow citizens."
- In 1973, on the 50th anniversary of the beginning of the 1920s migration of Mennonites from Russia, immigrants and their descendants erected a cairn on the grounds of Rosthern Mennonite Church in memory of David Toews and B.B. Janz.
- A month-long David Toews Memorial Festival of Sacred Music was organized in association with the University of Saskatchewan in the summer of 1976.
- In 1988, the Rosthern community recognized the historical legacy of David Toews by commissioning a bronze bust of his likeness and giving it a place of prominence in the *Mennonite Heritage Museum*, now the *Rosthern Museum and Mennonite Interpretive Centre*.
- In 1991, a plaque was mounted in his honor to a cairn on the grounds of CMU in Winnipeg "in memory of a dedicated Christian teacher, minister and conference servant."
- In 2005 and 2006, Blake and Louise Friesen spearheaded a book about David Toews, *David Toews Was Here*, by Dr. Helmut Harder.

End Notes:

1. Lawrence Klippenstein, Retired Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba
2. [Harder, Helmut. *David Toews was Here* – 1870-1947](#), p32
3. Harder, p.109
4. [Epp, Frank H. *Mennonite Exodus*](#), (Published for Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council), D.W. Friesen and Sons Ltd., Altona, 1962, p64
5. Toews, John B. *With Courage to Spare: The Life of B.B. Janz. 1877 -1964*, Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1978,
6. Harder, 116-117
7. Ibid
8. Epp, p156
9. Gerald M. Brown, Reporter for Saskatoon Star Phoenix, July 1923
10. Epp, p146
11. Harder, p166
12. Ibid, p289
13. Ibid, p290

14. Ibid, p293

15. Occupied at the time of immigration by the Soviet Union

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We at MHSS are grateful to Dave Toews, editor of The MHSA *Chronicle*, for allowing us to co-publish this fine article by Gary Friesen.

Author Gary Friesen is recently retired from a 35-year career as an Industrial and Office Ergonomist. He lives in Edmonton and enjoys travel, history, cycling, golfing, and spending time with his two granddaughters. Gary and his wife Anne worship at Lendrum Mennonite Church in Edmonton, Alberta. Gary is a strong supporter of MCC, as was his grandfather, David Toews. Gary has been a volunteer with MCC Relief Sales in Edmonton and has participated in Go 100 activities. He has made significant and continuing contributions to Syrian Refugee resettlement since 2015. Over the years, Gary has served on various church committees.



The Poetry of David Loewen (1885 – 1977)

Editor's comment: In Vol. XXV no.1, 2020 we published David Loewen's autobiography. In this article we are publishing one of his poems. *In Vor der Losung* (Before the Lottery) written when he was 21, Loewen cries to God as he struggles with the thought that he might be selected by the Russian Czar to perform forestry, medical or military service. Loewen wrote in Gothic script which was transliterated into the Latin script and translated into English by Larry Loewen-Rudgers.



David Loewen,
1911

(Photo courtesy of
Harold Loewen)

Vor der Losung (Before the Drawing

of Lots)

Wie zitterst Du mein blödes Herz
Und warum so ein Sturm?
Was schreist Du? An welchem Schmerz
Krümst Du Dich wie ein Wurm?
Ach wenn ich denk der nahen Zeit
Die Losung ist bald da—
Ach wäre diese Zeit noch weit
Doch ist sie so sehr nah!
Wie wird mir fallen wohl das Loos?
Was wird mein Schicksal sein?
Ach wär die Losungsperrl doch groß,
Wie sehr würd ich mir freun.
Deßwegen fürchte ich mir so
Und muß stets denken dran;
Kann garnicht froh von Herzen sein
Denn dunkel scheint die Bahn.
Ach schähme armes Herze dich,
Hast Du Dich ganz verirrt?
Wann hat der Herr vergessen Dich;
Wie bist Du so verwirrt?

Oft ist gar wunderbar und tief
Sein rat—scheitz uns auch aus
Es gehe noch so krum und schief
Er führt es herrlich aus.
Und sollt ich dienen ist's sein Will
In Zukunft als Soldat.
So will ich ruhig halten still,
Und preisen seine Gnad.
Denn Glauben wir an Gotteswort
So ist auch eine Gnad,
Wenn Er für uns, ob hir ob dort,
Ein Plätzchen offen hatt.
Es mus dem Frommen dienen nur,
Zum besten, was Gott tut,
Gehts auch entgegen der Natur,
So ist doch recht und gut.
Und wenn Du schreist, Du armes Herz,
Und bist stets voller Furcht.
Was nützt es, was hilft Dir Dein Schmerz,
Was Er will, führt Er durch!
Drum schweige Herz ergieb Dich dem
Der alle Welt regiert.
Ist's auch dem Fleisch nicht angenehm
Er uns stets richtig führt.
Herr Jesu gibe mir Mut und Kraft,
Und große Freudigkeit.
Zu tun mit Lust gewissenhaft,
Was Dein Rat mir gebeut.

Before the Drawing of Lots (Vor der Losung)

Why are you trembling my foolish heart?
And why such a storm?
And over what pain are you crying?
Why are you curling yourself up like a worm?
Oh when I think that the time is drawing near,
The drawing of lots will soon be here.
Oh I wish that this time would be far off,
But, yet it is so very near!
How will the dice fall for me?
What will my fate be?
Oh, would the number on the dice be high,
How very much that would please me!
That is why I am so fearful.
And must always be thinking of it.
I cannot be glad in my heart,
Because the road ahead is dark.
Oh, be ashamed of yourself poor heart,
Have you completely lost your way?

When has the Lord forgotten you,
 Why are you so confused?
 Often it is very wonderful and deep,
 His council- even if it blinds out our
 understanding.
 No matter how bent and twisted it turns out,
 He executes it divinely.
 And should I serve, it is His will
 In the future even as a soldier.
 So I will quietly keep still
 And praise His mercy.
 For if we believe in the word of God,
 then it is also a blessing.
 When He is for us be it here or there,
 He has a place open for us.
 Only the devout are to be served.
 Whatever God does is for the best.
 Though it may go against your nature.
 Still, it is right and good.
 And if you cry, you poor heart,
 And you are always filled with fear.
 What is the use, how does your pain help you?
 Whatever He wants, he will see through.
 Therefore be quiet, heart, give in to Him.
 He rules all of the world,
 Though it may not be a comfort to the flesh,
 He leads us always correctly.
 Lord Jesus, give me courage and strength
 And great joyfulness
 To do gladly and conscientiously
 Whatever your wisdom commands.

(cont'd from page 3)

method for vaccinating for small pox at that time.
 It would be announced on a Sunday that all those not
 yet vaccinated would meet at a certain elder's place
 at a certain day. A child or adult who had been vac-
 cinated would be there with a festering arm. All the
 children who had not been vaccinated would have a
 small cut or scratch made on one of their arms to
 create a slight bleeding. The elder would then touch
 the knife blade to the festering arm and then touch it
 to each newly scratched arm. Yes, the way vaccina-
 tions are done has changed since those early days
 over a hundred years ago.

We pray that it may it go well with each of us in
 2022. Peace to all!

Archive Transition: From Paper to Digital

By Victor Wiebe

Almost everyone has a computer or tablet and a mobile smartphone. We are living, communicating, and writing in a digital world made possible by the computer and smartphone. The change to digital impacts how most information is created, recorded, stored, accessed, and used. The archival storage of information and its accessibility to the public and the digitizing of previously stored material presents a real challenge for archives and done correctly, benefits us all.

Take this simple example: I visit my uncle Hugh Wiebe in Vancouver and we talk about great uncle Jacob and wonder about the village his wife came from in Imperial Russia. Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could access digitally relevant archival information about the village while we chatted? This is the current dream regarding the perfect Digital Archive, to provide ready and easy digital access at any time.

The question of a perfect digital archive is every archive's desire, and one with which we at MHSS are engaged. Personally, I have a passion for paper and all documents associated with that medium, but I also have to confess to using digital files frequently because they are easily accessible from anywhere, at any time, even when libraries and archives are closed. Saskatchewan Government Archives has overcome the loss of paper access when it closed the Saskatoon office by digitizing its paper records. Patrons have gained better access via the digital format.

I was recently sent an article on the tragic plague of 1706 that killed one third of all the people in Danzig, including Mennonites. The article was sent as a simple attachment to an email. The article was in German but had a translation feature that allowed me to read it in English. Paper can't do this. It was a scholarly article with many



Victor Wiebe

Photo credit: Jake Buhler

footnotes and references to earlier studies. As I read the article, I was intrigued by a reference so I clicked on it. I was instantly taken to a beautiful, high resolution colour scan of a linked source document. It was a 200-year-old book, and I could easily read the text of every page at home, even at midnight. That is one of the great benefits of scanned documents. All archives would like to be able to provide tools like that to researchers.

Digital Archives will require careful planning, great effort, and considerable financial resources to reach that stage. There will be problems to solve and some bumps and failures on the road are to be expected.

The fate of scanned, original documents and books poses an important question. Will digitized hard copy be preserved? The answer is Yes, of course. All digital archives will continue to hold and preserve their hard copy collections.

I was writing a GAMEO article on the 1685 anatomy atlas titled: *Anatomia humani corporis*, written by the Dutch Mennonite professor of Anatomy, Govert Bidloo. As a Mennonite, he wanted the book's illustrations to be posed not as classical sculptures but to be realistic and truthful as actually seen by doctors to bring passion for, and dignity to, the dead. This it did and the book radically changed how anatomy was illustrated. The book is rare and no library on the prairies held a copy. I was able to write the article because I easily found a digitally scanned copy online from a university in Hamburg, Germany.

While I was working on this article, I visited my son in Vancouver and found out that the University of British Columbia held a copy. They retrieved the book for me from their rare book room. I was astounded at the size and beauty of the book. It was huge, with large illustrations on very thick paper and beautifully bound in tooled leather. This was a book published to impress all readers. The context of a physical book, its size, value and purpose is best understood from an original, hard copy. Something digital copies can't convey well.

More and more materials will come to archives in digital format, such as photographs, reports, emails, and video. With Covid restrictions, many churches have begun making video recordings of their Sunday worship services. These should rightfully be deposited in archives.

For the MHSS Archive to add a digital archive capability, basic concerns regarding hardware,

software and staff competency will have to be addressed. Beyond these, the list below names other background areas that require careful deliberation.

Selection: What areas of our collections do we choose to digitize?

Uniqueness: How do we determine if we hold unique resources? Do we digitize items already available on line?

Copyright: Are the items under copyright or in the public domain, and if the former, have we acquired permission to digitize and share? Creating a digital surrogate as a backup copy is permitted (with restrictions) by the Canadian Copyright Act.

Storage: Where will we store our digital files? How will our files be backed up? Do we have a preservation strategy for digital files?

Display: How do we plan to cooperate and share our collection with other Mennonite archives and the public?

Description: How will we describe each digital item so that users can locate it? What metadata standards are most appropriate for our collection and will it help users find our materials?

Becoming a perfect Digital Archive will not be easy but it will be an important benefit to clients worldwide.

If you enter the following text in your search engine you will get the article I wrote:
[https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Anatomia_humani_corporis_\(Anatomical_Atlas\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Anatomia_humani_corporis_(Anatomical_Atlas))

This list is patterned after the list given at:
<https://www.library.yorku.ca/web/collections/digitalscholarship/digitization-best-practices/>

GGE

Book Review

By Jake Buhler

Ernie Hildebrand. *Guiding Diverse Flocks: Tales of a Rural Mennonite Pastor* (Altona, MB, Friesen Press, 2021). 200 pages. Paperback. Non-fiction. Autobiography.

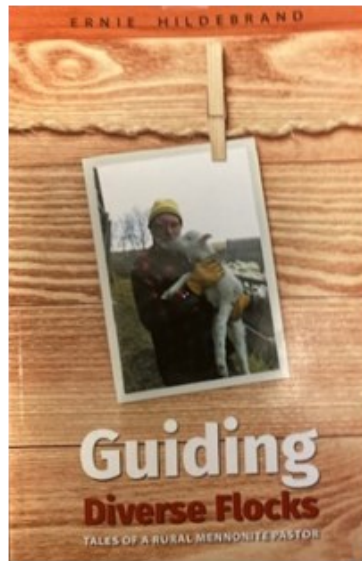
Ernie Hildebrand's autobiography is divided into 3 sections: First, life on the farm near Crystal City, Manitoba; second, training for ministry and serving as a pastor and instructor; third, returning to the farm near Crystal City.

The title, *Guiding Diverse Flocks*, is poignant twice over. Hildebrand was a sheep farmer, and his detailed descriptions of the differences between Suffolk and Polypay breeds is graphic. But he also worked with diverse flocks at Osler, Springstein, Swift Current, and Mather. These church flocks were also graphically different. Hildebrand might have used the word *shepherding* rather than *guiding*, but he chose the latter. His behavior was that of listening and discerning to get group consensus. He guided a flock of sheep even as he guided the life of a congregation.

But in their private lives, Ernie and Judy were very decisive. They were project oriented and succeeded in formidable tasks. To restore the old house on the Crystal City farm was daunting but it showed that Ernie and Judy were visionaries and carpenters. They built a smaller barn out of recycled lumber in Swift Current and a huge barn in Crystal City as well as a garage. And more. But always there were others who helped in the projects in exchange for what Ernie could do for them.

The entire book is a long story from beginning to end. And a good story it is. And in the telling, some things got left out or are told incompletely. Such is the case with the Osler story that involved the Eldorado story. A local person might have reviewed the script before it went to press.

Very few pastors ever write about their lives in ministry. It is a tough assignment. But Hildebrand



Very few pastors ever write about their lives in ministry. It is a tough assignment. But Hildebrand tells his stories of ministry with eagerness and fortitude. There were tough times all right but you just tell it like it was. Let the chips fall where they may.

Hildebrand gets away with *telling it the way it was* because he is such a likable person. A friend told me, *if you cannot get along with Ernie, its probably not his fault*. Agreed.

Does Hildebrand tell us what lessons are to be learned from his life? If so, Hildebrand is not academic or philosophical about it. At the end he summarizes his life: *I have always been curious...I believe all of life is sacred...it is belonging to a community of faith...its joining with others to discuss the big issues of life and death*. And so, he rests his case.

If you want to read a book by a farmer-minister-farmer, you will do well with this one. It is a pleasure to read a book that has been carefully edited and laid out by a publisher. More authors might consider that approach.



Ernie Hildebrand.
Photo credit: Rhonda Hildebrand

*Guid-
Di-
verse*

Flocks can be purchased for \$20.00 by contacting Rhonda Hildebrand at j.rgascho@sasktel.net or by phoning her at 306- 239-0300.

Frank and Agnes Wiens: A Remarkable Missionary Story

by Abe J. Dueck

The following story is a reprint from Vol 40, No. 1 - March 2014. Used with permission by Jon Isaac.

The story of Frank and Agnes¹ Wiens, pioneer Mennonite Brethren missionaries to China, is a story of incredible faith, courage, and adventure. It has intriguing connections to events and people in the United States and Russia, as well as to Canada.² The story of Mennonite Brethren (MB) missions in China is not generally as well known, particularly in Canada, as the mission stories in India and Africa, for a variety of reasons. Recent developments in China have spawned renewed interest in recovering the Mennonite story. This brief account is only one of many that deserve further analysis and interpretation.

Frank Wiens was born in 1880 in Henderson, Nebraska. His parents emigrated from Russia in 1879. Agnes Harder Wiens was born in 1883 of parents who had also migrated from Russia in 1875. They were married in 1902 and, after spending one year at McPherson College, they attended Rochester Baptist Seminary, enrolled in a missionary program. Frank's gifts as an evangelist were quickly recognized by the MB Church and he spent a few years as a Conference evangelist. Sometimes he was referred to as the "Billy Sunday" of the Mennonites on the prairies. Frank and Agnes, however, had their sights set on becoming missionaries in China.

In 1909, the MB Conference voted to open a mission field in China. This decision was reversed a year later, which came as a serious blow to Frank and Agnes. They were determined to go anyway, even if it meant soliciting support on their own.

As a first step, they decided to travel to Russia, where they still had close relatives and family friends. On September 3, 1910, they set sail and soon arrived in the Molotschna colony, meeting their cousins in the village of Sparrau. Regular reports of their sojourn there, as well as subsequent developments, were sent to the *Zionsbote* and the *Mennonitische Rundschau*.

Before long, Frank was fully involved in evangelistic activity throughout the Mennonite colonies, including Samara, Orenburg, and Crimea. He also preached to large crowds among the Russian people. He refused to be intimidated by the fact that he was unable to secure permission from the Russian authorities to preach. He was also sometimes harshly criticized and at times threatened by Mennonites who resented his proselytizing activity.

On July 13, 1911, the Wiens family boarded the train to Siberia. By this time, two children had been born to them—Harold and Adina. They stopped in Omsk, intending to stay very briefly,



Frank J. and Agnes (Harder) Wiens with children, Herbert and Adina, 1911. Photo credit: CMBS-Winnipeg (NP025-07-041)

but strong pleas from the local leaders led them to stay until the end of August. On September 1, they finally boarded the Trans-Siberian Railway bound for China via Manchuria, disembarking at Vladivostok on the southeast coast of Russia. Although Wiens took many photographs of this incredible journey, he was detained by police in Vladivostok and his photos were confiscated.

The final leg of the journey to China was via boat. Sailing from Vladivostok, they arrived in China on the eve of the Revolution. On October 9, 1911, they entered Swatow harbor—the same day that China declared its independence from the Manchu dynasty. The troublesome era of the Re-

public began. Wiens soon met several Baptist missionaries, Jacob Speicher and George Campbell.

After some delays, on April 14, 1912, Wiens finally left for Shanghang in Fujien province, the city that would become the base of an ambitious missionary program among the Hakka people. Before long Frank and Agnes began Sunday services, even though they had barely begun to learn the Hakka language.

Shanghang was surrounded by a huge wall, with a gate at each of the four corners. Wiens soon purchased a ten-room house near the north gate, inside the city. The main missionary compound, however, was established on property about one mile east of the city. It came to be called *Mi Fa Vien*, which literally meant, "American Chinese Garden."

Before long, Wiens showed his entrepreneurial skills, using Chinese laborers to build a boys' school, a girls' school, a church, and many other facilities. Although the political situation in China during World War I as a whole was unstable, the mission prospered. Agnes Wiens contributed as much as Frank, using her nursing skills, as well as working with a group of "Bible women," who also travelled independently to some of the outstations. Her message was that in Christ, there was no difference between men and women.³

Wiens initiated several major economic projects. The first was an attempt to introduce a dairy industry by importing four Holstein cattle from America. The venture proved to be a greater challenge than Wiens had anticipated. When the cattle arrived in Hong Kong to be transferred to a ship for China, Wiens was detained under some suspicion of collusion with the Germans. A naïve official at one point asked him, "Who are these Holsteins?" thinking that they were human beings. After a tortuous journey the rest of the way to Shanghang, the health of the cattle was repeatedly threatened. When ticks overwhelmed the herd, Agnes Wiens sewed protective blue garments for them. The attempt to create a dairy industry failed in the long run, however, when disease decimated the herd.

Another significant venture involved the creation of a silk industry. In 1916, Wiens travelled to Foochow to inspect a silk factory and brought back cuttings of a mulberry tree. Soon he established a thriving mulberry tree farm on a fallow piece of land and before long the silk worms spun their cocoons. Two stocking-knitting machines were purchased and there was promise of success. But before long, strong competition with new stocking designs brought an end to Frank's dream.

During times of natural disaster, such as a serious flood in 1917, and during times of civil war and anarchy, Wiens often played a crucial role. In 1917, a

major flood enveloped the region and Wiens became the Red Cross agent for relief. In order to get money from stingy rich locals, he posted the names of contributors.

In 1918, during the "Era of the War Lords," Shanghang was alternately under the northern and the southern armies. When the northern forces entered the city in August, a short period of peace was followed by brutality and plundering. About 200 women received shelter in the mission compound. Again, a Red Cross station was set up that was headed by Wiens. Foreigners were held in some awe by the respective conquerors and the missionaries were therefore often able to intervene in difficult situations.

The most dramatic series of events transpired in late August 1918, when the city was under siege by the southern forces. Wiens had entered the city before the gates were closed and could not return home. The southern general came to the mission residence to ask Frank to help negotiate a peace settlement, but found only Agnes at home. Agnes decided to undertake the peace mission herself, after gathering her family and associates for prayer. With caution she proceeded to the east gate where she held up a flag to signal her peaceful intent. Some shots were fired at her, even hitting the flag. She carried a basket with a message for her



Mission House Mi Fa Vien built by Frank J. Wiens, 1918.

husband who was inside the city. The message stated the terms of peace and indicated that the attack on the city would resume by 5 p.m., if the terms were not accepted by morning.

Frank Wiens became the intermediary. He climbed the huge wall on a long bamboo ladder to receive and deliver messages. After seven such successive exchanges, a truce was reached. According to the terms, a sum of money was to be paid to the southern general and Wiens was to lead the northern army out of the city the next day. Quick preparations were made and in due course the officials and their soldiers marched out of the city and boarded 18 boats to head through enemy territory toward the coastal city of Swatow. Wiens

knew that he was in great danger, but two weeks later he returned safely. The city residents were extremely grateful and honored him with a procession and fireworks the next day. Several years of peace followed. Daughter Adina wrote that Agnes Wiens never received adequate recognition for her role.⁴

Beginning in 1919, after almost a decade on their own, the mission work was finally strengthened with the arrival of new missionaries, which included several single women, as well as several couples. This made it possible for Frank and Agnes to return to America for a brief furlough. They arrived in San Francisco in July 1921, and after a busy year of deputation work, boarded a ship for their return to China in October 1922.

During their year away, the political landscape had become more unstable in China. Wiens was convinced that the Chinese leadership needed to be prepared to take over responsibility for the church and for evangelism. He worked hard to transfer responsibilities. Early in 1927, the situation became desperate and they were advised to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. Under difficult circumstances, they soon departed, settling in Reedley, CA. They still hoped to return, but in the meantime, they needed to earn a living and they became involved in other ministries.

The door opened for Wiens to come to Canada in 1930. He was invited to become principal of the Tabor Bible Institute in Dalmeny, Saskatchewan. Frank and Agnes travelled to Dalmeny in August with their three youngest children, Harold, Linda, and Roland. It is not clear why this lasted for only two years, but they returned to Reedley in 1932.

By 1934, Frank and Agnes were determined to return to China, even though the Mission Board was not willing to support them. At the 1933 General Conference, both Frank and Agnes indicated their strong desire to return to China.⁵ Even though they understood that financial help would not be forthcoming, they pled for moral and prayer support.

The Reedley church and a number of individuals pledged to support them financially and by the end of August 1934, they were back in China. Initially, the Board also promised to provide \$200 per year. This support, however, was soon terminated. Frank and Agnes clearly felt abandoned (Adina indicates that a Board member referred to Frank as a "maverick"⁶). When they arrived in Shanghang, they found that almost the entire mission compound had been destroyed. Agnes was already encountering health problems, and after a period of suffering, she passed away in June 1935.

Frank spent the next while in itinerant evange-



Frank Wiens taught at Dalmeny Tabor Bible School for several years in the early 1930s. Photo courtesy Mennonite Archives, Fresno Pacific University, 1951

lism and also served with the church in Shanghang. At the 1936 General Conference, a letter from Frank was read that apparently raised the question of Conference support again. The Board recommended against further involvement in China, because "circumstances were not clear or promising."⁷ Also, the situation in India was becoming much more promising.

Frank was clearly very lonely. His good friend, C.N. Hiebert, who was then in Winnipeg, came to his rescue. Via correspondence, he introduced Frank to Agnes Koop, a nurse at Concordia Hospital in Winnipeg, who was considering mission work.⁸ After a brief visit with some of the children in California, Agnes was on her way to meet Frank in China.

Frank and Agnes Koop's wedding took place in Hong Kong on June 7, 1937. A month later, on July 3, Agnes was commissioned for mission service by the First Chinese Baptist Church in Hong Kong. Frank wrote that because of time constraints, it had not been possible to have the commissioning at the Ministers' Conference in Winnipeg.⁹ The marriage proved to be a happy one.

A month later, in July, the Japanese attacked Beijing. Shanghang was spared from attacks until May 1939, when the first bomb fell on the city. Once again, the couple became involved in Red Cross work, with Agnes taking a lead role.

Ultimately, all formal mission work came to an end by the beginning of World War II. Frank and Agnes finally left in early 1941, primarily because by that time Frank's health was deteriorating. They settled back in Reedley, where Frank passed away in 1942. Agnes (Koop) Wiens passed away several decades later, in 1984.

The story of Frank and Agnes (Harder) Wiens, and the story of Frank and Agnes (Koop) Wiens, together with their families, and the Mennonite mission work in China as a whole is a fascinating and important story of Christian faith and remarka-

ble courage.

The middle son, Harold, had a distinguished academic career as a geographer, specializing in China. He graduated from Tabor College, studied at Yenching University in Beijing, and received a Ph.D. degree from the University of Michigan. He spent time as an academic in China, and as well as nineteen years on the faculty of Yale University.

Much of the story of the Wiens family parallels the



Wedding photo of Frank J. and Agnes (Koop) Wiens taken in Hong Kong on June 7, 1937. Photo: Courtesy of Linda Cheever

story of other early Mennonite missionaries in China, such as the Henry and Nellie (Schmidt)

Bartel. A recent novel by Bo Caldwell provides the casual reader with an excellent entrée into this

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Roland (the youngest son) and his wife, Anna, went to China as missionaries in 1948, but were forced to leave in 1951. Thereafter, they served in Japan for a number of years. They made renewed contact with the Chinese Christians, beginning in 1980. Their culminating experience was a return visit to Shanghai in 1988.¹⁰

Much of the story of the Wiens family parallels the story of other early Mennonite missionaries in China, such as the Henry and Nellie (Schmidt) Bartel. A recent novel by Bo Caldwell provides the casual reader with an excellent entrée into this dramatic and significant chapter of the Mennonite mission in China.¹¹

End Notes:

1. Frank was married twice, first to Agnes Harder and then to Agnes Koop.
2. Frank Wiens wrote an account of their experiences, including the first two terms in China. See F.J. Wiens, *Fifteen Years among the Hakkas of South China* (1925). Frank's frequent reports were also published in the *Zionsbote* and the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. See also a detailed account of the family's experiences based on the above as well as private correspondence and interviews by Adina Wiens Robinson, *China Beckoning* (unpublished manuscript, 1992).
3. *China Beckoning*, 164.
4. *China Beckoning*, 215.
5. *Yearbook of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America*, 1933, 24f.
6. *China Beckoning*, 368.
7. *Yearbook of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America*, 1936, 27.
8. *China Beckoning*, 391ff.
9. "Aus der Ferne," *Zionsbote*, 1 September 1937, 2-4.
10. For details see an unpublished manuscript by Roland and Anna Wiens, *China then and Now*

(1993).

11. *City of Tranquil Light* (Macmillan, 2010).

Cornelius Boldt: Farmer, Minister and Teacher

By Jake Buhler

Cornelius Boldt was born on November 6, 1902 on the family farm near Osler, Northwest Territories to Jacob J. and Susanna [nee Lepp] Boldt. He was one of 19 children and the first to be born in Canada. His parents had arrived from Minnesota, USA in 1901. He died in Saskatoon on January 13, 2000 at age 97 and is buried in the Osler Mennonite Church Cemetery.

Cornelius received his elementary public schooling in the Altona S.D. #859 and graduated from high-school at the German-English Academy [now called Rosthern Junior College] in 1925. He was baptized in Rosthern by Aeltester David Toews on June 8, 1924. He obtained his Normal School Teaching Certificate in Saskatoon in 1926. He then taught school in the Renfrew S.D. 4116 and LaBassee S.D. 4156, both public schools in the Rosthern School Superintendency #49 from 1926 to 1933.

Cornelius moved to Manitoba in the fall of 1933 and remained there until 1941. He taught in several public elementary schools. He also spent three years, but not consecutively, at Winkler Bible School graduating in 1940. He then graduated from Winnipeg Bible Institute in 1941. On July 25, 1935 he married Maria Friesen at the Winkler Bergthaler Church. Maria was born December 16, 1911 on a farm near Winkler, Manitoba to Heinrich and Katharina [nee Hildebrand] Friesen. She attended Zion elementary public school, before completing her high school at Winkler. Later she attended Winkler Bible School where she met Cornelius.

Cornelius and Maria returned to Saskatchewan briefly in 1938 where, on August 8 he was ordained to the ministry at Osler Mennonite Church by Aeltester David Toews, alongside Jacob H. Pauls. Pauls would remain the minister at Osler for the next 25 years, but Boldt would usually leave to teach and do ministry elsewhere.

From 1941 to 1944 Cornelius and Maria lived on their small farm near Osler. They farmed and while doing so Cornelius also ministered at Osler Mennonite Church. From 1944 to 1947 Cornelius was the minister at Hague Mennonite Church just 10 miles from his Osler farm-home. During these years he also taught twice a week at Rosthern Bible School. At that time the academic school year began in November and ended in March. In 1948 Cornelius and Maria went to Mexico to serve under the Mission Board of the General Conference Church as a teacher.

In 1950 Cornelius and Maria moved to Manitoba where Cornelius would teach again for several years.

From 1952 – 1954 Cornelius and Maria itinerated in scattered communities in northern BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba ministering to various Mennonite groups.

The Boldts' longest stay was in the La Crete – Fort Vermillion area in Alberta where Cornelius taught school for 7.5 years from 1955 to 1962. While there he developed strong relationships with Old Colony Mennonites through community-based church activities. He spent a year in Warman before ministering at Bluebird Mennonite Church and Park Valley Mennonite Church [also known as Bethel Mennonite Mission] in Saskatchewan for 7 years from 1963 to 1970.



*Maria and Cornelius Boldt, circa 1955.
Photo used with permission*

istered in Ruddell, Saskatchewan at a House Church from 1970 to 1973. He ended his long career at First Mennonite Church in Saskatoon from 1973 to 1986. There he shared the German language ministry through preaching and visitation.

In 1986, Cornelius and Maria retired to Bethany Manor in Saskatoon where they lived until Cornelius died in 2000.

Cornelius wrote and published a dozen booklets mostly on faith and life subjects. He painted dozens of pictures of churches and other scenes onto hardboard. His 644 photographs are available on-line at MAID. The images are of the many groups of people he worked with and their surroundings. Cornelius was a deeply spiritual person, but wherever he went he was not interested in evangelizing them, but rather to help grow their faith. Cornelius and Maria lived frugally on the edge of ministry. Cornelius ministered to remote congregations, usually for no salary, except what he could earn from teaching. For Cornelius, it was a life's calling. They left behind a bursary fund available to students wishing to attend Mennonite schools. Maria described herself as "Cornelius's secretary". She was his loyal companion always. She died on November 13, 2007 and is buried at the Osler Mennonite Church Cemetery.

Sources:

1. Rempel, J. G., *Die Rosenorter Gemeinde in Saskatchewan in Wort und Bild*. D. H. Epp Printers, Rosthern, Sask. 1950.
2. Osler Mennonite Church Archives
3. Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan Archives
4. Boldt, Maria, *My Life's Journey* [notes in a scribbler]

Photographs of Cornelius Boldt: Here is a sampling of his photographs from the 1950s. Cornelius and Maria traveled extensively to make contact with outlying communities to encourage them in their faith. On the left a boy in Hay River, NWT north of High Level, Alberta. On the right, the community of Lame Deer, Montana, location of the Northern Cheyenne Indian Reservation. Note the cemetery.



Venice School (S.D. #4117) is located SE of Hague near Blumenthal Village. Cornelius had returned from Manitoba and was possibly attending an evening service, possibly when Carl and Genevieve Ens were teaching there.



The Lake Four community was located north of Prince Albert and north of Park Valley. Notice the farmer's innovative sloping grain box. On the right is the church likely built of local spruce logs. Also notice the rectangular windows.



Wymark is located south of Swift Current. The school was part of Wymark S.D. #3265. Can you make out the writing on the chalkboard? Can anyone identify the teacher or any students?

Cornelius visited this church congregation at McCreary, Manitoba, north of Winnipeg.





Cornelius made contacts with indigenous families like this one at Meadow Lake, Sask.



Unidentified couple in front of an almost completed church in Prince Albert.



It appears Cornelius and Maria Boldt may be showing slides (a good attraction) in this Meadow Lake Church.



Travelling the roads near Pierceland, Sask. was a challenge for the Boldts.



Sunday School children at the Mennonite Brethren Church in Pierceland, Saskatchewan.



Cornelius Boldt (seated far right)) with his 14 siblings, and parents
 Jacob and Susanna Boldt. circa 1940

WEBSITES

MHSS: mhss.sk.ca

Cemeteries: <https://mhss.sk.ca/cemeteries/>

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

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