

# Mennonite Historian



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*This group of Mennonite families lived on the estate (chutor) of Kornejewka in south Russia around 1905. Among those pictured are Julius Heinrichs (inset from an older photo), and Heinrich Bergmann (front, fifth from left), soon to become a member of the Russian Duma. Photo provided by Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

## Abraham R. Friesen: A Diary Excerpt From Russia

Old diaries of Mennonites from Russia can tell us much about every-day experiences in the life of individuals and families, as well as the colonies generally.<sup>1</sup> Many items seem routine, notes on the weather, farm operations, visits from friends and relatives, etc. Occasionally observations may be more profound, with comments on religious affairs or political events in attempts to understand the larger world "outside".

More and more of these diaries are coming to light, and their transcription and/or translation opens them up for readers today. The diary of Abraham R. Friesen (1846-1884), a young Kleinemeinde farmer and school teacher from Lichtenau, Molotschna, illustrates this quite well.

Abraham had followed the family tradi-

tion of his father, Kornelius (1810-1892), who too had combined the two occupations in the Molotschna community of south Russia. Married to Agatha Kornelsen, he migrated to the Kleinemeinde area of Borosenko around 1869. Both families moved to Manitoba in the 1870's to settle in the East Reserve around Steinbach.

The two volumes of this document have been preserved by descendants; the author's grandson, Harry S. Friesen of Winnipeg, has begun to translate the material into English. The original was unpaginated, and written in German long-hand, somewhat illegible at points, but basically readable for persons familiar with the script. An interesting feature is the use of notes in a kind of code involving Russian letters, numbers, and letters of the English alphabet. The first

volume contains 164 pages and covers the period from October 12, 1870 - December 16, 1875, thus ending a few months after the family's emigration to Manitoba. The second volume includes 226 pages, dealing with the period from February 18, 1876, to May 28, 1884 in the Canadian setting. About eighteen pages appear to be missing in this original. The second volume also has a brief note on the death of the author, written by his daughter Maria in 1933.

For interested readers we submit a short excerpt from Abraham's writings set down in 1872 not long before the emigration.<sup>2</sup>

April 13, 1872. F. Enns came from Borosenko<sup>3</sup> on Thursday, also Ab(ram) Reim(er), Kor(nelius) Eids(e), Joh(ann) Fr(iesen) also visited here. Yesterday and the day before it rained in places, with thunder and lightning. It looks like rain today also. Sisters-in-law Mrs. Enns (Ennsche), Giesbrecht (Giesbrechtsche) and H. Warkentins were here today, April 16. (Then follows a "coded" message, undeciphered by the translator-Ed).

April 23rd. Kornelius Kornelsens from Crimea<sup>4</sup> were here and in the evening Johann Reimers of Borosenko were also here.

April 21st. The school councillor Franz Dueck was in school. My rheumatism does not want to leave me completely.

April 21st, Ditto. Siemens, Muensterberg, were visitors here in the afternoon.

April 26th. I, father, and brother-in-law Giesbrecht drove to the fields to look at the grain. Very dry and windy. The grain does not look good.

May 1(?). H. Friesen of the Crimea came over; they came to visit us. D. Friesen, Rosenfeld, came to our place too, and brought sister Maria and brother Kornelius along.

Sunday, May 6th. It rained heavily so that we were surrounded with water. Father-in-law Giesbrechts, Heinrich Warkentins were here. It rained heavily in Muensterberg, Blumstein too.

May 10th. Examinations were held here.<sup>5</sup> It went very well as far as we were concerned. Visitors were teachers: Siemens, Muensterberg; Dietrich Warkentin, Lindenau; Joh(ann) Warkentin, Neuhutterthal; brother-in-law, D. Friesen

(?), Rosenfeld. From here Ab(ram) Warkentin, Kor(nelius) Warkentin, H. Warkentin; both mayors (schultz); H. Nikkel, father-in-law, G. Giesbrecht, Kor(nelius) Kornelsen, Joh(ann) Boldt, Ab(ram) Nikkel (?), Mrs. Isaak Berg, Mrs. Wiebe, Mrs. Ballau.

Sat., May 13th. Bought a gelding from Jakob Schmitt for 10 ruble silver. 6 years old.

May 12th. D. Friesens left and Kor(nelius) Goossens were here.

The original diary is deposited in duplicate at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives. Mr. Friesen, the translator, resides at 250 Waterloo in Winnipeg, Manitoba. *Lawrence Klippenstein*.

#### Notes

1. A recent example of research based on a personal diary is John B. Toews, "A Russian Mennonite: The Diary of Diedrich Gaeddert (1860-1876), *Mennonite Life* XXXIII, Dec., 1978, pp. 10-18.

2. The early 1870's were the years of struggle about obtaining alternative service for Mennonites in Russia. The diary strangely enough, makes almost no allusions to these events.

3. Borosenko had been founded as a Mennonite settlement to the south of the Old Colony around 1865. The Kleingemeinde villages established there included Friedensfeld, Rosenfeld, Hochfeld, Heuboden, Steinbach, Blumenhof, and later Gruenfeld.

4. A Kleingemeinde group had been organized in the Crimea at the village of Anafeld in 1867. Several years later it reorganized to become an immersionist congregation known as Krimmer Mennonite Brethren.

5. A discussion of the educational pattern in the Molotschna colonies was published by Peter Braun, "The Educational System of the Mennonite colonies in South Russia," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, III (July, 1929), pp. 169-182.

## Mennonite Films

A Winnipeg craftsman and film producer, Otto Klassen, recently donated copies of two films to the archives of the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

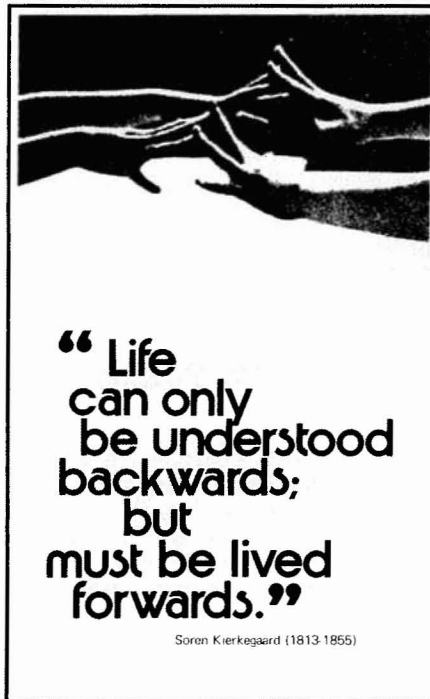
A 25-minute production depicts an extended interview by Dr. George K. Epp with minister and historian, Gerhard Lohrenz, and two other well known leaders, now deceased, Rev. J. J. Thiessen of Saskatoon, and Winnipeg businessman, C.A. DeFehr.

The second film, a 12-minute run, called *Danken*, reflects with gratitude to God upon the deliverance felt by many in the Mennonite migrations of World War II and later.

Having himself experienced the difficult treks of those years, first to South America, and then to Canada, Klassen has long shown a deep interest in the meaning of Mennonite heritage. His extensive involvement in film making has been for him an avenue of expressing his appreciation, and a concern that rich treasures of our story not be lost.

Currently working on several other themes, Klassen is known already for a 50-minute Centennial celebration title in color, *Prairie Pioneers. The Mennonites of Manitoba*. His large collection of color photos have been prize-winning contributions at several major exhibitions of the province.

All the above-mentioned reels are available for public use from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba R3P 0M4.



## CMBC Student Research

Mennonite studies has been from the outset a feature of the curriculum of Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg. In this course hundreds of students have received a thorough introduction to an Anabaptist perspective on Christian faith, and the Mennonite story since its beginnings nearly half a century ago.

Normally the course in Mennonite history and thought has also involved a research project on related themes. In recent years increasingly more emphasis has been laid on using primary sources for such work, particularly from the Canadian Mennonite experience. It may interest readers of this newsletter to know what topics were investigated this past year. They include the following:

**Biographies:** C.F. Klassen, MCC director in Europe; the politics of David Boldt, MLA from Osler, Saskatchewan.

**Congregational and conference history:** Sargent Avenue Mennonite Church; Winnipeg; Sommerfelder Mennonites of Manitoba; Altona Bergthaler Church; Sterling Mennonite fellowship; Winkler Bergthaler Church; Fiske Mennonite Church, Saskatchewan; First Mennonite, Winnipeg; the Dzhabul Mennonite congregation of Kazakhstan in the Soviet Union; Mennonites in Zaire, Africa, and the Maritimes of eastern Canada; and Ontario inter Mennonite cooperation.

**Community history:** the Greenfarm S.D. and the village of Rosenthal, both in southern Manitoba.

**Family studies:** The Hieberts, Abram Janzen; Plenert; Bergen-Epp; Mrs. Susie Rempel and her family.

**Schools:** Elim Bible School, Altona; Rockway Mennonite School, Kitchener, Ontario; Menno Bible Institute, Didsbury, Alta.; attendance in Manitoba public schools, inspectors' reports in Manitoba Mennonite schools.

**Indices:** "Recalling Past Days", of the *Red River Valley Echo*, 1972-1977; *Mennonitische Blaetter*, 1854-1882.

**Others:** Mennonite attitudes to alcohol, church discipline, Mennonite church architecture, Mennonite voting patterns, the experience of the Russian Revolution, and the celebration of Mennonite centennials.

Professors John Friesen and Adolf Ens have been in charge of instruction and research assignments. Copies of all papers completed are available for further research in the files of the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

## MVM (Canada) Incorporated

At a special member's meeting held in Steinbach on April 17, 1979, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society passed a resolution to reorganize under a new name. The new name is Mennonite Village Museum (Canada) Inc., reflecting the major interest which the Society has had in that project over the past fifteen years. All members of the earlier MMHS automatically become members of MVM (Canada) Inc.

At the same meeting it was agreed that the Cultural Committee, a sub-committee of the Society, "be permitted and encouraged to facilitate the formation of a new corporate body under the old name of "Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society". This group would then serve to initiate other tasks related to heritage concerns and historical work among Mennonites in the province.

All interested persons are invited to become members of the Mennonite Village Museum organization, or of the projected Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, or of both, if they so desire.

The current executive of Mennonite Village Museum (Canada) Incorporated includes the following persons: Past president, J.J. Reimer, present board president, Henry W. Redekopp, Gerhard Ens, secretary, Eugene Derksen, first vice-president, P.J.B. Reimer, second vice-president, and chairpersons of the committees: Elmer Hildebrand, finance; John Friesen, Cultural Committee; George Loewen, Museum management, and Mary Loewen, Women's Auxiliary.

The annual meeting of MVM (Can.) is projected for later in summer. A date will be announced shortly.

### Now Available!

#### That There Be Peace

Mennonites in Canada and W.W. II

*A pictorial album and reflections on the work of Mennonite conscientious objectors in Canada during World War II. 106 pp.*

Paperback - \$6.00

Hardcover - \$9.00

(Postage included)

Order from:

**David J. Braun, Box 112  
Steinbach, Manitoba  
R0A 2A0**

Please enclose payment  
with order.



*A Sunday afternoon event in the village of Altberghal, west of Altona, on the bank of Buffalo Creek. The photo is dated "about 1905" and was provided by Mrs. A.A. Braun, of Winnipeg, Manitoba.*

The material for this page was provided by the Cultural Committee of MVM (Canada) Incorporated.

## Village Museum News

Visitors at the museum this spring have included about 7000 school children in May and June.

CN has agreed to restore to working condition one of the steam engines which has been in the museum for a number of years. There will be no cost to the museum.

A new booklet to guide visitors has been published this spring. Entitled "Mennonite Village Museum" it was written by Sue Barkman and printed by Derksen Printers of Steinbach.

The museum now carries an extensive line of Mennonite publications for sale to the public.

Restoring the log house and rebuilding the semlin are part of a special project aimed for completion by Pioneer Days time.

PIONEER DAYS THIS SUMMER ARE SCHEDULED FOR AUG. 3-6. Attractions include oxcart rides, milling, threshing, and possibly the grand opening of the new barn as well!

Jeanette Hamilton is heading a team of artifact catalogers as part of a National Inventory project with the National Museum Association. Five local assistants are also involved.

Retired curator of the Mennonite Village Museum, John C. Reimer, and his wife Maria, celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary (60th) in June. Mr. Reimer was a school teacher for 26 years. Besides helping to found the museum, he has also given time to family research and related activities. The Reimers live in Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Books to Mexico

The Cultural Committee recently agreed to donate a number of copies of Mennonite studies material to the Mennonite community in Mexico. Among the titles are **Woher? Wohin? Mennoniten!**, Vol. II and IV, by P.J. Schaefer; **Johann Cornies**, by D.H. Epp; **Geschichte der Mennoniten in Europa**, by C.H. Smith, and J.J. Nickel's **Betrachtungen ueber die Bergpredigt**. Additional copies of these titles can be obtained from the Heritage Centre.

## Centennials Again

A Centennial reunion for the village of Gnadenthal in southern Manitoba is being planned for July 19 and 20, 1980. The two-day event will highlight the religious and cultural background of the various people who have lived in the community during the past hundred years and also offer traditional culinary delights.

Work has been started on a history of Gnadenthal to be published in the spring of 1981. Pictures, information and statistics are solicited from all former residents and friends.

Research is being headed up by Mrs. Ruth Bock, Lot 89, Manitou Road, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3L 1W7.

For further information on the program contact Mrs. Elma Dyck, 48 Coral Cres., Winnipeg, Manitoba R2J 1V7.

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The village of Osterwick in southern Manitoba celebrated its centennial on July 15. It was noted that 51 teachers taught in the community since its beginning. **The Brauns of Osterwick**, written by Peter Brown and published in 1972, depicts the early history of the village.

## Heritage Centre Events

\* A new microfilm reader-printer has been placed in the archives at the Heritage Centre. With a growing collection of microfilm materials it will make new information available quickly to students and researchers at the Centre.

\* Lois Schmidt, receptionist and secretary at the archives, will be continuing her studies this fall. Coming to take her place will be Elizabeth Quapp from Leamington, Ontario. A fuller introduction will appear in the next issue of MH.

\* Among the new recent archival acquisitions is a set of Low German tapes donated by Dr. Victor Peters from Moorhead, Minnesota. They come from the years when Dr. Peters produced a Low German program for CFAM, a feature still continuing under the direction of Gerhard Ens, editor of *Der Bote*.

\* Volunteer staff assistants at the archives of past months include Joyce Schellenberg, Margie Bryce, Norman Klippenstein, Harry S. Friesen, and Dennis Stoesz. **Additional volunteer help is urgently needed for a great variety of tasks at the archives.** If interested, contact the office at 1-204-888-6781.

\* Visitors are invited to see the first stages of a new heritage art display in the Mennonite Heritage Centre, prepared by Ken Loewen of Altona, and Gerald Loewen of Winnipeg. Black and white photography and welding sculpture are highlighted in the display.

\* The board of the Red River Valley Historical Society held its annual meeting at the Centre on May 11. Several church groups have also recently toured the premises.

\* An attractive Mennonite genealogy display was prepared by Mrs. Margaret Kroeker for the Music and Art Festival held at Polo Park Mall in Winnipeg on May 27. Margaret, and Mrs. Hannah Rempel, provide regular part-time voluntary genealogical research assistance at the Centre.

\* Adolf Ens, member of the History Archives Committee, and professor at CMBC, received his PhD in Canadian history this spring. His dissertation dealt with Canadian Mennonites and their relationship to the government in educational affairs.

\* Succeeding Vera Fast as member of the History-Archives Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada is Rev. Frank F. Enns, minister of the Glenlea Mennonite congregation. Rev. Enns is the author

of *Ohm Franz*, a biography of his late father, Aeltester Franz Enns, of the Whitewater Mennonitengemeinde. The book was first published in German, and recently has appeared in an English edition also. For copies contact the author at 74 Linacre, Winnipeg, Manitoba. The editions sell for \$5.00 and \$4.00 respectively (paperback).

## New Acquisitions

Among the recent microform acquisitions at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives is the material of "The Radical Reformation Microfiche Project, Section I" entitled **Mennonite and Related Sources up to 1600**. It is a comprehensive collection of the primary sources on religious nonconformity in Europe during the sixteenth century. Included are 388 different titles, mainly in Dutch and German. A microfiche reader comes with the material, which now provides a significant resource for Anabaptist-Mennonite studies at Canadian Mennonite Bible College and the Heritage Centre.

The bulk of the attendance registers of closed schools in the southern Manitoba "Mennonite" divisions of Hanover, Rhineland and Garden Valley have been deposited at the archives also. They contain valuable information about the history of the one-room, and also some multi-room schools, hence documentation for the history of education in Western Canada generally. A number of financial ledgers, trustee minute books, etc. have been included in the deposit. A study of the Greenfarm S.D. north of Winkler based largely on these records was completed by Beverley Suderman at CMBC this spring.

It is hoped that old registers still located in private homes or offices of these areas will be forwarded to complete this collection in the near future.

## Publications to Come

A number of Mennonite writers and researchers are looking forward to publication of their work in 1979. Among them are the following:

**Walk Humbly with Your God** by William Janzen. An anthology of twelve sermons preached at the Ottawa Mennonite Church. Published by CMBC Publications.

**Days of Terror** by Barbara Smucker. A story for children about the emigration of Mennonites from Russia in the 1920's. Available in August.

**That There Be Peace** edited by Lawrence Klippenstein. A pictorial sketch of the Canadian Mennonite conscientious objectors' story in World War II. Published by the

Manitoba CO Reunion Committee. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**No Strangers in Exile** by Hans Harder, translated from the German edition by Dr. Al Reimer. A novel about Russian Mennonite experiences in Siberian exile during the Stalin era. Published by Hyperion Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

**Aeltester Johann Funk - Life and Family** edited by Mary Jefferey. Genealogy, with introduction of the first Aeltester of the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba. Paperback.

**Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America** by Gerhard Wiebe, translated from the German edition (1900) by Helen Janzen. A memoir of the 1874 emigration of Mennonites from Russia by an Aeltester of the Bergthal Colony, Gerhard Wiebe. Paperback.

Community history books are in progress also for the Blumenorter and Lowe Farm Mennonite congregations, Man., the Rural Municipality of Morris, Manitoba, the towns of Horndean, Altona, and Niverville, as well as the villages of Gnadenthal and Blumenfeld in southern Manitoba. The Conference of Mennonites in Alberta and the Elim Bible Institute of Altona are preparing publications of their history as well.

## Two Newsletters Added

In early spring our office received the first issue of **Menno's Memo**, a newsletter published by the Golden Age Society in Clearbrook, B.C. Its address is 2494 Clearbrook Rd. It seeks to gather news about heritage concerns in the Mennonite community of the Fraser Valley. Projects of the Golden Age Society include administration of the MCC Furniture Store, and another shop for promotion of handicraft skills of local people, besides being "senior citizen tour office, income tax application office and a collection place for Mennonite historical items."

Not as new, but still unknown to many is **De Mennist**, a bilingual newsletter in Dutch and English, coming from a small Mennonite community in Australia. The editor is Foppe Brouwer, who also directs an emerging Mennonite congregation at Fennel Bay in New South Wales. His address is 9 Brougham Ave., Fennel-Bay, 2283, N.S.W. Australia. Its concern is strongly devotional and reflects the way in which Anabaptist themes are worked within what is essentially a "non-ethnic" Mennonite group down under. Foppe with his wife Alice, and their daughter, visited the Mennonite World Conference at Wichita, and also spent time with several Mennonite congregations in Canada last summer. They continue to have strong connections also with Mennonite congregations in The Netherlands.