



Preservings

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“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

The Old Colonists - Following Jesus

In 1875 the Reinländer Gemeinde was formed in the West Reserve, Manitoba, Canada, under the leadership of Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, formerly of the Fürstenlandt Colony, South Russia (see *Preservings*, No. 14, pages 49-72). The new community consisted of immigrants from the Chortitza “old” Colony and its daughter settlements in the Black Sea region who were, therefore, known as “Alt-Kolonier” or “Old Colonists”.

The Reinländer Gemeinde attempted nothing less than the restoration of the Apostolic Order in the tradition of their Flemish Anabaptist forebears of Reformation times who had suffered a century of fierce persecution for their faith (see *Preservings*, No. 22, pages 1-44). The Flemish Ordnung included a paradigm of grassroots democracy, commitment to the Gemeinde over individualism, pure orthodox teachings (“Rein” meaning pure), yieldedness or surrender to the will of God (Gelassenheit), toleration for other faiths, penitence and following Jesus (Nachfolge) as the key to salvation, and a visible church separated from the world in the spirit of medieval monasticism.

The Reinländer quickly grew to become one of the major branches of the Mennonite church and, certainly, the largest within the Flemish-Russian stream (comparable to the Amish and Old Orders among the American-Swiss Mennonites). By the turn of the century the denomination had established successful colonies near Hague and Swift Current, Saskatchewan, and later, also a pioneering settle-



Susanna Peters, age 7, Colony Riva Palacios, Bolivia, showing her younger sisters how to correctly ride a horse. Susanna is the daughter of Isaak Peters and has 11 siblings. Devout Christian formation as the sure path to salvation, respect for elders and authority, and genuine family values and strong work ethic are an essential part of Old Colony faith and culture. Such large families are a blessing of God and the backbone of the church. Photo - Kennert Giesbrecht, Men. Post, May 16, 2003, page 4.

ment at Peace River, Alberta. By the 1990s the largest Old Colony congregation in Canada had been established in Southern Ontario, mainly by returnees from Mexico.

In 1922-26 some 6000 or approximately half of the Old Colonists in Canada, chose to suffer the bitter fate of exile rather than to submit to the arbitrary suppression of religious freedoms, the illegal expropriation of property and the resulting oppression and hostile cultural landscape. Mexico provided a harsh physical environment but proved to be fertile ground for the growth of the Old Colony church, spawning new settlements within Mexico as well as in Belize (1958), Paraguay and Bolivia.

For 128 years the Old Colony Mennonites have persevered through exile, poverty and harassment, blazing a trail of Biblical faithfulness across North and South America. In this issue of *Preservings* we proudly feature the Old Colonists, so often misunderstood and denigrated by their assimilationistic and progressivistic Mennonite co-religionists. We celebrate the immense contributions which they have made to the Christian church, serving as a light and model of a people separated unto God in the “old” New Testament tradition of “following Jesus”.

The Editor.

Inside This Issue

Feature Articles	3-44
President’s Report	45
Editorial	46-50
Guest Essay	51-52
Letters	53-55
News	56-67
Articles	68-125
Material Culture	126-132
Book Reviews	133-139

Introduction - The Old Colonists - Following Jesus

Originating in the Flemish Gemeinden of Imperial Russia, 3800 Old Colonists established themselves on the treeless plain between the Red River and the Pembina Hills in Manitoba in 1875-78. The Reinländer Gemeinde has steadily expanded ever since, becoming the largest - and certainly, the fastest growing - branch of the Flemish-Russian Mennonite diaspora. A quarter of Russian Mennonite descendants - some 150-200,000 souls - would proudly claim ancestral and spiritual roots in this community (Endnote). Comparable membership statistics for other denominations are: Mennonite Church USA 110,000; Amish 83,000; Mennonite Church Canada 37,000; M.B. Canada 34,000.

Previous issues of *Preservings* (Nos 14-17) focused on the founding and early years of the Reinländer Gemeinde in Manitoba. This issue will follow the Old Colonists through their unfolding history as they established new settlements in Mexico, Belize, Bolivia and Paraguay.

Where other sectarian movements among the Russian Mennonites (with the exception of the Kleine Gemeinde), set out to repudiate and renounce their traditional Christo-centric faith, the vision of the Old Colonists was to return to the purity and zeal of their Anabaptist ancestors, hence the name "Reinländer", speaking for the Flemish vision of "pure" teaching and a "pure" church. The Old Colonists have experienced sacrifice, hardship and persecution (and errors), but have also manifested steadfastness in the New Testament tradition of penitence and following Jesus.

The persecution of Hutterites in South Dakota as well as the Kleine Gemeinde in Kansas, speaks for the anti-Pacifist, anti-German mania which swept North America during and after World War One. The Old Order Mennonites of Ontario had more difficulties securing military exemptions than the conservatives of Western Canada who were protected by their *Privilegium* negotiated prior to immigration in 1874. In the U.S.A. oppression of Hutterites, Amish, Conservative and Old Order Mennonites was inflicted by bigots and lynch mobs as well as by government agencies such as the Army (*Pres.*, No. 19, pages 53-54). In Western Canada most Mennonites lived in territorial block settlements making individual acts of violence and terrorism more difficult.

By 1916 public opinion had turned even more dramatically and Legislatures in Saskatchewan and Manitoba enacted Anglo-conformist laws (ethnic cleansing), *inter alia*, abolishing Mennonite confessional schools, implementing compulsory district schools ("Zwangschulen") funded by double taxation, and punishing families that resisted with usurious fines and imprisonments. This created a hostile environment and a crisis of conscience for those wishing to remain true to their faith and religious tradition. The 1919 plea of A. Vernon Thomas, *Free Press* staff reporter, that the Mennonites not be unjustly exiled - although ignored by his countryman - demonstrated that not all Canadians were swept away by mass hysteria and prejudice against non-Anglo-Saxon minorities. But the course of government policy was firmly set, result-

ing in the exile of many conservatives from Canada.

During the 1920s some 8,000 Old Colonists, Sommerfelder and Chortitzers fled Canada rather than compromise their faith. There is always a social cost for the oppression of minorities. Marjan Blok has written that over half of Antwerp migrated after its fall in 1585 and that the Netherlands would never have had its "golden age" had it not been for the Flemish emigres and the money and skills they brought (*Pres.*, No. 22, page 26). I have estimated that "harrying the good people out of the land" in the 1920s is still costing the Canadian GNP some \$3,000,000,000.00 annually in lost revenue.

Many capable writers among the Old Colonists have left a rich literary legacy. We are proud to publish two of these writings. The historical account "Schools and Community" by teacher David Harder creates an authoritative narrative for their history in Mexico up to 1960. I first read the account of the suffering and death of deacon Isaak Dyck in 1944, written by his father Ältester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld, Mexico, while on a flight from Winnipeg to Toronto last October. I was deeply moved by Ohm Isaak's description of his son's suffering and death which provides a striking voice for the genuine piety and deep biblical religiosity of the Old Colonists.

Sjouke Voolstra has been referred to by Dr. Walter Klaassen as "...the most important recent interpreter of Menno Simons." In his book, *Menno Simons: His Image and Message* (Newton, Kansas, 1997), 109 pages, Voolstra portrays Menno as a faithful parish priest who sought to return the sacraments to their apostolic purity. Voolstra's well-reasoned treatise places Menno within the context of the Roman Catholic church assuming leadership after 1536 of a part of the diverse Melchorite Anabaptist movement. In the process Menno established a new denomination which sought to be a disciplined, visible church "without spot and wrinkle." An abridgement of Voolstra's book forms a valuable companion piece to the articles on our Flemish Mennonite forebears published in Issue 22 of *Preservings*, outlining the origins and antecedents for many of the teachings and practices of our modern-day conservative and traditionalist Mennonites.

Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites are accorded a relatively respectable status within Swiss-American Mennonite culture. By comparison, conservative and traditionalist Mennonites within the Flemish-Russian stream have largely been denigrated and - more often than not - omitted entirely from the historical record. The origins of such pejorative attitudes, at least in part, go back to the historians of the Dutch Doopsgezinde where the conservatives were described "...with more ridicule than fact..." Samme Zilstra, *Om de ware gemeente* (Leeuwarden, 2000), page 501. However, the condescending viewpoints dominating Russian Mennonite historiography, in part, can also be traced to the writings of German archivist Ludwig Keller (1849-1915). Keller popularized the notion that normative Anabaptism was represented not by Menno Simons and the biblical teaching of the disciplined, visible Church of God, but rather by

Hans Denck and a religious culture which exalted individualism and spiritualism. The editorial outlines the story of Ludwig Keller and how his ideas and writings became the ideological vehicle for rejecting the Gospel-centric teachings of Menno Simons and for attacking and denigrating his spiritual descendants.

Some of the earliest scholarly writings about the Old Colonists such as *The Old Colony Mennonites: Dilemmas of Ethnic Minority Life* (Baltimore, 1969) by Calvin Redekop, and *They Sought a Country* (Berkeley, 1971) by Leonard Sawatzky evaluated them in terms of how well and quickly they assimilated - the narrative of modernization. The Old Colonists, of course, did not fare well by this standard as the story of the Flemish Mennonites since the days of the Reformation was one of faithfulness to Christo-centric faith and heroic resistance to assimilation and proselytization whether in Flanders, Zeeland, Frisland or Polish-Prussia. Unfortunately, some Mennonite academics have seemingly failed to realize how important it is for a community to remain firmly rooted and anchored within its tradition and "...to resist the siren call of modernization and accommodation that has seduced so much of western civilization," Eric Margolis, *Wpg. Sun*, Oct. 19, 2003.

Regrettably, also, the condescending tone established by such academic works has been adopted as the voice for much of the writing about conservative Mennonites in Canada and particularly by those targeting them for conversion to so-called Evangelical religious culture. Scholarship has evolved and become more sophisticated and immigrant and minority groups are now examined from different perspectives, including their strategies and success in resisting assimilation. These more nuanced studies certainly recognize the immense contributions which the Old Colonists have made to society with their ethos of resettlement and pioneering (the frontier experience). Several articles from back issues of *Mennonite Life* from the 1940s and '50s by writers J. Winfred Fretz, Walter Schmiedehaus and Charles Burkhart speak of earlier times which do not yet reflect the negative viewpoints referred to.

Henry Schapansky has correctly pointed out that "Historical writing in respect of the Russian Mennonites has long been dominated by Brüdergemeinde apologists. Non-Brethren works

Attention: Readers responses, critical or otherwise, are welcome. The editor can be contacted at 1(204)326-6454 office, fax 1(204)326-6917, mail Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0. Website - hshs.mb.ca - e-mail delplett@mts.net

Please remember we are now the Flemish Mennonite Historical Society Inc. (FMHS) and all cheques and payments for memberships and subscriptions to *Preservings* should be changed accordingly. *Preservings* will now be published annually. The annual subscription fee remains \$20.00. The membership fee is an additional \$20.00 annually.

Shall the Mennonites be Driven out of Canada? 1919

“Shall the Mennonites be driven out of Canada?”

by A. Vernon Thomas, Morden, Manitoba, from the *Steinbach Post*, January 22 and 29, 1919.

Mennonites Targeted?

Canadian papers received here furnish convincing evidence that a drive has been started against the Mennonites of Western Canada. Their children are to be forced into the public schools whether they will or not, with the result that large groups of these people are seriously discussing emigration to Argentina.

If four years of war had not prepared one for anything I should have believed such a situation impossible. I feel deeply that fair-minded Canadians do not realize what is at stake touching the welfare and good name of Canada, and as I question to your readers.

First let me say very clearly that I do not discuss at all the case of certain Mennonites who have recently come to the Canadian West from the United States with the intention, it is alleged, of escaping military service. I have no reliable information as to what prompted it. What I have to say is solely applicable to the old established Mennonite settlements of the West, against which it is evident, a racial and religious drive is now being launched.

Mennonite History.

The Mennonites of Western Canada are in no sense nationalistic. They have no nationalist ambitions or pretension. Whoever states the contrary, no matter what individual Mennonites themselves may have said in foolish moments, is either stating what he knows to be false or is criminally ignorant as to these people.

The history of the Mennonites of Western Canada is an open book to anyone who wishes to read it. In just what particular country the forebears of the Canadian Mennonites may have been born away back in the sixteenth century is surely unimportant. Important is that they wandered over half

of Europe, living now in one country and now in another, seeking religious freedom. They lived in Switzerland; they lived in Holland; they traversed portions of Germany and Austria and finally they found an asylum in Russia. In this latter country they lived continuously for one hundred years prior to coming to Canada.

When the Russian Government in 1870 withdrew from the Mennonites the immunity from military service granted them when they first settled in the country, they looked around for a new home. The Canadian Government heard of this and sent a special emissary to Russia to invite the Mennonites to Canada. The invitation was accepted on the strength of definite and specific pledges, highly guaranteed by the Canadian Government of the day. One of these pledges had to do with freedom from military service but another, just as important to the Mennonites, read:

“The fullest privilege of exercising their religious principles is by law afforded to the Mennonites without any kind of molestation or restriction whatever; and the same privilege extends to the education of their children in their schools.”

Fairness.

Now I suggest to fair-minded men and women that the language of this solemnly made pledge is reasonably clear. I think the wayfaring man though a fool might be counted upon to understand it. Yet today we are confronted with the strange spectacle of politicians, magistrates, editors and others contending that this pledge to the Mennonites does not mean and imply what for fifty years, without a single dissentient voice, everyone has understood it to mean and imply.

These people may be right, but if they are, surely

no treaty, no covenant, no guarantee made in the English language is worth the paper it is written on as soon as any considerable body of people wish to break it. Have we not here one more instance of that weakness in human nature which permits perfectly good reasons to be found for doing something men and women wish to do, no matter what solemn obligations or sacred covenants have been entered into to the contrary?

Schools.

Let me frankly confess that the type of school which exists in some of the Mennonite colonies is not the type of school which I would wish to send my own children if I had any. But I am not infallible and I do not know whether the kind of school which conforms to my ideas of education is best for everybody's children or best for the whole country.

The overwhelming reason for the particulars of the Mennonites in regard to schools is fear of their children being demoralized by contact with the outside world. In view of the kind of world we have been living in during the past four years dare anyone say that this fear has absolutely nothing to justify it? Are we now after these fearful years so cocksure that our system of education is the very best conceivable, and so reliable, that it should be forced to anyone whether they will or no? On the contrary, it seems to me that unless we want to march straight to such another bloody horror as we have just gone through we shall ruthlessly examine our educational structure from basement to garret.

Premier Norris.

Those who know the Mennonites of the West have, I believe, invariably spoken well of them. I remember driving out from Morden one summer

(Introduction to Issue No. 23 continued)

have generally emanated from the progressives. The Brethren secured some support from the progressives since...the Brethren were seen as useful tools in breaking up and modernizing the traditionalist community;” (page 118). In his article, “Patriarchs of the Brüdergemeinde”, Schapansky brings forth evidence that the sectarian movement did not arise spontaneously as has been claimed by denominational historians but was the result of “external forces and family backgrounds.” It is sobering to reflect that the painful split of 1860 - which tore apart families, communities and churches across Imperial Russia and America - might have been avoided had the foreign operatives not been allowed access to the Mennonite colonies as was in fact recommended by Vice-Director Sivers (page 139). The article by Henry Schapansky provides an objective analysis on the dynamics of sectarian divisions among Mennonites and a helpful perspective as to how such painful and tragic events can be prevented in the future (see *Pres.*, No. 22, page 63).

The Old Colonists provide a stark but poignant example of a pilgrim people remaining faithful to

the apostolic order in the face of extreme harassment and sometimes outright persecution - frequently by naive and misguided co-religionists. David Quiring has compared the situation of communities continually under attack to a country at war, “...which neglects all else while it focuses on surviving the challenge from the outside,” Quiring, “Men. Old Colony Life under Seige in Mexico,” M.A. Thesis, 1997, page 198.

The story of the Old Colonists is a fascinating account of the perseverance of a religious faith and community over time and space. Those who take the time to compare the beliefs and practices of the Flemish Anabaptists as portrayed in the June 2003 *Preservings*, or the teachings of Menno Simons as described by Sjouke Voolstra in this issue (pages 30-41), will acquire a rich sense of the many resonances and convergences which still echo in the hearts, lives and communities of the modern-day Old Colonists, faithfully following Jesus unto the end. The Editor.

Endnote: Calvin Redekop, “Learning from those who leave Anabaptism,” in *Men. Weekly Review*, Oct. 20, 2003. Dr. Redekop is a renown sociologist who has written extensively about Mennonites and

particularly the Old Colonists. Ironically, those who have studied growth patterns of various Mennonite denominations have seemingly overlooked the fact that when Mennonites convert themselves to other religions such as American Evangelicalism, they lose what they have that is distinct, and enter into a fiercely competitive religious marketplace where the successful predators recognize no moral or ethical boundaries in expanding their territories. In marketing language once product identity (brandname) is lost, the generic product can compete only on price and marketing. Dr. Redekop refers to the example of the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren who lost significant market share when they abandoned the Mennonite name (much of Mennonite theology had already been rejected by the E.M.B. founders) (see *Pres.*, No. 14, page 143-4). By remaining true to the faith of the fathers and the “old” tradition of following Jesus, conservative groups such as the Old Colonists and Amish, avoid the entire issue of growth as the ultimate “good” of North American society and can focus on actually attempting to live as the church and people of God - a formula which has seemingly held them steadfast to their course over the past five centuries.

day a few years ago in the company of Premier Norris (Mr. Norris he was then) to a Mennonite village. We admired the beautiful gardens which smiled in the front of every cottage, filling the air with fragrance and astonishing the eye with a riot of colour.

I remember that Mr. Norris was interested in the horses of one of the villagers and that we exchanged a greeting with several of the Mennonites. They were courteous and well disposed, if perhaps a little shy. But I am sure it never occurred to any of us at that time that these people could ever be a source of danger to Canada. Their life was certainly not our idea of existence, but there was orderliness on every hand, there were everywhere evidences of industry and of a feeling for the beautiful.

Progress.

Suspicious as the Mennonites are of the ways of the majority they have by no means stood still since they arrived in Canada. Let me commend this thought to those who would now push and prod the Mennonite populations: there has been movement and progress amongst them and a great many Mennonites have accepted the public school idea.

At the beginning of 1913 there were 64 public school districts in the Mennonite settlements of Manitoba, 76 Mennonite public school teachers and 1858 Mennonite children enrolled in public schools. I take these figures from the *Manitoba Free Press* of Feb. 10, 1913. They are contained in one of eight special articles described as "A Study on the Ground by a Free Press Staff Correspondent." That staff correspondent was myself. I have reread these eight articles after the lapse of five years, and I am proud to be able to say that there is not a sentence I would wish to change. I commend this series of articles (*Manitoba Free Press*, Feb. 4 to 12, 1913) to Canadians who wish to read what I believe is a fair statement of the Mennonite position. These articles were approved by the *Manitoba Free Press* at the time and their accuracy and good faith were not challenged from any quarter.

I find I mention in one of these articles an opinion by Mr. Alex McLeod, formerly of Morden, Man, a well-known Canadian, who spent half a lifetime in close touch with the Mennonites, as to the literacy of these people. Mr. McLeod has stated - emphatically that there is less illiteracy amongst the Mennonites of Manitoba than amongst any other nationality in the province, not excluding the English-speaking portion.

I have shown that there has been a movement towards the public school amongst these people. Let me add that there also has been movement in their private schools. Many of the latter conducted formerly in the German language alone have in recent years voluntarily devoted some time to the teaching and use of English. There has been move-

ment even amongst the most backward element of the Mennonite population.

Tolerance.

Again let me emphasize this thought. These people very different in origin and traditions from ourselves, have moved, perhaps not as fast as some of us would have liked to see, but at any rate there has been movement. This movement was a work of a quarter of a century. It was accomplished by the exercise of patience and tolerance on the part of teachers, inspectors, private citizens and others. With the continued exercise of these qualities the movement will continue. But if coercive methods are tried, it will, in my opinion, not only be more conducive to bailive but the gain of years will be entirely lost. Is it worthwhile risking that?

There is another reason for going slowly with the Mennonites. Those who know these people best will bear me out when I say that many of those Mennonites who have become Canadianized as it is called, have lost some of the sterling qualities of their parents.

To be continued.

(Continued from last issue).

It is an old story, vouched for by thousands of sociologists, social workers and others both in Canada and the United States, that the children of the foreign-born show many regrettable tendencies not apparent in their parents. One, at least, of the reasons invariably given for this is the hiatus between the old and the new traditions and ideals. Is it then part of wisdom to try and hasten the transition? As a matter of fact, beyond a certain point, it cannot be hastened. The quicker the process in appearance, the slower it is in reality and vice versa.

Fanatics.

I make the charge that behind this drive against the Mennonites are a handful of fanatics, some of them imbued by mere political consideration and others by racial and religious arrogance. I admit that many decent and sincere people have been persuaded to join in this piece of Prussianism by the specious and high-sounding names under which the onslaught is being waged. But never yet did Prussianism fail to find a fair garment with which to hide its nakedness.

Proof? I can give some. The fanatics now egging on western governments against the Mennonites are to a large extent the same men and women who forced the Manitoba Government to abolish without a trace the old standing right of the French to the use of their language in the schools. A minister in the Manitoba Government which committed this wrong said to me personally: "It was an injustice and I am ashamed of it. The truth is that we were stampeded." The minister will today stand upon the platform and defend the abolition of the bilingual clause, although his heart and conscience tell him it was an injustice.

Conclusion.

I have reason to know that the present drive against the Mennonites was started and is being supported by some Canadians in the belief that wartime was a favourable time to "put it over." Is not this, however, the dishonourable and un-British procedure of striking a man when he is down? Is it not deliberately calculated that arguments which the Mennonites might have at other times advanced because of the national passions aroused in the general public by the war? Is it not calculated that many people who in normal times speak out for the Mennonites are now silenced by the prevailing temper? Is it not calculated that it will be possible at the present time to create the impression that the Mennonites are sympathizers with the Kaiser and imbued with the principles of Prussian Militarism? This looks to me very much like a piece of dirty work.

A Saskatchewan dispatch in the *Manitoba Free Press* of September 20 last states that the Mennonite convention held in Hague, Sask., decided to send a delegation to Argentina to see if favourable terms of settlement could be secured in that country. Personally I believe that at least half a dozen South American republics would "tumble over themselves" to get Canada's Mennonites as settlers and that they would cheerfully guarantee them all the measure of religious liberty they asked for.

But are Canadians prepared to have it go forth to the world that Canada, with all her boasting of the past as to her democratic and progressive institutions, drove beyond her borders a body of harmless and defenceless citizens because they desired to exercise rights that had been solemnly guaranteed to them?

Is it to go forth to the world that settlers, driven out of Canada, found shelter and asylum, religious liberty and freedom of conscience, in a Roman Catholic institutions? If so, it matters not with what virtues and progressive instincts we decorate ourselves, the liberal spirits of other countries will never thrill when our name is mentioned.

By A. Vernon Thomas, Morden, Manitoba, from the *Steinbach Post*, January 22 and 29, 1919. Courtesy of Ralph Friesen, Nelson, B.C. The article by Vernon Thomas was apparently also published in the *Nordwesten*, Jan. 15, 1919.

About the Author.

In 1913 Vernon Thomas was a staff correspondent for the *Manitoba Free Press*, where he wrote his series of eight or so articles on "The Bilingual Schools of Manitoba," published in the *Free Plett* from February 4th to 12th. They were a prelude to or part of a campaign of the Sifton-owned paper to end the bilingual school provisions of the "Laurier-Greenway Compromise" of 1896. Courtesy of professor Adolf Ens, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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American Mennonites and the Great War

Introduction.

Few experiences in modern times have left such a scar on the U.S. Mennonite psyche as World War I. Mennonites considered themselves productive, loyal citizens - but during the Great War, their neighbours doubted their patriotism and considered them disloyal at best.

When the U.S entered the war, the Germans were demonized as barbarian and militaristic Huns. Soon the nation was swept up in a wave of intolerant mass hysteria and super-patriotism that demanded total conformity.

The many Mennonites who did not conform suffered greatly. Particularly intense were the trials of Mennonite men who refused to serve their government as noncombatants - the only option then open to conscientious objectors.

From Gerlof Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War 1914-1918* (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1994), back cover.

Some conscientious objectors refused to work in prison just as in camp; they soon found themselves in solitary confinement, manacled to the bars of their cells. Such was the sad fate of the four Hutterites - the three brothers David J., Joseph J., and Michael Hofer, and their brother-in-law Jacob J. Wipf. Each of the Hofer brothers was married and had children. They, together with an Andrew Wurtz, were drafted in May 1918 and sent to Camp Lewis in Washington. Already on the train to camp, some fellow-draftees humiliated the Hutterites by cutting their beards. In camp they refused to sign the so-called Enlistment and Assignment Cards by which a draftee agreed to follow all military commands, render any kind of service, wear the uniform, and drill.

They were beaten and all of them except Wurtz, who was separated from the others, were placed in the guardhouse. As for Wurtz, because he too refused to comply with military orders he was forced to wear the uniform, held under water, dragged over a wooden floor with rope tied around his legs and splinters entering his body, and then thrown into a ditch. He finally agreed to do garden work and later worked on a nearby dairy farm.

On June 10 the three Hofer brothers and Wipf were court-martialed and sentenced to twenty years of imprisonment. The Hutterite minister Joseph Kleinsasser tried to persuade Keppel to intervene on behalf of the men by describing the kind of treatment the three had endured. "Now, dear Keppel," Kleinsasser wrote on July 14, "is there no reasonable way to find out a persons (sic) conviction, or stand, or religion?" Quite bluntly, he wondered if it were necessary to torture people in order to find out their religion and if the government, of which Keppel was a part, was not responsible for tolerating such outrages and to accept the "hun(sic) ways?"

Kleinsasser's moving appeal had no effect. The three men were transferred to a federal prison on the island of Alcatraz. Here also they refused to cooperate. So the wardens stripped them of

their outer clothing, confined them in their cells with their hands cross-chained to iron bars, and fed them little food and water. Within five days the four men were covered with boils and insect bites and had swollen arms. The ordeal in Alcatraz continued from mid-1918 until November, when they were transferred to the military prison at Fort Leavenworth.

During a night in November 1918, the men arrived at the railroad station. According to later allegations, the guards then drove them with bayonets to the prison, which was located about three hundred yards down the road. Further, according to the allegations, the men, who had been overheated in the railway cars, now caught colds when they were again stripped of their outer clothing. Military officials denied that the guards had acted so brutally and callously.

But on November 21, Joseph and Michael Hofer were transferred to the military hospital. David Hofer and Wipf, still refused to work and wear uniforms, remained shackled for two weeks to the bars of their cells. Had he put on the uniform, Wipf stated later, he would have been a "hepocriss(sic)." Wipf did manage to send telegrams to the wives of Joseph and Michael, warning them of their husbands' condition.

Unfortunately, the women were given train tickets to For Riley instead of to Leavenworth, and when they finally arrived at Leavenworth their husbands were almost dead. Joseph died at about 8:30 a.m. on November 29, 1918. As a final insult, authorities dressed his body in the military uniform which he had so persistently and valiantly rejected. Reverend Jacob (J.D.)

Miniger, an "old Mennonite minister and city missionary of Kansas City who often ministered to men in Fort Leavenworth, was at Joseph's side when he died." Miniger later testified that "if ever I saw a person die as a real Christian and pass from this life into a better world, it was Joseph Hofer."

Michael Hofer told Miniger, "I wish it had been I instead." And on December 2, he died, with his brother David at his bedside. This time the brothers' father begged the authorities to dress the body in Hutterite clothes, and they relented. Meanwhile, after Joseph's death, the men's pastor, John Wipf, was trying to secure the release of the men by pleading with Senator Edward S. Johnson of South Dakota to intervene with Secretary Baker. "I can't stand it no longer," Wipf wrote, "So for God(sic) sake, please help us and put a stop to it. Go and see Hon. Baker. Secr of war. He can stop it, I know, please do your best, but at one(sic)."

Johnson may indeed have intervened. In any case, David Hofer was released a few days later and the chaining of prisoners discontinued. Wipf remained in prison, but as he reassured his wife, Katharina, on December 8, 1918, he was holding fast to his covenant with God until death and counting on the reward or crown which God had promised to all who suffered for his sake. In April 1919, he too was released.

From Gerlof Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War 1914-1918* (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, 1994), pages 152-154 (see book review by Ted Regehr, *Preservings*, No. 22, pages 133-134.

Of the 65,000 drafted men who initially claimed to be conscientious objectors [in the U.S.A. in WWI], only 4,000 stayed with it, doing medical work in the Army or labouring in military camps [Noncombatants]. The Hutterites evidently fit into a smaller group yet "some 450 individuals would not cooperate with the conscription system in any way and went to Federal prison,.... [Absolutists]"

....World War I draft law "exempted from combat service, but not military service, conscripts from traditional peace churches."

Many pacifists avoided such harassment in World War I simply by agreeing to wear a uniform and perform services that didn't violate their convictions. But the Hutterites thought it was too much to ask....

The Hutterite men's martyrdom, while in line with centuries of pacifist resistance, also contributed to changes in this country's policy concerning conscientious objectors status as an alternative to military service. That....contributed to a climate that smoothed the road for further conflicts. In World War II and the Korean and Vietnam wars, Hutterites built Deerfield dam in the Black Hills, served as smoke jumpers in fighting forest fires and did maintenance work at Custer State Park.

Today South Dakota has about 60 Hutterite Colonies.

By John Walker, "Hutterites Cherish Pacifism as Nation Wages War," in *Argus Leader*, Sioux Falls, South Dakota, March 31, 2002.



A photo taken at Camp Funston, Fort Riley, Kansas, during World War I includes Amish conscientious objectors refusing to wear the military uniform. Photo - Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War*, page 113. This same photograph is identified in Clarence Hiebert, *The Holdeman People*, page 254, as being Holdeman conscientious objectors.

Prisoners of Conscience - Fort Leavenworth

“Prisoners of Conscience: Closing Fort Leavenworth,”

By Robert Rhodes, Newton, Kansas, reprinted from Mennonite Weekly Review. Dec. 9, 2003, pages 1 and 10.

FORT LEAVENWORTH, Kan. - Joseph Hofer already had died when his wife Maria arrived by train from Parkston, S.D., that dismal autumn of 1918. Confined as a conscientious objector during World War I, Hofer had succumbed to long months of physical exposure and harsh treatment in two military prisons.

Now, as his coffin was opened for his young widow, she was met with a sight of unexpected horror. Instead of dressing him in his modest black Hutterite clothes, Hofer had been placed in the uniform of the U.S. Army - the uniform he had resisted wearing for nearly half a year.

Though in life he would not accede to the will of the American military, Hofer was returned in death to his family in the guise of a soldier.

In an age before alternative service, and when Christian COs were often still treated with harsh disregard for their convictions, it was an offense the Hutterites would not soon forget.

The prison where Hofer died - home to hundreds of conscientious objectors during the 20th century - closed its doors Oct. 5.

The U.S. Disciplinary Barracks at Fort Leavenworth, founded in 1875, has been replaced by a new, state-of-the-art prison nearby....

For such a cavernous place, the hulk of the old USDB is filled with a surprising silence.

It is irrevocably empty now - a place where a community of as many as 1,500 men once went about the enforced tasks and duties of incarceration and work....

At the main entry, up a steep run of steps that ends in a narrow alcove, U.S. Army Sgt. Anthony Gannuscio produces a large ring of ancient-looking skeleton keys.

Gannuscio rattles one of the keys in the main lock, then pulls the sliding bars away, opening the portal onto the main floor of the maximum-security lockup....

“There was a lot of life here,” Gannuscio said....

Inside the enclosure, near the castle, is another similar building, a former hospital and medical clinic.

This is where two Hutterite men died from pneumonia - and some say from physical abuse - only days after the Armistice that ended the First World War.

The USDB was built to hold prisoners court-martialed for various offenses in the nation's armed forces....

During wartime, however, the prison's mission changed from the ordinary task of rehabilitating wayward recruits and officers to take on other matters.

As many as 600 COs - sources vary on the exact number - were held in the USDB during World War I. Among these were many Mennonites, Amish and Hutterites, but also COs of no particular belief who simply refused to take part in the war effort.

William G. Robertson, command historian at

Fort Leavenworth,...said some COs objected to being held in the general population, considering themselves prisoners of conscience who did not deserve to be jailed with sometimes violent offenders.

Those who would not work, however - like the Hutterites, who wanted to give no appearance of helping the war effort - were kept in the prison's lower level in solitary confinement.

There, Robertson said, they would have been kept in chains for several hours a day - much the same treatment afforded prisoners in solitary now....

Each cell held one prisoner, and was about 5 by 8 feet. An adult male, standing in the center of the cell, could not extend his arms full length to the side. In each cell was a metal-frame bed and mattress, a stainless steel toilet and a small wall-mounted shelf that flipped up to make a table.

Accounts from World War I indicated prisoners in solitary did not have beds, or much else.

In today's solitary wing, only isolated penalty cells were without a bed, or a toilet. Instead, a raised concrete platform and a grate in the floor had to suffice.

The prisoner sat wherever he could, clad only in his underwear.

In prison terms, this was the end of the road. Assistant command historian Kelvin Crow said in its heyday, the USDB was considered a model prison....

“People would come from all over the place just to study this,” Crow said, noting that the prison has long had a low recidivism rate.

Over time, Crow said, the military's philosophy about jail standards has evolved considerably, too, especially compared to the days when rough conditions and even rougher treatment of COs by military guards was typical.

“I think the Army is more enlightened now,” Crow said.

Joseph and Michael Hofer arrived at the USDB on a cold night in November 1918. Step-



Mennonite COs, Camp Funston, Kansas. Photo - Homan, American Mennonites and the Great War, page 112. Since these men do not wear the uniform they are “Absolutists” who refused to participate in any activity which might aid the war effort. The majority of the COs were “non-combatants” who wore the uniform and took part in military drills, etc. but not combat.

ping off a train a few hundred yards away, they were marched through the icy night to the USDB's entrance.

The two men, brothers from the Rockport Hutterite colony near Parkston, S.D., had just come from the federal prison at Alcatraz in California, along with their brother David and another Rockport Hutterite, Jacob Wipf.

The four, along with other Hutterites, had been drafted in May 1918. When they refused to serve or wear the military uniform, they were subjected to brutal physical abuse and privation. The beatings and other abuse continued until June 1918, when they were court-martialed and sentenced to 20 years in Alcatraz.

There, the damp conditions took their toll on the men, as they did on many others who had been confined to the “The Rock” in San Francisco Bay.

When they were transferred to Leavenworth, they probably already had pneumonia and possibly tuberculosis, according to accounts of the day.

Crow said this was often the case for prisoners from Alcatraz. Indeed, around the time when the Hutterites arrived, an outbreak of Spanish influenza claimed many lives in the USDB, including several Mennonite COs.

Because they refused to accept any work assignments, the Hutterites were sent to the solitary confinement cells.

After being held there for a short time, nearly always chained to the bars except during meals, the ailing Joseph and Michael were transferred to the military hospital. Joseph died there on Nov. 29, 1918, and David on Dec. 2.

After an outcry following the Hofers' deaths, David Hofer was released from prison. Wipf remained in custody until April 1919.

The chaining of prisoners was stopped, however, following the intervention of U.S. Sen. Edward Johnson of South Dakota, who took the matter of the Hofers before the Department of War.

The entire affair sent shockwaves through the remote and close-knit Hutterite world, causing all but one colony to pull up stakes and migrate to Canada.

The shock has not been forgotten, either. Today, Hutterites need only hear mention of “the Hofers” and their story of martyrdom leaps to mind.

The graves of the two COs are today a place of occasional pilgrimage - not unlike the dungeons and public squares of eastern Europe, where Anabaptists still travel to touch a part of their flight-filled heritage.

This one is much closer to home, though.

Today, in the old Rockport cemetery, are two clean, modestly decorated graves, set off from the others, marked “Hofer.” Whose graves they are, no one has to ask.

W.W.I Meade Kleine Gemeinde Experiences

“W.W.I Meade Kleine Gemeinde Experiences,”

by W. Merle Loewen, 205 Craig, P.O. Box 56, Ellinwood, Kansas, U.S.A., 67526-0056

Background.

In the history pre-dating the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde, reformers like Menno Simons in the 1500s, had a significant impact on the formulation of a pacifistic world view. The Anabaptists were firm on convictions like the Bible as man's ultimate authority; peace with God comes only through faith in Jesus Christ; believers' churches refusing subjection to the state in matters of belief and worship; ministers elected by the congregation and voluntarily supported by it; adult baptism based on confession of faith in Jesus Christ rather than infant baptism; godly living, including refraining from violence of any sort and rejecting military service, based on Scriptures like the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5.

Over the centuries much persecution and debate occurred over the proper adherence to the doctrine of pacifism. As our forefathers in the Vistula Delta faced the Hohenzollern-Prussian acquisition of Royal Prussia in 1772, they were allowed military exemption if they paid a specified tribute to provide military training in the area. The response to these restrictions brought the search for a new more tolerant homeland. This became available at the invitation by Catherine the Great for land in the Black Sea area of South Russia. Numerous families chose to emigrate from Prussia by the 1790s and early 1800s. Nearly a century later the concern for religious freedom, including adherence to pacifism, brought a tide of emigration to North America in 1874-76. It is interesting to note that the Prussian Mennonite community, after much debate, adopted a resolution in 1870 to reject traditional adherence to pacifism, leading to more common military service and ever greater assimilation with German culture.

WWI.

World War I brought new challenges to Kansas Mennonites. With the United States entry into the war against Germany in April 1917, various communities in central and southwest Kansas were still using the German language in homes and churches. Suspicion arose among non-Mennonite neighbours, that somehow these people were a threat to domestic security.

James C. Juhnke, professor of history at Bethel College, Newton, Kansas, in an article entitled “Mob Violence and Kansas Mennonites in 1918” said, “Most Kansas Mennonites shared a common belief in nonresistance. They respected and obeyed the government as ordained by God, but when there was a conflict between the commandments of government and the scriptures, they were ready to disobey government.” (*The*



Ältester Jacob F. Isaac's two oldest sons and two friends hold up the American flag, ca. 1914: l.-r., Henry J. Isaac, John K. Cornelsen, Peter J. Isaac and Andy W. Friesen.

Kansas Historical Quarterly, Volume XLIII, 1977, p. 335). The writer documents various acts of intimidation, especially in central Kansas communities, where individuals were tarred and feathered for alleged lack of patriotism to purchase war bonds, resistance to active military service, and lack of sufficient flag display and allegiance.

The Juhnke article also gives a humorous account of an activist response by a central Kansas pastor, Bernhard Harder. “Facing the mob in front of his farm house, Harder insisted that he never had anything against the American flag. The flag was nailed to the front porch entry without protest. Sensing that the mob's anger was still not appeased, Harder seized the initiative and proposed that they join in singing ‘America’. With his loudest and most vigorous voice, he sang four full verses of the patriotic hymn. The abashed mob joined in on the first verse, but their voices trailed away and their feet shuffled as they didn't know the words of the others. The embarrassed...patriots had been out-Americanized by a Mennonite German-American,” (*Ibid.* p.343).

Meade, Kansas.

My grandfather, Ältester Jacob F. Isaac, apparently also faced a hostile group in Meade, during the W.W.I period, which questioned the loyalty of the Kleine Gemeinde's leaders and congregation. In response to the request for the leaders to appear the next day to answer the group challenges - for whatever reason - no one appeared to receive the response and the intensity of the moment seemed to have subsided (see *Pres.*, No. 19. pages 53-54 and also Royden Loewen, *Family, Church and Market* (Toronto, 1993), pages 257-258).

It is interesting to me that I found a picture of my uncles, the Ältester's two oldest sons, stand-

ing in front of their rural schoolhouse, during this era, holding an American flag (see photo).

My father, William W. Loewen's older stepbrother, Abram E. Loewen (see photo), son of Heinrich F. Loewen, was drafted along with several other Meade Kleine Gemeinde young men during W.W.I. During my youth, my father recounted some of the persecution that my uncle Abe had experienced during his time at Camp Funsten, Kansas. Regretfully there was never any interaction between my uncle and myself about his W.W.I experiences.

Some years after my uncle Abe's death in 1978, I came into possession of his copy of a diary written by his colleague during the Army experiences, “Diary Kept By Noah H. Leatherman While in Camp During World War I,” published in 1951

by Aaron L. Toews, Linden, Alberta, Canada.

From this diary come accounts of the persecution suffered by Mennonite Conscientious Objectors after their induction into the Army in June 1917, until Mr. Leatherman's discharge from the Army in January 1919.



Abram E. Loewen, suffered severely for his non-resistant stance while drafted into the U.S. Army. He was the son of Kleine Gemeinde minister Heinrich Loewen (1860-1935). The Loewens farmed at Meade, Kansas, in a big way, and in 1915 the “three Loewen brothers operated a farm of 1375 acres, raising 1010 acres of wheat.” According to one family history they “were credited with being the first midwesterners east of the Rockies to use a combine.”

Abe Loewen.

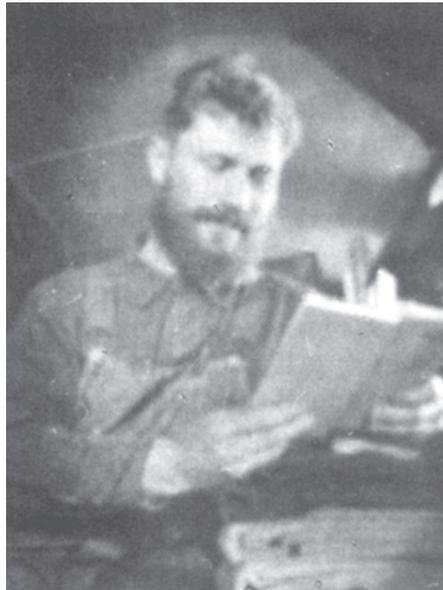
Uncle Abe Loewen is first mentioned in the October 22, 1917 entry, along with John R. Harms, and Jacob J. Bartel from Meade, Kansas. The final mention of any Meade men in the diary is April 1918. Whether the Meade men were transferred to Camp Dodge, Iowa with 161 men, including Mr. Leatherman, in early July 1918 is not stated in the diary.

At the end of July these 161 men were transferred to Ft. Riley, Kansas. After the W.W.I Armistice of November 11, 1918, a group including Mr. Leatherman were transferred to the U. S. Disciplinary Barrack, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, to serve a sentence of 25 years. Initial parole for good behaviour would be available in 1935. In November these men met the four Hutterites (three Hofer brothers and Wipf) who arrived from Alcatraz Island. In late January 1919, the men saw a list of 130 COs in the Kansas City newspaper scheduled for release. On January 27, 1919 these men were discharged from the Army.

What we do know about some of the Meade men is that they did suffer some severe persecution. At Camp Funsten, Kansas. (Oct. 22, 1917) "John R. Harms, Jacob J. Bartel and Abr. E. Loewen refused to work in spite of the fact that they were severely threatened and placed in the lower room of our barrack without getting any supper" (p.7). "Walter Lindel and I tried to explain our convictions to the sergeant and lieutenant but they heaped threats and curses upon us and placed us with Harms, Bartel and Loewen. Our meals were bread and water and frequently we failed to get even that. Our cots too were taken away from us so we had to sleep on the



1955. Jacob J. Bartel (1895-1959), Meade, Kansas. Bartel and Abr. E. Loewen "...refused to work [for the army] in spite of....[being] severely threatened." Bartel was a descendant of Johann Bartel (1764-1813), the pioneer minister in Kronsgrarten, near Ekatherinoslav, southern Russia. Photos for this article are courtesy of Merle Loewen, Ellinwood, Kansas.



Noah Leatherman, a Kansas Holdeman, was drafted and registered as a conscientious objector. This photo was taken while at Camp Funston. Photo - Hiebert, *The Holdeman People*, page 254.

floor" (Oct. 29, 1917) "It was quite cold with some snow. We were ordered to take a cold shower in the morning and to stand on the north side of our barrack all day" (p.8).

(Nov. 8, 1917) "During this time Lindel refused work at the stone quarry and Loewen, Harms, Bartel and Graber were transferred to the Y.W.C.A. For some reason Loewen was again made to run until he fell exhausted and unconscious. After recovering he was treated kindly by a lieutenant of the Truck Co" (p.12). (Nov. 24, 1917) "I learned that several officers were put back in rank and transferred into different Companies because of treatment given to the COs" (p. 13). (Dec. 26, 1917) "Loewen was ordered to work at a warehouse instead of at the Y.W.C.A. Upon refusal to do so, he was made to stand on the cold side of our barrack and was deprived of any dinner. Not being used to the severe cold, he was too frozen at night to walk into the barrack without assistance. We did what we could to warm him and by next morning he felt better" (p. 15).

(Jan. 20, 1918) "We were told the quarantine was lifted and nine of us were taken back to Camp Funsten where we found conditions for COs much better. Orders had been received not to force anyone to stand outside anymore. This order seemed to be the result of an investigation of Loewen's case" (p. 16). (Mar. 11, 1918) "Rorick, Schrock, Harris, Lindel and Loewen were called to appear before a major. Loewen was asked whether he wanted the officer who ordered him to stand outside to be punished. He replied in the negative." "Loewen's books were brought back a few days later" (p.18). (May 8, 1918) "Smith was taken to headquarters for trial. In the afternoon of the 13th, the Hutterites, Loewen, Ross, Wagoner, Lindel, Rorick, Bartel and Hanson were also taken. The trouble caused was due to Smith's diary. However, they found nothing for which he could legally be punished"



The gates at Camp Funston, Kansas. Photo - Hiebert, *The Holdeman People*, page 254.

(p. 21).

Thus ends the entries about Meade men in Noah Leatherman's diary.

Conclusion.

In interviewing some of the children of Meade W.W.I COs, they remember very few remarks about the Army experiences by their father. This pattern is somewhat similar to what W.W.II military veterans did for the first 50 years after the war. Then as the news media pressed for historical debriefings, many men now in their upper '70s and early '80s begin to share as a final goodbye to the traumatic war memories.

A few W.W.I. Meade stories have surfaced, even with the reluctance of the men to share Army life details. Allegedly one CO, not mentioned in the diary, was unable to ever father any children as a result of Army persecution. Another had suffered a facial scar, which was visible for the rest of his life.

Noah Leatherman's diary comments at his discharge seemed to echo the sentiment of W.W.I COs. "In conclusion I wish to thank our Eternal, Almighty, Incomprehensible God and Father for his love, mercy and protection during these trying times. To him be praise, honour and glory for ever and ever" (p. 50)

Further Reading:

Gerlof D. Homan, *American Mennonites and the Great War 1914-1918* (Waterloo, 1994), 235 pages.

Plett, "1922 Delegation to Mexico," *Pres.*, No. 14, pages 104--5, for photos of Ält. Jacob F. Isaac, Meade.

Wendy Dueck, "Maria Dueck Isaac (1898-1975)," in *Pres.*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 47-49.

Holdeman Draftees

[Son Heinrich G. Esau] was forced to join the Army on Oct. 7, 1917, and on the 8th of June, 1918, was sentenced to 25 years in Fort Leavenworth on account of non-resistance. On April 15, 1919, he was set free.

[Daughter Adina] was married to Abram W. Penner...[who] was called to the Army on October 7, 1917. On July 8, 1918, he was sentenced to 25 years in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, but set free on April 12, 1919. They now [1933] live on a farm near Littlefield, Texas. From *Johann Plett...Family Saga*, page 312.

Schools and Community - David Harder (1894-1968)

Schools and Community: Remembrances of School Teacher David Harder (1894-1968), Eichenfeld, Mexico.

Biography.

David Harder was born in Manitoba on August 22, 1894. He was the son of David Harder (1865-1937) and Susanna Thiessen (1872-1936) (see RGB 342-3). David Harder Sr. was the son of David Harder (1834-1915) and Katharina Giesbrecht (1936-1922) (see RGB 325-3). Grandfather David Harder was the son of Peter Harder and Maria Friesen.

The David Harder (1834-1915) family emigrated to Manitoba in 1875 crossing the Atlantic ocean on the S.S. Moravian with a travelling party consisting of Bergthaler and Old Colonists. The Harder family settled in Eichenfeld, West Reserve, where they are listed in the 1881 census (BGB, page 390-207). The children, David Harders (1865-1937) also lived in Eichenfeld, Manitoba, where son Abraham was born in 1899.

David Harder started teaching as a young bachelor in Manitoba. In 1916 he married Katharina (Trien) Wiebe born February 24, 1891, daughter of Bernhard Wiebe and Anna Peters. They had two children, Katharina born October 11, 1924, and son David Harder born in 1930, who died after three months. Daughter Katharina married Abraham Klassen.

In 1922 the David Harders together with his parents, three brothers and two sisters emigrated to Mexico settling in the village of Eichenfeld, Manitoba Colony, near Cuauhtemoc. David Harder lived in Neuhorst (Campo 13), where he taught for many years. According to a notebook of his writings transcribed by "old friend" Peter P. Peters, Gnadenthal, David Harder lived in Neuhorst #13, on September 29, 1943. Son-in-law Abraham Klassen remembers that David's brother Abraham, who was severely crippled, lived with them in the teacherage in Neuhorst. Later Abraham Harder married a spinster and had several children including son Abram who lives in Aylmer, Ontario.

David Harder also taught in Hoffnungsfeld and Hamburg. Nephew Abram Harder, Aylmer, Ontario, remembers that around 1948 his uncle David Harder taught in Saucito, a village 11 km. north of Rubio. Cuauhtemoc apple grower, Peter Rempel, remembers David Harder coming into his father's book store to buy school supplies, as did all the other teachers at the time.

According to a Notebook of Peter P. Peters, the David Harders were living in Rosenfeld, #5, Nuevo Ideal, Durango, by May, 1955. They lived in the "grote schoave" at the home of their children Abraham Klassens. In 1962 the Klassens moved to La Batea in the State of Zacatecus, settling in Blumenhof, #2. Two years later the Harders also moved to La Batea to live again with their children. Mrs. Katharina Harder died in La Batea, on May 25th, 1964.

In 1968 the Abraham Klassen family moved back to Cuauhtemoc taking father-in-law David Harder with them. They settled at the home of Abraham Klassen's sister in Campo 66, Nord Colony, who had a second property where they could live temporarily. Three months later, on April 7, 1968, school teacher David Harder died here at the age of 73 years, seven months and 16 days.

Daughter Katharina and son-in-law Abraham Klassen eventually moved to Aylmer, Ontario, where

she died February 29, 1994. Mr. Abraham Klassen is currently remarried and living in the Menno Home in Aylmer, Ontario.

Anecdotes.

Old Colony Ohm Peter Dyck, Wheatley, Ontario, grew up in Blumengard (Campo 15), Manitoba Colony. He remembers an anecdote about his uncle David Harder from around 1945. Harder had an old car motor standing on his yard and this was quite an attraction for the young boys. On one occasion, Peter's fingers got caught in the V-belt of the motor and Ohm Doavft had to come and free him.

Jakob Peters, formerly of Blumenort, Manitoba Colony (*Pres.*, No. 20, pages 101-105) remembers David Harder as a good school teacher. Peters' brother-in-law Johan Loewen attended school with David Harder in Hamburg and apparently Loewen did not always meet his teacher's expectations. Jakob Peters remembers David Harder as a slight man, approximately five feet, eight inches tall.

Schools and Community.

David Harder was a gifted writer. He was best known for his historical sketch of the Mexican Mennonites published posthumously as *Schule und Gemeinschaft: Erinnerungen des Dorfschullehrers David Harder von Mexico* ("Schools and Community: The recollections of the village school teacher David Harder from Mexico"), (Gretna, Manitoba, 1969), 84 pages. The booklet was published in 1969 by Jakob Rempel, Gretna, the Vorsteher of the Old Colony Gemeinde in Manitoba. Jakob Rempel was a well-informed folk-historian and knowledgeable about the history of the Reinländer Gemeinde. He served for many years as the Old Colony representative on various MCC boards and also sponsored refugees after WWII.

"Schools and Community" is an insider's account of the story of the Mexican Mennonites, providing a useful background of the Reinländer Gemeinde, the beginnings of the emigration movement, and descriptions of many of the more significant experiences and difficulties encountered in Mexico. Undoubtedly many readers will take issue with one or another of David Harder's descriptions and/or interpretations of the Mexican Mennonite story. Nonetheless, his account creates a credible, central narrative of that story.

Harder's views regarding the "alphabet war", for example, are probably somewhat dated, as academics and scholars now recognize that it is quite appropriate and even wholesome for a long-established community such as the Old Colonists to develop its own vocabulary and dialect. The "au" sound probably reflected the Flemish (linguistically Dutch) ethnic roots of the Russian Mennonite pioneers, and should have been respected for that reason alone. One detects here possibly the influences of General Conference workers in the area who probably did not fully understand the historical origins nor the many valuable benefits for a community in fostering and nurturing its own unique literature and vocabulary. The Old Colonists - like all Russian Mennonites - had never, in fact, been ethnically Ger-

man, and there was therefore really no legitimate reason why they should emulate and adopt the modern "Reichs' Deutsch" from Germany. In fact, there are probably many sound reasons to base linguistic traditions such as enunciation upon resonance with the Flemish (Dutch) language, the mother-tongue of the ancestors of the Old Colonists. In the modern-day such linguistic uniqueness would be celebrated and promoted in literature and tourism as an empowering legacy of culture, local-colour and the life-vitality of a people. Historian Adolf Ehrt (*Das Mennonitentum in Rußland* (Leipzig, 1932), pages 20, 21 and 28) has pointed out, also, that the Germanization of Mennonites in the Vistula Delta and later in Russia, played a significant role in the breakdown of traditional faith and culture, something the Old Colonist Ohms were obviously cognizant of as well.

The Mexican Mennonite community has been blessed with a number of gifted and talented writers. Unfortunately only few of these have been published and made available to the Old Colony people and a wider readership. Hopefully the translation and publication of "Schools and Community" will be a small step in filling this void and also encourage others to collect, study and publish the letters, sermons and diaries of the Old Colonists.

Historian Peter Zacharias and author of the ground-breaking study, *Reinland: An Experience in Community* (Altona, 2002), has concluded that "David Harder writes well and with considerable objectivity. He was a very perceptive individual and recorded details and events which are significant to historians. He was also willing to write about controversial issues. The example of David Harder certainly challenges the myth that Old Colony school teachers were uninformed and lacking in general knowledge. His writings and opinions demonstrate a good knowledge of the larger context of his people and Mennonite history in general."

Conclusion.

David Harder is remembered as a capable and much respected school teacher. He favoured more instruction in grammar and greater explanation and clarification in the German language and regretted that he was unable to do so. David Harder was a devoted Old Colonist teacher who supported and worked within the context of the confessional school system.

Nephew Abram Harder, Aylmer, Ontario, recalls that his uncle David Harder did not agree in all respects with the "Ordnung" of the Old Colony Gemeinde in the Manitoba Colony and which may have influenced some of his moves. Evidently he may also have sometimes attended worship services of the General Conference Church. From "Schools and Community" it is clear that although David Harder was critical of certain decisions and policies in the Reinländer Gemeinde at Cuauhtemoc, however, to the end, he remained a true and loyal Old Colonist. He was a gifted folk historian and steadfast chronicler, who supported and affirmed the Old Colony community as a people of God and faithful followers of Jesus.

Schule und Gemeinschaft - David Harder

Foreword.

The following remembrances of the late teacher David Harder, who died in 1968, who had been active in the village school in Manitoba before the emigration from Canada to Mexico, have much historical and spiritual worth, so that, with the encouragement of several of his friends from there, his old friend, Peter P. Peters, Gnadenthal, Mexico, came to Canada last summer with the aforementioned remembrances to have them published as a book or other printed form.

Nothing definite was planned regarding the publication until the time that Br. Peters had to get ready to go back to Mexico other than during an informal discussion at Ältester Gerhard Lorenz, Winnipeg, where Peters and Br. H. P. Hildebrand, Blumenort, and the writer, were present. It was decided that Peters should leave the books of teacher Harder here and that we should faithfully publish these recordings as literally as possible. In the meantime, however, Br. Peters has also died and thus, unfortunately, we now have to do the work without him.

There are still some articles (also among teacher Harder's writings) dealing with "The Calling of a Preacher", "Child Rearing", and some meditations added. Finally, it should be mentioned that some additions to his writings have been made. These are listed on pages 48,49 and 50.

Gretna, Manitoba, March 1969, "Jakob Rempel"

1. The Reinländer Mennoniten

Our Gemeinde, the Reinländer Mennoniten of Canada, called the Old Colonists by many, is according to their confession, a branch of the old "baptism-minded Gemeinden", of which we can everywhere read in the "*Martyrs-Mirror*", which was founded during Pentecost in Jerusalem (Acts 2), and which, already during the time of the Apostles and also during later centuries, had to suffer indescribably much persecution; although it was also sometimes tolerated here and there at times, especially after the fire of tribulation had abated in Holland and Germany, where they had nonetheless lived for many years under various obstacles - yet even then had endured much opposition for many years.

In the years of 1788 to 1789 the emigration of our forefathers from Germany [Polish-Prussia] to Russia began, which immigration, according to the notes of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe, continued until 1862, when the last non-resistant [Mennonites] - or those who refused to accept any obligations regarding the military service - migrated from Prussia to Russia.

When then after some 85 years of relative peace in Russia, our forefathers faced the question of military service, the greater part remained calmly in their place and subjected themselves to the requirements of the government. But our forefathers again left their homeland and migrated with their children from Russia to Canada in 1874 and later, consisting of two groups or Gemeinden, namely: the Bergthaler Gemeinde under the leadership and oversight Ältester Gerhard Wiebe and

the relatively young Fürstenländer Gemeinde under the leadership of Ältester Johann Wiebe (Note One).

As the first ones in Canada evermore started to participate in worldly matters and voluntarily introduced the worldly or government schools and elected government officials [2], and also permitted themselves to be elected into government offices, wherefrom the others, however, abstained; thus a division soon came to be between these two Gemeinden here, in that the so-called Fürstenländer separated from the Bergthaler. At that time the Fürstenländer took on the name "Reinländer Mennonites."

After the beloved Ältester Johann Wiebe had led his flock on good Biblical pastures, he died February 21, 1905. The Honourable Peter Wiebe, who died September 12, 1913, became his successor in office. He was succeeded by the Honourable Johann Friesen.

In the beginning in Canada we dwelt only in Manitoba. But when the land there began to become scarce, people from our Gemeinde settled two more colonies in the Province of Saskatchewan: one group in Hague, who elected the Honourable Jacob Wiens as Ältester; then after some years, the other group [settled] in Swift Current. This group elected as their Ältester the Honourable Abraham Wiebe, a son of the deceased Ältester Johann Wiebe. Together with the Colony in Manitoba, these two colonies constituted "one church". Yet each had its own administration, own Waisenamt [orphans' and widows' trust office] and its own Gemeinde Vorsteher [Reeve or Overseer] (Note Two).

In Canada we had enjoyed complete freedom in operating our own schools, which taught primarily reading, writing, arithmetic and calligraphy. The language was German. The reader was the Bible. For the beginners we had the "Fibel" [primary reader] and the Catechism, which was based on the Holy Scriptures. These schools we consider absolutely essential to keep our people free from the world, free from military service and steadfast in non-resistance. In the government schools the children are being taught that it is their duty and responsibility, in case of a war, to protect the fatherland with the sword and to sacrifice their life for it. Our simple and humble methods of teaching, in as far as we do not neglect them, are however, sufficient to satisfy the promises which our fathers made when emigrating into Canada: namely, to be a silent agricultural people who would benefit the country by their service [3]. Should we, in contrast, commit our children to the worldly nurture, then not only would we suffer the loss of the humble agricultural life and the fruits of the land, but rather it was also readily obvious where things would go within a few years in such a case with our religion and regarding our Gemeinde, namely, to the world. For the regular schools are the true bridges allowing a transition from Christianity to the world, of which we have an example of many Mennonites who have their children educated in the secular schools, and who now set themselves up as equals to the world in all respects, which,

however, Paul has forbidden us in Romans 12:2.

Here I would not want to be understood that I judge other people or nations who do not have our faith. Banish the thought that I should consider or esteem other people who understand the Holy Scripture differently than us, that they should all be regarded as lost or condemned. This judgment or conclusion regarding the conscience of man I leave completely in God's Word, which teaches that during the final judgment many will come forth from morning and from evening to sit with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, but the children of the kingdom will be cast out, etc. Matthew 8:11-12. But each one wherein he hath called, he is to remain with God, I Corinthians 7:24, also verse 17:20.

"I [do not] judge other people or nations who do not have our faith....that they should all be regarded as lost or condemned."

But as I am called forth as a Mennonite, the faith of my fathers, and faithfully follow it in so far as I find it to be in harmony with the Word of God and acknowledge it as being right, I am therefore not at liberty to accept another teaching. This would not be any different from forsaking my own faith and choosing something else in its stead. He who is not faithful in little things, is also not faithful in big things, Luke 16:10.

"I am called forth as a Mennonite,....I am therefore not at liberty to accept another teaching."

Thus our church lived in Canada since 1874 in relative peace until the time of the European War, 1914 to 1918, in which war Canada, as an English colony, also participated [4].

2. School Persecution.

It happened in 1918 that the government demanded of us that we send our children to their schools. In the beginning, and, in fact, in the spring of 1918, this only occurred in the Gemeinde in Hague, Province of Saskatchewan, but soon then also at Swift Current and in Manitoba.

As the school question, as already mentioned, had become a religious question for us, we could not, if we wanted to be true to our confession of faith, obey the government in this case. Thereafter it now often occurred that brethren of our Gemeinde were sentenced to pay fines or imprisonment, as they refused to send their children to the government schools. However much we appealed to the government by pleading to permit us to practice our religion, the way we had enjoyed in the past for so long, it remained unchanged: we should henceforth leave our children in their schools.

Many delegations to the Federal Canadian Government as also to the officials in the Provin-



An early pioneer home. Sketch - Kaufman Museum, North Newton, Kansas/Men. Life, Oct. 1949, page 10.

cial Government in which we were living were made by our representatives. But everything was in vain. Yes, futile was also the request that even if we should have to forsake our dwelling places, whether the Canadian government would not somewhere have a place for us, where they could allow us our freedoms. In response to this request the high officials had answered, "Also not in the farthest north!"

After having been engaged in this effort for over a year, and the government in spite of all work, begging and supplication could not be moved [in its policies], the Gemeinde decided to emigrate out of Canada, if we could find the liberties which we had lost here somewhere in a different country [5].

3. The Emigration.

In July 1919 (July 15 in Manitoba), brotherhood meetings were held where it was decided to send delegates to Argentina, South America, in order to find out whether the government of Argentina would want to grant us the freedoms regarding church and schools in their country. Two delegates each from all three Gemeinden were sent: from Manitoba - Uncle Klaas Heide und Uncle Cornelius Rempel from Blumenort; from Hague - the two ministers Johann P. Wall und Johann Wall; and from Swift Current - Rev. Julius Wiebe and David Rempel. At the beginning of August in the year 1919 these six delegates left for South America. While they were in Brazil, Rev. Johann Wall himself fell sick and died there. He was also buried there by his grieving travelling companions (Note Three). Thereafter the five delegates pressed forward on their trip and also finally came to Argentina. Yet the entire trip seemed to be a failure. Neither the Argentineans nor the Brazilians wanted to grant us such liberties to instruct our own children according to our methods in our own schools and to remain free of military service. The delegates returned home on November 24, 1919,

with this news.

In fact a small shimmer of hope was illuminated by the small South American country of Paraguay, yet an emigration to that place was deemed as impossible and was given up. But our Gemeinde at Hague continued to maintain hope for South America, and sent another delegation down there. But these finally came back without having accomplished anything and consequently they also abandoned the idea of South America. But some years later - around 1926 or 1927 - one group from out of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde, with whom we otherwise did not have any fellowship, made the long journey for the same purpose which had concerned us, and emigrated to Paraguay after their delegates had made prior investigations of the land regarding religious freedom [6], and after having received an official contract from that government regarding religious freedom, making the long journey to Paraguay in South America, where - after they had overcome many difficulties and manifold hindrances - they finally established themselves and made their living (Should we not learn from them?).

Although our delegates returned from that long journey without success, yet the oppression regarding the schools did not abate in the meantime. In the beginning the persecution was undertaken only in areas where our brethren were living in districts in which the public schools had earlier been built by such people who - although they called themselves Mennonites like we - were ready to pull together with the yoke of the world to a considerable extent and, in fact, did so voluntarily. Although the entire oppression against us because of the schools, to a large extent, was caused by the these Mennonites, yet it seemed the law regarding us was already complete, for presently government schools were built in and among our villages by the Attorney [Trustee] for the government and our brethren, as already mentioned, fell deeper into punishment as they did

not send their children to these schools, rather only to our schools.

In the beginning of 1920 an offer of land and privileges came from Mississippi, U.S.A., and consequently delegates from our Gemeinden in Manitoba and Swift Current departed for there on January 15, 1920. They returned on January 19, 1920 with the news that they were being offered the wished-for freedoms in the State of Mississippi, although this was not yet ratified in writing by the government.

Various dealings now took place between our representatives and several men in Mississippi. Representatives from out there came to Manitoba and offered land for grain farming, as well as religious freedoms. The latter, however, were not deemed to be satisfactory, not was it so, when they reappeared a second time.

On April 12, 1920, many delegates from three Gemeinden went to Mississippi. They returned on April 29 and brought along - what they thought were - nearly all desired liberties [7].

At a brotherhood meeting on May 4th in the church in Reinland, it was decided to purchase about 200,000 acres of land in Mississippi. Following this many individual persons departed for there on May 14th. They arrived back on Pentecost, May 25 with the information that they had reserved 125,000 acres of land. It was now decided at a brotherhood meeting in Reinland, Manitoba, on June 1, that four men should drive there and complete the transaction and make the agreed upon down payment.

Every householder from out of our Gemeinde in Manitoba who wanted to move there now had to state how many acres of land he would like to buy, and make a \$2.00 down payment for each reserved [acre]. This money was actually collected, but could not be paid out on account of the land, as henceforth the U.S.A. border was closed for all Mennonites. For this reason the brethren who had been appointed to go there to complete the purchase agreement had not crossed over.

Since we could not ascertain why the border was closed for us, nor was anyone permitted to cross, we had to see this as the leading of God, who would not want to permit us to suffer misfortune. Most likely the entire offer of freedom had merely been that of the land agents. Consequently we gave up on the U.S.A.

It now came to pass that the government of the Province of Quebec in Canada seemingly was inclined to grant us the freedom which we sought. As a result some representatives from Manitoba and Swift Current travelled there on August 13, 1920, and returned at the end of August.

The Gemeinde at Hague did not participate in this. Some delegates from there went to Mexico on September 8, 1920, who then came back on October 9 with good expectations [8].

But from Manitoba and Swift Current some drove to Quebec several times, and it really seemed as if that the Quebec government was actually inclined to accept us into their Province. But as Quebec was just as much in Canada as Manitoba and Saskatchewan, it was decided among us not to take the risk without the approval of the supreme Canadian Government. Although both the

Ältester Johann Friesen from Manitoba and Abraham Wiebe, Swift Current, themselves went to Ottawa, the effort to move to Quebec was likewise abandoned (Note Four).

During this time another offer for land and freedom was made from out of the State of Florida, U.S.A. But the same already did not delay us very much. Although these people did find a receptive audience at places, it was not of great significance.

4. Mexico.

However, as already mentioned, when the delegates who had travelled to Mexico came back on October 9 with good hope, it was decided at a brotherhood meeting in Reinland on November 1, 1920, to jointly send delegates from all three Gemeinden to Mexico. These left on November 11, 1920, two from Hague and two from Swift



Plutarco Elias Calles, President of Mexico, visited the Mennonite colonies in Cuauhtemoc in 1925 (see Pres., No. 21, rear cover). Photo of President Calles from Peter Rempel, ed., 1922 Mennoniten in Mexico 1997,

Current. This time those from Manitoba did not receive their passports in time and, as a result, had to remain back. The travellers returned at the end of December and again brought good prospects. Thereupon, on January 24, 1921, the following from our three Gemeinden were sent to Mexico: from Hague - Rev. Johann Loepky and Benjamin Goertzen; from Swift Current - David Rempel; from Manitoba - Rev. Julius Loewen, Uncle Klaas Heide and Uncle Cornelius Rempel.

On March 12th the delegation returned from Mexico with the *Privilegium* which was received from President Obregon whereby our people were promised complete religious freedom and also our own schools completely according to our custom - to instruct our children according to our conscience [9]. Also the land was found by the delegates to be good enough, so that they voiced the hope that with the help of God we could also make our living there (Note Four).

Thus, finally a hope that we could again find a place of refuge, if it was otherwise God's will.

In the meantime our oppressed situation here in Canada had not improved for us. Various people who lived in the vicinity of the state or government schools, and, in some villages where the government was now in addition allowing new schools to be built, were being plagued evermore severely. Nor were the ministers being spared: the aged Rev. Peter Friesen, Schanzenfeld, together with some others, was thrown into prison in Winnipeg for a month, since he did not wish to commit his children unto the spirit of the world. And although most of the brethren paid such punishments [fines] with money, it still was, nonetheless, a plague. For this reason some people began to leave their homesteads and moved to such places, where because of their greater distance from such schools they were left in peace.

According to a discussion held in the Gemeinde a list was drawn up as how much land



Alvaro Obregon, President of Mexico, 1920-24. In 1921 Obregon granted the Old Colonists their Privilegium. Peter Rempel, ed., 1922 Mennoniten in Mexico 1997, page 305.

each brother wanted to buy in Mexico. Thereupon several delegates again went to Mexico, April 5, 1921 to finalize the matter. They returned May 9 and again brought good information, and so the beloved Ältester Johann Friesen called the brethren together on Thursday, May 19, in the church in Reinland for a discussion. It was decided that some 200,000 acres of land should be bought, to which we then wanted to move in order that we could again - as in Canada - cultivate our land. Also the land which our people owned here in Canada should be sold, and, if possible, before we emigrated [10].

It was now decided that all the land owned here in Manitoba should, if possible, be sold as a community, so that all would receive the same price per acre. The dwellings should be counted as belonging to the land and no valuation should

be made for them. However, the dwellings of the landless should be estimated, so that they would also receive something, and this money should then be taken from the money which the Gemeinde would receive for all the land.

Certainly some found this a little difficult to surrender their land, which they considered as of better quality and upon which they had exerted so much effort and work to maintain it in a more profitable condition, for the same price as that of less valuable land. Yet they soon became willing and surrendered themselves to the principle, "Look not every man unto his own things, but every man also unto the things of others," Philippians 2:4 and Corinthians 10:24. Indeed, it soon had the appearance, so to say, that we were of all one heart and one soul. It seemed that everyone realized that we all had to emigrate from there and be united in faith if God was to grant His blessing for our journey. So it seemed and it may also have been that way in the hearts of many. But it is not nearly the most difficult thing to be a Christian in happy hopeful times, and at that time many were of the firm expectation that all the land which our brethren owned in Manitoba could be sold for a high price of at least \$75.00 per acre. Many people could not understand that such a price was much too high for such people who would later have to buy the land from out of the hands of the real estate agents in order to cultivate it and then still be able to live from it, and that the high price of the property, which was paid for some individual farms, was to a great extent only the result of the high war time [prices] of 1914-1918, and that earlier it had been much cheaper, and out of necessity also had to become cheaper again. The high prices during the war period had, in this regard, blinded the eyes of many.

Well and good, for most of the brethren committed all their land for sale [11] and a contract was made with the lawyers, McLeod, Black & Co. in the City of Morden, that these should be the sellers of our colony in Manitoba. This agreement was binding until August, 1921. If the land could not be sold in a joint sale by the designated date, then our people should have the liberty to sell according to their own possibilities, so that the Gemeinde would not be prevented or held back from emigrating through a purposeless dealing. In Saskatchewan the Gemeinde had also arranged a similar joint sale.

After many visits to Mexico, the delegates brought back the information on September 10th, 1921, that they had bought land for the Manitoba colony in the State of Chihuahua near San Antonio de Arenalis (later Cuauhtemoc) for \$8.25 American per acre. Once again everyone had to state how many acres of land he wanted to buy, and then immediately also pay \$2.25 for every acre. Whoever was not able to pay everything, owed the remainder to the Gemeinde against six (6%) per cent interest and the Gemeinde, in turn, remained indebted for this to the sellers.

Regarding the selling in our Gemeinde, all efforts up to August 21, 1921 were entirely futile. Naturally, in the meantime, the land value had fallen drastically. Hence many brethren began to be uneasy, so that it was again and again

decided at brotherhood discussions to leave the land in the block sale. Consequently our representatives continued to deal through the aforementioned lawyers. Many began to become quite unwilling in this regard and always more earnestly requested the freedom to sell their land on their own since they surmised an unnecessary delay in the immigration because of the futile arrangement with the lawyers.

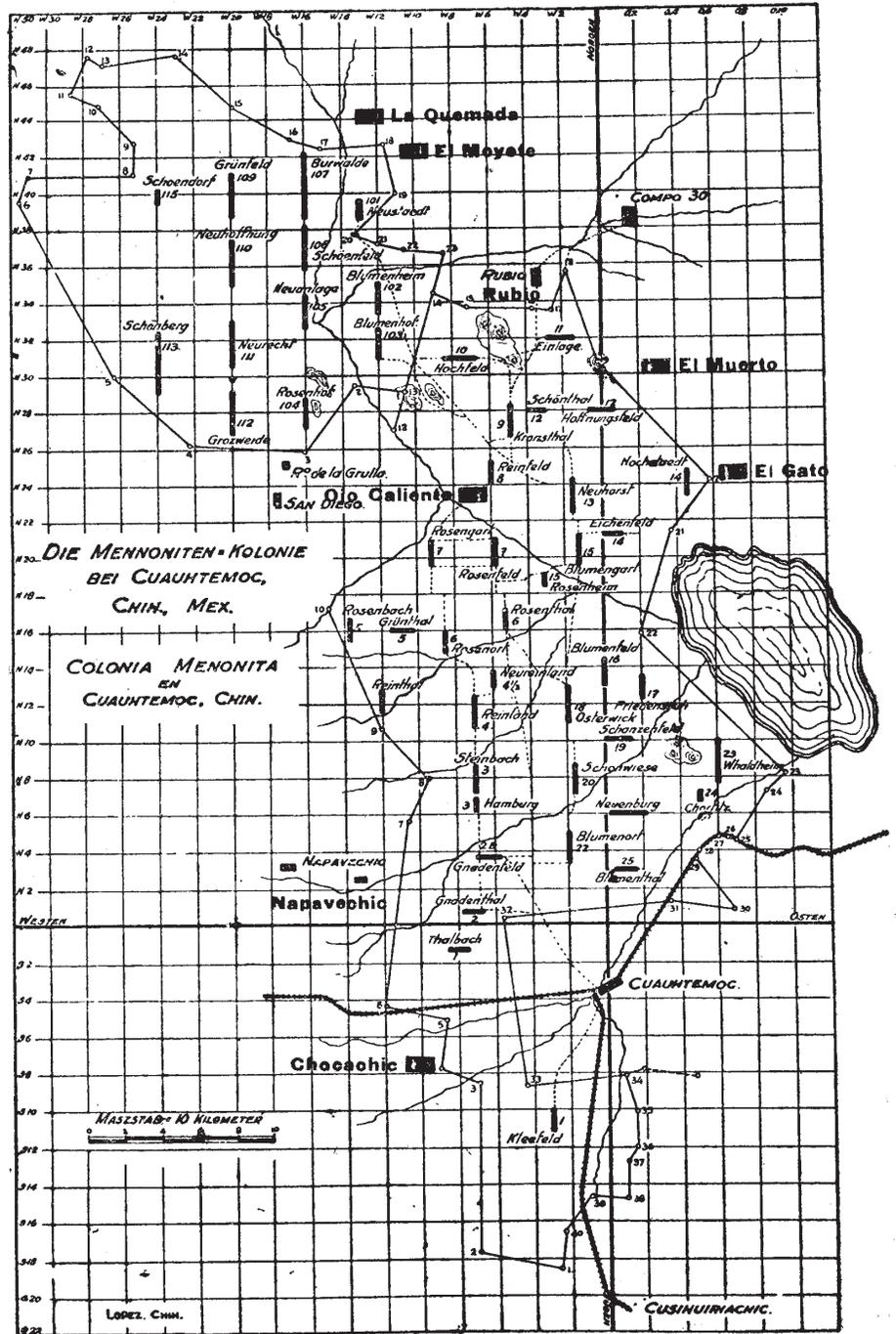
In the beginning when the land was submitted for sale, the aforesaid lawyers also soon had a prospective buyer for the land. Consequently a date was established [12] at which time the sale was to be concluded. When the designated day arrived, the buyer experienced some kind of a hindrance, so that he was not able to buy it for that price and the sale was aborted. But a new agreement was immediately entered into with the same buyer. A closing date was again agreed to when the sale was to be completed, only for a somewhat lower price. But when the designated day came, again something had intervened, so that the transaction was again aborted. This repeated itself several times. One time the buyer did not have the money, another time he did not appear because of sickness. Soon it was this, soon that was in the way, so that the sale could not be completed. Yet the dealings were continued in the same manner.

Regarding the moveable property everyone was at liberty to sell according to their own need and wishes. Many who now had a desire to emigrate as soon as possible, sold the goods which they did not want to take along to Mexico at public auction sales to the highest bidder already in the fall of 1921. Everything went for a low price, as there were too many sellers and too few buyers.

Finally some people also began to sell their land on their own and that without having received the prior permission from the appointed leaders. They were, however, often seen as not being quite "in order". Indeed, it got to the point that those who had sold their land on their own for the price which they could get in order to be able to prepare for the emigration, had to ask for forgiveness from the ministerial, otherwise they were declined the emigration papers. The prices for which the land sold differed, around \$10.00 to \$20.00 per acre, more or less.

This writing, however, is not to serve for the purpose of publicizing the mistakes and unrighteous errors which were made in the entire emigration process. But as the evil beast is a persecutor and perverter of all good in everyone, so it was finally really no wonder that his hand would also be in play during an emigration where many a sincere-minded Christian, because of his faith, is subjected to many things [13]. Maybe the beloved God permits the enemy to do this in order to test the faith of those who consider themselves as such who because of their religion fled from one land into another.

In the beginning, when the work of the emigration was introduced by the Lehrdienst, the desire to emigrate was almost universally quite strong. Only a few tended to hold back a little more. When, however, the entire endeavour was delayed for so long, in that, firstly, the search for



Map of the Manitoba and Swift colonies, near Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, founded by the Old Colonists in 1922 - Walter Schmiedehaus, Ein Fester Berg, pages 151-2. The Mexican Mennonites have won the hearts of many neighbours and officials with their simple lifestyle and Christ-centered discipleship. One of these friends was Walter Schmiedehaus, the German Counsel in Cuauhtemoc who became a frequent advisor. In 1948 he published the renowned history Ein Fester Berg ist unser Gott: Der Wanderweg eines christlichen Siedlervolkes (Cuauhtemoc, 1948), 307 pages. But these pious people also have enemies, especially among the so-called American Evangelicals, such as Evangelist Jakob Funk, Winnipeg, Canada, who in 2001 published various untruths about them in several periodicals (see Pres., No. 18, page 39 and No. 19, page 77). Presumably such slandering of the conservative Mennonites is intended to make it easier to convert their young and dissatisfied people away from the "hard" Gospel of following Jesus and to turn them against their own community and faith. Photo - Diese Steine, page 589.

religious liberty in so many places came to naught, and now the selling of their own land did not progress forward, the desire for emigration in many abated and, finally, ended entirely for some.

The Gemeinde had already worked in earlier

years with some brethren who had difficulty in accepting the Ordnung of the Gemeinde. Even during the time when the government did not demand it, they had rather sent their children to the secular schools instead of being a light. The

spirit of pride also evermore gained in strength in our people, including the desire to drive the automobile which became so strong within many that they did not want to yield in obedience to the Gemeinde in this matter either. It had earlier already been decided by brotherhood decisions that the automobile should not be allowed in the Gemeinde, as the vehicle, first of all, was a means of striving for equality with the world, whereby the desire and love of the world and its glory was evermore enhanced. Also we do need to give heed thereto that we would not only want to enjoy the good in this life with the rich man, but rather should willingly bring sacrifices for our faith.

Consequently Ältester Johann Friesen arranged for a brotherhood meeting to be held in the church in Reinland on January 24, 1922, where it was decided that the Ältester together with the ministers should go through the church [membership] and make a list of those who furthermore wanted to submit to the Word of God and the simplicity in Christ and to emigrate together with the Gemeinde. Those who voluntarily came forward were stricken [from the membership rolls] [14] by the Lehrdienst according to the teaching of Joshua, "...choose you this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." [Joshua 24:15]. This was completed by March 1, 1922, but only in the Gemeinde in Manitoba.

In the meantime the danger for our religion grew ever greater as the oppression on part of the government regarding the schools did not abate. In addition, as already mentioned, lethargy and indifference seemed to creep in amongst many. Since the mutual selling of the land, however, did not progress, many became fearful of waiting for too long with the emigration. Therefore many came to the conclusion to emigrate as soon as possible, and, if necessary, without first having sold their land, which they then committed to others who did not intend to emigrate immediately to sell on their behalf. Some forthwith sold their land for the price which they could receive. February 7, 1922, a number of brethren gathered at the home of Franz Loewen in Rosengart in order to determine how many would be willing to emigrate right away, if possible. Enough persons were assembled here in order to fill three train loads. This gathering was conducted by the ministers, the Honourable Isaac Dyck and the Honourable Franz Loewen. None of the other leaders were present.

After this had taken place, all those who pushed so much for emigration were asked by means of a circular letter by the Obervorsteher Franz Froese to gather in the school



Peter and Bernhard Penner, Gnadenfeld, plowing with two Fordson tractors and plows brought along from Canada. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 66.

in Reinland on February 11, 1922, which then also took place. Enough people were also gathered here so that a fourth train load could be filled. Here all the papers essential for emigration were completed.

Following this the first train departed on March 1, 1922, from Plum Coulee, Manitoba, for Mexico. On March 2 the second train left from Haskett, Manitoba, Canada. On March 7 the third train and on Sunday, the 11th of March, the fourth train left, both from Haskett, Manitoba.

During this time two trains also left from the Swift Current Colony in Saskatchewan. All of

them.

5. Situation in Mexico.

The proverb says, "All beginnings are difficult." We also experienced this in the new settlement [in Mexico]. Many had gotten rich during the high prices of the war of 1914 to 1918, and even those who had not yet been able to save money but had a debt-free farm could, as soon as he had received the payment for his land, make the beginning relatively well. But the landless had different experiences, namely, after having paid for the trip, they were without money right from the start; indeed, some might even owe money for the journey.

What was now to be done so that those who could not pay in advance for the allotted land could pay in honesty and faith upon credit? The Vorsteher of the Gemeinde had to pay the sellers from time to time as the [16] land payments became due. But from where were they to get the money if the debtors in the Gemeinde could not pay? In this regard meetings were held right from the beginning in the school in Rosenfeld, Mexico. I cannot say otherwise but that those who gave advice at that time - who were mainly of those of better means and well-to-do - were led by the spirit of love, for in so far as I was able to ascertain, (I - who then was poor and have also remained poor), they accepted the well-being of their poorer fellow-brethren as much on their hearts as their own.

The conclusion was reached that the poor, who otherwise could not pay, should punctually give over annually the fifth part of their harvest to the Gemeinde as payment on account of their land debt. Those who would do so punctually, would have the right to farm the allotted land

according to his desires, so as to support themselves and their families in an honourable way. Could it have been done better? The one who does not have his own land and cultivates rented land, usually has to pay the fourth part, and frequently even more, as the rent. For such a payment he actually has nothing more of the harvest than the left over part. But here in the Gemeinde he could become a landowner if he annually paid the fifth part, and that as payment for the land, so that year by



Going visiting with a nice horse and a one-seater buggy. Naturally mother has the smallest child on her lap, the second smallest one sits between mother and father, and the oldest two, sit at their feet. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 66.

them arrived safe and sound in San Antonio during the first half of the month of March [15]. Here our freight was unloaded and all things were eventually taken from the city to the countryside, where each one planned to settle. The emigration now halted until July of the same year. Then again many trains departed for Mexico. The emigration lasted primarily for three years, 1922 to 1925. Nevertheless some also left Canada for Mexico thereafter.

Regarding the frequently mentioned land sale



Three Friesen brothers tilling beans, Neuendorf, during the 1940s. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 66.

year he could increase his estate. Once his land debt had been liquidated in this way, then he did not have to pay the fifth part any longer.

Oh how sad, that many poor later did not meet these obligations. According to my humble insight, many a one grievously sinned against that generous arrangement, because many did not make the agreed-upon payments over numerous years. Hence many fellow brethren, including often the innocent heirs, suffered great losses. Oh, how does this harmonize with the content of the second tablet of the Ten Commandments: you are to love your neighbour as yourself?

The agricultural practices in Mexico to a great extent differed from that which we were accustomed to in Canada, so that all of us had to unlearn many things. In addition the prices of our products decreased so much during the depression [17], so that they had almost no worth in comparison with the prices of our necessary supplies and farm implements. (At that time, 1930 to 1932, corn, beans and oats were priced only at 15-20 pesos per ton). As a result poverty also started to manifest itself among those who during the war years in Canada had already more or less laid money aside. Whoever bought a single corn cultivator in those impoverished years had to produce up to 15 tons and more of corn in order to pay for the same.

The lack of money got ever greater and little progress was made with the paying of debt in the Gemeinde. Consequently the Gemeinde could no longer pay the sale agents, unless they borrowed evermore money from the wealthier brethren. After a while, however, these started to become more and more reluctant. As a result always higher interest was promised, and although it became always more difficult, the Vorsteher were always able to bring together enough money that the payments falling due to the sellers of the land could be met until the debt to the outside could finally be liquidated.

In addition to loans from some individual brethren, the Gemeinde Vorsteher, however, had also borrowed large sums from the Waisenamt, which [money] at that time, at least in part, belonged to the minor heirs and, in part, also belonged to the older persons and the elderly, who had invested their savings into the Waisenamt in order to be able to live from it. The money was to be paid back, after, firstly, the brethren who owed their land to the Gemeinde had paid for it, and secondly, after the surplus land which had been bought for the future was



This photo must be taken shortly after the arrival in Mexico. In front, holding the whip, is David B. Penner. Sitting besides him is the well-known dentist, Isaak L. Dyck. Sitting in the rear, left hand side, is Peter B. Penner, Blumenthal. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 66.

sold to the increasing youth in our Gemeinde and be paid for by them in a similar way.

But then, however, as already mentioned, those first years were much more difficult than many had thought, and also little of the great debt in the Gemeinde could be paid back. It so hap-



This tractor belongs to Abraham Rempel, Reinland, who apparently brought it along from Canada. Abram Rempel was the father of B. A. Rempel, Neu-Reinland (see Old Colony Men. in Can., pages 181-2). Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 67.

pened that very soon the ones who had their money in the Waisenamt [18], could not nearly be paid according to what they needed. Many meetings were held regarding this matter, as to how best to remedy this need. Presently it was decided, among other things, that the interest on the debt was to be dropped, so that the depositors



Johan P. Neufeld, Reinland, plowing his land with a unique team. In front are two exceptionally large mules and, in the back, three large Canadian horses. The driver is Peter Martens, formerly Heuboden, today [1997] living with his children in Campo 64-B. Mr. Martens and Mrs. Martens, nee Peters, were both 87 years old [in 1997]. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 67.

would not receive any interest, but that the debtors were to pay one (1%) per cent interest. This was applicable to the Waisenamt as well as also the Gemeinde treasury. But as the depositors in the Waisenamt had to give up one (1%) per cent of their deposits for the administration of the Waisenamt, the depositors thereby came to a disadvantage relative to the debtors. Instead of receiving some compensation from the others for the use of their money, they now had to forfeit one (1%) per cent of it to the Waisenamt, whereas the debtors who were using other people's money, by comparison, only had to

pay one (1%) per cent. This awakened a good deal of dissatisfaction.

It came to the point that the depositors sold their accounts for far below the real value in order to thereby be able to use or spend at least a part of it. Those who otherwise wanted to buy things from other persons, by assigning credit in their deposits, frequently had to pay two or three times the actual amount owing. This occurred especially during public auction sales when prices were bid higher.

These difficult times lasted for many years. It was caused in part because the Gemeinde had much more debt in the Waisenamt and to individual brethren than it had assets. Indeed the church had much land lying for sale, but for the most part it lay at such high altitudes that there seemed to be no water to be located there. For that reason there were no buyers to be found for this land, although the land had been reduced to \$14.00 per acre, and there were many in need of land. It became more and more common, how-

ever, that our brethren bought land in other places from the Mexicans, where there was water and which also was cheaper than the church land. 1922-1936.

Another very critical situation resulted in much difficulty. The land had not been bought from the owners in Mexico for Mexican currency but with American dollars, and therefore the Vorsteher had also [19] borrowed much money for the payment of this debt from individual brethren in dollars. Now it happened that the Mexican peso, which in any case only had half the value of the American dollar, was even more devaluated, so that it became evermore difficult to pay back the dollar debt to the brethren. Therefore it was finally decided to peg the value of dollar in the Gemeinde at \$2.15 pesos. This again caused much dissatisfaction among the brethren who had loaned dollars to the Gemeinde, as these thereby lost a large part of

the value of their money.

When we all were in Canada then some brethren gave the advice for the time being not to buy any more land in Mexico than could immediately be paid for in cash. If later on more land was needed, then surely means would be found. Others, however, thought that if once we were in Mexico and had success, then the land surrounding the colony would soon be bought up by others and we would have no reserves for our increasing youth. Therefore it was best to buy as much land as was only possible, so as to also provide for the future. The latter advice was followed, and because of this the aforementioned difficulties arose. If the first advice had been taken, the land could later have been bought much more cheaply and no one needed to have suffered loss because of the Gemeinde. Although this way of securing land for the future may have been meant well, it was now manifest that trust in God's help would have been safer.

Under what load of debts the Manitoba Colony had to suffer for many years can in part be seen from the following table. Although many brethren owed the Gemeinde large debts, as of January 1 [20] 1932 the Gemeinde had \$890.124.74 more debt than credit, in 1933 the Gemeinde had 930.920.52 more debt than credit, in 1934 the Gemeinde had 769.182.73 more debt than credit, in 1935 the Gemeinde had 689.738.03 more debt than credit, in 1936 the Gemeinde had 684.436.94 more debt than credit, in 1937 the Gemeinde had 658.696.41 more debt than credit, in 1938 the Gemeinde had 648.751.04 more debt than credit, in 1939 the Gemeinde had 598.518.96 more debt than credit, in 1940 the Gemeinde had 546.562.34 more debt than credit, in 1941 the Gemeinde had 446.691.90 more debt than credit, in 1942 the Gemeinde had 376.490.57 more debt than credit, in 1943 the Gemeinde had 308.826.19 more debt than credit, in 1944 the Gemeinde had 154.950.04 more debt than credit, in 1945 the Gemeinde had 89.201.03 more debt than credit, in 1946 the Gemeinde had 40.1244.39 more debt than credit, and in 1947 the Gemeinde had 29.691.48 more debt than credit (Note Six).

From 1932 to 1947 are 16 years. We emigrated already in 1922 to Mexico, namely, 26 years ago, and during this long time the excess debt had not yet been liquidated. How much longer should it take until both the debt and the credit were eliminated? Well, one had to console oneself with the fact that the financial situation was improving. In addition some brethren had found through exploring the mentioned [reserve] land that there was a possibility of water, and that by drilling wells sufficient water might be available for the necessities. The land itself was fruitful enough, if there is sufficient rain. As a result it became possible to either rent or in part to sell almost all the land. Should now the beloved God grant blessing, then the financial account could improve in time.

Some of the rich and better provisioned brethren had broken up much land with their tractor ploughs. The settlers paid for the ploughing with a certain share of the harvest.

These are in part the economic conditions of our Manitoba Colony until the latter part of the

1940s. [21]

Our sister Gemeinde of Swift Current settled here in our neighbourhood according to similar circumstance in 1922 and later. Those of the Hague Gemeinde settled a few years later in the State of Durango. From the latter the greater part remained in Canada, whereas from Manitoba the greater part moved to Mexico.

6. Temptations.

Also in other aspects the Gemeinde did not escape without trials and tribulations. Right frequently robberies and thievery took place. But the behaviour of our people has also often been so bad and lamentable, so that we justly must confess that we have been to blame when evil things befall us. Indeed the gracious God has used various means and wonderful guidance and thereby sought to draw us closer to Him. For example, through severe sicknesses which passed through our colonies with exceptional severity, especially in 1925, when many were carried to their grave.

Also on October 31, 1928, at 10 p.m. we experienced an earthquake. Although it did not create any particular damage, it displaced many into fear and anxiety. People were affected with dizziness and the shaking of the houses was evident. Chickens fell off their roosts, and other things more.

Besides this Mexico has also suffered several revolutions while we have lived here. It was particularly difficult in the year 1929, when large units of soldiers rode through our villages. As dangerous as such times can always be for the inhabitants of the land, yet not a hair was bent among us. So graciously the Ruler of the earth extended His hand before us [20], so that nothing happened to us. Have we in general not forgotten far too much to bring our thanks to our benevolent God because He has redeemed our lives from destruction and bestowed so much goodness upon us? Yet in spite of all the wonderful leading, as well as the many blessings which the beloved God has allowed us to partake of in order to draw us closer to Him, it seems He accomplishes His purpose only in small part, because "... one does not see any improvement. O, superseding loss! men hate the peace for the soul/ and rush onward toward Hell, and/ neglect the time of grace.

In the beginning when once in a while strangers stole something among us, one seldom or never heard that the thieves carried weapons or arms. In contrast one often had to hear that in such situations our own people took weapons and shot after the thieves, even though primarily to scare them away. Indeed, many, unfortunately, did not conduct themselves as would be appropriate for non-resistant Christians. Instead of praying for this country, the government and the people, much blasphemy and evil was spoken about the same. Instead of demonstrating to the people of this land through a pious virtuous conduct, how followers of Christ must here be engaged, the conduct of many, including also the youth, is such that reduces us to shame. And how many have not already by now become guilty regarding the property of others. Indeed, there

have already been thieves and robbers from amongst our midst. Also goods are frequently brought across the border in unlawful ways from foreign countries by our brethren. In addition there is much complaining and scolding regarding Mexico and the "thieving Mexicans." But through this and because sometimes resort has been made to weapons, we have not become any better, and instead of the stealing becoming less, it has increased and the thieves have also started shooting at our people [23].

Indeed, even murders and fatal assaults have taken place amongst our people. Firstly, it happened in the Gemeinde in Durango, where a youth was shot by the hand of a Mexican. Only a few years later, in 1931, in our colony here in the village of Schanzenfeld, a young brother, by name Letkeman, a bachelor, was shot by bandits, whereof he died some time later after a severe sickness.

Thereafter, on Tuesday, October 24th, 1933, at about 10 p.m. a murder was committed, which far eclipsed all of the like which we had experienced to that time, namely, the family of Peter Schellenberg, consisting of husband, wife and an only son of four years old, and living near the City of Cuauhtemoc were murdered in a dreadful manner. The husband and the wife, severely stabbed and shot, were found dead on their yard on the morning of October 25 by the young Wilhelm Wiebe of Blumenthal. The son with a slashed throat was found in a room.

Whether a special reason was applicable against these Schellenbergs, which gave rise to an act of revenge, has not become known. Should this not finally awaken all of us, that we should direct ourselves to the Father in a truly childlike manner, to supplicate to Him for grace and mercy for ourselves and likewise also for the government, that it might be strengthened to guard against such evil? This event more or less transposed the entire colony into fear and dread. Although the government sent policemen to protect us, yet in many villages the men took turns standing guard during the night, so as to warn the people in the village in case of a further attack and whereby the terror might be ameliorated and such attacks might be also be thwarted [24].

After this, in the beginning of May, 1934, another cry of fear went through the colony. On Monday, April 30th, Jacob Peters, teacher in Neustaedt No. 101, was shot by bandits in the store of P.H. Peters, Burwalde, during a robbery. This murderer was captured some days later by the police and some time later was also shot by them.

The Gemeinde in Durango also had to suffer a good deal because of attacks by bandits - particularly during the winter of 1933 to 1934 - so that they hardly knew what they should do since they could no longer even rest during the night, because they had to live in constant fear. Even their unmarried women were at times shamed until finally the leader of the bandits was executed by the police. Some more attacks occurred later whereby some of the wives were also raped. Oh, what a lamentable situation.

April 1, 1936, Uncle Abraham Braun in the Colony in Durango, was murdered during the

night by bandits.

When we think back to the years during which we lived in Canada without giving thought as to what served for our peace, how has it become so much different! Until the time of the Great War of 1914 to 1918 we lived in comparative peace and even during the war itself we had nothing to complain about for the longest time. And as the times grew evermore prosperous, many amongst us became rich with earthly possessions. Everything that the farmer had to sell brought an abnormally high price. Wheat at that time was sold for over \$3.00 per bushel, whereas before the war it usually sold for less than a dollar, somewhere around 60 to 80 cents per bushel. Many were able to do with their farms what they wanted, [25] there was always enough money at hand.

A few years later however, the prices fell and it began to go backwards. After we had already been in Mexico for several years, prosperous times were also experienced here, in the midst of poverty and deprivation. Many who had never been without money during the rich times, were now without credit. But it is not always the great poverty which is to blame for the loss of credit, but also the punishable indifference in making payments, and that many far too easily promised what they later do not fulfill. If a person is hindered by poverty in making payments which have been promised, they should not allow the matter any rest, but rather seek to make arrangements with the creditor. As this is often not done, he thereby loses his credit.

In May 1935 it happened - in fact, partially unexpectedly - that the government took away our school freedom and closed our schools. In the process the inspector recorded what kind of school room it was, the circumstances found inside, and that our schools were forthwith closed, because the teaching methods in force therein, were against the school regulations of the land, or something of the like. This writing was signed by the official, and also the teacher had to sign the same with the promise not to conduct school until the school was brought into compliance with the government.

During this summer our beloved Ältester Ohm Johann Friesen, Neuenburg, died on August 2, 1935, after a quite protracted sickness. His successor in that office was Prediger Isaak Dyck, Blumenfeld, who was elected through a general ballot on December 12. The election was still conducted by Ältester Johann Friesen [26].

But as winter and therewith the holy Christmas time drew nearer, and we still did not have the freedom to hold our schools, notwithstanding that our representatives on our part had dealt with the government throughout the entire summer, it so happened that in some villages the teachers gathered quietly with their pupils in private houses during the evening to learn the poems and songs which our children customarily memorized for the Christmas program.

Finally after eight months of long waiting, during which time extensive negotiations were conducted with the government, and it nonetheless seemed as if everything was futile, the government relented and granted us the freedom to again teach in our schools according to our old

customs. This occurred in 1936, and we also proceeded forthwith.

7. Restless Factions.

For many the time during which our schools were closed brought forth sadness and anxiety, but for many others the murmuring spirit of discontent seemed to evermore gain strength. As long as we could live here in apparent peace and security, only a very few were very unsatisfied. Even from the very beginning now and then a few went back, but most were nonetheless satisfied. But when the loving God permitted the attacks by the bandits and even death and fatal assaults were committed against our people, then the unrest became great, and there were evermore people to be found who wanted to get away from here. But only a very few thought of an emigration. Most of them only wanted to return back to Canada. Many brought their Canadian citizenship papers in order, and as many were too poor to be able to do so this, it was frequently desired that the Vorsteher should take the matter of obtaining British citizenship into their hands.

It got so far that Ältester Isaak Dyck was asked concerning this matter during a brotherhood meeting. However, it was disapproved by the brethren who could not see [27] that if we left a country because of our religion to flee into another, we could not subsequently ask the government out of whose land we had fled, for help and safety for the reason that we were apparently not faring well here. This, however, increased the unrest even more, and so they finally constituted their own party which then worked at being able to get back to Canada. This party gained a large following, and finally even the Ältester was persuaded to take up the work [regarding the return] to Canada.

When a brotherhood meeting was held for this reason on November 1, 1935, the enthusiasm was so strong for Canada, that it seemed somewhat unwise to speak against it. Finally a delegation from the Gemeinde in Chihuahua was actually sent to Canada, who personally traversed the entire country from west to east, but everywhere received only refusals except in the Province of Quebec, where the liberties were not definitely declined. The same wanted to consider the petition for freedoms and then inform us of their decision in that regard by letter. This process protracted for over two years, and in spite of the fact that we in the meanwhile had again received our school liberties in Mexico and the government had also promised to protect us from the attacks, yet the desire to move back to Canada grew ever stronger. Finally, after repeated inquiries, the answer from Quebec came, that they had no land for immigrants and also that the language would have to be either English or French.

Yet the Canada-minded party long ago already had disregarded the work which the Gemeinde Vorsteher did in this regard, and for some time had worked independently. Many times men from amongst them went to Canada, but who never accomplished anything. In summer of 1937 some of their men again went to Quebec. They [28] came back in September of the same year with a great display with good promises,

although they had actually accomplished nothing more than "we will send it to you later." Now the unrest increased evermore. Lists of names were drawn up, so as to show the Gemeinde how many there were who wanted to go to Canada. They demanded of the Vorsteher to start preparing for an emigration down there.

In March of 1938 some men from the United States (U.S.A.) were here in Cuauhtemoc and had given a certain part of our brethren good promises regarding land and liberties in the State of South Dakota. As a result a "South Dakota Party" was formed among us, which worked toward an emigration to South Dakota. Later this "air building" imploded upon itself. Nothing had been gained thereby, but much money had evidently been spent in travelling. In the meanwhile many also went back to Canada. But what was the worst of all this? Many a one had sinned through complaining and blaspheming regarding the country, people and government, instead of praying for it the way the Holy Scriptures teach us. Could the word of Isaiah 30:9 not apply to many of us when it states "That is a rebellious people, lying children that will not hear the law of the Lord?"

If we honestly consider how earnestly we have sometimes prayed that God, the Lord, might have compassion over us and bring us into a land where we could serve Him in peace and live according to our faith; and then when He graciously answered our prayers and had brought us into a pleasant land, and we then speak so disparagingly, "No, I do not like it here. I want to get away from here," is this a thank-you well-pleasing unto God for graciously heeding our prayers? How can such a person expect God to be with him if he works with such an attitude, to move from one country after another, or to carry out a move back to Canada? [30] Oh, that together with Nineveh, we would truly repent. Otherwise we have much to fear that severe punishment might fall upon us. "Nevertheless the firm foundation of God stands sure, having this seal, The Lord knows his own." And, "Let every one that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity," 2 Timothy 2:19. Further, "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him," Hebrews 10:38; Romans 1:11; Galatians 3:11.

8. Second World War.

When in 1939 the fearful war broke out in Europe against Germany, which Canada also supported with all its might, then for a time the restless spirit - which had worked so tirelessly to persuade the Gemeinde to move back to Canada - amongst us abated. Rightly said they periodically abandoned this field of conflict in order to engage other issues and thereby to get as many souls as possible into the web. But for many this temporary forsaking of the thoughts regarding Canada did not come about through an honest attitude, for it came about because so many among us in their feelings sided with Germany. This was in no way in harmony with the teaching of non-resistance as found in the New Testament. Since Canada and the United States fought against Germany, the rebellious desire to move

to Canada thereby abated temporarily.

In spite of such sad misconducts among us, the financial situation did not stand still. Apparently it was to be that we should experience things as formerly the Israelites did under Judah whereof it is written in 2 Chronicles 12:12, "...and also in Judah things went well." As this account of 1939 earlier already reported, the huge debt of the Gemeinde at that time was already decreasing, although its complete liquidation [30] seemingly still lay in the distant future. The surplus land which the Gemeinde had for sale for a long time, was gradually sold; although the debt was not nearly completely liquidated, there was already a need for land for the young members.

Although spiritually conditions among us were only poorly established, yet the Gemeinde grew larger in numbers through the steady natural growth. The [Manitoba] Colony which already in Mexico was too large for one Ältester with his ministers, spread out evermore in that many brethren bought land adjacent to the colony from the Mexicans, where they also built their dwelling places.

If we compare the size of our Manitoba Colony, Chihuahua, with the colonies which Ältester Gerhard Wiebe and Johann Wiebe brought from Russia to Canada, in 1874 and later, we find that our Gemeinde was much larger in numbers already during the time of its settlement in Mexico. Ältester Gerhard Wiebe wrote in his book *Auswanderung nach America* ("Emigration to America") that the Bergthaler Gemeinde in Russia had five villages and the flock of Ältester Johann Wiebe in Russia, according to the reports of the elderly, consisted of six villages, although the membership was perhaps a little less than that of the Bergthaler.

In contrast even in the beginning our Manitoba Colony in Chihuahua soon consisted of 32 villages. In the year 1940 there were already 41. As there was now, in any case, a constant need for more land for the young people, who annually through baptism were added to the membership, advise should and had to be established, to found a new colony, although the large land debt still had not been paid.

Land for settlement was offered in different locations and delegates were also sent out to seek an appropriate parcel of property suitable for the establishment of villages. But many years went by and something suitable could seemingly not be found. Thus it happens when people place their trust more on the [31] visible, perishable creation instead of upon the providence of God. Soon this, and soon that stands in the way.

Finally in 1943 to 1944 after four years of searching a small parcel of property was bought in the State of Coahuillo near Saltillo, Station Agua Nueva. Yet this transaction protracted for so long, that in the meantime, the Holdeman's Gemeinde living here in the north bought the land there, and exactly that which we had actually wanted.

In the meanwhile, a trainload among us in



Peter and Maria Neufeld settled in Kronstal. Maria is standing in the doorway watching Peter plow with their horses brought along from Canada. Sons Peter and Herman are running behind. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 69.

Cauhtemoc departed on March 4, 1944, for Saltillo, including Rev. Franz Loewen. Soon letters were also received from these members reporting they found the region there to be above expectations. They had feared that the beef cattle would always have to be fed, but it turned out that the meadows there were better than these here. In summary, the settlers lived in joyous hope and many from here rejoiced with them.

Yet after a few months the settlers reported the exact opposite. According to the report the soil was, in fact, worthless - the top soil was too shallow, and the subsoil was alkaline, chalk or something else. Indeed, what was seeded quickly sprouted, but then soon dried out. If it was irrigated, it dried out even quicker. All the good reports of the fine growth of corn, alfalfa and the like, which some of those who had inspected the land the previous summer had promoted, were now no more. Inquiries were made regarding the same, but were nowhere to be found or heard. No, it was simply not possible to live there. By June Vorsteher G. Neudorf already returned from there to Chihuahua in order to look around here for a place - if possible, a Wirtschaft. He had sold his former property here in Rosengart for much too good a confidence in the new settlement near Saltillo. Only a few remained firmly committed to the view, for the time being, that first of all more experimentation and practice were required there, among whom Rev. Franz Loewen was the leader [32].

But unexpectedly and suddenly the 19th of June, 1944 brought the news that Rev. Franz Loewen had died after a two or three-day sickness. Thus the last pillar there near Saltillo was gone. A number of the settlers from there also soon came back, and presently more came and already by the beginning of October of the same year, the last ones from there were back in Chihuahua and the entire settlement project was a total failure.

For those who observed these efforts and experiences in the Gemeinde in an honest way relative to the gradual but increasing abandonment of the Word of God and the declining of the love among us, the reason for such misfortune cannot remain hidden. I say that it cannot remain hidden to whoever has an honest heart that the Word of God amongst us was being forsaken, which has not only occurred in isolated instances. For example, we have among us a goodly number of brethren, who, instead of farming are engaged in trade businesses and in order to protect their stores from thieves or bandits, nearly every businessman amongst us retains his own policeman for a designated salary. Although this is done with the permission and approval of the government, it stands contrary to the teaching of non-resistance of the New Testament.

In this and other similar ways the Gemeinde has received the protection of the government. But if one goes deeper in evaluation, one finds that in matters of church judgments, which have apparently been earnestly commanded unto the Church of God here on earth, with respect to which together with other earnest warnings, however, it has been strictly as the Holy Scriptures state, "...for the judgment is God's", Deuteronomy 1:17, that it is a manifold departure from the Word of God. Often times already judgment is passed upon this one or another brother or excommunicated one without witnesses, which, however is forbidden in the Scripture, Deuteronomy 17:10. Further, the command of God, Exodus 22:16



The children of school teacher Isaak Peters, Reinland, returning to the yard with a load of corn husks, mid-1930s. From l.-r.: Peter, girl unknown, Wilhelm, Justina, Isaak, Sara and Helena. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 69.

and Deuteronomy 22:28-29, is completely disregarded in our time, and set aside. The one who objects and refers in that regard to God's Word may soon hear that he is a self-righteous Pharisee, who alone always knows everything better than all the Ohms [ministers] and more of the like [33].

Exodus 23:21 states that God, "...will not pardon your transgressions." Likewise also in 2 Chronicles 24:20 and many other scripture references. Further, it is stated in Matthew 24:12, "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold." Unfortunately this is also applicable amongst us. Love grows cold and disunity, jealousy, mistrust, suspicion of another, etc. articulate the hearts and minds of many brethren and sisters. Love, in particular, suffered a grievous violation when the alphabet dispute arose amongst us.

9. Neglecting Our Schools.

Since time immemorial we have had a long tradition in our schools that the discourse between teacher and pupil is in the language of the Scripture: in the language in which we read and pray amongst us, namely, High German. Although it is called by us High German, it really is not exactly the way the entire Scripture has been written, but it is literally an incorrect German. Regarding our schools, of which so many would still make various positive claims, they have entirely no structure and no established rules as to what is being taught and how. Consequently the teacher is left completely to his own resources in this regard. He discharges his obligation how he has accepted his service in his heart, according to what he feels or does not feel is best for the Gemeinde.

Through this process the schools have in general degraded to the extent that we find only few persons amongst us who still have some discernment to know what is right and wrong. These few individuals are accused by many as being "Hochhinauswollende" [wanting to be high-minded]. Indeed, under certain circumstances they are actually seen and regarded at times as hurting the Gemeinde. But these individuals are exactly those who at times accept much suffering and often they make above-humanly efforts, if possible, to ward off the complete apostasy [34] of the Gemeinde and a general departure from God and His Word - even if not to forestall it completely, then at least to hold back as much as possible.

Although our schools in Canada also did not receive the legal recognition to which they were entitled by law, yet in matters of education it was better there as the weather provided us with some help in that regard. Because of the cold, the pupils were for the greater part contentedly confined to the warm [school] room, and when they returned home after school, they always also learned various fine proverbs, songs or poems, so as to be able to recite them by memory. In this way the thinking and attitudes propagated in the schools were to a certain extent also reinforced at home and the schools and the parental home more or less extended to each other the hand. We had school there [in Canada] seven months of the

year.

When the government in Canada took away our rights regarding education, we moved from Canada to Mexico, exactly because of our schools, since the Mexican government granted us the freedom in that regard. And the thanks on our part? As soon as we got here we immediately shortened the school year by one month, so that at the best, we had school for only six months per year.

Secondly, to a large degree, the memorization of many assignments at home fell away, and the teachers who also wanted to have this practised like in Canada, were prevented from doing so without regard to the fact that some of the older people saw this to be very essential; because, as they said, this can be of much comfort for an older person when their sight and hearing has failed, when they can remember many biblical proverbs, poems and songs. But as this, however, was now omitted for the most part in addition to the school term, which as already mentioned, was shortened by one month, it was also the case that during the in- between times the pupils to a large extent would forget what they had learned during the school term (as well, nearly all our holidays fell during the school term). In addition to all this misfortune it also frequently happened that the student had to miss school several days because of the work on the Wirtschaft.

A severe thanklessness toward God and also the government! That all this must work itself out with negative results for the Gemeinde can clearly be seen by all those who do not intentionally close their eyes to the same. Sadly, for a long time already, the damaging fruits of this neglect have been visibly noticeable, for many confess without inhibition that they do not understand the sermons in the worship services. In addition there is also always more indifference towards the Holy Scripture. Hence, before long everybody lives according to their own thoughts. Therefore, the Scripture in 1 Corinthians 15:34 aptly applies to us, "...for some (amongst us many) have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame."

10. The Alphabet War.

Oh! What a lamentable apostasy of our Christendom!

With respect to the decline of our schools and the voices against the villages of Blumenort and Blumenthal whose residents manifested certain efforts according to their understanding to run a half-decently good school, although they also lacked the correct knowledge. The school instruction, as already mentioned, was left up to each individual teacher, provided only that he not do too much diligence, namely, did not do or teach what the "good-minded" were no longer used to, and because of this, the learning of reading in many schools was wrong and more or less different.

The vowel "a" was uniformly wrongly pronounced in most schools. In reciting the A.B.C.'s the "a" is pronounced "au" among us, but while reading there are at least three different pronunciations for this "au" amongst us. For example,

"haben, sagen, laben, fahren" are not pronounced like the "a" in the German is pronounced alike in German, with the same sound. Amongst us, rather, each word has its own pronunciation, namely, "sagen" in our midst is "sagen", "laben" is pronounced by us "lauben", and "fahren" is pronounced while reading like the Low German, something like "foahren". There are many words like this [36] which are wrongly pronounced while reading and speaking and in this way the misguided and wilful mistakes have become a habit in our midst and this habit has been raised to virtue. Isaiah 3:4 says, "I will give children to be their princes, and babes shall rule over them."

But not only the vowel "a" disturbs our peace, love, unity, like-mindedness and learning to read. Satan has long, long ago already discovered many other words for that purpose. To mention only a few - "Lehrer" is to be pronounced "lierer", and here one says "mier" for "mehr", and "geburen" for "geboren" and more of the like nonsense. The person who pronounces words correctly is seen as being proud and striving for higher things, etc.

How may such diversions harmonize with the following and other teachings in the Holy Scripture, "Of such things put them in remembrance, charging them before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers;" 2 Timothy 2:14. And 1 Timothy 6:3-5, "If any man teach otherwise, and abide not by the salvation-yielding words of our Lord Jesus Christ...he is proud knowing nothing..." From such a war of words arises jealousy, hatred, slander, evil suspicion, "school disputes", and such persons as are robbed of the truth, and others more. "Likewise Micah says in chapter 3:9, "Hear this, I pray you, you heads of the house of Jacob...that abhor judgment, and pervert all equity." Likewise also Amos 5:7. Solomon says further in Proverbs 19:1, "Better is the poor that walks in his integrity, than he that is perverse in his lips, and is a fool." Similarly also in chapters 2:1-3, 8:13, and Proverbs 16:28, "A forward man soweth strife..."

Concerning the letter "a", Blumenort and Blumenthal steadfastly continued to cling to the right pronunciation, while in the other villages right and wrong rotated, which occurred with the changing of teachers and thereby the "au" remained constant.

After the deterioration had progressed so far that many could not even read and even less to write meaningfully, then it had come so far that at a general brotherhood meeting [37] of October 6, 1942, it could be required of Blumenort and Blumenthal that in the future that they should pronounce "a" wrongly in their schools, like it was in the other village schools. But they did not want to understand it in this way, as they could not see why this should be required of them, as they were only teaching their children the way all of them, the parents, had learned it, not only here in Mexico, but also the entire time that the Gemeinde had been in Canada, and no one, not even the Ältesten Johann Wiebe and Peter Wiebe had demanded such of them. Consequently they were declared as being opponents of the Gemeinde and with them all those that supported

them in some way. There were many of these brethren in the Gemeinde who agreed with the two villages.

If only we had punctually made use of the freedom to operate our schools to instruct our children in reading, writing and comprehension so that the Holy Scripture could always speak to our members, according to what Timothy says in 2 Timothy 3:14-17. Here amongst other matters it is stated, "...And that from a child you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make the wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus...." I say, had we earnestly endeavoured in all circumstances, but especially in the instruction of our children, to cling unto the Scripture, which manifoldly commands us how we are to teach our children, as for example in Psalms 78:1-8; Genesis 18:19; Deuteronomy 4:9,10, 11:18-21; 32:45 and many other passages of scripture, then the Gemeinde through the blessing of God might have been able to be a light from which also the children of this world could have learned. In which case, however, our schools would have been a strong hindrance to Satan in his endeavour to lead all the world unto eternal woe. But to avoid this, Satan, the enemy, seeks to rob us of our schools. Until now he had not yet succeeded in doing so by external means and so now he came from within, and - how sad! Through strife, conflict [38] and lovelessness on the one hand and through general neglect and slothfulness on the other, it seems he has completely succeeded in his work. Through the unfortunate and woeful alphabet dispute the "love" in the Gemeinde was extinguished to a great extent.

Is it then any wonder that our efforts to establish a new colony did not want to succeed?

11. New Settlement in the South.

Finally, when the dispersion of many families out of the Gemeinde increased precariously, it was possible in December 1945 to buy a large parcel of property for \$25.00 per acre, more or less, adjacent to the northeast of our colony. Unfortunately the land had to be bought again according to contractual obligations and paid off with many instalment payments. In addition, we had not yet ascertained the depth of the water table and whether there was any water to be obtained at all. But with expectation that there would be the means to meet all needs, we started to settle the land in the spring of 1946.

The beginning, however, was much more difficult than what many had thought. Again there were in the Gemeinde rich brethren, but many of those were hesitant at this time to loan much money to the Gemeinde, as the memory was still too fresh in their minds, how the lenders had been dealt with during the first land purchase in Mexico; namely, how poorly the great promises which the church fathers had repeatedly reiterated at the time were fulfilled, of which mention has already been made earlier in the book.

In spite of all this our God always and at all times deserves unspeakably great thanks, to whom presently we unfortunately always remain too much indebted, for even though it was very difficult, and at times even impossible, to make

the payments when due, and even more difficult sometimes because of the water, yet God has always helped to bear the burdens. In addition, during the rainless years the settlers often had to be on the roads day and night with their emaciated horses and partially broken down wagons, in order to haul home the water which was absolutely essential [39] for their families and their cattle from such places where water was still available in limited quantities, whether in a dug well or here and there in creeks where water ran together during the rainy season. A drilled well was made almost from the beginning, which in fact yielded abundant water for the entire colony, but could not bring forth enough. But nonetheless, advice was always found here, so that the settlement could be carried through, and established on its own feet.

In the beginning there was also assistance with the payments from the Old Colony. The Swift Plan Colony was also involved in buying this land. It also happened that the harvest was so meagre that the payments due in that year could not be made. But then the seller was soon willing and postponed the payment date for one year. For a long time already there were men in the Manitoba and Swift colonies who owned well-drilling machines. These helped along by securing water for the new North Colony through drilling wells, which many in the beginning did not want to believe, as the water table was very deep.

It was fortunate in many places to be able to make good wells, which provided good water. Naturally all this cost much money, but it paid off for those who possessed the means and the courage or were able to borrow it. Yet for the others who could not bring forth either the means nor the courage, the water issue was and remained a difficult hurdle, and many a one later left the colony for this reason.

If our Gemeinden had possessed such a fellowship amongst us and had steadfastly clung thereto, namely, that every member of the Gemeinde tithed a designated part of his income to the Gemeinde, then the Gemeinde would have had a treasury, the contents of which undoubtedly would always have sufficed [40] to pay for such land purchases in cash to help the new set-

tlers according to need. Many difficulties, expensive trips, chagrin, opposition and unpleasant work which arose for the Gemeinde Vorsteher because of these credit purchases could have been avoided. Provided, of course, that the Gemeinde in all its dealings would always have dealt according to Holy Scriptures, and not always have more and more deviated therefrom as at present. But the more the Gemeinde departed from the Word of God, the more independent it became, whereby the danger arose that such accretions to the treasury can easily become subject to capricious misuse.

According to what the Gemeinde Vorsteher of the old Manitoba Colony in Chihuahua announced in the beginning of 1958, by the close of the year 1957, the Gemeinde had finally liquidated the last debts to the Waisenamt, as well as also to the individual members of the Gemeinde. Indeed, all debts incurred up to the present have been paid. This, however, is valid only to the extent that one does not take into account the large sums lost by the brethren, or their heirs, who had loaned a lot of money to the Gemeinde during the first years here in Mexico, as already mentioned earlier (Note Seven).

But should one not take these sums into account? Is it right before God that those debts should be arbitrarily considered as liquidated - without any thought on my part or yours - for we do know how difficult it was for some brethren to be coerced by the representatives and some of the members of the Gemeinde to accept this loss? "You shall love your neighbour as yourself".

The shortage of land and living space will become ever more critical because of the ever increasing number of young people in the Gemeinde, especially in the State of Durango. Although one repeatedly hears that there is still much arable land for sale in Mexico, and although the Gemeinde has also frequently sent out men as delegates who usually came back with the report that they had found land there and there and which they had inspected and which, according to their opinion, was good, yet for a long time it could not conclude a purchase because the Gemeinde could not become united for any of the investigated places.

Finally in the year 1961 a number of brethren



Franz and Elisabeth (Bergen) Enns, Blumenthal and their daughters heading to church on Sunday morning, ca. 1940. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 70.

united in the Gemeinde in Durango and negotiated a transaction on payments for a parcel of property in the State of Zacatecas near La Batea [41], Post office Frenillo. Each buyer had to pay a certain sum in cash for his part, and obligate himself to punctually pay the balance in regular specific instalments. This settlement took place in 1962. Three villages were established. Shortly thereafter the Gemeinde accepted the responsibility for this undertaking.

12. Social Insurance.

Already in the year 1956 it occurred that a political party (whether out of the government faction is not clear to me) began to agitate that we should be registered for social insurance. With this a general nation-wide law was to be enacted, so that every person in case of sickness, employment disability, accident, age, or the like, would have a guaranteed support. We opposed this requirement because, firstly: we understood the Holy Scriptures that the followers of Christ should not assist in making worldly laws, as Christ says, "My kingdom is not of this world," John 18:36. If, however, we provide our written endorsement for the enactment of a worldly law, then we are co-origators of that law. Christ teaches a clear line of demarcation between His followers and the members of the world, Matthew 20:25-26; Mark 10:42-44; Luke 22:25-30; John 14:17; 8:23; 17:14-16.

Secondly: the provisions of the social insurance system require that each person of 16 years of age and over must personally register. This would have the result that the parents would be prevented from obeying the Biblical injunction of raising their own children, for at 16 years the children still have not yet in any way out grown the parental responsibility. In our Waisenamt the children are only declared adult at the end of their 21st year of life. But the government of this land has graciously granted and confirmed in writing our Waisenamt privileges; so we are, therefore, able to see this social insurance system [45], if it should be pressed upon us, as a violation of our privilege.

Thirdly: if through our own signatures we assist in establishing such a worldly law and help to enact it, we are thereby becoming the servants of man, which is forbidden to us by 1 Corinthians 7:23.

As a result of our objections the aforementioned party desisted for the time being. But this mild proving did not remain without consequences in our Gemeinde. Many thought that now it was time to move out of Mexico. Thus the "Ten-delegates' spirit" had received a powerful nourishment. And as if it was destined to happen, in the year 1957 a brother in the Old Colony in Chihuahua had discovered that British Honduras, an English crown colony in Central America, apparently had land for settlement and also granted religious freedom.



Cornelius Abrams, Santa Clara, ca. 1925, plows his land with a three-horse team and a three bottom disk-plow. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 72.

13. British Honduras.

Oh, how wonderful it sounded that British Honduras somehow was "English"! Here one could emigrate with righteousness, and in spite of all opposition again live under an English government without experiencing a guilty conscience. Indeed, now one did not have to move back to "Egypt" - to Canada - but one could emigrate because of one's faith, and still live in an English



1942. Farmers from Reinland, Manitoba Colony, returning from Cuauhtemoc. They have sold a load of oats. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 75.

country as formerly in Canada.

Soon men, among them also ministers, from the Gemeinde in Chihuahua drove to British Honduras to investigate the matter. And truly, they found it to be the way the mentioned brother had stated. So that no one would need doubt the truth of the matter, they soon also brought the desired *Privilegium* as the governmental confirmation of the same. Now it was ready! Just the way it had for so long been desired.

Although we could live in Mexico according to our faith completely without molestation and our God in addition had so richly blessed the work of our hands so that many already had become well-to-do and in part had achieved great wealth, for which we never can thank our beloved God enough, yet now there was to be an emigration [45].

Already in spring of 1958 many moved away to British Honduras. The motivation was great and many were truly of the view that it was an emigration because of faith. A people can become so foolish when they forsake God's Word, and yet, consider themselves followers of Christ!

After a few months some already came back. They did not like it there and their faith had suffered shipwreck. But this made no impression upon those emigration faithful who still were here but also wanted to emigrate to British Hon-

duras. They considered those who had come back as having fallen away. The emigrants were believers until they too experienced disappointment, and even if not all of them, yet many came back to the despised Mexico. According to reports, the ones coming back would have been even more numerous had they not become too poor. This is also how it was in the beginning in the colonies in Chihuahua and soon also in Durango. For some years it was principally a moving forth and back. Very large sums of money were wasted through this emigration and

immigration. Many thereby became completely destitute.

14. Settlement in Casas Grandes, Santa Rita

Although the Gemeinde in Chihuahua had bought additional land for settlement, yet an almost constant need remained. It seemed as if the shortage of more *Wirtschaften* could no longer be met for the always again upcoming generation. Almost simultaneously with the migration to British Honduras, a group of members from the Manitoba Colony formed a new colony as Casas Grandes. The ministers Heinrich Wiebe and Abram Wiebe and Ältester Bernhard Wiebe moved there as well.

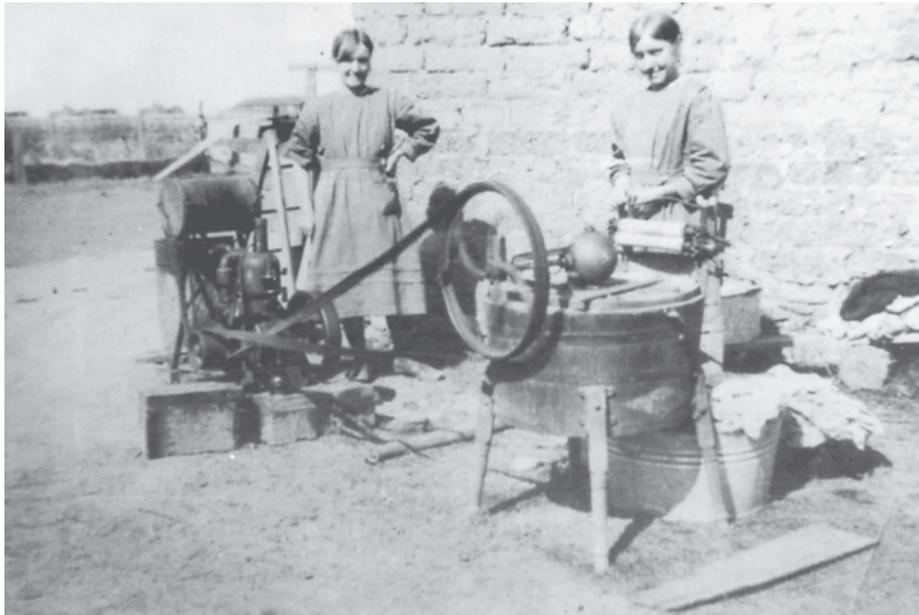
Not long thereafter additional land was again purchased adjacent to the Nord Colony [44] and by the year 1961 or 1962, all the arable land up to the colony of the Sommerfelder Gemeinde at Santa Clara had been bought up [This new purchase became the Santa Rita (Colony)].

15. The Rubber Tire War.

The constant land shortage in our colonies, especially at present in Chihuahua is in part a consequence of the steady increase of our people in the Gemeinde which after being here for 41 years was already large in numbers as it had steadily increased in size during this long period. In part, however, the land shortage came about because the cultivation of the land was done by draught machines (tractors).

When we moved here in 1922, we were accustomed to doing all our fieldwork, such as ploughing, seeding, mowing, and everything which belonged to grain farming, with our horses. This is also how we did things in the beginning in Mexico. Nonetheless even in the beginning one saw and heard a draught machine here and there pulling a plough through the fields. In fact it took a number of years before tractors were in the majority but then it did not take very long before the horse teams had largely disappeared from the land.

In the meantime, the draught machines had been significantly improved by the factories and their wheels had long since received rubber tires. This apparently was to serve so as to minimize the repair costs. At the same time the draught



Jakob Friesen's daughters in Schönwiese washing clothes. This was apparently one of the first motorized washers. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 76.

machine was now also able to replace the horses on the road. But exactly the latter were not allowed. "Among us the machine shall not be a vehicle for road travel." Why not? "Well, for then the opportunity is easy, especially for our youths either on Sunday or in the evening, to quickly drive here or soon there, or actually to speed to the city and to partake in and revel in the pleasures of the world which only misleads. Soon we would no longer be a people separated from this world." This must now be acknowledged during our current apostasy from the Word of God. But from out of this, however, comes the second question, are we at this time really separated - the small flock despised and hated by the world of which we read in John 15:18-23? [45] and 16:20. Where are the visible signs which prove this separation?

The unfortunate alphabet war had finally come to a halt without any resolution. In its place we now had the "rubber tire war". The number of the brethren that wanted to have rubber tires on their tractor wheels increased substantially. The contrary party, which had most of the ministers and the Ältesten on its side, did not concede in this. Many brethren were placed in the ban because of this; they usually, in fact, allowed themselves to be reaccepted after a short time but without having changed their attitudes. This form of judgement seat almost became the norm, indeed, it actually seemed as if no one thought of it any more, that God himself says in His Word that the judgement "is mine" and that He very clearly and unequivocally tells us in the Holy Scriptures how we are to govern the judgement seat and that we are not to add anything thereto. Matthew 16:15-22; 1 Corinthians 5; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 5:21; Deuteronomy 4:2; Deuteronomy 1:16-18; Deuteronomy 13:1; Revelation 22:18, 19; Deuteronomy 19:15-21, and many other places more.

The unrighteousness always more and more gained the upper hand and the love grew cold

and disappeared. Things were unspeakably bad. Finally it got to the point in the Old Colony in Chihuahua that the brethren that demanded the rubber tires carried away the victory. This occurred approximately in the years 1958 to 1961. Towards the end it resulted in much alarm and great accusations, especially from the leaders of the other colonies, instead of [them] actually taking a lesson therefrom:

Alas, that man might only hear,
That the Lord wishes to grant
His children the gracious peace.
So that they would not fall into doubts,
because of impatience and bring,
themselves into foolishness [46].

Only a few years later, after the rubber tires had been forced into the "old" Manitoba Colony, the same happened in the Swift Colony.

Now there were still the newest colonies in Chihuahua - the Nord Colony where Bernhard Peters is Ältester, and the Santa Rita Colony where Bernhard Penner is Ältester, and at Casas Grandes with Bernhard Wiebe as Ältester. These now drew away from both of the first colonies, Manitoba and Swift. They were of the view that the leaders of the Manitoba and Swift Colonies had been too accommodating regarding the brethren who were demanding rubber tires and that they had shown too little reacceptance of those who (were barred).

They wanted to do things better and held as having fallen away, everyone whom they had to shun even though the scripture says no more in that regard, other than that those who use [the things of] the world, shall not misuse them, 1 Corinthians 7:31. God's Word commands many things, which are to be kept out of the Gemeinde, as for example, idolatry, strife, wrath, disputation, duplicity, factionalism, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, greed, seeking for honour, mischievousness, lying, slander, betrayal, wantonness, gos-

sip, thievery, robbery, disobedience to parents, etc.

Indeed, it seems as if the hypocritical gossipers are often the ones who can best beautify their own matters but [at the same time] denigrate and shame their neighbour and bring them into disrepute and whereby they have only one regret, that they cannot make it any worse; Psalm 36:3; Jeremiah 9:3-6; Galatians 5:19-21; Romans 1:28; 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; 1 Timothy 1:9-10; 2 Timothy 3; Romans 2. It is no wonder, when such Christians, whose main concern only focuses that their self-made laws and prohibitions are followed, and indeed, who actually think that thereby they are wiser than the ancients, who governed likewise in the first colonies and already before this last breaking down. I say, is it any wonder when such ruling leaders also break down shortly just like those who are being shunned by them!

This was the experience of those leaders in both Nord Colonies in Chihuahua. Already in the fall of 1966 the tractor tires also pressed into their midst and they themselves were powerless against them just as the former had been, who had been shunned by them - unfortunately! How much better would it not have been [47] if the Gemeinde would have governed in love, peace and consensus with "serving" and not "ruling" leaders, in accordance with the ordinances of the Scripture and not according to the rules of man.

16. Registration for Emigration to Bolivia.

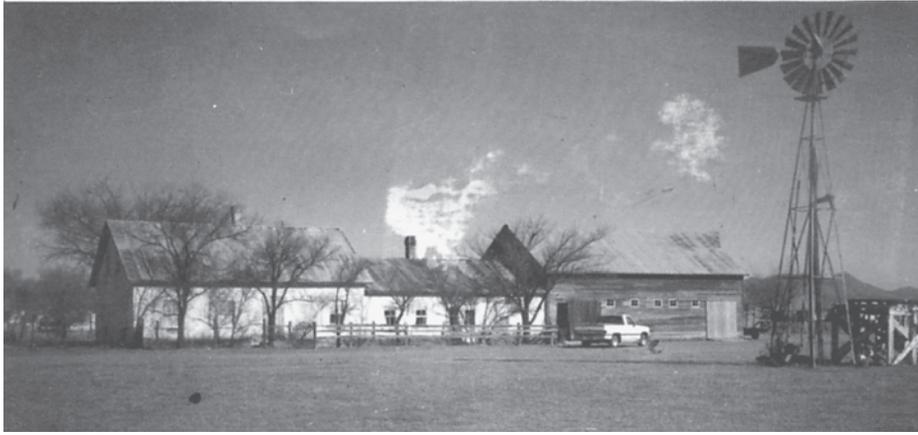
Instead of holding to the Scripture and turning in love to their members, they separated themselves one from the other by public registration and preparations for emigration. In September 1966 they sent delegates to Bolivia [to seek] for freedoms and land which was also granted them. The brethren who did not subscribe for emigration during the registration no longer paid to the Gemeinde. They were declared as fallen away.

But the emigration from Mexico was not decided for the reason that the Mexican government had revoked any of the freedoms which had previously been granted, rather solely and alone, because many members of the Gemeinde no longer wanted to allow to stand the self-made laws and ordinances, principally with respect to the rubber tires on the tractors.

The emigration from the Nord Colony in Chihuahua to Bolivia began in the year 1967 by



Johan and Katharina Wiens and their daughter Sarah, pioneers in Rosenort. The Wiens also lived in the village of Rosenort in Manitoba. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 128.



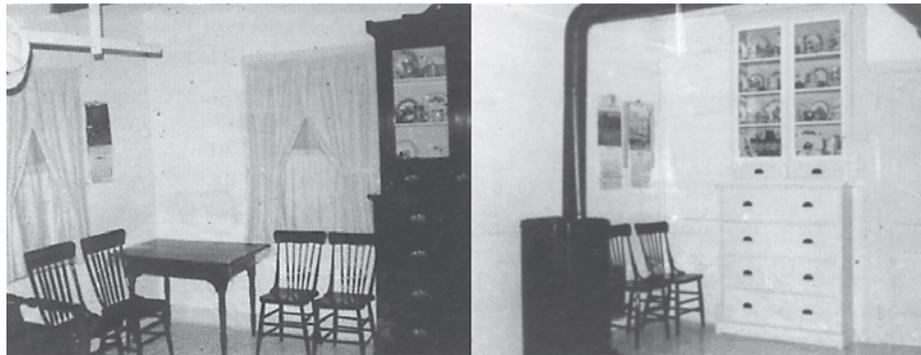
The *Wirtschaft* of Prediger Jakob Loewen in Rosengart, later owned by his son Abram. It later also remained within the family of Ohm Jakob Loewen. Photo - Rempel, ed., *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 135.

air flight on the jet-propelled aircraft (called a jet). A number also moved by the sea and land routes, namely, by way of omnibus [bus] and ship.

Also in the Durango and Zacatecas Colonies matters generally were in a sad state and everywhere the apostasy from God's Word and teaching became more and more manifest. In Chihuahua at one time the rubber tires sufficed as the reason and in Durango and Zacatecas the enemy had invented something else in order to bring

Kanada 1875 is Form Einer Predigt (Cuauhtemoc, 1972), 72 pages; see *Old Colony Men. in Canada*, pages 51-52).

Note Two: The designation "Gemeindevorsteher" is to be understood as a substitute for "Oberschulze" and, in fact, for the reason that it was felt that a member of the Gemeinde could not hold an office which had any legal or governmental basis, and also here in Canada should not take part in any Municipal offices [The designation of "Obervorsteher" may also have its ori-



Inside photo of the 75 year-old Jakob Loewen house in Rosenort. Photo - Rempel, ed., *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 135.

about disputation, discord and banning.

In the settlement at La Batea, Zacatecas, which [48] had its beginning in the year 1961, the unrighteousness terribly took over already right in the beginning, although not regarding rubber tires but because of other disputations whereby the judgement seat, which God has created for Himself alone, was grievously misused.

Until here [are concluded] the recordings of school teacher David Harder who was called away from this world by death on April 4th, 1968 at the age of 73 years and four months and [49] 10 days.

Endnotes (as added by the publishers of David Harder's manuscript):

Note One: The Fürstenländer Gemeinde, as Harder called it, only emigrated to Canada in part. A Farewell Sermon of the Ältester Johann Wiebe from his Gemeinde in Russia is still extant ("Die Auswanderung von Russland nach

gins in the Fürstenland Colony where "the leaseholders in the six villages had to elect a man from among their midst to represent them to the manager of the estate....He was the mediator between the tenants and the management in all matters with respect to the settlement," Franz Doerksen, *Diese Steine*, pages 438-9. Editor's Note].

Note Three: On pages 49-61 will be found a letter from Predigern Johann Wall and Johann P. Wall, both from Saskatchewan, written to their families while on the trip to South America, reporting about the journey and especially about the illness and death of the Prediger Johann Wall. Note Four: Page five - The then Prime Minister Mr. Arthur Meigen from Canada had declined to provide another written guarantee regarding the still valid military freedoms, but had made no objection to a settlement by the Gemeinde in Quebec.

Note Five: In the report to the brotherhood meeting called by Ältester Johann Friesen regarding

the *Privilegium* which had been received from President Obrigon, it was stated that the same needed to be presented to the Mexican Congress before it could be considered as being in force and satisfactory. Such a process, however, was not followed, nor was this required prior to proceeding with the land purchase in Mexico and to the emigration. Soon, however, one heard it said among our people in Mexico that it was better not to become citizens there. They stated that the *Privilegium* was in reality, nothing more than an agreement between the President and the delegates, namely, considered as foreigners. And in fact, there was no provision in the military laws for conscientious objectors. For this reason, it also occurred that our people there tried, in as much as possible, to keep their Canadian citizenship papers current, in order not to be seen as citizens of the country there [in Mexico].

Note Six: In addition to the financial difficulties mentioned by Harder, the long-time Gemeindevorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel also added the following: i) The sums mentioned on page 13, are in Mexican currency, i.e. in pesos.; ii) It was during the pioneer years in Mexico, while the both F. F. Froese and A. J. Neudorf served the Gemeinde as Vorsteher, when it became necessary to borrow money from the brethren for the Gemeinde through which the question about dollars or pesos arose together with the related difficulties; but also that the regulations which became necessary, were - for the most part - accepted peacefully.

Note Seven: That the Gemeinde during the 1930s and '40s united itself that every average farmer paid 600 peso into the Waisenamt or provided equivalent surety, and that also many large and small sums were gifted, and in addition, for four years after each other, 25 centavos per acre extra tax was levied, and that also, through these decisions, it was possible, that the men who later stood in these offices could deal with such believers where large sums came into question, so that likewise in 1957, the outstanding interest could be paid off, and that finally everything could be settled in a peaceful manner.

Further Reading:

Katharina, Mrs. Abraham Klassen, daughter of school teacher David Harder, has compiled a booklet of family information.



Prediger Jakob Loewen, Rosenort.

Isaak Dyck: His Accident, Suffering and Death

The Misfortune which befell the Honourable Deacon Isaak Dyck as well as his suffering and dying, written by his father; the Honourable Ältester Ohm Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969), Blumenfeld, 1981.

Introduction.

It is the inwardmost wish of your weak and humble father and grandfather that this tragedy and sad event would be written as with the finger of God into all our hearts. Yes, that it might remain for us as an ever enduring memory, so that we would never forget how fragile our life is, and that we human kind should reconcile ourselves with God and fellow men during our days of health and not wait until the sickness or death would overtake us at a time and hour where we had not expected it.

We say that we all together
Are mortal, and that in any place
Death could find us.

Yet we do not prepare for death,
and believe there is no danger
and continue in our sins.

One says the hour is unknown
Death comes suddenly like a tear
of the weaver's thread.

Like smoke and shadow fade,
and yet, this no one enlightens
and we live on so securely.

We speak much time and again
of a long eternity
which never is to end.

We say if a bird came from the sea
to take a kernel of sand from the shore
already a thousand years have passed [3]

But ever here there was yet hope
that after many thousand years
the sand would be carried away.
Eternity, however, is without end.
Yet no one wants to contemplate it,
and escape eternal plagues.

On this and about eternity
to rightly consider at all times,
would you, Lord, grant grace?
O grant that according to Thy teaching
we not only talk much about it
But live accordingly.

Grant us wisdom, power and desire,
that we might at all times,
seek to build on Thy foundation,
which Christ for us has built.
And help us pray through Thy grace,
in complete trust and confidence. Amen.

Oh how often do we people not forget the words of Scripture which teach us: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come," Hebrews 13:14.

When the good King David had given over to his son, Solomon, the building of the glorious temple in Jerusalem in earthly splendour and glory to the honour of the most high God, David straight away pointed out the comparative brevity of all things and the frailty of the life of man. He said, "For we, however, are strangers before You, and sojourners, as were all our fathers, our days on earth are as a shadow, and there is non abiding," I Chron. 29:15.

And hence, I thought to describe the un-



Isaak and Maria (Martens) Dyck were the parents of Ältester Isaak M. Dyck (1889-1969). In Mexico they lived in the village of Blumenfeld. Isaak Dyck originated in the Old Colony in Russia and had lived on the Fürstenland Colony with his parents. He had received a good education. Photo - Old Colony Men. in Can, page 128/Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 282. The Dyck family traces its ancestry to Jakob Dyck (b. 1752), Chortitza pioneer in Imperial Russia and owner of Wirtschaft 38. Jakob's father Jakob Dyck (1729-92) lived in the village of Neustädterwald, West Prussia, at the time of the 1776 Konsignation.

timely passing of our beloved son, who in his young years had to leave this world. Wherein apparently, the most wise designs of God remain hidden, that through his early death, God had sought to draw us closer unto Himself and to demonstrate to us how everything here in this world - whatever is not founded on the most precious Word of God and our Redeemer Jesus Christ and His grace - is but vile and for naught; transitory and not enduring.

Oh, how frequently we humans forget to pray for proper grace to die. How often, even when we do read the Word of God, do we not pass by without notice the beautiful Psalm 39 without considering that it contains within it the best remedy for our sick souls and the best counsel whereby we can overcome all disappointments, hindrances and manifold suffering and burdens, which so often overtake us in our human condition.

A sincere but striving disciple of Christ, who truly treasures his salvation from the heart, must sigh with fear each time when he must hear of sicknesses and tragic deaths. With a frightened spirit and a contrite heart, he must pray and sigh into His God: "Oh, Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, Thou has made my days as handbreadth, and mine age is as nothing before Thee. Verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity," Ps. 39: 4-5.

Jesus had to weep over Jerusalem that they had not recognized the time of their visitation [4]. Now we people often come upon the ques-



Isaak M. Dyck. At the age of 18 already he became a school teacher, a highly respected profession among conservative Mennonites, frequently leading to higher office. At age 23 Isaak M. Dyck was elected to the ministry. In 1935 he was elected to the highest office as Ältester of the Old Colony Gemeinde, Manitoba Plan, and committed his entire life in the service of his church. He died on Dec. 2, 1969. This photograph was taken by a Mexican reporter in 1950 and published in the periodical, "HOY". Photo - Pres., No. 21, page 104/Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 282. Isaak M. Dyck was a gifted writer and several of his books have been published: see Plett, "The Lonely Ohm - Myth and Reality," in Pres., No. 21, pages 101-103.

tion, what really is a visitation? Answer: All tribulation, fear, need, suffering and temptation and every tragic circumstance which the Lord according to His wisdom permits to come upon us, and whereby He seeks to turn us away from the world and to draw us unto heaven. And when death in its various manifestations enters our homes and families, through which He wants to turn us away from our sins - all these are to be called visitations. They are to direct us humans unto God, and whereby weary and burdened sinners should flee unto Jesus our Saviour, through whom all repentant sinners can receive forgiveness of their sins and the eternal salvation. If now the poor human through all of these aforementioned visitations allows himself to be led unto repentance, then the beloved God may thereby achieve His purpose with us. So that once the visitation is over, after the chastening and after the thunderstorm, things become much better with the person than before.

It can then come to pass as the Apostle testifies in I Peter 1:13-19, "Therefore, gird your minds for action, be sober in spirit, fix your

hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ. As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance. but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior, because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.' And if you address the Father as the one who impartially judges according to each man's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay upon earth. knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ." [5]

But if the grievously fallen person does not allow himself to be turned about through all the aforementioned and gracious visitations of God, and that he has not perceived the time of grace during which he has received so many a gracious solicitation from the heavenly Father, who loves us so dearly, and whereby the good Holy Spirit has convicted him that he is a fallen sinner and that he must seek God's grace and mercy, then he will continue to live in a world without a care according to the prompting of his fallen nature. With each day he gets older, colder and less perceptive respecting all that is good, thinks seldom about sickness and death, or how he will be able to prevail with his account on that day before God as Judge. If upon once again hearing the Word of God he has become afraid, or perhaps he has been somewhere at a funeral and has seen the deceased lying in the coffin, whom he had known so well and with whom he was related, and then through the funeral sermon he must hear how this pilgrim had such a serious battle and in the years of youth and in the days of good health, had been so little concerned about dying in an unsaved condition, and had grieved and regretted it with such lamentations; he, [the deceased] being one whom he had considered as better and more righteous than he himself.

Yes, and when at times in such hours and days, the grace of God works so mightily upon him and calls out to him, "Hurry and save your souls!" or:

How long do you want to sleep
you deceived son of man,
do you not see the punishments,
which already are at hand?
Do you at all hours
fulfill the sinful measure?
The whip already is prepared
Which soon shall scourge you.

Indeed, even if the good intentions arise within him, to seek to be more diligent, since still he feels so completely unprepared for dying; yet his good intentions cannot come into fulfilled fruition without the gracious assistance of the Holy Spirit - for a repentant heart is still



Isaak and Margaretha Dyck. Isaak Peters Dyck, son of Ält. Isaak M. Dyck, married Margaretha Dyck Friesen, daughter of the veteran teacher Isaak F. Dyck. Isaak and Margaretha also lived in Blumenfeld. He was elected at a young age as a deacon of the Gemeinde. On April 4, 1944, he was working in his blacksmith shop and while welding on a piece of surplus iron he had purchased from the mine in Cusihuiriac, he was grievously wounded by a strong explosion of which he died five days later. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 282.

required. And where there is no repentant heart, the Holy Spirit is not present either. And if the Holy Spirit is lacking, then the inspiration unto prayer is also lacking. And without a persistent continuation in prayer, the good intentions cannot come into fulfillment. And good intentions without a diligent daily life gradually fade away, like the mist disappears in the sunshine.

And thus many a one himself is thereby hindered from making progress during good times, and no sincere Christianity is found and no blessed victory can take place [7].

Again, he turns to the world and earthly affairs, he makes himself busy, and excessively busy, in order to gain and possess much here in this world. He worries and has only little rest, in that he always thinks only of how to increase the temporal; the body is weakened through all this travail, and yet, he does not wish to hear of death and of heaven.

And in that the person is not awake to watch and to pray for himself, so he again soon becomes indifferent, and then when he also gets together with like-minded people like himself, who deem everything as insignificant and whose undertakings begin and conclude mostly with joking and mocking, then the thought of their own death is again soon dissipated. They live again like before, only as a carnal person and not as a spiritual person, continuing in an unchanged carnal disposition, and the awakening and exhortations of God within his soul become weaker and always weaker and dissipate within him. He conducts his life only so approximately according to the course of this world and according to the princes which passeth before in lusts, namely, "according to the spirit who now has his work in the children of unbelief," Ephesian 2:2 [8].

Through his impenitence he treasures unto himself the wrath of God unto the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, "who will render to every man according to his deeds, namely, praise and honour, and unperishable being. To them who by patience and good works seek for eternal life, [8] But

unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, he will repay with indignation and wrath, Tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil," Romans 2:5-9.

Over such an unrepentant sinner Jesus must weep, if we people do not recognize nor consider the time of His visitation.

My Saviour, oh Thy heart weeps,
Weep, thou Jerusalem, with anguish!

In sin thou seest perishing.
Oh shall my spirit's plague,
mine early and late lamentations,
not be seen by Your eye of mercy?

Let us not perish in need
not like Lot's wife look back
when you bought us out of Sodom,
much more claim Thee in genuine

faith
and the words, riches, greed and pleasure for-
sake
through which Satan has enslaved us.

And let us always truly consider
what Thou wouldst give in blessing
to one who surrenders to Thy will,
what Thou wouldst grant him in grace
to live with Thee and the Father,
closer than here friend with friend.

Now, has I have, right from the beginning,
departed from my objective and reason of my
writing, I will again seek to guide the ship back
into the harbour, and proceed with my intended
task [9].

The Accident, April 4, 1944.

It was on April 4, 1944, when the [days of] Easter again stood fast before the door. I had many concerns in my heart, Psalm 94. I had a heavy burden upon my heart. Again I had to fear, with anxiety and worry about how the Easter days, especially Good Friday, would be observed so sinfully and godlessly among us in our Gemeinde. For instead of meditating during these days upon the suffering of our Redeemer Jesus Christ, how He was sacrificed for us on the tree of the cross and voluntarily gave Himself unto the death, as a lamb which bore the sins of the world. And how our sins caused Him so much suffering and pain; this is only so little observed. For:

Few there are that comprehend
the right way of Christ's pain
and who hate the cursed sins
and thereby become the cause of His suffering.
They thereby crucified Him, anew,
with their controverted thoughts.

For instead of fasting, praying and weeping,
and attending the worship services and consid-
ering the special significance that Good Friday
should be for us, and how our earliest forefathers,
aged fathers and mothers, Ältesten and
teachers did not even rest on this day and how
we also in regret and penitence over our sins

should direct ourselves to the cross of our Saviour in a godly sorrow and say to ourselves: [10]

Soul go to Golgatha
sit down before the cross of Jesus
and consider there what leads you,
as an inspiration unto repentance.
Do you want to be unreceptive?
O then you are hard as stone.

And so the festive days in our time are used by the majority only for receiving guests and to drive visiting and also to indulge oneself with idolizing the delicious meals and thereby to nurture the body, and to furnish the sinful body with beautiful clothes; many a one considers this to be the most important matter incumbent upon us during these days. But of the heavenly manna many hearts remain empty. What does the Word of God say about such people? Namely as follows: This "But she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives," I Tim. 5:6.

Yes, I felt a special pressure upon my heart as if something great and extraordinary would take place. Yet, mother and I became united on that same day (April 4) in the afternoon to go to Blumengart for a little while to visit our sick mother there. We had been there a time of perhaps 10 minutes, and we had only just barely unhitched the horses and gone into the house. And while I was greeting the aged mother and saying to her, "It is with an older person, especially when they are sick, just like the poet says:

"I have been a guest on this earth
and have here no abiding place
Heaven is to be mine
It is my Fatherland.
Here I ebb - to and fro,
there in the eternal rest
is God's gift of grace
which concludes our striving," [11].

After I had finished reciting this verse, I saw that Isaak Bergen, our servant, came driving with great haste upon the yard at mother's. The horse was covered with foam indicating that it had a great urgency. With fear and trembling I went forth to meet him asking for the meaning of this that he had come after us so hurriedly? He said that we should quickly come home as Isaak had had a serious accident while welding in the shop.

At once we hitched up the horses and returned home. Mother and I spoke but little while driving the way back. Only, we mostly groaned and wept and prayed to God for grace and mercy that He would not so soon let our son die. And if [it was to be that] he should die through this accident, that He might grant him enough time that he could get prepared.

When we arrived, they already had brought him inside. He laid upon his bed with folded hands.

But, oh what a woeful sight for us parents! The leg was broken, the bone smashed and the

face and mouth also somewhat damaged.

The first thing he said to us: "It has not happened to one who is innocent. It is only a small reminder of the nail marks of our Redeemer Jesus Christ."

United we bent our knees and supplicated God that He should not test him above measure, but rather carry out everything for our best unto the salvation of our souls.

The accident had happened somewhat as follows: Some years ago he had bought in the city of Cusi[huiiachic] a pile of old iron, in order to use it in the smithy as needed from time to time for necessary purposes. Under the many pieces



Prediger and Mrs. Abram Dyck, Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Plan. He was the brother to Ält. Isaak M. Dyck. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 282. Ben Froese, Palmlite Electric, Steinbach, Manitoba, is a great-grandson of Ohm Abram.

of iron he had often noticed a small pipe which was screwed shut on both ends. Many a time he had thrown it aside without taking note that it could be a heavily laden dynamite bullet.

On this day he had wanted to weld together a horse bit and had picked up this little pipe from the earth and laid it cross-wise across the welding table to hold the bit in a straight line. Hereupon he had released the stream of fire. And when the bullet achieved the required heat, the explosion followed, and a fearful crash resulted, so that it could be heard in the neighbouring village.

The bullet had penetrated his leg about a hand width above the knee and had remained lodged there.

Treatment.

After the expiration of half an hour Dr. Johan Enns had also arrived. After he had examined the leg, he had said, that he was not prepared to do so, to extract the piece of iron. He had not brought any tools along for this.

Quickly [a horse] was hitched and driven to Rosenthal in order to get the equipment.

After these had been brought, and a modest anesthetic had been administered, he cut the piece of iron - weighing half a pound - out of him. This caused him great pain. As long as he was holding my hand, he could just barely endure it without screaming. After the operation was completed and Johan Enns had somewhat reset the leg for him, the pain abated somewhat. He got a

little calmer and seemed to speak with courage to us, so that we, and especially his beloved wife, had hoped that he might get well.

But here the Words of God were to come to fulfillment, when the Lord speaks through the Prophet Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, sayeth the Lord," Isaiah. 55, verse 8.

When evening drew near, the pain again appeared to increase. I wanted to stay with him for night, but when the clock had struck 11, he wanted that I should lie down. I asked him whether it would be right on my part, if I only wanted to sleep, and he then had to endure the entire night without sleep and had to lie there in his pain?

Yes, he replied, I should only do so, as for so many a night he had slept well while I had to wipe the sweet sleep out of my eyes and had been away for many nights, while fulfilling my duties for the Gemeinde. Well, I allowed myself to be indulged and had also slept well.

When I came to his bed in the morning, I became aware that he had not slept at all during the entire night.

During the day the pain abated again. In his previous suffering he manifested a great patience. Often he lay in his bed with steepled hands, so that it seemed as if he mostly wanted to engage himself in prayer to his God. This day,

Wednesday, towards evening, Johann Enns came again and examined the wound and said that if it were as yet not God's will, he would not need to die of this. Again we received courage and hope that his need and pain would be lessened.

Visitors.

Many guests came to visit him and wanted to share in his tribulation and sickness which had befallen him. Although with few words and yet with friendly countenance he entreated all to remember him in prayer. Now, the time did not stop and the next day, Thursday, I and all the Ohms again wanted to get together in Rosenthal. The past night I had been at home. When I got there in the morning, he again seemed to be quite courageous. He requested that I extend greetings to all the Ohms, and also where he had failed or should have offended anyone, that they would forgive him for everything. When I came from the church on Thursday, it was already quite late and the day was starting to ebb, and I still had to drive to Blumenort, and the next day, namely on Good Friday, I had to go to Blumengart to worship services. Hence I did not take time to drive there [15].

I asked mother, "How was it today with him?" she said, "Not any better. The pain is setting in more and with greater frequency. It also seemed as if the infection had to some extent set in and the leg had begun to swell." Also I became aware through mother, that he had

made some arrangements what should be done if he would die, which filled my heart with grief and care.

Although I would gladly have stayed with him, yet I had to drive somewhere to fulfill my obligated duty. During the entire Good Friday my thoughts were mainly only with him, and though I tried very much to hurry, it was still almost evening by the time I came back.

When I arrived, I saw at once that his condition had worsened noticeably and he had already waited very much that I should return. The pains always started to set in more and with greater intensity. Nothing could be read in his face but the expression of deep grief, sadness and pain. On this day there were especially many guests with him, who entered and departed until late in the evening who wished him a good recovery and an eminent [return to] health. He responded to the well-wishes of the beloved friends mainly with the sighing answer: "The world is not a loss to me."

After the visitors had departed, he suddenly said to us and his beloved wife, "I have always felt so unworthy and thought that I was truly not much respected in the Gemeinde. They had never received many visitors [16], nor had it been a surprise to him, as who could find anything pleasing in him? And that he should become a servant in the Gemeinde, and be called as a deacon, he had never deemed himself worthy." But now that he was sick, he had to see and feel how the people loved him so, and they received so many visitors, of which, however, he felt so absolutely unworthy.

Once the visitors on this Good Friday were gone, and we and the children, namely his siblings, again were alone with him, the song was sung for him, "Flee you weak power," which he was able to listen to with great emotions. As he was getting a little more calm for the night, we agreed among ourselves that mother and Maria would remain with him during the night.

And I asked him whether he would wish that I also should stay with him? "No," he said, I should only go to sleep, as he saw that I was tired. And hence, with a heavy heart I went home and with the words of the poet, I wished him the blessing, "Let me this night experience, a sweet and tender peace, may all evil pass away, cover me with your blessing."

Turn for the worse.

At about 3 a.m. Maria came to the window and said to me with a frightened voice, I should come at once, as Isaak now was very sick. I arose at once. And in the meanwhile Siemens' Jacob was here with the vehicle and hurriedly brought me over there. When I arrived there he was in great fear and anxiety regarding his poor soul. He extended both arms to me and embraced me with child-like love to his chest. Now he quite openly told us that he would die [17].

And that we all should help him very much to pray that he might depart from here in a blessed state. He requested that the older siblings and Aunt Jakob Fehr also should come over.

Oh, how sadly and with what pain he gazed

down upon all of us. How it cut our hearts when he talked so solemnly and earnestly about his death, perhaps towards the end. Many tears were shed, for as intense and unbearable as his pain and suffering was, he however, manifested a great love for us all, and began to talk much about the beauty of heaven. When his loving wife gave him a drink of water to quench his great thirst, he then usually said, "Such delicious water there also will be in heaven."

Suddenly Wilhelm Wiebe's little son, Peter, was at his bedside and wept his bitter tears, for as it seemed, he had such great sympathy with his beloved uncle. When Isaak presently took



The former farmyard of Prediger Abram Dyck, Gnadenfeld. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 282.

note of this, he held him by the hand and said, "Only be very good and obedient, then you will also go into the beautiful heaven."

He then began to confess to us his great weakness, especially to me, how in his younger years he should have lived and walked in much greater obedience toward God and the parents, and that he had caused the heavenly kingdom too little violence [Matt. 11:12]. [Translator's comment: The kingdom is the realm over which Jesus rules. One has to take it by storm, namely, to enter into it by overcoming all hindrances. This storm of entering into the kingdom requires sincere repentance and faith in Jesus, Mark 1:15 and John 3: 3,5]. And that he should have much more humbled himself before God and the Gemeinde. He had also experienced what the Apostle Paul had testified, and said about himself, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh), dwelleth no good thing, for to will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I desire I do not, but the evil that I do not will, I do, Oh, wretched person! Who will redeem me from this body of death?" Romans 7:18 [18].

Indeed, if we people could always be thus minded during the days of our health, as if one were sick! Then we would fare as it is written, "Lord, in trouble have they visited You, they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was upon them," Isaiah 26:16.

"I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice, and He gave ear unto me. In the day of my desolation, I sought the Lord. My hand is extended during the night, and ceased not. For my soul refuseth to be comforted," Psalms 77: 1,2.

He also spoke of Good Friday, of what importance it is and regretted it very much that he had not spoken much more of the Good Friday

to the guests who had visited the day before, about the suffering and death of Christ. The day is much more serious than we believe. Here we should seriously think about our sins and say:

"Therefore I reject evil sin with this good night today. Flee far away and stay behind, you have frightened Jesus. That He lamented without measure how His God had forsaken Him.

Receive thanks, Oh Friend of souls, for the fear and bitterness for the stripes, the pain and torture, and for the bitterness of death. That you have for sin and shame endured to save us.

Grant that we henceforth would repent of our heavy load of sin, and not renew the punishment which you now have paid. But to thee we fully surrender and live according to Thy will."

Recovery?

When the morning dawned, he became a little more peaceful. And although he often said with groaning, "O, my poor leg", it nonetheless seemed to be getting somewhat better with him. Most sicknesses in the human condition have such characteristics and traits that with the dawn of the morning shimmer they abate somewhat and get a little better. And thus it was also with him. Yet, however, he gladly wished that I would not drive away anywhere, but rather remain with him. For he had perceived that on this day (Saturday), I had promised to go far north with the Gemeinde Vorsteher [head of the secular administration of the Gemeinde] to the Holdemaner because of the inappropriate dealings regarding the land in Saltillo.

He did not want me to go, and rather requested me in a child-like way to postpone it, as he believed that he would not last for long with his improvement. This request I could not reject nor ignore, because in so far as I knew his inner emotional disposition, I was firmly convinced that he would not have made this request without an important reason. Hence much counsel again was needed and various remedies applied. Also this day two doctors of ours came and did everything possible to help him, and yet, as it seemed, without success.

I remained the entire day with him. Many guests still came on this day to visit him. And as it seemed, they usually said in taking leave, "Oh, how you have wasted away. How is your face so haggard?" And these questions he mainly answered with but a few but deeply penetrating words, "I do not regret the world!" ("Mir ist der Welt nich Schade").

With justification he could say with the righteous Job, "Therefore I will not refrain my mouth. I will speak in anguish of my spirit. I will complain in the bitterness of my heart and soul. When I laid down, I said, When shall I arise? And thereupon I calculated when it would become evening, for I was in complete terror of everyone until darkness fell. My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust. My skin is bro-

ken, and become loathsome. My days are swifter spent than a weaver's shuttle, and are gone without hope, and no holding back was possible there," Job 7.

The Last Night.

As the day drew to an end, I said to him and his beloved wife, who was present, I was getting a strong sense that we would have a difficult night. During the evening his father-in-law from Kronsthal suddenly came and said that he had come as he wanted to stay with him for the night, which he accepted with great joy. During this time he had a special love for all people. And so upon his request the song was sang for him, "My God, in pity I lie here with sickness heavy afflicted."

Dr. Johan Enns came again this last evening and did everything possible to alleviate his suffering. It seemed that as long as we sang and read for him, he was quite peaceful, but as soon as we stopped the pain at once got greater. A fearful night now broke forth for him and for all of us. The pain was almost unbearable, but not once did he cry out. Only mostly silent sighing and prayer, which we could perceive in him.

Oh, how often were we not moved unto the depth of the soul for our poor son. Unitedly we again all bent our knees in prayer and cried within the silent chambers of our hearts to our God for grace and compassion, that He might take him from here through a peaceful and blessed death.

And thus he fought, wrestled and prayed, at times under gruesome pain. All at once, he prayed the prayer which he had learned at home in his young years, and which I had written out for him, which Susana Petkau, Eichenfeld, had recited to me in 1925, yet prior to her death, and which goes as follows:

I come oh highest God,
to Thee, and fall upon my knees.
Oh, do You completely from me,
Oh, beloved Father, want to flee?
Oh, do not judge, righteous God,
as You alone still can help,
me from out of my calamity.
Remember not how much
I have sinned before You, my God
and transgressed so frequently,
how I have displeased You
thus, many a day and weeks,
thus many a year I've spent.

That I the guilt did not consider
which led to Your wrath.
Oh do not judge me, righteous God,
according to my just deserts.
I transgressed Your command,
which Your Son has reconciled
I believe it firmly,
I trust in You for Jesus' sake
you will save me from all evil. Amen.

It seemed as if we - all of us - would come to a complete end with him. Nothing wanted to help, so that we had to think about the Words of Scripture which the Lord had spoken to the

Death at Last.

After this heart-breaking farewell he became completely peaceful and consoled, his soul became quiet in peace and he submitted in confidence to his God. He said, that he had the firm hope that when the sun of the morning would arise, he would peacefully be able to fold his hands together in death. We all sat around his bed and listened to his words. Many things he did yet arrange, some of which I already have written and the rest I will yet mention. When his wife laid both children on his breast, especially his daughter Susana [24], and asked him, "What then shall I do with the children if you die?" He answered, "These you should raise up in all humility and from childhood on always point them to Christ's footsteps."

Also he said, "It has always been my habit one time every day to kneel in a silent place and to humble myself before God, although because of great busyness it had often been omitted." Also he had received only one glimpse of God's grace that he as a pardoned sinner would be welcome at the narrow gate. The rest of his time of life he had always had to wrestle with sin. He also added, that now I wish nothing further than that I could be carried to the cemetery as a twice broken sinner - in body and in spirit (he thereby pointing to his smashed leg). He also mentioned the verse, "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit and a fearful and contrite heart, this O God, You will not despise," Psalm 51:19.

Now it seemed for a time as if he had ar-



Pre diger Abram Dyck, Gnadenfeld, with his horse and buggy. In this manner also Ält. Isaak M. Dyck covered thousands of miles in the Bustillos valley, seeing to the spiritual needs of his parishioners. It was said that no storm was too severe nor no night too dark, but that Ohm Isaak would be out with his faithful horse and buggy wherever he was needed to give comfort or counsel to those in grief, pain, sorrow and anguish. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 113. This photo was snapped by Walter Schmiedehaus.

frightened Zion: "In the moment of wrath, I have hid my face from thee for a moment. But with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer," Isaiah 5:48.

This difficult conflict lasted until three o'clock in the morning. All at once he raised himself up on his bed with his own power - which he could thus far not have done - and said with a loud heart-rending voice, "So now the biggest pain of death is overcome. Only death is needed."

And although he himself believed that the Jordan would as yet be very deep for him, nonetheless he hoped that the Victor over death, namely, Jesus Christ, "who has the power over death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel," Tim. 1:10, that He would safely help him across. It seemed as if he had overcome all pain and bitterness, and wanted for nothing further but to die.

Now he asked us all to come nearer. And with hand and mouth he began to take farewell of each one, whereby, however, many a tear was shed, which, as I hope, the beloved God will all have counted and received and sealed in His eternal testament, and that after overcoming the final travail each and everyone upon such seeding with tears will be allowed to enjoy an eternal and ever-enduring harvest of joy in that blessed eternity. For here in this sad world of woe there is not anything better, nothing more loving, than a repentant, contrite and weeping sinner, over which not only every soul dedicated unto God - but also every Ältester and minister - must rejoice. For Jesus says, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth," Luke 15:10.



Pre diger Ohm Abram Dyck, photographed in 1950 by a Mexican reporter. The photo was published in the periodical "Hoy". Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 283.

ranged all things. I sat by him at the head end of the bed and thought that his hour of redemption would soon strike. All at once he reached for my hand and having held it, he again began to speak and said, "Father, I trust you will not lessen your work in the Gemeinde, even if it sometimes is very difficult. Cling fast unto that which you have. Depart not from it, not to the right nor to the left."

"Yes," he repeated [25] "Cling to the old regulations and Ordnungen of the Gemeinde." In response to which I answered him, "But how am I to do it when my work is so often rejected and, it is being said, that it is wrong?"

He replied, "Simply battle onwards." The incomprehensible almighty power of God, whereby heaven and earth are sustained, would also help and assist me.

This I believe was his last encouragement to me, and that while he was fully conscious. After this it seemed as if the hand of death began to rest upon him. I sat beside him on the bed, and as it seemed he did not want to let go of my hand. His wife was on her knees on the other side of the bed, praying. And when she presently said in her prayer, "Then I will apparently have to say it, Lord, Your will be done!" Then Isaak said, "That is wonderful. This was what I so gladly wanted to hear, that you should release me. Hence I die more readily."

Oh, how often he looked to the clock and waited for the release of his body. When the morning red came forth, I noticed he often looked to the window. I asked him, "Why do you do it?" He replied, "Now the sun shineth outside against the brick fence, and I am still here on earth."

A Separated Brother.

Presently I was called away from his bed, for outside at the door an excommunicated brother stood and wanted to speak with me. After I had spoken the most essential things with him, I asked this separated brother to come in – as I thought it to be for his best that he would have to see how helpless and pitiful Isaak must lay upon his bed.

After this brother had entered and remained standing beside the bed, Isaak said to him, "Well, you now want to make right your matter with the Gemeinde? That is wonderful. Then let it be for you not only a confession of the mouth, but do it so that you do not make the Ohms and the Gemeinde any more work."

This moved the separated one to the core of his heart, so that tears of repentance flowed forth from his eyes.

Last Farewells.

In the meantime, the time that the people began going to worship services, around seven o'clock in the morning, had come. Many stopped by here before going to church to see about his condition and were surprised that he was already so near to death. Many shook his hand as a farewell. When the beloved fellow servant, Ohm Heinrich Wiebe, came to him, he requested that they might pray for him in the church, so that he soon could be released from his heavy

suffering.

I have already written that he had made his last requests to me, but now he asked for one more thing, whether his funeral could be held in the church. Also he mentioned that no one should leave the funeral without having eaten.

Now he again began to pray and among other things he prayed the beautiful song:

When my sins do hurt me
O, my Lord Jesus Christ [27],
Then let me well consider
how You have died
and all my load of debt
on the trunk of the holy tree,
You have taken upon Yourself.

Suddenly he reached for his wife, and when she bent over him, he embraced her to his sick bosom and said, "Please do not weep." Hereupon he directed his eyes toward me and asked whether he yet once more could embrace me, which I also did not refuse him. After he had embraced me in child-like love and had given me a kiss, we all saw that it was coming to the



Dr. Johann E. Enns in his local pharmacy in Rosenthal, Campo 6, was consulted not only by fellow Old Colonists, but also by many Mexican patients. Photo - Ken Hiebert in Schmiedehau, Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko (Winnipeg, 1982), page 171.

end with him. When the clock struck nine in the morning, his struggles and suffering were ended. The soul departed and separated itself from the earthly bonds of the physical body and hurried over – as we hope – to the eternal dwelling of peace.

We celebrated a sad Easter. It was a sad Easter for us and his bereaved widow, whom, as I hope and desire, will never be forgotten during our entire life.

Exactly on the first Easter day at 9 o'clock in the morning, he left us and went over into eternity.

The Funeral.

On April 12, his remains were accompanied to the silent cemetery. The funeral, according to his request, was held in the worship house in Blumenfeld. Although the church inside was filled to over-capacity, almost the half [of the mourners] had to stand outside [28].

The beloved Ältester Jakob Peters conducted the funeral sermon with an important introduction:

"Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven,
And the One who knows me is on high.
But the appointed years have come,
And I must go there upon the road,
upon which I shall not come again," Job 16:19-22.

I conclude this writing with the poet and say: Song 445

80 Mel – Es ist gewislich
445. O, God, he who considers the life well,
will find that it is generally filled
with fear, need, pain and sin,
full of effort, burdens, worries and anguish,
full of weakness or vanity,
also where it is best.

2. All these many years,
I, unfortunately, have not really considered,
the world has always deceived me
with wrong impressions.

Forgive me, Oh Lord!
Through Your grace
also this my transgressions
and other serious sins.
3. But now I think about it
and also about the future life.
Humbly I call upon You,
that You would grant
that for which You have created me,
redeemed from the burden of sin
and also called forth through grace.

4. That which attacks me here,
which still would like to torment me,
I want to commit my confidence
to Thee, Oh God!

For when body and soul perish,
then help me, Oh my Lord,
that I do not need to fear,
because I cling to you
with all my heart and soul.

5. Are the sufferings of this time,
the difficulties here on earth,
not worth the great glory,
undoubtedly to follow?

Surely, the one who desires so,
shall be over-abundantly rewarded
for such very humble work. Amen!

The End

Further Reading:

Peter A. Petkau, "Ältester Isaak M. Dyck, Blumenfeld, Servant of the Reinländer/Old Colony Mennonite Church," in Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada* (Steinbach, 2001), pages 125-128.

Plett, "The Lonely Ohm - Myth and Reality," in *Pres.*, No. 21, pages 101-104.

Menno Simons: His Image and Message

Sjouke Voolstra, *Menno Simons, His Image and Message* (Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, 1997), 109 pages.

Book Review by Walter Klaassen.

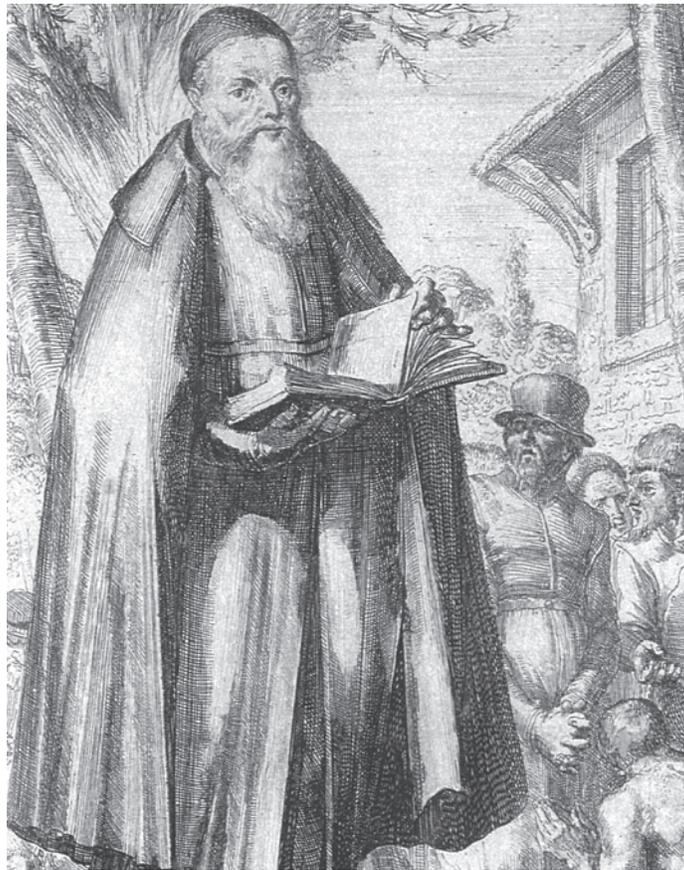
Sjouke Voolstra is the most important recent interpreter of Menno Simons. Voolstra was a Doopsgezinde (Mennonite) minister in Middelburg and Eindhoven, and was from there called in 1981 to the Mennonite Seminary at the University of Amsterdam. He taught theology, but distinguished himself especially with his teaching and publishing in Anabaptist history and thought.

His vision for the recovery of the 16th century heritage by 20th century Dutch Mennonites involved him repeatedly in controversy in the pages of the *Algemeen Doopsgezinde Weekblad* (Dutch Mennonite Weekly) because his vision of the contemporary appropriation of that heritage was strongly disputed by many theologically liberal Mennonites. Last year a large volume of essays with the title *Balanceren op de smalle weg* (*Balancing on the Narrow Way*) was published to honour Voolstra and two colleagues on their retirement from the seminary.

The book to be reviewed is not new. It is the printed version of lectures delivered by Voolstra at Bethel College in October, 1995. It is the fruit of many years' work and marks a radical departure from what was written about Menno Simons in the Netherlands over the last century.

According to Professor Voolstra in the first chapter, Menno, while he was acknowledged as the originator of the Mennonites, enjoyed virtually no honour among his own people in the Netherlands in the last hundred years. The gradual alignment of the Doopsgezinde with liberal theology and their radical individualisation of religious faith closed the door to understanding this priest and Anabaptist leader from the 16th century. Since he was not a modern man with modern ideas he was considered irrelevant to the present: "At present, Menno Simons only continues to merit respect in his native country because of his love for the unattainable ideal. The ideal itself has proved a mistake. The memory of the messenger is kept alive, while his message is scarcely listened to."

And then came Sjouke Voolstra. For years he had been saying and writing that Menno Simons has to be understood as a man of his time and compared with other Christians of his time rather than by what is thought appropriate in the 20th century. The writer then goes on to describe what was most important to Menno Simons in the penitential life, in the Lord's Supper, and in baptism. The purpose was to give Menno Simons "a face and a voice again."



Menno Simons (1496-1561). Engraving by Romeyn de Hooghe, 1710, in Gottfried Arnold, *Historie der Kerken en Kettern* (Amsterdam, 1701). Photo - Voostra, Menno Simons, page 23. The engraving denotes baptism, one of the central themes of Menno's teaching.

The clue to understanding Menno on the subject of penitence is his *Meditation on the 25th Psalm*. Voolstra shows how Menno's views on penitence as an Anabaptist leader were brought forward from his practice as a Catholic priest from 1524 to 1536: "The justification of the sinner is not unconditional. Without contrition, without real penitence, there can be no absolution, which is no longer granted by the priest, however, but by Christ himself. Faith is a process of penitence and reformation of the life being led. Faith is not faith unless it becomes effective in love. And this love is principally a deed of obedience."

The beginning, indeed the whole character of the Christian life in its ongoingness is true penitence.

On Menno's understanding of the Lord's Supper Voolstra writes that the emphasis shifted from concentration on the bread with its miraculous properties as he understood it as a priest, to "The true use, the true users, and the true servers of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. The degree of inner experience of God's righteousness and love in Christ, and of outward obedience to the Word of God becomes the determining factor in a true celebration of the Lord's Supper."

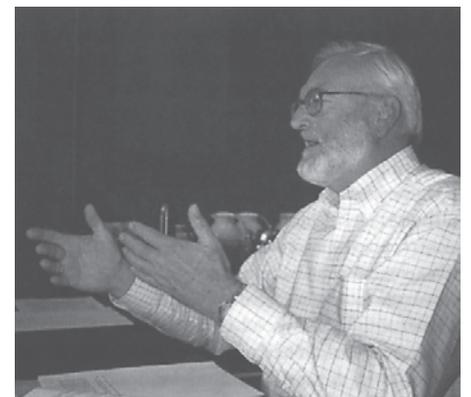
It is now no longer the bread which is changed

into the very body of Christ. Rather, "the heavenly bread, the body of Christ, which is not subject to transformation and decay, changed humankind within itself" The function of the Lord's Supper is "in the first place: remembrance of the suffering of the Lord" and "in the second place: exhortation to love." It was "a spiritual communion within the assembly of the true penitents served by true penitents."

Voolstra writes about Menno's view of baptism under the heading "The Longing for Perfection." Baptism was an end and a beginning, the end of the life separated from God and the beginning of the journey of sanctification, being made perfect by the Holy Spirit. Its importance is not in the water but in the effect it has on the believer. "Believers are not changed by baptism but in baptism." Belief is the pre-condition for baptism. But "without true baptism, and thus without true penitent belief and the New Testament believers' baptism, there is no promise of the forgiveness of sins and therefore no one can inherit heaven." That was Menno's position.

The development of Menno's views on penitence, the Lord's Supper and baptism are set with in the continuity and change from Catholic priest to Anabaptist leader, a story Voolstra traces with great care. They are reconstructed from his writings. I highly recommend this little book of a hundred pages to the readers of *Preservings* because of its rehabilitation of Menno Simons, but also because it is written with passion and commitment for all who want to know about their heritage.

Review by Walter Klaassen, Pt. 1, 606 Victoria Ave., Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, S7N 0Z1.



Sjouke Voolstra, lecturing. This photo was erroneously identified as Walter Klaassen in Pres., No. 22, page 46.

An Abridgement of Sjouke Voolstra,

Menno Simons, His Image and Message (Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas, 1997), 109 pages, compiled by Delbert F. Plett.

Chapter One - The Art of Oblivion: Menno Simons in Dutch Mennonite Historiography.

Menno Simons is someone from a distant past....What perception have we formed of Menno Simons through the course of history? How reliable are the facts?...Is the perception itself still part of the perception that his spiritual heirs have of themselves and wish to project to the outside world?...What assumptions have determined the conceptualization of his person and the interpretation of his message?... (pages 1-2).

The most important, earlier historian of the Reformation in the Netherlands was Gerard Brandt (1626-85)....Halfway through the 17th century an increasing number of voices are heard - Galenus Abrahamsz de Haan was to become their spokesman - in favour of abandoning the traditional closed Mennonite community, which had become so divided by that same severe discipline. This incited resistance on the part of the conservatives, however, who started to argue the importance of the confessions and the disciplinary procedures laid down in them.... (page 8).

In the case of Menno Simons' stance on the question of discipline, a psychological interpretation has contributed to the underexposure of other factors in the conflict about discipline. Abhorrence of the excesses has meant too little understanding of the important role of discipline in the formation of a reformatory church in a hostile environment, for both Anabaptists and Calvinists. Without pure doctrine and morals, a reformatory movement lost its unity and appeal and did not last long. Furthermore, it is too often forgotten that the guidelines for biblical discipline - and the conflicts of its application! - developed only gradually in interaction with practical circumstances and the political situation (page 10).

We cannot allow the judgement of the Reformed on Menno Simons to depend solely on John Calvin: "You cannot imagine anything more conceited than this ass [Menno Simons], anything more insolent than this dog," (page 13).

Menno placed all emphasis on Christ's freedom from sin. How can Jesus Christ reconcile sinful human beings with God if he himself is not an immaculate sacrificial lamb? Christ's human nature can show no resemblance to fallen humankind. Christ did not receive his flesh from Mary, says Menno Simons in an echo of Melchior Hoffman. Christ, true man and true God, is a new creation of God. The Word has become flesh, repeats Menno constantly, and only faith in this immaculate Lamb can produce a community of saints without spot and wrinkle....The Mennonites longed fiercely for the visible reality of the freedom from sin of the re-born man.....It was exactly at this essential point that Mennonites and Reformed diverged in their ideas on the relationship between faith and works, and church and the world (pages 13-14).

The Mennonites longed fiercely for the visible reality of the freedom from sin of the re-born man

Conceptualization of Menno Simons in Dutch Doopsgezinde historiography. The Zonists.

The Dutch Mennonites did not start writing their own history until the middle of the 18th century. This interest came mainly in the circles of the confessional Mennonites, who had broken with the anti-confessionals in 1664. Until 1801 they formed a separate religious community and were called Zonists, a name derived from the church building of their most important congregation in Amsterdam. The Zonists appointed themselves guardians of the orthodox Mennonite tradition, and so it is not surprising that they took a fresh interest in the life and work of their spiritual forefather. The question facing us now is, How did they make Menno Simons instrumental to their endeavours to justify the Mennonite tradition in 18th-century Dutch society.

Herman Schijn may rightly be called the founder of Dutch Mennonite historiography....They wished to convince their compatriots of Mennonite loyalty and love of peace....The best proof that Mennonites were no revolutionary Anabaptists was Menno himself....On the one hand, it is true that they preferred the name Mennonites to Doopsgezind, in order to use this reference to the Mennonite confessions to distinguish themselves from their anti-confessional co-religionists who were accused of indeterminate tolerance and Socinianism....In the question of discipline, they followed the moderate opinions of the Waterlanders and the Young Frisians, who had once been rejected by Menno....Retaining the

name, therefore, did not mean that the Zonists retained Menno's doctrine in full....Every effort was made to allocate Menno a place of equal value beside the church reformers Luther and Calvin. "Mennonite Protestants" was their preferred designation as a consequence.

The Zonists described their history as a process of breaking free from Melchiorism, and they subsequently introduced a distinction between the anti-confessional Doopsgezind and the confessional Mennonites in order to facilitate the integration with the orthodox Reformed Protestantism. Menno Simons was used in the service of this objective to transform his followers into a respected and established minority within Dutch Protestantism. This meant, in concrete terms, that Menno's ideas on Christology, discipline, the office of elder, and the non-payment of ministers were discarded. It actually amounted to the acceptance of the confession of Lubbert Gerrits and Hans de Ries - the original opponents of Menno's ideas on Christology and discipline - as a touchstone of Mennonite orthodoxy in the 17th century....Menno deserved lasting respect, not for his doctrine but for his life (pages 18-21).

"....the confessional Mennonites, who had broken with the anti-confessionals in 1664....were called Zonists,...."

Conservative Mennonites.

The anti-confessional Doopsgezinden remained silent about Menno; the confessional



Map showing the land of Menno Simons' birth in 1496. Source: Piet Visser and Mary Springer, *Menno Simons: Places, Portraits and Progeny* (Altona, 1996), page 12. "The roads that he walked between Pingjim and Oldesloe, with or without crutch; the waters upon which he sailed, lying down or standing; the villages and towns which he called at as a fugitive or where he was able to stay for longer periods with wife and children; the fields, barns or cellars wherein he hid or where he prayed and preached or debated differences with others, form merely vague lines and coarse points upon the map of the 16th century Low Countries," page 11. For a map showing Friesland within the context of the modern Netherlands as well as Flanders, the ancestral home of the majority of Russian Mennonites, see Pres., No. 22, page 37.

Mennonites allowed him a voice as a representative of pluriform, orthodox Protestantism. But what did Menno mean to the Old Flemish, who could call themselves the most faithful followers, both in doctrine and way of life? In the middle of the 18th century, this smallest group of Dutch Anabaptists attempted to preserve its separate identity in an era of rationalism and moralism by publishing a confession of faith and a catechism.

Pieter Hendriks, minister with the Old Flemish in Sappenmeer, wished to base the religious content of these documents on Menno's writings.... Without passing judgement on other confessions, he clings to a separate existence for the Old Flemish, characterized by the preservation of the tradition of unpaid ministers and the office of the elder. Baptism without reform of the subject's life, and communion without proper preparation are rejected; the importance of the washing of feet as a sacrament is put into perspective. Marriage with someone of another faith is condemned; discipline is preserved, including a moderate use of excommunication and shunning; the swearing of oaths and the use of weapons is denounced; the Christian public authorities respected. In general terms, Menno's body of thought is retained, only his Christology and defense of shunning of spouses are discarded. However, Menno's agreement with the Old Flemish tradition could not

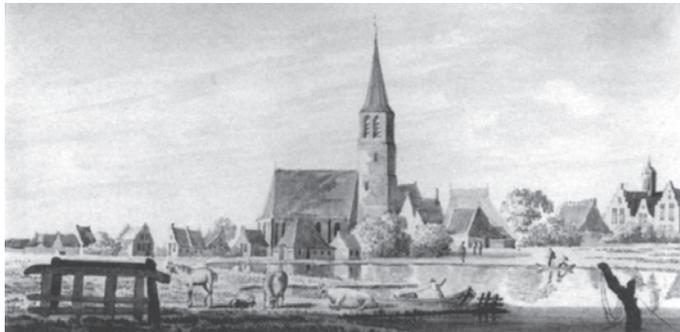
prevent this group's further fragmentation and a century later it had dispersed completely (21-22). [Editor's Note: However, the teaching of the Old Flemish resonated with that of the Flemish Anabaptists who fled to the Vistula Delta and later to the steppes of Southern Russia, where they established highly successful Christian communities which rejected both the doctrinal fragmentation of their Dutch brethren as well as the spiritualistic and assimilationist agenda of their anti-confessional Doopsgezind enemies.]

Pietist Mennonites: "Menno as the quiet one"

Finally, the Pietists renewed their interest in Menno Simons halfway through the 18th century, and to a great extent they have determined how he is perceived. The wealthy Amsterdam preacher Johannes Deknatel was one of the most important Mennonite followers of the Pietist Graf Nicolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf in the Netherlands [He was a minister with the liberal anti-confessional Lamists]. Menno's works were virtually unobtainable in Deknatel's days and so he published an anthology of them, which was widely distributed outside the Netherlands in two German translations. The choice of themes from Menno's writings makes it all too clear that Menno is being produced here as the defender of Pietist neo-orthodoxy. Deknatel ranges Menno against the moralism and the scanty of works



Witmarsum, the birthplace of Menno Simons, according to a sketch from 1739 by K. P. Sannes. Photo - Visser and Springer; Menno Simons, page 15.



The reformed church in Witmarsum, 1785, according to a drawing of H. Tavernier. Here Menno Simons was appointed village priest in 1532. Photo - Visser and Springer; Menno Simons, page 20.

professed by his co-religionist contemporaries; humankind, through the fall of Adam reduced to powerlessness, will not be saved by works, but only by the personally sustained belief in Christ's redeeming blood and his merits. Menno's doctrine of rebirth constituted proof that Pietism was no new doctrine in the Mennonite church.... Menno emerges from Deknatel's anthology as a Pietist *avant la lettre*.... This new perception of the mild and pious Menno had already been pre-formed in the Pietist historiography of Gottfried Arnold (pages 22-24).

Liberal Doopsgezind: "Menno as virtuous Dutch citizen"

.... The sharp distinction between confessionals and anti-confessionals had faded gradually in the second half of the 18th century. The conservatives [although thriving in Imperial Russia and North America] had become isolated and had as good as died out [in the Netherlands]. The Doopsgezind - they intentionally no longer called themselves Mennonites - were open to all spiritual movements of their times without allowing themselves to be tempted by extremes. Moderation became their hallmark. Their piety was a vague mixture of Rationalist moralism and Pietist subjectivity. The Doopsgezind congregations had been united without any confessional foundations in the Algemene Doopsgezinde Sociëtat since 1811.

The first monograph on Menno Simons appeared in 1837... The book by A. M. Cramer... [who] concluded that the Doopsgezind church had evolved from the personal study of the Bible and that the reason for its existence should not be sought with any great reformer, but in the medieval sects where the spirit of Christ had been preserved in its purest form.... The idea of the church isolated from the world by discipline had lost its meaning. We must [in Cramer's view] regard Menno's goal of founding a pure church as a failure.... the call to pure morals and baptism after rebirth is what still remains of Menno's message....

With this perception of Menno before them, the 19th century Doopsgezind began to create a distinct profile of themselves in their struggle to be recognized as a religious community which represses the ideal of a non-sectarian, non-dogmatic, free Protestant church, subservient to the development of the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The most important thing was the encouragement of their own, independent, free piety, a practical and profound Christianity. Constant vigilance was required to ensure that this inner piety was not threatened by "outward" traditions, such as defencelessness, simplicity of clothing, home and lifestyle, as well as subdued behaviour. The sharp features of the perception of Menno

had faded so much by the end of the 19th century that even as leader he was compared with and replaced by Hans Denck, who had been made the precursor of free and undogmatic Protestantism by Ludwig Keller.... Menno Simons had been reduced to a symbol of the virtuous 19th century Doopsgezind, conservative-liberal citizen....

The 20th century perception of Menno Simons is somewhat less self-glorifying than that of the late 19th century. The lack of interest in Menno Simons' theology remains unchanged because its relevance is as little felt as in the previous century. The apologist historiography has, however, made way for research into reliable historical information. In historical terms, the Menno Simons biography by K. Vos may rightly be described as a milestone which no researcher whatsoever can ignore.... Later 20th century researchers have, as yet, found little to add to the historical information collected by Vos. Dutch Doopsgezind historians preferred the spiritual leaders of a less sharply defined Anabaptism, such as Hans de Ries and Galenus Abrahams de Haan. It was only in the years in which his birth,

Levensword van Menno Simons

Niemand kan een ander Fundament leggen, dan hetwelk gelegd is, namelijk Jezus Christus. 1 Cor. 3:11.

departure from Poppedom, and his death were commemorated that a consideration of Menno Simons was unavoidable....

It was more respectful sympathy than shared beliefs...Menno had discarded the free-thinking Doopsgezind and alienated himself from them. They preferred to identify with the moderate Waterlanders and the spiritualist figures on the fringes of the Anabaptist movement. An overwhelming majority of them felt the most closely allied to those groups which had been furthest away from Menno. Furthermore, the contemporary rejecting of doctrinism and church discipline brought about a distortion of the task of Menno Simons as apologist and organizer. If there was any awareness of Menno Simons' role in the process of institutionalization and confessionalization of the originally multi-colored Anabaptism, then it was regarded as a road to decline (pages 24-33).

“....Menno Simons' role in the process of institutionalization and confessionalization....was regarded as a road to decline....”

Epilogue

At present, Menno Simons only continues to merit respect in his native country because of his love for the unattainable ideal....The memory of the messenger is kept alive, while his message is scarcely listened to. We only know the perception of Menno to the extent that it has been formed and distorted in accordance with the ideas and longings of each era. For those who no longer experience anything of him, we can do nothing less than suggest his contours in the sketch we design of his times.

Chapter Two - The Anticlerical Priest: From father confessor to lay preacher of true penitence.

Menno Simons was a Catholic priest. As a consequence, the study of his spiritual development must take his calling to the traditional priesthood seriously and also attempt to assess the extent to which this calling had a lasting influence on his piety....[His] spiritual development is inextricably bound up with the process of re-orientation in which the church and society found themselves at the time. The monk Luther sought to escape from his existential distress and asked, “How do I obtain a merciful God?” The liberating answer was: “Not though a holiness which can be earned, but through trust in the unmerited forgiveness through Christ alone.”....The question of the justification of the sinner through faith alone made room for the more practical question of the regeneration of the believer. Once that point had been reached, the Anabaptists joined in the reformational discussion. The Anabaptists were regarded as heretics, not only by the Catholics but by the Protestants as well, because of their one-sided emphasis on sanctification.

The Last Judgement in Word and Image.

Salvation was presented graphically to the late-medieval believer. The sacrifice of Christ was

performed as a play during the mass. Christ, Mary and the saints, the intercessors in sanctification, were tangibly and visibly present in the church building. A painting of the Last Judgement behind the altar illustrated what the believer must prepare for during his life....In order to transport ourselves to the religious world of Menno Simons, we should try to look at such an altar piece with his eyes....

The individual soul was imprisoned in a life-long cycle of sin, forgiveness, and doing penitence; of falling, being raised up again, and performing works in atonement of guilt. This cycle was determined by the power of sin which caused weak humankind to break God's laws time and time again, and by the forgiveness of sins offered by the church in the sacrament of penitence....Confession and doing penitence were the believer's most important religious activities. Confession was the most important part of the preparation for life's end and the believer had to go to confession at least once per year, usually as preparation for Communion at Easter. The objective of confession was to reveal sins and to intensify repentance for the sins committed. The task of the father confessor was to guide the penitent in making the most perfect confession and subsequently to assure him of forgiveness....[The] absolution [of the priest] enabled him to offer grace in a miraculous manner as a counterweight to the weakness and doubts of the believer....The church had the indulgences at its disposal to remove these doubts - as a life insurance for the deceased....

It is a misunderstanding that Menno Simons with his growing doubts as to the sacrament of penance and purgatory also disassociated himself from the penitence evoked by confession. He wanted more penitence, not less. His objective was to restore to the *contritio*, or true heartfelt repentance, the profundity and intensity which it had lost. Menno Simons and his followers did not interpret the Reformation as a lightening of the burdens of faith; as serious Christians they voluntarily accepted a much heavier yoke in order to inherit heaven....[Menno Simons] used the Bible as the only instrument to reinstate and shape the essence of late medieval penitential piety in all its simplicity and power.

“It is a misunderstanding that Menno Simons....disassociated himself from the penitence evoked by confession.”

From father confessor to preacher of penitence

The central themes of Menno Simons' reformational theology arise from his practice as a pastor and can best be explained in the pastoral context....He developed a new kind of practical theology from his pastoral experience meant to give his contemporaries ultimate assurance of their future salvation and of the new life on earth based on biblical norms which granted entrance there. Two examples from pastoral practice will illustrate this development - the preparation for communion and for life's end.

Penitential books had an important place in the performance of his task as a father confessor....The penitential books served to assist the confessor in uncovering sins and determining the degree of punishment, the required works of satisfaction....The norms for disciplining Christian society were derived from the high demands made of the apostolic life in a monastic setting, which had to be kept up to the mark by regular confession....The traditional Christian preoccupation with sexuality is a prominent presence in most of the books of penitence....For Menno, the Bible became the new confessional mirror which had to replace the church's confessional books. The problem of penance naturally played a major role in the development of the disciplining of the Anabaptist congregations along biblical lines.

In the late Middle Ages, the *eschata*, the Last Acts, were one of the main themes of religious meditation....True religiosity consisted of *mortificatio*, as ascetic killing of the urge for self-preservation and of natural desires and appetites in preparation for the total submission to God. The degraded Christ served as the model for this process of dying and submission. *Mortificatio carnis* was the import of the *imitatio Christi*; the dying of sins being analogous to the suffering of Christ. There was no hope of being raised to a new life in Christ without this death and true penitence....

In the late Middle Ages a great deal of religious literature was published in print in the vernacular, meant for a wide audience of monastics, semi-monastics (*conversos*), and laity. What had originally been monastic piety became common property in a large circle of serious believers who meditated on the life to come with the aid of these “do-it-yourself” instructions....This literary popularization of the original monastic-penitential piety determined the nature of the Reformation in the Netherlands to a great extent....In this religious literature which developed in the course of the 15th century, we encounter an ever-increasing occupation with the human being who must fight sin in great desolation, and who finds his only comfort in the solitary and suffering Christ....

This harmonious merging of personal devotion and sacramental mediation of salvation was cruelly disturbed however when, with references to the Bible, Erasmus and Luther unintentionally or intentionally fanned the feelings of doubt concerning the legitimacy of the traditional sacrament of penance. The consequence was that the role of the priest as the exclusive mediator of salvation became devalued, and the individual believer seeking inner peace was forced more and more to resort to independent reading of the Bible as the only reliable confessional book.

The earlier tendencies to internalization of religious life were reinforced again in this way, also where the convention of prayer was concerned. For example, a shift away from saying prayers aloud to praying in silence became apparent in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries. Anyone who prayed had to do so with all his heart; in which connection it should be noted that in the Middle Ages the heart was regarded as

the center of reason and not of the feelings. It was no coincidence that silent prayer, both at home and in the assemblies of the congregation, became one of the characteristics of Mennonite orthopraxy. Menno's followers needed no one else for the most intimate conversation with God; they could conduct that themselves. Outsiders observing their silent prayers were amazed at the deep sigh which accompanied this most intimate of confessions before God.

The practical-experiential piety of the followers of Menno Simons is not a product of the Enlightenment or Pietism in the first instance, but can be traced back as far as late-medieval penitential piety. Their assemblies and devotional literature display all the characteristics of the *colationes* and *admonitiones*, as we know them from the tradition of the Modern Devotion....The works of Menno Simons have a close affinity with this. It was also his objective to produce a moral theology which can be characterized as a biblically-grounded equivalent of the sermon and the catechism, as we encounter them in Middle Dutch devotional literature. They were not intended to

be works of literary beauty, but rather instructions for leading a life equal in form to Christ's. In the case of Menno Simons this Christian lay ethic was also nurtured by Old Testament Wisdom literature (The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiastes) and by the Christian tradition, which had a strong neo-stoic flavour. Menno Simons owes tribute to this traditional, penitential lay piety, from which he is only distinguished by a great biblically-grounded, ethical rigorism.

“.....a shift.....to praying in silence became apparent in the course of the 14th and 15th centuries.”

“Nochtans soo vele van Luthero geholpen”

When and how did Menno Simons' doubts about the traditional sacramental mediation in salvation originate?...[He] attributes this liberation from his terrible fear and doubts to Martin Luther.....Luther and Menno Simons had learned from Erasmus that Jesus' call to repentance in Matthew 3:2 (Vulgata: “poenitentiam agite”) did not refer to the church's sacrament of penitence, but that these words had to be interpreted as a call

to a lifelong process of leading a pure life. According to Luther, with his radicalization of the primacy of grace, this true evangelical penitence was not a precondition of faith but a consequence of it. It was not penitence, therefore, but faith which was the true key to receiving forgiveness....

Menno Simons, however, was afraid that no

of this evangelical confessional practice, and how was the call to true penitence heard in his times?...Christ was the only means of salvation. From now on, satisfaction existed in demonstrating the love of God and one's neighbour, in the belief which is effective in love and expressed in all the works of mercy inspired by Christ and the

apostles. This put an end to the compulsory prayers, masses, pilgrimages, and penances which had made the church into a mercantile corporation trading in salvation.

Menno Simons confesses his past to God in one of the writings which he produced in the year of his break with Rome, his “Meditation on Psalm 25.” Just as in the account of the life of a monastic, one section is always devoted to a vividly-coloured description of the path from secular life to conversion and entrance into the monastery, so does Menno Simons describe his exodus from the church which has gone to worldly ruin....Existential need, criticism of the traditional church, and care for the world form an invisible unity. Inner and outer conversion can scarcely be distinguished from each other....

After his confession, Menno summarizes his new teaching as follows: “I have taught nothing all along but true repentance, a dying unto our sinful flesh, and the new life that cometh from God.” The intention of this doctrine was the purification and intensification of the traditional conventions of penance....The sacrament of penance was both a means of care and coercion.....True penitence led to the reinstatement of the pure and simple Gospel from apostolic times - a longing which could be fostered by humanist utopias and dreams of a Golden Age....Once the Bible had been rediscovered as the only foundation for the building of the authentic church, and the laity had claimed the right to interpret and apply what they read in the Scriptures, the power of the scholastic theologians and the clergy disappeared like snow in the summer. In the third decade of the 16th century - the decade of Menno's reformational awakening - all emphasis was gradually being placed on the biblical authenticity of religion and the moral purity of believers.

Menno Simons and his contemporaries heard the proclamation of true penitence from Melchior Hoffman and Jan Matthijs....The time had now come for the radical decision and the great



Pingjum, where Menno Simons was appointed Vicar in 1525. A drawing by J. C. Vischer, 1778. Photo - Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 17.

real renewal of the life of the believer could be involved as a result of Luther's unilateral emphasis on the passive aspect of faith and by his reversal of the biblical sequence of penance and faith. And he saw the truth of this suspicion in the behaviour of many of Luther's followers....Menno makes less of a distinction between faith and penitence than Luther does. Anyone who does not show a visible change in his life may not call himself a believer according to Menno Simons - which means that, to him, true penitence remains one of the conditions for the determination of what believing actually implies. It is the core concept of his semi-pelagian doctrine of grace, which also governs his ideas on true baptism, the true Lord's Supper, and the true ministry.

“...no real renewal...could be involved...[by] Luther's unilateral...reversal of the biblical sequence of penance and faith.”

Penance and restitution.

But what was Menno Simons' interpretation



View of Pingjum. - EVW. Photo - Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 18.

purification....The images of hell and damnation on the altar piece were threatening to become reality.

No Gospel without the Law

Let us relate the penance problem to a theme which has received little attention as yet in the study of Anabaptist theology; namely the relationship between Law and Gospel....Law and Gospel, God's demanding justice and forgiving mercy, were one and of equal weight in the spiritual interpretation of Menno Simons. The Word of God, as life-destroying Law, uncovered offenses and condemned sinners and offenders. The Word of God, as life-bring Gospel, pardoned the condemned and gave them the strength to lead sanctified lives....

Rebirth is brought about by both the Law and the Gospel. Where the fear of God and the love of Him are both present, then there is true penitence, according to Menno Simons. He makes scarcely any distinction between true penitence and faith. For him, true penitence is the articulation of the true faith which changes people both internally and externally....

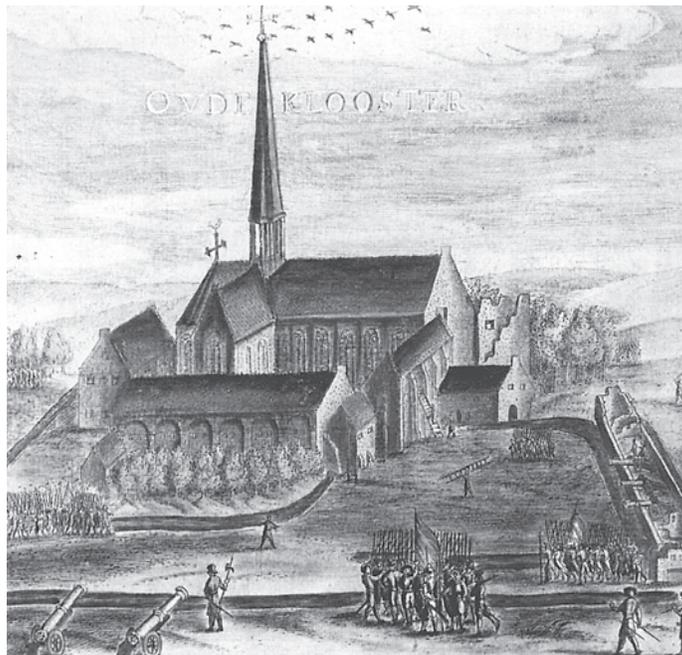
In general, the radicalism of Luther's doctrine of justification found little response in the Netherlands, where people were better-disposed to the ideas of the moderate Melancthon, who did not consider the beginning of faith as the end of penance. Thus we see that the traditional practice of penitence and the effective doctrine of divine grace left a permanent mark on the theology of the ex-priest from Witmarsum....Faith is a process of penitence and reformation of the life being



Naaktkopers - naked runners in Amsterdam, 1535. In: Hotensuius - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 27.

led....Love is also a commandment. Grace which fails to bring about any change in how life is lived is only cheap grace. Grace is not absolution alone, but also starting to behave as a liberated person....

Law and Gospel, Law and Grace, penance



Relief of Oldeklooster, Bolsward. In: Hotensuius - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 25.

and faith, justification and sanctification, God's work and human activity are closely interconnected in the theology of Menno Simons and are sometimes difficult to distinguish. His traditional, penitential piety is made to serve a practical objective, namely the raising of the evangelical quality of church and society, a renewal which demands obedience. No one can be blessed, according to Menno Simons, without faith, love, and obedience to Jesus Christ. Christ's gospel is also Law....

Clerical self-hate and anticlericalism

The principal concern of the early 16th century believer was the existential-religious fear for the salvation of his soul. Life on earth was but a prelude to everlasting life and had to be made subservient to it....It is only with some difficulty that we secularized citizens of the late 20th century are able to imagine this medieval and early-modern fear of the Last Judgement and the craving for the certainty of salvation....

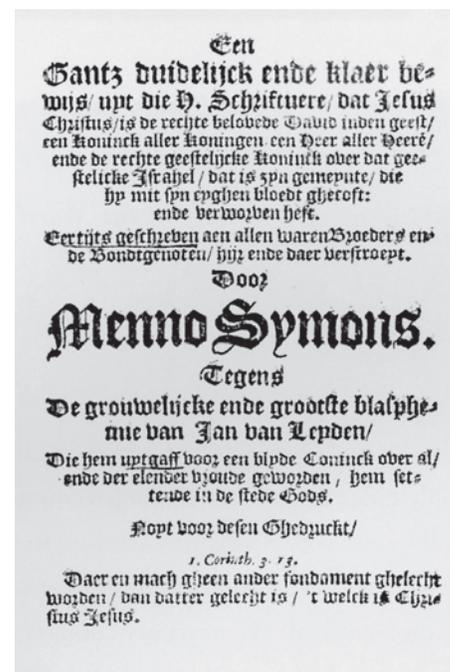
We hear anticlerical complaints not only at the time of the Reformation but also in the preceding centuries. They were expressions of fear for the soul's salvation and of worries about the quality of mediation in salvation performed by the church....directed against the hierarchical structure....or against the base morality of the clergy and their monopoly on salvation....The father confessor who was supposed to use the confessional books to help his parishioners achieve self-knowledge, himself became a penitent when he saw himself reflected in the new confessional mirror of the Bible....

It was no sudden conversion, but rather a process lasting more than ten years and consisting of several phases - ignorance, rumours of reform, growing doubts and uncertainty, Bible study, self-criticism, criticism of Christianity, cautious internal church reforms, Anabaptist influences, resistance and then surrender to these, break with the traditional church, call to leadership. It was only in his role of persecuted apologist and leader of the Anabaptist movement that Menno Simons' anticlericalism became virulent....[His] fierceness against the hostile clergy may appear strange to us liberal advocates of tolerance, but what appears strange to us actually inspires his persecuted co-religionists to have confidence in him....

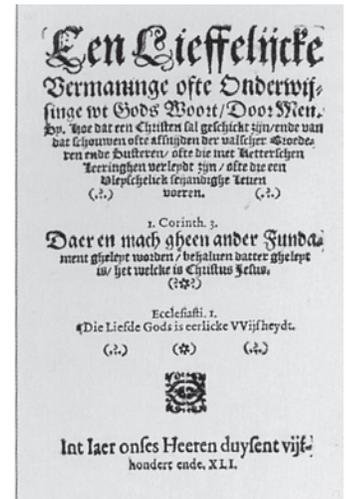
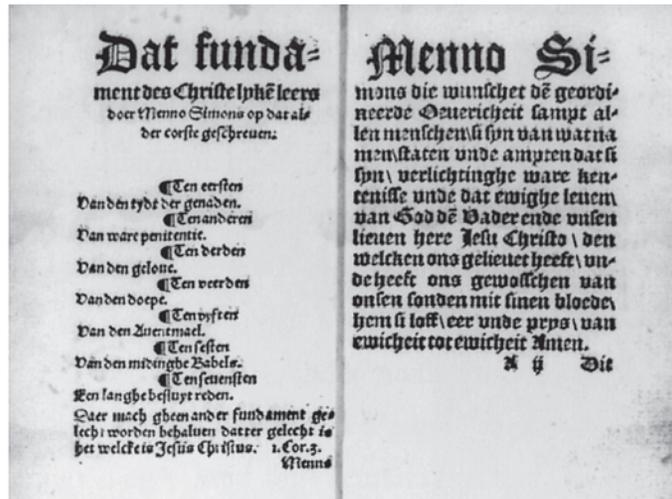
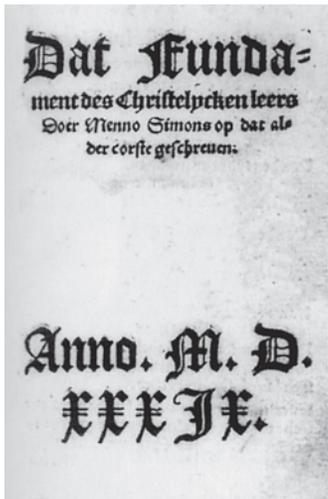
‘It was no sudden conversion, but rather a process lasting more than ten years [for Menno Simons]....’

True penitence and Mennonite piety

True penitence may be regarded as the germ cell of a type of piety which characterized the followers of Menno Simons for centuries. We find this piety to comprise a mixture of experience, common sense, and decisiveness, which can be interpreted as the articulation of true penitence, the rationalist Bible interpretation, and the concept of efficacious grace. The precedence of a penitent life above the doctrine professed continues to be well-expressed in the baptismal liturgy of the Mennonite congregations.



Menno Simons' tract against Jan van Leyden, ca. 1535 (1627). - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 29.



Menno Simons' Foundation book written in 1539/40; title page, left, with table of contents, middle. Right, Menno Simons. The first book on the ban: A Kind Admonition, 1541. Visser and Springer; Menno Simons, page 35. In 1833 the first complete German edition of M. Simons' Foundation book was published by the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia in an attractive three volume set (see Saints and Sinners, pages 261-262).

gations until well into the 18th century... If true penitence, the experiential nature of faith and self-criticism decline, then the development of an external and legalistic practice of religion is possible....

It proved simpler to hold up the Bible in front of another as a confessional mirror, than to allow oneself to be moved to true penitence by that same Bible. Having learned from bitter experience, later generations with their rejection of all external factors which could lead to dissension finally also relinquished true penitence as the core Mennonite piety. Without an understanding of the central role of true penitence in the theology of Menno Simons, it has not become easy to interpret Menno Simons' vision of a Christian life. Without affinity with this penitential type of faith, we can only speak in terms of a partial actualization of the theology of Menno Simons (pages 37-58).

Chapter Three - The real presence of Christ: The congregation of true penitents

The fertile Frisian coastal area, which is where Menno Simons came from is characterized by innumerable Romanesque churches with saddleback steeples.... Today if you were to visit Pingjum, the village where Menno Simons commenced his religious career as a vicar, you would find few reminders of his times. Only the stone church building has been preserved and it still stands there like a beacon in the flat, green landscape. The silhouette of the church and its tower make the village recognizable as Pingjum. In Menno Simons' day, however, this church was more than a refuge for the village dwellers,....it was in fact the magical center of the parish, and the material prosperity and spiritual welfare of those living in the vicinity depended on it.... Water and oil, bread and wine, received their supernatural powers in this building.

Nowhere was the divine presence more tan-



B & H. Danzig, ca. 1580. In 1549 Menno Simons stays some weeks in Danzig to settle some differences. "The city and the neighbouring Vistula Delta were very popular among the persecuted Dutch [and especially the Flemish] brothers and sisters. In this relative peace thousands of Mennonites are able to construct a new existence," Visser and Springer; Menno Simons, page 45.

gible than in the host. God's son was shown to the faithful in the form of a circular piece of bread, so that they could adore him.... The celebration of the Eucharist was a universal sign of recognition throughout the Christian Occident, right into the remotest corners and tiniest hamlets....

In the third decade of the 16th century, the increasing doubts concerning the reality of Christ's physical presence in the Lord's Supper prompted a drastic reconsideration of the question of where divine reality could be experienced, if it was not tied to matter.... Because the cup was denied the laity, the host represented for the faithful the supreme magical means of communication with the divine. God descended into this "bread of life" in a hidden and invisible manner, as a continuous incarnation and a constantly repeated sacrifice.... By partaking of this body of Christ, the communicant was made identical in form to Christ, he participated in his future bliss during his earthly existence.... It was not as the proclaimed message of forgiveness of sins and victory over death that Christ constituted the foundation of the church, but in the form of the consecrated bread.... Every

form of criticism of this sacramental interpretation of the divine presence undermined the foundation of the church and was regarded as heresy or atheism.

As a consequence, the change in Menno Simons' belief in the presence of the sacred in the profane and his post-Sacramentarian alternative for transubstantiation deserve further analysis.... There are three central questions in this connection; namely the nature of the Eucharist, the role of the server, and the worthiness of the partaker. His primary responsibility for the liturgy and the care of souls led the vicar of Pingjum to the gradual realization that the actualization of the incarnation could not be confined to the magical transformation of bread and wine into the flesh and blood of Christ, but that its real significance was the transformation of the heart of the believer. True penitence as the real nature of the sacrament of penance became, for Menno Simons, the most important framework for interpreting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

"True penitence.... became.... the most important framework for interpreting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper."

God is Spirit; worship is spiritual

Menno Simons lived in a time in which many serious believers replaced the religion of immanence with the religion of transcendence.... where was the divine reality to be found when adoration and glorification of images, relics, and the host were being denounced as false religion?... [The Anabaptists] made a distinction between the material and spiritual worlds and pleaded for exclusively spiritual worship.... Freed of the sacramental material reality, and conse-



The Baltic Sea coast. Part of the landscape of the Flemish Mennonites in the Vistula Delta (see Pres., No. 18, pages 120-130). Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 43.

quently no longer subject to manipulation by the priesthood, God was a spiritual and transcendent power asking for direct admittance to the inner being of the believer during spiritual worship.....

However, the spiritualization of religion in the 16th century did not lead to belief being put into perspective, but rather to its intensification. The Reformation was not preceded by a time of decline in piety, but by a time during which piety intensified among the common people as well....Menno did not revert to the critical voices from the previous century in his doubts concerning the miracle of the mass; he responded exclusively to all the sometimes diffuse and confused rumours about reformers and reforms which reached him in the second and the third decade of the 16th century. This means that the most fruitful interpretation of the life and work of Menno Simons will be one which is based on the spiritual climate of the early Reformation in the Netherlands. And who determined that spiritual climate more than Menno Simons' contemporary and fellow-countryman Erasmus, critical heir of the piety of the Modern Devotion and inspiring propagandist for a type of piety which bore clear traces of a New Testament interpretation with neo-Platonic tinges and of the "simple" theology of the early Church Fathers.

....Fundamental to the work of Erasmus is his longing to restore Christianity to its original, primitive, apostolic purity in doctrine and existence. For this reason the concept of rebirth which we frequently find with various designations (*renascentia, regeneratio, restitutio*) in Erasmus and Menno must not be interpreted in the narrow Pietist sense alone. It refers to a religious renaissance of both the individual believer and the whole of Christendom, which can be brought about through an authentic explanation of the teachings of Christ.....Nevertheless, Erasmus' own criticism of many church practices did not lead him to actual plans for reformation, but where Erasmus had ploughed others could harvest....as a erudite interpreter of a contemporary, primitivistic, biblicist, and neo-Platonic type of piety, Erasmus unmistakably also touched chords in Menno, particularly regarding the internalization and spiritualization of religion, biblically legitimized with a reference to the dualism in John and Paul, where letter and flesh are made secondary

to the spirit in a neo-Platonic manner (John 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6).....

Menno Simons, in contrast, gives faith a much more biblicist-moralist charge. For him, flesh means disobedience to the divine commandments primarily, while he interprets spirit as obedience and subjection to the Word of God....This also has consequences for Christology. For Menno Simons, incarnation is the residence of Christ in the hearts of believers and the transformation of individuals who were not obedient to God into a people subject to God in obedience. The divine presence should not be sought in the host (as in Roman Catholic doctrine), nor in the written symbols of scripture or the impenetrable heavenly spheres to which these letters refer (as in Erasmus), but rather in the congregation of true penitents. The sanctified life of this congregation constitutes living and visible proof of the real presence of Christ. Grace which fails to bring about moral improvement is no grace.....

“....Fundamental to the work of Erasmus is his longing to restore Christianity to its original, primitive, apostolic purity....”

Changing insights concerning the Eucharist, the communicant, and the celebrant

Which traditional ideas about the Eucharist were dismissed by Menno Simons?....he showed himself to be a kindred spirit of what were known as the Sacramentarians, with their denial of the physical presence of Christ in the consecrated elements of bread and wine, and their rejection of the adoration of the host....he challenged the misapprehension that the sacrament as such could take away sins in a magical way....

The Eucharist.

Their power [of the priests] came from the doctrine that Christ, who resided in heaven, was locally bound to bread and wine during the daily mass, and that Christ's sacrifice for our sins was repeated by the priest....The invisible soul of the believer cannot be nourished with the visible bread and the visibly created reality of bread and wine cannot be transformed into the spiritual, invisible Son of God....True communication and unity

with Christ is only possible in the place where a congregation is gathered in true faith and brotherly love, with obedience to the Bible and a correct use of the sacrament, which is to say in two forms....Only through the Word of Christ is the Christian governed spiritually and inwardly....

The degree of inner experience of God's righteousness and love in Christ, and of outward obedience to the Word of God becomes the determining factor in a true celebration of the Lord's Supper....Is it not true that the grace of God does not work through dead matter, but in living hearts



Baptismal scene. In *Hortensius* - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 19.

and obedient lives?...

There stands Menno Simons the priest, behind the altar....But doubt is eating away at him - he does not believe that a miracle is taking place in his hands. We must try to imagine in how much fear and trembling Menno Simons took leave of the traditional interpretations of the Eucharist....the heavenly food did not change inside a human body and did not take on human substance. No, exactly the opposite took place; the heavenly bread, the body of Christ, which was not subject to transformation and decay, changed humankind within itself.

The communicant.

The communicant's awe of the host was just as great as the celebrant's fear....Menno therefore replaced the host as sacramental medicine by the direct care of Christ as the spiritual master of healing. It was Christ himself who should be adored, not the host. God's love was no longer received through the stomach, but via the ear into the hearts of the believers. But what significance was still to be attached to the Lord's Supper?....Menno Simons summarizes the true use of the Lord's Supper...in the first place: the remembrance of the suffering of the Lord...in the second place: the exhortation to love....His ideas on the Lord's Supper do not differ greatly



Melchior Hoffman who brought Anabaptism to Friesland in 1530. Drawing by C. van Sicherm I (1607) - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 21.

from what the Sacramentarians taught....

At the end of the religious discussions between Luther and Zwingli in Marburg in 1539....Menno remarks that the scholars of this world had not addressed the most important question, namely the people for whom Christ had instituted his supper. It is not the question of the nature of the presence of Christ in the elements of the Lord's Supper which is of the central importance to Menno Simons, but Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 11:28-29: "But let everyman examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup...." The necessity of self-examination is one of the most important characteristics of Anabaptism....The strong emphasis on self-examination preceding participation in the Lord's Supper, became the evangelical substitute for traditional confession, which was also meant to lead to knowledge of sins and contrition before communion. The Lord's Supper could only be celebrated in the congregation of true penitents, who formed the embodiment of the faith of Christ and freedom from sin. It was among the truly penitent that the efficacy of Christ as spiritual sacrament proved the greatest, particularly in

a moral respect. The body and blood of Christ had to be understood in the agreeable sense, as being his love which was working in the "agreeable congregation" which shared the faith of Christ, where lust and desire were tempered and burdens and cares were shared....

It is in connection with this question that Menno first names excommunication as a means of prevailing upon these sinners to show penitence and obedience to Christ. Those who had committed inner sins, however, did not have to explain themselves before the congregation, but before God himself. By reason of logic, Menno Simons was forced to add a third characteristic of the Lord's Supper to the first two. Besides the remembrance of the reconciling death of Christ and the exhortation to love, Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper to preserve the purity of God's church. The true penitence of the communicants must be maintained at a high level by means of good discipline; the "service" or "duty" of love as the Anabaptists called it.

"...Christ had instituted the Lord's Supper to preserve the purity of God's church."

The celebrant.

The proper use and proper users of the Lord's Supper are only realized when there are sufficient good servers of the Lord's Supper. Menno Simons gradually came to the conclusion that these were difficult to find in the circles of the Roman Catholic clergy....In the opinion of the outlawed priest from Witwarsum, the evangelical ministers led easy and safe lives, because they were less strict than the Anabaptists where the discipline of the Lord's Supper was concerned, partly as a concession to their protectors. Their congregations remained half church and half world, and constituted the visible demonstration of their adoptionist Christology, which taught that Christ was half God and half man. This was in sharp contrast to the Christology of Menno Simons, in which strong emphasis was given to the complete divinity and holiness of Christ incarnate. Only a church without worldly taints could be born out of the belief in this Christ who was free from sin - "the pure Word of God."....

In summary: In the eyes of Menno Simons, the true Lord's Supper was a spiritual communion with Christ in the assembly of true penitents, served by true penitents. The true church, as the *communio sanctorum* from the Apostle's Creed, was interpreted as the congregation of the true penitents....The mercy of Christ was not to be sought in images or in the host, but in the strictly disciplined brotherly love which formed the outstanding distinguishing mark of the apostolic church.

A Sacramentarian priest?

Menno Simons says that in 1524....the thought suddenly struck him that the consecrated elements of the Lord's Supper were not flesh and blood of Christ....Sacramentarianism is the designation of a religious movement in which the church's ideas about the physical presence of Christ in the



Jan Matthijs, apocalyptic preacher and successor to Melchior Hoffman as leader of the Anabaptists in the Netherlands. Drawing by C. van Sicherm I (1607) - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 21.

elements of the Lord's Supper were criticized and reinterpreted....it has been established that the Sacramentarian groups were the first targets of the apocalyptic Anabaptist preachers of penitence, just as the apostle Paul addressed himself to the synagogues first. It was not until Melchior Hoffman and his pupils had convinced him that baptism too must be administered to the true penitents, that Menno Simons started making the baptism of believers and strict discipline the precondition for admittance to the Lord's Supper....

In our times, when religion is increasingly becoming reduced to the sphere of private life, it is essential to be aware of the "totalitarian", encompassing-all-reality nature of religion at the time of the Reformation....The discussion of Menno Simons' changing ideas on the Lord's Supper is the proof of how difficult it really is to do justice to these very aspects (pages 59-81).

Chapter Four - The longing for perfection: The separation of the latter day saints

After the search for the historical and theological origins of Menno Simons' ideas on a renewed practice for penance and the Lord's Supper, the time has now come to turn our attention to another aspect of the care of souls, namely, baptism....On which points and on the basis of which considerations did Menno Simons introduce a correction of the Anabaptist doctrine with which he came into contact after 1530?

Rumours of a new baptism

Doubts about the physical presence of Christ in bread and wine had led Menno Simons to study the scripture. This had brought the vicar of Pingjum the name of being an "evangelical preacher", a reputation which he himself considered unjustified....His cautious sympathy with the reformational cause had not affected his relationship with his immediate surroundings. On

the contrary his parishioners considered him a preacher of the Word of God and a man of irreproachable conduct....

...his doubts concerning the biblical legitimacy of infant baptism were not aroused by his own Bible study, but by a concrete person and a historical fact, namely the sentence passed by the Court of Friesland on Sikke Freerks on 20th March 1531.....The rumour of the beheading of Freerks had also reached the vicar of Pingjum...he had heard about the execution before he had heard anything in his life about several "brothers" - kindred spirits of Melchior Hoffman....Menno Simons [concluded]....that no account of infant baptism was to be found in the Bible. He found in the Church Fathers that infant baptism had mainly come into fashion due to the idea that original sin could be washed away by this rite....He then went on to study how the reformers in Wittenberg, Strasborg, and Zurich continued to justify the practice of infant baptism....

...the Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries is the fruit of Melchior Hoffman's successful preaching in East Friesland. From April to June 1529 [he]....together with Karlstadt...had been a guest of squire Ulrich van Dornum, who was a strong Zwingli sympathizer. They supported the general resistance of the East Friesian nobility and peasants against the Lutheran reformation, through their rejection of the Roman Catholic and Lutheran doctrines concerning the Lord's Supper....

Inhabitants of East Friesland had allowed their children to go unbaptised even before 1530...Melchior Hoffman was the first to start this practice, after he had joined the Anabaptist movement in Strasborg. He visited East Friesland for the second time from May to November 1530 and turned the shire into a bridgehead for the Anabaptist reformation in the Low Countries....When Hoffman had to leave East Friesland in the autumn of 1530, he appointed Jan Volkerts Tripmaker as his deputy and Volkerts it was who baptised Sikke Freerks....

Sikke Freerks had gone to Leeuwarden from Emden, and he probably spread the ideas of Melchior Hoffman in an existing conventicle of like-minded Sacramentarians in the Friesian capital....The brothers Obbe and Dirk Philips may have been members of this circle, although it was not until January 1534 that they were baptised by the missionaries of Jan Matthijs of Haarlem, Hoffman's successor in the Netherlands....Being among the first leaders of the Melchiorite Anabaptist movement, Obbe and Dirk appointed Menno Simons a fellow elder at the beginning of 1537....

The second wave of Anabaptist activities led by Jan Matthijs did not go unnoticed by Menno Simons who writes of it in dramatic terms....Many other inhabitants of Friesland had also been rebaptised, spurred on by the threatening apocalyptic preaching of Jan Matthijs. Rebaptism was necessary to escape the ominous Judgement of God and those baptised had to swear to break completely with the Roman Catholic church. The prophecy that the time of assembly of 144,000 redeemed had come (Rev. 7:14;14:1) led numer-

ous men and women to leave their houses, goods and children behind to find a "safe haven" in besieged Münster.

Nor can the priest of Witmarsum have remained ignorant of the fact that Bartholomeus Boekbinder and Willem Kuiper, two other apostles of Jan Matthijs were who filled with the same Pentecostal spirit, had caused turmoil and discord in the Sacramentarian conventicle at Leeuwerden, with the Münsterite message that God would very soon extirpate all shedders of blood, all tyrants, and all the ungodly.... They both took part in the demonstration of the "Sword Walkers" or "Sword Bearers" in Amsterdam of 22 March 1534, walking through the streets with drawn swords exhorting the inhabitants to penitence....

Menno Simons lived in the northwest coastal region of Friesland which, for reasons still unknown, proved particularly receptive to the apocalyptically motivated practice of rebaptism. Numerous villages around Witmarsum had inhabitants who had been rebaptised.....Between five



Jan van Leyden, polygamous Anabaptist king of Münster. Drawing by C. van Sicherm I (1607) - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 25.

and six hundred Anabaptists had gathered...then managed to capture the Oldeklooster (the Old Cloister) near Bolsward....The stadholder Schenk von Tautenburg was only able to retake the monastery after a week-long siege. One of those killed was Menno Simons' brother....Full of understanding and compassion, Menno Simons writes of them as people whose only misdeed had been to defend their faith...

Menno Simons' first contact with the Anabaptists

...It appears that he [Menno Simons] was baptized by Obbe Philips and accepted into the Anabaptist congregation, but Obbe Philips does not mention this fact, saying only that he ordained Menno Simons as an elder in the city of Groningen....at the start of 1537....Like many

others in his immediate surroundings, Menno must have been affected by the apocalyptic preaching of penitence by Jan Matthijs' emissaries. The call to true penance and proclamation of the imminent advent of a new world of sanctification and justice which had to be awaited without the use of force made a great and lasting impression on him and he continued to consider this message to be the true import of the Anabaptist faith. He rejected and opposed the Münsterite realization of this same message, however, as soon as its excesses became visible in his own surroundings.

What we have difficulty in understanding is the great respect which Menno Simons and his fellow believers originally cherished for "prophets" of this kind....Is it possible to link Menno Simons so closely to these prophetic and apocalyptic beginnings? There are a number of clues which make the temptation great to risk a reconstruction of a circle of Anabaptists with whom Menno Simons became associated....Geertruid and Griet, two sisters from his parish, were also members. Menno married Geertruid, most probably a beguine, a member of a Netherlands lay sisterhood, not bound by vows....Geertruid's sister Greet,....was married to Rein Edes....

...Menno Simons had close connections with a circle of Anabaptists in Witmarsum, which had evolved after 1534 from the preaching of a Münsterite minister and these people were so dear to Menno that he married one of them....It was not until the excesses of the Anabaptist preaching of penitence became visible that Menno Simons turned against these prophets and opposed the central role of Münster in the preparation of the coming of Christ. He disassociated himself from Melchior Hoffman and Jan Matthijs...Against these developments he ranges his own interpretation of the Anabaptist faith, based exclusively on the "explicit, literally written Word of God as truly understood in the spirit." Excommunication comes into operation on the basis of this doctrine, and this inevitably had to lead to the development of a division between his followers and those who continued to sympathize with the Münsterite ideas....

The ultimate purification

The apocalyptic craving for purity was the most significant motive for the Anabaptist reformation in the Low Countries. The consciousness of living at the end of time was common during the Reformation....

Menno Simons, too, lived his entire life in the expectation that the final judgement of the world was at hand. This apocalyptic consciousness reinforced yet again the fear already present in all serious believers of having to appear before God's seat of judgement at the end of their personal lives. Apocalypticism and eschatology presume and strengthen each other, as well as sometimes being difficult to distinguish from each other, also in the writings of Menno Simons. Menno's whole life was determined by them to a significant degree. He had experienced in his own surroundings the signs of the wrath of God which threatened temporal existence - hunger, illness, drought, wars, fire, robbery, imprisonment and

extirpation, and this must have greatly increased receptivity to the preaching of penance by the Münsterite prophets. But it was much more threatening to have been robbed of God's Word, thus depriving believers not only of their temporal lives, but also of the promise of everlasting life. This was the reason why he interpreted the rediscovery of the Gospel and the ensuing reformation as a positive sign of the end of time. While the Münsterites did not shrink from using violence to cleanse church and society of godlessness if necessary, Menno Simons, on the other hand, wanted to use only the Bible and his own writings as a double-edged sword to achieve his objective. Their means differed but their objective was the same; the cleansing of church and society....

What the Anabaptists unmistakably had in mind at the beginning, and as a matter of principle, was a reformation and purification of reality as a whole. They were concerned with a personal inner conversion (true repentance) and outward renewal (regeneration)....In the case of the Anabaptists, this true evangelical religion was characterized mainly by a new individual and collective morality implying social criticism. And because religion was a political matter in those days, the Anabaptist purification movement encountered restrictions defined by the authorities. The Anabaptists were greatly frustrated in their original ambitions by severe and bloody repression, but at the same time they were confirmed in their conviction that they, as the persecuted, were the true latter-day saints.

....It was only after the fiasco of Münster that nonviolence gradually developed into a principle for that part of the Melchiorite Anabaptist movement in the Netherlands led by Menno Simons and his followers, which wanted to dissociate itself from the Münsterites....As far as he was concerned, nonviolence in principle was not a central theme of overriding importance in his theology. This is shown, for example, by his ambivalent attitude to the authorities. Menno's rejection of government violence is also determined by the situation: ultimately he only denies the authorities the right to use judicial violence in questions of religion. In other words, the authorities must not allow the Roman Catholic church to turn them into the implementor of its pursuit of heretics....and continually exhorts the authorities to form an independent judgement on the true and false church....

“...after the fiasco of Münster....nonviolence gradually developed into a principle for that part of the Melchiorite Anabaptist movement....led by Menno Simons”

If Menno had succeeded in finding a local or regional authority which could have implemented a reformation in the Anabaptist style - and the chance of this was quite real in East Friesland - then this would not have been in conflict with his theology. The totalitarian nature of religion at the time and the conviction that the authorities

were responsible for religion determined that neither Menno nor his contemporaries were able to conceive of a fundamental separation of church and state....[But] The Habsburg repression did not give the required latitude to lower authorities who sympathized with the Anabaptists, while the severe demands made on the moral standard of the purified church by the Anabaptists with their strict discipline made it impossible for the government to enfold all its subjects within such a church without spot or wrinkle....

“If Menno had succeeded in finding a local or regional authority which could have implemented a reformation in the Anabaptist style....this would not have been in conflict with his theology.”

Defenceless and defending saints

Condensed in time and space, the disturbance near 't Zand in Gronigen provides a good illustration at microlevel of the core and ambivalence of the question of violence....Two people from Gronigen had seen the situation in Münster for themselves and returned with positive news at the start of 1535. At the beginning of February...between 900 and 1,000 people gathered in and around the farm of the rich farmer Eppe Peters, close to the stronghold of the Omptedas, the squires of the village, joyful at the good news which the two commissioners had brought back from Münster. The crowd which had flocked there included the aforementioned Herman Schoemaker who proclaimed himself an Old Testament prophet, even God the Father himself. For days on end he lay in bed, stripped to the waist, constantly drinking beer and calling out as one possessed



David Joris, spiritualist, “...who reduced belief....to a radical, inner purification.” Drawing by C. van Sichem I (1607) - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 39.

to “Slay the monks, priest, all rulers of the world, especially our rulers....”

The expectation that time was short was growing and approximately 300 of those present were rebaptized believing that this sign would save them at the coming Day of Judgement. Everyone threw themselves on the ground, weeping and singing....to cut an exciting story short, they came to a bad end. Cornelis int Kerkhof, the Son of God, was exposed and driven off...while Herman Schoemaker fell into the hands of the troops of Karel van Gelder, the stadholder of Gronigen....The “Messiah of 't Zand” died in prison, incessantly screaming the message from Bernd Rothmann's “Van de wrake” [On revenge], that monks, priests and rulers should be extirpated....

The course of the disturbance gives a good impression of the overstrain which the expectations of the end of time and the persecution by the church and authorities had caused in many people....Approximately a week after the trouble at 't Zand seven men and five women cast off their weapons, clothes and jewellery in a house in the Zoutsteeg, on the orders of the tailor Hendrik Hendriks. Naked and defenceless as children they were to await their deliverance. The truth had to be naked. They ran naked through half the city in the wintry cold, howling horribly: “Woe, woe, the vengeance of God, the vengeance of God.” Most of them were sentenced and executed....At what point did the apocalyptically-motivated passive resignation and defencelessness have to change into militant purification?...

“[Menno Simons]....emphasized that Christ had already come and that no other earthly Messiah was to be expected before the Second Coming of Christ....”

Internal and external Kingdom

Although the apocalyptic drive to purify religion was something Menno Simons continued to have in common with the Melchiorites and the Münsterites, he did feel called upon to correct the excesses of the appearance of the Melchiorite movement. In opposition to the expectation of the appearance of a Messianic third David, whether Jan van Leiden, David Joris, or someone else, he emphasized that Christ had already come and that no other earthly Messiah was to be expected before the Second Coming of Christ....In worldly matters he called for obedience to the Emperor, kings, lords, and all authorities. The only sword with which the reformation could be continued, was the double-edged blade of the preaching of the Word of God. This led to the foundation of a spiritual, inner and invisible Kingdom; namely a community of saints with the faith of Christ which was not congruous with the world. Christ with his word and spirit ruled in the hearts and conscience of reborn people. It was a “gathering of penitents”, a community of love which had to be maintained by constant self-examination and

discipline between the members, and which had to await submissively the Second Coming of Christ.

Menno Simons' emphasis on the inner and spiritual Kingdom - his reaction to Münster - should not be misunderstood as a flight from the world, or as spiritualism. It was no invisible Kingdom in the sense that all that really mattered was inner purity of heart and conscience, without this belief manifesting itself in an outward form. On the contrary, the church as "a true and proper entity", recognizable by its doctrine, faith, behaviour, sacraments, discipline, etc. would be created in the hearts and consciences of reborn believers as a consequence of the rule of Christ, the preaching of the pure Word.

Menno had to fight a battle on two fronts, against Jan van Leiden on the one hand and David Joris on the other. The stained-glass artist from Delft, who had been ordained an elder by Obbe Philips in the same year that Menno had been ordained, reduced belief after Münster to a radical, inner purification which should extinguish even the *fomes peccati*, the tender which continually caused humankind to flare up in sin. The method of achieving this was a complete confession before the congregation or part of it, which would not only arouse repentance for outward sins (as was the case in Menno's ideas concerning true confession), but which also brought to light surreptitious feelings and desires, mainly of a sexual nature. The spiritual person could become perfect by publically confessing the secret stimuli which led to sin. The Law, God's demanding justice which revealed the sin, lost its accusatory nature....By stressing this urge for inner perfection as the core of faith, the necessity of external forms such as the sacraments and discipline disappeared. The evangelical teachings became a secret, individualistic, and spiritual doctrine of sanctification without outward manifestation, thus making it easier to avoid the danger of persecution.

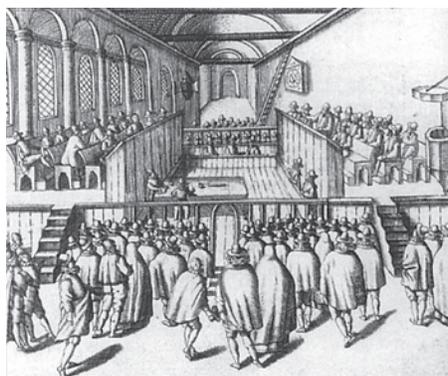
Menno Simons recognized a formidable enemy of his own program of purification in this extreme spiritualism, in this temptation to nicodemism ("feigning to the world"), and in the 'devilish confession, bringing no shame with it.' It endangered his endeavour to build the Melchiorite movement on the foundation of the apostolic teachings; the perfection to which Menno aspired to had been moderated to the absence of public sins. But obedience to Christ's teachings and ordinances was also a precondition to obtaining the promise of forgiveness and everlasting life. The most important of these ordinances was baptism, which marked the assembly of true penitents and completed their separation from the godless world.

Baptism as an end and a new beginning

In his early writing *Verclarighe des christelychen doopsels* (1539), Menno Simons describes the traditional manner in which he himself, as a priest, had baptised many infants. Before the child was baptized, he had explained to those present that the child lived under the

wrath of God, but would be reborn through the sacrament of rebaptism. He then performed the rite, explaining each separate part of the ceremony. He blew over the child...exorcized the devil....stroked its eyes with saliva and laid salt on its tongue; made the cross over the infant and baptized it as it was held above the baptismal font by its godparents....How poorly did his later Anabaptist baptismal convention contrast with this. There were no unbiblical sacramental attributes and only some water was poured over the head of the person being baptised while the trinitarian baptismal formula was uttered. This much more powerful baptism rescinded the idolatrous infant baptism....

Before Menno heard of the "renewal of baptism" through the execution of Sikke Freerks, he must have been aware of the criticism of infant baptism which was being heard loudly everywhere....Even around 1521 doubts were already being expressed in the circle of the Wittenberg reformers....In addition, Erasmus' notes on Christ's command to baptise in Mat-



Religious disputation between Mennonites and Dutch Reformed (1597) - UBA-DG. Visser and Springer, Menno Simons, page 39.

thew 28:19, cleared the way for the idea that education should precede baptism....

In the Low Countries, too, the point of view was held as early as 1532 that it was better to baptise someone who realized the significance of their promise not to lead a worldly life. Nevertheless, this criticism had not led to the practice of believers' baptism and Melchior Hoffman was the first to initiate it....Menno Simons must have been well acquainted with his writings and he certainly derived his doctrine of incarnation from Hoffman. He devoted the major part of his works to the defense of Christ's complete freedom from sin, because this constituted the foundation of his church without spot or wrinkle, but he perforce shows little evidence of a direct dependence on Hoffman where other characteristic tenets are concerned, including baptism. The Anabaptist ideas on the doctrine of incarnation, baptism, and the Second Coming of Christ, which Menno came into contact with after 1530, subsequent to his "Exodus from Popery", were reformulated by him in a supremely effective manner within the context of the teachings of Christ and apostolic practice.

"[Menno Simons]...devoted the major part of his works to the defense of Christ's complete freedom from sin,...this constituted the foundation of his church without spot or wrinkle,...."

...Menno....considers the believers' baptism in the first place to be a sign of obedience to Christ's command to baptise (Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:16)....he uses Sebastian Franck's *Chronica* as his main source in an attempt to prove that adult baptism was also apostolic practice in the early church.

Just as was the case in his teachings on the Lord's Supper, Menno shifts his attention in his teachings on baptism from the sacrament itself to the effect it has on the believer. Without true penitence and faith, water will be of no help to the person being baptised. Believers are not changed by baptism but in baptism. Not by the magical effect of the water, but by obedience to the Word of God and therefore also to Christ's command to baptise....Without true baptism, and thus without the true penitent belief and the New Testament believers' baptism, there is no promise of the forgiveness of sins and therefore no one can inherit heaven, is Menno's sharp formulation.

In this way, the spiritualists were kept at a safe distance from Menno's church without external spot or wrinkle. But the Münsterite Anabaptists were also spurned. They interpreted baptism one-sidedly as an apocalyptic sign, the sign of Tau from the Revelation of John, with which the 144,000 redeemed were marked at a decisive moment, awaiting the Second Coming of Christ. When this decisive moment had passed in 1535 with the fall of the New Jerusalem, the Münsterite Anabaptists started to replace baptism with the laying on of hands. It is no coincidence that this strict apocalyptic interpretation of baptism as the sign of Tau is only found on a few occasions in the works of Menno. He wished to disassociate himself from the idea, too, by reserving the sign of Tau for his own followers alone, who were characterized by exclusive obedience to the letter of the New Testament.

Being just as aware as the Münsterites of how short time was, Menno Simons maintained unabridged the call to true penitence, but corrected some aspects of the belief on which true baptism must be based. He concentrated belief on exclusive obedience to Christ and the apostolic teachings, thus rejecting the Münsterite ideas on the violent revenge of godlessness, the visible Kingdom, polygamy, and the sharing of goods, most of which were founded on the Old Testament. Free of these errors, the original true penitents could truthfully describe themselves as reborn; believers who "breathed Christ" in faith, doctrine, and life, yearning to meet their Lord.

Further Reading:

William Schroeder, "Menno Simons: 500th Birthday: What mean these stones? A Biography of Menno Simons," in *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 24-27.

The Missing Peace - Violence in America

“The Quest for the Missing Peace: Violence in America and in American Historiography,” by James C. Juhnke, a precis of *The Missing Peace, The Quest for Alternatives to Violence in United States History* (Pandora Press, Waterloo, 2001).

Historical myths promote support for war, prof says

by Joy Brown, *Mennonite Weekly Review*, Nov. 18, 2002, pages 1-2.

Bluffton, Ohio - How we learn history is part of the reason Americans continually advocate warfare, a Mennonite history professor believes.

“We are the victims of the myth of redemptive violence,” said James Juhnke, the feature speaker at the Bluffton College’s 24th annual Keeney Peace Lectureship Oct. 29. “It pervades our culture, our history books. The myth...dictates the master narrative of American history.”

Juhnke, a recently retired history professor at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas, is co-author of *The Missing Peace: The Search for Nonviolent Alternatives in U.S. History* (Pandora Press, 2001).

With the United States once again at the brink of taking military action against Iraq, Juhnke defended his opinion that war is not the answer.

“War is going to make the situation disastrously worse in Iraq,” he said.

Speaking to a packed house at Yoder Recital Hall, Juhnke said U.S. history education ignores efforts at peace. He said most Americans cannot name one dispute, particularly in the international arena, that ended peacefully.

Juhnke named three historical events in which peaceful solutions were achieved. One was the Cuban Missile Crisis in which President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev made a deal that favoured removal of nuclear weapons from Cuba and Turkey.

“Why don’t more Americans know about the dynamics of peacemaking?” Juhnke asked. He answered himself by noting that President Bush made a speech earlier this fall in which he told the American people that “throughout history people have fought for freedom” and named various wars, from the Revolutionary War to World War II. Juhnke said Bush was perpetuating the myth of redemptive violence by claiming that only fighting begets freedom.

“It becomes important for us to know this is



James Juhnke, recently retired history professor at Bethel College, North Newton, Kansas. Photo - Men. Weekly Review, Nov. 18, 2002, page 1.

The Missing Peace, by James Juhnke.

The book, *The Missing Peace, The Quest for Alternatives to Violence in United States History*, addresses the problem of violence. The United States is a violent society. Every day, on average, more than 6,000 Americans suffer physical injury from violent assault, and more than 65 people die from homicide. At its peak in the 1980s, the U.S. homicide rate was about 15 times that of industrial nations such as France, Japan, Germany, and the United Kingdom. American citizens own more than 200 million guns. More than a decade after the end of the Cold War, the United States is still armed to the teeth with weapons of mass destruction, and makes preemptive war against other nations that want to have the same weapons.

How can we reverse this spiral of violence? We suggest that one important place to begin is with the teaching of history.

A connection between contemporary violence and the history that we have been taught may appear at first preposterous or ludicrous. Few of us (historians included) remember any of the history we were taught. When asked to recall history, we think we are being asked for a trivial pursuit of obscure dates and events. Few people remember these details of history, but we all carry a very vivid history that has been absorbed, rather than processed, and so remains unconscious. Americans, perhaps more

not the whole story of American history,” Juhnke said. “We need to know the stories of when peace broke out when war was expected. The U.S. is a country made by peace as surely as it is a country made by war.”

He noted events that most people thought would never occur without war, such as the breakup of the Soviet Union and the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Returning to the issue of war with Iraq, Juhnke said “the impulse of America is to assume we alone are responsible [to solve] the problems” and that violence is the only way to do this.

Juhnke urged his listeners to “find your place where you can be a peacemaker” in order to bring about “cultural transformation,” which he said will be a huge task for generations.

People can do a variety of things to make a difference, from teaching students on the playground how to mediate their conflicts to standing up for people in a disadvantaged ethnic or social group.

“Make your peace where you can, and know you are part of a rising movement for cultural transformation,” Juhnke said. “Let’s work for a day when that myth crumbles...into fragments.”

than Canadians, instinctively assume that theirs is a country made by war. In public schools we learn a history of freedom and independence won through war with Britain, land expansion and growth through war with Native Americans and Mexicans, preservation of the union and freedom for slaves through the Civil War, achievement of world power through naval power projected overseas, and deliverance of the world from Nazi and Communist totalitarianism through war and threatened war.

The power and prevalence of this historical narrative is demonstrated by a simple exercise that Colman McCarthy, a popular journalist and history teacher, uses to begin his history classes. He asks the students to identify the following 10 people: Robert E. Lee, Sojourner Truth, Ulysses S. Grant, A. J. Muste, Napoleon, Adin Ballou, Caesar, John Wollman, Dwight Eisenhower, Dorothy Day. His results are consistent, whether in high school, college or law school. Students know five: the five generals - the five who perpetuate the notion that greatness and freedom are dependent upon the effective use of violence. Why? (Note One).

The linkage of violence and freedom in U.S. experience has grown into a powerful national myth, marked with appropriate holidays (holy days) like the Fourth of July, Memorial Day, Veterans’ Day, and George Washington’s birthday. Like all great myths, this one is compounded of truth and falsehood, born of the urgent need to explain and justify human experience. It has roots in an ancient mythic structure, one which theologian Walter Wink argues is embedded in a “domination system” going back to the origins of Western civilization. According to Wink “the distinctive feature of the myth is the victory of order over chaos by means of violence.” This pervasive myth, which he argues is the “dominant myth in contemporary America (more influential by far than Judaism or Christianity),” is variously called “the Babylonian creation story, the combat myth, the ideology of zealous nationalism, and the myth of redemptive violence.” “It is,” Wink claims, “the spirituality of the modern world,” (Note Two).

The book, *The Missing Peace*, undertakes three tasks: 1) to demonstrate that violence in the United States has done more harm than good, often escalating rather than diminishing violence. The violence of even arguably “just wars” has left a legacy of death, destruction and debt which has perpetuated and intensified the violence of poverty, racism, the workplace and the home. Violence has limited freedom.

2) to offer a different lens from which to view history: one of mutuality and interdepend-

dence rather than of self-willed triumph. A just and lasting peace is marked by a concern for the welfare of all and a recognition, in Martin Luther King's words, of the "inescapable network of mutuality." (Note Three). For this reason, efforts for peace move toward reconciliation and mutuality, rather than demonizing "the other" as "enemy" and "evil." Peace cannot be separated from justice. Therefore we offer an alternative framing question for our interpretation of history, one that asks how a given event moves people toward reconciliation and justice or away from that goal.

3) to provide hope and encouragement for a less violent future by re-remembering those people and events who worked for nonviolent alternatives, but whose stories are often missing from traditional texts. Often the stories are missing because the alternatives were rejected or because they were not considered "successful." This approach robs us of the ability to learn from mistakes. Narrating events without discussing alternatives that were tried leaves us with a rather deterministic, inevitable interpretation of history, subverting the notion that personal choice had anything to do with outcomes. We want to rethink the notion of "success" and reclaim the hidden heritage of a "non-violent America."

In this book we propose a shift in viewpoint from the myth of redemptive violence which acclaims the effectiveness of violence in securing freedom, to the celebration of what makes for a peaceful and just society for all the citizens of the world. In our understanding, peace is both personal and communal; local and universal; spiritual and political. Violence typically subverts both justice and peace. We attempt to demonstrate an alternative reading of history, one that celebrates those people and those structures and systems which offer non-violent models in the struggle for freedom and a more peaceful and just society.

Alternative interpretations.

How shall we understand, for example, the history of violent encounters of invading Europeans and resisting Native Americans? One option is to celebrate the peace traditions that existed in North American communities before the European ever arrived. An Iroquois "League of Peace," was one remarkable Native American experiment to replace violence with nonviolence. The League originated in the Great Lakes region of what is now northern New York between the Hudson and Niagara rivers. According to Iroquois legend, the League was born out of the genius and vision of a leader-prophet named Deganawidah. The five Iroquois peoples were destroying themselves in warfare and cannibalism and were abandoning their agricultural villages. Among these disrupted peoples, Deganawidah came preaching a gospel of peace and the rule of law. He led in creating a new confederation of self-ruling but cooperating tribes, with broad popular participation in decision making. The Great League of Peace and Power unified the self-ruling villages of the Five Nations in the

century before the Europeans arrived.

Each Native-American tribe had its own peace traditions. Because of their missionary work among the Cheyenne and the Hope Indians, Mennonites became aware of the peace traditions of these peoples. The Cheyenne Indians had a strong tradition of Peace Chiefs, rooted in the teachings of their founding prophet, Sweet Medicine. This peace prophet appointed the first chiefs and told them: "You chiefs are peacemakers. Though your son might be killed in front of your tepee, you should take a peace pipe and smoke. Then you would be called an honest chief." Today, one of the Cheyenne Peace Chiefs is Lawrence Hart, a graduate of Bethel College and a former Mennonite pastor.

American history textbooks, attempting to be politically correct in an era of ethnic tolerance, lift up the names of Indian warriors who militarily resisted the European advance – men such as Tecumseh, Geronimo, and Crazy Horse. The names of great peace chiefs such as Handsome Lake and Black Kettle are not well known. But who most deserves to be remembered? Should it be the warriors who died in fruitless battle after fruitless battle? Or should it be the peace chiefs and nonviolent survivors – many of them women – who outlived the wars and who taught the cultural ways of their peoples to the next generation? The cultural survival of Native-American ways in the face of an awful holocaust of disease and destruction is most remarkable. It must be explained. The true heroes of this cultural achievement are not the defeated warriors but the peace prophets and persistent peacemakers.

The American War for Independence (1775-83) is one of the most sacred events in American history. It is an article of faith that the war against oppressive British rulers was necessary for independence. The American revolution was, Americans believe, inevitable. In this case, Americans would do well to learn more about Canadian history. Canadians demonstrated that it was possible to achieve independence gradually and peaceably over a long period of time. The Americans might also have had a less blood-soaked history if they had adopted the proposal of Joseph Galloway at the First Continental Congress in 1774 to reform and restructure the British empire. Galloway's proposal for a North American parliament came within one vote of being adopted at the Congress. But it has been tossed into the dustbin of history, along with the proposals of other peacemakers.

Early American national history was not a matter of unrelieved warfare. A perspective of constructive nonviolence remembers the peace idealism of the early republic. At the outset of the American national experiment, a commitment to peace was near the core, not at the fringes, of national identity. Quaker pacifism put a permanent stamp on the character of the middle colonies and states. A classical republican, or "Whig," political ideology saw the American experiment in democratic republicanism as an updated and more secular ver-

sion of the earlier holy experiments in Pennsylvania and New England. The new republic was hostile to "standing armies," military instruments belonging to old world monarchies and their conspiracies with ruling aristocrats.

America's early peace idealism was more than misguided romantic innocence. It led national leaders to decisions against war in situations when warfare seemed imminent and justifiable – as in 1799 when President John Adams moved to end the "Quasi-War" with France, and in 1807 when President Thomas Jefferson avoided war with England by a strategy of economic embargo. Classical republican antipathy to "standing armies" is an authentic American ancestor of late twentieth century concerns about the excessive power of the military industrial complex.

Civil War, 1860-65.

The American Civil War competes with the War for Independence as a heroic moment in the American national memory. Americans imagine that the Civil War was inevitable. They make president Abraham Lincoln, who made the key decisions for war, into an unqualified hero. In retrospect, from the viewpoint of people living at that time, it appears that options to war were available. From a pacifist perspective, Lincoln is less heroic.

What might Lincoln have done differently to avoid war? Instead of isolating himself at Springfield, Illinois, and avoiding comment on the national crisis, as he did after the election of November 1860, Lincoln might have taken an active leadership role before his inauguration. Immediately after the election, Lincoln needed to assert himself as a moderate national leader, not hostage to the radical wing of the Republican party, and willing to cooperate with moderate unionists in the South. Lincoln had said, "I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.... It will become all one thing or all the other." He subsequently had reinterpreted his provocative statement, pointing out that it was a prediction, not a policy, and that "it may have been a foolish one perhaps," (Note Four).

The truth was that president-elect Lincoln had no intention and no plan to challenge slavery where it existed. Even though Southerners doubted that truth, only about 25 percent of them would have favoured secession immediately after Lincoln's election (Note Five). Lincoln could have done much more – with strong public statements and personal correspondence – to convince Southern moderates of his intentions, and to empower the southern unionists in their efforts to oppose the secessionist movement. Where great statesmanship was required to control events, Lincoln largely let events control him. David Herbert Donald, distinguished Lincoln biographer, has noted Lincoln's general "reluctance to take the initiative and make bold plans; he preferred to respond to the actions of others," (Note Six).

Toward Total World Wars.

The analysis of the decisions for war in the

mid-nineteenth century can be applied to subsequent wars. From the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, the United States moved toward wider cycles of global warfare. The Spanish-American War of 1898 represented a clear turning toward imperialism. The American version of imperialism, however, for the most part masked itself as an "Open Door" policy to allow unimpeded flow of American capital interests. The United States did control the Philippines as a colony, but in general the American empire took a "neo-imperialist" form that achieved economic domination without direct political control.

The American national decision to join the European War in 1917 needs to be examined not simply in terms of the inexorable causes leading up to war, but also in terms of the visions and efforts of peacemakers who wanted to keep the country out of war. From a peacemaking perspective, the proposals of William Jennings Bryan for international arbitration and for true neutrality are as important to remember as the drift of President Woodrow Wilson for war.

World War I was a failure in conflict resolution, and one result of that failure was the outbreak of another world war. World War II, today often referred to as "The Good War," killed more people, created more refugees, destroyed more cities, and disrupted more social and political systems, than any war in human history. Among its legacies were the Soviet Union's control of almost half of Europe, a dangerous military-industrial complex in the United States and the permanent threat of thermonuclear holocaust.

The prevailing view of World War II as an unqualified triumph for freedom and democracy has malevolent effects upon foreign policy decisions in the United States today. President George W. Bush repeatedly justifies his unrealistically optimistic views of the prospects for post-war democracy in Iraq upon his triumphalist view of World War II. The people of Iraq, as well as of the United States, are paying a high price for this view of history.

Hidden Heroes and Stories.

Have peacemakers invariably failed in United States history? Much depends upon what we define as "success." An honest portrayal of American history must distance itself from the version of pragmatism that argues whoever or whatever wins is right. History is more than the stories of the powerful, rich and famous. We must remember those who vigorously contended for peaceable solutions to conflict, even when their faithful witness was not rewarded.

Students of the American past may well draw more inspiration from the peacemaking efforts of Joseph Galloway at the First Continental Congress than from the bare majority which rejected Galloway's plan for inter-colonial union. There may be more to learn from the Garrisonian nonviolent abolitionists in the Non-resistance Society of the 1830s than from those who made civil war more likely by insisting that only violence could solve the problem of slavery. It may be said that William

Jennings Bryan "failed" as Secretary of State in his efforts to negotiate conciliation treaties with the nations of the world (1913-14) and in his advocacy of consistent U.S. neutrality after war broke out in Europe (1914-15). But in the perspective of peace values, Bryan's policies look more worthy than the world war which Americans later claimed to have won. "Success" in history, especially in victorious wars which set the stage for more warfare, is often a cruel illusion.

A constructive nonviolent perspective investigates the critical moments leading to war and asks the questions: Was this war necessary? Who was offering proposals to avoid the violence? What were the arguments for and against those proposals? What would the likely effects have been of their adoption? Too often we have blotted out the memory of peacemakers while we celebrate events of violence. Americans are remarkably well informed of the details of the Boston Tea Party of December 17, 1773, while we are quite ignorant about the success of the people in Philadelphia at the same time in nonviolently persuading the British captain to take the East India tea back to England. Or, to choose a recent example, Americans need to reexamine the notion that President Ronald Reagan brought about the end of the nuclear arms race with his hard-line rhetoric and military buildup of 1981-5. We need to take account of the decisive influence of peace-minded anti-nuclear scientists, especially Andrei Sakharov, upon Soviet leader Michael Gorbachev to take dramatic unilateral and disproportional steps toward disarmament. If we can overcome our addiction to stories of redemptive violence, Americans would be able properly to credit the international peace movement with its decisive role in bringing about the end to the Cold War.

The breakthroughs of nonviolence in United States history have come more often from creative minorities than from established centers of power. In the vanguard of the great crusades against slavery, for women's rights, against militarism, and for civil rights, were leaders of creative minorities who knew that the ideals of peace and justice are ultimately one and inseparable. These peace prophets came upon the scene as outsiders whose alternative visions projected new possibilities for public life. They constitute a luminous honour roll: Deganawidah, Roger Williams, Henry David Thoreau, Elihu Burritt, Carrie Chapman Catt, Mark Twain, Jane Addams, Mary Harris Jones, Linus Pauling, Cesar Chavez, and many, many more.

Peacemakers have often paid a high price for their convictions. Martin Luther King, the greatest American teacher of nonviolence in the twentieth century, today is so eulogized on his national holiday that we forget how lonely his stance once was. Yet King forged the teachings of Jesus, Thoreau, and Gandhi into a movement that transformed race relations in the country. As historian Vincent Harding argues in *Hope and History*, we must tell the story of that nonviolent movement because it carries the ideas and resources for a wider cultural transforma-

tion (Note Seven). King was uncompromising in his commitment to the gospel of love, to the essential unity of all humankind under God. He applied the principles of nonviolence as surely to the war in Vietnam as to racial oppression at home. The civil rights movement is a fountain of hope for the future not only because it teaches us to nurture a heart of love, but also because it reminds us nonviolent social transformation requires persistent and disciplined challenges to unjust social structures.

Mutuality and Interdependence.

The American story is much more than one of violence. The United States is not solely a "country made by war," as one recent military historian would have it. America is also a country built by peacemakers. "The critical drama of our past is not violence," says peace historian Charles Chatfield, "but rather the struggle to overcome violence," (Note Nine). The elements of that drama are at hand in our historical libraries and in the minds of our elders, awaiting the honest historians, literary artists and social prophets who can craft them into a compelling narrative. If America is to be transformed toward peace, Americans must learn to tell the stories of peace. The same can be said for the remembered history of all nations in this world. Right remembering of the past is an important dimension of Anabaptist-Christian witness and mission to the world.

Endnotes:

Note One: Coleman McCarthy, foreword to *The Universe Bends Towards Justice: A Reader on Christian Nonviolence in the U.S.*, ed. Angie O' Gorman (Philadelphia, New Society Publishers, 1990), ix.

Note Two: Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers, Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 13, 16.

Note Three: Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in *Why We Can't Wait* (New York, New American Library, 1963), 77.

Note Four: Quoted in David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, Simon & Shuster, 1995), 209.

Note Five: William W. Freehling, *The Reintegration of American History: Slavery and the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 212.

Note Six: Donald, *Lincoln*, 15.

Note Seven: Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why we Must Share the Story of the Movement* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990). See especially chapter five, "'God's Appeal to This Age,' The Search for Alternatives to Violence," 91-104.

Note Eight: Geoffrey Perret, *A Country Made by War: From the Revolution to Vietnam. The Story of America's Rise to Power* (New York, Random House, 1989).

Note Nine: Charles Chatfield, "Nonviolence and the United States History: Insofar As," in *Nonviolent America: History Through the Eyes of Peace* (North Newton, KS., Bethel College, 1993), 259.

President's Report

By Ralph Friesen, 413 - 6th Street, Nelson, British Columbia, Canada. email: friehof@shaw.ca

Mennonite envy

Since the last President's Report, we have moved to Nelson, B. C., a community of about 10,000 on Kootenay Lake, with houses climbing up the slopes of the Selkirk Mountains. It is a beautiful place, both naturally and architecturally, and a vibrant one—full of artists, writers, snowboarders and adventurers from many parts of the world.

There is even the odd Mennonite to be found, such as my old schoolmate Henry Reimer, the youngest of the P. D. Reimer clan of Steinbach. Back in 1932, P. D. Reimer advertised in the *Steinbach Post*, giving notice that the Bargain Store would “buy, sell, exchange,” and that he had recently got a shipment of three dozen army boots. Henry, a long way in space and time from the Bargain Store, owns and operates Civic Auto Repair in Nelson. At work early every morning, he seems to be just as industrious as his father was.

I have been making the rounds of local churches on Sunday mornings. At the Presbyterian church, the speaker told of being a Bible School student in Abbotsford, years ago. He and another student were sent out to go door to door, raising funds. Wherever they went, people would talk to his colleague, whose name was Wiebe, wanting to know which Wiebes these were, was he related to such-and-such Wiebe, etc. — the genealogical connection-making that has been a standard Mennonite practice for centuries. The speaker said he, a non-Mennonite, began to feel excluded and envious. So he decided to fabricate an identity, and the next day, going out on his own, introduced himself to a new household as “Klassen.” The occupants, of course, showed great interest, invited him in, asked him many questions about his clan. Somehow, he evaded these, and escaped the house after collecting a donation. A block away, he remembered, to his horror, that he had signed the receipt with his actual name. He knew there was nothing for it but to go back and confess, which he did. The people of the household were understanding and forgiving.

Mennonite “devils”

This instance of “Mennonite envy” turned my attention to some historical precedents. The phenomenon goes back to the very beginning, to the 16th century. In 1924, at a celebration in Swalwell, Alberta of the 50th year of the 1874 immigration to Canada, Peter Isaack reminded the assembly that as early as 1560, two years before the death of Menno Simons, Mennonites had already established flourishing communities in Prussia. Their success aroused such a degree of envy that “it was even said that the Devil had brought them to this land, resulting in floods and storms. (Note One).

I was shocked to read this. Were not our ancestors “harmlos”? Why would simple people struggling to live a life of true discipleship to Christ be labeled envoys of the Evil One?

The same article, by “J. W. T.” (Johann W. Toews, son of Kleine Gemeinde/Holdeman Ältester Peter P. Toews) describes another instance of the same sort of labeling, occurring in Winnipeg in 1874 or '75: “As was told to me by pioneer Albert Wittick of Niverville, Manitoba, the Mennonites at that time, living their simple life, were often misunderstood. He told of an Englishman in Winnipeg, 50 years ago, who, upon seeing a Mennonite walking along the street, a scarf bound around his head in the usage of the



Duerrer's “The Knight, Death and the Devil” (1514).

time, asked whether this was not a true devil. Anyone who knows Albert Wittick does not need to be told that he soon set the Englishman to rights.”

The reference to the Mennonite pedestrian's turban-like headgear is a bit mysterious, as it is not on the record as being the style of the time. At any rate, it would seem that the man drew attention to himself by somehow looking Eastern European—hence, like a “true devil” in English Canadian eyes. The Mennonite's different appearance, his obvious “otherness,” marked him for discrimination.

The great Swiss psychologist Carl Jung taught that we all carry around aspects of ourselves that we find distasteful. Instead of acknowledging these fragments of our own darkness, we tend to project them onto handy objects around us, such as people who are different from

ourselves. For the citizens of Prussia, as for the Canadian on the streets of Winnipeg, the sight of Mennonites evoked some sort of reactive fear, which they gave the name of “devil,” the ultimate expression of “not-me-ness.”

Our ancestors in Prussia and the lone Mennonite on the streets of Winnipeg were undeserving victims of a mean and envious spirit. They meant no harm. They were not devils; they were scapegoats. Because of their stranger status, their simple way of life that set them apart, Mennonites were sometimes lightning rods for the energy of envy and fear among the citizenry.

And yet, and yet.... what if, somehow, they were devils? It was language that they themselves sometimes employed, within their own community.

In the 1830s in South Russia, Klaas Reimer (1770-1837), founder of the Kleine Gemeinde, attacked fellow Mennonites who were teaching end-times, emotionalist theology, by declaring that “Satan came amongst us with many terrible sanctimonious matters through his servants, namely, Bernhard Rempel of Muntau, Klaas Friesen of Lindenau, Heinrich Wiebe of Ohrloff and Martin Warkentin of Blumstein.” He goes on to list the specific errors of these “servants” of Satan (Note Two).

Reimer's sincerity cannot be doubted. And supposedly the resident Prussians of the 16th century were also sincere, and actually believed that the Netherlandic refugees were in cahoots with Lucifer, and responsible for bad weather. The 19th century Winniepegger, on the other hand, was clearly expressing a thoughtless, routine sort of prejudice, which cannot be called “sincere,” but which was powerful nevertheless, part of a mind-set that made possible such discriminatory legislation as removing Mennonites' control over their own schools in pre-war Manitoba.

Historically, as Mennonites, we have been both on the receiving end and the giving end of “devil” language. It may be that there is still a time and place for using it. Anyone who does, though, should be aware that demonizing the other is a marvelous way of distancing oneself from one's own darkness. Admissions of their own failings are found everywhere in the early writings of our ancestors. Sometimes these ring disingenuous, even false. Mostly, though, they demonstrate a sincere willingness to genuinely acknowledge the imperfection of the writer, who depends on God's grace. That is mature humility.

Notes:

Note One: J. W. T., *Steinbach Post*, October 29, 1924.

Note Two: In “Ein kleines Aufsatz, 1836,” published in Delbert Plett, *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia*, p. 140.

Editorial - Whose History is it Anyway?

“Ludwig Keller (1849-1915) and the Flemish Mennonites: Whose History is it anyway?” by Delbert F. Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R0A 2A0 (e-mail delplett@mts.net) websites: “www.hshs.mb.ca” and “www.mts.net/~delplett”

Anabaptism.

Historians generally agree that the first generation of the Anabaptist movement of the Reformation was diverse and pluralistic with rebaptism often the only common factor or motif, representing a rejection of the existing church and social order. The term “Anabaptist” covered a motley assortment of spiritualists, chiliasts, Antitrinitarians, mystics and social-revolutionaries each with their own unique theological configuration and agenda. Thus anyone from modern-day Evangelicals, Baptists, Marxists, revolutionaries, terrorists, polygamists, and even the “left behind” industry can to some extent legitimately lay claim to some brand of Anabaptist roots, antecedents and ideology: see Abram Friesen, *History and Renewal: In the Anabaptist/Mennonite Tradition* (Newton, 1994), page xi.

Waterloo theologian Arnold Synder has described early Anabaptism as a process, a diffuse and varied phenomenon that developed over time and ended with the consolidation of sectarian boundaries and church denominations (*Pres.*, No. 21, page 28). The founder of Anabaptism in the Low Countries (the modern-day Netherlands and Belgium) was Melchior Hoffman. His followers, Jan Matthijs and Jan van Leiden, attempted to establish the Kingdom of God on earth by the violent seizure of power in Münster. Menno Simons, who joined the Anabaptists in 1536, came to influence and denominationalized that part of the Melchiorite movement based on primitive New Testament Christianity, focusing on non-resistance, the ethic of love and the principle of the visible, disciplined church without spot and wrinkle. The Flemish Mennonites adhered to the wholesome biblical teachings of Menno Simons - the medieval monastic tradition of following Jesus.

Hans Denck (1500-27) was an early Anabaptist leader who emphasized spiritualism and inward piety over external conformity to the teachings of Jesus. Divisions, ceremonies and sects were to be avoided and everyone should be free to pursue his own salvation as best he could. His indifference to sound doctrine, especially his redefinition of the love of God for humanity (and his universalism), offended many nonresistant Anabaptists.

Historiography.

Because of the violent and vile nature of many first generation Anabaptists, the peaceful or non-resistant Anabaptists (Mennonites) were unjustly denounced and demonized in the historical accounts of the Reformation.

Samme Zilstra has written: “The first historical writings were written with a definite goal, namely, to make the readers aware of the dangerous character of the Anabaptist movement for State and society, above all, on the grounds of the excesses which had taken place in Münster,” Zilstra, *Om de ware gemeente* (Leeuwarden,

2000), page 14.

Later historians such as Gerard Brandt (1626-85), Amsterdam, made valuable corrections to the historical record by recognizing the distinction between the Chiliastic Münsterites and the peaceful Anabaptists who came to be known as Mennonites in honour of the Frisian reformer Menno Simons. Brandt pointed to “...the alleged revolutionary descent of the Mennonites, but he excused them by arguing that only a few Anabaptists had been overcome by zealotry and had incited revolt... These simple and defenceless folk had, however, been wrongfully lumped together with the zealots,” Voolstra, *Menno Simons* (North Newton, 1997), page 3.

The Anabaptists, nonetheless, continued to be marginalized and deliberately misrepresented in Reformation historiography as the fanatical revolutionaries of Münster in order to discredit the entire movement. Historian Keith Sprunger has written that in later years “Progressive Mennonites yearned to overcome the caricature of Mennonitism: That Anabaptists were Münsterites, radical troublemakers, and theological illiterates, unlike the respectable Lutherans and Calvinists. Having evolved from the Münsterite Anabaptists, Mennonites were chained to a blighted history and had no positive contributions to make to the modern world, except perhaps as quietistic, isolated farmers,” Keith L. Sprunger, “Cornelius H. Wedel....,” *Men. Life*, Dec. 1981, page 17.

Ludwig Keller (1849-1915).

It was Ludwig Keller (1849-1915) who dramatically changed the situation legitimizing Anabaptism as a respectable subject for academic study. Keller was a German Protestant scholar who served as state archivist in Münster until 1895 and later in Berlin.

Historian Robert Friedmann has written that Ludwig Keller’s intensive research of the archival sources brought him to the realization “...that the religious brotherhoods outside the church organizations had been given a completely false evaluation in traditional presentations of church history.... Around 1880 the Mennonites in Germany were not very historically minded.... In this situation Keller’s book, *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer*, appeared in 1882, centring attention upon Hans Denck. It was a real eye-opener for Mennonites, and many were willing to accept Hans Denck (the ‘spiritual reformer’) as the finest and most original expression of ‘Anabaptist’ genius,” (page 163).

In 1880 Keller published his *Geschichte der Wiedertäufer*, in 1882 *Ein Apostel der Wiedertäufer* (Hans Denck), in 1885 *Die Reformatoren*, in 1886 *Die Waldenser*, and in 1887 *Zur Geschichte der altevangelischen Gemeinden*. Keller espoused “...the idea that there was a direct connection between the

Waldenses and the Anabaptists and that their principles, doctrines, and institutions continued to live in the Christian church from its beginnings through the centuries which he named ‘*altevangelische Brüdergemeinden*’.... He had a vision of an ideal Christian brotherhood of humanity above the dogmatic ecclesiastical or materialistic, naturalistic view of the world.”

Keller claimed that “the best and purest tradition of Anabaptism’ goes back to the period of 1517-34.... Keller equated the teachings of mystics and spiritual reformers with those of Anabaptism proper.... and above all Hans Denck. They all taught a free semi-mystical and individualistic interpretation of the Scriptures.... but they had little to do with the essential idea of Anabaptism,” Robert Friedmann, *Men. Enc.*, Vol. III, pages 162-163.

Ludwig Keller linked the Mennonites to the Waldensians, providing “Anabaptism with a respectable evangelical ancestry which pre-dated even Luther.... This put Mennonite history into a positive perspective equally praiseworthy with the mainstream Lutheran and Reformed Protestants,” Keith Sprunger, “Cornelius H. Wedel....,” *Men. Life*, Dec. 1981, pages 18-19. “Keller’s vision was for a widespread Christian humanism with its roots in the old Evangelical brotherhoods,” Mary Sprunger, *Men. Life*, June 1985, page 13.

Influence of Keller.

Keller sought and won widespread approval and acceptance of his ideas among Mennonite scholars of his time. He published articles in the *Mennonitische Blätter* beginning in 1883 and also



Archivist and historian Ludwig Keller (1849-1915), Münster. Photo - *Men. Life*, June 1985, page 12.

had personal contact with many German and Dutch leaders including Anna Brons, a writer in the Dutch Doopsgezinde tradition (see Mary Sprunger, *Men. Life*, June 1985, pages 10-16).

Keller's loyal disciples in America included historian John Horsch, co-worker of Johann F. Funk, editor for the *Herald der Wahrheit* and Mennonite Publishing House, and father-in-law of Harold S. Bender. Others influenced by Keller included J. F. Funk, John Holdeman, David Goertz, Herman Suderman and Jacob R. Toews. In 1887 John Horsch moved to Elkhart, Indiana. "Keller hoped that Horsch would perhaps help in reshaping also the Mennonite church in America according to his ideas..." In 1888 Horsch published Hans Denck's *Von der Wahren Liebe* and long extracts from Denck and other likeminded writers were published in the *Herald der Wahrheit* and *Mennonitische Blätter*.

John Horsch wrote that with "With Keller a new era of historiography of the Old Evangelical churches has begun," Keith Sprunger, "Cornelius H. Wedel..." *Men. Life*, Dec. 1981, page 18.

Robert Friedmann noted, astutely, that "Strangely enough, Menno Simons is somewhat neglected and his authority even opposed (Keller: 'By cleaving to Menno Simons the goal of the brotherhood has been narrowed down too much.'). In 1891 John Horsch published his *Kurzgefasste Geschichte der Mennoniten*, quite in line with Keller's ideas; Hans Denck appears here as the most important early spiritual leader of Anabaptism," page 163.

Friedmann writes: "Keller had been thinking of the Mennonites as an open society of inspired Christians, while the Mennonites understood themselves as a closed brotherhood with strict discipline. Keller, who was always a staunch individualist with some inclination towards mysticism, had very little appreciation for this type of church life, and his association with the Mennonites inevitably had to come to an end. And yet his idea of 'old evangelical brotherhoods' was widely accepted even long after the 1880s. The Langnau-Emmental Swiss congregation accepted this name for their church and on the title page of P. M. Friesen's book on Mennonites in Russia (1911) we meet this term again," Friedmann, page 164.

"Alt-Evangelische Bruderschaften".

Ludwig Keller's concept of the Alt-Evangelische Bruderschaft ("Old-evangelical brotherhoods"), alleges that "Menno Simons had defended 'precisely the most narrow minded interpretation'... Not the post-Münsterite, but the pre-Münsterite epoch..." was the defining period of the Anabaptist movement. Hans Denck was embraced as the most important pre-Münsterite leader and it was his "position that was to be the cornerstone upon which Mennonite renewal was to take place," Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal*, pages 62-63. Denck was embraced as a "devout pietist, who earnestly heeds the voice of God in his breast," Abraham Friesen, page 70, and who was linked through "...a kind of Baptist apostolic succession from the apostolic church to Reformation Anabaptism and the English Baptists through the persecuted medieval sects, especially the Waldenses," A. Friesen, page 79.

Harold S. Bender has written that "...the introduction of the term, *Alt-Evangelische* and its corresponding historical concept into the literature and usage of the German Mennonites after 1885 was largely due to the influence of noted archivist, historian, and defender of the Anabaptists, Ludwig Keller of Münster, Germany.... The yearbook which H. G. Mannhardt of Danzig published in 1888 carried the title *Jahrbuch der alt-evangelischen Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten Gemeinden*.... In the second (1891) edition of her book, *Ursprung, Entwicklung und Schicksale der Taufgesinnten oder Mennoniten*, Anna Brons added the word *alt-evangelisch* to the title. In like manner P. M. Friesen put it into the title of the book, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland* (Halbstadt, 1911). Johann Horsch... had used the term... during the period when he was under Keller's influence, but he did not continue its use."

Harold S. Bender, *Men. Ency.*, Vol. I, pages 78-9.

Peter M. Friesen (1849-1914).

Historian Abraham Friesen, Santa Barbara, California, suggests that Keller's Evangelical Anabaptist theory found its way to the Russian Mennonites with the publication of P. M. Friesen's 1911 history, *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland (1789-1910)* (Halbstadt, 1911), Part One - 777 pages and Part Two - 154 pages. Keller is not directly cited by P. M. Friesen, possibly because he "must have been aware of the devastating attacks on Keller," Abraham Friesen, *History and Renewal*, page 4.

With the publication of his massive collection of documents and writings, Peter M. Friesen embedded Kellerite ideology and philosophy into Russian Mennonite historiography. The disciples, traditionalist Flemish Gemeinden - faithful to the Reformation ideals of reformer Menno Simons - were disparaged and denigrated and any associations with a more inward and spiritualistic religion such as represented by Separatist-Pietists and Baptists of various varieties, were lauded and exalted.

The resulting pejorative statements and negative interpretations of Peter M. Friesen regarding the Flemish Mennonites are already well known. Given his starting premises it is understandable that he found little positive to say about the traditionalists and conservatives. In pursuit of his agenda, he put forward essentially only false descriptions of their communities in the Vistula delta. He referred to the Flemish ministers as "the blind leaders of the blind, void of any apparent education or theological knowledge as well as any spiritual life emanating from God," pages 54/57. Although the Flemish had heroically survived three centuries of persecution and oppression in Polish-Prussia, establishing a highly successful and much envied culture, P. M. Friesen maligned them as follows: "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).

P. M. Friesen casually dismissed the sturdy and courageous Flemish pioneers in Chortitza in

1789 - who established one of the most successful communities in all of Imperial Russia - as being "predominantly from the most impoverished and decayed segments of the Mennonite society [in Prussia]," (page 91). This was actually the very opposite of the truth for it was the later more pietistic and Germanized, post-Napoleonic Wars emigrants who were impoverished in the way Friesen described (For a more detailed discussion, see *Pres.*, No. 21, page 94; No. 19, pages 124-6 and elsewhere). By applying the Kellerite theories to the traditionalists in the Vistula delta, P. M. Friesen was able to lay the groundwork for a historical interpretation whereby Flemish Mennonite faith, life and culture in Imperial Russia was seen as corrupted and fallen from its very outset and desperately in need of - you guessed it - renewal and conversion to Separatist-Pietist and/or Baptist ideology and religious dogma (see "Separatist-Pietism," *Pres.*, No. 12, pages 12-15).

Search for a Usable Past?

Under a discussion of a "Search for a Usable Past" among American Mennonites in the 20th century, Dr. Paul Toews, Fresno, California, summarizes the ideas and influence of Ludwig Keller as follows:

"Keller's work especially would strongly influence a series of European and American Mennonite historians, notably Christian Hege, Christian Neff, John Horsch, and C. H. Wedel. Central in Keller's work was a thesis that the Anabaptists had been part of a much larger movement in Christian history - a movement whose principles, doctrines and loose institutional connections had perpetuated a continuing Evangelical tradition. Keller named the groups in that tradition the 'alt-evangelische Gemeinden' ('old evangelical fellowships'). In his recounting, these groups included historical figures ranging from the great medieval mystic Meister Eckhardt; through Johann von Staupitz, Martin Luther's Augustinian prior; to Protestant mystics such as Johann Arndt, so-called "father of German pietism."

"It is no wonder that Keller attracted the Mennonites. With an emphasis on spirituality and piety, his thesis could fit well with influences from American Revivalists. Moreover, the groups and persons of whom he wrote had all cultivated their religiosity and piety apart from the state churches. And central in his analysis had been the Waldenses and the Anabaptists. Indeed Keller's interest was more than historical; he wanted to bring the kindred spirits together around

Epic Drama.

It is remarkable how - with a little ingenuity and creativity - the Kellerite disciples were able to belittle and ridicule the great Flemish Mennonite migration to the steppes of Southern Russia of 1788-89, which for sheer epic drama and heroic pioneering spirit and perseverance rivalled the 19th century trek of Brigham Young and the Mormons to Salt Lake City or even the 17th century odyssey of the Mayflower and the Pilgrim Fathers to Plymouth Rock.



Peter Martinovitch Friesen (1849-1914) with wife Susanna (nee Fast) and daughter Susie. Photo - Harry Loewen, *Shepherds, Servants and Prophets* Kitchener, 2003), 131.

the tradition. And of that new fellowship, 19th century Mennonites were to be at the core.”

“Church historians at large rejected Keller’s thesis, but for the Mennonites it was compelling. Hermann G. Mannhardt, a Prussian Mennonite pastor and publisher, and Peter M. Friesen, a Mennonite historian in the Ukraine, incorporated Keller’s interpretation into Mennonite histories.”

“More directly for the Mennonites in America, Keller deeply influenced John Horsch. Having immigrated from Germany in 1886 and joined the staff of MC [Mennonite Church] publisher and leader John F. Funk, Horsch was an accomplished Mennonite historian well before he took up the crusade against modernism. His pages in Funk’s *Herold der Wahrheit* were full of writings from Catholic and Protestant mystics. Horsch offered accounts of history that used the Keller thesis, emphasized the Anabaptists, and linked them ecumenically to the spiritualist reformers such as Hans Denck. At the turn of the century Mennonites were not separating true Anabaptists from spiritualists, as Bender and other Anabaptist vision scholars would later do.”

From Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society 1930-1970* (Scottdale, 1996), pages 87-88.

Cornelius H. Wedel (1860-1911).

Cornelius H. Wedel (1860-1911), the first president of Bethel College, Newton, Kansas, led the way in establishing a tradition of higher education among American Mennonites. His four volume history of the Mennonites was “the first general and comprehensive history of the Mennonites written and published in America.”

Keith L. Sprunger has written that Cornelius H. Wedel and John Horsch “were the foremost American ‘Kellerite’ historians.... Their historical work took place within the general American Mennonite renaissance of the Kellerite period.... In a summing up of Mennonite history at the conclusion of volume four, Wedel again

stated that the Mennonites, like Old Evangelical brethren, valued primarily personal Christianity and freedom of conviction....”

Sprunger adds that “Wedel’s Waldensian-Kellerite theories, although useful at a certain stage of Mennonite historical development, have not stood the test of time.... Wedel’s history books had a large influence,” Keith L. Sprunger, “Cornelius H. Wedel....,” *Men. Life*, Dec. 1981, pages 14-22.

Some time ago my cousin Eddy Plett in Mexico called me regarding the historical writing of C. H. Wedel. Although Wedel’s books were useful in the classroom, they did find troubling his negative interpretations of the conservative or traditionalist Mennonites and more often than not, their complete omission from the historical record. In his “Drittes Bändchen”, for example, C. H. Wedel dismisses the Kleine Gemeinde as follows: “In many respects their Christendom was manifested as an impotent, pharisaical and powerless orthodoxy,” (page 168). Such false and slanderous comments echo similar views later voiced by P. M. Friesen.

The followers of Ludwig Keller apparently saw the visible, disciplined Gemeinden of the traditionalist Mennonites as anathema and repugnant to everything they understood as pious, godly and Christian. The resulting one-sidedness and intolerance made it literally impossible for Kellerite disciples such as C. H. Wedel and P. M. Friesen to come to an objective and realistic understanding of the conservative, confessionalist tradition, including the Grosse Gemeinde in the Molotschna, the Flemish Gemeinde in the Chortitza Colony in Czarist Russia or the Old Colonists, Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, (New) Reinländer and Kleine Gemeinden in Manitoba.

General Conference Renaissance.

Under a discussion of a historical renaissance of General Conference Mennonites, Dr. Paul Toews, Fresno, California, explains how Kellerite ideas and concepts influenced leaders such as C. H. Wedel:

“Into the 1920s the Keller thesis was also a starting point for several GC historians, most notably Cornelius (C.H.) Wedel, founding president of Bethel College. Travelling to Europe in 1898, Wedel unsuccessfully tried to visit Keller, and he freely credited Keller for much of his historical inspiration. In an 1899 book, *Bilder aus der Kirchengeschichte für mennonitische Gemeinde-schulen....*, and then a much more ambitious four-volume *Abriss der Geschichte der Mennoniten....* published between 1900-1904, Wedel used the Keller thesis to trace a continuity between Anabaptists and the earlier apostolic age in Christian history. Keller provided Wedel with a way of seeing the Mennonite story as part of the larger record of God’s work to fashion his kingdom....”

“Succeeding Wedel as GC’s interpreters of history were C. Henry Smith, eventually of Bluffton College and Edmund George (E.G.) Kaufmann, eventually president of Bethel. They rejected the Keller thesis yet offered conceptual categories very different from those of the emerging Mennonite Church interpretation....” Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, page 93.



Cornelius H. Wedel (1860-1911). Photo - *Men. Life*, Dec. 1981, pages 18.

Smith became the acknowledged dean of Mennonite historians and the publication of *The Story of the Mennonites* brought forward a somewhat different way to interpret Mennonite history seeing the Anabaptists as “proto-American liberals”. Dr. Paul Toews describes Smith’s thesis as follows: “That interpretation argued in effect that Anabaptists and Mennonites had contributed significantly to Western freedom and progress. Mennonitism, like other social movements, had both conserving and liberating elements. In Smith’s narrative the liberating elements became the main story. The great Anabaptist-Mennonite contributions were the twin ones of church-state separation and religious tolerance. Both stemmed from the understanding that - ‘religion is a matter of individual conscience’ - which Smith said was the commitment at ‘the very heart of....Anabaptism.’”

“After the Anabaptists, according to Smith, Mennonites had made other contributions to Western culture. Logically and historically, their refusal of coercion in religious matters had become nonresistance in individual and political life. Moreover in various countries Mennonite industry, frugality, agricultural skill, and simple virtue had stimulated economic development. And in Holland, Mennonites’ contribution to high culture, commerce, and industry had few rivals from other small religious groups.”

“As the Holland example suggested, not all Mennonites had contributed equally....Essentially he [Smith] offered a scale of acculturation on which the more liberal Mennonites had rendered the greatest contribution,” Toews, page 97.

Poor and Simple.

Unfortunately the corrupted interpretations and biased descriptions of the conservative Mennonites offered by the Kellerite disciples continue to dominate the historiography of the Russian Mennonites. In his *The Story of the Mennonites* (1945), C. Henry Smith (1875-1948), for

Attention Readers: The opinions expressed in the editorial and/or elsewhere in *Preservings*, are those of the editor alone and do not necessarily reflect the views of the FMHS, its board of directors, and/or its membership.

example, characterized the conservative Mennonites of Manitoba as follows: "Religiously and culturally the Manitoba Mennonites lagged somewhat behind their achievements in the field of material progress..." (page 648). Smith revealed a rather shocking lack of understanding of the Flemish Mennonite tradition as well as unforgivable condescension towards the Old Colonists in describing their worship services: "The preacher never looked at his audience. The merest gesture with his hands, or the shrug of the shoulders, the slightest departure in any respect from the practices of the fathers would have been met not only with astonishment but instant disapproval on the part of such in the congregation as were sufficiently awake to notice the innovation..." (page 649). Of the Old Colonists themselves, Smith writes: "Deluded and foolish they were, so we say according to our modern notions..." (page 650).

Well known, also, is the statement by historian Frank H. Epp in *Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920 The History of a Separate People* (1974), "The Canadian groups [emigrants from Russia of the 1870s] consisted mainly of Chortitza people, descendants of those poor and simple pioneers who in the previous century had first left Prussia for Russia..." (page 195). These are almost the exact words written by Peter M. Friesen in 1911 already quoted. That such misinformed, myopic views were openly expressed in an official publication of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, supposedly speaking for all Canadian Mennonites and not only the assimilationists, is truly astounding!

Evidently Kellerite ideas had now been morphed into some kind of a racist, genetic, cultural impoverishment thesis (also known as the "poor and simple" theory) (see Plett, "Poor and Simple," *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 15-16). One of the stellar formulations of same is found in the M.A. Thesis of Abraham Friesen, "Emigration in Mennonite history with a special reference to the conservative Mennonite emigration from Canada to Mexico and South America after World War One," (University of Manitoba, 1960). Dr. Friesen observes quite correctly that "...the Mennonites who did not take part in the emigration movement [of the 1920s to Latin America] disparaged and impugned the motives of those who did participate," (page 164).

The "poor and simple" thesis reflects the theme of modernization and the Anglo-conformist dominated scholarship at mid-century, and probably set the stage for the negative analysis found in the works of Leonard Sawatzky and Calvin Redekop on the Old Colonists already referred to. The template created by these and other writings is employed by modern-day neo-Kellerites such as Harold Jantz, Winnipeg, to bombard MCC and other institutions with such outmoded ideas apparently as part of some program of mass conversion of conservative Mennonites away from Gospel-centric faith to Evangelical Fundamentalist religious culture and Calvinistic traditions.

Evangelical Anabaptist Theory.

As Professor Abraham Friesen has already pointed out "Those who wish...can now pick and

choose...from a wide spectrum of radical reformers' scattered across the historical landscape of 16th century Europe," *History and Renewal*, page xi. It has become quite respectable within liberal and assimilationist Mennonite circles to argue that Evangelicalism is a modern-day configuration of Anabaptism, using Reformation leaders whose writings resonate with these ideas much like Ludwig Keller did 120 years ago. This is the so-called Evangelical Anabaptist theory (see Plett, "Is the future for Mennonites Evangelical?" in *Preservings*, No. 21, pages 39-40).

Keller's rejection of Menno and his vision of the people of God gathered in disciplined community in favour of an aberrant form of Anabaptism based on spiritualism, mysticism and individualism, provided the opponents of the confessionalist Mennonites with an intellectual weapon which they zealously employed to dismiss Flemish Mennonite tradition and culture as inferior and corrupt. Because Keller's ideas were adopted and echoed by many writers in the Russian Mennonite community they continue to have a profound impact, although Keller was basically discredited by his contemporaries.

Mennonites who have converted themselves to other religious cultures such as the Brüdergemeinde in Imperial Russia in 1860, the Rudnerweiders (E.M.M.C.) in 1937, and Evangelical Mennonite Conference in Manitoba in the 1950s, are still exalting ideas similar to those of Keller - albeit in a more modern configuration - providing an ideological platform for their aggressive attacks against and interference with the functioning of traditionalist Christian Gemeinden.

It is improper and untruthful to use such simplistic and outdated ideas as tools in maligning conservative congregations or even in suggesting that their faith is less worthy or invalid. The notion that those who have converted themselves to a liberal, spiritualistic, modernization and/or Separatist-Pietist/Evangelical Fundamentalist religious culture and agenda are the true Anabaptists, and that the conservative, traditionalist Mennonites who earnestly strive in simplicity to live out the teachings of the New Testament in the tradition of Menno Simons are not genuine Anabaptists, speaks of intolerance and condescension unwarranted by the historical facts.

In view of the propagation of such uninformed historiography and incorrect ideology, it was possibly understandable why conservative leaders like Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900), Chortitz, East Reserve, Manitoba, were openly critical of that kind of skewed higher education. It is within this context, for example, that Ältester Gerhard Wiebe referred to the majority of the leaders in the United States who had "...turned away from Bethlehem and have gone over to Bethel College..." Wiebe, *Causes and History*, page 67. Ohm Heinrich Balzer (1800-46), Tiede, Russia, referred to "...learned preachers with higher education, who in turn changed the church in its very foundations, making it conformed to the world," *The Golden Years*, page 244. Balzer concluded that "Consequently it was necessary to depart and secede in order that our Gemeinde could be led back to the foundation and original constitution of the church," *The Golden Years*, page 223.

Conclusion.

Historian Robert Friedmann has written that "Ludwig Keller rendered the Mennonites a meritorious service by his historical research, which obligates them to lasting gratitude," *Men. Ency.*, Vol III, page 163. However, his interpretations did not stand under the scrutiny of his fellow scholars. Friedman notes that "Today scholarship has learned to make a distinction between the spiritualists such as Denck, and the regular Anabaptists."

Nonetheless, Keller's theories were eagerly accepted by contemporary Mennonite historians as already mentioned. Following Keller's mistaken view of normative Mennonitism as a proto-Pietist branch of Protestantism, C. H. Wedel, John Horsch, C. H. Smith and P. M. Friesen overlooked the actual roots of Mennonitism which lay in the medieval monastic tradition, the Gospel-centricism of traditional Catholic theology, Erasmus and Christian humanism, Sacramentarianism and the Brethren of the Common Life. These elements constituted the experiential embryo of the Anabaptist movement in the Low Countries and it is here that the strength and sustaining life-vitality of the Flemish Mennonite faith are to be found. Surely the Flemish followers of Menno Simons are entitled to a historiography that accepts and acknowledges them as fellow human beings and treats them and their tradition of following Jesus with respect and tolerance.

The Evangelical Anabaptist theory is historically invalid and incorrect. It has dominated and corrupted Russian Mennonite historiography for far too long providing a rather implausible foundation for justifying what amounts to little more than disdain and ridicule of the conservatives. In view of the fact that the conservatives and traditionalists have invariably carried the Mennonite community on their collective backs with their hard work and pioneering spirit and that they emulated the heart and soul of the early Christian Church, one questions why they have been so badly misrepresented?

The example of Ludwig Keller illustrates the dangers when history writing is used as a tool in order to advance alien religious cultures and foreign traditions instead of actually documenting and honestly interpreting the unfolding of past events. Through the propagation of Kellerite ideas by his Mennonite followers, several generations of leaders were misled to unjustly denigrate their conservative and traditionalist ancestors who faithfully preserved the teachings of the great reformer Menno Simons.

In the closing paragraph of *History and Renewal* (page 146), Professor Abraham Friesen, Santa Barbara, California, poses the poignant question, "...who speaks for the Anabaptists? The one who conforms to our position, as in the case of Keller? If not, how do we determine who speaks for them?"

Mennonite historians of the Flemish-Russian stream, with only few exceptions, have not spoken for the majority of their brethren in the faith, nor have they correctly understood and told that story.

Whose history is it anyway? The Editor.

Hans de Ries and the Dutch Doopsgezinde

Hans de Ries (1553-1638).

Hans de Ries (1553-1638) was an important leader of the Waterlanders, the Dutch denomination in the 16th and 17th centuries which opposed and attacked the faithful followers of Menno Simons. Hans de Ries was a minister of the congregation at Emden, Friesland. After 1600 he served as the leader of the congregation at Alkmaar (see *Pres.*, No. 22, page 26). His followers, the Waterlanders, refused to call themselves Mennonites preferring the term Doopsgezinde. "The Waterlander leaders Hans de Ries and Galenus Abrahamsz were the great heroes" of Dutch historiography: Zilstra, *Om de ware gemeente*, page 20.

Hans de Ries' great protagonist was the heroic Pieter Jans Twisck (1565-1636), who vigorously defended the Mennonite Church and the purity of the Holy Gospel against the incursions of the anti-confessionals. Unfortunately - or fortunately, depending on one's viewpoint - the preservationist Flemish and Frisians were eventually driven from the Netherlands, establishing renewed communities in Polish-Prussia and Imperial Russia with a modern diaspora numbering 600-700,000. Under the influence of the anti-confessional teachings of Hans de Ries, the Doopsgezinde Church in the Netherlands was almost totally destroyed, declining from 200,000 in 1800 to 10,000 in 2000.

Although Hans de Ries was born in Antwerp, he was not part of the spirit and genius of the Flemish Mennonite church. The faith of Hans de Ries was incompatible with that of the Flemish Anabaptists who aligned themselves with the teachings and theology of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips. Hans de Ries can be seen as the forerunner of many other liberal assimilationists over the centuries who worked energetically to attack and interfere with the legitimate functioning of the Gemeinden of the spiritual descendants of Menno.

Hans de Ries rejected many of the key evangelical teachings espoused by Menno Simons and Dirk Philips and promoted spiritualistic and anti-confessional ideals which resonated with the Kellerite teachings. For that reason - presumably - he was treated favourably and exalted by C. H. Wedel, C. H. Smith and P. M. Friesen. Through these writings the spirit of Hans de Ries still prevails in standard Mennonite history texts such as C. J. Dyck, (*Introduction to Mennonite History* (Waterloo, 1993), and Cornelius Krahn (*Smith's Story of the Mennonites* (Newton, 1981)). Thus the leader whose liberal and anti-confessional ideas doomed his Doopsgezinde denomination in the Netherlands to irrelevance and extinction and who rejected the wholesome New Testament teachings voiced by Menno Simons is incorrectly held forth as a great hero of the faith.

Dutch Historiography.

The ideas and theology promoted by Hans de Ries gained considerable credence from the

Dutch Doopsgezinde historians who traditionally exalted the Waterlanders as the normative Anabaptists. This was the viewpoint expressed by A. M. Cramer (1837), W. J. Kühler (1940) and N. Van der Zijpp (1952).

This interpretation has been seriously challenged by the recent history, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlander 1531-1675* (Leeuwarden, 2000), by Samme Zilstra (see *Pres.*, No. 22, page 79). Zilstra points to the wealth of publications since 1952, "...which has outdated the normative interpretation of older writers such as Kühler and Van der Zijpp. Both writers utilized the images and conceptions...of the Waterlanders (for the 17th century), as the standard by which other denominations are measured. This led to serious misrepresentations such as the...enhancement of the interpretation of the Waterlanders - a relatively small denomination - as the ideal of true Anabaptism. This interpretation was aggravated by the idyllic images of the 17th century Waterlanders which resonated with the ideas inherent in the free-spirited 19th century Christendom..."

"In the first place, we have challenged the interpretation that the roots of Anabaptism should originate from the time before 1530....One of the options which could be pursued for the Oudste [Ältester] David Joris, was spiritualism and a belief in an inwardly process which made the outwardly, such as the organization of the Gemeinde, of little value....Further research has shown that until approximately 1545, Joris had considerable influence and that he was a serious contemporary of Menno Simons. This spiritual stream has also received far more attention than it has earned."

"As just mentioned, through the interpretation of Kühler and Van der Zijpp, the Waterlanders were made into the norm. The result was that the descriptions of the Frisians and Flemish, who did not fare well by this standard, followed rather predictable tendencies. The interpretations were constantly compared with those of the Waterlanders and were more ridicule than actual fact. We have done more justice to these groups with our writing which is distinguishable from Kühler and his followers. Nowhere in his work does he [Kühler] acknowledge that the Flemish were the largest denomination within the Doopsgezinde, only that he is ready to treat this group disproportionately regarding their numbers. By doing so it is made possible, as was bravely presented again in a recent work, to represent that the Waterlanders constituted the majority within the Doopsgezinden, when in actual fact they only made up some 20 percent.

"Furthermore, our research has revealed that the Waterlanders were not a monolithic block, as Kühler...represents, but consisted of a variety of separate streams. The characteristics

which Kühler ascribed to the Waterlanders, such as openness towards those who held other opinions, the aversion to confessions and the almost boundless tolerance towards different viewpoints among the educated, are revealed upon research to apply to only a fraction of the Waterlanders. And a not inconsiderable part of the Waterlanders (half of the Gemeinden in North-Holland), did not join themselves to the Lamists in 1670 but rather to the Zonists who came out of the Flemish. The anti-doctrinal character of Galenus definitely went too far for them."

"One of the reasons why they came to an incorrect understanding of the confessions of the Waterlanders, was a misunderstanding of the worth and the matter of the confessions generally....Whoever studies the primary sources more carefully will see that Galenus with his interpretation of the confessions (not binding, the apostolic creed as sufficient) and regarding the Ordnungen of the Gemeinde (essentially superfluous) did not represent the norm within his movement, and formed the deviant view more so than the Mennonites.

"These interpretations speak for a growing alienation towards a feeling of Mennonite identity for Galenus and his followers. These beliefs were definitely not shared by all the Doopsezinden. When Galenus and his followers wanted to implement these ideas among the Waterlanders they were also met by powerful opposition," pages 499-503.

Conclusion.

Kühler's historical interpretation has been described as "an attempt to seek an historical Anabaptist parentage for the advanced theological liberalism' of most 20th century Netherlandic Mennonites," Paul Toews, *Mennonites in American Society*, page 92. Based on the research and writing of Samme Zilstra it is no longer legitimate nor academically acceptable to present Hans de Ries and the Waterlanders as a norm for early Anabaptism. Nor can the Waterlanders any longer be represented as the majority and most influential group among the Doopsgezinde as it was the faithful and steadfast Flemish who deserve that honour. It appears that the task of writing Dutch Anabaptist history to properly document the history of the majority Flemish as well as other conservative and traditionalists denominations has yet to be fully engaged and completed.

To the extent that the introductory histories of C. J. Dyck and C. H. Smith have relied on the flawed accounts of Kühler and Van der Zijpp, they are of negligible value to the faithful descendants of Menno. Hopefully these historical errors and theological misconceptions can be corrected and rectified before the Mennonite Church in North and South America follows the example of the Dutch Doopsgezinde into irrelevance and eventually oblivion. The Editor.

Guest Essay

I am a Mennonite not an Anabaptist

“I am a Mennonite not an Anabaptist,”

by Levi Miller, Director, Herald Press, Mennonite Publishing Network, 616 Walnut Ave., Scottdale, PA., U.S.A., 15683.

Introduction.

“They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land,” Psalm 35:20.

I have lived my adult years in a church in which the basic stuff of sermons and conversations was to be against those who live “quietly in the land”. As a youth, I was taught that all that is needed for evil to triumph is for the good ones to be quiet. I still believe that.

I have been a part of a church which has had a love affair with warm and sometimes also noisy activism. Yet even today when I hear someone condemn us for being the quiet ones, I confess some guilt. After all of our church planting, justice, the fast lane, Ronald Reagan, video, and the Ten-Year Goals, I’m still a Mennonite, one of the quiet ones.

“...when I hear someone condemn us for being the quiet ones, I confess some guilt.”

It’s the difference between the 16th century and the 19th century. In the 16th century we were Anabaptists; in the 19th century we were Mennonites. It’s the difference between a revolutionary European restorationist movement and a North American experience which has lasted for generations. It’s the difference between the turbulent 1960s and the quieter ‘80s. If you would ask me if I’m an activist or a quietest, I might answer the latter as readily as the former.

In the ‘60s the Anabaptists fascinated and guided us with their fanaticism and faith. They belonged to a romantic era when we believed that we could turn the world upside down, especially if we could change the structures of our societies. Our heaven-stormer ancestors seemed exactly what was needed for an era when we sought to stop an unpopular war. Peace, justice, and racial fraternity seemed within grasp.

Anabaptism.

But today such activism and Anabaptism have lost their hold on us. I thought of this at a ‘60s and ‘90s retreat I participated in last year. We wanted to use the ‘60s to look at the ‘90s. But we were mostly looking back, fondly and almost sadly. Too much had changed.

Today we realize that spirituality and contemplation are also a part of the Christian life and community. Some of us admit to being a part of the middle class and wear suits as readily as demins. We have children to raise, spouses to love, and vocations to pursue. We should grieve the loss but not lose our identity. We have become less Anabaptist, but we can still be Mennonite Christians.

We are less Anabaptist in part because the Anabaptism of today is no longer the Anabaptism which Harold Bender introduced and domesticated in 1943. An Anabaptism of sisterhood and brotherhood, of discipleship, and of love and non-resistance can be accepted (Bender’s ideal). But the scholars have convinced us of the many origins of early Anabaptism. Some were violent peasants, some were scholars, some were spiritualists, and alas, not all were Swiss/South Germans. If the new definitions were more authentic historically, they nonetheless had the effect of removing Anabaptism further from our North American Mennonite reality.

Mennonitism.

And as we move further away from the ‘60s and Anabaptism, we find ourselves looking again at the 19th century. In pluralistic North America, Anabaptism lost its meaning as a faith of the persecuted and we became Mennonites. Humility and a deep piety preserved the way of yieldedness to Christ, community, and non-violence.

By the mid-1970s, Goshen College student Joseph Liechty, now a missionary in Ireland, would do a study of the gentle 19th century bishop John M. Brenneman and discover a paragon of Christian virtue (“Humility: the Foundation of Mennonite Religious Outlook in the 1860s,” *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, January 1980). In Brenneman and in the letters of that period, Liechty discovered what he called “much spiritual treasure of great value.” It was as though a thirsty man had deliberately gone to the desert and had found - of all things - water.

Evangelical Anabaptism?

Some, of course, still appeal to Anabaptism. The stories are gripping and powerful and it is admirable history. Nonetheless, at its worst, such an emphasis can lead to individualism, because to appeal to an Anabaptist community today is to appeal to a non-functioning society. An older generation of scholars such as John H. Yoder (*The Priestly Kingdom*, Notre Dame, 1984) and Norman Kraus (*Anabaptism and Evangelicalism*, Herald Press, 1979) have spent most of their adult careers appealing to this type of community.

Some evangelical church planters also like to call themselves Anabaptists. The Anabaptists were a growing evangelistic group and the term is sufficiently vague that one can use it to mean many things. It is not burdened with some of the cultural characteristics of North American Mennonitism. The Mennonite Brethren, for example, like it for this reason.

Mennonite Legacy.

In any case, the point here is not to eliminate Anabaptism; the point is rather to take the North

American experience seriously. And for the late ‘80s and the ‘90s, I believe that there is much in the legacy of the 19th century Mennonite experience to help us keep the faith. I have several suggestions:

1. **Recognize and appreciate the resilience and ongoing vitality within North American Mennonitism.** We would note that, by the grace of God, we have lived and worked and maintained Christian communities in North America for 300 years. Indeed we have planted such communities all over the globe. We would appreciate how this movement has had strong renewing qualities within itself.

It has gone from a martyr motif to humility, to missionary, to Anabaptist recovery, to our present peace, charismatic, and church planting phase. We would not shout “crisis” at each turn of North American Christianity’s yearnings, but we would have some perspective. We have borrowed from and also defended ourselves from other movements throughout our history.

2. **Basically accept the economic and social order in which we find ourselves** and give thanks to God for the many privileges and responsibilities of living in North America. We would be aware that our North American forbears were wealthy farmers who lived frugally and were quite literate about their economic system.

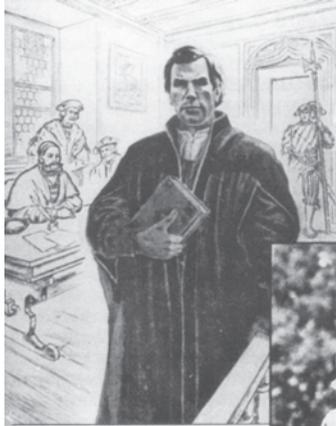
Mennonites have a long history of treating wealth, sometimes faithfully and sometimes in unfaith. Richard McMaster’s *Land, Piety, and Peoplehood* (Herald Press, 1985) documents this story quite well. The love of wealth and great disparities of wealth are the roots of all evil, as the Bible says. But our peasant-to-riches litanies are often beside the point. First, many of today’s professional daughters and sons of farmers have less real wealth than their grandparents, even if they may have more money to spend. Second, the question is usually addressed with a view to finding the ideal economic system.

We need not agree as to whether the British Tories, the French Socialists, or the Canadian Conservatives - three ruling governments - have the best economic blueprint for a just society. The more basic question for us is what to do with the wealth which God has given to us. God may be a democratic socialist, such as Duane Friesen argues in *Christian Peacemaking and International Conflict* (Herald Press, 1986) or God may be democratic capitalist. The 19th century Mennonite would have been reluctant to identify God too closely with any economic system.

3. **Be more intuitive and less scholastic in our teaching of the faith.** We would accept, for example, that a Mennonite Christian is by defini-

tion a pacifist. Interestingly, the 19th century Mennonites did not write much about peacemaking. They simply taught the Christian story from Genesis to Revelation and assumed pacifism to be a part of it. The biblical story was, of course, strongly reinforced by the martyr history with which we identify. But rather than teach Christian peacemaking like a driver's education course to adolescents - which, to be sure, is better than no peace teaching - we would make peace and non-resistance a part of our total understanding of being Christian.

Ron Sider, in an interview last year with *The Other Side* magazine, noted this influence in his Brethren in Christ church and home: "Without fully realizing it at the time, I acquired a deep commitment to peacemaking and to caring for the needy as well as a solid, orthodox theology which taught the deity of Christ, the bodily resurrection, the atonement, the Trinity, the person of Christ as both fully God and fully human - all the doctrines Christians have held down through the centuries" (October 1986, p. 10).



A 16th century Anabaptist: Michael Sattler in Europe. Photo - Gospel Herald, July 7, 1987, cover.

4. Accept our being a part of the North American middle class, in it but not totally of it. This is not easy. I would be the first to agree with Thomas Merton that it is hard for God to penetrate the middle class. In his autobiography Merton writes, "The one thing that seemed to me more or less impossible was for grace to penetrate the thick, resilient hide of bourgeois smugness and really take hold of the immortal soul beneath that surface, in order to make something out of it."

Yet Merton became attracted to St. Therese of Lisieux precisely because she kept everything which was bourgeois about her but not incompatible with faith. "She became a saint, not by running away from the middle class, not by abjuring or cursing the middle class, or the environment in which she had grown up: on the contrary, she clung to it in so far as one could cling to such a thing and be a good Carmelite" (*The Seven Storey Mountain*, p.354). St. Therese became a great Christian because, like many 19th century Mennonites, she simply applied the gospel to her middle-class life. We should do no less.

5. Recognize that there are various ways of being prophetic. The Hebrew prophets knew that sometimes the strongest prophetic word was to live in a "foreign land" with faith and hope. Protest and rebellion are only one form of prophetic witness. The 19th century Mennonite style was more in keeping with Jeremiah during the dark hour of Jewish captivity. Do not rebel, he counselled, "build houses and settle down; plant gar-

dens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters..." (Jer. 29:5-6).

This stance is especially hard for us today because we are so attached to our countries. The reason we had to hate America so intensely during the '60s was that we loved her so madly. We were the Christian citizen's answer to a jilted lover. We were a generation who had come to believe that we were young Americans, and we had redefined America as a country of the peaceful, the just, and the disarmed.

I thought of this several years ago when I visited Washington with my son and showed him the mall where over a half million of us had gathered on May Day of '71. We were angry that our government should have troops killing and being killed in Southeast Asia. If only, I thought, our government would act justly like the Canadians or the Europeans or the Vietnamese; then these people could return to



A 19th century Mennonite: A farmer in North America. Photo - Gospel Herald, July 7, 1987, cover.

peace and tranquillity. Alas, we were still to hear more killing in Southeast Asia.

Our hope and love for America, coupled paradoxically with an intense hate of the government, were probably misplaced emotions for a nation and how it behaves. The 19th century American Mennonites were more philosophical and realistic about the nature of nations. They hated America less, because they knew that no nation deserved the love that we had given to America.

6. Cherish a certain modesty and quietness. This is a biblical virtue which is often aesthetically pleasing and even has some utilitarian value. Roelf Kuitse of Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries spent some time visiting Mennonite churches, service workers, and missionaries

in Africa. He reported later that an African Christian leader told him Mennonites are still one of the most welcome groups on the continent because "they do a lot but they don't make so much noise."

Last summer my family spent several days in the gentle hospitality of Guillermo and Eva Zuniga in Mexico City. Zuniga is a physician who by choice lives in a modest sector where he serves the people and leads the Mennonite Church Council of Central Mexico. Guillermo said that he learned his service ethics from the Trique Indians of Mexico among whom he and Eva had lived and served for several years. Although they had little, the Triques shared with their neighbours.

"Quietism is not our only response; nor is it always the best one. But for many, it is both authentic and biblical."

On Zuniga's walls, among the Aztec and Mayan art, was a Pennsylvania bank barn. That barn, he said, was a part of a Mennonite family who helped him go through medical school. And now he wanted to serve and heal in the same way that others had helped him. This quiet Christian pietism is good and just and merciful. It is to love Christ deeply and to share that love.

I'm not saying that this is the only mode of behaving or the total Christian message. My stay in Mexico also reminded me that some 19th century Mennonites might well have joined Henry

David Thoreau in refusing to pay the poll tax in order to refrain from supporting America's war against that country in 1848.

Quietism is not our only response; nor is it always the best one. But for many, it is both authentic and biblical.

To "live quietly in the land" has deep rootings in the biblical and Mennonite tradition. We would do well to cherish it and not discard it cheaply.

Reprinted from the Gospel Herald, July 7,



A 20th century Mennonite: the author Levi Miller. Photo - Gospel Herald, July 7, 1987, cover.

1987, pages 482-484.

The Author:

Levi Miller is a member of the Scottsdale Mennonite Church in Pennsylvania. He is currently serving as director of Herald Press. Earlier he served as director of the Historical Committee of the Mennonite Church (Goshen, Indiana). Levi is the author of *Ben's Wayne* (Good Books) and *Our People, the Amish and Mennonites of Ohio* (Herald Press).

Levi can be contacted at Levi@mph.org. Phone 724-887-8500.

Letters

We welcome letters to the editor and appreciate feedback from our readers, critical or otherwise. We will assume that all letters and e-mails can be published, unless the contrary is indicated. We reserve the right to edit, discard and/or not to publish any letter/e-mail and/or not to respond. E-mails should not contain attachments. All letters and e-mails should contain the writer's name, address and home phone number. Letters should be short (preferably under 300 words) and to the point.

#24-2920 Cliffe Ave.
Courtenay, B.C., V9N 2L7
June 27, 2003

...You did it again. What a wonderful issue of *Preservings*. And so much new stuff. Thank-you. "Elizabeth Bartel"

Box 1674, Battleford
Saskatchewan, S0M 0E0
June 25, 2003

Thanks for your excellent detailed journal on Mennonite history. Read every article, finding each one captivating, especially "Mother Teresa - the Saint of the Gutters," page 60. Congratulations to her assistant, Esther Reimer Crowe, for receiving the Governor-General's "Caring Canadian Award".
Sincerely, John P. Nickel.

Box 42, Glaslyn
Saskatchewan, S0M 0Y0
June 27, 2003

Dear Brother Plett,

I read and reread the editorial, pages 38-42 of *Preservings*, No. 21, with tremendous interest and found myself agreeing in point after point. As you know by my correspondence, I do not agree with you on every point you raise; yet, must admire the Christian conviction that you so forcefully and fearlessly raise. Bravo, Bravo.

To tell the truth, I have used some of the points that you addressed in our local adult Sunday School on several occasions. Specifically? My disagreement with Mr. Kraybill's "evangelical" conclusion - I agree wholeheartedly with your conclusion, page 42.

Thank-you for your insight - would you agree it is God-given? I could be (and will be) somewhat specific - "The Third Way", page 42, is a masterful presentation.

But enough, "Raymond Toews"

Box 1945, Altona
Man., R0G 0B0
Received June 12, 2003

Having recently read your letters section of the December 2002 *Preservings*, I feel a response is needed to your attacks on Premillennial Dispensationalism. To claim that because I believe the truth of scripture as it was brought out by Darby and Scofield and others of the later 19th century must mean that Christ has been reduced in my faith to "a magical wizard of oz, whose mantra's need to be repeated in order to gain salvation," is completely unsubstantiated and simply a tragic error....

With regard to your claim that Premillennial Dispensationalism is based on man's thought and

not on scriptural proof, I have enclosed a pamphlet entitled "The Seven Dispensations of Scripture".....

Just write me.... Franklin Rempel
Editor's Note: Mr. Rempel is referred to the article "The Kingdom of God and the End Time," by Walter Klaassen in *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 28-30 as well as subsequent exchanges with M. J. Moll and Terry Tiessen published in *Pres.*, No. 20, pages 59-60. In his article Dr. Klaassen pointed out that "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 the subsequent exchange, Dr. Klaassen pointed out that "Jesus proclaimed a different kind of kingdom, 'a kingdom that is not of this world.'" In reality Premillennial Dispensationalism as it has evolved in North America is built on the premises and presumptions of Scottish Commonsense realism and Baconian philosophy (see *Pres.*, No. 20, page 48). The bible school movement of the late 19th century, in turn, largely developed in order to propagate these heresies and as such had an incredibly devastating effect upon Mennonites, since many fell victim to these delusions and propagated the same so fanatically. On the other hand, we should not be discouraged as the Bible also clearly teaches that there will be many false teachings in the end-times which will deceive the very elect.

You claim you're faith is centred on the "Lord Jesus Christ" and yet the tragic truth is that the Darbyite-Scofield religion neatly excises Jesus Christ and His life, teachings and example out of Biblical teaching during this time of grace and thereby its adherents cannot honestly claim the name of Christian.

By becoming a mouthpiece for the Mullahs of American Fundamentalism, you are shaming not only the name of your heroic Mennonite ancestors - who suffered the worst persecution known to mankind in Flanders for 150 years - but also the sacrifice of our Lord on the Cross whereby He won the victory over death and evil, establishing the ethic of love for those who would follow Him.

Box 1, Group 1, Selkirk
Manitoba, R0E 0M0

Greeting! Many thanks for issue number 22 of the *Preservings*. This is a particularly interesting issue. 'Flemish Mennonite Martyrs....' is some account! Sadly I missed an obviously very interesting Family History Day in March [2002 - *Pres.*, No. 20, pages 64-66], if the article on p. 34ff. about Flemish and Frisian Roots, is anything to go by. The new cover is most attractive too!

I am enclosing my cheque for my subscription to *Preservings*. My kindest wishes to you. "C. S. Grant"

July 1, 2003
9 Greensfield Dr., Winkler
Manitoba, R6W 1E3

Greetings.

I want to encourage you to keep up interesting articles in *Preservings*. You tell another side of a story that needs to be told. Enclosed also find my renewal of my subscription. Thank-you "Abe Wiebe"

2206 Wiggins Ave.,
Saskatoon, Sask., S7J 1W7

Dear friends of the Historical Society,

Have appreciated reading the wealth of information in *Preservings*. Enclosed is my cheque for \$20.00 so that I may continue receiving copies. Thanks for your diligence in researching, collecting, preserving and publishing this information.
Respectfully, Esther Patkau.

37-54006 Range Rd. 274
Spruce Grove, Alberta, T7X 3S8

Enclosed find \$20.00 for membership in 2003. Thank you for this informative magazine/journal.
"Elizabeth Siemens"

367 Walsh Trail
Swift Current, Sask., S9H 4R3

Enclosed is a cheque to pay for subscription to *Preservings* for 2003. I enjoy the magazine immensely.

Yours truly, "Peter R. Derksen"

July 8, 2003
maryrdubeck@shaw.ca
37-31450 Spur Ave.
Abbotsford, B.C., V2T 5M3

Since I believed this to be a truly scholarly journal, I must admit there were things I did find surprising and also disturbing....I am taken aback by the lengthy editorializing that follows positions taken that do not agree with the editor. Letters to the editor usually point out and elaborate the letter writers' views on issues presented in the article....More disturbing is the defensive, strident tone and language employed in these rebuttals. One example will suffice to make my point.

Leona Wiebe Gislason, a well-respected historian and author of *Rückenau*...., in her letter to the editor (*Pres.*, # 21) pointed out several valid observations pertaining to the Eichenfeld Massa-

cre. Your response was that "the tent missionaries evidenced an unchristian and spiteful attitude towards the Mennonites in Eichenfeld" and then you generalized with "this is typical of those who forsook the Christo-centric faith of their forebears..." Do you really believe that only one Mennonite Gemeinde interprets, represents and reflects a Christo-centric faith correctly? Are we not all as fellow believers in Christ striving to live our lives in such a way as to please the Lord? May God give us the grace to do this regardless of which Mennonite heritage of faith we follow....

Best Wishes, Mary Dueck

Editor's Note: 1) As we state in our publication statement (*Pres.* No. 22, page 4), "*Preservings* is a project of Mennonite orthodoxy.... The editorial viewpoint.... is conservative and orthodox with respect to the Russian Mennonite story...." We make no apologies for defending that position relative to letters to the editor within the context of Mennonite historiography, which for far too long already has been dominated by the fictitious and apostate "Evangelical Anabaptist" theory. By not only defining this project but also defending the same, a symbolic space and textual territory is created where orthodoxy is normative - something which has not been possible since the noble Zonists in Amsterdam in the 1660s so heroically defended the traditional Gospel-centric faith espoused by Menno Simons.

2) The spiteful attitude of the "tent missionaries" was revealed by their view that "Not a single believer was to be found in Eichenfeld" (*Pres.*, No. 21, page 25), demonstrating thereby that a) they were fanatical adherents of Separatist Pietism, recognizing as Christian no one who had not met its manmade and legalistic entrance requirements; b) they had no respect for believers who remained steadfast to the faith of their fathers, or c) they were completely ignorant of genuine Christo-centric faith as manifested in Flemish Anabaptism. I agree with what I think you are saying, that Christians of different confessions should respect each other, but the tent missionaries - in my mind - manifested the complete opposite position so characteristic of Separatist Pietism - and this is exactly my point: the Eichenfelders did not run after the tent missionaries attempting to alienate their children and turn them against their faith, church and community, it was the other way around.

#2511-40 Homewood Ave.
Toronto, Ont., M4Y 2K2
July 7, 2003

Re: Mother Teresa - The Saint of the Gutters, *Pres.*, No. 22, pages 56-61.

Wow, that's a real work of love! If Mother had done it herself I know she would have chosen the exact same quotes that you selected for the inserts. They express her most pivotal concerns.

Your're right, the rescue cartoon says it all, and the history, Requiem and Eulogy accurately cover the life

and death of our great Hero. Anyone that didn't even know her would be compelled to read the whole feature.

As for my personal story, I'm still in disbelief - me and Mother Teresa on the same page and photograph? I'm unworthy yet euphoric. In fact, almost "intoxicated" at the very thought of it! I'm enclosing a small donation [\$500.00].

Shan't ever forget, "Esther Reimer Crowe"

Card: We can never clone Mother Teresa but a compilation like yours is proof that the source that she tapped into is still at work. What a complete and beautiful expose. Thank you very much, "Esther"

1706 Kentfield Way
Goshen, Indiana
U.S.A., 46526
15 July, 2003

Subject: Transition
Delbert,

So soon you tire of making spott of our Steinbach and Hanover church leaders? Surely there's another twenty years' worth of ridicule somewhere, especially with Ralph Friesen joining you in rewriting local history.

Now that you've changed the historical society's emphasis to pit the Flemish Mennonites against the Frisians you will have a wealth of Dutch material to feed that old rivalry. All you need now to complete the break with the community is a postal box in Antwerp.

"Melvin J. Loewen"

Editor's Note: We appreciate your always cogent observations. I know it was a big shock for many, to all of a sudden have the history of their people told from the perspective of their own grandparents. The story of our Mennonite ancestors in Flanders tells us that the polemical disputations among the conservative Mennonites in the northern Provinces of the Low Countries, as well as the aggressive attacks by the apostate Doopsgezinde were never exported to the south, where a spirit of submission to the Gemeinde as the bride of Christ prevailed and allowed them to survive 150 years of persecution. Many of the most noble and heroic



Elisabeth Giesbrecht, daughter of Vorsteher David Giesbrecht, El Capulin, Casas Grandes, Mexico, feeding the cows prior to milking. Photo - Eddy Plett, Jagueyes, Feb. 19/03.

of these traits are still manifested in the Hutterites, Old Order, Amish and Conservative Mennonites of the modern-day including our beloved Old Colonists.

Plautdietsch-Freunde e.V.
Robert-Hanning-Str. 14
D-33813 Oerlinghausen, Germany
From: "Peter Wiens"

<peter.wiens@plautdietsch-freunde.de>

Date: Wed, 23 Jul 2003 21:24:24 +0200

Velmol Dankscheen fe dee....nieje Preservings!
Etj hab daut Heft uck futs derchjebledat en faustjestalt, daut etj doa vel benne lese well en mott. Besondasch entressere mie dee Artijel "Flemish an Frisian Mennonite Roots" en "Name and Origins..." von Henry Schapansky....

Daut eschte, waut etj mie nu oba aul futs derchjelest hab, es dee Bok-Rezensioon von Ralph Friesen ewa Rudy Wiebe sienen latsten Roman "Sweeter Than All the World". Dit es wertjlich een wundaboaret Bok en een butajewenlicha Schrefstala! Wiebe we je nu eene tietlang en Dietschlaunt en etj haud dee Jeleajenheit, ahm en uck siene Fru tjanetolere. Etj kaun mie goot veastale, daut dee Literatua von Rudy Wiebe uck seea halpe woat, daut "ons" dietschet Voltj hia aul dee ewa 200 Dusend Russlaunt-Mennoniete een tjlien bet beta tjane en vestone (en vleicht uck leewe?) woare....

By the way: Enne neachste FRIND (Somma 2003) schriew wie een bet ewa Rudy Wiebe. Wie welle ons een bet meea met ahm en siene Literatua beschafte....

Aulet Baste fe die en fe dee "Flemish Mennonite Historical Society"!

Peeta Wiens

30 Jul 2003
Bremerhafen, den 06.07.03.
Westermannsgang 9, Germany

Subject: Brief uber Diese Steine

Zu allererst mochte ich mich fur das herrliche Buch [Diese Steine] herzlich bedanken. Im Verlauf vieler Jahre habe ich mir bereits einige Bucher betreffend unserer Volksgruppe, der Mennoniten, besorgt, und keines von denen aber war so ausfuhrlich, was Chortitza angeht und auch sonst, wie das von Ihnen bezogene. Herzlichen Dank auch im Namen meiner Schwester. Dieses Werk ist allen Russlandmennoniten als Erinnerungshilfe warmstens zu empfehlen... Seien Sie herzlich gegruebt und nochmals vielen Dank fur das Buch. Grueb, "Heinrich Dyck"

Hertogerstr. 20
2211 Hamburg, Germany
July 31, 2003

"Diese Steine - Die Russlandmennoniten" ist fur mich ein Tischbuch, ein Historische Dokument. Ich mochte noch ein Exemplar diese

Buches erwerben, bitte senden Sie mir das Buch auf die genannte Adresse.

“Elisabeth Wittenburg”

Colonie Sommerfeld No.4,
Asuncion, Paraguay
Aug. 4, 2003

Crossway Publications Inc.

Werte Freunde Adina Reger und Delbert Plett Q.C. wie auch der Arbeitsstab von C.P.I. Da wir schon drei Sendungen von dem Buch *Diese Steine* erhalten haben, die verteilt worden sind unter unsern Gemeinde (Prediger) und Schullehrer; die gerne zur erbauung in der Mennonitische Geschichte angewandt werden. So möchten wir einem herzlichen Dank ablegen für dieses Material, in welchem so viele lehrreiche Stücke erscheinen, die uns zeigen und sagen wie viel es unsern Mitbrüder und Schwestern gekostet hat um treu zu bleiben, um ihren Glauben an Jesus Christus zu leben, und ein zeugniz zu sein für uns und folgende Generation.

Sollten Forderungen an uns gerichtet sein, so schreibt an - “Johann J. Heinrichs” Schreiber für die Sommerfeld Gemeinde.

Box 1074, Warman
Sask., S0K 4S0
Sept. 5, 2003

I would like to draw attention to an error in my article on Ältester Abram J. Buhler in the June *Preservings*. Under the group photo on page 103, I refuted Leonard Doell’s claim that this photo was taken in 1952 for the reason that Franz Thiessen was only elected into the ministry in 1953. But the Franz Thiessen in the picture is not the Franz Thiessen from Vanderhoof, B.C., as stated but another Franz Thiessen presumably from the Sommerfeld Gemeinde in Manitoba. My sincerest apologies to Leonard and both Franz Thiessens.

Truly yours, “Abram Buhler”



An Old Colonist couple in Bolivia picks up their copy of *Diese Steine* at the home of Peter Giesbrechts in Santa Cruz. The story of the Mennonites presented from a Gospel-centric perspective.

Box 521, Hugoton
Kansas, 67951
Sept. 30, 2003

A note of thanks for all the great work you have done on the history of the Mennonites and the interesting stories you have in “Preservings”. I really enjoy and [they] are informative. Enclosed is a gift of appreciation for the information you have given us on our Mennonite history. It makes us appreciate the stand our parents had to take. Thanks. “Lee Isaac”

Oct. 6, 2003
Bolivienhilfe

CDC 6294, Santa Cruz
Bolivia, South America
bolivienhilfe@mennoniten.org

Subject: diese steine

Ich wollte mich noch einmal im Namen der Mennoniten in Bolivien bedanken für die Bücher “Diese Steine”. Die Mennoniten in Bolivien sind sehr interessiert an diesen Büchern und lesen sehr viel darin. Unten habe ich ein Bild eingefügt, wo eine Familie sich gerade ein Buch bei uns im Haus Betesda abholt.

Hier ist eine Familie Fehr, die möchten gerne die Zeitschrift “Preservings” bekommen. Könnt ihr die zuschicken auf meine Anschrift?

Und noch eines. Ich habe hier in Bolivien einen Enkel vom Prediger Johann P. Wall (der Delegat nach Südamerika war) getroffen. Und wir haben interesse, mehr Material über sein Leben und die Delegatenreise zu sammeln und ein Buch machen. Wie denkt ihr darüber?

Nun so weit für heute, seid Gott befohlen. “Peter Giesbrecht”

Editor’s Note: Es ist sehr wertvoll über unseren edle Voreltern Information zu sammeln, damit unsere Kinder und Kindes Kinder eine Kunde über ihre Herkunft haben. Es ist besonders wichtig Biographien über Leiter und Prediger, wie Johan P. Wall, Durango, Mexico, die ihr Volk an der Zeit treu geleitet haben, anzufertige. In *Preservings*, Nr. 20, Seiten 98-99 and 105, finden sie weitere Information über den Delegat Johan P. Wall.

Haußstrasße 20
71554 Weissach im Tal
Deutschland
30. Oktober 2003

Subject: *Diese Steine* - Reger und Plett

Mit großem Interesse habe ich ihr Buch gelesen. Es vermittelt mir einen guten Einblick in das Leben der Mennoniten, die ab 1788/89 nach Russland ausgewandert sind. Auch über die fast unüberbrückbaren Differenzen der Aussiedler und Spätaussiedler konnte ich so mein Wissen erweitern.

Nur bei einigen Begriffen hatte ich Schwierigkeiten, da sie mir im Mennonitischen Umfeld nicht geläufig sind. Sie sprechen des öfteren vom “separatistischen Pietismus”, oft im Zusammenhang mit der “kleinen Gemeinde”. Beides sind laut Text theologische Abspaltungen der Mennoniten, die ihren eigenen “mennonitischen” (?) Weg gehen. Die

Erläuterungen am Schluss des Buches “Zum Glauben und Denken” und ein Bericht aus dem Buch von Horst Penner “Weltweite Bruderschaft” halfen mir einiges mehr zu verstehen.

Das die Konflikte von damals bis heute viele mennonitische Gemeinden, bis hin zur Sprachlosigkeit, entzweien ist schmerzlich. Die Schwierigkeiten mit fremden Schulen wurde mir erschreckend bewusst, als ich gemeinsam mit Abram Fast (Weißenthurm), Dr. Heinrich Klassen (BTG), Peter Rempel (AGUM) und Hermann Heidebrecht (ABD) in das Innenministerium einbestellt wurde, um über die Schulsituation von mennonitischen Spätaussiedlern zu sprechen, die ihre Kinder nicht zu allen Schulveranstaltungen schickten.

Eine kleine Korrektur möchte ich anbringen: auf Seite 533 schreiben sie im dritten Absatz eine Erklärung für IMO. Dieses ist nicht korrekt, denn die IMO (Internationale Mennonitische Organisation für Hilfswerk und andere christliche Aufgaben) ist nicht das Hilfswerk der Niederländer sondern ein Hilfswerk deutschen und niederländischen Mennoniten.

Zur Bereicherung der Geschichte der Mennoniten, die aus Russland ausgewandert sind, schicke ich ihnen das Buch “Die Backnager Mennoniten”. Hier [in Backnag] wurde nach dem II. Weltkrieg die erste Mennonitengemeinde der “Russland Mennoniten” (für viele bis heute ein Schimpfwort) gegründet, die aus der Ukraine (Galizien und Raum Chortitza) fliehen mussten.

Mit freundlichen Grüßen, “Günther Krüger”
[Vorsitzender des Verbandes der Mennonitengemeinden in Baden-Württemberg, Deutschland]

Enne ejne Sproak lese en schriewe tjene.

Von ewa sas Miljarde Mensche oppe Welt talt jieda sasta aus “analfabeet”. Dise Fru ooda dis Maun es aulsoo een “nje gramatny”, woona nich lese en nich schriewe kaun. Dee Vollvesaumlinj von Vereinte Natsionne stalt enne Resultatsoon 56/116 faust, daut dee “alphabetisierung entscheidend ist für den Erwerb von unenbehrlichen Lebensfertigkeiten jedes Kindes, jedes Jugendlichen und jedes Erwachsenen, die sie befähigen, die Herausforderungen anzunehmen, dene sie um Leben gegenüberstehen [...]”. Soo haft dee UNESCO dan uck fe dee Joare 2003 bet 2012 dee “Internationale Dekade der Alphabetisierung” utjeroopt. Sel wie Plautdietsche ons to dise Grupp von Analfabeete tale? Retjt ons tom Lewe dee Sproak von onsem “Gaußlaunt” too? Daut muucht vleicht hia en doa so senne...En dise *FRIND*-Utgow red wie von “Plautdietsch Literatua”, uck wan dee meschte von ons noch nuscht opp Plautdietsch jelest habe, en noch wenja jeschrewe habe...Nich schlemm? Much senne. Oba doch zimlich schod. Enne ejne Muttasproak lese en schriewe tjene - daut schient mie eene gaunz normale Sach to senne. En et schient soo, daut etj nich auleen so dentj.

Peter “Pota” Wiens, Chefredaktion, *FRIND*, Utgow, Nr. 10, sied 8 (see page 63).

News

Professor Sjouke Voolsta, Amsterdam - Retires

“Doopsgezinde dr. Voolsta seeks to halt cosmetic facelift of the church: Young Yuppies and a steadfast sailor,”
by K. C. Karel, from *Reformatorisch Dagblat*, Nov. 21, 2002, page 19.

Introduction.

They are old enough, now to sit and talk with their children regarding faith. The Haarlem preacher, J. Gulmans, had to wait six years until the anniversary of the founder Menno Simons (1496-1561), to recognize that the 12,000 doopsgezinden of the Netherlands were elderly. After another two years a movement took place to implement “a new thinking, faith and practice” among the “dopers” in the Netherlands. An ambitious package of regulations was presented to put a halt to the departure of people. This was to combat the greying process and the “doopsgezinden” congregations were to receive new power.

This has become a dead end road, finds Voolsta. In an interview this summer, the scholar criticized the current program of his church community. “What has been promulgated as a renewal, is nothing less than the restoration of a dead, non-committed, individualistic, ‘doopsgezinde-view’ based on sentiment.” In order to voice a Christian faith in a secular society, you will find it necessary to define the denominational confession, said Voolsta, who characterized the program of the administration as “nostalgic nationalism.”

Narrow Way.

Sjouke Voolsta spent his youth on a farm in the neighbourhood of Akkrum. His father was an outstanding farmer. His mother, who died in his youth, sharpened his Mennonite conscience. Voolsta registered as a student of theology at the Doopsgezinde Seminary in Amsterdam where he graduated *cum laude* with a thesis on the teaching of the incarnation of the 16th century theologian Melchior Hoffman, a theme with which he graduated 11 years later, with honours. He served the Doopsgezinde congregations of Goes-Meddelburg-Vlissingen (1972), Eindhoven (1978) and Amsterdam (1982).

Thereafter Voolsta taught for more than 20 years in the Doopsgezinde Seminary, at first as lecturer and then, since 1984, as professor. He taught courses in Christian faith and ethics and in the history of the Doopsgezinde. The training all these years was conducted at the University of Amsterdam (shortly it will be moved to the Free University).

At the beginning of this month [Nov. 2002], Voolsta took his leave together with lecturers Dr. C. van Duin and Dr. A. G. Hoekema. The trio completed a collection of writings under the title, *Balanceren op de smalle weg* (Balancing on the narrow way”) (published by the book center). At the end of the eighties, Voolsta used the biblical expression to characterize the position of the community life of the Doopsgezinde in the Netherlands. By balancing between ecumenicalism and

self-sufficiency, independence and orthodoxy, the country’s oldest protestants in the past decade have sought their place in the church spectrum.

Self-sufficiency is the course that the Doopsgezinde wants to achieve in ecumenical discussions. Consequently, according to Dr. Hoekema, the Doopsgezinden, as a small minority in the community must give as much room as possible for pluralism and alternative structures, where ecumenicalism and peace became the position next to the narrow way.

Another interpretation is also possible. Narrow is the path of the man or woman not blown about by every tempest. Colleagues and friends have gotten to know Voolsta year’s-long career as a professor and researcher as someone who maintains his own course.

In his contribution to the farewell anthology, Piet Visser, Voolsta’s successor, characterized his predecessor’s nature “as steadfast to look beyond dearly held assumptions to set the subject under intense scrutiny thereby provoking genuine dialogue in order to get at the heart of a matter. It is also the style of Voolsta, a passionate sailer, to fix a firm course before his eyes, also searching for creativity and intelligence in the winds of God.”

Visser recognizes in Voolsta, “the faithful theologian, the critical historian, the free-spirited Frisian and an outstanding Mennonite.”

Regarding the fixed course missing in his church, Voolsta says firmly, “a community must be permanently engaged with its biblical faithfulness. The dialogue must develop from this perspective. The survival of the church does not come from a universal feeling of spirituality as it is now everywhere understood. Service of God has become a luxury item for the individual.”

Sadly, Voolsta noted that a knowledge of the scriptures and tradition have gone missing. Exactly these elements are so necessary to form a community. The professor has always pursued this goal in order to arrive at the composition of a confession to thereby restore the venerable tradition of the Doopsgezinde to an honoured stature. “Originally each group had its own confession. With the establishment of the Doopsgezinde brotherhood in 1811, it was decided not to adopt any confession so that this would not become the cause of disagreement. The confessional tradition was thereby forsaken.”

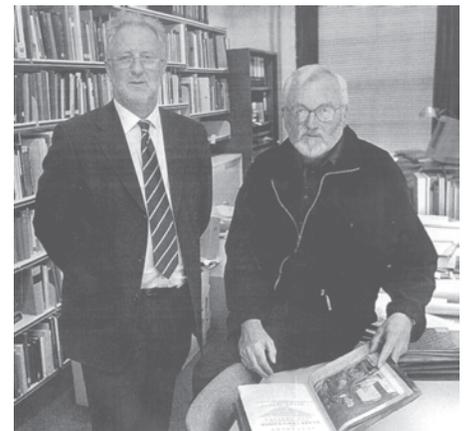
“However, without a confession, a Christian community cannot amount to anything. The often empty content of the present discussion must make room for dialogue regarding the scriptures. The confession must not be imposed from the top, but must derive out of such a discussion. Human restraint also becomes relevant and they question whether this position [currently held] is

as self-evident as many think. Nor can we avoid talking about the teaching of reconciliation. If it has not been done for us, how can we be a reconciling influence within society?”

Existential.

As a result, Voolsta has always known the Doopsgezinde tradition as a type of existentialism, which has consistently been suppressed in the 20th century. He mentioned the names of William de Clercq, Jan Ter Borg and Jan de Liefde, all of whom had departed from the Doopsgezinde. Many Doopsgezinde have joined in such a separation. The 19th century reformation tradition of the separate community voices new resonances with the orthodox stream of “Dopers” as it has always existed. This aspect has remained under represented in the writing of history and I wish to ask that we respect the same. The Doopsgezinde past was almost totally written as a success story of the free-spiritedness [“liberalism”] of the second half of the 19th century. The right-thinkers have disappeared from the landscape. We must do the right thing by this group.”

Voolsta distanced himself from the “cosmetic facelift” whereby many churches are currently polishing their image. Why do Christians always have to go along with the delusions of the day? Christians should stand in opposition regarding the thinking of their culture and must pay attention so as not to succumb to these allures themselves. The old conservative ascetic tradition must again be revived. To be Christian contemplates a defined form of self-discipline. Take the example of Islam with its strict self-discipline and forms of prayer. Christians should also practice such forms.”



“To be a Christian assumes a definite form of self-discipline,” says professor Dr. S. Voolsta (right), who recently took his leave of the Theological Seminary in Amsterdam. “Take the example of Islam.” Left, his successor, Dr. P. Visser. Photo-*Reform*. *Dagblat*, Nov. 21, 2002, page 19.

Political Priest Helped Aged, Poor

“Obituary - Donald Malinowski: Legislature became extension of inner-city parish,”
by Aldo Santin, *Free Press*, June 7, 2003, pages 1-2.

A memorial service will be held this afternoon for Rev. Donald Malinowski, a north-end MLA for 25 years whose colourful and sometimes controversial life included involvement as a Polish partisan during the Second World War and advocacy for the poor and seniors.

Malinowski, who died on May 16 at the age of 89, was the first priest to run for the Manitoba Legislature. He ran unsuccessfully for the NDP in Winnipeg Centre in 1962 and 1966 but finally won in 1969 in Point Douglas.

Malinowski won four consecutive elections, all the while remaining a parish priest. He announced his retirement from politics in 1985.

Former premier Ed Schreyer said he appointed Malinowski to be his legislative assistant, adding the parish priest had tremendous impact in the community.

“He gave us a great deal of encouragement in gearing up to build literally thousands of units of senior-citizens housing and nursing-home care,” said Schreyer, who will deliver the eulogy today at a service at 1 p.m. at St. Mary’s Polish National Church, 361 Burrows Ave., - the same church where Malinowski had been the parish priest for 17 years in the 1960s and ’70s.

When he won the NDP nomination for Winnipeg Centre in 1966, he said he hoped to “translate the Judeo-Christian ideals into legislation.”

He said in an 1983 interview that he decided to enter politics “to help people not only on Sunday, but every day of the week.” Politics, he said, was a natural extension of his community work. “I found in many fields that spiritual help was not enough for people who were short of money or couldn’t find decent shelter.”

As a youth, Malinowski fought in the forests of the Swietokryskich Mountains with the Polish partisans against the Nazis from 1943 to 1945.



Priest Donald Malinowski: spiritual help sometimes not enough for the poor. Photo Free Press, June 7, 2003, page 1.

He was imprisoned when the Communists took over Poland after the Second World War. He was sentenced to death for refusing to swear allegiance to the new regime but managed to escape and fled to Sweden. He emigrated to Canada in 1950 and then entered the Polish National Catholic Church seminary in Pennsylvania two years later.

Malinowski married Anna Glazer of Toronto in 1956. He was ordained in 1957 and was appointed the parish priest at St. Mary’s in 1959, a post he held for 17 years. He was later pastor at St. Joseph’s church in Beausejour.

As an MLA, he advocated for increases in the minimum wage and affordable housing for seniors. He opposed Sunday shopping and the return of the death penalty.

He made headlines in the run-up to the 1981 election when he won a closely contested nomination in St. John’s against lawyer Roland Penner, who would later be appointed Attorney General.

The local executive condemned Malinowski’s tactics, which included using a four-year-old

endorsement from federal NDP elder statesman Stanley Knowles. During the nomination speech, Malinowski spoke in Polish and warned the mostly elderly non-English-speaking party members that anyone who voted for a communist would spend an eternity in hell, apparently a reference to Penner’s father Jacob, one of the founding members of the Canadian Communist Party.

The executive also accused him of paying for memberships and busing in members who no longer lived in the riding. A subsequent investigation by the party executive later cleared Malinowski of any wrongdoing.

As parish priest in St. Mary’s, he oversaw the construction of a new church on Burrows Avenue, and spearheaded the construction of seven seniors-housing projects in Point Douglas, including the Polish Manor.

Among his honours for his community work, Malinowski was awarded the Order of Canada, the Order of St. John of Jerusalem Knights of Malta and the Polonia Gold Medal.

Carl Bangs 1922-2002

From the University of Chicago Alumni Magazine:

Carl O. Bangs, native of Mandel, Norway, PhD 1958, a minister and professor, died July 7, 2002, of a stroke. He was 80. He was married to Marjorie Friesen of Salem, Oregon. Dr. Bangs served in Nazarene and Methodist pastorates in Oregon, Missouri, and Illinois. In 1953 he became a professor of philosophy and religion at Olivet College, where he taught until 1961 and also directed the band and founded a brass choir. He then joined St. Paul School of Theology as a historical-theology professor, remaining until 1985....He is best known for his biographies of Dutch theologian Arminius and American Methodist bishop Phineas Bresee....In retirement Bangs was a member of the pastoral staff of Old Mission United Methodist Church.

Source: Nazarene Archives website - courtesy of Dr. James Urry.

Survivors include his wife, Marjorie, and a son. His wife - the Friesen Mennonite connection died two weeks later. Dr. and Mrs. Bangs lived in Kansas City, Missouri. In the 1960s Dr. Bangs spent considerable time researching his wife’s Kleine Gemeinde ancestral roots. She was the granddaughter of Rev. Abraham F. Friesen (1857-1935), first minister of the Steinbach Brüderthaler Church (later the E.M.B.) in 1898 (see *Dynasties*, pages 445-6).

The Nazarene Archives, Kansas City, recently received the Carl O. Bangs Collection, containing over 50 c.f. of papers. Dr. Bang’s attention to detail is evident in his biography of Bresee and lies is at the heart of his current project: a book on the Mennonite Friesens. His wife, Marjorie Friesen Bangs, who speaks Dutch and German like her husband, has been his constant partner in these projects.



Dr. Carl and Marjory Friesen Bangs. Photo - Bert Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Rhineland M.L.A. J. M. Froese Dies

Jacob M. Froese, a Reinfeld farmer, community leader and long-time member of the Manitoba Legislative Assembly, died on June 14 at his Winkler home at the age of 85.

A member of the Old Colony Mennonite Church, Froese represented the constituency of Rhineland in the Legislature from 1959 to 1973. Jacob M. Froese was the son of Old Colony Bishop Jakob Froese.

Froese was first elected as a Social Credit member for Rhineland at the age of 41 in a bye-election, following the death of veteran Rhineland MLA W. C. Miller, on Nov. 26, 1959. Froese was re-elected in the Manitoba general elections of 1962, 1966, and 1969, and worked till a 1973 loss.

He served with distinction during the tenures of Premiers Doug Campbell, Duff Roblin, Walter Weir and Edward Schreyer.

He was the sole Social Credit Party member, but this didn't stop him from influencing votes and decisions with his relentless research and principled stands. Some considered him the conscience of the Legislature.

Froese served nationally and internationally in the Credit Union League from 1950-73, and was president of the Winkler Credit Union for a time. He spent countless hours serving as a director on MCC Canada, Eden Mental Health Centre and on the boards of Winkler's Salem Personal Care Home, and Bethel Hospital, and as a director of Radio Southern Manitoba. He organized and chaired the Property Owners Association of Stanley Municipality for many years.

Education was a high priority for Mr. Froese serving as chairman of the local Calder and Reinfeld school districts, for two years, as secretary from 1944 to 1958, and on the Manitoba School Trustees' Association, for 15 years as vice-chairman.

Froese supported both public and private education. As vice-chair of the Manitoba Mennonite School Association, with children at Mennonite Collegiate Institute, he was instrumental in getting provincial funding for private schools. He was also vice-chair of the Manitoba School Trustees Association for 15 years, where he worked successfully to get improved pensions for teachers.

Froese also campaigned for public support against the adoption of unitary divisions. His position on unitary divisions was based on his opposition to the loss of local control it would entail; the centralization of administration in an undesirable manner and the delegation of power to the appointed finance board, so says Rhineland's 1984 history by Gerhard Ens, *Volost & Municipality* (Altona, 1984), pages 227-9.

As a grain and special crops farmer, he served as president of the Winkler Cannery, a founding director of the Flax Growers of Western Canada, a director of Palliser Wheat Growers Association, the U.S. International Wheat Growers Association, and the US Durum Growers.

In a family interview, son Jack says, "Dad made some sacrifices in that our farm did not

grow as some of our uncles' farms grew. But did we leave a positive Christian example? When Conservative MLA Arnold Brown stopped farming he rented his land out, and do you know whom he rented it to? It was to Dad and his sons; we are still farming this land to this day. We three brothers are farming together and have always farmed together."

In a recent *Winnipeg Free Press* interview, Edward Schreyer, former New Democratic Party premier and Governor General of Canada, remembered Froese warmly. The two sat next to each other on the same side of the Legislature, recalled Schreyer, noting that Froese had a cau-



Jakob M. Froese - Photo by Harry Siemens/Cdn. Men., July 14, 2003, page 4 (see also Pres., No. 16, page 41).

cus of one, and I had a caucus of five, Schreyer said. Froese was an atypical politician, soft-spoken and concerned primarily with agriculture and issues affecting his and other rural ridings.

Schreyer and his wife recently attended Froese's 60th wedding anniversary party. "I think our showing up pleasantly surprised him," he said.

Froese made headlines in 1961 when he pitched a tent in the main rotunda of the legislature after being denied an office as a lone Social Credit MLA. Manitoba Lieutenant-Governor Peter Liba, was then a *Winnipeg Tribune* legislative reporter, and said the story he wrote helped get Froese an office.

"He was always a gentleman and he was always courteous. He did his homework for his constituents," said Liba in a *Free Press* interview.

Schreyer confirmed that at one point Froese turned down the NDP government offer to be Speaker of the House. Earlier this year, in an interview for a history class, Froese explained

why: "Electors voted me in to represent them."

Froese obituary stated, "It was his faith that sustained him and caused him to respond...to constant demands and requests for assistance from people in all areas. He lived out his lifelong motto 'to serve and to be of service without expecting or receiving anything in return.'" His faith was an integral part of who he was and what he did. He stood up for what he believed and did not apologize for it.

Funeral services were held in the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church June 19, with burial in the Reinfeld Cemetery.

He is survived by his wife Mary (Peters), seven daughters, three sons and their families.

Written by Elmer Heinrichs, PO Box 1106, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0. Assignment writer. A shorter version of this article was published in the *Canadian Mennonite*, July 14, 2003, page 4. A biography of Jakob M. Froese's father, Altester Jacob J. Froese (1885-1968), Reinfeld, Manitoba, was published in *Preservings*, No. 16, pages 41-43.

Battle of the Foot-in-mouths

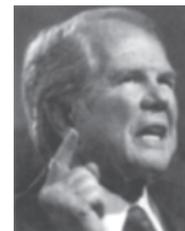
The U. S. State Department raged last week that Pat Robertson had suggested nuking its HQ. Did he, or didn't he?.....

On Liberia's Charles Taylor (who later fled the country with millions of dollars): "So we're undermining a Christian Baptist President to bring in Muslim rebels to take over the country?"

On his prayer offensive to get rid of liberal Supreme Court justices: "One justice is 83 years old, another has cancer and another has a heart condition. Is it not possible for God to put it into the minds of these three judges that the time has come to retire?"

And about that State Department: "When you get through [a recent book on U.S. diplomacy], you say, "If I could just get a nuclear device inside Foggy Bottom, I think that's the answer....."

From *Time*, Oct. 20, 2003, page 63.



Pat Robertson, leader of the Religious right in America.

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A New Bethania in Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine

“Mennonite Family Centre of Zaporizhzhya, Ukraine: The Mennonite Benevolent Society in Manitoba Embraces the Challenge,” by Louie Sawatzky, *Beacon of Hope*, Number One, Issue One, pages 1-4.

Many Canadian Mennonites can trace their roots to what is now called Zaporizhzhya in the Ukraine. The Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home of Winnipeg also has a cultural and historical tie to that area in that our predecessor, known as the Bethania Mental Hospital, was founded close to the Dnieper River in the Chortitza Colony of Southern Russia in 1911. Many readers of this paper have read articles about various projects now taking place in this area; projects led by people of vision who trace their ancestry to the steppes of Russia.

In the mid-1990s, Mennonite tourists from Canada were attracted to Heritage Cruises and tours of the world-famous Dnieper River, making stopovers in Zaporizhzhya, the first and oldest Mennonite settlement in Russia, dating back as far as the 1780s. Participants returned home burdened by the poverty, poor health and lack of any services for the frail elderly. Their stories filtered to the Board of the Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, who in 1997, in partnership with our founders, the Mennonite Benevolent Society (Manitoba), dispatched a delegation of three on a fact-finding mission. Upon their return, they confirmed the existence of pervasive and dire need and that MBS could reasonably play a role to mitigate the hardships for at least some of the people residing in the area.

Partnering with the Zaporizhzhya Mennonite Church, a very basic home care service was established in the spring of 2001. The Church serves as a referral point to identify the most vulnerable elderly within the Church and sur-

rounding areas. Currently approximately 15 seniors are receiving daily or weekly visits by the caregivers. Every attempt is made to work with the families in helping them care for their own.

Anne Goertzen, a Bethania employee in Winnipeg, provides leadership to the program. Her work is augmented by the efforts of locally trained Ukrainians and volunteers who constitute the “staff” for the program.

The home care program is currently being expanded by adding several small apartments where respite care will be offered for those who need a place to go for a period of time, either to recuperate or to build up strength until they can return to the current care provider. This addition to the home care program was ready to take the first guests in October of this year. This is an exciting program expansion.

A home care training program was begun in 2002 and more recently a palliative care training module has been started. This training program has ballooned, with courses given not only to workers within our program, but to family members, persons working within the medical system of the City, and to persons in surrounding areas. We are astounded by the demand for this course, and the changes that take place for those taking the course, and those receiving the care from the graduates.

A modest equipment pool with basic orthotic supports to enhance independence in activities of daily living has also been put in place.

The vision for this comprehensive program includes a facility from where ongoing care can be provided for those whose needs cannot be managed within the present environment. Such a facility will be fully accessible for persons with disabilities.

We are grateful to the City of Zaporizhzhya for their donation of a 10-storey building shell, which when retrofitted, will be suitable to house this program for years to come. It will serve as a visible “Beacon of Hope” for the at-risk elderly who are the prime focus for the initial phase of this program. It will also double up as the church home for the Mennonite congregation in Zaporizhzhya. The MBS vision



Louie and Nancy Sawatzky, Winnipeg. Louie Sawatzky has been appointed project manager of the new building project for a seniors' care home in Zaporizhzhya. Louie and Nancy both grew up in Southern Manitoba. Photo - *Beacon of Hope*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, page 4.

for Ukraine lights the way for many of us to return to our roots with extended hands, reaching the hearts of the people of Zaporizhzhya. This dream can only become a reality when we assemble as a community (of Mennonite and other Ukrainian descent) to join in the effort. While it is clear that there are many risks inherent in undertaking such a project, we are inspired by the words of Paul Toews, Russian Mennonite historian:

“There are opportunities that come to a people because of their history. It would be a great irony if the greatest Mennonite contribution (in Ukraine) were yet to come.” For more information or to join in this exciting project, please write to:

Louie Sawatzky,
158 Orchard Hill Dr.,
Winnipeg, Manitoba,
Canada, R3X 1K4.
Phone (204) 253-3631.
E-Mail: lsawatzky@aol.com

From *Beacon of Hope* (Volume 1, Issue 1, Summer 2002).



The City of Zaporizhzhya donated this 10-storey building shell which when refitted and equipped will house the Mennonite Benevolent Society program for years to come. Photo - Rudy P. Friesen/*Beacon of Hope*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, page 3.



The main building of the original Bethania Mental Hospital built in 1911 on the village site of Alt-Kronsweide, just north of Einlage along the Dnieper River. The facility accommodated 76 patients. Photo G. Lohrenz, *Damit es nich vergession werde*, page 129/*Diese Steine*, page 147.

Ukraine - Mennonites Show Mercy to Neighbours

“Mennonite women in Ukraine show mercy to neighbours,” by Maria Linder-Hess, Mennonite Central Committee, Winnipeg.

Kutuzovka, Ukraine.

To help meet needs in their community, women from Kutuzovka Mennonite Church have organized a “mercy group.” The 10-member group volunteers time each week to visit local people who are elderly, sick or bedridden. The mercy group is a “place where faith in Christ can be put into action,” according to participant Lyuba Chernyetz, who also says volunteering has helped her realize the joys of serving. “I never knew I could be fulfilled by helping other people,” she says. Chernyetz, 46, joined the church in 2000.

Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) worker Rebecca Spurrier helped the mercy group form last year. Now the women meet biweekly to discuss their activities. They keep a running list of community members who could benefit from a cheerful visit or helping hand, and they make sure each person on the list gets regular visits.

Recently the group began visiting patients in a psychiatric hospital in nearby Molochansk. On an afternoon in June, Chernyetz dropped in on 9-year-old Oleg, the grandson of a woman she used to visit. Oleg had lived with his grandmother until last winter, when she died from an illness. Following her death Oleg was sent to a children’s home, but recently his father returned to the area and the two now live together. Chernyetz invited Oleg to a church-run summer day camp.

She then visited a middle-aged woman named Lida who has been partially paralysed for four years and can rarely leave her third-floor apartment.

Like the other mercy group members, Chernyetz does not own a car. She most often walks or hitchhikes in order to visit people’s homes. She lives on a small farm in the village of Dolina but hopes to someday study at

a Bible college.

Each Tuesday the mercy group goes to Dolina Home for the Elderly to chat, sing and pray with residents there.

Olga Lartina, 80, who lives at the home, says she always looks forward to their visits. “We sing a song - ‘In prayer I receive joy.’”



Lyuba Chernyetz, right, brings homemade cherry biscuits to 9-year-old Oleg. Chernyetz is part of the women’s mercy group of Kutuzovka Mennonite Church in southeastern Ukraine. (Photo by Matt Lester). Photo -MCC News Service.

That one about prayer is my favourite.”

Dolina and Kutuzovka are located in an area of southeastern Ukraine once called Molochna Colony. Mennonite immigrants from Prussia founded the colony and its dozens of villages at the start of the 19th century and lived there until World War II (see *Pres.*, No. 22, page 77). It was the largest Mennonite colony in the Russian Empire. During that time, Dolina village was called Schönau and Kutuzovka was called Petershagen.

The Kutuzovka Mennonite church was first built in 1892 but was later closed by Soviet authorities and used for grain storage. Church work began here again in 1998, and the building was restored in 1999 (see *Pres.*, No. 16, page 50).

Rebecca Spurrier, of Dillsburg, Pa., is working with school, church and other community efforts in the area. Linder-Hess is a writer with MCC Communications.

Rebecca Spurrier is a member of Grantham (Pa.) Brethren in Christ church.

From *Mennonite Weekly Review*, August 4, 2003, pages 1-2.

Fresno Prof. gets Fulbright for Ukraine

Fresno, Calif. - A Fulbright Scholarship will allow a Fresno Pacific University faculty member to teach American history while researching Mennonite history.

Paul Toews, history faculty and director of the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, will be in Ukraine from September through June on a Fulbright lecture-research award.

He will teach U.S. history at Zaporizhshia State University and visit archives throughout the former Soviet Republic in search of documents relating to Mennonite history.

The Fulbright program is sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. For 57 years it has sent Americans to study, teach and do research abroad and brought international scholars to the United States.

Toews’ research will focus on finding documents relating to Russian Mennonites, whose story has been forgotten by the archivists who store the records.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Mennonites came to Russia at the request of Czar Catherine II to farm the Ukraine. They were persecuted under Soviet rule in the 20th century, and most eventually left the country. Classed by the Soviets as “national minorities” along with Jews, Tartars, religious dissenters and other groups, they were treated officially as though they never existed.

In one and sometimes two trips a year since 1996, Toews has searched archives throughout the Ukraine, working to identify and secure reproduction rights to millions of pages of documents for a consortium of five archives in Kansas, Winnipeg and British Columbia.

What he and other Mennonite scholars are doing “will ultimately reshape the Mennonite story,” Toews said. His work has also



Paul Toews. Photo - Men. in American Society, page 441.

sparked the interest of Ukrainians. “This was part of their history, as well,” he said.

Also while in Ukraine, Toews will lead his 10th Mennonite Heritage Cruise. More than 1,500 North American Mennonites have taken these cruises, visiting sites and connecting with their history.

From *Mennonite Weekly Review*, August 4, 2003.



At the MCC-supported Dolina Home for the Elderly in southeastern Ukraine, MCC worker Rebecca Spurrier visits resident Nadyezhda Serdyuk. Clutching Spurrier’s hand, Serdyuk says she is sad because her sight and energy are failing. “When we’re with God,” Spurrier replies, “you’ll see everything. And we’ll sing and dance.” (Photo by Matt Lester). Photo - MCC News Service.

The GRANDMA Genealogical Database

The GRANDMA Genealogical Database, by Dr. Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon.

Mennonites have a long tradition of being interested in family history and genealogical research. With the advent of modern computer technology it has become feasible to organize and integrate all of this information into databases using genealogy programs. Alan Peters in Fresno, California, was probably the first Mennonite genealogist to enter substantial amounts of genealogical data into a database. As an outgrowth of Alan Peters' work and the efforts of an active core of genealogists in the Fresno area, the California Mennonite Historical Society launched a cooperative worldwide project in 1991 called the GRANDMA Project. The goal of this project has been to create a unified database containing as much genealogical information as possible about the ancestors and the descendants of Mennonites of Low German background (i.e. those who trace their ancestry back to The Netherlands, West Prussia, and/or Russia).

The first version of the combined genealogical database, known as GRANDMA, was created in 1996 after merging the gedcom files contributed by 12 genealogists all together to create one unified database and containing 135,482 people. This database was released on CD-ROM and was known as GRANDMA 1. Through the contributions of hundreds of other genealogists the GRANDMA database has grown significantly since 1996. The second version of the database, GRANDMA 2, was released in 1997 and contained 267,864 names. GRANDMA 3 was released in May 2000 and contained 401,268 names. The most recent version of the database, GRANDMA 4, was released in December 2002 and contains 672,293 individuals from 205,463 families.

The genealogical data on the *GRANDMA 4* CD are formatted for three different genealogy programs: Brothers Keeper 5, Brothers Keeper 6, and Legacy 4. Users of the Grandma database need to become familiar with at least one of these programs if they want to access the data on the CD. Brother's Keeper 5 is an older, simpler version of the Brother's Keeper program. Brother's Keeper 6 is the latest version of the program and has been completely redesigned. It would be advisable for genealogists using the GRANDMA 4 database to learn how to use the Brother's Keeper 6 program.

Accompanying the *GRANDMA 4* CD is a 94-page manual that users will want to keep on hand for reference. The manual explains many things about the database and about the other materials found on the CD. Among the most important things the manual explains is the use of the "Name Code" system that Alan Peters and Jeff Wall developed in the early 1990s and which is still being refined as necessary. Because many Mennonite given names and surnames are spelled in many different ways, a system was devised in which all of the major Low German Mennonite surnames were assigned a number between 1 and 301. Similarly, all the common given names were assigned a two-letter code. For example, all

variant spellings of the surname Klassen have been given the surname code "036" and the given name Kornelius and its variant spellings have been given the given name code "co". The surname code and the given name code are combined to create a "Name Code" such as "036co".



The Grandma 4 CD. A valuable research tool especially for those without easy access to a Mennonite archives.

When a Name Code such as "036co" is used in the search screen preceded by a backslash in either version of the Brother's Keeper program a complete list of all people having the name Kornelius Klassen and all of its variant spellings will be brought up, sorted by their birth date.

Also included on the GRANDMA CDs are additional materials of interest to Mennonite genealogists besides the GRANDMA database. The *GRANDMA 1* CD includes scanned images of genealogical records from the Rosenort Mennonite Church of West Prussia. The *GRANDMA 2* CD includes scanned images of the pages from the genealogical portion of Benjamin H. Unruh's very important book *Die niederlaendisch-niederdeutschen Hintergruende der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*. The *GRANDMA 3* CD includes scanned images of genealogical records from the Tragheimerweide and Orlofffelder Mennonite Churches and the *GRANDMA 4* CD includes scanned images of genealogical records from the Tiegenhagen Mennonite Church.

One of the most exciting aspects of the GRANDMA Project has been the development of an on-line version of the GRANDMA database during the past two years. Ken Ratzlaff in Topeka, Kansas, developed the software for the on-line version of GRANDMA and others such as Jay Hubert provided significant input as well. The on-line version may be found at <http://www.grandmaonline.org> and contains the most recent version of the database. Access to the on-line version is by subscription only.

Among the strengths of the GRANDMA database are its large size and the fact that many of the early Mennonite church records from the 1700s, 1800s, and early 1900s have already been

entered into the database. The data from many published Mennonite genealogies can be found in the database, as well as information taken from many other sources. The ship passenger list information for all the Mennonites who immigrated to the United States has also been integrated into the GRANDMA database. There are plans to do the same for the Mennonites who immigrated to Canada.

Probably the most significant weakness to the GRANDMA database is the fact that much of the genealogical data in the database is not linked to any specific source. The reason for this is the fact that many of the people who have submitted gedcom files to be included in the GRANDMA database have not taken the time to appropriately attach sources to each event. However, a researcher can usually determine who contributed a particular piece of information by reviewing the various compilation files, which contain all of the original gedcom files in an unmerged state before they were integrated into the GRANDMA database. Even though there is much data that is not linked to a source, there is also quite a bit of data that is linked to one or more sources. There are currently over 10,000 separate sources cited in the GRANDMA database and efforts are ongoing to increase the amount of genealogical data that is linked to specific sources. Because there is always the possibility that an individual bit of data found in the GRANDMA database is erroneous, it is best to confirm the information found in the GRANDMA database from primary source material if at all possible.

The GRANDMA database has become an excellent source for genealogical information for Mennonites of Low German background. For genealogists just beginning to research their ancestral lines this should probably be one of the first sources they consult in their quest to understand their "roots". The California Mennonite Historical Society is seeking additional genealogical material to add to the GRANDMA database and is also interested in correcting any errors that researchers discover in the database.

The *GRANDMA 4* CD may be ordered from Kevin Enns-Rempel - phone (559) 453-2225; E-mail: kennsrem@fresno.edu; or write the Center for M. B. Studies, 1717 Chestnut, Fresno, California, USA, 93702-4709. Also see the website at <http://www.fresno.edu/affiliation/cmhs/gpc/home.htm>. Basic cost \$30 U.S. or \$45-\$50 Cdn.



Alan Peters, founder of the Grandma project. Photo - Men. Historian, Dec. 1998, page 3.

In Memorium - Historian Horst Penner (1910-2002)

"In Memorium - Historian Horst Penner (1910-2002), Kircheimboladen, Germany, author of *Der Weltweite Bruderschaft*,"
by Dr. Horst Gerlach, D-67295, Weierhof, Post Bolanden, Germany.

Dr. Horst Penner was born on January 27, 1910, in Neuteich, West Prussia....His father carried on the business of iron dealer and merchant....Horst Penner received his baptismal instruction and baptism in 1926 in the Mennonite Gemeinde at Ladekopp, Großes Werder [Vistula Delta]. The instruction was held according to the Elbinger Catechism of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1725-96). From his earliest youth Penner was a book worm. On one occasion his thrifty grandfather Peter Wiebe (Laddekopp) warned him against the acquisition of more new school books and asked, "Kannst du denn schon alles, wat en de ole Böker stet?"

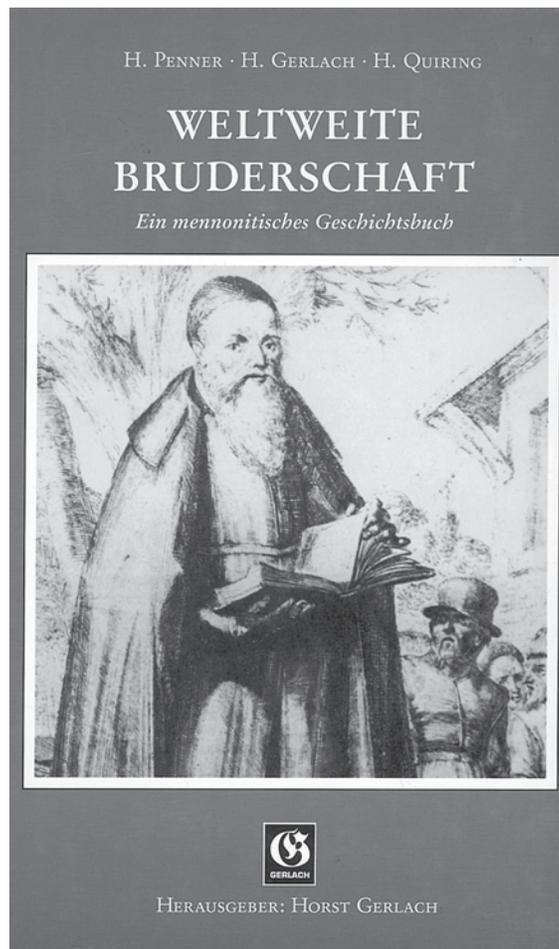
Horst Penner studied history, geography and German philology in Tübingen, Innsbruck and Königsberg. His advisor for his doctoral thesis was Professor Friedrich Baetgen, later President of the "Monumenta Germaniae Historica". Baetgen said to him, "You are a Mennonite and I am assigning to you the topic, *the settlement of the Mennonite Hollanders [Niederländern] in the Vistula Delta.*" This became the topic that he could never forsake throughout the rest of his life. His first teaching position was in Zoppot near Danzig. He went to Berlin to further his proficiency in sports....Here he met Clara Schrade....[They] were married in 1939 and from this marriage were born three sons and one daughter.

Then came the war which he experienced in the naval flak service. While stationed in Gronigen and Sappemeer with a radar unit, he used his free time to research the Niederländische [Netherlandic] background of the Mennonite eastward emigration. Later he was with Rommel's Afrika Corps and was seriously wounded during a bombing attack in the Tunisian harbour of Sidi-Ab-Dalah and again later in Italy in an accident involving a transport truck.

When the Red Army was approaching the Vistula Delta in 1945, Horst Penner was taken from his birthplace with a military medical train just in the nick of time.... His next post was as public school teacher in Obristfeld near Coburg....Penner always wanted to return to the



Dr. Horst Penner.
Photo - Horst Gerlach.



Weltweite Bruderschaft: Eine Mennonitische Geschichte, 5th edition, 542 pages. A standard German-language work on the history of the Mennonites. To order write Horst Gerlach.

Gymnasium (high school) and wrote a letter to Richard Hertzler, Weierhof/Pfalz. He answered, "Report at once to the Nordpfalz Gymnasium in Kircheimboladen." He received the position as assistant master and from 1959 to 1967 served as school principal. Under this responsibility also came the reconstruction of the Gymnasium.

During his spare time, Penner occupied himself with further research into Mennonite history. In 1955 he published *Der Weltweite Bruderschaft: Ein Mennonitisches Geschichtsbuch*. The book went through many printings which were always expanded and became the standard work of Mennonite history and was read in schools and Gemeinden in Russia, Mexico and Paraguay and was also eagerly used by many outsiders. The resettlement worker ("Umseidlerbetreuer") Hans von Niessen, Rengsdorf near Neuwied, remembered that he used the book in the 10th grade in the Zentralschule (high school) in his time in the Neuland Colony in Paraguay. "It was best work available at the time in the German-speaking market."

In 1973 a Russian-German seminary student from the Baptist Seminary in Hamburg smuggled the book to Russia. Here it was eagerly transcribed by hand, embellished with pictures and passed around. In this manner the Gemeinden living in exile again found new access to their roots. The Ältesten Heinrich and Gerhard Wölk, currently living in Frankenthal, who came to the Pfalz in 1978, related that they had taken part in such a transcription. It is told about the "Penner book" that when it appeared in Kazakhstan, there immediately was a circle of readers among the youth. The book was read in turns and discussed. The partakers thereby received a look into the Mennonite world and realized they were members of a world-wide family. People felt bonded and related in the faith with the fathers of the faith, with the courageous Anabaptist martyrs, and the "Quiet in the land" of all time periods.

In 1978 the first volume of the *Geschichte der Ost- und Westpreussischen Mennoniten* appeared, published by the Mennonitische Geschichtsvereins (Mennonite Historical Society). In this book the roots of all surnames of this community were traced according to their heritage. Hardly a week would pass in the Mennonitische Forschungsstelle [Mennonite Research Centre, Weierhof] that researchers would not reach for this book in order to research their own roots. The book covered the time prior to 1772. Later it was joined by another volume, which dealt with the time after 1772. The second edition of the first volume was soon sold out. At present it is in the process of being reprinted and a reprint of the second volume is also being prepared.

In addition, Penner wrote some 50 articles which were published in the *Westpreußen-Jahrbuch*, the *Mennonitische Jahrbuch* and the *Mennonitischen Geschichtesblättern*....A number of years ago Penner wrote a novel *Der Viegenhof an der Weichsel*. In 1994 the family paper, *Der Bote* published this manuscript consisting of some 90 type-written pages as the literary crowning masterpiece of a life of research. The President of the German Federal Republic decorated Penner with the Federal Service Cross for his honourable contributions and the City Mayor Dr. Lothar Sieß made him an honorary citizen of the City of Kircheimboladen. Horst Penner was also always a welcome guest at the meetings of the Landsmannschaft Westpreußen.

Gary Waltner, director of the Forschungsstelle, commemorated the service of the deceased on behalf of the Mennonite Historical Society [of Germany] and Dr. Horst Gerlach for the Landsmannschaft Westpreußen.

Translated and reprinted from the *Mennonitische Geschichtesblätter*, 2002, pages 216-218.

“Frind” - A Publication for the Language

“Frind” - A Publication for the Language: first even Magazine published

by the Plautdietsch-Freunde (Plautdietsche-friends) for a language previously passed on orally,” from *Lippische Landes-Zeitung*.

Oerlinghausen (kk). Peter Wiens never expected these developments. Two years ago [2000], the - at that time - 31 year-old founded the Plautdietsch-Gruppe (Society) in Oerlinghausen (see *Pres.*, No. 20, page 73). A short time later this was followed by Internet access, conferences and readings in the Low German language. Latest project: the magazine “*Plautdietsch-Frind*”. This publication is the first time that a print medium for the international Plautdietsch community is available on the market.

In the meantime Plautdietsch is being spoken on all continents. To some degree it consists of entire village communities that have retained their handed-down language. For the most part, those mastering the dialect are Mennonites. Many of them came to Germany in the 1970s and thereby the Plautdietsch is also strongly represented in the southern city of Oerlinghausen.

Peter Wiens himself was born in Siberia and came to Germany in 1975. At that time, as he remembers, his mother-tongue was Plautdietsch. He learned Russian and German as foreign languages. In the meantime the Plautdietsch-Freunde E.V. (Plautdietsch Society Inc.) have spun a web which binds together Plautdietsch speakers in the entire world. An objective of the society, says the 33 year-old Wiens, is not only to cultivate the language but to also bring forward the written word.

The Plautdietsch language involves mainly an oral, spoken tradition of which there are hardly any written documents (Endnote). This results in a danger of losing certain characteristics and developments of the language which have evolved

over many centuries as no written tradition secures its continuing existence. This is a development which always more Plautdietsch speakers are seeking to work against.

Only a few years ago, the Canadian Jack Thiessen published a Plautdietsch dictionary. Like his fellow citizen, Reuben Epp, Thiessen wrote stories which can also be found in the first issue of the “Plautdietsch-Frind”.

Peter Wiens publishes the magazine for the society and also functions as the editor-in-chief. In terms of contents and graphics design the magazine is very attractive and offers articles for reading, recipes and information regarding Plautdietsch activities or media. *Frind* is published every three months [Issue No. 10 will come out at Christmas, 2003].

The production costs of 1000 copies was 3,000 Mark (approximately 2000 U.S.) which are firstly distributed to members of the society and to subscribers. With the first issue, Peter Wiens has been able to win rich numbers of the

Russian-Germans as interested customers; now he must also increase the number of paying subscriptions.

“Even Plautdietsch speakers have their difficulties with the written form,” declares Wiens. Those who until now have only spoken the language but never read, and certainly have not written, must first make themselves familiar with the written version. “But that,” Peter Wiens is convinced, “is purely practice.”...

From *Lippische Landes Zeitung/Der Bote*, April 24, 2002, page 37.

Endnote: See “Krahn Letters,” in *Pres.*, No. 15, pages 11-14. Because Plautdietsch was disparaged by many of the so-called intelligentsia (e.g. P. M. Friesen) among the Russian Mennonites in the later part of the 19th century, and the strong move to Germanization, much of the Plautdietsch letters and sermons traditionally written among the common folk have presumably gone lost.

“Plautdietsch Freunde e.V. (Plautdietsche Friends Inc.): Society for the documentation, promotion and nurture of the plautdietsch language,” by Editor Peter Wiens, Oerlinghausen, Germany.

Well-known Plautdietsche authors such as Arnold Dyck or Dr. Jack Thiessen from Canada describe Plautdietsch, the circa 450 year-old dialect of the Russian Mennonites, as their “virtual Homeland,” (see *Pres.*, No. 15, pages 131-136). The number of speakers of Plautdietsch in Germany has increased dramatically during the last decades through the arrival of more Aussiedler from the former Soviet Union. Until now there has - unfortunately - not been an organization or lobby group on behalf of Plautdietsch. Something is now supposed to change in this regard.

The organizational meeting of the Society of “Plautdietsch Freunde” took place in Oerlinghausen. Twelve people from the region of Ostwestfalen-Lippe took part. The charter members are between 20 and 40 years old; the majority are Germans - more specifically Mennonite Germans from Russia - from the former Soviet Union who have immigrated to Germany and who to a great extent speak Plautdietsch as their mother tongue. Founder and chair of the society is Peter Wiens from Oerlinghausen.

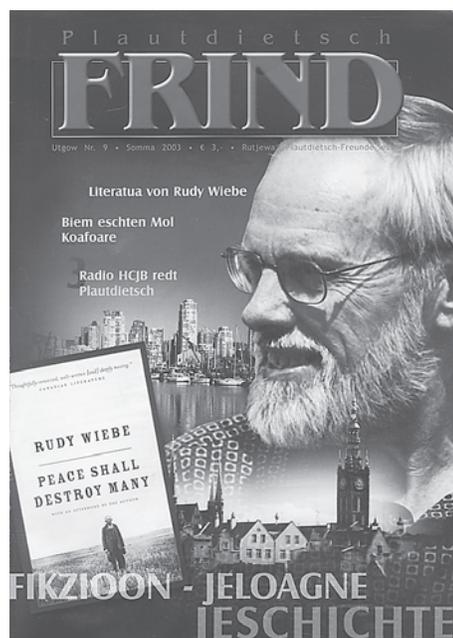
The gathering and presentation of Plautdietsch material belongs among the first priorities of the society’s goals - above all, also on the Internet. But also the organization and holding of public meetings in and about Plautdietsch stand in the middle priorities for the Society: for example, conferences, readings, film-nights, concerts, public high school courses, etc. Study trips to Plautdietsch-relevant locations also belong among these goals [In the summer of 2003 the Society organized a tour of the Mennonite settlement in Paraguay and in 2002 a tour to

Zaporozhe, Ukraine, the former heartland of the Russian Mennonites]. The periodical, “Plautdietsch FRIND” is intended not only to report about the activities and projects of the society, but to also be a public forum, namely, a communications vehicle for Plautdietsch in Germany and world-wide.

Added to the long list of objectives also belong the promotion and support of literary productions, of translations, and of socio-cultural as well as linguistic research. Also highly desirable are contributions for the development of a Plautdietsch grammar, as well as the publication of dictionaries and reading books for the Plautdietsche.

At present the society is still in its infant stages. With the entry into the Register of [non-profit] Societies and the recognition of the values of the society by the Finance Ministry, the first steps have already been taken. In the meantime lecture conferences have been held, and study trips undertaken. Plautdietsche courses have been offered, and much more. Information regarding actual conferences, projects, support work, promotions, memberships, etc., can be obtained at all times from the address below - the society gladly provides information!

Address:
Plautdietsch Freunde e.V.
Robert-Hanning Str. 14,
D-33813 Oerlinghausen
Germany.
www:plautdietsche-freunde.de
Tel: 05202-9939450
Fax: 05202-158654
E-mail: info@plautdietsch-freunde.de



The cover of *Utgow* Nr. 9 of *Frind*, the magazine for the Plautdietsch people around the world. This issue featured Canadian best-selling author, Rudy Wiebe, Calgary (see *Pres.*, No. 22, pages 136-7).

Kelowna Historian Loses Home to Fire

by Reuben Epp, October 2003.

In 1995, when Harry Loewen retired from the University of Winnipeg, he and his wife Gertrude moved to Kelowna, British Columbia. At that time Harry had been Chairman of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg since 1978, and founding Editor of the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* since 1983.

In anticipation of retirement in Kelowna, Harry and Gertrude had built a house on the outskirts of Kelowna completed in 1990. As time passed, Harry and Gertrude realized that they needed more space than they had in their single-storey home. A lot up the street and near at hand became available. So, they bought the lot and set about building their new dream house.

They moved into this house in the year 2000. Gertrude again set about converting a stony gravel lot into a beautiful garden, which shortly thereafter received honourable mention in local news for its beauty and conservation of water.

In late evening of the 21st of August, Harry and Gertrude and their neighbours were suddenly and unexpectedly notified to vacate their premises within 20 minutes to escape approaching fire. They gathered their most valuable and irreplaceable possessions into their car, leaving behind most everything else, including Harry's library of 2,000 or more volumes of historical and literary works and 1,000 books belonging to son Jeff. As it turned out, they might have rescued more, had they known that their home would not be destroyed that night. However, once vacated, they were not permitted to return for further salvage. Their house and those of 45 neighbours went up in flames on the 22nd of August. Of the Loewen home and contents, nothing remained but memories and ashes.



Rio Verde Colony, East Paraguay

The Rio Verde Colony ("green river"), located 350 km. northeast of Asuncion, was founded in 1969 by Old Colonists from Mexico with 65,000 acres of land. The colony has 20 schools, a number of worship houses (but only one Gemeinde). The farmers raise soybeans, wheat, corn and other

crops. They often harvest two crops a year and also sell milk. Based on their yards, Wirtschaften and appurtenances, many have gathered a considerable capital. There are currently approximately 3000 residents. Automobiles are driven by some although not officially scanted by the Ordnung. In order to be a good example, the Vorstehers continue to drive with their horse and buggy.

From *Menno informiert*, Oct. 2003, pages 4-5.



Rio Verde Vorsteher Abram Friesen, brought a short report regarding the Colony for visitors from *Menno Colony*. Photo *Menno informiert*, page 4.

Visitor List - Menno Colony.

List of visitors to the Menno Colony (tourists) in April, 2003: Canada - 60; Brazil - 1; Italy - 2; Asuncion - 13; Germany - 61; Moseldorf - 2; Colony Menno - 1; U.S.A. - 47; Holland - 2; Switzerland - 5; San Lorenzo - 40; England - 1; Bolivia - 1. Total - 236. Submitted by Abram W. Wiebe. From *Menno informiert*, May 2003, page 20.

Photo caption (right): The ex-Oberschulze of Menno colony, Jacob N. Giesbrecht (see Pres., No. 18, page 95), shows the Canadian Ambassador, Mr. McDonald (left), the Museum of Industry in Loma Plata, Paraguay. Photo - *Menno informiert*, May 2003, page 7.

Canadian Ambassador Visits Menno Colony, Paraguay

On May 22, the Canadian Ambassador, Mr. Thomas McDonald together with various of his colleagues from the Canadian Consulate in Buenos Aires visited the Menno Colony. The Canadian Ambassador in Buenos Aires is simultaneously also responsible for the countries of Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay. The entourage of the Ambassador included the following persons: Ms. Francine Beland, Consul, Ms. Beatriz Barbaglia from the Citizenship Department, Ms. Juana Leschziner, Immigration Department and Alvin Fehr, Assistant Consul in Asuncion.

The purpose of this trip was generally to inform himself regarding the Menno Colony, whose residents are of Canadian origins and also almost half still are Canadian citizens.

The greetings took place in the offices of the Oberschulzen [District Mayor]. Here a projector was used to inform them with general statistical information regarding the demographics, production, and social categories. Thereafter the entourage, escorted by the appropriate management personal toured the most significant institutions of the colony such as the Museum, super-market, pasteurization plant, senior's home, slaughter house, etc.

For the evening the destination was Laguna Capitan, where they also had the opportunity to see a part of our purebred breeding program. The evening meal was served here and appropriately appreciative remarks were exchanged on both sides affirming the value of the visit. The Ambassador and his entourage demonstrated great interest regarding the state and development of the Mennonites in Paraguay of Canadian heritage.

By Andreas Sawatzky, in *Menno informiert*, May 2003, page 7.



News from the Gemeinden

News of interest to Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde and Reinländer Mennonites in North and South America. Satan is working zealously to slander and denigrate the traditionalist and conservative Mennonites, steadfast descendants of the Flemish Anabaptist martyrs, valiantly faithful to the tradition of following Jesus. All Gemeinden and denominations have their calling from God and have made important contributions to the Kingdom of Christ and to the Mennonite community deserving of acknowledgment and celebration.

Ex-governor visits.

A string of important personal from the PAN party came to km. 12 on May 31, where they met with the Mennonite citizens. At the head table were found the former Governor of Chihuahua, Francisco Barrio Terrazas and his wife Hortencia, the current candidate Humberto Ramos Molina, and others. Barrio related how gladly he came to visit the Mennonites (see *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 75-6). He had good memories of them from the time when he was Governor. He treasured the confidence that they had had in him, how they conducted their assemblies, how they prayed with him before the meals and other things more. He had good memories of the 75th anniversary celebrations (see *Pres.*, No. 12, pages 27)...It was quite obvious how glad Barrio was to be among the Mennonites.



When Francisco Barrio travels among the Mennonite villages he gladly takes his wife Hortencia along. They always again feel the well-being and even mentioned that they would someday gladly live in this region. Photo - Deutsch Men. Rundschau, June 2, 2003, page 5.

El Valle Colony, Mexico.

The Federal Government is providing the opportunity for land to be registered into the Pro-campo Program and El Valle has hopes that they will obtain a great benefit from same.

It is almost a certainty that in the future they will be able to obtain the government subsidy of some \$100.00 per hectare for thousands of hectares of land. Only the little land that was being cultivated during the first year at the time the colony was founded (1993) received the Pro-campo at previously. It is expected that it will be possible to register up to 7,000 hectares of land, but it is not yet completely certain.

Another improvement is the cheaper diesel fuel. They do not have the cards as of yet, whereby they can buy diesel for half price, but they are to arrive shortly.

The large new Colony supermarket (80 feet

by 40), is making headways. The work is progressing on finishing the inside. The business (cooperative) has supplies of almost all items which the neighbours might need in the homes and on their farms. Jakob Banman Hiebert is the manager.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, June 13/03/
Die Post, June 20/03, pages 18-9.

Expensive bananas come to Cuauhtemoc.

With the further development of the Campeche Colonies, there is continually more trade between Campeche and Chihuahua. One individual who has annually taken part in the commercial exchanges is Franz Wall from El

Temporal Colony. This week he brought along a load of over 12 tons of bananas (but from Oaxaca), and took potatoes and equipment, etc. back to Campeche. The bananas sold quickly on the streets. Wall makes regular business trips between south and north and has already transported much farm machinery (such as binders) and every amenity imaginable to Campeche.

The Mennonite colonies are experimenting with the raising of bananas even though their region is not the best suited for the same. It takes 18 months to raise such as crop.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, Sept. 19/03/*Die Post*, Oct.3/03, pages 18.

Lacteos Mennonitas de Chihuahua.

Large new cheese factory is opened. On September 19, 2003, after a period of four years had been fulfilled, the first large and modern cooperative Mennonite cheese factory (Lacteos Mennonitas de Chihuahua) was opened at Campo 70 [Nord Colony] with many participating. The Governor of the State [of Chihuahua] as well as a large number of officials from various governmental departments, presented speeches, made a tour for an inspection and praised the facilities, the vision, dedication and hard work of the Mennonites and provided encouragement to carry the project forward. The Governor expressed the necessity of developing new markets, especially in the USA and Canada, where the price is high and this cheese would be very competitive.

The President of the cheese factory executive, Heinrich Loewen, thanked the many stakeholders in the undertaking and said, "it would not have been possible without the support of the government." He also thanked the Amish, who were represented there, in English. Seldom or perhaps never previously had there been such as large participation by the media (radio, TV, newspapers) at similar events in the colonies. For days on end afterwards there were reports about the factory, occasionally also very exaggerated. It was said without any factual basis that this was the largest cheese factory in Latin America and that it produced 12 tons of cheese per hour (later it was 12 tons of milk not cheese).

The Governor received a case with the first cheese produced by the factory. In addition he and the other dignitaries received a basket with cheese and other delicacies.

Facts: To date the establishment has cost 60 million pesos [about 6,000,000 US].

- The Amish borrowed the factory \$500,000 at 5.5 per cent interest.

- There were six cheese factories that were partners and which in time shall disappear.

- In total there are 1800 milk producers who are shareholders in the factory, in that 10 cents per Kilo is always deducted from their milk cheques.

- The borrowed money pays interest (\$1000 per day) which seems high and also causes concern, whereas others say it is only seven pesos for each of the 1800 shareholders.

- The State Government donated the cement, paid for the well, and provided 6,000,000 pesos as a guarantee for borrowings at the bank.

- The fixtures and equipment (all new) were imported from Germany and the USA.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, Sept. 19/03/*Die Post*, Oct.3/03, pages 18 (see also *Pres.*, No. 20, page 76, and No. 21, page 95).



These three men have given much time in the past three years to the construction of the milk pasteurization plant "Lamesa". Here they are standing in front of the pasteurization equipment. From the left: Dietrich Friesen, Campo 71, Johan Giesbrecht, Campo 66, and Heinrich Loewen, Campo 81. Photo - Deutsch Men. Rundschau, June 2, 2003, front cover.

Ordnungs-Komitee Elected - Manitoba Colony

Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mex. - An important meeting took place on August 15, 2003, in the Gemeindehaus (Gebietsamt offices) in Lowe Farm, where seven "Ordnungs-men" were elected. The candidates were two neighbours from every village in the Manitoba Colony whose names were brought along to the meeting by the village Schulzen. This new committee shall see to good behaviour in the colony generally and proper driving on the streets. The police are willing to recognize this committee and to invest it with the appropriate authority. One goal of the committee is to seek to avoid the situation where the police feel it necessary to watch in the villages. This sometimes leads to more instead of less disorder, complain some of the neighbours.

Addressing the question of the disorder in the Manitoba Colony does not manifest in any way that the problem in this colony is worse than in most other colonies [or in any Mennonite community in Canada, for that matter, where police are called to visit highschoools on a regular basis to search for drugs, etc], rather it is a sign that the leaders of the colony are seeking to deal with various problems instead of ignoring them.

The following seven persons were elected in order to help: Jacob Friesen (101/2), David Fehr (61/2), Cornelius Fehr (1C), Johan Klassen (61/2), Johan Friesen (4), Johan Guenther (17), Johan Fehr (81/2).

These men will have assistants in every village, who know all the neighbours, and who support the Colony-committee. One of the concerns is the misuse of alcoholic beverages, also by minors, who cannot legally purchase it. One particular measure will be to work with the sellers, whether they be older Mennonites or the liquor vendors, who are only allowed to sell to older persons and during certain prescribed hours, but who do not follow the law. It is always frustrating for parents when children under 18 years of age have access to forbidden drinks.

Definite responsibilities, rights and working methods will be discussed further. The local government is prepared to give the committee much authority. The Colony officials (such as this committee, the Vorsteher, etc.), do not in any way press their way into these public positions and do not always accept them. The assistant to the Vorsteher elected a few weeks ago, left Mexico rather than taking on the position. The question, whether to seek such an escape, often arises for the newly elected.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N./Die Post*, Sept 5/03, pages 4.

Plattdeutsch in the Uni.

Ruth Bergen, a Mennonite student, is teaching a Plattdeutsch course at the University of Chihuahua. Some 15 personal, who apparently later wish to work with Mennonites, for ex-

ample, doctors, are taking the course. The word vocabulary and the exercises are practised during a discussion in the medical program.

Various Courses.

On June 2, the annual IMAN-course (Institution Manantial) is again taking place in the Kleine Gemeinde school in Schönfeld. There are some 80 participants, mostly Kleine Gemeinde school teachers from Durango, La Honda, Swift Colony, etc. During the four week program instruction is given in Spanish, English, German, SEAN (religion), grammar, etc. Among the teachers are Eddy Plett, Nancy Wall, Corny Reimer and Mervin Kornelsen.

An English course is also starting in the Kleine Gemeinde school in Gnadenthal for which there are always many students applying. It is clear that the interest of people is much greater to learn English than to improve the German.

The Old Colonists also have regular classes for school teachers and other teachers have their own conferences for the exchange of ideas and experiences....

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, June 13/03/*Die Post*, June 20/03, pages 19-20.

School Expansion in Gnadenthal.

The concrete walls are standing and the roof is on for two additional classrooms to the Old Colony school in Gnadenthal. Always more parents wish to register their children there and now the school has become too small. No more than 24 students shall be in each classroom. This allows the teachers to spend more time with each individual student and it is also easier to find teachers. It has already been mentioned that it may soon be possible to offer Kindergarten.

In addition, the teachers can be more specifically trained; for the teachers who, for example, are teaching reading, do not necessarily need to understand the higher maths and the teachers for the higher classes can concentrate on their subjects. More young women are always being appointed which has certain advantages; for example, they have not yet fallen into any deep ruts from which it is sometimes almost impossible to help older teachers out of, but which may lead to a false goal.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, Aug. 1/*Die Post*, Sept 5/03, pages 24.

New School in Oasis.

In this dynamic, quite new colony, south of Ojinaga, the Kleine Gemeinde is building a new school with eight classrooms. It shall be ready for use in time for the school opening later this month. The school is replacing two other buildings which will be used as teachers' residences. One great deficiency which the colony has not yet solved is to find enough

school teachers (this is a problem throughout Mexico). They are still searching for one teacher for the fifth grade.

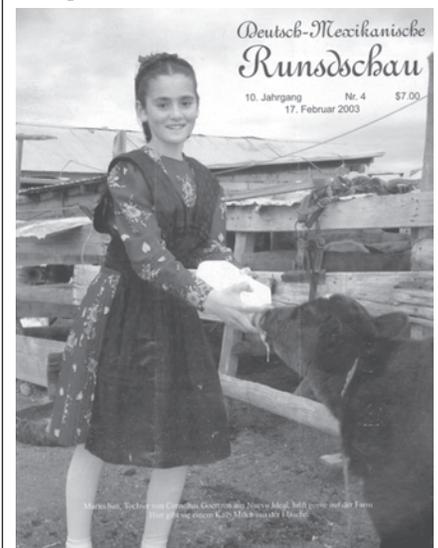
A much smaller group, the EMC church, also has a school in the colony where Spanish is the main language. In the neighbouring colonies (Las Bombas and Los Juncos) there is a Reinländer/Old Colonist school, but some parents drive their children to Oasis.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, Aug. 1/*Die Post*, Sept 5/03, pages 24.

Amish Schools.

A recent survey of Amish and Old Order Mennonite schools in the U.S.A. and Canada reports a total of 34,194 students in 1246 Amish schools with 1778 teachers and 8580 students in 298 Old Order Mennonite schools with 178 teachers. In addition there are 209 special ed. students in 71 Amish schools and 82 special ed. students in 29 Old Order Mennonite schools. The report, which lists each school with the year of founding and number of students, was published in *Blackboard Bulletin*, December 2002, pages 13-30.

The *Blackboard Bulletin* is a magazine written especially for students and teachers of the Amish and Old Order Mennonites containing valuable stories of interest to young Christian readers and resources for their teachers. It is published monthly (except for July and August) by Pathway Publishers, Route 4, Aylmer, Ontario, Canada, N5H 2R3. Subscription \$6.00. Highly recommended for Conservative Mennonite parents who are struggling to raise their children in the Christo-centric tradition of their parents.



Mariechen, daughter of Cornelius Goertzen from Nuevo Ideal, Durango, gladly helps on the farm. She is nursing a calf from the bottle. Photo - Deutsch Men. Rundschau, Feb. 17, 2003, front cover.

Two Old Colony Worship Houses Built in Chihuahua

On October 2, 2003, the new Old Colony worship house at Campo 4B near the highway (off km. 13) was dedicated and for which many participants had come. Ältester Franz Kroeker and other Ältesten from other colonies spoke many uplifting words to the listeners. The words were so notable that many were moved to tears.

At first those assembled gathered by the door and sang the song No. 89. When they got to the third verse, Ältester Franz Kroeker unlocked the door and the congregation entered. The 35 ministers and five deacons first met in the "Stübchen" (ministerial office) and the women entered by their door and the men by the other. The Ohms took their place in front on three long benches. Ältester Franz Kroeker greeted the congregation with the words, "Welcome here, most beloved friends."

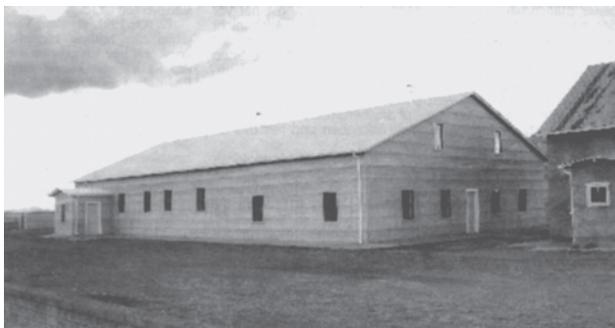
The entire building together with inside finishings, fence, and grounds altogether cost 857,000 pesos. It is presently the largest Old Colony Church in Mexico; it was constructed in three months (The construction of the Blumenfeld worship house also built in the last year, took only two months, thanks to the help of many villages.

The new 4B worship house resembles those built recently (e.g. Lowe Farm), except for small details such as two doors for the women which is not the case in other churches. The toilets are fully modern and located close to the worship house. The benches are lacquered and have backs (which hardly any others have), the central gas heating heats from above and at the bottom from the walls instead of from a stove in the middle of the worship house.

The building of the worship house was supervised by carpenter Franz Banman, Reinland, and Abram Wiebe Steinbach. As someone has already commented, "Good construction superintendents have been at work here."

This worship house is the 14th Old Colony worship house on the Manitoba Colony. There are now the same number in the north end and south end. During the last 10 years the villages of Kleefeld, Lowefarm, Blumenort, Schönthal and now also 4B have received a new church. This worship house is primarily for the families along the highway, and also for the worshippers from Steinbach and the south end of Reinland. Consequently the worship houses in Gnadenfeld and Rosenthal will have more room for their visitors.

At the same time a new worship house was also built in Campo 67. The construction started on August 5 and on October 16 the worship house was to be dedicated. The entire construction took only 10 weeks. One of the church sextons (caretakers), Cornelius Wiebe already said,



This worship house in Campo 67 was completed in 10 weeks and is to be dedicated on October 16, 2003. A corner of the old church can also be seen on the photograph. Photo - Bram Siemens - Men. Post. Oct. 17/03, page 4.



This Old Colony worship house in 4B (off km. 13) was dedicated on October 2, 2003. The benches are sufficient to seat 460 persons, but by setting out extra benches, over 600 can be seated. The building superintendants were Franz Banman and Abram Wiebe. Photo - Bram Siemens - Men. Post. Oct. 17/03, page 4.

jokingly, "As much as we are working on the church, it would be best to bring along a stove and blankets and to live there during the construction, in order to have more time available for the work." The new worship house is being built behind the old one. The old church, some 52 years old, is built with mortar and the walls at the end are already weak. In addition they were already often in need of more room. The old worship house had room for some 300 persons, the new one should seat some 800 people.

The new building has the dimensions of 90 by 48 feet, of which the sanctuary alone is 78 by 48 feet. The ceiling is being painted white in order to make the room brighter.

At the entrances thought has also been given to people in wheelchairs. A small ramp has been built there so that these can easily drive to the main level.

The caretakers of these worship houses are Cornelius Wiebe, Campo 68, and Bernhard Friesen, Campo 67. The construction superintendents were Abram Giesbrecht 64B and Abram Friesen, Campo 70.

According to the reports of the representatives, this is now the largest Old Colony worship house in Chihuahua.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, in *Die Post*, Oct.17/03, page 4.

Editor's Note: God has blessed the Old Colony Gemeinde in the Manitoba Colony, probably one

of the world's largest Mennonite congregations with 14-15,000 souls. The population of the Manitoba Colony is 18-20,000.

Paris, Texas.

It is an historical event that the Old Colonists and Sommerfelder have reached agreement and are building a worship house and school together in the Paris region. At the present time the Old Colony Ohms are coming every second week from Seminole, Texas, to conduct worship services. In the meantime some of the neighbours gather to sing. [It is good when the conservative Mennonites can unite and work together as their common enemy, Satan, is always seeking to destroy the true Church of God

with all manner of deceivers and charlatans.]....

Paris, Texas, is a city with some 27,000 residents but the Mexican Mennonites live 15 miles to the west of Paris. Many of them work in the two large (Thiessens') or many small Mennonite trailer factories. Other Mennonites work on farms and some at a giant sand screening plant of an America.

Report by J.Reimer from *K.N.*, Aug. 1/*Die Post*, Sept 5/03, page 24.

Of Crabs and Roads in Belize.

The crab industry is recovering from the sickness ("Taura Syndrome") which severely affected the raising of crabs and this year the harvest is very good. Expectations are for a good future and several Mennonites (such as the Froeses') are again digging more ponds with their large equipment for the local people as well as foreigners. There are 13 crab farms in the country, which bring in 100,000,000 Belizean dollars into the land, representing 33,000,000 pounds of crabs. Among the Mennonites there are Cornelius Rempels who are raising the sea creatures and selling them. The Belizean crabs actually have achieved the highest reputation in Europe which will promote the export. The outlook for everything appears promising and it is to be expected that in the future Mennonites will not only be scooping earth out of the ponds but also crabs.

The Mennonites (principally David Dyck and Albert Reimer) also continually build and repair roads for the government. It is principally the Mennonites who own the equipment for the street and road construction. Foreign firms are also allowed to partake in the larger projects. David Dyck has already received a small contract to improve certain roads which will be finished within a month. In this year Dycks and Reimers have built or repaired the largest part of the 110 kilometres of access roads.

Articles

Mennonites in Mexico, 1946

“Mennonites in Mexico, 1946,” by J. Winfield Fretz, reprinted from *Mennonite Life*, April 1947, pages 24-27.

Background.

Of the total number of Mennonites in Mexico as of January 1, 1946 [80-100,000 as of 2002], there were 12,673 [60-80,000 as of 2002] who belong to the group known as Old Colony Mennonites. The *Alt Kolonier*, or Old Colony Mennonites, is the descriptive name of an actual historical situation going back to Russia. It referred to the first settlement of Mennonites of the Ukraine in 1789 in the region of Chortitza. Following the original settlement in Russia, the newer settlements always referred to the Chortitza settlement as the “Old Colony.” Those from the Old Colony who migrated from Chortitza, Russia, to Manitoba, Canada, from 1874 to 1880 and from there to Mexico from 1922 to 1927 continued to be referred to as Old Colony Mennonites.

The name is appropriate in a sociological as well as an historical sense, because throughout the last century this group has made persistent efforts to retain all of the old customs, practices, and beliefs of their forefathers. They have tried to reproduce and preserve as accurately as possible the old social and economic systems that their forefathers established. Their settlement in villages, their pattern of building arrangements, their mode of dress, their attitude of non-conformity to the world, their church and community organizations, their system of landholdings, their attitude toward education, and their adherence to the German language are reflections of a conservative attitude. All these customs and values have been transferred from generation to generation and from colony to colony with as little change as possible.

Migration, 1922.

The story of the mass migration of 5,000 [7,000] Old Colony Mennonites from Canada to Mexico in the '20s is one of the most fascinating, and little known chapters in Mennonite history. These Mennonites demonstrated all the stout courage, persistence, industriousness, and amazing resourcefulness exhibited by any previous pioneering group.

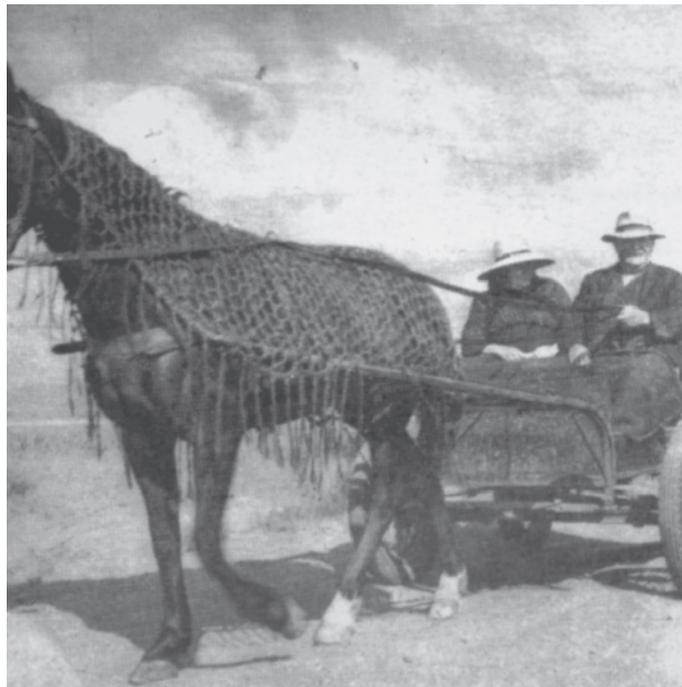
In addition to the Old Colony settlers there are a number of smaller Mennonite groups in Mexico. A colony of approximately 600 Sommerfeld Mennonites is located north of the Old Colony. They migrated at approximately the same time and from the same place in Canada. The larger



The two farmers, J. Knelsen and Cornelius Hildebrand, have just (spring 1935) completed a “good” bargain at the auction sale. Photo - Dr. G. Wiens/Schmiedehaus, Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten, page 110.

portion of the Sommerfeld Mennonites migrated to Paraguay rather than to Mexico.

A third group is the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite, more commonly referred to as the Holdeman Mennonites. This small group has a membership of about 65.



Peter J. Froese, Gnadenfeld, with his wife on the buggy, circa 1950. Mr. Froese was the Brandältester of the Manitoba Colony for many years. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 111.

A fourth group of Mennonites is a remnant of the Mennonite refugees from Russia who came to Mexico following World War I. This group at one time was comprised of from one hundred to two hundred persons, but most of this number have scattered to various parts of the United States and Canada.

Chief consideration in this article will be with the Old Colony Mennonites. Over 10,000 [35-40,000 in 2002] are located in the State of Chihuahua, which is the largest of the 28 Mexican States and adjoins Texas on the south. The Mennonite colony is about 230 miles south of El Paso and 75 miles west of the capital city of Chihuahua. Another 2,000 [10,000 in 2002] are located in the State of Durango, 75 miles northwest of the city of Durango.

The reason Mennonites went to Mexico is that they were denied what they felt were important educational privileges which had been granted them in 1874 when their fathers came to Canada. It was a part of the Canadian Government's attempt to nationalize all Canadian ethnic groups except the French. The Mennonites felt that a threat to their own schools was also a threat to their beliefs. They dispatched delegations to various countries in Latin America to look for a new country in which to settle. The delegation was unable to secure the desired privileges in any of the countries they visited, but by sheer accident one of the delegations chanced to engage in conversation with the Mexican Consul at Buenos Aires as they were waiting on the pier to return to Canada. After hearing their story the Consul invited the delegation to visit Mexico, promising them the kind of privileges they were seeking. Upon returning to Canada a delegation was sent to Mexico, and after a number of journeys and at least five meetings with President Alvaro Obregon they were granted the desired privileges.

Immediately after receiving the assurance they desired, they made plans to dispose of real estate in Canada and move as rapidly as possible to Mexico. At first practically all the Mennonites had planned to migrate, but as time went on many lost their enthusiasm. It is estimated that only about 50 per cent of the Old Colony people actually left Canada for Mexico.

Land Ownership.

The original purchase of land in Chihuahua consisted of about

155,000 acres. The price paid was \$8 an acre, now considered to have been entirely too high; but at the time by comparison with Canadian land prices, it seemed very reasonable. This land was surveyed and laid out in a large number of villages. Each village was provided with enough land for 10 to 30 farm families. The homes in a village are located on either side of the wide main street. The villages are several miles apart. The farms range in acreage 80 to 300 or 400 acres, but the average is about 160 acres. Very few of the farmers have all their land in one plot but have fields at varying distances from the farm home.

The land ownership policy of the Old Colony Mennonites will appear strikingly unique to most Mennonites who have become thoroughly individualized and used to private ownership. The Old Colony Mennonites in Chihuahua are organized in two separate corporations. The Manitoba Colony has two companies: The Rempel-Wall Reinland Waisenamt and the Heide-Neufeld Reinland Waisenamt. The two names represent the men of the colony who were well-to-do leaders. Each of these men together invested eight per cent of the total amount and the rest of the money was invested by the colony under the name of the Reinland Waisenamt. The land is divided into individual farms, but farmers do not own their farms in a technical sense. They have no titles or deeds and cannot take a mortgage on their farms. The title to the property is held by the two delegated owners. Taxes are collected from the company representatives and they in turn collect from the individual farmers.

The problem of a developing landless class is a perennial one. In each village one can find from two to a dozen heads of families who do not own land but work for others. When a sufficient number of the landless class develops, a pressure is exerted to seek for new land. During the past summer a 72,000 acre tract to the north of the present colony was purchased and 12 new village plots were laid out [the Ojo de la Yegua or Nord Colony]. Immediately those who were interested in securing land for themselves applied for farms in one of the various villages. Those who did not have the money to pay in full made down payment and borrowed the rest, which was to be repaid in five years.

A characteristic of most villages is the common pasture consisting usually of about 40 acres per family. Thus, if a village has 20 families, it would mean an 800 acre pasture.

Mechanization.

The Mennonites in Mexico are farmers. There are, however, some commercial and industrial developments that have sprung up as a result of necessity. In the colony there are those who are exceedingly poor and those who are quite well-to-do. One of the more thoughtful members of the colony observed that in Mexico, as in other parts of the world, the process of the rich getting richer and the poor poorer was at work among the Mennonites. They can still begin farming with a very few implements and



School girls in Reinfeld in 1951. Who will still recognize themselves on this photo? Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 139.

with very little money in cash. On the other hand there is an increasingly large number of Mennonites who are buying farm machinery and doing everything with mechanical power. This is illustrated by the inventory that the writer took of the machinery of one of the well-to-do Mennonite farmers in the colony. Farmers in the United States and Canada who read this will discover that this farmer has more equipment than they are likely to have. Here is a list of machinery found in perfect condition, well painted and protected from the elements in a dry shed: A McCormick Deering binder, a McCormick-Deering mowing machine, a power disc, a John Deer Model G four-bottom plow, a Minneapolis Moline 16-foot drill, a John Deer disc-tiller, a John Deere two-row corn planter, a four-disc John Deer plow, a Case tandem disc and a Waynesborough Pennsylvania thresher. This farmer also has a gasoline engine, a large machine shop, a vise, drill and all the equipment that a farmer ordinarily needs. Next to his machine shop he had an office with a knee-hole desk, metal filing cabinet and several chairs.

Commercialization.

There are 14 stores scattered throughout the villages of the Chihuahua Colony. Most of them are small and carry only the essential merchandise that is needed by the local farmers. For the more specialized purchases colonists go to the city of Cuauhtemoc or to the city of Chihuahua, 75 miles to the east. There are 14 cheese factories in the Old Colony villages. One of the factories is moving to the new settlement to the north. These factories provide a market for milk and at the same time give employment to two or three individuals in each village. Often the young people who are not farm owners find ready employment here. Recently there have been a few wooden-box factories established in connection with lumber yards in the villages. These are generally oper-

ated by enterprising farmers who operate such a business as a side line. Apple boxes, boxes for pepsi-cola, orange boxes, and candy boxes are made for some of the Mexican manufacturers. One of the farmers stated that he had made over 30,000 boxes in the last two years.

A biographical note about one of the storekeepers and cheese factory operators runs as follows: Peter H. Peters, member of the Swift Current colony in the village of Burwalde, was born in Manitoba, then moved to Swift Current, Saskatchewan, in 1912 where he worked as a store clerk for several years. From 1917 to 1923 he managed a store and then came to Mexico in 1923. He had originally planned to start a flour mill but discovered that wheat did not grow well, so he started a store. He employs three to four clerks and pays them 150 pesos a month; translated into American dollars this means about \$30 a month. In addition to the store, he operates a cheese factory which he established in 1938. Mennonites had at first made butter; but since Mexicans were not used to eating butter, there was not a great sale for it. Also, there was no way of keeping it sweet until it got to market; therefore, cheese was a more practical commodity. There are from seven to nine men employed in this cheese factory.

Church Life.

The church is the very center of life in the old colonies. It is not on the periphery. Religious practices prevailing among the Old Colony Mennonites are conservative. A description of a Sunday morning worship service may be of interest to the person unacquainted with this type of religious meeting. Between the singing of the two hymns, the ministers enter the pulpit from a side room. The minister of the morning then makes the introduction (Einleitung) which is written out and read. The same introduction is read every Sunday; following this all kneel for a silent prayer. A minister reads the text and proceeds

without comment to read the sermon. The time required for its reading ranges from 45 minutes to an hour.

The service begins at about nine o'clock [90 minutes after sunrise] and lasts from an hour to an hour and a half. Ministers wear black, cotton shirts and long tailed or frock coats. None of the men wear ties. The older women all wear black kerchiefs and the younger women [unmarried] wear white ones. Most of them have beautifully embroidered designs on the outside in the back. Many of the children do not attend services except for special occasions such as weddings or funerals. Young people do not join the church until they are in their late teens or early '20s. They must join, however, before marriage as ministers will not marry anyone outside the church [marriage is deemed to be an institution of God]. The German language is used in the service. The ministers are chosen by vote of the male members of the congregation who first elect deacons and from the list of deacons select a minister.



Prediger Ohm Cornelius Schmitt, Schöndorf, Swift Colony. He was one of the men sent to Mexico City in 1935 to work for the freedoms for the schools. He was sent on a second delegation in 1936 which was successful in restoring the confessional schools. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 193.

The form of worship and the method of selecting ministers is not greatly different from that of some American Mennonite groups.

Schools.

Each village has its own school and the teacher is elected by the heads of the families in the village. Often he is a day-laborer such as a carpenter or a smith's helper or a cowherd [Often teachers have risen to great prominence in Old Colony society]. The schools are usually in session for five or six months from November to April with the month of May off to help with the seeding.



Franz Froese, Neuhoftung, Swift Colony, having his oats swathered. The yield was 140 bales per acre. A typical landscape in the Bustillos Valley. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 195.

The studies consist of the *Fibel* (the "ABC book"), the catechism, the Bible and the *Gesangbuch*. Individuals are advanced as they learn to read and write. The school day starts with singing of a hymn, followed by prayer, which is usually the Lord's Prayer. Grace is said before and after each meal, audibly and in unison. A prayer is also said at the close of day. The first period is devoted to reading lessons and recitation from the *Fibel*. This is accompanied by a period of spelling, then a period of writing, followed by arithmetic. When the Mennonites came from Canada to Mexico they changed to the metric system so they could not use their old arithmetic books. As a result sheets were prepared for the use of the children and these have been used over and over again. Simple arithmetic is mixed in with recitation, and words are written on the board for correction in spelling. Friday afternoon is an informal period of drawing, brief Bible history and stories, and conversation. Most of the children seem to enjoy school. Everything is conducted in the High German language, although all of the children speak Low German [Plautdietsch] among themselves, and many of the teachers speak the High German poorly.

In the middle '30s the Mexican Government made a strong effort to remove the educational privileges of the Mennonites.

Conclusion.

It is surprising how few of the young people have left the colony in the 25 years of residence in Mexico. Yet one is able to find a rather large number of individuals and families who have wandered away from the precincts of the colony. During the past summer we discovered upon rather casual inquiry no less than 36 families who had left the colony. All of these were men who were in search of adventure or more economic opportunities than they had in their home community. Some were older men with large families who were dissatisfied or unable to make a living in the colony.

On our way from Cuahtemoc to Creel where the Bergthal Mission Station is located, we encountered Mennonites at almost every railroad station and a number of times on the train. Two or three of the Mennonite men we met had married Mexican wives and were living outside the colony. A number of the men told us they were finding employment with

Mexican landowners who were eager to get Mennonite farmers to cultivate their land since Mennonites knew farming methods and could produce much greater yields from the land. In one Mexican community we found 17 families, in another nine families, and in two other places two and three families, respectively.

There were no churches established among these isolated families, and from a spiritual standpoint these Mennonites were simply unprovided. This is a situation that should be of concern to Mennonites everywhere, because as time goes on this drift of the landless and the unattached will increase rather than decrease.

About the Author:

J. Winfield Fretz, associate editor of *Mennonite Life*, is teaching sociology and economics at Bethel College. He was engaged by the Mennonite Central Committee to make special studies in Mennonite mutual aid and colonization, visiting the Mennonites of Mexico and Canada a number of times. Photo - *Mennonite Life*, April 1947, page 2.



Steinbach Post, August 26, 1936

Mother G. E. Kornelsen was recently at old Joh. Barkmanns, and went along to riverbank at Ste Anne where she went on a boat ride (Lumme), with young Harold Reimer at the rudder. Not too bad for 80. During the hot spell, Widow Joh R. Reimer, age 73, went along with a bathing party and went into the water. What's more, she proved herself a good swimmer. Not to be looked down upon in the 70s. Our beloved ancestors, who spent their childhoods close to the Molotschna or similar rivers in Russia's open fields, often regretted that here there was no body of flowing water throughout the summer. More than once we heard the same thing from our fathers. Many times they told of swimming and diving in summer, and of ice skating in winter, in tones of admiration.

The above incident is courtesy of Ralph Friesen, President of the FMHS.

Mennonite Life in Mexico

"Mennonite Life in Mexico," by Walter Schmiedehaus, reprinted from *Mennonite Life*, April 1947, pages 28-38.

Introduction.

I would like to do with each one of my readers what I have already had the privilege of doing with many friends and countrymen who have found their way to this distant territory. I would like to invite them to mount my wagon with me and to drive out to the Mennonite settlement. We proceed through the waste and thorn bush-covered plain around Chihuahua, then on the winding, uphill highway into the hills of Sierra Madre, higher and higher, until the chapel of the Hazienda of Bustillos comes into view, after that over the miles of the wide lagoon which has the mighty ramp of the outstretched copper mountain in its back and now suddenly we arrive on a completely changed landscape: the prairie of the steppes of the high land. Here we travel alongside the Northwest railroad whose shining rails extend through the level stretch like a glossy band which loses itself in boundless distance.

On we go until we reach the height from which we get an indelibly impressive view of the magnificent territory which is the purpose and the objective of our journey. On the road of sand and rock our wagon still ascends to higher ground. Light-colored oak underbrush is found on either side. Now we have reached the summit. Unlimited seems the extent of our view: the wide valley east, north and west before, around and behind, miles upon miles. The Mennonite villages lie towards the north. From this place they appear as built up from a box of toys. Their corrugated iron roofs and stilted American windmills sparkle in the clear, bright sunlight of this altitude. Waldheim, Blumenthal, Neuenburg, Blumenort, Gnadenthal, Gnadenfeld, Schonwiese, Osterwick - clearly visible and easily distinguishable is village after village from this exalted observation point. Those still farther north fade away in the indistinct haze of distance.

There, plainly before us, though some miles towards the east, is Cuauhtemoc itself, the former San Antonio de los Arenales, the railroad junction, the business center for the surrounding steppes and these mountainous places, the "town" of the Mennonites. It is no longer that lonely cattle-traffic place of 1922, that desolate station at which the first Mennonite trains stopped. The old, wild-west outpost at which I arrived in the summer of 1923 has long since developed into a respectable place.

We jolt and shake with our wagon along the straight, stone and boulder-strewn street of Cuauhtemoc. Street! We call it by that name!

It is the untouched surface of a hill which shows temporarily neither evenness or asphalt. Now down to the river, which in former years we forded, dry or flooded, bridgeless. Now there is a bridge.

The Mennonite Village.

Here we are again on the flat, endless prairie, that is, what remains of it since the plow of the Mennonites has torn it up far and wide and has brought it under cultivation. The roads



Isaak Hamm, who served as a good school teacher in the village of Neuenburg for many years, also studied how horses could best be trained. Here he together with his only son is driving with a purebred stud horse. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 152.

are good and even, and in ten minutes we come to the first village, Blumenort. It is typical of all the rest; one needs to know the surroundings well in order that the similarity may not be confusing in finding one's way. Every village is cut in two by a long, wide street. On either side there is a lineup of separate farms with its land in the background. Its pattern is the same as seen a hundred years ago on the banks of the Chortitza, in Russia, or as that which was found in the Molotschna. However, the trees grew taller and the gardens prospered more magnificently in Russia. Due to poor soil in this Mexican highland and the moderate amount of moisture, growth is somewhat retarded. But that is eventually a question of time. There are villages in Mexico, too, where trees are as large as those in Russia, where poplars once stood in succulent green and gardens prospered luxurious.

Every house is located a little distance from the street, and behind it a garden in which the women raise vegetables, flowers, and fruit trees. There are the strawberry patches, there the vine clings to its support of lath-wood, there the big sunflower turns her golden face to the light, there grow genuine gooseberries and crowblack blackberries. One needs to be reminded repeatedly that this is Mexico.

Yard and Field.

Buildings and yards are well arranged and tidy. The main dwelling, offices, farm build-

ings, stable room, baking oven and well and the workshop which is seldom missing and the machine shop, all are located in the yard, the entrance to which is a short drive-way from the street. These residences are like those of the farms of North Germany; the dwelling invariably together under one roof with stable.

The stables are orderly, a constant marvel in view of the Mexican surroundings where such things are not known. Everywhere domestic cattle are driven into open corrals, if it has to be. But, proper buildings for horses and cows! With cribs, mangers, litter, cement trenches and water supply, and horses even being groomed with curry comb and brush! This the natives cannot understand, and so they have their fun saying that the Mennonites take better care of their horses than of men. May it be so? These horses deserve it! What stately, massive, temperamental creatures! Heavy - very heavy Belgian breeds, as a rule, such as one sees nowhere else in Mexico except possibly on propaganda pictures of the local beer brewery. But there are lighter ones too, high-stepping trotters, which draw the light "buggy" like a toy, while they take the busy lord of the mansion

speedily from village to village or to town. These faithful, four-footed work-comrades of the Mennonites honestly earn the thoughtful care and love which they receive from their lords.

Also the rest of the animals, cows, hogs, chickens, ducks and geese, having their regular place in this domestic economy, make a very favorable impression. The chickens do not sit all night in the customary wood box - a supposed protection against coyotes - which balances on a man-high sawed-off tree trunk. No, they are kept in appropriate chicken houses, and they reward both care and bountiful feed with diligent egg laying.

A few years ago the Mennonites, after having tried the raising of crops exclusively, changed to diversified farming. Since that change, their income has increased considerably. Dairies and cheese factories within the colony insure a current income. There is a ready market for milk, butter, cheese, eggs, lard, ham and bacon. The cheese dairy of P.H. Peters, in Burwalde, is a respectable enterprise which serves, in round numbers, 700 hundred customers all over Mexico. A very good business has been built up in Rosenthal by the Wiebe Brothers. It consists of a perfectly regulated cheese factory combined with a butcher shop.

When I visited this place recently, a sizeable building was in the process of construction with double and triple adobe walls and

facilities for the installation of machinery which will cost thousands of pesos. The whole thing is a freezing plant of which there is no equal in the whole of Sierra. They are mighty energetic people, the Wiebe's and they will get somewhere in helping the colony. At different places in the settlement the firm of David Redekop has branches for the purchase of milk and eggs and for the manufacture and export of cheese. Isaac Dyck, of Osterwick, Blatz, Martens, and others have meat and sausage products which they send as far as 2,000 kilometers and to the capital of Mexico.

The Home.

As soon as we enter one of the houses it seems as if the world-clock has been set back a few hundred years. The spotless, polished floor reflects the ancestral, traditional furniture. There are simple chairs and wooden benches or sofas with cambered backs and brass-plated trunks with huge keys, a pound in weight. There are shining dish cupboards, mostly built into the walls, in which there is porcelain of variegated color. On the wooden beds there are beautiful quilts and feathered pillows neatly covered with flowered pillow tops. These are the pride and wealth of the housewife. In contrast to the otherwise strictly observed exclusion of all gay and gaudy colors, the furniture is red or yellow, the floor is also yellow and the window frames light blue. If not blue, then the more unassuming brown may be preferred.

For the industrious housewife the sewing machine is indispensable. Nothing is being wasted. Under skillful fingers even rags and shreds are utilized in making pieced quilts or in weaving footmats or bedside carpets. Pictures as well as all ornaments and decorations are absent from the room. Calendars hang on the wall instead of pictures.

The great-grandfathers' "Russian" clock, with its sparkling brass weights, ticks away patiently on the wall. "Russian" because one of the ancestors brought it along from Russia to Canada 70 years ago. In fact there are veterans among these clocks, which came from Prussia to Russia in the time of Catharine the Great, though they are scarce. The dials are uniformly oval, perforated and indented above in the form of a crown. They are adorned in black with roman numerals in yellow and there are other decorations in yellow and red. The old dials have seldom been repainted in their



Mr. Rempel, Neuenburg, has covered the eyes of his bull with a rubber blindfold. Now even his daughters Agatha and Sara are able to enter the corral undisturbed to feed and milk the cows. In 1965 the Rempels moved to Canada. Agatha and her husband Cornelius Fehr live (1997) in the Altona area. Sara and her husband Ernest Fehr live in Waldheim, Mexico. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 152.

original color after the paint had suffered or was gradually sacrificed to the tooth of time. The clock, however, remained the same. Only the dial was replaced by a simpler or brighter one or it was repainted according to the well-known style of the old kitchen clock.

In spite of the missing ornaments, the inside of the Mennonite homes makes one feel its snugness and its friendliness. The reason for this is the breath of tradition and the cleanliness which everything breathes. The little windows with the extremely tidy curtains before which stand the most beautiful houseplants, fuchsias with glowing "flying hearts", *fleissiges Lieschen*, and *flessiger Jakob*, next to this *Kakteen* and the fine-leaved green as-



During the 1940s the family of Jakob and Helena (Froese) Loewen lived in the Wirtschaft in Neuenburg originally owned by Ältester Ohm Johan Friesen. In the 1950s Jakob Loewen was elected as a minister and in the 1970s the family moved to the Rio Verde Colony, Paraguay, where he was elected Ältester. The children on the photo are Jakob, Franz, Johan, Klaas and Susana. Photo - Rempel, ed., Mennoniten in Mexico, page 152.

paragus and ferns, these all make the home very attractive.

Hospitality.

These people are usually well prepared for unannounced company. The bench or the sofa in the living room is extendable and can easily be transformed into a double bed. If we do not get through with our visit today, this country man will gladly let us sleep in his living room even though he does not know us and we are to him nothing but bloody strangers who, on top of all, sniff around suspiciously and possibly try also to photograph everything.

In the meantime he invites us into the kitchen which usually serves as dining-room at the same time. There are the good, iron

cook-stove, the table and benches, water containers and all kinds of crockery and dishes. We are urged to sit down, and at once food is served. Bacon and eggs sizzle in the frying pan. Smoked meats are brought on the table and added to a dish of fried sausage. A little later waffles are served and *Pflaumenmus* and with all that good, homemade-bread, white or dark, the best butter and fresh cheese and as many cups of coffee as one may be able to drink. All this when they are unprepared for guests who, as they say, "snowed" into their house. But now, if they have invited their guests before and if the good housewife has had an opportunity to do her best, then the laden table is really bending under its load.

We have scarcely finished our visit in the house of this friendly host. Those strong, brass-plated trunks, found in both living room and bedroom, and their fabulously large keys have really aroused our curiosity. What might there not be in spacious chests like that? But we must not bring the patience of our friends under too much provocation, and so we take leave of them and drive to the home of Johann Thiessen, in the village of Hamburg.

Young and sympathetic is the appearance of this farmer. His wife, who is certainly not older than he, seems to be more advanced in years, which is the unavoidable result of an overburdened life, which knows no vacations and no recreation. The man's work continues from sunrise to sun-set, but the woman's work is never done! The young farmer shakes our hand and, according to custom, asks us to come in. The housewife follows with the youngest on her arm. Then something winks through the doors, and we barely catch a glimpse of



Two sisters from Reinland, siblings to the well-known clock maker A. W. Peters. Left, Mrs. Gerhard Reimer; Waldheim, and right, Mrs. Peter Martens. Photo - Rempel, ed., *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 172.

the ends of flying frocks. Then a whisper, a rustle in the adjacent room, and with extraordinary promptness, such as one would wish for in many a young dame of our society, the three daughters of this family appear in the living room. Even the oldest is little more than a child, all three of them are beautiful: fair of complexion, blond hair, rosy and healthy; without powder and lipstick, the hair parted carefully in the middle, perfectly tidy from the head to the bare feet. In great haste the Thiessen daughters had gone to the big chest and had exchanged their housedresses for their holiday attire. At last we get a peep into the ancestral chest which hides all that belongs to the wearing apparel of the family.

The Simple Life.

The Old Colony costume corresponds perfectly with the earnest character of these strictly religious people. It is neither picturesque nor beautiful. It rather disfigures that which by nature is pleasing and attractive. Humility and the fear of God and the thought of repentance control the form of clothing even at the expense of practical usefulness for which those of the Old Colony have otherwise such a good understanding. Seeing these people walk about in the gardens on Sunday afternoon, one easily gets the impression of pilgrims walking about in penitential garments. This is especially noticeable in women. Everywhere in the world, during the holidays, women desire to make use of their original right to adorn themselves as beautifully as circumstances permit in order to make the most favorable appearance.

Among the women of the colony the situation is the opposite. Custom demands that they should look modest and unassuming in order to be well pleasing to God and that no sinful thoughts may be allowed to come up. All are dressed alike, adhering to a uniform of centuries whose relentless rigidity leaves for feminine imagination and gifts for plan-

ning their attire, if any, an extremely reserved margin. Legs, ankles, arms and neck, yes even the head must be covered. Long skirts, drawn tightly at the waist, fall widely in numerous folds upon the tips of the feet. Above the skirt is an antiquated, short blouse. A kerchief covers the smooth hair which is parted strictly in the middle. Married women wear, in addition, the black cap. The Mennonite bride is brought under the cap literally [*"unter die Hawve"* - Dutch *Huwen* - to marry] as well as proverbially just as we find her here and there on pictures which we see at our grandmother's or great-grandmother's. When going out, and often in the house, too, the kerchief covers the cap.



Two sisters-in-law from the village of Reinland, in approximately 1940, with their babies born three days apart. Who recognizes them? Photo - Rempel, ed., *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 172.

With married women the whole makeup from the head-cloth to the shoes is either black or at least of another acceptable, dark color, such as dark grey, dark blue, green or brown. A few embroidered flowers on the kerchief and some inconspicuous patterns on the dress are permissible. In the choice of the color there is a very small range left to the taste of the woman, and it seems that this breach in the bare wall is widening. Namely, one sees today comparatively more color than at first, specially noticeable in children's and girls' clothes. Many of them possess even a bright red. Even in the latter every suggestion of a figure is strictly avoided. Yet the unmarried are allowed to wear lighter clothes, usually a checked grey or flowered calico. They wear white or light-colored kerchiefs and aprons of the same color, while those of the married women are black or at least dark.

The hair-dress is without exception the same for old and young; the smooth white parting in the middle, and on the back of the head the closely fastened braids. Children are permitted now and then to let the head-cloth slip down on the neck or even to take it off so

as to carry the little head freely in the light and the fresh air. Otherwise this costume is for all, adults and children, from the great-grandmother to the smallest girl who has just learned to stand on her own feet. In spite of all that is praiseworthy in character, it is and remains, by custom and tradition, a straight-jacket which the Mennonite child without variation has to wear from the cradle to the grave.

In regard to men the maintenance of the original costume is less pronounced, perhaps for frugal considerations. Well-woven, black cloth costs money, and every unnecessary expenditure is to those people an abomination. With them everything is *veel to dia* ("much too high in price"), and so they claim their right to look around for cheaper and at the same time more appropriate clothing. In fact, no one cares to maintain that the black suit is exceptionally suitable for field work. So, for the week days the plain but practical "overalls" are considered a good discovery. On Sundays, however, they must be exchanged for the traditional black costume of the fathers or at least a dark jacket-suit. Here, too, it is noticeable that the younger generation is moving away from tradition. One sees fellows, of course mostly unmarried ones, walking about in light grey, green, and brown tailored suits.

The genuine costume has a vest buttoned to the top and a short jacket with one row of buttons. The head-gear is a dark sailor's cap or a broad-rimmed, black hat. On the fields in sunny Mexico and at work the most favored is, naturally, the customary, big straw hat which the women also gladly wear over their head-cloth. Collars and neckties are forbidden. Neither rings nor watch chains are worn, the latter only when made of black horse hair. The best way out is a black shoe string. The Old Colonist wears neither beard nor mustache. He keeps his face smooth shaven.

The big chest in the living room has again been closed and the huge key has been turned around securely. We have taken leave of friend Thiessen and his family. Again we are on our way. Far in all directions lie scattered villages of the settlement.

Public Affairs.

Each settlement has as a religious head an "elder", and, as a secular leader, an Oberschulze ("manager"). Every village has its Schulze, who is subordinate to the above mentioned and is responsible for order and the necessities in his village. The highest court of appeal is self-evidently the church. The whole miniature state organization is decidedly theocratic. Important problems are submitted to the so-called *Bruderversammlung*. Procedures in such matters are conducted by the board of trustees and their assistants. Important resolutions without the sanctioning of the preacher and the elder are inconceivable.

Into this frame belongs also the arrangement of the Reinlander *Waisenamt* in the

Manitoba colony and the Bergthaler Waisenamt in the Swift Current colony. The Waisenamt is an extraordinarily important organization, purely ecumenical in character, which works hand in hand with the colony-administration, the trustees, and the church. It is a sort of banking establishment. It receives money and exists especially for the purpose of managing the inheritance shares of widows and orphans. It keeps the inheritance of children under age until they become of age, takes over auctions of property left behind, and regulates all other business in connection with inheritance. The institution has partial control of considerable funds, which are invested for the benefit of the colony, especially in interest-bearing loans to the settlers themselves, by which the poor get both opportunity and help for improving their economical condition.

The colony has its own fire-insurance, its businessmen, mechanics, dentists, and even physicians. The latter call themselves discreetly and appropriately *Knochernarzt*. They are practioners who have learned whatever they know from father, grandfather and great-grandfather. Perhaps the gift of being able to take care of disease and wounds has been transmitted to them. These men might be compared to chiropractors. However, what pertains to the Mennonite physician, John E. Enns, of Rosenthal by way of example whose consultation room and dispensary are crowded from morning til evening by Mennonites and

Mexicans, is exceptional. Here is a man in whom there is a combination of practical capability and skill, amazing knowledge, and an impressive personality.

Not unlike him is our friend the dentist, Jakob A. Enns (see *Pres.*, No. 20, page 103). Besides the very good and, for rural conditions, extraordinarily equipped dispensary of Johann E. Enns, there are two more in the colony. Moreover there are a number of ambulance outfits owned by those skilled in medicine and by the midwives. Patent medicines can be bought in most of the village shops. In Cuauhtemoc there are two dispensaries which serve that place and also their Mennonite customers. We find *Schlagwasser*, *Wunderoel*, *Kaiseroel*, *Alpenkrauter*, *Grossmutter's Abfuhrte*, and Dr. Bell's horse medicine which is supposed to be agreeable to men as well as to horses.

In Church.

Let us step into one of the churches. The whole building is bare of all ornaments and every kind of decoration both inside and out. A great number of these houses of God date from the beginning. They are built of wood as they were in Canada. The very first wood which was used in the settlement came from Canada. Simple wooden benches fill the room, being separated in the middle aisle. Over the benches on the men's side, under the ceiling but within reach, is a ledge on which they hang their caps and hats.

The pulpit in front is a simple reading-desk. Near this, next to the wall, is a special bench for the song leaders who are called "*Vorsaenger*." They have a very important service to perform. In long, drawn, "a" sounds they give the congregation the right pitch and then go on to combine the melody with stanza, verse, and word. Musical instruments are taboo. Consequently, the loud, unaccompanied, unpracticed singing of these ancient church songs makes a peculiarly strange impression upon visitors.

The worship service is carried on in primitive form and takes a long time. The preacher, with the Bible and the songbook in his caloused hands, mounts the pulpit in his high buttoned vest and his black coat and Wellington boots. The latter is meant to be in accord with Ephesians 6:15, "*und an den Beinen gestieft, als fertig, zu treiben das Evangelium des Friedens*". Perhaps tradition plays as great a role here as the adherence to the words of the Bible. It goes back to their ancient home in Russia and Prussia where farmers and fishermen wore high boots.

Because of much repetition through the years, the layman's sermons have acquired a monotonous, flowing tone. The customary procedure in things is seldom interrupted by anything original. But when the preacher departs from the guided High German and begins to speak to his congregation in the familiar Low German, then a liberating breath draws through the room and one can feel the



On August 15, 1987, the *Vorsteher* of all the colonies in the Cuauhtemoc area gathered in Steinreich for a meeting and invited Governor Fernando Baeza Melendez to the meeting. The purpose was to inform themselves further regarding questions of military freedoms and also to petition for assistance to improve the roads in the Nord Colony. L.-r.: Gerhard Reimer, Peter Bergen, Jakob Loewen, Gerhard F. Kornelsen, Governor Melendez, Peter Harms, Cornelius Friesen, Bernhard L. Dueck, in front of Dueck, Melchor Perez, Heinrich Sawatzky, Municipal President Jorge Castillo Cabrera, Johan Fehr, Johan Barman and Jakob Froese. Photo - *Rempel*, ed., *Mennoniten in Mexico*, page 256.

living pulse of a personal note. Many prayers are inserted in the sermons, and as the preacher comes to those places in his reading he gives a sign whereupon the members of the congregation turn and fall on their knees with their heads laid on the hard benches.

Singularly striking is the going back and forth of the attendants at the service. Women go to take care of their children. The men go to look after the horses outside and possibly linger a bit for a chat or a small cigarette before they come back to the hard bench.

At last the worship is ended. The stranger leaves the church with a depressed feeling. It is difficult here to discover a spark of light or comfort, of edification, or exaltation. The only subject is repentance and submission which is repeated year after year, as a religious inheritance from generation to generation, placing a dull burden on the shoulders of the growing youth which to outsiders seems too hard and too heavy.

And yet! One would have to become an Old Colony Mennonite one-self - speak Low German, farm as they do, live their simple, uninspiring life - in order to understand that one can be happy also in that way and that this church also, in its own way, distributes peace and salvation. In any case, these people appear to be satisfied as they leave the church with us. They gather in groups in front of the church. Friends and relatives greet each other. The men smoke their cheap cigarettes and wait patiently until the women ultimately find the conclusive word of farewell to each other. By and by the light wagons finally roll away and begin to distribute themselves on the country-roads and by-roads leading to the various villages.

Social Life.

"In the sweat of they face shalt thou eat bread!" This word applies not only to adults but also to youth. Therefore, the orthodox believer of the Old Colony does not approve of play and hilarity for children. Early, very early in life the little ones must learn to know the seriousness of life. From childhood they are expected to become accustomed to a life rich in labor and well pleasing to God. So they are drawn into the work of cultivating the land early and even the very small ones join in and learn to herd the cows, to feed the hogs or to take care of the still smaller brother or sister. These little ones never know that best of childhood joys; namely, Christmas with its shining lights and the decorated Christmas tree. The Christmas tree is outlawed. That belongs to pomp and outward splendor, which must not exist. But here, too, we find that the lines are drawn somewhat mild and flexible after all. In spite of all prohibitions, numerous little girls play with homemade stuffed dolls and little boys with wooden horses, or little wagons received as Christmas presents. They do find time to play with these treasures.

I have known people among them, Klaas Heide for instance, who owned half a million

and in spite of that appeared as the most modest and unassuming man among them. They travel the lowest class on trains and stop at the most inexpensive hotels and inns. Any kind of amusement is naturally prohibited. No money can be spent for that. At the most it may happen that one or the other stopping in town secretly visits a movie or orders a glass of beer at some tavern.

With the exception of the permission to use tobacco, a concession considered trivial in the colony, everything "worldly" is prohibited. No music, no singing (except church songs), no dance, no ornaments, no glitter, no theater, movie, game, or sport. No carousing or card playing among men. No *Kaffeekraenzchen*, sewing society, or reading club among women. Books scarcely exist. They are not exactly forbidden, yet, the contention of the older ones as a whole is that they are not welcome. Too much might slip in which absolutely does not belong to the colony. The spiritual nurture of the colonist by rights is to be limited to the Book of God. At the same time it is common practice to read the religious papers of the Mennonites from Canada and the United States.

Now we drive again over the plain, level roads of Bustillos. It is remarkable that we meet only horse and wagon conveyances, and in case an automobile or a truck does rush past us, it certainly does not belong to the Old Colony people. The automobile belongs to the list of "prohibited things." And that is good too! Why should a farmer need an auto? Whether he gets to town in one hour or three hours, in order to make his purchases or to visit relatives in some neighboring village, really makes no difference to the tempo to

which the whole life of the colony is bound.

One need not laugh that the private auto is not permitted but that otherwise the most modern agricultural machinery is allowed, such as tractors and gasoline motors. That is no contradiction. Back of that is a wise thought and a good reason. Machines are for the work. They help building, production, business, and therewith further the real purpose of a soil conquering pioneer.

The long journeys to town are eagerly utilized for long and loud conversation between two or more. This shortens the way. News spreads, speedy as the wind, through the whole colony even though distances involve hundreds of miles, where telephone and telegraph are not available. Spontaneous visits among each other is the rule, and almost exclusively the way to fill in holidays. An invitation is often the last word of farewell in front of the church door or after meeting casually in a store in town. The technical word for this social intercourse is *spaziere* and it's supposed to have a transitive meaning. If a Mennonite goes to *spaziere* with someone, it means that he visits him. It is then that much roasted sunflower seed is cracked between the teeth and the husks of the same decorate the previously spotless floor.

Engagements, weddings, and funerals are opportunities for larger social doings. Invitations to these are passed from village to village by word of mouth or written on slips of paper. The following is an authentic invitation to an engagement service as it is formally customary:

"Wertgeschaetzte Freunde! Weil es die Alleinweise Guete Gottes so gefuegt hat, dass sich unsere Tochter Helena mit dem

About the Author:

Walter Schmiedehaus (1901-90), born in Essen, Germany, emigrated to Mexico in 1920 with his parents settling in Chihuahua City. He was interested in the Spanish colonial period of Mexico and wrote many articles as well as a number of books on the subject including, *Mexiko, das Land der Azteken an der Schwelle der zukunft*.

Since Walter Schmiedehaus learned Spanish so quickly he was offered a job in San Antonio de Los Arenales (Cuauhtemoc) in 1923 in a new bank being opened for the infant Mennonite settlement. In 1926 Walter's parents opened a pharmacy in San Antonio which he took over in 1933 when his parent's returned to Germany. Young Schmiedehaus soon won the trust of the Mennonites and starting in 1924 represented their interests in various ways. At the request of Delegate Klaas Heide and Ältester Johan Friesen, he was sent to Mexico City in 1925 to represent them regarding problems with the Agraristen. For many years Schmiedehaus was the German Consul in Chihuahua.

Walter Schmiedehaus wrote various articles about the Mennonites and in 1948 published his best-known work, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* (Cuauhtemoc, 1948), 307 pages, republished in 1982 as *Die Altkolonier-Mennoniten in Mexiko* (Winnipeg, 1982), 215 pages.

In 1990 Klaas J. Heide wrote about Walter Schmiedehaus, "His personal influence upon our colonies has been too little appreciated. He has earned the right, not too be forgotten in the story of the Mexican Mennonites," Rempel, editor, *1922 Mennoniten in Mexiko 1997* (Cuauhtemoc, 1997), pages 298-302.



Walter Schmiedehaus. Photo - Men. Life, April 1947, page 2.

Junggesellen Jakob Reimer die Ehe versprochen haben, und sie so Gott will, naechsten kommenden Sonnabend den 11ten ds. Mts. sich in ein christliches Eheverloebnis einzulassen gesonnen sind, so laden wir alle hierin umseitig genannten Freunde nebst ihren lieben Angehoerigen zu oben gesagtem Dato zu Uhr 12 des Tages in unsere Behausung gefaelligst ein, um mit uns in Gemeinschaft diese Verlobungsfeier in christlicher Weise zu vollziehen, und hernach mit einem geringen aber wohlegmeinten Gastmahle aufwarten und bedienen zu lassen, wofuer wir uns jederzeit dienstschuldig erkennen werden. Eure Euch liebend Freunde David und Agatha Dyck, Kleefeld."

Such assemblies are at least in their part more formal and come near to being equal to a religious service even as the expression "in christlicher Weise" indicates. On the appointed day young and old gather on the yard of the bride's parents. Usually the guests appear early so as to be ready for a good repast which is served partly in the house and partly outside the house if the number of guests is large. On such occasions there is a whole row of bowls with *Borshtsh* placed on benches along the wall. If the guests are too numerous to be taken care of by the girls appointed as waitresses, then they serve themselves from these bowls.

The engagement-ceremony takes place inside. Peculiar old songs are sung by those convened. First a song of greeting to the betrothed couple and then in response; both have long, draw-out verses and they are sung as they sing the songs in church. Kind wishes are given and the benediction is spoken. Now as the bride steps out of the house she wears neither the light kerchief, which she wore as a girl, nor the black cap under which she will soon come.

From this point on the meeting is less constrained. Presently coffee and *Zwieback* are served at long tables in a shed or barn. Very soon the older ones separate themselves from the younger. The first stand or sit in solemn groups and talk about the weather, the harvest, the hogs which have a peculiar sickness this year of which many have died, about trying a new kind of seed-wheat, about business and buying and selling. They also talk about peace for which they have hoped; about that which is to come; about England, Germany, Canada, and not last about Russia and Communism.

Here and there the younger ones, too, know something to tell each other, something preachers dare not hear. But finally everything is harmless after all. What these young people have to say to each other is simple, innocent, and inoffensive. They are not at all so rebellious, so worldly as the older ones think, exceptions excluded, of course, even though some youngster of the group may secretly pull a mouth organ from his pocket and play a modern "warble" behind the barn door, music such as he has heard in town or even in a movie when not under observation. Yes,

music which has nothing in common with the traditional songs exclusively allowed in church. Yet they will change soon, very soon, as soon as they will enter their early wedlock. They will become transformed into the same serious, uncompromising *Altkolonier* as their fathers are. They will then live and work as faithful members of the church with no thought of changing even one iota of its tradition, even though in some cases a change could not do any harm, as, for example certain things regarding the school system. We smile as we leave these young boys and are almost glad that once in a while youth has something to conceal from their elders; otherwise they would not be genuine young people!

Marriage.

"It is not good for a man to be alone." For this reason marriage on the average comes early in life. A few weeks after the engagement comes matrimony. It is a mystery how these young people manage to learn to know and to love each other since single people of both sexes seldom have a chance to meet and be together. But that youth will yet have to be born which does not find a way when the time comes! In this respect the youth of the *Altkolonier* differs in no way from the rest of humanity.

Love, in the sense that we know it, is indeed not an absolute requirement. The main point is to establish an orderly home and family. For everything else the Lord provides. Is it not written in the book of Moses: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"? That large families are expected is, therefore, self-evident. When the German ambassador in Mexico, Mr. Collenberg and his wife, on a visit to the colony, asked Mr. Rempel how many children he had he scratched his head for a little while and then said: "16!" After a while he added carefully: "*Bis jetzt...!*"

Bachelorhood is an exception because matrimony is generally accepted as a duty or a necessity. One does not marry merely because of pure inclination but because a wife is absolutely needed. Who would otherwise keep house, wash clothes, sew, take care of the garden and feed the calves, lambs, and small pigs? Who would milk the cows, feed hogs, make butter and cheese, bake bread and wait upon the "Lord" of the house? Lord, that is exactly how the *Altkolonier* feels. All the above mentioned are the tasks of the very busy housewife, besides the duty of bearing children and training them.

To marry again in case of death is considered a natural thing. A year of mourning is out of the question. The normalization of the stricken home must not be hindered, and for that reason prompt remarriage is desirable. Frequently the widower or the widow has remarried within a few weeks.

In a village by the name of Schanzenfeld a man of 60 years, whose second wife was being lowered into the grave, nudged his neighbor and said, "Say, I think I'll take Katharina over there!" Katharina stood on the other side

of the grave and was a widow 22 years of age who a short time ago had lost her husband. A few weeks later this uneven couple was married.

Not always does re-marriage take place so quickly. One woman of the Swift Current colony, 68 years old, remained a widow for over one year, and it was believed that perhaps at this age being already richly blessed she might remain as she was. How surprised we were when we heard of her engagement. When we congratulated her she said, "Yes, but I thought it over a long time. Three men I have already buried. One does lose courage."

Funerals.

Plain, simple and without ceremony is the burying of the dead. Somewhere out in the fields lie the cemeteries without crosses, without stones, mounds, or markers, without trees, or lawn. The simple coffin is lowered into the grave with a benediction and a short prayer. Then the funeral procession starts on its way to the home of the bereaved, there to take part in a medieval "Totenschmaus." No time for mourning is given to the widow, the orphans, and others. They are all kept busy entertaining guests: if wealthy, a banquet, and if in less easy circumstances, at least coffee and *Zwieback* are served.

Because of all this, however, we have no right to conclude that such a procedure indicates a total absence of refined feelings or that it is proof of callous heartlessness. We met here with the old tradition as we do everywhere. It has been done this way for many hundred years. So it is done today and thus it remains. To this is added the ever-present, considerate, practical explanation. Many guests have journeyed hours, and some even half a day, to show their respects to the deceased, and in coming they became hungry and need to be fed. Life demands its rights.

Conclusion.

Dust twirls behind our wagon. The farms of Blumenort on both sides fall back. The colony lies behind us. We're on our way back to Cuauhtemoc. In a few minutes we come into the midst of the commonplace, grey reality of Mexico after leaving what seems now as a distant, singularly strange, and yet, for us, an intimate and homey land.

Call for Papers:

Preservings will henceforth be published annually, each December. The subscription fee remains at \$20.00 annually. The feature story of the December 2003 issue will be the Molotschna Colony in honour of the Bicentennial. The feature story of the December 2005 issue will be Polish-Prussia, and the feature story for the December 2006 issue will be the Flemish-Dutch Mennonites. These issues will seek to give voice to the story of the conservative and traditionalist majority within these communities. If you are interested in contributing an article, please contact the editor at 1(204)326-6454.

Vorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel (1893-1988)

Vorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel (1893-1988), Blumenort, Manitoba Colony, Mexico,"
by son Gerhard E. Rempel, #804-325 6th St., Winkler, Manitoba, R6W 1G5.

Family Background.

Vorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel (1893-1988), was the grandson of Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901). Wilhelm Rempel was the son of Wilhelm Rempel (1797-1848) and Anna Krahn (1798-1877) of Rosenthal, Chortitz Colony, Russia (see *1880 Village Census*, page 318).

Wilhelm Rempel Sr. was the son of Dietrich Rempel (1761-1845) and Judith Loewen. Dietrich Rempel I was the son of Isbrandt Rempel (1737-1803). Isbrandt immigrated to Russia in 1788 - listed as Family No. 92 in the immigration record of 1788 (Unruh, page 297). The Isbrandt Rempel family pioneered in the village of Einlage,

Chortitz Colony.

Isbrandt Rempel is listed in the 1793 census as owner of Wirtschaft 120 in Einlage (Unruh, page 211). Isbrandt Rempel, age 58, and wife, Anna, age 58, are listed as owners of Wirtschaft 29 in Einlage in the 1795 Revisions-Liste, with children Katharina, age 21, and sister Agatha, age 43. Also listed are son Diedrich Rempel, age 34, [second] wife Helena [Wiebe], as owners of Wirtschaft 32, with son Diedrich, age 3, Heinrich age 2, and daughter Helena 4. (Unruh, page 239). Isabrandt Rempel, age 64, and wife Katharina, age 64, are listed in the 1801 Old Colony census as the owners of Wirtschaft 33, with 3 horses, 6

cows and a wagon (*Diese Steine*, page 661).

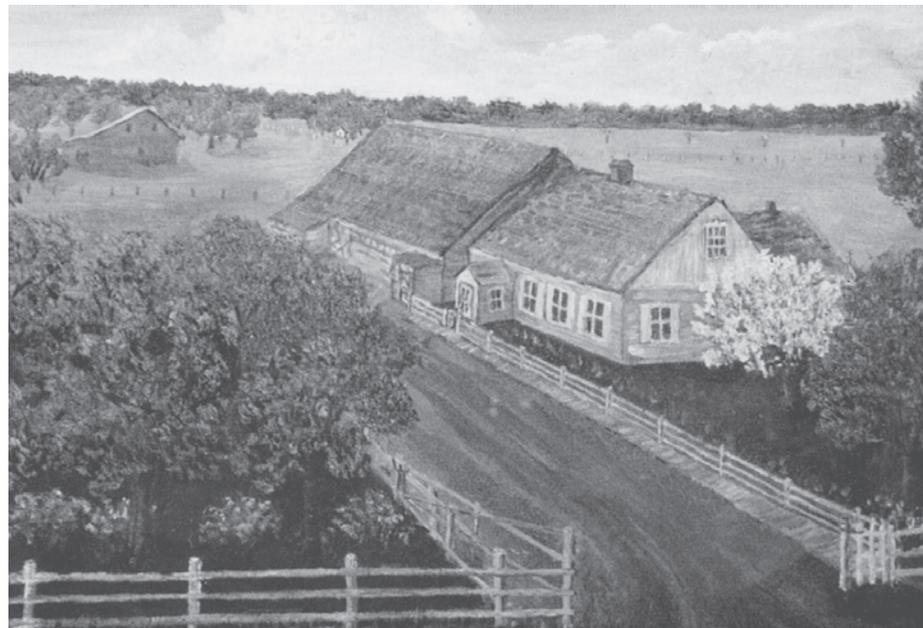
Dietrich Rempel (1761-1845), age 41, is listed in the 1801 census as owner of Wirtschaft 26 in Rosenthal, with wife Helena, age 28, sons Diedrich 10, Heinrich 7, Isbrandt 6 months, daughters Helena 11, Catharina 4. Dietrich Rempel was a well-to-do farmer with 5 horses, 13 cows, 2 pigs, 1/2 plow, 2 wagons and a spinning wheel (*Diese Steine*, page 662).

According to the Feuerstellen-Listen 1802, Isbrandt Rempel was still resident on Wirtschaft 210 but son Dietrich Rempel had traded with Peter Rempel, "from whom it was taken away and given to Johann Andres" (Unruh, page 251). Through this exchange Dietrich Rempel became the owner of Wirtschaft 261 in Rosenthal (Unruh, page 252).

Dydrich Rempel, age 45, from the City of Königsberg, landowner, is listed as the owner of Wirtschaft 24 in the village of Rosenthal in the 1808 Revision with wife Magdalena, age 35, children: Magdalena (Helena) age 17, Dydrich 15, Heinrich 14, Catharina 11, Isbrandt 8, Anna 6 and Gerhard 2. By 1808, Dydrich Rempel was a well-established farmer with 7 horses, 17 cattle, 2 sheep, 8 swine, 1/2 plow, 1 harrows, 1 wagon, 2 spinning wheels, 35 GTschw. of grain and 20 hayrakes of hay (Unruh, page 264).



Wilhelm Rempel II (1820-1901) and wife Agatha Sawatzky (1825-82). Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 3.



The Wirtschaft of Wilhelm Rempel II and Agatha Sawatzky in Blumenort, Manitoba. Photo - Rempel Family Book, front cover/Pres., No. 17, page 40. The barn is still standing.



Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901) and second wife Sara (Penner) Abrams sitting in the buggy. Holding the reins is one of her son-in-laws. After his second marriage Wilhelm Rempel II moved to Gretna. Photo - Gerhard E. Rempel, Winkler, Manitoba.



The gravestones of Wilhelm II and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel in the cemetery at Blumenort, West Reserve, Manitoba. Photo - Gerhard E. Rempel, Winkler, Manitoba.

Wilhelm Rempel II (1820-1901).

Wilhelm Rempel II was born in Rosenthal, Chortitz Colony, South Russia, in 1820. On February 12, 1846, he married Agatha Sawatzky (1825-82), daughter of Gerhard Sawatzky and Agatha Friesen (see *Pres.*, No. 9, Part Two, page 14).

In 1875 Wilhelm and Agatha's daughter Anna and husband, Jacob Peters, immigrated to Canada arriving in Quebec City on the S.S. Peruvian on July 13, 1875 (Note One). The Jakob Peters family travelled in the same party as Ältester Johann Wiebe. They settled in Blumenort, West Reserve, Manitoba. They joined Ältester Wiebe in establishing the Reinländer Gemeinde (RGB 116-3).

On May 23, 1878, the extended Wilhelm and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel family left their homes in Russia. On June 8 they boarded ship in Liverpool, England, crossing the Atlantic ocean on the S. S. Peruvian. They arrived in Quebec, Canada on June 18. Wilhelm Rempel II was the leader of the immigration group consisting of 271 Mennonites. Wilhelm Rempel kept a journal account of the immigration journey from Russia to Manitoba, Canada, which was published in 2000 (Note Two).

They arrived in West Lynn, Manitoba on July 1, 1878 (Gregorian Calendar) (Note Three). The next day they travelled by horse or by oxen to their destination. The Rempels settled in Blumenort, where daughter Anna and husband Jakob Peters had already built a small house for them. The Rempel family joined the Reinländer Gemeinde (RGB 122-1). In 1878 and 1879 Wilhelm Rempel and sons Gerhard, Jacob, and Johann built a traditional house-barn on the Wirtschaft in Blumenort. Wilhelm Rempel was a moderately successful farmer and in 1881 owned 15 acres of cultivated land, two oxen, two horses, and a full line of farm machinery.

Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel died on June 30, 1882, in Blumenort. On December 27, Wilhelm remarried to Sara (Penner) Abrams, widow of Peter Abrams Sr. She was the mother of Sara Abrams who was married to Wilhelm's oldest son, Wilhelm Rempel III, and of Peter Abrams Jr. who was married to Wilhelm's daughter Susanna.

There was an interest in education in the Rempel family. Oldest son Wilhelm Rempel III (1846-1931) attended the "Fortbildungsschule" (Secondary School) in Chortitz and had taught for eight years in Russia. In Manitoba he taught in Reinland, and was appointed Inspector of Mennonite schools in 1884. In 1889 he and brother-in-law Peter Abrams helped organize the Mennonite Secondary School in Gretna. Wilhelm Rempel III also became its first teacher. In 1898 he moved to Rosthern, Saskatchewan. According to the Reinländer Gemeindebuch he "left" the Old Colony Gemeinde.

Wilhelm Rempel II died on February 20, 1901. Agatha was given a gravestone in the Blumenort cemetery where she was buried, but Wilhelm Rempel had not received a gravestone. At the 1999 Reunion in Gretna, Manitoba, the extended Rempel family decided to give Wilhelm Rempel II a gravestone beside Agatha's. His exact burial spot in the cemetery is not known.

A Testimonial, 1894. by Wilhelm Rempel.

In 1894, Wilhelm Rempel (1820-1901) wrote the following remembrance and admonition for his descendants:

My dearly beloved children. I feel led by the Spirit of God to share with you in honest love that which I should have told and taught you in your tender youth, which I have, however, not done because of ignorance and embarrassment. However, this presses upon my heart and I cannot postpone it any longer since I do not know how much longer I have to live for sometimes certain premonitions come to such as: "put your house in order for you must die." But I have only poorly prepared my house in that I have not lead you - my beloved children - to God, and have not warned you in true love and as a righteousness-working father of the necessity of leading a better life. Not once, my beloved, have I invited you to pray together with me. Dear beloved children, how much have I not neglected regarding you! So that I will never be able to make it right in all eternity if the beloved God is not gracious unto me.

But I hope and confidently believe in God, that through Jesus Christ he will forgive all my debt of sin including the sins of omission. So that finally through much striving and praying I shall be able to call forth: now I have found faith in Jesus Christ. He has also died for me on the trunk of the cross. And I also hope that on that great Day in his eternity He will also receive me. And therefore I write this to you, beloved children and children's children who may read this, so that we might all wish to gather before the throne of our Saviour where there will be no more tears nor crying and where God will wipe all the tears from our eyes.

Beloved children and children's children: As your father and grandfather who loves you dearly, I plead with those of you who have not yet - moved to tears by heartfelt penitence and sorrow - properly converted yourself to Jesus Christ and who have not yet made an honest commitment to Jesus Christ, I beg that you convert yourself unto God and to our Saviour. Do not always delay it from one time to another and do not think: "I am still young, I can still convert myself when I am older." No, oh no, my beloved, do not make it the way I did.

Oh, my beloved children and children's children! The loving and compassionate God has sought me for so many years and has knocked at the door of my heart, but I have not allowed Him - the precious Saviour - in, and instead He had to stand outside and wait. But He did not give up with the always repeated knocking on the door of my heart until - after many long years and in my advanced age - I finally yielded to our precious Saviour.

Oh my dear children! I beg you, as your very loving father, do not delay any longer with your conversion and also do not think: I first want to become better, for you can come to Jesus laden with sin exactly as you are. Yes, oh, yes, my beloved, only come to Jesus exactly as you are, laden with sin from the soles of your feet to the crown of your head. Throw yourselves at the feet of Jesus with true penitence and repentance and truthfully confess all your sins and do not cease in pleading and supplication. Although it may seem to take long to you, He will finally hear and help, if only you will do so in a genuine childlike faith.

Oh, you beloved children: Do consider the matter, how long our beloved God has also sought you, and now you should also not want to allow

yourself to be invited [further] to come unto Him. Oh, if the beloved Jesus had not loved us so much, then He - our loving Saviour - would have forsaken us long ago. But He had shed His life-blood on the tree of the cross on Golgatha for us, in order that He redeemed us from all our sins; us, those of us who come to Him in righteous penitence and repentance.

And now my beloved - all of you: I have written this to you in genuine love and truth although in very great weakness and imperfection. And I bid you again, dearly beloved children: do not throw what I have written to you in great weakness into the wind. You should be able to understand it, if you wish to do so.

Oh, my beloved children and children's children! You do not know how much I love you and how often every day I lie on my knees and pray for all of us, that the loving God might give all of us a new heart and a new spirit, and that the same might lead us in all truth and love since all of us will have to appear before the throne of our Saviour Jesus Christ on that great Judgement Day and give account for every unnecessary word that we have spoken. Oh, but that none of us might have to go lost.

Here, my beloved children, here I kneel down and plead with our Lord Jesus with tear-filled eyes, that in His time He might wish to receive all of us to Him, and to bring us into His eternal dwelling-place. Oh, do help all of us for that - You faithful God - for the will of Jesus Christ. Amen!

And now something more about the raising of children. I wish to tell you, my beloved children, something from my school years and of how impressionable children are in their innocent childhood: namely, I had an old Uncle and Aunt where my Father had been raised. I always stopped in there for a few moments in the morning on the way to school. In winter it would usually be about the time when my Uncle had just gotten up and was getting dressed. While doing so he prayed these prayers: "Our Father who art in Heaven" and "Oh thou great God hear me!" and "Christ's blood and righteousness".

That was something new for me. This was not done so at my home. But I did learn these prayers at that time and they have always accompanied me throughout my entire life.

So, beloved children, this is the way I was raised. But not that I did not know any better. I knew well enough but I did not wish to do so. I was ashamed to speak to you about God and the Word of God. But, my beloved, you should do it better than I did. Lead your children to Christ - the children's friend - in their tender years and teach them what He has all done for them. Do not be ashamed before anyone to always again speak about Him. Then you will not have to lament the way I have just done.

And now, my beloved, should I no longer be here and if one or the other of you should err from the right way which leadeth heavenward, then take this page to hand and reflect to yourselves of the time when I still lived amongst you and I wrote this for you in love. Written in my 74th year in 1894. I was born on March 12, 1820 in the village of Rosenthal in Russia. "Wilhelm Rempel"

From George Rempel, editor, *Rempel Family Book: A...Genealogy of Wilhelm and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel...* (Winkler, 2000), pages xi-xii.

Johann W. Rempel, Vorsteher.

Johann W. Rempel, youngest son of Wilhelm and Agatha Rempel, was 11 years old when the family left Russia in 1878. Johann received his elementary education in Blumenort, West Reserve, Manitoba, under a qualified teacher who had received teacher training in Russia. (Blumenort hired only teachers that had received teacher training as long as they were able to find them).

In 1887 Johann W. Rempel married Katharina Wiebe, daughter of Wilhelm Wiebe, their neighbours across the street. They were members of the Reinländer Gemeinde (RGB 118-1) and had 12 children. Johann W. Rempel took over the family farm in Blumenort and farmed most of his life.

In the years 1909 to 1918 Johann W. Rempel served as Vorsteher (Reeve) of the West Reserve on behalf of the Old Colony (Reinländer) Mennonite Church. The work of the Vorsteher was not always easy in his time of service, especially during the First World War - 1914 to 1918 - when there was much animosity against the Pacifist Mennonites who also happened to speak German, the language of the enemy.

In 1916 and 1917 the Provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan passed legislation of providing for government district schools and compulsory attendance

(Zwangschulen) to drive Mennonites and their church schools out of existence. In 1918 they started to apply the new legislation. They built more and more district schools on the Mennonite Reserves. Mennonite leaders, including Vorsteher Johann W. Rempel, tried everything possible to persuade the Provincial Governments to respect the *Privilegium* given to them in writing in 1873 by the Dominion Government of Canada. When they realized the Provinces were determined to forcibly apply their school legislation ever more strictly, many Mennonite leaders saw no other way for their people than to find such religious freedom in another country.

In the course of his duties as Vorsteher, Johann W. Rempel had much paper work and records to maintain. He also carried on a considerable correspondence with various government officials and lawyers, using the English language. He was of the view that some English language could have been instructed in the church school system.

When Johann W. Rempel retired from farming, he served as a teacher in Kronsthal from 1923 to 1925. In 1999 a man by the name of Ben Kehler (age 93) remembered how Johann W. Rempel helped him with a self-image problem he had in school: "Because of how I was treated by previous teachers, I believed it myself already that I was no good

for anything; and it seemed to me that I could do nothing right in school. I got strapped most every day for being mischievous, and so I thought I was a nut. I had accepted it, so to speak, that I was not going to learn much of anything. And so, on the first day Johann W. Rempel was my teacher, I



Johann W. Rempel (1867-1927) and Katharina Wiebe (1867-1944). Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 294/1880 Village Census, page 395.

naturally did all my stupid things again and expected to be strapped but nothing happened. But we lived next to the schoolyard where teacher Rempel lived, and after Vaspa when teacher Rempel saw me walking on our courtyard, he came up to the boundary-fence between our yard and the schoolyard and asked me to come to him. Somewhat hesitantly I came closer to him and expected to be scolded or threatened. But instead, he said nothing about my behaviour in school. He just assured me that he wanted to be my friend. And it did not take long under teacher Rempel's teaching that I actually realized that I too had it in me to do something right; and before long I loved my teacher and I knew that he loved me."

Johann W. Rempel was the last teacher in the church school in the village. In the fall of 1925 the Manitoba government made the church school in Kronsthal into a district school.

In 1926 Johann W. Rempel, wife, Katharina, and their youngest two daughters, Margaretha and Susanna, (somewhat hesitantly) emigrated to Blumenort near San Antonio de Los Arenales in the State of Chihuahua in Mexico. Johann W. Rempel died in the Palmore Hospital in Chihuahua, Mexico on February 28, 1927.



Johann W. Rempel (1867-1927) and Katharina Wiebe (1867-1944) as a younger couple. Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 293.



Johann W. and Katharina Rempel had this yard and house built in Blumenort (Mexico). Johann lived in these buildings just over a year and died. Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 294.

Gerhard J. Rempel - Manitoba Colony Vorsteher

Youth.

Gerhard J. Rempel was born to Johann W. and Katharina (Wiebe) Rempel in 1893 in the village of Blumenort, West Reserve, four miles west of Gretna. He and all his siblings were born and raised in the house-barn his grandparents had built on their Wirtschaft in 1878-9. Gerhard was the third child in a family of four boys and five girls.

When Gerhard was only a few days old lying in his cradle, a neighbouring woman and her children came to visit the new Rempel baby and his mother. This being on a very short January day, it was already dark when they arrived. The woman went into the kitchen where Gerhard's mother was making supper and her little boys stayed with the baby's brothers Wilhelm and Johann in the room where the baby was lying in his cradle. Baby Gerhard's older brother Wilhelm, only three years-old, wanted to show his neighbour friends what his little brother looked like. He grabbed the lamp and held it close to the baby so his friends could see. Wilhelm held the lamp too much at an angle and the hot cylinder fell off and right onto the right cheek of the baby. Of course, baby Gerhard squeezed his little hand directly against the hot cylinder on the side of his chin, burning not only the skin on his little hand but also burning even deeper into, or through, the tender skin of his chin. Baby Gerhard was badly burned. Even his future beard had been burned out; he never grew a beard on that part of his chin.

Marriage.

In 1914 Gerhard J. Rempel married Agatha Krahn (1894-1915) whose family also lived in Blumenort. Agatha Krahn died on December 25, 1915, three days after giving birth to son, Johann. Three months later Gerhard married Agatha Ens (1896-1973), daughter of Abraham Ens (1855-1900) (*Pres.*, No. 20, page 102), and step-daughter of Abraham Schmidt also from Blumenort. Gerhard had dated Agatha Ens before and according to Gerhard's own words, had liked both Agathas so much that it had been hard for him to decide which one he should choose. He has been quoted as having said, "looking back now, I am glad I got them both."

Nephew Jacob Peters, Blumenort, Manitoba, has described Gerhard's second marriage as follows: "He [Gerhard] felt very desolate with his little baby. So one evening he went to my grandparents, Abram Schmidts (Mrs. Schmidt was formerly Mrs. Abram Ens), who had a 19 year-old daughter named Agatha Ens. When he entered the kitchen, Mrs. Schmidt was alone there. He asked if he could talk with Agatha. Her mother allowed it. He then talked with her, and asked her if she would be willing to become his wife and a mother to his little baby. She asked for some days to think it over, which he gladly allowed. After this time she accepted his proposal and they were married in 1916....This marriage lasted for almost 57 years, only 13 days less, and they had 17 children," (Note Four).



Gerhard J. Rempel (1893-1988) and Agatha Ens (1896-1973). Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 338.

Not long after Gerhard J. and Agatha (Ens) Rempel were married, they moved from Blumenort, Manitoba, to Reinland in the Swift Current Colony, Saskatchewan, where Gerhard was the village schoolteacher from 1918 to 1922. Gerhard also did some farming. In spring of 1922 they moved back to Blumenort, West Reserve, taking over the Wirtschaft of his father, Johann W. Rempel, who wanted to retire. Nephew Jacob Peters writes: "Why his father, who was only 54 years-old, left the farm work to his son, I do not know. Maybe he felt obligated to do something else, for he was a school teacher before he moved to Mexico in 1925."

Mexico, 1923.

In October of 1923 Gerhard and Agatha and their five children, Johan, Katharina, Abram, Elisabeth, and Isaak emigrated from Manitoba to Blumenort, San Antonio de Los Arenales (later known as Cuauhtemoc) in Chihuahua, Mexico. Nephew Jacob Peters writes: "1921 was the year when the Reinländer Gemeinde decided to move to Mexico. In 1922 in March they began moving, and in October 1923, Gerhard Rempels also moved there. From this time on, much of this account is from my own memory because we - my mother, brother and I - moved together with them. They had the rear compartment in the last passenger wagon on the train. Only the caboose was behind them. Our compartment was just before their's. Together with us was also Elisabeth Schmidt, my mother's step-sister. In the compartment in front of ours was the Peter Froese family who settled in Gnadenfeld #2B....Gerhard Rempel was the steward on that train. He had to see to it that all went orderly and that the train was kept tidy."

Gerhard and Agatha Rempel had bought an 80-acre farm in Blumenort and on it stood a small

wooden shed that Gerhard had purchased from a Heinrich Penner in Blumenort, Manitoba. Penner had it built for him to move into when he would arrive in Mexico, but had later decided to stay in Manitoba for the time being. Agatha's brother Franz Ens, who had moved to Mexico in 1922, had moved that shed onto their yard. As a result the Rempel family did not have to live in a tent as did many of the other pioneers.

Brother-in-law Franz Ens had already built a large barn with a lean-to on both sides. Jacob Peters writes: "He [Franz Ens] had also built a shanty for Gerhard Rempels and for my mother on our respective farmyards. When we came to Mexico, Rempels and we lived for some days in the lean-to on the north side of the barn until our belongings were brought into our shanties. When this was done, the Rempels moved with us into our shanty. The cows and horses were stabled in their shanty. The animals could not be outside as the farms were not yet fenced in. The Rempels then built a small adobe house and moved into it. When they lived with us I said to my cousins: 'while you live with us, your father is our father also.' But they would not agree. They would not share their father."

Franz Ens had also already hired some Mexicans to make adobes (mud-bricks) for Gerhard and Agatha. Upon arrival in their new home village, also called Blumenort, they started building the walls for an adobe shed, 16 feet wide by 36 feet. When the walls were finished they put on a tin roof and moved in with their five children. Next they built a kitchen and a pantry with adobe walls, but an earthen roof. After this was completed the wooden shed served as a horse and cow barn.

These were the primitive accommodations of the Rempel family until 1927 when they added a few bedrooms between the kitchen and the shed.

Gerhard and Agatha had taken with them three horses, harnesses, a wagon, a few cows and other domestic animals, most of their furniture and other belongings. Although they quickly had sufficient living space for their family, they still did not have adequate shelter for the animals. Winter was drawing nearer, and so, Gerhard hired Mexican labourers to make adobe bricks to build the walls of a 30 x 50-foot barn.

Teaching.

When Gerhard and Agatha had barely begun building the barn walls, the Dorfschulze (village mayor) came and told Gerhard that the villagers of Blumenort were in need of a school teacher. They had decided they wanted to hire him if he was available.

What should Gerhard do? Should he accept the offer to teach, or not? The barn was badly needed and the walls were waiting to be finished. And many other things needed to be done on the newly established farmyard. But money to survive the winter was also badly needed. The \$250.00 dollars Gerhard had in his wallet when he arrived in Mexico were nearly used



Farmyard and buildings of Gerhard J. Rempel on the original 80 acre farm in Blumenort, Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico. Son Gerhard E. Rempel, was born in this simple house. Photo - Gerhard E. Rempel, Winkler, Man.



House and barn of Gerhard J. and Agatha Ens Rempel in Blumenort, Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico, their permanent home after 1933. Photo - Rempel Family Book, page 338.

up. He could not afford to hire much needed help. Gerhard and Agatha considered their options. After they had talked about this for a while, they decided that the modest income Gerhard's teaching would bring in would come in very handy during the winter months. Gerhard loved teaching and Agatha said she would make time to help him build the barn walls after school hours and on Saturdays. They decided to take the teaching job and keep building on the walls, as time would allow.

Gerhard started teaching immediately. Each day when he came home after school, Agatha had a pile of mud-mortar ready. Gerhard changed quickly and the two worked on those walls every day until it was high time to do the chores that the oldest children could not yet do.

When the adobe walls were high enough, about 10 feet, an earthen roof was made over the walls. Long and heavy tree-trunks, purchased from native people who hauled them in from the nearby forest, were lifted onto the walls with the help of hired men. Cheap rough boards, purchased and hauled in from a nearby sawmill, were nailed onto the trunks. Then a four to five inch layer of white soil was put on top of the boards and the roof was finished - a so-called "Eaddak" (earthen roof). A few simple arrangements were quickly made inside and the animals had a home for the cold winter nights. Doing the chores now was much easier.

Nephew Jacob Peters has written: "Gerhard Rempel was a teacher for two years. I had my first school year with him, but I remember nothing in particular of that time. We must have gotten along very well...."

Pioneering.

Almost every month, for the next two years, Gerhard and Agatha received a letter from his parents Johann W. and Katharina (Wiebe) Rempel, still in Manitoba. They had bought the half-farm adjacent to Gerhard and Agatha (next to the north). By the fall of 1925 Johann W. and Katharina (Wiebe) Rempel and daughters, Margaretha, and Susana, were also ready to come to Mexico. In one of his letters, Johann W. Rempel sent along a blueprint for a two-room adobe house, about 14 feet wide and 24 feet long. He asked son Gerhard to have it built for them. It also had an earthen roof but with planed beams and boards. Later this little house was to be their summer-kitchen.

When they arrived in Blumenort, Mexico in late October 1925, Johann W. Rempel and family temporarily moved into that small two-room house. He then hired help and quickly constructed a building about 30 feet wide and 70 feet long with three rooms of living space in the front of the building and a barn in the back. It was built with lumber according to

the style in Manitoba. Because of the dryer conditions in the Bustillos valley, they put on a tin roof, not a shingled roof. Sadly, Johann W. Rempel was only able to live in this house for just over one year. On February 28, 1927, he died of constipation in the Palmore

Hospital in Chihuahua City.

In 1924 Gerhard J. and Agatha Rempel built two bedrooms onto their shed. The addition was also built with adobe walls and had an earthen roof. It only had a dirt floor.

In the early 1930s, Gerhard and Agatha bought an additional 40-acre farm adjacent to their 80-acres. The little house on this farmyard had been vacated when Agatha's widowed sister Aganetha Peters, who owned it, remarried in 1926 (*Pres.*, No. 20, page 101). In 1933, Gerhard and Agatha started building an addition to this smaller house, with bedrooms, a large family room, kitchen and pantry. They moved into this more adequate dwelling which became their permanent home. The original shed they had first built and lived in until now was used



Vorsteher Gerhard J. Rempel discusses mutual concerns with friend and advisor Walter Schmiedehaus, 1940. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 302. For another photo of Gerhard and Agatha Rempel, see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 115.

for grain storage, and the old kitchen with its dirt floor, was used as a work- and tool-shop of sorts.

Farming.

Pioneering in the semi-arid Bustillos valley was difficult because the climate and environment was so different from the prairie conditions the settlers had known in Manitoba. Breaking up the grassland and prairie soil with plow and horses was slow and hard. It needed just enough moisture to do this successfully and there were not many days in summer when conditions were right. The share-plows that had served the Mennonite farmers well on the Manitoba prairies were not suitable for the Bustillos

valley. The soil contained so much gravel that the plowshares became dull in a few hours.

Gerhard J. Rempel, like the other pioneers, wanted to grow wheat in Mexico as they had done in Manitoba. Through research and trial and error they quickly recognized that wheat farming was not sustainable with the varieties available at the time. Often the wheat crops were a total failure. New methods of working the land and new varieties of grain, beans and corn, had to be adopted before the pioneers from Manitoba could successfully farm in the new country.

Crops were small in the pioneering years and prices for the mixed farm products were not good. It took a long time for the colonists to establish a market for their products like eggs and butter, because they really did not have a marketing mechanism. Even in the 1930s when the bean, corn and oat crops were relatively good, the market and prices were poor.

Sometimes a farmer took a load of good corn all the way to Chihuahua City with his horses and wagon. When he got there he received barely enough money for the load to buy two 50-pound bags of wheat flour. Good beans often had no price at all, or at best 30.00 pesos per metric ton. To somehow make use of the beans, Gerhard J. Rempel's sons built a cooking pot out of a 200-litre barrel and set it up near the cow-barn and in this pot beans were cooked daily to feed the cows.

By the early 1930s Gerhard J. Rempel had found a way to market butter. Once a week, with horse and buggy, he went from neighbour to neighbour in the villages of Blumenort and Schönwiese, buying the villagers' butter. He took it to the train station in Cuauhtemoc and shipped it to Chihuahua City. He did this for a good number of years, until some of the colonists started making cheese successfully. Often, when Gerhard J. Rempel was busy doing other things, his sons Johann and Abram went from neighbour to neighbour to buy up the butter and delivered it to the train station in Cuauhtemoc. The sons had to do this much more often after Gerhard J. Rempel was voted in as the Colony's Assistant Vorsteher in 1932.

Land Surveyor, 1927.

The Manitoba Colony in Chihuahua always had two land surveyors. In 1927 Gerhard J. Rempel was elected as a land surveyor. At first he served as the junior surveyor under the leadership of Johann Schellenberg, Schönwiese, the senior surveyor. When Johann Schellenberg died in October of 1931, Franz A. Enns Blumenort, was elected as land surveyor and Gerhard J. Rempel became the leading surveyor. He served in this capacity until the end of 1932 when he was elected as the Assistant Vorsteher of the Colony. Frequently Gerhard J. Rempel had to take time to survey land in different villages when he did not have the time and when he had more than enough work to do taking care of his own family and farm.

Part of the work of the surveyors involved the reserve lands of the Manitoba Colony. About 25 to 30 percent of the colony land was not sold to anyone until the late 1930s. It was unbroken grassland and used for haying. When the summer months were not too dry, parts of this land produced good hay. When the haying season came each year, the

colonists purchased the hay crop on various parcels of the land to feed their horses. The colony surveyors had to measure off the portions of land for individual colonists or groups of colonists and price each parcel according to the quality of hay growing on it. The small income from selling the hay crop on the otherwise idle land was used to make a small payment on that land. But most of the money to make the payments on this portion of land had to be borrowed from the Waisenamt and from the wealthy farmers in the colony.

Vorsteher, 1933.

In 1932 Gerhard J. Rempel was elected as Assistant Vorsteher of the Manitoba Colony, with his term commencing in 1933.

The Manitoba Colony in Mexico, as well as in Manitoba, always had two "Vorsteher" (Reeve). The Vorsteher elected first is called the Leading or "old" Vorsteher and the other is considered the Assistant or "young" Vorsteher, until he becomes the senior elected one. They were elected for two-year terms. Gerhard J. Rempel was first elected Vorsteher for the years 1933 and 1934 and then re-elected five times for two-year terms, serving a total of 12 years. Towards the end of 1944, Gerhard declared he would not accept re-election for another term. The Colonists accepted that decision and elected Cornelius C. Wall from Gnadenfeld.

However, in 1953 Gerhard J. Rempel was elected for another term, serving for 1954 and 1955. He was re-elected again for the term 1956 and 1957, resulting in a total of 16 years of service as the Vorsteher of the Manitoba Colony.

The most serious crisis affecting the Manitoba Colony occurred in the spring of 1935 when the government in Mexico City closed the Mennonite confessional schools in Chihuahua and in Fall in Durango. Nephew Jacob Peters describes the involvement of Vorsteher Gerhard Rempel: "In 1935 when Lazaro Cardenas became President in Mexico, he introduced new laws about education and the schools of the Mennonites were closed. They should use the new curriculum in their school but could not agree to do so. Therefore Gerhard J. Rempel and Ohm Abraham Dyck from Cuauhtemoc were sent to Mexico City to try to get the school freedoms restored. After about seven weeks Rempel and Dyck came back and were not yet able to report any results. In Fall when the schools were closed in Durango, Ohm Johan Wall and Ohm Peter Klassen from Durango and Vorsteher Johan Dyck from Santa Clara went to Mexico City. Johan Wall remained in Mexico City until Christmas. Eventually the *Privilegium* given and signed by President Alvaro



Gerhard J. Rempel, ca. 1955. Son George remembers that "In his last four years as Vorsteher, Gerhard J. Rempel usually stood at the gate just like this when

people came to see him on business and were tying their horses 'aum Wolm' about 70-80 feet away from the gate." Photo - George E. Rempel, Winkler.

Obregon was acknowledged by President Cardenas. Johan Wall now sent a telegram reporting the news and eventually the schools in the Mennonite colonies were reopened...."

Vorsteher's Office.

The large family room added to the Rempel home in 1933 also served as the Vorsteher's office. Into an inner "adobe" wall of this room, a deep closet was built to accommodate the huge safety-deposit-box, the so-called "Vorsteher Safe". Every Friday was the so-called Vorsteher-sitz or sitting-day. On these days the Colonists came to do their business with the Vorsteher. The so-called sitting-day was hosted alternately by the two Colony Vorsteher, both living in Blumenort at the time.

Every other Friday, when Gerhard J. Rempel was the host, the family room became the Vorsteher's office, meaning also it could not be used by the Rempel family.

There were other limitations as well. Every Colonist that came to see the Vorsteher drove onto the yard with horses and buggy or wagon. The men coming from neighbouring villages would just tie their horses to special posts, do their business and leave. Those coming from distant villages had to feed and rest their horses before they left for home. These horses were put into the barn often taking up all the space. Frequently there were so many people that all the Vorsteher's own horses had to go into the corral in the back yard to feed on the pile of oat straw.

For mother and sisters this meant preparing and serving larger quantities of food on such a day, because the men that came from distant villages to finish their business with the Vorsteher had to be served, and indeed, before the family ate. And when more guests came than were anticipated, we naturally only got what was left over or whatever else was to be found in the pantry. A day like that meant we boys had to unhitch the many guest horses, bring them into our barn and feed them.

When more guests' horses came than we had empty stalls, we had to take our horses and let them feed outside on the oat-straw pile; sometimes our barn was over full of visitor's horses. When one of us boys was plowing with a five-horse team and came home to feed the horses and to eat, but found the stable full of visiting horses and was forced to feed his workhorses outside on the feeding wagon, and eat when all the guests had eaten, we sometimes showed the unfriendly features of our faces; but not our parents, they were much too hospitable.

Business.

In the 1940s and 50s Gerhard Rempel frequently went to Kansas and Oklahoma, USA, and purchased used-tractors and implements, kitchen- and heating stoves, wagons and buggies, harnesses and many other things. He took the machines apart and loaded them into railroad cars for transport to Mexico. When the loaded cars arrived in Cuauhtemoc, we boys helped unload and hauled the material home and also put the machinery together again. Here it was placed ready for sale and we helped to sell it.

Gerhard Rempel had many children and in order to have work for them all, he started a printing press and a small bookstore.

Singing.

Gerhard Rempel was also a song leader at worship services, funerals and other occasions. Nephew Jacob Peters has written: "Gerhard Rempel was not only the Vorsteher, he was also a Vorsänger (songleader) in the worship house in Neuenburg."

Both Gerhard and Agatha loved singing and in their home was much singing, old melodies, choral (number) melodies and the "Evangeliums Lieder" tunes according to their notes. Agatha sang most songs by memory and Gerhard sang "la la" when he didn't know the words any farther. When another of Agatha's siblings had died, and only her brother (who lived in Canada) was still alive, she called into memory a song she had learned from her older siblings in her youth (when she had been their maid off and on). The song came into her mind again and again, "Drüben im Lande der Ewigen Freuden" from the "Heimatklänge" hymn book. When the family gathered on Easter Monday, she taught her children the song. This song has been a favourite for most of her children ever since.

Agatha loved to work in her vegetable garden and in her flowerbed. Her children and friends have greatly benefited from her love of flowers and gardening skills.

Retirement.

Gerhard and Agatha continued farming until Agatha crossed over into her eternal home in 1973. After her death, Gerhard said: "The Psalmist says, The days of our lives are 70 years; And if by reason of strength they are 80 years, Yet their host is only labour and sorrow; For it is soon cut off, and we fly away. I will soon be allowed to follow her."

In 1975 Gerhard Rempel returned to Manitoba. For the last several years Gerhard Rempel lived in the Salem Home in Winkler where at the age of 95 years he too could go home. In these 15 years as widower he wished again and again that he could soon depart from this world. When he was 93 years-old, he said again one time - as so often before: "I wish so yearningly that I could be where Mother is."

This time I said to him, before too much time you will die one day. And when you do, will you go to heaven? And he said: I hope: my next question to him was: Then please tell me: What do you mean by it when you say: I hope?

And his answer was, "Gerhard, when I say, I hope, then I mean, I am counting on it with confidence." At the age of 95 years he gently fell asleep one last time and went across into his eternal home to be there together with Mother and with Christ Jesus in all eternity.

Endnotes:

Note One: Jakob Peters was the great-grandfather of Jakob Peters, Blumenort, Manitoba (see *Pres.*, No. 19, page 101).

Note Two: George Rempel, editor, *Rempel Family Book: A Family History and Genealogy of Wilhelm and Agatha (Sawatzky) Rempel and their descendants* (Winkler, 2000), pages vii-ix.

Note Three: According to the older Julian calendar still in Russia at the time, the date of arrival was July 13 or 12 days later.

Note Four: Jacob Peters, Blumenort, Manitoba, letter to the editor, received June 17, 2003, 2 pages.

David Redekop (1877-1953), Pioneer Businessman

“David Redekop (1877-1953), Ignatyev Colony, Russia, and Cuauhtemoc, Mexico - Pioneer Businessman,” compiled by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Family Background.

David Redekop was born in 1877, son of David Wilhelm Redekop (1843-1919) of the village of Eichenfeld, Jasykovo Colony, north of the Chortitza “old” Colony. David’s mother, Maria Woelk (1844-1901), was the daughter of David Woelk and Helena Martens of Einlage who lived in Eichenfeld, Jasykovo Colony in 1873.

Historian Marianne Janzen, Winnipeg, Manitoba (*Pres.*, No. 18, pages 25-31) has pointed out that the 1873/1858 Jasykovo census states that “David Wilhelm Wilhelm Redekop [1843-1919] m. Maria Woelke [1844-1901] was from Neuendorf # 11,” (Note One).

Genealogist Henry Schapansky, New Westminster, B.C. (currently of Edmonton, Alberta), has written that the 1808 census shows that “Living at Wirtschaft # 11 in Neuendorf was, indeed, Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1808) and his father Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1779). Presumably # 11 passed from Wilhelm (b. 1779) to Wilhelm (b. 1808), at some time prior to 1858,” (Unruh, page 267).

Marianne Janzen and Henry Schapansky suggest the following ancestry for David Redekop (1843-1919): He was the son of Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1808) who was the son of Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1779) who was the son of David Redekop (b. 1748), listed in Petershagen, Prussia, in the 1776 Konsignation.

Henry Schapansky also writes that he believes Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1808) married for the second time to the widow of diarist Jakob Wall and that Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1808) was the miller who owned a treadmill in Neuendorf in 1869 as mentioned in the Jakob Epp diaries (see Harvey Dyck, ed., *The Diaries of Jacob Epp* (Toronto, 1991), pages 153 and 266).

Wilhelm Redekop (b. 1779) married Helena Friesen (b. 1781) in 1802. David Redekop (b. 1748), “moved to Walldorf and then to Russia in 1788 where he lived in Schönhorst from 1795-1803” (Unruh, pages 242 and 296) and where he is listed in the 1801 census,” *Diese Steine*, page 656.

David Redekop (1843-1919).

David Redekop and Maria Woelk Redekop established their Wirtschaft in Eichenfeld, No. 4, Jasykovo Colony, just north of Chortitza and Zaporozhe, where their children were born. Maria Redekop died in 1901. David Redekop Sr., son Gerhard David Redekop, sons-in-law Johann Warkentin and Jakob Wiebe, and daughter Susanna Redekop were murdered in the October 26, 1919, massacre in Eichenfeld (see *Pres.*, No. 18, pages 25-31).

Daughter Helena Redekop (1868-1909) married Heinrich Unger (b. 1866). Daughter Elisabeth Redekop (b. 1870) married Wilhelm Dyck (1869-1932). Daughter Maria Redekop (1872-1920) married Johann Warkentin (1871-1919). She died in Franzfeld, Jasykovo. Son Wilhelm David Redekop (1874-1961) married Aganetha Dyck (1876-1946). Wilhelm died in Selinograd, Soviet Russia. Son Gerhard Redekop (1882-1919) married Aganetha Siemens (1882-1950). Daughter Anna Redekop

(b. 1884) married Jakob Wiebe (1882-1919) son of Peter “Fischer” Wiebe of Insel Chortitza. Anna married for the second time to Wilhelm Krahn (b. 1866). Daughter Susanna Redekop (1886-1919) married Franz Warkentin (1886-1919).

Emigration.

In 1903 David Redekop (1877-1953) married Helena Dyck (1880-1971), daughter of David Dyck and Helena Warkentin of Krons Garten. Together with brother Wilhelm, David Redekop and his bride moved to Neu-York (No. 4) in the Ignatyev Colony, north of Donetsk, where they owned a flour mill. Their children were born in Neu-York.

Because of the oppressed conditions of the Mennonites in the Soviet Union, the David Redekop family decided to emigrate in 1924. The door to Canada and the U.S.A. was closed and they decided to emigrate to Mexico to-



David and Helena Redekop. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 215.



The customers of the Redekops would first sell their products such as eggs, butter, lard, hams, etc. in the so-called ‘butter room’ and then they walked over to the Redekop’s store business where they made their purchases. Johan Berg worked for the Redekops for many years. Here he is purchasing the butter from Jakob Friesen. Several foreign guests are talking with Jakob Berg. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 215.



The Redekop store. Here the Mennonites could purchase all their clothes and food. Friendly Plautdietsche service drew the customers from the villages from near and far. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 215 (for another photo, see *Diese Steine*, page 598).



Every day from morning to night during the 1940s and '50s, horses hitched to wagons were tethered in front of the Redekop's store in Cuauhtemoc. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 229.

gether with a number of other families. After an unsuccessful attempt at establishing a settlement at Irapuato in the Caunajuato region, the Redekop family as well as others moved to Cuauhtemoc (End Note). In January 1927 David Redekop wrote *Der Bote* as follows: "There are presently five Mennonite families living here from Russia, and two from the Sommerfelder Gemeinde from Santa Rita."

By this time the Redekops had expended all their financial resources and were very poor. They started herding cattle for the Old Colony people. Being an entrepreneur at heart David Redekop started buying butter from the Mennonites and reselling it to the Mexicans. Around this time many Mexican banks had failed and consequently some of the wealthy Old Colonists gladly lent him money for his business ventures as they no longer trusted the banks. By investing the money wisely David Redekop not only established sound credit but rapidly advanced in his business affairs.

In the beginning the Redekop and Rempenning families asked to join the Old Colony church but were told that they could not be admitted as they were Russländer. Consequently they asked around in Kansas for assistance with organizing a church and connected



In 1949-1950 the Redekops built a massive grain elevator in Cuauhtemoc. It is told that Aaron Redekop had visited Kansas on business and was impressed with the large grain elevators. When he decided to build a grain elevator in Cuauhtemoc, he used the Kansas grain elevators as the model. Thousands of tons of oats were processed by this elevator. It has been only little used during the past years. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 229.

finally with the Hoffnungsau Gemeinde near Goessel, who then provided teachers and ministers.

The Kirchliche Gemeinde in Cuauhtemoc, consisting of Russländer, was known as the Redekop Church and was served by General Conference workers until 1963 when Aaron Redekop expelled them. At this time the Conference moved their operations to Quinta Lapita and the Redekops continued with their own church served by a Conference minister from Saskatchewan but not sponsored or associated with the General Conference.

Death.

David Redekop died in 1953. He was buried in the Old Colony cemetery in Blumenthal, the closest graveyard to Cuauhtemoc.

At this time sons Aaron and Peter were still involved in the family business. Son David Redekop who was married to a Mexican ran the family ranch in Santa Clara which was later bought by the Sommerfelder. In the mid-1940s David moved to Saltillo, Quacuilá, where he bought a ranch close to where the Old Colony settlement was later established. Son Peter eventually moved to Virgil, Ontario, where he owned an apple orchard and vineyard. In 1945 son Wilhelm Redekop moved to Niverville, Manitoba, where his sons farm in a big way, under the name "Redekop Farms". Wilhelm's son Jake assisted with the compilation of this article and Aron Redekop, translated the item from the *Mennonitische Post*.

David Redekop was interested in the spiritual life of his church in Cuauhtemoc and when Rudnerweider ministers Isaac Friesen, Winkler, and Gerhard Froese, Altona, came to the Cuauhtemoc area, he received them gladly. Son Aaron, however, did not support the Rudnerweider's intentions relative to the Old Colonists. Of all the sons, Aaron was certainly the most aggressive businessman and the respected head of the Redekop family clan. Aaron helped many people by lending them seed



Aaron Redekop (right), with wife Katharina, nee Rempenning, and nephew Jake Redekop, Niverville (left), President of the Niverville Credit Union. Photo - El Paso, 1985.

grain, groceries and money and in most cases earned their respect and appreciation. For many years Aaron Redekop served as a spokesman for the Old Colonists. The Redekops lived relatively modestly considering their extensive financial wealth.

End Note: A brief account of this migration of Mennonites from Soviet Russia to Mexico has been compiled by Marianne Janzen, "Notes on the Emigration of Russian Mennonites to Mexico, 1924-1929," in *Mennonite Historian*, Vol. XVI, No. 1, March 1990, pages 1-2 and 7.

Telephone Interviews: George Rempel and David Friesen, Winkler, Manitoba, October 15, 2003.



David and Katharina in their kitchen in Cuauhtemoc. The dwelling house of the Redekop family was in the same building as the store. Photo - 75 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko, page 229.

Aaron Redekop (1911-2001), Entrepreneur

Remembrances of Aaron Redekop (1911-2001), Entrepreneur of his People, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico,

by Jorge Reimer, *Kurze Nachrichten aus Mexiko* as published in the *Mennonitische Post*, July 20, 2001, pages 17 and 19.

Introduction.

Aaron Redekop, the most successful and most renowned Mennonite entrepreneur in Mexico and one who for many years played a very important role in the development of Mennonite culture here, died on June 9, 2001 at 2:00 a.m. at home having reached the age of 89 years and 5 months. Mr. Redekop, directly or indirectly, intentionally or otherwise, left behind a lasting imprint in matters of education, business and religion.

On the 21st of May he was involved in an automobile accident near Seagraves in Texas where he owned a cotton gin. He recovered from his injuries and from pneumonia and returned to his home after a two week stay in the hospital. Eight days later he developed a fever and despite efforts to control it, he passed away. Mrs. Siemens and his daughter Margaret were with him at the time of his passing.

The funeral was held on June 12 at the Old Colony church. Bishop Peter Thiessen officiated and made the following observation; "Mr. Redekop worked hard with great results but now he is still and is no greater than anyone." His text was based on Isaiah 46,4. Ohm Cornelius Fehr spoke at the cemetery. The children; one son and six daughters were all present. He was predeceased by one son (Aaron May 14, 1999 age 54 years) and his wife (Katherine June 6, 1999 age 86 years).

He joined the Old Colony Church in Seminole approximately two years ago which is where Bishop Peter Thiessen is in charge.

History.

Mr. Redekop came from Russia as a 13 year-old with his parents, the David Redekops, along with a group of Mennonites who settled in Irapuato, Cuanajuato. The Mennonites had settled in a predominantly Catholic region and were blamed for the lack of rainfall and the Catholic clergy became hostile. Whether this was the reason for leaving the area or not is not quite clear but they left and settled in Rosario near Cuauhtemoc and later moved to Cuauhtemoc.

The Cuauhtemoc region is where Aaron Redekop became an entrepreneur and worked very hard. For some years he served on the city council and when a certain matter would be decided upon Aaron would say: "Esta bueno, esta bueno, pero..." whereupon he would share his thoughts and ideas as to why he felt the matter should be resolved otherwise. Invariably his advice would be adopted.

Mr. Redekop's parents were apparently very poor upon arrival in Mexico. People that knew them say that at times they were reduced to begging to maintain an existence.

Evidently the entrepreneurial spirit was deeply rooted in this man because it did not take very long before he was driving around in the villages with his horse and wagon selling wares that the settlers required.

Aaron told the story later of how his father (David) had purchased a Model T Ford from J. Rempel, Blumenthal and had borrowed 50 pesos from Johan Rempel, Saucito, to be paid at a future date. When the elder Mr. Redekop had accumulated the necessary cash to pay his debt, Aaron and brother Peter had to walk from Cuauhtemoc to Blumenthal to make the payment to save on gas.

The Ford, however, presented one problem. When Rempels drove it from Canada to Mexico the springs on one side of the vehicle had broken.

Mr. David Redekop, never at a loss to try something, taking a friend with him, drove out to Rio Conchos and loaded his car with fish that he hoped to sell door-to-door in the colonies. Now he ran into the problem of the broken springs. They had not travelled very far when they had to stop to repair the Ford. They found a branch from a tree and fixed it as well as they could. But the next problem was that they were out of gas and also had no money. The local people had gathered around and were wondering what was going on so Mr. Redekop called out: "Cambiamos pescado por petroleo!" (We wish to trade fish for gasoline). They had no money for food so they cooked the fish in water with block [cattle] salt for seasoning.

Aaron Redekop likely also had a very difficult beginning in his business career but he must have inherited much of his business acumen from his father. After a short time business improved and it did not take long before he owned more property than any other Mennonite in Mexico. He bought entire blocks in the city centre, land and properties in the neighboring colonies and ranches in the United States.

Missionaries.

Initially his children attended the village school but eventually he became dissatisfied with the level of learning so he sent for instructors from Canada. These people, however, brought with them more than the necessary school instruction. They began to do mission work and they also conducted evening assemblies.

Since Mr. Redekop had made vast strides in the business world, the inhabitants of the neighboring colonies without exception made their purchases from him. This is how it came about that Mr. Redekop also invited the people from the colonies to attend these meetings. The Mennonites, as good customers, gratefully accepted the invitation. These people had, however, made this commitment without consulting the authorities. When the spiritual leaders learned of what was going on it caused considerable consternation and the members of the congregation were forbidden to attend these meetings.

This would have placed Mr. Redekop in a very difficult position had he not changed his mind very quickly. As a businessman he had no desire to lose his customers at any price. His customers were everything to him. He had even

outfitted livery barns so that his customers could have their horses well cared for while they made their purchases. He declared himself rid of the Canadians and went on with his business.

Mennonites who had business in the city but who travelled some distance were always happy to stable their horses in Redekop's barns and often spent the night there as well. The yard was surrounded by a very high wall and the gate was closed and locked at night. When one or another of the Mennonites returned a little too late from having gone to the movies they would simply climb over the high wall. Redekop allegedly once made the observation that "even if he had the wall built so high that it would reach into heaven they would still climb over."

The response to this was: "No, we Old Colony Mennonites are not that stupid. If we ever should make it to heaven we would never come back to Redekop's."

He was apparently a man of high energy which often caused differences of opinion but when he realized that something was damaging to his business he would rather compromise.

Someone remembered an incident where a preacher Janzen [from the Russländer] selected a sermon on the text: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God." When the worship service had ended and Mr. Janzen had left the podium, Mr. Redekop kicked him with such force as to sprain his foot. "You did this out of sheer spite to me," said Mr. Redekop.

As a young lad Aaron Redekop took a ride on a boat in the company of other young friends on the lake at Rosengart, Nr. 7B by the Hot Springs where a dam was under construction. When the boat started to take on water, everyone was afraid and Aaron was convinced that the end was at hand. Instead of trying to save himself he concluded that he might as well end the matter quickly. Why try to postpone the inevitable? With that he leaped into the water fully convinced that he would drown. He was very surprised to learn that when his feet touched bottom his head was still above water.

Legacy.

Some years ago his son Aaron was kidnapped and though he escaped his captors, his family no longer felt safe in Mexico. His wife wished to move to the U.S.A. as all their children were already there. They did move but Mr. Redekop continued to do business in Mexico where his investments in land and businesses was still very large. Among the many businesses and lands that he presently owned are: the only giant elevator in Cuauhtemoc, land in Los Juncos and area, a cotton gin in Seagraves, Texas, and a cotton gin in N. Casas Grandes, numerous city blocks in central Cuauhtemoc and a ranch in Dell City, U.S.A.

About two and a half years ago Mr. Redekop joined the Old Colony church at Seminole.

Dr. Franz Penner, Gnadenfeld, Mexico

“Dr. Franz Penner, Gnadenfeld, Mexico: A Servant of His People,”
Aptd 170, Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua, Mexico, 31,500.

Family Background.

Franz Penner was the son of David Penner and Katharina Krahn of Gnadenfeld, Manitoba Colony, Mexico. David Penner started an apple garden when he was over 60 years old. The people said, what would that help him? He did live to be 95 years-old. David and Katharina Penner both came to Mexico as teenagers. He was the son of Bernhard Penners from Gnadenfeld, Manitoba, and Katharina was the daughter of Franz Krahn of Blumenort, Manitoba.

In 1974 Franz Penner married Sara Rempel, daughter of George and Susan Rempel, currently of Winkler, Manitoba, and well-known as a historian and as coordinator of the Mexican Mennonite videos (see *Preservings*, No. 21, page 59). Franz and Sara have three children. In addition to being a homemaker Sara works with emigration papers and has considerable contact with the Canadian embassy in Mexico City and in the community.

Franz Penner was born and raised in Gnadenfeld, Mexico, on his parents' farm. He studied medicine in Guadalajara, Mexico, graduating in 1981. After interning at two hospitals in the city of Cuauhtemoc he opened a private medical clinic on Highway 28 in Gnadenfeld where he is still practising today. In addition to his medical practice, Dr. Penner enjoys working in his apple orchards, a small one besides the clinic in Gnadenfeld and a larger one in Grunthal, planted in 2002.

Autobiography, Dr. Franz Penner.

I was born and raised on a farm in a lovely village in the middle of the century. My family lived in Gnadenfeld, one of the first villages established by the Old Colony pioneers in the San Antonio de los Arenales (now Cuauhtemoc) area in 1922. Most families had numerous children living on small farms, but family life was peaceful.

I was the last of 11 children. I'm fortunate that birth control was not used (four died at infancy). Mom was 45 and Dad 49 when my umbilical cord was cut. Being the last of seven kids had some advantages as well as some disadvantages. When I would get into a fight with somebody bigger, I would remind my opponent that one of my older brothers would back me up - which of course usually wouldn't happen.

I got to learn many things on the farm by helping and observing what my older brothers did. The disadvantages I believe anybody can imagine. Discipline was a big issue in our family and I am very thankful for that because discipline helps to shape and mould a personality and character for a better life. I tried to bypass certain things where Dad thought that he was right and wouldn't discuss it with me. One example was when we were not allowed to go to the barber and have our hair cut. That was done at home and Dad always determined the style. Soon two of my brothers got skilled in doing the hair cutting for us and somehow the style changed quite a bit.

I attended the Old Colony village school for only one year which was good. We had a good teacher and the kids were taught reading, writing and arithmetic (German was the language of instruction). Dad was a farmer but he was more of a businessman. He had more contacts with the outer world than many farmers.

My siblings and I kept a good relationship with our friends in the village even though our lifestyle changed. After I finished Grade 8 I very much wanted to go to high school but that was not yet approved by my parents, so I joined the rest of the family working on the farm. Even though it was fun, I didn't give up looking for an opportunity to continue my studies. After six years that moment came, where I could go back into the books on a school desk. I met two more colleagues who were also my age, so it didn't



Franz Penner, graduating from medical school in Guadalajara, Mexico. Photo - Oct. 1995.

feel so awkward to be among students six years younger. I had a wonderful time back in school thanks to the teachers and colleagues who were very kind.

I met a wonderful lady at the school. She was teaching in the elementary school and had planned to help out for a year and then going back to Canada where her family lived. We got to know each other and fell in love. After two years Sara and I got married in Rosenort (now Rosetown), Manitoba.

After that we lived in Guadalajara, Mexico, for seven years. It is a beautiful city with an excellent climate throughout the year. I attended the preparatory school and then the medical school. It is one of the best universities in Mexico. We had many international students and lecturers

on campus. It was exciting to meet so many people from different places in the world. In mid-term of my studies, our first child was born.

Student life was busy and tough. We both worked part time in a clinic while I attended the preparatory school. Sara took language classes for a while and during summer vacations we both worked in Canada. I worked in construction and as a truck driver. Sara worked in a government office (not that she was into politics but she had a nice job).

A year before I finished medical school, I had to look for a good hospital to do the internship. There were several choices: the ones I was debating were in Guadalajara, Chicago, or Chihuahua City. We decided that being closer to home would have more advantages, and that's the one we choose. It was a 120-bed hospital and had basically all the specialties. One year went by during which I worked on a very tight schedule. I hardly saw my family. I have never before or after had so little time to sleep. But that was a good experience and I needed every bit of it.

After that we went back to Guadalajara to write a final test qualifying me for a year of social service. This involved working in a government hospital for 26 hours a week without pay - the minimum time of service required of every doctor before he/she gets their licence to practice. I used part of that year to get settled into a private practice. I also got involved looking after Dad's apple orchard (that's what I did before I got back into studying).

Now 20 years later I enjoy taking care of my own orchards. Sometimes I'm not sure which is my hobby, my medical practice or taking care of the orchards. Working with and relating to people gives me satisfaction and peace of mind - being able to help people that suffer, to help alleviate their pain and see that they leave the hospital in a better conditions, or that they leave my office with hope for a better and happier future ahead.

Our local medical association has a slogan which says, "To serve beyond the limits of our obligations." I pray that this might not be just a slogan but a fact for many more colleagues and Christians in general.

From: Franz Penner E-mail: franz_sara@yahoo.com

Dr. Franz Penner operates a medical clinic 8 km. north of Cuauhtemoc City on the main highway Cuauhtemoc - Colonia Obregon. The clinic was opened in 1983. The clinic employs two secretaries/receptionists, both of them young married women. Dr. Penner is a family practitioner and his patients are mainly people from the Mennonite colonies in the area. He attends patients at two hospitals in the City of Cuauhtemoc: "Hospital Medico Sierra" and in the "Sanatorio y Maternidad San Jose."

Belize - A Mennonite Story

“Belize - A Mennonite Story,” by BBC Reporter Joasia Haniewicz,
20 Sandringham Road, Golders Green, London, NW11 9DP, written in 1991 (yo.haniewicz@bbb.co.uk).

Introduction.

It was totally unexpected. I was in the Belizean jungle when a small, blonde-haired, green-eyed girl emerged through a clearing. She wore a dingy blue 16th century peasant-style dress, a black bonnet which hugged her little fawn face and she walked barefoot. Not only did she wear a dress from another age but an expression from another world. When I asked her where she was from, she seemed puzzled, a little afraid and within seconds she ran away. This was my first sighting of a Mennonite.

That was three years ago. I was a whistle-stop traveller in Central America with just 48 hours to cross the length and width of Belize, a former British colony flanked to the one side by Mexico and to the other by Guatemala in the neck of the Caribbean. My first brief snapshot impressions of Belize City were hardly inspirational: an ex-capital city; it had that “has been” look about it. I was vaguely charmed by the city’s decrepid shanty timber houses, hungover after the vicious hurricane in 1961 but less enamoured by some of its male population loitering on the sidewalks, hissing obscenities at me. But most of all, I disliked the stinking black open sewer snaking its way through the centre of town. Wherever you looked the sewer was there. Whenever you didn’t look, it was still there, thickening in your nostrils and ripening under the humid heat of the day. Children sailed their blue, yellow and pink plastic boats in it whilst their parents lived with sewer-phobia - the fear of falling into it. Like Aldous Huxley, I felt that if the world was flat, Belize City would be crouching at the end of it.

The rest of Belize was more enticing with its steaming swamps and great fat acres of unexplored high jungle - home to the jaguar, the deadly fer-de-lance snake and sweeping cahun tree. Orange Walk, Cockroach Caye, Spanish Lookout were just some of the beguiling names on the Belizean map. It was a place for pioneers and pirates and a safe plateau for refugees from the more volatile Central American countries.

But to come back to that little girl. I just couldn’t stop thinking about her. What was she doing in those thick 16th century clothes in the hot and steamy Belizean jungle? She was a Mennonite. What was a Mennonite?

I desperately wanted to know about the Mennonites but the guide book offered me only one para-

graph on these people and instead described the violent muggings and theft within the country which left me feeling quite cold.

That was until I had a revelation. I decided that a country took on the characteristics of one’s state of mind and that three years earlier, my attitude had been at fault and not the place itself. This proved to be completely correct.

Upon arriving in Belize, instead of the “cat-calls”, I was met with warm Creole greetings: “whe di go an gial?” (what is happening girl?) and “I coulda help you?” (can I help you) and “whada yer name?” (what is your name?).

The sewer was still there in the centre of town but greatly cleared up and the heat had just begun to pick out the fragrances emitted from the orchid, jasmine and sour-sap. It is hardly surprising that such a green, peaceful and rather forgotten country had been selected as a homeland by the shy and introverted hardworking Mennonite farmer.

“Great-grandfather migrated with his family from Prussia to South Russia via the wheelbarrow route. He lies buried there. Grandfather with married sons and daughters came to Canada in 1875. He sleeps beneath the soil in Manitoba. Now father, an old man has brought his family to Mexico where he is starting all

over again.”

The Mennonites.

There are over 600,000 Mennonites [1,000,000 adults members] scattered throughout the world today centered mainly in Canada, United States, Central and South America. Their story is one of struggle for survival, a battle which has lasted for over 400 years.

The first Mennonites emerged in the early 1500s in Switzerland, Holland, South and North Germany; they were called the Anabaptists (again-baptisers) and were part of the larger Reformation movement. The Anabaptists were re-named Mennonites after Menno Simons who was originally a Catholic priest from the Dutch province of Friesland. Menno Simons broke away from the Catholic church in 1536 and became the figurehead through his leadership and writings for all European Mennonites. The Mennonites believed in the total authority of the Bible, adult baptism based on a voluntary commitment to God, the non-swearing of oaths and that all men should live in a peaceful, non-violent way. These beliefs lie at the heart of practicing Mennonites today.

The Mennonites sought to lead a pure christian life, one in which the inner life was reflected in the outward appearance and attitudes. As such, they considered child baptism meaningless because a child was unable to effect his own personal transformation. True faith was a decision to be reached by every thinking and believing person.

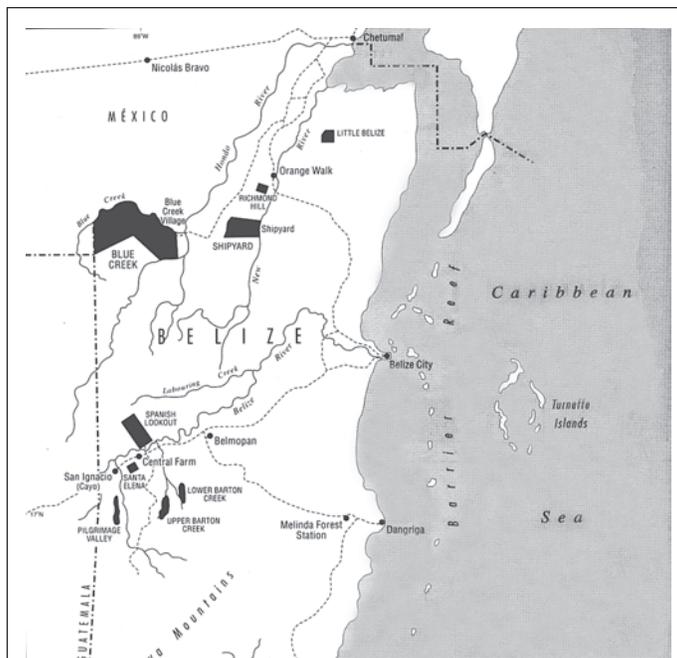
The Mennonites were completely opposed to all warfare and acts of aggression even if it was in self-defence. They believed their fate was in God’s hands.

They were people of high ideals and by their very existence they pointed out the failings of the Protestant and Catholic churches. By accepting their faith, they singled themselves out as a “special” people and were open to criticism and persecution. In some ways they can be described as the Jews of the gentile world.

“We didn’t inherit the land from our fathers, we are borrowing it from our children.”

Europe To Belize.

Following persecution in northern Europe. the Mennonites



Map of Belize showing the Mennonite settlements and Colonies. Map by Wm. Schroeder, Mennonite Atlas (Winnipeg, 1996), page 80/Diese Steine, page 616. Three colonies were founded in 1958: Spanish Lookout by the Kleine Gemeinde from the Quellen Colony (Jagueyes), Mexico; Blue Creek and Shipyard settled by Old Colonists from Mexico. Barton Creek and Little Belize were later established as “horse and buggy” settlements. Little Belize is a daughter colony of Shipyard. Barton Creek started as a conservative split from the Kleine Gemeinde Spanish Lookout Colony. The Blue Creek Old Colonists who remained steadfast in their faith have relocated to Shipyard, Bolivia and Paraguay.

found their way into the Gdansk area (Polish-Prussia), taking with them their Low German language known as “platt deutsch”. Their initial persecution led them to isolate themselves within Prussia, becoming a country within a host country, a structure which has not changed to the present day. In Prussia they were given certain privileges in return for their farming skills. They were given religious freedom, exemption from military duties, and the right to have their own schools and government. Initially, they were welcomed as industrious farmers, clearing difficult swampy areas and creating rich farmland. They never disturbed anyone, maintained their traditional ways and made an impact on the country’s agriculture.

Their prosperity elicited a jealousy amongst their non-Mennonite neighbours and the Prussian government stymied them from buying more land. This land hunger forced them to move on and in the 1780s, Catherine the Great invited them to clear the lands in southern Russia. In order to make her invitation more attractive, Catherine offered the Mennonites free transportation from Prussia, religious freedom and exemption from military service. By 1789, 200 families settled in the Chortitza region by the River Dnieper. Her successor Paul I renewed these promises in a Privilegium (see Appendix I).

The initial colony in Chortitza was made up of poorer Mennonites but with the new privileges, rather more prosperous groups were attracted to settling in Russia from Prussia. Settlers arrived in Molotschna in southern Russia in 1804 and by 1836, there were around 10,000 Mennonites in the Molotschna colony. An American traveller passing through the Mennonite villages in 1872 speaks as follows:

“The dwelling houses were large brick structures with tile roofs, a flower garden between the street and the house and well kept vegetable garden and orchard in the rear. The stables with splendid work horses of every build, and the sheds with vehicles of every description, among them family coaches and all kinds of farming machinery. They were certainly the best farming communities I had seen anywhere. Scattered over the country were large isolated estates with buildings reminding one of the feudal baronial castles of western Europe. Their owners were millionaire Mennonites who had acquired large tracts of land by private purchase. I was entertained by one of them, who had the reputation of being the largest sheep owner in Europe. When I



The women on Barton Creek do not cut their hair; “which always remained in a hidden braid.”



A young couple with their child on the Barton Creek settlement. Family values and togetherness are extremely important to Hutterites, Amish, Old Order and Conservative Mennonites.

asked him how many sheep he owned, he could not tell but said he had 3,000 shepherd dogs taking care of his flock. A little figuring developed that he owned over a million sheep, scattered in flocks all along the coast of the Black Sea.”

The Mennonites had become very rich farmers and many people believed they had lost their spiritual values by accepting large scale farming methods from the outside world.

“The man who begins to live more seriously within, lives more simply without.”

Divisions.

The Mennonite church is characterised by its numerous splinter groups. Various divisions occurred over the centuries and almost always

seemed to represent a struggle between the “old way” and “new way” - the traditional versus the progressive, the Old Law versus the freedom of the new. However, the underlying aims of each group were identical; namely finding the best way of attaining spiritual perfection. The Amish were originally Mennonites but broke away from the Mennonite church in 1693 as they believed without exception that an excommunicated Mennonite should be shunned. Shunning in the Amish groups was the result of a person committing a grave sin in the sight of God. When shunned the offender was thrown out of the community and banned from having any contact with his family and friends. He had disgraced himself before God and was therefore rejected by Him and by his human family. The Mennonites however, believed that excommunication should not be so stringent. Although excommunication is practised in all Mennonite communities, the aim is always first to try and bring back the “sinner” into the community and not just to simply fling him out into the world.

Kleine Gemeinde.

In 1812, a division occurred amongst the Russian Mennonites. The “Kleine Gemeinde” (small church) was formed when Napoleon invaded Russia and Mennonites pledged money in support of the Russian army. The Kleine Gemeinde believed that as a non-resistance group they could not contribute money towards an aggressive movement.

Leaving Russia.

In 1870, the Russian government abolished all military exemptions and made it compulsory for everyone to learn the Russian language. Pressure was exerted on the Mennonites to assimilate with the Russian population. This, coupled with their increasing land hunger, made it apparent that a new homeland would have to be found. Offers of re-settlement came from North America, and in 1873 a Mennonite delegation was sent there to search for a new homeland. They were offered eight townships of land near the city of Winnipeg in Canada. Every Russian Mennonite over the age of 21 received 160 acres of land as a gift. More importantly, the Mennonites were given complete freedom of faith and exemption from military service. They were allowed to live in closed self-governing communities, have their own schools and speak the Low German language as in Russia. The Canadian govern-

ment also agreed to subsidise the Mennonites' passage over the ocean.

Shortly before their departure, the Czar of Russia, Alexander II made a plea for the Mennonites to remain in Russia having woken up to the fact that he was about to lose a group of people who made an enormous impact on the country's agriculture. In order to persuade the Mennonites to stay, the Russian government declared that they would not have to serve under the war ministry but in other services such as forestry work, fire fighting in the cities and in civilian medical work in hospitals. This satisfied some Mennonites but to others it represented a contribution to the war effort. Subsequently, in the years between 1875 and 1914, 18,000 Mennonites emigrated to Canada and the United States.

For the next 50 years the Mennonites in Canada enjoyed their privileges and freedom but in the 1920s their way of life was once again threatened by the compulsory attendance of all children in government schools. Parents objected to the curriculum which they believed was too worldly; they wanted the Bible to be the major text book in school, giving the children spiritual rather than material values.

The offer of religious freedom and military exemption drew many Mennonites to Mexico. By 1950 there were 16,000 Mennonites in Mexico mostly in the state of Chihuahua [80,000 today]. Their freedom, however, was short-lived because the Mexican government was unable to supply them with enough land to meet the needs of their rapidly expanding families. Additionally, certain Mennonites wanted to drive cars. This caused a split within the Mennonite communities. The stricter groups believed that cars would evoke vanity and pride from the people and so in 1958 they left Mexico, this time for Belize, then known as British Honduras (see Appendix Two).

Belize.

For two months, I lived in four major Mennonite communities in Belize including Upper Barton Creek, Spanish Lookout, Blue Creek and Shipyard. I also visited settlements in Little Belize and the new settlement in Indian Creek.

Only 174 miles long and 68 miles wide, Belize is a small country. It borders on Mexico and Guatemala and 65 percent of its land is undeveloped forest, scrub or wasteland. Its first settlers in 1640 were Englishmen who arrived with their black slaves from Jamaica to cut logwood. Largely ignored by the Spanish, the country eventually became a British crown colony in the 19th century. Guatemala has made repeated claims of ownership on Belize but its British presence has helped it to remain culturally, linguistically and politically separate from its Guatemalan and Mexican neighbours. This year (1991) Guatemala formally acknowledged Belize's separate identity.

The country achieved independence from Britain in 1981 and currently has a population of 180,000 dominated by Creoles, Garifuna (black caribs), Mestizos, Mayan and Kekchi Indians. The Mennonites form three percent of the total population (representing the largest percentage of any country although in total (5,000) [estimated 10,000 as of 2002] they are still quite a small group. However, the Mennonites' contribution to the agriculture cannot be underestimated. Over the last three decades, they have provided the country with most of its chicken and milk, as well as being major corn, bean and rice producers.

Over the years, numerous internal conflicts within the Mennonite groups have led to migrations within Belize. Most of the moves have been due to the more traditional groups resisting modern conveniences, e.g. electricity and cars. In the stricter groups, the women wear long, plain and dark dresses with long aprons.

Buttons and zips are forbidden. Their heads are covered with headscarves and black bonnets. The men wear long trousers which are held up with braces as belts are forbidden. Their shirts are dark and collarless. Watches are allowed but have to remain hidden in their pockets.

Religion.

The Mennonites in Belize appear to be a rather eccentric group of people - the stricter groups wear strange clothes and lead rather exaggerated simple lives. Their overriding belief is to live a life as pure as possible, faithful to God, adhering closely to the scriptures in the belief that the afterlife is more important than the one on earth. Although being a Mennonite has evolved into being a culture, their overwhelming faith in God is what influences the way they dress, work, think and interact with one another.

As described earlier, the Mennonites believe that baptism into the church should occur when a person has undergone a personal and spiritual transformation, usually in adulthood. Once a person feels ready to take on this commitment, he attends religious instruction over a period of a few months and covers a number of articles of faith. On these articles (varying to some degree from group to group), the Mennonite faith is based. (See Appendix Three).

Barton Creek.

Of all the Mennonite communities, the darkest, strangest and most reclusive of all is Barton Creek. I had not intended on going to Barton Creek first, believing that a sensible plan of action was to ease myself in gently by staying with the more progressive Mennonite groups.

On my first day in Belize, a Belizean advised me to never make any firm plans in the country because they always fell flat. How right he was. On route to Spanish Lookout, a progressive Mennonite settlement, at a rather unenterprising spot - a Shell gas station, I bumped into the one non-Mennonite living as a self-sufficient farmer in the ultra-orthodox Barton Creek settlement. Her name was Rosanne Orrizzi, an American of Italian origin who some five years ago decided to escape the western world and live alone on a farm in Belize. She could not have chosen a more remote spot. Barton Creek lies in the middle of a massive forestry reserve known as the Mountain Pine Ridge. It is right in the centre of Belize and 25 miles from the Guatemalan border. A three-hour ride by horse and buggy to the nearest rather desolate village called Georgeville, Barton Creek is not a place which people visit on a quiet Sunday afternoon. The road is dusty and rocky and creates havoc for any four-wheeled vehicle. Rosanne's truck is the only one which braves the seven-mile windy path to the village - a trip she makes once a week to collect essential provisions. I knew I had struck my first bit of gold meeting Rosanne so without any hesitation, I striped the bus of all my belongings and clambered into her decaying truck.



Conservative Mennonite families are rich in children which they consider a gift and blessing of God. Great efforts are made in the home, family and church to teach them the ways of Christ. Here a typical family in the Barton Creek settlement.

Rosanne has an exquisite farm, overlooking dense woolly green mountains which she manages, out of choice, totally alone. A Calamity-Jane type of figure, she can be heard all over the farm "yellin n' cussin" at her sheep, dogs, chickens, geese, ducks and horses. A more striking contrast to the Mennonites - "the quiet in the land" could not be imagined.

Rosanne proved to be a treasure house of information on the Mennonites. Her letter of introduction to one of the pivotal members of the Barton Creek community, a man called Henry Friesen, gave me an entry into this community I might not have otherwise obtained.

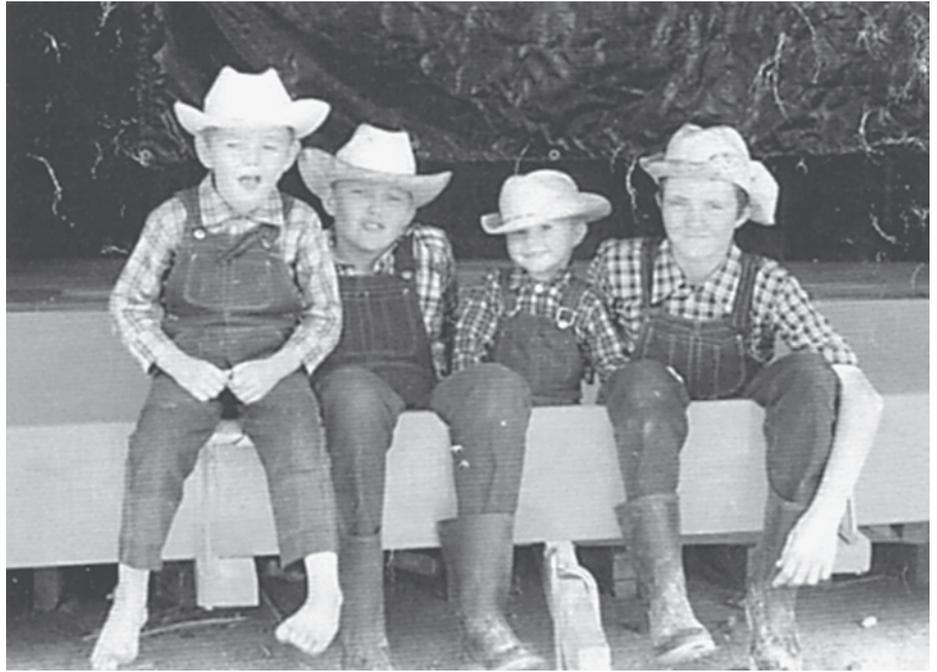
Clutching my note, I climbed the steep white dusty hill towards the Mennonite settlement. Within half a mile, I reached the first farm - home to the Hein family and their 16 children.

As I approached, each window, doorway and nook and cranny was filled with a child's staring face. The women looked strikingly eerie in their long black dresses, black aprons, black headscarves and blank faces, and the men rather biblical with their waist-length frizzy beards. I smiled at them but received no response - just a continuous long and hard stare. Walking further, I met with the same treatment. Men and women in the fields put down their tools and transfixed their gazes on me. Having somewhat adjusted to feeling a freak, I approached a man with a navel-length red beard dressed in baggy trousers and braces and asked him the way to Henry Friesen's house. Distant, but not unfriendly, he pointed his finger to Henry's farm. I carried on but looked back and saw that the man was still looking at me.

Nervously, I approached Henry's farm and saw a man bearing a now almost familiar appearance - a long grey beard, pudding bowl haircut, baggy trousers and braces. Believing him to be Henry, I introduced myself (consciously lowering the tone of my rather loud voice), shook his hand and passed him Rosanne's note. He read it, looked up and with a smile he said "Ah welcome, welcome, it's always a wonderful thing to receive a guest from God." Well, I'd never considered the BBC in quite that light but gratefully I stepped into Henry's home.

Their home which was built of mixed timber was glaringly plain. There were no ornaments, pictures or mirrors - even the calendar was dull and industrial. Upon asking Henry why he kept his house looking so simple, he responded with a verse from 1 John 2:16, "for all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but is of the world." He explained that a Mennonite should live a completely unworldly life without any superficial and distracting adornments. Being of Canadian origin, the Friesens spoke excellent English although between themselves, they used the original Low German. I explained to them that I was carrying out a study on the Mennonites in Belize and within a short period of time, they invited me to stay with them.

Before going to bed, I asked whether I could have some water to wash myself with. I was



Four young boys in the Barton Creek settlement pose for the camera.

given a bucket and after having washed my hands and face, was encouraged to wash my feet. I did so and was followed by Henry Friesen, his wife, two daughter and two sons who all washed their hands, face and feet in the same water.

Even in 100 degrees plus temperatures, the women in Barton Creek wore long dark dresses in a colour range of dark blue, dark green, brown or black with thick black stockings underneath. Long aprons in the same colour were worn on top. Head coverings were compulsory - big black bonnets for outside the home, black scarves for inside. On retiring to bed, I noticed the daughters wearing their scarves in bed. Upon enquiring why, I was told "in case we get the urge to pray to God in the night and our heads must be covered in the sight of the Lord." And again a scripture: "Every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her be shorn or shaven, let her be covered," 1 Cor. 11:5. The women were forbidden to cut their hair which always remained in a hidden braid, loaf-of-bread size, underneath their head coverings. It was washed once every two months. Meanwhile, the men were not allowed to cut or trim their beards and they all had identical pudding bowl hair cuts. Instead of belts, men wore braces, believing that belts attracted too much attention to their bodies. The aim was to wear loose clothing in order to not attract the opposite sex.

The strongest symbol of Barton Creek's unworldliness was of course the horse and wagon. It is on this issue that many Mennonites broke away from the Spanish Lookout community. Spanish Lookout Mennonites began acquiring cars, trucks, tractors and bulldozers. This caused a rift with the more con-

servative members who in 1969 drifted away to establish communities in Upper and Lower Barton Creek.

Note: The only thing that divides Upper and Lower Barton creek is the beard. In Lower Barton Creek, the men shave their beards. Currently, attempts are being made to unite the two communities

No modern equipment was allowed in Barton Creek. Horses were used in the fields and as transport for pulling buggies.

In extreme need, the Barton Creekers could accept rides from other people and they were allowed to take buses but they were told by their Minister to use the horse and wagon whenever possible. They believed that the horse was put on the earth to work and that a motorised vehicle was simply part of a man's vanity. Henry Friesen described to me a journey he made by horse and wagon to Belize City from Barton Creek. It took him a whole week to get there, a journey which by bus would have taken just three hours.

On Sunday, I watched a procession of horses and wagons in solemn single file approaching the church for the regular Sunday morning service. The men got out and stood at the right-hand side of the grey timber building and the women clustered at the left-band side. The men entered the church first, sat on the right hand side and the women followed taking their places on the left.

The Mennonite church is comprised of Elders who controlled all the community's affairs and ordained officials - Ministers who taught the Gospel and Deacons who assisted the Ministers. I was encouraged to join the service and was immediately struck by the beautiful singing of hymns in High German. Passages from the Bible were read out by the Minister and then interpreted. The service was carried out partly in English and partly in Low

German. At one stage, the Minister spoke of the evils of drinking tea and coffee, and reminded his members that they should lead as pure a life as possible. The service lasted three and a half hours, after which I was invited by numerous Mennonites to their homes.

I was warmly surprised by this gesture and subsequently learned that the people were keen to share their spiritual values with me. On this occasion, I returned to the Friesens for lunch. Prayers were always said before and after each meal. For lunch we ate black beans with a mixed vegetable stew followed by a fruit salad. Everything was eaten from the same plate.

Since I spent so much time with the Mennonites, I also spent time in their outhouses! These were tall wooden structures set approximately 30 yards away from the house. Inside, one would find a plank containing two round holes - a large one for adults and a smaller one for children. Rather amusingly, instead of toilet paper, receipts for items bought were used, indicating that money was only fit for the toilet! On one occasion in the outhouse, I flashed my torch into the corner and there six inches from my foot, I saw a slim black and red snake curled up snugly for the night. I later discovered it was the coral snake, one of Central America's most poisonous species.

The Mennonites in Barton Creek owned approximately 4,000 acres of land. The land was bought by a committee which sold varying amounts to its members. The Mennonites tried to keep their farming organic. Peanuts and potatoes were the greatest income bearers. They also grew corn, beans, tomatoes, water melons, carrots, papaya, sweet peppers, cabbage and coriander. On a smaller scale, they were involved in cattle and pig farming.

Flour was made from cassava and bread baked once a week. Once the bread turned stale, the mouldy bits were cut off and the bread was put in the oven and eaten as toast. On the whole, the Barton Creek Mennonites produced food for their own consumption and with the money obtained from what they did sell, they bought cloth, kerosene for their lamps, shoes, salt and sugar. Nothing was wasted. Old clothes were torn into strips and used as towels.

Cloth was bought in bulk (usually by the Minister's wife) and then sold to members of the community. No special garments were worn at weddings, just their regular clothing. The entire church was invited to the wedding and the food was provided at the bride's expense.

The church building was also used as a school which looked positively Dickensian with its plain walls and lines of wooden desks and rows of benches from a bygone age. School teachers were selected by members of the Mennonite church and were expected to take up the position without question. Children began school at the age of seven; the girls finished their education at the age of 12 and the boys at the age of 13. School began at 7:30 am and ended at midday. In the afternoons, the children were expected to help in the home or in the fields. The Bible was the main text book at school and the children learned how to read,



A typical farmyard in the Barton Creek settlement. There are few places on earth that approach the pristine beauty of this Mennonite community. The buildings are built in the "bat and board" style reminiscent of the buildings of Mennonite pioneers in Kansas and California. It is a building style useful in wet and humid climates. On these high plateaus the Barton Creekers raise potatoes. Others farm in the valley of Lower Barton Creek. It is the only "horse and buggy" settlement of Kleine Gemeinde origins although the majority of the community are of Old Colonist background.

write and do simple arithmetic. To be educated was not considered to be a great virtue as it was believed that physical work was the greatest expression of man's love for God.

Each farm had a large circular metal tank to collect rainwater for drinking, washing and cooking purposes. Sometimes during the dry season, January to May, the tanks ran dry and water had to be taken from the Creek. Whilst in Barton Creek, I watched the Mennonites water divining and then digging a well for water. The method they used was ingenious. Two horses rotated in a circle with a lead attached to a manual transmission made up of bits and pieces taken from old abandoned cars and bicycles. This lead was joined to a large concrete block which two men guided into the earth to "drill" for water. It was a slow process. However, two days before I left Barton Creek, the Mennonites struck water at a depth of 80 feet.

The community did not have electricity but lived at night by the honey-coloured light emitted from their kerosene lamps. In any case the people went to bed early at around 8 p.m. and rose at 5 a.m. After supper, families sat together, talked and sang hymns. At night the entire area would be filled with a great melody of High German hymn singing.

On my last day in Barton Creek, the Minister's daughter presented me with a gift of two pristine white pillowcases. I inspected them for signs of creativity such as an embroidered flower or little motif but, of course, I should have known better. The pillowcases were plainly stitched with white thread without any trace of decoration. Like everything else in their lives, the Mennonites of Barton Creek believed that true beauty is found in simplicity.

Televisions and radios were strictly forbidden. People were aware that a war was going on in the Gulf but without access to the outside world, they did not know why the war was taking place and who was involved. Their interest in the war was fairly passive.

The very worst thing that can happen to a Mennonite is to be excommunicated. Excommunication meant separation from the community and the loss of eternal life. Excommunicated Mennonites remained in the community but were unable to enjoy any form of social fellowship. At meal times, they ate alone and were shunned by the entire community. The only way they could re-enter the church was through sincere repentance. In Barton Creek, the entire settlement was plunged into sadness because one of its male members had been excommunicated. His crime (serious enough in any group) was that he had had intimate relations with his sister and had refrained from confessing it at the time of his baptism. Despite repeated requests from members of the church, he did not repent of his sin and eventually was compelled to leave the community. I discovered that he was working on a farm near a place called Dangriga with another excommunicated Mennonite from Lower Barton Creek - the latter having been excommunicated because of buying a truck to make his business more efficient. I decided to track the two down and discover how they were coping with life in the outside world.

At 2.30 in the morning, I left Barton Creek with the Minister Titus Martens on his horse and wagon. I decided it was tactful not to mention that he was taking me part of the way to see the very member he had excommunicated.

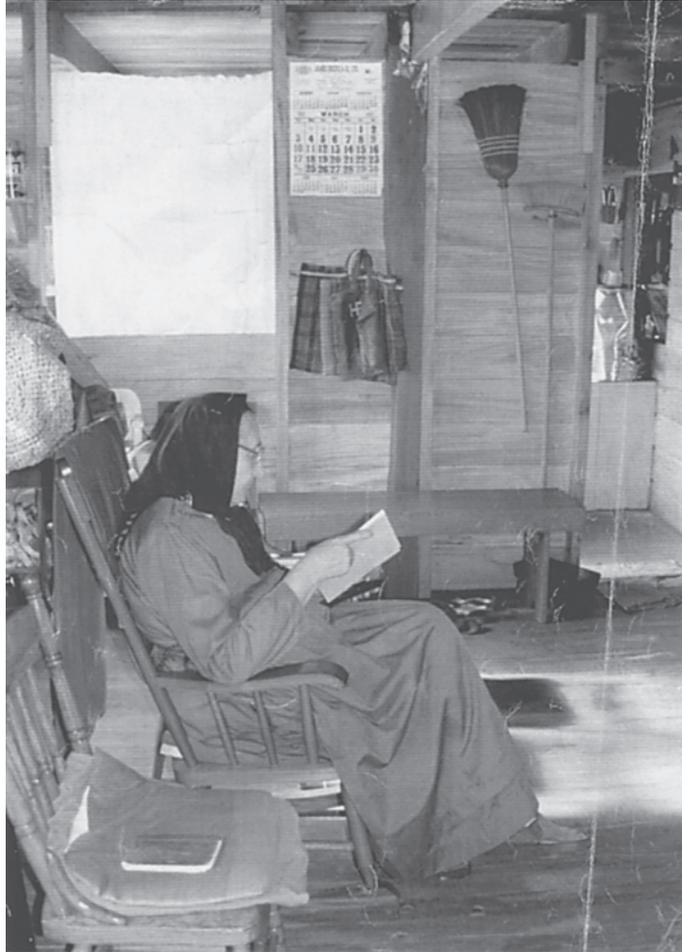
The Misfits.

After repeated enquiries at restaurants and gas stations in the local town of San Ignacio (Belize is so small, it is very easy to track people down), I was eventually led to the excommunicated Mennonite's adopted Spanish family. The family was unable to speak English but I was able to communicate with them in rudimentary present tense Spanish, having taken private lessons prior to my trip and a week's Spanish course in Guatemala en route to Belize. I was given a telephone number of the farm where the two men - David and Henry were working. Phoning them up, I was struck by how keen they seemed to want to talk to me about why they had been excommunicated. After a five-hour bus journey along the dusty and bumpy Hummingbird Highway, I alighted at a swampy, mosquito-ridden place called Kendal. Amidst the dark Belizean faces, I immediately recognised the pale Mennonite face of David. He showed me his dark dilapidated wooden home and proudly displayed his radio cassette recorder which would have been strictly forbidden in Upper Barton Creek. He gleefully pointed out the bright, shiny buckle he was wearing on the belt to his trousers, having abandoned his braces many months ago.

On leaving the Barton Creek community, David found himself a Spanish girlfriend. I met him one week prior to his wedding. He seemed to be caught between two worlds - the conservative world of Barton Creek and the modern world of which he was now a part of. He complained of how much people seemed to swear, drink and smoke and how few spiritual values they seemed to have. He admitted that he had been totally wrong in being intimate with his sister but felt that the enormous restrictions in Barton Creek had driven him to it.

As a teenager, David displayed rebellious tendencies. He would trim his beard, visit the village close by and openly disagree with Barton Creek's conservative ways. In some respects, one has the impression that the community enjoyed him for his individual ways but at the same time scorned him for being too much of a controversial figure. As the eldest of 16 children, he had a somewhat privileged position. When his father was out of the house working, David would take on the role as head of the household. To a certain extent his position gave him some flexibility, a freedom to challenge his father's ultra-orthodox ways. By the time he reached his 18th birthday, he had turned into a wayward teenager, fairly normal in any western society but outrageous in a con-

servative Mennonite one. As a marriageable partner his prospects would have been poor. He would have been considered as too forward thinking for any strict Mennonite father's daughter. Following the rejection of two proposals of marriage, in desperation he developed a close relationship with his sister. He could have kept quiet about it but instead decided to confess what he had done and achieved his longed-for release from the Barton Creek community.



Grandma reading the Bible. In addition to reading and studying the Bible, the Barton Creekers place considerable value on the traditional Mennonite canon of devotional literature including the Martyrs' Mirror, Schabaelje's The Wandering Soul, Dirk Philips, Pieter Pieters and Menno Simons.

Henry, David's friend was a much sadder case. He had been excommunicated from Lower Barton Creek due to buying a truck in order to make transportation of his chickens to the market more easy. He found the horse and wagon too impractical, having to get up at 2 a.m. every morning to make the three-hour ride to the market. Despite repeated warnings to sell his truck, he held onto it and eventually was forced to leave the community. He took his wife and four children to Spanish Lookout, a progressive Mennonite community where he was welcomed with open arms. However, every day, members of the Lower Barton Creek community would arrive in Spanish Lookout and torment Henry's wife telling her that she had forfeited eternal life by leaving the community.

The pressure was too much for her and she left her husband, taking her children back to Lower Barton Creek. Henry was devastated. He had lost his wife and children - everything he had ever worked for. As he was married and unable to obtain a divorce, he could not re-marry in Spanish Lookout. He left and is now living with a Spanish girl - a way of life which makes him unhappy. Again, like David he is caught between two worlds.

Henry had a large clapped-out American car. It was old and the windscreen was broken. It was certainly no status symbol but for Henry it was a massive leap from the horse and wagon. The three of us drove to Dangriga, the town where I was staying for the night. We went to a local restaurant, a 1950s style Burger King. Dark and moody Creole women wearing pink and yellow plastic hair curlers were perched on high stools. A television set was playing in the background. Like children, both David and Henry were glued to the screen. Suddenly a submarine appeared on the television. I asked Henry if he knew what a submarine was and rather uncomfortably he said "something unreal...oh I guess I don't really know."

It was painful to watch them both, knowing that everything around them made so little sense. They left and I felt very sad.

Shipyard.

Of all the Mennonite communities, Shipyard had been the one I had least looked forward to visiting. Renowned for being skilful carpenters, I had experienced some hostility from the few Shipyard settlers I had met selling their furniture in Belize City. Having spoken to a number of other Mennonites, I knew that this group (known as the Old Colony) were very set in their traditional ways, a tradition firmly rooted in Russia. I

did not think they would accept me as an outsider to stay with them. I also heard that very few of them spoke English. However, one name was given to me by individuals from different settlements - a man called Dr. David Friesen [see *Pres.*, No. 21, page 72]. I knew he wasn't a qualified doctor but nevertheless treated the whole community of Shipyard with the rudimentary medical knowledge he had acquired over the years. Two people from Blue Creek took me on a dark evening to his home to see if I could make arrangements to stay with him.

Upon entering the community. I was reminded of my first impression of Barton Creek - the sound of clip-clopping hooves on the soft white sandy paths and the smell of their droppings gently hanging in the air. The darkness

hit me most of all, electric lights being forbidden in favour of the kerosene lamps. In a shadowy corner of his yard. I was introduced to Dr. Friesen and he agreed to have me in his home for as long as I wanted to be there.

My stay in Shipyard ended up being my most rewarding and happiest time in Belize. Dr. Friesen was happy to allow me to spend my days with him in his surgery and, of course, through this I met many people and learned a lot about them through their visits to the surgery.

Medical Centre.

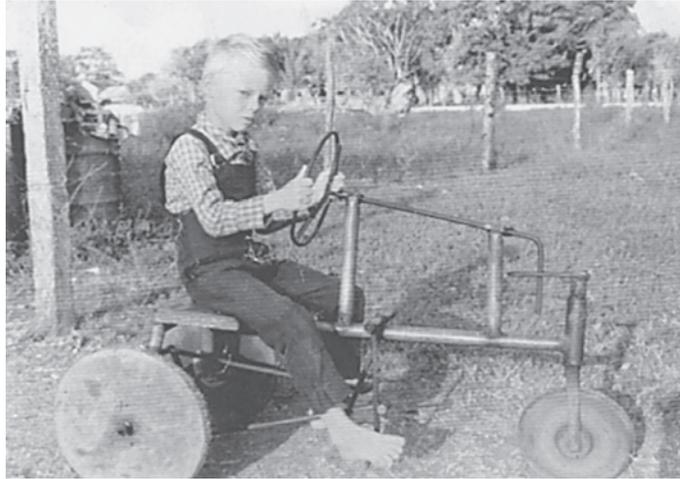
Dr. Friesen's father was a self-taught dentist in the community. When Dr. Friesen was 15 years-old, his father went to Belize City for a few days. During this time a few people came to the surgery and requested David (being the dentist's son) to pull their teeth out. At first he refused to do the extractions because although he had watched his father doing the work many times, he didn't have any experience himself. Finally, the people said that if he made a mess of their extractions, they would not take any action against him, if only he would try. He did and removed their teeth successfully. This marked the beginning of Dr. Friesen's medical career.

Dr. Friesen left school at the age of 12 and had few formal qualifications. He had a certificate in mid-wifery and a certificate for treating malaria. At the front of the medical centre was the dental practice. The room contained 50-year old ex-U. S. dental equipment and an equally old and threadbare dentist's chair. Most of the equipment's accessories did not work. However, David was able to carry out fillings and extractions quite adequately. On top of this he made false teeth in a room at the back. The false teeth business was a big one in Shipyard due to the Mennonites having such poor teeth. By the age of 15, most Mennonites had full or partial plates. It was almost a symbol of adulthood

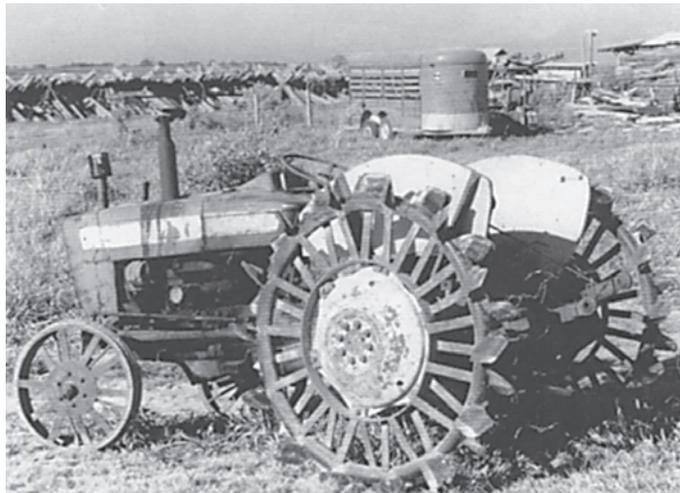
- you reached your mid-teens and got a new set of teeth! In any case, the Mennonites thought the false ones were prettier than their natural teeth. Judging from the mis-shapen ones I saw, they could have been right. I tried to work out why they had such bad teeth. To a certain extent they didn't look after their teeth and they all drank rain water which had very few minerals. In addition, their diet was deficient in calcium. Few people drank milk, ate cheese or fruit and vegetables. Dr. Friesen was aware of this and at the time of my visit was trying to re-educate the people to prevent tooth decay. It was mostly a waste of time, since they seemed to enjoy having false teeth. Even

when they had a few natural teeth left, in their mouths, they would persuade Dr. Friesen to pull them out to give room for new false ones.

To the side of the dental practice was the surgery. David would skip from one room to another depending upon a patient's needs. One of my favourite occupations was to peer through the wooden slatted windows and watch the patients drawing up to the surgery in their horses and wagons. Sometimes there would be a queue of four or five of them. For consultations, David would charge nothing and a small marginal profit on the drugs which be



A young lad with his home-made tricycle on the Shipyard Colony.



A tractor equipped with steel wheels on the Shipyard Colony.

sold. Besides treating the 2,000 Mennonites in Shipyard and 1,000 in Little Belize, a large number of Belizeans would come to see him, believing him to be one of the most efficient practitioners in the area. Mennonites from other more distant colonies would come to see him, sometimes travelling up to half a day in order to reach him. He was an astonishing character and with his rather forlorn and brown three front teeth poking out of his mouth, he was an unlikely advertisement for a dentist. He worked with just one assistant whom he trained to do all the things which he could do, a man called John Heide. Softly spoken in English learned from a book 80 years old, John used the most

quaint and dated English expressions. He was the embodiment of perfect humility. As a team they were perfect and as a third party, I was warmly included in their day to day lives. When David was away, I would help John in the surgery, mopping up blood, holding patients' hands and clearing and tidying the shelves. The surgery was open six days a week from 7 a.m. until 5 p.m. and any time for emergencies.

Last year, David had only three Sundays totally free of patients.

One of the first patients I met was a woman who had been pregnant 27 times! She had married five times and lost one child in infancy but otherwise had 21 healthy children.

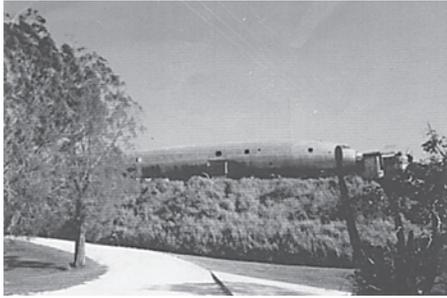
Another patient was a seven-year old girl who had chopped her left hand off with an electric saw (electricity for work purposes is allowed). Every morning this little girl would come to the surgery to have her dressings changed. She would cry her heart out every time the bandage was removed probably at the shock of seeing her stumps and realizing that she did not have a hand anymore. Another child was brought in after having fallen out of a horse and wagon and rolling underneath. The top layer of his skin on his arms and legs had been ripped off.

Part of the reason for the high incidence of accidents among children lay in the fact that the Mennonites have such large families (they did not believe in contraception) and they just cannot keep an eye on all their children. A small family consists of six to eight children, an average one of 10 to 14 and a large one upwards of 19. The children were expected to do adult jobs before they were mature enough to cope with them and the standards of safety were appalling.

My days flipped over like a pack of cards watching toe nails being removed, fingers being sewn hack on, children being treated for thread worms and even a bullet from an air-gun being removed from a boy's thumb. The Mennonite pale European skin is totally unsuitable

for the tropical climate and unsurprisingly there is a high incidence of skin cancer among the community. Once a month the British army would send in a doctor to perform operations such as hernias. The community had a very good relationship with the army who in emergencies would send helicopters to sick up the patients.

Spanish Lookout, Belize,
has a new website:
www.spanishlookout.bz



David Dyck's plane on the Blue Creek Colony. The Blue Creek Colony has been taken over by Rudnerwieders (E.M.M.C.), a Fundamentalist sect from Canada who are apparently on a campaign to eradicate Christo-Centric faith among Mennonites in Latin America.



Slash and burn "Milpa" - Indian Creek. A technique used to transform the rain forest jungle into some of the most productive farmland on earth. Photo probably from Blue Creek.

Rubber Tires.

Shipyards were characterised by its ban on the use of rubber tires. This originated from the time when the Mennonites lived in Mexico and it was feared that the younger generation would flee to nearby towns on rubber-wheeled tractors to find worldly entertainment. Unlike Barton Creek, tractors were allowed in Shipyards but they had to have smooth or spiked-iron wheels. Smooth iron-wheeled tractors were used for the roads and spiked iron-wheeled tractors for the fields. Rubber wheels were allowed on trailers which were not motorised thus a tractor with iron wheels could carry a trailer with rubber wheels. Even children's bicycles had iron wheels.

Shipyards people were allowed to ride in other peoples' motorised vehicles but they were forbidden to ride in a vehicle belonging to someone of the same religion because if a man from Shipyards was driving a vehicle, he was breaking the community's rules and therefore should be excommunicated. Although rather eccentric, the horses and wagons were an attractive sight. I enjoyed riding in them, visiting other members of the community and it was wonderful to inhale fresh country air, unpolluted by car fumes. One of the most breathtaking sights was seeing a large procession of horses and wagons going to church on Sunday.

Dr. Friesen would smile when I quizzed

him on the rubber wheel issue saying "I happened to be born in a community which has very strange ideas." When the motor car emerged in 1911, many Mennonites in Canada and in the U.S. accepted it but the Old Order Mennonites and the Old Colony Mennonites banned it completely.

Clothing.

As in Barton Creek, the community was expected to dress modestly. This group had the most attractive dress code of all the Mennonites in Belize. It was a style of dress brought back from Russia. The women wore identically-styled dresses - mid-calf in length, pleated at the back, smooth at the front with an apron effect at the toe. The prints on the dresses were different but usually floral on a dark background. They wore rather fetching large-brimmed straw hats with different coloured ribbons which hung to the side. Sometimes, under the straw hats, they wore peasant-style scarves. They really looked lovely. The men wore braces or overalls with checked shirts and straw hats.

Like Barton Creek, the Mennonites in Shipyards were forbidden to have televisions, radios and cassette recorders. What did surprise me was that they were allowed to smoke! Apparently, the habit was brought over from Russia and remained part of their culture.

I alternated between staying with Dr. Friesen and John Heide. Both men had 10 children. The structure of their days was fairly similar.

We would wake up at 5.00 a.m. and have breakfast at 6.00 a.m. often consisting of bread doused in a bowl of coffee (in this community coffee was allowed). As with all Mennonites, prayers preceded and ended each meal.

At 10 a.m., we would eat lunch, usually rice, red kidney beans and sometimes pork. At 2 p.m. we would eat a snack called "faspa" usually comprising of bread with chocolate spread or cake. At 6.30 p.m. we would eat a very light supper usually some soup such as borscht or chicken soup with home-made noodles. Being of Central Eastern European origin myself, I recognised some of their dishes as being from this area.

Rather like the Jews, they selected the best dishes from every country in which they lived and adopted them as their own specialities.

Bath times were quite a performance. A tiny cubicle in the house was allocated as the shower. I was given one bucket of water and an empty bucket with holes pierced at the bottom of it. My first attempts to wash were futile. By the time I had lathered myself under the pierced bucket of water, most of the water had hit the concrete floor and I went to bed feeling like a cake of soap. Gradually I became an expert managing to lather myself quickly and transfer only some of the water to the bucket with holes. I would then quickly raise this bucket, hang it above me and shower under the few precious droplets of water.

Afterwards, I would spend a couple of hours teaching the squad of 10 children some English. At 8 p.m., I would go to bed. My bedroom at John Heide's was a schoolroom. I slept beneath the blackboard on a raised platform with rows and rows of desk and benches in front of me. First, I would run around the room with a petzl (miner's torch) on my head, wopping the cockroaches with the sole of my shoe. I would then block off the sounds of the squeaking rats outside by donning my headphones and listening to the World Service on my short-wave radio.

As mentioned earlier, John Heide and his wife Elizabeth had 10 children. He was 31 and his wife was 27. Elizabeth could not speak any English but this was not a problem as John would take the time to act as a mediator be-



Prayers before supper. Shipyards.



The little one is tired. Playing and working with many siblings and cousins of similar age creates a rich learning, socializing and growing-up experience for children.

tween the two of us. She was a lovely woman and like the Friesens, there was obviously a lot of affection between the two of them. John believed that his wealth lay in having such a large and close family.

For 12 years, John worked as a school-teacher in Shipyard. This would have been a position of some status, as he would have been selected by the community to do this work. In order to make a little extra money, John would help Dr. Friesen after school in his surgery.

Some Mennonites who had been excommunicated from Shipyard due to buying a truck, came to visit John Heide. Because they were excommunicated, John should have shunned them in accordance with the community's regulations but he didn't. and subsequently lost his job as a schoolteacher. On top of this, he forfeited his position as one of the seven leading singers in the church. Luckily Dr. Friesen gave him full time employment in his practice but it seemed that it was only a matter of time before John would be excommunicated.

Pressure was already on him to leave the school house and the picture looked rather bleak until Dr. Friesen came to his rescue. Dr. Friesen had a brother living in progressive Spanish Lookout who promised to look for a house there for John Heide and his family. Prior to my departure, a house had been found for them and the Spanish Lookout community was planning to set John up as a dentist there.

It was a shame for Shipyard. John was intelligent, quietly spiritual and had a wonderful touch with the children. Despite the community's rejection of him, he maintained that he still loved his people and accepted their treatment of him because he knew that this was the way they lived and operated.

Land.

In total, the Mennonites in Shipyard had 22,000 acres of land, approximately 200 acres per family. They grew beans, corn, sorghum and rice. The beans were exported. Due to their rapidly expanding families, giving rise to land hunger, a daughter colony was set up in 1981 in Little Belize, approximately 30 miles away from Shipyard. Most people had land if only to feed their large families. Dr. Friesen, in addition to his surgery, had 200 acres of land and as I left he bought another 300 acres in the new colony at Indian Creek.

Many Mennonites were involved in producing mahogany and cedar wood furniture. The craftsmanship was excellent and each household, no matter how poor would have a shiny mahogany table, rocking chair and bed-

stead. Mahogany was cheaper than plywood - even rabbit hutches were made out of mahogany! Carpenters would make the furniture when they weren't taking care of their land. As a departing gift, I was given a solid mahogany suitcase. It became clear as time went on that most Mennonites could turn their hands to anything of a practical nature.

As in all the Mennonite communities, I was struck by the cohesion of the family unit. Each



Traditional meets progressive at the co-op store in the "Zentrum" at Spanish Lookout. Barton Creekers travel to Spanish Lookout by horse and buggy to purchase their supplies.

child would be designated a certain job either in the house or out in the fields. I never came across a lazy Mennonite - not one. Each person had his/her place and as such was never made to feel excluded. Of course, the spiritual aspect dominated their entire lives. Religion was not just going to church on Sundays. Most people would read two or three chapters from the Bible each day and sing hymns. The hymn singing was extraordinary and very peculiar to this Old Colony group of Mennonites. They would linger for a long time on one note, emitting a rather haunting sound. Dr. Friesen had a tape recorder hidden in his drawer in the surgery and at the end of the day, he would pull it out and listen to pre-recorded hymns - hardly a sin in anyone's language.

I will never ever forget my precious days at

Shipyard, the wonderful warm dark evenings punctured by flickering lightening bugs, sitting on various lamp-lit porches, surrounded by inquisitive children exchanging stories with the Mennonites. And how rich those stories were. Most of them described their long eventful journeys from Canada to Mexico to Belize and the astounding pioneer way in which they cleared the wild and vast jungles of Belize.

There were no rude noises from televisions, radios, cars or phones to disturb these evenings, only the gentle sound of horses hooves clip-clopping past. One rarely appreciates how happy one is until the time has disappeared. That didn't happen to me. I kept pinching myself the whole time to remind myself that I was there and soon would be gone. It came too soon. I left with watery eyes and the gentle smiles of John and Elizabeth in my mind.

Spanish Lookout.

Two Belizeans and a Spaniard were trekking through the bush. Suddenly without warning, a wild boar jumped out of the trees and began running towards the men, aiming particularly for the Spaniard. One of the Belizeans cried out "hey Spanish look-out." From such legends, place names are born.

The Spanish Lookout Mennonite settlement is situated on the Belize River, 65 miles west of the capital city Belmopan. The people in this colony are from the Kleine Gemeinde group and have always been more economically successful than the other Mennonite colonies in Belize.

The first settlers arrived in Spanish Lookout in 1958. The early years were difficult as the settlers had to clear dense, high jungle, adjust to the humid climate and battle against insects and tropical diseases. They were also ham-

pered by the Belize River across which everything had to be carried by a crude and inadequate ferry. Several people were injured in the first years of clearing the bush and the stories have been well documented by a member of the community.

Menno Loewen.

"John Reimer was out in the bush clearing a 20-acre field with his two 17-year old twin sons, David and Harvey. The first pioneer years had been hard on them but now as the productivity of their farm increased, acres were being cleared for pasture and planting and the future looked bright. The father and his sons were out cutting down trees. Due to the numerous vines binding the trees together, a tree doesn't immediately fall down when it has



In conservative Mennonite families youngsters learn to help in the family farm at an early age. Here the children help their parents by sorting kidney beans which are raised for export to Jamaica.

been sawn. They had already sawn four trees that hadn't fallen down and David was cutting the fifth. Suddenly, a huge cahun tree started to fall. The boys tried to warn him but it was too late. The 2,000 pound tree fell on him killing him instantly."

Despite the setbacks the Kleine Gemeinde people at Spanish Lookout made an excellent adjustment to their new environment. Until their migrations to Mexico in the 1950s, many of them had lived in south-eastern Manitoba, a densely wooded region in Canada. They therefore had experience in land clearing operations. Additionally, they had more capital than Mennonites in other Belizean colonies and spoke better English (due to their more recent Canadian origins) which gave them more access to the farming infra-structure of Belize.

Unlike the Old Colonists of Shipyard, the people were not opposed to using modern equipment including trucks, bulldozers, tractors and machine-operated farming implements. Those who did oppose the use of modern equipment left and joined the more conservative groups in Upper and Lower Barton Creek.

Today, the Belizean government views Spanish Lookout as a model example of a successful settlement although some of their non-Mennonite neighbours feel frustrated that they do not mix with the rest of the country, isolating themselves through their use of the Low German language and keeping them-



The Friesen Hatchery on Spanish Lookout is one of the earliest successful enterprises, supplying the entire country of Belize with young chicks.

selves in their community. To a certain extent there is jealousy of their economic success. And it's expanding. One wonders as this colony goes from economic strength to even greater economic strength how the population will view them and how their own spiritual values will survive.

Initially, the Spanish Lookout group bought 18,274 acres of land in 1958 at a price of \$100,000. They now own 46,000 acres. The land was bought on mass by the community and privately sold to members of the community. The farms follow a Canadian system with farms running off intersecting roads. They are beautifully maintained and have an almost surreal quality to them. The most important crops are corn and beans; the corn is planted in the summer and the beans in the winter. Milo, peanuts, watermelons and vegetables are also major products. Gaging quantity production is often difficult because if the produce is smaller than the demand, the prices become inflated but with over-production the prices become abnormally low.

From the very start, the Mennonites developed an egg hatchery business. This was privately owned by the Thiessen family and some 60,000 chicks were hatched every week, serving the whole country. The eggs were provided by Spanish Lookout although some eggs had to be imported. Broiler chickens were big business and very practical since the chickens

consumed vast quantities of corn. Some 24,000 broiler chickens were produced each week and distributed throughout the whole of Belize.

Rearing cattle was another successful venture although the community did experience considerable theft from their herds of cattle. Luckily the government imposed a high head-tax on cattle when sold which curtailed to some extent the thievery. The Mennonites here were also great milk, butter and cheese producers.

Before the Mennonites came to Belize, most of the country's food was imported and it was very difficult to find any fresh food at all, so the Mennonites' contribution to the country's food production was great. Even today, walking through any major store in Belize City, one is struck by the enormous quantities of imported food products and the only fresh food-stuffs appear to come from the Mennonites.

Spanish Lookout had electricity, even in the more remote areas. They had a unique phone system using an old-fashioned switchboard run by Wilma Thiessen and Sara Dueck. They had 15 lines with 10 to 14 numbers on each line. The Spanish Lookout telephone directory was fascinating in its repetition of family surnames and unavoidably some inbreeding was evident.

Spanish Lookout had only one commercial store although another one was in its final stages of completion. Everything from barbed wire to food to underwear was available in this store. All Mennonites living in the community received a dividend at the end of five years relating to the amount of money they had spent in the store. People from outside the community (including Barton Creek) regularly shopped there due to the very competitive prices.

There were five churches in Spanish Lookout, served by a ministry of 20 preachers and deacons and again one's spiritual life took precedence above all else.

The Kleine Gemeinde group always took a strong stance on nonconformity, humility and church discipline. Among the practises especially condemned were card playing, smoking, drinking and musical instruments. Any worldly act was punished by excommunication. Additionally, the Kleine Gemeinde objected to all forms of resistance. It was not permissible to help police apprehend violators. Children were taught to take life seriously and therefore laughing, joking and general frivolity were frowned upon. Over the years in Spanish Lookout, there has been a softening of attitude. Although televisions and radios are not encouraged, people do have them.

Having sent some of my luggage ahead of me with Mennonites taking the five-hour trip by horse and buggy to the Spanish Lookout store, I was free to make my way there fairly unencumbered and at a leisurely pace. I went by horse and buggy to Georgeville and from there took a bus to within two miles of the Spanish Lookout



The co-op store at Spanish Lookout. The store has been enlarged and completely modernized since this photograph was taken 10 years ago. It is now housed in a large building which rivals North American "box stores" and attracts customers from all over Belize.

ferry. It was Sunday so there was no traffic whatsoever and I had to walk to the ferry. It felt much longer than two miles in the midday heat and within a short time I felt exhausted and the two small bags on my back felt like boulders. Eventually, I reached the ferry which bore me across to Spanish Lookout. I was the only passenger. Once across the Belize River, I still had another four miles to walk. To prevent myself from feeling sorry for myself, I kept thinking how the Mennonites must have felt, arriving here in 1958, after a long and arduous journey to be faced with the prospect of clearing the bush on arrival - and all I had to do was walk with two modest bags to this prairie-like settlement. Eventually, I hailed a ride from four Mennonite girls. Immediately, I was struck by how modern they looked although still rather home-spun in their cotton dresses and modest little head coverings. I was surprised to see a girl driving. I was taken to the hatchery and found a few Salvadorean workers who invited me into their simple home and offered me some water. Eventually, some Mennonites were contacted and I found myself deposited with the family of Mary and Menno Loewen.

After Barton Creek, their home seemed positively palatial and at night I had the luxury of an electric light bulb instead of running down my batteries on my torch to read. Memo Loewen was one of the first pioneers to come to Spanish Lookout and as such was a mine of information about the area. Additionally, he was completely fascinated by Mennonite history and gave me fantastic information and access to books I had only heard about. We would spend hours discussing the Mennonites, a subject that the pair of us found utterly absorbing. Menno's wife Mary, was a modest woman - quiet - but if the Mennonites were the quiet in the land, the women had an even quieter voice.

Quilting was a great social occasion for women because as such, women did not waste time talking and doing nothing. Their lives at home were extremely busy looking after many children and running the household without the assistance of any modern conveniences. However, once a week, women would take it in turns to have quilting sessions in their homes. These giant squares of fabric would be stretched across a table and up to 20 women around it would hand stitch the fabric. Quilting gave them the opportunity to talk, exchange recipes, sing hymns and quote passages from the Bible and with 20 pairs of hands a quilt was quickly completed. I was allowed to join in these sessions and somewhere in Spanish Lookout, there is a quilt bearing the rather over-large stitches created by my own fair clumsy hands. Maybe one day like the Mennonite quilts in the States, it'll become a collector's item!

The Mennonites had been the victims of drug-related problems throughout Belize. In 1990 the community via a central committee acquired more land in Spanish Lookout. Menno's son-in-law was a member of the com-



The telephone switchboard at Spanish Lookout. The telephone system has been amalgamated with Belize Telephone in recent years.

mittee. Going out to investigate the newly purchased land by tractor, he came across a field which a freelance Belizean farmer had been using to plant marijuana. He was spotted by the farmer and recognised. Some days later, he was returning home with his wife and three children and just as he was about to park his car there was a shoot-out. It was clear that Menno's son-in-law was the target. Instead, Menno's five-year old granddaughter was hit in the head by two bullets. Medical facilities in these colonies were limited and for any major operations, people travelled to Merida in Mexico or to Guatemala City. The family took the little girl to Guatemala and after an operation she made an adequate recovery although the surgeons decided to leave the two bullets in her head because they were too deeply entrenched in her brain and the removal of them would have caused brain damage. I asked the family if they considered moving from the area as they were obviously prime targets but although they admitted that some people had moved because of attacks such as these, others had decided to stay and they themselves had decided that they were definitely not going to be driven out.

The Mennonites have been accused of being too isolationist and yet drug-related incidents such as this have reinforced their withdrawal from society. Whenever they came into contact with the world, the contact spelt dan-

ger and caused them to retreat back into their own communities. Getting the balance right between interacting with the society at large and yet maintaining their conscientious way of life was something the Mennonites here saw as occurring through a closer understanding of how they honoured the world. Whilst in Belize, I made contact with Howard Benson (ex-BBC) working for VSO at Belize Radio. I introduced him to Menno Loewen and both Howard and Menno felt it was necessary for the Mennonites to have a sympathetic ear, for the Belizeans to understand their way of life and the problems they face via the radio. Shortly after my departure, Howard set up a programme based on the Mennonites in Spanish Lookout.

Blue Creek.

If I had to select a Mennonite community in Belize in which I could realistically settle, I would plump for Blue Creek. It does not have the romanticism of the simple life of Shipyard or the pace of Spanish Lookout but lies somewhere between the two poles.

Firstly, it is located in the most beautiful spot, high in the hills with exquisite views all around. The heat is never oppressive because of the constant cool breezes. Orange Walk is the nearest town and the Mexican border is only a spit away.

I stayed in Blue Creek with David and Susanna Dyck, arguably the wealthiest Mennonite family in Belize. David was a building contractor owning numerous bulldozers, tractors, graders and trucks so essential for clearing the bush in Belize. He also owned 3,000 acres of land. Almost every recently built road and bridge I came across, seemed to have the stamp of David Dyck's name on it and he was very highly regarded throughout all the colonies, offering employment to anyone who asked.

Blue Creek was established in 1958 and in David's own words, the people from this community and Shipyard, all came from "one bucket". They were all Old Colony Menno-



The main worship house of the Kleine Gemeinde in Schönthal, Spanish Lookout, seating over a 1000. It is used for all-congregational meetings and other community events. The Kleine Gemeinde here is divided into four church districts. The colony has 1400 residents and is considered by government officials to be the "bread basket" of Belize. In recent years Dick Harms and other predators have been successful in establishing several small sectarian church groups on Spanish Lookout seeking wherever possible to meddle and interfere with the legitimate functioning of the Church of Christ. Photo - Diese Steine, page 616.

nites originating from Chihuahua in Mexico, driving horses and wagons, following strict codes of dress and clinging to their old ways. However, very rapidly, in order to clear the bush, people started buying tractors, bulldozers and land rovers. David's father was the first Mennonite to buy a bulldozer. Susanna Dyck's father, a Minister also bought a vehicle and one day found himself forcibly banned from preaching in the church by his congregation who wanted to adhere to the old ways. It was a scandal at the time, a Minister being excommunicated by his own people. When David and Susanna wanted to be baptised in the church, a prerequisite to marriage, they were turned down year after year due to both their fathers owning rubber-wheeled vehicles. Gradually, the traditional group started to leave, moving to Shipyard, Bolivia and Paraguay until only the progressive group was left in Blue Creek.

When the Old Colony decided to move, they needed to sell their land but were forbidden to sell it to the remaining Mennonites who by this time had all been excommunicated. David, not yet having been baptised into the church was one of the few people able to purchase the land because until one is baptised into the church, one cannot be excommunicated. Thus he acted as a middle man - buying land from people leaving Blue Creek and selling it to the people remaining.

For a few years, the progressive community was without a church until the people contacted a Mennonite group in Canada who came over and formed the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Church [Rudnerweiders]. This along with the Kleine Gemeinde are the churches in existence in Blue Creek today. The churches have a very good relationship with one another and there are none of the petty squabbles found in some other groups.

The population of Blue Creek was 500 owning a total of 35,000 acres. Everyone lived independently but worked together on maintaining the roads, schools and church. Everyone paid tax for this maintenance but it was not a fixed percentage of their income; it was based upon what the community spent during the year.

The busiest time of the year was in the dry months of February to May. During this time, the Mennonites were employed to work outside the colony, land clearing and road building. For the rest of the year, they worked within their own colony on their own land.

There was a community store and whatever profit it made, the community benefitted as the profits went into discounting the prices the following year and a small percentage went into people's pockets. In addition, the people had their own bank called the Credit Union. All the interest stayed in the community rather than going into the commercial banks. One of the biggest problems in Belize was getting spare parts for equipment so people would fly regularly to the United States for spare parts. The community had an aeroplane, privately owned but there for the benefit of the people in Blue Creek.

In true Mennonite form, David Dyck was a man of vision and imagination. Some years ago, a South American cargo plane crashed 18 miles south of Belize. The wings were destroyed so the company was unwilling to fix it; they asked David to bring his equipment to carry it away. Subsequently, David decided to buy it for storage and the plane literally was plonked in his back garden. All the hydraulic parts were used for a hydroelectric plant providing water for some 45 families in Blue Creek.

Equalling David Dyck's flair and imagination was Barry Bowen, one of Belize's greatest entrepreneurs. A seventh-generation Belizean, (with the appearance of a romantic swashbuckling pirate) Barry owned all the soft drinks and beer in Belize and he was a close friend of David Dyck's. The two of them were often described as the Belize Builders.

Barry went to the United States and brought back embryos from the strong stock of Herefordshire cows. Together with David Dyck, they implanted these embryos into the stringier Belizean Brahma cows. The result was a fatter cow but with the genetic make up of the Brahma, a species able to withstand the tropical climate of Belize.

There was just one telephone in Blue Creek. During the day it was kept at the community

store and after 6 p.m., the line was transferred to the Dyck's household. This meant that their living room had an endless stream of people waiting to use the telephone! It was a great meeting place for all Mennonites, an opportunity for problems to be aired and discussed. Although in terms of Mennonites, the Dycks were very wealthy, they certainly weren't materialistic. Their home was comfortable but kept fairly simple.

During my stay in Shipyard at Dr Friesen's, I heard that David Dyck's brother had been killed by a massive log of wood which fell onto him from a trailer. He was just 40 years old. When I returned to Blue Creek, this incident caused the entire community to become subdued. But death in such a way was not unusual. Like farmers anywhere, they were prone to accidents such as these. This one was unfortunate but I could not help thinking how many accidents could have been avoided through more stringent safety measures. David Dyck's nephew had a nasty accident on a motor bike because of faulty brakes. Nobody had told him about the faulty brakes. He ended up with two broken arms and stitches round his neck. What was more amazing was how his nephew took this accident in his stride. With two arms in plaster, I watched him change tires and mend equipment around the farmyard!

Until recently, the standard of education in Blue Creek had been poor. Most Mennonites attended school until 12 or 13 and as teachers had to be Mennonites, their standard of education would be low. However, in Blue Creek a new educational programme had been implemented for students up to the age of 17 and 18. It was run by the Eastern Mennonites of Pennsylvania. After this a student had a choice on taking further studies. Most chose not to, preferring to work on the land. The curriculum had a religious bias and each student was given a tailor-made programme to suit his/her needs. There were few discipline problems in the school probably due to the strong religious and moral element. The teachers were baptised members of the church and quite often teachers from Canada were invited over to help out in the school. In Blue Creek English was taught to a high standard and many children found it a real struggle. I was therefore able to help several of them with their homework.

Like Spanish Lookout, Blue Creek was progressive in its outlook but again had run into drugs-related problems. In the past, because of their knowledge of the bush, certain farmers were enlisted to help in drug-trafficking activities. Sometimes, this was done at gun-point and the Mennonites had no choice in the matter. Occasionally, farmers were simply tempted by the promise of easy money. Others simply could not stand the pressure and joined Mennonite communities in Canada.

Indian Creek.

For a taste of the pioneering life, I spent a day in Indian Creek, a new colony 25 miles south of Shipyard, purchased for the mushrooming younger generation of Shipyard. In



"Reimer Feeds", founded by John K. Reimer, son of Kleine Gemeinde Ältester Corn. R. E. Reimer, Mexico, was the first large privately-owned business on Spanish Lookout. Spanish Lookout is rapidly developing into a commercial and shopping for central Belize. Photo - Diese Steine, page 616.

total 16,500 acres had been bought and the clearing of the bush was still in its early stages.

I clambered into a bulldozer, taking my place next to the driver. As there was no seat, I perched myself on an extremely hot metal ledge. Suddenly, we were thrown forward in attack on a large cahun tree before us. It tremored a little but was barely blistered. After four or five lunges, the tree came down, splattering the bulldozer with its great big leaves. Suddenly a swarm of African killer bees in complete revenge filled the bulldozer cabin. I quickly covered myself with a net and escaped with only two but extremely painful stings. The driver wasn't so lucky. He was stung by at least 15 of them.

The method used to clear the land is called milpa - slash and burn. It's quite a remarkable sight, seeing these vast stretches of land aflame in preparation for planting. Some Belizeans argue that the Mennonites are clearing too much land and destroying the wildlife and I must admit I never felt this as strongly as when I watched three howler monkeys hanging on for dear life onto the one solitary tree which hadn't been knocked down by a bulldozer. As Belize becomes increasingly ecologically minded (it already is), more and more people are likely to object to these intensive landclearing operations.

Conclusion.

My experience of living with the Mennonites in Barton Creek and Shipyard had a profound impact on me. It was an extraordinary feeling, deserting London on a cold winter's day in February when the entire western world was preoccupied with the Gulf War and just one week later stepping back 300 years in time to a world which knew nothing about the collapse of communism in Central Eastern Europe and the devastation being wreaked by the Gulf War. Working as part of the news operation in London, these major new stories had dominated my life but being with the Mennonites without any contact with the outside world, these events ceased to exist and suddenly I felt like an ostrich burying my head in the sand. Sometimes this 'ostrich' syndrome among the Mennonites irritated me and occasionally I questioned the morality of their withdrawn existence - living and feeding off the land just enough to cover their own needs but without giving much back to Belize. This of course was only true of Barton Creek and this community could only exist because the other groups contributed so enormously to the country's agriculture. Sometimes the rules and regulations such as those in Shipyard seemed ridiculous. How many broken legs and arms could have been set properly if people had cars and trucks to take them swiftly to the nearest hospital instead of relying on their horses and wagons. Some of the older generation believed it was just a matter

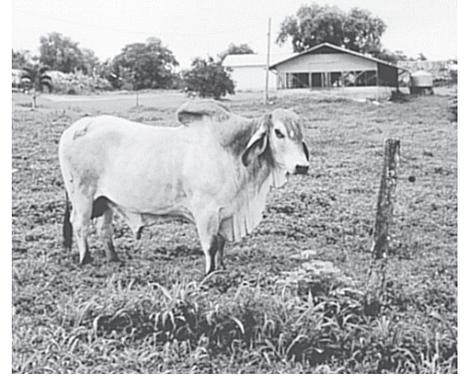
of time before this would all change. And yet I could not help but feel what a shame this would be. How long would their strong Christian values last once they began to mix with the outside world? The work ethic was so intense amongst them and one could see in Spanish Lookout how once they acquired modern equipment for farming they became more and more prosperous and their spiritual lives were much more difficult to maintain.

The Belizeans liked and admired the Mennonites and regarded them as displaying true Christian characteristics. If anyone in trouble crossed their paths, they would do everything in their power to help them. Nothing was too much trouble. The environment was infectious and I found myself wanting to be of some use, of some service to them.

I went to Belize to study a group of unusual people. I left making several friends and the letters I have since received strike a strange chord in my heart. I have developed a bond with these people and with this overwhelmingly wild and beautiful country which will stay with me always.

Acknowledgements.

I did not want to turn this report into a history book, but it is only when I looked into the origins of the Mennonites and examined



A farmyard on Spanish Lookout. The Brahman livestock is very suitable for Belize because of its resistance to the humidity and heat. Photo - Diese Steine, page 616.

support. I also thank my boss Donna Eaton who released me from my work commitments at a very busy time during the Gulf War.

The people in Belize I wish to give a special thank-you to include: Professor Ervin and Phyllis Beck (my surrogate family in Belize City), Menno Loewen who helped me enormously on the historical background, Mary Loewen his wife (Spanish Lookout), David and Susanna Dyck for their incredible gener-

osity, allowing me countless hours in their office and the use of their typewriter (Blue Creek), Ben and Loretta Wiebe for their precious feedback on my report (Blue Creek), Henry and Helena Friesen (Upper Barton Creek), Dr. David Friesen and Agnietta Friesen, John Heide and Elizabeth Heide for including me in their daily lives (Shipyard). Noah and Loretta Hochstetler who encouraged me from the very start to carry out my study (Stann Creek), Mike Gundy for mending my tape recorder, taking a whole weekend to fix it (Belize City), Bruce and Carolyn Miller and Lissette (Gallon Jug), Barry Bowen and Dixie (Gallon Jug), Rosanne Orrlzzi (Upper

Barton Creek), Titus Martens (Upper Barton Creek), David and Eva Penner (Upper Barton Creek), Howard Benson (VSC, Belize Radio) - and to all the people who gave me rides in their trucks and horses and buggies when public transport wasn't available - in many cases going out of their way to take me to my destination.

Photographs:

All photographs for this article except as noted are by the author Joasia Haniewicz. Captions by the editor.

Appendix I.

- 1800 Russian Privilegium to the Mennonites.
1. Religious tolerance;
 2. Exemption from military service;
 3. Freedom from the declaration of oaths;

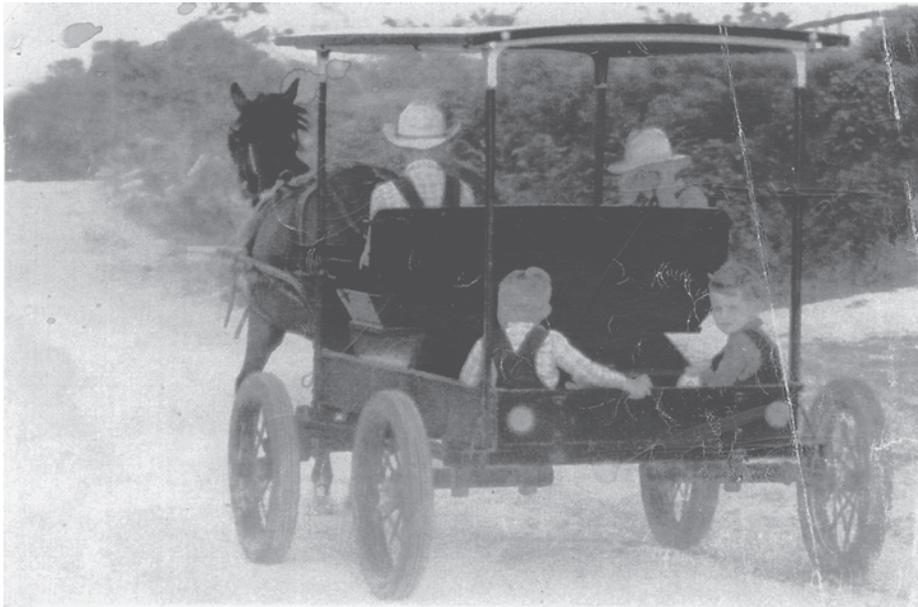


A store on the Shipyard Colony. The ice-cream "schmecks". Today there are 10,000 Mennonites in Belize. Photo - Diese Steine, page 616.

the reasons for their migrations, that I began to understand why the more traditional groups have chosen to live in isolated settlements not only in Belize but throughout South America.

Throughout my stay in Belize, I received enormous kindness from the Mennonites. Their communities were always far away from any built-up areas and in every instance, no matter how plain, I was given somewhere to stay and my offers to pay for my keep were often rejected. Prior to this trip, I never dreamed that I would be given such access to the Mennonites especially to the ultra-conservative groups but as an outsider, I was always welcomed and invited into the heart of their lives. My experience turned into one of the most precious two months of my life.

For this I have to thank the board who selected me for this study and for Maureen Bebb's



Old Colonist boys being taken to school by their older brother. The Old Colonists are known for their genius in building and manufacturing products like these wagons. Their forefathers in the Chortitza "Old" Colony on the Dnieper River; once produced six percent of all agricultural equipment in Imperial Russia (see Pres., No. 21, page 120). Old Colonists' wagons have high quality suspension systems. For an earlier photo essay on the Mennonites of Belize, see Wilmer Penner, "Belize," Pres., No. 12, pages 38-40 (website www.hshs.mb.ca)

4. 65 dessatien of free arable land to each family;
5. Exemption from taxation for 10 years;
6. The right to fish and establish distilleries of which they were to have a monopoly within their settlements;
7. Freedom from accommodating soldiers.

Appendix II.

The Agreement Between the Mennonites and British Honduras.

The Government of British Honduras will grant to the Mennonites:

1. The right to run their own churches and schools with their own teachers in their own German language, according to their own religion.
2. Exemption from making the customary immigration deposits.
3. Protection of life and property in peace and war.
4. Entire exemption from military service.
5. The privilege of affirming with the simple "yes" or "no" instead of making oaths in or out of courts.
6. Freedom of movement according to law to enter or leave the country with their money and property.
7. The right to administer and invest the estates of their people, especially those of widows and orphans in their own "Trust System" called the "Waisenamt" according to the rules and regulations.
8. The right to bring into British Honduras the old, infirm and invalid members of the Mennonite community provided that the individuals do not become a charge on the Government of British Honduras.
9. Exemption of Social Security or compul-

sory system of insurance.

The Mennonites will (in return):

1. Pay all costs and expenses incurred in establishing settlements.
2. Bring into British Honduras capital investment in cash and kind amounting to five hundred thousand dollars more or less British Honduras currency.
3. Produce food not only for themselves but for local consumption and for the export market.
4. Conduct themselves as good citizens, and subject to this agreement, observe and obey the law of British Honduras.
5. Pay all normal duties, land tax, estate duty, property tax and income tax.

Appendix III Articles of Faith.

1. It is only possible to be close to God through strong faith. It is essential to recognise that God is an eternal, uncomprehensible being, the Creator of everything and those who seek him shall be rewarded.
2. It is believed that because of Adam and Eve, men live in a continuous cycle of sin. It is only through God's mercy that the whole of mankind is not forever condemned.
3. Jesus was sent into the world to save mankind from guilt and sin.
4. Jesus was conceived by the Virgin Mary and therefore the human side of him, has to be recognised. He was the "word" that changed into human form. He represents God's sacrifice for the human race and only in him can salvation be expected.
5. Christ provided the New Testament as a guidance for his followers. It should be fol-

lowed closely in one's spiritual life in order to receive salvation. Everyone can be included except for disbelievers who are unworthy of eternal life.

6. It is believed that a man's heart is essentially evil and needs to undergo repentance. A reflection of this repentance is an amendment in a man's way of life. Without faith, baptism, communion or any religious ceremony is hollow and salvation will not occur.

7. Upon confession of faith, penitent new-born believers are to be baptised by water in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.

8. The church should consist of repentant and baptised believers only.

9. The church can only exist with Bishops and Ministers to guide its members. These religious offices should be selected, through prayer by church members who are sound in faith.

10. Communion should be observed to keep the memory of Christ's death.

11. The washing of feet should be practised as it represents the cleansing of the soul. It also denotes humility.

12. Matrimony is an honourable state if occurring between Christians. Freedom of choice is allowed providing each person selects a believer.

13. It is believed that God has instituted a civil government for the punishment of the bad and maintaining order.

14. Revenge and resistance to evil is forbidden. It is better to run away rather than attack in self-defence. One should pray for, comfort and feed one's enemies.

15. The swearing of oaths is not allowed. A simple 'yes' or 'no' should be sufficient.

16. Excommunication is recommended for constantly sinning members of the church. The aim of the excommunication is to persuade the sinner to repent of his sin to enable him to return to the church.

17. Excommunicated members should be shunned by other members in order that they do not 'contaminate' their fellow Christians. It is hoped that through shame, the sinner will repent of his ways. Once a member is excommunicated, he is banned from all social occasions such as eating with other members.

18. It is believed that all the dead will rise on Judgement Day and all believers separated from non-believers. The good will receive everlasting life while the bad will go to hell.

Each Mennonite prior to baptism is tutored on the above and made to confess the articles as a part of his faith. Until baptism, he is not considered to be a complete member of the Mennonite church.

Further Reading:

Howard Snider, "Agriculture in the Kleine Gemeinde Community of Spanish Lookout, Belize," in *Mennonite Life*, March 1980, pages 19-24.

Campeche: Old Colonists in the Land of the Maya

“Campeche: Old Colonist Mennonites in the land of the Maya - A Photo Essay,” by Delbert F. Plett Steinbach, Canada, and Johan Neufeld, Colony El Temporal, Apdo 2, Hopolchen, Campeche, 24600 Mexico.

Introduction.

Upon driving south of Merida towards the Mennonite colonies in the Campeche region of the Yucatan peninsula one traverses the land of the Mayan Indians. The descendants of the once mighty Maya who in 600-800 A.D. built cities unrivalled by any Europe, today live in simple villages seemingly unchanged during the past 100 years. The climate is pleasant, around 28 degrees C. in February. The trees and bush are quite small and scraggly when compared to the rain forests of Belize.

A large part of the Yucatan Peninsula consists of limestone which developed under sea level eons ago. In many areas ridges of limestone traverse the countryside. The stone is sometimes crushed and used for gravel, base material and for concrete mix. Because the ground consists of stone, the water cannot seep into the subsoil. For

this reason many farmers have drilled holes through this layer of limestone so that the water can run away. There are also underground rivers in some places. Fruits and vegetables can be raised here and some international corporations own large orange groves.

The Mexican portion of the Yucatan Peninsula includes the States of Quintana Roo (Cancun), Yucatan (Merida) and Campeche (Campeche), bordering Guatemala and Belize to the south.

The cities of Campeche and Merida are among the oldest European settlements in the Americas, dating to the conquest by the Spanish in the early 16th century. Campeche founded in the third century A.D., was the principle town of the Mayan province. The name Campeche comes from the Mayan word “Ah-Kim-Pech” which means “The sir sun jigger”. The Spanish pronounced it “Kna Pech” meaning “place of snakes and jiggers”. In 1517 expeditionaries under Francisco de Cordova reached Ah-Kim-Pech to replenish their water but were repulsed by Mayan troops. By 1541 the Spanish had prevailed establishing the “Villa de San Francisco de Campeche” with fortifications built between 1685 and 1704.

Since 1982 10 Mennonite colonies have been established in Campeche State in Mexico’s Yucatan Peninsula, the land of the Maya. The newly established settlement experienced a tragic setback caused by Hurricane Isadore which struck Sep. 21-26, 2002. An account of the onslaught of the storm and the subsequent rebuilding efforts, including the generous aid of Old Colonists from Chihuahua in northern Mexico, is found in *Preservings*, No. 22, pages 92-94.

souls. Both Chave and Yalnon are “Old Ordnung” colonies. The former Ältester was Ohm Wall and the current Ältester is Ohm Klassen. Yalnon is the larger colony and therefore the Gemeinde is referred as the Yalnon Gemeinde. The farming originally was with raising corn, but because only little land is level it has changed over to cattle farming and dairy.

Chave Colony has suffered three floods because of heavy rains resulting in severe physical losses and economic devastation.

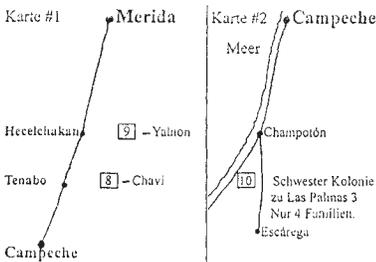
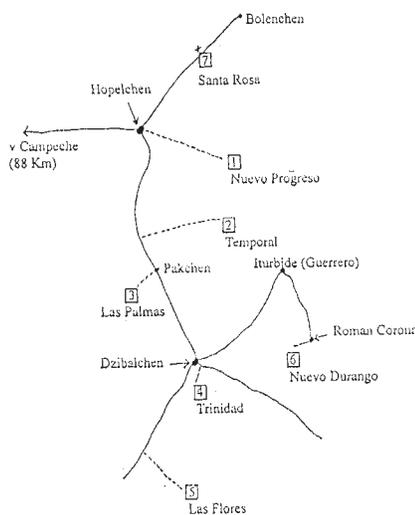


Schoolgirls washing their hands in the school in Grunthal. Because the earth in the Campeche region is so reddish, and colours everything which it touches, the students have to wash their hands after recess, so as not to stain their school books and materials.

Kolonien in Campeche

Name der Kolonie	Gegründet von Familien stammend von:
1. Nuevo Progreso	- La Honda, Zacatecas
2. El Temporal	- Buenos Aires & El Cuervo, Nvo. C. Grandes
3. Las Palmas	- Ontario, Kanada
4. Nueva Trinidad	- Las Virginitas, Nvo. C. Grandes, Chih.
5. Las Flores	- Tamaulipas
6. Nuevo Durango	- Chavi, Yalnon & Durango
7. Santa Rosa	- Santa Clara, Chihuahua
8. Chavi	- La Batea, Zacatecas
9. Yalnon	- Durango
10. New Ontario	- Ontario, Kanada

Norden



Maps showing location of Mennonite colonies in the Campeche - Merida area. Photo - Men. Post, April 20, 2001, page 1.

Chave and Yalnon, 1982.

Chave and Yalnon were the first colonies in Campeche State, Mexico. They were founded in 1982. Because of a land shortage, the Durango and La Batea Colonies were looking for land they could purchase to found daughter colonies.

They were advised by friends and relatives in Shipyard and Blue Creek, Belize, that land might be available in Campeche, Municipio Hecelchancan. Delegations were sent out and land was purchased in Hecelchancan, approximately 60 km northwest of Hopelchen and 60 km northeast of Campeche City.

Chave was settled by the La Batea Colony and Yalnon by the Durango Colony, Durango State. By 2003 the two colonies together had 1705



Teacher Peter Loewen with some of his students in the school in village # 3 - Grunthal, El Temporal Colony.

Nuevo Progreso, 1987.

The next colony to be established was Nuevo Progreso situated 20 km east of Hopelchen. "Progreso" is the name of the seaport on the Mexican Gulf, just north of Merida. The land was purchased by the La Honda Colony, Zacatecus State (see *Pres.*, No. 21, pages 67-71 and 140) for its landless people. This colony was started around 1987. Neuvo Progreso adheres to the Old Ordnung. It currently has approximately 1562 souls. The leader is Ältester Johan Wall. In the beginning corn was the main production. In later years they have started raising chilies and watermelons.

El Temporal, 1997.

The El Temporal Colony was bought in 1997 and settled the following year. The original tract of land consisted of 5000 hectares of which only 1,000 was suitable for farming. The settlers came from Buenos Aires and Cuervo Colonies in Casas Grande Municipco, State of Chihuahua, in northern Mexico. El Temporal refers to the desire of the settlers to find a region where they could raise corn and other crops from natural ("temporal") rains and without irrigation.

Ältester Bernhard Wiebe from the Manitoba Colony founded the Buenos Aires Colony in Casas Grande in 1958 (see *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 74-77). When Ältester Wiebe retired, Abr. Thiessen was elected but he moved to Bolivia founding the Casas Grande Colony in 1996. A new Ältester was then elected, Ohm Franz Wall, and he moved to El Temporal with a group. The Buenos Aires Colony was then reorganized by Ältester Peter Peters from the Nord Colony.

One hundred families joined Ältester Wall in the move to El Temporal. Five villages were established: No. 1 - Rosenfeld, No. 2 - Hamburg, No. 3 - Grünthal, No. 4 - Neuendorf and No. 5 - Rosengard. The Temporal tract area was a leftover parcel of land not good enough for any

Ejidataria or Mexican Agaristas. Several open areas existed on the property, cleared by annual spring burning by the Mayas. No. 1 Rosenfeld was the first village laid out, at the east end. It had a considerable parcel of 100 hectares of open level land. The soil here was reddish grey and very productive. The land does flood after heavy rains. It was decided that the first group of settlers would have the most difficult start and so they were allotted this larger open parcel.

The village lots were "en ge loest" - the koagels were numbered and each villager drew a



Writer and farmer Johann Neufeld (left) with son Johann Bergen Neufeld, El Temporal, Campeche. Photo captions for this article are courtesy of Johan Neufeld.



The Wirtschaft of Johan Fehr Klassen, No. 3, Grunthal, Vorsteher of El Temporal Colony. In front a field of Havenero chiles. Hurricane Isador dumped more than a meter of water on the entire yard in October 2002 and the Klassens had to take refuge in the village school.

lot, thereby selecting their site along the village street. The open field system used by the Old Colonists in Canada was abandoned shortly after their arrival in Mexico in the 1920s, and each farmer now has his individual parcel of land along the common village street.

The Gemeinde is served by Ältester Franz Wall. There are five ministers: Ohm Isaak Fehr - No. 4, Abram Fehr (no relation) - No. 1, Peter Wiebe - No. 5 (the son of the former Ältester Bernhard Wiebe), Jacob Wall (the Ältester's son) - No. 2, and Kjnals Wiebe - No. 5. The deacon, Ohm Isaak Enns - No. 2, is the Ämenpleger, serving the poor. There are two worship houses, one in Rosenfeld and the other in Hamburg. The Gemeinde in Campeche is constituted on the Old Ordnung.

Sunday worship services in El Temporal commence at 70 minutes after sunrise, but the time varies from colony to colony. By sunrise Old Colonist pilgrims have finished breakfast and the 70 minutes gives them enough time to feed the cattle and do the chores and be ready for worship services.

Ohm Abram Fehr.

Ohm Abram Fehr was with the first group to arrive in El Temporal. They had hired the Maya ahead of time to build a tar-board shack, but it was not completely finished and the roof was not nailed shut. As a result, Ohm Abram slept the first few nights under the open sky, marvelling at the incredible iridescence of the stars in the heavens in this part of the hemisphere.

The settlers took their equipment along from El Temporal but sold the cattle and the equipment which they would not use in Buenos Aires. The equipment was hauled the 3,000 km. with large semi-trailers. Ohm Abram recalled that he had had only 5000 pesos in cash left over after he finished selling his property in Buenos Aires. With this he had to build a



Johan Neufeld and grandson Abram Neufeld pose with the Mennonite Kjist which his great-grandparents brought along to Canada from Imperial Russia. Glued into the inside top cover of the Kjist was a portrait of Kaiser Wilhelm II.



The ancient tradition of "Scharwerk" as a form of mutual aid is still continued by the Old Colonists in Mexico. Here Vorsteher Johan Fehr Klassen #3 (front right), with a group of "Scharwerkers", working on the road at the east end of #2, Hamburg. They are blasting away a large rock in order to level the road, making it more accessible to large trucks to haul their produce.

simple house, plant a crop, and buy a cow for milk, etc.

Village No. 1 - Rosenfeld - was immediately able to rent an additional 80 hectares of cultivated land from the Mexicans adjacent to the colony which was ready for planting. They planted corn and were blessed with a good crop and this enabled them to survive the first year. With hard work and the Lord's blessing Abram Fehr was able to raise a family of 19 children. His main income was raising corn and construction, building houses out of cement (Beton). Ohm Abram was elected as minister in Buenos Aires. Later he moved to the Cuervo Colony, a daughter colony where he farmed. Cuervo means crow in Spanish.

Ohm Isaak Fehr.

Ohm Isaak Fehr was elected as a minister in Santa Rita, Cuauhtemoc. He was one of the latecomers to Buenos Aires, settling there around 1969. He and his family also were among the later settlers in Temporal arriving later in the summer of 1997. They settled in No. 4, Neuendorf.

Ohm Isaak was always interested in the history of his people and devoted to the teachings of the Holy Gospel. As a result the village Schultenamt asked if he would be agreeable to serve as a school teacher. Neuendorf was the smallest village and found it difficult to get a good teacher. Ohm Isaac's granddaughter had started teaching and needed help, and so he helped her. After the granddaughter married, the village was again without a school teacher. In the meantime the Schultenamt, noting Ohm Isaac's abilities and interest, asked again if he would not serve as their teacher. He agreed as a favour to his village so they could have their own school.

Ohm Isaac is gifted with languages. He reads, speaks and writes Plaut-Dietsch, High German, Spanish and English. He has served on several delegations to Bolivia and various States within Mexico, including Campeche. Many of the Old Colonists had developed considerable loyalty to Mexico over the past 80 years and were reluctant to leave the Republic. Consequently, they looked for farmland within Mexico, which would eliminate the need to emigrate to a different country. Ohm Isaac is often consulted for advice and his opinions are highly valued by other Colonies and Gemeinden.

Ohm Isaac's son Johan Fehr, Grunthal, is the younger Vorsteher of the Colony. The senior Vorsteher is David Loewen, Hamburg.



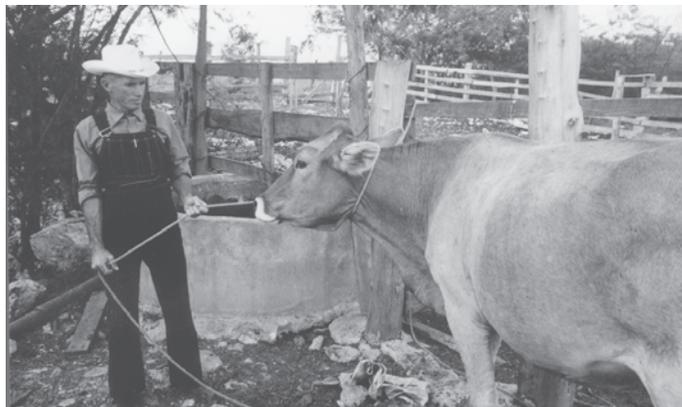
The Wirtschaft of Ohm Isaak Fehr in No. 4, Neuendorf, El Temporal.



School in Grunfeld (# 3), El Temporal. Providing a Christian education to their children has always been a central part of the tradition of the Flemish and Old Colonist Mennonites.



Isaak Bergen Neufeld (left) and brother Abram Bergen Neufeld holding son Gerhard, standing on the yard of writer Johan Neufeld. On the buggy are Edith, Johan and Anna, children of Isaak Bergen Neufeld and Aganetha Neufeld.



Johan Neufeld, El Temporal demonstrates one of the Brownswiss cows which the Amish Mennonites have purchased for their brethren in Campeche. These cows are not as tame as the Holstein cows, but much more hardy regarding woodticks and other bugs and also endure the hot humid climate better. Those who wish to confine such a cow sometimes encounter interesting adventures.

Farming Economy.

The El Temporal Colony now has 636 souls. The main farming is with corn, chillies, tomatoes, watermelons and soybeans, also dairy and beef. The colony was fortunate to be able to earn some cash funds in the first years, especially with producing wood coals which were sold in Mexico City. This allowed many to survive. Because there was only a limited amount of level arable land, another source of income was necessary. Much of the land consisted of rocky ridges so that of the 5000 hectares originally owned by the colony only 1000 were cultivatable. An additional 500 hectares were rented from the Mexican neighbours which is farmed by the Colony. Through this many receive income during the season, which carries them through until their own crops are harvested and marketed.

The dairy and beef farming is the financial foundation for those of more modest means. One cow produces from 8-10 litres of milk. A well-fed cow could produce up to 20 litres of milk. The milk is sold to the cheese factory situated in Campo No. 1 owned by Isaac Braun. Another cheese factory in Campo No. 2 was owned by Abram Enns but closed in 2002.

Trinidad, 1998.

The La Nueva Trinidad Colony was founded in 1998 by settlers from Los Virginias in Casas Grande, Mexico. The colony is under the Old Ordnung with the one exception - they have rubber tired tractors and electricity. The Ältester is Heinrich Siemens and the ministers include Joh. Rempel, and Abr. Wiebe. The colony has a population of 6-700 and is situated 10 km south of Ozelbalchin.

Nuevo Durango Colony was established by Durango Colony, Durango State, Mexico. It was founded in 1999. The population is 610. The colony does not have their own Ältester but functions as part of Yalnon Gemeinde. It is located 60 km southeast of Hopelchen.

The Las Palmas colony was founded in 1999 by settlers from Ontario and Seminole, Texas. It is situated 4 km. south of Pakditi. They have recently joined the Santa Rosa Sommerfelder Colony.

The Los Flores settlers were Sommerfelder from Tamaulipas. Las Flores was founded in 1999. It is located 20 km south of

Ozelbalchin.

The Santa Rosa Colony was a settlement from of Santa Clara Sommerfelder Colony, in Chihuahua State. It was founded in 2002 and is situated north of Hopelchen.

Casas Grande, Chihuahua.

There were several reasons for the emigration to southern Mexico. When the settlers moved from Buenos Aires it had already been devastated by many dry arid years. Not only was there no rain but even the ground water dried up. In the meantime, Free trade (NAFTA) reduced prices for their products, especially oats and corn. The government also increased diesel fuel prices as they wanted to export oil and promoted the use of hydro-electric power with subsidies. The Gemeinde was not really in favour of the electrification as a way of life, and even if it would have been, the electrification was expensive and beyond the means of the colony to install.

Old Colonist folk historian Johan Neufeld, El Temporal has written that "the third and most serious blow in addition was that one year the weather was so very hot, and exactly when the corn was blooming, so that the pollen or seed was burned by the sun, so that the corn had ears but almost no kernels. That was a severe blow. The field had been abundantly fertilized and also irrigated - which was very expensive - and now almost nothing of that came back. I still recall one farmer, who had very nice good looking corn, but he had, however, not looked at the ears. When he went on the field with the corn combine and harvested, almost no corn came into the bin. Then he stepped off the machine and went to the back to check, whether the corn was all blowing over. There he found the corn heads where almost no kernels of corn had grown. What a blow!" fax to the author June 13, 2003.

Through all this adversity the financial means of the Buenos Aires Colony had been severely depleted. The decision was reached that it was necessary to find a new place of habitation where they could continue their lifestyle and freedom of religion without the need for irrigation farming.

Having decided on the necessity for relocation, the group under Ältester Franz Wall quickly came against a seemingly insurmountable problem. After so many years of drought and crop failures, they had no financial resources left. But then the door opened when the Amish brothers in Christ in Ohio loaned them the money to purchase the land.

Since the departure of the Temporal settlers the Buenos Aires Colony has adopted electrification. The concern became greater that many farmers were renting irrigated land from the Mexicans and were farming outside the colony. The

Mexicans around the colony immediately adopted electrification and received government subsidies for drilling wells. This in turn required that the Mennonite farmers use rubber-tired tractors to get back and forth from their land. This became a very devious force in the colony.

Most of the Ohms and also the old Ältester Bernhard Wiebe, although against electrification, finally came to the conclusion that limited use of electricity had become necessary to bring the people back into the colony and make the farming more productive. Because of this, the new Ältester, Abr. Thiessen, and one Ohm, Bernard Wiebe, (no relation to the old Ältester) and a



Johann Neufeld, El Temporal (right), in his work room with sons Isaak and Abram. This building has a granary at one end, smithy in the middle, buggy shed/machine shed/cow and horse barn, at the other end.



Heinrich Banman, on the buggy, and David Fehr, standing, visiting on the village street. Both are from # 2, Hamburg, El Temporal. David Fehr is the son of Ohm Isaak.

small group that wanted to remain faithful to the "old" Ordnung moved to Bolivia where they founded the Casas Grande Colony.

Amish.

Folk historian Johan Neufeld, El Temporal, has written: "All these circumstances among other things, brought the Mennonite farmer of only mediocre means into the most desperate circumstance. Nor did this remain hidden from the outside world. Tourists came from Kansas and Indiana, and also a Mr. McGrath - from the nearby small city of Hannover, New Mexico - the leader of a Amish community. This Mr. McGrath...led his Gemeinde so that now and again they brought the means of nourishment to the people at the

Buenos Aires Colony and the El Cuervo Colony and also lent them money so the people could buy seed corn."

"And so there was an outwardly searching for a solution and, in fact, in two directions - some wanted to electrify their wells or pumps, and others, wanted to buy land, where there was rainfall. But money was required for both options. An approach was made to the Amish in the Indiana region for help, and lo and behold, they actually provided the money on a long term loan in order to buy the land which our people earlier already had identified in Campeche. And then they were also asked for help by those who did

not want to resettle, in order to bring the electric power to the El Cuervo Colony. This was also granted and done. And thus, they [the Amish] helped those who wanted to remain, so that they had their means of advancement, and also those who wanted to resettle somewhere else."

"After we had lived here [in El Temporal] for a short time, Mr. Melvin Yoder, together with others, came to see for themselves what their money had accomplished here. And surely they will have seen how poorly things still were. As a result they bought cows (maybe 10), and gave the poorest people a cow, on the condition, that once the cow had a calf, they should feed it up and then give it to someone else in need, and then the cow would be their property. This was also a great help to the poor. It did not work everywhere the way it should have, but on the whole it did work very well. They [the Amish] later also bought more cows and distributed them among the poor."

"And so, they have always again helped us out. They bought a house in Hopelchen and placed a couple there, who were to help us with various matters, and who also did so. (At that time they could hardly have imagined how much the people here would need to rely on them; namely, when the hurricane came over, the Galen Nisslys distributed the goods that had been donated)."

"When the hurricane struck it again was the Amish who provided the first meaningful assistance. They brought much food stuffs. Because so many people had so much water in their houses, many of their possession were damaged. The Amish again said, they wanted to help us in this regard but they did not say how much. They said - or rather asked - how much damage had occurred. Consequently the tax assessors or inspectors from the Brandordnung ("mutual fire insurance agency") were sent around to every home to investigate how much damage each one had suffered. It was all counted together and written on a list which was provided to the Amish. Then Galen Nissly called Mr. Yoder by telephone and explained the situation to him. And to him came the calm reply,

'Write out a cheque for the entire amount!'"

"Here again one sees their willingness. And in this way, they have also continued to bring provision here to our Armenpleger ("deacons") right up to the present time. We also want to be truly thankful to them from the bottom of our hearts, but surely this is far too little. And we also want to thank God, the giver of all goodness. We have also received many gifts from the Hilfskommittee from Chihuahua and MCC. They have sent us beans, used clothing, sewing machines and chain saws. They also provided 100,000 Mexican pesos so that we could make more than 25,000 hay bales on the leased land of the colony and to distribute them among our neighbours so that they could feed their cattle through the drought times. We want to be thankful also to these people," Johan Neufeld, El Temporal, fax to the author June 13, 2003.

Belize Fellowship.

The Old Colonists in Campeche maintain spiritual fellowship with their pilgrim brethren in the Shipyard and Little Belize colonies in Belize. Meetings are held among the Ohms and generally the same or a similar Ordnung is maintained in the Gemeinden. An interesting development which started in Shipyard, Belize, and spread to Campeche is a movement among the Ohms to discourage smoking, for health reasons. In visiting the five villages of the El Temporal Colony, for example, I do not recall seeing anyone smoke.

Of course, the Old Colonists in Campeche and Belize share the common enemy of American Evangelical missionaries who seek to lead astray the faithful with their Calvinistic untruths and legalistic traditions. My sense was that the leadership in Campeche was relatively well informed regarding the operations of such predators and sought to combat same by maintaining their Gemeinde on a biblical foundation with wholesome teachings and by modelling a life of devotion and dedication to the Saviour in the medieval monastic tradition.

Conclusion.

The founders of the Reinländer Gemeinde in 1875 had a vision of a community founded on New Testament principles of grass-roots democracy, purity of doctrine, community, equality and of families working and growing up together on self-sufficient colonies (monasteries). Because of the commercialization of agriculture in northern Mexico, drought and the implementation of Free Trade, this way of life was no longer possible in Chihuahua for many Old Colonists. The resettlement to Campeche represents an attempt to recreate the biblical vision of Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905) and the Flemish Anabaptists of the Reformation (Endnote).

It was a blessed experience for the editor to meet and visit with the pilgrims in El Temporal Colony, Campeche. It was evident that the settlers were there because they wanted to be there and had willingly made the sacrifices of pulling up roots and relocating to an entirely different climate and culture in order to be faithful to that vision. A spirit of Christian fellowship and mutual cooperation permeated the functioning, interrelationships



The village street in # 5, Rosengard. A typical village scene. The windmill, left, is situated on the yard of Heinrich Friesen. In the background, the village school. The roads with their white gravel, contrast starkly from the red-brown earth of the neighbouring fields.



The Catholic church in the main square in the city of Hopelchen, Campeche, typically the center of the community it serves. This photo is taken from the window of the apartment of MCC worker Henry Wiebe of Winkler.



The Wirtschaft of Ohm Peter Wiebe, # 5, Rosengard. Ohm Peter is the son of the former Ältester Bernhard Wiebe, who years ago, led his Gemeinde from the Manitoba Colony, Cuauhtemoc, to establish the Buenos Aires Colony in Nuevo Casa Grande in northern Chihuahua.

and development of the colony. Through their quiet and peaceful lives and boundless energy and work ethic the Old Colonists have not only transformed the physical landscape but also provide a dramatic testimony of Godly living.

Through the leading of the Holy Spirit the community of God has been transplanted to the land of the Maya. Since 1982 some 6,000 pilgrims have established 10 colonies in Campeche State. They have again demonstrated the resourcefulness and steadfastness of the Flemish-Russian Mennonites in adapting themselves to a new environment, while

at the same time, retaining their faith and community traditions. In the process they have established a new homeland for a pilgrim people - following Jesus faithfully unto the end.

Endnote:

For a balanced and scholarly review of the vision and founding of the Old Colony Gemeinde, see Dr. John J. Friesen, "Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde," in Plett, ed., *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada 1875-2000* (Steinbach, 2001), pages 3-20.

Return of the Kanadier Conference, Oct. 3-5, 2002

“Return of the Kanadier: A History Conference on a Migrant People, October 3-5, 2002,” as reported by Tina Fehr Kehler, Winkler, Manitoba, M.A. student at the University of Manitoba.

Editor's Introduction.

The term “Kanaidier” in reference to Mennonite returnees from Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America is an invention of those dealing with them. The word “Kanaidier” originated in the late 19th century when referring to those who had immigrated to Canada, as compared to those remaining behind in Russia. By the correct definition all descendants of the three Mennonite denominations emigrating to Canada in the 1870s are “Kanaidier”, including myself. I for one am proud to be associated with the “Kanaidier” whether returnees or otherwise.

Clarification should be made regarding the term “Old Colonier” or better said, “Old Colonists.” The modern-day descendants of the 4000 Old Colony settlers coming to Manitoba between 1875 and 1880 are found in four major groups. There are those who never moved to Mexico. This group is highly assimilated. They include prominent business people like the Kroekers in Winkler, Jim Penner, founder of Penner Foods, and the wife of Vic Toews, Provencher MP. It is common for members of this group to deny any Old Colony association having found that the biases and put-downs by assimilated Canadian Mennonites are simply too painful and powerful to fight. For this “non-emigrant” group it is easier to abandon their heritage and blend quietly into society.

The Old Colonists that moved to Mexico in the 1920s themselves can be seen as three distinct entities. The main group still living in and around Cuauhtemoc have established a relatively successful society, which is starting to advance rapidly economically as the process of capitalization gains momentum. One can expect that within 50 years this community may well replicate the success of the mother “Old” Chortitza Colony on the Dnieper River in former Imperial Russia. This is the community which is often featured in the “News from the Gemeinden” section in *Preservings*.

Over the decades many colonists have moved out of the established mother colonies, both for economic opportunity as well as in reaction to ever increasing modernization. These are the “horse and buggy” Old Colonists who have established a hundred successful communities (and a few not so successful) in Mexico, Bolivia, Belize, Paraguay and elsewhere.

The fourth group of Old Colonists are those who for one reason or another - including poverty and lack of economic opportunity - choose to return to the “homeland” which their ancestors once wrested from the wilderness of the Canadian prairies. They return hopeful of finding work and economic well-being. Thousands of returnees have estab-

“Return of the Kanadier”

The symposium, held at the Eckhardt Gramatte Hall at the University of Winnipeg, was a successful event. The purpose of this conference on the Kanaidier people was to formulate their history, the obstacles they have faced such as integration and their successes such as healthy family, church and economic lives. It also gave those who study or have an interest in the Kanaidier people the chance to meet each other.

Abe Peters, Kanaidier Concerns Desk at MCC Canada stated that the term “Kanaidier” was invented by Canadian Mennonites. The recent work of MCC and the purpose of this conference, is to promote more openness to churches that express their theology more conservatively.

Abe introduced the first speaker of the conference, Bill Janzen, director of the MCC office in Ottawa for 25 years. He has a long association with the Low German Mennonites in Canada, Mexico, US, and Latin American countries. He played a key role in opening the immigration laws allowing thousands of Kanaidier Mennonites to obtain Canadian citizenship. Bill is also the author of *Building Up One Another*.

Bill talked about welcoming the Kanaidier, what has been occurring since they began arriving. To understand is to welcome. He reiterated the importance of the conference since approximately 40,000 Kanaidier have come back. Thirdly, Bill Janzen discussed the question of whether there is room for self understanding between the Kanaidier and other Mennonites. Is there one Canadian Mennonite family? The Kanaidier have a different self understanding, they see themselves as wandering pilgrims, a people called to hardship. They liken themselves to the children of Israel. He hopes that all Mennonites can understand themselves as part of one story. But there has been evidence that the Kanaidier have not been written into the larger

lished successful lives in Canada contributing enormously to the economies of Steinbach, Winkler, and other communities across the country as well as in Kansas, Texas and elsewhere. The returnees were the group under consideration at the “Return of the Kanadier” Conference Oct. 3-5, 2003. The Editor.

Mennonite story, for example, the third book in the Mennonite’s in Canada series, *A People Transformed*, does not account for the experience of the Kanaidier, implying that they have not been transformed.

Bill concluded by asking whether it was possible for steps to be taken to welcome all people where they live. The work at this conference is part of the task of holding up the vision for the worldwide Mennonite Church. Because the Kanaidier will not be able to come in the future, he asks what can be done in Mexico and Latin America. The world is pressing in while their numbers are pressing out. God’s will is that this world be a welcoming place for all.



MCC Kanaidier Concerns director, Abe Peters (retired), Winnipeg, visits with Heinrich Loewen, organizer of the new cheese factory at Campo 70, Nord Colony, Cuauhtemoc, Mexico (see Pres., No. 21, page 76). Heinrich Loewen has coordinated this project which has over 1,000 shareholders.

Questions during the discussion were raised regarding the closure of the legal door to Canadian citizenship. Bill reiterated his pessimism for the continuation of the current mode of entry and the opening of any other avenue. Those Kanaidier who gain better education in Mexico will have easier entry on the point system and will be able to integrate better into Canadian society.

Friday morning saw reviews of Delbert Plett’s *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada* by Rosabel Fast and Ken Reddig and a response by the author.

Pedro Castro from the Metropolitan University-Iztapalapa, Mexico City spoke about the Mennonites in the Cuauhtémoc area. His father owned a store in Cuauhtémoc that sold Mennonite produce and so was intimately connected to them. Castro has written a history book about Cuauhtémoc a third of which discusses the Mennonites. He pointed out five reasons why the Mennonites are returning to Canada.

The first reason is that the Mennonites have persisted in their own culture and have not integrated into Mexican society. Mennonites tend to prefer Canada since they see it as some kind of “Motherland.”

Secondly they have experienced a scarcity of land. Their expansion has reached the limit in the best lands. Global climate changes have affected the area making farming successfully difficult. Castro states that there are approximately 35,000 to 38,000 Mennonites living in the state of Chihuahua, when with their natural growth rates there should be approximately 150,000. This indicates the degree of out migration.

The third affect has been an economic crisis. Much of their business is in agriculture and cattle production. The Mennonites have been negatively affected by free trade and American subsidies. They have not been able to be competitive since their costs are often higher than their return on sales. They have been subject to Mexican agricultural policies which caused a decrease in agricultural production and a subsequent increase in buying exports.

These devastating effects have led the Mennonites to search for better living conditions, the fourth reason for leaving Mexico. They seek employment in the agriculture and industrial sectors.

Finally, Castro states that many decide to move because of the influence of drugs and alcohol. Mexico has been an exporting country of marijuana and cocaine with Chihuahua being an ideal location for its movement because of its proximity to the U.S. border.

David Quiring, professor at the University of Saskatchewan, spoke about his studies in Mexico in the 1990s. As a balance to Castro’s presentation, Quiring discussed their spiritual struggles. In their efforts to pass their religious traditions to their children their greatest conflict is with other Mennonites. Those that want to help often want to change the Old Colony Church.

In Quiring’s opinion the General Conference (present-day Mennonite Church Canada/US), the Kleine Gemeinde and MCC have had the greatest effect. In the 1950s the General Conference made a concerted effort to bring change in schools, agri-



Larry Towell, Bothwell, Ontario, author of a photograph book on the Mexican Mennonites (Pres., No. 18, pages 144-5) discusses mutual interests with Marvin Dueck, MCC worker, Chatham, Ontario (right).

culture and a new church for those who were dissatisfied with the Old Colony Church. As the Kleine Gemeinde set up villages in the 1940s and ‘50s they were a threat to the Old Colony Church because they accepted excommunicated members and proselytized. In 1946, MCC’s Winfield Fretz stated that “The Mennonites in Mexico are in need of spiritual awakening...” but warned that MCC should play a background role. They concentrated on economics, by giving out loans, and health issues. MCC went back in 1975 and *Die Mennonitische Post* and *Das Blatt* with the agenda to bring about change since in its view the Old Colony system was “bankrupt” and in the “dark ages.”

Other organizations like the MB Church, EMMC, Mennonitische Gemeinschaft, EMC, Church of God in Christ and Reinlander have also had an impact. Their major concern has been the reform of the Old Colony Church. However, many Old Colonists do not see other Mennonites who attack and condemn them as fellow believers. Other Mennonites have not allowed the Old Colony to go their own way for several reasons. They cannot ignore the problems of the Old Colony Mennonites particularly when they have called for help. They also state that by returning to Canada, other Mennonites have had to make the Old Colony Mennonite’s problems theirs. Evangelical Fundamentalists believe that the Old Colony Church teaches heretical beliefs, for example, that the Church should separate from the world physically, not to evangelize outside of one’s community and that it is wrong to insist on a dramatic conversion experience and that one must know one is saved.

The Old Colony bishops have been blamed for the decline of the colony. They believe they have faithfully led the people and that forces outside their control have affected their members. They see the greatest threat as being spiritual rather than economic. The bishops also continue to have a clear understanding of what it means to be an Old Colonist. Both the laity and bishops are concerned about the future generations and truth.

Titus Guenther, professor of theology at CMU, spoke about the migration to and emigration from Paraguay’s Menno Colony. He stated that one in four either died or returned to Canada directly af-

ter migration and that one tenth of the original settlers are still there after celebrating their 75th anniversary of settlement. The number of returnees is greater than those who have remained.

The return migration from 1960 to the present has been diverse in nature. Returnees have come from all social classes, educational backgrounds and as singles or in families. Some come for an adventure, others to see where their parents have come from, and many to escape poverty. Their occupations include factory work, construction, lumber, and carpentry. Others have worked for MCC, become missionaries, teachers, church leaders, chaplains and editors. Half of those who return decide to become involved in a church.

David Friesen, from Cuauhtemoc, talked about the reasons for the migrations from Mexico echoing and adding details to those given by Pedro Castro. Friesen highlights the economic reasons for their return. NAFTA perpetuated the difficulties. Those who first moved to Mexico had no experiences with doing agriculture on the type of land available. Between 1950 and ‘51 insufficient amounts of rainfall caused many to leave for Canada. Minimum wages were very poor, making it impossible for those without land to make a living.

Some events have helped the Mennonites stay in Mexico. Without the creation of the cheese factories, Friesen states, all the Mennonites would have left. Then in 1994 the Mexican government instituted “Procampo” - a subsidy for farmers which enables them to compete on the global market. He concluded by stating that many more Mennonites will work illegally in the U.S. because of a lack of opportunities in Mexico.

Marvin Dueck, MCC worker in Chatham, Ontario, spoke about the migration culture from the perspective of those living in the Leamington area of Ontario. He comes from the position of working with immigration officers to give evidence to support Mennonites to stay in Canada. The beginning of the welcoming process is the ability to register as Canadian citizens after delayed registration of birth having been born abroad.

When they come to Canada they find it difficult to integrate culturally. He states that most people who leave do not reject the way of life or the Church but do so because they do not have land or are impoverished because of health issues. Many find it difficult to work for others since being a worker in Mexico was considered second class. Thus they have a dream of earning enough money in Canada to return to Mexico to set up their own farm or business.

The Mennonites from Mexico have made a significant impact on the area in which they reside. For example, they contributed \$60 million dollars in labour in 2001 in one area of Ontario alone. They enjoy challenges and some have started their own businesses. Many have a longing to return. Several groups have migrated back to various parts of South America at different



David Friesen, former MCC worker in Casa Grande, Mexico, and currently in Winkler, Manitoba, speaks about the reasons for the “Return of the Kanadier”.

times in the 1970s. Overcoming culture shock is a major concern. Culture shock is also coupled with guilt for leaving the Church in Mexico. They feel they are committing the sin of Lot's wife by looking back to the country their ancestors left.

The Church in Canada is integral to a family's integration, however they are not completely adequate for the task. There are many different Mennonite churches which are involved in Southern Ontario. Unfortunately, the Old Colony, in particular, have difficulty in retaining their youth.

Robyn Dyck, an undergraduate student at the University of Winnipeg, gave a presentation entitled "The Diaspora Networks According to the *Mennonitische Post*." The *Post* reunites the diaspora of Kanadier Mennonites and creates an "imagined community" through the letters families send to one another. An "imagined community," says Dyck is no less real than a spatial community. It is a community of interest rather than space. Dyck took a random sample of papers from the 1970s to the present to discover how community was maintained through the writing of letters.

The *Post*, Dyck notes, has created a space for a homeland on a page. It gives members a unique opportunity to locate themselves in the discourse uniting people across space and time. Space and time are compressed as letters between relatives, months between their compositions, are placed side by side. Its contributors are mostly elders, though they are equally divided between the sexes. All are Mennonites but vary in socioeconomic background and Church affiliation.

Dyck noted some interesting facts about the nature of the letters. She found that the scripts have remained the same; that *Post* members have grown accustomed to the medium. The letters all begin in the same way, individuals greet the editor, apologize for their lack of writing ability, discuss the weather, greet relatives and then talk about local events and discuss the health and well-being of themselves and those around them. The format of the letter is a "cultural script." Members know and use the appropriate sequence of letter writing.

Dawn Bowen, of Mary Washington College, Virginia spoke about the La Crete community in

Alberta. The first Mennonites who settled the area came from Old Colony Mennonites from Saskatchewan and were later joined by others from that province, Manitoba and Mexico. The move was initiated to distance their community from the ever encroaching world. In 1967 several factors caused another wave of migrations to Bolivia in 1969.

These families who remained in La Crete felt verified in their decision when they heard about the numerous problems many of the families were experiencing in Bolivia. Several of these families returned shortly, others then went back to Bolivia and returned to Canada again. Migration from Bolivia continues to the present for several reasons. A drought over the last five years have left many destitute, as well parents want their children to have opportunities which they did not. The migration to La Crete is increasing, though exact numbers are unknown.

The influx of immigrants has put pressure on the existing community. Though they have been able to find jobs, finding adequate housing has seemed problematic. As well, the schools have been burdened with a huge increase in enrolment. A survey found the immigrants felt their needs were generally being met.

Karen Pauls of CBC Halifax presented on the Northfield community in Nova Scotia. This group originated with the Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba who had moved to Belize and are now making their home in Nova Scotia. Though there was no direct statement to the fact, Pauls suspects that the reason for the move to Canada is because of disagreements.

Pauls noted several aspects of women's lives. Single women help on the farm and live at home until married. They believe that women should work in the house and need to be submissive but are not to be slaves. Women's groups study a particular book to learn about how to live in a marriage. The women, Pauls spoke to said that they were fine with not being leaders.

The community attempts to live the mandate of being in but not of the world; thus are Christians first and citizens second. They do not have radios, or televisions but do read the newspaper on occasion. They walk a thin line between assimilation and adaptation, to be witnesses for their faith while maintaining their stance as a separate people.

Friday evening Myron Dyck, a student at the University of Winnipeg, gave a historical overview of the 25 years of the *Mennonitische Post*. The *Mennonitische Post* filled the void which the *Steinbach Post* left when it failed a decade earlier. Abe Warkentin was the first editor in 1977 to oversee its publication. The response was positive. Circulation fluctuated between 4-5,000.

The *Post* has attempted to respect the Kanadier people. It views them as a unique people who deal with complex issues. The *Post* has allowed them to define the paper for themselves. It also has had to deal sensitively with controversial issues and various people's opinions. In particular, it has had to work against the sentiment that Mennonites should help others and not themselves. Overall, it has sought to build bridges of understanding.

Anne Froese reminisced about working at the *Post* for over 15 years. Being sensitive to the Kanadier has been their biggest struggle. The *Post* is accepted in most colonies. The reaction by the leaders of the colonies has been by omission. They accept it for their people until something controversial provokes an outcry. Dealing with sensitive issues is a balance between getting out the news and not offending and thereby losing readers. The *Post* was to be a Christian paper, in spirit and tone, but it was not to give biblical commentary or be a vehicle for theological debate. [Editor's Note: It is clear that the *Post* regularly publishes theological material of an Evangelical Fundamentalist orientation, e.g the column "Was Sagt Die Bibel," by John Dyck, Blumenort, Manitoba. It is impossible for intelligent conservative leaders not to be concerned that some sort of wider agenda is being pursued.]

The evening concluded with an audio visual performance by Larry Towell, an artist from Bothwell, Ontario. Towell is a photojournalist who has worked in places such as Los Angeles and the Middle East. He came to know the Kanadier people through his father who hired them to work at his auto body repair shop.

Many of the presentations throughout the conference dealt with how others have helped the Kanadier, however, Towell stated that it was they who had helped him. His experiences taught him that there was little he could actually do for the people. He saw them as an endangered community because of forces outside of their control. He gained an appreciation for the Mennonite perspective over the 10 years he worked among them. It helped him become involved in the documentation of the anti-globalization peace movement. Because of the Mennonites in Mexico, he saw that there was "something wrong with the world and we have to do something about it."

In 10 years, he went to each colony at least three or four times and shot 3000 rolls of film. Before the art book of pictures was published, he spent another year in Mexico gathering written material for the book (see *Pres.*, No. 18, pages 144-5). Later he produced an artistic soundtrack of sounds from Mexico, which he terms an "experimental sound piece."

The presentation included pictures from the book, sounds and poetry from the soundtrack with accompaniment by Towell on various instruments. It was moving, touching, beautiful and heart wrenching. The black and white photographs vividly captured their struggles and their daily lives. His use of light and shadow was genius, for example, one picture displays a profile of a young woman in the foreground while her husband sits on a chair in the background, the light from behind the photographer casts a shadow of the woman on the back wall as though she is standing right next to her husband facing him and waiting for instruction.

Towell's presentation was not without controversy. Some of the pictures were of a personal nature, others portrayed social problems, while a few photos showed individuals covering their faces from the camera, as though they did not want their picture to be taken. Many in the audi-



Pedro Castro, Mexico City (left), talking with Ken Braun, Altona, Manitoba. Ken has been a regular at Mennonite historical meetings for years.

ence questioned his ethics out of a concern for the exploitation of the Kanadier people. Some questioned how he obtained their permission and he answered that photography is a process. It takes years to gain acceptance and access. He stated that he was tolerated by the leaders of the colonies and they kept their mutual distance. Towell said "you respect people and if they don't want their picture taken they'll tell you. People give you their photograph."

He commented that it was interesting that he, a Roman Catholic, was doing this work and not a Mennonite. Roman Catholic images came up during his poems that accompanied the presentation, likening a urine stained blanket where three young children had slept as a shroud. His work with the Kanadier was "a human experience, you see God in other people. I saw a fallen, sinful people, not unlike myself."

Saturday morning saw the session on social issues chaired by Merle Fast from the St. Jacobs Family Support Centre in Ontario. She said, "It's interesting that people want to see the Old Order Amish who's way of life is different but they're not interested in the Low German-speaking Mennonites."

Judith Kulig and Barry Hall represented their research team from the University of Lethbridge on the topic of "Health and Illness Beliefs Among the Alberta Kanadier." The study was conducted in a partnership between academic researchers, MCC and health authorities. Five Low German speaking researchers conducted interviews with 45 women and 41 from the Old Colony, Sommerfelder, Kleine Gemeinde and Reinlander churches. They also held three community meetings which were well received by the 23 women and 31 men who attended.

Cheryl Campbell from the Pembina Valley Learning Centre in Winkler, Manitoba spoke about adult education and the Kanadier immigrants to the area. The Winkler Resource Centre along with area churches began English training in 1983. Formal classes were first held in 1986 moving from churches into schools. The Pembina Valley ESL/Adult Education began in 1988. Currently classes are being held all across Southern Manitoba. Workplace language training, which takes place on site, has been running since 1991. The centre also runs full day programs which begins in late October after the fall harvest. Campbell says that the students are "extremely courageous and have tremendous challenges."

Luann Good Gingrich Ph.D. candidate at the University of Toronto presented a paper entitled "Social Exclusion and the Low German Population in Ontario."

Later Saturday morning a session on Economic Integration took place. The first paper was presented by Janis Thiessen, a Ph. D. candidate at the University of New Brunswick. Her paper was entitled, "Mennonite Factory Workers: Ethnicity, Class and Integration" which came out of oral history's conducted with Mennonite work-



Lisa Friesen, talking with Tina Fehr Kehler, Winkler, Manitoba (right), who spoke about differences in the role of Mennonite women in Mexico and

ers in Southern Manitoba.

Peter Epp, a student at the University of Winnipeg, presented a paper on entrepreneurial immigrants in Manitoba. It was based on a series of 10 interviews with Kanadier Mennonites. Epp discovered a difficulty that Mennonite entrepreneurs have in bridging *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* - community and society.

Ted Regehr, professor of history at the University of Alberta and Bill Janzen from MCC Alberta, discussed the hurdles of integration faced by the Kanadier Mennonites in Alberta. The Kanadier Mennonites came to Alberta in the 1970s and in the 1980s. Prior to this time, the agricultural labour market was reserved for First Nations People. The Kanadier are scattered all over the province. Since the time the Mennonites left for Mexico, the government has become much more flexible with respect to education.

Bill Janzen continued the presentation by giving a picture of the problems they face and how they are dealing with them. The Kanadier come because Alberta is in need of skilled and unskilled workers and they are seen as productive and able to contribute. It is difficult to track the education of the Kanadier in Alberta because many schools are privately funded and some children are registered as being home schooled. The churches are split by the issue of education. Janzen stated that MCCs mandate is to work with the people in such a way that they gain a sense that they are helping themselves.

Tina Fehr Kehler, an M.A. student at the University of Manitoba presented a paper on two major shifts that occur in the lives of these women in their migration to Southern Manitoba. She interviewed 14 women about their life in Mexico and their life in Canada. The Kanadier can be understood as a subculture within the overall Mennonite ethnic group with particular differences. Some women and their families attempt to maintain as much of their old way of life as possible, while others embrace a Canadian lifestyle.

One transition involves a change in the economics of the household. In Mexico, all family members contributed their share to the economic survival of the household. Work and household life in Mexico were integrated. A girl learned her life's vocation in the home and on the farm and

continued to work equally with her spouse in raising children, tending a garden, working with the animals and in the fields. A woman's work was understood to be absolutely necessary for the continuation of life. However, in Canada there is a much greater distinction between work in the household and work for pay. All of a sudden, their "work" within the household is not "work" because it is not understood to be necessary for the maintenance of a household in Canadian terms. The women also tried to maintain the self-sufficiency with which they lived in Mexico by sewing their own clothes and other household items, growing their own food, raising animals, and making much of their own food

Another defining transition is the move from a religiously based life to one that is predominantly secular. In Canada, the everyday tasks of life are no longer so intensely geared towards the maintenance of the religious community as they were in Mexico. For women, this means that their tasks of socializing their children into the Kanadier culture and religion, maintaining their household, and caring for other members of one's church or one's neighbours do not have the same religious meaning in Canada as they did in Mexico. They are no longer performing these tasks as members of a community within the context of a "sacred village" but as individuals within a secular world. Thus the Kanadier women's religious life tends to become more individualistic in Canada as the Church does not play the same integral role as it did in Mexico.

In Mexico a woman's greatest religious undertaking was bearing and socializing children into the *Gemeinde*. Many still held to the tradition of wearing a head covering for prayer.

Kerry Fast, Ph.D. candidate in Religion at the University of Toronto, spoke about the religious life of one immigrant woman, Tien, in order to examine a Mennonite immigrant woman's relationship to her Church, community and family. Tien has not been able to stop the pain that accompanied her separation from her husband, an act not sanctioned by the Church or in the reporting of her husband's abuse to the authorities. Fast explores Tien's life to see how the manipulation of her pain has created religious meaning. Our bodies coupled with our history shape our identity.

The exploration of an individual story reveals that a person's story is unique in its experiences, "Tien is not just another Mexican Mennonite woman."

Tien married a landless Mennonite which meant no social standing in the community and a precarious income. Her husband was an alcoholic and in debt which meant social and religious marginality. Their move to Canada was an improvement not only in their ability to get enough to eat but also in giving Tien the necessary inner resources to stand up to her husband's abuse.

Tien grew up in a loving Christian home based in the teachings of the Old Colony Church. Fast

quotes Tien as saying "I think my parents raised us very well!" She sees herself as perpetuating the faith of the Church through the raising of her children.

Her life, however, has been pain filled, physically and psychologically. Health, as understood by the Mennonites, is dependent on a good relationship with God and one's community. It is a spiritual and social phenomena. Old Colony faith is not abstract but lived in interaction with other people, Fast states. In Mexico the social pressure exerted by the church leaders and male community kept her husband in check and allowed Tien to manage her situation. However, in Canada the church did not excommunicate and therefore her husband did not change his behaviour. She is concerned that the church does not act appropriately in dealing with behaviour that jeopardizes his salvation. This disruption of "church discipline" caused a point of departure from regular practices of dealing with her husband's behaviour. Her pain filled body attested to the conflict she was in as she reported her husband against the will of the church, for the sake, as she saw it, of his salvation.

Prayer has the ability of creating new realities. Her prayer enabled her to report her husband. It allowed her to deal differently than before with her pain. Fast concluded by saying that "Through an examination of one woman's life, I have tried to demonstrate that constructing religious meaning for Old Colony Mennonites involves an active engagement with the beliefs and practices of the tradition but it is always given shape in the particularities of individual lives." Fast demonstrated that religion is more than theology but is inherently involved in the active living of people's religious lives and that it is an embodied experience.

Patricia Harms, originally from Winnipeg, has a Master of Divinity degree from Princeton Theological Seminary and is a Ph. D. candidate in history at Arizona State University. Her discussion entitled "'God is here with us as well': Gendered Experiences of Emigration from Paraguay" arose out of a lifetime of stories told by the women in her family about connections with relatives in Paraguay. The stories were verified by taped conversations sent back and forth between sisters in Paraguay and Canada.

These tapes provide a glimpse at a story that is generally hidden from society, "a story told by women of rural agrarian societies, a family that remained poor despite a lifetime of hard work and struggle." It also made possible a way for Helen to come back to Canada when her sister Margaret visited her in Paraguay in 1985 after nearly 40 years of separation. As Margaret said on one of her tapes, "God lives here too and it was alright for them to come back."

The final session on Saturday afternoon addressed church life in Canada. John Friesen, professor of history at Canadian Mennonite University, spoke on the Kanadier and their theology



Bill Janzen, with MCC Ottawa (left), talks with Abe Harms, MCC worker in Ontario. All photographs for this article are courtesy of Conrad Stoesz, Mennonite Heritage Center, Winnipeg.

and church. He began by stating that the Christian faith is about being an alien in the world. Particularly, the Old Colony vision and experience of church has been one where the Christian faith should shape all of life - economic, village, social and education. To do so required the control of schools, retention of German, memorization of the Catechism, familiarity with the Bible and learning the skills necessary to live life in a colony setting.

In the 1920s the Old Colony Church left for Mexico because the Canadian government had taken this control away. However, in Mexico, the Mennonites still struggled with modernity. Individual churches have divided over issues of modernization. The Church saw itself in contradiction with the world.

When the Kanadier come to Canada, they do so from the life based in the Church. Church life was intricately a part of their lives in Mexico. They believe that the Church should have leaders and must have rules for living. Communion is important as a way of making things right with one another. The Kanadier migrants share several characteristics. Most have come for economic reasons, not because they are seeking a true church. They come back as individual families rather than en masse. They rely on a network of family and friends without which they would have few resources.

The Kanadier are most concentrated in the conservative Mennonite churches including the Old Colony, Reinländer, Sommerfelder and Chortitzer Churches. They feel most comfortable in these spaces because of the use of Low German. Though the composition of these churches is largely from those from Mexico, the Kanadier often do not become members. For instance in the Zion Mennonite Church in Schantzenfeld, potential members must give their testimonies in public which turns them away from membership. The churches in Canada accept the baptism of those in Mexico and therefore see those churches as sister churches in the Christian faith. Issues with the home churches must be resolved before one can become a member. Some Kanadier arrive with sealed letters of transfer

from their churches while many churches in Bolivia or Paraguay do not issue letters.

Bruce Guenther, professor at Trinity Western University and final presenter, gave a presentation entitled "The Evangelical Path of the Kanadier." He began by recalling varying Mennonite reactions to the Evangelical movement. Some Mennonites complain that evangelicalism is a sickness that has infected Mennonite teachings. Others see it as a panacea for perceived Mennonite exclusivity. The Kanadier who enter evangelical churches view those Kanadier outside the evangelical church as heathen.

The number of evangelical denominations working with the Kanadier includes the EMMC,

EMC, Chortitzer, Brethren in Christ, MB, Gemeinde Gottes (particularly in Ontario), and a few Baptist, Evangelical Free and Pentecostal churches. These churches have been a means of their integration into Canadian society. Those Kanadier on the evangelical path are small but significant - seven percent - the same percentage as the number of evangelicals in Canada.

The most dramatic trend is that approximately 60% of Kanadier do not actively participate in the church (this is an Alberta figure). This is a pastoral concern that has united church leaders. Most Kanadier have opted not to join evangelical churches.

Nevertheless, those who have joined do so for individual reasons. Guenther cited nine reasons for joining evangelical churches. One, some become disaffected with the Old Colony Church. It is a natural progression away from a conservative orientation. Third, in the process of adjusting to a new culture some also decide to enter a culturally different type of church. Fifth, it provided a place for a more gradual integration into Canadian society. Sixth, some parents went to an evangelical church "for the sake of the young people." They felt that churches entirely in German would alienate their children. The churches offered programs that provided good opportunities for youth. These spaces helped children adjust to a new culture. Seventh, evangelical churches offered assistance when resources were scarce. Eighth, they offered women greater possibilities in being involved in services and in a way of life. Ninth, English evangelical churches provided a place to shed Old Colony religious heritage and Mennonite identity for those looking to do so.

The discussion periods after sessions were rich with added information and insight into the Kanadier population. Discussions between sessions about presentations, triumphs by and problems of the Kanadier were equally rewarding.

"Return of the Kanadier": A History Conference on a Migrant People, October 3-5, 2002," report written by Tina Fehr Kehler, Winkler, Manitoba, an M.A. student at the University of Manitoba.

Altona, Shootings - October 16, 1902

"A Horrible Crime in Altona, Manitoba, Committed by the Teacher, H.J. Toews. Three Men and Three School Children the Victims of the Criminal. Then Sends a Bullet Through His Head," *Der Nordwesten*, Volume 14. No.23 Winnipeg Manitoba, Thursday, October 16, 1902.

Introduction.

A crime hardly imaginable, on Thursday, turned the quiet, peaceful village of Altona, Manitoba, into a state of fear and agitation and a number of families to grief and mourning over a precious life. Paralyzed by shock, one is driven to search for a solution to the puzzle of human nature that would drive a man to shoot in cold blood three harmless, well-meaning men and three young, innocent girls who were entrusted to his care. Again, on the other hand, this horrible instance demonstrates how thoroughly corrupt and capable of any action human nature becomes when its passions are bereft of solid inner moorings or external control.

The murderer is the teacher, H.J. Toews.

The victims of the Tartar are: John Hiebert, merchant in Altona, Abraham Rempel and Peter Kehler, farmers, and two of Kehler's daughters and one of Rempel's. Of these, Kehler's daughter, Anna, has already succumbed to her wounds. Meanwhile, J. Hiebert, Abr. Rempel and Helene Kehler are so severely wounded that their recovery is in serious doubt. P. Kehler and Rempel's daughter are lightly wounded and out of danger. The murderer himself sent a bullet through his own head.

In order to give our readers a more accurate report of all the details of the event, we have on our part had a special reporter at the scene who has made a most detailed inquiry of the persons involved. The following presentation can, therefore, enhance the claim to accuracy

in regard to conflicting reports, especially on the part of the children.

The Place.

In order to better understand the process of the tragedy it will be appropriate, next, to describe the scene. Altona is a well-known, flourishing little town on the Canadian Pacific Railway about 8 miles north of the international border. About a mile south of the railway station lies the village of Old Altona. Both the station and the village form a public school district. For the convenience of the village residents a separate school in Altona is maintained where, for some time earlier, the perpetrator of the gruesome deed, Heinrich J. Toews, was teacher.

The schoolhouse lies in the middle of the village, just west of the main street. A few steps to the south of the same and on the same side of the street lies the old schoolhouse, which is designated as residence for the teacher, but which Toews, who is unmarried, did not use since he slept in the schoolhouse itself and took his meals elsewhere. Still farther south by several hundred steps lies the residence of David Klaassen, jr. On the other side of the road lies Peter Kehler's house, approximately opposite the old and new schoolhouses. For easier orientation we are adding a graphic representation of the locality described.

The Motives.

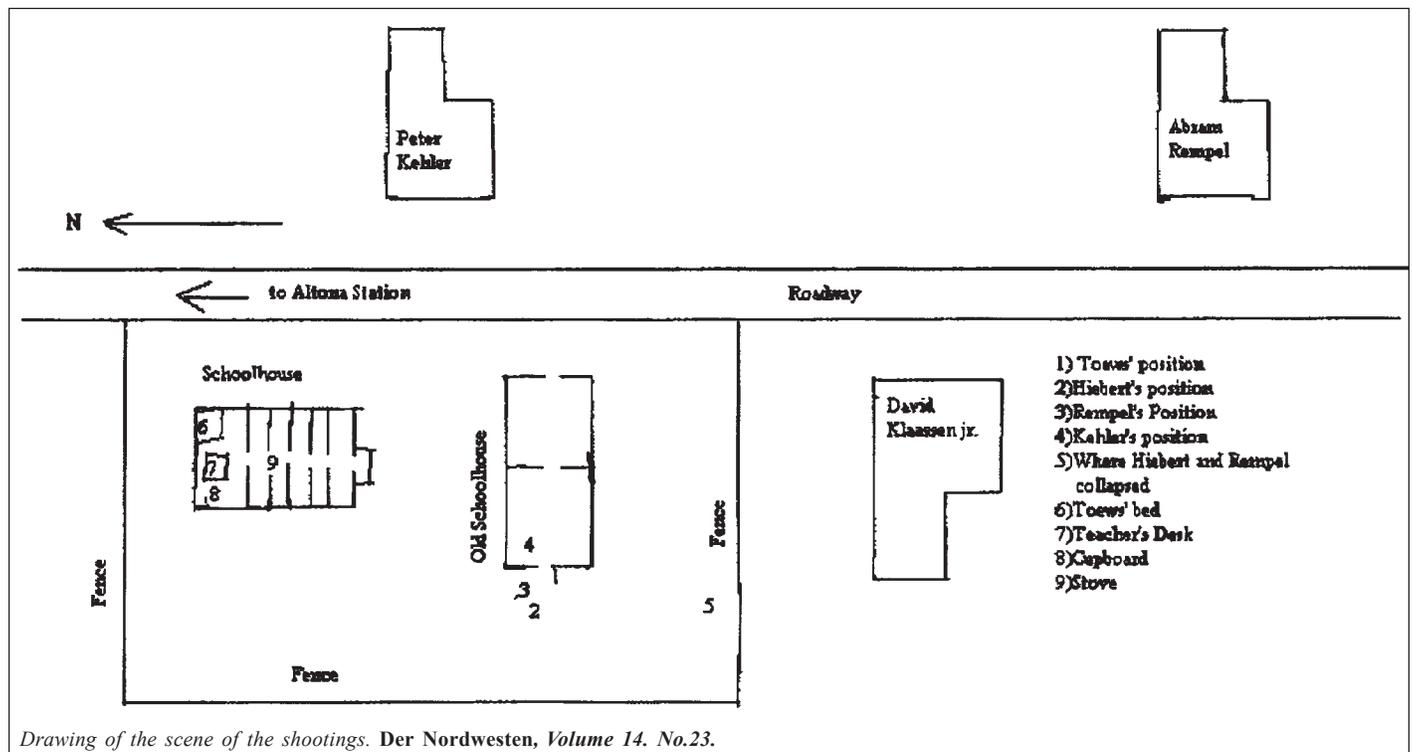
Already in the year 1899 Toews taught in

the Altona School for a short while and during this time boarded at the Abraham Rempel house. When in the year 1901 he came to Altona again, he found a friendly reception in the same house. At the same time it constantly took the highest attention to satisfy him. Thus, when on Sept. 1 of this year, he again resumed his activities at the school, the Rempel family in light of the circumstances which his pretentious character demanded, declined to provide him with further board. Also in the Peter Kehler families where he enquired, he received a negative answer. For one month then he boarded at O. Gaube's hotel in the small town of Altona and finally with David Klaassen. As a result of the refusal he had received from both the Rempel and Kehler families he directed a hatred against the same that went so far as to seek every opportunity to mistreat the children of the same in school. For example, during recess these children were not permitted to play with the other children on the school yard, but were banned to the street. During school hours he left these children to stand on the platform while he forced the others to laugh at them.

Whoever did not laugh along received a thrashing. He also bid the children to chicanery the Rempel and Kehler children by throwing stones at them, for example, on the way home from school.

Called to Answer.

In righteous indignation over such demeaning treatment of their children, the two fathers,



Drawing of the scene of the shootings. *Der Nordwesten*, Volume 14. No.23.

Peter Kehler and Abr. Rempel, called Toews to account in the classroom on Thursday morning. During the dispute which ensued Rempel at different times struck the pointer over the desk and stove so that it splintered. When they realized that in this manner they could not accomplish anything, they told him that in the afternoon they would be back with all the trustees. School trustees in addition to Abr. Rempel were John Hiebert and John Schwarz. The latter two were notified of Toews' improper behaviour and since they lived in town were asked to come out to the village school in order to talk to the teacher in an attempt to bring him to reason.

When the Rempel and Kehler children returned to school after the noon recess Toews asked them if their parents had said anything about him to which he received a no for an answer and only that they would come with the trustees. Since Mr. Schwarz was delayed by a business matter, the other two trustees, Hiebert and Rempel, met at the schoolhouse around 2 o'clock alone. Peter Kehler came to the place somewhat later to find out how the matter would proceed.

When Toews saw both trustees coming he went over to his bed, which stood in the classroom, and the children saw him retrieve an object from the same and heard a click, without a doubt the revolver. From a cupboard on the opposite side of the teacher's desk he took a hammer and nails.

With crossed arms so that his hands were hidden by his shoulders he stepped out onto the school yard where he met the two trustees. Accosted by John Hiebert, Toews invited both of them to step into the school, he would follow them immediately. To this Hiebert objected since he wanted to avoid having the children hear the settlement of an unpleasant matter; there was enough space on the yard.

Shoots Trustees.

For whatever reason, Toews did not comply, but without saying a word, he strode to the old schoolhouse and entered by the open door. The two trustees did not enter the building but walked around it to the other, the west facing door. There they met Toews again, who had left hammer and nails behind in the building.

For what reason he had taken these two items with him is not clear; it is reasonable to conclude that a well-laid plan, that he had determined to execute went astray as a result of the trustees' decision not to enter the schoolhouse ahead of Toews. When Toews again met the trustees, this time at the backdoor of the old school building, he still had his arms crossed in order to conceal the revolver so that the two intended victims were fully unsuspecting of the fate that was planned for them.

When Toews met all the remonstrances of the trustees with silence, Hiebert eventually said to him, "If you will not answer to give account we will have to lock the school and release you of your position."

During this one-sided exchange Toews stood leaning against the wall of the building

to the right of the door while Hiebert stood diagonally opposite him and Rempel on the other side of the door. Hiebert had hardly uttered these words when Toews pulled his revolver. Hiebert just had time to utter, "You are not going to shoot!" when a shot rang out, and the unfortunate victim received a bullet that entered his right side just above the hip, passed sideways through his abdomen, and lodged in his left hip. As later surgery revealed the intestines were not injured, a fortunate circumstance, explainable only by the fact that they were firmly distended, as this happened shortly after the noon meal. Abr. Rempel, who during the exchange had briefly turned his attention to observe his workers in the field, is arrested by



Susia Loewen, nee Rempel, one of the victims of the Altona shootings of Oct. 16, 1902, who survived. Her son Al Loewen, is retired and living in Altona.

the shot and on seeing Toews turn to him jumps to avoid the bullet. But, too late! Still next to the tartar (murderer) in proximity he receives a bullet from the barrel of the revolver in his left shoulder. The bullet drove diagonally from top to bottom of his body.

While all this was happening, Peter Kehler to his misfortune, had also come upon the scene. Wanting to hear how the discussion between Toews and the trustees would be going, he had entered the old school building from the east where he anticipated meeting the three. He saw Toews raise his arm and shoot at Hiebert and Rempel. With the exclamation, "The man, he is shooting!" he turned to run through the first door. But not content with both his victims, Toews turned in full rage at Kehler and before reaching the outdoors he already felt a piercing pain in his right hand and felt his warm blood running down his fingers. Overcome by fear and terror, he ran toward his house where he collapsed at the fence. Fortunately his injury was light, a grazing shot had only torn

some flesh from the fingers of his right hand.

How much more severe the experience of the other two on whom Toews sought to avenge fully his supposed disgrace.

Upon recovering from his consternation, Kehler sees Hiebert and Rempel hurrying over to the house of David Klaassen jr. pursued by the merciless murderer. Hatred beaming from his eyes energizes his feelingless hand with a sinister certainty. He fires another three shots at Rempel and all three hit their mark. The first again hit his back but closer to his shoulder blade and pierced a lung; the second grazed his neck while the third from a greater distance left a blue bruise on his spine. When both of them reached the fence surrounding Klaassen's house they collapsed. Despite his severe wounds, Hiebert had managed to crawl through the fence.

Alarmed by the shots, Mrs. Klaassen had stepped out of the house, and saw Toews turn and stride directly toward the schoolhouse. That is where the second, more grizzly part of the tragedy was about to take place. Not content with the bloodbath so far perpetrated, the villain now turned his rage toward three fully defenceless, innocent little girls, who looked up to their teacher with boundless trust which still had not been shattered in spite of the unjust treatment they had already suffered.

The entrance to the schoolhouse is located to the backs of the children. Immediately upon his entrance he harshly commanded the children, "Now learn, and don't let me catch anyone looking up!" This command the children obediently followed. In the back of the children he then removed the spent cartridges from the revolver and replaced them with new ones. That done, he now coldbloodedly chose his victims. It would appear that he had also premeditated the murder of the three girls, for, quite contrary to usual procedure he had placed them on the back benches. On the last bench sat Susie Rempel, 11 years old, and Lene Kehler, 10 years old, and on the second last bench the 7-year old Anna Kehler. First he approached Susie Rempel and fired two shots at her so close up that her clothes singed.

With the one shot he shattered her right arm below the elbow, for the second shot he placed the mouth of the weapon in her armpit. The bullet shattered her upper arm and exited above. The arm is forever useless and may have to be operated.

Then he turned to the next-seated Lene Kehler, shot her twice through the chest and once in her arm whereupon she sank down as if dead.

Suffering from the wounds she has received, she is currently lying without hope. One bullet went through her body, while the other bullet is located in her back under her skin where it can be easily felt.

The last victim was the little Anna Kehler. In order to reach her, he pushed one bench back somewhat, lifted up her jacket and placed the mouth of the weapon directly on her body.

In the meantime the child has by death already been delivered from her frightful suffer-

ing, until then occupied in fantasy with her teacher by repeatedly saying, "Oh, teacher, had you only been friendly to me - I tried so hard to be good." At the first shot the majority of the children ran to the door to escape into the open, but so paralysed by fear that as they tumbled over the threshold to the ground and crawled away on all fours. Some children, still deathly pale, only appeared from hiding after four hours.

Attempts Suicide.

It appears that Toews then immediately left the schoolhouse, and using the roadway partway and partway the railway embankment, hurriedly made his way to the Altona station. Meanwhile some residents of the village had quickly gathered and started out to Altona to get the doctor, they however did not dare to pass by the murderer. A cyclist, Ewert by name was coming from the station to meet them, who upon being informed by the villagers quickly peeled back to the doctor. As he neared Toews, the same shot a bullet through his own head and collapsed on the roadway. Apparently aiming at the temple he hit too close to the eye so that the wound, not necessarily fatal, fully tore the eye, and injured the other so that, should he survive, he will be blinded. The bullet lodged in the bone of the forehead. People from Altona found him lying on the roadway with his head supported on his hand. In his pocket they found 16 shells and in the revolver another five. He was taken to Dr. Meek's office where he was given first aid, and stayed overnight guarded at his bed by Peter Braun and watched over by his aged mother, who in motherlove ministered as best she could in spite of her shock at the gruesome deed of her son.

As soon as possible, the wounded were taken into their homes where they are now under anxious care. Both doctors McKenty of Gretna were immediately fetched. Dr. G. Hiebert of Winnipeg, a brother-in-law of John Hiebert, that same evening hurried to the bed of suffering of the same. The three severely wounded are hovering between life and death, although with Hiebert and Rempel there is a faint hope that their lives may be saved.

Anna Kehler already succumbed to her wounds on Friday and on Sunday, with community participation, was carried to her final rest.

On Friday morning, under guard, the murderer was taken to the Winnipeg General hospital where under anxious care he seems to be recovering. Whereas he interacts with his environment on other matters he claims to remember absolutely nothing of the events of Thursday.

On Friday evening an inquest into the death of Anna Kehler was held in the schoolhouse. According to the statements of Margarethe Berg, 8, Joh. Loepky, 8, David Klaassen, 9, Peter Klaassen, 7, and Dr. McKenty of Gretna, the jury came to the unanimous conclusion that Anna Kehler died as the result of a bullet wound between the 6th and 7th ribs which

was inflicted by H. J. Toews. The jury consisted of Messrs. Peter Braun, Jacob G. Yoerger, Otto Ritz, Henry M. Klaassen, Joh. Reinecker, H. Hubman, Wm. Berg, Jacob Schwarz, John Patterson, Otto Gaube, H. Bannmann, and H. Braun.

Personal Data.

H.J. Toews comes from the government district of Ekaterinoslav in Russia, his place of birth, and is currently 38 years old. His father died early and his mother remarried Joh. Bergmann, now deceased, and father of the current reeve of Rhineland. Toews came to Manitoba some 25 years ago and grew up in the village of Reinland. A brother, Bernh. Toews, lives in the village of Weidefeld, another near the village of Rhineland (sic. Reinland) as well as a sister. His mother is well advanced in years at 82.

Toews had already spent a good while in the teaching profession. For 7 years he worked in Neuhoffnung; in 1899 he was employed at the school in Altona for the first time but suddenly left at Christmas and taught in the Steinreich School District in the village of Weidefeld. In the following year he returned to Altona again where he was engaged for this year. As teacher he enjoyed great popularity with parents and children. Although he was not particularly outstanding in his profession - he held his position by virtue of a permit - he was able to motivate the children to produce lasting results in his school. He was generally a quiet character at times showing an irritability in his being and an unbelievable overrating of his own personality. This personality trait together with a thorough upheaval of his nervous system in conjunction with an indulged-in secret vice not to be described further possibly led him to this shuddering deed, if one is not inclined to grasp at the popular explanation

of temporary insanity. According to his religious convictions he had not joined any faith community. All our readers know him by his travelogues which he sent the "Nordwesten" for publication some time ago.

Last News.

A Special Dispatch for the "Nordwesten" from Altona reports the condition of the wounded on Wednesday noon as favourable. All are on the way to recovery and for Joh. Hiebert there

is hope that his life will be saved. Lene Kehler is improving slowly, A. Rempel feels better, and Susie Rempel is out of all danger. In most serious condition is Joh. Hiebert yet he may survive if unforeseen complications do not enter.

H. J. Toews is in the local hospital (Winnipeg tr.) under constant guard by two policemen. His condition is not improving, inspite of most diligent care. According to information his doctor gave us, his condition is extremely critical, and it is hardly to be expected that he will recover. But it is too early to predict definitely. At times he appears to be unconscious and at other times he is fully lucid.

About the events on Thursday he offers not a word, not even when an old friend visited him today. Otherwise he spoke clearly, he remembers the past and complains about severe pain in the head.

A picture of the two Kehler daughters will appear in our next issue.

Further Reading:

Bernhard Toews, "Heinrich Toews Murders, Altona," in *Pres.*, No. 19, pages 98-100.

Esther Epp Thiessen, *Altona: the Story of a Prairie Town* (D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., Altona, 1982), pp. 47-48.

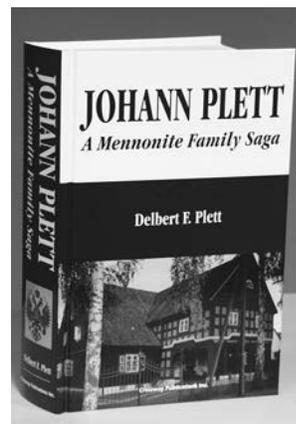
Vic. Penner and T.E. Friesen, *Altona: A Pictorial History* (Friesen Printers, Altona, 1990), p. 33.

Acknowledgement:

Mr. Al. Loewen, Altona, Manitoba, (324-6744) is a son of Susie Rempel, who was injured in the shootings. The bullet was lodged and popped out years later when the doctor lanced her arm.

"Altona Shootings" article Courtesy of Ralph Friesen, Nelson, B.C.

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Family Background.

I, Helen Rempel Wiens, was born in 1928 to my parents Franz and Helena Rempel in Osterwick, Ukraine. My Mother was a Klassen - Dietrich and Judith were her parents. Dietrich Klassen hailed from Osterwick but he was a professional and so they lived in the cities of Melitopol and Berdiansk. He was a designer engineer and had studied in Germany. My mother grew up and went to school in the city and hence speaks fluent Russian to this day.

My grandparents, Dietrich Rempel and Susanna Derksen Rempel lived in Osterwick. They were “Anwohner” (not landowners). Grandfather Rempel worked at the Schulz factory (see *Pres.*, No. 17, pages 27-28). They had 18 children of whom 12 grew to adulthood. Two of their children immigrated to Canada during the 20s. Of the remaining 10, there was only Johann Rempel who was arrested in 1937. One son Peter was a chauffeur in the city of Zaporozhze, where he married a Ukrainian woman called Olga. Their offspring still live in Zaporozhze. We are always in communication with them and have helped them throughout the years.

My mother remembers when the Revolution took place - she was 10. Her father came home from work, took the picture of the Czar off the wall and hid it. My Grandfathers both died of typhus in 1919. My grandfather Klassen was buried in Berdiansk (I visited that cemetery in 1995). The Klassen family then had to return to the village of Osterwick in order to survive. The unrest and famine was raging; my mother remembers going begging in the village - some people still had something but didn't want share what they had. Were it not for the MCC food distribution, the “American kitchen” it was called, my parents might not have survived.

My parents were married in 1927 in the beautiful church in Osterwick. They had seven children, two of whom died in infancy. My father worked in the collective farm. In 1935 the Communists broke down that beautiful church, to use the bricks for something else.

School years.

During my school years three of my uncles were arrested by the police. One was my Father's brother, Uncle Johann Rempel. Two of my Mother's brothers, Jakob and Heinrich Klassen, who lived in the Caucasus Mountains, were taken away. We received this information about the Klassen uncles' arrests by letters from their wives. In 1993 when I visited the sons of these Klassen uncles I was touched to see how one of these sons, who was 12 years-old when his father was taken away, had not forgotten his father. He was still moved to tears when he talked about him. When I returned from that trip I told my husband and children, “I have never done a bigger mission in my life than this trip to visit my relatives in Krasnodar in the Caucasus Mountains.”

I made good progress in my studies at school and began to read a great deal. I am still a voracious reader to this day. I got to know the Russian literature quite well. People in the village still had books and I was able to borrow them. One of my favourite authors was Carl May. I remember his book “Through the Desert” telling the adventures of some young people during the building of the Suez Canal. I also read books like “Uncle Tom's Cabin”, “Tom Sawyer” and “Quo Vadis”.

I received awards, called “premjа” for excellence in school work. These awards were handed out during a ceremony at a public meeting. One of these awards was a book, “A 1001 Arabian Nights”, another was a clothes brush, a toothbrush and toothpaste, and once it was a tam (cap). Looking back now, I realize that none of these school awards that I received were acknowledged or praised by my parents. I felt though that my Mother was pleased because she had also been a very good student.

When school started in September 1938 we were in for a shock. The language of instruction was not German anymore - but Russian. Our former teachers had of course been bilingual, and just switched over. But we village children did not know Russian, maybe a word or two or a song. However, we managed our lessons in Russian and in my Grades Four, Five and Six classes I had good report cards. I also made Russian friends. I felt comfortable with Dascha, Katja or Polja. I wonder if they survived the war? I know that many of the boys in my class died while serving their country at war.

At the end of May 1941 I had completed Sixth grade and I went to work on the collective farm during the summer. By then I was 13 years-old, my friends were a year older so this was our venture into youth. The work on the farm was drudgery, hoeing kilometre long rows of beets or sunflowers, etc. I believe I damaged my skin at that time with too much sun. The men would cut the grain with a horse-drawn mower and it lay where it fell on the stubble. Our job was to tie the cut grain into sheaves - not with twine - we didn't have that. We had to take the grain stems and twist them together, and then tie them around an arm load of cut grain. We didn't have shoes to wear to the field, we walked barefoot on the stubble!

German Invasion, 1941.

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked Russia. This would prove to be a totally new chapter in our family's history. Not until September 1945, when my Father found us and we were united in West Germany, were we able to feel safe again and live without fear.

My mother was still at the Maternity Clinic, having given birth to brother Abram on June 19, 1941. Now I had three brothers, Abram, Dietrich and Hans who was born in 1938 after Grandmother died. On Sunday, the 22nd of June our neighbour's daughter came running over and said, “War has broken out. Germany has attacked Russia! It's going to be announced over the loud-speaker, the control of which was at the Radio Station.”

All we could do was listen to what was being



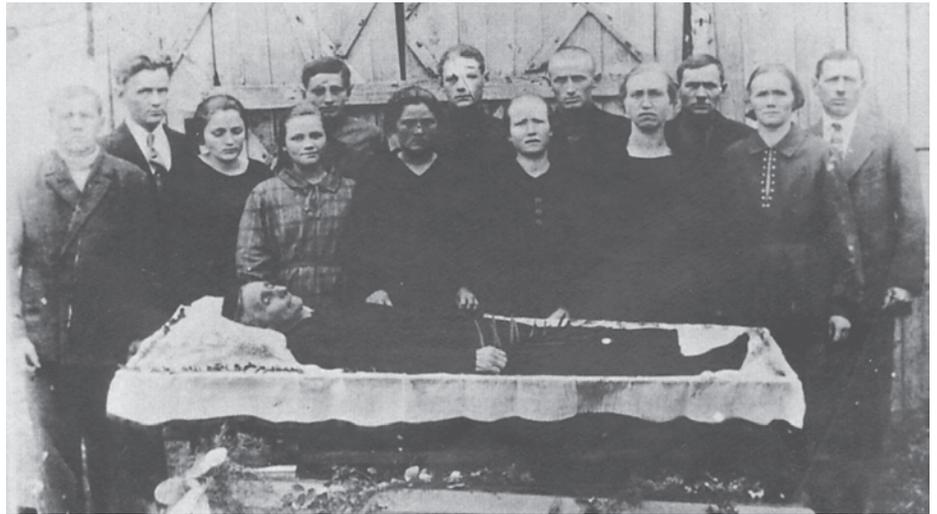
Derksen family photo ca. 1898. Great-grandfather Johann Derksen (1831-1918), front row, center. He was born and raised in Neu-Osterwick. Couples l-r. Susanna Derksen Rempel seated, front right, with baby, and husband Dietrich Rempel, standing; Anna Derksen Berg and Jakob Berg; Helena Derksen Bergen with husband Heinrich Bergen to her right; Tina Derksen Peters, Mrs. Franz Peters, front beside her father; Johann Derksen with wife Agatha in front; and Franz Derksen with wife Anna in front.

broadcast. The loudspeakers were there to serve for propaganda purposes. Foreign Minister Molotov came on and made an earth-shaking announcement, "Russia is at war." We had been told Germany and Russia had a treaty, they had agreed they would not attack each other. They had even divided Poland between each other in 1939. In Russia we were not given the news of other countries, we did not know much about the war, that it had already started in 1939, or that the British King had abdicated, nor what was happening in Germany. No one was permitted to listen to the news from the West, those who did were arrested.

As soon as the war began we had refugees coming, multitudes of Jews were beginning to flee to the east. They were aware of how Germany treated the Jews. We, on the other hand, had no knowledge of who Hitler was or what his Nazi party plans were. My Mother came home with the new baby and we lived in a state of tension in our homes. What would happen to us who were German? We didn't dare to do this or dare to do the other. I think my Father must have been shaking all the time, not wanting to do anything that could be held against him. I remember thinking, what if I became better friends with Russian girls. I spoke Russian well and had some good Russian friends. I realized by then they looked at me as being on the other side, because I'm German.

The German army (Wehrmacht) moved into Russia with a Blitzkrieg (lightning war)! The attack on Russia started on June 22 and by August 18th the Wehrmacht reached Osterwick, 20 kilometres west of the Dnjepr. They probably reached the Dnjepr River the same day - there was not much resistance from the Russian Army.

The Wehrmacht came and liberated us! The ordinary soldiers were very nice to us, were glad to hear German spoken, treated us very well. Much later we were to realize that Hitler and Stalin operated on the same system, especially in the way they killed people. There was no reli-



Grandmother Susanna Rempel's funeral in Osterwick, 1933. L.-r.: David Rempel, Peter, Susanna, Anna, Abram, Liese, Bernard, Helena and Franz, Greta and Heinrich, Maria and Johann Rempel.

gious freedom in Germany during the war, to say the wrong thing was dangerous. But all this we would find out later.

When the German army arrived there was a bit of fighting, airplanes dropped bombs on the cities, but that didn't happen to us in the village. We kept on working in the fields, sometimes the planes would drop leaflets, but we did not dare to pick them up or read them. By August 16th the German army was about 25 kilometers west of us. Our village was to move east - across the Dnjepr River with everything, horses, tractors, cattle, people. Many people had to accompany the cows, the women had to milk the cows and cook for the men who took care of the livestock. Already by the end of July many people were moving east - across the Dnjepr River. Many of my friends lost their fathers at this time because they had to drive the tractors, or look after the cattle that were driven across the river.

Escape.

My father as brigadier was still on the farm on August 16th. The German army was expected to arrive within a week. The order was given that all the people and everything were to move across the Dnjepr River and go east. But secretly our family plan was to go west - and hide until the Germans would come and liberate us. And that is exactly what we did. We were aware of how dangerous a plan this was if we were found out. By now there was turmoil everywhere, especially for the leading Communists in the village. How to save oneself was the big question on everyone's mind. What happened that night of August 16th remains forever in my mind.

My father secured us a ladder wagon (Leiterwagen) on which we could load our belongings and hay for the horses. Some other families also threw some of their belongings onto the wagon, and we travelled west - in the middle of the night. I remember it so well, my mother with the two month-old baby and my two other brothers. My father was walking, leading the horses, as quietly as possible, leaving at the west end of the village instead of the east. Many other people from other villages did the same thing. We walked all night, saw and heard the fighter planes flying overhead. We travelled about 10 kilometres during the night.

The next day was Sunday, August 17th. We needed to stop, rest and feed the horses, and we also needed to eat. My father was very agitated - so afraid the Communists would come after us. And they did - the top Communist people from Osterwick. They hunted people everywhere.

We were parked in a little gully in a Russian village. There were some trees and there was grass and a school nearby. Then we all saw the officials' horse-drawn coach coming and we recognized the top Communist officials from Osterwick. They stepped out of their coach, rifle in hand, and said, "Oh, this is what you Germans are doing. You are traitors to our country! Now, who is the leader here and who gave you this wagon and horses?" To my father he said, "Franz, we are going to finish you right now." He loaded his rifle, but my mother and everybody screamed!



House of Franz and Helena Rempel in Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, 1943, l.-r.: sons Johan and Dietrich, daughter Helena, parents Helena and Franz Rempel with baby Heinrich, and German Wehrmacht soldiers Ernst and Georg. The Rempel family left Osterwick a few weeks later on the train bound for Germany.

“Well, we’ll do it at the end of the village,” he said. “All males come along.” They didn’t bother with the women. We were a group of about 12 families.

My father went to say good-bye to my mother and quoted a scripture, “My days are like the evening shadow; I wither away like grass,” Psalm 102:11. I have prayed much for God to protect my father, but never as fervently as I prayed that day. My father was barefoot. These men were very much in a hurry and rushing the men. But my father was still hunting for his Schloren (“sandals”). He couldn’t go barefoot. In the meantime the Communist officials went back to the road thinking all the men were on the wagon and would follow them. Eventually father found his Schloren and then he tried to catch up with the wagon on which the other men were.

A Russian man from the village who had watched all this whispered to him, “Why don’t you just disappear, here in the bush?” And my father disappeared! God used this man to save my father’s life.

My father crawled deeper into the reeds and came upon a field where the grain sheaves had already been set up into stocks. He climbed into one of them and hid there. He found that there were many other men hiding in the stocks. We of course didn’t know this. We were still afraid the communists would come back. My father at the same time was concerned as to what would happen to us. The men on the wagon were ordered to drive back to Osterwick, but in all the confusion and agitation over the war front being so close, most of them managed to escape.

By evening my father crept out to see what was happening to us. Our women and children



Franz and Helena Rempel and their five children upon arrival at the train station in Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 14, 1949: l-r: Johan 11, Diedrich 14, Helen (the author), Heinrich 8 and Franz 6.

had already been moved into the school building, and everyone was beginning to settle down for the night. My mother and I had seen father go into the bushes. Later that evening someone came to my mother and told her, “Franz is there in the bushes and he wants to talk to you.” So, thank God, my father was alive and still with us. My father spent another night in the bush. The next day, August 18th, 1941 the German army arrived and we were free.

We thanked God for his liberation. The next day we went back to our village of Osterwick. It was already under the control of the German army. At the banks of the Dnjepr River the German Wehrmacht’s advance halted for some time. Then the attack continued and the front moved further east, to the other side of the Dnjepr River, towards

the Molotschna colony. There the Russians did the same thing, they loaded all the men and boys onto trains and took them east. As a result many more of their men died and were missing in our villages on this side of the Dnjepr River. Because of the delay of the German army, the Molotschna villages suffered much more severely, since the Soviets had more time to send the Mennonites to the labour camps of the Siberian Gulag in the east.

German Occupation.

As soon as we were back in our village we were permitted to work freely and were able to organize our church services again. We used the elementary school building, took out the inner walls and made one big meeting room for our Sunday services. So we had religious life back in our village, with permission of course from the occupying military.

The collective farm could not be dissolved immediately under the

occupation by the Germans. It was very necessary to produce grain and feed and to run our households. But now there was a difference - we always had enough to eat, and of course we also had to raise food to feed the German army. In the fall it was back to school for me, Grade Seven. The same teachers who had been forced to teach Communism could now teach German. They were good teachers and I have fond memories of my seventh year in school. It would also be my last school year in the Ukraine.

There were about eight Jewish families living in our village, who spoke the same Low German that we all did. Already by September and October we were beginning to experience what Nazi Germany was all about. The Germans were arresting all the Jewish people and taking them to the city of Zaporozhe. At first we didn’t know what happened to the Jews that were sent away. But then we began to hear - the Jews were all being murdered. This happened in all the villages, wherever there were Jewish families. The Jewish males were all circumcised, and the other people weren’t. So they just had the boys strip their pants and they had proof they were Jewish.

I recall what happened to one family in our village. Vera was the lady’s name. She was Russian and her husband was Jewish. Vera had a son from her first marriage - non-Jewish, and several children from the Jewish husband. When she was taken she had a small baby in her arms. One day in school I happened to glance out of the window. I saw Vera walking across the yard with her baby in her arms. She had been given a chance to save herself, but her husband and his children would be shot. Knowing what happened to Vera made a deep impression on me to this very day. She had chosen to die with her family and had just come to say good-bye to her oldest son. He lived with his grandmother and aunt. That son later died in Germany, while playing with a grenade that exploded. In another situation, a Jew-



Helen Rempel Wiens, second row, third from the left. Front row: teacher G. Heyeck and principal A. Froese.

ish man was married to a Mennonite lady - the Nazis let her and the children live, but killed the Jewish husband.

My baby brother had been given the name Abram, but under German occupation we were not to have Jewish names, so he became a Heinrich (Henry). By 1942 we began to realize what the plans of the occupation officials included, and that we were not as free as we had thought we were. Females named Sarah called themselves

women and children. It was not easy travelling in war time; they would be bombed or fired upon, and the fall weather created misery with snow and frost. My friend recalls travelling with this group - they slept in open fields under the stars at night, shaking the snow off their blankets in the morning.

In my village of Osterwick many of our young men were away, in the German army. By now the Russian army had pushed the Wehrmacht back

At first the custom was to hang the helmet on top of the cross on the grave. We noticed the German soldiers' graves were dated only two years ago. We had to think of the soldiers dying in Russia - no crosses would be marking their graves.

Post-War.

Franz, my father, born 1905, and the others all worked on the collective farm in Osterwick. We left with the retreating German army in 1943. We were sent on a freight train which took us to Ober-Schlesian (now Poland) in 10 days. Two weeks after that my mother gave birth to the youngest of her children, a boy named Franz. The doctor that attended was Jewish, he wore a yellow star.

In 1945 we fled again, further west by train in the cold winter. We landed in the Harz Mountains, the City of Wernigrode. After our stay in that camp (we always stayed in camps), we were shipped a little further west and so we were never occupied by the Russian Army. The Americans liberated us on April 11, 1945. MCC made contact with us as soon as June 1945 and so we were helped again by MCC. It took four years until we could immigrate to Canada. For this our family has been extremely grateful. It's the best country in the world.

In the late 1940s and early '50s, my uncles' Franz, Heinrich, David and Bernhard, came to Canada with their families. These brothers have all died. Ben was the last one to go in November 2001 at age 87. Four of the other siblings of my father died in Germany and two others in Russia.

We, the Frank Rempel family, came to Chilliwack, B.C. in 1949. I, Helen, am the oldest and the only daughter. My four brothers are Dietrich, John, Henry and Frank. Four of us became teachers. Dietrich went into the ministry after some time and is still pastoring in the Clearbrook Mennonite Church in Abbotsford. My mother, Helen Rempel, at 95 years of age, lives at the Menno Home in Abbotsford. She is in relatively good health. My father died in 1986 at the age of 81.

I married Peter G. Wiens in 1956. The Wiens family came to Canada in 1923. They lived in Saskatchewan for many years. We lived in Vancouver and were active members of the Mennonite church. We had three children. Our children are all married and I have eight grandchildren. My daughter Andrea is married to John Nikkel and they farm in Landmark, Manitoba. Daughter Judy and Glenn live in Surrey, B.C. Son John and Michiyo live in Coquitlam, B.C.

My husband Peter Wiens died of a stroke in 1996. I married again, to Jacob Franz, a retired dairy farmer. We belong to the Greendale Mennonite Church, Chilliwack. In 1986 I and my husband went to Russia for the first time. And then I went several times again. In September of 2002 I went on the Mennonite Heritage Cruise down the Dnjepr River. That was my sixth time back "in der alte Heimat". I believe this will be my last time. No more "dosviedanije".

Source:

Helen Wiens Franz, *Give God the Glory* (Abbotsford, B.C., 1996), pages 11-16.



Franz and Helena Rempel with family in front of their house on South Sumas Road, Chilliwack, B.C. 1962. L.-r. Henry, Dietrich and Dorothy with son Kenneth, Franz, Peter and Helena Wiens with children John and Judy in front, and John and Erika.

Lydia and males with the name Abram became Victor or Herman. Brother Henry's name change remains a memorial of those days.

I did not get to attend "Zentralschule" (High school) in Russia. By then the high school was in Zaporozhe and students were required to pay board and tuition. My father wanted me to help look after the household and my brothers. So I remained at home and continued working on the collective farm.

Retreat, 1943.

The war was not going well for Germany. The disaster at Stalingrad was especially bad. They kept flying the seriously wounded soldiers out. Many of them had become mentally ill from the terror, stress, starvation and suffering they had experienced. They had been afraid of becoming Russian prisoners of war. Hitler refused to let them retreat at Stalingrad and thousands of his men were killed in that battle. Not only Hitler's German boys were killed, but also our young Mennonite men were usually forcibly inducted into the Wehrmacht and sent to fight and died in the same way.

By 1943 we were preparing to go to Germany. The German army was retreating and our Mennonite people were leaving Russia with them. The people from the Molotschna villages who were further east than we were left before we did, by horse and buggy. They were mostly

to the Dnjepr River, just 25 kilometres from us. It was October 19th, 1943. The evening before we boarded the train to leave, we gathered in our church for a service. The minister Jacob Neudorf said; "This is it - 140 or so years, not quite 150 years ago, our forefathers came here from Polish-Prussia. Now we are all going back to where they came from originally." It was like an official farewell service with blessings and with prayers asking God for guidance.

I recall leaving the village of Osterwick. The train station was about five kilometres from our village. My cousin, Margaret Dueck and I walked those five kilometres together. Others had gone ahead with the luggage on a military truck, also my mother who was in her last month of pregnancy. I figured, this is the last I'm ever going to see my village. And now - I'm amazed to say, I've been back there four times - in 1986, 1990, 1995 and 2002. At the train station we were put in the same boxcar with my family and other relatives. The train cars had wide shelves on which we could lie with our blankets and look out through the little window. There was a little stove in the car and we could boil water or cook a bit of food. Our train would stop at stations where we could get food. So - we are on our way, travelling west!

I knew my geography well, could tell when we were travelling through Poland. Often we would see crosses on German soldiers' graves.

Patriarchs of the Brüdergemeinde, 1860

“Patriarchs of the Early Mennonite Brüdergemeinde, 1860,”

by Henry Schapansky, 108-5020 Riverbend Road, Edmonton, Alberta, T6H 5J8.

Introduction.

The emergence of the Brüdergemeinde (later the Mennonite Brethren) during the 1850s was a major and divisive development among the Russian Mennonites and requires serious examination by students of that history. The Russian Mennonite community had previously experienced a division into “progressives” and “traditionalists”, and I have discussed aspects of the earlier division elsewhere. The “progressives” were essentially assimilationists, wishing a fuller integration of the Mennonite community into Russian society with its values of authoritarianism, nationalism, capitalism and militarism. The minority progressives, represented by Johann Cornies, Bernhard Fast, and generally speaking, members of the Ohrloff Gemeinde in the Molotschna Colony, naturally secured support and encouragement from Russian bureaucracy.

Division in the Mennonite community is an almost natural process, occurring through normal internal growth, emigration and, sometimes by differences in the practice and implementation of theological beliefs, although P. M. Friesen refers to this tendency as the “Mennonite sickness” (Note One). The significance and uniqueness in the separation of the Brüdergemeinde is two-fold. Firstly, I claim, the Brethren were nurtured and inspired by external groups, without whose support the Brethren movement might have collapsed. Secondly, the Brethren themselves were almost absorbed into the Russian Baptist movement. Indeed, it may have only been through the efforts of a handful of Brethren; including Aron Lepp, that the Brüdergemeinde survived as a non-Baptist group.

The Planer Brethren and the Volga Brethren did in fact join the Baptists (previously non-Mennonite but “converted” through the efforts of missionaries Heinrich Bartel and Benjamin Becker). In fact, the first chairman of the Russian Baptist Union was Brüdergemeinder Johann Wiehler. It is therefore not surprising that the traditionalists, or even the progressives, viewed the Brüdergemeinde movement as a threat to their own existence.

Historiography.

Historical writing in respect of the Russian Mennonites has long been dominated by Brüdergemeinde apologists. Non-Brethren works have generally emanated from progressives. The Brethren secured some support from the progressives since it was external support that shaped the Brethren movement, and since the Brethren were seen as useful tools in breaking up and modernizing the traditionalist community.

The largest single work on the history of the Russian Mennonites and the Brethren may

still be the massive opus of P.M. Friesen. He was well placed to chronical events since he knew many of the early Brethren personally and since his uncle Johann Klassen, early Brethren extremist (although his extremism is downplayed in Friesen’s work), was perhaps the single most influential and important of the Brethren.

The purpose of this article is to examine the family backgrounds of the early patriarchs of the Brethren, to establish a profile of both early Molotschna and Old Colony Brethren, and to examine common features to explain, in part, the emergence of the Brüdergemeinde phenomenon. Of interest too are the differences between the various Brethren groups, particularly between those of the Old Colony and the Molotschna, and between those known to have been extremists and those of more moderate views.

P.M. Friesen himself lends credence to the view that external forces and family backgrounds played a large role in the formation of the Brethren. He examines at length the influence of the Lutheran Separatist-Pietists, the Hamburg Baptists, the immigration of the pietist-led Rudnerweiders and Gnadenfelders to Russia, and generally documents well the importance of non-Mennonites in the Brethren movement. He also establishes clear links between the Brethren and other extremists such as the Templars. In Friesen’s view the Mennonite community had lapsed into spiritual lethargy and external forces were required to awaken it.

A somewhat different view, most recently elaborated by Dr. John B. Toews (although expressed in many other earlier Brethren writings) is that the movement arose almost entirely within the community, involving individuals alarmed by the decadence of Mennonite society, who had received the grace of God and had a conversion experience, either dramatic or otherwise (Note Two). Toews draws some evidence for the decadent nature of Mennonite society from the translated diaries of David Epp, although David Epp may not have been a representative witness, as I have discussed elsewhere (*Pres.*, No. 21, pages 134-7 and No. 22, pages 138-9). In addition, the translation by Toews of the diary is itself somewhat problematic and sometimes misleading (Note Three).

The view expressed by Toews, and some earlier Brethren writers, lends credence to the opinion, held by some Mennonites of the 1860s, that the Brethren had adopted a form of Lutheran pre-destinationism. Many of the extremist Brethren felt that, having been saved and therefore elected by God, they could do no wrong. Many of the excesses of the period arose from this belief.

Observations.

Turning to the evidence of P. M. Friesen, and the profiles (presented below) of the individual early Brethren patriarchs, some initial observations may be made:

1. The early Brethren were more numerous in the Molotschna than in the Old Colony, although both groups were relatively small indeed. Many of the early Brethren were closely related (family connections having been established prior to 1860), so that the number of Brethren “clans” was even smaller.

2. Extremists appeared in both Molotschna and Old Colony Brüdergemeinde groups and were in the majority for a number of years. Indeed, the most extremist of all the Brethren may have been Gerhard Wiehler from the Old Colony, who at one time banned his father and brother (all extremists) for disagreeing with his views.

From the material of Friesen, we can construct a listing of some of the more prominent extremists and moderates of the period 1860-1864. Some of the extremists did, however, it should be noted, adopt more moderate views after 1864.

Extremist Molotschna Brethren - Benjamin Becker, Jacob Becker, Bernhard Penner (later a Seventh-Day Adventist), Isaac Koop, Hermann Peters (founder of the “Breadbreakers”), Wilhelm Bartel, Johann Klassen (uncle of P.M. Friesen), Heinrich Bartel.

Extremist Old Colony Brethren - Gerhard Wiehler, Johann Wiehler, Johann Wiehler (junior) Franz Wiehler, Heinrich Neufeld, Peter Berg, Johann Loewen.

Moderate Molotschna Brethren - Abraham Kornelsen, Heinrich Hiebert (banned by the extremists), Jacob Reimer (also banned by the extremists), Gottlieb Strauß, Daniel Hoppe.

Moderate Old Colony Brethren - Abraham Unger, Heinrich Epp.

3. Separatist-Pietist and Baptist views and missionary efforts played different roles in the formation of the Brethren. The earliest impact was made by the Pietists among both the Molotschna and Old Colony Mennonites. A study group of various individuals in the Molotschna, influenced by the teachings of missionary Eduard Wüst, was formed and referred to as the “Wüst Brethren”. Individuals from the Wüst Brethren formed the nucleus of both the Molotschna Brüdergemeinders and the Templars. In the Old Colony a similar small extremist Pietist group arose in the 1850s. Johann Loewen, Heinrich Neufeld (later an extremist Brethren), Abraham Unger, and one Jacob Janzen were part of this faction which however adopted some strange radical ideas and eventually disappeared as a group (Note Four).

Baptist influence was perhaps evident ear-

lier in the Old Colony than in Molotschna. Abram Unger, first Ältester of the Old Colony Brethren (the Einlage Gemeinde) was a strong supporter of union with the Baptists (Friesen refers to this group as Baptist-Predestinationists, page 446) and his son Abraham married Louisa Benzien, daughter of prominent Hamburg Baptist Karl Benzien who later moved to Russia.

However it was to be the Baptist influence that endured the longest and discussions were held between the Brethren and the Russian Baptists for many years regarding a possible union. Pietist influences survived longest perhaps in the Kuban settlement. P.M. Friesen seems to have viewed the Kuban settlement as a backwater in the Brethren community, and apparently favoured closer ties with the Russian Baptists.

4. The overwhelming majority of early Molotschna Brethren and Templars were from families who immigrated to Russia during or after the European war of 1805 to 1815, particularly after 1815. Many Brethren or Templars came from families that had been Mennonite for only one, two or three generations.

Of the 27 or so Wüst Brethren listed in P.M. Friesen, only the following were clearly from pre-war immigrant families: Abraham Matthies, Abraham Peters, Heinrich Hiebert (although heavily influenced by his school teacher, pietist Tobias Voth), and perhaps Jacob Reimer and Jacob Buhler (1822-55). Some of Wüst Brethren were from non-Mennonite families including David Hausknecht (a school teacher), and brothers Nicholas (1815-74), Heinrich (1824-84) and Johann (1826-64) Schmidt, whose grandfather David Schmidt came to Russia in 1810 from the Zweibrücken region (Pfalz). Many came to Russia directly from West Prussia as young men, including Peter Siemens, Leonard Sudermann and Herman Sudermann, after 1820.

Of the 32 family heads listed in Section One (below), only the following came from pre-war families: Heinrich Hiebert, Isaac Regier, Abraham Peters, Johann Hiebert, Jacob Kroeker, and perhaps Abraham Regier (an 1808 family) and Jacob Reimer (an 1810 family).

Of the 38 additional family heads of Section Two, only the following were from pre-war families: Jacob Giesbrecht, Wilhelm Giesbrecht, Abraham Eidse, Daniel Eidse, Johann Martens (Old Colony) Jacob Martens (Old Colony), Heinrich Neufeld (Old Colony), Abraham Neufeld (Old Colony), Kornelius Reimer (an 1810 family), Franz Martens (an 1809 family).

5. The number of early Old Colony Brethren was much smaller than the number of early Molotschna Brethren. Many were connected through family ties, particularly to the leading Old Colony Brethren who included school teacher Johann Wiehler and wagonmaker Abraham Unger. The small number of Old Colony individuals and clans in the Brethren movement and lack of family data in respect of less well-known families makes it difficult to

draw any firm conclusions.

What is, however, apparent is that a majority had Kronsweide Gemeinde roots, or married into Kronsweide Gemeinde families. Furthermore, circa 1862, a majority of Old Colony Brethren were living either in Kronsweide or Einlage. Some Old Colony Brethren came from families of the post-war immigration.

6. There were close connections, including family ties, between the Molotschna and Old Colony Brethren. Many of the Old Colony Brethren, particularly the extremists, joined the Brüdergemeinde Colony in the Kuban. Many of the disillusioned Kuban settlers later joined the Old Colony Brethren settlements at Andreasfeld and Wiesenfeld. In the early 1860s several Old Colony Brethren appear to have been living in the Molotschna including Gerhard Wiehler.



Johann Claassen (1820-76), Liebenau, Kuban.

The Old Colony Brethren played a surprisingly large role in the early history of the Brethren, in view of their much smaller numbers. This may have been due to the remarkable abilities of individuals such as Abraham Unger and the senior Johann Wiehler.

Conclusions - Molotschna.

What can we conclude from the family profiles of the early Brethren? The first conclusion we can make is that indirectly proposed by P.M. Friesen. The Molotschna Brethren had generally speaking roots in families who immigrated to Russia after 1815. If we regard war-time (1807-1815) immigrant families (small in number) in the same category as post-war families, then very few early Molotschna Brethren had roots in pre-war families.

The early influence of Lutheran Pietists is well evident in post-war immigrant families, particularly in respect of the Friesian Rudnerweide Gemeinde. Their Ältester Franz Görtz was a supporter of Pietist views and was responsible for the controversial appoint-

ment of Pietist Tobias Voth as a school teacher in the Molotschna. Tobias Voth had married a Lutheran (of a Pietist family) and was to influence some of his students including Heinrich Hiebert in Pietist directions.

The Gnadenfelders, originally from the Flemish settlements in the Neumark, had lived in Prussian territory since 1765 before finally moving to Russia in 1834. Many of the later leaders of the Neumark and Gnadenfelder Gemeinden were originally from Lutheran families including various members of the Lange and Lenzmann families. Over time, the Neumark Mennonites, due to their isolation, had absorbed ideas and individuals from their Lutheran neighbours. Nevertheless many Gnadenfelders, including Ältester August Lenzmann opposed the Brüdergemeinde movement.

Conclusions - Old Colony.

Conclusions in respect of the Old Colony Brüdergemeinde are not as easily made. Their numbers were small and less detail is available with respect to the less prominent adherents. It does appear that members from the Kronsweide Gemeinde dominated the profile of the early Old Colony Brethren.

The Kronsweide Gemeinde originated as a result of the efforts, it seems, of a group of Friesians, known as the "Rosenkrantzers", in early years of the Old Colony settlement (1788-1793). The Rosenkrantzers, led by Johann (Jan) Klassen and Franz Pauls adopted theological views rejected by their Flemish neighbours and by the West Prussian Flemish Gemeinden. A letter written by Franz Pauls, outlining their ideas, to Danzig Ältester Peter Epp, was not deemed worthy of a response (Gerhard Wiebe diary, letter of June 21, 1792, to Johann Wiebe).

The Rosenkrantzers and Kronsweide Gemeinde settlers came from both Tragheimersweide and Lithuanian Gemeinden. The Tragheimersweide Gemeinde originated out of Lithuanian Gemeinde settlers who returned to Prussia in the 1730s, and the Tragheimersweide Gemeinde became the Molotschna Rudnerweide Gemeinde when most of its members moved as a group to Russia in 1819. The Lithuanian Gemeinde had previously experienced a "Great Awakening" circa 1710 and a number of Lutherans (some possibly of Swiss background) joined the Lithuanian Gemeinde during this period. This was a major concern to both the Mennonites and Prussian authorities (The Lithuanian Gemeinde was located in Prussian territory, it should be noted).

There is, therefore, a long connection between the Old Colony and Molotschna Brethren. The leading Old Colony Brüdergemeinder, Abraham Unger, did indeed have family roots in the Tragheimersweide Gemeinde, as did less prominent Old Colony Brethren.

We cannot however ignore the fact that some of the early Old Colony Brethren, including Heinrich Neufeld and members of the prominent Johann Wiehlers family, had roots in Flemish families of the pre-war immigration pe-

riod. Johann Wiehler (senior) may have been a remarkable individual since sons Gerhard and Johann played key roles in the early development of the Brethren.

Additional research on those early Brethren whose family backgrounds are less well-known, will, in my opinion, confirm the general conclusions drawn above. Curiously, while many leading Brethren were from Flemish Gemeinden, the majority of the early Brethren were from Friesian and non-Mennonite backgrounds. Curiously, too, despite the significance of the Gnadenfelders in the Wüst movement of the 1850s, they are not well represented in the early Brethren, although heavily represented in the Templers. Of interest too would be additional research involving the Flemish immigrants of the post-war period, living in the southern regions of the Heubuden Gemeinde (for instance at Kurzebrach) who may have been influenced by their Tragheimersweide Gemeinde neighbours.

Sources:

The names of the Molotschna Brüdergemeinde families, as well as some family details are drawn from the work of P.M. Friesen and include the following:

I. (a) Signers of the Ausgangsschrift (6.1.1860);

(b) Participants in the Brüdergemeinde Ältester Election of 1860;

(c) Persons mentioned in the list of 5.1.1861 (Report of government investigator Alexander Brune, published in J. B. Toews, *The Story of the Early Mennonite Brethren* (Hillsboro, 2002) and not already mentioned in P. M. Friesen.

II. Signers of the Brüdergemeinde Petition of 30.12.1863;

III. Other prominent early Molotschna Brethren of the 1860s referred to in P.M. Friesen, but not found in the previous lists.

The names of the Old Colony Brüdergemeinde families are taken from the following:

- Einlage Brüdergemeinde Baptism list from 1862, Alf Redekop, *Mennonite Historian*, March 1998 (Note Five) and also in the work of J. B. Toews, see above.

- All references are to P.M. Friesen, *Geschichte der Alt-Evangelischen Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Russland* (Halbstadt, Taurien, 1911) German edition, 776 pages Part I and 154 pages Part II.

Molotschna Brüdergemeinde I:

I (a) Signers of the Ausgangsschrift (6.1.1860)

1. Three original leaders:

Abraham Kornelsen (b. 1826) Eliesabethal - A son of Abraham Kornelsen (1789-1828), m. Maria X (b. 1806). Abraham Kornelsen (1789-1828) came to Russia in 1819 with his widowed mother Sara (nee Ediger), and two sisters. The father of Abraham (1789-1828) was Abraham Kornelsen (1764-1810) of Schweingrube, Tragheimersweide Gemeinde.

Abraham Kornelsen's mother Maria X (b. 1806) remarried Abraham Wall (b. 1798) of Grossweide, Molotschna.

Abraham Kornelsen (b. 1826) left the Brüdergemeinde movement briefly during the period of extremism, and later, in 1879, moved to the U.S.A. He was the person P.M. Friesen felt would have been the most able first Ältester of the Brüdergemeinde. He was an opponent of the Brüdergemeinde extremists.

Johann Klassen (1820-76) Liebenau, m. Katherina Reimer (1826-70), 2m. 1870 Katherina Schmidt (1852-1915). A son of David Klassen (1760-1827) m. 1788 Sara X (widow of Johann Suckau of Tiegenhagen) 2m. Aganetha Penner (b. 1782).

David Klassen was a son of Peter Klassen



Heinrich Hübert (1810-95), first Ältester of the Molotschna Brüdergemeinde.

of Tiegenhagen, deceased in 1788 and possibly in 1776. David Klassen may have moved several times as various references refer to him at Orlofffeld, Königsberg and Petershagen. He may have been a merchant. Peter Klassen was likely the son of David Klassen (1700-80), 1776: Fürstenwerder, Landwirt, 1 male, 1 female, 2 sons, 1 daughter, 1 male servant, middle class. If this connection is correct, Johann Klassen was also distantly related to Martin Klassen (1820-81), author of *Geschichte der wehrlosen taufgesinnten Gemeinden von Zeit der Apostel bis auf die Gegenwart* (Danzig, 1873), a pietistically-orientated history of the Russian Mennonites, and his cousin Claas Epp (1838-1913), leader of the infamous trek to Central Asia in 1880 to 1884. Johann Klassen would also have been related to David Klassen (1813-1900), delegate of the Heuboden Kleine Gemeinde to North America in 1873 and well-known founder of the Rosenhof/Rosenort settlement near Morris, Manitoba, in 1874 (Note Six).

Johann Klassen came to Russia in 1827 with his mother and siblings, settling in Sparrau, Molotschna. Katherina Reimer was a sister to Brüdergemeinder Jacob Reimer (1817-

91) (see below). Katherina Schmidt is difficult to locate. Johann Klassen was the uncle of Brüdergemeinde historian, Peter M Friesen. He was a sometime supporter of the extremists.

P. M. Friesen describes Johann Klassen as politically astute and a determined and skilful organizer. He joined the extremists for a time, and was later the first Oberschulz of the Brüdergemeinde Kuban settlement.

Isaac Koop (b. 1817) Eliesabethal (later Waldheim?), m. X (unknown). A son of Johann Koop (b. 1785) m. Katherina X (b. 1782) who came to Russia in 1819. They stayed in Burwalde, Old Colony until 1824 when they moved to Eliesabethal. Johann Koop was likely a son of Andreas Koop (b.1812), Klein Mausdorf 1776: 1 son (Ellerwald Gemeinde) later of Heubuden.

2. First Ältester.

Heinrich Hiebert (Hübert) (1810-95) Liebenau, m. Agatha Loewen (b. 1805), 2m. Maria Epp (d. 1900).

A son of Nicholas (Klaas) Hiebert (1785-1858) of Münsterberg, Molotschna. Nicholas Hiebert (1785-1858) was a son of Nicholas Hiebert (1739-1804), Lakendorf, 1776: No children listed. Nicholas Huebert (1785-1858) came to Russia in 1804. His widowed mother Susanna Zacharias (b. 1764) married Nicholas Ens (b. 1773) of Ladekopp, Molotschna. Agatha Loewen was a daughter of Peter Loewen (b. 1765) of Ladekopp, Molotschna. Maria Epp was the daughter of Jacob Epp, an immigrant to Russia of 1839 to 1845, difficult to locate.

P.M. Friesen describes Hiebert as a thinker and capable theologian, though a poor speaker, indecisive and not the best choice for Ältester. He was deeply influenced by his school teacher Tobias Voth. Heinrich Hiebert (Huebert) was elected Brüdergemeinder Ältester in 1860 and retired in 1877. An opponent of the extremists. Heinrich Hiebert moved to the Kuban in 1873. See Alf Redekopp, *The Münsterberg Hüberts* (Winnipeg, 1992), pages 1-17.

3. Others.

Dietrich (Dirk) Klassen (b. 1809) Marienthal, m. Maria Janzen (b. 1811). Brother of Johann Klassen (1820-76) above. Maria Janzen appears to be a daughter of Heinrich Janzen (b. 1775) of Prangenu, Molotschna, who came to Russia in 1818.

Martin Klassen (b. 1820 - ?), Lichtfelde, m. X (unknown), likely a son of Abraham Klassen (b. 1803), 2m. Maria X (b. 1808) m. Gerhard Görtz (no dates) of Rudnerweide, Molotschna. Abraham Klassen came to Russia in 1831.

Franz Klassen (no dates) Eliesabethal, m. X (unknown) 2m. 1846 Margaretha Fröse (1801-73) m. Abraham Wiens (1800-44). Difficult to locate this Franz Klassen. He was the first deacon of the Brüdergemeinde. Margaretha Fröse was a daughter of Cornelius Fröse (d. 1834) of Grossweide, Molotschna. He was likely the son of Franz Fröse deceased in 1776: widow Fröse, Marcushoff 1776: 2 sons, 3 daughters.

Kornelius Fröse was a member of the Thiensdorf (Friesian) Gemeinde and came to Russia in 1819. Abraham Wiens was a son of an Abraham Wiens of Herrenhagen (b. ca. 1762) and came to Russia (with other members of his family) in 1815.

See Alan Peters, "Margaretha Froese: 'Mother' of the MB Church," in *MBHS West Coast Bulletin*, No. 18, Nov. 1987, page 4.

Kornelius Wiens (1827-85) Eliesabethtal, m. 1856 Sara Dyck (b. 1834). A son of Abraham Wiens (1800-44) mentioned above, an immigrant of 1815. Moved to the U.S.A. 1874.

Abraham Wiens (1830-1900), Eliesabethtal, m. 1855 Maria Buller (d. 1871) 2m. 1872 Maria Friesen (b. 1850). A brother of Kornelius Wiens above. Oberschulze of the Kuban settlement from 1874 to 1886.

Abraham Wiens (b. 1823?) Lichtfelde, m. X (unknown). Possibly a son of Abraham Wiens whose widow married Abraham Neudorf (b. 1782) of Montau. It is not known when the Abraham Wiens family came to Russia.

Isaac Regier (b. 1830) Pastwa, m. X (unknown). Apparently the son of Jacob Regier (1784-1864) of Münsterberg (Heubuden Gemeinde) who came to Russia in 1808 (according to the 1835 Molotschna census). Jacob Regier lived in the Old Colony until 1826 when he moved to Rudnerweide, Molotschna (according to the 1835 census).

Daniel Hoppe (b. 1823) Schardau, m. X (unknown). Not it seems of Mennonite background. From Neulanghorst, G.W, West Prussia. Came to Russia in 1854.

August Strauß (no dates), m. X (unknown). Difficult to place. Undoubtedly of Lutheran origin, possibly from Volhynia, likely also a son of Gottlieb (August) Strauß who lived at Gnadenenthal, Molotschna, at sometime. Likely, therefore, an immigrant of 1836 to 1838. Moved to Crimea.

Abraham Peters (no dates) Ladekop, m. X (unknown). Possibly a son of Abraham Peters (b. 1810) of Ladekopp. Abraham Peters Jr. was a deacon in the Brüdergemeinde and later moved to the Kuban settlement.

Andreas Voth (1826-85) Pastwa, m. Katherina Wall (1828-1908). Difficult to locate. Possibly from a Neumark or Volhynian family and likely came to Russia after 1835. Later moved to the Crimean settlements.

Peter Stobbe (b. 1830) Fürstenau, m. X (unknown). This Peter Stobbe was likely the son of Johann Stobbe (b. 1800) of Schardau, Molotschna, an immigrant of 1819.

Jacob Wall (no dates) Pastwa, m. (unknown). Difficult to locate. Apparently Jacob Wall came to Russia in 1836 as a young man from Kurzebrach (Heubuden or Tragheimersweide Gemeinde).

Jacob Becker (1828-1908) Rudnerweide, m. Anna Görtz (d. 1860) 2m. 1862 Margaretha Wiens (1838-1925). According to Alan Peters, Jacob was the son of Peter Becker (d. 1842) and Helena Schmidt (b. 1805), originally from Karolswald, Volhynia. Peter Becker would then have been an immigrant of 1836-38. Margaretha Wiens was a daughter of Abraham



Jakob Reimer (1817-91), Gnadenfeld-Felsenthal-Wiesenfeld.

Wiens (1800-44) and sister of Abraham Wiens (1830-1900) above. Moved to the Kuban.

(b) Participants in the Ältester Election of 1860, not already mentioned above.

Signers of the Ausgangsschrift (1860) NOT participating in the election include the three original leaders (Abraham Kornelsen, Johann Klassen, Isaac Koop) and Jacob Wall.

Benjamin Becker (b. 1833), Gnadenfeld, m. 1864 Anna Neufeld (no dates). Anna Neufeld was a daughter of Heinrich Neufeld (Brüdergemeinde extremist) from Einlage, Old Colony. Benjamin Becker (together with Heinrich Bartel) travelled to the Volga region in 1859 proselytizing among the Volga Germans. Benjamin Becker was a brother of Jacob Becker above.

Gottlieb (August) Strauß (no dates), Waldheim, m. X (unknown). Likely father of August Strauß above.

Friedrich Strauß (no dates), Waldheim, m. Aganetha Pankratz (no dates). Likely a son of the above Gottlieb Strauß.

Johann Strauß (no dates), Waldheim, m. X (unknown). Likely a son of the above Gottlieb Strauß.

Simon Harms (b. 1831), Liebenau, m. Agatha (?) Hiebert (b. 1833). Simon Harms was born in Wengelwald (Thiensdorf Gemeinde) and came to Russia with his father Johann (b. 1801) in 1841. Agatha (?) Hiebert was a daughter of Heinrich Hiebert above.

Heinrich Fleming (1830-1912), Schardau, m. 1852 Katherina Stobbe (1833-77), 2m. 1877 Magdalena Janzen (1853-79), 3m. 1881 Anna Friesen (d. 1888), 4m. Renatha Wichert (1837-1908). Heinrich Fleming was a son of Heinrich Fleming (b. 1785) m. 1814 Elisabeth Köhn (b. 1792), an immigrant of 1818 (Marienthal), from Bohnhoff, Tragheimersweide Gemeinde. Katherina Stobbe was a sister of Peter Stobbe above.

Abraham Regier (b. 1828), Rudnerweide, m. X (unknown), 2m. 1868 Maria Becker (b. 1840). Brother of Isaac Regier above. Maria Becker was a sister of Jacob and Benjamin Becker.

David Dirksen (b. 1830), Waldheim, m. Karolina Strauß (b. 1832). Difficult to be certain with respect to this family as there were several David Dirksens of about the same age in the Molotschna. A son of Kornelius Dirksen (1789-1878) of Ellerwalde, Tragheimersweide Gemeinde and an immigrant of 1819. Karolina Strauß appears to have been a daughter of Gottlieb Strauß above.

Jacob Reimer (1817-91) Gnadenfeld, m. 1839 Wilhelmina Strauß (1813-89). A son of David Reimer (1784-1840) m. Maria Neufeld (b. 1789) who came to Russia in 1810 (Elbing Region) and settled first in Krons Garten, then Schönsee, Molotschna. Later he moved to Felsenthal. Wilhelmina Strauß was a daughter of Gottlieb August Strauß above.

Heinrich Bartel (no dates), Gnadenfeld, m. 1862 Helena Regier (no dates). This Heinrich Bartel is difficult to locate. Likely the son of Heinrich Bartel (no dates) also of Gnadenfeld. In 1859, together with Benjamin Becker, he was engaged in proselytizing activities in the Volga region among the Volga Germans. It seems he had an affair with one Helena Regier in 1861, which when discovered created some scandal. Heinrich Bartel later moved to the U.S.A.

Bernhard Penner (b. ca. 1839), Gnadenfeld, m. X (unknown). A son of Bernhard Penner (b. 1813) m. Anna X (b. 1816). The senior Bernhard Penner came to Russia in 1834 with his father Johann Penner (1773-1849). They were from Neu-Dessau Neumark Gemeinde. Bernhard Penner Jr. was an extremist and later joined the Seventh Day Adventists.

Johann Hiebert (b. 1818), Wernersdorf, m. X (unknown). A son of Martin Hiebert (b. 1787) from Kronsweide, Old Colony, who moved to the Molotschna in 1825. This family is descended from a Lithuanian Mennonite family who moved to Kronsweide.

David Klassen (b. 1806) ? Ladekopp, m. Helena X (b. 1809). This David Klassen was a brother of Johann Klassen above. It is known that Johann's brother David joined the Brüdergemeinde, but in 1835 he was living at Sparrau.

Jacob Kroeker (b. 1822) Lichtfelde, m. Maria Janzen (b. 1823). A son of Julius Kroeker (b. 1796) m. Anna X (b. 1797) of Blumstein. Jacob Kroeker's name was crossed off the election report, although his name appears on subsequent Brüdergemeinde lists. Maria Janzen was a daughter of Franz Janzen (b. 1787) of Tragheimersweide Gemeinde, an immigrant of 1819 (Lichtfelde, Molotschna).

I (c) Persons mentioned in the report of Alexander Brune, May 1, 1861, not already mentioned above or in subsequent lists.

Aganetha (Agatha) Pankratz (no dates), Gnadenfeld, m. Friedrich Strauß (no dates).

Difficult to locate. Likely a daughter of Peter Pankratz (b. 1811) m. 1834 Anna Penner (b. 1816). Peter Pankratz appears to be the son of Jakob Pankratz (b. 1774) of Deutsch Wymyschle (Poland) originally from a Prezckowko family. Anna Penner was from Neumark and was a sister of Bernhard Penner (b. 1813) and an aunt of the extremist Bernhard Penner of I(b). The Peter Pankratz family likely came to Russia in 1834-36.

Elisabeth Pankratz (no dates), Gnadenfeld. Difficult to locate. Likely a sister of Aganetha Pankratz above.

Susanna Unruh (no dates), Gnadenfeld. Difficult to locate.

Gerhard Wall (b. 1835), Grossweide, m. X (unknown). He was the son of Abraham Wall (b. 1798), 2m. Maria X. (b. 1806) m. Abraham Kornelsen (1789-1828) of I(b), an early leader of the Bruder. Gerhard Wall was a step-brother of Abraham Kornelsen of I(a), an early Brethren leader. Apparently Gerhard Wall's wife did not join the Brethren. Gerhard Wall may be identical with the Franz Wall of Section II.

Agatha Schmidt (no dates), Schardau. Difficult to locate. Possibly a daughter of Heinrich Schmidt (b. 1814) of Schardau. Heinrich Schmidt was from Rosenkrantz (W. Prussia, Tragheimsweide Gem.) and came to Russia in 1819.

Peter Regier (1824-1915), Rudnerweide, m. 1842 Helena Kroeker (1824-1903). He was a brother of Isaac and Abraham Regier of Section I. Helena Kroeker may have been the daughter of Jacob Kroeker of Tiegerweide.

David Block (b. 1810), Rudnerweide, m. (?) Elisabeth Adrian (b. 1817). Apparently he was the son of Dirk Block (b. 1779) of Reichenberg who came to Russia in 1818. Elisabeth Adrian, possibly the wife of David Block, was a daughter of Heinrich Adrian (b. 1779) of Schweingrube, later Bönhhoff (Tragheimersweide Gem.) and was an immigrant of 1819.

Siebert Görtz (no dates), Sparrau, m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate. Possibly a son of Heinrich Görtz (b. 1795) m. 1818 Maria Boldt (b. 1794) of Kramershoff (Tragheimersweide Gem.). Heinrich Görtz came to Russia in 1825.

Johann Neufeld (no dates), Sparrau, m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate. Possibly identical to the Old Colony Brüdergemeinder Johann Neufeld (b. 1809) of Schönhorst.

Johann Thiessen (no dates), Sparrau, m. (?) Katharina Fast. Difficult to locate. Possibly the son of Abraham Thiessen (1800-51) m. 1824 Judith Epp (1802-74) of Sparrau, an immigrant of 1836.

Molotschna Brüdergemeinde II.

Molotschna Brethren, signing the petition of 30.12.1863 to the Ministries of Crown Lands, not already mentioned above.

Bernhard Janzen (b. 1831), Tiege, later Blumenort, m. Anna Wiens (1832-95). A son of Abraham Janzen (b. 1797) who came to Russia in about 1838. Anna Wiens was a sister of Abraham and Kornelius Wiens mentioned above. Bernhard Janzen moved to

U.S.A. in 1874.

Kornelius Reimer (1823-85), m. Anna Wiebe (no dates), 2m. Anna Reimer (no dates). A brother of Jacob Reimer above, moved to the Kuban.

Peter Dyck (b. 1830), Pordenau, m. X unknown. A son of Peter Dyck (1788-1867) of Heubuden (G.W.), later Pordenau, Molotschna, an immigrant of 1819.

Abraham Dyck (1827-68) ?, m. Helena Friesen (b. 1840), 2m. Heinrich Friesen (b. 1843). A brother of the above Peter Dyck, Abraham Dyck was murdered by thieves in the Kuban.

Kornelius Kornelsen (b. 1805), Wernersdorf, m. Margaretha Braun (b. 1785), 2m. X (unknown). A son of Heinrich Kornelsen (b. 1774) of Kampeneau (Thiendorf Gemeinde) who came to Russia in 1819.

Jacob Giesbrecht (1824-1907), Berdiansk, m. Gertruda Dyck (1828-1907): her 2m. - 1m. 1847 Isaac Neufeld (no dates). Jacob Giesbrecht was a son of Jacob Giesbrecht (b. 1787) m. Margaretha Wiens (b. 1788) of Muntau, Molotschna. Gertrude Dyck was daughter of Gerhard Dyck (1793-1883) of Lichtfelde.

Wilhelm Giesbrecht (b. 1833) ? m. X (unknown). This Wilhelm Giesbrecht was likely the brother of Jacob Giesbrecht above.

Abraham Eidse (1830-1906) Lindenau, m. 1856 Susanna Isaac (1837-64), 2m. 1866 Sara Block (1841-1917). A son of Kornelius Eidse (1801-60) of Lindenau, Molotschna, moved to the Kuban. Kornelius Eidse was the brother of Abraham (1811-93), Fischau, and Helena (Mrs. Abraham S. Kornelsen) (1806-80), whose families immigrated to the U.S. and Canada in the 1870s.

See Plett, *Dynasties*, pages 77-98.

Daniel Eidse (1833-92), Lindenau, m. Katherina Klassen (b. 1840). A brother of Abraham above.

Abraham Dolesky (no dates), m. X (unknown). A grandson of Jacob Dolesky (b. 1769) of Neulanghorst (G.W.) who came to Russia in 1816.

Jacob Dolesky (no dates), m. X (unknown). Likely a brother of the above Abraham Dolesky.

Wilhelm Loewen (b. 1834) (?) Rudnerweide, m. X (unknown). Possibly this Wilhelm Loewen was the son of Johann Loewen (b. 1807) m. Sara Koop (b. 1804) of the Heubuden Gemeinde who came to Russia in 1828. Elected Brüdergemeinde Lehrer in 1878.

Jacob Martens (no dates), Lichtfelde, m. Helena X (no dates), 2m. Anna Schmidt (no dates). Likely the son of Franz Martens (b. 1796), originally from Schönwiese, Old Colony, who moved to Lichtfelde, Molotschna in 1836. Jacob Martens moved to Kuban.

Johann Martens (1839-99), Gnadenheim, m. Maria Reimer (1848-1911). Brother of Jacob Martens above. Maria Reimer was a daughter of Jacob Reimer above. The Johann Martens family eventually moved to Wiesenfeld.

Franz Martens (1828-1907), Rückenau, m. Susanna Guenther (no dates), 2m. 1895 Hel-

ena Thielmann (1851-1928) m. 1872 Johann Wiehler (1839-89). A son of Franz Martens (b. 1801) who came to Russia in 1809 with his step-father Abraham Ens (b. 1784).

See Alf Redekopp, *Jacob Thielmann* (Winnipeg, 1987), pages 141-148.

Kornelius Penner (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Heinrich Penner (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Abraham Penner (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Johann Klassen (no dates) m. X (unknown). A son of David Klassen (b. 1806) of Sparrau, brother of Johann Klassen (1820-76) mentioned above.

Johann Klassen (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate but a cousin of the above Johann Klassen and nephew of Johann Klassen (1820-76) above (according to P.M. Friesen, page 338).

Kornelius Klassen (b. 1829) ? Kronsweide, m. Anna Neufeld (b. 1831). Possibly the Kornelius Klassen of Kronsweide (see Old Colony Brüdergemeinde). This Kornelius Klassen, I believe, moved to the Kuban.

Kornelius Pauls (b. 1806) ? Neukirch, m. Charlotte Döring (b. 1808). Difficult to locate this Kornelius Pauls, but likely from the Marcushoff Gemeinde, and came to Russia in 1840.

Peter Nickel (1826-77), Sparrau, then Liebenau, m. Sara Gäddert (1829-82). A son of Peter Nickel (b. 1798) from the Schönsee (Valley Friesian) Gemeinde who came to Russia in 1827. Sara Gäddert was a daughter of Peter Gäddert (b. 1795) m. 1822 Sara Gäddert, of Liebenau, also, it seems an immigrant of 1827.

Peter Buller (Buhler) (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Heinrich Boldt (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Hermann Peters (1841-1928), Gnadenheim, m. X (unknown, d. 1927). Difficult to locate. This Hermann Peters founded the Hermann Peter's Gemeinde (or Breadbreakers), breaking away from the moderate Brethren in 1865 to 1866. Eventually this Gemeinde re-settled at Trussovka, Omsk region.

Franz Wall (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate. Possibly an error for Gerhard Wall (b. 1835) of Grossweide, step-brother of Abraham Kornelsen mentioned above.

Jacob DeFehr (no dates), m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Nicholas Hübert (no dates) m. X (unknown). Likely Nickolas Hiebert (b. 1835), brother of Heinrich Hübert above, or a son of Heinrich Hiebert.

Abraham Hübert (b. 1812) ? m. X (unknown). Possibly a brother of Johann Hiebert (b. 1818) above.

Peter Siemens (1828-1906), Konteniusfeld, m. X (unknown). This appears to be the son of Peter Siemens who came to Russia in 1846. Peter Siemens Jr. was a school teacher in Münsterberg and elsewhere. P.M. Friesen states that in 1865 he was a member of the

Ohrloff Gemeinde. In 1878 he was elected Brüdergemeinde Lehrer.

Isaac Koop (b. 1845) m. X (unknown). A son of Isaac Koop above.

Johann Friesen (b. 1817) ?, Gnadenheim, m. ? Helena Martens (no dates). Difficult to locate. Possibly the son of Gerhard Friesen (1789-1856) of Gnadenheim. This Johann Friesen came to Russia in either 1811 or more likely in 1819.

Gerhard Friesen (d. 1918) ? m. X (unknown) 2m. 1890 Anna Mierau (1857-1906) m. 1883 Abraham Wiens (1860-88). Difficult to locate. Likely a son of Johann Friesen above.

Franz Friesen (no dates) m. X (unknown). Likely a son of Johan Friesen above.

Heinrich Friesen (b. 1843) 2m. Helena Friesen (b. 1840) m. Abraham Dyck (1827-68). Likely the son of Johann Friesen (b. 1812) of Tiege. Heinrich Friesen later moved to Friedensfeld. Helena Friesen and Abraham Dyck are mentioned above.

Heinrich Neufeld (1818-90). This Heinrich Neufeld was very likely the Old Colony Brüdergemeinde extremist (see Old Colony Section). His daughter Anna married extremist Benjamin Becker.

Abraham Neufeld (b. 1843). This appears to be the Abraham Neufeld of Insel Chortitza, Old Colony, who later moved to the Kuban, and then the U.S.A. (see Old Colony Section).

Molotschna Brethren III.

Other Molotschna Brethren of note in the early period.

(a) **Wilhelm Bartel** (no dates) Berdiansk, m. X (unknown). Brother of Heinrich Bartel of Gnadenthal above. An early extremist, he somewhat modified his views after the scandal involving his brother, but later joined the Templars.

Christian Schmidt (1833-1906) m. X (unknown). A Lutheran from Konstinograd, later follower of Wüst. Joined the Brüdergemeinde in 1861, elected Lehrer 1865 and co-Ältester Friedensfeld 1875. Moved to the Kuban 1878. Named Reiseprediger in 1872.

(b) Brethren of note who joined the movement in 1864

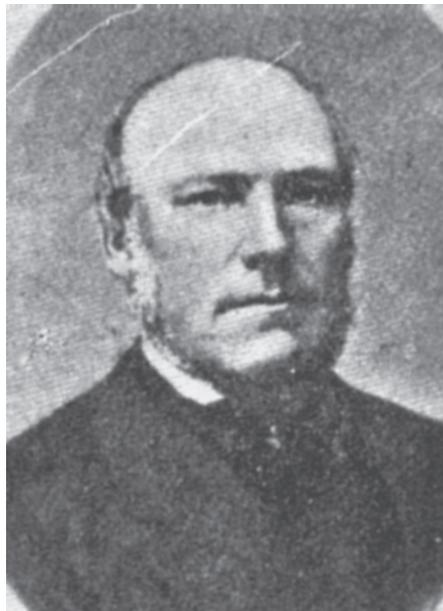
Jacob Janz (no dates) Fürstenau, m. X Toews (no dates). Difficult to locate this Jacob Janz. According to P.M. Friesen, he was from a Polish Mennonite family, possibly from Deutsch-Kazun. Later, in 1868 moved to Friedensfeld and was elected Ältester of the Friedensfeld and Sagradovka Brüdergemeinde Gemeinde in 1875. Elected Lehrer in 1865. His wife appears to have been a daughter of Aron Toews of Fürstenau.

Daniel Fast (b. 1826) m. X (unknown). A son of Isaac Fast (1775-1834) of Halbstadt, Molotschna. Daniel Fast was elected Lehrer in 1870, Ältester Kuban Brüdergemeinde in 1877 to replace the retiring Heinrich Hübert. He was an uncle of P.M. Friesen's wife, Susanna Fast (b. 1854).

Abraham Schellenberg (1845-1920), Tiege, m. 1868 Katherina Lorentz (1847-84), 2m. 1885 Susanna Fleming (1861-1924). Abraham

Schellenberg was the son of Abraham Schellenberg (1807-84), whose family was associated with the Kleine Gemeinde. His nephew Abraham Schellenberg (1839-1924), later settled in Grünfeld, Manitoba. Abraham Schellenberg (1845-1920) was elected Lehrer, then Ältester 1875 (to replace Heinrich Hübert who had moved to the Kuban). Abraham's brother David Schellenberg (1852-1919) was elected Ältester in 1881 to replace brother Abraham who immigrated to Moundridge, Kansas, in 1879. David resigned from his office amidst unfortunate circumstances in 1909.

See Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 437-



Abraham Unger (1820-80), first Ältester of the Einlage Brüdergemeinde.

439.

Johann Fast (d. 1898) m. X (unknown). Likely the son of Johann Fast (1811-72) m. Susanna Fast (b. 1828) of Halbstadt. Johann Fast Sr. was a son of Martin Fast (1774-1828). Susanna Fast (b. 1828) was a sister of Daniel Fast above. Johann Fast Sr. was the father of P.M. Friesen's wife, and Johann Fast Jr. was his brother-in-law. Johann Jr. was elected Lehrer 1868, co-Ältester in 1878 (Molotschna Brüdergemeinde), but for various reasons including ill health was unable to fully function as Ältester.

Philip Isaac (b. 1833) m. Margaretha Toews (b. 1835). Philip Isaac was son of Philip Isaac (b. 1796) of Tiege, Molotschna. Margaretha Toews was a daughter of Johann Toews (b. 1795), an immigrant of 1822, later of Tiege, Molotschna. Philip Isaac held no office in the Brüdergemeinde Lehrdienst, however he was a capable administrator of Brethren affairs.

Isaac Mathies (b. 1822) Rudnerweide m. X (unknown). A son of Abraham Mathies (1781-1824) of Altona. Isaac Mathies was a merchant, who was financially ruined through his association with the Brethren and later abandoned the Brüdergemeinde movement. His

brother Abraham (b. 1813) was an early "Wüst Brother".

(c) Signers of the Brüdergemeinde petition of 10.10.1867 not already mentioned above.

Heinrich Nickel (no dates) m. X (unknown). Difficult to locate.

Peter Martins (b. 1845) ? m. Susanna Friesen (no dates). Difficult to locate, but possibly the brother of Franz Martens (1828-1907) above. (d) Later influential Brethren of the early period

David Schellenberg (1852-1919) m. 1879 Helena Ens (no dates) 2m. Sara Klassen (b. 1848) - her second marriage. David was the brother of Ältester Abraham Schellenberg mentioned above. David Schellenberg was elected Ältester of the Molotschna (Rückenu) Brüdergemeinde in 1881.

Eduard Löppky (no dates) m. X (unknown). A Baptist from West Prussia, according to P.M. Friesen, who later broke all ties with the Baptists and joined the Brüdergemeinde. Moved to the U.S.A. in 1878.

Peter M. Friesen (1849-1914) m. Susanna Fast (b. 1854). A son of Martin Friesen (1814-83) m. Helena Klassen (1814-79). Martin Friesen was from Kurzebrach, son of Abraham Friesen (d. 1826) who came to Russia in 1818 and settled at Sparrau. Martin Friesen's birth date in the Russian calendar is listed as 17.9.1814 (see also *Pres.*, No. 11, page 38, regarding the connections to the Bergthaler Friesens). Helena Klassen was a daughter of David Klassen (1760-1827) and Agatha Penner (b. 1782) and was a sister of Johann Klassen (1820-76). Brüdergemeinde founder Johann Klassen was therefore P.M. Friesen's uncle, as were other early Brethren Klassens.

Susanna Fast was a daughter of Johann Fast (b. 1811) and Susanna Fast (b. 1828). Susanna Fast (b. 1828) was a daughter of Isaac Fast (1775-1834) of Halbstadt, Molotschna. Kuban Ältester Daniel Fast (b. 1826) was the uncle of P.M. Friesen's wife and Johann Fast (d. 1898), co-Ältester of the Molotschna Brüdergemeinde was his brother-in-law. P.M. Friesen was therefore related to many of the Molotschna Brüdergemeinde Fasts.

P.M. Friesen was the widely-known Brüdergemeinde apologist and author of *Die Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft in Rußland 1789-1910* (Halbstadt, 1911), frequently referred to herein. He was elected as a Brüdergemeinde Lehrer in 1884.

Old Colony Brethren ca. 1862.

Abraham Unger (1824-80) Einlage, m. Katherina Martens (b. 1825). A son of Heinrich Unger (1785-1855), 2m. Margaretha Sawatsky (1795-1871). His mother Margaretha also joined the Brethren in 1862. Heinrich Unger was a son of Peter Unger (1753-1818) of Insel Chortitza, originally from the Tragheimersweide Gemeinde. Margaretha Sawatsky was a daughter of Kornelius Sawatsky (1771-1821) of Rosenthal.

Abraham Unger was heavily influenced by the reading of Baptist literature and by correspondence and friendships with leading Ham-

burg Baptists, including August Liebig, Johann Onken and Karl Benzien. His son Abraham later married Louisa, daughter of Karl Benzien. All of these Baptists came to Russia to assist in the formation of the new group.

Abraham Unger was elected first Ältester of the Einlage Brüdergemeinde 1868-1876.

Kornelius Unger (b. 1822) m. X (unknown), 2m. Katherina Regier (b. 1833). Brother of Abraham Unger above. Katherina Regier may have been a daughter of Johann Regier (1802-42) of Kronsgarten, later Schönsee and Oberschulze in the Molotschna.

Plett, *Pioneers and Pilgrims*, pages 305,308,325-6.

Heinrich Epp (1831-1916) Einlage, m. Maria Unger (1831-1907). A son of Kornelius Epp (1796-1872) m. 1817 Maria Pries (no dates) of Rosenthal. Maria Unger was a sister of Abraham Unger above and Heinrich Epp was therefore a brother-in-law of Abraham Unger. Johann Epp, *Gedenke des ganzen Weges: Band I: Geschichte der Familien Epp, Fröse, Unger, Lepp u.a.* (Lage, Germany, 1998), 476 pages.

Johann Epp (no dates) m. X (unknown). Brother of Heinrich Epp above.

Peter Unger (b. 1831) Einlage, m. Maria Bergmann (b. 1835). Likely a son of Peter Unger (b. 1806) of Insel Chortitz and a grandson of Peter Unger (b. 1780), uncle of Abraham Unger above. Maria Bergmann was likely the daughter of Wilhelm Bergmann (b. 1791), originally from Nieder-Chortitz.

Peter Berg (b. 1831) Chortitz, m. 1851 Anna Rempel (b. 1831). A son of Jacob Berg (1791-1881) m. 1811 Helena Sawatsky (1792-1852) of Neuendorf. Peter Berg moved to the Kuban. Anna Rempel was a sister of Gerhard Rempel, below.

Peter Friesen (1825-95) Chortitz, m. Anna Koop (1825-80). A son of Isaac Friesen (b. 1783) m. ? Katherina Friesen (b.1787) of Burwalde. Peter Friesen moved to Kuban and later to Wiesenfeld. Anna Koop was a daughter of David Koop of Chortitz.

Katherina Friesen (b. 1834) Einlage. From Schönhorst. Difficult to locate.

Johann Loewen (b. 1828) Chortitz, m. 1849 Margaretha Friesen (b. 1829). A son of David Loewen (1773-1863), 3m. 1827 Sara Pauls (1809-86) of Burwalde.

Heinrich Krause (1818-1907) Kronsweide, m. Katherina Peters (no dates), 2m. 1856 Katherina Friesen (b. 1823). A son of Peter Krause (b. 1790) m. Aganetha Arend (b. 1795) of Kronsweide. Katherina Friesen was a daughter of Jacob Friesen (no dates) m. Katharina Lempy (b. 1804).

Jacob Koslowsky (1831-99) m. Sara Wall (1832-79), 2m. Helena Born (d. 1881). A son of David Koslowsky (1769-1846) m. Anna Willms (1792-1846) of Einlage. Sara Wall appears to be the daughter of diarist Jacob Wall (1807-60) m. 1828 Judith Dyck (1807-42) of Neuendorf. Jacob Koslowsky was therefore a brother-in-law of Fürstenländer Ältester Johann Wiebe (1837-1906).

Aron Lepp (1827-1912) Einlage, m. Katherina Siemens (1829-1907). A son of Peter Lepp

(1778-1830) 2m. 1811 Helena Dyck (b. 1791) who came to Russia in 1817, and a brother of Peter Lepp, founder of the firm "Lepp and Wallman". Aron Lepp was a superintendent of the Judenplan until 1862. He was, according to P.M. Friesen, most responsible for ensuring that the early Brüdergemeinde was not absorbed by the Baptists, and was second Ältester of the Einlage Brüdergemeinde. Katherina Siemens was a daughter of Johann Siemens (b. 1808) m. Maria Dyck (1811-95) of Chortitz.

Wilhelm Janzen (b. 1818) Kronsweide, m. X (unknown), 2m. Maria Neufeld (b. 1828). Difficult to locate.

Jacob Janzen (b. 1844) Kronsweide, later Serjevka, m. X (unknown). Son of the above Wilhelm Janzen.

Peter Nickel (b. 1827) Nieder-Chortitz, m. Judith Nickel (b. 1836). Difficult to locate.



Philipp Isaak (1832-79), Tiege.

Johann Toews (b. 1825) Rosenthal, m. Maria Klassen (b. 1822). Difficult to locate but possibly son of Jacob Toews (1798-1852) who came to Russia in 1811 and eventually settled at Schönwiese. Maria Klassen could be a daughter of Jacob Klassen (b. 1785) also of Schönwiese.

Heinrich Toews (no dates) Alexandrovsk, m. Katherina Loewen (b. 1841). Possibly a brother of Johann Toews above.

Johann Wiehler (1809-94) Chortitz, m. 1829 Aganetha Braun (1808-69), 2m. 1871 Maria Kasper (1840-1918). Johann Wiehler was a son of Johann Wiehler (b. 1771) m. 1804 Aganetha Krocker (b. 1782) who came to Russia in 1804. Aganetha Braun was a daughter of Gerhard Braun (1784-1849) of Rosenthal.

Gerhard Wiehler (1833-1911), m. 1858 Aganetha Harms (1840-1911). Son of the above Johann Wiehler, perhaps the most extremist of all the Brethren radicals. At one time he banned his father, brother Johann and fellow extremist Benjamin Becker for disagree-

ing with his views. He later moved to the U.S.A. In the *Mennonite Historian* article (March 1998), his name is misstated as Gerhard Buller. Aganetha Harms appears to be the daughter of Jacob Harms (b. 1816) m. Katherina Hamm (b. 1818) of Blumstein, Molotschna.

Johann Wiehler (1839-89) m. 1872 Helena Thielmann (1851-1928) (she remarried 1895 to Franz Martens (1828-1907)). A son of the above Johann Wiehler and likewise an extremist. Johann Wiehler was the first chairman (1886) of the Union of Russian Baptists. Helena Thielmann was a daughter of Jacob Thielmann (1810-62) m. 1836 Aganetha Letkeman (1819-1876), Neukirch, Molotschna immigrants to Russia in 1817. The Thielmann family was originally associated with the Kleine Gemeinde. Franz Martens is listed under the Molotschna Brethren.

Franz Wiehler (b. 1843) Chortitz, m. Anna Neufeld (b. 1843). Also a son of the Johann Wiehler Sr. Anna Neufeld was a daughter of Old Colony Brüdergemeinder Johann Neufeld (b. 1809), see below. Moved to Kuban.

Jacob Wiehler (1845-71) Chortitz. Also a son of Johann Wiehler Sr. Moved to the Kuban.

Gerhard Rempel (1830-80) ? Nieder-Chortitz, m. Aganetha Wiehler (b. 1835), 2m. Johann Siemens (no dates). This Gerhard Rempel appears to be the son of Peter Rempel (1808-55), m. 1829 Maria Peters (1806-86) of Schönwiese. Aganetha Wiehler was a daughter of the above Johann Wiehler.

Old Colony Brethren of 1862.

Heinrich Neufeld (1818-90) Einlage, m. X (unknown), 2m. 1862 Maria Unruh (1836-74). Heinrich Neufeld was a son of Abraham Neufeld (1777-1846), 2m. Helena Theichgraf (1779-1866) of Schönhorst. Abraham Neufeld came to Russia in 1803 from the Heubuden Gemeinde. Heinrich Neufeld appears to have moved to the Molotschna and later to Kansas, U.S.A.

Abraham Neufeld (b. 1843) Insel Chortitz, m. Agatha Friesen (b. 1829), 2m. Maria Reddig (b. 1853). A son of Abraham Neufeld (b. 1820), 2m. Elisabeth Siemens (1813-57) of Insel Chortitz. Abraham Neufeld Sr. was a grandson of Dietrich Neufeld (b. 1766), a Lutheran Mennonite.

Elisabeth Neufeld (b. 1842) Kronsweide, sister of the above Abraham Neufeld.

Peter Neufeld (b. 1834) Einlage, m. X (unknown), likely the son of Peter Neufeld (b. 1806) of Schönhorst and a nephew of Heinrich Neufeld above.

Johann Neufeld (b. 1809), Kronsweide or Einlage, m. X (unknown), likely a brother of Heinrich Neufeld above.

Jacob Neufeld (no dates) m. X (unknown). A son of Johann Neufeld above listed by P.M. Friesen as Jaab Neufeld.

Peter Neufeld (b. 1826) Kronsweide, m. Katherina Klassen (b. 1818). Difficult to locate. Katherina Klassen may have been a sister of Abraham Klassen of this section.

Abraham Klassen (b. 1821) Kronsweide, m.

Susanna Neufeld (b. 1818). Likely a son of Abraham Klassen (b. 1789) m? Sara Kädtler (b. 1793) of Burwalde, later Kronsweide.

Kornelius Klassen (b. 1829) Kronsweide, m. Anna Neufeld (b. 1831). Likely a brother of Abraham Klassen above. Kornelius Klassen moved to the Kuban.

Sara Klassen (b. 1845) Kronsweide. Likely a niece of Abraham Klassen above.

Heinrich Peters (1825-94) Kronsweide, m. Helena Klassen (1822-1911). Heinrich Peters was a son of Johann Peters (b. 1792) m. Aganetha Hiebert (b. 1793) of Kronsweide. Helena Klassen was likely a sister of Abraham Klassen above. Heinrich Peters moved to the Kuban.

Katherina Klassen (b. 1842) Kronsweide, 3m. Benjamin Nickel (b. 1803) Nieder-Chortitza, m. X (unknown), 2m. Aganetha Driedger (b. 1824). Benjamin Nickel later (after 1862) joined the Brethren. He was the father of Benjamin Nickel below. Benjamin Nickel is difficult to locate. He later moved to the U.S.A.

Benjamin Nickel (b. 1840) Nieder-Chortitza, m. Helena Neufeld (b. 1835), 2m. Aganetha Vogt (b. 1848). A son of Benjamin Nickel above. He later moved to the Kuban, then the U.S.A. Helena Neufeld appears to be a daughter of Johann Neufeld (b. 1809) of this section.

Dietrich Gortzen (b. 1833) Schönwiese, m. Aganetha Klassen (b. 1817). A son of Dietrich Gortzen (b. 1790) of Schönwiese. Aganetha Klassen appears to be the daughter of Jacob Klassen (b. 1785), 2m. Maria X (b. 1797) of Schönwiese, and a cousin of Abraham Klassen of this section.

Johann Fröse (b. 1825) Kronsweide, m. Anna Nickel (b. 1826). A son of Kornelius Fröse (b. 1793) of Kronsweide. Johann Fröse moved to the Kuban.

Johann Hiebert (b. 1831) Einlage, m. Elisabeth Fast (b. 1834). Likely a son of Johann Hiebert (b. 1808) of Einlage.

Kornelius Hiebert (b. 1835) Chortitza, m. Katherina Wiens (b. 1841). Likely a brother of Johann Hiebert above.

Johann Isaac (b. 1817) Kronsweide, m. Helena Banman (b. 1812). Likely a son of Jacob Isaac (b. 1784) of Chortitza. Helena Banman was a daughter of Jacob Banman of Kronsweide.

Gerhard Isaac (b. 1832) Kronsweide, m. Susanna Schmidt (b. 1830). Likely a brother of Johann Isaac above.

Peter Unrau (b. 1810) Kronsweide, m. X (unknown). A son of Wilhelm Unrau (b. 1778) of Kronsweide.

Kornelius Unrau (b. 1819), Kronsweide, m. Maria Peters (b. 1819). Likely brother of the above Peter Unrau.

Endnotes:

Note One: P. M. Friesen, page 28, German edition.

Note Two: J. B. Toews, "Mennonite Brethren Beginnings," in Toews and Enns-Rempel, *For Everything a Season* (Fresno, Ca., 2002), pages 3-13.

Note Three: In an earlier review of the translation, I pointed out a number of the translation errors which were obvious to me from the context itself. Having now had access to a copy of the original it appears that the number of such errors is larger than I indicated previously. In addition, there are some less obvious but potentially misleading examples of poor translation. As a case in point, early in the diary, the entry of January 29, 1837 contains the following remark "Peter Reimer, Anwohner aus Nieder-Chortitza, der sich ebenfalls unter die Russen umtreibt solle nach der Colonie gerfordert werden." Toews translates this as "Peter Reimer, a cottager from Neu-Chortitza is likewise living amongst the Russians. He will be asked to return to the Colony so that he can be dealt with." I feel a better translation is "Peter Reimer, a non-landowner from Nieder-Chortitza, who is likewise keeping company (hanging around) with Russians, should be asked to present himself to the Colony (administration) so that he can be dealt with.

Many additional examples exist, for instance "Beisitzer" is not "Besitzer" as Toews would have it, entry for January 29, 1837 where Toews translates Deputy/Assistant Oberschulze as "landowner".

Other examples of translation errors:

1. Entry of May 16, 1837 - original "Das Schulzenamt würde zurecht gewiesen, Brüder der Gemeinde erst vor Lehrdienst und Gemeinde gehoren and dann". The correct translation is "The [Einlage] council was reminded [corrected and advised] to first bring members [affairs regarding members] to the Lehrdienst...."

Instead of Toews "[Mr] Schutzmann was reminded". This important passage illustrates the relationship between "Schulzenamt" and "Lehrdienst" and its importance is obscured by the poor and incorrect introduction of "Einlage resident Schutzmann" into the translation.



Prediger Johann Wieler (1840-90).

2. Entry of August 7, 1841. Original "Er habe sie fast mit Gewalt gezwungen mit ihr Hurerei zu treiben". The correct translation is "he almost used force [to attempt] to have sex with her". Instead of Toews "[accused] him of raping her"

3. Entry of April 28, 1842. Original "Laut Außsagen der Frau Striemer jun." The correct translation is "according to Mrs. Striemer junior" instead of Toews "according to [the widow] P. Dyck". This is important because the widow of P. Dyck is mentioned in previous entries.

Note Four: G. Epp, *Geschichte der Mennoniten in Rußland: Band II*, pages 20-30.

Note Five: There may be some inaccuracies in this material. For instance the name of prominent Brüdergemeinder Gerhard Wiehler is translated as Gerhard Buller.

Note Six: Plett, "David Klassen 1700-80," in *Dynasties*, pages 259-295.

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Acknowledgement:

All photographs for this article are from P. M. Friesen, *The Mennonite Brotherhood in Russia (1789-1910)* (Fresno, Ca., 1978), page 279.

Material Culture

Music of the Old Colony Mennonites

“Music of the Old Colony Mennonites,” by Charles Burkhart, reprinted from *Mennonite Life*, Jan. 1952, pages 20-21 and 47.

Singing.

One night last December [1951], I and two other members of the MCC unit at Cuauhtemoc paid a visit to the Old Colony Vorsänger, Isaac Fehr, who lives in a large and sturdy house in Campo 14. On that visit I was to realize a desire that I had entertained for many months: to hear the Old Colony Mennonites sing their own hymns, a thing they do entirely from memory, since none of their music has ever been notated.

A group of some 30 people made up of the Fehr's children and their families was awaiting us when we arrived, about eight-thirty in the evening. The Old Colony people are by nature friendly and having non-Old Colony visitors was apparently a rare social event that no one cared to miss. We all went inside and took seats in Mrs. Fehr's spotless parlor. While we were getting acquainted, I opened one of the copies of their noteless *Gesangbuch*, which had been printed in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, and I think that the Fehrs and I were brought a little closer together when I told them that I had been born near there and that my grandfather had worked for many years in the publishing house in that town.

Someone then suggested that we sing and I asked if I might be permitted to transcribe the melody. “But surely you cannot write all the notes down!” said my host. I said I would try and that afterwards I would gladly sing the hymn alone so that he might check my accuracy. Number 689 was then suggested and at once the host found the page and began to sing. The song was taken up by his sons and then by his wife, daughters

and daughter-in-law who were sitting on the other side of the room. Their voices rose in unison in a kind of timeless, melancholy chant.

Wie schön leuchtet der Morgenstern,
Am Firmament des Himmels fern,
Die Nacht ist nun vergangen.

All sang in an energetic and forthright manner, with ease and assurance, and I wondered how they had ever memorized so perfectly such a complex and unpredictable melody. The Fehrs were obviously a very musical family. Later in the evening I was to learn that Fehr knew by heart some 60 such hymns and that the family sang together every night while the girls did up the supper dishes.

Suddenly the hymn ended and the singers seemed to expect the next move from me. I was rather nervous as I sang their song back to them, for it was a bold thing I had claimed I could do and the master himself had doubted it was possible. I had no idea how exactly the singer measured the many little flourishes that embellished the tune, and for all I knew my version of it might sound distorted and ridiculous to them. But when I finished, I was reassured by Fehr's joyous smile and the words: “Krakt racht!” (Correct!)

At once more numbers were suggested and in the next hour and a half I took down the notes of eight more hymns. Fehr started them all in a comfortable key and the group scarcely ever flatted. All of them sang tirelessly, apparently fascinated by what I was doing and happy to satisfy my curiosity about their music. They were also most helpful in correcting my mistakes and gladly

repeated tricky passages several times.

On Sundays Fehr takes his place as one of several Vorsänger in the village meetinghouse. In the actual performance of a hymn by a congregation not only does the Vorsänger start the song, but at the end of each line, while the congregation catches its breath, he always puts in a few little solo notes of his own. An amazing thing about their performance in church, which I have also been privileged to hear, is that it is also very energetic and hardly ever subject to flating. This is no doubt due to very good Vorsänger, some of whom, Fehr insisted, know by heart 100 different hymn melodies.

Origins.

An Old Colony Mennonite hymn tune is not something that a stranger can whistle after hearing it for the first time. Without metre or harmony, but consisting entirely of one long melodic line, it must be heard many times before it can be remembered or even distinguished from another. They have been passed down from father to son for many generations, and very few Old Colony Mennonists would have sufficient musical training to read them. Listening to them being sung, the outsider is bound to ask: “Where do they come from? How have they been developed?”

I have no doubt that old, Protestant chorale tunes form the basis of this unusual music, but only the basis. To these chorale tunes the Old Colony Mennonites have added a great many embellishments of their own. An original chorale

Unser Herrscher, unser Koenig

from *Gesang-Buch . . . geistreicher Lieder No. 696*

This *Gesang-Buch*, still being used by the Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico, was originally used by all Mennonites of Prussia, Russia, and Canada.

The upper staff represents the original *Choralbuch* melody while the Old Colony version is found on the lower staff. A comparison of the two will show that the first of these melodies lies imbedded in the second.

(Various species of notes do not represent metrical beats, but only approximate lengths. Question marks indicate occasional lack of agreement between chorale and Old Colony variation).

tune, in fact, can scarcely be perceived by a superficial hearing of the ornate Old Colony version, but it can be extracted by a careful analysis of the written notes. The method of extracting the original tune, that is, of eliminating all the embellishments that the Old Colonists have added is simply to select the first of every group of notes that is sung to each syllable of the text. These first notes, placed one after the other, will then be found to form a fairly accurate version of a now easily recognized chorale. This extracted melody is then compared with the corresponding version in the Old Colony *Gesangbuch*. In case the melody extracted from the Old Colony version and the notated version in the *Choralbuch* fail to agree in a few places, the missing note can usually be found among the more prominent (longer) notes within the corresponding group of notes in the Old Colony version. Lack of agreement here and there can be attributed to unconscious errors that are bound to creep in when the Old Colony version is repeatedly sung by memory for so many years after the original chorale melody has been forgotten.

I have applied this method to all melodies that I transcribed at the Fehrs' and one such analysis is reproduced here. To make it clearer, I have used two staves. The upper staff contains nothing but the original chorale as it is found in the *Choralbuch*, page 17, No. 49. The Old Colony version is found on the lower staff. The first of these melodies lies imbedded in the second, as a comparison of the two readily shows.

Seeing these two versions side by side it is reasonable to ask how it was that the one grew out of the other. How did the Old Colonists' elaborate variations on a theme come into being? Was the process unconscious? Or was it an act of deliberate creation on the part of some early and especially gifted Vorsänger? The Old Colonists themselves do not have an inkling as to the development of their music, and as far as I know, no definite answers are to be found in books, which leaves speculation as a last resort (Note One).

The American musicologist, George Pullen Jackson, in an article on the music of the Old Order Amish, offers an interesting hypothesis that may well apply to Old Colony music also. The Amish singing is almost identical with that of the Old Colonists: it is purely melodic, without metre, led by a Vorsänger and, according to Jackson, most of the melodies are ornate variations of old European folk songs. Speculating on how the complex Amish tunes developed from the simple folk tunes, he writes: "...it is a common observation that groups sing more slowly. And when the group is uncontrolled by instrument, director, or notation it drags still more... And even worse – the human vocal apparatus doesn't seem able to hold to a given tone very long without letting down, breaking over into some sort of pitch variation. Hence the singer holding as best he can to any given tone while waiting till the group mind decides to sing the next tune-tone, tends to waiver up and down... (this) wobbling-about (does not remain) the self relief of one person... (but) tends to become the relief of the many. The many tend to

waver along similar lines. Their vocal vagaries become fixed, stylized, incorporated with their 'tunes', and a singing manner is born – or evolves," (Note Two). If Jackson is right about the Amish tunes, it may be that the Old Colony tunes evolved from the chorales in the same way.

The more recent history of this music is more certain. As I have the story from Fehr and another Vorsänger in Campo 4, it seems that both the Old Colonists and the Bergthal group used this old, ornate style in the early days in Russia. Before coming to Canada, however, the Old Colonists dropped this style and adopted the simpler style of chorale singing, which, because it was available in notation, was called *Ziffern-Weise*. The *Ziffern-Weise* was introduced through the Franz *Choralbuch*. After the migration to Canada in 1875, the Old Colony elder, Johann Wiebe, fearing that singing of the *Ziffern-Weise* was too worldly, had his people return to the *alte Weise*. But at the same time the more progressive Bergthal group, led by Elder Gerhard Wiebe, dropped the *alte Weise* and switched to *Ziffern* style, which is still used by the Bergthaler and Sommerfelder.

It is curious that the conservative Old Colonists should have considered the highly embellished *alte Weise* more reverent than the simple melody of the *Ziffern*. Perhaps, when he had his people readopt the singing style that they had used so long in Russia, old Elder Wiebe was prompted by what seems to be the central idea in the Old colonists' outlook on their own culture: that the old way is best.

Endnotes by Cornelius Krahn, editor of *Mennonite Life*:

Note One: Editor's Note: It is likely that the Mennonites of Russia and Prussia did not "create" these elaborate variations and embellishments but simply adopted them from the surrounding Protestant churches in Prussia. This theory should lead to a study of Protestant singing in general in the Prussian Mennonite communities during the 18th and 19th centuries. The Franz *Choralbuch* has also to be viewed as a part of this development. The Old Colony Mennonite creativity will very likely be confined mostly to the preservation of once commonly-used old forms and variations of singing and not so much to developing something new.

Note Two: "The Strange Music of Old Order Amish," *The Musical Quarterly*, July, 1945, Vol. XXXI, No. 3, pp. 278-279, G. Schirmer, Inc., New York.

Further Reading:

Wes Berg, "Old Colony Mennonite Singing: Old Songs in a New Land: Russian Mennonite Hymns Come to Manitoba," in *Pres.*, No. 16, pages 44-45.

About the Author.

Charles Burkhart is a graduate of Goshen College, Indiana, and in 1952 served as an MCC worker in Mexico. He is Professor Emeritus in music theory at Aaron Copland School of Music, Queens College, City University of New York. He is best known for his *Anthology of Musical Analysis*.



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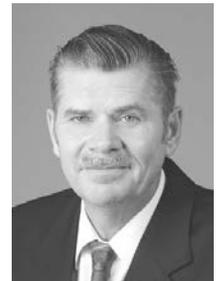
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Old Clocks - Keeping Time, Yesterday and Today

“Old Clocks - Keeping Time, Yesterday and Today: The Story of the Kroeger Clocks,”

by Arthur Kroeger, 202-1060 Kimberly Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2K 4J7.

Identification.

Mr. and Mrs. Peters brought their clock in for cleaning and repair. As Mrs. Peters was handing me the pendulum while Mr. Peters was unwrapping the clock itself, I remarked, “Oh yes, it is a Kroeger clock.”

“How can you say that without actually seeing the clock as such?” was Mrs. Peters’ reaction to that statement.

After handling old Mennonite clocks for several decades, I learned to recognize most of them at first glance. With the Peters’ clock, even though it had a repainted face, the identification was easy. It was a very typical, turn-of-the-century, Kroeger-made clock with an all brass movement and a counting wheel bell-train.

Identification of an older clock is not always so simple. Restoring and repairing these old “machines”, and these are machines that have in most cases served their owners for a lifetime and more, is interesting, challenging and also real work. Some of them have not been cleaned for 20 or more years. To make them work properly it is required to pinpoint the problem which inhibits the working of the mechanism. Sometimes it is corrosion, the other time damage due to rough handling, or just wear. Whatever it may be, most of the time it can be fixed. These clocks have, due to their sturdy construction, a remarkable durability. Nevertheless different clocks have spe-

cific problems. Mechanically every clock tells her own story. Yet even more interesting, quite often, is the story the clock owner has to tell about his wanderings with his cherished family clock that has been in the family for generations.

The Neufeld Clock.

To mind comes the story of the “Neufeld clock”. Miss Neufeld had heard about me one morning on the radio. When we got together I asked her about her clock story. Yes they took their great-grandfather’s Kroeger clock wherever they ventured and venture the whole clan did: from Chortitza in the Ukraine (the clock was made in Rosenthal near Chortitza) it was taken first to the daughter colony of Borosenko, then to Orenburg in East Russia.

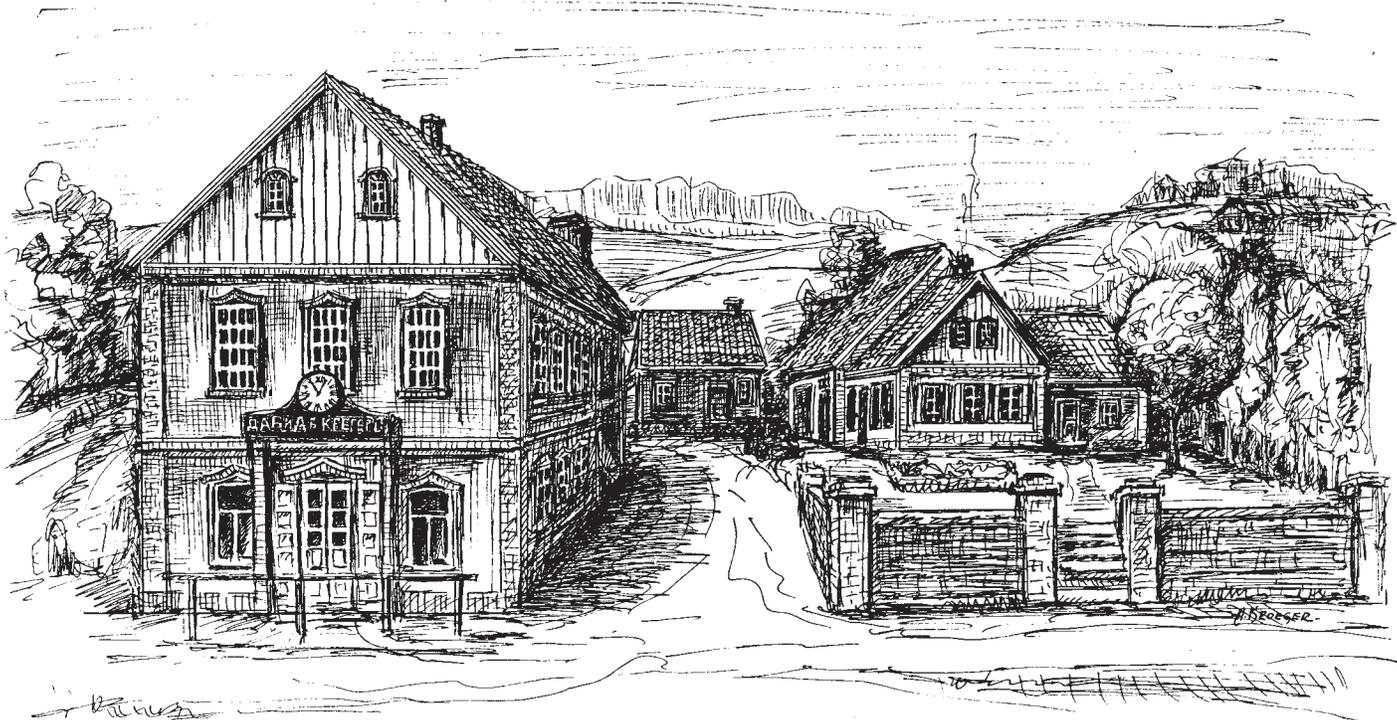
In 1929 the rush was on to leave the Soviet Union for obvious reasons. They then travelled to Moscow and on to Germany and Brazil, all the way into the jungle, where the parrots and monkeys ruled. The old clock was put up in the primitive hut which the men had build. World War II ensued and after the war the family split up. The clock was taken to Germany, then back to Brazil. From there it finally ventured to Winnipeg, Canada.

Did she, Miss Neufeld, have written material about their travels? Yes they did. Very interesting indeed. A member of the family was for years in missionary work in India.

There she met up with missionary Penner (He had taken a Kroeger clock to India for a duration of 38 years. That clock is now in the Steinbach Museum, - another story). Did the Neufelds have any photographs? Yes, and a number of them from the Brazilian jungle and, surprise, besides family pictures also those of their “rich” relatives, the Koops of Chortitza. There they were, the great-grandparents of my half-brother Peter. His mother, my father’s first wife, was a Koop daughter. She died of typhoid in the 1920s. Because of the old Kroeger clock I had discovered a long lost branch of Peters relatives.

Another clock owner, as she was leaving with the restored clock, remarked: “By the way, this clock came to Paraguay via China. We bought it from a “Charbiner”.” Another fantastic story of rather tense conditions some Mennonites found themselves in. As a result of this, my wife and I read four or five books written on this subject. The China detour was cumbersome but many took their Kroeger clocks with them. Where in the Neufeld’s case, the German government intervened on behalf of the refugees, in the Harbin-China case it was the American president who made the transport from China, via Europe to South America, possible. Interestingly one member of the Neufeld clan was able to reach his family in Brazil via Harbin, China.

Not always does a clock owner know



Pendulum clock and motor factory of David Krüger ca. 1910 in Rosenthal, Chortitza Colony, Imperial Russia. The patriarch of the Kroeger clock dynasty was Johann Kröger (1754-1823), clockmaker in Prussia. Sketch by Arthur Kroeger. For a photo of the premises as they appear today and owner David Kroeger, see *Diese Steine*, pages 133.

much about his or her clock. For instance, it may have been inherited from a person who never left a written record for the new owner to be informed.

Markings.

Not always is an identification easy, especially when it comes to the older clocks. Why did the Kroegers not mark their clocks? The study of history was required to establish the cause for the absence of identification marks on Kroeger clocks. The answer is complicated. It had to do with being a "Mennonite clockmaker" in the early 1700s in the Danzig area. Little do we know and realize how much the common man's life was influenced and regulated (also) by the governments of most European countries.

During the time when they were ruled by autocrats, i.e. kings, emperors and czars, the Mennonite families withheld their sons from military service and they did not pay government church dues either. These were two main obstacles to gaining citizenship. But citizenship was required for membership in a trade guild. Only guild members were allowed to mark their products or ware with their name. Since the Kroegers produced clocks in the Danzig area in the early 1700s, where they were prohibited from using any markings, because they did not belong to the clockmakers guild, they continued this practice also in the Ukraine. Their clocks were simply known as "Kroeger clocks". But the other Mennonite clockmakers in the Ukraine, Mandtler, Lepp, Hildebrand and Hamm all marked their clocks.

Even at that certain clocks present a puzzle: the mechanism is distinctly Kroeger-made (and we should remind ourselves that six generations of Kroegers in the Ukraine i.e. Rosental made clocks), but the face plate was marked with the letters "G.M." It stands for Gerhard Mandtler, the clockmaker from Lindenau, Molotschna. As it turned out the Molotschna settlers had brought their (Kroeger) clocks with them from Prussia. By the time the Mandtlers set up shop in Lindenau many of the old clocks required an overhaul. The round faces of the early 1800s were now (1840) out of fashion, and Mandtler would suggest a modern restoration, a new face, square with a half-round on top. The old face was replaced and the clock looked like new and could be given to an offspring as a wedding present. A few such clocks are still around.

One clock of similar kind was obtained by the writer a few years ago. The ancient, 1800 mechanism had a "modern" face plate. This clock had only the hour hand. The mechanism and the face had been made more than one hundred years apart. My research led me to Paraguay, South America. I found out that the exquisitely hand-painted work was done by an art teacher, Miss Irene Franz, now deceased. She had hand-copied the usual decals of a Kroeger clock in every detail. Only with a magnifier could I detect the brush strokes



of the handiwork.

What does one do in such a case? I decided to make an old-fashioned dial plate for the old mechanism. The artfully painted "modern" dial did not have to wait very long to be used. It was transferred to a "modern" (1900) clock mechanism I had been able to obtain through a distant relative, a Mr. Victor Kroeger (now deceased), who had, a few years ago, come from the Siberian part of the former Soviet Union. The original dial of that clock had been very poorly restored. In these two cases two Kroeger clocks which had been made by a Kroeger some hundred years apart in a round-about way, travelled the world - in one case via South America, in another, over Siberia to Winnipeg, Canada - to be restored to the rule: parts of the same period belong together.

A completely disinterested person, hearing about my hobby remarked: "this, working with your ancestors' clocks, has been

given to you by God!" More and more I have come to realize the weight of this statement.

Clock Stories.

The interest in Mennonite clocks amongst our people ranges from zero to enthusiastic. Mr. Eddy Funk, of Winnipeg, comments: "The ticking of my Kroeger clock is music to my ears." Mr. Arthur Kroeger, originally from Steinbach, now residing in Winnipeg remarks: "I really feel at home when I hear the old clock ticking away." Arthur became a research ambassador for me. Returning from a trip to South America he promptly brought photographs and background stories of several Kroeger clocks from Paraguay. His wife, Mrs. Kroeger, almost overtrumped him, bringing in information on a number of clocks owned by her friends in British Columbia, where she resided before. A prominent family in Winnipeg marked the one hundred year anniversary of their Kroeger clock with a special

celebration, inviting family and friends.

The above-mentioned "clock stories" are but a sample of numerous such stories that beg to be told. Besides Winnipeg, Steinbach, Winkler, Altona and the surrounding areas are "rich" Mennonite clock territories. Of course the other Prairie Provinces rival with Manitoba in this respect. Actually one has to say that old clocks can be found wherever Mennonites live in any number. Amazingly such clocks still exist in the far reaches of Siberia.

At present I am working on two clocks. The owner of one is a former resident of Steinbach, the other is residing there. One clock is a real oldie, made around 1800 with the hour hand only. This hand is large and very ornamental and showy on the round face marked with only the quarter hours. The other clock was made, as in a previously mentioned story, one hundred years later around 1900. If the first one was the simplest and also the cheapest clock made by the Kroegers the second clock is up-to-date for the twentieth century. It has the hour and minute hand and a bell train. While the round face of the first mentioned clock is hand-painted, the second clock has showy floral decals as decorations and of course it has the "ringer". It is loud and obtrusive. It is designed to be heard throughout the farmer's house, on the hour, every hour, day and night. Clocks of this kind were and are more expensive. But from a collector's point of view the old round-faced clocks are a rarity.

Conclusion.

This is not the occasion to bring forth the whole comprehensive story about Mennonite-made clocks. Such a book is planned and "in the works".

Clock owners are asking for an informative work on this subject! Is there any excuse? Yes, the clocks just keep on coming and there is "no end to the story". Would the makers of these clocks have given it a second thought, that their handiwork would still be around a hundred years later, and at that in many such strange places? The magazine *Scientific American*, special issue for September 2002, on "A Matter of Time", advertises on its cover the subjects dealt with in this issue: Times' Mysterious Physics, The Philosophy of Time, and Building time machines, and other related articles.

Article upon article about time and the time-keeper - the clock, constitute the content of this publication. The one I would like to quote from is on page 92 and is titled "A Clock for All Time". It is printed for some reason on a green background. In it, after a brief introduction, it says: "A typical cesium clock (for scientific use) lasts no more than 20 years...in a small machine shop (near San Francisco) a small group of futurists and engineers...is re-

fining a mechanical clock meant to tick through 1,000 decades...a sociological experiment...A clock is a symbol of continuity; one that lasts a real long time might give people a sense of perspective..." Have those designers heard of Mennonite-made clocks?

Further Reading:

Arthur Kroeger, "A timeless craft that passed through generations of Kroegers," in *Mennonite Mirror*, Volume 13, No. 5, Jan. 1984, pages 5-7'

Arthur Kroeger, articles under the heading, "Symposium über Immigranten Möbel Traditionen," in *Der Bote*, 1992, No's 23, 24 and 25.

Wally Kroeger, "Mennonite clockmakers: their time - less legacy," in *The Marketplace*, September/October, 1999 issue.

Tony Funk, "Oh My Grandparent's Clock," in *Pres.*, No. 21, pages 129-20.

Glenn Penner, "The Early Krueger/Kroeger Family in Prussia," in *Mennonite Family History*, Jan. 1989, pages 18-19.

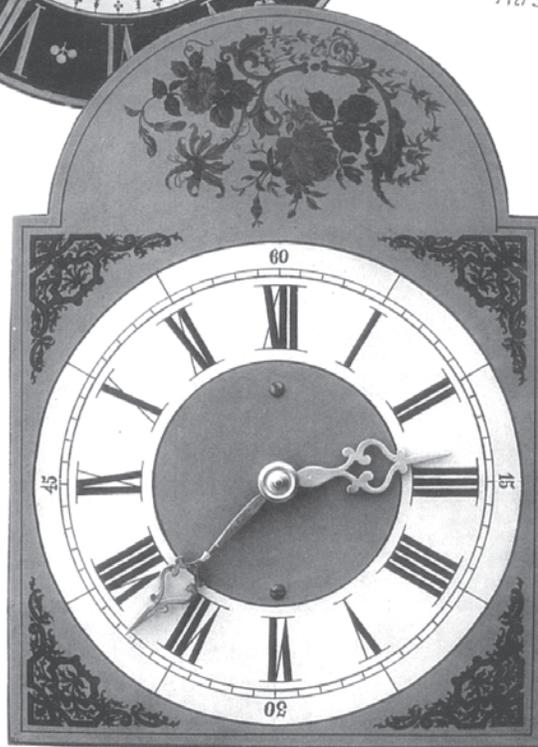
Two Clocks that changed Faces

Upper Picture

The one-handed mechanism of this clock received a more appropriate, newly produced face made by A. Kroeger:

Lower Picture

This face, exquisitely hand-painted by the art teacher Miss Irene Franz in Paraguay, was inappropriate for the one-handed clock. The face was transferred to the more modern mechanism with two hands. It came with an obliterated face from Siberia, Russia.



a restoration problem

Russian in Mennonite Low German

“Russian in Low German: Russian Elements in the ‘Plaudietsch’ of Mennonites,”
by Gerhard Wiens, reprinted with permission from *Mennonite Life*, April 1958, pages 75-77.

Introduction.

When, in the summer of 1918, we treated the soldiers of the German army of occupation to our delicious Ukrainian “Harbusi,” we were at first surprised and then amused that they should call these wonderful spheres of wetness “Wassermelonen.” Watermelons! It seemed an insult to a noble fruit. We had “melons” too, of course muskmelons, that is, and a “Harbus” was no watery muskmelon. Our Low German word was “Harbus” and in High German that had to be “Harbuse!”

We had quite a few good German words which we never found in a German book or dictionary. We did notice that these were the very words that the Russians seemed inclined to borrow from us. Could it be that we had borrowed them from the Russians? Being a future language teacher I concluded even before I had spelled my way through the Russian primer that we had indeed borrowed freely from the Russians. Some time ago I decided at last to investigate the subject. It came to me that I might be the last man ever to undertake this study, or perhaps even in position to undertake it. For the little Low German Mennonite world in which I grew up is smashed and gone and the memory of this linguistic phenomenon is surviving only in the minds of it bilingual members and will die with them.

Background.

My people were Mennonites of Dutch ancestry who had fled from Holland during the Reformation, had lived in the Danzig region for 250 years, had left Germany just after finally deciding to drop Dutch and adopt German (High and Low), and had settled in the southern Ukraine at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th century. My own settlement, the Molochnaya Colony (north of Melitopol), was the largest and second oldest. Consisting of 60 farming villages with a total population of about 30,000, it was large enough to permit the preservation of our language and our way of life.

The Low German dialect of the Danzig region, more precisely of the Marienburger Werder, was our mother tongue. We learned High German and Russian in school, but the language of our homes remained Plattdeutsch. High German was used so rarely only in school, in religious service, and in our correspondence that it exerted little influence on our Low German speech. It was, so to say, a “Sunday language.”

But Russian was very much a weekday language. We heard it every day from the inhabitants of the surrounding Russian villages and from our Russian labourers and maids, and we had to use it with them. We heard it and used it under the conditions of the workaday world, with its problems, its needs, its emotional exigencies, that is with all its realism. The impact was sufficient to move even a stubborn Dutchman. Through five generations we assimilated a consider amount of

Russian.

But I had no idea how extensive this assimilation was until I began this study. I had always been able to name offhand a dozen words of Russian origin and had assumed that there might altogether be several dozen. I can now say that there are several hundred. I have searched through the Ushakov Dictionary of the Russian Language (85,000 words) and compiled a list of Russian words which I know we used in Low German. I have analyzed the material to determine the shape and manner of our borrowings.

New “Things” Enter.

Our Low German was altogether a spoken language. What little literature we had was but a fixation of the spoken language, consisting of a few short stories and plays on themes from our daily life. Our dialect was limited to the requirements of our simple life and never pretended to be anything more.

It was natural, therefore, that our adoptions from Russian should have been of the same character. They were common, concrete words. It is understandable that the vast majority of them were nouns. The stock of verbs, for example, which we had brought with us to Russia was adequate for a life whose basic activities continued the same. But there were many new things all around us for which our language had no names or not quite the right names - “things” in the broad sense of physical objects, persons, animals, institutions, offices, conditions. For these we adopted the Russian names.

We did, to be sure, go beyond that and adopt Russian names for things for which we had, or may be presumed to have had, Low German words. But in this we were rather cautious. When I came to America and landed among the Pennsylvania-Dutch farmers of Ontario, I was amazed at the extent to which their speech was “ufgemixt mit der englische langvich.” Compared to the Pennsylvania-Dutch and most German-Americans we were die-hard conservatives.

But our beloved Low German was not nearly so pure as we were proud to claim. This study of mine may indeed shock some of my people, but I wish to assure them that I still love our dear Plaudietsch as much as they do.

I have classified our borrowings as follows:

1. New words from the new environment;
2. Russian neologisms;
3. Replacements for Low German words;
4. Parallelisms.

Examples.

First, Russian words for things new to the settlers for which they had no words of their own. Among them were, naturally, the Russian measures and monetary units: Versta – two-thirds of a mile, pood - 36 pounds, destina - 2.7 acres, sootki - one day and night, kopeika - kopeck.

There were also the Russian terms connected with administration: uradnik – village policeman,

pristav – overseer, volost – district, uyezd – county.

And many other new things in their environment too tedious to classify: samovar – tea urn, kvas – sourish drink made from bread and malt, khokhol – Ukrainian (derogatory), plavni-flood plains, bashtan – vegetable plot outside village, bashlyk – Caucasian hood, mogila – ancient burial mound, pop – Russian priest.

In the second category I have placed Russian neologisms which came into being with newly created things, like *benzine*, *Bolshevik*, or entered our lives in more recent times, like *okopi* (trenches). For example: drezinka – railway handcar, morozhenoye – ice cream, benzinka – cigarette lighter, samogon – homebrew, cheka – cheka (secret police), propoosk – (military) pass, prodnalog - tax in kind.

In the third category I have put words which replaced existing Low German words, like bulka – white bread, bazaar – market, svinka – mumps, konoval – horse doctor, chesnok – garlic, saray – shed, gooskom – in single file.

Here also belong those loanwords whose counterparts probably existed in Low German but were rarely or never used because our ancestors had little need for them until they came to Russia; arbus – watermelon, bania – steam bath, baklazhan – eggplant (but in our region – tomato), kazarma – barracks, taboon – drove of horses.

In the fourth category I have listed words which were used parallelly with their Low German equivalents, but usually with some shading of meaning: pulemot – machine gun, poyas – belt, baba – pleasant woman, kavaer – gentleman, khutor – estate, kipatok – boiling water for making tea, puzo – stomach (derogatory).

Assimilation.

Now let us analyze the manner of assimilation. What happened to the Russian words - grammatically, semantically, phonetically?

Quite a lot.

Most dramatic was the change in pronunciation. We low-germanized everything “ohne Ansehen der Person.” (The second column below attempts to render the Low German pronunciation.) bulka - bultji - white bread, varenye - vrenj - jam, kanat - knout - rope, mogila - mihil - ancient burial mound, fortochka - fortochtji - small hinged portion of window, khutor - khuta - estate, dulia - dull - insulting gesture (fig), velospied - flitsipay - bicycle, bazaar - bozoa - market, shchoty - shot - abacus, domkrat - dumikrouft - jack, screwjack. Low German *dumikrouft* means “thumb strength”.

Russian proper names, too, were often given the Low German pronunciation. Indeed, this was the rule for much used place names of the vicinity: Molochnaya - Molosh, Dnieper - Nippa, Berdiansk - Birdiaunstji, Yekaterinoslav - Kitrinslouf, Bogdanovka - Bodownoftji.

I might mention here that Mennonite children

were rarely given Russian names, but the Russian diminutives of some names were very popular, such as *Anuta* (Anna), *Petia* (Peter), *Kolia* (Nicholas) *Katia* (Katherine). Our horses bore beautiful Russian names like *Solovey* (nightingale), *Iskra* (spark), and understood only Russian, and no more of that than they chose.

Since nearly all adopted words were nouns, the grammatical changes were largely limited to changes in gender. These were quite frequent and seem largely unpredictable. But not quite. Russian feminine diminutives ending in *-ka* were among the most commonly adopted nouns and nearly all of these became neuter, for the obvious reason that the suffix *-ka* became *-tji*, the Low German equivalent of the High German diminutive suffix *-chen* (*fortochka - fortochtji*), and in German all diminutives are neuter.

An amusing phenomenon was the use of Russian plural nouns as singulars. For example: *pirozški* (small pies) and *vareniki* (filled dumplings), foods which were usually consumed in plural quantities, became *piroshtji* and *varentji*, plurals, but for the singular we used the same forms, giving them feminine gender for the Russian masculine. *Dukhi* (perfume) is only plural in Russian, but in Low German it is singular neuter. Some words taken from the Russian plural left us grammatically perplexed. When during the civil war we gave shelter to Russian refugees we called them *bezhenetsy*, but what were we to call a single refugee? *Bezhenets* did not sound right, and the correct Russian singular *bezhenets*, sounded even more wrong, quite un-Low German.

I have found only seven verb adoptions. They are: *govet* (prepare for the Sacrament by fasting), *gulat* (stroll), *borotsa* (wrestle), *sluzhit* (serve), *katatsa* (take a drive), *meshat* (hinder), *staratsa* (endeavor). They were all given the Low German infinitive ending and conjugated regularly: *hivee-i, hily-i, birotsi, sluzhi, katy-i, mishy-i, stiry-i*. *Gulat* was narrowed in meaning to signify the strolling of lovers and hence courtship. *Borotsa* is interesting in this respect; it is a reflexive-reciprocal verb, but we did not feel it as such. Since, however, wrestling is reciprocal, we super-added the German reflexive pronoun: *He borotst sich met dem Broda* (He wrestles with his brother). *Sluzhit* was used only to refer to the sitting upright of dogs, as when begging for food.

Change in Meaning.

The sematic analysis showed that in most cases the chief meaning of the Russian word was retained. In no case was the meaning changed completely, and only in a few cases was the word given a new shade of meaning which it did not have in Russian, as in *bezhenetsy*, which to us meant only Russian refugees; or *ingoosh*, member of a Caucasian tribe, which to us meant only the mounted policeman, a member of that tribe, whom we hired during the first World War. (An amusing sidelight here is that most of us mistook the first syllable for our indefinite article *-en* and called the man a *goosh*.)

Quite a few words, however, were used only in restricted meaning, which often happened not to be the main Russian meaning: (Russian - English - Low German Meaning) *baraban* - drum,

revolving cylinder of threshing machine; *vokzal* - railway station, waiting room of station; *lavka* - bench, small store; *paskha* - Easter, Easter cake; *prikaschik* - clerk, overseer of estate; *podkladka* - lining, washer (on bolt), *kanat* - cable, rope.

It is significant that quite a few words were used only when emotionally charged, i.e. not in a cool report but uttered with feeling. *Molodets* may mean simply a fine young man, but we used it only in its Russian affective connotation, as an expression of approval. Other affective nouns were: *coodak!* - you're a queer one!, *chepooka!* - it doesn't matter!, *doodki!* - nuts to you!, *durak!* - blockhead!

But in this field we let ourselves go and used not only nouns but adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, verbs and even entire sentences: *nichevo!* - it doesn't matter, *pora!* - it's time!, *zhalko!* - too bad!, *zharko!* - it's hot., *kooda!*-where do you think you're going!, *khvatit!* - that's enough!, *mozho?* - may I?, *poshiol von!* - get out of here!, *ya tebe dam!* - I'll let you have it! (threat), *shtob ti izdokh!* - drop dead!, *gorko!* - means bitter and was shouted by crowd when during game at wedding boy got to kiss girl.

Other Influences.

Our store of interjections was greatly enriched by Russian. In the midst of pure Low German one heard *Okh!* *ekh!* *ukj!* *oy!* *ey!* *ooy!* *Noo!* *Oy-oy-oy!* expressed admiration and *ay-ay-ay!* Concern. Russian terms of abuse and oaths also were not unheard amongst us.

As might have been expected from the great dissimilarity of the two languages, the influences of Russian on Low German itself was extremely slight. I have discovered no etymological and only one case of syntactical influence, but it is fascinating. Indeed, it is strange that one of the oddest Russian constructions should have been the only one we adopted. A Russian can say: *Rabotat-to on rabotayet, da fso nikuda ne goditsa*, meaning: He works all right, but it's all no good. The infinitive at the beginning is, as it were, a questioning response to a claim, and then the claim is granted but immediately whittled down. In Low German we said: *Obeidi obeit he, oba dout es oulis nusht vayt*.

In this article I have confined myself to loanwords which were current in my settlement, the Molochnaya Colony. They were generally the same in the other Mennonite settlements, although in cases of closer relationships with the Russian environment the borrowing was heavier. Ukrainian too was frequently drawn upon whenever it was the main language of the neighbourhood.

Spread of Low German.

In the 1870s and '80s thousands left our villages to go to the United States and Canada. Our dialect has survived among many of their descendants, and in it much Russian lives on. In Gretna, Manitoba, in 1925, I heard a tipsy young fellow moan, "*Etj fail, fidollt prost*" (I feel darned rotten). To feel without reflexive pronoun that was already English, but *prost* was still good Slavic Plattdeutsch, having been borrowed from Polish by our ancestors even before they left

West Prussia.

Again, half a century later (1923-1929), some 20,000 of us came to Canada. Many of these immigrants live in sufficiently compact settlement that Low German has continued to be their everyday speech. Unfortunately I have had very little contact with my fellow-immigrants for a quarter century. The present shape of our dear mother tongue would be a fascinating study for me.

Plautdietsch has even migrated to Mexico and South America (Paraguay, Uruguay, Brazil). In the tightly closed settlements there it stands a chance of living on even longer than in North America.

But the home of all of us is gone. There are no longer any Mennonite villages in South Russia. During the second World War their inhabitants were evacuated and dispersed. A few thousand of them have found new homes in Canada and South America.

Sources.

- I know of three major works on our dialect:
1. Jacob Quiring, "Die Mundart von Chortitza in Sud-Russland," Dissertation, Munchen, 1928. Its section on the Slavic influence was of particular value to my investigation because it lists several dozen loanwords from Polish and Lithuanian which our ancestors had brought with them from their West-Prussian home and of which many could easily be mistaken for Russian.
 2. Walter Lehn, "Rosental Low German, Synchronic and Diachronic Phonology," Dissertation, Cornell University, 1957.
 3. J.W. Gorzen, "Low German in Canada, a Study of 'Plautdietsch' as spoken by Mennonite Immigrants from Russia," Dissertation, University of Toronto, 1952 (m.s.).
- See also *Mennonite Life*:
 J. John Friesen, "Romance of the Low German." April '47, 22;
 J. Gorzen, "Plautdietsch and English." April '47, 22.

The Author:

In 1958 Gerhard Wiens was with the Department of German, University of Oklahoma, and a summer grant to study Mennonite folklore.



Gerhard Wiens - Photo - Men. Life, April 1958, page 50.

Books

Linea Reimer Geiser, *Caught in the Light* (First Books Library, Goshen, 2003), 96 pages. Ppbk.

Poetry has been described as literature that reaches into the fire. As readers, we want that, someone else daring to touch life where it sings us with pain and joy. Linea Reimer Geiser reaches into the flames of memory and observation with these poems.

As she recalls her life, her heritage, and responds to her daily experience, she finds language which awakens us as we read. With sensory and surprising images, she invites us to enter with her into life and to remember what we may have forgotten.

Beginning with the first poem "Sing for the Claw Foot Tub of Childhood," Linea draws us into the need to wash away the past which irritates like "the summer straw of threshing" which sticks to her body. But we find with her that the "past drips through" and that "everything intermingles, everything collides." The contradictions of experience are the stuff of poetry, she convinces us in a number of her poems. She describes the cultural tensions of Mennonite girls in the city, the spring dreams collapsed by revival preachers, the reality of ashes as we dance, and the Gospel as both freeing and demanding. In her description of family members, she mourns death, recounting the flaws, the "father czars," the hidden skeletons, as well as "the strong and beautiful."

What dominates in this collection, however, is the poet's power to praise. The yellow leaves of autumn, the labor of gardening, and the winter's deep cold are not metaphors for struggle and death, as we might expect, but are gifts to receive with sheer gratitude. The poet shouts "glory to the glow-

ing trees."

"(I) gladly stain my knees/risk poison ivy and/roil my spine for the sake of/conspiring with God to tend/ my flower bed." Linea lures us to consider praise in unexpected places.

She honors the lives of family and friends with loving and incisive language, and with these tributes and elegies she preserves the history of her heritage. The poignancy of the personal "Yellow Dress" is captured in its ending stanza:

"My mother, elegant and poor in her yellow dress with yellow buttons trailed by daughters concealing me high under her ribs."

She ends this section with a poem of fragrant vision for the world, gathering those she loves with instructions to make "Soup for the World."

Ending this collection are poems exploring language for faith. Linea recognizes the pain of birthing of both mothers and martyrs, keens for the evil in this world, acknowledges loneliness and loss of direction. With wit and daring she has Jesus "Barreling/down the road in his silver pick-up" to carry old Elizabeth to heaven where the poet's cats "aspire/to be nothing/but (God's) regal lap-warmers."

Her "Grandmother God/swoops me up in her arms/for a hug/a cheek to cheek and reminder/ that I am her treasure."

These poems are an invitation to be lifted in this kind of swooping motion, and to be "caught in the light."

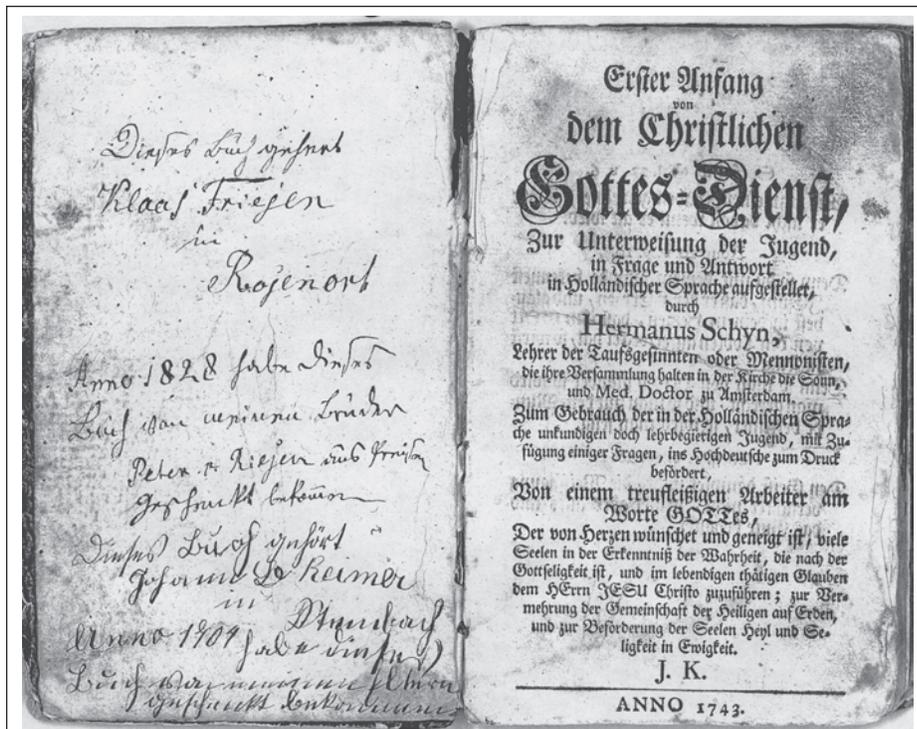
Reviewed by Jean Janzen, Fresno, California. Jean Janzen has taught poetry at Fresno Pacific University and Eastern Mennonite University. She has published five collections of poetry, the last one, *Tasting the Dust*, Good Books, 2000. Her poems have appeared in numerous journals and anthologies and in 1995 she received a National Endowment for the Arts Award.

Milton K. J. Reimer, *A Goodly Heritage: The Life and Times of the John B. and Maria Dueck Reimer Family* (Box 212, Fessenden, N.C., 58438-0212. 2003), 95 pages.

As already mentioned elsewhere, we are unable to even begin to mention in *Preservings* all the books published annually regarding the Russian Mennonites. *A Goodly Heritage* is the biography of John B. Reimer (1889-1962) and Maria Dueck Reimer



Linea Reimer Geiser, 610 Renere Dr., Goshen, Indiana, U.S., 46526 - August 2003.



A real treasure of *A Goodly Heritage* is a reproduction of the title page of the *Erster Anfang von dem Christlichen Gottes-Dienst* ("The beginning of the Christian service") published at page 86. *Erster Anfang* is the 1743 German edition of the Dutch catechism for the instruction of the youths by Herman Schyn (1662-1727), Amsterdam, the prominent doctor, minister of the Zonists Gemeinde, historian and heroic defender of the conservative Mennonite faith (Pres., No. 20, page 39). The book originally belonged to minister Klaas Friesen (1793-1870), Rosenort, Molotschna, whose grandsons C. K. "Well-driller" Friesen, teamster Klaas I. Friesen, and Johann I. "Malla" Friesen, played prominent roles in the history of Steinbach. The inscription reads: "This book belongs to Klaas Friesen in Rosenort. In 1828 I received this book as a gift from my brother Peter von Friesen in Prussia. This book belongs to Johann B. Reimer; circa 1904. I have received this book as a gift from my parents."

(1892-1939) who farmed on SE10-7-6E (where Clearsprings Mall is located today) from 1911 until their retirement. The book was compiled by son Milton Reimer, who has used documents, letters, and family recollections to create a surprisingly multi-faceted portrayal of their lives.

Johann B. Reimer was one of the associates of Rev. Ben D. Reimer, who pushed the Kleine Gemeinde away from the Holy Gospel and Jesus Christ as the cornerstone of the Gemeinde towards Evangelical Fundamentalism. Books like these help historians understand how these crusaders completely failed to comprehend the vision of their forefathers, and why they felt it necessary to forsake the same in favour of another religious culture and tradition.

J. B. Reimer was elected as deacon on 1944 and one of the gem's of his literary legacy are his "Home visitation reports," surprisingly candid notations made subsequent to pastoral visits in the community. One example recorded after a visit to David Ungers, Dec. 4, 1951: "...The man is sickly and likes to talk about it. But he is reluctant to speak of spiritual things and constantly changes the subject. I tried with God's help to make him aware of eternity and finally he let me go on. The sister went outside and stayed there for a long time. I asked if I could pray with them. He did not refuse and so I prayed. He thanked me for the visit and we parted non friendly" (pages 63-64).

The book also includes information on the parents of both John and Maria B. Reimer, he being the son of Steinbach major Johann R. Reimer and the grandson of the well-known patriarch Abr. "Fula" Reimer, most of which is material duplicated from earlier issues of *Preservings*. Maria, on the other hand, was the daughter of Johann R. Dueck (brother to Ält. Peter) and Margaretha P. Kroeker, daughter of Steinbach pioneer Franz M. Kroeker. The book includes some new material regarding the Dueck family - including some reminiscences by Maria Dueck Reimer of her growing up years and family life - which I would gladly have had access to in completing my recent Plett Family Saga, had the book been available earlier. As it is, it will be a good reason for nephews and nieces to purchase the book in order to learn more about their parents and grandparents.

For his dedicated efforts in preserving the goodly heritage of his family, we wish Milton God's richest blessings.

Book review by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

Christian scholars respond to Left Behind phenomenon. By Rob Clements.

Craig C. Hill, *In God's Time: The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

Paul Spilsbury, *The Throne, The Lamb & The Dragon: A Reader's Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

Craig R. Koester, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

One of the interesting side-effects of the Left Behind series has been the number of new non-fiction books dealing with the interpretation of Revelation and other End Time themes such as "the Millennium" and "the Rapture." Though the

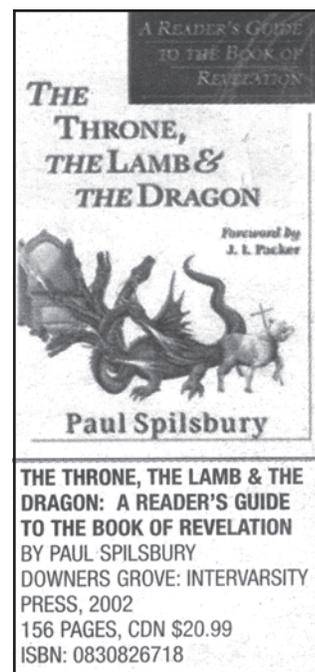
dispensationalist theology embedded in Left Behind novels is so entrenched in contemporary evangelical thought that some may consider it "gospel truth," many evangelical scholars and teachers are not convinced that the scenario played out in the Left Behind series are as biblical or orthodox as they may first appear.

In fact, reading the historical survey contained in the first chapter of Craig R. Koester's recent book, *Revelation and the End of All Things* (Eerdmans, 2001) one might wonder if an "orthodox" position even exists given the diversity of positions held by Christians throughout the centuries. Many Christians today may be surprised to learn that, prior to the twentieth century, many evangelical leaders (including the theologian Jonathan Edwards and the evangelist Charles Finney) were "postmillennialists," meaning they believed that the world would get better, rather than worse, before the second coming of Christ. The Protestant reformers also varied in their approaches: Martin Luther once declared it neither "apostolic nor prophetic" but later changed his mind affirming the book as a promise that "Christ is with us, even when things are at their worst"; John Calvin maintained a silent position on the subject, writing commentaries on every book of the Bible except Revelation.

One of the more accessible books on this topic is Paul Spilsbury's excellent book, *The Throne, The Lamb, and the Dragon* (IVP, 2002), which creams off what biblical scholarship has been saying about Revelation in recent decades, and presents it in a pastoral manner without getting bogged down in academic issues.

Spilsbury, who teaches New Testament at Canadian Bible College in Regina, Saskatchewan, has produced a relatively short book (156 pages) but it cuts to the heart of the main themes of Revelation and challenges Christians to live out the message in a way that neither diminishes its relevance for today, nor reduces it to a mysterious code-book of the future. His sensitivity and desire to show how Revelation fits into the larger biblical story is evident throughout the book. What's more, he goes on to show what Revelation says about discipleship today.

According to Spilsbury, the book of Revelation gives us "no reason to think that anything like the rapture will ever take place" (p. 79) nor should we expect a prior event that snatches us away from the trials of the present age. "To follow the Lamb and to be identified with him is to share his experience of the world's hatred and the dragon's hostility" (p. 81). This is the sort of book one can give to a new Christian obsessed trying to figure out the identity of the beast and rest assured that, if read seriously, that person will come away with a deeper apprecia-



tion of what it means to follow Jesus when times are tough.

Another recent publication - *In God's Time* by Craig C. Hill - covers many of the same topics in a more scholarly (and at times humorous) manner. Professor Hill, who teaches New Testament at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, D.C., confesses he consumed tall stacks of Last Days literature in high school, knows the evangelical sub-culture well enough to persuasively debunk many of more ludicrous End Times scenarios (e.g., that the World Wide Web is a Satanic plot) with great skill.

However, many conservative evangelicals will find the introductory chapters of this book hard to digest because Hill critiques "inerrancy" as a useful or helpful category in asserting biblical authority. He is also critical of young-earth creationists and extreme views about God's predestination of events, which would make this book a difficult one to give to many die-hard End Times enthusiasts.

The author admits as much in his preface, stating that he wrote the book for thoughtful Christians who find End Times literature "baffling, off-putting, or troubling." For the most part he succeeds, though arguably many Christians unfamiliar with the intertestamental Jewish literature might find his study of non-biblical apocalyptic writings such as 1 Enoch just as baffling and troubling. The book also includes an appendix entitled "Not Left Behind" which challenges the idea of Rapture as taught by "prophesy scholars" such as Tim LaHaye, Hal Lindsay and Kenneth Copeland, among others. Regardless, Hill does a remarkable job of articulating a thoughtful and fully biblical approach to what many Christians find a bewildering subject, affirming that God's eventual triumph is central to Christian faith.

Rob Clements is director of Clements Publishing <www.clementsublishing.com> and a consulting editor to Regent College Publishing in Vancouver, B.C.

Reprinted with permission from *ChristianWeek*, May 27/03, pages 9-10.

Profits of the Apocalypse

The commercial success of the Left Behind series has prompted a deluge of new titles in the genre, some from surprising sources. By Greg Devitt & Rob Clements.

Gone are the days of the vagabond Dooms Day Prophet marching the streets proclaiming, "the end is near!" You see, he's been edged out of the market. The prophets of today wear neatly tailored suits and have agents that broker multi-million dollar publishing deals. The end of the world is now big business.

Ever since Hal Lindsay published *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970, Christian publishers have fared well on prophecy books, but when Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins' *Left Behind* series hit the shelves in 1996 no one could have foreseen their dramatic impact on the publishing industry.

April 8th marked the release of the eleventh book, *Armageddon*, in this apocalyptic adventure series. And the timing couldn't have been better. To quote the series' website <www.leftbehind.com>, "What a better time than now to take advantage of uncertainty and fear by telling people the truth about 'Armageddon' and God's eternal plan." It hit number one spot on the New York Times bestseller list April 27.

The *Left Behind* series has sold in excess of 50 million books since its introduction. The phenomena has spawned a children's series of twenty-six books, a plethora of comic books, and a host of movies, greeting cards, videos, music and other apparel ("the best in rapture wear"), not to mention at least two official websites.

All of this has been good news for Tyndale House, a Christian publishing house based in Wheaton, Illinois. In 1998, before the series really took off, the company had sales of about \$40 million. That figure more than quadrupled during the fiscal year that ended in April 2001, according to *Christianity Today*.

The remarkable commercial success of the series has not gone unnoticed by larger, secular publishers. *Publishers Weekly* recently reported that Tim LaHaye has signed a four-book deal with Bantam Books (a division of Random House) in the neighbourhood of \$45 million dollars. And another large New York publisher, Penguin Group (USA) has banked on a continued appetite for apocalyptic fiction by launching its own series called *The Prodigal Project*.

Said director of religious publishing Joel Fotinos in Religion Bookline, "The main goal isn't to teach a specific theology, but to inspire through the story." The first book in the series "*Genesis*" was released in January. The second installment, "*Exodus*," comes out in June, with an announced 350,000 first printing.

Trouble in Paradise.

With all this money changing hands there was bound to be trouble in paradise.

Three year ago LaHaye sued Namesake Entertainment and Cloud Ten Pictures (even though the movie would go on to sell three million copies). Co-author LaHaye cited breach of contract due to the low quality of the movie version of the series' flagship book they produced.

According to a Cloud Ten Pictures press release

of March 27th, 2003, however, the Federal judge presiding over the Tim LaHaye lawsuit regarding the *Left Behind* films has dismissed all of LaHaye's claims against Cloud Ten.

"Obviously the Federal Court has vindicated Cloud Ten," said the company's President Edwin Ng in a press release. "We are extremely pleased with the result and continue to look forward to making future Left Behind films, television programming and films based on the *Left Behind: The Kid's series*."

One of the more interesting of *Left Behind's* offspring is the Left Behind Prophecy Club Internet site (accessible from <www.leftbehind.com>). For only \$29.95 (US) you can have a three-month subscription (additional months cost \$3.95) to a growing community whose purpose is to speculate as to how current events in our world fit into LaHaye's end-times theology. "Join now!" the web site exclaims, "to find out, Is the UN a precursor of the One World government prophesized in the Bible? Could the Antichrist be alive now? If so, how can he be identified so he does not deceive us? Are ATM's and other revolutions in global banking foretelling of the Mark of the Beast?"

You may also participate in their message board forums with a host of other End Times enthusiasts to discuss numerology, the newest release in the series, or whether or not George W. Bush is, in fact, the AntiChrist.

Truncated Theology.

The *Left Behind* series is based on a particular area of End Times theology called dispensational premillennialism. Tim LaHaye has been a leading proponent of this ideology for many years and is the co-founder and president of the Pre-Trib Research Center, an organization established for the express purpose of promoting dispensational premillennialism within the Christian community.

Dispensational premillennialism originated in the middle of the nineteenth century with John Nelson Darby and was popularized by the publication of the Scofield Reference Bible in the early 20th century.

Despite the remarkable popularity of *Left Behind* some Christian leaders and teachers are not happy with the theology presented in the series.

"The error of 'Left Bind' theology is that it fails to grasp the nature of apocalyptic literature," says Dr. Victor Shepherd, who teaches systematic theology at Tyndale College and Seminary in Toronto. "It draws too readily correspondences between the images in Revelation and world occurrences."

Worse, say Shepherd, "it depicts an understanding of God that is at variance with the crucified one. God is portrayed as indifferent to the suffering of the world if not the abater of that suffering."

"Where they should be weeping, they strike me as gloating," he concludes.

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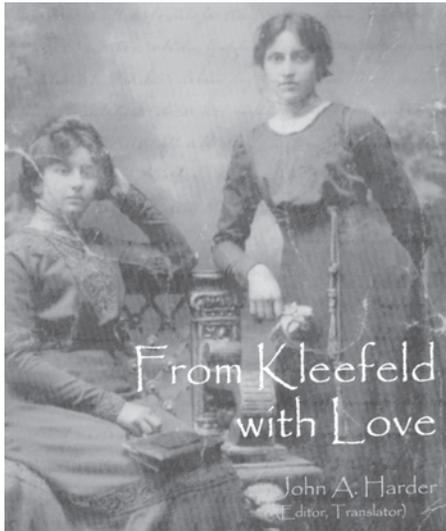
John A. Harder, editor and translator, *From Kleefeld with Love* (Kitchener, ON: Pandora Press, co-published with Herald Press, 2003). Paperback, 198 pp.,

In the last decades many books have appeared that chronicle the experiences of Russian Mennonites in the Soviet Union. Of special importance, for both the historian and the general reader, are collections of letters written between the 1920s and the end of the Stalin era when Mennonites underwent unprecedented loss, exile, imprisonment and suffering. Books like *Letters from Susan* (1988), edited and translated by John B. Toews, *From Russia with Tears* (1991), translated and edited by Peter and Anne Barga, and *Wo sollen wir hin* (Where shall we go?) (1998), edited by Julia Hildebrandt, Heinrich Klassen and Gerhard Woelk, are just a few collections of letters that come to mind. *From Kleefeld with Love* is the latest collection of letters written during this period.

From *Kleefeld with Love* contains letters of Mariechen Harder, Sara Spent and a few others, written to the Abram H. Harder family (Abram was Mariechen's brother) who had emigrated to Canada in 1924. Letters written by the Harders of Canada to their Kleefeld relatives have not survived, although there are a few letters written by the Harders to their relatives in Kansas, describing their farming conditions in Arnaud, Manitoba, in the 1920s. Of interest is not only the content of these letters, written by young women, but especially the frankness with which they describe the deplorable conditions in the Soviet Union of the 1920s and '30s. The courage of the writers is seen in that, while they suspected that the mail was opened by the authorities, they nevertheless let their Canadian relatives know what they experienced and suffered at the hands of the Soviets and what they thought of their new political masters.

In a 1931 letter, Mariechen Harder writes that the reality which they now face defies comprehension. Even the Makhno period, according to Mariechen, was not as bad: "The horrible times of mass murder in Blumenort during the Civil War were nothing in comparison to the tyranny we know today. And this is no exaggeration. What I am reporting will stretch all credulity" (p. 134). Mariechen's letters speak of arrests of ministers, loss of homes and homeland, deportation and resettlement in distant places, separation of families and lack of food, requisition of livestock and produce, forced collectivization, and constant harassment by the authorities. There is no doubt in the letter-writers' mind that the Mennonites are targeted by the authorities because they are "Germans," are considered "kulaks" (former well-to-do farmers), and because they as believing Christians cannot go along with the Soviet atheistic regime.

The uppermost wish of the letter writers is to emigrate. Even after 1930 when Canada no longer accepted immigrants, Mariechen still hoped that she might be able to get out of Russia. She is willing to work hard in the new country, pay off her travel debts as soon as possible, and then devote her time and strength to contributing positively to her new homeland. She expresses anger toward a certain "Herman Dick" family who emigrated to Canada in the 1920s and then complained to their relatives



From Kleefeld with Love - front cover: Mariechen and Greta Harder, young women in the beauty of their youth

back home in Russia about how bad things were in Canada: "It is a great tragedy that they left when they did," Mariechen writes, "they are fortunate they escaped with their lives. Were they to return now, their hair would soon stand on end" (p. 130).

There is thus far no study that deals with the effect that communications between Mennonites in the Soviet Union and their relatives abroad had on the Soviet authorities. There is no doubt, however, that the Soviets knew from letters such as these and reports in Canadian papers like the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and *Der Bote* about what Mennonites (and other Germans) thought of the Soviets and the conditions in Russia. When the Nazis in 1933 came to power in Germany and in 1941 invaded the Soviet Union, a paranoid Stalin suspected all Soviet Germans (among other nationalities) as potential "spies," "collaborators," and generally "enemies of the state." Consequently Mennonites and Germans living in Ukraine and in the Volga regions were "resettled" to northern and eastern parts of the Soviet Union where they were forced to work in slave labour camps under often inhuman conditions. It is against this background that the cries for help expressed in these letters must be understood.

Mariechen Harder, the principal letter writer in this book, died in 1939, with her hopes and desire to escape to freedom unfulfilled. The only freedom she had was letter-writing. Time and again she tells her loved ones in Canada that writing for her is like breathing; not being able to write would be her death. In her letters she not only expressed her longing for freedom, love and life itself, but she also left a legacy which continues to keep our link to the past world alive - even though her home, the village of Kleefeld, has disappeared from the map.

The book is beautifully produced, includes photographs and maps, and the English translation reads well. The cover shows a photo of the sisters Mariechen and Greta Harder, young women in the beauty of their youth - a beauty and youth eventually turned to forms wracked with suffering and pain. Mariechen and the other writers ask why they have to suffer so much and so long, but in the end they leave the answer to God in whom they put

their trust.

The editing and proofreading, betray some haste and carelessness. The map of the Molotschna colony (p. 18), for example, to which the text refers repeatedly, appears in reverse and is practically illegible. One can only make it out when held before a mirror! There are inconsistencies in the spelling of place and personal names as, for example, in "Professor Benjamin Unruh" (p. 173) and "Benjamin Unrau" (p. 154).

These blemishes aside, the book is a valuable source for students of Russian-Mennonite history and deserves a place in all Mennonite libraries and homes.

Harry Loewen, Professor Emeritus of Mennonite Studies, Kelowna, B.C.

Jack Klassen, *The Chiropractor* (Altona, 2003), 212 pages. \$19.95

Probably the first novel written completely in Low German. Also available in an English edition. This novel deals with a period of time during the early 20th century when parts of eastern Manitoba were still being settled. The Mennonite settlers who came to the Kleefeld area near Steinbach were a devout and uncomplicated folk. They possessed an innocence which is missing among many of today's culturally assimilated Mennonites. Although these pioneers were not perfect, they held to Biblical ideals which were positive and good.

Under these circumstances, a young girl grows up to become a chiropractor and a single parent to a number of foster children, adopting several in the process. The reader shares in her personal struggles and triumphs as she deals with life from day to day.

From the *Mennonitische Post*, June 20, 2003, page 22.

David Ewert, *How to Understand the Bible* (Herald Press, Waterloo, Ontario, and Scottsdale, Pennsylvania, 2000), 240 pages.

David Ewert is an esteemed preacher, teacher, professor, and scholar of the Mennonite Brethren church. Appropriately, this book is dedicated to the late Abram H. Unruh, whose careful exposition of Scripture, according to the author, inspired him in his youth. The author is aware that reading books about the Bible (hermeneutical aids) may be more problematical than reading the Bible itself (p 107), but he is equally aware that information about the Bible does help us to understand it the way the biblical authors would actually like to be understood.

A quick glance at the bibliography (p 225-27) indicates that there is a plethora of "How to..." books available on biblical hermeneutics. So why another one? The author justifies yet another book on hermeneutics by writing one in non-technical language, and by dealing with a large range of topics (p 12, 19). The author succeeds well in both counts. From years of practicing the art of preaching and teaching, not only in academia, but also in the ecclesia where God's people gather to hear the Word of God, Ewert is uniquely qualified to write yet another "How to..." book geared for the laity.

This book abounds with arresting and enlightening illustrations and quotes, much like the re-

viewer remembers the communication techniques of Ewert's mentor, A.H. Unruh. The author does not only write about the Bible. He uses biblical texts copiously to illustrate interpretive principles. The reader will be gratified to see how often the content of the Bible becomes illumined in the process of writing a book on biblical hermeneutics. The book is conveniently divided into 13 chapters, thus making it readily adaptable for a quarterly Sunday School study on hermeneutics.

Hermeneutics, according to the author, is not only an aid to understand the Bible (theology), but also, and at the same time, it clarifies the biblical way of life (ethics). One has not understood unless one walks the way, and conversely, as one walks the way, one understands. It is the strength of this book that it holds knowing and *Nachfolge* together as one indivisible whole, true to the Bible itself and the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition.

Ewert demonstrates that, in order to understand and apply the Bible, we need to know about biblical times, its geography, culture and language (pp 20-4). But one must also understand oneself, one's pre-understandings (*Vorverstaendnis*). Our experiences and perspectives from our world color our reading of the Bible and its world.

Ewert urges us to become aware of our pre-understandings, but at the same time forthrightly says that there is no fool proof way of escaping a subjective, individualistic reading of the Biblical text (p 36) - and especially so, the reviewer adds, in the western world. To lessen this danger the author again stays within the Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition and wisely recommends testing one's interpretation of the Bible in the community of faith, the hermeneutical community (p 37, 116-18). Understanding and *Nachfolge* are vocations of the church.

Chapter 3 (The Uniqueness of Sacred Scriptures) briefly, and helpfully in many ways, discusses the meaning of canon and the process of canonizing the biblical books. Although biblical canon consists of "inspired writings" (p 42), the author does not, unfortunately, explain what is meant by that term (see also p 60). It is clear, however that the process of canonizing these writings was a church activity (p 43). The Bible is historically conditioned. It is difficult to adhere to a plenary-verbal theory of inspiration. From the meaning of the term, canon (measuring stick), one can assume that there is some coherence in the diverse canonized books, and that one can speak of a unifying theme, or perspective. Ewert calls this unifying theme salvation history, *Heilsgeschichte* (p 43).

Most chapters of the book under review have to do with the Bible as literature. In chapter 4 the author draws our attention to the fact that a translation of the Bible is already an interpretation. Languages are thought worlds in which people live. Since there are no exact equivalents of translating one linguistic thought world into another, translations can readily fall prey to the translators *Vorverstaendnis*.

If Bible translations have to do with translating one linguistic thought world into another in equivalent meanings, we need to know how language functions in a particular linguistic world. Ewert engages us in a helpful discussion of this problem (chapter 5), beginning with the basic unit, the word (its etymology, usage, and history), followed by the more complex structure, the sentence (morphology,

syntax, and context), then on to the use of figurative (chapter 6), and symbolic ways of communicating (chapter 7). Although words and grammar are basic literary units, the author warns against reading of the Bible in a purely literal way, another important hermeneutical principle (p 70). Figures of speech and symbolic language were not intended to be taken literally. The readers may think that departing from a literal interpretation, opens the flood gates to a loose reading of the Bible. The author argues that this is not the case, and strengthens his argument by a liberal use of example and illustration.

In one of the longest chapters of the book (chapter 8) the author highlights some general principles (guidelines) of interpreting the bible, the science of hermeneutics proper. Throughout this chapter, Ewert abides by the principles of our Anabaptist forebears that understanding and *Nachfolge* are two parts of the same coin. Hermeneutical guidelines are given to prevent arbitrary and fanciful readings of the biblical text (p 106). The author rightly shies away from a western dualistic, and privatized reading of the Bible, and emphasizes again the need to test one's insight in the community of faith, the hermeneutical community (pp 116 ff).

Following hermeneutical guidelines, however, is no assurance that Christians will come to agree on all matters of faith and understanding. The author touches upon the complex topic of reading the culturally conditioned Bible, mixed up with socio-religious-political factors of the time, in other culturally conditioned worlds (chapter 9). Losing this orientation and spiritualizing, or idealizing the Bible, Ewert shows, is an unbiblical way of reading it. There is an unavoidable ethnic/cultural component to biblical faith because God's way can be manifested in this diverse socio-religious world. In this regard, the author stands firmly in his own Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition by keeping faith and life together, contrary to the two-kingdoms view of faith of Martin Luther.

But numerous hermeneutical questions arise from chapters 8 and 9, crucial in coming to understand and live out biblical faith. How can a time conditioned book be understood, and manifested in the modern world? Is finding the continuing relevance of the Bible like removing and discarding the husk and keeping the kernel, or searching for the essence, and once found can then be directly proclaimed and applied anywhere in the world? Ewert at times tends in this direction. He states that the message of the Bible is the same but the dress is different (p 139), or it is a matter of distinguishing between "religious practices of abiding significance" and those that simply belonged to the first century (p 131). Is the "how" of the Bible only a matter of dress? Is only the "what," the essence, the kernel, that counts? Biblical faith is after all an historical religion and cannot be spiritualized into an idealistic essence. In the last two chapters of the book, on the unity of the Bible, the author deals with this significant question in greater detail, crucial to understand and walk in the ways of God.

Already in chapter 10 the author broaches the problem of the unity of the Bible, although chapter 10 and 11 deal primarily with the literary genres of the OT and NT. He establishes a hermeneutical principle that the OT is to be read in the fuller light of Christ (p 144). He is aware that in doing so one

runs the danger of christianizing the OT and not allowing it to speak in its own right. Since the so-called OT was the only Bible the Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, had, is it not more appropriate to reverse that principle and to say that, for them, the light of the OT enlightened the Christ event? Should one not do the same today and read the NT from the perspective of the OT since they are historically related?

The Bible, the author claims, is essentially a history of salvation (*Heilsgeschichte*, p 141). To prevent the NT from getting off the biblical track (e.g. to become hellenized and read from a Greek/Western point of view), should one not read the NT from the perspective of the OT? Paul saw that the law was given to keep God's purposes on track (Gal. 3:24). For him the law was God's revelatory gift to help us understand the purposes of God. Is it therefore not better to say that the NT is dependent upon the OT to interpret the Christ event in an Hebraic/biblical way, rather than that the Christ event gave the NT writers a new standpoint from which to read the OT (p 187)?

In the last two chapters of the book (chapters 12, 13), Ewert treats the problem of the relationship of the OT to the NT, and the unity of the Bible in greater detail. One is tempted to say that these chapters form the most important pages of the entire book because of the significance of understanding the Bible from an Hebraic/biblical perspective. In the mind of the reviewer, these chapters raise some dangers and questions.

First of all, the use of the fulfillment motif in interpreting the NT (p 119, 203) creates the danger and the possibility of leaving the OT behind altogether. The NT then becomes a free-floating entity cut off from its roots and open to interpretations that may have more things in common with perspectives from other thought worlds than the biblical world. The OT gives the needed perspective and roots to understand the NT and so prevents it from becoming a multiplicity of new sects.

The author rightly emphasizes that the so-called OT is the Bible of all the writers of the NT (p 206). Yet the difficulty of dividing "ethnic" Israel from "spiritual" Israel (p 204) highlights the danger of emphasizing discontinuity between the OT and the NT. Does Christ "radically alter his (Paul's) understanding of the Bible" (206)? One must heed the caution of the author of not christianizing the OT. Yet reading the Bible in a Christ-centered way rather than, as Paul himself did, God-centered, opens the door to losing the biblical/Hebraic perspective informing also the NT.

Similar cautions can be raised regarding the author's theory of the unity of the Bible under the caption "progressive revelation" (chapter 13). With this term the author means "... that God made himself known in stages, and the final stage was reached in Christ" (p 210). Although the author does not wish this term to be understood in an evolutionary way - and rightly so - the idea nevertheless, lies close at hand with the use of such terms as "stages," "coming to a climax in Christ" (p 209), and "fuller and final revelation" (p 209). Sometimes the author describes the relationship of the testaments in discontinuous terms: "new covenant" and "profound difference" (p 208), "new people of God", and "Israel failed to carry out its mission..." (p 221). Sepa-

rating the church from God's chosen people runs the risk of uprooting the NT and the church from its biblical/Hebraic character, from the OT. A God-centered understanding of the Bible would guard against these risks.

For St. Paul, God's purposes have not been finally realized with the coming of Christ (Ro. 9-11). History has not stood still since Christ came. The end (parousia) has not yet come. Paul's view is that God will be all and in all (1 Cor. 15:24-28). For him, Christ is penultimate. The Ultimate is God.

In conclusion, Ewert shows that a "How to ..." book about the Bible is at the same time a book on faith, theology, and ethics. The book raises important issues and provides many helpful ways to better understand the Bible. Our gratitude to David Ewert for producing yet another book on how to understand the Bible. The reader comes away from reading the book instructed, enlightened, and challenged. The book deserves to be widely read and studied.

Book Review by Peter Fast, Retired Professor of New Testament Studies, C.M.B.C. and C.M.U., Winnipeg.

Abram Abramavitsch Fast, *W setjach OGPU-NKWD* ("In the net of the OGPU-NKWD") (Barnaul, Russia, 2002), 461 pages.

Firstly, I would like to note that this book is a significant reference work for the researcher of Mennonitism. The hundreds of archival sources which the author has studied enabled him to compile a well documented and analytical study regarding the Germans in Altaj. The Altaj region, District of Barnaul, Province of Tomsk was founded in 1908. The settlement lay between the Ob and Irtysh Rivers, 180 miles south of the Siberian railway. In the beginning Barnaul, 400 km. away was the nearest large city. By 1910 36 villages had arisen on the Kulunda steppes. In 1909 the city of Slawgorod was founded on the western border of the Barnaul Mennonite settlement which was thereafter known by that name. By 1913 the settlement had a population of 10,416 which rose to 14,890 by 1921. The settlers had a difficult time.

This is a work dealing with the tragic events of the 1930s in the German Rayon (Nemezkiy Rayon) of the region of Altaj. It relates how the wheel of oppression of the communist regime of Stalin had its beginnings in the 1920s, reaching its pinnacle with its surrealistic implementation in the years 1934 and 1937-38, and concluding with the almost total mass extinction of the entire able-bodied population of the German villages.

The author shows the preparations for the repression and how it was carried out providing a documented account to the readers (or their relatives, acquaintances and associates).

The book is divided into four chapters: 1. Establishment and Liquidation of the German Rayon (1927-1938); 2. Emigration Wave (1929-1930); 3. Collectivization and Expropriation; 4. Search for the Fifth Column.

Each chapter begins with the overview of the story of the German Rayons for the particular time period together with citations from relevant works, his own analysis based on the documentation, and closing with references to archival sources. The

book acquires a great value by including a list of those “innocently repressed in the 1930s in the German Rayon” containing ca. 1000 names.

A few snippets from the contents of chapter 1: “...The years 1925-26 were a time of conflict between the two forces in the District of Slawgorod: the governing body of the official government versus the Mennonite community....The question of the liquidation of the Mennonite community was first raised by the Secretary of the Siberian District Committee in November of 1926. This question was turned into reality without regard to the positive submission of the community...The establishment of a German Rayon [secondly] was to carry out a repression against the German population, to be implemented by the German party functionaries who were to be appointed by the government....The purpose of this reorganization was to establish a grounds for the Stalinistic unification of the farming classes with socialism....Goal: to disturb the speech and religious barriers. The opposition of the German population to the establishment of a German Rayons was broken in 1926....The decision to establish a German Rayon with 57 villages and a population of 13,165 persons was finalized in March of 1926....In any event, the German Rayon only lasted for 11 years and already on September 26, 1938, a decision to liquidate the German Rayon was publicized....Only in the year 1991 was a new German Rayon created in the region of Altaj.

Chapter 2: The reasons for the emigration of the German population to America: grain prices had risen drastically; accelerated process of collectivization and expropriation; attack on believers, churches and against the religious world view in general. One of the forms of protest was the immigration to America.

Chapter 3: An increase in forced and unpaid labour, and the loss of the love of the land. A psychological orientation towards poverty was established and a disappearing of the bond between the generations.

Chapter 4: Developments in Germany in 1933 when Hitler came to power worsened the lot of the Germans in Russia which became even more tragic. During the years 1934-35, numerous acts of terrorism were carried out against the Germans in Russia. There were searches for “Enemies of the State”. Thanks to the NKWD, if there were 79 farmers (Wirte) who were signalled out in the German Rayon in 1934, by 1935 there were already 375. One must truly possess a great ability to fantasize in order to still be able to find that many Kulaks after all the expropriation and repression of 1931-32. Already in November of 1934 a large group of the newly found “Kulaks” were exiled to the north.

Chapter 5: The motto of the NKWD was: sooner that 10 innocent perish than that a spy might remain hidden somewhere. With this the acts of repression became even stronger during the years 1936-38. The main purpose of this repression was: to establish a permanent fear in the lives of millions of people regarding their fate. That meant full and unreserved submission to the power of Stalin. In the years 1937-38 21,462 persons were repressed in the Altaj Region of whom 11,624 were shot. 658 persons were repressed in the German Rayon of whom 561 were shot.

This book is highly recommended for histori-

ans, archivists and for the residents of the German Rayon of the Altja Region or for their descendants and relatives, who were connected with the mass repressions either directly or indirectly.

Book review by Adina Reger, Wiefenthurm, Germany.

Abram A. Fast.

Abram Abramawitsch Fast was born on Nov. 19, 1934 in Protassowa, German Rayon, Altaj Region. His mother Ekaterina Jakovlevna was a housewife and died in 1981. His father, Abram Abramowitsch, was a teacher who died in 1982. A. A. Fast graduated from the Altjaer Technical School for the Mechanization of Accounting, the Nowosibirsk Party High School, and the University of Marxism-Leninism on the Altja regional committee of the KPSS. He worked as the book keeper in the Kolchosa “F. Engels” and for the village committee of the village “Polewoje”, as the film presenter on Orlowo, for 25 years as the party secretary in the Kolchosa of “Telman and Lenina” and as chairman of the executive committee of the village Soviet in Orlowo and Polewoje in the German Rayon of the Altja region. At present Abram Fast is a pensioner. Since 2000 he has lived in the City of Barnaul.



Abram Fast, author of Im Netz der OGPU-NKWD. Photo scanned by Adina Reger.

John B. Toews, Editor, *The story of the Early Mennonite Brethren (1860-1869): Reflections of a Lutheran Churchman* (Kindred Productions, Hillsboro, 2002).

This book contains English translations of documents found in the St. Petersburg Central Government archives, in a file entitled “Hupfer” (leapers). The documents of this file include government reports, memoranda, and correspondence compiled for the purpose of understanding and dealing with the emerging Mennonitische Brüdergemeinde (the “Hupfer”) or separatists (“Aussgetretene”) 1860-1869 in South Russia. The documents were written by various government officials and other individu-

als, in several languages (Russian, German and French). The Russian documents were translated by Olga Levovushkina, Lenka Maksymets and Svetlane Solovyova - but revised by John B. Toews. French documents were translated by Alvin Harns, the German by Toews. The translations were all revised and edited by Toews. Much of the book consists of a report by Councillor of State Alexander Brune (a Lutheran churchman), commissioned by the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1863 to report on the emerging Brethren.

Although I have not accessed the original documents, it is apparent that there are serious problems with the translation and editing itself. For instance, the word “homosexuality” (page 137) is clearly based on an incorrect translation. Given that the translation of a prior work by Toews (*The David Epp Diaries, Pres.*, No. 22, pages 138-9) contains important and serious translation errors, one wonders if Toews is really qualified as a translator of such documents. One wonders too if Toews’ acceptance of early Brüdergemeinde claims regarding the decadent lifestyle of the Mennonite community may explain the translation errors as well as his own commentary.

Many of the documents are presented only in summary form. In some cases, it appears useful information is suppressed, and one wonders why this was done. Surely Toews can not have assumed the details would be uninteresting to the reader. Even had the material contained repetitious detail or bureaucratic formalities, it should be the reader, not the editor, who should skip unnecessary passages.

Some of the translations are prefaced by a commentary. Although sometimes useful in outlining background, I feel his commentaries should have been moved to his own general introduction so as not to intrude upon the immediate reading of each section.

His own introduction again presents views previously expressed as to the origins of the Brüdergemeinde movement. In Toews’ opinion, the Mennonite community as in South Russia had decayed, and a new reading of religious works led to a new found joy of salvation in a small number of pilgrims within the Mennonite community. In this, Toews totally neglects the important conclusions drawn by the government officials presented in this book, namely that the origins of the Brethren movement are found in the activities of “foreigners”. Toews’ view of the decadent nature of Russian Mennonite Society is simply the same as that expressed by the early Brüder. One wonders what he means by “deviant sexuality”. Is this based on his own incorrect translation regarding homosexuality? One cannot but be puzzled by the inclusion of reports (by the early Brüder) of masturbation among teenage boys as evidence for moral decay.

In a work of this kind, containing old and valuable historical documents, one expects to find a completeness, attention to detail and accuracy which is lacking here.

Turning to the actual documentary material itself, much that is new and interesting is presented. Among specific items of interest are, the listing of the original Bruder in the Old Colony (previously presented by Alf Redekopp, *Mennonite Historian*, March 1998), additional material on the early

Molotschna Bruder, and details of proposals for exiling prominent Brüdergemeinder leader Jacob Reimer.

On a more general level, we have the opinion and views of investigator Alexander Brune himself, as well as those of other leading government officials, who took time to study the issues and problems relating to the emergence of the Bruder. While they are sometimes greatly misinformed as to the history and sometimes beliefs of the Mennonites, they nevertheless appear to have had a good grasp of contemporary issues relative to the Brüder. Their conclusions in respect of the Brüder are generally very negative. On the other hand, they are aware that unthoughtful action could make martyrs of the extremist Brüder, and further the Brüdergemeinde cause. The extremism of the early Brüder is documented in these reports, as is the illegal proselytizing of Brüder among Orthodox Russians (Ukrainians) and the subsequent imprisonment of some of the Brüder (including Heinrich Hiebert) for this reason.

The unwise reactions of various leading members of the Mennonite community to the "Hupfer" is likewise documented here.

Some of the documents comment on the need for improvement in morality and behaviour in the community. In this, most of the traditionalists would have likely agreed.

Probably the most interesting aspects of those reports relate to the various reasons assigned as to the origins of the "Hupfer" movement. These are briefly: foreign influence, lack of unity within the Mennonite community, moral decline within the Mennonite community.

I have already discussed briefly some aspects of alleged moral decline above. The reports of this file contain the allegations presented by the early Brethren, which may have been accepted at face value by the report writers themselves. It is however difficult to take some of these opinions, particularly those of Gerhard Wiehler seriously (Wiehler was one of the most extreme and erratic of all the Brüder). On the other hand, probably no one felt that improvement in the moral life of the community was impossible. Lack of unity within the Mennonite community is most evident in the Molotschna. Here it was government intervention which caused many problems with the removal of two Ältester and the division of the traditionalist Flemish Gemeinde into three. Likewise the arrival of the pietist-led Rudnerweide Gemeinde in 1819, the Gnadenfelders in 1834 and the Waldheimers in 1836 contributed to divisions in the community. The separation of the majority of the traditionalists from the Ohrloff Gemeinde was caused in a sense by assimilationists as well as by the arrival of the Rudnerwieders.

However, the most important cause of the emergence of the Brethren, according to Russian officials, is illustrated in a report of Vice-Director Sivers (not dated) included in the file. His recommendations include the following (future) preventative measures: 1. Prohibit all foreigners from teaching or preaching in Russia. 2. Avoid appointing foreigners educated abroad as village pastors. 4. Foreigners who received their education abroad should not be allowed to teach in the village schools. 5. Teachers of new religious interpretations who ar-

rive from abroad should immediately be sent back.

Here again, we would find the traditionalists in agreement. Indeed, the traditionalists had very much earlier anticipated this problem in opposing the appointment of pietist teacher Tobias Voth in the Molotschna in the 1820s. P.M. Friesen would also have been in agreement that foreign influence contributed much to the formation of the Brüdergemeinde. Curiously, these important conclusions have escaped the commentary of Toews.

The documents presented in this book are of value in understanding the emergence of the Brethren and in understanding the Russian Mennonite community of the 1850s. Had the material of this book been translated, edited and commented upon by a non-Brethren, a different perspective from that presented here would likely have prevailed.

Book review by Henry Schapansky, 108-5020 Riverbend Road, Edmonton, Alberta, T6H 5J8.

Harry Loewen, editor, *Shepherds, Servants and Prophets. Leadership among the Russian Mennonites (ca. 1880-1960)* (Pandora Press and Herald Press, 2003), 446 pages.

What are the qualities of leadership nurtured by and for a closed ethnic-religious community such as the Russian Mennonites?

How does a closed community obtain leaders who can lead it into Christian interaction with its host society?

How do leaders transpose their leadership into a new context created by revolution or emigration?

These are some of the questions which arise upon reading this collection of short and interesting biographies of Russian Mennonite leaders in the period 1880-1960.

The most common feature of the leaders depicted here seems to be that their lives spanned the Russian Revolution after which they continued or launched their leadership under drastically changed conditions. The exceptions are two leaders who are famous among Russian Mennonites for their work as historians: P.M. Friesen (d. 1914 in Russia) and C. H. Wedel (d. 1910 in USA).

The dispersion of the Mennonites from and within Russia is partially reflected in the dispersion of the 22 leaders who lived into the 1920s: three remained in the Soviet Union, eight migrated to Canada, five to Germany, four to the USA, and two alternated their abode between Germany and Canada. But why are no leaders who immigrated to South America included? Perhaps the profile of such leaders could be raised in some way by our co-religionists in the South.

The only church leader depicted here who lived out his life in the Soviet Union is David H. Epp. After establishing his reputation as a minister, publisher and historian in the pre-revolution era, David H. Epp became the last elder of the Chortitza congregation. Epp and most of the other leaders portrayed in this volume are inspiring models for combining high competence in various vocations with a deep faith in God and devoted service to the church.

Some persons are included in this volume not because they were leaders within the religiously-defined Mennonite community but because they represent those who rejected the Mennonite faith

and church and adopted Communist ideology and then emerged as prominent Soviet German writers (David Johann Penner and David Schellenberg). While they share most of the external factors in their biographies with their peers who devoted themselves to the Mennonite church, their views provide an alternative perspective on Russian Mennonite life.

The biography which perplexes most is that of Walter Quiring. His associations and actions within the Third Reich were and are still controversial and troubling. That the Mennonite community in Canada accorded him influence through his articles and books and then placed him into position of leadership, namely as editor of *Der Bote*, says something about our view of leadership and political tolerance which bears further reflection.

One could point to other omissions if this collection was intended to be fully representative of the pantheon of Russian Mennonite leaders in this era. The pivotal role of the Russian Revolution in this collection of biographies might explain why no persons from the more traditional Mennonite groups who emigrated from Russia in the 1870s are included.

Other notable omissions from the religious life of the Russian Mennonites would be Jacob J. Thiessen, who dominated the Conference of Mennonites in Canada after emerging as a leader in the immigration of the 1920s, and Heinrich Voth, who ministered to the widely scattered "kirchliche" Mennonites struggling to re-establish their spiritual and congregational lives in the post-World War period. Fortunately we have fine book-length biographies of these people-shaping leaders by Helmut Harder and by Herman Heidebrecht, respectively.

Reading these biographies one is struck by the many moves made by these leaders – with their families to new settlements, to schools, seminaries and universities in Russia and beyond, to teaching positions or congregational leadership in the widely dispersed Mennonite settlements; to exile and prison camps in the GULAG Archipelago and in emigration.

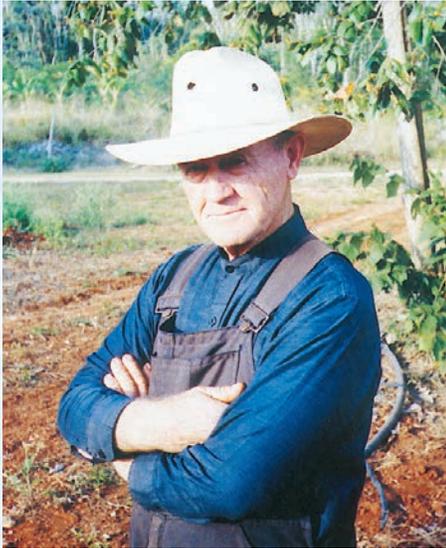
Finally, one could also ask about and lament the many unnamed potential and emerging leaders whose gifts and opportunities for leadership in the service of their people, perished in the innumerable personal tragedies and the overwhelming destruction of the Mennonite community but also of Russian civil society.

Harry Loewen, the compiler and editor of this collection, provides a helpful introduction to the background and factors which shaped Russian Mennonite leadership in this era. We should be grateful to him and the eighteen writers of the individual biographies for recording and interpreting the lives of a representative set of leaders in our history. They give us inspiring vignettes and episodes as well as sobering ones. The amazing fact is that God has worked in and through these gifted though flawed individuals for the benefit of us, their descendants. Will we learn from them and carry the light they passed on to us further to our neighbors across the street and around the world?

Reviewed by Peter H. Rempel, Mission Facilitator, Mennonite Church Canada, Winnipeg, Manitoba, July 29, 2003, as published in *Der Bote*, Sept. 10, 2003, pages 28-29. Revised September 17, 2003.

Campeche: Old Colonists in the Land of the Maya

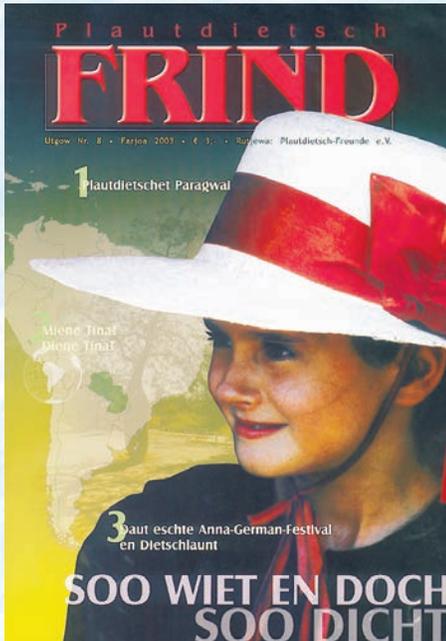
Since 1982 some 6,000 Old Colonist and other conservative Mennonites have settled in the Campeche region of the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico, faithful to their vision of living separate from the world and the “old” New Testament tradition of following Jesus. In the face of much adversity and travail they have established a new Homeland for a pilgrim people (see pages 101-105 for the story).



Prediger Ohm Isaak Fehr, Neuendorf, No. 4, El Temporal Colony, Campeche. Old Colonists have been blessed with devoted and consecrated Christian leaders in the tradition of their Flemish-Anabaptist forebears of Reformation times. Photo - February, 2003.



School girls in Grunthal, No. 3, El Temporal, Campeche, Mexico with teacher Peter Loewen, rear. A sound Christian education and spiritual formation in the home and community have always been central in Old Colonist faith and culture. Photo - February, 2003.



The smiling face of an Old Colonist girl framed by a map of South America speaks for the contented lifestyle and Christo-centric culture of the conservative Mennonites. The cover of Utgow Nr. 9 of Frind features the Plautdietsch world of Paraguay (see page 63).



The farmyard of Johan Reimer, No. 1, Rosenfeld, El Temporal, Campeche, Mexico. Hurricane Isadore dumped more than a meter of water onto this yard, and the Reimers had to seek refuge with their children Jakob Bueckerts in Grunthal, No. 3. Photo - February, 2003.

