



Founding Editor Harry Loewen “im Ruhestand”: a Tribute

Already I can hear readers of *JMS* express incredulity. Harry Loewen retiring? Impossible. He's not old enough. Too vigorous and active to join the ranks of retired seniors. In German it sounds even less plausible. To picture Harry in a permanent state of rest is as preposterous as to imagine Niagara Falls drying up, Mt. Vesuvius collapsing in ashes, prairie grain crops blighted by frost in midsummer. But there it is, a vivid reminder that time not only brings changes but that it is also a stupid wastrel of talent and experience.

So, given the inexorable fact of his official retirement, what can we say about the first holder of the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg and the founding editor of this journal? Looking back we can say that almost everything about Harry's career seems unlikely and at the same time strangely inevitable. Think of it: although born in the Mennonite village of Friedensfeld, Ukraine in 1930, he had never even heard the word Mennonite until he found himself a refugee in Germany at the end of World War II. His father was arrested in 1937 and Harry never saw him again. His schooling was disrupted in 1943 and not really resumed until he came to Canada at seventeen—without a word of English. His first experience of Mennonite church life came through contact with MCC in Germany and he was baptized in 1946 by a Baptist-Mennonite pastor in Gronau. He also had an exceptional mother who nurtured him culturally by introducing him to music and literature and taking him to concerts and movies in Germany.

Everything considered, this was hardly a propitious background for the kind of career Harry has had. What the young refugee had, however, was intelligence combined with an indomitable will to succeed. Between 1948 and 1951 he breezed through Coaldale Bible Institute and by 1955 had graduated from MBBC in Winnipeg. Along the way—in 1953—he married Gertrude Penner, whose immigrant background was similar to his own. Together they served as home missionaries in Winnipegosis, Manitoba, from 1955-57, a period during which Harry also found time to complete senior highschool through correspondence.

The fatherless young immigrant had found his element and ethos: education and teaching. After completing his BA in history and German at the University of Western Ontario in 1959, he came back to Manitoba to complete an MA in history at the University of Manitoba in 1961. He began his teaching career at MBCI in the early '60s, moved up to the MBBC faculty on the same campus, and in 1968 accepted a position in the German department at Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo. In 1970 he completed his educational odyssey with a Ph.D in German language and literature at the University of Waterloo.

The crowning challenge of Harry's academic career came with the invitation in 1978 to serve as inaugural Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg. He knew that by accepting he was taking a considerable risk. As chair of the German department at Laurier he was giving up a promising career at a good university in an Ontario community both he and Gertrude enjoyed living in. The risk was that neither he nor anyone else knew what could be made of a new post in the relatively limited and undefined field of Anabaptist-Mennonite history and literature. He would have to devise a programme of study without any model to follow; he would have to create a viable presence within the largest urban Mennonite community anywhere; and he would have to convince both the founder of the Chair, Dr. David Friesen, and the University of Winnipeg that what he was doing was academically respectable while at the same time benefitting the Mennonite community.

Almost two decades later we can say that Harry has met that challenge with a degree of success even he, ever the confident optimist, might not have anticipated. While several other endowed ethnic chairs at Canadian universities have languished or failed outright, the Chair in Mennonite Studies, as embodied by Harry, has gone from strength to strength and developed into a flourishing one-man academic industry that his successor will be hard put to match.

Harry's blend of academic/scholarly skills and personal qualities has always struck me as being unusual enough to be exactly right for his kind of career: serious scholar alternating with zealous popularizer to advance the Mennonite cause at all levels. And to inspire others to follow his lead. Harry has that kind of "evangelizing" power as well. When I first met him in 1978 during fall registration at the University of Winnipeg, I felt immediately drawn to his lively intelligence and warm personality. His energy and enthusiasm

hummed like a dynamo and I soon found my gears meshing with his as he began activating his plans and aspirations. I discovered that there is something irresistible about Harry (quite apart from the qualities Gertrude had found irresistible, I suppose). When he joined our editorial family at the *Mennonite Mirror* his articles, editorials and book reviews came in a steady stream. He also threw his energy and flair into the publishing ventures of the Mennonite Literary Society, and in 1980 came out with his own editorial effort of *Mennonite Images*, a ground-breaking collection of essays on Mennonite issues.

As Chair in Mennonite Studies Harry devised courses in Mennonite history and literature which found a ready response among Mennonite students and which have continued to attract them in ever larger numbers. The popularity of his courses is in no small measure due to his stimulating lectures and to the warmth and enthusiasm he generated both in and out of the classroom. Spin-offs from his courses have come in the form of major seminal articles on Mennonite literature and culture. He also enhanced his reputation as a scholar with some fine papers delivered at academic conferences, especially at the annual German-Canadian Studies symposium. Early on, he established an annual public lecture series under the auspices of the Chair, a series that has produced important scholarship over the years and continues to be remarkably well attended by a cross-section of the Mennonite community in Winnipeg.

As if all this weren't enough, Harry came up with another important project in the early eighties: the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, which has become a prominent focus for Russian-Canadian Mennonite scholarship. Harry's initial dream was to establish a learned journal for all of Mennonite Canada, as *MQR* serves American-Mennonite academia. At about the same time, however, scholars at Conrad Grebel decided to found their own review. Undaunted, Harry pushed ahead with *JMS* and in the first issue in 1983 he defined the role of the new journal with characteristic conviction: "The *Journal of Mennonite Studies* will be firmly rooted in the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition, but will seek to express that tradition in an ever-changing world in which Mennonites are also subject to change." Under Harry's devoted and dynamic editorship that aim has never wavered and *JMS* continues to broaden the scope of Mennonite scholarship, particularly in the areas of Russian and Canadian Mennonite history and literature. In recent years Harry and I have shared the editorial duties but he has continued to be the dynamo that drives the operation.

Working with Harry on some of his many projects, I noted again and again his intense commitment, his capacity for getting things done on time, the sheer joy he got from intellectual and scholarly activity, the deep personal satisfaction he derived from serving the Mennonite community with the gifts God had given him, and, not the least, the modesty with which he placed the many fruits of his labor at the Mennonite altar. For a person like myself, with a touch of indolence in his nature coupled with an innate disinclination to get down to the brass tacks of new or untried projects, Harry Loewen has been literally a God-

send. I know that without his galvanizing presence and frequent pep-talks, his breezy optimism and refusal to take no for an answer, my own labors in the Mennonite vineyard would have been fewer and farther between.

Overarching Harry's fecund career as teacher, scholar, writer and editor is the bright rainbow of his Anabaptist-Mennonite faith. I regard him as a Mennonite Christian in the truest sense of that term. The reasons are easy to cite, exciting to contemplate. As a scholar of the Reformation-Anabaptist period, he has a thorough understanding of and respect for Mennonite theology and tradition. As an ordained minister in the Mennonite Brethren church he has thought through his personal faith and his obligations as a spiritual leader. He has always preached with fervor and sincerity, but with tolerance and generosity towards those whose views and convictions differed from his own. Not that he wasn't quick to expose, often with witty irony, what he perceived as shallow spiritual excesses and an ignorance of Anabaptist tenets in what so often passes for Mennonite religious practise these days. He has the courage to take strong positions on controversial issues, and has a knack for expressing his opposition in terms that are not only clear but non-inflammatory.

And then there is Gertrude. Harry knows how fortunate he is to have her. Supportive as she has been of his career, she has also helped to stabilize and diversify his interests. Together they have raised three sons and are now blessed with two grandchildren. Together they are superb hosts: Gertrude's *verenetje* dinners are legendary among their large circle of friends. Together they have spent many culturally rewarding and relaxing summers and part-summers in Germany, where both spent their formative years. In their handsome retirement home in Kelowna, a nest Gertrude has spent much time feathering in recent years, they will continue to entertain. There, Harry has a spacious, free-standing study in the back yard amidst Gertrude's spectacular displays of flowers and shrubs. That Harry will fade away quietly is unlikely. His one remaining dream seems to be the establishment of a colony of academic friends and former colleagues in the Kelowna paradise. Our book review editor Vic Doerksen has answered the call and is even now having his retirement home built there. Others like Walter Klaassen, Reynold Siemens and Reuben Epp are already there with more likely to follow.

And of course Harry will continue to write and add to the plentiful store of articles and books he has produced over the years. The subjects of his books range eclectically from early studies of Goethe and Luther to his more recent popular successes *Why I Am a Mennonite* (1988), a collection of personal essays by diverse hands, and *No Permanent City* (1993), a fine collection of Mennonite stories from various periods and countries told and retold in Harry's lively style. Both books have been translated into German and will thus gain many more readers. His latest summer project was the writing of children's stories for his own grandchildren. But knowing Harry, I have little doubt that before long many other people's grandchildren will benefit from his artful story-telling.

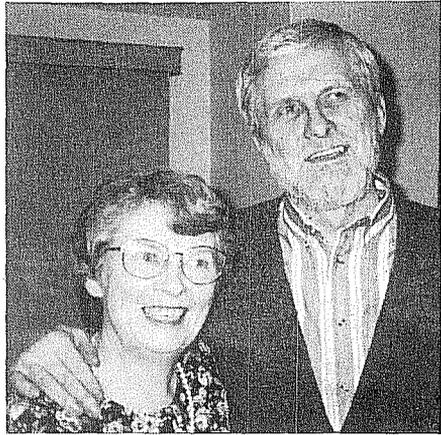
For a man like this, retirement is an ambiguous if not an entirely artificial state. Harry will give up some of his career functions but continue others and perhaps even find new ones. We know that the intellectual and moral dynamo that is Harry Loewen will continue to hum productively. And so, even as we salute him for his rich and multifarious contributions to the Mennonite community we also look forward to what he will give us in future. His work will continue to resonate in others, young and old, which means, of course, another kind of after-life in retirement.

Not bad for a Russian-Mennonite immigrant boy who started off not knowing what a Mennonite was.

Al Reimer

Co-editor

Journal of Mennonite Studies



Victor G. Doerksen – a Tribute

It was in the fall of 1949, entering the tenth grade at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, that I first met Vic Doerksen; about a month ago I had the privilege of spending some five days with him at a resort just outside of Harrisonburg, Virginia—two “old” friends supposedly attending a conference on Anabaptism and Pietism. Doerksen did eventually deliver a paper; I was just along for the ride. Between 1949 and the conference in Harrisonburg (can it be, some forty-five years?!), we have shared a world of experiences, academic interests, spiritual concerns and a friendship—he misled me into taking up the game of golf many years ago—that has not dimmed over the years despite the passage of time and separation due to distance. To pay tribute to Vic Doerksen the scholar, teacher, human being and friend is therefore a distinct honor.

After matriculation from MBCI in 1952, Doerksen worked for the Canadian Pacific Railway for two years in order to help support other members of the family who preceded him in the pursuit of a university education. In 1954 it was his turn to attend the university, and he made the most of it, entering the Honors Program in English and German literature one year later. Gradually, German literature won out over English, not necessarily because of professors in the department like Stirk and Cardinal, but probably because of Professor Karl W. Maurer, a superb interpreter of 19th century German literature, so absorbed in his subject in intimate graduate seminars that he would at times insert the lighted end of his cigarette—he was a chain-smoker—into his mouth! It was at moments like that, I’m convinced, that he did not believe the biblical injunction that it was not what went in, but what came out of a man’s mouth that sullied him. Doerksen later co-edited Maurer’s *Festschrift* and remained close to him until his death in 1995.

After graduating with an Honors B.A. degree in 1958, Doerksen spent a year at the university in Frankfurt, Germany, then returned to complete an M.A. in German literature under Maurer in 1960. For a year he taught at the University of New Brunswick, then another at the University of Manitoba, leaving for the University of Zurich on a Canada Council Fellowship in 1962 to study German literature under the famous Germanist Emil Staiger, and Church History under the equally well-known Fritz Blanke. In 1964 he graduated *Magna cum laude* with a thesis on the 19th century Swabian poet, Eduard Moerike, entitled: *Eduard Moerikes Elegien und Epigramme. Eine Interpretation* (Zurich, 1964).

That summer Doerksen returned to Winnipeg and the University of Manitoba as a lecturer, but in 1965 received a tenure appointment as Assistant Professor in German Literature. In 1968 he was promoted to Associate Professor and in 1974 to Professor. With the grant of tenure and the rank of Associate Professor came administrative duties: in 1968 he received the first of four three-year appointments as head of the department. Now, in his last year, he has once more been recalled to act as head of the Department of German and Slavic Studies. To be recalled as head three times under these circumstances—and then to put off retirement in order to accept a fourth call, however limited—must surely speak eloquently in favor of Doerksen's diplomatic skills or of his saintly qualities, perhaps both. Then again, it may just be the Anabaptist quality of *Gelassenheit* which allows him to suffer abuse, over long periods of time, in relative silence.

Aside from heading up his department over many years, Doerksen has also been an active member of the university and wider Canadian and European academic communities, serving on numerous local, national and the occasional international committees, as well as national and international editorial boards. He has—and this testifies to his standing among his peers—also served as external reviewer for a number of language departments at other universities as well as on boards of granting agencies.

To continue to be a productive scholar under these circumstances is not always easy, but Doerksen has done so to an extent far greater than many a less active academic. From the very outset of his doctoral studies, Doerksen has followed two main lines of scholarly investigation: the one dealing with Eduard Moerike in particular and 19th century Wuerttemberg literary and cultural history in general; the other dealing with Anabaptist/Mennonite literary themes and history. The first is an academic/intellectual interest; the second, more personal. The first gets one into an academic department; the second, satisfies the deepest longings of the Anabaptist soul.

Doerksen belongs to that generation of Canadian Mennonite scholars whose parents were uprooted from the Russian soil they had come to love and transplanted to Canada in the 1920s, in the process very often losing touch with both soil and soul alike. Caught between a nostalgic past and a sometimes painful present, between the German and English languages, between Russian

village and Canadian homeland, many, given an academic opportunity, went in search of their soul, either as a vocation or as an avocation. Some rediscovered it in their Anabaptist heritage which transcended both the present and the recent past. For some, Bender's classic essay was the catalyst; for others, study at European universities—primarily Swiss or German because of the inherited linguistic skills. Doerksen has come about as close to blending these two interests as one can in an academic context. Staiger and Blanke—Moerike and Anabaptism; seemingly unrelated interests. But given the history of 19th and 20th century Russian-Canadian Mennonites, not so unrelated after all.

The continuity of Doerksen's academic interests is truly remarkable. He began with a doctoral study on Moerike's elegies and epigrams; his most recent essay is entitled: *Vorstellung contra Begriff: Eduard Moerike in the Religious Crisis of his Time* (1995). In between lie the magisterial "Die Moerike-Literatur seit 1950—Literaturbericht und Bibliographie," published as a *Sonderdruck* of the prestigious *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift fuer Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* (1973). This established him as one of the leading interpreters of Moerike and led directly to the publication, in 1975, of his *Eduard Moerike* volume in the *Wege der Forschung* series put out by the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft of Darmstadt, Germany. These studies and his preoccupation with Wuerttemberg in the years from the French Revolution to the Frankfurt Parliament also led to other, more encompassing studies of the period, especially since many of Moerike's close friends were involved—to a greater or lesser degree—with the Liberal agenda of the time. Thus, in his *A Path for Freedom: the Liberal Project of the Swabian School in Wuerttemberg*, Doerksen traced these forces for the first time in coherent fashion. His 1994 *Ludwig Uhland and the Critics* then concentrated on perhaps the most important of these liberal literati and illustrated, in convincing fashion, the way succeeding generations had interpreted—and misinterpreted—the man and his work.

The other scholarly strand—the Anabaptist/Mennonite works—are less voluminous, perhaps only because Doerksen is, after all, a teacher of 19th century German literature. Here is more avocation than vocation; more heart than mind that drives the work. Not that the work is therefore 'mindless'; quite the contrary. For the heart very often provides insights the mind of itself would never apprehend. There are essays on the Anabaptist martyr ballads, on German Pietism and its influence upon the Mennonites, on Eduard Wuest and the beginnings of the M. B. Church. Interspersed are essays on more recent Mennonite literary history—all of which one day (hopefully sooner than later) will result in a unique study on the "Mennonite Imagination" from the time of the Reformation to the present, a labor of love that has no forerunners and few models to show the way.

Aside from his scholarly studies, Doerksen has also been an editor and facilitator of Mennonite literature. A moving force in the publication of the

collected works of Arnold Dyck—he chaired the editorial committee and edited volume I with Harry Loewen—he has also published the poetry of Fritz Senn, acted as series editor of the translation of the entire Echo Verlag Historical Series and served on the editorial board of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*. Editorial work not being enough, he translated the Echo volume on the *Mennonite Templars* himself. Earlier, he had already translated *A Wilderness Journey. Glimpses of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia, 1925-1980* for the Mennonite Brethren Studies Center in Fresno, California, and acted as consulting editor for the translation of P.M. Friesen's history. In his spare time he wrote for the *Mennonite Mirror* and served various other local Mennonite literary and historical organizations.

Doerksen's writings and oral presentations are characterized by a clarity, directness and succinctness I have always admired—especially since I was, earlier, verbose to a fault. Imagine my delight, therefore, when at the conference in Harrisonburg on Anabaptism and Pietism, Doerksen had to threaten the moderator of his panel repeatedly in nearly Magisterial Protestant fashion when the latter sought to limit his presentation of "Pietism, Revivalism and the Early Mennonite Brethren" to the time allotted him! Whereas I have—shamed by Doerksen himself—moved in the direction of pith and brevity over the years, Doerksen has, apparently, reversed his course and begun to move in the opposite direction! But then he is the one retiring and I am just beginning to hit my stride!

Doerksen has always been a model to me in another respect, perhaps the truest measure of an academic. His resume lists grants in aid of research nearly in excess of the number of research projects themselves! I have always believed that writing grant proposals was an art, but I had no idea it could be so lucrative. As impressive as his list of publications is, imagine what Doerksen might have accomplished had he turned all that creativity and energy to his scholarly work! It boggles the "Mennonite Imagination" just to think of it.

As I have returned to Winnipeg from time to time I have gained the impression that Doerksen has been at the center of Mennonite literary and historical activity in the province over a long period of time. Never one to demand center stage for himself, he has worked tirelessly through committees and other means to facilitate the work of the recovery of a Mennonite heritage in danger of being lost. He has given unstintingly of his time, talent and vision. Perhaps the one thing he—and others working with him—have not been able to achieve is the institutionalization of gains made in order to ensure their being passed on to succeeding generations. My own fear is—and has long been—that with the passing of the present generation of scholars, many of whom felt compelled to go in search of their Anabaptist/Mennonite souls, the absence of a strong institutional base will limit what can and will be done in the future. Perhaps, as in times past, outsiders—who have little or no understanding of the Anabaptist soul—may once again attempt, as they have done in the past, to tell us who we are. If this happens, however, it will not be Doerksen's fault, but the

collective fault of all of us Mennonite academics who have placed self-interest above the common Mennonite good.

There used to be a tradition—more so in British and Canadian than American universities—of the gentleman/scholar. Occasionally, being a Christian was added to the mix. When the three—Christian/scholar/gentleman (pardon the male chauvinism)—are combined, as they are in Doerksen, one gets that rare breed of person in whom faith, learning and humanity are blended in exactly the right proportions. Though I have little or no first-hand knowledge of his teaching, I would like to think that these elements so evident in his literary and public activity would also manifest themselves in the classroom. I know they have manifested themselves in his relationship with me over the years; by extension, they must also have done so elsewhere.

Doerksen's humanity finds full expression in his relationships with his family, colleagues and wide circle of close friends. It is difficult to think of Doerksen without also thinking of his gentle and friendly wife, Margaret. After her marriage to Vic in 1959, Marg gave up her teaching career and supported her husband in all his academic pursuits, and accompanied him on many of his travels to Europe. Their own child, David, died in 1971. Their two adopted children, Paul and Eirena, compensated for that loss and continue to bring joy to the Doerksens. Socially, Vic and Margaret are known for entertaining students and friends in friendly and warm surroundings.

Many years ago, when I began graduate studies at Stanford University under Lewis W. Spitz, he informed those of us hoping to work in Reformation history that we were about to enter upon a *calling*. This was no mere job that we could lay down as soon as retirement beckoned; a *calling* lasted until God Himself released us. The university might retire us but this did not need to mean the end of our creative and scholarly endeavors. Knowledge, learning, indeed accumulated wisdom collected over many years of diligent study should not come to an end even though teaching might. Much might yet be done; indeed, the "Mennonite Imagination" could envision much that needs to be done. Retire to British Columbia if you must, dear friend; continue to help us to understand ourselves better as long as you can.

Abraham Friesen
University of California, Santa Barbara