

Mennonite Historian

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



An evening playing Mennonite circle games on November 21, 2008 in Winkler brought fun and laughter to the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society 50th Anniversary Celebration. Photo credit: Conrad Stoesz.

Heritage Hunting: The MMHS in My Life, 1946–2008

by Lawrence Klippenstein

There has been quite a bit of discussion about the 50th anniversary of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS) this past year. Perhaps that helped me to accept a small new assignment to write a short history of MMHS. I seemed to fit the niche of writer, I was told, because I have been involved with Society affairs throughout the 50 years, and indeed a little longer.

Actually MMHS did not exist in 1946, but there were antecedents of what was to come. A good deal of important ground work had been done prior to 1958. I did not know either that I would meet a leading person in the prep crew in the person of Paul J. Schaeffer when I entered the Mennonite Collegiate Institute (Gretna, MB) in 1946 – my final year. We used a German-language text book on Mennonite history which Mr. Schaeffer had written (actually four volumes when he got done – *Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!* [The Origins and Future of the Mennonites]). It was a good theme for

the MMHS which would emerge eventually twelve years later.

I was not present either when a group of men gathered in 1957 and 1958 to formally organize the group. Of the ones present, Ted Friesen of Altona and Gerhard Ens of Winnipeg, then the youngest participants, remain in our midst. I am much aware now of several features of those discussions. One is that establishing a museum rose quickly to become a main agenda item for the group. Some organizing work along this line had in fact been going on in Steinbach about the same time, there led by John C. Reimer and others.

Museum work would begin seriously in the early 1960s. John C. Reimer and J. J. Reimer quickly became leading persons in the project. About the same time MMHS found itself connecting with its Ontario sister historical society to discuss the writing of a multi-volumed history of Mennonites in Canada. Frank Epp, then working with *Canadian Mennonite* at

Friesens in Altona, was willing to tackle the project, strongly supported by persons like Ted Friesen, J. Winfield Fretz and others. It would take a number of years and now stands, in its three volumes, written by Frank (now deceased), and then helped by Ted Regehr, as a monument to that idea. My involvement would be limited later on to reader services and promotion of sales to a limited degree.

In the early 1970s things changed quite a bit. The celebration of the centennial (1874-1974) of Mennonite settlement in Manitoba had become the topical issue of the day. MMHS undertook to lead these celebrations. A special Steering Committee to direct the planning was set up, and I gave some time to serve as executive secretary with an office in Altona where we were teaching after returning from University of Minnesota graduate studies about that time. Gerhard Ens began a program of Low German Mennonite history lectures on CFAM around 1972, devoted at first to promotion of the museum well established in Steinbach by then, and then moving into promotion of the Mennonite story as a whole.

One of the projects where I became personally quite involved was that of erecting a cairn in honour of the one-time land scout and minister, Heinrich Wiebe (1839-1897) of Edenburg. Unveiled also in 1972, it stands to this day at Cairn Corner about a mile northeast of Gretna at the junction of PR 243 and Hwy. 30. Part of serving as secretary had to do with preparing promotional material and getting out the word of centennial celebrating to various communities throughout Manitoba.

One of our larger early public projects was staging a centennial reenactment, in 1973, of the visit of the Mennonite delegates of south Russia to visit the proposed new settlement area in southeastern Manitoba in 1873. The trek began at the Upper Fort Garry gate near today's The Forks, and proceeded to the old Hudson Bay post (then still standing) in St. Anne and other points of what would become the East Reserve after the Mennonites arrived.

The central celebration year, 1974, was quite busy. A number of significant events, music, drama, art exhibits, publications, etc., resulted from the work of several sub-committees and the MMHS board as a whole. We mailed out several issues of a special newsletter, called **100**,

(cont'd on p. 2)

and provided regular reports of what was happenings in local communities all over the province. The local papers of several communities seemed ready to publish longer and shorter historical items which I submitted during this period. We had *Mennonite Reporter*, the successor to *The Canadian Mennonite*, strongly committed also to publishing much related material. Soon after I arrived at the Conference of Mennonites in Canada (now Mennonite Church Canada) as historian-archivist, in 1975, the Archives began to publish *Mennonite Historian* which would then carry a good deal of MMHS news and reporting in the ensuing years. Its own newsletter, edited by Royden Loewen of Steinbach, began to appear in December, 1984, and now entitled *Heritage Posting*, has just begun its 25th year of publication.

The fork-in-the-road of 1979 was for MMHS a kind of surge experience. That move allowed the museum, Mennonite Heritage Village (its current name) to become an organization independent of MMHS which had birthed it some 20 years earlier, if the concept given life in 1958 can be part of the counting. Independent meant obtaining its own board and its own charter, and for MMHS meant a redefinition of its work without its kingpin agenda item, a Mennonite museum.



MMHS Board 25 Years Ago (1984). Back (l-r): Rhinehart Friesen, John Dyck, Doreen Klassen, Ed Schellenberg, Abe Dueck. Front: Ted Friesen, Delbert Plett, Ruth Bock. Photo credit: MHC 50:58.

That left such fields as publishing, heritage site preservation, heritage outreach and awareness through the arts and education, for MMHS to work on – work enough for years to come. I recall joining Adolf Ens in checking a translation of Gerhard Wiebe’s *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten von Russland nach Amerika*, done by the late Helen Janzen, and published in 1981, soon after the “forking” of MMHS.

I had my turn with many others of presiding over board work for a few years, and helped to develop the Historic Sites and Monuments Committee somewhat beyond its early phase. In 1999 and 2000, a series of 125th anniversary celebrations of Manitoba Mennonites could pick up and carry further the centennial celebrations of 1974. The July, 2000, event held at Fort Dufferin north of Emerson highlighted the West Reserve region, but Winnipeg and Steinbach programs carried forward 1974 themes significantly. The creation of the Post Road Memorial Trail, and leading tours along it, belonged to my 125th recalls of the year 2000.

The publication of four volumes in the West Reserve Historical Series, guided in large measure through all its stages by Adolf Ens of Winnipeg, brought the region into further prominence among local history endeavours of this period. I offered four or five essays on related themes such as “Altbergthal, 1879-2000,” “Ältester Johann Funk 1836-1917,” “Mennonite Education in the West

Reserve,” “Heinrich Wiebe, 1829-1897,” and “Bergthaler Settlement of the West Reserve, 1878-1882” as a contribution to this larger project. A small family book on Klippensteins from both Reserves (though I’m not into genealogy all that much!) came out of all this hubbub as well.

When in 2008 we gathered for three commemorative “moments” in Winnipeg (academic papers), Steinbach (choir music) and Winkler (circle games) to note the 50th anniversary of MMHS, we found new impetus in the work of our boards and committees, now presided over by Conrad Stoesz, gave our newsletter a boost, and took a deep breath in casting our profile for further work ahead. Better linkage with Mennonite Heritage Village projects enriched these initiatives and brought wider awareness of meaningful heritage work for the general public.

There is much more one could say. Many other participants in these programs ought to be named. This is not yet a “short history of MMHS,” but it sketches in part a profile of what a person might get into if one found time and energy to let MMHS penetrate one’s life at some level. Many others have a similar story to tell. I have found it gratifying, educational and indeed, inspiring. Heritage is, after all a God-given layer of living, and discerning its power and impact is never time wasted. My word of warmest thanks to those with whom I could be connected and experience the hunt.

Lawrence Klippenstein, former MHC director, lives in Steinbach, Manitoba.

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Editors: Alf Redekopp (MHC)
Doug Heidebrecht (CMBS)

Associate Editor: Conrad Stoesz
(CMBS/MHC)

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
P: 204-888-6781

E: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca
W: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives
or

1310 Taylor Avenue,
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
P: 204-669-6575

E: dheidebrecht@mbconf.ca
W: www.mbconf.ca/mbstudies

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Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Michael Ignatieff and Ignatyev Colony

A recent visitor to the Mennonite Heritage Centre asked me if there was any connection between the recently named leader of the Liberal Party of Canada, Michael Ignatieff and the Russian Mennonite settlement with a similar sounding name. Others may have wondered the same.

In 1888 the Chortitza Colony bought 15,470 hectares of land from the Countess Ignatieff in the the Bachmut district of the province of Ekaterinoslav, beside the Krivoy Torets River and close to the Kahr'kov-Mariupl railway line. Many of the landless families from the Chortitza settled in this colony, founding seven villages. In popular speech the villages were often simply known by their numbers. My father, for example, grew up in "number two", which was actually called Romanowka. The other villages were called Yekaterinovka, Leonidovka, New York, Nikolayevka, Ignatyevka and Alexeyvka. Oscar H. Hamm of Saskatoon published a history of this colony in German in 1980 and in English in 1984, entitled, *Memoirs of Ignatyev in the Light of Historical Change*. In it he publishes a little report he received from John Enns, Reesor, Ontario after he published the German edition. Enns wrote:

"...In the early thirties a tall young man arrived here in Reesor by way of the local commuter train that had stopped briefly. His travel bag held only the barest necessities for his personal use. He became acquainted with my father, who invited him to our home, where the

stranger agreed to stay for a few days. His name was Nicholas Ignatieff and his permanent home was in Toronto. He was the son of the last Russian Minister of Education during the reign of Tsar Nicholas II and his grandfather was the Count Nikolay Pavlovich Ignatieff, who in the second half of the 19th century had become well known as the panslavic Russian Diplomat in Europe. Our visitor knew about his grandfather's dealings with a Mennonite group which had bought the count's estate. He also told us an anecdote in connection with his grandfather's possessions in Ignatyev. The count's wife was an American lady who had expressed the wish that the village, in which the count's buildings formed a rather significant complex, should be named New York. This request was granted, and thus the once unpretentious settlement in the Ukraine retained the name after the world-renowned American city.

"...Our visitor...had after the revolution of 1917 fled to England with his parents. There he and his four brothers had studied, and after 1924 the whole family came to Canada. Nicholas at first worked as an engineer at the Hydro-Transmission Company of Ontario, but at the time of his visit in Reesor he was already on the staff of Upper Canada College, Toronto, where he taught history... One of his brothers (George Ignatieff) has been working in the foreign office in Canada, and off and on I find his name mentioned in the papers."

Michael Ignatieff (b. 1947), leader of the Liberal Party of Canada is the son of George Ignatieff (1913-1989), who was a Russian-Canadian diplomat. His great-grandmother, Catherine Leonidovna Galitzine (widow of Nicolai Paul Ignatieff (1832-1886) was the countess who had the American interest and was the reason for the naming of the village of New-York, and I wonder if she wasn't also the reason for the naming of village number 3 Leonidovka, after her father, Prince Leonid Galitzine. *A.R.*

MCC Manitoba and MHC Collaborate in Research

by Conrad Stoesz

The Centre is collaborating with the MCC office in Winkler to assist Mennonites who have recently arrived from Latin and South America.

For newcomers, crossing borders can be difficult. But a reversal in the Canadian citizenship regulations could benefit some. As of spring 2009, those who can prove their parents were born in Canada are entitled to a Canadian passport, allowing much freer movement across international borders, and for some a step towards Canadian citizenship.

Tina Fehr-Kehler of MCC helps the new arrivals obtain the proper paper work. At times she calls the Centre for assistance. Using various resources, the MHC staff can usually find information to supplement the evidence she receives from the newcomers. Genealogical research is making a real difference in the lives of these newcomers. It is more than a pastime of collecting names and dates. Increasing the knowledge of their family history has become essential in the repatriation process. It is very gratifying to help in this way.

Recent Books

Colin P. Neufeldt, compiler and editor. *Unsere Familie: A Pictorial History of the Ratzlaff, Janzen, Pauls, and Schmidt Families* (Edmonton, AB: Private publication, 2007) 332 pp. This family history book focuses on the author's relatives from his maternal side, with the primary reference point being his great grandparents Erich P. **Ratzlaff** (1890-1979) who married Agneta **Janzen** (1892-1976); and, Hermann **Pauls** (1885-1946) who married Wilhelmine **Schmidt** (1892-1982); hence the names Ratzlaff, Janzen, Pauls and Schmidt in the title. These first generation people were forced to flee their home in the Mennonite village of Wymyschle, Poland at the end of World War II. This book consists of the historical family photos and documents, all done in original "colour" or as well current day (2006) photos of their descendants.

A second book printed in the same high quality by Friesens Corporation of Altona is entitled *The Neufelds & Borns of Kubanka: A Pictorial History of Two Families*, also edited by Colin Neufeldt, Kevin Neufeldt and David Wiebe Neufeldt (Lethbridge, AB: Private Publication, 2006) 358 pp. This book is about the history and descendants of the **Neufeld family** beginning with Johann Neufeld (1859-1896) who was married to Aganeta Reimer (1857-1941), and the **Born family** beginning with Isaak Born (1866-1946) who was married to Anna Regier (1863-1924). The editors of the book are grandsons of Johann Neufeld (1889-1970) who married Kornelia Born (1892-1974) in 1917, and left their home in Kubanka, Orenburg, USSR in 1926 to start a new life in Canada. Contact: Colin Neufeldt, 11620-32A Avenue, Edmonton, AB T6J 3G8

Queries

Harder - I am looking for an immigration record (ship and date of entry) for Peter Harder (1871-1946), his wife Katharina Epp (1876-1953) and family of Burwalde, Choritiza colony who came to Canada around 1905. Harder taught in Blumenthal, SK and had 3 sons: Jacob (1899-1978), Peter (1904-), and Martin (1906-). Contact Elvira Heppner at eheppner@mts.net.



Tina Fehr-Kehler with Maria Bergen and daughter Fernanda. Photo: Bud Kehler.

In Memoriam:

Georg Hildebrandt (1911-2008)

by Peter Letkemann



Georg Hildebrandt, author of the best-selling book *Wieso lebst du noch?* (*Why are you still alive?*) died in Heidelberg, Germany on 23 December 2008 at the age of 97.

Hildebrandt was born as Isaak Isaak Hildebrandt on 19 July 1911 in the Mennonite village of Kondratyevka (Borissovo Settlement) in the Don Region of southern Russia/Ukraine. His father Isaak was a successful farmer and deacon in the local Mennonite church.

When I first met Mr. Hildebrandt in 2001, I also asked myself, “Why are you still alive?” How had this gentle, soft-spoken 90-year old man, with the firm handshake of a person half his age, survived 25 years of exile and imprisonment during Stalin’s reign of terror in the Soviet Union? The answer can be found in his personal memoir *Wieso lebst du noch?* published in Stuttgart in a hard cover edition in 1990 to critical acclaim in the German press. The book was later published by Ullstein Verlag in a paperback edition in 1993. An English translation appeared in Fargo, N.D. in 2002 (see my review in *Preservings* No. 21, December 2002, 138-139).

The map below, which Hildebrandt hung in the living room of his apartment, displays the 20 prisons and labour camps in which he was interred during the 25-year period from 1930 to 1955.

After his final release in 1955 and a successful operation in Moscow to remove most of his left lung (due to tuberculosis contracted in prison), Hildebrandt was able to rejoin his family living in exile in the Urals. In 1961 he and his wife, like so many other Germans, moved to Alma-Ata in Kazakhstan, where he worked as a technical draftsman until his retirement in 1971. It then took another three difficult years to obtain an exit visa and permission to emigrate to West Germany.

On 16 November 1974 he and his wife finally landed in Frankfurt. Hildebrandt’s first purchase in Germany was a copy of Volume 2 of Solzhenitsyn’s *The Gulag Archipelago*. After reading a few pages, Hildebrandt put the book aside; he had already decided to write a book describing

his own experiences in the Gulag camps, and did not want Solzhenitsyn’s descriptions to colour and influence his memories. Shortly after arriving at the Refugee Processing Centre in Friedland, West Germany, Hildebrandt purchased a notebook and wrote on the cover: “What I may not forget.” For the next 15 years he filled the notebook with his memories and toiled at organizing them into a manuscript.

Family and friends gave him little encouragement. His wife, for example, said: “you are not sleeping well – it will ruin your health to dwell on these horrible memories – who will want to read these terrible experiences? Who will believe you?” Among those who did encourage him was Dr. George K. Epp of Winnipeg.

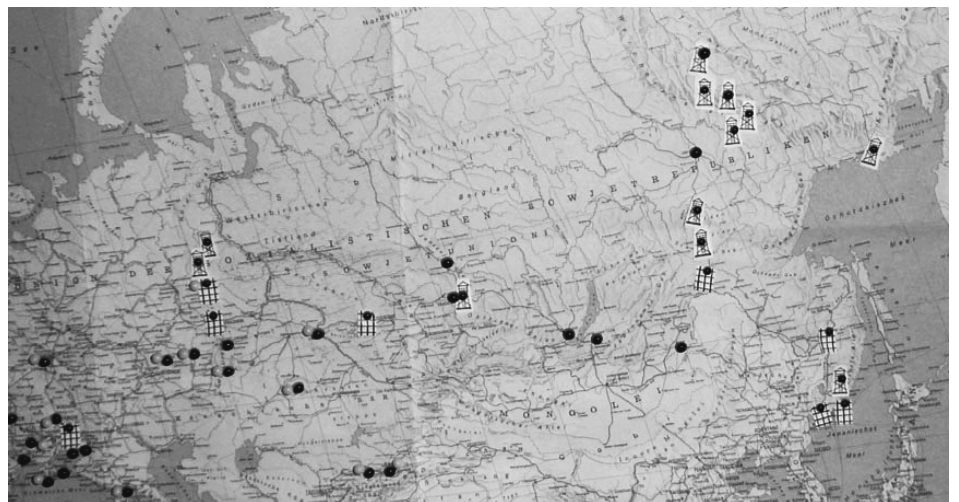
It was not an easy book to write and is not an easy book to read: drawing on his remarkable memory Hildebrandt related events with amazing detail, clarity, honesty and objectivity – he “pulls no punches.” He had to write his painful experiences from his soul; confronting them on paper was a form of therapy. Yet he wrote the book not only for himself, but also for all those who perished in the camps and were never allowed to tell their story. However, he does not “dwell” only on the horrible situations encountered in the camps, in fact, he told me that he left out many of the worst stories – they were so terrible “that people would not have believed them.” He also writes of the “humanity” he encountered in the prisons and labour camps, which itself recognized no rule of humanity. Hildebrandt survived not only physically but also spiritually and emotionally, with his humanity intact.

Hildebrandt’s account can easily be

compared with the works of Solzhenitsyn and other Russian writers on the subject. Unlike their accounts, however, Hildebrandt’s memoir is significant for his revelations of the “special” treatment accorded to Germans in the Soviet Union. From the 1930s to at least the 1980s, Soviet Germans were labelled not only as “enemies of the people,” but derisively as “fascists” – and treated accordingly! Yet Hildebrandt did not write with Solzhenitsyn’s passionate anger. We can feel his pain, yet there is no sense of revenge. Many reviewers have commented on the author’s positive attitude – Hildebrandt was not an embittered, grumpy old man; he was open, good-natured, and lived his life to the fullest. He himself attributed his psychological survival in large measure to his happy childhood years in the Mennonite community of Kondratyevka.

In 1995 Georg Hildebrandt published a second book entitled *Erst jetzt lebe ich* (It is only now that I truly live). In it, he documented the response which his memoir had engendered: he included a sample of the more than two dozen reviews – including a favourable review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and excerpts from the hundreds of letters he received from individuals throughout Germany and North America.

In February 2003 Hildebrandt was awarded “die Verdienstmedaille des Verdienstordens der Bundesrepublik Deutschlands” - the German Medal of Achievement in recognition of his efforts to build bridges of understanding between Russians and Germans. The medal was officially presented to Georg Hildebrandt in July 2003, on the occasion of his 92nd birthday.



Map showing 20 prison labour camps where Hildebrandt was interred from 1930-1955.

In Memoriam:

Gerhard Hildebrandt (1919-2007)

by Peter Letkemann



Dr. Gerhard Hildebrandt died in Göttingen, Germany on 30 April 2007, after a lengthy battle with cancer. Five weeks earlier, on 23 March 2007, he had celebrated his 88th birthday. A memorial

service was held at the Baptist Church in Göttingen on Monday, 14 May 2007.

Dr. Hildebrandt was well-known throughout Germany as a distinguished teacher, churchman and historian. For three decades he taught Russian language, history and culture in the Department of Slavic Studies at the University of Göttingen. He published a Russian-language textbook and numerous articles dealing with various aspects of Russian and Soviet history.

Dr. Hildebrandt was born in the village of Hierschau (Molochna Settlement) on 23 March 1919, the son of David Hildebrandt and grandson of Ältester Gerhard Plett (see Helmut Huebert, *Hierschau*). In 1930 the Hildebrandt family was “dekulakized” and exiled to the northern forests, where Gerhard and his father worked in a forestry labour camp cutting timber that the Soviet government exported to the West in order to obtain “hard currency.”

With the assistance of local camp officials, Gerhard was able to enrol in a correspondence course and obtain his teacher certification. In 1940 he was hired as a German teacher in a secondary school in the Suzdal Region, north-east of Moscow. During the summer holidays in 1941 he was allowed to visit his parents, who had survived the labour camps and settled in the village of Einlage (Chortitza Settlement). When German forces occupied the region in August 1941, Gerhard was conscripted into the German Wehrmacht as an interpreter and spent the next 4 years advancing and then retreating with the German army. At the end of the war, Gerhard was taken prisoner by the British, but released in June 1945. For the next two years he taught at a small country school in the southern Germany province of Württemberg.

At a Mennonite youth gathering in 1946, Gerhard met Dr. Ernst Crous, pastor of the Göttingen Mennonite Church and

former archivist in the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. Dr. Crous recognized Gerhard’s academic and leadership talents and invited him to enrol in the newly founded Slavic Department of Göttingen University. In addition to studies in Russian language, culture and history, he also took courses in theology. Hildebrandt completed his doctoral work in the spring of 1956 with a dissertation on the prominent 17th century Russian Orthodox reformer Avvakum. Subsequently, Gerhard Hildebrandt was appointed as Lecturer for Russian language studies in the Slavic Studies department at Göttingen University – one of the oldest and most illustrious universities in Germany – and served in this department until his retirement in the late 1980s.

That same spring he married Julia van Delden, daughter of a prominent German Mennonite industrialist from Gronau, whom he had met at a Mennonite youth gathering in 1947.

In 1951 Gerhard was ordained as a lay minister in the Göttingen congregation. Five years later, when Dr. Crous retired, Hildebrandt was elected to take his place as Ältester, a position which he held until 2002. In 1976 Gerhard was elected to the board of the “Vereinigung der Mennoniten in Deutschland” and served as its chairman for a decade from 1979 onwards. As chairman he worked closely with A. Schnebele of the South-German “Verband” to effect a unification of these two Mennonite conferences into the “Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden” in the 1980s.

As chairman of the conference, Gerhard Hildebrandt met with Pope John Paul II, on Monday, 17 November 1980 in Mainz – the occasion was a meeting of representatives: Mitglieds- und Gastkirchen der Gebetsgemeinschaft Christlicher Kirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und Berlin (West).

In the years following his retirement in the late 1980s, Gerhard Hildebrandt turned his scholarly attention to Mennonite history, specifically the history of his own Russian Mennonite people. In April 1991 he organized the “Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des russland-deutschen Mennonitentums” (Society for the Study and Preservation of the Russian Mennonite Cultural Heritage)

and served as its chairman until 2006. For most of this time Julia Hildebrandt served as recording secretary of the society.

She and Gerhard also worked together closely to publish a moving collection of Mennonite letters from the Gulag, entitled *Aber wo sollen wir hin* (Frankenthal, 1998) and a collection of essays entitled *200 Jahre Mennoniten in Russland* (Weierhof, 2000) – papers presented a decade earlier at a Mennonite bicentennial symposium in Bechterdissen in September 1989. It was here in Bechterdissen that I met Gerhard and Julia Hildebrandt for the first time and developed a life-long friendship.

In 2006, just 6 months before his death, he completed an important collection of source documents in German translation - Gerhard Hildebrandt, *Die Mennoniten in der Ukraine und im Gebiet Orenburg. Dokumente aus Archiven in Kiev und Orenburg* (Göttingen: Göttinger Arbeitskreis, 2006). Together with Dr. Alfred Eisfeld (Göttingen), Gerhard was also working at another collection of source documents in German translation dealing with Mennonite political involvement in Ukraine in the period following the February Revolution of 1917. Dr. Eisfeld has continued working on the project, which is now scheduled for publication later this year in Göttingen.

During the last years of his life, Gerhard was also busy writing a history of Mennonites in the Soviet Union (1927-1941). He was the last surviving Mennonite historian who could actually write about this tragic era from personal experience. Unfortunately, his important manuscript remained unfinished at his death.

Peter Letkemann lives in Winnipeg.



Gerhard Hildebrandt met with Pope John Paul II, on Monday, 17 November 1980 in Mainz.

Photos: Courtesy of Peter Letkemann.



Mennonite Church Manitoba Records Project

Since August 2008, Tamara Dyck has been working part-time on a project to archive and catalogue all Mennonite Church Manitoba (MCM) past records. Employed by MCM, but supervised by the Centre, she has prepared a fonds and series level description with accompanying inventory lists of over 100 pages.

This project was largely made possible through the overall initiative of Edgar Rempel, MCM Executive Director and MCM's Administrative Assistant, Bev Sawatzky, who prepared many of the files for transfer to the Centre.

The MCM collection consists of over 15 metres of textual records, 570 audio reels, 1147 audio cassettes, 2 video cassettes and several hundred photographs.

At the end of the project, it is hoped that records will annually be transferred to the archives.



Tamara Dyck. Credit: A.R.

Genealogy Card Scanning Project Phase 2

The rather routine task of stamping a sequential number on both sides of each one of the approximately 200,000 and then feeding them through the card scanner in batches of 40, is being



Christina Redekopp. Credit: A.R.

performed by Christina Redekopp, a graduate of University of Winnipeg. This project was begun in 2007 when approximately 75,000 were scanned. At the end of Phase 2 just over 150,000 will have been scanned. We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through Library and Archives Canada, in assisting to get the project this far. When the entire collection has been digitized, it will provide Mennonite archives and genealogists specifically a wealth of information which previously had very limited availability. A.R.

Church Bulletins, Minutes, and Annual Reports

During the early part of each year, the Centre receives collections from a number of congregations that are part of Mennonite Church Canada. These packets usually include the weekly bulletins (order of worship and announcements), annual report book, and minutes of the council and congregation. There could also be other publications such as newsletters, directories and special publications.

Connie Wiebe, Archives Administrative Assistant, receives, sorts, files and updates the listings of these collections. For a detailed listing of congregational records look under holdings on our website at:

www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives/



Connie Wiebe. Credit: A.R.

Anabaptist Display Finished

A new "Who are the Mennonites?" display that was talked about beginning ten years ago was dedicated at the Centre on December 18, 2008. The gathering of Mennonite Church Canada and Canadian Mennonite University staff and faculty, and friends were encouraged to use the exhibit to help visitors get an introduction to Mennonite faith and history.

It is estimated that 75% of visitors to the Centre have never visited before, nor been to a Mennonite institution. It is hoped that this exhibit will help address their questions and also breakdown stereo types and misunderstandings. A.R.

A Saskatchewan Visit

by Conrad Stoesz

On March 6-7, 2009 I had the pleasure of being a guest speaker at the Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society's (MHSS) 2-day event featuring the history of the Bergthaler Mennonite church in Saskatchewan.

Friday evening there were 300 people in attendance at Valley Christian Academy, near Osler, to hear tributes to former Aeltester Abram Buhler and Altester John D. Reddekopp.

Saturday started off with the AGM after which I brought greetings from Mennonite Church Canada, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society to the 150 people gathered.

My paper focused on the Sommerfeld Mennonite church and its connections to the Saskatchewan Bergthaler church. I argued that the Sommerfelder/Bergthaler split in Manitoba in 1893 had as much to do with guarding against American revivalist influences as educational concerns. I also traced the history of the Sommerfeld church and highlighted connections to the Saskatchewan Bergthaler.

After a delicious lunch of borscht, potato soup, meat and buns, Leonard Doell gave a presentation on the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan. Current Bishop, George Buhler spoke about the future of the church.

I was encouraged by the response to my presentation and enjoyed talking with people on various historical topics during the breaks.

I was given a tour of the Mennonite villages in the Osler area by resident Len Doell and then treated to a delicious meal, including farmer sausage, with MHSS president Jake Buhler and his wife Louise.

On Sunday I spoke to Osler Mennonite Church adult Sunday school group on the story of the conscientious objectors using www.alternativeservice.ca website. I suggested that if we want peace in our world we need to be telling the stories of those who have worked for peace.



Ray Dirks (left) designed the display, Dr. John J. Friesen (right) retired CMU professor researched and wrote the text. Alf Redekopp (centre) provided overall supervision. Credit: Dan Dyck, MC Canada.

The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague

By Doug Heidebrecht

I had first heard of the International Baptist Theological Seminary (IBTS) in Prague, Czech Republic from David Giesbrecht, former librarian at Columbia Bible College and now Director of the Archives for the Mennonite Historical Society of B.C. David and his wife Betty had volunteered in the library at IBTS during the fall of 2003. I was exploring various doctoral programs and David's enthusiastic report of their time in Prague caught my interest. I applied to begin Ph.D. studies at IBTS in the fall of 2004 and encountered a vibrant Anabaptist community in the heart of Europe.

This year the IBTS is celebrating its 60th anniversary. In 1948, the Baptist World Alliance held a consultation in London to discuss mission work in post-war Europe.¹ At this meeting, the Southern Baptist Foreign Mission Board announced their intention to start a seminary in Switzerland, a neutral country not involved in war reconstruction. An estate was purchased in the village of Rüschnikon and in 1949 the seminary began offering classes toward a Bachelor of Divinity degree with a faculty recruited primarily from North America. The seminary provided a multi-cultural, multi-national community that trained ministers for service throughout Europe.

In 1988 the Southern Baptists handed over responsibility and ownership of the seminary to the European Baptist Federation. Several challenges faced the new governing body. The lack of international accreditation provided difficulties for students wishing to pursue further studies outside of Switzerland. The considerable financial pressures for

maintaining the seminary were heightened when the Foreign Mission Board voted to discontinue their promised ongoing financial support of the seminary in 1991.² With the collapse of communism during the early 1990s, dozens of national seminaries emerged all across central and eastern Europe, which raised questions about the viability of IBTS.

The European Baptist Federation decided to relocate the seminary to the Czech Republic, which facilitated attendance by students from eastern Europe and offered the possibility of much lower operating costs. Jenerálka Castle, an estate built in 1828 and located in a village with the same name (which in Czech means "woman general") on the east side of the Šárka Valley just outside of the city of Prague, was purchased in 1994. Renovation of the derelict buildings took place from 1994-1997 with the assistance of over a thousand volunteers. In April 1997 IBTS officially opened in its new location.

The vision for IBTS also changed at this time. The primary mission of IBTS is to serve Baptist Unions and seminaries by offering higher degrees in theology that would equip conference leaders, missiologists, and seminary lecturers. In 1998 IBTS became a validated institution of the University of Wales with the right to offer Master of Theology degrees and supervise students working towards a Doctor of Philosophy degree in four areas: Applied Theology, Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, Biblical Studies, and Contextual Missiology. In 2000 the government of the Czech Republic granted IBTS accreditation for a Magister of Theology degree, which is recognized



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throughout Europe.

IBTS has established several institutes that engage in ongoing research projects. The Institute of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies, for example, is currently working on a project to make Balthasar Hubmaier's writings available for online research. The IBTS Library holds photographic reproductions of the original prints of all of Hubmaier's works. The Institute of Baptist and Anabaptist Studies has also been involved in the restoration of a seventeenth-century Anabaptist House in the village of Sobotište in Western Slovakia.

Each year IBTS publishes the *Journal of European Baptist Studies* (JEBS) as well several research publications. Recent volumes include: *The Life and Ministry of Balthasar Hubmaier (ca. 1480-1528)* by H. Wayne Walker Pipkin and *Anabaptism and Mission* edited by Wilbert R. Shenk and Peter F. Penner. The library of IBTS, with 75,000 volumes, is one of the largest English language theological libraries in continental Europe.

Besides its academic programs, IBTS offers a variety of opportunities for engaging in theological reflection within a European context. Conferences are held on a variety of topics each year, which draw participants from around the world, particularly Anabaptist scholars from North America. IBTS also offers visitors to Prague accommodations at its Hotel Jenerálka on campus, which is only 20 minutes from the city centre. Further information about IBTS can be found on their website: www.ibts.eu.

As a Canadian, I have found IBTS to be a rich environment for study within a European Anabaptist context. I have appreciated the emphasis on communal hermeneutics, engagement within the life of the church, and intentional Anabaptist spirituality that is not detached from rigorous academic scholarship.

Endnotes

¹ The historical account of IBTS that follows is based on Petra Veselá, *Fit for a King: Tracing the History of the Czech Republic, Jenerálka and IBTS* (Jenerálka: IBTS, 2004), 41, 67-72.

² Keith G. Jones, "The European Baptist Federation: A Case Study in European Baptist Interdependency, 1950-2006" (PhD diss., University of Wales, 2007), 150.



The International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague. Photo credit: Doug Heidebrecht.

Low German Lose Two Significant People

By Elmer Heinrichs

The use of Low German as a communication medium has been a part of Dutch and Russian Mennonite life and expression from the very beginning of their existence as a separate and distinct Christian community.

Herman Rempel of Morden and Rev. John J. Neufeld of Winnipeg gave special attention and made big contributions not just to the maintenance of the language but also to its continuing practical applications.



Herman Rempel. Photo: *Kjenn jie noch Plautdietsch?*



Rev. John J. Neufeld. Photo: CMBS NP149-01-5395

Both men passed away late last year but their legacy remains significant to many who retain the language as an important aspect of their life.

Rempel, a long-time resident of Winnipeg before moving to Morden to work and retire, spent much of his life in civil service, then went on to running for political office and in retirement also devoting himself warmly to the family. He passed away on October 11, 2008.

Many people came to know Herman best for his Low German-English dictionary, *Kjenn Jie Noch Plautdietsch?*, which was published twice, first in 1984,

and a larger version in 1995.

The work was well received by the general public, and, as Reuben Epp has noted, is repeatedly quoted in *Preussisches Woerterbuch* being compiled by the University of Kiel in Germany.

John J. Neufeld hailed from the district of Rosenheim north of Rosenfeld, attended the Winkler Bible School in the 1950s and, among other things, became a much-listened-to radio preacher in the Low German language.

He joined the Gospel Light Hour produced in Winnipeg and broadcast on two stations at first, CFQC in Saskatoon, and CFAM in Altona.

His *Licht von Evangelium* productions stretched over 28 years, with some 5,000 programs. His translation of Bible texts into Low German then led to a project to translate the entire New Testament into Low German.

On his 73rd birthday in May of 1986 Neufeld finished the last verses of Revelation.

Daut Niehe Testament became a significant spiritual resource to many Low German-speaking people for whom this could now become not only a language to speak but to read as well. The New Testament in Low German was published by Kindred Press in 1988.

Neufeld translated the Psalms and Proverbs as well. With the help of the United Bible Society the whole Old Testament could appear in Low German, with 3,000 copies of the entire Bible selling in 2007 alone.

Rev. John J. Neufeld passed away on October 25, 2008 at the age of 95. A funeral service was held on October 31 at Eastview Community Church in Winnipeg. Interment was at La Salle Cemetery. His Low German translations carry forward his concerns for ministry.

(Adapted from *Heritage Posting*.)



John J. Neufeld (left) and Neil Klassen, Producer at MB Communications in Winnipeg with a Low German translation of scripture in 1984. Photo: CMBS NP109-10-23.

Dr. Rhinehart F. Friesen† (1914-2009)

Dr. Rhinehart F. Friesen was born January 6, 1914 in Gretna, Manitoba to Jacob L. and Maria Friesen. In childhood he grew in the community of his large family and in the freedom of the open prairie and woods.

When Rhinehart finished Grade 11 at the age of 14 it was obvious he was too young to confront the world of the Depression, so his parents and teachers wisely persuaded him to spread Grade 12 over two years taking extra subjects and participating heavily in both intra and extra-mural activities. After graduation from the Mennonite Collegiate Institute at Gretna in 1930, he attended Normal School in Winnipeg from 1931 to 1932. He took his first job teaching Elementary School in Winkler, Manitoba.

While teaching in Winkler he boarded at the home of Dr. Cornelius Wiebe who inspired Rhinehart's journey into medicine: an ambitious choice, especially since at that time admission to the University of Manitoba Medical School was limited to a small handful of non-anglo candidates.

Upon completion of his medical internship, Rhinehart married Eira Charles on February 11, 1944. Shortly thereafter, with the rank of Captain, Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, he was posted to Halifax and Debert, Nova Scotia, and Goose Bay, Labrador. Following the war he began a residency at Royal Victoria Hospital in Halifax. This residency was interrupted in 1946 when he contracted tuberculosis giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to a dying patient. He spent a year in Ninette Sanatorium. Expected never to be strong enough to practice medicine but greatly respected by his professors, he was awarded the position of Medical Director of the Manitoba Cancer Relief and Research Institute. After six years he restarted his career with a residency in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the University of Manitoba and was awarded a Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons (Canada) in 1957.

In 1964, in collaboration with Dr. Jack Bowman, Dr. Friesen performed the first successful intrauterine transfusion saving babies threatened by Rh disease. He became an international expert in the technique and lectured extensively at conferences worldwide. Through the 1960s and 1970s he became a respected

Award of Excellence to David K. Schellenberg



Dr. Rhinehart Friesen (1914-2009) Photo credit: *Mennonite Mirror*, May 1983.

leader of the Manitoba medical community as a physician, teacher and innovator and as a favourite of medical staff and patients wherever he practiced. (See *Mennonite Mirror*, Volume 12, No. 9 – May 1983, for Dr. Friesen's account of this medical break-through. – A.R.)

During Rhinehart Friesen's retirement years in the 1980s, he was involved in numerous volunteer activities related to senior's retirement education, children's love of reading and Mennonite history. He was a member of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society for a number of years. He was the author of *Almost an Elephant* (1987) and *A Mennonite Odyssey* (1988). He also enjoyed woodworking, demonstrating craftsmanship in simple things such as the building of toy boats. Playing the piano and singing brought happiness and togetherness into the home. As a member of Westminster United Church he served as an elder, an outreach visitor and on numerous committees.

Rhinehart F. Friesen died on February 6, 2009, predeceased by his beloved wife, Eira of 65 years, on December 11, 2008. Rhinehart and Eira had 3 sons and 1 daughter – John, Bruce, Gordon and Leslie-Anne.

(Adapted from obituary published Feb. 9, 2009 in *Winnipeg Free Press*)

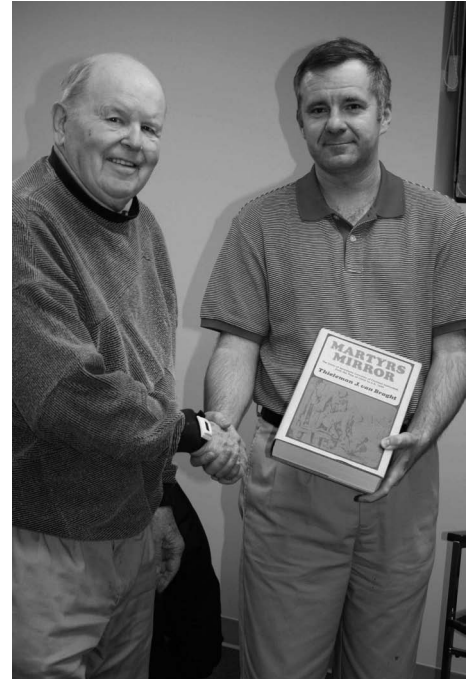
The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada named David K. Schellenberg as the recipient of its 2009 Award of Excellence for his contribution to the preservation of Canadian Mennonite history over a lifetime. The award, made at the Society's January 24 annual meeting in Montreal, especially noted his untiring efforts in the creation and nurture of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference Archives located in Steinbach, Manitoba.

Rev. Schellenberg, who died November 8, 2008 at the age of 91, served as a pastor in the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, and the editor of its English-language paper from 1963 to 1987. He was a conscientious objector in World War II, and frequently emphasized nonresistance in his editorial work. "Dave," as he was known to all, participated in many historical projects for the Evangelical Mennonite Conference, and in his retirement years served on the denomination's archives committee until 2006. He remained a consultant to the EMC Archives until his death.

The Society was pleased to have its annual meeting hosted by the newest provincial Mennonite historical society -- la Société historique mennonite du Québec formed in 2007. Much of that society's efforts have focused on identifying and gathering the documents related to the early history of Mennonites in Québec.

The Canadian Society celebrated several landmarks in the past year. The Global Anabaptist Mennonite Encyclopedia Online (GAMEO) now boasts 14,000 articles, including all of the articles from the print *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. The Divergent Voices of Canadian Mennonites (DVCM), primarily funded by Mennonite Central Committee Canada, reported the publication of Marlene Epp's *Mennonite Women in Canada: a History* by University of Winnipeg Press and a successful conference on Mennonites and Money at the University of Winnipeg in October 2008.

Among other decisions, the Society approved donating copies of Ted D. Regehr's *Mennonites in Canada, 1939-*



Rev. Dave K. Schellenberg (left) is being recognized in 2007 for his many years of service with Evangelical Mennonite Conference (EMC) archives and the archives committee by **Don Kroeker**, chair of the EMC archives committee.

1970: *A People Transformed* to every Mennonite congregation in Canada. Copies of Frank H. Epp's *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940: A people's struggle for survival* will also be offered to congregations for the cost of postage.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was established in 1966 to sponsor the *Mennonites in Canada* history series by Frank H. Epp and Ted Regehr. Its membership is composed of six provincial Mennonite historical societies, four Mennonite denominational bodies, Mennonite Central Committee Canada and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

The 2009 executive is Sam Steiner (Waterloo, Ontario), President; Royden Loewen, (Winnipeg, Manitoba), Vice-President; Lucille Marr (Montreal, Quebec), Secretary; Richard Thiessen (Abbotsford, B.C.), Treasurer; and Alf Redekopp (Winnipeg, Manitoba), fifth member.

MHSC News Release

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Two significant new books on 16th century Anabaptism were published last year, one dealing with a trained theologian, Balthasar Hubmaier, who helped shape the movement in eastern Europe during a very brief leadership cut short by martyrdom; the other about a lay leader who gave lifelong guidance to south German Anabaptism.

The importance of Balthasar Hubmaier for Anabaptist Mennonite studies was confirmed when his key theological writings were translated and published as the 5th volume of the Herald Press series, *Classics of the Radical Reformation*, in 1989. Baptists had promoted him before that, especially in the publication of Torsten Bergsten's *Balthasar Hubmaier: Anabaptist Theologian and Martyr* in 1978. In 2006 one of the translators of the *Classics* volume, H.W.W. Pipkin, chose Hubmaier as his theme for the annual Hughey Lectures. The result is a 118-page booklet entitled *Scholar, Pastor, Martyr: The Life and Ministry of Balthasar Hubmaier (ca. 1480–1528)*, published (2008) in the Czech Republic by the International Baptist Theological Seminary of the East European Baptist Federation. Not only is this a fresh biography by a long-time Hubmaier scholar, but it also encompasses the significant scholarly work produced on him in the two decades since his theological writings were published. It is available for 250CZK (about \$14 Cdn.) plus shipping from denise@ibts.eu.

The Writings of Pilgram Marpeck, translated and edited by William Klassen and Walter Klaassen came out as the 2nd volume of the *Classics of the Radical Reformation* in 1978. While Hubmaier's primary influence on the movement was through his writings, Marpeck left a personal and practical imprint on the shape and character of the emerging believers church through his long leadership role. William and Walter have now collaborated on a new volume, *Marpeck: A Life of Dissent and Conformity* (Herald Press, 2008, 423 pages), giving us the fruit of their long scholarship in showing more comprehensively the dynamics of Marpeck's long theological dialogue with other contemporary Reformation leaders.

Two other recent books are about the experiences of men of Mennonite descent in the armed forces in World War II.

The Mennonite Saga: (With Medics in World War II), a historical novel by Lee Heide (Victoria, BC: Trafford Publishing, 2008), attempts in 281 pages to give in alternating chapters a historical overview of Mennonite history from Menno Simons to the present, and a fictional account of the experiences of Medical Corpsman Paul Haydon in the European theatre of WW II. The author has written several other novels as well as some volumes of short stories. Her grandfather, born in Ekaterinoslav immigrated to the Rosthern area in 1895. At the time the fictional Haydon joins the Canadian forces the family lives in Abbotsford, B.C.

A very different approach is used in Bruno Friesen, *Panzer Gunner: From my Native Canada to the German Ostfront and Back. In Action with the 25th Panzer Regiment, 7th Panzer Division 1944-45* (West Midlands, UK: Helion & Company, 2008), 220 pages, hdc. Born to new immigrants in Manitoba in 1925, the author was in public school in Kitchener, Ontario in 1939 when he and his brother were shipped to Germany about 6 months before Canada joined the war against Germany. In 1942 he joined the *Wehrmacht*, spending most of his service time on the eastern front. The core of this book describes Friesen's time in the military. It is detailed, technical and relatively detached. (James Urry discovered the book in a New Zealand shop "that deals in military and technical books.") Friesen returned to Kitchener-Waterloo in 1950, seemingly fitting in with his former Mennonite congregation as well as any other returning soldier or CO. There is not much detail on family dynamics – what went into the decision of his father Gerhard Friesen (the well-known author "Fritz Senn") to move his family to Germany so shortly before the outbreak of World War II.

The Journal of Peter Elias (1843–1925): Journal of the Emigration from Russia to America & Experiences in Canada from 1875 to 1920, (Abe Elias, [2008]), consists of three parts. The first (58 pages) consists of excerpts from one of the handwritten journals of Peter A. Elias as translated by W.J. Kehler in 1990. The second (155 pages) is a transcription by Abe Elias, Winkler (a great-grandson of the author, and publisher of this book) of the original German manuscript. The third part (42 unnumbered pages) consists of family photographs relating to Peter P. Elias (grandfather of the publisher) and a

selection of his poetry. Since the journals of Peter A. Elias have been widely quoted in historical books relating to Mennonites in Manitoba, this book is significant. Unfortunately, the chapter divisions of the (abridged) English translation do not conform to those of the German original, making it difficult to check the translator's sometimes insecure rendering of Elias' meaning.

Anna Kosloff & Anna Bilborough, *Stateless* (Richmond, Victoria, Australia: Greenhouse Publications, 1983), 214 pages, appears on the face of it to be an odd choice for a book note here in 2009. James Urry discovered it in a used bookshop and quickly determined that its co-authors were Anna (Bergen) Nachtigal Kossloff and her daughter. Born 1900 in the Samara district in Russia, Anna was unsuccessful in her efforts to immigrate to Canada after the revolution. Her alternate route led eastward into China and India, then back west to Germany and eventually to Australia. Dramatic flight stories from communist Russia are not unfamiliar in Russian Mennonite history, yet this particular journey differs significantly in its unique route and the experiences of a stateless Mennonite woman married to a Russian.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 12)

for the intricacies of human psychology will be fascinated by this study of a strong man who had to struggle with particular personal weaknesses. When it would have been easy and natural for him to lead autocratically he chose, however, to be a consensus builder. While he was selfless in the time and energy that he gave to the church, he felt betrayed and offended when his example as a father or his commitment to progress was questioned. Further, it is ironical that the man who was seen as a leader in the early changes was later criticized and rejected because he could not understand or accept the need for more changes.

Mary Neufeld has done an admirable job of analyzing the life of the father she loved, and thereby she helps us appreciate the sacrifices of those who influenced and shaped the churches that we know today.

Worship at 'George Street' – a history of our transitions 1924-2008 is a 270 page hard cover publication by Karl Dick. Available for \$25. Contact: W-K United Mennonite Church office. P: 519-578-0660 or E: wkumchurch@on.aibn.com.

Call for papers

A conference exploring the past 150 years of the Mennonite Brethren Church will be held in July of 2010, immediately preceding the bi-national gatherings of the United States and the Canadian Mennonite Brethren Conferences being held in British Columbia. The general theme will be:

Searching for the Center and Defining Boundaries: Mennonite Brethren Experience as Anabaptists and Evangelicals

In 1860 the Mennonite Brethren Church emerged within the context of religious and social ferment in the Ukraine. During the first few decades of its existence, the movement struggled with integrating Anabaptist, Pietist, and Baptist influences into a distinctive identity within the larger Mennonite church body. Subsequent emigrations moved the center of the church from its birthplace to North and South America while mission efforts expanded ethnic boundaries. Mennonite Brethren continue to wrestle with their identity amidst the push and pull of various religious movements and within their diverse regional and cultural contexts.

The organizing committee is issuing a call for papers to be presented at this conference. Please send us a one-page summary of the theme of a paper you wish to explore. The general theme may be addressed from theological, sociological, historical or related disciplines. Deadline for submissions is May 15, 2009. Please send your submission to

Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission
1310 Taylor Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3M3Z6
Or email: kreddig@mbconf.ca or
ajdueck@mbconf.ca.

Letter to the Editor

I read with great interest the article entitled "Abraham Cornelsen (1826-1884): A Biography." by Helmut T. Huebert (Sep. 2008). I was particularly interested because Abraham Cornelsen was apparently instrumental in the conversion of the family of my great grandfather Martin Just II to the Mennonite Brethren Church. In fact, the article mentions the role of the "Heins and Justs" as recent converts in defusing the situation that led to Abraham Cornelsen's imprisonment.

I write to point out some conflicting information regarding some dates contained in the article. One is the statement that Abraham Cornelsen "officially joined the church when he was baptized 25 April 1860." Another is the statement that "Probably early in February [1860 as

implied by the previous sentence], thirty-two of the leading Brethren were summoned to the Halbstadt District Office to answer charges of having baptized two people in a river." These dates appear to be in conflict with other official events surrounding the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church according to the account of Jacob P. Bekker in his book, *Origin of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (translated and published by the Mennonite Brethren Historical Society of the Midwest, Hillsboro KS, 1973). According to the account of Bekker, who was my great great uncle, he became the leader of the Mennonite Brethren Church when it was founded because Abraham Cornelsen along with Johann Claassen and Isaak Koop were misled by the inspector of a high court into signing an agreement in early February 1860 that they would take no further action in religious matters until they had the explicit sanction of the government. These three had comprised the executive committee that was appointed to present the original letter of secession authored by Abraham Cornelsen (signed 6 Jan. 1860) to the council of elders of the Mennonite Church.

According to Bekker's account, the three honored that agreement and suspended religious activity while Johann Claassen journeyed to St. Petersburg to seek the possibility of official sanctioning. Claassen did not return until May, which contradicts the possibility of baptisms taking place between February and May, 1860. The summoning of the 32 brethren in February 1860 appears to be impossible because the second letter of secession signed by the 32 brethren was not presented until 19 March 1860 (Bekker p. 59-61). Rather, according to Bekker (pp. 75-78), this event occurred after baptisms that occurred in September 1860.

The advice Claassen received was that the three members of the executive committee should take no role in the formation of the new church to avoid prosecution for violating the agreement they had signed. Rather, the congregation should elect teaching ministers from among the rest of the congregation. Upon his return, Claassen presented this advice to the congregation on 30 May 1860. That afternoon, four brethren were nominated to become teaching ministers and two were elected (Jacob P. Bekker and Heinrich Huebert). This seems to be the official beginning of the new church as previous documents were primarily documents of secession. According to Bekker

(p. 69), under this elected leadership, "on the following Sunday, 6 June, Holy Communion was observed. Since 10 February 1860, when the three brethren had given their signatures to the inspector, the seceded group had not held communion services."

Bekker (p. 70) continues, "At this time we were not aware of baptism by immersion. This form of baptism had remained entirely foreign to the majority. After three months [September 1860] two converted sisters who had not yet received the 'sprinkling baptism' in the old church requested to be baptized by us." Prior to that time those joining the seceded group had no reason to be rebaptized because the sprinkling baptism received in the old church was regarded as adequate. The duty to perform these two convert baptisms fell on Bekker. Not until this time in September 1860, after prayer and study by Bekker and Heinrich Bartel based on a pamphlet brought back from St. Petersburg by Claassen, and subsequent approval by the congregation (Bekker p. 72), did the new Mennonite Brethren Church come to the conclusion that baptism should be by immersion. Whereupon "Bekker first baptized Bartel, then Bartel baptized Jacob Bekker, and the latter then baptized three others" (Bekker p. 73). Only after this date, when the doctrine of baptism by immersion began to be taught, did others who had been members of the old Mennonite Church begin to contemplate and receive baptism into the Mennonite Brethren Church.

If Bekker's account is correct, then Abraham Cornelsen could not have officially joined the Mennonite Brethren Church by baptism on 25 April 1860. While it is possible that he could have been baptized by sprinkling into the old church, that seems highly unlikely after the first letter of secession was authored by him. Helmut T. Huebert, who authored the article on Abraham Cornelsen has shared with me the sources for this date of baptism, which consist of a family history he believes was prepared by the Cornelsen family, and a GRANDMA entry for him (#16147). I am also aware of some errors in Bekker's account, but mostly in his reference to historical facts that predated his involvement in the founding of the Mennonite Brethren Church. Thus, ultimate resolution of these conflicts appears to require further research, but the detailed account of Bekker is highly convincing.

Richard E. Just, Silver Spring, MD

Book Reviews

Dr. Horst Gerlach ed. *Die Russland Mennoniten; ein Volk unterwegs Band II: Westpreussen, Russland und zurück* (Kirchheimbolanden: Selbstverlag, 2007), hdc., 416 pp. Ad van Lit, ed. *Geen geluk/Kein Glück Mennoniten in Siberie (No Happiness: Mennonites in Siberia)* (Brummen (NL): Selbstverlag, 2005), pb., 127 pp.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, former MHC Director, now living in Steinbach.

A good deal of current historical literature dealing with Mennonites in Russia and the former Soviet Union, is being self-published by their authors and editors. That often means they come out in fewer copies, and are not as familiar to the public as items provided by regular publishers. These two titles illustrate this reality.. It would be unfortunate if they did not reach the readership they target, or even find their way into libraries which could give needed access. Their German (in one case German/Dutch) texts will restrict North American usage somewhat, but the inclusion of many photos will compensate partly for that.

Gerlach's volume is wide-ranging in its coverage of Mennonite history in West Prussia, and Russia. Some attention is given to spillover of the stories to Germany and Latin America. . With his good access especially to original Prussian materials of all kinds, he is able to supplement significantly the typical rather limited coverage of Prussian Mennonite life and thought, especially in the 20th century up to the time of dissolution of communities at the end of WWII.

Tsarist period Russian Mennonite themes in this volume are quite derivative from earlier published works, but again one finds some very valuable and rare data from the Soviet period, even after WWII, which has not been gathered up in recent works on the subject. The story of the Siberian Mennonites of Neudachino (the specific theme of Van Lit's work) is a case in point (pp.190ff).

Gerlach's organizing principle is at times somewhat unclear, but the material is quite readable, many articles are usefully brief, with a number of contributors of special themes involved. One must take time to locate and assess a wealth of material, but it is worth the time taken to do so.

Van Lit for his part, as a Dutch photographer, has gathered a most interesting and graphic set of photos about Siberian Mennonites in the somewhat remote village of Neudachino east of Omsk on the Transsiberian Railway. Thematically it highlights the experience of the intrepid Gerhard and Maria Neufeld family in its final days of life in the village before emigrating to Germany less than a decade ago. Having known the Neufelds personally adds a strong note of interest in this work for the reviewer.

With a dual Dutch/German text the volume again makes up for linguistic exclusion of English with its rather magnificent photographic portrayal of a family situation that is full of pathos, but also of achievement in the deprived situation of impoverished Mennonites in Siberia . These families could make some progress after the fall of communism, but seeing little future in quality of life virtually all the families of this community left for Germany. Some thirty of a one- time group of over 100 families remain in Neudachino today.

Both volumes are well-printed and produced, and the editors merit much thanks for giving these studies to the reading public.

Mary Neufeld, *A Prairie Pilgrim: Wilhelm H. Falk* (Winnipeg, MB: Self-published, 2008) 461 pp.

Reviewed by Arden Thiessen, retired EMC minister and part-time Bible College professor in Steinbach.

Wilhelm H. Falk (1892 – 1976) was one of those sturdy, committed church leaders who guided the faith and cared for the souls of the Mennonite pilgrims over whom they had spiritual oversight. In 1927 Wilhelm Falk was ordained as a minister of the Sommerfeld church on the West Reserve. From the beginning he felt restless about entrenched church traditions and preached a message of conversion, renewal, and holy living. He was one of the four ministers who were eventually asked to leave the church and who then formed the group of Rudnerweide congregations. In 1937 he was chosen to lead this revival movement as Aeltster, a position in which he toiled diligently for the next seventeen years.

Mary Neufeld, the author of this imposing volume, has done an incredible

amount of research and collecting. At many points the reader will wonder if the work would not have been more effective if petty family affairs, household details, and the repetitive meeting reports had been edited and reported more concisely. At the beginning Mary admits that, being one of the younger daughters of the Falk family, her version of her father's life and ministry will likely be biased. My impression is that she is actually admirably fair and objective. There is little here of the gushy adulation with which former leaders are sometimes described, the uncritical idealization of new church movements, or the reactionary accusations into which the children of important figures have sometimes slipped. Mary is concerned that her father be remembered and appreciated for the selfless service to which he was committed, but she is also frankly candid about the flaws and weaknesses that the family had to endure.

This book will be enjoyed by readers who have connections with the Altona/Winkler area and desire new insight into the church dynamics that swirled around the Bergthaler, Sommerfelder, Mennonite Brethren, and Rudnerweider (EMMC) churches of the area.

Mary's biography gives us fascinating insight into the lives of our former church leaders, men who combined their passionate dedication to the welfare of their churches with the relentless responsibilities of earning a living and caring for a family. How did they do it? Mary's research and recollections give us honest insight into how the responsibilities of the church affected one leader's family life.

This family chronicle will be valued by those who have an interest in the story of the emergence and development of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference. There is extensive treatment of various conflicts: the German language issue, the matter of pacifism during World War II, disagreements over the doctrine of eternal security, struggles over conference polity, and the encroaching emphasis on a pre-millennial view of the end times. While denominational sources may have dealt with the history of these issues, Mary presents another perspective, that of the young daughter who is introduced to these discords through the agonies of her father.

Those who read biographies with an eye
(cont'd on p. 10)