

Mennonite Historian

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



Saturday morning session, 6 June 2004. Left: Dr. Alexander Prussin (Arizona), interpreter; Right: Dr. Viktor Kleis (Dnepropetrovsk) speaking on "Ukrainian Mennonites during the German Occupation of World War II" at the "Molochna 2004" International Scholarly Conference in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine. (Photo: Courtesy of Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg)

Recapturing the Russian Mennonite Story

by Dr. Paul Toews and Walter Unger

In order to celebrate the bicentennial of the founding of Molochna, the largest Mennonite settlement in Tsarist and Soviet Russia, a major academic conference, "Molochna and its Neighbors" was held in several southern Ukrainian centers, notably Zaporozhye and Melitopol, in early June, 2004.

Mennonites are a confessional group which migrated from sixteenth century Holland to Poland to Russia/Ukraine, and then disbursed to many countries. There are over half a million Russian Mennonite descendants in North America. They have been returning in considerable numbers as scholars and tourists in the last decade. A renovated former historic girls school now serves as a Mennonite regional relief centre, specializing in medical and educational projects. MCC and other

Mennonite agencies are also actively at work in Ukraine.

Thirty seven papers from researchers in seven countries on three continents were presented at the June conference in Ukraine, most of them from Ukrainian and Russian scholars. Ceremonial events were held at three Molochna village sites as well as in the city of Dnepropetrovsk. The major event was the unveiling of the Settler's Monument in Halbstadt/Molochansk with Canadian Ambassador Andrew Robinson participating. Canadian novelist Rudy Wiebe presented a major address to Ukrainian university students at the historic Potemkin Palace in Dnepropetrovsk. The events received wide coverage in regional Ukrainian newspapers and television.

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Sketches From Siberia: The Final Chapter on Sudermann

by Werner Toews

On August the 22, 2003 the letter arrived in the mail...a large white envelope from the Canadian Red Cross. I was optimistic that the letter would contain information that would reveal the exact details of the fate of Jacob and Nicolai Sudermann. This was some 65 yrs after they were last heard from.

I had started this process in November 2002 by filling out an application sent to me by the Restoring Family Links Division of the Canadian Red Cross. I decided to use the services of the Red Cross just like my grandmother, Elizabeth Sudermann did during the 1950s after she had settled in Canada. She wanted to find out what had happened to her husband, Nicolai Sudermann.

After many months of waiting she received a reply that he had died in a labour camp after contracting dysentery. Many Mennonite people had received similar answers on the fate of their loved ones and, strangely enough, most of the men died in 1940. People had to find closure from this information whether they believed the official answer or not. As the years went by more and more information became available about how, during the 1930s, the Soviet Government had terrorized it's people with artificial famine, executions, exile to Siberia and lengthy prison sentences.

Jacob's sister, Anna Sudermann, had also tried to learn the fate of her brother and finally received the answer that he had also died in a labour camp in 1940.

I was not satisfied with these answers and had to learn the truth once and for all on the fate of the Sudermann brothers.

I located as much information that I could about their lives by reading the memoirs of Anna Sudermann and speaking with the surviving family members. The information I had garnered from the memoirs, I later discovered, was accurate and precise. It described the dates and events surrounding the arrest of each of her brothers and to which cities they were taken.

I completed the application and was told by the staff it could take up to a year before I would receive an answer. I had wanted the answer in time for the opening of the exhibit of Sudermann art at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery, but this was not to be. The months went by

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Molochna 2004

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Conference organizer, University of Toronto historian Harvey Dyck, was not able to attend due to illness. His colleagues and friends successfully rallied to mount the conference and its surrounding events. The conference co-chairs were Canadian historian John Staples, and Ukrainian geographer, Nikolai Krylov.

In addition to the academic conference these days of bicentennial markings included the unveiling of several memorial monuments. The Mennonite International Memorialization Committee for the Former Soviet Union supervised the placement of a Settlers' Monument in Molochansk (formerly Halbstadt). Two benches at the railway station of Svetlodolinskoe (formerly Lichtenau) recall the voluntary migration of Mennonites to freedom in the west and involuntary deportation to the eastern Gulag. The station is on the railway line built by the Wall brothers and other investors. Two plaques placed in Vladovka (formerly Waldheim) recognize the role played by Agnes and Cornelius Warkentin in the establishment of a still existing hospital. The second plaque is placed at the local school which occupies the site of the former Isaac Neufeld

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The mayor of Svetlodolinsk (Lichtenau) and other regional government officials welcomed those in attendance at the ceremony marking the dedication of the two Mennonite memorial benches at the site of the historic Lichtenau train station. Photo: Courtesy of Peter Letkemann.

factory. In Bogdanovka (formerly Gnadenfeld) a monument was placed at the site of the former Mennonite cemetery.

Also unveiled in the Yavarnitzky Museum in Dnepropetrovsk (formerly Ekaterinoslav) was the recently discovered tombstone of Samuel Contentius, Head of the Board of Guardians which regulated the affairs of foreign settlers in the region and a friend of Mennonites.

An extensive photo exhibit consisting of 139 historic Molochna images was opened in Melitopol.

The exhibit was opened in the Melitopol Museum of Regional Studies. It will also go on display in the Zaporozhye Museum of Regional Studies in autumn.

A historic Sunday worship service was conducted in the famous former Zentralschule (regional High School) in Halbstadt, the first such service since 1943. The opening hymn, sung in Russian and English, was "Great is Thy Faithfulness." Pastor Jakob Tiessen of the nearby Kutuzovka Church conducted the service. The sermon by conference participant Johannes Dyck, formerly of Kazakhstan, currently living in Germany, celebrated the "love and hope of our Christian faith" In attendance were members of the Zaporozhye and Kutuzovka Mennonite congregations plus representatives of diaspora communities in Paraguay, Germany, Canada and the USA. Most of the packed hall however was made up of local non-Mennonite Ukrainians.

Local and regional officials and many villagers attending each event expressed sincere appreciation for the multiple contributions which Mennonites made to

the history of the region. One local leader said explicitly that "we wish to build on the past which you so richly gave us."

Ukrainians speak of this spring as unusually beautiful. The landscape is green, spring rains have watered the steppe, the wild flowers are brilliant in their colour. After the winter the renewal of the spring is a metaphor for what is happening to the Mennonite story and to Mennonite-Ukrainian relationships. The Mennonite story, long suppressed, is being rediscovered as a vital part of the history of the southern Ukraine. The values that shaped the Mennonite story are being embraced as necessary for the renewal of Ukrainian society. The admiration for Mennonites as a people of memory, for having a sense of tradition that anchors them in changing times was repeatedly invoked. Both Ukrainian and the returning Mennonites from Paraguay, United States, Canada and Germany were moved by the mutual embrace and the kinship that such historic celebrations rekindle.

Noted Dutch historian, Piet Visser of Amsterdam, summarized the early June events in this manner:

"The conference was well organized and featured papers from different angles and disciplines. The level of scholarship was good. What struck me most dramatically was the substantial amount of work contributed by Ukrainian and Russian scholars. This is very promising for the future of Mennonite studies. I think it is vitally important that non-Mennonite scholars in eastern Europe bring new research to the story, allowing

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Queries

Hiebert – Looking for information about Abraham Hiebert (b. 7 Apr. 1907) married to Margret Arens (from Alsen, North Dakota), or their son Leonard Hiebert (b. 4 Jan. 1939) in the Langdon area, North Dakota. Abraham had more children whose names are unknown. He may have come from the Sioux Fall, SD area, but rumor has it that he came over the border from Manitoba with his younger brother. The younger brother changed his name to Roy Daley. Contact: Kathy Pupeza, 3625 Flag Ave. N., New Hope, MN 55427 or e-mail: markp@paperdepotinc.com.

Thielman – Sarah Dekker Thielman (1878-1968) was a Mennonite woman who practised midwifery in Russia and Canada (Saskatchewan and Ontario) between the years 1909 to 1941. A journal, written in the German Gothic script, that records her activity as a midwife, is at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg. Marlene Epp, a historian in Waterloo, Ontario, is doing research on Mennonite women and midwifery and would like to learn more about Sarah Thielman. If you have any information or recollections about her and her work, please contact Marlene at: Conrad Grebel University College, Waterloo, Ontario, N2L 3G6; or e-mail mgepp@uwaterloo.ca.

Harder – Looking for information on Abraham Harder, father of Katharine Harder (b. 7 Oct. 1821) who married Gerhard Andres (1814-1839) who lived in Einlage where my ancestor Johann G. Andres was born on 19 February 1841 and where Abraham Harder died in the same year. Contact: Pamela Williams, 3549 E. Caballero Street, Mesa, Arizona 85213 or e-mail pamelamaureen@hotmail.com.

Klassen – Looking for ancestral information on Cornelius Abraham Klassen (1883-1919), a teacher for 13 years in the Ukraine and farmer near Issyl Kul for last 3 years of his life, and his father Abraham Johann Klassen (1850-1922) and mother Cornelia Toews Klassen (1860-1936)

from Kleefeld in the Molotschna Colony. Contact: Robert Klassen, 3807 North 36th Road, Arlington, Virginia 22207 or email: bklassens@erols.com.

Rosthern Junior College / German English Acadmey – In preparation for the 2005 Centennial celebration at Rosthern Junior College next July 29-31, a pictorial history/story book is being prepared. Needed are the class photos or photos of the entire student body for the years: 1906, 1910, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1932, 1933, 1934. Please mail to: Sylvia Regier, Box 208, Laird, SK S0K 2H0 or phone 306-223-4324. Original photos will be returned to the owner.

Martens – I am looking for information on a Cornelius Richard Martens who was from the Livelong, Saskatchewan area. He married Sheila Nelson in the mid 1940s. They had a daughter together in 1947, named Lois (my mother) born in Red Deer. This marriage failed and he later re-married. He was a truck driver, loved to play guitar and had extremely curly hair. I would like to help my mother find her father or other members of his family Contact: Shaunagh Schemenauer, 6205-33 Street, Lloydminster, AB T9V 2V7 Phone: 780-871-0686 or 780-808-1787 or email: shaunagh@telusplanet.net

Recent Books

Reg Rempel. *Bahnmann Centennial Celebration : Commemorating the Arrival of Heinrich & Katharina (Wiens) Bahnmann and Family in North America* (Creighton, SK : Reg Rempel, 2004) 95 pp.

This family history book consists of four sections. The first section begins by tracing the ancestry of the main subjects, Heinrich P. Bahnmann (1852-1906) and his wife Katharina Wiens (1859-1936) who were from Berdjansk, South Russia, left in 1903 and settled in Rosthern, Saskatchewan in 1904. The section includes their family history and that of each of their children, as well as a short piece on the history of the city of Berdjansk written by Anthropologist Dr. James Urry. In 1912 Heinrich P.

Bahnmann's widow Katharina, married Abraham Dyck (d. 1914), and in 1916, she married the widowed Rosenorter Mennonite bishop Peter Regier (1851-1925).

The second section is about the Bahnmann Centennial Celebration held July 4-6, 2003 at Rosthern. It includes photos and reports about the program and activities of the family reunion. The third section consists of the genealogical data which documents all of the descendants.

The final section consists of the description of the 775 photos contained on the CD which is included with this publication.

Reg Rempel has also put together a translation of Katharina (Wiens) Bahnmann Dyck Regier's "Black Book" which contains excerpts from the notes of her husband, Peter Regier, bishop of the Mennonite Rosenorter Church about church events in the Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan area. Copies have been placed in the archives in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Abbotsford and Newton. For more information contact: Reg Rempel, P.O. Box 399, Creighton, SK S0P 0A0 or e-mail rgr@sasktel.net.

Paul Thielmann and Alfred H. Redekopp. *Stammbuch von Jakob Thielmann (1786-1813) & Helena Kröker* (Hennef, NRW, Germany : Paul Thielmann, 2004) 296 pp.

This compilation is a new edition, translation and expanded family history of the Thielmann family originally published in 1987. With significant additional genealogical information for those descendants that carry the Thielmann surname, this publication includes 115 coloured and 130 B&W photographs. All of the text (i.e. the biographical sketches) and photographs used in the 1987 publication are included. The new information is particularly relevant to the many descendants of this family that have migrated to Germany from the former Soviet Union during the past 20 years. The book is available in several formats—in colour or B&W, and with either soft or hardcover binding. Contact: Paul Thielmann, Kegelswies 102, 53773 Hennef, Germany or phone 02-242-874-2784 or 0-172-245-7849.

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

Fate of Jacob Sudermann

(cont'd from p. 1)

quickly as I organized the show and gathered as much of Jacob's art work that I could find.

Then the day of the opening arrived, May 2, 2003. The MHC Gallery was filled with family and friends. What a joyous occasion it was celebrating the life of Jacob Sudermann with the display of his art and the messages of love to his family found on the backs of his paintings.

Then, after a successful run at the Heritage Gallery and a request by the Steinbach Heritage Village Museum, the exhibit was moved to Steinbach on July 22 where it was on display until the beginning of November.

So with great anticipation and anguish I slowly opened the envelope to reveal its contents. I knew that the information contained in the envelope would not be good news. But possibly and hopefully, it would finally reveal the details of the fate of the Sudermann brothers.

I slowly read the cover letter by the representative of the Manitoba region of the Red Cross. It stated that they had received information from the Ukrainian Red Cross on the fate of Jacob Sudermann and my grandfather, Nicolai Sudermann.

The final line stated:

"We hope you will find this information helpful. This case will now be closed."

I paused for a moment before I started to look at the next page. I quickly thought this is it...the next pages will finally explain what happened to Jacob and Nicolai.

I turned the page. There it was about half way down the page.

"We inform you that, according to the Zaporizhzhia region's State Archives: Sudermann Jacob Davidovich DOB 1888 German (then described his place of residency) on November 23 1933 was arrested and convicted to five years of a labour camp in Dalekoskhidny Krai, Russia. Reason: Counter-revolutionary propaganda."

Then a heart stopping line which read:

"On October 15, 1937 was shot: On August 15 1989 was rehabilitated."

I was in shock. I knew that there was a possibility that this is what may have happened to him. I was not fully prepared to see it in cold type written words.

I quickly scanned the next paragraph



Artist Jacob Sudermann (1888-1937)

which contained information on my grandfather.

"Sudermann Nikolai (Mykola) Davidovich DOB 1898 German".

Again his place of residency and then more disturbing information:

"On November 4, 1937 was arrested. Reason: Counter-revolutionary propaganda. On January 9 1938 was shot in Zaporizhzhia. On November 30 1989 was rehabilitate."

The rest of the paragraph correctly described the names and ages of his wife and his children. One of them of course was my mother. She was five years old when her father was shot. Then I asked the obvious question—why were they shot?

I wasn't sure if I could find all the answers but I was determined to seek as much information as I could, to try and understand why they had been executed.

My next thoughts were about my mother and her siblings. I knew that they had years ago come to terms with the thought that their father had died somewhere in a Siberian camp. But did they really want to know about this new information? I also knew that the information about him being a counter-revolutionary was completely false and ridiculous. I later discovered that during this period of history (1937-1938), the Soviet government used this term to describe former landowners, people who believed in God and church, former intellectuals and people of certain ethnic groups. Unfortunately the Sudermann brothers were all of the above, and as such, were open to arrest, torture and, in the end, subject to the ultimate punishment—death.

I then thought about today's world and then asked myself the questions: Has anything really changed? Do we really learn from the mistakes of the past?

A few days later, I went to my mother's house to show her the letter. I did this with a heavy heart not knowing what her reaction would be. I had told her many months before that I was making enquiries about the fate of Jacob and her father, Nicolai.

When I arrived I told her that I had finally received information from the Red Cross about what had happened to Jacob and her father. I gave her the official letter and waited patiently while she read it. Her first reaction after reading the letter was, "How do we know that this is the truth?" I told her that in all my research this appeared to be what had happened to many of the Mennonite men that had been arrested and taken away.

Her next comment was, "Well at least then they didn't have to suffer in a camp."

Of course she was right. But I asked her the question, "Why did so many people have to suffer during that time?"

My mother replied: "You have no idea what it was like to live through that time."

I remember hearing those exact words on numerous occasions when I asked about her childhood life in the former Soviet Union. It was a time of terror for families—husbands, fathers, brothers (even women and children) of the towns, villages, and cities of the Soviet Union arrested in the middle of the night, taken to prison, and never heard from again.

Then she asked what 'rehabilitated' meant. I told her that I had found the definition on the Memorial Society website (www.memo.ru/eng/).

(This society was founded in the former USSR in the late 1980s. Its main task was the awakening and preservation of the societal memory of the severe political persecution in the recent past of the Soviet Union. Beginning in 1987, the Memorial Society began a struggle for the full rehabilitation of victims of political repression in the USSR. This included a public recognition of the innocent persons and a public apology to them from the state. The first rehabilitation law was passed by the Government in 1991.)

The Memorial Society defines the term 'rehabilitation' as follows:

the restoration of lost rights and privileges, the restoration of civil rights for the future, and also the elimination of restrictions of rights connected with illegal ascription of criminal responsibility, the deprivation of freedoms, the improper conviction of innocent persons, and the illegal application of forcible means of a medical character.

(Fate of Suderman –cont'd from p. 4)

My mother then said, "what does that help now...they are all dead."

She was right, of course and many people would come to the same conclusion. I told her that it probably was a way for the present government to apologize for past crimes perpetrated on its people by the former Soviet government.

When I informed the rest of the family of this information I heard the same comments, "At least they didn't suffer." They did not suffer, but the wives and families did...short- and long-term suffering. Most of the villages were without men. The women and children were left to defend themselves against an ever-increasing cruel world.

I later discovered through my research on the Sudermann family that my grandfather's brother, Heinrich Sudermann, who was arrested on the same day as Nicolai, had also been executed.

A further discovery was that my great grandfather, teacher Heinrich Epp, the father-in-law of Nicolai Sudermann, had also been arrested and executed. Epp was a highly respected teacher in the Mennonite village of Chortitza. He was relieved of his teaching duties by local government officials when he admitted that he believed in God.

I had asked the Memorial Society to help me locate further information on my relatives. They obtained the same documents that the Red Cross had received from the Zaporizhzhia Archives in the Ukraine. There is a notation on all the documents which says "place of burial...missing." I am still in the process of finding out where my relatives are buried.

This is the final chapter of the life of Jacob Sudermann, but it is not the final chapter of his memory or the memory of all those who suffered through that dark period of soviet history.

I wish to thank Ray Dirks (MHC Gallery, Sue Barkmann and Roland Sawatzky (Mennonite Heritage Village) for helping me with the exhibit. Thank you also to Lawrence Klippenstein for organizing two "Sketches from Siberia" workshops. And, thank you to Alf Redekopp, Conrad Stoesz and Connie Wiebe (Mennonite Heritage Centre) for helping me with my research.

Werner Toews is working on a book about Jacob Sudermann and his art work.



Linda Huebert Hecht sorting through cabinets 9 and 10 of the Frank H. Epp Collection.

The Frank H. Epp Collection

by Jennifer Konkle

After combing through nine of Frank H. Epp's filing cabinets (so far), Linda Huebert Hecht knows more than a little bit about this important church leader. Hired by Conrad Grebel University College in 1999, she has worked part-time archiving Epp's extensive collection of correspondence, research notes, articles and newspaper clippings. According to Sam Steiner, Grebel Archivist, this five year project, jointly funded by the Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund and Grebel, is important because "Epp was a very significant Canadian Mennonite leader that helped influence 20th century Mennonites to be more actively engaged in the political discussions of the day. Whether one judges this to be a good or bad thing, he helped this to happen. Persons that have this kind of pivotal influence need to be preserved in their papers."

The Epp Collection is very large, consisting of 22 four-drawer filing cabinets and includes documents from Epp's entire career, reflecting the many roles he had, as journalist, radio speaker, ordained minister, church leader, historian, professor, college president, politician, peace activist and author, as well as his positions with Mennonite Central Committee, several non-Mennonite organizations, and on many committees.

He began collecting materials in the 1950s when he became founding editor of *The Canadian Mennonite*, and continued to do so until shortly before his death in 1986.

Nearly half finished, Huebert Hecht is currently processing cabinet number 10, on political science. There are several larger sections related to Epp's sermons, writing, speaking and travels, which remain to be processed. Finished files include issues pertinent to the Mennonite community at a particular time, such as conscientious objection and alternative service, Mennonites and peace, and information on Mennonite educational institutions. "The Middle East section reveals the breadth of Epp's contacts as he did the research for his books on this topic," says Huebert Hecht. "As well, this collection includes newspaper clippings and magazine articles on many different social, political and cultural topics, a selection of which has been kept. One of the oldest items processed to date is a newspaper article on Mennonites in the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* of 1938." Huebert Hecht mentions the integral role that Epp's wife Helen played in creating and managing the collection and in handling correspondence. The archival guide

(cont'd on p. 8)



Mennonite Heritage Centre

600 Shaftesbury Blvd Winnipeg MB Canada R3P 0M4

MHC Vault Renovation Project

After two years of planning, it took just over two weeks in early June for the Heritage Centre Archives storage vault to be transformed with a significant increase in storage space. During the two weeks that we were closed about two thirds of the collection was moved out temporarily and a system of mobile shelves installed, and then everything was moved back in again.

We want to thank all the volunteers that helped with the move. Thank you also to our researchers who needed to suspend their research at the Centre during that period. And, thank you to our funders.

This project was made possible through financial support from Canadian Council of Archives, The Winnipeg Foundation, Mennonite Foundation of Canada, The Thomas Sill Foundation Inc., Drew Foundation, LBL Holdings Ltd., and other individuals.

Thank you very much.

A.R.



Staff and volunteers from Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University help move the archives in preparation for the installation of a mobile shelving system.



Existing shelves were reconfigured and integrated with the new mobile shelving system



Over 4000 archival boxes were temporarily moved to the MHC Gallery area.



The MHC Gallery main level was filled from corner to corner with archival boxes.



Moving back in.



One aisle and eleven banks of shelves mobilized – storage capacity doubled.



Archival material all back in order with additional space for the future.

History – Why Bother?

by Shauna Hudson

I am in my fourth year of study at Canadian Mennonite University, working towards my BA of Church Ministries (with emphasis in youth ministry). I hope to go into full-time youth ministry after I graduate. I also spent this past summer working in the Archives at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg.

Anyone who knows me well, knows that I avoid history classes as often as I can. What does history have to do with youth anyway, I would ask myself. I have even been known to say that I hate history. I know that sounds harsh, but I simply do not find it interesting. To sit in a classroom, listening to the professor listing off dates is not my idea of a good time.

As a student at CMU, however, I am required to take 6 credit hours of Mennonite History in order to graduate. This, as you may have guessed, was not something that I was looking forward to. I avoided it as long as I could, but in my third year of study I could avoid it no longer. I signed up for an early Anabaptist beginnings course and I was hoping that learning about where my ancestors came from and what they went through to obtain the freedom that we now enjoy would be interesting to me because I am Mennonite. Unfortunately, it did not work out exactly as I had hoped. The class I took was a first year class, however, the professor had previously taught at the seminary level and, in my opinion, seemed to forget that we were not in seminary. I often told people that if I had actually been a first year student, I probably would have dropped the class. I have no problem with working hard and having to memorize things but to me, the things he would require us to remember were ridiculous.

Why then, one might ask, did I chose to work in the archives at the Centre for MB Studies? That is a good question. The simple answer to that question is that I needed a summer job, they were going to pay me well. Seems selfish, I know, but it has truly turned out to be a great experience working at the Centre for MB Studies. Never before have I enjoyed history! Granted, not everything I do at the archives is directly related to Mennonite History, but because I have

been able to learn on my own, I have gained a new appreciation for it.

I have enjoyed learning about how many of our Mennonite Brethren churches got started. It is interesting to see how God can take a small group of people with a vision or a need and help them flourish. It is proof that nothing is impossible with God (Luke 1:37). I have also enjoyed acquiring tidbits of information regarding such subjects as dancing in the church and conscientious objectors, to name a few through the reading that I do as well as the people that work in the office. Some of the ideas of the past seem funny to us now, however, these were real issues that the church and the people of the church had to deal with, just as we deal with issues now that might not seem as important in the future. And lastly, but not least, my favorite part of this job has been hearing personal stories about real life experiences in the church, those that have caused great joy as well as those that have left behind deep scars.

I come away from this job with the realization that learning about history can help us reflect on where we have come from, as well as get us excited about where we are going.

Shauna Hudson is a student at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg.

CMBS Featured Photo



Abraham Friesen (1859-1920) and his wife Maria Martens (-1917) became two of the first Mennonite missionaries from Russia when they arrived in Madras, India in 1889. By 1914 there were a total of 18 Mennonite missionaries in India at three stations. In 2003 there were 127,000 Mennonite church members in India. Check out the monthly featured photos at www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies.



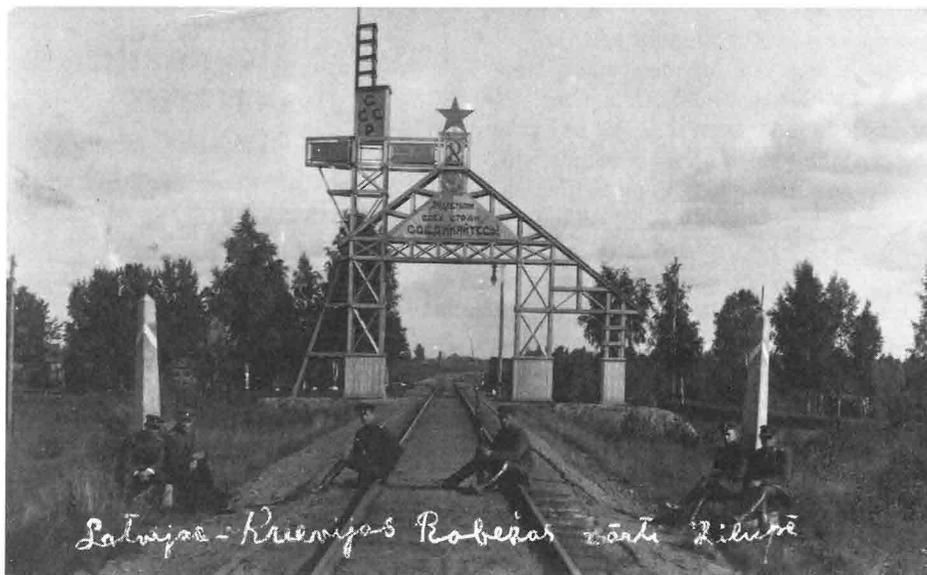
CENTRE FOR
**Mennonite
Brethren
Studies** IN CANADA

1-169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada R2L 2E5

Search for New Director

The Canadian Conference of MB Churches is searching for a director for the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The successful candidate will administrate the Centre with its archival and research functions and network with current and emerging scholars in the MB denomination and other Mennonite conferences. Also included in the job description is the responsibility to serve the MB Conference by addressing critical and contemporary issues with credibility and integrity, engaging in diversity of thought. The candidate will be sensitive to cultural diversity within the conference and be able to communicate well through storytelling and teaching the history as well as new stories of the MB Conference.

For further information please visit the website at www.mbconf.ca/news or email Cam Rowland, executive director of Discipleship Ministries at discipleship@mbconf.ca.



The Red Gate at the Latvia-Russia border gate, viewed from the Latvia side. Credit: Latgale Cultural History Museum, courtesy of Arthur Kroeger

Frank Epp Collection

(cont'd from p. 5)

to the collection is based on their filing system.

Frank Epp's personal correspondence, distributed throughout the cabinets, is one of the most interesting parts of the collection. According to Huebert Hecht, he kept copies of all the letters he sent—from simple requests for information and longer personal answers, to short notes of affirmation and concern for individual people. She notes that "Epp often took the time to write a letter, extending congratulations, sending a personal thank you, giving encouragement and in general keeping in contact with many different people. In his correspondence one can follow 'both sides of a conversation' and learn much about Epp's thinking and ideas over the whole span of his lifetime."

The cataloguing is a continuous process, and is not yet complete. The guide for the collection is on the web at: grebel.uwaterloo.ca/mao/Manuscript%20Collections/HM1.26.htm. It will eventually be open to the public, but interested researchers may be able to look at the finished sections already. As for the usefulness of the collection, Steiner speculates that "Epp is significant enough that someone might do a biography; persons interested in Mennonite participation in political life (i.e. running for office) would find it useful; and persons interested in Mennonite responses to Vietnam and to the Middle East will find it useful since Epp was an outspoken

Mennonite leader on these areas. All in all, anyone interested in how Canadian Mennonites engaged society in the 1950s-1970s would likely find it useful."

The Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund granted \$1,000 in 2004 for the ongoing processing of the Epp archives. The Fund is a memorial to the late Frank H. Epp (1929-1986) and its proceeds are used to support projects in those areas of Christian concern and scholarly interest to which his life was devoted. **The administrative committee of the Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund invites applications for study/work projects which further Epp's vision for mission in Canada and throughout the world.** Specific areas of interest include scholarships, internships, and research assistance for undergraduate and graduate students in the history of minorities (especially Mennonites), peacemaking (particularly in the Middle East), Mennonite ecumenicity, and communication of the Christian faith. The fund also provides funding for research, writing, publishing and other projects considered important and meritorious by the sponsoring agencies. The fund is sponsored by Conrad Grebel University College, Mennonite Central Committee Peace Office, Mennonite Central Committee Canada, Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, and Mennonite Publishing Services and is administered by Mennonite Foundation of Canada.

For applications contact: Frank H. Epp Memorial Fund at www.grebel.uwaterloo.ca/pacs/frankepp.htm

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

The four books noted below are all in German. Three are reprints. Readers who do not handle German may wish that some of these would soon appear in English translation. Technology now allows for the production of reasonably affordable books in a small press run. But translation services are expensive – unless competent translators volunteer their services!

Hermann Heidebrecht, *Auf dem Gipfel des Lebens: Das Leben des Ältesten Jakob Rempel. Vom Stallknecht zum Professor, vom Träumer zum Märtyrer* (Bielefeld, Germany: Christlicher Missions-Verlag, 2004) is a new biography of the widely-known Russian Mennonite church leader who died in Stalin's concentration camp. As bishop of the Neu-Chortitza Gemeinde in Baratov-Schlachtin colony, Jakob Rempel quickly rose to prominent leadership roles in the Mennonite church in the early Soviet era. Heidebrecht writes in a lively style and had access to a good range of primary sources. The 287-page biography is enhanced by previously unpublished photographs.

Through the medium of Crossway Publications, Delbert Plett has begun a "Flemish Mennonite Historical Series." Well known as the author-compiler of the multi-volume history of the Kleingemeinde in Russia and Canada, and as editor of the periodical *Preservings*, Plett is seeking to provide historical material for the large communities of German-speaking Mennonites in Europe and Latin America. The first two books in the new series are Adolf Ehrt's *Das Mennonitentum in Russland von seiner Einwanderung bis zur Gegenwart*, first published in Germany in 1932, and *Hildebrand's Zeittafel*, first published by J.J. Hildebrand in Winnipeg in 1945. Both books are laden with information, the latter in brief, dated chronological entries of important events in Anabaptist-Mennonite history.

The above three are candidates for translation. A selection of Low German stories by the well-known Arnold Dyck, reprinted from Volume III of Dyck's *Collected Works* (published 1988 by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society) would lose much in translation in trying to catch Dyck's nuanced humour. However

this 93-page selection, *Onse Lied: Plautdietsche Jeschichte* (Sonnentau Verlag, Germany), reprinted by Dyck's children, would make a good gift for someone not familiar with the rich lode of literature (in Low and High German) left behind by this prolific writer.

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(cont'd from p. 2)

for new insights and perspectives. During my time at the conference I also enjoyed moments of great psychological or spiritual impact. In particular I recall a long discussion with a Ukrainian teacher associated with the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine at Halbstadt, whom I admire so much for her courage in difficult personal circumstances, itself surely a paradigm for present day Ukraine, plus my unexpected visit with other Mennonites to the massacre site at Eichenfeld and its evocative memorial erected in 2001. It is such moments and golden silences that will remain with me."

Dr. Paul Toews is a historian at Fresno Pacific University and was a Fulbright exchange scholar to Ukraine (2003-04); Walter Unger, Toronto, is chairman of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine.

**The Chair in Mennonite Studies
and the
Mennonite Historical Society of Canada
host**

**State of the Art of
North American
Mennonite History**
A weekend conference
October 1 and 2, 2004
University of Winnipeg
Admission Free

One aim of the conference is to bring into focus the North American volume of the *A Global Mennonite History* series. The keynote address will be given by the general editor of this five-volume series, Dr. John Lapp, and the respondent is Barbara Nkala, an author of the first volume of the series, the one on Africa. It is hoped that this conference will assist the authors of the North American volume, Steve Nolt and Royden Loewen, to conceptualize the book.

For further details, contact Royden Loewen at 204-786-9391 or e-mail to rloewen@uwinnipeg.ca.



John, Henry and Herman Lepp of Springland Manufacturing in Rivers, Manitoba.

Springland Manufacturing and Lepp Wallman Co.

by Helen Lepp

Nineteen years ago the Lepp brothers were looking for a way to add income to their farming operation. Since then the Springland in-bin grain augers have been sold in distant parts of the world. When Springland started, the boys' Aunt Tina made the remark, "This reminds me of the Lepp Wallman Co. in the Ukraine".

We did some research to see how closely they were related to the Peter Lepp who started that company. The boys' great-great-grandfather was possibly a cousin to the Peter Lepp who started the Lepp Wallman Company. The boys' grandfather, Henry P. Lepp of Rivers was hired as a secretary for the Lepp Wallman

Company, but because of the revolution of 1917 this job never materialized.

Today Springland augers are being sold in Ukraine. In the last six months 50 filling augers for air seeders were sent directly to PE Agro Soyus Ltd. ul. Nizhendneprovskaja set. Yublieyny, Dniepropetrovsk Region, Ukraine. This region is 50 km. north of Zaporozhye where the original Lepp Wallman buildings stood.

May these augers help to put seed into the rich soil of the Ukraine so that many can be fed.

Helen Lepp is the mother of John, Henry and Herman Lepp, founders of Springland Manufacturing in Rivers, Manitoba.

THE JOHN AND MARGARET FRIESEN LECTURES
IN ANABAPTIST/MENNONITE STUDIES

Presents

The Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Church in Africa

Featuring **Barbara Nkala** from Harare, Zimbabwe, Director of the International Bible Society of Zimbabwe and Malawi, contributor to Volume 1 of the *Global Mennonite History Project*, and worship leader at the 2003 Mennonite World Conference assembly.

October 6-7, 2004, Chapel, Canadian Mennonite University

"The Changing Face of the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Church in Zimbabwe"
Wednesday, October 6, 8 P.M.

"Key Factors Shaping the Identity of Mennonite and Brethren in Christ Christians"
Thursday, October 7, 10:30 A.M.

"Challenges Facing the Christian Church in Africa"
Thursday, October 7, 8 P.M.

The *MB Herald* Photograph Collection Index Nears Completion at Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Winnipeg)

by Donovan Giesbrecht

If a picture says a thousand words, then the *MB Herald* Photograph Collection at the Centre for MB Studies speaks volumes. For four consecutive summers, I have spent considerable time processing around 20,000 photographs donated by the *MB Herald* to the Centre for MB Studies, a project that now nears completion.

The photographs depict the history of the Mennonite Brethren in Canada over the last fifty years. There are shots of outdoor baptisms, sod-turning ceremonies, revival meetings, annual conventions, overseas mission work, and of church buildings from across the country. All of the sorts of photographs

you have seen in the *MB Herald* over the last half of a century are now a part of this new archival collection at CMBS.

Processing the photographs has generally proceeded in two stages. First, the people, places, and events depicted in the photos were identified—here I was assisted by *MB Herald* Editor Susan Brandt, former Director of CMBS Abe Dueck, and many other volunteers and researchers that frequent the Centre—and secondly, the photos were described and indexed in the CMBS Photograph Database. Thanks to this database, visitors to the Centre can now call up *MB Herald* photographs according to subject, place, year, or even by a keyword search.

The photographs confirm a version of Mennonite Brethren history that resonates with many of our personal experiences. Taken as a whole, they depict the rapid urbanization of the Mennonite Brethren church; the gradual disappearance of church choirs and the ever increasing presence of rock music worship bands; the growing ethnic diversity of Mennonite Brethren churches; the emergence of women leaders and speakers; the shift from self-made conventions with homemade food, rural hospitality, and local speakers to conventions with catered dining, hotel accommodations, and professional Evangelical speakers; and the transition from simple wooden church buildings to cathedral-like mega-structures. The list could go on and on.

Many of us have witnessed these changes personally, some we regret, others we welcome. Whatever the case, they are changes captured by the camera lens of the *MB Herald*, a lens that has helped preserve the Mennonite Brethren story for over half a century. Feel free to drop by the Centre to view some of these photographs and experience part of this story for yourself.

Donovan Giesbrecht graduated from the University of Winnipeg in Spring 2004 with an honours degree in Philosophy and also holds a major in History. He continues working at the Centre on an interim basis



Delegates at the 1961 Canadian Conference of MB Churches Annual Convention share a meal of homemade soup and buns in the Coaldale MB Church basement. The caption at the back reads "Der Borscht schmeckt gut." Photo Credit: CMBS Photo Col. NP149-2



No more borscht, homemade buns, and church basements, delegates at the 1992 Canadian Conference of MB Churches Annual Convention dine in style at the Sheraton Hotel, near Laval, Quebec. Photo Credit: CMBS Photo Col. NP149-2-128

The Hoepfner Letters

by Ed Falk, Winkler, Manitoba

Two sets of letters written to Peter Hoepfner (1825–1907) and his family are now accessible at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives—some as originals and others as photocopies. Peter Hoepfner was a grandson of Jacob Hoepfner (1748–1826) one of the delegates from Prussia who initiated the Mennonite migration to Russia in 1788. One set of 22 letters, written between 1882 and 1901, were found in Morden; the other, a set of 70 letters written between 1876 and 1891, were found in California.

Each set has been transliterated from the original Gothic script and reproduced in Latin print, keeping all words, spellings and sentence structures as in the original. The letters have also been translated into English with an attempt to capture the thought of the *Danziger Platt-Deutsch* of the writer and express it in current English.

In 1998 a friend asked me to transliterate the “Morden” letters. I found material in the letters which was too important to allow to remain hidden to the majority of the family as well as other students of history. These letters are from family and friends and concern themselves with family life, the emigration, spiritual life and church issues. The family life concerns are health, farming, births, marriages, deaths and every-day life experiences. The emigration concerns relate to the experiences and difficulties of the trip and the new world experiences. The church issues relate to the founding of the church in the West Reserve and leadership within the settlement.

Of special note are letters from bishop Isaac Dyck and bishop Peter Klassen. Isaac Dyck describes the beginnings of the “forestry service” in quite a bit of detail. Johann Hildebrand adds more details as to their operations. Peter Klassen provided good scriptural advice in a “brief” (*his word*) way—an 8-paged letter. He says the solution is to act in love!

Agatha Hoepfner in the North-West Territory (later, Saskatchewan) pleads for help from Manitoba because they are short of food and have no way of buying any.

Hoepfner families are known for their

love and skill of hunting. Isaak Dyck writes in 1884, “Foxes and rabbits are plentiful. At least there are so many rabbits that a good hunter is almost certain of bagging his prey. Now all we need is a Hoepfner!”

Heinrich Penner, a nephew, describes the details of weather, crops and family in great detail.

The results of the transcription and translation were first made available at a Hoepfner-Heppner Reunion in Steinbach in 2000.

The second set of letters is much larger and covers the initial migration to Manitoba and the settlement period in much more detail. Various writers, family and friends describe the details of their attempts, successes and failures to sell their property and/or repurchase property in Russia as their plans changed.

The letters describe the pain of family separation as some family members migrate to the New-World or to “New Russia” meaning the Orenburg settlement. Heinrich Hoepfner, for example, writes in 1876, after describing the sale of his farm and his plans to emigrate, “My in-laws do not know I wrote this letter, although my wife is aware of it.”

Bernhard Hoepfner describes his “on again off again” plans to emigrate to “America” and his concerns with the health of his wife. He also indicates his frustration that his father has been convinced by a relative not to emigrate with him. He also tells some of the story

of the Klaus Epp migration to Tashkent.

The letters mention the complications to emigration which are being caused by the Russo-Turkish war.

There are letters in which church issues and settlement issues and issues of leadership are mentioned.

In 1890 Johann Hildebrand describes the celebration at the 100th anniversary of the immigration to Russia. He also describes some of the details of the collection of funds for the erection of the Bartsch and Hoepfner monuments.

In 1881 Heinrich Penner describes details of farming and the erection of a building on his farm at Schoenhorst.

Letters from Minnesota and the Manitoba East Reserve give us a glimpse of life in other communities and how the people related to each other in the new country.

Included also are some documents and two different sketches of the Manitoba West Reserve indicating which sections were allotted to each of the first 26 villages.

Anyone interested in a copy of either set of letters may contact Ed Falk at 204-325-8929. Folio I consists of 104 pages and Folio II about 350 pages. (Had the letters been available at the same time they could have been produced as one volume, but that was not the case.)

Editor's Note: *The materials are also accessible at the Mennonite Heritage Centre (Vol. 1418-1419).*

Unidentified photo—can you help?



Esther Epp Harder inherited this photograph from her grandparents Jacob and Elisabeth Epp who left Fuerstenland Colony in Russia in 1926. Can anyone identify the members of this choir? Please contact the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3M 0P4; e-mail: archives@mennonitechurch.ca.

Book Review

Ens, Adolf. *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada*. (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2004), xiii, 258 pp.

Reviewed by Richard D. Thiessen, Library Director, Columbia Bible College

In July of 1902 nine men met at the home of Rosenorter Mennonite church Bishop Peter Regier. The outcome of this meeting was an agreement for the Bergthaler and Rosenorter Mennonite churches to meet annually. The first of these meetings took place in 1903 near Altona, Manitoba. Ens writes that their motivation was two-fold: "God's desire that the unity of Christians should manifest itself in outward structures, and the desire of the churches to cultivate communion in the Spirit and encourage each other in Kingdom work" (20). A century later, the product of this union of two relatively small prairie Mennonite churches is now a national conference of over 230 congregations spread from British Columbia on the west coast to Ontario and Quebec in the east, both rural and urban, worshipping in numerous languages and ministering in a variety of ways to a post-modern world.

It is no easy task to summarize the history of a conference that spans a century, and yet Adolf Ens has succeeded in his attempt "to provide both a broader understanding and a deeper appreciation for our Church and its attempt to live in faithful discipleship of Jesus Christ, its acknowledged Head" (xiii). Ens is well qualified to write the history of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. For over twenty-five years he was a professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. Those who know Adolf will recognize the skill in which he succinctly summarizes the various facets of CMC history, his keen analysis of events, and his appreciation for the more light-hearted and even humorous stories found in the history of the church. As one who has been an active minister in the church, readers will also appreciate Ens' desire to highlight issues and events from history that are pertinent to church life today. This is not just a recounting of events from the past – it is a story that has lessons for us today as we continue to interact with our culture and struggle over

matters of the heart.

In his survey of the history of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, Ens divides the content into seven main chapters. The first chapter details the beginnings of Mennonite settlement in Canada from their start in Manitoba to their move west to Saskatchewan. Ever the teacher, Ens does a fine job of contextualizing Mennonite history within the larger political and sociological events of the day. One is struck by the realization that Mennonites in Canada at the turn of the century, particularly in what was soon to become the province of Saskatchewan, were not a homogenous group by any means. Many had moved from Manitoba, where they or their parents had immigrated from Russia beginning in the 1870s. Others had migrated directly from Prussia, while still others had moved north from the United States, where they or their parents had settled in the Midwestern states of Kansas and Nebraska in the 1870s. Somehow this diverse group of individuals on the frontiers of civilization were able to set aside their differences in order to come together in a spirit of unity and cooperation.

The second chapter deals with the years 1903–1924. As the two founding churches met to forge a closer relationship, other congregations, primarily in Saskatchewan, soon joined them. Ens states that in the early years, the conference "operated somewhat along the lines of the General Conference motto: 'In essentials unity; in nonessentials liberty; in all things charity'" (19). The conference was also characterized by the principles that this was not to be a conference of ministers but of congregations, and that each congregation exercised a sizeable amount of autonomy. The conference was not to interfere in the internal affairs of a congregation unless requested to do so. "It was to be a consultative rather than a legislative body. The unity it sought consisted not so much in outward forms and practices as in love, faith and hope" (21).

The third chapter covers the time period of the coming of the *Russländer* in the 1920s and the debilitating economic Depression of the 1930s. The desire of newly founded congregations comprised almost entirely of newly arrived immigrants from Russia to join the conference created new challenges for the leadership. Differences in church polity and theology between the *Russländer* and the *Kanadier* (Mennonites who immigrated in the 1870s) were bound to

rise to the surface, and it took the skill of leaders like David Toews and Benjamin Ewert to insure that all could agree to live and serve together in spite of their differences. This time period also saw the development of home missions, the continued movement of Mennonites west to Alberta and British Columbia, and the formation of numerous Bible schools and other Christian educational initiatives.

Chapter 4 looks at the history of the conference during World War II and the years following, until 1953. One of the key events of these years was what became known as the "Schoenwieser controversy," while other issues such as how to respond to the war and the resulting refugees also tested the conference and its leaders.

The remaining chapters deal with the ever expanding conference as it dealt with issues such as urbanization, the language transition from German to English, finances, conference re-organization and the break-up of the large multi-local *Gemeinden*, evangelism and church planting, divorce and remarriage, women in the church, the peace issue, conference periodicals, and relating to the Ontario Swiss Mennonites.

An interesting feature of the book is the table that accompanies each chapter, listing all of the congregations that were added to the conference, with footnotes providing background information on a number of them. Photographs and maps appear throughout the book, and the book also includes excerpts from letters and books. Appendixes and end notes supplement the chapters, and a general index along with a congregational index allow one to quickly track down a name or a subject. Only a handful of minor errors and formatting problems were noted, reflecting well on the editorial and readers committees and those involved in the production of the book.

Adolf Ens has made a tremendous contribution to Mennonite Church Canada in the writing of its history. This book should be found in every Mennonite church library and in the home of anyone who has a desire to understand and learn from those who have come before us. As Dan Nighswander so eloquently states in the foreword to the book, "readers will find much in this book that will lead them to gratitude and confidence in God's leadership, and will stimulate their imagination of what faithfulness might demand of the church in the twenty-first century."