

Preservings

~ A Journal of the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.



Preservings \$20

Issue No. 32, 2012

"A people who have not the pride to record their own history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great."

— Jan Gleysteen



In this Issue	2
Table of Contents	2
Editorial.....	3
Feature Articles	4

Articles	31
Reflections.....	45
Local Histories	50
Around the Mennonite World	58

Reviews	77
News.....	81

In this Issue

It is not saying anything new that too often the experiences of women have not made it into the stories we tell about the past. This issue's feature articles have as their subject the stories of women. Royden Loewen uses two women's diaries to draw out how women found their own unique places in the process of transplanting communities from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s. Similarly, Jody Marten's article focuses on two women, but in her case she examines women who were single, often a marginal identity in Mennonite life. She concludes that the two single women of her story maintained rich and fulfilling lives, not suffering the loneliness that is often attributed to the single life. Martha Hiebert retells us the stories she heard in Bolivia—remarkable stories of women as midwives and healers. A second group of two articles looks at family life. Suzanne Smith takes us into the changing world of Hutterite family life, while Glen Klassen shares with us his interesting work on health and illness among early Manitoba Mennonites with a study of childhood illness and death.

Other articles include Titus Guenther's sojourn in Paraguay and his story of European Mennonite interactions with Paraguay's indigenous peoples, a relationship he characterizes as "witness through interdependence." Bruce Wiebe delves further into the land transactions that brought the first Hutterites to Canada in 1918. The theme is not unfamiliar to us—the intermingling of political and profit interests, in this case a Prime Minister and a Senator. Arden Dueck's records of his parent's recollections of a Kleine Gemeinde family moving to an Old Colony settlement to teach are featured in his article "Going to Yermo." A "Reflection" article by Ralph Friesen, a Foundation Board member, offers some food for thought as he delves into the question of "Salvation, the Ordnung, and Self Esteem."

Most of us live locally and our neighbourhoods, where we grew up, the circles of people we have come to know, are our world. Mary Neufeld tells us about how she uncovered the history of Schoenthal in Manitoba's West Reserve, while Frieda-Marie Elias remembers for us what it was like to be a young teacher from Saskatchewan who arrives in La Crete, Alberta to take up a teaching position.

A regular feature in the last number of issues, "Around the Mennonite World," has four contributions. David Friesen tells us about the 90th Anniversary celebrations in the Manitoba Colony in Mexico; Jesse Hofer takes us on a trip to Germany and Austria to learn more about Hutterite roots, while Kennert Giesbrecht and I each have a report of our visits to Horse and Buggy Mennonites.

Finally there are book reviews and, for this issue, there were more books than we could find reviewers and space for. We are always looking for contributors to *Preservings* and want to encourage your continued support by submitting your stories of the Mennonite past. The richness of each issue is a credit to our faithful contributors and I want to thank them heartily.

Hans Werner, co-editor

Preservings, a journal of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., is published annually. Co-editors are Hans Werner 1.204.786.9352 plettfoundation@gmail.com and John J. Friesen, 1.204.488.8128, djfriesen1@shaw.ca. The annual subscription fee is \$20.00, and cheques should be made out to the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and mailed to Hans Werner, D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3B 2E9. Reader responses are welcome. Please send manuscripts, articles, and/or photographs to the above address at the University of Winnipeg. Our mission is to inform our readers about Mennonite history, and in particular to promote a respectful understanding and appreciation of the contribution made by the so-called conservatives.

PRESERVINGS 2012

Table of Contents

In this Issue	2
Editorial.....	3
FEATURE ARTICLES: MENNONITE WOMEN	
Mennonite Prairie Women Writers, by Royden Loewen	4
She is Worthy: An Exploration of Singleness Identity for 20 th century Mennonite Women, by Jody Martens.....	8
Midwifery and Medicine in Bolivia, by Martha Hiebert	14
FEATURE ARTICLES: FAMILY LIFE	
The Changing Nature of Hutterite Family Life, by Suzanne Smith	19
Deaths of Mennonite children in first two decades in Manitoba, West Reserve, by Glen Klassen	24
ARTICLES	
Mennonites in Paraguay: Witness Through Vibrant Interdependence, by Titus Guenther.....	31
A Politically Risky Land Sale, Bruce Wiebe	35
Going to Yermo, Durango, Mexico, by Aiden Dueck	38
REFLECTIONS	
Salvation, the Ordnung, and Self Esteem, by Ralph Friesen	45
LOCAL HISTORIES	
Researching Schoenthal, Manitoba West Reserve, by Mary Neufeld	50
Teaching at Wilson Prairie School, La Crete, by Frieda-Marie Elias	56
AROUND THE MENNONITE WORLD	
Report on a History Trip to Europe, by Jesse Hofer.....	58
Mennonites in the Land of the Maya, Campeche, Mexico, by Hans Werner.....	65
90 th Anniversary Celebrations in Mexico, by David Friesen	68
The Low German Mennonites of Argentina, by Kennert Giesbrecht.....	72
Mennonite Women and the Burden of Dress, by Hans Werner	75
BOOK REVIEWS	77
NEWS	81

Our Cover

Our cover features a collage of images of women that are part of the stories in this issue of *Preservings*.

Editorial

by John J. Friesen
co-editor

How is a faith heritage renewed?

One of the issues faced by all denominations, churches, and *Gemeinden* is how to renew their faith heritage. Over the years, both internal and external conditions change. New challenges arise. The young need to be inspired to make the faith heritage their own. Older members need to be challenged. Rivalries need to be managed so they do not tear the community apart. How does a church renew itself so these challenges can be met successfully?

The so-called conservative Mennonite, Amish and Hutterite churches have faced the matter of renewal in a variety of ways. Some of the most conservative have emphasized keeping the tradition. New leaders are required to commit to faithfully follow the traditional practices. And yet, as researchers have shown, even the most conservative among the Amish, Hutterite, Old Order Mennonites, and the Old Colony do change practices over time. In some cases the changes may be a measure of adaptation to the society around them, as is seen in the development of schools in the Old Order Amish groups. For the Amish, these changes met the groups' internal needs of maintaining community cohesion, and fulfilled the education requirements of the state or province. In other cases, because of perceived threats, changes may draw the line between church and world even more sharply, as has been observed in changing clothing styles, modes of transportation, or use of modern technology.

Another way in which Old Orders have brought about renewal is through migration. Isaak Dyck, who was elected bishop of the Old Colony church near Cuauhtemoc shortly after the migration to Mexico in the 1920s, wrote a booklet in which he described the migration as a renewal and a recommitment to the original ideals of the church. During the fifty years in Manitoba, the Old Colony church, in his view, had become lax and needed renewal. Migration draws the community together in a common goal, creates a certain financial leveling since all have to start over, and forces people to rely on each other more in getting settled in a new pioneer setting. All of this creates a more tightly knit community. This renewal through migration has been repeated many times by Old Colony churches in Latin America, by Old Order Amish in the USA and Canada, and by Hutterites as they start new colonies. .

A different form of renewal comes through evangelism. Mission groups, who target the conservatives, usually invite individual members to a personal conversion experience that will give the individual assurance of salvation. This conversion experience is often accompanied by a negative evaluation of the person's earlier life of faith and the church from which he or she came. Their church is usually described as bound by dead tradition and lacking in spiritual life. This process of

renewal through conversion cuts the converts off from their earlier church and faith experience, negates what was positive in their experience, and leaves the people rootless in their new faith commitment. Often it is the marginal or the disaffected members of the churches who respond to these invitations. Many who have responded to the call of evangelism, have reflected positively on their experience, so for some this form of renewal seems to have been beneficial. The conservative churches, however, see such mission efforts as negative, and destructive of community. It may help individuals, but it does not help to renew the church. Rather, it often causes the church to become even more defensive and resistant to change.

A third form of renewal comes through education. The Old Order Amish of North America have improved their schools, created new devotional literature, adopted a newsletter, and brought about a renewal that is from within. They have not compromised who they are, but through improved education have strengthened their leaders and community. The Menno Colony which was established in Paraguay in the late 1920s had leaders who encouraged the church to embrace education by improving their schools. The leaders were visionary, but patient. Over the years, the Menno Colony church has brought about amazing renewal through education, without causing a split in their church. The church was able to include both the most impatient, and the most reticent. In Mexico, the Old Colony church in the Manitoba settlement is bringing about renewal through education by organizing what it calls "Committee Schools." These are schools organized by a committee promoting better education, are supported by the church leadership, and are operating alongside the traditional village schools. In Manitoba, Hutterites have embarked on a process of renewal through education. One group has introduced high school education, more courses in Hutterite history and theology, and improved German language education. This Hutterite Church is passionately committed to their communal faith heritage, but trying to renew it from within, through better education.

So, how does renewal happen? There is likely not one formula that fits all. For Old Colony Churches the problem of renewal is compounded. The historic methods of emphasizing tradition and migration have served their purposes well in many contexts. But many, both within and outside of the Old Colony churches in Latin America, have noted the problems in education.

The dilemma for the Old Colony churches is that they have not found the key to renewal through education without destroying the sense of community and common purpose that has shaped them. The Old Order Amish have found that key. Hutterites in Manitoba are embarking on new methods of education which they believe will renew, but not destroy communalism. For the horse and buggy Old Colonists, this key to an improved education model that will renew without destroying still eludes them.

Contributors:

Aiden Dueck

Frieda-Marie Elias

Ralph Friesen

prfriesen@shaw.ca

David Friesen

John J. Friesen

djfriesen@shaw.ca

Kennert Giesbrecht

Titus Guenther

Martha Hiebert

Jesse Hofer

jessschool@gmail.com

Glen Klassen

grklassen@gmail.com

Royden Loewen

r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca

Jody Martens

Lydia Penner

lpenner@planet.nl

Mary Neufeld

Suzanne Smith

Hans Werner

h.werner@uwinnipeg.ca

Bruce Wiebe

franzwiebe@hotmail.com

Feature Articles

'Mothers of Israel': Mennonite Prairie Women Writers and Their Place in History, 1874-1910¹

Royden Loewen, University of Winnipeg

I The 'Other' Of Mennonite History

For a long time now we have heard voices of the "other", the women, in the din of Mennonite history. Most notably we have heard it in Marlene Epp's 2008 *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* which introduced the complex, changing worlds of Mennonite women in Canada.² These women are no longer silent, not even those who arrived in the first Mennonite immigrant wave to western Canada in the 1870s. Where once the story was all about the great white fathers – Gerhard Wiebe, Johann Wiebe, Peter Toews – who led the churches to Manitoba in the 1870s the story has moved on to include women. Early midwives, school teachers and venerable grandmothers have all made their mark.

I want to add to this story by surveying the way these women cast their own stories. We can focus on the notable or the ordinary women, give them their due, but we can go a step further and contemplate the way they themselves saw their lives. Indeed their own writings tell us more than what they did, but how they viewed what they did. We can follow the counsel of German-American historian Walter Kampenhoefner, who has written about letter writing among German-speaking immigrants in general, and see just "how individual immigrants came to know...a new society, how they...liv[ed] between two cultures, and perhaps most important, how they felt about this process...."³ To use a phrase historians employ perhaps too readily, we can see how these women saw themselves as 'agents,' that is how they saw their roles in settlement, the meaning in their worlds, and their relationship to the men in their lives, their husbands, brothers, *Goutmauns*, sons, and even the passing male traveller. We may even be able to see them not as "passive subjects" but "agents of resisting memory" and creatively "talk[ing] back", to use the language of literary critic Sidonie Smith.⁴ Or to use the ideas of Domna C. Stanton, we may get to see a particularly female point of view; that is, the "threads [and] life-lines" of the "female 'I,'" and where those threads "came from and extended to others."⁵

The bits of biography and autobiography below open the possibility of entering these women's complex, private worlds. They show the pioneering experience on the Manitoba frontier from the women's own perspective.

II When Men Write About Women

A quick survey of biographies written by Mennonite men involved in the 1870s migration to Manitoba indicates just how differently men and women wrote about women. Men, for one, rarely wrote about women and when they did they highlighted a very select group of unusual women and their roles in bolstering community institutions. They stood out as barriers to this male agenda or as supportive roles enabling the

migration. Delegate Johann Funk's diary noted two women on his scouting trip to Manitoba in 1873. One was a 102 year old Metis woman who sat by her log cabin close to a Red River boat dock and so impressed the Mennonite male delegates that they presented her with a gift of tobacco. The other was Queen Victoria whose "purity and wisdom" was the boast of Canadian officials seeking to capitalize on the monarchal bias of the Mennonites. Both allusions provide data to the Mennonite delegates on the conditions, political and cultural, of the unknown territory of Manitoba.⁶

Certainly the official histories of the Mennonites provide few references to women. The fact of course was that the Mennonite church and village associations had few, if any "official" offices or institutions for women. The first English language history of Steinbach, Manitoba includes a single reference to a woman during the settlement's first generation. It notes that "since...Steinbach had no doctor...in those days, the...Gemeinde decided that several you[ng]...women...should take a short course from a...midwife in Minnesota....Mrs. Aganetha Reimer, a young mother with more than half a dozen of her own children...took the course and in more than 40 years of practice handled about 700 confinement cases...[When busy times ensued, she] always found time, day or night to service in her mission for God and church."⁷

Such stories, passed down through the centuries, clearly were meant to bestow an honour on these women who held publicly-sanctioned roles. But these male-sanctioned stories don't often record how women "talked back" to the powers that be, or to any men for that matter. In one oft-repeated story related to Steinbach settlers, the "resolute young wife" of Manitoba-bound Mennonite pacifist, Johan Friesen, who upon seeing her husband in danger of being robbed by two men in Odessa during their 1874 trip "knocked one of the would-be robbers flat..."⁸ But this is quite an unusual story, and one that pits a Mennonite woman against a non-Mennonite man. In another story, Mennonite midwife Aganetha Barkman, went a step further and "talked back" to Mennonite men when in about 1905 she ignored the Steinbach Kleine Gemeinde bishop's plea that she remove the large silver buttons from a new coat and set aside her fashionable fur hat. Significantly, this story is not found in the church history book, but was related by Barkman's daughter in an oral history project.⁹ Perhaps men praised the Mennonite midwife, but they rarely spoke of how these women felt about that role, what power it might have bestowed on them, how it made them feel. Their offices were sanctioned by male leaders, but their stories were sanitized by male writers.

Another group of women recognized by male-written histories were the widows. Given the established Mennonite

mutual aid systems and the protection offered by a migrating community, few Mennonite villages were without female-headed households. And these women were often accorded special recognition. A story passed down through several generations of Pletts in Manitoba's East Reserve has a representative section for its widow. It honours Maria Brandt Plett who was "a part of the great immigration to North America in 1874." Upon arriving in North America, Plett established a medium-sized, mixed farm in Steinbach. This historical narrative makes a special note that Plett eventually became a significant depositor of funds in the local Mennonite mutual aid society, thus assisting male-headed households.¹⁰ The Mennonite block settlement provided the opportunities for Widow Maria Brandt Plett to take up homesteads; the kin-generated literature turned these women into heroes who beat the men at their own game.

III Chain, Group And Secondary Migrants

Of course midwives and thriving widows were minorities within their respective community sisterhoods. Women's own accounts present a different set of stories. Those narratives open the windows into the family farm household. Here women worked alongside their men to build the homesteads. From here they networked with women of the village, cooked in such ways to ensure household self-sufficiency, told the stories and folklore and tales of the old country, and made sure their children knew the meaning of the great migration of the 1870s. Their own writings also reflect their relationships to the men of the village and extended family and the way the women exercised 'agency.' They wrote about life the way they saw themselves in it, in the way they saw it unfold, and thus they participated in creating the very symbols and structures that were at the foundation of Mennonite community.

These writings suggest that women were particularly attentive to social relationships on the frontier. And those relationships were shaped by the very 'group' nature of their immigrant communities. The East and West Reserve Mennonites were group settlers who secured an almost complete transplantation of an ethno religious community, including its social and kinship networks, its temporal institutions, its egalitarian inheritance practices and its strict codes dictating the nature of relationships across social boundaries. Here men ran the community organizations, but here too, women found their own measures of status within familiar social networks, by working alongside other women in the community, and alongside their men within their farm households.

Like other immigrant women, these Mennonite women, too, were subsumed in public by men. Indeed, the very decision to migrate was a corporate one, made by men gathered in a church brotherhood meeting.¹¹ Moreover, it was men who made travel arrangements, established village councils, selected the village sites, and rode into Winnipeg to take out the homestead papers.

But unlike many women on the Canadian frontier, the Mennonites found themselves in highly replicated village communes where they at once reencountered old social networks.¹² This meant that Mennonite women more often found themselves in transplanted sisterhoods, in the midst of the women of their in-group. And reflecting the value they placed in such networks, the women also frequently seemed to have determined the village of residence, directing their families to settle next to kin in kin-oriented villages.

Aside from circumstantial evidence suggesting degrees of status and decision making among women settlers, who were these women, what did they feel, how did they view matters/ Katie Funk Wiebe has argued that in Mennonite literature "there is much misery and little grandeur in the female characters" and the women are "flat, uninteresting and unconvincing." And why is this? Perhaps Funk Wiebe's observations stem from the fact that only 3 of the 11 novels she surveys are written by women, perhaps it is because we don't take examples of womanly agency at face value. Consider that in one of the novels surveyed, Elizabeth Schroeder's, *From Here to the Pinnacle*, "Liesbeth chafes at the restrictions on her sex" and that in another by Ingrid Rimland, the reader is introduced to Katya who "is the bold, open matriarch, opinionated, steadfast, fastidious about order" and granddaughter Katya "is termed impatient, proud, shortsighted, unwilling to know God's inscrutable plan" by community leaders. Rimland's novel is controversial for its racialized language, but it might well be so for contesting the stereotype of the "flat" female character.

The "sad and sickly 'Stillen im Lande'" pioneer woman seen in the history book and novel appears mostly to be a male construction.¹³ Female autobiographies and letter writers depict stronger women who influenced the shape of the frontier settlement.¹⁴ Their writings reflect strongly cohesive communities, in which kin and ethnic links provide a wide range of social support and define the vistas of social realities. Moreover, their own writings define ethno-religiousness in a particularly female way. They seem surprisingly unconcerned with the official Mennonite signposts of pacifism, congregationalism, parochial schools, municipal autonomy, rurality, and religious asceticism. Their concern is with the everyday, with illness and well being, with home and hearth. Their faith was one of daily living.

Susanna Banman Peters, Albergthal

These characteristics mark life for Susanna Banman Peters of Manitoba's West Reserve. Her autobiography reveals a complex constellation of ethnic community, kin and household social ties. But mostly it reflects an intimate association with the farm economy. Her writing certainly recounts the pioneer difficulty and sacrifice that Peters shouldered. She writes about her parental farm's progression from the reaper to the binder, from poverty to security. She describes her own more difficult life, shaped as it was by one misfortune after another - her first husband died during the 1919 Flu epidemic and her second husband was killed at a railroad crossing.¹⁵ But this woman's overriding concern was the economic security of the household. And thus, she records the progression of her married life, from "14x18 foot shack built on the northeast corner of [my parents-in-law's] yard at Kronsweide" to the eventual sombre move to a church-owned lot in the service town of Plum Coulee.

Moreover, most of Peters' account is a tale of work and her own role in making the household a success. She boasts about her abilities of forming stooks and hammering nails, of pulling weeds and making plaster, of spinning and milking, of hauling water and piling straw. Moments when she could not work were times of immense psychological pain: in 1902 when a farm injury kept her from working for a "couple of months" she experienced such consternation that for years she found it hard "to think of that time." Indeed, her biography pays more attention to her life in the fields and in the barnyard, than to her

life in the house; babies come without description of pregnancy or delivery or even childrearing.

Interwoven into her descriptions of the household economy is a richly layered account of life within the ethnic community. She notes how she and her family moved from one Mennonite village to another, from Blumengart on the East Reserve in 1889 to Altbergthal and a succession of other villages on the West Reserve. And the villages are never merely described physically; they are cultural sites. True, Peters does note that Altbergthal was located by a small creek that bordered the village's west side and she does describe the physical layout of the village with its house-barns all facing the central street.

But much more space is dedicated to listing each resident, "starting at the north end of Altbergthal" and then, too, the families who lived "at the crossroads to the south," 17 families in all, not including the herdsman who lived in a hut near the pastures south of the village or the schoolteacher's residence. Peters' life was located within this village and its residents comprised almost the entirety of her social network.

Only occasionally does Peters describe a social interaction with a non-Mennonite and when she does, it is always with reference to how that person related to Mennonites. The non-Mennonites in her autobiography included farm workers like the sojourning Italian with whom they were "very pleased" and the Russian immigrant who "did not work." They included faceless, hostile strangers like the Winnipeg doctor who could do nothing for her sister and the returning World War I soldiers who "bring with them the flu", indirectly causing the death of her husband. Even Mennonites from outside the village are mentioned only if they relate directly to her social network; the Mennonites who were noteworthy of mention in Peters' autobiography were Heinrich Dueck of Waldheim, Saskatchewan who married sister Anna in 1890 and Peter Falk of Schoenthal who married sister Aganetha in 1896. Social networks and ethnic community boundaries are the markers of Peters' life, caught as it was in a cycle of poverty and misfortune.



Helena Penner in a party dress, 1902. Photo Credit: Gretna: Window on the Northwest, 35.

Helena Penner, Gretna

But Susanna Peters' account is similar in many ways to a biography written by a member of perhaps the most prominent and well-to-do Mennonite family of the Mennonite reserves in the 1870s. Not only did Erdmann Penner bring over 30,000 dollars with which to establish a succession of stores, his daughter Helena Penner was among the very first Mennonite women to graduate from a Manitoba university.¹⁶ Moreover, the Penner family lived on the periphery of the Mennonite settlements throughout their life. From the time they established their first store in the "abandoned village of Tannenau...two and a half miles from the nearest Mennonite village" to the time that



Helena Penner's 1900 graduation photo. She is believed to be the first Mennonite woman to obtain a degree from a Manitoba university. Photo Credit: Gretna: Window on the Northwest, 18.



Helena Penner's parents were prominent in the migration to Manitoba. Erdmann established businesses in a number of communities, while her mother, Maria baked, fed and lodged many Mennonites who came to their home while on business in Winnipeg. Photo Credit: Preservings 10 (pt2) (1997): 9.

Erdmann Penner helped found the poly-ethnic railroad town of Gretna on the U.S.-Canadian border and erected an ornate 12-room Victorian house, the Penners kept some distance from fellow Mennonites.

Still, when daughter Helena Penner penned her autobiography she envisaged her life within an omnipresent Mennonite community.¹⁷ Her mother had all the worries of any migrating woman: should she bring the down-filled blankets?; how should she care for her possessive hens and threatening turkeys?; what should she do for her sick little “Sara, a perfect cherub...with lovely blue eyes...golden curls?” But mother’s life is lived out within a migrating community.

A consequence of group migration was a high degree of gender mutuality in each step of the move. Notwithstanding the male congregant’s decision making power, it seems individualistic male bravado was less required and less tolerated by the group settlers than more individualistic settlers, and that females participated in each step of the physical relocation. This is borne out in Penner’s biography. As Helena Penner notes, they migrated after “Father and Mother had made up their minds to do what they were asked to do - take the people to Canada....everyone...who wanted to come along...rich or poor, old or young, sick or well....pretty well the whole colony....”

In fact, mother used the community as resource to rein in father’s restlessness. As Helena Penner recalled it, “after...spying out the lay of the land, Father...said [living in Manitoba] was absolutely impossible” and he wanted to return to Russia at once. The fact that the Penners stayed seems attributable to mother who “did not want to [go back]. She wanted to stay long enough so that they at least would see the people settle in a bit, and besides, [mother argued], there was far more to America than this wilderness....” In addition, it was the community that provided mother with purpose and belonging.

Even as the family lingered in Winnipeg and father scouted the American Midwest, mother anchored herself mentally to the “mass of people” out in the Mennonite reserves and worked actively to cultivate her ethnic ties. Thus, during “that [first] winter....mother performed a heroic task...[as] she turned...more than ten 100 pound bags of flour...[into] bread and buns...to feed her own family, of course, but largely to feed the multitude [of Mennonite men]...coming to the city [to buy supplies and market commodities].” Moreover, mother invited these Mennonite men to “sleep at her place.” And the men responded: mother “said that sometimes they lay, packed like sardines, on the kitchen floor and she could hardly get breakfast ready, she had so little place to work in. And to every one of these men she would give a hot breakfast—just bread and butter and coffee or buns and coffee, and as much as they wanted.”

When the family moved to the East Reserve in 1875, mother became even more fully connected to the Mennonite community. Again, Penner gives special recognition to her mother’s heroic contribution to community life: once, she “guide[d] lost wayfarers to shelter” by placing lanterns in windows during a bitter winter storm; in general, she became a kind of “‘Mother of Israel’ among these people” who would “come and talk [medical and social problems] over with ‘Auntie Penner’ as they called her.”

Later, when the Penners decided to join the “stream” of people migrating from the low and alkaline East Reserve to the more fertile West Reserve, Mother Penner retained her seat of influence. The decision to move was mutual: “Father and



The Erdmann Penner house in Gretna. Photo Credit: MHC Archives Photo Collection, 247.2.

Mother had driven out there...to look over the place. They came back very enthusiastic about what they had seen. Especially the settlements near the Red River - near water - captivated Mother.” Significantly, it was once the family had settled into polyethnic Gretna and into their roomy Victorian house that mother falls out of the biographer’s view; it is now the story of a prospering father and a set of energetically acculturating teenaged children.

As in all biographies, these two by Susanna Banman and Helena Penner, have their share of heroics. But neither is primarily a rendering of individualistic achievement; they are writings that reflect both the realities of gender and of ethnicity. Ethnicity for both of these Mennonite women, representing the two extreme ends of the Mennonite socioeconomic scale, entailed a life within block settlement and amidst a people with a highly cohesive sense of peoplehood.

Conclusion

This is a short survey of male conceptions of farm women and then a snapshot of two early Manitoba women’s lifeworlds. Both lived in replicated villages, in close proximity to their kin groups, able to draw on or contribute to ethnic community mutual aid. Both participated within a familiar ethno-religious group at each stage of the migration. In the end each of the women worked to re-establish the boundaries of ethnic communities and each charted a life within farm households where mutuality with husband prevailed. But each also drew from her respective ethnic repertoire to negotiate a place for herself between the restrictions of patriarchalism and the opportunities of sisterhood.

Women immigrants never bore only “other” voices. Those voices were intersected, proscribed and enabled by an ethnically-determined set of social networks and cosmologies, and further restricted and empowered by the variables particular to that of the Mennonite migrant group. Within the confines of their communities, in the everyday, they and their daughters saw “mothers of Israel” where men tended to see the patriarchs of the Gemeinde.

Endnotes

- 1 This piece is an abridged and revised essay that appeared originally as: Royden Loewen, “‘As I Experienced Them Myself’: The Autobiographical German-Language Immigrant Woman in Prairie Canada, 1874-1910,” *A Chorus of Different Voices: German-Canadian Identities*. Eds, Angelika E. Sauer and Matthias Zimmer. New York: Peter Lang, 1998: 119-142.
- 2 Published by the University of Toronto Press.
- 3 Walter Kamphoefner, Introduction, *News From the Land of Freedom: German Immigrants Write Home*, eds. W. Kamphoefner, W. Helrich, U. Sommer (Ithaca: Cornell, 1991), viii. See also, Lorelei French, *German Women as Letter Writers, 1750-1850* (Madison NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson, 1996).
- 4 Sidonie Smith, *Subjectivity, Identity and the Body: Women’s Autobiographical Practices in the Twentieth Century* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993), 18; 22.
- 5 Domna C. Stanton, introduction, *The Female Autograph* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1984), 13.

- 6 John F. Funk, “Notes by the Way,” 1873, *Brothers in Need to Brothers in Deed*, ed., Clarence Hiebert (Newton, KS: Faith and Life, 1974), 80.
- 7 Peter J.B. Reimer and David P. Reimer, eds., *The Sesquicentennial Jubilee: Evangelical Mennonite Conference* (Steinbach, MB: Evangelical Mennonite Conference, 1962), 35.
- 8 Reimer, “Historical Sketches,” p. 38.
- 9 Interview with Sara Reimer Kroeker (Steinbach, MB), December 9, 1983, EMCA Archives, Steinbach, Manitoba, Box 152.
- 10 Delbert F. Plett, *Plett Picture Book: A Pictorial History of the Children and Grandchildren of Cornelius Plett and Sara Loewen* (Steinbach, MB: D.F. Plett Farms, 1981), 41-44.
- 11 For greater detail on this phenomenon see my book, *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 92-106.
- 12 On the nature of these communes see: Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974).
- 13 Katie Funk Wiebe, “The Mennonite Women in Mennonite Fiction,” *Visions and Realities: Essays, Poems and Fiction Dealing with Mennonite Issues*, eds. H. Loewen and Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Turnstone, 1985): 231-242.
- 14 See my chapter, “Immigrant Families and Pioneer Women” in *Family, Church and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds* (Toronto: U Toronto P, 1993): 92-106.
- 15 Susanna Banman Peters, autobiography, unpublished typewritten script, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.
- 16 F.G. Enns, *Gretna: Window of the Northwest* (Gretna: Gretna History Committee, 1987), 18.
- 17 Helene Penner Hiebert, “Granny’s Stories,” Mennonite Heritage Center.

She is Worthy: An Exploration of Singleness Identity for 20th century Mennonite Women

Jody Martens, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Women’s history, and indeed Mennonite women’s history has undergone an intense process of rehabilitation in recent times. The unquiet spirits of the mid-twentieth century that gave way to a woman’s movement of unprecedented size and strength revealed, among other things, that the voices and stories of women in history had been minimized, manipulated and often entirely excluded. Much of Mennonite history, too, has been stitched in the fabric of patriarchy, leaving women mysteriously absent in the “official books.” But, as Marlene Epp notes in her history of Canadian Mennonite women, “we know women were surely there.”¹ As the lost stories of women are slowly uncovered, one has to consider the extent to which available sources limit us to traditional historical narratives. That is, the places in history where information exists often paint only a lackluster image of the “common woman” as the childbearing partner of a man; a half-transparent bystander lurking in the shadows while her male counterpart dominates major events, politics, and church affairs. Although Mennonite women share many stories and experiences, generalizing and condensing this rich history fails to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity and beauty in the patchwork quilt of the woman’s sphere as a separate, but integral part of the full historical narrative.²

Thankfully, the stories of women that Epp describes as often seen in mainstream history, “mostly through a low-lying fog,” are being recovered, discovered, told for the first time, or retold in a new light. Still, there are many corners left to explore in this vast and hazy land. While stories of women as pioneers, refugees, immigrants, nurses, teachers, laborers, church members, leaders, missionaries, and nonconformists are shedding

light on the elusive feminine figure of the past, the dominant theme in the history of Mennonite women centers around the role of women as mothers and wives, hinges of the nuclear family. The nuclear family, a unit in the larger community,



A Mennonite family upon their arrival in Winnipeg from Europe after World War II. Children and family, a fundamental part of women’s stories, has too often been the only story worth telling. Photo Credit: Preservings 23(2003): 116.

was and in many ways still is the primary Mennonite social institution.³ A woman's status and identity, then, if not formed in the public sphere, was created and maintained through the important roles she played in maintaining a home and raising children. While the familial experience is a fundamental part of Mennonite women's history, one must invariably ask, were there any "others"? This article will focus on the experience and identity formation of single Mennonite women, with a focus of the experiences of single women in Manitoba. Following a short analysis of singleness in the Mennonite context, I have chosen the stories of two Manitoban single women to illustrate the complexities and misrepresentation of stereotyped "singleness," while celebrating the successes and life stories of these women within this context.

Largely an anomaly in the framework of early Canadian Mennonite history, "singleness", as a deviant marital status for women, was largely a neglected and mysterious subject in religious, cultural as well as academic circles until the mid-twentieth century. This could be due in part to the ambiguous nature of "permanent" singleness, but probably more so because greater attention has generally been paid to singleness as a transient state between childhood and marriage; as a result, those single adults over age 35 are seen to have missed the "official" transition into adulthood.⁴ In writing on Mennonite singleness in 1989, Mary Bergen contends that such a concept, "feeds into the stereotyped opinion that older never-married women are to be pitied and that older never-married men are suspect."⁵ Still, singleness is a reality for many women, "both in society at large as well as within Mennonite communities."⁶ Bergen notes that fewer Mennonite women have remained single compared to the national average, while a proportionately high number of Mennonite women have been active in missionary work and other community-oriented services.⁷

Before I discuss singleness in the context of 20th century Mennonite culture, it is important to consider the expectations and socially prescribed roles for women in Mennonite communities as they transitioned from Russia to Canada. In his study on the *Kleine Gemeinde*, Royden Loewen paints a picture of family-based villages in Russia where women married young and were expected to begin families of their own. The highly gendered system that divided the public and private spheres was already firmly in place in Russian Mennonite settlements. While Marlene Epp notes that there are many examples of strong and influential women as, "evidence of a matriarchal social order that offset a woman's subordinate position in church structure and religious doctrine," this influence relied heavily on the centrality of the family and a woman's position within that structure. The family was the basis for church and community life, and consequently, "could not really be considered a privatized realm totally separate from other spheres of governance."⁸ As a result, women who made "alternate choices to marriage or motherhood, or whose lives simply took different turns, carried the psychological and emotional burden of being aberrations from the family norm."⁹

A woman's identity also relied on her ability as a mother, presuming every woman could and wanted to bear children. In writing about the appeal of the domestic sphere and high birth rates in Russia, Loewen notes that, "Because healthy women rarely remained single and large families were extolled, most women were pregnant for a third of the time during their twenty-five childbearing years."¹⁰ The notion that unless a

woman was sick or somehow unfit, there would be no other reason for her to not marry speaks to the influence of marriage and family inherent in early Mennonite culture. A woman who did not marry or bear children was in many ways powerless. Loewen tells the story of one Margaretha Harder, "...a reportedly emotionally weak, fifty-four-year-old in Borosenko."

An unmarried woman, Harder was a member of the Kleine Gemeinde and was being forced by her brothers, members of another congregation and guardians of Margaretha and her 400-ruble inheritance, to remain in Russia. The brothers insisted that she was too weak to make the migration and moreover that their father would have refused to allow Margaretha to emigrate. Margaretha, however, complained about her brothers to her Kleine Gemeinde elders, insisting that she wished to remain in the Kleine Gemeinde and make the migration to Manitoba. It was only after the church leadership took up her case and threatened to expose the brothers' action to the colony "Waisenvorsteher" that her brothers relented. In the end, the brothers showed their true intent by dropping their threats to forcibly keep Margaretha in Russia in exchange for her money. The Kleine Gemeinde, which wanted to avoid a public showdown at the time of emigration, simply put up its own money and assisted Margaretha to settle in Manitoba.¹¹

While this story should not be taken to reflect the regular practice of church or community, it illustrates the vulnerability of a woman on her own, subject to the control of a patriarchal hierarchy. The structure of a traditional Mennonite community, inadvertently or otherwise, did not easily allow for the inclusion of single women. Women were not permitted in church leadership, they did not run businesses or financial institutions, and were generally not seen in leadership roles. This traditional community structure assumes that women will ultimately be subsumed into the church and economy through the process of marriage, where her male partner will represent her. When a woman does not marry, she never achieves this "official representation" in integral venues of community participation and it becomes increasingly difficult to find a place, a voice, and acknowledgment as an included member of the community. In her analysis of single Mennonite women in Mexico, Doreen Klassen illustrates this nonconformist transition of four women into the public sphere. The women Klassen interviewed were first generation fulltime female wage earners and house owners, "negotiating an alternative settlement pattern for single-women within a society with nuclear-based housing patterns."¹² All four women worked at the same nursing home, while living in shared or side-by-side housing next to their workplace. Within this independent work and living arrangement, the women frequently took on responsibilities that continue to be seen as unorthodox for a woman in a conservative Mennonite community. The women expressed how they "construct a sense of self as integrated into, yet distinguished from, their Mennonite community, but also how they achieve an adult identity in a society which has conventionally equated marriage and child-bearing with a woman's status as an adult."¹³ While the four women Klassen interviewed descended from the conservative majority who left Canada for Mexico in the 1920s, their experiences still reflect some of the circumstances of single women in greater Mennonite culture.

I will focus on the stories of two single women raised in rural Manitoba during a time that offered opportunities largely unavailable to their pioneer ancestors. The women are Helen Janzen (1908-1992) and one whom I will call Sara Wiebe, as she prefers to remain anonymous. My research included Helen Janzen's memoir and personal collection of papers from the Mennonite Heritage Center Archives, and an oral history interview with Sara Wiebe. While Helen did not speak exclusively about her "singleness" in her memoir, her story offers insight to the ways single women were able to form an identity within a culture that hailed marriage and motherhood as the ultimate achievement in life for a woman, and in this sense, serves as an important exploration of the constantly stretching and evolving fabric of Mennonite social customs. Sara offered a short commentary on her position as a single. The purpose of this portion of the study as whole is to celebrate the entire life stories of two Manitoban single women, rather than to reduce them to their singleness identity as the only important story they have to tell.

Helen Janzen's Story

Helen's story begins with the pleasant recollections of a rural childhood. She opens her memoir recounting her experiences of Christmas as a part of a loving family in the small community of Edenthal, her childhood home just a half-mile from the country school she attended. Her mother's parents settled near Gretna upon immigrating to Canada as part of the Bergthaler Church.¹⁴ Helen describes her family and home as one of encouragement, openness, and as "...a somewhat atypical family...It was a family in cultural transition, with a dynamic rather than a static world-view. The parents' life was an authentic expression of their ethical and moral outlook on life, and their widening world-view."¹⁵ While her father was forced to earn his own living at the age of twelve, he desired for his children to have every opportunity that life did not afford him, especially in respect to higher education. Helen also describes her household as one of blurred gender roles, unlike the commonly prescribed identities based on the division between domestic and manual labor that defined so many early 20th century families. Helen writes that because of the many roles her father played as a boy from a very poor pioneer family, he "had no rigid concept of male-female division of labor. He often helped inside, knew how to prepare meals, loved playing with children and helped to nurse us when we were ill." A family of five sisters and one brother, Helen recounts the various farming, labor, and carpentry tasks the girls took part in regularly.¹⁶

Helen's family moved to Gretna in 1920, where she completed high school, graduating from grade twelve in 1926. She describes the lasting impact of her schooling experience in Gretna, and especially the influence of her principal H. H. Ewert, calling him, "...the greatest model of a teacher and of

dedication and self-sacrifice I have ever known."¹⁷ During a teaching shortage and upon the encouragement of friends and family, she received a teaching permit and was hired at the Rosefarm country school in the fall of 1926. One year later Helen enrolled in Normal School, marking the beginning of years of post secondary education and career developments that few Mennonite women of rural Kanadier backgrounds would have had the opportunity to commit themselves to. After receiving her First Class teaching certificate, Helen spent 10 years teaching at the district school in Gretna, while her summers were spent living in residence at the University of Manitoba, studying German Literature, sociology, English, and psychology. She reflects on her university experiences as so enjoyable that earning a degree was like an added bonus: "This was not drudgery...I loved it."¹⁸ In 1936 she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree, and 1938 marked her tenth year teaching in Gretna.

Feeling she needed a change, Helen decided to enroll in the faculty of Home Economics at the University of Manitoba. She again moved into residence, attended classes full-time, and took summer courses, earning a Bachelor of Science degree in Home Economics in the summer of 1940. Home Economics became Helen's calling for the remainder of her working life. She fervently pursued further education and taught a variety of courses in homemaking, textiles, cooking, foods, nutrition, and childcare; subjects that were traditionally reserved for mothers, presumed experts in homemaking and housewifery, to teach their daughters. While a single female educator was not unusual, it was expected that these young teachers would eventually marry and leave their career. Helen's dedication to a lifelong career in Home Economics indicates first that she had many of the same interests as her married counterparts, but also that her career may well have been a manifestation of what she enjoyed or desired in typical nuclear family life, without the formalities of marriage.

After having taught in a number of Winnipeg schools including William Whyte, West Kildonan, and Lord Selkirk, and earning degrees and certificates from the University of Winnipeg, University of Manitoba, Evanston Northwestern University, University of Chicago, summer courses in Ames, Iowa, and many evening and weekend courses in Manitoba, Helen was asked to join the Manitoba Department of Education as the first Consultant and Supervisor of Home Economics for the province. Initially hesitant, she humbly expressed feelings of inadequacy, but eventually accepted the position, feeling "it was wrong to turn it down." Helen lists this as her third career, where she remained for 21 years.¹⁹

Not only was Helen pioneering a life as a single woman, she was also paving new ground as a successful Mennonite woman in a professional world dominated by men. In listing a few "firsts" in her life, Helen recalls that she was the first female Mennonite teacher hired in Winnipeg, as well as the first woman on the Executive of the Mennonite Central Committee. Helen recounts being the only woman working for the Department of Education for a number of years, "a ratio of 1:40."²⁰ That said, her minority position hardly seemed to faze her. Writing fondly of her experiences wading through traditionally gendered territory over the course of her career, Helen seemed to make friends and garner respect everywhere she went. In the presentation address to Helen at her retirement party in January 1972, Jo Wilson included this: "I'd like also to



Helen Janzen, 1974. Photo Credit: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives.

mention, if I may, [Helen's] ability to charm the opposite sex. Over the years she has sat on many committees, some made up entirely of men, and she has won their respect and admiration. She has been our image and we have benefited greatly."²¹

Helen lived in many places at different points in her life; university residences as a young adult, and apartments with various roommates whom she speaks fondly of later on in her working life. One of those roommates, Bernice Flaws, would end up staying with Helen for over 40 years. Like some of the women in Doreen Klassen's study, Helen and Bernice ate together and shared a common food and household expenses budget. They formed a relationship that seemed to go beyond "roommates," to a companionate relationship, that Craig Forsyth and Elaine Johnson describe as common for older singles, feeling "an extensive sense of obligation with regard to caring for each other."²² The women intentionally shared many of life's experiences, including traveling to Europe together five times. Helen writes, "I have often thanked God for Bernice. She is like a sister to me."²³ Their relationship also coincides with Marlene Epp's note that single women frequently, "found community with each other, as women with similar interests, common goals, and shared identity markers as women without husbands."²⁴

Traveling, too, remained a deeply desired and important inclusion in Helen's life. She fills 65 of her 122-page memoir reflecting on and describing her many trips. The purposes of her trips included conferences with the International Congress of Home Economics, taking courses, exploring her and Bernice's cultural roots, attending a Mennonite World Conference, and many sightseeing and historical tours. She visited much of Eastern and Western Europe as well as Japan, vividly describing her experiences. Imbedded in all of Helen's commentary on traveling, family, work, and life is her dynamic philosophy as both an activist in many areas of social justice, peace and disarmament, and as a Christian, recurrently expressing gratitude for everything God had done in her life.

Helen was not passive in the social issues of her time. Among the issues most important to her, poverty, ecology, women's concerns and nuclear proliferation consumed much of her life. Alf Redekopp writes that, "Her commitment to the traditional Mennonite peace position went beyond mere wishful thinking."²⁵ Helen actively participated in the Student Christian Movement (having met J. S. Woodsworth), acted as a General Conference delegate on the Mennonite Central Committee board, a delegate on the Manitoba Interfaith Council Board, a membership secretary for the Winnipeg branch of the United Nations, a member on the Committee on Disarmament and of its executive, letter writing for the release of prisoners for Amnesty International, a member of several Education committees, and years of volunteering in various areas of ministry for Charleswood Mennonite Church. On becoming more involved and educated in global issues and warfare, Helen writes, "I am much better informed, am a more committed conscientious objector and feel convinced that it is my obligation to speak out."²⁶ Among other activities, Helen participated in the Peace Walk in Winnipeg in 1982. The province of Manitoba also presented her with a Meritorious Service Award.²⁷

Helen was also a member of many Societies and clubs, most notably the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum and the Mennonite Historical Society. Proud of her heritage, she frequently emphasizes the importance of history, art and literature as

critical in fostering a better knowledge and understanding of Mennonite culture. In an article on Helen in the *Mennonite Mirror*, she is quoted reflecting that, "Some people don't know who they are and some don't care. Others are ashamed of their culture. I have always been very up front about my background. I will tell people that I am an Anabaptist-Mennonite and hope that I may change their view of what it means to be a Mennonite. I know who I am. I have never tried to push my tradition but I have never hesitated to claim my heritage."²⁸ Helen certainly seems to have "known who she was" in many respects; challenging not only what was believed to be "Mennonite," but also, perhaps less intentionally, what was believed to reflect singleness, success, and womanhood. She received numerous honorary life memberships for her work and dedication to different organizations, and was widely recognized by friends and family at both the large, formal 75th birthday celebration thrown for her, as well as the retirement banquet in her honor. In one address for her 75th, Helen's niece Jeanne spoke on behalf of all her nieces and nephews, praising Helen for her constant dedication to family, her ability to always pay attention to what was happening in everyone's lives, offering encouragement, advice, and taking time to visit and send letters on a regular basis.²⁹ Other letters and speeches credited Helen similarly; friends and family undoubtedly saw her as an inspiration.

Ultimately, Helen never fit the culturally stereotyped profile of a "spinster." An ambitious, personable, and widely respected woman, she defies the notion that single women are prone to eternal loneliness, or are in some way unwanted or "unmarriageable." Birthed into the early 20th century societal milieu that saw patriarchy fighting to maintain power over early feminist advances, Helen's accomplishments seem all the greater. Furthermore, those accomplishments may very not have been possible had she been married with children. While the complexities of her singleness cannot be understood from a short memoir and a box full of letters, it is evident that Helen was a capable woman who desired and succeeded in constructing an identity, as fulfilling and rewarding as those of her married peers. Helen's lack of a traditional family was replaced by the many close relationships she maintained and the ways she recreated familial structures in her life. Sara Wiebe's story, too, challenges the prescribed limitations of singleness.

Sara Wiebe's Story

I interviewed Sara at her apartment in Winkler, Manitoba. When I first spoke with her over the phone she was hesitant to share her life story with me, given the nature of my article. After giving her several weeks to decide, however, she graciously welcomed me into her home. I assured her that my intentions were to celebrate the stories of women that had not yet been told. Writing now, I hope that I have achieved this. The first thing I noticed about Sara was her cheerfulness and hospitality. She offered me food and drink, and made sure I was comfortable and everything was in place for our interview. She began by telling the story of her parents' migration to Canada from Russia as refugees in 1923.

Sara was born in Lechfeld, Germany, during the time her family was waiting to continue to Canada. Upon arrival in Manitoba, they were received by a host family from the community of Greenland. Her father became a hired farm hand while her mother stayed home to care for Sara and her older sister. In 1927 the family purchased a farm near Roseisle to

be nearer to her uncle and aunt. Though farming was difficult in the beginning and Sara struggled with health problems that kept her from starting school on time, she remembers these years fondly. She eventually completed her first seven years of school in Roseisle. When her family moved to Graysville, Manitoba in 1938, Sara finished grade 8 and began working on the farm. By this time, three brothers had been added to the family. Sara recalls the constant abundance of farm work; she and her sister were always needed to help her father and brothers with milking, field work, feeding, and churning.

In Roseisle, Mennonite families in the area met in each other's homes to worship and have fellowship while there was no formal Church structure nearby. Sara remembers the close community that was fostered through the years of participating in that house Church. While they were not able to run a Sunday school during this time, the children were given "Sunday school lessons" each week at home. Sara emphasized the solid spiritual foundation established in her home, and her parents' dedication to their Mennonite faith. In Graysville, the family attended a small Mennonite church that eventually identified as Bergthaler. While they had no official pastoral leadership for some time, Sara describes the fellowship those families shared reading through books of sermons and organizing music, leading choir and worship with what ability they had. During her time in Graysville Sara spent four winters attending bible school at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg, including frequent train trips to Winnipeg with boxes full of canned goods and preserves to sustain her during her winter stay.

Early in her life, Sara felt a deep love and desire to work with children. She became involved in teaching Sunday school and Vocational Bible Camp at her church, but eventually felt that she wanted to do more, and possibly pursue a career in education. She reflected on this question, "...is this really what I wanted to do day after day? Because it was my high interest, in teaching and being with children, but of course I lacked the education." Eventually, Sara saw an ad in the newspaper looking for staff to work at an orphanage in Waterloo, Ontario. She immediately felt a strong conviction to apply for the position, but admitted, "...it was very hard for me at that time. I felt I had to give up everything to go there, having been surrounded by family and friends and familiar people and places...but I gave my complete will to Lord as he would lead." She describes the profound ways working with those children impacted her, and as Marlene Epp wrote of Mary Snider, never married matron of the Berlin Orphanage in 1896, "undoubtedly created...the sense of herself as mother to a 'busy household of children.'"³⁰

The director of MCC in Kitchener/Waterloo at the time asked Sara if she would consider going back to school, and after contemplating the steps involved in achieving a degree, Sara began taking correspondence courses to complete her high school education. She worked at the MCC warehouse and spent her evenings and spare time studying. After two years in Ontario, Sara decided to move back to Manitoba to complete her education. Between night school, summer school, and college courses, over the span of two years, Sara earned her grade 12 diploma and a teaching certificate from teachers

college in 1959. She began her career in Blumenort, and she recounts this as a very positive experience, building community with her students and their parents: "That was a very good experience, I had wonderful children, a wonderful community...I didn't do everything right, but I loved the children, we played together, worked together, ate together." After eight years in Blumenort, Sara decided to move to Lowe Farm. She returned to University during the summers to continue working at a degree in Education. She finally decided to take one year off work to pursue studies full time. Sara remembers these years as times of testing and questioning whether she was making the right decisions. At one point, she recalls reading a verse on the wall of a friend's house that read, "He who has helped you hitherto, will help you all your journey through." She felt this was an affirmation that it was okay to return to Lowe Farm and continue teaching. Sara did return, teaching there for a total of 24 years. Finally, in 1984, after persistent health problems would not subside, she decided she could no longer give her students and teaching what it required, and decided to resign. Sara continued to teach adult English part time, as well as substitute teaching when she could.

When her father took ill in 1985, Sara decided to stay with her mother in Winnipeg while her father was in St. Boniface Hospital, as her siblings were not able to be there full time. Her father was moved back to Winkler in 1985, and Sara went along, staying in Winkler to assist her parents. Her father passed away in 1986, and Sara spent the next eight years with her mother, until she passed away in 1993. Forsyth and Johnson cite the relationship with elderly parents as one of the most common interpersonal relationships for a single woman. They term this the, "co-resident daughter role," as, "the continual cohabitation by an adult daughter with her parents until their deaths."³¹ Far from being negative about her role as caretaker, Sara felt blessed to be able to spend these last years with her parents.

Sara, like Helen, loved to travel. She and her sister visited her brother while he was working in Jamaica, she visited Germany twice; the first trip she attended the Mennonite World Conference in Holland, traveled through Italy and Switzerland, and enjoyed a twelve hour trip along the Rhine. Her second trip to Germany was for a summer course, though she spent her spare time taking bus trips and visiting various friends and family in Europe. She also took two trips to Israel in the 1990s that she exalts as some of the most amazing experiences she has ever had. Her last major trip was in 1997, when she learned about a Mennonite Heritage Cruise taking travelers from Canada to the Ukraine. In total, eight members of her extended family went on the cruise. Sara recalls the profound experiences they had seeing the places many of their parents and grandparents were raised and lived for years.

While the nature of Sara's singleness is complex, she asserted that her life was no less meaningful, and she feels positively about her experiences and relationships: "I feel I have been enriched with friends, children and family." One of the boys Sara cared for in the orphanage in Waterloo sought her out while she was living in Winkler, sending her letters, and eventually making the trip



The orphanage where Sara (not her real name) worked in the 1950s. Photo Credit: Waterloo University Library.

to visit her with his family; later Sara visited that family in Florida, a connection she still holds dear. Sara also reflected that while she sometimes needed help with things she could not do, her father, brothers, nephews and nieces were always there to help. She maintains close relationships with several of her nephews and nieces who help her with errands, and drive her to appointments and errands when needed.

After her mother's passing, Sara purchased a home two doors down from her sister, where they spent a lot of time together. She continued to teach Sunday school throughout her career and retirement, until she was 83 years old. She still loves her Sunday school children, and feels blessed to have spent so many years in that position. She also worked as a deaconess and volunteered at a number of places including Salem Mission for over twenty years, the MCC store, the gift shop at the hospital for more than ten years, she continues to volunteer in her apartment building serving meals, and has done many visitations with those who are lonely and sick, concluding that, "The Lord has been wonderful and *is* wonderful. His praise will continually be in my mouth."

Eventually, after her sister passed away in 2000, Sara decided to move into a smaller suite in 2007, where she resides today. She loves having neighbors close by. During the three hours I spent in her apartment, one of Sara's neighbors stopped by twice asking for help with paying her phone bill. Sara kindly looked at the bill and gave her instructions on what to do. Sara has undoubtedly drawn in people around her through her genuine and caring nature. Like Helen, Sara has maintained close friendships and connections that create a sense of family in her life.

A perfect illustration of Sara's impact is in the reunion her grade one class held for her last summer: "Now my experience last summer was very special...when my former grade one class asked if I would like to come and spend an afternoon with them; that was a very special time and a highlight." Her former student, now professor of Mennonite Studies organized a reunion dinner in Steinbach. Almost all the students attended, some of whom traveled from other provinces. They visited the sight of the school where she first taught in 1959, and presented Sara with a plaque; this plaque, which Sara showed me, was kept hidden behind a pillow in the back room of her apartment, as she felt displaying it might come across as boastful.

In reflecting on her experiences in life and as a single woman, Sara said this:

"Now, did I have a fulfilled life? I did. I had a happy childhood. I had many friends. I had many good experiences. Did I ever wish I would have a husband to have to love and love me? Of course. That's natural...I have prayed about that, but God has been there for me, has not given me a husband. I do not feel that the Lord has not given me what was good for me. He has allowed me to work with many many children...I knew for sure God was calling me to do that work...Friendships from that time on are still there...you know, blessings were everywhere."

The purpose of this article is foremost to bring light to the stories of those aunts, great aunts, nurses, teachers, mentors, laborers, and various other single women who undoubtedly struggled to build a life and identity in a highly familial culture. I am not suggesting that single Mennonite women were intentionally oppressed or mistreated in Mennonite communities, but rather that through a lack of understanding and experience with single adults, singleness as an accepted marital status was

a process, and those women who made strides as early bearers of alternative identities deserve to have their stories told. This article also does not touch on the experiences of single men, widows or widowers, individuals with disabilities or mental health issues deemed unfit for an independent life, or those divorced, and is not suggesting that never-married women were the only "othered" minority in this sense.

Both Helen and Sara defy many of the traditional assumptions about singleness. Both maintained close relationships with one or more of their siblings, nieces and nephews. Family continued to surround them and play integral roles in their lives. Familial bonds for these women also manifested in other areas of their lives. Helen and Sara both loved teaching, and spoke of lasting relationships with students and colleagues. Neither woman expressed an overwhelming sense of loneliness later in life, and in many ways fit into what E. Kay Trimberger calls the "new type of single woman," that Doreen Klassen cites in her article. The new type of single woman is, "content and happy with her life and the prospect of remaining single. She is satisfied with her accomplishments, relationships, and identity... She has a home that nurtures her, whether she lives by herself or with other people...she has satisfying work that provides her with economic autonomy...is satisfied with her sexuality... enjoys some connection to the next generation...finds intimacy within a circle of family and friends...and maintains a community primarily through her friendship networks."³²

Helen and Sara also do not reflect the stories of *all* single Mennonite women. There were many single women who were missionaries, those who did not pursue careers, and surely those who did indeed struggle with the characteristic loneliness and exclusion that Helen and Sara did not seem to face in a debilitating way. While singleness was largely seen as an estranged category in society at large, the transition to accepting alternate marital statuses in Mennonite communities occurred at a different pace, under the circumstantial tradition that marriage and family were the most esteemed positions for women. While this article only begins to scratch the surface of singleness identity, the investigation of these largely unexplored pockets in women's history provide fascinating and important new contexts in which to better understand the experiences of Mennonite women and the rich history of which they are a part.

Endnotes

- 1 Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History*. (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008.), 3.
- 2 For a concise history of Mennonite women in Canada, see Marlene Epp. "Women in Canadian Mennonite History: Uncovering the 'Underside'" *The Journal of Mennonite Studies* 5 (1987).
- 3 Royden Loewen, *Family Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 32. For further reading on Mennonite women within the context of family in rural Canada, see Royden Loewen, "'The Children, the Cows, My Dear Man and My Sister': The Transplanted Lives of Mennonite Farm Women, 1974-1900." *Canadian Historical Review* 17, no. 3 (September 1992).
- 4 Craig J. Forsyth, and Elaine L. Johnson, "A Sociological View of the Never Married." *International Journal of Sociology of the Family*, 25, no. 2 (1995): 92. Also, Doreen Klassen notes, "Cross-cultural scholarly literature contains a commonly-held notion that singleness is considered to be an affirmed fact by the age of 35, considerably later than the Mennonite assumption of singleness as a social reality at 23." In Doreen Helen Klassen, "'I wanted a life of my own': Creating a Singlewoman Mennonite Identity in Mexico," *The Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 26, (2008): 66.
- 5 Mary Barga, "Singleness," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*, 1989, <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/S5678ME.html>

- 6 Klassen, 53.
 7 Bagen, found in Klassen, 53.
 8 Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 61.
 9 Ibid., 96.
 10 Loewen, *Family, Church*, 40.
 11 Loewen, *Family, Church*, 97.
 12 Klassen, 51.
 13 Ibid., 52.
 14 Helen Janzen, *Memories*. (Winnipeg: Helen Janzen, 1985), 6, 10.
 15 Correspondence and other writings, 1952, 1980-1987. *Mennonite Heritage Center Archives*, 4867:6
 16 Janzen, 4.
 17 Doug Koop, "Mennonite and More," *Mennonite Mirror* (1982), 4.
 18 Janzen, 43.
 19 Janzen, 48.
 20 Ibid., 50.
 21 Jo Wilson, "Presentation Address to Miss Helen Janzen Occasion of her Retirement, January 1972." In, "Personal Biographical Material, 1972-1974." *Mennonite Heritage Center Archives*, 4867:1
 22 Forsyth & Johnson, 96.
 23 Janzen, 53.
 24 Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada*, 103.
 25 Alf Redekopp, "Janzen, Helen (1908-1992)," *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*.
 26 Janzen, 62.
 27 Ibid
 28 Koop, 4.
 29 Janzen, 103.
 30 Epp, 58. Berlin was renamed Kitchener in World War I.
 31 Forsyth & Johnson, 96.
 32 E. Kay Trimberger, *The New Single Woman* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2005), xviii, in Klassen, 64.

Midwifery and Medicine in Bolivia

By Martha Hiebert

Martha Hiebert and her husband Isbrand have been MCC workers in Bolivia and in 2010 they travelled there again to collect stories of Mennonite women. Martha visited with women in their homes in the colonies and has written their stories. The following three stories are about women who served their communities with medical and birthing knowledge.

Frau Anna Banman (Franz) Colonia Valle Esperanza, March 17, 2010

Anna grew up as the daughter of a self-trained health care worker and midwife in Mexico. In the Manitoba Colony in



Anna Banman, Colonia Esperanza, Bolivia served as a midwife and healer since she was fifteen years old when she began to help her mother. Photo Credit: Martha Hiebert.

Mexico her mother had a lot of clients of Mennonite and of Spanish Mexican origin. More and more Spanish speaking patients came to see her and often she called on Anna, whose Spanish was better than hers, to translate for her.

Occasionally her mother called upon her to help with little things in the medical practice as well. By the time she was 15 years old she helped her mother full time. She had not chosen this line of work, but she had come to it gradually. She had not objected, since she had a natural gift for it.

When Anna was only twenty five years old her mother passed away. This meant that the colony was without a midwife and without basic health care. Because of her prior involvement, people looked to her for help. She objected to taking on this role. Two years earlier she had married Franz Banman and was already a mother. How could she be a wife, mother and health care provider all at the same time! She had experienced first-hand how hard this had been for her mother, how tired and overworked she often was!

Sure, Anna assisted when patients came, one after another, for the entire day, but she never needed to get up at night. How often a buggy came onto the yard at night! Her mother was the one to get up and receive the patients. She often encouraged expectant mothers throughout their labor and often into the wee hours of the night. Often it took a long time until the cries of the newborn baby relieved the stress of the preceding hours.

Her mother shouldered all of the responsibilities; Anna only helped out when called upon. She usually slept through the night while her mother worked alone with her patients. Now she was to take full responsibility for the entire practice!

Anna was not eager to become a full time health-care provider, even though she knew she would be capable of the job. She felt as though she was basically inheriting this profession, not choosing it.

She tried to pass the job on to someone else and sell all the equipment and supplies. She was not successful. The community and colony leadership insisted that she take over this role. She finally consented and provided health services to the best of her ability. At the same time she cared and raised her own family as it grew.

Then in 1967, at the age of 32, by now the mother of six children, she and her husband decided to move to Bolivia.

She had a lot of packing to do and things to prepare. Secretly she thought that perhaps in a new country, in a new colony, she would be relieved of her responsibilities as a health care worker and would be able to dedicate her time completely to her family. It wasn't that she didn't enjoy helping others. There were definitely many rewarding experiences: when a sick child recovered, when a wound healed quickly and neatly, or when she delivered a newborn child and experienced the joy it brought. Needless to say it was also a hard job which demanded much time and energy. How she would love to have more time for her own family and for all the things that other women were able to do!

But it was not to be. The young Banman family settled in the Riva Palacios Colony. Anna's reputation as a health care provider had preceded her. People came to see her soon after they arrived and she could not turn them away when they needed help. In addition, the income from her practice helped them as they built up their farm. She continued to juggle her responsibilities as a mother with those of her practice. Here three daughters were born to the family, making a total of nine children.

After several years Franz and Anna began to talk about moving again. They looked for a settlement where there was more land for a growing family. Each son or son-in-law would eventually need land to begin a farm of his own. Anna decided to train two interested women in Riva Palacios to take over as health care providers. They worked with her for a time and learned their profession on the job. Anna was concerned that patients received proper care, with high standards of cleanliness. When the time came to leave the colony, she was sure that these women were able to provide care for their community.

In 1985 the Banman family moved to Valle Esperanza Colony. Here she dedicated herself completely to providing health care for that region. Many patients came for help; for advice, for deliveries of children, for treatments of illnesses and injuries. Eventually Anna and Franz were able to build a pleasant clinic with a consultation office, a patient room and a pharmacy. Her practice was well established and her services were widely sought.

Anna could not help everyone who came to her. She referred her patients to professional doctors in Santa Cruz. Often she accompanied them to the city for their appointments, explaining their symptoms and translating for patients who spoke no Spanish. The doctors were friendly and respectful of her and the work she was doing. She learned a lot from the doctors and nurses that she met on such visits. At one time a doctor even came to visit and help in her clinic. Another doctor invited her to stay in Santa Cruz for a week so that she could observe him at work to learn from him. It was an offer she would have loved to accept, but it was not an option because she had a family to tend to and clients to serve at home.

In 1990 Anna stopped working as a midwife. She found it increasingly physically difficult. By then she had delivered a total of 1300 babies. She encouraged her husband's niece Mrs. Margarethe Banman Sawatzky to join her so that she could train her as a mid-wife. With time she consented, and after four years of working together she was ready to provide that service in her own home. If she ran out of space for her patients, she transferred them to Anna's clinic for recovery after the delivery and Anna took over the care. This partnership was most appreciated and enjoyable.

When the hospital in nearby Cuatro Cañadas opened, Anna thought that her practice would decline. That was not the case. There were still many people in her colony as well in the nearby colonies who preferred to go to a Low-German speaking, trusted familiar person for medical help and for deliveries of their babies.

Until 2011 Anna had a busy practice. The pharmacy was a thriving business. Every other week she and her assistant went to Santa Cruz to buy supplies for the pharmacy. If she needed to accompany patients to see a doctor, she arranged to do that on the same day.

When Anna reviewed her very full life as a health care provider, she remembered how hard it had been to manage her practice and her family at the same time. The children helped out a lot – the girls taking over the household responsibilities as they grew old enough. She remembered training household help several times so that the work in the home got done. But the hardest of all memories was one of her husband. She remembered the day of the beating well.

The male youth of the settlement got together Sunday nights. For lack of something better to do they often got into fights with each other to prove their strength. Sometimes they did not know the limits and would beat each other up badly. Anna found it difficult and most unpleasant to have to treat the wounds of victims of such fights. On one occasion a battered youth was brought to the clinic and as she treated him, she asked who he was. She was shocked to hear that she knew him well, but had not recognized him!

One evening the youth were out in the yard of the Franz Banman home. From where the parents were sitting they could hear that a fight was underway; each group cheering their buddies on. Suddenly the cries were no longer those of two parties fighting, but of one party being beaten by the others, begging for them to stop; others still cheering them on.

Mr. Banman went out to the group and commanded them to stop it. They refused. Soon he realized that the ones on the ground being beaten were his own sons. He flew into action, entering the fight to break it up. The young men then turned on him, leaving his sons, to beat him.

By this time Anna and her teenage daughters came see what was going on. When she realized that her husband was being beaten relentlessly, and at age 42 was no match for an out-of-control group of youth, she yelled to her daughters to help her. She stepped into the fight screaming, and pulled her husband out of the mayhem. The young men were shocked to have a woman break up their fight and slowly slunk away. She was left to help her injured sons and husband into the clinic for treatment.

After that Mr. Banman was not the same. The damage to his body was temporary, but the damage to his spirit permanent. Until then he farmed diligently, helped in the clinic and recorded the purchases, sales and income. He stocked the shelves and chatted with clients if time allowed. Now he had no interest in farming, and he was no longer trustworthy in the pharmacy. Anna said that after that incident he had "trouble with his nerves" (suffered depression). She had convinced him to go for treatment with a specialist in the city, which he started twice, but never continued as needed.

The day after the beating Mr. Banman went to the Elder and church leaders to explain the situation and discuss what course of action they would take against the young men who

had assaulted him. The Elder agreed that the boys should be punished with lashes, as was local practice. The parents, however, refused to agree to this. To his dismay and life-long disappointment, no action was ever taken against them. Anna added, "God's way is not our way, but they will have to be accountable to God one day."

Life became harder and harder. Anna continued her work in the clinic without his help. Now she had to watch him as well. She noticed that he began to use some of the medication from the shelves to alleviate his emotional pain. He began drinking secretly. She never considered him an alcoholic, but she knew that he was drinking. What had happened to the ambitious husband she had once had!

On September 12, 2001 Mr. Banman and Anna were on their way to Santa Cruz by group taxi. The taxi stopped at the edge of the highway near Pailon to pick up more passengers. Mr. Banman got out for a smoke. Without looking down the road, he stepped back to light the cigarette, right into the path of an oncoming truck.

Mr. Banman, unconscious, was rushed to the hospital in Santa Cruz with his wife tending to him on the way. He never regained consciousness and passed away at the age of 63. "Those years after the assault were hard and seeing him die like that was hard, too!" Anna concluded.

At the age of 77, in 2011, Anna found herself getting increasingly tired after each day of work and decided to sell the pharmacy and retire. Throughout her life Anna not only provided medical help for many people, but she repeatedly trained others to do the same. The community service that she claimed not to have chosen, but in essence, inherited, became her life-long passion.

Greta Klassen (Abram) La Sierra Colony, February 18, 2010

"What a day!" thought Greta as she closed the clinic door and walked across the wide driveway to the house for supper. She was thankful that the girls, ages 12 and 14 were able to take care of the meals on their own by now. She never concerned herself with cooking and housework when she was seeing patients.

Greta, a self-trained health care provider and midwife, was tired after a long day. Many clients had come; some with colds, children with diarrhea, others to have an injection as prescribed and a couple of pregnant women for their check up or reassurance. She knew it would be refreshing to sit down for supper and spend a quiet evening, sitting outside in the front yard under the stars with her family.

Really only part of the family was still at home. This year, 2009, had brought many changes in their lives. Abram and Greta had sold most of their belongings and their home in Pinondi Colony. Their oldest, married son still lived in that nearby colony. As a family, they had taken the three young adult children to a more conservative place, to Barton Creek in Belize. Now she and Abram were back in Bolivia with the youngest three children, renting a home in La Sierra Colony, as they tried to decide what to do next.

Greta and Abram were looking for a better environment for their young adult and teenage children than the one here in the colonies. There was so much disrespect for others when the youth got together in the evenings. The use of alcohol and now even drugs was giving rise to more fighting and promiscuity. Many adults were afraid to pass by a group of youth on the street on Sunday evenings.



The 'parking' area for the clinic on the yard of Greta Klassen where the buggies arrive with their expectant mothers and others seeking her medical expertise. Photo Credit: Martha Hiebert.

One family had been out on their buggy recently, when they were stopped, pulled from the buggy, and left standing there, as it raced off filled with young people. When they found it next day, it was nearly ruined, and the horses fearful and disheveled.

Greta and Abram hoped and prayed that the young adult children they were missing so much would find a safe, new home in Belize. Thoughts of them also reminded her of the restlessness they were feeling within themselves as a couple. Should they pack up and move out there permanently as well? Should they stay here in La Sierra or move back to Pinondi, where they still owned some land? She was glad for this rental place, but longed to live in her own home - to live in better conditions again.

Greta entered the large, one room, adobe brick house that was her temporary home. She dismissed her thoughts about their future, as she joined her family at the supper table. Anna, her youngest, brought the freshly cut bread to the table, and they all bowed their heads in silent prayer. It was not custom to talk much during mealtime, but she asked about the progress on the mattresses that Abram and their son were making for sale. They had begun this new trade during the last year. Greta relaxed as she enjoyed her supper surrounded by her loved ones.

Greta had just put away the leftovers when she heard a horse and buggy slow down and turn onto their yard. Soon she heard the visitors greet Abram and ask for her. Tying her kerchief securely under her chin, she glanced out the window, to recognize a familiar, expectant mother. "A new child will be born before the morning," she thought to herself. Hopefully she would still get some sleep tonight.

Greta led the couple to the small, wooden building and prepared them for the work that lay ahead. She was so thankful that the girls knew to keep the fire going and to have hot water on hand at all times. She told her patient's husband that she would call on him to fetch kettles of hot water from the kitchen, as needed. Each time he went, he was also to refill the boiler on the stove and add wood to the fire. Good thing that the water tank on the wagon had been filled at the village well during the day!

The door of the clinic was at the end of the twelve by sixteen foot room. The two windows on each side were actually just holes cut into the plywood walls. One of the windows had screen tacked over it. The others were closed with the shutters, made from the wood that had been cut out to create the window. There was no ceiling, only the tin roof. A tiny breeze found its way up the cracks of the smooth, clean floor boards, as well as through the cracks between the plywood sheets of the walls.

The small room was furnished with a desk, small table, several chairs and two beds, neatly covered with colorful blankets. A sheet was strung beside the bed opposite the door to serve as a curtain for a little privacy. There was just a little space to stand at the end of each of the beds. Abram had made shelves between the studs of the walls in a few places so she had more storage space. More supplies were stored underneath the beds.

Greta showed the young woman to the bed at the end of the room and went out to fasten the shutter over the screened window. It was a cool June evening and would become colder during this wintery night. They would need plenty of blankets to keep warm during the night. Greta lit the kerosene lantern that hung from the ceiling.

Labor progressed well and before midnight the welcome cries of a new-born filled the little room. The exhausted mother



*The inside of Greta Klassens clinic on the La Sierra Colony in Bolivia.
Photo Credit: Martha Hiebert.*

was soon asleep. Greta cleaned up, showed the tired father the other bed and picked up the new baby to take him with her to the house. She would care for him tonight, allowing the new mother to get some much needed sleep.

Just as she was ready to leave, the silence of the night was interrupted by the sounds of an approaching buggy. "I guess there will be no sleep for me yet!" she thought. As she went out to check, she knew immediately that there would be another little one born within hours.

She laid the newborn she was holding, onto the bed and told the new father to pull the curtain at his wife's bed and go to the house. As she ushered the newly arrived couple into the clinic, she changed her mind. She turned to the new arrivals: "As soon as we are out of here, you can get settled in this bed."

With that she took the new mother, her husband and the newborn to the house. Abram woke up and she asked him to give this couple their bed. He could sleep in his son's bed, which was on the kitchen side of the curtain that divided the one room house. Their son went out to get some of the mattress materials and made up a bed on the kitchen floor.

Greta returned to the clinic, where the expectant mother waited for her. Her husband went out to unhitch the horses. She reassured her patient that the baby would be born soon. In due time, the welcome cries of a newborn filled the little clinic for a second time that night. A healthy baby was born. As she finished cleaning up, she showed the new father to the other bed.

Greta wondered where she would find a place to sleep, her tiredness returning again. Yes, she would move one of the girls out of the double bed that they shared, and have her sleep on the floor. That would do for tonight.

With that, the sounds of an approaching horse and buggy disturbed the silence of the night again. Once more, when she went to check, she knew that a third baby would be born within hours. Greta returned to the clinic and told the new father to go to the kitchen for the rest of the night. She drew the curtain at the bed of the new mother, who objected; "The other couple went to sleep in the house when we came. Please may I go over to there, too? I don't want to be here for a delivery!"

Thinking fast, Greta came up with a plan. She led the new arrivals into the clinic; "You take this bed and I'll be back right

away.” She took the young family to the house, laid some quilts on the floor, woke up her daughters, and moved them to the floor, giving their bed to the new parents.

Crossing the yard back to the clinic she saw that it was almost dawn. Shivering in the cold night air as she crossed the yard, she no longer felt the tiredness that had overcome her earlier. The labor and delivery went well and by morning the welcome cries of a third newborn filled the clinic. She left the little family to sleep as she picked up the pile of laundry she had created at night - her heart full of gratitude for three good deliveries and three healthy babies!

Greta knew she would not go to sleep now. There was no bed for her anywhere and no blankets left anyway. She would also not be able to relax enough to sleep; her mind would just replay all the events of the night. She would go in, sit at the stove in the warm kitchen and have a cup of coffee.

Opening the door she was surprised to see her husband, son and the two couples sitting at the breakfast table, visiting. “What! I thought you were all sleeping! You ladies should be in bed!” she scolded. She went to check on the two newborns, who were sleeping contently.

Greta joined the others at the table, but before she had her second cup of coffee, clients began to arrive. Abram went out to tell them that Greta would be out to see them in a while. Her workday was beginning again.

Helena Bergen (Abram) Durango Colony, Interviewed Jan. 31 2011

Helena was born to Isaak Hildebrandts in the country of Belize. At the age of four her family moved to Mexico, but when she was 12, they moved to the Nuevo Durango Colony in Paraguay. Her parents had been the self-trained health care providers in every place where they had lived. As soon as she was old enough, Helena was called upon to help as needed in their practice. Usually her duties were limited to cleaning or carrying out meals. On occasion she had to assist when one of her parents was not available to help the other. Her father noticed the natural gift of health care in Helena and told her so on many occasions. Helena did not mind helping when called upon, but she did not want to follow in their footsteps.

While the family lived in Paraguay Helena married Abram Bergen. As was the custom in the conservative Mennonite colonies, the young couple lived with Helena’s family for the first year or two while they were getting established. On one occasion, when Helena was newly married and only nineteen

years old, her parents had gone to an engagement celebration in a nearby village. They instructed Helena and Abram that if any clients should come to see them and the matter could not wait until the next day, Helena should make them comfortable while Abram would hitch up the buggy and go to get them. They hoped that no one would come and did not really expect anyone either.

Their expectations were wrong! A buggy came to their house, bringing a mother in labor. Helena had enough experience to be able to sense that this baby would not wait long to be born. She urged Abram to notify her parents quickly. She took the couple to the little clinic but it was locked. It was always locked when it was not in use. She went for the key, but it was not in its place. Her parents must have taken it with them. They would simply need to break into the clinic. One of the windows was not closed, so they broke the screen and the man crawled in and unlocked the door.

Helena’s mind was working fast. She made the patient comfortable on the bed and prepared the things that she thought her parents used for a delivery. She listened impatiently for the sounds of her parent’s buggy as she calmly encouraged the woman during labor. Her husband, completely bewildered, kept to himself in the most distant corner.

Helena did not really know what to do. Only rarely had she assisted at deliveries but never very actively – only getting what she was asked to get. The delivery went well though. The patient coached Helena along the way. This was her twelfth child and she was very aware of the progress she was making. Finally a healthy baby was born. Helena didn’t know how to deal with the umbilical cord, but here again the mother advised her.

By the time she heard the buggy approaching, she was almost finished with the clean up. Mother and child were asleep. Her parents rushed in to find everyone doing well – only Helena needed reassurance and comfort after the stress she had experienced. Her father again affirmed her natural gift to care for others.

When a group from Durango Colony in Paraguay decided to start a new settlement in Bolivia, Helena and Abram, with their four children, all under the age of four, joined them. Her parents also moved and set up their practice in Bolivia. Abram and Helena settled in and established a small farm. With time, Abram was asked to teach in the local school, so he became a teacher. He quite enjoyed the work with the children.

Helena had never planned to take over the practice of her parents. Her parents were aging and she was asked to take over



*Helena Bergen with a healthy newborn baby.
Photo Credit: Martha Hiebert.*



The two room clinic built by Abram and Helena Bergen for her medical and his dentistry practice on the Durango Colony in Bolivia. Photo Credit: Martha Hiebert.

their role, while they could still provide some training. By now she had a growing family and did not want to work full time with irregular hours while she raised her family.

Then on December 23, 2008 her mother passed away and her father only a month later in January 2009. She was approached repeatedly to begin a practice of her own. Still Helena hesitated to accept the challenge. How could she! She was a mother of 11 children - the youngest, only a year and half old! She had her hands full with family and household. How could she take over such an intense job which meant being on call all day, every day and night! Yet, people did not leave her alone. They did not want to travel to Charagua for medical help. They wanted to be treated by someone who spoke their Low German dialect.

In emergencies, people began to come to her anyway and she helped them with the knowledge and supplies that she had. Gradually she began to provide medical help, not because she had decided to, but because people came to her. She couldn't send them away, if she had the ability to treat them. Finally she conceded and set up a practice.

In July 2010, with the help of her husband, she began to work full time as a self-trained health provider. She renovated a small two room building across the driveway from their house and established her small clinic there. Soon she needed more room and often she had to bring patients into the family house.

She was determined from the start that her practice should not interfere in the lives of their children. Bringing patients into the house was not acceptable to her. She needed more room. After several months she and Abram had a chance to borrow some money to build a clinic with several rooms.

Shortly before Christmas 2010 the new clinic on the far side of the yard was partially completed and they were able to set up the practice there, even though the floor tiles could only be laid later in January. Now there are two comfortable rooms for patients, a consultation room with an adjoining laundry room and a large examination room, complete with a dentist's chair. If needed, Abram does dentistry work for clients as well. Along the one side there is a wide veranda-like hallway which serves as a waiting area and provides a wonderful space to hang the laundry to dry in rainy weather or during sand storms.

Helena enjoys serving her community with her natural gift, even though she is still concerned that her youngest children are being cared for primarily by their older sisters. She is proud to have delivered forty-three babies since she began working in August, twelve of them in the new clinic. She appreciates working along side her husband, who still teaches in the school across the village street and runs a small farm. The people of Durango now have a comfortable pleasant place where they can find basic medical help.

The Changing Nature of Hutterite Family Life

Susanne R. Smith, Ph.D., Vancouver, Washington

I was first introduced to the Hutterites in 1998 when a dear friend and fellow colleague took me to spend the weekend on a Dariusleut colony. Having arrived after dinner time, we went to the house of the friends I was to stay with. My male colleague was told to take a seat while I went with one of the women to get something for us to eat. This was my first introduction to the gender roles which exist on Hutterite colonies!

I was left there that evening while my colleague went to stay on another colony about thirty miles away. While I was nervous about my time on the colony, I was welcomed warmly and made to feel like not just a part of the family, but a part

of the community, in the few hours I had spent there that first evening. This helped ease my worries and made me look forward to my first day on a Dariusleut Hutterite Colony.

Since it was strawberry season, the entire next day was spent processing strawberries to be used by the colony over the course of the year until next year's harvest. While the work was hot, laborious, and seemingly never ending, it was also shared equally by all women on the colony. It was one of the most exciting and stimulating days I have ever had as the sense of community, shared sense of purpose and love of God was overwhelming at times. All women on the colony were working together towards a common goal and it was a beautiful experience for someone from the Outside. A reminder of what life used to be like when we believed in the importance of a sense of community.

And what do women do when they are together? They talk! My colleagues and I have joked that I learned more about Hutterite women and children during my first day on a colony than they had learned in their previous ten years of research combined. As someone who studies parenting, parent-child relationships, and gender roles, I felt as though I had finally found a niche for my research - a place where I could contribute to the larger body of knowledge and understand how parenting works in a more controlled environment. Thus, I have been visiting Hutterite colonies across North America since that time, and have made both social and professional visits several times a year since that first visit. I will admit I have become so close to members of one colony I am no longer able to do research there because of the inability to be objective. I consider this a true gift.



A group of Hutterite women husking sweet corn. Hutterite life is communal on many levels. While work is divided based on traditional gender roles, it is done together. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

While I have only been fortunate enough to study the Hutterites for the last ten years, I am also able to draw on the experiences of a dear friend and colleague, Dr. Bron Ingoldsby, who studied them for almost twenty years prior to his death. I have all of his field notes, and the blessing of hours of conversations with him about the Hutterites and our various visits to colonies while he was still alive. Thus, this paper will draw primarily from my own work, but will include a few examples from the work of Bron Ingoldsby both alone and together with me as well. While the format of this paper is very nontraditional, all data which is included was obtained following strict qualitative guidelines for both quality and consistency.

One thing Bron and I talked about, and were beginning to write about a great deal prior to his death, is the rate of change among Hutterites over the last twenty years. Society in general is changing with regard to things such as the role of romance in relationships, parenting techniques, and gender roles, and some of these changes are being reflected in the Hutterite communities I visit as well, although at a slower pace. Thus, this paper will focus on the role of change within the Hutterite family on the topics of romantic love and child rearing. While our experiences encompass all three Leuts, my time has been spent primarily among the Dariusleut so they are perhaps overrepresented in this article.

Hutterite Family Life

From the beginning, the community was seen as more important than the family itself. Believers were to separate from non believing spouses, and during migrations, Hutterites moved as congregations, rather than as individual families (Huntington, 1997). Communal living is considered to be essential for salvation. Wives are to submit to their husbands, and for both, loyalty to the community supercedes family ties (Hostetler, 1997).

And yet, while the community is the foundation of the Hutterite way of life, the family is also one of its primary institutions. In many ways families reflect those on the Outside when it comes to being loving, nurturing, and supportive. Colony life is structured to nourish these family ties and relationships, and recognizes the value of strong and stable families and individuals. Thus, while the community has historically been seen as the cornerstone, it has not been to the detriment of family stability and development.

Hutterites are descended from eighteen families, and there are only thirteen traditional surnames in use today. Nuclear families live in connected or near-by apartments, and everyone except the minister and his family, usually eat their meals in a central dining hall. Everyone has assigned work which is always along traditional sex role lines. There is a sex and age ranking that operates in all settings, be it church, home, work or meals (Hofer, 1998; Hostetler & Huntington, 1996). Daily life on a colony has the feel of the stereotype of 1950s America - hardworking but idyllic. Protected from the perversions of Hollywood, the focus is on family, friendship and pleasant interaction (Hofer, 1991, 1986).

Mate selection is based on free choice as long as it is with another Hutterite. In early Hutterite history they followed the procedure where the minister selected a few women for each man to choose from, but this was abandoned in the nineteenth century when one young girl refused to marry the older man who had been selected for her (Peter, 1971). The emphasis has

always been on compatibility and working together for the common good. Hutterites were taught that they were to come together not as a function of their own choice and emotional connection, but in accordance with the will of God. Early on, wives were even referred to as 'marital sisters' (Friedmann, 1961).

In times past, courtship was slow and low key. Meeting members of the opposite sex from other colonies seemed to be restricted to formal opportunities for visits, such as weddings and funerals. Today, both sexes, but especially boys, will find more frequent opportunities to seek out romance. Parents tend to give their children wide latitude in making these contacts (Ingoldsby, 2001). For example, adults give implicit approval to unchaperoned gatherings, and to visiting other colonies for social purposes.

However, in recent years it has been noted that courtship and marriage is more physical and romantic than previous investigators had indicated. Although they are strongly opposed to non-marital intimacy, there is evidence that premarital pregnancies, although extremely rare, do occur. Romantic love, as indicated by public displays of affection such as hugging and kissing, is evident in courtship and marriages, which has seemingly resulted in greater equality between partners and spouses.

Wilson (2000) provided another example of the movement towards romantic notions of love and courtship. One young Hutterite girl commented when asked about her desires, "My dream would be to marry the most wonderful man in the world and have ten kids." When she was asked about one particular young man, she replied: "Is he a Harlequin? What I mean is, a hunk, a good-looking guy. We all read Harlequin books. They're not allowed, but we can't resist. They're love stories" (Wilson, 2000, p. 57).

Still, the desire to marry and have children is prominent. In 1950 the median age for marriage was 22.0 for women and 23.5 for men (Hostetler, 1997). Today it is somewhat later, being 25 for women and 26 for men (Smith, 1999). Virtually everyone marries, but one notes in recent years an increase in "unclaimed jewels," or women who remain single due to a sex ratio imbalance, compounded by the fact that more men than women leave colony life for the outside world. I have conducted research on these Dariusleut and Schmeideleut "unclaimed jewels" and, unlike women on the outside, they see their single status as the will of God and seem able to find a place for themselves within their colonies.

One driving force of marriage is fertility, and in 1954 Eaton and Meyer published their landmark study on Hutterite fertility. They found that the Hutterites averaged over ten children per family, and at 4.12% had what appeared to be the fastest natural growth rate of any identifiable social group in the world. Using birth control is strongly condemned, as is premarital sex, so the number would be even higher if they married at a younger age.

Over the next three decades it was noted by a number of researchers that the overall fertility rate for Hutterites was dropping. In 1980, Peter demonstrated that it had fallen to only 2.9%. He speculated that it had to do with delaying the age of marriage for economic reasons. For example, modern farming methods required fewer workers and creating new colonies was expensive. Reducing family size allowed them to go longer between colony divisions.

Overall, a trend has been noted in which Hutterite families are beginning to look more like those in the greater society. Dating and mate selection has become more romantic, age of



Hutterite marriage is for life. The woman joins her husband's colony where she becomes part of the caring community that will help her raise her children. At one time Hutterites were considered to have the highest natural growth rate in an identifiable human group, but birth rates have declined since the study was done in the 1950s. Photo Credit: www.hutteriteheritage.com

marriage is increasing, and family size is decreasing. My research suggests that the affection between husbands and wives has resulted in greater decision making equality, but this is a topic for future research-exploration. Families spend more time together and are becoming the center point of daily life, rather than the community (Ingoldsby, 2003), which is another change we will discuss below. As one Hutterite recently noted "the world is leaking in" (Wilson, 2000, p. 140).

Child Rearing

Just as views about love and marriage are historically based, so too are the Hutterite ideals of how to care for children. The basic rules for child care were described by early Hutterite leader Peter Riedemann in 1545. Children under the age of three are to be cared for by their parents or other relatives. After that, they move to the colony kindergarten, where they spend most of the day. They learn the prayers and hymns and how to act in appropriate ways for their age and status. At six they join the German school, where they study their religious history and traditions and learn to read and write in their old German script. At fifteen, they leave school (this is still true for the Lehrerleut, but the other groups are starting to allow interested youth to finish high school), join the adult dining hall, and begin regular work on the colony. They are cared for in all ways by the colony, which never turns to the government for assistance (Huntington, 1997).

Riedemann explained that children should be taught to obey, not to be headstrong, and to seek the eternal over the temporal. It was made clear that their teachers are responsible for the children's souls, and since children are weak and self-centered, they require constant supervision and training to resist temptations. Corporal punishment was acceptable, but should not be the only method, and striking a child on a bare limb was forbidden. The goal of Hutterite education and rearing is to create a social type - people whose innate corruptibility has

been molded by consistent discipline. They learn to obey God by obeying their parents, and subjugating their own personal selfish desires (Hostetler, n.d.).

Children are taught to be respectful and obedient to adults. The goal of child rearing is that each child will voluntarily submit to the church community. In the sixteenth century, children "were turned over to the community and they lived, ate, and slept completely outside the family domain" (Flint, 1975 p. 53). This socialization process is so thorough (even though children now live with their parents) that the culture has survived mostly intact for over 450 years (Hostetler & Huntington, 1996, 1968).

While this socialization process has historically taken place in kindergartens, some colonies do not have enough preschool children to have them now, which is another reason we are seeing a move from being more community-centric to more family-centric. Children are still socialized much as they were before, but now at home rather than in the community school house. They are able to maintain their Hutterite identity because parents are never left to raise children alone or in isolation. Women are surrounded by other women who are helping to parent their children, and children are advantaged enough to have many people in the colony who care about them and help them develop. This is one of the things I love most about being among the Hutterites- the shared sense of parenting.

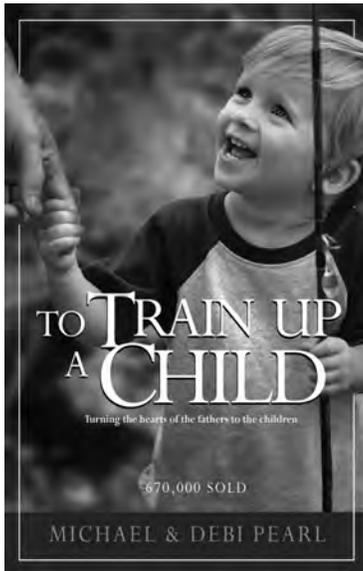
By twentieth century standards, Hutterite parents have relatively little control over their children, but the pattern they developed in the sixteenth century was more family-centric than that of the larger society that they came from (Hostetler 1997). The Hutterites separated themselves from the world, and favored strict adult control because they were convinced that children cannot resist worldly temptations on their own, and that many parents are too soft in their discipline to keep them away from evil (Flint, 1975; Hostetler, n.d.).

To Train Up A Child

There is one source of formal child rearing counsel which seems to be used widely by the Hutterites. It is the book *To Train Up A Child*, by Pearl and Pearl (1994). The authors claim an Amish background, but run their own evangelical ministry. In the Introduction, Pearl and Pearl indicate that the emphasis of their book is to teach parents to train their children to obey, and that it is relatively simple to have a cheerful home with happy, obedient children. They claim that the truths they are going to share do not come from the professional world of research, but are the techniques used by God and the Amish.

It immediately becomes clear, however, that the recommendations of the book are based on behavior modification. The behaviorists are never given their due credit, but the basic guidelines are the same as one would read in any other child rearing manual that focuses on reward, punishment and conditioning. The authors do believe that children have a natural inclination toward evil, but they also repeatedly make the point that disobedience is not the fault of the child, but is rather a function of inconsistent or poor parenting.

Much of the material is also clearly dependent upon the teachings of Dreikurs and his followers. It is definitely not democratic or authoritative parenting, for that is based on the notion that parents should instill social values in children, and should respect the child's ability to make decisions. Authoritative parents are firm and set boundaries and rules to



A widely used source for child rearing read by Hutterites. The authors claim Amish background. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

relationships with your child and other topics, it is overshadowed by its focus on corporal punishment. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs, 13:24) and similar biblical scripture are used to promote spanking as the keystone of effective parenting. The Pearls recommend striking with a switch on the bare legs of a child every time they disobey, question, or even hesitate to instantly obey. The purpose is to inflict pain and demand submission, but should be administered calmly and with instruction, so that they will fear and obey God. It is even recommended that they set up training opportunities which will result in a switching. They claim that this approach will always result in happy, healthy and safe children.

The text’s behavioral training focuses on negative conditioning (punishment for bad behavior rather than praise for good behavior) and has very little to say about love and affection. Outward obedience is the goal, and inner attitudes are ignored or assumed to follow. Their recommendations for numerous daily beatings of young children would easily qualify as abusive in the greater modern society.

How well does this all fit in with current Hutterite beliefs and practices? Philosophically, it is very close. Without articulating it, Hutterites do follow the Calvinist belief that children are if not born evil, then prone to it. Their focus on behavioral conditioning without anger fits Locke’s ideas of a moldable child. Working toward outward obedience without much concern for positive support and inward feelings is also manifest in Hutterite society.

However, even though they use the practice of strapping, it is not nearly as common or frequent as the Pearls recommend, nor is it as common as it was in years past among the Hutterites. In fact, I have never seen a child strapped, or even spanked, on any colony of any Leut. The German teacher will give a strap or two on the hand when persuasion fails, but early Hutterite teachings specifically forbade switching on bare skin.

Further support of this increased leniency was given by a Dariusleut grandfather as he explained that his father had given

him a specially made leather strap with the phrase “empire builder” carved on it. He went on to say, “And I knew just what that was for. I rarely used it, maybe just once or twice on little Johnny, but I made sure when I did that it hit home. My wife couldn’t do it, so I would tell her to leave the room or go visiting while I did it.” He never strapped his daughters, and uses it mainly as a threat with his grandchildren. On one recent occasion, his nine year old grand-daughter got into his chair and wouldn’t leave when he asked her to. After speaking nicely a few times, he got out the strap and she immediately fled to a safer location. His smile revealed that he did not really intend to use it, but her quick reaction also indicated that she knew what it was for. Most of the discipline in this large family comes in the form of simple re-direction and some finger shaking, which is my experience with other families.

Another example of this pattern of change in the use of strapping in discipline occurred on a Montana colony. Bron was visiting a family when the discussion turned to the two preschool age sisters playing at their grandmother’s house. The grandmother and her mid 30s unmarried daughter both agreed that strict discipline was still necessary and that they used the strap on the girls when necessary. They felt it was important to follow the injunctions of the Old Testament to use the rod so as not to spoil the child, and declared that the children appreciated it. The mother of the girls, and daughter-in-law to his host, said little but admitted that she rarely if ever struck her children.

While there is a good amount of excellent, scientifically based counsel on building strong relationships

with your child and other topics, it is overshadowed by its focus on corporal punishment. “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes” (Proverbs, 13:24) and similar biblical scripture are used to promote spanking as the keystone of effective parenting. The Pearls recommend striking with a switch on the bare legs of a child every time they disobey, question, or even hesitate to instantly obey. The purpose is to inflict pain and demand submission, but should be administered calmly and with instruction, so that they will fear and obey God. It is even recommended that they set up training opportunities which will result in a switching. They claim that this approach will always result in happy, healthy and safe children.

The text’s behavioral training focuses on negative conditioning (punishment for bad behavior rather than praise for good behavior) and has very little to say about love and affection. Outward obedience is the goal, and inner attitudes are ignored or assumed to follow. Their recommendations for numerous daily beatings of young children would easily qualify as abusive in the greater modern society.

How well does this all fit in with current Hutterite beliefs and practices? Philosophically, it is very close. Without articulating it, Hutterites do follow the Calvinist belief that children are if not born evil, then prone to it. Their focus on behavioral conditioning without anger fits Locke’s ideas of a moldable child. Working toward outward obedience without much concern for positive support and inward feelings is also manifest in Hutterite society.

However, even though they use the practice of strapping, it is not nearly as common or frequent as the Pearls recommend, nor is it as common as it was in years past among the Hutterites. In fact, I have never seen a child strapped, or even spanked, on any colony of any Leut. The German teacher will give a strap or two on the hand when persuasion fails, but early Hutterite teachings specifically forbade switching on bare skin.

Further support of this increased leniency was given by a Dariusleut grandfather as he explained that his father had given

him a specially made leather strap with the phrase “empire builder” carved on it. He went on to say, “And I knew just what that was for. I rarely used it, maybe just once or twice on little Johnny, but I made sure when I did that it hit home. My wife couldn’t do it, so I would tell her to leave the room or go visiting while I did it.” He never strapped his daughters, and uses it mainly as a threat with his grandchildren. On one recent occasion, his nine year old grand-daughter got into his chair and wouldn’t leave when he asked her to. After speaking nicely a few times, he got out the strap and she immediately fled to a safer location. His smile revealed that he did not really intend to use it, but her quick reaction also indicated that she knew what it was for. Most of the discipline in this large family comes in the form of simple re-direction and some finger shaking, which is my experience with other families.

Another example of this pattern of change in the use of strapping in discipline occurred on a Montana colony. Bron was visiting a family when the discussion turned to the two preschool age sisters playing at their grandmother’s house. The grandmother and her mid 30s unmarried daughter both agreed that strict discipline was still necessary and that they used the strap on the girls when necessary. They felt it was important to follow the injunctions of the Old Testament to use the rod so as not to spoil the child, and declared that the children appreciated it. The mother of the girls, and daughter-in-law to his host, said little but admitted that she rarely if ever struck her children.

Corporal punishment is still more common than would be found elsewhere, but is less than it has been in the Hutterite past. Knowing no other way, a strap on the hand is still the standard penalty for serious offenses. Children will cry out when strapped, but then wink at each other, indicating that it does not hurt as much as they let the adults think that it does. Strapping has become more the province of the German teacher than the parents.

One Dariusleut man told us the following when asked about corporal punishment, which is in basic agreement with the counsel in Pearls’ book.

“As I understand there are German school teachers still around who are pretty rough with the children and that causes tension between the parents of the child and the teacher. I must say, like it or not, my father was a German school teacher and he used the switch. But now many use the strap. I know ours does here. Now if this makes better children, I can’t say. Discipline should be taught at home. There is a saying the Hutterites have: Oh you dear switch; You do make me so good; You make me so pious; That I may enter the kingdom of God.”

In addition, a Schmeideleut, who is the German teacher on his colony, had this to say in response to the Pearl book and their own discipline practices:

“Parents do use a strap, but just as a last resort and in a loving manner that would not even resemble child abuse. The frequency would vary, but I would say our community is very typical and would be characterized as very infrequent use of the strap in school and at home.”

Generally, mothers will point out problem behaviors and threaten to discipline children for them, but wait for father to come home to administer actual punishments. This of course



Hutterite children singing. Socialization of children is important if Hutterite life is to be sustained and increasingly takes place in the home whereas earlier Hutterite practice relied more heavily on the school and the German teacher. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

violates the guidelines of Pearls' book, but is not surprising based on the gender roles and social structure of Hutterite society. Thus, one can conclude from these examples that while previous generations perhaps grew up with intimate knowledge of the strap, today's generations use the strap infrequently, if at all, although they do believe in the use of spanking in general although still to a lesser degree than previous generations.

It is important to note that there is just as wide a variety of parenting styles among the Hutterites today as there is in the greater society. Within an overall context of most being loving, though not very affectionate parents, one sees evidence of both authoritarian strictness and what would be considered permissiveness on the outside. Our cultural ideal of authoritative democratic parenting is still fairly rare among the Hutterites, however, due to the strong Hutterite value of adult control over children.

As personalities and pressures differ, so does parenting. However, it is still much more community based than it would be in the outside world. Women and female children in charge of other children on the colony are free to discipline any child on the colony- not just their own. In fact, while I am not sure how common this is within or across colonies or Leuts, I have been on several colonies when a problem happened with one of the children in the school. Rather than the teacher working this problem out with the parent, all the women with children in the school gathered to come to a consensus on what should be done to discipline the child. Further, some Dariusleut women reported there is comfort in this sense of community- that you never feel as though you are parenting alone.

Despite the fact that the community remains so influential, child rearing is moving towards becoming determined more at the family, rather than the community level. Community control is often undermined, in a quiet way, by individual families, in order to give their children more freedom. The following example illustrates this trend. We were visiting a conservative colony, and attended church services with them Sunday morning. We noticed that there were no teen aged young men in attendance, and asked about it afterwards. It was admitted to us that they had taken some colony trucks the night before and gone off to visit girls in another colony. All of their parents had known what they were going to do, and



Hutterite children probably face stricter parenting than is common in the society around them, but the use of corporal punishment is declining. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer

simply let it happen rather than asking permission from the minister or the community.

Perhaps this is because parents tend to see their colony as a safely contained extended family where everyone shares responsibility. As a result, some of their practices might be seen as neglectful by outside standards, but are acceptable on a colony because of their physical and social environments. For example, older children are often put in charge of younger children and are then free to roam where they like on the colony with no adult supervision. As one Dariusleut school teacher told us, "They don't get as much supervision from their parents as you would think as they can go anywhere on the colony- they are like free range chickens!" This is not unlike, however, generations past when those on the outside could let their children freely play with no concern that they would be put in harms way. We often speak of those days with longing, and thus while some would see this as being neglectful or overly permissive, I think of it as being like so many other things with the Hutterites- a reflection on our past, and a reminder of times that were kinder.

As with the rest of us, it is difficult to decide where to be on the continuum from strictness to permissiveness. Maintaining traditional values argues for the former, but the stricter a colony is the more likely they are to lose their youth. It is estimated that over 800 Lerherleut adolescents have run away from colony life due to over strictness in denying them the pleasures of the modern world. The other Leuts have allowed more in the way of sports and technology, for instance, only to find that their children stay, but are no longer traditional Hutterites. As always, the price of change must be carefully weighed, and any decision either for or against change can come at a cost.

Conclusion

As one can see from this discussion, while Hutterites do adhere to some of the practices put forth by Pearl and Pearl (1994), they have also developed their own ways of developing happy and obedient children. It appears that they may unknowingly be part of the wider movement of conservative Christians who work to safeguard the traditional family in part through Bible-based parenting strategies. As courtship and marriage becomes more romantic in nature, research would indicate

this will also bring about a shift in gender roles and gender equality among the Hutterites. I would never go so far as to suggest it would mirror that on the outside, but I have seen many examples in my time on colonies of women influencing important colony decisions.

Perhaps more importantly, however, is the fact that women feel no need or desire to change the gender roles that exist currently. This is shown both in the small number of teenaged girls that leave colonies and in conversations I have had with women who value and appreciate the roles they play as they are ordained by God. Change, simply for the sake of change, has rarely been shown to be a good thing. However, change based on the availability of new evidence or ideas, based on the desires of a group of people, or based on necessity seems to work. The changes described in this paper in a movement towards more romantic love, a trend away from strapping and a trend towards using the viewpoint of the family in addition to the good of the community seem to be changes that are helping the Hutterites maintain their strong faith, community, and family ties.

When people ask me why I study the Hutterites, or why I like spending time on colonies, I respond that I thrive on the sense of community that is present, I love how women work together to parent and to survive in general, and I like the lack of exposure to the harmful media sources we have on the outside. There is something soothing about knowing what your daily routine is going to be like, and knowing that you will be surrounded by people who care about you and put their faith and the well being of their faith community above their own selfish

desires. While change is inevitable, Hutterites have found a way to control the types of changes that are taking place so that they work to their benefit, rather than to their detriment.

References

- Eaton, J., & Meyer, A., *Man's capacity to reproduce: The demography of a Unique population*. Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1954.
- Flint, D., *The Hutterites: A study in prejudice*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975.
- Friedmann, R., *Hutterite Studies*. Goshen IN: Mennonite Historical Society, 1961.
- Hofer, S., *Born Hutterite*. Winnipeg: Hofer Publishers, 1991.
- Hofer, S., *The Hutterites: Lives and images of a communal people*. Winnipeg: Hofer Publishers, 1998.
- Hofer, S., *The Hutterite treasury of recipes*. Saskatoon, SK: Hofer Publishing, 1986.
- Hostetler, J., *Hutterite Society*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1974, 1997).
- Hostetler, J., *Child rearing sources: The Hutterian Brethren*. Willow Grove, PA: John Hostetler, n.d..
- Hostetler, J. & Huntington, G., *The Hutterites of North America*. Philadelphia: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1996.
- Hostetler, J. & Huntington, G., "Communal socialization patterns in Hutterite society." *Ethnology*, 162, 331-355, 1968..
- Huntington, G., "Living in the ark: Four centuries of Hutterite faith and Community" in *America's communal utopias* (D. Pitzer, Ed.). Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997.
- Ingoldsby, B., "Hutterite families" In *The International Encyclopedia of Marriage and Family* (J. Ponzetti, Ed.). NY: Macmillan Reference USA, 2003.
- Ingoldsby, B., "The Hutterite family in transition" *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 32, 377-392, 2001.
- Pearl, M. & Pearl, D., *To train up a child*. Pleasantville, TN: Michael Pearl, 1994.
- Peter, K., "The Hutterite family" in *The Canadian family* (K. Ishwaran, ed.). Toronto: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971.
- Wilson, L., *Hutterites of Montana*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.

Child survival in the Mennonite East Reserve before the Age of Antibiotics

Glen R. Klassen, Winnipeg

The vast majority of children born nowadays will survive to become adults. Let's take the City of Steinbach to illustrate this welcome fact. According to the recent census there were 13,524 residents in the city in 2011¹. Manitoba's birth rate is 13 live births per 1000 population per year. So the people of Steinbach, if they are typical Manitobans, should be producing about 176 babies a year². How many of them will survive to adulthood?

Since the Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) (Fig 1) in Manitoba is about 6.3 deaths before the age of 1 per 1000 live births³, the residents of Steinbach can expect about 1.1 of the 176 babies born annually to die before the age of 1. About 80 percent of these deaths will occur within one week of birth, and are due to conditions such as congenital birth defects, which are still hard for the medical professions to treat. Virtually none of them are due to infectious disease.

If we look at children from 1 to 5 years old, the death rate for them is about 1 per 1000 per year. So about 0.18 of them will die each year in Steinbach. This actually means that there might be one death every five years in this age group in the whole city. For older minors, the death rate is virtually zero.

So of the 176 babies born each year, 174 or 175 of them will survive to become adults. And these rates are getting slightly

better each year as medicine develops new treatments and as nursing care, already excellent, becomes even better.

This state of affairs is vastly different from the reality during pioneer times in Manitoba, when the IMR hovered between 100 and 150 deaths per 1000 live births. This is like present-day Afghanistan, the country with the worst IMR in the world. At an IMR of 150, modern Steinbach could expect 26 infant deaths per year! One every other week! The pioneers also lost many of their pre-school and even school-age children to epidemics of diphtheria, scarlet fever, measles, whooping cough, and typhoid. This is unheard of in modern Steinbach. Things did not improve a lot until the 1930s, when better sanitation and good hospital care was achieved. These advances were greatly accelerated by the development of vaccines and antibiotics.

The antibiotic age began in 1936 with the introduction of the sulpha drugs, and took a great leap forward in 1941, when penicillin became widely available. My late brother Bernard was saved from pneumonia at that time by what must have been one of the first penicillin prescriptions in Steinbach.

Several vaccines predated the antibiotic age. There was a crude smallpox vaccine from as early as the 1770s and vaccination for this virus was routine among Mennonites in Russia long before they emigrated to Canada. Even so, many people

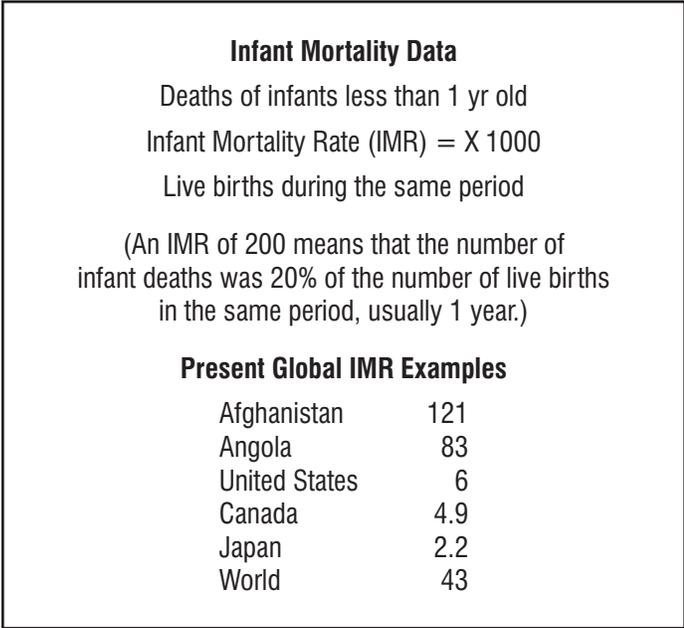


Figure 1

died of smallpox due to bad vaccine preparations, or to simply not getting the vaccine, including my great-great grandmother Helena Born Fast.⁴ Although smallpox was not a major cause of death among Mennonites in North America,⁵ vaccination still was fairly routine. There were several smallpox scares before the turn of the century, with the establishment of one or two quarantined pest-houses,⁶ but the disease did not spread. The hysteria that erupted was probably due to memories of Russian epidemics. Typhus, a life-threatening disease spread by lice, was also not common among the Mennonites in North America, although their relatives in Russia after the revolution suffered terribly.⁷

Help for the dreaded diphtheria (*Halskrankheit*) came in the 1890s when an anti-toxin serum became available. This serum was not a vaccine because it did not prevent diphtheria, but it did reduce the fatality rate from about 50% to about 10%. The cost of the serum was a deterrent for many villagers and may have played a part in the high fatality rates during the great Hanover diphtheria epidemic in 1900.⁸ An effective diphtheria toxoid vaccine finally came into widespread use in 1926. All of the other vaccines used to protect children nowadays were developed after that.

From 1874 until the arrival of Dr. Alexander Schilstra in 1910, the East Reserve did not have a professional physician in residence.⁹ There were, however, four men who were often called to attend deaths. They were Isaac Warkentin, Blumenhoff (attended 65 deaths from 1883-1911), John Harrison, Niverville (attended 40 deaths from 1886-1911), John Peters, Grunthal (attended 10 deaths from 1897-1911) and Dr J. Dufort, Giroux and Steinbach, a veterinarian (attended 28 deaths from 1908 to 1911).¹⁰ All four of these healers are given the title "Dr" in the Hanover records. In addition, about 20 deaths were attended by midwives. Thus, for the period 1874-1912, about 163 deaths were registered as having a non-professional "physician" in attendance.

During the same period there were also about 132 physician-attended deaths, mostly in the latter years, but also in a few cases in the very early years. When professionals were

called, they were usually from St. Pierre-Jolys (Drs Lacombe, Gervais, DeLorimier, Belanger), or Ste. Anne (Dr Demers). Others from Winnipeg, Winkler, Morris, and Lorette were called occasionally.¹¹

Thus, for about 295 deaths between 1883 and 1912, some sort of medical expert was present.¹² This represents 22% of all registered deaths, about 1 in 5 (A total of 1356 deaths were registered from 1883-1912). Professional doctors attended only about 10% of all deaths.

Why were doctors called to so few death-beds? The determining factors may have been very practical: the long distances, the cost of services (especially those of the professionals from surrounding municipalities), and the low probability of getting life-saving help even with a doctor present. There may also have been an attitude of "Gelassenheit," submission to the will of God. Of the 132 physician-attended deaths, only about 10 were infants under 1 year (7.5%) and many of those occurred in the last two years of the period, when Dr. Schilstra was available. As infants accounted for at least 30 percent of all deaths, it is obvious that the life-threatening illness of an infant was not considered to be as important or seen as likely to respond to medical treatment as that of an older child or an adult.

It might be argued that the contrast between pioneer life and modern life is most dramatic with respect to child survival. Many other things have also changed significantly. We are much more affluent in the modern world, our religious expression has changed, our attitude toward politics is very different, we travel a lot more and we communicate instantly with the whole world. But surely all of these changes are overshadowed by the fact that we no longer have to bury one-third of our children.

In this article I want to report research done on the IMR in the RM of Hanover in the first three or four decades after the arrival of the Mennonites in 1874. My aim is to partially recreate life as it was then with respect to child health so that we can appreciate the challenges faced by the pioneers and see how they were affected. I will also be asking whether child death rates among residents of Hanover, predominantly Mennonites, were typical of rates in other regions or whether they were higher or lower. In previous projects I have found that Mennonites had abnormally high death rates during diphtheria epidemics and during the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918.¹³ The results of this study are a little happier.

First I will tell the story of one extended Mennonite family and its experiences with regard to health and then I will present the statistical data. We will see whether our selected family was typical or atypical. The patriarch of the family I have chosen happens to be my great-great grandfather. but in my defense I can say that he was also the ancestor of several thousand present residents of Hanover.

In 1874 Johan Martens Koop (1831-1897) came to Blumenort, Manitoba with his wife Katharina nee Barkman (1832-1923) and with his nine surviving children and one son-in-law in tow.¹⁴ Their oldest daughter Anna, wife of Peter W. Loewen, was to give birth to their first grandchild in November of that year. Thus began the first generation of Canadian-born Koops. Anna (b 1854) died at the age of 36, a month after giving birth to Peter, her tenth child. The other eight Koop siblings grew up in Canada and raised large families, except for Aganetha (b 1859), who died in childbirth with her first child in 1883. According to the Koop genealogy book¹⁵, Johan and Katharina had 108

grandchildren between 1874 and 1913. Katharina lived long enough to see them all, but Johan died in 1897. Unfortunately, 31 of the 108 died in childhood, 16 of them before their first birthdays. Ten of the grandchildren were named Katharina while seven bore the name Johan.

Johan and Katharina also had 25 step-grandchildren, the offspring of two sons-in-law who remarried after the deaths of their first wives, the Koop's daughters Anna and Aganetha. The sons-in-law were Peter W. Loewen, who married Katharina Friesen after the death of Anna, and Peter L. Plett, who married Susanna Friesen after the death of Aganetha. Grandfather Koop treated all of his grandchildren alike, whether they were biological or step grandchildren.¹⁶ Thus, the Koops had 133 grandchildren in all.

I have chosen to focus on the Koop family as a real family that experienced Canadian life during the first 40 years after immigration. Statistics tend to be impersonal, so a more anecdotal account of child survival in a single extended family will balance the more general, statistical view that emerges from a study of the entire East Reserve, which will follow.

Four years after arrival in Blumenort, Johan Koop left the village to establish his own village a mile and a half south-west of Blumenort together with two of his sons and two sons-in-law¹⁷. They called it Neuanlage, which means "new settlement." Here they farmed on five quarters of land and continued to live relatively prosperously. A few years later they expanded to eight quarters with yet another son-in-law moving in. Eventually Johan's son Johan (b. 1863) took over his

father's farm and became part of the Neuanlage community. Their church affiliation remained with the Blumenort Kleine Gemeinde although they had their own private school in the village,¹⁸ which remained in operation until 1916.¹⁹ The village disbanded in 1890,²⁰ but the villagers did not move very far from each other, maintaining very close ties.

About half of the Johan Koop family lived in Neuanlage while the other half was part of the Cornelius S. Plett family in Blumenhof: four of the Koop girls had married four of the Plett boys. So Neuanlage was populated largely by the Koop family, but one other family had thrown in their lot with the Koops. This was the Peter Friesen family (Peter B. Friesen b. 1838 and Elisabeth Barkman, b. 1841). Elisabeth was Katharina Koop's niece even though they were about the same age. Their eldest daughter Katharina became Peter W. Loewen's second wife in 1891, after the death of Peter's first wife, Anna Koop. Katharina gave birth to nine children but only three survived childhood. The Friesen farm was eventually taken over by Peter's son, Peter (b. 1867), who was married to Anna Wiebe (b. 1868). They had eleven children, four of whom were named Peter. All four died in childhood.

During those first 40 years of life in Canada, the family endured three major diphtheria epidemics (1884, 1900, and 1909-11) and one of scarlet fever (1894) as well as many smaller but still life-threatening outbreaks of typhoid, measles, and whooping cough. In addition, they were always vulnerable to isolated cases of tetanus, meningitis, hepatitis, child-bed fever, tuberculosis, diarrheal diseases, and farm accidents. It

Table 1. Grandchildren of Johan and Katharina Koop who died as infants

Child	Father	Mother (nee)	Died in	Age (yr)	Han rec	Cause/duration	Doc called
Aganetha	Peter Loewen	Anna Koop	1890	0.01	yes	inflammation	no
Cornelius	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1905	0.00	no		?
Jacob	Peter Klassen	Katharina Koop	1887	0.33	yes	Cholera morbus	no
Elisabeth	Peter Klassen	Katharina Koop	1896	0.67	yes	several mo	no
Jacob	Jacob Koop	Helena Nickel	1885	0.25	yes	2 d	no
Helena	Jacob Koop	Helena Nickel	1885	0.07	yes		no
Katharina	Jacob Koop	Helena Nickel	1889	0.92	yes	diarrhea	no
Abram	Peter Plett	Susanna Friesen	1888	0.03	no		?
David	Peter Plett	Susanna Friesen	1891	0.02	yes		no
Cornelius	Abram Plett	Gertrude Koop	1893	0.06	no		?
Jacob	Abram Plett	Gertrude Koop	1900	0.83	yes	typhoid	J Peters
Gertrude	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1901	0.25	yes	0.5 d	no
Abram	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1902	0.33	yes	24 h	no
Isaak	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1905	0.17	yes	ill since birth	no
Frank	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1907	0.14	yes		no
Margaretha	David Plett	Helena Koop	1894	0.58	yes	scarlet fever 5 d	no
Child	David Plett	Helena Koop	1897	0.00	no		?
Gertrude	Jacob Plett	Maria Koop	1892	0.67	no		?
Katharina	Peter Koop	Margaretha Schellenberg	1898	0.00	no		?

can be assumed that they did not suffer much from nutritional deficiencies since meat, milk, eggs, and vegetables were always available and much of their life was spent outside, working in the sun.²¹ They were without easy access to professional medical help, but semi-professional help was always near-by in the form of midwives, chiropractors, and other healers as noted earlier.

Table 1 is a list of the 19 Koop grandchildren who are known not to have survived to their first birthdays. Six of them do not appear in Hanover death records. It appears the very young were sometimes overlooked with regard to registration. Most of the families lost at least one infant and some lost more than one. Causes of death, where known, are diverse, but only one infant died during the scarlet fever epidemic of 1894. Generally the very young were not at highest risk during epidemics due to the presence from birth of maternally transmitted immunity, which lasts for up to three months.

We find only one case where a “doctor” was called for an infant (for Abraham L. Plett’s Jacob). It is strange that this Blumenhoff Kleine Gemeinde family called Chortitzer John Peters all the way from Grunthal while “Docta” Warkentin lived only half a mile away. Family memory attributes little Jacob’s death to typhoid,²² although the Hanover record says “sickness of the lung.” Anyway, both Jacob’s grandfather, Cornelius S. Plett, and his uncle Johann Plett died of typhoid

at about the same time. Cornelius and Johann were estranged at the time over a disagreement about the Holdeman Church. Perhaps Warkentin was not called because he was a member of the Holdeman Church. It is also interesting that this typhoid outbreak in Blumenhof occurred during a major diphtheria epidemic.

Table 2 lists 21 grandchildren who died after their first birthday.²³ Four of the deaths are not in the Hanover records, one of them because the family had moved out of Hanover. Thus, the rate of registration is significantly higher than it was for the infant deaths. Perhaps these deaths were taken more seriously. Of the nine deaths in 1900, it is likely that six or more were due to diphtheria. It was a very bad year for the extended Koop family when the typhoid deaths in Blumenhof are taken into account. “Docta” Warkentin was called to the Abraham Plett’s for Helena’s diphtheria death, but that was a few months before the tragic typhoid outbreak mentioned earlier. Scarlet fever claimed two lives in 1893-94 and in the same year 3 year-old Anna Koop died of burns. On at least nine occasions a “doctor” was called in, usually Warkentin. John Harrison, Niverville, was also called in two cases. In no case was a professional from St Pierre or Ste Anne called.

The losses seem catastrophic, particularly in the Peter Loewen and the John B. Koop families. Katherina (Friesen) Loewen lost six of her nine children, and Sara (Baerg) Koop lost

Table 2. Grandchildren of Johan M. and Katharina Koop who died as minors, aged 1 year and up.

Child	Father	Mother (nee)	Died in	Age (yr)	Han rec	Cause/duration	Doc called
Peter	Peter Loewen	Anna Koop	1888	2.00	yes	fever 7 d	Is Warkentin
Peter	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1893	1.00	no		?
Margaretha	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1900	6.00	yes		no
Aganetha	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1900	3.00	yes	diarrhea 8 d	no
Sarah	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1900	2.00	yes	diarrhea 5 d	Is Warkentin
Abram	Peter Loewen	Katharina Friesen	1914	10.00	no		?
Mary	Peter Klassen	Katharina Koop	1891	10.00	yes	dropsy	J Harrison
Maria	Peter Klassen	Katharina Koop	1900	7.00	yes	diphtheria	no
Peter	Jacob Koop	Helena Nickel	1894	2.00	no		?
Cornelius	Peter Plett	Aganetha Koop	1885	1.92	yes	consumption	no
Abram	Peter Plett	Susanna Friesen	1894	4.00	yes	scarlet fever	no
Maria	Peter Plett	Susanna Friesen	1893	1.00	yes	scarlet fever 2 wk	Is Warkentin
Helena	Abram Plett	Gertrude Koop	1900	6.00	yes	diphtheria	Is Warkentin
Susana	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1894	7.00	yes	scarlet fever	no
Anna	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1894	3.00	yes	burns	Is Warkentin
Abram	John Koop	Sara Baerg	1900	3.00	yes	4 wk	no
Jacob	Jacob Plett	Maria Koop	1900	3.00	yes	9 d	Is Warkentin
Aganeta	Jacob Plett	Maria Koop	1906	1.00	yes	25 h	Is Warkentin
Peter	Peter Koop	Margaretha Schellenberg	1900	6.00	yes	1.5 d	no
Margaretha	Peter Koop	Margaretha Schellenberg	1900	4.00	yes	lung inflammation	J Harrison
Peter	Peter Koop	Auguste Hemiger	1913	6.00	no		



The Johann B. and Sarah Baerg Koop family in a family photograph taken in 1897. By the time this photo was taken the family had lost one child to scarlet fever and one to burn injuries. Abram, held by his mother in this photograph would die in 1900 and the family would lose another four infant children between 1901 and 1907, none of whom lived more than four months. Photo Credit: Preservings 13 (1998): 71.

seven of her fifteen children. It should be remembered that these families did not live in poverty at the edges of their society. They were part of the farming and the ministerial elite. Both C.S. Plett, Blumenhoff, and Johan M. Koop, Neuanlage, were the most prosperous farmers in their areas. Peter W. Loewen was a minister and Sara Baerg's father, Peter Baerg, was the interim leader of the Kleine Gemeinde in 1874-1875.²⁴ Infant diseases and epidemics were simply a fact of life in those days, and were not attributed to parental poverty or negligence. The lives of children seemed to be in the hands of God and there was very little that could be done. Indeed, there *was* very little that could be done in those days, before the remedies and medical care existed that we take for granted nowadays.

Most of the remedies applied in those days would be considered mildly harmful. The treatment of throat ailments with hot water or sulfur infusions was unpleasant for the patient and counterproductive. Lancing of abscesses was risky. Mustard plasters on the chest had no effect on *Streptococcus pneumoniae* or on *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*. Bloodletting with leeches only weakened the patient. Being a doctor in those days must have been hell. They had so little in their tool-kits. The presence of an authority figure, however, probably was psychologically bracing. The practitioners who really made a difference were the midwives, although even they were unable to prevent fatal Streptococcal or Staphylococcal infections that sometimes followed childbirth. "Wochenbett" (death as a result of childbirth) is a frequent notation in the early death

records of Hanover.

Figure 2 is a visualization which shows how the death of minors, and especially of infants less than 1 year old, dominate the death statistics. The data does not reflect the absolute number of deaths in each age group, only the balance between them. The grey area at the bottom represents the percentage of all infants who died in each year. The bottom trend-line shows that from 1884 to 1941, this percentage declined slightly from 38 percent to about 35 percent although there may be a hint of improvement from 1932 on, perhaps reflecting the use of the sulfa drugs. The present rate in Canada is about 1 percent. For us, then, 1 out of every 100 funerals is for an infant. Before the antibiotic age it was 1 out of 3. This data indicates that the frequent death of infants was an unsolved and ongoing problem well into the 20th century.

The darker middle area of the graph represents minors from 1 to 18 years (The difference between all minors <18 yr and infants <1 yr). The upper trend-line represents the average change for all minors. The convergence of the two trend-lines indicates that the proportion of deaths among minors of 1 year and up declined significantly. Preschoolers and school children had decreasing death rates compared to the other categories. It is in this age category that the major epidemics can be clearly seen: diphtheria in 1884, 1900, and around 1910 and scarlet fever in 1894. Each of these epidemics can be seen as a great broadening of the dark middle area in the graph. This indicates the fact that preschool and school age children's deaths became

highly significant compared to the deaths of infants and adults. The 1918-19 flu epidemic does not emerge clearly in this type of presentation.

Figure 2 seems to show that the survival of preschoolers and school children improved steadily even before most vaccines and antibiotics were available but that infants did not enjoy these benefits to the same extent. It underlines the fact that the premature death of children continued to be a major sorrow in those days, perhaps the most excruciating one.

Figure 3 shows that the death of minors was greatly skewed to the younger age categories. The right side of the graph is what would be expected, with the number of deaths increasing with age. Improvements in health would tend to make this curve steeper and steeper, with more and more people dying in old age. The left side of the graph shows how the brunt of health threats was borne by the very young in the pre-antibiotic age. A modern graph of this type would look more like a hockey stick than a funnel, with the handle of the hockey stick along the bottom.

Figure 4 shows the IMR in Hanover for each year from 1884 to 1941. These data were taken from the Manitoba Vital Statistics database, available on line.²⁵ The numbers we are dealing with are rather small for statistical purposes, and this is why the IMR fluctuates so much from year to year. Some of the major peaks correspond to known epidemics, but they may merely reflect the random ups and downs in a small population. The trend-line is a crude attempt to see whether the annual rates are going up or down on average over the years.

The main observation is that the IMR is flat from 1884 to about 1920, suggesting that there was no improvement in the survival of infants in Hanover for the first 35 years and that the IMR hovered around 100 during that time. This is the minimum value because there were many infant deaths that do not appear in the Vital Stats database or even in the Hanover records. Of the 19 children listed in Table 1 only 9 were registered with Manitoba Vital Stats, even though 13 of them were in the Hanover death records.²⁶ There are a number of ways of getting a more accurate death rate for all infants, registered and unregistered, but they involve sifting through family genealogy books, "Sterbeliste," diaries, and cemetery inscriptions and records. I have done some of this tedious work and I estimate that until the turn of the century, the proportion of unregistered deaths in Hanover could have been as high as 50 percent, and that by about 1920 it had

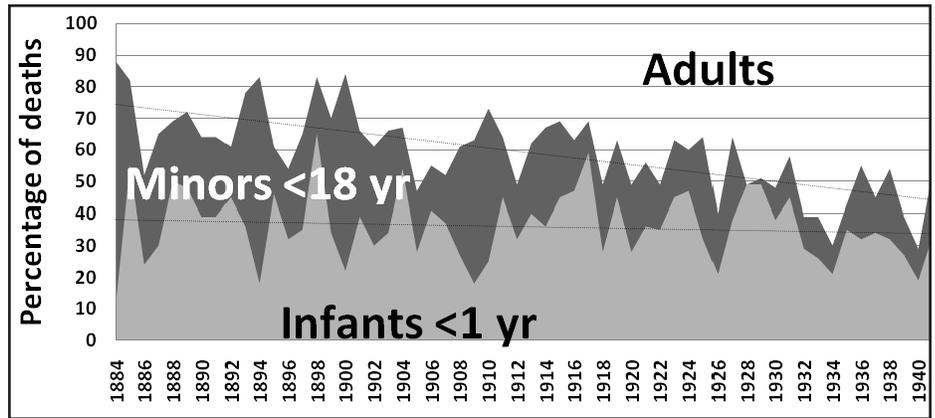


Figure 2

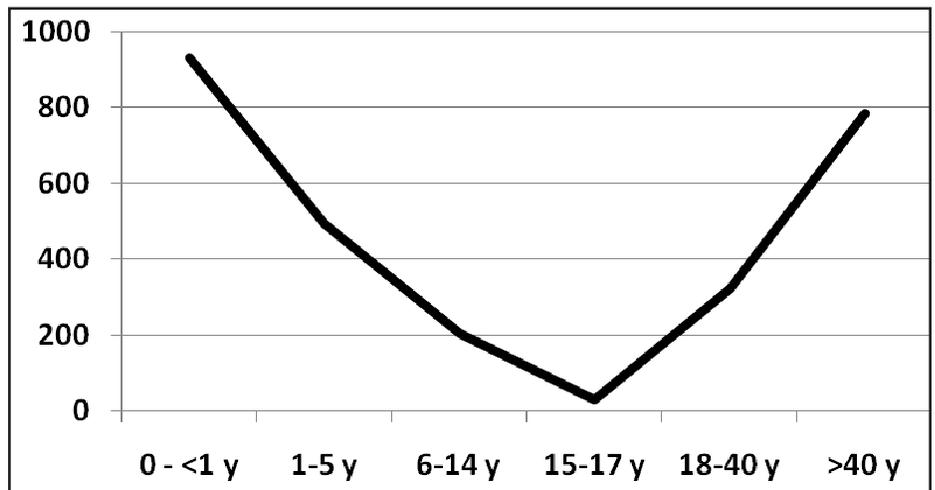


Figure 3

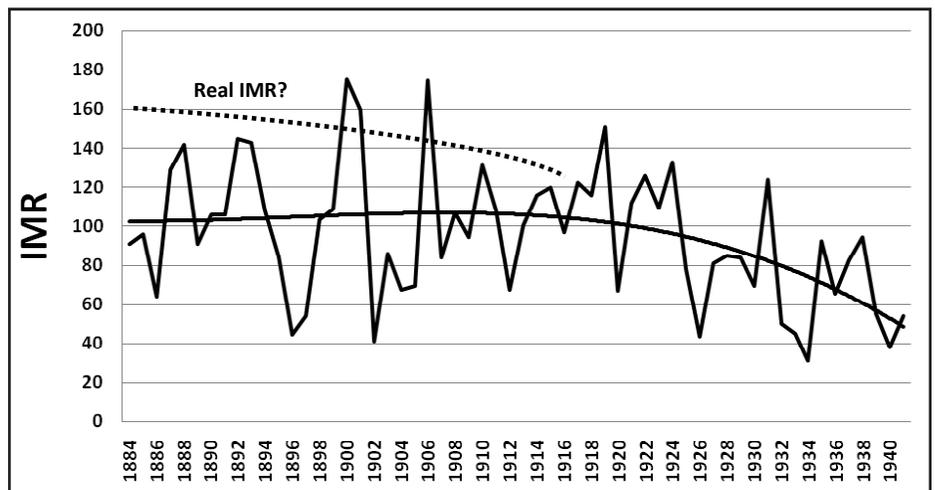


Figure 4

dropped to about 20 percent. Thus, the real IMR probably was closer to 150 or even 200 in the 19th century. The dotted line above the trend-line in Figure 5 is my rough estimate of the real IMR in the 19th C. This is supported by the observation that about 15 percent of the Koop family children died before reaching their first birthdays.²⁷ The Koops seem to have been a typical family with regard to infant survival.

How do the Hanover IMR results compare with other geographical areas? Populations in Europe and America have



"Angel Kidnappers" by Jose Costellanos, Museum of Modern Art.

very similar histories with respect to infant mortality.²⁸ Until about 1800, it is estimated that the IMR in Europe was about 300 and possibly as high as 500. Susanna Wesley (1669-1742), the mother of John and Charles, lost 9 of her 16 children as infants. This was not considered unusual even among aristocratic families. Then after 1800, when the industrial revolution took hold, the IMR went down to about 160, with higher spikes during epidemics of cholera and other infectious diseases.²⁹

These rates persisted in European countries and in Canada until the beginning of the 20th century. Thus, the average IMR in Hanover in the 19th century is typical of European values, and may even be a little better.

What about the 20th century? By 1926, which was the beginning of universal child immunization for diphtheria, the IMR was still about 100 in Canada, but then it began a steep decline to present values. The curved trend-line in figure 4 follows the curve for all of Canada almost perfectly after 1926, reaching 50 by 1941 and then declining rapidly to modern levels³⁰. Thus, there is nothing unusual about Hanover's IMR values when compared with European populations and with the rest of Canada.

With regard to epidemics, the 1884 and the 1910-11 diphtheria epidemics were world-wide, and Hanover suffered along with everyone else, although the death rates among Mennonites were unusually high.³¹ The 1894 scarlet fever epidemic was also a wide-spread epidemic, especially in North America. The 1900 diphtheria epidemic, however, which claimed the lives of more than 50 children in Hanover, was a local outbreak, affecting only Hanover.³² It seems that the people of Hanover were slow to get access to the curative diphtheria serum, perhaps

because there was no province-wide crisis, and because there were no professional doctors in the municipality at the time.

The death of children is a sorrow that few parents experience nowadays. I myself have not experienced a single such death in the three generations of my parents' large extended family, numbering over 100 people. For Johan and Katharina Koop's children, who experienced the empty cradle time and time again, and who saw their vibrant youngsters succumb to horrible throat infections one after another during the bad years, the world must have seemed a bitter place. Perhaps this paper can be a belated tribute to all those children who did not survive childhood, who would otherwise be forgotten, and to their parents who yearned for the relative freedom from infectious disease that we enjoy now.

Endnotes

- 1 These statistics and similar ones were taken from Statistics Canada web sites such as www12.statcan.ca or www.statcan.gc.ca.
- 2 This is just for Steinbach. Many more babies are born each year at Steinbach's Bethesda Hospital.
- 3 As can be seen in Fig 2, Manitoba has a significantly worse IMR than Canada as a whole.
- 4 Eva Fast, *Cornelius Fast: Seven Generations*, 2004.
- 5 I have found no cases of smallpox in Hanover records or in the Reinlaender Gebietsamt records for 1881-1883.
- 6 F. G Enns, *Gretna, Window on the Northwest*, D.W.Friesen, 1987. pp. 82-85.
- 7 Typhus should not be confused with typhoid, a water and food-borne gastrointestinal and nervous system infection. Hanover records sometimes use the term *Typhus feber* for typhoid. West Reserve records always use the correct term *Nervenfeber* for typhoid. In one case in Hanover the correct term was used in a submission made by Johann Neufeld (for Anna Stoesz's death in 1887), but Cornelius Epp, the registrar, translated it as "Nervous Fever". This is surprising

because typhoid was the leading cause of death due to infectious disease among adults in those days.

8 Glen Klassen, "Spanish Flu epidemic: Not the only calamity for Mennonites in the early 1900s," MH Dec, 2008.

9 The first time Schilstra's name appears on a death record is March 18, 1910, in the middle of the worst diphtheria epidemic to occur in the ER.

10 All data noted as "Hanover Records" in this paper were taken from microfilmed RM of Hanover Municipal Records held at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives in Winnipeg. Microfilmed in 1996. These records include all data from the RM of Hespeler and the Clear Springs settlement. Both were part of the RM of Hanover by 1890 (J.H. Warkentin, *The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, 1960, p. 61.)

11 Including Dr. McTavish (Morris), Dr. Hiebert (Winkler), Dr. Erdman Penner (Winnipeg), Dr. Royal (Lorette)

12 It is not certain that they were present at the death itself, but their names appear as the "Name of Physician" on the death record, so we may assume that they were called in at some point.

13 Glen Klassen and Kimberly Penner, "Influenza Pandemic Deaths Among Mennonites in 1918-19," *Preservings* 28(2008): p. 18-22.

14 They arrived in Quebec on the *S.S. Austrian* on July 17th, 1874, and in Blumenort on July 31st. One daughter, Elisabeth, died in Russia in 1873.

15 *The Koop Family Register 1801-1875* (no publication details).

16 Eddie Loewen, grandson of Peter W. and Elizabeth (Friesen) Loewen

17 Royden Loewen, *Blumenort: A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874-1982*, The Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, 1983, pp. 50 – 52.

18 The location of the school is marked on J.U. Klassen's map of Neuanlage, 1982 (MHC Archives)

19 Loewen, p. 152.

20 Loewen, p. 247.

21 It is likely that they were somewhat Vitamin C deficient in winter when eating preserved meat, since milk and eggs do not provide this vitamin. Also, citrus fruits were not readily or cheaply available. Nevertheless there is no evidence that they suffered from scurvy to any great extent.

22 Les Plett, *Family Register of the Descendants of Our Grandparents Abraham L. And Gertrude (Koop) Plett #14*, 1997.

23 I don't have data on four of Peter B Koop and Auguste Hemiger's children.

24 Loewen, p. 265.

25 <http://vitalstats.gov.mb.ca>

26 Since the Hanover records were created at the behest of the government it is a mystery why some of them did not end up in Vital Stats.

27 This is just a rough comparison to the IMR since we can't really calculate a formal IMR for the family.

28 Gilles Pison, *Populations and Societies*, n410, 2005.

29 It is easy to suppose that the Industrial Revolution, which spawned child factory labour and city slums, should have raised the IMR. Not so. Apparently the industrial towns and crowded cities were better for child survival than the rural areas.

30 *Selected Monthly Statistics, Canada, 1921-1990*. Statistics Canada, Catalogue 82-548, pp. 94-95

31 Glen Klassen and Conrad Stoesz, "Diphtheria epidemics of the 1880s in the Mennonite West Reserve in Manitoba," *Preservings* 31 (2011): 41-48.

32 Klassen, MH, Dec. 2008.

Articles

Mennonites in Paraguay: Witness Through Vibrant Interdependence¹

Titus Guenther, CMU Winnipeg



The ethnically diverse teaching staff of the Agricultural School in Loma Plata reflects the years of interdependence in the Chaco. The school was founded in 1981. Photo Credit: unknown.

It is often assumed that Mennonites of Paraguay, and especially in the Menno Colony, moved there to find isolation from the world. Even though this may have been true initially, they have long since opted for outreach and dynamic witness, as this article will show. To a considerable degree, this witness takes place through the lively interdependence with the various aboriginal (tribal) societies around them, the other colonies, and the national society. This witness-through-interdependence is also happening between the Southern and Northern churches, as will be seen below.

That there is indeed much dynamism within Latin American Mennonite churches is obvious from their vigorous growth in recent decades. The Latin America Mennonite history volume reports that in 2009, Mennonite and Brethren in Christ (BIC)

membership on that continent was 169,364 baptized adults in 26 countries.² This figure is impressive when we remember that the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) in 1978 reported 44,300 Mennonite and Brethren in Christ members in Latin America, and 83,400 members in 1990.³

Anabaptist-Mennonite Transplant and Mission Churches in Paraguay

On a personal note, I am a descendant of the oldest Mennonite migration from Canada to the Paraguayan Chaco, namely, the Menno Colony. In the Chaco, the newly arrived Mennonites who were farmers, and aboriginal hunter-gatherers quickly learned a certain degree of interdependence on an existential level. For example, the newcomers were shown what plants signaled sweet underground water for digging wells. Conversely, by watching the Mennonites, the aboriginal peoples moved at a fast pace from what anthropologists call a Neolithic culture to the ways of modern Western civilization. This transition took Western peoples about 4,000 years, or from the time of the biblical Abraham and Sara to the present, as missionary Bernhard Toews liked to remind the Natives when they became impatient.

This interdependence became even stronger as the newcomers engaged the First Nations as laborers on their farms in exchange for food, clothing and artifacts or tools. Aside from Mennonite industries and farms, there were virtually no employment opportunities in the sparsely settled Paraguayan Chaco. The Aboriginal peoples, of course, had worked out a careful interdependence with their natural surroundings, which became unhinged by the relatively massive influx of Western settlers. But instead of fleeing from the newcomers, a steady stream of First Nations tribes moved into the new settlement area of the Mennonite colonies. Thus, starting in 1927, the reported few hundred surviving First Nations of the Lengua or Enlhet tribe, faced with extinction because of fiercer neighbouring tribes,⁴ multiplied under the Mennonites' protective presence. They were gradually joined by five additional tribal groups that came from remote regions to settle and work among the Mennonites, living in relative harmony with each other. Today, these tribal groups far outnumber the white immigrant groups in the area. Many of them have become small-scale farmers themselves.

When Mennonites began their mission work with the motto "Light to the Indians," the First Nations, according to Jacob Loewen, subverted this mission of "spiritual salvation" by demanding a more holistic approach (Prieto, 112). They said in effect: "We see what is important to you, namely, farms, schools, and churches, and we want that also." To the credit of the pacifist Mennonites (cf. James Juhnke, 1979), they did not call in the army in the face of unrest, but with the help of MCC and the International Mennonite Organization (IMO), gave in to these demands and created one of the most holistic mission-settlement realities anywhere in the world.⁵

With their current 8,800 adult members, the First Nations churches in the Chaco⁶ are surpassing the membership of the immigrant Mennonite churches. I grew up in the midst of this remarkable mission-settlement project, but had no idea of how "exceptional"⁷ it was relative to the common approaches of churches of the Modern Missionary Movement (MMM) of the day. I had to come to Canada to read about it in books and articles and to attend anthropology courses to have my eyes opened.

The story of this unequal-yet-complimentary partnership, or interdependence, in mission and settlement has brought astounding results, even though it is still a story in the making, beset by challenges and perils. Although the story unfolded in relative isolation deep inside the Chaco, it represented a strong witness before the nation's leaders. Thus, Calvin Redekop, in *Strangers Become Neighbors*,⁸ reported in 1980 that the then Minister of Indian Affairs, upon learning about the dynamic of the mission-settlement project, urged that all of Paraguay's projects with its 17 ethnic aboriginal tribes ought to follow this model.

Jaime Prieto's handy resource book, *Mission and Migration*, insightfully reviewed by César Moya in the 2010 issue of *Mission Focus*, is a delight to read. The book's coverage of almost a century of Mennonite history in Latin America, including some very recent Anabaptist-Mennonite groups, is long overdue and offers exciting information. It is even inspirational!

The title of the book, *Mission and Migration* confirms that the Mennonite church family, like most historic denominations, got to Latin America in three ways: by "transplanting" church groups (to Mexico, Paraguay, Brazil, Uruguay, Bolivia, Argentina, and Belize), by mission or the evangelization of Latin and Aboriginal peoples, and by churches springing up on their own or being initiated independently (*iglesias autóctonas*) such as Chile's Pentecostal churches, and of late also Mennonite churches in Chile.⁹

The title, *Mission and Migration*, suggests that there are two distinctly different ways of establishing churches: through migration or through mission. However, there is another way of doing or being missional.¹⁰ That way is proposed by John H. Yoder in, *As You Go: The Old Mission in a New Day*.¹¹ In contrast to the Catholic model of sending mostly all-male "Religious" or Monastic groups, and in contrast to the historic Protestant model during the Modern Missionary Movement of sending single men and women, or nuclear families to "the field," Yoder argued for what he called "migration evangelism." This form of mission involves sending out groups large enough to forestall debilitating loneliness, but small enough to make significant interdependence with the national population unavoidable. As noted above,¹² several decades before Yoder advanced this astute model for mission, the various Mennonite groups that settled in Latin American countries embodied a form of this migration evangelism, even if they stumbled into it accidentally.

For the Mennonite colonies, interdependence came to be multi-faceted, multi-directional, inter-colonial, inter-ethnic, and also inter-continental. Space does not allow a discussion of all the facets here. Although the Canadian and Russian Mennonites came to the central Chaco for different reasons, all the groups initially migrated there with the motive of obtaining religious freedom and ethnic/human survival. The last thing on their minds was a call to mission. How could you do mission if the land was devoid of peoples as they had been told? The Russian immigrants were quicker in sensing a call to evangelization when they met the hunter-gatherer nomads, but even the Mennonites from Canada, who were hesitant at first, rose to this task before long. No matter their origin, none of the immigrant Mennonites had training in missiology or in cultural anthropology. This appears to have been both their weakness and their strength. When in the early 1990s I gave a presentation on this Chaco mission-settlement at the



Jacob A. Loewen (1922-2006) was a linguist and anthropologist who wrote a controversial report about the relationship of Mennonites to their indigenous neighbours in Paraguay. Photo Credit: GAMEO.



A Lengua farm family who has adopted many of the ways and culture of the European Mennonites who moved to the Chaco in 1927. Photo Credit: Gäste und Fremdlinge, 1987: 139.

Inter-Protestant seminary in Santiago, Chile, where I taught church history from 1989-94, my Methodist colleague Manuel Hernández suggested that the fact that the Mennonites in the Chaco had no training for mission had given these churches greater flexibility for responding to the situations they encountered.¹³ He may be right.

There was also significant interdependence between South American and North American Mennonites. While Mennonites came to Paraguay as peace church people, they came, not un-typically, as Christians with mostly answers and few, if any, questions for the Chaco people. They came with a limited grasp of the Native cultures. The Lengua society placed a high premium on peaceful community living, including the radical sharing of foods. Had Mennonites taken the time to enquire, they might have found valuable points of contact (*Anknüpfungspunkte*) here for similar Gospel-based practices. But did they take notice?

When the lack of cultural understanding led to inter-ethnic friction (Whites versus First Nations) over water and land resources in times of drought, Paraguayan Mennonites turned to their North American counterparts, and received excellent help from cultural anthropologist, Jacob A. Loewen. He was sent by MCC, and taught Mennonites to look at their world and their relationships with aboriginal peoples through the aboriginals' cultural lenses.

I remember as a high school student in 1962 listening to Loewen's riveting lectures in Low German on Native practices, their spirit world and worldview. When Loewen had convinced us that the Natives were indeed ready to transition from farming apprentices to becoming farmers themselves, MCC and IMO (Europe) at first significantly financed the settlement project, while the Chaco Mennonites did most of the work in making this a reality. Some 1700 native families were soon settled and outfitted with some basic farm equipment, with many more families waiting to be settled. In a fairly short time this ambitious mission-settlement project became self-supporting.

So far the focus has been mainly on the holistic mission program of the Mennonites in the Chaco. It needs to be said, however, that Mennonites have done vastly more in their adopted country than engage in missions to their Native neighbours. Edgar Stoesz and Muriel Steckley's chapter, "From Isolation to Outreach: Service & Mission,"¹⁴ provides an overview of the diverse witness-through-service programs, created by the Mennonite immigrants. They founded, and still run a Leprosy Clinic, which serves most of Paraguay's leprosy patients. They established a children's home for street children in the capital city, Asunción. They revamped the deplorable *Manicomio Nacional* (National "Madhouse") into a modern Neuropsychiatric Hospital, to name just a few examples of their contribution to Paraguayan society.

Since descendants of immigrant Mennonites are exempt from military service in Paraguay, thousands of young people



The hospital at Kilometer 81 was established by MCC and the Mennonites of Paraguay in the 1940s to serve leprosy sufferers in Paraguay. By 2012 it also served AIDS/HIV, and tuberculosis patients. Photo Credit: www.km81.org.

have opted instead to serve at these projects as Christian Service workers. It is also worth noting that, although the 32,217 Mennonites in Paraguay in 2009 (Prieto, 347) make up only one half of one per cent of Paraguay's 6,000,000 population, Mennonites, with support from other churches in the country, successfully spearheaded a proposal to insert into the national constitution a clause that allows all conscientious objectors, irrespective of race or creed, to render alternative social service in that country in civilian clothes and under non-military direction.

That said, it is my conviction that for all the Mennonites' outreach and service endeavors, they have been more intent on teaching than on learning from Paraguayans, and have come away the poorer for it. Frank Dyck, a Canadian teacher in the Menno Colony's *Zentralschule* (high school), used to remark on the immigrant Mennonites' work ethic. He maintained that the Latin Paraguayans, with their relaxed, celebrative approach to life, were teaching him more about "actual living."

Instances of interdependence between South and North also happened in the areas of education, medicine, and agriculture. Mennonites in the South received from the North teachers, pastors, evangelists, medical doctors, agronomists, and MEDA loans for starting small industries.



Students of four or five ethnic backgrounds at work in library at the Agricultural School, La Huerta. Photo Credit: Rony Doerksen.

The South was not only a recipient of help from the North, however; it also reciprocated. It provided a socio-religious microcosm for case studies by cultural anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of the North.¹⁵ It offered placements for practicum students from North American colleges and universities, and sent many students to Mennonite schools in North America. With their multi-lingual ability, these students became pastors in German-English churches, speakers on German radio programs, and editors of German church papers. Some served as medical doctors and nurses in Canada and the US, and others were sent abroad on mission and service assignments through North American mission boards and MCC. Those Paraguayan Mennonite students that went to Europe made comparable contributions there.

Significant interdependence and collaboration also took place between the colonies in the Chaco that had originated

in Canada and in Russia. Menno Colony, which had been introduced to the Chaco by the First Nations people, assisted the Russian Mennonite groups on arrival and helped orient the founders of Fernheim Colony. Together with Fernheim Colony, Menno billeted the refugees who arrived after World War II in their homes for several months, and helped build houses on new farms in the newly founded Neuland Colony. This was the beginning of a relationship that was at times competitive, but mostly mutually enriching and collaborative.

Over the decades, colonies in the Chaco have developed increasing interdependence through joint projects. The *Lehrerseminar* (teacher training school), supported and patronized by all the Germanic Mennonite colonies, is located in Filadelfia, Fernheim Colony. The *Berufsschule* (Vocational School) is housed in Loma Plata, Menno Colony. The Home Economics school is located in Neuhalbstadt, Neuland Colony; both the latter schools serve all three colonies. Needless to say, the Chaco colonies were decisively involved (along with colonies from East Paraguay and beyond) in the founding of Mennonite theological schools such as CEMTA and IBA in Paraguay's capital.

The collaboration between the immigrant colonies and aboriginal settlements, as well as between the various Germanic and ethnic churches (including Latin Paraguayan churches) is indeed considerable. The collaboration is happening on many levels from the economic to the ecclesial, from the educational to mission and service, and from the medicinal to the general social safety provisions. The presence of such a holistic, multi-ethnic Christian community in itself is a powerful witness to its social surroundings, to the nation and beyond.

Endnotes

- 1 This article represents a portion of a longer article, published as Titus Guenther, "Interdependence and Witness in the Coming Church: Dynamics Between South and North American Churches," in *Mission Focus: Annual Review*, Vol. 19, 2011, 161-172.
- 2 Jaime Adrián Prieto Valladares, *Mission and Migration. Latin America – A Global Mennonite History*, transl. & ed. C. Arnold Snyder (Intercourse, PA and Kitchener, ON: Good Books and Pandora Press, 2010) 347; henceforth, Prieto in brackets.
- 3 Diether Götz Lichdi, ed., *Mennonite World Handbook: Mennonites in Global Witness* (Carol Stream, IL: MWC, 1990) 328.
- 4 Cf. Calvin Redekop, "Mennonite Mission in the Paraguayan Chaco," *International Review of Mission*, 62 (1973), pp.302-317.
- 5 J.A. Loewen, "Missions Today: Three Models for Kingdom Building," *Mennonite Reporter* (Oct. 3, 1977), p. 5; echoed in Prieto, 112.
- 6 Titus Guenther, "Ältester Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968): A Man of Vision for Paraguay's *Mennogemeinde*," in *Preservings*, No. 27 (2007) 30. The ca. "7,000 Indigenous church members" indicated here, today stands at ca. 8,800 church members (cf. email communication with Gustav Guenther, Nov. 19, 2011).
- 7 James Juhnke, in chap. 10 on "Latin America" has a subheading entitled: "Paraguay: The Great Exception," in *A People of Mission: A History of General Conference Mennonite Overseas Missions* (Newton, Kansas: Faith & Life Press, 1979), 185-193, here 185.
- 8 Calvin Redekop, *Strangers Become Neighbors: Mennonite and Indian Relations in the Paraguayan Chaco* (Herald Press, 1980).
- 9 Described briefly in the article in *Mission Focus*, cited above, n.1.
- 10 Juan Martínez advanced the same idea during this year's mission conference (in Elkhart, IN, Oct. 27-29, 2011) by speaking of "migration as mission."
- 11 Focal Pamphlet No. 5. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1961). In *Body Politics: Five Practices of the Christian Community Before the Watching World*, (reprinted by Herald Press, 1997) Yoder argues similarly throughout about the missionary value of the church's key practices as a discipleship community. The indispensable "missionary value" of the local, worshipping community is by now commonplace in missiological circles. Cf. for example: David Bosch, *Believing in the Future: Toward a Missiology of Western Culture* (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1995) 59f.; Jonathan R. Wilson, *Living Faithfully in a Frag-*

mented Worl. (Valley Forge, Pa: Trinity Press International, 1997) 68-78, calls for a "New Monasticism"; Ron Sider, *Doing Evangelism Jesus' Way: How Christians Demonstrate the Good News*, (Nappanee IN: Evangel Pub. House, 2003) 62-65.

12 Titus Guenther, "Ältester Martin C. Friesen (1889-1968): A Man of Vision for Paraguay's Mennogemeinde," in *Preservings*,... No. 27 (2007) 30 and 33, n. 79.

13 Titus Guenther, "Jesuitas y Menonitas: dos modelos asincrónicos de obra misionera integral en el Paraguay", *Boletín Teológico*, Fraternidad Teológica Latinoamericana, 23, No.41 (1991), 31-53. Cf. also *ibid.*, "Social Change without Violence," *Missiology: An International Review*, IX, No.2 (1981) 193-211.

14 Edgar Stoesz and Muriel Steckley, *Garden in the Wilderness: Mennonite Communities in the Paraguayan Chaco 1927-1997* (Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1999), 161-70.

15 See the above cited works of Jacob A. Loewen, Calvin Redekop, and James Juhnke for instances of such studies.



Lucas Giesbrecht (on left) and Friends providing music to a tour group visiting Yalve Sanga before the Mennonite World Conference Assembly in 2009. Yalve Sanga was established as a mission station to the Lengua peoples in 1936. Photo Credit: Hans Werner

A Politically Risky Land Sale

Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, Manitoba.

The 1918 immigration of pacifist South Dakota Hutterites into Canada while the country was at war in Europe presented a dilemma for two Conservative politicians whose profit motives outweighed their concerns over political risk. Aime Benard was a wealthy Manitoba landowner, hotelier, and Conservative MLA who was appointed to the Canadian Senate on September 3, 1917. Arthur Meighen was born in Ontario but practiced law

at Portage la Prairie Manitoba where in 1908 he was elected as a Member of Parliament. He held various cabinet portfolios and served twice briefly as Prime Minister, once in 1921 and again in 1926.

Opposition to the influx of German speaking Mennonites and Hutterites was led by the Great War Veterans Association and public sentiment was likewise opposed. Demands were made to stop further entry of such groups and the deportation of those already in the country.¹ Accusations of who had allowed these groups into Canada and who had sold them land were levelled in newspapers of the day with calls being made for an investigation to affix blame.² Senator Aime Benard of Manitoba was a target of the charges. He had sold his large farm near Elie to Minnesota Republican State Senator Joseph Hackney in 1917. Hackney then resold this land to the Hutterites in 1918.³ Arthur Meighen's farmland in the same vicinity was similarly reportedly sold to Hutterites, having been transferred first through Senator Benard.⁴ The chronology of events does implicate both Meighen and Benard and neither could have claimed innocence.



Aimé Bénard, (1873-1938) was a financial agent, businessman and farmer. He farmed 4,000 to 5,000 acres at Benard, Manitoba, which was named after him, maintained a dairy farm of 300 pure bred cows, and a ranch with 1,000 cattle at Lake Winnipeg. Photo Credit: Archives of Manitoba, Legislative Assembly 1907-1910.



Arthur Meighen. (1874-1960) was born in Ontario but practiced law in Portage la Prairie. He was Prime Minister of Canada from July, 1920 to December, 1921 and again from June to September in 1926. Photo Credit: Library and Archives Canada / C-000691.

The property in question was Lot 5, 6, and the easterly 20 acres of Lot 7 in Baie St. Paul south of the Assiniboine River, which Meighen together with Portage la Prairie Real Estate Broker William Richardson acquired in 1911. Property Taxes

Cert. No. 27020

MANITOBA

Certificate of Title

UNDER THE REAL PROPERTY ACT

Arthur Meighen of the City of Ottawa in Ontario
 Solicitor General of Canada
 is now seized of an estate in fee simple in possession subject to
 such encumbrances, liens, and interests as are notified by memoran-
 dum, underwritten (or endorsed hereon), in all those pieces or parcels
 of land known and described as follows.

Parish Lots Five and Six and the most
 Easterly Twenty Acres of Parish Lot Seven all
 of the Parish of Beau St Paul in Manitoba, said
 Twenty Acres being a strip of land whose Western limit
 is parallel to the Eastern limit of said Lot Seven

The land mentioned in this Certificate of Title is under The Real Property Act subject by implication to:
 1. Any subsisting reservation contained in the original grant of this land from the Crown.
 2. Any municipal charges, rates or assessments at the date of this Certificate, or thereafter, chargeable to this land.
 3. Any unregistered subsisting right of way or other easement over this land.
 4. Any unregistered subsisting lease or agreement for a lease for a period not exceeding three years, which there is actual occupation of this land under the same.
 5. Any judgments, decrees or orders for the payment of money against the registered owner, registered since the date of this Certificate and properly maintained in force.
 6. Any public highways embraced in the description of this land.
 7. Any right of expropriation by statute.
 8. The title of any person adversely in actual occupation of and rightly entitled to this land when it was first brought under said Act.
 9. Caveats affecting this land registered since the date of this Certificate of Title.

Produced and returned to the Registrar on 1917 at 29034
 Cancelled in full
 Vols. 29034

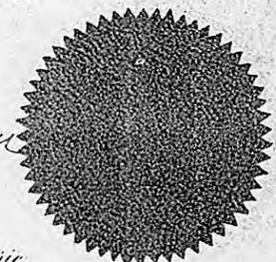
Produced and returned to the Registrar on 1918 at 28922
 Cancelled in full
 Vols. 28922

IN WITNESS WHEREOF I have hereunto signed my name and
 affixed my Seal of office this fourteenth day of March
 One thousand nine hundred and seventeen

Signed in the presence of
 Alex. Say Ct

St. B. St. Marshall

District Registrar
 for Portage la Prairie.



Signed & Issued
 26th March 1917

Certificate of Title for Lots 5,6 and part of 7 issued to Arthur Meighen on March 17, 1917. Source: Portage Land Titles Office.

to the Rural Municipality of Cartier were subsequently paid but only until 1914.⁵ In February 1917 Richardson transferred his half share in the property to Meighen for a nominal one dollar and, reflecting his cabinet position, title was issued to "Arthur Meighen of the City of Ottawa in Ontario, Solicitor General of Canada." On September 24 of the same year Cartier Municipality conducted a sale of this property for taxes owing and were themselves recorded as the purchaser for the \$779.97 outstanding.⁶ However, they never had their charge against the property noted on Meighen's Certificate of Title nor did they attempt to take possession of the land. Indeed, as late as 1918

he is still recorded in their Tax Collector Rolls as the Honorable Arthur Meighen.⁷ On October 26, 1918 a Caveat on Meighen's Title was registered by the Hutterite Joseph Waldner affecting the easterly 20 acres of Lot 7. In order for this Caveat to have been accepted for registration some agreement between Waldner and Meighen must have been concluded. The date of the Caveat is significant in that it predates the Armistice in Europe which ended Canada's involvement in World War I and hence Canadian Servicemen were still fighting and dying while Cabinet Minister Meighen was looking to his own welfare. On December 2, 1918 Arthur Meighen, now giving his occupation

as Minister of the Interior, signed a transfer of the property to Aime Benard for the sum of \$8,922.00. Interestingly, the transfer month has been crossed out to insert December and Land Titles Office stamps reveal it to have been presented for registration on December 14 and December 17 of 1918, and finally on January 24, 1919. Pitblado & Hoskin of Winnipeg who had earlier done legal work for Aime Benard was the law firm involved. However, the transfer from Meighen to Benard could not be registered as presented on the two December occasions because of the 1917 Tax Sale but on January 21, 1919 the problem was resolved when the property was redeemed for \$935.97 by Pitblado Hoskin on behalf of the owner. The four year non-payment of property taxes demonstrated a less than stellar civic responsibility on the part of the person referred to as the Honorable Arthur Meighen during his Cabinet tenures as Solicitor General and Minister of the Interior. Three days later on January 24, 1919 a Certificate of Title subject to the Waldner Caveat was issued in the name of Aime Benard. Whatever the agreement with Meighen was it justified the Waldner Caveat of October 26, 1918 and provoked the Great War Veterans Associations to protest. The protest was reported in the media as early as November 2, 1918, with the stated objective of arousing hostile sentiment to further land sales to communal settlers. The protest was, however, insufficient pressure for Meighen to reconsider the sale.⁸ Senator Benard had signed a transfer of the property to six Hutterite purchasers for \$14,792.50 already on December 3, 1918, only the day after the transfer was signed by Meighen to him but predating both the tax redemption and registration of the land in his own name. It would appear that by January 24, 1919 when Benard's own title was issued, and the earliest date possible to register his December 3, 1918 dated sale to the Hutterites, negative public opinion caused the transfer to be

Richardson & Pihon, L.L., Law Builders, Winnipeg-4119

MANITOBA
"THE REAL PROPERTY ACT"
TRANSFER OF LAND

I, Arthur Meighen, of the City of Ottawa
in the County of Lanark, Province of Ontario
Solicitor General of the Dominion of Canada being registered
owner of an estate in fee simple in possession
subject however to such encumbrances, liens and interests as are notified by memorandum under-
written or endorsed hereon, in all that piece or parcel of land known and described as follows:

Lots Five {5} and Six {6} and the most
eastern twenty {20} acres of Lot Seven {7}
in the Parish of Beau St. Paul, in
Manitoba, said twenty acres being a strip
of land whose western limit is parallel to the
Eastern limit of said Lot Seven {7}

do hereby in consideration of the sum of Eight Thousand, Nine Hundred
and Twenty Two {8922.00} Dollars
paid to by Aime Benard
of the village of Benard, in Manitoba Province
the receipt of which sum I hereby acknowledge, transfer to the said Aime Benard
all my estate and interest in the said piece of land

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto subscribed my name, this
2nd day of December, A.D. 1918

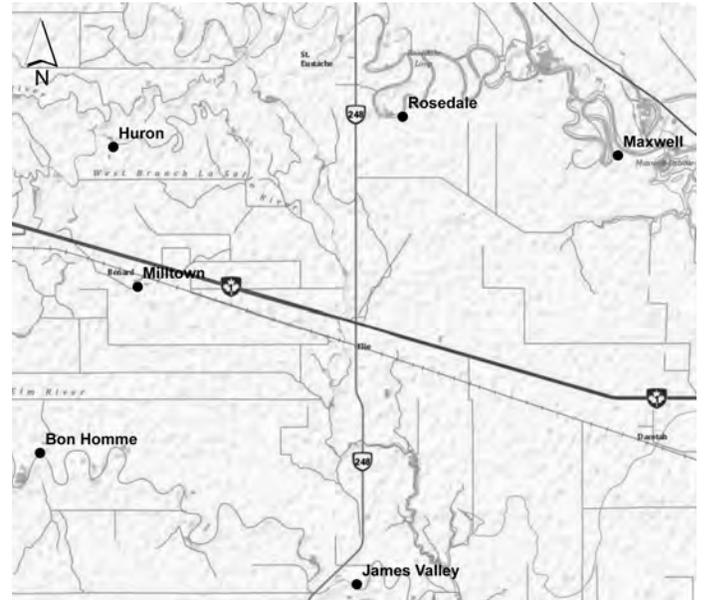
Signed by said Arthur Meighen
in the presence of George Dux Alfred Dux
Subject to Caveat No 16037 - and subject to
all taxes

Document of transfer of Lots 5,6 and part of 7 from Arthur Meighen to Aime Benard. Source: Portage Land Titles Office.

withheld from presentation at Land Titles. However on June 6, 1919 it was finally registered and the Hutterites took legal ownership of the land thereby validating the allegations of the GWVA. Whether or not this controversy was a significant factor in Arthur Meighen, now Prime Minister, losing his Portage la Prairie Commons seat in 1921 is unclear, but it is known that Aime Benard, who had previously delivered the French Canadian and Metis vote to the Meighen Tories, had lost his influence after being blamed for bringing the Hutterites into the district.⁹ Aime Benard himself had no electorate to face and continued in the Senate until his death whereas Arthur Meighen was forced to run in an Ontario by-election in 1922.

Endnotes

- 1 *Manitoba Free Press*, August 6, 1919. Other than the endnotes listed the sources for all data are the Abstracts, Old System Files, RPA Files, Transfers, and Certificates of Title at the Portage la Prairie Land Titles Offices affecting the legal descriptions cited.
- 2 *all instances of Manitoba Free Press and Montreal Daily Star*, August 8, 1919.
- 3 *Ibid.*
- 4 *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 2, 1918, Library and Archives Canada Microfilm Reel 153, N-39454, NJ.FM.821
- 5 Rural Municipality of Cartier, Collectors Rolls 1914, 1915, 1916, 1917, 1918.
- 6 Rural Municipality of Cartier, Tax Sale Record Book.
- 7 Rural Municipality of Cartier, Collectors Roll, 1918.
- 8 *The Montreal Daily Star*, November 2, 1918.
- 9 *Manitoba Free Press*, November 3, 1921.



Hutterite colonies established in the Elie area in 1918. The land transferred to Hutterites by Arthur Meighen through Aime Benard became the Maxwell Colony. Sources: Hutterite Directory, www.cerontech.com; Basedata for the map provided by ESRI.

Going to Yermo: Experiences of the Menno B. Dueck Family

As recalled by Mrs. Liesbeth (Menno) Dueck, With details from Menno Dueck's diary

Written by Arden M. Dueck, son

Preparing to go

It was a beautiful harvest day in the latter part of October, 1962. Menno was cutting oats on the fifty acres behind Springstein (*Quellen* Colony, Mexico), close to the mountains. I (Mrs. Menno Dueck) was at my parents place on this certain day. From their kitchen window I had a clear view to that field, about one and a half kilometers to the west. Suddenly I saw a pickup truck park at the end of the field. What caught my attention was

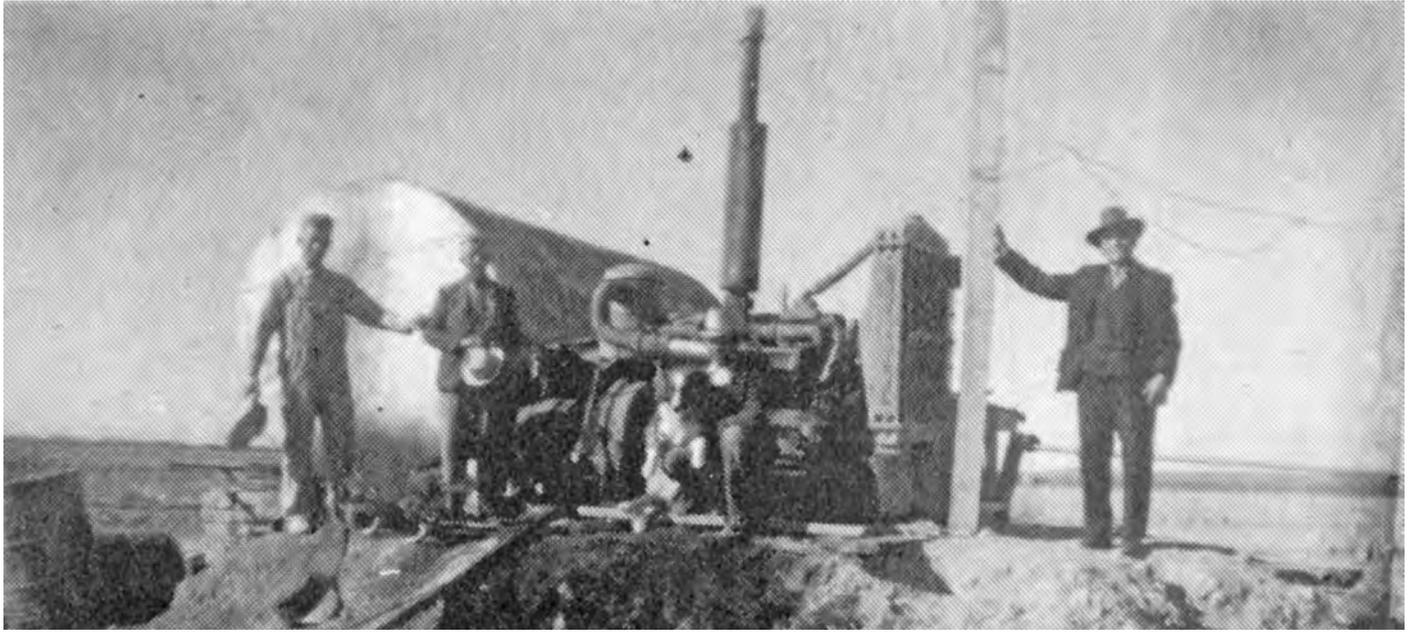
that it remained there for an hour or more. Finally it left, and Menno continued with his swathing. When I brought Menno his dinner, he told me it had been Rev. Peter Loewen, and he had asked if we would be willing to go to Yermo to teach school. We had sometimes thought about going to a mission field someday, but this seemed so sudden.

Of course there were also some holdups. The major one was that Menno's parents, Bernhard R. Duecks, on whose farm we lived, were old, and depended on our care. In addition, my father, Isaak P. Loewen, had suffered a minor heart attack not long before. But both parents encouraged us to go.

The Yermo colony was an eight hour drive in those times, almost directly south of Chihuahua, in the Durango desert. It had been settled by Old Colony people many years before. Although Yermo was dependent on irrigation to raise any crops, an occasional rain, if it came at the right time, could produce a crop of fodder. In the beginning, the settlement had looked promising. A school had been established, and Old Colony ministers had come on scheduled Sundays to preach. Hydro power was virtually unknown to the common farmer in those days, and all irrigation pumps were driven by diesel motors. Soon after the establishment of the colony, the price for diesel fuel rose sharply, and the price of cotton dropped. On top of that, a number of wells ran dry. Consequently, people started moving away. By 1962 only thirteen families remained. In this particular year the crops were so meager that the farmers did



The Yermo Colony was about an eight hour drive south of Chihuahua in the State of Durango. It was eventually abandoned. Source: Google Maps.



The Yermo Colony was dependant on irrigation for crop production. Since there was no electricity to the colony, water had to be pumped using diesel powered pumps such as this one on the farm of Bernard Penner. Photo Credit: 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico, 273.

not have enough feed for their cattle, and somehow they came to *Quellen* Colony for financial aid. Deacon Cornelius R. Plett went there to investigate the situation, and found it bad indeed. Arrangements were made and loads of feed were sent.

For some reason, the Old Colony Church ceased its support for this settlement. This caused the responsible persons in the settlement to consider another source of aid. Consequently they came to *Quellen* Colony to ask the *Kleine Gemeinde* for spiritual help and a school teacher, and so it happened that Menno, while he was cutting oats, got that visit from Rev. Loewen.

After we made the decision to go to Yermo for a school-term, Menno, together with Gerhard Plett, Albert Plett and Jakob U. Kornelsen, went to see the place and the people. The people were very friendly and receptive, but also a bit shy. The children, especially, looked up shyly at Menno as if to say, "This strange man shall be our teacher?" But, already on that first visit, Menno started to gain their confidence.

So we began to prepare for this mission with the aim to start school on the first of December. Albert Reimers agreed to take care of our dairy farm and Menno's brother Willi took over Menno's responsibilities as secretary of the colony treasury. Neighbors and friends pitched in to help us get ready. As an additional support from the neighbors, the threshing crew harvested our oats first.

Going

On Thursday, November 28 we finished threshing the oats and the next morning we started to pack the belongings that we wanted to take along. My parents came over to watch the packing procedures. Earlier in the week we had sent two tables and a baby's high chair with Walter K. Friesen, Ben P. Plett's, truck driver, who went on regular trips to Torreon, hauling oats or hogs. These pieces of furniture were fastened on an overhead platform above the hogs. The space on the box of our model '53 Chevrolet pickup was very limited, and our cooking range was a big one, so Menno went to his brother Henry's furniture store in the morning and bought a small new cooking

stove, which happened to be a gray spotted one. By noon our big load was ready to go.

After a simple, but warm, farewell with our loved ones we loaded our three boys, Arden six, Vernon four, and Peter one, into the pickup cab, stowed the ever-present diaper bag, and took off. Strange feelings crept over me as the reality of this adventure began to dawn on me. The future suddenly felt so far off and so vague. The heavy overcast sky and the drizzle only added to our forlorn feelings.

We stopped in Chihuahua for the night, and during the evening took Peter to the doctor. Peter was very restless and did not sleep well during the night. The doctor said he was nervous, which I did not like to hear, especially not about a one year old baby. He prescribed some medicine and the next morning we went off into the unknown.

At home we had electric light in the evening, from our neighbor's small plant, but we knew here we would have to depend completely on a kerosene lamp for light. We had brought along our lamp, but not the chimney, for fear of breaking it on so long a trip. So we stopped at Ceballos and bought one.

Several kilometers south of Ceballos we came to a driveway where we turned off the pavement onto a dirt road. The sun sank on the western horizon, and a steady wind blew billows of dust over the railroad tracks as we crossed them. After a few more kilometers of zigzagging among the mesquite bushes and dust clouds, we came to the first house in the settlement. It happened to be the one that was to be our home in the coming months. Our closest neighbors, Johan Bartsches, had noticed our coming, and immediately came over to help unload. A queer feeling came over us as we stepped into the house. The first things we saw in this so very strange environment were the familiar pieces of furniture we had sent a week before. We noticed the house had been cleaned and nicely whitewashed. We arranged the furniture as best we could in those two small rooms. The house also had a pantry which came in very handy, but it had no curtains.



The home of Jacob M. Wiebe, one of the first settlers in the new colony of Yermo in the 1950s. Photo Credit: 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexico, 272.

Settling in

The schoolhouse was only about 60 feet behind our house, toward the west. In the evening all the men in the settlement met, which they called *Schultebot*, to discuss general affairs of the colony. Although it was already dark, we saw the men gathering by pale moonlight. Having no curtains, I knew they could also watch us through the windows, so I pinned a diaper across the lower part of each window to secure at least a certain measure of privacy. Soon it was bedtime and we retired, thankful that we had arrived safely with all our belongings. But the surroundings were, oh, so strange.

Sunday morning we went to their gathering for worship. Menno was invited to the front bench to sit with the song leaders to help sing, which he really enjoyed in the following months. After singing a few songs in a slow tempo, one of the older men read a portion out of the Bible, after which the gathering was dismissed. Once outside, one of the strange women came to me and invited us for dinner. I had no idea who she was or where she lived, but I said “yes” without hesitation, because we did not have anything prepared for dinner. She pointed out a house about a kilometer across the sand dunes and mesquite bushes, which she said was where she lived. She turned out to be Mrs. Jakob Enns. She was a talkative, interesting lady and served us a delicious soup for dinner. After dinner they invited us into the “big” room and we had a pleasant time together.

After a while we left and went “home.” As nice as our home was, we still did not want to sit there alone all afternoon. Since Menno had been here before, he knew where Klaas Heides lived, so we went there. While getting acquainted we found out that Mrs. Heide was a sister to the auctioneer Cornelius Rempel, who sometimes had come to *Quellen* Colony for an auction. So there at least we had a familiar connection. Mrs. Heide was very hospitable and served us a good *faspá*. We left early in order to be home before dark, since the whole area was still so strange that we did not want to risk getting lost.

Stepping into that strange house at twilight, one that was to be our home, gave us another keen reminder of how far from

“home” we really were. A wave of loneliness swept over us. But we lit our kerosene lamp, put our boys to bed, and retired for the night. We slept well in this strange environment.

Starting School

Monday morning, which happened to be December third, came, and with that the first day of school. The school was to start at nine in the morning, but by eight o’clock there was already a group of children standing in circles and waiting for this new adventure of attending a school with so strange a teacher. Menno got ready and also went to school. Arden was really too young to attend school, having turned six only a few weeks ago. However, since he was so interested in books, and the school was so close, with daddy the teacher, we decided to let him go to school. This resulted in him always being the youngest pupil in his class for the rest of his school years. And it turned out that he had no problem getting along with his class.

Just before we left home, the *Quellen* Colony schools had received a shipment of brand new German readers. Menno had taken some along and these turned out to be a real asset in the process of teaching. Being December, Menno soon started to practice a Christmas program, which was strange to everybody there. But the children were enthusiastic about everything, and learned easily. The three weeks before Christmas passed quickly.

The program was scheduled for Friday, December 21 in the afternoon. We planned to head back home to the *Quellen* Colony for the holidays right after the program. Of course we would not get home on the same day, but we wanted to get as far as Chihuahua for the night. So I packed all the necessary things in the morning, including our blankets, and of course all the items for the baby. Everything was ready by the time Menno came in for dinner. When the school children came back for the program after the noon meal, we were surprised to find that every child had a big gift for us, mostly groceries. One child brought a box of Corn Flakes wrapped in post paper. Katharina Rempel, one of the biggest girls, gave us two beautiful plates, decorated with cute flowers. One of those

plates I still have. We really appreciated those gifts, and knew they were tokens of love. The program was really interesting. Arden had learned a poem of 12 lines. When he finished reciting it, Mr. Abram Rempel looked to him and said, "You can memorize that much?"

Christmas Holidays

After the program we immediately got into our pickup and happily started off for our real home. We went through the somewhat familiar Ceballos, and on to Jimenez, Camargo, and Delicias. We, and especially the boys, were impressed with the glamour of the bright Christmas lights that adorned these cities. By the time we reached Chihuahua it had been dark for some time. We settled in at the San Juan Hotel. In the morning we continued homeward on the pavement to Parita, and from there the customary three hours of rough mountain road over countless stones and through innumerable bumps.



Returning to Duty

We finally left home at 10 a.m. We ate dinner in Chihuahua, and even allowed ourselves the luxury of making a phone call to my brother Dave Loewen in Manitoba.

Travel was slow in those days. Vernon usually stood on the seat and looked out the back window, watching the traffic. Suddenly he said, in his childish voice, "Baby's walker is standing on the highway behind us." Not quiet trusting his childish statement, I looked back, and to my surprise I actually saw the blue walker standing in the middle of the pavement, a distance behind us. We had just met a bus, and the suction caused by the wind had sucked the walker out from the pickup box. Menno quickly stopped and turned around. By the time we were back another traveler had also stopped to pick it up. I quickly jumped out and got there just ahead of the stranger. I held the walker very tightly. After securing it among the other furniture, we started off again.

At 8:30 we arrived at "home." About 50 meters in front of our house, toward the east, there was a small double shed. Into one of those tiny rooms we put our chickens. We unloaded everything and settled down for the night.

The next day, Wednesday, Menno resumed classes. A new student, Gerhard Heide, who, by their standards was really out of the school years, started to attend school, because of his interest in learning some of the strange things this new teacher taught. Menno also held weekly evening classes for adults to upgrade their knowledge. The good and regular attendance showed the interest in these classes.

I set up house again, with the view of spending another four or five months in this setting. We enjoyed our time, except for the fact that I was so very homesick. The boys spent a lot of time romping and playing on the sofa, which we had placed in the kitchen.

Adjusting to a different environment

Customs were different in the Yermo society than we were used to. On one occasion, I had Arden sitting in the bathtub beside the heating stove, when suddenly without any knocking, or other signal, the door opened and one of the neighbor men walked in. I realized that we needed to hook the door from the inside when someone was bathing. Everyone without exception

bathed once every week, and under some circumstances, even twice a week. Peter started walking soon after we came back, so taking the walker along had not been of much use.

Like all the other houses on the settlement, our house had no plumbing. Our water was hauled in 200 litre barrels. In front of our house we had another barrel that was open at the top, into which the water was poured with a pail. A lid prevented birds and other undesired animals from contaminating the precious liquid. Our flock of chickens supplied us amply with eggs. We bought milk from our neighbors.

Having been used to sewing circles ever since I could remember, I got the idea to introduce the idea in Yermo. I prepared cloth from colored feedbags, which every poultry farmer at *Quellen* Colony had in abundance, and was even able to find four boards to serve as a quilt frame. But the problem came when I began to ask for clamps. Nobody understood what a clamp was, until I asked Mrs. Klaas Heide. She took me to their tool shed and asked me to show her what I meant. When I saw the desired things hanging there, she said "Oh, we call those things swings." She let me have them of course. It was a very strange thing for those women to lay aside their work and go away on a weekday. I invited all of them, everyone came, and I think they all enjoyed the afternoon. I even had prepared a simple lunch.

During our quilting I overheard one woman say to another, "What will our husbands say when they come home, and discover we are not at home?" The trend there was very strong that the woman's place was at home to take care of the family and tend the herd of dairy cows. The school children must have sensed that something was going on, because after school most of them flocked into our house too. They were soon ushered home by the adults. The women must have enjoyed this gathering, because they kept up this custom for many years. Later I have sometimes regretted that I did not touch the spiritual lives of those dear women more. Later, quite a few of these people moved to *Quellen* Colony, revived their spiritual lives and joined the church. I hope to meet all of them in heaven someday.

As a whole we found the folks on that settlement very hospitable and friendly, albeit a bit cautious at first. The visits we made in their homes were usually supplemented with the eating of sunflower seeds, which was something strange for us. I still vividly remember Abram Rempels round light-green gallon box, with a neatly painted flower on the outside. It was always passed around the room with these precious kernels.

Routine Life and Visitors

On one Sunday, after we came home from church, Johan Bartsch's Cornelius suddenly appeared at our door, and with the grin of a 10 year old announced that they wanted to invite us for dinner. We were glad for an invitation, and immediately prepared to go. After the lad was outside he paused again, looked back and said ever so contentedly, "We have fried chicken for dinner." With that he was off, pleased with the success of his mission.

I did the house keeping. Having known beforehand that there would be no easy washing facilities, we had taken along a scrubbing board and a large tub to do the laundry. Just before we had left, I had bought 10 meters of striped flannel from which I made 11 big diapers for Peter. These I washed once a day. For the oldest boys I had made corduroy shirts. They washed easily and needed no ironing. For myself I had made a

plastic apron to protect my dress, and thus reduce the amount of laundry. I really learned to handle the washing board that winter.

The first time I did the laundry, I went to the road to hang the wash on the barbed wire fence, because we had no wash line. But doing that once was enough for an alert neighbor to notice, and by the next washday I had a short, but neat wash line, right close to the house. This was a great improvement in our living standard. Certain pieces of baby laundry I did every day. I was content to do our clothes on the scrubbing board, but to wash our bedding in the same manner seemed a bit too big a task. So when the necessity arose, I loaded everything into the pickup and went to one of our friends to do the laundry. I did this four times during our stay there, once at Jacob Ennses, and three times at Klaas Heides. On such occasions our wash lines were not nearly long enough. Once I left a basket of wash at Bartsches, where Greta was more than willing to hang them up for me. When I came to fetch the wash later in the day, everything was neatly folded and stacked on the table. Such amicable neighbors!

Although we really liked the Bartsches, we didn't always like their big dog. On one occasion we had visitors for a meal, this time Cornelius P. D. Reimers and Cornie B. Reimers. As a supplement for our noon meal, I cooked a pot of cherry *moos*. In front of our house we had a simple, partly enclosed veranda. This shade provided a suitable place to cool food, since we had no fridge. I brought a chair and sat the pot with the boiling *moos* on it. At noon when I went to fetch the *moos* I found the pot empty, except for the cherries. I did not know how this was possible, because I was sure there was no leak in the pot. Suddenly I remembered that dog. That solved the mystery.

On another occasion I baked a big apple pie, and I put it on the low wall under the veranda to cool off. At noon when Menno and Arden came in, Arden brought in an empty baking pan, and said he had found it in front of the house. I am not a perfect housekeeper, but to find one of my baking pans lying outside on the ground was more than I could understand. Then I remembered my apple pie, and the Bartsches dog. We got no dessert that day, and I don't think that dog will have needed a meal. Such experiences made me mad, I must admit, but there must have been some reason why they happened.

To break the routine of our humdrum life in the arid desert, we went to Ceballos every Saturday afternoon to shop. On one such occasion we happened to go along one of the backstreets, unpaved of course, and came upon a scene where a goat was being butchered on the sidewalk. A bunch of skinny dogs were involved in the affair, ever on the alert to catch any cuttings that should happen to come their way. "Look at that. There are at least 15 dogs around that butchering crew," I said disgustedly. "Now Betty don't exaggerate too much," Menno chided me. To defend myself, I started to count them, and it turned out that Menno was right. I had exaggerated. There were only 14 dogs.



January passed without special incidents. On one occasion one of the lenses in my glasses broke, so that meant going to Torreon. For some unknown reason, our paycheck came late that month, so Menno had to go to one of the neighbors to borrow some money to have my glasses fixed.

The incredible dust was one thing we were not used to, and could not get used to. Compared to these dust storms, we

had seen very little dust at *Quellen* Colony. On one particular Sunday, March 10, we had an especially bad dust storm. We visited Cornelius Fehrs and Peter Walls. When we returned home, I could not distinguish the colour, or the pattern, of the lower end of the quilt on our bed, which stood partly beneath the window. I took the quilt by all four corners, carried it out and shook off the dust.

The next day I spent the forenoon sweeping and hauling out the dust. I even sprinkled the rough cement floor with water, which brought a fresh smell into our abode. I was very pleased to have Menno come home to such a clean house at noon. During the last recess I sat outside and watched the children at their play. But soon after I came in, I noticed a storm approaching, and by the time school was dismissed the storm was so fierce, and the dust so intense, that none of the students ventured out. Only Menno and Arden came home since we lived so close, and in the leeward side of the school. Even in the house the air was misty. I let all my work lie, and took off my glasses, because wiping them clean lasted only such a short time.

At seven in the evening the storm subsided, so I began cleaning again. First, I took the broom and swept the tops of table and the cooking stove. After I had wiped them with a dry cloth and washed them, I started to make supper. Before I started the cleaning in the bedroom I looked at the window sill. When I saw that layer of dust, I got a measuring stick and found the dust exactly half an inch thick. By the time we had all eaten our fill and gone to bed, the air was completely still again. Plastic was not known at that time, or else we surely would have covered the windows with it.

...[the Dueck's had to leave Yermo because of Menno Dueck's declining health, ed.]

Leaving

I quickly did some laundry for the boys on the familiar scrubbing board, including the baby's eleven blue striped diapers, and stowed the wet laundry into my big homemade oil cloth shopping bag. Drying it would have to wait for some other time and place. We packed the necessary items, and left for Ceballos, where we would leave our pickup and take the bus to Chihuahua. When we were about halfway to the highway on the ever dusty road we saw a pickup coming in front of us. We stopped to let it pass, and to our surprise it also stopped and Menno's oldest brother Henry B. Dueck stepped out. He had met my sister Agnes in Chihuahua and she had told him that Menno was sick and he should go visit him. He had taken the bus to Ceballos, and hired the taxi to bring him to the Mennonite settlement. Since we were on our way already, he just got into our pickup, and accompanied us to Ceballos and on to Chihuahua.

After arriving in Chihuahua, he soon left for home. The first thing we did in Chihuahua was to rent a hotel room, so I could hang the wet clothes out to dry, on hooks, chairs and whatever else I found to hang clothes on. The Hotel Macaida was popular with the *Quellen* Colony people at that time, so it was not much of a decision to pick that hotel. Next we went to the doctor who knew Menno. The doctor examined him, and said that he was not qualified to treat this illness, and sent us on to another physician. So we went there, taking our three small boys with us. Menno was too weak to carry our 16 month old baby, so I carried him.

Hospitalized

This doctor also examined Menno, and asked scores of questions, which all coincided with the symptoms of Menno's illness. The doctor really painted a dark picture of Menno's condition. We knew that Menno was sick, but we had not realized it was as serious as the doctor claimed it to be. He immediately wrote out the necessary forms and sent us to the laboratory to take a series of tests. The next day, Wednesday, March 21, happened to be a national holiday when all businesses would be closed, but because of the urgency of the situation, he made arrangements at the laboratory to make the tests the next morning.

At eight o'clock in the morning we were at the laboratory, as the doctor had ordered us, but found the doors still locked. Exhausted and drained, Menno slumped down on the concrete steps, and started to vomit again. I stood by helplessly, one boy on my arms and two beside me. But it did not take long until a pretty car drove up, a gentleman stepped out, opened the door to the laboratory, and let us in. It took him quite a while to take all the different samples to make the desired tests. To our dismay he said that the results of the tests would not be ready till the next day at five o'clock in the afternoon.

Menno was of course too sick to walk around on the streets, so we spent the day resting in the hotel. I was busy entertaining the boys and keeping them quiet. At noon I went out to buy something to eat, and later Menno went to buy milk for the baby.

In the same manner we idled away the Friday morning, and in the afternoon we took a taxi to the laboratory for the test results. The doctor's office was in the same building, so it was easy to get there. After the doctor examined and studied the tests, he turned to Menno and said that he had a strong case of hepatitis, a serious sickness of the liver, and that he would hospitalize him immediately. "That cannot be, because I have my family here, and I need to take them home first," Menno protested.

"That would be the worst thing for you to do," replied the doctor. "You need rest. Rest is most important for your sickness. You need to go to the hospital promptly." "But what shall I do with my family?" "I don't know about that, but you need to go to the hospital." Resigning ourselves to the fact that we had no other choice, we gathered up our three boys and went out into the street to wait for a city bus.



God's support in gloom and despondency

Knowing life could and would not stand still, I numbly walked across the street to catch the bus back to the hotel. I gave the small shopping bag to Arden, the oldest, and told him to hold fast to it, because everything we have here in Chihuahua is in there. I carried Peter, the baby. I bade Vernon and Arden to hold on to my skirt, one on each side, so I could always feel the tug, to be assured that they were still coming along. The bus arrived and we went back into the city.

What a relief to finally enter the familiar hotel again, safe and sound. After we had secured the key at the front desk, Arden happily ran ahead of us up the stairs to the second floor, and unlocked the door to our room. After we were all in the room, I immediately remembered the shopping bag with all our valuables, and turned to Arden and said, "Okay, now give me that bag." "Where is it? I don't have it," he replied baffled.

"You don't have that bag?" I asked alarmed. He turned to

the door and opened it, and to my great relief I found the shopping bag there, right beside the door. He must just have set it down to open the door. After I grabbed it, I held it real tight for a while. I definitely could not have afforded to lose that.

The first thing I had to do was to go and find milk for Peter. I took some money and went out into the semi darkness, not sure where the store was where Menno had bought milk the other day. But God always provides, and so He did now. To my great relief, when I stepped out into the street, I met Heinrich U. Kornelsen's Peter, a truck driver from *Quellen* Colony. Although we never had had any special connections with him, at the place and in the situation I was in now, I immediately felt very comforted to be in the presence of someone I knew I could trust. I briefly informed him of my plight, and he was ever so ready to assist me in any way possible. He knew right away where that store was, came along and helped me make my purchase. He even offered to carry Peter, commenting that it must be heavy for me to carry him all the way. But Peter was a very shy boy, and at that moment he seemed to have a special love for me. Before we entered our hotel room again, Peter Kornelsen told me the hour he would be leaving in the morning, and said he would come to my room so I could give him a letter for our parents and siblings. Nobody back home knew of our predicament.



I was unaware of the fact that the hospital had no visiting hours in the morning. So I prepared the boys, walked the six city blocks to the bus stop and boarded the bus with them, to visit Menno. God in His wisdom shut my eyes to the fact that absolutely no children under twelve are allowed into the hospital. As soon as I entered the waiting room that truth hit me, and hit me hard. Again I realized how alone I was. No person to help me and no one to understand me. But I had the Lord to lean on, and that I truly learned to do in those days. My very limited knowledge of Spanish made it impossible to communicate with the nurses. If only I could briefly see Menno and ask him how he was doing. Suddenly I saw this Mennonite man who had watched us yesterday evening, coming down the hallway. "Now here comes my help," I thought. "This man saw our sad plight yesterday. Surely he will help me and I will be able to speak with him." "My husband is in the hospital," I confided to him, "and I desperately want to see him, but I do not know what to do with the boys. Can you help me?"

He gazed at me and finally said in a tone as careless as could be, "Well I don't know either," and with that he walked off, continuing to blow smoke out of nose and mouth. "O my," I thought. "If there ever was a man with a hard heart, that must be the one." After a few steps he turned around and said in a sarcastic tone, "That nurse over there knows English, and you probably also speak English."

I sat down and after weeping for a while, I gathered myself again, and set off in search of that nurse. Since I had taken note of which room she entered, I quickly found her, explained my situation and asked her for help. "Yes, I can help you," She replied in a friendly tone. "In your case, I will allow you a brief visit, even though it's not visiting time. If you can persuade the oldest two boys to remain in the waiting room, I will let you take the baby along." "Yes," I said, "these two boys will stay here, but not the baby." "Okay, take him along," she repeated.

I quickly returned to the oldest boys and promised to buy them as much chewing gum as they would want, if they would stay here obediently until I came back. "But stay here and by no means go out of the hospital. Just remain sitting on these chairs." "Okay," they promised submissively.

Relieved I walked off to Menno's room, with Peter on my arm. I had not gone far until another nurse came and curtly told me that children were not allowed in the hospital. Not knowing enough Spanish to tell her that the other nurse had permitted me to take the baby along, I turned around, disappointed, and went back to the waiting room. I told Arden and Vernon to keep Peter there, and to take care that he not walk out. "If he will try to get away, just hold him tightly. No matter how loud he screams, you just hold him."

Again I set off to see my husband. What a relief to finally see my loved one again. But I was not allowed to enter the room, because of the contagiousness of Menno's illness. I had not stood by the door long when another Mennonite man happened to walk past. When he saw me he asked in a very tender, caring voice, "Are those your boys in the waiting room?" "Yes," I said. "Well, they have spilled some milk on the floor, but the nurses are cleaning it up already," he continued in his soft voice.

I immediately realized that I had been away from the boys long enough. Even though my visit with Menno had been brief, I had found out that he felt somewhat better, had rested well during the night and was being well taken care of.



It was now Sunday morning, a week after that eventful Sunday with my sister Agnes, back in Yermo. In due time we were ready, and all set off to the hospital. Now I had someone to look after the boys and I could be relaxed when I went in to visit Menno. For dinner we went to a restaurant, and finally were able to eat a real meal, not just baked stuff, like we were almost used to.



During the conversations we had had with the doctor, he had already told us that it was out of the question for Menno to resume teaching after his recovery, because he should do absolutely nothing for at least two months. So we knew we would not go back to Yermo to finish the school term. Deeming it best to get all our belongings back from Yermo without delay, Cornie Friesen and I left by bus for Ceballos the next morning. Sister Lena stayed in Chihuahua with Arden and Peter. I took Vernon along with me. In Ceballos we took our pickup and went the remaining eighteen kilometers to our home. Cornie had to rely completely on me to give driving directions, because he had never been here before.

Our neighbor Mr. Johan Bartsch, always ready and helpful, saw what was happening, and together with his sons, came to help load the furniture. The Bartsches even invited us for dinner. We did not care to take the remaining nine chickens back home, so we gave them to the Bartsches. Peter D. Walls had been interested in our new stove, so I sold it to them. By evening we were back in Chihuahua with our load.



Arden did not care to go along, because at the hospital there was no interesting pastime for him. Since Ben Loewens wanted to come back to the hotel room as soon as they had had their appointment with the doctor, I decided that Arden could stay in the hotel room. But I strictly ordered him to stay in the room. Since he was interested in books and anything that pertained to school, I had already bought a scribbler with squares for him. He quickly got his scribbler and pencil, lay down on his stomach on the floor, and contentedly started to copy words out of a Spanish magazine. When I returned several hours later, Lena told me that he still had lain in the same position, copying Spanish words, when she had returned. How situations had already changed from a week ago. My biggest difficulties were over, at least I thought so.

That evening when the Ben Loewens left the hotel, I stayed because I knew that nobody could enter the hospital outside of the visiting hours. For some unknown reason, though, Ben Loewens were granted permission to see Menno. Menno sent word with them that he felt much better. How good to hear that.

But Ben Loewens wanted to leave the next morning, Wednesday, and that meant Arden would be leaving also, and I would be left completely alone. But I knew that Abe F. Petkau came to Chihuahua every Wednesday to buy groceries for his store. So I might at least see a familiar face again.

Morning came. Ben Loewens prepared to leave. I packed Arden's things and prepared him to go along home. The sensation of the situation began to gain weight. I was determined to leave the room with them, and I took my small shopping bag with knitting stuff along. In the lobby we paused and Ben cleared the account. While sitting there and waiting for him to finish, I was overcome by emotion. It was so difficult for me to think that Arden was now also leaving. Suddenly I saw Arden standing at the door crying. Of course I had to go and find out what was wrong. "I feel so sorry for you that you have to stay here all alone," he said between sobs.

Such innocent childish compassion would touch any mother's heart, and in the situation I was in, I had to double my self-composure to be able to control myself. Obediently, but still crying, he got into the pickup with his uncle and aunt, and was gone. I immediately took the bus to the hospital and spent the whole day there. Just as I had presumed, Abe Petkau did come to see Menno shortly.

At five, when the visiting hours ended, I prepared to leave. "Go straight to the hotel," Menno said. "I don't feel at ease when I think of you walking alone on the streets."

I definitely wanted to do that, but I would stop at the Café Royal to eat a good meal before I would go to my room. I needed that to keep up my energy. Just as I entered the restaurant, Abe Petkau came out of the corral with his truck. When he saw me he stopped and said sympathetically, "So now I leave you here all alone." "Yes, that is the way I feel, all alone," I replied, doing my best to control my emotions. He said good-by and left.

I went in and ordered a meal. A regular meal cost 7.00, but this time I treated myself to something special and paid 10.00 Pesos. After an hour I was finally able to swallow everything. Since Menno had told me not to be out on the streets alone after dark, I went straight to the hotel. When I came to my room, I entered, but made a u-turn and went straight out again. I simply could not stand that empty room. I went into the street and cried. I was such a pathetic sight that I don't think I was in danger of anybody attacking me. Never before in my life had I

prayed so fervently and continuously as I had in these last days.

When dusk fell, I knew I had to go in. When I entered the room again, I found to my amazement a Carillon News lying on my bed. We had for a time received it to stay up-to-date with happenings back in Manitoba, and had even changed the address to Yermo. And this one had the Yermo address on it. How this magazine got into that room during the day, I could not figure out, and it remains a mystery to this day. But now I had something to read. And read I did. Never before, or after, did I indulge so deeply in that paper.



Storms subsiding

Finally the day arrived when the doctor said Menno could go home the next day. I do not remember how, but somehow we did get the message home that somebody should come for us. Dad's brother Willi had made arrangements that he would come for us, once Menno was ready to leave. When they arrived in the forenoon, we went to the hospital together, but with such different feelings than a few weeks earlier. The nurses wanted to take Menno out on a wheel chair. Not having walked for a few weeks he definitely was out of practice, but he insisted that if he was not well enough to walk, he was not well enough to go home. After he had practiced walking in his room a little, they finally consented to let him walk out. His shaving had been neglected for a while, his face was still very yellow and he had lost considerable weight. He still was far from a picture of health. But what did all that matter now? We were going HOME! I don't remember ever going home from Chihuahua as happy as this time.

We had not gone far into the mountain range when the car motor overheated. Willi stopped to let it cool off, and started again. In no time it was hot again. Finally he just drove, knowing that not far ahead was a water hole where he could fill the radiator with water. Arriving there, we all contributed to fill

up the radiator. One found an empty bottle to carry water, the other a baking pan, and so we soon had the radiator filled. We continued the journey and arrived home safely. First, I brought Menno to bed and then took our pickup and went to Springstein to get our boys. What a blissful meeting that was. It was almost too good to be true that we were together as family, and able to sleep in our own beds again.

Menno stayed in bed and rested during the next weeks. And he swallowed pills. What a bunch of pills the doctor had given him. They cost almost a 1000 Pesos. The pills, plus the doctor's fees and the hospital bill, took all the money we had earned in Yermo.

A month later Menno went along with somebody to Chihuahua for a check-up. To his disappointment and shock, the doctor said his condition had not improved in the last month. How could that be? Menno did rest like the doctor had commanded. Henry Heide had done the milking and all the field work, and Menno had taken it easy.

After two months we went to see the doctor again. Menno had to retake all the tests. We stayed overnight and the next day we took the results to the doctor. The doctor took them and studied them for a while. Then he laid the papers on the table, stood up and smiled at Menno. "I'm going to tell you something," he began in fluent English. "When you came in the first time three months ago, I never thought you would make it. Your liver was 30 percent dead." That statement pierced Menno so deeply that he hardly heard what the doctor said next. "And two months ago when you came in for your checkup, and I found your condition still so bad, I thought this time when you came we would really start treating you. I expected to do surgery on your liver. But instead of that, I today pronounce you - healthy."

A wave of thankfulness and praise to God overwhelmed us as the truth dawned on us. What more could we do than praise the Lord, thank the doctor and nurses, and start life again with new zeal and resolution.

Reflections

SALVATION, THE ORDNUNG, AND SELF-ESTEEM

Ralph Friesen, Nelson, B.C.

The blind beggar

In the 1980s when my wife Hannah and I and our two young children were living in Zimbabwe—we were teaching at a rural school—we took a trip to South Africa during one of our breaks. On the streets of downtown Pretoria we came upon a woman seated on the sidewalk, a baby in her lap, a pewter cup before her. She was blind, a blind beggar. And she was singing, a chorus that we immediately recognized from Sunday School days:

*Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul
Thank you, Lord, for making me whole
Thank you, Lord, for giving to me*

Thy great salvation so rich and free.¹

We left some coins in the cup and walked on. My mind went into a small turmoil. "Making me whole," she had sung. But she was blind! How could she think of herself as whole . . . ? I tried the words out, singing them for myself. I had no physical disability; in that sense I was whole. But obviously the chorus was talking about a different kind of wholeness. Spiritual wholeness, or salvation.

For this woman, salvation did not require physical perfection, or financial well-being, or racial equality in those apartheid days. Yet, "saved" she was, and grateful for it. I will always remember her, and always remember her song, resonating as

it did with my own chorus-saturated childhood.

We may not associate salvation with the idea of wholeness. Many of us grew up hearing of a dichotomy amongst humans—the saved and the unsaved, a critical, eternal difference between one and the other. The stakes, heaven or hell, were so high that the word was fraught with heavy emotion. The first meaning of “salvation,” in Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary, is “deliverance from the power and effects of sin.” From the Latin *salvare*, “to save.” It also has a more general meaning, along the lines of deliverance from any danger or difficulty, but it begins this way, with a religious meaning. Not just any religion—specifically, Christianity, a Christian concept rooted in the stories and teachings of the Bible.

When my father, a Steinbach Evangelical Mennonite Conference minister, spoke at a missionary conference in the 1950s, in the only recording I have of his voice, he evoked the famous “how great a salvation” passage from Hebrews 2. There the German term is *Seligkeit*, which also translates more generally as happiness, bliss. For the purposes of what I want to say, I am thinking of salvation as *Seelenheil*, a healed soul, wholeness. Not necessarily or primarily a matter of declaring a particular belief and then closing the gate behind you to shut out the pursuing wolves of doubt and relativity. Which still leaves much to be wondered about, including the meaning of “wholeness,” but I’ll leave you, dear reader, to think of your own experience of that, and use it as your reference.

Was the woman sitting on the sidewalks of Pretoria happy? I don’t know. She sang of it. What could be more beautiful? Yet the word “salvation,” or the word “saved”—these words do not carry one simple, agreed-upon emotional connotation for everyone. When you read the title of this article, for example, you will have felt something. Maybe positive anticipation and excitement, to think once again of your own knowledge of salvation, that blessed state. Maybe repugnance, to think of how others have forcefully urged you to get “saved,” which felt like a foreign invasion of your soul rather than a benevolent healing intervention. Maybe confusion, to see these words yoked: salvation and *Ordnung* and self-esteem. Salvation, we have been taught, is free. The *Ordnung* is a set of rules. And self-esteem is a secular term from popular psychology. What connection could exist among these words and the ideas and ideologies behind them?

The *Ordnung*

Ordnung equals order, but for our purposes not just any kind of order. Specifically, as for our ancestors and still for the Hutterites and Amish and Old Order Mennonites today, the *Ordnung* is meant to structure all of life—religious, educational, economic, social. All of it. Having attended the “Anti-Modern Pathways” conference at the University of Winnipeg in October, 2011, I’m going to borrow the term “anti-modern” to describe these traditional Anabaptists and their outlook on the larger social settings in which they exist.

The *Ordnungen* comprise the rules and regulations of the anti-modern church community, containing both broad principles of faith such as non-resistance or submission to authority, and particular applications, such as sober, non-conformist dress, non-attendance at worldly events, and non-use of some modern technologies, especially those that could connect the community to the fast-paced outside world. It can be understood as archaic, a throw-back to what Mircea Eliade calls the



Young Amish women illustrating one aspect of the *Ordnung*—women’s dress. Photo Credit: <http://nursing322sp10.wordpress.com/the-american-amish/>

“sacred” world that existed before the various revolutions of modernity. That world, occupied by “religious man,” is a created cosmos which lives and speaks; it has inherent meaning. The Great Chain of Being of Medieval Europe is one symbol of such a world, in which everything has its place and purpose.²

From a modern perspective, we have a tendency to see the *Ordnung* only as a set of “thou shalt nots.” Even now, when a mainstream Mennonite attempts to explain traditional Mennonites to an outsider, he or she will often begin with a list of Puritan prohibitions: no movies, no dancing, no drinking, no smoking, etc. This hardly feels like salvation to us. It feels more like jail. We’re more enlightened than all that; we’ve learned that salvation is a free gift. Unearned, and not even earnable. Free, for the taking, for anyone who believes.

Free . . . but with conditions. Fundamentalist Christians have codified salvation in their own way, so that certain tenets and belief statements become a kind of salvation bottom line. They too have a structure, as we all do, loosely or rigidly, for what we believe. If this structure is not imposed by some outside authority, like a church or community or formal belief system, then we impose it on ourselves, through habit and routine. Even the freest individual is pretty predictable much of the time. Living in a state of salvation, even the act of being saved—these involve structures and rituals, sacred or profane. Our freedom exists within such structures.

What are the basic differences between the fundamentalist Christian of Mennonite background and the traditional Mennonite Christian understanding of salvation? The first is modern in the sense of an emphasis on the individual and choice. The fundamentalist says, for example, “On July 23, 1957, I was saved when I went up to the front after hearing Mark Gripp speak at Red Rock Lake Bible Camp.” And that’s it; no more is required. The traditionalist says—well, probably nothing, since words are not quite to be trusted, or perhaps all of this hasn’t even been thought through. But the description might go along the lines that he or she came under conviction in a certain year of life, probably in the late teens, and saw that it was time to become baptized and join the church, and in making this conscious decision, committed him/herself to being a

follower of Jesus within the context of the community and the *Ordnung*. In this way he or she hopes, but does not assume, that he or she is saved.

At present, among the traditional Mennonites of Mexico and South America, there are missionaries, who themselves go by the name “Mennonite.” The stated goal of some of these missionaries is to bring the lost to salvation. The assumption seems to be that the traditional Mennonites are, in fact, lost. Not saved. There is even an organized “Mission to Amish People” despite the astounding Amish witness to the world when in Nickel Mines, Pa. in 2006, they extended forgiveness to the family of a man who murdered their children, demonstrating a reach into dimensions of spiritual transcendence even the self-defined saved would hardly be able to reach.

“The Way”

It appears that every path of salvation requires an *Ordnung* of some kind. We don’t like the traditional *Ordnung* very much because of all those prohibitions and restrictions and requirements of obedience. Yet we are aware that life requires us to make hard choices, to make sacrifices, to understand that we cannot always have what we want—and “wanting” in itself can be a burden. At the afore-mentioned “Anti-Modern Pathways” conference Hans Werner of the University of Winnipeg described the *Ordnung* as practiced in the past and still today by conservative Mennonites in Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, etc., as, for them, “the way of salvation.” I was struck by the term: the way.



The famous *The Broad and the Narrow Way* painting. Its origin is attributed to a design by Charlotte Reihlen of Stuttgart, Germany in the 19th Century, subsequently painted by Herr Schacher. It was reproduced in Dutch and English versions. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons

Although Jesus talked of “the way,” and even said: “I am the way,” many readers will likely identify this language more with Buddhism, or at least Taoism, than Christianity. But whatever the associations, thinking about salvation as a “way” leads us to thinking of it not so much as an isolated event or one-time conversion experience, as a practice. For “anti-modern” peoples, the practice is a matter of following Jesus in a prescribed manner which they think of as Bible-based, involving humility, simplicity, and separation from the world. Do that, and you are saved. Maybe. Because, inherent in the humility teaching is a reluctance to assume knowledge of God’s judgments in these matters. A smiling, confident declaration: “I know that I’m saved,” is foreign to them, considered presumptuous and even arrogant.

Self-esteem

Another speaker at the conference, Andy Martin, an “ex” Old Order Mennonite now at the University of Toronto, said that Old Order spirituality was rooted partly in the Benedictine monastic tradition, in keeping with humility and separation from the world—one of the original Swiss Anabaptists, Michael Sattler, had been a Benedictine.³ Martin then went on to introduce another connection I had sometimes wondered about, but never really exposed to the light of inquiry: could individual self-esteem actually be higher in these “anti-modern” communities than in secular society at large? Could that be so even if, paradoxically, the *Ordnung* taught that the beginning of wisdom was fear (of God) and that salvation must be worked out in “fear and trembling”? The proper attitude of the individual inside the community is humility; he or she comes before God as an unworthy sinner. Strangely, but enticingly, Martin seemed to suggest that true self-esteem begins with just that kind of understanding.

Hmmm. Again, since I make my living as a Marriage and Family Therapist, and since I daily encounter any number of mainstream society clients struggling with the problem of low self-esteem, my attention was piqued on more than one front. I was interested as a student of the mentality of the generations of Mennonites who went before me, without whom I would not be here. I was interested as a mental health professional. And I wondered about my own life pilgrimage.

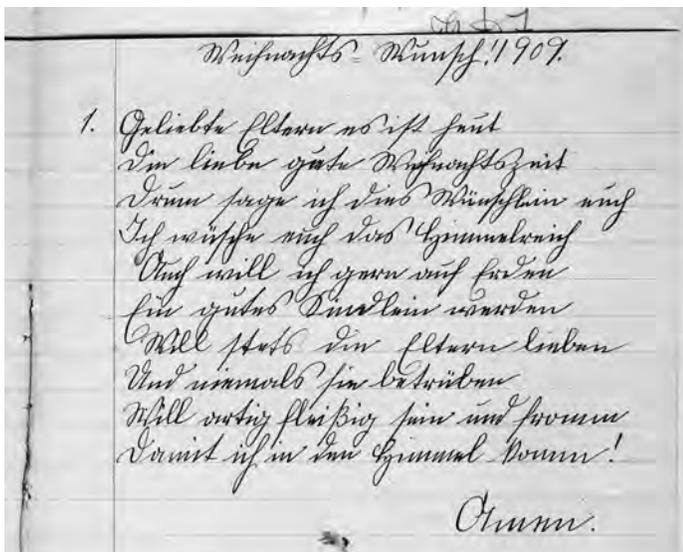
Gordon Neufeld and the parent-child bond

This spring I happened to attend a series of lectures entitled “Power to Parent: the Vital Connection,” presented by well-known psychologist and author Dr. Gordon Neufeld. The lectures were not delivered in-person; they were actually DVDs of Neufeld speaking. Listening to him, many connections opened up for me, including connections to my theme here, of salvation and the *Ordnung*. I may not be representing Neufeld as he would want to be represented; for that you can read his best-selling book (with Dr. Gabor Maté) *Hold On to Your Kids*, or visit his website. His biography says he got his first degree at the University of Winnipeg (as I did), and of course his name is a Mennonite name, so I’m curious, but won’t try to weave those threads into my discourse.

What I understand Neufeld to be saying is that the first principle of parenting is to do all things in a context of attachment between parent and child. He also thinks that, in a family, parents must be in charge, for the benefit of all concerned. And that it’s good for children to obey their parents.

The word “obey” is highly charged in modern society, because of countless examples of evil being committed by those in authority, or those who said they were only taking orders, and because it runs counter to our strong value of individual autonomy and freedom. For our ancestors and contemporary Old Colony people, however, obedience—to the *Ordnung* and thus to God—was and is central to the Christian life, to salvation. Among traditional Mennonites, a good child obeys his or her parents, unquestioningly. Take the example of my father’s Christmas / New Year’s “Wünsche” to his parents at the end of the year of 1909 (my father was 7). After wishing them “das Himmelreich” (the Kingdom of Heaven) he adds:

*Auch will ich gern auf Erden
Ein gutes Kindlein werden
Will stets die Eltern lieben
Und niemals sie betrüben
Will artig fleiszig sein und fromm
Damit ich in den Himmel komm!*



A 1909 “Wünsch” which the author’s father would recite to his parents and extended family at Christmas or New Years. Source: the author.

*And here on earth I long to be
A good little child
Always loving my parents
Never disappointing them
Well-behaved, industrious, pious
So that I will get to be in heaven.*

How will he get to heaven? By always showing love to his parents, never causing them sadness or distress, and by being industrious and well-behaved and pious. In short, by obeying them, following the *Ordnung* in the home and in the village.

In later life my father, who was pastor of the Kleine Gemeinde/EMC in Steinbach in the 1940s and 50s, assimilated other, more fundamentalist interpretations of salvation. But even these retained a strict set of rules forbidding movie-going, drinking, smoking, swearing, ostentatious display, etc. which actually resembled the traditional *Ordnung* in many ways. And he always maintained respect for the beliefs of earlier generations.

But regarding this question of children and obedience: Here’s where Gordon Neufeld makes it interesting. Children, he says, must *want* to obey their parents. They must be so closely attached to their parents that it pains them to disobey; rather than do so, they would wish to come into harmony with Mom or Dad. And parents, in turn, shall not require obedience for its own sake or just for their own convenience—they shall have the child’s well-being at heart. Neither shall it be brought about by threats or force, or by instilling fear. “Collect before you redirect,” says Neufeld. In other words, you can direct them best—or only—when you are truly connected with them, emotionally.

A child will grow up with healthy self-esteem not if it gets everything it wants, but if it learns to obey its parents as they teach that the child has a contribution to make—to siblings, the household, and the community as a whole. The child can do this in the knowledge that being asked to contribute, and being loved, are not contradictory, but aspects of the same story of good connection with parents.

Much of current evangelicalism (as opposed to the American fundamentalism of my growing-up years in the 1950s) emphasizes God’s love. If you believe that you are a precious child of God, and live your life from this understanding, then you do have hold of one of the pillars of self-esteem. (If you stake your self-esteem on your good fortune in being “right” while adherents to other religions are wrong, that is of course a shakier foundation.)

By comparison, the theme of personal unworthiness combined with unquestioning obedience that runs through traditional Mennonite understanding would seem to create the conditions for individuals who would suffer terribly from lack of self-esteem. And though such can be found in the anti-modern communities, we don’t have evidence of a greater incidence of depression (often connected with low self-esteem) amongst them than in “modern” populations, and the level of inventiveness, productiveness and peaceful interactions with others reported by many visitors and social scientists would suggest that these communities produce individuals who do have a healthy level of self-esteem.

The earth revolves around the sun

To function properly in their communities, these individuals have, it seems, denied the usual claims of the ego such as we modern individuals are all too familiar with. Could this be a form of transcendence? If so, they have accomplished what the contemporary Christian mystic Cynthia Bourgeault calls the displacement of the ego as “the seat of one’s personal identity.” A true example of living the precept, “Thy will be done.” To do this, says Bourgeault, is to awaken the “true self” or “higher Self” . . . “rather like discovering that the earth revolves around the sun rather than vice versa.” It’s an interesting analogy for a traditional people who might well still be convinced that, in the physical universe, the sun revolves around the earth. Suffice it to say that for them, the value of the individual is second to that of the community.

The mystery of authentic self-esteem is that it does not at all involve self-congratulation or narcissism, which are actually merely clever unconscious disguises for low self-esteem. Rather, it involves a lived connection to a higher Self, whose characteristics can be recognized as compassion, courage, humour, curiosity, resilience, and so on. The traditional *Ordnung*

creates at least some of the conditions for the presence of such a Self through its right understanding that we (the “earth”) revolve around the sun rather than vice versa.

The Fundamentalist insistence on the centrality of blood sacrifice for salvation, coupled with the demand that every knee shall bow to the superiority of a maligned Saviour who in the end will be King over all (and the wicked shall pay) is psychologically and spiritually foreign to authentic self-esteem. The over-heated, strangely joyful imagination that secretly or often openly delights in vengeful fantasies played out on the world’s historical stage is rooted in fear, and in the imperatives of the ego. Mennonite traditionalists certainly acknowledge “Christ died for me” as essential to salvation, and they refer often to the Judgement Day, a time of accounting. But the tone and emphasis are different.

Traditionalists also seem to know that to make salvation a matter of an individual decision, expressed in a declaration of belief, is to overload the individual. Our salvation can’t be entirely in our own hands; we just don’t have the ability to carry it off, all on our own. Rather, the community must help us, even in some way do it for us, by imposing on us a ritual way which we, in time, come to internalize and accept as our own. Or not—there is always the possibility of “not.”

Children should want to obey their parents because the parents have created a strong, positive, loving attachment to them, with patience and vision. What if we were to apply this idea to different concepts of salvation, different *Ordnungen* from traditional to contemporary? If we want to obey because we love our parents/ministers/deities, and believe they love us, then the problem of individual freedom more or less evaporates. When we feel we’re acting—and being acted upon—in love, we feel free. We’ll still run into our own ego demands; we’ll still run into one situation after another in which we have to test whether we’re able to set aside the ego’s imperatives in an attitude of servanthood. But doing this in the context of attachment has a very different feel from doing it fearfully, resentfully, or with the sickening sense of abandoning ourselves.

My sojourns in evangelical (as opposed to Fundamentalist) circles lead me to believe that there has been a resurgent, energetic, sincere reclamation of a healthy emphasis on God’s love. Yes, evangelicals tend to worry about the possibility of losing focus and going astray if they de-emphasize God’s judgment, and some still hold fast to a conviction that well-directed volleys of Bible verses will solve all problems, whether individual or social. But many evangelicals now send out a message of inclusivity in their telling of the salvation story, and many, as well, put “love your neighbour” into concrete action. Their teachings on humility, though, might benefit from a deeper look at the traditions from which they emerged, whether mystical or separate-from-the-world communitarian.

Has the God of the traditional Mennonites changed, too, in the direction of “collect before you redirect”? I’m not in a very good position to tell; all my visits to Mexico seem to find me lounging in a beach chair, cerveza in hand, and no



Dr. Gordon Neufeld conducting a workshop on raising children. Photo Credit: www.amotherinisrael.com.

Mennonites in sight, as far as I can tell from the sunburned crowd of scantily swim-suited bodies. They’ve had a lot of bad press, these traditional peoples. Not all is well with them, socially—and, one infers, spiritually. Perhaps they would do well to invite Gordon Neufeld down for a few workshops on parenting—and, by extension, living according to the *Ordnung*—through attachment. (Does Neufeld speak Low German?)

But the traditional peoples also show us examples of hospitality, ingenuity, perseverance, and courage that I believe are attributes of the “saved.” They have their *Ordnung*—their way. Some of them act with the quiet, unassuming confidence that characterizes a healthy sense of self-esteem, and others don’t, but their

accomplishments—I am thinking now both of our ancestors and people in the present—required a base level of such a sense, and this was and is derived in large part from their faith.

Of course a healthy level of self-esteem, wherever found, does not prove a particular social or religious system to be true. It shows something is working though, and this attracts our attention. Personally I agree with Gordon Neufeld that parents—and, by extension, social/religious systems—fail when they rely on fear to achieve their goals. Obedience or belief, communitarian or individualistic—if it is rooted in fear it cannot be whole; it will always have a coerced quality. So this is the challenge for us as parents, and for religious leaders as parent-figures—not to force, but to “suffer the little children to come unto me.”

Endnotes

1 The song was composed by Seth & Bessie Sykes, evangelists from the United Kingdom. Seth, who was a tram conductor, resigned in 1929, and both of them travelled throughout Britain with a barrel organ, singing, preaching the gospel and retelling stories from the Bible with lantern slides. First copyright for the song was in 1940. <http://www.hymnpod.com/2009/01/27/thank-you-lord/>, retrieved August 23, 2012.

2 Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 1957), p. 165.

3 Martin did not go so far, however, as to claim that St. Benedict was actually a euphemism for “St. Benny Dyck” (reference attributed to my friend and fellow Steinbach native Clint Toews).

D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc.

Visit our web page at

www.plettfoundation.org

for more information about the Foundation, our program of grants, our Fellowship program for students, and news.



Local Histories

Researching Schoenthal

A presentation made to the History Seekers in Altona MB , February 29, 2012, by Mary Neufeld, Winnipeg

You may ask, "Why a history of Schoenthal, and why me?" It all started with my writing and publishing the biography of my father, Wilhelm H. Falk. This led to my being asked to become a board member of Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. This in turn led to my being asked to write a village history. The committee in charge of local histories is planning to have histories written of all Mennonite villages in southern Manitoba and Adolf Ens asked if I would like to do Rudnerweide, thinking that there was a Rudnerweider church in that village. However, the church there was always a Sommerfelder church, but it is where the organisation of the Rudnerweider church took place and where my father was ordained as its first *Aeltester*. My answer was an immediate, "No!" Then I added, "If anything, I would do Schoenthal." It got me thinking, and eventually I agreed to do Schoenthal, because this is where my father grew up, went to school, served as *Vorsaenger* and was elected and ordained as minister in the Sommerfelder church.

I was given to understand that people here tonight might find it interesting to hear about the process I use to write this history and so that is what I will start with.

I am not a trained historian and so I sometimes think I may be a fraud. I approach this from what makes sense to me. Since I am no longer young and am retired, I take the time to pace myself and enjoy retirement at the same time by doing other things. Having said that, there is something enjoyable about the process of putting it all together. Of course it helps when I am somewhat familiar with the subject and have a connection; in this case my father and the village where he preached and went to school. I get very engrossed when I am writing and trying to put the pieces of the story together from various sources. It becomes like a puzzle, fitting them into the right slots. The problem is that sometimes there are extra pieces and other times not enough, so that becomes a challenge. Writing history means that the facts have to be accurate, as much as possible, and sources documented. I asked Rudy Wiebe when he was doing a reading of *Sweeter Than All the World*, which is written as a kind of history with a map inside the cover, how the reader could know what was fact and what was fiction. I thought he looked rather taken aback, and finally answered, "You don't." I was writing the biography at that time and thought to myself, "Fiction writers have it easy." I don't believe that anymore. I know they have other challenges.

I start by making a timeline and listing things that need to be included and a possible organisation of the facts. This just gets me started. As I research and start writing, the list is expanded and changed, and I adjust by inserting and moving things around.

To begin the research, I looked for histories of villages from existing sources, historical magazines and books. Books that contain information on Schoenthal and Mennonite villages in general are probably familiar to most of you: *Church, Family*

& *Village*, edited by Adolf Ens et al, *The Rural Municipality Of Rhineland Volost & Municipality* by Gerhard Ens, *Altona, The Story of a Prairie Town*, by Esther Epp-Tiesen, *History of the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church* and *A Prairie Pilgrim*. As I peruse these, I make notes; insert post-it notes, etc. Along the way I try to gather pictures, maps and graphs that might be included. The Altona archives and the Rhineland Municipality Offices are also sources for information. One of the interesting parts of doing primary research is talking to people who may have memories or knowledge of the subject material you are writing about.

As mentioned, I already knew something about Schoenthal when I started because of what I learned while writing the biography of my father. As I thought more about the beginnings of not only this village, but other Mennonite settlements, I realised that the Mennonite West Reserve was made possible because of the Canadian government's treaties with aboriginals, establishing their reserves and displacing them from the land that was part of their territory. So I looked up information on Treaty # 1 that dealt with the Rouseau Indian Reserve, which is near what became the Mennonite West Reserve, and followed up on newspaper reports, etc.

Mennonite Heritage Centre is one of the places Mennonite historians go to, and of course I went there too. I checked out several sources to which Adolf Ens directed me, as well as back issues of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Bert Friesen has done, and is still doing, indexing which is enormously helpful so that I was able to look up references to Schoenthal specifically. As you can imagine, finding relevant and interesting articles can include laborious translating. Another helpful source was the "Pioneer Portraits of the Past," a series edited by Lawrence Klippenstein and Elizabeth Bergen, that appeared in the *Red River Valley Echo* from January 28, 1974 to December 10, 1980 and have been compiled at MHC.

The Manitoba Archives is another place to go for information. I perused all the public school registers for Schoenthal which are stored there, and made lists and noted interesting facts. I began to question myself as to whether these lists of teachers, trustees and their salaries, etc. should be included. Thinking that lists may be boring to readers, I asked Adolf about this and he said that some people like to go down the list just to find their name, or that of a relative, or friend, or to see if there are any recognisable names. One way to deal with this is to include them in an appendix.

Manitoba Archives has preserved Homestead Applications for land patents on microfilm and so I painstakingly went through those and had a CD burned so that I could follow up at home and make hard copies. When I think about what makes up the history of a village I realise that its existence and activities all revolve around the lives of the individuals and families that make up the small community, starting with the original

Application for Homestead Patent

Under the Provisions of the Dominion Lands Act, 42 Vic, Cap. 31, and amendments thereto.

To the Agent of Dominion Lands,
District.

Sir,-- I have the honor to apply, under the Provisions of "The Dominion Lands Act," and amendments thereto, for a Patent from the Crown for my Homestead ~~from~~ ^{ground} set forth in the annexed Affidavits.

Dated February 8 1884

Heinrich Falk

COUNTY OF Manchester
PROVINCE OF MANITOBA.

Agent of Dominion Lands

of the Municipality of Schoentahl
in the County of Manchester

and province of Manitoba, to wit, make oath as follows:--

(1) The land for which I claim a Homestead Patent, under the Provisions of Sub-Section 11 of Section 34 "Dominion Lands Act," is the SE quarter of Section No. 19 Township 2 Range 1 W containing 160 acres, my Pre-emption being the SW quarter of Section No. 19 Township 2 Range 1 W part of the Manonite Settlement of Schoentahl

(2) That none of the buildings belonging to other residents in the said Settlement are on this land.

(3) I obtained entry for the above-mentioned Half Section in Dominion Lands Office at Cornwall on the 29 day of Sept 1879 and have been actually residing in the said Settlement of Schoentahl and cultivating lands within the limits of the same continuously since the 29 day of Sept 1879 and I am still residing therein and cultivating the said lands.

(4) I had last season 25 during the year this application is made 25 acres under crop, and have, at the date of this application, altogether 25 acres, broken and under cultivation on the lands within the limits of the Settlement aforesaid.

(5) My improvements in buildings are of the following descriptions and dimensions:

1 House 20 x 32 } 1881
1 Stable 12 x 16 }

(6) I am a British subject by Naturalization. Heinrich Falk

Affirmed before me this 8 day of February 1884 at Cornwall of Manitoba W. B. Leck

Certificate of Naturalization dated Feb 2-3 forwarded to Department of the Secretary of State Feb 17 1884

NOTE.—The Affidavits may be sworn before a Justice of the Peace, Commissioner for taking Affidavits, Land Agent or Clerk in any Dominion Lands Office in Manitoba, New Brunswick, or the North-West Territories. The size, description in detail, and date of erection of all buildings should be given, and this Form followed as nearly as practicable in making application for Homestead Patent. Copies of this Form furnished on application at any Dominion Lands Office.

Entered P. Emphor Melcomville No. 5705 April 25 79

The Homestead Application for SE 19-2-1W by Heinrich Falk, the author's grandfather in 1884. Credit: Manitoba Archives, Mary Neufeld.

settlers. So I decided to write something about each original settler. One of the challenges I dealt with was how much detail to include when there was a lot of information for some and very little for others.

Some very interesting information is found in these homestead applications. Several documents in particular were extremely intriguing. They appeared along with the documents for Peter Falk (my great-grandfather) and Aaron Dueck, a relative by marriage. Peter Falk had received his patent in 1886 and Aaron Dueck in 1887. Twenty one years later (1907), a lawyer for Peter and Aaron wrote to the Department of the Interior requesting that a patent issued to Emma Snow regarding the West ½ section of 17, township 2, range 1 west, be sent to him and enclosed a fee of \$2.50 to cover the cost. The response to this letter is that “no patent appears to have been issued to Emma Snow.” Another follow-up letter from the Department asks if the land description given is correct since a patent for SW-17 was issued to Peter Falk and one for NW-17 to Aaron Dueck. I have no answers for this mystery, only speculation and questions.

Who was Emma Snow? Where did the name come from and why the request? When I googled Emma Snow for curiosity’s sake and in the slight hope of discovering something, I found numerous entries. One was a list of addresses for 64 Emma Snow’s in the U.K.; another listed 14 professional Emma Snow’s in a variety of top executive, administrative and other positions in the U.K or Australia. One cited Emma Snow as an actress and still another was a site for Emma Snow as a product; using words such as “Cheap Prices” or “Best Value.” This to me was all very interesting and surprising information. As you can imagine, this changed the direction of my speculations. I was reminded again that there is probably very little information that does not somehow impact or influence how history is viewed or recorded.

My husband and I were in Ottawa about three years ago and our accommodations were within walking distance of the Parliament buildings as well as the National Archives. I decided to visit the Archives to see if they had anything about Schoenthal, and came up with something very interesting. It was a joint application for a Post Office from the villages of Schoenthal, Bergthal and Gruenthal. This was something new to me, and I was thrilled at this unexpected find. I didn’t look very carefully and filed it away to use in the appropriate place. When the time came to include it, I examined and read it very carefully and discovered that it referred to villages in the East Reserve. What a disappointment. This error could probably be put down to my amateur status as a historian, because on hindsight it became obvious that the documents were referring to a different location. However, that there might also be a Schoenthal in the East Reserve had not occurred to me.

Another aspect of research is of course going directly to the place to gather any information possible. So, I visited the cemeteries in Schoenthal, and made notes of the people buried there in the hopes of finding some information, again making lists and taking pictures. I also talked to some residents living there today, and made a note of how many houses are still there, where the church and school used to be and anything else I deemed interesting. Invariably, I was given names of people who I was told would know something, and when I called that person, another name was given to me. I remember especially, after following up on a number of names, of

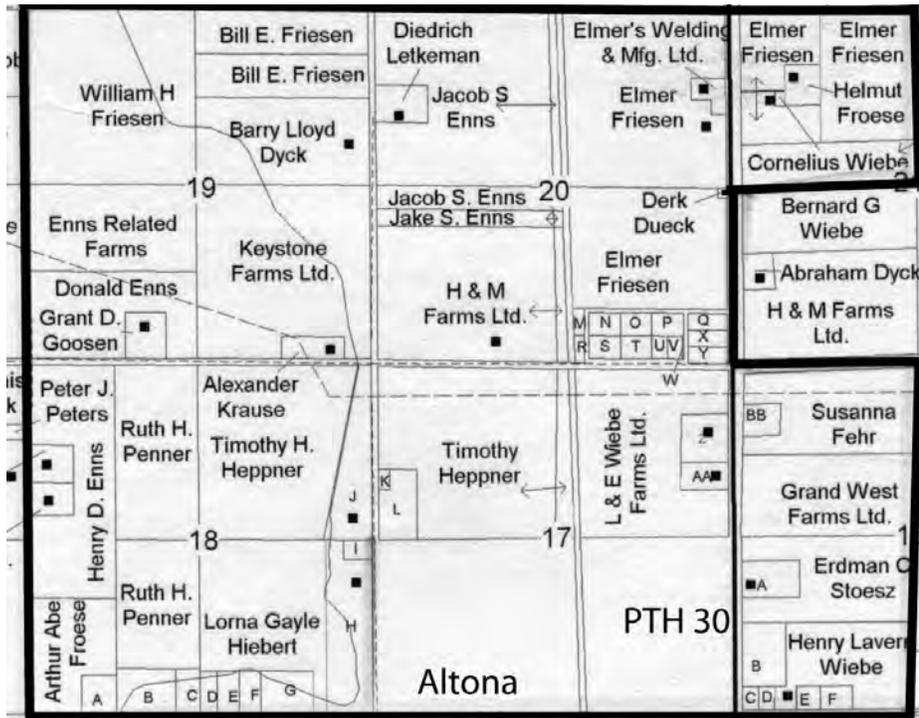


The former Sommerfelder cemetery in Schoenthal, now used by the Reinlaender Church. Photo Credit: Mary Neufeld.

speaking to a person who raised my hopes of finally striking gold. He told me to speak to his wife because she grew up in Schoenthal! However, when I reached her by phone, she immediately corrected her husband, telling me that it was not Schoenthal, but Schoenau, a neighbouring village. I finally gave up on that particular telephone game. Other times tracking down seemingly small, perhaps even insignificant, details led to an interesting story.

In researching my father’s childhood, I had visited and interviewed Eva Dueck who lived in the house where my father grew up, outside of the village itself. I was curious to see the house again, knowing that Eva Dueck was no longer there and had died in 2009 at the age of 104. Last summer, I turned into the driveway and drove past the grove of trees (that had very likely been planted by my grandmother or step-grandfather), that shield the yard and buildings from the view of travellers on the road. I literally had to catch my breath when I emerged into the clearing. It was like the scene out of a novel and seemed as if it appeared out of nowhere. There on this glorious yard of manicured lawn and strategically placed trees and shrubs, in place of the original “little house on the prairie” that I had visited what seemed like just a few short years ago, stood a large, spectacular, rambling ranch house. It was actually seven years ago since the day I visited Eva. I was not only amazed at the transformation, but I was also very curious as to what happened to the original house that was there, which I knew had been remodelled, but had originally been built so as to be nearly indestructible. I seized my courage, got out of the car and knocked on the door, my sister Elizabeth beside me for support. A lovely young woman answered my knock and told me that she was visiting her parents from another province where she was a student. Her parents had been lured here from the United States for a job with Friesens in Altona. When I asked what happened to the old house, she told me that it had been moved to Roland. What an amazing “then and now” picture!

I have found unexpected and interesting connections when talking to people about my project, such as my friend in Brandon telling me that her grandfather was Heinrich Dueck, a homesteader in Schoenthal, and that he had been a director of the *Waisenamt* for many years. She told me that her niece had a lot of historical family material and so I visited this niece at her cottage in St. Malo. She allowed me access to the box of material that her grandmother had compiled. I discovered that Bishop David Schulz was raised by homesteader, Heinrich Dueck. (More about this later.) Among this material was a typed autobiography in German written by David Schulz’s wife Tina, and I learned some interesting things not found in any other sources. Just this week I received pictures concerning



The area of the village of Schoenthal on a 2010 property ownership map. Credit: R.M. of Rhineland.

this homesteader's family from my friend in Brandon.

Some people I talked to told me that Schoenthal is not, and never was, a village, so I asked around. My sister Magdalene Redekop is friends with John Warkentin, historian and geographer and he said that Schoenthal was a village and an original map he had, confirmed it. He very generously gave me this map which he said had never before been published. Perhaps the most definitive argument for its being considered a village is that government documents use the word "village" when referring to Schoenthal. The dictionary simply says: "group of houses etc. in country district, larger than hamlet and smaller than town," which seems to describe this settlement.

Moving on to the actual history of Schoenthal, and what I have learned through these activities, I begin with the simple question of, "Where is Schoenthal?" I'm sure all of you here are familiar with the place. This former village, which might or might not now be considered a hamlet, is less than two miles northwest of Altona, east of the Buffalo Channel. The Schoenthal area consisted of four and three quarter sections of land surrounding the village.

What is surely familiar to everyone here is that it is one of the Mennonite villages in the Mennonite West Reserve settled by Mennonites coming from South Russia (Ukraine) in 1874. Having first settled on the East Reserve (Grunthal/Niverville area), they came to Schoenthal in the West Reserve as early as September 1879.

There are twenty homesteaders listed for the Schoenthal area and the 1881 Federal Census lists nineteen households. Some of the households included parents. Of these not all resided in the village itself but chose to build homes on their homestead, probably some of the earliest Mennonite settlers to move away from the traditional village lifestyle.

Most influential in a Mennonite village were the church leaders, deacons, ministers and *Aeltester*. They ran the private school, dictated the curriculum and appointed teachers.

The school building was built first and church services were held in the school until a church was built. Apparently the Mennonite villages also had mayors, but I have not yet discovered whether Schoenthal ever had a *Schulze* or mayor or who that mayor was.

Schoenthal built a church in 1888 in the southwest corner of Peter Falk's homestead (my great-grandfather). An article in the *Rundschau* describes in detail the construction of the church building, the planning stages, as well as its finish and the first worship service. Unfortunately the editor neglected to include the name of the writer but comparing it to the writing of other articles and biographical information of Peter Epp, I think I can safely conclude that this article too was written by Peter Epp, one of the original homesteaders. He was secretary of the *Waisenamt*, author of a book of poetry, as well as having published a genealogy of the Epp family. This is the translated article from the *Rundschau*:

Since it has been a long time since I have sent a report to the Rundschau, when I came home tired from the field today and found that Rundschau No. 16 carried only five columns of "News from Mennonite circles," I thought maybe everyone experiences the same as I do: The work is so urgent at this time that people are too tired to write something for the Rundschau. But then where will the editor find material for his columns, if everyone is too tired to write? I thought this cannot be! I am definitely tired, but to write I can sit and rest. Well then! Little pen come here! Let's see if you are able to achieve something.

Next I want to report that already earlier at a general brotherhood meeting it was decided that this spring a new meeting house should be built in Schoenthal (which in our Gemeinde will be the fifth) to which purpose a collection was organized to be held in the Gemeinde. When, however, this was not sufficient to cover the costs, the missing money was borrowed from the municipality's treasury.

Consequently on March 15, 1888 Aeltester John Funk, Rev. Abr. Bergen, Abr. Schroeder, Isaak Giesbrecht and Deacon Heinrich Bergen came to us and called the village church community together to meet in the school building to discuss the building of this church and there it was agreed that the meeting house would be built on Peter Falk's land. [The Rundschau inadvertently changed the name Falk to Fast. All maps show that the church was built on Falk's land and no Fast is among the homesteader's names.] Of the brethren present at this meeting, Heinrich Dueck of Schoenthal, David Klaassen and Jacob Niebuhr of Rosenfeld were appointed as Bauherren - overseers-and yours truly was appointed as Baumeister (master builder). I willingly took on my assignment, however, keeping in mind that the work is to be done by volunteers and so with expectations that volunteers will also appear who are better at working with agricultural equipment than understanding how to use carpenter's tools. I must admit however

that, fortunately with God's help, everything went smoothly beyond expectations. My first task was to come up with a cost estimate for the building, for which brother Heinrich Dueck was helpful. We found that for this building we would require 22000 ft. timber and 14000 ft. roof shingles; the house should be 48 x 28 feet and the walls 12 feet high. We handed over the cost estimate to the two overseers D. Klaassen and J. Niebuhr, who drove to Winnipeg on March 20, in order to purchase the building material.

On April 2, the dealer shipped the lumber out of Winnipeg by train to the station in Rosenfeld, that is five miles from here, and since the overseers had already appointed drivers, accompanied by a strong east wind and snow flurries we drove to the station on April 4 in order to bring the lumber to the building site, which however we were not quite able to manage. On the way back the snow flurries transformed into a fairly strong rain, so that our fur coats, which we wore because of the cold when we left home, became quite soaked and the drivers with their load sought out their homes on the way rather than continue farther. When the weather later changed to more favourable conditions, the lumber was quickly dispatched to the building site and consequently we were ready for the construction to begin. Now however, winter set a new obstacle in our path, when he deposited a stockpile of layers of snow on our building site and could not be persuaded with goodwill to clear away the layers of snow. We decided then to snatch this place back by force. For this purpose we appointed youth with shovels. I took charge speaking words of encouragement to them, and after a short concentrated combat we had the place under our control.

Then the beloved sun with its warm rays came, assisted by a warm south wind, so that the place was soon dry enough that we could begin the construction. On April 7 we laid the foundation. Now, the 1 ½ foot high foundation should be filled with earth; but where should we get the earth in this frost? There was still a blanket of snow on the ground. Fortunately, Br. Jacob Unrau had burned a heap of straw close to the site, under which General Frost had not entered the entire long winter. On Saturday April 7, eighteen youth and young men with carts were appointed, who on Monday the ninth, went to work with vigour to bring the required layers of earth. The people worked diligently, and we were able to begin the woodwork. On Tuesday, April 10, volunteer workers came streaming in from all sides, prepared for work with strength and courage and requested that I put them to work. With the large number of workers (approximately 30 eager men) I had the pleasant task of keeping up with their demands/requests, but fortunately I did not lose my courage either and I was able with God's help to assign work to everyone. Ah, what a workforce! Energetic, happy, and also voluntary. While all were working cheerfully, each one's effort seemed as if it was for their own property, and almost beyond their capabilities, I involuntarily thought of an anthill. When evening came, I thanked God in my heart that this day had ended, because I was very tired. After supper I lay down to sleep; but sleep eluded me till midnight, as I was very tired, and had to think again of how I would acquire the voluntary work for next day.

Those who have done construction work will not be surprised that the master builder must, and particularly when there are numerous workers, pay attention to many so that nothing is spoiled. This is particularly so when there are many

unskilled among them, where one says, Master, how must this, and the other says, Master, how must that, be done. After midnight a refreshing sleep overtook me, and I slept peacefully until dawn. When I awoke and said my morning prayers, I felt renewed, and gladly went to work refreshed. This day, however, not as many volunteers showed up, and I was able to breathe a little more freely. So we continued building during this week and by Saturday April 14, we had the building under partitions and roof. Now, however, we had to halt the work, because spring demanded: "With the plow into the field!" But not for long! General Frost came back (because he couldn't get over having had to retreat) and bid us halt the seeding. Again volunteers were asked to gather and on Friday the 20th and Saturday the 21st we continued to work briskly. We clad the exterior walls with building paper and boards, installed doors and windows and finished the building to the point where on Sunday April 22, the first worship service was held with a large gathering of people. Our beloved Aeltester John Funk presented to us the foundation of our most holy faith (as he maintained in weakness, nevertheless according to scripture) in articles from the main text in Romans 10:10, to instruct the beloved youth, who by testimony indicated their desire to join the church through baptism. Sunday April 19, again a large number of people gathered and were instructed by the minister Abr. Bergen on the same lesson and the same text.

In conclusion, I heartily thank all workers who took part in this construction, for your willingness and your enthusiasm for the work, with which you rendered your help and I ask you not to lose the enthusiasm in the future, and to offer your helping hand in finishing the building. It is after all to be a house of worship, and to that end, voluntary gifts will always be accepted with thanks to God. [A poem, obviously penned by the writer of the article, followed.]

Honored brothers and beloved friends!
Now we have built another house,
As you can all see.
A house, dedicated to God's honour
For our people, instructions and lessons.
Therefore it seems reasonable to think, on
That which the Lord our God has done for us.
That He, like a father, so graciously
Guards and protected us builders
That no one was hurt
And we now look at the building with pleasure
That hammer and chisel, that axe and saw
With diligence and sweat, in love and harmony
Brought to this state, is only accomplished with His help.
To Him be the glory for our deeds.
In every house, are rooms and chambers,
But surely also alternately, joy and sorrow.
There are lofts and also cellars
And kitchens and chimneys and cheery Soeler (salons?)
Yet all remains desolate, and dark and empty
Unless the Lord fills it from above.
Therefore, His blessing abide in this building,
And fill the hearts with peace and joy.
With peace and love, that dwell therein
And carry them kindly with grace and Verschonen—(forbearance?)
And as the foundation is carefully laid
And fastened securely with diligence and care

Whereupon the building stretches high
 As it found the master design
 And as the beams and roof's framework and rafter
 Carefully pliant, but also yielding and creaking,
 So remain here Christ the rock
 To the church as living stones
 Both big and small, appear in grace
 And protect them in every hour.
 Whereas down here is much pain and danger
 Also, often adversity and help is scarce
 So we pray once more, that the Lord protect
 This house from fire, storm and danger,
 And that He guard it as his dwelling place
 And as the ruler, building master and overseer
 View it with grace, and whatever is lacking
 In the building, to grant the entire community
 Remembrance of faithfulness
 And graciously consider the genuine need
 Of those who have built in His name.
 To Him be the honour, to that I say: Amen!"¹

In 1959 the church was dismantled and the material was used to enlarge and renovate the Sommerfelder church in Altona. The Schoenthal Sommerfelder church had been an active congregation for seventy-one years.

One of the organisers of the Schoenthal church was Rev. Abraham Bergen (my step-grandfather). He was one of the original settlers and had been ordained in 1869 at the Bergthal colony in Ukraine, Russia. I would like to share an interesting note about Abram Bergen. He had been widowed for four months when Heinrich Falk, my grandfather died. Abram did not wait long to visit Falk's thirty-six year old widow, Justina, on the neighbouring farm about a mile down the road. *Taunte* Lies told us that her mother and Bergen walked around the garden once, and then it was decided. They were married three months after the death of Heinrich Falk. My father Wilhelm Falk, along with his twin brother Derk, acquired a step-father at the age of seven. Abram Bergen was twenty years older than the widow Justina Falk.

Aeltester Peter Toews of the Sommerfelder Church, was not a Schoenthal resident, although it was his home church and he had a prominent role there. He was elected and ordained at the Schoenthal church, and later became Sommerfelder *Aeltester*, which further increased his influence in this, his home church. He farmed in Amsterdam, which is south-east of Rosenfeld. He was elected in 1929 and just three years later (1932) elected *Aeltester*, attesting to his leadership abilities. Before that time he served as Reeve of the Rhineland Municipality from 1921 – 1925. He represented the Sommerfelder Church in the *Aeltestenrat* during World War II.

In the 1890s there was a split in the Bergthaler Church, with the two groups gradually evolving into the Bergthaler and Sommerfelder churches. The Schoenthal church became Sommerfelder. Both churches at that time had three to five *Vorsaenger* at a service leading the singing.

My father, William H. Falk, became *Vorsaenger* in 1925 and two years later was elected minister. His first wife died in childbirth in 1930 and he married my mother in 1932. In 1937 he was elected and ordained as the first bishop of the newly formed Rudnerweider Gemeinde that came out of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde when he and three other ministers were

asked to leave. He represented the Rudnerweider Church in the *Aeltestenrat* during W.W. II

The school building was situated on the north end of the village, west of the road next to Buffalo Channel. The building also housed the teacherage. It burned down sometime before 1974, since the house that is there now has been occupied for at least thirty-seven years. Schoenthal became a public school in 1911 and closed fifty-six years later in 1967 to become part of the Altona Consolidated School. School registers show that at least until 1919 classes began in October, presumably due to the harvest season. In 1918 it was also closed for two and a half weeks in November. During April and June attendance was poor due to seeding time and, periodically, bad roads. In 1935–1936, the school was closed for more than four weeks primarily due to measles and scarlet fever. I'm sure the students were pleased to receive an unearned holiday on January 28, 1936 for the funeral of King George V of England, who died of pleurisy on January 20 at the age of 71.

The first teacher in the public school was George G. Neufeld, who had also taught in the private school and in fact had been one of my father's teachers. Neufeld later became the first full-time Mennonite inspector of non-Mennonite schools.

It is perhaps not well known that Dr. Cornelius W. Wiebe taught in Schoenthal for three years before going into medicine. He was the first Mennonite MLA and served as a Liberal. He practised medicine for fifty-three years and delivered about 6000 babies.

Nic. G. Neufeld taught at Schoenthal for seven years, and was one of its longest serving teachers. I found one of the entries in the Teacher's Annual Report in the registers very interesting. One of the items states: "Number of trees planted during year." The entry always stated zero, if anything at all, until Nic G. Neufeld's tenure, when for one of the years he entered "200" lilacs! I wonder if he had a lilac planting day with the students. Knowing Nic G. Neufeld, (he was one of my teachers at Roseville), this seems a likely scenario.

Schoenthal for its size had a relatively large number of notable people associated with it, other than the ones already mentioned, including my father, *Aeltester* William H. Falk, and step-grandfather, Rev. Abram Bergen. As mentioned earlier, *Aeltester* David Schulz grew up in Schoenthal. In the year that David was born, his father, Gerhard Schulz, died. In 1897, his mother Helena married Heinrich Dueck, a homesteader and widower living in Schoenthal who had eleven children by his first wife. Three had died in infancy. Helena had two boys, George and infant David and together Heinrich and Helena had another six children. David Schulz grew up in a large family of



The school, which was also the teacherage with the barn in the background. Photo Credit: Mary Neufeld.



organising the Rhineland Consumers Co-operative, becoming first president of Co-op Vegetable Oils and first Vice President of Rhineland Agricultural Society. He served as trustee and secretary treasurer for the Schoenthal School for many years. His son Ray, following in the footsteps of his father, became the first president of CSP Foods and Co-operative Seed Producers.

There are two cemeteries in Schoenthal. The one on the east side of the road is a church cemetery and now belongs to the Reinland Mennonite Church. The other one, on the west side, belonged to the family of homesteader Heinrich Dueck, (David Schulz's stepfather) who is known as someone who worked in the *Waisenamt* for many years. Although not known as official cemeteries, a number of farms also claim gravesites on their property.

Today of course, Schoenthal is no longer a village, since both church and school are gone. There are still people

Wilhelm Falk, the author's father and Aeltester of the Rudnerweide Church (on the left) and David Schulz, the Aeltester of the Bergthaler Church (on the right) were both from Schoenthal. Photo Credit: MHC Archives.

sixteen children and attended school in Schoenthal until grade eight. Schulz was ordained minister of the Bergthaler Church in 1920 and became *Aeltester* in 1926. He was involved in many community endeavors in Altona and was the Bergthaler representative on the *Aeltestenrat*.

As you can see, Schoenthal was rich with *Aeltesters*. Two *Aeltesters* grew up in Schoenthal and another *Aeltester* farmed in the area and headed the ministerial at the Schoenthal church. All three served in the *Aeltestenrat* during World War II.

Another notable citizen, who grew up in Schoenthal, was Jacob. J. (J.J.) Siemens. He is known for his work with farmers,

living on that stretch of the road, I counted about ten residences when I drove through the area last summer. It may be considered a hamlet, and I suspect perhaps not even that. The dictionary says a hamlet is: "small village esp. without church." In fact the town of Altona is encroaching upon Schoenthal. In 1999 – 2000 there was an official boundary change and the southern half of section seventeen, is now part of Altona.

Endnotes

1 MHC Microfilm, Rundschau, May 16, 1888. The letter is dated April 30.

Teaching in La Crete

Frieda-Marie Elias, Swift Current, Saskatchewan



Visiting on a Sunday afternoon in the grass in front of the Wilson Prairie School. Photo Credit: Frieda-Marie Elias.

I arrived. It was a lonely arrival and totally unannounced to the little hamlet of LaCrete, Alberta, five hundred miles northwest of Edmonton. The Canadian Coachways Bus driver had pointed out my one-room school, seven miles south of LaCrete, as we drove by: one school, one teacherage, three toilets, a huge pile of firewood, grass three feet high. The year was 1962 and I was at the adventure-filled age of my early twenties and a scant three years out of high school. I had taught one year.

Before two hours had gone by, I had had supper invitations to two homes. The last of the two became my sleeping place for several nights. Such was the hospitality of LaCrete extended to me, an Arborfield, Sask. native. The population of LaCrete may have been 50 to 75. There was a ten-room school (Mustus Lake), two stores, a post office, a nurse's station, a bulk oil business, a café and filling station, a library, a row of teacherages, and about five residential houses.

The surrounding regions were well-occupied with farm families on land taken up as homesteads starting in 1930 and



The author, Frieda Marie Elias with two schoolgirls in front of the Wilson Prairie School in the 1960s. Photo Credit: Author

also forest land. The early settlers had come by scows on the Peace River and those boats were loaded with their possessions. Homesteads were still being handed out. Settlers now arrived with large trucks, coming north from the town of Peace River, crossing the river at the Tompkins Landing or Fort Vermilion ferry sites, and driving on fairly good roads to their new land. The gravel road through LaCrete had been built a mere two years earlier.

The people there in 1962 had come from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Southern Alberta, British Columbia, Mexico and British Honduras (later Belize). Many were Old Colonists, others were Sommerfelder, and, besides those, there were "neutral people." Farmers mostly. All were good neighbors and friends.

I did not have a car so I walked often and much. It was a beautiful fall with a heavy crop being harvested under clear skies. It was amazing to see, just 118 miles from the North West Territories. There I taught in the one room Wilson Prairie School, grades 1 to 6, seven miles south of LaCrete.

There were six schools in the Mennonite area: Blumenort, halfway between Fort Vermilion and LaCrete; Mustus Lake in LaCrete; Wilson Prairie; West LaCrete, about 8 miles southwest of Wilson Prairie; Buffalo Head Prairie School, seven miles south of Wilson Prairie; Savage Prairie, east of Buffalo Head. The 2nd last one is of special interest because it was the first one, with Samuel Nafziger as principal in 1962. He had been the very first teacher in the area in 1953 or 1954. The family had come from the Eastern United States. Soon B.H.P. was a two-room school.

The second teacher at B.H.P. was Miss Sara Lehn who had arrived about 1955 or 1956. She had come from Russia in the 1920's but her new previous home had been Chilliwack, B.C. She was here, 1962.

I had 36 students. What a full house! Besides the regular, I was asked to teach German and help older students to learn the catechism. George Brown taught younger students their German.

I lived in the teacherage for the greater part of the school year. My closest neighbors were the George Brown family.



Children hard at work in the Wilson Prairie School. Photo Credit: Author.

They helped me out very often. So did many others.

Often, I visited at the homes of my students and ate good Mennonite food. I was invited to evening parties on Pig Butchering Days. Some families gave gifts of roasts cut from a yearling moose; it was lean and tender, most delightful. Can you imagine being taken home with a bobsled and the traces jingled? What wonderful memories!

One Sunday, Justine Goertzen and I babysat the thirteen children of a couple who had to be away all day. The children were well-behaved and happy. The older ones helped out by taking a younger one on the knee and rocking that little sibling sleep or reading a story or singing from the *Gesangbuch*. Mother had left plenty of good food. The day was very satisfying. Justine became like a sister to me as we did other things also.

I went along with other people to, mostly, the Sommerfelder Church on Sunday mornings. I understood the language very well. We took communion and prayed together. I enjoyed the old melodies of the songs.

There was a public health nurse at the nursing station and she worked along with a doctor in Fort Vermilion. The hospital was St. Theresa's, started in 1900 by the Sisters of Providence, who came from Montreal, and young nurses joined them at the Fort, perhaps some from Catholic communities. As well, local girls worked there and, eventually, some R.N.'s and C.N.A.'s who were early graduates of the Fort High School classes or, later, some LaCrete girls with their nursing degrees, worked in the hospital. I knew some of them personally.

The weather is true Northern Canadian weather: hot, wet, and perfect for growing crops in those beautiful summers; cold, snowy, and perfect in the winter. It did drop down to 40 degrees F (below) or even 50 degrees F (below) at times. That made some things difficult. But there was little wind so I experienced no blizzards there. We had a Chinook (or two) while I was there. Why? It "Kicked down" from the wooded foothills. Days were extra short in the winter, but hey, they were extra long in the summer. So crops were great! And you could read at midnight on June 21.

Around The Mennonite World

Report on a History Trip to Europe

Jesse Hofer, Silverwinds Hutterite Community, Sperling, Manitoba

Introduction

One morning in February 2012, as I was preparing to teach a high school Hutterite history class on the HBNI-ITV system,¹ I received an important looking email from the Goethe Institute. Several months earlier I had applied for a Goethe scholarship to take a course in Germany in order to improve my German teaching skills. Nervously, I opened the email, and discovered something very exciting: I had received a scholarship and was going to Frankfurt, Germany for two weeks in July! Most Hutterites who study in Germany also take some time to tour the places of our ancestors. The timing of the announcement made it even more special: I was thrilled to announce to my students that I would have the opportunity to visit many of the places we were studying in the course and which are referred to in our Chronicles.

Two of my colleagues received a similar scholarship. My wife and my uncle and former teacher accompanied me from my community. Before the German language course, the six of us planned a 10-day tour of places related to Hutterite history in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, South Tyrol (Italy), Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. After months of planning and preparation, we were eager to begin.

For the purposes of making my account both manageable and meaningful, in the first section I will provide a very brief overview of the places we visited and the people we met on our

journey. In the second section, I will focus on my experiences in Tyrol and South Tyrol (located in Austria and Italy respectively)—the region where Jakob Hutter was born—since we spent about half our time there and this part of the tour left the strongest impression on me. For the purposes of a coherent narrative I will relate the places we visited in chronological order according to the history and not in the order we visited them.

Part I: Brief Overview of our Hutterite History Tour

Anyone who has flown to a foreign land for the first time will understand how happy one is to set foot on solid ground and to be met by a friend or relative at the airport. Such was the feeling my uncle Zack Hofer, my wife Jennifer and I experienced when we landed in Frankfurt and were greeted by Gary Waltner. Gary lives at Weierhof, a Mennonite settlement in the Pfalz about an hour south of Frankfurt, where he works as a volunteer director at the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle.

Because we arrived two days earlier than our colleagues, we had planned to tour some sites near Frankfurt with Gary. Our first stop was the city of Marburg where the margrave Philip of Hesse ruled from his imposing castle atop the city. Peter Riedemann originally addressed his Confession of Faith to Philip in an attempt to explain the Anabaptist-Hutterite position. Today, Marburg is a bustling university city and the castle has been converted to house university students.



Map of the tour group's travels in Europe. Google Maps.

Next, we traveled to Wolkersdorf where Riedemann was imprisoned for several years and where he wrote what would become the Hutterite Confession of Faith in 1542. The original castle-prison has been destroyed and in its place stands an old barn made with bricks from the ruins. The genial owner led us down into the barn's cellar, where some of the castle's original walls still stand and where, presumably, Peter Riedemann stayed and wrote his important confessional work. To highlight the historical significance of the site, the community erected a sign bearing the story.

For supper Gary treated us to a variety of grilled meats with bread, cheese, potato salad and a tasty zucchini dish, along with some local wine and beer. The next day, after a hearty breakfast and devotions, we traveled to Worms to visit the cathedral where Martin Luther was brought to trial. Then Gary surprised us with a boat ride on the scenic Rhine River from Bingen to St. Goar, including the world-famous 120-metre tall Loreley Rock! The countless castles and vineyards found along the tall hills on either side of the river explained why the stretch of the Rhine between Koblenz and Bingen was added to the UNESCO World Heritage Sites in 2002. Gary picked us up several miles downstream and we headed to Alzey to see the castle where Leonard Dax was imprisoned. Leonard Dax was a Catholic priest who converted to Anabaptism in 1557. He

became one of the ablest Hutterite missionaries and apologists of the time. At around 18:00 we returned to a hotel in Frankfurt where we met the other three members who would accompany us on our Hutterite history tour.

On Saturday morning, July 21, our group of six took the train to Zurich, the birthplace of Swiss Anabaptism. One of the original Swiss Anabaptists, Georg Blaurock, brought the Anabaptist teachings from Zurich to Tyrol. In Zurich, our tour guide, Herr Damdach, led us through the Grossmünster, the church from which Zwingli famously launched his Reformation in the Swiss territories. In comparison to other churches we saw on our trip, the Grossmünster was plainly adorned in keeping with the Reformed stance against icons and relics; however, the splendid stained glass windows by Sigmar Polke (1941-2010) gave it an air of grandeur all its own. In the church's sacristy, we saw a Froschauer Bible, which is the version referred to in some of our Lehren.

From the Grossmünster we walked along the Limmat River and paused to read the memorial plaque to Felix Manz who was drowned in the river because of his Anabaptist convictions.

From Zurich we took the train to Innsbruck, Austria. Our journey through the stunning Alps by train was unforgettable! Rugged and treed mountains, turquoise lakes, streams and rivers alongside the tracks—all of it was simply gorgeous!



The Wolkersdorf cellar, the place where Peter Riedeman wrote his confession in 1542. The cellar is now under a barn built from the ruins of the castle that stood there. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.



Members of the tour group reading from the Froschauer Bible in the Grossmünster in Zurich, Switzerland. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.



The Lorelei Rock on the Rhine River near St. Goarshausen. The rock has been prominent in various legends of a beautiful woman who was the cause of shipwrecks on the narrow section of the Rhine some 120 meters below its peak. Photo Credit: Wikipedia Commons.

In Innsbruck we met our gracious host families: Eduard and Gertrude Geissler, Max and Margot Eugster and Ignaz and Gotlind Hammerer. The next day, a Sunday, we visited das Goldene Dach in Innsbruck and walked along the Inn River to the site of a proposed Anabaptist memorial park, which I will describe in more detail below. Next, we drove to the village of Rattenberg where we climbed to the Rattenberg Castle where 71 Anabaptists were executed. Near the town of Schwaz we toured a mining museum, Freundsberg Castle, where several Anabaptists were imprisoned.

On Tuesday, July 24, we rented a van and drove to Bruneck in South Tyrol, Italy, where Robert and Martha Hochgruber hosted us for two days, showing us many sites related to Jakob Hutter's story. I will relate the sites we visited in more detail below. In South Tyrol, we also had the opportunity to tour Schloss Taufers and see the Faulturm where Hans Kräl was imprisoned.

On Wednesday morning our trip continued eastward to Spittal an der Drau, where we toured a cultural museum and visited the Hofer, Waldner and Kleinsasser Hofes. We spent the night in Klagenfurt before traveling to Vienna on Thursday.

In Vienna we had a delightful lunch at Alexander Basner's apartment before traveling to the village of Steinabrunn (formerly a Hutterite settlement), Falkenstein castle and Anabaptist museum, and finally Mikulov (formerly Nikolsburg). At Nikolsburg, Hans Hut and Balthaser Hubmaier had a famous debate over the issue of whether Christians could use the sword. Of course, Nikolsburg is also the birthplace of G' maschoft; in 1528, Jakob Wiedemann led the pacifist Stäbler out of Nikolsburg and established a community of goods at a nearby village. The scale of Leonard von Lichtenstein's castle at Mikulov was astonishing and overwhelming! I knew he was an important figure, but I had no idea he was that wealthy and influential.

The next day, we visited a recently opened village museum at Niedersulz, located about 30 minutes from Vienna. One of the homes in the village was devoted to telling the Anabaptist story in the Weinviertel, Lower Austria. The Anabaptist house has three rooms featuring artifacts and information on the Radical Reformation, with a focus on the Hutterites' connection to the region.

Next, we went to Veľké Leváre where Martin Hoferka toured us through the formerly Hutterite, and current Habáner village. We saw many examples of the distinctive Habáner architecture. The Habáner are the Hutterites who were re-catholicized about 1760 under Maria Theresa. Today, they are most famous for their crafts, especially their ceramic traditions.

On our final day we continued our tour of Habáner villages with Martin Hoferka. First, we went to Sobotište, where we visited a mill built by Hutterites. Then we toured the Zahorske Museum in the town of Skalacia where Martin works. He showed us a hand-written concordance manuscript copied by Hutterites. The most interesting part for me was the room full of ceramics, some of which were in the Habáner style.

Retracing the path of our ancestors, we covered about 1800 kilometers in eight days. Reading the Chronicles of the Hutterian Brethren is much more remarkable and meaningful now that I can put a "face" to the people and places it refers to. All in all, the tour was everything we could have hoped for. The worst inconvenience we experienced was losing a cell phone, which was eventually recovered.

Next, I want to turn my attention to the Tyrol to take a closer look at the places and events that are part of Jakob Hutter's story.

Part II-Tyrol and the Story of Jakob Hutter

Jakob Hutter was born on the Präslhof in Moos in the Pustertal in South Tyrol near the village of St. Lorenzen. Our visit to the hamlet in the Tyrolean Alps was on a breathtakingly peaceful Tuesday morning. The Hof is within site of the Michelsburg, another castle where several Anabaptists were imprisoned. The elderly homeowner had prepared a doughnut-like pastry with fresh berry jam and juice. During our visit, we discovered from an old photograph and caption that Jakob Hutter's name may not come from his occupation as hat-maker (Hut is German for "hat"), but from the name of the Hof where he was born, now called Präslhof.

It is surmised that as a youth Jakob Hutter attended the church in the village of St. Lorenzen. We visited the church and experienced firsthand some of the images and architecture the young Hutter would have seen.

Jakob Hutter was a hatmaker who apprenticed with his uncle Caspar Huter in Stegen. In 1526 he heard a sermon preached by a goatherd Wölfl from the Sarntal. Inspired by what he



The Präslhof near the village of St. Lorenzen in the Tyrolean alps wherer Jacob Hutter was born. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.



The Tyrolean mountainside near Innsbruck, Austria. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

heard, Hutter bought a New Testament in the town of Bozen and began preaching. He was dismissed soon thereafter by his uncle and found his way to Spittal an der Drau, a city in mid-Austria. From there he found his way to Moravia, where he came into contact with the communal groups who sought refuge in the relatively tolerant border region. From 1531 to 1533, Jakob Hutter travelled three times between Tyrol and Moravia, distance of over 600 kilometers!

Some scholars suggest that Jakob Hutter's reading of the New Testament and particularly the Sermon on the Mount was shaped by his involvement in the Peasants' Revolt in Tyrol. The Peasant's Revolt in Tyrol was an uprising of farmers who were dissatisfied with the widespread economic inequalities and the lifestyle and moral conduct of the clergy in the region. Armed with pitchforks, clubs, knives and any other weapons they could find, and led by Michael Gaismair, the former

secretary to the bishop, the discontented farmers stormed the bishop's residence in Brixen in an attempt to have their voices heard. One can still see the marks left by their weapons on the metal door of the palace. The events of the Peasants' Revolt were one reason the authorities dealt so earnestly with the Anabaptists. The bloodshed and merciless killing of thousands of peasants by the local authorities may have taught Jakob Hutter firsthand that violence only begets more violence, and that in the kingdom of God the way of violence had come



The door to the Bishop's palace at Brixen, South Tyrol where the marks from the weapons used by Tyrolean peasants are still visible. Some historians believe that Jakob Hutter took part in the revolt in 1525. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

to an end. We were reminded that the beliefs we take for granted were forged through sacrifice and intense conflict.

The mountainsides in Tyrol's Inn valley still bear the traces of an important industry in the region dating back to the middle ages—mining. Apparently many of the miners were early converts to Anabaptism. Miners were the migrant workers of the day and their movements were the means by which new ideas spread across the mountainous region.² Near Brixen in South Tyrol we visited the mining shafts that became a refuge and meeting place for Anabaptists during times of intense persecution.

Overlooking the village of Schwaz near Rattenberg is an old castle, Schloss Freundsberg, which has been converted into a mining museum. Between 1528 and 1540 twenty Anabaptists were executed in Schwaz alone. Before their execution, they were imprisoned in the castle. Among the prisoners was the gifted Hans Schlaffer, formerly a Catholic priest, who wrote several letters to the church communities. These letters have



The tour group posing in front of some of the old mineshafts in the Brixen area of South Tyrol. Photo Credit: Robert Hochgruber.



Staner Joch, a flat area above the village of Stans was a meeting place for Anabaptists led by Jakob Hutter. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

survived to the present and have been published as part of a collection of Hutterite epistles. The museum includes a write-up summarizing the Hutterite-Anabaptist history in the region.

From the pathway adjacent to Schloss Freundsberg we could see another remarkable and moving connection to our history: Staner Joch. Staner Joch is a relatively flat section of the mountain above the village of Stans shaped like a yoke. Removed from the prying eyes of the authorities, Staner Joch is the place where Jakob Hutter gathered with the believers for the last time on August 1, 1533, before leaving for Moravia. In Moravia, Hutter would find a church community deeply divided over the issue of leadership.

Standing on the Freundsberg, gazing across to the mountaintop opposite the Inn River, I was deeply moved when I considered what might have happened at Staner Joch. As their leader, Hutter would likely have offered a word of

encouragement to his beleaguered flock. He may have shared survival strategies, or read from the Bible. Did the believers share a meal, perhaps one final celebration of communion? Did they pray together, the words of the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil"? What words and stories were exchanged? Jakob Hutter's beloved brothers and sisters in the Tyrol would never see him again. When he was forced to leave Moravia in 1535 by the relentless policies of Emperor Ferdinand I, he returned to South Tyrol, where he was also sought as a public enemy.

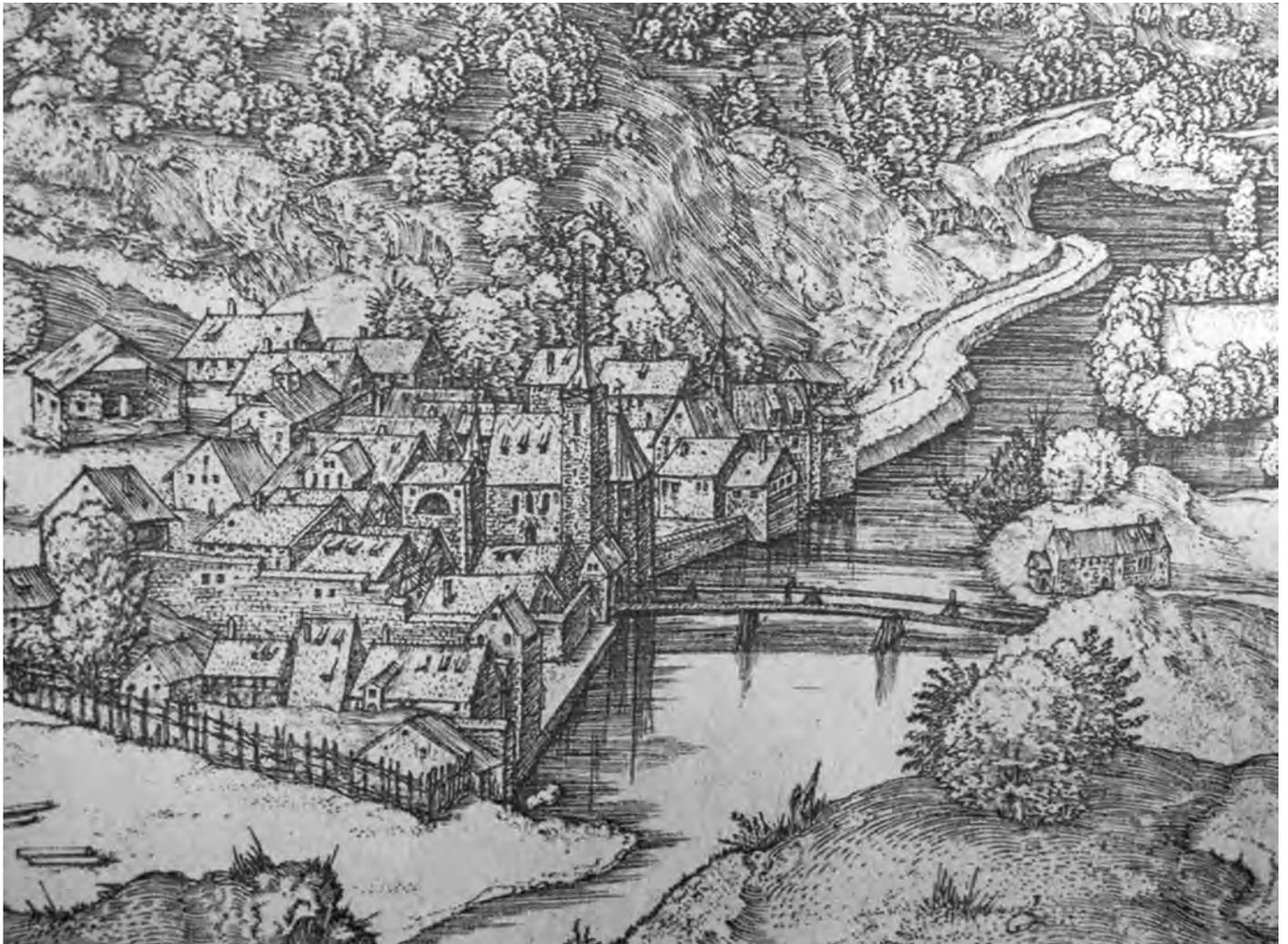
Jakob Hutter was arrested in November of 1535 in the town of Klausen in South Tyrol. In Klausen we visited the town museum to learn about the details surrounding Jakob Hutter's arrest and imprisonment in the Branzoll Castle towering above the town. The museum director, Christoph Gasser, showed us an old town register documenting important civic meetings and the annual assignment of positions in the town dating back to the early 1500s. We were interested in tracing the position of the sexton, because from our Chronicles we know that Jakob Hutter was given refuge in Klausen by a sexton by the name of Jakob Stainer. The archivist's mannerisms, choice of words and personality made him a congenial and interesting person to visit with.

The records showed that Jakob Stainer was assigned the job of sexton and reinstated for several consecutive years, before being stripped of his job because of his Anabaptist sympathies.

Jakob Stainer became attracted to the Anabaptist teachings and his house eventually became a favourite place for traveling evangelists such as Jakob Hutter. Jakob Stainer had built his house on the opposite side of the Inn River across from the church where he served as sexton, indicating his significant wealth and influence. Because the house was built across the river, separate from the village of Klausen, it belonged to a different political and legal jurisdiction than the village territory, and hence, was a perfect place to stay for people hiding from the authorities, including Anabaptists.

The woodcut artist Albrecht Dürer once visited Klausen and produced a piece featuring the village. Interestingly, the woodcut image clearly shows the home of Jakob Stainer across the river. It is in this home that Jakob Hutter was arrested after the bishop of Klausen made a deal with the local ruler to hand him over to his jurisdiction for imprisonment in the secure Branzoll Castle.

Hutter's wife, Katherine, was also apprehended, but she was placed in a less secure castle near Gufidaun. During her imprisonment she gave birth to her firstborn child, which was presumably seized by the authorities. We do not know if it was a boy or a girl, or whether the child survived. Katherine later managed to escape without her child. Two years later she was caught and drowned for her faith at Schöneck Castle in the Puster Valley.



Woodcut of the village of Klausen by Albrecht Dürer. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.



The Branzoll Castle towering above the village of Klausen. Here Jacob Hutter was imprisoned when he returned to Tyrol in 1535. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

Branzoll Castle, the place where Jakob Hutter was held before being taken to Innsbruck to his death, sits commandingly above the town of Klausen. Two-thirds of the castle was destroyed in a fire, but several castle enthusiasts restored the remaining part and today a friendly lady, along with her son and daughter-in-law, inhabit the castle. Before showing us inside, the homeowner served us a refreshing glass of elderberry juice and delicious raspberry squares and shared stories about the castle's history.

Our first impression upon seeing that the castle tower was inhabited was, "Wow, that looks like an interesting place to live!" Interesting, yes. But, practically speaking, a castle is not an ideal place to live. For one, it is difficult to heat and cool in a predictable and controlled manner because of its thick walls. Getting from the castle to the town, a stone's throw below, takes a while by car. As a shortcut, one can take the steps instead, but there are over one hundred of them! Modifications to the building have to be approved by the government. The windows are small, giving the building a dark and gloomy atmosphere. Only somebody who truly loves the place would be willing to live here.

From Klausen, Jakob Hutter was brought to Innsbruck to face the wrath and grim justice of Emperor Ferdinand I, who saw it as his personal mission to root out Anabaptism in his Catholic territories. From Moravia, Jakob Hutter had written some pretty sharp words against the Emperor, calling him the Anti-Christ and strongly criticizing the emperor's role in harassing a group of nonviolent followers of Christ with such heavy-handed measures.

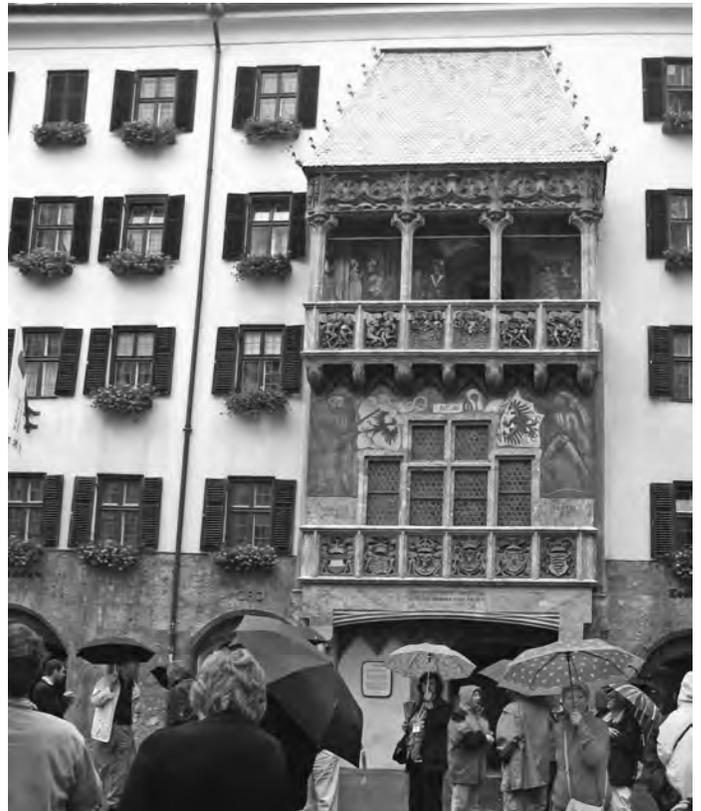
Before his execution in Innsbruck, Hutter was forced to look at what he called idols—the elaborate statues of the saints, altars and paintings in St. Jakob's parish church (now a cathedral) near the town square. When we visited the church courtyard at about 10:00 Sunday morning, worship was in progress and we could only briefly enter the building. The sermon could be heard outside, thanks to an amplification system. Somehow, it seemed fitting that we could not stay long in the building that Hutter was marched through as a final act of humiliation, although we could hear words of Scripture read which he would have found moving as well. The text was from John, Chapter 10, 1-4:



The Kräuterturm in Innsbruck where Jacob Hutter was tortured before being burned at the stake in February, 1536. Photo Credit: Innsbruck Stadtarchiv (<http://innsbruck.tsn.at/website/sehenswuerdigkeiten/stadtarchiv.html>)

Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice (NRSV).

Following the shepherd's voice, Jakob Hutter knew, did not mean enjoying green pastures in this life. Discipleship demanded a costly sacrifice and he was prepared to make it, through the gift of God's Spirit.



Das Goldene Dach (the Golden Roof) was completed in 1500 and is landmark in the city of Innsbruck in Austria. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer

While in Innsbruck, Hutter was held in the Kräuterturm³ in the northwestern corner of the city. The authorities tortured him to force him to reveal the names of his brothers, sisters and supporters, but he refused to betray anybody.

While King Ferdinand I may have looked on under the famous golden roof das Goldene Dach of his court in Innsbruck, Jakob Hutter was publicly burned at the stake. His public execution was to serve as an example to the common people of the consequences of embracing the heretical faith.

History is rich with irony and here in Innsbruck another instance of table turning is unfolding. Since 2005, members of the interdenominational Hutterer Arbeitskreis Tyrol and SüdTyrol⁴ have worked tirelessly to create awareness of the Anabaptist history in the region. The witness of the Anabaptists has personally moved each of the group members. In 2007, the Arbeitskreis was inspired to initiate a new relationship between the Hutterites in North America and the Catholic clergy and governments of Tyrol and South Tyrol. Their intent was to begin a dialogue and issue statements of regret about the brutal events of the past.

The group's latest endeavour is an installation called Übrige Brocken,⁵ a plan to build a Hutterpark to tell the stories of twelve Anabaptist-Hutterite martyrs from the Tyrol. The Inn



Site of a future Hutterer Park in Innsbruck, Austria. Photo Credit: Jesse Hofer.

River, the namesake of Innsbruck, was the most important route used by Anabaptists fleeing to the relatively tolerant region of Moravia, formerly in northeastern Austria. Today, it is the eastern part of the Czech Republic. The park will highlight this historical connection. According to the plan, the park will feature a ring of twelve stones each bearing a word of a verse from Zechariah 9, 16b: "For like the jewels of a crown they shall shine on his land."⁶ Originally from the glaciated mountainside high in the Tyrolean Alps, the stones symbolize both the persecution and dislocation experienced by the Anabaptists in the region. Accompanying each stone will be a story of an Anabaptist martyr whose witness is especially well documented and inspiring.

The Scriptural text and the circular formation suggesting a crown are fitting for several reasons: first, the witness of the Anabaptist martyrs and faithful believers is a crown of light that continues to shine inspiration to us today; secondly, the

crown is a fitting symbol of hope, salvation and ultimate victory for the faithful, even while the Ferdinands of the day raged wildly against them. As Eduard Geissler, one of the members of the Arbeitskreis has eloquently written: "The Anabaptist men and women refused to let persecution, death, torture and harassment hinder them from a life of nonviolent witness and loving fellowship to each other through discipleship to Jesus. From a spiritual perspective, they have become precious stones in the crown of God and they can continue to give light and direction to our land today."⁷

Ferdinand may have been wearing his royal crown and exercising his royal authority when he ordered the execution of countless Anabaptists in the early part of the 16th century, but God has a way of scattering the proud and exalting the lowly. The witness of the martyrs may have the final word yet.

The book of Revelations presents a similar irony for the oppressed faithful in the Roman Empire: at present, the Roman Caesar appears to be in control, his might and rule is unquestionable and untouchable. But have faith, the author urges. Caesar will not have the last word. In the end, the suffering Lamb will sit enthroned and the faithful will overcome and triumph.

Once the proposed park is complete, there will be another good reason to return to the land of our fathers to draw strength and light from their witness. Of course it would also be an opportunity to meet our new Tyrolean friends, and again experience their exceptional generosity and hospitality.

Sources

- Hutterian Education Committee. *The Chronicles of the Hutterian Brethren*, Volume I. Elie, MB, Canada, 2003
- Packull, Werner, *Hutterite Beginnings: Communitarian Experiments during the Reformation*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Schlachta, Astrid von, *Verbrannte Visionen? Erinnerungsorte der Täufer in Tirol*. Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2007.

Endnotes

- 1 HBNI-ITV is high school programming for Hutterite students via Interactive Television (ITV), delivered through the Hutterian Broadband Network (HBN) and collectively owned and operated by the Schmiedeleut Group 1.
- 2 Anabaptism generally enjoyed widespread favour among the Tyrolean population and about 5% of the population joined the Anabaptist communities. The mining areas in North and South Tyrol were especially receptive to the Gospel. (cf. Werner O. Packull, *Hutterite Beginnings*, The John Hopkins University Press, 1995, p. 161)
- 3 *Kräuterturm* comes from the word *chraut* in the local dialect meaning "gun powder." Apparently the buildings nearby were used to store gunpowder at one time. Astrid von Schlachta, *Verbrannte Visionen*, 112. An alternate meaning of the word "Kräuter" is herbs; it is possible the buildings stored herbs used in distilling spirits.
- 4 Members of the *Hutterer Arbeitskreis Tyrol und Südtyrol* include the chairmen Robert Hochgruber and Ulrich Wiegner (South Tyrol, Italy), the vice-chairman Ignaz Hammerer, Eduard Geissler, Astrid von Schlachta, Max Euster (Tyrol, Austria) and many others. Artist Verena Simeoni from Innsbruck designed the "Übrige Brocken" installation.
- 5 The title "Übrige Brocken" (bread crumbs), is significant for several reasons. It is the title of an important early Hutterite publication. The twelve stones featuring the Scripture text and marking the story of each witness are in some ways like crumbs of bread. Finally, the references to breadcrumbs and the number twelve brings to mind Jesus' miraculous feeding of the five thousand.
- 6 In German the text has exactly twelve words: "Denn Steine an seinem Diadem sind sie, die über seinem Land funkeln." (Sacharja 9, 16b)
- 7 Author's translation. Original text from Eduard Geissler.

Mennonites in the Land of the Maya

Hans Werner, Winnipeg

In February of this year (2012) my wife Diana and I left Winnipeg on a cold February morning to travel to Cancun for a few days of vacation in the warm Caribbean sun and then to travel into the Yucatan jungle to visit the Mennonite colonies in Campeche State. We left Cancun on a Sunday morning in a rented car and after getting ourselves oriented we travelled down the modern 180D highway, a toll road that goes to Merida. It is too expensive for many Mexicans so we had little traffic for miles on end. Somewhere south of the city of Merida we got a little lost looking for the exit to get to the 261 that would take us to Hopelchen; it seemed every road going to the villages beside the main highway was labeled 261. We eventually found our way and our crossing into Campeche State was marked by our passing through a large gate.



The gate that marks the border between Campeche and Yucatan States on the way from the capital city of Merida, the capital of Yucatan. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

The Yucatan was home to the thriving Mayan civilization that reached its peak about A.D. 900. Mayans still live throughout the area and the evidence of their civilization extends well beyond the famous Mayan ruins at Chichen Itza. The route to Hopelchen takes you by Uxmal, one of the more famous sites, and the numbers of tour buses that we saw were evidence of the popularity of visiting these places. However, you could also come across ancient Mayan architecture right beside the highway when the forest suddenly opened up to reveal these amazing structures.



Mayan ruins on Highway 261 between Merida and Hopelchen. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

We arrived in Hopelchen about 2:00 pm on a Sunday afternoon. Hopelchen is the main market town for a number of Mennonite colonies in the surrounding area. It is a typical Mexican town, the streets are narrow, the signs obscure and there was a celebration going on in the town square that made it even harder to negotiate because some streets were blocked off. We were looking for the Mexico Mennonite Aid compound, but finally had to stop at a street vendor to see if we could get some directions, but our lack of Spanish language skills made it difficult. A young woman wearing jeans, a modern hair style, and with whiter skin than what we had been seeing pulled up in an SUV and asked us if she could help. She spoke perfect English and Low German and then took us through the town in a most convoluted way, because of the blocked streets, to our destination. The Casa de Luz y Esperanza, as the Beachy Amish centre in Campeche is called, was locked and our attempts to raise someone failed. We were in Mexico on a Sunday afternoon unable to meet our contact. My wife Diana made the sensible suggestion that there must be Mennonites around and we should look for them. We drove a short distance out of Hopelchen when we came across what seemed to be Mennonite homes and yards. We soon saw people visiting outside their home that were undeniably Mennonite. We joined their Sunday afternoon visiting. The two couples were both Abram Klassens and they were in-laws. We soon learned their cluster of homes was a new colony, Santa Fe, and they were Kleine Gemeinde folks and had been at a baptism service that morning. We were advised that there were three hotels in Hopelchen, one was definitely not recommended, but the others would be acceptable. They noted that visitors from Belize usually stayed at a hotel on the edge of town that had no name. We left their company to secure our night's lodging.

After we checked in, we returned to the Mennonite Mutual Aid where we met Dan and Linda Brychik and a couple that had just arrived to take up a term of service, Leon and Nora Yutzy. We spent the evening visiting with the two couples and learned



Diana Werner checking in to the 'no name' hotel in Hopelchen. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

a lot about their work among the conservative Mennonites of the area. Mexico Mennonite Mutual Aid was instrumental in providing funds for the purchase of the Temporal Colony in the 1990s. We returned to the hotel for the night. It was basic, but had everything you might need. It was fairly clean, had hot and cold running water, a toilet, even toilet paper, towels and soap.

After a good nights rest, we were back at Casa de Luz y Esperanza at about 8:00 am, which was already bustling with activity. I met a number of people from El Temporal who came in to make phone calls. It seems the Amish Centre is a focal point for the Old Colony people, who are not allowed to have telephones, to come in to make calls to family in Bolivia and Cuauhtémoc, to arrange for equipment purchases, fax documents, and so on. We met Franz Wall from El Temporal who said we could follow him—he would be going home after he had been to the bank. It took awhile but soon someone else came to tell us they were ready to go. The messenger jumped into the car with us and we joined a beat up pickup truck driven by a Mexican, which they had hired to take them to town and back. We drove about 25 km down the highway then another 10 or so km down a winding bumpy dirt/gravel road to El Temporal. Our guides ‘dropped us off’ about half way between the highway and the first village, but told us that our destination, the home of Johann Neufeld was in the first village. His yard would be marked by an old style windmill—not the fancy new ones that generate electricity. Johann Neufeld is the contact for *Preservings* in Campeche and he was very happy to see us. They were just having lunch and we were immediately invited to join them in a meal of Somma Borscht, bread and canned fish. I gave him eight copies of the magazine, apologizing for having given away the two additional copies that he normally gets. He suggested eight was enough and I could reduce the number that we sent him for the future as well, as not many people could read English.

We visited for a while with Johann Neufeld. He explained the origins, time of establishment, and religious orientation of the colonies in the Campeche region. I was unable to get down all the detail he provided, as I did not have a good sense of the places he referred to. He also gave us a detailed explanation of the charcoal production business when I asked about it. A

Mr. Bueckert, the father-in-law of Johann’s son, had pioneered the charcoal production method of creating a pit in the ground with shafts to create sufficient draft. The sale of charcoal had brought considerable revenue to the colony in its heyday, but a new policy of the Mexican government, which he thought was a condition of World Monetary Fund loans, meant the forest was not to be cut down indiscriminately. This had pretty much put an end to the charcoal production business, except for a few renegades who continued to do it because they needed to put bread on the table. The charcoal is purchased by dealers who provide forged documentation allowing them to purchase charcoal.

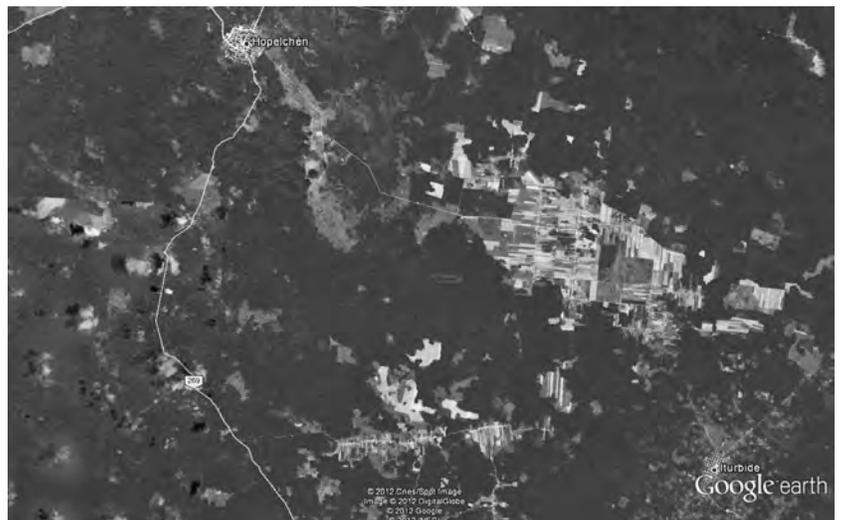
I asked Neufeld about the process if should there be a move to, for instance, lift the ban on steel wheels. He indicated the Ohms would talk about it and see if the change could be made without upsetting everything. As he pointed out, the Ohms had no power unless the ‘brothers’ were behind them. Invariably, however, one or another of the Ohms would think it would be going too far and if they had sufficient support from some of the brethren they would move away to another colony.

Johann Neufeld volunteered to accompany us on a tour of surrounding colonies. We visited Las Palmas and Trinidad, in addition to El Temporal. While we were touring Trinidad we passed someone on a rubber tired tractor and Neufeld pointed out that he had formerly lived in Temporal, but wanted to use rubber tires and so had moved to Trinidad. Neufeld had come from Nuevo Casas Grandes as part of the first settlers that founded El Temporal. Temporal has no power line to the villages, so any power that is used is generated from windmills, or diesel generators. Tractors are on steel wheels, and horses and buggies provide other transportation. El Temporal has recently acquired more land and now consists of seven villages.

When we entered the first village in Las Palmas, we came upon a field of chili peppers. There was also a field of tomatoes. Las Palmas also had no outside power and used horses and steel wheels. Trinidad appeared to be the most developed of the colonies. Neufeld noted that they had arrived at about the same time as the people from Temporal but had come with more capital. Trinidad had electricity and rubber tires, but no cars or trucks. On Sundays, Neufeld noted, you would not find tractors



Judith Neufeld Goertzen was happy to have a chance to look through the last issue of *Preservings*. Although she did not read English, the pictures were interesting. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.



The Mennonite colonies south of Hopelchen in Campeche State, Mexico. The cultivated land of the colonies jumps out of the jungle on this satellite image. The larger colony is Progresso, while El Temporal is to the south and west. Credit: Google Earth.



Chili peppers and tomatoes are examples of the intensive agriculture practiced by conservative Mennonites in the Yucatan. Photo Credit: Hans Werner.

being used as basic transportation, only horses and buggies. After touring the other colonies we returned to El Temporal where we spent more time touring Neufeld's home village. We went by the church and school, and a grain-handling complex with conveyors, bins and weigh scale. There were a lot of new homes being built because of a good harvest. Neufeld suggested it was good to see after years of hardship. We also passed by a watermelon field planted using plastic mulch and being sprayed for weeds using a tractor mounted sprayer and four people walking along the rows with hand sprayers equipped with shields. Neufeld claimed he was not a very good farmer because he had too many other interests including a passionate interest in history. Neufeld also indicated that the next day (Tuesday) there was an auction sale at Las Palmas where he would be one of the clerks. He also does surveying for the area colonies. The GPS unit he uses for this was lying on their dining room table when we arrived. He claimed he could not

charge as much for surveying as he should, which he lamented, because he thought it should be a valued skill. When we were touring villages he often pointed out that villages had not been surveyed properly and gave an example of one that was 3° off either due north or west.

We returned to Hopelchen where we heard that some visitors were coming to the Amish centre for supper. The visitors were siblings who originally came from El Temporal, had lived in Michigan, but now lived in Ontario. They had been visiting the colony, but it was unclear what their connection was to the Amish centre. It was also not entirely clear whether they now all attended the same church. One of the boys indicated to me that they were now part of the 'Charity' group and the girls all had specifically styled 'white caps'. Although they were careful in their conversation, it struck me that part of their purpose in visiting their relatives in El Temporal was to convert them to a Charity style of faith understanding.¹

We stayed in the guest room of the Amish Centre, which is part of the new couple's residence and in the morning we had breakfast with them. After breakfast we made preparations to go to Progresso, the colony nearest to the town of Hopelchen. Before we left an Old Colony man came into the centre to ask for a loan for medical expenses for a family member. Dan Brychik advised him that he would have to see some evidence from a doctor before he could do that. When the man left Dan commented that he had seemingly accepted that answer quite easily. He explained that you could usually tell when the purpose of a request was for alcohol, not for medicine. We said our good byes to the Amish, offering to pay for their hospitality, but they refused.

We were unable to find the road to Progresso and did not come across anyone to ask, so since it was getting later and we wanted to be in Cancun before dark we decided to leave Hopelchen. On the way back to Merida we stopped at the Santa Rosa colony, which is right on Highway 261. Santa Rosa is a Sommerfelder colony with people from different origins. We drove on to a yard where a forty year old, or so, fellow was working on what appeared to be a new garage. He indicated the colony had about 40 families. Behind the garage was a field of tomatoes. The colony looked to be quite prosperous, had electricity, vehicles, and fairly modern appearing homes. I caught a glimpse of his wife who was wearing a mid length



The Neufelds in front of their home in El Temporal, Campeche. Photo Credit: Hans Werner

print dress and a black kerchief. Across the highway was a very purple, large home, but I am not sure whether it belonged to a member of the colony or not.

We spent the next hours retracing our path to Merida and then Cancun. After spending the night in the 'other' Mexican world of the Cancun Hotel Zone we left the next morning for a short stop in Orlando where I spent one day with our children

and grandchildren who were vacationing there. Then it was back to the cold winter of Manitoba.

Endnotes

1 Likely Charity Christian Fellowship an Anabaptist group that began in 1982. It is usually characterized as a combination of conservative and revivalist emphases.

THE 90th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION OF MENNONITES IN MEXICO 1922-2012 June 22 and 23, 2012

David Friesen, Winkler Manitoba

On the weekend of the June 22 and 23, 2012, Low German speaking Mennonites and Spanish speaking Mexicans from near and far filled the campus of "Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, A.C." The 90th anniversary of Mennonites was being celebrated on two sites: one on the museum grounds in the Mennonite settlement on the Manitoba colony, and the other on the historical site called *Hacienda Castillo de Bustillos* where the Zuloaga family lived who sold the land to the Old Colony Mennonites

in 1921. At that time, although Mennonite delegates and Mr. Zuloaga met in El Paso, Texas to do the transaction, the delegates were billeted in this castle.

On the Friday of the celebration, June 22, the owners of the castle, who are relatives of the Zuloagas, honoured the Mennonites' celebration by unlocking the doors and inviting people to visit. The whole castle was open for viewing, except for the chapel which was being remodeled. The next day, Saturday, we had another gathering at the same site, but in front of the castle.

Participation at the anniversary celebrations of Mennonites in Mexico has increased considerably over the years. At the first celebration, the 60th in 1982, very few people showed up. The group did, however, include thirty participants who had immigrated to Mexico in 1922. The next occasion was the 75th anniversary in 1997, and it was celebrated with more enthusiasm and dedication. The professional film maker from Winnipeg, Dr. Otto Klassen, filmed the whole event, and made two videos of it. The anniversary celebration site was on Mennonite land where grain was stored. The 85th anniversary in 2007 was celebrated on the grounds of the Mennonite Museum.

The 90th celebration was a special highlight because two grandsons of the Mexican President Gral. Alvaro Obregon with friends from the neighbouring state of Sonora, to the West of Chihuahua, attended the event. A special delegation of the Mennonite settlement had gone to visit the Obregon family



The welcome banner inviting guests to the 90th anniversary celebration of the Mennonite presence in Mexico. Photo Credit: Jorge Reimer.

in the town of Obregon, Sonora in March to invite them officially.

In response, the Obregon family donated a bust of their grandfather to the Mennonites for their significant contribution to the economic development not only of the state of Chihuahua, but of the whole country. The bust of President Alvaro Obregon will be placed on permanent display in the Mennonite Museum, where it will greet visitors. It was Obregon, who after listening to the Mennonite delegates who had come from

Canada, signed the *Privilegium* with them in 1921.

The motto of the celebration this past June was taken from 1. Samuel 7:12b "...and called its name *Ebenezer*, for he said, "Hitherto the Lord has helped us." This topic was in harmony with the sermon preached in 12 March 1922 by the young minister Isaak M. Dyck - the first German Mennonite sermon in Latin America. In that sermon, Dyck, who later became bishop of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, thanked God for granting them a safe trip through the USA and into Mexico. He also thanked God for providing a country where they would be able to worship, teach and live according to their conscience. It was their first Sunday in Mexico, and the traditional dust storm was not at rest that day. The wind grabbed the tent so forcefully that some men got up and held the tent so that the congregation could understand what was being said.

In the same tone, Mennonites at the 90th anniversary celebration gave thanks to God for having been with them during these nine decades, even when during these years some leaders had to stand up and hold the tent down when storms seemed to overtake them. For example, in the thirties the radical President Lazaro Cardenas closed all confessional schools, including those of the Mennonites. Their *Vorsteher* (secular leader of the colony) Mr. Gerhard Rempel pleaded with the Mexican government to respect the *Privilegium* which had been signed by Obregon in 1921. In 1936, after three months of negotiations,



A parade is an important part of a community anniversary celebration. Here an old Oliver tractor on steel wheels pulling a threshing machine pass by the photographer. Photo Credit: Jorge Reimer.

President Lazaro Cardenas granted their request and signed another document identical to the one originally signed by President Alvaro Obregon. Yes, for these and other events, they thanked God who has sustained them constantly. They felt they could agree with the verse in I Samuel, and write *Ebenezer*.

The first day of the celebration, Friday June 22, was inaugurated by a parade made up of old machinery, buggies, tractors, a lady doing laundry, another baking, a blacksmith fixing and making new horseshoes, and more. A mini-train was provided with four six-passenger cars where passengers could choose to go on the Prussia, Russia, Canada, or Mexico car.

Around eleven o'clock the assembly gathered in the auditorium at the museum to attend the more formal program with singing, and listening to choirs from different schools. It was marvelous to see three different Mennonite churches participate in the celebration: the Old Colony, Mennonite Conference of Mexico, and Kleine Gemeinde. The fellowship hall filled up, and a lot of people had to stand at the entrance. On this occasion the bust of President Alvaro Obregon was unveiled in a solemn ceremony. The plaque read: "Considering the great appreciation and affection President Alvaro Obregon always showed towards the Mennonites, with pleasure we donate this monument to the Colonies of Chihuahua. The Obregon Tapia Family and the Obregon Ortiz Family in the Obregon City Sonora, June of 2012."

The grandsons of Alvaro Obregon spoke on behalf of the Obregon family. They honoured their grandfather for granting



A bust of President Alvaro Obregon, donated by his descendants, was unveiled at the anniversary celebrations. It will be placed on permanent display in the museum in the Manitoba Colony. Photo Credit: Jorge Reimer.

permission for the Canadian Mennonites to come and settle the semi-arid State of Chihuahua. Hector Obregon, one of the honoured guests, officially opened the celebration, and wished the committee and the all the participants a successful event.

In the program it was evident that many barriers had been removed over the years. Fifteen years ago, some ministers discouraged people from attending the celebrations. Now, different schools, representing all the different churches, took

part in it. The Old Colony “committee schools” contributed to the celebration by performing several songs. They sang the traditional melody “lange Wies,” and also other German songs which they had learned in school. Several church-choirs from various backgrounds enriched the celebration to the audience’s delight. Three Old Colony ministers and their *Vorsteher* were present. The latter were on stage during the unveiling ceremony. Later a group, including members from the Mennonite Conference of Mexico and the Old Colony Mennonite Church, had a private session with the Obregon cousins, and expressed their appreciation for being able to settle in this country of freedom. A grandson of the delegate Mr. Cornelius Rempel was present in the front row as a special guest. These celebrations signalled that barriers had been replaced by bridges.

The threshing techniques, baking bread, carpentry, and tractor-pull were done in the afternoon to remember the good old days. During this time the tour to the Hacienda de Bustillos was offered, and a fairly large group participated. DVDs were shown in the evening in the auditorium about the immigration and the early years in the settlement. These are the DVDs that Dr. Otto Klassen had filmed 15 years ago. (They are available in English, German and Spanish.) And being a good Mennonite celebration, the delicious food had its refreshing and replenishing effect. The ladies of the colony, from all the different Mennonite churches, worked together, cooking and serving the multitudes.

The second morning was a repetition of the first day with a parade, more programs, and a short message brought by a minister from the Kleingemeinde church. However, for the evening the attendees were invited to join a banquet-supper on the site of the Zuloaga family’s castle *Hacienda de Bustillos*. The banquet was under a huge tent in front of the castle. In this event everything was conducted in the Spanish language, because the focus was on communicating the Mennonite story to the Mexican society. This included telling who the Mennonites are, and why they came to Mexico. Many Mennonites were also present since most of the present generation of Mennonites understands and speaks a fluent Spanish.

One of the highlights was the presentation by a “mariachi” group who had been asked to come from Chihuahua City to play for a group of Mennonite singers who were dressed in the “mariachi” attire. It showed how this group of Mennonites had been acculturated by the Mexican culture. The singing group included professional singers such as Martha Penner de Martinez, a graduate from CMBC, Ed Heide, a graduate from Tabor College, and amateur singers from the Mennonite colonies. It was an excellent evening.

It was said that the evening at the *Castillo de Bustillos* was an historical night for *El Valle de San Antonio de los Arenales*, (the Saint Anthony Valley of the Dust Storms). On the one hand, this event was important for the Mennonites whose parents or grand-parents, or even great-grand parents had come to these desolate lands making it their new home (*die neue Heimat*) on the 8th of March 1922. On the other hand, it was historical for the Mexicans who live in this area to watch these people, who for half a millennium had moved from country to country, find a place where they could live, educate and worship according to their interpretation of the Anabaptist vision.

A harmonious coexistence has developed between Mennonites and Mexicans, even though the cultural gap between these two groups was, and remains, large. In spite of the gap, the



Martha Penner de Martinez, who has studied in Canada provided some of the music for the anniversary celebration. Photo Credit: Jorge Reimer.

acculturation process is also evident for economic, geographic and sociological reasons.

It should be noted, however, that Mennonites do not live in a bicultural, but rather in a tri-cultural society. The Mexican culture is the predominant one, the Tarahumara are the indigenous people who have been there the longest, and Mennonites are the new-comers. Every year in May, the City of Cuauhtemoc has a tri-cultural fair, celebrating these three cultures.

An important question asked at each celebration, as well as at this one, is: Why did Mennonites come to Mexico? The committee organizing this 90th anniversary celebration invited me, David Friesen, to address this question in two sessions, one on Friday in Low German at the Museum, and the other in Spanish on Saturday at the castle. On Friday I addressed the reasons why Mennonites wanted to emigrate out of Canada and move to Mexico, and on Saturday I addressed the reasons why President Obregon chose to invite the Mennonites to settle in Mexico.

The principal reason why Mennonites wanted to move to Mexico was that they felt betrayed in Canada. They were looking for a new setting in which they could find the freedoms they desired, and believed they were losing in Canada. After inspecting a number of countries, the delegates chose Mexico as the country that would give them the freedoms they desired.

In order to understand why Mexico decided to invite



The author, David Friesen addressing the anniversary audience on the topic of why Mennonites moved to Mexico in the 1920s. Photo Credit: Jorge Reimer.

Mennonites to settle in their country, we have to take into account several events that occurred in Mexico during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Mexico became an independent country in 1821, and proclaimed its first constitution in 1824, declaring that the only official religion would be Roman Catholic. Even with some changes during the 1830s, the Catholic religious character of Mexico remained intact. It was not until 1857, when President Benito Juarez changed the Mexican Constitution radically. He declared that in Mexico there would be freedom of religion. More importantly, he confiscated the properties of the Roman Catholic Church, forbidding it to own property. Thereafter, the big cathedrals and their contents are owned by the government. These laws are known as *Leyes de Reforma* (Reform Laws).

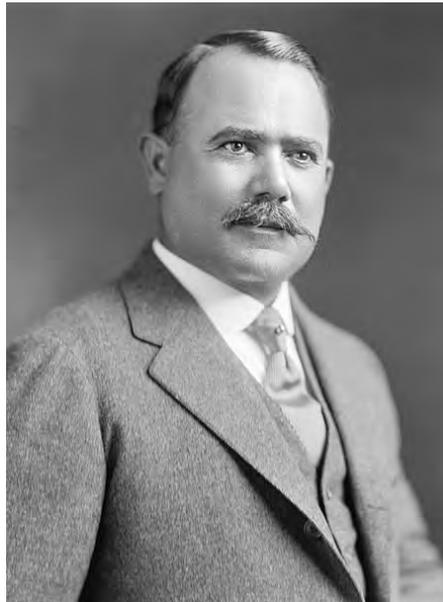
Benito Juarez, President for five terms from 1858-1872, had the courage to make Mexico the first secular state in modern times. No country until then had made it so clear that state and church should be separated, even though it was a concept advocated by the Anabaptists in the sixteenth century - long before Benito Juarez proclaimed it politically. The marriage between Constantine and the Church which began in the fourth century, was broken in Mexico in 1857.

The other event was a social change that took place a number of years later. When the Mexican government confiscated the Roman Catholic Church's land, it was sold to the wealthy - those who could pay a good price. This caused a big rift between the haves and the have-nots. By 1900, 95 percent of the land belonged to 5 percent of the Mexican population. The proletarian class and the poor farmers (*campesinos*) lived in desperate poverty. The land in the state of Chihuahua, the biggest state in Mexico, was owned by a handful of people.

The situation became so critical that the Mexican Revolution broke out on November 20, 1910. This revolution lasted for a number of years. In 1917 the various revolutionary factions drew up a new Constitution. It provided more protection for the labour class, but for our interest the most important aspect was the agrarian reform (*reforma agraria*). This law stated that one farmer could only own a maximum of 500 acres of farm land.

This constitution, including the land reforms, was not implemented until Obregon became President in December 1920. Consequently the big landlords (*latifundistas*) tried to sell their land before the law would go in effect. Two of those landlords were David Russek and Pedro Zuloaga. Both of them sold land to Mennonites. Russek went to Manitoba twice and to Saskatchewan once offering his land to Mennonites. He sold his land to the Sommerfeld Mennonites in the area of Santa Clara. Zuloaga sold his land to the Old Colony Mennonites, and it was in his castle that the delegates were lodged when they came to investigate the land.

The third event was that one of the revolutionaries, Alvaro Obregon, the one who finally defeated all his opponents, became President. Obregon, a successful general and skilled



Alvaro Obregon was the Mexican President who granted the Privilegium to Mennonites, which prompted the migration to Chihuahua State in the 1920s. Photo Credit: George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress, Wikipedia Commons.

politician, was also a scientific farmer through studies, and a farmer at heart through his DNA. When he was not involved in the revolution, he was a successful farmer, experimenting with new crops and techniques.

Obregon was the President who received the handful of timid, humble, freedom seeking Canadian Mennonite delegates. They asked for exemption from military service, their own private German schools, freedom from giving an oath, and the ability to live their faith according to their conscience. Even though the conversation had to be done by an interpreter, the discussion was apparently friendly and welcoming.

When Mennonites raised the matter of controlling their own schools and teaching in their own language, the President was aware that this request was unconstitutional. The law read that the schools had to be non-confessional, based on reason and facts. The Reform Laws in 1857 had officially taken prayer out of the schools. The President was in a dilemma. On the one hand, he wanted

these Mennonites to settle in Mexico because he knew they were good farmers; on the other hand, education was an important plank in his program of reform. So he tried to persuade the delegates to agree to eventually change their language of instruction to Spanish, and to adopt the Mexican education system. However, when Obregon sensed that Mennonites would not agree to this, but would rather not immigrate to Mexico, he agreed to the Mennonites' request on schools.

During the intervening years, some Mennonites have tried to respond to the desire of the President for them to teach Spanish in their schools. The pioneer school is named after him *Escuela Alvaro Obregon* (Alvaro Obregon School), where the full Mexican education program is pursued, and foreign languages such as German and English are taught as well. In addition, in many Mennonite schools today, Spanish is being taught.

These are historical coincidences that prepared the immigration to Mexico. Without the reforms of 1857 there would have been no freedom of religion except for the Roman Catholic Church. Without the 1917 Constitution there would have been no agrarian reforms, and the landlords most likely would not have sold their land to Mennonites. At least they would not have been desperate to sell it in the shortest time possible. Had President Alvaro Obregon, who was a good farmer himself, not been so eager to have these farmers come to Mexico, he most likely would have declined their request to have their own schools.

Mr. Gerhard Ens, in one of his Mennonite history radio talks, said that God had prepared ways for the different immigrations among the Mennonites. The move by Mennonites to Mexico in 1922 followed this pattern. The aim of the 90th anniversary celebration of Mennonites in Mexico was designed to show the hand of God in this move: forming us as brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Another Ebenezer has been erected.

The Low German Mennonites of Argentina

By Kennert Giesbrecht, Steinbach, Manitoba

A lot has been said and written about Mennonites in Paraguay and Bolivia but very few people are aware of the fact that there are also three Mennonite colonies in Argentina. Until recently I belonged to this group of people who did not know much about Mennonites in Argentina. Then in April 2012 I had an opportunity to travel to all three colonies: Nueva Esperanza (in La Pampa), Pampa de los Guanacos (in Santiago del Estero) and Colonia del Norte (also in Santiago del Estero). All three colonies have their roots in Mexico (or should I say Canada ... I don't want to go back any further!). They are Low German speaking people and their main method of transport is still the *horse & buggy*.

The goal of my trip, as editor of the *Die Mennonitische Post*, was to get some pictures and stories for our paper. I also wanted to follow up on numerous invitations I had received over the years. The colonies in Argentina always felt themselves to be "outsiders". They never received as much coverage in the *Mennonitische Post* and they longed to share more about their lives in the most important newspaper amongst Low German speaking Mennonites in Latin America.

Although I have had the chance to visit some 100 colonies over the past decade, the colonies in Argentina were never in my travel plans. The main reason for that was the isolation and separation of the colonies. I knew I would need at least ten days to visit all three colonies. In Bolivia or Mexico on the other hand I can easily visit one or two colonies a day.

But this past year I could combine the trip with my visit to some Bolivian colonies. After a week in Bolivia I flew to Buenos Aires. A good friend from Colonia del Sur, Bolivia, agreed to join me on this trip. So I knew I would not be alone for the endless bus rides and other travels. Benjamin Guenther is a teacher and well-respected man in his colony. He and his wife Anna have many friends and relatives in at least two colonies in Argentina. Having been there before Benjamin was just the right man to be my travel guide.

The Nueva Esperanza colony was founded in 1986 by Mennonites from the northern parts of Chihuahua, Mexico. Most of the migrants came from the Capulin colony, close to the city of Nuevo Casas Grandes. Isaak Bueckert, Jacob Loewen und Abram Rempel were some of the men heavily involved with scouting for the land and dealing with the Argentine government. Nueva Esperanza lies roughly 750 km southeast of Buenos Aires. Although the soil is very fertile this region lacks rainfall and therefore the farmers have suffered major setbacks over the decades. This is the main reason why many Mennonite farmers have opened welding shops where they build farm equipment and tools. In the village of Reinfeld I met a most unique situation, where out of the twenty farmsteads about twelve had large factories on their yards. Each one employed a number of people in an attempt to make a living from sales of farm equipment. The thousands of ranchers and farmers in the Pampa region make for a ready market for their products.



Every new settlement has its challenges. For Colonia del Norte the plagues of ants and the salty soil have been very challenging at times for farmers. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.



The school buggy in Pampa de los Guanacos Colony in northern Argentina. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.

The continuous droughts and the need for more land pushed the La Pampa Mennonites to search for more land. In 2004 they bought land roughly 1,200 km further northwest, close to the city of Santiago del Estero. Mostly young families bought land in the new settlement. Some opted to develop their farmsteads first and then move up there later. Others packed their belongings and started conquering the wilderness in the north. Others bought land but never could quite decide to move there. After all, moving has many negative side effects, like leaving friends and relatives behind, or not knowing what farming will be like in the new and strange environment. Colonia del Norte (or colony of the north) owns about 12,000 ha of land and 110 families call this place home.

The third Mennonite colony is Pampa de los Guanacos, roughly 1,000 km slightly northwest of Buenos Aires and only 500 km east of Colonia del Norte, Santiago del Estero. This group of Mennonites comes from Durango, Mexico. The first Mennonite delegates came to this region in 1994 and by 1995 the first families moved here. Amongst the delegates were also the church leaders from the Durango colony who chose to leave Mexico because of conflicts with the colony and church. Ältester Bernhard Bueckert and all the ministers and deacons left Mexico and were part of this new settlement in Argentina. Here I had the privilege of having one of the most remarkable visits I have had on the dozens of trips I have made to Mennonite colonies in the last ten years. Bernhard Bueckert, Jacob Martens, Gerhard Klassen, Gerhard Andres, and several other men who were all delegates of this migration



Maria Hiebert tries helping her dad (David H. Hiebert) in their family store in Colonia del Norte. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.

back in the 1990's, sat down with me and told me countless stories of their move, the challenges and difficulties and also the discontent of many settlers because of the choice of land they made. Today Pampa de los Guanacos has a population of roughly 122 families or 650 people. The summers tend to be very hot in this region and periodical droughts make farming very risky and difficult. As a result many farmers in this colony have chosen to produce milk or raise beef cattle. The nearby city of Pampa de los Guanacos and also distant cities are good markets for their products.



Johan Neudorf showing off some shoes and boots made in their work shop. His daughter and an employee look on. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.



Benjamin Guenther (left, from Bolivia) and his cousin Johan Guenther show off some of the products of Johan's welding shop. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.



Mrs. Sara Klassen, wife of Jacob Klassen from the village of Blumenort, washing the families dirty laundry outdoors. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.



Greta Klassen, daughter of Gerhard Klassens from the village of Blumenhof, preparing the oven for the pizza they're going to bake for lunch. Photo Credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.

Although the Mennonite colonies are well established in Argentina and they call this county home by now, Old Colony Mennonites are not known very well by the 'native people' or so called 'Argentinos'. During my brief stay I had several encounters with the media who were making documentaries for TV, or writing for newspapers or magazines on the life of the colony people. There is a general sense of curiosity amongst the Argentine people, they want to know more about these people who live, dress and behave so differently. When I walked in the airport and bus station in the metropolis of Buenos Aires with my Old Colony companion I noticed the

many stares we got.

With the vast territories Argentina possesses and the relatively small population for the land, we can expect to see more Mennonite colonies to be started in the next decades. There is still a lot of farming land to be had in Argentina, and Mennonites are always on the lookout for more land to satisfy their needs and desires to own their own farm.

Endnotes

¹ *Die Memnonitische Post* currently has 13,500 subscribers and purchasers in the Americas, about 150 of those live in Argentina.

Mennonite Women and the Burden of Modesty

Hans Werner, Winnipeg

There is remarkably little research on the question of women's fashion for Mennonites from the Dutch-Prussian-Russian stream. This brief photo essay is admittedly only to raise questions and stimulate further research on an important aspect of women's pasts.

The photos shown here are all taken around the turn of the century in Manitoba's East Reserve. Johan E. Funk, the photographer for most of them, lived in the reserve and took photographs of his family and acquaintances from the 1890s to about 1904. The images shown here were kept by Funk's son Abe of Steinbach and were reproduced from glass slides by Jim Peters. Research by Linda Buhler and others have identified the subjects for many of these photos.¹ The other photos come from the *Preservings* image collection.

Among more conservative groups of Mennonites and in earlier times generally, the burden of modesty is and was borne only by women, with acceptable fashion dictating that the feminine form must be hidden. Women were also not to look like men, in the sense that wearing pants was unacceptable, but appearing too feminine represented sexual danger and was not appropriate. There remains, however, a striking range of diversity within this basic conservative mode. Katharina Doerksen Funk is wearing the typical formal attire worn by older women for photographs in at the turn of the 19th century. The long black dress is accompanied by a long black apron. Her head covering is a black bonnet that is quite elaborate. The shawl around her neck is the only nod to colour in the otherwise dark clothing.



Katharina Derksen Funk (b. 1844) and her husband Johan (b. 1841), c 1903. Photo Credit: Johann E. Funk Collection.



Unidentified women and children. Photo Credit: Johan E. Funk Collection.



Regina Derksen's wedding portrait in 1907. Photo Credit: *Preservings* 11 (1997): 1.



Katherina Kliewer, c. 1903. Photo Credit: Johan E. Funk Collection with additional research by Linda Buhler.



The wedding photo of Maria Reimer and J.R. Friesen, 1903. Photo Credit: Preservings 9 (December 1996): 73.

Younger women and those from the less conservative churches could dress in a more fashionable conservative style. Regina Doerksen's 1907 wedding photo, while still black is close fitting and features puffed sleeves. Delbert Plett noted that she "came from royalty as Mennonites go;" her brothers were Sommerfelder and Chortitzer bishops and ministers. At a time when it was considered to be a mandate from scripture that a woman's head ought to be covered when she was in church seems to have produced an extension of the practice to public appearances in general. The question remained, however, how elaborate such a head covering could be, or how simple it had to be. The unidentified women in Johan E. Funk's photo of two women sitting on a bench among flowers are wearing elaborate hats. It is also not clear what his photographer's eye saw when he took the photo of Katherina Kliewer. Were the bicycle, fancy white dress with frills, and the hat novelties, or was this scene that one might have come across in Manitoba's East Reserve more often.²

By the early 1900s it seemed that Kleine Gemeinde couples could be quite modern, at least when they went to a photographer to pose for their wedding portrait. Maria Reimer is dressed in white with a brooch adorning her fancy dress. Her hair is clearly styled and she has no head covering at all.

All of these photos were taken of people who lived within twenty or thirty kilometers of each other over approximately a ten year period and all of them are Mennonites. The photos are all taken at formal sittings and offer little in the way of a sense of what was fashionable on weekdays when the photographer was not there. Before they were cropped, some of Johan E. Funks photos show the makeshift backgrounds he used to try to hide the walls of the simple homes where he posed his subjects. Wedding photos also do not necessarily show what women actually wore at the wedding ceremony in the local church. Where did the elaborate black bonnet originate? There is a rich field of research, and questions that beg for stories about the eternal question for women—what do I wear?

Endnotes

1 Linda Buhler, "Johann E. Funk: Pioneer Photographer, A Photo Essay," in *Preservings* 7 (December 1995): 41-43.

2 Linda Buhler, Index to Johann E. Funk Photograph Collection.

Reviews

Las Mujeres Flores (the Flower women)

Eunice Adorno, La Fabrica, 2011.



It is a strange thing but different groups of Mennonites seem to draw the attention of different media. Soviet Mennonite women have their myriad autobiographies, middle class North American women their cook books, the women of the Low German-speaking Mennonites in Latin America appear ubiquitously in picture books. Walter Quiring, Abe Warketin, Larry Towell, Kennert Giesbrecht, and others have presented these women and girls in their traditional European garb altered by Mexican traits of straw hat and colourful ribbons. No doubt the Latin American ‘colony’ Mennonites are photogenic; they are not just beautiful, but being a visible plain people out of any similar context makes them a photographer’s paradise.

What makes *Las Mujeres Flores* unique is that it is a work by an award-winning Latina photographer from Mexico City, who was drawn by intense curiosity, but also driven by tenacious resolve to come to know these women, but unlike so many, she entered their communities, invited the women into relationship with her, and photographed them. The author’s singular expressed purpose was to try “to understand their feminine way of life in the country.” [15] Like so many other ethnographers of these women, she found behind the dour looks, the modest dress, “the kitchen, a kind of secret” in their worlds, but one in which “separated...from their husbands, the women forge their own universe...” [15]

The book features moderately conservative Mennonites – car-driving Old Colonists or perhaps Kleine Gemeinde – women. They work in electricity-driven kitchens, drive cars, have their own cameras, sometimes wear blue jeans under their dresses. But they are dressed in the tell-tale print dresses, covered with flowers, decked in black kerchiefs. Adorno finds them in the kitchen, the bedrooms, on the streets, under wash lines, at work and at play. She has won their trust clearly: she gets them to take off their coverings and exhibit their uncut hair, even to appear in undergarments. Adorno readily crosses ‘the line’ of cultural taboo and has photographed the ‘forbidden’: a scene of a man in church, a woman bending over revealing the top of her knee-high socks, a couple holding hands, several scenes of deceased persons. Because the book contains but a

single page of text, the book’s preface, one must deduce the author’s true intention. It is also hard to imagine that the author was permitted to take some of these photos and the question of ethics can be raised.

But she has driven home the point that the flower is the conservative woman’s passport to self expression and autonomy. The flower bedecks the dress, the ceramics in the china cabinet, the drawings and doodlings. It is there too in the encroaching artifacts of modernity – the plastic flowers, the floral patterned wallpaper, the embroidered sheer curtains, the vinyl chairs, the linoleum. The flower symbolizes the Mennonite woman’s agency, her expression of beauty and passion, her connection to nature and her social ties to family and community.

We all make errors and Adorno’s brief preface has several. She refers to La Honda as La Onda, to ‘Fraum Blaum’ as the apparent Low German translation of ‘flower women,’ to the Mennonites as “native Germans”, to the idea that Mennonites were “granted” land (they purchased all their lands) by President Obregón, that their original settlements included the Zacatecas communities, that traditional Mennonite women’s names include flowers; it would seem that Violet, Rose, Lily, Daisy are hardly the names one finds among conservative women.

But the book is catching the Latin American community by storm, in fact it has been entered into an art exhibit in Madrid and won a national prize in Mexico. The non-Mennonite audience seems to trust Adorno’s sincerity. When she says that she sees her own ‘religious’ history in these women and understands that these women also look at her, and have their own judgment of her, she communicates her Latina-based value of Mennonite culture in Latin America. Mennonite viewers will be a bit more hesitant in embracing this potentially controversial book. But they should note that the Low German Mennonites are coming to be accepted as part of the pluralistic cultural landscape of Latin America by Latin Americans.

Royden Loewen
University of Winnipeg, Chair in Mennonite Studies

Subscription Form

I wish to subscribe to *Preservings* for

- the year 2013 (issue 33) \$20.00 _____

- the year 2014 (issue 34) \$20.00 _____

Total: _____

Please make cheques out to the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation and mail to:

D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation,
University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg Manitoba, R3B 2E9.

Name: _____

Address: _____



De Fehrs. Kroniek van een Nederlandse mennonietenfamilie

[The Fehrs. Chronology of a Dutch Mennonite Family]

Arlette Kouwenhoven, Amsterdam/Antwerp: Uitgeverij Atlas, 2011, paperback 247 pages, ISBN 078 90 450 2001 3.

In this book the anthropologist Arlette Kouwenhoven writes Mennonite history in an unusual way. She follows a Mennonite family from Amsterdam, Netherlands to Sabinal, Mexico via Poland/Prussia, New Russia, and Canada. The Fehrs are a real family, but Kouwenhoven is not so much writing their family story as using their history as representative of that of the stream of Mennonites called "Russian Mennonites." And within this stream, she writes about descendants of the "Flemish" congregations of Dutch Mennonites and the later "Old Colonists" from Russia. Her approach makes for a history that is essentially about people, which adds interest.

She uses facts about the family inasmuch as these are available, but where these are very summary, she fills in the story with suggestions as to what may have been the situation. She bases these suggestions on her knowledge of the life of Mennonites in those places, gleaned from both primary and secondary sources, and on the general history of the area. For example, in the chapter on Poland/Prussia she asks herself why there is a gap in the DeVeer/Defehr/Fehr genealogy at a certain point. She suggests that many family members may have died of the plague that was raging at that time. (p.74-75)

This extensive use of background of the political, social, and economic life of the times influencing her Fehr family puts Mennonites in the context of the society they live in. As a result, the book is not only about the Mennonites in their church life, but also about events in the society in which they live.

Being an anthropologist, and not a theologian, Kouwenhoven is able to see factors involved in the development of attitudes and ideals in the Mennonite community that are not directly related to their faith. A striking example of this is the principle of the separate community living "away from the world." The Mennonites of Danzig were merchants, bankers, shippers, and businessmen and were therefore of necessity part of "the world." But they were set apart by the policy of the Danzig government, which did not allow foreigners to become citizens, and of the guilds, who denied them membership in the local trades and industry. This contributed to the formation of Mennonite communities developing their own industries and lifestyle outside the city. (pp.52-53) The compact Mennonite village of the Canadian prairies, with houses built along a single street, developed in South Russia as a protection against plundering by nomadic gangs in the area, the vicissitudes of the extreme climate, and isolation. By living close together, they helped each other and formed close relations. (p.100,102)

Nevertheless, although not Mennonite, or even religious, Kouwenhoven writes about the faith and practice resulting from it with accuracy and respect. She quotes diaries, articles, and

letters in which religious attitudes are expressed. For instance, she makes extensive use of the diaries of Jacob D. Epp and David Epp of the Old Colony of Chortitza, not only for the insight they give on economic and social conditions, but also their religious attitudes. (pp. 125-129) Later in the book, she makes similar use of the diary of Jacob Wiens, who emigrated to Canada (p. 145), letters of his grandson Jacob Fehr to his sister Katharina 1942-1951 (p. 149), and the pastoral letters of Elder Johann Wiebe in the Hague-Osler Colony (p. 166-167). In the last part of the book, about the Mexico colonies, she gives much attention to what present Mennonites say. As she writes in the introduction, she stayed with David and Maria Fehr in Sabinal several times.

Kouwenhoven discusses with integrity issues that created conflict which to people outside the community might seem ridiculous, such as the use of wigs (in Prussia), singing in four-part harmony (South Russia), whether cars might be used (Canada), what sort of education was to be followed (various places), and whether rubber tires on tractors are allowed (Mexico). She seems to have been able to distinguish the subtle differences between various groups of Mennonites with accuracy, although only someone with detailed knowledge of the groups could judge this.

Kouwenhoven's ability to maintain neutrality in discussing difficult issues, is evident in the way she deals with the drugs trafficking of Mennonites from Cuauhtémoc area. The temptation to participate in drugs trafficking is fed by a lack of perspective for the future, she suggests. Drug use, and trafficking, are "plagues" that are tolerated by the community, she claims, "from fear, from helplessness, from absence of alternatives." (p. 214) In her last chapter, discussing the dilemmas of the Old Colony communities with respect to their isolation, she posits that some change will come, because Mennonites have always had to adapt to the country where they live in order to survive.

A disadvantage of her approach of following a family tree in order to write anthropological history is that the relationships become confusing, and, as a result, the thread is sometimes lost if you don't pay attention. It is some help that Kouwenhoven numbers people with the same name according to their generation, like Gijsbert de Veer from Amsterdam and Jacob Fehr of Russia/Canada, and the family tree chart following on the Table of Contents is a good reference, as Kouwenhoven has the names of the people in the line she follows printed in bold typeface.

The book is certainly one to read if you want to get basic insight into the background of the group of Mennonites referred to as Old Colony, and it is an interesting introduction to the history of the Russian Mennonite stream as a whole.

Lydia Penner
Den Haag, Netherlands

Inside the Ark; The Hutterites in Canada and the United States

Yossi Katz and John Lehr, University of Regina:
Canadian Plains Research Council Press, 2012, 432 pages. \$39.95.

Inside the Ark is a fascinating and informative book about Hutterites. Although the title indicates that the study includes all Hutterites in North America, the introduction clarifies that the focus is largely on the Schmiedeleut in Manitoba and in the northern states immediately south of Manitoba, with some references for comparison to the Lehrerleut and Dariusleut.

The authors, Yossi Katz and John Lehr, bring unique perspectives to the study of Hutterites. Both are geographers. Katz holds the Chair for the Study of the History and Activities of the Jewish National Fund at the Bar-Ilan University in Israel. He has published in the areas of modern history of Israel, Zionism, and the Kibbutzim movement. Lehr teaches at the University of Winnipeg in the geography Department, with a focus on the history of agricultural settlements in western Canada. Both have a lengthy history of contact with Hutterites, having researched their history, and lived on colonies for extended periods of time.

Even though this book is not a comparative study of Hutterite colonies and the Kibbutzim, it is clear that the authors' familiarity with the Kibbutz forms some of the categories from within which they analyze the Hutterite communities. Numerous comparative references are included. This novel approach is helpful in seeing Hutterites from a new perspective.

The book consists of two quite different sections. After a brief historical survey from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the first half of the book is a study of various aspects of Hutterite life. The chapters deal with topics like: Organization and Law, Isolation in Space and Social Convergence, Religion and Tradition, the education system, women, and *Weglaufen* (leaving the colony). The analysis is largely of the Schmiedeleut Hutterite Church in Manitoba, with most of the material drawn from Group Two.

Since both the authors are geographers, this is the perspective from which they write. They discuss the importance of space for Hutterite colonies. One aspect of space is that colonies are located so as to reinforce separation from the world, and to maximize the development of communal life internally. Colonies are located away from major highways, usually on gravel roads. Outsiders do not easily stumble onto a colony.

The importance of space is also discussed in terms of how colonies locate buildings. In more recent years, with the ever greater use of automobiles, many colonies have developed a circular arrangement of dwellings with a circle drive around the outside of the dwellings. This provides easy vehicle access to each dwelling, and creates an inner courtyard which houses the common areas of kitchen, church, and washing facilities. All dwellings are roughly equidistant from facilities which are used daily. This inner courtyard provides space for members to meet and visit, and a sheltered area in which children can play safely.

Space is also discussed in terms of how Hutterites' live together, including gender relations, work patterns and assignments, the role of education, and the continuing attraction to the outside world.

One of the most fascinating, and also most disturbing, chapters is the one about *Weglaufen* (running away). Hutterites have left communal living since colonies were first established in North America in the 1870s. However, the pace of leaving, or defection, has increased in the past number of decades. According to the authors, during the first 75 years, about 600 people left in total. Today, the rate of leaving is greater than the rate of natural increase.

The reasons for leaving have also changed. In the earlier days, Hutterites left to experience the freedoms and economic opportunities of the host society. Many who left, especially the young men, would return after some time.

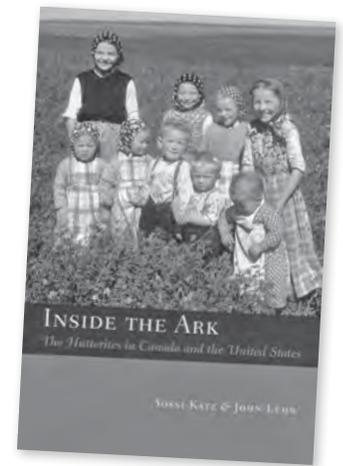
Today, "the main cause for defections is the search for spiritual realization, a road paved by Evangelical Christianity, and the appeal of charismatic evangelists and their missionary allure." (174) In this evangelical interpretation of Christianity, personal worship of God, rather than life within the framework of the community, is the key to salvation. In other words, the choice presented to Hutterites is "for 'internalized religion' and not 'institutionalized religion', which demands the submission of individualism to community." (175)

Hutterites, young and old, who defect for religious reasons, are not likely to return. Their visits to the colony are also a threat, because they can, and often do, influence family members and friends to leave. Thus colonies strictly regulate the visits of defectors to the colonies, and try to maintain the space between community and world.

The latter half of the book consist of an appendix, which includes a few pages of photos, charts, tables of statistics, a complete listing of all colonies in North America as of 2006, and an English translation of the "Ordinances and Conference Letters of the Schmiedeleut, 1762-2009." This latter material has never been published before, and provides readers with a rich, new, first-hand, view of the inner working of Hutterite life from the perspective of the leaders who issued letters of direction and admonition to the their member colonies.

In particular, these Ordinances and Letters reveal the continuing struggle by Hutterites to maintain community by balancing a variety of polarities of space. Separation from the world is balanced with the need to connect with society for business, shopping, and other needs. Separation in clothing styles is balanced with the desire by members for more modern colours and styles. Control of young people is balanced with the need to not drive young people away with too many, and too strict, rules. The desire to handle all disciplinary matters internally, is balanced with a legal system which requires that some matters, like abuse, be handled by provincial or state authorities.

The authors end the study with their prognosis of the future viability of Hutterite colonies. In their view, the future looks



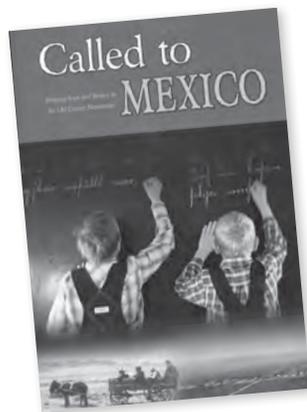
bleak, unless Hutterites address some issues. Hutterites, they believe, will need to invest more in education, including a greater emphasis on critical thinking, so that young people will be able to discern what is good, and what threatens community living. More teaching needs to be focused on understanding the weaknesses and problems of individualism, and the advantages of community.

The authors also believe that the authority structure of colonies, which is now centred in the minister, needs to be more distributed so that more people can participate in decision making. This includes separating the religious and economic leadership roles. They believe that in order to not only survive economically, but to compete successfully, Hutterites need to

more fully develop their intellectual capital through improved education. This includes changing gender roles, so that both women and men can contribute to community to their fullest potential.

The book is an excellent and interesting read. It is provocative, and not everyone will agree with all of their suggestions. But it is written by two authors who are sympathetic to Hutterites, passionate about the advantages of communal living, and hoping that Hutterites will survive in the future as the largest, and longest lasting, religious communal group in history.

John J. Friesen,
Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite University



Called to Mexico: Bringing Hope and Literacy to the Old Colony Mennonites

Aaron and Elmina Hershberger, eds. Nappanee, IN: Old Colony Mennonite Support, 2011, 408pp. \$15.99

Called to Mexico is a compilation of stories of the experiences of Amish school teachers who came to Mexico to help Old Colony Mennonites with their schools. The book also includes a few brief stories of economic development projects,

such as the Campeche heifer project. The stories are assembled in geographic and thematic groups that flow quite seamlessly into an engaging narrative. Throughout the stories the reader is treated to what one conservative set of eyes sees when it engages another, quite different, conservative group.

In January 1995 eight Amish men arrived in the Manitoba Colony to assess whether the Amish could in some way offer help to Old Colony Mennonites. The Amish soon concluded that the greatest need of Old Colony Mennonites was literacy and over a period of years have sent school teachers to help with schools as part of the School Committee (*Shulkommitee*) reform movement. Most of the book is devoted to telling stories of the interaction of these Amish school teachers with a variety of Old Colony leaders, parents, and fellow school teachers. As the editor puts it “at times it seems laughable to have the Amish, largely a closed culture, being in direct contact with another closed culture.” (26)

The stories are lovingly told. It is clear the Old Colony people became friends of their Amish school teacher visitors. Like good friends do, the Amish saw both the virtues and the pitfalls of the Old Colony way of life. The stories offer up a rich panorama of shared understandings and misunderstandings, differing emphases, and humorous incidents. Interaction with the Old Colony also gave pause for careful reflection by the Amish on their own culture. One contributor suggested that Amish returning to the United States from Mexico “without fail, ... testify to a fresh realization of their priceless heritage.” (298) While living among the Old Colony they missed the “fellowship at church,” noted the excessive work load of Old Colony *Ältester*, and the greater unity and tighter discipline of Amish practice. The Amish are grateful for the positive activities that are there for their youth and bemoan the plight

of youth of the Old Colony who “must row against a strong current” if they “want to behave in a decent way.” (299)

They also note similarities. The slow singing, “its grandness, the sense of solemn reverence, the disciplined voices,” (46) the conservative dress and the desire to hold back, to resist the world, are points of unity and they find that seeing “these concepts embedded in another culture, has a way of deepening” (300) their own roots. They develop a keen sense of the Old Colony people’s desire to be faithful and are critical of the “more liberal Mennonite Churches in Canada” who “often view the Old Colony people as lacking spiritual salvation and show little respect for their traditional way of life.” (15)

There are many humorous stories. The “electric shower” that tingled when you touched the faucet and then eventually gave its user an electric shock through the water itself; the pony who seemed to be able to pull the buggy better after the Amish woman bathed its hoof, even if it was the wrong hoof; the attempts to understand each other when one conversant spoke Low German and a poor High German, while the other Pennsylvania Dutch and a poor but different High German—all gave rise to times of mutual laughter.

Throughout the book the abiding theme is the Amish conviction that stimulating Old Colony Mennonites to progress, as understood by fellow conservatives, was dependant on assisting them in creating a school system that would produce a generation of literate Old Colony Christians. It is clear that progress was measured in small increments, but the Amish love for their very different conservative cousins, is a shining example of a humble desire to help the neighbour. As told in a story of the beginnings of this relationship, when the first Amish arrived in the Manitoba Colony in 1995 Bill Janzen had encouraged them not to laugh, not to cry, “just try to understand.” (26) That theme is pervasive in the book, and presumably throughout their interaction with Old Colony Mennonites—the Amish took that advice to heart.

Hans Werner
University of Winnipeg

News

Mexican Farmers Exploring Tatarstan Agribusiness

From the Kazan Herald, September 12, 2012

A delegation of representatives of Mennonite families currently living in Mexico visited Tatarstan from 29 August to 13 September to explore the possibility of investing in the republic and relocating their agrarian communities here.

All talks are still preliminary, but the tentative plan would see several families of Mennonites purchasing sufficient land upon which they would concentrate their farming communities, each complete with a school, church, community center and stores. The size of the community could increase considerably in the years to come, depending on the decision of individual families back in Mexico and land availability in Russia.

With a very rough and very tentative arrival date of January 2014, this migration would be a reconciliation of sorts between Mennonites and Russia. A group of farmers with Anabaptist Protestant beliefs, Mennonites had suffered persecution after their tight social groups were founded based on the teachings of Menno Simons Freisland in the 15th century, scattering small enclaves of Mennonite communities across Europe.

In 1768, Catherine the Great invited Prussian Mennonites to populate land the Russian Empire had recently required in present-day Ukraine. The offer, which included large swaths of land and religious freedom, was attractive to the Mennonites. Skilled farmers, the Russian Mennonites enjoyed an agricultural success that was curtailed by the collectivization following the Russian revolution. Several decades earlier, some Russian Mennonites had relocated to Canada because of changing ethnic policies within Russia. In 1922, these Canadian Mennonites were then invited to live and work in Mexico by presidential decree.

The Old Colony Mennonites, with a strong emphasis on community, education, family, and hard work, became successful farmers in Mexico, playing an important role in the revolution and modernization of the country's agricultural sector. Using their agricultural know-how, Mennonite communities transformed Mexico's arid and dry land into arable production fields of corn, cotton, oats, beans, chili peppers, wheat, and sorghum. Similarly, Mexico's Mennonite cattle products form an important part of their agribusiness expertise.

Confronted with present day land and water shortages in Mexico, however, some Mennonites are seeking other lands to continue to develop their agricultural prowess.

An official invitation from the Russian Federation brought the current delegation to Tatarstan, where their activities are being coordinated by Joseluis Gomez-Rodriguez of the consultancy firm Direct Vertex Solutions



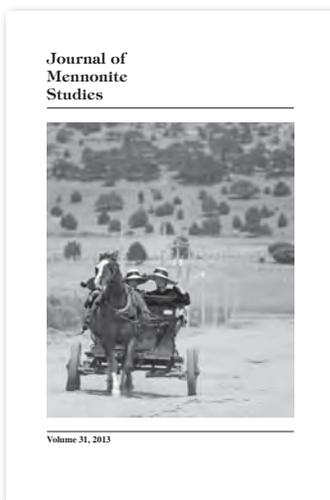
(Gomez-Rodriguez has been a regular contributor to The Kazan Herald's opinion pages).

While in Tatarstan, the delegation met with a range of government and business officials. In Kazan, they met with Tatarstan Investment Development Agency Chief Executive Linar Yakupov and Ruslan Kabiroy, Tatarstan First Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, and Dmitry Shevelev, Head of Foreign Economic Activity at the Tatarstan Chamber of Commerce. They visited the Alabuga Special Economic Zone and met with Deputy General Director Renat A. Khalimov and visited the mayors of the municipal governments in Yelabuga Municipal government, Sabinovsky District, and Aznakaeva District.

While in Russia, the delegation also explored land opportunities in Orenburg District, Samara District, and Moskovskaya District.

The Mennonite delegation was very keen and interested in learning about the myriad of business opportunities available

Subscribe to the Journal of Mennonite Studies



The 2013 issue has the papers
from the 2011 Anti-Modern
Pathways Conference

To subscribe
Phone 204 786 9391

or

Email the editor, Royden Loewen
at
r.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca

here. In a conference hall in Park Inn Hotel, the group met with a host of local businesses, including farmer supplier equipment companies, slaughterhouses, and construction and irrigation companies.

According to Gomez-Rodriguez, Tatarstan stands to gain a lot, not only through investment but also because of the group's vast expertise in agriculture, including knowledge of the latest technologies in greenhouse farming, watering, harvesting, energy conservation, and using alternate energy sources.

"What we're really doing here is investigating," Mennonite farmer Henry Kethler said to *The Kazan Herald*. "It's very interesting. The land looks good – it looks like good farm land. There are a lot of options here."

When they get home, Kethler explained, they will pass along all the information and groups of families will decide how to move forward.

A second delegation from Mexico is set to arrive in the near future and will be seriously exploring agribusiness opportunities within various regions of Tatarstan as well as within Moskovskaya district, Gomez-Rodriguez added.

Hespeler Papers Come to the Archives

Winnipeg, MAN. —At first glance, the creased and yellowed pages simply appear old, but a closer inspection reveals something more. Some of the documents bear the personal signatures of 19th century rulers such as Queen Victoria and

Kaiser Wilhelm II of Prussia—and they have a Mennonite connection. These papers pertain to the life of William Hespeler (1830-1921), a German-Canadian businessman who served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Manitoba. He was also the immigration agent who encouraged thousands of Mennonites to emigrate from Russia to Manitoba when they sought escape from Imperial reforms. Hespeler's appointment as an immigration agent came from the first Prime Minister of Canada, Sir John A. Macdonald.

On Feb. 12, Jeremy Hespeler-Boulton of Victoria BC, great-grandson of William Hespeler, gave the papers documenting Hespeler's life and work to the Mennonite Heritage Centre (MHC). According to Director Alf Redekopp, "Hespeler was largely responsible for Mennonites coming to Manitoba, particularly the Bergthaler Mennonites from South Russia." Klaas Peters, who wrote a booklet about the history of the Bergthaler Mennonites, referred to Hespeler as 'Our most highly esteemed friend, our dear old friend.'

The most important parts of the material are the documents that Hespeler took to Russia to convince the Mennonites to come to Canada. That material includes documentation of the 1872 exchange between the Canadian Government and Russian Mennonites regarding potential rights and freedoms, including exemption from military service. Redekopp also found most fascinating the documents were that have the signatures of monarchs and rulers such as Queen Victoria, Kaiser Wilhelm



On May 10, 2012 half a dozen lay historians and others met for a luncheon-workshop at the Mennonite Heritage Village restaurant to celebrate the work of William Hespeler. The stimulus for the workshop was a large deposit of Hespeler's personal papers donated to the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg some weeks earlier. After a lunch, a list of these documents was reviewed at this gathering. Photo Credit: Lawrence Klippenstein.

II of Prussia, Grand Duke Friedrich of Baden and Zähringen – Karlsruhe, and English King Edward VII. The document signed by Queen Victoria provides official recognition of Hespeler as “Council of the German Empire for the Province of Manitoba Canada.” Her seal is embossed on the upper left-hand corner of the paper.

Redekopp also points to the 1867 document issued on April 30th by the Governor General of British North America, when Hespeler, who was born in Baden-Baden, Germany, officially became naturalized as a British subject. At the time, Hespeler resided in the village of Berlin, in the Province of Upper Canada, and changed his name from “Wilhelm” to “William”. This took place just two months before the federal Dominion of Canada was formed on July 1, 1867. “It’s great to see that part of Canadian history,” Redekopp says. “The Heritage Centre doesn’t often see material from the period before Mennonites came here.”

Hespeler’s reach as an immigration agent extended beyond Mennonites; he also helped Icelandic immigrants and Jewish refugees from Germany plant new roots in Manitoba. He worked to ensure all immigrants to Manitoba had the supplies and shelter they needed upon arrival, including the development of a plan for the town of Niverville, Manitoba. As a businessman, Hespeler was a grain merchant who oversaw the construction of the first grain elevator on the Prairies.

Hespeler was married three times and spent his last year of life as a widower in Vancouver, living with his only son, Alfred. Little is known about his family or religious life, or why he is buried in an Anglican cemetery in Winnipeg with other Winnipeg pioneers. Some of the documentation received by the MHC indicates his military service as a German citizen was deferred—which may provide a line of connection with Mennonites. A street in northeast Winnipeg, an area historically populated by Mennonites, is named after Hespeler.



D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. 2012-2013 Board of Directors

Roy Loewen, Steinbach, MB, chair

John J. Friesen, Winnipeg, MB, vice chair,
and co-editor of *Preservings*

Kennert Giesbrecht, Steinbach, MB,
secretary treasurer

Leonard Doell, Aberdeen SK

Ralph Friesen, Nelson, BC

Abe Rempel, Winkler, MB

Hans Werner, executive director of the
D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc.,
and co-editor of *Preservings*.

Preservings

For subscriptions and address changes, write:

Hans Werner,
D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation,
University of Winnipeg,
515 Portage Ave.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3B 2E9.

For editorial matters, contact one of the co-editors:

Hans Werner, telephone (204) 786-9352
or email: plettfoundation@gmail.com

or

John J. Friesen, telephone: (204) 488-8128
or email: djfriesen1@shaw.ca

Dear Friends:

With this mailing, the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation is pleased to be able to provide another issue of *Preservings*. Through it we hope to continue the vision of Delbert Plett to help readers better to understand and appreciate their Mennonite heritage. Our plans are to continue to produce *Preservings*.

There are of course considerable costs incurred in preparing, editing, printing and mailing this journal. We invite all readers to assist in covering the costs by subscribing on the form on page three. The subscription fee is \$20.00 per year.

We also invite you to contribute articles, biographies, or news. You may know of people whose story should be told in these pages. Maybe grandparents, relatives, or neighbours’ stories would be of interest to our readers. Please contact us about writing such stories, or let us know who might be able to do so. We depend upon many willing writers for the content of the paper.

Blessings to you.

Sincerely,

John J. Friesen and Hans Werner,
co-editors for *Preservings*



*The caption for this 1952 Mennonite Life photo suggested "women especially cling to the accustomed traditional modes of dress."
The photo was taken "at the Redekops" in Mexico. Photo Credit: Mennonite Life 7(1) (January 1952): 35.*