Arlette Kouwenhoven, *The Fehrs: Four Centuries of Mennonite Migration*. Trans. Lesley Fast. Leiden: NL: Winco Publishing, 2013. Pp. 264, maps, illustrations. Softcover, $29.95.

Arlette Kouwenhoven's examination of the Fehr/Defehr/de Veer family traces fifteen generations across four centuries and four major migrations, beginning in 1612 in Amsterdam, Netherlands and ending in 2010 in Sabinal, Mexico. Kouwenhoven is not a Mennonite. Her interest in the Fehr family's story emerged as a result of a casual conversation between her husband, a yucca dealer, and another yucca dealer in Texas who happened to mention a group of ultra-conservative Mennonites in northern Mexico. An anthropologist, Kouwenhoven applies multiple methods to discover and recover lost stories of centuries of Mennonite Fehrs. The re-

sult is much more than a genealogical tale of the descendants of grain trader Gijsbert de Veer. Tracing the lives and migrations of each generation, Kouwenhoven seeks to understand the motivations behind the decisions made by each family generation. In so doing, she provides readers with an understanding of how related families in the same generation can have fundamentally different lifestyles. Moreover, while this book focusses on the Fehr family, its stories are "representative of what happened to tens of thousands of Dutch and Flemish families" (21).

The book is divided into five major sections, each one corresponding to an area in which the family settled in their search for the perfect place to follow their Mennonite way of life. In the first section, "Amsterdam 1612," readers are introduced to the Dutch Reformation when Mennonites were persecuted as heretics. In these earliest days, schisms became a characteristic of the Mennonite community, as entire groups were banned by one another, as groups were split, and as new groups were formed. Gisjbert de Veer, a wealthy merchant, was a member of the Old Flemish Mennonites. Kouwenhoven speculates that de Veer considered the Netherlands too worldly, and set his sights on Poland. Having established his family in the Baltic grain trade, Gisjbert left his eldest son in charge of the Amsterdam branch of the family enterprise and, along with his wife and three youngest children, moved to Danzig where two other sons were already working in the family grain business. The second section, "Poland/Prussia 1612-1789," explores the Dutch Mennonite family lines in Danzig where the family increased its wealth as distillers and lacemakers. Successful in business, the family, along with other Mennonites adopted *Plautdietsch* so that it became the common language among Mennonites. (Gisjbert's third great-grandson, in the mid-eighteenth century, was the first to write his name in the German fashion as Defehr [61].) As the Dutch language died out, so did Anabaptist songs. The transition to High German as the language of the Bible led to the adoption of a German-language hymnbook with mainly Lutheran songs. Reprinted in the nineteenth century, this is the same hymnbook used in Sabinal in 2010. What is considered to be an expression of the oldest Mennonite traditions is actually an expression of the "first major break with the past." As Kouwenhoven notes, "Tradition is not always what the ancestors practiced, but more typically what people say they did" (59).

Intergroup conflicts and an economy crippled by war led Benjamin II (the first Defehr) to leave the city in favour of rural life in Klein Mausdorf. When this area was grafted into the Prussia of Frederick the Great in 1772, Mennonites found themselves in a

militaristic country where it was increasingly difficult to live out their pacifistic convictions. In response, Benjamin II packed up and moved to southern Russia, what is now Ukraine, the focus of the third section, "New Russia 1789-1874." Mennonites found prosperity and space to practice their faith unmolested; many special conditions were formalized in the 1800 *Privilegium*. Despite these advantages, threats to Mennonite unity emerged again in disputes over reforming impulses in opposition to traditionalist positions. Russia's policies of Russification, in the wake of their defeat in the Crimean War, threatened Mennonite communities. Some responded by emigrating to Canada and the United States. The Fehr family was once again divided with some Fehrs leaving for Manitoba while others remained in Russia. The Russian Fehrs who survived the horrors of the Revolution and Civil War, and were able to emigrate, followed their Canadian relatives to Manitoba forty years after the first transatlantic migrations. Section four, "Canada 1874-1922" outlines the lives of the Fehr families in both the East and West Reserves of Manitoba and in Saskatchewan. This and the fifth sections are the strongest in the book, largely because of the availability of sources that allow Kouwenhoven to paint a more fulsome picture. She, herself, admits that at this point "The Fehrs are now coming tangibly closer … They gradually take on form and color in diaries and letters and finally appear as individuals in an occasional photograph" (153). True to established patterns, divisions within the community and threats of assimilation into Canadian society, especially as a result of 'The School Question' resulted in yet another migration, this time to Mexico. The last section, "Mexico 1922-2011, and beyond …" offers fascinating comparisons between the Fehrs who remained behind in Canada, those who moved to northern Mexico in Chihuhua state, and those who are once again readying themselves for another migration, this time to Quintana Roo state. Here it is striking to see how quickly families can diverge; in the space of a generation it is difficult to see how the Fehrs of Sabinal are related to the Fehrs of Saskatchewan. Kouwenhoven's carefully researched book provides readers an important opportunity to follow the ebb and flow of one family whose faith shaped and continues to shape lifeways.

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