

LECTURE TWO

Memory: Monuments and the Marking of Pasts

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The annual cycle of rituals that re-enact the life of Christ, discussed in my first lecture, still structure sacred time for most Christians, including Mennonites. The rituals create a regular pattern of observance that also acts as a form of continuous remembrance. Although the worshipers have no personal experience of the events being marked, through regular participation an additional form of remembrance is created as those raised in faith remember their own earlier involvement in acts of worship. Such acts, however, entail more than just personal experiences; all public rituals regularize action and help establish common identities and shared experiences that over time create collective memories.¹ For Christians this collective sense of being and belonging reaches back to the very foundations of the faith and the establishment of the early church. For Mennonites it has increasingly been focused on their Anabaptist ancestors, who themselves believed they had reconstituted the early church and thereby recaptured the true meaning of the Christian faith.

The sense of a connection between the Christian past and the present is clearly seen in Thieleman van Braght's *Martyrs Mirror*, one of the central edificatory books of the Mennonite canon from the seventeenth century onwards.² This massive volume brings together published and unpublished accounts of Anabaptist suffering, mainly in the movement's formative years in the sixteenth century, and links these experiences to those of the martyrs of the early church.³ The *Martyrs Mirror* presents readers with shocking accounts of the suffering and death of hundreds of people. Personal testimonies of victims, records of their imprisonment, torture, interrogations, and executions are almost obscenely enhanced by the vivid engravings that artist Jan Lyuken produced to illustrate the volume.

At the start of the book van Braght tells his readers that his collection

... was written for a perpetual remembrance of the steadfast and blessed martyrs; concerning whom it is the will of God that they

should not only always be remembered here among men, but whom He Himself purposes never to forget but to remember with everlasting mercy.⁴

Van Braght thus intended the *Martyrs Mirror* to be not just a record of Christian past suffering; by concentrating on Anabaptist martyrs it was to establish a perpetual memorial for their descendants in faith. The martyrs' faith had been tested through persecution, suffering, and death. Van Braght believed that the spirit of relative toleration, wealth, and luxury Mennonites enjoyed in the Dutch "Golden Age" exposed them to the dangers of "the world." Worldly success was not a sign of God's blessing but merely a new test of Mennonite faithfulness. As a consequence, their salvation was now at as great a risk as it had been for their Anabaptist ancestors at the time of their widespread persecution.⁵ By reading the martyr accounts, van Braght hoped contemporary Mennonites would reflect upon their salvation by considering the sufferings of true Christians at earlier times.

This reflective purpose is why the words "theater" and "mirror" occur in the book's title. The term "mirror" hints at the idea of a "mirror of memory," an idea common in Renaissance thought, while "theater" suggests an exhibition or display in the public sphere. The kind of theater van Braght had in mind was not for entertainment:

... most beloved, do not expect that we shall bring you into Grecian theatres, to gaze on merry comedies or gay performances ... we shall lead you into dark valleys, even into the valleys of death (Ps. 23:4), where nothing will be seen but dry bones, skulls, and frightful skeletons of those who have been slain; these beheaded, those drowned, others strangled at the stake, some burnt, others broken on the wheel, many torn by wild beasts, half devoured, and put to death in manifold cruel ways....⁶

The mention of Greek theater is not van Braght's only reference to the classical world. Elsewhere he compares the heroes recorded in antiquity with Christian martyrs.⁷ However, he does so in order to contrast ancient depictions of heroic acts involving violence and earthly triumphs with the faith, suffering, and desire for salvation that early Christians and

Anabaptists sought through martyrdom.⁸ In doing so, he draws attention to the contradiction between triumphant celebration and profound reflection implied in the marking of pasts. This contradiction would later re-emerge in Mennonite attempts to memorialize the past with forms derived from worldly mirrors and theatrical performances.

In the original Dutch edition, van Braght refers to the Anabaptist martyrs as *Doopsgezinden* or “Baptist-minded,” and points out that this term was not really accepted “by choice or desire, but of necessity.” He suggests that “their proper name ... should be, Christ-minded, Apostle-minded, or Gospel-minded.”⁹ He mentions Menno Simons only in passing and rarely uses the term “Mennonite” or its variation “Mennist.” Like the term “Anabaptist,” Mennonite was a label first applied to the *Doopsgezinden* by their opponents. In the Dutch Republic of van Braght’s time Menno Simons was recognized by descendants of the scattered Anabaptist founders as an important early leader, but his name had still not been adopted by many to differentiate themselves from others in a world of competing Protestant groups identified by the names of their alleged founders.¹⁰ Just as Calvin’s name became associated with the Reformed Church (Calvinist/Calvinism) and Luther’s with German protestant churches (Lutheranism), and these terms were gradually appropriated by their own followers, so too was the term Mennonite.

While for many believers their identity became associated with Menno’s name, it took longer for Menno to achieve iconographic status for Mennonites and for members of other Protestant groups. A Dutch engraving of 1817 for a monument celebrating the history of Protestantism includes a portrait of Menno, along with Calvin, Luther, and others, as one of the founders of reformed religion.¹¹ However, two earlier engravings depicting triumphant monuments dedicated just to *Doopsgezinden* give Menno’s portrait pride of place, high above the other pictures and allegoric images surrounded by heavenly clouds and chubby cherubs disguised as angels.¹² In spite of the architectural and sculptural appearance of the monuments, the structures illustrated in the engravings were probably never intended to be

realized in physical form.¹³ But by the middle of the nineteenth century some Mennonites in Germany did propose that to mark the 300th anniversary of Menno's death in January 1861 a physical monument (*Denkmal*) should be raised to Menno's memory and his role in founding their faith.

The idea for such a monument was first proposed in the *Mennonitische Blätter* in 1859. It was but one proposal for a series of celebrations also intended to include festive church services on a specific date (*Gedenktage*) and the establishment of a fund (*Menno-Stiftung*) to support the training of ministers and the widows of ministers. The idea to mark Menno's death in these ways met with considerable opposition from leaders of more conservative congregations in the German lands and in Russia. The resulting debates were publicly played out in the columns of the *Mennonitische Blätter*.¹⁴ Wolfgang Froese, in his analysis of these debates, suggests the issue brought to a head differences that had emerged by the middle of the nineteenth century between the views of the mainly older, rural lay ministers and the newer, educated and professional clergy serving mainly urban congregations.¹⁵ These differences are complex but at the time included theological issues and divergent attitudes to the development of a professional, trained clergy. The main opposition came from rural areas of southern Germany, Prussia, and Russia.¹⁶

Conservative correspondents questioned the appropriateness of celebrations that focused on a mere mortal, and reminded readers that it was Jesus, not Menno, who had died on the cross. By focusing attention on Menno, they argued, believers' thoughts would be drawn away from this basic truth. Some also questioned whether Menno, or any single early Anabaptist, should be seen as a founder of the Mennonite faith. Had not, they asked rhetorically, the Anabaptists only rediscovered the true Christian faith and re-established it? Anabaptist martyrs stood in a long line of Christian martyrs who had suffered and died for the true faith. This line reached back before the Reformation, in their view to the Waldensians and eventually to the first Christian martyrs. Marking Menno's memory in the proposed ways threatened to betray the Mennonites' foundation in Christ and as a faith community. In southern Russia, a minister of the *Kleine Gemeinde* was so impressed by the arguments of one south German elder that he wrote to him in support.¹⁷

Behind this debate lay deeper concerns about how the past was to be represented in an increasingly secular society. One elder described events such as the unveiling in 1856 of a statue to Luther at Worms, and the 1859 festival to celebrate Schiller, the poet of German liberty, as “an unseemly veneration of the human spirit and homage to the spirit of the times.”¹⁸ The “spirit of the times” to which he referred was the promotion of nationalism. The age of nationalism provided immense opportunities for celebrating public events and building triumphant monuments associated with the creation of nations.¹⁹ While religious events such as the Reformation and figures such as Luther could be, and indeed were, appropriated to the cause of national identity, the major focus was on secular historical events and individuals involved in national awakening and the struggle to achieve independence. War was often glorified in oversized monuments and statues raised to national heroes, military figures, and “martyrs” to the nationalist cause, many of whom were plainly not acting as true Christians. But nationalism itself took on many of the features of religious fervor, and the marking of a nation’s past acquired sacredness outside Christian tradition. As one scholar has noted:

... every nation has its own story of triumphs and tragedies, victories and betrayals ... those who have sacrificed themselves on behalf of the nation have demonstrated in their lives – or their deaths – that its worth transcends other values. Hence, the significance of cenotaphs, tombs of the unknown soldier, memorial services, and the like.²⁰

It is not surprising, therefore, that in such a context the proposal for a Menno monument met with opposition from conservative religious leaders.

Although no monument was erected in 1861, Menno’s death was marked by services in a number of Mennonite congregations.²¹ During the 1870s, however, plans for a monument were renewed, and eventually in 1879 a stone obelisk was erected to Menno’s memory at Witmarsum in the Dutch province of Friesland.²² It was claimed that the site on which it was located



Menno Simons monument photo by Jan Gleysteen courtesy of Mennonite Archives of Ontario.

was where Menno had first preached after leaving the Catholic Church in 1536, but as with many nationalist monuments, the historical accuracy of this claim is dubious.²³ The erection of the memorial again provoked controversy. The editor of the American Mennonite newspaper *Zur Heimath* described it as an idol.²⁴ This newspaper was newly founded by immigrants from Russia, but the Mennonites who remained in Russia were soon to raise monuments themselves to their more immediate past.

In 1889, during celebrations to mark the centenary of Mennonite settlement in Russia, an obelisk, somewhat similar in shape to the Dutch Menno monument, was erected in the Khortitsa settlement.²⁵ Two other memorials were also raised at this time, though not to spiritual leaders but to Johann Bartsch and Jakob Höppner, the deputies who had negotiated with Prince Potemkin the initial agreement leading to massive Mennonite migration from Prussia at the end of the eighteenth century.²⁶

After 1889, however, Mennonites in Russia do not appear to have erected further monuments to mark similar anniversaries of key pioneer events, most notably the centenary of receipt of the Mennonite Privilegium in 1800 or the founding of the Molochna colony in 1804.²⁷ Instead, the opening of new schools, hospitals, and other institutional structures seemed sufficient to mark the steady march of progress in the Mennonite world. Russian Mennonites looked to the future and played down their immigrant status, stressing that they were part of an Empire of diverse peoples and origins working towards a common future.²⁸ The only other Mennonite memorial of significance in pre-revolutionary Russia was a large cross erected in 1888 in the cemetery of Neu Halbstadt, Molochna to the memory of the noted preacher and poet Bernhard Harder. The cost of this marker was raised by private subscription, so it was not an official marker of collective memory.²⁹

The destruction of the Mennonite Commonwealth in the twentieth century, after a period of bitter war and revolution and the assumption of Soviet control, removed any further possibility that Mennonites would celebrate their past in their old Russian homeland. Instead, these events were to lay the foundation for a new marking of the past by Mennonite refugees from the Soviet Union in North and South America. They would draw on older ideas of Mennonite suffering, whereby the sacredness of suffering would be combined with secular appeals to peoplehood emphasizing their status as victims.

In North America during the twentieth century, as the idea that diverse groups of mainly European immigrants had pioneered the continent became increasingly acceptable, a large number of pioneer monuments were erected by their descendants, usually to mark significant anniversaries of settlement. Mennonites in the United States, and somewhat later in Canada, would eventually join the descendants of other immigrant communities in triumphantly marking their settlement with celebratory events and the raising of monuments. This has become especially popular among the descendants of Mennonites from Russia. The monuments and memorials usually emphasize the Mennonites' maintenance of faith, their contributions to the development and prosperity of the regions where they settled, and their status as good citizens. Sometimes the lead was taken by non-Mennonites, as with the statue erected in 1942 by the municipal council of North Newton, Kansas.³⁰ At other times Mennonites were active in their own cause, most notably in 1974, the year marking the centenary of the first immigration of Mennonites from Russia to North America. Undoubtedly, the most striking of the memorials raised on this occasion is that by the descendants of Swiss Volhynian Mennonites at Hopefield, Kansas.³¹ But a less monumental marking of the past had occurred earlier in North American history.

In Canada the first marking of the Mennonites' arrival from Russia in 1874 seems to have occurred in 1924, at the fiftieth anniversary of settlement.³² Celebrations appear to have been muted and no monuments were erected. At this period Mennonites still kept largely to themselves, and

public celebrations of nation-building were largely dominated by Canadians of British descent. However, books to mark the anniversary were published, one surprisingly written by a newly-arrived Mennonite refugee from Soviet Russia.³³ Ten years later another new settler, Arnold Dyck, published a booklet marking the sixtieth anniversary of settlement.³⁴

As I argued in my previous lecture, up to World War Two a number of these new Mennonite settlers in Canada, or *Russländer* as they became known, were more concerned with issues of Mennonite peoplehood and events in their old homeland than with their place in Canada. One indication of this is seen in the wording of the Loyal Address that Mennonites presented to King George VI on his official tour of Canada in May 1939. Three Mennonite groups are identified in the address, and each has a paragraph briefly outlining in sequence their historical settlement in Canada. The first group identified are those who came in the late eighteenth century from the United States because they “preferred to remain under British rule and protection”; these people pioneered “in a new and undeveloped country.” The second paragraph describes those who, between 1874 and 1877, settled in the Red River Valley and “had to undergo great hardships as pioneers” but “rejoiced in the new found liberty which had been denied them in Russia.” The last group described are the *Russländer* who “came from Russia during the years 1925 to 1930”:

The terrible revolution which convulsed that country just prior to the years named, and the bloody character of the Russian Government, brought the greatest distress to them. All they possessed was taken from them. Many, together with other Christians, were either murdered or banished to the bleak tundras and forests of Northern Russia. Famine and contagious diseases decimated their ranks. In their great need and distress they asked for help in order to escape from the horrors of that country. The Canadian Government on the petition of the Mennonites here, granted the same and 21,000 of these refugees were permitted to make their home here.³⁵

The account of *Russländer* settlement presented in the address in fact collapses a number of events into a single story of unrelenting suffering, although neither the Soviets nor Stalin are mentioned by name.

The defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945 meant that Russländer who still hoped they could return to Russia were forced to realize their future now lay in Canada.³⁶ Not content with marking their own past, they were now eager to appropriate the past of other groups in order to stress their contribution as pioneering settlers by linking themselves to the 1870 immigrants. J.J. Hildebrand, one of the strongest supporters in the 1930s of Mennonite peoplehood and a separate *Mennostaat*, in the post-war world turned his attention to Canadian history. In 1950, just ahead of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first Mennonite settlement in Manitoba, he published an account, in the settler-pioneer mode, of the 1870s immigration.³⁷ By the time the centenary of Mennonite settlement in Manitoba from Russia was celebrated in 1974, official multiculturalism policies gave additional support to the idea that non-British immigrants, including Mennonites, played a major role in settling Western Canada. But during the year of celebrations, so prominent were some Russländer in organizing events that an outsider might have mistakenly thought it was the 1920s groups and their descendants, not those of the 1870s, who were the original pioneer settlers. In Winnipeg and surrounding areas, a key Russländer in many of these activities was Gerhard Lohrenz.³⁸

In the early 1950s Lohrenz was younger than most leaders of the Russländer community. Since the 1930s he had been a teacher and minister with literary ambitions in a Manitoba country school, and he moved to Winnipeg only after the Second World War. As many of the older leaders retired or died, he became more influential in Mennonite affairs, and by 1974 he was the elder of the Sargent Avenue congregation in Winnipeg. Lohrenz had also become something of an expert on Russian Mennonite history, lectured at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College on that topic, and helped establish local and national historical societies. Later he would try his hand at writing popular historical accounts. During the 1960s and '70s he also pioneered guided Mennonite tours to the Soviet Union, taking groups to revisit the old settlements in Russia and Ukraine. This required

considerable skill, but his language proficiency and earlier experience of Soviet officialdom made his tours a great success.

One consequence of these visits was that Lohrenz was instrumental in convincing Soviet officials to sell to Canadian Mennonites the Khortitsa centennial memorials to Johann Bartsch and Jakob Hoepfner (Höppner). Bartsch's memorial stone arrived in Canada in 1969 and Hoepfner's – complete with its original headstones – in 1973.³⁹ They were placed in a new complex devoted to Mennonite settler pioneers, the Mennonite Heritage Village outside Steinbach.⁴⁰ As common ancestors of the 1874 immigrants and later immigrants and refugees, Höppner and Bartsch in memorialized form were made welcome by all Mennonites. But for Russländer the memorials had special significance, as they provided an important link between their role in the development of Russian society and, after the prosperous post-war years, their own contribution to Canada's growth and prosperity since the 1920s.⁴¹

In 1974, in conjunction with the centenary celebrations, Lohrenz published a short account of Mennonite settlement in Western Canada. In it the 1870s immigrants are dealt with in a single chapter that, strangely, covers only 1874 to 1926. The following chapters hardly mention the earlier immigrants or their descendants but instead focus on Lohrenz's own Russländer, who “served as stimulation to the Mennonite body and led to a veritable [cultural] renaissance.”⁴² Obviously, for Lohrenz, any Mennonite achievements as Canadian settler-pioneers to be honored in 1974 were as much the work of his own people as of the original settlers. But he really belonged to that generation of Russian Mennonite refugee/immigrants who, exiled from their real homeland, remained at heart more in Russia than in Canada. Lohrenz's autobiography, published in 1976, ends with his move to Winnipeg in 1947. Although by the time he published his memoirs Lohrenz had lived longer in Canada than in Russia, twelve of the book's eighteen chapters deal with his life prior to emigration – and chapter thirteen is entitled “We emigrate from our Fatherland.”⁴³

This Russia-focus of many Russländer also remained dominated by concerns with events surrounding the Russian Revolution and its immediate aftermath. In the period following World War Two, however, this part of their past became refocused as new refugee immigrants arrived and the

Cold War began. Ideas of suffering – a theme linked to older Mennonite traditions and developed in the inter-war period – now drew on new sources of victimhood. Primarily this centered on their being victims of communism, a useful identification in the Cold War’s chilly atmosphere. Indeed, many Russländer with rather shady pasts in the 1930s, due to their pro-German and in some cases pro-Nazi sympathies, found redemption in the increasing polarization of East and West. The stand-off between the United States, its allies, and the Soviet Union produced new dichotomies: communism versus democracy, totalitarianism versus freedom, atheism versus Christianity. The Russian revolution, the civil war, and other sources of their suffering were clearly all the result of communism; Russländer now discovered they were on the side of the righteous.

However, the problem was that many Russländer had left the Soviet Union in its very formative period; most had departed before Stalin came to power, and certainly all who could leave had left long before the Great Terror began in the late 1930s.⁴⁴ While nearly all Russländer had lost relatives, many close family members, and friends in Stalin’s purges, the Mennonites who really experienced the full force of communism as depicted in the western rhetoric of the Cold War were the refugees who had escaped with the retreating German armies in World War Two. Members of these groups who avoided being forcibly repatriated to the Soviet Union had come to Canada, either directly or via Paraguay, between the late 1940s and the 1950s. If after the war Russländer had to appropriate the pioneer settler history of earlier Mennonite immigrants to prove they were loyal Canadian citizens, so also did they have to align themselves with these later refugee groups who had suffered under Stalin to insist they too had been victims of communism.

In 1979, Gerhard Lohrenz raised the issue in the Mennonite German-language press of whether the time had come to erect a memorial to, as he put it, “our martyrs.”⁴⁵ After noting how Cossacks, Poles, and Jews had all built monuments recording their bitter experiences during the twentieth century, he briefly reminded Mennonite readers of the suffering “our little people (*unser Völklein*)” had experienced in Russia, particularly under the

Soviets. Then he asked, “Where are our memorials?”⁴⁶ The term *Völklein*, referring to pre-revolutionary and inter-war usage, was instantly recognizable to older Russländer readers but was not so familiar to Mennonite refugees who had arrived after 1945. Yet Lohrenz clearly had these people in mind when he brought up the subject of a memorial to new Mennonite martyrs. His congregation included a large number of post-war Mennonite refugees as well as some Russländer, and both groups were to be included in his suggested memorial.

Lohrenz’s article produced a number of responses. A post-1945 immigrant noted that the idea of erecting a suitable memorial to their suffering had been raised first by his people in 1971.⁴⁷ The issues surrounding the memorial therefore involved different interpretations of past Mennonite suffering, and longstanding differences between Russländer and post-1945 refugees about the true nature of communism and the Mennonite experience in Russia and the Soviet Union.⁴⁸ As has been noted, Russländer views of suffering centered on their experiences of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and subsequent events that had been given new shape and meaning in the inter-war period. The post-1945 immigrants stressed their experiences in the Stalinist period, especially arrests, terror, executions, deportation, the Second World War, and the Great Trek out of the Soviet Union with retreating German troops between 1930 and 1945. The two groups shaped their memories very differently. Given their number and longer experience in Canadian society, the Russländer tended to dominate discussions of the past.

A committee was soon established to plan for the memorial. From the minutes of the first meeting and the press articles that followed, clearly Lohrenz had already decided the purpose, size, and best location for the memorial. A granite pillar, “four foot square at its base and nine foot high,” decorated with bronze plaques, would record Mennonite victims from “the time of World War I to the present in Asia and Europe.” It was to be located in Winnipeg, adjacent to the Legislature Buildings, or at Centennial Park or in North Kildonan.⁴⁹ Lohrenz favored a site somewhere between

the Legislature Buildings and the Assiniboine River, an idea he apparently had already discussed with politicians.⁵⁰ Interestingly, this was the area where a general monument to Mennonite contributions to Manitoba had been suggested during the 1974 centenary celebrations. In spite of a design competition being organized, a memorial was never built.⁵¹

After 1979 Lohrenz's idea for a memorial to the suffering of Mennonite martyrs in Russia continued to be discussed in the Mennonite press, but like the 1974 plans it failed to find widespread support.⁵² Lohrenz would later note that his proposal had met opposition from some people who thought it involved too much "self-glorification" (*Selbstverherrlichung*).⁵³ But in 1984 a new committee under the auspices of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was established to revisit the idea, this time under the leadership of Gerhard Ens.⁵⁴ The committee met at Douglas Mennonite Church, where they were hosted by its minister, George K. Epp, himself a post-war refugee from the Soviet Union who had been involved in the discussions over a decade before.⁵⁵ The committee also included people from the post-1945 generation of immigrants, including Otto Klassen and Jacob Rempel, who acted as secretary.

The first meeting of the new committee agreed in principle that the monument should honor Mennonite victims of violence in the twentieth century, "especially in Europe." These events had "to be recorded and remembered" as "the great majority of Mennonites are not ... aware of the enormous suffering and the great number of victims of this violence." A memorandum prepared for the meeting also recommended that the term "martyr" be avoided, "because it is a risky description" of the "violence suffered by a minority for various reasons" and because the form of violence Mennonites suffered "was beyond any known norms in western countries." What these norms were is left unexplained. The memo continued that even those who died during "the war" were also "victims of the violence of our century" – presumably a reference to World War Two. Members agreed they should "avoid political overtones as much as possible," and while the monument might remind "us of injustice and violence suffered ... it must create ... awareness without fostering the idea of hatred or revenge."⁵⁶ The wider world must be informed "that the Mennonite community [had] suffered, but it must also know that this Christian community invites all to forgive and love their enemies." Eventually any reference to martyrs

was dropped from the name of the memorial, and a rather clumsy title, “Mennonite Monument Dedicated to the Victims of War and Terror,” was chosen in its place.

Discussions on themes to be depicted on the monument’s brass relief plaques reveal some of the finer issues inherent in differences between Russländer and post-1945 immigrants as to how the memory of suffering should be suitably expressed.

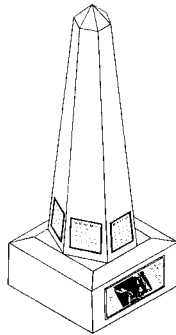
Originally, Lohrenz had preferred using brass sculptures by the 1920s immigrant artist Johann Klassen of Bluffton, Ohio.⁵⁷ Klassen had produced a number of fine plaques depicting Mennonite suffering, but these did not include the specific type of references favored by the post-1945 immigrants. The new committee eventually settled on a large relief plaque depicting suffering, and six more to fit on each side of the obelisk with texts in German and English. One is devoted to the Victims of War and Anarchy between 1914 and 1920, basically the major experience of the Russländer.⁵⁸ Three of the others deal with the post-1945 group’s experience as Victims of the Terror (1929-41) and Victims of World War Two (1939-45), with one of these

honoring the many women who were often “bereft of husband and home” in the 1929-53 period.⁵⁹ One plaque to Unknown Victims covers the entire 1914 to 1953 period; for those victims the cenotaph-like monument might “be their gravestone and remind us of their suffering.”⁶⁰ The final plaque

Mennonitisches Denkmal

gewidmet den Opfern des zwanzigsten
Jahrhunderts

Lobe den Herrn und vergiss nicht was er
dir Gutes getan hat . . . der dein Leben
vom Verderben erloest, der dich kroenet
mit Gnade und Barmherzigkeit . . .



Bless the Lord and forget not all His
benefits . . . Who redeems your life from
the pit, Who crowns you with steadfast
love and mercy . . .

Ps. 103:2-4

October 21, 1984

*Brochure cover provided by
James Urry.*

contains a religious message calling for forgiveness and urging people to love their neighbors.

The form “favoured” for the monument was “a six metre hexagonal column on an appropriate platform.” Its location, however, remained a matter of debate.⁶¹ A number of sites were discussed by the new committee, and for the first time mention was made of the “Steinbach Museum” or, more correctly, the Mennonite Heritage Village.⁶² Approaches were made to the government about placing the memorial adjacent to the Legislature, but these were soundly rejected.⁶³ Eventually, under Ens’ guidance, negotiations were begun to place the memorial at the Steinbach site.⁶⁴ These proved successful, and on July 28, 1985 the memorial was unveiled in Steinbach before a large crowd of Mennonites and non-Mennonite dignitaries.⁶⁵

In the long term the post-1945 group has succeeded in making the Steinbach memorial their own. The online site guide for the Mennonite Heritage Village identifies the stone and brass sculpture as “The Great Trek Memorial ... dedicated to the memory of the Mennonites in Russia and the Soviet Union who suffered persecution during Stalin’s reign of terror and undertook the ‘Great Trek’ during World War II.”⁶⁶ Reflecting on a symposium in 1997 to mark the sixty years since Stalin unleashed the Great Terror that would consume the lives of thousands of Mennonites and hundreds of thousands of other Soviet citizens, Gerhard Ens began with a reference to the memorial.⁶⁷ And the book issued to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Trek and post-war emigration of Mennonites to Canada refers to it as the “Monument to Mennonite suffering in the Soviet Union.”⁶⁸ The earlier, clumsy title intended to connect the Russländer experience with those who suffered under Stalin and during World War Two seems to have been forgotten.

The author of a recent book on the history of Europe since 1945 has noted how, long after World War II and in contrast to the period after World War I, Europeans were unwilling to raise memorials to the war. Only in more recent times have memorials been constructed to mark this period, and many of these are to specific groups or events, most notably to Jewish victims of the

Holocaust.⁶⁹ In North America memorials to both wars were constructed, although both the involvement of some Mennonites in the armed forces during World War Two, and the raising of memorials in predominantly Mennonite towns where the names of those killed include Mennonites, have proved controversial.⁷⁰

In eastern Europe the collapse of communism and the freeing of states held captive under Soviet control since 1945 has led to major changes in interpretations of the past. How the past should be marked in monuments and memorials has often been contentious. The statues of hated communist leaders were soon toppled, and today even Lenin lies uneasily in his Moscow mausoleum. In the new environment, monuments have become sites of contention as different interest groups assert their own view of the past. In eastern European countries, old Soviet war memorials are no longer seen as monuments to liberation but to the enslavement of nations.⁷¹ Perpetrators are transformed into victims, and plans to erect new memorials can cause international incidents.⁷² It is in this highly charged political atmosphere, where memories of the past are contested, that some Mennonites have embarked on an extensive program of erecting Mennonite memorials in Ukraine.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was preceded by a gradual easing of relations with the West. Mennonites were quick to take advantage of the situation. Tour visits became more regular and intense, archives were opened and material copied, and critical events in Mennonite history were marked by academic conferences. The latter have included a symposium in Winnipeg to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the start of the Great Terror named the “Soviet Inferno,” and in Ukraine the centenary of Mennonite settlement in Ukraine (Khortitsa 99) and the founding of the Molochna settlement (Molochna 04). The major force behind the organization of these events is Harvey Dyck of Toronto, as part of his Research Program for Tsarist and Mennonite Studies.⁷³ Following the Khortitsa 99 conference, he and a group of other Mennonites established a Mennonite International Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union (MIMC-FSU).⁷⁴

The decision to erect memorials was triggered partly by the experience of many visitors to former Mennonite villages in the FSU, where they saw that war and revolution, as well as

time and neglect, were relentlessly effacing physical evidence of a one-time Mennonite presence. The simple memory of Mennonites in the region, and the name Mennonite itself, had virtually disappeared from public discourse. ... [A] group of participants in [the conference] Khortitsa '99 decided to carry forward the vision of memorialization, as an act of historic justice for those of this background and in order to fill in blank pages in the historical record.⁷⁵

Since the Khortitsa 99 conference, when a small memorial was unveiled in Nieder Khortitsa, the Memorial Committee has organized and facilitated the erection of other memorials across Ukraine.⁷⁶ Their unveiling has often been coordinated with the marking of particular anniversaries, associated academic conferences, and the presence of tour groups. Some memorials mark Mennonite achievements as settlers in the region and thus belong to the triumphal mode of monument-raising. Examples include the monument to Mennonite civic contributions unveiled in Molochansk and the memorial to Johann Cornies, one of the great heroes of economic and social progress for many Russländer and their descendants.⁷⁷ Another memorial, a stone bench on the Lichtenau railroad station in Molochna, relates to emigration, but not quite in the migrant-pioneer tradition, as it recognizes the station as a place of departure for Mennonites and loss of their homeland.⁷⁸ Most migrant peoples put up memorials to their ancestors' *arrival*; it takes a particular view of the past to erect a monument to their *leaving*.

I have neither the time nor space to examine in detail all the monuments and memorials erected in recent years in Ukraine; instead I will concentrate on one memorial in the victim/suffering mode and the booklet that has been produced to tell the story behind it.⁷⁹ This is the memorial erected in 2001 at the site of a massacre in October 1919 of over seventy Mennonites at Eichenfeld-Dubowka in the Yasykovo settlement, north of Khortitsa. In a form suggestive of a coffin laid out for viewing, the Eichenfeld memorial clearly marks an event of death and great suffering. It clearly indicates some of the problems in trying to mark a complex past event in a singular stone memorial. At one level its message might appear simple: it is a memorial to the victims of a savage massacre who have lain in mass, unmarked graves



Eichenfeld memorial designed by Paul Epp. Photo of site visitors courtesy of Pandora Press, Kitchener, ON.

until the stone was erected and unveiled. But the memorial is also supposed to mark not just a single event and its victims.

It is a wider statement about a past in the present. It stands in a context larger than the actual event, one serving to represent a Mennonite world savagely brought to end, a past forsaken,

and a future destroyed. It points to the perpetrators of the massacre not as individuals but as carriers of an evil, false ideology who are precursors of greater horrors yet to come. This wider context is hinted at by the memorial itself but articulated in greater detail in the booklet. The problem is that explaining context is not a matter of detailing certain facts; rather, it often entails the interpretation of contested issues open to critical questioning. Once set in stone, these contextual issues cannot be subjected to such reasoning. But a text claiming to provide a *context* to a stone memorial is open to critical questioning that in turn raises new questions about the meaning of that memorial itself.

The fact that a number of people were murdered in such a terrible manner, on the date stated on the stone and detailed in the book, is not in question. But why the deaths occurred in this particular village, to this group of people, and at this particular time is something that must be interpreted and explained. The explanation in press releases provided at the memorial's unveiling, and the more detailed account given in the later booklet, are simple and inadequate. We are presented with simple dichotomies of good and evil, with innocent Mennonite victims and guilty perpetrators.⁸⁰ Such stark oppositions have little explanatory power in understanding such complex

events. And in several places in the booklet the use of the word “innocent” to refer to Mennonite victims becomes a rhetorical screen that in many ways prevents a closer examination of Mennonite actions prior to the massacre. A number of relevant sources are also not referred to in the booklet, even though they are important in grasping the context of the massacre.⁸¹ This is especially so in the account given of the sequence of events leading to it.

Following the collapse of the Tsarist regime in 1917/18, local peasants seized land they believed they had rights to, including areas owned by Mennonites. The German army that occupied the region briefly in 1918 assisted some Mennonites to regain their land, sometimes forcibly. German troops also trained Mennonite youth in the use of weapons and military tactics ostensibly for purposes of self-defence. In the area centered on Eichenfeld, these armed Mennonite units (*Selbstschutzler*) were later involved in both offensive and defensive actions against neighboring groups they saw as a threat. But in the section of the booklet intended to explain events leading to the massacre, the self-defence unit is mentioned only once. Even then, the only person named as a member of the unit is misidentified.⁸² In contrast, almost every one of the oral accounts by local contemporary Ukrainians included in the booklet mentions the role of the self-defence unit as a factor contributing to the attack on the village.⁸³

One inevitable consequence of erecting memorials to events involving complex historical issues is that the memory produced is, of necessity, shallow and simplistic. This is why some academic interpreters of such memorials – including those to war, victimhood, and suffering – have argued these memorials are often more concerned with forgetting than with remembering. Or at least they are concerned with remembering selectively and forgetting strategically.⁸⁴ But what Mennonite message is being stamped upon the landscape of Ukraine by the erection of all these memorials?

It certainly is not a general Mennonite vision of a transcendent faith community. The one exception might be the Mennonite Centre in Molochansk, housed in the old Halbstadt Girls’ School, which provides essential ongoing social services to the local community.⁸⁵ But the other stone memorials are passive, not active. Moreover, they appear to reflect a very particular Mennonite view of the past. They emphasize individuals and events – triumphs and tragedies – predominantly from the perspective

of one section of the Mennonite community: the Russländer and their descendants. And it is members of the latter who are most active in promoting the memorials. The view of the past is taken essentially from a secular perspective, one first developed by educated Russländer refugees in their Canadian exile. Despite the religious sentiments expressed in the texts inscribed on the monuments and the religious nature of the ceremonies that accompanied their unveilings, the larger message remains more secular than sacred, more worldly than transcendent.

A special seal was designed for the Khortitsa 99 Conference. In the background is an outline of the Khortitsa oak, similar in shape to Arnold Dyck's earlier Echo Verlag design. The tragedy is that by 1999 the great oak was dying; today it stands leafless, its boughs pointing skyward like fingers pleading to the sky in suffering. But over the years a number of Mennonite visitors to the tree have picked up its acorns and brought them back to North America where, once planted, they have produced new trees. In September 2004 one of these trees was presented to Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo. Planted in a "Russian Mennonite Memorial Garden," the young sapling is intended "to memorialize and honour the experiences of Soviet Mennonites who suffered and died under Stalin in the Soviet Union."⁸⁶ In August 2005 another tree was presented to the College, this time to recognize "the Swiss Mennonite story."⁸⁷ Whereas the Russian Mennonite experience is still firmly rooted in the old world symbolized by a transplanted oak, the descendants of the older Mennonite settlers of Ontario seem to be saying, with their native black walnut, that "we are of this continent" in a way that some other Mennonites still have to come to terms with.⁸⁸



Seal design by Paul Epp. Image from www.paulepp.com

All this talk of trees whets my anthropologist's imagination. Trees have played a significant part in the symbolic and ritual lives of people of many cultures. The possible pagan associations of the Khortitsa oak were noted in some College and University press releases when the tree was planted. The religious significance of trees has also been the subject of anthropological interpretation and explanation.⁸⁹ That great classicist, folklorist, and anthropologist Sir James George Frazer titled his most famous work *The Golden Bough*. Frazer's immense output included, in that nuanced manner only Victorian intellectuals could manage, a subtle message that Christianity was a religion much like any other, primarily concerned with the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth. As we have seen, the seasonal cycle of Christian worship following pagan rhythms of time is widely acknowledged; but Frazer's hint that accounts of Christ's death parallel older religious traditions involving the killing of sacred figures was perhaps a little more risqué for his time.⁹⁰

Frazer was greatly influenced, like many nineteenth-century writers in ethnology and folklore, by the pioneering research of the great German folklorist, Johann Wilhelm Emanuel Mannhardt. Mannhardt devoted considerable effort to the study of the folklore of plants, in particular the symbolism of trees in European folk culture.⁹¹ Mannhardt was born in 1831 into a well-known Mennonite family long established in the city of Friedrichstadt.⁹² His father, Jakob, would become elder of the Danzig congregation and founder of the *Mennonitische Blätter*, the journal that in the 1860s had carried the first, and apparently last, major Mennonite discussion on the appropriateness of erecting memorials to mark the Mennonite past. Wilhelm is probably better known in Mennonite circles for his book on Mennonite privileges, published in 1863 as Mennonites in Prussia faced the secularizing influences of the Prussian nation state.⁹³ But his interest in folklore, plants, and especially trees perhaps needs proper recognition by Mennonites. If Conrad Grebel University College intends to further develop its gardens and extend the planting of memorial trees, might I suggest room be made for a Wilhelm Mannhardt Memorial Garden?



Khortitsa oak tree in former years. Photo courtesy of Pandora Press, Kitchener, ON.

Notes

¹ The classic study of collective memory is Maurice Halbwach's essay, first published in French in 1925, *On Collective Memory* (London: Routledge, 1992). The literature on this subject is large and growing; see the recent overview by Jeffrey K. Olick and Joyce Robbins, "Social memory studies: from 'Collective Memory' to the historical sociology of mnemonic practices," *Annual Review of Sociology* 24 (1998): 105-40. Of particular relevance is Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1989).

² Thieleman J. van Braght, *The Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, trans. Joseph F. Sohm (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972).

³ On the earlier collections and their connection to van Braght's book, see Brad S. Gregory, *Salvation at Stake: Christian Martyrdom in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2001), Chapter 6; on the theme of suffering in the book, see Alan F. Kreider, "The servant is not greater than his master": the Anabaptists and the suffering church," *MQR* 58 (1984): 5-29.

⁴ Van Braght, *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, 13.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁷ "Of old, among the heathen, the greatest and highest honors were accorded to the brave and triumphant warriors, who, risking their lives in the land of the enemy, conquered, and carried off the victory ... this usage has obtained from ancient times, and obtains yet, in every land, yea, throughout the whole world. We say nothing of the honor and praise, which, many years after their death, was bestowed in public theatres, upon those who had been sacrificed to idols, for the narration of it would consume too much time." Van Braght, *Bloody Theater or*

Martyrs Mirror, 11, 12.

⁸ “We have already spoken of the great honor which custom conferred [by the ancients and others] upon the brave and triumphant warriors; yet not one of all these, however great, mighty, valiant and victorious he may have been, or how great the honor and glory with which he may have been hailed, could in any wise be compared with the least martyr who suffered for the testimony of Jesus Christ.... The honor, therefore, which is due to the holy martyrs, is infinitely greater and better than that of earthly heroes; just as the fight they fought, was infinitely more profitable, and their victory, as coming from the hand of God, infinitely more praiseworthy and glorious.” Van Braght, *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, 13, 14.

⁹ “We could have wished that they had been called by another name, that is, not only after the holy baptism, but after their whole religion; but since it is not so, we can content ourselves with the thought that it is not the name, but the thing itself, which justifies the man. For this reason we have applied this name to them throughout the work, that they may be known and distinguished from others.” Van Braght, *Bloody Theater or Martyrs Mirror*, 16.

¹⁰ H[arold] S. B[ender], “Mennonite,” *Mennonite Encyclopedia* (from now on, *ME*) 3, 586-87; R[odney] J. S[awatsky], “Mennonite,” *ME* 5, 555-57.

¹¹ In Piet Visser and Mary Sprunger, *Menno Simons: Places, Portraits and Progeny* (Altona, MB: Friesens, 1996), 93; at the center of the tableaux was Calvin, reflective of the central role of the Reformed Church in Dutch history in spite of there being freedom of religion at this period.

¹² The engravings from 1792 and 1800 are reproduced in Visser and Sprunger, *Menno Simons*, 94.

¹³ In 1515-17 Albrecht Dürer produced a series of woodcuts for a Triumphant Arch of Maximilian I (The Arch of Honor) which, when assembled and displayed just as prints, produced the desired monumental arch.

¹⁴ I am most grateful to John Thiesen of the Mennonite Library and Archives in Kansas for supplying me with printouts of the relevant pages of the *Mennonitische Blätter* (from now on, *MBL*).

¹⁵ Wolfgang Froese, “... ein würdiges und bleibendes Denkmal zu setzen. Ein Diskussion in den *Mennonitischen Blättern* über die Feier des Menno-Simons-Gedenkjahres 1861,” *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter* 53 (1996): 62-76.

¹⁶ Christian Schmidt, an elder in Baden, Johann Toews, a Prussian minister from Ladekopp, and Johann Wall, a minister from Prussia on the Volga who was a leader of the last large group of Prussian migrants to settle in Russia in the 1850s.

¹⁷ Letter from the minister Heinrich Enns dated February 24, 1861, in Delbert Plett, ed., *Storm and Triumph: the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (1850-1875)* (Steinbach: D.F.P. Publications, 1986), 155-57.

¹⁸ Christian Schmidt in *MBL*. 7 (1860), 52; also quoted in Froese, “... ein würdiges und bleibendes Denkmal,” 71; on the Schiller festivals see George L. Mosse’s *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1975), 87-88.

¹⁹ Mosse, *Nationalization of the Masses*, Chapter 3 is a pioneering study of such memorials.

²⁰ Ross Poole, *Nation and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 17.

²¹ See also Jakob Mannhardt's "Zum 13 Januar 1861, dem dreihundertjährigen Todestage Menno Symonis," *MBL* 8.1 (1861), 1-9.

²² P. Cool, *Gedenkschrift van het Menno Simons monument* (Zwolle: W.E.J. Tjeenk Willink, 1879); see also reports in *MBL* (1878-79).

²³ [Christian] Neff, "Menno Monument," *ME* 3, 567-68; Neff described the historical veracity of the site as "rather improbable." There are plans to redevelop the site around the monument into an International Menno Simons Centre; see <http://www.mennosimonscenter.org/en-US/helpproject/html.aspx>.

²⁴ [Christian] Neff, "Menno Monument," *ME* 3, 576-77; see reply to American criticisms by B.C. Roosen in *MBL* (1878).

²⁵ On the celebrations and the memorial, see James Urry, *None but Saints: the Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Books, 1989), Chapter 13. In New Halbstadt, Molochna a Russian general had earlier erected a memorial to recognize Mennonite assistance to his soldiers in the Crimean War of the 1850s; see picture in Peter M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, trans. J.B Toews et al. (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature, General Conf. of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), 581.

²⁶ Their monuments were placed at their gravesites, though not without the opening of old wounds about their treatment in Russia after they had emigrated. These obelisks and their gravestones, but not the bodies of the deputies, were later moved to Manitoba (see below).

²⁷ This was perhaps an indication of changed political circumstances, and Mennonites did not wish to draw attention to their past in this manner.

²⁸ On the obvious style and splendor of such architecture and how public buildings presented a collective identity, see Rudy P. Friesen (with Edith Elisabeth Friesen), *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2004).

²⁹ Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia*, 949, picture 162; the base of the monument contained the figure of a large "black Labrador" and the words "Faith, Hope, Love." It was erected at the same time the book of his poems was published (Leland Harder, personal communication).

³⁰ Keith Sprunger has described the background to the raising of this striking statue in his "The most monumental Mennonite," *Mennonite Life* 34.3 (1979): 10-16; Sprunger has carried out further comparative research into what he calls 'Mennonite Monumentalism' – the apparent desire by Mennonites to seek public recognition in monumental form (Keith Sprunger, personal communication).

³¹ Harley J. Stucky, *The Swiss Mennonite Memorial Monument: Is it Inspirational Art, Symbolic Expression, or History?* (Newton, KS: Harley J. Stucky, 1999).

³² The publication in 1900 of elder Gerhard Wiebe's *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Amerika* (Winnipeg: Nordwesten Druckerei, 1900) was probably timed to coincide with the 25th anniversary. However, I have not made a systematic investigation of this matter or the possibility of any other events or publications marking the anniversary.

³³ Novokampus [Dietrich Neufeld], *Kanadische Mennoniten: bunte Bilder aus dem 50 jährigen Siedlerleben zum Jubiläumsjahr 1924* (Winnipeg: Rundschau Publishing House,

1925); Neufeld was a highly educated Mennonite who had fled Russia before the start of the major Mennonite emigration to Canada in 1923. He held socialist views and could be considered among those I suggested in my first lecture might be considered unbelievers. He spent most of the latter part of his life living away from the Mennonite community under the name Dedrech Navall; see the biography in his *A Russian Dance of Death: Revolution and Civil War in the Ukraine*, trans. and ed. Al Reimer (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1977), xiii.

³⁴ *Das 60-jährige Jubiläum der mennonitischen Einwanderung in Manitoba Canada gefeiert am 1. August 1934 in Steinbach Manitoba* (Steinbach: Warte Verlag, 1935). Beiträge zur mennonitischen Geschichte, Heft 1.

³⁵ The typescript of the address can be found in Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Vol. 1078 File 107a; a black and white photo of the presented address in Vol. 545.63. The original address is still in the Royal Archives, Windsor Castle, England.

³⁶ Some, like Walter Quiring, were never fully reconciled with the situation; Quiring spent his last years in Germany and one of his last writings, aimed primarily at American Mennonites, accused them of betraying the real basis of Mennonite peoplehood. See his “Zum Problem der innermennonitischen Abwanderung. Versuch einer Deutung am amerikanischen Beispiel,” *Mennonitisches Jahrbuch* (1974), 19-34.

³⁷ J.J. Hildebrand, *Aus der Vorgeschichte der Einwanderung der Mennoniten aus Russland nach Manitoba: zum 75-jährigen Jubiläum dieser Einwanderung* (Winnipeg: J. Hildebrand, 1949).

³⁸ On Lohrenz see Gerhard Ens, “Gerhard Lohrenz: his life and contributions” in John Friesen, ed., *Mennonites in Russia 1788-1988. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989), 1-12; I also knew Lohrenz personally, conducting several extensive interviews with him in 1974.

³⁹ Gerhard Lohrenz, “The Johann Bartsch monument: from Russia to Canada,” *ML* 24.1 (1969): 29-30; Lohrenz wrote that the monument “will remind us of our past, of our achievements and failures, and it is hoped that from these we will learn in order to become better men and women for today,” 30.

⁴⁰ The original nucleus of the Mennonite Heritage Village was a collection of artifacts from the pioneer period gathered by the teacher John C. Reimer, a descendant of the founder of the Kleine Gemeinde. Museums are, of course, also sites of memory; see Rachel Waltner Goossen, “Museums,” *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/M87ME.html> (Retrieved 5 Dec 2005).

⁴¹ For Lohrenz and other Russländer there was also a sense of triumph in the “rescue” of these Mennonite objects from the hands of the Soviets who had destroyed most of their property, persecuted their people, and banished the history of Mennonites from their accounts of the development of Russia and Ukraine. The concept of “rescue,” linked to the Biblical theme of exodus, was a major trope in Mennonite writing of the 1920s immigrant experience; see Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus. The Rescue and Resettlement of the Russian Mennonites since the Communist Revolution* (Altona: D. W. Friesen & Sons, for the Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962).

⁴² Gerhard Lohrenz, *The Mennonites of Western Canada, their Origin, and Background and the Brief Story of their Settling and Progress here in Canada* (Winnipeg: the author,

1974), 39; earlier, at the end of the chapter on the 1870s groups, he notes how “conservative” Mennonites had left for Paraguay and Mexico but were replaced by the Russländer who, according to Lohrenz, “caused an intellectual awakening among the Mennonites of the west,” 29.

⁴³ Gerhard Lohrenz, *Storm Tossed. The Personal Story of a Canadian Mennonite from Russia* (Winnipeg: The Christian Press, 1976). A similar pattern can be seen in Russian-born Russländer obituaries, often autobiographical as they were prepared prior to the person’s death. In these, the section dealing with life in Russia is often extensive while details on their life in Canada is surprisingly brief, despite its being of longer duration for most.

⁴⁴ I have noted elsewhere how the period of the New Economic Policy (NEP) is rarely discussed not just in Russländer memoirs but in the scholarly writing of their descendants: “After the rooster crowed: some issues concerning the interpretation of Mennonite/ Bolshevik relations during the early Soviet period,” *JMS* 13 (1995): 26-50.

⁴⁵ The idea that the Russian Mennonite experience could provide the basis for a new collection of martyr stories to match those of the sixteenth century was realized by A.A. Toews in his two-volume collection *Mennonitsche Märtyrer der jüngsten Vergangenheit und der Gegenwart* (Winnipeg: Christian Press, 1949, 1954), a work dominated by the Russländer story. In more recent years the usefulness of the idea of “martyrs” and “martyrdom” in relation to the events in which Mennonites suffered and died in the twentieth century has been a matter of debate in the Mennonite community; see the essays in the special edition of *The Conrad Grebel Review* 18.2 (2000) devoted to “Living with a history of suffering: theological meaning and the Soviet Mennonite experience,” and Harry Loewen, “A Mennonite-Christian view of suffering: the case of Russian Mennonites in the 1930s and 1940s,” *MQR* 77.1 (2003): 47-68.

⁴⁶ Gerhard Lohrenz, “Ein Denkmal unseren Märtyrern?” *Bote* 56 (September 1979), 4-5.

⁴⁷ Otto Klassen, “Zu: Anregung zum Denkmal von Gerhard Lohrenz,” *Bote* 56 (24 October 1979), 4; Klassen, who was to make a film on the trek of Mennonites from Ukraine in 1943/44, mentions the involvement of Kornelius Epp and George Epp in the discussions.

⁴⁸ See Krista Taves, “The reunification of Russian Mennonites in post-World War II Canada,” *Ontario Mennonite History* 13.1 (1995): 1-7; Krista Taves, “Dividing the righteous: Soviet Mennonites as cultural icons in the Canadian Mennonite narrative, 1923-1938,” *JMS* 16 (1998): 101-27. On the larger context, Ted D. Regehr, *Mennonites in Canada 1939-1970: a People Transformed* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1996), Chapter 4; Marlene Epp, *Women Without Men. Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ Minutes of a meeting at Springfield Heights Church, 22 October 1979; “Minutes of the Local History and Historic Sites Committee for 1988-1992,” Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Volume 700:5. I am very grateful to Alf Redekopp of the MHC for locating this file and providing copies.

⁵⁰ Lohrenz, “Ein Denkmal unseren Märtyrer,” *Bote* 56 (14 November 1979), 7; see also his “Ein Denkmal der Mennonitennot,” *Mennonite Mirror* [from now on, *MM*] (April 1980), 19-20.

⁵¹ See R[udy] P. Friesen, “The missing Mennonite monument,” *MM* (March 1975), 15.

⁵² Peter Regier, "Ein Denkmal unseren Opfern im Osten," *Bote* 59 (6 January 1982), 4; Heinrich Wiebe, "Denkmal für Mennonitische Märtyrer des 20. Jahrhunderts," *Bote* 58 (28 October 1981), 4; "Zu: Denkmal den Opfern der Repressalien in der UDSSR," *Bote* 58 (23 December 1981), 4.

⁵³ Gerhard Lohrenz, "Das Denkmal," *MM* (January 1983), 26.

⁵⁴ Ens, a former principal of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna and editor of *Der Bote*, was a Mennonite leader with more experience of Canadian society and broader connections in the Mennonite community than Lohrenz. By this date Lohrenz was unwell, and he died in 1986.

⁵⁵ Epp was becoming a more influential leader in the community by this time.

⁵⁶ The political issues involved were undoubtedly obvious to members of the committee, though not expressed openly. The language of North American Cold War politics lies just below the surface of their discussions and would re-emerge at the monument's opening. As victims of Soviet oppression, Mennonites could partake in anti-Soviet rhetoric, but there were problems in taking full advantage of Cold War rhetoric. First, Russländer political sympathies with Nazi Germany prior to World War II were questionable; second, the post-1945 immigrants were "rescued" by German forces during the War. Finally, the language of Cold War politics was couched in militaristic and warlike terms inappropriate for many non-resistant Mennonites.

⁵⁷ On Klassen, see Harry Loewen, "Johann P. Klassen (1885-1975)" in Harry Loewen, ed., *Shepherds, Servants and Prophets: Leadership among the Russian Mennonites (ca. 1880-1960)* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press/ Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 2003), 213-28.

⁵⁸ Ens suggested in the discussions it should be 1922 so as to include the famine period; eventually 1921 was apparently settled on as the end of the Russländer experience.

⁵⁹ Proposals for the title of the women's plaque included "Frau und Mutter."

⁶⁰ Any connection between the concept of "Unknown Victims" and military memorials to "The Unknown Soldier" does not seem to have occurred to anyone on the committee.

⁶¹ Gerhard Lohrenz had continued to push for a site near the Legislature, repeating that the "English, the French and the Ukrainians all have memorials on parliamentary ground": "Das Denkmal," *MM* (January 1983), 26-27.

⁶² Minutes of meeting of March 13, 1984 held at Douglas Mennonite Church.

⁶³ Victor Schroeder, of Mennonite descent and at the time Minister of Finance, allegedly told the committee that they should not think that every ethnic group could record their "tragedies" in the Legislature area and instead suggested Centennial Park.

⁶⁴ Ens was a founder and keen supporter of the Steinbach Mennonite Heritage Museum.

⁶⁵ Shortly afterwards, in September 1985, another memorial dedicated to Mennonite pioneer women was unveiled at the Village. It consisted of a large boulder with brass plaques but did not specify any particular group or migration. It was the idea of a Russländer, Olga Friesen (nee Heese), who was married to a descendant of the 1874 migration, Ed Friesen, after she saw a memorial to Boer women pioneers during a visit to Pretoria, South Africa. This may well have been the large Vortrekker Monument, a massive political statement to the tragedy and eventual triumph of the Boers. Friesen was a member of the wealthy Heese family of Ekaterinoslav; see her obituary in *The Carillon*, December 16, 2004; on the South African

monument, see Andrew Crampton, "The Vortrekker Monument, the birth of apartheid, and beyond," *Political Geography* 20 (2001): 221-46. I am grateful to Roland Sawatzky of the Mennonite Heritage Village for details on this memorial and others at the Village.

⁶⁶ Website of the Mennonite Heritage Village.

⁶⁷ Gerhard Ens, "Mennonites and the Soviet Inferno: reflections on the symposium," *JMS* 16 (1998): 95; Ens was acknowledging Peter Letkemann's reference to the memorial at the start of the symposium. Ens himself had earlier acknowledged a similar focus of the memorial in the newsletter of the Mennonite Heritage Village, "The Great Trek," *Preserving our Heritage* 1.2 (1993), 1.

⁶⁸ Harry Loewen, ed., *Road to Freedom. Mennonites Escape from the Land of Suffering* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Books, 2000), 3.

⁶⁹ Tony Judt, *Postwar. A History of Europe since 1945* (London: Heinemann, 2005), 823-26. In the Soviet Union, however, massive monuments were constructed to the victims of "The Great Patriotic War" and every major town has a war memorial; see N. Tumarkin, *The Living and the Dead. The Rise and Fall of the Cult of World War II in Russia* (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

⁷⁰ On the war memorial in Altona in southern Manitoba, see A. James Reimer's reflections in his "Weep with those who weep," *Canadian Mennonite* 5.3 (February 12, 2001); see also the responses in the next two issues of the *Canadian Mennonite* by Arthur K. Dyck (March 12) and Conrad D. Stoesz (March 26).

⁷¹ Paul Stangl, "The Soviet war memorial in Treptow, Berlin." *The Geographical Review* 93.2 (2003), 213-36.

⁷² Pawel Lutomski, "The debate about a center against expulsions: an unexpected crisis in German-Polish relations," *German Studies* 27.5 (2004): 449-68; see also the essays in Daniel J. Walkowitz and Lisa Maya Knauer, eds., *Memory and the Impact of Political Transformation in Public Space* (Durham: Duke Univ. Press, 2004).

⁷³ The program, which also has its own publication series, is connected to the Centre of Russian and East European Studies at the University of Toronto. Dyck has long had an interest in marking Mennonite anniversaries; he dedicated a 1979 article on the 1929 Mennonite rush on Moscow to emigrate from the Soviet Union "as a small fiftieth anniversary memorial to the victims of 1929." Harvey L. Dyck, "Despair and hope in Moscow. A pillow, a willow trunk and a stuff-backed photograph," *ML* 34.3 (September 1979), 23.

⁷⁴ *Mennonite Brethren Herald* 39.11 (May 26, 2000); the title seems to have changed to the International Mennonite Memorial Committee for the Former Soviet Union (IMMC-FSU).

⁷⁵ Press release May 2000 at the time appearing at <http://home.ica.net/~walterunger/Memorials.html> but since removed. Funding for memorials was "expected to come through private donations including public subscription promoted by special events and the Mennonite media; and through special levies on selected tours specifically organized to attend dedicatory events." In a 2003 press release for the Molochna 04 conference, organizers invited new proposals for historic memorials in the Molochna area but said each proposal would have to be approved and require a funding guarantee.

⁷⁶ Most if not all the memorials and monuments have been designed by the artist Paul Epp of Toronto, and in terms of aesthetics are very finely realized.

⁷⁷ The new memorial reproduces the monument once located in Ohrloff at Cornies' grave, but now lost. It was in the form of a broken column that according to "popular legend" had been chosen by Cornies, who wished to symbolize that at his death his work was incomplete; Friesen, *Mennonite Brotherhood*, 879. The new monument is situated at the site of his Molochna estate, Yushanlee (today Kirovo); see *Canadian Mennonite* 8.22 (November 15, 2004).

⁷⁸ The memorial is predominantly focused on the emigration to Canada of Molochna residents in the 1920s, especially in 1924, and hence is a Russländer monument; at the time of its unveiling it was also dedicated to the memory of Mennonites deported by the Soviets, especially ahead of the advance of German forces during World War II.

⁷⁹ The booklet, published as part of the series "Tsarist and Mennonite Studies" of the research program of the same name, is authored by Harvey Dyck, John R. Staples, and John B. Toews: *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: a Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, 2004). The other major memorial in this mode is to the massacre at Borosenko in 1919; see Margaret Bergen, "The Borosenko Memorial," *Mennonite Herald* 28.4 (December 2002). Bergen proposed the idea for a memorial and financed the work, which was organized by the Memorial Committee.

⁸⁰ Overwhelmingly, the perpetrators are identified in the booklet as Makhnovisty, followers of the anarchist Nestor Makhno. Evidence suggests that local Ukrainian peasants from neighboring villages were also involved; they certainly looted the settlement once the Mennonites fled.

⁸¹ These include both primary and secondary sources, including for instance references in Neufeld, *A Russian Dance of Death*; Gerhard P. Schroeder, *Miracles of Faith and Judgment* (Np.: Gerhard Schroeder, 1972); Toews, *Mennonitische Märtyrer*; Julius Loewen, *Jasykowo. Mennonite colony on the Dnieper* (Beausejour, MB: Henning Loewen Family, 1995 [Orig. in German 1967]); Isaac Tiessen, *Why I do Not Take the Sword* (Aylmer, ON: Pathway Publishers, 1991); Marianne Janzen, "The Eichenfeld massacre – October 19 1919," *Preservings: the Journal of the Hanover Steinbach Mennonite Historical Society* 18 (2001): 25-31; David G. Rempel, "The Eichenfeld massacre, October 26, 1919," *Preservings*... 21 (2002): 25-27. An older account can be found in Heinrich Toews, *Eichenfeld-Dubowka: ein Tatsachenbericht aus der Tragödie des Deutschtums in der Ukraine* (Karlsruhe: H. Schneider [1938]); the author of the latter is in fact B.H. Unruh, writing under one of his pseudonyms approved by Nazi authorities. Peter Letkemann informs me he has a large file of sources on this event, some still unpublished.

⁸² Dyck, Staples, and Toews, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*, 33; they confuse the victim Heinrich Heinrichs with his son of the same name who, unlike his father, survived, served in White armies, and escaped to North America; see Rempel, "The Eichenfeld massacre," 26. Some accounts suggest that Heinrich Heinrichs' house was the first attacked and that the attackers were seeking Heinrich junior (Peter Letkemann, personal communication).

⁸³ The Ukrainian researchers under Svetlana Bobyleva report that seven of the thirteen accounts they collected made this connection. See Dyck, Staples, and Toews, *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre*, 80; see also references on 82, 84, 85, 86, 87.

⁸⁴ See the essays on war memorials in Adrian Forty and Susanne Küchler, eds., *The Art of Forgetting* (Oxford: Berg, 1999).

⁸⁵ See <http://www.mennonitecentre.com/Referencepaper.html>.

⁸⁶ Press release September 7, 2004 at http://www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/aboutgrebel/releases/2004_12_memorialgarden.shtml

⁸⁷ “Where the black walnut grows,” *Canadian Mennonite* 9.16 (August 22, 2005); the Mennonite pioneers in Ontario chose land on which the black walnut grew, as it was a sign that the soil was good for agriculture.

⁸⁸ Somewhat ironically, however, I have been informed that the suggestion for a “Swiss” tree to match the Khortitsa “Russian” tree was made by a descendant of the Russländer (Paul Tiessen, personal communication).

⁸⁹ Laura M. Rival, ed., *The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism* (Oxford: Berg, 1998).

⁹⁰ Robert Ackerman, *J.G. Frazer: His Life and Work* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 107-09; 169.

⁹¹ See for instance Wilhelm Mannhardt, *Der Baumkultus der Germanen und ihrer Nachbarstämme: mythologische Untersuchungen* (Berlin: Borntraeger, 1875); *Antike Wald- und Feldkulte aus nordeuropäischer Überlieferung* (Berlin: Borntraeger, 1877).

⁹² See the entry on the Mannhardts by Erich Göttner in *ME* 3, 467-69, and for Wilhelm Mannhardt by Brigitte Bönisch-Brednich in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 9, 230-31 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1999).

⁹³ *Die Wehrfreiheit der Altpreussischen Mennoniten: eine geschichtliche Erörterung* (Marienburg: Altpreussischen Mennonitengemeinden, 1863).