

Brazil News



No. 224
15 JULY 26

57 Years in Brazil

The Year of Four

The year 2026 will be remembered in the history of the Mennonite church in Brazil as the *year of four*. In the span of 51 days, four “ancients” with close ties to the movement to Brazil were laid to rest. With one exception of one, three were born in North America. Two were presently residing in the US. Since all had an impressive impact on developments of this South American “colony,” we give you a quick overlook of their lives, chronologically.

Duane Holdeman

Born: 22 December 1931, in N. America, and died 6 June 2026, in Moundridge, Kansas, at 94 years.

I have thought and thought about a descriptive name or phrase for Duane, something that would summarize him, almost as an afterthought. I draw a blank and think that my description is going to have to be paragraphic.

Duane was who he was. He made no effort to imitate anyone else. At times he had trouble creating a cohesive sentence. To know if he wanted to really say something, he had to say it out loud and listen to himself say it. When it wasn't what he really meant to say, he would put his mouth in reverse and then hit “drive,” surge ahead, hoping to come up with what he really wanted to say. At times I think only he understood himself.

If you have let what I just wrote cast a doubt on his intelligence or innate abilities, you have totally missed the point. What made Duane a productive man was exactly his willingness to try anything new. This becomes evident when those who knew him as a boy, as a young man, as an adult, and it becomes evident that he was game to step in and roll up his sleeves if he saw something that needed to be done. In no time flat he was doing it – sometimes sort of like he talked – but always pulling his

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part of the load. Julius Cesar purportedly said, “I came, I saw, I conquered.” Duane’s mantra was, “I came, I saw, I went to work.” And didn’t throw up his hands as so many do. He put them where there was work to be done. And he did it!

Pages could be written on Duane, the pioneer. He moved to Brazil when the movement was still in its infancy. And that is exactly where his ability to come, to see and to work made a tremendous difference in the development of the colony. Homes, sheds, land clearing, planting, wells and water systems, roads, machinery adapted for agricultural projects, often had to be built from scratch. It was in all this that Duane’s ability to see the need and go to work stands as a memorial until today.

On July 6, 1975 Duane, together with his wife Frances, was ordained to the diaconry. To say he filled a desperate need in the early church in Brazil is an understatement, so I will confine myself to a couple of memories.

Some forty years ago I ran into one of those snags common to mankind. I needed some money to make an urgent payment, and didn’t have it. No matter where I looked, poked and prodded, nothing! I am not one of those who believe that the vows taken by a deacon include a seat in a bank’s loan department. But, at my wit’s end, I decided to pay Duane a visit and tell him of my situation.

I really hesitated before driving into Duane’s yard one evening after dark. I proceeded to tell him my need and prepared myself to answer a barrage of questions, especially on my ability to repay the loan some 15 days later.

Without a single question, Duane got up, retrieved his checkbook and wrote me a check for the amount needed. Needless to say, I paid that debt on the due date – or maybe even before.

For the early decades of the colony, I was the interpreter. This included bank business, legal affairs, purchase of farm machinery, building projects, doctors visits and hospital stays, and you name it, plus meetings in church. This included not only worship services, but business meetings as well.

Duane’s natural curiosity stimulated him to attempt most anything he saw needed to be done. Some things he learned quite well, some not so well, and some, anything but. As a deacon he had to learn how to keep books. I really don’t know what these books looked like, but some of them I believe only he and the good Lord understood, hopefully.

Anyway, at the point of this little narrative, he was the church treasurer. So, of course, he kept the congregational books. There are those who believe that some especially difficult or sacrificial tasks can serve as penitence and facilitate passage through the gates of pearl. Needless to say, we don’t adhere to this celestial back door entrance, but if we did, I do think I would have come up with a pocket full of penitential tickets. Here is what happened:

Remember that I somewhat diplomatically suggested that Duane was not a born scribe. And so, when it was time to read his prepared financial report, I stood beside him as interpreter. Everything he said, I was to transmit in understandable Portuguese. When I saw him pull a sheet out of his shirt pocket, folded several times,

I believed I was facing an interpretational crisis. (Or, if the penitence thing held water, the possibility of cashing in on some celestial passes.)

So, here is what happened. Duane pulled that paper out of his pocket, tried to smooth it out on the pulpit... but for the readers to understand what I was facing, here I describe what that report, that folded piece of paper, resembled. It was a sheet of typing paper with no lines. So, in the upper left-hand corner, there was the first numerical entry, with a two or three word description following.

Then, came the next entry, underneath the first. And the third and the fourth, and so on, forming a column, not vertical, as you are thinking, but somewhat serpentine, with slight zigs this way and zags that. When that column reached the bottom, he continued from the top, to the right of the first column. And then finally, another on the right side of the folded sheet.

I suspect that in his mind that report made perfect sense to Duane. It didn't to me, yet my job was to interpret, so I literally interpreted whatever he said. I don't think the congregation had the slightest idea what was being reported. This brings me to a great respect I have for the Monte Alegre Congregation. When the report was finished and the chairman of the meeting asked, "Any questions?" There was not a peep from the audience. Just one question and we would have all been down the drain. I think Duane understand at least part of his report, I and the congregation the same as nothing. Although He must have known the answers to any questions, the good Lord also remained silent.

I can't relate the trajectory of Duane's life in the US. I am sure that many, many interesting stories could be told. He is supposed to have continue driving his car while in his 90's. Legend has it that he drove from Moundridge to Wichita. True, you can't prove it by me. Maybe he had a folded map in his shirt pocket.

Jake Loewen

Anyone who knew Jake and can't remember anything memorable about him has a chronic case of amnesia, or worse.

Jake and his brother Ike were loggers, in Oregon before moving to Brazil. Their dad, J. G. Loewen, was born in the steam engine days. His dream was to become an engineer. The story I heard decades ago is that when he got converted, he understood that the life of an engineer was not in his spiritual cards.

One can't do justice to Jake's legacy without doing an autopsy of his mechanical organism. For this we go to a third Loewen brother. Pete and his family moved to Brazil during the early Colony days. He was killed in an auto accident after but a short time in his new home.

To get the benefit of what I am about to tell you, I want to make it clear that to me a car is a mode of transportation. Don't ask me how many horsepower the motor has or any technical details. I am interested in how many kilometers to the liter of fuel it makes, is it comfortable, reliable and does it do what I figure what a car should do for me.

Way back in the early days of the settlement in Rio Verde, the 220 kilometers of the road to Goiânia was unpaved and could easily take over three hours to make the trip. For some reason, which I no longer remember, Pete and I made a trip to Goiânia. We hadn't driven very far before he started giving a rundown on all the cars he had ever owned. And there were a bunch of them of all kinds and makes. We had driven but a short distance when Pete launched into a detailed exposition of each of his cars, the year he bought them, the technical details of the motor, transmission, chassis – absolutely everything.

When he finished describing his first car, he went on to the second car, and the next and the next and the next. The fact that he remembered all this is a cerebral miracle for which I have no explanation... That is how we drove to Goiânia.

The second miracle of this trip was that I enjoyed every bit of it. I, who know how to change a tire, and that is about it, thoroughly enjoyed my time with Pete.

Now we get to Jake. I think that most of his time in the US, before moving to Brazil, was spent as a logger or earth mover. Of course, this equipment was powered by diesel engines.

Diesel engines were in his DNA. The same as Pete was able to give a millimetric description of all the cars he had ever owned, I really believe that Jake was able to recite the characteristics of the dozens and dozens of diesel engines that he operated in his lifetime.

As was the case with Pete and his cars, I enjoyed listening to Jake tell of his exploits as a logger and heavy equipment operator. Much of his work was in mountainous terrain on crudely built dirt roads. The stories he told were always 3-D, not just the facts, but what he felt and saw and others involved in situations.

Jake had the uncanny ability to archive hundreds of stories in his memory bank, disposable for instant recall. In a conversation, he was able to retrieve a story to perfectly illustrate what was being discussed. I never saw him at a loss for a fitting story.

Jake enjoyed singing. All Loewens do. My best memory of his singing is when his brother Ike was in church. After the sermon and there would be a bit of time for contributions from the congregation, I was obligated to announce, from the benches, "Now Jake and Ike are going to sing a duet for us." The two brothers would look at each other and sort of shake their head. Then they would get up, mount the steps to the rostrum, position themselves behind the pulpit, look at each other... And then begin singing. "*Be on time.*" Of all the many and varied memories I have of Jake – and Ike – this is the best. The very best!

Richard Mininger

I spent decades as an interpreter, both in Mexico (Spanish) and in Brazil (Portuguese). I loved interpreting. Usually. Occasionally, rarely, this was not the case. I probably interpreted for around a hundred different speakers. Probably more. This brings me to Richard Mininger.

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Of everyone from whom I interpreted, many have been a real delight and inspiration, there are three that stand out: Min. Abe Toews (Mexico and Brazil), Min. Paul Wenger (Mexico) and Min. Richard Mininger (Brazil).

How can we define an interpreter? In the truest sense, it is his job to accurately transmit, into another language, what the speaker says. Actually, this is not a job. It is an art. To do this, the interpreter must have the ability to share the speaker's cape. That means he must not only interpret words, but feelings, convictions, and corporal expressions, as well.

It also means that the speaker must have the grace to share his cape. This is not something that is acquired or cultivated, but comes natural. Thus, it is an art for both the speaker and the interpreter. When two such meet, and work together, the message heard in both languages will be the same.

I loved interpreting for Richard. He had the inherent ability to merge his thoughts and convictions with his facial expressions. One either has or doesn't have this gift. It cannot be successfully imitated.

Richard didn't see his interpreter as a nuisance, as a hinderance to a smooth delivery. When I was scheduled to interpret a wedding sermon, he would give me a list of the scriptures he planned on using. We insert that in the sermon preached at his funeral, it was said that he determined if something was sound doctrine by the simple lymphs test: "Is it in the Bible or isn't it"

Before a wedding, after he had given me a copy of the scriptures he planned on using, I looked them up in my Portuguese Bible. It happened once that one of them was a verse found in the Song of Solomon, in which the wise man graphically describes a particular anatomical attribute of his beloved. I showed this to Richard and asked, "Are you sure you want to use this verse?" His instant reply was, "Well, it's in the Bible, isn't it?!"

He selected another verse.

Richard was always the man of God. In church, in the pulpit, in his home, in private conversation, on the street, he always made one feel welcome. By nature, he was a peacemaker. with a little vial of healing oil on hand to pour on wounded feelings. If his middle name should have ever been substituted, it would have been "Hospitable." Their home was the epitome of hospitality.

The years Richard and Edith spent in Brazil weren't easy. It was a period, to put it mildly, of confusion. Many of us learned to know each other in Brazil. We were an amalgamation of families from different congregations in different states in the US. Somehow we unconsciously developed the concept of a Brazilian church that would run practices and interpretations of decisions made in the old country through a separator that would render a purified cream.

Murphy's law kicked in with the separator. Instead what was considered to be undesirable being separated, it resulted in a separation in the brotherhood. We will not discuss the repercussions here. Suffice it to say, they were not good. The solution was not spontaneous nor without fatalities. Fortunately, that old separator has been

scrapped and we are today normal congregations. It was during this period that Edith's health deteriorated and the Miningers felt it necessary to return to the US. Needless to say, they will always occupy a special place in my heart – a very special place.

Moacir Rosa

Many of you have never heard of Moacir Rosa. He was born on March 6, 1943 and died on April 16, 2026. He was married to Sebastiana da Silva Rosa. Moacyr became a member of the church on May 10, 1981. His later years were somewhat turbulent. Even so, he and his wife have left a legacy that stands as a shrine to the saving grace that was present in their family.

All six of their children are members. One is a deacon's wife,

Several nephews and nieces were taken in when their mother died, five all together. Two are ministers and one is a minister's wife.

What does this short review tell us? It tells us that someone chooses someone out of the sheepfold to unobtrusively do a great work for Him. Moacir had only a very basic education. He was no financial giant. He made his living doing menial jobs for others and working on small projects of his own. I doubt if anyone ever called him an attractive man. His speech was not cultivated, yet he was capable of making inspiring talks in church. A word of instruction or encouragement to others came natural to him. In just a word, Moacir was an ordinary man with a very special gift of being unobtrusively useful.

Update

Brazil News has been on the blink these last months. We hope to shortly get it back on a semblance of order. For those of us who are acquainted with the history of Rio Verde from the onset, we can hardly believe our eyes. The progress in all areas is astounding.

I think some of us watch political developments. We believe that the party in power will determine the prosperity or decline of the nation.

We have been here for over a half century and have lived under a military government, left-leaning and right-leaning presidents. And yet the country continues on a steady course.

Out of space. More on this in the next issue.

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