

Katherine Martens and Edgar G. Reimer, *Reimer Legacy: A Compilation of Historical Voices*. Winnipeg: Katherine Martens, 2015. Pp. xxi +142. Softcover, \$20.00.

The subtitle of this book gives the reader fair description of what to expect – an eclectic variety of authors and genres providing information on key members of the Jakob D. Reimer (1817-1891) family. The seven chapters of the book include four different authors each with distinctive styles. The first chapter, by Jon Isaak, is a carefully researched and footnoted introduction to the

pater familias, Jakob D. Reimer, founder of the village of Wiesenfeld and moderating leader in the early period of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Ukraine. Isaac's biographical portrait of Jakob emphasizes themes key to the lives of most of his descendants – a passionate pursuit of faith in the midst of conflict and hardship. Perhaps the most admirable anecdote which emerges from the study of Jakob's diaries is his insistence of full truth – reporting not only the good but also the unhappy. Peter M. Friesen, revered historian and leader of the Mennonite Brethren Church, sought Jakob's advice in historical writing about painful church disputes. Jakob's answer is good historiographical practice and informs the character of much of the rest of the book: "Do it honestly... Write it all as it happened!" (4).

The subsequent chapter on Jakob's daughter, Maria, as compiled by Katherine Martens is in part a reflection on the choices of Jakob as they affected his children. It is also the story of a remarkable woman who made her own way, choosing to become a missionary to India and writing poetry. Once arriving in India, Maria was told that her health was failing and that she was dying. In response Maria wrote spiritual poetry – which Martens translates and includes. Part of the chapter is a biographical summary by Maria's brother, Jakob C. Reimer. Typical of other chapters, this represents the weaving together of many sources, voices, and perspectives in these mini-biographies.

Chapter four is an autobiography written by Jakob C. Reimer, translated by Katherine Martens. Unusual, however, is its composition in the third person using pseudonyms for himself (Winter) and his wife, Katherina (Blondina). Winter's great love of Blondina pervades this story of hardship. Blondina lost her mother and then later her father as a teen. Winter reports that a poem (included in the chapter) was recited by an 11-year old cousin at their wedding ceremony – not about marital bliss like you might expect but rather about the hardships of being an orphan. This poem was followed by a meditation from the pulpit on the need to support orphans, complete with an offering designated for a local orphanage. What Blondina thought of this marriage ceremony is not included. Married in 1912 Winter and Blondina were living in relative peace and contentment but as their children began arriving the First World War, the Russian Revolution and famine caused great suffering. Their journey to Canada and the hard work of starting again in Saskatchewan, and then a decade later in British Columbia during the Great Depression, took their toll on Blondina and Winter.

The story of Winter's brother, Cornelius C. Reimer, is a poignant biography of profound suffering and resilience by Edgar Reimer. Drafted by the Czarist regime in 1915 Cornelius worked to supply food for the troops. In the 1920s he worked for the American Mennonite Relief Association in Moscow but was arrested in 1929 by the secret police on charges of treason and sent to a "silent" prison camp (where people were never heard from again). Cornelius escaped prison in 1941 as the Nazis were advancing into Russia, and was employed by both the Germans and later the Americans throughout the war. He emigrated to Paraguay and then Canada. The story of his life is perhaps the most extraordinary and painful in the collection.

The final biographical sketches of David Dürksen, titled "One Marriage Made in Heaven" and David's son, Gerhard, titled "One Marriage Not Made in Heaven," are as juicy as their titles. Continuing enticement is found in Gerhard's sons, one of whom became a German SS Officer, then recanted and wrote a book chronicling and condemning the German actions in Russia. This chapter ends with stories of women in Russia forced into slave labour or relocated to the far North and their determination to survive even in such conditions. Tantalizing portraits of people who do not quite fit the typical Mennonite story parameters are found in this chapter.

Although this book is focused on the family history of Edgar Reimer, the lives of the individuals here typify and exemplify the experiences of many. The extraordinary character of their lives should not be diminished because it was shared by others. A small quibble – as a book on family history some of the accounts veer overly long on details that could only be of interest to the family. Overall, there are a number of highly interesting people remembered here.

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