

# Mennonite Historian

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



Ernest Dyck with some early students at the Institut Biblique Laval in Montreal. CMBS Photo Collection NP130-09-022.

## A Quebec Story: New Beginnings for the Mennonite Brethren

By Susan Huebert

Sometimes, a new vision can come out of turmoil. The 1960s were turbulent times in Canada and around the world, but one exciting result of the many changes that occurred was the beginning of the Mennonite Brethren church in Quebec. From its modest beginnings in door-to-door ministries to established and growing congregations, the Quebec Mennonite Brethren church has had a varied and dynamic history.

The mid-twentieth century was a time of change in Quebec. Radical transformations had been happening in the province since the late 1940s when the Quiet Revolution broke the power of the Roman Catholic church over society and the people became increasingly secular and nationalistic, the latter fed in part by the province's relatively minor role in Canadian society at the time. Meanwhile,

issues of education and economics exacerbated some of the problems the communities were experiencing. Social, political, and religious upheaval left many Quebecois confused and at a loss.

Halfway across the world in Africa, an upheaval of a more violent kind was taking place. In the Belgian Congo, revolutionaries overthrew European rule in 1960 and plunged the country into an anarchy that destroyed institutions and communities. The new government under Mobutu Sese Seko eventually brought a kind of calm to the region, but not until years of fighting had obliterated villages, killed thousands of people, and caused many westerners to flee the country. Unable to return to the newly re-named Zaire, Canadian Mennonite Brethren church planters were left adrift. However, they were not left without a mission for

long. Soon, the Mennonite Brethren in western Canada saw possibilities for mission work in the central part of the country. Quebec was opening up to outside ideas, and with their knowledge of the language, the displaced workers were ideal for mission work in a French-speaking region. Ernest and Lydia Dyck were the first church planters to go to Quebec following their evacuation from the Belgian Congo in 1960, settling in the town of St-Jerome. Soon, another five couples followed. Some had been in the Congo and some came from other parts of the world, but they all had a vision of starting Mennonite Brethren churches in Quebec.

Starting new churches anywhere can be a challenge, but many saw Quebec as an especially difficult mission field. One issue was that the newcomers perceived the local educational level as being low, which made intensive Bible study difficult. Another concern was the local people's philosophy of work and money; western Mennonites found the seeming lack of ambition and easy acceptance of the *status quo* difficult to comprehend.<sup>1</sup> However, plans for church work progressed and by 1961, Ernest Dyck was ready to begin door-to-door evangelism in St-Jerome. After eight weeks of meeting and talking with the local people, Sunday services and a Bible study started. Construction on a church building began in 1963, and a year later, the first Quebec church officially became part of the Mennonite Brethren conference. A vision that had formed years earlier was starting to come together.

Evangelism in Quebec came in many forms. Most of the early churches were in the Montreal area, and often the church planters used literature discussions and Bible study groups to attract new adherents. Another major initiative involved following up on contacts from the "Sermon of Science" exhibit at EXPO '67, which generated a great deal of interest, especially among young people. By the 1970s, four congregations were running, including Ste-Therese, which began as an outgrowth of the St-Jerome church but which eventually helped to build the congregations of St-Laurent, St-Eustache, and Ste-Rose. The St-Eustache congregation began as a house church in the home of a mother and her two sons who had converted. Each church was unique, but together they formed a common identity as part of the new evangelistic movement in Quebec.

(cont'd on p. 6)



A Winnipeg audience listens intently to a new perspective on Mennonites by Ukrainian scholar Nataliya Venger at the Mennonite Heritage Centre on April 23, 2007.

## Mennonites under Soviet Regime: not Victims, but Creators of their Future

By Werner Franz

“Usually when the Mennonites think about the history of their congregations in the early Soviet period, the idea about persecution is the first response and a memory pattern for that period understanding. And of course it is true and beyond controversy. But persecution as a phenomenon means the presence of at least two participants: persecutors and victims. Traditionally the victims are supposed to be Mennonites. In my lecture today I would like to reject this approach. I would like to tell you how the Mennonites lived and survived, how they struggled for their future, for saving their religious and cultural identity, how they overcame the circumstances. And ... they did not let themselves to be considered as victims. They were creators of their future.

“The history of the Mennonite communities in the early Soviet period was one of exclusive and extraordinary examples when the national minority offered the authorities its own scenario and the authorities were ready to realize it. It was a dialog of two partners: the Soviet power and the Mennonites, a tiny religious group.”

These were the challenging introductory words of Nataliya Venger, Fulbright Scholar and Professor of History, Dnipropetrovsk National University, Ukraine, in a lecture sponsored by the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The event took place on April 23, 2007 at the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Her topic: *“The Mennonite Challenge to the Soviets: Congregations under New National Policies in the Early Communist Period”*

Venger painted the background for the Mennonite experience in Russia, explaining how the appearance of the Mennonite communities in Russia was connected to the colonization policy of Catherine the Great (1762- 1796). Among

the concessions made to Mennonite (and other) settlers in the context of implementing these policies, one of the most important ones was the right of community self-administration. This made it possible that congregations were converted into “micro-civil” societies which integrated the different spheres of public interest: political, economic, cultural (e.g. education), health related, and spiritual. This self-administration system influenced Mennonite identity, developed traits of economic rationality in Mennonite behaviour, and stimulated personal responsibility and initiative.

Mennonites had been recognized by the Russian state as an official foreign confession which guaranteed religious freedom and autonomy to them. The Mennonites were admired for their economic success, and the Bolsheviks were well aware of the foreign contacts of the Mennonites, many of whom had wealthy relatives in European countries and in North America. These perceptions of the Mennonites by the Russian authorities gave them an edge when it came to dialogue and negotiations between the two parties. Mennonite communities had extensive experiences of successful negotiation with Russian authorities. Here are some illuminating examples presented by Professor Venger:

1. During the cruel fights between the various political forces since 1917, Mennonite communities communicated and negotiated with all these military forces, except with Machno. Usually Mennonites supplied food and other goods in exchange for relative security and protection.

2. During the time of the great famine starting in 1921, Mennonites, who

themselves were victims, took active part in famine relief activities, aided by the “American Mennonite Relief”. Mennonite famine relief efforts demonstrated the Mennonite ability to efficiently direct financial assistance to the Soviet Union. The result was saving lives not only of thousands of Mennonites, but also of their neighbours who received food and machines from foreign Mennonite centers.

3. When the new law about cooperatives was passed in 1921, the Mennonite were quick in responding to it by creating in 1922 the “Union of South Russian Mennonites” (approved under the name “The Union of Citizens of Dutch Lineage”) and in 1923 the “All-Russian Mennonite Agricultural Union”. The law required the chairmen of the local councils of the co-ops to be communist party members. Not so with the Mennonites: They were allowed to elect persons to this as they wished, sometimes leading members of the Mennonite congregation. So these settlements were not under the control of the Soviet power.

4. As members of the “Mennonite Union” the Mennonites insisted on their religious rights. In May of 1924 they demanded – successfully, although for a short time – that the Central Executive Committee of the USSR allow them to have their religious meetings and Bible study classes,

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# Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

## Queries

**Gretna, Manitoba** – Looking for records of the Senior's Home (**Alten Heim**) in Gretna, Manitoba that was destroyed by a fire (possibly during the 1920s), such as lists of residents or a photograph. I am informed from an oral tradition that my great grandfather, Daniel Teichroew (1860-1924) from Schoenhorst, Russia and who died in Gretna was a resident of this home. His wife was Sara Redekop (1862-1931) who died in Halbstadt, Manitoba. Contact: Edwin Teichroew, 34 Amarynth Crescent, Winnipeg MB R2Y 0C1 or e-mail: edwint@mts.net.

**Sawatzky / Janzen** - Looking for descendants of Thomas Sawatzky (1869) and Katherine Janzen (1870). Contact: F. Dyck, 10-200 Ronald St., Winnipeg, MB R3J 3J3, 1-204-897-1031 or e-mail: fadyck@mts.net.

**Klassen / Rempel** – Looking for information about ancestors of my grandparents: Peter Peter Klassen (1853-1908 Russia) and Susanna Johann Rempel (1863-1939 Neu Samara, Russia); also about the children of their son, Peter P. Klassen (1886-

1930): Peter, Katherine, Maria, Suzanna, Lydia. One of Susanna Rempel's brothers was Dietrich Rempel, married to Margaret Teichroeb, parents to Rev. Abram Dietrich Rempel - (Alexanderkrone to Main Centre, SK to Yarrow, BC 1878-1953) Contact: Katie (Klassen) Giesbrecht, 102-11240 Mellis Drive, Richmond, BC V6X 1L7 or e-mail: stewart\_rberry@hotmail.com)

## Genealogical Publications

Ryan Taylor. *The Canadian Genealogical Sourcebook* (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Library Association, 2004) 158 pp.

This book is a general source book for reference librarians who are not specialists in genealogy. It can help determine in a very general way where and what kind of Canadian genealogical sources are available. The book has a section for the whole country, other sections for each province and territory, and a section at the end for researching some ethnic groups.

Author Ryan Taylor (1950-2006) was a librarian and genealogist who wrote over



**Planning Family Roots Days in Manitoba is often facilitated by much work behind the scenes. This year Mavis Dyck of Morden (left) helped plan an event in Winkler for March 3<sup>rd</sup> and Evelyn Friesen of Steinbach (right) helped plan an event for April 14 at the Mennonite Heritage Village, where this photo was taken. Thanks a lot!!** Photo credit: Alf Redekopp

50 books. In 1994, he became the Genealogy Department Cataloguer at the Allen County Public Library. In 2000 he joined the faculty of the National Institute for Genealogical Studies, University of Toronto.

Edward R. Brandt, et. Al. *Germanic Genealogy: A Guide to Worldwide Sources and Migration Patterns*. Third edition. (St. Paul, MN: Germanic Genealogy Society, 2007) 658 pp.

Originally published in 1995 and revised in 1997, this is a completely revised edition. It claims to be the most complete and up-to-date resource for beginning and advanced genealogists doing research of Germanic/German ancestry throughout the world. The basic criteria for the term 'German' that was used is that the person or people in question were German-speaking. The book includes a country by country guide to sources providing useful addresses of archives and societies, migration patterns and sources, word lists and language helps, extensive annotated bibliography, how to get started on genealogical research, how to use church and civil records and other resources. The book is well-indexed and comprehensive.

A limited number of copies are available from the Mennonite Heritage Centre (Winnipeg) for \$55.00.



Mary Dueck and Tiena Warkentin display their family histories at the Local History / Family Roots Day in Steinbach on April 14, 2007, sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in Steinbach Photo credit: Alf Redekopp.

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



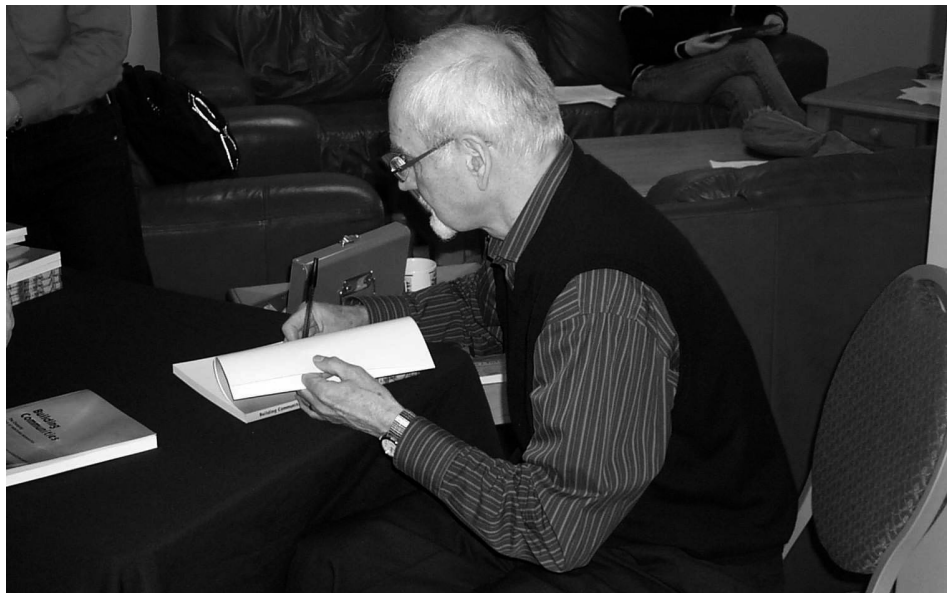
## Summer Student Assistants

The Heritage Centre has hired two students this summer thanks to the financial assistance received from programs delivered by the Canadian Council of Archives. **Candice Redekopp**, a University of Winnipeg student in her fourth year of the integrated education program, has been hired as an archival assistant funded in part through the Young Canada Works (YCW) in Heritage Institutions program. She will be assisting with cataloguing and preparing descriptions of the materials acquired from Mennonite Genealogy Inc. Over 20 boxes (more than 10 metres of textual records) will be processed.

**Jacob Brown**, who has completed one year at the University of Winnipeg, has been hired as a special project archivist to work at the first phase of digitizing the A.A. Vogt Genealogical Index Card file, which will consist of scanning over 200,000 index cards, contained in 6 large metal filing cabinets. The project is being made possible through the National Archives Development Program (NADP).

## GAMEO

The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online website, called GAMEO ([www.gameo.org](http://www.gameo.org)) currently makes available nearly 7,500 articles. With more articles being added weekly, it is estimated that 14,000-plus entries will be online by the end of 2008. **Adolf Ens** and **Larry Kehler** are two volunteers at the Heritage Centre that have helped. AR



**John J. Friesen** signing copies of his recent book *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*, published and launched by CMU Press on April 11, 2007. John J. Friesen also was the recipient of a Manitoba Day Award from the Association for Manitoba Archives (AMA) which recognizes the users of archives. Not since the writings of E.K. Francis and John Warkentin at mid-century has such a comprehensive study of Manitoba Mennonites been written. (See review on p. 8). Photo Credit: Alf Redekopp.



Mennonite Genealogy Inc. Annual General Meeting was held on April 9, 2007 at 415 Edison Avenue in Winnipeg. Present were: (l-r) Alf Redekopp, Gordon Thiessen, Hanna Rempel, Abe Rempel, Margaret Kroeker, Lori Klassen, Phil Klassen, Linda Thiessen and Jake Kroeker. Some of the final details about the transfer of the MGI holdings to MHC were discussed at this meeting. Photo credit: Abe Rempel.



**Candice Redekopp**



**Jacob Brown**



Janelle Hume, a Canadian Mennonite University student is back for a second summer at the Centre thanks to a student grant program. She is working with the records that document the transitions of the Mennonite Brethren Bible College to Concord College to Mennonite College Federation and finally the present day Canadian Mennonite University. A detailed finding aid will emerge from her working through 11 metres of documents that will give excellent access to future researchers. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz

## The papers of Joe Wiebe

Many people—particularly Manitobans—will remember the long-time Home Missions family of Joe and Marie Wiebe. This couple dedicated their lives to the work of Home Missions in Manitoba. Their story was written by Hedy Durksen many years ago and entitled *Along Highways and Hedges*.

The sermons and diary of Joe Wiebe were brought to the Centre in late May by their son, David Wiebe, currently the Executive Director of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches.

We thank the Wiebe family for these wonderful papers that give an excellent glimpse into the day to day activities of Home Missions in Manitoba over a number of decades.

## New Formats for Old Film

The Centre is breathing new life into some old machine-readable materials that were in an obsolete format. The Centre began with some of its 16mm films. These films over time will deteriorate to the point where they cannot be played. The first films to be transferred to DVD were films created by Heinrich H.

Warkentin, who used his own resources to document MB missionaries working in the 1950s and 1960s. Warkentin's collection consists of 75 reels of films, which are housed at the MB Centre in Fresno, CA. The Winnipeg Centre has some copies of these films. They were used around North America by Warkentin to show people mission activities thereby raising awareness and support for missions. The first films transferred to DVD deal with the missions in Paraguay and Mexico. The cost for a standard transfer is about \$50 for each 20-minute film. For broadcast quality the cost becomes thousands of dollars.

A second project is the transferring of audiocassettes to compact disk. After the purchase of some hardware the Centre is starting to digitize some of its audiocassette collection in-house. In each case the original is kept and preserved as long as possible, but eventually they will become unplayable and the hardware to read them will also become unusable. While transferring the materials to a digital format is not without its own set of preservation problems, it will make these materials more easily used for a period of



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time. A secondary benefit is that digital materials can be shared more readably and thereby increasing access.

As time and budget permits the Centre will continue to slowly convert its older machine-readable materials to such new formats.

CDS

## Historical Library

Susan Huebert has come back. Some 20 years ago Susan worked as a summer student with the Centre. Since that time she has obtained her library of Science degree and traveled extensively. She has worked in such places as Egypt with MCC, British Columbia, Northwest Territories and most recently in Edmonton.

Susan is specifically concentrating her work on the J.A. Toews Historical Library. This 4,000-volume collection was put on-line a few years ago, however, there are numerous glitches and often books we have do not show up. These glitches occurred when the initial library database was converted onto the present online format.

The collection is online via the University of Winnipeg library. A big thanks to Lorna Jensen from the University of Winnipeg Library, who came several times to help train Susan with the specialized software that the University of Winnipeg utilizes. KR



Susan Huebert (left) and Lorna Jensen. (right) Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz

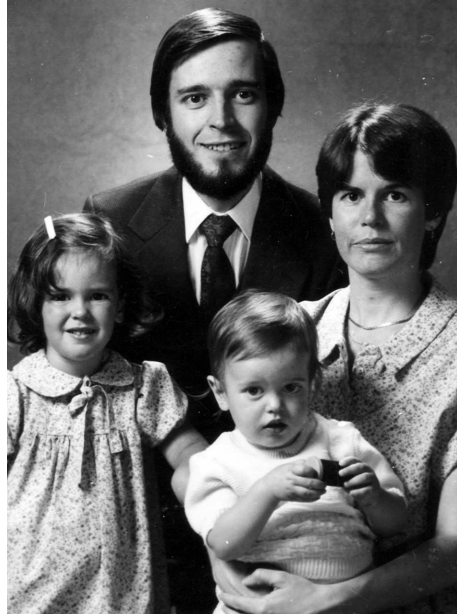
## Quebec MB Church

(cont'd from p. 1)

Working out cultural and theological differences between the Mennonite Brethren churches in western Canada and the new Quebec congregations required tact and understanding, and many of the issues that emerged in the first years have still not been resolved. Early church planters tended not to emphasize the Mennonite distinctives like nonresistance very heavily, and many converts were glad of this restraint.<sup>2</sup> However, forming connections with congregations in other parts of the country became somewhat more difficult as a result, and church leaders in Quebec have often had problems dealing with their counterparts from the west. Funding was another issue. Even after the churches were well established, they were dependent on western churches for finances and training. Concerns about paternalism and excessive reliance on outside help are still relevant for churches in Quebec.<sup>3</sup>

Very early in the church planting process, leaders from the west realized the need for local input into the guidance and direction of the congregations, but this brought up questions of educational background and skills. The new converts were enthusiastic in their faith, but few of them had the training to lead churches or to conduct programs. Ernest Dyck of the St-Jerome church, noting the lack of evangelistic skills in the congregation, decided to start a course to teach the preaching techniques and Biblical knowledge he felt the church members lacked. Meanwhile, Henry Brucks in Ste-Rose had a more ambitious idea. Church growth had gone more slowly in that town than in many other areas of the province; Ste-Rose had no official Mennonite Brethren church until 1976, nine years after evangelism first started there. However, Brucks believed that with trained leaders, the church would begin to grow rapidly.

Rather than starting a local training program as the church leaders in St-Jerome had done, Brucks had a vision for a Bible school program for the whole province. His idea was to establish a full-fledged college program, with classrooms, dormitories for the students, and an official curriculum. He believed that the Quebec Mennonite Brethren Church was growing rapidly enough to warrant an extensive and organized program, but others were more cautious. Ernest Dyck,



**Pierre Wingender, pastor of the St. Rose congregation with wife Louise and children Julie and Philippe.** CMBS Photo Collection NP130-2-025

for example, believed the time had not yet come for an official program, and he advocated running less expensive local programs until the churches in Quebec were more established. Nevertheless, he soon saw the vision and accepted a leadership position in the new school. The Institut Biblique Laval was formed in 1976 to teach future church leaders in the skills they would need to conduct services, start church programs, and help their churches flourish.<sup>4</sup>

Quebec's theological school grew and changed. At first, most of the faculty members came from the west, but that began to change as qualified local professors began to emerge. Jean Raymond Théorêt was the first French-speaking faculty member from Quebec, and when he later became president of the school, the move to Quebecois faculty began. In 1986, Pierre Gilbert joined the faculty, and the trend towards local faculty was established.

The issues that had caused dissention in the institute's early years continued to trouble the community. Some people still maintained that practical pastoral training should be the main focus of studies, while others believed that an academic program was necessary for the future of the institution. Although the school had no academic accreditation for the first ten years of its existence, the administrators eventually arranged an agreement with the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg whereby IBL students could obtain a Bachelor of Religious Studies by

taking their final year in Winnipeg. Finally, full accreditation with the Université de Montréal came in 1990 and by 1997 IBL students could obtain a Bachelor of Theology degree entirely on their own campus. By 1986, the governing faculty members were all Quebecois, and in 2000, the school changed its name to École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal (ETEM) in order to reflect its identity in the community.<sup>5</sup>

Language has always been an issue, both for the school and the churches. The Institut Biblique Laval became a unilingual French school in 1980 in accordance with Quebec politics and popular sentiment at the time, and only one of the first Quebec Mennonite Brethren churches used English as its first language, the Victory Fellowship Mennonite Brethren Church in Knowlton. The Quebec Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, *L'Association des Églises des Frères Mennonites du Québec*, waited until 1983 for its foundation, although church planters had prepared for that time since the 1950s. Two years later, the French-speaking conference joined the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Christian literature was also an issue. In 1980, the *Mennonite Brethren Herald* started *Le Lien* as a supplement to its regular publication, but readership grew and *Le Lien* became a separate publication in 1982.<sup>6</sup> Quebec Mennonite Brethren were developing their own voice.

Like churches anywhere, the Quebec Mennonite Brethren churches had their share of problems, but also successes. The St-Jerome church, for instance, began well, with eighteen baptized members by 1970. By the end of the decade, however, the church had begun to stagnate and decline despite the many programs the church sponsored. Eventually, however, the attempts to attract people with Bible studies, summer camps, and community programs had an effect and the church began to revive. Ste-Therese went through a similar process as a decline in the 1960s eventually gave way to a revival in 1972-73. New leadership may have been a factor; Guy Lavoie, who had grown up in the community, returned to his home province after living in Prince George for some years. He had experienced a conversion in British Columbia, and his enthusiasm for his faith inspired the congregation. The St-Laurent church also

experienced difficulties in the late 1960s, and it was not until Pastor Pierre Wingender organized teams for discipling new believers that the church's decline reversed.

Special programs to help church members and adherents were key strategies in helping the congregations thrive. Bible studies and summer visitation ministries helped encourage growth. An early radio program called *Le Chant Joyeux* gave the chance for people to hear sermons and music in their own homes, while congregations also established camp programs to help children learn spiritual principles.<sup>7</sup> The camps were popular, and by 1980, the Quebec congregations had established six of them, including Camp Peniel. As the churches developed, they came to see peace as an important element of the people's faith, although Quebec did not hold a peace conference until the *Paix Parmi les Hommes* (Peace Among Men) conference of 1983.

Cooperation with other communities has long been important for the churches in Quebec. The Institut Biblique Laval had its first home in a building bought from the United Church, but after its move to Ste-Rose from St-Laurent, the school shared its space with the Ste-Rose Mennonite Brethren Church. The English-speaking church, Victory Fellowship, also found that sharing space could be beneficial, and the congregation met in St. Paul's United Church for part of its history. Congregations grew differently, and one even joined another denomination when the eleven members in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts became part of the Alliance church in 1973. Until the Institut Biblique Laval formed, aspiring leaders studied theology at the Bethel Bible Institute in Lennoxville, but having a school of advanced learning helped to unify the growing congregations.

The Mennonite Brethren church in Quebec has grown considerably since the early days in the 1960s. Eleven congregations now consider themselves part of the denomination, including many of the original churches. There is still only one English-speaking congregation, The Westside Gathering in Montreal, but Mennonite Brethren influence has expanded beyond the area immediately surrounding Quebec's largest city. The churches will likely continue to experience both problems and success, but they are off to a good start.

#### Footnotes:

1. Peter Penner. *No Longer at Arms Length: Mennonite Brethren Church Planting in Canada*. Winnipeg and Hillsboro: Kindred Press, 1987, p. 104.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 113
3. *Ibid.*, p. 110
4. Ewald Unruh. "Developing Leaders." (2007) The Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Retrieved May 5, 2007. <http://www.mbconf.ca/events/gathering2006/reports/leaderdev.en.html>.
5. Jean Raymond Théorêt and Éric Wingender. (December 2004). "École de Théologie Évangélique de Montréal." *Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online*. Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online. Retrieved 16 May 2007 <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/157.html>
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Mennonite Brethren Herald*, Sept. 26, 1980, p. 16.

*Susan Huebert is currently working at the Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg.*

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## Mennonites under the Soviets

(cont'd from p. 2)

publish their own national newspapers, and to establish orphanages for those Mennonite children who had lost their parents.

5. Mennonites negotiated successfully an alternative to the military service, legalized by a law passed in 1925.

6. When it became clear after 1923 that the needs of the Mennonites were ignored and legislation served only the Soviet power interests, the Mennonite Union arranged an emigration program to Germany and Canada. Between 1923 and 1926 about 19,000 Mennonites emigrated legally.

"The activity of the Mennonite Union in the Ukraine was not only one of the brightest events in the Mennonite history, but also one of the brightest victories." Venger summed up her interpretation of the Mennonite experience in Russia. "The Mennonite won in the duel between unequal competitors."

For me it was refreshing to listen to Venger's somewhat unusual, highly appreciative, portrayal of the experience of my forbearers in the former USSR during the 1920s. To hear her say that Mennonites during this time of terrible suffering did not behave as victims but rather as "creators of their future", made me thankful and proud to part of this story.

As a member of a Mennonite congregation and a Mennonite settlement group in Paraguay I feel invited by Venger's presentation to make some comparative observations:

As in Russia, Mennonites in Paraguay have not made their progress dependent on government support, although they have, wherever possible, used existing laws to their advantage, and negotiated with government authorities for legislation that could be supportive of their own projects, as well as of development projects of other groups in Paraguay, especially groups of aboriginal people.

As in Russia, Mennonites offered to the country their own plan of development in their form of settlement, administration, and integration. In Paraguay this included specific programmes of development and cooperation with the members of the aboriginal people.

As in Russia, Mennonites are recognized and appreciated by government authorities, often more so than among their own kin.

The Mennonite experiences in Russia portrayed by Professor Venger and related to the Mennonite experiences in Paraguay invites us to compare them to the "Jeremiah Model", central to John H. Yoder's depiction of Christian life in the world. This paradigm is based on God's instructions to the people of Israel in the Babylonian exile, instructing them to make themselves at home there and to seek the peace (*shalom*) of that city, by producing, raising families, and praying for the city (Jer. 29:5-7). This paradigm presents a challenge to the people of God today to live faithfully in situations that sometimes seem to be like exile, like not feeling at home. This faithful living in exile is like a pilot project in relation to the realization of the Kingdom of God. Here, the words of Karl Barth can be a promise and a challenge: "The order of the faith community constitutes a public offer to the entire society." (In J. H. Yoder, *For the Nations*, 1997, p. 27) To this high calling we are invited to respond.

*Werner Franz is the former president of CEMTA, a Mennonite Seminary in Asunción, Paraguay. Presently he is on a two-year sabbatical-study leave in Winnipeg.*

## Book Review (cont'd from p. 8)

In terms of content, format and style *Building Communities* is destined to become a standard text for educators and students at both secondary and post-secondary institutions and others wanting to study the history of Manitoba Mennonites.

## Book Review

**John J. Friesen, *Building Communities: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites*. (Winnipeg, MB: CMU Press, 2007), 230 pp.**

*Reviewed by Diane Haglund, Conference Archivist, The United Church of Canada.*

**B**uilding Communities was commissioned by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society in response to the need for a new history that would bring the story of Manitoba Mennonites into the era of the urban, secular world of the twenty-first century. Author, John Friesen, has written an accessible history that will be of interest to both Mennonite and non-Mennonite readers. It explores subjects such as labour and the arts which to date have received little discussion in popular Mennonite history. The book also includes new emphasis on the experience of women.

The book divides the Manitoba Mennonite story into three parts or eras. The unique characteristics of each are expressed in a number of topics. The topics chosen reflect the published research since one of the goals of the project was to pull together previous studies into one narrative. Each topic is discussed in terms of how it contributes to community building.

The first section, *Pursuing a Vision 1870-1920*, provides a concise history of both Anabaptism and the early development of the Province of Manitoba. Chapters in this section trace the development of community and the deep sense of unity provided by social life, the impact of diversity on the churches, political negotiations related to terms of immigration and the management of schools and municipal affairs. Life in Manitoba changed significantly during the first 46 years that Mennonites resided here. The province had been settled by diverse groups and Winnipeg had evolved from outpost to a metropolis that served as the distribution and financial hub of the west. The Mennonite community also had changed. Relatively secure financially it had developed solid social and economic support institutions and educational institutions. Mennonite churches had successfully weathered a period of division and reorganization and served their communities well. The vision of the larger society, its expectation that immigrants would integrate into English society were at odds with the vision of a

people who “wanted to follow the teachings of the Bible and instruct their children in its ways, to be free from military service, and - to live in peace and follow their convictions.” These two sets of values were clashing and how Mennonites would deal with the situation would be the pivotal struggle of the next three decades.

The second section, *Engaging Society 1920-1950*, explores the difficulties and challenges which stemmed from this struggle. Conflicts over issues of education and the resulting response by some Mennonite groups to emigrate and the immigration of thousands escaping communism predominated life during the 1920s. As for many Manitobans the 1930s were dominated by the hardships of the Depression. World War II followed and conflict relating to the response to military service resulted in further emigration during the 1940s and immigration from Europe created new demands. Friesen demonstrates that the need to face these challenges created new vitality and confidence in the community. Chapters in this section trace reforms and changes in church life, adaptations to cooperative models, the development of the arts, the struggle to regain control of education and the creation of Bible schools and other educational institutions, advances in health care and social service, and the incorporation of new theological ideas.

The final section, *Expanding Horizons 1950-2000*, addresses the impact of urbanization, the introduction of radio and television, affluence and increased mobility, and the influence of secularism. Chapters in this section discuss the adaptation of churches to meet community needs in new times, the widespread acceptance of peace theology, support for private schooling, the development of private business, the emergence of a literary group that would restructure the perception of Mennonite reality, changing attitudes to labour and unions, expanded roles of relief and immigration committees, engagement in political activity and the impact of incorporating other historic and geographic groups within the existing community. This section is a welcome and much needed addition to the history of Mennonites in our province. It documents the transformation of the community over this period and “the resilience and ingenuity” with which it managed profound change. “From

conservative to more evangelical and liberal, have all reshaped their faith communities in dynamic and creative ways.”

Friesen describes his methodology as “eclectic”. He draws on material from studies in immigration, organizational patterns, religious history, theological analyses, social history, economic life and political involvement. The flow of the narrative and the masterful weaving of themes and ideas throughout the three sections reflect his own scholarship. He has been a teacher of the Mennonite story for some thirty-five years and has directed hundreds of research projects. This dense, multi-faceted history reflects his knowledge and understanding of the Mennonite story and his remarkable gifts as a teacher.

John Friesen received the 2007 Association for Manitoba Archives’ *Manitoba Day Award* for excellence in the use of archives for *Building Communities*. His book is generously illustrated with photos, maps and tables. Side bars of quotations from archival and secondary documents provide an effective means of reinforcing the text. Footnotes not only document primary material but also direct readers to books and articles that expand on the content of the book. Appendices are comprehensive and include directories of Mennonite churches in Manitoba ca. 2000 and their location, periodicals, newspapers and magazines published by Mennonites in Manitoba, candidates of Mennonite background for election to the Manitoba legislature and the Canadian House of Commons. A diagram of the record of divisions among Mennonite groups is particularly useful for readers new to the Mennonite story.

Friesen wrote his book to inspire further research and interpretation.

*(cont'd on p. 7)*

### Cairn Unveiling Ceremony

Commemorating

**Gerhard Wiebe,**

first resident minister

(1888-1895)

of the **first**

**Mennonite Brethren Church  
in Canada**

(now Winkler MB Church)

Location: From Winkler Bible Camp – 1 mile east on Road 16 North and ¼ mile south.

**Date: August 4, 2007, 2:00 p.m.**

For further information call

204-774-0176