

IN THIS ISSUE

Since early January, when the World Health Organization issued its first alert regarding a new coronavirus identified as COVID-19, the ordinary rhythms of life in countries around the world have slowly unraveled. On March 13, the U.S. president declared the coronavirus pandemic a national emergency, and within a week all Canadian provinces and territories had issued similar decrees. In the months since then, virtually everyone in the world has struggled to adjust to the new and strange realities of face masks, social distancing, quarantine, and the fear and uncertainty unleashed by the invisible virus. Yet, as public health officials and social historians have always known, there is nothing new about global pandemics; human populations have been susceptible to disease since the dawn of time.

In the opening essay of this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review*, **Vanessa Quiring** describes a similar pandemic in the fall of 1918—the so-called Spanish Influenza—as it was experienced by Mennonite communities in southern Manitoba. Based on her 2015 master’s thesis at University of Manitoba, Quiring’s article describes the progression of the disease among Mennonites in the rural municipality of Hanover, noting that the mortality rate among Mennonites there was significantly higher than that of their non-Mennonite neighbors and close to twice as high as the national average in Canada. The heart of the essay explores reasons why this may have been the case. Quiring notes, for example, that Mennonites in the area had recently found themselves at odds with the provincial government on issues related to enforced public education and as German-speaking pacifists in the context of widespread support for World War I. Those tensions, combined with the government’s refusal to print public health notices in any language other than English, go some way to explaining Mennonite reluctance to comply with public health measures. But the stronger explanation for high mortality rates among Mennonites was the group’s longstanding familial and communal identity—at a time of collective stress, Mennonites often refused to maintain the social distance necessary to keep the disease from spreading. The essay is both interesting and timely.

Blake Hamm, a lawyer practicing in Winnipeg, follows Quiring’s article with an essay that provides additional context for the tensions Manitoba Mennonites were experiencing with their provincial government at the time of the influenza pandemic. Mennonites immigrated from South Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s on the basis of assurances—often described as *Privilegia*—that they could operate their own German-language schools and that they would be free from military

conscription. These promises were laid out clearly in a document written in English and translated into German that came to be known as the Lowe Letter. But the actual language of the Order in Council introduced slight changes that gave the provincial government the right to revoke those promises. Caught by surprise when the terms of the *Privilegia* shifted, Mennonites first resisted—resulting in fines and imprisonment—and then either capitulated or emigrated. Hamm makes a strong case that the provincial governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan continue to bear a moral—if not also a legal—onus for their linguistic sleight of hand and subsequent mistreatment of Mennonites.

Shortly after World War II, the (Old) Mennonite Church underwent a fundamental shift in its global mission strategy, largely as a result of the visionary leadership of J. D. Graber, who became general secretary of Mennonite Board of Missions and Charities in 1944. Following a larger trend toward “decolonization,” Graber introduced a new commitment to nurture indigenous leadership, to encourage local churches to be self-supporting, and to recast the role of missionaries as servants rather than leaders. Complementing this new approach was a deep interest in culturally appropriate expressions of the gospel that were informed by the discipline of anthropology. **Agustina Altman**, an anthropologist from Buenos Aires, Argentina, analyzes the impact of this “anthropological turn” in Mennonite missions as it played out in Argentina, focusing especially on the transformation in Mennonite mission strategy among indigenous people in the Chaco. Altman then goes a step further to trace the broader impact of this shift on the emergence of anthropological studies in the Chaco, noting particularly the ways in which early anthropologists in the region relied heavily on local missionaries for contacts, networks, and other forms of support.

Finally, we conclude this issue of *The Mennonite Quarterly Review* with a brief survey of the life and work of the artist Emma Schrock. A self-taught painter, Schrock gained widespread recognition for her simple depictions of scenes rooted in her Old Order Mennonite and Amish context in northern Indiana. **Ervin Beck**, professor of English emeritus at Goshen College and a widely-recognized expert in folklore and folk art, used the occasion of a major exhibit of Schrock’s paintings to summarize her unusual life story and key themes in her art work. In light of the fact that the exhibit was forced to close shortly after opening due to the COVID-19 virus, Beck’s essay and Schrock’s paintings reproduced here should help to preserve the memory of the artist’s creative work.

– John D. Roth, editor