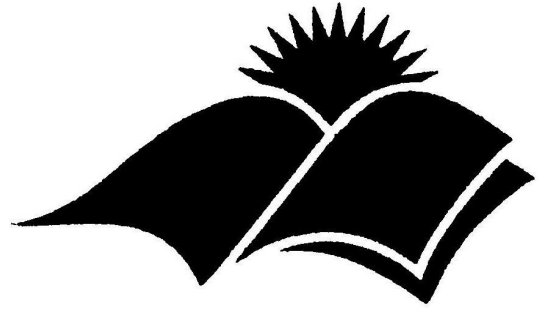


# Historian



Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association

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Hours are 9:00 a.m. until 12 noon, Monday to Friday, holidays excluded

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Edited by Jill Nicholson

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## Jakob Leonard Dück's Schönfeld Tagebuch

By John Dick

Jakob Leonard Dück (1852-1922) was my great-grandfather who served the Schönfeld Mennonite church from 1889 to 1919. This Tagebuch is his record of services to Schönfeld family and church. My paternal and maternal great-grandparents both lived in Schönfeld, they shared the same name but were not related. Jakob Leonard and Agatha (Löwen) Dück were my maternal great-grandparents. They had nine children, the youngest was my grandmother (Tina - Mrs. N.N. Driedger).

Jakob writes that in 1891 there were 280 Mennonite families living within Schönfeld, 769 men and 672 women, a total of 1,441 adults. Schönfeld was not the homogeneous Mennonite colony common at that time. Schönfeld was unique in that it was recognized as a separate municipality within a Russian municipality by the Tsarist government. As such, its farms and estates were scattered over an area similar to Essex County. That meant that Schönfelders lived among other ethnic neighbours, including Russians, Ukrainians and their villages. This geographic distance meant extensive travel time to church ministers and also left them vulnerable to extensive violence later on. Within that large district there was a concentration of homes, a church, a high school and stores also called Schönfeld.

Jakob served the Schönfeld congregation until 1919 when he and his family fled to Neukirch, Molotschna where he died in 1922. His wife Agatha brought this Tagebuch to Canada. When our grandmother died in 1973 the book was left to our mother (Agatha (Driedger) Dick). When our mother died in May of 2013, the Tagebuch came into our possession.

At the beginning of his book Jakob left notes about his family, a prayer for their marriage and the names of their children, including the time of day of their birth. On the final pages, after his death, Agatha summarized his years serving

the church and the community – 1,342 sermons, 221 funerals and 115 weddings.

Today Jakob's Tagebuch resides in the Essex/Kent Mennonite Historical Association archives on Pickwick Drive. It is in very delicate condition with many loose pages. Not all 173 pages were in chronological order. Thanks to sister Ruth for the considerable work in piecing them together. Deciphering the old German script looked to be a significant challenge. His writing had been very neat but it had grown faint over the years. It required weeks of painstaking work. For that task we must give a huge thank-you to Johanna Dyck. When I first approached her she understood what a commitment that would be. I greatly respected her for wanting to think about it. Days later Johanna called and accepted. From that point she was relentless in her dedication and quest for accuracy, even seeking out acquaintances to help understand peculiar terms and Russian words. Johanna converted the 173 pages of script into German writing we can understand. These pages are now archived with the Tagebuch along with an English translation of Johanna's German work.

Jakob's Tagebuch witnessed the Schönfelders happy times and it also discloses the tragedies too. It accounts many funerals. of young parents, of too many children and of course those murdered in the anarchy. While we had hoped to find personal comments about life at that time, there were few. The Tagebuch is Jakob's account of family and church services, including the scripture passage he referenced for each occasion. This Tagebuch however, while lacking the personal comments we hoped for, is an excellent record for those working on genealogy.

When Amy Neufeld married Sam Varteniuk in Peterborough on July 21, 2007, she became the most recent in a succession of women who have worn an antique silver tiara known as the Neufeld Crown. The crown, now one hundred and twenty years old, remains a treasured reminder of life in Ukraine for the Neufeld family, and also continues to connect each succeeding generation of their far-flung descendants.



Johann Neufeld (1839-1901) was the owner of two prosperous estates, Felsenbury and Rosenhof, near the Dnieper River in Ukraine. In 1887, he decided to make a special gift for his wife, Katherina Wiens Neufeld (1844-1917) on the occasion of their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. He chose a gift based on the theme of a myrtle wreath.

Myrtle is a shrub, common in the Mediterranean region, with small narrow leaves, white blossoms, and dark blue edible berries that have uses in herbal medicine. The plant has a long symbolic association with love and marriage. In Greek mythology, it was sacred to Aphrodite, goddess of love. In many European traditions, a bride would wear a sprig of myrtle on her wedding gown, and the newly-wed couple would plant it and raise a myrtle bush as a reminder of their marriage vows.

Johann Neufeld travelled to Germany and commissioned a jeweller to make a myrtle wreath out of pure Mexican silver. He also had a matching silver lapel pin made in the shape of a sprig of myrtle tied with a ribbon. The pieces were exquisitely crafted, with every leaf separately fashioned, and many finely-detailed silver blossoms and berries.

At Johann's and Katherina's silver wedding on January 5, 1888, the eldest daughter, Elizabeth, placed the crown on her mother's head, and the pin on her father's lapel.

Johann and Katherina had eight children, Elizabeth (1864-1920), Johann (1867-1920), Gerhard (1869-1918), Katherina (1871-1918), Anna (1882-1968), Heinrich (1885-1942), Herman (1887-1956) and Maria (1890-1954), (who was born two years after her parents' silver wedding when her mother was 46 years old).

Elizabeth and her husband Heinrich Wiens (1854-1930) were next to wear the crown and pin on their silver wedding on July 12, 1908. The heirlooms were then passed to her brother Johann Neufeld Jr., since he and his wife, Olga Cornies (1877-1947), would be next to celebrate their twenty-five anniversary.

But the Russian Revolution brought a violent end to the peaceful and prosperous life the Mennonites had known for 150 years in Ukraine. About 1918, as the raiding and destruction of the Mennonite estates by revolutionaries and bandits increased, Johann and Olga, who had inherited the Rosenhof estate, were forced to flee, leaving many of their personal possessions, including the crown and pin, behind. Rosenhof was turned into a state commune by the Soviet government.

Elizabeth and Heinrich Wiens and their eight children were also driven from their estate, and the family was forced to split up. In 1919, Elizabeth, Heinrich and two of their daughters, Lily and Anna, had to move to Rosenhof and were working as farm labourers in the commune, along with other displaced Mennonites and Russians. Lily and Anna discovered the crown and pin among their uncle Johann's personal things. Miraculously, they had not been found by the looters. They decided to bury the treasure until it might be safe to retrieve it.

Burying valuables was not without risk. Bandits would often probe the ground in farmyards with the points of their sabres, looking for soft spots where something might be buried. And some people hid their treasure so well that they themselves couldn't find it again.

In 1920, Lily and her husband, John F. Wiens were preparing to emigrate to Canada. Lily returned to Rosenhof and dug up the crown and pin along with some clothes in an old duffle bag. But the day before their departure, they heard that the border guards were searching every person and every piece of luggage leaving the country. She decided not to risk taking the crown and pin, and gave them to Anna in hopes that she could bring them later.

It was six years before Anna Wiens and her husband David Reimer were finally able to leave Russia. She put the crown and pin along with some clothes in an old duffle bag. Anna, pregnant with their first child, was miserably ill during the train journey. When they reached the border, she was vomiting, and the guards waved them through without searching their luggage.

Anna and David Reimer took up farming near Kingsville, Ontario. Their son, David Jr., remembers the time his mother tried to sell the crown. In 1939, after three years of almost total crop failure, Anna decided that they must sell the crown to survive. She put on her Sunday best and went to see their landlady, a Mrs. Charlie Quick, whose husband owned a large grocery and dry good store on the main corner of Kingsville. She told Mrs. Quick the story of the crown along with her life story, and asked Mrs. Quick if she would like to buy the crown because she needed the money for food. Mrs. Quick told Anna never to sell the crown and pin because they were family heirlooms and should be kept in the family. She gave Anna a hundred dollars in cash, with no strings attached. (David Jr. doesn't know if the money was ever paid back, but knowing his parents' integrity and pride, it probably was.) When his mother arrived back home, David Jr. saw his father hug and kiss her in the middle of the yard in broad daylight. Anna and David Reimer wore the crown and pin at their silver wedding in Kingsville on July 12, 1950.

Over the years, the descendants of Johann and Katherina have continued the tradition of wearing the crown and pin at silver anniversaries. More recently, the crown has also been worn at weddings, though the pin is not used as much, because it makes a hole in the groom's lapel.

When a couple wishes to use the crown, their first challenge is to find it. Since no one actually owns the crown, it has been handed from one keeper to another as the generations go by. Finding the current keeper of the crown is always an interesting exercise in the Mennonite connection game.

When my niece Amy decided she wanted to wear the crown at her wedding, her father James asked me to help him locate

it. Amy's mother Lynn had worn it at her wedding to James in 1974. Since then, I had seen it once again when my mother Alexandra wore it at her golden wedding in Ottawa.

I began the search by asking my mother if she knew who had the crown. She said that she had borrowed it from Agnes Janzen in Virgil, Ontario. But that was nineteen years ago. Agnes, a long-time keeper of the crown, had recorded its history and had compiled a list of all the Neufeld family members who had worn it since 1888. Mother contacted Agnes, who, remarkably, was still living in Virgil. Agnes informed her that she had given the crown some years ago to a Mr. Reimer in Leamington.

I called Astrid Koop of the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association, to ask if she could locate a Mr. Reimer who might have the crown. (Astrid is a descendent of Katharina Neufeld (1871-1918) and her husband Jakob Goosen (1864-1913)). Within a couple of hours, she had found the crown. It was with David Reimer Jr.'s daughter, Diane Reimer Brightwell in Mississauga.

So, this summer, my brother James drove from Peterborough to Mississauga and introduced himself to Diane, the great-great-granddaughter of Johann and Katharina, and the current keeper of the crown. Diane graciously lent it to Amy, another great-great granddaughter so that the tradition of the Neufeld crown could carry on.



## New Curator - Jill Nicholson

I am pleased to have been selected as the new Curator/Consultant for EKMHA.

I am a Leamington native and attended Leamington District Secondary School.

My father, Don Nicholson, was a Town councillor for over twenty years. He also coached numerous Leamington baseball and hockey teams. My mother, Audrey, was a nurse at the Leamington District Memorial Hospital and a committed community volunteer.

I graduated from the University of Western Ontario, receiving degrees in French and Library Science and a diploma in public administration.

After graduation from library school, I worked in public libraries across Ontario in an administrative capacity – Ottawa, Ajax, Region of Waterloo and Lincoln. I was the Chief Librarian of the Leamington Public Library for eleven years until the merger with the Essex County Library.

I have had a lifelong interest in history. I took several Canadian history courses as part of my undergraduate degree. I led the team that digitized local history indexes and photographs at the Leamington Public Library. I continued to work in local history at both the Ajax and Lincoln Public Libraries.

I have participated in a number of professional library associations. I have also sat on a number of community boards in my areas of interest in literacy, employment and culture.

I am a new retiree and have moved to the family home on Danforth Ave. in Leamington.

I look forward to adapting my library skills to the work at the Centre.



## Prayer of an Old Singer

*From the Archives*

Dear Father in Heaven.

Lord, today I come to You with a sad heart. You have given me a good singing voice and I have strived from childhood on, to “serve and praise You by singing lovely songs” as You commanded. But now, Lord, I am dissatisfied with my singing. My voice no longer stays in tune the way it should and the way it used to. I cannot sing as loud or as long and my hearing and sight are failing. I make many mistakes. My Lord, I do not wish to stop singing in the choir, so I pray that You will not be angry with me when I make mistakes. I will sing more quietly so that my mistakes will not be as

noticeable and disturb the others’ singing. I want to continue serving in the choir in order to praise and honour You. Please Lord help me succeed. Amen

This is a prayer I found written by Dad in his songbook. I’ve translated it into English. Louise Cornies





# Heritage Centre Programs and Services

The Heritage Centre offers a variety of both ongoing and scheduled programs throughout the year. Colouring Club is held the first Thursday of the month. The Leamington Public Library also visits the second Wednesday morning of the month.

**Heritage Centre Library - Ongoing**



**Heritage Cafe - Every Weekday Morning**



**Travelogues - Scheduled**



**Kindred Credit Union - Wednesday Mornings**



**Archives Tours**



**Upcoming activities at the Heritage Centre**

- **Heritage Cafe:** Weekday mornings at 9 a.m.
- First Thursday of every month, visit the **Colouring Cafe** for adults from 9 - 10:30 a.m.
- Leamington Public **Library** visits the Heritage Cafe on the 2nd Wednesday of the month at 9 a.m. Borrow print, audio, and electronic books, as well as music and movies.
- **Kindred Credit Union** comes every Wednesday morning.

**Upcoming EKMHA Events**

- **AGM:** April 12, 7:00 p.m. - Heritage Centre Auditorium
- **Spring Banquet:** May 11, 6:00 p.m. - UMEI. Speaker: Kenneth Neufeld, former Ambassador to Afghanistan. Tickets are \$30 and are available from Board members or call 519-326-0456 for more information.

Harry Thiessen has been a volunteer with the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association since its inception in 1987.

He has been involved with Board activities as Secretary for 8 years, Treasurer for 6 years and editor of the Historian for 9 issues. He has also volunteered as the Archives Attendant.

Currently, he has been cataloguing and processing new acquisitions to the collections. He inputs the records into the Pastperfect software and ensures that the items are easy to retrieve for research and review.

Many thanks to Harry for all his contributions to EKMHA.

Enjoying this newsletter? Help make the next one even better! Send submissions to [info@ekmha.ca](mailto:info@ekmha.ca)

- Call 519-326-0456 or email [info@ekmha.ca](mailto:info@ekmha.ca) for updates.

**Support Essex-Kent Mennonite history! Become a member of EKMHA or renew today**

Your support helps EKMHA continue its mission of preserving the histories of the Mennonites of Essex and Kent Counties. Membership costs only **\$15/year** for an individual, church, organization, or business. Visit [www.ekmha.ca/membership](http://www.ekmha.ca/membership) to join online or fill out and return the form below.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Membership Fee (\$15 per person/group) \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Donation to Heritage Centre (Optional) \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to receive email about EKMHA news and events?  Yes please  No thank you

Are you interested in volunteering 1 hour/month or more?  Yes, send me info  No thank you

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