

Roland M. Sawatzky and Andrea M. Dyck, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village*. Steinbach, MB: Mennonite Heritage Village, 2014. Pp. 67. Softcover, \$20.00.

The book, *A Collected History: Mennonite Heritage Village*, deftly features four aspects that make the Mennonite Heritage Village (MHV) what it is today: artifacts, volunteers, sponsors, and behind the scenes - the staff who put the book together. From the designer, photographer, and authors the book is an eye-catching piece that features thirty-eight of the Museum's sixteen thousand artifacts. Together this corpus of material culture provides a glimpse into Mennonite life in Russia and Canada. The purpose of the book is to feature the diverse collection that the Museum has amassed over the past fifty years that makes the museum "unique in its preservation and interpretation of the Russian Mennonite story."⁽⁷⁾ Secondly, the book "seeks to share the history of the Russian Mennonites through the lens of material culture, using each of the artifacts, demonstrations, and buildings as a focal point

for some of the major events that have shaped the life of this branch of Anabaptists over the past five centuries.” (7)

Authors Roland Sawatzky and Andrea Dyck, challenge the belief that Mennonites are “plain and non-materialistic.” *A Collected History* features materials that are personally significant and even private such as a finely carved wooden pencil box, an ornamented (*fraktur*) letter of endearment, a plain shoe, or a Brandenburg silk lace dress. From personal items the book also includes community and public items and places such as the church, a school, and a tractor. Some of the museum’s iconic buildings are beautifully represented in the book including the windmill, house barn, and summer kitchen. To help tell the story of the artifacts, some of the Museum’s volunteers are featured baking, milling, threshing, and sawing at the museum. The volunteers animate the artifacts so that visitors (readers) have a more fulsome understanding of the artifact and its technology.

As Museum director Barry Dyck writes: “each page has an individual story to tell and together they communicate the larger story of the passion, faith, determination, pain, vision, hardship, failure, adventure, and success of the Russian Mennonites.”(6) The items were chosen for the story they represented. The text does not go into fine detail about the artifact, but it is used as a touchstone to tell a larger story. The last pages are devoted to significant sponsors of the Museum and its mandate. Each sponsor is featured with a large black and white photo and a brief history. Without community support the Museum, and many other Mennonite heritage institutions, would be unable to realize their mandates and support the community the way they do as memory institutions.

A Collected History is not the first book to focus on Mennonite material culture. Most apropos is Reinhild Janzen, *Mennonite Furniture: A Migrant Tradition, 1766-1910* and Ervin Beck’s detailed online bibliography, “Mennonite and Amish Folklore and Folk Arts,” 2016, <https://www.goshen.edu/academics/english/ervinb/mennonite-folklore/>. Other sources include Jake Peters discussion of Russian Mennonite Fraktur in *Mennonite Private School in Manitoba and Saskatchewan, 1874-1925* and Arthur Kroeger’s book, *Kroeger Clocks*. Unlike these earlier volumes, *A Collected History* focuses the “reader” on the image of the artifact and less on text that delves into the history, role, and meaning of the artifact.

One of the strengths of the book is its large, high quality, color images. Our connections to the past are often two dimensional, black and white photographs of demure stern-looking people. The

way the artifacts are featured in the book reminds readers of the multi-dimensional, complex, vibrant, emotion-filled lives Mennonites led. The past was not simple, black and white, yes or no - but diverse and multi-faceted. The great colour photos with story-telling text help provide much needed depth when it comes to understanding the past.

While the great photos of the book are to allow the items speak for themselves, for this reader, more information would be welcome. A translation of the text of the love letter, a bibliography to point to more resources, or even a map of where these items came from would be great additions.

In the book's attempt to challenge the belief that Mennonites are non-materialistic and provide examples of this, not enough attention is given to the diversity of Mennonites and their beliefs over time. The text does not delineate denominational differences or commonalities or nuance how a non-materialistic outlook impacted certain decisions such as how the interior of a church should look. However, this kind of discussion is perhaps more academic in nature and to fully delve into it, a different kind of book may need to be envisioned.

A Collected History is a beautiful book created to engage a wide range of readers, using large color images to draw the reader in to read the stories about the Mennonite people. To this end, the book is a great success.

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