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Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE ARCHIVES and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA

Manitoba Colony leaders (*Vorsteher*) (l-r) Wilhelm Fehr, Jacob Dyck, and Bernhard Friesen with Bruce Wiebe in the Colony's new archival space in 2022, showing the administrative materials/objects that came with the community to Mexico 100 years ago. See story beginning on page 2.

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A New Mennonite Archive in Mexico

by Conrad Stoesz and Bruce Wiebe

In 1922, Mennonite leaders of the migration out of southern Manitoba packed not only their belongings to restart once again in Mexico, but also took many of the community records with them. They packed them in trunks like the one pictured at the right. The paper documents date back to the era of Imperial Russia, but mostly detail how the Mennonites survived and soon thrived on the open Manitoba prairie. Many of these documents are now being collected and preserved, thanks to a new archive in Lowe Farm, Manitoba Colony, Mexico, *Gemeindearchive der Kolonie Manitoba, Mexico* (GAKMM).

Bruce Wiebe of Winkler, Manitoba, with roots in the nearby village of Reinfeld, has long been interested in the history of the Mennonite West Reserve. When Reinfeld community members were looking to celebrate their centennial in 1980, it became apparent to him that their community records were not available, as many had been taken to Mexico.

Although Wiebe had visited Mexico periodically, his 1992 trip was aimed at locating and making copies of records detailing the Manitoba experience. Wiebe was invited into former *Vorsteher* Jacob Froese's barn at Gnadenfeld. There he was shown a large, black trunk that contained the materials he had long been seeking! Wiebe made arrangements to borrow selected materials for microfilming back in Winnipeg.

One of the travel trunks containing community records that accompanied the Colony members when they relocated from Manitoba to Mexico in 1922. Photo credit for all images in this article, including this issue's cover image: GAKMM (*Gemeindearchive der Kolonie Manitoba, Mexico*).

Over the years, Wiebe made many more visits to Mexico. He became concerned that the old records were being forgotten, and, in some cases, those in private hands were being lost. When Wiebe visited in 2022, with the aim of now digitizing those old materials, he learned that the colony office in Lowe Farm was being renovated and colony *Vorsteher*—Wilhelm Fehr, Jacob Dyck, and Bernhard Friesen—were planning a dedicated space to house their old records.

Wiebe took the opportunity to explain the significance and the backstory of the documents that were now stacked on the floor. The colony leaders invited Wiebe to return and help organize these records. With support from the Plett Foundation and the Mennonite Heritage Archives, on a subsequent trip to Mexico, Wiebe set to work removing the materials out of the old trunk and other containers, and then organizing, labelling, and creating spreadsheets to document the boxes' contents.

Most of the materials were from three branches of the colony administration: *Waisenamt*, the office for the division of properties after the death of a parent and the inheritance of minors; *Brandordnung*, the office for the mitigation of fire through regulations and the mutual sharing of losses; and *Gebietsamt*, the office of the *Vorsteher* that manages colony affairs such as taxation and relations with government officials.

Colony leaders also provided Wiebe with an opportunity to speak to the village leaders, who were invited to bring their administrative documents to the archive for preservation. Reports are that some have already been donated.

Before leaving Mexico, Wiebe worked out archiving procedures with Abraham Thiessen, newly retired senior colony administrator, who will carry on the archiving task (see images that follow). Thiessen is ideal for the task because of his knowledge of the Colony, personable demeanor, and familiarity with data and spreadsheets.

Knowledge of past destruction of historically valuable documents through fire, coupled with the afterglow of the 100th anniversary celebrations recently held in Mexico, will likely spur others to donate more materials to the archive for

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Genealogy and Family History

Prussian Mennonites in the Dutch East India Company?

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

In this article, I will do something that genealogists do regularly, something that irritates me to no end—assume that someone with a Low-German sounding surname was actually a Mennonite.

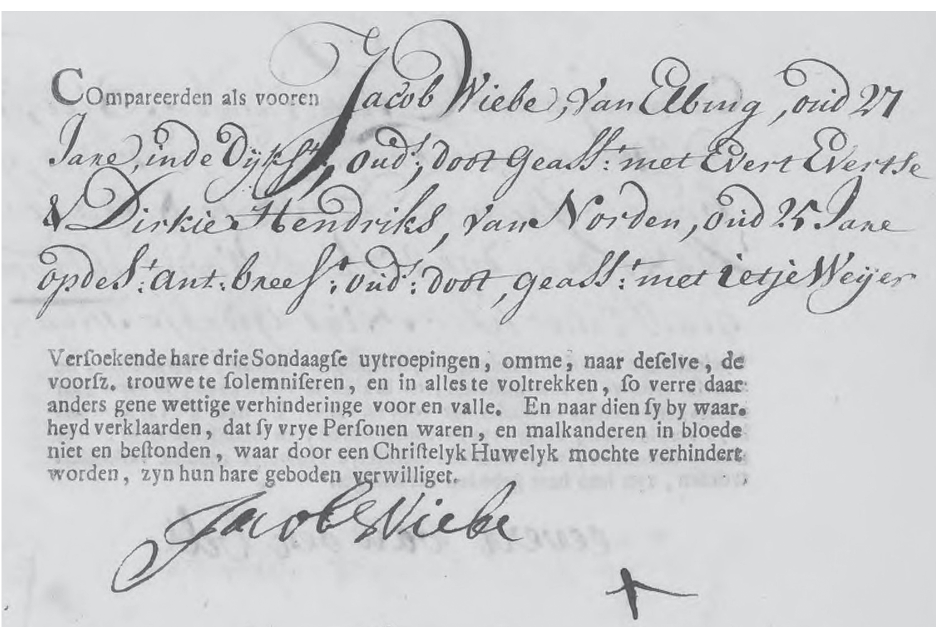
During the 1600s and 1700s, the Dutch East India Company (known in Dutch as the *Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie* [VOC]) was one of the most powerful organizations in the world.[1] Direct involvement of Dutch Mennonites in the VOC was limited, since the VOC armed their ships and expected their employees to take up arms if one of their ships or forts came under attack. Having said that, it would seem likely that any Prussian in the VOC with a Mennonite sounding surname would have no longer been a member of a Mennonite congregation, but more likely a former Mennonite, or of Mennonite ancestry.

Employee records of the VOC have been available online for a few years.[2, 3] While searching these records, I was surprised to find recruits from Prussian locations such as Danzig and Elbing with very distinctive Mennonite sounding surnames. In searching, I chose—based on my 50 years of experience with Prussian records—surnames that I knew to be almost exclusively Mennonite during the 1600s and 1700s. Such surnames include Penner and Wiebe.

Searching through the 3,000 or so names of Danzigers and Elbingers in the VOC employee lists, one sees many names that look "Mennonite," but it would be foolish to claim that those with patronymic, well-known Germanic surnames such as Janson, Dircks, Gerrits [Goertz], Peters, Maartens, Willms, Bartel, Everts, etc. (and their many variations) or common German surnames such as Schmidt, Schroeder, Becker, or Hildebrand were Mennonites.

The only Penner from Prussian territories I was able to find is Daniel Penner of Danzig. He joined the VOC in 1734 as a sailor and cannoneer on the ship *Venenburg*. His tour ended in 1736, after 633 days of employment. He signed up again in 1737 and died in early 1738 while overseas. Other men of possible Mennonite ancestry are Hendrik Ep(p) (Elbing), Abraham Kreker (Danzig), Cornelis Riesen (Danzig), and Jacob Wien(s) (Danzig).

Pieter Claase (Peter Klassen) was from *Kleijnmuijsdorf*[4] *bij Dantzig* and joined the VOC in 1764. His place of origin refers to none other than Klein Mausdorf, which was only about 40 km from Danzig. This village was predominantly Mennonite. Classen would have been born sometime around 1740.


Compareerden als vooren Jacob Wiebe, van Elbing, oud 27 Jare, inde Dijkst; oud; doot geall: met Evert Evertse & Dirkie Hendriks, van Norden, oud 25 Jare op de St: ant: breest; oud: doot, geall: met ietje Weijer

Verſoekende hare drie Sondaagſe uytroepingen, omme, naar deſelve, de voorſz. trouwe te ſolemniſeren, en in alles te voltrekken, ſo verre daar anders gene wettige verhinderinge voor en valle. En naar dien ſy by waarheyd verklaarden, dat ſy vrye Perſonen waren, en malkanderen in bloede niet en beſtonden, waar door een Chriſtelyk Huwelyk mochte verhindert worden, zyn hun hare geboden verwilliget.

Jacob Wiebe

Betrothal notice for Jacob Wiebe and Dirkie Heinrichs. Image credit: Glenn Penner.

The 1727 list of landowners found in the Tiegenhof fire insurance register shows two Peter Klassens and a Jacob Klassen in Klein Mausdorf.[5] One of these may have been his father or grandfather. By the time of the 1772 census of West Prussia, there were no Klassen families in Klein Mausdorf.[6]

Jacob Wiebe was born around 1704 in Elbing. Dutch civil records show that he married Dirkie Hendriks of North Frisia, in the Netherlands, on August 3, 1731, in Amsterdam.[2] He was 27 years old at the time and came from Elbing. The VOC records tell us nothing about his background prior to joining other than his origin of Elbing. Wiebe went on at least seven voyages to China and Ceylon.

His first voyage was in 1732 as quartermaster. He was captain and commander for his last three (1746–1766). During this time, he became quite wealthy but did not live to enjoy his wealth, as he died in late 1766 while on his last voyage.

The last ship Jacob Wiebe commanded was the newly built *Jonge Thomas*. The *Jonge Thomas* became well know in VOC history after it ran aground near the Cape of Good Hope in 1773 and many sailors were heroically rescued.[7] A document related to his last voyage and death gives his heirs as an Anna Wiebe, who was married to Tjark Fock Miller (possibly Jacob's sister), and his only surviving child, Hendrik. There is no mention of a surviving widow, which indicates that she likely died before him.[8]

It has been claimed that Jacob Wiebe had a son, also named Jacob, who also served with the VOC, but that Jacob came from Danzig. He was likely also of Mennonite descent. His first voyage was from 1749 to 1751. He died in early 1766 while on his fifth voyage to Asia.

At this point, it has not been possible to prove that any of these men were Prussian Mennonites. The Prussian records needed to confirm this no longer exist. The Elbing-Ellerwald Mennonite church records went back to at least the early 1700s, but those records disappeared a long time ago.

Endnotes

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_East_India_Company
2. https://www.openarchieven.nl/
3. https://www.nationaalarchief.nl/
4. The spelling of this location illustrates how difficult it was to search for locations. Danzig had the following spellings: Danzig (38), Dantzig (1885), Dantzigh (533), Dantsik (379), Danzigh (30), and

(cont'd on p. 10)

New Mennonite Archive

(cont'd from p. 2)

safe keeping. While the newly established archive is also open to receiving family materials such as photos, correspondence, ledgers, and diaries, little of this material has yet come in. Not yet part of the archive are church documents such as registers, preaching schedules, and sermons.

There is still much work to be done, but a functioning archive now exists to preserve and make accessible the Colony's documentary history, something that will serve the community into the future.

Conrad Stoesz is the archivist at Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg. Mennonite West Reserve historian Bruce Wiebe lives in Winkler.

Bruce Wiebe with Abraham Thiessen (right) in the Colony archive at Lowe Farm, Manitoba Colony, Mexico.

Sarah Tjart Nickel Comforts the Queen of Prussia (1806)

by Arnold Neufeldt-Fast, Toronto

After losing 23,000 soldiers on October 14, 1806, on the bloody battlefields of Jena and Auerstedt, Berlin fell on October 24, forcing the Prussian royal family to flee. They left by way of Cüstrin, Bromberg, and Osterode *en route* to Königsberg. Along the way, they spent 13 days at the so-called Commander's House, a large building at the old Thorn (Toruń) Gate in Graudenz (Grudziądz).

On November 8, 1806, a Mennonite "deacon couple"—Sarah Tjart Nickel (GRanDMA #480957) and her husband, Abraham Nickel—set out for Graudenz, 17 kilometers from their home in Jamerau, to present gifts to the King and Queen. It was the royal family's time of "great need," and Mennonites had pledged a very large sum of money, as well as prayer. "The heavy heartache that this terrible time brought upon our royal house and the great distress of the Fatherland also touched the hearts of our forefathers."[1]

The memory of the encounter is embellished history, vividly described first in a memoir published by Protestant Bishop Eylert 38 years later.[2] Though Mennonites had long forgotten about the encounter—even the local Schönsee Frisian congregation could not recall details—the story quickly "spread in all patriotic circles in Prussia and found its way into almost all school textbooks." German Mennonites eventually identified the resolution passed on October 28, 1806, and commemorated the supportive aid[3] by erecting a monument for the centenary in 1906.[4]

But most famously, the episode in Graudenz was incorporated into a much larger historical fiction about Queen Luise and Napoleon written in 1858 by Luise Mühlbach and translated into English in 1893.[5]

Notably, Mühlbach's many writings feature females as prominent actors. In her telling, Queen Luise (1776–1810) was the only one who could ultimately save Prussia from the French—a view shared by many contemporaries. Though she died at the age of 34, by mid-century, she had become a Prussian national myth, a cult figure, and heroine for resistance and national liberation. Not unlike Princess Diana of our era, her youthful beauty, charismatic presence, and identification with commoners were characteristics remembered and celebrated. Already in 1798, the German Romantic poet, August Wilhelm Schlegel, christened Luise the "Queen of Hearts"[6]—and Mühlbach is clear that by 1806, Luise had also earned the right for political agency.[7]

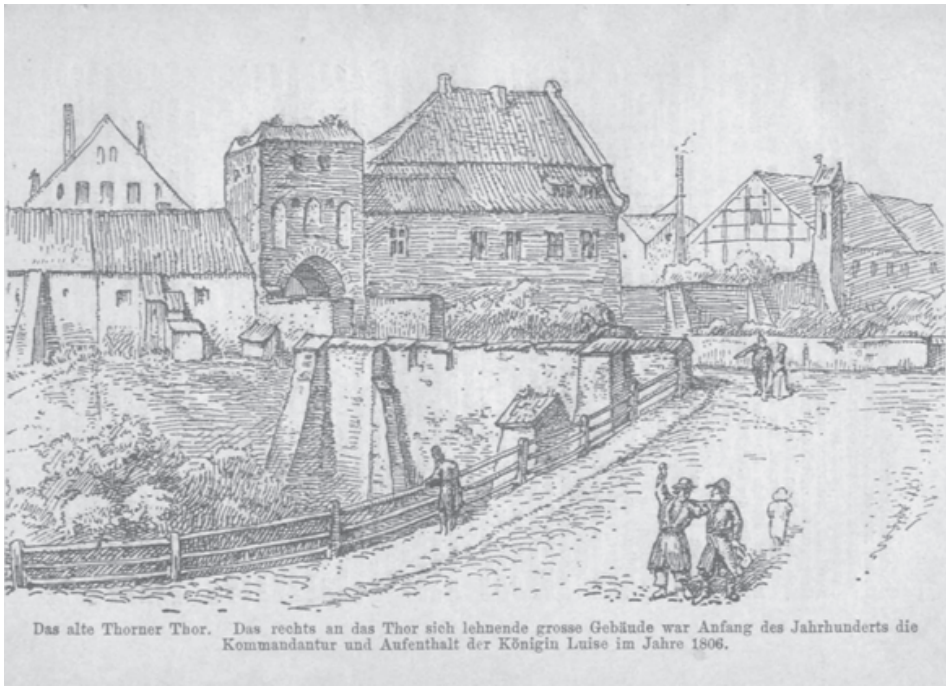
Accounts of the time in Graudenz came to define the King and Queen in historical memory. Friedrich Wilhelm III had been criticized as indecisive and faint-hearted and now—with defeat at hand—despondent. In the hall of the Commander's House in Graudenz, his council "was thrown into the greatest turmoil caused by Napoleon's exaggerated demands."[8]

In contrast, Mühlbach depicts Luise's passion, poise under stress, natural modesty, and comfort when in conversation with simple Mennonites. Mühlbach builds on Eylert's account and includes many of the same quaint details. Because of their religion, apparently, Mennonites never removed their hats and used only the informal *Du* ("you") versus the formal *Sie* (also "you"), even when addressing royalty.

Notably, Mühlbach's account gives equal attention to Sarah Tjart Nickel as to her husband. That is unique for the times, and telling the story in this way today also addresses in a small way the paucity of stories of Mennonite females with agency. For Mühlbach, it is the insistence and manner of Sarah Nickel, her ability to charm the chamberlain, King, and Queen in her own way, which moves the story forward. Sarah Nickel is an artisan; she offers a sacrificial gift from her own *Wirtschaft* (butter is scarce). She is not only a deacon's wife, but a teacher of prayer and, in this way, a model of Christian piety. She comforts and encourages the Queen for what readers know will come next in the drama—the Queen's encounter and negotiations with Napoleon!

In November 1806, Sarah Nickel was 40 years old, and the Queen was 30. While her husband handed over the large Mennonite monetary gift to the King, in Mühlbach's portrayal, the exchange of gifts between the women is almost more memorable. For Sarah's basket of farm-fresh food and home-churned butter, Luise says, "I thank you for your nice present, my dear woman, and I myself will put some of it today on the [bread] of my sons, who shall eat them in honour of good Mde. Nickel."[9]

And then the Queen shares a gift as well: *The Queen had listened to these words [of Abraham Nickel] with increasing emotion; her beautiful countenance was beaming with joy; her eyes were lifted to heaven, and her lips seemed to whisper a prayer of gratitude. ... The Queen, overcome by her feelings, burst into tears—tears such as she had not shed for a long while. She took the costly Turkish shawl from her shoulders and threw it around the surprised [Sarah Nickel]. "Keep it in memory of this interview," whispered the Queen, in a voice choked by tears. ... "God save Prussia!" exclaimed the Queen, raising her tearful eyes and clasped hands. "God save Prussia!" whispered [Sarah and Abraham Nickel], bowing their heads in silent prayer.*[10]



Das alte Thorner Thor. Das rechts an das Thor sich lehnende grosse Gebäude war Anfang des Jahrhunderts die Kommandantur und Aufenthalt der Königin Luise im Jahre 1806.

Graudenz's "Old Thorn (Toruń) Gate." In 1806, the King and Queen resided in the large building adjacent to the gate. Image source: X. Froelich, ed., *Führer durch Graudenz und Umgebung*. Woerl's Reisehandbücher (Wien: Woerl, 1893), 23.

Abraham and Sarah Nickel meet King Friedrich Wilhelm III and Queen Luise in Graudenz. The illustration includes the exchanged gifts: scarf, money, and food basket. With hat on, Abraham Nickel is engaged in conversation with Luise. Image source: *Illustrirtes Panorama. Familien-Magazin. Malerische Blätter für Herz und Welt*, vol. 2 (Berlin: Brigl & Lobeck, 1861), 8.

Undoubtedly, the author has taken a great deal of poetic license in telling this story. But it is the case that in this time of national crisis, Mennonite elders Johann

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Mennonite Heritage Archives

MHA Update

by Conrad Stoesz

With support from Golden West Radio, I am now working on a third season of *Still Speaking, Stories from the Mennonite Heritage Archives*. The five-minute audio stories—based on archival materials at MHA—have been well received by listeners, I'm told.

Season one aired in early 2020 and focused on stories that highlighted the Mennonite Heritage Archives and its role in the community. Season two aired in 2023 and included 13 episodes centred around the 100th anniversary of the *Russländer* migration to Canada that began in 1923.

The new season will tell stories related to the 150th anniversary of Mennonites coming to Manitoba and forming communities in the province. Episodes are still being written but already include stories on water, transportation, war, the first church, and fire. If you are not within Golden West's broadcast range, you can listen to the stories on our website and catch past episodes at https://www.mharchives.ca/features/still-speaking/. In addition to Golden West's support, *Still Speaking* is made possible with technical assistance from Darryl Neustaedter-Barg and Graeme Unrau.

Another project MHA staff are working on is the digitization of the *Odessaer Zeitung* newspaper with funding from the D.F. Plett Foundation and help from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The *Odessaer Zeitung* was published daily from Monday to Saturday from 1861 to 1914. Of special interest is the *Koloniales* section. It carried news, views, and opinions of the German-speaking colonists that settled in Ukraine. Reports also came from the Volga region, Russian Poland, and the Caucasus. As colonists spread to other areas of Russia in the late 19th and early 20th century, reports from Central Asia, the Urals, and Siberia began to appear.

The *Odessaer Zeitung* will be posted on MHA's digital collections platform, https://collections.mharchives.ca/, with open access to those registering for a free account. Recently added titles to the site include *Christian Week*, 1987–2006 and *Mennonite Reporter*, 1971–1997.

MHA archivist Conrad Stoesz recording another episode of *Still Speaking, Stories from the Mennonite Heritage Archives*. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Voices from EMC & EMMC

Pioneer schoolteacher and Mennonite historian Rev. Peter J.B. Reimer (right) and George B. Cornelsen toured the former Hudson Bay building in Ste. Anne, Manitoba in 1973. One hundred years earlier, Mennonite delegates, including those of the *Kleine Gemeinde*, stayed here while they explored the possibility of migrating to Manitoba. Concerned about Russia's move to universal conscription, four of the delegates made arrangements with the Canadian government and recommended the move. Nearly 7,000 Mennonites immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s. Among them was a group of *Kleine Gemeinde* families who disembarked the steamboat *International* just southwest of current-day Niverville, marking the beginning of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference in Canada, 150 years ago this summer. Text and photo credit: Erica Fehr.

For the early *Rudnerweiders* (original name for Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference), there was a strong desire to get together as an entire church family to celebrate and share of God's goodness. Finding a suitable gathering place was a challenge. The creative solution came in the form of a tent that was purchased in the 1940s and set up on the northwest side of the Bergfeld churchyard. This tent could seat 500 to 600 people. The original purpose for the gatherings was to celebrate *Erntedankfest* (Thanksgiving) but as the mission interest of the group grew, it was also used to host an annual Mission Festival. Families brought picnic lunches and spread out on the churchyard. The afternoon would feature special speakers and musical numbers. These tent meetings were the high point of the summer. Text and photo credit: Lil Goertzen.

Historical Commission Awards Four Grants

On June 21–22, 2024, the Mennonite Brethren (MB) Historical Commission gathered in Wichita, Kansas, for its annual meeting. It was a hybrid meeting with six people in person and four on ZOOM. Besides hearing updates from the four archives in the Historical Commission network, the Commission engaged deeply with the research grant applications on its agenda.

The Commission awarded four research grants.

An MB studies $2,500 USD project grant was awarded to **Abidon Malebe Mubwayel**, instructor at the Christian University in Kinshasa, D.R. Congo. He is at the dissertation stage of his doctoral program. This grant is to support the editing and completion of his dissertation. His project title is ***Symbolic Practices and Religious Language Specific to the Confessional Identity of Mennonite Brethren in D.R. Congo***.

An Alfred Neufeld $2,000 USD global church history grant was awarded to **Anicka Fast**, secretary of the Mennonite World Conference Faith & Life Commission, based in Bussum, Netherlands. She is co-editing a book that aims to reshape the story of the global Anabaptist church through biography, in this case, biographies of Congolese Mennonites. The book is being published by Langham Press, Cambridge. This grant is to subsidize the printing and distribution costs to make the volume more affordable in the African context. The book title is ***Witnesses to Peace: Stories of Conversion, Mission, and Renewal in Congo***.

A $2,000 USD publication grant was awarded to **Arnold Neufeldt-Fast**, professor at Tyndale Seminary in Toronto. Arnold is completing a manuscript on the history of the Fürstenland Mennonite settlement in Ukraine to be published by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. According to Arnold, from the late 19th to the mid-20th century, "Fürstenland was a place for new beginnings, identity formation and, from start to end, a place for lively debate about what it meant to be Mennonite." This grant is to help with the book's publication costs. The book title is ***Fürstenland: A History of Mennonites in Russia***.

A Katie Funk Wiebe $1,000 USD research grant was awarded to **Jean-Claude Saki Kavula**, director of a Christian peacemaking organization in Kinshasa, D.R. Congo. He aims to make a church resource book that tells the stories of people resolving conflicts non-violently. This grant is for part one, the collection and editing of these stories into a manuscript. The title is ***Religion and Nonviolence in the Resolution of Conflicts within Mennonite Churches in D.R. Congo***.

For details about the Commission's funding initiatives and application procedures—and news releases announcing past recipients—see the Commission's website, https://mbhistory.org.

At this year's meeting, the Commission also recognized the contributions of Kevin Enns-Rempel and Jon Isaak who will both retire from the Commission at the end of 2024.

Since its formation in 1969, the Commission has helped coordinate the collection, preservation, and interpretation of MB archival records (congregational meeting minutes, conference proceedings, personal papers, periodicals, publications, and photographs) that form and inform MB theology and history.

The Commission works with a network of four archival centers: Center for MB Studies (Hillsboro, Kansas), Mennonite Library & Archives (Fresno, California), Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia (Abbotsford, B.C.), and Centre for MB Studies (Winnipeg, Manitoba).

More information about the work of the Commission—a funded ministry of both the U.S. Conference of MB Churches and the Canadian Conference of MB Churches—is available on its website.

Commission members include Richard Thiessen (chair, CAN), Don Isaac (vice chair, US), Valerie Rempel (recording secretary, US), Jon Isaak (executive secretary, CAN), Chris Koop (CAN), Kevin Enns-Rempel (US), Peggy Goertzen (US), Karla Braun (CAN), Hannah Keeney (US), Benny Leung (CAN), and Maricela Chavez (US).

MBHC news release

Sarah Nickel Comforts the Queen

(cont'd from p. 5)

Donner of Ohrlofferfelde and Cornelius Warkentin of Rosenort gathered Prussian congregational representatives on October 28, 1806, at the home of "Herr Wölke" in Koczelitzke (later Warnau, Marienburg District). They voted unanimously to offer "a voluntary patriotic contribution to support the soldiers who have remained in the field, their widows and orphans." The amount was six times the required annual payment for the support of the Cadet School at Culm, or 30,000 thalers. Since 1780, Mennonites had been exempted from military service in exchange for an annual contribution of 5,000 thalers to the military training institution.[11]

It is also the case that while in Graudenz, a promissory note was presented to the King by the deacon of the Schönsee Frisian Mennonite congregation and Jamrau farmer, Abraham Nickel. A brief letter, dated November 8, 1806, was penned by Donner[12] and signed by Nickel "on behalf of all the congregations." The letter and "patriotic contribution to the war" was acknowledged by the King in writing the same day, "with gratitude for the good intentions of the Mennonite community," and with instructions for the funds to be delivered to Lieutenant General v. Geusau.[13] The first 17,000 thalers were transferred in Ortelsburg (Szczytno) in the presence of the King, and another 13,000 in Königsberg, in both cases "by several deputies from all the Mennonite congregations."[14] Mennonites had hoped to induce the King and his officials to be benevolent with regard to Mennonite privileges, and it worked. Elder Donner recalled with gratitude to God that "our religious freedom [remained] untouched."[15]

Notably, local Schönsee elder Jacob Franz (#858189), who had signed the agreement in Koczelitzke, is absent from all accounts of the royal encounter in Graudenz. Nickel had travelled from his home to Graudenz, where he struck up a conversation with General Adjutant Karl Leopold von Köckritz, an official in the royal entourage. He disclosed that Mennonites had decided to collect money in response to the battle of October 14, for the soldiers, widows, and orphans. The Adjutant asked for more information about the Mennonites, and then asked Nickel to report this immediately to the King in writing. Donner recorded that "both the King and the Queen spoke verbally with Nickel and his wife, and assured them, with much kindness, of their benevolence towards all Mennonites."[16] At a time of military collapse, the substantial donation was a welcome gift from a community worried about its special status.

The royal children, however, were not travelling with the Queen and King as Mühlbach's story suggests; rather her senior personal assistant, Countess von Voß, had already accompanied the royal children to Königsberg. Recent news of their poor health worried Luise greatly. "I am very thin, and I think my appearance is bad, a consequence of tears, nights spent in commotion, and restlessness of every kind, and of all-consuming grief," she wrote to Voß, but she makes no mention of the Mennonite encounter.[17] Whatever the

Another image of the gift exchange, this time with Sarah taking the lead. Sarah and Abraham Nickel with Prussian Queen Luise and King Friedrich Wilhelm III. Image source: Friedrich Christoph Förster, *Preußens Helden im Krieg und Frieden: eine Geschichte Preußens*, vol. 3 (Berlin: Hempel, 1867), 806.

Peter J. Dyck (1914–2010) putting chalk into the etched letters of the Abraham Nickel monument (Nickelstein) in Schönsee, Poland, so the words will show up better on a photograph. See also article in *Mennonitische Rundschau*, March 1, 1961. Photo credit: MAID CA CMBS NP149-1-6261.

actual facts, a tradition developed around the distress of the royals in Graudenz and the sacrificial, genuine patriotism of peasant Prussian subjects, symbolized by the Nickels.

The length of the royal respite in Graudenz was short; on November 15, the first French reconnaissance soldier was spotted across the Vistula River from Graudenz, making the quick departure of the royals an imperative.[18] A centennial monument was erected in 1906 in honour of General Wilhelm de Courbière, who commanded the defense of Graudenz against Napoleon's troops 1806–1807, and in honour of the soldiers who died there.[19]

Caught up in the same patriotic commemoration, Mennonites erected their own monument in memory of Abraham Nickel and the Mennonite contribution to the state in 1911. "The heavy heartache that this terrible time brought upon our royal house and the great distress of the Fatherland also touched the hearts of our forefathers," wrote the editor of the *Mennonitische Blätter*.[20] Christine Fellmann Hege wrote in 1909 that the "patriotic contribution" of 1806 was a sign of Mennonite "loyalty and love of Fatherland," in concert with the resistance of all Germans "against the yoke of Napoleon."[21] At this point, Mennonites were no longer seeking exemptions from military service, but had long become "fervent Prussian patriots."[22] The back side of the monument also points in this direction, citing Psalm 101:6, "'My eyes will be on the faithful in the land.' In honour of our forefathers, and as a model for our descendants."[23]

Mennonite archival materials can confirm the encounter in Graudenz, but what about the encounter with Sarah Nickel? In 1854, L. Halmhuber, whose father knew the couple well, wrote that the shawl given to her by the Queen was "stolen" from Nickel by French troops, and "the good woman was heartbroken."[24] However, in 1919, *Mennonitische Blätter* reported that it had survived and had been passed down from Nickel's daughter Elisabeth to a Marie Schröder(?) Koppel, who described her heirloom in detail.[25] One nearby mayor recalled that Mrs. Nickel "supplied the Queen with fresh cream and butter every day."[26] Another story claims that the type of local pear shared by Nickel with the royal entourage was later given the name "Luise Pear" and still identified as such by Mennonites a century later.[27]

After Germany's loss in the First World War and the harsh conditions imposed upon country, women across Germany founded the politically conservative Queen Luise League (*Luisenbund*). By 1927, it included some 2,000 local groups of "patriotic German women and girls," among which were a number of Mennonite women.[28]

Because of the nationalist symbolism of the Nickel Monument, it was removed by Polish authorities in 1938, but with Hitler's invasion of Poland a year later, it was returned to its former place in front of the church in Schönsee, "to continue to bear witness to how the West Prussian Mennonites gave what they could to King and Fatherland in the emergency year (*Notjahr*) of 1806."[29]

Fact and historical fiction are indistinguishably intertwined in Prussia's later patriotic memory of Queen Luise and her engagements. However, Mennonite memory of the events downplayed the role of women like Sarah. The absence of Sarah Tjart Nickel's name from the "Nickel Monument" and the longer 1911 *Mennonitische Blätter* article both stand in contrast to her importance in later retellings of the story.

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Endnotes

1. "Die Feier am Nickelstein, den 8. Juni 1911 zu Schönsee," *Mennonitische Blätter* 58, no. 7 (Juli 1911), 50–53. Two related photos in issue no. 8 (August 1911), 68f.

2. Rulemann Friedrich Eylert, *Charakter-Züge und historische Fragmente aus dem Leben des Königs von Preussen, Friedrich Wilhelm III*, vol. 2, pt. 1 (Magdeburg: Heinrichshofen, 1844), 226–228. See also longer footnote on Mennonites and conscription.

3. "Die Feier am Nickelstein 1911, den 8. Juni 1911 zu Schönsee."

4. Christian Neff, "Nickel, Abraham (1743–1820)," Global Anabaptist Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO), 1957. On ordination dates, see https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/West_Prussian_Mennonite_Ministers_1787.pdf. See also *Nahmensverzeichniß der sämmtlichen remonstrantischen Professoren und Prediger; wie auch derjenigen aller andern Mennonitischen Gemeinen in- und ausserhalb der Batavischen Republik* (Danzig: Müller, 1805), 39. Even in the late 1800s, there was some confusion as to whether he belonged to Schönsee congregation or elsewhere. A correction in the GAMEO entry is forthcoming.

5. Luise Mühlbach, *Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia* (New York: Collier, 1902; c. 1893).

6. "Am Tage der Huldigung, Berlin, 6. Juli 1798," in *August Wilhelm von Schlegel's Poetische Werke*, part I, bks 1–3, edited by Eduard Böcking, 3rd ed. (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1846), 161.

7. Elisabeth Krimmer, "Royal Housewives and Female Tyrants: Gender and Sovereignty in works by Benedikte Naubert and Luise Mühlbach," in *Strategic Imaginations: Gender of Sovereignty*, edited by Anke Gilleir and Aude Defurne (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2020), 61–84.

8. "Die Feier am Nickelstein 1911, den 8. Juni 1911 zu Schönsee."

9. Mühlbach, *Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia*, 344.

10. Mühlbach, *Napoleon and the Queen of Prussia*, 345f.

11. Documents from the Mennonite Church at Gruppe (District of Schwetz) were identified in 1806 by Elder Jacob Goertz of Roßgarten (District of Culm) and reprinted in Paul Fischer, *Feste Graudenz 1807 unter Gouverneur de Courbiere. Geschichte der Blockade und Belagerung mit Vorgeschichte von 1806* (Graudenz: Kriedte, 1907), 13–15.

12. See *Autobiography of Johann Donner, 1771–1830*, translated and edited by Timothy H. Flaming and Glenn H. Penner (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Archives, 2022), 9, https://www.mharchives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/JohannDonnerBio1825EnglishFinal.pdf.

13. Fischer, *Feste Graudenz 1807*, 14.

14. Horst Penner, *Die ost- und westpreußischen Mennoniten in ihrem religiösen und sozialen Leben in ihren kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen, Teil II: 1772–bis zur Gegenwart* (Kirchheimbolanden: Self-published, 1987), 37. Donner notes that the monies were paid to the king on his next stop in Osterode. See *Autobiography of Johann Donner, 1771–1830*, 9.

15. *Autobiography of Johann Donner, 1771–1830*, 9. See also Horst Gerlach, *Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Preuschoff: Uelzen-Oldenstadt, 1980).

16. Heinrich Donner and Johann Donner, *Orlofferfelde Chronik*, transcribed by Werner Janzen and Merle Schlabough, 2022. See also Mark Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers: Nation, Religion, and Family in the Prussian East, 1772–1880* (University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 81.

17. Queen Luise to Countess von Voß, November 13, 1805 (Graudenz), letter no. 160, in *Königin Luise: Ein Leben in Briefen*, edited by Karl Griewank (Hildesheim: Olms, 2003; reprint), 219.

18. Xaver Froelich, *Geschichte des Graudenzer Kreises* (Graudenz: Self-published, 1868), 146.

19. For photo and dedication service details, see Fischer, *Feste Graudenz 1807*, 58–60.

20. Cf. "Die Feier am Nickelstein, den 8. Juni 1911 zu Schönsee."

21. Christine Hege, *Kurze Geschichte der Mennoniten* (Frankfurt am Main: Minjon, 1909), 81.

22. Jantzen, *Mennonite German Soldiers*, 83.

23. "Die Feier am Nickelstein 1911, den 8. Juni 1911 zu Schönsee," 68f.

24. L. Halmhuber, *Mit Gott für König und Vaterland! Oder, Preußens Hohenzollern* (Berlin: Schultze, 1854), 174 n.

25. "Das Tuch der Königin Luise wiedergefunden," *Mennonitische Blätter* 66, no. 4 (April 1919), 27.

26. Halmhuber, *Mit Gott für König und Vaterland!*, 174n.

27. Horst Gerlach, "Königin Luise von Preußen und die Luisenbirne—Flucht durch Westpreußen nach Memel. Ein Beitrag zum Preußenjahr," *Der Bote* (October 3, 2001), 34–35.

28. Gerlach, "Königin Luise von Preußen und die Luisenbirne," 34–35.

29. Ernst Crous, "Das große Weltgeschehen und unsere Gemeinden im Osten," *Christlicher Gemeinde-Kalender für das Jahr 1941*, published by the Konferenz der Süddeutschen Mennoniten und der Konferenz der Ost- und Westpreußischen Mennonitengemeinden, vol. 50, 138f.

Dutch East India Company

(cont'd from p. 3)

Danszig (1). Elbing, Marienburg and Koenigsberg also had multiple spellings. This hinders searches, since the spelling of a surname or location must be exact.

5. https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Brandregister_1727.htm

6. https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/1772/West_Prussia_Census_1772.pdf

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jonge_Thomas

8. https://www.openarchieven.nl/ghn:3e9514bd-5d21-4606-9424-cca331495f32/en

Adolf Ens: In Memorium

by Conrad Stoesz

Dr. Adolf Ens (1933–2024) was known for his precise writing, dry wit, organizational mind, and dedication to his family and the church. With an economy of words, he could communicate clearly. He served on numerous boards and committees, where his ability to think structurally and organizationally was valued. His teaching and research gave voice to those on the margins.

Adolf was born to immigrant parents, Gerhard G.H. Ens and Helena Sawatzky, in the village of Reinland, Manitoba, on December 13, 1933, as the seventh of eleven children. He grew up in the Blumenorter Mennonite Church. He enjoyed his childhood and village life. He graduated high school from the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna, Manitoba, and proceeded to the University of Manitoba, earning a Bachelor of Science (honours chemistry) and a Master of Science. He enrolled in a doctoral program in chemistry at McGill University, Montreal, but his studies were cut short due to a diagnosis of tuberculosis that required quarantine at the sanitorium in Ninette, Manitoba.

After being released from the sanitorium, he earned a teaching certificate and taught school in Loon Straits, Manitoba, and at his former high school. He returned to studies at Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary (AMBS), where he graduated in 1966. It is here he met Anna Epp from Abbotsford, British Columbia, also studying at AMBS. They were married on December 28, 1961, and three children were born to them in Newton, Kansas, where Adolf worked for the General Conference Mennonite Church and taught at Bethel College.

Adolf and Anna served with Mennonite Central Committee in Java, Indonesia, from 1966 to 1970. When the family returned to Canada, he began doctoral studies in Religion at the University of Ottawa (1971–1974) and was invited to teach at Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC), now Canadian Mennonite University (CMU). In Winnipeg, the family became active members at Fort Garry Mennonite Fellowship. His Ph.D. dissertation was published as *Subjects or Citizens: The Mennonite Experience in Canada, 1870–1925* (1994), and was awarded the Margaret McWilliams award for scholarly books in 1995. A second MCC service stint took Adolf and Anna to Kampala, Uganda, from 1982 to 1984.

CMBC Publications editor Adolf Ens at the 1993 book launch of the translation of Franz Bartsch's *Our Trek to Central Asia*. Photo credit: MAID CA MHC 603-183.0.

Adolf served many years as editor of CMBC Publications and many more years with the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. Throughout his research, teaching, and volunteering, he was a big supporter of the Mennonite Heritage Archives. In addition to his more than 10 publications, Ens was an avid bird watcher and cyclist, braving the winter weather before mountain bikes or bike paths were common in Winnipeg.

In 2018, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada honoured Ens with the Award of Excellence and noted his role as teacher, missionary, theologian, and historian. In class, he would tell a dry joke to see if students were still paying attention. While Adolf was widely known as professor and teacher, many simply considered him friend—perhaps one of the titles he liked the best. He was generous with his time, giving freely of his knowledge and encouragement. He was a mentor to many students and lay historians. Ens retired from full-time teaching in 1999, but taught part time until 2004. Upon retirement, colleagues called him "a theologian with a third-world bias" and someone who "opened parts of our background that others had not bothered with." His daughter, Anita, recalled advice he gave her when dealing with people who have different views: "You can't change people's thinking. The first thing you have to do is listen and see where they are coming from, and then share the information in a way they can hear it." When it was time for him to respond to the tributes, Ens unfolded a piece of paper and said, "I find that for an occasion such as this, it's best to have my spontaneous responses written out."

GRanDMA Reorganizes

by Glenn H. Penner <gpenner@uoguelph.ca>

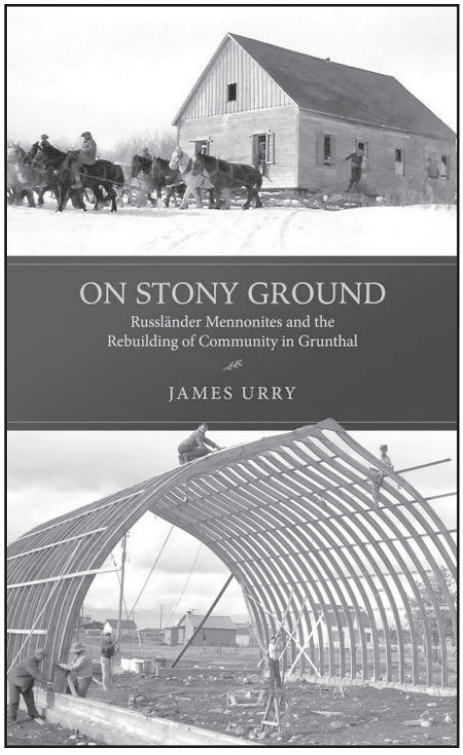
The Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry (GRanDMA) project has undergone a major reorganization and has expanded

significantly under this process. It is now incorporated under California law as Mennonite Genealogy Incorporated (MGI).

Those of us seniors who have been doing genealogy for decades will recognize MGI as the organization started by Abram Vogt of Steinbach in the 1960s and dissolved in 2007. Members of the so-called "Grandma committee" are now members of the MGI board of directors: Jay Hubert (Port Townsend, WA; CEO), Kevin Rempel-Enns (Fresno, CA; CFO), Jeff Wall (Fresno; Secretary and lawyer), Alan Peters (Fresno; founder), Ken Ratzlaff (Lawrence, KS; webmaster), Tim Janzen (Portland, OR), Tony Isaac (Houston, TX), Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, BC), Marvin Rempel (Langley, BC), and Glenn Penner (Winnipeg, MB).

The new MGI includes the GRanDMA project and its online version (https://grandmaonline.org/), the Mennonite DNA Project, as well as the www.mennonitegenealogy.com website.

MGI has accumulated significant funds from GRanDMA database subscriptions over the last decade and will be using this money to support a number of projects in the future, including the funding of genealogical research projects proposed by individuals and organizations. More information on these research grants will appear in a future issue of the *Mennonite Historian*.



Book Reviews

James Urry, ***On Stony Ground: Russländer Mennonites and the Rebuilding of Community in Grunthal*** (University of Toronto Press, 2024), pp. 384

Reviewed by Paul Tiessen, Kitchener

In his entertaining and scrupulous study, *On Stony Ground: Russländer Mennonites and the Rebuilding of Community in Grunthal*, James Urry documents the progress—including what poet Sarah Klassen would call the "unlearning"—of the lush dream that Grunthalers carried with them from European Russia to the barren ground they settled in southern Manitoba, over 60 km south of Winnipeg. Klassen (in "A brief history of Edison Avenue")—and writing about all *Russländer* (Mennonite immigrants to Canada of the 1920s)—described a "Lost Paradise" such as theirs, its "Wind breathing through gold-bright wheatfields...."

Urry's focus is on Grunthalers who migrated from a prosperous colony, Schönfeld, that had been established between the 1840s and 1870s. There, Mennonites had once felt justified in putting on a grand display of social pretension. The Schönfeld colony, with its central village and scattered estates, was a highly successful offshoot of the Molotschna colony (or, as Urry spells it, Molochna), lying some 100 km to the north-east of Molotschna (23). Following the 1917 Revolution—when anarchy, led by the "infamous warlord" Nestor Makhno, reigned (25)—Schönfeld was ravaged and destroyed. By the fall of 1919 and into 1920, Schönfelders were fleeing to their mother colony, subsisting on the charity of others (26). Many of these "once wealthy and proud" refugees migrated to Canada in 1924, settling in and around Grunthal. Urry recounts their determination to "regain their lost dignity" (34) even as succeeding generations are compelled to adjust their sensibilities in response to their ever-changing Canadian experience (28, 151–158, 177, 207, 237–241).

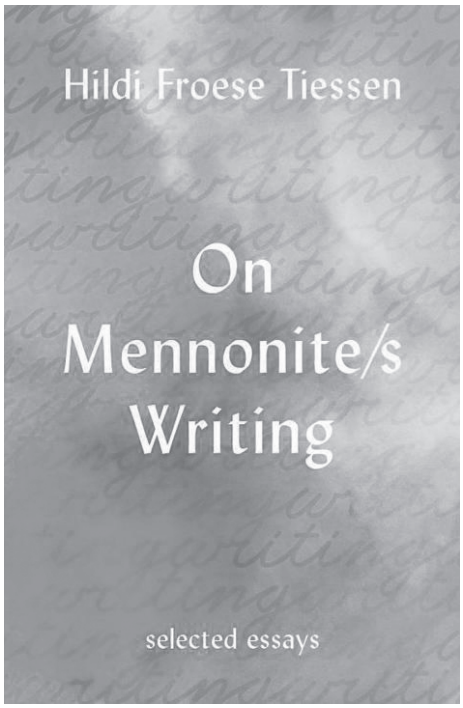
Urry has drawn on myriad secondary sources (cited in his 955 endnotes), on his own understanding of cultural and political currents of Mennonite life in Russia and Canada, and on his own ethnographic research. There is much to which he gives attention: language (German, English, Mennonite Low German), worship practice, business (including the co-op movement), farming, libraries, marriage customs, sports (although with a reductive reading of Mennonites-and-hockey!), choral music, the immigrants' travel debt, the impact of the Great Depression, the lure of German Fascism during the 1930s, the problem of conscription during the 1940s, postwar prosperity. His extended attention to tensions involving school reform, including the impact of the educator Cornelius G. Unruh (207–211)—a nephew of Benjamin H. Unruh and Abraham H. Unruh, both cited in the text—is vividly put. But because Unruh was Mennonite Brethren (MB), he "remained an outsider in the community" (208–211).

In his treatment of religious form, Urry's focus is on Elim Mennonite, a "conservative" congregation that became part of the "General Conference" stream. MB folk, comprising a second denominational stream of *Russländer*, flit about in the shadows of his work. In Grunthal, even if you had only "associated with Mennonite Brethren in Russia" you were viewed with "suspicion" (235). The "influential Mennonite leader" C.F. Klassen's MB links are not cited (114–216, 238). The iconic B.B. Janz is mis-identified in the index (353), as is the renowned "Revelation Reimer" (356). Urry's sarcastic and flippant treatment of religious revival campaigns seems gratuitous and out of place (257–258). More seriously, Urry notes that respective groups of Mennonites, generally ready to cooperate in secular activities, keep religious matters distinct from one another (217–219).

Urry explores Grunthal's *Russländer*—imagining themselves a "privileged class" (56)—in relation to neighbouring cultural groups, including the *Kanadier* (Mennonites who settled in Manitoba during the 1870s), English, French, Ukrainian, Jewish, and Indigenous. His close and sympathetic attention to the evolution of power between groups, and between successive generations of Grunthaler, is evocative and moving and humane (e.g., 237–241). Although he acknowledges the eventual blurring of traditional identity categories, even in the vagaries of census taking (266–268), his treatment of the original 1924 immigrants and their descendants ends on a note of both melancholy and mellowness.

In 1989, in *The Molotschna Colony: A Heritage Remembered*, Henry B. Tiessen (my dad) opened his recollection of life in the Mennonite Commonwealth with his descending into the Molotschna from the north, where the escarpment affords a breathtaking view of the colony. It is April 1911, and he is returning from a visit to his grandparents in the Schönfeld colony. Nine years later he would witness Schönfelders following his route, fleeing to provisional safety in the Molotschna before meeting up, again, in Grunthal in the 1920s. Their descendants will surely enjoy Urry's meticulous analysis. And established fans of Urry's work will get the benefit, here, of his decades of close reading of patterns of behaviour by Mennonites from Russia.

Dr. Paul Tiessen is Professor Emeritus of English and Film Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario. His current work in progress is tentatively titled Sorgenkind Chronicles: True stories of everyday life in the Mennonite neighbourhoods of Rudy Wiebe.



Hildi Froese Tiessen, ***On Mennonite/s Writing: Selected Essays***, edited by Robert Zacharias (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2023), pp. 309.

Reviewed by Paul Doerksen, Winnipeg

This book, edited by York University professor Robert Zacharias, makes available "the definitive collection of work by a scholar widely recognized as the primary critical figure in contemporary Mennonite literary studies." (back cover) The book includes a very helpful editorial preface and introduction along with eighteen essays, two of which are not previously published, by Hildi Froese Tiessen, long-time professor at Conrad Grebel University College. The title of the book makes use of the phrase *Mennonite/s Writing* coined by Froese Tiessen as a 1990 conference title and which became a kind of ubiquitous umbrella term regularly invoked subsequently in other conference titles, essays, and the like (11). Indeed, a conference being organized for 2025 is titled *Mennonite/s Writing 10*.

In her *Afterword*, written for this collection, the author humbly characterizes her role and contributions to the field of Mennonite literature as a case of being "in the right place at the right time," of being "given an astonishing range of opportunities (267)." These opportunities included the organization and shaping of numerous conferences, as well as the publication of numerous "state of the art" essays, which are invaluable for insightful orientation to the field of Mennonite literature, both retrospectively and prospectively. However, Froese Tiessen's contributions extend far beyond giving an account of things; as Zacharias nicely points out in his introduction, she has also been instrumental in *creating* opportunities through organizing conferences, lecture series, and publishing anthologies of creative work.

This collection of essays shows that she brings to view the importance of creative thought and work in the Mennonite world(s), arguing along the way that Mennonite thought cannot be limited to what theologians say and write. Literature performs various crucial roles such as embedding art in Mennonite experience even while releasing it from the imperatives of that experience (38). The Mennonite artist also "strips the commonplace of its conventional use and context," which enables a disarming and dislocating of the merely functional, which in doing so forces Mennonites "to take a fresh look at the most ordinary signs of their ethnic identity and question their significance (57)."

Froese Tiessen challenges the persistent problem of Mennonite use of binaries such as center vs. margin, insider vs. outsider (86), and considers developments and the significance of post-colonial and post-modern thought. While she does not consider her task as the identification of some essential quality of Mennonite writing, she nonetheless maintains that Mennonite literature ought not to simply be absorbed in the literary mainstream and thus not retain anything that is distinctive. Rather, if Mennonite literature is to continue to "identify the Mennonite reader to herself," it must retain the trace of "heritage, history, sensibility (199)."

Here we find a crucial dimension of Mennonite literature for Froese Tiessen to which she returns many times in these essays, that literature contains the capacity to reveal a community to itself as no other field or discipline is likely to do (133). Put another way, literature mirrors people to themselves, it identifies me to myself. It is precisely this capacity that drives her to encourage the continued creation of literature that presses in new directions, which is open to new developments.

Froese Tiessen's work on describing developments and creating opportunities stands as an extremely valuable contribution to Mennonite life. Additionally, the essays included here which address specific works and authors—for example, her first essay on the early work of Rudy Wiebe, another with reference to Dallas Wiebe, another dealing with Julia Kasdorf and Di Brandt—are insightful and tend to give more specific and constructive attention to the theological aspects of these authors' work, an easily-ignored dimension of Froese Tiessen's work.

The publication of this collection of essays stands as a constructive contribution to the field of Mennonite/s Writing. Rob Zacharias's curating of these eighteen essays from among the dozens available represents Froese Tiessen's work very well, allowing the reader to see developments in Mennonite thought and in the author's at the same time, including the dimensions of her work that remains essentially the same throughout these essays.

Zacharias wants this collection to serve both as "a kind of touchstone and resource for future scholars (3)." That description seems right to me, as I find the book to be a fine contribution to Mennonite literary studies in particular, and to Mennonite life and thought more generally.

Dr. Paul Doerksen is Associate Professor of Theology and Anabaptist Studies at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.