

Mennonite Historian

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

Mennonite Brethren Ordination of Women, 1899-1958

by Doug Heidebrecht

The 2008 ordination of two women for pastoral ministry within Mennonite Brethren congregations in British Columbia prompts a closer look at an earlier practice that was once common among Mennonite Brethren.¹ Mennonite Brethren congregations in Canada and the United States ordained at least 131 women for mission work, both in North America and overseas, between 1899 and 1958. The practice of ordaining women was rescinded by the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in 1957 and replaced with a commissioning service. An understanding of the extent of this Mennonite Brethren practice along with the process leading up to its retraction will provide a helpful perspective for continuing reflection on today's renewed practice.

The Mennonite Brethren Practice of Ordaining Women

While it is difficult to provide a precise and comprehensive picture, the actual practice of ordaining women by the Mennonite Brethren is easily substantiated. Biographical sketches in four missionary albums published by the Mennonite Brethren Board of Foreign Missions between 1951 and 1956 provide an initial portrait of women's ordination.² Unfortunately, for many of the early Mennonite Brethren missionaries biographical information was not always provided in the missionary albums, and so a complete description of the extent of ordination remains elusive.³

The first recorded ordination is of Susanna Hiebert, who along with her husband Nikolas, were some of the first North American missionaries sent to India in 1899.⁴ Prior to 1920 eleven women are



Susanna Hiebert in India shortly after her ordination in 1899. Photo credit: CMBS

identified as ordained for mission work in India, China, Congo, or Oklahoma; with an additional two listed in the 1915 *General Conference Yearbook* as ordained for home missions in Minnesota.⁵ The Mennonite Brethren General Conference clearly recognized the practice of ordaining missionaries by 1908 and a decade later, in 1919, clarified that ordination was the responsibility of missionaries' home churches.⁶ It appears that some women were also ordained in Russia for missionary service during these years, such as Anna Penner (and her husband John) in 1913 in Rückenau, Russia.⁷

Between 1920 and 1929 another ten women were ordained as missionaries, while only six women were ordained during the 1930s. Mennonite Brethren mission activity expanded considerably following World War II and church reports in *The Christian Leader* supplement the missionary albums' portrayal of ordination practices. By 1958 a total of at least 131 women had been ordained; with 45 ordinations taking place during the 1940s and 57 during the 1950s.

Both married and unmarried women were clearly identified as ordained. Forty-one percent of ordained women were unmarried (23 women in Canada and 30 in the U.S.). References to the ordination of a married couple always referred to both the husband and the wife, unless the husband had been ordained prior to marriage. Interestingly, when Martha Hiebert married A.A. Janzen after the death of his first wife, she was ordained alone in 1946, since her husband had previously been ordained in 1917.⁸ A woman's ordination was still recognized even after the death of her husband, as in the case of Tina Dick.⁹

The practice of ordination was wide spread in both Canada and the United States, and not just limited to a few congregations. Forty-nine women were ordained in Canada representing 28 churches, while the 82 women ordained in the United States represented 32 different churches.¹⁰

The perception that Mennonite Brethren only ordained women for overseas mission work is not accurate. At least thirteen women were ordained to "home" missions (10% of the total number of women ordained), which involved outreach and church planting in Arkansas, California, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Texas, and Saskatchewan. Only 15% of women ordained to "home" missions were unmarried.

The above survey reveals a widespread practice of ordaining women for missionary service among Canadian and American Mennonite Brethren churches. The inclusive use of the term "ordination," to refer to the setting apart of both husband and wife as missionaries, was very different from reports of men being ordained to pastoral or church ministry within North America. Interestingly, this inclusivity is also apparent in reports of couples ordained to the deaconate ministry, which have not been included in the above ordination statistics.¹¹

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Nevertheless, the language of "ordination" was not consistently used and sometimes women were commissioned rather than ordained for missionary service.¹² While variation in the use of terminology does not detract from the practice of ordaining women, it does suggest that dedicatory language was somewhat fluid and its meaning, perhaps, imprecise.

Yet there are clear examples where the ordination of women carried full recognition and blessing for ministry. As Paulina Foote anticipated her ordination for missionary service to China in 1922 she struggled with the association of ordination and preaching. She wondered whether she would need to stop proclaiming the gospel message if men were present. Foote recalls later, "what a surprise to me when Elder Foth in his sermon at the ordination proved with Scripture passages that women should preach...My problem about ordination was solved."¹³

The Rescinding of Women's Ordination

The nearly 60-year practice of ordaining women for missionary work came to an end in 1957 due to its perceived correlation with a very different concern emerging within North American churches. During the 1940s, the General Conference Committee of Reference and Counsel raised concerns regarding "the

various spiritually disintegrating influences which are beginning to infiltrate into our conference and in consideration of some positions of individual brethren and the churches in our conference in relation to points of doctrine and practice."¹⁴ In response the Committee encouraged churches to regulate the ordination and appointment of ministers more carefully by ensuring that leaders receive "their training in our own conference and have proven themselves for a period of several years as true and faithful to the doctrine and practice of the Mennonite Brethren Church."¹⁵

In 1951, the Committee of Reference and Counsel presented a practical guide that outlined a congregation's responsibility in the discernment of leaders, the appointment of church leaders, and the calling of a pastor.¹⁶ The Committee recognized two significant shifts occurring: leaders were more often products of educational institutions rather than the gradual training process within local churches; and churches were moving away from a system of several ministers working together to a "one man pastorate."¹⁷ Confirmation of the call to ministry through ordination was to be considered only after a leader had been proven faithful over the course of two or three years.¹⁸

This attempt to regulate the ordination of church leaders raised further questions for district conferences regarding the consistent application of these guidelines. During a special session of the Pacific District Conference held on September 30, 1954, R.M. Baerg presented a series of recommendations from the Pacific District Committee of Reference and Counsel, which included a suggestion that uniformity of practice implied that "women missionaries be commissioned and not ordained."¹⁹ A month later, the Pacific District submitted a revised list of these recommendations for consideration at the 1954 General Conference convention and asked "that the Conference consider whether it wouldn't be better that women missionaries be commissioned and not ordained."²⁰

The General Conference Committee of Reference and Counsel recognized that the Pacific District's questions required "a close study of Biblical principles and practice related to the points concerned."²¹ They responded by asking for an opportunity to conduct "a more thorough study and formulation of a Scriptural basis" for a statement which would be

"documented with Scriptural references" and submitted "to the district conferences for evaluation and reaction."²²

The General Conference Committee of Reference and Counsel met February 9-10, 1955 and asked B.J. Braun "to write out the principles as established by the Pacific District Conference regarding these questions."²³ The following day Braun presented a statement that distinguished ordination from licensing, which was defined as being "only for a specific Christian work project and for a specified period of time."²⁴ Braun notes, "the licensing of ministers is a new phenomenon in our M.B. circles. The need for it and practice of it has arisen directly out of a new movement in our churches known as extension work."²⁵ On the other hand, ordination "should be extended exclusively to Christian workers who are acceptable for the ministry of the Word within the framework of the M.B. Church and, such who are definitely and honestly desirous to labor within said framework."²⁶

Finally, Braun addressed the question of women's ordination:

That in view of the fact that we as an M.B. Church, on the basis of clearly conceived scriptural convictions, do not admit sisters to the public gospel preaching ministry on par with brethren, we as a Conference designate the act of setting aside sisters to missionary work "a commissioning" rather than "an ordination."²⁷

The Committee minutes reflect no discussion by the members regarding this proposed shift in practice, no explanation of the "clearly conceived scriptural convictions," and no "thorough study" of the biblical basis used to support of their decision.

The General Conference Committee of Reference and Counsel presented this exact statement to the 1957 General Conference convention three years later.²⁸ There is no indication that this statement was ever submitted to the district conferences for evaluation or reaction. Convention delegates approved rescinding the ordination of women in favor of a commissioning as part of the larger recommendation regarding the practice of licensing and ordination.²⁹

Despite this new resolution, the long standing practice of ordaining women missionaries did not fade away immediately. Almost a year later, on June 15, 1958, the last ordinations of women by Mennonite Brethren took place. Daisy

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Queries

Isaak - Looking for information on the descendants of Jacob Isaak (1871-1916) and his wife Susanna (1871-1951) originally from Karasan, Crimea. They had 9 children: Jacob (b. 1901) came to Canada in 1926, the rest remained in Russia; Elizabeth (Mrs. Wall)(1899), Susanne (1902), Abram (1905), Anna (Mrs. Wiens) (1907), Dietrich (1910), Sara (1913), Boris (1916) and Tina. Contact Marlene Voth (MarleneVoth@mts.net) or write to the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Dueck/Isaac – Looking for information about Margaretha Isaak, wife of Johann Dueck (b. 2 November 1857). Margaretha was the daughter of Peter Isaak and Maria Giesbrecht. She was born ca. 1860-1870, probably in Halbstadt, Molotschna. Her siblings included Abram (b. 12 Feb. 1857), Peter (b. 16 Aug. 1859), David (b. 10 Oct. 1866), Gerhard (b.12 July 1868) (see photo below), Justina (b. 15 Mar. 1874) and Elizabeth (b. 10 Mar. 1881). Johann Dueck and Margarethe Isaak had 2 or 3, children; all died as young children. Margaretha died mid- to late 1880s, probably in Alexan-derkrone, Molotschna. Contact: John Friesen, 12 – 183 Hamilton Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2Y 2L2. P. (204) 837-2735. Email: jfries5@mts.net.

Wiens - Looking for confirmation for the parents of Hermann Wiens (1828-1879). Some of the sources record his parents as Nicholas Wiens (1772-1864) and Anna Ratzlaff (1781-1857). Other sources suggest Claas Wiens (1771-1850) and Margarete Conrad (1777-). Contact John Wiens 203-681 St. Anne's Rd. Winnipeg, MB R2N 3S9 (204) 257-5232.

Dobrischenko - Does anyone know where the town or village of Dobrischenko, Ukraine is/was? It was given as the birth place for a Penner in 1904 in an obituary in the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. Speculation locates it in the Memrik region. Contact: Marlene Penner Nordstrom, 51 Tuscany Hills Park NW, Calgary, AB T3L 2A2. P:(403) 547-1547 E: maroy@shaw.ca.

Recent Books

Chronik der Familie Johann und Katharina Dück: Kurzer Überblick mehr als 200 Jahre Familiengeschichte. (Marienheide, Germany: Private publication, 2008) 149 pp.

This book was primarily compiled by the descendants of Johann Dueck (1881-1930) and his wife Katharina Klassen (1882-1947) who now live in

in Germany. The book includes accounts of life in the former Soviet Union for most of the 20th Century often under very difficult circumstances. There is also some family history about the siblings of Johann and Katharina Dueck, some of which immigrated to Canada in the 1920s. Contact: Henry Dueck, 32 Garrison Ave., Leamington, ON N8H 2P2 or e-mail hhdueck@primus.ca.

Michael Penner. *Our Friesen Heritage: Reflections on the life of Gerhard S. Friesen (1852-1922) and his family.* 2nd Edition. (Richmond, BC: Private publication, 2007, 2008) 130 pp.

This book begins with the life story of Gerhard S. Friesen (1852-1922) born in Lichtenau, Molotschna, South Russia, immigrated to Canada in 1874 with the Mennonite Kleinegemeinde group, and who eventually settled near present-day Kleefeld, Manitoba. In 1881 he chose to be part of the Holdeman church (Church of God in Christ, Mennonite). In 1888, two years after his first wife died, he moved to North Dakota where he remarried in 1890. He returned to Canada in 1903 and settled Alberta for a time before moving to Arawana near Elkhorn, Manitoba in 1918, where he died in 1922. Subsequent chapters contain family photographs, personal writings of Gerhard S. Friesen, a chapter on Maria Wiebe (1852-1886), his first wife and Henrietta Koehler (1863-1948), his second wife, and concluding with information about his children and a listing of the descendants. Contact: Michael Penner, 11671 Seahurst Road, Richmond, BC V74 4K1 or e-mail pennermi@hotmail.com.

Margaret Froese. *Passages: In the life of Isaac Friesen & Katharina Harder and their children* (Winnipeg, MB: Private publication, 2006) 277 pp.

This book is divided into four parts: an introductory history, followed by the story of Jacob Friesen (ca.1830-ca.1888) and his wife Margaretha Penner (ca. 1830-ca.1880), the story their son of Isaac Friesen (1869-1943) and his wife Katharina Harder (1869-1945), named in the title, and ending with stories of their children and grandchildren. Contact: Margaret Froese, 922 Merriam Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3T 0V3.



Can anyone identify this photograph? People, place, date? Gerhard and Aganetha (Huebert) Isaak, brother of Margaretha Isaak (see Query above) are believed to be the couple on the far right. Contact: John Friesen (jfries5@mts.net)

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

Spanish Flu epidemic: Not the only calamity for Mennonites in the early 1900s

By Glen Klassen

When thinking about disease epidemics that affected Mennonite communities at the beginning of the 20th century, the influenza epidemic of 1918 comes most readily to mind. Mennonites in southern Manitoba endured proportionally more deaths than their non-Mennonite neighbours during this terrible time, due to some peculiarity of their genetics or their social practices or some other factor.¹ The horror of November, 1918 consisted of the rapid onset of the epidemic, the speed of its spread, the fact that almost everyone was sick at about the same time, and that many young adults between the ages of 20 and 40 died. The sheer frequency of funerals (when they were permitted) was traumatic to the extent that flu epidemic stories from that time are still being told.

But was the flu epidemic of 1918 an isolated, exceptional event in the early years of the 1900s? To see whether other similar episodes occurred, the annual death rates in rural municipalities of Hanover, Rhineland and Stanley from 1898 to 1938 were calculated based on records at Manitoba Vital Statistics (Fig. 1). The 1918 event is clearly visible in the data from both the East and West Reserves, but another major event appears in both reserves in 1908-11 as well as a

huge peak of deaths on the East Reserve in 1900.² A number of lesser events occur between the major events at intervals of about 4 or 5 years until the mid 1920s. The number of deaths was determined by counting death certificates available at Manitoba Vital Statistics, and the death rates were calculated from population numbers obtained from the Canada census. Thus the number of deaths in these data is really the number of registered deaths. For 1918 there is reason to believe that the number of registered deaths was very close to the number of actual deaths, but that was not the case in 1900. Jacob Klassen (Chortitzer Mennonite Church deacon) found 15 graves from 1900 in the Chortitzer Mennonite cemeteries on the East Reserve, and only 12 of the deaths were registered.³ However, from a reading of village reports in *Der Nordwesten* of that year, I found that only about half of the deaths mentioned are registered. A report from Clear Springs tells of the deaths of four residents, none of whom were registered.⁴ This means that the average official death rates for the first decade of 1900 are far below the actual ones. It also means that the epidemics were more severe than the official numbers indicate.

The 1900 event in Hanover and the 1908-10 event on both reserves are believed to have been mainly a series of

Age	1898	1899	1900	1901	1902
less than 1*	14	14	24	14	7
1 to 5	4	14	43	6	4
6 to 10	0	2	17	2	2
11 to 15	0	0	8	1	0
16 to 25	2	1	3	3	1
26 to 40	0	3	5	3	4
more than 40	2	11	11	8	5
unknown	1	3	2	1	0
Total	23	48	113	38	23

Table 1. Number of registered deaths from all causes by age group in Hanover.

* The number of deaths of children under 1 year, though horrifying, was not unusual for those times. Most of these deaths were not due to diphtheria because temporary passive immunity is passed on from the mother.

outbreaks of diphtheria among children under the age of 15. Outbreaks of typhoid, scarlet fever, whooping cough, influenza and measles were also common in those days, and doubtless they were also factors in raising the death rates in the worst years, but diphtheria was the most life-threatening. Influenza would occasionally take the lives of more than one family member but diphtheria had the potential of killing all the children under 15 in a family within a few weeks.

The 1908-1911 event seems to have escaped the notice of most historians although it was mentioned in the Manitoba Free Press and identified as an epidemic of diphtheria.⁵ Space does not permit me to discuss this event further except to say that preliminary analysis points to diphtheria, but also indicates the presence of an adult disease.

I would like to tell the story of the 1900 diphtheria epidemic in Hanover in more detail. Table 1 shows the number of registered deaths per year from 1898 to 1902 in the various age groups. In 1900 no fewer than 68 children ages 1 to 15 died and had their deaths registered. This contrasts with only 4 in 1898 and 6 in 1902. Remember that these are underestimates due to the number of unreported deaths. 1900 was truly a tragic year in Hanover. Royden Loewen mentions that 16 children died in the Blumenort district alone.⁶

According to government reports, there were 474 cases of diphtheria in 1900, most of which occurred in Winnipeg. Many of these children were saved by injections of a crude but effective diphtheria anti-toxin (not a vaccine), but the fatality rate was still relatively high (at least 10%).⁷ A report from Bergfeld (near Grunthal) reports 14 deaths and 13

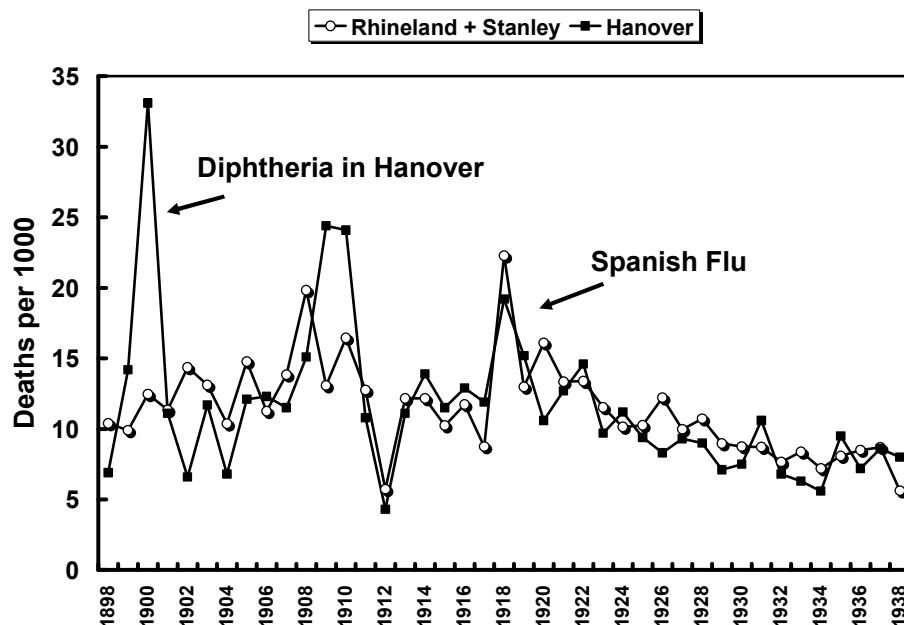


Figure 1. Annual registered death rates from all causes in Hanover and Rhineland/Stanley municipalities.

recoveries in this area. If this was typical, the fatality rate could have been as high as 50%. If 50 or more diphtheria deaths occurred in Hanover in 1900, then there must have been many more cases, perhaps more than 100, indicating that a significant fraction of the 474 Manitoba cases were East Reserve Mennonite children.

How did it happen? Most likely an asymptomatic carrier of the bacterium *Corynebacterium diphtheriae* (5% of adults were such carriers) infected a susceptible child by coughing or sneezing near the child. The bacterium started growing in the child's throat and within a few days (up to 6) it secreted a toxin into the blood which stops protein synthesis in the body's cells and leads to serious symptoms involving the nerves and the heart. Blood cells and lymph coagulate around the tonsils forming a membranous clot that can choke the child. Meanwhile siblings and others who have close contact with the victim were being infected. Most adults had enough immunity to the toxin so that they did not usually get the disease. Those who recovered could still pass on the bacterium to others for about a month, and these convalescent carriers were probably the cause of the waves of outbreaks that occurred after the first cases recovered. There was no vaccine for prevention and no antibiotic to kill the bacteria. The newly developed anti-toxin serum was expensive and somewhat dangerous to use due to the possibility of an allergic reaction, but it could reduce the fatality rate to 5-10%.⁸

The Hanover epidemic of 1900 occurred in three waves of escalating seriousness (Fig. 2). The year began with widespread reports of typhoid, measles, and possibly whooping cough, which caused some deaths, but then by late February, there were reports of the dreaded *Halskrankheit* among children. After a brief reprieve, the disease was again reported in many Hanover locations in June (Steinbach, Clear Springs, Bergfeld, Gruenthal, Hochstadt, Kleefeld, Chortitz, Blumenort). Most shocking were the deaths of 7 of Peter Sawatzky's children, aged 2 to 13, between June 12 and July 4 at Bergfeld.

In July a doctor Gerway was sent to the vicinity of Bergfeld, Gruenthal and Chortitz by the provincial Board of Health to assess the severity of the outbreak there and to quarantine affected homes and administer the anti-toxin.⁹ He reported 27

cases of diphtheria resulting in 14 deaths in Bergfeld and Gruenthal. Two more deaths were measles-related. This high rate of mortality is similar to that reported for European communities before the advent of the anti-toxin, so it is likely that Mennonite children in these villages did not receive the serum until it was too late for about half of them. A dispute broke out about who would be paying the doctor's fees but eventually the municipality assumed responsibility. In late August there were reports that the whole village of Bergfeld was under quarantine and that the doctor was placarding some homes with a blue card with the word DIPHTHERIA written in very large letters.

The Manitoba Free Press reporter(s) who covered the Bergfeld story were not sparing in their criticism of the Mennonites. A July 9th story decried "an utter lack of sanitation or preventative measures; the people there regard the disease as a Divine visitation, and if a person becomes ill they either have to die or get better without medical or other help. People from affected houses go visiting or driving all over the countryside with the result that the disease has extended well into the settlement and while the physician was there he found a father taking a sick child to see a veterinarian surgeon." Another story in the same vein (July 14th) claimed that "the people there (Chortitz) allow the Mennonite 'bone-setters' as they are

termed, to treat their ailments and seem to have no idea of the value of quarantine measures."¹⁰

The last and worst wave of the disease struck in October. It had now reached the vicinity of Niverville, where three of Peter Kehler's children died between Oct 9 and 22,¹¹ but it still raged in the centre of the Reserve where the Peter Peters near Steinbach lost 7 children in just 10 days, aged 2 to 15, including two sets of twins.¹² By January 1901 a report from Hochstadt says that while there were still cases of diphtheria, there were no longer any deaths. Presumably the quarantining and the anti-toxin had belatedly done the job.

The flu epidemic of 1918 came to a people with bitter memories of recent health disasters, particularly the diphtheria epidemics of 1900 and 1908-10. The survival of their faith and optimism is a remarkable feat.

Endnotes

1. Glen Klassen and Kimberly Penner, "Influenza Pandemic Deaths Among Manitoba Mennonites in 1918-19," *Preservings* 28 (2008): 18-22.
2. I have separate data for Rhineland and Stanley, but since the boundaries changed in 1916, it is easier to combine the two. Data from the two townships in Stanley west of Morden that were not in the West Reserve are included. The Clear Springs settlement is taken to be part of the East Reserve.

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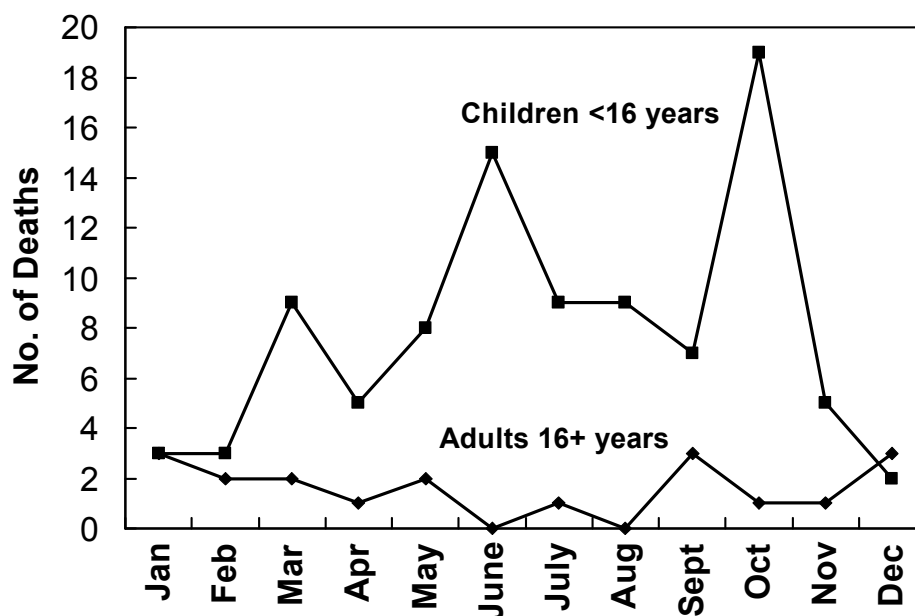


Figure 2. Monthly numbers of registered deaths from all causes of children and adults in Hanover in 1900.



Archives in South Africa and Germany

By Alf Redekopp

This past September and October, I visited a number of archives while on vacation and extended leave. My visit to South Africa was in response to an invitation from the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa (ESSA) in Pietermaritzburg, to help facilitate the establishing of an archive for their institution. As I planned for the trip, my itinerary allowed me to include a little additional travel in South Africa and in Germany.

ESSA Archives Project

In Pietermaritzburg I worked together with Yvonne Snider-Nighswander, Mennonite Church Canada Witness worker in South Africa, to establish the ESSA archives. A designated space for the storage of the archival material was approved, materials were collected, archival supplies were selected and purchased, a computer database was customized, policies were drafted and implemented and some of the key materials were collected and processed. Orientation and basic training in archival principles and procedures were also provided.

It became clear that the essential criteria for having a sustainable archives are the same as in South Africa as in Canada. They are: (1) A resolution and statement of purpose passed by the sponsoring organization; (2) a designated person who is accountable for the archives' operation, management of its holdings;



Alf Redekopp in the ESSA Archives. Photo taken by Yvonne Snider-Nighswander.



Alf Redekopp and Yvonne Snider-Nighswander visiting the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. Photo taken by Jewel Koopman.

(3) sustainable funding from the sponsoring organization to carry out its declared purpose; (4) a secure designated space for storage and handling of records, adequately protected from loss through neglect, or other agents of deterioration such as water, light, extreme fluctuations in temperature and humidity; (5) an acquisition policy which will inform the development of what is collected; (6) record arrangement procedures which will allow the material to be found and understood – observing the principles of provenance and original order; and (7) an access policy which specifies when and how the records will be used.

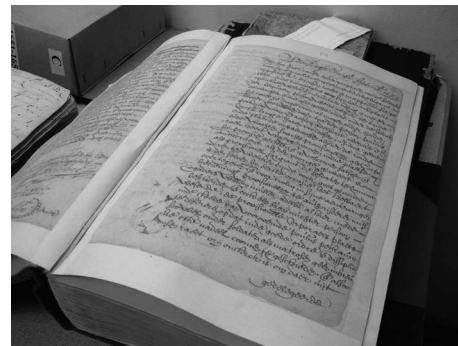
Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives

Alan Paton (1903-1988), the famed author of *Cry, The Beloved Country* (1948), was a founding member of the Liberal Party of South Africa (1953). He continued to write novels and poetry throughout his life, but he also wrote extensively on matters of a political nature. The Centre therefore holds not only Alan Paton's literary works and related documents and manuscripts, but also papers pertaining to the Liberal Party and other institutions and organisations who contributed to the struggle against Apartheid in South Africa.

The Centre was established in 1988 and is located on the campus of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Manuscript librarian, Jewel Koopman was very helpful as we began to look for archival supplies for ESSA. Their Centre's newsletter and website which she edits are also very informative. See <http://paton.ukzn.ac.za>.

Western Cape Archives and Records Service

This organization is a provincial government archive which also collects non-public records pertaining to the history of the Western Cape and its diverse communities. It was quite amazing to be shown their earliest records of the Cape Colony of Africa dating back to 1651. It would be interesting to compare this collection to our Canadian Hudson Bay Company Archives housed in Manitoba.



Records in the Western Cape Archives date back to 1651. Photo taken by Alf Redekopp.

Mennonitische Forschungsstelle (Bolanden-Weierhof, Germany)

This institution is a library and archives for all Mennonites in Germany owned by the Mennonitischen Geschichtsverein (Mennonite Historical Society). The research centre began in 1948 and was originally located in the home of Dr. Ernst Crous in Göttingen, a long-time archivist in the state archives in Berlin. In 1968 the collection was moved to Weierhof, where it was combined with the library of Dr. Christian Neff, pastor of the Mennonite Church in Weierhof and also editor of the *Mennonitisches Lexikon*. The collection was housed at the Gymnasium Weierhof until the current dedicated archives building was constructed in 1996.



Prussian Mennonite Church registers dating back to the 1780s. Some of these were microfilmed at Weierhof in 1968 by the Genealogical Society, Salt Lake City, Utah and can be viewed at a number of Mennonite archives in North America. Photo taken by Alf Redekopp.

The John A. Toews Library: Mennonite History, Theology, and Culture

By Doug Heidebrecht

Two distinct collections are located in the Centre for MB Studies: archival holdings lodged primarily in a climate-controlled vault and a library currently consisting of about 5914 volumes. The formation of a library within the Centre was first proposed by Herb Giesbrecht and Helmut Huebert two weeks after the untimely death of John A. Toews on January 13, 1979. The Historical Committee approved the establishment of the "J.A. Toews Mennonite Historical Collection" in honor of Toews, which was to consist of "older and rare books pertaining to Mennonite history, theology and culture."

This library collection, which was initially housed in a separate room at the Centre, began small and increased slowly through donations or purchases. The initial mandate reflected the intent to acquire books, pamphlets and unpublished materials that in "some discernable way reflect/or document the theology, church-life, worship, inter-church relationships, language, culture, education, art, governmental relationships, social-geography and other aspects of life which have affected, and continue to affect, the history of Anabaptist-Mennonite people."

In 1992, in light of the formation of Concord College, questions were raised regarding the ownership of books pertaining to Mennonite Brethren history and theology, which were lodged in the MBBC library. Abe Dueck proposed reconstituting the J.A. Toews Mennonite Historical Collection as a Mennonite



John A. Toews

Photo: CMBS
NP26-02-092.

Brethren historical library, which would continue to be owned by the Canadian MB Conference. 872 books were transferred to the Centre at this time.

In light of this background, I have addressed three areas pertaining to the Centre's library this fall. First, I sought to clarify the library's collection development mandate along acquisition levels: Comprehensive – inclusion of all significant works; Research – able to support graduate level research; and Basic – introductory material on a subject. Any materials relating to Mennonite Brethren, particularly reflecting the rich diversity present among Canadian Mennonite Brethren, are to be collected at the comprehensive level.

Second, I began to assess the Centre's thesis and dissertation holdings, which represent a key component of a specialized library collection. Of the 153 theses and dissertations in the library, only 18% were written since 1990. With this in mind, we have added 20 volumes to the collection in the last month, which address topics such as short-term missions, preaching, Mennonite singing, hermeneutics, and technology. We welcome donations of masters and doctoral work to place in the Centre's collection.

Third, we are renaming the Centre's library to represent the broad mandate that was envisioned at its inception 30 years ago. The Centre's library will now be called, "The John A. Toews Library: Mennonite History, Theology, and Culture." We invite you to come and use the resources available for your research or interest.



CMBS volunteers:
standing (l-r) Susan
Huebert, Clara
Toews, Kathie Ewert,
Abe Dueck; seated
Ed Lenzmann, Lois
Wedel. Photo credit:
Conrad Stoesz.



Volunteers Appreciated

By Conrad Stoesz

On November 13 The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies hosted 20 people to say thank you to the 9 volunteers who continue to serve the Centre. A dinner of *vereniki* (cottage cheese filled perogies), *farmers sausage*, *holobsi* (cabbage rolls), corn, salad and *saskatoon pie* was served followed by a short program. "Its one small way to show our appreciation for the tremendous work they do for us," said newly minted director Doug Heidebrecht. The volunteers at the Centre have logged approximately 1200 hours of time this year. Some of the volunteers come twice a week, others twice a month, and others are "on call." Activities include filing, sorting, scanning, research, translating, editing, mailing, and data entry. Everyone comes with their own networks of people, knowledge, and skills, therefore projects are assigned keeping these attributes in mind.

Bill Schroeder is the longest serving volunteer who began when the Centre opened in 1969. A new crop of 4 volunteers began in 2005. Because of their on-going work, the Centre is able to pursue new initiatives and deal with increased demands for the Centre's resources.

When asked why they come, volunteers mention the importance of contributing to the church community. They enjoy the good atmosphere, the variety of the work, and the interesting things they see and learn. Lois Wedel observed, "I am amazed at all the sermons pastors preach and I have a new appreciation for the difficulty of pastoral work." Kathie Ewert remarked, "it was interesting to see what was important to people a hundred years ago, to see what they were thinking and writing about." Clara Toews responded by saying that through her work at the Centre she became "inspired how people through the years have tried to be faithful." Ed Lenzmann summed it up with "I wouldn't come if I didn't enjoy it."

Letter to the Editor

I have read Peter Letkemann's review of the book *"Remember Us": Letters from Stalin's Gulag (1930-37)* by Ruth Derksen Siemens, and I would like to share some comments. I was born in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and have a post-graduate degree in Theory of Language (Translation Theory) from Odessa University, Ukraine. Having lived in Ukraine for over 40 years, I am fluent in both Ukrainian and Russian and knowledgeable in the socio-political history of Ukraine and Russia. With the knowledge and experience I gained from being born, educated and employed in Ukraine, I assisted Ruth Derksen Siemens in translating some of the terms used by the writers of the letters in her book.

What really surprised me in Mr. Letkemann's review, besides its extremely negative tone, was his inaccurate comment about the former capital of Ukraine. On p. 8 he refers to Kherson as "the former capital of Ukraine." This is simply not true. In 1917-1934 the capital of the Ukrainian Republic was Kharkiv (my home town). Compared to Kiev and Kharkiv, Kherson was a minor administrative centre. It has never been "the capital of Ukraine".

Also, in his attempt to "define" and explain Russian and Ukrainian words, Mr. Letkemann makes other questionable comments. For example, he argues that Torgsin stores "were set up to deal only in hard currency, such as US dollars, or gold." This may be the formal dictionary definition, but the writers of the letters provide details about the points they earned and describe their trip to the Torgsin store to redeem them. "Torgsin" is an abbreviation of the Russian phrase "torgovlia s inostrantsami" which means "trade with foreigners." However, it is doubtful that any foreigners carrying hard currency or gold would be allowed to shop in the area where the camp was located. In this particular case, other shoppers might have been permitted to redeem their points there.

More importantly, he misses the point. Most of the words (and concepts) he is defining would have been as unknown to the writers (the Regehr family) as they were to the readers (the Barga family) in Canada. The writers were forced to live and work in a new reality -- the unnatural, brutal world of "Archipelag Gulag." I doubt that this "new world" was clear and

understandable to them. They would have had very little prior knowledge of it; in addition, this new reality was changing every day. This might very well have been one of the purposes of the camp: to drain and destroy the prisoners by immersing them in this unknown, frightening, and repressive reality.

So "defining" each word for the reader and supplying our present-day, encyclopedic understanding of these words might actually detract from the authenticity of the story. If we follow Mr. Letkemann's reasoning, it would seem as if the words and concepts of the camp-world were explicit, well-known, and completely understandable for the Barga family in Canada. Regards,

Dr. Tatiana Teslenko, Senior Instructor,
University of British Columbia

Ordination of MB Women

(cont'd from p. 2)

Martens was ordained for mission work in Herbert, Saskatchewan by J.H. Epp, principal of Bethany Bible Institute and a member of the Board of Foreign Missions.³⁰ Across the country, Nancy Fehderau, along with her husband Harold, were ordained on that same day in the Kitchener M.B. Church by J.B. Toews, Executive Secretary of the Board of Foreign Missions.³¹

The abandonment of the practice of ordaining women in 1957 cannot be isolated from the swirling changes enveloping Mennonite Brethren during the mid-twentieth century, particularly in the United States. Rapid acculturation, geographical expansion, and urbanization eroded conference unity and altered church practices.³² In response, the strategy of conference leaders was to call for a more clearly defined church polity, which in turn, identified ordination much more exclusively with the "ministry of the Word."

Perhaps D. Edmond Hiebert's 1957 commentary on 1 Timothy can provide insight into the "scriptural convictions" underlying the logic used to rescind the practice of ordaining women at that time. Hiebert reasoned that a woman could not "assume the office of a public teacher in the congregation" for this official position of "superiority and authority" was "inconsistent with her divinely assigned position of subordination to the man."³³ Consistency between belief and practice required a change in practice.

The recent ordination of women by Mennonite Brethren churches can find precedence in the well-established tradition of ordaining women for mission work between 1899 and 1958. However, the lack of an explicit justification for rescinding the ordination of women in 1957, should provide incentive to articulate a clear biblical and pragmatic rationale for its renewed practice today.

Endnotes

¹ Grace Kim was ordained on March 30, 2008 by Pacific Grace Church in Vancouver and Bev Peters was ordained by Northview Community Church in Abbotsford on April 19, 2008. See Laura Kalmar, "Ordination of Two Women Revives Discussion," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, May 2008, 18-19. These Canadian ordinations were preceded by the Mennonite Brethren church in Congo, which ordained Madame Lukala Londa Charly to serve in pastoral ministry in France in August 2000. See Mary Anne Isaak and Jeanine Yoder, "Ordination Decision: A Sign of Changing Relationships," *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, January 16, 2004, 10-11.

² See, *Missionary Album of Missionaries Serving Under the Board of Foreign Missions the Mennonite Brethren Conference, Inc.* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1951); *Missionary Album of Missionaries Serving Under the Board of Foreign Missions the Mennonite Brethren Conference, Inc.* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1952); *Missionary Album of Missionaries Serving Under the Board of Foreign Missions the Mennonite Brethren Conference, Inc.* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1954); and *Missionary Album of Missionaries Serving Under the Board of Foreign Missions the Mennonite Brethren Conference, Inc., Revised* (Hillsboro: Board of Foreign Missions, 1956).

³ I wish to thank Ed Lenzmann for his help researching these early records.

⁴ *Missionary Album* (1951), 14. See also, N.N. Hiebert, "A Brief Survey of my Life," (Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Box 965, Folder 11, No. 1, c.a. 1945), 1.

⁵ A.E. Janzen and Herbert Giesbrecht, eds., *We Recommend...Recommendations and Resolutions of the General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Churches* (Fresno: Board of Christian Literature, 1978), 150. See also Mrs. H.T. Esau, *First Sixty Years of M.B. Missions* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 255.

⁶ Janzen and Giesbrecht, 105-106, 109.

⁷ "Ordination und Aussendungsfeier in Rückenau," *Zionsbote*, November 26 1913, 6.

⁸ *Missionary Album* (1951), 62.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁰ For slightly lower statistics, see Gloria Neufeld Redekop, "The Understanding of Women's Place Among Mennonite Brethren in Canada: A Question of Biblical Interpretation," *Conrad Grebel Review* 8, no.3 (Fall, 1990): 260; and Gloria Neufeld Redekop, *The Work of Their Hands: Mennonite Women's Societies in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1996), 58.

¹¹ For example, see "Field Notes," *The Christian Leader*, April 15, 1953, 9; "Deacons Ordained in Kitchener, Ont.," *The Christian*

Leader, October 15, 1955, 16; and "Our Congregations at Work," *The Christian Leader*, September 15, 1956, 23.

¹² For example see, "Miss Elsie Fischer to Be Commissioned," *The Christian Leader*, August 1, 1952, 2; H.B. Warkentin, "Dedication and Ordination," *The Christian Leader*, April 1, 1954, 8; and Leslie H. Stobbe, "Ordination and Farewell," *The Christian Leader*, September 1, 1954, 6-7.

¹³ Paulina Foote, *God's Hand Over My Nineteen Years in China* (Hillsboro: M.B. Publishing House, 1962), 26.

¹⁴ *Year Book of the 44th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1948), 106. See also "Doctrine in Principle and Practice," *The Christian Leader*, February 15, 1949, 5-6; and "An Important General Conference Resolution," *The Christian Leader*, November 1, 1950, 3-4.

¹⁵ *Year Book of the 44th General Conference*, 106-107. See page 76 where these concerns motivated the formation of a commission to study the possibility of establishing a seminary to train Mennonite Brethren church leaders.

¹⁶ *Year Book of the 45th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1951), 134-140.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126. See also Richard Kyle, "Ecclesiological Developments, 1940-1960," in *Bridging Troubled Waters: The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Twentieth Century*, edited by Paul Toews (Winnipeg, Kindred Productions, 1995), 204.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 135, 136, 139.

¹⁹ *Year Book of the 45th Pacific District Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (1954), 97.

²⁰ *Year Book of the 46th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1954), 6. The Southern District Conference also brought questions regarding the practice of licensing to the 1954 General Conference. See pages 6-7.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ "The Minutes of the Annual Sessions of the Committee of the Reference and Counsel of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America," (Hillsboro: 1955), 4.

²⁴ "Minutes of the Annual Sessions of the Committee of the Reference and Counsel," 13.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ *Year Book of the 47th General Conference of the Mennonite Brethren Church of North America* (Hillsboro: Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1957), 106.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁰ "Ordination-Farewell held for Daisy Martens," *The Christian Leader*, September 23, 1958, 9. Mrs. Alfred Schmidt was also ordained in 1958 (June 1) in Hepburn. See "Our Congregations at Work," *The Christian Leader*, June 17, 1958, 22.

³¹ "Mission News," *The Christian Leader*, June 17, 1958, 7; Nancy Fehderau, "Ordination," email to Doug Heidebrecht, November 8, 2008.

³² For a fuller description see, Paul Toews, Introduction," in *Bridging Troubled Waters*:

Mennonites and Money: Wealth and Poverty in the Past and Present

This report was translated and adapted from a German report by Kennert Giesbrecht published in the Mennonitische Post.

On October 9th and 10th an academic conference on the theme of Mennonites and money was held at the University of Winnipeg, under the leadership of Professor Royden Loewen.

Speakers came from the USA, The Netherlands, New Zealand, and various parts of Canada. The most familiar international guests was probably James Urry, author of *None but Saints*.

The Mennonite Brethren at Mid-Twentieth Century, edited by Paul Toews (Winnipeg, Kindred Productions, 1995), iii-xvi; and Kyle, "Ecclesiological Developments," 193-212.

³³ D. Edmond Hiebert, *First Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1957), 60. Hiebert was professor of New Testament at Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary.

Doug Heidebrecht is the Director of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg.

Diphtheria

(cont'd from p. 5)

2. Jacob Klassen *Chortitzer Mennonite Church Cemeteries*, CMC Archives, Steinbach (1985). This valuable resource is not well known. Jacob has his original work and I also have a copy.

3. *Manitoba Free Press*, July 7, 1900, p. 2. The dead were Merrill McFarlane, 10, and Nellie Rankin, both of diphtheria, as well as Mrs. J. Tomlinson and the infant son of T. Laing.

4. *Manitoba Free Press*, Sept. 8, 1910; Oct 13, 1911.

5. Loewen, Royden, *Blumenort A Mennonite Community in Transition 1874-1982*. Blumenort Mennonite Historical Society, Steinbach (1983) p. 218. Loewen attributes the deaths to typhus and diphtheria. It was actually typhoid, very different from typhus, but this is a common confusion.

6. *Journals and Sessional Papers...Manitoba*, Vol. 33 (1901) pp. 291-92.

7. *Manitoba Free Press*, July 19, 1900, p. 6.

8. *Manitoba Free Press*, July 9, 1900, p. 3.

9. *Der Nordwesten*, Aug. 2 report from Steinbach, Aug. 9 report from Gruenthal.

10. All three, Margaretha 4, Helena 2, and Susana 1 were registered, but Helena and Susana's death dates in the records are one day earlier than those on their grave stones (see Jacob Klassen, above)

11. *Der Nordwesten*, Oct. 25 Steinbach report. All these deaths were registered.

12. *Der Nordwesten*, January 24, 1901.

I wish to thank Michelle Larcombe for research assistance and the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. for research support.

Glen Klassen is Adjunct Professor of Biology at Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg..



James Urry (left) and Roy Loewen (right).
Photo credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.

A review of the history of Mennonites and their money showed periods of both affluence and poverty. In Holland and Russia, a significant number of Mennonites became very wealthy. Often the demise of Mennonite society in these countries was blamed on the pursuit of this wealth. Menno Simons exhorted his parishioners to live simply and humbly. The fact that generally Mennonites throughout the world today belong to the wealthier class of society gave rise to heated debate and lively discussion. Menno Simons was concerned that the pursuit and accumulation of wealth would draw people away from God.

"Individualism and capitalism are contrary to the teachings of Jesus," Travis Kroeker stated in his presentation on Friday afternoon. "However," he said, "the problem is that current Mennonites do not want to hear this. They turn away and pretend that it does not concern them."

"The early Mennonites pursued 'survival' and wanted nothing to do with wealth and capitalism," said Karl Koop. "For example, Peter Peters, an early disciple of Menno Simons, consistently demonstrated why Christians should not be rich."

Royden Loewen, spoke of how many Mennonites have chosen a life of poverty and humility. He used the groups of Mennonites that emigrated from Canada to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s, as an example. From the writings of their leaders he showed that they did not want their members to be lured away by wealth.

About 300 people attended the conference and probably all went away wondering about the implications for the future. Will the pursuit and accumulation of wealth lead to a demise?

It was also affirmed that Mennonites can do much good in the world with their wealth.

A.R.

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Germany & Russia

Many of us are aware of the wide range of “conferences” that have been organized by *Aussiedler* of Mennonite background who settled in Germany in recent decades. John N. Klassen’s 2003 doctoral dissertation “Church Planting and Church Growth among Evangelical Russian German Christians in Germany ...” has now been published as *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* by the Verlag für Theologie und Wissenschaft (Nürnberg) and Verlag für Kultur und Wissenschaft (Bonn), 2007, 444 pages. As part of the “edition afem” it is volume 27 of the “mission academics” series. There is an enormous amount of information packed into 75 tables with fairly comprehensive church statistics through 1998 and in a few cases to the year 2000. An extensive index allows for a quick study of particular persons, events or theological themes. [CMBS]

Von Gott beschenkt um Segen zu sein: Mennonitengemeinde Bechterdissen 1956–2006 (Leopoldshöhe: Mennonitengemeinde Bechterdissen, 2006) tells the story of one of the older congregations in Germany of Mennonites from Russia in a well-organized 183-page book with numerous full colour photos, maps, graphs and tables of information. MCC PAXmen from North America were involved in the post-WW II years in helping to build this Mennonite community. An accompanying CD contains additional photos, interviews and other supplementary items.

Kurt Kerber, Redaktion, *aufbrechen . . .: Mennonitische Gemeinden im Verband seit 150 Jahren* (Sinsheim: Verband deutscher Mennonitengemeinden K.d.ö.R, [2005?]), 122 pages. This contribution to a history of 150 years of association of south German Mennonite churches contains a number of essays followed by a two-page profile of each of the member congregations.

In 2001 David Neufeld gathered together a series of previously published historical papers dealing with one of the congregations in the Verband for a *Gemeindeggespräch* of the congregation in Regensburg. The interest was so strong that these papers were reprinted in an attractive 86-page booklet entitled *Mennonitengemeinde Regensburg: Mit*

unserem Erbe in die Zukunft. Although Amish-Mennonite farmers had begun to settle in the area in 1802, the congregation was founded in 1820.

A.I. Savin, compiler, *Ethno-Confession in the Soviet State: Mennonites in Siberia, 1920-1989: Annotated List of Archival Documents*, translated by Olga Shmakina with assistance from Ludymilla Kariaka, edited by Paul Toews (Fresno, California: Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 2008), 218 pages, soft cover, \$40US, is the first volume of the Siberian Mennonite Research Project which originated from a meeting of historians and archivists in Winnipeg in 2001. The bulk of the book lists and describes, in a brief paragraph for each, 1,000 files. Part 1, covering Mennonite communities of Siberia for the years 1920-1930s lists 922 of these files, with the rest covering 1940-1980s. This volume is indispensable for researchers studying Mennonite history of this period.

Increasingly, Mennonites from the former Soviet Union now living in Germany are writing contributions to the history of their former homeland. Susanne Isaak, *Nach Siberien vertrieben* (Meckenheim: by the author, 1999), 128 pages, has compiled recollections by ten former residents (mostly women) of the village of Zentral in Voronezhskaya oblast who were exiled to Siberia during the 1940s. These brief memoirs, together with other material she has collected, are offered as a supplement to a history of Zentral published in 1996.

A much more ambitious book is *Susanowo: damit es nicht vergessen wird, 1911–1991* (Detmold: Das Team, 2005), hardcover, 239 pages. This village was founded northwest of Orenburg by descendants of the Petersdorf clan when their mill in the village of Deyevka, Orenburg settlement burned down. Collectivisation in 1930 included all the families, and despite the execution by firing squad of 12 men in 1937 (on false charges of belonging to a counter-revolutionary fascist organization), the village chronicle shows steady economic progress. In 1987 the move to Germany began; by the end of 1990, 192 families (840 persons) had left.

A somewhat different approach to writing history of life in the USSR is Heinrich Mandler’s *Familie Rempel: Zur Geschichte des Mennonitentums in Russland* (Bielfeld: by the author, 2005), soft cover, 190 pages. The bulk of this book tells the stories of the ten surviving

children (3 died in infancy) of Aron and Justina Rempel. The longest sub-section is that of Helena, wife of the author. Two biographies of the eldest son, Bishop Jacob Rempel, have recently been published. The third son was Peter A. Rempel, long-time minister and Bible school teacher in Manitoba.

A still different window into a particular era of Mennonite life in the former USSR comes through letters. Catharine (Schroeder) Kirkland translated 147 letters (over 300 pages) written between 1924 and 1936 (and some later ones) from the Memrik area to relatives already in Canada. Apart from forming a detailed supplement to an earlier history book on the Peter and Katharina Schroeder family, it provides a wealth of detail on day to day life in the transition to the Stalin era. Other families working on a similar translation project will find useful ideas for how to make the final product usable and attractive. *The Schroeder Letters from the Parents and Siblings of Anna (Njuta) Enns: A Glimpse of Life in Russia, 1924-1936* (Regina: Catharine Kirkland and S. John Kirtland, 2008), 385 pages, 8½ x 11, Sirlux bound.

Jakob Kroeker is known to many as publisher of the widely-used daily devotional guide, *Christlicher Abreisskalender*. Others know him as co-publisher of the Russian Mennonite periodical *Friedensstimme*, or as founder and long-time director of the German mission organization *Licht im Osten*. Fewer perhaps know that he wrote a major Old Testament commentary under the title *Das lebendige Wort* (The Living Word). One of his successors at the mission has now selected excerpts from Kroeker’s writings and placed them in some 175 categories. Armin Jetter, compiler, *Lebendige Worte: Jakob Kroeker Brevier* (Basel: Brunnen Verlag Giessen, 2008), 511 pages, makes readily accessible Kroeker’s wise and spiritual insights into a wide range of topics from Abraham to Zukunft (future). [CMBS]

Canada

Katharina (Janzen) Epp, *Thanks for all Good Things*, translated by Henry Klaassen and edited by Maureen Epp (Winnipeg: Carl H. Epp Family, 2008), Sirlux bound, 785 pages, is the English version of her diaries from the years 1919 to 1944. Katharina (b. 1868) was one of the pioneer settlers of the Mennonite community around Eigenheim, Saskatchewan. Translation of this diary makes it accessible to the many who do not read

German readily. Its perspective will provide much to an understanding of the social history of rural prairie life and of the faith of the particular Mennonite community of which Katharina was part.

Carl A. Krause has reprinted two of his articles published earlier and reworked a third. *Eigenheim Connections* (Saskatoon: by the author, 2008), 28 pages, provides a background setting for the Katharina Epp diaries. One reviews history of the Eigenheim area prior to Mennonite arrival there in 1892. A second presents the views of two earlier diarists from that Mennonite community. The third gives a brief history of Mennonites who came to that area (and other parts of Saskatchewan and Manitoba) in 1918, escaping from Oklahoma in the context of the WW I anti-Mennonite mood.

Joe S. Wurz, *Prosperity and Persecution: Self-Defense or Non-Resistants of the Hutterites and Mennonites in Moravia, Austria, Hungary, Rumania and Russia* (Manitoba: by the author, 2008) is a small booklet (13 x 21 cm, 74 pages) in which the author has loosely pulled together a number of incidents and exhortations from a variety of sources to argue why non-resistance is better than, for example, the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* (self-defence) during the anarchic times of Nestor Makhno in Russia.

Paraguay

With the next assembly of Mennonite World Conference scheduled for Paraguay next year, readers may want to update their knowledge of the Mennonite scene in that part of South America. The MHC now has a complete set of the *Jahrbuch für Geschichte und Kultur der Mennoniten in Paraguay*. The most recent three volumes range in size from 160 to 220 pages; the basic language is High German, although Low German and Spanish also occur. The focus in 2005 is on biographies of leaders, in 2006 on education and in 2007 on Mennonites and literature.

With a new volume recently published on Mennonite women in Canada (reviewed elsewhere in this issue), readers may wish to look at comparable work done in Paraguay. The well-known historian and story teller, Peter P. Klassen, provides eight biographies in *Frauneschicksale: Mennonitische Frauen auf der Wanderung, Flucht und Ansiedlung* (Uchte, Germany: Sonnentau Verlag, 2004), 277 pages. One was a teenager when her parents left Manitoba

to settle in the Chaco; another a widow with three children fleeing the Crimea as a refugee; some were professionals; one came as an MCC worker-spouse and developed her own career as an educator and advisor in the Indian resettlement program.

Quite different are the memoirs/autobiography of Peter Boldt, *Out of the Jungle: The true story of a young Mennonite boy in the Paraguayan Chaco* (Belleville, Ontario: Guardian Books, 2007), 147 pages. These are the recollections of a man who grew up in the Chaco but moved to Canada with his parents at age 15. Although now living in the USA, Boldt was surprised, while sleeping under the southern sky and listening to the frogs and night birds sing on a visit to the Chaco, to realize that he had come "home." [CMBS]

Other items on Mennonites in South America may also be of interest to Assembly pilgrims or others with roots in Latin America, such as a profile of the *Mennonitengemeinde / Congregación Menonita Montevideo 1951-1992*.

Plett Foundation Opens Offices at the University of Winnipeg

The remarkable legacy of Delbert F. Plett, a prominent Steinbach lawyer who died in 2004 will live on thanks in part to a partnership between the University of Winnipeg and the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. At a ceremony at the University of Winnipeg on November 7, 2008, the Plett Foundation officially accepted the keys to their new office from Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, president of the University. Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair of the Foundation's Board, noted that before his untimely death in 2004, Delbert Plett was not only a Steinbach lawyer and noted land developer, but also an enthusiastic

promoter of history with a keen interest in telling the story of Traditionalist Mennonites; publishing more than a dozen books on the theme.

Plett left the majority of his sizeable estate to the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, which is committed to continuing this work. Loewen also thanked the University of Winnipeg for its tradition of supporting Mennonite studies. University President Dr. Lloyd Axworthy, welcomed the Foundation to the campus and noted that the partnership with the Foundation is a continuation of Plett's work and an important key to the study of Canadian history. Axworthy emphasized the importance of the Foundation as one of a group of organizations participating in the development of the Canadian History Centre at the University.

The Foundation's offices are on the second floor of Bryce Hall, one of the older buildings on the campus located just east of the historic Wesley Hall. Dr. Hans Werner is the Executive Director of the Plett Foundation and welcomes visitors to the new location. In addition to managing the work of the Foundation, Werner teaches Mennonite Studies and Canadian History in the University's Department of History. The Plett Foundation publishes the annual history magazine *Preservings*. It also issues grants for research and publication of conservative Mennonite history. Its fellowship program at the University of Winnipeg and Canadian Mennonite University enables graduate students to do research that fits the Foundation's mandate.

The D.F. Plett Historical Foundation, Inc. is the residual beneficiary of Delbert Plett's estate and estate executors, Tom Mooney and Norman Plett, Delbert's brother, were on hand to celebrate this important milestone in the Foundation's development. It is estimated that the estate will be fully liquidated and the Foundation fully operational in another two or three years. *—News Release*



Dr. Axworthy, Executive Director, Hans Werner and other visitors view the new offices. Photo credit: Kennert Giesbrecht.

Book Reviews

Sam W. Reimer, *Gray Matter Graffiti* (Winnipeg: Circle Design, 2008) 214 pp.

Reviewed by Adelia Neufeld Wiens, Coordinator of Student Advising, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.

Sam Reimer was born in Steinbach in 1949, lived in Kansas from the age of 15 till early adulthood, and then settled in Vancouver where he remains. This lovely book reflects a lifetime of writing and polishing by an eccentric, delightful poet and artist.

Reimer describes the contents thus: "Some are autobiographical, some fictitious, some more serious, some angrier, some more sorrowful than others – ranging from the profane to the sacred, and en masse erring on the side of oddness." I appreciate the summary except for the reference to "oddness." Some of these poems are quirky, maybe, but if this is odd, then the world has worn me down because I just don't see it!

Everything in this volume is burnished, from the charming introduction by Robert L. Peters to the biography and colophon at the end. This book will delight many, both those on the edge of faith and those in its warm, comfortable middle.

Divided into "chapters" with titles such as "Backroads Magic," "Anarchies of Love," and "Jesus Chrystals," the poems are both easy to read and wonderful to savour.

There are surprises. The art and graphic design complements the text, and sometimes enchants. On one page, I read the poem and then look again. Printed on an angle, in lightly screened large font are these words: "To treat a man as a beast in a cage/serves only a greater beast to enrage." An explanation follows: "This couplet got me disqualified from jury duty, among some other lines." I could have so easily missed this!

Reimer's observation of nature offers wonderful descriptions. "Impression: Along Molson Way," concludes *Give the earth just a crack at the city/ & gardens grow in gangs,/daisies/& morning-glories run in packs.*

His descriptions of places and feelings are evocative. In "Dunster Sketch," *calligraphies/ from the moon/ shine blue-/ white with tall/ dark silhouettes/ poised for dancing/ against the sky/ across the snowdrift floor/ Bluejay night broods mellow/ moods in the valley.*

Reimer is divorced. His pain at that is

expressed in several poems, including "Liz Lost": *& where are you/ my shadow love/ my ring around the /dark side of the moon you*

There is haiku: *Japanese woman/ in her early twenties a/ blossom breeze passing*

And there is faith. Reimer's metaphor for faith "Holding Patterns" concludes, *But we're in a holding/ pattern, symmetrical, safe,/ & our pilot sees in more/ than a few dimensions,/ has eyes in his palms,/ radar under his hat,/ & when we land we'll get to/ shake his hand & ask/ Him how it really went.*

This small volume is a treasure. Reimer has been playing with words since he discovered Shakespeare as a child, and we are fortunate that this collection has finally been published.

"Within Word-Within-World Play" sums it all up:

*As the work of poetry
Began with word-play so the hum-
drum-drudgery of editing
Must be made palatably entertaining
Ending finally as it began
Within
Word-Within-World Play*

Read this and enjoy. Words. Play. World.

Marlene Epp, *Mennonite Women in Canada: A History* (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2008) 378 pp.

Reviewed by Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder, translator and freelance writer in Winnipeg.

A question Mennonites continue to ask themselves is what it actually means to be Mennonite. As Marlene Epp, a professor of history and peace and conflict studies at the University of Waterloo, states in her preface, issues commonly discussed when debating Mennonite identity are usually political, theological or ethnically centred. She gives the reader an opportunity to wrestle with this topic from a different perspective – that of gender, which has rarely entered the conversation. Depending on the reader's identity, this might be uncomfortable, challenging or exhilarating. It is most certainly enlightening.

"One should not judge a book by its cover" is an old adage that has merit. However, the photo on the cover of Epp's book is so symbolic of her content that it deserves special mention. Depicted are 13

women seated in front of what is probably a church building since they are dressed very formally. Three of them are without hats, the others are sporting very lavish headgear adorned with flowers and fruit. The women are sitting behind a fence. This can be viewed as symbolic of the tension in which Mennonite women live their lives. Epp writes: "Women experienced exclusion and victimization within their families and churches, but they also exercised influence and agency.... They carved out spaces for themselves within the structures that constrained them, but also at times successfully subverted and resisted those structures."

As a Mennonite herself, Epp has an "insider perspective." She claims, however, that she is a woman of the twentieth century who may share a Mennonite world view with her subjects but her life experience differs greatly from that of most of the women she describes. (Epp's analysis stops at 1980, a time after which Mennonite women began to accept positions of authority in public, professional, and church life as a matter of course.)

Epp divides her book into five chapters: women as immigrants, women within families, women in the context of the church, women in the broader world, and women as artists. Her introduction provides the reader with invaluable background material and adds a sense of urgency to the study.

In her meticulously researched book, Epp paints for her readers a portrait of Canadian Mennonite women that is both universal and particular – universal in that much of what she writes can be applied to women in general, and particular because Mennonite women have their own unique issues due to their ethnic and religious backgrounds.

What all women have in common is that they have been mostly invisible in historical texts. For Epp, writing this book was "an exercise in overcoming women's invisibility with feminist curiosity ... and about taking women's lives seriously."

As a Mennonite woman reader, I experienced a gamut of emotions: despair that women have been seen in a "low-lying fog" throughout history, disgust and rage that we as a society have allowed this to happen, and excitement and exhilaration that women are finally given credit for the unique and invaluable contributions they make in our world.