

Mennonite Historian

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



Stooking grain at harvest time on Namaka Farm #3 in Namaka, Alberta, ca. 1930s. This photo comes from Abram A. Wall (1902–1986). Abram and Emily Wall farmed in Namaka until 1938, when they left to take up fruit farming in Vineland, Ontario. Like the Walls, Ben Jansen’s family also farmed in Namaka before they relocated to Vineland in 1937, when he was 11 years old. Liz Jansen, Ben and Margaret’s eldest child, recently began exploring those early pioneering years, when *Russländer* Mennonites farmed and interacted with Siksika Blackfoot Indigenous peoples living in that area of Alberta. See her story beginning on page 2. Photo credit: MAID CA MHC 068-329.0.

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The Mennonites of Namaka Farm and their Siksika Neighbours: Lessons in Settler-Colonialism

by Elizabeth (Liz) Jansen, Orangeville, Ontario

In the spring of 1925, newly arrived Mennonites, known as *Russländer*, began settling on the almost 13,000-acre Namaka Farm in southern Alberta. Situated on an eight-mile tract between the hamlet of Namaka and the Bow River and adjacent to the Siksika (Blackfoot) Nation, Namaka Farm was the vestige of a large colonization project. When owner George Lane ran into financial difficulty, it had been taken over by Dominion Bank, which now wanted to recoup its investment. This land was the traditional home of the Siksika Blackfoot Nation, one of four Indigenous Nations that make up the Blackfoot Confederacy. Plains people had stewarded the land for thousands of years, before being moved to reserves in 1881.

Those first *Russländer* families lived communally as tenants, but, by 1930, the settlement had evolved to thirty-six families on individual farms, collectively owned. They were a strong, resourceful, and resilient farming people, and even if they had to start over again, they would learn to thrive. They had a long history of

taming “wild” land and bringing it into production. They could do it again.

My father, Ben Jansen, lived on Namaka Farm between 1930 and 1937, between the ages of four and eleven, and regaled us with fascinating stories about these formative years. Subsequently, the *Russländer* on this colonial-designed Mennonite settlement became the focus of my MA thesis as I explored how their experiences prior to arriving in Canada influenced how they adapted and formed relationships with their neighbours. I sought ways of showing how the wisdom derived from those times could inform intercultural and ecological relationships today.

With their arrival, *Russländer* inserted a third culture in this area with their distinct, entrenched belief systems that disrupted existing power relationships. Obtaining a holistic picture required that I speak with descendants from each of three groups: Mennonite settlers who lived on Namaka Farm, non-Mennonite settlers who interacted with them, and Siksika people who were their closest neighbours. The most significant insights came from listening to recollections of the same experiences from the perspectives of Mennonites and Siksika.¹

Beginnings

Peter and Elsie Nikkel extended a warm welcome and led me across the pastureland surrounding their home as August breezes blew across the open prairie. Elsie was born on that farm in the late 1930s on what was then Namaka Farm Three. We were



Pig butchering at Namaka Farm #3, Namaka, Alberta, ca. 1930s. The large rope is part of a block and tackle system used to hoist the pig carcass. A barrel of hot water was used to prepare the hide for cleaning. Hot water made it easier to scrape (shave) off the hair. In this photo, the men have lowered the pig carcass into a barrel of hot water. Photo credit: A.A. Wall Collection, MAID MHC 068-333.0.

standing on wild prairie wool grass—land deemed unsuitable for cultivation that had never been “broken.” “This is the original,” said Peter, as I stared at the earth beneath my feet. “You’re standing on original prairie.” “The soil here is very alkaline,” said Elsie. “On a windy day like we had yesterday, you can get a dust storm that is white. More like a blizzard.”

We headed for a nearby vantage point, while keeping a close eye on a herd of cattle grazing in the distance. “The Siksika had a wagon trail that ran across these fields to Calgary prior to fences going in,” Peter said, pointing to barely discernable parallel indentations wandering northwest across the land. “You can hardly distinguish them now, but there are two sets of tracks that weave in the same pattern, one set going in each direction. When we get a skiff of snow, they become more visible.” Nodding

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Editors: Jon Isaak (CMBS)
Conrad Stoesz (MHA)

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

1310 Taylor Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
204.669.6575
jon.isaak@mbchurches.ca
or
500 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 2N2
204.560.1998
cstoesz@mharchives.ca

www.mennonitehistorian.ca

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Genealogy and Family History

Mennonite-Hutterite Genealogical Connections through the Centuries

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

Part 1: Prussia and Poland (1535–1790)

Although the general public frequently confuses Mennonites and Hutterites, the two groups have always lived separately, even if occasionally in close proximity. The purpose of this two-part article is to give an overview of the interactions between Hutterites and Low-German Mennonites from the early 1600s until the migration of the Hutterites from Russia to the United States in the 1870s, with emphasis on conversion and intermarriage between the two groups.

Prussia (1535–1780)

According to the former *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, now incorporated into GAMEO, “In the spring of 1535, 200 Anabaptists (60 families) expelled from Moravia, in part, of Silesian origin, came to the region of Thorn, Graudenz, and the Duchy of Prussia.”¹ Typical of GAMEO, this statement is given without any clue as to its origins. Were these people in any way associated with Jacob Hutter, who died in 1536, or his followers? Without knowing the original source, this question is difficult to answer. The late genealogist, Adalbert Goertz, pointed out how the Mennonites of this region had surnames that were unlikely of Dutch origin. The corresponding Mennonite congregations—Montau, Schönsee, and Thorn—always kept their records in German, going back to the mid-1600s.²

Mennonites in Poland (later West Prussia) and Hutterites were aware of each other’s existence for several decades before there was significant interaction between the two groups. By the late 1500s, the Low-German Mennonite population was well established in what was Northern Poland, and later became the Prussian province of West Prussia and has been part of Poland again since the Second World War. At the same time, the Hutterites had established themselves in Moravia.

By the 1590s, the Hutterites were sending missionaries to other Germanic territories, including Danzig, which

already had a Mennonite population. These missions appear to have been fruitless as far as converting Mennonites was concerned. At the same time, the so-called Long Turkish War began (1593–1606), which led to considerable looting of Hutterite colonies in Moravia. The Hutterian Brethren started sending out scouts to look for a new home.

One such expedition was undertaken in 1603 by three men who travelled to the Baltic region, including Danzig.³ The next year, one of those men, Joseph Hauser, led seven families to Prussia in a colonization attempt. They settled in, or near, the village of Wengeln, south of the city of Elbing. Wengeln was founded in 1557 by Dutch (presumably Mennonite) settlers, and the village would have had a significant Mennonite population by 1604. These Mennonites would have been members of the Frisian congregation at Thiensdorf.

On October 7, 1604, Hauser, together with preacher Darius Hein and Mennonite lacemaker Klaus Philips of Elbing, appeared before the Elbing city council.^{3, 4} Harassment by city officials and members of the local guilds, who saw the Hutterites as competition, as well as some underhanded financial dealings by the owner of the property they were leasing, eventually led to the return of 73 Hutterites to Moravia. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren* mentions that a small number of Mennonites joined the Hutterite community, but all appear to have returned. Only two are mentioned by name, Peter Hasel and Wilhelm Peters.

Although the *Chronicle* does not mention it, there were likely Hutterites who joined the Mennonites of the local Thiensdorf congregation. There is only circumstantial evidence for this⁵ in some of the atypical first names found among the Mennonite members of the Thiensdorf congregational records, started in 1776, and census lists from that time period; they include Melchior, Absolon, and Darius. It has also been suggested that the surname Hein, which was prominent in that congregation, is of Hutterite origin. There is no evidence for this.

From the mid-1600s until the late 1770s, there was little, if any, contact between the Hutterites and Prussian

Mennonites. During most of this time, the Hutterites were in self-preservation mode. This lasted until 1770, when the few remaining Hutterites moved to a safe haven in Russia.

In early 1780, Mathies Hofer was put out of the Hutterite congregation in Russia. By late 1780, he had arrived in Prussia seeking a new congregation. This prompted the *Ältester* of the Elbing-Ellerwald (Flemish) congregation, Gerhard Wiebe, with whom the Hofer family was living, to write the Hutterite community in Russia.⁶ In February of 1783, two Hutterite men, Joseph Miller and Christian Hofer, visited the Prussian Mennonites while on their way back from an attempt to bring some of their former brethren back from Hungary.⁷

Hutterites and the Groningen Old Flemish Congregation

During the 1600s and 1700s, the only documented conversions or marriages between the Hutterites and the Low-German Mennonites involved the Przechowka Groningen Old Flemish people⁸ and their descendants in various daughter settlements.

One example was Tobias Schellenberger. He is mentioned in the Przechowka church register as coming from the Moravian Anabaptist community in Hungary (after fleeing Moravia). He left the Mennonites at some point, but his son Tobias (1640–1697) remained.⁹ This family has no known connection to present-day Mennonite Schellenbergs. Another was Steffan Funk (d. 1709), who is said to have originated in Moravia and joined the Groningen Old Flemish congregation at Przechowka. That would have happened sometime in the late 1600s.^{9, 10} A third Moravian who joined the Przechowka congregation in the 1600s was a man with the first or last name, Thomas. His son was Jacob Thoms, likely born in the 1640s and died after 1675.⁹ Although very rare, the Thoms or Thomas name is still found among descendants of the Przechowka people in Kansas, Oklahoma, and the Dakotas.

Brandenburg and Volhynia are two locations that were settled by Groningen Old Flemish Mennonites originating in the Przechowka congregation in Prussia.¹¹ The first Mennonite villages in Brandenburg were founded in 1764, and the first move to Volhynia from Przechowka and

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Namaka and Siksika Neighbours

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his head to another area close by, he said, "Over there you can see all the dips and doodles where the buffalo must have taken dust baths."

Plains peoples, like those of the Siksika Nation now living on a reserve a few miles east, had thrived for millennia on these lands. They understood the natural cycles of the land and the beings that inhabited it. They migrated with the seasons, knowing how and where to draw sustenance during each season. Settlers, like my ancestors, arrived to occupy this land recently taken from the Siksika. They were there to "break" the sod, which they and the government saw as a necessary step to produce crops—and cash. They struggled.

Elder C knew about the history of the Namaka Farm Mennonites and offered sobering insights. He said,

In Ukraine, they were under intense religious persecution. That's why they had to leave, emigrate sometimes to the point of violence or genocide, kind of persecution. So, the history of your people, their roots are in Ukraine. An agricultural breadbasket of the world and it still is today. So, their life vocation, their life skills were based on the land, you know, producing the land. The land to produce crops for our nation's existence was an agriculturally based economy. And then there's also the spirituality or the religious component of your people as Anabaptists.

But for us in terms of relationships, not only with Mennonites but with all of Canada, and the governments of Canada and prior to the recognized governments of Canada, under the British monarchy, Canada, Turtle Island is our home. It's our homeland. It's not yours. And in our stories of creation, and where God chose to put folks, we were given North America with its hosts of different tribes.

Currently, we say Mother Earth, but the understanding in terms of Blackfoot epistemology is that the earth is like the mother who provides for our sustenance, and it is in our spirituality; it is incumbent upon us to be good stewards of the land, the waters, the earth, the sky, and the seas. And we only harvested what we could use without over-exploiting the natural resources.

And so, the British Empire, because they didn't have the people to come to these new lands that they had discovered, contracted folks to come as settlers into Canada. They were given that liberty, certainly not a burden, to purchase land.

Much of the history of Mennonite adaptation involves the purchase of farms and the challenges in meeting the financial aspects of their land agreements. Yet, here was a Siksika Elder saying Mennonites were under no obligation to purchase land. It was their choice, a choice not given to the Siksika people.

I have some awareness of what conditions were like on Indigenous reserves at that time because I have studied them. Even today, many people are unaware of the atrocities, rationing, starvation, broken promises, and attempted assimilation sanctioned by the Canadian government. It is impossible to speculate with accuracy, but some things are certain. All *Russländer* would have recognized the look of starvation and the behaviour it cultivated. They would have understood what it was like to be robbed of basic means of survival. Whether they comprehended it consciously or not, they would have possessed a knowing that prompted them to act from compassion, kindness, and gratitude. Never did I hear my father, or any Mennonite I spoke with, express fear or malice towards Siksika people and their ways.

Many questions arose as I contemplated those times. How did *Russländer* who settled on Namaka Farm, separated from Siksika by a porous border, feel about their Indigenous neighbours? What did the Mennonites of Namaka Farm, having evolved from a different history and speaking little English, know or understand about life in the Siksika Nation next door to them? Were they aware that the Canadian colonial government proffered rights and economic benefits differently to each group with policies and actions that affected their survival and settlement experiences accordingly?

Three examples demonstrate the complex interactions that enabled *Russländer* settlement, illustrate the disparities, and offer lessons for today.

Farming

Mennonites were esteemed as prized agriculturalists, so settling them on Namaka Farm would have been considered by the

Canadian Colonization Association (CCA) and the Dominion Bank to be a fiscally prudent undertaking. Yet *Russländer* were less likely to have farming experience than Mennonites who had preceded them. As the Russian economy grew, it included industrialists, small business owners, teachers, and religious leaders, as well as agriculturalists.² Although farming was a requirement of immigration, not everyone who arrived was an experienced or willing farmer.

In early May 1925, senior officials from CCA, Dominion Bank, and George Lane Co. were understandably alarmed after learning that only eight families had any farming experience. This prompted immediate visits to Namaka Farm to assess the situation and protect their investment. While they were shocked at the agricultural ineptitude they witnessed, they were hopeful the Mennonites could learn to farm.³

Tumultuous, fractious, and difficult years followed, but by the spring of 1930, the CCA was holding Namaka Farm up as a success story after A.W. Klassen, Namaka Farm Manager, arranged well-attended meetings, open to the public, where agricultural experts addressed topics such as soil cultivation, drought avoidance, weed control, and livestock handling. CCA's W.R. Dick reported back to T.O.F. Herzer, General Manager of the CCA,⁴ copying Bishop Töews, chairman of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. Dick said,

Having now established a precedent of having such meetings addressed by the professors of the university and agricultural experts, we consider a distinct step has been taken for the benefit of our purchasers, not only here but also in other centres. ... I feel that the work is so good and the results so satisfactory that the information could be passed on to the other provinces in case they would see their way to do work along this line.⁵

The prolonged drought of the 1930s tested the most resilient and showed there was more to know than what came from books.

Indigenous transfer of knowledge happened in unexpected ways. "It was a real big lesson to our people and non-Native people because of the drought that happened," said Herman Yellow Old Woman. He continued,

They say that at that time, they found out that Native people that lived off the land were very resilient. The Dirty 30s were tough. But it wasn't as tough on them as it was to the non-Native people. Because the non-Native people only knew agriculture to survive. Whereas the Native people knew how to survive off the land, even through drought. That was not written in historical books and libraries.

Herman shared more information that I had not heard. He said,

Back in the day I think they [Mennonites] really appreciated our people because our people knew everything about the land, from water, from the environment, the animals. Everything. And they knew how to doctor themselves, even the animals. And the Mennonites didn't know how to do that. A lot of the skills of doctoring came from Native people to help with their pets. They learned skills off our people because our people learned off the animals of the land.

This made so much sense that these newcomers could learn from those who knew how to coexist with the land. I wondered how that interaction transpired as their predominant languages were different. I also felt immense gratitude that the Siksika people, whose land and way of life had been stolen from them, were now helping these settlers learn to survive.

Language and terminology

Siksika stories about their interactions with Mennonites portrayed some of the same interactions from an entirely different perspective. My first revelation was when Siksika people referred to my ancestors as no different from other "settlers." *Russländer* were a distinct culture to me, and it surprised me again to hear that others did not differentiate them as such.

To most Siksika, however, it was clear. Anyone on the other side of the fence was a white settler on stolen land. Even at the Elders' Circle, there were those who didn't know what a Mennonite was. Partly, it was semantics. Elder A explained,

I think to our people anybody who was not Blackfoot was just white. I don't know if they differentiated between Mennonites, Hutterites, all the different French and English. They were just white people. They referred to a lot of the Mennonites, the Hutterites as Otaksistoyiiks. It means whiskers/moustache, hair around the



Harvesting on Namaka Farm #3, Namaka, Alberta, ca. 1930s. Photo credit: A.A. Wall Collection, MAID MHC 068-330.0.

mouth. Our people lumped them into one group, including women. They did not distinguish amongst these "religious sects." I didn't realize that some of them were Mennonites. To me, they were all just English people.

The Siksika initiated contact and got to know these newcomers just as they would have with other white settlers. Mennonites and other colonists described Siksika coming on their yards and most often using the terms "wanting," "asking," or even "begging" for food. Some did refer to "trade." Giving Siksika visitors food happened in the context of a charitable act.

Siksika Elders, however, were clear that they were trading or buying, and described reciprocal, balanced transactions. The choice of terminology portrayed very different perceptions about the power dynamics assumed by each group. Siksika people also combined "trading" with visits, interacting with and getting to know their new neighbours, as the Siksika had for millennia.

Numerous interactions between Mennonites and Siksika demonstrated that positive, respectful, and even fond relationships can develop in the absence of a common spoken language. Bryan Little Chief told me,

These people didn't know English, while our old people, too, were very vague on the English language, but they somehow still communicated. Because, our old people, they were like that.

German was the connection to *Russländer* identity, so while they began learning English, retaining German

was also important. Maintaining their cultural heritage through language was another liberty not afforded their Siksika neighbours. Once in the residential school system, children were forbidden from speaking their home language under threat of punishment. Teaching, reading, and writing were all conducted in English.⁶

Beef

Dad told us they never went hungry. Every year they butchered and smoked a pig. Chickens were readily found in the farmyard. He recalled many times when visitors would show up for dinner, he would be sent out to catch a chicken, garrote it with a length of wire, pluck the feathers, and eviscerate it for his mother, my grandmother, to cook. Beef cattle required more feed and time to mature and were thus less available.

Alan West remembered his father and uncle starting the Namaka Beef Ring, a cooperative of twenty non-Mennonite and Mennonite families. Alan said,

Every week, one of the farmers would supply a steer. My dad and uncle would butcher it and divvy it up. They'd keep records about who got what cut the last time. Whoever supplied the beef that week got the worst cuts. A steer would be delivered on Monday, killed on Tuesday, butchered, and delivered on Thursday. Thursday morning, we would have steak and gravy for breakfast. That was pretty good pay. We brought the offal home for the pigs and sold the hide. As the operator, that money was ours.

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Mennonite Heritage Archives

MHA Update

by Conrad Stoesz

My update begins with a tribute to Jon Isaak, something that is occasioned by his announced retirement at the end of 2024.

Jon began his ministry at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS), Winnipeg, on June 15, 2011, as the eighth director of the Centre. Jon had earned a PhD in Early Christian History from McGill University and came to CMBS after working as a Bible professor at the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (Fresno, California) and as a missionary teacher with Mennonite Brethren Missions & Services at St. Petersburg Christian University, St. Petersburg, Russia, teaching Bible, and before that, in Kikwit, Democratic Republic of Congo, teaching maths/physics.

Jon understood his role at CMBS as helping the Centre to collect and preserve Mennonite Brethren (MB) records and to resource church leaders. Jon was well-suited to provide research and analysis for the Conference. He published essays on how MBs have engaged with culture as a renewal movement, on how methods of biblical interpretation have changed with time among MBs, and on how theological topics like the saving significance of the cross (atonement) have been articulated by MBs. Jon was hired at CMBS to “build

on the Centre’s position as a theological resource” for the MB Conference, said then executive director, David Wiebe.

Early in his tenure at CMBS, Jon was asked to add the role of Executive Secretary for the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission to his tasks. In this role, he edited and produced eight books, edited and distributed the *Profiles of Mennonite Faith* series of bulletin inserts for MB congregations in North America, and oversaw the Commission’s research grants program. Since 2011, Jon has been active in the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, serving several terms on the nominating committee. And since 2020, Jon has chaired the *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO) Management Board. One of Jon’s dreams was to add worship resources to the Centre’s array of resources. This came to fruition in 2014 with the addition of worship resources created by Dr. Christine Longhurst of Canadian Mennonite University to the CMBS webpage.

I had the privilege of working with Jon from 2011 to 2017, when I left for full-time work at the Mennonite Heritage Archives (MHA). Jon always found ways to build up his coworkers and advocate for them. He encouraged and empowered them to strive to do their best. Jon was a positive force during an era of change. In his term as director of CMBS, Jon has seen many changes in staffing levels, conference leadership, and financial support. But through it all Jon has reminded me that the Church belongs to God, so we need not be anxious.

Jon likes projects. The more diverse

the better—from editing a manuscript, to doing home renovations, to working on his “veggie-mobile” (an old diesel VW Rabbit that also runs on used vegetable oil). These skills have been evident in the collaboration between CMBS and the MHA in the production of the *Mennonite Historian*. While the magazine was started in 1975 by the MHA, it has been a shared project with CMBS since 1987.

With Jon’s retirement and the shrinking of the

Voices from the EMC



Mennville is the oldest of the four EMC churches in the Manitoba Interlake. Originally called Washow Bay, the land was cleared and broken between 1950 and 1952. The community grew quickly. A private Christian school was priority for the small community. When the converted granary burned down in 1985, a modern school was built with a gym and an innovative heating and cooling system that used two wells and a heat exchanger. Here we see some of the students of the Mennville Christian School riding a “snow rabbit” that stands just outside the building. Text and photo credit: Erica Fehr.

job description of the CMBS staff person, we are sad to see the partnership between MHA and CMBS on the *Mennonite Historian* come to an end. However, MHA will continue publishing the Mennonite Historian and take on the CMBS mailing list. Richard Thiessen of Abbotsford, the new Chair of the MB Historical Commission, has agreed to provide MB-themed photos and content for each issue. Dr. Hans Werner, retired history professor from the University of Winnipeg, will take on the editing and layout that Jon so ably did. Thank you, Jon, for your significant service to the MB and wider Mennonite community over all these years!

In other MHA news, we continue to benefit from community supporters such as Golden West Radio. Season three of “Still Speaking” is drawing to a close, but with support from Elmer and Hilda Hildebrand and the Golden West team, MHA has launched a new 15-minute radio program, “Tales from the Mennonite Heritage Archives,” which began airing November 3, 2024. Dan Dyck and Caley Dyck are leading the project. If you can’t catch the program on Sunday mornings at 9:15 CST on Golden West Radio 950, 1220, and 1250 AM, you can listen to it on our website or as a podcast on Apple Podcasts or Spotify.



Conrad Stoesz (left) and Jon Isaak co-editors of the *Mennonite Historian*, November 20, 2024. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

CMBS Update

by Jon Isaak

Things are changing at CMBS. But what's not changing is CMBS's commitment to resourceing Mennonite Brethren Churches—their institutions and their people—for the mission of God that we share. This includes responding to queries from denominational leaders, pastors, church people, and the general public in reference to items they've seen while searching the CMBS webpage, <https://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/>.

People use the CMBS online finding aid when looking for church bulletins, obituaries, congregational meeting minutes, school yearbooks, historical books, research papers, conference meeting minutes, photographs, statistics, reports, newspapers/magazines, etc. Like any archives, CMBS is committed to preserving, describing, and making accessible church records and resources. It is a funded ministry of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches.

I have enjoyed these 13½ years working as the “keeper” of the CMBS archives, helping people make connections from the past to the present. The past always has something to say—and now more so than ever, since so much historical material is

available online for analysis and meaning making.

So, what is changing? Well, I'm retiring at the end of December 2024. In the photo below, you see me standing with **Carina Gallardo**. She is the new Records and Archives Technician, whom I am training to take on the archiving aspects of my role at CMBS. We have been working together since October, processing files, photos, documents, and website updates.

Carina graduated from the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg with an Advanced Bachelor of Arts. She has pursued work in the field of Library and Information Science through practicum placements and technical support roles. She is excited to bring her skills and knowledge to managing the CMBS archives—helping people find the archival materials they are looking for. If you have a CMBS archives question, you can email her at <carina.gallardo@mbchurches.ca>.

Looking back over my years at CMBS, I have found my work with authors especially satisfying. Editing their submissions for publication in the *Mennonite Historian*—the joint publishing project of CMBS and the Mennonite Heritage Archives—has been very rewarding. I have learned so much about Mennonite history from these gifted writers and researchers. Plus, the



“tinkering” and “puzzling” involved in making the photos and articles fit within the page constraints of the 12-page quarterly magazine is just a lot of fun!

While the *Mennonite Historian* aspect of my CMBS role will not be picked up by Carina, the magazine will continue to be published by MHA. See the Conrad's report on opposite page.

I'll end my 2024 update with a brief accounting of this year's numbers:

- **\$466 of used Mennonite history books sold**—for the list of books currently for sale, see <https://cmbs.mennonitebrethren.ca/used-books/>;
- **1,476 images uploaded to the online photo database**, Mennonite Archival Information Database or MAID—now 15,555 of CMBS's 32,575 photographs are viewable online, <https://archives.mhsc.ca/>;
- **11 Mennonite Brethren books uploaded to the Internet Archive**—there are now 131 books viewable online, <https://archive.org/details/@jonisaak/>.



Jon Isaak (left) and Carina Gallardo, pictured in the reading room at the CMBS archives. Carina began her work as Records and Archives Technician in October. She will be managing the archival collection when Jon retires at the end of the year. Photo credit: Michelle Madunatu.

Namaka and Siksika Neighbours

(cont'd from p. 5)

Contrast that with the experience of the Siksika, no longer able to live on the bison that had sustained them for thousands of years. Elder C said,

We lived on rations. I think it was on Thursday that beef were slaughtered, and the choice cuts went to the agency, or to the stock man, or to the farm instructor. And we got the meager pieces. And the tripe, the intestines of the animal, to eat. And so out of necessity, folks that had produce to sell, we went to them. In the West End, we went to your people.

Vera Penner recalled a story depicting the desperation from those times. She said, *Once, in the middle of the night a Blackfoot man came in without knocking, walked into Mom and Dad's bedroom and woke them up. We never locked our doors in those days. Dad asked what he wanted, and the man said he wanted some meat. My dad said, "I don't have any meat to give you." And the man said, "Oh, yes, you do. You have a deep freezer downstairs." Dad finally got up and gave him a roast or something. We had all kinds of interactions with them, but none of them were dangerous.*

When I asked Vera why she thought this man had been driven to obtain meat in this way, she told me that was their way. She, like other Mennonite descendants I asked, lacked awareness of how dire living conditions were on the reserve during the years Mennonites were settling on Namaka Farm. I wondered if her parents had thought otherwise, but the response she attributes to them suggested they too thought the nature of these transactions was due to "their way."

Conclusions

Russländer's lived spiritual practices of non-resistance, integrity, and charity earned them the respect of the Siksika people, an advantage not accessible to their British neighbours. Consequently, Siksika neighbours taught them how to care for the land, water, and animals, even before they could speak a common language or understand each other's cultures. Elder C tempered the recollection, saying,

Certainly, there were those good relationships. It wasn't violent because

you folks preach nonviolence. And so, you know, there was certainly that goodwill. And up until I would say, ten years ago, our agriculture for the farmers here on the reserve, our agricultural technology, always lagged with your people, you know, the big tractors with the four-wheel drives and 40-foot cultivators or whatever the length is. And we've always lagged not because we're not smart enough, or we don't have those attributes of ingenuity and accommodation and all those kinds of things.

Mennonite farmers benefitted from privileges not accessible to Siksika, but their gratitude does not balance the scales. Nonetheless, their practices were noted. Bryan Little Chief said numerous times that, "It's the religious sects (like Mennonites and Hutterites) that seem to have respect for us." He based that on how those "sects" treated the Siksika. As a result, Siksika were more open to forming relationships and extending a hand when they could. This happened when they taught Mennonites about the land and how to care for their animals. When we learn from each other, we all benefit.

Wisdom comes from experience and awareness of how our actions affect others, both short and long term. We learn when things go well, but the greater lessons and the growth of wisdom emerge from our mistakes. The strengths *Russländer* embodied helped them through the transitions of the 1920s and '30s. Yet, some of the values they held tightly had unforeseen and inadvertent repercussions.

At the same time that Mennonites were giving thanks, whether they were aware of it or not, they were reinforcing the colonial hegemonic structure and perpetuating systemic injustices and racism. They did not see that at the time, but we have the advantage of hindsight. Only by listening to the voices of all parties who were involved in creating them, coming to terms with our roles in creating disparity, then sharing our findings, can the wisdom from history make a difference today.

Future studies

Immigrants were attracted to Canada for better opportunities and a better life. White settlers, including my *Russländer* ancestors, were given disproportionate

advantages with which they built economic prosperity for themselves and Canada.

Drawing from the Mennonite culture—a culture known for practicing peace, compassion, and charity—my doctoral project will explore the effects of colonization and agricultural development in southern Alberta in the early 1900s, centering on Mennonites and their relationships with Indigenous peoples and the land.

Liz Jansen is a PhD student at York University in Toronto. If you know anyone with knowledge of these times in southern Alberta, please contact her at ejansen@yorku.ca.

Endnotes

1. My goal in this project was to interview three to twelve participants from each of the groups. I ended up speaking with eighteen Mennonites, seven Siksika, and eleven non-Mennonites, interviewed mostly in August and September 2023, with the last one occurring in December 2023. Mennonites were interviewed in their homes, farms, and one by Zoom. Non-Mennonite interviews took place in homes, farms, a long-term care residence, the CPR Demonstration farm in Strathmore, a local Roadhouse, and Tim Hortons. Most Siksika content came from participation in an Elders' Circle at Old Sun Community College on the Siksika Reserve. One participant who could not be present was subsequently interviewed via Zoom.

Deep gratitude goes to each person who generously shared the stories they carry about a personal, formative, and painful time. Elvera Penner, Elsie Thiessen Nikkel, Peter Nikkel, Milt Willms, Ellie Janz, Nellie Wojtaszek, Gerta Janzen West, Irene Morrison, Donald Janzen, Tyler Janzen, Susan McMillan, Graham McMillan, Sharon Gray, Dale Willms, Marilyn Redekop, David Wall, and Ray Dirks contributed vivid recollections from early *Russländer* settlement on Namaka Farm, adding to the legacy left by my father, Ben Jansen. Siksika Elders Gwendora Bear Chief, Bryan Little Chief, Tom Yellow Old Woman, and Aakai'kitstaki, and three who requested anonymity, referred to as Elder A, Elder B, and Elder C, shared their wisdom, culture, and memories of interactions with the newcomers. Marguerite Watson, Chas Watson, Alan West, Gail Buker, the late Margaret Buker Peterson, Bruce Klaiber, Heather Limb, Laura Limb Janzen, Wayne Christie, Tom Sadler, and Terry Peterson helped me understand non-Mennonite settlement and culture.

2. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920–1940: A People's Struggle for Survival* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1982), 141.

3. Correspondence from T.O.F. Herzer to W.R. Dick, "Only Eight Families Experienced Farmers," May 13, 1925, CPR papers, M2269, B177, F1762, GLA, ASC, University of Calgary.

4. Richard D. Thiessen, "Herzer, Traugott Otto Francis (1887–1958)," in GAMEO, December 2016, [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Herzer,_Traugott_Otto_Francis_\(1887-1958\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Herzer,_Traugott_Otto_Francis_(1887-1958)).

5. Correspondence from W.R. Dick to T.O.F. Herzer and Bishop David Töews, "Letter to T.O.F. Herzer Re Farm Education Meeting," April 10, 1930, CMBoc Fonds, Namaka Farm, Vol 1291 F752, Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.

6. Robert P.C. Joseph, *21 Things You May Not Know about the Indian Act* (Port Coquitlam, BC: Indigenous Relations Press, 2018), 65.

New History of Hochstadt/ Kleinstadt, West Reserve

by Lois Braun, Altona, Manitoba

On a Sunday afternoon in June, around 100 people gathered together to celebrate the launch of a new book about their community. Hochstadt was first a traditional, one-street village just a few miles northeast of Altona, Manitoba. Those twenty interrelated families came from the East Reserve in 1880 to acquire better land. At the same time, a Braun clan came up from Fargo, North Dakota, and established a cluster of farms they named Eigengrund, near the village.

The village proper began to disband around 1885, but a provincial school district, three miles by three miles, was laid out in 1892 and given the name, Kleinstadt. Over time, more families moved in, and this school district lasted until 1967, when many of the rural schools in the West Reserve were closed and consolidated into the bigger town schools. As an agricultural community, the area remained vibrant. Most of the residents were alumni of Kleinstadt School.

My husband, Ron “Joe” Braun, and his brother, Ken, grew up in the district. In the early 2000s, owing to constant encouragement from Adolf Ens and Lawrence Klippenstein, they began collecting the research of Kleinstadter William J. Kehler and conducting interviews with long-time Kleinstadt residents. Then Ken suffered ill-health, and the project lay dormant. In 2022, Joe and I, who after marriage had lived together in Kleinstadt for many years, formed a committee with three other former Kleinstadters—Ray Friesen, Stan Funk, and Wallace Hamm—and the research and interviews continued in earnest.

Reaching out to neighbours, friends, and acquaintances, we connected with many former schoolmates and both professional and amateur historians, and, with the additional help of the Internet, we amassed a lively collection of genealogies, essays, anecdotes, and photographs, culminating in the publication of *Hochstadt Village, Kleinstadt School District: Memories and Histories*. The scope of the book mainly covers 1880 to 1967, after which long-established families dwindled, newcomers were more transient, and homesteads were torn down to create farmland.

The book launch was held at the Neuberghthal Commons, because



Lois and Joe Braun being interviewed for a June article in the *Pembina Valley Online* about their new book on Hochstadt/Kleinstadt. Photo credit: Zack Driedger.

Neuberghthal, being next door to Kleinstadt, was for many decades a sort of sister village, sharing with it many interrelated families, sports events, and school picnics. The book launch featured Spanish music performed by Jenessa Kehler, a granddaughter and music student of Ben Kehler, a classical guitarist who grew up in the Kleinstadt district. Altona musician Paul Bergman also sang a few of his farm-flavoured compositions. Representatives of the RM of Rhineland brought greetings.

A highlight of the program was a selection of poems specially prepared for the event, and performed by two, one-time Kleinstadt teachers, Mary Froese Siemens and Melvin Klassen. A third teacher, Peter Hildebrand, was present at the launch and represented in the performance by two of his grandchildren. The grand finale of the afternoon was the distribution of the newly-published book, followed by a good deal of visiting among the attendees.

Among other things, the book notes a meeting at the Hochstadt Bergthaler Church in 1903 where resolutions were drawn up and an agreement cemented among a group of twenty church representatives to create a Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, conjoining the Rosenorter congregation in Saskatchewan and the Manitoba Bergthalers.

Not much later, the Hochstadt Bergthaler Church building, standing in what remained of the village, was abandoned in favour of an Altona location, and, in 1912, the church was transformed into the district’s public school.

In 1956, it was torn down and a new school built on the same property.

The community was also known for producing a group of young men who liked to sing. Beginning already in their teens back in the early 1930s, they called themselves the Hochstadt Quartet and performed hymns and gospel music at many events in southern Manitoba for over 60 years. Quartet members were brothers Jake and John Hoepfner, Bernard Sawatzky, and Ben Krueger, accompanied by a Rosenfeld man, Henry Berg.

Hochstadt/Kleinstadt was sometimes referred to as “the tower district” in the past. In the 1920s, the Department of Surveys constructed a 65-75-ft. wooden tower on the site of Hochstadt village to aid in geodetic triangulation, a survey system that involved similar towers in Roland and St. Jean. With battery-powered lights atop each of the three towers, surveyors used trigonometry to determine positions on the surface of the earth. When the survey was finished, the wooden tower remained, unused for several years, and became a source of adventure for young climbers and a destination for sight-seers. It eventually collapsed and the government donated the lumber to the family living on the quarter.

In 1977, a grand Kleinstadt reunion was organized. Around 300 people were on the potential guest list, but it is not known how many attended. Accompanying that July 14th weekend event was the release of a slim 27-page book about the history of the

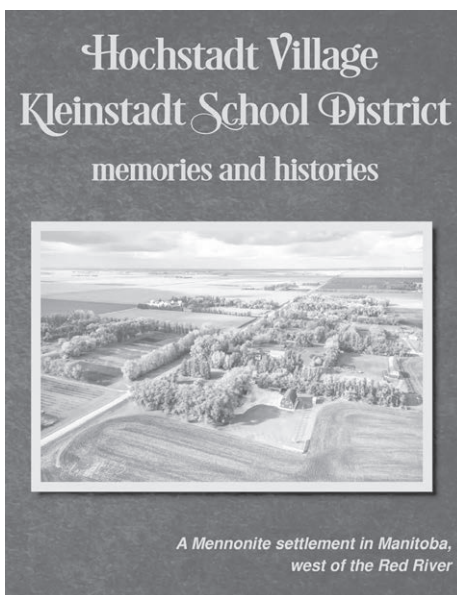
community, highlighting the research of past resident William J. Kehler and his brother, Frank. Also included in the book were essays and reflections from some of the locals.

Long-time families in the district in the mid-20th century were generations of Hamms, Kruegers, Kehlers, and Brauns. Today, one of the farms is still inhabited by a descendant of 1880 settlers. The district has two maintained graveyards: Hochstadt Cemetery and Eigengrund Cemetery, the latter a burial place for descendants of the original Braun clan.

The community consists of excellent farmland, and most of its inhabitants and descendants remained farmers through the 20th century. Two specialty farms sprang up in the later 1900s: a raspberry and strawberry U-pick operation, and a market garden featuring watermelons, cantaloupes, and cucumbers.

Today, the agricultural focus of the Kleinstadt area continues; there is a large dairy operation, a farm raising black pigs, and a successful pedigreed-seed producer, Wesmar Farms. While only a small handful of the current residents of Kleinstadt have deep roots in the district, the history and legacy of the area are now preserved in this 243-page, hardcover volume.

Lois Braun is a retired schoolteacher and author of several publications, residing in Altona with her husband, Joe. Hochstadt Village, Kleinstadt School District: Memories and Histories (2024), co-authored by Joe and Lois Braun, is available for purchase (\$50) at the Mennonite Heritage Archives and other locations. Call 204.324.6259.



Forced to Leave a Son to Die: A Migration Story, 1926–28

by Henry J. Engbrecht, Winnipeg

The decision for my grandparents, Peter P. and Anna (Dueck) Engbrecht, was huge—to leave their estate and all they had in Ukraine. Their transatlantic journey was yet bigger and more complex. And their new beginning in western Manitoba was even bigger.



Russian Mennonite Emigrants detained for health reasons at Atlantic Park Hostel in England, 1926. Photo credit: MAID MHC 379-8.0.

Peter and Anna had eleven children. Two children, Sara and Johann, had died at ages four and five. The three oldest, Nicolai, Peter, and Justina, were married. Of these, only Nicolai, his wife, Justina Epp, and their young family came to Canada on their own.

With their remaining six children, Peter and Anna set out on their migrant journey on October 16, 1926.¹ When they arrived in England (November 2), son Heinrich, age 17, was very ill and was immediately hospitalized. Consequently, the family was laid up in Southampton² for over six months, waiting.

It was hoped, of course, that Heinrich would recover. However, when it came time for the family to leave on their overseas voyage, Heinrich was not well enough to travel. He was suffering from nephritis, an incurable kidney disease (though not contagious) and needed constant medical care. It appears that he was out of hospital at the time of their departure but was readmitted within a

month after the Engbrecht family left, never recovering enough to be released. Yet, there is a memo from July 25, 1927, in which the doctors declared Heinrich medically fit to make the voyage. However, he would need to have access to medical assistance on the journey.

Very soon after the family's arrival in Manitoba, Peter began to pursue the hope of bringing his son over. The immigration laws were unfavourable for seriously ill

persons to enter the country, especially for one who hadn't recovered from illness. Peter persisted. He sent letters to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization (CMBoC), desperately seeking for the approval of a bond agreement to make an exception for his son to enter Canada.³

It is abundantly clear from the correspondence that the CMBoC took Peter's pleading very seriously and promptly forwarded his concerns to the chain of authorities: immigration officials, both federal and provincial, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR),⁴ and the Canada Colonization Association, a subsidiary of the CPR. Each level of bureaucracy required assurances that Heinrich would not be a liability for them, and that the Mennonite community would cover the cost for all his needs. The CMBoC gave assurances that Heinrich's illness would not be a "charge" to the country.

Nine months into his stay at the Shirley Warren Infirmary, Heinrich conveys optimism in a letter to his family:

March 27, 1928

Dear parents and siblings,

... So, I'm already much better than I was the last time I wrote and, praise and thank God, I'm much stronger in everything and have quite good strength. I had news from Mr. B. Unruh that I have permission to travel to Canada if a hospital in Manitoba accepts me. So, I'll be in a hospital there soon. But I hope that I won't be in the hospital for long, because if I were home now, I would be well soon. I'm still pale in the face, but I can say I've gotten rid of the swelling. I can't, so to speak, find any of that anymore.

It's already spring here. The birds are singing and the trees are already starting to turn green... I will write more when a letter comes to answer.

With warm greetings,
Heinrich Engbrecht

His hopefulness and optimism are both notable and heart-warming. How he must have looked forward to joining his family again!

However, Heinrich died on November 20, 1928. The funeral was held on November 26.

Helena Toews (1904–1996), older sister of J.B. Toews (1906–1998), reported that she and 12 others attended the funeral of Heinrich Engbrecht at the Atlantic Park Hostel. A minister led a 10-minute service. Otherwise, it would have been a pauper's burial. Helena donated a shilling (worth about 12 cents, which those staying over at Atlantic Park could earn for doing odd jobs) for the funeral service and raised donations from others for the burial. This is a line from a letter that Helena wrote to her fiancé, David Pauls, living in Arnaud, Manitoba, at the time:

After the minister left and the grave digger was standing there to proceed with the filling in, the small group sang two hymns in German.

In a letter of deep appreciation to Bishop David Toews, Peter Engbrecht writes:

December 2, 1928

Dear Brother Toews,

I would like to thank you very much for informing us of the passing of our son, Heinrich, also for the letter of condolence that we received. Because we received the news on time, we had the joy of celebrating a community/church funeral here in our church on the same day as he was buried, which was very consoling for us ...

With friendly greetings,
Peter Engbrecht

Ultimately, there was peace. Peter, and the leadership in the CMBoc had done everything they could. Heinrich was laid to rest with dignity; and the family was able to feel closure together with their supporting community. For so many others, that was not the case.

Peter and Anna's sorrows didn't end there. A year later, their daughter, Anna, died (age 29), giving birth to her first child. The child lived. Ten years later, Aganetha died (age 28), giving birth to her fourth child. This child also died.

Peter and Anna's story attests to the huge price paid by immigrant families in terms of set-backs and suffering, contrasted by their powerful perseverance, unshakable faith, and astonishing fortitude, something that the immigration leaders also carried and exhibited. For the five generations that followed, life in Canada has provided opportunities beyond measure for our family.

Dr. Henry J. Engbrecht, Professor Emeritus, Music, University of Manitoba, is the grandson of Peter P. Engbrecht.

Endnotes

1. Travel Schedule for Peter P. and Anna (Dueck) Engbrecht and family, whose last residence in Ukraine was Ebenthal: left from Shelawaja on October 16, 1926 (6 days); came to Rezekne, Latvia, on October 22, 1926, left there on the 23rd (overnight); came to Riga on October 23, left October 27 on the steamship Baltanic (4 days); arrived in London, England, November 2, 1926, left May 14, 1927 (6.5 months); and arrived in Quebec on the Empress of Scotland, May 23, 1927 (9 days), destined for Giroux, Manitoba (based on information obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Archives [MHA], Winnipeg).

2. Mennonite refugees were housed in barracks in Eastleigh, very close to Southampton, 80 miles southwest of London.

3. Letters translated by Ernest Braun, CMBoc collection, volume 1273, file 621, MHA, Winnipeg.

4. The CPR was involved because it had underwritten the cost of travel for the approximately 20,000 Mennonite immigrants that came to Canada from 1923 to 1930.

Mennonite-Hutterite Genealogy

(cont'd from p. 3)

Brandenburg happened in 1791. There was a considerable movement back-and-forth between these two communities and also with the mother congregation at Przechowka.

At some point, Mathies Hofer left Prussia and tried to emigrate to Pennsylvania. He was unsuccessful and eventually ended up back in the Brandenburg Mennonite community in the home of minister Ernst Voth where he died in 1786.¹² Joseph Miller and Christian

Hofer spent some time visiting the various Mennonite congregations. As they were leaving Prussia, they stopped at the most southerly Mennonite congregation, referred to as Ober Nessau, or Nieszawka, in the Thorn (Torun) region. Here, 17 Groningen Old Flemish Mennonites were waiting to join them on their journey back to Russia.

From Franzthal in Brandenburg: Elisabeth (Schmidt) Decker, a widow with five children, Hein, Jacob, Heinrich, Benjamin, and Eva; Maria Schmidt (sister of the above) with daughter Maria.

From Pzrechowka: Elisabeth (Funk) Knels with two children, Abraham and Johann; Sara and Heinrich (possibly related to Elisabeth Knels).

From Brenkenhoffswalde in Brandenburg: Eve Richert, widow with two children, Eva and Anna; Peter Nachtigal, who was their wagoner.

These Mennonites joined the Hutterite community at Wischenka in the Chernihiv region of Russia.¹³

Two additional families from the Groningen Old Flemish joined the Hutterites. According to documents in the Brandenburg State archives, Ernst Voth and Peter Janz, of the Brenkenhoffswalde congregation, requested permission for Peter Isaac to move to Wischenka in Klein Russland on July 2, 1783.^{14a} The move is confirmed by the *Chronicle*.^{14b} The other family was that of Peter Ratzlaff (GRanDMA #3693), who joined the Hutterites in 1810 but left in 1812. Although he left and ended up in the Chortitza colony in South Russia, three of his daughters joined the Hutterites. Ratzlaff, who was likely a Volhynian Groningen Old Flemish Mennonite, had married a Swiss Mennonite from the nearby Michelsdorf congregation and left that church to join the Hutterites.¹⁵

Although several Groningen Old Flemish Mennonite families joined the Hutterites in the late 1700s, most eventually returned to Mennonite congregations.¹⁶ The genealogical details for these families can be found in the GRanDMA database.¹⁷

Part 2 will deal with genealogical connections between Hutterites and Mennonites in Russia.

Endnotes

1. https://gameo.org/index.php?title=West_prussia
2. Adalbert Goertz, "The Marriage Records of Montau in Prussia for 1661–1704," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 50 (July 1976), 240–243.
3. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren*, vol. 1, 561–564.

4. L. Neubauer, "Mährische Brüder in Elbing," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* XXXIII (1912), 447-455.

5. Alan Peters, "Genealogy by the Map (III): Out of the Ordinary: Mennonite Families in the Kleinwerder," *California Mennonite Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 26 (Nov. 1992), 3-4, <https://fpscholarworks.fresno.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/006cb03f-4f1f-47f2-a958-4589884614a2/content>.

6. See the Gerhard Wiebe diary, pages 266-269, 290-293. Images available here: [https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_\(Teil\)/Elbing-Ellerwald_-_Amtstagebuch_von_Gerhard_Wiebe_1778-1795.html](https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/churchregisters/Oestliche_preussische_Provinzen_und_Polen_(Teil)/Elbing-Ellerwald_-_Amtstagebuch_von_Gerhard_Wiebe_1778-1795.html).

7. *The Chronicle*, vol. 2, 501-504, 527-532.

8. [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Przechowka_\(Kuyavian-Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Przechowka_(Kuyavian-Pomeranian_Voivodeship,_Poland))

9. Church Records of the Przechowka congregation in Prussia. For a translation, see https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/prussia/Przechowka_Church_Register.html.

10. See [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk,_Stephan_\(17th/18th_century\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Funk,_Stephan_(17th/18th_century)).

11. See [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Brenkenhoffswalde_and_Franzten_\(Lubusz_Voivodeship,_Poland\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Brenkenhoffswalde_and_Franzten_(Lubusz_Voivodeship,_Poland)) and [https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Volhynia_\(Ukraine\)](https://gameo.org/index.php?title=Volhynia_(Ukraine)).

12. *The Chronicle*, vol. 2, 504, death of Matthies Hofer.

13. *The Chronicle*, vol. 2, 528, Przechowka to Wischenka list.

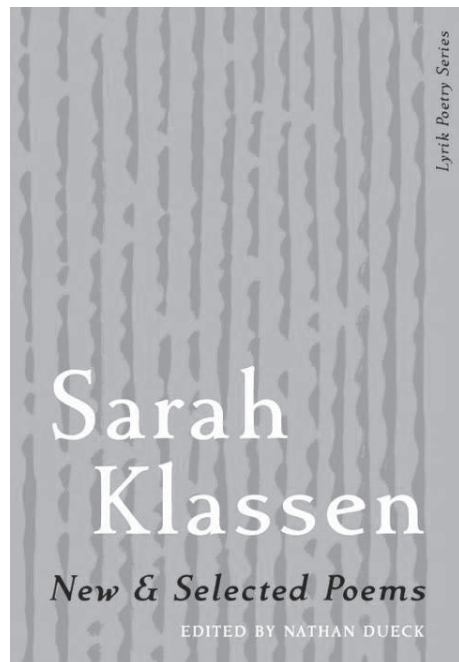
14. a) Brandenburgisches Landeshauptarchiv, Rep. 3, Nr.12297 (1783); b) *The Chronicle*, vol. 1, 530.

15. *Hutterite Roots* (Hutterite Centennial Steering Committee, Freeman, South Dakota, 1985), 83.

16. See, for example, *The Chronicle*, vol. 1, 536.

17. For more information on the GRanDMA database, see <https://mgi.mennonitegenealogy.com/grandma/whatsgrandma.php>.

Book Review



Sarah Klassen, *New & Selected Poems of Sarah Klassen*, edited by Nathan Dueck, Lyric Series 1 (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2024), pp. 232.

Reviewed by K. Maria Dueck-Shimp

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Writing from a place known for its horizons, Klassen, award-winning Manitoban poet, seeks to broaden our own and succeeds in that with her new book. There is something here for us all.

As a linguistics teacher, I delighted in the juxtaposition of verbal and nonverbal communication. As a language learner, I nodded along as Klassen describes the frustration of grasping for a yet unlearned word. As a prairie dweller, I too have waited for spring with "ravenous hope." And as someone without roots, I felt understood by the precise imagery of longing for a home that no longer exists.

Intentionally edited and arranged by Nathan Dueck, the collection of published and new poetry begins with Klassen's foundation of person and inspiration: the stories and imagery found in the Bible, reinterpreted. Each poem presents a preview of the collection's themes of heritage, suffering, migration, faith, and simplicity. Emerging on the other side, the sections that follow, specifically, *Rewinding Time*, *A Matter of Language*, and *Still Life with Light*, give us a more accessible introduction to Klassen and her voice, even as she dips in and out of viewpoints.

Although "Collector" is written about her mother, Klassen also paints herself as one as she gathers stories, feelings, and evidence of the suffering and small joys those around and before her have faced. This is a legacy she has inherited from her mother, like the joint pain she alludes to in "Blue chair." Immigration and belonging are approached diversely and compassionately from past to present, ancestral stories to the stranger's refugee experience. Klassen's new works are a highlight at the end of the collection, balancing light and heavy themes with crisp insights amid observations of nature's subtle lessons.

In art there is a concept called the vanishing point, a key ingredient of landscape painting. Klassen taps into that, at times vanishing to make space for voices often unheard, but reentering to carry us through the scene. However, the glimpses of her inner life and experiences, such as in *Still Life with Light*, are where she is strongest. Similarly, her personal depiction of faith in "Pensées," although written from the perspective of Simone Weil, resonates more deeply than her direct references to biblical characters and events in *Alpha and Omega*.

In "Evidence" and "Language arts" we see her wrestle with the weight her own witness carries compared with the horrors her students have faced. Like a thesis statement, we understand her mission to "join all disconnected fragments" with a "soft pencil." It is all she can do, she admits, to make sense of the pain in the world. She offers her words as a guide, as she did her students, for "tough nouns" to become "verbs reverberating confident as trumpets." If it weren't for the pencil lines left behind, it would be too soft. But her marks are there and leave their lasting impressions. And isn't that what we need, a soft embrace that lingers forever?

K. Maria Dueck-Shimp is a TESOL lecturer at Providence University College, Otterburne, Manitoba.

Mennonite Genealogy, Inc, to Award Research Grants

Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., (MGI) is now accepting research-grant proposals for projects that advance Low-German Mennonite and Hutterite genealogy. Eligible activities include the acquisition and processing of historical documents as well as hosting relevant conferences. MGI is especially interested in documents from Poland, Ukraine, and Russia.

Awards up to \$15,000 for up to three years will be available. The first application deadline is February 1, 2025, with awards announced by March 1.

For application details, visit <https://mgi.mennonitegenealogy.com/grants>.

MGI, a non-profit organization registered in California, is dedicated to a variety of activities surrounding the genealogy of Mennonites and Hutterites from Prussia and Russia and their descendants. Best known are the "GRanDMA" genealogical database of nearly 1.6 million individuals and "GRanDMA OnLine," the web app for searching and for creating reports.

Additional resources include "Mennonite Genealogical Resources," which hosts tens of thousands pages of historical documents, and "Mennonite DNA," a project exploring DNA insights into Low-German Mennonite heritage.

Explore MGI's projects and resources at <https://mgi.mennonitegenealogy.com>.