Mennonites and World War II:
Books in the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies

by Kevin Enns-Rempel

The following books in the Center’s library collection help to tell the story of the Mennonite experience in World War II. All may be checked out from the Center by anyone with a Special Borrower’s card (no charge to Historical Society members, $25 a year for anyone else).


North American Mennonites may forget that Mennonites found themselves on both sides of the struggle during the war. Bartel, a Mennonite living in Poland at the time of the war, joined the German Army in 1937 and fought on the eastern front until the war ended in 1945. He later migrated to Canada, where he still lives today. This book “traces the story of one man’s struggle to overcome guilt and become convinced that the way of peace is the only alternative to war.”


This collection of oral history interviews with fifteen men who served in CPS and two “CPS wives” documents the varied experiences of those who performed alternative service during the war. It includes accounts by members of historic peace churches as well as objectors from other religious, political and philosophical orientations.


This book is the single most complete account of the Mennonite Civilian Public Service program. It includes information on every CPS camp operated by Mennonite Central Committee during the war.


The decision to be a conscientious objector to the war fell more directly on men than on women, since only men were subject to military service. Goossen explores the ways in which women expressed their opposition to the war and performed alternative service even though not required to do so by the Selective Service program.


Hershberger focuses on how the “Old Mennonite” Church anticipated and responded to the challenges of the war, particularly in terms of conscription and alternative service. Though it focuses primarily on that one specific Mennonite group, the book also contains information pertaining to other Mennonite groups.


This brief and profusely illustrated book offers a basic overview of the many ways that CPS participants carried out their alternative service duties during the war.


For Mennonites still living in the Soviet Union, the war was a particularly difficult and often terrifying experience. In 1998 several thousand survivors of that experience gathered in Manitoba to share their stories and memories. Harry Loewen edited this collection of stories and photographs drawn from that event.


Edna Schroeder Thiessen was born in 1926 near Warsaw, Poland. This is her story of the war years and her subsequent flight from Poland through Germany to Saskatchewan.


The author, who was raised in a Mennonite community in Nebraska, recounts “the tedium and adventure, the drama and humor” of the CPS camps.


This novel, set in the Vistula River delta region of Poland, explores the ways in which Mennonites of that area responded to Hitler’s Third Reich.
"Enriches our understanding of the impact of the Civil War on Mennonites and Amish, and on American religious groups in general. In addition, the authors have enhanced our knowledge of the influence that religion had on the war." (Thomas F. Curran, Journal of American History). "By highlighting the struggles of these religious outsiders who strived to keep the church distinct from the world, Lehman and Nolt have produced an insightful study that further elucidates the centrality of religion for a proper understanding of the Civil War." (Sean A. Scott, Ohio History). "Civ 3.1.2 Mennonite Brethren Church. 3.1.3 Mennonite Church USA. 3.1.4 Mennonite Church Canada."

When the German army invaded the Soviet Union in the summer of 1941 during World War II, many in the Mennonite community perceived them as liberators from the communist regime under which they had suffered. When the tide of war turned, many of the Mennonites fled with the German army back to Germany where they were accepted as Volksdeutsche. The Soviet government believed that the Mennonites had "collectively collaborated" with the Germans. After the war, many Mennonites in the Soviet Union were forcibly relocated to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Describing Mennonite life in Canada, Heide concentrates on their contribution to World War II. Although they were exempt from military service, many volunteered in both combat and non-combat roles. The story follows one family member who becomes a Medic and serves throughout the war in England and Europe. Read More. General Fiction. Offered a permanent commission after the war, he spent the next 18 years in the RCAF at various bases in Canada and England. Taking early retirement, Heide spent the next 14 years working for a high-tech company that made flight equipment. At age 59 he retired to write full-time, and has written many stories and articles over the years.