THE LIVING MIRROR:

Archeology of Our Faith

by

Lauren Friesen

lfriesen@umich.edu

Chicago Community Mennonite Church

2015
Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #1: Sister Frieda Kaufman
Mennonite “Sisters”, Bethel Deaconess Hospital, Newton, Kansas 1911.

Photo: www.flickr.com. Bethel Deaconess Hospital
In 1900 the 18 year old Frieda Kaufman (1883-1944) from Basel, Switzerland attended a large gathering of Mennonites in Freeman, South Dakota where she proposed that Mennonites in North America begin a Nursing School and Hospital. Three years and a few months later in 1903 Sister Frieda Kaufman, at the age of 22, Kaufman was named the director of Bethel Deaconess Hospital and Nursing School in Newton, Kansas. Three other Sisters, Ida Epp, Catherine Voth and Martha Richert joined her as the initial instructors. Within seven years Mennonites founded 10 Deaconess Hospitals and Nursing schools: 5 in Europe and 5 in North America. The Deaconesses were ordained and served in both health and spiritual capacities. Churches supported these hospitals as their mission and patients paid only as they were able. One of the founders, Martha Richert, left for India in 1909 where she began the first hospital devoted to leprosy patients. The Deaconess Sisters did not marry, lived on the premises, had to wear uniforms and were on call 24/7 through their working years and then retired on-site. Only unmarried, female students were admitted to the nursing programs. In the 1950s many of the hospitals affiliated with other medical providers and by the 1970s the Deaconess movement came to an end. This “Sisters” movement was patterned after Florence Nightingale’s work in the Ukraine during the Crimean War of 1853-1857. During that war Mennonite schools, churches and hospitals in the Crimea and Ukraine served as emergency medical wards for many of the victims. From Florence Nightingale to Sister Kaufman, a significant number of Mennonite women in Europe were inspired to enter health care work and the Sisters movement developed from that. Surely the Lord would say of the Deaconesses, “well done you good and faithful servants.”

Sources:
http://gameo.org/index.php?title=Bethel_Deaconess_Hospital_(Newton,_Kansas,_USA)&oldid=107145
Kaufman, Sister Frieda Marie. Inasmuch then as I am a deaconess, I will glorify my ministry. Newton, KS: General Conference Mennonite Church, 1947.
Thiesen, Marcy. “Without the Past there can be no Future.”  
Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #2: Carel van Mander
Karl van Mander (1548-1606) grew up in Flanders in a Mennonite home. He was talented in art and literature. In his early 20s he wrote eight plays that were performed all across the Netherlands. Then at the age of 24, van Mander traveled to Rome and studied painting under Michael Vasari. Vasari had been a student of Michelangelo. Van Mander’s fellow students under Vasari included Tintoretto and El Greco. Due to his accomplishments in Rome he had a private audience with the Pope Gregory XII. After six years in Rome he returned to Flanders, married and moved to Harleem and became active in the local Mennonite community. In
Harleem he founded a school for painters in 1579 along with another Mennonite Corneliusz Cornelius. The school was in existence until the late 19th century. The school attracted many outstanding artists including Mennonites such as Franz Hals, Jacob, Solomon and Isaac Ruisdael. Van Mander’s hymns were published with the title *The Golden Harp*. This book was in use by many Dutch Mennonites until the 1870s. After a decade of intense work in Harleem, van Mander moved to Amsterdam and founded yet another school for artists and students of classical literature. In the 1700s this school became the foundation for the University of Amsterdam. In his final decade, he published a landmark book *The Lives of the Painters* (*Het Schilderboek*). This volume has never gone out of print from its first edition in 1604 till now. In the century that followed Amsterdam was the center of the Dutch Golden Age and many credit van Mander as the founder of that glorious age. At his funeral in 1606, more than 20,000 people lined the streets of Amsterdam as his coffin was carried from the Mennonite Church to the burial grounds outside the city. Surely the Lord would say, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources:

*Dictionary of Art Historians*: https://dictionaryofarthistorians.org/manderk.htm


---

**Archeology of Our Faith**

*Strata #3: Sarah Gross Lapp*
Sarah Gross Lapp (1837-1902), horse-and-buggy doctor, with her husband Samuel. She delivered over 1,200 babies.

Photo: Hostetler, W., *The Lapps of Nebraska.*
Sarah Gross Lapp (1837-1902) was known as the “Horse and Buggy Doctor” in Adams County, Nebraska. Before moving to Nebraska, Sarah and her husband Samuel Lapp, lived in Pennsylvania where seven of their eleven children were born. Of those seven, six died in early childhood which motivated her to study medicine. Because medical schools were male bastions, she trained in a hospital in Philadelphia under the mentorship of a Dr. George Keller. After a few years of study she passed the medical exam and became a licensed doctor. The Lapps moved to Nebraska in the 1870s. where, with her horse and buggy, she traveled across the praries to attend to those who needed medical assistance. People marveled at her courage in making home visits come rain or shine, snow or sleet. Even though she was a general practitioner, she assisted with the delivery of over 1,200 babies.

Dr. Lapp was also known for her unusual remedies. Consider, for example, the young boy who was guant and pale from being indoors all winter. When Dr. Gross was called to the home she recommended outdoor play. She took a bucket of water, poured it on the ground and told the boy to get his feet and hands all muddy. When he began to lick some of the mud off his fingers, she advised the parents that his malnutrition made him crave the minerals in the soil. Within a week, he was well. In Nebraska, the Lapps had four children, all boys. Two became Mennonite ministers and two sojourned to India as missionaries. Mahlon, the eldest built a clinic in Dhamtari, India which today is a fully modern hospital. The youngest, son, George, also went to Dhamtari, India where he established an orphanage and school for the lower caste children. Eventually a church was established in that village and Mahatma Ghandi spoke in the courtyard of this church during his nonviolent campaign to free India from British rule. Son George also served as an Interim President of Goshen College. Sarah Gross Lapp’s commitment to service and education has been passed down across continents and subsequent generations in America. The examples are too numerous to mention. Surely the Lord would say of Dr. Sarah Gross Lapp, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.“

Sources:

Burkhard, Sarah Schiffler. "Roseland Mennonite Church (Roseland, Nebraska, USA)." Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. 1959.
Lapp Family History, Oral Tradition. n.d.
Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #4: Lina Zook Ressler
Jacob and Lina Zook Ressler (1869-1948)
Niagara Falls, 1903

Photo:  http://www.mennoniteusa.org/?s=ressler&submit=Search
Lina Zook was born in Wayne County, Ohio in 1869. As a teenager, Lina set her sights on becoming a missionary. With the encouragement of her home church, she came to Chicago as one of the founding members of the Chicago Mennonite Mission. The Mission opened its doors in 1893 on the corner of West 18th Street and Wells. Eight Mennonite workers staffed this new venture and they were funded by Mennonite Churches in Ohio, Indiana and Illinois. The Mission provided weekly tutoring services, home visits, basic health services, nutrition education, classes in life skills and Bible studies. On any given day, more than a 100 children participated in a variety of educational activities. Lina Zook was a key figure in this venture as the Mission began to collaborate with other Chicago ministries. In the absence of Mennonite materials, she relied on a Presbyterian curriculum for bible classes. She arranged for Doctors from the American Baptist clinic to provide health care for the children. Because she was a gifted singer, Lina quickly became a soloist for Dwight L. Moody’s evangelistic services. All of this was not without controversy in her home church. Within a few years, she was asked to return to Ohio.

On her way back to Ohio, Elkhart Institute, the forerunner of Goshen College, hired her to teach Bible and serve as Preceptress which in today’s language means the Director of the Biblical Studies Curriculum. While teaching in Elkhart, she met Jacob Ressler who was on his way to India to serve as a missionary. A month after they met, he wrote a letter proposing marriage. After an 18 month romance by correspondence, Jacob returned to America in 1903 for the wedding. Suddenly Lina voiced her misgivings: she did not want to be called Mrs. Jacob Ressler and insisted on being known as Lina Zook Ressler. Jacob accepted her idea and they married. After four years as missionaries in India, Lina and Jacob were hired by Herald Press in Scottdale, Pennsylvania where they served as editors for the remainder of their working years. Lina wrote and edited Sunday school materials and two magazines for children: Beams of Light and Words of Cheer. Lina wrote five hymns which have been published in a variety of youth hymnals. She kept meticulous diaries throughout her life which now occupy more than four feet of shelf space in the Mennonite Archives in Goshen, Indiana. Surely the Lord would say of Lina Zook Ressler, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources:
Lapp, John A. Mennonite Church in India. Scottdale, PA., 1982.
__________. Hymns. http://www.hymnary.org/person/Ressler_LZ1

Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #5: Nicolaas Bidloo

How would you like to be the personal physician to Russian Czar? Not just any Czar but Peter the Great? Peter the Great lived in Amsterdam for a year and a half when he was 26 years
old. During that time a Mennonite doctor, Nicolaas Bidloo became his personal physician. When the Czar returned to Moscow in 1703, Dr. Bidloo accompanied him and continued to live there for the rest of his life. In the Netherlands, the Bidloo family was well known for their medical advancements. Nicolaas’s father Lambert, also a physician and professor, authored, in Latin, a text on botany. Nicolaas’s uncle, Govert taught medicine in Leiden and wrote, in Latin, a classic text on human anatomy. Govert was also the personal physician to William of Orange who became the King of England following the Glorious Revolution. In addition to being a physician, Nicolaas was an accomplished painter, musician (violin), horticulturist, linguist, educator and architect. He designed and built the first hospital and medical school in Russia and became its educational director. That medical school would later become the University of Moscow and hence the sculpture honoring Peter the Great and Bidloo as its founders.

Dr. Bidloo wrote, in Latin, a 1,000 page treatise on medicine and surgery which was quickly translated into Russian and became a standard medical text across Europe until the late 1800s. The historian O. Peter Grell credits the Bidloo family of physicians for demonstrating the compatibility between science and religion. Their work, he claims, set the stage for an integration of religion and science during the Dutch Enlightenment.1 Dr. Bidloo also designed and built a model Dutch village on his large estate outside of Moscow. There he planted medicinal herbs and experimented with vegetables that could grow in the Russian climate. During summer weekends, Bidloo frequently conducted outdoor orchestra concerts on the front lawn of his home. Peter the Great, his entourage and visiting royalty were often in attendance. This village fell in disrepair during the Soviet Era (1917-1991) but has now been completely restored.

The extended Bidloo families were very active in the Flemish Mennonite Church in the Netherlands and Nicolaas maintained his ties via financial contributions and occasional visits back to his home congregation. Surely the Lord would say of Nicolaas Bidloo, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources:

Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #6: Francis Daniel Pastorius

Photo: http://www.philart.net/art.php?id=273

Francis Daniel Pastorius (1650-1730) was a law student at the University of Jena, Germany when he read literature on the Mennonites. After completing his Juris Doctor, he moved to Crefeld, Germany and joined the Flemish Mennonite congregation. There he crossed paths with William Penn. In 1681, the King of England granted Penn a large tract of land in the new world and Penn visited Mennonites in Holland and Germany to recruit them for his new colony. Pastorius was interested along with approximately 35 families in Crefled. He arranged
for a village settlement and in 1683 Germantown, Pennsylvania became the home for these new immigrants. Pastorius was the mayor, judge and spiritual leader for this new settlement. The Mennonites lacked a meeting house so they shared a building with the local Quakers. In 1688, five years after their arrival, the Mennonites from Crefled issued the first anti-slavery document in the New World. The following sentence from this document illustrates his concern: “In Europe there are many oppressed for conscience sake; and here there are those oppressed which are of a black colour.” He opposed both: religious oppression and racial oppression. Not only did he bring Mennonites to the New World, he helped them organize into a congregation in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Pastorius also experimented with gardening and took meticulous notes on which herbs, vegetables, flowers and grain crops thrived or failed in the Pennsylvania climate. His own fields of flax formed the basis for the Mennonite weaving industry in colonial Pennsylvania. He wrote letters in seven different languages and also became fluent in two Native American languages.

As the Colony Governor, William Penn ordered Pastorius to build a jail in Germantown for civic offenders but no jail was built. Eventually a set of stocks arrived from Philadelphia and still Pastorius refused to use them and preferred diligent conversation with a transgressor. Eventually, though, they were put to use. One Mennonite bet another that he could not smoke 100 pipes in one day. The stocks were used not for the one who smoked but the one who placed the bet! He was known for issuing an annual decree that “On this day, all crimes and transgressions from the past are forgiven.” In his spare time, he taught children, both boys and girls, basic education skills and in the absence of available materials, wrote his own texts. This Mennonite leader was known for his cooperation and collaboration with people from other traditions, especially the English speaking Quakers and Native Americans. One Mennonite historian has called him a Menno-Quaker in the best sense of that term. Although the record is unclear as to whether he actually joined either group and as a result, Pietist Lutherans, Quakers and Mennonites in Pennsylvania all recognize him as a religious and civic leader. Pastorius was also a poet with more than 300 published works. Two centuries later, the Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier penned his sixty-five page poem “The Pennsylvania Pilgrim” in honor of Pastorius. As one biographer stated, “Everything he touched he did adorn.” Surely the Lord would say of Francis Daniel Pastorius, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources:


Strata #7: Rodolphe Petter
Rodolphe Petter was born in the Lake Geneva region of Switzerland. His parents were Protestants: father a Huguenot and mother a Waldensian. Both are French protestant
denominations. Young Rodolphe was orphaned at age seven and then moved from one relative to another. In his early teen years, a blind Huguenot pastor and theologian hired Rodolphe as an assistant. He read aloud theological treatises and newspapers, served as a travel guide and took dictation for the pastor’s letters. When the pastor died Petter, in his middle teens, moved in with the Samuel Gerber family and worked on their farm. The Gerbers were Mennonites in the Jura region. At that time Mennonites, and especially the Gerbers, placed a high emphasis on mission work. Petter had a dream about becoming a missionary and so he enrolled in six year theological program at the Basel Institute for Linguistics and Missions. Also, a romance blossomed between Rodolphe and Marie Gerber and upon completion of his education program, they married.

Shortly after the wedding in 1890, Rodolphe and Marie moved to America and after a year of language study at Oberlin College, began their life work among the Cheyenne people in Cantonment, Oklahoma. Initially they lived in a small house but after it burned down, a large tent (see photo) served as home, research station, classroom and church. The Petters were already fluent in French, German, English and Rodolphe could read Latin and Greek. Together, Marie and Rodolphe began to learn Cheyenne. It is a difficult language and according to the Cheyenne no one who was not born into the tribe had ever learned to speak it. They kept extensive notes on words, idioms, grammar and other linguistic patterns. Their attentiveness to the language made them welcome guests in many homes. Rodolphe’s training in linguistics enabled him to develop a Cheyenne orthography (written language) which is still in use today.

After nearly 20 years in America, Marie passed away in 1910. Three years later, Rodolphe married Bertha Kinsinger who was also a linguist with an interest in Native American languages. After 25 years in Oklahoma, the Petters moved in 1916 to the Cheyenne Reservation in Montana. While the Petters also thought that that Christianity, as a revealed faith, was superior to Native religions, they diverged from many other missionaries by advocating that the Cheyenne people, their language and way of life had value in itself. They worked against Native American assimilation into the American Way of Life! Look at their body of work: a Cheyenne dictionary, a hefty tome of 1126 pages, a Cheyenne grammar, two Cheyenne hymn books, a translation of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrims Progress*, the complete *New Testament* and most of the *Old* in Cheyenne illustrate their commitment to the Cheyenne people. The Petters also published a beginner’s guide for learning Cheyenne. All in all, they produced 8 books in a language that had, till then, never been written. Lawrence Hart, Mennonite pastor and Cheyenne Chief has credited Petter with the preservation of the Cheyenne people. When everything else was taken away (buffalo, deer, fishing streams, native arts and horses) Petter helped sustain a Cheyenne identity by preserving the language. The Petters, wrote Chief Hart, are now viewed as Saints among the Cheyenne. Surely the Lord would say of Marie, Rodolphe and Bertha Petter, “Well done thou good and faithful servants.”

Sources:


Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #8: Florence Cooprider Friesen
Florence Cooprider was born in McPherson, Kansas in 1887. As a child she suffered from Diphtheria, Scarlet Fever and Tuberculosis and recovered from each. Florence had what was described a delicate constitution. At a Goshen College basketball game she fainted when she saw a player sprain his ankle. The ankle was taped and the player continued to play but Florence had to be carried out in a stretcher. While at Goshen College she read a report stating that many women in India refused the services of a male doctor and so their death rate in childbirth was very high. With that knowledge, she announced her intention to enroll in medical school. Her mother, Henrietta Brunk Cooperider, was opposed and stated “The sight of blood makes you sick. You can’t even cut off the head of a chicken. How will you do surgery?” Florence replied “Let me prove I can do it.” Her mother brought three chickens to the back steps of the house and handed Florence the ax. Within minutes Florence met the challenge and with her parents approval entered the University of Illinois Medical School. Following medical school she left for India and devoted her life there to the health of women and children. She began her work with the health needs of women in India and set up six satellite clinics in villages surrounding Dhamtari, India. Dhamtari was the site of a Mennonite Hospital that served all the castes in Indian society including what Indian historian, P. J. Malagar, identified as Hindus, Untouchables, Aboriginals and Muslims. One of her patients once stated, “Ah, your God must be a very good god, to send a doctor to the women in India.” Also, while in India she married the widower P. A. Friesen who already had 4 children. In addition to her practice, Dr. Cooprider Friesen effectively trained a large number of nurses and encouraged many to continue their medical studies. Even to this day, Dhamtari is a significant center for women’s health in India. Dr. Cooprider Friesen’s practice in India consisted of assisting women with birthing, education on malnutrition, leprosy and common childhood diseases. After her retirement, she moved back to Kansas and operated a maternity clinic in her own home. She had a birthing room and recovery areas for the mother and child. Two children were born to P.A. and Florence. The youngest is Paul Friesen, professor emeritus of art at Hesston and Bethel Colleges. One of her step sons, John Friesen also served as a missionary in India and devoted much of his work to Leprosy care. And to make the circle complete, one of John Friesen’s grandsons is the pastor of Ellis Avenue Baptist Church in Hyde Park, Chicago. Surely the Lord would say of Florence Cooprider Friesen, “Well done thou good and faithful Servant.”

Sources:

*Building on the Rock.* Scottdale: Mennonite Publishing House, 1926. Written by missionaries located in Dhamtari, India.


Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #9: von Beckerath family
Johannes Brahms at the Piano, Willy von Beckerath
Photo: www.musixcool.com
von Beckerath Organ, St. Paul’s Cathedral, Pittsburgh

Photo: atonementparish.blogspot.com

The Mennonite von Beckerath family of musicians, artists, weavers, politicians, vintners, scholars and organ builders
The von Beckeraths were a Dutch Mennonite family of that moved to Krefeld, Germany in the early 1600s. Little is known of them, apart from their reputation as silk weavers and Mennonite leaders, until Hermann and his younger brother Rudolf step into the history books in the 1800s.

In 1815, at the age of 14, Hermann left the family weaving industry and apprenticed at the Krefeld Bank. By the time he was 25, the Krefeld Mennonite Church elected him as one of the pastors. Upon reaching the ripe age of 31, he bought the bank and renamed it the Beckerath-Heilmann bank. In 1840, at age of 39, he was elected to the Parliament in Berlin. From that vantage point, he delivered one speech after another pleading for full German citizenship for Mennonites and Jews. His speeches on the rights of minorities were so influential that a publisher released them with the title, *Reden und Redner*. A line from that book has been quoted and adapted by many: “Solange die Juden nicht frei sind, sind wir selbst nicht frei.” “As long as the Jews are not free, we ourselves are not free either.” Hermann became disillusioned with the slow progress in Parliament and joined the 1848 revolution to rid Germany of its dukes and princes. Many fled into self-exile. He was a popular speaker at those revolutionary gatherings in Frankfurt. Von Beckerath was influential in drafting the declaration entitled “The Basic Rights of the German People”. This treatise is now viewed as one of the foundational documents for German democracy today. A few years after the revolution failed, Beckerath was invited by the Kaiser to Berlin as the head of a new commission on German freedoms. His work resulted in granting Jews citizenship in areas in Northern Germany where the Prussian Kaiser ruled. During all that time, Hermann remained president of his bank, the primary violinist in a chamber orchestra and pastor of the Krefeld Mennonite Church.

His brother Heinrich was also active in the church, a violinist of renown and a business leader. He purchased land along the lower Rhine River and founded the von Beckerath vineyards. The property also was home to the medieval Cracau Castle which served as a home and winery.

The von Beckerath generation that followed Hermann developed close ties with the musician Clara Schumann and sponsored many of her concerts. She introduced them to the composer Johannes Brahms who was promptly invited to the country estate of Alwin von Beckerath. On that first visit with Brahms at the piano, the von Beckerath women and men sat down with their violins, violas and cellos and the music began. After that first run through on a new composition, Brahms reportedly stated, “Donnerwetter hier muss man sich ja zusammennehmen und schön spielen.” Roughly translated it is “Holy cow, one has to be on their toes to play with this crowd!” After that first visit, Brahms was a frequent house guest at Cracau and stayed for weeks at a time. During one of those impromptu recitals, Willy von Beckerath took out his crayons and rendered the iconic portrait of Brahms at the piano.

There are many distinguished descendants among the von Beckeraths but time only allows us to mention only two.

In the late 1800s Rudolf von Beckerath established a pipe organ company in Hamburg, Germany. That firm is still flourishing and the other image is an example of their work in America.

Another descendent, Jürgen von Beckerath was a scholar who specialized in Ancient Egyptian history and hieroglyphic writing. He published more than a hundred scholarly articles and books on Egyptian Pharaohs, religious traditions and cultural developments.
Today the von Beckeraths have settled in various countries across the globe. While some are no longer Mennonites, many continue affiliation with the Mennonite Church. Surely the Lord would say of the von Beckerath family, “Well done thou good and faithful servants.”

Sources:


Email exchanges with Krefeld Mennonite Church (Germany) pastor Christoph Wiebe: cw@mennoniten-kr.de
Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #10: James Lark
Bishop James (1888-1978) and Rowena Lark (1892-1978)

Photo: www.gameo.org
James Lark was born in Savannah, Georgia, the only child of Lela and James Lark. Orphaned at six years of age and lived with relatives. He was baptized in the local Baptist church at age 16. With the help of relatives and friends graduated from Quaker Institute for College Youth in Pennsylvania in 1916. He taught high school in Jacksonville, Florida and married Rowena Winters, also a teacher, in 1918. In 1927 they moved to Quakertown, Pennsylvania and began attending Rocky Ridge Mennonite Church. They purchased a farm next to the church property and Rowena continued teaching. The Larks organized local summer camps and Bible schools for children in the area. In 1935 they moved to Brentwood, Maryland and James organized youth activities for the local Mennonite Church.

In 1944 the Chicago Mennonite Mission invited them to serve as directors of education. James taught Bible, history and practical skills (gardening, electronics repair, etc.). Rowena taught music and courses in hygiene and health. They became a team in ministry. James was ordained as a Bishop by the Illinois Conference in 1946 and founded the Dearborn Mennonite Church (later renamed the Bethel Mennonite Church). The Larks purchased 10 acres in Hopkins Park, Illinois as a summer retreat and learning center for urban children. They named it Camp Rehoboth (cf. Gen 26.22) and the St. Ann Congregation emerged from the work at this camp.

Over the next few years, the James and Rowena were in great demand by many churches. They began Mennonite summer Bible Schools and camps in Saginaw, Michigan, East St. Louis, Illinois, Fresno and Los Angeles, California. Eventually, in 1960 they moved to Fresno and bought land and a building to start a new church. After a decade in Fresno, Bishop James and Rowena Lark moved to Los Angeles where they provided pastoral leadership for the Calvary Mennonite Church.

After Rowena passed away in 1970, at age 78, James moved to Wichita, Kansas to be nearer to some of his children. There he started his final church venture: Zion Mennonite. His vision expanded as his years advanced. The church in Wichita had a community garden, a small clinic, social center for the aged, recreation areas and programs for infants and young children. He called this a venture in “wholistic ministry.” In 1978, at the age of 90, James passed away peacefully in his sleep.

Surely the Lord would say of James and Rowena Lark, “Well done thou good and faithful servants.”

Sources:


http://www.docstoc.com/docs/101363332/Hm1-566-James-and-Rowena-Lark
The Archeology of Faith

Strata #11: Lois Mary Gunden Clemens
Lois Mary Gunden Clemens (1915 – 2005)
Lois Mary Gunden Clemens was named “Righteous Among the Nations” for saving the lives of Jewish children in France during the Holocaust. Gunden is only the fourth American to be recognized with this prestigious honor from Yad Vashem, Israel’s official memorial to Jewish victims of the Holocaust.

During World War II, in a French Mediterranean town far from her home in Goshen, Ind., Lois Mary Gunden Clemens risked her own safety to save the lives of Jewish children. In 1941 Gunden Clemens joined Mennonite Central Committee and the Secours Mennonite aux Enfants to establish a children’s home in southern France near the Mediterranean. The children’s home became a safe haven for Spanish refugees as well as for Jewish children, many of whom were smuggled out of the nearby internment camp of Rivesaltes.

One morning while the children were out for a walk, a policeman arrived at the center in order to arrest three of the Jewish children, Louis, Armand and Monique Landesmann. Gunden Clemens told the police that the children were out and would not return until noon. At noon the policeman appeared again and ordered her to pack the children’s belongings and prepare them for travel. This time Gunden Clemens told him that their clothing was still being laundered and would not be dry until the late afternoon. Gunden Clemens testified that throughout that day and evening she prayed for wisdom, guidance, and the safety of the children. The officer never returned and the children were spared. Finally, in January 1943, the Germans detained Gunden Clemens in a camp for more than a year before releasing her to the United States as part of a prisoner exchange.

After her release, Gunden Clemens returned to Goshen College to teach, and later earned her doctorate in French from Indiana University. She married widower Ernest Rittenhouse Clemens and after moving to Pennsylvania, she taught at Temple University from 1965 to 1975 and at North Penn High School in Lansdale. She editor of The Voice, the national publication of the Women’s Missionary Society of Mennonite Board of Missions and authored the widely read book Women Liberated.

In a 1989 interview with the Philadelphia Inquirer, Gunden Clemens said, “It doesn’t matter whether you are male or female, but what matters is the person you are and what you can give to the life of the church and the community.”

Three of the Jewish children who were under Gunden Clemens’ care are still living, and were able to give testimonies to Yad Vashem about her. Surely the Lord would say of Lois Gunden Clemens, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources:

Redacted from Goshen College Communication and Marketing News Release, July 17, 2013 and used with permission.
Archeology of Our Faith

Strata #12: Hans de Ries
Hans de Ries (1553-1635)

Photo: GAMEO

Hans de Ries was a Catholic priest in Antwerp, Belgium when he and another cleric, Hans Bret were arrested and tried for teaching Anabaptism. Hans De Ries was found innocent
but Bret was burned at the stake in the market square. De Ries promptly fled to central Holland where he was appointed pastor in a Protestant Dutch Reformed congregation. Within a few months he resigned his post. He had given one sermon after another on nonresistance and yet the women and men brought their daggers and swords into the church. He quickly left for the city of Alkmaar north of Amsterdam. In Alkmaar, he was rebaptized as an adult and began his long ministry among Mennonites. After serving for about a year, he was again a nomadic ministry across Holland, North Germany and far into what today is Poland. Eventually he also traveled to South Germany and Switzerland to train pastors and mediate congregational conflicts. After 16 years on the road, he returned to Alkmaar where he was pastor of the Mennonite church for the nearly forty years.

On account of his travels, de Ries knew more about the entire Mennonite church than any other pastor. He recognized the diversity that had been with the Anabaptist movement from the beginning and still continued into his day. There were significant differences in doctrine, worship practices, urban versus rural vocations, clothing styles, foods, languages, acceptable music for worship and even a preference for spoken versus silent prayer. In the Netherlands there were also great divisions. The Flemish in the south emphasized the importance of simple dress as a symbol of separation from society. The Frisians in the north endlessly debated nuances in doctrine while the Collegiants toward the west sought a rational, universal and abstract faith that transcended traditional boundaries. For example, the Collegiants welcomed the Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza into their circles. Finally, de Ries’s association of congregations, the Waterlanders, valued artistic expression and social action. This was the Golden Age in Holland and many artists, including Rembrandt, attended Waterlander services. Many artists, academics, physicians, poets and were active in Mennonite churches during that era.

The religious and cultural differences among Mennonites did not discourage de Ries from developing a vision for a unified Mennonite church. Instead of reconciling these differences, he side-stepped them and emphasized the importance of beginning common ministries that no one congregation could undertake on its own. Under his leadership the differing Anabaptist groups established homes for orphans, developed programs to aid widows, provided theological institutes for pastors and church leaders and began issuing publications for all interested congregants. As a result some the orphanages and homes for widows are still functioning. Ventures in service, publication and education among Dutch Mennonites have flourished ever since leading, eventually to the 1735 establishment of the first Mennonite seminary in Amsterdam.

De Ries’s work attracted the attention of Baptists in England. A large contingent of nearly 150 came to the Netherlands and began discussing a possible merger with Mennonites. When their leader, John Smyth, suddenly passed away about a third of the group returned to England while the rest joined Waterlander Mennonite churches in Western Holland. Also Unitarians (Socinians) from Poland and Moravia as well as Quakers from England traveled to Netherlands as guests of the Collegiants and Waterlanders. De Ries was deeply involved their discussions on doctrinal and religious matters. He was drawn to the Quakers and believed that the light of God resides in the souls of all. C. J. Dyck wrote that de Ries’s work and writings were intentioned to “achieve, rather than enforce consensus” among Mennonites.

Even though Mennonites were greatly divided in his time, de Ries never shunned, banned or excommunicated any member, church or group of Mennonite churches. He taught, lived and accepted diversity within the body of Christ. This is remarkable because of the great differences.
Again and again he emphasized the need for peace, the necessity to work in harmony with all people and especially for peaceful home life. He admonished the men to show love toward their wives and children and to avoid bringing the tensions and coarseness of the workplace into their homes.

De Ries also published extensively. His books and pamphlets on theology comprise about approximately 1,675 written pages. He also wrote a hymnbook for Waterlander churches, more than 200 pages of letters and a massive book on Anabaptist martyrs that later became the core of van Braght’s *Martyr’s Mirror*. One of the saddest aspects of his legacy is that only one of his publications, *A Confession of Faith*, has been translated into English. That translation was done in 1962 by C. J. Dyck a former professor at AMBS. With de Ries’s encouragement, Mennonites became central figures in the development of the Dutch Golden Age of art, literature, commerce and education. This visionary man of peace, Hans de Ries, may have much to offer us today as we live with congregational diversity while maintaining unity in service and ministry.

Surely the Lord would say of Hans de Ries, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

**Sources:**


**Archeology of our Faith**

Strata #13: Lena Waltner
Lena Waltner (1895-1992)

Photo source: *Encircled: Stories of Mennonite Women.*
Lena Waltner deserves to be named the mother of Mennonite art education. She was the first full time art professor at a North American Mennonite College. She designed the first curriculum for an art degree at that college and her students became widely known within national and international art circles. Art students were her only children and she devoted her life to them.

Lena Waltner was born near Marion, South Dakota in 1895. She was educated in Freeman Junior College in South Dakota, Bethel College in Kansas, summer art institutes at the University of Iowa and earned an MA in art from Colorado State University. Her thesis on designing an art curriculum was adopted by the State of South Dakota for their kindergarten through grade 12 art education program.

After four years of teaching at Sioux Falls, Freeman Junior, and Yankton colleges in South Dakota, she accepted the challenge to teach art full time at Bethel College. It is remarkable that in 1934, at the height of the Depression, Lena and the college planned a new degree in art. Previous art instructors at Bethel had taught part time and only offered courses as electives.

Her curriculum included courses in painting, drawing, pottery, weaving and art education. Almost immediately the college began to offer a minor in art and considered plans for a major. Due to financial realities of the time, the art major was put on hold for a number of years.

Lena Walter emphasized a comprehensive view of art. She wrote, “The idea that art and artists are confined to art galleries is antiquated; instead, art must function in daily living. Art is expressed in everything that is done … It includes, therefore, vastly more than painting and sculpture.” Outside the classroom she devoted considerable energy to landscape design, developing plans and supervising the building of her own home, creating table service on a potter’s wheel and filling her walls with original art. Posters and reproductions were not her style.

A commitment to art research sent her to Paris, Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut, Mexico City, the native peoples of South Dakota and the American South West. In the 1950s she was invited to Colombia, South America to lead summer workshops in painting and weaving. That trip offered another opportunity to research South American fabric design.

Throughout her career she had to contend with colleagues, churches and other audiences that did not appreciate art or understand how visual learning might be a valid field of serious study. Her struggles would be familiar with anyone who has worked in an academic arts program: space, materials, curriculum requirements and the general impression that the arts are not essential for life but luxury. According to her colleagues, she was very professional in how she could “hold her own” during contentious faculty discussions.

Lena took considerable satisfaction in the success of her former students. A significant number became professors of art at a variety of colleges and universities as well as designers for major publishing houses. Galleries in many cities, including New York, Milwaukee, Chicago, Basel and Berlin, have exhibited the work of her students.

Waltner was a member of the American Association of University Women, Western Art Association, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, served as the president of the Kansas State Art Teachers' Association and editor of its publication, Art Scoop.

Lena retired in 1960 and remained active on the Bethel Campus. She was instrumental in designing the new art studios and galleries in the Fine Arts Center that was completed in 1965.

Even after all of these achievements, her greatest sense self-worth sprang from the art education program. She wrote, “The most important product of an art program is a properly
educated child…to see the unfolding of intellectual, emotional and mental capacities of students.”
Surely the Lord would say of Lena Waltner, “Well done thou good and faithful servant.”

Sources: