

# Mennonite Historian

## Reflections of a Retiring Director

by Abe Dueck

Six years ago the retiring Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Lawrence Klippenstein, wrote an article entitled, "Two Decades at the Heritage Centre: Survey and Reflections" (*Mennonite Historian*, XXIII, 3 (September, 1997)). Now my turn has come, much more quickly than I might have imagined. My time at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (CMBS) has only been about one-half as long as Klippenstein's at the MHC, since I only began my formal duties in 1991. However, my association with the Centre as a member of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society and Historical Committee which were responsible for giving direction to the Centre, goes back to around 1980. In 1975 the Winnipeg CMBS had been designated as one of three archival centres for Mennonite Brethren in North America, and Herb Giesbrecht had already been appointed as the first archivist (part-time) in 1969. In 1979 Ken Reddig became a half-time archivist and later became full-time archivist until 1990.

When I began in 1991 I was concerned about some division of responsibilities between "archivist" and "director." I was a historian, but realized that the archival discipline was becoming more and more specialized and formal training was increasingly necessary. Fortunately, Alf Redekopp had already worked for some time at the Centre and had received some training and experience so that he was prepared to take on the more specialized tasks. In addition to continuing some teaching at the College, I was able to devote some time to research and writing as well as assume the other duties assigned to me as Director. For a number of years the two Centres in Winnipeg have shared an archivist, first with Alf Redekopp working half-time at each Centre, and now Conrad Stoesz assuming the same role. This cooperation has served the two institutions well. Cooperation has continued at various levels, including the publication of the *Mennonite Historian*, microfilming of documents in the former Soviet Union, and co-sponsorship of various events.

The past twelve years have seen some dramatic changes at the Centre as well as in the archival community as a whole.

(cont'd on p. 2)

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



In their day, the Mennonites of Russia were a potent force in business. Some of their contributions still endure, like this sunflower field in Fuerstenland, 2002. Photo credit: Wally Kroeker.

## Ukraine: Husks of Faded Glory

by Wally Kroeker

*"Above the villages, where once only the red hot chimney of the local smithy had glowed, now the belching flues of factories pushed upwards into the clear sky...The rattle of heavy machinery, the hiss of steam engines, the thud of heavy hammers that echoed from factory and workshops through villages and out across the carefully cultivated fields – all of these signaled the transformation...of the very nature of Mennonite life itself."* – James Urry in *None But Saints*

I recently visited the Russian "homeland" (present-day Ukraine) with a large group of people on a Mennonite Heritage Cruise to search out their roots. We all descended from "Russian Mennonites," a line of Anabaptists who emerged in Holland in the sixteenth century, later migrated to Polish Prussia, and started moving to Russia in 1789.

They were invited to Russia by the Czar, Catherine II, who needed settlers to populate and develop new regions. She offered the Mennonites free land, religious freedom and the right to live together in self-governing "colonies." The first to accept her invitation migrated to a tract of 89,000 acres which was named Chortitza Colony. As the flow accelerated, a larger tract more than triple the size was added.

We traipsed through a lot of the old villages that Mennonites built in the 1800s. Some have mere husks of former structures, or crumbling foundations. But elsewhere many buildings – houses, schools, hospitals and factories – remain intact and in use. Some former Mennonite churches have become community clubs or granaries.

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## Reflections

(cont'd from p. 1)

The discipline has become much more rigorous and training has become essential to carry on the tasks of archives. In that respect the division of responsibilities between the archivist and the Director is increasingly important, although the Director must also be very informed about archival practice and procedure. Technically, with the advent of more and more sophisticated computers and the advent of the widespread use of the internet, archives have faced very critical challenges in the past decade and will continue to do so. In the early 1990s the internet was just beginning to come into popular use, whereas now it is the dominant means of communication with clients. The Canadian Council of Archives, with the introduction of the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN), has promoted the presence of Archives on the Web. Our Centre, like many others, has very significant resources such as finding aids on the Web. Our John A. Toews Historical Library catalogue is on-line through the University of Winnipeg site. We have also worked together with the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to create a Canadian Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (CMEO), a resource that is growing and is used extensively by people from all parts of the globe. In many ways our Centre, like many others, has become globalized in the past decade.

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The greatest challenge of the past decade has probably been (somewhat ironically), keeping in touch with our congregations across Canada and nurturing our denominational identity as well as the need to preserve our heritage and make the rich resources of the past available to future generations. In the mid-1970s, when the Historical Commission of North America became active and established mandates for the three Centres (Hillsboro, Fresno, and Winnipeg), there was a flurry of activity which included a number of publications on Mennonite Brethren history, symposia, as well as a concerted effort to collect congregational records. J.B. Toews spearheaded an effort to microfilm the records of congregations throughout North America in 1978. This was a very important accomplishment. In the last two decades, however, it has become increasingly difficult to build on those initial efforts. The number of congregations has grown dramatically and many are from other ethnic communities. Even those with historic or family connections with the past do not necessarily value the past. We can no longer take for granted that there will be a reservoir of awareness or appreciation for much of our past. The definitions of our community have to be expanded and the history of people with different backgrounds needs to become part of the new story of Mennonite Brethren in Canada.

During my tenure as Director I had hoped to visit most of the congregations across Canada in relation to the mandate of our Centre. I have been able to visit most of the congregations in Ontario and Alberta as well as many in Saskatchewan and Manitoba. The Historical Commission (MB) and the Historical Committee of the General Conference Mennonite Church co-published the booklet, *Heritage Preservation: A Resource Book for Congregations*, by David Haurly. This was made available to all our congregations. Workshops were also held at provincial and national conventions. But new and repeated initiatives need to be taken.

A great deal of satisfaction has come from the publication of a number of books by the Centre. These include: *The City Mission in Winnipeg* by Anna Thiessen, translated by Ida Toews (1991), *A Man of His Word: A Biography of John A. Toews* by Elfreda Toews Nafziger (1992), *A Journey of Faith: An Autobiography by*

David Ewert (1993), *Durch Truebsal und Not* by Helene Dueck (1995), *Honour Such People* by David Ewert (1997) and *Crossing the Divide: Language Transition Among Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1940-1970* by Gerald C. Ediger (2001).

The Centre also published a number of volumes of the *Mennonitische Rundschau Index* and assisted in the editing and publication of other books. A major translation work of *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents* by John B. Toews has been completed by Walter Regehr on a volunteer basis.

Personally, I have also had the privilege of writing or editing many articles and books, such as *The Canadian Mennonites and the Challenge of Nationalism* (1994) and *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922* (1997). I look forward to doing more research and writing after my retirement. I have had the opportunity to serve as Book Review Editor of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, and have enjoyed working with Roy Loewen at the Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg in a variety of ways.

With respect to the Centre's facilities, significant changes have taken place. The facilities which the Centre occupied from 1979 to 1990, although a major improvement from the previous facilities, quickly became too small and also had other liabilities as a basement location with difficult access to the public. When Concord College moved to the new site on Shaftesbury in 2000, space became available in the former library and administrative offices and the move was accomplished with considerable help from volunteers.

Now, it appears, the Centre is poised for another move. Although decisions have not been finalized, the Canadian Conference offices are likely to be relocated within the next two years. If so, the Centre will likely also move to a new location, whether it is in a new building to be constructed near or on the present site, or at an entirely new location. While another move would present new challenges and a great deal of work, it might also create an opportunity to receive an even better facility which is built to archival standards.

I am delighted with the appointment of Heinrich Loewen as the next Director of the Centre, and I look forward to working with him during the transition and beyond. I wish him well.

# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Recent Books

Kenneth Peter Petkau. *Search for a Peaceful Land: The Peter David Petkau Family Journal: A Family History From the Mid 1600s Until 1969* (Waldheim, SK: Private Publication, 2003) 140 pp.

This book is the family history of Peter David Petkau (1884-1969) born in Alexanderfeld, Kuban, S. Russia and died in St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada; first married to Elizabeth Abrams (1888-1924) and then married to Maria Block (1894-1993), lived in Kamenka #4, Orenburg, Russia and then emigrated from Russia to Canada in 1926. The book begins with several chapters describing the history of the family name, the journey from the ancestral home in Petershagen, Prussia to Russia, life and places of settlement in Russia and eventually the move and settlement in Canada. The book continues with a sections of family photographs, reproduced documents of immigration, letters and reports of relatives left behind in Russia and maps. The final section consists of a genealogical listing. Contact: Kenneth P. Petkau, Waldheim, Saskatchewan.

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## Queries

**Broeske** - Our Great Grandfather Johann Broske, (with countless spellings such as Broeske or Berskia) emigrated from Prussia to Russia in 1873, and joined the Mennonites leaving for Canada on the first boat that came across in June 1874. He was apparently the only person of this surname to come to North America. We know via stories handed down that all his brothers were killed in the Prussian-Austrian war of 1866, and he was the only remaining brother. Did he have any sisters? His father's name was Jacob Johann or Johann Jacob, and his mother was an Anna Vetrovski, or Vertrovski. They had 3 or 4 sons. Johann's first wife's name was Anna and she died somewhere between Prussia and Russia. He came to Canada as a widower with 3 daughters. He was of Lutheran background in Prussia and was baptized into the Kleine Gemeinde Church in Russia in May 1874 prior to departure to Canada. His was the

first recorded marriage in the Blumenort Kleine Gemeinde once he settled here in Canada. We are very interested in unlocking the mystery of Johann prior to his arrival on the scene in Russia in 1873. Contact: Teresa Broesky Wiens at tjwiens@mts.net

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## Manitoba Vital Statistics Records Now Available Online For Genealogical Research

A new Web site allowing access to certain Manitoba vital statistic records for genealogical research is now available, Manitoba Finance Minister Greg Selinger announced on March 26.

The new site allows researchers to look up major life event records such as births, marriages and deaths online and order copies from the Vital Statistics Agency.

"These types of records often provide valuable information for people interested in tracing their family tree," said Selinger. "Genealogists often spend years tracing their relatives and learning about their family history. By making this information available online, the records will be easily accessible to anyone interested in finding out more about their heritage."

Effective Jan. 1, 2003, amendments to the Vital Statistics Act were proclaimed permitting unrestricted access to birth records more than 100 years old, marriage records more than 80 years old and death records more than 70 years old.

Researchers are able to enter their family data into a search program and sort through results online. All electronic information available for each record will be available for online viewing. This electronic information is not a complete copy of the record.

If consumers require more information for genealogical research, certified photocopies of the original registration record, which contain information exactly as recorded on the original document, can be ordered from Vital Statistics for \$12 per record. Legal certificates are still

restricted to the individual named on the record.

Information on marriage commissioners and marriage license issuers will be posted on the Web site, as well as copies of all application forms.

Other services provided by the Vital Statistics Agency are name changes, certified copies of vital event documents and commemorative birth and marriage certificates.

The Vital Statistics Agency registers all vital events (births, marriages, deaths, stillbirths and name changes) in Manitoba, and provides documents as proof of these events. Databases contain Manitoba records from 1882 to the present and some records dating back to 1813 are also available.

To access the genealogical database and other information about the Vital Statistics Agency, visit the government Web site at <http://www.gov.mb.ca/cca/vital>.

## Molotschna Atlas

(projected for 2004)

I am planning to publish an atlas of the Molotschna Colony in the year 2004. We will try to include a detailed map of each of the villages. I published a request for maps a few months ago and a number did come in. We still need maps for:

Altona (also spelled Altonau)

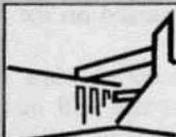
Blumstein  
Fabrikerwiese  
Fuerstenu  
Hamberg  
Konteniusfeld  
Mariental  
Neuheim\*  
Neukirch  
Nikolaidorf  
Pordenu  
Prangenu  
Reinfeld\*  
Schardau

\*places established during the 1920s, mainly by people who had been expelled from their own land.

Please send maps to:

Helmut T. Huebert, 6 Litz Place,  
Winnipeg, MB R2G 0V1 Canada.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: [aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca](mailto:aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca)



## Mennonite Heritage Centre

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### CCA Financial Assistance Program helps the MHC

The Heritage Centre has hired Megan Wiebe as a project archivist for five weeks this summer to review the existing inventory and description of the Elim Bible Institute records housed at the Heritage Centre. She will review the material and the existing finding aid file lists. Culling of some materials of no long-term historical significance will be one of the tasks. In the end, she will produce an updated finding aid which meets the current standards of archival description.

Elim Bible School was founded in 1929 with its first classes offered in Gretna, Manitoba. In 1940 the school moved to Altona where it continued to operate until it closed in 1988 due to low enrolment.

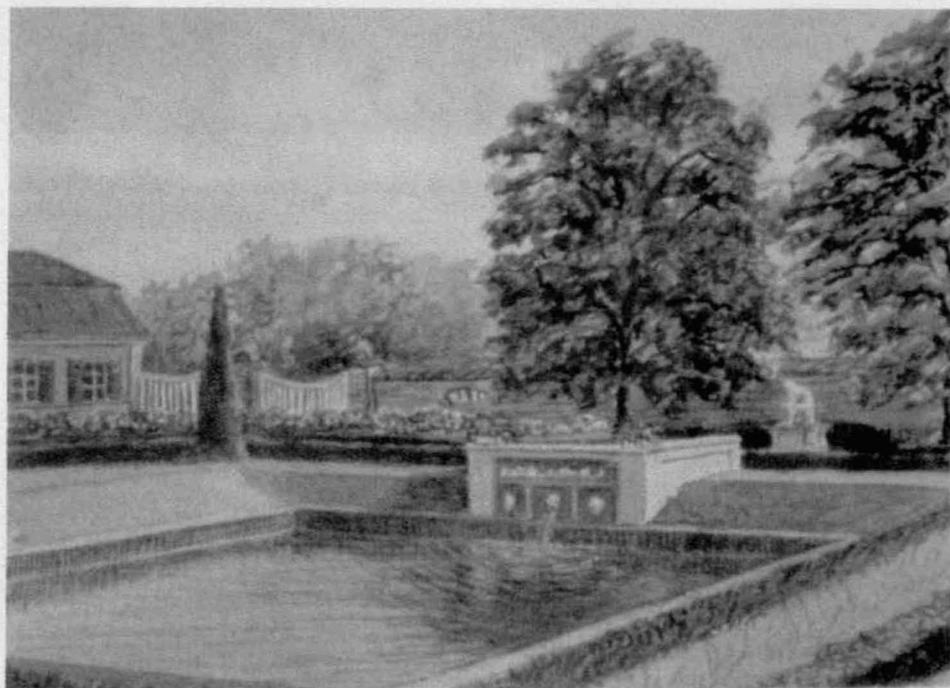
This project would not be possible without the financial assistance of Federal Government Funding through the Canadian Council of Archives in Ottawa.

### Summer Career Placement

For a number of years now the Federal Government has operated the "Summer Career Placement" Program through Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC). The program was designed to assist students in preparing for their future entry into the labour market. The program provides employers with a wage subsidy when creating career-related work experiences for students.

When HRDC approved the application submitted by the MHC for this summer, we were able to hire Trevor Friesen-Stoesz for a 9-week contract from May 5<sup>th</sup> to July 4<sup>th</sup>. Trevor is working as an archival assistant.

Trevor is a graduate of Canadian Mennonite Bible College (2000) and the University of Manitoba (2003). He will be continuing his studies in the Faculty of Education in September.



A Painting by Jacob Sudermann (1888-1940), one of well over 100 art works on exhibit by at the MHC Gallery from May 2-July 15, 2003. Sudermann was a Mennonite artist from the Ukraine, who had been a full-time artist at the time of his arrest and imprisonment in the 1930s under Stalin.



Megan Wiebe, 2003. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.



Trevor Friesen-Stoesz, 2003. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.

### Congregational Records at MHC

Since the Heritage Centre was built in 1979, many congregations have regularly submitted records for permanent storage. These records often consist of weekly bulletins and reports of annual meeting with accompanying minutes. Some congregations have systematically submitted additional records such as minutes of the Church council and other committees, records of projects and programs such as Sunday school, clubs and ladies groups; and publications such as newsletters, directories and anniversary books.

Do you know what records exist for your congregation? Thanks to funds received from the Canadian Council of Archives under the Canadian Archival Information Network (CAIN) program, we were able to create a updated inventory of the records in our holding of each Mennonite Church Canada related congregation. Project archivist Bert Friesen recently completed this 2-year project. You may access these inventory descriptions through our web site at: <http://www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/holdings/>.

## New Director Hired for CMBS



The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, and the Board of Discipleship Ministries of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches are pleased to announce the appointment of Dr.

Heinrich Loewen as director of CMBS, effective August 1. Heinrich fills the vacancy left by the retirement of Dr. Abe Dueck who has ably served the Centre as director for twelve years.

Coming most recently from the pastoral staff of the Elmwood MB Church, Winnipeg, Dr. Loewen takes up his new responsibilities well prepared in church history and theology and with extensive experience in congregational and conference ministry, Christian education, and in business. He holds an M.Div. in Church History from the German Theological Seminary, Giessen, an M.Div. in Pastoral Ministry and Church History from Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary, Fresno, and a Ph.D. in Theology from the Evangelische Theologische Faculteit, Louvain, Belgium. After serving as the founder and president of the Union of Anabaptist Churches in Germany, Heinrich was the founder and president of the Bibelseminar Bonn.

Dr. Loewen will be able to contribute much to the mission of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies as it seeks to conserve the history and heritage of the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church while also serving as a resource to the conference and to congregations as they reach out to their surroundings in relevant ways. As one who enjoys preaching and teaching as well as researching and



Retiring Director Abe Dueck and Conrad Stoesz, half-time Archivist, 2003.

writing, Heinrich is confident that the Centre can serve as a "vital link between the gifts and strengths of the past and the ministry and outreach of the MB church in the present and in the future."

--Gerry Ediger, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and John Neufeld, Board of Discipleship Ministries

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## Recent accessions

1. Photographs and correspondence from Linda Banman, missionary to Brazil. -- 1955-1986.
2. Borden MB Church records. -- 1906-1974.
3. Odessa Region State Archives Fonds 6 (Board of Guardians) Inventory 1, files 866-3055. -- 4 reels of 16 mm microfilm; and, Inventory 4, files 17820-21535. -- 8 reels of 16 mm microfilm.
4. Coaldale Inter- Mennonite Altenfest Committee records. -- 1974-1992. This includes minutes of annual, Health society, credit union and mutual aid meetings.
5. The David G. Rempel microfilms of selected files from St. Petersburg Archives. -- 16 reels. -- 1789-1917; 1 reel of microfilm from the Ulrich Dueck genealogical charts collection, photocopied [198-?]; and 29 reels of microfilm from the Hermann Thiessen genealogical collection including correspondence, manuscripts and card files. -- 1977-1992.
6. 38 reel to reel audio recordings used, and some produced, in missionary work in the Congo by John and Agnes Esau. -- 1950-1960. -- Note: some material in the Kituba language.
7. Rev. Isaac Block materials. -- 1957-1995.
8. Gnadenheim (Flowing Well) Mennonite Brethren church Sunday School conference materials, minute books, receipts and correspondence. -- 1915-1968.
9. Helen Harder Loewen, missionary to India, correspondence and reports. -- 1945-1983.



CENTRE FOR  
**Mennonite  
Brethren  
Studies** IN CANADA

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## Summer Staff at CMBS

The Centre is pleased to welcome back Leslie Wiebe and Donovan Giesbrecht as summer project staff. Donovan is working on phase 3 of the MB Herald photograph collection made possible through a grant from the Canadian Council of Archives, Control of Holdings program. Another 4000 photographs will be processed this summer. Of this 70-80% will be described and made searchable on our photograph database.

Leslie is working at a number of projects, which include updating and creating archival finding aids and entering statistical data sent by the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Churches. Her position was made possible through a grant from the Career Placement program of Human Resources Development Canada.

CDS



Donovan Giesbrecht sorting photographs, 2003. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.



Leslie Wiebe entering the annual statistical reports from congregations, 2003. Photo: Courtesy of Conrad Stoesz.

## Ukraine

(cont'd from p. 1)

We were astonished to see the economic footprints left by the Mennonites. While many were farmers, some became a vigorous force in business and industry.

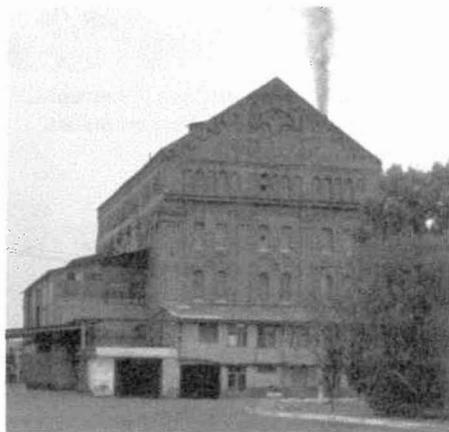
We drove along highways lined on both sides by endless rows of trees. This was part of the Mennonite legacy. Agricultural pioneer Johann Cornies urged his people to plant trees on the barren steppes to strengthen the soil, trap winter moisture and prevent erosion. Each villager was responsible to put in a quantity of seedlings each year. By 1850 the Mennonites had planted a million trees in Russia, transforming the landscape and local ecology.

Farming became more productive and diverse. Sheep, grain and silkworms became prominent.

We were told that the Mennonites introduced sunflower seeds to Russia. Today, oceans of sunflowers cover land once tilled by Mennonites, and the seed's oil remains the number one choice for cooking. (Mennonite settlers later brought sunflower seeds to southern Manitoba and set up North America's first sunflower oil extraction plant in the town of Altona.)

Russian Mennonites developed winter wheat (and later brought it to the U.S. where it became a staple of the midwestern breadbasket). Many villages had mills to grind grain, and in time Mennonites gained a Europe-wide reputation for their milling excellence.

Prosperous farmers bought additional land outside of the colonies. Hundreds of private estates were established. Some grew to be breathtakingly large, up to 100,000 acres. By the time World War I broke out in 1914 more than three million acres were in Mennonite hands.



The Willms mill in Halbstadt, the tallest Mennonite-owned mill in Russia. Now it manufactures condensed milk (2002).



A century ago the Heinrich Schroeder company in Halbstadt sold threshing machines, plows and pumps. The building is still in use (2002).

Mennonites did remarkably well when they turned their hand to industry. They became proficient weavers and brick-makers, and set up industries to manufacture farm implements.

Blacksmith Abraham Koop opened a small shop in Chortitza in 1864, added a foundry 10 years later, and eventually produced plows and binders. By the early 1900s this company employed 800 people and produced 3,000 agricultural machines a year.

Peter Lepp, who had been a clockmaker in Prussia, began a metal fabricating business. He and his partner, Andreas Wallman, developed the largest Mennonite factory in Russia. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century their annual output reached 1,200 reapers, 220 threshers and 500 winnowers.

In his book *An Introduction to Mennonite History*, Cornelius J. Dyck says that by the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mennonite-owned factories had a combined annual output of 15,000 mowers and 10,000 plows. Clearly, Mennonite industrialists had captured an amazing niche market in implements. At one point they were producing up to 12 percent of all the agricultural machines in Russia.

A number of factory structures are still in use. One Lepp-Wallman facility in the city of Zaporozhye is now used to manufacture Daiwo automobiles.

Lepp and Wallman built row housing and a hospital for factory workers. During our visit, a joint worship service of three Mennonite congregations was held in an assembly hall that Lepp and Wallman erected for employee activities.

Hermann Niebuhr, a miller, visited the U.S. in 1893 and toured the Pillsbury company in Minneapolis. He was so inspired he built his own huge mill in Chortitza. It was eventually expropriated after the Russian Revolution. "It is still in

use today and is still the largest in the area," writes Winnipeg architect Rudy Friesen in his book, *Into the Past: Buildings of the Mennonite Commonwealth*.

Another large flour mill was owned by H.H. Willms in Halbstadt (today Molochansk). This towering seven-storey structure was said to be the tallest of the Russian Mennonite mills. It no longer grinds grain but now produces condensed milk.

The earliest Mennonites in Russia had lived simply. They brought with them the combined house-barn architectural style from Prussia. Their churches had basic designs at first, then became more upscale as the immigrants settled in and prospered. By the turn of the twentieth century some churches had ornate gateposts, Gothic windows and ceiling frescoes.

Their lifestyles reflected an emerging new status. They traveled, studied abroad, carried on commerce in European capitals, and adopted cultural fashions of the day.

No longer were the Mennonites "the quiet in the land." They had become a vital force in society. Two were members of the Duma, Russia's national Parliament. Johann Esau was for many years the mayor of the large city of Ekaterinoslav, known today as Dnieperpetrosk. The Czar brought foreign dignitaries to see the Mennonites as an example of progress and diligence.

All that came crashing down with the turmoil of the 1917 Revolution. Like other immigrant groups, the Mennonites suffered at the hands of roving anarchists who plundered and killed.

Famine struck Russia in the early 1920s. The formerly affluent found themselves destitute. Their need gave rise to the formation of Mennonite Central Committee as North American

Mennonites reached out to their brothers and sisters with relief supplies. The vacated home of a wealthy lumberman, Jacob Dyck, served as the new organization's first soup kitchen. Its spacious dining room, used in an earlier time to entertain large numbers of guests, now fed hordes of hungry Mennonites.

Mennonites had begun leaving Russia in the 1870s, many for economic opportunity, some out of fear that rising nationalism posed a threat to their religious freedom. Some 18,000 Mennonites had left for the central plains of Canada and the United States. Now another 20,000 left during the brutal turmoil of the 1920s. More would leave after World War II, ending up in South America.

The rich land of the Russian Mennonites was turned into collective farms; their formerly thriving businesses were taken over by the state.

As we explored we pondered the meaning of our forbears' agricultural, economic and spiritual heritage. "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past" (Deut. 32:7).

And we wondered what still could be salvaged from the Anabaptist sojourn in this gigantic region which during the Cold War was held up as The Enemy.

There is little Mennonite presence left. At one time there were 120,000 Mennonites in Russia; today, an estimated 5,000 still live in scattered regions across the former Soviet Union. There are three congregations in present-day Ukraine. One is the Kutuzovka congregation which worships in quarters once occupied by the Petershagen church, recently restored with financing from Canada. A Mennonite Center that ministers to the spiritual and humanitarian needs of the local community works out of the refurbished Mennonite girls school in Molochansk. Efforts are under way in the city of Zaporozhye to build a large seniors center, sponsored by a group in Winnipeg.

Meanwhile, a steady stream of North Americans comes to visit their heritage, trying to settle for themselves the question, "What do these stones mean?" (Josh. 4:21). By the time they are done they have a new understanding of the nature of home, land and productivity. As they depart, some muse: Would it still be possible to "rebuild the ancient ruins" and "raise up the age-old foundations" (Is. 58:10-12)?

The hard work of the past casts a long shadow. As does ours today.

## Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 8)

the area. He also ran a general store and worked some land which may have amounted to about a quarter farm (about 45 acres). He was a very hard-working man, and as David notes numerous times, especially concerned that all his children would receive a good education.

The family included three children (Neta, Gerhard and Johann) from the first mother, Maria Rempel, and six children (an unnamed son, Heinrich, Maria, Heinrich, David and Jacob) from the second mother, Maria Pauls (p. 280). David and his siblings were close, and seldom expressed an awareness that some of them had the earlier mother and some the later one. Earlier connections with the descendants of the deputy Jacob Hoepfner and then the Peter Hildebrands added a further layer of significant relationships for the total clan.

Eight maps, several genealogical charts, several appendices (including the 1785 foreign settlement manifesto of Catharine II, hard to find elsewhere) a glossary, a very good index and other aids, including a number of excellent photos, and the cover page beautiful painting by the late Henry Pauls of Leamington, augment the text significantly.

One can quibble with details here and there. Was the formation of the *Allianz* group actually a second schism of the *Kirchliche Gemeinde*? In any case that beginning event came around 1905 rather than "after the October Revolution" (p. 28). The paper *Christlicher Familienkalender* in fact terminated publication in 1920, not 1919 (p. 97). The reference to Maria Pauls as first wife of Gerhard Rempel (both then 19 years of age) ought to read Maria Rempel (cf. p. 39 and p. 280). The allusion to 1905-06 "revolutions" is somewhat puzzling. Usually the history books will note disturbances and local uprisings or call 1905 the "first revolution". It would also be useful to know the source of the Bartsch correspondence mentioned in on p. 306 in footnote 2.

Regarding source annotations, the unpublished Abram Dyck diaries (p. 316, footnote 3), are currently located in the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. Staples' dissertation (p. 305, footnote 15) is now in print as *Cross-Cultural Encounters on the Ukrainian Steppe: Settling the Molochna Basin 1784-1861* (University of Toronto Press, 2003) and

the David G. Rempel Microfilm Collection (p. 305, footnote 14) is now available at a number of additional libraries and centres, including the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg.

Dr. David G. Rempel (1899-1992) studied at Bluffton College (BA), University of Wisconsin (MA) and then completed his PhD in 1933 at Stanford University in California. With the exception of three years in US military service during WWII, Dr. Rempel taught at the College of San Mateo (at the outset a Junior College) from 1934 till his retirement in 1964. Further details of his career are available in James Urry's "In Memoriam" essay in *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 11, 1993, 224-235.

### Call for Papers

#### Mennonites and Refugees: A 25 Year Retrospective

A history conference examining the interaction between North American Mennonites and refugees will be held Sept. 30 - Oct. 1, 2005, at the University of Winnipeg, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the coming of the so-called Vietnamese 'Boat People' and other Southeast Asian refugees in 1979/1980.

For further information contact: Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. R3B 2E9 or email to r.Loewen@uwinnipeg.ca.

### Call for Submissions

for

#### Sound In The Land

Deadline: Sept. 25, 2003

This Music Festival/Academic Conference, May 28-30, 2004, at Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, will celebrate the wide array of Mennonite-rooted music, from four-part to funk, both in live performances and scholarly papers or creative writings. This multi-genred, interdisciplinary event invites musical compositions, collaborations, creative writings, and academic submissions about Mennonite music making in terms of ethnicity, cultural studies, or musical/theoretical/historical analysis. For further information contact Carol Ann Weaver <caweaver@uwaterloo.ca>, phone: 519-885-0220x245.

## Book Reviews

Paul Toews and Kevin Enns-Rempel, editors, *For Everything a Season: Mennonite Brethren in North America, 1874–2002; an Informal History* (Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2002) 188 pp.

*Reviewed by Dan Nighswander, General Secretary, Mennonite Church Canada*

The closing of a denominational structure after over one hundred and twenty years of history is an occasion that stimulates reflection on the meaning of that institution in the life of its members and the world. When the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America voted itself out of existence in 1999 (with final implementation in 2002), the General Conference Executive and the Historical Commission mandated the writing of an “informal history” of the bi-national church’s life.

Fifteen authors wrote thirteen chapters and an afterward. Each chapter addresses a theme, tracing it through that more than a century of development. The first two chapters sketch the historical origins and migration stories. Subsequent chapters deal with theology, structures, mission, publishing, higher education, writers, music, congregational life, engagement with the surrounding cultures and the expanding boundaries of the church. The afterward offers some suggestions for what directions the future might take as the separate national bodies and emerging multi-national structures take over the leadership of the Mennonite Brethren church.

The writing is engaging, and considering the number of writers the style and quality of the chapters is impressively uniform. The interest of the book is enhanced by well-chosen sidebars with additional human interest stories and facts. There is also an abundance of photos, most of which fall into one of three categories: photos of large groups of people—especially conference delegates, but also Sunday School picnics, choirs and committees; buildings, primarily churches and colleges; and important men—sometimes with their wives. Unfortunately there is only one map, where several would have been helpful. An index of the photos and of topics and people would also have been helpful additions.

In reflecting on Mennonite Brethren writers and writing, Katie Funk Wiebe observes that only books of history and theology were approved by church authorities. She suggests that one reason for this is that “historians were more likely than novelists to present a positive picture of the developing church, without raising troublesome questions. Historians shaped the Mennonite Brethren profile by looking at its systems and institutions from the outside [one thinks, rather, from the inside]” (p. 111). This book fits into that mold. It presents an insider’s view and a positive picture. No difficult questions are raised. Except for a few hints (e.g., in chapters on publications and music) one gets no sense of debate, conflict or parting of the ways.

The editors claim that “another generation will make [the] analysis and offer an assessment as to the consequences of the decision to effectively dissolve this [General Conference] structure,” (p. 1). Nevertheless, it is disappointing that nothing significant is said of that decision in this book. So little is said, in fact (except, as the title suggests, that “it was time”), and the positive depiction of the achievements of the General Conference is expressed with such enthusiasm that the reader is left with a sense that the decision was arbitrary and ill-conceived. But since so many other formerly bi-national Christian churches in North America have separated along national lines one presumes that some of the same rationale must have been influential in the Mennonite Brethren decision. Even a hint of this would have been welcome.

As the editors indicate, this is not the study that will help us to understand why the General Conference has come to an end. Neither does it give a fully-rounded story of the life of this organizational institution. What it does give is exactly what it promises: an informal, authorized history that should prompt a lot of reminiscing and justified satisfaction (not, of course, pride) in what the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America contributed to the life of its members and to effective service to God throughout its entire existence.

David G Rempel, with Cornelia Rempel Carlson, *A Mennonite Family in Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union: 1789 - 1923* (Toronto, Buffalo, London:

University of Toronto Press, 2002), cloth, 352 pp. \$65.00

*Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein*

The literature on Mennonites from Russia is rich and growing. But now and then a new volume appears to rise perceptibly above what has been published to date. Such are the David Rempel (b. 1899) posthumously published memoirs for the years through 1923 when the Rempel family emigrated to Canada.

The family story manuscript for this book is one Dr. Rempel worked on for many years. It is augmented here with a very fine introduction by Dr. Harvey Dyck of the University of Toronto, and has also been given a very helpful editorial “touch-up” by David’s daughter, Cornelia, who was able also to bring some additional material into the account.

The volume is in the first instance, a family study about two Rempel families from the Khortitza Colony in New Russia. These were the ancestors of the author through the marriage of Gerhard and his distantly related first wife Maria, both of them Rempels, and then through a second marriage for Gerhard, to Maria Pauls, who became the mother of David. Their home community was Nieder Khortitza on the Dnieper, a village founded in 1803.

But this volume is much more than a genealogical survey or even a family story. It ranges widely beyond the narrow confines of a home to depict the life of an entire community and to provide a more intimate picture of the Old Colony settlement experience up through the Civil War and famine years to the time of the Mennonite emigration to Canada in 1923. What makes this volume truly an exceptional achievement is the enormous wealth of detailed data not only about the family structure and the characteristics of its members, but the every-day life of the people of Nieder Khortitza and their times in south Russia. These facts are brought together to provide a fascinating glimpse of interrelations and socio-economic realities particularly of life on a common village level normally not found in books about Mennonites in Russia and the Soviet Union.

David’s father Gerhard was a businessman, who worked at the grain trade buying and selling grain for export beyond

(cont’d on p. 7)