

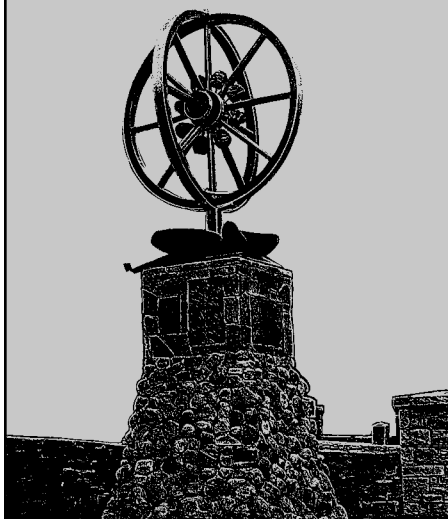
Ontario Mennonite History

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Journey from Russia to Canada, June 1924

*By Mariechen (Maria) Braun (1924 and 1958).
Translated from German by Nancy Riediger Fehderau (2007).*



*Preparing to leave Russia at the Lichtenau train station in 1924.
(Mennonite Archival Image Database photo NP012-01-41)*

Our journey began on Monday, the 23rd of June. All our baggage was brought to the Lichtenau train station by means of a horse-drawn *Leiterwagen* [a field wagon with racks]. The long train with its approximately 52 carriages stood ready and waiting. They were freight carriages, but had been cleaned, and arranged so that we could sleep above and below. Twelve hundred emigrants were leaving.

Many friends and relatives accompanied us to the station to bid us farewell. But first we all gathered in the Lichtenau church building and had a time of prayer. Then everyone walked back to the station and the loading of the train began. In our train carriage there were 22 of us: Jakob Friesens, John Rempel, three Fehderaus, my parents and Mrs. H. Braun with her son, Hans, and me. It was a hot summer day.

As the sun was setting, the train began to slowly move forward. The people left behind began to sing the hymn "*Jesu, geh voran, auf der Lebensbahn*" [Jesus, go before us on our life's journey]. Many, many tears were shed. It was very difficult to leave our old, dear homeland. My heart was overwhelmed with a peculiar, deep emotion. Never will I forget that moment of saying "good-bye" forever to my dear, old home.

By six o'clock, Tuesday morning, we found ourselves in Aleksandrofst, where the train stood for two hours. Sister Selma Neufeld, who worked as a nurse in Bethania Hospital, came to the station to say her good-byes to us. I was only able to have a few words with her, as I was being called to attend to the sick. I also had worked as a nurse for over five years in the hospital in Russia.

There were a number of sick people on the train that needed my help. Among them was a woman who had lost her stillborn baby twins the day before we left. She was brought to the Lichtenau station by stretcher and loaded onto the train. I had to nurse her, as well as others, which meant that every day I prepared seven dressings and bandages.

Sister Magda, who also worked in the Bethania Hospital brought me a letter which included a picture of herself. Dr. Thiessen also came to the station shortly before we left to bid us farewell.

The train deputies had taken the trouble to prepare facilities for bathing, but we didn't have the time to do that. On Wednesday, at half-past eight in the morning the train made a lengthier stop, and since there was a nice lake nearby, my father and my uncle took the opportunity to bathe here. Manja Fehderau, Olga and Lydia Friesen, Susie Rempel and I washed our feet in the water and also washed out our stockings. These girls were all from our train carriage.

As I wrote before, there were 22 people in our wagon. Wherever we stopped, and people left the train, it was Mr. J. Rempel's responsibility to always count heads so that no one would be left behind once the train took off again. We arrived at another stop at half past two in the afternoon. Here the train stood for eight hours, while our train was handed over to another group of officials. Every carriage was inspected to see that everything was in order. Then we continued on to stop again on Thursday at seven o'clock in the morning. Here we again stood for nine hours. The wagons were inspected again. We started off again at four o'clock in the afternoon and arrived at Smolensk on Friday afternoon at five o'clock.

In Smolensk it was very beautiful. The scenery was breathtaking, but we only stopped there for two hours. Just before Smolensk and for a long stretch after there were beautiful evergreens and the tracks were bordered with lovely flowers and wild vegetation.

On Saturday, at ten in the morning, the train stopped for a lengthy time. We went to the city market and bought some nice strawberries and radishes for ourselves. I also bought some medicine for those suffering from fever. My father had to buy a hat for himself since he had lost his to the wind.

At five o'clock in the afternoon the train started out again. When we stopped again on Sunday, the 29th of June, at three o'clock in the morning, it was raining. There was a leak in our carriage, right above the place where our table stood, in the middle of the carriage. We used that water to wash up a bit.

Kolja Fehderau and I began to write letters. The others were all sleeping. I also prayed fervently that the Lord would allow us to have good weather. Aunt J. Friesen was also praying for that at her bed. By seven o'clock in the morning it had stopped raining. Our train slowed down and stopped very near a place where there was a lovely lake.

We were allowed to set up our tea machines. At the shore of the lake we set them up and started a coal fire in the machines. It was a lovely picture as they began to steam. The water was soon boiling. We made our coffee or tea.

Outside, under the clear sky, and on the green grass we then partook of our breakfast. The nature surrounding us was lovely and the sunshine after the rain was glorious. After breakfast we did our laundry. As the noon meal approached, those of us in our carriage decided to make our meal together. Mrs. Rempel cooked *Pflaumenmoos* [plum soup], Tina Fehderau made noodles and fried some ham. I made scrambled eggs and Manja Fehderau set the table which we had carried outside. In this way we, from our carriage, had a wonderful noon meal together under the blue sky.



*The Red Gate at the border of Latvia.
(Mennonite Archival Image Database photo NP141-01)*

In the afternoon we had to stay by our wagons as there was to be another inspection. At five o'clock we were ordered to unload all our things, the trunks and baskets. Everything was to be opened for the inspector to look through. It went well. They did not take anything from us. Then we had to load everything back on to the train again. The women were then also inspected by a female official and the men by a male official to ascertain whether we had any valuable items on our person.

Seven o'clock in the evening we started off again. At four o'clock in the night, the train travelled across the border into Lettland [Latvia] through a huge red gate. Just before this happened, our train was stopped again when soldiers came aboard and looked for things they could confiscate and keep in Russia. Whoever had a pail, and whoever had a hatchet, had to give that up to the soldiers. We had fashioned for ourselves little step stools in order to get in and out of the train wagons more easily. Well, these were also taken.

Kolja Fehderau had a green overcoat, much like the ones the soldiers wore. The soldiers wanted all those coats. As the soldiers entered our wagon, I took his coat off the hook as quickly as I could, rolled it up, and sat on it. The soldiers didn't even notice it, but they asked us if we had any green coats. I told them to look around and take what you find. They then left our wagon. Kolja Fehderau was very sad and said that he now had nothing to wear as a coat. I told him that he still had his overcoat. His face expressed his delight. He was so happy.

So, at four o'clock we went through the big red gate, and Russia was behind us. At five o'clock our train stopped at the first Latvian station. We all disembarked and had a thanksgiving service for the Lord's wonderful help. Brother J. Wiens preached his first sermon under the free skies. We all received an insignia pin to wear. Here we were also transferred into another train and received our first help as refugees—a very nice porridge soup with bacon and good brown bread. Then we travelled further to

another stop, where we arrived four o'clock in the evening. We had to unload all our things and were billeted in barracks. They had been washed clean. Before we moved in, we had to take another bath. All our things were disinfected. That bath was a real blessing. Many were bathed yet that very day. My parents and I as well. Those that were not able to have a bath that day had to sleep in the train and were bathed the next day.

Tuesday, the first of July, we remained in the barracks the whole day. It was quite comfortable. Some women came and volunteered to wash our laundry for us. I gave them our wash—my dresses, jacket, aprons and stockings. They brought them back to us clean and ironed. It was a beautiful sunny day. The food was good and there was enough. Before evening, we were registered and allowed to board the train again. The train wagons had also been cleaned. We took our supper into the carriage and ate there. Some people were still sleeping in the barracks.

On Wednesday, the 2nd of July, already early in the morning, the last train wagons were loaded. We were all given a good breakfast—a soup with meat. Eight o'clock we started out and went a long time without stopping. We enjoyed the scenery of evergreens and lovely flowers. When we did stop along the way, we were not allowed to get hot water. We couldn't set up our tea machines either. However, we decorated our train on the outside with green boughs from the woods.

Now we very quickly made our way towards Riga where we arrived at six in the evening. We travelled very slowly through the beautiful city of Riga to another train station where we had to transfer to another train that was waiting for us, the doors open. Inside each wagon hung a lighted lantern. The change of trains did not take long. But we couldn't get any hot water here either. We just had time to get off and then get on the new train. The train wasted no time in making its way to the port city where the ship had already been waiting for three days. So that was the end of our overland journey by train. We sang a lot on our journey. And by the time we got to the ship, all my sick patients were well again.

On Thursday, the 3rd of July, seven o'clock in the morning we arrived in Liebau. Stopped there for just a short while, and then the train took us to the port where the ship was docked. Huge wagons with horses stood there waiting. Our baggage was loaded onto the wagons and taken to the ship. We didn't have anything to do with our baggage anymore. It was all taken care of for us. We just took our hand baggage with us. Once more we had to go before the Commissioner and then embarked onto the ship.

I, together with my parents, were put into a first-class cabin, because the cabins in third class were already full. The

cleanliness of the ship was very pleasing to me. The first thing we did was to wash and change clothing. Now we couldn't leave the ship anymore. At five o'clock in the afternoon the ship moved away from the pier, and thus began our voyage across the ocean.

Friday, the fourth of July we were in the Baltic Sea. Around noon it was quite stormy. The ship tossed back and forth so much so that many couldn't bear it and became seasick.

Saturday, the 5th of July, four o'clock in the morning we sailed into the *Wilhelmskanal* [Kiel Canal]. It was thrilling. Our ship stood for two hours and then we slowly moved forward. The whole passage through the canal took nine hours. It is a remarkable structure. The shores were beautiful with all the buildings and bridges under which we sailed. Three o'clock in the afternoon we arrived at the other end of the canal and stayed put there for another hour. Then we left the canal and were in the North Sea. Before nightfall we were still able to see land.

Sunday, the 6th of July, we were rocking in the North Sea. In the morning we gathered in a huge ballroom where Brother Jakob Friesen preached a good sermon. It almost seemed to me as if we were in church back in Halbstadt.

Many couldn't stand the rocking of the ship. It was at its worst over the noon hour. It didn't bother me, nor my parents. In the evening, Brother Franz Martens (Mrs. K. Rempel's father) from Sagradowka delivered the message to us. We had church services every evening. During the day oranges were handed out which we really enjoyed.

On Monday, the 7th of July we arrived in Antwerp, the port city in Belgium, where we transferred onto an even larger ship. We spent the night, however, still in the first ship. In the evening, we had our service again, then we received our boarding cards for the other ship.

Tuesday morning, the 8th of July we transferred. We had to all check in with the officials. Eyes and hands were examined. About 60 people had to stay behind because of illness. We felt very sorry for them. They were going to be sent later.

Wednesday we boarded the other ship. By the time the last ones boarded, it was already almost evening. They had beautiful horses in Antwerp that pulled the baggage wagons to the ship. Some people went into the city to buy a few things. The food is better on this ship than on the previous one. There is a huge dining room with 20 long tables where 400 people can eat at the same time. In the evening we gathered on the deck where missionary Thiessen gave us a missions sermon.

On Wednesday, the 9th of July, at six o'clock in the morning, we left Antwerp. We always had land in sight, right until we

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came to the port city in England where we docked. It was just before evening. We stayed there until the next day at one o'clock in the afternoon. During this time, the ship was loaded with mail, supplies, and other baggage. Many more passengers also boarded the ship. For the kitchen, a lot of vegetables and other supplies were taken in, and apples, oranges and chocolate which were to be sold in the ship's store. Very unexpectedly, Mr. Huebert showed up, an American whom we learned to know in Halbstadt.

We could see the chalk cliffs. In fact, there was so much to see that we didn't become bored waiting for the ship to leave again. But I was very tired. At one o'clock our ship began to rock a bit again. Mr. Huebert took a picture of us.

On Thursday, the 10th of July, we left England again through a channel. It took us five hours to get across the channel. Now we were in France where we stayed for an hour in the port city of Cherbourg. Over 80 passengers were added here. Our dear, plump friend, the Captain, left us here. From France, we then headed out into the vast ocean waters.

Friday, the 11th of July we were on the high seas. Our ship rolled quite a bit. Many people became ill. I and my parents also lay in our beds. We were being rocked as if we were in a cradle. Manja Fehderau, who also had her bed in our cabin, was very sick. If she just raised her head, she would begin to vomit. I fed her with a spoon.

On Saturday, the 12th, I didn't get up because my head felt so dizzy. Otherwise I was not seasick. Later, when I felt better, I got up and went to the store which was very close to our cabin. There I bought some apples and oranges. My parents would often stand by the store and enjoy looking at the good things for sale there. When they left to go to the deck, I bought some apples, oranges and chocolate for them and placed them on their beds. Then Mother would say, "It all tastes so very good, but how can we just keep buying these things?" I replied that it really didn't matter whether we had a few dollars or not once we arrived in Canada. We didn't have much money. They would make this voyage only once in their lifetime, because they were already elderly, so they should enjoy it. I was so thankful that they were both not seasick and could come to the dining room for their meals.

In the afternoon, those that were seasick kept me hopping. I was called from one sick person to the next. One wanted pickles, the other "*geroestete* Zwieback" and other things. The kitchen people didn't give anyone anything, but when I came with my nurse's cap, they gave me whatever the sick ones desired. I remained well, was able to attend to others, which I did very willingly.

Sunday, the 13th of July. We are still on the high seas. It is not good weather. Mostly foggy, damp and chilly. It often rained. We preferred to stay inside, rather than go out on the decks. Some reported that they had seen whales from the back of the ship. For supper we were served good herring fish with onions and vinegar which we thoroughly enjoyed. It really tasted good for my Father. After supper, my Father took a book and wanted to go and read on the deck. But he soon came back looking very

pale. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Oh," he replied, "it is such a pity to have to give up my good herring to the fish." But he did not become sick.

On Monday, the 14th we had a good breakfast. Everyone got a good piece of fish. Manja Fehderau, who was so very seasick, is improving. She can laugh again. At nine o'clock we all had to come to the dining hall. Those who had not been immunized, were immunized. In the evening I sat in Friesen's cabin. Had a very good conversation. In our spirit we were at our dear "Morija" which was the nursing home in Halbstadt. In the evening we also had our church service. A Mr. Peter Wiens preached.

Tuesday, the 15th, was the fifth day that we had been on the ocean. In the mornings it was always foggy. My sick people are recuperating nicely. Aunt Margret went upstairs by herself. Manja Fehderau is also much better. She got up in the afternoon. We gathered in Johann Rempel's cabin and sang together, one song after another. All those that we knew from memory. It was very nice.

At nine o'clock the women were called forward to inspect their hair again. I did not have to have it done, because I couldn't take off my nurse's cap. And because I had my mother with me, she didn't have to go either. We could already see some sea gulls, and in the evening we could see a lighthouse. The evening service was led by Brother Kroeker.

On Wednesday, the 16th of July, I got up very early and went up on the deck. The beautiful red dawn sky was reflected on the waves of the ship's wake. I could already sight land. For breakfast we had fish again.

Manja Fehderau is already quite sprightly. She even washed her hair already. We enjoyed a very meaningful day today. First of all, the weather was so good with lots of sunshine. In the afternoon, Manja and I had a wonderful conversation together. Then I went up on the deck. There I had a lively conversation with other first-class passengers.

The ship is not rocking anymore because we have entered the bay. The huge ocean is behind us and everything went well. Supper tasted absolutely wonderful for us—bread and butter with meat and tea. After supper we gathered again in Johann Rempel's cabin and sang our hearts out. A card was passed around for all to sign which was to be sent to the members of the Halbstadt choir left behind in Russia. Then we had a precious evening service led by Brother Jakob Friesen. After the service we went outside on the deck. It was full moon, and the water was glassy smooth. A scene which gave us such pleasure that we could hardly get enough of it. Also all day we have been able to see land along one side.

Thursday, the 17th of July—rain. We ate our breakfast early. At eight o'clock we were again called before the health officials. A few were detained. Had a good noon meal—carbonade, and for dessert, rhubarb compote. It remained foggy all day with lots of rain. We kept seeing more and more land—our future homeland. Shortly before evening, those that had been detained had to disembark. They were taken by small boat to an island quite nearby. Half past nine in the evening our ship began to

enter the port. A wonderful picture. The profusion of lights. We entered very slowly. It seemed very festive. When we at last stood still, the first thing that was done was to unload the mail.

On Friday, the 18th we had our breakfast already at five in the morning. At eight o'clock we disembarked. We made it! We had to walk along a long hallway and then came to a large room that was furnished with benches for us to sit on. Had to come before the officials once more, to have our papers and documents checked. Then we went along a second long hallway into another large room. Here there weren't any benches so my parents seated themselves on their baggage. They were very tired and hungry. I went and looked for a place to buy something to eat. Sure enough, in one corner of the room there was a little store which sold bread and sausage. I bought some bread and a good length of sausage and brought it to my parents. They ate it with relish. Mother said that sausage had never tasted so good to her.

Then came the hardest part. All our baggage had been brought from the ship and placed all together in a huge room. Each one had to find their own. That was no small task as there was baggage for 1,200 people. When I was finished, I went back to my parents.

The group was divided here. Three hundred people were sent to western Canada, and 900 were to be sent to Ontario. At half past six we boarded the train that was to take us to Ontario. This was certainly different than in Russia. Our baggage was taken care of by the baggage handlers, and we rode in fine carriages. We made our way speedily through very lovely areas, forests, rocky cliffs, and lots of rivers and lakes. After 24 hours we arrived at our destination point in Ontario.

While the train was still in motion, I was called to the office. There was a Committee that had their offices on board our train. When I arrived, they asked me how much they could pay me for the work I had done among the sick throughout the journey. I told them that I did that willingly with no expectation of payment. Even the medicine had been given to me by Dr. Tavonius. I just had paid three dollars when I had to buy some Quinine. They immediately gave me the three dollars and then gave 10 dollars more for my work. I went to my parents and said, "Now I have received more money than I spent on the ship when I bought apples, oranges and chocolate for you."

Saturday, the 19th of July, four o'clock in the afternoon we arrived in Waterloo. The train stopped and we were all to disembark. This was the goal of our journey. We were to be greeted in a church. Because the road had been freshly paved, we couldn't be taken there by automobiles, so we had to walk. The church was too small to accommodate all of us, so they welcomed us in the church yard. There were shelters where the buggies stood on Sundays. They had prepared board benches in these shelters so we could all sit and be in the shade. The people were very friendly and good to us. We were given our supper there. Each of us got a bag filled with some food. Cups were brought in big baskets, and coffee was served from huge milk cans. So we all got some hot coffee to drink.

There was such a crowd of people that they had to put up a thick rope to separate us. The Canadians had to stay on the other



Maria Braun (also known as Mariechen) was a charter member of the Kitchener Mennonite Brethren church. Here she is at Victoria Park, Kitchener. (Photo courtesy of Louise Harback.)



A Mennonite Brethren Sunday School class in 1928. Maria Braun, a well-loved teacher, is standing at the back right. (Photo courtesy of Louise Harback.)

side of the rope. It was very warm and dusty. In the middle of the yard, they had raised a platform from which we were welcomed and greeted by a number of preachers and by the Committee. They came with little papers and asked for our names. All 900 of us were to be billeted for the night. The farmers had divided us amongst themselves.

An older man came to me and asked if my name was "Braun." Yes, I said. "Then I am right. Do you have your parents with you?" Yes, they were sitting behind me. We were to come right away and get into their auto. They wanted to drive home. My parents went along but I stayed behind, because I couldn't find one of our boxes. My father had put it on the ground when we alighted from the train. I prayed in my heart that the Lord would allow me to find it, as all our papers and documents were in there. My parents were already in the car. My mother was crying as they drove off and I was left standing there. The yard became emptier and emptier. Each farmer took his people home with him. All 900 had been divided out. As I stood there, I watched as one after another drove off.

Then a woman from the city came to me and asked where I was staying for the night. I told her that I didn't know. "If no one comes for me then I will spend the night here on these boards with my pillow and cover." She started laughing and I began to cry. I felt so alone and forlorn. My parents were gone. But the woman said right away in the most friendly way that I would spend the night at her house. But she couldn't wait until I had found my box. Her neighbour, a Mr. Shantz, was also still in the churchyard. She asked him if he could stay longer. When he said, yes, she said, "Then bring this young woman to my house later." Mr. Shantz's wife was also there. When the yard was almost bare, I went around once more, but I couldn't see any box. I wanted to go all the way back to where we had disembarked from the train. Mr. Shantz wouldn't let me go alone; his wife should accompany me. He said, "That Russian girl might get herself lost." So the two of us set out. Mrs. Shantz thought that I was going too far.

"No," I said, "I have to get to where I can see the train junction tracks." And sure enough, as we neared the place, there stood the box in the grass. Everything was still inside. Was I ever happy and thanked the Lord!

It was beginning to get dark. We went back to the church yard, put my things in his auto and they drove me to this lady's house. When she saw me, she immediately asked, "Did you find your box?" (That's when I learned that "Dose" was "box" in English.) Yes, I replied. "Well," she said, "As soon as I got home, I had to pray for you that the Lord would let you find that box." That was balm for my wounded heart.

I was so warmly welcomed. Mr. Shantz, wanted to know all about who we were, and what our journey was like. I was dead tired. Finally, Mr. Shantz went home. I was so glad. I just



The Kitchener Mennonite Brethren Sunday School teachers in 1941. Maria Braun is second from the right in the front row. (Photo courtesy of Louise Harback.)

wanted to lie down. In a few minutes he was there again. Oh, no, I thought to myself, I just can't talk anymore! But he just wanted to press something into my hand, because otherwise he said he would not have been able to sleep. He gave me five dollars.

When he left, I had a bath. The bedroom was ready for me. I was told to leave my dusty shoes outside my bedroom door. In the morning there they were, cleaned and shined by my door. Before I lay down on my bed, I knelt down before my Father in heaven and thanked him with tears in my eyes for His wonderful help.

In the morning, my friendly hostess, Mrs. Good (that was the name of the people who took me in), telephoned my father. She knew where my parents were. About ten miles away from the city. She called me to the phone. I was to speak to my father. When my father heard my voice, he cried for joy. He could hardly talk; he was so glad to hear my voice. They had been very worried about me.

I then had breakfast with the Goods, and they took me with them to their church. I was greeted in a friendly way by many people. It happened to be the Sunday when they celebrated communion. They invited me to participate in everything. That was the first Sunday in Canada.

Monday morning, a young man drove up with a truck from the farm where my parents were staying to pick up our things. He took me along as well. Thus, I was together with my parents again. That was the end of our journey.

This was written in the year 1958 from my notes which I made on our journey in 1924. At that time, I wrote down all our experiences into a small booklet. I was 38 years old at the time. Now I am 72 and I want to write this report in a good manner.

Memories of migration: Cross-Canada train tour to commemorate Russlaender centenary

Story and photos by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

It's been almost 100 years since 1923, when thousands of Mennonites from the Soviet Union began migrating to Canada. A train tour commemorating their journey will wind across Canada in the summer of 2023 to mark the anniversary.

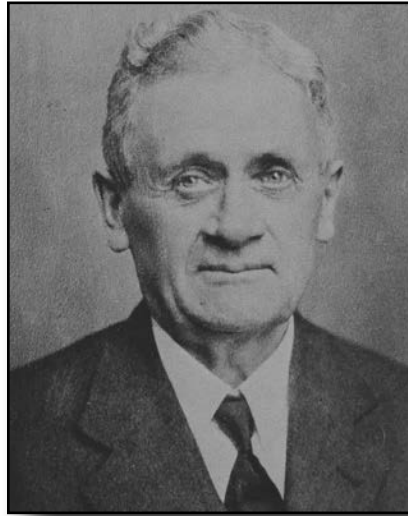
Ingrid Moehlmann, the event's initiator, remembers her father's final wish that started it all. "On his deathbed, the last thing he said to me before he slipped from consciousness was, would I please do something for this centenary," she says.

His grandfather, David Toews, helped bring thousands of Russian Mennonites, or Russlaender, to Canada after the 1917 Russian Revolution ravaged the country with famine, epidemic and violence.

When dissent arose amongst the Canadian Mennonites on how much to support these immigrants, Toews arranged for the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) to pay the travel costs, putting the debt for 21,000 people in his own name. He also persuaded Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to allow the Mennonites into the country.

Toews dedicated most of his life to the project—he finished fundraising and paying off the debt six months before his death. "That was a huge, huge thing in our family," says Moehlmann, who attends First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

The idea of a train tour came to Moehlmann in a dream in 2015, a year after her father passed away, and she's been planning Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour ever since. Going almost coast to coast, the three-week journey, organized by TourMagination, an Anabaptist-heritage travel company, will start in Quebec City on July 6, 2023 and end in Abbotsford on July 25. The trip is divided into three segments, each roughly a week long; participants can join just one or two sections or all three.



The tour will commemorate the work of David Toews, Moehlmann's great-grandfather, who organized the migration of Mennonites from the Soviet Union to Canada beginning in 1923.

Moehlmann will lead the tour with Henry Paetkau. They are heading up the Russlaender Centenary Committee (RCC), a subcommittee of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. The tour will make stops in places of key historical significance to the Russian Mennonite migration, from the first landing site and quarantine station on Grosse Isle, an island near Quebec City, to the three earliest Mennonite settlements in the Fraser Valley of B.C.

Along the way, participants can join music events, visit museums, tour cities and attend a gala dinner sponsored by the CPR, among many other highlights. In Winnipeg, the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies will host an academic conference exploring themes of war, revolution and migration in the Mennonite experience led by Aileen Friesen, associate professor of history at the University of Winnipeg and co-director of the Centre for Transnational Mennonite Studies.

Moehlmann is looking forward to the arrival in Rosthern, Sask. to reenact

the moment when the Russlaender got off the train and broke spontaneously into song, singing, "Now thank we all our God" in German. "I've heard about that my whole life," she says.

The tour will celebrate the faith of the immigrants, remember the loss of their former communities, memorialize the challenges of resettlement and acknowledge Indigenous displacement in Mennonite and Canadian history.

"We can tell our story about what took place in Ukraine and there is a lot of heartbreak and tears associated with that, but . . . we need to understand that we came to this land as settlers and therefore we are incorporated into this fabric of settler colonialism that is part of Canadian history. And we cannot get away from that. That is also part of our story and we need to acknowledge it," says Friesen.

Travellers will explore truth and reconciliation during the tour, as they learn about the displacement of Indigenous peoples that made way for many Mennonite settlements. "We know and understand the damage that has been



*Ingrid Moehlmann is the instigator of the Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour, a weeks-long train trip across Canada, coming in 2023.
(Photos by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe)*



David Riesen, Moehlmann's father, requested on his deathbed that the Russlaender migration be remembered. (Photo by Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe)

done through settler colonialism and it needs to be acknowledged," Friesen says.

It's important to commemorate the Russlaender's centenary because the history is fading from memory, Moehlmann says. "I see the Mennonite world I grew up in sort of crumbling very quickly. People just don't understand anymore, I think, because they're many generations removed."

For many who do remember, this story is deeply personal. Moehlmann's grandmother and her family could not afford to make the journey to Canada after all the men in their family but one were killed and their livelihood was lost. It was David Toews who provided the funds. "My mother's entire family, both sides, was directly saved by this travel. It was my dad's family who did that. . .

. So for me, both sides of the story are really significant because there's no way I would be here if one or the other hadn't happened."

"I'm hoping [the tour] makes people reflect on how it is we came to be here and some of the lessons learned along the way," she adds.

Friesen says although Mennonite identity has changed significantly over the years, "that sense of community still prevails and it'll be nice to experience that again, to experience all these different elements as a community."

To learn more, visit russlaender100.com.

Reprinted from Canadian Mennonite

Participants encouraged to 'pay it forward'

By Nicolien Klassen-Wiebe

As participants on the Memories of Migration: The Russlaender 100 Tour reflect on how they came to be in Canada, and the many people who helped their ancestors on their journeys, they will be encouraged to "pay it forward" throughout the tour. "We're recognizing that lots of people gave us a helping hand . . . we wanted to look at doing something good with that," says Ingrid Moehlmann of the Russlaender Centenary Committee and initiator of the train tour. As part of the commemoration, the committee established the Russlaender Remembrance Fund through Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) Canada. Donors

can choose to support three areas of work that connect with the migration: MCC's Indigenous Neighbours program to acknowledge Mennonites' displacement of Indigenous peoples; MCC's Ukraine program to remember the loss of their former communities; or MCC's International Refugee Settlement program to recognize the challenges of resettlement today. MCC is a meaningful partner for this project because it was first formed in 1920 to help the Russlaender Mennonites.

Reprinted from Canadian Mennonite

J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund in Ontario Mennonite Studies Sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario.

Dr. J. Winfield Fretz was the first president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. This fund is named in his honour.

The fund is available to any individual or charitable, church or community-based organization that requires financial support for the publication of research as a book, film or other form of media.

Projects should illuminate the experience of Mennonites in Ontario.

Normally up to \$2,000 is available per project. Applications are accepted twice yearly, May 1 and December 1. More information: mhso.org/content/fretz-publication-fund

Amish Bicentennial Celebrations

Under the auspices of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, an Amish Bicentennial Committee is planning to commemorate Christian Nafziger's land scouting trip and the coming of the Amish Mennonites to Canada 200 years ago. Everyone is invited to participate in the events described below.

1. Amish Mennonite Heritage Bus Tours

a. "Up the Nith" Heritage Bus Tour

Depart from St. Agatha Mennonite Church

Wed. Sept. 28, 9 a.m.- 4 p.m. & **Sat. Oct. 15,** 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Cost: \$80

Tour Leaders: Fred Lichti and Ken J. Jantzi

Tour Description: This day-long heritage tour covers 200 years of Ontario Amish Mennonite history on a 100-kilometre bus trip. Through stories and stops along the way, you will learn about the oldest Amish Mennonite settlement in Canada and how it changed and developed through the centuries. This tour will explore the spectrum of Amish Mennonite people in Ontario from the "tradition minded" Old Order Amish to the "change minded" groups (Mennonites) which no longer use the term "Amish" and have assimilated in varying degrees with the mainstream society. Stops at Old Order Amish farm enterprises and a parochial school. Full meal at Anna Mae's Restaurant is included in the cost.

b. "Wilmot-South Easthope-East Zorra Heritage Bus Tour"

Depart from Steinmann Mennonite Church

Sat. Oct. 1, 8:30 a.m. - 1:30 p.m.

Sat. Oct. 1, 12:30 p.m. - 5:30 pm.

Cost: \$42

Tour Leaders: Ruth Steinman and David Neufeld

Tour Description: This half-day heritage bus tour through Wilmot begins with the history of the Indigenous people and the story of Amish-Mennonite settlement over the past 200 years. From Wilmot Township, we will travel west into South Easthope, Tavistock and East Zorra to explore the story of the Amish Mennonites who settled west of Wilmot and established the East Zorra Congregation in 1837, the second Amish Mennonite congregation in Canada. East Zorra grew into five congregations. Both morning and afternoon bus tours will share a traditional Amish bean soup lunch at Steinmann Mennonite Church from 12:30 p.m. - 1:30 pm.

Pre-registration and Pre-payment required for all bus tours.

Contact: Ken J. and Joyce Jantzi,

63 David St, Wellesley, ON N0B 2T0,

kjjantzi@gmail.com or 519-496-4044.

2. Hymn Sings

a. **Sun. Sept. 11, 2022** 7:30 p.m. at Maple View Mennonite Church

b. **Sun. Sept. 25, 2022** 7:30 p.m. at East Zorra Mennonite

Church, 677044 16 Line, Tavistock, ON N0B 2R0

(Location to be confirmed).

3. The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation in Canada:

Fri., Sept. 30, 2022 7:30 p.m. at Steinmann Mennonite Church Gym. Rebecca Seiling, MCC's Indigenous Neighbours Engagement Associate, will present the "the Landed Buggy," an Old Order Mennonite buggy which has been decorated and modified to reflect a web of connections between the land, Indigenous people and settlers. For Amish Mennonites who settled here years ago, we pass on narratives of the land, how we acquired it and ways that we care for it. This installation encourages reflection and questions such as: In what ways have our past/present stories between Indigenous and Mennonite peoples been told? Are there ideas that need to shift or be broadened or challenged? How can shifting our narrative inform our future together?

4. Indigenous Awareness Workshop

Sat. Oct. 1, 10:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. Lunch provided.

Workshop with Clarence Cachagee and others at Crow Shield Lodge, 1044 Christner Road, New Hamburg, ON. (follow signs)

Cost: \$100 per person. Pre-registration and Pre-payment required. (Limit of 20 participants).

Contact: David Neufeld, da.neuf11@gmail.com or 519-897-7893

When the first Amish settlers arrived in Wilmot Township they encountered Indigenous peoples of the Mississauga Nation. In light of what we are learning about this meeting of peoples, the Amish Bicentennial Committee is offering an Indigenous Awareness Workshop, hosted by Crow Shield Lodge.

"Reconciliation is a critical, complex and multifaceted process that is about working towards solidarity as a society and country between Indigenous and non Indigenous Peoples. It is the responsibility of every Canadian. Reconciliation requires collective efforts from all peoples to revitalize the relationship between Indigenous Peoples and Canadian society, and as we walk in the light of reconciliation together, we are moving forward as one." (from the Crow Shield Lodge website)

Clarence Cachagee writes, "As we all walk and benefit from what creation offers, we must always remember what dwells in the shadows. At Crow Shield Lodge we create a safe and welcoming space where we can lean into those hard and challenging conversations. We at Crow Shield Lodge look forward to sitting on the land with you and breaking bread."

5. Worship Service on Sun. Oct. 2, 2022,

2:00 pm. at Steinmann Mennonite Church including a guest speaker, special music, offering for MCC (Ukraine ministries and refugees), fellowship time following the service and a display of Ontario Amish Mennonite artifacts and memorabilia.

Christian Nafziger, the Amish land scout

By Fred Lichti

Two hundred years ago, life in German-speaking Europe was difficult. Most farmers were too poor to own their own land. Many wars were fought and, although some countries permitted non-resistant Christians to buy exemptions from military service, many Mennonites and Amish moved to America where they enjoyed religious freedom and a better life.

Christian and Maria Nafziger were Amish Mennonites who lived near Munich in the Kingdom of Bavaria. They dreamed of a better life for their family and decided that Christian should visit America to search for farmland for themselves and other Amish families. With little more than a walking stick in hand and faith in God, Christian walked to Amsterdam in the fall of 1821.

For generations Dutch Mennonites had been helping the downtrodden and impoverished Mennonites from Switzerland and the southern German states find passage to America. Nafziger told his story to a Dutch Mennonite businessman named von Eegen who gave Christian a ticket on a sailing ship bound for America plus a \$10 bonus. Although Christian's destination was Lancaster, Pennsylvania, "beggars can't be choosers" and his ship left Amsterdam on Christmas Day 1822 docking in New Orleans on March 2, 1822. No doubt he told his story to van Eegen's business partner, Vincent Nolte, a prosperous German who made his money trading cotton with Europe. Nolte also gave him \$10 for his travelling expenses.

New Orleans was more than 2,000 km. south of his destination. Before steam ships provided two-way travel on the Mississippi River, farmers and merchants often floated their produce on rafts to the port of New Orleans and then walked home. Maybe Nafziger joined these rafters making their way north on foot. After visiting the new Alsatian Amish settlement near Cincinnati, Nafziger arrived in Lancaster, Pennsylvania in May 1822.



*The first Amish meetinghouse was East Zorra, built in 1883.
(Mennonite Archives of Ontario photo)*

Surely, Nafziger was disappointed to learn that the good farmland was already taken or too expensive to buy. His friends encouraged him to check out Upper Canada where Mennonites had established a settlement along the Grand River and the government had recently signalled a willingness to accept more "German pacifists" as settlers.

In August 1822 Christian arrived in the Mennonite settlement along the Grand River, then named Ebytown, today called Kitchener. The Pennsylvania Mennonites gave him a warm welcome and showed him the Crown Reserve to the west (Wilmot Township). Perhaps they met up with some Mississaugas, the Indigenous people who sometimes camped south-east of the Baden Hill and farmed, hunted and fished in this area.

Along with some Mennonites, Christian visited the British ruler of Upper Canada, Lieutenant Governor Maitland. He agreed to open Wilmot Township for settlers and promised to give 50 acres free to any family who built a cabin, cleared a road allowance and stayed at least seven years. With Maitland's encouragement, Christian

returned to Europe via London where he stopped to confirm his land deal at the Colonial Office. Nafziger's obituary says that he actually met with the King of England who confirmed Maitland's land deal, pressed some coins into Christian's hand and wished him well.

After more than a year of travel, Christian returned to his wife and children in January 1823. Because they had no money to make the move, Mennonites in Ebytown helped Christian and his family move to Canada in 1826.

Beginning in 1823 many Amish Mennonite families began settling in Wilmot. A few came from Pennsylvania but most came directly from Alsace, Lorraine, Germany and Switzerland. They were soon joined by Mennonites from Ebytown and Lutherans and Catholics from the same areas of Europe where the Amish originated.

The first Amish Mennonite church in Canada was organized here in 1824. Later it split into two congregations which today are called Steinmann Mennonite Church and St. Agatha Mennonite Church. When the land in Wilmot was taken, the Amish

Mennonites moved west to East Zorra (1837) and Zurich (1848) and north to Wellesley (1859) and Poole (1874). For the first sixty years, all Amish Mennonites worshipped in their houses and barns. Beginning in East Zorra in 1883, they started to build Mennonite-styled meetinghouses.

The first of many splits in the Amish Mennonite tradition was precipitated in 1886 in the Wellesley and Milverton areas when some chose to stay with traditional ways and continued to worship in homes. They drive horses and buggies and are called the Old Order Amish.

Others keep some traditional patterns but are also change-minded like the Beachy Amish Mennonites (1903), the Conservative Mennonites (1956) and Faith Mennonite (1987). The most change-minded congregations are part of the Mennonite Church of Eastern Canada (formerly Western Ontario Mennonite Conference). Maple View and Zurich Mennonite are now part of the Mennonite Brethren Conference. This spectrum of congregations are all part of the Amish Mennonite Fire and Storm Aid Union which practises mutual aid when members suffer losses due to fire or storms.

On the bicentennial of his trip to America, we thank God for the courage and faith of Christian Nafziger, the Amish land scout from Bavaria. He helped open Wilmot Township and encouraged many Amish Mennonites from German-speaking Europe to come to Canada. Whatever your biological and spiritual heritage, thank the Lord for the privilege of living in Canada, a peaceful and prosperous country with religious freedom and give thanks for the Indigenous peoples who have shared their land.



‘Life Upstairs’ at Brubacher House

By Laura Enns, Brubacher House host



The Brubacher House apartment living room (Photo by Jacquie Reimer)

In November 2021, Brubacher House launched “Life Upstairs,” its first digital exhibit which tells the fascinating story of the museum’s unique history of live-in hosts through personal stories, photos and videos from past and present hosts. The exhibit was supported by the J. Winfield Fretz Publication Fund of the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, and Conrad Grebel University College.

Bethany Leis, the Brubacher House 2021 digital historian-in-residence curated the exhibit in collaboration with web designer Chris Steingart of QT Web Designs. As previous hosts themselves, both Leis and Steingart were able to capture the richness of museum life as only insiders could.

The restored 1850s Pennsylvania German Mennonite farmhouse, now owned by the University of Waterloo and operated in partnership with Conrad Grebel University College and the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario, was originally built by John E. Brubacher and Magdalena Musselman for their family of 14 children. After a fire destroyed most of the home in 1968, it was restored and reopened as a museum in 1979, with a modern, upper-level apartment for live-in museum hosts where the Brubacher children would have once slept.

Visitors have often remarked on the personal connection that they feel when they enter the house—a sense of warmth and welcome into an actual home,

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more than just a tour of a typical museum. When the museum was closed to in-person visitors for two years due to COVID-19, it occurred to Joshua and me—current Brubacher House hosts—that it might be the perfect time to undertake a digital exhibit exploring this contemporary history of the house, giving visitors a behind-the-scenes tour without actually having to walk anyone through our own living room!

Leis's surveys, interviews and archival research explored how the 11 host couples or pairs who have called Brubacher House home since 1977 have both shaped the museum and been shaped by it. The resulting digital exhibit reveals common themes in the host experience.

Drawn into the story of a family that valued simple living and self-sufficiency, museum hosts have been inspired to live into the rhythm of the seasons by planting flower and vegetable gardens, preserving their own food, and exploring outdoor photography. The house which historically provided space for large and deeply connected families and communities has continued to provide a backdrop for hosts' important life events: marriages, births, anniversaries, graduations, and citizenship celebrations, as well as holidays and other special occasions.

Hosts have also been witness to the enormous changes to the University of Waterloo's North Campus, from the construction of lakes, ponds, golf courses and baseball diamonds, to the development of the David

Johnston Research + Technology Park. Significant annual events like Canada Day at Columbia Lake have attracted tens of thousands of visitors, including celebrities such as Justin Trudeau. More common, but less welcome, visitors have included skunks, snakes, bats, mice, groundhogs, and insects.

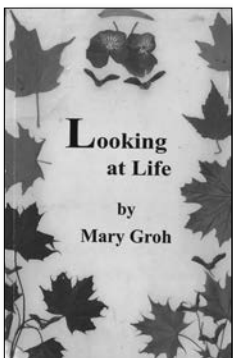
Almost all hosts reminisced about the charms and quirks of living in an old house: basement floods, furnace malfunctions, and electrical fires, alongside the beauty of Columbia Lake sunsets and stunning views from the apartment's large windows. In addition to these stories, the digital exhibit highlights hosts' favourite artifacts or aspects of the museum. A blog created for current and future hosts allows the site to endure as a virtual diary of hosts' personal experiences of museum life that do not always make it into the museum tour.

All of these stories came to life in a wonderful virtual launch event on November 18, 2021, which brought together current and former hosts for an evening of live conversation and laughter-filled storytelling over Zoom. The event recording can be viewed on YouTube at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzujlQIMj0U&t=653s>.

The complete Life Upstairs digital exhibit can be accessed for free online at lifeupstairs.ca.



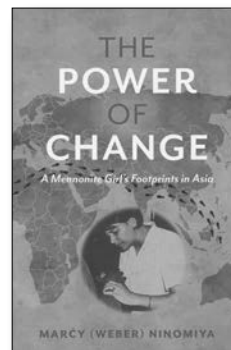
NEW BOOKS



Looking at Life.

Mary Groh.
Privately published, 2022, 236 pages.

To celebrate her 90th birthday, Mary Groh put together this autobiography and reflection on her life experiences. She presents a portrait of Mennonite life in the latter 20th century with its concern for personal piety and urban missions. This was a time when Mennonites were moving to the city. Born and raised in Toronto, Mary now lives in Kitchener, Ont., and can be contacted at marygroh05@gmail.com.



The Power of Change: A Mennonite Girl's Footprints in Asia.

Marcy (Weber) Ninomiya.
Privately published with FriesenPress, 2022, 400 pages.

Marcy Weber grew up in the village of Conestogo, Ont., attending St. Jacobs Mennonite Church. She studied nursing and worked at K-W Hospital for a while in the early 1960s before taking an assignment with Mennonite Central Committee to work in a medical clinic in Vietnam during the war. She married Aki Ninomiya and went on to work in human development in various Asian countries for many years. Marcy and Aki now lived in St. Jacobs, Ont.