

The Strange 'Affair' of the Caobo Company and its Plan to Take over the Molochna

By David Sudermann

At Christmas, 2005, "Caobo Company," a small real-estate investment enterprise recently incorporated in Delaware, mailed out 15,000 copies of a handsome color prospectus: "Caobo (Word) Company: A Plan for the Restitution and Development of the Mennonite Lands of Ukraine." Most of this mailing landed on the doorsteps of Canadians of Russian Mennonite background. In Russian the word for "affair," *aphera*, means "swindle, trickery." Whether trickery or not, the Caobo plan is wonderfully ambitious and speculative. The company hopes to sell one-million dollars worth of its unregistered stock in \$1000 increments solely to Mennonites. This modest kitty would provide the "seed" capital for the company to repossess 500,000 acres of Molochna farmland and develop it for profit. In a review of the stock offering's legality is now underway. Since the scheme involves reclaiming former Mennonite lands as a unique kind of "restitution," or restorative justice, it is of special interest to Mennonite historians and ethicists.

A few facts regarding Molochna

Located southeast of Zaporozh'e (Chortitza-Alexandrovsk), the Molochna Mennonite settlement was the largest in Russia. Settlers began arriving in 1804, and by 1860 it consisted of fifty-seven villages and three *khutors* (estates). Not counting the estates, total acreage came to about 324,000 acres (120,000 *dessiatinii*). The total acreage owned by Mennonites in the region, if all of the estates are counted, would easily have exceeded 500,000 acres. By the early 1900s the Molochna and surrounding Mennonite estates had become a region of flourishing farms, flour mills, and other small to medium-size businesses. Schools and health care were among the best in Russia. A new rail line began to move freight and passengers through the area in 1912. If social democracy had taken root in Russia and WW I had been avoided, the Molochna was poised for rapid economic growth. That prospect vanished in February 1918 as the Bolshevik revolution finally arrived in Halbstadt,

(cont'd on p. 10)

Mennonite Historian

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



Workers of Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church: Louise Lau (secretary), Sabrina Bach, Enoch Yim, James Ip, Soo Jin Ahn (interim pastor). When the Pacific Grace MB Church became overcrowded, a second congregation was begun in Burnaby in 1990. Today it has over 160 members.-

The Growth of Chinese Mennonite Brethren Churches in Canada

by Joseph Kwan and edited by Ken Reddig

The Chinese community in western Canada traces its beginnings to less than a decade after the coming of the first Mennonites from Russia. Chinese were brought to Canada in 1883 as immigrant labourers to help build the first trans-continental railroad—the Canadian Pacific Railway. Some 6,500 Chinese were brought to Canada for this task. Even though numerous Chinese lost their lives during the construction of the railway, the community endured and remained highly resilient in the face of general hostility to their very presence. In fact it was argued at the time that "Chinese would not assimilate and if they did they would represent a lower standard of civilization." (Bumsted p. 162-163)

The railway was completed in 1885 and once the railway was constructed the federal government moved swiftly to limit Chinese immigration by imposing a \$50 'head tax' on subsequent immigrants. The subsequent loss of jobs once the railway was completed led to a Chinese migration into the cities and also the countryside. Results of this can be seen even today as it is hard to travel anywhere on the western prairies where a small town does not have one or two Chinese restaurants and a small group of Chinese business people. Adaptation into the business community of western Canada happened relatively quickly, though socially and culturally the pace was much slower.

(cont'd on p.2)

Chinese MB Churches

(cont'd from p. 1)

While the story of Chinese Mennonite Brethren has its roots within some of these early Chinese immigrants, the congregations are composed predominantly of a more recent immigration. The story of this rapidly expanding community of churches begins with a mission venture that did not even have the Chinese community in mind when it first began. It was a "skid-row" mission, as it was then called, among the poor and minorities living within the inner city of Vancouver. Begun by Henry G. Klassen, from Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, he engaged in street meetings in Vancouver in about 1952. This ministry eventually developed into the Pacific Grace Mission, featuring a growing Sunday School attended by many children. By 1957 some 200 children were attending and the mission was conducting worship services, street meetings and weekly home visitations. Eventually the group became so large that they had to build their own chapel to accommodate the people. Over the years more and more of the regular attendees were Chinese.

By the fall of 1972, there were 22 Chinese attendees, and by 1973 they asked to meet separately due to their

increased numbers. In 1974, a Chinese department within the mission was established, with meetings conducted in Cantonese. In 1977, the English services were discontinued, and the church formally changed its name to Pacific Grace Chinese Church. Some English-speaking Christians stayed behind until 1983 to help the church develop and to teach in the children's Sunday school. It is interesting to note that just as the Mennonites from Russia experienced difficulties with language transition, so too there was not unanimity within the Chinese community in their struggle with the transition from Chinese to English. (Penner, p. 136)

The first few years were full of trials for the church. Henry Klassen had invited Li Him-Wor (Paul Li) from Hong Kong to lead the Chinese department, but Li passed away suddenly in 1975. The second Chinese pastor, Chu Yu-Man (Eddie Chu), soon left for further studies, and the church was without a pastor for two years. For a time, Chan Chung-Ton (Stephen Chan) helped lead Bible study classes and preached during the Sunday worship services.

In 1980, Wong Cheung-Ho (Enoch Wong) arrived to pastor the church, and the church once again thrived. Because the Chinese predominated in the community, the congregation was able to emerge and assume responsibility for evangelizing within its own community. It was also during this time that a large number of refugees fled Indo-China, particularly Vietnam. Mennonite Central Committee had developed an agreement with the Federal government, and through the assistance of many church groups across Canada, these refugees were assisted in beginning new lives in Canada. Some found their way into this emerging church. The church was officially registered in 1981, and the membership grew from 20-30 members to 105 in 1983. Three members of the church entered Bible College, including Zhuang Jian (Miller Zhuang), who later joined the pastoral staff in 1987.

Enoch Wong retired in 1987 due to health reasons and was succeeded by David Chan. Due to worries over the imminent 1997 takeover of Hong Kong by China and the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, another large influx of immigrants from Hong Kong began entering Canada in the late 1980s, and Pacific Grace seized the opportunity to reach out to these immigrants.

Membership jumped from 155 in 1987 to 240 in 1989. The deacons tried frantically to find a bigger meeting place, but no appropriate site was found. To temporarily alleviate the overcrowding problem, the church moved to two Sunday worship services. Keynes Kan joined the staff in 1988, and Valerie Yiu in 1989, and Yiu began an English worship service for English-speaking Chinese youth. Not content to just focus their efforts in Canada, the church also had a vision beyond the shores of North America. Associate pastor Miller Zhuang was sent to Venezuela, and two Chinese churches were established there. This became their first international outreach as a community of believers.

As the membership continued to grow and space became more of a pressing concern, the leaders had a vision for developing new congregations. In 1990, a branch congregation, Burnaby Pacific Grace Chinese Church, was established. South Pacific Grace MB Church was established in southern Vancouver in March 1995.

As the number of new immigrants from Hong Kong declined after 1997, Pacific Grace changed direction. In 1999 simultaneous translation for Mandarin-speaking Chinese was added to the worship services.

Although Pacific Grace MB Church was the first Chinese MB Church to be established, the first Chinese MB church that was registered with the government was Bethel Chinese Christian MB Church, established in 1978 by the B.C. MB Conference Board of Church Extension under the leadership of David Poon. Sixty-two people attended the first worship service in the former location of Fraserview MB Church in Vancouver. In January 1979, the church moved to the new Fraserview MB Church location in nearby Richmond, B.C. and in February to the facilities of Richmond Bethel (MB) Church. The church was formally registered on July 29, with 31 charter members, including four who were newly baptized. It officially joined the B.C. MB Conference in 1980, becoming the first registered Chinese MB church in North America.

In August 1980, the church moved back to Vancouver, renting Wilson Heights United Church as its meeting place. In 1981, a building at 235 East 15th Avenue was purchased for \$280,000. An

(cont'd on p. 8)

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Recent Books

Levi Dueck, editor. *The Henry L. & Anna Friesen Family Then & Now* (Rosenort, MB: Henry L. Friesen Book Committee) 560 pp.

This book contains the family history and genealogy of Henry L. Friesen (1851-1910) and his wife Anna B. Klassen (1855-1892) who came to Canada as part of the Kleinegemeinde church group from South Russia and settled in the Rosenhoff-Rosenort area near present-day Morris, Manitoba. Contact: Levi Dueck, Box 26, RR 1, Morris, MB R0G 1K0.

William Schroeder. *Translation of Familien-Chronik (Family Chronicle) of Gerhard Heinrich Doerksen (1866-1930)* (Winnipeg, MB: Private publication, 2005)

This booklet contains the work of William (Doerksen) Schroeder, born 1927, who translated from the old Gothic German script into English, the writings of his Grandfather Gerhard Doerksen. The compilations also includes some loose genealogical lists preserved by Jessie Doerksen (1904-1987) plus an appendix with the Schroeder branch of the Doerksen family tree. The type setting and photo reproductions for this book were done by Ruth (Schroeder) Lavasseur. Gerhard Doerksen (1866-1930) was trained as a teacher, came to Canada in 1924 and died at Pigeon Lake, Manitoba. Contact: Wm. Schroeder, 832 Wicklow St., Winnipeg, MB R3T 0H7.

William Schroeder. *The Family of Abram and Maria Friesen, Great Deer, Saskatchewan* (Winnipeg, MB: Private publication, 2005).

This book begins with a biographical sketch for Abram Friesen (1859-1933), son of Peter Friesen (1812-1891) and Maria Balman (also Banman) (1814-1860) of the village of Bergthal, Bergthal Colony, South Russia; and his wife, Maria Dyck (1859-1931), daughter of Heinrich Dyck (1832-1887) and Maria Epp (1833-1877) of Friedrichsthal, Bergthal Colony, South Russia. Both families immigrated to Manitoba between 1874 and 1876 and settled in the village of Rosenthal, located on the Mennonite East Reserve where Abram and Maria were married in 1878. By 1881 they had moved across the Red River and were living in Kronsgart about seven miles south of Plum Coulee. In 1902 the family moved to Saskatchewan and settled at Great Deer in 1903. In addition to the family history information, the book contains a genealogical

listing, a translation of the 1909 diary of a daughter Susanna Friesen and many photographs.

Contact: William Schroeder, 434 Sutton Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R2G 0T3 or 204-669-1806.

[Ralph Thorpe and Delores (Loewen) Harder]. *List of the Descendants of Anna Loewen (1850-1910) and Erdman Nikkel (1848-1922); List of the Descendants of Heinrich Loewen (1852-1937) and Aganetha Dyck (1856-1931); and, List of the Descendants of Katharina Loewen (1859-1930 and Klaas Peters (1855-1932)* (3 booklets out of 5)

In conjunction with the Loewen Family Reunion held in July 2002, five separate descendant listings were prepared and distributed. These titles represent the first three. Each booklet begins with the same ten leaves containing "The Story of Heinrich

Loewens and Sara Toews" written by Delores (Loewen) Harder including photocopies of the family documents such as entry on ship passenger lists, homestead applications, church register pages and others. The genealogical listings which follow were compiled by Ralph Thorpe.

Contact: Ralph I. Thorpe, 136 Darlington Private Unit 504, Ottawa, ON K1V 0X6

Queries

Goertzen - I'm looking for any information on Heinrich Goertzen (born 01 November 1815 in Schoenwiese, Chortitza, South Russia, died on 25 November 1874 in Duluth, Minnesota) who married Helena Funk (born 15 March 1816 in Russia, died on 08 April 1894). They married on 08 August 1835 in Chortitza, and had the following children, Hendrich (1836), Tobias (1838), Helena (1839), Jacob (1841), Maria (1846), Abraham (1849), Katarina (1852), Frans (1853), Anna (1856), Sara (1859), and Johan (1864). Contact: Bob Walton, 93 Nature Park Dr., Campbell River, BC V9W 7Z9, phone (250) 923-9214 or e-mail waltonrk@telus.net.

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



A New Year's Wish written by Catharina Thunin (?) of Brunau for 1 January 1783.

The original was brought to Canada by Heinrich and Sara Loewen in 1876, and is currently part of the estate of Katherine (Loewen) Symington. Who is this Catharina and what is her connection to the Loewen family (ie. Heinrich Loewen (1823-1908) and Sara Toews (1827-1889)?

One theory is that Catharina was the daughter of Hans Thun of nearby Jackendorf, baptized into the Baerwalde Flemish Mennonite Church in 1790. Since the average age of baptism was about 20 years of age that would make her about 13 years old when she wrote the New Year's letter. Johann Thun of Jankendorf had 6 children in 1772 and 8 in 1793. Glenn Penner of Guelph who has looked at the census records of the time, thinks this Johann (Hans) is the ancestor of most of the Mennonite Thuns. This family is rare in Canada but better known in the US.

Another theory is the writer of the letter is Catharina Thimm listed in the B.H. Unruh's *Niederländisch-Niederdeutschen Hintergründe* as the husband of Cornelius Wieler who migrated from Prussia to Molotschna in 1818 (p. 365). Can anyone provide information on how any of these families might have been connected to the Heinrich and Sara Loewen family? Contact: Ralph Thorpe, 136 Darlington Private Unit 504, Ottawa, ON K1V 0X6 or e-mail rathorpe@sympatico.ca.

The First Mennonite Sangerfest in Russia

by Peter Letkemann

The first Mennonite *Sangerfest* in Russia took place on 30 May 1893 in the Mennonite Brethren Church of Ruckenau (Molochna). Given the significance of this event for Russian Mennonite music history, it was disappointing to Wesley Berg and myself that no details of the program could be found at the time we undertook our research into Mennonite choral singing many years ago.¹ The second *Sangerfest*, held in Ruckenau the following year on 29 May 1894, received extensive coverage in the *Zions-Bote*,² but it seemed that copies of the *Zions-Bote* for the year 1893 had unfortunately been lost. Other Mennonite newspapers of the period made no mention of the 1893 festival. The only description I found, was a short notice published in September 1893 in the journal of the *Christlicher Sangerbund*.³

Several weeks ago, however, I made the joyful discovery that issues of the *Zions-Bote* for 1892 and 1893 had now indeed been located and that photo copies of these were available in the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg. Leafing through the issues of July and August 1893 I was delighted to find not only one, but three lengthy reports on the first Mennonite *Sangerfest* of 30

May 1893.

The first report was entitled, appropriately enough, “*Unser erstes sudrussische Sangerfest*.”⁴ The unknown author [the lower corner of the page, where the authors name was located, was torn off] gave no details of the *Sangerfest* itself, except to say that seven choirs were present and that two visiting [Baptist] preachers, Kargel and Lehman, spoke during the program. The rest of his article offered a) a rationale in defence of this and any future festivals, and b) the subtle criticism that in the future both choirs and conductors could benefit from the instruction of a professionally trained conductor.

The third report was written by Bernhard Martens (Petrovka) and entitled “*Nachklange zum Sangerfest*.”⁵ Martens also gave few details of the program, writing instead more about what the various speakers had said than about the singing of the choirs. In general, he felt that the choirs harmonized well [“*harmonierte es sehr gut*”], but qualified his praise with the comment that “their accomplishments – in terms of rhythm, tempo, tone production and harmony – were varied” [“*verschieden*”].

In the lengthy report entitled simply “*Ein Sangerfest*”, J. Fast finally provided details of the entire program, including the names of the participating choirs and

speakers, and particulars of the songs sung by the choirs.⁵ The *Sangerfest* began early Sunday morning and continued on into the late afternoon. The morning program included 22 choral selections, several congregational hymns, a lengthy *Gebetsstunde* [prayer meeting], and two *Festreden* by the visiting Baptist preachers Johann Kargel and Samuel Lehman. After the lunch break, the afternoon program presented another 11 choral selections, several congregational hymns, and two messages by *Prediger* Isaak Regehr and David Duerksen.

The festival opened with the song “*Anbetung*” [see photo], sung by the visiting MB choir from Herzenberg (some 200 km north of the Molochna Colony). This was followed by the visiting choir from Bessabotovka (a Baptist settlement near Barvenkovo⁶) singing “*Da bin ich gern*” [see photo]. Other visiting choirs came from the Mennonite Brethren congregations in Andreasfeld and Friedensfeld, and from the neighbouring village of Rosenort (Molochna). They were hosted by the choir of the Ruckenau MB Church. The six choirs sang separately [a total of 22 songs] and also joined in 11 Mass Choir selections. The Mass Choir consisted of the six participating choirs, together with a number of individual singers from other villages. In all, there were a total of about 120 singers.

The musical repertoire was taken almost entirely from the anthologies *Sangerfreund* (1889-1890) and *Liederperlen I* (1891-1893) – edited and published by Isaak Born (1853-1905). Born, together with a selection committee of 3 or 4 fellow conductors, chose the songs from a large variety of German and American songbooks, transcribed them into *Ziffern* notation and published a 4-page leaflet, which was sent to Mennonite [mostly MB] member choirs of the *Sangervereinigung* (choral association) on a monthly basis.

This choral association was affiliated with the *Christlicher Sangerbund* in Germany, founded in 1879.⁷ Isaak Born and his 66-voice choir from Lichtfelde (Molochna) had joined the *Christlicher Sangerbund* in 1886. Given the fact that he was probably the initiator and main organizer of the *Sangerfest*, and one of the most experienced Mennonite choral conductors at the time, it seems

no 1

Der Sangerfreund
erscheint monatlich.
Preis gegen Voraus-
zahlung.
pro Jahr 50 Kop.
per Post 75 „

Sangerfreund

Singet dem Herrn
ein neues Lied. Nf. 98, 1.

Der Sangerfreund
ist zu bestellen beim
Herausgeber Isaak
Born in Licht-
felde, Salzbau-
Gouvernement, Zarren
Sudruß.

1. Jahrgang.
Juli 1889.
Nr. 1.

C dur, a=6. E. S. Lorenz.

Deiter

1. Die frommen Sanger.

mf 5 | 1. 2. 3. 2. | 1. 7. 1. 6. | 5. 3. 5. 5. 5. | 4. 4. 3. 3. |

3 | 3. 4. 5. 4. 3. 4. 5. 4. | 3. 1. 3. 3. 3. | 2. 2. 1. 1. |

1 | 5. 5. 1. 5. 5. 1. | 1. 5. 5. 5. | 5. 5. 5. 5. |

mf 1 | 1. 1. 1. 1. | 2. 3. 4. | 1. 1. 1. 1. | 7. 5. 1. 3. |

1. Da bin ich gern, wo fromme San-ger wei- len, Und frommer Sang im Chor er-
2. bring, Wo lei- je nur im Lie- de tont die Kla- ge Ver-schneht und Him- mels Freu- de
3. Sand; Und wo beim Klan- ge fee- len: vol- ler Lie- der Eich je- ster knupft der Treue Band.

2, 5 | 1. 2. 3. 2. | 1. 7. 1. 6. | 5. 3. 5. 5. 5. | 6. 2. 1. 7. | 1. 5. |

7, 4 | 3. 4. 5. 4. 3. 4. 5. 4. | 3. 1. 3. 3. 3. | 4. 4. 3. 2. | 3. 5. |

5, 5 | 5. 5. 5. 5. 5. 5. 1. | 1. 5. 1. 1. | 1. 6. 5. 5. | 5. 7. |

5, 5 | 1. 1. 1. 1. 2. 3. 4. | 1. 1. 1. 1. | 4. 4. 5. 5. | 1. 7. |

1. Klingt; Die fro- hen Stim- den rasch vor- zuber ei- len Und je- de neue Freu- de bringet.
2. bringt; Wo lei- je nur im Lie- de tont die Kla- ge Und un- term Sai- ten- spiel der- Klinget.
3. Sand; Und wo beim Klan- ge fee- len: vol- ler Lie- der Eich je- ster knupft der Treue Band.

- 1 -

odd that Isaak Born's own choir did not participate in either the 1893 or 1894 *Sängerfest*.

The musical repertoire of all Russian Mennonite choirs consisted of three major musical types or styles – 1) through-composed American anthems or German motets, 2) strophic German *Chorlieder*, and 3) American gospel songs. In this first Mennonite *Sängerfest*, about one-half of the 33 choral selections were of the “Gospel Song” variety; the other 16 selections were divided equally between *Chorlieder* and anthems. The only Russian song in the program was the national anthem, “*Bozhe Tsarya*” [“God Save the Tsar”], sung by the Mass Choir.

None of the *Zions-Bote* reports provide names of the choir conductors for this occasion, but from other sources we can identify two of these. The MB choir from Andreasfeld was conducted by the young Aron Gerhard Sawatzky (1871-1935), who had just taken over the choir that year. Being relatively inexperienced, he and the choir did not attempt any difficult anthems on their own, choosing instead to sing three simple gospel songs.

The MB choir from Friedensfeld was conducted by Bernhard B. Dueck (1869-1937), who had begun conducting the choir the previous year (1892). They chose to sing four selections on their own: two gospel songs and two anthems by the American composer H.R. Palmer (both printed in *Liederperlen*, but borrowed from the popular anthology *Geistliche*

Chöre).

Being the first of its kind, it seems that the idea of a *Sängerfest* was greeted with a certain degree of suspicion by some in the Mennonite community. But all of the reports conclude that it was a great success. The large Rückenau MB church was filled to capacity, and in spite of the subtle and “implied” criticisms voiced above by two of the reporters, it seems that all those present were unanimous in regarding this first Mennonite *Sängerfest* as a great “blessing,” and as a harbinger of more and better things to come.

Endnotes:

1. Wesley Berg, *From Russia with Music, A Study of the Mennonite Choral Singing Tradition in Canada* (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1985), 22-23; Peter Letkemann, “The Hymnody and Choral Music of Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1915,” Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1985.
2. Isaak Born, “Unser zweites Sängerfest”, *Zions-Bote*, 18 Jul 1894, 2; Friedrich Schweiger, „Ein Besuch unter den Sängern in Russland“, *Zions-Bote*, 26 Sep 1894, 2-3.
3. *Sängergruß* 15, Nr. 9 (September 1893), p. 69
4. *Zions-Bote*, 12 Jul 1893, 3.
5. *Zions-Bote*, 16 Aug 1893, 3.
5. *Zions-Bote*, 26 Jul 1893, 3-4.
6. P.M. Friesen, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft*, p. 451.
7. Peter Letkemann, “The *Christlicher Sängerbund* and Mennonite Choral Singing in Russia,” *Mennonite Life*, Vol. 41 no. 4 (Dec 1986), 4-10.

New twist on Glamour

Strasbourg, France - Sarah Thompson, the North American representative on Mennonite World Conference's youth and young adult committee, AMIGOS, was named one of Glamour magazine's “Top 10 College Women” in the USA. She was featured in their October 2005 issue.

Thompson, 21, is a senior women's studies and international studies major and student government president at Spelman College, a historically Black college for women in Atlanta, Georgia. Known in the college community as an antiwar activist, she also recently interned at the U.S. Justice Department to “learn how to effect change from within the system.”

In the feature, Thompson said that “the act of forgiveness is essential to social change,” which reflects her Mennonite faith. Currently, she is active in the Atlanta Mennonite Fellowship but her home congregation is Prairie Street Mennonite Church in Elkhart, Indiana.

Thompson entered the contest for a bit of fun; winning was not a serious ambition. “My friend convinced me to apply. I didn't think Glamour would want anything to do with a young activist Mennonite whose history taught her to question critically mainstream culture's emphasis on physical appearance, makeup and fashion. I was surprised when I received the call.” The contest used to be for the “Best-Dressed College Girls.” “I certainly would not have won that contest!” she says.

“I decided to apply for the Glamour contest because I wanted to affirm all women and men who are working for positive social change and doing antiwar work,” she said. Thompson's story most likely marks the inaugural time that the word “Mennonite” has appeared in the magazine.

One of her professors said, “In my 23 years of teaching, she's the most impressive student I've ever met. I want her to run for President one day.”

Thompson is not nearly as concerned about a presidential race as she is about serving the youth and young adults of North America through the AMIGOS committee.

“We are working to create a global network of young Anabaptists. If appearing in Glamour can help this cause, that's great!” she remarks.

Thompson won a \$2,000 cash prize and a trip to New York City.

Mennonite World Conference media report

The image shows a page from the 'Sängerfreund' magazine, August 1889, No. 2. At the top, there is a decorative title box with the text 'Sängerfreund' and 'Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied. Pf. 98, 1.' Below this, there are two smaller boxes with text: 'Der Sängerefreund erscheint monatlich. Preis gegen Vorauszahlung. pro Jahr 60 Kop. per Post 75' and 'Der Sängerefreund ist zu bestellen beim Herausgeber Isaak Born in Sichtfeld, Salzbath, Gouvernem. Saurien Südrussl.' The main part of the page is a musical score for a hymn titled 'Anbetung'. The score is in F major (F dur, a=3) and 3/4 time. It consists of three systems of musical notation with lyrics in German. The lyrics are: '1. Alle Welt be: te an und bring' Eh: re dem Herrn, Der als Hei: land zu uns Sündern kam, und in 2. Alle Welt be: te an und froh: lo: de mit Macht; Denn der Him: mel ist uns auf: ge: than, Got: tes 3. Alle Welt be: te an und leg freubig Ihm dar, Was die Lieb von ihrem Kind be: gehrt! O welch' 1. hei: li: ge Lie: be sich wil: lig und gern für uns op: fer: te am Kreu: zes: stam: 2. Fre: de und Heil ist nun wie: der gebracht; Kommt und eilt solch Er: be zu ent: pfang! 3. herr: li: chen Dienst übt die fe: li: ge Schar, De: ren al: les ih: rem Gott ge: hört!



Mennonite Heritage Centre

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MHC News

Since January 2006 CMU student **Rachelle Friesen** of Waldheim has been working several hours a week assisting with the sorting and filing of church bulletins received from our Mennonite congregations from across Canada. She has also assisted with sorting and filing serials and periodicals. This student help is a big assistance to our Centre and very much appreciated.

Sharon Brown who worked on the Christian Heritage Library sermon collection project in 2002 has also come to the Centre regularly since January. She spent some time as a volunteer editing encyclopedia entries for the Global Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) project. Currently she has been hired to turn biographies published in *Preservings* magazine into entries for GAMEO. This project is being made possible through a grant from the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.

Edward and Elisabeth Enns are translating the diary of Jacob P. Janzen (1880-1963) which the Centre acquired in 2004. The diary which the Centre holds spans over 35 years, beginning in Russia where he worked in the Bethania Mental Hospital, through the years of revolution and unrest leading to the emigration from Russia, to the years of farming in the Springridge area near Pincher Creek, Alberta. The Enns's need to be commended for their dedicated service and contribution to future generations.

Archivist **Conrad Stoesz** continues to process additional collections. Some of the more recent collections that have been processed include the Cornelius Krause fonds, the William Janzen fonds, the David D. Janzen fonds and the Jacob Hoemsen fonds.

Conrad is on the planning committee for a major conference on the experience of Conscientious Objectors which is scheduled to be held at the University of Winnipeg in Fall 2006. Further details will follow.

A.R.

James Urry, Mennonites and Politics

Well known anthropologist James Urry of New Zealand launched his new book at the Centre to a crowd of over 150 people on March 4, 2006. The book is entitled *Mennonites, Politics, and Peoplehood: Europe – Russia - Canada 1525 to 1980*. Starting with the Schleithem Confession of 1527, which stated that rulers obtain their position and power because of violence (or threat of it) and that the participation of Christians in such violence was not appropriate, the book follows Mennonites' understanding and involvement with civic politics.

Urry traces the political views of Mennonites in Holland, Prussia and Russia and pointed out in his address that Prussian Mennonites were wary of constitutions where rights were enshrined into laws and rather sought to live in places where they received privileges (*Privilegia*) from autocratic leaders who could not be removed from office at the whim of the masses. This is one reason Mennonites chose to deal with the Russian Tzarina – the largest autocrat in the world at the time.

Urry was surprised to find Manitoba Mennonites involved in civic politics as early as the 1890s with the race between Enoch Winkler and William Hespeler in the riding of Rosenfeld in 1899. In some Mennonite gatherings Hespeler was called "our candidate" and people were encouraged to vote for him. In the end Hespeler won by 17 votes.



James Urry greeting George Richert during the book signing at the Heritage Centre, March 4, 2006. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz

Urry also highlighted the 1973 Manitoba provincial election where Conservative candidate Alfred Penner took returning officer George K. Epp to court. Ministers were not allowed to be returning officers and Epp at the time was a lay minister. Urry was intrigued that a Mennonite would take a fellow Mennonite to court over politics.

The book also deals with changing dynamics in the Mennonite communities with each wave of migration and the changes that they brought to the way politics were viewed. Differences between denominations and urban/rural Mennonites are also discussed in the book.

After Urry's introduction to the book he entertained questions from the audience, followed by a book signing. Sales of the book were brisk. Copies can be ordered from the Mennonite Heritage Centre for \$27.95 plus applicable taxes, shipping and handling.

CDS



CMU student Rachelle Friesen assisting Heritag Centre Administrative Assistant Connie Wiebe with sorting and filing periodicals. Photo by Alf Redekopp.



Front rows (l-r): Sr. Therese Bilodeau (Missionary Oblates of St. Boniface), Sr. Agnes Breton & Lynn Champagne (Filles de la Croix), Kimberley Hiebert (St. Gianna Parish), (Myrna Brownlie & Doreen Oliver (Diocese of Rupertsland), Sr. Gerarda Pura (St. Benedict's Monastery). Back rows (l-r): Wolodymyr Senchuk (Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Canada), Darren Pries, Conrad Stoesz (Mennonite), Diane Haglund (United Church of Canada), Ken Reddig & Alf Redekopp (Mennonite). Photo Credit: Lorie Mayer.

Religious Archives Group

Nine religious archives in Manitoba met in late January at the Centre for MB Studies in order learn from each other as well as work together in common projects. Of concern to the gathering was how best to instill a sense of history within each religious denomination or group, as well as properly keep the records in the best possible format.

Consensus was that the group should work together in promoting such projects as Christian Unity Week, promoting Heritage Sunday or Christian History Week as well as circulating displays such as the *Mendis Photography Display* which is comprised of photographs of a wide variety of church buildings in Manitoba.

The group has been active within the broader Association for Manitoba Archives for a good many years, but more recently has found renewed energy to address concerns and issues among religious archives. It was noted continually throughout the meeting that the group needs to work together more closely rather than each archives remaining isolated within their respective religious affiliations. KR

Recent Accessions

1. William Schroeder has donated a book on the construction of Dutch windmills entitled: *Molens* and written by Ir. F. Stokhuyzen. It is profusely illustrated with drawings and photographs.
2. Saskatchewan conference and congregational records including the congregations of: Regina Chinese Community Church, North Battleford Fellowship, Regal Heights MB Church, Sunrise Community Church and Central MB Church. Donated by the Saskatchewan Conference.
3. Anna Thiessen diaries, photographs, and correspondence covering her time at the Herbert Bible School, Biola Bible school in Los Angeles and her time at the Mary Martha Home in Winnipeg, Manitoba. -- 1913-1976. Donated by Doug Schulz.
4. Peter P. Isaak original and published poetry, stories, sermons, and autobiography. -- 1926-1961. Donated by Frieda Rogers. CDS



CENTRE FOR
**Mennonite
Brethren
Studies** IN CANADA

1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6

Oral History Project

It is often difficult for people to write their stories and adequately describe their relationship to their family, church and community. While for some people writing comes relatively easily, for others it is a task and chore in which they do not readily engage.

As each generation passes, the stories of faith, relationships and community history become lost. In order to capture more of these stories, the Centre for MB Studies is embarking on a long-range oral history project and concentrating initially, though not exclusively, on those congregations and church members whose stories are not well known.

To facilitate this project, the Centre has purchased a very special piece of equipment, a CD recorder that will enable the interviews to be recorded directly in digital format. This will enable easier access as well as enhance long-term storage in a secure format. In the past, oral history projects were recorded onto cassette tapes in analog format. The process of transferring from analog into digital format was laborious and often quality was lost in the process.

As with all oral history programs, people being interviewed will need to give permission to the Centre for research use of their oral histories. This ensures that personal privacy and legal requirements are properly met.

We ask our readers to identify people who they feel should be interviewed for this project. Please send suggestions to either Conrad Stoesz or Ken Reddig. We will then make the proper contacts and initiate the interview process. The broader the participation, the better information we will be able to garner for a fuller understanding of the story of the Mennonite Brethren Church and community. KR

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has received a request from Germany for back issues of the *Mennonitische Rundschau*. They are looking for the years 1946-1978. If you have extra copies of any year (including earlier than 1946) please contact the Centre.



Pacific Grace Mission Chapel / Pacific Grace MB Church Photo credit: CMBS NP 149-01-5842

Chinese MB Churches

(cont'd from p. 2)

expansion of the building began in 1984, the church became financially self-supporting in 1985, and by 1988 the church had paid off its mortgage and begun a missions program. In 1995, a larger building at 3215 School Ave. was purchased, with the church borrowing \$580,000 from the bank and \$190,000 interest free from members of the congregation. The new mortgages were paid off by 2000.

The two Chinese MB churches established in the 1970s were located in Vancouver, where a significant number of Chinese were living. But during the 1980s, churches were also established as a result of outreach programs to refugees from Southeast Asia as well as students from Hong Kong. In Saskatchewan the Regina Chinese Community Church and in Manitoba the Winnipeg Chinese MB Church were founded under these circumstances. The high number of overseas students created a special challenge for these churches – because the turnover was high, establishing a solid leadership and financial stability was difficult.

Three other Chinese churches were also established, one in Scarborough, Ont. (Grace Gospel Church, Chinese) and two in Vancouver (Faith MB Church and Vancouver Life Chinese MB Church), but all three closed within 10 years. Faith MB Church was officially a “multi-ethnic church” but was composed mostly of young Chinese, particularly students, who wanted to worship in English. Vancouver Life Chinese MB Church worshipped in Swatowese, a Chinese dialect spoken in eastern Guantong and Fujian provinces.

In 1986, Chu Chun-Chong (Aymon Chu) began a Chinese outreach program called Gideon Chinese MB Church through Killarney Park MB Church in Vancouver. Although the ministry closed down for a time, its members later became the founding members of Vancouver Chinese MB Church. The churches in Regina and Winnipeg have continued to minister despite the challenges they face.

Each congregation has its unique and individual story. While this brief overview concludes in 1996, as with all churches, there have been successes and failures. But from its humble beginnings over 50 years ago as a mission within the inner-city, today the result of that mission is 20 Chinese MB churches in seven cities and in three countries. Fourteen of these churches are in Vancouver’s Lower Mainland.

These Chinese Mennonite Brethren churches, in concert with the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, now have their own publication known today as the *MB Chinese Herald*. They are a vibrant community of believers who identify with the Mennonite Brethren in Canada. And while some of them may prefer to speak a different language, their story has the similarities of persecution, struggle for identity, within the larger Anglo-Canada landscape much like those previous immigrants of Russian Mennonite descent.

Joseph Kwan is the editor of MB Chinese Herald.

Sources

J.M. Bumsted, *The Peoples of Canada: A Post-Confederation History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2004)

Joseph Kwan, “We are in the same family: The Growth of Chinese MB Churches”, *MB Herald*, Vol. 40, No. 21, 2001, pp. 1-8

Peter Penner, *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada* (Winnipeg: Kindred Press, 1987)

Index of Russian Mennonite Martyrs

An English index of the contents for the two-volume *Mennonitische Märtyrer...* by Aron A. Toews has been completed by Harold Jantz and can be acquired by contacting either the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies or the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. See contact information p. 2.

Letter to the Editors

Re. Review by Roland Sawatzky of David Quiring’s *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision* (*Mennonite Historian*, Vol. XXXI, No. 3 (Sept. 2005))

I read with interest the review of David Quiring’s book, *The Mennonite Old Colony Vision*, and hoped as I did that there might be some challenges to the position Quiring took to that “vision,” but in vain.

Surely one might expect that a careful observer of the Old Colony way—and a reviewer with a genuine interest in their welfare—might show some sympathy for the disadvantage and hurt experienced by thousands of Old Colony families, but there appears to be none.

I’ve read Quiring’s book carefully and found it greatly troubling. Quite frankly, I can’t understand an academic and historian who can examine closely the situation of the Old Colony people and apparently see the illiteracy, poverty, unsustainable population growth, landlessness, the “blind following” demanded of members by ministers and leaders, etc., and yet never express compassion for the plight of these people or see the drive for isolation as bringing unnecessary harm.

There are many problems with Quiring’s book. Some are historical. Old Colony leaders don’t know their own history back farther than a few generations. Even though they promise to pass the church on to the next generation exactly as they think they got it, they don’t really know where that vision of the church originated. So using a form of High German in church and school is a sacred duty to their forefathers, even though they rarely use it otherwise and for many it is virtually a foreign tongue. And Quiring doesn’t help when he relates a version of their linguistic history that is clearly faulty.

He doesn’t appear to know that those forefathers once worshipped in Low German and used a Bible (there was a Low German Bible and also the Dutch Biestkens Bible) that they could read in Low German. They made the switch to High German in the church and school in the central Vistula region of Prussia and Poland because of the growing political and economic ascendancy of central Germany—very worldly influences—over the more Low German-speaking area around Danzig.

Some are religious. While Quiring doesn't make as pointed a matter of it as reviewer Sawatzky, he certainly does treat the Old Colony as though they were an ethnic group. Nowhere in the book does he explore the nature of their relation to Jesus Christ. But the underpinnings for the walls of suspicion and their insistence on remaining separated physically from other groups are their beliefs about what the Bible teaches. These include such ideas as the obligation of leaders not to bring change or the fear that any rule of the church is a rule given by God.

Both Quiring and Sawatzky appear to think that it is wrong for others to challenge such understandings, Sawatzky almost more than Quiring. But when has historic or New Testament Christianity ever given up its obligation to witness to its faith or to engage other Christians from within its understanding of the faith? That's a denial of the very essence of the life in Christ.

This isn't about embracing a conservative way of life. Anyone who has followed Amish Mennonite work among the Old Colony knows that they have been more explicit than almost any of the MCC workers in challenging tenets of Old Colony belief and practice. Among other things, they have tried to help bring an understanding of how to distinguish between the commands of God and man-made rules that a community might develop.

Some of the problems with the book are simply human. No one can enter into the experience of the Old Colony people without recognizing the suffering thousands have experienced simply because of the outcomes of their beliefs and practices. Large numbers live in poverty. In the most conservative settings, only the landholders have voting rights. The more successful become ministers and community leaders. The less successful get little sympathy from them. The *Mennonitische Post* reported last year that in Bolivia dozens were excommunicated when they went to work for Bolivians out of need. The same happens when they place rubber on their equipment at certain seasons. When the work is over, the practice is that they apologize and are received back into the church. It creates a debilitating hypocrisy.

The poverty of their education also means they resist innovation and change which their farming should demand. They can't speak the language of the country well—if at all—and find it difficult to

negotiate in their own interests. The result is that too often they are taken advantage of, or simply make poor financial deals. Some have succumbed to the temptation to become drug mules to bolster their incomes. Others become alcoholics to escape the harshness of their life.

What should one say about the resistance of church and community leaders to even such--it would seem to most of us--harmless or positively helpful activities as sports, youth gatherings, Bible studies or singsongs for the young people?

One could go on. I find it troubling in the extreme that Quiring can document many of the ills among the Old Colony and still appear to argue that it was too bad that many could "escape to Canada" to cope with their poverty or that MCC should have interjected itself in their needs.

Do Quiring and Sawatzky feel any real empathy with the people whose worlds are so shrunk because of a view of the outside and of faith that they've inherited. Why is it that we can profess such concern for the needs of our world and yet show so little heart for the people who are children of the same villages we lived in only a century and a half ago? It should weigh on our collective Mennonite conscience! The harms and disadvantages these people experience flow directly out of the religious understandings and worldview they've acquired. Challenging it is no sin!

Harold Jantz
Winnipeg, MB
Sept. 28, 2005

Re: Response to "Mennonite Old Colony Vision" Review

While I certainly respect Mr. Jantz's emotive response to my review of Quiring's book, as well as his concern for the many disadvantaged members of the Old Colony church in Mexico, I would like to make a few things clear about the nature of the review itself. My purpose was to outline the qualities of Quiring's analysis of Old Colony life and the society's contact with MCC. My purpose was not to judge the Old Colony system.

Quiring provides solid evidence of the nature of ethnic boundary maintenance in Old Colony settlements. While Jantz maintains that "the underpinnings for the walls of suspicion and their insistence on remaining separated physically from other groups are their beliefs about what the

Bible teaches", this does not change the fact that by any modern definition of "ethnicity"¹ they are an ethnic group. The logic of social structures within an ethnic enclave go far beyond "beliefs about what the Bible teaches" and include a worldview based on decades of historical experience, interethnic relations, economic systems, and individual decisions.

As for Quiring's position on the role of MCC in Mexico, the fact is there have been unrelenting tensions between conservative Mennonite colonies (in Mexico, Bolivia, and Paraguay) and MCC for decades, and Quiring goes to some length to try to explain them. Although I chose not to judge this issue personally, I believe his "negative" stance towards MCC should be viewed with some seriousness by those who are truly interested in helping Mennonites in Mexico. For the record, it should be noted that contrary to Jantz's view, Quiring points out many times the real assistance Old Colony individuals have received from MCC. This help is contextualized within a larger understanding of MCC activities and Old Colony power structures.

¹Barth, Fredrik 1969 *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*. Boston, Little Brown.
Bentley, G.C. 1987 "Ethnicity and Practice". *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 29: 24-55.

Roland Sawatzky
Winnipeg, MB
Nov. 16, 2005

Upcoming Publication

The book *Creating Communities. A History of Mennonites in Manitoba* by John J. Friesen is planned to be published later this year. It will cover the Mennonite story from the earliest settlements in the 1870s to the 1990s. The study is inclusive, encompassing the various communities and church groupings. The themes include health care, community settlements, political involvement, education, peace, theological developments, service, mission, and more. All Manitoba Mennonites should be able to find their place somewhere in this study.

One of the stories of interest is that of Dr. Mrs. Katherine Thiessen from the village of Hoffnungsfeld near Winkler. Starting in the early 1880s, she served as a medical practitioner for more than 20

(cont'd on p. 11)

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Harvey L. Dyck, John R. Staples and John B. Toews, comp., ed., and trans. *Nestor Makhno and the Eichenfeld Massacre: A Civil War Tragedy in a Ukrainian Mennonite Village* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2004). Pb., pp. 115.

This slim volume brings together the accounts of Mennonite witnesses and Ukrainian recollections of the 1919 massacres by Makhno forces in the Iasykovo area with historical analysis of the civil war setting in which they took place. The occasion was the memorial service held at the former village of Eichenfeld in May 2001 to honour the victims and work toward a peaceful healing of memories. The combination is both moving and informative.

Helmut T. Huebert and Springfield Publishers of Winnipeg have provided a steady stream of material on the Mennonite experience in Russia/USSR ever since the first edition of the Schroeder-Huebert *Mennonite Historical Atlas* first appeared in 1990. Currently Huebert is working on a volume entitled "Mennonites in the Cities of Imperial Russia." Monographs on Barvenkovo (50 pages), Millerovo (83 pp), Melitopol (33 pp) and Orechov (20 ppp) were released in limited circulation in 2005. Any one researching family history in one of these locations will find in these chapters a wealth of information, including maps, photographs, lists of businesses, churches and events of interest to the larger Mennonite community.

Hilda J. Born, *Third Daughter: Living in a Global Village* (Abbotsford, BC: Imprint Press Publishers, 2006), Pb., pp. 178. This autobiography describes in some detail life in southern Saskatchewan during the great Depression and in the Fraser valley of British Columbia later on. Each of the nine chapters is subdivided into generally short topical sub-units. This does not make for a smooth chronological story, but the author's skill in writing results in a very readable social history narrative. A dated timeline and concise genealogy in the appendix allow the reader to place the author and the story in historical and geographical context.

The biography of Bishop David Toews is back in print. The slightly revised second edition corrects some unfortunate errors that slipped into the first printing

and adds some new photos and information that has come to the author's attention since the first edition came out in 2002. Helmut Harder, *David Toews Was Here 1870-1947* (Winnipeg: CMU Press, 2006), Pb., 346 pp.; \$32.

Another Book Note

A new book by Abraham Friesen, Professor of Renaissance & Reformation History, Emeritus, at the University of California at Santa Barbara, has just been published by Kindred Productions and the Historical Commission of the US & Canadian Conferences of Mennonite Brethren Churches, entitled *In Defense of Privilege: Russian Mennonites and the State before and during World War I*. Price: \$39.99 (pb), \$49.99(hdc).

Abe Dueck, currently the Executive Secretary of the MB Historical Commission, writes in describing the book that during the past fifty years there has been an explosion of literature on the Mennonite experience in Russia and the Soviet Union. Memoirs, biographies, novels, family histories, village histories, general histories and thematic studies, have all contributed to the wealth of material available to contemporary Mennonite scholars and other readers. The opening of a number of archives in the former Soviet Union and the microfilming of many documents previously not available have added to the richness of primary sources in recent decades.

Most of the recent studies, however, have belonged to the general category of social history. Relatively little has been done to advance our understanding of the intellectual and religious history and identity of Mennonites during the Russian phase of the Mennonite experience. Mennonites in Russia had already migrated several times since their beginnings in the 16th century because of persecution and hardship and the fear of loss of special privileges known as "Privilegia". A large number had left Imperial Russia in the 1870s because of the government's attempts to assimilate them into the nation state. The majority remained and prospered, but not without having to resist new attempts to withdraw many of their privileges. In the early part of the 19th century, particularly after 1910, the pressures became increasingly intense and called for very concerted

efforts to respond to the accusations such as the charge that they were really Germans and therefore could not be trusted. Were they ethnically German or Dutch? And how did this relate to their religious identity?

The fundamental issue that was at the center of debates within the community, as well as in negotiations with the authorities was: "Who are the Mennonites?" This question is still one of the most critical questions for Mennonites today. Both within and outside the Mennonite community this question still begs for a definitive response.

Abe Friesen's study is the most thorough study to date of the developments pertaining to the special Mennonite privileges and the struggle for identity within the Russian Mennonite community. Friesen carefully analyzes these developments and places them in the context of the history of the Anabaptist/Mennonite movement since the 16th century. He also seeks to address the question of the relevance of that experience for Mennonites today.

This account is a truly fascinating one which will most certainly intrigue the scholar and general reader alike.

Caobo Company

(cont'd from p. 1)

now Molochansk. One hundred or more Red Guards, reinforced by well-armed desperados from the Black Sea Fleet, spent ten days looting and terrorizing the region. Even before the "Halbstadt Tage," though, confiscation of estate lands, destruction of buildings, and theft of moveable property by local peasants had commenced. The Molochna never recovered, and the lucky ones left Russia in the 1920s, many settling in Canada.

Molochna 2005

Now a part of independent Ukraine, the Molochna region remains deeply depressed economically and socially. Once a town of about 20,000, Halbstadt-Molochansk has shrunk to about 7,000. Perhaps over half of Molochantsi are elderly with minimal government pensions and few social services. Many old Mennonite buildings survive, but are becoming increasingly dilapidated. Only two or three businesses remain active. Molochansk boasted one of the largest grain elevators in Russia, still standing, but the huge silos are said to be nearly empty. Broken windows point to perfectly

good apartment buildings that are no longer inhabited; most other buildings appear depressingly run down. The surrounding fields, once belonging to large collective farms, have now been broken up into small plots and these titled to former farm workers. Too small to farm profitably, the little plots are now leased back to wealthy landowners. In summer the fields are filled with sunflowers and ripening wheat. There remains a large state-owned cattle breeding station near Molochansk. Mennonite Centre Ukraine, the primary humanitarian organization in town, opened its doors in the renovated *Mädchenschule* in 2001. Known in Canada as “Friends of Mennonite Centre Ukraine,” our group has underwritten some two hundred-fifty humanitarian projects ranging from emergency medical aid to computer training, from scholarships for local university students to city dumpsters.

Paul Willms and the Caobo Company

“Caobo,” if the reader wonders, is an unwitting mistransliteration of the Cyrillic “Slovo,” or “Word” in Russian. The “company” consists mainly of CEO Paul H. Willms, a real-estate broker-developer from Everett, Washington, and his partner and company president, patent attorney Boris Tankhilevich, a Russian American from California. Willms is of Mennonite background; the company has no other Mennonite connection. On a trip to Ukraine last year, the partners saw the rich Molochna farmland once belonging to our relatives, observed the depressed economic situation, and had an inspiration: why not start a tiny corporation, sell stock to wealthy Mennonites, and then use the capital to lobby the Ukraine government for the return of Mennonite land—somewhere between one-half million and one million acres—confiscated under communism? Taking ownership of this vast tract of land for free, the company could then attract large investment banks, develop agribusiness on a massive scale, introduce Western-style farming methods, build a large tourist center, plant vineyards, and sell real estate. Foreign investment would stimulate the depressed economy, jobs would be created for unemployed Ukrainians, and the partners would make a lot of money. They propose to accomplish this by “harnessing” western technology and know-how. Products would include wheat, canola, potatoes, wine, and “private label” mineral water.

Ultimately Caobo Company would invest up to US \$2 billion (*Prospectus*, p. 8).

Flaws in the plan

In its prospectus Caobo is described as “a planned real estate investment firm” whose mission is “to acquire the Mennonite lands of Ukraine through restitution, and to be the corporate owner/steward overseeing their long-term, profitable development” (p. 2). In order for this to happen, however, the Ukraine Parliament would need to pass a special Restitution Law—a kind of new “Privilegium”—to transfer to Caobo, representing Mennonite descendants, ownership of the land. No such law is contemplated, and various political factions in Ukraine oppose even selling land to foreign companies, let alone giving it away. Current Ukraine law prohibits the sale of land to foreigners. Second, Caobo cannot legitimately claim to represent the Mennonites dispossessed over eighty years ago. Third, Western know-how and investment clearly offer no panacea for Ukraine; the answers to Ukraine’s economic woes will need grassroots Ukrainian remedies. Finally, the “restitution” envisioned by Caobo does not mean “restoring” the land to Mennonites but taking it away from current Ukrainian owners and giving it solely to Caobo Company.

Notion of “restitution.”

The Caobo principals assume that Mennonites would want to repossess their ancestors’ farms and estates and that this would offer emotional closure for the wrong done to parents and grandparents. While it is true that Chortitza and Molochna, along with other Mennonite settlements, often seem like sacred places to those whose roots are there, it is unlikely that descendants, now fully integrated into North American society, would desire to reclaim the old property from current inhabitants. And if the memories of violence and dispossession do indeed linger across generations, how would investing in the Caobo scheme lay them finally to rest?

More to the point, even before the Russian Revolution, Mennonites felt ambivalent about the prosperity they had achieved in the Russia, often at the expense of cheap Russian-Ukrainian labor. Some Mennonite leaders of the revolutionary period, such as Elder Heinrich Unruh of Halbstadt and prominent publisher Abram Kroeker, came to believe that the destruction of the Molochna community expressed God’s

judgment. For too long, in their view, Mennonites had flaunted their wealth and turned a blind eye to the poverty of the peasants. Similarly, the theme runs deep in Anabaptist tradition that our destiny is to suffer persecution and periodic loss of material possessions. We may even welcome such loss as a sign of our “chosenness” and as a condition of our return to a living faith. Sacred though many Mennonites feel this land to be, it would cut against the grain for them to step forward now to reclaim possessions that were only transitory to begin with, particularly if it meant ejecting the current owners.

Authentic restitution

The Caobo plan calls for Mennonite reentry into Ukraine in a way that would make a difference economically for a frightfully depressed rural area. There is nothing wrong with this notion. As Mennonites we have both a historical mission and a humanitarian mandate to return to Ukraine. We may no longer own the land, but we do “own” an important piece of Ukrainian history; it is an authentic form of restitution to give that history back to Ukrainians as they seek to shape a new national identity. Moreover, restoration of the broken relationships among Mennonites and their Ukrainian-Russian neighbors calls for a strong, imaginative humanitarian effort, one that should include economic development. Unworkable as the Caobo scheme may be, it may spur humanitarian organizations like my own to take a closer look at the possibilities for economic development.

David P. Sudermann is a member of the Board of Director of the Friends of the Mennonite Centre in Ukraine.

Upcoming Publication

(cont’d from p.9)

years. Even though Mennonites were at first wary of a woman medical person, she was eventually widely accepted within the community. When medical professionals moved into Morden and opened a hospital, she was opposed by them, and sued, likely because of the competition she provided. She refused to defend herself in court because she did not think it was appropriate for a Mennonite Christian to participate in a court battle. She suffered the losses, and eventually stopped practicing.

Many other stories are included in this glimpse into the life of Mennonites in Manitoba. Look for further announcements about this book.

Book Reviews

Marjorie Hildebrand, comp. and editor. *Reflections of a Prairie Community: A Collection of Stories and Memories of Burwalde S.D. #529* (Winkler, MB: Friends of the former School District of Burwalde #529, 2004), Hdc., 160 pp. and David Sawatzky. *Halbstadt Heritage: Halbstadt, Strassberg, Blumental (Houston) 1879-2005* (Altona, MB: Halbstadt Heritage Book Committee, 2005), Hdc., 404 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

A body of historical literature on the former West Reserve is much in the making. Fifty years ago the still very useful macro-works of E.K. Francis (*In Search of Utopia* (1955) and John H. Warkentin (*The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba* (1960), published in 2000) set the stage for a host of more narrowly-focused monographs which have appeared since then.

Henry J. Gerbrandt's *Adventure in Faith* on the Bergthaler Church of Manitoba (existing mostly in the West Reserve) came along in 1970. Frank Brown's *A History of Winkler* came out in 1973, and *The Brauns of Osterwick*, a family study by Peter Brown, followed a year later. Village studies of Reinland and Gnadenthal came off the press in 1976 and 1982 respectively. Two years later, in 1984, the RM of Rhineland published *The Rural Municipality of Rhineland: Volost and Municipality 1884-1984*, written by Gerhard J. Ens.

This is no exhaustive list for publishing up to that time. It simply offers examples of how research and writing developed in those years. Village and town studies, too numerous to list here, began to proliferate after that. New studies on West Reserve geography as well as studies on Winkler, Reinfeld and other local communities are in progress. The West Reserve Historical Series, generated by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Local History Committee, with its three volumes already out, is strongly suggesting a future agenda for significant themes to tackle in the years ahead.

This review deals with the latest community studies published in the region. Halbstadt and Burwalde were two early Mennonite villages of the West Reserve, in opposite corners of the area,

to the southeast (not far from Emerson) and the northwest (not far from Morden), respectively. Halbstadt, its new history book tells us, had mostly Bergthalers in its homesteader list, while Burwalde families belonged to the Reinlaender Gemeinde. That meant for most of the Halbstadt people an initial time of residence in the East Reserve (1874-ca. 1878) whereas the Burwalde families came with a Mennonite immigrant influx that began on the Red River at Fort Dufferin just east of the West Reserve in 1875. The Halbstadt history represents a larger area, representing three school district (village designated) localities, whereas Burwalde originated as a single school district community.

Apart from these somewhat external contrasts in the experience of these village groups, the books present a number of parallels in experience, and the telling of their stories. Both communities were originally Mennonite street villages (Burwalde in the shape of a T) which, however, dissolved before 1900. For Halbstadt this meant a shift from a community south of the Post Road to an area somewhat to the north of its original location. In Burwalde this change brought a number of Bergthaler families into the area as originals moved to their farmsteads, or even west to Saskatchewan.

Each of the books has a central section (proportionately considerably greater for the Halbstadt volume, than in the Burwalde book) dedicated to short family sketches, written by family members if possible, and usually included with at least one photo per family. The profiles range from very brief to quite substantial with a good deal of most interesting related matter.

Each volume has a series of theme chapters, not strictly chronological but indicative of the vital and varied life which was to be found in these rural communities. School life, with club work and sports, for instance, is highlighted in each. One can read about church activities (Burwalde was a founding centre for the Mennonite Brethren church and Halbstadt had the Bergthaler church which still exists--though not as Bergthaler), general community life, agricultural activity as the main form of making a living, crisis times like floods (each community had its creek, and low lands) and war-time, business (more so in the case of Halbstadt which actually developed a business

centre) and all manner of miscellaneous stories (like the Brummtopp experience at Halbstadt, etc. Reunions have obviously played a big part in keeping a sense of community alive in both cases.

Both volumes are well produced in hardcover and strong bindings. Quite narrow margins make the Halbstadt book look a bit "over-packed", but for those for whom this was and is home, it will not be too much. They are profusely illustrated with good reproductions--clearly an interest factor even for people unfamiliar with the communities. Rather excellent landholding maps can be found in both books. The Halbstadt volume provides a useful index; the Burwalde book makes do without.

Some readers might have preferred a more chronological arrangement scheme in both instances so one could relate various aspects of community experience more easily to each other. The Burwalde book has gone into a third printing (each run relatively small), but some problems have survived all three editions. One reader has pointed out that page 1, bottom, should read, "traders", not "raiders", page 2 should have a reference to La Verendrye's Missouri Trail (not Misson), that the map on page 4 should really be titled "Burwalde Village and Homesteaders 1878-1884), and that on the same page the Menno Canuck line has not been positioned quite right. It should be one half mile further east down the middle of Section 23-3-5W.

Readers may wonder about the location of Waldorf north of Halbstadt since maps and indexes generally do not seem to include it (*Halbstadt*, p.10). The use of the abbreviations "Sask." and "Man." within regular prose sections seems somewhat informal at times (e.g. Halbstadt, p. 13...province of Sask.). In general, proof reading has been quite good and typos kept to a minimum in both volumes.

Community histories will provide the backbone for broader historical treatments of West Reserve themes. These two volumes make a significant contribution here, especially with their memorable preservation of stories, past and present which make them so valuable in their own right.

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