

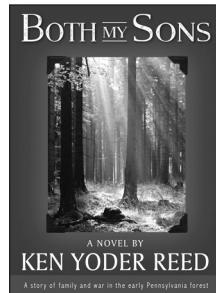
# Wartime choices in colonial America

I'm not one of those folks who reads historical fiction and longs for the past, for a more bucolic way of life and the wonder that might accompany the discovery of new frontiers. Indeed, I know a work of historical fiction has succeeded when its details make me exceedingly grateful for the present and the relative ease with which I can navigate my days.

Ken Yoder Reed's novel, *Both My Sons*, is definitely strong by this measure, with rich imagery and characters that allow readers to feel immersed in the world Reed has created. As I read Reed's well-crafted story about the Mennonists' struggle to establish a settlement in 18th-century Pennsylvania, about harrowing journeys across the Atlantic and about the persecution many Anabaptists were fleeing in Europe, I felt renewed gratitude for their many sacrifices and for the opportunity to practice my religion now without fear or suffering.

*Both My Sons* is a novel that considers, in part, this idea of sacrifice and the personal costs that accompany the choices we make. At the novel's center is a sacrifice one brother makes for another, the latter having been conscripted by Benjamin Franklin (alongside other Mennonites) to drive a supply wagon for red-coats during the French and Indian war. (In his notes, Reed affirms that this kind of conscription of Mennonite wagons actually did happen, in 1755, when Franklin threatened Mennonites, then acquiesced to a deal in which Mennonite wagons were used to transport supplies, but no guns, ammunition or soldiers.)

Both brothers are the sons of Klaus Greenywalt, the last name



## BOTH MY SONS

By Ken Yoder Reed  
Masthof, 2016

Reviewed by Melanie Springer Mock

changed from Grünewald by William Penn's secretary. Greenywalt is a Mennonite who immigrates to Pennsylvania as part of Penn's grand experiment. Greenywalt becomes a successful land owner and miller at the Pequea settlement, located just outside of what is now Lancaster. He has left a wife and father-in-law in the Old Country, with assurances that the pair will travel once the old man is freed from a prison, where he has been shackled as a prisoner for his faith.

Reed begins and ends his story in the same time frame, July 1755, when the French and Indian War was raging in Pennsylvania. He separates the story into several parts, moving between narrators as well as back and forth through time. For some novelists such chronological and narrative shifts muddy a plot's trajectory, but Reed handles the changes in perspective well. The multiple narrators add context and depth to the story, allowing us to see not only Greenywalt's point of view but also that of his wife, raised in Bern by aristocrats and with an entitled worldview; and of Janey, an indentured servant of Scots-Irish descent, who remains always an outsider in the Pequea settlement; and the two sons, in many ways extensions of their father.

*Reed considers the ways our tightly held convictions can complicate our most cherished relationships.*

Greenywalt is a likeable character, despite his flaws. Though he makes choices that complicate his life in the settlement, and that compromise his faith, readers will be drawn to his sense of responsibility and longing to do what's right for both his sons and for the women who bore them. By the novel's end, we have a clear sense that Greenywalt is an honorable man. He navigates not only the many tensions that make him an outsider in Pennsylvania as a nonresistant Mennonite in the midst of war but also the tensions of ostracizing those within the settlement who do not wholly share Mennonite values and ethnicity.

One of the many strengths in *Both my Sons* is Reed's consideration of the ways our tightly held convictions can complicate our most cherished relationships. Greenywalt's oldest son, Ichabod, becomes a tal-

ented commander in the British army, well loved by his men. Ichabod's success as a commander is due, in some part, to his father's instruction as a hunter and woodsman. His prized possession is a gun Greenywalt gave him when Ichabod was 8, for the purpose of shooting animals.

Greenywalt struggles to reconcile his beliefs about nonresistance with his son's heroism and, in a powerful closing chapter, finds peace in his new understanding of Ichabod's life and its meaning. Though conflict remains — between the nonresistant Mennonites and their neighbors, between the French and British, between Greenywalt's settlement and the outsiders they have ostracized — the book's denouement suggests reconciliation is possible.

Though Reed is now a Presbyterian, he grew up Mennonite in Pennsylvania and, according to his biography, had eight years of education in Mennonite schools. His knowledge of Mennonite history, faith and practice informs *Both My Sons*. While I knew the basic contours of Anabaptist history in

Europe and the 18th-century immigration of Mennonites to colonial America, *Both My Sons* filled in significant details, helping me understand the struggles facing Mennonites in the Old and New Countries.

On the Masthof website, Reed explains the impetus for *Both My Sons*: the discovery of scant information about one of his forebears, Nicholas Stoltzfuz, who came to America from Germany in the 18th century. Reed wondered why Stoltzfuz would make such a risky journey, traveling across the tumultuous Atlantic with his family to begin a new life. Using a 1744 letter as his evidence, Reed began to reconstruct Stoltzfuz's reasons for leaving Germany and settling in America.

It was Reed's hope that *Both My Sons* might tell the story of people like Stoltzfuz, and about the Swiss-German immigration to America, in a way that might be accessible for nonhistorians. In my estimation, he has succeeded, and *Both My Sons* is as informative as it is entertaining.

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## BOOKSHELF

### Unexpected Invitations: Surprises, Adventures and Opportunities in Mennonite Ministry

by Angela Rempel with Erwin Rempel (self-published, Mennonite Press, 2016). Diverse ministry and family experiences overseas and in the U.S. make up the Rempels' story of a lifetime of following God's call. They served in pastoral min-

istry, missions in Brazil and Botswana and denominational leadership, including Erwin's role as executive secretary of the General Conference Mennonite Church Commission on Overseas Mission. From cross-cultural missions to U.S. church issues, the Rempels experienced Mennonite faith and life from many angles. Available for \$19.95 from the authors at [rempel.story@gmail.com](mailto:rempel.story@gmail.com) or 2203 Lake Terrace Dr., Harrisonburg, VA 22802.