

MENNONITE HISTORIAN

Published by the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for MB Studies in Canada

Volume XV, No. 2, June, 1989



Delegates of the 14th General Conference at Alexanderwohl Church near Newton, Kansas, 1896.

Photo: MHC Archives 308-2

The GC/MC Merger Proposal: Some Historical Considerations

by John Friesen

The proposed merger of the (Old) Mennonite Church and the General Conference Mennonite Church has created interest in questions related to General Conference beginnings. This article will look at two such issues. First, was the formation of the General Conference the result of a split from the (Old) Mennonite Church, or was it the result of an independent initiative? Second, why did so many 1870s Russian Mennonite immigrants to the USA join the General Conference?

With respect to the first question, there is an apparently widely-held perception that such a merger would heal a split which began in 1860. From this perspective merger is a positive move because it resolves a conflict and terminates a division. Does this interpretation reflect a good understanding of the 1860 event, when the General Conference was formed?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to observe the 1860s situation among Swiss Mennonites. The first Swiss Mennonite immigrants to North America settled the Franconia region north of Philadelphia shortly after 1700. Up to the American Revolution other settlements in Lancaster, Pennsylvania and in Virginia were established. After the USA became independent in the treaty of Paris, and Britain had ceded the lands east of

the Mississippi to the USA, Mennonite settlements were established in the frontier regions of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa. The purchase of land beyond the Mississippi from France in 1803 made that area available for settlement in the latter part of the century.

The Swiss Mennonites who settled the mid-western and western communities did not come as groups, nor did they originate in one place. Some came from established communities in the east — Franconia, Lancaster, Virginia, or from one of the mid-western settlements. Others came directly from one of the south German states or from Switzerland. Those Swiss who came from south German states had absorbed new ideas, new cultural mores, and new religious influences from movements like Pietism. They had incorporated influences to which their fellow believers, who had emigrated to America generations ago, had not been exposed. In the mid-western settlements in the USA, the early immigrants and the later immigrants frequently did not see eye to eye on many important issues.

It is important to note that the people who founded the General Conference consisted of a mixture of early and later immigrants. The churches in Iowa who initiated, organized and hosted the founding meeting of the GC in

1860 were recent immigrants who felt out of step with the earlier Swiss immigrants. The Iowa Mennonites were of Swiss background, and had lived in the Palatinate since the end of the seventeenth century (Krehbiel Vol. I, 30f). The only people from outside Iowa who attended the first GC session were John Oberholtzer and Enos Loux, both from the Franconia area in Pennsylvania (Pannabecker 46). These men had actually not intended to come to the meeting because of the cost involved. When someone offered to pay his way, Oberholtzer decided to attend.

As is well-known, Oberholtzer was the leader of a group of Swiss Mennonites who had walked out of a Franconia area conference meeting of leaders in October, 1847. By 1860 this new group, which had named itself the East Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference, had been in existence for thirteen years. Thus the 1847 division in Pennsylvania was not directly related to the founding of the General Conference in Iowa in 1860. The two were quite separate events and happened for rather different reasons.

In order to understand the motivation for the formation of the General Conference one must remember that the (Old) Mennonite Conference did not exist in 1860. At that time there were only a number of regional groups of Swiss Mennonite congregations whose leaders (bishops, ministers and deacons) met periodically, frequently twice a year, once in fall and once in spring. Some of these groupings belonged to organized area conferences, while others did not. Some kept minutes as early as the 1860s, while others did not do so until after 1900. Constitutions were usually not adopted until after the turn of the century. In 1860 there was no general or over-arching conference which united these regional groupings. Such a Mennonite Church conference was organized only in 1898 (Schlabach 139).

The people who met in the Iowa consultation of 1860 hoped to establish a broad Mennonite organization which would bring all Mennonite groups under one umbrella. To accomplish this they set forth a series of resolutions.

The first one of these resolutions put forth the objective

That all branches of the Mennonite denomination in North America, regardless of minor differences, should extend to each other the hand of fellowship. (Smith 347)

In formulating this resolution these men
(cont'd on p. 2)

(cont'd from p. 1)

deplored the fact that there was so much "strife among the congregations, and that the denomination has never, since its existence in America, constituted an ecclesiastical organization." (Smith 347)

If one looks at the formative factors of the General Conference from the perspective of the Iowa churches, it appears that, as recent immigrants to America, they took note that there were various area conferences, that some "new" churches, like the East Pennsylvania Mennonite Conference were just coming into being and that some larger tasks like education and missions needed to be undertaken. These observations led them to propose a broader "conference" structure which would allow Mennonite churches to accomplish a number of common tasks while still retaining their individual character. Given such a goal, the formation of the General Conference was not a division among Swiss Mennonites of America. It was first and foremost a proposal for greater unity than had existed hitherto.

Why was it that the formation of the new conference left a divisive rather than a unifying impression? It may have been the fact that of the groups which decided to join the proposed Conference, a number were "new" Mennonite congregations which locally had split from their area conferences. This was true of the Pennsylvania body led by Oberholtzer, and was also true of the Ontario Mennonites, led by Daniel Hoch. Both of these men were prominently present at the second session of the General Conference held in Wadsworth, Ohio, in 1861.

Did the formation of the General Conference come as the result of a split in the Mennonite Church? The answer seems to be No! (Dyck, Raid) The formation of the GCMC was not initiated by a schismatic group, and it was formed at a time when there was no Mennonite Conference. The vision of the founders of the General Conference was to form a unifying organization which would allow diverse Mennonite congregations to cooperate for common tasks. If we wish to see a continuity between the formation of the General Conference and the present merger plan, one might say instead that this part of the original vision is finally being actualized.

A second question which the merger talks raise is why the majority of General Conference members are Russian and Prussian (about 75% in 1989) and not Swiss Mennonites? Why did the Russian and Prussian Mennonites not simply join one of the existing non-General Conference Swiss area conferences, or form their own conference?

In fact, the majority of the 1870s Russian Mennonite immigrants did form their own conferences (or *Gemeinden*). Those who settled in Manitoba, 7,000 in total, formed a number of local *Gemeinden*, none of which joined the General Conference until 1970 (Epp 209f). Of the 10,000 immigrants who



Andrew B. Shelley (1834-1914), pastor and church editor, strongly supported the forming of a General Conference Mennonite Church.

Source: *Mennonite Year Book and Almanac*, 1915, p. 17

settled in the USA, separate organizations were established by the Hutterites in South Dakota, the Kleine Gemeinde in Nebraska, and the Mennonite Brethren, largely in Kansas. Shortly after settlement many of the Volhynian Mennonites joined The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, led by John Holdeman.

Many of the others, especially in Kansas, i.e., Mennonites from Prussia, the Molotschna, and some Swiss from western Ukraine (Volhynia and Galicia), organized into local congregations which together formed the *Kansas Konferenz der Mennoniten* in 1877 (Haury 25-51). Why did the congregations of this conference join the General Conference?

This question becomes especially apropos because their first contact was with Swiss who were not of the General Conference. In 1873, when the delegates from Russia inspected the lands in the USA and Canada, the most important initial US Swiss Mennonite contact was John F. Funk from Elkhart, Indiana. So why did the newly organized churches a few years later not join the developing group of Swiss churches in Kansas, congregations which were in fellowship with Funk in Elkhart?

The answer to this question seems to lie in three areas: education, missions and organizational structures. (Pannabecker 100f.) The *Kansas Konferenz* organized in 1877 as the result of a meeting of teachers. Education was the reason for the conference to begin. The General Conference also had an interest in education in that a seminary had been organized at Wadsworth, Ohio, in 1867. Even though it closed in 1878, interest in education was strong in the General Conference. The immigrant Russian and Prussian Mennonites appear to have concluded, one senses, that they could easily work with the people in the General Conference on the issue of education.

The second area of common interest was missions. The *Kansas Konferenz* began to show interest in missions in the 1870s, and this too coincided with the General Confer-

ence's developing interest in missions. Both groups focussed their initial efforts in missionary work among American native people.

A third reason why Russian and Prussian Mennonites joined the General Conference may have been related to the organizational structure of the Conference. That structure was attractive because it allowed individual congregations to join. One by one the Kansas congregations, and later congregations among the 1870s immigrants in Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota became a part of the General Conference. The principle of allowing considerable diversity in worship and custom seemed to suit the various Russian and Prussian Mennonite groups since they too were not from one region and thus represented different traditions.

The story of the formation of Prussian and Russian General Conference congregations in Canada goes beyond the 1860s era. The Canadian congregations were established as the result of emigration from the USA to Canada, and emigration from the USSR in the 1920s and after World War II. The factors which attracted the first Prussian and Russian Mennonites to join the General Conference, also seem to have been factors which attracted the later immigrants.

The merger proposal and the possibilities of meeting on a broader scale, as was done in Bethlehem in 1983, and now again in Normal, Illinois, may move us to look at still other questions. Through such discussion and research both groups may become more aware of their own roots, and in the process learn more about each other's stories as well.

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FAMILY HISTORY AND GENEALOGY

by Alf Redekopp

Recently Published Genealogies

Giesbrecht, Agatha, et al., *Jacob Harder and Maria Abrams, 1788-1988*. (Plum Coulee, MB: Private publication, 1988). 194 pp.

This genealogy traces the ancestry of Jacob Harder (1819-1904) back to a Jacob Harder (1736-1787) of Neustaedterwald, Prussia, and the ancestry of Maria Abrams (1819-1902) back to Johan Abrams (1794-1856). Jacob Harder and Maria Abrams arrived in Canada in 1875 with their family and settled at Reinthal, Manitoba, near Plum Coulee. In the 1920s and again in the late 1940s, some descendants moved to Mexico and Paraguay. The book contains a record of most of these descendants, in addition to many fine photographs, and an index to the entire book. Contact Agatha Giesbrecht, Box 212, Plum Coulee, MB, R0G 1R0.

Other Noteworthy Books

Unrau, Ruth, *Index to Obituaries in the Mennonite Weekly Review, 1924-1955*. (North Newton, KS: Bethel College, 1989). 55 pp.

This index is a new genealogical research resource which contains over 5,000 entries extracted from obituaries and new articles reporting deaths in the Mennonite Weekly Review, published in Newton, Kansas, from 1924 to 1955.

Giesbrecht, H.K., *Bauer Giesbrecht wandert zurück nach Sibirien. Erlebnisse eines mennonitischen Rußlandsflüchtlings*. (Berlin: Internationaler Arbeit-Verlag, 1931). 16 pp.

This booklet is a description of the experiences of one Mennonite individual, Heinrich Kornelius Giesbrecht, who lived in the village of Alexandrovka in the Slavgorod Mennonite settlement of Siberia. He left the Soviet Union via Moscow in December, 1928, for Germany.

Giesbrecht described how he became increasingly disillusioned with capitalism, and convinced of the legitimacy of socialism as it was developing at the time in the Soviet Union. He felt that he had been misled by the larger landowners and Mennonite preachers to emigrate. Although at various points along the way he recalled that the Soviet authorities warned him and advised him not to leave, this was not heeded as he left his home to bring his family to Moscow.

While in Moscow, he became separated from his family. Believing that they had not returned home, but already left for Germany, he continued on. He became rather restless with life in the refugee camp at Hammerstein, Germany. He also began to see some of the deceitful ways of the Mennonite leaders, and how the individuals who could brag of the greatest losses under the Soviet regime, now again became the most honoured and advantaged.

When he received letters from his wife who had returned home from Moscow, he encouraged her to stay, partly because of his disillusionment in Germany, and partly because of letters he received from friends and



Mennonite Family History continues to publish articles on Prussian-Russian Mennonite ancestors. The July 1989 issue will include an article by Glenn Penner entitled "The Early Hoepfner Family in Prussia." A list of all such articles published to date can be ordered from the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

relatives in Canada and Brazil. They spoke of extremely poor conditions.

Eventually he managed to secure permission to leave the refugee camp for 10 days and visit a Mennonite farming family in East Prussia. Seeing first-hand how this middle class farmer took advantage of his workers and in turn was taken advantage of directly by other capitalists and not having ever seen anything to compare to such misery in the Soviet Union, he became determined to seek permission to return to his former home.

Initially this request was denied, but eventually he was granted permission to leave the camp and join the Hammerstein Labourers, who assisted him. He received a letter from the Soviet Union, dated September 27, 1930, granting him permission to return to his previous home in the village of Alexandrovka in Slavgorod.

He concluded: "Now I am happy that I can return...I am glad that the Soviet authorities earlier sent my family back home from Moscow, and that I also now have the privilege to return! Many lower and middle class farmers who blindly followed the 'kulaks' to emigrate, would rather return..."

The story was published in Berlin around 1931 by the labour movement. Unfortunately, the story does not continue to report the actual return of Giesbrecht and whether he found his family again, or how he fared after his experience in Germany. It would be interesting to obtain further information about this man and his family. Can anyone provide some?

Queries

Bartel — Peter J. Bartel, b. Sept. 7, 1873, d. Apr. 19, 1920, first m. Nov. 2, 1894, to Helena Siemens, b. Aug. 25, 1874, d. Nov. 11, 1895; second m. Apr. 6, 1901, to Katharina Peters, b. Nov. 7, 1871, d. Mar. ?, 1961. A son, born Sept. 3, 1895, most likely in Kronsgarten or Felsenbach, came to Canada from Steinau, USSR, in Oct. 1926 with his wife and 2 children, Mary

and Jacob, settling in Herbert, SK. Anyone who has a record of this family, please write: J.A. Bartel, 430 Killarney Rd., Kelowna, BC, V1X 5C5.

Esau — Anyone knowing of the descendants of Dietrich K. Esau, who came to Canada in 1914 and is believed to have settled in Alberta, write: Mary Hoepfner, Box 16, Mornden, MB, R0G 1J0.

Guenther — Jacob Guenther, Heubuden, West Prussia, b. ca. 1725, d. 1794. Wife Susanna Peters d. 1813 in Heubuden. Information on Jacob's birthplace, parents and ancestry would be appreciated. I am searching for the Guenther source in Germany/Switzerland. Please write: Robert Guenther, 4074 Koko Dr., Honolulu, Hawaii, 96816.

Harder — Cristena Harder, b. Feb. 12, 1888, in Heuboden, Manitoba, married Abram Jantzen (Jantzen) on July 10, 1906, perhaps in Schoenwiese, Saskatchewan, died April, 1927, in Fenwood, SK. She had 13 children. Any information regarding her parents or siblings would be appreciated by Susan Fitzgerald, RR 2, S-5, C-21, Westbank, BC, V0H 2A0.

Berg — Any information regarding the parents and grandparents of Dietrich Berg, b. Nov. 15, 1854, d. Sept. 23, 1891, m. Maria Friesen, b. Jan. 26, 1860, and d. Nov. 9, 1893, found in the Bergthal Colony Church records, would be appreciated by D.J. Berg, 6 Dalecroft Circle, Unionville, ON, L3R 5C1.

Genealogy and Computers

Users of the Apple IIe, IIc and IIs computers who use "Appleworks" program, may be interested in sharing information with users of the IBM PCs, who use either "WordPerfect" or "dBase." With a program, entitled "Crossworks," and a special cable physically linking the computers, files can be converted and transferred from one computer and program to the other, and vice versa, maintaining many of the formatting features. Anyone interested in more detail, please write: Alf Redekopp, c/o Centre for MB Studies, 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R2L 2E5.

Send all inquiries in Genealogy to Alf Redekopp, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Canada R2L 2E5.

CMBS Guide to Genealogical Holdings

A guide to the genealogical resources at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has recently been prepared. Compiled by Alf Redekopp, assistant archivist, the guide lists books, church registers, maps, diaries, obituary collections and also details the holdings of the large Katie Peters genealogical collection at the Centre.

The guide has a name index of significant family collections. Yet to be completed is an introductory section aiding the novice genealogist in preparing a genealogy. Copies of the guide will be available for purchase at a later date.

REFLECTIONS ON COLLECTIONS

Prussian Mennonite Study Sources (MG XVIII B)

by Jim Suderman

Sources available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives for the study of Mennonites in Prussia include microfilmed as well as original and photocopied documents, maps and photographs.

The largest source category (totalling 28 microfilms) contain records of the Mennonite congregations in Danzig, Deutsch Kazun, Elbing-Ellerwald, Fürstenwerder, Grosswerder, Heubuden, Königsburg, Ladekopp, Marchushof, Montau, Orloffelfelde, Petershagen, Rosenort, Thiensdorf, Tiegenhagen and Trageheimerweide. Most of these records have been copied from archives in Bethel College, though some have come from repositories in East Germany and Poland. They date from the origins of the Mennonite church in the Danzig region to late 1944/early 1945, when the Mennonites of that area fled before the advancing Soviet army.

Two smaller collections of microfilms include the *Zimmerman Familienarchiv* (9 films) — a genealogical resource, and a collection of 8 films from the *Deutsches Zentralarchiv* in Merseberg, containing files on "Matters Pertaining to Mennonites" and the "Acquisition of urban and rural real estate by Mennonites in the Marienwerder administrative district." The information contained in these records dates predominantly from the 19th century.

Eight more films on miscellaneous topics round out the microfilm collection of Prussian materials. Most important among these are the 4 films of materials listed in the *Inventaris der Archiefstukken Beruste nde Bij de Vereenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente Te Amsterdam*, and *De Erste Stamm Nahmen Unserer bis her so genante Duede Flamingen oder Groningersche Mennonisten Societaet al hier in Preusen* (1 film).

The collection also contains photocopied materials from Bethel College and the Center for MB Studies (Fresno) including such items as a chronicle of the Mennonite pioneering settlement of the Tiegenhof area, reports on Danzig area dams and floods, blueprints of the hospital building of the Danzig Mennonite congregation, related materials on the Mennonite congregation in Galicia prior to and during the Russian occupation (1914-16), lists of sermon texts of J.J. Kampen (1840-1867) and information on the Conference of the East and West Prussian congregations, 1944.

Visual sources of information include 51 maps from the Heritage Centre Map Collection, illustrating regional topics from 1613 to 1955 (found in the MHC Map Index), and nine photo collections (indexed in the MHC Photo Index), including those of Anna Andres, Gerhard Bartel, Wanda (Regier) Friesen, Gerhard Lohrenz, Peter Regier, and the Sudermann Family.



Left to right: MHC summer staffers Russ Sawatsky, hired under a CareerStart grant, McLauren Panderla, an MCC trainee from Hyderabad City, India, and Gwen Enns, volunteer. "Mac" will be leaving on July 7, while the others continue through July and August.

Russian Mennonite Bicentennial Symposium

A Russian Mennonite Bicentennial symposium will be held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from November 9 through 11, 1989. Sponsors include the Centre for MB Studies, the Mennonite Heritage Centre, the Chair of Mennonite Studies (University of Winnipeg), Menno Simons College, all of Winnipeg, and Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ontario. Presenters and themes of papers are as follows:

- Len Friesen, "Mennonites and the fissuring of the New Russian Society, 1860s-1905"
- Peter J. Klassen, "Historiographic Perspectives: Through Different Eyes"
- Adolf Ens, "Prussian Mennonite views of those who emigrated to New Russia"
- Harry Loewen, "Intellectual Developments among Russian Mennonites"
- Harvey Dyck, "Economic conflicts and issues of the 1860s and 1870s"
- Lawrence Klippenstein, "State Service among Mennonites: The Soviet Period, 1917-1937"
- John Dyck, "The struggle for self-understanding: Two conceptions of *Gemeinde* amongst Russian Mennonites 1914-1923"
- Jim Urry, "Changes in Mennonite Social Structure: Social and Geographic Mobility, 1880-1914"
- Abe Dueck and John Friesen, "The Church in Russian Mennonite Communities."

- George K. Epp, "How Mennonites Experienced the 1930s and 1940s"
- Walter Sawatsky, "Mennonite Life in the Soviet Era"

It is hoped that several Soviet scholars will be able to join the symposium. Respondents to the papers will include Dr. Dan Stone (History Dept., University of Winnipeg), Dr. Theo Stavrou (Professor of Russian History, University of Minnesota) and Anna Janzen (a graduate of Associated Mennonite Seminary and pastoral assistant from Luebeck, West Germany). The symposium will conclude with a banquet to be held at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

Inquiries may be sent to John Friesen, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4.

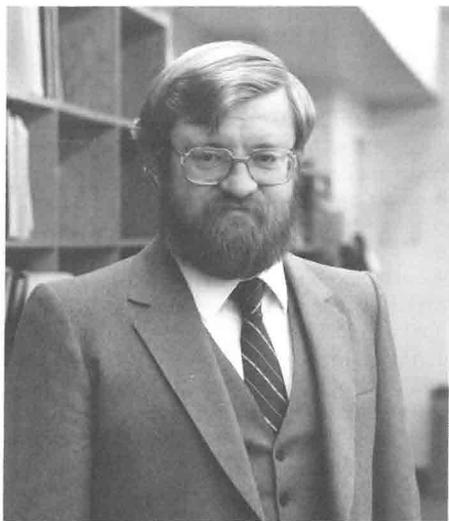
MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE GALLERY

Members of the Mennonite Artists' Club of Manitoba mounted a new exhibit of paintings, sculpture, etc., at the Heritage Centre in late June. The "Group of Seven" includes Peter von Kampen, Tina Buller, Agnes Dyck, Arthur Kroeger, Elsie Krueger, and Elma Neufeld, all of Winnipeg, and Gerald Eidse of Morris, Manitoba.

We invite everyone to an "open house" where the artists will be introduced and the new exhibition officially opened. The open house will be at 7 p.m., on 7 July 1989. Admission is free.

If you would be interested in doing an exhibition, contact the Centre at (204) 888-6781.





Ken Reddig, Archivist of the Centre for MB Studies, 1979 - present.



Herbert Giesbrecht, Archivist/Librarian for the Canadian Conference of MB Churches, 1969-1979, in the first Archives, a small faculty office.

Centre for MB Studies Twentieth Anniversary

by Ken Reddig

In July this year, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies celebrates its twentieth anniversary. Formation of the Centre, at first known simply as "The MB Archives," officially began upon a recommendation to the Canadian Conference Convention in 1969. The statement read, "We recommend that Herb Giesbrecht, College [MBBC] librarian, be appointed archivist for the Canadian Conference to spend a quarter of his time in this work" (Canadian Conference Yearbook, 1969, p. 83).

The notion of establishing an archives had, in fact, been considered many years earlier. Around 1950, Dr. Abraham H. Unruh, Professor of Bible and Exegesis at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg, was researching his history of the Mennonite Brethren Church, *Die Geschichte der Mennoniten-Brüdergemeinde: 1860-1954*. In the process of his research he became acutely aware of the lack of readily available resources and proposed the establishment of an archives collection. However, no action was initiated at that time.

It was later, during the sixties, that Herb Giesbrecht began collecting some basic materials of Canadian and provincial MB Conferences. At the same time the late Dr. John A. Toews, then president of MBBC, assisted in securing the personal papers of B.B. Janz of Coaldale, Alberta. This large collection of personal and official correspondence, materials relating to the emigration and resettlement of Russian-Mennonites in Western Canada helped to inspire the establishment of a Canada-wide

MB archives. Later, in July of 1969, an archival centre was formally established.

At first the collection was housed in a small office in the library building. In 1973 it was transferred to a small classroom which became quite crowded, as the holdings grew through donations and the diligent efforts of Herb Giesbrecht. In 1979, with the completion of the library expansion, the archives was moved into the basement of this new building.

That summer saw some additional changes.

Ken Reddig, a teacher at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, was hired as the first full-time archivist while Herb, who had served the Conference as archivist for the first ten years, resumed his original position as full-time College librarian. By this time the archives had grown to the point where a full-time archivist was required.

Over the next ten years the archives grew significantly in terms of holdings. By now it has tripled in size. Some of the more important collections are noted below.

The basic collection at present is the fairly comprehensive microfilm collection of Mennonite Brethren congregational records. Also included are the inactive files of most Canadian and provincial conference boards and agencies. The archives houses a complete collection of all Mennonite Brethren yearbooks from North America and an extensive collection of Mennonite periodicals (over 500 titles) from around the world. Maps, charts, photographs, rare books and recordings (both audio and visual) are included to provide a broad research base of Mennonite Brethren involvement not only in the life of the local congregation but on the provincial and national scene as well.

Many personal collections have been gathered as well. These include such individuals as: B.B. Janz, D.B. Wiens, C.A. DeFehr, Helen Warkentin, A.H. Unruh, C.F. Klassen, Anna Baerg, J.H. Franz, Herman A. Neufeld, J.A. Toews, Heinrich S. Voth, Heinrich H. Voth, Johann Warkentin and Eric Ratzlaff. These collections are intended to be representative of Mennonite Brethren individuals and families, and not only represent the more prominent Mennonite Brethren leaders.

Of particular interest to genealogists is the large collection of materials donated by Katie Peters. This collection, in constant use, contains some 65,000 cards and well over 600 volumes of genealogies plus 35 linear feet of obituaries.

The archives, now known as the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, is staffed by Ken Reddig, Archivist, Alf Redekopp as Assistant Archivist and Director of the Genealogy Collection, Bert Friesen as Indexer for the massive *Mennonitische Rundschau* indexing project, and several volunteers who provide assistance one day each week. Among these are: Ida Toews, Erica Voth and Walter Regehr.

The past twenty years have seen considerable historical activity. The Centre has attempted to develop an appreciation for the heritage of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Canada, and the people who make up that body of Christian believers. It has grown significantly from that modest beginning of a quarter-time position and a few file drawers of documents in a small office.

Genealogists, historical researchers and anyone interested in simply finding out what an archives is are invited to visit the Centre on the MBBC campus. The staff is eager to assist in research projects or in providing tours of the facility.



Swiss Elements of the Mennonite Mosaic in Ontario

by Lorna Bergey and Lorraine Roth

Conclusion

2. Amish Components and WOMC

The Amish presence in Ontario traces its history back to the scouting trip of Christian Nafziger in 1822. He came from Bavaria seeking a place where he could bring fellow members of the conservative wing of the Swiss Mennonites, known as the Amish or Amish Mennonites.

Settlers began arriving in 1823 and this immigration continued until the 1850s. They settled in Wilmot Township just west of the Waterloo Mennonite settlement. Mennonites from Waterloo, especially Jacob Erb, were instrumental in getting this settlement established. The Amish came from various areas in Europe — Alsace, Lorraine and Montbeliard in France, the Palatinate, Hesse, Waldeck and Bavaria in Germany, and Switzerland.

The Amish Mennonites first spread into the townships of South Easthope and Mornington in Perth County, East Zorra in Oxford, Wellesley in Waterloo, and then as far distant as Hay Township in Huron County. By 1854 congregations had been organized in five areas — Wilmot, South Easthope-East Zorra, Wellesley, Hay (Blake) and Mornington. By this time there were large populations in most of these areas although meetinghouses were not constructed until the 1880s. Between 1883 and 1886 each congregation built a meetinghouse and Wilmot built two — Steinmanns and St. Agatha.

The building of meetinghouses precipitated the secession of the Old Order Amish in Ontario. Two groups, one in Wellesley and the other in Mornington, continued to meet in homes; they in turn established three more congregations. A number of other congregations, some unaffiliated, and others affiliated with other Amish or Mennonite groups, have emerged.

The five original congregations, however, formed the Amish Mennonite Conference in the early 1920s. The term "Amish" was dropped in 1963/64 and the Conference was re-named Western Ontario Mennonite Conference. By the time of the MCEC merger in 1988, the congregations affiliated with WOMC numbered seventeen.

Sunday school was attempted in a home of a member in the Wellesley congregation in 1884, but strong opposition stopped the movement. In the early 1900s however Sunday schools found acceptance as a form of teaching German to the children. A Sunday school conference was organized a year before the church conference.

Although Sunday schools found their way into the Amish congregations in order to help teach the German language, they may, in fact, have been the means by which the English language finally made its way into the congregations. No doubt World War II and the feelings in the community against anything German also helped to precipitate the change.

Other Christian education programs were introduced, following the example of the Mennonite Conference and as materials became available from the Mennonite Publishing House. Young people's Bible meetings were introduced in the 1920s, winter Bible schools for young people and adults in the 1930s, and summer Bible schools for children in the 1940s.

Although not in on the initial planning and founding of Rockway, the WOMC has supported the school with students and funds. The Conference was involved also with the founding of Conrad Grebel College. Although the support of higher education by this Conference has not been outstanding, a number of church-wide leaders have come out of its constituency.

The Amish were very slow to accept revivalism and develop interest in mission. However, there were persons who were concerned and the Conference was propelled into mission in spite of itself. Several persons from the Wilmot congregations became converted, felt called to prepare themselves for service, attended schools in Goshen and Chicago, and in 1924 were the first Mennonite foreign missionaries from Ontario to leave for Argentina under the Mennonite General Board of Missions. In order to handle the support of these workers, the Conference formed a Missions Committee which eventually became the Mission Board.

For the next decade and a half, missions were still largely the concern of individuals only. In the early 1940s a revival movement swept through Amish congregations. People became interested in mission although few of them could consider the training needed for foreign service. They began though to look for local opportunities.

In 1948 several families moved to Ailsa Craig, a few miles northwest of London. It was not long until this group felt the need to move into London and begin both a rescue mission and a Sunday school. Mission Services of London and Valleyview Mennonite Church are among the fruits of these endeavours.

The Mission Board opened its first home for seniors in the 1950s. At present, Tri-County Homes operates a nursing home in Milverton, a home for seniors, a residential village for seniors and a home for retarded children and adults in New Hamburg. Hidden Acres Camp was initiated by the Mission Board, but is now run by a private board dedicated to serve the Conference constituency.

The Amish also have a reputation for practising mutual aid, but the prosperity in this new land caused some people to seek the security of insurance companies. In order to meet the need for the security of a more formal organization and to avoid having to insure in "worldly" companies, they organized a Storm and Fire Aid Union in 1872. This organization survived all the divisions in the Amish Mennonite community through the years. Some adjustments had to be made, such as a separate fund for electrical motors and power machinery which are not part of Old Order Amish investments.

3. Summary

Each group of immigrant Mennonites came to Canada in search of freedom from religious and economic oppression. The Pennsylvania German Mennonites, the Amish and the Mennonites from Russia maintained their distinctive fellowship groups. There was little inter-action until World War I united them in a common cause — the necessity of petitioning the government for their military exemption.

In order to give a positive witness to their historical stance of non-resistance, members of Ontario Historic Peace Churches established the Non-Resistant Relief Organization in 1917 to extend relief to victims of war and disaster, regardless of race or creed.

After the Amish Mennonite Conference dropped its Amish designation, it would have seemed logical for the Conference to join the Mennonite Conference of Ontario. There was considerable cooperation on various levels,⁴ but the Amish had come from a strong tradition of congregationalism. Although the Mennonite tendency toward central authority had probably peaked at this time, these former Amish communities were still somewhat wary of that kind of church government.⁵ It took another twenty-five years of cooperation, exchanging leaders, inter-marrying and a third party — the United Mennonites,⁶ to finally bring about the union.

Endnotes

¹ Mennonite Conference of Ontario minutes. Cf. also L.J. Burkholder, *A Brief History of Mennonites in Ontario*. (Markham, Ont.: Mennonite Conference of Ontario, 1935).

² A resolution of MCO in the 1920s to make the wearing of a "plain" bonnet by sisters a test of membership met with considerable resistance from a large number of members and the pastor at Kitchener First Mennonite. The bishop appealed to the Conference to make an investigation and the pastor was silenced. In 1924 those not in agreement with the action of Conference withdrew and organized Stirling Avenue Mennonite Church, with a strong emphasis on congregationalism. Cf. F.H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), 48ff.

³ Maurice Martin (ed.), *Mennonites in Ontario: A Mennonite Bicentennial Portrait 1786-1986*. (Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Bicentennial Commission, 1986), p. 42.

⁴ The Women's Sewing Circles in Ontario of both MCO and WOMC have worked under one organization since 1952.

⁵ A basic source for the larger Canadian Amish story is in Orland Gingerich, *The Amish of Canada* (Waterloo, Ont.: Conrad Press, 1972).

⁶ The first congregations of the United Mennonite Conference were organized by Mennonites coming from Russia in the 1920s. Many of them were billeted in homes of the Ontario Swiss Mennonites upon arrival in Canada and decided to locate permanently in Ontario. Cf. F.H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940*, 139ff.

MB Annual Meeting: Christianity in the Soviet Union

The annual meeting of the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society will be held on Friday evening, July 7, at 9:15 p.m. The featured speaker will be Victor Hamm, producer and speaker of the Russian-language radio programs of Mennonite Brethren Communications. Victor will speak to the Society, and answer questions, via special telephone hook-up, from West Germany. The meeting will be held at the conclusion of the general business session of the Canadian MB Conference Convention that evening.

On June 9 Victor left for the Soviet Union on a three-week evangelistic tour. At the time of his address he will have just returned from his tour and will be in Germany visiting relatives. In his address he will inform the Society of his evangelistic tour and also update those in attendance on the state of Christianity in the Soviet Union.

In addition to Victor's address, Dr. Abe Dueck of MBBC, who late last year spent three weeks in the Soviet Union, will briefly highlight the historical development of recent changes in the Soviet Union and comment upon the status of the Mennonite Church.



The library and archives of the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle at the Weierhof in West Germany. Gary Waltner is in charge of the Centre. A major project related to the Centre is a Russian Mennonite Bicentennial symposium to be held at Bechterdissen near Bielefeld in September.

Photo: Lawrence Klippenstein

The New GCMC Historical Committee

Mission and goals occupied the recently formed GCMC Historical Committee as it held its first meeting at the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College, April 21-22. Committee members include David A. Haury (chair), North Newton; Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg; Steve Estes (secretary), Hopedale, Illinois; Wilma McKee, Hydro, Oklahoma; and David Rempel Smucker, Akron, Pennsylvania. The Committee reports to the GC Commission on Education and revives the work of the Heritage Committee, which ended in 1983.

The Committee will serve as a liaison with the Historical Committee of the Mennonite Church as well as district and provincial historical organizations of the General Conference Mennonite Church. It will also review manuscripts and coordinate the Mennonite Historical Series, which now includes 16 volumes published by Faith and Life Press.

For further information contact David Haury, Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas, U.S.A. 67117.

Book Notes (cont'd from p. 8)

stories were first published elsewhere, this attractive 227-page anthology brings together some of the best. Pb.

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and CMBC Publications have released the first English translation, *The Kuban Settlement*, of the historical series of monographs published by the Echo Verlag in the 1940s and 1950s. Pb., 93 pp., \$9.00.

ECHO HISTORICAL SERIES

A collection of historical books on the Mennonites in Russia, previously published only in German and mostly out of print, are now being made available to a much broader audience.

The Echo Historical series was originally conceived and edited by the prolific writer, humorist, and historian, Arnold Dyck.

Fourteen monographs were published in German between 1945 and 1965.

This priceless heritage, too valuable to lie dormant, is now being made available in English through the cooperative efforts of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and CMBC Publications.



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BOOK REVIEWS

Steiner, Samuel J., *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1988). 223 pp., pb., \$14.95.

Reviewed by E. Reginald Good

Eighteen thousand Mennonites migrated from Ukraine to North America in the 1870s and 1880s. That move has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation. Attention has focused on the cause of migration, the choice of destination and the settlement experience.

Samuel J. Steiner's *Vicarious Pioneer* makes a significant contribution to the existing scholarship by examining the reception of Russian Mennonites by their co-religionists in Ontario. Jacob Y. Shantz (1822-1909) was a Pennsylvania-German Mennonite resident in Ontario who played a leading role in negotiating loans for Russian Mennonites who settled in Manitoba. Steiner believes that "without the determined financial assistance of Ontario Mennonites, clearly led and symbolized by Shantz, the immigrants struggling in Manitoba in 1875 and 1876 might well have turned to Kansas or other U.S. destinations..." (p. 161).

Steiner's purpose is to explain why Shantz accepted responsibility for organizing Ontario Mennonite aid to Russian Mennonite immigrants when his efforts ultimately proved detrimental to "his business enterprises, and possibly his own relationship to the traditional segment of the [Old] Mennonite Church." (p. 18). Steiner theorizes that Shantz had what some scholars have termed an "entrepreneurial personality" (p. 30). It is pointed out, for example, that Shantz was "unafraid to tackle daunting projects that many thought were too risky" (p. 30). What distinguished Shantz from other entrepreneurs, in Steiner's estimation, was that he "placed service to God at the centre of his activity" (p. 161).

Steiner's assessment of Shantz's personality will not go unchallenged. There is evidence to suggest that Shantz was motivated as much by self-interest as altruism. His view of the agricultural potential of the north-west was typical of that held by Ontario expansionists, generally, as described in Doug Owsram's *Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980).

These people argued that settlement of the north-west would provide a growing market for Ontario's protectionist industries, including Shantz's Dominion Button Works. During the period of his involvement with Russian Mennonite immigration, Shantz was a member of Ontario's industrial elite and it is probable that his economic worldview quite resembled that of his expansionist peers'. That is the assumption made by Owsram when quoting Shantz in his landmark study cited above.

It is an assumption corroborated by the fact (not alluded to by Steiner) that Shantz speculated widely in prime agricultural land and mill sites reserved for Russian Mennonite settlement in Manitoba. Further, Shantz appears

to have profited personally from arranging commercial mortgages for Russian Mennonite settlers at unusually high interest rates. That is the insinuation made by Steiner when he writes that Shantz "appeared less than candid" about the matter when interrogated by a House of Commons Committee in 1886 "and did not mention his own large loan with the London and Ontario Investment Company" which held the mortgages concerned (pp. 146-47).

Although *Vicarious Pioneer* is not the final word on Jacob Y. Shantz, it is the most comprehensive study to date and is likely to spawn more intensive scholarly research on the reception of Russian Mennonites by their co-religionists in North America. Steiner's suggestion that Shantz's involvement with Russian Mennonite immigration alienated him from the Old Mennonite Church illustrates the need for more general studies on the impact of Russian Mennonite immigration on Old Mennonite Church life. It may be, for example, that the creation of charitable organizations specifically to assist Russian Mennonite immigration and settlement accelerated constituency pressure to rationalize existing, traditional church structures. That pressure could have contributed to the internal destabilization that precipitated the Reforming/Reformed and Old Order schisms.

Reg Good is a doctoral student at the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

Driedger, Leo, *Mennonite Identity in Conflict* (Lewiston and Queenston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1988). 237 pp., hdc.

Redekop, Calvin W., and Steiner, Samuel J., *Mennonite Identity: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (New York: University of America Press, 1988). 284 pp., pb.

Loewen, Harry, *Why I am a Mennonite. Essays on Mennonite Identity* (Kitchen: Herald Press, 1988). 350 pp., pb.

Reviewed by Paul Redekop

The appearance of three major books on the topic of Mennonite identity in one year could well be taken to reflect a Mennonite identity crisis. Crisis, though, may not be quite the right word. These works reflect issues that have actually been emerging over the last several decades, and are likely to continue for years to come.

In recent times Mennonites have had to come to grips with the forces of urbanization and modernization, as well as the emergence of new and ethnically very different Mennonite communities in other parts of the world. As a consequence, Mennonite identity has come to lose much of the taken-for-granted character it had before.

The impact of urbanization and modernization on Mennonite identity is documented by Professor Driedger. This book brings together findings from his research on this subject over a number of years. They show trends

in urbanization and regional differences, while also demonstrating the impact of these social processes on the Mennonite way of life, on beliefs and attitudes, and on marriage and family life.

Another aspect of the effect of modern society is reflected in the volume by Redekop and Steiner. This book is a compilation of papers presented at a conference on Mennonite identity held at Conrad Grebel College in May of 1986. That assembly brought together scholars from the fields of theology, philosophy, sociology, psychology and literature to share the insights of these disciplines regarding identity concerns. These studies show how Mennonite scholars have been coming to grips with the kinds and forms of knowledge available in modern society.

For the first generation of Mennonite scholars, the goal was to master such knowledge in order to interpret it in terms of the traditional frame of reference. However, for many contemporary Mennonite scholars, it may not be clear which comes first, i.e., to decide whether these new forms of knowledge are to be understood within a traditional Mennonite frame of reference, or whether these new ways of knowing are employed to understand one's identity as a Mennonite. It is often not clear on which side of this particular fence the various authors of this volume take their stand.

The third of these books on Mennonite identity takes a more personal approach. Its editor, Professor Harry Loewen, asked a wide range of individuals for testimonials regarding their Mennonite identities. As these individuals tell their stories, they give a reality to the issues and concerns expressed in the first two books. The stories tell of personal odysseys from country to city, of exposure to new ideas and values, of an attendant loss of the confidence that one was born a Mennonite, leading in many cases to a profound personal struggle and a conscious and deliberate decision to be a Mennonite.

Collectively, these works reflect the disappearance of the "good old days" when one's identity as a Mennonite could be taken for granted. On the other hand, they provide an interesting commentary on the historical irony that a religious group whose distinctiveness was based in the first place on the need for individuals to make their own conscious commitment to the faith, should have reached the point where membership could have been assumed to such an extent.

Dr. Paul Redekop is director of MCC Mediation Services in Winnipeg.

Book Notes

Hildi Froese Tiessen, who teaches literature at Conrad Grebel College, has edited a volume of 22 Mennonite short stories entitled *Liars and Rascals* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1989). Most of the 13 authors represented are Canadian, including such well-known ones as Rudy Wiebe, Sandra Birdsall and Patrick Friesen. While most of the

(cont'd on p. 7)