Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian

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The First Christmas of an Orphan Immigrant in Canada in 1925:

Christmas Ain't Christmas Without Halvah and Rakovye-sheyki

by Jake Buhler

In 1913, Jacob Pauls was born to Heinrich and Helena (Unger) Pauls in the Mennonite village of Grigorjewka in South Russia, now Ukraine. In the fall of 1918, when he was four years old, his mother died of the Spanish Flu. Ten days later his father died and he and his eleven-year-old sister, Maria, were adopted by their Unger Grandparents.

In 1925, when Jacob was eleven, he and his then eighteen-year-old sister left South Russia and crossed the Atlantic Ocean unaccompanied on the SS Melita. They arrived in Quebec City before taking a four-day train ride to Osler, Saskatchewan. Upon arrival at the Cornelius Driedger farm, Maria became a hired worker, and Jacob went to school not knowing a word of English.

Two days before Christmas, Maria heard her eleven-year-old brother Jacob sobbing inconsolably. Maria went to his bedside and he explained that he feared there would be no gifts for him. There

Jacob is standing on the chair. Maria is standing on the left. Parents are Heinrich and Helena Pauls who would die just over a year after this 1917 photo was taken.

(Continued on page 4)

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Credit for the photo in this publication's nameplate goes to Len Rempel.

The Editor's Perspective

Ken Bechtel

2022 and 2023 are important migration centennials, recalling Kanadier Mennonites leaving for Mexico and Russländer fleeing anarchy and Communist oppression by immigrating to Canada. 2022 is also the two-hundredth anniversary of the arrival in Canada of the first Amish Mennonites from Europe.

My personal roots are in the Ontario Swiss Mennonite community. As an Intentional Interim Pastor I have had the privilege of walking with congregations from all four major Dutch-Russian Mennonite migrations (1870s, 1890s,1920s, post WW II), as well as the 1820s Amish Mennonites and my own early 1800's Pennsylvania Swiss. My wife, Audrey Mierau Bechtel, has ancestry in that part of the 1870s migration that spent time in Nebraska before coming to Saskatchewan in the early 1900s.

I assume this volunteer role of editor with some trepidation. I have accepted this appointment initially for a year. I do look forward to learning more about the rich history of our diverse Saskatchewan Mennonite community. The key factor that successfully twisted my arm was the assurance that I would have the support of more seasoned Saskatchewan Mennonite history buffs like Jake Buhler, Leonard Doell, Dick Braun and friends. They remain on the lookout for stories, issues and articles for this and future issues.

Each issue of the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian is the work of dedicated volunteers—the writers, George Epp our trusty copy editor, our hard working layout and design folks Diana Buhler and Kathy Braun. I thank Jake Buhler, the past Interim Editor, for passing along several of the articles in this issue.

The Saskatchewan Mennonite story is one filled with warts, woes and wonders. All three "w's", are well reflected in the historical vignettes, the travels and travails gathered in this issue. Our province's Mennonites brought with them a long history before even touching Saskatchewan soil. Dutch and Northern European Mennonites fled persecution to resettle in Poland; generations later, many migrated to Southern Russia. In both locations, circumstances created the need for yet another migration and Canada beckoned. Putting down roots in Saskatchewan presented many a challenge and provided great rewards.

But we start with some Christmas stories. May your Christmas be a blessed one! All God's best for the new year, 2023!

FEATURES AND ARTICLES

President's Corner

John Reddekopp

It is one-hundred years since the first group of Mennonites from Saskatchewan emigrated to Mexico. As I mentioned in the previous edition, we expect to have the exhibit which recognizes this event in our area next spring. That exhibit is currently on display at the Mennonite Historical Museum in Steinbach.

Those Mennonites who left did so largely because the provincial government was requiring them to send their children to English public schools rather than to the private German schools they had established in the Mennonite villages shortly after they arrived in Saskatchewan around 1900. The families that stayed behind during that emigration gradually embraced the public system.

My grandparents on both sides of the family paid fines for initially keeping their children from attending the public school. This was typical in many Old Colony Mennonite families. Later my mother attended the local one room public school and my father took night classes. By the time I attended in the 1950s my grandfather served on the school board and the school had really become the centre of the community in many ways. Two events that really brought the community together were the year end school picnic and the annual Christmas concert. It was sometimes said that the teacher was judged largely on how good the Christmas concert turned out. In my experience the concert consisted of poems and plays which often did not necessarily have a Christmas focus but ended with a Nativity. And let's not forget that, at the end of the evening, treat bags which had been purchased by the school board were handed out to everyone.

On that note I would like to wish all MHSS members and their families a Very Merry Christmas 2022!

A Word from our Treasurer

Thank you for your past and present donations. They help to keep the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan's work going on. To receive a 2022 Tax Receipt, your donation and/or membership must be received in 2022. The cheques must be dated on or before December 31, 2022. E-transfers, with explanation, can be done at: 4funds@mhss.ca.

- Susan Braun, MHSS Treasurer

(continued from page 1)

was no bowl that might contain gifts of nuts, candies and toys, a tradition he had grown up with in South Russia. He especially wanted Halvah and a candy called Rakovye-sheyki.

She assured him there might be gifts on Christmas morning. The next day she walked to the Abrams Store in Osler. She was able to buy Halvah, but not the Russian candy. Instead, she bought suckers which was new for Jacob. She had just enough money for a wooden toy and a pair of Fuesthaundschtje (mittens).

On Christmas Eve, Jacob set out the Komm (bowl). Next morning, he got up early to see what dee Weihnachtsmaun (the Christmas Man) had brought him. He was delighted. For many decades later, Jacob remembered how his fears of having no Christmas gifts turned into much joy on that first Christmas day in Canada.

This orphan boy later married Mary Schmidt, and at the age of twenty-two was ordained as the minister at Osler Mennonite Church in 1938, a position he held for twenty-five years.

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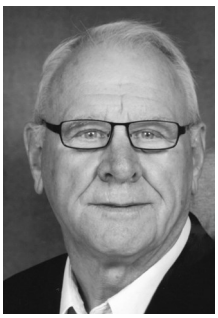

Jake Buhler is a former educator having been a school principal for 15 years before moving to Thailand to direct MCC's Indochinese refugee program for 6 years. After that he spent 15 years with the Canadian Embassy in Thailand and Vietnam coordinating poverty alleviation. He currently lives in Saskatoon working with historical societies, and groups that promote settler-indigenous relations.

Finding the Magi in a New Land

by Jake Buhler[1]

Bangkok, Thailand. December 24, 1981

It was 30 degrees Celsius and it did not feel like Christmas Eve at all. Outside the bedroom window the banana tree was flowering; there would be bananas in just over a month. The giant mango tree with its dark green leaves was showing signs of flowering. Outside the kitchen window the Som Tam vendor was preparing her delicious papaya salad lunch treat. There was no Christmas music in the shops. There was no Santa Claus, no Christmas trees, and no sign that the birth of Jesus would soon be celebrated. There was no Silent Night, and it certainly did not feel like a Holy Night was about to arrive!

What to do? Sarah was six and Elizabeth was three. Even they were alarmed that there would not be a real Christmas for this MCC family who were ten thousand kilometers from their loved ones. But from somewhere in the yard a green plant was found that sort-of resembled a two-foot Christmas tree. It was placed on a rattan trunk under the picture of an elephant, the most highly revered animal of Thailand. A few candles were added. The two girls finally went to sleep having put out their bowls, as had been the custom in Saskatchewan.

Early next morning, Sarah and Elizabeth woke up to the calling of the fruit vendor in the little street next to the MCC house. There, in the bowls, were two dolls that had been shipped from Canada. There would be Christmas after all. And there was. The girls dressed up in their costumes and played for hours.

Elizabeth Buhler (left) and her sister Sarah imagining themselves to be food vendors in Bangkok in 1983.

Photo credit: Jake Buhler

My story could have ended very well at this point: a Mennonite family is inconvenienced a bit in a non-Christian surrounding but ends up making it a meaningful Christmas after all! But that is not how it ended.

After lunch I explained to my two daughters that God had sent us Jesus in Bethlehem. And Jesus, when he grew up, would show us true love because he would give us his all. I added that in Thailand there were poor people who needed our help.

The girls went to play in the other room with their new dolls. But there was also quiet conversation. Perhaps an hour later, they returned with their two new dolls. "Here," they said, "are our dolls. We want to give them to poor children. We can play with our old dolls."

Sometimes the Magi are three and six years old!

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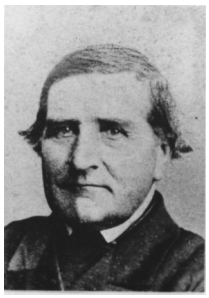
[1]Jake and Louise Buhler served with Mennonite Central Committee from 1981 to 1987 with responsibilities in Thailand and Vietnam.

Conscience and the King
An Account by Aeltester Peter Bartel



Aeltester Peter Bartel (1812-1879) Great Great Grandfather of Ruth Heppner. He was ordained a preacher for the Montau-Gruppe congregation in 1840, and as elder in 1856.

The Context

On November 9, 1867, William I, King of Prussia, signed a new military service law in his capacity as the North German Confederation head of state and Commander-in-Chief. Mennonites were now subject to the draft with no obvious alternative outside of emigration.

Prussian militarism and related restrictions were a factor for those Mennonites who came directly from Prussia in the 1890s. Readers with a Russian sojourn in their family histories may recall that these same issues had been important factors in their ancestors' earlier move from Poland/Prussia to what was then known as South Russia. This crisis marked the beginning of the end for Prussian Mennonite Wehrlosigkeit (nonresistance).

As this law was in the process of being debated, passed, submitted for royal assent and applied, five Mennonite Elders brought their concerns and lobbied for changes. Ultimately, their efforts were rewarded with a March 1868 provision for alternate service (e.g. medical service, secretaries, supply drivers).

One of these five Elders, Peter Bartel from the Montau-Gruppe congregations, has left his family an account of their interactions with politicians and royalty.

Aeltester Bartel was no stranger to resistance. Because of the distances, his 800+ member congregation had two meeting places, some 14 kilometers apart. Despite significant opposition, he led both the Montau and Gruppe groups in the remodeling or replacing of their church buildings. In the aftermath of this law, Bartel fostered the adoption of a new constitution. This permitted members to accept noncombatant service but not military service. Candidates for baptism were asked to make a pledge that they would not accept military service and any who chose armed military service would no longer be considered members of the church. In 1871, ninety five who opposed this regulation formed a new congregation meeting in Montau. This split was not healed until 1920. (KJB)

Description of the personal efforts of the 5 Elders before the High and Most High Government people in Berlin for reprieve from the law of the country passed on November 9, 1867.

Ruth Heppner of Rosthern and her late mother Erika Quiring shared this family treasure. Here is Ruth and her fiancé, Blumenheim born and raised Peter Janzen. Their marriage was on October 9, 2022 in Neuanlage, SK.

This law affected the exemption privileges which the Mennonites of West Prussia had received in 1780. (There was a yearly payment of 5,000 Talern for this exemption.) While the law was still being debated, the following took place. After both the deputized elders and representatives, namely Dr. Wandrupp, Member of Parliament, and Privy Councilor v.[1] Brauchitsch, had already spoken to us in parliament and brought our petition forward, both men felt it necessary that 5 Elders travel to Berlin to present their case in person.

Thereupon, a meeting of congregations was quickly called for October 23, 1867 at which 5 Elders were selected. These would immediately make their way to Berlin. They were:

1. Gerhard Penner, Kohczelitke,
   Elder of Heubuder Congregation.
2. Johann Toews, Ladekopp,
   Elder of Ladekopp Congregation.
3. Johann Wiebe, Fuerstenwerder.
   Elder of Fuerstenwerder Congregation.
4. Johann Penner, Pr.- Koenigsdorf,
   Elder of Thiesdorf Congregation.
5. Peter Bartel, Gruppe,
   Elder of Gruppe Congregation, the last being my humble self.

We five Elders left for Berlin on that same day, October 23, 1867, and taking up lodging in "Hotel Alexander Grossfuerst," Friedrichstr, 57, we went first to Administrator Guthke in the Ministry of Commerce. He was our dear, well known friend and believing Christian. This man was always very helpful in all our concerns because he knew his way around the Ministries. He was accessible to us as long as we were in Berlin.

On October 24, we went to Mr. Brauchitsch who took pleasure in welcoming us and gave us some insights into the thoughts of the high officials. With consoling words, he encouraged us in our situation and took us into the Parliament where we sat and listened in the spectator gallery for 3 hours.

For 2:00 p.m., Mr. Brauchitsch had made an appointment for us to meet with His Excellence v. Roon, Minister of Defense. This high gentleman received us in a friendly way. After Brother Toews had explained our sad situation and we had

presented our plea—i.e. help us to again be exempted from the military law—his Excellency made this remark. "To free you from the military law (is not) in my power. But you should not be afraid that all would not go well." He made the suggestion that we should counter with the offer to do medical service in the army. He hoped that that would be accepted.

Thereupon I asked His Excellence if this would be unarmed service.

He replied "Not without sidearms, even if there is no need for their use. They must carry them in the King's honour." Hereupon we declared that if that were so, we would have to humbly decline that service as well because carrying arms was against our Statement of Faith.

Thereupon this high gentleman became deeply engrossed in discussion of our nonresistance. Finally he posed this sober question: "What then do you think about salvation for those of us who carry arms in battle (wage war)?"

At this I felt compelled to answer, and with God's leading I spoke these words: "Excellence, we think of it the same way as Paul in Corinthians spoke about meat offered to idols, namely when the Corinthians bought meat in the marketplace, they could buy everything that was for sale. If however they were told that it had been offered to idols, they should not buy it because that would turn out to be sin for them. Similarly about waging war, because we have, so to speak, taken in this doctrine with our mother's milk, we have been taught by parents and church leaders and have acquired this viewpoint from God's Word, that waging war is sin, and therefore it has become a matter of conscience. If we do this (bear arms), it becomes sin for us.

"But your Excellence and (your kind) have been taught the opposite since infancy, that waging war is a matter of defending the Fatherland and is a holy duty, and is not an idol offering and will not become a sin to you and yours."

The high Lord replied, "Well, then, after all you will allow us into Heaven."

To which we answered, "But of course."

Then His Excellence said, "Now I am satisfied." He gave us hope that he would do all in his power for us. He shook hands with us and dismissed us.

The next day, October 25, we saw some more memorable things. We were in the spectator gallery for 2½ hours and saw and heard what goes on there. We understood from what was said that nothing could be done for us at this time and so we took the night train home.

On February 17, 1868 we received a dispatch from our representative Mr. Brauchitsch that we should in all haste come back to Berlin. Our presence would be valuable in obtaining military exemption. So the same 5 Elders arrived in Berlin on February 18, 1868, and found lodging in the same place as before. We quickly made our way to our dear friend Guthke, administrator at the Ministry of Commerce, who as before was a great help to us because he knew all the "ins and outs." On the same day we also went to our representative, Mr. v. Brauchitsch and Mr. Wandrupp. They believed that our rights had not yet been taken away. The Minister of Defense was for us. It would depend largely on the King, if only we could gain an audience there. In the ministries there was a difference of opinion regarding our situation. The Chancellor was not exactly in our favour.

(*Bartel recounts a flurry of appointments with politicians, sometimes 3 or 4 in a day. Several were pessimistic about the possibility of any change. Some expressed sympathy for their situation, whereas others were "apathetic and cold towards us and our dilemma." The Minister of the Interior who had advocated on their behalf even stated that "perhaps we should emigrate." On February 21st, after a 9:00 a.m. meeting with the Minister of Education… KJB)*

At 10:00 a.m. we met with the Finance Minister. His Excellence was very adamant against us, and was sorry about the harsh law. He was of the opinion, however, that we would get over these scruples of conscience. He cited the example of his pious mother about giving up her sons to serve in the militia (military service). She had gone to the King but her efforts had been disregarded. She finally got over her qualms and so, too, would we.

At 11:00, our appointed time, we met with the

Representative of the Defense Minister, General v. Podbielski. This High Lord let us know that he knew well about our dilemma. Assistance for us was already being worked out, we could depend upon it. The enactment of this law would be worked out to our best advantage. He also gave us to understand that we would be able to agree with and accept it. It would not be too great a challenge if only we would be faithful, of one mind (in our faith) and in our spiritual lives.

Also we should not be divisive, creating splinter groups. This would be a joy to allow their freedom of conscience. There were some petitions brought forward from our people that they wished to serve in the armed forces…

(Bartel recounts a series of meetings for the purpose of thanking various politicians for their help. KJB)

It's noteworthy that we had just stated our thanks to the Upper Tribunal Counselor and gone out the door at approximately 1:00 p.m. when a messenger with a memo in his hand awaited us. We were to go to the King at 1:45 as we had secured audience with His Majesty. We hastened quickly to our lodgings and changed to proper dress, prayed about this noteworthy event, and traveled in God's name to the King's palace. Servants led us through numerous magnificent rooms before we arrived at the throne room, where we were arranged and instructed by adjutants (aides). Then one of the aides stood before a double swinging door, put his hands on each of the doorknobs and looked attentively through a small opening. It took a long while. All at once he threw open both doors and stepped back quickly, and (…) the King and his attendants entered.

King William I of Prussia (1797-1888)

King of Prussia (1861-1888) Emperor of Germany (1871-1888)

Quick as lightening His Majesty stood before us and spoke to us (in a soft voice): "Children, what would you like?" At this Brother Toews addressed the King. "May your Majesty be pleased! We are the Elders of the Mennonite Congregations in the province of Prussia. Our congregations have been put in a sad situation by a recently passed law regarding the "taking up of arms" through which our fundamentals of faith, our innermost basis of belief, have been affected. We and our congregations have an unlimited trust that Your Majesty will deliver us from this sad situation."

His Majesty replied, "It really is not my intention to repress anyone's conscience, for my fathers and I have always respected and protected your faith issues, but I cannot act against the law. By interpretation of this law, I will find ways and means to arrange things so it can conform with your conscience."

To this Brother Toews replied, "Your Majesty, if the military law must be stretched even in the slightest way, we must urgently beg Your Majesty for an appropriate space of time to allow for emigration. Otherwise our congregations will fall into utter confusion."

Then His Majesty answered, "This, too, you ask of me?" He then asked each of us where we came from. When the King turned to Brother Gerhard Penner, Brother Penner said, "Your Majesty, in material ways we will gladly do all in our power, as long as our conscience is spared." His Majesty replied, "I am not against you in any way, for you have always conducted yourselves as true citizens and have proven this in your choices in these last years. We have been happy to perceive and take note of this."

At this the King asked when Brother Penner had received his ordination (orders) and when he was told, the King said "So from me!"

Then the King turned to Br. Wiebe who said, "We pray that Your Majesty would find favour if we personally present a request for a change in the military law at the time of the Opening of the Parliament."

The King replied, "Making petitions is everyone's right, including yours." To this Brother Wiebe remarked, "We most humbly give thanks that our worry is removed, our worry about acting

against the will of your Majesty in petitioning against a law which your Majesty has approved."

Montau is now called Matąwy. The Ober-Gruppe (now called Górna Grupa) church building was some 14 kilometers south west.

The stained glass window in the Montau Church. The bottom of the window notes in German that it was "Gestiftet" (donated) by Johann Bartel Montau. This Bartel was Ruth's great grandfather through her mother's maternal line. The Montau church building is now used by a Roman Catholic congregation.

After His Majesty had spoken to the last of us and asked if we all lived in close proximity, I answered, "No, Your Majesty. I live in the Graudenz Lowlands, precinct of Marienwerder."

The King asked, "How far are you apart?" to which I answered, "About 10-12 miles, Majesty."

Brother Johann Penner when asked where he lived answered, "In Pr. Koenigsdorf near the station of Gronau between Marienburg and Elbing."

The King asked "Is the railway close to the highway station where we used to change horses?"

To this Brother Penner answered, "That was Fischau, Majesty."

After this, we were kindly dismissed.

A day later, February 26 at 1:30 p.m we received audience with His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince. When Brother Toews began his address, he stated that the military law had put our congregation in a very sad and frightening situation and that His Royal Highness probably was already aware of this. He continued that we the delegation from the Mennonite congregations wish to take refuge in this frightening situation by presenting our most humble plea to His Royal Highness and asking to be released most graciously from this edict.

The Crown Prince responded: "But children, I won't be able to do that for the law stands even higher than the King," and since the King was already working on our case, the Crown Prince hoped that the King would find means of helping, that the law would be less harsh.

Whereupon Brother Toews answered: "Royal Highness, if it should be impossible to be released from this law, we pray most humbly for a delay."

The Prince asked what kind of delay and for what?

Then I answered, "Your Royal Highness. Kindly forgive us. We need time in emigrating to sell off our possessions so that we need not leave with only a staff in our hands."

To this the Crown Prince said "Emigrate, and where to?"

Brother Wiebe answered, "Royal Highness, to the southern states of Russia."

"Oh," said the Crown Prince, "then you better keep the way open for our children to come back, for shortly the situation in Russia will become what has happened here and then you will be sorry."

Thereupon Brother Gerhard Penner said, "Oh Royal Highness, we know well that we would not be happy to emigrate. We are only suggesting it if all else is impossible. Otherwise, we will gladly do all that is required of us as long as it is not against our conscience."

To this the Crown Prince said, "Yes but don't emigrate."

I said, "Royal Highness, we are fully prepared in material regards, during peaceful times as well as war times to do medical services. We will do this in the 'lap of our congregation.'"

Brother Penner immediately added, "In our home congregation, we will gladly set up a hospital and take in as many sick as the government sends

us to heal and to care for."

Then the Crown Prince asked, "We should send them (the sick) to you?"

Brother Penner answered "Yes, Royal Highness!"

The Crown Prince said, "Well, I hope now everything will turn out all right!" and asked us how big our congregations are and how many congregations. He also asked how old our children must be at time of baptism. He opined that because we do not take an oath, we would also be unwilling to take the oath of allegiance. He said we have similar customs to the 'Herrnhuter' where he had once attended a service which he had enjoyed. He had never visited our service.

The Crown Prince, Friedrich Wilhelm Nikolaus Karl (1831-1888). When he finally ascended to the throne, this enlightened liberal prince was suffering from advanced cancer and reigned for only 99 days. His premature demise is considered a turning point in German history.

Then His Royal Highness asked each where we lived and what our profession. When he realized that we were the clergy in the congregations he asked us a number of questions regarding the nature of our churches, whereupon he expressed his satisfaction…

At 5:00 we were ordered to the Privy Councilor Wagner, the Representative of the Chancellor, to give account of all that the Crown Prince had said.

He dismissed us with hopeful words and predicted that our case would be solved to our satisfaction. Each of us had entered our names in the Mennonite Memorandum which was then handed to him. He wanted to preserve this as a commemoration. After this we traveled home in God's name…

Nieder-Gruppe, 1868
Peter Bartel, Elder

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Translated by Annemary Buhler from a document provided by Erika (Bartel) Quiring, May/June 1998. A copy obtained from another family member is dubbed "Beschreibung der persönlichen Bemeuhung der fünf Ältesten" in Peter J. Klassen's Mennonites in Early Modern Poland & Prussia (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), p. 235. Our thanks to the late Erika Quiring and her daughter Ruth Heppner for sharing this account.

[1]The abbreviations ""v." and "v.d." stand in for "von" and "von der."

Mennonites on the Move: From the Netherlands to Poland

By Ken Bechtel

2022 and 2023 mark the hundredth anniversaries of Mennonite movements to Mexico and Canada. 2022 is also the two hundredth anniversary of the first Amish Mennonite immigration to Canada. But there's a much longer history of Mennonites on the move.

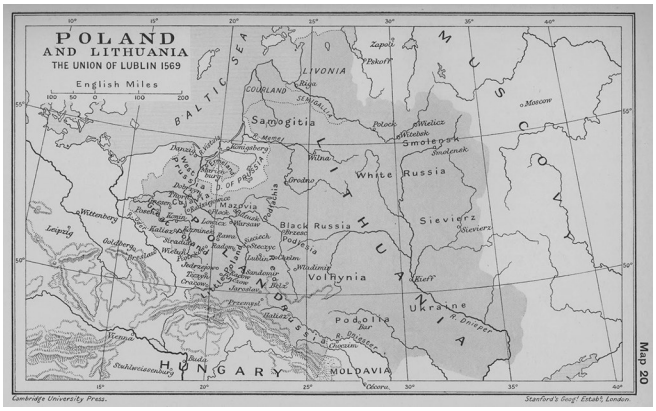
In 2013, my wife Audrey and I took a week-long tour of Poland with a California based Mennonite genealogy group.

Poland was the country to which many Anabaptist Mennonites fled from the Netherlands and northern Europe. Prussia (formerly Poland) was the land from which they moved to Catherine the Great's Southern Russia (now Ukraine).

Audrey Mierau Bechtel with the sign for Mirovo (formerly Mierau), approximately 14 km north of Malbork.

It was in Poland that Audrey's Mierau ancestors joined the Mennonites. We got to stop briefly at the hamlet and cemetery of Mierau, now called Mirovo.

Place of Refuge



Poland and Lithuania had been governed by the same sovereign since 1385. The Union of Lublin, (1569) united the two countries into a single state.

There were good reasons for Mennonites choosing 16th century Poland as their place of refuge.

In the 1500s, Poland was the largest of all European states, a loose federation encompassing much of what we now call Poland, Lithuania and the Ukraine. Within Poland, there were free cities such as Danzig, and other cities who likewise exercised a fair bit of autonomy.

Governed by a Sejm or parliament and elected King, Poland was unique among European kingdoms for its tolerance of minorities such as Jews, Muslims and dissident Christians. Although a devout Catholic, Sigismund I the Old (king 1506-1548), accorded religious toleration to Greek Orthodox Christians and royal protection to Jews. In 1525 he recognized a Lutheran duke as his legitimate vassal over the objections of the pope. In 1535 the king signed a peace agreement with a Muslim Tatar leader. In 1573, the parliament adopted the Warsaw Confederation[1], granting nobles the right to choose their religious affiliation and pledging never to impose a faith by force. By that day's standards, Poland was Europe's haven of toleration.

Reasons to Flee

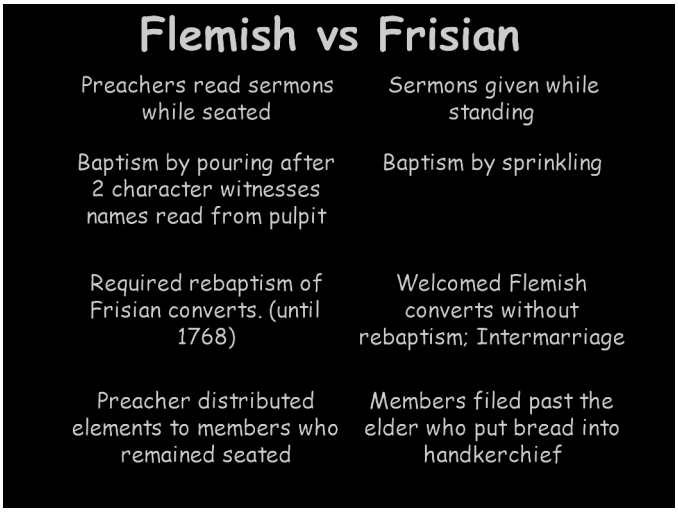
In the 1500s, what we now call Belgium was the southern part of the Spanish ruled Netherlands, Catholics determined to root out all protestant heresy. They were especially vigilant and violent in the southern Belgian areas.

In 1528 & 1535, Emperor Charles V issued edicts against the Anabaptists. As "protector of the most holy Christian faith," he ruled **"that each and every Anabaptist and rebaptized person, man or woman of accountable age, shall be brought from natural life to death with fire and sword and the like."** By the 1570s, some 1500 – 2500 had been executed. Some 400 martyr stories in the Martyrs Mirror, or 2/3 of those from the Netherlands, were Belgian Flemish.

Friesland, the northern province of the Netherlands, had been home for Anabaptists since the 1530s. Over the next four decades, some 50 Anabaptists were seized and executed. In 1531, an Anabaptist tailor by the name of Sikke Freerks, was beheaded in Leeuwarden. When Menno Simons, the priest in the nearby village of Witmarsum, heard about Sikke's execution because of rebaptism, he began his study of the question of infant baptism. This led ultimately to his embrace of Anabaptism. In her 1545 mandate, Countess Anna of East Friesland first used the term Mennist to distinguish between those Anabaptists connected with Menno from other radical reformation groups such as the violent Batenburgers. Menno had been recognized as an important leader among the peace minded Anabaptists, to the point that even outsiders acknowledged his role as a conciliating force.

In the mid 1500s, Mennonites in Franeker Friesland welcomed Flemish Anabaptists fleeing bloody persecution. The differences in sensibilities of these two Anabaptist groups soon became evident. Flemish weavers dressed more fancily than their Frisian hosts whose lavishly furnished houses raised Flemish eyebrows. When the elder for the four local congregations refused to risk making the 11 km journey for baptisms and communion, the Franeker congregation selected a Flemish minister. The Frisian Elder objected strongly to this violation of a pact between the four local congregations and

the affront to his authority. To make a long story short, 1566 marks the beginning of a centuries long Frisian/Flemish split, groups expressing their biblicist simplicity in different ways. Mennonite leaders took sides, Dirk Philips for the Flemish and Leenart Bouwens for the Frisian. The division spread throughout the Netherlands, and both groups experienced further schisms. As they took those and other differences to Poland, some Flemish came to describe themselves as the "Clerken" (clear) ones. They deemed the Frisians to be "Grobe" (coarse), as coming off the "Drekwagen" (garbage wagon), and loose about their boundaries.



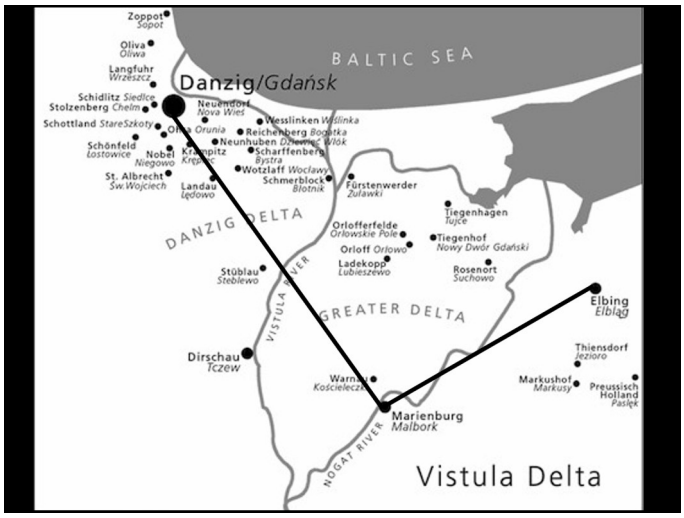
The Flemish and Frisian Mennonites evolved distinctive practices. Both groups further splintered into more progressive and restrictive factions.

The Flemish Frisian split was resisted initially by the Danzig congregation which included members from both origins. Elder Quirin Vermeulen kept them together until 1588, two decades after the schism in the Netherlands. In 1588, however, a Frisian elder from Montau arranged to have Vermeulen deposed and the congregation split into separate Flemish and Frisian groups. When they came back together in 1808, there were 166 from the Frisian group and about 700 from the Flemish side.

Though the Flemish required rebaptism of Frisian Mennonites wanting to join them, Frisian and Flemish leaders worked together when faced with local or national political challenges. Over the years, there came to be lots of Flemish names in Frisian churches, Frisian names in Flemish churches. The terms Flemish and Frisian soon became "party names" rather than indications of individual members' geographical origins. Originally names like Derksen, Friesen, Funk, Janzen, and Martens were Frisian. Original Flemish surnames included Classen, Dyck, Epp, Penner, Thiessen, Von Riesen and Wiens.

Mennonites Fleeing Persecution

Persecuted Dutch and Flemish Mennonites started fleeing to Poland in the 1530s, primarily to the northern largely German speaking areas. Our earliest records talk about their settling in or near the port city of Danzig (modern Gdansk) and Elbing (now Elblag). Within decades there were Mennonite congregations scattered throughout the Danzig, Elbing and Marienburg triangle.



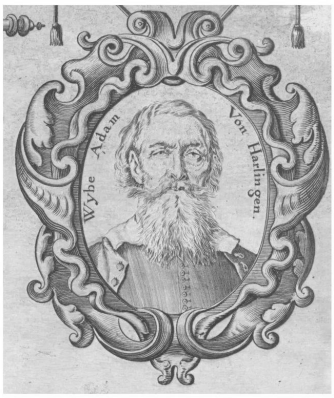
The Danzig, Elbing and Marienburg triangle, home for most of the Mennonites in Poland.

In Cities like Danzig & Elbing

Many of the earliest Mennonites in Danzig and Elbing were Flemish refugees who brought such skills as weaving and lace making. As pacifists unwilling to swear an oath to defend the city militarily, they were not allowed to live within the city walls, but were allowed to build just outside the cities and to ply their trades.

Among the names of the 43 Mennonite families listed for the Danzig suburb of Alt Schottland in 1776 are Buhler, Dyrcksen, Heppner, Jantzen, Kroecker, Schroeder, Siemons, Thiesen, Van Kampen, and Von Dyck.

Gdansk's Golden Gate, designed by Flemish Mennonite architect Abraham van den Blocke



Adam Wiebe (1590?-1653), the genius civil engineer still honored in Gdansk. The life and descendants of this Mennonite immigrant from Harlingen in Friesland were fictionalized by Rudy H. Wiebe in his work Sweeter Than All the World (Toronto, Alfred A. Knopf, 2001).

Even today, we see significant evidence of their roles within these cities in the late 1500s and early 1600s. Visitors to modern Gdansk pass through the Upland Gate and the Golden Gate, and marvel at the murals in the city hall, the products of the Flemish Van den Blocke family, Willem and his sons Abraham and Isaak. Those with a more expensive taste for the bubbly may head to the "Pod Łososiem" (The Salmon) restaurant, Mennonite Ambrosius Vermeulen's restaurant and tasting room for his famous Goldwasser, a liqueur with tiny flakes of gold. If you walk through Gdansk, you may walk past the Wiebe Wall, Wiebe Square, Wiebe Armoury, and Wiebe Bastion, all named for Adam Wiebe, a Frisian refugee who came to Danzig in 1616 and became the city's most ingenious engineer. He invented dredgers to transport soil, a river icecutter, aquaducts and the world's first cable car system for carrying massive amounts of earth from the mountain across the river to build up the city's fortifications.

In spite of these and other roles within Danzig, Mennonites had a somewhat tenuous relationship with the city. The craft guilds refused admission to these non-citizen Mennonites but deemed them as advantaged competitors. In 1582, local guilds' complaints against the employment of Mennonite linen weavers by the Catholic St. Bridget's Church were judged by the city council, which decided to limit the number of Mennonite weavers to one per abbey. During one period in the 1600s, Danzig guilds raised the issue of restricting or expelling these rivals at every council meeting. They did succeed in having Mennonite traders banned from the annual trade fairs. The Flemish Mennonite artisans had introduced lacemaking to Poland in the 1500s. In the mid 1700s, constant pressure from the guilds finally persuaded the king to forbid Mennonites teaching the trade to their sons.

Then there were all those expulsion orders - a royal order in 1552, city orders in 1560, 1566, 1572, 1573 and 1596! These were not enforced, however. Elbing likewise had its history of formal expulsion orders in 1550 and1556. Under pressure from the Lutherans, the city fathers were even forced into officially ordering that these "foreigners were to leave the region of the city by Easter 1572." They extended this deadline until after harvest and then conveniently forgot it. The city fathers deemed them too important economically to be expelled.

Jost van Kampen's townhouse was renovated in 1590 to serve as the meeting place for the Mennonite church. The letters "niten" (from Mennoniten) remain in the brickwork.

In 1585, Elbing granted citizenship to Jost van Kampen and a colleague, encouraging them to advance the silk trade they had introduced. It was

Jost Van Kampen who purchased the townhouse and renovated the second and third floors to serve for 300 years as the meeting place for the Mennonite church, until a new church was built in 1890.

Rural Mennonites

The challenges for rural Mennonites were somewhat different. Cities, political and church authorities and landed gentry held vast marshy acreages rendered useless by recent wars and frequent flooding, especially that of 1540. In 1543, the city council reported that many villages of formerly 15 to 20 farms did not exist any more.

These Hollanders, however strange their faith, brought skills that could transform abandoned land into profitable farms. We refer to these lands as the Werder, formerly marshy land between the rivers, now made productive by protective dykes, islands created by revealing the good land once under water! Mennonites were therefore welcomed and given generous lease terms in return for their building of dykes, canals and drainage systems that turned this swamp land into the bread basket of Europe. Huge granaries were built in Danzig to handle the burgeoning grain export business. Such accomplishment came at a cost, some estimating that up to 80% of the first generation died of "swamp fever." Soon there were rural Mennonite communities scattered throughout the Danzig, Elbing and Marienburg triangle.

One of many "Dutch" house barns scattered throughout the Danzig, Elbing, Marienburg triangle.

Evidences of the four hundred years of Mennonite settlement remain in this triangle. There are dykes and canals for drainage, a few windmills, the unique Dutch house barns. A few of their church buildings remain, some abandoned, others now used by Catholic or Polish National Catholic congregations. More often we poked around cemeteries, some of them well labeled and maintained.

In those cemeteries, we found names you and I would all recognize – Bargen, Classen (with C's, K's, single and double A's), Doerksen and Enns with a variety of spellings, Fast, Fehr, Friesen, Funk, Goertzen, Harder, Martens, Nickel, Schellenberg, Wiens. Work crews from local Catholic churches, Mennonite and Polish friendship societies and German/Dutch work crews have worked hard at cleaning up, restoring and posting helpful signage for some of them.

The signage for the cemetery of the Rosenort Mennonite Church, Rosenort, Gross Werder. Peter Regier (1851-1925) was elected as a minister of this congregation in 1879. He emigrated to Canada in1893, settled near Laird and in July 1894 helped organize the Tiefengrund Rosenort Mennonite Church. He served as Elder for the Rosenorter Gemeinde with meeting places including Eigenheim, Laird, Rosthern and Aberdeen.

Over several centuries after settling in Poland, Mennonites faced significant challenges. Although a somewhat privileged minority, they often needed to appeal to authorities. The peace issue was often a key subject of contentious dealings with governments and neighbours. The churches recognized by the state (Catholic, Lutheran and sometimes Reformed/Calvinist) lodged complaints and demanded church tithes and service fees for registering births, deaths and marriages. Some of the trials, of course, were self-inflicted and were made more difficult by baggage brought to Poland. The transition from Dutch/Flemish to High German in worship would be a case in point. There are

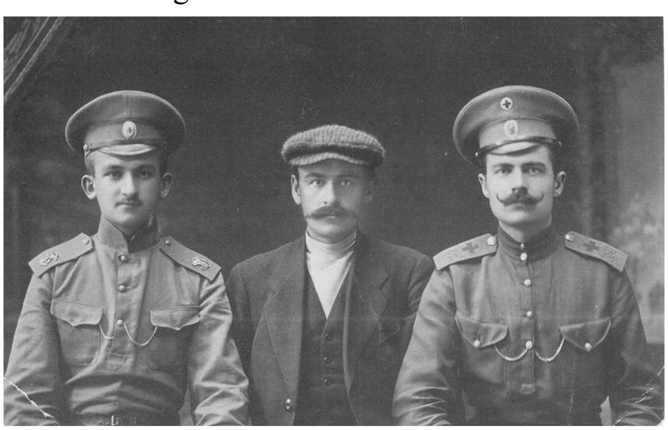
intriguing stories about each of these struggles, and we will explore some of these in future issues.

[1] The Warsaw Confederation (1573) was one of the first European acts granting religious freedoms. The nobles who themselves represented different major religions pledged mutual support, giving official sanction to the earlier custom of toleration. The territories of the Polish Commonwealth were inhabited by many generations of people from different ethnic backgrounds (Poles, Lithuanians, Ruthenian, Germans and Jews) and of different denominations (Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish and even Muslim). Poland thus continued to be, in the words of the outraged Catholic Cardinal Hosjusz, "a place of shelter for heretics" including Mennonites.

In Search of my Great-Uncle, Peter Franz

By Bill Franz

I've always been intrigued by the story of my great-uncle Peter. There's a photo of Peter with his two older brothers, David (my grandfather) and Nikolaus, in World War 1, in Russia. My grandfather, David, was unfit for military service (he had a withered arm). Nikolaus served as a medic in the Imperial Russian Army, judging by the crosses on his cap and on his epaulets. Peter, I think, served as a soldier judging by his uniform. Both David and Nikolaus perished in the Gulag during WW2, but Peter had emigrated to Canada in 1928.

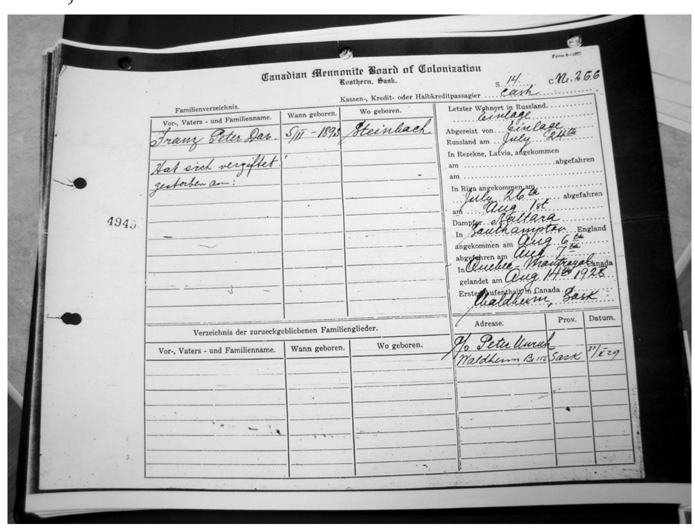


Peter, David and Nikolaus Franz (L to R), Imperial Russian Army, WW1, circa 1914

Their younger sister, Maria Grunau, had emigrated to Saskatchewan in 1923, with her children. Her husband had to stay behind in Germany as he did not pass the medical examination, and he subsequently died there. Maria remarried, to a Peter Unruh of Waldheim. Peter Franz spent some time with the combined families of Maria and Peter Unruh, before moving to the district of Rabbit Lake north of the Battlefords.

Rabbit Lake was booming in the late 1920s. Its location on the CNR line and available affordable land for homesteading made it attractive to Mennonite immigrants from Russia. The district was initially settled by homesteaders starting in 1905, the year Saskatchewan became a province. A land grant was made to the Canadian Pacific Railway Company on March 1, 1905. The Canadian National Railway (CNR) station at Rabbit Lake was built in 1928.

Peter David Franz had been born on February 5, 1893 on the Steinbach estate in the south-east part of the Molotschna colony, to David and Katherina Franz, née Fast. He was the third of sixth children. All I knew from my father, Johann Franz, was that his uncle Peter had died a bachelor, in Saskatchewan, in 1937.



Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization
Rosthern, Sask.

S. 14 C. N. 266
Kassen-, Kredit- oder Halbkreditpassagier cash

Familienverzeichnis.

Vor-, Vaters - und Familienname.	Wann geboren.	Wo geboren.
Franz Peter Dav.	5/II - 1893	Steinbach
Hat sich vergiftet gestorben am:		

Letzter Wohnort in Russland Einlage
Abgereist von Einlage
Russland am July 24th
In Rezekne, Latvia, angekommen am ... abgefahren am ...
In Riga angekommen am July 26th abgefahren am Aug 1st
Dampfer Baltara
In Southampton England
angekommen am Aug 6th
abgefahren am Aug 7th
In Quebec Montreal Canada
gelandet am Aug 14th 1928
Erster Aufenthalt in Canada Waldheim, Sask

Verzeichnis der zurueckgebliebenen Familienglieder.

Vor-, Vaters - und Familienname.	Wann geboren.	Wo geboren.

Adresse.	Prov.	Datum.
c/o Peter Unruh Waldheim, B. 10	Sask	31/X 29

4945

Peter David Franz, Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization form (1923-1930)

From the records of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, in Rosthern, Sask., Peter's last place of residence in Russia was Einlage. Einlage, one of the largest villages of the Chortitza settlement on the right bank of the Dnieper River, was moved in 1927 because the construction of the Dneprostroi power dam put the village level under water.

Peter Franz left Einlage on July 24,1928, arriving in Riga, Latvia on July 26. He sailed on the steamer, SS Baltara, on August 1, to Southampton, England and on to Montroyal (Montréal), Québec, arriving August 14. The SS Baltara had been built in Belfast in 1909 for the Royal Mail, renamed twice, and wrecked on January 11, 1929 at the mouth of the Vistula River off Danzig Harbour.

Although Northern Saskatchewan was spared the worst of the drought during the Great Depression, I understand it's a tough place to make a living farming. From GAMEO (Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online), "Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church (Bournemouth, Saskatchewan, Canada): Mennonites began gathering for services in the Bournemouth, Saskatchewan area in 1927. The Bournemouth congregation was part of the Hoffnungsfelder congregational group and thus affiliated with the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. This section of the group collapsed in the 1930s because of the Depression. The language of worship was German."

Peter Franz, undated. Circa 1928

Peter Franz homesteaded on the NE quarter of Section 13, Township 48, Range 14 W3 (NE 13-48-14 W3). This land was railway land, and he may not have been the first or the last to try his hand there. According to George and Melita Hildebrand, the current owners, this land probably changed hands many times. If you couldn't make the payments because of crop failure, ownership reverted back to the railway. There were several homesteaders on the section of land, each on their own quarter. This land was always under grass, so clearing the bush wasn't required, but there were lots of boulders.

The last entry on the Canadian Board of Colonization card states, "Hat sich vergiftet! Gestorben am:" He poisoned himself! Died on…

I went to Rabbit Lake on a day trip with a friend in August 2020 (we were camping at Dillberry Lake on the Alberta/Saskatchewan border). We found the municipal cemetery and walked every inch of it, but couldn't find Peter Franz's grave. We explored the former village of Rabbit Lake as well. Subsequently, I was provided with the names of some local contacts and learned that yes, Peter Franz was buried in the Rabbit Lake cemetery and his grave was maintained. I knew I needed to make another trip to Rabbit Lake.

This past July, 2021, I returned with my friend Alan Stewart and my wife Pearl. We camped at Meeting Lake and had made arrangements to meet with Alan and Shelly Laughlin and Cornie and Marlene Martens. On the Sunday, we were invited to attend church in Glenbush, at the Fields of Hope Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church. This is the only church still operating of the original five in the congregational group, although both the Rabbit Lake and Mayfair churches still stand and are maintained. After worship in Glenbush and a look at the cemetery there, Alan Laughlin led us past the Bournemouth site and its small cemetery. We wound up at the Rabbit Lake church and cemetery, to our surprise only half a mile west of the municipal cemetery! We had been so close the year before! But this way we got to meet and share information with the Laughlins, the Martens, and the Hildebrands.

The next morning Alan Laughlin took us to meet George and Melita Hildebrand, who took us to see the land that Peter Franz had farmed. We had learned that Peter had taken a poison pill, and speculation was that he may have had this pill (perhaps cyanide) from the Great War (WW1). Did he suffer from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)? He was a bachelor, times were hard, and communication with family in the Soviet Union had been cut off in 1935. Waldheim was some 150 kilometres distant.

Peter had a change of heart and made his way across the field to his closest neighbour, Henry Stobbe, who farmed on the next section to the north-east. Henry Stobbe brought him to hospital in Rabbit Lake, some ten miles away. This could not have been an easy undertaking in January, 1937. The Rose Gill Hospital was under the direction of Dr. John H. Storry, and the staff tried to save him, but too much damage had been done. Peter Franz

died three days later, on January 19, 1937, at the age of forty-three. Apparently, he had a death-bed conversion before he died.

The people of the Fields of Hope Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church maintain their cemeteries, and Peter Franz's grave was one of several that had maintenance work done in 2020. I certainly appreciate their kindness. We also enjoyed their hospitality very much! They in turn appreciated learning more about Peter Franz, part of the history of settlement in the Rabbit Lake area.

Bill Franz (author) at the grave of his great-uncle Peter Franz, Rabbit Lake Hoffnungsfelder Mennonite Church cemetery, July, 2021.

About the author:
Bill Franz is a writer, father, and grandfather, originally from Winnipeg. A first-generation Canadian descended from Mennonite immigrants who fled Eastern Europe during World War II, he is a current director at the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta. His first book, Mutti and Papa, A Love Story, is a family history that traces the love story of his parents, Johann and Ella, refugees fleeing war-torn Europe.

A version of this article was first published in the October 2021 issue of the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Chronicle.

The Search for the Family of Johann Fast (1852-1920)

My great-great-grandfather, Johann Fast, was born in 1852 in one of the Mennonite villages in present day Ukraine. The family lived in Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony before emigrating to Canada in 1892. This much was clear from passenger lists and village maps. The story of the family's pioneering activities and the lives of Johann's descendants was well documented. His ancestry was unknown.

Johann Fast and his wife Maria Krahn.

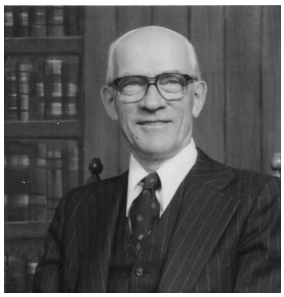
Years ago my great-uncle, Ben Fast, assembled the Fast family tree based on family records, recollections, and any genealogical source documents he could find. In the 1960s and 1970s research was considerably more difficult than it is today but he made the best of the resources at hand and published his results. It was a good foundation.

A decade or so later I picked up his work and began my own research to build on the foundation he had laid. I had no hint, when I started, that this would become a thirty-year mission.

I worked my way through the journals, books and other materials that were available to find clues about Johann's parents, without any success. The internet gradually exposed a richer resource base but still I found nothing to help me.

At one point I reached out to Ben for any details he might recall. He wrote to say that his grandfather, Johann, had two brothers, Heinrich, who was a life-long bachelor, and Jacob, whose son, also Jacob, lived near Winnipeg for a while. Ben

had visited the younger Jacob in Winnipeg once in the distant past. That was all he knew.



Barry's great uncle Bernhard H. Fast, 1910-2008. Barry credits "great uncle Ben" with having "assembled the Fast family tree."

I tried to use these names to triangulate any kind of relationship to a family, a location, or a census entry, without success. I searched Canadian census records for these two brothers and came up with nothing. Over the ensuing years I repeated these efforts whenever I found a new set of genealogical records, but nothing emerged. I obtained Johann's death certificate and learned that his father was listed as Johann Fast, but this new information was not helpful at all.

Very recently I came across a picture of Johann's sons, a reproduction from my mother's collection of old family photographs (she is the great-granddaughter of Johann [1852]). Taken in Rosthern, Saskatchewan, the picture was well over a hundred years old, and it looked like a photo from the wild west. I found it curious that there were nine men in the picture, because Johann had eight sons. I asked my mother what she knew about the photo. She had the original, with names

Heinrich Fast on the far left, with Johann's eight sons.

written on the back. I learned that the ninth person in the photo was Heinrich Fast, the uncle of the eight brothers. He appeared to be about the same age as the others and anyone would assume he was another brother. In fact, born in 1871, he was only a year older than the eldest of Johann's sons, and 19 years younger than Johann.

This was a turning point in my research. It placed Heinrich in Rosthern, at least long enough for a photo shoot, and gave me hope. Using "Find a Grave" (www.findagrave.com) I found his date of death. With that information I tracked down his Obituary, published in the old German language newspaper Der Bote. The obituary confirmed he was never married and that he had come to Canada in 1904 and settled in Rosthern. I now had enough information to obtain a death certificate.

Heinrich's death certificate contained the names of his parents, Johann Fast and Judith Rempel. Johann (1832) and Judith (1832) were in the GRanDMA Mennonite genealogical database. A considerable amount of genealogical work had been recorded, establishing three or four generations of their ancestry going back to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth where so many Dutch Mennonites lived for two centuries. In the database Johann (1832) and Judith (1832) were not associated with sons Johann (1852) and Heinrich (1871), but their other son, Jacob, was connected to them. After completing further research, I learned the reason for the missing associations and the fascinating story of Jacob and his family.

Johann's Ancestry

Johann's mother was Judith Rempel (1832). She was born to Dietrich Rempel (1792) and Maria Nickel (1792) in the village of Chortitza in the Mennonite settlement of Chortitza. Judith's grandfather, also a Dietrich Rempel, had been an early settler of the Chortitza Colony, homesteading initially in the village of Einlage in 1789 with his first wife. The Rempels had emigrated from the Konigsberg area of Prussia. When his wife died soon after they arrived in the colony, grandfather Dietrich married Helena Wiebe. Helena and her parents also were among the earliest settlers, having arrived in 1789 and established a homestead in Einlage. The Wiebes had emigrated from Stobbendorf, a town

about 40 kilometers east of Danzig. Judith's father, Dietrich, was born to Helena Wiebe and Dietrich Rempel in early autumn 1792.

Less is known about Judith's mother, Maria Nickel (1792). Born on 25 December 1792, she probably was a daughter of Johann Nickel (1746) and Anna Nickel (1749) who emigrated in 1797 from Tryl, a town 80 kilometers south of Danzig on the west bank of the Vistula River. There is no indication Johann and Anna were closely related even though they had the same surname.

Johann's father was Johann Fast (1832). He was born to Johann Fast (1800) and Aganetha Toews (1803). The elder Johann Fast (1800) emigrated around 1821 from Wernersdorf, a village on the Nogat River, a few kilometers south of modern day Malbork, Poland. His parents were Cornelius Fast (1765) and Maria Toews (1764). They also emigrated in 1821 and settled in the Molotschna colony.

Aganetha Toews (1803) came to Russia as an infant in 1804 with her parents Jacob Toews (1768) and Aganetha Epp (1782). The Toews family emigrated from Sandhof, a village near Malbork. Her father, Jacob Toews (1768), was a brother of Maria Toews (1764) and consequently Johann Fast (1800) and his wife Aganetha Toews (1803) were cousins.

Johann's Brother Jacob

Johann's brother, Jacob, was born in 1860. Unlike his brothers, Jacob (1860) did not emigrate to North America. He stayed in Russia, surviving the Russian Revolution, the Ukrainian War of Independence, and the First World War. Life was very difficult in the Ukraine after years of armed conflict and political upheaval. Jacob (1860) had three sons with his wife, Gertruda Dyck (there could be a fourth son, but the data is unclear). According to details in the GRanDMA database, two of the sons were taken by the secret police of the Stalinist regime in the 1930s. They were never seen again. The third son, Jacob (1910), survived.

World War II brought more upheaval. In 1941 the German armies invaded Russia, in some places occupying territory in Ukraine that had been inhabited by Mennonites for 150 years. The occupying forces established a Ukrainian Auxiliary Police Force to implement Nazi policy and conscripted local men to fill the ranks. German-speaking natives were preferred, and many Mennonite men found themselves collaborating with the Nazi regime, Jacob (1910) among them. Some of the activities performed by the auxiliary forces were administrative, overseeing the governance of occupied villages and cities. However, some of the work was of a more sinister nature and, particularly in major population centers, involved identifying and reporting Jews to the German army and administering the distribution of property taken from murdered Jews.

In 1943 the German forces left Russia, retreating westward accompanied by hundreds of thousands of German-speaking inhabitants, part of a Nazi policy to repatriate German speaking people dispersed across Europe. Among them were thousands of Mennonites. These people were resettled in German-controlled territories and processed to become German citizens. Jacob (1910) and his family were swept into this mass exodus from Ukraine. Jacob's parents were with them. In time they became German citizens. The family lineage connecting Johann (1832) to his son Jacob (1860) and his grandson Jacob (1910) was diligently recorded in German archives. In 1947 Jacob (1910) and his family, along with his now widowed mother, immigrated to Canada.

Jacob (1910) moved with his family to Steinbach, Manitoba, just outside Winnipeg. He had a daughter there in 1948. In 1954 Jacob became a Canadian citizen.

The family relocated to Ontario at some point. Years later, on November 12, 2001 this headline appeared in the Toronto Star: "War crime case proceeds against ill 91-year-old".

The article was about Jacob Fast (1910), whose wartime past had been discovered. Government officials had learned about his participation in the Ukraine Auxiliary Police Force and his German citizenship. He had not disclosed these facts when he applied for citizenship in Canada. The courts

found no evidence that Jacob had committed any war crimes but because he was deemed to be a collaborator with the German occupying forces, he was ineligible for Canadian citizenship, and it was revoked in May 2007. By now Jacob was elderly and very ill. He died in Canada a few weeks later.

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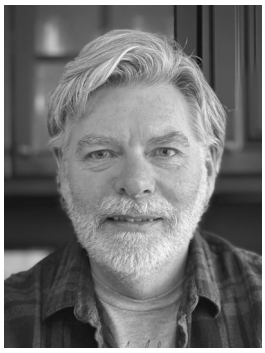
Barry is a retired financial industry executive who began searching for his Mennonite roots more than 30 years ago. He has been digging ever since. Originally from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, he now lives in Whitby, Ontario.



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Swift Current Bible Institute and Odessa Theological Seminary Connections

(adapted from a report by Florence and Otto Driedger)

Despite the war, Ukrainians continue their biblical education at Odessa Theological Seminary. Opening in 1991, the seminary grew out of Baptist roots. A small group graduated this past October.

In our early contact with Odessa, we were introduced to the president of the seminary, Sergei Sannikov. He was a co-founder with Boris Khersonsky—whom we knew well—of the Socium program which taught the values base of human services, human justice, and social work. Very little had been written during the earlier seventy years because faith-based education was banned during the Soviet years.

When Swift Current Bible Institute was closed in 1996, it had the task of dealing with its fine library. With MCC contributing the cost of shipping the books, the entire library was sent to the Odessa Theological Seminary. The staff were very thankful for the books, even though they were in English. Ukrainians had long had more access to English education than to biblical and theological knowledge.

Mennonite Church Canada maintains an ongoing relationship with the seminary. For additional information, google "Odessa Theological Seminary."

Odessa Theological Seminary

2022 graduates

Herman Peters (1912-2005) Neuhorst Saskatchewan

by Dick Braun

Herman Peters 1912-2005

Herman Peters was born to Herman and Anna (Klassen) Peters in 1912 in the village of Neuhorst, Saskatchewan. Neuhorst is a village in the Hague/Osler Mennonite Reserve, established in 1898. The Peters were some of the first people to move there. His father, Ohm Horm, as the village people called him, was a blacksmith by trade and a bit of a farmer.

Young Herman had three sisters whom we'll meet later: Nettie, the oldest, Betty and Annie. The Peters were considered poor, and so they had a house with a thatched straw roof.

Young Herman was like the other young men of the village. He had to find work outside of the village and so he did a variety of jobs.

Ohm Horm and Mrs. Peters passed away, leaving the young Peters children with their village property including some acres in the village pasture.

In 1929 the English school was started in the village. Sometime after this, the teacher in the village offered English night classes to the village people. Herman also took some of these classes. We (MHSS) believe we have a poem that Herman wrote in one of those classes. There was an interesting thing that happened at that time. The classes were only offered to the young men and one day the young ladies of the village decided they also wanted to learn English and so they did a sit-in and it caught on.

Herman became an entrepreneur. He cut fire wood for other people and did other handy work in the village. He also cut feed for other people.

He also got into the watch and clock repair business. Herman had a bit of an in into this business as his cousins owned Klassen Jewelers in Saskatoon. Herman bought a full line of equipment for this work. He fixed any kind of watch and clock and he also sold watches. Herman would always point out that the watches he sold had genuine jewels as

bearings for the shafts in the watch. As a young boy I was intrigued by the workings of a watch and so I went to watch Herman fixing watches on many an evening.

Now a little bit about Herman's sisters. Nettie only had one eye and was a bit chubby. She was the leader in the house. Betty was a thin, slight lady. Annie had a nervous breakdown and so ended up in the Saskatchewan Mental Hospital in North Battleford. Annie came home to visit occasionally, but living in an institution made her quite different from her siblings. Annie dressed differently from her sisters. The sisters often had big patches on their dresses, which could have been washed more often. I might add that none of the Peters children ever got married.

Herman thought that his sister Annie should have a memorable Christmas and so he acted. It was in December of 1944 that Herman sent some money to the Saskatchewan Mental Hospital so their sister Annie would have a Christmas gift. I remember Herman buying baloney at the village store for their cats as a Christmas treat. Herman was a very kind person and that is how he treated his neighbors and his animals.

Herman's truck was in a parade in 1980 at Neuhorst's homecoming celebrations.

Herman and his sisters lived very frugally. They had a barrel by the back door into which they would pour the water after they had washed so they could use it another time. Herman was delivering water to the village people. In 1951 he purchased a new Fargo half ton truck from Bergen's Garage in Neuhorst. With this new rig he could haul a lot more loads in a day, except Herman had a hard time pushing that gas pedal down a bit more so the truck would go a little faster.

John Loeppky is MC for the celebration in which Herman Peters is honoured. Herman was recognized in 1998 at the village of Neuhorst's one-hundredth birthday as the oldest citizen, and having always lived in the village of Neuhorst. He even boasted about the fact that he had never been out of the province.

Herman also developed a new system in the village whereby the residents of the village could come to his yard and buy drinking water by the pailful. This was so that the individual households did not need to store so much water at one time. He had a big garage and it was equipped with a full line of butcher equipment. People would rent his place to butcher pigs.

Herman built a new house on the same yard on which he had been born. This would now be the third house on this yard. Herman's thinking was ahead of its time, as he built it so that all the water from washing hands and bathing was recycled.

Herman was the last to die of the Peters siblings. He willed his estate to the Old Colony Church.

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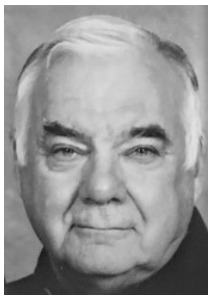

Dick Braun grew up in an Old Colony home in the village of Neuhorst in the Hague Osler Mennonite Reserve. He got interested in history at a very young age, listening to his grandmother's and parents' life stories. He enjoys collecting personal history stories and old documents for the MHSS Archives. Dick is a member of the Osler Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan.

Book Review

Enns, Elaine and Myers, Ched.
Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of Decolonization.
Eugene: CASCADE Books, 2021

Reviewed by George G. Epp

Before diving into *Healing Haunted Histories*, we need to grapple with the terms in the title: *settler, discipleship, (de)colonization, haunting. Settlers* used to refer to immigrants who expended their sweat and tears to pioneer what would become Canada. In the *HHH* context, they are the ones who benefitted from the transaction that saw the indigenous inhabitants displaced by colonizing Europeans. *Decolonizing* implies reconciliation, the actions and words that end the unjust boundaries colonialism set up between the colonialized and the settlers.

Approaching this reconciliation process demands that both settlers and indigenous peoples learn to recognize—each in their own story—the histories that created what they are, the conditions and events that shaped them.

Discipleship of Decolonization gives our task an Anabaptist/Mennonite rear-view mirror; discipleship in answer to the gospel of Jesus Christ lies engrained in our very origins as much as do believers' baptism and the refusal to bear arms.

Elaine Enns' family story—which she relates in the book—serves to illustrate at least a vital ingredient of a *discipleship of decolonization*: as descendants of a people who have lived under the oppressive thumbs of colonial powers, much of what continues to haunt us must resonate with the tragedies that haunt indigenous people under colonialism worldwide. It's necessary, of course, that our history as well as the history of our indigenous neighbours are known to us, and that we accept that for each of us, events & circumstances of our family/community histories form a significant part of who we are today.

Much of the rest of *Healing Haunted Histories* consists of wisdom gleaned through years of work in the area of reconciliation by Enns, Myers, and numerous colleagues in the field. Readers may find parts a bit jargon-heavy, but that's not unusual among specialities. For instance, looking at the history that made us and others through the lenses of *landlines, bloodlines* and *songlines* seems new to me. You and I can trace our own history through, for instance, *landlines*: the "ground" historically and presently on which I and my ancestors have walked or are walking. Similarly, we could shift from there to a *bloodlines* study which would be a look at the kinship relationships—familial, faith, economic—under which we live and have lived. *Songlines* refers to "individual and collective conscience," leading to things like our senses of justice and compassion. (p. xxv)

Working toward a reconciled future among indigenous/settler peoples in Canada will be a long-term project requiring both hope and perseverance. As a source book on which we as Mennonites can build, this text with its annotations, extensive Bibliography and a studied look at one Mennonite family's *landlines, bloodlines* and *songlines*, will be of great value going forward.

As did Enns and Myers, I leave the last word to Harry Lafond, former chief of the Muskeg Lake First Nation near Leask and Executive Director of the Treaty Commissioner's Office:

"But there is no shortcut to a lasting, long-term relationship between Indigenous and settler communities. Each of us is called to remember the past, live the present, and set the framework for the next seven generations. And that will only happen under the spiritual nudging of *mâmawi-ohtâwimâw (God, the Father of all).*" (pp. 313-315)