

Packing For Canada

The Centre for Transnational Studies hosted a webinar on this subject this week. I was moved by some of the accounts regarding items packed by our Mennonite forbearers. The stories reminded me of an item brought to Canada by my aunt, Helena Loewen, of Acme, Alberta.

In the fall of 1918, the Orenburg District was under control of the White Army, and once the Red Army attacked, Pretoria found itself in the war zone. Pretoria became the centre where horses were exchanged, and Abraham Loewen was in charge of this work. They brought war material into the Loewen yard, and he was expected to move it on.

Particularly troublesome for the Loewens was that Johann, the oldest son, had been conscripted into the Red Army. At the start, he was fighting with forces near Petrograd (St. Petersburg), but later he was sent to the south to fight against Deniken's army. It was there in Sochi, that he died of typhus, in 1922, a fact not known to the family for another 30 years, after they had emigrated and were living in B.C.

Helena Loewen was one year older than Johann and had had a close relationship with him. She was 28 years old at the time of the family's emigration to Canada and leaving without knowing the fate of her brother must have been most difficult, not only for her, but for the entire family.

Among the personal things that Helena packed to take with her to her new home was Johann's childhood tie. She kept this memento all her life, and at her death in 1990, upon her request, it was given to me.



Helena (seated), 1926



Johann, 1915

