

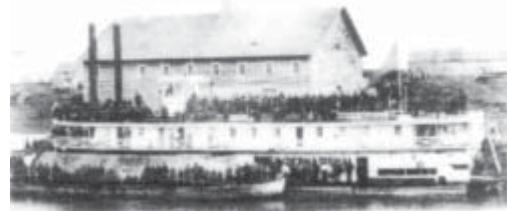
# Preservings

-being the Magazine/Journal of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.

Preservings \$10.00

No. 19, December, 2001

"A people who have not the pride to record their own history will not long have the virtues to make their history worth recording; and no people who are indifferent to their past need hope to make their future great." — *Jan Gleysteen*



## Mennonite Theology

In his feature essay, J. Denny Weaver has written that "Theology has never been more crucial to the future of Mennonites as faithful Anabaptists than at this moment." Since the Church Councils of the third century, Christendom (what our great-grandparents referred to as the "Christentum der Welt") has separated theology and ethics.

Professor Weaver points out that in the past, religious culture (also referred to as ethnicity) "has 'saved' many generations of Anabaptists [Mennonites] as a peace church, and continues to have meaning, religious and otherwise, for many people..." and should not be maligned. "Mennonites [had a] visible ethnicity that reminded us...that Jesus was our norm for ethics."

On the other hand, "...throughout Mennonite history, when Mennonites have become culturally assimilated, they have also lost their commitment to nonviolence and ultimately their identity." Consequently, "...theology has become a primary tool for defining who we are as a community of faith," especially for assimilated Mennonites.

Weaver argues rather effectively that the current post-modern era, far from being something to be feared, is an opportunity for Mennonites and others who include the ethical teachings of Jesus in their Christian faith, to place their beliefs alongside the creeds of Christendom with equal credibility.

Weaver analyses the writings of Dutch Bishop Peter Jansz Twisk (1565-1636), as well as Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony

leaders such as Ältester Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), Ältester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), Prediger Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) and Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), to conclude that "Developing a theology specifically shaped by the non-violence of Jesus is not a fundamental departure from previous Anabaptist and Mennonite theologizing."

Some samples of Weaver's observations regarding our local faith heroes: "[Klaas] Reimer also used terminology reminiscent of Christus Victor, the atonement motif that depicts Jesus' saving work in terms of victory of or a defeat of the devil." "[Gerhard] Wiebe's description of the death of Jesus might be said to echo the element of victory from the Christus Victor atonement motif." "[Ältester Johann Wiebe's]" "...comments about the blood of Jesus being an offering for sin...certainly locate Wiebe in the historic satisfaction school of images." John Holdeman "...considered [premillennialism]...a gross contradiction for Christians to accept war in the present while arguing that Jesus's teachings about nonresistance belonged to a future kingdom."

Weaver concludes that "Mennonites and Amish [leaders]...understood and talked about atonement in terms of...some version of Anselmian, satisfaction atonement doctrine." At the same time, "...all of [the Mennonite writers studied]....added to or changed the emphasis in some way so that discipleship and following Jesus were visible....If we now develop a theology specifically shaped by nonviolent discipleship, we are simply being more explicit and going further in a direction already visible in these earlier writers."

Mennonites and other Gospel-centric believers can validate their faith through living a faith embodying the teachings of Jesus. "Ethics and theology are two versions--one written and one lived--of the story of Jesus." "John Howard Yoder said that we testify to the truth of Jesus by living like Jesus did...."

In the place of the violence accommodating theology of Christendom, Weaver suggests "...a theology that is actually a reading of the Bible's narratives in Revelations and the Gospels...and a narrative Christus Victor for an atonement motif....that displays the reign of God in non-violent confrontation of and triumph over



J. Denny Weaver, Bluffton College, Ohio. Author of *Becoming Anabaptist* (1987), *Keeping Salvation Ethical* (1997), *Anabaptism in the face of Postmodernity* (2000), and *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Eerdmans, 2001). Weaver's published works rank him as a major scholar of contemporary religion. With his insightful exposition of a Christ-centered theology, Weaver continues in the footsteps of his father-in-law Bishop J. C. Wenger as a gifted Bible teacher and contributor to the Christian faith. Photo - Pres., No. 18, page 54.

evil....Developing a theology that makes explicit the nonviolence of Jesus involves a discussion about who Jesus is and what it means to be a Christian."

Such a theology, Weaver suggests, "...shaped by the nonviolence of Jesus...thus challenges both the direct violence of war and...the systemic violence of economic and colonial exploitation....The peace church should pose an explicit challenge or alternative to the religious nationalism."

All believers whether Mennonites or otherwise will be inspired by Weaver's insightful and poignant analysis and observations regarding a theology acknowledging fully the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The Editor.

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# Introduction - Feature story “Mennonite Theology”

Without particular planning in that direction, this issue of *Preservings* has become our first major theological issue. Important articles on “Conversion and the rebirth,” by the editor, “Assurance of Salvation,” by Bishop J. C. Wenger, “Mission work and the Anabaptists,” by Joseph Stoll, Senior editor of Pathway Publications, “Confessions of a Hutterite Convert,” by Robert Rhodes, and “The Kingdom of God and the Endtimes,” by Oxford scholar Walter Klaassen, are anchored with a major paper by J. Denny Weaver, Professor of Religion, Bluffton College, Ohio, on “Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity.”

Although implicit from the very first epistles and tracts of the Reformation-era, the development of a Mennonite theology--in the sense of a scholarly articulated expression, is a relatively recent project.

In examining and utilizing the writings of 19th century Mennonite leaders, J. Denny Weaver has avoided the error of many of arching over 400 years of history and using only Reformation roots to inform the discussion of a Mennonite theology. This, of course, is helpful to some 300,000 Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites, whose biblical communities and existential Christian living remained faithful to this vision for all those years, manifesting thereby also the truth and validity of Gospel-centric faith.

J. Denny Weaver correctly points out that ever increasing assimilation makes it critical for Mennonites to have a theology to define themselves in place of their former ethnicity. But it is even more essential for Conservative Mennonites to have such as theology because for the past century or more they have been under continual assault by proselytizers seeking to turn them away from their Gospel-centric faith and to convert them to Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture. Over the decades this has resulted in thousands of broken homes and many fractured and even destroyed Christian communities.

Consequently it is critical to provide the faithful with digestible and understandable doctrinal and theological resources which are properly grounded in scripture and reflect the Gospel-centric spiritual heritage once received from God. Hopefully the theological articles in this issue of *Preservings* will be a modest contribution to such an endeavour.

Ever since the invention of the concept of a “conversion experience” in the “Great Awakening” of 18th century England, Protestant Fundamentalists have used the idea as a primary weapon in their endeavour to entice Christians of other confessions to convert themselves to their religious culture. My paper on “Conversion and the Rebirth” underlines the truth always recognized within the Mennonite community that there are a number of Biblical models of conversion or accepting the sovereignty of Christ, and that to pro-

mote one to the exclusion of others as the only recognized way to salvation is a grievous perversion of the Gospel.

Protestant Fundamentalists have been exceedingly zealous in carrying out their interpretation of the Great Commission, particularly in attacking other Christian confessions to convert to their religious culture. But they have typically forgotten the last reported instructions of Jesus, namely, to teach them “...to observe all things I have commanded you,” Matt 28:20.

Mennonites who have abandoned Gospel-centric faith and converted themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism have enthusiastically joined in the crusade of that religious culture of imposing its “truth” upon the entire world. Their particular mission in this hyper-modernist project has been to convert all other Mennonites to their way of thinking. As one strategy to this end, they have treasured the myth that they were merely engaged in returning people to the core values of Reformation Anabaptism.

Joseph Stoll, senior editor of Pathway Publications, Aylmer, Ontario, has compiled a much needed paper on “Mission Work and the Anabaptists”. He explains why the Protestant mission movement has found little acceptance among Amish, Mennonites and other Christians who still centre their faith and life on Jesus Christ and His teachings. Stoll particularly challenges the notion that this movement is based on the historical precedent of the Apostolic church and/or that of early Anabaptism.

We are thankful to Robert Rhodes for allowing us to republish his article “Confessions of a Hutterite Convert.” The article demonstrates that Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites, have an important mission of their own, namely, to show people the way to Christ by simply following Him in life and deed, building God’s kingdom on earth through communities modelled on those of the New Testament. Thousands, indeed, millions, come every year to observe Amish and Old Order Mennonites in their home communities because it strikes a sympathetic chord with people of all religions and confessions thereby enriching their lives and inspiring them in their future hopes.

Over the past century Mennonites in southern Manitoba have been deeply impacted by the Protestant Fundamentalist teaching of dispensationalism. Rev. Ben D. Reimer, Steinbach, was a dispensationalist although the Evangelical Mennonite Conference he co-founded never officially adopted the teaching (I understand it came quite close). By 1953 the Rudnerweider or Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church centered in the West Reserve had officially adopted dispensationalism.

Dispensationalists profess that the life and teaching of Jesus are not relevant or applicable in the current time which they referred to as the

“church age”. Such a teaching of course is directly contrary to the fundamental notion of Christians as being those who followed or imitated Christ and His teachings. As such dispensationalism is regarded by some observers as an Anti-Christian teaching as it denies the efficacy of the life and teaching of Christ in the present time.

In 1999 Professor Walter Klaassen published a major work, *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* (Harold Press, 1999), 281 pages, in which he outlines the historical origins of the Darbyite Scofieldian apostasy and presents Biblical teaching on the topic of the 1000 year reign of Christ, the millennium. In his article “The Kingdom of God and the Endtime”, Walter has summarized parts of the book for *Preservings* readers. Hopefully it will assist Mennonites to better understand their heritage of faith and perhaps even those who have converted themselves to alien religious cultures will be able to recognize where they went astray.

Undoubtedly among the most tragic and dramatic chapters in the history of Christianity is the story of Mennonite persecution and suffering in Soviet Russia. Lawyer and historian Colin Neufeldt, Edmonton, has made another important contribution to this historiography with his account of the 1929 flight to Moscow. In this instance Mennonites engaged in what may well be one of the most significant acts of civil disobedience in Soviet history, staring down the Communist government in Moscow. Tragically the thousands not able to escape to freedom suffered the cruellest deaths and punishments imaginable.

The editorial dealing with the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S.A. and its aftermath attempts to extrapolate some perspective on these events which have undoubtedly affected life in some way for all of us.

The material culture section continues the on-going series looking at various Mennonite educational endeavours (including the Hutterites, of course) with an article about the Kleine Gemeinde school system at Jagueyes, Mexico. Through their “Centro Evangelico Escolar” (CEE) they have made an important contribution to the kingdom of God by developing wholesome school curriculum and other reading and devotional literature. CEE teaching materials are now used across North America and in Germany.

The world of Mennonite books and literature is so rich it is impossible to introduce the reader to more than a sampling. One of the most important books for Russian Mennonites (a community of over 500,000), is the work of Henry Schapansky on the *Old (Chortitz) Colony*. In my book review essay I explain how Henry’s *magnum opus*, corrects historical errors that have cursed this community since the publication of P. M. Friesen’s *Mennonite Brotherhood* in 1911.

Enjoy. The editor.

## Publication Statement.

“*Preservings*” is the magazine/journal of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0, published in June and December, semi-annually, a project of Mennonite orthodoxy. Editor Delbert F. Plett, phone 1(204)-326-6454, business, 1(204)326-6719fax, e-mail “dplett@mb.sympatico.ca”. Web sites: “www.hshs.mb.ca” and “www.mts.net/~dplett”.

We are always looking for more individuals who may want to contribute articles and/or photographs. Please send manuscripts, articles and/or photographs to HSHS c/o Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Annual subscription fee is \$20.00, individual issues \$10.00 each.

The editorial viewpoint of *Preservings* is conservative and orthodox with respect to the founding peoples of Hanover Steinbach (“East Reserve”) and regarding the Russian Mennonite story. The views and opinions expressed in the editorials, commentaries, articles and letters published in *Preservings* are those of the editor and individual writers alone and do not reflect those of the HSHS, its board of directors and/or membership. Copyright remains with the writers and artists. Registration # 1524399.

# Feature Articles

## Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity Why Theology Matters

Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: Why Theology Matters, by J. Denny Weaver, Professor of Religion and Chair of the Department of Religion, Bluffton College, Bluffton, Ohio.

### Introduction.

Theology has never been more crucial to the future of Mennonites as faithful Anabaptists than at this moment (Note One). Since Mennonites have taken great satisfaction—it would not be proper historically to say that they prided themselves!—on not being a theological tradition, asserting the importance of theology may seem like an audacious statement. This essay will provide justification for that seemingly audacious statement. In so doing, it both honors and looks beyond the historic Anabaptist and Mennonite legacy that we treasure.

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**"Theology has never been more crucial to the future of Mennonites....than at this moment."**

When I underscore the significance of theology, I am not limiting theology to discussion of those beliefs that have defined specifically Mennonite understandings—the supposedly “distinct” Mennonite beliefs such as adult baptism, symbolic understanding of the Lord’s Supper, peoplehood (what used to be called the “brotherhood”) understanding of the church, separation of church and state, or nonresistance and pacifism.

That is, theology for Mennonites includes far more than expressing these “distinct” views and practices that distinguish Mennonites from other Christians. In “theology,” I am also including the doctrines of Christology and atonement, which define who Jesus is in a central way for every Christian. In classic language, Christology and atonement identify and expound the person and the work of Christ. These formulations constitute the doctrinal foundation of Christian faith, and comprise key elements of the theological identity of every Christian tradition. That is, every Christian tradition lays claim to some version of these doctrines. And if theology is important for Mennonites, as I believe it is, then how we discuss Christology and atonement are exceedingly important.

The initial two sections of the essay discuss factors that contribute to the importance of theology for Mennonites. One factor comes from contemporary Mennonite experience. It is easily recognizable when I name it as the loss or the abandonment of ethnic identity. The second element compelling theology comes from the character of the world beyond the Mennonite experience. This factor is “postmodernity,” which is in the title of the still relatively new book *Anabaptist Theology in Face of*

### Postmodernity (Note 2).

The focus of the essay, then, is to outline the nature of a theology specific to Mennonites as a peace church. This task draws liberally on material from *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* as well as on selected writers of particular historical importance for the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony traditions within the Flemish-Dutch-Russian Mennonite stream.

### Demise of ethnicity.

Lasting into the final third of the twentieth century, and still prevalent for some folks, Mennonites have had a quite visible ethnicity that reminded us that we were supposed to follow the way of Jesus, or that Jesus was our norm for ethics—what Harold Bender’s “Anabaptist Vision” called “discipleship.” In fact, Bender called discipleship—following the way of Jesus—“the essence of being Christian,”(Note 3).

This ethnicity was a package of things such as speaking a Dutch or Germanic language, wearing uniform “plain” clothes for those in the Swiss Mennonite tradition, eating certain foods identified with one or the other European backgrounds, and maintaining a high degree of intermarriage so that family names were passed from generation to generation as “Mennonite” names. Even while steeped in such ethnic identifiers, it was always fashionable for Mennonites to profess they did not aid salvation, nor earn Mennonites any extra standing with God.

At the same time, the ethnic factors did serve a purpose as boundary markers. They identified Mennonites as a minority people—a society—that was visibly different from the wider, surrounding society. And while these ethnic markers did not save, they performed a religious function—they were and to some extent still are an ever present reminder that a part of what it meant to be a society different from the world was “discipleship,” or following the way of Jesus, or accepting Jesus as the norm for ethics.

And central to that way of Jesus was the explicit and specific rejection of violence and a commitment to nonresistance or pacifism. The commitment to pacifism was strong enough and persistent enough that significant numbers of Mennonite young men have refused induction into the armed forces during all wars in which Canada and the United States participated. Since the term was coined in 1935, Mennonites have been known as one of the historic peace churches (Note 4).

By tradition, until very recently Mennonites

did not “do theology.” They were a people of the Bible. The Bible was the place to read about the life of Jesus, which was the basis for discipleship or following the way of Jesus. Theology was an exercise that appeared to contribute little to following Jesus, and in some cases seemed even to detract from it. Mennonites read the Bible not to discuss theology but to find the story of Jesus as the basis for a life of discipleship, and that discipleship included a commitment to nonviolence. It was stated in various ways that how people lived was the real test of following Jesus. One witnessed to Jesus Christ by living like Jesus Christ. Ethnicity reinforced discipleship that was learned from the Bible in general and from the story of Jesus in particular.

Now ethnicity shaped by a Flemish, Dutch, German, Russian history is close to a thing of the past. While it is always possible to point to some regions of North America, perhaps southern Manitoba, and to some Mennonite or Amish groups that have retained more ethnicity than others, for all Mennonite groups except the old orders, a distinct ethnicity is fast disappearing.

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**"Mennonites [had a]...visible ethnicity that reminded us....that Jesus was our norm for ethics."**

### Assimilation.

The other side of demise or abandonment of Flemish-Dutch-Russian-German ethnic identity is assimilation into the wider culture of our North American nations (Note 4). Or perhaps we should say that Mennonites are trading one or another form of Flemish-Dutch-Russian-German Mennonite ethnicity for a more widespread North American cultural identity. This story of cultural assimilation has happened a number of previous times in the history of Anabaptists and Mennonites of European origin. We know something of these stories of assimilation in Netherlands, in Poland, in Russia. Now in North America the story of Mennonite cultural assimilation is once again playing itself out, and we are all active participants in some way in this story.

The cultural assimilation of Mennonites in North American—their coming to accept and make use of and be at home in the surrounding culture—in and of itself is neither morally wrong nor intrinsically evil. As was noted, there is nothing salvific about the several varieties of Flemish Dutch-Russian-Germanic culture used by

Mennonites, and abandoning it in and of itself neither gains nor loses us status with God.

Some respond to this loss and accompanying assimilation with regret. Others rejoice—they are tired of “feeling different.” But whichever side of that particular divide we fall on, this explicit declaration that God does not favor one ethnic group over another can open doors and eliminate at least one barrier for new folks who are attracted to the story of Jesus as understood by Mennonites.

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“...throughout Mennonite history, when Mennonites have become culturally assimilated, they have also lost their commitment to nonviolence and ultimately their identity...”

From the perspective of the peace church, however, cultural assimilation or abandonment of ethnic identity also has a down side. In the vast majority of cases throughout Mennonite history, when Mennonites have become culturally assimilated, they have also lost their commitment to nonviolence and ultimately their identity as Mennonites (Note 6). While cultural assimilation and abandonment of nonviolence are not linked causally or necessarily, the correlation between the two is too great to be ignored. Awareness of the correlation is particularly troublesome at this time because Mennonites in North America have never been more assimilated than at this moment, and for those with the eyes to see, there is ample evidence of a lessening of the overall commitment to nonviolence (Note 7).

### Theology.

The argument that follows does not require us to decide between lamenting or rejoicing in this demise. It is sufficient merely to observe that the process continues unabated. Rather my focus concerns its potential impact on the future of Mennonites as a peace church.

With the fading of specific historic ethnicity, what remains to remind Mennonites as a peace church that the church is to be a nonviolent witness to the social order? If a significant contribution of ethnicity was to underscore the calling of Mennonites to follow Jesus, what replaces ethnicity?

It is precisely in this juncture between cultural assimilation and loss of commitment to nonviolence that I interject the discussion of theology for the peace church. If we use it properly, theology can replace ethnicity as that which gives identity to the peace church. And by positing a theological identity for the peace church that is specifically shaped by Jesus’ rejection of violence, theology thus has the potential to accomplish a task previously unattainable, namely to enable Mennonites as a peace church to remain a peace church in the midst of or in spite of cultural assimilation and abandonment of identifying the church by a single ethnicity.

Virtually by default theology has become the primary tool for defining who we are as a

community of faith, as a Christian religious people (Note 8). Since Mennonites have not identified themselves as a theological people, that assertion may surprise. The assumption long prevailed that Mennonites had little theology, at least little theology of value. When examined more closely, however, that assumption required considerable modification. *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, which was published three years ago in the SAMH series (Note 9), reports on a lot of theologizing by nineteenth-century Mennonites and Amish.

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“...theology has become the primary tool for defining who we are as a community of faith...”

When I started what turned out to be that book in 1987, I was working under the assumption that Mennonites were not a theological people and that there would be little material of theological import in the nineteenth-century. I assumed that scouring the nineteenth-century sources might produce enough material for a brief article composed mostly of surmises and guesses. Reality proved quite different. I found so much material that it was almost 10 years before the “brief article” was finished and published as *Keeping Salvation Ethical*.

But although I discovered a great deal of material to assess for that project, which challenged the assumption that Mennonites did not have much theology in their tradition, it is still true that theology was not the primary way that Mennonites identified themselves. Today, with the abandonment of ethnicity, theology has a different role to play than in previous generations. It has become the way to give verbal, perhaps even visible, expression to the Jesus that we profess to follow.

These observations on cultural assimilation and abandonment of ethnicity are an impulse from within the Mennonite experience that points to the growing importance of theology.

### Postmodernity.

A phenomenon from outside the Mennonite experience that underscores the importance of theology, is postmodernity, one of the current buzz words in many contexts both inside and outside of academia. Seemingly everyone wants in on the discussion. That seemed to be the case at the Bluffton College conference on postmodernity in August 1998, when 38 presentations crowded onto the program and nearly 200 people attended. One result was *Anabaptists and Postmodernity* (Note 10), the first book in the C. Henry Smith series.

Recently I saw that Eerdmans has just published a book on *Mathematics in a Postmodern Age: A Christian Perspective*. If mathematics, the discipline most often presumed to be pure and without philosophical or theological perspectives, is being discussed as a function of postmodernity, and in a book published by a major evangelical publisher, then it does appear that postmodernity is something that we ought to talk about and know how to deal with.

For context, we need a brief history of postmodernity. What preceded postmodernity, whose name makes what preceded it of necessity “modernity,” was the belief that there was or at least ought to be one universally recognizable and universally accessible truth, if we could just locate it. The point was that this one truth was assumed to be recognizable and accessible. Even if this truth was not yet known in its entirety, the assumption was that it could be known and accessible to everyone once it was identified. For centuries, it was assumed that the church was the institution that held the key to and defined what this universally recognizable and accessible truth was. Theological and philosophical arguments within the church were about the shape of this presumed universally recognizable and accessible faith.

The eighteenth-century philosophical movement called the Enlightenment did not challenge the assumption that there was a supposed universally accessible truth. What they challenged was the idea that it was the church which held the key to a supposed universally accessible truth. After observing all the wars fought in the name of religion, Enlightenment philosophers decided that religion was the problem rather than the answer. Wars resulted, the philosophers argued, because various people were defending their own biased version of truth under the guise of religion.

Philosophers thus shifted the search for the assumed universally accessible truth to a foundation outside of the church—placing the supposed foundation in rational thought or reason that was independent of the church that had sponsored so many wars. This foundation outside of the church was presumed to be neutral and unbiased. Enlightenment philosophers did not challenge the assumption that there was or ought to be one universally accessible and universally recognizable truth. They just shifted the search for it from sources inside the church to sources outside the church.

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“‘modernity,’ was the belief that there was or at least ought to be one universally recognizable and universally accessible truth,...”

Now modernity is being jostled for position by the phenomenon called “postmodernity.” Modernity—the assumption that one could eventually identify a universally recognizable truth—is not ceding the terrain easily or quickly, however. But alongside those who argue for universal access to truth are philosophers such as Fredrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty, whose names need only be mentioned here. The work of such writers has shown that the Enlightenment efforts to “step back” ever farther in order to find a neutral and more general foundation for universal truth always revealed only more particular, context-related foundations. And they argue, quite forcefully I believe, that the Enlightenment’s supposed neutral and unbiased foundation was not neutral and did reflect a particular context. And

wars can be and are fought in the name of Enlightenment's supposedly rational principles, such as freedom and democracy and individual rights, just as wars were fought in the name of religious principles.

Postmodernity is the name currently used for this recent claim that there is no neutral, unbiased beginning point; no universally accessible and universally agreed upon foundation that can validate ultimate truth claims—neither inside the church nor outside the church. For many centuries the church claimed to be the ultimate source of truth, followed by several centuries of efforts by philosophers to make the same assertion. Stated crassly, postmodernists now argue that there is no universally recognized source of appeal by which we can show Muslims or Buddhists that it is simply irrational not to believe in Jesus. In the same way, there is no universally accessible source of appeal by which Muslims or Buddhists can show Christians that it is irrational and unreasonable not to be Muslim or Buddhist.

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**"Postmodernity is the...claim that there is no neutral, unbiased beginning point;..."**

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Postmodernity can sound scary. Hearing that there is no universally recognized and universally accessible vantage point from which to validate truth leads folks to fear postmodernity as a wide open claim that there are no standards, that anything goes, and that it no longer makes sense to believe anything. It sounds like unbridled relativism. But that need not be the case.

### **Responding to postmodernity.**

The absence of a universally recognized and accessible foundation from which to validate the truth of Jesus Christ does not mean that Jesus is not the basis of truth. In fact, if this foundation existed in such a way that it was universally recognized and accessible by everyone, whether Christian or not, that foundation actually would be a higher authority than Jesus, and Jesus would then no longer be ultimate truth. The ultimate authority would be that universally recognized foundation that established the truth of Jesus (Note 11).

Thus the postmodern observation about the lack of a universally recognized and accepted norm of truth is not really undercutting the truth Jesus at all. Something does change, however, namely the way that we witness to the belief that Jesus is the source of ultimate truth. Postmodernity has disabused us of the idea that there is a universally recognized, reason-based argument for the truth of Jesus. We are brought to the point of seeing that a different kind of witness to the ultimate truth of Jesus is required.

At this point, I accept John Howard Yoder's answer. It is quite clear that the condition depicted by the term "postmodernity" does not require anyone to believe anything. And in that setting, where nothing is required and where no answer can be deemed to meet some universally recognizable and accessible standard of reason-

ableness, how do we testify that Jesus Christ really is the way, the truth, and the life?

John Howard Yoder said that we testify to the truth of Jesus by living like Jesus did when it is not required and even when it proves dangerous or costly. In a context of seemingly relativism, we give witness to the belief that Jesus really is the source of ultimate truth by choosing to live by or in or out of his story when it is not required, even to the point of martyrdom (Note 12). The stories in the *Martyrs Mirror* thus testify to the belief of Anabaptists in the ultimate truth of the Jesus they followed. Choosing to follow Jesus, even when that choice means opposition and suffering unto death, is testimony to the belief that Jesus is ultimate truth.

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**"John Howard Yoder said that we testify to the truth of Jesus by living like Jesus did...."**

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It is apparent that the historic Anabaptist idea of discipleship or following the way of Jesus coincides with the way one witnesses to the truth of Jesus Christ in the context of postmodernity. The stories of Anabaptist martyrs in the *Martyrs Mirror* are elegant testimony to the Anabaptists' belief that their faith in Jesus was more true than the supposedly universal claims of Christendom. Anabaptists neither "invented" or discovered postmodernity. However, when their challenge to the presumed universality of Christendom in the sixteenth-century is recognized, it becomes clear that they are an embryonic version of the fully developed phenomena that today is called postmodernity.

Choosing to live by the story of Jesus is an answer to those who assert the relativity of all views. Living within the story of Jesus when we do not have to is a confessional action—a confession of faith, which witnesses to the belief that all stories and positions are not equal. Living within the story of Jesus when we do not have to is a confession that we believe that of all the stories claiming to be true, the story of Jesus is the one we believe to be most true (Note 13).

### **Theology and ethics.**

Another facet of living within the story of Jesus is to tie it to ethics. In fact, living within the story of Jesus is about ethics, that is, about behavior and how people live and act. In other words, ethics is what discipleship is about. It is very important to understand how ethics relates to theology, which I said has never been more crucial to the future of Mennonite faithfulness than at this present moment.

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**"...living within the story of Jesus is about ethics,...ethics is what discipleship is about."**

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For the most part, in the western intellectual tradition, it has been assumed that theology and ethics are separate disciplines. While ethics can fit under theology as a general religious category, theology proper and ethics occur at two

different points in the standard outline and deal with essentially different material and different issues. That separation of theology and ethics is readily apparent in standard dictionaries of theology and ethics when one examines the entries for dogmatics or theology and for ethics or moral theology (Note 14).

John Howard Yoder pointed to this separation in *Politics of Jesus* when he provided a list of ways that the teaching of Jesus has generally been proclaimed "not relevant" for social ethics (Note 15). The easily visualized example of this separation is profession of faith in Jesus Christ—that is, claiming to be *Christian* or Christ-like—while accommodating or espousing the sword rejected by Jesus.

From the perspective of discipleship, however, the idea of living out of the story of Jesus implies a quite different understanding of the relationship of theology and ethics. Rather than seeing theology and ethics as separable or separate, to live out of the story of Jesus implies that they are actually two ways to express the same reality, namely the truth of Jesus Christ. Ethics, the way we live out of the story of Jesus, is a lived and living witness to our understanding of who Jesus is.

Theology is the words and word pictures we use to give verbal expression to our understanding of who Jesus is. It seems obvious then that theology and ethics are related, and most significantly, that the living expression of Jesus that ought to be visible from our ethics should correspond to the Jesus portrayed in our theology. The image of Jesus gained from examining the lives of the people and the church that lives out of the story of Jesus should picture the same Jesus that is depicted in the church's theology.

Here is the place to begin to see why theology is very important for the continuation of Mennonites as a peace church. This juncture of theology and ethics calls the church to think seriously about theology. It is theology that provides verbal and written expression about Jesus Christ, who is witnessed to by the life of the church. If Mennonites are the church based on "discipleship," what is the theology that fosters discipleship? If Mennonites are to continue as a peace church, what is the theology that makes clear and visible the rejection of violence in Jesus' life and teaching?

### **Theology for the peace church.**

For some Mennonite theologians, the question about the theology for Mennonites as a peace church has already been answered. Some of our theologians argue that that theology already exists. The claim is made that Mennonites should espouse the theology focused by the historic creeds of western Christendom (Note 16).

But what happens when our theology comes from Christendom? What about the supposed correspondence between our theology and our ethics when our theology comes from Christendom? Does Christendom's theology express or reflect nonviolent discipleship?

As a part of the answer to such questions, consider for a moment some familiar data that

many readers already know. Western Christendom has been and continues to be warlike. The wars of the twentieth century that North Americans participated in were fought with the blessings of the church, and soldiers fought in the name of Jesus Christ. Remember Billy Graham praying in the White House with George Bush the night before George, Sr. unleashed the Gulf War?

Much of the modern missionary movement from the preceding century followed the guns of western colonial occupation around the world. In the time of the sixteenth-century Reformation, people—Anabaptists—who questioned the majority faith of Christendom were burnt and beheaded and drowned and pulled apart by horses. The history of the middle ages contains a list of church-sponsored crusades whose stated goal was to violently wrest the Holy Land from the Muslims who lived there—and several hundred years later we are still living with the legacy of how that “Christian” violence has shaped Muslim impressions of Christianity and of the West.

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### **“Western Christendom has been and continues to be warlike.”**

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In his recent book *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom*, Alan Kreider described the evolution of conversion from the early church to the imperial church of Christendom. In the early church, conversion was a long, four-stage process that required changes in the beliefs, behavior, and belonging of the one joining the church. The change in behavior included renunciation of violence and retaliation. But after the European empire became Christian, there were forced conversions of conquered tribes and of dissenting groups such as Jews within the empire. In the imperial church, conversion still required some minimal change in beliefs and belonging, and orthodox Christian belief received frequent emphasis. But a change in behavior was not expected. And pointedly, no change in attitude toward military service was expected. In fact, at the baptism of Clovis, king of the Franks, he wore his helmet in the baptismal pool and the bishop blessed his military endeavors (Note 17).

With reference to the relationship between theology and ethics described above, the orthodox theology of Christendom was theology about Jesus accompanied by ethics not derived from Jesus. And since there was some stress on correct belief, it would appear that the theology did not challenge the ethics—the behavior—that was not based on Jesus. And this separation of theology and ethics constitutes the longstanding pattern in western Christendom, from the coerced conversions through the crusades and sixteenth-century Anabaptist martyrs and missionaries following colonial guns and Christian invocations on twentieth-century wars, and finally summarized in John Howard Yoder’s description of ways to declare Jesus irrelevant for ethics. It certainly appears that the foundational theology of western Christendom has not

emphasized the nonviolence of Jesus.

If ethics matched theology, and if the received, traditional theology really were the foundational expression of Jesus’ nonviolence, as is claimed by its Mennonite defenders, then the western church would look a lot different than it appears in historical observation. In other words, if the foundational theology of Christendom actually depicted the intrinsic nonviolence of Jesus’ story, then most of Christendom would already be pacifist—which it most certainly is not.

I suggest that if the Mennonite church adopts the theology of western Christendom as its foundational theology, it has a base that has peripheralized and ignored and even suppressed the nonviolence of Jesus. If theology depicts the nonviolent Jesus that the would-be peace church would follow in discipleship, I suggest that the theological foundation of Christendom’s theology is a very inadequate theology for the peace church.

### **Christendom.**

It is not the case that Christendom had one, unified theological system that was the same everywhere. It did not. There were and are many versions of what I am here identifying by the nomenclature of Christendom’s theology. However, characteristic of all these versions of Christendom’s theology is the separation of theology from ethics. And these versions also contain certain core theological formulas to be considered presently.

These words constitute a general assessment of Christendom’s theology. But some may argue, perhaps, that the theology was clear and that the church just ignored it. Thus we need to ask whether there is anything specific about Christendom’s orthodoxy that might contribute to this separation of theology and ethics, and to the capacity of supposedly Christian theology to support or accommodate ethics that do not reflect the life and teaching of Jesus? I think there is.

While there are multiple versions of Christendom and of Christendom’s orthodoxy, there is general agreement about the core theological content of orthodoxy, the orthodoxy that Kreider noted was “affirmed by the religious and civil leaders.” (Note 18).

For Christology, the foundation of this theology comes from the decrees of the councils of Nicaea (325 C.E.) and Chalcedon (451 C.E.), and the trinitarian terminology suggested by the late fourth-century writers Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea, and Gregory of Nyssa, who are called the Cappadocian Fathers. In briefest form, Nicaea identified Jesus as “one being” (*homoousios*) with the Father. Chalcedon called him “truly God and truly man,” thus repeating that he was of the same being (*homoousios*) as God and adding that he was also of the same being (*homoousios*) as humankind.

Between these two councils, the three Cappadocians asserted the deity of the Holy Spirit and suggested the Trinity formula (one God in three persons), which states that although

the being of God is one, there are also three distinguishable “persons” in that one being; but that while distinguishable each of the three beings nonetheless is also fully the same being as God. These formulas all presume that the answer should be in terms of ontology as understood in Greek philosophy. While there is an evolutionary path traceable in the historical development of these formulas, they attained their final status and were established as the official, orthodox theology after the church was well on the way to being the imperial church of Christendom.

The significant point is that these abstract formulas provide nothing of the particularity of the story of Jesus and thus provide no guidance for the one who would be Christ-like, that is, *Christian*. Kreider noted the change in conversion from early church to the church of Christendom. In particular, he noted that while the church of Christendom maintained the importance of orthodox belief, there was no longer the expectation of changed behavior. As was noted, Clovis could receive baptism while wearing his helmet and have his military missions blessed; and being baptized into the church meant that one became like and conformed to the nominally Christian society rather than learning to be distinguished from it.

I suggest that defining minimal, orthodox Christian belief on the basis of these abstract formulas about Jesus is what undergirds a supposed conversion to Christian faith that accommodates a life that is counter to the life and teaching of Jesus. These abstract theological formulas enable real professions of Christ, but their abstractness poses no challenge to ethics that most certainly do not originate with Jesus Christ.

A bit later, an atonement doctrine was added to these Christological formulas. Although atonement doctrine never attained the status accorded these formulas, the satisfaction theory of atonement, given its first full articulation in Anselm of Canterbury’s *Cur Deus Homo* (1098), builds on the Nicene-Chalcedonian formulas and has been the obviously dominant atonement motif for many centuries. The various versions of this motif say that our salvation was made possible when Jesus died in order to supply the death required by God to satisfy God’s justice or God’s law or the imbalance in creation in God’s universe.

There are a host of violence problems that accompany Anselmian atonement in all of its many forms, including the abstractness of its formula, and its assumption that a violent death is necessary to satisfy God’s justice or law or the distorted order of creation. For the complete discussion of atonement including discussion of Christology, readers should refer to *The Non-violent Atonement* (Note 19).

The question for consideration here is, “What do Mennonites as a peace church have if these several formulas of Christology and atonement are touted as the intellectual, theological foundation for the peace church? What does the peace church have if these formulas that say nothing of the life and teaching of Jesus are the theo-

logical articulation of the Jesus Christ, who is then expressed in lived version by the church's ethics?"

The answer, I am afraid, is that if theology, which articulates who Jesus is, does not make central Jesus' life and teaching, then ethics will not make those things visible for very long. If those formulas devoid of ethics or that harbor violence are the theological foundation of the peace church, we are, I believe, on an evolutionary path of change in the church today analogous to the one Alan Kreider described for the early church. That is a path that has the peace church moving toward and becoming like the church of Christendom.

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" . . . c h a r a c t e r i s t i c  
of...Christendom's theology is the  
separation of theology from ethics."

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Of course, it is quite possible to retain and use these formulas for the peace church by adding additional material from the life of Jesus. The result, it is claimed, is then a complete picture of Jesus that makes visible his rejection of violence while retaining a foundation in the classic creeds. But as will be explained presently, that kind of addition also changes fundamentally our perception of the quality or character of the formulas being supplemented. Such an addition in the name of saving the classic formulas actually undercuts their character as the unquestioned given of orthodoxy. If they were the unquestioned foundation, then there would be no need to supplement them. And by supplementing them, the beginning point has been shifted to that which provoked the addition, namely to the New Testament's narrative of Jesus.

Stated briefly, what I have described thus far is the problem addressed in *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*. One of the main purposes of this book is to help the peace church think about its theological underpinnings. And in that discussion, I wanted to show the peace church that already within the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition are indications that we should be thinking theologically and constructing theology out of a nonviolent perspective, rather than merely adopting the violence-accommodating and violence-modelling theology of Christendom. For this discussion in *Preservings* I add to the argument of the book with additional material from writers of importance for the Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony traditions within the Flemish-Dutch-Russian Mennonite tradition prominent in southern Manitoba.

#### **Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: Atonement**

What does this book and these additional writers, particularly the Kleine Gemeinde, Bergthaler and Old Colony writers, have to say to this set of questions? On the one hand, the book shows that Anabaptists and Mennonites have always been in contact with and made use of the theology of Christendom. While they may not have called it by that name, nor even recog-

nized it as the theology of Christendom, some version of those beliefs were a part of who they were.

In the chapter of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* on twentieth-century Mennonite theology, Christendom's theology appears in the various first lists. On the conservative side of the spectrum, John Horsch, Daniel Kauffmann and J.C. Wenger made explicit lists of Bible doctrines held in common with all Christians and then other lists of Bible doctrines specific to Mennonites. Others, such as Harold Bender did not mention "lists" specifically, but nonetheless discussed their theology along those lines.

Earlier Mennonite writers on the progressive side also made lists or in other ways identified beliefs held in common with other Christians and beliefs distinct to Mennonites. And the methodology of more recent Mennonite writers also displays this pattern of distinguishing views distinct to Mennonites and those held in common with other Christians. Those doctrines and formulas on the list of beliefs held in common with other Christians are the current versions of Christendom's theology. Under any number of names, these lists show familiarity with and use of the core theology and theological formulas of Christendom.

Using the doctrine of atonement as the item for comparison, the chapter on nineteenth-century Mennonite and Amish theologizing reveals a similar result. A sample of writers from Mennonites and Amish representing both progressives and conservatives and from Russian and Swiss ethnic groups shows that all of them understood and talked about atonement in terms of images that reflect some version of Anselmian, satisfaction atonement doctrine. While a small minority actually referred to Anselm by name, most did not even realize that they were discussing something called "atonement." Nonetheless, when they discussed their understanding of how Jesus' death saves, they used images whose roots ultimately reach to Anselm of Canterbury in the eleventh-century. In other words, the theology of these nineteenth-century writers can be located in the theological stream of Christendom.

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"...Mennonites and Amish [leaders]... understood and talked about atonement in terms of...some version of Anselmian, satisfaction atonement doctrine."

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The same observation applies to sixteenth-century Anabaptists. Chapter 4 notes the scholarship that describes these Anabaptists's references to Christendom's formulas, and it provides some additional, specific examples of Anabaptists who used Anselmian atonement images, as well as some who did not. These observations on twentieth-, nineteenth-, and sixteenth-century Mennonite and Anabaptist theologizing shows that these folks were in conversation with Christendom's theology.

#### **Alt. Klaas Reimer (1770-1837).**

Examination of Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colony writers reveals the same kind of interaction with and use of Christendom's theology. The most prominent example of atonement imagery among the materials of early Kleine Gemeinde leaders published in Delbert Plett's series of volumes is Kleine Gemeinde co-founder Klaas Reimer's (1770-1837) (Note 20) sermon for communion (Note 21). This sermon contains multiple and extended references to sacrificial, substitutionary atonement.

Reimer interpreted the atoning death of Jesus in terms of the passover, when the angel of death spared the first born of the Israelites after seeing the blood of a perfect lamb smeared on the doorpost. Reimer called this passover "a type of the death of Jesus, a sacrifice which is valid once and for all." The blood was a "type of Jesus," and the passover of the Israelites was "a natural type of the holy passover sacrifice of Jesus, who was slain for us. With His blood our heart's door has been marked and our soul washed, so that the death angel may pass over." And the passover lamb was "a type of the real salvation in Jesus," (Note 22).

Conjoined with the passover analogy, Reimer also used the terminology of both satisfaction and penal substitutionary atonement motifs (Note 23). There is clear satisfaction imagery when he wrote that Jesus longed "to redeem us with His bitter death" and penal substitution when he said that "he took our punishment upon Himself to pay our debt with His blood." Or wrote that Jesus "had to suffer on our behalf," which was a great sacrifice that "bought us out of the world," (Note 24). The penal substitutionary motif is quite clear when Reimer writes:

"As a result we are subject to temporal and eternal punishment, unless someone would come who was completely pure from sin and who was equal to God to carry our sin which we have incurred. Who would thus qualify to reconcile us with God? Who was afflicted with our guilt? The divinely given command stipulated that if man would violate it, then he would die. This command was irreversible. Guilt had to be punished," (Note 25).

He followed up this passage with remarks about the need to find one "who would take all guilt upon himself in order to satisfy the righteousness of God" and that Jesus "entered the counsel of God and undertook to be our substitute in whatever matter we came too short....Indeed, beloved, Christ took all our guilt which His Father demanded of us upon Himself from His childhood to His death," (Note 26).

As is intrinsic to satisfaction and substitutionary atonement imagery, all of Reimer's statements about the saving work of Jesus focus on his death and tie salvation to death without reference to resurrection. And Reimer even stated specifically that the Father willed the death of the Son: "But the cup could not be taken away if we were to be saved. In love He willingly suffered, for the will of the Father demanded it," (Note 27).

Intermixed with the predominant satisfaction atonement language, Reimer also used terminology reminiscent of Christus Victor, the atonement motif that depicts Jesus' saving work in terms of a victory over or a defeat of the devil. For instance, immediately after the statement that the Father willed the suffering of the Son, Reimer added, "He began to wrestle with death, namely, with the devil, who, however, had no claim upon Him. Satan held us captive. Satan withheld Him most tenaciously, and yet, He saved our souls from the evil one," (Note 28).

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"[Klaas] Reimer also used terminology reminiscent of Christus Victor, the atonement motif that depicts Jesus' saving work in terms of a victory over or a defeat of the devil."

Earlier he had written that Jesus "took us out of the jaws of the devil and destroyed the power of death," (Note 29). And he called Jesus' saving work a "victory over death," (Note 30). These comments are not a complete Christus Victor image, however. In these statements of victory over death or devil, there is no mention of resurrection, and Reimer does not work out how the satisfying or penal substitutionary death accomplishes victory over the devil. But in spite of the fragmentary nature of these Christus Victor elements, they do indicate Reimer's sense of the inadequacy of the satisfaction motif that was his predominant understanding. This point is developed further in what follows.

#### **Alt. Abraham Friesen (1782-1849).**

I found one instance of a specific atonement motif in the writings of Abraham Friesen (1782-1849) (Note 31) printed in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde*. It appeared in a letter related to the "Franz Thiessen incident." The named Thiessen and his daughter were in prison in deplorable conditions for punishment of an alleged incestuous relationship, after being reported to district authorities by ministers of the Grosse Gemeinde. A theological issue concerned the fact that the Grosse Gemeinde did use civil authorities for punishment, whereas the Kleine Gemeinde considered "excommunication and avoidance" to be the only legitimate punishment or discipline that Christians should use.

Friesen wrote to the ministers of the Grosse Gemeinde, asking them to "pay heed" to the plight of their imprisoned members. "I bid you," Friesen went on, "for the sake of the love of Jesus do allow yourselves to be moved. For behold, He has given His own life for the sinner and allowed Himself to be martyred even though He Himself was without sin. Yet we ourselves are so headstrong that we, so to speak, throttle and choke our fellow servant who in fact does not owe us anything. Alas, for the wicked servant was thrown unto the most severe tormentors until he too had paid all that was due. And how much more are not all of us indebted in this case?" (Note 32).

When Friesen here places the reference to

Jesus' death within the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:23-35), he clearly has in mind the motif of satisfaction atonement, in which Jesus' death pays a debt that sinners owe to God. Since Jesus has already paid the infinite debt for sinners, not showing mercy to Thiessen father and daughter, Friesen says, puts the ministers of the Grosse Gemeinde in the place of the unforgiving steward, who exacted payment although he himself had been forgiven his own debt. In other words, since Jesus has already received infinite punishment, humans now no longer need to punish.

With the motif of debt satisfaction in mind, it is important to note that Friesen also brought a slight addition or modification to this motif. While he saw Jesus' death in terms of debt payment, Friesen also held up Jesus as a model of nonviolence as he "allowed Himself to be martyred." Rather than working to "throttle and choke" the Thiessens, Friesen implies, the elders of the Grosse Gemeinde should follow Jesus' example rather than using the violence of punishment. In a move whose significance is developed more fully in what follows, Friesen thus modified satisfaction atonement with the Anabaptist idea of nonviolent discipleship.

#### **Heinrich Balzer (1800-42), Tiege.**

Heinrich Balzer (Note 33) also penned a communion sermon that contained several uses of atonement imagery. Balzer called communion a "testament of the new covenant, which was established when Jesus "shed His own blood." As a will grants an inheritance only on the death of the testator, by Jesus' death—through the shedding of his blood—this new covenant was established, which guarantees "forgiveness of sins" and "assurance of eternal salvation" for all who believe (Note 34). It is clear that Balzer understood this shedding of blood in terms of satisfaction atonement imagery. He wrote that a soul is "washed from sin, cleansed and sanctified through the blood of Jesus," and in the words of the "Apostle John," God's love was made manifest when he "sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins (1 John 4:9-10)," (Note 35).

In a subsequent sermon Balzer wrote that sinners are "reconciled and united with God" only through Jesus Christ "because He reconciled us with the Father substitutionally and in our stead." It is a penal substitutionary motif when Balzer adds that "He has become the righteousness for our sins and has paid for our debts with His blood," (Note 36).

#### **Alt. Peter J. Twisk (1565-1636).**

Similar observations apply to Peter Jansz Twisk's "Peaceable Kingdom of Christ," an exposition of the twentieth chapter of Revelation. Although written well before the time of Reimer, Friesen and Balzer, Twisk's essay became part of the Kleine Gemeinde's experience when it was printed by Kleine Gemeinde elders in German in 1875 in the generation after these three leaders (Note 37).

A comment by Twisk points rather clearly to an understanding of satisfaction atonement in

this booklet. Twisk writes that the law was "fulfilled and confirmed through the blood of Jesus Christ and his full and complete propitiation," (Note 38). The idea of "propitiation," namely that Jesus' blood satisfies the divine requirement, clearly points to satisfaction atonement (Note 39).

Further, in the following paragraph Twisk's use of images of salvation and the death of Christ also points to satisfaction atonement. When he says that one who killed inadvertently and then escaped to a city of refuge could "escape the murderer's doom and be made free after the high priest ... had died," and noted that the kingdom of peace on earth can be established "only after the High Priest—the spiritual Melchizedek, the King of Salem—had died," (Note 40) the images of salvation appear to be escape from punishment as a result of a representative death. And escaping punishment on the basis of a representative death seems to require some version of satisfaction atonement in Twisk's theology.

#### **Alt. Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900).**

These references to atonement in the writings of Reimer, Friesen, Balzer and Twisk have parallels in two southern Manitoba, Old Colony writers, Gerhard Wiebe and Johann Wiebe.

Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) (Note 41) was Elder and leader of the immigration from the Bergthal colony to southern Manitoba beginning in 1874. Wiebe's *Ursachen und Geschichte* (Note 42) offered his account of the immigration and the decaying state of Mennonite affairs in both Russia and North America in the late nineteenth century. Two comments in this writing indicate that his atonement assumptions fall within the category of penal, substitutionary atonement (Note 43).

The first instance comes in the course of Wiebe's description of the events leading up to the Bergthal immigration from Russia. At one point, the Czar convoked Wiebe. As he waited with much fear, trembling, and trepidation in an outer room for the meeting with the Czar, an aide came with a brush and proceeded to clean Wiebe's clothing from head to toe, including his boots. Of the thoughts racing through his mind, he could describe only one: "That's how you will some day be inwardly cleansed when you will appear before the King of Kings. Only there no servant will clean you, you must be washed by the blood of Christ alone," (Note 44). The image of a substitutionary atonement, with Jesus' blood cleansing the individual of sins, seems clearly to stand behind Wiebe's choice of words in this instance.

Wiebe's second explicit use of atonement imagery comes close to making the penal dimension explicit. In the immediate context of explaining why he opposed the use of Christmas trees, he used as an example the gifts of the three wise men who sought out the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. According to Wiebe, the first gift, gold, which must be purified by fire, represents the cleansing and purification sinners must undergo in order to enter the kingdom of heaven. That cleansing takes place through the Holy

Spirit "and the blood of Christ." The gift of incense symbolizes the gospel, which is to pervade and affect the entire world.

Finally, in mentioning the gift of bitter myrrh, he made explicit the motif of punishing sin. Myrrh signified Christ's "terrible death on the cross; yes, those were our sins which made his end so bitter, because when He stood before Annas and Caiaphas, they spat in His face and slapped it, and our sins were there too; and when they brought Him before Pilate, where they tortured Him some more, then my sins and your sins, dear reader, were also there. And when He was being whipped, our sins were also present. And when He carried the heavy cross to the place of execution, then this Lamb of God carried my sins and yours; and when He broke down under the weight of the cross, he sank under the weight of our sins also. And when he was being nailed to the cross, our sins were also there. And when His last hour came the Lord cast all of our sins on Him in that terrible condition, so that He cried out: My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" (Note 45).

In this vivid description, while Wiebe did not lay out the legal framework explicitly, it seems quite clear that he saw Jesus bearing the sins of humanity and experiencing the punishment required by God's law as retribution for those sins. "The sacrifice had to take place," he wrote, "for the sins of the whole world, also for me and you, dear reader."

At the same time, Wiebe's description of the death of Jesus might be said to echo the element of victory from the Christus Victor atonement motif. Perhaps better stated, he included a bit of a victory motif alongside the language of sacrifice and satisfaction.

When Jesus expressed the anguish of being forsaken, "Satan took advantage of the opportunity. He thought: Now God has cast Him out, and so he wanted to crush Him with all our sins and to kill Him" (Note 47). That was an agony which no man can describe, much less bear. But the sacrifice [Opfer] had to take place for the sins of the whole world, also for me and you, dear reader; and as He said: It is finished, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. Through bitter suffering and dying He overcame death, devil, all our sins; because through His blood He reconciled [versöhnte] us with His and our Father, and so we can be saved from our sins only through Christ and His shed blood," (Note 48).

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"[Gerh.] Wiebe's description of the death of Jesus might be said to echo the element of victory from the Christus Victor atonement motif."

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This is a statement of victory over the Devil without resurrection.

In the two instances where Wiebe used explicit atonement language, his imagery reflects the motif of penal, substitutionary atonement. While he mentioned the sins heaped on Jesus who must of necessity be crushed with them, Wiebe did not actually state that Jesus' blood or

his death was the required payment demanded by God or by God's law. But along with the substitutionary motif was also the element of victory, but attached to the death rather than resurrection. However, it is also quite evident that Wiebe used atonement language without awareness of alternative images and motifs.

#### **Alt. Johann Wiebe (1837-1905).**

Similar observations apply to Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) (Note 49), elder of the Reinland Old Colony Mennonites in southern Manitoba. The discussions of salvation and the work of Christ in his "Epistle to the Gemeinden," written some seven months before his death, reveal a satisfaction atonement motif. For example, the satisfaction image seems clear when he wrote that we should love Jesus who "first loved us, 1 John 4.19 and gave his life for us as a sacrifice, and redeemed us from this present evil world, in accordance with the will of God our Father."

Or when he writes that the savior "promised of God came into this wearying world when the time was fulfilled for us poor sinners in order to make reconciliation for us from sin, indeed, from eternal death, and to again make us co-inheritors of eternal life."

Wiebe wrote that Jesus Christ "was given to us by God as a highly expensive gift, ... and came to us in this wearying world, in order to reconcile us again with His heavenly Father, indeed, even to give His blood and life for us and to become an offering for sin, and to satisfy God, His heavenly Father, and to reconcile the fallen humanity with God." And in the next paragraph he noted that Jesus did not give gold or silver for us since such things could not atone for fallen humanity. "Instead Jesus had to give His blood and life for man, so that he could be helped. Behold, that is how our beloved Savior made our purchase, dearly and at great cost, 1 Corinthians 6.20." And he says that "after our release-purchase, ... we no longer belong to ourselves, rather to the one who bought us," (Note 50).

In these references, Johann Wiebe certainly does not appeal to Anselm nor to atonement images per se. Nonetheless, his comments about the blood of Jesus being an offering for sin or that satisfies God or that purchases or redeems sinners certainly locate Wiebe in the historic satisfaction school of images.

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"....his comments about the blood of Jesus being an offering for sin....certainly locate [Johann] Wiebe in the historic satisfaction school of images."

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These references to atonement in the writings of Reimer, Friesen, Balzer, Twisk, Gerhard Wiebe and Johann Wiebe all indicate rather clearly that if or when these men were interrogated about their understandings of atonement theology, in all likelihood they would answer with language and motifs whose roots can be

traced to the atonement image of Anselm of Canterbury, although it is nevertheless modified to account for their nonviolent, discipleship orientation as is developed in what follows.

In this regard, Klaas Reimer, Abraham Friesen, and Heinrich Balzer, Peter J. Twisk, whose booklet the Kleine Gemeinde chose to print, and Gerhard and Johann Wiebe, are aligned with the nineteenth-century, North American Amish and Mennonite writers whose views are summarized in chapter 3 of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*.

This observation means that if agreement with or use of classic atonement imagery is the criteria, Reimer, Friesen, Balzer, Twisk, and the cousins Wiebe, like the nineteenth-century Amish and Mennonites of my earlier study, can be located in the broad theological stream of western Christendom. And that is certainly true, if the only criterion of judgment concerns whether these writers used images of standard atonement theology from Christendom.

#### **Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: Adaptations of Atonement.**

The description of how theologizing by both early Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony, and nineteenth-century North American Amish and Mennonites may reflect a version of Christendom's theology constitutes the on-the-one-hand of the argument. But is locating the theology of these Mennonite writers in the broad stream of Christendom that which most specifically identifies their theology? I think not. Observing that one can locate these early Kleine Gemeinde or Old Colony writers or nineteenth-century Amish and Mennonites in North America in the theological stream of western Christendom is far from the end of the story. In my analysis, there are other, more significant things to say about the theology of all these writers than that extracts of their thought fit within Christendom's theological grid.

These more significant observations constitute the "other hand" of the argument. Put bluntly, the point is that portraying these writers merely in terms of so-called orthodoxy says little that truly characterizes their theological outlook, or that explains what orients them as Anabaptist and Mennonites. We will be much closer to understanding their theological outlook when we examine the wider context in which atonement appeared, and attempt to determine modifications in classic atonement imagery that were the result of their ecclesiological orientation. Each chapter in *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* suggests that Anabaptists and Mennonites did not merely accept Christendom's theology. They added to and adapted it. Similar adaptations and additions are evident in Reimer, Friesen, Balzer, Twisk and the Wiebes.

These additions and adaptations are what the second lists were about in the chapter on twentieth-century Mennonite theologizing. Whether Mennonites were of traditional or progressive stripe, they were not able merely to accept their version of Christendom's theology. They felt compelled to add to it. They added a

variety of things, depending on whether they were traditionalists or progressives. But in every case, one of the added items was some version of nonresistance or pacifism or nonviolence. The point to underscore for the moment is that they *added* to the theological core of Christendom's theology. In other words, they considered Christendom's theology to be inadequate or incomplete.

#### **Adaptation.**

Chapter 4's examination of nineteenth-century Amish and Mennonite atonement theology reveals an amendment of Christendom's atonement theology. None of the figures that I studied merely repeated satisfaction atonement. The classic formulas of satisfaction atonement focus on the death of Jesus as the decisive event in a divine transaction that transpires outside of the realm of history. As a transaction outside of history that focuses on Jesus' death, it makes no use of the life and teaching of Jesus and suggests very little about the ethical life of Jesus' followers in history—and the little that it does say is very problematic (Note 51).

However, while the nineteenth-century writers made use of this image, all of them added to or changed the emphasis in some way so that discipleship and following Jesus were visible. And above all, they made an effort somehow to make pacifism and nonresistance visible in the way that they talked about the death of Jesus. They were far from unanimous in the way they made these additions and changes in emphasis—but the point to make here is that they all made adaptations in traditional atonement theology that were provoked by a commitment to nonresistance. Among these, Gerhard Wiebe is singled out below.

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“...all of [the Mennonite writers studied]...added to or changed the emphasis in some way so that discipleship and following Jesus were visible.”

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A similar story is told for sixteenth-century Anabaptists in chapter 4 of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*. While various figures made use of classic images and formulas, again there were adaptations and changes. One of the most well-known was Menno's adoption of Melchiorite celestial flesh Christology. While Menno wanted to claim that he was “orthodox” on the question of Christology, he also made an adaptation that was not orthodox. The idea of heavenly or celestial flesh for Jesus that Menno borrowed was an attempt to say that Jesus had real flesh that could bleed and die, but in order to preserve the sinlessness of Jesus, it was said that this flesh descended from heaven rather than being a product of Mary his mother.

By the standard of Christendom's orthodoxy, which affirms the full humanity (as well as deity) of Jesus, Menno's answer was heresy. But do we chastise him for departing from orthodoxy and being a bad theologian? Or do we

credit Menno with the insight to attempt to develop a Christology that would be more in line with his understanding of a church that was distinct from the state church and expressed discipleship to Jesus Christ? I suggest that it is the latter—that we should give Menno credit for an early attempt at a specifically Anabaptist theology rather than spank him for daring to revise Christendom's orthodoxy.

#### **Kleine Gemeinde.**

The writings of the early Kleine Gemeinde leaders also reveal adaptations or critique of the presumed general theology that they inherited from one or another version of Christendom-derived traditions. One obvious difference that distinguished these leaders from most Christian traditions was their commitment to the nonviolence of Jesus. Here brief mentions will suffice of comments showing that Klaas Reimer, Abraham Friesen, and Heinrich Balzer all held firmly to the idea of nonresistance and refusal to participate in war and in civil government.

Reimer opposed fines or work penalties on those who violated church standards because “the teachings of Christ” are “that ye resist not evil,” (Note 52). He identified his church as “nonresistant Christians,” who teach love of enemies and who preach the gospel of peace (Note 53).

Abraham Friesen penned similar comments about nonresistance and the sword. In one letter he expressed horror at the thought that “Christians are to be able to kill somebody,” and said that “the Lord Jesus has completely forbidden the carrying of the sword or the waging of war,” (Note 54). Christians did not resist evil, he said, although they submit to government which is ordained of God for that specific purpose. Nonresistance meant that Christians refrained from physical punishment, which is “entrusted to the government” and instead “instruct and admonish the offenders with the Word of God,” which “alone is to be our method of punishment,” (Note 55).

Heinrich Balzer wrote that the fruit of a person sanctified by God is “love for the enemy,” and that the “believing Christian must suffer wrong willingly,” (Note 56). He also stated that only the government operated by nonChristians is authorized to exercise power in the world (Note 57), and that those who read devotional books written by people who “justify war and the shedding of blood” then “stand in one mind with those who perpetrate blood wars,” (Note 58).

Such admonitions about nonresistance and love of enemies are based on a need to be obedient to the teachings of Jesus and to the teaching of scripture. However, the commitment to nonresistance and love of enemies is more than one point of obedience. It is also a commitment that impacts other beliefs as well. A specific example of this impact is the opposition of these leaders to the new doctrine of premillennialism that was brought to Russia via German pietist literature and that many Mennonites were finding attractive.

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“[Klaas] Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde believed that the kingdom of God had already begun with Jesus...”

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Klaas Reimer described his opposition to “the thousand year reign” in “Ein Kleines Aufsatz,” his autobiographical sketch of 1836 (Note 59). In premillennialism, the ethical teachings of Jesus were said to be for the future millennium. For Reimer, this was an understanding that clearly undercut present-day obedience. Reimer and the Kleine Gemeinde believed that the kingdom of God had already begun with Jesus and thus the teachings of Jesus were to be obeyed already in the present.

#### **Alt. Peter J. Twisk.**

The rejection of premillennialism as a belief that undercut obedience to Jesus' teachings is made abundantly clear by the efforts of the Kleine Gemeinde to translate and print Peter Jansz Twisk's “Peaceable Kingdom of Christ.” The Kleine Gemeinde had published a number of earlier writings that they believed defended the traditional Anabaptist faith against the inroads of modern thought and pietist expression. Twisk's booklet was the last such item published. Delbert Plett notes that “because of emigration there were only very few Russian Mennonite leaders left in 1874 who supported the full gospel teaching of the peaceable earthly Kingdom of Christ,” (Note 60). The Twisk translation appeared in 1875.

Earlier we noted the presence of the satisfaction atonement motif in Twisk's booklet. But it was actually different than and much more than a bare assertion of satisfaction atonement. A major point of the essay is to say that the supposed millennium of Revelation 20 has already begun. It was begun by God with the birth of Christ, and it will end with the end of the world. In other words, the millennium is a figurative way to refer to the time of human history between Jesus' birth and his second coming. And thus it obviously included the time in which Twisk and now the Kleine Gemeinde are living.

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“...the millennium....[refers] to the time of human history between Jesus' birth and his second coming.”

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During this time, particularly as it nears its end, Twisk stresses that Christians will be tempted away from following the way of Christ in the peaceable kingdom. He interpreted the “two witnesses” of Revelation 11 as Old and New Testaments, which serve to convict the consciences of sinners. For Twisk, the killing of the witnesses in Revelation 11, was a warning that consciences stirred by the biblical witness “were again quieted and the troubled hearts were quieted and joy took its place. A voluptuous life and the giving of presents became the unhindered chief work of the people,” (Note 61).

Premillennialism, Twisk believed, could well quiet these convicted consciences by teaching that obedience to the teachings of Jesus was not expected now because those teachings were for the future kingdom. Twisk emphasized the presence of the kingdom now, in his history, and opposed a premillennial teaching that had the clear potential to postpone obedience to the teachings of Jesus, in particular his teaching on non-violence, to the supposed future millennium. By asserting that the millennium had already begun with the advent of Christ, Twisk and with him the Kleine Gemeinde leaders, asserted that obedience to Christ's teachings was intended for the present time and was to be maintained until the return of Jesus.

For the Kleine Gemeinde leaders, premillennialism in particular and the new pietism encountered by the Russian Mennonites in general were in fact eroding the Anabaptist commitment to discipleship to Jesus. As Delbert Plett summarized, the Kleine Gemeinde leaders who published Twisk's booklet considered the "prosperity and secularization," which could be enjoyed within the "harmless Christianity" of the "inward" faith of pietism, to be the most dangerous threat to the true church (Note 62).

#### **The Peaceable Kingdom of Christ.**

It is in the context of the assertion of present-time obedience to the teachings of Jesus that occurred Twisk's remarks on the atoning death of Jesus. He wrote that the propitiatory death of Jesus was actually the last link in "the great chain of the law relating to all the commandments," with which Satan is said to be bound in Revelation 20. The chain which was "fulfilled and confirmed through the blood of Jesus Christ and his full and complete propitiation, was now strong enough to bind Satan and cast him into prison." As a result, the angel could "proclaim the everlasting gospel to them that dwell on earth," (Note 63).

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"[Twisk]...wrote that the...death of Jesus was...the last link....with which Satan is said to be bound in Revelation 20."

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In other words, the blood of Jesus has established the Kingdom of God on earth, and it cannot be overcome by Satan. This kingdom is represented by "the church, from the days of the apostles on until the time when this time shall be fulfilled, ... This present time, the last days; the days of the gospel dispensation, shall end with the end of the world," (Note 64). But even though it cannot be overcome, this epoch of the "millennium" will be a time of temptation and distress, as "Satan will indeed assail men and lead them into many temptations," (Note 65). Twisk's focus on obedience in a time of temptation and opposition certainly appealed to the Kleine Gemeinde's perception of their own situation. As they wanted to stress, "those who continue in watchfulness and prayer, and highly esteem the commandments of God ... shall be preserved," (Note 66).

With reference to atonement, these observations about present-day discipleship and the interpretation of the atoning death in terms of Revelation 20 comments show that an apparently standard image of atonement was actually put by Twisk in an Anabaptist, peace church context quite different from the standard story. And with Twisk's idea in mind that the death of Jesus was the chain that bound Satan, it even appears that Twisk has an element of Christus Victor. Recall here that Klaas Reimer's theology also displayed elements of Christus Victor.

In any case, Twisk, and the Kleine Gemeinde with their reprinting of the pamphlet, wanted to stress obedience to the teachings of Jesus in contrast to the surrounding social order. They posed this obedience as a contrast to an inner gospel that encourages a life that reflects and is comfortable with or in conforming to the world around it.

This focus on discipleship produced an ecclesiological orientation that distinguishes significantly the Kleine Gemeinde both from the pietists but also from the majority Mennonite tradition in Russia. The impact of discipleship on Twisk's and Kleine Gemeinde theology is missed entirely if one analyzes their theology in terms of the categories of supposed standard theological imagery. That is, if standard theology is taken as the norm, so that one only asks if Twisk or Kleine Gemeinde agreed with the presumed standard theology, it is apparent that they do--they did use the dominant satisfaction imagery. And if that is the norm, then obviously these folks are part of western Christendom, a rather strange and insignificant little piece of Christendom.

However, when one observes the impact of the Anabaptist stress on present-day discipleship on the supposed standard atonement motif, we find a differently oriented theological tradition. This differently oriented tradition has the potential to challenge the standard canon on a number of theological points on the basis of an element--discipleship, with particular focus on nonviolent discipleship--that is lacking in the standard theology. And then this element given visibility by these Anabaptists becomes, not just one separate item that they happen to hold while Christendom does not. Rather, the element that distinguished Anabaptists is the basis for a different school of thought.

Here it is significant to recall the earlier observations concerning Abraham Friesen's addition of a discipleship impulse to his satisfaction atonement motif. Seeing the element of discipleship in Twisk and its impact on Twisk's atonement theology shows that the modification in Friesen's atonement theology is not incidental. The commitment to nonviolent discipleship did bring these writers to correct a missing element in the received atonement theology.

#### **American Mennonites.**

In their response to premillennialism, the Kleine Gemeinde leaders closely resembled that of some of their brothers in North America. Heinrich Egly, Johannes Moser, and John Holdeman all wrote expositions or otherwise

commented on Revelation 20 in order to express views similar to those of Twisk and the Kleine Gemeinde writers in opposition to the new premillennial teaching. As the complete title of Egly's sermon "Vom Friedensreich Jesu Christi" indicated, its main point was to emphasize that the peaceable kingdom of Christ had already begun, "as soon as Christ had made his offering on the cross," (Note 67).

And like Twisk, in particular Egly identified the atonement death of Christ on the cross as "the great chain" that bound Satan (Rev. 20.14) (Note 68). Egly's intent was to refute the premillennial argument which would postpone obedience to Jesus' commands to a future thousand-year rule of Christ, and to emphasize the present and immediate manifestation of the new birth. Obedience to the commands of Jesus belonged not to a future millennium but to the already-present kingdom of God.

In his discussion of those who believed in a future thousand-year reign of Christ, Johannes Moser specifically rejected the idea that nonresistance belonged to a future kingdom, or that Christians were currently bound by Satan in such a way that they could not now practice nonresistance. Though he confessed to not understand the meaning of the numbers and prophetic texts of Revelation, he believed that the peaceful nature of Christ's kingdom was clear: "If his followers [do not forgive their enemies], who will do it. ... Shall Christ's followers remain bound by the power of Satan and then be freed from him only for a thousand years and only then be ruled by Christ," (Note 69).

For Moser, it was clear that the reign of God had already begun, and that those who claimed Jesus as Savior had to follow his nonresistant example already in the present, and not wait for obedience until a future millennium (Note 70).

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**"[John Holdeman]....considered [premillennialism]...a gross contradiction for Christians to accept war in the present while arguing that Jesus' teaching about nonresistance belonged to a future kingdom."**

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In a similar way, John Holdeman's belief in nonresistance also led him to oppose premillennialism. He considered it a gross contradiction for Christians to accept war in the present while arguing that Jesus' teaching about nonresistance belonged to a future kingdom. Any future reign of peace, he declared, must be "the manifestation of the saving truth contained in the gospel." And since that is the gospel proclaimed by the present church, it is impossible to contend "for war now and universal peace in the millennium," (Note 71).

#### **Alt. Gerhard Wiebe, Chortitz.**

What shaped Gerhard Wiebe's world view and constituted the context for his apparent assumption of satisfaction atonement was his perception of a life of obedience to the commandments of God (Note 72). The particular charac-

ter Wiebe gave to that obedience reflected rather strikingly his experiences as leader in the Bergthal colony, and his perception of the relationship of Bergthal to the other Mennonite colonies in Russia.

In *Ursachen und Geschichte*, Wiebe sketched conditions in Russia, related events of the Bergthaler immigration to southern Manitoba and his leadership there, his resignation from the office of bishop in embarrassing but unknown circumstances, and his perception of the decaying state of Mennonites as they neared the twentieth century. The little book begins and ends with calls to be obedient to the commands of God.

Humility, nonresistance, and opposition to higher education characterize that obedience, with humility as the common denominator. It is hardly surprising when his humble Bergthaler appear as more obedient than the proud Mennonites in other, wealthy colonies.

The protection promised by God to God's people, Wiebe believed, depended on obedience, whether in the Old Testament or in Wiebe's own time. The fact that the Bergthalers had survived the hardships of immigration to Manitoba Wiebe attributed to the unity created by their obedience to the commands of God (Note 73). On the other hand, the scattering of the Mennonite churches to the four winds and the fragmentation of the two large congregations that remained in Russia were the result of having ceased to listen to the Word of God (Note 74). Throughout, Wiebe emphasized the consequences of obedience (Note 75).

**“...Gerhard Wiebe’s world view...[was shaped by] his perception of a life of obedience to the commandments of God”**

Not surprisingly, Wiebe believed that Jesus exhibited a humble, unpretentious outlook. In fact, it was Jesus' humility that led to his rejection. “Had Jesus come in pride and magnificence [Hoffart und Pracht], then they would have accepted him,” (Note 76). Jesus also chose humble people as his disciples. They came from “the lowliest people, namely, fishermen and also a customs collector.” None came from the “advanced school” of Gamaliel, which trained its students in “arrogance and self-righteousness.” Because Paul had imbibed the teaching of Gamaliel’s school, he had to be called “through thunder and lightning.” (Note 77).

Nonresistance belonged indelibly to the obedient, humble life. In the opening sentence of *Ursachen und Geschichte*, Wiebe gave the saving of “our children from military service and ruin” as the reason for emigration to North America (Note 78). In other settings he linked nonresistance, humility, and opposition to advanced education, which is discussed below.

Signs of arrogance included not only educated ministers but also revival preachers (Note 79) who proclaimed a repentance which touched the heart but accepted everything from the world. No doubt Wiebe had both kinds of

preacher in mind when he wrote that “They preach repentance, but live in greatest arrogance, and try to cover up with the aura of Holy Scripture their belief that a person can go along with everything in the world, as long as his heart is not attached to it,” (Note 80). Such preachers mention only a few words about the text, Wiebe said, and then to attract acclaim, they talk about the railroad, newspapers and whatever is happening in the world (Note 81).

Things which displayed arrogance or lack of humility included ostentatious display in clothing and fashions, buggies and coaches, marriage into other confessions, standing for and holding public office, and placing money at interest (Note 82). His critique of Mennonites for arrogance, education, and display applied both to the wealthy who remained behind in Russia and to the advocates of education in southern Manitoba.

Putting all these observations together, in Wiebe’s *Ursachen und Geschichte* one glimpses a world view comprised of humility and simplicity, obedience, nonresistance, and opposition to education. The integration stemmed from an understanding of the visible church, which existed as the living extension of Christ and his disciples. It was a community defined and reinforced by lifestyle. Rather than appealing to biblical authority, Wiebe wanted to preserve a simple nonresistant people by opposing the outside influences which would enter via higher education.

In that context, his brief references to atonement constitute an addendum to this package of the simple, obedient, nonresistant life. Arrogance belonged to the sins that were heaped on Jesus, and for which he had to undergo suffering and rejection from God. Jesus’ death carried away the sin and punishment of those who violated the humble, obedient life. This understanding of atonement deals with the legacy of sin but does not shape Wiebe’s view of the obedient life. It is not a view of atonement but the visible church—humble, nonresistant, opposed to higher education—which identifies Wiebe’s outlook.

#### **Alt. Johann Wiebe, Rosengard.**

Nonresistance was an evident and constituent element of the context in which to situate Johann Wiebe’s comments on atonement. His group, “a fairly large number,” had “left Russia because of the military service or because we were to become subject to the secular law and worldly might,” (Note 83). And as was the case for the Kleine Gemeinde writers, Wiebe was disturbed that church discipline was being replaced by punishment by the secular authorities—“the chastisement of the brethren always lessened more and more and the worldly power was applied in its place,” (Note 84).

In a letter written to the congregations remaining in Russia admonishing them to avoid the many temptations confronting them and to remain faithful to the gospel, Wiebe emphasized rejection of the sword. If they love God, he wrote, “how shall we be able to assume the [military] service which the Government is re-

quiring of you? ... For Jesus did teach Peter to place the sword back into its sheath.” A bit later he adds, “Has our Redeemer ever done any such works which aid in the waging of war?” (Note 85). And then notes that for “those who are becoming genuine disciples of Christ. ... All wars presently must fall away, . . . the [wars] shall fall away and such a person shall grieve that they have previously acted against the teachings of Christ,” (Note 86).

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**“In a letter written to the congregations remaining in Russia...[Johann] Wiebe emphasized rejection of the sword.”**

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The discipleship to Jesus manifested in this rejection of the sword flows from Wiebe’s understanding of atonement. His description of the journey from Russia to Manitoba begins with the prayer that the grace of Jesus Christ will “increase in all believers,” who are “washed by His blood from all our sins so that we may henceforth gladly walk before Him in holiness and unblemished in His love,” (Note 87). That is, the cleansing from sin expressed in satisfaction atonement should result in following Jesus.

Emphases on following Jesus and not being conformed to the world are essential to Johann Wiebe’s comments on atonement, with a range of issues included under nonconformity. After saying that Jesus made reconciliation for sinners, Wiebe notes that “if we wish to be partakers of this Saviour so lovingly given to us by God, this Deliverer, we must also strive in all things to walk in His ways and according to His commandments.” That is, atonement means nothing if it does not eventuate in discipleship to Jesus. A bit later after another comment on how the atoning blood of Jesus had purchased us at great cost, he wrote, “For this reason, we should glorify God with our body and spirit.”

This glorification of God will result in a nonconformity that rejects the splendor of worldly adornment (Note 88). Aspects of being conformed to the world include “extravagant clothing,” “games and drinking,” “going on about with contrivance and airs,” “misguided sitting and standing and walking,” “embellishments on houses,” and “luxurious life and clothing.” And following in the light of Jesus certainly includes rejection of the violence of punishment.

In Russia, the Gemeinde had afflicted each other with the violence of punishment, including members of the “Chortitzer Gemeinder who had to do penance labour in the forest because they did not paint their houses and fences.” This violence was the result of men “who had been given offices according to the worldly fashion,” (Note 90). Thus very much like the other writers in this essay, it is the case that Johann Wiebe’s theological outlook is made clear not by locating his theology in Christendom’s but by showing how his peace church orientation reshaped the theological tradition received from Christendom.

## Orthodoxy and Adaptation.

Here I have sketched some examples from twentieth-, nineteenth-, and sixteenth-centuries of people from the Anabaptist, peace church tradition, who made changes and adaptations to Christendom's orthodoxy in ways that reflect the peace church tradition. But these additions and adaptations are more than mere additions and adaptations. The importance of this "more than" mere additions and adaptations appears in a perhaps surprising manner. It is actually the case that adding to orthodoxy reveals something very significant about orthodoxy, and materially changes the light in which we should see it.

It is the claim of and for orthodoxy that there is nothing beyond it, that it transcends all else to be the unquestioned given of theology. Orthodoxy claims to be the foundation because it is the unquestioned given. Rather than challenging it, the point about orthodoxy is that one is supposed to accept it. This givenness constitutes its primary characteristic, namely the claim to be the unquestioned foundation on which all else must build.

But when Anabaptists and Mennonites added to and adapted that supposedly unquestioned foundation, they were doing more than merely adding and adapting. By adding and adapting they were also--implicitly--calling into question orthodoxy's claim to be the unquestioned given. The need to add and adapt reveals its incompleteness and inadequacy and thus challenges orthodoxy's very character as orthodoxy. Needing to add demonstrates its limitations and its limitedness. And with its inadequacy and limitedness on display, it is no longer the supposed unquestioned foundation that all Christians should necessarily accept as the arbiter of truth.

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**"Adding to orthodoxy's formulas from a peace church perspective displays the peace church's commitment to a different foundation..."**

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And further, that which provoked the additions and adaptations is actually functioning as a higher authority than the supposed authoritative and unquestioned, transcendent foundation being supplemented and adapted. When Anabaptists and Mennonites felt compelled to make changes and adaptations in the inherited theology of Christendom, they were implicitly acknowledging a higher theological authority than Christendom's orthodoxy. Adding to orthodoxy's formulas from a peace church perspective displays the peace church's commitment to a different foundation than orthodoxy's. And equally important, it also displays orthodoxy's particular context as the theological foundation of the church that is not a pacifist, peace church.

With orthodoxy's inadequacy exposed, with orthodoxy's context exposed as the theology of the church that does not espouse the nonviolent life and teaching of Jesus, it is no longer the unquestioned given, the unquestioned foundation that its proponents in Christendom have claimed.

## Understanding and Reason.

Heinrich Balzer's 1833 essay on "Understanding and Reason" (Note 91) foreshadows these conclusions about the nature of theology. In this tract, Balzer attributed the decline of the Mennonite church in Russia to a confusion between *Verstand* (Understanding) and *Vernunft* (reason) (Note 92). It was this perceived decline which led to the formation of the Kleine Gemeinde.

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**"Heinrich Balzer's 1833 essay on "Understanding and Reason" foreshadows these conclusions about the nature of theology."**

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Balzer developed his concepts of understanding (*Verstand*) and reason (*Vernunft*) in terms of a tripartite anthropology that consists of "physical life," "life of the soul or [rather] of the senses," and "spiritual or mental life." Humans share physical life with all living creatures. For Balzer, the life of the soul is expressed itself through thinking or reasoning; it is what "governs . . . physical life by way of the five senses." Humans also share this kind of life with other living creatures, except that God has endowed the human soul with a much greater portion of "reason, the natural light." With this light, humans can judge their own actions and make a "rational choice" between right and wrong."

Finally, what Balzer called mental or spiritual life is that part of humanity by which "the Great Lord has tied Himself the closest to man, and by which man received the greatest privilege of all creatures." This is also the life that was lost in the fall, and then "retrieved and made available again to the reborn ones" through the resurrection of Jesus. This true knowledge, or "reason of the heart" is not accessible by human effort or human reason. It is "revealed through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to those who genuinely repent from their sins, deny them [*ihnen absterben*], and conduct their lives in accordance with the world of Christ in whose redemptive death they believe," (Note 93).

True "understanding," as Balzer perceived it, consists of "correct knowledge of God's will regarding man," as it is revealed in the scriptures, while this illumination is "through the divine power of the Holy Spirit." The more a person opens his or her heart to the working of the Spirit, "the more the mind will be illuminated and inspired." This illumination is a reversal of the fall (Note 94). Robert Friedmann wrote that for Balzer, *Verstand* or "understanding" is a person's "cognitive faculty behind his faith, ...the faculty to know God and His truth." It is "a mental faculty, a capacity of understanding and judging" that provides a "vision of the eternal truth," (Note 95).

In contrast to understanding, for Balzer "reason" is human thought processes, the faculty behind rational thought, the "natural light" that the Creator gave to every human being "to a greater or smaller extent." It was not obliterated in the fall but did become corrupted. Thus "natural reason is restricted exclusively to activities

of this world, ... to what one can see, judge, test, and decide upon." When exercised in these areas, reason is very useful and avails much. However, anything dealing with salvation "requires a simple obedience to the Gospel that lies completely beyond the limits of reason." And further, since reason was corrupted in the fall, it has become "hostile to God and His will." Thus for the Christian or reborn person, "this reason must be subordinated to the faith, and brought under its obedience," (Note 96).

As Balzer perceived understanding and reason, both faculties are necessary. He wrote the tract in order to clarify their relationship and to recognize when reason oversteps its bounds. When the place of reason is recognized, reason and understanding are not in conflict. However, when reason is not subordinated to understanding, dire consequences follow.

Balzer posed a number of contrasts between understanding and reason. We note here some of these contrasts, most of which relate to education and the threat posed by higher education.

Understanding moves a person "to accept all those teachings of the Gospel which are necessary for salvation." In contrast, while secular learning can develop reason "to a high degree," reason cannot speak to the truth of salvation in Christ. In fact, reason doubts whatever is beyond its "concepts and judgments" and "the truth of salvation in and through Christ is to it nothing but folly," (Note 97). Believers with understanding live happily in "the simplicity of Christ," and regard "worldly honors, high repute, elated rank, and the pleasures of social life . . . as vanities, as mere sham and smoke."

Those with understanding hold "riches" to be "detrimental to salvation" and they flee from "higher learning, . . . worldly scholarship and philosophy." In contrast, reason pursues "enlightenment" and aspires to "reputation in this world," to riches, to "worldly honor and position." For those guided by reason, "the simple Word of God is too naked and too meager for the intellectuals." They pursue "diversions of every kind, comedies and other [stage] plays." While they supposedly "disdain acts of violence," they will pursue a claim "through litigation," and "to love one's enemy and to do good to those who offend you seems to them like a thorn in the eyes," (Note 98).

## Higher Education.

As long as early Christians tried to live "according to the teachings of the Gospel, . . . they avoided conformity to the world." But when they began to blend teachings of the Gospel with "all kinds of interpretations and expositions, and to match them with philosophical tenets, then they began to conform themselves to the world in all things." And from then on, the focus was not on "development of heart and understanding, but of head and reason."

In order to attain enlightenment and to be honored and respected, "they established universities and schools of higher learning where worldly scholarship found a home, and where the cultivation of reason found mighty sponsors. . . . They confused and mixed up *under-*

standing and reason, the cultivation of the heart and the enlightenment of the head, to the greatest harm of Christendom. Rationalism was declared the greatest triumph of Christianity. Christian simplicity was labelled mere ignorance and dumbness,” (Note 99).

Balzer sketched a history of Mennonite acculturation until his own time, apparently referring to developments in Holland and Prussia. While under persecution they followed the teachings of the gospel. But with the coming of peace, they became immersed in the world of business and commerce which brought desire for much worldly knowledge such as the study of “business administration, geography and political science.” Preachers then needed to acquire higher education. Eventually there was a desire for full equality in privileges with other denominations, followed by adjusting Mennonite principles “to the requirements of this world by way of rational arguments so that civil and war services could now be accepted without hurting one’s conscience,” (Note 100).

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**“Balzer sketched a history of Mennonite acculturation until his own time,...”**

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One result would be losing their sense of being a peace church. Balzer warns against contact with denominations “which contend that serving in the army and in civil service, that practicing the sword, oath, and vengeance are quite evangelical.” Since such Christians often have a strong faith, Balzer warns his readers against “undervaluating your own principles out of courtesy, brotherly love, and misunderstood impartiality,” which might eventually result in accepting a confession opposed to the nonresistant faith. Accepting such a confession is made easy by the pietist belief that salvation depends on “faith and nothing else.” In fact, Satan might even allow a confession “that one believes, even if one does not practice the works of Christ.” In contrast, “an earnest Christian will never separate faith and works,” (Note 101).

Balzer’s suspicion of higher education was shared with Gerhard Wiebe (Note 102). Wiebe characterized the change in the fourth-century church represented by Constantine as the beginning of a great battle in which “light and darkness exchanged places,” (Note 103). A part of these changes included the loss of nonresistance. The struggle was between the false and true bishops, the former desiring guidance by the “state laws” while the latter held to “God’s Word and command,” (Note 104).

But the most serious offense of all in the fourth century, Wiebe wrote, concerned education. “The biggest error was committed by the church itself . . . by its building of advanced schools; for here the Word of God and human wisdom were mixed together, and through this simplicity and innocence decreased steadily. ... So it was that after four hundred years the teaching of humility was transformed into an arrogant priesthood” which preached to please the emperor in exchange for an imperial supply of

wealth (Note 105). Through the centuries, a few folks such as Menno Simons kept the truth faith alive, and Menno’s legacy was carried to Poland and then to Russia. When Wiebe described the demise of nonresistance in Russia, education was to blame for that loss. Arrogance desired the prideful, higher education that undermined nonresistance, while humility and simplicity remained content to obey the Word of God and retain nonresistance (Note 106).

**Observations.**

Likely few, if any, readers of this essay accept the suspicion of higher education found in Balzer and Wiebe. In fact, most of us have immersed ourselves in the kind of higher education that Balzer specifically rejected. However, his point that the truth of Jesus Christ cannot be fully contained within any human formulations is nonetheless valid. For example, while we willingly use the tools of historical, critical scholarship on the Bible, and our understanding of scripture is greatly enhanced by use of these tools, the truth of Jesus Christ is not dependent on these tools and we should not allow these historical tools to limit the truth of the story of Jesus.

While we learn from the findings of science concerning the evolutionary character of change in the physical, biological realm, we do not allow observations in the scientific realm to speak about the existence of God nor about the truth of salvation in Christ. Balzer was concerned about supposed rational arguments that explained the necessity of war or at least rationalized the peace church’s acquiescence to war and participation in the force of government. Balzer rightly acknowledges that human reason shaped by higher education can be destructive when wrongly applied. We do well to remember that warning, as well as the learning implicit in his tract, namely that no human formulation contains absolutely the truth of God in Christ.

It thus appears that the distinction Balzer made between understanding and reason reflects the argument that no human formula, such as those claimed by orthodoxy, can serve as the ultimate truth of Jesus. All human reason comes out of a context and reflects the particular context in which it is developed and is specific to the culture and language in which it is developed. No human statement can or should be elevated to the status of ultimate truth. To be Christian is to confess that ultimate truth is defined in relation to the particular story of Jesus Christ. All human statements, including the human statements claimed by orthodoxy, are efforts to express the truth of Jesus. But as human statements, none can escape their particularity. And as particular statements that emerge from a particular or specific context, they are always subject to amendment, adaptation and expansion.

The additions and adaptations made by Anabaptists and Mennonites that are discussed in *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* and in this article show that the Mennonite peace church has professed commitment to the story of Jesus Christ from within a reading of the story that makes explicit and visible Jesus’ re-

jection of the sword. It is this story that should be expressed and given explicit visibility in a theology for the peace church, rather than merely building on the formulas of Christendom, which reflect little if anything of the life and teaching of Jesus. Theology for the peace church should be theology that is specific to the story of Jesus, rather than building on fourth and fifth and eleventh-century formulas given their authority by the church of Christendom (Note 107).

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“....theology for the peace church should reflect the peaceful story of Jesus.”

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The purpose of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* and this essay in *Preservings* is to make that point, namely that the theology for the peace church should reflect the peaceful story of Jesus. If our theology does not contain and express that story explicitly—and the creeds and formulas of Christendom do not—the church will not remain a peace church for many more years. If the nonviolence of Jesus is not made explicit in our theology and in our understanding of what it means to be Christian, Mennonites will quickly cease to be a peace church.

**Nonviolent theology.**

As a specifically nonviolence-shaped theology, I have suggested narrative Christus Victor as an image of Christology and atonement that displays the reign of God in nonviolent confrontation of and triumph over evil. This image develops salvation based on a nonviolent reign of God and separated from the violence of retribution.

My construction of narrative Christus Victor is anchored at both ends of the New Testament. On one end, throughout the book of Revelation there is the image that has been called Christus Victor. The classic imagery of Christus Victor depicts a cosmic battle between the forces of God and the forces of evil, who hold captive the souls of humankind. Developing an understanding of the potential historical antecedents of Revelation’s symbols shows that this confrontation of reign of God and the forces of evil occurred in the historical realm in which we live, and the aftermath of that victory is still going on.

But for Christians, the point is that although the forces of evil killed Jesus, the reign of God has triumphed through the resurrection of Jesus. As we live in the story of the resurrected Christ, humanity is freed to celebrate salvation in the reign of God, in spite of and in the face of the resistance to the rule of God that continues in the world.

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“I have suggested narrative Christus Victor as an image of Christology and atonement that displays the reign of God in nonviolent confrontation of and triumph over evil.”

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At the front end of the New Testament, the Gospels depict the same confrontation between the representative of the rule of God, namely Jesus, and everything and everyone that is not under the rule of God. The Gospels portray a Jesus who challenged violent or exploitative or oppressive conditions in a number of ways.

In place of the violence accommodating theology of Christendom, I have suggested a theology that is actually a reading of the Bible's narratives in Revelation and the Gospels. It is a reading that assumes that our identity as Christians comes from living within the narrative of Jesus. This theology assumes that Jesus is the norm for ethics. One can call this reading of the biblical material a narrative Christology and a narrative Christus Victor for an atonement motif.

Faith shaped within this theological reading of the Bible is Christian faith as embodied nonviolence. It is a lived theology. This is theology as ethics and ethics as theology. Stated another way, ethics and theology are two versions--one written and one lived--of the story of Jesus. To be Christian is to live this story of Jesus. Put in evangelistic language, to accept Christ is to accept God's invitation to join Jesus' story.

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**"...ethics and theology are two versions--one written and one lived--of the story of Jesus."**

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The last chapter of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* presents a longer version of this sketch of a "Nonviolent theology." This book chapter followed an extended interaction with material and analysis that come from the historical Anabaptist and Mennonite tradition. I hope that Mennonites as a peace church recognize that that book as well as this essay in hand were written about them and for them, using resources from their tradition.

In September, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. released *The Nonviolent Atonement*. This latter book exposes the accommodation of violence by the theological formulas of Christendom and presents an extended development of narrative Christus Victor as a thoroughly biblical and intrinsically nonviolent understanding of atonement and Christology specific to the nonviolent life and teaching of Jesus.

*The Nonviolent Atonement* is directed to Christians in general, and carries out the discussion of violence in Christian theology in a way that makes virtually no use of Anabaptist and Mennonite history. In so doing, it makes the point that rejection of violence is the calling of every Christian, and it challenges every church to be a peace church. But I hope that Mennonites as a peace church recognize that that book as well was also written for them, for their continuation as a peace church.

### Conclusions.

Developing theology with the perspective and methodology of this essay has a number of implications.

### The nature of theology.

Developing a theology specifically shaped by the nonviolence of Jesus is not a fundamental departure from previous Anabaptist and Mennonite theologizing. In fact, it is actually carrying farther a process already visible in the earlier writers. In this essay, we have observed ways that these writers added to and modified traditional or supposedly standard images and motifs. Those changes resulted from their sense that commitment to nonviolent discipleship was not adequately expressed in the formulas of Christendom. If we now develop theology explicitly shaped by nonviolent discipleship, we are simply being more explicit and going farther in a direction already visible in these earlier writers.

Developing and professing theology that explicitly expresses the nonviolence of Jesus is not merely for the sake of preserving Mennonite, peace church identity. Nor is it merely a matter that each church or denominational tradition ought to have its own theology. In fact, if it is only a matter of preserving Mennonite, peace church identity or of developing a theology for a church, namely Mennonites, who had none previously, then it is not worth doing at all.

Developing a theology that makes explicit the nonviolence of Jesus involves a discussion about who Jesus is and what it means to be a Christian.

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**"Developing a theology specifically shaped by the nonviolence of Jesus is not a fundamental departure from previous Anabaptist and Mennonite theologizing."**

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Theology that makes explicit the nonviolence of Jesus is *Christian* theology. Such a theology challenges anyone who claims the name of Christ to acknowledge the nature of Jesus' teaching and Jesus' mission. And posing this theology shaped by nonviolence brings to the fore the extent to which the various versions of Christology and atonement inherited from Christendom are silent about Jesus' rejection of violence, and thus reflect the church that has espoused and defended the sword through the centuries.

Theology that makes explicit the nonviolence of Jesus has a scope far beyond the Mennonite peace church--it is a challenge and a call to every Christian. It does not need a qualifier like Mennonite or Lutheran or conservative or evangelical. It should be intelligible without any mention of Anabaptism or of Mennonites. And choosing to develop this theology rather than merely adding an element of nonviolence to Christendom's formulas is fundamentally a debate whether Jesus' rejection of the sword is intrinsic or incidental to his life and his mission to make the reign of God visible in our history. At the same time, the peace church should embrace theology specific to Jesus as an expression of what it has always professed to believe as a church that is committed to living out of the life and teaching of Jesus.

### For postmodernity.

Saying that theology for the peace church is specific to the story of Jesus means that in the long run, postmodernity does not constitute an ultimate problem, and that in the long term, we need not continue to discuss theology in terms of postmodernity. However, since it is a current buzz word, used to describe a supposed new stage in history, it is important that we do show how the gospel and our theology address this particular phenomenon.

Our focus, however, is on Jesus rather than on postmodernity. Thus theology starts with and is specific to Jesus, rather than allowing itself to be defined or shaped by some particular understanding of postmodernity. And from a commitment that ultimate truth is measured by Jesus Christ, we will continue to express truth from that story long after the next buzz word replaces postmodernity.

### For allies and conversation partners

Claiming the story of Jesus as the foundation of peace church theology, and thereby recognizing that there are problems with Christendom's theology, brings into view some potential conversation partners with which Mennonites are mostly unfamiliar. The last chapter of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* points out one such dialogue partner, namely black theology. I often recall my first real conversation with James Cone, some 10 years ago. I told him that conclusions I had reached from a nonviolent perspective seemed already articulated in his *God of the Oppressed* (Note 108), namely that Nicene Christology and Anselmian atonement have accommodated violence, and that Christus Victor was an atonement image with the potential to challenge rather than accommodate violence.

I wanted to ask if I had correctly read these elements in his work. And Prof. Cone assured me that I had understood correctly. And then I asked whether I needed to continue with my project, since he seemed already to have developed aspects of what I was saying. And James Cone said, "Prof. Weaver. You aren't saying anything that we in the black community don't already know. But you are one of the few white folks who knows. Your job is to talk to the white community."

The last chapter of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity* deals with black and womanist theology specifically to introduce them to Mennonites; and to say that if the Mennonite church is serious about dealing with racism and injustice, and is serious about being a diverse church, there are openings that we have, as yet, thought very little about developing. And recognizing these affinities with black and womanist theology shows that trying to plug into one of the versions of Christendom's theology is not the only avenue of ecumenical discussion open to Mennonites.

For much the same reasons that I find dialogue partners in black theology, I think that a theology for the peace church that is specific to the liberating story of Jesus could find resonance in many liberation struggles, both of mi-

nority groups in North American and around the world. In many places, there are Christians affiliated with Mennonite World Conference who have chafed under the church of the colonial occupiers, and who are striving to follow Jesus in a way that confronts the colonial Christendom legacy of land seizure and economic and political exploitation. In a recent article, John Kampen wrote that “The themes of struggle and survival and the attendant stories of those experiences provide the basis for a shared identity in the global Mennonite church movement,” (Note 109).

**“Theology shaped by the nonviolence of Jesus that thus challenges both the direct violence of war and...the systemic violence of economic and colonial exploitation...”**

Theology shaped by the nonviolence of Jesus that thus challenges both the direct violence of war and the military but also the systemic violence of economic and colonial exploitation fits the agenda of “struggle and survival” that Kampen suggested as the common experience of the global Mennonite movement. But this nonviolent theology and Kampen’s observation also pose a challenge to the Mennonite churches in North America. Will they identify with these justice issues facing the global Mennonite community? Or will they continue their drift toward identity with the values of North American society, whether in Canada or the US, and build on the theology inherited from Christendom that fails to challenge those values?

#### **For sacred nationalism.**

The horrific events of September 11 in New York and Washington and western Pennsylvania occurred as this essay was approaching its final form. In the following days, the United States public has willingly followed the lead of government and news media in moving the country towards a war of retaliation. As this essay is sent to press, we do not know the nature of the United States response, except that it will be both violent and applauded by a majority of citizens. The song “God Bless America” has become an unofficial second national anthem. This call to violence is occurring in the midst of and with the support of religious nationalism, which is strongly influenced by Christian professions.

The peace church and a peace-church shaped theology obviously speak to this nationalism and its sacred violence. I note three areas. First, posing a nonviolent witness in the face of violence, whether terrorist or retaliatory, is an obvious contribution.

Second, the kind of theology that I propose makes abundantly clear that violence is not intrinsic to Christian faith. Rather, violence has been incorporated into Christian theology (Note 110). To show that Christianity and Christian faith are not intrinsically violent seems extremely important with a view to the relationship of

Christianity to Islam. For nearly 1000 years, the predominant Muslim experience with Christians is military crusades from “Christian” Europe and colonial occupation from “Christian” Europe and North America. An intrinsically nonviolence-shaped theology (in contrast to a Christendom theology with nonviolence as an add on) seems a very significant Christian witness to Islam.

**“...the peace church should pose an explicit challenge or alternative to the religious nationalism...”**

Third, the peace church should pose an explicit challenge or alternative to the religious nationalism of the United States. The omnipresent appeals to and invocations of God in the name of the nation clearly claim that God favors the United States, and that the United States speaks for God and carries out a divinely ordained mission in the world. In other words, these multiple invocations of God put the American nation in the place of the church in the economy of God. The peace church’s profession of faith in Jesus Christ should thus show not only that following Jesus means rejection of the sword, but must also make clear that this particular nationalism, like all nationalism, is idolatry.

#### **Afterword.**

Posing theology as the means to keep Mennonites a peace church establishes a weighty agenda and the implications are many. It is a task that has great continuity with past Mennonite history, even as it breaks with elements of that history to chart a new course for the future. It is an important task that I invite you to pursue.

#### **Endnotes:**

Note 1: I wish to express many thanks to Gerald Biesecker-Mast and Zachary J. Walton for their assistance and critique on the final draft of this essay.

Note 2: J. Denny Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity: A Proposal for the Third Millennium*, The C. Henry Smith Series, vol. 2 (Telford, PA: Pandora Press U.S., copublished with Herald Press, 2000). See also Chris K. Huebner, review of *Anabaptist Theology in Face of Postmodernity*, by J. Denny Weaver, *Preservings*, no. 18 (June 2001): 145-48.

Note 3: Harold S. Bender, *The Anabaptist Vision* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1944), 20.

Note 4: The designation “historic peace churches” was first used to designate Mennonites, Church of the Brethren, and Quakers at a conference of these churches at Bethel College (Newton, Kansas) in 1935. (Melvin Gingerich, “Historic Peace Churches,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*, and Paul Peachey, “Historic Peace Churches,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia V*). The term is still much-used to designate Mennonites, Brethren and Quakers collectively, as demonstrated by the conference of historic peace churches that met June 25-29, 2001 at Bienenberg Theological Seminary, Liestal, Switzerland.

Note 5: The demise of ethnicity and cultural assimilation are complex phenomena, involving more dimensions than the brief John Kampen, “The Mennonite Challenge of Particularism and Universalism: A Liberation Perspective,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 19,

no. 2 (Spring 2001): 6-9 discussion here. For a recent survey of literature on these changes among Mennonites, see Kampen, “The Mennonite Challenge,” 6-9. Note 6: For some examples, see Cornelius J. Dyck, ed., *An Introduction to Mennonite History: A Popular History of the Anabaptists and Mennonites*, Third, reprint, 1967 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1993), 157-58; Sjouke Voolstra, “Mennonite Faith in the Netherlands: A Mirror of Assimilation,” *Conrad Grebel Review* 9, no. 3 (Fall 1991): 277-92; Peter J. Klassen, “Faith and Culture in Conflict: Mennonites in the Vistula Delta,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 57, no. 3 (July 1983): 194-205.

Note 7: The fact of cultural assimilation among Mennonites seems self-evident. Among the evidence that could be cited for a parallel loss of commitment to nonviolence, see Jacob A. Loewen and Wesley J. Prieb, *Only the Sword of the Spirit* (Winnipeg: Kindred Productions, 1997), which was reviewed by J. Denny Weaver in *Preservings*, no. 18 (June 2001), 140-41; the two pages of articles in the 9 November 2000 issue of *Mennonite Weekly Review* that deal with the projected organization of the new Mennonite Church USA on the basis of mission but make no mention that the gospel to be proclaimed was a gospel that included Jesus’ nonviolence; or the guest editorial in *Ohio Evangel*, which questioned why the (now defunct) project to organize four regional conferences into a Great Lakes Conference used mission as the organizing principle and had several missions committees but no committee for peace, justice and service (Robin Miller, “How Necessary is a PJS Commission?” *Ohio Evangel*, November 2000, 2).

Note 8: This does not mean that I advocate efforts to keep ethnicity in order to underscore the call to follow Jesus. On the contrary. With the emphasis on theology as that which identifies the church, we are free to contemplate the exchange of one ethnicity for another, and it becomes obvious that a specific kind of ethnicity does not save and is not necessary for the continuation of the Mennonite churches. At the same time, we ought not malign Flemish-Dutch-Russian-German ethnicity. It has “saved” many generations of Anabaptists as a peace church, and continues to have meaning, both religious and otherwise, for many people. While we need not fear the exchange of Flemish-Dutch-Russian-German ethnicity for a more North American identity, there is also no need to engage in deliberate disparagement and purging of Flemish-Dutch-Russian-German traditions.

Note 9: J. Denny Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical: Mennonite and Amish Atonement Theology in the Late Nineteenth Century*, foreword C. Norman Kraus, *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*, no. 35 (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1997).

Note 10: Susan Biesecker-Mast and Gerald Biesecker-Mast, eds., *Anabaptists and Postmodernity*, with a foreword by J. Denny Weaver, The C. Henry Smith Series, vol. 1 (Telford, Pa.: Pandora Press U.S.; copublished with Herald Press, 2000).

Note 11: Although Christian fundamentalism claims to believe nothing but the Bible, it is actually a modern movement as the term “modern” is used here. Fundamentalism was a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century response to a number of phenomena that contributed to what today is called postmodernity. Against the apparent and supposed relativism and loss of the sense of ultimate truth of postmodernity, fundamentalism asserted that a divinely inspired Bible constituted the source of ultimate truth. This claim to have found a way to articulate ultimate truth identifies fundamentalism clearly as a modern movement. However, this particular claim to truth was based on assumptions of the philosophy of Scottish Common Sense Realism made prominent by Scottish philosopher Thomas Reid. Thus rather than supporting the ultimacy of Jesus as it claimed, fundamentalism actu-

ally just asserted a different “higher” truth as the one that would validate Jesus as ultimate truth. Thus fundamentalism’s actual source of truth is not really Jesus but a particular doctrine of biblical infallibility anchored in assumptions of Common Sense philosophy. For the best history of fundamentalism, but written before the term “postmodernism” came into vogue, see George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism: 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

Note 12: For example, John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 61-62.

Note 13: This statement clearly has many implications. What is the relationship between Christianity and other religions? How do we dialogue with other religions? Are they completely false or just less true than Jesus? How do we relate to Christians who understand the story of Jesus quite differently than does the peace church? In this essay, I am focusing only on the implications for theology for Mennonites.

Note 14: For examples, see “Dogmatics, Dogmatic Theology,” “Systematic Theology” and “Moral Theology,” in Alan Richardson and John Bowden, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1983); “Moral Theology,” in James F. Childress and John Macquarrie, eds., *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986); “Dogmatics,” “Systematic Theology” and “Ethical Systems, Christian” in Walter A. Elwell, ed., “Evangelical Dictionary of Theology,” 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic and Paternoster Press, 2001); and “Dogma,” “Theology” and “Moral Theology” in Karl Rahner, ed., *Encyclopedia of Theology: The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975).

Note 15: John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 5.

Note 16: While there are a number of such examples, the most well-known are the articles of James Reimer, which are collected in his A. James. Reimer, *Mennonites and Classical Theology: Dogmatic Foundations for Christian Ethics* (Kitchener: Pandora Press, Co-published with Herald Press, 2001). C. Arnold Snyder proposes such a theology for Mennonites from a historical perspective. See C. Arnold Snyder, “Beyond Polygenesis: Recovering the Unity and Diversity of Anabaptist Theology,” in *Essays in Anabaptist Theology*, edited by H. Wayne Pipkin, Text Reader Series (Elkhart, In.: Institute of Mennonite Studies, 1994), 1-34; C. Arnold Snyder, *Anabaptist History and Theology: An Introduction* (Kitchener, Ontario: Pandora Press, 1995), 83-99; C. Arnold Snyder, *From Anabaptist Seed: The Historical Core of Anabaptist-Related Identity* (Kitchener, Ont.: Pandora Press, 1999).

Note 17: Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 1999), 21-32, 36, 45-46, 48, 52-53, 61, 64, 67, 69, 77, 82, 87-88, 89, 92. Earlier John Howard Yoder used Emperor Constantine as the symbol of the series of changes described here. See John Howard Yoder, “The Constantinian Sources of Western Social Ethics,” in *The Priestly Kingdom*, 135-47; John H. Yoder, “The Otherness of the Church,” in *The Royal Priesthood: Essays Ecclesiological and Ecumenical*, ed. and introd. by Michael G. Cartwright, foreword Richard J. Mouw (Grand Rapids, Mi.: Eerdmans, 1994), 53-64; John H. Yoder, “The Disavowal of Constantine: An Alternative Perspective on Interfaith Dialogue,” in *The Royal Priesthood*, 242-61.

Note 18: Kreider, *Change of Conversion*, 92. See also 45, 48, 82.

Note 19: J. Denny Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2001).

Note 20: For a biographical sketch of Klaas Reimer, see Delbert F. Plett, ed., *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications, 1993), 113-20; Delbert F. Plett, *The Golden Years: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia (1812-1849)* (Steinbach, Man.: D.F.P. Publications, 1985), 195-213.

Note 21: Klaas Reimer, “A Sermon for Communion 1829,” in *Leaders*, 174-90.

Note 22: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 174-75.

Note 23: The satisfaction and penal substitutionary atonement motifs can be traced to medieval theologian Anselm of Canterbury. “Satisfaction” is the term that most nearly fits Anselm’s own formulation, while substitutionary atonement applies more closely to the version of it that was developed by the Protestant Reformers. While Klaas Reimer did not refer to Anselm or to Anselmian atonement by name, the terminology and atonement imagery he used, as with the other Kleine Gemeinde writers treated in following paragraphs, does reflect the influence of Anselmian categories. With due awareness of the origin of these atonement images, one can say that these Kleine Gemeinde writers had an “Anselmian” understanding of atonement, even if they never referred to Anselm by name. For a more extensive discussion of atonement images, see Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*.

Note 24: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 175.

Note 25: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 177.

Note 26: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 177-78. See also 179, 180, and Klaas E. Reimer, “A Sermon on Love and Brotherhood,” in *Leaders*, 207, 218.

Note 27: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 179. For an extended discussion of why it is problematic that God willed the death of Jesus and for an alternative that avoids that problem entirely, see Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement* and J. Denny Weaver, “Violence in Christian Theology,” *CrossCurrents* 51, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 150-76.

Note 28: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 179.

Note 29: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 175.

Note 30: Reimer, “Sermon for Communion,” 181.

Note 31: For biographical data on Abraham Friesen, see Plett, *Leaders*, 223-36; Plett, *Golden Years*, 248-66.

Note 32: Abraham Friesen, “Letter by Abraham Friesen, October 23, 1821,” in *Leaders*, 246.

Note 33: For biography of Heinrich Balzer, see Plett, *Leaders*, 295-304; Plett, *Golden Years*, 214-36.

Note 34: Heinrich Balzer, “Preparatory Sermon, 2 Cor. 13:5,” in *Leaders*, 318-19.

Note 35: Balzer, “Preparatory Sermon,” 325.

Note 36: Heinrich Balzer, “Sermon on Galatians 6:15, 16,” in *Leaders*, 337.

Note 37: No early Dutch edition is known of this tract by the conservative Frisian elder, Peter Jansz Twisk (1565-1636). Either the first Dutch printing was lost or it was never printed in Dutch. The essay has been preserved via the German edition, *Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung des 20. Kapitels in Offenbarung St. Johannis*, which the Kleine Gemeinde first printed at Odessa in 1875. John F. Funk published an English translation as Peter J. Twisk, *The Peaceful Kingdom of Christ or an Exposition of the 20th Chapter of the Book of Revelation*, translated by John F. Funk (Elkhart, In.: Mennonite Publishing Company, 1913). See N. van der Zijpp, “Twisk, Pieter Jansz,” in *Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*; Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries: Its Genius and Its Literature*, Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History, no. 7 (Goshen, Ind.: Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), 262-63.

Note 38: Peter J. Twisk, “The Peaceable Kingdom of

Christ,” in *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (1850-1875)*, edited by Delbert Plett (Steinbach, Mb.: D. F. P. Publications, 1986), 312.

Note 39: Propitiation was John Funk’s translation of the German “völlgültiges Versühnoper” ( Peter J. Twisk, *Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung Des 20sten Kapitels in Offenbarung St. Johannes* [Odessa: Ulrich und Schutze, 1875], 5). The King James version of the Bible used the term “propitiation” in Romans 3:25, and 1 John 2:2, 4:10, which may have influenced Funk. The NRSV and NIV both render these same texts with “sacrifice of atonement” or “atoning sacrifice.” The point is that the motif of debt payment is more explicit in Twisk’s words than in the New Testament verses. Thus it is significant that Twisk uses an Anselmian satisfaction motif, and this analysis cannot be dismissed by a claim that Twisk was merely using biblical language. For a detailed discussion of why New Testament language need not be read in terms of Anselmian atonement, see Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, 49-66.

Note 40: Twisk, “Peaceable Kingdom,” 313.

Note 41: For biography on Gerhard Wiebe, see *Preservings* no. 5, pp. 1-14, and Adolf Ens, “Wiebe, Gerhard,” in *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*.

Note 42: Gerhard Wiebe, *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten Aus Rußland Nach Amerika* (Winnipeg, Mb.: Druckerei des Nordwesten, 1900); Gerhard Wiebe, *Causes and History of the Emigration of the Mennonites from Russia to America*, translated by Helen Janzen, Documents in Manitoba Mennonite History, no. 1 (Winnipeg, Mb.: Manitoba Historical Society, 1981).

Note 43: For my earlier discussion of Gerhard Wiebe’s atonement theology, see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 103-96.

Note 44: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 35-36; Wiebe, *Causes*, 45.

Note 45: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 55-56; Wiebe, *Causes*, 69-70, quote 70.

Note 46: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 70. Translation is mine.

Note 47: Wiebe’s meaning here is ambiguous. The German sentence in question reads: “... und jetzt nahm der Satan die Gelegenheit wahr, er dachte, jetzt ist er selbst von Gott verstoßen, und wollte den Herrn mit all unseren Sünden erdrücken und töten, das war eine Angst, die kein Menschen beschreiben, viel weniger noch ertragen konnte” (*Ursachen*, 56). Where the thought ends that Wiebe attributed to Satan is unclear. Also ambiguous is whether Wiebe intended to say that Satan or God wanted to crush Jesus who was bearing “all our sins.” If it is Satan who wants to do the crushing, the Christus Victor motif is more evident. If it is God who crushes Jesus bearing the sins of the world, then the penal, substitutionary element is more consistent within Wiebe’s theological outlook. Since Wiebe was far from a systematic thinker, it is perhaps best to allow the ambiguity to stand here, particularly since other elements of this passage indicate that he did assume substitutionary atonement.

Note 48: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 56; Wiebe, *Causes*, 70.

Note 49: For biography of Johann Wiebe, see Peter D. Zacharias, “Biography of Johann Wiebe,” *Preservings*, no. 14, 3-8, and Delbert F. Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications, 2001), 51.

Note 50: Johann Wiebe, “Epistle to the Gemeinden, 1904,” in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada*, 67.

Note 51: Here I am referring to the modelling of innocent submission to abuse, which feminist and womanist writers have found so offensive in satisfaction atonement. For extended discussion, see Weaver, “Violence in Christian Theology.” and Weaver, *The Nonviolent Atonement*, chs. 5, 6.

Note 52: Klaas Reimer, “A Letter to the Honourable Aeltester Jacob Fast,” in *Leaders*, 158.

Note 53: Klaas Reimer, “A Letter to the Honourable

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Aeltester Jacob Fast," in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812 to 1874*, edited by Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications, 1993), 158; Klaas E. Reimer, "An Answer in Reply," in *Leaders*, 162, 164; Klaas E. Reimer, "A Sermon on Love and Brotherhood," in *Leaders*, 204, 209, 213, 216.

Note 54: Abraham Friesen, "A Letter to Abraham Isaak, 1821," in *Leaders*, 252-53.

Note 55: Abraham Friesen, "A Simple Declaration, 1845," in *Leaders*, 277-78.

Note 56: Balzer, "Sermon on Galatians," 340.

Note 57: Heinrich Balzer, "A Letter to H. W., a Former Brother," in *Golden Years*, 226.

Note 58: Heinrich Balzer, "An Epistle to David Epp in Prussia," in *The Golden Years*, 229.

Note 59: Klaas Reimer, "Ein Kleines Aufsatz," in *Leaders*, 134-36.

Note 60: Delbert Plett, *Storm and Triumph: The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (1850-1857)* (Steinbach, Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1986), 309.

Note 61: Twisk, "Peaceable Kingdom," 320.

Note 62: Plett, *Storm and Triumph*, 308-09.

Note 63: Twisk, "Peaceable Kingdom," 312.

Note 64: Twisk, "Peaceable Kingdom," 313.

Note 65: Twisk, "Peaceable Kingdom," 314.

Note 66: Twisk, "Peaceable Kingdom," 314.

Note 67: "Vom Friedensreich Jesu Christi, welches seinen Anfang nehmen sollte, sobald als Christus sein Opfer gethan hatten am Kreuze, nach allen prophetischen Schriften." Heinrich Egly, *Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung der Offenbarung St. Johannes und Noch Etliche Andere Artikel*, edited by Jacob Schenbock (Elkhart, In.: Mennonite Publishing Co., 1895), 1. For my earlier discussion of Heinrich Egly's eschatology, see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 184.

Note 68: Egly, *Das Friedensreich Christi*, 3.

Note 69: Johannes Moser, "Ueber die Wehrlosigkeit," *Herold der Wahrheit* 16, no. 2 (January 1879): 21.

Note 70: For my earlier discussion of the eschatology of Johannes Moser, see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 99.

Note 71: John Holdeman, *A Treatise on Redemption, Baptism, and the Passover and the Lord's Supper* (Carthage, Mo.: The Author, 1890), 29-30 For my earlier discussion of Holdeman's eschatology see Weaver, *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 178.

Note 72: This material on Gerhard Wiebe is drawn from Weaver, *Anabaptist Theology in Face*, 76-80.

Note 73: For particular claims of such divine protection, see Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 31-33; Wiebe, *Causes*, 40-41.

Note 74: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 1-8, 46-49; Wiebe, *Causes*, 1-7, 59-63.

Note 75: See esp. Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 49-58; references to end of world, 54, 58; Wiebe, *Causes*, 68, 72-73; references to end of world, 68, 72-73.

Note 76: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 9; Wiebe, *Causes*, 9.

Note 77: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 8; Wiebe, *Causes*, 8-9.

Note 78: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 1; Wiebe, *Causes*, 1.

Note 79: Mennonites in southern Manitoba faced three revivalist-oriented options: John Holdeman's revival preaching among the Kleine Gemeinde in the winter of 1881-82; the travelling preachers of the Mennonite Brethren who began coming after 1883; and of the General Conference Mennonites, particularly after 1890. None of these had a significant impact on Gerhard Wiebe's people in the East Reserve. Frank H. Epp, *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920: The History of a Separate People*, Mennonites in Canada, vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), 290, 294-97; Henry J. Gerbrandt, *Adventure in Faith: The Background in Europe and the Development in Canada of the Bergthal Mennonite Church of Manitoba* (Altona, Manitoba: Bergthal Mennonite Church of Manitoba, 1970), 85-88, 103-07.

Note 80: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 7; Wiebe, *Causes*, 7. Note 81: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 9, 13; Wiebe, *Causes*, 9, 14. In order to assure and ensure that the preacher was not displaying his own arrogance or pushing new ideas, the conservative worship tradition of Gerhard Wiebe read sermons collected from earlier generations of ministers.

Note 82: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 19-20, 51-52; Wiebe, *Causes*, 23, 64-66.

Note 83: Johann Wiebe, "A Record of Our Journey from Russia to America," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000*, edited by Delbert F. Plett (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications, 2000), 52.

Note 84: Wiebe, "Record of Our Journey," 54.

Note 85: Johann Wiebe, "Beloved Gemeinde in Christ," in *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada*, 55.

Note 86: Wiebe, "Beloved Gemeinde," 56.

Note 87: Wiebe, "Record of Our Journey," 52.

Note 88: Wiebe, "Epistle," 67.

Note 89: Wiebe, "Epistle," 68.

Note 90: Wiebe, "Epistle," 69.

Note 91: This tract was translated and edited by Robert Friedmann, "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered, in a Treatise of 1833," *Mennonite Quarterly Review* 22, no. 2 (April 1948): 75-93. Friedmann's article was reprinted in Plett, *Golden Years*, 237-47. Citations in what follows are from *Golden Years*.

Note 92: Robert Friedmann, ed. and trans., "Faith and Reason: The Principles of Mennonitism Reconsidered, in a Treatise of 1833," in *The Golden Years*, 237.

Note 93: Heinrich Balzer, "Understanding and Reason. Simple Opinions Regarding the Difference Between Understanding and Reason, Discussed According to the Teachings of the Gospel," in *The Golden Years*, 240-41.

Note 94: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 241.

Note 95: Friedmann, "Faith and Reason," 238.

Note 96: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 241.

Note 97: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 241-42.

Note 98: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 242.

Note 99: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 243. In a footnote, Robert Friedmann notes that Balzer was writing at a time when a liberal philosopher such as David Friedrich Strauss was removing the deity of Christ and emphasizing his humanity. See *Golden*

*Years*, 246 n.15.

Note 100: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 243-44.

Note 101: Balzer, "Understanding and Reason," 245.

Note 102: For my earlier discussion of Gerhard Wiebe's suspicion of higher education, see *Keeping Salvation Ethical*, 74-76.

Note 103: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 10; Wiebe, *Causes*, 10.

Note 104: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 10; Wiebe, *Causes*, 10.

Note 105: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 10, see also 48-49; Wiebe, *Causes*, 10, see also 61-62.

Note 106: Wiebe, *Ursachen*, 12-13; Wiebe, *Causes*, 13-14.

Note 107: It needs to be pointed out again here that building on these creeds and formulas actually reveals their incompleteness and thus actually subverts their claim to universality, which constitutes the supposed reason to build on them in the first place, as in the literature of note 16.

Note 108: James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1975), reprinted by Orbis in 1997.

Note 109: Kampen, "The Mennonite Challenge," 20.

Note 110: Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology."

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# Rebirth and Conversion

"Some Comments and Observations Regarding the Meaning of the Rebirth and Conversion,"  
by D. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Introduction.

Mennonites believe that salvation is the reconciliation of the individual with God and fellow human beings. To be born again means coming to faith in God and accepting God's vision for humanity. For the believer conversion contemplates a changed relationship to God and fellow human beings, part of which is expressed through discipleship, sharing and pacifism. Those who are reborn seek to model their lives on Biblical teaching as expressed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and, particularly, the Beatitudes.

## Salvation

For Luther, humans were saved by faith and faith alone. His view of humanity was "once a sinner always a sinner." For Protestants salvation means deliverance from the power and penalty of sin. They have traditionally placed great emphasis on the rebirth as the means by which human beings can escape eternal damnation and avoid the fires of hell.

For Evangelicals conversion is a sort of transaction or deal made between them and God whereby they can escape God's fiery wrath. Accordingly they tend to focus on the future significance of the rebirth, rejoicing in heaven, and--at least for the majority of American Evangelicals who are Dispensationalists, savouring the idea of ruling the world in the "future" millennium in Jerusalem together with Christ.

For Mennonites, by comparison, the rebirth is seen more in terms of the present. The purpose of the rebirth is for humans to be reborn in the image of God as defined in Biblical teaching. The significance of the rebirth is in the here and now, in terms of how it changes believers. Salvation is the lifelong experience of those who turn to follow Christ and His teaching. Salvation changes the character and morality of those who are redeemed, incorporating them more fully into the Kingdom of God.

Theologian Robert Friedmann has contrasted various views of salvation as follows: for Catholics, salvation means relating to God through the church community (the "horizontal"); for Protestants, salvation is an individual matter between man and God (the "vertical"); but for Mennonites, salvation is both the individual relationship with God as well as relating to God through the community; Friedmann, *Theology of Anabaptism* (Scottdale 1973), page 81.

## The Fall.

Luther and Calvin had a negative view of human nature and creation. As a result of the Fall, humankind was depraved, sinful and worthless (sometimes referred as the "worm" theology). For this reason many Evangelicals teach that a dramatic crisis conversion is required for humans beings to make the transition from their condemned worthless state into that

of God's kingdom. Such sentiments are replete in Evangelical hymnody and devotional writing, often resulting in extreme feelings of worthlessness among adherents of this religious culture (and presumably explaining, at least in part, the high levels of emotional dysfunction found within Evangelical religious culture).

Protestants Fundamentalists teach that human beings are born into this world completely and totally separated from God and His love and therefore children are born lost and subject to the curse of sinful condemnation and death. For this reason they require that even innocent children must undergo a dramatic climactic conversion experience, a process which has emotionally scarred thousands of people for life.

Evangelicals have often made conversion into a ritualistic rite of passage for those who wish to become Christians or as another legalistic prerequisite to recognizing other believers as "true" Christians. They have developed elaborate rituals to socialize and set the appropriate emotional stage which will enable individuals to pass these legalistic entrance requirements. Little room is left for the working of the Holy Spirit in many of their high-pitched ceremonies.

Although Mennonites agree that Humankind is sinful by virtue of the Fall of Adam, they hold to a higher view of creation. They believe that all of humankind was, is, and always will be, in God's care and within the purview of His great and boundless love.

The Bible teaches that humankind was made in the image of God and therefore cannot be without hope, worth or merit. They profess that when God created the world, He not only created man and female in His own image (Genesis 1:27), He pronounced that all His creation "...was very good," (Genesis 1:31). Humans beings should not declare as worthless something which God has created and deemed to be good.

Mennonites also believe that children are born into the world as part of God's kingdom and not subject to the condemnation of sin. Jesus uses the allegory of children to describe the faith and other characteristics of those who are part of His Kingdom. The sinfulness of the Fall is not imputed to children until they reach the age of accountability when they can make their own choices between good and evil.

Since human beings always are in God's care and part of His Kingdom, conversion for those raised in a Christian environment is often nothing more than an affirmation upon reaching the age of accountability that the individual wants to be a part of God's Kingdom and follow the teachings and example of Christ.

Ironically, although Mennonites stress humility (demut) as part of their religious teaching, they do so within the context of those who know they were created in God's own image and that He declared them to be inherently good.

## Complex Innocence.

In an article dealing with the Mennonite view of children and their nurture and education, Professor Keith Graber Miller evokes the concept of complicated innocence: "Throughout his voluminous writings Menno repeated this theme....the absence of both faithfulness and sinfulness in children but the presence of an 'innocence,' as he described it, tempered with an inherited Adamic nature predisposed towards sinning. Menno's perspective on the child's nature,...obligated parents and the Christian community to nurture children 'in the fear of God by teaching, admonishing and chastising them,' serving also as models of an 'irreproachable life,' so that when their children come to the 'years of discretion' they might 'hear, believe, and accept the most holy Gospel of Jesus Christ,'" Miller, "Innocence, Nurture and Vigilance: The Child in the Work of Menno Simons," *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, Vol. LXXV, April 2001, pages 173-198).

Menno readily acknowledged "that humans were born with a sinful nature...Through the first and earthly Adam, all people became wholly depraved and children of death and hell." But "his view of human nature was not compatible with Augustine's non-innocence...Nor were his views identical with other Reformers' notion of 'total depravity' which suggested that all born of Adam's sin deserved condemnation for original sin apart from any wilful sinning." Menno held to the view that humans were responsible before God only for their actual sinning, a distinction similar to the one drawn by Thomas Aquinas.

Miller states that Menno differed radically from Augustine regarding the soteriological implications of the corrupt and sinful nature. "Our entire doctrine, belief, foundation and confession, is that our innocent children, as long as they live in their innocence, are through the merits, death, blood of Christ, in grace and partakers of the promise...." Menno suggests at several points that Christ's grace is for children of both believing and non-believing parents, nor is it restricted to those within the Christian fold, but the inheritance of all children, of whatever race or belief.

Miller also states that "the ultimate goal of the sixteenth-century radical reformers was not a momentary decision for personal salvation, but a life-long commitment of discipleship. Hence, children were nurtured toward this positive, life-giving way of being, not simply left wallowing in their Adamic misery." The supreme negative model for Menno...was the high priest Eli, who was held responsible because he had not reproved his children enough," (page 185).

Some guidance in the thinking of early Mennonite leaders regarding parental responsibility in child rearing is found in the treatise of Dutch Ältester Pieter Jansz Twisck, "A Father's Gift of 1622," (Port Treverton, Pa. 1982), 132 pages; see also Heinrich Balzer, "Faith and Reason," in *Golden Years*, pages 244-245.

### Conversion Models.

No crisis conversion is necessary nor is it mandated by Biblical teachings. Mennonites profess that scripture sets forth at least two models of conversion.

One model is the dramatic “Road to Damascus” experience as in the case of the Apostle Paul, who, however, only made his final decision after being struck blind for three days. This type of conversion is probably more common among individuals who, like Saul, had separated themselves from God’s Kingdom and His love by their evil conduct and attitudes.

Certainly the teachings of certain Evangelical denominations that individuals are not saved unless they have undergone a crisis conversion experience, are false and unbiblical. Such teachings have done great damage to God’s Kingdom and have misled many an innocent and searching soul. Those who hold to the legalistic requirement of a crisis conversion are generally referred to as being part of the “born again” movement, although in reality all Christians, whether Catholic, Orthodox or Mennonite believe in being born again.

The other model of biblical conversion is that of Timothy whose coming to faith was based on the nurture of his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5-7). This has also been referred to as conversion by Christian formation, where the teachings and admonition of Godly parents and a Christian community combine to socialize and nurture young people in the ways and knowledge of God’s Kingdom and the teachings of Christ. This is probably the way to salvation more commonly found in Mennonite communities where the young are nurtured by parents, taught in church schools and instructed in worship services, in the ways and teachings of Christianity.

Mennonite theologian J. C. Wenger describes this as follows: “Inasmuch as young children are safe under the blood of Christ they should be taught from their earliest years that God loves them, that He hears their prayers, that He is able to assist them to be good, and that He forgives them their sins. In other words, even prior to reaching the age of personal accountability, and experiencing genuine conversion, the child who is receiving a Christian nurture experiences on his child-level the love and goodness and forgiveness of God. Later, when the spiritual awakening of the soul occurs, there will be an altogether new and profoundly deeper consciousness of sin, coupled with an awareness that God is now asking for the heart of the newly awakened youth, and asking for a public profession of faith in Jesus Christ...,” Wenger, *Introduction to Theology*, page 276.

### Assurance of Salvation.

Some religious cultures such as Protestant Fundamentalism in American and Separatist Pietism in Germany developed the doctrine of assurance of salvation. The idea is that “true” believers must have a conscious cognitive knowledge that they are saved. This teaching, of course, is directly contrary to Biblical teachings that God alone knows who is saved. The idea of followers of Jesus, who like their Sav-

iour are lowly and humble, declaring themselves and others who had met their complicated legalistic requirements as “saved” can be seen as spiritual arrogance, as an affront to the boundless mercy and grace of God, and, indeed, as a lack of genuine faith.

As already stated, for Mennonites, being a Christian meant simply following Him and living out His commandments, the idea of “discipleship”. Certainly, there are no prerequisites for salvation other than contrite submission to God’s grace. This principle was well stated by Kleine Gemeinde Ältester Abr. L. Friesen (1831-1917), Jansen, Nebraska: “In simplicity of mind we hold that a true heartfelt remorse and repentance is a presentable reformation upon which we are promised salvation, and which is the foundation of every conversion,” (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 569).

In his book *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries* (pages 11-12), Robert Friedmann compared Pietism and Mennonitism, and rejected the notion that the latter was some form of proto-pietism. For Mennonites the joy and peace flowing from discipleship was the “quiet peace that passeth all understanding.” In other words inward joy came as a result of following Jesus and living out His teachings. This is the nature of the warm and inspirational content of devotional writings such as the works of Dutch Ältester Pieter Pieters (1574-1651), repeatedly published and widely read among the Russian Mennonites.

For pietists, on the other hand, inward joy became the object and purpose of their religious culture and all its rites and ritual evolved to foster the degree of emotional fortitude deemed necessary. Presumably Pietists and Evangelicals find it necessary to focus on these beliefs since they have failed to recognize the single most fundamental truth of the Apostolic church, namely, that Christians were those who followed Christ and emulated Him.

For Darby and Scofield the easier way was to simply decree that Christ’s teachings were not applicable in the current time period. The mammoth void left by truncating the Gospels in this manner was filled by inventing the concept of assurance of salvation, whereby people would feel good inwardly even though they did not seek to follow Christ. In fact, Darby and Scofield declared it to be a sin to even attempt to do so, dismissing discipleship as a form of works-righteousness.

By a complicated system of biblical proof-texting and quoting scripture out of context, Protestant Fundamentalists made “assurance of salvation” a legalistic requirement for salvation. e.g. Evangelicals quoted 1 John 5:13, “these things have I written onto you...that ye may know that ye have eternal life,” but they conveniently fail to mention Chapter 2, verse 3, which introduces the epistle, stating that, “He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.”

### Fruits of Rebirth.

Far more significant than the exact means or method of rebirth are the fruits of the rebirth. Mennonites and many other Christians profess that the genuineness of a conversion is demonstrated not

by the type of experience or process but by the fruits or life of those who profess to be Christian.

Luther did not see conversion as resulting in significant change in the life of the believer. Nor is a change of life the essence of the rebirth for modern Evangelicals. This is evident from the recent Barna study which found that there were no significant differences in terms of 70 moral and social behaviours between those who professed to be part of the so-called “born again” movement and the general American population (see *Preservings*, No. 17, page 78).

Mennonites profess that when people come to faith or grow in faith, their life changes and becomes more closely modelled on the teachings of Scripture. This is also the focus of Menno Simons in his article on the Rebirth, see *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons* (Harold Press, 1956), pages 89-102.

### Acknowledgement:

I acknowledge the helpful comments and critique of Dr. John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Dr. David Schroeder, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Retired, and Dr. John H. Neufeld, former President of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg.

### Further reading:

Marlin Jeshke, *Believers Baptism for Children of the Church* (Herald Press, 1983) (He speaks of the gradual conversion as “the more excellent way”).

Hans Kasdorf, *Christian Conversion in Context* (Herald Press, 1980).

Al Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1999).

Henry J. Schmidt, Editor, *Witnesses of a Third Way A Fresh Look at Evangelism* (Brethren Press, 1986).

John C. Wenger, “Christian conversion,” in *Introduction to Theology* (Box 575, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22801, 1996), pages 272-278.

## In the next issue:

“Rebirth and conversion: Biblical Models,” by Dr. John H. Neufeld, former President of Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, Manitoba, former senior Pastor of First Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, and author of *The Story that Shaped Us: Sermons by John H. Neufeld* (C.M.B.C. Publications, Winnipeg, 1997), 161 pages.

# Assurance and Confidence

"Assurance and Confidence," an extract from John C. Wenger, *Introduction to Theology* (Sword and Trumpet, Box 575, Harrisonburg, Virginia, 22801, 1996), pages 301-305.

## Introduction.

It is perfectly evident from a reading of the New Testament that the apostles of Christ possessed the happy assurance that they were the children of God and that He who began a good work in them would also enable them to persevere to a happy end in Christ.

This type of assurance is possible only for those who understand the plan of salvation: that it is God who moves the sinner to repent, that it is God who bestows upon those who accept Jesus the gift of eternal life, that converts enjoy the forgiveness of their sins not through any merit of their own but alone through the redemptive death of Jesus, and that God is able to keep, and intends to keep, every one of His children.

It should be noted that Christian assurance is not built upon a particular type of conversion; nowhere in Scripture is salvation made to depend on any particular experience in connection with conversion, such as weeping, seeing a vision, or participating in an ecstasy. Christian assurance is also not based upon feeling.

Certainly good health, physical, mental, and spiritual, tends to promote an attitude of optimism and euphoria, but the assurance of salvation is not dependent upon any sort of merit; the notion that any human being can approach God through personal merit is absolutely unscriptural and untrue. The only way any believer throughout history has been able to stand before God is through the perfect righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ. There is a certain sense in which evangelical theologians even speak of Christ "keeping the law for us," (Note 33).

The cause of doubt are undoubtedly numerous. In some cases doubt is occasioned by ill health, especially that due to nervous and emotional difficulties. Doubt may also be occasioned by what could be called emotional trauma; that is, one calamity after another befalls a given individual in quick succession so that the person feels forsaken and crushed. At that point doubt is apt to come as to whether God loves the individual, or even as to whether there is a God who would permit such experiences to happen. Doubt is also commonly associated with the emotional instability of adolescence, particularly being a part of an intellectual awakening that frequently takes place in the latter teens or early twenties.

Unfortunately human beings are also so constituted as to be capable of escape mechanisms; that is, when one has good reasons for dreading to face a certain situation or truth, the mind tends to subconsciously persuade one that the situation must be avoided through sickness, or that the truth can be escaped by the very "fact" that it is not the truth but falsehood! Consequently if one is living in sin one is inclined to rationalize that after all no one has ever seen God and it is altogether probable that He does not exist! This fact of escape mechanisms must be cautiously kept in the background in any attempt to help an individual who is plagued with doubts, for there are many other reasons for doubting besides this moral occasion.

As a matter of fact when an individual is worried and distressed by his doubts it is sure evidence

that he is really a believer, otherwise he would have no particular concern about his intellectual problems. Doubt is therefore a disguised form of faith, or faith manifesting itself in the life of one who is emotionally insecure or troubled.

## Christian Assurance.

What then are the factors which make possible Christian assurance? These factors are two: the Spirit and the Word.

Ordinarily the Holy Spirit uses the Word of God to bring assurance to the Christian believer. The serenity of faith on the part of the Christian varies from person to person, depending undoubtedly in part on such factors as physical health, devotion to the means of grace, maturity of life and experience, and perhaps also temperament. In other words, the cure for doubt is not simple; each case must be treated as to its individual nature. Least of all dare one assert that doubt is necessarily an evidence of sin; on the contrary it is frequently found on the part of those who most earnestly desire to live a winsome Christian life.

Basically the only approach to the believer who lacks Christian assurance is to take the Scriptures and point out the clarity and simplicity of the promises of God to bestow salvation as a free gift on everyone who puts his trust in Jesus Christ. Statements to this effect run throughout the New Testament. Matthew quotes Jesus as saying: "Come to me, all ye who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light," (Note 34).

Mark quotes Jesus thus: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you will receive it, and you will. And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one; so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses," (Note 35). Luke quotes Jesus as stating that the very purpose of His incarnation was redemptive: "For the Son of man came to seek and to save the lost," (Note 36). And John quotes the Saviour as saying: "Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life." (Note 37).

When the Philippian jailer cried out to Paul and Silas: "Men, what must I do to be saved!" (Note 38), the apostolic reply was: "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household," (Note 39). The promise of the Apostle Paul in his Letter to the Romans is: "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For man believes with his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved. The scripture says, 'No one who believes in him will be put to shame' ....For, 'every one who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved,'" (Note 40). And one must not forget the promise of the Saviour: "And him who comes to me I will not cast out," (Note 41).

## Type of Conversion.

It should be noted again that salvation is not promised on the basis of any particular type of conversion, it does not rest upon feeling, and it is not achieved by merit: salvation is God's free gift promised unconditionally to everyone who accepts Christ as Saviour and Lord.

It is the function of the Holy Spirit to take the precious promises of God's Word and enable the Christian believer to rest upon them.

## Anxiety and Doubt.

He who is troubled by doubts will therefore need to pray that God's Spirit might enable him to simply lay hold by faith on the promises of God, being willing to walk by faith and not by sight, renouncing feeling as the touchstone of his salvation, and seeking to live close to the Lord: for where worldliness and spiritual coldness enter a life, Christian assurance departs. The old Gospel song is theologically sound:

Trust and obey, for there's no other way

To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey  
(Note 42).

Even better is the doctrinal teaching of the poem of Edward Mote (1797-1874), "The Solid Rock," 1834:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness;

I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name.

When darkness seems to veil His face, I rest on His unchanging grace;

In ev'ry high and stormy gale, my anchor holds within the veil.

His oath, His covenant, and blood, support me in the whelming flood;

When all around my soul gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.

When He shall come with trumpet sound, O, may I then in Him be found;

Clad in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.

On Christ, the solid Rock I stand;

All other ground is sinking sand (Note 43).

As Christians become more mature, and in so far as they seek to follow Jesus in every area of their lives, there gradually grows upon them the quiet and happy assurance that they have been truly called by God into His kingdom, and they learn to rely in simple faith upon the blessed promises of His Word.

**Footnotes:** (33) Menno Simons, *Complete Works*, I, pp. 44, 113, 154. (34) Matt. 11:28-30; cf. John R. Mumaw, *Assurance of Salvation* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1950); (35) Mark 11:24-26; (36) Luke 19-10; (37) John 5:24; (38) Acts 16:30; (39) Acts 16:31; (40) Rom. 10:9-13; (41) John 6:37; (42) *Church and Sunday School Hymnal* (Scottdale, Pa.: Mennonite Publishing House, 1902; *Supplement*, 1991, No. 454); (43) *Ibid.*, No. 458.

# Mission Work and the Anabaptists

**“Mission Work and the Anabaptists,” by Joseph Stoll, Senior Editor, Pathway Publications, R.R.4, Alymer, Ontario, Canada, N5H 2R3.**

## Introduction.

Our Amish and Old Order Mennonite churches have generally not been caught up in the missionary movement of the past several hundred years. The explanation is not hard to find. Mission work in the organized sense as it is commonly known today came in as a companion to revivals, Sunday Schools, and prayer meetings.

The *Mennonite Encyclopedia* states, “Modern Protestant mission work finds its stimulus and origin in the 18th century Pietist movement and the evangelical awakening which followed it.”(1) The simple fact that this movement has its roots in the so-called “Great Awakening” of the 1700s and 1800s is sufficient explanation why our churches have not readily accepted it.

I think, however, that we need to be very careful not to pass a negative judgment upon all the sincere missionary efforts that have resulted. (Especially when we trace our own ancestry back to the barbarian hordes of northern Europe, to whom Christianity was first presented by Roman Catholic missionaries!)

No doubt many heathen people have been brought to a knowledge of the Gospel who might otherwise never have heard it. Even though in our opinion the methods are not according to a Scriptural pattern, it is still possible that God has made use of these efforts in extending His kingdom.

Still, it is our sobering responsibility to measure all things by the Word of God. We will list several points below that could be termed justifiable criticism of the popular missionary movement of our day. These points will help explain why our Old Order churches have been reluctant to join.

1) *The movement has generally not been church-sponsored.* Rather, it developed independently, apart from congregational or denominational ties. Missionary societies sprang up like mushrooms. These were directed and supported by individuals who often found organized churches a hindrance or a liability.(2)

2) *The movement has not been church-centred.* Missionaries have placed emphasis on personal salvation but given little attention to discipleship and the role of the church in the life of the believer. This of course was merely a reflection of Pietism itself.

3) *It was often linked to colonialism.* Missionaries were seen to be ambassadors of their home country as much as of Christ. Missionary outreach went hand in hand with European and American imperialism.

One historian has also noted: “Another motivation surely was romanticism as would-be missionaries heard sudden calls to far-off countries, distant sea islands, and exotic peoples,” (3).

4) *It has often taught a faith-only gospel* in which discipleship and cross-bearing were largely omitted. Faith was considered an inner experience, a personal matter between the be-

liever and God. Important New Testament doctrines such as church discipline, brotherly admonition, nonconformity, nonresistance, non-swear-ing of oaths--often received little emphasis, or none at all.

5) *The movement has maximized the role of the soul-winner* and minimized the role of God who “is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). It has taught that if we go out and win souls, each soul won will be a star in our crown or a trophy that we can present to our Father in heaven--concepts that are difficult to defend with the Scriptures.

By contrast, the New Testament presents the vision of the church of God as a city set on a hill, a light to a perishing world and the salt of the earth that Jesus spoke about in Matthew 5. It is the church--a disciplined body of the righteous redeemed, who are “good stewards of the manifold grace of God,” (1 Peter 4:10).

## The Anabaptist “Model”

Beginning more than a century ago, the main-line groups of Mennonites and many of the Amish-Mennonites gradually accepted the missionary emphasis of the time. Mennonite mission boards were set up and missionaries dispatched to faraway places. Closely linked with the new mission spirit was the introduction of revival meetings and Sunday Schools and related Pietistic programs. Only the Old Order groups remained aloof.

Meanwhile, the writers of history began to view the Anabaptists of the sixteen century in a more favourable light. For years historians had given them a very unflattering report. They had

been labelled as the black sheep of the Reformation. Even the peaceful Anabaptists had to live with the stigma of the Münsterite rebellion.

But all that began to change. The Anabaptists were at last recognized as champions and pioneers of the free church concept. During the 1940s, too, historians began to exalt Anabaptists as pioneers in missions. The Mennonites especially, who could look to the martyrs as their flesh-and-blood ancestors, now began to honour them as their spiritual forefathers and the forerunners of their present-day faith and doctrines. To see a link and a precedent for missions was only natural. The Anabaptists were acclaimed as having been two hundred years ahead of their time as missionaries.

John Horsch (1867-1941) performed a valuable work for his generation by giving the Anabaptists a fair hearing, something previous historians had failed to do. Among other things, he separated the Münsterites from the peaceful Anabaptists and pointed out the vast differences between them. His book *Mennonites in Europe* was published in 1942, the year after Horsch died.

But Horsch made the mistake of overdoing a good thing. In his admiration for the Anabaptists, he made them look much better on paper than they were in real life. He did this by glossing over their disagreements, inconsistencies, and human failings. Later historians have been more realistic in portraying not only their strong points, but also the fragmentation and instability among many Anabaptist groups.(4)

In his chapter on “Missionary Zeal Among the Anabaptists”, John Horsch wrote: “Menno Simons, as well as other evangelical Anabaptist



Valentine Bender family, 1910, Grantsville, Maryland. The Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites are known for their work ethic, honesty and high moral family values. Photo from Scott, Old Order and Conservative Mennonite Groups (Intercourse, Pa., 1996), page 122. Like Catholics and Orthodox Christians, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites and Hutterites feel they have been targeted in the “great” Protestant Fundamentalist Holy War to impose their teachings on the entire world. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, the Amish, in particular, have stood their ground and have grown to over 100,000.

and Mennonite leaders, was in a real sense a missionary. Menno was engaged in the work of spreading the gospel through preaching, teaching, and personal work, as well as through the printed page.”

“On the point of the missionary calling of the church Menno Simons’ views differed from those of Luther, Zwingli, and Calvin. These reformers held that Christ’s commission to preach the gospel to all nations concerned only the apostles. Menno, as is clear from his writings, recognized that the great commission is binding for the Christian church of all periods.”(5)

All in all, this is a mild statement, and there are excerpts from Menno’s writings to support Horsch’s conclusions. And yet the case is hardly as clear and simple as he presents it.

It remained for a young scholar named Franklin H. Littell to do further research and to make much stronger and more sweeping statements. In 1946 Littell presented a paper to the American Society of Church History on “The Anabaptists Theology of Missions.” That article was then incorporated into Littell’s book *The Origin of Sectarian Protestantism*, first published in 1952.

Few historical articles have had as great an impact on the Mennonite church as Littell’s chapter on missions. It has been quoted again and again, and reference to his research appears in virtually every major study on Mennonite missions since then. As far as I knew when I began this article, his scholarship had never been challenged. So there was reason to tremble before suggesting that in some respects Littell has not only overstated his case but has failed to be wholly objective.

#### A Central Place

Christ’s parting words to His disciples were, “Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you ....” (Matthew 28: 19, 20). Mark also records this commandment in a parallel version but with slightly different wording. These final words of Christ upon earth are often referred to as “The Great Commission”.

In his landmark article on Anabaptists and missions, Franklin H. Littell made the following statement: “No words of the Master were given more serious attention by His Anabaptist followers than the Great Commission....The proof text appeared repeatedly in Anabaptists sermons and apologetic writing. Confessions of faith and court testimonies gave it a central place.”(6)

Littell is certainly correct that Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15, 16 were often quoted by the Anabaptists in their writings and in their court testimonies. For instance, my search of Menno Simons’ writings alone uncovered more than thirty references to these passages of Scripture.

But the important question is, “For what reason were these verses quoted? Why were they given such a central place?”

Was it to prove the Great Commission to go



*Amishman plowing with a four-horse team. Although subjected to demonization and denigration by some Evangelicals, the Amish and Old Order Mennonites have won the hearts of other Americans, who are sympathetic to their simple lifestyles and genuine Christian faith. Photo from Zielinski, *The Amish: A Pioneer Heritage* (Des Moines, 1975), page 30.*

as missionaries was not just for the Apostles? Hardly. In nearly every instance Menno was arguing his case for believer’s baptism as opposed to infant baptism. He was quoting Scripture to prove that baptism must always be preceded by teaching and by faith, hence infants are ineligible for baptism.

That was the context in which these verses were so frequently quoted. The issue was baptism, not the missionary mandate to go into all the world. I believe Menno Simons’ use of these verses was fairly representative of the Anabaptists in general.

This is not to say these verses were *never* used with reference to the spread of the Gospel. In Menno’s writings, for instance, there is at least one notable exception to the general rule: “We seek and desire with yearning, ardent hearts, yea, at the cost of our life and blood that the holy gospel of Jesus Christ and His apostles, which alone is the true doctrine and will remain until Jesus Christ will come again in the clouds, may be taught and preached throughout all the world, as the Lord Jesus Christ commanded his disciples in his last words which He addressed to them on earth.”(7)

Menno’s great longing to spread the Gospel message is clearly evident here. He had a burden that God’s church might grow and prosper. The work begun by the Apostles needed to continue. But in what context the Apostolic commission was understood by Menno to have been conferred on sixteen century church leaders, he does not explain. The historical record indicates that the preaching and witnessing in Menno’s

day extended only as far as their language and culture reached.

In response to my letter of March 26, 1999, to him, Dr. Littell replied, “On Menno: you will find less reference to the Great Commission in his extant writings because his chief labour was to hold together the little bands of faithful under persecution. The Great Commission is mentioned much more frequently among the South German brethren, who were active in sending preachers and proclaimers throughout European Christendom.”(8)

#### Luther and Other Reformers

We are told by historians, and no doubt correctly, that the great Protestant reformers were not mission-minded. Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli believed the Great Commission to have been especially directed to the Apostles and their generation, and to have been largely fulfilled by them. In fact, as these reformers pointed out, it was the Apostles themselves who established a stable system of congregations which was to serve as a pattern for the centuries to follow.

The same historians assure us that the Anabaptists disagreed expressly with the reform-

#### In the next Issue:

“Mission Models for the 21st Century,” by Dr. Titus Guenther, Professor of Religion and Missions, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

ers on this subject. The Anabaptists were to have understood Christ's command to apply to all Christians in every age, and to be binding on all church members. For that reason the Anabaptists deserve to be honoured as the true forerunners of the modern mission movement.

But is this true? Is the historical record clear on this?

The Anabaptists were indeed active in spreading their faith to their neighbours and friends. There was a commendable zeal to share the Good News. The conviction that time was short and that they were living in the last days before Christ's return added urgency to the situation. There was widespread expectancy that Jesus would return very shortly. The fact that the Anabaptists were hounded from one district to another and had to flee for their lives only served to spread their faith into new areas.

For a time the Hutterites sent out special missionaries to other parts of Europe, and the South German Anabaptists may have also done so for a brief period. But on the whole it was a spontaneous movement rather than an organized one. I am not aware that the Swiss Brethren or the Dutch Mennonites ever ordained missionaries. An elder such as Leonard Bouwens travelled a great deal and may have had oversight of a number of congregations, but his office was hardly different from what we know today as the bishop's office.

Moreover, at least one prominent Anabaptist leader agreed with the reformers

that Christ's commission had been especially meant for the Apostles. Dirk Philips, the leading theologian and most able writer of the Dutch Anabaptists in the early days, wrote the following: "The apostles were chosen and sent by Christ to preach the gospel to every creature (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19) and to be witnesses for Christ unto the ends of the earth (John 15:27; Acts 1:22). Hence God dealt wonderfully with them; but He does not deal thus with all teachers, for they are not like the great apostles; neither does God purpose to accomplish through all teachers what He accomplished through the apostles; and therefore He has not imposed upon all teachers what He imposed upon the apostles."

"The apostles were commanded by the Lord to preach the gospel to every creature, which by the grace of God they did (Colossians 1:6). If this were to be followed out, then the teachers now would have to preach not only to the Christians as mentioned (1 Peter 5:2) but also to the Jews, Turks, and all the heathen. But Paul declares to the teachers and bishops of the church that they shall take heed unto themselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost had made them overseers (Acts 20:28)."

"On the day of Pentecost the apostles spake with tongues of fire, and everyone understood them (Acts 2:4). This never came to pass before that time, nor has it come to pass since. God also wonderfully delivered the apostles

out of prison (Acts 5:19; 12:7; 16:26)...."(9)

Strangely neither John Horsch nor Franklin Littell nor any other historian to my knowledge, has ever made any reference to Dirk Philips' views on the Great Commission. In a personal letter to Dr. Littell on April 12, 1999, I asked him as follows if he had any explanation: "In your book you quote the Lutheran polemicist, Justus Menius where he says the Great Commission was meant for the apostles, and that the apostles themselves set up a different pattern for their successors--the role of pastors, shepherds, and overseers."

"In my opinion, in writing about these very same points, Dirk Philips roundly outdoes Menius! Or am I missing something? If Philips meant what he said, why has he been ignored by historians on his view of the Great Commission? I hope you can clarify this for me."(10)

Dr. Littell's reply was, "My judgement would be that Phillips is simply repeating what had been the prevailing doctrine in 'Christendom' for centuries, and which continued into the middle of the 17th century in some of the established churches..."(11)

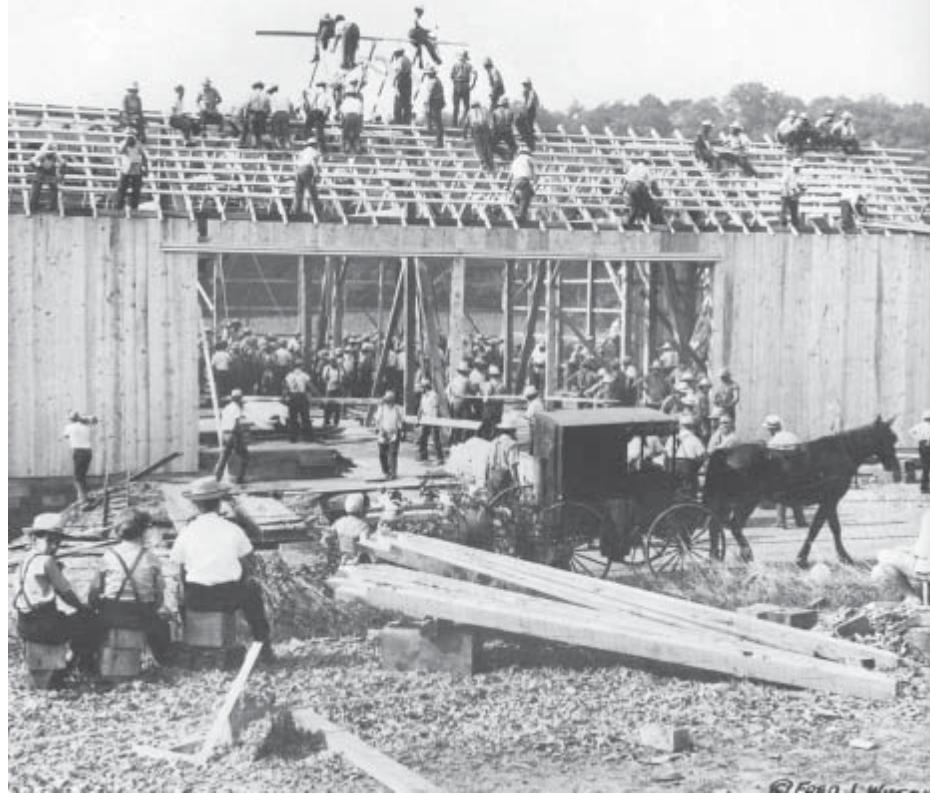
As mentioned earlier, when I began this article I was not aware that anyone else had taken note of what seemed to be a distortion of history. But now my attention has been called to a recent book by Abraham Friesen who makes this statement, "For Christians prior to the great missionary movements, the Great Commission had more to do with faith and baptism than with any missionary mandate...I am of the opinion that scholars who have sought to interpret the Anabaptists emphasis on this passage from a missionary perspective have done violence to the evidence,"(12).

### Beyond the First Generation

The Anabaptist movement was more complex and varied than many people realize. Because it had so many faces, it is no wonder we have different interpretations of its history. Yet there is widespread agreement that the Anabaptists were notably successful in recapturing the vision of the first century Christians. It was almost as if history was repeating itself, except that the signs and miracles were absent.

The similarity is broad enough to include what we might call the "first generation factor". In both the early church and among the Anabaptists, the greatest zeal and evangelistic fervour was evident in the first generation of converts. Succeeding generations settled into a more structured and stable pattern of organized congregations. This does not mean that the faith of the latter was necessarily inferior--it was simply the normal development as churches passed from one generation to another.

To correctly evaluate the Anabaptists, and to learn from them, is indeed a challenge. There were underlying social and economic factors that ought not be ignored. Above all, it was a movement spawned by the Reformation itself and thus somewhat a matter of timing--the very same sparks introduced to the Europe of a cen-



*Ohio barn raising. The Bible articulated communitarianism of the Amish help them survive as a community. It also attracts many American tourists who come to marvel at a people faithful to God's edicts and the teachings of the Good Book. Photo from The Amish: A Pioneer Heritage, page 72.*

tury earlier (or indeed, to the world of today) would never have caught fire and caused such a conflagration as it did in the sixteenth century.

The formation and molding of stable congregations of believers in the context of this Reformation scramble was an impressive and positive accomplishment for God by the labours of such committed church builders as Menno Simons and Dirk Philips.

We cannot deny that there is much to learn from a people who took their faith so seriously that hundreds of them sealed their lives with martyrdom. We may question the conclusions of some historians, but perhaps it is best not to focus too much on that. Rather, may our faith in Jesus Christ become the central and controlling element in our lives, just as it was for the earnest believers who lived before our time.

Thus in our day, too, the church of Christ may be built up and strengthened and her borders enlarged, "a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish (Ephesians 5:27). – The End.

#### Endnotes:

- (1) "Missions, Foreign Mennonite", *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 3, Page 712.
- (2) See William R. Shenk, "The 'Great Century' Revisited," *Anabaptism and Mission* (Herald Press, 1984), pages 161-62.
- (3) Theron F. Schlaback, *Gospel vs Gospel* (Herald Press, 1980), page 22.
- (4) For instance, C. Arnold Snyder says, "...The varied roots of South German/Austrian Anabaptism are found in the ashes of the Peasants' War, the apocalyptic theology of Thomas Müntzer, and the mystical spiritualism of Hans Denck." *Anabaptist History and Theology* (Student's Edition), 1997, Pandora Press, Page 124.
- (5) John Horsch, *Mennonites in Europe* (Second Edition, 1950, Mennonite Publishing House), page 315.
- (6) Franklin H. Littell, *The Anabaptist View of the Church* (Starr King Press, 1958, reprinted 1998 by Mervin J. Baer), page 111.
- (7) *The Complete Works of Menno Simon*, part 2, page 243.
- (8) Letter from Franklin H. Littell to Joseph Stoll, April 5, 1999.



*Two young girls, joining their family for an outing. Amish, Hutterites, Older Order and Conservative Mennonites stress family values and sound Christian nurture. Pathway Publications, Alymer, Ont., in particular, is known for producing a wide range of inspirational literature and wholesome storybooks suitable for all ages. Photo from The Amish: A Pioneer Heritage, page 145.*

(8) Letter from Franklin H. Littell to Joseph Stoll, April 5, 1999.



*John Christian Wenger, Professor of History and Theology, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Goshen, Indiana, and major expositor of Biblical teaching in the orthodox Mennonite tradition. Photo courtesy of J. C. Wenger, A Lay Guide to Romans (Harold Press, 1983), page 169/Diese Steine, page 644.*

- (9) Dietrich Philip, *Enchiridion or Handbook of the Christian Doctrine* (Pathway Publishers, 1966), page 211.
- (10) Letter from Joseph Stoll to Franklin H. Littell, April 12, 1999.
- (11) Letter from Franklin H. Littell to Joseph Stoll, June 11, 1999.
- (12) Abraham Friesen, *Erasmus, the Anabaptists, and the Great Commission* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 1998), page 137.

#### Acknowledgement:

"Mission Work and the Anabaptists," is reprinted with permission from *Family Life*, the monthly devotional magazine of the Amish Mennonites. With a circulation of 20,000 *Family Life* is the largest Mennonite magazine or journal serving 100,000 Amish Mennonites, 25,000 Old Order Mennonites and 25,000 Beachy Amish Mennonites.

### The Armchair Christian

- 1) In his armchair sat a Christian  
Filled and clothed and satisfied.  
"God has blessed me with His goodness,  
All my needs He has supplied."  
Oh, his house was nice and cozy;  
Everything was up to par,  
And in front, parked in the driveway,  
He could see his brand new car.
- 2) "Yes, it's true that God has blessed me,  
But of course I do His will;  
Belong to church and every Sunday  
I am there my place to fill."
- These were thoughts that he was thinking,  
But above a flaming Eye,  
Sees this world with all its people,  
Millions, millions, passing by.
- 3) Going through this world of sorrow,  
Lacking clothes or home or bread;  
Many babies born in hovels,  
Lacking care, will soon be dead.  
Many children, dirty, ragged  
Never have a chance to be  
Happy, healthy, strong, and robust,  
But grow up in misery.
- 4) Little chance to hear the Gospel,  
Little chance God's love to know;  
Life for them holds little beauty,  
Only hunger, dirt, and woe.  
And when God will sit in judgment,  
Will this verdict be the lot  
Of the placid armchair Christian,  
"Go away, I know you not?"
- 5) "Many people, lost and lonely,  
Hungry, naked, needed care  
And the plenty that I gave you,  
You refused with them to share.  
Now, I say, I do not know you.  
My spirit is not in your heart.  
Selfishly you used your blessings,  
Away with you! Depart! Depart!"

-By Ben Giesbrecht, *Family Life*.

"Armchair Christian" is reprinted with permission from *Family Life*, March 2001, page 12.

# Confessions of a Hutterite Convert

"Confessions of a Hutterite Convert," a lecture delivered Nov. 30, 2000 at the Bucher Meetinghouse, Young Center for Anabaptist and Pietist Studies, Elizabethtown College, Elizabethtown, PA.  
by Robert Rhodes, Starland Hutterite Colony, Gibbon, Minnesota.

Touchstone magazine had a cover story the other month on "pugnacious converts" - spiritual gadflies who come to roost in one religious milieu or another, explore and praise its many virtues, and then proceed to famously rock the boat with vigour and effect. We all know the sort: Augustine, Merton, certainly the figures of the Reformation.

Though I am a convert to the Hutterites, which is nearly unheard of, I dare not class myself with people of such radical mien. However, I guess I'm pugnacious in my own way, and my family's presence in a colony of the Hutterian Brethren likely rocks more boats than not.

Not that we try. But this is what going against tradition will get for you, and tradition is something Hutterites eagerly embrace.

We came to the Hutterites because we felt God was asking something more of us than living conventional, if faithful or meaningful, lives in the greater society. To do such a thing is to answer a distinct call, a call that not everyone hears.

To answer such a call is also to embrace a certain contradiction - why apartness and not activism? Why this and not something else? Perhaps we should ask instead: What is my true home? What am I called to? Where do I find it? These we cannot answer rationally, but by drawing near, by hearing the call of the Spirit, we can perceive them quite plainly.

To live earnestly as we do is to live from the ground up, with no illusions and no designs on utopia. One does not join for prosperous times

or to chase fair weather. Nor does one join to "find God" amidst our barns and beards and black-centric wardrobe. Instead, we joined the Hutterites because we felt God would like to find us in such a place, not vice versa.

Was this a successful exchange? A life with careers and decent money, for an existence with no private property to speak of, and virtually no say over our own destinies?

Ask me when it's over with, when the people I live and eat with every day take me out to our cemetery, past the treeline and through the wrought-iron gate, and leave me in a six-foot hole, in the homemade coffin that awaits us all. Once I am forgotten, we'll see how pugnacious I really was.

When my family became Hutterites, we realized we were travelling on uncharted ground. Though there had been a few others who had joined from "outside," and many others who had tried but eventually left, we knew there was no simple or even complex path for us to follow.

Our entry into this culture - coming from an English-speaking, professional, upper middle-class background, into a German-speaking, Russian-peasant communal background that is strongly familial - was not only a leap of faith, but slightly reckless. We had no idea of the obstacles we would face, and so great was our enthusiasm at first that we tended to ignore the possibility that we might not like what we found.

From this, however, we learned our greatest lesson not only about the Hutterites, but about living in community and living as committed, convicted Christians: There is no easy road. And once one finds this path, and discovers where it will lead, one cannot turn back

unchanged. It is truly, as Job laments, a road of no return.

Man, because of his inner convictions, seeks and cultivates the culture of community. This, because it is basic to man, should be a clear means to a meaningful life, if we do not hinder our communal inclinations.

However, because we are human, we seek perfection instead of goodness, and a perfect balance between our faith and practice instead of a gentle, changing, unbounded harmony. This, because we are awash in faults, is why we will never attain utopia, and why we will always have a terrible struggle on our hands whenever we endeavour to become a community.

Despite the image many have of the Hutterites - of being slightly outdated and less than aware of the nuances of human nature - we have found this to be utterly untrue. I think this is where the Hutterian life has some of its great beauty. After centuries of living in community, with all the ups and downs and tragedies and fallow periods, the Hutterite mind, if such a thing can be said to exist, has become ingrained with the reality of community. It seems, once one truly enters into such a community, that the struggles and hardships of living with other people are so familiar they defy explanation.

Our sermons preach it, our immense Chronicle recounts it - time and again, the failures and near failures to make community work. Even in communities where the spiritual state is lacking, the inclination toward community exists in virtually every soul. It is simply part of the soil on which every community is founded.

And community itself is an anomaly. This is where theology enters in, and most important of all, our common striving for God.

Without this, community - or at least meaningful community - is impossible. For centuries, but especially in the past 200 years or so, count-



December 17, 1999, Hutterite friends visiting the home of the editor, Steinbach, Manitoba. Rear, l.-r.: Katie Hoffer, Keystone Colony, Dora Maendel, school principal, Fairhome Colony, Portage la Prairie, and teacher Jonathan Maendel, Baker Colony, McGregor. Front: Maria Maendel (Mrs. Ben) and Rev. Ben Maendel, Baker Colony, McGregor. Like Old Order, Conservative and Amish Mennonites, Hutterites feel they have been unfairly denigrated by Protestant Fundamentalists, in their Crusade to impose their beliefs on the entire world regardless of the cost in human pain, divisions and separations.



September 3, 1999, writer Adina Reger (middle, facing camera), born in Kasackstan, and now of Weißenthurm, Germany, visited the Crystal Springs Hutterite Colony, south of Niverville. She enjoyed the lunch fellowship with Patricia McAdams (to her left), and Maria Kleinsasser (Mrs. Jakob) and Rachel Waldner (Mrs. Albert) (to her right). Across the table are Rebecca Kleinsasser (Mrs. Jonathan), left, and Rebecca Kleinsasser (Mike). Photo in the Colony cafeteria. Adina Reger was touring Canada and the U.S.A., doing research for her recently released book, *Diese Steine*, a pictorial history of the Russian Mennonites.



*A young Hutterite woman contemplates the future. Community and faithful discipleship have kept the Hutterian Brethren strong and growing. Confessional education has played a key role. Photo by Laura Wilson, Hutterites of Montana (Yale University, 2000), 149 pages, from front cover, Christian Living, June 2001.*

less utopian societies have sprung up in our world, particularly in idealistic and spiritually diverse North America. Most have become relics, because once they reached deep water, they did not possess a sufficient keel to center them.

There are those who say the Hutterites are shipwrecked as well. Despite a lack of aggressive outreach among the colonies, and an acknowledged need for deep spiritual renewal in many places, the Hutterian Church remains very much a living, changing group. Just comparing the colonies of today with the scholarship of even a few years ago will show a broad spectrum of changes and different attitudes, brought on by a number of diverse influences, even though the basic mechanics of Hutterian life remain the same.

Granted, the majority of the 400 or so Hutterite colonies in North America would probably be unwilling or at least very hesitant about taking in newcomers, which places some very serious limits on the church as a whole. Still, among the communities themselves, there remains a distinct line of progression, a kind of momentum which seems to assure a future for every community and its daughter settlements. With or without converts, the communities fully expect to endure, and they very well could.

A concern I return to occasionally is one that afflicts most churches, but I think it is rather central to the Hutterites' lack of involvement in social causes, and people's perceptions of us as backward or out of touch. I believe that after centuries of flight, and after decade upon decade of separation and apartness, we have lost our sorrow, our deep concern for the plight of

others. We have replaced this sorrow with stoicism, but this is not enough. This is serious.

In the history of the Hutterites, we can see periods in which the emphasis on communalism had all but disappeared. These were also, without exception, times of great spiritual decline. No doubt, the Hutterites of those days were looked upon as a failed endeavour, if they were not forgotten or overlooked altogether. Having forsaken their earlier zeal for communalism, propelled as this was by persecution, the brothers went into a slow but numbing decline - a trend that was reversed, we are told, by nothing short of divine intervention.

The communal vision of Hutterite Michael Waldner, who restored community of goods in the mid-1800s, in the Ukraine, was more than a Biblical and philosophical longing. To read the accounts he left, an actual vision from beyond left him convicted of the rightness of the communal path. On one side, he saw divine joy and salvation for those who shared

all and lived together as one; on the other waited a blistering eternity of fire. One can imagine this hellish imagery, aside from appearing to be a visible, viable warning, represented also the inner despair some of the brothers and sisters must have been feeling, finding themselves in this state of decline.

This fire was a trial and punishment of the present, not just of the future. By travelling back to the Christic, communal center of generations past, Waldner felt the Hutterites would find their only chance at rehabilitation and salvation. This they did, even though many abandoned the communities, and even more migrated to North America only to strike out on their own once they had arrived.

But perhaps the Hutterites, more than any other group in modern times, show that without Christ-centeredness, without an unfailing emphasis on God over any man, community (and indeed true Christianity) is impossible.

True, other communities have existed that were not spiritual in foundation, but which pursued a certain ideal or lifestyle. This, too, is building on sand, because invariably, differences of opinion arise. And when humans cannot solve these problems of day-to-day living, where is one to turn? In spiritual communities, the answer is obvious; but in those without such a grounding, drift and eventually destruction are inevitable.

This does not mean, though, that we are immune to anything or that we will be here in another 100 years. It simply means that God has suffered us to survive, and that for now anyway, we remain in His grace.

This is a mystery, to be certain, a mystery we will never be able to discern, and which we should simply accept as it is.

This is what we believe.



*Hutterite children from the Starland Hutterite Colony, Gibbon, Minnesota: "Without Christ-centeredness, without an unfailing emphasis on God over any man, community is impossible." Photo courtesy of Christian Living, June 2001, page 4.*

# The Kingdom of God and the End Time

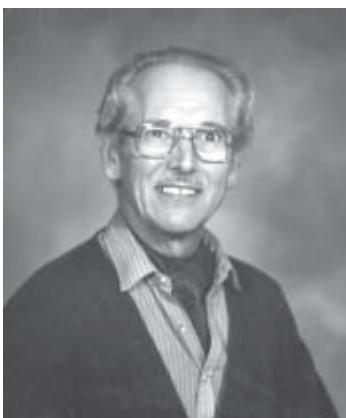
"The Kingdom of God and the End Time," by Walter Klaassen, Site 12A, c. 23, R.R.7, Vernon, B.C., V1T 7Z3.

## The Great Trek, 1880.

In the summer and fall of 1880 three long wagon trains with about 900 people left the Mennonite settlement of Am Trakt on the left bank of the Volga River, and headed east. Their destination was Central Asia where they believed God had prepared a refuge for them from the terrible events to come on earth just before the return of Jesus. Their interpretation of Scripture, especially the book of Revelation, convinced them of the rightness of their decision.

They arrived at their destination after 3000 km and three months of hazardous travel, only to find, not a place of refuge, but precarious existence among hostile Muslim tribes outside the borders of Imperial Russia. Claas Epp, the manipulative and pretentious leader of this exodus, was finally discredited even by his most devoted followers, when his prediction that he would ascend into heaven failed twice. The whole glorious expectation had turned to shabby disappointment.

This is only one instance among thousands since the early days of Christianity of mistaken biblical interpretation about the Last Days and especially the last return of Christ. In my book *Armageddon and the Peaceable Kingdom* (1999) I devoted a chapter to the history of mistaken calculations about the End. But Christians have never given up repeating the same errors over and over again until the present day.



Walter Klaassen is the great-grandson of Martin Klassen (1820-81), Köppenthal, cousin of Claas Epp (1838-1913), and author of a separatist-pietist interpretation of Mennonite history, *Geschichte der wehrlosen Taufgesinnten Gemeinden von Zeit der Apostole bis auf die Gegenwart* (Danzig, 1873). Martin Klassen was a cousin to Maria Klassen, mother of David Klassen (1813-1900), Kleine Gemeinde delegate to America in 1873. Walter Klaassen is a widely recognized Bible scholar. Among his important works is *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (3ed.), (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 118 pages (see book review section).

Perhaps that is not surprising when one considers that what is at stake is the goal and outcome of human history. That is a very large and very important subject. Our Book, the Bible, gives expression to the hope that the world will not, as some say, end with a whimper, but will in the end be part of the triumph of God's purpose with his creation.

## Interpretation.

But how to interpret all those wonderful passages from the Prophets, Gospels, Epistles, and Revelation? How to do it so that the interpreter does not simply become the latest exhibit in the long line of error and disappointment? For when you look at the books published by the most recent prophecy experts among whom are Hal Lindsey, Jack van Impe, Tim LaHaye, and Grant Jeffrey, you will note that they have constantly been revising their own predictions when they turned out to be wrong and as world events unfold. I predict that they will keep on doing so until they are shouldered aside by others with yet more predictions which they too are certain will be fulfilled in the near future.

"...Hal Lindsey, Jack van Impe, Tim LaHaye, and Grant Jeffrey,...have constantly been revising their own predictions..."

But there is a way of approaching the biblical announcements about the End of all things which takes us out of the cycle of excited expectation and dull disappointment, and onto a path of "quietly waiting for the salvation of the Lord" (Lam.3:26). The interpretation of Scripture should take careful note of the way familiar words are used in the Old and New Testaments.

## The Kingdom of God.

For example, the overall reality proclaimed in the Bible is that God is king. His sovereignty is called the kingdom of God. In the Old Testament that kingdom is universal but becomes visible especially in the earthly Israel with its kingdoms of Israel and Judah. The land and the holy city of Jerusalem were visible symbols of God's kingship. Before the Exodus from Egypt and during the Exile of the people in Babylon, God's promise was to bring the people to their own land and to restore it to them. In particular, the promises in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament related to bringing the Israelites back to their land from exile.

The central feature of today's prophetic schemes, usually called by the name "premillennial dispensationalism", is the claim that because not all of the prophecies in the Old Testament prophets concerning the land

and the people were fulfilled, they will be fulfilled in the future. They claim that this fulfilment began when the state of Israel came into being in 1948, and will all be completed within a generation or two from that date.

Now, because the main theme of Jesus' teaching as recorded in the Gospels is the kingdom of God, one might ask why Jesus and the New Testament writers like Paul never linked the physical land of Israel with the kingdom of God, nor ever claimed that the unfulfilled prophecies of the Old Testament referred to the Jewish people and the land of their time? In fact, Jesus predicted that the Temple and the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed, but his predictions contain nothing about the physical restoration of the land, the city, and people.

"...Jesus and the New Testament writers....never linked the physical land of Israel with the kingdom of God..."

The New Testament writers wrote about the city and the Temple and the people, but they considered them to be important in God's purpose now as a hallowing or making holy all of life lived in God's presence. The kingdom of God in the teaching of Jesus never means the physical land of the Jews or their earthly kingdom. In fact he specifically said that the kingdom of his teaching was not of this world. Rather, he said, that the kingdom of God is coming or near you, or among you and within you.

The Apostle Paul, whose words about the kingdom of God are the earliest in the New Testament, specifically says that "the kingdom of God is not food or drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit," (Rom.14:17). The writer of the book of Hebrews is even more explicit about the meaning of the land and the kingdom of God: If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, "a heavenly one" (Heb.11:15-16). We read that even for Abraham the physical land was of secondary importance, "for he looked forward to a city that had foundations, whose architect and builder is God," (Heb. 11:10).

## The Community of Faith.

In the New Testament God's kingdom means what it meant in the Old Testament, namely the absolute sovereignty of the God of Israel, but it is no longer linked to the land of Israel. The kingdom's visible sign on earth now is the enlarged community of faith including Jews and Gentiles, the reconstituted Israel called the church, and in the life of its

members who live by kingdom rules.

It is this kingdom of God, which is on earth, of which we are citizens, that can be called the millennium, the 1000-year reign of Christ. It is a kingdom of peace which means that it is not defended with physical weapons. It is from this understanding of the kingdom of God that those dramatic elements of the End time, second coming, antichrist, resurrection, judgement, and millennium take their meaning.

**"...this kingdom of God, which is on earth, of which we are citizens, that can be called the millennium,..."**

That means, in the first place, that all these are real, as real as we are, as real as God is. Second, it means that they are primarily spiritual realities relating to our Christian life in this world. Realness should, of course, not simply be equated with something material that we can see and touch. Third, it means that because they are spiritual realities, they are part of God's eternity and should not be built into an earthly scenario as is done by the prophecy experts named above and many others. Fourth, it means that because they are real and they are part of our faith, we need to know that each of them are part of the Christian life of each one of us.

#### The Second Coming.

The *second coming* is very important to Christian teaching because it must be understood primarily as the promise that God will bring to victorious conclusion what he began with Adam and Eve. It is therefore better called the final coming because it means the completion of God's purpose which he began with Jesus when he came into the world and which he will conclude through Jesus. And because it is Jesus who is coming, we don't need to be afraid. When that will happen even Jesus himself did not know. To make predictions about when it is likely to happen is to meddle in things we know nothing about. It really is a question about whether, in all these things, we will take the



*Claas Epp (1838-1913) and wife Elisabeth, nee Janzen (1836-1913) and daughter Maria (1862-88). Epp interpreted literally the teachings of Jung-Stilling that the Russian Czar would be the defender of the Church in the endtimes and that Christ would return in the East. These teachings were fanatically promoted by Separatist-Pietist missionaries as well as prominent Mennonite leaders such as Evangelist Bernhard Harder (1822-84), Halbstadt, and were widely accepted among both Brüdergemeinde and Kirchengemeinde Mennonites by 1900. The Claas Epp incident together with the terrible apostasy of Münster stands as a warning to those who convert themselves to alien religious cultures.*

*Photo from Belk, The Great Trek, page 59/Diese Steine, page 492.*

word of Jesus or the word of the modern prophecy experts.

**"...will [we] take the word of Jesus or the word of the modern prophecy experts."**

A word needs to be added about a favourite of the prophecy experts, the so-called "silent rapture". When we look at the passages Mark 13:26, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17, Matthew 24:40-42, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 2 Peter 3:10, and Revelation 1:7-8, we note that all of them announce that Jesus will return, but they say nothing about this being silent. In fact they suggest that there will be a lot of sound of trumpets and shouting. Nor is this coming separated by years from resurrection and

judgement as though all of these take place at different times on an earthly calendar. "For our ways are not God's ways, neither are his thoughts our thoughts," (Isaiah 55:8).

#### The Antichrist.

##### *The Antichrist!*

There is perhaps more curiosity about this and the number 666 than about any other part of the End time catalogue. The Antichrist is a symbol of the sum total of human rebellion against God, which in the 20th century achieved many high water marks. We think of the Nazi regime and the Holocaust, we remember the Soviet Gulag, the genocidal slaughter of Armenians and Tutsis, the greed and oppressive injustice of the present global trade system.

Many Christian interpreters have said that the antichrist is as present in the world as Christ is. John in his first epistle states that "many antichrists have come" and that the antichrist is one who denies the incarnation of God in Christ. It is therefore not any single person but can be a number of people. Mainly it means the power of evil which lures people into opposing God and his good purposes.

#### The Resurrection.

*Resurrection* is part and parcel of the gospel. "Because I live, you shall live also," said Jesus. Paul wrote that when we are baptized we die to the old life and are

raised up to the life in Christ. Becoming a Christian is therefore called resurrection in the New Testament. In baptism we receive the Holy Spirit and that Spirit begins then and there to transform us into the image of Christ.

That process will come to its climax when, after death God gives us the same kind of glorified body in which Jesus was raised from the dead. He was the first one who came with that body; all of us who are joined to him will follow him with the same kind of body into the life of God. We don't know how this happens nor what God's time-table for each one of us is. We trust that, because of Jesus' death and resurrection we shall see God face to face.

#### Judgement.

*Judgement*, too, may not simply be made part of a calendar of events that will take place



*Hal Lindsey. Self-styled prophecy experts exploit the fears and anxieties of the elderly, the lonely, naive and vulnerable with their perversions of biblical teachings. Photo from Old Colony Mennonites, page 44.*

in the future, as the modern prophecy experts claim, at a number of points during the End time, and supremely at the very end in the so-called judgement of the Great White Throne. In the gospel of John Jesus, as he approaches the Cross, says: "Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out," (12:31). In another place he says, "This is the judgement that light has come into the world," (3:19). According to these passages the coming of Jesus into the world and especially his death on the Cross was God's judgement on the world.

But already from the Old Testament we know that judgement is an unavoidable aspect of our life. We reap the consequences of our actions; this is judgement in the most elementary sense. And if we believe in God, have Jesus for our living example and fail in our discipleship, the judgement we experience is God's judgement on our sin. God forgives us, but that never wipes out the consequences of our sin. We cannot escape judgement.

There is, however, also the hope of a final judgement upon all the inhumanity we inflict on each other. So much evil goes by undealt with. There has to be a reckoning somehow for the tyrants of the earth who cared nothing for the lives of human beings and their suffering. Like Abel's blood, their blood cries from the earth for justice. Much closer to home, our secret sins and the wrong we do to each other are included in that enormous deficit we all, from Adam onward, have incurred. We know that if we accept God's forgiveness for our sin, we are forgiven, but Peter wrote that "judgement begins with the household of God."

When all this happens and how God will exercise that judgement, we scarcely know. What we do know is that because of what Jesus did for us, we may have confidence on the day of judgement.

#### **The Millennium.**

The millennium is what modern prophecy experts call the kingdom of God, and in doing so ignore what Jesus and the rest of the New Testament writers say about it. It is mentioned in the Bible only in Revelation 20:4,6. There it is clearly stated that those who will reign with Christ for 1000 years are "those who had been beheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God," (20:4). Thus the millennium is a reward for martyrdom,

and, according to verse 4, only the martyrs will reign with Christ.

In Revelation 5:10 we are told that the whole church will reign on earth, which is somewhat different. In any case, these references have nothing to do with a kind of political kingship of Jesus in a world government. Reigning with Christ, according to one passage means to be part of Christ in the same way that dying with Christ and enduring with Christ is part of being in Christ (2 Tim.2:12). In Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 we read that Christ made us, that is those who have faith in him, a kingdom.

Reigning and kingdom in these passages also have nothing to do with any earthly political kingdom. They are part of the life of God in which we participate, the life in Christ, in particular the overcoming and reigning over evil in our lives and in our surroundings.

**"...the millennium,...is a present and future participation in the peace of God..."**

Thus the millennium, too, is not a physical event which we can locate on earth at a specific point of time. It is a present and future participation in the peace of God in our everyday life. According to the New Testament we have been living in the End time ever since the coming of Jesus and therefore do not need to wait for it or be afraid of it (Hebrews 1:2).

We therefore have no need for calculations of time on an earthly calendar for the realities of the Spirit of the second coming, resurrection, judgement, millennium, and of the evil of antichrist. We do not need to be anxious and fearful as some are that we will "be left behind." For our attitude to all these it is best for us to trust in God and not to lean on our own understanding.

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"We do not need to be anxious and fearful...that we will 'be left behind.'

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#### **Further Reading:**

F. Bartsch, *Unser Auszug nach Mittelasien* (Steinbach, 1948).

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Walter Klaassen, "Apocalypticism," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. 5, page 28-30.

Pieter J. Twisck, *Das Friedensreich Christi oder Auslegung des 20. Kapitels in Offenbarung Johannis* (1875, Odessa), 31 pages.

Pieter J. Twisck, *The Peaceful Kingdom of God* (Elkhart, Ind., 1913), 32 pages.

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## **Israel and Prophecy**

#### **Bishop Dick Wiebe.**

In the July/August, 2001, issue of the *Chronicle*, page 2, published by the Chortitzer Mennonite Conference, Bishop Dick Wiebe, New Bothwell, wrote as follows: "It started when someone made a statement about Israel and the turmoil in the Middle East. I could not agree with some of the statements that were made and spoke up in defence of Israel with respect to their God given right to the land that they have reclaimed by force."

Comment by Dr. Walter Klaassen.

*July 12, 2001*

"Although Wiebe does not tell us what was said, his response is precisely what I speak to when I wrote that the New Testament, the New Covenant, says nothing about the land nor about the physical Israel by itself. We are all God's Israel now and our 'land' is God's universal Kingdom and our City is the heavenly Jerusalem. There are no separate divine agendas for Israel and the church."

"I know that folks get excited about events in the Middle East because it is all linked in their head with Christ's Return. When Jesus admonished us to watch, He was, I believe, not making reference to political events in Israel, but to the state of our own spiritual life, such that we are always ready to meet Him when He comes."

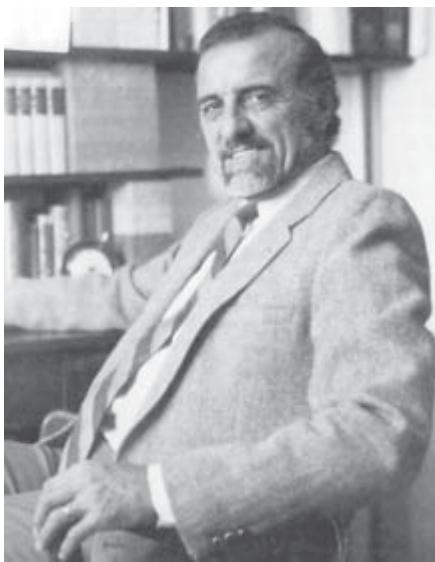


*Bishop Dick Wiebe. Photo from the Chronicle, July/August, 2001, page 2.*

# Dance of Death – The Sorrows of Civil War

## Introduction.

The period 1900-1914 has sometimes been called the “golden age” of the Mennonites [in South Russia]. However, the war years, 1914-17, inaugurated a time of great tumult for the Russian people. The stamina of the Russian nation weakened rapidly as its armies suffered repeated setbacks and revolutionary fervour in the larger cities grew stronger. As the author points out, most Mennonite families were shocked by the sudden conscription of all their able-bodied men who were subsequently required to enlist in the forestry service or the medical corps.



Peter Pauls, Professor of Literature, University of Winnipeg, Photo credit - rear cover Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story (Winnipeg, 1986), 254 pages. See "Island of Chortitza: Sunday 1840," Preservings, No. 17, pages 13-17, for another article contributed by Dr. Pauls.

## Steinbach Massacre.

My brother Peter married in May, 1919. On December 5th of the same year, he, his wife and most of the inhabitants of the village of Steinbach were murdered. On Saturday [December 4th?] the people in the village of Felsenbach would have suffered the same fate if the White Army troops had not prevented it. Even so, many there lost their lives and a number of others were critically wounded. On Tuesday we travelled to Steinbach to bury the murder victims.

When we arrived we found all the doors wide open and the windows broken. The slain women lay uncovered. Pigs and dogs were running about unchecked. Some of the corpses had been partially devoured. We dug a mass

grave ten metres in length, two metres wide and two metres deep. When we finished digging the grave we lined it with corn straw. Then we drove to each yard, placed the bloodied corpses on wagons and proceeded to the cemetery. First we put down one layer of bodies, then a layer of straw and so on until we had three layers of corpses. Finally, one more layer of straw and lastly the earth.

As I have stated already, my brother was among those massacred in Steinbach on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1919. My brother's right hand had been chopped off. His head bore the marks of two sabre wounds and his heart had also been pierced. He was found lying in the doorway between the living room and the *Eckstube* [corner room]. His wife Greta's hands were still covered with bread dough. Her head had been split open. The dough tray was standing on the oven; the dough had overflowed and had run down to the floor. Greta's father was lying in the living room, his skull crushed.

Let me allude briefly to an earlier incident. Kornelius Funk was a big, muscular man, by all accounts over two metres tall. He was a man of great strength. He was well-to-do and employed both male and female servants. On one occasion his servant was instructed to stock the barn with fresh straw. The wagon, pulled by one horse, was driven to the straw stack and loaded with straw. The return trek was uphill and the ground was wet because of a recent rain. The horse was unable to pull the load over the barn threshold.

Funk's man-servant asked if he should harness up another horse.

Funk answered, “No, unhitch this one.”

The man was uneasy, thinking he had overloaded the wagon. He was afraid he would be scolded later. Yet, by the time he returned after taking the horse to the barn, the wagon had been unloaded. Funk had managed it all by himself.

When these murderers confronted Funk, he warded off the first attacker by grasping the sabre with his bare hands and thrusting it aside, thereby overcoming his assailant. Funk was able to stave off two more bandits in similar fashion, but the fourth one shot him at point blank range and thus he was finally brought down. Then they went after the mother who had collapsed on the bed. The girls, Lena and Kornelia, had hidden themselves under the bed and were screaming in fear. Both were shot and wounded but not killed. They were eventually taken to Felsenbach, to their Uncle Heinrich's place, where they were well cared for. In spite of this, Lena eventually died of her wounds. Kornelia had suffered a neck wound and the bullet had exited through a nostril. Apparently she lives to this day.

Old Mr. Funk was still seated on the upholstered bench in the living room. His head was hacked open in two places and the fin-

When Czar Nicholas II abdicated in March, 1917, his administration was replaced by a socialist regime led by Alexander Kerensky. In October, 1917 (old calendar), the Bolsheviks, under the leadership of Lenin, overthrew this newly formed government. Supporters of the Czar led by officers of the White Army tried to quash the revolution. There was a threat of widespread chaos as the radical village councils tried to institute the new “Red” laws and regulations.

The German occupation of Ukraine from April to November, 1918, brought a brief period of peace and reconstruction to the Mennonite colonies. However, with the retreat of the [German] army, the Mennonite colonies and the surrounding regions found themselves in the midst of a conflict between the White and Red armies and victims of repeated attacks by Nestor Machno as well. Relative peace and quiet was restored only after the White army was defeated in 1920, when the Reds took firm control of the entire country.

By Dr. Peter Pauls, University of Winnipeg.



Map of the Black Sea region, South Russia, showing the inner circle and outer circle of Machnov's operations 1918-1921. Photo credit - Victor Peters, Nestor Machno (Altona, n.d.), page 59/Derksen, page 14.

gers of both his hands had been severed. He was holding the youngest grandchild on his lap. The child had also suffered a mortal head wound.

The eldest granddaughter was in the bloom of youth. She was beautiful – white skin, red cheeks, dark black hair. She had apparently been preparing to comb her hair, but now she was lying lifeless on the floor with two grizzly head wounds. It was a sight I won't forget as long as I live. I carried her to the wagon and transported her, along with others, to the mass grave.

The elderly Neufelds, together with two sons and two daughters, were ordered to stand in a row and then shot. All collapsed at once. The parents, one son and one daughter died instantly. The other two were seriously wounded and were brutally kicked as they lay prostrate on the ground. The murderers were heard to say, "They'll give up the ghost eventually." But God be praised, they survived. The infants in their cradles lay with slashed skulls but smiling faces looking as if they expected someone to pick them up and comfort them.

### Ebenfeld.

Ebenfeld was situated nine werst [approximately nine kilometres] from the village of Felsenbach. Some of the Mennonites there had armed themselves with the help of Kaiser Wilhelm's soldiers. The German military had at this time defeated the Russians and had overrun Ukraine, the breadbasket of Russia. The German soldiers were present in our village as well. When England attacked Germany from the west, the Germans were forced to retreat. The German army left many weapons behind, and so the revolutionaries were well armed and thus able to subdue the population.

Jakob Bergen was one who had acquired arms during this time. He said he was a non-resistant Mennonite, but he wasn't really. When the bandits arrived at his home, he and his sons shot them. When his store of ammunition began to run out, he fled to the Old Colony and took refuge with his daughter Susie who had married and was living there. However, Bergen's wife had remained in Felsenbach with her sister, Mrs. Jakob Wieler. The bandits found Bergen's wife there and demanded that she tell them where her husband was hiding. She refused to betray her husband and was consequently murdered.

On December 4th, the bandits from Scholochovo suddenly appeared [in Ebenfeld?]. They brought with them farm workers who had grievances against the Mennonite farmers. These workers now wanted to have their revenge, and the innocent were sacrificed along with the guilty. Diedrich Penner's parents were among those murdered.

Penner's daughters were also assaulted and then killed. Then the bandits turned their attention to the son, Abram, who managed to escape through a window. They shot at him as he fled and wounded him in one of his



*The Abraham Derksen family, Felsenbach, Borosenko. L.-r.: front, Gerhard, Liese, Maria, Isaak (Peter), Agata; second row: Heinrich, Margaretha, her husband Peter Wiebe, and the parents Katharina and Abraham Derksen, Jackob. Rear: Anna, Susanna, Katharina, Peter and Abraham (twins), and Aron. Photo courtesy of P. Derksen, Es wurde wieder ruhig, page 4.*

arms. However, Abram was able to run the nine kilometres to Felsenbach where his wound was tended to and he was able to recover.

When the Red Army gained the upper hand and took possession of Nikopol, Abram Penner was made local commandant. He travelled to Scholochovo, sought out those who had murdered his family, and took his revenge. Satisfied, he settled in Schöndorf and professed his resolve to become a Christian. Whether or not he carried out this intention I don't know. In any case, one night, on his way to Nikopol with a group of farm hands, he and all his companions were murdered near a railway station.

My brother Abram had also planned to go with this group, but they left before he could join them and he had to travel alone. His friends came to a horrible end, but he escaped with his life.

### Felsenbach.

Our village, Felsenbach, was warned that it would be attacked on a Saturday. It was still dark when a long convoy of wagons and horsemen arrived. Whoever was able to flee did so. I hid in the underbrush on the frozen river. I was completely encircled by reeds; my clothes were almost indistinguishable from this undergrowth. From my hiding place I could see that our village was completely surrounded.

It so happened that this group of bandits, made up of approximately 90 men, was led by one Solonskii from Scharapovko. Solonskii was an orphan and had been raised by his uncle who had been a shepherd in Felsenbach for thirteen years. These men called themselves a self-defense group.

Solonskii and his men held a meeting in the village church. At this meeting the planned massacre of Felsenbach inhabitants was called off, thanks to Solonskii.

In the meantime, Scholochovo had been taken over by White Army troops. Two scouts set out from there with the news. They were on horseback and carried a machine gun. When they reached the hill near our village they saw through their binoculars that Felsenbach was surrounded. They set up their gun and then proceeded to fire on the village. The occupying troops gave the signal and soon the horsemen and the wagons were gone. The scouts also fled. In a short time the village was no longer occupied and many returned to their homes.

After nightfall the troops who had occupied our village returned. Mrs. Bergen from Ebenfeld was brutally stabbed to death. Mr. Frank Froese, a mill owner, was hunted down and killed on the frozen river. Mr. Regier was shot to death and his son Peter wounded. Mrs. Regier had one of her thumbs chopped off. Old Mr. Gerhard Ens and his son Peter were both shot and so killed. David Wiebe lost one of his hands and suffered a severe head wound. He survived for a time but then succumbed. Jakob Wieler was similarly wounded and died after a few weeks.

Diedrich Ens was carrying water when the chief officer from staff headquarters came riding up to him and asked him where he might find some attractive women or young girls. Ens replied, "I don't know; one man may find this woman beautiful while another prefers someone else." The officer unsheathed his sabre and threatened to capitulate him.

As a result of this encounter Ens lost an arm and suffered a severe neck wound. He

fled to the barn and managed to bar the door, but his pursuer was able to shoot his way in. Ens then escaped to the river. However, he collapsed in a ditch before he could reach the village. Members of his family found him, unconscious, by following the trail of blood. They brought him to our little house where they bound up his wounds. They continued to care for him until he recovered.

### Escape.

Many villagers were severely beaten. There was great distress everywhere as the civil war raged on with unrelenting fury. Sometimes one group of bandits had the upper hand, at other times another. All of them were thieves and the thievery continued unabated. As if this were not enough, we were plagued by diseases that were spread by these bandits, and many of our people died as a result. It was not uncommon to bury three corpses in one grave. Eventually, there were no longer any coffin makers or able-bodied persons to inter the dead.

Fortunately, both my sister Katharina and I did not come down with typhoid fever. Katharina was kept busy sewing shrouds for those who died of this disease. She also washed the deceased and dressed them for burial. I did my best to care for our starving livestock and the livestock that belonged to others. The animals were bellowing for feed; horses in their agony gnawed their cribs. No one was available to provide water for these animals or to clean their stalls. I worked from dawn till dusk, well beyond my physical endurance.

One day our village was again occupied by troops. One of them came riding up to me on a foaming steed. He ordered me to fetch a bucket of wheat for his horse.

When I returned with some oats he said, "Didn't I say wheat?"



*The home of Abraham Derksen in Felsenbach, Borosenko. It was built in 1912 out of kilned bricks and had a zinc-tin roof. It stood parallel to the street. It was one of the nicest and largest homes in Felsenbach. Photo courtesy of P. Derksen, Es wurde Wieder ruhig, page 4.*

Without objecting, I brought him the wheat and he offered the entire amount to his horse.

When I tried to divide this grain among all the horses, my act of compassion brought about an angry response from this culprit. He ordered me to operate the grindstone so that he could sharpen his sabre.

"With this sabre I'm going to cut you into pieces," he said.

Then he asked me to feel the edge of his weapon to see if it was sharp enough. Who can trust the devil?

When he went out to check on his horse that had become sick from overeating, I decided to make a dash for it. I ran through the back door of the barn and hid in a ditch that was three metres deep. My pursuer screamed and shouted, but I used my long legs to good advantage and was able to escape to the village windmill.

I arrived at this windmill together with Abram Klassen, another fugitive. The windmill was under close guard and we were asked to identify ourselves.

We denied that we were Germans. We said we were from Schischke, a Russian village.



*The steammill in Felsenbach, Borosenko, owned by Franz Froese, who was hacked to death on the ice by the Machnowzy in 1919. The mill operated with a benzine motor but was nonetheless referred to as the steammill by the locals. Photo from Diese Steine, page 394.*

Mr. Groening, the manager of the mill, said, "Boys, you'll have to find another place. I fear for my own life, and so I've decided to close the mill and leave."

Klassen and I decided to seek shelter in Schischke. We made our way along the meadows behind the village gardens even though there was no road there. We were trying to avoid being questioned again. The weather was mild and it was raining. At times we walked through water that was knee-deep. Then we saw someone we knew driving along the street. We stopped him and were able to persuade him to give us a lift.

When we reached the end of the village we were stopped and questioned. We

didn't answer all questions truthfully and so we managed to pass through. On our arrival in Schischke we went straight to one Marie, known as Lamischa. However, she did not welcome us.

Then we went to old Titko, a friend of my father. He too was reluctant to let us in. Desperate, we fled to the home of the one-legged Makar Spilki. He was already harboring 15 others, but he took us in as well. This meant that there were 17 persons to provide for each day. The Penner girls from Ebenfeld were in this group. This man was visited regularly by bandits, but as soon as they arrived on the premises we all took refuge upstairs. Makar Spilki always greeted these bandits in a friendly, diplomatic manner.

On one occasion, not all of us were able to

### Peter Derksen (b. 1905).

Peter Derksen, the author, was born in Felsenbach, Borosenko, in 1905 to Abraham Derksen (1863-1925) and Katharina Olfert (1863-1945). His father was a diligent farmer and in time he acquired a double Wirtschaft in Felsenbach, Borosenko.

Peter Derksen survived the terrible events which he described. In 1928 at the young age of 23, the voice of his community fell upon him and he was elected as a minister, an office to which he remained true for the remainder of his days.

In his memoirs he describes the many years of prison camp in the Soviet Gulag. Finally in 1955 he was released and resettled in Kasachstan.

After faithfully serving his Lord in the ministry for many years under the most difficult circumstances, he was allowed to emigrate to Germany where he spent his last days. We are thankful for the written testimony brother Derksen has left for posterity.

See also Reger and Plett, *Diese Steine* (Steinbach, 2001), pages 393-395.

get upstairs and out of sight.

"Who's up there?" the intruders wanted to know.

Makar replied, "Two people infected with typhoid."

These bandits turned around, quickly mounted their horses, and were gone. We could repay this man, Spilki, only with our love and gratitude. When the number of persons in his small household became unmanageable, I decided to move in with a brickmaker. Three days later, the last of these invaders departed and we were all able to move back to our homes.

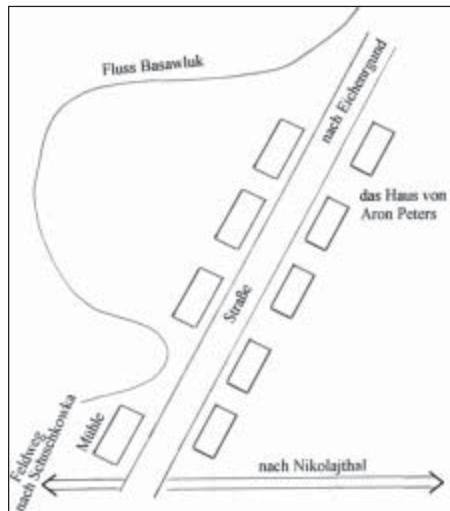
#### Father.

Upon our arrival at home we found everything in chaos. The rooms and their contents were barely recognizable. The beds were a dreadful mess. What was left of them was difficult to look at. These outlaws had even relieved themselves everywhere, indiscriminately. There was filth all over, so that the house resembled a pigsty. Just when we managed to restore some semblance of order, we were invaded once again. Three men suddenly appeared and demanded money.

During this incident our parents were brutally beaten. These men noticed that there were still horses in our barn. We had a 27-year-old saddle-backed nag and a brown mare with a bad limp. The bandits ordered us to provide them with transportation. I hitched up the horses and mounted the wagon, but I was told to dismount. Father was to accompany them and he was to do the driving. The horses were hardly able to do what was expected of them. Father was given no choice but to comply.

They set out for the village of Rosenfeld, but when they reached the outskirts of that village they ordered father to get off and run for his life, all the while threatening to shoot him. Father told them he couldn't do this and that if they killed him they would be guilty of a very grave sin.

"Is shooting someone in cold blood a sin?" they asked sarcastically.



Map of the village of Felsenbach, Borosenko Colony, by D. Plett, 1998. Courtesy of Diese Steine, page 393.



Baptism group, Felsenbach, 1926. The baptism was performed by Ältester Jakob A. Rempel. Rear, l.-r.: Hans Thieszen, Isaak Derksen. Front, seated: Heinrich Dueck, Jakob Regehr, Gerhard Klassen. Photo from P. Derksen, Es wurde Wieder ruhig, page 24.

"It is indeed," father insisted.

"Run!" they shouted, and he did.

Three shots were fired, all narrowly missing him.

Because we had no other horses I set out on foot to see what had happened to our father, to find out if he was still alive. I had just reached the nearby hill when I saw him coming slowly toward me. Mother had prayed with us children and our prayers had been answered. Thank God our father had not been murdered.

#### Disease.

The civil war raged on. We were always afraid of losing our lives. Our family was also visited by the dreaded typhoid fever. Except for me and my sister Katharina, the entire family came down with it. Jakob had been married only a short while when his wife, Neta (nee Froese) died of it.

Many of my siblings married during these years. Aron married Sara Penner from Blumenhof. Maria married Sara's brother, David. Henry took Anna Froese as his wife and Liese married Jakob Bartel. Peter married Margareta Braun of Steinau. As I mentioned earlier, both Peter and his wife were murdered in 1919. They had been married only from May to December. Brother Jakob was a widower for a time but later married Helena Krahm from Schöndorf. Katharina, Anna, Susanna, Agatha and I were still at home.

#### Acknowledgement.

Extract from Peter (Isaak) Derksen, *Es wurde wieder ruhig. Die Lebensgeschichte eines mennonitischen Predigers aus der Sowjetunion* (Winnipeg, 1989), pages 9-19, chapter two, "Dance of death and suffering of civil war", translated and edited by Dr. Peter Pauls, University of Winnipeg.



With the civil war, the Bolsheviks paved the way for unimaginable atrocities. In Orcha in 1918 a Polish officer was hung and impaled by the soldiers of the surrounding Red Army. From Stephane Courtois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus (PiperVerlag, München, 1998).

## The Flight to Moscow, 1929

"Flight to Moscow, 1929: An Act of Mennonite Civil Disobedience,"

By Colin Neufeldt, 11620-32nd A. Ave., Edmonton, Alberta, T6J 3G8 (Note 1) (See also Colin Neufeldt, "Cleansing the Countryside, The Dekulakization of the Soviet Mennonite Community 1928 to 1933," in Preservings, No. 13, pages 6-9).

### Introduction.

It is not very often that a story about Mennonites makes it to the pages of *The Times*, *Frankfurter Zeitung*, and *The New York Times*, but that is what happened in the fall of 1929 when newspapers around the world published articles on the plight of thousands of Mennonites who had descended upon Moscow in a last-ditch attempt to emigrate from the Soviet Union.

Not surprisingly, the Soviet government did not appreciate the international attention that it received as a result of this Mennonite flight to Moscow, and did all that it could to quell the ongoing press coverage. The Soviets were not successful, however, and stories about Mennonites in Moscow continued to appear in the international press for weeks. The flight to Moscow received such international interest that diplomats and leaders from the USSR, Germany, Canada, and other North and South American countries became involved in a game of high stakes diplomacy that very nearly jeopardized the already fragile relations between the Soviet Union and the West.

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"The flight to Moscow received such international interest that....the USSR, Germany, Canada, and other North and South American countries became involved..."

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### Socializing the Countryside.

What drove thousands of Mennonites to flee to Moscow and culminated in an international incident? It was the socio-economic and political turmoil unleashed by Soviet leaders throughout the country in 1928 and 1929. Some of these leaders thought that the policies of encouraging limited forms of capitalism, private trade of grain and other commodities, and noninterference in the affairs of the countryside during the years of the New Economic Policy (1921-27) had gone on too long, and had prevented socialism from taking hold in the countryside. Radical, perhaps even brutal programs that would collectivize and industrialize the USSR more rapidly were what was needed, they argued.

There were also other "official" reasons to justify the use of force to create thousands of collective farms, as well as industrial and military projects: 1) the war scare of 1927 -- a pervasive fear of imminent attack by neighbouring capitalist states; 2) the perception that industrialization in the USSR lagged far behind that of countries in the West; and 3) the misguided belief that the country was

being held hostage by *kulaks* (more prosperous peasants) who were hoarding grain to the detriment of starving workers in the cities. In the opinion of some Soviet authorities, it was the *kulaks* -- those peasants who regularly employed labourers, owned a wind or water mill, agricultural machinery, a cow or a horse -- who were sabotaging government efforts to socialize the USSR.

Industrializing and collectivizing the country, therefore, entailed "dekulakizing" *kulaks* -- that is, dispossessing them of their property and eliminating them from the countryside. Although "dekulakization" did not officially commence as a government policy until 1929, state officials began implementing dekulakization measures such as excessive tax assessments and the expropriation of *kulak* grain, property and livestock without compensation in the early months of 1928. By mid-1929, the arrest, imprisonment, exile, and in some cases, execution of *kulaks* was becoming commonplace in some regions of the country.

For a variety of reasons, the Mennonites fell neatly into the category of *kulaks*. Their successful farming and business operations, their participation in the *Selbstschutz* and the White Army during the Civil War, their support of the German occupation of Ukraine in 1918, their religious beliefs, and their strong ties with relatives in the West, made the Mennonites ideal candidates for dekulakization. By the early months of 1928, Mennonites of every social and economic class, including



"An environment of daily death, finally left peasants in Charkow indifferent. Because of repeated cases of cannibalism, the government printed a sign 'To eat one's child is an act of barbarism.' With his collectivization of the countryside, the 'great attack' against the peasantry, Stalin applied the weapon of hunger--above all--against the Ukraine. Stalin's politics cost an estimated six million people their lives." From Stephane Courtois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus (PiperVerlag, München, 1998).



The first sacrifices of the famine instigated by the political policies of the Stalin government were the children. From Stephane Courtois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.

Mennonite ministers, were characterized as enemies of the state, and subjected to high taxes and the expropriation of their property and crops.

To keep the pressure on, the government enacted new laws which prohibited the religious instruction of children in the schools, limited the public observance of worship services on Sundays and religious holidays, and increased the taxes on church buildings exponentially. When Mennonite congregations

failed to pay their taxes or broke the new laws their churches were expropriated and converted into community halls, sports facilities, barns, or granaries. Eventually, more and more Mennonite ministers, farmers, and community leaders were arrested, imprisoned and exiled to work camps scattered throughout the USSR (Note 2). As one witness of this campaign wrote on May 5, 1929: "This was Easter Sunday. The day before yesterday it was reported from Regional Headquarters at Melitopol that 60 Mennonite families had been exiled, including the well-known Mennonite leader, Philip P. Cornies of Ohrloff....," (Note 3).

**"Mennonites of every social and economic class, including Mennonite ministers, were characterized as enemies of the state....."**

How did Mennonites try to avoid the dekulakization and exile process? Some allied themselves with the state, believing that this would protect them from the dekulakization process. This prompted some Mennonites to seek positions of employment at various levels of the state bureaucracy, including the village soviets, the Committees for the Village Poor, the Regional Land Division Committees, the District Soviet of People's Deputies, and the Communist Party. Other Mennonites handed over their property to the local authorities and signed on as members at the small, but growing number of col-



*"Kulaks were exiled to the Soviet Gulag where they laboured in prison camps and slaved in massive public works projects. The construction of the Baltic/White Sea Canal was a project which rivalled those of Pharaoh. Many thousands of unfortunate souls lost their lives during the construction. From Courois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus."*

lective farms that were being established across the country (Note 4). There were also Mennonites who moved to outlying territories of the Soviet Union, such as the regions near the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, where the persecution of *kulaks* was not as intense and where escape to the West had been possible for some Mennonites.

The most effective way to avoid dekulakization, however, was to emigrate to the West. In the past, emigration had proven to be very popular; between 1923 and early 1927, for example, over 17,000 Mennonites emigrated from the Soviet Union, usually with the assistance of Mennonite organizations such as the *Verband der Bürger Höllandischer Herkunft* and the *Allrussischer Mennonitischer Landwirtschaftlicher Verein*. In mid-1927, however, the government severely restricted the flow of emigres when it

slashed emigration quotas and decreased the number of medical inspectors who could determine those medically fit to leave the country. It also whipped up anti-emigration sentiment in the Soviet press by publishing stories of those who were allegedly disappointed with their emigration experience or by portraying those who wanted to leave as " betrayers of the fatherland." Such a story appeared in the newspaper *Das Neue Dorf*: it described a Mr. Sawatzky who, after moving from Chortitza to Canada in June of 1927, complained that emigrating to the West "had been the most disastrous mistake of his life," (Note 5).

In 1928-29 the government implemented additional measures that reduced the likelihood of re-

ceiving an exit visa. One such measure was increasing the bureaucratic red tape that came with an exit visa application. To obtain a visa, an applicant and his family first had to receive permission from both the village and regional soviets. The application was then scrutinized by the tax, police, and military authorities to ensure that all of the applicant's taxes were paid, that there were no outstanding police records, and that the applicant was exempt from military service. Further approval had to be obtained from the secretary of the regional soviet, the foreign office, and in some cases other government departments. If and when an application was approved, the applicant had little time to waste, as the visa expired three months from the date that it was issued.

Fees were also required with every visa application. In 1927 and 1928, Mennonites complained that authorities doubled or tripled the cost of exit visas every few months or so; the cost of an adult visa could range between 5 and 50 rubles in the spring of 1928, 100 rubles in the summer of 1928, 220 rubles by the spring of 1929, and as much as 400 rubles in the fall of 1929. Since every prospective emigrant over 16 years of age required a visa, many large families found it impossible to raise sufficient funds to purchase visas for all of their members.

As one Mennonite from Fürstenwerder (Molotschna) lamented, the price of the exit visas for his family totalled a thousand rubles, an amount that he could hardly afford (Note 6). Because most visa applications were rejected [less than 1,360 Mennonites emigrated from the USSR between April of 1927 and January of 1929] and the application fees never refunded, many Mennonites did not bother to reapply. Those that did reapply were required to forward an additional 20 rubles with each new application. Eventually, many Mennonites came to view applying for an exit visa as a waste of both time and money.



*Moscow 1936. Stalin, between (from left to right) Chruschtschow, who displayed his prowess during the oppression of the Ukraine; Schdanow, who started the campaign against "World Capitalism" after the war; Kaganowitsch, Minister of Railroads; Wororschilow, Minister of Defense; Molotow, Stalin's most important deputy, who died in 1986; Kalinin and Marshal Tuchatschewski. Second row: Malenkov (2), Bulganin (5) and Jelena Stassowa (8), who represented the Comintern. From Courois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

### Fleeing to Moscow.

What sparked a renewed interest in the emigration option were the actions of a small group of Mennonite families, most of whom were from the *German Raion* near Slavgorod, Siberia. In the late fall of 1928, approximately 30 families, who had been unsuccessful in obtaining exit visas from local officials, decided to liquidate their assets and farming operations. In the early months of 1929 they proceeded to Moscow with the intention of submitting their visa applications directly to the Peoples' Commissariat of the Interior ("PCI"). Within a few months more families from Siberia and the Orenburg area travelled to Moscow. Upon their arrival, the families registered with the local militia, acquired bread ration cards, and found shelter in dachas and apartments in the suburbs of the capital. Many immediately went to the Russian-Canadian Trade Association ("RUS-KA-PA"), which provided would-be emigres with emigration advice and prepaid steamship tickets purchased by relatives in the West. They were also advised to submit their visa applications to the Ministry of the Interior, but they eventually discovered that this brought no results.

Acting out of frustration and taking an enormous risk, the Mennonites in Moscow eventually forwarded their petitions to emigrate to the All-Russian Central Executive Committee ("ARCEC"). To everyone's surprise, ARCEC approved some of the exit visa



*"In 1928, at the time that Stalin put forth his first five year plan, a new category of 'enemies of the people'--the 'experts' accused as 'saboteurs', arose in the murderous process. The purpose was to instil loyalty to his 'Second Revolution'. The accuser (standing right), Nikolai Krylenko, was himself liquidated in 1938." From Courrois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

applications. Shortly thereafter, however, ARCEC announced that no one else would be allowed to go abroad. This was simply unacceptable for the Mennonites, and on the advice of Peter F. Fröse (an influential leader in the Mennonite emigration movement), representatives of the Mennonite families directly petitioned Petr G. Smidovich (a Presidium member of ARCEC and Chairman of the Committee to Assist the Nationalities of the Northern Borderlands) for permission to emigrate.

In the early summer of 1929, three Mennonite representatives were invited to meet with Smidovich to discuss the matter. After hearing their submissions, Smidovich promised to present the representative's request for



*Felix Dzerschinsky, founder of the Tscheka and head of the GPU/NKWD until his death in 1926. He imposed his stamp on the Soviet regime. From Courrois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*



*Berija submitting his vote during a phoney "democratic" election. After Manschinske, Jagoda and Jeschow he controlled the political police and played a major role in the oppression - until his elimination in 1953 through his rivals Chruschtschow, Malenkow and Molotow. From Courrois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

visas to the Presidium of ARCEC and to the Peoples' Commissariat of Foreign Affairs ("PCFA"). Before doing so, however, he specified that the Mennonite representatives would have to submit a list of those Mennonites who had arrived in Moscow on or before June 1, 1929. When the representatives insisted on submitting a list of all the Mennonites who were currently in Moscow, including those who had arrived after June 1, 1929, Smidovich replied that this was unacceptable. He reiterated that he only wanted the names of those who had arrived in Moscow by the June cut-off date; he also warned that anyone who came to the capital

after this date would not be allowed to leave the country. Following Smidovich's instructions, the representatives submitted a list of names, which reportedly included between 60 and 70 Mennonite families (Note 7).

In late July, word came from the authorities that the Mennonite families on the list had been granted passports. The families could leave the USSR after they had paid the required passport fees (220 rubles per adult), undertaken the mandatory medical examinations, and obtained permission from the Ministry of Labour to travel abroad. On July 29, the families were taken to Moscow's Perlovka Railway Station where they boarded a train that took them to Leningrad. Here they were examined by a doctor and their possessions searched for illegal foreign currency. Two days later the refugees boarded a ship destined for Germany. On August 5, the families arrived at Hamburg where they were welcomed by an official of the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR). On August 7 the Mennonite families embarked on the ocean steamer, *Montcalm*. The families disembarked at Quebec City after 10 days at sea and began a new life in Canada.

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*"By late summer of 1929 thousands of Mennonites in Siberia, Orenburg, Ukraine, the Crimea, the Caucuses, the Kuban, Ufa, Memrik, Samara, and the Trakt.....[were] leaving for the Soviet capital."*

News of this group's success spread like wildfire across Mennonite settlements throughout the Soviet Union. By late summer of 1929 thousands of Mennonites in Siberia, Orenburg, Ukraine, the Crimea, the Caucuses, the Kuban, Ufa, Memrik, Samara, and the Trakt were selling, giving away, or abandoning their property and livestock, and leaving

for the Soviet capital. Panic gripped some Mennonites, and the plan to go to Moscow to obtain a visa became so popular that the populations of some Mennonite villages dropped by seventy percent almost overnight. By September 18, over 250 Mennonite families had taken up temporary residence in Moscow's suburbs, and by the end of the month the number of families had increased to 400. At the same time, other German-speaking groups, including Lutherans, Catholics and Evangelicals, heard of the success of the Mennonite flight to Moscow and left for the capital in the hope that they, too, would obtain exit visas. (Note 8)

The rising tide of Mennonite refugees converging on Moscow forced the government to act at the end of September. Secret police (the "GPU") were dispatched to follow the refugees, warn them that no additional exit visas would be granted, convince them that they should immediately return to their home villages, and arrest those seen in the vicinity of government departments and foreign consulates. They also took Mennonite refugees into custody when they arrived at Moscow railway stations or exchanged Soviet currency for Canadian and American dollars.

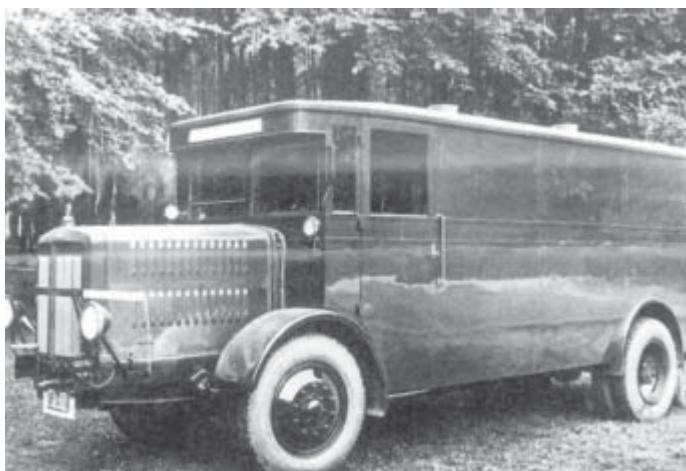
Back in the villages, Soviet authorities took steps to stem the flow of Mennonites leaving for the capital: local officials refused to issue travelling passes to Mennonites, dismantled the homes of those who had already left for the capital, prohibited all sales of livestock and property, forced Mennonites to sign statements promising that they would not depart for Moscow, and arrested Mennonites who were suspected of planning to leave their villages. Some authorities even took Mennonites hostage if they were caught travelling to the capital. Despite these measures, German-speaking families continued to migrate to the suburbs of Moscow.

In mid October the population of refugees in Moscow included 875 Mennonite families, 150 Lutheran families, and 60 Catholic families. By the third week of October there were over 1,000 Mennonite families in Moscow, and in early November the population of German-speaking refugees had swelled to over 13,000, of whom 9,120 were Mennonites, 2,481 were Lutherans, 95 were Baptists or Evangelicals, and 743 were Catholics.

Many of the refugees who arrived in Mos-



*Assembly for the purification of the Party. The 'Tschistka', later an instrument of ideological control of the party, served as forums for the denunciations, which could target anyone in their workplace. The forced self criticism which resulted from such accusations were usually followed by imprisonment, several days or even weeks later. From Courrois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*



*"These vehicles, 'Black Ravens', as they were called by Moscowites, transported the prisoners from the Lubjanka Prison to Lefortovo or Butyrka. Often these vehicles were disguised as bakery trucks. 'Russia fell into pain and misery. The innocent were allowed to die under the footsteps of others, in prison transports', wrote poet Anna Achmatowa, whose son was held in prison." From Courrois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

cow had very little money in their pockets. Few could afford the exorbitant rental accommodations, so many families opted to live in unheated dachas in the suburbs, such as Klyazma, Dyangarovka, Taninka, Perlovka, Tarasovka, and Pushkino. Those families that did rent apartments often shared their accommodations with others in order to reduce expenses; one family complained that 24 people were forced to share a cramped, two-room apartment. Escalating Moscow rents (between 45 and 150 rubles an apartment per month) and bread prices (between 11 and 32 rubles a kilogram) made life extremely difficult, and forced some to resort to panhandling to eke out an existence.

The refugees received no sympathy from their landlords, many of whom demanded that apartment rents be paid at least six months in advance. Refugees were also arrested on

trumped-up charges after Moscow residents allegedly complained to police that the refugees were eating more than their share of available bread. There was even infighting between Mennonite and non-Mennonite groups, as some of the non-Mennonite refugees complained that the Mennonites were only looking after themselves at the expense of others. To make matters worse, there was an outbreak of disease in the refugee population: some contracted trachoma, while others, particularly children, were afflicted with measles.

In mid-October, Professor Benjamin H. Unruh, a leading spokesman for Soviet Mennonites in Germany, sought permission to provide aid to those in Moscow, but the Soviet government denied all offers of help from the West. As a result, the refugees often had to depend on the charity of fellow Soviet citizens, including humanitarian groups such as the "Tolstoyans," to make ends meet (Note 9).

**"The continuous flow of refugees into Moscow...despite government threats of punishment, infuriated Soviet officials."**

The continuous flow of refugees into Moscow and their persistent refusal to leave the city, despite government threats of punishment, infuriated Soviet officials. Some came to view the huge influx of Mennonites to the city as the work of a counter-revolutionary organization bent on embarrassing the government. What also infuriated authorities were attempts by the refugee group captains -- often unmarried Mennonite men who regularly wore disguises to avoid arrest -- to contact diplomats at the German embassy and provide them with updates on the desperate circumstances of the refugees. To prevent such liaisons from taking place, the government dispatched the GPU and German-speaking members of the Komsomol to monitor and arrest refugees found at the railway stations, the German embassy, the RUS-KA-PA building, and government offices.

#### Kiel/Swinemünder Groups.

What convinced many Mennonites in Moscow that their strategy for procuring exit visas would work was the success story of a

group of refugees later referred to as the "Kiel group." In early October, a group of Mennonite refugees living in the Dyangararovka suburb organized a committee for the purpose of meeting with government officials and securing permission to emigrate. Under the leadership of H. Martins from Crimea, the committee presented requests to emigrate to Grigorii E. Zinoviev (a Presidium member of the Central Union of Consumer Societies), as well as to Mikhail I. Kalinin (President of the Russian Republic and the USSR).

**"...the group subsequently staged a demonstration by Mennonite mothers and children in....President Kalinin's office on October 24.**

These initial requests fell on deaf ears, but on the advice of a Communist party member who had befriended one of the refugees, the group subsequently staged a demonstration by Mennonite mothers and children in the waiting room of President Kalinin's office on October 24. They also mailed petitions with the signatures of approximately 700 refugees to six government departments. The petitions stated that "If for any reason the government authorities were to decide against the granting of passports, there would be nothing left for the refugees to do but to gather as a mass of suffering people in Red Square, the centre



*The infamous Lubjanka prison, Moscow, 1925, located on Lubjanka Street, hence the name. Lubjanka was a prison for political prisoners and saboteurs. It was also the seat of the WCK (All-Russian Special Commission), commonly pronounced "Tscheka". Prisoners were processed here as well as judged. In the basement cells, the GPU/NKWD, the successor to the Tscheka, exterminated enemies of the people with a shot in the neck. The building became a symbol of the horror and barbarism of the Communist Regime. From Courois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

of Moscow, and there die before their very eyes." On the petition envelopes, it read: "From the group of Mennonites of Dyangarovka, one of the suburbs of Moscow occupied by them."

Within days, the group received news from the PCI that exit visas would be available, but under certain conditions: 1) all of the required documents for emigration be assembled for the Ministry, and 2) each adult passport be purchased at the sum of 400 rubles. Without reservation or delay, the group delivered the required documentation and paid officials over 75,000 rubles for the visas. The group also submitted passenger lists, each with the names of between two and three hundred families,



*Moscow, October 1929. The family of Nikolai Reimer during their attempt to escape to Canada. L.-r.: Hans Penner (brother to Mrs. Reimer), Nikolai Reimer, daughter Katja, Mrs. Reimer, nee Agatha Penner, and son Nikolaj. Like most other Mennonites imprisoned in Moscow in 1929 Nikolai Reimer was held in the Butyrka Prison. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Adina Reger, Weißenthurm, Germany. Rev. Nikolai Reimer's memoirs were published in 1990 under the title Nur aus Gnaden, 160 pages (see Pres., pages 139-140).*

to facilitate the transport of the refugees to the border. By the end of October, eight lists that collectively included the names of over 10 000 refugees were forwarded to the PCI.

Late in the evening of October 29 and without warning, the GPU appeared at the residences of the families on the first list. They directed the refugees to go to the nearest train station that very evening; those who failed to be at the station by midnight would be left behind, and would leave on another train. Some of the refugees packed their belongings immediately and walked to the train station.

Other refugees, however, questioned whether the GPU order to leave immediately for the station was to be taken literally, and delayed leaving for the station until the next morning. There were

still others who did not go to the station for a variety of reasons: some were waiting to be paid their wages, others did not want to depart until all of their relatives were with them, and still others claimed that their laundry was too wet to be packed for the long trip ahead.

All except one of the families who walked to the station the night of October 29 were loaded onto six rail cars; the family that did not embark the train stayed behind because one of its members did not show up at the station on time. On the side of the rail cars was the word, "*Переселенцы*" ("resettlers").

In the early morning of October 30, the train carrying both refugees and military personnel left the station, and after some delays, travelled to Leningrad where the refugees were unloaded and transported to an administration building at the *Sovtorgflot* (Soviet Merchant Marine). After being fed and disinfected, the families were examined by a doctor who determined who was fit to emigrate. One of the families was forced to stay behind because of a sick child.

On November 1, the remaining refugees, 323 in all, were then taken to the ocean liner, *Dzerzhinskii*. Just before the refugees were to board the ship, the GPU unexpectedly began interrogating and searching some of the refugees. Although the GPU threatened to detain some of the refugees for trumped-up offences, all of the refugees were allowed to embark. Finally the ship left Leningrad and sailed for Kiel, Germany, arriving there on November 3, 1929.

Back in Moscow, some of the families who did not get a seat on the first train that left Moscow were told that another train would soon take them out of the country. On October 31, this group (later referred to as the

"Swinemünde group") boarded a train at Perlovka station, and was then transported to a railway siding just outside of Moscow. Here the refugees waited, all the while being taunted by local officials who threatened to send the refugees back to the capital if they did not pay them conduct money.

Eventually the train arrived in Leningrad, where officials confiscated the refugees' money and kept them under guard at Sovtorgflot for almost a month. In mid-November, officials told the refugees that the government had changed its mind: the refugees would not be allowed to emigrate and they would be shipped back to their home villages. They also warned the refugees that they would not receive any more food unless they paid the sum of 3,000 rubles immediately.

As it was impossible for the refugees to raise this kind of money, they asked their captors if a few of them could leave Sovtorgflot to search for food. Five men were allowed to leave. Taking watches, musical instruments and other valuables with them, some of the men immediately went to the Leningrad markets where they sold their valuables and purchased food for the group; others found their way to the German consulate in Leningrad and advised the foreign diplomats of their desperate circumstances.

The consulate provided financial assistance to the men, and began negotiating with Soviet authorities to secure permission for the refugees to emigrate to Germany. On November 29, the refugees were released from their locked confines and allowed to board the ship, *Alekssei Rykov*. Although the ship was delayed in leaving Leningrad -- it ran aground after departure and was temporarily immobilized after the chain for the anchor wrapped around the propeller -- it eventually reached Germany on December 2, 1929. The refugees initially stayed in Swinemünde, where German officials first heard of their incredible escape from the USSR (Note 10).

#### Diplomacy.

Why did the Soviet government allow the Kiel and Swinemünder groups leave the USSR? It was largely because of behind-the-scenes, international diplomatic negotiations that these groups, as well as thousands of other Soviet Germans, were able to cross the Soviet border in late 1929. Com-

affairs, notwithstanding pleas from the German Red Cross that Germany should help these refugees to emigrate to the West. As late as August 1, for example, the German Ambassador in Moscow publicly opposed any efforts to help the refugees, arguing that they would be both futile and harmful to Soviet-German relations.

What changed the minds of German authorities were appeals for intervention by Professor Unruh and Dr. Otto Auhagen (the German agricultural attache in Moscow). In early October, both men independently advised authorities in Berlin of the desperate circumstances facing the refugees, and pointed out that intervention on behalf of the refugees would not become a burden for Germany since their passage overseas to Canada was already guaranteed. To get a first hand understanding of the situation, Auhagen visited some of the Mennonite refugees in Moscow. On one of his first tours on October 11 he took along two German and three American news correspondents who dispatched stories on the plight of the Moscow refugees to the outside world (Note 11).

The German government responded immediately to the breaking news story on the Moscow refugees. On October 12, it dispatched Consul Dienstmann to Moscow to meet with Boris E. Shtein (secretary-general for the Soviet delegation to the Preparatory Commission and Arms Limitation Conference), to convince the Soviets that it was in their best interest to allow the refugees to emigrate. To Dienstmann's surprise, Shtein and the Soviet government put up little resistance to the proposal, and promised that all of the refugees, including those in transit to Moscow, would be permitted to leave, but on two conditions: another country must be prepared to accept the refugees and their departure must take place without further delay.

The Soviet authorities' unexpected support for Germany's proposal for emigration was due to a number of factors: 1) Soviet officials were caught off guard by the huge influx of refugees into Moscow in such a short period of time and they wanted to clear the refugees out the capital as soon as possible to prevent it from becoming a haven for the more than one million Soviet Germans who also wanted to leave the country; 2) the attention that the refugees



*Maria, daughter of Nikolai Reimer, died in Moscow on October 25, 1929. She was 10 months old. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Adina Reger, Weißenthurm, Germany.*

ing to the rescue of these refugees was Germany, one of the few countries that was still on relatively good diplomatic terms with the USSR at this time.

When Germany first learned that Mennonites were arriving in Moscow in the spring and summer of 1929, it initially followed its "hands-off policy" vis à vis Soviet domestic



*"Sketches of exiles/deportees, illustrate the lives and death of the millions who were deported. This sketch is by Euphrosina Kerniowskaja, 'Arrival at the camp for reindoctrination' in Siberia, April 1943. A horrible fate awaited those Mennonites who were not able to escape from Moscow in 1929. The postcard face presented by Soviet propaganda was not born out by the horrible realities." From Courois, Das Schwarze Buch des Kommunismus.*

received in the foreign press made the Soviet government uncomfortable, and it wanted to get the story of the refugees out of the headlines as soon as possible; and 3) the Soviets believed that allowing the refugees to emigrate, rather than forcibly returning them to their villages or exiling them to gulags in Siberia (as proposed by the PCI) would generate some much needed goodwill in the West.

When the German Foreign Office learned that Soviet authorities were on side, it immediately went to work to make preparations for the departure. The German plan for the refugees -- which was based on Professor Unruh's assurances that the earlier emigration agreements between the Canadian government, the CPR, and Mennonite relief organizations were still intact -- contemplated that most, if not all, of the refugees would resettle in Canada with the help of the CPR. It also assumed that there was adequate financial support for the plan, given Professor Unruh's advice that he had contacted the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization ("CMBC") and the Mennonite Central Committee ("MCC") in the United States to arrange for credit agreements with the Canadian government and the CPR to facilitate the emigration of a large number of people. German officials also received promises from the CPR representative in Hamburg that immigrating to Canada was still possible and that there were more than 3,000 credit passes available for the refugees at the RUS-KA-PA office in Moscow. To demonstrate their own commitment to the plan, the German government promised that each refugee who arrived in Germany would receive personal identification cards which guaranteed the return of any emigrant to Germany should he or she be deported from Canada (Note 12).

Back in Moscow, the Soviet government took steps to speed up the emigration process. It waived the payment of standard passport fees, and requested that the German embassy immediately issue 1,000 visas, with more visas to come at a later date. The Soviet plan was to ship between 800 and 1,000 refugees by boat from Leningrad, and more than 5,000 by train through Latvia to Germany.

When the Soviet government eventually provided confirmation that the refugees could leave, the German government asked Canadian authorities to accept the refugees on compassionate grounds. Without waiting for a formal reply from the Canadians, both So-



*After the Revolution in the village, 1933. Voroschilow, Stalin and Kalinin at the International Congress of Kolkhoz workers. Photo from Dmitrij Wolkogonow, Triumf i Tradgedija ("Triumph and Tragedy") (Moscow, 1990).*

viet and German authorities started the exodus process. On October 27, the German embassy in Moscow received word that the refugees were ready to be moved out. Within short order, the refugees were divided into transport groups, with the first contingent (the Kiel group) leaving by train on October 29 in the dead of the night so as not to arouse the suspicion of Moscovites.

#### Canada.

The success of this exodus was contingent upon Canada being the final destination for the refugees. What temporarily derailed this exodus was a statement, issued by the Canadian government on October 28, that rising unemployment made it impossible for Canada to receive any refugees until the spring of 1930. Caught off guard by Canada's announcement, the German government immediately advised its diplomats in Moscow not to issue any more



*1929, at the Moscow airport "Tuschinskij". Front middle, Gorkij (a writer), Voroschilow and Stalin. Photo from Wolkogonow, Triumf i Tradgedija*

visas until the problem of finding a host country for the refugees had been solved. Until that happened, Germany refused to accept responsibility for the refugees. Soviet authorities, on the other hand, were both embarrassed and infuriated by what had happened, and immediately issued orders to halt all transports of refugees.

On October 30, Shtein advised the Germany embassy of the Soviet position on these developments in plain and unmistakable terms: "The Soviet government had no interest in what happened to the emigrants later. It was only concerned that the encampments of these unemployed and half-starved individuals in the environs of Moscow be dissolved. The trains were fired and ready to leave; if they do not journey to the west

they will be routed to the east." (Note 13).

Shortly thereafter, the PCFA warned Germany that unless a host country immediately came forward to accept the refugees, their forcible deportation to their home villages or alternatively to the gulags would begin in a few days -- immediately after the anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution.

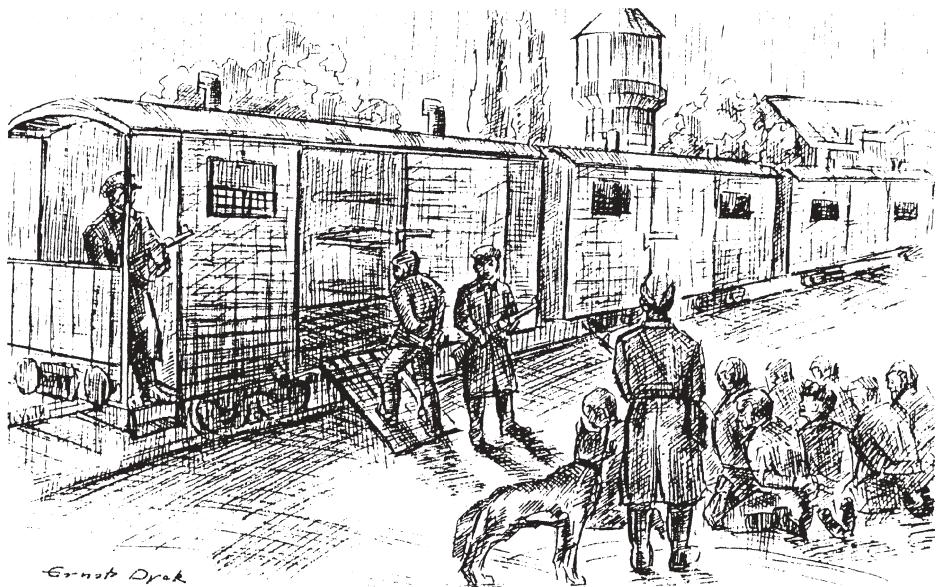
Germany recognized that the Soviet threat was not a bluff, but it was also not prepared for these developments. Germany wanted to get the refugees out, but with more than a million Germans already out of work, it did not feel that it had the financial wherewithal to support the refugees for an indefinite period of time. What also alarmed German officials were the unconfirmed reports that there were more than 80,000 Soviet Germans in transit to Moscow. How could Germany possibly afford to take in so many people? Not surprisingly, the German government appealed to Soviet officials to delay the deportation until it could evaluate its position and make a final decision.

If Germany was hoping for help from the Canadians to deal with this predicament, it was misguided. On October 30, Canadian officials advised the German government that it would accept a limited number of refugees with German personal identification cards, but only on the condition that the support and maintenance of the refugees would be guaranteed by a third party. Ottawa made it clear, however, that such guarantees could not come from CMBC, since it had ongoing financial guarantees for the 21,000 or so Soviet Mennonites who had emigrated to Canada in previous years. The CPR subsequently announced that no refugees would be transported

until all outstanding issues pertaining to their entry to Canada, and the requisite financial guarantees had been resolved.

The tide of public opinion in Canada was also increasingly turning against the refugees, particularly in the western provinces where some premiers announced that they were opposed to allowing any more refugees into the country. A number of North American Mennonite leaders, including P. C. Hiebert (chairman of MCC) and David Toews (chairman of CMBC), did their best to rally public support for their coreligionists stranded in Moscow. In early November, for example, Toews lobbied the Canadian Prime Minister, provincial premiers, cabinet ministers, as well as senior bureaucrats in Ottawa to permit the refugees to come to Canada. These efforts, however, were largely unsuccessful, and by mid-November it was clear that the Liberal government in Ottawa, which was about to embark on an election in a country now affected by the Depression, would not permit any more émigrés into the country unless it first had the approval of the western premiers. Such approval would not be forthcoming from James T.M. Anderson and John E. Brownlee, the premiers of Saskatchewan and Alberta. They repeatedly voiced their opposition to allowing more German-speaking settlers into their provinces, notwithstanding reports from Ottawa that the refugees would be exiled to Siberia if Canada refused their request for asylum. It was now the western premiers, not the federal government, dictating Canada's immigration policy and determining the fate of the Moscow refugees.

The opposition of the western premiers was the primary reason why the Canadian government refused to grant the refugees entry into the country. But throughout the country there were other reasons why the refugees were not welcome: 1) growing opposition in western Canada to a further "Mennonite and Hutterite invasion" of immigrants; 2) public outrage over the Friesen-Braun trial, one of the longest and most contentious criminal cases in Saskatchewan (Note 14); 3) a com-



*Transport of prisoners usually occurred in the most brutal manner. Pacifist Mennonites were herded like animals by machine gun toting guards, with police dogs ready to attack anyone deviating from the column. They were shipped in cattle cars (called the "Red Cow"), see John B. Toews, Pres., No. 13, page 18. Sketch by Ernest Dyck, from Gerlach, Die Russlandmennoniten (Kirchheimbolanden, 1992), page 143.*

mon misperception that the refugees were not law-abiding citizens and that that was the reason why the Soviet government wanted to deport them; 4) a widespread belief that the Mennonite refugees would be a burden on Canadian society; 5) a fear among western Canadian farmers that more industrious Mennonites would take the best land and be more productive at their expense; 6) a poor Canadian harvest during the summer of 1929; and 7) economic uncertainty as a result of the recent crash of the stock market on October 24.

What also hurt the refugee cause were the actions of some Mennonites from Dalmeny, Saskatchewan, who sent a telegram to the premier of Saskatchewan voicing their opposition to allowing more Mennonites émigrés into the province and encouraging the premier to press on with his anti-immigration policies. The premier used the telegram as

evidence that even Canadian Mennonites were opposed to allowing their own kind into the country (Note 15).

Despite the public backlash in Canada against the refugees, Toews was successful in obtaining one concession from federal and provincial authorities. The governments agreed that the CPR and the Canadian National Railway (CNR) could each sponsor 200 families from Europe. While the CPR applied its share of the quota to the Moscow refugees, the CNR could only promise to take a few Mennonites as it had previously committed a large share of its quota to non-Mennonite refugees in Germany.

#### Germany.

Back in Germany, the government was eventually forced to stop dithering on the problem of what to do with those still in Moscow.



*Alexander J. Fast, C. F. Klassen and B. H. Unruh(right), possibly 1928. Dr. Benjamin H. Unruh played a key role in saving 5671 souls, from death or even worse, the hell of the Soviet Gulag. He is well known among Russian Mennonites for his scholarly work Die niederländische-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert (Karlsruhe, 1955), 432 pages. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Life, January, 1960, page 9.*

Newspaper articles on the Soviet threat to exile the refugees had solidified German public opinion decidedly in support of the refugees, and with upcoming municipal elections, the German cabinet realized that it would be politically expedient to do all that it could to prevent their exile. On November 8, the cabinet forwarded \$150,000.00 to the Canadian government as a guarantee that the Moscow refugees would not become a financial burden on Canada. German officials also announced that they would provide similar guarantees for refugees who were not eligible to emigrate to Canada, but did qualify to emigrate to other countries such as Brazil.

In response to Germany's offer, Professor Unruh assured the German Foreign Office that the Mennonite communities in Europe and North America would provide most of the financial and material aid that the refugees required. At the same time, Unruh worked together with German relief agencies such as the German Red Cross, the Central Executive Committee of the Agency for Home Missions, and the Chief Executive Committee of Christian Worker's Association to organize *Brüder in Not*, an association with the single purpose of providing aid to ethnic Germans waiting in Moscow.

With the help of the German press, these relief organizations raised over 890,000 Reichsmarks from ordinary Germans who themselves were now facing severe economic hardship as a result of the stock market crash. *Brüder in Not* also received large quantities of food, clothing, and money from ethnic Germans living outside Germany. The German rail-way system transported their donations free of charge.

To demonstrate its own commitment to the refugee cause, the German government announced on November 18 that it was setting aside six million Reichmarks for the stranded refugees. Although the Ministry of the Treasury later reduced this amount by two and a half million Reichmarks, the German cabinet recognized that its contribution had to be as generous as the contributions of its citizens. Germany's President, Paul von Hindenburg, made a personal donation of over 200,000 Reichsmarks, and promised to write a note of thanks to anyone who donated a 1,000 Reichmarks or more to the cause (Note 16).

#### **Exit Visas.**

While this huge fund-raising campaign was taking place in Germany, the Soviet government was preparing to evacuate the refugees from Moscow. On November 15, Maxim M. Litvinov (a member of PCFA and head of the



*Butryka Prison, the largest prison in Moscow, 45 Nowoslobodskaja Street, as it looks today. It was a central distribution prison, referred to as "SISO". Here investigations and interrogations were conducted, and then the accused were sent on to appropriate facilities. Most average political prisoners (as opposed to high profile leaders) were held here. This is where Machnov as well as the Mennonites imprisoned in Moscow in 1929 were held.*

Soviet delegation of the Preparatory Commission for the Geneva Disarmament Conference) warned that deportation could not be postponed any longer. In response, the German embassy requested that no further action be taken until the next German cabinet meeting. Soviet authorities, however, had run out of patience, and by November 24, ordered over 8,000 refugees to be forcibly transported to their home villages or to the gulags.

When news of the arrests in Moscow reached Germany, public outrage forced German authorities to demand that the Soviet government stop the deportation process immediately. To continue to do so, they warned, would seriously jeopardize Soviet-German relations. The Council of People's Commissars ("CPC"), however, did not initially take the German warning seriously, and announced that any previous agreements to allow the refugees to emigrate were now rescinded.

It defended the action taken, stating that the Soviet Union had no alternative but to act in the way that it did, given that the refugees, now cold and hungry, would not survive in the city with winter fast approaching. The CPC also blamed the German press for the deportations, arguing that German newspapers were exploiting the story of the Moscow refugees for propaganda purposes, which the Soviet Union could no longer countenance.

The Soviet explanation for the deportations infuriated the German foreign office. Without delay, Germany's foreign minister countered with a warning that if the USSR wanted to maintain normal relations with Germany, it could no longer refuse Germany's request to allow the refugees to emigrate. The import of Germany's threat was not lost on Litvinov who advised that he would ask the CPC to reconsider its earlier decision. After a meeting on November 25, the CPC announced that the remaining refugees in Moscow, who now numbered less than 6,000, would be allowed to leave for Germany immediately.

It was Germany's refusal to blink during brinkmanship diplomacy with the USSR that ultimately facilitated the massive evacuation of the remaining refugees in Moscow. For most of these refugees, the news that the Soviet government had granted them permission to leave did not immediately inspire joy and relief, but rather guarded optimism, as they did not know whether the Soviets would remain true to their word. The refugees also quickly discovered that leaving the USSR came with a price, as each refugee family was required to pay 55 rubles to obtain the necessary "family certificate" that would entitle them

to cross the Soviet border.

Between November 29 and December 11, at least nine trains transported refugees across the Soviet border into Latvia. When they arrived in Riga, those refugees who had been taken ill were brought to the local hospital for treatment, while the healthy were welcomed by Latvian authorities, German diplomats, newspaper correspondents, and the Red Cross, who provided food, clothing, and books. After participating in hastily held thanksgiving services, they bordered trains destined for camps in Germany (Note 17).

#### **Refugee Camps.**

A total of 5,671 refugees (including the Kiel and Swinemünde groups) reportedly crossed the border into Germany. Of this group, there were 3,885 Mennonites, 1,260 Lutherans, 468 Catholics, 51 Baptists and 7 Adventists. Most refugees were transported to the military barracks in Hammerstein, before being moved to refugee camps at Prenzlau and Mölln. Upon their arrival at the Hammerstein camp, the refugees were first welcomed by German officials, the German Red Cross, and other charitable organizations.

#### **Moscow Street, Steinbach.**

The Mennonite 1929 flight to Moscow and the subsequent defiance of the Communist regime was an act of heroism and civil disobedience which will stand for all time in the annals of Western Civilization and in the history of freedom loving peoples.

In 1947 the newly incorporated Town of Steinbach changed the name of Moscow Street to McKenzie Ave. Instead of being toasted and honoured for their heroism, the recent arrivals living along the street had apparently been made to feel embarrassed for their background. See *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 98-99.

—The Editor.

They were subsequently moved to a segregation area where they had to bathe and be disinfected; they then were allowed to move into other areas in the camp where they were issued identification cards, examined by doctors, fed, and housed in stables and barracks. The Hammerstein camp was divided by a wire fence, intended to prevent the spread of disease between the new arrivals and those refugees who had already been processed. Notwithstanding the fences, there were outbreaks of scarlet fever, pneumonia and other diseases throughout the camps. The worst was a measles epidemic which claimed the lives of at least 150 refugee children (Note 18).

Disease and death afflicted a number of the families in the camps, but in comparison to their existence in Moscow, life in the camps was generally quite good. The refugees were encouraged to form an Executive Committee to help German officials manage the camps, maintain discipline, organize workshops and daily activities for the adults, and establish kindergartens and schools for the children. The Executive Committee also ensured that the refugees assisted in meal preparation, helped with the laundry, and cleaned and repaired their barracks. The daily routine at the camps was punctuated by births and deaths; almost 50 babies were born at the Mölln camp alone, the majority of whom regrettably died before the emigration process was completed.

To help pass the time, the refugees organized reading rooms, Sunday schools, and church choirs; they also held worship services, including an ecumenical Christmas service where a Catholic priest, a Lutheran pastor, and a Mennonite preacher each delivered messages. They also received distinguished guests, including Dr. Auhagen, who visited the camps in late January, 1930. Another highlight for many refugees was when they were permitted to leave the camps and move about on the streets of nearby villages and cities where they toured local historical sites and points of interest.

Although international interest in the refugees died down not long after they settled in the camps, they continued to garner much attention in Germany. German citizens demonstrated their ongoing generosity by forwarding "love gifts" (which included letters from German school children, money, clothing, and food) to those in the camps. German farmers and businessmen sent petitions to the German government offering employment to the refugees, and students from Berlin came to the camps to entertain the refugees with lectures, stage plays, and games.

Not all of the refugees appreciated the generosity of the German people, however. Shortly after their arrival in Germany, a few refugees sent petitions to the Soviet government and the Communist Party of Germany requesting permission to return to the USSR. These petitions were immediately granted by Soviet authorities, who made arrangements for the disenchanted to return home, and published newspaper reports of their homecoming for propa-

ganda purposes. When hearing of these defections, the other camp refugees immediately disassociated themselves from those planning to return to the USSR, and collectively prepared a formal letter to the German government expressing their deep gratitude for the country's help and generosity (Note 19).

While the refugees adjusted to life in the camps, the German government was preoccupied with locating a final destination for them. It immediately ruled out the United

approval from Professor Unruh, but not from MCC in the United States. MCC was concerned about Brazil's compulsory military service laws, and therefore considered the country unsuitable. It regarded Paraguay as a better choice, and announced that it would facilitate the settlement of at least 100 families to that country. In short order, MCC raised over \$100,000 to finance their proposal, and subsequently purchased land near Menno Colony in Paraguay.

Before emigrating to Brazil, Paraguay, or Canada, most refugees were moved to a refugee camp in Mölln. Here they were subjected to a battery of medical examinations conducted by German and foreign doctors. In the case of those wanting to emigrate to Canada, for example, the refugees had to pass at least three medical exams, two of which were conducted by Canadian physicians and a third by a German doctor. Similar examinations were required for those intending to go to Brazil, but what further complicated the Brazilian emigration process was the intervention of the Brazilian Immigration Commissioner, who took it upon himself to personally select those refugees suitable for his country. For those willing to emigrate to Paraguay, on the other hand, an absence of restrictions as to health conditions or the number of refugees made it a viable alternative for those who did not qualify to enter Canada or Brazil.

While the paperwork to emigrate was being processed, the population in the camps grew from 5,671 to 5,990 individuals (Note 20). Most refugees left Germany for their new host countries by the summer of 1930. Some refugees, however, lived in the camps for several more years. As late as November 1932 there were still at least 70 refugees living at the camp in Mölln.

Where did the refugees eventually settle? According to one report, 2,533 refugees (of whom approximately 1,200 were Mennonites) emigrated to Brazil. Almost all of the refugees who went to Paraguay -- 1,572 in all -- were Mennonites. More than a 1,000 of the 1,344 refugees who went to Canada were Mennonite. There were also a handful of refugees who either stayed in Germany or went to other countries: 458 refugees stayed in Germany and settled near Mecklenburg and in East Prussia, while at least 6 went to Argentina, 4 to Mexico, and 4 to the United States.

It did not take long for the refugees who settled in South America to put down roots. In Paraguay, for example, the Mennonite refugees established the settlement of Fernheim (eventually consisting of 13 villages) in the Chaco near the Menno Colony; one of the these villages was named after Dr. Auhagen in appreciation for all that he did in Moscow. The refugees who travelled to Brazil established settlements in the municipality of Blumenau near Hammonia, as well as the settlement of Auhagen (also named in honour of Dr. Auhagen) on the Stolz Plateau. What made the difference between survival and starvation for many of the refugees in Brazil was



*Field Marshall von Hindenburg, later President of Germany, helped the Russian Mennonites fleeing from Moscow in 1929 with a personal gift of 200,000 Reichs Thaler and through diplomatic intervention. Photo from Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 87.*

States, which had harsh immigration restrictions and had already filled its quota of immigrants from the USSR. It also did not like the idea of relocating the refugees in Europe, even though the idea was popular in some areas in Germany and the Russian-Mennonites had a proven track record of establishing successful settlements near Frankfurt, Molligen (East Prussia), and Mecklenberg. Canada had already agreed to take approximately 200 families, but where would the rest go? German officials quickly set their sights on South American countries, and in particular Brazil -- a nation that had already accepted more than a half a million German immigrants. The German government solicited the advice of Professor Unruh in its negotiations with the Hanseatic Colonization Society of Brazil. Unruh had a very low opinion of South American countries, but he recognized that the country that was his first choice -- Canada -- could no longer be counted on in this crisis. Having a high regard for European immigrants, Brazil advised that it was willing to take a large proportion of the refugees.

When Germany announced its proposal to send the refugees to Brazil, it received tacit

the material and financial aid provided by Mennonites in Holland. In gratitude for the assistance provided by the Dutch Mennonites, the refugees named both a colony and a settlement "Witmarsum," after the birthplace of Menno Simons, the founder of the Mennonite religious movement.

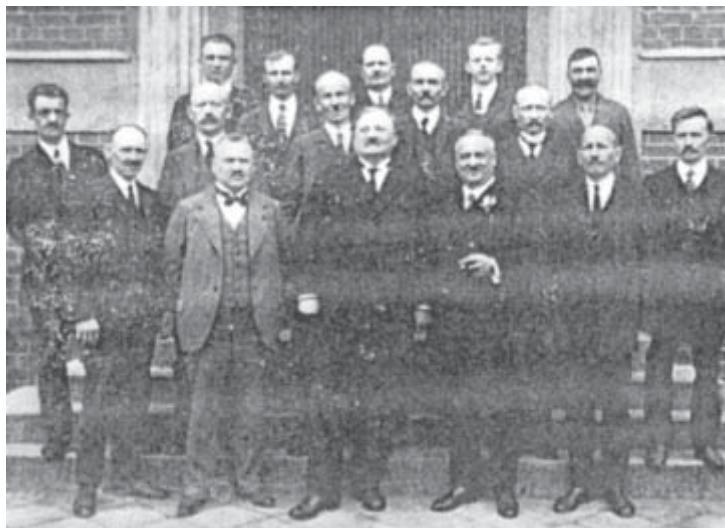
#### **Deportation/Exile.**

What happened to the 8,000 refugees who did not reach Germany? In early November, not long after the Canadian government announced its "wait-until-spring" ultimatum, the GPU began arresting Mennonite men who did not have papers to indicate that they officially registered with the local militia. Viewing the Mennonites as the instigators of this debacle, the GPU initially singled out Mennonite leaders for arrest. This was the experience of H. Unruh, who, after working unceasingly on behalf of the refugees and participating in negotiations with Soviet officials and German diplomats, was denied an emigration visa and arrested in early November.

Within short order, Lutheran, Baptist, Evangelical, and Catholic refugees were also taken into custody, and by mid-November, more than a 1,000 people had been arrested. In their roundup of the leaders, the GPU put the German embassy in Moscow under surveillance and incarcerated anyone who dared to approach the embassy. Despite enormous risks, relatives of incarcerated refugees used disguises and other means of subterfuge to pass their pleas for help to the diplomats at the embassy. Unfortunately, these diplomats could provide little assistance to those who were imprisoned, and advised them that they could not interfere in the activities of the GPU. They did, however, succeed in enabling Dr. Auhagen to continue his visits to refugee groups scattered throughout the city.

On November 15 and 16 the GPU conducted mass arrests; during the following week they began transporting some refugees to their home provinces and exiling others to gulags in remote regions of the country. To accomplish this task, the GPU duped many refugee families into believing that the government had granted them permission to emigrate, and that the cattle and coal cars onto which they were being loaded would take them to Germany. The GPU also made a practice of separating refugee men from their families and holding them in overcrowded Moscow jails (including the infamous Lubyanka and Butyrka prisons) for days and even weeks at a time.

While in custody, the men had all of their personal property and money confiscated, and were ordered to sign statements indicating that they wanted to return to their home villages voluntarily. Many of those who initially re-



B. H. Unruh (centre, front) with representatives of the German government and Mennonite refugees from Russia, 1930. Photo courtesy of Mennonite Life, January, 1960, page 9. This issue was a special commemorative issue for B. H. Unruh (1881-1959).

fused to sign the statements were transferred into locked, unventilated rooms that were either heated until they were unbearably hot or chilled until they were freezing cold. Others were not given food for days on end or had pistols held to their heads in order to make them more compliant. Under such conditions it did not take long for most men to put their signatures to the statements. Those who continued to refuse to sign the statements were interrogated and then brought before a prosecuting judge who decided who should be released, deported, or incarcerated for a longer period of time (Note 21).

With the signed statements in hand, GPU officials transported the men to Moscow railway stations where they were loaded into cattle and coal cars, usually at gunpoint. The GPU then informed the refugee families that their husbands and fathers were at the railway station, and that they must go to there immediately if they wanted to be reunited with them. Some women and children went passively with the authorities to the stations; other women, however, refused to go, fearing that the GPU was tricking them and that their husbands were still in jail. Many of the women who did not cooperate, including those who were ill or pregnant, were beaten by GPU officers, bound hand and foot, and then loaded into vehicles destined for the nearest station.

The beatings were so intense for some women and children that they died before reaching the railway station. As one Mennonite from the Crimea witnessed: "[The GPU]...came into the living quarters, loaded the families into trucks and drove them to the railroad station. Women whose husbands were jailed bravely resisted this maneuver, for they did not want to go without their husbands. Four women suffered a tragic death through these tactics of the GPU. One of the women threw herself out of the truck three times. She would not go along without her beloved husband. As punishment she was

given three lashes across her back with the sword by the GPU soldier. With that she went along on the truck with the others. We, too, were loaded by force into a car and taken into the station. Very soon thereafter the freight cars were pulled into the station and we were pushed into them. There were 42 persons who crowded into this freight car. And on the platform of the station there was an immense crowd of people! An incredible spectacle unfolded before our eyes: children were crying, old people were moaning and groaning and weeping. The distress and the disaster which befell us couldn't possibly be described in human language!" (Note 22).

The GPU used at least eight trains, with as many as 20 cattle cars apiece, to evacuate the refugees

from the capital. As many as 60 refugees were crammed into a single, unheated car, and most were given little, if any food provisions. In sub-zero, November temperatures, refugees died in transit to their home villages or to work camps located in places such as Vologda, the Solovets Islands, Siberia, and the Ural Mountains. Other refugee family members were separated from each other, with the parents on one train headed one way, and their children on another train going in the opposite direction (Note 23).

In describing the carnage that resulted from the brutal roundup and evacuation of refugees, one Mennonite wrote: "Very often the women and children were bound like cattle, thrown onto trucks, loaded into stock cars, and then sent back. Those from the Crimea travelled nine days, those from Siberia for three weeks in severely cold weather.... As a result of this use of brute force many children suffered broken arms and legs. Pregnant women gave birth on pavements or on trucks and both mother and child died within hours. Many became mentally and emotionally ill. Those sent back in spite of promises had nothing to eat, no roof, etc., so that they all faced hunger and possible death. There was horror and terror of which only he has an idea who understands Russian conditions. Many families were torn asunder....About 8,000 are sent back," (Note 24).

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"...the women who did not cooperate, including those who were ill or pregnant, were beaten by GPU officers, bound hand and foot..."

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The trip on the railcars was particularly hard on the children. One participant reported that the bodies of 35 dead children were unloaded onto the platform at one of the train stations en

route to the Mennonite villages in Ukraine. On a train bound for Siberia, another Mennonite observed that parents unloaded the corpses of 60 children from cattle cars at one of the stations. Many of those who survived the journey would eventually die in the exile settlements where they and their families were forced to work as slave labourers.

And what happened to Mennonite refugees who came back to their home villages? A small number immediately attempted to return to Moscow, where they joined a few Mennonite families who avoided arrest and continued to live in the capital in the hope that the government would eventually allow them to emigrate. Most of these Mennonites were forced to return to home villages by the spring of 1930, but there were more than 130 Mennonites who were given permission to emigrate.

Most returnees saw no point in going back to Moscow, however, and tried to make the best of a terrible situation. Many returned to discover that their homes had been looted or destroyed while they were away, and that they could no longer farm their land and therefore had no means of making a living. Although some returnees received assistance from their neighbours, most were not allowed to buy food, even though the Soviet government had promised to supply them with bread on their return.

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**"Pregnant women gave birth on pavements or on trucks and both mother and child died within hours."**

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Consequently, they faced immediate poverty and starvation. Their names were also put onto government black lists that branded them as "counter-revolutionaries" and "agitators for emigration" who threatened the security of the Soviet state. Their punishment for trying to escape from the USSR included exorbitant taxes, the extraction of gold teeth from their mouths, eviction from their property, imprisonment, exile, and in some cases, execution. During the brutal dekulakization campaigns of the early months of 1930, when the majority of the country's kulaks were dispossessed of their property and exiled, many of the first people to be subjected to these measures were those who had fled to Moscow in the fall of 1929.

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**"There was horror and terror of which only he has an idea who understands Russian conditions."**

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Ironically, some of the local officials who carried out these heinous measures against the Mennonite refugees were themselves Mennonites who had opted to work for the Soviet state rather than pursue the possibility of emigration in Moscow (Note 25).



*The German consul, Dr. Stive, welcomes the Mennonite refugees in Rega. Left, Ältester Johannes Janzen, one of the leaders of the refugees. Gerlach, Bildband, page 86. See also Willms, Toren Moskaus. page 87.*

### Conclusion.

The inhuman treatment of the refugees after their forced evacuation from Moscow was the culmination of a two-year period of increasingly oppressive Soviet measures that crippled the Soviet Mennonite community economically, politically, religiously, and socially. Throughout 1928 and 1929, escalating grain quotas and taxes, expropriation of property, aggressive atheistic propaganda campaigns, the closure of churches, and the arrest, imprisonment, and exile of Mennonites only confirmed the community's suspicions of the government's present and future intentions. It is not surprising, therefore, that so many Mennonites fled to Moscow when they thought that there was a possibility of leaving the country.

While it is true that the Mennonites who left their villages for Moscow were not contemplating involvement in a large-scale act of resistance against the Soviet state, those who reached Moscow participated in one of the most remarkable and successful acts of civil disobedience in the history of the Soviet Union.

When so many Mennonites and other ethnic Germans from almost every region of the country converged on Moscow at the same time, and when they persistently refused to leave the Soviet capital despite the threat of arrest and deportation, these Mennonites showed that individuals, powerless in themselves, could together present a significant force which the Soviet leadership found difficult, and sometimes impossible, to control.

The Mennonites also demonstrated that a group of people with international support could force the Soviet Union to back down and permit thousands of its citizens to emigrate to the West. In essence, the Mennonites who participated in the flight to Moscow demonstrated that civil disobedience could be both possible and effective in the Soviet Union.

It is impossible to speculate whether more Mennonites would have been allowed to leave the USSR if they had been better organized from the outset. That the Mennonites did not initially present themselves to Soviet authorities as a serious political threat, but rather as a group of disaffected German-speaking families who wanted to join their relatives already in the West, was one of the chief reasons why the Soviets did not consider them to be a serious threat until after the international press

made their plight known to the West.

This likely proved to be advantageous for the refugees: had they posed a serious political threat before the international spotlight was focussed on them, Soviet officials would probably have lost their patience sooner, and taken steps much earlier to forcibly clear the refugees out of the city before the West knew what was going on. Given the circumstances in which the refugees found themselves, they were remarkably successful.

In this respect, the flight to Moscow also highlighted the important roles that the international press and diplomats can play in determining the destinies of ordinary citizens. Much of the credit for facilitating the emigration of more than 5,600 Moscow refugees to the West must be given to Dr. Auhagen, Professor Unruh, the German government and the German diplomats in Moscow. It was Dr. Auhagen who first brought western reporters to the Moscow suburbs, it was Professor Unruh who kept the story of the Moscow Mennonites on the agenda of the German government, and it was the German government and its diplomats and their behind-the-scenes negotiations with Soviet authorities that finally compelled the Soviet authorities to allow the refugees to leave.

At the same time, however, Germany is also partially to blame for the deportation and exile of the remaining 8,000 or more Moscow refugees. Had the German government not made assumptions as to how the Canadian government would respond to a request to receive the refugees, and had it not called the distribution of passes to a halt and waited for a host country to come forward, more Soviet transports of refugees would have probably left for the West rather than for the gulags in the East.

But Germany is not entirely to blame for what happened. The Canadian government and the League of Nations must also accept some responsibility for the deportation and exile of the refugees. In failing to communicate its intentions to the German government and in allowing western premiers and public opinion to determine its emigration policy, the Canadian government left both the refugees and the German government in the lurch. As for the League of Nations, it was hardly seen or heard during this affair, demonstrating once again its ineffectiveness in dealing with such matters.

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**"....those who reached Moscow participated in one of the most remarkable and successful acts of civil disobedience in the history of the Soviet Union."**

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### Observations.

Some other observations are also in order. There is no doubt that the flight to Moscow was one of the reasons why Mennonites in some areas of the USSR were dekulakized and exiled in disproportionately larger numbers in the early 1930s when compared to other groups (i.e. Ukrainians, or Russians). In the

paranoic world of Stalinist Russia, any demonstration of a desire to emigrate from the country was tantamount to direct opposition to the state and its policies. That so many officials in the countryside viewed the Mennonites as ethnic Germans only fuelled their paranoia, making it easier for them to brand the Mennonites as spies for the West bent on sabotaging the great Soviet experiment. Dekulakization, imprisonment, exile, or execution were the only ways to deal with enemies of the state, such as these non-Slavic minorities who attempted to leave mother Russia.

Finally, the actions of the Mennonites during the flight to Moscow support an argument that I have advanced before: that Soviet Mennonites were not just passive victims of a brutal regime, but active participants in the historical drama that overwhelmed the USSR at this time (Note 26). All too often, historians have portrayed Soviet Mennonite history as though it were a martyrology – an account of Mennonites exclusively as the victims of terror and oppression.

The flight to Moscow demonstrates that Mennonites were not only passive victims, but also active players in the historical events that encompassed them. They initiated the flight to Moscow, they pled their case before Soviet leaders at the highest levels, they demonstrated in the office of the Soviet President, they actively sought the assistance of officials at the German embassy, and they defiantly resisted the GPU who came to arrest and exile them. There were even Mennonites who joined forces with the state, and arrested and exiled refugees upon their return from Moscow. To argue that Mennonites were only passive participants or victims could not be farther from the truth.

There is one question that this paper has not answered, and that is whether the Mennonite flight to Moscow precipitated Stalin's call on December 27, 1929 -- for "the liquidation of the kulaks as a class" -- an announcement that initiated his government's most brutal campaign to dekulakize, exile, and execute millions of Soviet citizens in the early months of 1930. Was it mere coincidence that Stalin's announcement followed immediately on the heels of the international debacle and massive exile that arose from the flight to Moscow? An analysis of Stalin's memoirs and personal papers would be required to answer such a question, but that is the topic of a research paper for another day.

#### Endnotes:

Note 1: The author thanks Lynette Toews-Neufeldt for her help and suggestions in preparing this article.

Note 2: Colin Neufeldt, "The Fate of Mennonites in Soviet Ukraine and the Crimea on the Eve of the 'Second Revolution,'" (M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1989), pp. 41ff, 64ff.

Note 3: H.J. Willms, ed., *At the Gates of Moscow*, trans. George Thielman (Yarrow, B.C.: Columbia Press, 1964), p. 38. See also *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* [hereafter: *MR*], 26 June 1929, p. 12.

Note 4: Zaporizhzhia Regional State Archive, Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine [hereafter: ZSA]: collection #235, inventory list #3, file 40 [hereafter: ZSA:235/3/40];

ZSA:1415/3/1; ZSA:235/4/111; ZSA:235/1/787; ZSA:235/4/104; ZSA:235/1/730; ZSA:235/4/113; ZSA:235/1/779; ZSA:235/1/753; ZSA:235/1/751; ZSA:235/1/767; ZSA:235/2/54.

Note 5: B.B. Janz, "Was andere über die Not der Mennoniten unter dem Bolschewismus in Russland gesagt haben," B. B. Janz Collection, Centre of Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, Manitoba, p. 64. Note 6: *MR*, 1 May 1929, p. 12.

Note 7: B. H. Unruh, "Bericht über die katastrophal Lage der mennonitischen Ansiedlungen in Russland und die Massenflucht der Kolonisten," 29 October 1929, p. 1.

Note 8: John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets and Mennonites* (Newton, Kansas: Faith and Life Press, 1982), pp. 130ff; *MR*, 13 November 1929, p. 11.

Note 9: B. H. Unruh, "Die unter den deutschen Kolonisten Russlands, besonders unter den Mennoniten, ausgebrochene Auswanderungsangst," 10 October 1929, p. 1; *Der Bote* [hereafter DB], 4 December 1929, p. 4; *MR*, 27 November 1929, p. 12.

Note 10: *DB*, 29 January 1930, p. 4; *MR*, 4 December 1929, p. 2; Willms, *At the Gates of Moscow*, pp. 56ff.

Note 11: Benjamin H. Unruh, *Fügung und Führung in mennonitische Welthilfswerk, 1920-1933*, (Karlsruhe: Heinrich Schneider, 1966), pp. 27ff; Otto Ahagen, *Die Schicksalswende des russlanddeutschen Bauerniums in den Jahren 1927-1930* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1942), pp. 79ff.

Note 12: Harvey Dyck, *Weimar Germany & Soviet Russia 1926-1933* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1966), pp. 165ff; Frank H. Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, (Altona: Canadian Mennonite Relief and Immigration Council, 1962), pp. 232f.

Note 13: Twardowski to the Foreign Ministry, November 2, 1929 4562/E160278-80 as cited in Dyck, *Weimar Germany & Soviet Russia: 1926-1933*, p. 168.

Note 14: What initially was a \$5,000 debt dispute between Isaac Braun and Henry P. Friesen became a criminal trial after it was alleged that Braun and his witnesses had committed perjury in court. The Saskatchewan Court of Appeal eventually found Braun guilty of fabrication of evidence, sentenced him to five years in prison, and deported him to the USSR in October 1933.

Note 15: B. H. Unruh, "Bericht III: zur Massenflucht der deutsche-russischen Bauern (vom 24.X--23.XI)," 23 November 1929, pp. 2ff; *The Times*, 14 November 1929, p. 13; Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 247.

Note 16: *MR*, 11 December 1929, p. 4; *MR*, 4 December 1929, pp. 2f.

Note 17: *MR*, 26 February 1930, pp. 1ff.

Note 18: Sigfried Kraft, "Die Russlanddeutsche Flüchtlinge des Jahres 1929-1930 und ihre Aufnahme im Deutschen Reich," (Ph.D. dissertation: Martin Luther Universität, 1939), p. 58.

Note 19: Willms, *At the Gates of Moscow*, pp. 125ff, 160ff, 171f; Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, pp. 257ff.

Note 20: In the early months of 1930 the German government continued negotiating with the Soviets and was successful in securing emigration visas for additional Mennonite refugees. By November 1932, the number of refugees in German camps had grown: 152 babies were born in the camps, 323 latecomers arrived from the USSR, Iraq, and Iran, and 132 additional relatives were allowed to leave the USSR and join their families in Germany. There were also 288 refugees who had died in Germany. Willms, *At the Gates of Moscow*, p. 103.

Note 21: *MR*, 1 January 1920, p. 6; *MR*, 25 December 1929, p. 13.

Note 22: Willms, *At the Gates of Moscow*, p. 143.

Note 23: *MR*, 29 January 1930, p. 30; *DB*, 25 December 1929, p. 4.

Note 24: "Letter from Heinrich Martens," 29 December

1929, as cited in Epp, *Mennonite Exodus*, p. 236.

Note 25: Colin Neufeldt, "The Fate of Mennonites in Ukraine and the Crimea During Soviet Collectivization and the Famine (1930-1933)," (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Alberta, 1999), pp. 41ff.

Note 26: Colin Neufeldt, "Shifting Paradigms: Soviet Archives and the Reinterpretation of Soviet Mennonite History," in *Knowing and Interpreting our Past: Alberta's Mennonite History*, ed. Judith Rempel, (Calgary: Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta, 2000), pp. 49ff; Colin P. Neufeldt, "Through the Fires of Hell: The Dekulakization and Collectivization of the Soviet Mennonite Community (1928-1933)," *The Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 16 (1998), pp. 1ff.

#### Errata

We welcome and encourage readers to take the time to draw errors and omissions to our attention. This can be done by a letter or fax to the editor (1-204-326-6917), or call the editor at 1-204-326-6454/e-mail delplett@mb.sympatico.ca. If you want to write but do not want your letter published, please so indicate. We will try to publish as many letters as we can. We really appreciate any and all assistance with corrections and clarifications as this is critical to the process of documenting our history.

1) Errata, *Preservings* No. 18, page 85. Telephone call from John D. Kornelsen, 175 Woodhaven St., Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1K6, Aug. 30, 2001, advising that the property (SW33-6-6E) where the photograph of Gerhard G. Kornelsen, Watkins dealer, was taken belonged to Abram K. Wiebe (1881-1951), whose grandson Dick Wiebe is still farming on this yard. On the photo G. G. Kornelsen is talking to Mr. Abr. K. Wiebe (left). View toward the east. Cf. *Pres.*, No. 5, page 6; No. 8, Pt. 1, page 48-9; No. 13, page 63.

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If you are no longer interested in receiving *Preservings*, or if you have moved and your mailing address has changed, please drop us a line. With each issue we lose a number of readers who have moved and have not bothered to send in their new addresses.

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*Hanover Steinbach Historical Society*  
**ANNUAL MEETING- JAN. 26, 2002**

Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) and Banquet of the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society.

**DATE: Saturday, Jan. 26, 2002**

**PLACE: Mennonite Village Museum, P.T.H. 12 North, Steinbach**

**5:00 p.m. MEMBERSHIP MEETING** - The H.S.H.S. will hold its Annual General Meeting (A.G.M.) - election of directors, President's report, financial statement, etc. All members are encouraged to attend.

**Banquet and Entertainment**

**6:00 p.m. RECEPTION** - Come early. Enjoy the fellowship - get acquainted!

**6:30 p.m. BANQUET** - Enjoy a traditional Mennonite meal of farmer sausage, Verenike, fried potatoes.

**7:30 KEYNOTE SPEAKER** - Professor J. Denny Weaver speaks on "American Civil Religion, Christ-centered Theology, Sept 11. and Post-Modernism."

**8:30 ENTERTAINMENT** - The "Heischraitje & Willa Honnich" have entertained 1,000s across North America with their lively country/bluegrass stylings and "flat-German" humour.



*J. Denny Weaver, Professor of Religion and successful author, Bluffton College, Ohio.*



*The talented "Heischraitje & Willa Honnich". L.-r.: Gerald and Dennis Reimer, Grant Plett, Ray and Pat Plett. Photo from Pres., No. 13, page 25.*

**TICKETS \$20.00**

Come out, meet your friends, and enjoy a stimulating and entertaining evening. Tickets available from HSHS board members Orlando Hiebert 388-4195, Ernest Braun 388-6146, Ralph Friesen 284-8347, and D. Plett 326-6454 or call The Mennonite Village Museum 326-9661.

## President's Report

by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

### Musings.

As a Winnipeg resident, I don't have much day-to-day involvement with Hanover-Steinbach. I'm not in touch with this territory in the same way as the previous HSHS president, Orlando Hiebert was--and still is. Orlando not only would attend various historically related functions, he was directly connected with the land, as a farmer. My report will reflect the fact that my involvement and connections are more tenuous. This report might be better classified as musings with some sort of historical reference.

### Morning song.

I have begun the practice of singing a song each morning when I get up. It is always the same song: *Jesu, du allein*. My wife's family and I associate the words with my father-in-law, who died two years ago. His name was Paul Hofer. He spent most of his long life as a Hutterite, although he lived in Winnipeg for the last part of it. He knew hundreds of songs, I think, from the *Gesangbuch* used by the Hutterites. *Jesu, du allein*, was one of them. Perhaps it is a children's song; at any rate, the words are very simple. The first stanza, for example:

Jesu, du allein  
Sollst mein Führer sein  
Zeige selbst mir deine Wege  
Deiner Wahrheit schmale Stege  
Steh mit Kraft mir bei  
Dir zu wandeln treu.

I like this song for its humble recognition of our weakness and vulnerability as human beings, and its hope that the power and kindness of the Good Shepherd will be accorded to the speaker. I sing it in memory of Paul Hofer, who taught me of the comfort and beauty to be found in the old songs. And also in memory of my great-grandfather, Abram S. Friesen. I actually don't know if Great-Grandfather ever sang it; I only know that he used to wake up his household with a morning song as he made the fire.

### "Furst".

I have just finished David Bergen's novel *See the Child*, published in 1999. One of the "characters" in the novel is the town of "Furst," which is clearly based on the actual town of Steinbach. Neighbouring communities like LaBroquerie, St. Pierre and St. Malo also make appearances, but under their proper names. *See the Child* is wonderfully written--a moving story of a businessman in mid-life whose life changes direction when his teen-aged son dies.

I was curious to see how Bergen, a Winnipegger with connections to Steinbach, would describe the community. The community, however, is not his main interest, so the "Furst" in the novel remains only vaguely out-

lined, without defining landmarks or community characters. Maybe there is something about today's Steinbach, with its well-kept business fronts on Main Street and its neat suburbs, that makes it interchangeable with any other community of similar size in North America. That would not be true, of course, of the village in its early years, built upon the old Mennonite village plan transplanted from South Russia. Or even the town in which I grew up in the 1950s, with the H. W. Reimer store or the original Kornelsen house-barn, the Tourist Hotel, or the C. T. Loewen lumber yard, distinct landmarks of a unique place. As for the characters--they were at times almost bigger than life.



Paul Hofer (1906-99). "Endlich kommt er leise, Nimmt uns bei der Hand, Führt uns von der Reise, Heim ins Vaterland."

### Windmill.

It is gratifying to see that the windmill at the Village Museum has been rebuilt. I want to congratulate and commend all those who had the determination and vision to see this project through. The windmill also has significance for me because my ancestor, the afore-mentioned A. S. Friesen, was the one who owned the original mill first built in 1877. From today's perspective it is a little alarming that he was so unsentimental as to sell the mill two years after it was erected when he discovered there wasn't enough wind to power it consistently. When business and sentimental forces meet, it isn't hard to predict which will win. When survival is not such an immediate concern, we can afford to build monuments in honour of the past.

### Verstand und Vernunft.

After five years of study, I received my Master's in Marriage and Family Therapy degree from the University of Winnipeg, this past October. The MMFT program is run by the Interfaith Marriage and Family Institute. This is my second Master's degree, the first being granted in English Literature many years ago. All this learning would not have impressed Heinrich Balzer (1800-1846), a member of the Ohrloff "Grosse" Gemeinde in the Molotschna, who joined the Kleine Gemeinde in 1833. In



Abraham S. Friesen (1846-1916), Steinbach pioneer, windmill owner, mayor and entrepreneur. Photo courtesy East Reserve 125 Years (Steinbach, 1999), page 28.

his treatise *Verstand und Vernunft* (Understanding and Reason), Balzer wrote:

"Whatever belongs to higher learning brings forth nothing but sophistrey, unbelief, and corruption of the church; for 'knowledge puffeth up,' (1 Cor. 8:1). Reason gets its strength and sustenance from this learning, and soon simplicity is bound to be abandoned....Everybody knows by his own experience the tremendous difficulties in this denial of one's reason and intellectual autonomy, a denial so much needed for salvation, and yet rendered so hard by misunderstood education and enlightenment."

Balzer articulates a great truth: there is a way in which the "denial of one's reason and intellectual autonomy" is essential for salvation. To become an effective family therapist--in fact, to become a whole human being--it is necessary to experience the breaking of the container we call "ego". Our deepest understanding is not achieved with the intellect, but with the heart. You can take refuge in your head very easily in a university setting, but you can do so down on the farm, too. If Heinrich Balzer were alive, I would love to assure him that even in our secular universities, there are teachers of the heart. They have helped me on my pilgrimage to Zion.

# Editorial - My Personal War Diary

"My Personal War Diary," by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0 (e-mail delplett@mb.sympatico.ca) websites: "www.mts.net/~delplett" and "www.hshs.mb.ca".

## September 11, 2001.

The September 11, 2001, World Trade Centre bombing by Muslim terrorists, is an event none of us will ever forget. The constantly replayed images of 747s crashing into 110 storey skyscrapers, framed by a blue New York sky, burn their way into the brain. It is simply too sci-fi, way out of the box. Where McDonalds symbolizes the globalization of capitalism, 9/11 will forever represent the globalization of terror, at least non-State articulated terror.

Sept 11, 2001, may eventually be seen as the ultimate defining moment of post-modernism: the camel-riding terrorists, striking at the heart of the most sophisticated and powerful empire the world has ever known, destroying the very pride of its capitalist hegemony. In a moment the terrorists exposed the extreme vulnerability of a



*Osama bin Laden, the world's most wanted man. He is seen as a defender of the faith by millions of Muslims.*

high-tec, commercialized economy to a stunned world.

President George W. Bush spent the first day in seclusion. Apparently his advisors felt the terrorists might hijack another plane and execute a kamikaze manoeuvre midair against Airforce One.

New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, in the meantime, served as an "ersatz" President, touring the site (euphemistically named "Ground Zero") and holding impromptu news conferences. During that awful day, Mayor Giuliani gave face and voice to some kind of comprehension and understanding to the American public and an equally shocked world as to what had just occurred.

Coming back into the public eye the second day, President Bush was understandably overwrought. He vowed that the terrorists would be hunted down and hanged like bandits at high noon in a spaghetti western. With blustering, befuddled expression, Bush found his voice in the wording of the old wild-west poster: "Wanted, dead or alive" referring to bin Laden.

In the days following Sept. 11/01 the Pentagon disseminated information encouraging growing support for bombing Afghanistan. The American public was sold on war being assured their military was so sophisticated a few smart bombs on bin Laden's cave would obliterate him. Humanitarian concerns were addressed by the clever strategy of dropping some Christmas "Tutjes" with each load of bombs so that the local population would know how lucky they were to be bombed by a God-fearing, lovable Christian country like America.

## America at War.

President Bush and his cabinet quickly made a critical decision. This was not a criminal matter where justice was to be sought according to legal process and international law. Offers by the Taliban to deliver bin Laden to a neutral country while proof of his guilt was evaluated were brushed aside as nefarious devices.

President Bush opted to declare war, war against "he knew not whom". He threw down the gauntlet for the "free world". The mantra

sounded Biblical, a Holy Crusade, or was it an evangelical crusade, "you're either for us or against us."

Nations such as Pakistan, one of the largest Muslim nations, were forced to line up in the world coalition. It mattered not that President Muschariff was contending with a large Muslim population, raising the spectre of a coup by militants, and with it control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

The Bush who would be President but could not win the popular vote was now morphed by war (just like his Daddy) into the most popular President of all time. The man who only days earlier was mocked by late-night talk show hosts as being slowwitted, as a puppet manipulated by Vice President Cheney, or as somewhat predisposed to drink, now became the Sheriff saving the free world, or was it Christianity from the Terrorists or was it from the Muslims? I'm not sure "W" knew for sure.

In any case, President Bush declared war. He played well to his constituency, morphing an understandable desire for revenge into solid support for bombing somebody (if it didn't go on for too long). Quite apart from the fact that the U.S. was in the habit of dictating "its" terms to other nations and peoples, the 9/11 attacks were denounced as acts of calculated barbarism. "Cowards," Bush called them.

"Brave" U.S. military were soon dropping bombs from 30,000 feet and blasting missiles



*A map of middle Asia, showing Afghanistan in the middle, white. It is hard to believe that until a decade ago, over 100,000 Flemish Mennonites were living within 800 miles of Afghanistan in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and in the Omsk and Orenburg areas in Siberia. Over the last several years many of these fine folks have immigrated to Southern Manitoba. After decades of discrimination and oppression in the Soviet Union, these new immigrants are street smart and have already served notice that they will not tolerate the stereotyping and marginalization which Latin American returnees have endured for decades.*

from cruisers in the Persian Gulf. Hopefully there would not be too much collateral damage, the euphemism used to describe the killing of innocent civilians.

Nervous NATO allies invoked Article Five of their treaty which declared an attack against a member state to be an attack against all. This forced the U.S. to consult with the Allies before taking action, presumably giving them a chance



*Emaciated Afghanistan refugees in a refugee camp in Pakistan. World Relief organizations are warning of a human disaster with possibly millions of Afghans dying of cold and hunger. The U. S. has an outstanding record of abandoning people it has "liberated" once their own policy objectives and national interests have been met and satisfied.*

to add a word of caution should Bush decided to do something irrational, such as using nuclear bombs or chemical weapons against the Muslim world.

The stock market reacted. The shares of Corporations in the industrial-military complex went up, shares in the airline industry plummeted. All U.S. T.V. stations carried the slogan, "America at war" on their screens. Layoffs rippled their way through the economy, starting with the airlines and quickly spreading through the travel industry. The U.S. was in a Recession.

By the end of September, the U.S. response to the 9/11 incident (as it was euphemistically being called) had variously been dubbed as "Infinite justice" and as a "Crusade". The names were quietly dropped presumably after some kind soul in the Justice Department brushed up on a little history and the possibility that some Muslims (misguided as they were) might make an unintentional connection to medieval crusades to reconquer the Holy Land or even to the more modern crusades of Protestant Fundamentalists to impose their religious culture on the entire world.

#### Responses.

During his Sept. 11, 2001, appearance on CNN's "Larry King Live", the Rev. Jerry Falwell advocated the bombing of Afghanistan, notwithstanding the little detail that there was no evidence at the moment that the ruling Taliban had participated in the attacks. I had the sense that the Rev. Falwell would love to sit in that first B-52 whistling over Afghan territory waving a little American flag wherever he saw a sinister clump of bushes identifying another target for the bomber fleet to blast to kingdom come.

The American public morphed the Sept. 11, 2001 tragedy into an orgy of patriotism and reli-

gious fervour bordering on mass hysteria.

TV commentators repeated what seemed like trite wisdom, that the World Trade Centre bombings forever changed the world. What the bombings actually changed was the way Americans perceived the world. No longer could they see themselves as some kind of island or special race exempted by God from the horrible realities of war, terror, and natural disasters which routinely kill tens of thousands in the rest of the world.

Objective news reporting in the U.S. fell to previously unimaginable lows with major commentators like Geraldo Rivera interspersing their interviews with exclamations of "we'll get those bastards," etc. Even the usually irrepressible Bill Maher of "Politically Incorrect" was subdued. Late night comedy talk shows with hosts Letterman and Leno were cancelled.

Anyone questioning in even the slightest detail the wisdom of the U.S. response was imme-



*Gerhard Schroeder, Chancellor of Germany. Protestant Fundamentalists finally have their man Bush in the White House. But Flemish Mennonites had a Brandt and now a Schroeder in the Chancellery in Berlin, so maybe we're not out yet completely after all.*

diately silenced as unpatriotic. Saudi Arabian Prince Alwaleed bin Talal bin Abdel Aziz al Saud, was spurned by Mayor Giuliani when he attempted to donate \$10 million to aid victims of the WTC attacks. His suggestion "as a friendly ally" that "the US should reexamine its policies in the Middle East and adopt a more balanced stance toward the Palestinian cause" was evidently too much for grief-stricken Americans to handle.

The U.S. government hastily implemented a series of measures including airport safety, financial aid to the airline industry, security in public buildings, homeland defense, which in their totality will cost billions if not trillions of dollars.

October 26, 2001, the Pentagon approved \$200 billion for a new generation fighter aircraft for its military. Presumably "brave" American airmen would now be able to bomb third world backwaters from 40,000 feet instead of 30,000. The sad reality is that if the USA had spent even 10 per cent of the \$200 billion in 20 countries in the Middle-east in people-orientated development programs such as those operated by MCC and MEDA and other NGO's and land distribution reform among peasants, all of this would never have been necessary.

#### Mission Creep.

"Mission creep" is the process whereby military operations, like most human undertakings, take on a life of their own. Somehow the Taliban, read Afghanistan, has now become the target. Apparently if enough of those "evil" Afghans

could be blasted into kingdom come, the Taliban would see the error of their ways, repent, and deliver up the goods.

After four weeks of "smart" bombing the Taliban appeared to be strengthening its resolve rather than falling apart. In their minds these warriors were fighting for "their" God, country and freedom--usually fairly good incentives, even for "Christians".

Toward the end of October the bombing was intensified. The famous "bunker busters"--10 tons of TNT--were put into use, not to mention those powerful "daisy cutters". By the first week of November, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld boasted over 3,500 ordinances dropped. The



*Images of the two World Trade Towers crumbling to the ground in mid-Manhattan will haunt people for ever.*

Pentagon claimed that collateral damage was minimal with only the occasional Mosque and Red Cross centre being hit. In early November, Northern Alliance generals were complaining that the American bombing was not accurate enough. More than a million Afghans were now homeless refugees, many sure to die from cold and starvation.

American news channels quietly replaced the phrase "America at war" in the lower corner of the TV screen with a more modest, "America strikes back." The massaging of revenge had to take backseat to ensuring that the economy did not tank. Who wants to buy a new car or a new house, when you're staring at "America at War" all day.

October 28, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld announced proudly that the airwar had been won.

#### Attention Readers:

The editorial opinions expressed in the editorial and/or elsewhere in *Preservings*, are those of the editor alone and do not reflect those of the HSHS, its board of directors and/or membership.

This announcement would have sounded better coming from Crusty the Clown. Perhaps Rumsfeld didn't know that Afghanistan had no airforce.

By early November US ground forces were reportedly operating in Afghanistan, mainly behind the lines of their new allies, the Northern Alliance. It appeared that the role of "courageous" American soldiers would be more in advising rather than undertaking the nasty business themselves.

As of the beginning of November the prowess of the Northern Alliance still looked a bit spotty. Quite a few bunker busters would be required to put the opposing armies on a level playing field, no pun intended.

As of Nov. 2, Bill Maher was back (almost) to his usually sarcastic self. Much of US news reporting continued to be stilted and one sided. A highschool student in Fairview was suspended for wearing a T-shirt protesting US policy in Afghanistan. He was later reinstated.

During the first 60 days, American media did its best to imitate 1970s Soviet-style broadcasting: one got a taste of what it must be like to live in a country where there is only one "news" source and one "official" interpretation. By Nov. 7 members of the media themselves acknowledged that they had gone too far in abandoning the critical role of the press. Nov. 8, it was estimated that U.S. bombing is costing \$500 million per day.

#### Fundamentalism.

Jerry Falwell, among the leading gurus of American Fundamentalism, appeared on "Larry King Live" on the evening of the Sept. 11, 2001, claiming God had allowed the tragedy to happen because of "feminists, homosexuals, abortionists," and oddly enough, the "A.C.L.U." (American Civil Liberties Union). Falwell later recanted, but those familiar with the religious culture he represents, knew that in a moment of crisis Mullah Falwell had shown his true colours.

Over the years, Falwell and Pat Robertson have blamed every ill imaginable on the separation of Church and State, read this to mean, the separation of their church from the power of the U.S. State.

The majority of American Evangelicals believe in a bizarre teaching known as dispensationalism, which postpones the teachings of Christ to a future time when they will rule in Jerusalem. As was to be expected, they interpreted the Sept. 11 attacks as being the Anti-Christ. In their view, the Anti-Christ was responding to U.S. military support for Israel and the daily killing of children and civilians taking place in the West Bank.

Since dispensationalists do not accept the work and teaching of Jesus ("My kingdom is not of this world"), they decree that the gift of the land of Israel to Abraham in Old Testament times (already fulfilled twice according to a literal exegesis), was still in force today. Hence, whatever actions Israel takes in expanding its borders or seizing more land from the Palestinians is merely the affirmation or fulfilling of the will of [their Fundamentalist] God.

I wonder how far the borders of Israel extend



Afghanistan refugee camp near the Pakistan border. This camp is called "The refuge of the hopeless". Many women and children have fled to this camp. Life in the refugee camps is not that great as many services are not available--water, sanitation, garbage disposal, etc.

in the secret maps of Mullahs Falwell and Robertson? I wonder if Protestant Fundamentalists would recognize the same claim for the restoration of land to former owners, if our North American natives, for example, would lay claim to the continent?

Kenneth Copeland, evidently claimed that "the Lord told [him], this is an attack of the devil against God...against our stand with the Nation of Israel." Jack van Impe, who only recently declared the European Common Market to be the coming Anti-Christ—with China as a backup force, claimed to have predicted "that terrorists would soon strike America" (*Pres.*, No. 14, page 31; No. 15, page 44).

Christian dispensationalists are the most significant sub-group of modern Protestant Fundamentalism. It is conveniently forgotten that if Mullahs like Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell ever did succeed in their goal of taking over the American political system, that society would soon very much resemble that imposed by the Taliban. By their reckless fantasy of world hegemony and the hatreds which that engenders, they are putting at risk all of humankind.

Of course, they don't care. If they could succeed in morphing this or any other crisis into a full blown conflict with nuclear or chemical weapons, they would only see that as fulfilling their "prophecies". Then they would brag about it yet. To use Tim Lahaye's terminology, the only ones "left behind" were the dispensationalists when the gifts of biblical exegesis were being dispensed.

According to the scuttlebutt on the talk shows, the current suspicion is that the anthrax letters in the U.S. may have been mailed by some rightwing "Waco" wingnut.

Protestant Fundamentalists preach that those who do not accept their creed and adopt their God are heathen and bound for eternal hell fire. Muslim Fundamentalists believe that those who do not acknowledge Allah are infidels. Whose God is right and who will be the judge? Whoever has the most bombs or the most tanks?

In a sense the world is in the vice grip of two holy wars: Protestant Fundamentalism seeking to impose its truth on the entire world, versus the Jihad of modern Muslim Fundamentalism, which seemingly arose largely in reaction to the perceived liberalism and moral decadence of the West and in self-defence. The resulting tensions are exacerb-

bated when Jewish militants seize land and establish settlements in territories guaranteed to the Palestinians by international agreements and treaties.

#### Media.

The Mennonite religious media was restrained and moderate in its response to the Sept. 11 attacks.

In an excellent editorial, Jim Coggins, editor of the *M.B. Herald* (Sept. 28/02, page 2) encouraged his readers to "...resist the temptation to seek revenge..." and noted that "The attack on the centre of American wealth reminds us that we have often become rich at the expense of other parts of the world." The Oct. 12 issue carried responses to the Sept. 11 attacks by a whole range of Mennonite and Evangelical religious leaders, all of them moderate and rational. I appreciated John Redekop's analysis of the terrorist attacks in the same issue (page 29).

Ron Rempel, editor of *Canadian Mennonite* (Oct 8/01, page 2) had some equally appropriate words of empathy for the victims of the terrorist attacks and that "...the voices of the victims inject a painful urgency into the widely held sense that the world cannot go on with business as usual."

E.M.C. *Messenger* editor Terry Smith noted how "The ugly, bloody, shocking side of biblical history--involving holy war, terrorism, slaughter of innocents, international military campaigns—is disturbing as we seek to be a redemptive community centred in Christ with a vision of peace; it can provide both comfort and caution."

*ChristianWeek*, its mission of being a voice for Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture usually only barely disguised with a few token articles about Catholics and Anglicans getting sued, produced a relatively balanced issue Oct. 2, with an article by Marianne Meed War (page 3), actually questioning the actions and claims of the prominent Mullahs of American Fundamentalism such as Falwell and Robertson.

The next issue carried an editorial piece "On the Record - Represent Islam forthrightly," basically--and not surprisingly--arguing that the Muslim faith was more warlike than the Christian faith, read Evangelicalism (given *ChristianWeek*'s hyper-modernist premise that Protestant Fundamentalism is the only valid version of Christian truth). Several other articles of similar vein were at least partially balanced off with a story by Karen Pauls: "Canadian Chris-

tians support Muslim neighbours," (page 4).

The editorial in the Oct. 30 issue of *Christian Week* dealt with the use of warlike language in the liturgy of Protestant Fundamentalism essentially working the idea such language might be offensive to those targeted for conversion to its religious culture and that programs to spread it across the world would be more effective if the language could be toned down somewhat and less warlike. Touche

One of the more bizarre views presented by *Christian Week* appeared Nov. 2/01 in the editorial column "On the record" (page 2). The column referred to Rev. Henry Blackaby, author of a book *Experiencing God* which has sold millions, who suggested a possible purpose for Sept. 11: "Do you suppose God would permit the death of 6,000 people to see six million Muslims come to Christ?...Could God be using this moment in history to expose the radical nature of Islam in order that many millions of Muslims who live peacefully will see their religion as impoverished and desire to turn to something better?"

Presumably Blackaby feels that the millions of women and children in refugee camps because of U.S. bombing will trample all over each other to convert to Christianity. I know that Protestant Fundamentalists like to live in a world of "perpetual present" (ignorance is bliss) where history is avoided if at all possible, but perhaps someone should show the good Reverend a history of Christianity and then have him count the years since the birth of Christ when Christians have not been fighting and killing each other in the name of Christ. Unfortunately the answer is more likely to convert people to atheism.

#### Demonization.

The Sept. 11, 2001, attacks also resulted in a wave of demonization of Muslims and the Muslim faith. The same thing happened to Germans during WWI and WWII and to Russians (to some extent to all Slavs) during the Cold War--except being Caucasian these folks were not as easy to spot in a crowd. Now the Japanese and Chinese on the other hand...?

It is much easier for the American public to support carpet bombing, which will likely result in the deaths from cold and starvation of millions of Afghans, if the Taliban and even the Muslim people can be painted as evil. Within a few days of Sept 11, 2001, the talk shows were loaded with experts explaining how the Muslim faith was inherently violent and inclined to terrorism. Old videos and documentaries which reflected negatively on the Taliban and Muslims in general were dug out and aired repeatedly.

As of the end of November more than 600 American Muslims were in detention (a euphemism for being in jail) on suspicion of terrorist connections and/or associations, without bail, trial and in some cases, without even knowing why they were being held. The Bush administration announced that non-Americans charged with terrorists activities would be tried by military tribunals with summary execution as a possible disposition.

#### American Justice, 1918.

The bombing in New York had special meaning for Russian Mennonites whose Dutch and Flemish ancestors took part in the founding and early history of the city, then known as "New Amsterdam". The first Mennonites in what is today New York were recorded as early as 1643.

But Mennonites also have another reason to take note of developments since the Sept. 11 attacks. In the words of one observer, a wave of racial and religious stereotyping swept across America in its aftermath. Muslims and people with Middle-eastern characteristics are afraid to walk by themselves for fear of attack. Some have been and are being killed.

History has demonstrated that American generosity, fair-mindedness and patriotism can also turn into racial hatred and blind bigotry. The lynching deaths of almost 6000 blacks in the century following the end of the Civil War with prominent roles played by Protestant Fundamentalist leaders, will forever make African Americans suspicious of the U.S. justice system. History points also to the centuries long oppression of natives, mistreatment of Eastern European immigrants, Anti-Semitism, demonization of Catholics, the imprisonment and expropriation of Japanese in WWII, etc., etc.

Mennonites can appreciate the fear and anxiety of those who are the target of such hatred as they too have tasted the jackboot of American justice.

In his 1945 *Hildebrandt's Zeittafel*, J. J. Hildebrandt, North Kildonan, provided a useful survey of the atrocities inspired by WW I, the Great War, the war to end all wars:

"Patriots formed themselves into mobs and marched by day or night, demonstrating in the streets, manifesting their unbounded patriotism by mistreating opponents of the war under the very eyes of the police and other authorities. They desecrated the churches, homes and automobiles of the Mennonites with tar and/or yellow paint, affixing smut and shameful slogans with the most

gross expressions, as well as American flags. In some places they also pulled cows into churches."

"With threats of shooting, they also extracted money for military purposes (for the war chest). They beat and mistreated honourable fathers and grandfathers and tarred and feathered them. One individual was painted with carbolic acid tar. In Inola, Oklahoma, one such mob hung a Mennonite minister on a telephone pole. Fortunately, he was cut loose in the nick of time by a friend who came rushing by, so that he was revived back to consciousness. Both churches of the Mennonites here were also set ablaze and reduced to ashes.

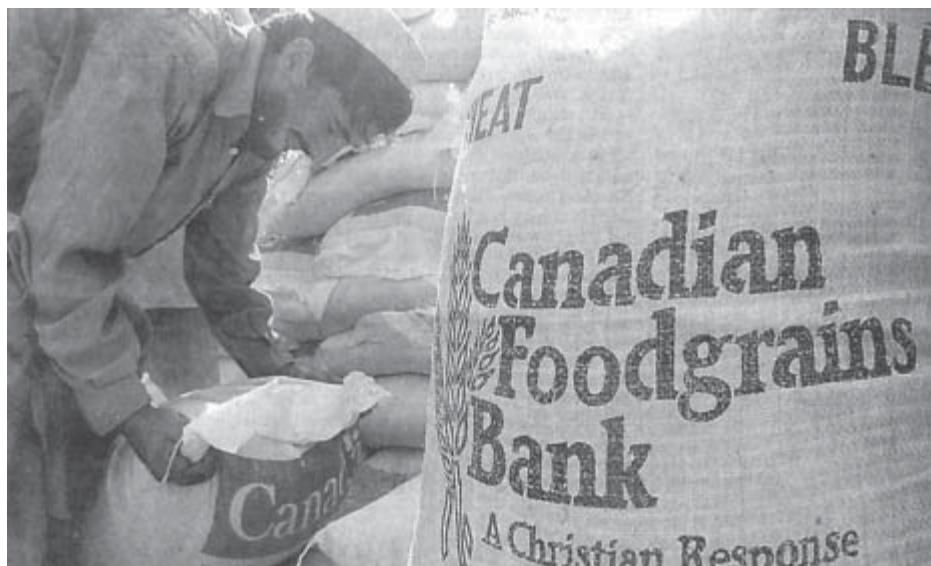
"Sheep and horned cattle were taken from the Hutterite Brethren in Dakota by force and the proceeds taken and placed into the war chest of the Federal Government for military use.

"Hundreds of conscientious-objectors were judged and sentenced to prison terms ranging from 1-30 years under war legislation, because they refused to take up arms. Only three such prison camps existed in the entire country: Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Governors Island in New York State. Chained in hands and feet they were transported under heavy guard and also mistreated in the same fashion in the prison camps, so that two of the Hutterite prisoners died in confinement at Fort Leavenworth.

"This is how the much glorified American freedom of religion manifested itself in practice," (*Hildebrandt's Zeittafel*, pages 288-9).

Kleine Gemeinder Abe E. Loewen (son of Rev. Heinrich Loewen, Meade, Kansas), was saved from a similar fate at Camp Funsen (now Fort Riley), Kansas, only by the fortuitous intervention of a high-ranking officer. (The Loewen brothers were large scale farmers at Meade and reputedly were the "...first midwesterners east of the Rockies to use a combine.")

Back home in Meade, Kansas, local leaders demanded that the Kleine Gemeinde ministerial present themselves in town to salute the flag. The Lehrdienst attended but refused their orders, ex-



An Afghan worker in the Pakistani city of Peshawar handles a bag of wheat donated by Canada. Donald Rumsfeld, U.S. Defense Secretary, said October 7, 2001, air drops of food would start after the military attacks. Photo from Globe and Mail, Oct. 8, 2001, page A8.

plaining their beliefs. They were instructed to come back the next day, when the townsfolk would be gathered to deal with them. They presented themselves as ordered, but the hand of God had intervened and no mob materialized. Battle-hardened veterans like Ältester Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), who had stared down the Czar in 1874 and successfully fought off three waves of Fundamentalist proselytizers in Jansen, Nebraska, as well as publishing Anabaptist devotional literature and being named as a source for his study of Menno Simons by Professor John Horst (1916), if called upon to walk a gauntlet howling for blood, would undoubtedly have followed the Lamb to the slaughter without flinching.

J. J. Hildebrand recounts further atrocities:

"In Sugar Creek, Ohio, U.S.A., a letter to the editor by M. C. Bontrager, from Dodge City, Kansas appeared in the 'Sugar Creek Budget'. The Mennonite opposition to war was evident in this letter. The American legal authorities instituted legal process against both the editor S. H. Miller and M. C. Bontrager....The result of the process was a fine of \$500 and costs of \$900.

"August 18, 1918. Shortly before midnight, an automobile full of men pulled onto the yard of a Mennonite farmer in the U.S.A. He was summoned and called out of bed, and asked if he would give them a few gallons of gas so they could drive on. Still wearing his nightclothes he got some gasoline for them. After it was filled into their gas tank, they grabbed him and pulled him into their car and drove off with him.

"After they had driven a considerable number of miles, they stopped and threw a sling around his neck. With this they dragged him around here and there and from the road to a nearby tree on which they intended to hang him. Here they also informed him that if he was now motivated to donate some money for the war, it was already too late; but if he wanted, he could pray before he was hung.

"He prayed and also for his murderers. As he did this, they tore his shirt from his body, and cut his head hair with horse shears they had in their auto; first, a 1 1/2 inch strip from front to back and then a second such strip from one ear, over his skull, to the other ear. They did this so roughly that the skin on his skull was also cut away. Since they had held his face down while driving there, he did not know where he was. Then they painted his upper body and instructed him to run home.

"He ran a distance and eventually found his way to a farmer in the neighbourhood. From here he found the way to some of his relatives, where he was able to warm up and recuperate. They gave him clothes and took him home in an automobile.

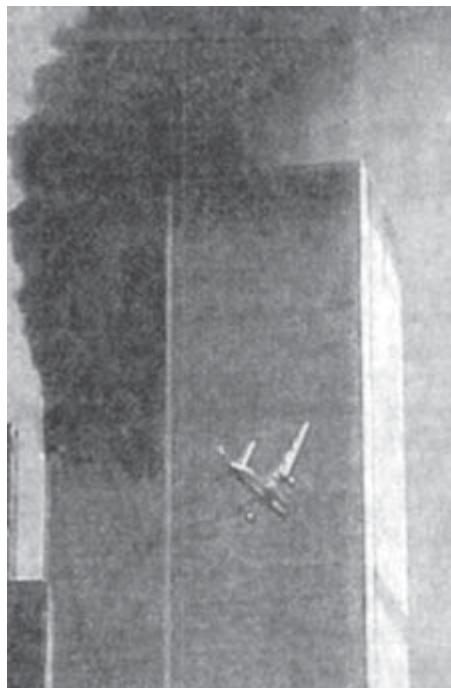
"This was not the first time this had happened to this Mennonite. Already in July of 1918, he and an entire group of other Mennonites were dragged into a hayloft by U.S. deputies from the neighbouring city where money for the war chest was pressed out of them. The oppressors as well as a large group of their associates from their Clan who had gathered hid their identity by hiding their faces under masks. Nevertheless, the

victims did recognize a number of their Anglo-Saxon neighbours," (*Hildebrandt's Zeittafel*, pages 297-9).

The moral of the story? Hug a Muslim today.

### Canadian Justice.

Russian Mennonites in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta for the most part were spared such hostilities largely because they lived in large block settlements where bands of ruffians found it difficult to implement their terrorism. These type of patriots invariably are the bravest in large groups, also called mobs. Nonetheless there were numerous acts of individual mistreatment and oppression.



*The scenario of the Sept. 11/01 attacks was way out of the box. The conceptualization of these attacks went far beyond the imagination of even the most creative Hollywood TV producers such as Stephen Spielberg or writers of thriller novels such as Tom Clancy.*

During the war years, Manitoba even became a haven of sorts, as Hutterites from the Dakotas and draft-age Kleine Gemeinders from Meade fled from severe harassment and persecution back home.

The response to the situation in Canada (oddly enough not in Ontario) came more subtly in the form of state-sponsored oppression through the withdrawal of the legal privileges which the Dominion Government had guaranteed the Mennonites prior to their agreeing to come to Canada in 1873. These measures of expropriation and terrorism were implemented by Provincial Governments driven by public pressure resulting from anti-pacifist, anti-German hysteria whipped into fever pitch by newspapers.

In Manitoba the Department of Education created district schools which were imposed upon the Mennonites with a regime enforced by fines, forced sale of properties and imprisonments. These schools will be known in infamy as

"Zwangsschulen".

December 18, 1919, teacher Bernhard Toews (1863-1927) and a number of others were judged guilty in Altona, and sentenced to 30 days imprisonment in Winnipeg. Toews was thankful he was allowed to keep his Bible. The renowned Old Colony teacher David Harder wrote that the aged minister Peter Friesen, Schantzenfeld, was thrown into jail in Winnipeg.

Between 1923 and 1925 5493 individuals were charged in Saskatchewan alone. There was a wave of similar charges in Manitoba. In many cases the property of citizens was taken by the authorities to pay for "illegal" fines adjudged against them. These were third generation Canadians relying on civil rights guaranteed in 1873 by the Dominion Government--which now stood cynically by.

One of the results was the exile and emigration of 10,000 of Canada's best citizens to Mexico and Paraguay, a measure of social engineering (and incredible stupidity) which is costing the Canadian GNP billions annually in terms of lost revenues to the present day.

The point is that Mennonites should have a heart of sympathy for others when they undergo the same oppression. The reality, however, is that sometimes those who have been oppressed and/or their descendants, themselves become offenders because the assimilation process teaches them to do so in order to win recognition and approval from their fellow citizens. Returnees from Latin America (e.g. Evangelist Jakob Funk, Winnipeg) have sometimes been the harshest critics of their former brethren, this being their way of winning approval from their newly-found co-confessionists and their children have sometimes been the worst bullies to the children of more recent immigrants, etc. I'm sure sociologists have some kind of fancy word for this process.

### Terrorism.

Terrorism is defined as the use of violence and threats to intimidate or coerce, especially for political purpose. Terrorism has been used throughout world history by governments and non-government bodies alike.

The Old Testament recounts a number of incidents which could only be described as terrorism.

Government or state sponsored terrorism would include the Indian raids during the French and British wars in North America, as well as U.S. carpet bombing in Vietnam. How about the British burning of the White House in Washington during the war of 1812? Terrorism was one of the strategies leading up to the founding of the State of Israel in 1948.

Liberation movements, in particular, have used terrorism as a means of levelling the playing field between a large powerful occupying regime or oppressor and that of a relatively powerless citizenry.

### Enlightenment.

18th century Evangelicalism critiqued both the old-line Protestant churches which had become doctrinaire and removed from personal experience as well as the modernism of the Great

Enlightenment which challenged the wisdom that universal truth was found only in the creed of Christendom. Enlightenment thinkers held there was only one natural truth or order of things, but that these were universal needing only to be extrapolated by science and logical inquiry.

American Fundamentalism arose at the end of the 19th century as a reaction to theological liberalism and higher criticism in Protestant Evangelicalism, a product of the Enlightenment. American Fundamentalism was extremely doctrinal and legalistic, more comparable to 17th century Protestantism.

Both Muslim and Protestant Fundamentalism are cut from the same quarry, namely, our common Middle-eastern Judeao-Christian culture. Old Testament writers tried to downgrade their Arab kinsmen by describing them as descendants of Ishmael, Abraham's oldest son by Hagar, his Egyptian concubine. The story of Ishmael being driven from his home and rightful inheritance by a jealous step-mother is one of the most touching in the Bible. (In terms of physical features, Jesus probably looked more like bin Laden than the Ben Hur (Charlton Heston, N.R.A.) look-a-like that Evangelicals like to present in their Sunday School material. Hopefully this will not be too shocking for Evangelicals when (and if) they get to heaven.)

The suggestion that the Muslim faith is more warlike than Christianity, if true at all, is only true to the extent that Western Europe experienced the 18th century Enlightenment, bringing forth ideals of democracy, personal freedoms, human dignity, tolerance and free market economies; ideas leading to the American Revolution in 1776 and the French Revolution. These reforms influenced all of western Europe except Protestant Fundamentalism which arose largely in reaction to these rational ways of thinking, labelling them the Anti-Christ.

The Münster debacle in 1535 convinced the Flemish Mennonites, of the necessity of a faith based on reason and common sense. The Mennonites in Czarist Russia, read Dutch writers such as Bishop Pieter Pieters (*The Way to the City of Peace*) and Bishop Jan Schabaelje (*The Wandering Soul*) who were Waterlander Mennonites. The Waterlanders as well as Flemish Mennonites were influenced by the Collegiants, who practised Enlightenment ideas (Men. Enc. I, page 640). My Flemish Mennonite forbearer Cornelius Toews (1766-1831), Lindenau, Molotschna, "was a very learned man" reading Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire (*Pres.*, No. 18, page 99).

The forgoing suggests that Flemish Mennonites (the 1870s Manitoba Mennonite pioneers were all of the Flemish Confession) were influenced by the Enlightenment although resoundingly rejecting its ideas about faith. Faith itself was irrational but the practice of that faith must be pragmatic and based on reason, as opposed to

focusing on emotions as seen in religious cultures such as Separatist-Pietism. Using reason only reflected the use of God-given common sense and practicality, ideas which evidently appealed to the merchants, artisans, tradesmen and craftsmen among whom the Flemish Mennonites had originated during Reformation times.

Being genuine biblicalists they had already two centuries earlier adopted many Enlightenment ideas such as grass-roots democracy, equality, tolerance for others, empowerment for women, etc. for their *Ordnung*.

Fundamentalism, whether Christian, Muslim or Jewish, is of itself merely a project of hyper-Modernism. Christian Fundamentalism was essentially a Protestant phenomenon: Catholics had their Jesuits and Franciscans who valued learning and reason as a precious gift of God.

worlds.

Nov. 6 Congress gets ready to enact a stimulus package to revive the flagging economy. In the view of one observer, the package consisted of "\$149 billion of corporate welfare for multinational corporations and \$14 billion for the poor."

Another observer raised the question: given that 15 of 19 hijackers were from Saudi Arabia, why was the U.S. bombing Afghanistan?

For 50 points, given that Timothy McVeigh was, and other Christian militia survivalists were, and probably still are hiding out in Montana, why isn't Montana being bombed?

The answer, Saudi Arabia controls U.S. oil.

Question. Why isn't the U.S. developing thermal energy and other sources of energy so that they don't need to maintain armies on foreign soil which create resentment and hatred? Answer.

The corporations getting the \$149 billion tax break (many of whom happen to be headquartered in Texas) will make sure it never happens.

There are two billion Christians and 1.2 billion Muslims on planet earth. Its too many for either side to ever hope to exterminate the other. Sooner or later, some kind of detente or peaceful co-existence will need to be established. The sooner the better for everyone concerned.

Oh, and by the way, Nov. 9 bin Ladin announced he has "chemical and nuclear weapons and he will use them in retaliation if the U.S. uses them".

Americans--who usually couldn't care five pesos for events or conditions in some third world backwater as long as their morning orange juice is delivered on time and fresh--went on a history and geography study binge.

Images of women and children getting blown apart by bombers five miles in the air do not have as much media traction as the world's tallest skyscrapers being brought down by 747s in the middle of Manhattan. It also helps when the victims are sophisticated wealthy New Yorkers well connected to the military-industrial complex.

## **Economics.**

The global economy thrives in conditions whereby a small per cent of the world population, the so-called first world, harvests and enjoys the wealth of nations, while the vast majority languish in poverty. Social scientists have long predicted the point where the billions of "the poor and hungry masses" would rise up and challenge the prevailing order. As the most developed economy, America is at the top of the food chain, reaping the benefits of the world's labour and creativity.

Instead of plowing a little more of this money back into grass-roots economic development in poverty stricken countries (presumably this would also create more consumers), the U.S.A. proudly spends billions on the military and in foreign aid to prop up corrupt dictatorships which happen to support its global defense needs and



"Courageous" American military forces engage the "cowardly" enemy in Afghanistan. An engaging moment in post-modernism: horse mounted tribal cavalry versus B-1 stealth bombers and smart bombs.

## **Observations.**

In his speech to the nation Nov. 8, President Bush characterized the U.S. efforts as a war to save civilization. "The U.S. has enemies who want to kill all Jews, all Christians," he added. Americans were encouraged to be vigilant but to continue life as normal. Failure to go about one's daily business meant the terrorists had won.

The same day, General Franks, commander of U.S. forces attacking Afghanistan, stated that the target was the Al Qaeda organization and not bin Laden. Well, make up my mind. Pakistani President Musharrif stated that what is missing in terms of the American attack against Afghanistan is realistic "intelligence on the ground."

In the October 2000 elections the Religious Right finally found a President willing to be in their debt and to sing their tune in exchange for votes. This added a volatile new component to the mix of world power and may well have been a trigger for upscale terrorist activities. Ironically President Bush has taken a tougher line with the Israelis than any previous President and has unequivocally declared his support for an internationally recognized Palestinian State. This is a major breakthrough for hope of any permanent detente between Christian and Muslim

local economic interests, e.g. Middle-east oil. In South and Central America, the U.S. has traditionally supported economies and political systems which rival Soviet Russia for their inhumane treatment of their citizens, e.g. regimes which have targeted and "whacked" Catholic priests who fought for land reform and local cooperative ventures.

In fact, the Taliban and bin Laden are themselves products of American foreign policy driven by self interest as opposed to some kind of a universal vision or populist ideal. Many in the third world feel that the principles of democracy and personal freedom invariably touted by the U.S. as manifestations of its moral superiority, are only applicable in America (mainly for Caucasians and third generation Americans) and not overseas.

Over the course of history, most empires have fallen or failed because their ruling classes got too greedy, their thinking too warped by a paradigm of privilege and domination. In 19th century Imperial Russia, a few percent of the population controlled 90 per cent or more of the wealth. This resulted in brain numbing poverty for the lower classes. After several centuries of such miserable existence, the oppressed finally had nothing left to lose. This resulted in the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 which liquidated not only the wealthy upper classes but also unleashed a reign of terror and totalitarianism.

A concerted effort to share at least a little of the wealth of the world economy (or at least a small part of the spending on the military) with billions living in third world poverty seems to be the only long term solution to bridge the growing discontent by the "have nots".

The argument that the bin Ladens of the world are driven by hatred and would kill regardless may have some validity. However, it is also true that poverty is the medium that fertilizes the soil of human suffering for the seed of bigotry and hate. If this could be reversed through education and grass-roots economic development, the bin Ladens of the world would be isolated; they would number their supporters in the 100s and not in the 100 millions. Like Timothy McVeigh, the Oklahoma bomber who represents Christian Fundamentalism at its worst, bin Laden would be denied a following and no longer be a threat to world civilization.

Our 17th century Flemish and Dutch forebears were the innovators of mercantile capitalism which for a century cranked a postage-stamp country into a world power.

Good God-fearing capitalists should recognize that civilians blown to bits by bunker blasters do not buy Big-Macs nor do they buy Mack trucks. In its own self-interest, global capitalism should ensure that policies are put in place that make happy consumers not martyrs out of the world's poor and dispossessed. Unfortunately, the allure of lucrative military contracts, short term profits and corporate tax rebates may well take precedence.

### **Empires.**

WWI, the so-called Great War, started when too many empires wanted to own too much real estate. The Treaty of Versailles imposed by the victorious Allies in 1918, placed harsh and unre-

alistic terms on the vanquished Axis powers. The reparations imposed on Germany destined it to generations of poverty. The resulting misery created a green-house for the breeding, evolution and growth of the Nazis. They demonized the Jews and used a series of minor wars and imagined threats to national security to morph the most civilized nation in Europe into an evil and horrible monster.

Empires throughout history, including the Romans, Soviets and the British (they had those pesky Hessian mercenaries the colonial revolutionaries hated so much), found it easier to fight their wars with surrogates. These usually receive less veterans benefits such as health care and pensions.

Nov. 28 Defense Secretary Rumsfeld announced that the U.S. was not in a position to take prisoners in Afghanistan, this was the responsibility of their local partners, the Northern Allies. Nov. 28 hundreds of Taliban bodies were discovered cluttering the compound of a prison in Mazar-e Sharif, the horrible aftermath of a prisoners' revolt it was claimed. Some of the corpses had their hands tied behind their back.

The U.S. response to Sept. 11 was described as a war to save civilization. If this was really true, why was the task being committed to a rag-tag group of fighters known as the Northern Alliance whose previous atrocities rivalled that of the Taliban. Surely a fight to save civilization should be conducted by the warriors of the best fighting machine money could buy?

Justice must be done. The terrorists must be brought to justice and punished. Mennonites acknowledge that governments were instituted by God to establish and maintain order. The measure of the force used must be appropriate to the severity of the assault and must abide by international rules of conduct.

The Sept. 11/01 terrorist attacks could be seen as a wake up call. The U.S. will fail to heed the cries of the weak and the dispossessed of the world at its own peril. Not only do such people not buy McDonalds burgers, they form a vast and impenetrable swamp of human misery that breeds the worst in humankind.

Lovable and for the most part peaceful Americans, might have good reason to ask, "Why does the world not love us?"

"The way you treat the peoples of the world, from whom you harvest your wealth and well-being, is not just," responds the third world, whether rightly or wrongly.

In watching the President, cabinet ministers, and administration spokesmen enunciate and defend U.S. policy, one gets the sinking feeling they still do not get the message. They are still missing the point.

And that's discouraging.

It also raises the question, whether those born into the American establishment, educated in the Ivy League and socialized by the military-industrial complex, are capable of thinking outside the box, in order to even understand the complex global issues at stake. This is especially the case when the ruling oligarchy is also influenced by the Religious Right which is still battling the 18th century Enlightenment.

### **Conclusion.**

By the middle of November the Northern Alliance was winning a lot of ground in Afghanistan. By December the major cities in Afghanistan had fallen and the groundwar was refocusing on hunting down the Taliban and hopefully bin Laden in their cave bunkers.

Success in the bombing campaign had legitimized U.S. strategy. The slogan "America at War" reappeared on T.V. screens. Talk shows were now kept busy with topics like expanding the war, with Iraq as the first candidate for American "liberation".

The media reported Dec. 1 that an entire village of 30 mud homes had been obliterated by bombs with an estimated 200 casualties. Hopefully the U.S. military does not revert to its Vietnam-era habits of massaging the truth according to what the American public wants to see on TV.

Hopefully the war can be brought to a speedy and just conclusion. Hopefully it is resolved by the time another issue of *Preservings* is supposed to come out in June, 2002. Hopefully the U.S. does not again forsake those whose lives it has destroyed as it has done many times in the past (e.g. Nicaragua). Hopefully we are still here to bring another issue of *Preservings* to press.

As we approach the Christmas season, let us pray with new meaning for "Peace and goodwill among men [and women too, of course]."

For religious Fundamentalists--and especially for the American brand, religion is like a giant football game, whoever scores the most yardage wins. At this time of world tension and crisis it is vitally important that Fundamentalists of all stripes be encouraged to exercise moderation and restraint in promoting their particular vision of world domination and rule.

Sept. 11 could be interpreted as a call for action: a call for freedom, democracy, education, nourishment, dignity, tolerance, equality, equity and justice for all of the world's citizens.

A few divisions of missionaries marketing North American "happy face" religious culture around the world and token foreign aid gobbled up by corrupt puppet regimes, probably just won't do it.

So-o-r-ry!

North Americans, living in the three countries which share that soil--Canada, U.S. and Mexico (at least some of us), remain the most blessed and fortunate of all peoples on earth.

God bless America, home of the free.

## **Attention: Libraries and Researchers.**

Do you need back copies of *Preservings*?

We now have available a CD-ROM with Issue No.s 8 to 18 of *Preservings* (Note: No pictures included for Issue 8, only the script).

Cost is \$25.00 plus \$10.00 for shipping and handling. To order send cheque or money order to Scott Kroeker, Box 21306, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T3 (allow several months for delivery). Check it out first on our website - [www.hshs.mb.ca](http://www.hshs.mb.ca)

# Guest Essay

## A People of Peace in a World at War

### **11 November 2001.**

How does a small community, far removed from New York and Washington, let alone Islamabad and Kabul respond to this world of violence? Is there something we can do?

Christians can easily recite the words from Isaiah to "turn our swords into plowshares" or the words of Jesus "to turn the other cheek," to "love our enemies." Mennonites in particular might even recall the words of Menno Simons in 1536 that "alas we leave spears and swords to those who consider swines' blood and human blood to be of equal value." They might recall the 1524 words of young Conrad Grebel, the founder of Anabaptism, "true Christian believers are sheep among wolves, sheep for the slaughter; they must be baptized in anguish and affliction...They [do not] use worldly sword or war, since all killing has ceased with them...."

But what does all this mean in light of September 11; what does it mean on November 11 when we "remember" the horror of war throughout the twentieth century. You may disagree, but it seems to me that there are things that a people committed to peace can do.

First, it means that we grieve with those who grieve. We pray for those who tragically lost their beloved in New York and Washington. The images of the crumbling World Trade Towers have long disappeared from our TV screens, but we can be certain that the terrible pain of separation, of kids who lost their Dads, husbands who lost their wives, parents who lost their kids, is far from over. And now that full war rages in Afghanistan we can also be certain of intense suffering there and our grieving must include Afghan victims of war, innocent people who die from stray bombs, but also mothers who anguish over dead sons killed by cluster bombs, and even stubborn, idealistic, Jihad fighters have kids and wives and sisters and parents.

Second, we embark on the difficult journey of trying to forgive the terrorists. This may sound not only difficult but foolhardy. Yet only through forgiveness can we overcome our primordial urge for revenge. And it is timely to remind ourselves that if there is to be revenge, it is not we who need to worry about it. People of peace do not seek vengeance, nor dream of it, nor wish it. They do not see in another death closure to one's own pain. Death is not the end of anything.

Third, we must try to understand the Middle East and the Islamic countries from which the terrorists came. News reports suggest that their leader, Osama bin Laden, is an unbalanced person full of grandiose delusions and murderous intention. But why do so many people support and even applaud him? Why are so many people in the Arab world angry with us in North America?

It may be that our ally Israel occupies Palestinian lands it took in 1967. It may be that we use a very disproportionate percentage of the earth's oil production and forget its profit undergirds the rich lifestyles of Saudi and Kuwaiti elites. It may be that

our own societies produce pornographic materials and other forms of entertainment that the Islamic world finds terribly offensive. It may be that 100,000 children have died in Iraq, indirectly from our embargoes. It may be that the western countries have troops on Saudi soil, soil that is considered holy by Muslims. And knowing this, we may also know that our own beloved Canada can do more to make this world more peaceful.

Fourth, we ask our governments to use restraint and abide by the "rule of law." This means that we send the message that (to refer to the old Aesop's tale) the "sun" is more powerful than the "wind". Violence begets more violence, killing people simply produces vengeance, vengeance produces killing. The "rule of law" means that governments take action to stop a crime from reoccurring and they do this under the provision of law. We pray that governments do not "attack" countries in order to bring fear, humiliation or death to a people, to show them who is mighty and who is not.

Fifth, we recognize that we cannot sit comfortably and watch others die. Our ancestors suffered when they practiced nonviolence; we too must prepare to suffer for this stance. We begin with our comfortable lifestyles, likely our time and safety, as during and after all wars there are opportunities for God's people to serve, feeding the hungry and bandaging the wounds, all wounds. History shows that such actions of peace do not go unnoticed. Many will say that the position of peace is the position of the coward, the slacker, the impossible idealist. Many others find great hope that some effort is made to break the cycle of hatred and violence.

Sixth, we remember our own history and theology. Each group has had its heroes of faith who stood up to violent intent with nothing more than a remarkable commitment to serve. Witness Mother Teresa's life of service in India, observe the lives of the Catholic nuns and priests who died standing between warring factions in Central America. Witness the Baptist and Pentecost leaders in the Soviet Union, imprisoned for refusing military service for the Communists. For the Mennonites the times of the Anabaptists, brought thousands of ordinary people, farmers and craftsmen, mothers and fathers, to deaths, tied to stakes and burned alive, for insisting that "Christ must be followed daily."

Some would invite it; others would take it painfully. Margaret Hottinger gladly embraced death; when she was drowned in 1531; the executioner was generous, dunking her once, he lifted her again above the water and asked whether she wished to recant; her answer was "no" and he dunked her now for a longer time, and when he raised her up again, she answered before he even spoke; no, she would not deny her Lord now, and as she had no intention of changing her mind, he might as well leave her under the water; she died moments later. Others found the martyr's death more difficult: Hans Buechel put to death in the 1500s in Germany

pleaded with God to "forgive the sin and fault of those who do hateful things to me and who do not care what happens to my wife and child" and then he prayed, "Lord be gracious and watch over my wife and small child, keep them in your protection and if it be your gracious will, give them back to me."

For many members of Mennonite churches, 1918-1942, marked times when mothers were raped by Machnovites and fathers shot by NKVD agents because they would not fight and they would not deny God. In the spirit of our own heroes of faith, we remind ourselves that we are the children of God. For the Christian it means that we look at our Lord on the cross. It was not in weakness that he died. His death marked the great defeat of evil; it marked the triumph of "love" over "sin". Those who accept Christ's death affirmed life and love and goodness, and life and love and goodness could overcome sin. As a result of Christ's death, his powerful teaching on the power of peace, the Sermon on the Mount, can be realized now, today, in God's Kingdom, amongst his people.

Seventh, we can take action in our own little worlds. Forgive someone who has wronged you. Befriend someone from the Middle East. Send an E-mail of condolence to someone in New York. Give to Afghan refugees through Mennonite Central Committee and other Christian organizations today. Treasure the resources of this earth, especially if their use aggravates an entire people. Pray for peace. There is room for a people of peace in a world at war. A people of nonviolence have no cause for bashfulness. We can be a people of reconciliation in our everyday lives. Our own communities can be voices of peace in the international community.

By Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Reprinted from *SMC Echoes*, Oct. 2001, page 7.



Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg.

# Letters

We welcome letters to the editor and appreciate feedback from our readers and suggestions as to how we can fulfil our function better. We welcome criticism of articles and editorial commentary. We reserve the right not to publish any particular letter and/or not to respond to a letter, particularly if it refers to an issue already previously dealt with. Please keep all letters short (under 300 words) and to the point. We reserve the right to return, discard, edit and/or shorten letters as deemed necessary.

R.R. #3, Box 30  
Winkler, Manitoba  
R6W 4A2  
May 5, 2001

Dear Friends,

I hope its not too late to renew my membership--we're absent during winter months. I really appreciate your work and look forward to each issue of *Preservings*! But please keep the order form separate from the issues. I don't wish to cut any parts out of them!

Do you still have any back copies of *Preservings* #11 and #14? If so I would like to order one of each.

Sincerely, "Irene Hildebrand"

**Editor's Note:** Unfortunately, no back issues are available as we have no resources or funding to provide such a service. Photocopies of articles can be obtained from libraries and there is also the CD ROM (with issues 8-18 available from Scott Kroeker, Box 21306, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2T3, for \$25.00 plus \$10.00 postage and handling. Allow several months for delivery. Also check out our website "hshs.mb.ca" for Issues 8-17, to offprint articles. Remember the index published at pages 118-124, Issue 14.

Eberhart Reimers  
Pasco, WA 99301  
June 5, 2001

To: HSHS

Following up on my telephone order earlier during the day, I am enclosing a check to cover the mailing expenses for your *Preservings* from 17<sup>th</sup> December 2000. Kindly fill-in the proper amount in US Dollars covering the US \$10.00 for the journal and mailing....

I perused this issue at a locally befriended Mennonite family, and, although not of Mennonite origin, as a history buff I considered it fascinating reading. I have a sister-in-law of Dutch-Mennonite origin. Though no longer practicing, with the huge outflow of Mennonites from Russia back into crowded Germany, she is interested in learning about the fate of the Mennonites in the Americas. In my view, the life story of individual families is more revealing than generic books about the subject matter (of which there are many in Germany). I am also going to mail her the book "The Helpless Poles," as it is quite revealing and is connecting well with the *Preservings*.

Sincerely, "Eberhart Reimers"

John and Hazel Fehr  
Box 314, Hague  
Sask., S0K 1X0

Hello,

Thank-you for the uplifting magazine "Preservings". It is refreshing to read about our Old Kolony people without cringing. As practicing members of the Old Kolony faith here in Sask. it gives us much encouragement to keep up the fight for our faith in Christ. I'm enclosing a cheque for \$40.00 to pay for two subscriptions....

If possible we would like the June and Dec. issues of this year 2001.

Thank-you very much!

407-32075 Dahlstrom Avenue,  
Abbotsford, B.C., V2T 2K7  
July 9, 2001

Editor, HSHS

I am reading, I believe, my second issue of *Preservings* which I find most interesting and informative

I have noted your opposition to "crisis conversion" and "predator churches" (your words). I had not intended to write this note until I read in the June, 2001 issue, Melvin (Jackie) Loewen's letter where he mentions "the vehemence of your attacks against all forms of religious renewal" and suggests "a gentler, kinder appreciation of all God's children." These are my sentiments as well.

What prompted this writing was your response to Melvin's letter. The vehemence of your reply, that "denominations...would have the gall to ask for gentler, kinder appreciation" when someone (you?) speaks out in defence of their victims" is surprising to say the least. What I "hear," is a defensive person who uses 31 column inches of space to make his point and then has the "gall" to end his rebuttal with, "I appreciate your taking the time to write."

In your "defence" (my word) you say, "Our job as historians is to document the facts, fairly and honestly." I have to agree, but there is such a phenomenon as "facts as I see them." I trust that you will give that matter closer scrutiny.

I wish you God's blessing in producing an excellent publication.

Sincerely, "Alvin Philippsen"

P.S.: My cheque for the next two issues of *Preservings* is enclosed. (\$20)

Birchwood Retirement Residence  
4 5480 Luckakuck Way,  
Chilliwack, B.C., V2R 2X5  
e.bordel@home.com

July 23, 2001

Hi Del:

Great editor's note on page 50 of *Preservings*. I have been distributing by mail and fax your reply. Great work. Do you have an e-mail address for Ralph Friesen? "Eldon" Unger

Box 720, Altona,  
Manitoba, Canada  
ROG OBO  
tedf@friesens.com  
July 12, 2001

Editor Preservings;

Just recently received *Preservings*, No. 18, June, 2001. Thank you. This issue continues in a worthy manner the previous ones and is no disappointment. The length and variety of interesting articles astonishes. Congratulations for a fine issue.

I want to comment very briefly on some of the articles that were of particular interest. The two articles, one by E.K. Francis on Pages 3 to 9, and the one by myself on E. K. Francis, pages 10-12, are timely indeed. They coincide with the reprint of his book published by Friesens in 1955 "In Search of Utopia". You are to be commended in taking it upon yourself to issue this reprint. Francis' stature has grown with time and the book has come to be recognized as the definitive history of Manitoba Mennonites from 1874 to 1950. I hope that sales will be strong.

Of great interest also is the article on William Hespeler, pages 20 to 24. This man was a remarkable individual and a good friend and helper to Mennonites settling in Manitoba in the 1870s. His biography is certainly worthy of being recorded.

Dr. David Schoeder's article on Salvation was most interesting, and I believe will be helpful to many people. It is written in such a way that laymen can understand his clear and cogent outline of this important Christian doctrine. Mennonite Churches have attempted to maintain the Anabaptist concept even if in practice they have diverse interpretations.

The achievements of film producer Otto Klassen are well described. His films have recorded Mennonite history well and have given it a positive emphasis.

"A Tale of Two Gesangbücher" by Dr. Peter Letkemann is certainly an exhaustive article on the history of our Hymnody. It tells the story well. What it does not do is to show how rich a heritage the Dutch Mennonite hymn writers left. But it does show what an integral part of Menn-

nite culture is in its Hymnody.

The book reviews: John Friesen has written an excellent review of the two books by John Warkentin and E. K. Francis. Likewise Al Reimer has managed to give us an intimation of that harrowing and graphic story of the Mennonite Exodus from the Ukraine in the early 1940s. Finally Chris Huebner has written what was for me the first fairly plain concept of what post modernity means.

All together a rich and memorable issue that finds a worthy place in my library. Sincerely, "Ted Friesen"

**Editor's Note:** There is opposition to a renewed interest in our history and faith, from the viewpoint that our great-grandparents--our Manitoba pioneers--were genuine Christians, whose faith and beliefs were second to none. Presumably this stands in the way of ambitious leaders who wish to deliver their congregations into the hands of the Mullahs of Protestant-Fundamentalism in the U.S. Your moral and intellectual support has been critical to this work.

---

The Sword and Trumpet  
P.O. Box 575, Harrisonburg,  
VA 22801 0575  
Phone (703) 434-1219  
July 19, 2001

Dear Bro. Delbert:

Greeting. I trust that this letter will find you in reasonable health continuing to enjoy the blessings of the Lord.

My compliments to you and the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society for your noble work with particular reference to the issue of *Preservings* which you have sent to me. I consider this to be a masterpiece, aside from the fact that you do have the article and picture of and about me.

The story of the Mennonites in Russia is one of the most moving chapters of Mennonite history.

I pray that this issue of *Preservings* will be a great blessing to those who read it. I wish you and the members of the Historical Society the abundant blessing of the Lord in your work and witness.

Very sincerely yours, "Go. R. Brunk" Co-Editor

**Editor's Note:** Your words of encouragement are important. As you well know from your work, there are many "Mennonite leaders" opposed to retrieving the testimony of our past, as this interferes with their schemes of leading their people away from the truths once received and to deliver them into the clutches of alien religious cultures. One of their strategies is to keep their people in ignorance of their history and culture which anchors people in their faith. When history has to be put forward they make sure their parishioners are fed a starvation diet of negative half-truths.

---

76 Quinella Pl.,  
London, Ont., N6K 4H3  
July 21, 2000

Dear Mr. Plett:

Enclosed is our membership renewal. Wonderful reading! Keep up the good work.

I appreciated your article in the 2000 issue of "Journal of Mennonite Studies". Now that I have retired I may find time to revisit the issue I addressed in my 1981 "Mennonite Quarterly Review" article. If so, you will hear from me again.

Your challenges to both the "Protestant Fundamentalists" and the "Molotschna Trumphantists" make for wonderful reading. You air issues which desperately need to be addressed. Again, keep up the good work!

David Flynn and I read a paper at the recent meeting of the Anabaptist Sociology and Anthropology Association (June 14-16/2001) focusing on relations between the Kanadier (1870s arrival) and the Russlander (1920s arrival). You may well find some of our observations interesting. Conference organizers have a right of refusal on publication of the paper so I cannot send it immediately. One way or another, I will make sure you get a copy in the future.

Best Regards, "A. Koop"

**Editor's Note:** Thank-you for your kind comments. The topic of the socio-economic background to the 1870s emigration is in great need of further examination. I have been inspired by the work that you and Dr. Flynn have been doing at King's College, and in fact used your paper, "A sense of community: Three Mennonite Towns in Manitoba, Canada," which you presented in New Delhi, India, in 1986, for my brief comparison of Steinbach, Altona and Winkler, published in *Preservings*, No. 9, Part One, pages 2-3 (hshs.mb.ca).

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4870 Parkridge Pl.  
Kelowna, B.C., V1W 3A1  
From: <hloewen@silk.net>  
20 Jul 2001

Dear Del,

Thank you so much for sending me the latest copy of "Preservings." As always, it is packed with much interesting material—and evidence of your hard work. Needless to say, I love Al Reimer's excellent review of my book "Road to Freedom." I'll drop a cheque for the issue into the mail tomorrow.

On another matter, how about paying us a visit again? Last time you were here you stayed at the Vic Doerksens for the night. Now, after we built again, we have an extra room for you to stay at our place. Our son Jeff said today, "Why don't you invite Mr. Plett again. I like him." Jeff, by the way, reads your "Preservings" with great interest as well.

With best wishes, "Harry Loewen"

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59 Richardson Cr.  
Regina, SK S4S 4J2

Dear Society!

We, our children, and even some grandchildren read with great interest your *Preservings*, #18. Especially Delbert Plett's sensitive coverage of Kronsgarten, pages 113 to 119.

It is indeed a riddle why Dr. B.H. Unruh did not deal with Kronsgarten in his monumental book: *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*.

It is also mystifying that in the many post-publication articles that Dr. Unruh published in *Der Bote*, elaborating on the contents of his book, an explanation for Kronsgarten's deletion does not feature.

Should some of the descendants of the Kronsgartners get concerned over the term "missing Souls", the implication is not with reference to "purgatory", but "ve'beiselt" by our chroniclers....

Is there any work in progress on J.J. Hildebrand's *Hildebrand's Zeittafel?* It badly needs an index, maybe translating too.

Very sincerely, "Heinrich Bergen"

**Editor's Note:** It was largely due to your extensive knowledge and resource material such as photos and maps that the article was possible. The descendants of Kronsgarten owe you a great debt.

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411-20 Vahalla Dr.,  
Winnipeg, Man., R2G 0Y1  
Aug. 10, 2001

Editor,

The last issue of the "Preservings" had a number of letters to the editor and some subsequent responses.

In considering them, I concluded that we do well to define our terms more clearly. Did not a Greek philosopher say, "If you speak to me, define your terms?"

I am inclined to believe that such delineation would reveal much churchism and faithism. Now let me define the two terms.

1) Churchism is the view and practice which holds that baptism, church membership and communion are sufficient for salvation without a personal living relationship with Jesus Christ. In such a case personal repentance of sin and a trusting commitment to Christ are sidestepped. Some of its adherents may live ethically and others not.

As Paul says in 2 Tim.3:5, "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; from such turn away."

2) Faithism is the view and practice of maintaining to be saved without one's own works, solely through faith in Jesus Christ. There is no repentance. They profess a correct way of salvation and assurance, but do not live righteously, do not follow Christ. In Tit.1:16 Paul says, "They confess that they knew God; but in works they deny Him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate."

In *Pilgrim Aflame*, M. S. Augsburger has Michael Sattler say to the reformers, "The church

of Jesus Christ is made up of those who walk in the Spirit and who live in the Spirit" (p.155).

"True Christians," he wrote, "are those who carry out Christ's doctrine in their lives" (p.177). No doubt this involves all aspects of the believer's life: the personal, filial, social, religious, financial, etc.

May God grant that we of today would have a right relationship to Christ through a genuine repentance and sincere faith in Him, whether we are conservative, traditional or evangelical. "If the church is the body of Christ, the holy presence of Christ in the world, its most fundamental task is to build communities of holy character. And the first priority of those communities is to disciple men and women to maturity in Christ and then equip them to live their faith in every aspect of life and in every part of the world" (*Dangerous Grace* by Colson).

Sincerely "Ben Hoeppner"

**Editor's Note:** We appreciate hearing from Rev. Ben Hoeppner who has made a massive contribution to the preservation of Manitoba's early pioneer history. Over the past decade or so Rev. Hoeppner has transcribed and translated thousands of pages of journals, diaries, and sermons. He has done this work as a volunteer and without remuneration and deserves a great debt of gratitude from the Mennonite community.

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Box 237, Rosenort  
Man., ROG IWO  
July 13, 2001

Editor

Thank you for keeping me on your mailing list and forwarding your most informative paper to me. I appreciate the fact that Preservings has given a voice to a group of Mennonites who have often been unheard or who have been depicted in very unfavorable terms by the larger Mennonite constituency.

In the interest of retaining integrity in that process I thought I had to point out some quite misleading statements in your editorial in the June, 2001 issue.

You say there, "It is told that the E.M.C. minister in Leamington, Ontario, personally visited every Old Colony home in the area, trying to persuade the people to switch to his church." Since you make that a major premise for what follows I believe it is important that such a statement should be accurate. (I note that you are quite forthright in the same editorial in reminding others when they make statements that you label as "simply false and untrue") Since we have resided in southern Ontario for some time I am somewhat familiar with the situation of the Mennonites out there and also know the minister in question quite well. I am amazed that someone in your position as a lawyer and publisher would be content to preface your critique with an, "It is told". I personally contacted the minister in question and he has informed that you had made no contact with him before publishing this misinformation. He insisted that he had certainly not visited more than five percent of the Old Colony homes in the area and had not made it a point of "persuading the people to switch to his church."

I must also question the comparison you make between the migration of our ancestors from Russia in 1874 with the migration of Mennonites from Mexico in more recent times. As you are very much aware the 1874 migration was essentially a transplanting of church body from Russia to Canada. The people arrived here with their church leaders intent on reestablishing themselves as a body in a new land. The migration of Mennonites from Mexico to Ontario, and other parts of Canada, has been anything but that. These people came here largely as individual families for the basic purpose of seeking a better economic future for themselves. In many cases they came with their residency requirements incomplete and in all cases without their church. There has never been a transplanting of the Old Colony church from Mexico to Canada. It was the Old Colony church from Manitoba who made contact with the Mennonites coming to Ontario and helped them to establish a Canadian Old Colony church. This group was no more recognized by the Old Colony church in Mexico than were your so-called "Predator denominations". In terms of history and family relationships and also doctrinal similarity there was certainly more affinity between the Mexico O.C. and the Manitoba O.C. but all churches formed with these Mennonite immigrants shared the distinction of not being recognized by the O.C. church in Mexico.

I believe many Old Colony leaders would acknowledge that the extensive migration of Mennonites from Mexico has been far too big for the Old Colony church to respond to individually. The Old Colony church in Manitoba deserves a lot of credit for accommodating a large number of Old Colony people from Mexico in their own congregations as well as helping to establish new churches in Ontario. It is estimated by people who worked with their citizenship that about 25,000 Mennonites have come to southern Ontario over the past 35 years. When we add up the numbers of Mennonites in the churches we find that less than half that number are actively involved in any church. Is it really very meaningful to talk about "predator churches" in that context?

You would do well to familiarize yourself with some of the numerous co-operative Mennonite institutions and help organizations in southern Ontario such as the MCC Resource Center, the Mennonite Community Store and the Menno Lodge to name a few. Many of the very critical statements you make serve only to accentuate differences and even to arouse hostility between church groups. In reality there is a good relationship between most of the churches and as a member and former pastor in one of your so-called "predator churches" I enjoy a very brotherly relationship with the leaders of the Old Colony as well as the Sommerfelder churches. I have personally benefited greatly from getting to know these churches and their leaders from the standpoint of personal relationships and I suggest that the future will be better served as we continue to work together instead of accentuating our differences.

Respectfully Yours, "Menno Kroeker"

**Editor's Note:**

Thank-you for writing to express your views. I am happy to publish your letter though it far exceeds our length guidelines. I also note for the record that this is a courtesy which would not be returned in the Evangelical media.

As editor of *Preservings*, I am pleased to engage in a dialogue on such an important subject. I have a number of concerns relating to the topic and the content of your letter.

1) **Theology:** By the 1940s, E.M.C. leaders such as Rev. Ben D. Reimer and the entire E.M.M.C. Conference (Rudnerweider) in the West Reserve had converted themselves to dispensationalism, a belief system which takes Jesus and His teachings out of current application. There is concern that your project is more about converting those who are already Christian from one religious culture (Mennonitism) to another (Evangelicalism) than about bringing people to the Gospel or about building them up in their faith.

2) **Culture:** Through the leading of God, Mennonites since Reformation times have developed a religious culture which reminded them of the centrality of Jesus and His teachings in their lives and faith. Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture does not have these safeguards and in some instances even turns people away from Christ, e.g. dispensationalism. Some of the more educated and discerning Evangelicals today are coming to understand conversion and salvation in terms similar to that of orthodox Mennonite teaching, i.e. more "...in terms of allegiance" (Dr. D. Climenhage, *Messenger*, Oct. 17/01, page 3) than of completing a maze of legalistic entrance requirements, such as conversion experience, assurance of salvation, etc. invented by doctrinaire Fundamentalists. This raises the question whether it is really necessary to put people through the trauma of severing ties with family networks and support communities, condemning their parental faith, etc.

3) **Home Front:** One of the strategies of Protestant Fundamentalism is the demonization of people and communities it is targeting for conversion to its religious culture. What does such a religious culture do to the home congregations? Does this explain the sarcastic response with a curled lip which comes forth when Old Colony, Sommerfelder or Kleine Gemeinde cousins and relatives are mentioned? Or local employers who hire these immigrants cheap to do their dirty work and then disparage them as "M&Ms"? Or the negative references to our conservative brothers and sisters in Christ in the Evangelical media with incredibly insensitive suggestions such as that they have made tradition into a religion (e.g. *Messenger*, Sept. 19/01, page 2 or *The Gospel Message*, Issue 4, 1998, pages 2-5). "In the field" some proselytizers use terminology like "Kleida Christ'e" (literally clothing Christians) to persuade believers that their parental faith is inferior and worthless. I hear of cases where Old Colony children have converted themselves to Protestant Fundamentalism and then denounced good Christian parents as non-Christians, etc. I thought such tactics had gone out of style in medieval times. What eventually happens to children and young people that are brought up and socialized with

such attitudes towards other human beings? Now that it has been established that the Old Coloniers, Sommerfelder, Reinländer and other conservatives preach a Gospel that is more Biblical than that of Evangelicals, would it not be better to encourage and build each other up and acknowledge the many positive contributions all denominations have made to the Mennonite community and Christendom? I have a further suggestion: if, instead of robbing our young people of their heritage of faith (as you and I experienced) by a constant diet of negative images and misrepresentations about our grandparents, the young people were socialized with a positive and truthful portrayal of their spiritual, cultural and historical heritage, the youth would not only be more fulfilled and empowered human beings, they would remain in their parental churches and it would not be necessary to raid other confessions and denominations for people to fill in the ranks.

5) **Separatism.** One of the peculiar teachings of Protestant Fundamentalism is Separatism or Sectarianism, i.e. the teaching that new converts cannot be saved unless they join that particular denomination. Is this really a Biblical teaching? You yourself acknowledge the differences between Old Colony congregations. Could you not have organized the Old Colony people you were serving into a slightly more North American style Old Colony congregation thereby enabling them to enjoy and benefit from the heroic tradition of faith which God has given them?

You protest the reference to your activities as "predator" but the reality is that over the past 50 years your denomination has established stations in almost every Old Colony locality in Canada and elsewhere. You are legally entitled to do so, of course, but does this not demonstrate a clear denominational growth strategy? Perhaps your protest rings a little hollow!

One of the most disturbing things in your letter is the reference that only half of the returnees from Mexico have chosen to associate themselves with a Mennonite church in Ontario. This tells me that many of these immigrants are so distraught by the stream of negative propaganda put out about them by Mennonite media in Canada that they simply want no part of such a religious culture or that they themselves have started to believe the false caricature of their faith, history and culture that is being portrayed and simply want no further association with the same. I am sure you will agree that it is unacceptable to lose 10-15,000 believers at least in part because of the bigoted attitudes referred to.

6) **Historical Precedent:** The situation of the Old Mennonites helping out our great-grandparents in 1874 is actually not as distinguishable as you suggest. The Old Coloniers, who made up half of that migration, came mainly as individual families. This would have been an ideal opportunity for the Ontario Old Mennonites had they been guided by Protestant Fundamentalist sectarianism. Instead they were articulated by the love of Christ and helped the new immigrants with getting settled, housing, employment, dealing with governments, etc. This gave Ältester Johann Wiebe the window of opportunity to consolidate the Old Colony people in their parental

faith. How much poorer would Christianity not be today if this had not occurred or if this group had been subverted by outside proselytisers to adopt some version of Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture with the resulting faceless assimilation into the "Christentum der Welt"?

7) **Differences:** You question my credibility on the basis that I did not personally talk to your local minister in Ontario. At the same time you make negative allegations about Old Colony leaders in Mexico and Canada suggesting they do not recognize each other. Let me ask you, did you personally talk to any Old Colony leader regarding this statement? When I attend Old Colony worship services in Mexico and Canada, I recognize immediately that they are in harmony with each other in their core faith and spiritual values, preaching the centrality of Christ in their lives. Many Baptist churches across North America shun each other and refuse to recognize each other as Christians over minuscule differences in faith and practice. There are similar differences even within the E.M.C. Conference. I do not see this as a proper grounds to denigrate an entire Christian community--nor does it justify the painful divisions caused by sectarianism. You also conveniently forget to mention that it is the categoricism and refusal of Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture to recognize as Christian all other confessions--including Gospel-centric conservative Mennonites, that is the underlying cause of much of this painful conflict.

7) **Testimony:** Probably your least valid point is the accusation you make against me personally, that I am responsible for causing hostilities by drawing attention to historical facts and by pointing out wrongs that have taken place. I hold to the view that those who are seeking to turn people away from their parental faith, will themselves be accountable for their actions, whether good or bad.

I should mention in closing that one of my sources in southern Ontario gave the testimony of you as a sincere Christian and that you personally had not stooped to any of the questionable tactics typically used by Protestant Fundamentalist proselytizers. For this I applaud you.

Box 312, Warman  
Sask., S0K 4S0  
June 28, 2001

Editor,

I just thought I'd sit down and drop you a few lines to say hello and to thank you for what you have done. The people that I have talked to say that there are many interesting story's. The books are well liked by them as well.

I have received different donations. We still have quite a few books left as I gather from our other Ministers. I did give them a box of books to hand out. The money that I have receive comes to \$477.00. I'm sending you \$500.00. Whatever will come in later I shall send it at another time

We hope this letter finds you all in good health. As for us we have our ups and downs, but still much to be thankful for. May God bless and keep you till we see and meet each other on earth or in Heaven. Thank you.

By for now, "John and Katharena Quiring "

6779 Smith Blvd., RR 1  
Pefferlaw, Ont., L0E 1N0  
June 21, 2001

HSHS.

Please find enclosed a cheque for \$40.00 (number 482), of which \$20.00 is membership renewal, and \$20.00 is donation for ongoing work of the society. A receipt for income tax purposes is appreciated, but not necessary.

I enjoy the HSHS newsletter, Preservings, and look forward to receiving the latest.

I beg your pardon, please, that this was not forthcoming sooner.

Truly, "Rev. Douglas E. Neufeld"

June 20, 2001  
111-181 Watson St.  
Winnipeg, Man., R2P 2P8

Thank you Delbert for sending me your books. They appear almost intimidating in their comprehensiveness. Your passion for the subject is certainly well demonstrated. I think one has to live with the books for a while, but I think your passion is rubbing off on me as I am opening the pages. They will be an invaluable reference for me. My knowledge of Menno. history, of the KG in particular, has been minimal. One's interest in this subject grows as I get older. I am also looking forward to your fiction.

So again many thanks and keep on writing.  
"Al Toews"

P.S. How about Kleine Gemeinde Brethren and have KGB as the abbrev.?

18918 No. 88th Dr.  
Peoria, Az., 85382  
June 18, 2000

HSHS

RE: Renewal of Subscription

Enclosed is a check in the amount of \$20.00 (US) for annual renewal of membership and Preservings.

I have not received an issue since December 2000. Thank you for the good work of the Society.

Cordially, "Kenneth Kliever"

August 24, 2001  
Box 20252  
Steinbach, MB., R0A 2T1

Dear Delbert:

Many thanks for the copy of Preservings. By the way, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was hanged, not shot. Of course the net result is much the same.

"Jay Delkin"

Editor's Note: Sorry, my mistake.

## Preservings

July 16, 2001  
20 Rundelawn Close,  
Calgary, Ab., T1Y 4A5

Delbert:

I was drawn to read almost everything and was galloping along with you at a giddy pace in your editorial of #18 and came to the realization that four pages 45 to 48 are repeated and pages 41 to 44, the last of your editorial and the beginning of what appears to be something about India (of great interest to me) are missing.

Am I the only one? I hope so. If you could send me the four pages 41 to 44, I'd be glad.

The article(s) by David Schroeder is profound and necessary.

I acknowledged there that your work has had an impact on me, and I do not mind sharing it, if you wish. Anyway, for now, those four pages.

"Peter Penner"

**Editor's Note:** A replacement issue No. 18 has been sent. Thanks for your encouragement.

Box 42, Glastyn  
Sask., S0M 0Y0  
July 18, 2001

Henry R. Friesen  
Box 53, Wheatley, Ont., N0P 2P0.

Dear Mr. Friesen:

I read the article "Old Colony Mennonite Schools in Ontario", in *Pres.*, No. 18, June 2001, pages 131-133, with great interest.

Keep up the good work. I could say much, much, more, but I will keep my remarks restricted to two reference/recommendations.

Place the following into your board Library.

Tim LaHaye – *The Battle for the Mind*, Copy right 1980 Tim LeHaye published by Fleming H. Revell Co., pbk....

This is a invaluable book dealing with the humanist takeover of our governing systems. The book should be available, at any Christian Book-store....

If ever we need good solid Christian leaders and leading in our educational system, the time is now. You are most definitely on the right tract.

Yours truly, "Raymond W. Toews" B.A., U. of S., 1968 RMAA (retired)

**Editor's Note:** This letter addressed to Henry Friesen, the author of the article referenced, was mailed in care of and received by *Preservings*. Accordingly I will respond. I would recommend that all sincere Christians shun and avoid reading any writings by Tim Lahaye and his cohorts. Lahaye is a confirmed dispensationalist, a belief system which takes Christ and His teachings out of current applicability. This is the type of material which some Protestant Fundamentalists are seeking to bring into our public schools and thereby to indoctrinate the children of other confessions into their religious culture. Presumably if Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell ever achieve their goal of controlling the political system, such curriculum would soon be compulsory. At the same time, these people would be the first to scream to the high heavens and sue for the protection of the Constitution if Catholics, Episcopalians or even Mennonites would ever try the

same thing. Let us appreciate the separation of Church and State and pray for our Government that freedom of religion for Mennonites, Catholics and Orthodox Christians may continue for as long as possible.

402-255 Wellington Cres.,  
Winnipeg, R3M 3V4  
Oct. 26, 2001

Dear Mr. Plett.

I was recently given a copy of EAST RESERVE 125 and read it with great interest. Over the years, I allowed my interest in Steinbach affairs to lapse into near indifference. It has out lived me instead of the other way around. A recent drive down Main Street, after visiting the Heritage Museum where I enjoyed watching a little skit based on my grandfather, left me wondering where the places I grew up with really were: even the garage has changed and the family home now on Hanover street, took a second look before I recognized it. It pleased me learn that the present owners are dedicated to restoring it to its original appearance.

My reason for writing is to ask a favour of you, pictures of Main Street 1930-1940. The issue showed some pictures of the era but I would like to see more of the south side going east from my home and garage, past the Royal Bank, the blacksmith shop, livery stable, hotels, school, H.W. Reimer store, the farm implement garage (where the Pietenpol was built), law office. Penner Lumber. A tall order. I admit. Have you any leads?

I would also like to point out an important omission in the brief reference to the Pietenpol. Frank Sawatzky was the initiator of that project and continued to play a key role as two more planes were constructed.

Although this matter never wrought any specific change in the community, it did create enormous excitement, drawing huge crowds during flying exhibitions from 1932 to 1934 and later to a lesser degree.

Yours truly, "Wm. J. Friesen."

**Editor's Note:** Wm. J. Friesen is brother to Ed J. Friesen, well known owner of J. R. Friesen Garage. Dr. Friesen was referred to the four part series of articles on Steinbach Main Street done by Ernest Toews finishing with Issue No. 12, pages 79-84. The Pietenpol story is now being researched by the Canadian Aviation Museum (contact President Ralph Friesen for details).

Box 58, Drake  
Sask., S0K 1H0  
Nov. 6, 2001

Dear Sirs:

Someone loaned me a copy of your publication, *Preservings*, (#18, June, 2001.) It has introduced me to your organization and your program.

We have been residents of Saskatchewan for 40 years, but my background is Manitoba, West Reserve and Sommerfelder. I would like to become a member of your society. The information you offer would be of interest to me.

From your office,...I was told that newsletter

#18 (June, 2001) is still available. I would appreciate receiving it, plus the December one when it is printed. Thank you.... Further, I would like to purchase a copy of the Bergthaler Gemeindebuch. I am remitting \$23.00 for the same.

Provincially, we have a Mennonite Historical Society as well and I have been an active member of it for several years.

Yours truly, "Henry H. Funk"

Tabor College  
400 South Jefferson  
Hillsboro, Ks., 67063-1799  
29 Nov. 2001

Dear Delbert,

It seems that since you made me aware of Matt Groening and "The Simpsons" cartoons, that I stumble on Simpson editorials frequently. Here is another article which appeared in the *Wichita Eagle*, Kansas, earlier this fall, in the 8 September 2001 issue ("Religion and 'The Simpsons'", by Richard N. Ostling, Associated Press), copy enclosed.

Thank-you so much for the *Preservings*. Each issue is most interesting and well done.

Sincerely, "Peggy Goertzen,"  
Director, Center for M. B. Studies, Tabor College, Hillsboro, Ks., 67063.

**Editor's Note:** "The Simpsons" (*Pres.*, No. 14, pages 53-54) and the connection of creator Matt Groening to the Kleine Gemeinde and the KMB was indeed an interesting story. Thanks for your help. Cross-fertilization of ideas and icons is crucial in enabling all Mennonites and each denomination to appreciate the richness of their culture and heritage.



Members of the "The Simpsons" cartoon family, and Reverend Lovejoy, stand beside the coffin of Maude Flanders, wife of do-good neighbor Ned Flanders. A new book, "The Gospel according to the Simpsons," says the animated series shows respect for religion. From Wichita Eagle, Sept. 8/01, extracted by Peggy Goertzen.

# News

## The Way of Suffering and Sorrow

"The Way of Suffering and Sorrow: Dedication of the Eichenfeld Massacre Memorial, May 27, 2001, Nowo-Petrowka, Ukraine,  
by Alexandra Penner, member of the Evangelical Mennonite Church, Zaporozhe, Ukraine.

On May 27, 2001, the entire membership of the Evangelical Mennonite Church from Zaporozhe drove to the village of Nowo-Petrowka (Eichenfeld) for the dedication of a memorial for the Mennonites who fell victim to mass murder during the civil war. It took an hour to drive.

On arrival we were greeted by relatives and friends of the victims from Canada, U.S.A. and other countries, the Council of the City of Zaporozhe, the residents of the villages and many children.

Steve Shirk, representing MCC, presided over the proceedings. He described the events of the bygone years, as a bloody tragedy unfolded in Eichenfeld and the nearby villages.

Presentations were made by the following:  
1) Boris Letkeman, chairman of the Mennonite Church, Zaporozhe;  
2) Pankin, Chair of the District Soviet; and  
3) Jakow Plachtyr, Chair of the Nikolaipol Village Soviet.

Through the efforts of two residents of the village, a memorial was made and erected. The unveiling of the memorial and the reading of the text on the memorial was entrusted to Anne Konrad Dyck.

Slowly the memorial was revealed. Before our eyes stood a polished stone slab of granite, in the shape of a coffin, standing at ground level in an inclined position. Anne Konrad Dyck explained the symbolism of the memorial: in or-

der to read the text of the memorial the readers must bow their head.

Mikhail Sidorenko, Provincial head of the Society for the Preservation of Memorials, gave a talk, "From time and place".

Professor Fedor Turchenko, chair of history at the University of Zaporozhe spoke of the terrible time itself. Wassiliz Kamen, representing the Ukrainian Orthodox Church, spoke of the terrible memories.

A hymn was sung by the members of the Mennonite Church from Zaporozhe. This was followed by a poem.

The names of the murder victims were read to the assembly by friends and relatives. Heads bowed low in numbing sorrow. The names and ages of the murder victims were mentioned again. They included people ages 5 to 75, but mostly they were ages 17 to 35: Klassen, Wiens, Penner, etc. The relatives prayed individually for the victims.

John B. Toews, Vancouver, British Columbia, made a special presentation. His main thoughts were "Forgiving evil" and "There shall be peace", after which "Grace be with us all" was sung.

Many flowers were laid down: from the guests, by our congregation, and from the local residents.

The hymn, "Jesus, take my hand" was intoned. An invitation for refreshments was made



A "droshky" with mounted machine gun stands as part of the artifacts in the Machnow display at the Zaporozhe museum. The opposite wing of the museum houses the permanent Mennonite display opened May 26, 1999. During the same Conference "Khortitz '99", a memorial was dedicated in Nieder-Chortitz: see Preservings, No. 14, pages 65-68. The Eichenfeld memorial is the second placed by the International Memorial Committee for the former USSR, chaired by Peter Klassen, California State University in Fresno and Harvey L. Dyck, director of research in Russian Mennonite Studies at the University of Toronto.



Eichenfeld, May 2001. The Ukrainian mason and stone carver at the memorial marker. The thicket at the rear covers the mass graves. Photo by Harvey Dyck, Toronto, Ontario. In the words of Paul Epp, its designer from Toronto, the marker represents "the coffin these people never had and the dignified viewing which they did not receive." Photos courtesy of Anne Konrad Dyck, Toronto, Ontario.



Presentors at the memorial service, May 27, 2001: l.-r., Larissa Goriacheva, Manager, Zaporozhe Intourist (interpreting into Ukrainian), Professor John B. Toews, Vancouver, delivering his address; and Chair, Steven Shirk, MCC representative for Ukraine/Russia.

after the official ceremony was over.

After the bloody nightlong murder in the 1919, the survivors fled from Eichenfeld in fear and shock, seeking refuge in Adelsheim.

And so as a remembrance for the innocent victims, all of us, also followed the way which the survivors, the widows and orphans, took to Adelsheim (Dolinowka). We went the way of suffering and sorrow. We went silently, everyone felt the tragedy deeply. Our surroundings, in contrast, were wonderful--everything was fragrant; the song of the nightingale enveloped us, answered by the other birds.

How can such a horrible beast exist? On this earth, through the grace and mercy of God?

On top of it all, when the refugees returned home, all their livestock had also been killed by the Machnowze.

Oh God! A sea of blood...! And finally I



*Relatives of the Eichenfeld and Nikolaipoler massacre victims gather around the memorial stone at the May 27, 2001 dedication service. Front: l.-r., unidentified, Mary Dueck, Florence Dyck and Tillie Regehr. Photo by Anne Konrad Dyck.*

wish to add that during the period from 1918 to 1920, 76 men and six women were murdered on the night of October 26 to 27, in Eichenfeld (Nowo-Petrovka) in the Nikolaipol District. With one exception, all of them were buried in 12 mass graves; Hochfeld (Morosowka) - 13 men and three women, 1919-1920; Franzfeld (Warwarowka) - 11 men, 1918-1919; Petersdorf - nine men, 1919. 17 men and one woman were murdered in other parts of the district.



300 people including TV reporters attended the dedication service for the first massacre marker for the Mennonite victims of Eichenfeld and the Nikolaipoler District 1918-1920. The mourners included members of the Mennonite Church of Zaporozhe, visitors, dignitaries, villagers, clergy, etc. Professor Harvey Dyck (left) and Father Kamen. Photo by Anne Konrad Dyck.

With pain we remember the fallen, as it is written in Isaiah; perhaps the time will come when "...they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruninghooks," Isaiah 2:4.

This memorial is erected with the intention of reconciling the relatives of the victims and by the friends of the Mennonite story.

In closing I wish to adjudge Harvey Dyck, Toronto, according to his deserts. Everything was organized, prepared and carried out in an exceptional way through his great energy. After 80 years we remember the unfortunate victims!

Thanks and praise are due to Harvey Dyck for through this memorial he has permanently marked these victims of German background.

Through his efforts and exceptionally far-reaching work, people now speak out loud and openly about the Mennonites in front of all ears.

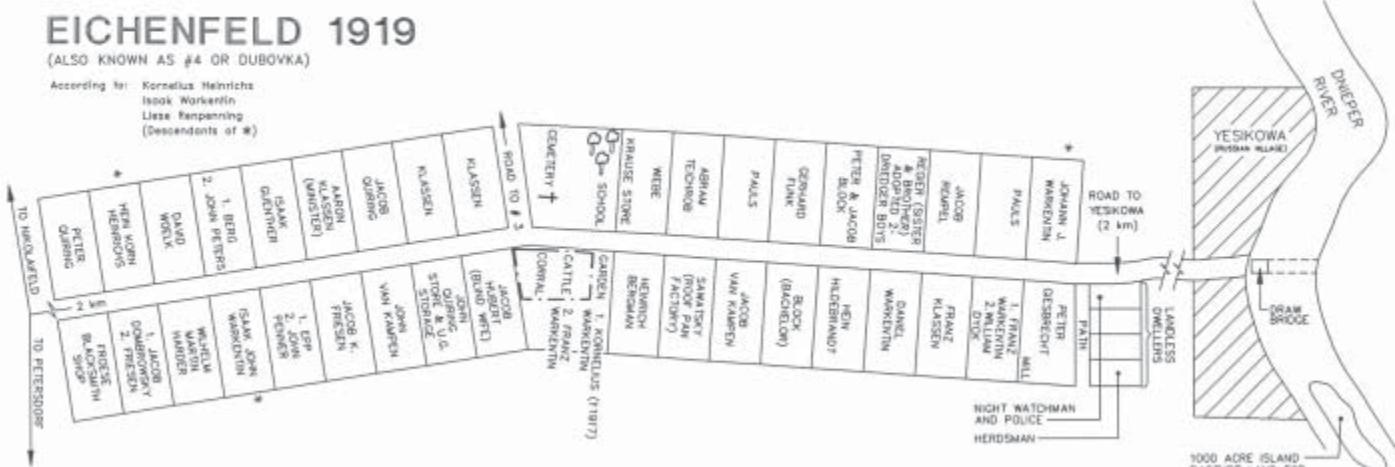
These events were reported in the newspapers, radio and through television.

People know about the Mennonite congregation in Zaporozhe and in Kutusowka (Petershagen), organized by Frank Dyck from Canada. I thank God that He sends such zealous believers into the world.

However, it is impossible to understand that the public wishes to elevate a thief like Machnov as national hero. In the museum in Zaporozhe there is a wing devoted to Machnow and his times.

With all my heart I hope that in time history will put everything into its place and that the truth will triumph.

Translated and reprinted with permission from *Der Bote*, Sept. 5, 2001, pages 5-6.  
Reference: Marianne Janzen "The Eichenfeld Massacre Oct. 26, 1919," in Preservings, No. 18, pages 25-31.



*Map of Eichenfeld, 1919. According to Kornelius Heinrichs, Isaak Warkentin and Liese Rempenning, descendants of \* asterisks. Drawn by L. H. Warkentin, 1990. Not to scale. Photo courtesy of L. Warkentin, John Warkentin and his Descendants 1820-1990 (Winnipeg, 1990), page 276.*

# Ukraine Congregation Struggles

"Ukraine Congregation struggles with limited resources,"

by Donita Wiebe-Neufeld, reprinted from Canadian Mennonite, June 18, 2001, page 15.

Jake and Dorothy Unrau of Alberta had to adjust their expectations when they became pastors of the Evangelical Mennonite Church in Zaporozhye, Ukraine. The difficult social and economic situation means that the church has extremely limited resources.

"Every day we make a list of things that need to be done," said Dorothy in a recent conversation. "We consider it a good day if we accomplish two or three of them." Very few people have phones or reliable transportation. "Sometimes we spend a whole day driving around without knowing if the people we need to see are available."

The great challenge, however, is the language barrier.

"It's difficult when you have a desire to minister and there are language problems," said Dorothy. Wanting to preserve its cultural heritage, the congregation felt it was important to use German even though the predominant language among members is Russian. The Unraus speak fluent German, but struggle with the Russian language. Services are held in German and translated into Russian.

The Unraus are currently on a four-month leave in Canada that ends in September. Their work in Ukraine does have its rewards.

"Our greatest joy is to witness the great hunger for God's word, and to see the growth and changes in lives when Christ is present. The people have a tremendous calm and peace of spirit when they have experienced God," they said.

The Zaporozhye congregation began in a cultural club. A number of people with Ger-



*Jake and Dorothy (Klassen) Unrau, pastoring the Zaporozhye Mennonite Church. The Unraus are originally from Burns Lake, B.C. Given their Old Colony roots they are certainly well qualified to understand the Mennonite community in Ukraine, who were systematically marginalized and denigrated in Soviet times.*



*Baptismal group at the Zaporozhye Mennonite Church, Ukraine. L.-r.: Sergei and Svetlana Romanov, Vitaly Fesenko, Victoria Denava; received into membership Anya Tiechev.*

man Mennonite background were attending the club and when they discovered a shared faith heritage they began holding Bible studies.

Frank Dyck from Calgary, who was teaching at the local Bible school, was invited to pastor the group: see *Pres.*, No. 14, page 42; and No. 13, pages 22-24. In 1994, the congregation was officially registered and began regular worship services in the club. The Commission on Overseas Mission [of what used to be the General Conference] became involved and sent Peter and Susan Kehler as the next pastors. The Unraus began in September 1998.

For the majority of Ukrainians, conditions are difficult. In 1991, with Ukrainian independence and the introduction of a market economy, people began spending most of their

energy just making a living. With no social safety net, families can easily be devastated when illness strikes.

Finding good health care is difficult and patients are expected to bring everything they need with them to the hospital, including food and surgical supplies. The church struggles to alleviate these problems, but with limited ability.

When asked what the North American church can do, Jake responded that prayer and financial aid are both desperately needed. Currently the Zaporozhye congregation is searching for a building, a very difficult undertaking.

By Donita Wiebe-Neufeld

The Unraus can be reached at (djunrau@hotmail.com) or through Peter Rempel o/c Mennonite Church Canada, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4 Phone (204) 888-6781.

## Hutterites attend Canadian Mennonite University

Ninety men and women from 30 Hutterite communities in Manitoba registered for a class taught at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg. The first course, held in four sessions (February 27, March 6, March 13 and March 20, 2001), was part of a pilot education project begun as a cooperative effort between the University and the Hutterian communities.

The initial course, "Anabaptist and Hutterite History and Beliefs" was taught by John J. Friesen, professor of history and theology. Each session consisted of two hour-and-a-quarter classes. By the last session attendance reached 140.

The students were "very enthusiastic." As the sessions progressed "it became quite evident" that many of the students had done considerable background reading and "a number had done in depth reading in their own Hutterian sources as well as the wider Anabaptist and Mennonite story."

The Hutterites have long been concerned about educating teachers, young people and community leaders within the context of their own faith tradition, a need not currently being met by other educational facilities. The Hutterites have pioneered the creation of a special education program at the University of Brandon, where their students can study without fear of being victims of proselytization by Protestant Fundamentalist fanatics. For more information on BUHEP and Hutterian educational programs see, *Preservings*, No. 17, page 82 and pages 117-121.



*Hutterite teachers and community leaders listen attentively as Dr. John J. Friesen, reviews the origins of Mennonite and Hutterite roots in the fires of the Protestant Reformation. Photo courtesy of Canadian Mennonite University.*

# Martin W. Friesen 1912-2000, Historian

A Tribute to Martin W. Friesen 1912-2000, Loma Plata, Paraguay – November 7, 2000, by Rev. Henry J. Gerbrandt, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The death announcement of my friend, Martin W. Friesen, came to me unexpected. Though I knew that Br. Friesen had gone into retirement I did not know how serious his physical disabilities were. His death and his funeral bulletin rekindled in me many pleasant memories of former relationships.

I recall the time when he shared with me the struggles he and his father, the late Bishop Martin Friesen, had when their church group, the Chortitzia Mennonite Church of Manitoba, decided to move to Paraguay. The Friesens had not been in favour of that move, yet in his ordination vows Bishop Friesen had committed himself to his people and decided to continue to be their leader in Paraguay. Already en-route on the ocean liner Martin W. Martin and his father Bishop Martin C. Friesen planned the school system for the future colony.

I found it most amazing how they drew up plans to acquire school materials from Germany and that from the very beginning in Paraguay a progressive school system in embryonic state would be born. The development of that plan was tragically stalled in the horrific struggle to get to the desolate wilderness, the Chaco area the government had decided to make available for the Mennonites. There were no roads from Asuncion into the wilderness. The terrible heat, tropical plagues, illness, lack of medical care and very primitive accommodation took their toll and more than a tenth of migrants died during the first year of waiting and moving.

Under the able leadership of far-sighted colony planners, villages were established and after some tragic failures a viable rural economy developed. During those pioneer years of intense struggle Martin W. Friesen and his father, Bishop Martin C. Friesen gave leadership to the spiritual and educational needs of the colony. At his funeral it was shared that Martin W. Friesen served the colony for a total of 62 years. His books and numerous articles will be a lasting legacy and will continue to serve the colony and the larger Mennonite society.

With nostalgia I recall several special moments with Br. Friesen. There was the time when he did research here in Canada and together he and I found the lost gravestone for the late Heinrich Wiebe, a leader from the Bergthal Colony in the 1874 migration from Russia to Manitoba. We found the stone under a pile of rubble in the corner of a farmer's field where the first Edenburg cemetery had been. We had it placed beside the cairn at the Einlage corner near Gretna.

I recall the days the Friesens lived with us in Altona and later we lived with them in their home in Loma Plata. I recall the sacred minutes when Br. Friesen and I stood in total darkness after sundown and drank in deeply the magic of the Chaco night. I recall the long evenings when he retold of the hard beginnings and the wonderful way how God had blessed their colony with wise leadership, the church, the schools, the coop and the flourishing economy they were enjoying. With pride he showed us enroute to Asuncion their Menno young people in service at the leper colony and their participation in the caring for the poor people of Paraguay.

I find the verses he had written during his final

illness and reprinted on the funeral bulletin very beautiful and moving:  
*Einst trieb mich endlose Planen,  
 jetzt leb' ich durch gläubig Gebet.*

*Einst seufzte ich, müde von Sorgen,  
 nun sorgt Er, und alles besteht.*

*Einst stand ich in eigenem Wirken,  
 nun wirkt Er, und ruhen darf ich.*

*Einst wollt ich für mich Ihn gebrauchen,*

*und nun gebraucht er mich für sich.*

Here follows a free translation:

Once I was compelled by endless planning,  
 Now I rest in confident prayer.  
 Once I groaned under constant worry,  
 Now He cares for me and all goes well.

Once I was driven by my own activities,  
 Now He is active and I am at rest.  
 Once I wanted to use Him for my vision,  
 Now He uses me for Himself.

#### Source:

Reprinted with permission from *Der Bote*, Issue 23, Nov. 29, 2000, pages 26-27.

#### Menno Colony, Paraguay.

Martin W. Friesen was the son of Martin C. Friesen (1889-1969), who led the faithful from the East Reserve to establish a new settlement in the "Green Hell of the Chaco" in Paraguay in 1926. After years of courageous struggle and perseverance, this settlement of 9500 citizens has come to bloom and rivals Hanover Steinbach in its prosperity, a testimony to genuine faith and the leading of the Holy Spirit. Ironically the Hanover Steinbach community from which most of the 1700 pioneers of Menno originated has only grown to some 25,000.

Martin W. Friesen worked alongside his father especially in the educational field. Among his most important historical contributions are: *kanadische mennoniten bezwingen eine wildnis: 50 Jahre Kolonie Menno - erste mennonitischen Ansiedlung in Suedamerika* (Loma Plata, Paraguay, 1977), 173 pages, and *Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis* (Altona, 1987), 502 pages.

Martin W. Friesen was the cousin to Peter H. Friesen, founder of Eastman Feeds, Steinbach, and the uncle to Martin F. Fehr, owner of Fehr's Sheet Metal, Steinbach. The Editor.



*Martin W. Friesen 1912-2000, historian of the Menno Colony, Paraguay.*

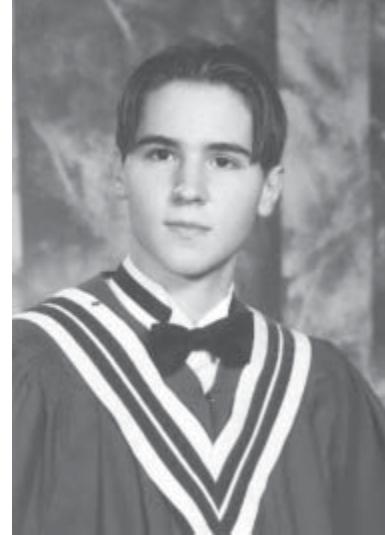
## H. E. Plett Memorial Awards

Every year the MMHS administers the Henry E. Plett memorial award for family history papers written by high school students in Manitoba. This year saw eight strong entries. Melissa Schroeder of Altona won the first place for her essay entitled "Cornelius J. Schroeder: A Biography". Second place went to Andrew Redekopp of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate for his essay entitled "Family History Essay".

The MMHS genealogy committee invites essays annually. Contact the committee for more information through the editors email address: [editor@mmhs.org](mailto:editor@mmhs.org) or postal address: Editor, Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2L 2E5.



*Ted Klassen presenting first place prize to Altona High School student Melissa Sawatsky.*



*Andrew Redekopp, Westgate Collegiate, second place winner.*

# Brendan Fehr, "Roswell", Movie Actor

Brendan Fehr, "Roswell", Movie Actor, Winnipeg, Manitoba; Abbotsford, B.C.; and Hollywood, C.A., by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Brendan Fehr.

Brendan Fehr, born in 1977, the youngest of three children of parents Hilda Wiebe and Jakob Fehr, has become a successful actor. He has been featured in the T.V. series "Roswell" and has been involved in a number of successful movies including "Perfect Little Angels," "Nightman," "Every Mother's Worst Fear," "Millennium," "Breaker High," and "Hand."

Brendan first started acting in high school in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and later in Abbotsford, B.C. He then went on to act in movies. Brendan now lives in Hollywood.

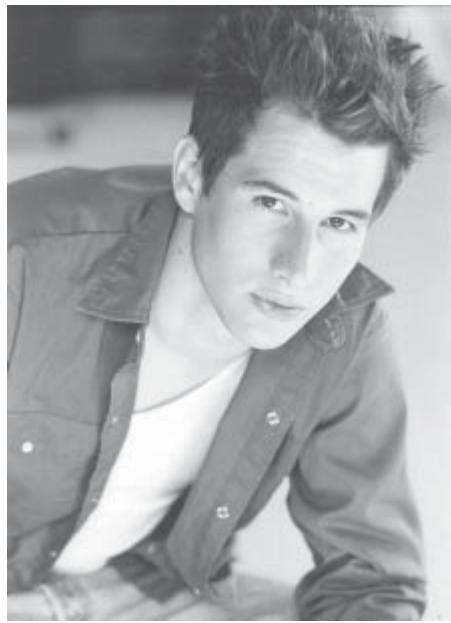
## Wiebe Roots.

Of particular interest to *Preservings* readers are the conservative Mennonite and "Old Colony" roots of Brendan Fehr.

Brendan's mother Hilda was the daughter of Isaac and Susanna Kroeker Wiebe from Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony, Soviet Russia. The Wiebes survived decades of oppression and religious persecution under the Soviets. In 1943 they fled from Soviet Russia and after years in transit and refugee camps, finally arrived in Blumenort, Manitoba, Canada, in 1948; see *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 14-18, for the story of their flight to freedom.

Several years later they settled in Steinbach, Manitoba, where Isaac worked for the local flour mill. Susanna Wiebe died last winter at the age of 89.

The Wiebe family traces its roots back to Peter Wiebe (1750-91), who immigrated from Elbing, Prussia, in the Vistula Delta, to Imperial Russia with the first Mennonite pioneers in 1788 and settled in Einlage. By 1801 son Heinrich



Brendan Fehr, publicity shot. Photo courtesy of Hilda Fehr, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Wiebe (1776-1849) was living in Neuendorf and owned Wirtschaft No. 17 (see 1801 Revision/census). By April 27, 1802 the family owned 3 horses, 9 cattle, 9 swine, 1 plow, 2 harrows, 1 wagon and a spinning wheel." Heinrich was a successful farmer and by 1808 he had 7 horses, 20 cattle and a servant.

From John Wiebe, ed., *Klaas Wiebe Family History* (Steinbach, 1986), pages 12-13, 157 and 166.

## Fehr Roots.

This article will focus on the paternal roots of Brendan Fehr. According to Mennonite genealogist Henry Schapansky, Brendan is a descendant of Benjamin de Fehr (b. 1734) and Anna Bergen (b. 1740) who were among the first to emigrate from West Prussia in 1788-9. They settled in the village of Neuendorf, Chortitza Colony and owned Wirtschaft 32 in 1801. He was also listed as a watchmaker. The family is listed under the name Benjamin Decker in the "Familien-Liste" of April 27, 1802 (Unruh, page 255).

Benjamin's son Jakob Devehr (1778-1823) is listed as owner of Wirtschaft 6 in Neuendorf. Jakob was the father of Helena Fehr (1820-98), who married her cousin Jakob Fehr (1809-76), Reinland, Manitoba, see *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 9-17), and Elisabeth Fehr (1828-1908) who married Wilhelm Esau, Peter Loewen and Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe, Gnadenfeld, E.R., Manitoba (see *Pres.*, No. 14, page 72, for photo).

Henry Schapansky has written that Benjamin's son Isaak de Fehr (1767-1857) came to Russia circa 1796-98. In 1814 Isaak owned Wirtschaft 11, Nieder-Chortitza, with a substantial operation of 5 horses and 19 cattle (Unruh, page 281). Isaak appears to be the father of Jakob Fehr (1809-77), pioneer of Steinbach and Reinland, Manitoba, and grandfather of Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), well-known chronicler of pioneer life in the West Reserve, see *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 9-17.

Isaak de Fehr's son Isaak de Fehr (1796-1861) was married to Helena Loewen (1798-1870). Son Isaak (b. 1821), Schöneberg, Chortitza Colony, Russia, was a minister who visited Manitoba in 1881. Three of his children immigrated to Manitoba where they were living in Blumenhof at the time of the 1881 census: Isaak (b. 1854), Jakob

(b. 1856) and Wilhelm (1863-1922) (BGB, page 371-2).

## David Fehr (b. 1838), Rosenfeld, W.R.

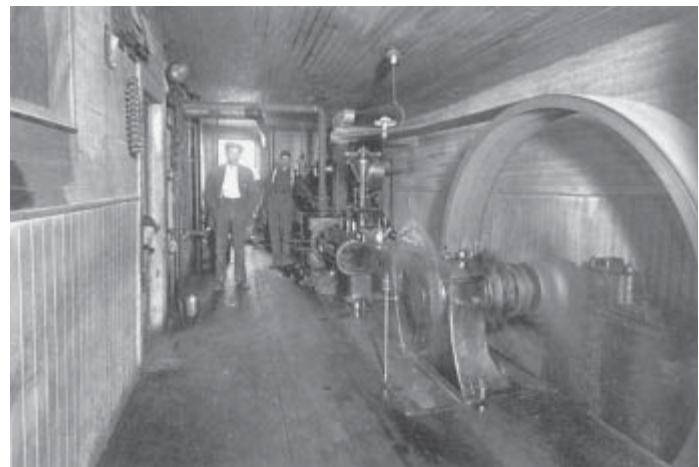
Isaak de Fehr (1796-1861) had another son David Fehr (b. 1838) married to Anna Klassen (b. 1839). David Fehr Sr. originated in Blumengard, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia (*West Reserve 1880 Census*, page 180). In 1875 they immigrated to Canada crossing the



The Altona flour mill built in 1886 for Peter Braun. After burning down it was resold to Peter Wiebe who sold it to David and Isaak Fehr; two brothers from Rosenfeld. The Fehrs operated the mill until 1926 when they emigrated to Paraguay. They sold the mill to Isaak I. Neufeld, who sold it to H. H. W. Reimer of Steinbach, the last owner. In 1960 the mill was sold to the Hutterites for \$800.00 who dismantled it. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 39.

Atlantic on the S. S. Moravian, with a contingent of Old Coloniers as well as Bergthalers including Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe.

The David Fehr family settled in Rosenfeld, W.R., where they are listed in the 1881 census. The family is listed among the first families of the Reinländer Gemeinde in Manitoba 1875-1880, page 3, no. 27. Later they belonged to the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, S1A-215.



Mill owners Isaak and David Fehr in the "machine room" of their Altona flour mill which housed a steam engine and this large pulley which drove the mill's various cleaning, grinding and other machinery. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 56.

## Preservings

In 1906 David Fehr owned the mill and livery stable in Altona (*West Reserve 1880 Census*, page 180). In 1910 his sons Isaak K. and David K. Fehr purchased one of the first cars in Altona, a 1910 McLaughlin Buick (see *Altona A Pictorial History*, page 41).



*The David K. Fehr family, circa 1890. Sons Isaak (b. 1882), on mother's lap, and David (b. 1878), later became prominent Altona businessmen, owning the flour mill, before moving to Paraguay in 1926 and 1927. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 16/Diese Steine, page 585.*

In 1926 and 1927 sons David K. Fehr (b. 1878) and Isaak (b. 1882), and their families, joined the exodus to Paraguay, settling in the Menno Colony. According to local historian Ted Friesen, the Fehrs were the most prominent citizens in Altona to join in the exodus.

David K. Fehr (b. 1878) married Susanna Siemens (b. 1883), daughter of Erdmann Si-

emens (b. 1840) BGB B276. At the time of the 1881 census the Siemens and Fehr families were neighbours in the village of Rosenfeld, W.R. (BGB 374). The David K. Fehr family settled in Waldheim, Menno Colony.

Their son Bernhard S. Fehr (b. 1913) married Nettie Reimer (b. 1914) who immigrated with their respective parents to what became the Menno Colony, Paraguay. Bernhard and Nettie Fehr were the parents of Jake Fehr, father of Brendan.

Bernhard Fehr (b. 1913) owned a brick factory in Loma Plata, Paraguay. In Fall of 1964, the Bernhard Fehr family with 13 children returned to Canada, first settling in Steinbach, Manitoba and later moving to British Columbia.

Son Jake Fehr lives in Mission, B.C., and owns Horizon Steel Yacht, building steel-hulled yachts ([www.horizonsteelyachts.com/builder.html](http://www.horizonsteelyachts.com/builder.html)).

### Reimer Roots.

Nettie Reimer, Brendan's paternal grandmother, was the daughter of Johann F. Reimer (b. 1878), son of Johann Reimer (1846-99) and Margaretha Funk (1850-1927), residents of Blumstein, E.R., in the 1881 census.

Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C., has written that Johann Reimer (1846-99) was the son of Dietrich Reimer (b. 1814) and Sarah Abrams (1821-66), BGB B24. Dietrich Reimer was resident in Bergfeld, W.R., at the time of the 1881 census. He was the son of Dirk Reimer (1780-1848) and Anna Klassen (1790-1849) of the Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia, BGB A44. Henry Schapansky has suggested that Dietrich Reimer was the great-grandson of Isbrandt Reimer (1723-79), listed in Peitzendorf/Hospital, 1776 Konsignation (census), West Prussia.

In 1926 brothers Johann F. and Jakob F. Reimer with their families joined the exodus to Paraguay travelling with the first contingent of Menno Colony pioneers, see *Ersten*

*mennonitischen Einwanderer*, page 13. Jakob F. Reimer was the father of Jakob B. Reimer, Oberschulz of Menno Colony from 1951-1967 and 1974-75 and grandfather of Sieg Hiebert, Business Promotions Manager, Steinbach Credit Union.

### Sources:

John Dyck, ed., *1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve* (Winnipeg, 1998), page 180.

Abr. B. Giesbrecht, *Die Ersten mennonitischen Einwanderer in Paraguay* (Loma Plata, 1995), pages 8 and 42.

Vic Penner, editor, *Altona A Pictorial History* (Altona, 1990), 293 pages.

Henry Schapansky, letter to author Oct. 23, 2000.

John Wiebe, ed., *Klaas Wiebe Family History* (Steinbach, 1986), pages 12-13, 157 and 166.

Telephone interview, Margaret Reimer Hiebert, Steinbach, Manitoba, Nov. 14, 2001.



*Isaac K. Fehr and wife, Laubenheim. He was the first Oberschulz of Menno Colony from 1928 to 1935. (He was the grandfather of Harry Fehr, manager of Quarry Oaks Golf Course.) Photo courtesy of Martin W. Friesen, Neue Heimat in der Chaco (Altona, 1987), photo-plates, page 417/Diese Steine, page 609.*



*Posing with Isaak K. Fehr and his vehicle of the day are Nita Bergen and Anna B. Braun, ca 1905. A Sunday ride in the country was just as enjoyable then as it is today. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 20.*



*Ben and Nettie (Reimer) Fehr went with their parents to Paraguay in 1927 and got married Oct. 15, 1935 in Menno Colony. Came back to Canada on May 8, 1964 and joined the Steinbach Mennonite Church. L.-r.: Lily 10, Sarah 18, Susie 19, Mary 15, Tina 16 and Benny 14. Mr. Fehr own Fehr's Service in Steinbach. Photo courtesy of 25 Jahre 1943-1968 Steinbach Mennoniten Gemeinde (Steinbach, 1968), page 68.*

# Kleine Gemeinde Relief Work, El Salvador

Mennonite Aid Central America - MACA: Kleine Gemeinde Relief Work in El Salvador,  
by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Earthquakes.

Two immense earthquakes shook the small nation of El Salvador on January 13 and February 12, 2001. They ruined 87,000 homes and caused hundreds of casualties. In one village more than 90 per cent of the houses were destroyed. Seventeen percent of the population of El Salvador was rendered homeless by the earthquakes.

Since then many governments and private organizations have provided assistance in various forms. MCC quickly send help and many churches aided in specific ways.

Hurricanes and earthquakes are a fact of life in Central America, much like tornadoes in the American mid-west. In 1960 the Mennonites who moved to Belize in 1956 were given their first exposure to the horrendous might and destructive power of hurricanes coming off the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean in 1960 with Hurricane Haiti.

The Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in Mexico and Central America are familiar with such tragedies. They have often been among the first responders to step in to assist neighbours in need (see *Pres.*, No.

12, page 38-39 for a report on the Belizean Mennonites).

The Kleine Gemeinde in Spanish Lookout, Belize, with a population of 1400, has frequently played a prominent role in disaster relief not only in Belize but also in neighbouring countries.

In October 1998 when Hurricane Mitch hit central Honduras, the Kleine Gemeinde from Spanish Lookout provided thousands of volunteer man-hours and enough food to feed 14,000 people in the Puerto Cortes/San Pedro Sula area, across the Gulf of Honduras; see *Preservings*, No. 13, pages 51.

## MACA.

The El Salvador earthquake happened on January 13th and by the 19th, six days later, a team of investigators including Otto R. Penner, Frank Barkman, Harvey W. Plett, George Rempel, Jake Braun and George Letkeman from Spanish Lookout Colony were on their way to the disaster area. Their mission was to investigate the situation and to identify villages which were not being helped by governments and other relief organizations. Invariably there

were those who fall between the cracks or are simply overlooked by world relief organizations and governments who do not have knowledge of the local people and cul-

tures.

Jaunary 31, 2001, Spanish Lookout elected a committee to be in charge of relief efforts, Frank Barkman and Harvey W. Plett, with Otto R. Penner as chair. The name given the undertaking was "Mennonite Aid Central America" or "MACA" for short.

Kleine Gemeinde relief efforts focus on "leading, encouraging and organizing the clean-up and rebuilding effort."

February 5, 2001, another group including Chair Otto R. Penner, Colony Vorsteher Denver Plett, Maria and Cornie P. Reimer, left Spanish Lookout. Their mission was to identify a place to help the needy in San Marcos Usulutan.

## San Marcos Usulutan.

Feb. 28, Harvey W. Plett, Denver Plett, and Heinrich D. Thiessen went to locate a place to live and started the work of making foundations for houses.

Many volunteer workers were sent and also financial contributions which were used for the purchase of materials.

Each volunteer worker worked with five families whose home had been destroyed. The 14 x 20 foot homes were constructed with a concrete base and 2 1/2 inch thick iron bars to hold up the roof.

As each home was finished the family was allowed to move in. They were then responsible to finish the house themselves. For many the partially completed house would remain their permanent home.



*The earthquake tore a big crack across this mountain, one side of which has slid down somewhat, together with half the village. A chilling reminder of the awesome destructive force of the earthquake. Photos for this article are courtesy of Daniel Penner, Box 1057, Arborg, Manitoba, R0C 0A0, who visited the disaster area on behalf of the Interlake Mennonite Fellowship Church, Arborg, Manitoba.*



*A mudslide caused by the earthquake near San Salvador City. Over 350 people lost their lives. The house visible in front slid down a distance of about six storeys, where hundreds of other houses lie buried.*



*This woman lost her house, with the exception of one wall which remained standing. She lives on the other side, under a sugar cane roof which she had also built herself.*



Many of the houses which had remained standing, looked like this one. No one would want to sleep in such a house because of the danger of a collapse.

### Home Front.

The four Kleine Gemeinde congregation in Spanish Lookout were kept informed on the activities by reports in the church bulletins.

March 30, 2001, it was reported that Henry Thiessen, Ben and Florence Barkman, Lloyd Friesen, Arden Koop and Miquel Tzul were still in El Salvador working on the housing project. In the village of San Marcos (where Henry Thiessen was field manager) 130 homes had been destroyed and 14 had already been rebuilt.

Another village Palpetate, only 4 km. from MACA headquarters had been identified where no other help had been given. Five foundations with roof were already finished. The villagers were thankful and provided a thanksgiving meal with Iguana, Oposum and chicken meat.

It was decided that any new houses will have steel pipes in the walls instead of wooden studs. This was for safety reason in the event of another earthquake. Little earthquake aftershocks are still being experienced.



Here is a house provided by US CARE. MACA improved the home with a foundation and two bags of cement to make a floor.



Here the house is being completed on the foundation with iron posts and 2x4s to hold the tin roof. Daniel Penner, Arborg, demonstrates how the roof beams are put in place. On the right hand side of the photo are the tin sheets used to make the roof.



Each of the homeless families received two bags of cement from which to make their floor. All the homes built by MACA used cement.

### MACA Report April 7.

In San Marcos 22 foundations finished. 10 new ones started. In Talpetate there are six wooden and six with steel posts finished. "They had a worship service with the villagers again on Saturday night."

"We need more volunteers to help. We would consider sponsoring your air fare 50 per cent for a two week stay and 100 per cent for a stay of three weeks or longer. Return tickets costs \$300 to \$320 excluding tax."

### MACA Report April 14.

"25 foundations are made in San Marcos. 80 are still needed. 12 houses are finished in Talpetate. 13 more are needed."

### MACA Report April 22.

"Henry Thiessen and Kurt Reimer are still working in Salvador. On Thursday, April 19, four volunteers came from the Quellen-Colony, Mexico....Friday, April 20. Elsie Banman (GDB), Martha L. Thiessen (ART), flew to El Salvador to work as cooks. We have no houseparents at the present. We would like to send a couple as houseparents to Salvador with a pickup truck. The truck would be used by MACA."

### MACA Report April 29.

"...Eddie & Esther went to El Salvador with

a pickup temporarily donated by 'Econo Diesel' to be used by MACA for a few months....The four volunteers from Quellen-Colony have return tickets for May 16. A group of eight volunteers from Swift Colony, Mexico, are planning to drive to El Salvador around May 14 to replace the group that is returning...There's another group from the Lowe Farm congregation, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, planning to come for two weeks....The Interlake Mennonite Fellowship Church, Arborg, Manitoba, sent a donation of \$10,000 Canadian. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the donors for their gifts."

### Conclusion.

The work of MACA in El Salvador continued until the beginning of July, 2001. By that time 66 homes with 14x18 foot foundations and roof had been constructed and another 40 houses completed with foundations only. Also important were the skills passed along, enabling the locals to finish the houses themselves. This will also give them a greater sense of ownership of the project and the end result.

Total expenditures from Spanish Lookout Colony (excluding the value of volunteer time), were around \$60,000.00 Canadian which paid for cement blocks, cement, lumber, pylcem, roofing, steel and welding supplies.

### Hurricane Iris.

On October 8, 2001, Hurricane Iris hit the southern coastal area of Belize. It caused 24 deaths, left 13,000 people homeless and severely damaged the banana crop. Again MACA has come forward to render economic assistance and humanitarian aid which is still going strong at the moment.

### Further Reading:

Dan Penner, "Mennoniten helfen in El Salvador," in *Men. Post*, June 1, 2001, pages 1-2; see also *Men. Post*, Nov. 19, 2001, page 20.

# Britney Spears, Pop Princess of Prayer

by Randy B. Brandt, 7578 Lamar Ct., Arvado, Colorado, 80003.

It has recently occurred to me that our current cultural climate can be summed up by two names: Jabez and Britney. While Michael Jordan, Paul-style, buffets his body so that he will not be disqualified for the prize (1 Cor 9:29 NAS), the basketball season must begin before he regains the headlines. No, the Zeitgeist is captured by the mysterious link between an obscure ancient male and a conspicuous postmodern young female.

Scoffers may protest that there is no connection, but here we believe in checking the facts. *The Prayer of Jabez* is making great money for



Randy Brandt is a great-grandson of Klaas R. Brandt (1845-1901), Rosenort, Manitoba, whose grandson Jack Brandt was the founder of "Brandt Construction" of Steinbach and later Omaha, Nebraska. Randy grew up in Kola, Manitoba. He currently lives in Arvado, Colorado, where he and his family attend the Grace Church, 6969 Sheridan.

Christian author Bruce Wilkinson; Britney is making great money after auditioning by singing "Jesus Loves Me."

That would be fascinating in and of itself, but there's more. Much more. *Jabez* emphasizes the power of repetitive prayer, encouraging the neophyte that this prayer "can release God's favor, power and protection" and that it "contains the key to a life of extraordinary favor with God." With that in mind, let's see what Britney told *Rolling Stone* magazine about her rise to fame:

"Every night, I had a Bible book that I prayed in," she recalls, "and every night, I would pray, 'I hope my song plays on a certain radio station that's really big,' and it would happen. Then I'd be like, 'I hope the video is wonderful,' and it was. Then I was like, 'I hope they play it on MTV.' "

Behold the power of prayer.

"I am totally blessed," Spears declares. Now she flies first-class and commands teams of people.

"It really hit me when I did the video for 'Baby,'" she says. "I was like, 'Oh, my God, all of these people are working for me!'"



Pop Culture idol Britney Spears. In his insightful article, Randy Brandt explores the resonance between pop-stars like Britney Spears and Evangelical religious culture.

Britney used a Bible book—does that mean an actual Bible, or a Biblical book of some sort? This happened before *Jabez* came out, so that wasn't it. No matter. She had something spiritual going on. Then she was like hoping to be blessed and stuff, and to like totally have her territory (and maybe more) enlarged, and behold, it totally was! How could a good Jabezite argue against her contented sensation of total blessedness?

Considering that Bruce Wilkinson states that the prayer of Jabez has no conditions, and that you can ask for blessing even if you have sin in your life, Britney certainly qualifies for blessing regardless of how you feel about her bare midriff.

The conclusion? An evangelical culture eager to embrace the blessings of Jabez is in no position to deny Britney's claims of prayer power paving the way to pop star prosperity. And that's a sad indictment indeed.

Website: <http://www.jemsoftware.com/content/who.html>

## In the Next Issue:

The new book *The Prayer of Jabez* by Bruce Wilkinson has sold millions of copies. In a second article Randy Brandt, Arvado, raises the controversial question, whether such religious "pop culture" is actually biblical?

## Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Purpose and Membership

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc. (HSHS) was organized in 1988 to research and write the history and heritage of the Hanover and Steinbach area, originally known as the "East Reserve". The initial emphasis was on the period 1874-1910 but much current research and writing is focusing on the 1920s and 30s, with more attention being directed to the story of our ancestors in Russia. Through public meetings, writings and publications the HSHS seeks to foster an understanding and respect for the rich heritage of the community.

Many volunteers from the community have contributed information, collected old diaries and letters, written articles, entered data on computer, proofread data, and helped in other ways to compile material for books. The financial support of the R.M. of Hanover, together with donations from private individuals has made it possible for the society to publish five books. Other works are in stages of completion.

These efforts have rewarded participants with a greater appreciation for their heritage. Perhaps you would like to show your support for the work of the society by donating family records, old correspondence or diaries. Any of our board members would be glad to talk to you.

The society also requires your support financially in order to continue the above activities. Your donations will help to keep the society strong. All contributions of \$20 or more will be acknowledged with a charitable donation receipt for income tax purposes. We are presently levying an annual membership fee of \$20 per annum but will appreciate you giving an additional amount of \$20 or \$40 to support the work of the society. Thank you for your participation.

Hanover Steinbach Historical Society  
Box 1960, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0

Enclosed is a cheque/cash in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ for:

Donation to society for  
which please issue a receipt \$ \_\_\_\_\_

TOTAL \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Postal Code \_\_\_\_\_

# Prussia/Royal Poland - Land of Our Forefathers - 2000

"Prussia - Land of Our Forefathers — Summer 2000,"  
by Merle and Betty Loewen, 205 Craig, P.O. Box 56, Ellinwood, Kansas, 67526-0056.

## Background.

Our genealogical heritage is rich in Kleine Gemeinde leadership families whose traceable roots come from Prussia/Royal Poland, perhaps as early as 1601, Imperial Russia (1804-5), Jansen, Nebraska (1874), then Meade, Kansas (1907).

The yearning to become more aware of my family roots was greatly nurtured by my mother, Margaret J. (Isaac) Loewen, oldest daughter of the Meade, Kansas, Kleine Gemeinde Ältester, Jacob F. Isaac (1883-1970) (*Pres.*, No. 14, pages 104-5). As a "walking" genealogist, whose expertise on kinships was amazing, long before computer programs could calculate relationships, she was explaining them to me as a youngster! In addition, my Uncle Peter E. Loewen assisted my relative and college professor, Dr. Solomon L. Loewen in bringing *The Descendants of Isaak Loewen Family* (481 pages) genealogy to publication in 1961.

## Loewen Heritage.

Michael Loewen (1601-1705) apparently was an army general who helped bring the Thirty-Year War (1618-48) to conclusion, finally settling Europe's boundaries for Protestant and Catholic areas of control. According to the research of Solomon Loewen (as yet unsubstantiated by Prussian Gemeindebücher), Michael Loewen was our multi-great grandfather. He was apparently baptized by George Hansen (1636-1703), Flemish Mennonite leader in Danzig, and interpreter of Mennno Simons (*Leaders*, p. 15), joining the Mennonite Church thereafter. Michael Loewen was honoured in Elblag (Elbing) for his leadership.

Isaak Loewen (1737-97), my 4th great grandfather, lived in Tiegenhof, Prussia, where he was Stammvater of the Kleine Gemeinde Loewen family (*Leaders*, p. 509). He was the first of seven Isaac Loewens. His son, Isaac Loewen (1759-1834), my 3rd great-grandfa-

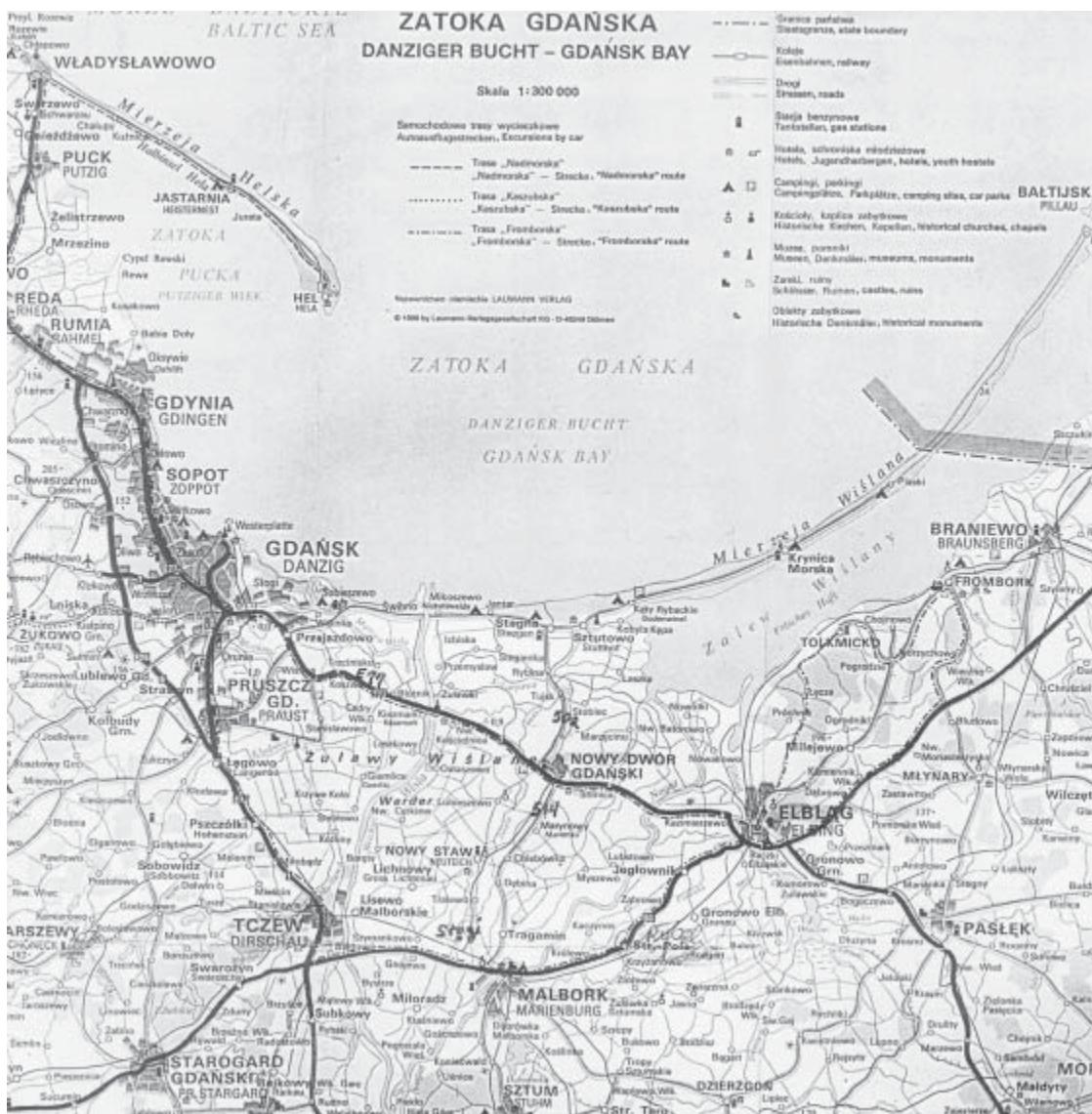
ther was baptized in the Ellerwald Gemeinde in 1779, located several km west of Elblag (Elbing). He was a carpenter and cabinetmaker. This family immigrated to Russia in 1804, arriving in Lindenau village in the Molotschna Colony in October 1805. Isaac's son, Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) became a deacon, leader, and prolific writer (*Leaders*, pp. 509-90).

## Von Riesen.

Abraham von Riesen (1756-1810) was the 4th great-grandfather in both the Loewen and Harder lineage. His son Abr. Friesen (1782-

1849), Ohrloff, was the second Ältester of the Kleine Gemeinde. The family belonged to the Flemish Tiegenhagen Gemeinde (*Dynasties*, p.531). After a move several kilometers north to Kalteherberge before 1798, the family immigrated to the village of Ohrloff, Southern Russia, in 1803.

With a love of history and travel, it has been our good fortune to take several trips to Europe with time spent exploring some Reformation sites. This Prussian/Polish connection trip was a very special privilege, as we traced Anabaptist routes that had beginnings in the 1500s from



*Modern roadmap of the Gdansk area, showing in detail the Mennonite triangle between Gdańsk, Malbork (Marienburg) and Elblag (Elbing), homeland of the wealthier Flemish and Frisian Mennonites who emigrated to Imperial Russia in 1788 and again in 1803. A map showing the locations of the various Mennonite Gemeinde in Prussia was published in Pres., No. 18, page 124. Another road map of the area was published in Pres., No. 9, Part 2, page 59. The Peter Klassen book A Homeland for Strangers contains a list of the Polish and German names of the Mennonite villages which makes it possible to locate the villages where various ancestors once lived.*

Holland to Danzig with 1,600 ships travelling between ports by the year 1600. Thus when our forefathers were recruited to come and drain the Vistula delta and the urge of religious freedom was paramount, our forefathers came to bring us a spiritual heritage of vast importance!

#### **Poland (Prussia).**

Betty and I, plus my brother, Roland and Gladys Loewen, and Dwain and Kathryn Mosier arrived in Gdansk (Danzig), the largest centre shipbuilding in Eastern Europe, early Sunday morning, June 25 via the night train from Berlin. Thirteen days earlier, the men completed a two-week concert tour of Europe with the "Travelling Chorus" from the Kansas Men-

nonite Mens Chorus in the Netherlands, Germany, and Switzerland. Thereafter we toured more of Germany, Austria, and Czech Republic on our own.

Through the professional assistance of my relative, Delbert Plett, Steinbach, (editor of "The Kleine Gemeinde Historical Series"), and Dr. Peter J. Klassen, (author of *A Homeland for Strangers*, our Poland "tour Bible"), California State University in Fresno, we were able to secure the services of Dr. Arkadiusz Rybak, Polish Mennonite expert and tour guide for numerous previous Mennonite Tour Groups to spend two days with us.

In addition, Anna and Marcin Mazurkiewicz, doctoral students and instructors in history at

Gdansk University, fluent in English, having both studied with Dr. Klassen at CSU in Fresno a year earlier, served as our translators and tour guides for the four days in Poland, a country that celebrated its millennium in 1997! (*Pres.*, No. 10, Part One, page 30).

#### **Archaded Houses.**

On our first day there, leaving Gdansk, we crossed the Wisla (Vistula) River enroute to Malbork via Nowy Dowl Gdanski (Tiegenhof), stopping at several arched Mennonite-built houses, typical of those built centuries earlier in the Marienburg Werder. The Polish government is very dedicated to preserving the buildings of our Mennonite forefathers. Official green plaques identify them as protected historical structures. The first one was on the outskirts at Gdansk and the second at Tragamin. At the third arched Mennonite-built house, in Marynowy (Marienau), we spent considerable time, since the government plaque identified it as having been built by Pidtra Loewena (Peter Loewen) in 1803.

Dr. Rybak explained that the multiple columns of the buggy drive-through, were indicative of large acreage holdings of the owner, while the ornate wood cravings overhead were the unique style of Loewen builders in Prussia, along with the circular chimney. The front entry door and frames exhibited intricate carvings that obviously were the handiwork of a craftsman. My brother and I were thrilled to find this Loewen-built house!

At Malbork Castle (Marienburg), Dr. Rybak, who serves as a tour guide at this monumental structure, was our personal escort. It was built by the Teutonic Knights along the Nogat River from the 13th to 15th centuries, later used by the Polish kings. This landmark still evokes wonder at the skill of its early builders. He gave us an exciting tour of the Castle, with rapid, delightful, knowledgeable, descriptions that were colourful, enthusiastic, laced with humour and very interesting! After the tour we lunched on Polish sausage and barbecued chicken outside the Castle on the banks of the Nogat River.

#### **Tiegenhagen.**

In the Nowy Dowl Gdanski (Tiegenhof) area over two days, we explored our 4th and 3rd great-grandfather, Isaak Loewen's, former village and church locations. At a Mennonite Museum we found some old postcards that depicted Tiegenhof shortly after the turn of the 1800s into the early 1900s. It gave us an idea what the village was like shortly after our 3rd great grandfather had immigrated to Russia. Along the Tiege River we traced "roots" in Zelichowo (Petershagen) and Ncyganek (Tiegenhagen), the former location of the Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church and cemetery (both have vanished), wondering if our 4th great grandfather's family was buried there.

Several km past Tujsk (Tiegenort), and slightly northwest is Swierzni (Kalteherberge), the former abode of our 4th great grandfather Abraham Von Riesen. Small drainage canals continued to be very evident, as



Brothers Roland Loewen and Merle Loewen (right) in the Stogi (Heuboden) cemetery with the Johann Loewen tombstone. Photo by Betty Loewen.



L.-r.: Roland and Gladys Loewen, Dr. A. Rybak, and Merle and Betty Loewen, in front of the Mennonite built archaded house in Tragamin. Photo by Mosiers.

they were throughout the Marienburg Werder, which averages four meters below sea level. Fields are often lined with small canals and trees, while the grassy pasture appeared ample to feed the livestock that was grazing around the farmsteads.

In Elblag (Elbing) we visited the old North Market Gate, dating from the 14th century hoping to find some acknowledgement of Michael Loewen's Thirty-Year War victory honour recorded, but failed to find any evidence there. Nearby, just across the Elblag River we photographed the former Mennonite Church building, currently serving a Catholic parish. The former location of the Ellerwald Church is several kilometers west. Currently only a pile of bricks remain from the building, but a few meters away was a cemetery, in good repair, shaded by tall oak trees. Two kilometers south at Wikowo (Wickerau) is a Dutch windmill still standing from the early Mennonite era, as a reminder of the numerous such windmills that had dotted the Vistula/Nogat Delta to help drain the lowlands and grind grain for the farmers.

Nearby in Stare Pole, we were guests of Dr. and Mrs. Rybak. While dining on organically grown berries, cookies, coffee and tea, we spend time in a question and answer session with him, while Anna faithfully translated the rapid exchange of Mennonite genealogy and history of the Prussian Mennonites.

#### Cemeteries.

Dr. Rybak took us to various former Mennonite church buildings and some Mennonite Memorial Cemeteries, like Stogi (Heuboden) and Szaleniec (Thorichthof). As such, grave markers from other sites can be placed in these cemeteries for protection. We discovered some Harder and Loewen tombstones, wondering what our computer genealogy would reveal upon our return home. The format of cemeteries was very interesting, as a tall oak tree was the focal point, with gravesites laid out along either side in the shape of a cross.

Dr. Peter Klassen in his *A Homeland for*



Worship house of the Flemish Gemeinde in Tiegenhagen, spiritual home of many of the Russian Mennonites. In 1941 the congregation, under Ältester Franz Regehr, had 800 souls. Photo from H. Gerlach, Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten (Oldenstadt, 1980), page 41.



*Briefing by Dr. Rybak at the gates of the Marienburg Castle. L.-r.: front, Betty Loewen, Anna Mazurkiewicz, Gladys Loewen, Dr. A. Rybak. Second row: Dwain Mosier, Kathryn Mosier, Roland Loewen, Marcin Mazurkiewicz. Photo by Merle Loewen.*

Strangers says "...the Office of Historical and Cultural Preservation in the Voivodship of Elblag has taken the lead in preserving some of these cemeteries as monuments to the significant economic and cultural contributions by the Mennonites in this area during the four centuries when they helped to develop the lowlands into highly productive land" (p. 72).

#### Gdansk.

We concluded our Poland trip in Gdansk visiting the former United Flemish and Frisian Mennonite Church building near Old Town, now used by a Pentecostal congregation. We met the pastor's wife and a deacon's widow, who spoke English, so we had a tour. Other Gdansk area sightseeing included the two sister cities of Sopot and Gdynia on the Bay of Gdansk and the Bay port of Westerplatte where W.W. II began.

The "Old Town", dating from the medieval days, with its architecture reflecting the Netherlands' influence provided many historical buildings, tourist shops, restaurants, museums, amid numerous cathedrals that tower over the city, symbolic of the religious prominence and struggle over the centuries.

After our final farewell to our wonderful newfound friends, gracious hosts, and guides for a fantastic four-day visit in the homeland of our

forefathers, we reluctantly boarded the train. We took with us treasured memories, (knowing our Anabaptist heritage is highly respected by the Polish people), pictures, souvenirs, and the special satisfaction of "having walked along footsteps in the land of our forefathers"!

## MMHS Genealogy Workshop and Annual Meeting

2001 February 2  
Saturday 08.30 hr. to 15.30 hr.  
at  
Centre for  
Mennonite Brethren Studies

169 Riverton Avenue  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Featuring Tim Janzen, Portland,  
Oregon

#### Topics:

- 1) Genealogical resources for Canada, Russia, Prussia;
- 2) demonstration of newly acquired Chortitza Colony registers;
- 3) Preview of Grandma IV.

**Cost: \$15 includes lunch**

for information phone: Conrad Stoesz,  
(204) 888-6781 or (204) 669-6575.

## Governor visits Old Coloniers, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico

On January 17, 2001, an assassin tried to kill Patricio Martinez, Governor of the State of Chihuahua. Through the hand of God he survived but he was deeply grieved that there were citizens in his State who spoke evil of him and who told him that they did not like him as Governor nor as an individual. Governor Martinez has largely recovered from his wounds, although he has become more sensitive since the assassination attempt.

Shortly after the incident Governor Martinez expressed his appreciation to the Mennonites in Chihuahua and particularly for the fact that prayers for the government are made every Sunday in their churches (the Old Colony). He said, "that the prayers of the Mennonites had been

effective and had possibly even saved him from death."

Governor Martinez called one of the Old Colony ministers in the Nord Colony (Ojo de la Yegua) and asked to meet with a group of the ministers to personally express his thanks. He also expressed his desire to attend an Old Colony worship service. He had planned to visit the Old Colony house of worship in Campo 81 Steinfeld, Santa Rita Colony on May 26, but was unable to do so as he had to see his doctor in Arizona.

On the following day the Governor landed unexpectedly with his helicopter at the cheese factory in Campo 70 Felsenthal. He promised to be back for a visit on June 2 when he also wanted to dedicate a series of projects for the region,

including the 27 km road construction north towards Braunfeld in the Santa Rita Colony, the strengthened electric current, new wells in Campo 64, etc.

On June 2, 2001, Governor Martinez, accompanied by wife, Patricia, and a large entourage of bodyguards and government ministers, arrived by helicopter at Campo 70 for an official State visit. The visit took place in the large milk production facility being built in Felsenthal.

As soon as the Governor arrived, he was ushered into a private room for a meeting with the Old Colony ministerial in order to personally thank the church for their prayers and support. In particular he thanked them for their prayers while he had been in the hospital in Phonix, Arizona. He again expressed his desire to attend an Old Colony church service in the near future. He seemed to feel that he would be blessed by such a visit even if he cannot understand the language of the ministers "...for it is according to how ones heart is directed."

One of the highlights of the visit was the official announcement that the State government would guarantee a 8 million peso loan at the bank to assist in the project's completion.

Governor Martinez received a warm welcome from 1700 Mennonites (Old Coloniers, Sommerfelders, Reinlanders and Kleine Gemeinders). During the days activities various speakers thanked the Governor for the completion of the projects and for his continued help and assistance for the Nord and Santa Rita Colonies.

This was followed by a tasteful meal for some 2000 visitors. The menu included a 484 kilo bull for sausage, a 830 kilo bull for meat, 300 kg of tortillas, 300 cases of "Seida". The meal was served within two hours by an efficient team of some 50 women. Heinrich Fehrs from Campo 80 (Bacthal, Santa Rita Colony) were in charge of organizing the meal.

After the meal the Governor met with various Mennonite officials in the region and did a radio interview with Bram Siemens. In the meantime, his wife Patricia Martinez was warmly received by the Mennonite ladies and spent the afternoon visiting with them and viewing various handicrafts and exhibits.

As a demonstration of appreciation, the women had made Mrs. Martinez a special Old Colonier dress and hat ("Haube"). The first lady loved the outfit and immediately put it on to model it. Then the ladies sent a messenger to interrupt the Governor during his meeting with the message that "there was a lady waiting outside who urgently needed to speak with him".

When the Governor came out of his meeting, he was surprised and hardly recognized the beautiful lady in the Old Colonier outfit, his wife. Later they promenaded together for several hours, meeting and talking with the guests and well-wishers. Even the Governor's bodyguards seemed to relax and enjoy the day among the Mennonites where they need not worry about untoward incidents.



Governor Patricio Martinez receives a plaque of recognition from the Santa Rita and Nord Colonies. L.r.: Governor Patricio Martinez, Johan Krahn Doerksen, Vorsteher Santa Rita Colony, Adrian Robles, Mayor of Riva Palacio, and Wilhelm Peters, Vorsteher of the Nord Colony. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, June 11, 2001, page 1.



The scene in the large milk production building in Felsenthal, Campo 70. The Governor spent over three hours here, meeting and greeting local officials and some 2000 guests. The milk production facility is to be completed by later this year. Photo courtesy of Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, June 11, 2001, page 4.

The Governor and Mrs. Martinez thanked the Mennonites again, and then the helicopter took off in a cloud of dust. The large building was cleaned up and the great "Gaustjebott" of the Nord Colony was over. It was estimated that the number of visitors had only been exceeded in the Mennonite colonies by the visit of President Salinas and the 75th anniversary celebrations. The Editor.

**Sources:**

*Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexiko* (June 1/01)

compiled by Jorge Reimer, Strassburg Plaza, Cuauhtemoc, Mexiko, from *Men. Post*, June 15, 2001, pages 7 and 19.

Reports by Bram Siemens, *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, June 11, 2001, page 1 and 4, 6, 16-18, and 20.



"We are setting the pace for fashion," joked Governor Martinez, after his wife had dressed up as an Old Colonier (Shades of Kelly McGillis in *The Witness*). For fun, Mrs. Martinez and a number of women got up on the podium. The first lady, Patricia Martinez, felt very much at home with the Mennonite women. Photo courtesy of *Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau*, June 11, 2001, page 17.



These ladies made short work of preparing the food for 2000 guests. Here a group is cutting up tomatoes, onions and chilies. The first evening a group of women got together to plan the menu. Mrs. David Giesbrecht made the soup. The Hans Fehrs were mostly in charge of the entire preparations of the food. They received great support and assistance from many volunteer girls, women and also men. Photo courtesy of *Men. Post*, July 6, 2001, page 1.



Governor Martinez was proud to appear with his wife, dressed as an Old Colonier lady, including the traditional Haube. The couple enjoyed meeting and greeting many of their loyal Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Reinländer and Kleine Gemeinde citizens. Photo from *Men. Post*, July 6, 2001, page 3.

**Catgoricalism?**

It is interesting to observe that certain Evangelicals in Canada have such good eyesight, they can tell from 3000 km. away how inferior the Mexican Mennonites are and that they are in desperate need of conversion to their religious culture (In the meanwhile, adherents of their own religious culture are not even distinguishable from the general North American population in morality and ethics: see *Brama* study, *Pres.*, No. 17, page 79) - Matt: 19:30; Matt: 7:3.

In contrast, Governor Martinez of Chihuahua State, is so moved by the faith of the Old Coloniers, he attributed his miraculous escape from an assassin to the prayers for government leaders that are duly rendered in every Old Colony worship house in Mexico every Sunday morning.

At the same time, employers across Canada, fall over backwards to hire Mexican Mennonite immigrants because of their willingness to do menial work, strong work ethic, honesty and respect for authority (for these reasons they are also more easily taken advantage of, undoubtedly a big attraction for some employers). Much of the present prosperity of southern Manitoba is made possible by the work of these fine people.

One is mindful of the novel, *The Salvation of Jasch Siemens*, where the character Nobah Naze, frustrated with the inequality of the preachers' sons getting away with all manner of mischief, while the marginalized like himself are condemned for the minutest infraction, commented on the irony of the situation to Jasch. I will allow the readers to reference their own copy of *Jasch Siemens*, pages 61. The Editor.

During the 1920s certain Mennonite Conferences had all kinds of money to send "missionaries" to save "souls" in exotic locations but did not have money to save their co-religionists from the "Hell" of the Soviet Gulag (*Hildebrandt's Zeittafel*, page 382). During the 1930s and '40s the Mexican Mennonites could have used help in organizing co-ops, credit unions, media, educational materials, and other social and economic development. All they got from their co-religionists in Manitoba were sermons of condemnation. Now the engine of economic activity has evolved to the point that much of this is being generated internally. Let us pray, that those who gave a stone when they should have given bread will also find forgiveness and God's grace for their hard-heartedness (Matthew 7:9). The Editor.

## News from the Gemeinden

News of interest to Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde and Reinländer Mennonites in North and South America. The intention of this column is to provide some news showing the Conservative Mennonites as the fulfilled, fully soteriologic, wonderful human beings that they are. This will make it harder for leaders who see them merely as victims for territorial expansion to demonize them to their congregations. All Mennonites will be inspired to hear of the experiences of our brothers and sisters in Christ wherever they might live, as every denomination and all communities have made important and vital contributions to the Kingdom of God which deserve to be acknowledged and celebrated. Please forward items of special interest in your area to *Preservings*, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.

### **Mexican Web Site.**

The more than 200 businesses along Highway 28 from Cuauhtemoc to Rubio [Chihuahua, Mexico] were offered an opportunity to take part in a web site (internet page) for the area. Nothing definite is in motion but as soon as something is actually available, the address will be publicized in the "Kurze Nachrichten". Naturally, Strassburgo Plaza will also announce its role in the enterprise. This is yet another step in the direction of the modern business world and indeed of a new culture, which is rapidly developing on the 40 kilometer long stretch. Every month new businesses are opened there.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexiko* (May 18/01) compiled by Jorge Reimer, Strassburgo Plaza, Cuauhtemoc, Mexiko, from *Men. Post*, June 1, 2001, page 17.

### **Santa Rita Ministerial Election.**

A ministerial election in the Old Colonier Gemeinde [in Santa Rita Colony, Mexico] was held on April 24, 2001 in the worship house in village No. 72. None of the three ministers who

were elected have yet been ordained. They are Isaak Harms, No. 74 (son of Franz Harms, Neuhorst), Diedrich Blatz, and Johann Klassen Wolfe, No. 76, son of Waisenman David Klassen.

According to a report all three men are 37 years old. All are engaged in public service in some capacity. Diedrich Blatz is Vorsteher (Reeve) (and will have to be replaced by a new election), he has also been road supervisor for two years and manager of the cheese factory for two years. Isaak Harms is a school teacher and auctioneer. As such, he was conducting the auction sale for Jakob Wieler (village No. 80), when he received the news of his election. Johann Klassen was the recording secretary at the same auction.

The situation in Santa Rita is unique as the Gemeinde here over the past 20 years has made a full cycle. The members originally were Old Colony. Then they were reorganized by the deceased Reinlander Ältester Peter Rempel from Manitoba, at that time without a protocol prohibiting motor vehicles and several other changes.

Last spring, the Old Colony Church offered the young people, they could attend their worship services and join their Gemeinde. Presently

the Reinlander have pulled back from Santa Rita, but it is expected that their ministers (Cornelius Wiebe, Peter Guenther, Wilhelm Reimer) will continue their ministry in the [Old Colony] Gemeinde. The Ältester Johann Rempel has moved to Alberta.

The Reinlander Gemeinde continues in the



Evangelist Jacob Funk made false statements about the Mexican Mennonites. To date he has failed to apologize. Photo from M. B. Herald, Sept 14, 2001, page 13.

### **Evangelist apology?**

A press release in summer of 2000 by "Family Life Network" and Evangelist Jakob Funk, Winnipeg (*Cdn Men.*, July 31, 2000, Vol. 4, No. 15, page 22; *M. B. Herald*, August 11, 2000; *Der Bote*, Sept. 20, 2000, No. 18, page 27) contained a number of untruths about the Mexican Mennonites: see *Preservings*, No. 18, page 39. These false statements were drawn to the attention of Family Life Network (*Cdn Men.*, Sept. 4, 2000, Vol. 4, No. 17, page 11; *M. B. Herald*, Jan. 19, 2001; *Der Bote*, Oct. 18, 2000, No. 20, page 5).

Notwithstanding being put on notice, no apology has been issued to date by Family Life Network and/or Evangelist Jakob Funk.

One would expect that a reputable organization would apologize and commit itself publicly to working together with all Christians, including the Old Coloniers, Sommerfelder, Reinlander and Kleine Gemeinde in Mexico who profess and practice Gospel-centric faith. Or do they condemn them as unChristian simply because they practice the Timothy conversion model and not the Pauline model legalistically adhered to by most Protestant Fundamentalists? And if so, is this really sufficient reason to demonize any community?



**Durango Dairy Enlarged.**

The Mennonites in the Cuauhtemoc area alone produce 30 per cent of the total milk production of Manitoba. However, the largest Mennonite dairy is owned by the Braun brothers in La Honda, State of Zacatecas, southeast of Durango City.

In the accompanying photo, Isaak Braun (right), one of the partners, observes to ensure that the milking system is working properly. Isaak Peters, Campo 15 and Cornelius Blatz, Campo 2, are doing good work.

The Brauns own over 1400 cows, of which they milk over 840 (as of February). They receive 26 000 kilo of milk per day. This is a very important source of high quality milk for their cheese factory "Pomas". They can not imagine how they could keep their cheese factory in operation without this source of milk. They do not sell bulk milk nor are they interested at this point, as the distribution of the milk in the city would be a complicated undertaking. The milk - cheese factory "Pomas" has around 150 workers.

Swift Colony with Ältester Gerhard Neufeld.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, April 27, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, May 4, 2001, page 23.

What a wonderful example of Christians working together in harmony and unity. The Editor.

### Ältester Jacob Loewen Funeral.

Many mourners attended the funeral of Ältester Jacob Loewen [Nord Colony]. It was estimated there were 2,800 listeners in attendance. The funeral sermon was given by Ältester Franz Banman from village No. 1A. He is already quite weak and was hardly able to complete the sermon, many could only hear very little. Following him Ohm Isaak Dyck also spoke in the granary [The granaries in Mexico are more like Canadian arenas holding thousands of people].

The devotional outside by the coffin was held by Ohms Franz Krahm and Isaak Dyck. The graveside service by Ältester Abram Klassen, Bernhard Giesbrecht, Isaak Dyck and Diedrich Enns. Sixty-one ministers from the various colonies were in attendance. Many more would have come, such as those from Durango and La Honda if they would have received the news in time. The funeral was originally planned for the 14th but later postponed until the 15th.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, June 22, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, July 6, 2001, page 20.

### Ältester Election, North District.

Ohm Johann Loewen from Einlage was elected at Ältester for the North District of the Manitoba Colony with 164 votes at an election held at the worship house in Lowe Farm on July 12, 2001. The runner-up had 29 votes.

Forty-eight Ohms (including Ältesten and deacons) from various colonies (Villa Ahumada, La Honda, Virginias, Durango) were in attendance.

The election, where only male baptized members take part, started at 8 a.m. in the morning, with several songs. Ältester Franz Banman [senior Ältester of the South District] presided over the worship service and conducted the election.

After the sermon, the voting began, starting from the front benches, while the Vorsänger [choristers] entoned a song. The vote was brought in the ministerial office [Ohms Stube], each one passed through the room, whether they cast a vote or not, which slowed the process somewhat.

Usually the names were written on a piece of paper at home and brought along; but if anyone had not done so, they could also give their vote orally in person.

After the name of the new Ältester had been made public, Ältester Isaak Dyck and Ältester Abram Friesen from La Honda held short devotionals. Also Ältester Johann Loewen himself brought a few words. The ordination shall take place next Thursday (July 19th) at the worship house in Lowe Farm.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, July 6, 2001, as reprinted in

*Men. Post*, July 20, 2001, page 20.

How wonderful to see the genuine biblicism of our Reformation Flemish forbears which resulted in grass-roots democracy still continuing in the modern day. The Old Colony Gemeinde in the Manitoba Colony has over 5000 members. The Editor.

### New Worship House Dedicated.

The new Old Colony worship house in Kleefeld near Cuauhtemoc was dedicated on May 3, 2001. It stands on the same site where the school previously was situated and where the church house stands today that has been rebuilt as a school.

This new worship house is only 3 km. distant from Kronsgart and was built because the one in Kronsgart is overfull. The new construction is similar to the worship house in Kronsgart but is made out of concrete and has aluminum windows. The plan was to have the worship house finished for Good Friday, the service for which the churches are fullest, but some of the material-like tin for the roof--did not arrive in time. Franz Peters and Franz Berg were in charge of the con-

struction.

Numerous believers had assembled themselves before the door to the worship house and they sang song No. 89 from the *Gesangbuch*. When they came to verse 3, Ältester Franz Banman, from the same village, opened the door and the believers entered. Inside they sang the other verse. Some 30 Ohms from the Manitoba, Nord and Santa Rita Colonies were present as well as the Ohms recently elected. Ältester Franz Banman and Ältester Abram Klassen, No. 65, spoke at the dedication service.

The construction had cost an estimated 250,000 pesos which was gathered from the contributions of the members. A few more benches need to be placed inside.

The largest Reinlander Gemeinden in Mexico are those in Swift and the one in Buena Vista, Ascencion, where Ältester Peter Banman is serving. Discussions in Buena Vista have taken place, whether they should also take the step back to the Old Colony Gemeinde. However, some are opposed and the Gemeinde remains as it was.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, May 4, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, May 18, 2001, page 17.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, June 8, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, June 15, 2001, page 21.

...Classes for adults were also offered at No. 2A, and on the 28th [May] the Amish came from the U.S.A. to help along. For one month they demonstrated their methods for the children in the schools and during the evenings they instructed present and future school teachers and other interested parties. The various classes were attended by children 12 years and older (including those out of the school years), youths (male and female), and parents.

A school bus brings many people from the surrounding area. The subjects being taught are mathematics, writing, calligraphy, reading, Catechism, etc.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, June 8, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, June 15, 2001, page 18.



The Old Colony school centre in Gnadenhal. The three room school was purchased from the Lowe Farm Kleine Gemeinde in 1999. It is now serving as a school resource center and the classrooms are used for teacher's training, adult education, etc. The Old Colony school system in the Manitoba Colony has over 2500 students and some 60 schools. Photo May 2001, by Henry G. Ens, Winkler, Manitoba.

### Ohms Ordained.

On May 1 all the newly elected Ohms of the Nord Colony were ordained by Ältester Franz Banman of the Manitoba Colony. The worship house in No. 72 was full. Correction Johann Klassen is 33 years old, not 37.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, May 4, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, May 18, 2001, page 17.



Museum.

The new Mennonite Museum building is situated on a choice property along the four-lane Highway 28, north of Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. The plans are to have the first section completed by the end of 2001. Although the structure is built in the configuration of the old traditional house-barn, it will be fully modern. The auditorium, where seminars on Mennonite history will be held, can seat 50-70 people.

In the meantime, the sub-committee is already working on gathering artifacts for the museum. They gladly receive the items as donations on account, but will also purchase items if necessary.

The estimated cost for the first part of the museum is 1,500,000 pesos. Of this amount, 300,000 pesos is coming from the Civil Association in Chihuahua, 300,000 from the Federal Government, and 350,000 as the surplus of the Jubilee Committee. An additional amount is coming from Manitoba; the committee from Chihuahua is working together with the Mennonite Historical Society from Manitoba, where funds which were gathered from those viewing the videos made for the 75th anniversary were received and gathered.

The museum buildings at km. 10 were dedicated and officially opened on November 23, 2001. Photo and text from *Mennonite Post*, July 6, 2001, page 3.

### ATTENTION - Family Historians and Genealogists:

There is still room for a few more exhibitors at "Family History Day 2001," (see ad on page 84). Take advantage of this opportunity to exhibit your research, family books and records. Many people have made exciting new discoveries from visitors to their exhibits and have established valuable genealogical connections. If you are interested or need more information, please contact Ernest Braun, Box 595, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0 phone 204-388-6146.

The Randy Kehler, "Chortitzer CD-ROM", is still available for \$100.00 a copy at Mennonite Books, 67 Flett Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba

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[www.mennonitebooks.com](http://www.mennonitebooks.com)



They are busily working in our "Home of Hope" [Hoffnungsheim], Km. 14, Straßburg. Kitchen help is always easier to find than workers who are to care for and work with the handicapped residents. On the photograph we recognize (left side) Mrs. Gerhard Rempel, Neta Friesen (middle) and Tina Froese, Campo 29, who has brought much joy to the home with her cheerfulness. Photo and caption from Men. Post, Sept. 21, 2001, page 19.

### Handicapped Home.

"Our home of hope has hope." Although the houseparents Gerhard Rempels have only accepted the position for a short time, the committee is full of hope, to be able to find willing people for the important work of the "home of hope".

Bill Ennses from Altona, Manitoba, are planning to come for a number of months (until December) to help along, and again starting in April, 2001. The Ennses have a handicapped son, also in need of assistance. Therefore they are knowledgeable about the work with the handicapped, but they have also learned much from others. Their interest, in the first instance, is to demonstrate and to train people, how to work with the handicapped, be it at home, in the "home" or with relatives in need of assistance.

At the present, four people have been placed to work in the home full time. But a pair from the 12 residents of the home also help out a lot.

One of the residents, who has won the hearts of many, Johnny Guenther (the little Johnny), is currently with his parents in Seminole, Texas.

In recent times the support has been sufficient. "And yet," said Johann Fehr, Campo 26, chair of the committee, "the assistance is not always equally strong."

The committee has purchased the house of the David Doerksens, of which \$3,000.00 [U.S.] has already been paid off. The remaining \$22,000.00 will be temporarily borrowed (for three months) from the Union de Credito. Now contributions are being awaited in order that this debt can be paid.

Susie Guenther and Mrs. Rempel are primarily the ones responsible for the distribution and application of the medicine. Dr. Franz Penner makes examinations of the residents in the home when he is called, in order to provide the necessary medical care.

Bram Siemens, *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburgo Plaza, July 23, 2001, pages 1 and 3

## Exhibition "Agromesa".

The third annual Exhibition of cattle, horses and farm products, such as quilts and other handiwork was extremely productive in all respects. During the three days (August 23rd to 25th) an estimated 5,000 people took part, a definite increase from previous Exhibitions.

One of the primary objectives is to offer various opportunities for learning, at the same time that friends meet each other and partake of the festive spirit. Innumerable opportunities were available for this. The exhibition was held in village 60 [Hoffnungsthal, Nord Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico see *Pres.*, No. 18, page 69].



Official opening of the "Expo - Agromesa". The ribbon is being cut by the President of the Union de Credito (the Mennonite Credit Union), and a representative of the State of Chihuahua (right). Standing at the right, Wilhelm Peters, Vorsteher of the Nord Colony. Standing at the left is Veterinarian Guillermo Zuniga.



Viewers enjoy the Exhibition sitting on benches set up on steps under a shade roof, also providing a better view. Photo from Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Sept. 3, 2001, page 12.



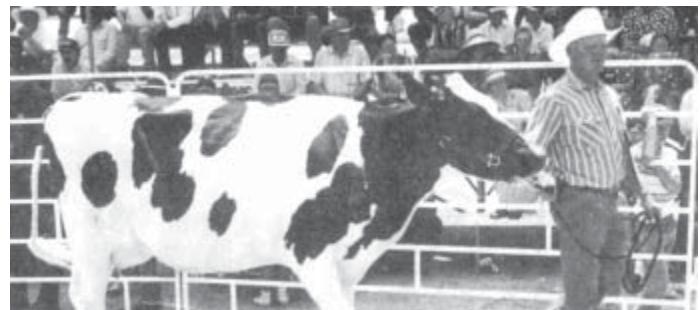
Sara, Mrs. Abe Kornelsen receives the first prize of \$200.00 from Engineer Adan Bencom for the best quilt blanket. Patty Carmero and Brenda Valdespino are holding up the quilt. In the background part of the grandstands for the Exhibition. Photo from Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Sept. 3, 2001, page 10.

The first prize for the best cow was won by Jakob Teichroeb, Rosenhof. Mrs. Abram Kornelsen won \$200.00 for the best quilt. Observers noted that the livestock shows significant improvement each year. Expert fertilization explains a large part of the improvement and greater care in nourishment is another.

From *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexico*, Strassburg Plaza, Aug. 31, 2001, as reprinted in *Men. Post*, Sept. 7, 2001, page 21.



Veterinarian Guillermo Zuniga (right), organizer of the Expo "Agromesa", presents Jakob Teichroeb with a certificate for the winning cow. This cow won in all categories: best cow in group (age group), best cow (in all age groups), and best beef among calves, heifers and cows. Therefore she was declared "Grand Champion." Photo from Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Sept. 3, 2001, page 1.



Wilhelm Loewen parades a cow, in order that the onlookers can see what a good milk cow looks like.



Old Coloniers and other Conservative Mennonites are known for their beautiful handwork. Various samples were placed on display at the Expo - Agromesa; hangers (left, for hanging up plants), quilts and also baking. Photo from Deutsch-Mexikanische Rundschau, Sept. 3, 2001, page 10.

## Lessons for today from Mennonite history

"Lessons for today from Mennonite history,"

by Siegfried Bartel, Chilliwack, B.C. reprinted from *Canadian Mennonite*, Oct. 22, 2001, page 5.

As someone born in 1915, the senseless killings on September 11 bring back the memory of World War II and the killing of 55 million (67 percent civilians), a part of history in which I had an active part.

We mourn with the families of the victims in the United States, and we are all, at different stages, occupied with questions of justice or even revenge. What is the Lord teaching us? What should be our stand?

The Confession of Faith of Mennonite Church Canada says that "violence is against the will of God. Such violence precludes war among nations, hostility among races and classes." It also quotes from Hebrews 5: "Thus peace and justice are not optional matters, but are central to faith in Jesus Christ."

But what is our history? Tom Price wrote in the *Mennonite Reporter* (Nov. 2, 1992): During World War II, nearly half of Mennonite Church, three quarters of General Conference Mennonites and two thirds of Mennonite Brethren members marched to war (with non-combatants accounting for 11, 16 and 32 percent of those totals).

Historians tell us that 4,500 Canadian Mennonites enlisted in military service during World War II. "They were excommunicated, shunned and ignored," according to the *Canadian Mennonite* (Feb. 12, 2001, page 6).

Where are the Mennonites today? James Toews, pastor of the Neighbourhood Church in Nanaimo, B.C., wrote in 1988: "I believe that the statement in our Confession of Faith that 'it is not God's will that Christians take up arms in military service' says more than the Bible says." Article 15 needs to be debated "in the light of changing nature of the society we are living in," says Toews.

That sounds familiar to me. One of our leading Mennonite pastors in Germany (Walter Fellmann) wrote 1935: "Our closeness with the German fatherland must be clarified – giving room to continue the position of our fathers."

Mennonites in Germany dropped their traditional peace position at their conference in 1934. Therefore, "in light of the changing nature of the society we are living in," I joined the army. I accepted Martin Luther's position: as a Christian one should suffer and not resist, but as a member of the state one has to murder and

fight. What had happened?

In 1867, my great-grandfather was part of a delegation to the king of Prussia pleading for

means victory and "Fried" means peace. Wilhelm was the name of the emperor. It could not have been more patriotic.

So, in 1937, I joined the German army without hesitation. In my more than seven years of service, I never experienced any insult for my stand on Christianity. The Bible was my steady companion, except for the last few months of the war.

After the war, reviewing my pilgrimage, I read "Zabelka's statement." He was the Catholic pastor for the airmen who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

He noted that for the first three centuries, the church was pacifist. "With Constantine, the church accepted the pagan Roman ethic of a 'just' war and slowly began to involve its membership in mass slaughter, first for the state and later for the faith." All major branches of the church found ways to modify Christ's teachings until they "were able to do what Jesus rejected: take an eye for an eye, slaughter, maim and torture."

I realized that the hero of the U.S. Civil War, General W.T. Sherman, was right when he stated: "I am tired and sick of war. It is only those who have neither heard a shot or heard the shrieks and groans of the wounded who cry aloud for more vengeance, more desolation. War is hell!"

I know it. I served in the front lines. I was highly decorated, wounded twice. I had many under my command and I killed many.

Do we realize what killing in war does to the killer? According to U.S. statistics, 58,000 plus died in Vietnam War. Over 100,000 have committed suicide since. It is estimated that there are 100,000 Vietnam vets in prison today and 200,000 on parole.

The churches who sanctioned, even blessed, them going out to kill could not help them deal with their guilt and trauma when they returned.

We Christians, especially Mennonites, have to ask ourselves whether Jesus' teaching to "love your enemies" is still valid. If the answer is yes, then the consequence is clear: "You cannot love the enemy and pull the trigger." May the Lord help his church with the struggle.

By Siegfried Bartel, Chilliwack, B.C. From a September 27, 2001, presentation at a Seniors for Peace gathering.



In 1937, Siegfried Bartel joined the German army "without hesitation," as a "born again" Christian, the Bible as his constant companion. This photo was taken on the Russian front after promotion to the post of Second Assistant to the Commander of Infantry Regiment 45. Bartel was convinced of the righteousness of Germany's campaign to save civilization from Godless communism. He served in all the major campaigns of WWII, was twice wounded, promoted to Captain and decorated with the Iron Cross for bravery under fire. Photo courtesy of Siegfried Bartel, Living with Conviction: German Army Captain Turns to Cultivating Peace (C.M.B.C., Winnipeg, 1994), page 47.

Mennonite exemption from military service. They received permission to serve in the medical corps. The pietist movement, with roots in the Lutheran church, had influenced my parents strongly. Accepting pietist values for emperor and state caused the peace position to weaken.

In my mother's diary, written when she was pregnant with me, is her prayer that the Kaiser (emperor) might win the war. When I was born, she gave me the name Siegfried Wilhelm. "Sieg"

# Altona-Hamburg Mennonite Church 1601-2001

"Persecuted refugees find safety and security: Altona-Hamburg Mennonite Church celebrates 400th anniversary, 1601-2001," courtesy of Frank Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Introduction.

During the 16th century a stream of refugees fled extreme persecution in the Low Countries (the modern-day nations of Belgian and the Netherlands) seeking refuge for themselves and their families. A number of these refugees settled in the Altona Hamburg area where they founded a Flemish Mennonite congregation in 1601. With the diligence and perseverance typical of refugees the congregation quickly became well established and its members prominent in shipping, whaling, trade and commerce.

The many prominent leaders of the Altona Mennonite Gemeinde included Jakob Denner (1659-1746) (see *Pres.*, No. 15, pages 142-143), his painter son Balthasar Denner (1685-1749) (see *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 127- 129), and Gerhard Roosen (1612-1711), a prominent writer and minister who argued against Mennonites arming their merchants ships with cannon in times of war.

There are several other Mennonite congregations in Germany tracing their roots back to the late 16th century, including Krefeld with 1000 members and Neuweid with 360 members founded in 1648. The German Mennonites tracing their roots to the 16th century Anabaptist refugees are referred to as "Einheimischen" by the ca. 100,000 "Umsiedler" Mennonites who immigrated to Germany from the Soviet Union since 1960 and particularly in the past two decades. There are some 8,000 "Einheimischen" Mennonites in Germany represented by the umbrella organization, "Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Mennoniten Gemeinden" (A.M.G.).

The Altona Hamburg Mennonite Church is still thriving today with 4-500 members. Their 400th anniversary was celebrated with a jubilee celebration and an exhibition at the Altona Museum "400 Years of Mennonites in Hamburg" as well as several articles in the local newspaper, *Hamburger Abendblatt* which have been translated by Frank Froese, Steinbach.

I am sure I speak for all *Preservings* readers in congratulating the Hamburg Altona Mennonites on the occasion of their 400th anniversary. The Editor.

## Further Reading:

"Altona Mennonite Church, 1601," in *Preservings*, No. 16, page 128, a short history of the Altona Mennonite Church with two maps.

## Mennonites left their Mark

"The Mennonites have left their mark in the history of Altona. As a small religious group, they found security and accumulated wealth here," by Christiane Zwick.

Reprinted from *Hamburger Abendblatt*, May, 2001, page 8, translated by Frank Froese, Steinbach, Manitoba.

For generations, the gates of Altona were open for craftsmen and persecuted religious communities who were not allowed into neighbouring Hamburg. Thanks to this toleration, a Jubilee celebration, "400 years of Mennonites in Hamburg," is being celebrated this year [2001]. The Altona Museum (Museumstraße 23, 22765 Hamburg) is commemorating this theme with an exhibition.

The extensive liberty available in the village of Altona, allowed the Mennonites who had fled the Netherlands to found a parish [Gemeinde] in 1601, with permission from the Count of Schauenburg.

But who were these refugees? They were followers of the Friesian reformer Menno Simons who like the Lutherans rejected the Papal authority, only in a much more radical way. In the Catholic Netherlands, all Mennonites were considered heretics. They concerned themselves with the restitution of an apostolic Christian community where all believers were allowed to interpret the Holy Scriptures. Even today, the pastors are elected and remunerated by the congregation itself. Each community remains autonomous and develops its own articles of faith.

For this reason, the Mennonites in Germany are a world apart from the Amish Mennonites in America, who have chosen to live a life of farming in isolation without machinery. As a branch of the Anabaptist movement, they hold in common their belief in adult baptism. Mennonites reject the swearing of oaths and military service as they wish their only loyalty to be to God.

Four hundred years ago, such undesirable subjects were not allowed to settle in Altona only out of pure altruism. The trade connections of the Mennonites in their old homelands were to enrich the Schauenburger estates, and later the Danish economy.

Not only was this expectation fulfilled but their economic progress gave the immigrants the means by which they gained influence as a community. This held equally true for their Catholic and Jewish neighbours, but the Anabaptists were the most successful. Although the Mennonites were only one percent of the population of Altona in 1800, four out of the ten richest families were Mennonite. Their names were: Van der Smissen, Roosen, Beets and Linnich. Even today, street signs still testify to this.

The wealth of these families above all else was earned in the shipping industry, through



The still life painting "Weintrauben" (1758) by artist Dominicus van der Smissen, a student and brother-in-law to Balthasar Denner, a portrait artist in great demand. Museum photo. From Hamburger Abendblatt, May, 2001, page 8.

commerce and whaling. In the 18th century, the shipyard of Berend Roosens was the most prominent in Hamburg's ship building industry.

The lifestyle made possible by this wealth is demonstrated in the exhibit. The feudal furniture stands in stark contrast to the simple black clothing worn to emphasize that all community members were equal, which naturally also included simple craftsmen and street vendors.

Vanity was taboo, which also comes through in the paintings of the Mennonite artists, who originally practised a hyper-realism painting style. The Altona "Balthasar Denner" became famous as "pore" Denner because of the minute detail in his portraits. His exceptional integrity in detail can be seen in the Jubilee exhibit.

The perseverance of this religious minority deeply influenced the exhibit designers, Dr Hajo Brandenburg and Silvia Jodat. "They could have had it so much easier, had they converted themselves." The passage through 400 years of Mennonite life in Altona also includes the present. An audio station where some youths explain their decision for adult baptism complements the display. There are 40,000 Mennonites in Germany and a million throughout the world.



An unknown painter, painted the picture "Altona and the Voßche mill" based on a drawing by H. Winterstein (18. century). From Hamburger Abendblatt, May, 2001, page 8.

## Tolerance that paid off

"Tolerance that paid for itself: The Altona Museum displays '400 years of Mennonites in Hamburg and Altona' beginning this Friday," by Matthias Gretzschel. From *Hamburger Abendblatt*, May 23-24, 2001.

**Hamburg:** - That tolerance can be a valuable trait and bring financial gain was more known in Altona than in Hamburg. While only the Lutheran religion could be practised in the Hanseatic City after the Reformation, Danish Altona since the 17th century was a haven of "Great Freedom" for Jews, Catholics and Reformers--at least from the confessional standpoint. And this tolerance was soon to be rewarded economically.

On May 24, 1601 the Mennonites celebrated their first worship service in Altona. This was the motive for the Altona Museum to set up a display this Friday to remember the 400-year story of the Mennonites in Altona and Hamburg.

This second largest city in the united Danish state soon benefitted from accepting these Christians that were being persecuted by other Christians in the Spanish Netherlands, simply because they professed differing theological convictions. The Mennonites soon proved themselves, namely, as competent craftsmen, ship owners, captains, and merchants.

With displays of documents, pictures and historical artifacts, the exhibition depicts the great contribution which the members of the Mennonite community made in the financial and cultural history of Altona as well as Hamburg--even though they were only allowed to live in the Hanseatic city and were not allowed to practice their religion there.

"The economic success of the Mennonites in the 18th century was a result of a compromise between assimilation and isolation which arose from a genuine sense of self awareness," wrote Hajo Brandenburg in the catalogue. He then adds: "For the Mennonites,

wealth was the only means by which to achieve power and influence in the community, since they had been excluded from the commercial life for so long."

The believers community, which named itself after the Anabaptist preacher Menno Simons (1496-1561) from the Netherlands, professed adult baptism from the very beginning and rejected the swearing of oath and military service--positions which stood in direct conflict to Catholic as well as Lutheran teachings. Since they were persecuted without mercy in their homeland, there was no alternative but to flee.

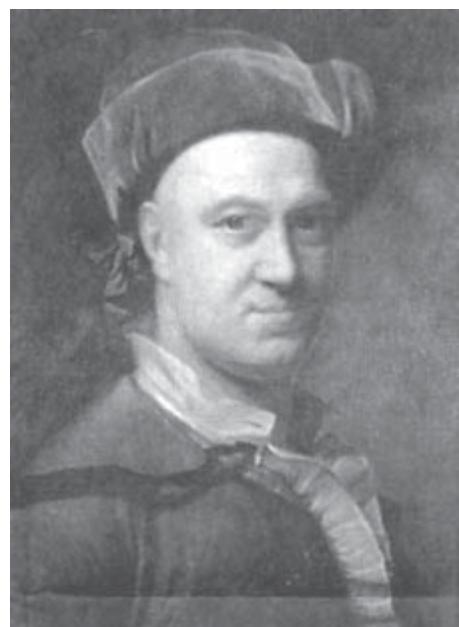
In their new homeland, the Mennonites remained a close knit group; not only because of their faith, but also because of the Dutch language and manifold familiar connections with each other as a community.

The wealthiest members of the community resided on "Palmaille" or the great "Elbstrasse". Among the most well-known of the Mennonite families were the Roosens, from whom originated a long line of significant descendants: preachers, weavers, ship owners, merchants, and textile factory owners.

The Van der Smissen family that fled in the 17th century via Friedrichstadt and Glückstadt to Altona, played an important role in the economic sphere for hundreds of years. From them descended also the artist Dominicus van der Smissen (1704-1760), who was not only successful in Altona and Hamburg, but also became renowned in London, Braunschweig, and Dresden. Some of his landscapes, portraits, and stills can be seen in the exhibition, next to the works of his teacher,

Balthasar Denner (1685-1749).

The story seemed to repeat itself in the 20th century. Again Mennonites came to Altona as refugees: at the end of World War Two from East Prussia and after the fall of the Iron Curtain from the Soviet Union. Because of differing cultural and political experiences, tolerance is again the ingredient within the community that is its own reward.



Self portrait by the Altona born painter, Dominicus von der Smissen (1704-60). From the museum. From *Hamburger Abendblatt*, May 23-24, 2001.

*Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc.*

# **Genealogy and Family History Day - March 9, 2002**

The Annual Genealogy and Family History Day sponsored  
by the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society  
will be held at the Heritage Village Museum on Saturday, March 9, 2002.

DATE: Saturday, March 9, 2002

PLACE: Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach

## **Agenda**

**10:00 a.m.:** Opening remarks and welcome, HSHS President and Family History Day Chair - Ralph Friesen.

20 or more displays with old family photos, genealogy and new research, in the historical “Exhibition Hall”. Exhibitors include Marianne Janzen, Rudy Friesen, Alfred Wohlgemuth, Mennonite Books, Jake and Hildegard Adrian, Ernest and Henry Braun, M. B. Archives, Heritage Centre Archives, Ralph and Hilton Friesen, etc..

**Keynote Speaker** - Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B. C., expert on Mennonite genealogy and the Prussian Gemeindebücher. Henry has recently published *The Old (Chortitza) Colony* (New Westminster, 2001), 519 pages, consolidating his genealogical research. This invaluable book includes important revisions of the Russian Mennonite story (see book review section).

**Session One - 11:00 a.m.** TOPIC: “Flemish Roots of the West Prussian Mennonites ca. 1540, the forgotten migration” (45 minutes plus question period).

**12:00 - 2:00: LUNCH** - A traditional Mennonite lunch of soup and pastries available, served by the Auxiliary.



*Henry Schapansky, Russian Mennonite genealogy expert. Pres., No. 6, page 25.*

**Session Two - 2:00 p.m.** TOPIC “Profile of the pioneer Chortitza Gemeinde 1789 and the Jakob Hoeppner affair” (45 minutes plus question period).

**4:00 p.m.** - The exhibition closes.

**ADMISSION \$3.00.** Admission entitles guests to visit “Genealogy Day” exhibits and symposium as well as all museum displays and the feature display in the gallery.

**EVERYONE WELCOME.**

# Articles

## Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937), Rosenhof

"Historical Report 1874 to 1890," by Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937), Rosenhof, Manitoba, written for the 60th year anniversary celebrations for the Mennonites of Manitoba celebrated in 1934.

### About the Author.

Johann R. Dueck was born in Gnadenthal on the Molotschna River in South Russia on December 1, 1863. At the age of 10, he emigrated to Canada with his parents, Abraham L. Duecks, in 1874. In 1887 Johann moved to Rosenhof where he taught school for several years.

In 1890 he married Maria K. Friesen, daughter of Johann Friesen (1807-72), Neukirch, third Aeltester of the Kleine Gemeinde. Johann R. Dueck served for 30 years as a deacon of the Scratching River Kleine Gemeinde (later Rosenort). At the time he wrote the following article (1934), he was living in Rosenhof, near Morris, Manitoba.

This article was the text of a presentation Johann R. Dueck gave at the 60th anniversary of the Mennonite arrival in Manitoba held at the Kornelsen School in Steinbach on August 1, 1934. The article was published in *Das 60-Jahrige Jubiläum der Mennonitischen Ost-Reserve* (Warte Verlag, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, 1935), pages 17-24. It was translated from German into English in August, 1986, by Ben B. Dueck, nephew of John R. Dueck, and published in Plett, editor, *Profile of the Kleine Gemeinde 1874* (Steinbach, 1987), pages 203-7.

Another article by Johann R. Dueck was published in the *Steinbach Post*, August 1 and October 10, 1934, and translated and republished in English in *Preservings*, No. 14, page 21.



Johann R. Dueck (1863-1937), son of Abraham L. Dueck (1841-99), Grünfeld, Aeltester of the East Reserve Kleine Gemeinde. Photo courtesy of granddaughter Elma Penner Thiessen, Mrs. Abe P. Thiessen, Box 427, Spanish Lookout, Belize, C.A.

### Historical Report 1874-78.

#### Dear Friends and Jubilee Assembly,

When I was asked to give an historical report of our arrival in Canada at this 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, I wondered whether I would be able to do justice to this assignment. My concern was firstly that I would speak loudly and intelligibly enough, and secondly, that I would use the proper amount of detail; less for unimportant things and more for events of greater interest and historical significance. I have always lacked the ability to say much with few words. Please excuse where I have used too many local happenings and not enough historical facts.

#### Immigration, 1874.

One or more groups of former Molotschna and Bergthal residents had already arrived here before us in the first few days of August, 1874, and had gone on to Winnipeg by boat. After making the most necessary purchases, they had returned (up the Red River) to the immigrants' sheds near Niverville. These sheds were simple wooden shelters, open to insects and rain. At that time, however, it probably rained little: otherwise the settlers would not have suffered from a water shortage. All pools and the hastily-dug holes had dried up. The laundry water had to be used several times and their meager water supply carefully conserved. Springs which always hold water (such as we have in Grünfeld) were not to be found there. To get water from the Red River, five miles away, was difficult, not least because of the scarcity of containers. Their attempt to dig a well failed, and when it caved in, two men were partially buried. However, they were rescued by a certain Mr. Redekopp.

Using the immigrants' sheds as a base, groups of settlers combed the reserve land to find suitable sites for establishing village settlements. However, the details of this search I will leave to other historians.

I shall begin my account by relating how our group, consisting of Steinbachers, Annafelders and others, was put ashore with boxes and baggage in scrub-bush near the junction of the Rat and Red Rivers one morning at the end of September, 1874. (Some insist it was in early October)

The prospect cannot have been very inviting as our group looked at the land of their earthly future. Soon the wagons, sent out by earlier settlers to fetch us, arrived. Some of these were carts with two wheels (Red River carts) pulled by one ox. Some immigrants, and especially the baggage, had to wait on shore until the next day. Peter Duecks, my uncle who had already been here in Manitoba since early August, came to get

us with a brand-new box-wagon pulled by two oxen. It must have been a heavy load, for I remember walking alongside the wagon, together with other men and boys, for most of the journey. Late in the evening, we arrived at their tent in Grünfeld. We had covered approximately 15 miles.

#### In the Beginning.

In the beginning, we lived together with Peter Duecks in one tent. How all 10 of us had room in it has often puzzled me later. It is a fact, though, that we all slept in that tent--somewhat crowded, with some of the children bedded on trunks and bundles--but we managed. When it grew colder, we even had to find room in the tent for a cookstove which had been standing outdoors in summer.

Let me relate a small episode of tent life. One evening the cook had put too much wood in the stove. The canvas of the tent caught fire from the red-hot stove pipes. Uncle Peter Dueck, while tearing down the overheated pipes, stumbled, falling on the stove and burning his knee and hands severely. My father ran outdoors and threw snow on the flames. As a result, the hole burned in the tent was not very large.

It must have been at the end of November that we moved into the "Serrei" (a straw-covered gable roof standing directly on the earth, rather than on walls) which our fathers had hastily built. This "Serrei" was about 26 feet wide and just as long, and approximately 18 or 20 feet high. At the east end, a 16 foot part was divided into rooms, each about nine or 10 feet wide. The walls were made of tongue-and-groove boards. Each room had a window at the east end, and a door was made at the west end. The west end of the "Serrei" served as barn for the cattle. We--my parents and siblings--lived in the north room and Peter Duecks in the south room. Any cracks in the board walls were stuffed with old rags; and since each room had a cook stove and firewood was plentiful, we did not suffer overly much from the cold. It was a different matter for the cattle who had a hard time of it, shivering under the bare thatched roof, even though the thatch was nine or ten inches thick. It simply was not enough to keep the natural warmth of the cattle inside the shelter. Our total "herd" consisted of two oxen, two cows and one calf. The calf's legs were frozen, and it died. One of the cows lost parts of her ears and tail. The hay was bad, because it had been cut too late in the fall. Some settlers evidently had bought grass mowers that first fall and had made their hay in time. In spring we bought some of this better hay, to feed the oxen so that they would be fit to work.

The school was in neighbour John Isaac's

"Serrei", a structure similar to ours. The Isaacs lived in the southern room; the schoolroom was the northern one. In this classroom, Diedrich Friesen taught 15 or 16 children. A table, three feet by 10 feet, with crossed legs, served as a school desk. On one side of it sat the boys; and the girls sat on the other side. The floor was bare earth, as was the case in most houses that first winter.

However, several Grünfelders had erected more permanent dwellings (block-houses) made of logs and some boards, with thatched roofs. In the second summer, several buildings were made with shingled roofs. As far as I can recall, there was only one "Semlin" (sod hut) in Grünfeld that first winter; three "Serrei" and also three buildings of other types. As was the custom at that time, houses and barns were built together, not only that first year, but for many years thereafter.

During that first winter (1874-75), my father and my uncle Peter Dueck hauled many loads of dry fir building logs from the east woods (about two miles from Grünfeld). They made their own sleighs, fashioning them from still-solid tree roots about six inches thick, found on fallen trees. These were shaped, fitted with pins and the runners clad with iron. These sleighs were four to five feet wide, with runners eight to twelve feet long. On these sleighs, 30 foot beams could be hauled. These beams were balanced on the sleigh and well-fastened; the oxen were then hitched to the load with yoke and logging chains. If the load travelled a bit downhill, the oxen either had to step out of the way or slow the load with their back parts.

### **Breaking Sod.**

When my parents also had bought a yoke of oxen in 1875, we could start plowing. Two teams of oxen were hitched to a 12 inch sod plow, because the sod was hard and tough. Years later, one team of oxen was sometimes able to pull that plow, but at first, everything was new and strange. Our fathers changed off daily guiding the plow, while I and my cousin Johann W. Dueck had to drive the oxen. This was not always easy, especially when the mosquitoes were bad.

Just how much sod we plowed and immediately seeded that first spring in 1875, I do not know, but probably hardly more than six acres. The hand-scattered seed was covered with earth by going over it about 10 times with a hand-made scrub-harrow. Some neighbours had already made harrows with wooden or even with iron teeth.

### **Grasshoppers.**

With timely spring rains, the wheat soon came up beautifully. But alas! The grasshoppers came also and soon had turned everything black. When the first swarm of grasshoppers had finally gone, the wheat slowly greened again. Then we learned that a new swarm of hoppers was coming from Rosenfeld, two miles south-east. These insects were already bigger than the first batch, which had been house-fly size. These newcomers quickly devoured all grain, vegetables and the juicy grasses. They were so voracious that they

did not hesitate to consume their fallen comrades. For example, if some person hit into a thick cloud of grasshoppers with a whip or stick, the strip was quickly covered with hoppers who ate their dead friends. If a person ran about 20 steps into a grasshopper swarm and looked back, he could see every footprint outlined as the hordes stormed together to swallow their crushed companions.

Initially it appeared that the predators were on a journey toward the northwest. They marched around houses and other obstructions, always headed in the same direction. When they developed wings, they often rose into the air in clouds or swarms on warm dry days, thereby darkening the sun. These grasshoppers were said to be different species than the ones seen here in previous years. Government officials described the ones seen here previously as the mountain locusts. In many places, including Morris, these insects came later. When the wheat was nearly ripe, and consequently did less damage.

### **Haying.**

In low-lying areas the hoppers did not destroy the grass, perhaps because earlier in spring there was water there and later, the grass became too hard for them. Therefore, we could still make enough hay. Haymaking in our village was done as follows: the largest part of the village, about seven or eight landowners, co-operatively bought a grass mower and a rake. During the mowing, the teams of oxen hitched to the mower were changed every two to two-and-a-half hours, to keep the mower going from early morning until late at night. Since it was customary in our village to have each team of oxen yoked, without lines, we younger boys had to guide them while our fathers or older brothers operated the mower and also goaded the oxen.

Raking was done in the same way, with the exception of having only one ox at a time hitched to the rake. The long windrows or hay made by the rake were pushed together with forks and formed into small haycocks ("Kopitzens"), of a size that four or five of them would make a load of hay. After enough haycocks had been made--several hundred--these were divided among the owners. Enough sticks, numbered one to eight, were made and one stick planted on top of every haycock. Lots were then drawn for the numbers. When the hay was to be hauled home, we boys would search out all the "Kopitzens" with Number Seven (our number) on them, then call our father with the hay wagon to come to load these. This method of dividing the hay was not very practical, but quite impartial. Some of the better-off neighbours already had bought their own mowers, or at most were two owners to one machine.

### **Building.**

Many buildings were erected in the summer of 1875, although our earthly future did not look promising because of the grasshoppers. But the pioneers had a firm trust in God and a strong hope--qualities which carried them through adversities--and they were not disappointed. Naturally, staple goods were scarce, and many people had to accept government help in the form of

flour and seed wheat for the next year (1876). Even if we could pay for our flour, there was often a lack of other ingredients. Syrup and lard, bought in large tins, always vanished too quickly. When milk was used in bread-baking, the result was a vast improvement over ordinary bread and salt. Meat was a rarity.

In the summer of 1875, our parents bought a 24 foot by 32 foot house, the western end of which was prepared for a barn. Others, for example, Johann and Jacob Duecks, who also arrived here from Russia in June, built barns in which the east ends were turned into temporary living quarters. Most houses were built in the following manner: a large frame was erected, using wooden pegs an inch thick and from six to 10 inches long to fasten the wooden members together. Although iron nails were already known, they were not practical for such heavy beams. Studs were spaced from three to three-and-a-half feet, and the spaces between the studs were filled with short wooden logs; a method again becoming popular among poor people today. Walls built this way soon required repairs, especially where the clay used to chink the logs was not protected by putting boards (siding) over it.

The roofs were mounted on the walls at ceiling height or one foot higher. Thin logs were then nailed across the rafters at 10 inch intervals. Onto these logs, the hay (thatch) tied into small bundles three feet long and two-and-a-half inches thick, was fastened. Such roofs sometimes lasted for 25 years or longer. Jak. Dueck, who built their house (26 by 42 feet) a few years later, already used wooden shingles. At that time, also, wooden boards became common as wall-coverings instead of the earlier-used short wooden logs.

During the winter of 1875-1876, the Grünfeld villagers hired Uncle Peter Dueck to teach in their school for a salary of 60 dollars cash; also, 10 loads of building logs from the nearby forest were hauled to his home. In addition, he received free firewood. The learning (teaching) of English was not even considered at that time. School supplies were few and very simple. Slates were mostly used instead of paper.

### **Spring, 1876.**

When spring came after a moderately cold winter, the villagers hastened to prepare their land with renewed hope. The land broken the previous year was replowed and seeded with the wheat they had bought which had by now arrived. A few more acres were broken and seeded mostly with oats. Several farmers who owned a team of horses already seeded over 20 acres; others perhaps hardly half that much. Naturally, all seeding was done by hand. People helped each other by lending others their harrows, plows, oxen and wagons, so that even the poorest person could sow something if he wished. With sufficient rain, the crops grew beautifully. Potatoes and other vegetable grew very well, too. Of grasshoppers there was no sign that second year.

Now and then someone built something. It was especially significant that a steam mill was built on the Reserve in Reinfeld village, three

miles north of Grünfeld. Being able to have your wheat ground in those days, contrasted with buying flour, was an even greater saving in money than it is today, because millers ground your flour by accepting "the sixth measure" of your wheat as payment. Later, when the milling price was calculated in cash, it was 12 cents per bushel in the early 1890s; later 15 cents and finally it went up to 20 cents. The flour in those years was not as good quality as today's is. If there was rust in the wheat, the flour appeared quite dark, and resulted in poor-quality baking. Some tried to eliminate the rusty kernels before grinding by winnowing the wheat beforehand, or also by some other means. People also tried harder to raise rust-free wheat by using rust-free seed. The grinding was done by means of two rounded, grooved stones, each four feet in diameter and 16 inches thick. The bottom stone was fastened in place, and the upper one, which was turning, rubbed the wheat into flour.

In addition, Cornelius Toews built a windmill in Grünfeld. However, this mill must have been here only a few years, because I can't remember much about it. I know more about the windmill built in Steinbach during the early years (1877), perhaps mainly because it was soon dismantled in Steinbach and re-assembled in Rosenort near Morris, where it continued to work for over 40 years, serving as a distinctive landmark visible for long distances. Finally, it succumbed to modern reality as people acquired their own crushers, powered by gasoline engines.

#### **Harvesting.**

As far as I know, all grain was still cut by scythe in the summer of 1876, at most, someone occasionally tried, with little success, to harvest his grain by fastening a tin platform behind a grass mower. Haymaking was better than the year before. Two or three landowners bought a mower and a rake, and therefore all that had to be done was to divide the grass flats, if that was even necessary. After the grain was tied into sheaves and hauled into stacks on the farm yards, people thought about buying a threshing machine. The threshing flail, as used in Prussia, or the threshing stone, common in Russia, seemed inappropriate here.

Therefore, the whole village of 12 or 13 landowners co-operatively bought a horse-powered threshing machine. Unfortunately, I do not know what price it was. During the first two or three harvests, no horses were utilized in running the thresher. Rather, the whole power source consisted of five yoke of oxen; these were all that was necessary. As oxen are notoriously lazy, we boys were sometimes appointed to prod the laziest of them. It was no fun to tramp in a circle for hours behind those animals! In addition, a driver stood on a platform in the middle of the circuit who helped us in urging on the oxen. Years later, a single driver kept the horses going from the central platform. Conditions were improved the following year (1877) when a regulator was attached, forcing each team of oxen and horses to pull an equal load. This also prevented the breaking of the tongue (of the thresher).

Power from the horse-power was transmitted to the pulley by means of steel rods with universal joints. It was somewhat difficult to bring the threshing machine into operating speed and to maintain the required tempo with the oxen. It could not thresh many hundreds of bushels in a day. In the front end, a man stood on a platform who "let in" or shoved the grain into the machine. To the side was a table on which the sheaves were laid and cut open. This work wasn't easy as long as "hand" binders were used. The partly-clean grain flowed into a box standing on the ground, from which bags were filled and the full bags carried into the house attic. Attics were for many villagers the only storage areas for grain, then and for many years thereafter. Some threshing machines already had a grain elevator which filled the bags. Resetting the machine often took nearly two hours. The wheels of the horse-power had been "dug in" and fitted with braces to prevent the pulley from pulling sideways. The straw carrier had to be taken off or the outer end carried after the machine, while the higher end was raised on braced stilts during threshing and set into motion by a long chain from the thresher. In Morris the farmers used only horses for threshing right from the beginning. In Grünfeld, it took three or four years until there were enough horses to operate the horse-power.

In the early 1880s steam threshers appeared, and came into common use in five or six years. Surplus grain raised originally had to be hauled to Winnipeg where everyone was anxious to trade.

#### **1876-77.**

In 1876 several businesses were opened on the Reserve. Our post office was Winnipeg. When the railway from the U.S. border to Winnipeg was finished in 1879, Niverville became our post office, and five years later it was Hochstadt. By this time, also, there were several sawmills on the Reserve. At the very beginning, all sawing of boards was done by manpower. The log to be sawed lay on eight-foot-high saw horses; one man stood on top, pulling the long saw high, while another stood on the ground underneath and pulled the saw down.

The following winter, 1876-1877, was a severe one, as the first one had been. However, we were better off, as nearly all villagers by now had warm houses and barns. Plowing began around April 20. Most of the plowing was still done in spring. Fall plowing only began much later. Cleaning of the seed grain was done with a round sieve, swung in a crosswise motion. Large weed-seeds and chaff were removed by hand, while small weed-seeds fell through the sieve. Some farmers made their own crude fanning mills, but as far as I can remember, it was many years until regular fanning mills appeared.

In the spring and summer we built a barn onto our house using the same framing system we had used in the house. All parts that were to be used--braces, rafters, pegs, nails, etc., were cut and readied on the ground, then half the

village was invited (partly as guests) for a barn-raising bee ("bahrung"). When the framework stood complete at four o'clock in the afternoon, a very heavy rain came, which I still remember very well. It was a particularly wet summer that year, causing small inland "lakes" throughout the region. The excessive moisture cut down the grain yields as well.

Here is an excerpt from Uncle Peter Dueck's letter of that time: "Peter Berg's 12 acre field of wheat yielded 200 bushels; Abraham Loewen threshed 300 bushels from 20 acres; John Dueck, 250 bushels from 20 acres; Jacob Dueck, 225 bushels from his 20 acres; our 10 acre field yielded 85 bushels, etc. Yields of oats were about double those of wheat."

A special holiday was declared on the East Reserve settlements for August 21 in honour of the Governor-General's visit. A small display was set up. The Grünfeld School was given the honour of singing several songs for the distinguished guest. The Governor-General gave a speech, translated into German by Mr. Hespeler. Mr. Hespeler had made himself indispensable to the Mennonites in these early years by giving advice and by acting as interpreter for them.

#### **1877-78.**

The winter of 1877-1878 was very mild. Farmers could plow right up to Christmas, and by mid-March the frost had already left the ground. The thermometer seldom reached 20 below (Reamur). Often there was an inch of snow, lapped up by the sun without a thaw. This also meant that there was not enough snow to use sleighs. We have never again had such a mild winter. The following summer, as well as the two summers thereafter, were again very wet.

In the summer of 1878 the first reaper appeared in our village. You could get your grain cut with this machine for one bushel per acre if you supplied the horses or oxen to pull it. This reaper deposited the unbound sheaves to one side, to leave the space for the next round open. A few years later, at several places, reapers with attached platforms were used. Two men rode on the platform, trying by hand the newly-formed sheaves before dropping them off. Wire binders were used for only a few years.

In 1882, several automatic binders were already in use. Although binders have undergone improvements and changes since then, they have remained essentially the same to the present. Similarly, grain threshers have been greatly improved, but the threshing and separating of grain from straw were done in the same fashion by the earlier machines as by the ones we have today. By the end of the 1880s, the steam threshers had made their appearance. They had to be moved from place to place by horses. Barely 10 years after that, there were already owners who had steam engines to pull the threshers. This proved a valuable relief for the horses!

Since this is going beyond the pioneer years, I shall end my report, in order not to take too much time. I thank the listeners for their patience and hope that my report has been of sufficient interest to many of you.

# Lord Dufferin's Visit, August 21, 1877

"Lord Dufferin's Visit to the East Reserve, Manitoba, August 21, 1877,"

by William Schroeder, 434 Sutton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 0T3, with additions by Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

## Introduction.

One of the most exciting events in the early history of the Mennonites in Manitoba was the visit in 1877 of Lord Dufferin, the Governor General of Canada. This visit left a deep impression on both the visitor and the visited, and was long remembered, especially by the Mennonites, as an event of unusual significance to their pioneer community.

Frederick Temple Blackwood, Lord Dufferin, was one of the most eloquent and distinguished British diplomats and statesmen of his time. He was born in 1826 and was educated at Eaton and Oxford. In 1862 he married Harriet Hamilton (1839-1936). Both families had large estates near Belfast, Ireland.

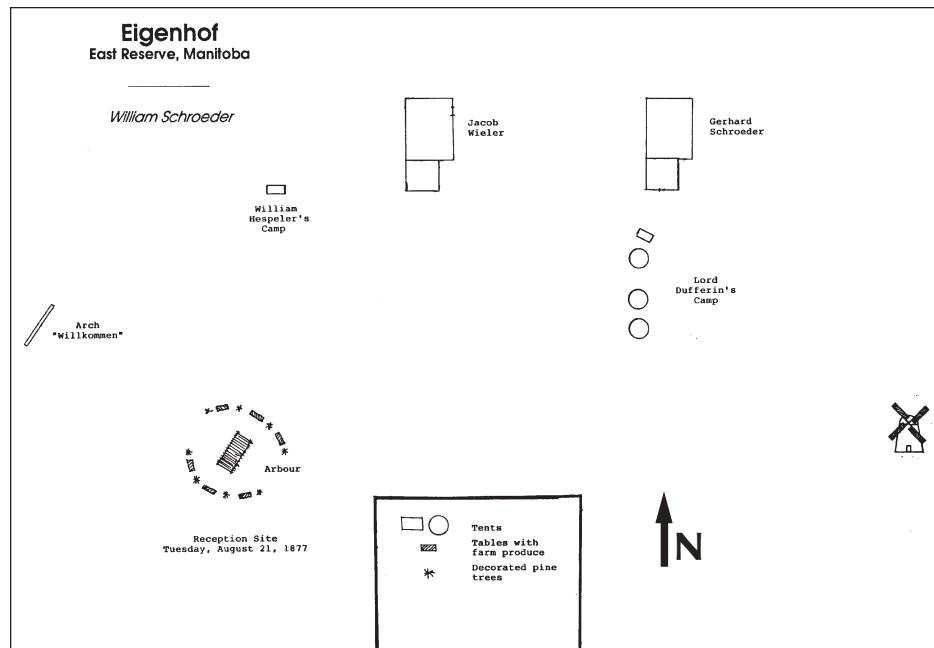
Lord Dufferin was appointed Governor-General of Canada by Queen Victoria in 1872. With their genuine warmth and charm this extraordinary couple soon won the hearts of all Canadians. He used his diplomacy in smoothing the relationship between the French and English Canadians. He encouraged British Columbia to remain Canadian and was instrumental in creating a better relationship between Canada and the United States. During a visit to Quebec City he encouraged the city fathers to preserve the old city wall as a historic site (Dufferin Terrace), and he was instrumental in establishing Queen Victoria Park on the Canadian side of Niagara Falls.

## West Reserve Tour.

When the vice-regal couple and their daughter Nellie (Helen, 1865-?) planned an extensive visit to Manitoba, the provincial authorities did not hesitate to include a tour of the East Reserve in their itinerary. The Governor and his family left Ottawa on July 30th, and followed the same route which the Mennonite immigrants had taken a few years earlier.

On August 5th they reached Pembina where Lord Dufferin addressed a group of Mennonites from the West Reserve who had come to see them. The Old Coloniers had not only selected the best land in Manitoba they had strategically located themselves near the Red River, the major transportation route, and also near Emerson, the leading commercial centre prior to the completion of the national railway. Unfortunately further details of Lord Dufferin's meeting with the Old Colony leaders are not available at the moment.

The Vice-Regal party arrived a Fort Garry on August 6th and were billeted in a house about five miles west of the fort. The house where they stayed was owned by Donald Smith (later Lord Strathcona), chief commissioner in Canada for the Hudson Bay Company. They visited schools, churches, hospitals and stores and of course attended many social functions. They also made several longer excursions to Lower Fort Garry, Stony Mountain and Selkirk.



Reception site, Eigenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba, Tuesday, August 21, 1877.

## East Reserve.

On August 20th they were ready for the trip to the East Reserve. The Free Press stated; "Of all that the Governor General and party will see during their visit to Manitoba their experiences in the Mennonite settlements upon the Rat River Reserve will be most interesting." William Hespeler, the special agent for the Mennonites emigration, had gone out to the East Reserve a few days earlier to make sure everything was ready for this important occasion.

Lord Dufferin's party left Silver Heights at about ten o'clock. Lady Dufferin, her 12-year-old daughter Nellie, the honourable Mrs. Littleton and her maid went in a covered carriage drawn by four horses. Lord Dufferin, Lieutenant Governor Morris, and two other gentlemen were on horseback. A 320 pound Metis, the Honourable James McKay, MLA, drove a buggy ahead of the covered carriage to serve as a guide. Other carriages carried the cook and food, tents, bedding and other camping supplies.

The caravan followed the southern branch of the Dawson Road. They hoped to reach Oak Island (Ile des Chenes), a clump of oak trees at the eastern end of the Oak River, by early in the afternoon, but like the Mennonite delegates in 1873, they were caught in an intense thunderstorm. The carriage that carried the four ladies sank into the mud; first one side, then the other and finally both sides. The horses got so tired that one of them simply sat down in the mud in despair. At one point the men had to help the horses pull the carts out of the mud. They arrived in Oak Island at five in the afternoon, very tired and famished. Lady Dufferin wrote in her diary, "Altogether it was not a nice day for camping out."

However, soon the sky cleared and the cook built a nice fire and prepared an excellent meal,

even though he had been in the most unfortunate cart and had been over his knees in mud. The menu included tasty soup, mutton, pork chops and potatoes, which was enjoyed by all. They slept in their tents for the night. The next morning they got up at seven, had breakfast and by 10 o'clock continued their journey toward the Mennonite Reserve. The weather was much better--the sun shone, but the wind was very cold.

At the point where the trail entered the East Reserve near the village of Kronthal, the Mennonites had erected an arch of evergreens bearing the inscription, "Mennoniten Reserve". Near the arch the vice-regal party was met by four young mounted Mennonite men who rode before the caravan as an honour guard. They drove through several villages and great corn fields before they arrived at the reception centre near the village of Eigenhof at 12:30 a.m., August 21.

## Horse Race.

During the trip through the reserve some of the riders in the caravan had indicated that they were interested in a horse race. The Mennonite men, assuming that Dufferin was in the covered carriage and that these mounted members in the party were merely his valets, took them up on it. They had short races and other equestrian amusements (Kurzweil).

How surprised they were when they arrived at the reception centre and discovered that one of the riders was in fact none other than Lord Dufferin, the Queen's representative!

Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941), later Steinbach miller, described this event as follows: "At the point where the road turned into the reserve they erected a gate of honour made from fir trees. Some of the young men rode up to this gate in order to

escort this guest of honour to the place where he was to be welcomed.

"The riders were full of suspense as they watched the road on which the visitor was expected to come. And behold, all at once a number of vehicles and several distinguished men on horseback were coming towards them.

"Which one of all those gentlemen could be the Governor? They didn't know. Surely, he would be sitting in one of the coaches. Those gentlemen on horseback had all kinds of pastimes with the Mennonite riders, short races, etc. and the latter were pleased and joined them quite freely and openly.

"Thus they arrived at the reception area. How horrified our riders were when they saw how one of the gentlemen was being waited on by the others and how respectfully and courteously he was treated. It was Lord Dufferin. A rigid fear fell over the young men, undoubtedly they had done something for which they would be blamed or maybe their loose behaviour had offended the Governor.

"In Russia they were accustomed to something different. A government official would be approached in nothing but the most respectful manner. They shared their concern with Mr. William Hespeler, who also was part of the Lord Governor's retinue, and whom many of the settlers knew. Mr. Hespeler passed these young men's fears on to Lord Dufferin; however, he calmed their fears by saying that all was well," (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 141).

#### Preparations.

In anticipation of the Governor-General's visit, excitement in the Mennonite community had run high for days. Tuesday, August 21, 1877, had been declared a holiday. A reception area had been prepared on a small ridge at the southwest corner of the village of Eigenhof. From that vantage point at least 10 Mennonite villages could be seen.

The reception area was beautiful in its simplicity. An arch made of evergreen branches bore the word "Willkommen" in large red letters upon a white background. Beyond the sign was an elegant arbour or shaded platform, also made from evergreen branches. The arbour was most profusely and tastefully decorated with garlands of flowers and bunches of corn mixed with poppies.

"Also Klaas Reimer Sr. [Steinbach merchant] had done his part and had brought a beautiful fir tree decorated with flowers and set it up in the arbour (*Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 132).

In the arbour were three young Mennonite girls with lace handkerchiefs on their heads, and trays with glasses in their hands, to serve hot lemon-seasoned tea to the guests in characteristic Russian style. Around it were little pine trees on which hung bouquets with some German lines of welcome wrapped around each. In front of the arbour were about one thousand Mennonites: the men on one side with specimens of their farm produce such as corn, wheat, oats and flax on tables before them; the women on the other side with specimens of vegetables from their gardens. Above all floated the German and Canadian flags side by side.

When the Governor had dismounted he changed into more comfortable shoes, and Johann I. Friesen (1860-1941), Blumenort, had the privi-



1877 depiction of the Jakob Wieler housebarn in Eigenhof, East Reserve. This charcoal sketch is believed to be the work of Lord Dufferin, Governor-General of Canada, during the Vice Regal visit of August 21, 1877, view to the north. In the foreground, right, is the windmill erected in 1872. Along the village street are the homes of Gerhard Schroeder, later Reeve (right), and Jakob Wieler (left). The drawing by Lord Dufferin is one of the earliest depictions of pioneer life in Manitoba. Courtesy of Mennonite Historian, March 1998/Preservings, No. 12, page 37, and East Reserve 125, page 3. See also biography of Jakob Wieler, Preservings, No. 16, pages 97-100. See biography of Gerhard Schroeder in article following.

lege of carrying his riding boots to the tent. Lady Dufferin found the tea most refreshing after that long cold journey and responded with a "Dankeschön." The guests were seated and the crowd then formed an immense circle around them.

#### The Address.

The Berghthal Oberschulze Jacob Peters (1813-1884) read an address in German of which Mr. Hespeler gave the following translation:

To His Excellency Lord Dufferin, Governor General of the Dominion of Canada:

"In the name of all the Mennonites who have emigrated from Russia, we greet you most humbly. When the Russian Government informed us six years ago that they were about to violate the agreement made with our grandfathers under the Emperor Paul, which exempted us according to our religious belief from all military duties, we were obliged to look for new homes under a government which we might trust would keep their promises, allowing us to worship God according to our consciences and exempting us from the duty of carrying arms.

"We were unable to secure the privilege of practising our religious beliefs under European Governments and therefore our eyes were turned to America.

"We had heard of the United States from agents sent among us, and some of our people settled in that country. In the year 1872 your Government sent our friend Mr. Hespeler to us in Russia, who offered us homes in your country. In the year 1873 we sent a delegation to visit this country, and also the United States, and some of us who signed this were members of that delegation. They travelled over the greater part of this province, and far into the west.

"They were treated with all kindness and consideration by the Government, and thereby the opportunity was given them of seeing and exam-

ining for themselves; and before they returned to our people in Russia, the Government repeated the promises which had previously been sent to us through Mr. Hespeler.

"The delegates were in a position on their return home to inform us that the advantages which this country offered excelled even the representations made, and therefore they had no hesitation in advising us to come here.

"From that time emigration commenced and has continued up to the present time. We now count about 1,072 families and next year we expect a further addition of our friends.

"We are pleased to be able to state that we are satisfied in the manner in which the Government has kept their promises to us.

"Your excellency has now the opportunity of seeing for yourself what we have accomplished during our short residence. You see our villages, our fields and our bountiful harvest--witnesses in themselves that the capabilities of the country have not been misrepresented to us.

"Under the guidance and protection of Divine Providence, we have every reason to look forward confidently to great future prosperity, our villages multiplied and our herds increased.

"We are contented and willing to obey the laws of the land, but we cannot reconcile our religious belief with the performance of military duty.

"We have full confidence in the continuance of the good faith you have kept with us and with thankfulness we acknowledge the fatherly care which is being bestowed upon us, and also for the assistance in advice and deeds we are daily receiving through your Government Commissioner and our intercessor.

"We know of your Excellency's noble character for honour, truth, and condescension and feel ourselves honoured and happy to be permitted to express to one so near Her Majesty in rank and goodness of heart, our grateful thanks for many



Artists rendition of the arch erected near the village of Kronthal where the "Winnipeggscha Waeich" (the Winnipeg Road) entered the East Reserve. The arch was made out of evergreens. Drawings by Wm. Schroeder, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

favours.

"We welcome you in our midst and pray to our Creator to bless your Excellency and Her Majesty the Queen, trusting that you will carry to her the expressions of our attachment, together with the interest we feel in everything which concerns the welfare of her person and her empire.

"With our most humble feelings of thankfulness for the honour of your gracious visit we sign ourselves in the name of all our brothers.

Jacob Peters, Oberschulze  
Peter Toews, Aeltester  
Gerhard Wiebe, Aeltester  
Heinrich Wiebe, minister  
Cornelius Toews  
Jacob Friesen

### The Reply.

His Excellency then replied in English and Mr. Hespeler translated the speech into German.

"Fellow citizens of the Dominion, and fellow subjects of Her Majesty: I have come here today in the name of the Queen of England to bid you welcome to Canadian soil. With this welcome it is needless to say that I should couple the best wishes of the Imperial Government in England and the Dominion Government at Ottawa, for you are well aware that both have regarded your coming here with unmitigated satisfaction.

"You have left your own land in obedience to a conscientious scruple, nor will you have been the first to cross the Atlantic under the pressure of a similar exigency. In doing so you have made great sacrifices, broken with many tender associations, and overthrown the settled purposes of your former peacefully ordered lives; but the very fact of your having manfully faced the uncertainties and risks of so distant an emigration rather than surrender your religious convictions in regard to the unlawfulness of warfare, proves you to be well worthy of our respect, confidence and esteem.

"You have come to a land where you will find the people with whom you associate engaged indeed in a great struggle, and contending with foes whom it requires their best energies to encounter, but those foes are not your fellow men, nor will you be called upon in the struggle to stain your hands with human blood--a task which is so ab-



This arch was erected near the arbour where the reception took place.

horrent to your religious feelings.

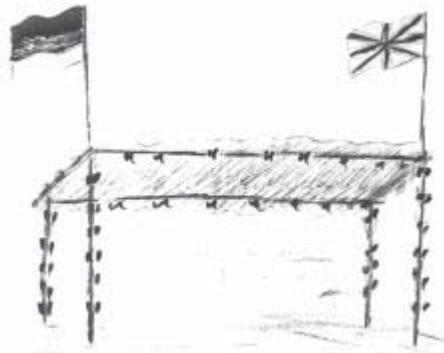
"The war to which we invite you as recruits and comrades is a war waged against the brute forces of nature; but those forces will welcome our domination, and reward our attack by placing their treasures at our disposal. It is a war of ambition--for we intend to annex territory after territory--but neither blazing villages nor devastated fields will mark our ruthless track; our battalions will march across the illimitable plains which stretch before us as sunshine steals athwart the ocean; the rolling prairie will blossom in our wake, and corn and peace and plenty will spring where we have trod.

"But not only are we ourselves engaged in these beneficent occupations--you will find that the only other nationality with whom we can ever come into contact are occupied with similar peaceful pursuits. They like us are engaged in advancing the standards of civilization westward, not as rivals, but as allies; and a community of interests, objects, and aspirations has already begun to cement between the people of the United States and ourselves what is destined, I trust, to prove an indissoluble affection.

"If, then, you have come hither to seek for peace--peace at least we can promise you. But it is not merely to the material blessing of our land that I bid you welcome. We desire you to share with us on equal terms our constitutional liberties, our municipal privileges, and our domestic freedom; we invite you to assist us in choosing the members of our Parliament, and with this civil freedom we equally, gladly offer you absolute religious liberty.

"The forms of worship you have brought with you, you will be able to practice in the most unrestricted manner, and we confidently trust that those blessings which have waited upon your virtuous exertions in your Russian homes will continue to attend you here; for we hear that you are sober-minded and a God-fearing community, and as such you are doubly welcome among us. It is with the greatest pleasure that I have passed through your villages, and witnessed your comfortable homesteads which have arisen like magic upon this fertile plain; for they prove indisputably that you are expert in agriculture, and already possess a high standard of domestic comfort.

"In the name then of Canada and her people, in the name of Queen Victoria and her empire, I again stretch out my hand to you, the hand of brotherhood and fellowship, for you are as welcome to our affection as you are to our lands, to our liber-



Artist's conception of the arbour erected for the Governor-General's reception at Eigenfeld, August 21, 1877. The arbour was made from evergreens and decorated with green corn stalks mixed with poppies.

ties and freedom. In the eye of our law the least among you is the equal of the highest magnate in our land, and the proudest of our citizens may well be content to hail you as his fellow countrymen.

"You will find Canada a beneficent and loving mother, and under her foster care I trust your community is destined to flourish and extend in wealth and numbers through countless generations. In one word, beneath the flag whose folds now wave above us, you will find protection, peace, civil and religious liberty, constitutional freedom and equal laws.

The address was listened to throughout with the greatest of interest. The audience never cheered, but when anything pleased them, they lifted their caps. Many of them, men as well as women, were moved to tears.

### Program.

Mr. Hespeler then presented the members of the reception committee. After this the students of the Grünfeld (now Kleefeld) school, directed by their teacher, Mr. Peter L. Dueck, sang a song written especially for the occasion by Rev. Peter Toews, also from Grünfeld. The words were sung to the melody of the hymn "Denk ich an die Himmelschore".

Johann W. Dueck, Rosenort, wrote that his father, school teacher Peter L. Dueck (1842-87), Grünfeld, composed a song for the visit: "Then my father and his school children sang a song he had composed for the occasion. Its melody was "Grosser Gott, wir loben dich" and several other good singers joined in: Welcome Lord and Lady Dufferin, Welcome Governor, Welcome, representative of the Queen, Welcome, honoured and dear! (first verse). Their Excellencies appeared to appreciate the song and asked for a copy which they were gladly given," *Prairie Pilgrims*, page 34.

Ruth Wohlgemuth, Manitoba, recalled that her grandmother Margaret Loewen Baerg (daughter of David Loewen (1836-1915), Hochstadt, and wife of Holdeman minister Peter Baerg, see *Pres.*, No. 18, page 36), had been among the students singing for Lord Dufferin that day, and that one of the songs was "O Beulah Land," see *Pres.*, No. 14, page 38.

The excitement generated by the event was demonstrated by Peter W. "Schmet" Toews (1866-



*Frederick Temple Blackwood, Lord Dufferin (1826-1902), Governor General of Canada. Photo courtesy of Wm. Schroeder, Bergthal, page 96/East Reserve, page 24.*

1935) writes "I was also among the singers. Uncle Peter [Bishop Toews] bought a cap for me for these festivities, and from cousin Johann Toews [father of "Baker" Toews, Steinbach], I borrowed a pair of pants. Unfortunately, cousin Johann was five or six years older than I. Consequently, the pants were about seven inches too long for me, but I rolled them up, and they served the purpose. Mother also made me a new shirt for the occasion," *Pioneer and Pilgrims*, page 141.

Then the teacher of another school presented Lady Dufferin with a scribbler containing a page of handwriting done by each student in his school and some samples of pencil drawings. These presentations were received with much pleasure. Several little girls also presented bouquets to the four ladies in the party. The flowers were kindly acknowledged, in German, by both the Countess and the Honourable Mrs. Littleton.

When the formal activities were over, Lord and Lady Dufferin walked around and were as speechlessly polite as they could be. While the tents of the vice-regal party were being pitched a short distance from the reception site, Mr. Hespeler invited them to his tent where they sat around a campfire and drank coffee. Some Mennonite women and children looked on from a respectable distance and Mr. Hespeler gave them some hot coffee also.

In the meantime the Governor's 12-year-old daughter had been playing with some adorable little Mennonite babies. After she had cuddled one particularly cute child for some time the baby's grateful mother gave Nellie a cucumber which she had brought for the exhibition. After an hour and a half of this casual interaction Lord and Lady Dufferin, accompanied by a group of Mennonite women, walked towards the Governor's tents which were about a quarter of a mile away. Along the way several of the women invited the visitors



*The Countess of Dufferin, nee Harriet Hamilton (1839-1936). She described her visit to the Mennonite East Reserve and her impressions of the Mennonites in her diary. Wm. Schroeder, Bergthal, page 96/East Reserve, page 24.*

into their homes.

#### **Lady Dufferin.**

In a letter to her widowed mother in Ireland Lady Dufferin described what she saw. "The Mennonites are most desirable emigrants; they retain their best German characteristics, are hard working, honest, sober, simple, hardy people. They bring money into the country, and can settle in a woodless place, which no other people will do. This is their third year here. Their houses are cottages very plainly built, roofed with thick hay thatch, the walls wooden, but covered with plaster. Next to, and opening into the livingroom, is a large building in which the cattle spend the winter.

"The inhabitants will gradually leave off this nasty plan, but it is their devotion to their cattle which makes them wish to have them so near. Everything looks neat, homemade wooden furniture, flowers in the windows and nice gardens. Necessity in Russia has taught them to make a peculiar fuel--cakes of manure, mixed with straw, which look exactly like turf. With this they go through the long Canadian winter without wood or coal."

"They dress in the plainest and least decorative fashion. The women, from their birth to their graves, tie up their hair in coloured handkerchiefs, fastened under their chins, and wear dark-coloured gowns, the baby's gowns being made after the same fashion as its mother's. All the people, men and women, are plain. The village herd and the village schoolmaster are the only two paid labourers in the Mennonite vineyard; the clergyman receives no pay. Their church is most simple--plain benches without backs, and no ornaments anywhere. School is not kept during the three summer months. They speak nothing but German.

"The only other thing I have to say about the

Mennonites is that the great proportion of those here are young, and that everybody has at least six children. Think what a gain they are to this country; in three years to have eighteen square miles (townships) settled by such people."

#### **Evening.**

Later that evening the Governor and Countess sat around their own campfire and dined before they retired to their tents. "Lord Dufferin made a few sketches, some of his suite went shooting, and others again remained indoors, and listened to the singing of some German songs. In the evening a display of fireworks took place," Stewart, *Earl of Dufferin*, page 529.

They slept very comfortably that night. Lord and Lady Dufferin and Nellie in one tent, Mrs. Littleton and her maid in another tent, and three gentlemen in a third tent. They had stretcher-beds with buffalo robes and blankets, and dry hay on the ground. The horses were kept in Gerhard Schroeder's (1848-1910) and Jacob Wieler's stables.

#### **Grünfeld (Kleefeld).**

The next morning by ten o'clock, the Governor and his party set off on their return trip to Fort Garry. They passed through several more villages including the Kleine Gemeinde village of Grünfeld (Kleefeld).

HSHS Research Director John Dyck described the visit as follows: "Perhaps their [Lord and Lady Dufferin] interest had been piqued by the brief look into some of the homes the previous evening. So the party stopped in Gruenfeld opposite the Johann Dueck [Schulze] residence where William Hespeler showed them the interior of a traditional Mennonite home. They also took a look at the adjoining barn. Lady Dufferin wrote in her dairy, 'The only fault to find with (the house) is that the stables open into the living room' indicating that the homes were faultlessly neat," *Oberschulze*, page 97.

Peter W. "Schmet" Toews wrote, "Later that evening we returned home. The next day the guests came through Grünfeld. I was present this time as well. The Lord desired to see the inside of a Mennonite home. He dismounted at Johan Dueck's and entered their home. I was privileged to hold his horse while he was inside, which I gladly did. I was a horse lover from the days of my youth," *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, page 142.

Johann W. Dueck, son of Grünfeld teacher Peter L. Dueck added the following account: "...On the following day the Governor took the opportunity to visit several villages to see what progress had been made by the immigrants. One place was at my uncle J. L. Dueck, who already owned a large house with a white brick oven inside. The Governor had many questions about this large oven and its uses," *Prairie Pilgrims*, page 34.

#### **Winnipeg.**

They got as far as Oak Island for the night and arrived at Silver Heights in the afternoon of August 23rd.

After two more long tedious journeys, one along the Dawson trail to Lake of the Woods and another across Lake Winnipeg by boat to Norway

House, the Governor's visit to Manitoba came to an end. In his farewell speech in Winnipeg on September 29th he summed up his impressions of his visit to this province and once more, while the nearest Mennonite was thirty miles away, described what he had seen in the East Reserve.

".....Although I have witnessed many sights to give me pleasure during my various progresses through the Dominion, seldom have I beheld any spectacle more pregnant with prophecy, more fraught with promise of an astonishing future than the Mennonite settlement (great applause). When I visited these interesting people they had been only two years in the Province, and yet in a long ride I took across the prairies which but yesterday was absolutely bare, desolate and untenanted, and the home of the wolf, the badger and the eagle, I passed village after village, homestead after homestead furnished with all the conveniences and incidents of European comfort and a scientific agriculture; while on the other side of the road were cornfields already ripe for harvest, and pastures populous with herds of cattle stretching away to the horizon (great cheering)."

"Even on this continent, the peculiar theatre of rapid change and progress, there has no-where, I imagine, taken place so marvellous a transformation (renewed cheering); and yet when in your name and in the name of the Queen of England, I bade these people welcome to their new homes, it was not the improvement in their material fortunes that preoccupied my thoughts. Glad as I was to have the power of allotting them so ample a portion of our teeming soil which seems to blossom at a touch (continued applause) and which they are cultivating to such magnificent advantage, I felt infinitely prouder in being able to throw over them the aegis of the British constitution (loud cheering), and in bidding them freely to share with us our unrivalled political instructions, our untrammelled personal liberties (renewed cheers). We ourselves are so accustomed to breathe the atmosphere of freedom that it scarcely occurs to us to consider and appreciate our advantages in this respect. It is only when we are reminded by such incidents, as that to which I refer of the small extent of the world's surface over which the principles of parliamentary government can be said to work smoothly and harmoniously that we are led to consider the exceptional happiness of our position (Hear, Hear)....."

### Conclusion.

Just before the Governor and his entourage got on the riverboat Minnesota to go back to Ottawa, they crossed the Red River once more. Each drove a spike into the Canadian Pacific Railway which was under construction at the time. The track was completed in 1879 and went from Selkirk, Manitoba to an American lime at Emerson. On their way back they stopped at a point called Fisher's Landing near Fargo. They went on shore to see a locomotive which was to be loaded onto a barge and floated to Winnipeg. The engine was named "The Countess of Dufferin," which reminds Manitobans to this day of Lord and Lady Dufferin's visit to this province more than a century ago.

When the pomp and ceremony of the official visit was over the settlers returned to the toil of

everyday life.

### Sources:

John Dyck, *Oberschulze Jakob Peters 1813-1884: Manitoba Pioneer Leader* (Steinbach, 1990), pages 87-98.

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Johann I. Friesen, "Presentation," in Klaas J. B. Reimer, et.al., eds., *Das 60-jährige Gedenkfeier der ersten Einwanderung von Mennoniten in Manitoba, Canada, gefeiert am 1. August 1934 in Steinbach, Manitoba* (Steinbach, Manitoba, 1935), pages 29-32, trans. and published in Plett, ed., *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, 1990), page 132;

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*jährige Gedenkfeier*, pages 17-24, trans. and published in Plett, ed., *Profile 1874* (Steinbach, 1987), page 207;

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*Manitoba Free Press*, August 9, 18, 23, 1877.

Marchionist of Dufferin and Avea, *My Canadian Journal* (London, 1891), pages 318-319.

George Stewart Jr., *Canada under the Administration of the Earl of Dufferin* (Toronto, 1915), page 529.

Events in Eigenhof were described by Abram P. Dueck (1909-93), Steinbach, Manitoba.

An earlier version of this article was published in *Mennonitische Rundschau* in 1977, Dec. 14, page 9. The above version was taken from William Schroeder, *The Bergthal Colony* 2nd (CMBC, Winnipeg, 1986), pages 95-109, with some updates and amendments.

## Bergthal, A Strategic Settlement

It has been suggested by those whose agenda is to denigrate conservative Mennonites that the Bergthaler people (Sommerfelder and Chortitzer) were the descendants of the poorest folk in the Chortitzia (Old) Colony who sought isolation in the remotest region of Czarist Russia. In fact, the very opposite is true.

The Old Colony daughter settlement of Bergthal was founded in 1836 only 30 km. northwest of Mariupol, where they actually shipped their grain (*Pres.*, No. 8, Part Two, page 45). This may have created the paradigm which the Bergthaler delegates were replicating with the selection of the East Reserve, in Manitoba, in 1873, some 35 miles from Winnipeg, the central city.

What is also significant and often forgotten is that Bergthal was located 80 km northeast of the new seaport of Berdjansk, completed in the same year. Berdjansk quickly became one of the busiest seaports along the Black Sea, providing the entire region with access to the lucrative wheat markets of Western Europe.

According to a recent paper by Dr. James Urry, up until the construction of the first railways in the 1870s, Berdjansk, in fact, rivalled Alexandrowsk (Zaporozhe) and Ekatherinoslav, in terms of its commercial and shipping activity. It is clear that the choice Bergthal site of almost 30,000 acres, released from the land reserves originally designated for Jewish settlement by Imperial Ukas dated March 30, 1833 (*Hildebrandt's Zeittafel*, page 186), was specifically chosen to overcome some of the drawbacks of the mother colonies in terms of proximity to markets. Even the Old Chortitzia Colony was disadvantaged as transportation along the Dneiper River was originally hindered because of the rapids, etc. problems eventually overcome later in the century. Until the railway construction boom of the 1870s, the larger Molotschna colony was some 130 km from Berdjansk, a significant distance when all grain was shipped by wagon trains.

With the hindsight of history, obtaining this property was a brilliant strategic move, attributable to Old Colony Oberschulze Jakob Bartsch (1797-1877). Oberschulze Bartsch was the son of delegate Johann Bartsch (1757-1821), the more reflective and intellectual of the two delegates in 1788, who in the face of Imperial Government investigation of controversy surrounding the settlement of Chortitzia, acknowledged his fault and was taken back into the Flemish Gemeinde with love and forgiveness.

According to Dr. Urry, Berdjansk itself had one of the most progressive Mennonite business communities of any city in "New Russia". In addition, the Bergthaler lived in the middle of four or five different ethnic groups including German Catholic and Separatist-Pietist Colonists, Cossacks, etc. These facts probably explain why the Bergthaler were more "street smart" in terms of dealings with other cultures and authorities. This was reflected by their sophisticated efforts in protecting their own culture, astutely recognizing the impact which new government policies would have on their educational system, etc.

Bergthal was settled by the sons and daughters of full farmers ("Vollwirten") in the "Old" mother colony for whom the resettlement of their young landless folk became a standard survival strategy for their centuries old, landowning "household" economy. The first settlers were relatively well-to-do, as each family was allowed five wagon loads of goods during the trek to the new site plus their livestock.

Those denigrating the conservative Mennonites, have often been so zealous in their mission, that they forgot to check the facts. In studying our history, it seems that pursuing the opposite tack to what critics are alleging, often provides a useful hypothesis for further research. The Editor.

### Further Reading:

James Urry, "Growing up with cities: the Mennonite experience in Imperial Russia and the early Soviet Union," paper presented at the Symposium, "Mennonites and the City", organized by the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, Nov. 30 and Dec. 1, 2001.

# The Life of Gerhard Schroeder 1848-1910

"The Life of Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910), Eigenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba, Vollwirt, Entrepreneur and Municipal Reeve,"  
by great grandson Ray Schroeder, Box 21592, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3.

## Introduction

Gerhard Schroeder was a titan among early Mennonite pioneers of the East Reserve. His name is mentioned in many books and articles and his place in the history of the R.M. of Hanover is nearly guaranteed. The purpose of this article is to create a comprehensive biography of a complex man. Another more muted purpose for this article is to dispel some myths about early life in Hanover. Gerhard's life was not one filled with isolation and mind numbing frontier labour; it was a sophisticated life committed to commerce, personal and collective betterment, and public service.

## Background

The story of Gerhard Schroeder begins in the village of Berghthal in the Berghthal Colony, Imperial Russia. He was born April 1, 1848 to Johann Schroeder and Maria Schellenberg. Gerhard was educated in the conservative Berghthal tradition (*Pres.*, No. 13, p. 116) and one of his teachers was Gerhard Dueck. He must have received a substantial education because he was an intelligent and capable man. Not only was Gerhard a farmer and miller but also a thoughtful entrepreneur and politician.

In 1867 Gerhard was baptized and later that year he married. By 1874 he and his young family migrated to Canada. This article intends to deal with things relating primarily to Canada. There is little information extant on the early years of Gerhard Schroeder.

Gerhard Schroeder's father was Johann Schroeder (1807-84), one of the most flamboyant founders of the Berghthal Colony. Much of Johann's colourful life is discussed in *Pres.*, Part Two, No. 8, pp. 44-47. Part of the lure of the story of Johann Schroeder has to do with his multiple marriages and some of this story needs retelling to augment our purposes here.

Johann married two daughters of Aron Schellenberg (1773-1853), Blumstein, an important figure in the Kleine Gemeinde community of the Molotschna Colony and later the settlement in the Crimea (see *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, p. 443). After the death of the second Schellenberg daughter, Johann married his maid who was much younger than he. In essence, Johann had three distinctly different families and each needs some mention to help gain a better understanding of the life of his son Gerhard, our major concern herein.

## Justina Schellenberg.

Johann Schroeder and all but one of his adult children migrated to Canada between 1874-1876.

Johann was married to Justina Schellenberg (1811-36) with whom he had five children of which only two, Katharina and Aron, survived infancy.

- 1) **Katharina**, married a Jacob Rempel with whom she came to Canada probably in 1875. The couple is listed in Schönhorst, West Reserve where her father and stepmother also lived.
- 2) **Aron** came to Canada with his wife Agnetha Peters and is listed in the Hamburg ship records



*Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910), Eigenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba, and wife Mrs. Margaretha (Penner) Doerksen. This portrait appears to be a composite made from the 1888 family photo.*

as being a passenger in 1876 but he is not in the Quebec passenger lists. In the 1881 census he is listed as a member of the village of Schönhorst, East Reserve but in the 1883 tax assessment he is listed under the village of Schönenberg. By 1886 he obtained a land patent for NE36-5-5E which was clearly a part of the Schönenberg community. Aron was the only one of Gerhard's siblings to settle in the East Reserve but eventually he moved to Saskatchewan. The three younger children in the first family all died in infancy (Note One).

## Maria Schellenberg.

After Justina Schellenberg's death, Johann married her younger sister, Maria Schellenberg (1813-59) with whom he had another eight children (Maria, Helena, Johann, Maria, Abram, Gerhard, Peter, and Jacob). Maria, Helena, Maria, and Jacob did not reach adulthood and Peter chose not to migrate to Canada (Note Two).

The other three boys did, however, migrate. **Abraham** and wife Katharina Dyck and **Gerhard** and wife Anna Harder came aboard the S.S. Peruvian in July 1874. They were

shortly followed by **Johann** and wife Sarah Penner who migrated aboard the S.S. Nova Scotian in July 1875. In the 1881 census Abraham and Johann, both of them ministers, are listed as residents of the West Reserve living in Alt-Berghthal and Heuboden respectively. Gerhard, our main subject here, remained in the East Reserve.

After the death of his second wife, Johann Schroeder married for a third time to Maria Dyck (1840-1900) with whom he fathered six children (Jacob, Jacob, Dietrich, Maria, David, and Heinrich) of which all except the first survived infancy. This last marriage was with his maid and the children from this marriage were subsequently referred to as the "Maid's" children. Depending on the interpretation, this could be either a humorous or a pejorative term.

For Johann the marriage may have been a genuine expression of his devotion to Maria but at the same time it was one of necessity. It was with this last of his three families that Johann migrated to Canada aboard the S.S. Nova Scotian in October 1874. He was elderly and blind but managed to complete the trip and to homestead in Schönhorst, West Reserve by 1881. Heinrich, Johann's youngest son, was born in Canada when Johann was already 71 years old. (Henry Schapansky covers the Dyck family lineage in *Pres.*, No. 16, p. 79).

## Marriage.

Gerhard Schroeder and Anna Harder (1848-76) were both baptized on June 5, 1867. The couple wed on November 26, 1867 in Berghthal, Russia. Anna was the daughter of Franz Harder (b. 1824) and Anna Stoesz (b. 1827). It appears the Harders suffered significant bad luck when it came to raising children. Of their six children, only Anna and her brother Franz (b. 1854) survived to adulthood.

Gerhard and Anna had two children Johann (1870-1956) and Franz (1872-1971). It was with this small family that Gerhard migrated to Canada in 1874 along with Anna's parents and her brother Franz. As mentioned earlier, the family was accompanied on the trip by Gerhard's brother Abram and his family but they were also accompanied by a widow named Mrs. Doerksen who was travelling with her six children (Jacob, Margaretha, Helena, Katharina, Maria, and Heinrich). Gerhard's wife Anna died in 1876 and Gerhard married the widow Margaretha Doerksen (1840-1926) who was a daughter of Heinrich Penner. Gerhard and

Margaretha had five children (Gerhard, Peter, Abram, Anna, and Aron). The household thus contained three families, namely those of each spouse as well as those of Gerhard and Margaretha together.

#### **Settlement.**

Upon arrival in Canada, Gerhard and Anna settled in Blumstein ostensibly along with Anna's parents and her younger brother Franz. Gerhard laid claim to the SW16-6-5E on September 28, 1874. Anna died in 1876 and her parents, Franz and Anna, subsequently moved to Silberfeld, West Reserve where they lived together with Franz Jr. and his young family. Gerhard may have also temporarily moved to the West Reserve but by 1877 he was remarried to the widow Doerksen and settled in Eigenhof, East Reserve (Note Three).

Eigenhof had four principle families including the families led by Gerhard Schroeder's new father-in-law, Heinrich Penner (1810-1882). Penner was the patriarch of the interrelated community which contained his own son Heinrich Penner (b. 1851), his daughter and son-in-law Jacob Wieler (b. 1842), and new son-in-law Gerhard Schroeder. These four families were accounted for in the 1881 census but Heinrich Penner Sr. died the following year and the younger Penner moved to Gnadenfeld, West Reserve. By 1883, only Gerhard Schroeder and Jacob Wieler (*Pres.*, No. 16, p. 97) remained in the village.

As stated, in the 1883 tax assessment only Schroeder and Wieler are listed for Eigenhof but this seems simply to be part of a greater phenomenon. The village system was disbanding and villages began to consolidate. Even the name *Eigenhof* seems a little preposterous because it literally means *our own yard* which plays poorly for future population growth. As the village system of the East Reserve gave way to settlement on the land for which farmers had their own patents, the village of Eigenhof became even less significant. Gerhard received land patents by 1887 as the village was being absorbed into neighbouring communities like Chortitz and Vollwerk. At the time of his death in 1910 Gerhard was living on SE2-7-5E.

#### **Wealth.**

Gerhard Schroeder was a wealthy man by the standards of the day. In the 1883 municipal assessment his wealth was only surpassed by such big names in Mennonite pioneer circles as Erdmann Penner, Jakob Peters, Peter Toews, and Gerhard Kliewer. This is important to note because Gerhard was only 35 years old at the time of the assessment when the other men in the grouping were considerably older. Another

reason to discuss Gerhard's wealth is to debate how it was accumulated. Gerhard's father was still alive in 1883 and had a young family despite being an old man. Also, Gerhard had many other siblings which suggests that he did not get any significant financial assistance from his father. Gerhard's first wife Anna Harder passed

this is true, and there is no reason to suggest otherwise, then Gerhard was one of the first farmers to return to the market driven agricultural practices Mennonites had experienced in Russia.

In the early years of settlement in Manitoba, Mennonite farmers were forced to rely on subsistence agriculture because of the primitive state of the pioneer economy.

To imagine these talented people as being only capable of subsistence agriculture is to perpetuate outdated myths that further need to be eradicated. Sheep farming alone could not account for the relative success of Gerhard's livelihood but it was certainly a contributing factor.

Considerable credit for financial solvency must go to Gerhard's three families who did much of the work when Gerhard was busy with municipal commitments or business dealings. The best example supporting this was when Gerhard acted as reeve from 1901 to 1907. He spent much time travelling within the southeast as well as to Winnipeg.

Clearly he was not completing the actual physical tasks necessary in farming. His eldest sons, Johann and Franz gained their own properties by the turn of the century but this still left members from the Doerksen family as well as Gerhard and Margaretha's new family. A grandson of Gerhard's who actually met him (Note Four) contested that in his later years Gerhard did little physical work. He dressed in fine clothes that were not meant for work. In the morning he issued his orders and it was in the best interest of those receiving the orders to not ask a lot of questions. A real taboo was to return from work during the day for clarification of Gerhard's job orders.

Much of Gerhard's income seems to have been invested in his farm but not in his house. The first house built by Gerhard on the Eigenhof yard was surely the one in the famous Lord Dufferin sketch but this house was worth little money in the 1883 tax assessment. In 1895 or 1896 the old house was replaced by a new one which eventually passed to one of the Doerksen children. When he died, Gerhard Schroeder had considerable financial assets. His money went to his widow and to members of both the Schroeder and Doerksen families. By 1910 he had acquired considerable property in sections 1-7-5E, 2-7-5E, 12-7-5E, and in 35-6-5E some of which went directly to his children.

#### **The Windmill, 1876.**

Mennonites arrived to settle permanently in Manitoba in 1874. Shortly thereafter these pioneers were busily developing their new homeland with an enviable entrepreneurial spirit. Early



*This famous picture has been in many books and previous editions of Preservings. It was probably taken in 1888. This is the family of Gerhard Schroeder (1848-1910) and Margaretha Penner. The children from left to right are Peter, Abram, Anna, Gerhard, and Aron (Pres., No. 7, p. 48).*

away in 1876 but she too probably did not have much in the way of assets because her father and brother were still alive at the time of her death which rules out any significant inheritance.

When Gerhard married into the Heinrich Penner family, he was again in a new situation. His father-in-law had many children including a son with whom he farmed which again rules out financial aid. Perhaps Gerhard's new wife had gained a considerable inheritance when her first husband died in Russia. One might hope that he simply had hard work and good fortune on his side but since he owned a windmill as early as 1876, even before he married Margaretha Penner, he certainly needed to have some sizeable investment capital.

Despite the inconclusive origins of his wealth, Gerhard Schroeder was a man of means and he did not lack for material goods. He owned land and livestock and a great number of sheep. Some folk traditions suggest that Gerhard had substantial contracts with the Jewish community in Winnipeg to supply them with sheep. If

mills in the East Reserve were located at Grünfeld, Tannenau, and Eigenhof (see *Preservings No. 16*, p. 120). The mill in Eigenhof was built in 1876 and was constructed by Peter K. Barkman of Steinbach. Gerhard may not have been responsible for bringing the mill to Eigenhof but he was certainly its owner shortly after its construction.

The mill was a smock mill type. The body was fixed but the cap could be turned into the wind. Too little wind meant no grain could be ground but too much wind was a threat to the stability of the mill. If the sails turned too quickly, one of two things could happen. The windmill could topple or else the millstones could throw a spark and cause a fire. Jacob Doerksen (Note Five) accounts for the destruction of the Eigenhof mill which occurred some time before 1883. He suggests that a strong wind occurred at night which encouraged Gerhard and his sons to mill as much as possible. Through bad luck or incompetence as millers, the mill itself was destroyed. The remnants of the mill were acquired by Peter Loewen and rebuilt at Hochstadt. The millstones were not moved and remained on the yard for many years (Note Six).

#### **Lord Dufferin's Visit.**

Lord Dufferin made a well documented visit to the East Reserve in August 1877 (*Pres.*, No. 12, p. 37). His entourage met with the Mennonites at Eigenhof and this is also where they stayed the night. One of the most important things to come from this visit was a sketch completed by Lord Dufferin that was eventually turned



Johann Schroeder (1807-84) fathered 19 children so in time his grandchildren were similar in age to his children. Seated at left is Franz Schroeder (1872-1971), the son of Gerhard Schroeder and Anna Harder. The other two men are Heinrich Schroeder (1878-1968) and Dirk Schroeder (1865-1945) both sons of Johann Schroeder and Maria Dyck (1840-1900). Consequently, they are Gerhard's half brothers and Franz's uncles (*Pres.*, No. 8, Part Two, page 45).

into a wood engraving. This sketch is important historically to the people of Hanover but it is also significant for the Schroeder and Wieler families. The buildings of these two families as well as the windmill are in the forefront of the picture and the village of Chortitz is visible in the background (see page 84).

While Lord Dufferin did not come specifically to meet the personalities of Eigenhof, he did get a first hand look at pioneer Mennonite life from that particular vantage point. At least some of his impressions were made based on the Schroeder and Wieler homesteads. Abram Dueck, a grandson of Gerhard Schroeder, claimed that the Governor General's horses were kept in Gerhard's stable for the night. Such a claim on its own it is quite meaningless, but in context, however, it is just one more of the events that shaped Gerhard's outlook on life (Note Seven).

#### **Chortitz Church.**

As could be expected, Gerhard was a baptized member of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. His Bible that he brought along from Russia was preserved by his descendants (see *Pres.*, No. 7, p. 48). As a leading member of the Gemeinde and a prominent public figure he would have been devout and committed to the principles of his faith. He would have contributed what he could to the intellectual, philosophical, and material needs of the church. In typical conservative fashion he probably professed his Christian faith with his actions in his daily life more than with superfluous words.

The one significant contribution Gerhard made to the church was acting as master builder of the Chortitz worship house in 1897 (see *Pres.*, No. 10, Part One, p. 34). The village of Chortitz had a church as early as 1877 because Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe lived there and made the village the centre of the congregation. The new church was a large structure for that time as befit its place in Hanover society. At the time, the village main street was to the north of the building whereas the church has since been modified to adjust to the realities of the survey system still in place. As a result, the front of the church is now at the back of the church. The 100th year anniversary of the worship house was celebrated in 1997. It is still in use today.

The fact that the church is not only functional but still in use is testament to the quality of the building itself and the quality of its parishioners. Two of Gerhard's sons (Johann and Abram, minister and deacon, respectively) were members of the Chortitzer Lehrdienst, reflecting the stature of the family in the pioneer community. Coincidentally, the graveyard across the road from the pioneer worship house is where Gerhard and all of his children except Franz (Note Eight), are buried. As the generations pass, Gerhard also has grandchildren and even great-grandchildren buried in the cemetery in the community he helped to build.

#### **Municipal Reeve.**

The Rural Municipality of Hanover was created in 1881 and was governed by elected councillors and a reeve in much the same fashion as



Franz Schroeder (right), Gerhard Schroeder's second son, who lived to nearly 100 years old. Sitting beside him is his nephew, Johan F. Schroeder (a son of Abram Schroeder and Maria Funk).

is evident in today's local government. Of course the system of local government that the Mennonites brought from Russia did not immediately end and a transition ensued until municipal government became separate from church control. The first elected reeve, Gerhard Kliewer, served for the year 1884. Peter Toews of Bergthal served from 1885-1894. Jacob Peters was reeve from 1895-1896 and then Toews returned to the reeve's chair until the election of Gerhard Schroeder in 1901.

Schroeder acted in the capacity of reeve between 1901-1907 but Toews returned for the year 1904. Working with Gerhard as secretary-treasurer were Johann S. Rempel (1901-1905), Diedrich Dueck (1905-1906), A. R. Friesen (1906-1907) and Diedrich Dueck again in 1907. Apparently the local political leaders were just as interested in obtaining and maintaining public office then as they are today. For the more complex aspects of local government, see Warkentin, *Reflections on Our Heritage* (Steinbach, 1971), p. 60.

Many of the things that council dealt with in the first decade of the twentieth century were the same as they are today, namely getting elected, establishing mill rates and assessing taxes, and improving the quality of transportation infrastructures. The municipality acquired revenue and made expenditures. People were appointed to carry out municipal contracts and by-laws were enacted. Disagreements arose and controversial decisions were made and enforced. Such was the overtly political and demanding state of affairs that Gerhard Schroeder presided over for seven years.

Information regarding road construction and water drainage comprise a significant portion of the minutes from municipal meetings. Materials were purchased and labour was demanded from municipal residents. Road and bridgework were supervised and sometimes men did not comply in good faith with municipal demands for their labour (Scharwerk). At times people had to be coerced and heavy-handedness on the municipality's behalf probably occurred.

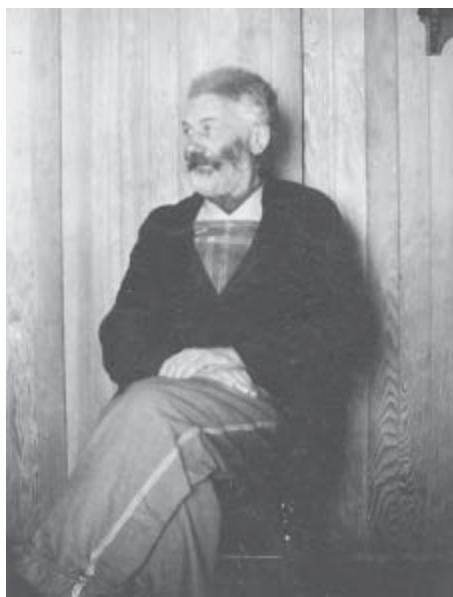
This is not to suggest that the councillors

and reeve were working in their own best interests. They were working for the collective good of the local area and at times individual objections to council decisions had to be dealt with promptly. Too often farmers blockaded passage over their land or created drainage patterns that negatively affected others. In many of these instances, the perpetrators were reprimanded by the reeve, the secretary-treasurer, or the councillors.

Drainage in the northern half of the municipality was greatly improved by the construction of what is now the Manning Canal. In a special April 4, 1903 municipal meeting, the RMs of Hanover, La Broquerie, and Tache rejected responsibility for absorbing the cost of a canal benefiting portions of the three municipalities. Hanover even contacted the law firm of *Campbell & Crawford* to find a legal way in which to avoid allowing the province to defer the cost of the canal to them. The canal was built between 1906 and 1908 (Note Nine) at the tail end of Gerhard Schroeder's tenure as reeve. The complicated process through which the project was initiated and completed points to some very capable and knowledgeable politicians in the southeast. These men were not ignorant but shrewd, not isolated but worldly, not inward looking but progressive.

More evidence suggesting the competency of Hanover's council under the stewardship of Gerhard Schroeder lies in matters of cultural sensitivity. In a February 4, 1903 meeting, council agreed to stay out of the affairs of the R.M. of Tache where German-speaking citizens were trying to become part of the R.M. of Hanover. Several years later, on March 6, 1906, council allowed that people in the Greenland area could petition for inclusion with Hanover in a united school district if they themselves initiated such a decision.

Hanover was willing to work cooperatively with German speakers outside of Hanover but



Gerhard Schroeder (1877-1958), oldest son of Gerhard Schroeder and Margaretha Penner (see also Pres., No. 17, page 100).

it did not want to alienate its municipal neighbours. Keep in mind, of course, the explosive nature of the issues of language and religion in education prior to the 1916 Manitoba Schools Act. Mennonite Hanover had predominantly Catholic neighbours to the north and great tact and decency must have been exercised to avoid strife over similar political and cultural situations. Similar comparisons can also be drawn with the Ukrainian Orthodox and Ukrainian Catholic populations in the south of Hanover and in the districts south of the R.M. of Hanover after 1900.

Some of the issues that were pertinent in the early 1900s have no bearing on current life in Hanover. Yet some issues that went unresolved then are unresolved today. In council meetings in October 1905, January 1906, April 1906, and June 1907, motions were passed in support of the prohibition of alcohol. The first three meetings mentioned all dealt with the liquor issue in the village of Niverville, a debate that is now more than 95 years old. Another controversy dealt with the building of a new municipal office and accompanying barn which was endorsed on March 6, 1906. By April tenders were accepted and the barn was built for forty dollars. Friesen and Neufeld Co. built the barn and reeve Gerhard Schroeder supervised its construction. By May 1906 that barn cost \$125.00 and was insured for that same amount.

The office of reeve was clearly a demanding one. Gerhard travelled frequently throughout the municipality as well as to meetings in Winnipeg and neighbouring municipalities. He was elected in 1901, 1903, and in 1906. In 1907 he was not allowed to run for office but the reason is unclear. The minutes do not suggest a reason for this. However, he presided over his last council meeting on November 16, 1907 and was replaced by Johann Braun, Grunthal, for the December 3, 1907 meeting. A more detailed examination of the municipal meetings would certainly help establish Gerhard as a competent



Abram and Maria (Funk) Schroeder. Abram was the son of Gerhard Schroeder and acted as deacon of the Chortitzer Church at Chortitz.

and responsible public figure.

### **Children:**

To encourage further research the following families need mention so that their stories may be documented as well. The life of Gerhard Schroeder has been better preserved than that of his children and there is really no good reason for this. The Doerksen children from Margaretha Penner's first marriage are not mentioned here but they too could benefit from further research.

### **First Marriage:**

1. Johann Schroeder (1870-1956) was a devoutly religious man and he became a minister in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. He wrote a book of poetry titled *Spuren Zum Trost*. He married Katharina Doerksen in 1890 and they had three children: Johann, Gerhard, and Katharina. The younger Johann was severely crippled and relied on Johann Sr. for everything. Only Katharina went on to raise a family.
2. Franz Schroeder (1872-1971) was born in Russia and came to Canada while still a child. He married Maria Stoesz in 1893 and they had two sons, Gerhard and Franz. Gerhard never had any children and Franz had two daughters.

The elder Franz did not live a conventional Mennonite lifestyle. He made money on the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and lived outside the traditional East Reserve which were both fairly clear indications of his independence. Franz was a strict, large, and extremely powerful man. His son George, also a large and powerful man, recounted his father's substantial strength with considerable astonishment. The father and his sons were also known for their longevity. Franz died less than two months from his 99th birthday.

### **Second Marriage:**

3. Gerhard Schroeder (1877-1958) remained a bachelor. He was a school teacher at Ebenfeld and included, as one of his students, his nephew George. George calculated that, for a period, Gerhard worked as a school teacher for room and board and six dollars a month. Gerhard lived on the original homestead with the Doerkenses until his death. He died penniless and his brother Abram ensured that Gerhard received a proper casket and headstone.
4. Peter Schroeder (1879-1906) married Maria Stoesz in 1901. Peter was a hard worker and gained notoriety in a horrific fashion. He was a powerful man and one day he tried to lift a heavy object which caused an internal rupture from which he later died. Peter and Maria had four daughters all of whom married and had families in the Hanover area. The existing families are the children of Maria and Cornelius Friesen, Margaretha and Heinrich Hiebert, Agnetha and Johann Friesen, and Anna and Jacob Neufeld. Former reeve Aron Friesen is the grandson of Peter Schroeder (Pres., No. 11, page 91).
5. Abram Schroeder (1880-1960) married Maria Funk in 1907 and they had eight sons. Abram did not enjoy farming and left such matters to others when possible. He was happiest when forging or working with leather and can-

vas. Apparently he worked too slowly for his own father's liking. However, this lack of outward ambition and drive for personal aggrandizement contributed to his reserved and generous character. He was a respected man of the greater Chortitzer community and served as a deacon in the church. Incidentally, his sons and their sons are the only descendants of Gerhard

ied. He lived at a time when exciting and challenging situations presented themselves and he was a part of solving some of those issues. There is no sense of apprehension, despair, or futility when looking at him and his contemporaries. Perhaps that early generation was more cosmopolitan and educated than the next generation. They seem to have been more successful in deal-

Margaretha's final resting place are still in remarkably good condition (Note Ten). Gerhard lived so long ago that establishing his legacy seems slightly counter-productive. He was clearly a man of substance but deifying him takes the reality and honesty from his existence. All that is now necessary is recognizing him as a significant founder of Manitoba's East Reserve and the R. M. of Hanover.

#### Notes:

Note One: The three youngest children, Johann, Maria, and Gerhard were born in 1833 and 1836 and all died in infancy. Maria and Gerhard were twins which could suggest that due to limited medical understanding they could have died along with their mother shortly after delivery.

Note Two: In *Berghthal Colony*, 1974, p. 26. William Schroeder writes about Peter Schroeder who stayed in Russia and taught school in Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony. Peter's son Gerhard wrote the well known book *Miracles of Grace and Judgement* (1974) and his great niece Sandra Birdhill is the author of the recently published best seller, "The Russlander" (Toronto, 2001), 350 pages.

Note Three: See Jacob Doerksen's detailed account of Eigenhof in *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*, 1994.

Note Four: George Schroeder (1900-1996) was the son of Franz Schroeder (1872-1971) and therefore a grandchild of Gerhard Schroeder. As a boy of 10 when his grandfather died, George remembered both first-hand as well as retold stories. He left the impression that Gerhard was a stern and somewhat cold man who was not without vanity. I interviewed George a number of times in the early 1990s when he was aging but still very clear in thought. Incidentally, this was the George Schroeder who lived south of Ile des Chenes. Anybody who ever met him found him unforgettable.

Note Five: See Jacob Doerksen's detailed account of Eigenhof in *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve*, 1994.

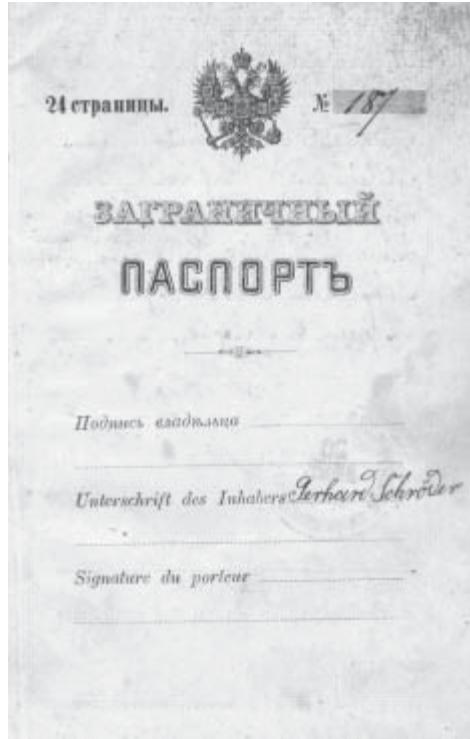
Note Six: William Schroeder, *Berghthal Colony* (1974) p. 58 and Jakob Doerksen verify this.

Note Seven: Mr. Dueck told me these things around 1990 some years before he died. For him this event was quite remarkable. William Schroeder also has an article on the Dufferin visit (1980) which is somewhere in the possession of the Steinbach museum.

Note Eight: Franz Schroeder is buried in the Niverville Cemetery.

Note Nine: See Jacob Doerksen's account of Silberfeld in *Historical Sketches*. In dealing with the Manning Canal project some of the dates mentioned in various sources seem to be contradictory or at least unsubstantiated. More research needs to go into this topic.

Note Ten: The writing on Gerhard's stone has deteriorated somewhat but the writing on Margaretha's stone is in very good condition. Gerhard's birth date on the stone is given as April 1, 1848 whereas his birth date is often listed as March 20, 1848. The earlier date is from the Julian calendar and the latter from the Gregorian calendar.



The passport of Gerhard Schroeder has survived to date in excellent condition. Note that Gerhard's Signature matches perfectly the one in the Gerhard Schroeder family Bible (see Pres., No. 7, p. 48).

Schroeder to pass on the patrilineal Schroeder name.

6. Anna Schroeder (1882-1935) married Abram Dueck in 1908. They had four children of which the oldest, Abram (known as *Launga Obram Dueck*), was an amateur historian and enthusiastic genealogist (see *Preservings* No. 15, p. 75). He did a great deal of research on the Schroeder family history and deserves credit for preserving and acquiring much valuable historical data. Anna is buried in Randolph Cemetery along with her brothers and many of her husband's relatives.

7. Aron Schroeder (1886-1936) was the youngest of Gerhard's children. He was mentally challenged but functioned as a farm hand. His nephew George told a story of how Aron did not understand the concept of money. On one occasion, young George and a friend traded two coins with Aron in exchange for a coin of greater value. Aron was happy to make the trade because two coins were clearly better than one. George also recounted that he and his friend were eventually caught, severely reprimanded, and had to return the coin.

#### Conclusion.

Gerhard Schroeder was a remarkable man. His status can only be raised the more he is stud-

ing with their political world than the subsequent generation that dealt with World War One, The Military Service Act, the Manitoba Schools Act, the mass migration to Latin America, and the influx of Russian Mennonites following the Russian Revolution. Such a thesis can put many of our preconceptions to the test.

Gerhard Schroeder died on November 22, 1910 at the age of 62. He is buried in the Chortitz cemetery in Randolph, Manitoba along with Margaretha Penner, all of his children except Franz, and many of his grandchildren. The two tall marble stones that mark Gerhard and



Gravestones in Randolph cemetery facing north. The writing on Gerhard's stone (at left) is difficult to read. Also, the stone plaque in front of the tombstone is not attached. Margaretha's stone is in very good condition. All photos for this article are courtesy of Ray Schroeder, Box 21592, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1B3. The Chortitzer worship house built in 1897 in background.

# Heinrich Toews Murder, Altona, 1902

"Heinrich Toews Murder, Altona, 1902," as described by brother Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), Weidefeld, West Reserve, submitted for publication by grandson Dick Hildebrandt, Box 664, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0.

A Christmas Gift to Elizabeth from you Loving Brother Erdman, December 25, 1932.

"Verse 4. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. 5. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and He shall bring it to pass. Psalm 37:4, 5."

Translated 1981 by W. J. Kehler, Altona, Man.

Explanatory Note: "Heinrich J. Toews was teaching in the Altona village school, (just south of Altona,) at the time of this tragic event. He wounded three school trustees and three pupils, one fatally, before turning the gun on himself in a suicide attempt." W.J.K.

The following is the account of an unfortunate incident which involved my uncle Heinrich Toews, as recorded by my dear father Bernhard Toews.

October 9, 1902, at 2 p.m. in the village of Altona, a heartbreaking incident occurred, which resulted in the wounding of three men; Abraham Rempel, Peter Kehler and Johan Hiebert, as well as three children, one fatally – seven year old Anna Kehler died about four days later- as a result of gunshot wounds inflicted with a revolver, by my dear brother Heinrich J. Toews. After the initial shock the others all recovered quickly.

The evil spirit had tempted by brother to the point where he intended to use him as a tool to take the lives of other people first and then end his own life with a bullet. However, the evil plan was not totally successful. The apostle Paul said "where sin is strong, mercy is nevertheless much stronger". This was borne out again in this case, for the evil intention had been that all should die. But oh! How much more terrible would have been the grief of the surviving family members. Every wife would have asked the question of her husband or child, and my mother of her son--was death instant or were you able to set things right with God before you died. But God does not desire the death of a sinner but rather that he repent and live. Yes, the Lord in his mercy granted time to repent to all the wounded. For my brother who had tried to end his life instantly by suicide, God in His wisdom and mercy had other plans. After five or six days he regained consciousness and was able to meditate on, and ask God's forgiveness for all his sins.

About 4 p.m. on that fateful October 9th Bernhard Wiebe of Altona brought the shocking news of the tragedy. With heavy hearts mother and I drove to Altona, where we found the unfortunate brother, bloodcovered, lying on a bench in the doctor's office. Oh! What a heartrending sight to behold. When we found that he was still alive, mother and I knelt beside him in prayer. We cleaned him up somewhat.

I stayed till 10 p.m. when I returned home to my family, but mother watched and prayed over her son through the night, that his sins might be forgiven, for thou Lord hath said "though your sins be as scarlet they shall be white as snow."

Friday October 10th I saw my brother again. He was lying there, unconscious, only occasionally responding to questions, but I gathered that his head was extremely painful.

That afternoon a constable and I took brother Heinrich to a hospital in Winnipeg.

When I visited at the hospital Saturday morn-



*Bernhard Toews (1862-1927), distinguished teacher, delegate to Paraguay and chronicler of his people. Among the valuable details provided in his account of the Heinrich Toews shootings, is the remarkably Christ-centric compassion in the responses of Old Colony Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) and Sommerfelder Ältester Abraham Doerksen. Johann Wiebe was the second cousin to the Bernhard Toews and the fateful emotionally disturbed Heinrich Toews. Photo from Preservings, No. 17, page 54.*

ing the doctor told me that brother Heinrich was not rational. In fact, he added, Toews has never been quite normal mentally. When I saw my brother he had great pain in his head and conversation was almost impossible. With a heavy heart at having been unable to talk to him, I returned home.

October 18th I went to Winnipeg again to see my brother. On the way down I was filled with a fervent hope and prayer that this time I might find my brother fully conscious and repentant of his sinful deed. By God's grace this prayer was answered. When I greeted him, he responded with "good day brother Bernhard".

He then inquired, "is it true what people are telling me here", "that I am supposed to have shot three men and three children in Altona?".

I confirmed that it was true indeed, and that Anna Kehler had died but the others were recovering.

"Oh no! Not dead!" he wailed, then added, "Do you suppose the child may have died righteous?"

"Yes!" I replied.

Suddenly he seemed to grasp the graveness of his predicament and in anguish cried out "Oh God!" "be merciful to me a poor sinner".

"The pain in my head is great, but the agony of my soul is even greater". He asked me to contact Bishop Johan Funk and Bishop Abraham Doerksen and request them to "lead their congregations in prayer for me", "do you think they would agree to do that!".

I assured him that they would gladly comply with his request, for there is more rejoicing over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous who have no need of repenting.

He further requested that I visit the three homes in Altona and ask their forgiveness, if possible, "for oh!, how terrible is the deed that I have done".

I assured him that I would carry out his wishes.

For about half an hour he carried on lamenting and praying over his sinful plight, crying out, "my sin is greater than that it can be forgiven me".

I consoled him with Isaiah 1:18, "though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool", and some other scripture passages.

I went straightaway to the railroad station intending to go home and forthwith carry out my brothers wishes. It seemed especially timely since the following day was Sunday. However, to my dismay I discovered that there was no train to Altona that day, so I would have to stay over Sunday. I visited my brother again Sunday morning. After a lengthy conversation we said goodbye and I prepared to return home.

On arriving home, relatives and friends were anxiously awaiting the latest news on brother's condition. All were extremely glad, and especially mother, to learn that her wayward son was conscious and repenting of his sinful condition. The bishops and others were only too glad to remember him in their prayers.

October 21st mother, Mr. Isaak Friesen and I went to Winnipeg to again visit my brother. Friesen, however, was denied permission to see him, so mother and I went in. He immediately recognized my voice and was glad I had come.

Then he said to mother, "dearest mother you have such a wayward son. Can you forgive me for all the worries and heartaches I have caused you?"

"Yes!" mother replied, "in fact I had already

forgiven you dear son, but pray God that He may forgive you for all your sins". He replied he had done much praying about that.

That evening, and again the next morning we visited him and tried to console him as best we could. We said goodbye and returned home with a glad feeling at his continued penitent attitude under the circumstances.

October 25th I went to see him again. He had been transferred to a jail cell the day before, where I found him resting on his cot. His eyesight was gone but he immediately recognized



*Heinrich Toews (1865-1902) with one of his students, Justine Klassen. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 33.*

my voice. "Dear brother," he said, "I still suffer severe physical pain, but even greater is the suffering of my soul". "I have prayed earnestly that I might have relief, but it has not been answered". Again I tried to comfort him with scripture passages. I reminded him that the Lord sometimes delayed answering our prayers in order to test our faith, but to continue praying with the assurance that those who were steadfast to the end would be saved.

Next morning being Sunday, there was a church service with organ music, singing and a sermon. The minister, an Englishman, came over to my brother and me, we knelt and the minister prayed with us. Heinrich showed his gratitude for the visit. When I prepared to return home, he urged me again to apologize to the Altona people. He then suggested that I might inquire whether it would be at all possible for him to be taken to Altona and he would then personally ask forgiveness from those he had hurt.

October 30th Mr. Isaak Friesen and I visited

him and he was overjoyed to have our company to join him in prayer. Isaak Friesen explained to him that legal procedures, in view of his admitted guilt to the crime, might possibly begin with a hearing next week, and urged him to trust in God and co-operate with the legal authorities. My brother was very pleased with this advice which he intended to follow. After several hours discussing scripture, we departed.

When I visited my brother November 2nd he asked if I had a Bible with me. I said "No, but I can borrow one from Mueller, your guard".

"Look up a passage that deals with government" he requested, whereupon I quoted five verses from Romans 13 to him. "Good!" he said. "I will have these five verses read in court and then commit myself to God's mercy and the court's wise decision."

His head pain had eased somewhat, so I could speak to him in a natural tone of voice, whereas previously we had spoken in whispers since loud voices aggravated his pain. We discussed many things for a few hours. When I was ready to leave he again sent his regards to the family and asked that we continue to pray for him.

When I saw him again November 17th, it was only for 15 minutes. He felt forsaken. He asked that the family continue praying for him, since at times he felt to be on the verge of despair, but wanted so much to atone for everything. For the third time he requested that I beg forgiveness on his behalf, of the Altona people he had hurt. He said he would so much like to do so personally if he could only get permission from the authorities.

The next morning I was denied permission to see him, due to his deteriorating health, I was told. So I left for home without seeing him.

December 1st I went to visit my brother again. He greeted me with a hearty handshake and said his sinful nature was still causing him distress. I informed him that the Ältester Johann Wiebe, Franz Dueck and Franz Froese are here with me. He welcomed Ältester Wiebe and confessed to him that he had neglected holy baptism for himself, and expressed remorse at his generally sinful state.

Ältester Wiebe consoled him with various scripture quotes which seemed to brace my brother up considerably. With our assistance he knelt and the four of us prayed together.

A lengthy discussion followed during which Ältester Wiebe asked what had prompted him to commit the terrible deed.

He answered "I must have suffered temporary insanity, or some evil spirit overpowered me to a point where he could use me as a tool to carry out the evil deed. I do not remember what exactly happened in Altona that day, except I had a vague feeling that something terrible had taken place and that I was involved somehow".

"Then followed the suggestion 'now you must turn the gun on yourself and end it all', any thought of salvation or condemnation never occurred to me at the time".

Before we left he asked for five dollars for cookies and soft drinks as a change from milk and water on which he had subsisted till now. I

asked permission from the warden, and he assured me that they would be glad to supply him with whatever he desired.

December 9th, mother, Jacob Zacharias and I went in to see brother Heinrich. He was overjoyed to be able to embrace his mother once more. He asked her forgiveness for all the trouble he had caused her. "Yes mother", he said, "instead of the joy I should have been to you, I have caused you nothing but grief".

"Dear brother", I said, "mother and all of us have experienced great joy in the knowledge of



*Annie and Helena Kehler aged eight and nine respectively taken shortly before the shooting incident in the Altona village school. Seated is Annie who died from the wounds inflicted by shots from her teacher's revolver. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History (Altona, 1990), page 33/Pres, No. 16, page 31.*

your true repentance of your sins. The merciful Lord who has given you time to atone for your wrongdoings, and eased your physical suffering somewhat, will not desert you now". "The Lord has said that those who come to Him in their hour of need, He will not cast away". He asked brother-in-law Jacob Zacharias for forgiveness.

We talked to him for several hours the next morning. Mother comforted Heinrich with various scripture quotations. We left for home that afternoon.

When I visited him again December 27th, he felt somewhat better. He could open his left eye, but his vision was too poor to recognize me. He had less pain, but had been unable to eat. Except for the occasional glass of orange juice, he still subsisted on milk and water. He had lost a lot of weight and his strength was failing. I cheered

him up by reading to him.

Next morning I read songs and poems to him for several hours. "Yes", he remarked, "I would like very much to die, but I hope we may all meet in heaven, where there will be no more parting, but eternal joy".

I next saw my brother January 14th (1903). The guard announced my presence and he greeted me with, "dear brother Bernhard, at last you have come again. I have been so lonesome". He then asked me what date it was. When I told him he said, "there is half of the month of January, then February, and then March". With his hands folded on his chest, he lay there, silent, for about 15 minutes.

Then he said "If I am still alive at that time, you will be summoned (to testify). Do you remember how despondent I was that time at the haystack in Gnadenthal? These and other occasions that you remember, you may mention in your testimony. But I beg you not to shy away from the truth in the hope of obtaining an easier sentence for me. It would only trouble your conscience later, and with God's help, I want to accept the decision of the court, for my soul has suffered much".

We talked about many things and I read to him from the book titled *Das Herz des Menschen* ("The Heart of Human Kind") When I finished he mentioned that it was a good book, and again expressed the hope that we might all share the joys of heaven as this book says.

As I was leaving he said, "the Lord bless you, give my regards to mother and the family, and continue to include me in your prayers".

At 10 a.m. January 19th, I received a message that my brother was very ill, and could I

come at once?

Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Zacharias were visiting at the time, and we all knelt and prayed that the Lord might take our brother unto Himself. Coincidentally, he passed away at that very time, 10 minutes after 10, as I learned later when I stepped from the train in Winnipeg, and an acquaintance showed me the report in the paper.

It was a great relief and I thanked the Lord for answering our prayer and sparing our brother all apprehension of the pending trial.

I sent a telegram informing mother of Heinrich's passing away, then proceeded to the jail where I viewed the mute, emaciated corpse.

I was informed that due to certain routine procedures, release of the body would be delayed till 4 p.m. the following afternoon. In the meantime I was interrogated as to whether, in my opinion, my brother had received satisfactory care while in custody. After answering this and other questions, the body was released. I thanked them, went to the chief warden and asked his advice. He phoned an undertaker who arrived shortly. For the sum of \$23.00 he supplied the casket, prepared the body and delivered the casket to the railroad station the next morning. And so on January 21st I returned home with my brother's remains.

The funeral took place, Sunday, January 25th, 1903.

Bishop Abraham Doerksen preached fervently how important it was to watch and wake, for this deceased person was a clear example of how tragic the result of temptation by the devil could be. He compared our brother with the thief on the cross who begged Jesus to "remember me when you enter into your kingdom", and

Jesus answered him, "this day shalt thou be with me in Paradise".

He then spoke of the prodigal son who repented, returned to his father and confessed, "father I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. Make me therefore one of your hired labourers".

The sermon was so moving that there were few dry eyes in the congregation.

Brother Heinrich was laid to rest in the Weidefeld cemetery. May the blessing of the Lord be with us and the sermon bear bountiful fruit. And may the wish of our brother that we all meet again in heaven come true by the grace of God. Amen.

#### Acknowledgement:

"Heinrich Toews Murder, Altona, 1902," as described by his brother Bernhard Toews, Weidefeld, West Reserve, was received courtesy of Bernhard Toews' grandson, Dick Hildebrand, Box 664, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0.

#### Further Reading:

Thiessen, Altona *The Story of a Prairie Town* (Altona, 1982), pages 47-48.

Bernhard Toews, "1921 Delegate," in Plett, *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875 to 2000* (Steinbach, 2001), pages 108-115, and *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 30-37.

Bernhard Toews, *Mennonitische Chaco - Expedition 1921 Reise - Tagebuch des Bernhard Toews* (School Board, Fernheim, Menno Colony, Paraguay, 1997), 108 pages. Spiral bound.



The village of Altona, 1901. A view of the main street, with the grain elevators, left. Altona was the Sommerfelder/Bergthaler centre in Manitoba. Photo courtesy of Altona A Pictorial History, page 31/Diese Steine, page 573.

# Bishop Jacob F. Penner (1898-1974), Morden

"Bishop Jacob F. Penner (1898-1974), Morden,"  
by daughter Kristine Friesen, 397 Churchill Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1W2.

## The Early Years:

Jacob Frank Penner was born to Frank and Maria Penner (nee Thiessen) on September 22, 1898. He was the second of three children born to this union. The Penners lived in the village of Chortitz, three and one-half miles southwest of Winkler, making their livelihood through farming as was customary for the majority of Mennonites who had emigrated from Southern Russia after 1874.

When Jacob was only two years of age, his mother, at the age of 23, passed away very suddenly, apparently from a heart attack. The bereft father and now two surviving children, Helena and Jacob, were not in a position to go through a lengthy, luxurious phase of mourning. Helena and Jacob's father sought out a new mother in Helena Suderman, a meticulous young woman in her mid 20s, to nurture and care for his two young children.

Helena more than rose to the challenge, running a smooth household, washing and ironing, cooking, cleaning and energetically assisting with outdoor chores. She was widely acknowledged for her expertise in baking homemade bread, making cookies and borscht. Jacob was often heard to proclaim that he and his sister, Helena, could not have had a more caring and loving mother had she been their natural birth mother.

Both of Jacob's parents were pious Christians who sought to honour God in all their endeavours. The Old Colony Church, built in 1881, and presently a relic in the Steinbach Village Museum, was their church, and on Sunday mornings the whole family, along with

most of the other villagers, could be seen walking to the simple, austere structure at the north end of the village.

Other children were born to Frank and Helena, and it was in this quiet, conservative setting that the family encountered God and His wondrous plan for His Kingdom. Jacob, along with Helena and younger siblings, attended the village school at the south end of the village where all of their studies were conducted in High German. Here they mastered their sums in simple arithmetic, with the more capable students (Jacob fell in this category) going on to higher mathematics. They learned to read out of the "Die Fibel" which progressed to different levels, the Bible, and everyone was expected to memorize the Catechism before they finished school.

Jacob was endowed with an adventurous spirit, was an independent thinker, and had developed a great love for learning in this rustic setting. These qualities, which had manifested themselves at a tender age, were to serve him well in his later walk. At 16 he recognized that the English language would become a requisite for their survival in Canada. He approached a certain Mr. Janzen teaching in the English school system in the town of Winkler about coming to the Chortitz school during the winter evenings to teach the English language to the youth (boys only) of the village. Mr. Janzen was glad to oblige, so, for a meagre sum, the Chortitz boys had their first English-as-a-second-language classes. They learned enough English to conduct business in that language in Winkler and the surrounding areas, including Morden.

In June, 1919, Jacob was baptized upon his faith in his home church.

## Marriage, 1920.

Jakob had spent some time in the village of Blumenort working as a hired hand for Mr. and Mrs. Heinrich Penner since the age of 18, wishing to add to the family fortune in this manner. Here he had met the petite, shy Sara Penner, second oldest daughter of his employers.

Sara became his bride on December 12, 1920. For a brief time they lived with Sara's family in Blumenort. During this time, they became the proud parents of two adorable little



Bishop Jacob Penner, late 1940s, before leaving on his first journey to preach the Gospel to the faithful in Belize.

girls, Sara and Helen, born within a year of one another.

In 1922, Jacob was approached by the villagers of Rosenort (now Rosetown), to take on the role of the village schoolmaster. Jacob and Sara now had a place of their own, namely the teacherage attached directly to the school. They worked diligently, Jacob combining teaching and farming, while Sara kept house, cooked, baked and imparted the Bible stories to her two little daughters.

## Mexico.

By the early 1920s, many of the Mennonites had become alarmed that the government was considering making the public school system compulsory for all children, including Mennonites. A large group that made an exo-



1922. Jacob and Sara Penner, with daughters Sara and Helen, before emigrating to Mexico. Photos for this article are courtesy of the author, Kristine Friesen, 397 Churchill Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1W2.



Jacob Penner as a young man in Chortitz, near the Town of Winkler, 1920.

dus in June of 1925 included Sara's family, so Jacob and Sara agreed to join them while Jacob's immediate family decided to remain in Chortitz. Upon their arrival in Mexico, the entire extended family settled in the village of Blumenthal, not far from Cuauhtemoc.

They were in the company of other relatives and many friends. This was also an agricultural community, but once more, Jacob was called to be the village schoolmaster, imparting knowledge, drilling facts and providing spiritual guidance to his young charges. His classroom reportedly hummed with energy and the activities accompanying genuine learning. (He was later to advise one of his daughters: "If there isn't a buzz in your classroom, if it's too quiet, there is no real learning going on).

The changes that came with this major move affected Sara's health. The hot climate did not agree with her. She struggled with severe migraines. She found the stories that reached her ears about the experiences the Mennonite men had with the bandits on their way to Cuauhtemoc and Chihuahua unnerving. She feared for Jacob's safety on his frequent trips to these centres; she also worried about her young children growing up in what she perceived as a lawless country.

In 1929, Jacob and Sara initiated a move back to Canada. Sara's family chose to accompany them so both families prepared for the long trek back north. Farming and teaching had paid off. Not only were Sara and Jacob owners of a comfortable home and furnishings, but their bank account had accumulated substantially. They were looking forward to a fresh start in Canada, anticipating a smooth transition.



Sara Penner, age 18, shortly before her marriage to Jacob Penner on December 12, 1920.

Rather than load up their possessions, they auctioned off the contents of their home, taking with them only the bare necessities. Jacob also visited the local banker in order to withdraw all their worldly wealth. The banker persuaded him to take only the cash they would need for their journey, assuring him that once they were back in Manitoba, the money would be transferred to whatever account he decided to open.

During their trek back north, little Jacob was born before they reached the U.S. border. By birth, he was considered a citizen of Mexico. It was many years before he was awarded Canadian status. There was much joy at his arrival in spite of the ill timing. Jacob and Sara now had that oldest son, so important to families in those days, partially due to the nature of their subsistence.

#### Financial Crisis, 1929.

In March of 1929, both families settled in the School District of Glencross, five and one-half miles south of Morden. They were preparing to farm and were in need of funds, so Jacob wrote the banker in Mexico for the transfer of money to their accounts. One week passed, two, three, and finally, several months. Jacob wrote the man again, thinking his letters had gone lost.

It was with reluctance that Jacob and Sara had to face the reality of the unbelievable – they had been swindled, and by a Mennonite banker.

There was not enough money to send even one person back to demand what was rightfully theirs. They were one hundred per cent bankrupt and now operating on a shoestring

and much prayer. The two families dwelt under one roof at first, until Jacob made arrangements with a Mr. Sawatzky to rent a quarter section of land a good half-mile northeast of his in-laws, planning to farm independently.

#### Learning.

Jacob and Sara made the acquaintance of Mr. Emil Boelig, a confirmed bachelor from Germany, who was also an ardent scholar. There was an instant rapport based largely on mutual respect and common interests. They agreed to assist one another with putting in crops, haying, and harvesting their yields.

When their work on the farm was done and the chores completed, Jacob and Mr. Boelig sat at Mr. Boelig's round, roughhewn kitchen table already littered with German and English books and magazines. In this humble environment, the two men attempted to master the English language with the aid of Mr. Boelig's "library," the weekly *Free Press Prairie Farmer*, the *Country Guide* and some of the books that Sara and Helen were using in the Glencross public school.

Mary J. Loewen, Sara and Helen's teacher at the time, and a dear friend to Sara and Jacob, generously agreed to lend them what books they required. They translated from German into English with a German-English dictionary as a tool. The local schoolteacher, Mr. Ben Klippenstein, became Jacob's tutor during the winter months of 1933-37.

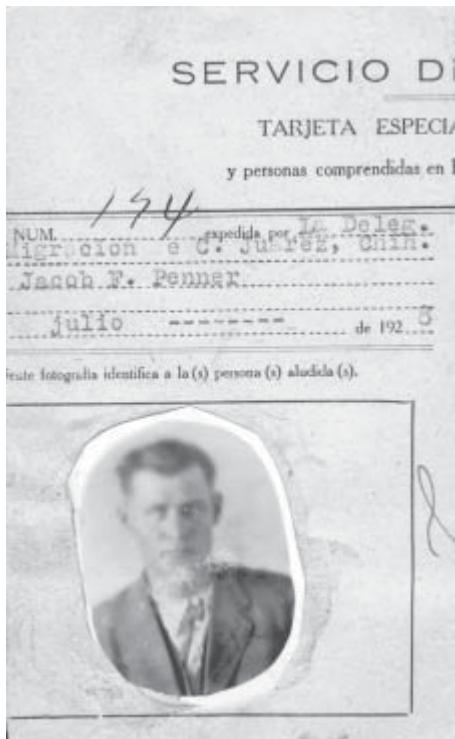
At this time, Jacob became involved with the public school system, serving a two-year term as a trustee for the Glencross School District. He also taught Sunday school in the Glencross School on Sunday afternoons.

#### Ministry, 1936.

Since their return to Manitoba, the family attended Sunday morning worship services in the Old Colony Church that had nurtured Jacob's strong faith in God in his early years and on into manhood. His keen perception of God's written Word, his apparent leadership qualities evident even as a youth and his love and compassion for people, along with a natural gift for speaking and giving wise counsel to those who sought it, led to a vocation that would affect the whole family.

In 1936, the Old Colony congregation called Jacob into the lay ministry. Sara was dumbfounded. She thought she understood the consequences of this new turn of events. The Dirty Thirties were hurting everyone in the Glencross area, as everywhere else. Their bankruptcy was fresh in her mind. She felt confused and angry. The sacrifice in time and travel that would be inevitable weighed heavily on her mind. She recognized that their hand-to-mouth existence could easily become a normal way of life for her family of now six children. Yet she too wanted to be obedient to her Master and to Jacob. Reluctantly she accepted the ordination and even looked on with pride as Jacob delivered his first sermon.

Jacob worked under the tutelage of Bishop Jacob Froese from Reinfeld during the early



Jacob F. Penner's passport photograph in Mexico before setting out to Manitoba to buy land. July 1928.

years of his service.

He ministered not only in the Chortitz worship house, but also in Reinfeld, Blumenfeld and Rosenort. He thrived on the camaraderie of Bishop Froese and the other circuit ministers. Sara gradually warmed to her new role as a minister's wife, as she became comfortable with their ever widening circle of friends and experienced the rich blessings flowing from these relationships.

Now Jacob's evenings were spent almost solely delving into God's word, as he prepared his sermons for the Sunday morning worship services. His library increased rapidly as he sought out resources that would make his messages meaningful and bring his parishioners closer to God.

In the spring of 1939, Jacob and Sara purchased a farm on a shoestring and much prayer in the School District of Mountain City, six miles south west of Morden. The bank approved this transaction based solely on their reputation. The drive to the village of Chortitz was eight miles straight east. From horse and buggy and horse and sleigh, the family had now graduated to a Model-T Ford with a rumble seat in the back.



Bishop Jacob F. Penner, Morden, 1970. Passport photo.

The Model-T had insufficient space to accommodate Jacob and Sara's entire family, which had grown to eight children. The younger children remained at home under the supervision of one of the older siblings. Since the Old Colony church was not engaged with Sunday School missions in the early 1940s, the challenge of spiritual nourishment for the family left at home was met by dutifully led Bible instruction by little Sara, Helen and, later, Anna. Jacob and Sara had taught their children well and strived to engage the whole family with God's written word, teaching them about their Saviour and guiding them in their spiritual walk.

These Bible studies were supplemented by a daily devotion at the breakfast table led by Jacob, which was how the family started the day. No family member was permitted to opt out on this most important event.

Jacob had long established himself as a man

of vision. Early in his ministry he recognized the need for Sunday School and a means to have the young people meet on a regular basis. He and Sara also spent many winter afternoons and evenings with old and new friends from Glencross, Mountain City and from their church family. Discussions on Biblical topics never failed to surface to the top. This brought to the forefront the need for Bible studies, as both Jacob and Sara realized the hunger their friends had for studying God's holy word.

Jacob and Bishop Froese were patient shepherds of their flock, and were willing to bide the time required to bring about changes to hold on to the young people within their fold. The majority of the older congregation was still intolerant to change.

#### Gathering the Faithful.

Jacob's ministry was not limited to the local congregations in southern Manitoba. He was invited to numerous communities out of province and colonies in foreign countries to ordain ministers, conduct communions or act as a liaison and arbitrator where there were misunderstandings.

In 1941, he and Bishop Froese made their trip to Pincher Creek, Alberta to ordain ministers in a colony whose mores strongly resembled those of the Hutterites. In later years, Jacob, together with Mr. Jacob Rempel from Altona, twice flew to British Honduras (now Belize), on a similar mission.

He and Bishop Froese were called to Aylmer, Ontario to accommodate the Old Order Mennonites for baptism and ordination. Jacob was frequently asked to visit a congregation at Rainy River and was always accompanied by a deacon or another minister from the church. Twice he was invited to Bolivia--the first time during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Jacob and Sara's early investment in their young family was paying off. Sara and Helen diligently took on the farm chores, cooking and cleaning with pride. During Jacob's early absences from home, there was always a farm hand to assist with chores and work the fields under Emil Boelig's watchful eye. Young Jacob was in his teens and eager to show his prowess as a man. During the war years, there was always a CO to take on some of the duties on the homestead, especially when Jacob had to go on one of his trips.

#### Family Life, 1945.

When World War II ended in 1945, farmers near and far thrived as a result of the postwar boom. For the first time since their devastating Mexican bankruptcy expe-



Bishop Jacob F. Penner, off to Belize, on a journey of preaching and teaching the Gospel and to gather and inspire God's children in the faith, mid 1960s. At the bottom of the stairs is Mr. Jacob Rempel from Altona, a dear friend and mentor to Bishop Penner and a faithful follower of Jesus Christ and loyal member of the Old Colony Church.

rience, Jacob and Sara enjoyed a surge in their financial status. Their farm thrived from the planting of crops (summer fallowing was strictly observed), selling crates of eggs to the grocers in Morden and preparing metal cans of rich farm cream for the cream truck that came for pick up twice a week. As in the past, a huge garden, pork and beef from their own livestock and a large brood of chickens made them almost self-sufficient.

Jacob and Sara's family had grown to 12—nine daughters and three sons. As soon as they were old enough, the children were given specific responsibilities, hoeing the garden, picking beans for the Morden cannery, carrying in pails of water for drinking, cooking and doing the laundry, feeding the livestock, bringing in cows from the pasture, milking, picking blueberries, chokecherries and plums. There were usually five children in school at a time, which kept them gainfully occupied for at least six hours of the day, and greatly reduced the stress level at home. Jacob and Sara encouraged each child to become an "A" student. Report card time was a highlight of the school year. Each report was carefully studied by Jacob and Sara, and no report was ever returned to the teacher without a comment to let him/her know they were 100% supported.

#### School Trustee.

In due time, Jacob again got involved in the education system by taking on the role of school trustee from 1950 to 1952 and chairman of the school board from 1952 to 1966 (the school was closed down in 1966). This gave him the opportunity to select conscientious, God-fearing, Christian teachers who would go well beyond the religious ritual of singing "Oh Canada" in the morning as outlined by the Department of Education.

The High German language was also implemented into the curriculum, so the students at Mountain City were introduced to bilingualism in German.

#### Bishop 1959.

During the 1950s, Bishop Jacob Froese experienced failing health. Although Bishop Froese continued to serve as best he could, Jacob had the title of Bishop conferred on him in 1959 to fill Bishop Froese's role when his health would not permit further involvement. Still, Jacob considered this a title only to continue the Lord's work when Bishop Froese needed to rest. Upon Bishop Froese's death in 1968, Jacob took on the full mantle of his appointment. He and Bishop Froese had accomplished much.

In 1967, a new church was built in the village of Chortitz. The Old Colony church now had a thriving Sunday School. The young people gathered together regularly, Bible study was held weekly and ladies' fellowship groups met in the basements of the various churches. From the time of its inception, both Bishop Froese and Jacob were involved in the Salem Senior Citizens' Home in Winkler.

Jacob was frequently invited to speak to

the residents at Tabor Home in Morden. He was on a rotation list to speak at Salem Home, and, when called upon, assisted many residents here with spiritual matters.

#### Senior Years.

As their family grew up, married and moved out, Jacob and Sara were not confronted with the proverbial empty nest syndrome, but found more time to play host to the many friends that visited their home, especially on Sunday afternoons. It was not unusual for their married



1974. Bishop and Mrs. Jacob F. Penner on their farm near Mountain City (west of Waldheim), south of Morden, shortly before they moved to Winkler.

children to drive down the treed driveway and on to the yard to find that it was already full of vehicles, and therefore, a house full of visitors. There was little else to do but make a U-turn and go home or stop in at a friend's or relative's place en route.

Jacob had enjoyed robust health until his late 40s, when he began experiencing sudden and fierce bouts of abdominal pain, at first infrequently. He was eventually diagnosed with kidney stones, which were removed at the St. Boniface Hospital when he was in his mid 50s.

Jakob did not allow this brief setback to interfere with his ministry, but continued in the work for the spiritual well-being of the people whom he loved. At age 72, he was once more diagnosed with a kidney problem. He agreed to surgery, to find upon waking up from his operation that the surgical team had found it necessary to removed his entire diseased kidney. As soon as he had recuperated, he was back at his life's work. The wound from his surgery failed to heal properly and caused him considerable discomfort, but he kept on serving the Lord. His three sons had now taken on the task of running the farm.

In 1974, Jacob felt the time was right for Sara and him to relocate in the Town of Winkler. Sara resisted at first. She loved the farm dearly, enjoyed the open space, her garden and the countless tasks surrounding raising chickens and livestock. She also loved both domestic animals and the wildlife that inhabited much of

the territory in the woodlands of the farm.

Jacob, perceiving that his good kidney was beginning to fail, wanted Sara closer to church friends in the event of his demise. They settled on 12<sup>th</sup> Street in Winkler in February, choosing this property for its immense backyard, where Sara could garden to her heart's content. Jacob and Sara enjoyed their new home and the amenities that came with the turf—their friends were, for the most part, nearby, trips for groceries and to the post office were a few blocks away and there was ample room in their home for overnight guests.

#### The End, 1974.

Jacob celebrated his 76th birthday on September 22. All seemed well except for the festering wound in the small of his back. He made one more trip to Bolivia. On Sunday, November 10, 1974, Jacob was in charge of serving communion to the Chortitz congregation. He returned home, his cup running over. Laying his books on the kitchen table, he placed his hand on them and said: "Doah, dout ess foedich. And dout jing aullah soh fraedlich toh" ("There, that is finished and everything went so peacefully").

His words were prophetic. The next morning, he was driven to the St. Boniface Hospital for a week of observation. He returned the following Sunday afternoon, chauffeured by Henry and Mary Penner from Baylor Drive in Winnipeg. The house flooded with company that afternoon and evening. Upon retiring, he turned to Sara and said: "Me ess soh aus von aul di Kjingah houden sultt noe Huis kommen" ("I feel as if all our children should have come home today"). Sara was astonished. "We had our house packed," was her reply.

The next morning, Sara discovered there was no milk in the house for their breakfast, nor for her baking and cooking. Jacob assured her that he would get the milk and be back immediately. He also advised Sara that Deacon Driedger was taking him to Winnipeg in the afternoon to counsel a sick man who had begged him for a visit because he was in need of help in spiritual matters.

Sara protested: "You only got home from the hospital yesterday." He smiled at her: "Me ess je nuscht" ("There is nothing wrong with me"), he countered, and left on his errand.

Sara would not see her beloved Jacob alive again. He died of a massive cerebral haemorrhage on his way back to 12th Street. Sara was devastated. With her family surrounding her, she planned the funeral service in the church on the north end of the village of Chortitz, after which Jacob's body was interred in the cemetery on the church grounds. Jacob had gone home to be with his Lord and Master, whom he had served faithfully.

On his headstone are engraved the words, which he often quoted: "Christus ist mein Leben. Sterben ist mein Gewinn."

#### Resources:

Franz Penner Family of Chortitz 1800-1997 (n.p., 1997), 96 pages.

## Sara's Story

"Sara's Story: The widowhood of Sara Penner, Morden, Manitoba," by daughter Kristine Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Following Jacob's sudden death, Sara stayed on alone in their house on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. In the early months after Jacob's journey home, she was often heard to comment: "Others have had to go through this valley; I can do it too." She prayed for strength to carry on, and faced the future with courage and much determination.

At first, her many church friends visited frequently. Her large family was a constant source of support and comfort. They took turns visiting her during the week to share her grief and assuage her loneliness. As in the past, she made certain that there would be plenty of prepared food so she could offer meals or "faspa" to her children and her many friends. Stepping into her kitchen, visitors were greeted by the aroma of cooking, of herbs, spices and baking.

Reminiscing about her years with Jacob was a source of healing and also joy. "We went through such hard times, but they were good times because we did it together," she was often heard to say (It was understood that she was referring to the insolvency followed by the Dirty Thirties when almost everyone was experiencing dire poverty).

When asked whether she had ever suspected that Jacob would become a minister, her reply was: "Not when I first married him, but I knew this would come sooner or later not long after we were married."

"What made you believe that," was the next question.

"Old people and young people came to him for advice on many and varied problems, and no matter who came or what their situation, he was always able to help them."

One story her children especially treasured was the secrecy and preparation for hers and Jacob's nuptials on December 12, 1920. When Jacob had asked for her hand in marriage, she did not immediately respond (she had been duly impressed by this six-foot handsome farmhand with the large, intense blue eyes). She also did not tell her parents that Jacob had proposed marriage, but undertook to clean the whole house in anticipation of their engagement. At that time, engagements were always held in the home and were a much bigger celebration than the wedding itself.

She confided in her brother, Jake, because there was the dilemma of her wedding attire and shoes. She had no money. When Sara's parents went to visit, she and Jake took a horse and buggy and sold lard from their fall pig killing in the surrounding countryside. Once they felt they had enough funds, they made a clandestine trip to Gretna where Sara purchased the materials she needed for her wedding apparel and found a pair of shiny,

patent leather shoes with bows on them. But what would her parents say? Jake encouraged her so she came home with her purchases.

When she finally broke the news to her parents, her mother's face was wreathed with smiles. Her father seemed equally pleased. After all, he had called Jacob "meen Jung" (my boy) almost from the day that he began working for them.

sure in making large, stuffed animals, bears, wooly kittens, punchwork wall hangings and sofa cushions, in spite of a touch of arthritis in her fingers.

In 1988, Sara took the Amtrak train from Grand Forks to Houston to visit her youngest daughter and her family. Her children had been unable to persuade her to fly. "I am willing to die when the Lord calls me," she



*Sara Penner, visiting her daughter Helen (Ed) Hemminger, Cranbrook, B. C., 1977.*

Sara would, in her reminiscing, occasionally speak of her heartaches. One heavy blow was the loss of her sister, Tina, to milk-fever after the birth of a child while they were in Mexico. Her dearest friend, Sara Heide, remained in Mexico when they moved back to Canada.

In the quietness of her home on 12<sup>th</sup> Street, Sara drew on God's Word for comfort. She carried on daily devotions by herself before breakfast or would have one of her children read if they had spent a night with her. This occurred frequently, as her children were aware that she did not like to be alone. Sara ardently continued the ministry she had been a partner to, to the best of her ability. She supported her church in prayer and deed by attending faithfully. She upheld her children and grandchildren in prayer. New babies, grandchildren and great-grandchildren born into the family were a source of much joy and pride.

Sara had always delighted in God's wondrous creation. She would hang up birdfeeders to attract chickadees, sparrows, robins and hummingbirds. She took solace in the large garden and the many flowers she grew and tended. Her hands were never idle. To while away the winter months, she crocheted large afghans for her children and grandchildren. She learned new crafts every winter from a daughter who was in charge of activities for seniors at Tabor Home in Morden, thus satisfying her creative energies. She took great plea-

explained, "but I want to die a natural death."

It was shortly after this that Sara began to experience serious heart problems, but with her doctor's guidance, she managed her illness by meticulously following his instructions. She celebrated her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday at the Friendship Centre in Winkler, with a packed and overflowing house of family, relatives and friends.

Sara was always thankful for her health, which allowed her to lead a full, rich and rewarding life. In the summer of 1992, she still managed a huge garden with the help of her oldest daughter. Her health declined rapidly in the fall of that year with several brief stages in the Winkler hospital. She was admitted to the hospital on Sunday, November 1<sup>st</sup>.

The doctors found it necessary to operate the following day, on what they presumed to be a stomach ulcer. Sara clung to life until the following Thursday, when she was taken Home. She was less than two months short of her 92<sup>nd</sup> birthday. She was laid to rest in the Chortitz cemetery, beside her beloved Jacob.

"Through wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches." — Proverbs 24:3,4.

# Material Culture

## Kleine Gemeinde Dream Culture

"Kleine Gemeinde Dream Culture," by Ralph Friesen, 306 Montgomery Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3L 1T4.

### Pioneer generation dreamers

In the extensive written record left by the Mennonites who immigrated to North America from South Russia in the 1870s, there are, surprisingly, a number of accounts of dreams. Given the "lawless" content dreams sometimes have, and given our ancestors' strict morality, we might expect that they would have ignored this aspect of life completely. They did not. In fact, there exists a small but significant body of written accounts of dreams of the pioneer generation.

In this article seven dreams are presented. They are all of the KG pioneers, with the exception of one recounted by Second Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), who, although a member of the KG, was not a pioneer.

By the "pioneer generation," I mean those people who immigrated to North America from South Russia in 1874-5. That generation, although somewhat affected by an individualistic Christianity with strong American influences, was still more faithful to its communitarian origins than were later generations. Their sense of "home" was divided--they sometimes longed for the land and community they had left behind South Russia; and yet they were determined that their future lay in North America.

For the most part, the dreams' subject matter features family members and spiritual and social problems. The dreams are as revealing of community life as they are of the lives of the individuals to whom they are attributed. Our knowledge of the particular circumstances and recent events in the lives of these people is limited--and these are important for our understanding. Nevertheless, these dreams, emerging from the collective unconscious of the pioneers, speak quite clearly about the beliefs and preoccupations of the KG. In this sense, we can use the term "dream culture."

### Holdeman's influence

In the Mennonite tradition, dreams have been viewed with caution. This reserve has both theological and cultural influences. Theologically, the Bible, not "revelation" given to individuals, is the authority for truth. Some 16<sup>th</sup> century Anabaptists such as the Muensterites and Thomas Muentzer (1490-1525) were visionaries. Perhaps it was their dramatic failure that led to suspiciousness by other Anabaptists of anyone claiming authority through visions. Culturally, Swiss, Dutch/Flemish and Prussian societies, from which the Mennonites sprang, emphasize

common sense and emotional control.

At the same time, the Bible, always the ultimate authority for Anabaptists, is full of accounts of dreams and dreamers. Jacob dreamed of angels ascending and descending a heavenly ladder. Joseph's ability to interpret the dreams of the Pharaoh helped vault him into a position of power and influence in ancient Egypt. Daniel saw numerous visions, as did John of Patmos. Peter's dream of "unclean" and "clean" flesh significantly influenced the early Christian communities.

There are some Christian traditions in which dreams are explicitly valued. Mystics write of dreams as a way to experience the presence of God within oneself. The founders of some

intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind" (Col. 2:18); nor should we heed dreams and visions, my beloved, for the powerful and unchanging Word of God should be more than sufficient for us to know the will of God and to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:13). For by the Word alone will we be judged on that judgment day, and by the Word we are told what is beneficial for us and what the Lord requires of us," (Endnote 1).

Holdeman's arguments were usually supported by reference to Scripture, but according to Clarence Hiebert, "If Holdeman had a dream, vision or revelation no further study of the Bible really seemed necessary," (Endnote 2). He even concluded that the KG was beyond renewal because he had a dream in which it was revealed that many members had not been truly converted upon baptism (Endnote 3).

### Allegories and moral lessons

Nevertheless, there was, however slight, a positive historical context for the dream record of the KG pioneer generation. There were, of course, the Biblical accounts of dreams and dreamers. All KG members knew these stories. As well, members were accustomed to an allegorical style, bearing some resemblance to dream narrative, in the devotional literature published and widely distributed by the Gemeinde. Peter Peters' (1574-1651) *Die Himmlische Hochzeit* (published in German and made available to KG readers in 1906) and Johann Philipp Schabalie's popular *Wandelnde Seele* ("The Pilgrim Soul") (1860), are examples.

For the KG, dreams were in a similar category as such allegorical literature. If a dream appeared to have a spiritual, religious, or moral message, it might be worth sharing with others. The recording of dreams and visions by the KG can be understood in strategic terms, as a means of persuasion--much like Holdeman's use of them, except that he was bent on conversion of the "unenlightened" of other Gemeinden.

For the early KG, one of the blatant signs of the corruption of the Grosse Gemeinde was tolerance of smoking. Second Aeltester Abraham Friesen's personal confession of tobacco use is typical of the KG position: "I smoked the pipe of tobacco, so that the fumes sometimes ascended from the nose and mouth, which to me symbolizes those who are damned in hell," (Endnote 4).



*Depiction of Jakob's dream of a ladder going up to heaven, from which the Lord spoke to him, Genesis 28:12. Dream representations were common in medieval artwork. This drawing is from the Calwer biblische Geschichten (Altona, n.d.), page 24, a standard text used in bible studies in Mennonite schools in Manitoba during the first half of the 20th century. It illustrates the presentation of biblical dream culture within Mennonite circles.*

streams of Christianity claimed their authority by what was revealed to them in dreams and visions.

The American evangelist John Holdeman belonged to this tradition. In 1882, he was preaching to the KG in Manitoba, trying to convince them that they needed to more spiritually alive. Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), the Aeltester who led the Nebraska/Kansas contingent of the KG immigrants, warned the Manitobans of the dangers of following Holdeman: "And let us not deviate either to the right nor to the left, no matter who may come in a holy appearance with sweet words and excellency of speech, or with dreams and visions. Wherefore I say with the Apostle Paul, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels,

Such symbolism is also found in an 1830 letter of First Aeltester Klaas Reimer, replying to criticisms of the KG by the Grosse Gemeinde ministerial: "My father warned me strongly in this regard. He said, that at the place of his aunt (Meume), who were very rich people, they had on one occasion received a wealthy visitor of high standing. He wanted to go into another room with him to smoke tobacco. When they did so, they found the table fully occupied, and it had smoked frightfully. Oh, what a terrible symbol, for on the day of judgement their works will follow them (Rev. 14:13)," (Endnote 5).

Tobacco addiction is notoriously difficult to overcome. It may have been the intractable nature of the addiction that turned Reimer to a form of rhetoric more compelling than a simple sermon. Clearly, both he and Aeltester Friesen understood the use of symbolism as a rhetorical device.

Subsequently, a similar, though much longer, narrative on the "evils of tobacco" theme circulated among the KG. Steinbach's first mayor and KG song leader Abraham S. Friesen (1848-1916) copied this "dream" down in his account book. It was still current in 1941, appearing in the KG publication *Der Christlicher Familienfreund* in February of that year.

The author is not identified, but the dream is presented as that of Franz Quiring of Marienthal. The anonymous writer begins as though it is an historical account ("On the evening of the 16th of February, 1831 I went to Marienthal to Franz Quirings to visit, to see if they were well, as they were my relatives") and then expands into an allegory of a smoker who dreamed of the Judgement Day. He was so terrified that he ceased smoking afterwards. The effect of framing the moral lesson as a dream is to intensify the emotion, making everything more "real" and thus heightening the imperative for change.

### Dreaming as grieving

There is one reference to dreaming among the KG of South Russia whose purpose is neither spiritual nor moral. In an 1865 letter to Aeltester-to-be Peter Toews (1841-1922), Isaac Loewen (1787-1873) writes: "I have frequently stayed with the widow Heinrich Loewen [his daughter-in-law, nee Maria Doerksen], and have on occasion resided with her for one, two, and also three weeks after the other, sometimes also longer. She is still unable to make a decision from among all her suitors who have proposed to her in marriage, to select one of them. According to what she says, she still dreams frequently of her husband. She is dearly fond of her little daughter called Maria, who very much resembles her father, which also helps to remind her of her former husband," (Endnote 6)

In this instance, the dreams carry no lesson whatever. They are a grieving response to the sudden death of Heinrich Loewen in 1863, two years before. To dream of a deceased loved one is to have a way of holding on to him, even though he has departed. Maria's dreams testify to the powerful and enduring emotional bond that had been created between her and her husband. Telling them was also a way of signalling to her various suitors that she was not yet prepared to enter into another marriage.

### The dreamers

The dreams are presented here in the chronological order in which they were experienced, as far as can be determined: first, Aeltester Abraham Friesen (1782-1849), in South Russia; second, an anonymous man on the trans-Atlantic voyage from England to Canada in 1874; third, Maria Kornelsen Enns (1844-1913), Rosenthal, Jansen, Nebraska; fourth, Aeltester Jakob M. Kroeker of Rosenhof, Manitoba (1836-1913); fifth and sixth, Anna Barkman Kornelsen (1854-1937) of Hochstadt, Manitoba; and last, Agatha Klassen Friesen (1848-1902) [Mrs. Cornelius P. Friesen] of Blumenort, Manitoba. The dates of the dreams are provided as nearly as it is possible to determine them.



*Anna Barkman Kornelsen (1854-1937), Friedensfeld and later Steinbach, was a gifted writer and chronicler of her people. Photo courtesy of "Anna: Woman of Strength," in Preservings, No.*

### Alt. Abraham Friesen, 1820

Abraham Friesen was the son of Abraham von Riesen and Margaretha Wiebe, one of the founding families of the KG. The von Riesen immigrated from Prussia and settled in Ohrloff, Molotschna, on a Wirtschaft next to the famous Johann Cornies. Abraham lived an active social life as a young man in the Grosse Gemeinde. He was an earnest spiritual seeker, and in 1818 joined the KG, which was led by his brother-in-law Klaas Reimer. Abraham was elected as minister in 1823 and as Aeltester in 1838.

Aeltester Friesen published his dream in "An Epistle to the Brothers and Sisters, 1820." The letter is a declaration explaining why he had left the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde and joined the KG:

"At one time I had a dream that I had prepared myself to ascend up unto a high mountain. After I had proceeded for a short distance,

the mountain became very steep, so that it seemed impossible for me to climb any higher. But when I turned about and wanted to go back, I quickly had to cling to the ground, lest, as it seemed, I would plummet down into [sic] the precipice. When I looked upwards, it was as steep as a straight wall. I can hardly express how anxious and fearful this made me. Nevertheless, I clung firmly, so as not to fall down. After a tremendous battle, I was able to descend from the mountain. Then the joy was exceedingly great."

### Anonymous man, 1874

The first account of the dreams of the pioneer generation of the KG comes from an anonymous man on the trans-Atlantic voyage from England to Canada in 1874. The story of the dream is told by Johann F. Toews (1858-1931) of Steinbach, Manitoba in his "Remembrances." Toews remarks that the ocean crossings were sometimes so stormy that the rolling ship actually cast some individuals from their bunks:

"One such person related in the morning that he had dreamt that he was on a train driving over a high bridge which had suddenly collapsed underneath him," (Endnote 7).

### Maria Kornelsen Enns, 1880

Maria Kornelsen Enns (1844-1913), was the eldest child of well-known school teacher Gerhard S. Kornelsen (1816-94) and Maria Enns (1821-71). Maria's brother, Gerhard E. Kornelsen (1857-1933), who is the subject of this dream, was also a teacher, in Steinbach, Manitoba (see *Pres.*, No. 18, pages 82-89). At the time of the dream, Gerhard was only 22 and had been married for less than two years. He had been very sick and his wife had also been bed-ridden for some time, news which Maria had received by letter from Manitoba.

Maria lived in Rosenthal, Jansen, Nebraska, with her husband Jacob Enns. The dream is reported in a letter to her parents and siblings in Lichtenau, Manitoba, first dated January 19, 1880. The letter was continued over a period of time, and posted later, as the dream itself is recorded on February 11. At the time of her dream, Maria was about 36 and had three children. Later in 1880 she and her husband were re-baptized and joined the revivalistic Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, (Endnote 8):

"Last night, I dreamt that we had walked to Steinbach; but the village had undergone so many changes that we hardly found our way to you Kornelsens; but we finally arrived. Wm. Giesbrecht went in just ahead of me, and I asked him if you, my dear brother, still lived? He said, "Yes, now still yes." When I came in, you lay in an American style bed and were covered with a white sheet. The dear sister-in-law sat by the bed; but you were hardly recognizable. You appeared so distressed and pitiful; and on your lap, you had little Aganetha who had already grown much. The dear sister Friesen sat at the bed, head in her lap, weeping profusely, nor did she look up. I pushed my way forward to the bed and asked you, beloved brother, if you were very sick. Then you spoke with a loud voice, yet sub-

dued, ‘Yes, I shall die soon, which I am glad to do, but I cannot yet.’”

“At this, I awoke, and the tears ran down my cheeks. I could scarcely say a word,” (Endnote 9).

Some explanation of the family connections of the characters in this dream is in order. The Rev. Wilhelm T. Giesbrecht (1849-1917), later a Holdeman evangelist, was Gerhard’s brother-in-law (Endnote 10). The “dear sister-in-law” was Gerhard’s wife Elisabeth, nee Giesbrecht (1855-1910). “Little Aganetha” was Gerhard’s daughter, born December 27, 1879. “The dear sister Friesen” was probably Agatha (1846-97), sister to Maria and Gerhard, and spouse of Abraham R. Friesen (1846-84), a school teacher in Lichtenau, Molotschna and son of KG school teacher Cornelius F. Friesen. In 1880 they lived in Blumenhof, Manitoba.

#### Jacob M. Kroeker, c. 1882

In 1881-82 many families in Manitoba, led by Bishop Peter Toews, left the KG to join John Holdeman’s church. In fact, most of the KG’s leaders left with Toews, and the old congregation was left entirely in the hands of three somewhat bewildered ministers. It was a crisis of community leadership. Scratching River’s preacher, Jacob Kroeker, the youngest of the three, said that he “felt far too weak and unworthy to try to reconstruct the church.” In his memoirs (1912) he recounted a dream of his severance from Bishop Toews: “I dreamed that Peter Toews and I were sailing on a huge water [when]... a great storm arose which threatened to sink our boat...[Only] after much exertion did I finally manage to reach the shore where tall trees stood with many branches. I grabbed for one but it broke. Then I grabbed a stronger one and saved myself. I did not know where Aeltester Toews was,” (Endnote 11).

#### Anna Barkman Kornelsen, c. 1896

Anna Kornelsen (1854-1937) was the daughter of Gerhard Doerksen and Helena Dueck, of Fischau, Molotschna. Along with her parents, she immigrated to Manitoba in 1875, also joining the KG that year. Peter W. Toews, also known as “Blacksmith” Toews, told of the arrival of the Doerksons at the immigration sheds on the Red River: “In the spring of 1875, another group of immigrants arrived.... Many of our settlers expected friends and relatives. Not so we. Father [Johann Toews] wanted to invite some that had no relatives to receive them. As we stood on the shore and were looking matters over, father heard one man say, ‘Who is going to invite us?’ He went over and invited them to come with us. They were Gerhard Doerksons. They had two grown girls. Martin Barkman, of Steinbach, took the girls with him. Later, he married the elder of the two girls,” (Endnote 12).

This elder girl was Anna. She and Martin Barkman took up a homestead in Hochstadt and began to raise a family. They moved to Heuboden and then to a farm a few miles south of Steinbach. In 1896, when Anna was 42, Martin died, leaving her with eight children. His death, she said, “caused a very deep wound in me.” By coincidence, she later (in 1912) married the wid-

ower Gerhard E. Kornelsen, the subject of Maria Enns’ dream, above.

Anna recorded two dreams in her journal. The first, entered on April 23, 1934, she probably dreamed in 1896. She writes: “When I was a widow for the first time I had a remarkably vivid dream”: “I dreamt I wanted to go home. I stood on the banks of a sea and did not know how to cross it. There was no other way to get home. My two brothers and their families were there, too. They boarded a small steamship and left me standing on shore alone. I gazed longingly after them and saw that their ship rocked to and fro. Despite this, they moved ahead, and I was to cross this vast sea on foot! I could see my home on the far shore, but to cross those wide and deep waters seemed impossible to me.”

“As I sadly stood there, enviously thinking how lucky my siblings were and why I was to cross this large sea alone, I suddenly noticed that its waters were becoming narrower and shal-



*Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938), son of the renowned Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Moses of the Bergthal people. Jakob D. Wiebe recorded three dreams in his journal presented in the form of dialogues in hell between Satan and his spirits. Photo courtesy of Diese Steine (Steinbach, 2001), page 546.*

lower. Then I could see bottom; the waters reached only to my knees! I thought: ‘God can do miracles as well today as in Israel’s time, when the Israelites passed through the Red Sea.’”

“I started walking, and then I noticed Mother was there. She walked ahead of me and I followed her, and we both arrived home safely. Then I turned and looked over the waters, saying, ‘There, that’s done; never again do I have to cross over,’” (Endnote 13).

#### Another Dream, ca. 1911.

Anna records another dream, whose date is uncertain. She does offer some context: “During my first period of widowhood (1896-1912) I had many cares and worries, making this a very difficult time in my life. However, God always helped!” She adds that “Auntie Peter Barkman [likely Mrs. Peter K. Barkman, nee Anna W. Toews (1827-81), or the second Mrs. Peter K. Barkman, nee Elisabeth Warkentin (1837-1911), neighbours of Steinbach] was still living then.” This would place the date of the dream some time before 911.

“Once I dreamt I was on my way home. Old

Mrs. Peter Barkman and my daughter Lena were also with me. While we were walking, Mrs. Barkman and daughter Lena suddenly disappeared, and I had to walk alone.”

“I could see my home in the distance, but there was a very tall, steep mountain in my way. I observed most people walking around the mountain to the right without any trouble; although there was a fierce blizzard, their path remained open. However, I could not walk there. I tried walking close to the mountain, but even there, it was too dangerous because of the deep holes; one slight misstep would hurl me down into the abyss.”

“I stepped back, and wondered how so terribly many people were able to hurry past the mountain without touching it, while for me it was completely impossible to walk along with the multitudes. Then I turned to the left to see if there would be a possibility for me to bypass the mountain on that side. But it was so dark and horrible there that I was too scared even to try; it was completely impossible.”

“Determined to try the right-hand side once more, I returned, because I wanted so much to reach my home.”

“When I got to the middle between the left and the right side, I looked up and saw, right on the highest peak, the Saviour hanging on the cross. Then a voice said to me: ‘You cannot get home unless you climb over the mountain, right past the cross.’ But how was I to climb that impossibly steep, rocky cliff? As I stood there dejectedly, I became aware of a ladder hanging against the mountainside.”

#### Agatha Friesen, 1902.

Cornelius P. Friesen (1844-99) served as school teacher in Blumenort and Blumenhof, Manitoba, from 1874 until his death. A few years after his passing, his wife (nee Agatha Klassen, 1848-1902) died very suddenly at the dinner table while eating. Her sons later recalled that she related a dream she had the night before she died: “She was crossing some water on a narrow path and...suddenly the boardwalk collapsed so that she fell into the water.”

“She awoke with a scream and accurately interpreted the dream to mean she would soon die,” (Endnote 14).

#### Universal archetypes.

Swiss psychologist Carl Jung developed the concept of universal archetypes. Jung speaks of the “collective unconscious,” a world of symbols common to all humanity. And he teaches that, in dreams, these universal symbols appear, connecting the experience of the individual dreamer with the experience of everyone else on the planet.

Several main themes and sub-themes emerge from a study of these dreams. I have tried to arrange them by symbol, as a way of structuring meaning. I do not claim that Jung would have considered all of these symbols as universal archetypes, though some certainly do belong to that category. I am thinking of these symbols, particularly, as messages from the collective unconscious of the pioneer generation KG. They reveal particular concerns of the Gemeinde, as well as universal ones belonging to all of the rest

of humanity, at all times. I have selected the following: water, tree, mother, baby, bridge, mountain, cross, pilgrim journey, and family. Because of the fluidity inherent to dreams, the themes carried by these symbols overlap and interweave.

### Water.

Water, with its associations to birth (and sometimes death), the unconscious, and emotions, is a universal archetype. It is central to the accounts of Jacob Kroeker and Anna Kornelsen, and implicit in that of Agatha Friesen.

The basic environment in Jacob Kroeker's dream is a vast body of water, the ocean. Literally, of course, both Kroeker and Bishop Toews had crossed the Atlantic, united in their purpose to come to the New World in search of religious freedom. The dream evokes that historical voyage. But the time has changed; the theological and social destinies of Kroeker and Toews are now divergent.

Water represents depth of emotion, often unexplored. The course of emotions in Kroeker's dream might run as follows: at first, a sense of excitement and adventure as the two men find themselves on a vast body of water. Where are they headed on life's sea? What will happen as they move out into uncharted waters? Then increasing fear and even panic as the storm comes up and nearly overwhelms the boat. There is a period of anxiety for the dreamer in not knowing whether his exertions to save himself will succeed, with an additional fright when the life-saving branch breaks. This is followed by relief when shore is reached at last. Finally, there is apprehension and poignant sadness at not knowing what happened to his companion.

This sequence of emotions quite possibly corresponds to Kroeker's experience in waking life. Its repetition in the dream also provides information about the complicated emotional experience of the KG in 1882. Holdeman's promise of new spiritual vistas created a sense of excitement but also unease. Initially there was the hope of cooperation and an attempt to ignore the powerful emotions beneath the surface. When it became clear that Holdeman did not believe in the possibility of the renewal of the Gemeinde, the surface calm gave way to the deep fear of being overwhelmed, even entirely wiped out. With strenuous effort, however, the Gemeinde managed to preserve itself.

The ship image appears again in Anna Kornelsen's first dream. Anna's two brothers and their families board "a small steamship" and move across the waters ahead of her, despite the hazards of rocking to and fro on the waves. Anna's unconscious seems to have chosen the steamship image from her actual experience as an immigrant, both in leaving Russia, when Mennonite families first travelled on a steamship down the Dnieper River to the Black Sea, and then again in North America when they took a steamship from Fargo Moorhead up the Red River to Winnipeg. Steamships were the vessels that most clearly represented the definitive moments of leaving and arriving, symbolizing the severing of old ties and the creation of new ones.

Anna has to cross the sea on foot: "there was

no other way to get home." She watches longingly as her family members depart on their steamship. It may be possible for them to stay on the surface of their experience, but for her, alone, the journey is at another level.

Anna calls the waters in her dream a "sea of sorrows." This befits her recent experience of losing her husband. The association of water with loss would probably have been very strong for her, reinforced by the memory of her father-in-law, Rev. Jakob Barkman (1824-75), who drowned in the Red River in the second year of settlement, profoundly shocking the whole community.

Yet despite loss, or even within it, there is the prospect of new life. The sea image prompts Anna to think of the miraculous parting of the waters during the flight of Israel from bondage in Egypt.



*Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929), charismatic leader and founding Ältester of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, today Manitoba's largest Mennonite denomination second only to the Mennonite Church Canada in terms of members in the Province. Drawing of Abraham Doerksen by Anne Reimer. Photo courtesy of P. Bergen, History of the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church (Altona, 2001), page 48/Diese Steine, page 581.*

It was an association that many people had consciously made at the time that the Mennonites left South Russia, destined for a "promised land."

Anna interprets the sort of transformation which routinely occurs in dreams, i.e., the discovery that the water reached only to her knees, as miraculous, and connected to the story of God's chosen people. Such an interpretation testifies to her deep faith, both personal and communitarian. Of course, the entire community, and Anna as a member, would often have been faced with the prospect of some "impossible" challenge which turned out to be possible after all. What seemed at first a profound, impassable sea, turns out to be a body of shallow water that can be waded through to reach one's destination.

The water in Agatha Friesen's dream, on the other hand, is present implicitly, as a symbol of death. She begins to cross a foot-bridge above it and awakens as she begins her fall, before she

actually reaches the water. A question is left. Had the dream continued, she would have been immersed: either her terror might have been extended with the sensation of drowning, or her emotion transformed into wonder at being returned to the element birth and renewal.

### Trees.

Trees, which appear in Jacob Kroeker's dream, are symbolic in many ways. A tree unites heaven (branches reaching into the sky toward the sun), earth (in which it is rooted) and water (which it taps from the soil). So it synthesizes the different elements and as such is a strong symbol of unity and connectedness (Endnote 15). In circumstances of struggling with the consequences of a major division in the community, it makes sense that such a unifying symbol presents itself.

Kroeker reaches for a branch of a tree on the shore; it breaks. He reaches for another and this one is strong enough for him to save himself. In the aftermath of the schism, it would have been hard for people to know which branch of the many-branched tree of Christian belief was strong enough to hold them.

### Mother.

"Mother" as a symbol is often connected with water, as "all waters are symbolic of the Great Mother, and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the universal womb, the *prima materia*, the waters of fertility and refreshment and the fountain of life," (Endnote 16). Consistent with this idea, at the end of Anna Kornelsen's sea dream the figure of her mother appears.

Anna's dream begins with a longing for home, which seems to be a spiritual, as well as physical place. She starts walking, and then notices her mother. In order to make this journey, one cannot wait for a guide to appear first. Rather, one begins, and after that, the guide will appear. It is expected by children that their parents will "go before" them in life's journey, showing leadership. Especially in going through life's major transitions, as Anna seems to be doing, parental figures may have appeal. How did our parents manage in such situations? What can they tell us? In the dream, Anna's mother's presence is reassuring, like that of a Higher Self--"we both arrived home safely."

Anna's mother did not go before her (i.e., die) in the physical sense until 1910, many years after the dream. Her father, however, died in 1882, leaving her mother a widow at the age of 50. In that sense, Anna's mother had already crossed a sea of sorrows, and knew how to show her recently widowed daughter the way.

### Baby.

In Maria Enns' dream, her brother Gerhard has his baby daughter Aganetha in his lap. A baby appearing in a dream can be an evocation of the dreamer's infant self, a part of oneself that is just emerging, perhaps innocent, trusting, helpless. At the time of the dream Maria was an "infant" in her new Krimmer faith.

Perhaps she hoped that her brother would support her move to another church. Or perhaps her unconscious recognized a new dimension in

Gerhard himself. This newness is more advanced in its development than Maria had realized; the baby "had already grown much."

### Bridges.

Symbolically, crossing a bridge represents an attempt to make a transition from one state of being to another. The transition may be the ultimate one, from this life into the next, or it may simply be one of those shifts in awareness that occur at different points in an individual's life. A sense of psychological danger often accompanies the act of crossing a bridge: "Bridges set men and women on a narrow path in which they meet the unavoidable obligation to choose--and that choice is salvation or damnation," (Endnote 17).

The bridge image also resonates with the spiritual and social choices that faced the KG soon after their arrival in North America. The departure of most of the leadership to join the Holdeman church in the early 1880s brought the future into question. In the United States, members left to join the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, and in both the U. S. and Canada at the turn of the century, the Bruderthaler. Whether people actually "crossed over" to another denomination, or simply thought of it, no one could escape awareness of such a transition as at least a possibility.

In the two dreams in which the bridge symbol appears, the attempts at crossing are unsuccessful. Physically, the Gemeinde had transported itself from one continent to another, settling in an unknown territory. It was a remarkable accomplishment requiring enormous courage and perseverance. Perhaps it was so remarkable that people could not quite believe in it, and so their unconscious minds brought up images of failure in the enterprise. Spiritually, the KG was high-minded, setting standards of purity and right living which were supposed to be higher, not only than those of the world around, but also than those of the larger Mennonite community. Achieving such high aspirations required tremendous effort and discipline.

The brief dream of the anonymous ocean traveller who was thrown out of his bunk recalls the immigrants' experience of travelling across continents, including the entire breadth of England, by train. Frequently, these trains crossed bridges. Comically, the dream symbolizes the man's actual experience of being thrown out of his bunk as the collapse of a bridge.

The symbolism, of course, extends further. The dreamer is in a train, on a journey with others. The train engine, the force compelling the dreamer and his community to leave the old country and move, en masse, to a new land, can be understood as the power of the group decision to leave South Russia. Whether an individual agreed with this decision or not mattered little. Many, like the dreamer, would have felt like passengers, pulled along by something much bigger than themselves.

While the train image gives assurance of being on a set course, the collapse of the bridge suddenly reverses that assurance, abruptly introducing the prospect of failure and loss of control. Fear of failure is a natural concomitant to high aspiration. A plunge from a great height, compared to a

shorter fall, feels catastrophic. Heaven, or salvation, is not assured; hell is always a possibility.

In Agatha Friesen's dream, the boardwalk collapses when she steps on it. If the bridge symbolizes the connection between this life and the next, it may be that the dream expresses Agatha's apprehension that she would be too heavy (with sin?) to ascend, and would fall instead to lower regions. The suddenness of the collapse could reflect her fear of not being ready for death, despite having been ill for some years. Agatha awoke with a scream, terrified. Such terror is contrary to the submissive acceptance the KG taught as the appropriate attitude toward one's own death. The weakness of the ego state in dreams leaves us subject to primitive emotions. It is also a natural, animal reaction to be terrified when the foundation under your feet collapses without warning.

### Mountains.

The similarity between the "mountain" dream of Aeltester Abraham Friesen (c. 1820) and that of Anna Kornelsen (c. 1900?) is striking. In both, a mountain is the central symbol; in both, the dreamer strives to climb it, with limited success. The similarity of image and theme points to a continuity in KG preoccupations over eight or nine decades, on different continents, and regardless of gender.

A mountain represents transcendence, a holy place where the divine may reveal itself. Climbing a mountain is an image for moving upward toward spiritual knowledge and purity and away from worldly desires. A mountain can also be a symbol of stability and changelessness.

Abraham Friesen relates his dream as part of his account of how he left the Grosse Gemeinde to join the KG. His standards for the new Gemeinde, and himself, were almost inhumanly demanding. The mountain symbolizes his personal goal of high spiritual attainment, which, he believed, should also be the community's goal. Similarly, for Anna Kornelsen, the mountain represents the desire to move toward a more pure spiritual life and away from earthly temptations. Some part of her aspired to absolute sinlessness; in her journal she recalls being near death from smallpox as a young girl in South Russia: "I often wondered why the Lord did not take me to Himself then, for I was still innocent."

A theological context for Aeltester Friesen's and Anna Kornelsen's dreams may be found in the pessimistically perfectionist theme in some KG writings.

For example, Peter Baerg (1817-1901), a Grosse Gemeinde minister who joined the KG in 1864, wrote: "As far as my own poor and imperfect life is concerned, I freely confess that I am a poor miserable sinner, and often with David I must say, that my sin is ever before me and my words and deeds convince me of it. I am aware of the same thing as the apostle Paul, who said, "For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing." Or, again: "Our thoughts and desires should always be directed *upwards* in all our occupations which we pursue here in the temporal realm," (Endnote 18).

Such serious aspiration inevitably creates a corresponding fear of falling into sin, and guilt



Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), Reinland, Manitoba and later Eichenfeld (Haskett). He was a gifted chronicler of the Old Colony people and recorded a dream from his youth which resonates with that of the patriarch Jakob. Photo courtesy of Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, page 74.

when such a fall occurs. This fear is palpable in both dreams. Abraham Friesen soon finds the climb impossibly steep, and is presented with the choice of going back. But going back suggests failure, having to return to an earlier stage of spiritual awareness, perhaps even a pre-KG phase. Just at this point, he encounters the terrifying prospect of a sheer fall. The intensity of his emotion is proportionate to the zealousness of his belief: "If a person does not deny sin, he is and remains lost forever and must suffer eternal death." (Endnote 19)

While Friesen does not actually fall, his ascent up the mountain is stalled, and he descends. In other words, he does not overcome the obstacle he is facing, but merely survives the experience. The principal sensation of the dream, as he himself says, is "earnestness and firm clinging." This would be consistent with a waking life situation in which the dreamer is determinedly holding on to a particular way of thinking and acting, and fearful that letting go might mean disaster. Friesen's "joy" at the end seems more like relief at avoiding failure.

In her dream, Anna Kornelsen is presented with a difficult dilemma: should she try to get past the mountain by going to the right or to the left? Right and left, of course, symbolically evoke Heaven and Hell, and Judgement Day. It would seem obvious that Anna would desire to take the path to the right. And so she does, as do "most people" who walk around that side without any trouble. In waking life, Anna may have observed people around her and thought that they were living lives of greater moral purity, negotiating their spiritual mountainside without a problem. Her dilemma is deepened by the sight of these multitudes. What is the matter with her, that she can't go to the right with equal ease?

Anna wants to take the path that others are taking, and tries walking close to the mountain. Here progress is not possible either, as "one slight misstep would hurl me down into the abyss." The abyss appears to be some sort of sin or personal darkness. It is natural that she wants to avoid this danger. The wisdom of dreams, however, is often perverse. Anna is obviously striv-

ing for a lofty ideal, but the abyss invites her to a different sort of self-knowledge, achievable only by a descent into the unknown. The same idea, of exploring her own dark side, is suggested again in her turning to the left, the sinister side of the mountain. It is so "dark and horrible" here that she quickly abandons this choice as "completely impossible."

In her third approach to the mountain and the crossroads leading right and left, something prompts Anna to look up. On the highest peak she sees the Saviour hanging on the cross. This is the height of her aspiration, to experience healing, salvation, and redemption. In the words of Aeltester Klaas Reimer: "Through His redemption we have been set free from sin and have been made the children of God, even fellow heirs with Him of His eternal kingdom," (Endnote 20). Anna is permitted to see the cross, but, like Aeltester Abraham Friesen, does not get to the mountain top. In these dreams, transcendence is wished for, even visualized—but not achieved.

#### Cross.

Robert Friedmann notes that, among the Anabaptists, the cross had a fairly specific symbolic meaning. It stood for the inevitable suffering endured by the Christian who stands in practical opposition against an evil world. He may be ridiculed or persecuted by others; and he must struggle to subdue his lower nature, which would have him partake in worldly pleasures or indulge in the routine dishonesties which characterize much of everyday secular life, (Endnote 21). In Anna's dream, then, the cross likely represents sacrifice as well as salvation and healing. It is a reminder of humankind's fall from Spirit into matter and the need to crucify or control the lower animal nature.

It is relatively rare in dreams to hear a disembodied voice, as Anna does: "You cannot get home unless you climb over the mountain, right past the cross." As a dream event the disembodied voice carries much force; it is equivalent to hearing from one's own soul. For Anna, spiritual peace will only be possible through pursuing the loftiest ideal, going to the peak. The dream ends with the tantalizing image of a ladder, a promise that there is a way to reach another state of being, transformed by proximity to the Saviour on the cross. Or it may even be that the divine can descend on that same ladder, as the patriarch Jacob once dreamed.

Yet neither Aeltester Friesen nor Anna Kornelsen is able to reach the mountain peak. Transcendence does not occur. Aspiration remains. That would seem to be consistent with the culture of the KG as a whole: the individual is a humble striver, sincere in wanting to be a true disciple of Christ, penitent in realizing that he is bound to fall short of this goal. The actual attainment of spiritual peace—the assurance of salvation—is not to be expected in this life.

#### Pilgrim journey.

"Journey," while not a concrete image, is nevertheless a concept that can be symbolically represented. A journey requires movement, and there is movement in all of these dreams. The anonymous man on the ship is on a train traversing a bridge. Jacob Kroeker and Bishop Toews sail together on a stormy sea. Maria Enns and her family walk to her brother's house in Steinbach. Anna Kornelsen's relatives sail away from her on the sea, then she begins to walk through the water, following her mother. In her second dream she sets out walking in the direction of home, and tries to cross a mountain. Aeltester Abraham Friesen climbs a mountain and then descends. Agatha Friesen begins to cross a narrow footbridge.

Such movement suggests a kind of restlessness, and an attempt to gain new perspective. In waking life we are often stuck with seeing ourselves and the world in a rigid fashion. These dreams introduce fluidity and mobility as an aid to seeing.

The KG thought of themselves as travellers on this earth, bound for another, better place that was their true home. This idea, with its Biblical roots, was of course not confined to the KG, but they embraced it with particular recognition. For example, Peter Peters frames one of his expositions as *Der Weg nach Friedenstadt*, or, the path to the city of peace. It appeared in Dutch in the 17th century and was translated into German and published in Prussia in 1790, (Endnote 22).

There are countless examples of the use of the "pilgrim" metaphor among KG letter writers. Jacob A. Wiebe (1836-1922), of Annenfeld, Crimea, concludes an 1867 letter with the greeting, "We remain your loving fellow-pilgrims to eternity," (Endnote 23). (Ironically, although Wiebe became a KG Aeltester, it was not long before he helped form the Krimmer Mennonite Brethren, parting ways with his fellow pilgrims.)

In the dreams under discussion, the idea of "pilgrim" is most specific in the "mountain" dreams of Aeltester Friesen and Anna Kornelsen, and more peripheral in Anna's "sea" dream, or the dreams of Jacob Kroeker or Maria Enns.

A pilgrim is one who follows a direct and purposeful path, aspiring to the sacred: "Pilgrimage symbolizes the journey back to Paradise or to the Centre; man, as a stranger in the world of manifestation, journeys back to his true home. All pilgrimage is made difficult, symbolizing the difficulty of regaining Paradise or finding spiritual enlightenment," (Endnote 24).

This description fits Anna Kornelsen most clearly. Her longing for home, in both her dreams, can be understood both literally and metaphorically. It was natural for her to miss South Russia. On an individual psychological level, the desire to find home is also the desire to find an answer to the existential question, "Who am I?" The answer is expressed in terms of connections to family members—so the true self is defined more by relatedness than individuality.

Nevertheless, there is a persistent awareness of the self being individual and solitary, as well. In one of her dreams, Anna Kornelsen wonders why she is destined to "cross this large sea alone"; in the other, she is aware of being different from the others she sees, and the vision of Jesus on the cross is given to her alone, (Endnote 25).

Dreams often express ideas or events through puns, proverbs, and popular sayings. An example

is Matthew 7: 14: "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." This verse, closely related to the idea of life as a pilgrim journey, was a favourite of the KG. It is echoed in these dreams: The anonymous dreamer is on a railroad track, straight and narrow; Maria Enns must get into her brother's room through a single doorway; Anna Kornelsen finds that, as she wades into the wide sea, "its waters were becoming narrower and shallower"; Agatha Friesen dreams of walking on "a narrow path."

#### Family.

Family was of central importance to the entire KG, but especially to women. It is Maria Enns and Anna Kornelsen who dream of families. Maria becomes involved in a "life and death" conversation with her brother, while Anna first sees siblings moving away from her, and then her mother leading her. In the dreams of both women there is a deep sadness connected to the possibility of abandonment by family members. In a tightly knit community, one's sense of physical and emotional safety would naturally depend on the proximity of family.

Maria's dream begins with her and unnamed others, perhaps her husband and children, walking together. Their destination is Steinbach, Maria's first home in North America, and the present home of her parents and siblings. A part of her seems to seek connection with this home. Steinbach could symbolize family or community, and the mix of loyalty, love, and conflict that these involve.

The village is almost unrecognizable, so that Maria can hardly find her way to her brother's house. In some way she is estranged from her home--she has a feeling of losing her direction. Home is no longer home, now that she is in Nebraska, in the midst of forming an association with the Krimmer group. Can she maintain ties with the rest of her family who remain with the KG?

In her letter Maria writes of trying to restrain her tears; in the dream, in the person of her sister Agatha, tears flow freely. Agatha is doubled up with sorrow, so absorbed with her emotion that she does not look up. Caught between her new loyalty to the Krimmer Gemeinde and her old one to her family, Maria may have found it difficult to disclose her sadness openly. She distances her grief, even in the relatively permissive environment of the dream, by projecting it onto her sister.

The object of this grief is Maria's brother. The image of Gerhard, very sick, distressed and pitiful, lying in bed and covered with a white sheet, resonates in many ways. The white sheet is like a shroud, as though in one way Maria's dream consciousness is saying that Gerhard is already dead. The dream-figure Gerhard's sickness of course corresponds to the real Gerhard's real illness. It may, as well, reflect her fear that some part of her will die if she leaves her original belief community.

In Anna Kornelsen's dreams, which were in some way prompted by the loss of her husband, emotion is more muted. But there is great

poignance in the image of Anna left standing alone on the shore, gazing longingly after her family members. Her unconscious raises the fear of having the family connection broken, and of being left behind, abandoned. As adults, we generally submerge our awareness of the fear of abandonment, which plays such a large part in our lives when we are children. Anna's dream expresses this primal fear.

#### Dreams as prophetic.

Anna Barkman's diary entry suggests that the KG members expected that, as in the Bible, their dreams could be prophetic: "With that, I woke. Well, it was true, my mother has truly gone ahead of me [she died in 1910 at the age of 77]. She was still living at the time I had this dream. Would that I, too, might safely cross this sea of sorrows and reach my eternal home, where no worries and sins will ever beset me."

"Today, on April 23, 1934, I want to add something to this account. This dream has already been partly fulfilled. Auntie Peter Barkman was still living then; now she has left me, and let us hope that she is now in that eternal rest. Lena, my daughter, has also left me; she no longer wants to walk together with me on the way to heaven...."

Anna's affirmation of the predictive powers of her dreams is perhaps over-generous. The likelihood of her mother "going before" her was naturally much greater than of the reverse. Her mother died in 1910, about 24 years after Anna had the dream. "Auntie Peter Barkman" died in 1911. While the date of the second dream cannot be exactly fixed, Anna connects the dream with the difficult period following her husband's death in 1896, so it, too, probably occurred long before the death of her aunt. As for her daughter "leaving" her, i.e., not staying with the Gemeinde, that situation changed for the positive, some time after the diary entry.

More remarkable than the questionable predictiveness of Anna's dreams is her belief that dreams are not random, but in fact fit into the larger meaning pattern in a person's life. That pattern was seen as ordained by a loving Creator. The Gemeinde struggled to balance another aspect of looking to the future, i.e., the question of what happened to the souls of deceased love ones. Anna's "hope" that her aunt is enjoying eternal rest is consistent with the Gemeinde's general approach to this problem: hope and expectation could be stated, but certainty could not. Yet, at the end of the "sea of sorrows" dream, Anna looks back across the waters and declares, unequivocally: "There, that's done; never again do I have to cross over." She seems certain of her connection with others, and with God.

Maria Enns, on the other hand, did not want her dream to be prophetic, but feared it might be. She asks Gerhard if he is very sick, to which he answers, in a loud, yet subdued voice, "Yes, I shall die soon, which I am glad to do, but I cannot yet." As it happened, Gerhard survived his illness and lived to be 75 after a life of teaching and community service in the KG.

Agatha Friesen, by comparison, awoke with a scream and interpreted her dream to mean she would soon die. The following evening, with the

same suddenness as in her dream, "she was just eating a fork full of noodles when she collapsed and died"--probably of a stroke, given the fact that she had high blood pressure. The dream's prophetic power is startling, both in the fact that Agatha's death occurred so soon after the dream, and that she "collapsed," just like the bridge in the dream.

#### "Strategy" of dream accounts

In five of the seven dreams we have considered, the individual recorded the dream, and then shared this record with others, suggesting a more-or-less intentional strategy on the dreamer's part.. In the "tobacco" dreams discussed earlier, the purpose is moral, to persuade the audience of the evils of smoking. An attempt to persuade is also apparent in the dreams of Aeltester Abraham Friesen, Maria K. Enns, Jacob Kroeker, and Anna Kornelsen.

Aeltester Friesen's dream account appeared originally in the body of "An Epistle to the Brothers and Sisters, 1820," which was published by his grandson Ältester Abraham L. Friesen, Jansen, Nebraska, in 1901 along with another letter in Ohrloff under the title "Eine kurze Beschreibung." The letter is a declaration explaining why he had left the Molotschna Flemish Gemeinde and joined the KG. To Friesen, the dream was worth recording because of the spiritual lesson it contained. "Usually I do not care much for dreams," he comments, "but this one did not leave my thoughts. It always seems to me that one must work for salvation with a similar earnestness and firm clinging." (Endnote 26)

Friesen was responding to a situation of moral laxness in the Molotschna. He well knew the pleasures of dancing, wearing fine clothes, and smoking tobacco and was concerned that his audience should come to take their spiritual lives more seriously, as he had done. Lest anyone mistakenly think that he is claiming special spiritual certainty, he adds, "Yet, I will not conclude this from my dream, rather I have based this upon what Paul says: 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling.'" (Endnote 27). The dream and Scripture were aligned in the common purpose of bringing people to the conviction that they had to change their lives.

Maria Enns' motive in including her dream in the letter to her family in Manitoba is somewhat ambiguous. She is genuinely concerned for her brother's health, but also tries to seize the moment to persuade him to change his beliefs. In her letter she writes: "In this desolate time, there is no true friend, no steadfastness nor certainties. Everything is perishable, only eternity remains for always, forever and forever. If only we might come to the right. How terrible to be on the left side [of God]. For my part, I must confess that I still cannot say from my heart, "Come, Lord Jesus, I am ready." This occasions a great earnestness in me. It is only of pure grace and compassion, because of our own strength we are nothing. If we could only sincerely immerse ourselves in the wounds of Jesus [an allusion to KMB baptism by immersion?], and submit ourselves to him; for God certainly does not desire the death of the sinner. Oh, dear brother, I have

been so deeply anxious for you," (Endnote 28).

Gerhard's physical illness gave Maria the opportunity to introduce the subject of spiritual well-being. The association of physical and spiritual was normative for the Mennonites of that era. Their correspondence often contains some statement along the lines of enjoying good physical health while admitting that the same claim cannot be made for spiritual well-being, (Endnote 29). Usually it is the letter-writer who expresses this idea in relation to himself, not commenting on the spiritual affairs of the recipient.

Maria at first follows this script in confessing that, for her part, she "cannot say 'Come, Lord Jesus, I am ready.'" Then she strays from it in making Gerhard her main focus. She projects her spiritual anxiety and tries to exert pressure on him to change his beliefs by hinting that his eternal soul may be endangered.

Minister Jacob Kroeker's account of the dream of himself and Bishop Peter Toews is found in his memoirs, or "Denkschriften," dated 1912. His memoirs would have been intended for his descendants, and perhaps for a wider audience of friends and those who knew him as a minister. As a postscript to the dream, he wrote: "Although I usually do not consider dreams very important, this one was very meaningful to me [for it showed me] that I had put too much faith in people." In this respect the dream is a warning to whoever had an ear to hear, about the necessity for watchfulness, the importance of not being naive in one's dealings with one's fellow man. Perhaps the dream reflected increased wariness within the KG toward the possibility of betrayal even from those in the highest authority. They had experienced a terrible loss, and a profound betrayal. Their leader had abandoned them. The split divided families. It caused members to question their basic beliefs, even those concerning the destiny of their eternal souls.

Anna Kornelsen wrote down her dreams in her diary in 1934, though she had dreamed them as much as 48 years previously. She writes: "These dreams are as clear in my mind as though I had dreamt them last night. As a rule, I do not attach much significance to dreams, but these were so remarkable and vivid that I have recorded them years after I dreamt them." Ordinarily dreams vanish like vapour at first waking; the lasting clarity of Anna's dreams shows that they embodied themes of central importance in her life.

It was very common for the pioneer generation Mennonites to keep diaries. For the most part, these accounts were impersonal, noting farm activities, market prices, the weather. They were "constructed by ordinary people in their everyday lives to make sense of life" (Endnote 30). Presumably, in Anna's case, their main intended audience was her family, including her descendants. Her strategy is best understood as motivated by the desire to send cautionary, inspiring messages to the next generation about spiritual struggle. Anna herself interprets her "mountain" dream in such terms: "I thought to myself; that is how difficult it will be (for the flesh) to walk the pathway to heaven. The only way for us to get there will be through much prayer. But the climbing seems so difficult for us; we always desire to

walk a smooth, comfortable path. Oh, my dear children, let us all climb! This will mean earnest prayer, and living a Godly life so that we will all eventually get up that mountain to our heavenly home, where we shall all be rewarded."

### Old Colony dreamers

A quick glance at a few dreams of members of the Old Colony tradition reveals much that is similar to the content of the KG dreams. A subtle difference can also be noted, however. The Old Colony accounts, generally, seem more affirming of the dreamer, in that they offer greater certainty of salvation and a greater readiness to encounter the forces of darkness.

As a young man in Reinland, West Reserve in early pioneer days, circa 1876, Jakob Fehr (1859-1952) dreamed that a recently deceased friend came down from heaven on one of two "white streams." His friend spoke and said, "I have come to tell you that one of these streams is also equally yours and upon it you too will some time ascend into heaven." Fehr thought this meant he would die soon.

Around 1885, Reinland Äeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) experienced a dramatic spiritual crisis in response to three Mennonite "evangelists" who attempted to persuade the Reinländer Gemeinde that they were in need of conversion. Wiebe found himself wrestling with Satan one night and saw something like a dream vision: "The devil manifested himself free and openly in his terrifying form, and when he drew near unto him with widely-stretched jaws and talons, the fear in his heart was unimaginable. He could no longer see any hope or alternative whereby to escape and flee from Satan. The thought came to him, 'Now God has yielded me up to Satan, he is taking me alive, along with him into the abyss.'

At the moment he "yielded" to Satan, Wiebe found that "the spirit of comfort was again imparted unto his heart."

Jakob D. Wiebe (1865-1938), son of the renowned Chortitzer Äeltester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), was the owner of the first general store in the village of Chortitz. He recorded three "bad" dreams in his journal. These are presented in the form of dialogues in hell between Satan and his spirits. The subject of these dialogues is the dreamer himself. He is the witness to discussions about his behaviour and the fate of his soul, somewhat similar to the literary device employed by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol* when Scrooge is shown the course of his life by a series of ghosts.

In the first dream a demon reports contritely to Satan that he has been unable to prevent Wiebe from attending gatherings "of those who honour Jesus." Enraged, Satan gives the demon 12 months to come up with a "better" report. Wiebe awakens, prays, falls asleep again.

A year seems to have passed by and again he is an observer of an assembly in hell. The demon assigned to him has a more "favourable" report this time--that Wiebe has been finding mistakes in others and lost his "first love" (apparently his first loyalty to his Gemeinde). In the third dream the demon reports to Satan that the dreamer, blinded with self-love, has lost his zeal for winning souls, forsaken his fellowship, and gotten

involved in "peculiar teachings." He has become interested in "community activities which provide more honour for him." A deafening shout of triumph goes up from the demon assembly who consider his soul as now belonging to them. The dreamer awakens again. Desperate with fear, he spends the rest of the night on his knees in prayer, until he regains his sense of peace.

The "three bad dreams" are not to be understood as actual dreams; they belong to the allegorical tradition discussed earlier. Clearly, this tradition was shared by Mennonite confessions other than the KG.

The style is similar to that of the anti-smoking dream copied into his journal by Abram S. Friesen. The values defended in the "three bad dreams"--faithfulness to "the small, persecuted flock of Jesus' disciples," brotherly love, humility--are all consistent with those emphasized in the KG.

The emphasis in Wiebe's account on soul-winning and conducting "services where many are saved" is something of an anomaly, as this language would seem closer to that of more evangelical groups such as the Bruderthalers.

Jakob Wiebe also wrote a kind of autobiography in allegorical form, beginning in 1876, when he was 11. His narrative combines elements of the story of the prodigal son in the Bible, and of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. Wiebe even quotes Bunyan. Like the KG writers, he envisions life as a pilgrimage, and the entry into eternal life as a narrow gate.

Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929), a Bergthalter who settled in Schönthal, East Reserve and later Sommerfeld, West Reserve, where he eventually became the hardworking and popular Ältester of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, recorded another dream which seems to belong to the allegorical tradition. It is highly doubtful that an actual dream would be so coherent. He had been thinking, with some satisfaction, about the way in which his work as bishop had been successful, despite his being quite exhausted.

In the dream, a stranger came into the room and asked, "How is the state of the endeavour?" Doerksen took his "endeavour" out of his own bosom and the stranger took it and weighed it--it was 100 pounds. Through a chemical process the stranger divided the endeavour into layers, made notes on a piece of paper, and gave it to Doerksen. The notes contained categories such as "fanaticism," "ambition," "love for monetary gain," and, finally, "love for God." The weight of the negative qualities was much greater than those of the positive. Abraham was thrown into despair at this assessment and cried out, "Oh Lord, save me." He concluded, when he awoke, that he needed to pray to be saved from his own ego. He followed the wisdom of the dream, and was, as it were, saved from himself.

There is more commonality than difference in the dream content and rhetorical style of the KG and Old Colony dream literature, suggesting a broader concept of "Flemish Mennonite dream culture." The attitude of "fear and trembling" promoted in the Jakob Wiebe account is very much akin to that found in some of the KG writers, as is his use of allegory.

Yet there are some significant distinctions.

The friend in Jakob Fehr's dream actually descends from heaven, and the dream's other "white stream" suggests that heaven will also be the eternal home of the dreamer. Such assurance is almost absent from the KG dreams. Johann Wiebe's vision and Bishop Doerksen's dream contain a piece of psychological and spiritual wisdom not expressed so clearly in any of the KG dreamers' narratives. That is, the container of the ego must be shattered before true humility and wholeness can be achieved.

Johann Wiebe's vision dramatically illustrates a kind of letting go, letting yourself fall even into the jaws of the devil. The results, astonishingly, are liberating.

### Endnotes:

1. Abraham L. Friesen, in *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1874* (Steinbach, 1993), p. 688. Presented to the KG in Manitoba in February 1882.
2. Clarence Hiebert, "The Holdeman Attraction," in *Leaders*, p. 922.
3. Royden Loewen, *Family, Church, and Market: A Mennonite Community in the Old and the New Worlds, 1850-1930* (Toronto, 1993), p. 175.
4. In Plett, *Leaders*, p. 238.
5. Klaas E. Reimer, letter, July 10, 1830, in *Leaders*, p. 171.
6. In *Leaders*, p. 559.
7. Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims* (Steinbach, 1990), p. 159.
8. Delbert Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America* (Steinbach, 2000), p. 122.
9. Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pp. 86-7.
10. See Plett, *Dynasties*, p. 161.
11. Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market*, p. 179.
12. Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, p. 140.
13. Anna Barkman Kornelsen, "Journal," in *Preservings*, June, 1997, part 2, p. 6. Anna's second dream is also published in the same article.
14. In Plett, *Dynasties*, p. 636.
15. J.C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 176.
16. *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, p. 188.
17. Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p 124.
18. In Plett, *Leaders*, p. 650 and p. 664. My italics.
19. In Plett, *Leaders*, p. 283.
20. Klaas Reimer, in *Leaders*, p. 180.
21. Robert Friedmann, quoted in Plett, *The Golden Years* (Steinbach, 1985) pp. 69-70.
22. Perhaps it was a forerunner to John Bunyan's famous allegory, *Pilgrims' Progress* first published in 1678, and incidentally subtitled "In the Similitude of a Dream."
23. In *Leaders*, p. 788.
24. *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, p. 130.
25. There is not room here to compare the idea of a psychological and spiritual home as it appears in these dreams, to the *Heimweh* so beloved by Jung-Stilling and the Pietists. Given the importance of the Pietistic influence on the Mennonites, it would be a connection worth exploring.
26. In Plett, *Leaders*, p. 239.
27. There seems to have been a particular meaning in the KG attached to "fear and trembling" (*Furcht und Zittern*, in German). Paul's phrase in Philippians 2:13. It is related to the KG emphasis on humility, and abhorrence of the arrogance implicit in being certain about one's personal salvation.
28. Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pp. 86-7.
29. E.g., a typical statement from Heinrich Reimer (1791-1884) of Muntau, Molotschna Colony, in an 1869 letter to Bishop Peter P. Toews: "Physically we are quite well...but our spiritual condition is very poor..." In Plett, *Leaders*, p. 643.
30. Royden Loewen, *From the Inside Out: The Rural Worlds of Mennonite Diarists 1863-1929* (Winnipeg, 1999), p. 20.
31. Jakob Fehr, "Journal," *Preservings*, No. 16, p. 17.
32. Johann Wiebe, "Wrestling Satan," *Preservings*, No. 16, p. 21.

# Old Colony Mennonite Samplers

"Old Colony Mennonite Samplers," by Betty Unger, Box 121, Crystal City, Manitoba, R0K 0N0.

## Background.

The term 'sampler' comes from the Latin meaning, an example to be followed. It is believed that early samplers were sewn mainly by women rather than by young girls, as were those of a later date. From the mid-18th century, it became more common for young girls to work samplers as part of their education, of which needle-work formed a major part. These samplers began to take on the form best known with decorative borders, alphabets, motifs such as animals, birds, flowers and houses, and very often had some kind of verse.

Samplers of today have become more pictorial and have become decorative articles to be hung by proud parents on the walls of their homes. As the design became more elaborate the number of stitches used was reduced, until generally only one stitch remained in use thus ending up with cross-stitch samplers so well known today. The beauty of samplers is held in the fact that each one will be totally unique--you will not find one that is totally the same.

During the 19th century, samplers became an important part of the school curriculum, young girls were encouraged to stitch to prepare themselves for their role as wives to be. These samplers tended to be simpler, usually having alphabets, nu-

merals, their names and dates, and the name of their school. The age of the stitchers ranged from as young as six to about the age of 15 years. The average age is 11.

## Mennonite Samplers.

One of the earlier Mennonite samplers is the Maria Hiebert (1842-91) sampler of 1858. Maria Hiebert, later Mrs. Peter Bergen (1838-1911), originated in the Berghthal Colony, Imperial Russia, BGB B205. The family immigrated to Manitoba in 1874 and by 1881 were resident in the village of Sommerfeld, West Reserve, BGB 367-87 (see report by Peter Bergen, "Maria Hiebert's Sampler of 1858," *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, page 63).

Below are examples of samplers done by Mennonite girls in Manitoba. None are dated

and only one has the artist's name (Agatha Ens). All have some of the characteristics as described above, all are cross-stitched. These pieces of work had dual functions. They were used as educational exercises, as well as artistic expressions. Some Mennonites referred to such work as "Kunst Stuecke" (art pieces). The Ens/Penner/Rempel examples below come from Old Colony/Fürstenland backgrounds while the Hiebert sampler has Berghthal roots. Did the girls from all Mennonite groups engage in such lovely artistic activities?

## Hiebert Sampler.

This sampler was made by Betty's grandmother Katharina Hiebert born January 10, 1890 daughter of Diedrich Hiebert and Elisabeth Penner of Schönwiese, West Reserve. She did not make this sample at school as was suggested earlier but at home in the evenings by candle-light. She apparently began working on this at the age of seven. Katherine married Abram N. Friesen and resided in Reinland.

Katharina made two smaller ones, which are damaged and belong to Betty. The illustrated sampler is in the possession of granddaughter Janice Friesen Tiessen of Winkler--a sister to Betty.

## Penner/Rempel Sampler.

This sampler was found among the possessions of Henry's late Aunt Margaretha Penner Friesen (Margaretha married Abram Friesen of Niverville), but we are not sure if she or her mother made it because it is not dated. Margaretha was born in 1897 and Henry's grandmother Susanna Rempel in 1878. Susanna was the daughter of Franz Rempel and Eva Neufeld who homesteaded in Reinland in 1876.



Penner/Rempel sampler.



Hiebert sampler.



Sampler by Agatha Ens de Rempel, dated 1909. Except as noted, photographs for this article are courtesy of the author Betty Unger, Crystal City, Manitoba.



*Agatha Enns (1896-1973) who stitched the 1909 sampler and husband Gerhard J. Rempel relax in the Grotte stoave, 1935. The family lived in Blumenort, Manitoba Colony, Mexico, where Gerhard served for many years as Vorsteher of the Colony. Agatha became an influential matriarch of a prominent family. Photo courtesy of 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), page 163. See also George E. Rempel, Rempel Family Book (Altona, 2000), pages 337-338. Agatha's sons include Peter Rempel, well-known businessman and promoter of community projects such as the highly successful Mexican Mennonite Credit Union and the Museum, see Pres., No. 11, page 23.*

Margaretha was the daughter of David Penner and Susanna Rempel. According to Rachael Panabecher, curator of the Kaufmann Museum, Newton, Kansas, this piece of work was done prior to 1900 because of the design of the pattern used. She suggests that the patterns are very Germanic in style. She felt that it might in fact be older than thought. The pattern may have been handed to the next generation. This sampler would have been made at home by either Susanna or Margaretha.. We think that Henry's grandmother made it. Now it hangs on a wall in our house.

#### **Ens Sampler.**

This sampler was cross-stitched by Agatha Ens born 1896. It would have been done prior to 1909 when she reached her 13th birthday. The sampler identifies that it was done in the village of Blumenort, West Reserve. The photograph comes from Agatha's daughter Helena Rempel Heide of Blumenort, Mexico--she is the wife of the late Klaas Heide, grandson of delegate Klaas Heide (see article by Sally Harms in Old Colony, Mennonites in Canada 1875-2000, edited by D Plett).

Agatha Ens married Gerhard Rempel and was the daughter of Abram Ens and Elisabeth Redekopp of Blumenort.

#### **Conclusion.**

This article is part of a presentation by Betty Unger at the West Reserve workshop in Altona, spring of 2001. Does anyone have more information or examples of samplers? Please contact Betty Unger at 204 873 2678--she is continuing research on this topic.

#### **References.**

See "Book Launch April 28, 2001, Altona," in *Preservings*, No. 18, pages 64-65, for report



*David Penner (b. 1875 in Hochfeld, near Steinbach) and Susanna Rempel (b. 1878). Susanna Rempel was the daughter of Franz Rempel and Eva (Neufeld) Rempel of Reinland and later Plum Coulee. The David Penner family came from Bergthal while the Franz Rempels came from Fürstenland. We believe the sampler was done by Susanna. David and Susanna are the maternal grandparents of Henry Unger. See John Dyck, editor, Three Hundred Years: Penner (Winnipeg, 1996), pages 37-43.*



*Abram N. Friesen (b. 1886) and Katharina Hiebert (b. 1890), maternal grandparents of Betty Unger. Abram and Katharina lived at Glen Cross and Osterwick, before settling in Reinland, West Reserve. Katharina's family came from the Bergthal Colony. Abram Friesen was a descendant of Jakob Friesen (1819-62), see Pres., No. 11, page 36.*

and photographs of Betty Unger's presentation on "Old Colony Material Culture," from which the above report is taken.



*Eva (b. 1897) and Margaretha (b. 1898) Penner. They were the oldest two daughters of David and Susanna Rempel Penner. Eva married the widower Jakob Friesen of Niverville, and Margaretha married Jakob's brother Abram. Abram and Eva lived in Niverville and Jakob and Eva on their farm in the area. The sampler was found among Margaretha's belongings.*

# Kleine Gemeinde Schools in Mexico

Writings regarding the Kleine Gemeinde school system in Mexico and the founding and origins of the Centro Escolar Evangelico publishing ministry, Quellen Colony, Jagueyes, Mexico.

## Introduction 1974.

The first teacher election on the newly established Quellen Colony near Cuauhtemoc, Mexico (currently referred to as "Jagueyes"), was held at a Kleine Gemeinde brotherhood meeting on December 26, 1948. The vote fell on brother Henry D. Friesen. The next election called on Peter R.E. Reimer. Brother Henry C. Penner got the responsibility for the first school library, in order to find suitable school books.

On January 5, 1949, two more teachers were elected: Peter F. Dueck and Johan I. Dueck. The first collection (levy) of funds for school expenses were 10 cents per acre of land, and \$30.00 per student ages 7 to 13 years. Teachers wages started at \$150.00 per month. (The US Dollar was at \$6.80 peso in those years). Initially 50 school benches were made. To construct school buildings, 15 cents per acre was collected.

The following information was taken out of the protocols of Ältester Peter P. Reimer (1877-1949). The first school was built in Camp 301 (Talheim), 1949. The teacher was Henry P. Friesen. The second school came to be built in Eichenbach, Camp 306, in 1950. The school in Campo 77 was built later in 1965. The new two-room school in Ebenfeld was constructed last of all in 1968. Not wanting to have too many students in one classroom, there was eventually more than one classroom per village. Currently (1974) we teach in three two-room schools and in five single classrooms. Teachers wages have increased to 1400.00 pesos per month.

The school issue was one of the more important reasons for moving from Canada. The schools were taken out of our hands. Teaching in religion and in the German language was becoming very limited. Curriculum was developed and implemented by the Provincial Government. There was very little emphasis on God's word and certainly not on our teachings.

Not many trained school teachers moved with us to Mexico, and so the change seemed rather sudden and drastic. The men were all busy pioneering and working for survival, so the schools suffered greatly in the first years. In order to get schools started, several young women like Helena J. Thiessen, Anna D. Dueck, Maria B. Loewen, Elizabeth R. Friesen and Mrs. Albert Plett did their best in teaching for small groups of children. They were especially involved in the Christmas programs with songs and poems which they taught the children.

Presently some books came out making it easier to teach. Several brethren had more knowledge of the German language. Soon there were some younger brethren who took the call to work with curriculum development. At the same time it was difficult for teachers, as they had to prepare many lessons themselves. Access to teaching books and aids was still limited.

Teachers met regularly, and thus got arithmetic books compiled and printed. Textbooks like bible stories, testament, catechism, readers and gram-

mar books were purchased. Later on more books were compiled and others purchased like song books, geography, first aid books, etc.

As already mentioned, the first school building was constructed in 1949 and within a short time a nice school building was standing in every village. In these beginning years, teachers visited each other's schools frequently (Prufungen). School conferences were also held regularly a few times each year. The intention and goal was to improve proficiency and to ensure equal quality. Those were critical but positive meetings. By 1974 there were 296 students and 11 teachers.

**By Jacob U. Kornelsen, Quellen Colony, Mexico, 1974.**

## German Curriculum 1948-97.

One of the major changes the Kleine Gemeinde

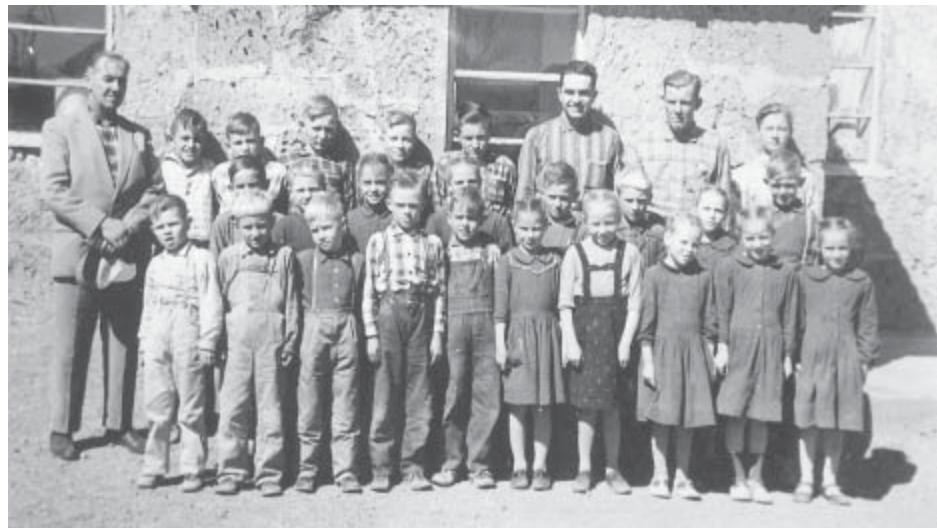
Church had to go through, was its relocation from Manitoba, Canada, to Chihuahua, Mexico, in 1948. In the "old" country the schools since the abolition of Mennonite confessional schools in 1919 had mostly been in the English language. The Christian denominational schools were forcibly replaced with government run public schools. The stated intention was to Anglicize and assimilate the young people.

In contrast Federal legislation in their new "homeland" of Mexico guaranteed the Mennonites the right to maintain and operate their own church schools.

There was a strong agreement in the Kleine Gemeinde about keeping the German language. But, in those years there was no complete German Mennonite curriculum the way the Kleine Gemeinde would have desired. This however, did



1995, Teachers' Training Course held in the dining hall/ conference room of the Ebenfeld worship house, Jagueyes. Lecturer Eddy K. Plett, School Administrator (Superintendent). Some 40 teachers took part in this week long refresher course held annually just before school opening in August. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 230.



A student group in Steinberg. John P. Plett is their teacher. School administrator Peter F. Dueck (left) has just inspected the school, early 1960s. The Steinberg school was the only one in Jagueyes to be built of stone. Steinberg was the Plett village and the village fathers evidently wanted the school to last. Builder - Abram R. Plett. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 223.

not keep our forefathers from being brave and founding a Christian school system for the future generations.

Beginners in school got the "Harold Fibel". For the following grades there were the New Testament and the Bible (Old Testament), which every Christian Mennonite young and old possessed. These books were used as readers. In addition, the Catechism played an important role in reading as well as in religious instruction.

After a few years, the schoolboard heard of an organization in Canada that would be able to provide a German reader series for the first six grades. It consisted of three volumes, being one for every two grades. These readers soon arrived and subsequently many residents of Quellen colony have learned and practised their reading out of these readers.

The first volume proved to be unsatisfactory for beginners. The problem was solved when a General Conference missionary couple in the neighbouring Santa Clara Colony, developed a reader for their own daughter. They made this reader available. With subsequent revisions, this reader has been used in the schools ever since. For the second Grade the "Dohrman Fibel" was found and came from Germany. Later when this was not available any longer, it was printed here and is still in use.

In the 1980s when the German readers from Canada had grown old and could not be replaced, there was a search for other readers required by Grades 3 and up. This time the development of a

completely new series seemed to be the solution. The task was completed in the early 1990s, with the assistance of the MCC. This series seemed superior to the previous ones as it also supplied workbooks and teacher's manuals. Most of this work was done in our own printshop (CEE) on the Quellen Colony. This series with complete workbooks is ready for use for Grades 1 through Grade 5. For higher grades books like "Die Pilgerreise" and "Der Fürst aus Davids Haus" are being used.

Provisions for arithmetic study were already made in Canada before moving. Mathematical material for Grades 3 to 5 was printed in German to taken along to Mexico. For the remaining grades, Mathematics books were put together as time went on. There were always capable brethren who took charge. In the course of years, these Arithmetic books seemed unsatisfactory, and the search for still better resources was begun. In the 1970s there were several brethren who arose and developed a math series for Grades 3 to 8. Kindergarten books were also prepared.

Other brethren took responsibility in subjects like geography. This resulted in the introduction of the Christian Light Publication (CLP) curriculum which has made geographical studies very complete (See *Preservings*, No. 18, page 63).

In grammar, the "Richard Lange" books were used throughout the years. Out of this came the new grammar series developed by Betty Plett, which is now available for Grades 1 to 7.

Music was considered an important element of education throughout the years. Songs had been collected in the early years and were brought together in a simple book called by its colour "Das Braune Buch" (the brown book), later called "Der Schulsanger". The Choral book was used daily in order to practice the melodies of the Church *Gesangbuch*. Other songbooks like "Liedersammlung" "Glaubenslieder" and others have been added as required.

The blue-coloured Calwer bible story book was used for German bible studies. Many students have received biblical understanding by studying this book and were thus able to continue on to other and higher levels. In the 1970s Pathway books were supplied for Bible studies in schools. Soon thereafter, the introduction of the CLP curriculum made Bible studies a very complete subject.

**By Arden Dueck – July 1997.**

#### Quellen Colony Schools.

Maintaining our own Christian schools has been a high priority of our Mennonite people. This was one of the main reasons for moving from Russia to Canada in 1874 and again in 1948 from Canada to Mexico.

When our grandparents moved to Mexico in 1948 they had a good understanding about education, although different from that of today. e.g. That our schools should be conducted solely in the German language and other similar matters more. For this reason our schools have gone through weak and primitive times. But God be thanked, there have always been those brethren who recognized the need for improvement of our schools. Through their steadfast courage and exertion it has been possible to make great advancements in our school system, by means of setting long term goals, which were then pursued.

One such goal which was established in 1994, was the so-called "Greater School Vision," which stated as follows: "In nine school years our students shall have fulfilled the requirements of our State secondary education and in addition shall master the three critical languages of Quellen Colony being Spanish, German and English. Other than our everyday Plaut-deutsch, these three languages are seen as highly important for our people.

Our school system has greatly improved. Firstly, our teachers are given the opportunity to participate in teacher training courses that are provided every year (see *Preservings*, No. 17, page 84). Secondly, our schools have adopted a complete curriculum from Mennonites in the USA, the Christian Light Publications (CLP) program, providing a complete instruction in geography, science, history, language and the Bible. This material provides a sound instruction in these subjects. Indeed, all facets are in resonance with the Mennonite faith, and the material is presented in such a way that the teacher and student, through self-instruction, can prepare themselves, as the demand for trained teachers is definitely increasing.

The educational system has greatly improved as aforesaid, and because of the reason that many more of our Mennonite co-confessionists in various Colonies have recognized the necessity that the schools for their children must be improved, there has, as such, always been more demand for



A historical picture. First school building in Ebenfeld, Jagueyes, Mexico. 1957. A large vibrant village has sprung up in the open field around the school house. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 226.



The Evangelical School Center (Centro Escolar Evangelico), Quellen Colony, Jagueyes, Mexico, built in 1993. Photo by Eddy and Betty K. Plett, courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 236.

German teaching materials. As a result the need arose to establish a educational center and school printshop which became a reality in 1993.

The founding of the “Centro Escolar Evangelico” (Evangelical School Centre) (CEE), and the advancements to the school system, in turn, resulted in the consequences that the improvements and demands became ever stronger. The school material that is being developed here is currently being used by Mennonites, Hutterites, and many friends from other Colonies in Mexico, several Canadian Provinces, the U.S.A., Belize, Bolivia, Paraguay and Germany.



A graduation celebration 1997. Typing students demonstrate their skills as parents show their interest and inspect the work. The event is held at the close of every school year and is modelled to some extent on the traditional “Prufungen”. At the end of the table (left) is Gemeinde leader (Ältester) Menno Loewen, behind him is school board chairman Corny D. Kornelsen. Students, from the front, l.-r. are: Trudy K. Dueck, Rhonda L. Plett, Glen R. Reimer and Lloyd P. Wiebe. Right, Lorna U. Fehr, Monica L. Heide, Sandra F. Dueck and Nancy K. Dueck. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 232.



The retail store of the CEE was filled to overflowing with customers during the special “book appreciation evening” held June 18, 1996 to promote literacy and devotional and educational literature. A special discount encourages residents to purchase wholesome reading material for family and home. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 239.

Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE) produces German material for subjects such as reading, mathematics, Bible, Science and Social Studies. The work and progress in the various subjects has advanced to different stages, but with the help of the Lord, it is going forward. In addition, Centro Escolar Evangelico is also printing Sunday School material and a monthly School newsletter called “Nachrichten aus dem Schulzentrum” (“News from the Educational Centre”).

The main reason for all of this is to teach our children that God is the creator of all and He alone deserves all honor and glory. Further, it is our

desire that our children shall grow up as useful and pious people, who will be of service to their Church and community.

**By Eddy K. Plett, Juguayes, Mexico. June 1997, updated May 2000.**

#### **Centro Escolar Evangelico.**

It was not just the land and people that were strange to our settlers in 1948. Our schools also had to survive some rather harsh pioneering years. This came out of the need for teaching materials which now again needed to be available in German. Such material had to be purchased or developed and paid for.

Brother Henry C. Penner was the first one to receive the task of looking for appropriate schoolbooks. A proposal was also made to gather in the necessary funds.

Among those who put a lot of effort into developing school materials in the early years were brethren like Peter F. Dueck, Hans P. Plett, Albert P. Plett and Menno B. Dueck. In the beginning of the 1960s when Menno B. Dueck was the Colony Secretary (Administrator), it so happened that he also was a member of the School Committee (School Board).

Since he now had the responsibility of providing for teaching materials and simultaneously administered the Colony’s finances, a small trade with paper and teaching supplies came into being almost spontaneously. This small book store eventually developed into the “Centro Escolar Evangelico”.

During this time a “Gestetner” was purchased and more and more text material and work books provided for use in the schools. In 1982 the first photocopier was set up. In May 1988 this little printshop was relocated to the home of Milton Reimers. This business grew, as more equipment were acquired.

The lack of space became more and more pressing while at the same time the large project of printing a new series of German readers was undertaken. These two reasons together with other circumstances motivated the responsible brethren to develop a plan for a special building for this purpose in 1993 which lead to the erection of the present day “School Center Building”.

Since teaching material was being used by ever more German-speaking schools, and more books were being developed, even this building built especially for this purpose was found to be too small in only a few years. One part of this building also contained the offices of the Quellen Colony administration. After five years of blessed work here a decision was made in 1998 to build an addition to the building in order to increase it to more than double in size.

**“The story of the Centro Escolar Evangelico,” adapted from *Quellen Colony picture book (Juguayes, 1998)*, page 236.**

#### **CEE Articles of Regulation.**

Centro Escolar Evangelico is a facility of Quellen Colony with the mission of providing edifying Christian teaching material for Mennonite schools, Sunday Schools and families. Included are responsibilities for development, translation and printing of such material. By means of a

bookstore, library and book loans the Gemeinde and the general public shall also be given access to edifying publications from other publishers. In the fulfilment of further obligations, the schools and general public shall also be offered other services such as writing supplies, photocopying, computer facilities, telephone booths and telefax.

#### Mission.

The mission of the Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE) is to give schools, churches and families, services that will include teaching material of good quality and from an Anabaptist perspective. The content of these materials shall be linguistically, socially and geographically based on the needs of the Mennonite schools in Mexico. At the same time, however, it shall be recognized that such material shall be usable outside of Mexico as well.

In no case shall the Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE) become an end unto itself, rather much more, it shall be a vehicle for service: firstly, of the schools and sunday schools of the Quellen Colony; secondly, the schools of the Kleine Gemeinde in other colonies; thirdly, for education among Mennonites in general; and fourthly, to offer Christian educational facilities wherever a need arises.

#### School Books, 1999.

A new school book appeared in the Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE) in almost every week of 1999 - 48 books - in addition to the sunday school material, which is printed monthly, and also other books in between. Mostly this covers new materials but also includes revisions of existing materials. Most of the new publications appear in serialized format. These include Mathematics exercise books and workbooks for subjects such as Bible studies, nature and social studies, as well as answer books and teachers manuals for many volumes.

In addition to many schools in Mexico, Seminole, Texas, Paraguay, Belize and Bolivia, the schools of the Hutterites, and Old Colony Gemeinden in Canada are definitely making use of these publications. An increasing amount of material is also being sent to Germany where it is being used by parents who are homeschooling their children. One request was even received from Africa.

The mission of the Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE) is to provide Christian schools, families and Gemeinden, with sound teaching materials.

In order to get a regular update from Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE), the readers can subscribe to the "Nachrichten aus dem Schulzentrum" which are being published on almost a monthly basis. For more information, write Centro Escolar Evangelico (CEE), Jagueyes, Aptd 502, Cd. Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, 31500. From "Die Zeit," No. 1, April 2000.

#### A Teacher's Story.

"The Lord's ways are higher than our under-

standing." When we acknowledge Him in all our ways, the Lord will lead without any doubt. Maybe in a different way than what we thought, but always better than what we would do. Our experiences testifies of that.

We wanted to become missionaries. Our goals had been that all along before we ever got married.



*On May 16, 1997, the printery was honoured by a visit from Chihuahua State Governor C. P. Francisco Barrio and wife Hortencia (left), Governor's Aide and Eddy K. Plett, School Administrator, right. Rear: l.-r.: Klaas N. Fehr, Larry D. Kornelsen and Rev. Arden Dueck. The CEE was established to print educational and devotional literature. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 239. See also Pres., No. 11, page 22.*

We were going to participate in a Spanish Bible School. Wherever the Lord would lead we would follow.

Becoming a schoolteacher was not at all my primary goal. Participation in a teaching course provided by Harvey Barkman from Landmark, Manitoba, Canada, referred to as "Teaching Techniques", was highly interesting, but no further goals resulted.

Then came a year when I had a chance to attend Spanish classes. The Lord knows how to lead in His due time. And so Betty and I—not yet even officially engaged at the time—had the privilege of studying under the teachers C. Paul and Hildi Amstutz. Here I was able to make exceptional progress in the Spanish language. This was

super, not only in language, but also regarding my missionary outlook.

The Amstutes did not stay longer and the School Board had to continue looking. In the following year a Spanish primary course "Abierta" was introduced. I could not attend but studied at home. Wonderful. In the following year, through

the great exertion of the Spanish School Committee, a number of individuals also began to study the "Secondaria" (second level Spanish).

These studies helped me a great deal, firstly in the language, and further, in that I came to see myself more as a Mexican citizen. As a result I possibly never shared the experience of others taking the 500 Level CLE Social Studies Course, that they had become more patriotic or orientated to the U.S.A.

Further years passed by. I had wanted to see and experience some more things before I got married. One of these was a trip to Canada.

During this time, my fiance Betty Rempel decided to attend the Bible School at Km. 17. I firmly believe that thousands of Mennonite students have received a benefit of this experience among all the others she had there. God has given my wife, Betty, good talents in the German language and this course was able to awaken these gifts even further. She has been able to awaken the same interest in myself as well.

Betty's gifts in this, as well as the exertions which her school teachers had already made, namely weekly meetings in order to study the language, have made her into one of the reformers of German language instruction in the Quellen Colony and beyond over distant borders in Mexico and North and South America.

Presently we celebrated our wedding day. For a certain reason our honeymoon took us to Puerto Vallarta, that we wanted to obtain more information regarding a Bible School in Guadalajara. Unfortunately nothing would come of this. Why, is



*1997. Teacher Verna Kornelsen (Larry and Anna) with her Grade Two class in the new four classroom Ebenfeld school. Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 231.*

known only to the Lord.

Soon after our marriage, a call came to become teachers in the High School (Fortschungsschule) in the Swift Plan Colony. I knew that this could only happen if Betty would undertake to lead the German instruction, which was to be the main subject. This took place from January to May, 1996. She did the teaching and I was learning. Many old and worn out grammar rules, which my teachers had apparently never fully comprehended, suddenly became so alive that the German soon became a dearly beloved language.

Then came the clear and unequivocal call to teach at home on the Quellen Colony. In the preceding year a teacher had not worked out successfully. May God give healing and restoration to all! I was asked to fill this position. Certainly I would not be teaching were it not for my wife who was more of a teacher than I was. On top of it all, to start teaching at the 500 CLE level without ever having studied in the CLE program seemed quite daunting. But previous studies and particularly the "Abierta" course definitely helped a great deal.

Then came the teacher training school in the summer of 1986. The school included a course in German instruction. With the recently acquired knowledge it quickly became evident that the instruction was not competent though well intended. A teacher stood here before the class for whom much was uncertain and who was only able to bring forth little, and at best, only able to clarify one or two words for himself during the course of an entire class period. Language was poor. The German seemed very much self invented. This was untenable. We complained to the School Board. This had the consequences that we have been involved in many teacher training seminars since that time.

During the same teachers' training school, we also complained that the homemade teaching materials were so full of mistakes. Through the leadership of Menno Loewen, Betty immediately received the task of revising the Grade 3 German grammar book. This was the beginning of her multi-yeared work of developing grammar books.

Betty did the work and I got the praise. She received a good wage but everything was done under my name. Apparently it was too unusual, that a married woman would work in developing curriculum (my feelings). Her wages as a woman teacher were not even sufficient to buy herself a



1997. High School computer class, Eichenbach school. The students learn word processing, computer literary and computer applications (e.g. accounting). Students Gerry K. Kornelsen (left) and Trudie Dueck (right). Photo courtesy of Bilderbuch, page 236.

meal in the restaurant at Cornelius Friesens. David Plett found out about this one day and things quickly changed. Since that time we have always received more wages than we had earned.

This is how the years went by in that we taught, drove to Mexico City, took the SEAN course, held various positions, etc.

In 1992 the Lord called us to Lowe Farm [Manitoba Colony]. This was perhaps more an



Leslie Plett (left) and Eddy K. Plett, stand in the book store section of Centro Escolar. They are two of the leaders in the CEE program. Photo Oct. 2000 by D. Plett.

experience and blessing for us, than that a great deal was achieved there. It was a wonderful year, full of rich blessings.

But before we went, I felt a burden, namely, the setting of some goals for the Quellen Colony schools. Even with the recently adopted CLE teaching program we were still proceeding without

stated goals. These goals were later amended, improved and implemented, and unbelievable progress was made.

In this year I was called to sit on the Quellen Colony School Board. Since we had promised to live in Lowe Farm for one year and because I only had little work there, I translated "Towards better singing". At the request of the Lowe Farm School Board, the book "Richtlinien und Prinzipien unserer mehrsprachigen mennonitischen Schulen" was also produced.

During this year, Rosabel Fast was already working on the readers for the third to fifth grades. This project had already been given to us before we were in the committee.

For various reasons and through the Lord's leading the school printshop at Milton Reimers' was enlarged. Minister Menno Loewen and Vorsteher (Reeve) Cornie K. Plett among others were leading promoters. Centro Escolar Evangelico came into being. The more work that was done, the wider the horizon became. In the meantime, Centro Escolar Evangelico was serving thousands of children across South and North America and into Europe.

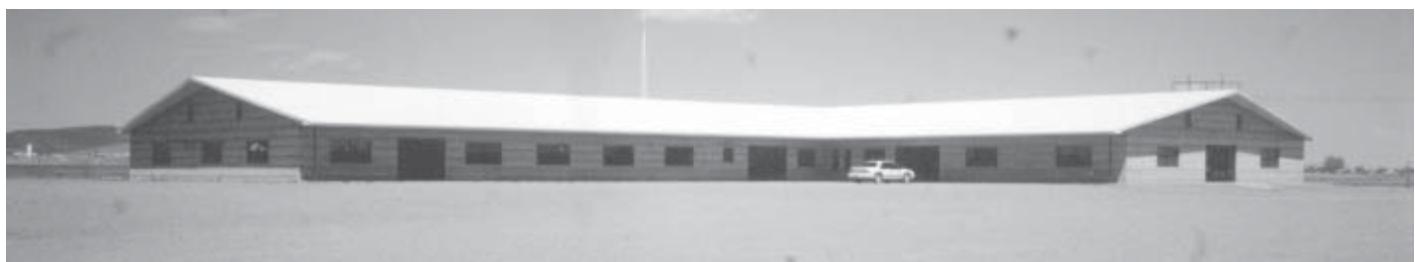
When I reflect over the widespread and growing work of Centro Escolar Evangelico, I am thankful for how the Lord has led us in His ways. Countless fellow workers and friends have become dear to us. We do not know whether the Lord may one day still lead us into a Spanish mission field. God knows, and His ways are righteous and pure goodness and blessing. We commit our ways unto Him, when we need to make decisions.

A special thanks go to Betty's parents. Time and money was never too precious when it came to school matters. Thanks also to my parents, the Quellen Colony schoolboard, of then and now, and the church ministerial, for having supported us in the ways of the Lord, whether by encouragement, financial help, or with humble understanding.

**"A Teacher's Story," by Eddy and Betty Plett – April 1998.**

#### For Further Reading:

Loewen, Dueck, Plett and Plett, editors, *Quellen Colony* (Jagueyes, 1998), Chapter 26, "Die Bildung in der Quelle," and Chapter 27, "Das Evangelische Schulzentrum," pages 221-239 (herein referenced as the "Bilderbuch").



The new (1998) 13 room Kleine Gemeinde school in Gnadenthal, adjacent to Casa Siemens on Four-lane Highway 28, north of Cuauhtemoc. The 20,000 square foot school is operated by the Lowe Farm Kleine Gemeinde. The school includes a large assembly hall and administrative offices. Photo - spring 2001, by Henry G. Ens, R.R. 1, Box 210, Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 4A1. See Pres., No. 13, page 56.

# The One-hand Clock in Orlovo, Siberia

The One-hand Clock in Orlovo, by Peter Penner, 20 Rundelawn Close, S.E., Calgary, T1Y 4A5 (justpen@shaw.ca).

## Introduction.

Your story "The Clock Keeps Ticking" (*Pres.*, No. 17, page 122), was prepared for publication about the same time I had a chance to photograph a similar clock still ticking in a very different place, in the home of Ivan A. Ewert, in Orloff (Orlovo), Altai Region, Western Siberia.

Some readers of *Preservings* will know about this as an area where Mennonites founded a colony in 1908 made up at first of 40 and later up to 70 villages in the prairie lands known collectively as the Kalunda steppe. They went there from Sagradowka, Kherson Province, Neu-Samara in the Volga region, and other areas of old Russia. At first this colony was named Barnaul after the site of the district administration of the day.

During my two month-stint as a Rotary Volunteer (doing English as a Second Language) in the city of Barnaul, I had the opportunity to visit Orloff, 400 kms to the west, and about 60 kms from Slavgorod. I was billeted for five days with Cornelius Berg in the village of Protassowo, about 15 kms from Orloff, my birthplace. He took me to visit Orloff's oldest resident, Ivan Ewert, 75 years, my own age.

## The Clock.

Ewert and Berg are seated in what every house, however humble, keeps as the living room. Though small, it had a settee, a woollen rug on the floor, another as a wall hanging, a cupboard for the good dishes and cutlery, and this one-hand clock. I did not vouch for its age or authenticity, except that it was a working clock that had come with the family to Orloff in those early days of pioneer serenity.



Noon meal prepared by Mrs. Ewert, October 23, 2000. Photos for this article are courtesy of the author Peter Penner, Calgary, Canada.



The Ewert house, Orlovo, Siberia, constructed in 1955.



Peter Penner (middle) with Barnaul Rotary Club hosts, Oleg and Ludmila Startsens, with certificates prepared for me for my work in Barnaul.



Ivan Alexanovich Ewert and Cornie Berg (ch) (right), in Orlovo, Slavgorod, Siberia. October 23, 2000.

## Soviet Gulag.

How different things were for those who stayed. Ivan Ewert's father was taken in the 1930s and Ivan spent the years 1943 to 1949 in the Gulag before being released (Note Two). He built this fairly typical house in 1955. Every other original village residence had been replaced either before or after the War.

In this house I was given a lunch made by Ewert's wife. She was camera-shy, but allowed me to take a picture of the table as set for lunch. What you see here is a soup, potatoes, two other vegetables, and the ever present staff of life, bread. All of this was served in dishes that came out of "dee Schrank", the cupboard in "dee groote Stow". This was her best china, even if none of the pieces formed a complete set. We spoke a mixture of Low German which I understand very well, and High German, in which I am more completely at home.

These two families, the Ewerts of Orlovo and the Bergs of Protassowo, have had their living in large kolkhozes (collectives) named Lenin and Engels, respectively. They will stay in Siberia while most of their friends and fellow-Mennonites (many have become Baptists) have gone to Germany as Aussiedler.

Meanwhile, the old clock will keep ticking away for these people who represent a Mennonite village life which, though subjected, at times,

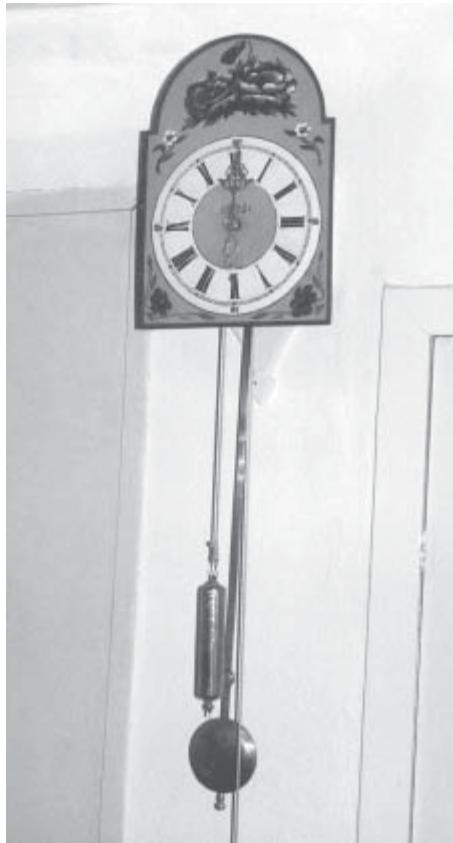


Main Street, Orlovo/Orloff, Siberia. Oct. 2000.

to severe repressive measures during the Stalin years, has endured since 1908.

**Endnotes:**

Note One: See Gerhard Fast, *In den Steppen Sibiriens*. Rosthern: J. Heese, [1957]  
Note Two: Johannes Schellenberg, *Istoria celo Orlovo* ("History of Orloff"). Moskwa: Gotika, 1996.



*The one-hand clock in the home of Ivan Ewert, Orloff, Altai, Siberia.*

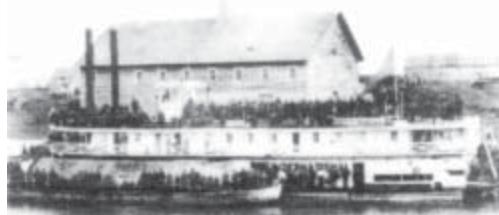
**The Author:**

Peter Penner was born in Orlovo (Ohrloff), Altai, Siberia. His family immigrated in 1925, settling first in Rosenfeld, Manitoba, and in 1931 in Vineland, Ontario. Peter Penner grew up and worked in M.B. circles and became a frequent contributor to Mennonite papers beginning in 1951. He has graduate degrees from McMaster University, Hamilton, taught history at Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick, 1965-1992, professor emeritus; retired to Calgary, 1994; Rotarian since 1979.

**Further Reading:**

For further reading on Mennonite material culture in Siberia, see *Pres.*, No. 15, pages 166-167, for a review of the book by Peter Wiebe, Director of the Omsk State Historical Museum, a compilation of photos and descriptions of artifacts. See also letter to the editor by A. Reger, regarding this review, *Pres.*, No. 16, page 62.

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# Recording Studio, Gnadenhal, Mexico

Bram Siemens, publisher of the *Deutsche Mexicanische Rundschau*, is also the operator of a local Low German radio station in Gnadenhal (Campo 2A), XEPL, Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico.

Although the religious programming originating in Canada tends to reflect the motifs of Protestant Fundamentalism rather than Gospel-centric faith, much of the programming such as local news, funeral announcements, childrens' programs, advertising and promotion of local activities and community endeavours has been of interest and benefit to local listeners.

Bram Siemens, assisted by his wife Blanca, also operates a recording studio. This allows local musicians to create and record their own cassettes for sale to local listeners. Some of the local groups include Peter Wall (Campo 106, Swift Colony), Country Gospel Singers (Nord Colony), and the Hans Rempel group (Campo 61/2, Manitoba Colony).



The home of the recording studio in Gnadenhal, Campo 2A, opened in spring of 2000. To the left are the offices of Low German Radio Station XEPL (How come we were never able to manage a Low German radio station in Manitoba?) To the right can be seen the new Kleine Gemeinde school (see page 120). Photo from Men. Post, June 2, 2000, page 1.



Ricky Wall, Wolfe and Pancho Banman (left to right), all teachers from the CETA School, Campo 106 (Schönfeld), a school of the Kleine Gemeinde, record a cassette of German songs, "Ein Wunderbarer Name." They are making the cassette at "Studio Vision" at Casa Siemens. Photo from Men. Post, Sept. 21, page 17.



Teachers of the Kleine Gemeinde CETA school, Campo 106, Swift Colony, part of the group making a new cassette "Ein Wunderbarer Name". If the editor would have had such attractive teachers in elementary school he might have actually passed spelling. Photo from Men. Post, Sept. 21, page

## Folk Music and Flemish Mennonites.

Country gospel music is popular among "Kanadiers", those Flemish Mennonites who pioneered southern Manitoba in the 1870s. Their music tradition incorporated elements of Flemish, Dutch, Friesian, Saxon, West Prussian, Russian and Ukrainian folk singing (see Doreen Klassen, *Singing Mennonite* (Winnipeg, 1989), 330 pages. These multi-national influences explain the richness of our material and spiritual culture, not only in singing but also in language, food, clothing and architectural expressions.

In Imperial Russia, and possibly even earlier, Flemish Mennonites had enjoyed folk music at lively Saturday evening social gatherings, serving as a wholesome supplement to their sober Sunday morning worship services. Many aspects of Flemish Mennonite culture were intentionally aesthetic and benefited from the exuberance of such family times and socializing to provide an emotional balance in their lives and faith (see *Pres.*, No. 15, page 34).

Country and blue-grass gospel music comes out of Celtic, Scottish and Appalachian folk music. Outside proselytizers have sometimes taken advantage of the Kanadier's affection for folk music to lure young people away from their home churches in Mexico using country and blue grass gospel music, much like the Springs Church in Winnipeg, Manitoba, uses dramatic physical manifestations, clever religious marketing and aggressive use of pop culture motifs to lure youths away from Steinbach churches.

Some country/blue grass gospel music can be quite good. But community leaders should be aware that repetitive playing can be emotionally harmful for listeners because of the negative content, bad theology and the constant disparaging of the human soul typically found in such music. Excessive playing can even drive people to severe depression if they are already down and listen repetitively.

Like most things in life, if used at all, exposure to such music must be subject to reason, caution and reservations. Young people, especially, must be forewarned about its potential harmful effects. Remember that there are hundreds of wholesome songs and uplifting lyrics in the *Gesangbuch* based on sound theology and Gospel-centric faith. The Editor.



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# Books

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## **Book Review Essay**

Henry Schapansky, *The Old Colony (Chortitza) of Russia: Early History and First Settlers in the Context of the Mennonite Migrations* (914 Chilliwack St., New Westminster, B. C., V3L 4V5, 2001), 519 pages.

### **Genealogy.**

Over the past decade Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C. has become well-known in the field of family history and particularly genealogy for his advanced work with the *Gemeindebücher* of the Prussian Mennonites of the 17th and 18th century. He has certainly achieved a legendary status among family historians and researchers for his generosity in sharing the fruits of his labour with others.

His village by village analyses of the Old Colony (Chortitza) communities have previously been published in *Mennonite Family History* in 1988 and after. The bulk of his new book (pages 159-514) gathers these articles into one corpus with additions and updates, making the work state of the art for anyone with Old Colony (Chortitza) roots.

Schapansky has also added useful chapters identifying early church and colony leaders (pages 119-130), a review of Old Colony developments in later times (pages 134-143), and a survey of its daughter colonies (pages 144-158). The appendixes (pages 495-511) provide a bibliography of available immigration, census and church records dating to the early 18th century. The publication of all this material in one volume will finally make the fruits of his labours widely available for researchers and family historians. Henry Schapansky deserves to be congratulated on the publication of his *magnum opus*.

However, it is the historical background to the Russian Mennonite story and, particularly, that of the Old (Chortitza) Colony (pages 1-118), published here for the first time, which may well turn out to be Schapansky's most enduring legacy. It is this ground breaking introductory section that this essay will consider and review.

### **P. M. Friesen, 1910.**

To understand what Schapansky is trying to do and why he felt his book about Old Colony genealogy needed such an extensive interpretative introduction, it is necessary to take a retrospective look at Russian Mennonite historiography. A standard strategy of aggressor cultures is to demonize their victims, in order to facilitate an imperialist agenda (Sort of like American carpet bombing when they are preparing to "liberate" a foreign country). This was also the case among those Mennonites in Russia, often the poor and marginalized, who had converted them-

selves to Separatist Pietist religious culture.

In 1910 Peter M. Friesen published his *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Brüderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)* (Halbstadt, 1910), 777 pages Part I, and 154 pages Part II, presenting a Separatist-Pietist version of Russian Mennonite history. The underlying thesis of the book was that Flemish Mennonite culture was corrupt, fallen and inferior and that Russian Mennonites could only find salvation by converting themselves over to Separatist-Pietist religious culture.

Against the overwhelming weight and authority of all facts, evidence and primary sources, P. M. Friesen lays the groundwork for his thesis, by putting forth the following assessment of the Prussian Mennonites: "Large scale impoverishment, with a consequent decline in the cultural, religious and ethical values of the once highly lauded Mennonites, developed in alarming proportions. Many became discouraged to the point of dull hopelessness" (page 87, page 70 in the original German edition). Friesen casually dismisses the sturdy and courageous Flemish pioneers in Chortitza in 1789 as being "predominantly from the most impoverished and decayed segments of the Mennonite society [in Prussia]," (page 91).

In actuality, the older predominantly Flemish communities in the Vistula Delta from which the Chortitza pioneers had originated were wealthier and more democratically established than those in the Vistula valley from where many of the later, poorer, more pietistical and Germanized settlers originated. It was the Flemish in the Delta who had stood tall, strong, courageous and victorious against the inroads of Separatist-Pietism. This was sufficient to make the Delta Flemish a primary target for these aggressor ideologues, who--not unlike their not-so-distant cousins, the Protestant Fundamentalists in America--believed it to be their manifest destiny to rule the world in a forthcoming earthly kingdom.

P. M. Friesen's use of history as a tool in the predator's arsenal should be acknowledged as the stroke of genius that it was. By manipulation and clever cutting and pasting, Separatist-Pietists sought to convince the children and marginalized in the Flemish community that their history, culture and faith was worthless and non-soteriological. In this way they laid the groundwork for their eventual conversion to Separatist-Pietist religious culture, and--of course, that other intriguing necessity for salvation that always seems to keep popping up--membership in their denomination. Finally they had a claw with which to dismember the democratically-structured, Gospel-centric, Enlightenment influenced, Flemish Gemeinden.

By the end of WWI, 20,000 out of 100,000

Russian Mennonites had been converted away from the Gospel-centric faith of the Flemish Mennonites. But this was only the beginning. By cleverly exploiting the dislocations brought on by sovietization, banishment, and the tragic dismemberment of the older, traditional communities, the proselytizers were able to almost reverse the statistics so that by the "Aussiedlung" of the 1990s, the vast majority had been lost to the Baptists and other alien religious cultures.

Best of all--for Friesen's cause--over the past 100 years his false premises have been repeated *ad nauseam* in 1000s of books so that they are unquestioningly accepted as Gospel-truth in many circles. The consequences have been devastating. An entire community has been robbed of its heritage, one of the most inspiring histories and certainly among the most noble religious cultures known to western civilization. Thousands of gifted young people have been lost to the faith because they were mistakenly socialized by their elders to believe that their ancestors were lesser human beings and of course--according to the legalistic dogma of Separatist-Pietism--"unsaved".

### **A Flemish Canon.**

Now, finally, after almost a century, a corrective historical treatment has been put forth by Henry Schapansky. Not only does he refute the false assumptions found in works such as those of Mr. P. M. Friesen, but Schapansky more than meets Friesen head on, putting forth his own rational, well balanced interpretation of Russian Mennonite history from the perspective of the Flemish Mennonites of the Old Colony themselves. The massaging of facts and inferior theology, which P. M. Friesen and other Separatist-Pietists cobbled together to sustain their interpretation, leads one to sympathize with Schapansky's decision that it was necessary to enunciate a Flemish historical canon all the way back to the Reformation and indeed even earlier to the patristic church.

In chapter one (pages 1-20), Schapansky extrapolates those teachings of the radical reformers which in his view constituted the faith paradigm of the Flemish Mennonites. Whether Schapansky's view that the "peaceful" radical reformers followed Pelagius instead of Augustine is correct, I will leave for experts in patristic history to assess. Certainly, Schapansky finds much historical evidence to support his restatement of the essentials of the Mennonite faith as it evolved during Reformation times. His nine points summarizing normative Mennonite teaching (pages 7-11), look surprisingly similar to some of the best manifestations of the Flemish Gemeinden in modern times. Indeed, Schapansky is of the view that "Among the most successful realizations of their ideal were the

Plautdietsche (Low German) Mennonite communities in Poland, Russia and later Mexico and Paraguay," (page 13).

In Schapansky's view "The subsequent history of the Mennonites and Hutterites is largely a history of resistance and self-preservation. It will easily be seen as well, that the main method of resistance and self-preservation would be emigration" (page 13). Schapansky makes the poignant observation that "The Anabaptist movement spread, as did the early Christian faith, along the trade routes of the empire, and it was towns people [the Flemish] rather than rural folk who were most attracted to the movement" (page 14).

These observations cast serious doubt on the claims of some Separatist-Pietist and Evangelical denominations that their mission programs, consisting of targeting other Christian communities such as Mennonites and seeking to alienate their young and marginalized for conversion to their religious culture, were modelled after Apostolic Christianity and/or early Anabaptism.

Schapansky concludes, "And indeed, the history of the Mennonites and Hutterites is a continuous history of emigration," (page 13).

### **The Mennonite Diaspora.**

In chapter two (pages 21-37), Schapansky draws attention to the usually overlooked fact that "The Anabaptist movement had spread rapidly in the Flemish and Dutch provinces of the Lowlands, particularly the coastal provinces. They were the largest non-Catholic group in many sections of the lowlands [Low Countries], until the later growth of the Reform Church. As these provinces were controlled by the Imperial family, persecution was extremely fierce," (page 21).

This resulted in the first emigration of Mennonites, namely, Flemish refugees fleeing to East Friesland and Gröningen since these principalities were under the sovereignty of local princes who allowed a degree of religious tolerance. "A great many did not stay but continued along the Hansa trading routes to the Vistula delta in Poland," (page 22).

I am still confused on one point, however, was there a refugee migration from Germany and Switzerland to the Low Countries in the 1520s and 30s or were these refugees those who had fled a decade earlier and were now returning because of increased persecution elsewhere? (see B. H. Unruh, pages 44-46).

### **Language.**

Schapansky points out that the major language in the lands of the Hansa was "Niedersächsisch (also known variously as Lower Saxon, Low German, Oostersh or Plautdietsch," (page 22) and that by 1500 "Niedersächsisch had become the principal language of the Dreierfriesland [East and West Friesland and Groningen], replacing to a great extent the native Friesian," (page 23). "The refugees from the southern lowlands undoubtedly spoke various dialects of Dutch [Flemish]..." (page 23).

"Although Menno Simons was knowledgeable in Dutch as well as High German,"

Schapansky points out that "B. H. Unruh makes a convincing argument for the case that the early writings of Menno Simons were in Niedersächsisch and later rewritten in Dutch." With the fall of the house of Hansa, "Niedersächsisch fell into decline." Schapansky notes "The fact that the Bible was not translated into Niedersächsisch at that time presented all of the northern Mennonites east of the Netherlands with an additional challenge [as they]...had to learn to read a second language to read the Bible, an important part of their lives."

Encouraged at least in part by the prominence of the newly independent Netherlands as a major 17th century world power, Dutch became "the second language of choice for those Mennonites who settled" in Elbing and Danzig and later in the Vistula Delta (page 24).

### **Frisian and Flemish 1567.**

By 1567 the Flemish refugees in the Dreierfriesland had moved to form their own Gemeinden. In pursuit of their agenda, Separatist-Pietists have usually tried to characterize this event as marking, in the words of P. M. Friesen, the end "of the only general 'golden age' of the old evangelical-Anabaptist congregations bearing his [Menno's] name...." Under the heading of "Decline of Dutch Anabaptism", P. M. Friesen asserts that "the only happy rapid development" of the Mennonite faith coincided with "the leadership of Menno Simons and ended with the onset of his 'crippled period'" (P. M. Friesen, page 31).

The Flemish - Friesian division of 1567 is dismissed by P. M. Friesen as the onset of the "Anabaptist disease", a silly and despised discourse over "beards, buttons, hooks and eyes, pockets and collars...." (Apparently when proselytizers attack other denominations and convince members to turn against their own community and tradition, those who wish to remain with their Gospel-centric faith are to be maligned with the pejorative term "Anabaptist disease" and the agitators and turncoats seeking to convert genuine believers to alien religious cults are to be glorified!)

Unfortunately the interpretative regime of P. M. Friesen has been widely accepted among later writers as a useful tool to legitimize Separatist-Pietist aggression and cruel division of families, communities, etc. The strategy has also allowed them to jump over and denigrate 400 years of faithful struggle and heroic pilgrimage of Flemish Mennonites in order to justify the outlandish claim that a return to true Mennonitism started with--you guessed it--the founding date of their particular denomination in 1860, 1937 or 1960, or whatever.

Unlike P. M. Friesen and his disciples, Schapansky has actually reviewed the sources and carefully considered the facts. He brings forth a well informed discussion as to why the Flemish refugees in Friesland in the end decided to organize their own Gemeinden. The three Ältesten were Leenaert Bouwens (who personally baptised more than 10,000 believers, Unruh, page 46) working in the northern Dutch provinces, Menno Simons on the north-

ern coast, and Dirk Phillips in the Vistula Delta. Bouwens is identified as the leader "most responsible for the division of the Mennonites into two main groups" being the strictest of the three leaders.

Contrary to popular belief both the Friesians (whom P. M. Friesen later promotes and favours) and the Flemish, belonged to the strict faction with respect to the principal issue of the ban. Other scholars such as Jacobus ten Doornkaat Koolman, have detailed the courageous and exhaustive measures taken by Dirk Phillips to avoid the schism (*Dirk Phillips*, page 141).

In Schapansky's view, "An understanding of the differences between the two groups is relevant...to the study of the West Prussian and Russian periods" (page 28). In pursuing this point, he deals firstly with the myth that it was the Friesians who were the stricter ones, a myth he attributes to C. H. Smith: "In fact, what C. H. Smith may have meant, and states in his work, is that the Friesian group was the more autocratic and the Flemish group was more democratic." Schapansky's interpretation here is supported by B. H. Unruh, pages 29-32 (Although not footnoted, Unruh is the source for at least some of Schapansky's conclusions and interpretations).

Some of the obvious reasons for the division were the differences in language. The refugees originating in Flanders, Antwerp and Brabant, spoke Flemish as opposed to the native Friesian. The Flemish refugees were sophisticated urban Mennonites, influenced by the Enlightenment, and more conversant in doctrinal discussion and community behaviour based on the principles of biblically articulated grassroots democracy. Because many were merchants, artisans and craftsmen of the finest repute, they wore better clothes because of which they became known as the "Feine" while their Friesian hosts were rural farming people and hence known as the "Grobe".

Schapansky points out that the Friesians may have resented the "foreign" influence of the Flemish (not unlike the Russländer and Kanadier divide still very alive in Canada today). "It was the Frisians (of Harlingen, Franeker, Leeuwarden and Dokkum) who initiated this split in 1566 in reaction against the Flemish groups, forming a union against 'Foreign influence'". Schapansky points out that it was the Friesians who were more autocratic and ethnically exclusive. "The more autocratic nature of the Friesians consisted in the power of the Ältester, who selected ministers for the Gemeinden and made decisions on behalf of the Gemeinde without a voting procedure" (page 29).

Not only were the Flemish more democratic (voting procedures permeated every facet of their governance), but "The role of women in the Flemish Gemeinden appears to have been important." The Flemish baptised much later than the Friesians and "...the Flemish Gemeinden put more emphasis on traditional Anabaptist principles than did their Friesian counterparts, and placed more stress on adherence to the te-

nets of the faith as a basis for membership, and less on ethnic or family ties" (page 30).

Schapansky counters P. M. Friesen's characterization of traditional Mennonites as being subject to some strange malady or virus predisposing them to fracture and schism. Schapansky celebrates the discussions and debates about "hooks and buttons" that Friesen disparages and which were a paradigm of conservative Mennonites as "indicating that church members took their faith seriously and that these issues were of utmost importance in their lives." "Divisions within the community are therefore rather indications of a vibrant and democratic Mennonite community" (page 31). It is noted here, of course, that practically all major divisions of later new denominations were caused by outside interlopers or turncoats seeking to lead astray those who still wished to centre their faith on Jesus Christ.

Schapansky states that many of the traditional Flemish and Friesians emigrated to the Vistula Delta, leaving their more liberal Waterländer, High Germans, and Doopsgesinde behind where after a period of prosperity they wilted and withered. It was these "émigrés [who] adhered to all the tenets of the Radical Reformation while struggling in pioneer conditions in an alien cultural environment. The stay-at-homes prospered economically and achieved recognition for cultural achievements while at the same time abandoning one by one the principles which distinguished them as Mennonites...." (page 27).

Schapansky holds forth the transplantation of traditional Mennonites to the Vistula Delta as representing the classic manifestation of Mennonite emigration dynamics. He notes that "Canadian and American Mennonites today may feel uncomfortable with the thought that they are the stay-at-homes, and the Mexican and Paraguayan Mennonites, the emigres..." (page 27).

### West Prussia, 1540-1945.

In chapter 3 (pages 38-48), Schapansky deals with the origins of the Mennonite communities in West Prussia. In short order he weaves together an amazing amount of background history, starting with the settlement of the first German and Polish settlers along the Vistula river and in the Delta in 1000 A.D. By 1309 the Teutonic Knights had relocated their headquarters to Marienburg at the southern tip of the delta and commenced construction of their world class castle, still standing to this day.

With the defeat of the Knights in 1466, the area became a personal fiefdom of the Polish crown, and often referred to as Royal Poland. On-going wars devastated the region so that "the dyking and drainage systems in the delta" lay in ruins "and much of the land in the delta was abandoned" (page 40). By 1525 various landowners were pursuing the rebuilding of the area and looking to refugees as an obvious source of settlers. Schapansky points out that "The delta region in the north can be viewed as a large triangle, at the points of which were the dominant cities of Danzig (west), Elbing (east) and Marienburg (south). In the middle of the

delta were the old Teutonic Knight towns of Tiegenhoff and Neuteich. The delta also consisted of separate Werders and polders, in a sense, subdeltas" (page 42).

Schapansky explains that by and large the Catholic hierarchy and the landowners favoured the Mennonites, while the City of Danzig, particularly the guilds, as well as the Lutheran church were less favourably inclined (page 43).

Travelling from Emden and East Friesland "The great wave of Mennonite immigration to West Prussia had begun by the 1530s" (page 44) with most settlement around Danzig and Elbing from where they spread to the Werders.

Marshalling his vast genealogical resources, Schapansky has analyzed the surnames of these settlers and concluded that they originated as follows: 40% in Friesland, 25% in the Flemish provinces south of the Rhine, 15 % from the middle and southern Holy Roman Empire (e.g. Swiss and Moravian Brethren), and 10% native West Prussians. Of the 40% originating in the Dreierfriesland, many--possibly over half--originated in the Flemish provinces of the Low Countries.

The Flemish were the last of the Mennonites in make the switch from Dutch to German, with a German *Gesangbuch* only adopted in 1780 (see Peter Letkemann, *Pres.*, No. 18, pages 120-130).

By pulling all this data together, Schapansky has reminded all Russian Mennonites that their ethnic origins are more Flemish than Dutch, German or even Friesian, a small detail overlooked by most historians. Our culture, thus, claims its primary origins in Flanders. Even Dutch, Friesian or Saxon (North German), were already secondary cultures, for our ancestors.

The origins of the Old Colony Mennonites, thus, were urban and sophisticated; they were merchant, craftsmen and artisans. This in turn may explain the far more extensive economic development of the Chortitza Colony in Russia by WWI, and similar achievements of Old Colonists in Manitoba's West Reserve and later in Mexico, Paraguay and elsewhere. This may also explain, why the Flemish Mennonites were successful in colonizing vast tracts of four continents--Poland, Russia, Siberia, Kazachstan, Canada, U.S., Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia, etc. while the best their enemies--those in their midst who had converted themselves to alien religious cultures such as Separatist-Pietism and Protestant Fundamentalism--were able to boast of, was to mount a century-long terrorist campaign against them, seeking to alienate their young and marginalized and to dismember their communities. In Russian there is a proverb expressed in German as "Zerstören ist nicht bauen". Tearing down is not building and no one should be proud of it.

In chapter 4 (pages 49-59), Schapansky deals with the origins and development of each of the Gemeinden in the Vistula delta and along the valley. Of primary importance to the Flemish were the Gemeinden centered in Danzig and Elbing and the rural Grosses Werder and Heuboden Gemeinden. Repeatedly he delves into explanations and discussions of various

aspects of these developments that readers will find fascinating. The information put together on each of the Gemeinde will be helpful in understanding the dynamics of the first years in Russia, as the settlers came from various congregations in Prussia.

Schapansky refers to the decline in standards and Mennonite values especially in the City Gemeinden, and concludes that "Although H. G. Mannhardt depicts this period in favourable terms, a critical reading of his account supports the view held by Nicholas (Klaas) Reimer (of later Kleine Gemeinde fame) that standards declined" (page 51).

Chapter 5 (pages 60-77), deals with growth and decline in West Prussia. Schapansky initiates the discussion with the observation that "Of the various groups of Mennonites scattered throughout Europe during the Mennonite diaspora, it was the West Prussian Mennonites who by 1750 emerged as the single most important group representing the Anabaptist and Mennonite ideals in action...It was in West or Royal Prussia where the traditionalist Flemish and Friesian Mennonites held steadfast to the old and honoured Mennonite beliefs, where their numbers grew and where their economic and cultural prosperity developed" (page 60).

Schapansky adds details for the growing body of information regarding the origins of the Mennonite confessional schools: "An integral part of the Gemeinde life was the school system. This undoubtedly was always part of Mennonite life," because "In many of the early land leases, references are made to the right of Mennonites to manage their own schools..." (page 63).

Schapansky also provides the background to the rising prosperity of the Delta Mennonites: "The Vistula River was the main artery of transportation and the key route of trade with the rest of Europe" (page 64). The Dutch would eventually win out in the competition with the Hansa League over the Danzig trade route. "Almost 50 % of the grain export of the Republic came from Royal Prussia"... By 1772 about 25-30% of the agricultural land of the Delta was in Mennonite hands" (page 65).

A series of wars as well as natural disasters resulted in the gradual decline of the regional economy: "Gradually, after 1650, Vistula trade and commerce diminished and an economic decline set in" (page 72). It can be argued that the same would have happened to the buoyant wheat growing economy in the Black Sea region after WWI, even had Sovietization not intervened, as more cheaply produced American and Australian grain flooded and captured the European market.

The Mennonite economy in the Delta, by this time, was well established. This prosperity in turn brought its own problems as "With the increasing affluence of the Mennonite community came an increasing pressure to assimilate." In Schapansky's view, "This was, and always had been, a primary destroyer of the traditional Mennonite community". These changes were felt first in the City Gemeinden and "An important result was the increasing separation between

the urban and rural Mennonite communities (page 72)."

With the decline in the fortunes of the so-called Polish Republic, Prussia increasingly intervened, culminating with the first Partition in 1772. "After the Prussian annexation of Royal Prussia, the Separatist-Pietist movement began to make the same inroads with the West Prussian Mennonite community, that it had elsewhere in the Netherlands, Hamburg and Friedrichstadt...As a result in many radical sects of the Separatist Pietist movement, emotional physical demonstrations, fiery preaching and fierce condemnation of all other religious groups became the norm" (page 74).

In this regard, Schapansky raises the intriguing question: "Why Mennonites, brought up in a traditional Anabaptist environment of faith in action and deed should be attracted to a mystical, ideologically complex, and at times fanatical sect, such as the Pietists, is a question that has a multifaceted answer. On the one hand, many Pietist sects developed skilful and fiery preachers, who were adept in instilling a feeling of guilt and despair in those of their Christian audiences who did not yet agree with their vision of salvation and the conversion experience. They were very much the predecessors of the modern American Fundamentalists and television Evangelists."

"The Mennonites," Schapansky explains, "living a simple non-worldly life, often had an unsophisticated and naive faith in the words of other professed Christians, and were often easy prey for sectarian groups," (page 76).

### **New Russia, 1789.**

Chapter 6 (pages 78-101) deals with emigration to Russia. The chapter opens with a brief but useful history of the Black Sea region as related to the evolution and development of the Slavic states of Poland, Russia and Ukraine. The conquest and reorganization of the Black Sea region as "New Russia" with the provinces of Kherson, Ekaterinoslav and Taurida, set the stage for the solicitation of foreign colonists, including the Mennonites, to settle these "new" lands (page 79).

Always interesting and worthy of serious evaluation are Schapansky's observations and opinions regarding the immigration typology which described Mennonite migrations such as the one to southern Russia. Some of these ideas have already been introduced to *Preservings* readers in "From Prussia to Russia: A Revisionists (Chortitza Colony) Interpretation of Mennonite History," Issue No. 14, pages 9-14, and "From Danzig to Russia: A Book Review Essay," Issue No. 17, pages 126-128.

Schapansky divides Russian Mennonite historians into two categories. The Prussian historians are referred to as the "Lebensraum" theorists. Because they represented the Mennonites who remained in Prussia and were comfortable there, they were puzzled why anyone would want to leave and thus concluded that the emigrants were basically motivated by the desire for more land or "Lebensraum."

In Schapansky's view, most of the historical

writers from among the Russian Mennonites themselves favoured assimilation and Russian nationalism and hence failed to understand why the pioneer Flemish Mennonites objected to the Government's paternalistic efforts in this regard. In response, this group of historians developed the "Poor and ignorant" theory to explain this conduct, namely, that the pioneers were basically a stupid, recalcitrant and impoverished lot. Schapansky concludes that "It is difficult to give a great deal of credibility to either theory because they fail to explain the factual information available relative to the immigrations, and do not take into account either the subsequent or previous history of the Mennonites," (page 84). To understand the immigration, concludes Schapansky, it must be divided into two periods, those who immigrated before the end of the Napoleonic Wars and those who immigrated later. The pre-1815 immigration was driven by "the annexation of Royal Prussia by Prussia and Russian immigration policy," (page 84).

"In summary," writes Schapansky, "the Delta Flemish Mennonites immigrated to Russia to maintain traditional, democratic Mennonite beliefs and culture. The Friesians remained because they were already partially assimilated and because they were more optimistic that accommodation with Prussia could be achieved. In hindsight, the Delta Flemish proved to be more than correct," (page 86).

In contrast, most of the Mennonites who immigrated after 1815 were motivated to do so because they had adopted Separatist Pietist beliefs. "Included with these groups were many Mennonites who would later promote Pietist or Chiliastic views including Nicholas (Klaas) Epp..., Johann Klassen (regarded as the founder of the Mennonite Brethren church), Wilhelm Lange, Tobias Voth and Heinrich Franz," (page 87).

The response to French military successes and occupations across Europe had been a wave of Separatist-Pietist religious fervour, expressed as anti-Enlightenment and fervently Chiliastic. The Russian Czar, Alexander I, played a prominent role in the defeat of Napoleon. Alexander I was deeply religious and "...like many Pietists before him, he saw himself as a chosen instrument of God and Russia as the bulwark of Christianity," (page 88).

Separatist-Pietists gurus such as Heinrich Jung-Stilling (1740-1817), Würtenburg, Germany (much like their modern-day counterparts Lindsey, van Impe, LaHaye and others) promoted the chiliastic beliefs in vogue at the time. These teachings were that Russia "in the east" would be the haven of the church in the end times and the Czar would be its defender. "One of the effects of the war (1807-15) was therefore to increase the attractiveness of Russia as a haven for Christians and in particular for Pietists who shared some of the same views as Alexander I. Many Mennonites with Pietist views therefore began to consider immigration to Russia as an attractive option." As a result of all this insanity, thousands of Germans including many Mennonites immigrated to Russia, "in the east", where Christ himself would even-

tually come and save His people (Stumpp, pages 27-28).

### **Molotschna, 1804.**

In the second part of chapter 6, Schapansky surveys the immigrations to the Molotschna of 1803-5 and later, as well as the frantic proselytizing of some of the Pietist leaders already referred to. "The Cornies era saw the rise of a new type of personality in the Russian Mennonite community. This was the patriotic, pro-Tzarist, autocratic or Pietist, progressive Mennonite. Very often these individuals included Mennonites of Friesian background or former Lutherans," (page 97). Schapansky concludes that "Many of the above individuals, gifted and talented as they were, did a great deal to disrupt the traditionalist Delta Flemish Gemeinden in the Molotschna. They were also later touted as the progressives, who sought to bring the traditionalists into the modern world, by writers of the pro-Tzarist school, or by Mennonite Brethren historians," (page 97).

The Kleine Gemeinde founded in the Molotschna in 1812 have typically received short shrift from Pietist and Pro-Czarist historians alike. As a note of interest, Schapansky has the following to say about the restitutive reform group: "The Kleine Gemeinde founded by Reimer and Janzen was composed of traditional Mennonites strongly committed to the ideals of the Gemeinde. They were at least as well-to-do as other Molotschna Mennonites and were economically successful. In later times, due to the cohesion of this Gemeinde, the members of the Kleine Gemeinde achieved considerable economic success. They were also subject to the same pressure from the later Pietist Mennonites of the post 1815 era..." (page 95).

The early debates about the future shape and formation of the Mennonite church and community in the Molotschna have been largely dismissed and denigrated as irrelevant by Pro-Czarist and Pro-Separatist-Pietist historians. P. M. Friesen, of course, is well-known for his negative views of anyone who was not a compliant vassal of Separatist-Pietism or even his particular brand (like modern-day Protestant Fundamentalists they often fought bitterly among themselves, e.g. later developments in Gnadenfeld).

Even the prominent M. B. historian John B. Toews, writing a century later, dismissed the discussions in the pioneer Flemish Gemeinde as follows: "[The] Jakob Enns' quarrels with Klaas Wiens (Steinbach) and Klaas Reimer (Kleine Gemeinde) were hardly the dialogue of gentlemen nor were they even sustained by theological debate of merit." John B. Toews, "The Russian Mennonite Intellect of the Nineteenth Century," in A. Friesen, ed., *P. M. Friesen & his History* (Winnipeg, 1979), page 3.

Future historians will not be able to ignore Schapansky's interpretative model that the Flemish were the more evolved and sophisticated in terms of theology, democracy and community ethos. His view that the early divisions in the Old Chortitza Colony were articulated by serious philosophical considerations determining the future development of the Mennonite settle-

ments in Russia, add fascinating possibilities also for a more sensitive reading of Molotschna history, and, in particular, that of the early debates in the Flemish Gemeinde between Ältester Jakob Enns, Tiegenhagen, Oberschulz Klaas Wiens, and reformer Klaas Reimer, Petershagen.

Viewed from the interpretative thesis put forward by Schapansky, these debates cast the reformers in a role similar to that of the framers of the 1776 American Constitution, setting out to reestablish their society based on their age-old principles of rationalism, democracy and literal Biblicalism. The 1860s separation of Separatist-Pietists, in comparison, could be thought of as the French Revolution, with a complete rejection of the existing social order and its outstanding values.

### Old Colony, 1789.

In chapter 7 (pages 104-118), Schapansky gets to the meat of his historical survey, namely, the ethnic, socio-economic and political constitution of the Old Colony (Chortitza) pioneers of 1789. He describes the events surrounding the founding and settlement of the Old Colony with new vigour and as one intimately knowledgeable with his topic.

With respect to Potemkin and his role in settling the Mennonites in New Russia, Schapansky refers to "stories previously circulated in West Prussia that Potemkin intended the Mennonites to settle as tenants on his estates and to possibly enserf them," (page 108).

He also clarifies the role of the Colony Director, appointed by the Russian government who "had the responsibilities and authority as that of the later Oberschulze...The first director (1789-1793) Jean v. Essen appears to have been incompetent," (page 109). J. v. Essen left the operation of much of the Colonial affairs in the hands of the delegates Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch, "who received some of the blame for the various disasters that befell the early Old Colony settlers."

One of the most intriguing issues in Russian Mennonite history was the role of Deputies Höppner and Bartsch in establishing the new settlement in the Chortitza region. Schapansky explains that the Deputies were often caught "in the difficult position of having to assume administrative duties on behalf of the director who was unable to fulfil government promises and meet the expectations of the settlers....The Russian government had of course no interest in seeing a strong Gemeinde of the Delta Flemish model develop. Russia officials continued to deal with the deputies in the autocratic spirit to which they had become accustomed, to issue their directives via the deputies to the Colony," (page 111).

This dilemma was only made worse once the establishment of an independent Lehrdienst for the new Flemish Gemeinde in the Chortitza Colony was completed. Schapansky here returns to one of the threads which he weaves skilfully throughout his work, that "The majority of the Old Colony settlers had a vision of establishing a Gemeinde, as in their homelands, where the Gemeinde would be central to their

lives, and where they could live in the world but not of the world," (page 110).

The settlers now presumed that the governance of their affairs would revert to the democratically constituted Gemeinde in accordance with their Delta Flemish tradition. Consequently, in 1793 the Deputies turned over to the Lehrdienst "the documents representing the interests of the Old Colony," (page 111).

The situation was aggravated in 1794 with the appointment of Johann Brackel as colony director. Brackel "routinely took 5 % of any allowances and loans destined for the settlers as a 'commission'...He was an autocrat of the worst kind and enforced his orders with threats and corporal punishment."

According to Schapansky, by August 1793, a group of 19 families under the leadership of Hoeppner "became critical of the involvement of the Lehrdienst in matters which they considered outside the jurisdiction of the Lehrdienst." A letter was sent to Danzig complaining of the conduct of the Lehrdienst. "The Höppner group also sent a letter to the Russian government accusing the Lehrdienst of misappropriating some 1129 rubles."

Schapansky reminds the reader that what was happening went far beyond the immediate matters complained about. "Although the conflict which came to the open in mid 1793 consisted of various specific accusations from one party against another, there was a much deeper underlying cause of division. That was nothing less than differing visions of how the future development of the Old Colony would proceed. The small Höppner group envisioned a greater role for the Russian government in the colony with benevolent autocratic rule and progressive economic leadership leading the colony to material prosperity. The majority wished to maintain and build the democratic community on the basis of the traditional Delta Flemish Gemeinde. Of particular concern to the majority in the Gemeinde was the totally unacceptable use of corporal punishment, the financial dishonesty of the director Brackel, the autocratic methods of the director and the association of the deputies with the director," (page 114).

Schapansky reports that complaints were also emanating from the Lutheran Josephsthal settlement and finally in 1797 Brackel was replaced by Johann Brigonstev. The new director "appears to have made a conscientious effort to listen to the settlers and redress the wrongs committed....In making these complaints, it should be remembered that the Director functioned very much like the later Oberschulz, and that in this respect, the Mennonites were complaining to the head of the colony, rather than to the government....In 1798, the Gemeinde banned Jakob Höppner and Johann Bartsch. Johann Bartsch admitted his errors and was re-admitted. Höppner on the other hand, did not," (page 115).

From the perspective of any jurist, the admission of guilt by one of several parties to a crime certainly casts at least an evidentiary onus on their co-accused. The fact that Bartsch was lovingly reaccepted into the Flemish Gemeinde

without further consequences also counters the allegations of some of the pro-Höppner and/or Anti-Flemish historians, that the Flemish Gemeinde was loveless and unyielding in its conduct. In actuality this event displayed exceptional restraint and a genuine spirit of forgiveness. It is seemingly typical of anti-Flemish historians to take a very Christ-centered act and turn it onto its head in a pathetic attempt to morph it into something negative.

Schapansky notes that "It was likely the report by Brigonstev that drew the attention of Samuel Kontenius, a member of the Guardians Bureau, to accusations of wrong doing in the Old Colony," (page 116). Kontenius was a well-respected and gifted administrator who later gained the admiration of most of the Mennonites under his jurisdiction. He investigated the matter, and the result of his inquiry was "the laying of specific charges against Jakob Höppner, Peter Höppner and Peter Rempel...Kontenius ordered a trial of the accused," (page 116).

Schapansky characterizes the ensuing trial as follows: "At the trial which probably took place in 1800, it appears that several Mennonites were required to testify, which they did with much reluctance. It seems that the Mennonites had wished to settle this affair internally without government intervention and through the traditional means of banning," (page 116).

It is critical to note here that the charges against Höppner were not brought by the Flemish Gemeinde as its enemies have repeatedly and *ad nauseam* alleged. The charges were brought by an Imperial officer, Samuel Kontenius, sent to investigate reports of disputation and unhappiness in Chortitza and Josephsthal. In actuality the charges seemingly stem from the uproar initiated by the complaints of Höppner and his group. In contrast Schapansky points to the serious efforts made by the Flemish Gemeinde to deal with the matter internally and according to ancient biblical doctrines, which in fact was done to everyone's satisfaction with respect to deputy Jakob Bartsch.

Schapansky notes that one of the positive results of the entire sad affair was "the issuance of special instructions in 1801 by Kontenius,"

### Grassroots Democracy.

From an 1840 letter written by Johann Cornies (1789-1848), Ohrloff, Molotschna, Imperial Russia.

"Here in our community there is a constant battle, and this happens because the people here are alive. If they were dead, there would be no battles, but then nothing good would be achieved either, for that which is dead is not productive. What Parliament in England is on a large scale, that is what the Molochna Mennonites are on a small one."

Courtesy of Dr. John Staples, Professor of Russian and Soviet History, State University of New York, Fredonia, U.S.A. E-mail to editor, Sept. 28, 2001.

whereby “the office of Director was abolished and a form of local and relatively democratic municipal government was established.” Regarding these reforms, Schapansky cites the view of David G. Rempel that these were “the most significant reason for the economic and material success of the Colonies. They freed the colonies from the ineptitude and corruption of Russian bureaucratic government at the local government level,” (page 117). Apparently the very genius of these regulations was that they articulated many of the most fundamental principles of the Delta Flemish “Ordnung”, incorporating them as part of Russian colonial administrative law.

### Conclusion.

Henry Schapansky is almost universally recognized as the expert in Russian Mennonite genealogy. In my view, it may well be that Henry Schapansky will become equally well-known

Duane K. Friesen, *Artists Citizens Philosophers Seeking the Peace of the City: An Anabaptist Theology of Culture* (Scottsdale, Waterloo, Herald Press, 2000). \$25.29. Softcover, 352 pages.

Several months ago, while visiting a local Junior High School, I found myself behind a young adolescent female clad in tattered jeans from which hung heavy chains and in a t-shirt with a picture of dripping blood on the back. I was aghast that one so young would want to identify with gang violence, but then I took a closer look at the t-shirt. The blood dripped from red lettering: “Bought with Blood”. New Testament scholar that I am, it took me a moment to realize that this was an allusion to Jesus’ atoning death and possibly Acts 10:28 or Revelation 5:9.

I tell this story because it illustrates for me the confusion that besets those of us who wish to maintain some distinction from the world but recognize that we live in a culture; it is as Duane Friesen states “like the air we breathe”. Our youth, in their desire to belong, tend to embrace the trends of the world and insert some Christian content to make them acceptable. I wonder if the habits of youth too easily become the way that we as adult Christians have come to live in our culture. I see church parking lots filled with luxury vehicles to which decals of fish silhouettes have been affixed. All too often, overt biblical content seems to be the only criteria by which Christians judge whether what our culture has to offer is acceptable. In contrast, Duane K Friesen, in *Artists Citizens Philosophers Seeking the Peace of the City: An Anabaptist Theology of Culture*, seeks to provide biblically based, theological reasoning for determining how we should participate in and of what we should partake of the culture in which we live.

I find many reasons to recommend this work to a wide readership within the Church from those of us who sit on commissions that make decisions about worship or church buildings, to those of us who dwell and work within a secular and multicultural setting, and particu-

as an interpreter of this history. In the long-term he may well be remembered as an historian and as the founder of the pro-Flemish school of interpretation. In this sense, he has provided an amazing gift to his people and deserves our recognition and thanks.

As a reviewer of such an excellent composition, one is hesitant to quibble about a few errors in grammar or style. Certainly a second reading by a qualified editor would have eliminated some of them. Given the panoramic scope of the treatise which Schapansky has put forth, some critics will find the lack of footnoting a serious drawback. In response it can be argued that Schapansky was writing for “his” people, namely, those who over the years have consulted and through him have solved countless genealogical problems. To this readership a more academic presentation would have been a serious detraction.

Very little of what Schapansky has to tell

larly in the aftermath of the terrorism of September 11, to those who wonder if we can speak to the violence of our culture or whether we should assume a variant of a former identity, “quiet in the land.” I also have some reservations about Friesen’s habits and conclusions that I will address, not because I consider them flaws within his arguments but because I consider them extrinsic to his purpose and wish to encourage his reader not to be distracted by them.

Inspired by Jeremiah’s admonition to God’s exiled community in Babylon, “Seek the peace (shalom) of the city where you dwell”, Friesen uses the metaphor of exile to emphasize the distinction between church and secular society and language of dual citizenship to describe our responsibility to and participation in both orders. Friesen enters into the ongoing discussion of the relationship of the church to society or the civil order in which it finds itself by providing a cogent summary of significant contributions by scholars such as H. Richard Niebuhr, John Howard Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas. He then lays out a Trinitarian model upon which he bases his discussion of how we should engage in culture.

While Friesen does not clutter his work with citations to biblical scholarship, he clearly attends to the best insights of their labour. I was particularly struck by his treatment of Matthew 18:15-18 and his grasp of the process of reasoning found in the Talmud (158, 225-26). The former has been treated as some sort of rule by which individuals within conflict are bound to behave and the latter as some sort of dead legalism. Friesen correctly, as I believe, recognizes these texts as models for ongoing discernment based upon conversation and practical moral reasoning.

Friesen’s Trinitarian model is a schematization of the roles and the relationship between God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit which he reduces to a tightly packed chart with multiple vertical and horizontal axes (97). For those who tend not to construct such conceptual frameworks for their theology, this

his reader is totally new. What is new is the way he has extrapolated the material from German and other secondary sources and put it together into one readily digestible account. This is a book that every conservative Mennonite should read and be familiar with. Even those whose ancestors departed from Gospel-centric faith would do well to read this book as it would give them an understanding of what their people once believed that so inspired and motivated them.

I would like to quote the entire historical sketch. That’s how good it is.

Book Review Essay of “Old (Chortitz) Colony of Russia” by editor Delbert Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

The views expressed in this book review essay are those of the editor alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the HSHS, its board of directors and/or members.

discussion may seem overly analytical and an impediment to reading further. Given the way that this model informs the discussion of culture, it is the general theme of divine power that is transcendent, loving and creative and the recognition that this power is manifest in all three persons of the Trinity to which the reader need most attend.

The final three chapters on “Engaging Culture” treat a wide range of its manifestation from the aesthetic dimension of life to the exercise of citizenship to the engagement of wisdom in our encounters with ideas such as those of other religious traditions and scientific knowledge. Friesen’s rich selection of illustrations drawn from personal experience and the life of the church render this discussion meaningful.

Although Friesen does not hold to a narrow view of culture, in his treatment of people as artists, he discusses the aesthetic experience of those things that we normally call cultural objects (architecture, music etc.). By appealing to aesthetic delight as a part of incarnational theology and by adopting a theory of aesthetic expression as communication, Friesen provides a doctrinal basis for taking pleasure in the aesthetic experience, a welcome relief from the legacy of a stark pietism and Platonism that assumed that we ought to be oblivious to our physical surroundings. Friesen draws the lines between beauty and eschatological hope, between form and integrity, between the space we create and our responsibility to God to honour his creation.

In his discussion of the role of Christians as citizens in the social order, Friesen argues for the use of our “analogic imagination.” Rather than succumbing to a new Constantinianism whereby Christians impose their values upon society to create a “Christian culture,” he advocates that the church seek means of working within our larger society analogous to the ways we relate within the Church. His principal examples include mutual aid, respect and safeguard of religious liberty, and nonviolent methods for confronting

evil.

In contrast to a notion of democratic responsibility or a doctrine of natural law — bases for civic responsibility typically taught in school and reflected in public discourse — Friesen grounds this concern for the individual within society upon theological claims about the image of God, a Trinitarian vision that balances individuals with community, and God's grace. By showing how participants in debates on issue such as abortion and prayer indiscriminately switch from social philosophical notions of inalienable natural rights to religious visions of a "holy commonwealth, Friesen makes sense of the confusion in which American society in particular tends to become ensnared. Friesen encourages habits of moral reasoning that allow Christians to enter into a conversation in which we can engage in the issues of our culture based upon a believer's church tradition of voluntary commitment without succumbing to the use of law to enforce our vision.

Friesen begins his last chapter in which he discusses how Christians as philosophers should treat the insights of human investigation that are outside our biblical and ecclesiastical traditions by citing Philippians 4:8, "If there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." He also provides a brief survey of the biblical affirmation of wisdom and a corrective to readings of 1 Corinthians 1:18-20 and Colossians 2:8 that treat these texts as admonitions to refrain from thinking rationally. He then turns to a challenging invitation to avoid the pitfalls of fundamentalism and to consider the contributions that other religious traditions might make to the cultures of which we partake. He warns against the tendency to relegate religion to the private sphere where it can make no contribution to public life.

I was reminded while reading this chapter of a recent debate prior to Youth Convention 2001 in Nashville. Some organizers wanted to provide yoga sessions for the young bodies wearied by so much sitting; others deemed these to be Hindu and a violation of Christian convictions. The Christian tradition has no adequate physical discipline like yoga or tai chi, and the neo-platonic dualism adopted by the Church Fathers leaves care of the body out of the spiritual picture. In this vacuum we have appropriate sports traditions such as the Olympics and ignore their relationship to a system of honour and shame often at odds with the biblical tradition. Friesen's book encourages a more reflective process for determining what we do accept and what we reject from what various cultures of knowledge offer us.

In a conversation about Friesen's book, one of my colleagues shared this response, "He gives away too much." I suspect that, among other things, he was concerned about Friesen's assertion arising out of his discussion of the individual Christian's relationships with individuals of other faiths that "It is not the task of the Church to convert others" (263). Ripped out of its context, this statement does not rep-

resent Friesen's point that conversion is not simply a matter of "assenting to a series of propositions" but something more profound entailing both conviction about God's story and identification with the people of that story. It does represent Friesen's habit of making truncated assertions.

At two points, I found myself agreeing with my colleagues' criticism. While Friesen uses his rapier prose style to drive his arguments straight to his point, he also directs his blade to cut off two aspects of Christian thought from his discussion. In his discussion of Miroslav Volf's book *Exclusion and Embrace*, he rejects notions of future eschatology with its vision of God's establishment of justice as "residue of the old myth of redemptive violence" (102). I agree that the traditions of the warrior God that inform this vision need to be treated with great circumspection, but to reduce the hope for future divine justice to belief in a "magical intervention" (103) does it an injustice. While notions of divine judgment have been used in ways that make nonsense of Jesus' sacrificial love, rather than ignoring this tradition or dispensing with it, I think that we need to continue to struggle with it lest the hope of resurrection is tossed out with the fear of God's wrath.

In his discussion of Jesus' place in the Trinity, Friesen describes various metaphors that inform atonement Christology and how they contribute to the legitimizing of cultures of domination and are disconnected with Jesus' life and teaching (116-117). Friesen is certainly correct in arguing that theories of sacrifice as expiation or substitution need to be informed by Jesus' willingness to suffer the wrath of human systems of power rather than God's wrath. He does not reject this Christology but reinterprets it, and in doing so, he follows a trajectory set by many contemporary theologians, but the speed with which he leaves behind the traditional notions of expiation may leave unattended wounds in the souls of Christians. These metaphors of ransom and substitution remain powerful in ways that deserve more consideration.

While Friesen expresses his own views bluntly throughout his discussion of his "Trinitarian Model for a Theology of Culture," not all aspects of that discussion are integral to the contributions that he makes to providing a basis for engagement with culture. Where Friesen may give offence it may be a reflection of his rhetorical style with its propensity to overstate the disagreements between his posi-

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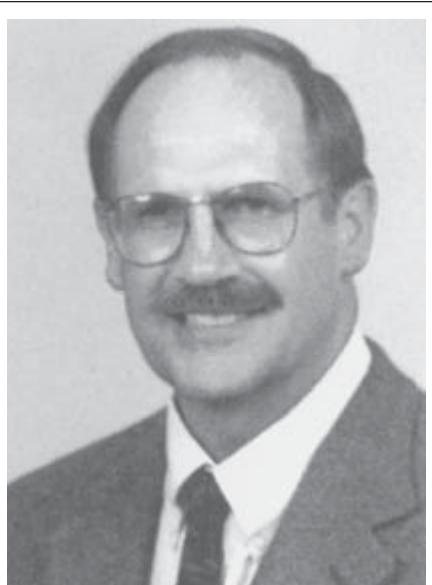


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Duane K. Friesen obtained his Th.D. in Christian social ethics from Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge, Massachusetts. He is currently Professor of Bible and Religion at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. He is the great-great grandson of Heinrich B. Friesen (1837-1926), Alexanderthal, Molotschna, well-known for his descriptive journals set in Imperial Russia. In 1879 the Heinrich B. Friesen family settled near Inman, Kansas (see Pioneer and Pilgrims, page 312/Dynasties, page 696). Photo courtesy of Friesen, Artist, Citizens and Philosophers, page 349.

tion and that of others. While he criticizes Hauerwas' view of the church for lacking a positive vision for public witness (39), his description of the mission of the Church (263) bears strong similarities to that of Hauerwas. He is dismissive of Kierkegaard's description of faith as a "leap" (73), but then later adopts a view of faith that stands in close agreement with Kierkegaard's ideas (98). I encourage future readers of this volume not to reject its conclusions because of flourishes of prose style or aspects of personal conviction that seem overly antagonistic or opposed to tradition.

Like most guides for the perplexed, Friesen offers no rules to live by that will keep the Church pure and untainted by the world in which we live. He does not set in place a formula through which we can run our questions about culture and arrive at clear answers to which all members of the church may agree. Instead he provides a model of theological reflection that makes it possible to live with the ambiguity that life within any culture entails in a manner that is discerning and actively contributes to that culture.

Reviewed by Jo-Ann A. Brant, Professor of Bible and Religion, Goshen College, Goshen, Indiana, 46526.

Walter Klaassen, *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* (3rd.), (Kitchener: Pandora Press, 2001), 118 pages.

Walter Klaassen, now semi-retired and living near Vernon, British Columbia, has written several books and articles in the area of church history and Christian theology. He has taught for many years at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo, Ontario, and continues to be involved in the work of Anabaptist scholarship, especially in translating sixteenth-century Anabaptist writings into English. One of his recent publications is *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*, a seminal volume, first published in 1973 and again in 1981. The book makes the argument that sixteenth-century Anabaptism combined elements of Protestantism and Catholicism to form a third viable option that has continuing relevance for Christians in the present day.

The opening chapter of Klaassen's volume begins with a brief summary of the early history of Anabaptism, and subsequent chapters address issues such as baptism, the Lord's Supper, discipleship, legalism, economics, the state and warfare. The final chapters view the movement in its larger context and also link it with current concerns about Christian faithfulness. The volume ends with an insightful postscript, not included in previous editions, entitled *Anabaptism: Both Positive and Negative*. Helpful biographical sketches of early Anabaptist leaders can be found in an appendix; a second appendix provides a stimulating guide useful for study groups.

The significance of this work can only be fully appreciated in light of historiographical considerations. Mennonites have usually heard the Anabaptist story in positive terms, but the majority of Christians since the sixteenth-century Reformation have been acquainted with a different account, one which has often described Anabaptism as a movement consisting of misguided fanatics or wild-eyed revolutionaries. While some nineteenth-century historians have portrayed the Anabaptists in more positive terms--for instance, linking them with renewal movements of the late Middle Ages--on the whole, students of history have been primarily exposed to negative portrayals of Anabaptism.

In the twentieth-century the person primarily responsible for rehabilitating the Anabaptist story was Harold S. Bender, an American church leader and historian of the Old Mennonite Church. In an essay entitled "The Anabaptist Vision" Bender argued that Anabaptists were not fanatics, nor in any way linked to renewal movements of the late Middle Ages. They originated with the Protestant Reformation, and rather than compromising their principles as Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli had done, they fulfilled the vision of the Reformation, gave it authentic body and form and set out to achieve it in actual experience. According to Bender, they were able to organize a church solely of earnest Christians dedicated to the New Testament principles of discipleship, voluntary church membership and an ethic

of love and non-resistance.

The "Anabaptist Vision" proved to be an important anchor for Mennonites in troubled times. Published in the mid-1940s, Bender's statement was not only a description of sixteenth-century Anabaptism, but also a treatise that assisted twentieth-century Mennonites with their questions about identity. In an attempt to stay clear of what seemed to be the two prevailing options for American Mennonites--fundamentalism or liberalism--Bender argued for a third possibility that encouraged Mennonites to return to their own heritage. This message came at a crucial moment in history. The world was at war and Bender was alarmed that so many Mennonite men willingly joined the military. The "Anabaptist Vision" was a reminder to Mennonites that they belonged to a pacifist tradition, and that being a true Mennonite meant avoiding participation in war. His enthusiasm for Anabaptism eventually stimulated other scholars to focus on sixteenth-century studies and research. Even historians outside of the Mennonite world began to view the Anabaptists more positively. As it happened, the enthusiasm that accompanied the recovery of the Anabaptist story fit well with larger historical trends that viewed the history of Reformation dissent with increasing appreciation.

For several decades the "Anabaptist Vision"



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functioned as a central Mennonite confessional statement, especially for American Mennonites of Swiss and South German ancestry. However, it did not survive the criticisms of scholarship that emerged in the final decades of the twentieth-century. Already in the 1960s a number of historians questioned Bender's assumptions; for instance, that Anabaptism was "Protestantism taken to its proper ends."

In the 1970s a new generation of historians preferred to describe Anabaptism with multiple origins, employing a polygenesis approach, the implication being that Anabaptist beginnings were diverse, not necessarily linked together as Bender had assumed. These historians viewed Anabaptism not so much as a single movement with one point of origin, but as three distinct movements, each with its own origin and characteristics: the Swiss, the South German/Austrian, and the North German/Dutch.

This new way of thinking proved to be a fruitful corrective in that studies were now directed to more specific geographical regions, resulting in more nuanced and differentiated descriptions of Anabaptism. No longer could historians describe Anabaptism credibly without first making clear which Anabaptist groups they were referring to; neither could historians ascribe primacy or normativity to any one tradition. During the Bender era the Swiss tradition was often viewed as the most pristine or genuine form of Anabaptism. The new approach to Anabaptist studies made it possible for Mennonites of non-Swiss descent--such as Prussian and Russian Mennonites--to view their heritage on its own terms.

Since the 1970s the multiple-origins approach has been fruitful for scholarship and for invigorating inter-Mennonite conversation. But the emphasis on diversity has also produced a dilemma. With such a bewildering array of perspectives it has become difficult to give a coherent account of Anabaptism, and produce a viable story for Mennonites seeking orientation and direction from their own history.

It is in this context that Walter Klaassen's *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant* makes a valuable contribution. While the author is keenly aware of, and conversant with the dilemmas of contemporary Anabaptist historiography, he dares to assume that Anabaptism was a coherent movement. At the same time, he does not follow Bender's proposal that Anabaptism fulfilled the vision of the Reformation. Klaassen maintains that the Anabaptists were actually depended on both Catholicism and Protestantism for their understanding of Christianity that ultimately took seriously the Scriptures, the life and teachings of Jesus, and the revelatory power of the Holy Spirit.

Klaassen's contribution differs from Bender's perspective in other important ways. First, while he has great respect for his spiritual ancestors, he does not idealize them, and is opposed to the notion that the truth belongs solely to them. Klaassen writes honestly about

the dangers of Mennonites appealing to the past, and notes that when they uncritically eulogize their tradition they are not only using history dishonestly, but may also be creating guilt among those who seem unable to measure up to the superhuman models of the past. Second, rather than promoting a sectarian or isolationist interpretation of the tradition, which is a possible outcome in following Bender's trajectory, Klaassen's approach is ecumenically open in that it emphasizes ways in which Anabaptism is part of the larger Christian story. Hence, the reader is given an opportunity to positively connect the Anabaptist-Mennonite tradition with the history of other Christian traditions.

It is difficult to find fault with *Anabaptism: Neither Catholic nor Protestant*. My sense is that Klaassen does not pay enough attention to the relationship between social conditions and religious ideas. I agree that Anabaptists were religiously motivated and that their ideas had biblical roots (p. 53), but I'm less certain that the development of their thought can be traced exclusively to biblical origins, as Klaassen seems to imply. This, however, does not detract from what I consider overall to be an insightful and nuanced presentation. We are fortunate to have this classic description of Anabaptism published in an expanded and updated format through Pandora Press Canada (co-published with Herald Press). The volume has scholarly integrity that the specialist and non-specialist will find a pleasure to read.

**Reviewed by Karl Koop, Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Indiana.**

Horst, Isaac. *A Separate People: An Insider's View of Old Order Mennonite Customs and Traditions*. Kitchener: Herald Press, 2000. Pp. 262.

This book is similar, yet different from the dozens of memoirs by septuagenarians in our Manitoba Mennonite communities. It is only indirectly autobiographical. Mostly, it is a biography of a people by one of its actors, Isaac Horst, a practicing Old Order Mennonite from Mount Forest, Ontario and an author of eight previous books.

The text itself is a reproduction of almost 100 insightful Canadian *Mennonite Reporter* columns by

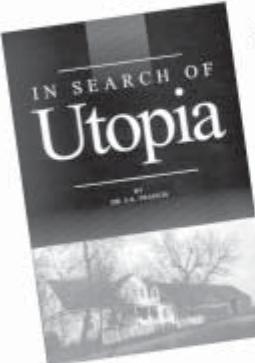
Horst, who uses the old rhetorical device of the master fielding questions of the novice to introduce the reader to his exclusive and often veiled Mennonite group. The columns or mini chapters range from history, to travelogue, to anecdote, to sermon. In the process one learns much about the Old Order communities; their service order, courtship rituals, colonization processes, minister selections, technology "wars" (to use the *Dachwaggeli* or the open buggy), and even their schisms (the way in which car-tolerating Markham Mennonites came to be separate from the horse-and-buggy Waterloo Old Orders).

But the book is more than a guided tour. It is a defence. Yet it is not so much a defence of the Old Order church institution, as of a way of life that is nonconformist, nonresistant, and agrarian and given to "discipline, obedience and discipleship." (29) And in this apologia, Horst is specific, defending an array of practices, including excommunication, women's unpaid work, corporal punishment, farm life, unannounced visiting, controlled dating, and so forth.

The defender of the faith is also an unrelenting biblicist. He notes unequivocally in the introduction that he will not "apologize for such Scripture texts" as "If any one loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (16) In the process of defending the old way, he also lecture us "moderns" on our waywardness. Indeed, a good part of the book is a prophetic critique of the world beyond the Old Order boundaries, the wider Mennonite world and even Canadian society in general.

Horst's list of modern vices is long -- feminism, television, church truancy, urbanism,

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sexual licence, and social assistance are only a part of this list. Horst always returns, however, to his primary task, to defend Old Order culture. But as he does, he seems to possess a hope that Old Order culture could be accepted more widely. Indeed, Horst finds allies and indeed authority for his viewpoints from non-Old Order sources; among them are Heinrich Balzer the Kleine Gemeinde preacher of the 1830s, Theron Schlabach's 1980s *Gosepl vs Gosepl*, Herschberger's 1940s treatise on community utopiansim, and John Howard Yoder's 1961 *As You Go*.

All this provides a sense of the very germ of Old Order life. One senses how important an alternative reading of Mennonite history is: missionary movements, John Oberholtzer, elaborate Mennonite institutions may be celebrated in mainstream Mennonite histories, but they are the bane to the Old Order mind. One obtains a glimpse of Old Order piety; in this book people "come to Christ," (110) they encounter "believer's convictions," (116) they "look to Christ" (122).

Individualism is spurned at every turn: candidates for the ministerial are "comforted" not congratulated; children are discouraged from obtaining "good paying" jobs; readers are chided for seeking in Christianity a "crown without a cross." (174) It is a fascinating account therefore of the cultural material that is used to bolster and invigorate the Old Order communities. Nothing staid and mindlessly traditional compels these people.

Horst is also a skilful communicator. Margaret Loewen Reimer who invited Horst to write these "insider's views" writes in the introduction that "Horst's is not a simple or predictable voice; it keeps surprising us with unexpected turns and shifts in tone...." (p. 10) Indeed, Horst moves from irony, to ridicule, to chiding, to humour.

Occasionally Horst's voice becomes almost abrasive. He notes categorically that Old Order women "would rather do...sewing, than to work outside the home" (110) and he is certain that "showing photographs to friends...is a demonstration of pride." (187) But overall the book works well to introduce a people who have been able to resist the technologized and consumeristic urban world that Canadian and Manitoba Mennonites have come to accept as normative. It is enough to make a "modern" squirm.

The Canadian Mennonite staff merits congratulations on convincing Mr. Horst to write. Unfortunately, the Old Order Mennonites remain the only conservative Mennonite group that we "moderns" romanticize enough to listen to: the voice of the "plain people" of Manitoba -- the Hutterites, Holdemans, Old Colonists -- too often comes to us by way of the dissenter, not the good natured "insider" apologist.

Book review by Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg.

Reprinted from the *Mennonite Historian*, September 2001.

*A Life Displaced: A Mennonite Woman's Flight from War-Torn Poland*, By Edna Schroeder-Thiessen and Angela Showalter, Kitchener, ON.: Pandora Press, 2000.

This is a powerful story. Deceptively simple in its telling, compelling in its imagery, it describes one woman's struggle for freedom. The horror of warfare becomes more real when expressed in terms of its effects on individuals.

At a time in our history when terms like bombing, refugees, and starvation are again part of daily discussions, this story takes on even more significance.

Edna Schroeder was born into a middle class family in the village of Secymin, Poland near the city of Warsaw. Hers was an idyllic existence. She had a loving family and a secure home. Her father was an influential community leader. Fruit orchards and trips to Warsaw to sell produce were part of her experience. She spent happy hours swimming in the Vistula River that flowed past her house. It seemed to be a perfect life—a life shattered in a heartbeat by the winds of the Second World War.

In 1939, Poland and its inhabitants became the first victims of the war. Poland was soon over-run and occupied by the Nazis. Edna, because she and her family were classified by the Nazis as "Volksdeutsche" (people of German origin), was expected to go to special camps where she and other Mennonite young people were to be trained in the "German ways". At these camps they endured extensive indoctrination. As long as the Germans were in control of the territory, Edna and the rest of the Mennonites were secure and reasonably safe, but once the Germans were driven back by the Russians their German background became a terrible burden. Where their German ethnicity had been grudgingly accepted, up to that point,

by their Polish neighbours, once the German army was pushed back, the true feelings of the population came to the fore.

Rapes, beatings and killings became commonplace. In Edna's words "The Poles treated us the worst. I talked with other girls later who said that the Russians did not beat them. They gave them bread and slept with them, but they didn't beat them."

Their Polish neighbours did. In her understated way, Edna describes scenes of unbelievable brutality and hate. It is difficult for the reader to comprehend the magnitude of this inhumanity and it soon becomes apparent why Edna built a "wall" that lasted for forty years and one which blocked out some of the most painful memories.

This is also the story of MCC and people like Menno Fast and Rachel and Bob Fisher who risked their own safety to help refugees like Edna. When we consider the value of MCC, we should remember how much these workers and others like them helped the refugees of the Second World War and other conflicts. Theirs is a remarkable story of courage, dedication and caring. By telling her story Edna Schroeder tells theirs as well.

Edna walked some 1700 kilometres to freedom. Freedom which eventually meant a safe and secure home in the Canadian prairie farm land of Watrous, Saskatchewan, where she married and raised five sons. Edna Schroeder's story remained untold until the efforts of Angela Showalter, an assistant in the Archives of the Mennonite Church at Goshen College, brought her incredible saga to light. Ms. Showalter has done a wonderful job of research and investigation and her introduction to the book is both articulate and concise. It is a scholarly and brilliantly written piece.

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## Preservings

This book is a "must-read" for any student of Mennonite history.

Review by John H. Peters, President, Mennonite Heritage Village Museum, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Alice and Ed Laing, *Pioneers of Clear Springs*, Steinbach, MB. Published by Ed and Alice Laing, Box 1088, Steinbach, MB, ROA 2A0, 2001. Softcover, 8½ by 11, 174 pages. Available at Mennonite Heritage Village, Mennonitsche Post, Carillon Stationers in Steinbach or from the authors.

It has often been said that not enough has been written about the early settlers of the Southeast, especially those who pioneered the area known as Clear Springs.

The third and fourth generations of descendants of these Scottish, English, Irish and Scandinavian settlers owe a debt of gratitude to authors Alice and Ed Laing who together have brought the history of the Clear Springs settlement to life in their new book *Pioneers of Clear Springs*.

Ed Laing grew up on the Clear Springs homestead of his great grandparents Thomas and Mary Laing. Alice(Keith) Laing came from the Otterburne West grain farming area to Clear Springs as a teacher at Ridgewood School in 1943 and married Ed in 1945.

*Pioneers of Clear Springs* in an interesting blend of anecdotal family recollections, historical data from a number of archival sources, Clear Springs Cemetery records and letters from the earliest of arrivals creates a clear picture of how things were.

And it is a report from John R McIntyre and Josiah J Cohoe to their fellow "Sons of Temperance" which provide a fitting opening to the saga of both hardship and reward. A story of faith and conviction and a cameo of the personalities of those who were the original Clear Spring's settlers are very much part of the Laings' effort.

In 1869, Clear Springs first settlers were John and Bertha Mack and Tom Slater from Hensall, Ontario along with Thomas and Clementine Rankin from Coldwater, Ontario and John Jamieson from the Shetland Islands, Scotland.

The original location of Clear Springs is best known today as the area surrounding and including Clearspring Village Shopping Centre, the Mennonite Heritage Village and the industrialized area of Clear Springs Road and Highway 12.

After the survey went through in 1872, settlers came anxious to take up homesteads. Many from different parts of Ontario were experienced farmers but others were Hudson Bay Company men who had served their apprenticeship in the north. Other settlers were volunteers who came with the Wolseley Expedition to quell the Riel Rebellion and took their discharge in Winnipeg which entitled them to a quarter section of Manitoba land.

Many came by Dawson Trail and others came by team and wagon along the Minnesota Trail to Fort Garry and then on to their new

homeland at Clear Springs.

Between 1869 and 1874, 20 families took up most of the land in what was to become known as Clear Springs. Interestingly, during the same period, Winnipeg grew from a village of 300 to a population of 2,500.

The Dawson Trail with its Manitoba beginnings just north of North West Angle, continued through Richer and Ste Anne and on to Fort Garry. This miserable, rugged highway remained in use until the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railroad.

It started at Dawson Landing (now known as Thunder Bay) and followed over 110 miles of lakes and portages and another 95 miles through the bush from Lake of the Woods to Fort Garry.

In 1874, during a stopover in Thunder Bay John McIntyre observes the wondrous sights of nature with its rushing rivers and beautiful clear skies but decries the presence of alcohol everywhere. He writes, "Here drunkenness is the great Ocean Steamship and on her nearly the whole town takes passage. Temperance is the small skiff with only a few oarsmen. We have rowed over some big waves and we have not got swamped and do not intend to until we the temperance element get charge of the Steamship and change her name from Drunkenness to Temperance."

Departing for Fort Garry later in the year, McIntyre's journal chronicles the hardships of the three week journey interspersed with vivid descriptions of the scenery along the way.

In the second section of their book, the Laings bring the family history and diversity of the Clear Springs settlement into sharp focus with short stories about all the most familiar names from William Acres, to Alex Borland, to the Laings, the Mooneys, the McCaskills and the Steels all the way through to Archibald Wright.

The arrival of the Mennonites in 1874 was very different from the Anglo-Saxons in that they came in large groups while the Clear Springs settlers came as individual families.

The Mennonite and Clear Springs settlers soon became good neighbors and throughout their research the Laings were unable to find any evidence of animosity between them, even though their cultures were very different to each other at the time.

They soon joined together in establishing a syndicate threshing machine and sawmill. The progressive Men-

nonite neighbors soon opened a store, gristmill and flour mill.

The sale of farms from the Clear Springs settlers to Mennonite neighbors was gradual but consistent over the years with many Anglo-Saxons seeming to be more restless and moving away. Many continued farming in the Grandview area where large tracts of inexpensive land became available.

As in most pioneering communities, the church at Clear Springs was found to be the best influence to raise the level of people's thoughts above everyday problems. The church also brought the pioneers together, encouraged them in their loneliness and gave them a much brighter outlook on life. The Clear Springs community also owed the beginning of schools and education to their church.

Rev. James Robertson, founder of the Presbyterian Knox Church, Winnipeg, came to Clear Springs for the first service Nov 15, 1877. All the settlers and children were at the service held in the home of William Laing Sr. A large number of children were christened at this service, the forerunner of many more held in the houses of the pioneers before a church was built in the late 1870s.

A second Presbyterian church was built in Giroux in the early 1900s. Becoming part of the United Church of Canada in 1925 the churches at Giroux and Clear Springs continued services during the summer months but only held services in a Steinbach school for the winter.

In 1956 a deal was made to buy the Chortitzer church building in Steinbach which was moved from Hanover Street to its present Main Street location, ending services at Clear Springs.

*Pioneers of Clear Springs* gives readers a

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A prairie farm in Clear Springs, SW13-7-6E, ca. 1920 (where Bob Brandt lives today), two miles northeast of Steinbach on Clearspring Road. Three generations of Clearspringers, Christy, May and Mabel McCaskill pose in front of their large modern grainery, topped with a windmill, to grind and store grain for livestock on the Alex McCaskill farmstead. Alex and Christy McCaskill operated the first, and only, Post Office in Clear Springs. Photo courtesy of Ed and Alice Laing, Steinbach.

real feeling of the importance these early settlers attached to many other things taken for granted today, like public schools and mail delivery.

The only way to maintain a link outside their community, the earliest Clear Springs settlers would have to travel by ox or horse teams or walk the Dawson Trail to Fort Garry to send or get mail.

Later, the walk was shortened somewhat by having the mail brought to the Hudson Trading Post in Ste Anne. The first official mail carrier for Clear Springs carried letters in his vest pocket.

The first school for Clear Springs had equally modest beginnings with the Presbyterian Church building doubling as a school. Miss Abigail McKibbon was the first teacher with 20 students enrolled in 1879.

The second teacher at Clear Springs, John Code, taught for one year before joining the Winnipeg Rifles to help put down the Riel Rebellion. In 1885, he was killed at the Battle of Batoche.

A new Clear Springs School was built in the summer of 1882 on land donated by William Mooney Sr. By that time the community had grown to the point it was divided into two school districts, Clear Springs and Ridgewood. Ridgewood celebrated the 100th anniversary of its school in 1983.

Drawing generously on recollections of earlier settlers and their descendants, Laings round out their book with a series of articles by David Laing, Rachel Langill Christy, Mary Lund Burns, Alice Lawson Cameron, Gladys Mooney Barkman and Harold and Doreen Ostberg. A chapter of memories from Clear Springs and surrounding area provide both a welcome addition to the pioneers' story and a challenge to readers to add contributions of their own.

The Laings have labored long and hard gathering material for their book as anyone with a connection to the Clear Springs settlement will attest. This has been a labor of love for the octogenarian and his wife and is indeed a tribute to Laing's grandparents and an historic heirloom for fourth and fifth generation Clear Springs settlers.

*Pioneers of Clear Springs* should also prove to be an inspiration to other descendants of these settlers to make sure their family stories are preserved in print as well. As is the case with every good history book, the reader is left with a desire to hear the rest of the story.

The Laings should be encouraged to begin work immediately on the sequel to *Pioneers of Clear Springs*. If the most difficult part of any task is in getting started, they are already well on the way and it would be a shame to see them stop now.

Reviewed by Wes Keating who has worked for *The Carillon* since 1971. His grandfather Peter Keating was one of the original Clear Springs settlers, homesteading NE 10-7-6, west of Steinbach on Keating Road.

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Plett, Delbert, ed. *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada, 1875-2000*. Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publishers, 2001. Pkb. \$20.00 plus \$3.00 postage.

This book marks an important development in Canadian Mennonite historiography in two significant ways.

First it fills a gap. Most Mennonite denominations in Canada have their history books. Recently Manitoba writers have produced several such histories: Ana Ens on the General Conference Mennonites, Jack Heppner on the EMMC, Harvey Plett on the EMC, and Henry Neufeld on the Mennonite

Brethren. Each of these groups has also been well represented in national Mennonite histories by Frank Epp and Ted Regehr. One group, the Old Colony [also Reinlaender] Mennonite Church, has been without such a history. Ironically, there may be more works in English on the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico than in Canada.

*Old Colony Mennonites* presents the history of the largest of the Mennonite congregations to take root in the Canadian prairies in the 1870s. It tells the story of the Old Colony remnant which remained in Canada, especially of the one in Saskatchewan, members of which later migrated to northern Alberta and British Columbia. The book also records the history of the thousands of Old Colony Mennonites who returned from Mexico to various points in Canada, including Alberta and Manitoba, but especially southern Ontario. The book even portrays the Old Colony Mennonites in Seminole, Texas.

A second feature of the book is perhaps even more important. The book marks an attempt to rehabilitate a people that the editor, Delbert Plett, suggests have been unfairly disparaged over time. Each of the five sections of the book -- the historical background, the biography of Ältester Johann Wiebe, the biographies of other early leaders, the congregational histories of churches across Canada, and the account of the 125th anniversary celebrations held in Manitoba in 2000 -- serve to produce a sympathetic human face on this important but under-studied denomination.

The richest single section of the book is the one that reproduces the documents of the Old Colony Mennonites. Especially important is the collection of writings by Ältester Johann Wiebe, recently brought to the attention of Canadian historians by Bruce Wiebe of Winkler. This collection of diaries and letters sheds invaluable light on

numerous features of this quiet congregation.

They reveal the ‘flesh and blood’ side of Wiebe: his tearful departure from Russia in 1875; his sense of destiny on the Canadian prairie, complete with an exuberant report of “wheat with such heads as I have never had before....” [57]; his deep dismay that many of his co-religionists stayed in Russia, conformed to more liberal lifestyles and to new government regulations; his love and passion for his congregation; his joy of offering pastoral council -- “if only I could once again come into your midst,” he writes in 1875, “I would talk until I was satisfied” [56]; his council to a church leader after a fall from grace; and his personality that exudes energy, authority and compassion.

In the words of the translator of several of these pieces, Delbert Plett, Aeltester Wiebe wrote in a Danziger High German prose that was “often complex, using allegory and imagery [revealing a] level of...comprehension and expression [that was] very deep, the mark of a brilliant thinker.” [52] Within this text lies a treasure trove of insight. The reason for the 1870s migration is illuminated by Wiebe’s letter to his Russian congregationalists in which he states boldly, “if we love God above everything else....how shall we be able to assume the service which the Government is requiring of you?” [52] Within the text too lies the code that shaped the history of the Old Colony: in a letter written in 1904, the year before he died, Wiebe counselled his parishioners to recall that “the reason God has allowed us to be born into this earth [certainly is] not in order to become rich, lordly, or to be acclaimed in this world.” [67]

The book also reproduces writings of professional historians and theologians, several of who are on the faculty of the Canadian Mennonite University. Together the writings of Professors John J. Friesen, Adolf Ens, David Schroeder and Wesley Berg depict a simple, agrarian folk who nevertheless held to a complex, courageous, contesting and biblically-based vision that sent them from one country to the next. Friesen’s thorough essay on the historical background of the Old Colony people is more than a narrative; it suggests strongly that the Old Colony had a strong start on the Manitoba prairie, possessed of strong leadership and a set of compassionate social institutions, but that more powerful external agencies -- especially an intrusive government and aggressive Mennonite missionary groups -- led the Old Colony to become “defensive, fearful of change and suspicio[us] of outsiders.” [13] Ens and Schroeder expand on this point, suggesting that the Old Colony Mennonites have been true witnesses to a call to costly discipleship that might well serve as a model for other denominations. Berg argues that even the *Lang Wiese* church melodies do not depict backwardness as much as the complex evolution of oral musical forms, reflecting developments in other rural societies around the world.

In addition to these interpretative essays are numerous biographies by descendants and congregational histories by present-day Old Colony leaders and lay historians. These pieces tie together the Old Colony Mennonites over time. Several biographies of the pre-1920s emigration to Latin America offer portraits of leaders such as Peter Wiens, committed to providing children with

an enlightened elementary education, or to Bernard Toews, willing to contest and even defy state laws to a point of imprisonment in Winnipeg during the month of January 1920.

These writings also link the Old Colony people across space. Various accounts provide fundamental details of congregational histories, leadership and memberships from British Columbia to Ontario. One is reminded at every turn that the reason for a dearth of material on the Old Colony may well be that it has been a community of diaspora. These accounts depict a people on the move and of communities attempting to establish themselves in new settings. Among the richest of the documents are the travelogues of Jakob Wiens en route to Canada in the 1870s and of Klaas Heide scouting potential Old Colony settlement sites in the 1920s.

Frequently internal divisions amongst the Old Colony are expressed by geographical separation: Johann Wiebe knew that the 1875 migration also marked a division, Leonard Doell’s account of the Saskatchewan settlements in the 1890s suggests strained links with the Manitoba leaders, and even current-day Rev. Abe E. Rempel notes that the distance between Manitoba and Mexico has been accompanied by less than “good relationship[s]” amongst church leaders. [141] But as often, new settlement ventures by this migrating people have shown great bounds of energy as institutions are rebuilt: the Old Colony Mennonites school network in Ontario, employing the “Christian Light Publication” curriculum of Pennsylvania and emphasizing English language instruction and even envisioning a Grade 12 education, is especially impressive.

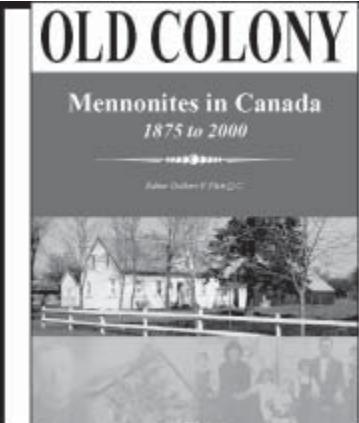
In many ways the book is a model denominational history. It provides a thorough index and

bibliography. Adding a visual affect to the histories are references to material history, depicting rustic lines of church architecture, panoramic photographs of settlements and century-old artifacts -- furniture, clocks and drawings -- that have travelled the distance with these migratory people.

A controversial feature of the book is the very sharp criticism its editor levels against other Mennonite churches. The book exhibits an implicit dualism, one that dichotomizes the Mennonite world into “Gospel-centric” disciples and those fallen Christians who follow “bizarre, heathen” [43] practices or those who assisted “Satan” with his “his plan...[of] attack....” [60]. In my mind, the book would have been strengthened if its ethos at every turn had embraced Doc Schroeder’s counsel that “it would be well if we would cease throwing stones.” [34] In my mind, too, the book would have been stronger without statements and designations that seem flippant: references to a “quacking duck” [86] or the invention of the German-English hybrid nomenclature, “O.K.”, does not reflect the quiet and sincere dignity of the Old Colony people.

This book marks a watershed in the historiography of the Old Colony Mennonites. Delbert Plett’s vision and energy has not only provided a service to the Old Colonists themselves but to all historically interested persons, hitherto unfamiliar with Old Colony history. As such the book will also serve a crucial role in enriching the wider Mennonite historiography that has overlooked the most quiet of the Mennonites. This story of an intense and humble commitment to Christ’s love will inspire the book’s readers.

Book review by Royden Loewen, Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg, Manitoba.



In 1875 the Old Colony (Reinlander) Church was formed in Manitoba, Canada, a Christian community committed to the restoration of the Apostolic Order. For 125 years Old Colony Mennonites have persevered through exile, poverty and harassment, blazing a trail of Biblical faithfulness across North and South America.

This anthology of historical sketches, biographies and congregational histories is written by professional historians and by the Old Colony people themselves. The inspiring story of this remarkable community is finally told. 196 pages. Editor: Delbert F. Plett Q.C.

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