

MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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Some of the early Brethren in the Winkler MB community.

Photo: Courtesy of the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg, Man.

Canada's First Mennonite Brethren Church at Winkler, Manitoba

by Arnie Neufeld

The year 1988 marks the centennial anniversary of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada. Delegates and guests at the 77th annual convention, to be held this July in Winkler, Manitoba, will celebrate this important milestone in the life of the church.

The Mennonite Brethren in Canada, with a present membership of approximately 26,000, and congregations in seven provinces, have experienced significant growth — both in numbers and influence — during the past 100 years. From an inconspicuous beginning the movement has emerged as an important force in the church community in Canada today.

The first congregation was established during an exciting period of national history. The Dominion of Canada, created in 1867 with the signing of the British North America Act, was a land of opportunity and challenge. The vast prairie region in the west was in need of development and, with the creation of the Province of Manitoba in 1870, soon welcomed thousands of immigrants representing a number of ethnic groups from different areas of the world.

The first group of Mennonites to choose Manitoba as their home arrived from Russia in 1874. This group of approximately 1500 persons, chose to build their homes in a designated area situated on the east side of the Red River (hence "East Reserve"), about thirty miles southeast of Winnipeg.

Most of the 3,261 immigrants arriving the following year constructed their homes in a second tract of land located west of the Red River. This area, situated in the extreme southerly section of the province, was known by the Mennonites as the West Reserve. It was a fertile region, and proved to be a favorable setting for the creation of a new community. A non-Mennonite resident of southern Manitoba later described the arrival of the German-speaking settlers:

All in a day, as it might be, the Mennonites appeared on the scene, and a great belt of bald prairie, fifteen miles wide from the boundary line, and reaching away from the bounds of the little settlement eastward nearly to the Red River, became

teeming with human life and activity. This was in the summer of 1875.¹

Although these Mennonites had come to Manitoba for a variety of reasons, to be sure, one of their most important motives had been their desire to make "...a clean and pure start, a sure return to the old ways."² Several church leaders "had vowed to reverse the accommodation to outside influence that had gone too far in Russia."³ Here in Canada, they believed, they would at last be at liberty to create the spiritual, social and economic utopia for which they had yearned.⁴

However, leaders in the Mennonite West Reserve were soon confronted with situations and problems which they had not expected. Foreign influences began to penetrate the life of the community; practices that had constituted integral parts of the Mennonite tradition and culture in the past were gradually abandoned; and it seemed to many as if the dream of building a Mennonite utopia might well end in confusion. The changes that occurred completely altered the face and structure of the community, and brought with it profound and far-reaching consequences in the life of the church.

Several developments and influences in the West Reserve emerged as agents of fundamental change and renewal in the community. Non-Mennonite persons in nearby towns became sources of "outside" ideas and perspectives, and at times provided the opportunity for employment. Under Canadian land ownership laws, farmers could relocate their homes from the village to their own parcels of land.

Mennonite church leaders watched with dismay as a growing number took advantage of this new freedom to escape the control and supervision of the church. New railway lines arrived in 1883 bringing another link with the "outside" world and stimulating the growth of new commercial centers in the heart of the community.

In 1879 the Manitoba government created municipal districts and regulated the election of local councils. This action further eroded the power of the village-based and church-controlled administrative system.

Leaders of the more conservative *Reinlaender Mennonitengemeinde* reacted swiftly by excommunicating all members who would agree to work for non-Mennonite employers, relocate their homes away from the villages or vote in the municipal elections. The *Lehrdienst* (Elder, ministers and deacons) was determined to do whatever was deemed necessary to retain the traditional ways and practices as they had known them in the past.

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However, the authority and control of the church hierarchy was diminished not only as a result of social and economic developments in the community. Fundamental church beliefs and practices were also being questioned and challenged.

The use of "modern" gospel songs created widespread irritation and tension.⁵ In one instance, the school teacher in the village of Hochfeld, Jacob Hoepfner, had introduced the livelier melodies to his pupils with the result that he was seriously reprimanded and censored. Although Hoepfner insisted that he had never learned the traditional songs, he was told by leaders in the village that he would be permitted to complete only the current school year, and that on condition that he would no longer sing gospel songs with his class.

Members of the community were also wary of periodicals and other printed materials brought into homes from outside sources. They found aggravating the insistence of American Mennonite papers which claimed to have "...light and truth to bring to the north."⁶

There were other influences challenging the religious status quo. Individuals and families received letters written by friends and relatives in other parts of North America. Some had been in contact with evangelicals when enroute from Russia to Canada. It is known that a Methodist evangelist boarded the ship carrying Mennonite immigrants in Liverpool and presented a gospel message to them. Baptist evangelists visited residents of the West Reserve and also made an attempt to lead individuals into a personal relationship with God.

Some areas of Mennonite residence in Manitoba were also visited by John Holdeman (founder of the Church of God in Christ Mennonite group), ministers of the Swedenborg persuasion, Mormon missionaries, and a number of gifted Mennonite evangelists from the United States. Evangelist N.F. Toews, a member of the General Conference Mennonite Church, conducted very successful meetings in Manitoba.⁷

In fact, the need for change and renewal was recognized and welcomed by a substantial segment of the southern Manitoba Mennonite community itself. By the early 1880s a growing element in the community was calling for improved educational standards. Some advocated cooperation with provincial government officials in establishing a comprehensive public school system.

One of the champions of progressive education and church reform was Johann Funk, one of the founders of the Bergthaler group around 1892. According to one historian, Funk emphasized conversion and the importance of a personal faith relationship with God, and caused "considerable unrest in the Fuerstenland (Old Colony) portion of the West Reserve."⁸



The first MB church building at Burwalde near Winkler, Man.

Photo: Courtesy of the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg, Man.

There were many influences and factors which challenged and eventually altered the traditional practices of the Mennonites in the West Reserve. Various individuals, groups and movements which sought to bring new spiritual understanding and renewal to the members of the community. One such center of religious reform and renewal was the village of Hoffnungsfeld, situated in the north-west corner of the West Reserve (about a half mile south-west of present-day Winkler).

Within the village of Hoffnungsfeld, founded by Jacob Wiens in 1876, lived a mixture of immigrants who had come from the Choritz, Bergthal and Fuerstenland colonies of southern Russia. The majority, however, had come from the Bergthal Colony. The village soon was known for its tolerance for new and progressive ideas. Jacob Wiens himself was a deeply religious man who welcomed individuals with evangelical convictions.

Another person who exerted a profound influence on religious conditions in the Hoffnungsfeld area was a teacher, Jacob Hoepfner. He was a great-grandson of one of the deputies involved in directing the migration of Mennonites from Prussia to New Russia (Ukraine) in 1788-89 and, as already noted, emerged as a promoter of gospel singing in the Manitoba Mennonite village schools. He had "experienced a profound encounter with God at an early age and remained faithful in this relationship all his life."⁹ As he participated in home Bible studies and other church activities, his influence soon spread beyond his immediate community.

Belonging to the Hoffnungsfeld group as well was Franz Sawatzky. He, along with Hoepfner, called for a new experiential faith in God and testified of instances where they had personally experienced the power and grace of God. They encouraged Bible study, the singing of gospel songs, a new emphasis on conversion and the promotion of missions

and evangelism in the church. They welcomed the formation of Sunday Schools and invited travelling evangelists to worship with them and share new insights with them. When the Bergthaler Mennonite Church was organized in Hoffnungsfeld in later years Hoepfner and Sawatzky emerged as outstanding leaders of that church.

A significant event in the village of Hoffnungsfeld, and indeed for the larger Manitoba Mennonite community, was the arrival of two Mennonite Brethren missionaries in the spring of 1884. John Warkentin, teacher in the village school, first saw the two visitors arriving while opening a window in his classroom. He immediately identified them as guests since it was not customary to wear white long-sleeved shirts, especially on hot humid June afternoons. (In the Mennonite communities white shirts were identified with pride and worldliness [*sich der Welt gleich stellen*]).

From its very beginning the Mennonite Brethren Church had placed primary focus and emphasis on missions. In Russia, the Mennonite Brethren Church had come into existence in 1860 as a group that stressed evangelism, and a dynamic personal relationship with Christ for all its members.¹⁰ However, the Mennonite Brethren Church did not simply originate in the context and atmosphere of renewal and missions; it became itself a dynamic force and vehicle for missionary action.

In Russia the Mennonite Brethren witnessed to their Mennonite neighbors and friends and, though legally prohibited from doing so, also made serious attempts to evangelize their Russian laborers and neighbors. In 1885 a foreign mission program was initiated. Abraham and Maria Friesen were the first Mennonite Brethren missionaries to serve in India, and by 1910 a church with a membership of 3,000 had been established there.

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In 1874, only fourteen years after the formation of the Mennonite Brethren Church, several families of Mennonite Brethren persuasion joined other Mennonite emigrants relocating to the United States. Bible study and prayer groups were soon organized and congregations established. By 1878 churches in Kansas, Nebraska, Dakota and Minnesota had agreed to organize together, thus creating the Mennonite Brethren Conference of North America.

The fourth conference (1882) of U.S. Mennonite Brethren churches was convened in the Ebenezer Church located in Harvey County, Kansas. A total of 36 delegates listened with interest as itinerant ministers reported on their services conducted in various communities during the past year. Towards the conclusion of the third session one of the delegates suggested that services should also be carried on among the Mennonites living in Canada. Although others shared the interest and vision, it was felt that more information should be gathered before launching such an undertaking.

At the 1883 conference, held in Nebraska, the question of missionary work in Manitoba was again introduced. It was agreed that two ministers, Heinrich Voth of Minnesota and David Dyck of Kansas, should travel to Manitoba, study conditions there, and then report to the following convention.

Both men were well suited and qualified for this assignment. Voth was an experienced minister and church planter, having served the Mountain Lake (Minnesota) church from its beginning. That he was held in high esteem was evidenced by the fact that he was ordained as Elder of the Minnesota churches immediately following the conclusion of the 1885 conference.

David Dyck, also a minister, had personal reasons for wanting to visit Manitoba. His wife's parents lived in the West Reserve, and he was concerned about their spiritual condition as well as other relatives that he knew there.

Dyck and Voth probably stopped first in the village of Reinland in Manitoba after their arrival in June, 1884. Reinland was considered one of the most important centers of the West Reserve, and was also the home of Dyck's relatives.

From Reinland they travelled to Hoffnungs-feld where a meeting with members of the Bible study group was arranged. From here they continued to Blumstein, another Mennonite village, and then arrived in Burwalde. Here they were welcomed in the Johann Nickel home and were able to conduct a service. Johann Warkentin (Winkler M.B. leader, 1906-31) later recalled that Jacob Wiens (*der Alte*) was present. He "was a believer and offered his home (in Hoffnungs-feld) to be used as a meeting place for a Sunday afternoon gathering."¹¹

During their stay in Manitoba Voth and Dyck visited numerous homes, conducted several house services, and became somewhat familiar with the religious needs and conditions of the area. They returned to their

homes, grateful for the contacts made and encouraged by the response and reception they had been given.

Speaking to the delegates at the 1884 conference, Voth and Dyck portrayed Manitoba as an area of great spiritual potential and need. They recommended the development of an active mission program there. The delegates accepted the recommendation and enthusiastically commissioned Voth as their first missionary to the Mennonites in Manitoba. During the next four years Voth would make numerous visits in Manitoba and assist in the formation of the first Mennonite Brethren congregation in Canada.

Before emigrating to Minnesota in 1876, Heinrich Voth and his wife, Sara (Kornelson), had lived in the village of Klippenfeld in the Molotschna Colony in Ukraine. He was a teacher in Russia, but devoted his energy to the development of his 40-acre farm after relocating to their new home in the United States.



Rev and Mrs. Heinrich Voth, first MB missionaries in Manitoba

Photo: Courtesy of the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg, Man.

He was blessed with a short, stocky build, grew a full beard, and possessed an attractive appearance and a pleasant personality. His family of nine children, was of great importance to him. Although Voth was often away from home because of his ministry, he continued to enjoy a warm and close relationship with his family.

Voth had experienced a dramatic conversion experience himself while employed as village teacher in Russia. His conversion was described thus:

As Heinrich studied the Word of God with his pupils at school and with Sara at home he came to realize more and more the need in his own spiritual life. Though he taught others, he felt he stood in need of the most important thing in life — a new life in Christ Jesus. This became a time of inner strife, conflict and intense heartsearching. After much prayer and agony of soul, Heinrich finally received the Lord Jesus Christ as his Saviour and believed in Him with all his heart.¹²

Voth remained a loyal, committed and effective servant of Christ all the remaining years of his life. He was a man of prayer, an outstanding evangelist and a gifted missionary. He left a deep and lasting impression on all who came under the influence of his ministry.

Many stories were told of his desire to help men and women find peace with God.

On one occasion he sensed an urge to visit the home of a family — Sperling by name — which lived south-east of Mountain Lake. The weather might have discouraged someone else, but he walked eight miles that winter day because he sensed a person was in need... He was able to lead this couple to the Lord as Saviour and they rejoiced in the Lord together.¹³

As a Mennonite Brethren church-planter in Manitoba he completed numerous mission tours in the West Reserve in the years 1884 to 1888. Always he would meet with established contacts, conduct services in homes, and encourage those professing faith in Christ. He was gratified to find a growing number who wished to openly confess their sin and acknowledge Jesus as their Saviour and Lord.

The experience of Jacob and Anna Banman was similar to many others. After their wedding in 1878 Jacob and Anna had moved to their homestead farm in the Burwalde district, north of Hoffnungs-feld. They had joined the Reinlaender (Old Colony) Church earlier, but were becoming increasingly unhappy with the church. They preferred the singing of gospel songs to the old songs used in their services and felt a need for a more personal and meaningful relationship with God.

When Heinrich Voth came to their community he stopped also at the Banman home and spoke to them of the inner peace and joy they too could know. During his boyhood years in Russia Jacob had come in contact with a family that had talked freely of their faith and assurance of salvation. This experience Jacob and Anna desired now as well. During one of Voth's visits to their home in 1885 the Banmans expressed their desire to know the reality of Christ and prayed for forgiveness of sin.

Voth continued to meet with them and encouraged them in their new faith. In the following year Jacob and Anna, together with another couple, were the first to be baptized by Voth in the first Mennonite Brethren baptism service in Canada.

There were other individuals and couples who also responded to the ministry of Voth and invited Christ to become their Saviour and Lord. Others were baptized and a nucleus of believers emerged. In December Voth met with the group that had been baptized and led a service in which the group participated in the observance of the Lord's Supper and foot washing. The question of a more permanent and resident leadership for the growing number of baptized believers was becoming a concern to Voth and the delegates at the following conference. *(to be concluded)*

GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY

by Alf Redekopp

Burial and Cemetery Records

Records relating to deaths constitute a major resource for genealogists. Such records can often contain not only the name of the person, but also the date and place of death, age or date of birth, and parent's name or spouse's name. Unfortunately, extensive records have not always been kept. Sometimes the only record that exists to confirm that a person lived in a certain area, may be a gravestone or marker at a burial site. Sometimes no markers even exist at a burial site, and only the memories of events and places have been preserved. For this reason, various projects relating to cemeteries have been completed or have been put into motion to assist genealogists and other interested historians.

A few years ago a Cemetery Project sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society resulted in identification of 103 cemeteries or gravesites where Mennonites in rural southern Manitoba were buried. Herman Rempel, the project chairman, writes that "records relating to deaths, to graves and cemeteries of the late 1880s up to the early 1900s are very skimpy and in many cases non-existent." Nevertheless, the information compiled through this project contains the record of many burials and deaths. The results of this project have been deposited for researchers at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, the Centre for MB Studies, and at Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., all in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

The earliest Mennonites in Manitoba lived in rural areas, and thus buried their dead in those areas as well, but where did the first Mennonites in the urban centres such as Winnipeg bury their dead? This question was discussed by the Winnipeg Regional Mennonite Genealogy Committee. After calling several of the older Mennonite congregations in Winnipeg, the conclusion was reached that the Mennonite people could be buried in almost any cemetery in Winnipeg because burial plots were often purchased from various salesmen. However, Mennonites did tend to use certain cemeteries more than others. These included Brookside, Glen Eden, Elmwood, Green Acres and Chapel Lawn cemeteries. It was also noted that Mennonites who lived in Winnipeg could also have been buried in the rural cemeteries of the communities from which they originated. Further details of this survey are also available at the three institutions already mentioned.

One further resource which is by far the largest project on this topic in Manitoba, is that of the Manitoba Genealogical Society's Cemetery Transcription Program. Presently, 296 cemeteries in Manitoba have been transcribed and another 32 are in progress. The list of cemeteries includes a number of communities where Mennonites lived, such as Blumenort, Boissevain, Grunthal, Hochstadt, Homewood, Kleefeld, Landmark, Marquette, Steinbach and others. Each tombstone record

is transcribed onto a card and filed alphabetically. The entire transcription of such records for each cemetery is available for sale separately (in a duo-tang folder). The list of cemeteries completed in this project has also been indexed in several ways — alphabetically, numerically with reference to points on a provincial map, and by municipality. Manitoba Genealogical Society has its office in Room 420, 167 Lombard Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, R3B 0T6.

Russian Mennonite Bicentennial Genealogy Workshop

When:

October 15, 1988

Where:

Mennonite Heritage Centre,
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Speaker:

Alan Peters, Fresno, California

Theme:

"Sources for Studying Prussian
Mennonite Roots"

For further information contact Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., Box 393, Winnipeg, Canada, R3C 2H6. Ph.: [204] 772-0747.

Queries

Neufeld: Any information on JACOB NEUFELD (b. 1820s or early 1830s). He married a FROESE about 1850, possibly in KRONSWELDE, Russia. One son, HEINRICH (1861-1941), married HELENA PENNER (1868-1933) on June 7, 1886. Another son, FRANZ (ca. 1850s-1911) married ANNA PENNER (1859-?) on Nov. 11, 1880. Jacob Neufeld's wife passed away in Andreasfeld, Russia, in 1903 or 1904. Any information on Jacob Neufeld such as dates, parents and ancestors would be greatly appreciated. Contact Herman Neufeld, P.O. Box 162, Virgil, Ont., L0S 1T0.

Isaak: ABRAHAM ISAAK (b. Oct., 1856 in Russia) immigrated to the U.S. in 1890. His wife, MARY DYCK (b. Apr., 1862) immigrated to the U.S. in 1891. Their children: ABRAHAM (b. Jan., 1883), MARY (b. Mar., 1885), and PETER (b. May, 1881). The Isaaks first settled in Portland, Oregon in the early 1890s, then moved to San Francisco around 1898, and by 1901 were living in Chicago. Does anyone have any information on this family such as date and place of death, or present day descendants? Contact Steven K. Smith, Gould Farm, Monterey, MA, 01245, U.S.A.

Dick/Dueck: FRANZ DICK (DUECK?) (b. Sept. 13, 1795, in Elbing, W. Prussia; d. Dec. 21, 1867, in Margenau, Russia) married ANNA WOELK (b. Aug. 2, 1802; d. Sept. 13, 1874). Three sons, GERHARD (b. 1825), CORNELIUS (b. 1828) and JOHANN (b. 1837), immigrated to the U.S.A. and settled in Henderson, Nebraska. Any information about parents and ancestors of Franz Dick and Anna Woelk, contact James D. Dick, 22404 36th Ave. W., Mountlake Terrace, WA, 98043, U.S.A.

Completed Projects

Marianne Janzen, a Winnipeg genealogist, has recently completed two projects, copies of which have been deposited at the three Mennonite genealogy centres mentioned above. "Mennonite Villages" consists of the village names of Mennonite settlements in Russia, Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia and Prussia, including geographic location through numerous maps, and the dates of establishment.

A second project, "The First Mennonite Settlers in Russia," is an attempt to identify the 228 Mennonite families from West and East Prussia, who first settled in New Russia (Ukraine) in 1788-1790. Congratulations to Marianne for work well done!

Any inquiries relating to items on this page should be addressed to Alf Redekopp, Centre for MB Studies, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, R2L 2E5.

A Fairholme Homecoming in Saskatchewan

by Mary Febr

Summer is the time for reunions. People fly, sail, travel by car, train and motorhomes in order to meet family and friends. It is the "in thing" of our day. For the little town of Fairholme, Saskatchewan, this was a first in its history.

Where is Fairholme, you may ask? Well, if you look on a road map of northern Saskatchewan you will still see it marked as a town between Glaslyn and Livelong. But let me warn you; should you drive this highway and blink your eye at the wrong time you may miss it. Gone are the two elevators, the three grocery stores, and even the railroad track and station with the bold "FAIRHOLME" name lettered on it.

Just a handful of people remain, and yet these had the courage to call a homecoming into being. Violet and Walter Harris, Ernie Wells and the Orville Fehrs, along with others, sent out invitations, not really knowing whether all the former folks from the town, and the many surrounding farms, would come.

But come they did. July 31, 1987 saw campers, trucks, motorhomes and lots of cars converging on the grassy field near the town hall. They came from all over Canada and the USA. Lists of the various country schools revealed where everyone had once attended: Speedwell, Jack Pine, Clarksville, Turtle Lake, South Branch, Parkdale, Palmerston, Darlington and Freemont. Nine former ungraded schools had, in their day, been bustling with children. Many had been in use before 1910, but all are now closed. Only the building used as the Darlington School was still on its original site in the town. Most others served as granaries, or had crumbled in a natural death.

Though this change to a consolidated school brought a slight note of sadness, the

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mood at the homecoming was jovial and hilarious. We pushed our bifocals closer to our eyes, and squinted at the name tags that were worn. Soon, a cheer, an embrace and then a flow of chatter, for old friends had found each other.

Registration had promised several hundred would attend. By Saturday, August 2, there were well over one thousand milling about the lone community hall with its lean-to beer garden. A tent seating about 1000 was hurriedly erected as soon as the parade was finished.

Yes, a town which boasts only one motel and a run-down church, a population of 43, had a parade: floats on trucks, wagons drawn by perfectly matched horses, riders, clown dogs and balloons. Twice around, and what seemed like a small, lonely place took on an air of festivity and joy. Glaslyn and North Battleford had their part in helping to feed the 1200 hungry visitors — hamburgers, a pancake breakfast and delicious fried chicken with all the trimmings.

Introductions and acknowledgements were made from the back of a pick-up truck. One powerline was enough to boom out sound on the loud speaker. Greetings and tribute were given by Dan Hicks, the Reeve of the R.M. of Parkdale. John Gormley, MP, commented on the community spirit found among farm people. Provincial MLA, Colin Maxwell, representing the Department of Culture, wished the homecomers a great time. Then presentations were made to some of the old timers. The oldest present was Mrs. Agatha Rempel, 93, who had left Fairholme in 1947 and currently resides in Calgary. Her husband, Jake, used to have a store in the hamlet years ago.

All former teachers were called up for pictures. Then each of the nine schools were named and those who had attended there at one time were given a chance to pose with childhood friends (and enemies). What a kaleidoscope of people, now 20, 30, 40 years later, we were! There were English, French, Metis, and a goodly number of German, referred to as Mennonites. All had found their places in life, and a goodly number had already passed away.

For many of us the inter-denominational church service on Sunday was important. Mr. Lawrence Ferguson headed up the Turtle Lake Mission Worship service. A special reading, from Revelation, chapter 21, was done by an Anglican lady, and songs composed for the occasion made any westerner welcome. The Rev. David Warkentin spoke on our Homecoming to Heaven. "There we will come together never to part again," was his encouragement.

Some of the folks from the former Speedwell Mennonite Brethren Church were asked to sing in German. A hilarious giggle set them off when the flat deck used as a stage began to lift at one end. A quick response from the leadership kept the organ and pulpit from sliding, and we, as a group of Christians, sang, "Gott ist die Liebe," to a wide-awake audience.

The Lord sent a strong refreshing rain during the service, so that even the little fellows



This log structure was built on the Speedwell Mennonite Brethren Church yard for Bible School classes in 1940.

Photo: Courtesy of Mary Fehr

with baseball gloves had to come inside the tent to hear the gospel. The young folks were the most disappointed that the competition on the ball diamond did not take place. Most adults were quite content to stay under shelter and visit.

Some of us who once worshipped in the little church ten miles north of Fairholme, known as Speedwell, dared the wet roads to visit the spot where the M.B. church once stood. At one time 117 church members were registered there. We had a regular Sunday worship service, Sunday school, Jugendvereins, even a Bible school.

Now only a little hollow is left where the basement once was. The yard is overgrown with tall poplars, but the graveyard marks the fact that many lived and some died at Speedwell. Homes around the area are either gone or are the shelter for swallows, groundhogs and skunks.

One cannot help but fight a feeling of nostalgia, even strong homesickness, for the days gone by. Homecoming is not a fad only. It is a powerful experience, at least for one person from Fairholme.

The author is currently a resident in Kelowna, B.C.

25 Year Celebration
Salem Mennonite Brethren Church
 691 Alexander Ave., Winnipeg, Man.
 July 10, 1988 — 9 a.m. to 12 noon

All former members and friends are cordially invited for breakfast at 9 a.m. and a Service at 10:30 with Rev. Rudie Willms, Vancouver, B.C., founding pastor, serving as guest speaker.

A Baptism at Chortitza-Rosenthal, Ukraine

by *Maria Naeser*

I have memories of Chortitza. There I attended the Zentralschule for three years, graduating with a diploma in 1934. Two years later, on July 18, 1936, I and four others from Einlage were baptized by Rev. Siemens in the Dnieper River. I was seventeen at the time.

On a dark night our little group made its way via Chortitza to Rosenthal, and the river bank below. We walked very quietly through the woods, watching constantly to make sure that no one was following us. Not a word was spoken. My brother, who was accompanying us, stayed at a distance from the group.

The baptism at the river also took place in silence. After that we gathered in a home where the mother of the family read the Scriptures and made a few explanatory remarks (there were few men around by now). Then we prayed, and sang quietly together. We were all strengthened and encouraged. Silently we made our way home by a secret path. In the years to come we would often meet in this home again.

We were received into the membership of the Rosenthal Mennonite Brethren congregation. The group did not have a regular church building. An elderly couple, the Peter Penners, had made three rooms of their home available to the congregation for services. All other churches were closed by now, and from the fall of that year on, the Penner home too could no longer be used as a church.

Excerpts from letters to the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Translated and published with permission.

REFLECTIONS ON COLLECTIONS

The J.J. Hildebrand (1880-1976) Collection

by *Jim Suderman*

J.J. Hildebrand, born in Ukraine, embarked on a world tour early this century, travelling through Europe and spending a few years in America. After a short stay in Japan, he settled in Omsk, Siberia, sometime prior to 1912. He emigrated to Canada in 1924, living most of his remaining 52 years in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The collection is quite large, containing almost two meters of material, most of it in German. It covers a wide variety of topics, including manuscripts on Mennonite history and correspondence on education, migration, and alternative service. Because of his great and wide-ranging historical interests, exemplified by his chronicle, Hildebrand's *Zeittafel* (1945), material on almost every aspect of Mennonite history is contained within the collection.

The collection also documents some of the controversies that grew up around Hildebrand. The issues involved were Mennonite immigration in the 1920s (Hildebrand helped set up Mennonite Immigration Aid, a parallel organization to the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization), the publication of the *Zeittafel* (claimed by some to have a vindictive tone), and his pre-1939 sympathies with Germany.

Unfortunately, the collection is incomplete. In 1970 part of the Hildebrand library and some manuscripts were sold to the University of Calgary. Included was an extensive manuscript entitled *Volkische Vorgeschichte der russländischen Mennoniten*. It is believed that this document is Hildebrand's main work, for which his *Zeittafel* formed only the skeleton. Hildebrand also published another book (1952) which included *Allgemeine Übersicht über Sibirien und der Gründung der Mennonitensiedlungen in Sibirien* and *Geschichte der Evangelischen Mennonitengottesgemeinde in Sibirien*.

The collection was donated to the Heritage Centre by Justina, the daughter of J.J. Hildebrand. She has also added a short biography of her father and is working through some miscellaneous materials which may be added to the collection later.

Summer Archives Assistance

A CMBC student, Heinz Fast, is working as an assistant in the MHC archives this summer. His work began on June 13, and it will continue through August. This summer position is made possible with the help of a Career Start grant, provided by the Manitoba Employment office.

Such help is of great importance to keep up with organizing our materials and other tasks which the regular staff sometimes cannot get to as quickly as it should.



A painting by Jacob Sudermann (1888-1940 ?) of Chortitza, Ukraine.

Photo by Nickel Media Services

Russian Mennonite Artists Featured

A new exhibit entitled "Russian Mennonite Artists" was one of the special features of the Mennonite Art and Music Festival held on May 15 at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg.

The exhibition had a central place in the gallery of the Mennonite Heritage Centre. It also hosted a special program which included the Low German singers, *Dietscha Schpohs*, readings by Tim Wiebe and a short drama, "The Tailor-Made Suit," directed by Verilyn Warkentin. Several hundred people visited the premises of the Centre.

It is hoped that the selection of works can be expanded as an aspect of the Russian Mennonite Bicentennial celebrations to be held in 1988-1989. Gerald Loewen is preparing the display which now includes items from the works of the painters, Arnold Dyck (1889-1970), Johann Heinrich Janzen (1868-1917), and Jacob Sudermann (1888-1940?), as well as some from the sculptor Johann P. Klassen (1888-1975) and photographer Peter Rempel (1872-1933).

We welcome suggestions for other persons to be included and are looking for original works (or copies) which could be incorporated into the exhibition.

New Exhibit

A new exhibition titled "Prairie Vistas: Buildings in Southern Manitoba Mennonite Communities" will be mounted at the Mennonite Heritage Centre on July 1. The artist is Marilyn Hiebert Mackay of Winnipeg, Man.

Come to the opening program on Thursday, July 7 at 8 p.m. in the Heritage Centre (600 Shaftesbury Blvd, Winnipeg).

Bote Index Support

Bote Index, Vol. II is now being prepared at the MHC archives. It will cover the years 1948-1963, when D.H. Epp and then Dr. Walter Quiring were editors of *Der Bote*.

We want to thank all those who have donated funds to make this possible. More recently such support has come from the Jacob Rempel Memorial Fund (Winnipeg) and the *Mennonitische Sprachverein* (Manitoba).

Further help is appreciated. About \$2500 is needed to fully fund the production of Vol. II. Send designated gifts to Jacob Rempel Memorial Fund or *Bote Index, Vol. II*, both c/o Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4.

CCA Backlog Grant III

The Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives recently received its third back-log reduction grant from the Canadian Council of Archives. A total of \$5,250.00 will be used to sort and catalogue three major collections of materials in the archives.

mhc
 MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE
 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3P 0M4

H.H. Janzen Evening in Kitchener

by Anne Wiebe

On the evening of March 26, some 250 guests assembled in the sanctuary of the Kitchener MB Church. They came to remember a former minister and teacher, Rev. H.H. Janzen. They came in accordance with Hebrews 13:7

Remember your leaders and superiors in authority who brought to you the Word of God. Observe attentively and consider their manner of living — and imitate their faith. (Amplified)

Words of welcome by Pastor John Wall, invocatory scripture and prayer by Rev. Isaac Thiessen and a rousing anthem: "Faith of our Fathers," provided the backdrop for what was to follow. An unexpected, but very welcome guest at the meeting, was the octette from MB Communications, in Winnipeg. The singing of this group was greatly appreciated.

Dr. J.B. Toews of Fresno, California, delivered the keynote address. Alluding to King David who, after serving his generation according to the will of God, died and was laid with his fathers, so also Janzen served his generation and left a legacy for us to follow. There followed a sketch of H.H. Janzen's ministry — graphically presented, skillfully illustrated and enlivened with spirited humour.

With Janzen, he pointed out, the ministry was not a profession, but a calling. With an inner awareness of his call, he also became increasingly aware of the limitations of his ability. This kept him humble and gave sanctity to his ministry. Janzen was endowed with singular clarity of spiritual perception — and once under the compulsion of an inner vision, he grasped the momentum of the moment and acted upon it. Thus at the opportune time the *Afrika Missionsverein* came into being. The incorporation of the Ontario MB Conference into its larger and older North American counterpart had a similar beginning.

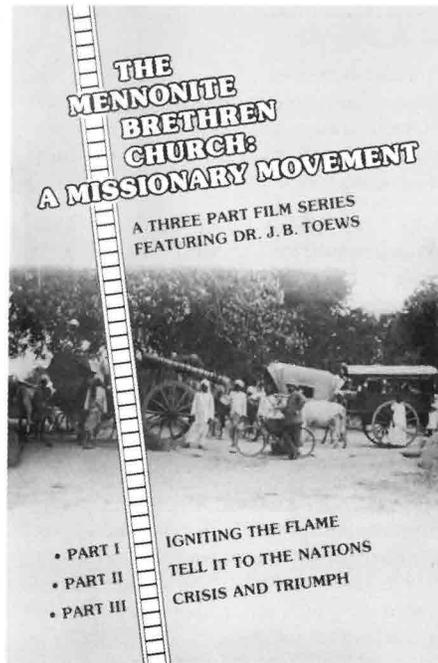
Janzen's implicit trust in God for the impossible is a further legacy, Toews pointed out. It was trust in the all-sufficiency of the Almighty that enabled him to guide MBBC through years of turbulence, when the cross-currents of culture and religion were rocking the boat. When MB methodology of conducting foreign missions had to be revamped in the sixties, it was Janzen's trust in God for the impossible that carried the day.

One other legacy, that of maturity, was called to mind. In reference to this Toews pointed out the profound influence Janzen's ministry exerted in evangelical circles in post-war Europe. His easy-to-follow sermons, almost entirely lacking in theological jargon, made a profound impression on his listeners, theologians and laymen alike.

In addition to the keynote address, three other papers had been scheduled, by Rudy Janzen, Ed Boldt and Ken Reddig. Time was of the essence, however, and after presenting brief summations of their papers, the speakers decided to have their texts appear elsewhere in print.

With a word of appreciation regarding the influence of H.H. Janzen to him personally, Don Enns, pastor of the Grantham Church, St. Catharines, ended the formal proceedings with prayer. Following this, all guests were invited to an informal period of reminiscing and fellowship.

The programme was sponsored jointly by the Canadian and the Ontario MB Historical Societies, and had been carefully planned by Ed Boldt, president of the Ontario MB Historical Society and Ken Reddig, Archivist at the Centre for MB Studies at MBBC, Winnipeg.



Manitoba Centennial Tapes Available

Video tapes of the Manitoba Centennial celebration, both morning and afternoon, will be available for rental or purchase from the Centre for MB Studies, July 1, 1988.

Available in VHS or Beta, rental will be \$5.00/tape. Purchase of the two video tapes will be approximately /15.00 each. Please write the Centre for rental or purchase.



Evening Hours: Centre for MB Studies

Beginning September 6, 1988, the Centre for MB Studies will be open to the general public for research and study every Tuesday evening, from 6:00-9:30 p.m.

MB Film Series Completed

A three-part film series entitled: "The Mennonite Brethren Church: A Missionary Movement," has been completed this past winter. Released May 1, 1988, the series features Dr. J.B. Toews of Fresno, California, as narrator and historian. Set in the context of three half-hour lectures, the films briefly tell the story of the growth and development of the Mennonite Brethren Church around the world. The films are illustrated with archival photographs and maps.

The films are available for rent from the Centre for MB Studies at a cost of \$25.00/film. Bookings for the films are now being taken by the Centre. Please write to the Centre for MB Studies, 169 Riverton Ave., WINNIPEG, Canada, R2L 2E5, or call (204) 669-6575.

Letters to the Editors

To the Editors,

Re: your announcement about the Low German New Testament [*MH*, March, 1988, p. 5]. The Low German New Testament published in 1988 is not the first of its kind. I have one in Low German published in Berlin, Germany, in 1935, by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

Esther Patkau, 2206 Wiggins Ave., Saskatoon, Sask., S7J 1W7

To the Editors,

Re: "The Grossweide Orphanage," Mennonite Historian, March, 1988, pp. 1-2.

By now you have probably been notified by other people that the photo you have on the front page is not the *Waisenhaus* of Grossweide, as is claimed by the author. It is the little orphanage in Schoenau, Molotschna Colony, which was located about five or six kilometers away from Halbstadt, where I used to live up to 1920.

In the photo I have recognized my aunt Sara Enns (my father's sister, seated second to the left of the house mother). My aunt served in the "Tent Mission" proclaiming the Word of God to the Russian people. Of course, the Communists soon stopped that. When my aunt moved to the Molotschna she found work in the orphanage at Schoenau.

In a picture in Dr. Walter Quiring's book, *Als ihre Zeit erfüllet war*, the orphanage in

(cont'd on page 8)

(cont'd from page 7)

Schoenau is connected with THE EVANGELICAL TENT MISSION. The English edition, *In The Fullness of Time*, incorrectly dates the photo 1913; it should be 1921.

The Peter Friesens (our neighbors) tell me that the *Hauseltern* of Schoenau did come from Grossweide, and the name was Abram Harder. But they couldn't have been the same Abram Harders who initiated the orphanage in Grossweide in 1906. In the picture he is holding a baby in his arms so this could be his son. The Harders of Grossweide appear in a picture in *In the Fullness of Time* (p. 94).

The orphanage in Schoenau was disbanded in 1922, I believe. The Mennonite staff was fired by the communist government as they were teaching the Word of God. Whatever happened to the children of the Home I do not know. 1922 was the year of starvation in southern Russia and they may have all starved to death.

Wishing you the Lord's help in your work,
I remain yours truly,
John J. Enns, 202-33 Pickwick Dr., Leamington, Ont., N8H 4X5.

To the Editors,

When we had our Mennonite Historical meeting in March of this year, Dr. John Friesen spoke to me about the Winnipeg *Mädchenheim* and the pictures of the girls in the *Mennonite Historian* (June, 1987).

I told him that I knew a lady who would know a lot of the girls' names. She is Anna Schroeder [Address: 133-31955 Old Yale Rd., Clearbrook, BC, V2T 4N1]. She has done a lot of work, and found most of the names. I have listed them as well as I knew how. I hope it will help you to find the few that are missing.

The names enclosed are as follows:

[P. 1: Row 1, front, seated] Malja Isaak, ?, Olga Perk, Helen DeFehr, Anna Janzen, nee Redekop, ?. [Row 2 (l-r)] Margaret Unruh, Esther Horch, nee Hiebert, Olga Neufeld, Margaret Kroeker, Anna Thiessen, Frieda Unruh, Justina Bartel, nee Boldt, Anna Rempel, nee Neufeld. [Row 3 (l-r)] Mariechen Wiens, nee Klassen, Aganetha Kroeker, nee Konrad, Liese Riesen, nee Unruh, Frieda Wiebe, Helen Kornelson, nee Neufeld, Agatha Martens, nee Dyck, Katie Neufeldt, nee Guenther, Anna Dahl, nee Derksen, Melvena Toews, Eva Neufeld, Hildegard Neufeld, nee Mrs. William Neufeld. [Row 4 (l-r)] Agatha (Aganetha?) Daleski, nee Derksen, Agatha Klassen, Tina (Margaret?) Rempel, Katie Peters, nee Wiebe, Agnes Friesen, nee Unger, Sara Stobbe, nee Dueckman, ? Schroeder, Mary Merraus(?), nee Lepp, Mary Janzen, nee Penner, Nuta Toews, Mariechen Derksen, nee Braun. [Row 5 (l-r)] ? Braun, Justina Derksen, Mary Friesen, Mary Nachtigal, Anna Friesen, Katie Wiebe, Agnes Unruh, Mary Friesen, Mary Loewen, nee Neufeldt, ?, ?.

[P. 3: left row, bottom to top] ? Reimer, ?, Olga Neufeldt, Lena Isaak. [right row, bottom to top] ?, Anna Thiessen, Liese Unruh.

[P. 5: l-r] Mariechen Wall, nee Schroeder, Marienchen Unruh, nee Baerg, Liese Fedrau, nee Martens.

Margaret Neufeldt

The Grossweide Orphanage (Conclusion)

by Herbert Giesbrecht

During the troubled years of the Russian Revolution and Civil War, however, everything changed for the worse. As early as September, 1914, all Mennonite teachers were conscripted for service (*ratniki*). Hence the school's teacher, Dietrich Esau, was also obliged to leave Grossweide. In 1919, a number of the Russian orphans at the Grossweide Orphanage were forcibly transferred to the Halbstadt school, now to be reserved for the Russian children only. Here the married children of the Harders, Abraham and Tina, now became the houseparents. A year later, this particular department was transferred once again, this time to Schoenau, where it was welcomed most warmly by the Russian peasants generally.

By 1921, however, all the Grossweide orphans, now integrated within this new department, were compelled to leave and the institution itself, with its 38 children, was fully taken over by the Soviet government.

At its peak (about 1921) the Grossweide Orphanage cared for 133 children in all. Soon thereafter, however, the total number of Orphanage residents (this included the orphans, teachers, sisters, and houseparents with their own families) was reduced to 83 by governmental action. This remaining group was sustained physically only by virtue of the relief which reached it from American Mennonite Aid sources.

On December 11, 1922, the Harders were themselves compelled to forsake the Grossweide Orphanage since they would not willingly submit to Soviet orders to introduce a government curriculum into their school program. Soviet attempts to reorganize the Orphanage including the removal of all religious practices and symbols and reminders thereof, and the endeavor to manage it along Communist lines, soon came to naught. What was once such an attractive and useful institution of social welfare quickly degenerated into a bleak wasteland of destruction and disuse.

During its brief existence, however, the Grossweide Orphanage fulfilled its ministry to disadvantaged children and to Mennonite society generally. Much of what Peter M. Friesen has said about the general contribution and value of Mennonite social welfare institutions happened here:

They provide a field for faith to work in; they are a counter-balance to gross materialism, the mania for riches. They are in the best sense of the word 'spiritual works of civilization' and at the same time promoters of the spiritual Christian values of civilization, branches of the tree grown from the mustard seed.⁶

Endnotes

¹The inheritance regulations were in fact in place as early as 1807. The practical implementation of the *Waisenamt* provisions and stipulations often proved but a stopgap measure that did not deal directly and effectively with the personal and social needs and aspirations of the disadvantaged individual.

²The other nine were the Maria School for Deaf-Mutes in Tiege (1885-), the Hospital in Muntau ("Wall's House for the Ill"), the Waldheim Hospital, the Ohrloff Hospital, the Moria Home for Deaconesses in Neuhalbstadt, the Home for the Aged in Rueckenau, the Home for the Aged of the Halbstadt Region at the Kuruschau, the School for the Poor at Beresovka at the Station Davlekanovo in Ufa, and the psychiatric institution 'Bethania' at Alt-Kronsweide, Chortitza Colony.

³The diary of Abraham Hiebert is a brief (15-page) hand-written document which Harder maintained during the years of his management of the Grossweide Orphanage. It contains the essential facts of the history of this institution, but underscores more heavily various examples of God's wondrous, even miraculous, guidance of this "faith adventurer." It was translated by Justina (Harder) Rempel in October, 1965, and a copy of the translation can be seen at the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg. Cf. also Abraham A. Harder, "Kurzer Bericht ueber die Gruendung, Entwicklung und den gegenwaertigen Stand der Waisenanstalt in Grossweide, gegeben am 13 June, 1922" in John B. Toews, ed., *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*. Winnipeg, MB: Christian Press, 1975, pp. 388-391.

⁴Heinrich Regehr, "Das Waisenhaus in Grossweide, gegruendet von Abraham A. Harder im Jahre 1906 in Suedrussland, Gouvernement Taurien, Berdjansker Kreis. Gnadenfelder Wolost, Dorf Grossweide: Erinnerungen," *Der Bote* 58 (1 Juli, 1981), 1-2.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)*. Translated from the German and edited by John B. Toews, Abraham Friesen, Peter J. Klassen and Harry Loewen. (Fresno, CA: Board of Christian Literature of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1980), p. 828.

Herb Giesbrecht is a librarian at MBBC, Winnipeg, Man.

To Our Readers: The editors welcome corrections and missing information. Write to Mennonite Historian, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4, or Centre for MB Studies, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, R2L 2E5.

B.C. Mennonite Archival Association Launched

by Hilda J. Born

Remembering our roots contributes to our self understanding and how we fit into God's plan. The Biblical records are oriented to history. Theology holds strongly to the idea of incarnation. "God is continuing to work among His people and we are part of that," Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein stated as he addressed the newly-formed B.C. Mennonite Archival Association.

The MAA of BC came into being for the collection and preservation of the history of the Mennonites in B.C. Many homes are presently storing historical material, music, books and manuscripts. Small steps were taken in the past to save some of these valuables for the future. However, neither the Clearbrook Community Centre, nor Columbia Bible College had the space or the personnel to organize them usefully.

Just as the books in the CBC library were first sorted and then labelled and put on library shelves in 1953, so now 35 years later, the research data pertaining to B.C. history is being indexed for useful reference at CBC.

The MAA executive consists of concerned individuals who each represent a segment of the Mennonite community. Dave Giesbrecht of CBC is the chairman. Mabel Paetkau represents MCC (B.C.) and Lois Harder, the MB Conference of B.C. Dave Loewen is there on behalf of the Conference of Mennonites in B.C., Hugo Friesen for the MEI, Abram A. Olfert for the Golden Age Society, and Esther Born, the local archivist, represents the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C.

Dusty cartons of old papers and manuscripts, and various Mennonite periodicals were formerly stored in a far corner at the Clearbrook Community Centre. Then, last year, CBC prepared a basement room to house the material and Esther Born, with the help of volunteers Tina Klassen, Helen Janzen and Hilda Born, began the task of sorting and filing. All donations of precious clippings and scrapbooks, old letters, church and family histories, published and unpublished, are now gratefully accepted. Each fragile item is carefully handled and placed in a controlled environment for safe keeping.

The first public forum for the new organization was the March 9 workshop led by Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein of Winnipeg. He is presently archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and has been working there since 1974.

The first lecture dealt with writing family stories, and the second listed valuable pointers in writing congregational histories. Both need persistent research and proof of accuracy. But statistics without interpretation remain dry bones. In family histories it helps to find "the tie that binds" and the congregations want to know what really was important. What happened at a deeper level?

When dealing with issues there is always the decision-making about what to do with



Lawrence Klippenstein speaking to a Mennonite Archives Association meeting in B.C.

Photo: Courtesy of David Loewen

the parts of the story that do not sound too pleasant. Can we tell the painful truth kindly, as we see it today, or do we ignore it? The Bible would be a much thinner book if only the good were told. There are though, in our history, plenty of heroic stories that need to be written and told.

Celebrating family or congregational milestones by recording their history is very worthwhile. Often that is the first time records are collected.

In the near future the newly-formed Archival Association of B.C. is proposing to hold a workshop on church record management. This will be another way to help the next generation remember "the stones" of our present history.

Anniversaries and Reunions

60 Year Celebration
Osler Mennonite Church
Osler, Saskatchewan
July 31, 1988

Events of the celebration include a Homecoming choir practice at the church on July 27 (8 p.m.), presentation of the drama "De Bildung" on July 29 and 30 (8 p.m. at the school gym), and services at the church on Sunday, July 31. Pictures and historical displays will be set up in the Osler Mennonite Church. Lunch and fasha will be available. The Red River Heritage Festival will be held at Osler on July 30 as well.

Those planning to attend are strongly urged to register in writing to Osler Mennonite Church, Box 129, Osler, Sask., S0K 3A0, or calling Dick Braun at [306] 239-4765 or Kathy Boldt at [306] 239-4742. Please register by July 15, 1988.

* * * * *

50 Year Celebration
United Mennonite Church
Yarrow, B.C.
September 24-25, 1988

A fiftieth anniversary celebration will be held at the United Mennonite Church in Yarrow, B.C. For further information write to the 50th Anniversary Committee, United Mennonite Church, 4336 Eckert Rd., P.O. Box 309, Yarrow, B.C., V0X 2A0. Please register by mail, if possible, before September 1, 1988.

* * * * *

The descendants of Bernhard H. Epp (1854-1926) of Lindenau, Molotschna, are invited to attend a reunion on July 22-23. The meetings will be held at the Boissevain Public School, Boissevain, Man. For further information write to H. Fast, 299 Donald Ave., Winnipeg, Man., R2K 1G5, or phone [204] 667-8105.

* * * * *

Former residents of the village of Gnadenfeld, Molotschna, Ukraine, are invited to a reunion on July 10 at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, Man. For further information write to Walter Jansen, 6 Bridgewater Cr., Winnipeg, Man., R2G 0V6, or phone [204] 669-0001.

Developing a Canadian Archival System

National Archivist Dr. Jean-Pierre Wallot announced on May 10 that funds totalling \$1,413,153 have been allocated to 177 archival institutions across the country for projects designed to help archival institutions organize their most important archival collections and make them more readily accessible to the public; to provide funds to aid professional development and training; and to fund internship programs at archival repositories for graduate students in archival science.

Recommended by the Canadian Council of Archives in co-operation with the Provincial/Territorial Councils, these projects are to be carried out on a cost-shared basis.

Such programs have been and continue to be well received by the Canadian archival community and benefit both researchers and the general public.

Book Notes (concluded)

Mennonitische Rundschau has issued a centennial number dated June 8, 1988. It features the early history of Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba. Contributors include William Schroeder, Frank Brown, Margaret Harder, and James Nickel.

We look forward to a biography of *Ältester* Heinrich Winter, Chortitza, Ukraine and then Canada, written by his son, Rev. Heinrich Winter of Leamington, Ontario. It is being published in German, and will be available at the Heritage Centre also. Publication date: July 8, 1988.

Flash:

Just off the press is a congregational history of Bethel Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, Man.

The volume, entitled *Bethel - Pioneering in Faith*, is edited by Betty Dyck. Other contributors include Henry J. Gerbrandt, Art Rempel, George Kroeker and Peter J. Dyck. Orders may be sent to: Bethel Mennonite Church, 870 Carter Ave., Winnipeg, Man., R3M 2E2.

Dolinovka, a Mennonite Village, 1927-1941

by Jim Suderman

In 1927, four villages were founded in the north Caucasus for the express purpose of raising horses for the Red Army. The area selected was in a very dry steppe area about 65 kilometers north of the train station Mineralny/Wody, on the Rostov-Min/Wody-Machatschkala-Baku line (see map). In 1927, the villages of Kasbek, Dolinovka, Usilije and Novaja Nadjezhda (Neuhoffnung) were settled by Germans from the Molotschna area. Many of these families hoped to escape the unsettled conditions of arrests, deportations and collectivization taking place there at the time.

Each village consisted of 20 farms, with 60 hectares of land per farm. An additional 1200 hectares of land were allotted for the horses. Each farmer was required to pay a fixed amount (about 200 rubles) for the land.

A group of young men went to the area in 1927 to plant the winter crop. Support, especially in terms of agricultural equipment, was supplied by the villages of the nearby Suvarov settlement: Fuerstental, Nikolaifeld, Arival, Blumenfeld and Woldemfuert. These villages were settled by Germans, some of whom also settled in the new villages. Like the Dolinovka-area villages, the Suvarov settlement was also supplied with 30 brood mares and one stallion per village.

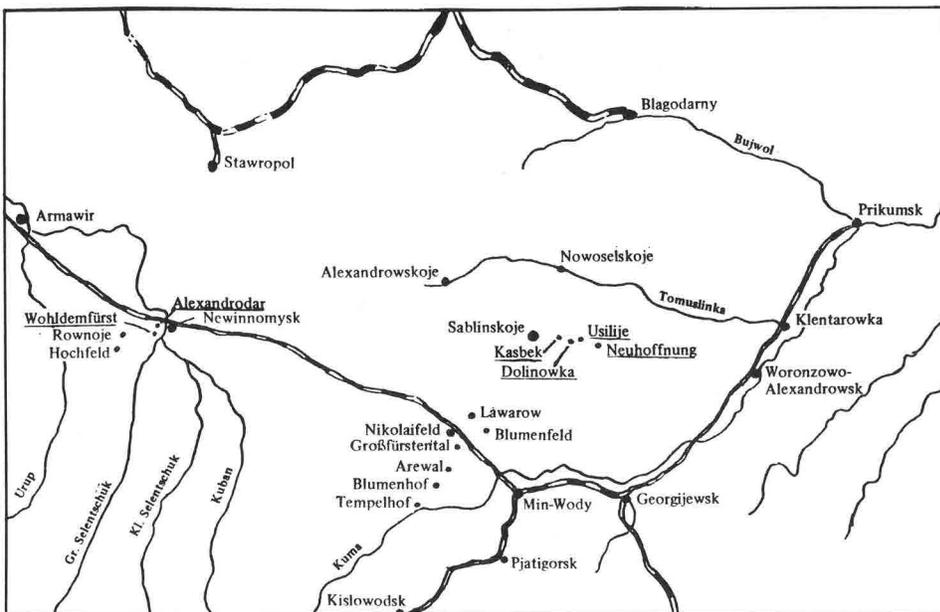
In March, 1928, the settlers arrived and began the work of creating the four new villages. The land was surveyed and distributed; the horses arrived and stables were built; the summer corn sown, hay made, lodgings for families and cattle built and much more.

The biggest problem was the shortage of water for the people and animals. Work was begun immediately to provide each village with a well. In the meantime water had to be brought in barrels from Novoselizkoje, 15 kilometers away on the Tomuslinka River. On especially hot days drinking water had to be rationed. Cows and calves had to be satisfied with skimmed milk and whey. Whey was also often used to wash the face, hands and feet, as well as to bathe the small children.

In Dolinovka, it took four months of digging with spades and pick-axes before water was found, 70 meters down. The water was quite hard and bitter — not suitable for drinking but adequate for food preparation and watering the pigs and horses. The animals quickly became accustomed to the water and would only reluctantly drink other water.

A vein of sweet water was found in a depression behind the farms at a depth of 5 to 6 metres. A whole row of wells were dug to provide for the needs of the inhabitants. However, most of them soon ran dry and the rest gave only 50-100 litres of water per day.

Collectivization, introduced in 1929/30, initially dampened the zeal of the settlers, but by 1930 most lodgings, stalls for the animals and stud horses and other buildings were in place. Notwithstanding the warnings of the Cossack inhabitants of Sablinskoje, 15 kilome-



The region of Dolinovka near the Caucasus mountains.

Map: Courtesy of J. Heinrichs, Wiesbaden, West Germany

ters away, many of the farmers successfully laid out orchards and vineyards.

In spite of the fatigue after a hard day's work, songs were often sung in the evening. There, in the warm evenings of the north Caucasus, people sang and played under the star-studded sky. The youth eagerly gathered to sing. They soon found a conductor in the person of Willi Heidebrecht (b. 1893), who took over the leadership of the choir. At first older songs were revived, but soon new songs, spiritual and folk, were practised. A stage was constructed for song nights in a horse barn, emptied and cleaned and decorated with flowers and other plants native to the steppe.

The villages began gathering for their Sunday church services at the home of Peter Martins as soon as it was roofed. These meetings were led by Rev. Peter Martins (b. ca. 1875), who also gave preparatory instruction for baptism. The first baptism service was held on Pentecost in 1929 or 1930 in Usilije, in a tent. The service was organized by all four villages. Some years later a song festival was held in Neuhoffnung in which all four village choirs took part.

In spite of collectivization, every farm had .15 hectares of potatoes, a vegetable garden, a cow and a calf. By 1941 the number of farms had doubled to about 40. In spite of the imprisonment of many good men (about 27), the inhabitants of Dolinovka left behind waving fields of grain, a first-class dairy farm, orchards and vineyards when they were resettled in Kazakhstan in 1941. The stud farm, with some 200 brood mares, also produced

race horses, some of which won prizes on the race courses in Piatigorsk, Rostov, Moscow and also internationally in Warsaw and other places.

One morning in September, 1941, the people woke up and found the village surrounded by Red Army soldiers. The villagers, who were mainly women, children and older men (the young men had already been called to work in camps in different regions of the Soviet Union) were taken by wagon to the train station at Blagodarnaja, about 80 kilometers north of Dolinovka. Here they were loaded into freight cars and carried away, escorted by armed NKVD troops. Many had endured this kind of resettlement before.

Today only a few houses are left of the old Dolinovka. They belong to an affiliate of the "Dolinovka" Kolkhoz, located where Usilije once stood. The stables, school, administration building, 70 meter well, orchards and vineyards are all gone. Kasbek, save for some piles of rubble, has completely disappeared.

This narrative is based on a short personal memoir of Dr. Peter Heidebrecht, who lived in Dolinovka and visited the area again in 1976, after he emigrated to Germany.

Our Apologies

Several errors have been drawn to our attention re: the March issue of MH. We submit the following corrections:

1) The date for the Osler Mennonite Church celebration (p. 7, col. 2) is July 31, 1988 (not July 3).

2) The person on the right in the picture of the Loewen sisters (p. 4) is Katrina, not Helena.

3) Mis-identification of the photo on p. 1 is discussed in a letter to the editors elsewhere in this issue.

Thank you, all who helped us catch these items. We try to be as accurate as possible. The editors



Book Reviews (cont'd from page 12)

One of the most polished histories to appear recently is *Gretna. Window on the Northwest*. Focussing primarily on a detailed, chronological narrative of the town's history, with emphasis on the first 50 years, the book incorporates much source material on Gretna from contemporary newspapers and other sources.

Written under the direction of the town-sponsored Gretna History Book Committee, the authors, Francis Gerhard (Garry) and Gaile Whelan Enns, avoided incorporating family histories into the narrative, preferring to use such documents as source material. While this may give the book a wider appeal, it may, perhaps, reduce the book's local appeal somewhat.

Niverville lacks a title page and a table of contents, both of which are needed to help orient the reader. On page 23 a very brief narrative sketch of Niverville's history provides a framework for the family histories which form the bulk of the book. These histories have been written and submitted by the families presently living in the community. The book is rounded off with histories of several organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce, Community Club, churches, Curling Rink, etc.

Horndean Heritage begins with a section entitled "Faces and Places," a collection of photos which leaves a lasting impression. Unfortunately, there is no narrative of the town's history to provide a context for the family histories, which comprise about two-thirds of the book. Church histories and "School Days" are the main themes for the remainder of the book. Many of the articles have the author identified, but many, inexplicably, do not.

Physically *Gretna* has a very attractive and versatile layout. Each page has three columns, two of which contain text, the third being reserved for italicized quotations from source material, photographs, or just left blank, easing the reader's eye. The photographs are well-captioned and followed by an accession number, a technique that could be profitably followed by other history book committees. *Niverville* and *Horndean Heritage* utilize a simpler, two-column layout.

Resources and energy for town histories vary, of course, but with the number of published histories to date, there are some excellent examples to follow. The almost completely narrative focus of *Gretna* is far more desirable than the almost exclusively family history-oriented *Niverville* and *Horndean Heritage*. A narrative of the town's history cannot be left out if family and institutional histories are to have meaning to readers outside of the town's community.

Jim Suderman is an Assistant Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Huebert, Helmut, et al., eds., *Looking Back in Faith: Commemorating the Centennial of Manitoba Mennonite Brethren in Photos and Writing, 1888-1988*. (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Brethren Centennial Committee, 1988), 83 pp., hdc., \$14.00.

Reviewed by Abe Dueck.

This is a rather attractive volume commemorating the first centennial of Mennonite Brethren in Manitoba. It consists of a large number of photos which are supplemented by brief essays on a number of individuals, institutions and other special topics.

The twelve or more prominent individuals who receive special attention are not only church and conference leaders (e.g., C.N. Hiebert, William Bestvater, William Falk, Cornelius DeFehr), but also four women, Anna Thiessen, Marie Wiebe, Helen Litz and Irmgard Epp. Almost every aspect of MB life receives some attention, including prominent business ventures.

Although on the whole the scope is quite balanced, there is perhaps inadequate emphasis on the rural and farming life. Otherwise the book is an excellent portrayal of the first one hundred years of MBs in Manitoba.

Dr. Abe Dueck is Academic Dean at Mennonite Brethren Bible College, Winnipeg, Man.

Penner, Peter, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada*. (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987), 178 pp., hdc., \$24.95.

Reviewed by Peter M. Hamm.

The title of Penner's history of church planting by Mennonite Brethren in Canada aptly conveys the overarching theme. Especially during the first two eras, "the frontiers of home missions, 1883-1945" and "the mission church era, 1945-1960," despite valiant efforts by mission workers, experimental strategy and ethnic barriers kept people "at arms length." The measurable success of "the church planting era, 1960-1983" is attributed to the incorporation of those "no longer at arms length."

A coffee table edition, with its large size, glossy paper, abundant photos, and helpful appendices, this systematic narrative of virtually every home mission effort will fascinate both those who recognize themselves in the story and those who wish to learn from the successes and failures of Mennonite Brethren church planting.

Hopefully, the arbitrary use of the comma, the sometimes confusing labels for pictures, the persistent use of "United Mennonites" for G.C. Mennonites, occasional biases (seems to be hard on Albertans), and excessive use of German will not keep some readers "at arms length." In any event, the book well warrants a careful reading.

Dr. Peter Hamm is Associate General Secretary for Mennonite Brethren Missions/Services.

Book Notes

Popular books about the Hutterian Brethren continue to come off the presses. Two recent ones are by German journalists. Bernd G. Laengin, *Die Hutterer. Gefangene der Vergangenheit, Pilger der Gegenwart, Propheten der Zukunft*. (Hamburg-Zürich: Rausch und Röhring Verlag, 1986, 335 pages) has used both standard historical sources and interviews with Schmiedeleut in Canada and the USA in writing his book. In addition he has conducted some new research in the south Tyrol, including the state archives of Austria and Rumania.

Ulrich Eggers, editor of *Punkt*, West Germany's leading magazine for Christians between 18 and 40, focuses his account on the Society of Brothers. This group, now affiliated with the Hutterian Brethren, was founded in Germany by Eberhard Arnold in the 1920s. Eggers' account of his visits to the bruderhof at Rifton, N.Y., proved to be such an engaging story that Herald Press published an English translation under the title *Community for Life* (Scottsdale, 1988, \$13.95).

More significant is an undertaking of the Hutterian Brethren themselves, namely to translate into English their own massive history. *The Chronicle of the Hutterian Brethren, Volume I* (Rifton, NY/Ste. Agathe, MB: Plough Publishing House, 1987, 887 pages), cloth bound, with index, makes available in an appropriate simple English style *Das große Geschichtsbuch der Hutterischen Brüder (Ziegelschmid's Die älteste Chronik)*. Volume II, in process, will give us the *Klein-Geschichtsbuch*, in translation also.

The school administration of Menno Colony in Paraguay has published a remarkable 166-page *Atlas*. With its help one is basically able to locate every household in the entire colony! Colony maps provide a basic orientation; maps of administrative districts and school divisions provide further detail; and maps of the individual villages locate all households. A comprehensive index of names and a census as of mid-1986 are included. On some maps accuracy of scale was sacrificed in order to show general orientation of one place to another. Technical reproduction of the maps is not state-of-the-art but thoroughly functional.

Gospel Publishers of Ste. Anne, MB, have released the third in a series of children's books by Mrs. Andrew Friesen. *Hilltown Friends. More about the Martins and their neighbors*, (1987, pb., 198 pages), is a sequel to *The Martin Family* and *Three Years Later*. The book costs \$7.50 and may be ordered from the publishers at Box 18E, RR 1, Ste. Anne, MB, R0A 1R0.

The memoirs of the late Mrs. Helene Frey Latter, formerly of Neu-Halbstadt, Ukraine, have been published by her husband, Walter Latter, of Morden, Manitoba. The book, called *I do Remember* (pb., 128 pp.) can be ordered from the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

(cont'd on page 9)

BOOK REVIEWS

Peters, Klaas, *The Bergthaler Mennonites*. (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1988) 91 pp., pb., \$8.00.

Reviewed by Abe Warkentin

It is a sad commentary on the Mennonites in Canada that it has taken over 100 years for much of their history to appear in print. However, it is encouraging to see the flurry of publication that has taken place in the last few years. There is a lot of catching up to do.

Canadian Mennonite Bible College has previously made significant contributions through its publication of historical material and now, with its third publication in the Bergthal Historical Series, should be recognized for its efforts.

This latest publication provides, for the first time (in the first part of the book), a very valuable account in English, about the Bergthaler Mennonite emigration from Ukraine to Manitoba in the 1870s. We are indebted to Margaret Loewen Reimer, of Waterloo, Ont., for her translation of *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten*, which first appeared in the columns of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* in the first months of 1890, was then reprinted in book form in 1925, and reprinted once more by *Mennonitische Post* in 1983.

This is not a long, stuffy register of historical trivia. Klaas Peters had a flair for the dramatic and his accounts could provide the historical background for half a dozen Hollywood epics. The episode where the Russian Mennonite delegates got involved with a drunken Metis and barely escaped Whitehorse Plains in Manitoba in 1873, the experience of Bergthaler Mennonites facing starvation on the ice-bound "Ontario" in Lake Superior in 1875, the trips by steamship up the Red River, the tough new start in a harsh land — these and other stories are captivantly presented.

The real contribution in the way of new historical material, however, comes in the last half of the book in the form of a biography of Klaas Peters by Leonard Doell. Peters, it appears, was as colorful as the history he documented in the first part of this book and no minor player in the history of the Bergthaler Mennonites.

Born in 1855 in Bergthal Colony, Ukraine, he participated in the emigration of the entire Colony to Canada in 1870s, settling with his parents in Gruenthal in 1876 and then moving to the West Reserve around 1881.

In the following years Klaas Peters farmed, taught school and in 1890, became an immigration agent for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In this role he went to Russia several times and enticed Mennonites to come settle in the Hague and Rosthern, Saskatchewan areas.

In later years, inevitably, his activities as land agent embroiled him in controversy, added to later by his involvement with the Swedenborgian Church and his political views. In 1918 he was brought to trial for signing military exemption cards for Mennonite men subject to the draft and fined \$200 and costs.

Peters, writes Doell, was a dreamer who ran out of money for the many projects he wanted

to pursue. He was a religious man and one who was ahead of his time. He should be noted for the generous amount of time, love and energy he contributed to the cause of the Mennonite people.

Hopefully, this third book in the Bergthal Historical Series will be followed by others. It would be a good thing too if they could be introduced into the schools in the Mennonite areas. Having grown up in the village of Gruenthal in the East Reserve I was taught the usual Canadian and European history in the public school system. I find no fault with that but somewhere in between the Medes and Persians and the Battle of the Bulge I would have benefitted from learning about local history and the pioneers (Bergthal Mennonites, including Klaas Peters) who founded my hometown in 1876.

As a boy, in summer, I sometimes went to the site of the old nearby village of Bergfeld, which was close to one of the finest swimming holes on the Joubert Creek, running south of Gruenthal. I remember how we admired the huge cottonwoods that clearly marked the former village street and wondered where the people had gone who once lived here. No historical marker explained, and no one told us, that the entire village had moved to the Chaco, Paraguay, in 1924. By now, unless someone has made a great effort in the interim, the cemetery of Bergfeld that in the 1950s was already hard to find, will have reverted back to pasture. With that the pioneers who broke the land will perhaps be altogether forgotten, lost to today's generation which would benefit from the story of their triumphs and tribulations.

Abe Warkentin is editor of Mennonitische Post. He recently also edited a pictorial album on Mennonites in Latin America, Gäste und Fremdlinge/Strangers and Pilgrims.

Loewen, David F., *Living Stones. A History of the West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1936-1986*. (Abbotsford, B.C.: West Abbotsford Mennonite Church, 1987), 178 pp., hdc.

Hiebert, Susan, ed., *History of the White-water Mennonite Church*, Boissevain, Manitoba, 1927-1987. (Boissevain, Man.: Whitewater Mennonite Church, 1987), 99 pp., hdc., \$25.00.

Harms, Orlando, *The Journey of a Church. A Walk Through One Hundred Years of the Life and Times of the Hillsboro Mennonite Brethren Church*. (Hillsboro, Kan.: Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1987), 461 pp., pb., \$20.00.

Reviewed by Bert Friesen.

These congregational histories mark major milestones in the life of three congregations in Manitoba, British Columbia, and Kansas. All three are predominantly of the Dutch/North German background of Mennonite groups which came to North America in the major migrations of the 1870s and 1920s.

The format of all of these books is a mixture of photographs with text. The quality varies but the text and pictures are successful in conveying a story which is interesting both to the participants in the story and to the outside reader. At times one would have appreciated more care being given to their quality and to some extent the format, especially of the data tables.

These books make some significant contributions to the story of the actions of God's people in his kingdom. The first contribution is the wealth of data presented in each of the books. This includes names of members, birth and death dates, baptismal dates, leadership profiles, congregational program descriptions, and congregational documents among many others. These data, along with the second contribution, which is the anecdotal and descriptive writing, will be a valuable source of primary information for future historians writing about this century of Mennonite activity in North America.

Of special note is Orlando Harms' volume on the Hillsboro congregation. It is a much more extensive treatment and covers a lengthier time period. Harms provides extensive bibliographies. Especially helpful are his contexts in which he sets the happenings of the congregation. He reminds the reader that the story of the congregation must be read in the light of the global and national events of which people were increasingly aware. Also, for any careful student of this subject, his summaries and conclusions must be noted. In them Harms encourages the reader to come to terms with the subject and invites evaluation.

These volumes make valuable contributions to the collection of Mennonite congregational histories. The people involved are to be commended for their efforts.

Bert Friesen is research director of a new book publishing firm, Tetracor.

Enns, F.G. and Gaile Whelan Enns, *Gretna. Window on the Northwest*. (Altona: Village of Gretna History Committee, 1987). 343 pp., hdc. Available from Village of Gretna, Box 159, R0G 0V0, for \$32.50.

Heinrichs, Cleo, ed., *Horndean Heritage*. (Altona: Horndean Reunion Committee, 1984). 188 pp., hdc. Available from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4, for \$20.00.

Kaita, Fred, ed., *Niverville: A History, 1878-1986*. (Niverville: The Niverville District Historical Society, 1986). 230 pp., hdc., \$15.00.

Reviewed by Jim Suderman

Many Mennonite villages in southern Manitoba celebrated their centennial anniversary over a decade ago. In the aftermath of those anniversaries, some villages collected materials and published their histories, a process which has continued to the present.

(cont'd on page 11)