



Published by the History-Archives Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada

The Simeon Reesor diary: To Manitoba (1875)

The Reesors were an important family group among the nineteenth century Mennonites of Ontario, Canada. One of them, Austin D., recently reported, "We have a reunion every decade, and a genealogical record, published in 1950, lists some 6000 names."

Less well known is the story of the contact some of them had with Mennonites emigrating from Russia to Canada in 1874

Mennonite Historian continues

The introductory issue of **Mennonite Historian** appeared as a kind of prospectus in September, 1975. Since then a number of persons have expressed support and encouragement to keep the publication alive. The History-Archives Committee has therefore resolved to attempt the preparation of at least three, and possibly four issues in 1976. This one is the first of these.

A regional emphasis may be evident from time to time, and perhaps thematic treatments will also occur. In this number material on the Mennonite House has been submitted by Lorna Bergey for the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario. The Reesor diary will possibly be of special interest to Ontario Mennonites as well.

Mailing lists and subscription fees are still in flux. Conference of Mennonites in Canada congregations will receive bulk mailings, but a list of individual and/or outside group addresses will be set up also. Any person desiring regular mailings is urged to notify the editor, and will be placed on this list. No subscription fee has been established to date. Monies received from readers will be used to defray expenses, and receipted as donations.

Readers are also invited to submit brief manuscripts on any area of Mennonite research that seems to fit into the framework of the paper. Such manuscripts will become the property of the publishers, but photos will be returned on request. *LK*

and later. Memoirs and various historical records mention the "winter" that some of the newcomers spent with Ontario Mennonites before moving on to Manitoba. Samuel (Austin's great-grandfather) and Simeon Reesor were among those who gave repeated assistance in this phase of settling the Canadian West.

The Philip Wismer records indicate that Samuel Reesor became a member of the

Ontario Russian Mennonite Aid Committee around 1873, and then agreed to sign for a loan of \$5000 as his share in a mortgage arrangement drawn up to support Russian Mennonite families till they were settled down.

In September, 1874, Samuel accompanied Jacob Y. Schantz on one of his many trips to Manitoba as an aide to Mennonite settlement there. The **Markham Economist** of Aug. 6, 1874 suggests that Reesor made additional trips to the west as well. He was a wealthy man, owning many farms as well as flour and saw mills, so that he had time and means to participate in various aid projects during that time.

Samuel's cousin, Simeon, similarly joined a group of Russian Mennonites in 1875. His personal diary is one of the few items documenting the activities in which both men were involved. The diary is quite well known to many Reesor families, but less so to other groups.

The handwritten original (Manitoba portion) was prepared for possible publication by Emily Nighswander, of Stouffville, Ontario, who describes herself as a "fourth generation descendant of Noah Reesor, brother of Simeon." Note that style, punctuation and spelling have been preserved as accurately as possible in the document.

1875

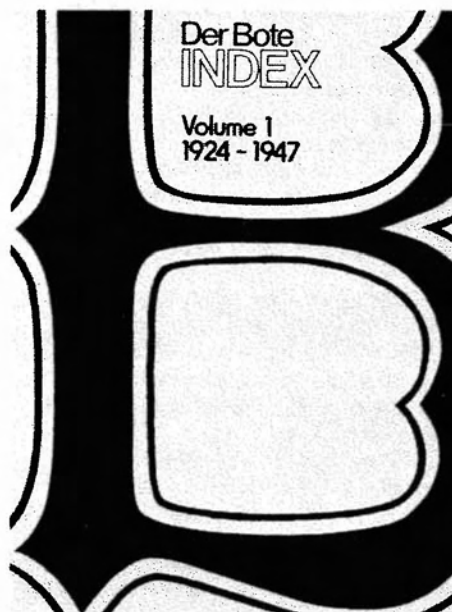
May 3 Today I started to Manitoba as interpreter to the Russian Mennonites Went to Toronto with 7 families who had remained with us over winter

May 4 Took train per G.T.R. at 7:30 a.m. for detroit. were joined at Berlin by 16 families making altogether 128 Souls arrived at detroit about Eleven P.M. There lay in the immigrant room till 8 a.m.

5 May Took Train on Michigan Central RR for Chicago 280 miles commenced to rain lightly at noon. Cleared at 5. P.M. arrived at Chicago 8. P.M. Laid over at Chicago & N Western Chicago and North Western depot missed our connection laid over to 10 P.M.

May Sixth Took the Chicago and North Western Train to Elroy at 10 A.M. The Mennonites had to pay \$1 dollar per head for the privilege of laying on the floor and a good breakfast arrived at St Pauls 8 A.M.

(continued on next page)



Der Bote index

The first volume of an index to the German-language Mennonite periodical, **Der Bote**, is now completed. Its 250 pages cover the period 1924-1947. Priced at \$12.00, the paperback volume may be ordered from CMBC Publications, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4. The cover page design is by Gerald Loewen. **Der Bote** is published in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, and edited by Peter B. Wiens.

The West Reserve of southern Manitoba was formally established by an Order-in-Council at Ottawa on April 25, 1876. Settlement, by Mennonites of the Fuerstenland colony in south Russia, began in the area during the summer of 1875. The reserve was unofficially constituted as the Rural Municipality of Rhineland in 1881.

Diary *cont'd.*

May 7 Took Lak Shore Miss RR Took Train for Moorhead at 9 A.M. very heavy thunder and rain. Storm entered upon the Northern Pacific RR about 5 P.M.

May 8 arrived at Moorhead 9 A.M. Put the Mennonites on Board the Steamer Dakota expecting to leave this evening But by the Customs officer failing to put in an appearance to inspect the steamer we were Compelled to "lay over" until Monday morning.

Sunday 9 Waiting Patiently all day weather very fine work is going on on board the new steamer now building here the Same as yesterday but Not as many men at work.

Monday May 10 Left Moorhead at 9 A.M. with full cargo went 20 rods in attempting to turn the head of Steamer down stream the rudder Struck the Bank and broke were detained about half an hour then got her head down Stream

May 11 weather cool and Clear light Showers in the afternoon

May 12 Halted at Pembina Customs at 5 a.m. Snow Bank on the River Bank arrived and landed The Mennonites at Rat River on the Red River at 3 P.M. all well and in good order Weather fine and Clear Went East up the Mennonite Road with 6 men to the immigrant Sheds that Schantz Built Where Peter Buhr lives Sent 3 men ahead to the Settlement for teams and 3 returned to the river for the night. Mr. Buhr thinks the winter is to long is not thoughhly Satisfied but thinks he can get along.

May 13 Went further east to John Schwartz Who came last Sepr with a large family Built a house is well satisfied with his Situation, if Wheat grows this Summer, Rained this afternoon grass is just Starting

May 14 Went East to Cornelius Tows he and I visited three or four houses all Satisfied with their Situation they are all making gardens and Sowing Grain Weather fine Spring Went to Henry Wiebe for the night.

May 15 Henry Wiebe & I visited a number of families traveled over ten miles all expressed their Satisfaction and content with future prospects Sowing wheat Weather fine and Clear Went to Johan Jansen Brotherinlaw to Wiebe for night.

Sunday May 16 Went to church at Janz Wicring (?) where H Wiebe Dilivered a Sermon then to Wieler Sarahs Brotherinlaw for the night Clear and windy

May 17 Monday Peter Wiebe Started for Winnipeg with oxen and wagons traveled all day 21 miles Weather windy and dry

May 18 Tuesday loafing around Winnipeg got on board the Steamer International at 6 P.M. for Moorhead Weather fine and warm.



Samuel Reesor (1817-1901). Photo taken 1899: Courtesy of Austin D. Reesor.

May 19 arrived at Pembina this evening Weather fine

May 20 Up Stream and onward Weather fine trees on the river are turning Green

May 21 Friday the Same thing over Weather fine and warm

May 22 Saturday. Sailing up the river Weather Clear and warm

May 23 Sunday arrived at Moorhead at day light this morning took up lodging at the Bramble house Weather very warm and dry

May 24 Monday left Moorhead at 12:30 P.M.

May 25 Tuesday arrived at St Pauls 9. a.M. left for Elroy 10. a.m. arrived at Elroy 8. P.M.

May 26 Wednesday arrived at Chicago 7.15 a.m. departed for Detroit 9 a.m. arrived at Detroit 6.30 P.M.

May 27 arrived at Berlin at 2 P.M.

May 29 Took train at Berlin for Toronto at 10.23 a.M. Took Nipissing* for Markham at 4 P.M. arrived at home all well and found all the family well This was my first trip to Manitoba and will be long remembered by me

Simeon Reesor

Simeon Reesor's expenses incurred on a journey as interpreter for the Mennonites to Fort Garry, Manitoba, May 3, 1875.

May 3	Street cars, Toronto90
May 3	Cartage T & N to GTR	7.00
May 3	Bed and breakfast	0.50
May 8	Dinner at Moorhead	0.50
May 17	3 meals & bed Winnipeg	1.50
May 24	5 meals & bed Moorhead	3.00
May 25	Breakfast St. Paul	0.75

May 26	Lunches to Chicago65
May 26	Ticket Det. to Berlin	5.10
		19.40
May 29	Berlin to Toronto	1.90
	Toronto to Mark70
		22.00

* Nipissing refers to the Toronto and Nipissing Railroad (T&R), later Grand Trunk and now Canadian National.

Though unnamed in the diary, the families of Reesor's group appear to be listed in Jacob Y. Schantz's record of Mennonite immigrant families moving to Manitoba. It has the following names cited under the heading. "These are the parties stopped in Ontario last winter, 1875. Left May 4": Johan Wiebe, Jacob Friesen, Peter Hader (Harder?), Peter Ebb (Epp?), Peter Dueck, Peter Tows (Toews), Isaac Funk, Johan Neufeld, Abraham Friesen, Aaron Dueck, Cornelius Dueck, Henry Falk, Peter Koehler (Kehler?), Henry Doerksen, Johann Schroeder, Widdow (sic) Unger, France Sawatzki (Franz Sawatzky?), Johan Sawatzki (Sawatzky?), Jacob Doerksen, Peter Martins (Martens?), Jacob Martins, Peter Loewen, Peter Wall, Martin Klaasen and Warkentin. The list totals 83½ "adults" (possibly meaning adult equivalent fares), having paid 472.61 in all.

The group settled with many other families on the East Reserve in Manitoba. "Henry Wiebe", mentioned as preaching a sermon, is possibly the Bergthal minister who later moved to the West Reserve (Edenburg) and spent several decades ministering to the churches of that area. He joined the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba when it began to form around 1890-1891. Lawrence Klippenstein

Sources: Emily Nighswander, "The Diary of Simeon Reesor, May, 1875", unpublished term paper, Elim Christian Education Centre, Altona, Manitoba, April, 1973; Jacob Y. Schantz, "Bericht ueber die Mennonitischen Brueder in Manitoba," *Herold der Wahrheit*, XIV (December, 1877), p. 188; "The Mennonites", *Markham Economist*, Aug. 6, 1874; "Ontario Mennonites gave generous assistance to Russian immigrant families," *Mennonite Reporter*, IV, November 25, 1974, p. 27; Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith*, Altona, Man., 1970; Jacob Y. Schantz, "Mennonites to Manitoba, 1874," unpublished typed manuscript, Conference of Mennonites in Canada archives, Winnipeg, Man., pp. 33-34.

The original Reesor diary also includes a "non-Manitoba" portion. It is located in the Provincial Archives of Ontario.



Mennonite House at Waterloo, Ont.

Under the leadership of Dr. J. W. Fretz, the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario became involved with the restoration program of a Pennsylvania - German Mennonite farm house. Located on the north campus of the University of Waterloo, it will constitute a tie with the Mennonite farm community of the past.

In 1966 the University decided to preserve this native fieldstone house, an excellent specimen of Pennsylvania - German architecture as a memorial to the Pennsylvania - German Mennonite people who pioneered and developed the 1000 acres, now the university campus.

It is only recently that funds were made available to proceed with the restoration program. Grants have been received from the Ontario Provincial and the Waterloo Regional Heritage Foundations.

The University of Waterloo has entered into an agreement with Conrad Grebel College in co-operation with the Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario to preserve and restore the building as closely as possible to its original state.

The house was built in 1850 by pioneer John E. Brubacher. The architecture of the house is typical of homes still to be seen in Pennsylvania but extremely rare in Ontario. It was built on a hill so that entrance to the basement may be gained on ground level on the south side and entrance to the main floor is gained on ground level on north side of the house. The walls are 15-20" thick.

The lowest floor housed two water cisterns, and a fireplace which was used for heavy cooking, soap-making, heating laundry water, butchering, etc. This space will be converted into a conference room and storage space.

On the main floor there was a large pantry and kitchen — dining room on the west side while on the east side there was a parlor and a bedroom. Complete restoration will be attempted on this floor, providing a museum to portray Pennsylvania - German Mennonite life style in the 19th century.

Upstairs there are four large bedrooms, one of which probably was used as a "rumple schtuup" or storeroom. Three rooms on this floor will be remodelled to provide a comfortable apartment for a couple to serve as custodian and host.

Restoration is quite extensive due to an accidental fire in 1968 which gutted the house interior but did not affect the masonry. A local artisan, Simeon Martin, was engaged to hand-hew timbers from a nearby Mennonite farmer's woodlot, and with the help of Old Order Mennonites Martin reconstructed the interior framing. A new roof was installed and the windows enclosed at that time.

Renovations will be carried out in harmony with the skills and techniques of the 19th century building, using hardware retrieved from similar houses on other locations, slated for demolition.

The University of Waterloo will continue to have total ownership of the land and building and will administer all restoration and maintenance.

Conrad Grebel College will be responsible for the custodian's apartment on third floor, and will secure custodial personnel, and give general supervision to the house program.

Furnishings for the conference room will be provided jointly by the College and the University.

The Mennonite Historical Society will assume responsibility to obtain authentic

furnishings for the restored main floor, to establish a historical and cultural centre.

If this museum is to become a reality, the interest and cooperation of local Mennonites is imperative. The Society has a limited sum available for expenditures on furnishings, but it will need to depend heavily on contributions from the constituency.

Anyone interested may contact Mrs. Lorna L. Bergery, RR2, New Hamburg, Ontario N0B 2G0, for a detailed list of furniture and artifacts required.

New books

Sara Heinrich DeFehr, ed. **Im Wandel der Jahre**, Winnipeg, Man., 1975. Paperback, 196 pp. A pictorial of the family, depicting roots in Gruenfeld, south Russia. Price: \$15.00. Order from: Peter Paetkau, Sperling, Man.

Dr. Joseph S. Height. **Homesteaders on the Steppe**. N.D.H.S.G.R., Bismarck, N.D. Cloth. 431 pp. Price: \$10.75. Order from: J. S. Height, 1221 E. Adams Dr., Franklin, IN 46131.

Johannes Janzen. **Das Maerchen vom Weihnachtsmann**, edited for a reprint by Dr. Waldemar Janzen. Paperback, 1975. 34 pp. By CMBC Publications, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man. Price: \$2.50. A fairy tale about Christmas written in Russia around 1905.

George F. Loewen, ed. **Erinnerungen aus dem Dorf Grigoriewka 1889-1926**. 1889-1926. Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1975. Paperback, 34 pp. Price: \$3.00. Order from the editor, 343 Helmsdale, Winnipeg, Man.

Gerhard Penner. **Mennoniten dienen in der Roten Armee**. Winnipeg, Man. 1975. Paperback, 193 pp. Price: \$4.50. Order from: Fellowship Bookcentre, 302 Kennedy, Winnipeg, Man.

Henry Peters, ed. **Nordheimer Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan 1925-1975**. Hanley, Sask., 1975. 140 pp. Price: Cloth, \$11.00; Soft cover, \$9.50. Order from: John Schellenberg, Box 297, Hanley, Sask.

Peter Rahn. **Mennoniten in der Umgebung von Omsk**. Vancouver, B.C. 1975. Paperback, 248 pp. Price: \$6.00. Order from: Fellowship Bookcentre, 302 Kennedy, Winnipeg, Man.

Dr. Karl Stumpp. **The German Russians: Two Centuries of Pioneering**. Trans. by Joseph S. Height. Freilassing, Germany. Jubilee edition, reprinted 1971. Cloth, 139 pp. Price: \$6.00. Order from: Dr. J. S. Height, 1221 E. Adams Dr., Franklin, IN 46131.

Dr. John B. Toews, ed. **The Mennonites of Russia 1917-1930. Selected Documents**. Calgary, Alberta, 1975. Cloth, 503 pp. Price: \$10.00. Order from Dr. John B. Toews, Dept. of History, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

Melvin O. Unruh and Gerhard G. Baergen, eds. **The Baergen Heritage 1725-1975**. Paperback, 119 pp. \$12.50. Order from Gerhard Baergen, 1708 Wilson Cresc., Saskatoon, Sask. S7J 2N5



The B. J. Hamm residence of Neuberghal, Manitoba, is thought to be almost 100 years old. It is still one of the best kept farmyards in the village. The community, located about five miles southeast of Altona, is planning centennial celebrations for July this year. Photo: Red River Valley Echo, 1975.

Notes and Comments

Dr. Gerhard Lohrenz. **Storm Tossed**. Winnipeg, Manitoba, 1976. Paperback, 204 pp., \$7.00.

This volume is the sixth to come from the author's desk during the past two years. It was written, he notes, "to walk again paths I knew so well", to help "Mennonite historians of the future", and to share the "force of truth" with the younger generation to come.

Coming from a quiet village in southern Russia, Dr. Lohrenz graphically portrays his deep personal involvement in the revolutionary turmoil of his homeland — the painful period of chaos, the emerging New Order in which he served as a Soviet official for a time, and the decision to emigrate to begin life again.

Storm Tossed will help many understand more intimately what actually transpired in Russian Mennonite communities during those critical days. The reader may also learn something about the meaning of being a "new Canadian" — the difficulties of acquiring another language, finding avocation, and getting a growing family settled down again.

As Dr. Al Reimer, Associate Professor of English at the University of Winnipeg, puts it aptly in his Foreword; "Now is the time for such books of personal reminiscences as this one." Hopefully there will indeed be many others who can take the time, and put forth the effort to tell a life story. Like Gerhard Lohrenz has done.

Lawrence Klippenstein

Research inquiries

Oscar Hamm, of Nutana Park Mennonite Church, Saskatoon is collecting material on the colony of Ignatievo, consisting of seven villages (1889-1942) in the Donetz Basin, Ukraine. Persons having information, personal or documentary, are asked to write to 2014 Sommerfeld Ave., Saskatoon, Sask. S7J 2E3.

This column is open to anyone wishing to obtain aid in historical research.

Echo Verlag books available

Echo Verlag, of Steinbach, Manitoba, headed by the late Arnold Dyck, ceased publishing books some time ago. However, some items of that series are still available. The following titles may be obtained by writing to Mrs. E. Friesen, 250 Waterloo St., Winnipeg, Man. R3N 0S5:

Am Trakt \$1.25
Heinrich Heese, J. P. Wiebe \$1.00
Die Kubaner Ansiedlung \$1.75
Templer Menn. Herkunft \$1.75
Die menn. Siedlungen der Krim \$1.75
Bei uns im alten Russland \$1.50

Two books authored by the late J. J. Hildebrand have again become available: **Hildebrand's Zeittafel**, \$5.00, and **Sibirien**, \$2.50. They may be ordered from CMC Archives, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man. R3P 0M4.

Our congregational historians

Our list of appointed congregational historians has nearly doubled since the report of September, 1975. It is hoped that every congregation will be able to have its appointment made by the end of 1976. The following names can be added now:

Nick Janzen, Cedar Hills Mennonite, Surrey, B.C.

G. I. Peters, First Mennonite Greendale, Sardis, B.C.

Gerhard Schellenberg, West Abbotsford Mennonite, Abbotsford, B.C.

Eric and Anna Wiens, United Mennonite, Mission, B.C.

J. J. Sawatzky, Clearbrook Mennonite, Clearbrook, B.C.

Agatha Dyck, United Mennonite, Yarrow, B.C.

George Wall, Coaldale Mennonite, Coaldale, Alta.

John P. Loewen, Hillcrest Mennonite, Grande Prairie, Alta.

Jacob A. Dyck, Mennonite, Rosemary, Alta.

Helen Brown, Bergthal Mennonite, Didsbury, Alta.

Dan Bueckert and George Dyck, First Mennonite, Saskatoon, Sask.

Laura Schapansky, Herbert Mennonite, Herbert, Sask.

Reuben Wendland, Grace Mennonite, Prince Albert, Sask.

Arnold Schroeder, Grace Mennonite, Regina, Sask.

Leonard Boldt, Osler Mennonite, Osler, Sask.

Elizabeth Peters, Aberdeen Mennonite, Aberdeen, Sask.

Elizabeth Klassen, Bethel Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

Dave Friesen, Carman Mennonite, Carman, Man.

Albert Schroeder, Grace Mennonite, Brandon, Man.

John P. Dyck, Springstein Mennonite, Springstein, Man.

Hilda Hamm, Sterling Mennonite, Winnipeg, Man.

H. H. Janzen, Winkler Bergthaler Mennonite, Winkler, Man.

Irma Mathies, Leamington United Mennonite, Leamington, Ont.

Ruby Weber, Rockway Mennonite, Kitchener, Ont.

Totals: Ontario — 7; Manitoba — 17; Saskatchewan — 13; Alberta — 7; British Columbia — 9.

Corrections to this listing are welcomed. Write in!