

Mennonite Historian

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



In January 1925, these Mennonite church and village leaders from across Russia gathered in Moscow. Their aim was to plan a lobbying strategy, petitioning the new Soviet government to respect their Mennonite religious, economic, educational, and agricultural ways within the new communist framework of the Soviet Union. Their strategy of negotiation and accommodation proved futile. Most of these men were soon arrested, exiled, or executed. For the names that correspond with the numbers in the photo, see <https://chortitza.org/Pht/Konf.htm>. The names are also listed in Gerhard Lorenz, *Heritage Remembered*, p. 88. For analysis of this meeting, which came to be known as the “Second Martyrs’ Synod,” the first being in 1527 in Augsburg, see Edward Krahn’s article starting on page 2. Photo credit: F.A. Bohdanov studio, Moscow.

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The Second Martyrs' Synod, 1925: The Faithful 77

by Edward G. Krahn, Lorette West, Manitoba

While the year 2023 marks the start of the centennial of the *Russlaender* Mennonites' arrival in Canada, the year 2025 is the centennial of what became known as the Second Martyrs' Synod. Seventy-seven Mennonite leaders from the Mennonite communities in Russia gathered under the auspices of the *Kommission fuer Kirchenangelegenheiten* (KfK) in Moscow in January 1925.

The 1925 gathering took place during the turmoil that accompanied the beginnings of the Soviet collectivization of Russian agriculture and industry. The KfK's agenda was to discuss future directions and ways to ensure basic human rights for the Mennonite community (their religious, economic, educational, and agricultural life) within the emerging Soviet Union. It was a pivotal moment for *Russlaender*, as many were deciding to either stay or emigrate.

The iconic photo (see cover) of those men in the snow of Moscow¹ reminds us of the historical importance of this meeting for *Russlaender*. The resulting repression of the 77 delegates by the State Political Directorate (GPU) resulted in

torture, imprisonment in Gulag camps, and execution of most of the delegates who remained in Russia, hence the designation, Second Martyrs' Synod.² Only 19 of those leaders escaped, with 17 of those finding a new home in Canada.

The leaders who arrived in Canada joined existing Mennonite Brethren or Mennonite Conference churches or helped to form new churches in new settlement areas.³ The following years brought many changes to Canadian Mennonite churches, ongoing adjustments to meet the many new challenges, including yet another World War.

All the KfK leaders, both in Canada and Russia, have passed on, and the memory of this monumental meeting has become faint in the minds of Mennonites today. My aim is to review the events that led to the meeting and to tell the life stories of "The Faithful 77."

Family connections

In the late 1950s, after my family moved to Manitoba from Saskatchewan, we returned each summer to Saskatchewan to work our family's farmland. We also visited my widowed grandmother, Maria (Letkeman) Martens (1886–1965), on a farm north of Tugaske that she had purchased in the late 1930s after moving back from Parkerview district. Parkerview was where the Fuerstenland wing of the Eyebrow Tugaske church had moved to in 1932 at the start of the Great Depression.⁴

Grandmother pointed out my grandfather, Johann Martens (1885–1935), in the second row from the bottom, the fourth man from the left in the KfK photo (#10 in the numbered photo). She also pointed to other men whom she knew, including my dad's uncle from Orenburg, Isaak G. Krahn (1882–1941, #45 in photo). She pointed to Jacob Aron Rempel (1883–1941, #38 in photo) and showed me a photo of him in a Gulag blacksmith shop, a photo she had received in correspondence from the family. I overheard her talking to my mother about writing other wives and families of the Mennonite leaders who had been at the conference, sometimes getting photos in return. In this way, the women knew whom they were praying for in Canada and in Russia.

In 1974, while I was working at the Mennonite Heritage Village Museum in Steinbach, J.J. Thiessen visited my mother and me at the museum while on a day trip

from a Mennonite conference in Winnipeg. He reminisced about my mother's time working as a domestic in Saskatoon, associated with the *Maedchenheim* he directed. Apparently, he knew she skipped Bible studies to go to the movies with her sister!

J.J. Thiessen also joked that my grandfather had been known as the Moses of Fuerstenland, but then added perhaps he should have been called the Joshua of Fuerstenland, as he had been able to enter the promised land while many had not. Upon my grandfather's death in 1935, J.J. Thiessen and David Toews took the nine children under their wings.⁵ My grandmother continued to write these two men over the years, honouring them by referring to them with the endearment term of *Onkel*.

While the photo showed 77 men at the Moscow synod, not to be forgotten were the wives and families back in their home villages; they also sacrificed for the leadership roles that their men took on.

Pressure increases on the *Russlaender*

Until recently, Mennonite historians have written from a very ethno-cultural centric standpoint, situating the Mennonites as a people apart, separate from the world events around them. However, the broader world and national events also impacted the Mennonite response to their circumstances. What were those contextual events? Answers to this question will point to the reasons why some *Russlaender* left for Canada starting in 1923.

The government's Russification movement had its start in the late 18th century but gained importance in the 1860s through a concerted attempt to assimilate non-Russian speakers and ethno-religious minority groups. Tsarina Catherine (1729–1796) had recruited German-speaking settlers from Europe to populate the areas of conquest, but this nationalized only the administration of these newly acquired lands, tying them closely to St. Petersburg, without Russifying the new arrivals culturally or religiously.

It was under Nicholas I (1796–1855) that the concept of official nationality arose. The thrust of the campaign was delivered through educational changes under the direction of Sergei Uvarov, the Minister of Education. The goals were aimed at creating a modern Russian

(cont'd on p. 4)

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Genealogy and Family History

The 1920s Mennonite Immigration to Canada: Genealogical Sources, Part 4: Post-Immigration

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

In the previous article of this series, I focused on the immigration records of the CMBoc (Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization), in particular the immigration cards. After immigrating, these families were expected to pay off their travel debt, also known as the *Reiseschuld*. The payment of this travel debt was coordinated by the CMBoc. The original *Reiseschuld* records are available at the MHA.¹ These records have files on every family that was helped by the CMBoc.

Census Lists: A Canadian national census predating the immigration was conducted in 1921.² This census can be searched from the Library and Archives website or through Ancestry.com. An interim Prairie Province census was conducted in 1926.³ During the time between these census enumerations, a large emigration of Old Colony Mennonites to Mexico had taken place and the majority of the 1920s immigrants had arrived in Canada. The 1926 census can be searched from the Library and Archives website or through FamilySearch. Of significant interest will be the 1931 census, which should become available in late 2023.

Layover in Ontario: When the “Russian” Mennonites immigrated to North America in the 1870s, many families spent a winter in one of the Swiss (Amish and Old Order) Mennonite communities, before setting off for their final destination on the prairies the following spring. Hence the name of the now well-known book *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need*.⁴

Most immigrants of the 1920s took the train directly from their city of arrival to their prairie destinations and were usually taken in by old friends and relatives who had already settled in existing Mennonite communities. One group, numbering over 800 people, chose to follow the example of the 1870s pioneers, arriving in Ontario in the summer of 1924. The arrival of this group is described in Sam Steiner’s book on Ontario Mennonites.⁵ A very interesting

and informative list of those families taken in by the local Swiss Mennonites has been posted to the internet.⁶ Some Mennonites from Russia chose to permanently settle in Ontario.

Land records: These were, and are, under provincial jurisdiction. Provincial archives and municipal offices contain property records going back to the establishment of the province or municipality. A good example of how these land records could be used is provided in an article by Bruce Wiebe.⁷ He researched the sale of the properties of three Old Colony Mennonite villages in Manitoba during the 1920s to incoming immigrants from Russia.

Congregational records: Most of the immigrant families banded together to form their own congregations. These congregations are too numerous to list here. Fortunately, two microfilming projects have preserved the records for nearly all of these congregations.

In 1978, the Mennonite Brethren in Canada and the U.S. undertook a project to microfilm congregational records (see photo at right).⁸ In 1980,⁹ the archives of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (the Mennonite Heritage Centre, now the Mennonite Heritage Archives [MHA]) undertook a similar microfilming of congregational records. These microfilms, as well as several collections of original congregational records are available at the CMBS and the MHA, both in Winnipeg.

Special mention should also be made of a project by the Mennonite Archives of Ontario (MAO) called Russian Mennonite Immigration Digital Files.¹⁰ Here one will find a variety of genealogically useful

files on the 1920s immigration, including pages from Family Registers for what became the United Mennonite Churches of Ontario.

Endnotes

1. See MHA Volumes 1294-98 (card file), 2352-2375 (ledgers).
2. 1921 census: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1921/Pages/search.aspx> and <https://www.ancestry.ca/search/collections/8991/>. Ancestry.ca is a pay site, but the 1921 census can be searched without purchasing a membership. However, one must enroll in a free membership.
3. 1926 census: <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/census/1926/Pages/search.aspx> and <https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/3005862>. One must enroll in their free membership in order to search.
4. Clarence Hiebert, *Brothers in Deed to Brothers in Need: A Scrapbook about Mennonite Immigrants from Russia, 1870–1885* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1974).
5. Samuel Steiner, *In Search of Promised Lands: A Religious History of Mennonites in Ontario* (Kitchener: Herald Press, 2015). See chapter 7.
6. See <https://www.mennonitegenealogy.com/1920s/>
7. Bruce Wiebe, “The Move to Mexico: The Sale of Three Villages,” *Preservings* (2010), 35–46.
8. See “Micro-film project puts young and old together,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (27 October 1978), 16, and “Fifteen thousand miles for documents,” *Mennonite Brethren Herald* (19 January 1979), 16–17.
9. I was one of the undergraduate university students working for the late Lawrence Klippenstein on this project during the summer of 1980.
10. Mennonite Archives of Ontario, <https://uwaterloo.ca/mennonite-archives-ontario/russian-mennonite-immigration-digital-files>.



Bill Reimer and J.B. Toews (l-r) pictured with the truck and trailer unit they used for eight months in 1978, travelling to each of the Mennonite Brethren congregations in the U.S. and Canada. Most churches (understandably) were reluctant to part with their leather-bound membership registers and minute books, even for a short time to have the pages copied offsite. So, the Historical Commission came up with a novel idea: “campout” in the church’s parking lot and use a microfilming camera to take a photo of each page of the valuable membership registers and congregational minute books. This way the books would never leave the church property, and the records could be copied and preserved. Reimer and Toews logged 15,000 miles that year, travelling and photographing 175,000 pages of church records, often spending long, 12-hour days stamping each page with a number and then photographing it. For an image of Reimer at the microfilm camera in the trailer, see <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/bill-reimer-with-microfilm-machine>. Photo credit: *MB Herald*, 19 January 1979, p. 16.

The Faithfull 77

(cont'd from p. 2)

nation, united in loyalty to the Tsar, guided morally by the Russian Orthodox Church, and speaking the Russian language. The aim was the total assimilation of non-Russian minorities—eventually, the Asian, Baltic, and German citizens were to adopt the Russian culture.

While Alexander II (1855–1861) did bring some reforms, aggressive Russification continued under his successor with the removal of some of the privileges, such as military exemptions, that the immigrants had received for settlement. This development led to the first wave of Mennonite emigration to North America starting in 1874.

The Russian government was concerned with its western border, seeing the unification of Germany under Chancellor Bismarck as a direct threat. The fact that there were ethnic minorities on the western border that had cultural ties to Germany and spoke German made the issue even more pressing. The feeling was that a united Germany would soon flex its muscles and turn eastward. Therefore, a more Russian-oriented borderland would be better able to defend the country.

The response of those Mennonites who remained in Russia following the 1874 emigration was to look for a united strategy to respond to these pressures, an all-Mennonite response, one that could speak for Mennonites as a whole. This led to the 1883 formal founding of the *Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinde in Russland*.⁶ At the same time, while Russia was concerned about their German “problem,” the Mennonites were becoming more successful, more united, more German, and with that, more visible.

The evolution toward a united Mennonite front can be charted in distinct phases. From 1883 to 1904, there was an attempt to strength and unify from within. The all-Mennonite Conferences focused on establishing hospitals, special schools, and promoting religious education, along with the publication of a uniform catechism, ministers’ manuals, and conferences to discuss common issues. These efforts were designed to blunt Russification by turning to German educational institutions and publications, including special speakers from Germany coming for Bible conferences.

But most important for Mennonites were the negotiations to find a compromise position with the government over alternative military service via the Forestry Service option. This led to the appointments of camp directors and special camp ministers, along with fundraising to pay for the camps themselves, a condition of the original conscription compromise with the government.

From February 8, 1904, to September 5, 1905, Russia entered a disastrous war with Japan. The two superpowers fought over territorial ambitions. While the war had little direct impact on Mennonites, the resulting 1905 Russian Revolution had a major long-term effect. A wave of political and social unrest spread across Russia as calls for social reform were directed against the Tsar, nobility, ruling class, and foreign influences. While some reforms did occur, they were muted. The seeds for future unrest and revolution continued to grow.⁷

The 1905 to 1909 period was marked by more turmoil and change in Russia, problems that impacted all Mennonites. In response, more Mennonite groups were asked to join with the *Bundeskonferenz* to broaden the unity of the all-Mennonite front. At the 1906 meeting, it was decided to invite the Mennonite Brethren. By 1910, at the Schoensee meeting, the Mennonite Brethren participated in large numbers in the all-Mennonite Conference.

In preparation for the 1910 conference, the list of delegates and the program had to be submitted to the government for approval prior to proceeding, a new requirement. Once approved, the conference was to be attended by government officials and all minutes were to be submitted in Russian. Special permission was needed to conduct any sessions in German. In response to this increased workload, a *Glaubenskommission* was appointed in 1910, which later evolved into the KfK as a permanent executive committee to deal directly with the government. Work started on a constitution for an all-Mennonite Conference.

Conferences address Soviet challenges

The first conference held after World War I was the *Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress* in Ohrloff, August 14–18, 1917. It turned out to be the first and the last conference, addressing both economic and cultural interests. A total of 198 delegates came from across the Mennonite

commonwealth. This conference addressed political, cultural, legal, and organizational topics. Presentations were made on the Kerensky provisional government, landownership, agriculture, and Mennonite schools. Delegates represented clergy, lawyers, engineers, farmers, theologians, and educators.

It was decided to establish a formal *Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress* to regulate and administrate the civil matters of the Mennonite commonwealth. But it was not to be, as the *Kongress* never convened again because of the civil war following the Russian Revolution.

The KfK had been established in 1910 as the *Glaubenskommission* to deal with the growing tension with the government. After the Russian Duma stripped Mennonites of their privileges and declared them a sect, the KfK became the main lobbying wing for Mennonites between conferences.

At the 1912 conference, the *Glaubenskommission* was renamed the KfK.⁹ It became the executive committee of the Conference, carrying out the decisions made at the conference and responding quickly to the rapidly changing political environment. It had been decided at the 1917 conference that, due to the critical issues facing the Mennonites and the need for rapid response, the chair of the KfK should receive a salary and dedicate himself fulltime to the work of the Conference.

The Revolution brought about a temporary pause in activities. The first conference after the Revolution was held in Chortitza in October 1922, during the first year of the Russian famine.¹⁰ Since 1920, the interests of Mennonites had been represented in Moscow by P.F. Froese and C.F. Klassen.

In response to more Soviet pressure, a meeting in Alexanderthal (Alt Samara) called for the constitution of a Mennonite religious and economic union, the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*. But under the laws of the Soviet government, this was disallowed. So, the two different wings separated, with the Mennonite community using the KfK to advocate for matters of the church.

The KfK played a major role in the program pre-planning and delivery of the 1925 Second Martyrs’ Synod in Moscow.¹¹ The KfK had submitted in May 1924 a petition to the Soviet government to extend basic human rights to the Mennonite communities. At the 1925 conference, they

reported on the success of that petition and sought the approval for the agenda of the upcoming conference.

While the conference reported the success of only one of the “rights” they had lobbied for—to publish their own periodical, *Unser Blatt*—many other decisions were made by the delegates during the sessions and during the tea breaks.¹² The biggest conversation topic was “do we go” or “do we stay,” even though this discussion is not reflected in the minutes. During the conference, the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization sent a telegram indicating that they were ready to assist those Mennonites who wished to emigrate to Canada.

Following the conference, the delegates returned to their communities and reported on what they had seen and heard at the conference, each with a different lens. What they did not know at the time was that the window of opportunity to leave was narrowing. The leaders returned to their homes with different visions of the future for the Mennonites in Russia.

Leading up to the conference, among the discouraging messages from the Soviet government, there was the odd positive message, suggesting compromise might be possible. The period of famine and starvation was over. The Soviet government had allowed Mennonite Central Committee to coordinate Western relief efforts in Russia. Crops were better. The New Economic Policy (NEP)¹³ and its liberalization seemed to have lifted the most draconian aspects of the post-Revolution period. Bands of marauders and armies were no longer pillaging and molesting. The Soviets had brought law and order back to village life. The White Army had stopped hostilities in the Russian far east, bringing an end to the civil war. Russian governments in the past had been open to compromise; surely, they would do so again. Did they not need the agricultural and business success of the Mennonites?

What they did not recognize was that the NEP had been Lenin’s attempt to allow some of the steam to leave the protests of the peasant class, permitting the fragile Soviet government time to gain full control. While meeting in Moscow in January 1925, the delegates did not see fully how Stalin, following the death of Lenin, was about to bring in the Iron Fist of collectivized agriculture. The full reign of terror was to begin.

Some delegates, having received word that they were under the watchful eye of the Soviets, returned home and quickly decided to leave as soon as possible, leaving that same year. Others returned and organized an emigration group, such as the 300 plus who left with Johann Peter Bueckert (1879–1958, #46 in photo) from Arkadak.¹⁴ Others brought the Colony’s church council together to organize a mass emigration as was the case for Fuerstenland.

Still others, like the Orenburg delegates under *Aeltester* Isaak G. Krahn, my dad’s uncle, returned home to preach against emigration. In Orenburg, only a small number, less than 400, under Minister Peter P. Dyck (1874–1957), left for Canada in 1926.¹⁵

Some delegates returned ready to leave, only to find that their congregations did not support such action, as things seemed to be looking up. So, they chose to stay with their congregation. And a few saw themselves as too old to uproot and emigrate.

Several individuals took the initiative to leave with their family or in small family units. At the Petrovka estate, eight of the 13 families left for Canada, organizing their own emigration under the direction of Heinrich Peter Loewen (1884–1950).¹⁶

Strategy of accommodation fails

Starting in late 1927, Stalin started his “Revolution from Above,” which included nationalization of industrial production, abolition of the market, collectivization of agricultural lands, domination of the Communist Party, and institution of his absolute power.

The reign of terror began with a direct attack on landlords, industrialists, and those associated with the old regime. Engineers, teachers, academics, kulaks (farmers who owned their land), and clergy were identified as “enemies of the state.” And those Mennonite ministers who had been associated with alternative military service were earmarked for early arrest. Delegates from the Second Martyrs’ Synod started to be arrested in 1927. The Soviets knew who the Mennonite leaders were from the subscription list of the *Unser Blatt*, the only right from their list of petitions that they managed to negotiate in 1925!

The Mennonite strategy of seeking political accommodation through direct negotiations with the government was now dead.

Fifty-eight of the Faithful 77 did not

emigrate; they were targeted for arrest, exile, and death. Being clergy, landowners, teachers, and merchants, they had several strikes against them. A few, like Peter Friedrichson (1866–1926, #15 in photo), were fortunate to die in their own beds of natural causes. The rest faced the full wrath of the Iron Fist. Indeed, it was the Second Martyrs’ Synod.

Edward Krahn is a semi-retired museum program manager. One of his current projects is to research the Second Martyrs’ Synod. If you have information related to any of the delegates, please contact him at <edgkrah@gmail.com>. He is trying to finalize the names of the 77, as there are discrepancies between the published lists. His delegate biographies are being posted at <https://chortitza.org/Pht/Konf.htm> and a future publication is planned.

Endnotes

1. Aron A. Toews, *Mennonitische Maertyrer* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1949), 157–159. The Moscow photographer was F.A. Bohdanov. See also <https://archives.mhsc.ca/index.php/all-mennonite-conference-in-moscow-in-1925>.
2. The first being in 1527, when some 60 Anabaptists gathered in Augsburg, Germany, to strategize next steps for the young movement. Most of these participants were also killed for their faith.
3. Gerhard I. Peters, *Remembering Our Leaders: Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 1902–1977* (Clearbrook: Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia, 1982), 14–40.
4. Bert Friesen, “Eyebrow Mennonite Church (Eyebrow, Saskatchewan, Canada), (1928–),” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online* (GAMEO), 2021; and Marlene Epp, “Parkerview Mennonite Church (Parkerview/Fitzmaurice, Saskatchewan, Canada),” GAMEO, 1989.
5. J.J. Thiessen, “Obituary of Johann Johann Martens,” *Der Bote*, May 22, 1935, p. 3.
6. Cornelius Krahn, “Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz der Mennonitengemeinden in Russland,” GAMEO, 1955.
7. Dominic Lieve, *The End of Tsarist Russia: The March to World War I and Revolution* (New York: Viking, 2015), 182–224.
8. Cornelius Krahn, “Allgemeiner Mennonitischer Kongress (Russia),” GAMEO, 1955.
9. Krahn, “Allgemeine Bundeskonferenz.”
10. Harold S. Bender and Elmer Neufeld, “Mennonite Central Committee (International),” GAMEO, 1987.
11. John B. Toews, *Selected Documents* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1976), 428–438.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 68–98.
14. Peter Letkemann, *A Book of Remembrance: Mennonites in Arkadak and in Zentral, 1908–1941* (Winnipeg: Old Oak Publishing, 2016).
15. Peter P. Dyck, *Orenburg am Ural: die Geschichte einer mennonitischen Ansiedlung in Russland* (Clearbrook: Christian Bookstore, 1951). (Note: This book is viewable online, <https://www.mharchives.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Dyck-Peter-Orenburg-Oct-2022.pdf>.)
16. Heinrich “Henry” Peter Loewen, *Find A Grave Memorial*, 131417777, https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/131417777/heinrich_henry-peter-loewen.

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada Meets at Shekinah

by Barb Draper, Elmira, Ontario

When the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada wrapped up its meetings at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Saskatchewan, on January 22, the freezing rain had started. Dick Braun loaded up the 15-passenger van with people going directly to the airport, but it was too late. The laneway at Shekinah was too slippery, and he could not get up the long hill. But no one missed their flight back home. John Reddekopp and Jake Buhler packed as many as possible into their four-wheel drive vehicles for the one-hour trip to Saskatoon and one of them made a second trip.

Twenty people met at Shekinah on the weekend of January 20–22 for these historical society meetings, representing Mennonite museums, archives, educational institutions, and provincial historical

societies from across the country. After two years of meeting online, the group appreciated making personal connections. The exchange of ideas among these Mennonite historical organizations is invaluable as it encourages inspiration and collaboration.

This year the Award of Excellence went to Leonard Doell, a Mennonite genealogist, oral historian and collector of community knowledge who has written a number of books and articles. He has also researched local Indigenous land claims and has developed invaluable connections with local First Nations communities.

Doell was deeply appreciative of the award and pointed out that he was able to build on what others have done before. He thanked the historical society for their work saying, “Keep up the good work in preserving our history and seeking ways to make it relevant to today’s world.”

Along with other members of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan, Doell was a knowledgeable tour guide as the group visited the original Old Colony Mennonite church in Neuanlage, the museum at Hague, and Stoney Knoll, a place that acknowledges that land sold to Mennonite settlers was actually a reservation of the Young

Chippewyan First Nation. The group also stopped in Rosthern to see the former train station where 100 years ago, hundreds of Mennonites arrived from the former Soviet Union.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada has been working on two commemorative projects. Over the past year an exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba, has told the story of the large migration of Mennonites from Manitoba and Saskatchewan to Mexico and Paraguay 100 years ago. Thanks to the hard work of curator Andrea Klassen, this exhibit is now being prepared to travel across Canada. It will generally work its way west through 2023 and go to Ontario in 2024.

The other big project happening this summer is commemorating 100 years since thousands of Mennonites arrived in Canada from the former Soviet Union. Henry Paetkau, the chair of this centenary committee, was happy to announce that there are nearly 60 people signed up for each of the three legs of the train trip from Quebec City to Abbotsford. Generous donations have allowed them to subsidize about 30 young adults on the trip.

“This is very exciting, and it will impact the dynamics of the tour,” said



The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada (MHSC) met at Shekinah Retreat Centre near Waldheim, Saskatchewan, January 20–22, 2023. Front row (l-r): Jake Buhler, Bruce Guenther, Barb Draper, Conrad Stoesz, John Reddekopp; middle row: Laureen Harder-Gissing, Jeremy Wiebe, Linda Klassen, Aileen Friesen, Dave Neufeldt, Brian Froese, Katie Harder; and back row: Henry Paetkau, Gary Dyck, Ben Nobbs-Thiessen, Dick Braun, Leonard Doell, Graham Schellenberg, Alf Redekopp, and Jon Isaak. Photo credit: MHSC.

Voices from EMC & EMMC



On February 15, 1980, young people gathered for a fun-filled weekend at Red Rock Bible Camp near Rennie, Manitoba. EMC Sno-Camp 1980 involved ice breakers, a film “The Prize,” lots of food, sessions with speaker Lorne Meisner, mini-Olympics, songs from “Sweeter Than Honey,” and all sorts of winter fun! From Meisner’s message: “Christians, more than anybody else in this world, have reason and the right to boast—because they know the one true God personally and intimately through Jesus Christ. Why don’t we brag more about God? Could it be because we don’t know him well enough?... ‘Oh God... grant unto us the desire and diligence necessary to know you as we ought and as you desire.’” Photo and text courtesy of Ruth Block.



A photo taken at the unveiling of a commemorative plaque on July 4, 1987, marking a 50th anniversary. The cairn notes that this is the site of the first church built in 1937 by the *Rudnerweide Mennoniten Gemeinde*. In 1959, the *Gemeinde* became known as the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (EMMC). For many years, spring and fall, a tent was erected on this site for Mission and Thanksgiving festivals. The cairn is situated on the churchyard of the Bergfeld EMMC church, south and east of Plum Coulee, Manitoba. The original building is still there, but it has had several additions and adjustments to the structure. Photo and text courtesy of Lil Goertzen.

Paetkau. “There will be some young adults on each leg of the tour and that will enrich the conversations.”

Other on-going projects supported by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada are the Mennonite Archival Information Database (MAID) and the Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO). Various Mennonite archives are also digitizing periodicals and other records to make them available to the public.

The executive committee of MHSC includes Conrad Stoesz, president; Laureen

Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies



Harder-Gissing, vice-president; Jeremy Wiebe, treasurer; Linda Klassen, secretary; and Bruce Guenther, fifth member.

Barb Draper is the outgoing recording secretary who is completing seven years on the MHSC executive.

John and Margaret Friesen Lectures

The Neglected Role of Dutch Mennonite Innovators in the Scientific Revolution and Early Enlightenment

Dr. Gary K. Waite

PhD, FRSC; Professor Emeritus, Dept. of History, University of New Brunswick

THURSDAY, MARCH 9, 2023
In-person and livestream



Lecture 1 | Mennonites as Social and Technological Innovators in the Sixteenth-Century Netherlands

11:00 AM | Mennonite Heritage Gallery
610 Shaftesbury Blvd.

Lecture 2 | Mennonites as Innovators of Philosophical Thought in the Dutch Golden Age

7:00 PM | Marpeck Commons
2299 Grant Ave.

CMU | CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY cmu.ca/friesenlectures

Leonard Doell Receives Mennonite Historical Society's Award of Excellence

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is pleased to present the 2023 Award of Excellence to Leonard Doell for:

- his contributions to the history of Mennonites in Canada and Saskatchewan in particular;
- his modelling of how to collect and share historical stories with empathy and patience; and
- his efforts to connect the past with the present in search of justice and peace.

Leonard was born and raised in Warman, Saskatchewan. His historical curiosity was piqued at an early age when he encountered the customers on his paper route. He began to carry around a notebook to interview them. Since most of his customers were of *Kanadier* Mennonite heritage this, along with mentorship by his grandfather Peter Doell, was his introduction to Mennonite history.

Post-secondary education at Swift Current Bible Institute and Canadian Mennonite Bible College further deepened

his love of Mennonite history and nurtured in him a passion for justice for Indigenous peoples.

Leonard has written and edited several books, including *The Berghaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan*, *Mennonite Homesteaders on the Hague-Osler Reserve*, and *Mennonite Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Saskatchewan*. He co-authored *The Berghaler Mennonites*. In addition, he has written articles for the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*, *Preservings*, and the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*.

Leonard is also known as a Mennonite genealogist, oral historian, and collector of community knowledge. His historical writing is described as “tactile,” referring to his capacity to bring to life the humanity and material lives of his historical subjects.

Leonard has also given attention to the nurturing of historical organizations, through his membership on the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan board for almost 25 years, and his chairing of that organization for eight years. He currently serves as a director on the board of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.

In his 25-year career with Mennonite

Central Committee Saskatchewan, which began in the 1970s as a historical researcher of Indigenous land claims and Indigenous-Mennonite relations, Leonard developed an extensive network of connections with First Nations communities. His relationship-building work with the Young Chippewyan Band and Mennonite and Lutheran settlers in the Laird, Saskatchewan, area led to the film *Reserve 107*. A later film he helped bring to fruition, *Custodians*, described how sacred sites are a joint responsibility of both settlers and First Nations people.

Chief Ben Weenie of the Young Chippewyan referred to Leonard Doell as “an elder of the tribe of Menno.”

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

All He Wanted Was a Studio

by Dan Dyck, Winnipeg

There was never a time when Alvin Pauls was not thinking about art, or making art.

His first published artwork was a childhood entry in a colouring contest held by the *Winnipeg Free Press*. “I was in grade four or five,” he chuckles.

Pauls won and received a paint-by-number set as a prize. When the loose, unnumbered cups of colour in the paint tray became dislodged from their numbered slots, all references to the numbered spaces on the canvas were lost. The result, he says, became his first piece of abstract art. The completed painting produced pink water and green skies.

Nicknamed “Pencil Pauls” by high school friends for his constant drawing, he became the go-to guy to produce posters for high school musicals and operettas. In *Pirates of Penzance*, he also played the roles of police officer and pirate. His artistic expression extended to music: he played cello and sang in choirs.

The youngest in a family of seven, Pauls grew up on a farm on the escarpment just outside Morden, Manitoba. His parents arrived in Canada from Gregorievka, Russia, in 1926. His father (Jacob) became a farmer and unpaid pastor, eventually becoming an *Aeltester* in the Mennonite Church. Alvin’s artistically inclined mother (Maria) became focused on raising the children. Prior to coming to Canada, both of Pauls’s parents had wanted to become actors.



Mennonite Historical Society of Canada president Conrad Stoesz presents the 2023 Award of Excellence to Leonard Doell (right). Photo credit: Graham Schellenberg.

He credits his parents for their wisdom and encouragement. His father recognized Alvin's artistic potential but suggested he first train as a teacher to provide a backup income, which he did. Later, while studying fine art at the University of Manitoba, his mother's friends expressed concerns that only pagans and heathens attended art school. Maria simply replied that she too would have liked to study art at university, an admission of pre-emigration dreams.

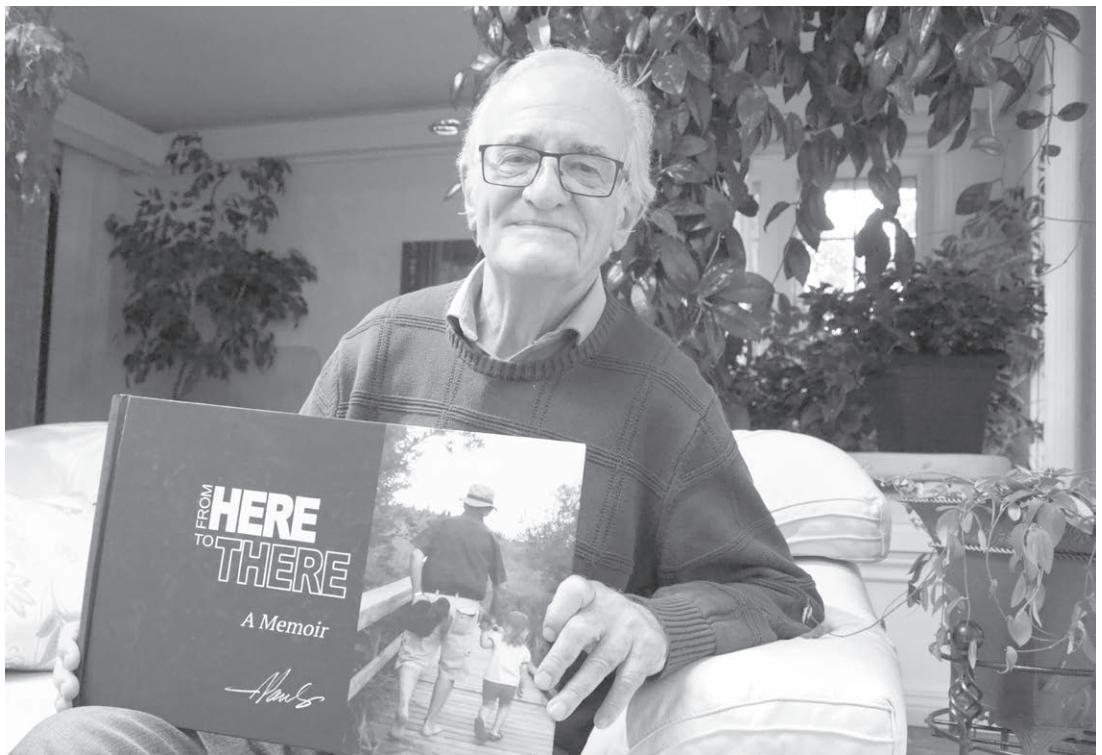
To say Pauls's vocational choice has been a resounding success would be an understatement. "Never say no to a project," he says—a philosophy that opens doors but also translates into long hours of hard work. If someone tells him something can't be done, he's inclined to

say, "Watch me." It's an approach he took back when he challenged the Mennonite tradition that required baptism before marriage.

With that same indomitable spirit, Pauls pursued a career as a ceramic artist. In university, he had followed his first love and trained as a painter. But an attraction to working with clay hounded him after attending a pottery class at a university summer school session.

After graduating with a BFA, the need for a steady income led him to teach art in the public school system. But the need to create remained powerful. "All I wanted was a studio," he said. "That's how the whole thing started. I thought it would take over from teaching." His desire for a studio eventually transformed into a pottery school, gift shop, and a ceramic art supply business called The Sounding Stone.

The journey to becoming a ceramic artist was interrupted with several bouts of the hiccups. At his first studio location, he learned that city construction codes would only allow a kiln in the building if he opened a pottery school. The kiln he designed and built himself would eventually pass a building inspection classified as a pizza oven. "There's a big difference between a 350-degree pizza oven and a 2,500-degree kiln," laughs Pauls.



Winnipeg ceramic artist Alvin Pauls displays a preliminary copy of his coffee-table-sized memoir, *From Here to There*. Photo credit: Dan Dyck.

The studio did not immediately provide the envisioned exit-ramp from teaching. While teaching art full-time, Pauls began registering pottery students for evening and Saturday classes at his new studio. Wife Judy's eye for giftware and her natural business acumen led to the opening of a storefront gift shop, for which Pauls crafted all manner of custom tableware. "It never was a one-man operation," he said.

Local ceramic artists began arriving at The Sounding Stone in search of various chemicals and materials when their orders from the nearest out-of-province suppliers were delayed or shorted. Inquiries became so frequent that Pauls created a supply catalogue. Word got out and soon The Sounding Stone was supplying tools and raw materials for local artisans.

Successes were punctuated with challenges. There were fires in Pauls's first and second locations. Thankfully, both were minor. A train car full of specialty potter's clay imported from California was thought ruined when it froze. It was a relief to find that when thawed, its properties remained intact.

Teaching never drifted far from Pauls's artistic pursuits. Aside from studio students, he also educated clients. His training in art history, symbolism, and the language of colour inspired design choices that

often invited an explanation—especially to clients with liturgical art requests. He laments the lack of interest in the long history of symbolism in liturgical art among modern day clergy.

Priests from the regional diocese and beyond became regular long-term customers of Pauls's ceramic censers, baptismal fonts, candle holders, and more. The Sounding Stone was a regular stop for vacationing clergy enroute to northern Manitoba's lakes for fishing expeditions. He would often engage them in conversations about lost religious symbolism in art, winning them over with his knowledge.

While an artistic vocation can be a solitary pursuit, Pauls enjoys team art. One kind of reward is in the creative design phase of a project. And involving others in the execution is "a lot of fun." A themed series of stained-glass windows at Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg—a project that took 14 years from congregational wish to completion—had Pauls gather a group of seven men from the church, teaching them to cut, foil, and solder glass pieces together. An unplanned consequence of the project held special meaning for Pauls; sunlight cast through the finished windows projects angel shapes on the ceiling. "We are living in a scientific age," he notes.

“[This project] brought back mysticism for me.”

Pauls believes artistic expression should not be limited. When a former student approached him to incorporate the ashes of a loved one’s body into clay and form jars, he was undaunted. The woman’s gay brother’s existence had been denied by their mother. The request had been turned down by artists in Ontario and the neighbouring American states. Pauls embraced the idea. Here was an opportunity to say “yes” to someone who had experienced much rejection in life.

Shaped by the good fortune that followed his parents from Russia to Canada and that enabled his education and vocation, Pauls is giving back. A Ukrainian newcomer family he met at a clinic needed help to find a medical lab. He drove them to the location, got to know them, and ended up loaning his car to them for the summer. A small gesture that is helping them get established.

At age 80, Pauls marvels at his excellent health. He has no aches or pains, does sit-ups, and spends an hour a day on his treadmill. He maintains an art studio at his supply warehouse, where he has returned to his love of painting.

His phone rings several times during our interview. An active life is re-emerging from the Covid lockdowns that bought him the time and focus to produce a coffee-table-sized memoir entitled *From Here to There*. Family history and photos of the home farm mingle with brilliantly coloured plates and photos or artwork, visual highlights of a prolific vocation.

Only two dozen or so copies of the 166-page tome will be printed, one for each grandchild, and a few extras. The small print run is deliberate. He wrote the book because he always wished he knew more about his own grandfather’s life. Today, he finds the most joy in his grandchildren, who will now own a piece of their grandfather’s legacy.

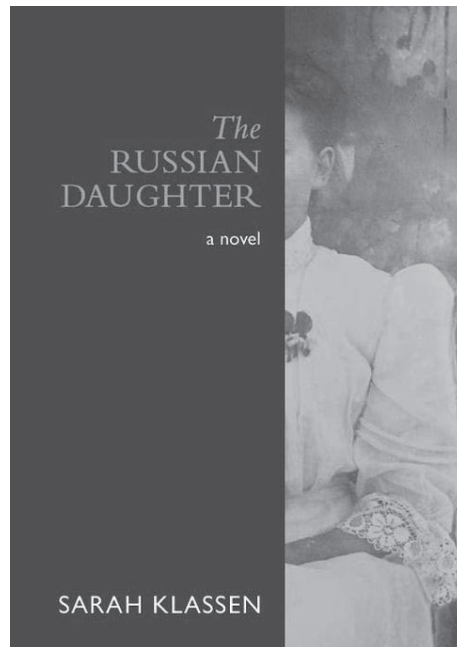
Dan Dyck is a volunteer writer at the Mennonite Heritage Archives.

Book Reviews

Sarah Klassen, *The Russian Daughter* (CMU Press, 2022), 260 pp.

Reviewed by Graeme Unrau, Winnipeg

This is the second novel of Winnipeg-based author Sarah Klassen, following



The Wittenbergs (2013), which won the Margaret McWilliams Award for popular history. *The Russian Daughter* joins a list of her works that includes poetry and short stories.

The Russian Daughter begins in the small town of Friedental, located in present day Ukraine, where Amalia and Isaak Albrecht have resigned themselves to childlessness after years of trying to conceive. Despite their relative prosperity in the village, Amalia feels inadequate as she watches the other women acquire the rewards and struggles of motherhood. When the opportunity to adopt a Russian child is presented, Amalia and Isaak move quickly to claim the baby as their own. But the child they take home is not the child that Amalia imagined; a small and fretful baby, Sophia presents more challenges as her adoptive parents realize she has a spinal deformity, and with age her fretfulness turns to sullen silence.

Meanwhile, Amalia’s sister Justina has birthed numerous children into an increasingly financially straitened household. When Amalia is offered Justina’s young twins to raise, she says yes. So different from Sophia in outlook and appearance, the twins take much of Amalia’s attentions, as a growing and increasingly distant Sophia struggles to make sense of her role in the family.

While set against a backdrop of unrest in early 20th-century Russia, the reader is drawn into the domestic life of the characters through much of the book, with small flickers of what is going on beyond

the insularity of village life. A sense of isolation pervades the lives of the two main characters, Amalia and her daughter Sophia. Both are often alone in their thoughts and overwhelmed by feelings of inadequacy, as mother and as daughter. The presence of another fretful mother hints at the conflict and political events outside the village; the Tsarina Alexandra’s portrait hangs in the Albrecht home, and her life and children are often the source of concern and gossip among the women of Friedental. The perils facing the distant Tsarina are prescient for those that will face the women of the village.

The men of the village provide an exploration of the world beyond the village. The plights of their wives and children are often where the events of *The Russian Daughter* touch the men’s lives. When the distant challenges facing Russia begin to be evident in Friedental, they respond with fear, hopeful optimism, and resignation.

Between the distant troubles and the idyllic village live the Russian peasants. They lived on the land before the Mennonites did and now act as farmhands and maids in the alien culture of the village. The resentment that exists in this space is deep and old, becoming activated as the political and social structures of Russian society begin to collapse. Sophia, feeling conspicuously different from her family while learning more about her Russian roots, finds herself straddling this widening chasm.

Klassen’s first novel, *The Wittenbergs*, also analyzes the relationship between Mennonite family members, identity, and the weight of past decisions, albeit seventy-odd years later. Both books carry the marks of Klassen’s own upbringing, drawing on stories from her mother and drawing on the landscape of her childhood in rural Manitoba. The two settings, Manitoba and the Ukrainian steppe, speak to each other, and invite a broader conversation around the Mennonite story. In *The Wittenbergs*, a perspective on the past is provided by the character’s interaction with it. *The Russian Daughter* does not provide the same template, requiring more of the reader, particularly with the current conflict that continues in Ukraine today.

The final chapters of the book provide some resolution to the familial tension, but not much. So much has happened to the Albrecht family, and they will always carry those scars. As they work towards

emotional and physical union in the chaos of civil war, there is a quiet hope alongside this honest and painful look at the complexities of family relationships.

Graeme Unrau is an archival assistant at Mennonite Heritage Archives, Winnipeg.



Carla Klassen, *These Songs We Sing: Reflections on the Hymns We Have Loved* (Pandora Press, 2022), 212 pp.

Reviewed by Christine Longhurst, Winnipeg

The book began as a personal project, undertaken by the author in 2014. Klassen was inspired by the 18th-century Lutheran composer, J.S. Bach, who wrote a cantata for worship every week. She found herself amazed at Bach's speed and discipline, and doubted whether she would even be able to come up with one new hymn arrangement every week for a year.

Inspired by Bach and encouraged by her husband, she decided to try. Beginning in September 2014, she began composing a weekly hymn arrangement, posting an audio version and some personal reflections on her blog, *The Hymn Project: A Year of Song*. This book is a collection of those blog posts, reworked and expanded in the intervening years as the author explored "a little deeper what these hymns have come to mean to me and others."

Carla Klassen, who has spent her career as a piano teacher, church musician, accompanist, and professional chorister, notes that she came to the project, "not as a

scholar or researcher, but as someone who has simply come to love hymnody."

The book includes reflections on 52 songs, one for each week of the year. Instead of simply choosing her favourites, Klassen put out a call for suggestions from family and friends. She was surprised by the intensity of the response, receiving song recommendations from a wide cross-section of ages and backgrounds. In the Introduction, the author notes that she was inspired by the possibility that "music could transcend the specifics of our beliefs and provide something that we all need, wherever we may be."

The songs she includes come from a wide range of musical genres. Klassen uses the word "hymn" in its broadest sense, defining it in chapter 2 as "a song of praise" and "a song of joy, thanksgiving, adoration, and prayer." The songs range from traditional hymns (like "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty") to German lullabies ("Gott ist die Liebe"); from Sunday School songs ("Jesus Loves Me") to African American spirituals ("Give Me Jesus"); from traditional gospel songs ("Trust and Obey") to children's songs ("Jesus Bids Us Shine"). The texts of most were written before 1900, with the most recent a contemporary hymn written by American hymnist Jaroslav Vajda in 1983. Klassen's Mennonite heritage is evident in her choice of songs like "Take Thou My Hand, O Father" and "In the Rifted Rock I'm Resting," texts that have long been meaningful in Mennonite congregations.

The book comprises an Introduction followed by 52 short chapters, each dedicated to the text of a different song. Although each chapter begins by briefly noting the song's origins (both text and musical setting), a deep dive into the historical background of each song is not her primary focus. Instead, Klassen uses portions of the song texts as leaping-off points for musings on a wide range of different topics. Gratitude, the love of God, the joy of children, the nature of faith, the joys of community—these topics and others form the basis for her personal reflections. Her writing is shaped both by her own experiences as well as those of the individuals who submitted song suggestions.

The author uses the traditional liturgical calendar as a general framework, highlighting the festivals that resonate most closely with her own tradition and

adding a few others. Songs for Mother's Day and Father's Day are also included. Those who wish to use the book as a weekly devotional tool should note that the author's "year in song" follows the school year (from September through the end of summer) rather than the liturgical calendar or yearly calendar.

Klassen writes transparently, taking us on her own journeys of discovery as she learns about hymn writers and song backgrounds, and discovers the richness of unfamiliar liturgical festivals. She uses a conversational and, at times, almost stream-of-consciousness tone, often addressing readers directly and offering words of encouragement.

Her Anabaptist background comes through clearly as she muses about the nature of violence, militaristic imagery, the role of community, pacifism, justice and more. Her deep love of song and belief in the power of music to bring people together is one of the key threads that weaves the chapters together. She often reflects on her own rich musical heritage, sharing memories of music-making with her family.

A few things might have improved the reading experience. Adding page numbers in the Table of Contents would have been helpful, as would an alphabetized index at the end in case readers wanted to locate a specific song more easily.

A more thorough editing would also have been helpful. There were some spacing inconsistencies, typos, and at least one incorrect attribution. Credit for English translations was often missing, even though the English texts were quoted.

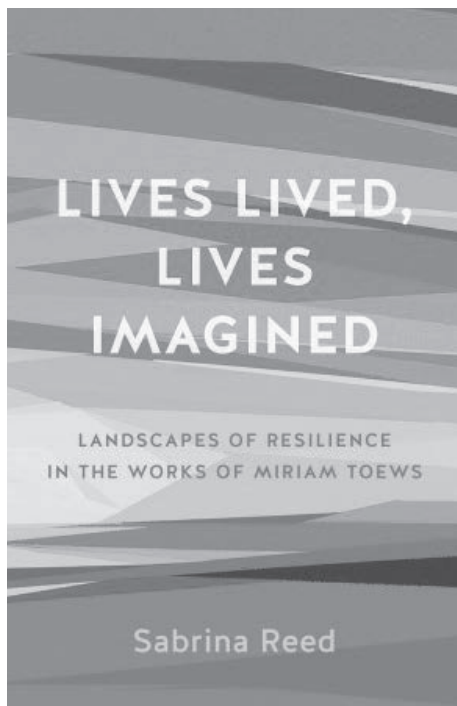
Readers may find their reading experience enriched by listening to Klassen's original hymn arrangements, all still available on *The Hymn Project: A Year of Song* blog, <https://thehymnproject.net/>.

Christine Longhurst teaches worship and music at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.

Sabrina Reed, *Lives Lived, Lives Imagined: Landscapes of Resilience in the Works of Miriam Toews* (U. of Manitoba Press, 2022), 264 pp.

Reviewed by Mary Ann Loewen, Winnipeg

I felt as though I were re-reading Miriam Toews's novels as I perused Sabrina Reed's analysis of Toews's works in the newly published *Lives Lived, Lives*



Imagined. I was once again ensconced within the world of East Village (*A Complicated Kindness*), in a hospital ward with Yoli and Elf (*All My Puny Sorrows*), and laughing uproariously as Swiv retrieves another ‘little blue pill’ from the floor for her grandmother (*Fight Night*).

It was Reed’s writing that made that possible. Her narrative is easy to follow, sentences are never laborious, and her intention is always in evidence. That intention is to show how “resilience, the ability to learn and grow from trauma rather than be destroyed by it, is an overarching theme in [Toews’s] . . . writing” (2). Reed achieves this by focusing on two of Toews’s novels with regard to each of four specific premises: the ambiguous role of home (*A Boy of Good Breeding* and *A Complicated Kindness*); the literal and metaphorical road trip (*The Flying Troutmans* and *Summer of my Amazing Luck*); religious fundamentalism (*Irma Voth* and *Women Talking*); and the genre of autofiction (*Swing Low* and *All My Puny Sorrows*). Fittingly, Reed discusses Toews’s ninth and most recent book, *Fight Night*, in her conclusion, in which she reiterates Toews’s protagonist’s focus on resilience: “resilience, then, comes from fighting to regain the ‘life force’” (214).

Throughout the book, Reed includes quotations from interviews Toews has given to various people, hosts like Tom Power of CBC’s talk show ‘Q,’ and researchers like the author herself. From

these interviews, readers learn that no effort is made to conceal the fact that many of the events Toews writes about are based on her own life. I found this openness refreshing after the decades’ long influence of Roland Barthes’s notion that ‘the author is dead.’* While Barthes’s idea has led to some brilliant insights, to completely disengage the author from their work is probably impossible, and in some cases results in missing the point.

Clearly, as Reed points out, Toews desires a resonance with her readers, especially in works like *Swing Low* and *All My Puny Sorrows*: “Toews tells the stories of her father and sister in an attempt to lessen the stigma associated with suicide, advocate for the rights of the mentally ill, and address her own bereavement” (158). Indeed, according to Reed, “Toews creates imaginative acts that transcend her grief and brings what has been silenced into language” (211). Reed’s various research methods make the point that without an awareness of the connection between Toews’s life and her work, the reader would miss out on significant influences of that very work.

In addition to the interviews, Reed also makes effective use of critical work by a myriad of both Mennonite and literary scholars (some of whom are both), including Magdalene Redekop, Grace Kehler, Marlene Epp, Sidonie Smith, Alexandra Ganser, and Paul Tiessen. These and many others’ insights serve to bolster Reed’s perceptions.

Reed demonstrates her ability to investigate a number of issues simultaneously in the chapter that focuses on *Summer of My Amazing Luck* and *The Flying Troutmans*. Feminism is explored through the lens of public perception of men versus women taking road trips: “a male character can step outside the domestic sphere with ease; . . . conversely, the female desire for escape must be . . . justified” (79). But Reed takes this further when she adds the issue of class. The main characters in *Summer of My Amazing Luck* are young mothers on welfare and “right from the beginning . . . Toews rejects a common assumption about those on welfare—that they choose to embark on a life of sponging off the state because they are lazy, feckless, or just plain stupid” (86). And then there are the absent fathers, and Reed ties in this theme seamlessly with the ‘road narrative.’ She writes, “fathers . . .

come and go, are absent or elusive—and they have the vehicles to escape” (89).

Supplemental to this highly accessible academic research, Reed also raises the less overt but hugely significant topic of ethics with regard to sharing unhappy family details with the public in Toews’s *Swing Low* and *All my Puny Sorrows*, quoting well-known life-writing scholars, including John Paul Eakin. Reed spends considerable time with this discussion, and through various quotations shows how Toews herself does not shy away from tackling this particularly thorny issue.

Another tool employed by Reed is to offer helpful background information regarding the various themes explored in Toews’s work. For example, Reed includes relevant historical data on the Mennonite persecution in Russia after the First World War and its resulting trauma, and background material on Mennonite migrations to North America, in order to provide context for the role that religious fundamentalism plays in *Irma Voth* and *Women Talking*.

Using various tools, Reed explores Toews’s novels in a nuanced, thorough manner. By taking the reader through all the novels, inserting appropriate voices and background information, Reed takes the reader on a journey that gets inside the novels of Miriam Toews. Indeed, by the time I finished reading *Lives Lived*, I was thoroughly convinced of Toews’s desire to reframe her past, to provide not only for herself but also for her readers “solace in the stories created by her art” (208).

What the reader is reminded of, through reading this comprehensive and sensitively written analysis, is Toews’s ability to penetrate incredibly serious issues with both deadly acumen and rollicking hilarity. And that the making of art, the act of writing out one’s story, either through fiction or autofiction, opens that world up to its readers. It was a joy to enter each of Toews’s novels’ worlds again. I have Sabrina Reed to thank for that.

*Roland Barthes wrote a famous essay entitled “The Death of the Author” in 1967 that hugely influenced literary critical thinking for decades.

Mary Ann Loewen is the editor of two recent books on parent-child relationships, Finding Father: Stories from Mennonite Daughters and Sons and Mothers: Stories from Mennonite Men.