Irvin B. Horst, an Anabaptist scholar and professor, died at Virginia Mennonite Retirement Community on April 23, 2011. He was 95.

Horst was born in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, on May 31, 1915, to the late Elmer and Catherine Buckwalter Horst. He graduated from the former Eastern Mennonite School with a Th.D. degree in biblical studies and theology; he also earned a B.A. degree from Goshen College, an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, and a Ph.D. from the University of Amsterdam, and did graduate work at the University of London.

On June 17, 1944, he married Ava Mae Rohrer, who died in 1994. Surviving are four children: Marlise, Rachel, Daniel, and Joanna Horst, and one grandson, David.

In 1946 the Horsts went to the Netherlands to serve with Mennonite Central Committee in postwar relief work. While there Horst began collecting books on Anabaptist/Mennonite history for the historical library at Eastern Mennonite College (now Eastern Mennonite University) and shipped a large box of them to the library. These books bear the signature: “Irvin B. Horst – Trunk – 1948.” For the remainder of his active life, he continued collecting for this purpose.

Horst taught Mennonite history and English literature at Eastern Mennonite College from 1955 to 1966 and, while there, was a major influence in developing the collection and policies of the college’s Menno Simons Historical Library.

From 1967 to 1985 Horst was the professor of Mennonite history at the University of Amsterdam, filling a newly-created chair. After retirement, he and Ava settled in Lancaster, where she died. In 1998 Irvin relocated to Harrisonburg, Virginia, and to the retirement community in 2003. As long as he was able, he visited the historical library almost daily. He especially enjoyed browsing the special collections shelves and handling the books, even when he could no longer see to read them.

In 1987 Horst was named scholar-in-residence at the Menno Simons Historical Library; subsequently, the special collections room was named for him. In 1992, Eastern Mennonite College released a book, *Menno Simons, a Reappraisal*, a Festschrift in honor of Horst that featured a
One of Horst’s major contributions to Anabaptist scholarship was, and remains, his 1962 Bibliography of Menno Simons, ca. 1496-1561, Dutch Reformer, With a Census of Known Copies. He also published numerous articles and pamphlets and several other books.

Alle Hoekema, writing on behalf of the Dutch Mennonite Church (Algemene Doopsgezinde Societeit Nederland), reflected on Horst’s contribution in the Netherlands:

Almost twenty years he served our church in the Netherlands and our seminary in Amsterdam with many skills, a great scholarly knowledge of Mennonite history . . . and with an amiable and humble way of life.

– Lois B. Bowman
Harrisonburg, Virginia

In Memoriam
Hans Kasdorf (1928-2011)

Hans Kasdorf—friend, gifted man of God, and profound mission scholar—died in Fresno, California, on March 26, 2011. My first encounter with Hans Kasdorf occurred in the context of our church council in Bielefeld, Germany. Kasdorf was teaching in Germany and took the time to write a letter of recommendation for my studies at the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Fresno. The favor required strenuous persuasion on my part. The breadth of Kasdorf’s perspective, his deep dedication to his work, and his historical and cultural understanding, along with his “good word,” made our family’s time in Fresno possible.

Kasdorf was born on July 27, 1928, in the village of Alexandrowka, in the Altai region of Siberia, close to the city of Slawgorod. The son of a Mennonite refugee family, he followed a path from Siberia through Moscow and north Germany, ending up in Santa Catarina, Brazil. He
spent his childhood in the small German settlement of Waldheim, located in the Krauel mountains. The complicated circumstances of that journey—combined with the challenges of World War II and the difficulties of building a life in his new homeland—were not especially conducive to a standard education. Although he attended school, he did not own a book until he was 18 years old. Nonetheless, from the time that he began formal biblical and theological studies in Canada at the age of 21 until the end of his life, he was always learning and teaching. He was a brilliant man.

Kasdorf’s passions were directed to God and God’s mission in the world. Following his marriage to Frieder Reimer in Canada (September 20, 1953) the young couple served as missionaries in Brazil. Here theory and practice were joined in service to the Christ and the church. In further studies in North America, Kasdorf devoted much energy to the subject of missions. His dissertation in 1976 focused on Gustav Warneck, the founder of German mission theology. A second dissertation in 1984 explored a century of Mennonite Brethren missionary activity.

Kasdorf was a “servant leader.” Following many years of teaching at Fresno Pacific College, he taught mission studies at the Mennonite Brethren seminary in Fresno (1978-1993). From 1994 to 1998 he developed the mission studies department at the Freie Theologische Hochschule at Giessen. He held his students and colleagues in high regard, finding time for personal conversation, frequently in his home.

Kasdorf had a global perspective. He was a welcome speaker at universities and colleges, seminaries and Bible schools. He accepted numerous invitations and served in teaching assignments in Brazil, the U.S., Paraguay, Germany, Austria, Canada, Scotland, Kenya, South Africa, Rumania, Hungary, and countries in the former Soviet Union. He was fluent in German, English, Portuguese, and Spanish. Beyond that, his knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, and Russian enabled him to pursue his studies even more deeply.

Kasdorf loved the church of Jesus Christ. For him, denominational boundaries were irrelevant. In every country and in every city in which he traveled, Kasdorf nurtured contacts with people in the church—with Anabaptists and Lutherans, Mennonites and Reformed, Puritans and Pietists. He loved all those who loved Jesus. He influenced others not by provoking but by persuasion, always nurturing points of commonality.


rather than differences. He built bridges across divisions inherited from the past. He often said: without the church there is no mission; and without mission there is no church. Kasdorf was well read, and an early riser. It was not uncommon for him to have read several hundred pages on any given day before his own lectures at the seminary. He could remember especially important passages with remarkable precision; indeed, even days later he could not only repeat a quote almost word-for-word but could also cite title and page number. Yet of all the books he read, he devoted his greatest attention to the Bible. In his autobiography he lamented his limited understanding of the biblical languages and noted, drawing on the counsel of the Pietist Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687-1752), that he always strived to be fully immersed in the Word of God, and fully imbued, informed, and purified by it.

With the death of Hans Kasdorf an important witness to Jesus Christ has departed from us. May his books and articles, along with the speeches and sermons that remain, continue to serve as signposts to Christ.

– Heinrich Klassen
Bielefeld, Germany
[trans. by John D. Roth]