

Preservings

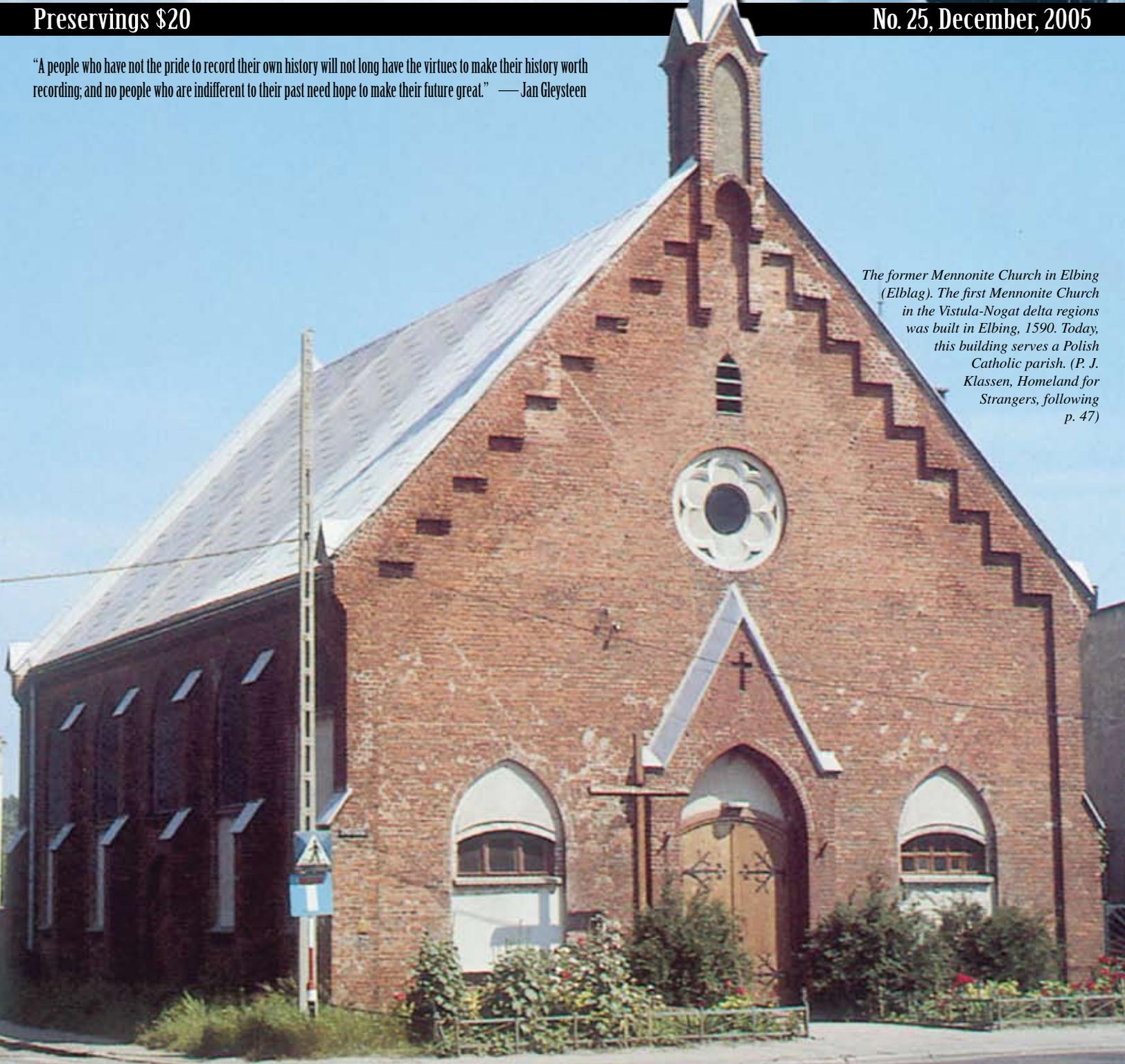
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Preservings \$20

No. 25, December, 2005

"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 former Mennonite Church in Elbing (Elblag). The first Mennonite Church in the Vistula-Nogat delta regions was built in Elbing, 1590. Today, this building serves a Polish Catholic parish. (P. J. Klassen, Homeland for Strangers, following p. 47)



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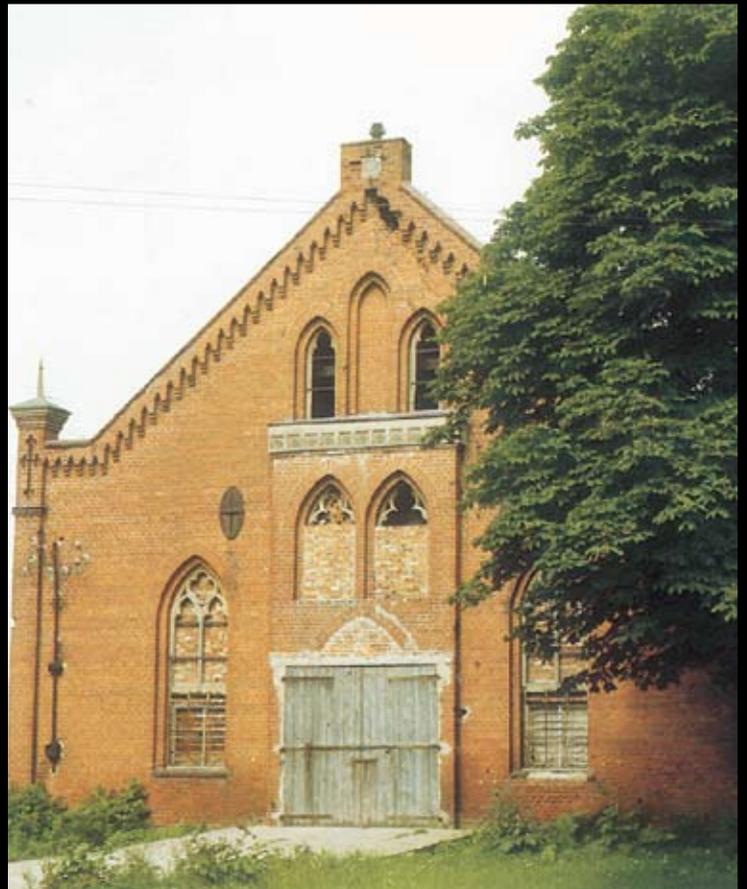


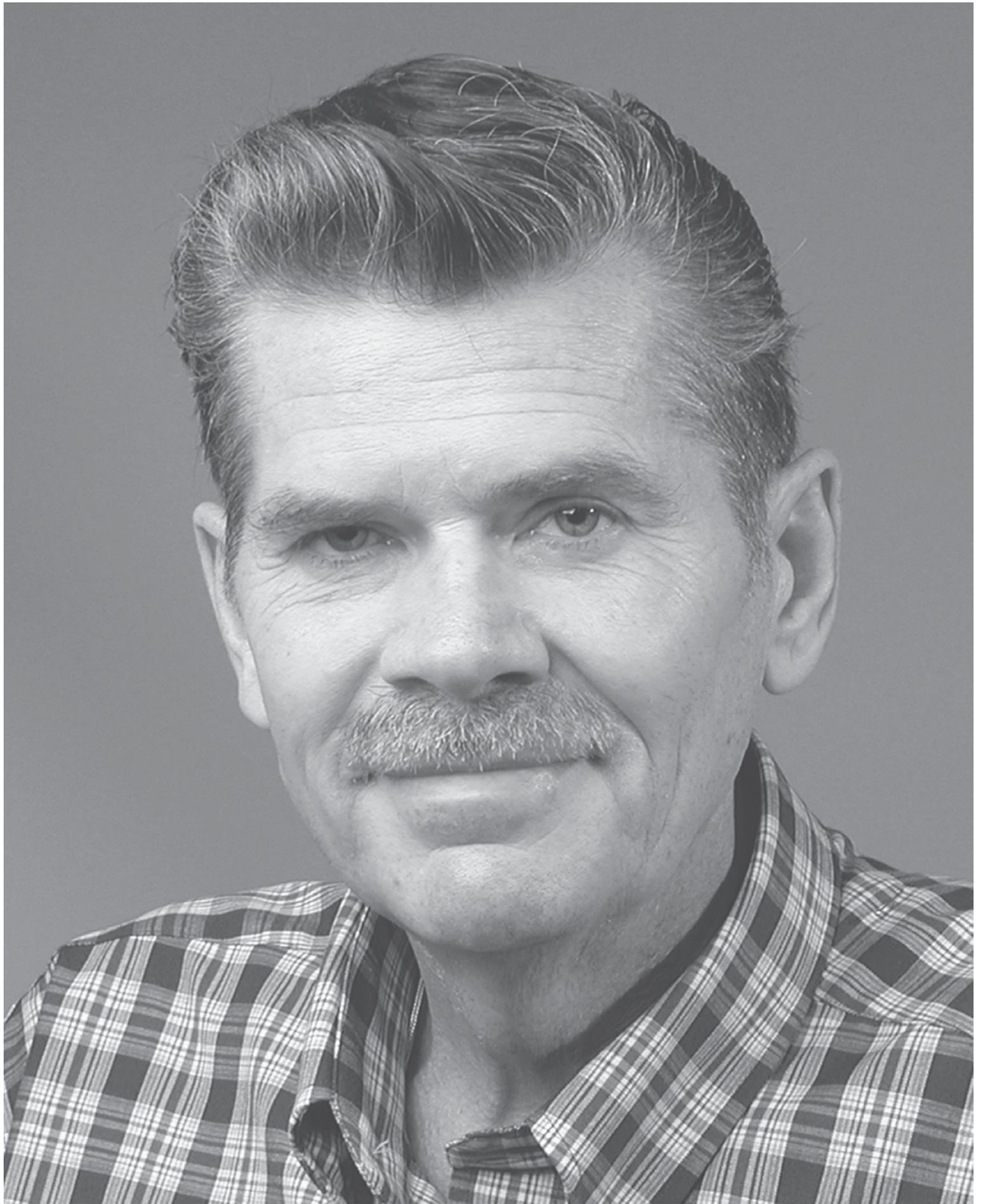
Top left: The former United Flemish and Frisian Mennonite Church in Danzig (Gdansk). Today, a Pentecostal congregation worships there. (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, following p. 47)

Bottom left: In Preussisch-Rosengart (Rozgart) this former Mennonite church building now serves a Catholic parish. (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, following p. 47)

Top right: A local Catholic parish uses the former Mennonite church in Montau (Matawy). (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, following p. 47)

Bottom right: In Thiensdorf (Jezioro) the building used by a former Mennonite congregation is now a storage building. (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, following p. 47)





Delbert F. Plett, Q.C. 1948-2004

Preservings 2005 - Table of Contents

John J. Friesen, Leonard Doell, co-editors

A year ago we were all saddened when Delbert Plett died. He had filled a large role in researching the history of conservative Mennonites, and advocating that they be given respect and recognition. Would this work continue?

A number of years ago, Delbert established the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., and named its first members. He willed the bulk of his estate to this Foundation, and gave it the mandate to continue his life work. Since Delbert had been providing the resources to publish the *Preservings*, the Flemish Mennonite Historical Society offered to transfer responsibility for the journal to the Foundation. The Foundation appointed Leonard Doell from Aberdeen, Saskatchewan, and me, to co-edit the *Preservings*.

In the last months of his life Delbert planned much the content of the 2005 issue, and so it fell to us to bring the issue to completion. The Foundation plans to continue publishing the *Preservings*. We as editors are working on the subsequent issues.

This issue includes tributes to Delbert Plett. Most were written at the occasion of his funeral, and reflect the emotion and sense of loss at that event. After an introduction to the mission and goals of the Plett Foundation, a number of articles by Delbert Plett are included. Written during the final months of his life, they express in his straightforward, bold, and sometimes sharp style, some of the main themes and concerns that consumed his life. As such they function like editorials in which he provides admonition and advice to people about whom he cared deeply.

The feature articles reflect Delbert's growing interest in recent years to examine the historical background to the present conservative Mennonite communities. The articles are divided into two categories: those dealing with Mennonite life in the Netherlands, and those focusing on Poland and Prussia. Both areas have been largely unknown within Mennonite circles in North America. Even less is known of the role and contribution of conservative Mennonites in those regions, since most histories have focused on the more liberal leaders and groups. These very fine articles provide a long-overdue corrective to this neglected history.

The biographies, as usual, provide unique and personal windows into the larger Mennonite story. A second set of articles are designed to present issues from new perspectives.

After a few items about news, material culture, and book reviews, the issue concludes with a tribute to Adina Reger. Delbert and Adina cooperated in the compiling of *Diese Steine*, a book about Russian Mennonite history. Considered by Delbert as his most important publication, he distributed almost 10,000 copies in Europe and Latin America, most of them free of charge. It is ironic, and sad, that Adina died almost exactly a year after Delbert's death.

Preparing this issue has been a real privilege. I have been impressed again with the monumental amount of work that Delbert Plett did in preparing the *Preservings*, and the other publications he produced. I have also come to appreciate even more his methodology. Delbert's aim was not only to inform, it was to change minds - or to use a contemporary expression - to effect paradigm shifts. He believed passionately that Mennonites have a rich heritage, and strove mightily to have people catch that vision.

— John J. Friesen, co-editor

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Preservings, a journal of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc., is published annually. Co-editors are John J. Friesen, 1.204.487.3300, jfriesen@cmu.ca, and Leonard Doell, 1.306.665.2555, ldoell@mccs.org. The annual subscription fee is \$20.00, and should be made out to the D. F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, and mailed to Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba, R5G 1N5. Reader responses, critical or otherwise, are welcome. Please send manuscripts, articles, and/or photographs to 500 Shaftesbury, Blvd., Winnipeg, MB, R3P 2N2. Our mission is to inform our readers about Mennonite history, and in particular to promote a respectful understanding and appreciation of the contribution made by the so-called conservatives. Copyright remains with the writers and artists.

Tributes

Obituary - Delbert Plett

Delbert was born March 6, 1948 in Steinbach, Man. He grew up on the "Platthof" in the Blumenort district and enjoyed a happy and secure childhood. He attended school in Blumenort, Man., enjoying his studies, but also frequently getting into mischief. As a teenager he helped his Dad on the farm and in the family's bush camps. At 16 he left home to work in construction camps in Saskatchewan and Northern Ontario. He began his university studies in 1968 and graduated from the University of Manitoba with a law degree in 1972.

Delbert was baptized upon confession of his faith in Jesus Christ on June 7, 1964 in the Ridge-wood Evangelical Mennonite Church. In 1975 he married Doreen Thomson of Winnipeg. On December 1, 1985 they joined the Steinbach Mennonite Church. To his lasting regret, the marriage eventually failed and ended in divorce in 1998.

In 1973, Delbert started his own law firm and in 1975 joined with Ernest R. Goossen, to form Plett, Goossen & Associates. Delbert continued to practice with various associates until this year. In February 2004, Delbert was diagnosed with terminal colon cancer and consequently, on June 1, retired from his law practice. He enjoyed his practice immensely, meeting and serving clients up to his very last day at the office, March 12, 2004.

Delbert had a zest for business, and land development in particular. Over the years he was involved in various development projects in and around Steinbach, Mitchell, Blumenort, and La Broquerie. His "farm" in the Friedensfeld area gave him special enjoyment as he would spend countless hours wandering the fields in deep contemplation over the mysteries of life.

Delbert served his community and province by sitting on various committees and boards. He

was honored to be appointed "Queen's Counsel" by the Government of Canada in 1992.

Having a passion for history since grade 9, Delbert turned to the study of his own roots and heritage in about 1978. He studied the Mennonites who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870's, as well as their history in Russia, Polish-Prussia and Flanders. In 1995 he organized the first of five Mennonite heritage tours, retracing the steps of Mennonite ancestors in Europe. In early June, 2004 Delbert was privileged to lead this tour one last time and to participate in the Bicentennial celebrations of the Molotschna Colony (1804-2004).

Delbert wrote and compiled 14 books on conservative Mennonites and published as many by other authors. In 1988 he organized the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society and oversaw its operations until 2003, when the name was changed to Flemish Mennonite Historical Society Inc.

Delbert had been the editor of the history magazine, *Preservings*, since 1995. In 2001 he and Adina Reger co-authored, *Diese Steine*, a popular history of the Russian Mennonites. This book became his defining work, of which he was very proud.

Above all, Delbert had a dream of a Mennonite people projecting a united testimony of peace in a world of violence. His dying wish was to see the Mennonite people all over the world united and working shoulder to shoulder as one brotherhood.

Delbert F. Plett Q.C. passed away peacefully after a battle with liver cancer on Thursday, Nov. 4, 2004 at Bethesda Hospital in Steinbach, at the age of 56 years. Since Delbert left no immediate family, he has left the bulk of his estate to the "D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc.," meant

to foster and encourage research and writing about the conservative and traditional Mennonites.

Delbert's siblings extend their heartfelt thanks for the overwhelming prayer support, love and kindness which he experienced from his many friends during his illness. A special thank-you to Dr. Kaethler for his extraordinary care of our brother, medically, spiritually, and for "taking him on"! Delbert's words, "I especially want to thank Mr. Peter K. Reimer in being my constant companion and angel of mercy during my time of sickness." Thank you, Mr. Reimer.

Family of Delbert F. Plett.

Predeceased by:

Grandparents: Martin K. Friesen (1881-1976) and Katharina K. Plett (1889-1971); Henry E. Plett (1870-1953) and Elisabeth F. Reimer (1870-1947).

Parents: Jacob R. Plett (1908-1969) and Gertrude P. Friesen (1913-1994).

Sister: Clara F. Doerksen (1933-2001).

Survived by:

Brother-in-law: Gerry Doerksen.

Nieces and Nephews: Juanita P. Doerksen, Mimosa Koop, Garth P. Doerksen, Keith P. Doerksen.

Sister: Kathy, Brother-in-law: Harry Peters.

Niece and Nephew: Roberta Loughrin, Todd P. Peters.

Brother: Norman, Sister-in-law: Heidi (nee Thoms)

Nephews: Ian T. Plett, Lennie T. Plett, Clinton T. Plett.

Brother: Nathaniel, Sister-in-law: Lucille (nee Gautron).

Nephew: Jason Plett.

Meditation at Delbert Plett's Funeral

Wednesday, November 10, 2004, Blumenort EMC Church
Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg

In John 15, Christ bids his followers to "remain in me as I in you; as a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. I am the vine, you are the branches." In Matthew 5, Christ outlines a series of blessings: "3" Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth... Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God... Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." Who are "branches of the true vine," who are the "meek, the pure in heart?" They are the Children of God. They are our parents, grandparents and great grandparents. Christ had broken the power of evil on the cross, had died for the sins of the world, and thus with assurance they knew they could be followers of Christ. They

could know a life of divine love and mercy.

Earlier this year and shortly after learning that his cancer had metastasized to his liver, Delbert called me over to his house and asked me to speak at his funeral. His instruction was clear: don't praise me, but tell the people about the vision that propelled my writing. (If I praise Delbert too much we'll let him chide me when we meet again). Just why he went to such extraordinary lengths, spent so much energy, devoted so many resources, to publishing so many books, was a mystery to many people. His answer always was simple: to tell about the faith of our ancestors, our grandparents, those Mennonites and their descendants who came to the southern plains of Manitoba in the 1870s.

Today I want to offer a description of these people as Delbert told it to us. They were: first, followers of Christ; second, intense and firm believers in God's guidance; third, humble and meek, the quiet in the land; fourth, ordinary 'flesh and blood' humans with a zest for life; fifth, people with a strong sense of belonging.

As followers of Christ, as *Nachfolger Christi*, these people were pilgrims in this world. They had come to Manitoba in the 1870s because of their simple, intense commitment to follow the way of Christ, to "be part of the vine," "to remain in Christ." As followers of Christ many also departed, leaving for Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s and 1940s where they sought to rebuild their communities of faith. And as followers of



Delbert Plett in the Ukraine, 1995. (D. Plett collection)

Christ, they were relentless in their pursuit of peace. They would not only resist the vacuous lures of this world. They would fight for the Kingdom of God, they would take on the *Kampf um die Gemeinde*. To be a follower meant to take a stand, to embrace costly discipleship.

In the summer of 1980 Delbert, a successful young lawyer of 32, having ridden the heady real estate market of the 1970s, flattered me, a rookie schoolteacher, by inviting me into his office at the old Goossen-Plett law building at the far end of Steinbach's main street. He led the way into his vault and there pulled out the old Gothic handwritten manuscript of Bishop Peter Toews. It was at least 100 years old and told the story of how back in 1812 Delbert's great-great-grandfather, Rev. Klaas Reimer, had led a spiritual renewal movement in Russia. In this old writing, which became the foundational document in Delbert's seven books on the Kleine Gemeinde, Reimer had stood up to his bishop by insisting that the people of God must be true followers of Christ. They could not support a war between Russia and France, even if it was only the pledge of a horse or a wagon or a bag of wheat, and even if it seemed a "just war". Nor could the nonresistant follower of Christ embrace punitive violence on the colony itself; how could so-called Mennonite authorities use the whip against fellow Mennonites to extract unpaid taxes or punish young vandals?

Klaas Reimer's reading

of Menno Simons' 1539 instruction was clear: "our weapons are not weapons with which cities and countries may be destroyed, walls and gates broken down and human blood shed in torrents like water. But they are weapons with which the spiritual kingdom of the devil is destroyed and the wicked principle in man's soul is broken down, flinty hearts broken, hearts that have never been sprinkled with the heavenly dew of the Holy Word....Christ is our fortress; patience our weapon of defence, the Word of God our sword and our victory a courageous firm, unfeigned faith in Jesus Christ. And iron and metal spears and sword we leave to those who, alas regard human blood and swine's blood about alike. He that is wise let him judge what I mean?"

This commitment to follow Christ literally led to the founding of the Kleine Gemeinde. They had rediscovered, as Delbert believed, the "Anabaptist Vision," the insight of the Mennonite founders almost 400 years earlier, that "faith" in Christ could not be divorced from "following Christ." To be a true Christian was to accept the teaching of Christ that religion was irrevocably linked to peace, community and love.

This same commitment to "follow Christ" led Bishop Johann Wiebe to Canada in the 1870s. And for me the most powerful chapter in Delbert's *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada* is the one depicting the life of this envisioned and stubborn follower of Christ. Imagine the newly-arrived Bishop Johann Wiebe standing on the banks of the Red River in Manitoba in 1875, looking westward, anticipating the settlement in the West Reserve. This land of Canada, he declared to his Old Colony church, was one of opportunity. Waving fields of full-headed wheat would come for sure, but more importantly in this land they would follow the way of Christ. Here in Manitoba the church congregation and not the state would teach the children; here the followers of Christ would alone determine their response to threats of war. For Johann Wiebe, parting from loved ones in Russia had been a bitter and tearful event; but seeing his co-religionists stay in Russia and conform to liberal lifestyles and compromise

their strictly interpreted biblical nonresistance was even more difficult. In letters written that first fall, Wiebe seemed exacerbated that he could not make the case to those back in Russia person: "if only I could once again come into your midst, I would talk until I was satisfied." Then, unable to be there in person, Wiebe penned a sermon of authority and compassion.

Listen to excerpts: "walk the true path of Christ...direct[ing] us heavenward...walk and go with striving and firm resolution....[W]e have been promised...full religious freedom in this land....[W]e [will] have no battles to conduct here....[W]e have only one [concern] which we must earnestly [pursue]...to love God above all else...The [church] which is founded upon a true, voluntary discipleship of Christ," the one of which the "Lord says, upon this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it....Oh my beloved, everyone!, examine yourselves....together with the congregation, [we must] promise him obedience and faithfulness for [our] entire....lives, yes, to be true disciples of Christ."... John 14....'if you love me keep my commandments' and..."He that...keeps them, he it is that loves me'....[W]ith earnestness of will, seek to emulate the life of Christ and to walk in his footsteps."

A second feature of the people in Delbert's books was their intense and simple faith. Like the writer in Psalm 46, their world might have been one in turmoil, military service threatened, seas "roared and foamed," nations vied for supremacy. Yet, they had a faith that anchored their very life. God was "their refuge and strength," he was their "river...of joy," he "was in the city," he would "make...wars cease, he [would] break...the bow...snap...the spear." And how could this God be known? Simply: "be still and know that I am God." The stories of stubborn, firm belief in God's providence fill, indeed overflow, Delbert's writings.

One of my favourites is the story of great-great-grandmother Elisabeth Reimer of Blumenort who at a family gathering in 1875 heard her son Klaas, Steinbach's leading merchant, and son-in-law Abraham Friesen, Steinbach's confident windmill owner, talk about leaving frigid, grasshopper-prone Manitoba. They would lead the clan south to the rich soils and temperate climate of Nebraska. It seems as if the two businessmen had considered all details, except the force of their mother. Elisabeth was the matriarch of the clan and she had the final say. Delbert thought that her 200 pound body secured her authority or perhaps it was the fact Elisabeth was the main breadwinner; her husband, as Bishop David P. Reimer of this congregation once put it, was simply too intellectual to "end up on a green twig."



Delbert Plett and his family, Easter 1995. l-r: Harry, Clara, Doreen, Kathy, Norman, Delbert, Nathaniel, and Heidi. (D. Plett collection)

Perhaps it was a force built on her energy. Elisabeth, as described by Delbert in the *Preservings*, was “a woman of incredible energy, busy from dusk till dawn, traveling from village to village...helping with birth and dying....nurturing her immediate family whom she gathered about herself...like a clucking brood hen.” As I see it, her force came from her simple, stubborn faith. As well-heeled sons Klaas and Abram made their plans on that Sunday afternoon, Elisabeth interjected, standing in their path, with nothing more than a simple rebuke: “God has led us to this land, and in this land we will serve Him.” There would be no moving south and hence Steinbach flourished, and as Delbert reminded his readers, the Reimers of Steinbach became national leaders, leading businesspeople, even celebrated authors.

If these people knew where they stood in their faith, they were nonetheless the quiet in the land. They might be maligned, but they would not defend themselves. And here I will make a digression and indeed praise Delbert. I always saw Delbert not only as historian, but indeed as lawyer. Except this lawyer was less interested in real estate and corporate law than in seeking justice in a virtual courtroom. How else could one understand Delbert’s single-mindedness, his relentlessness? In his writing Delbert was the “good lawyer”, the one offering a service known in the profession as *pro bono*, service for free. He granted that service to the ‘quiet in the land’, the conservatives who refused to defend themselves and whose simple discipleship we moderns found so hard to appreciate. And so Delbert stepped in, putting their story to a jury of skeptical history readers. Delbert had his critics for sure, suggesting that he saw issues in terms that were far too “black and white,” much too “cut and dried”, that he lacked objectivity. But his defense of his agenda never wavered; he stayed on message. These people, numbering in the hundreds of thousands, spread from central Nova Scotia through southern fields of Ontario and Manitoba, to northern Alberta, from Manitoba’s Interlake to the mountain valleys of Mexico, the jungles of Belize, the hot bush lands of Paraguay and Bolivia, must have their defense. If folks only knew their acts of love and kindness, the pains they went to build communities of hope and equality, the fear they had of worldly encroachment, their commitment to “battle for the kingdom of God,” their *Kampf um die Gemeinde*, they would earn a broader respect. Unfortunately the prosecutors in the case had it wrong: duped by modern values of quick and emotion-ridden gratification, they used their education and worldly wisdom to thwart the



The lawyers and staff of Plett, Goossen & Associates. Back row, l-r: Madrece Friesen, Ella Duncan, Terry Loewen LL.B., Karen Dyck LL.B., Delbert Plett LL.B., Q.C., Mavis Plett. Front row, l-r: Marisa Wiebe, Naomi Doerksen, Randy Brandt LL.B., Candice Kihn, and Kim Kroeker. (D. Plett collection)



Delbert Plett with a tour group posing under the great oak tree, Chortitza, Ukraine, 1995. (D. Plett collection)

traditional ways of the ‘old order’. The argument of the defense was simple: observe their quiet lives within the annals of history, know their suffering and self-denial, see their 500 year-old tradition, rooted in sixteenth century Flanders. But then recognizing their quiet faith, build bridges over a chasm of misunderstanding. They may be the ‘quiet in the land,’ but they are not void of godly faith.

Fourth, the people in Delbert’s many writings were a people who belonged; they were all connected. They all lived in families and indeed had well defined slots in huge clans. Delbert’s amazing knowledge of genealogy will be remembered by everyone. His own books were always impeccably and laboriously indexed; no one was left loose and undefined. Delbert took special delight in providing these links to unsuspecting folks: suddenly university professors and archivists who knew each other professionally were linked by kin. I was told that I, a Blumenort farm boy, was a fourth cousin through Deacon Isaak Loewen to Sylvia, Calgary author Ted Regher’s wife, to Ken Reddig Manitoba archivist with Mennonite Brethren, Kansas roots, to Harry Loewen

my predecessor at the University of Winnipeg (except not through the Loewens but the Thielmanns, that is Mrs. Thielmann who was a Loewen), to Mary Ann my wife, a Steinbach main street Loewen, and, of course, to Delbert, grandson of Rev. Cornelius Loewen Plett. Perhaps because he had no children of his own, the Mennonite family became his clan and he the facilitator of those seeking their place in the family tree.

But the enterprise was more than showing how people were connected. It was to show that they were connected to real ‘flesh and blood’ humans. In his most recent book, Delbert returned to the subject of his very first, the Plett family. In *Johann Plett: A Mennonite Family Saga* readers are introduced to a clan divided by migration; some came from Russia in the 1870s, others remained to face the horror of revolution, collectivization, successive wars, and then eventual exile to Siberia. Within the pages of this vast book are hundreds of people who come alive and who offer their testimonies of faith. Consider how the many descendants of David L. Plett, the great great grandfather of many members of this congregation, are strengthened in this sense of belonging. Many already knew that grandfather David had been a successful farmer in the Blumenhof district, owner of a massive Case steamer, that he had lived to be a really old man, that as a member of the Kleine Gemeinde he no doubt

was a conservative. But tucked away on pages 682 and 683 we see a David who was a caring, thinking “flesh and blood” human being. He felt deeply for his bed-ridden daughter Gertrude, ill from a kidney disease, operated on at Rochester clinic in 1924, a “difficult summer” in which she “had much to endure.” He painfully missed his brother Jacob when he died on November 4, 1934: “it still always feels so lonely, when one is there and looking around, where the brother always has been, and now is gone forever,” wrote grandfather David. In 1932 David showed his conservative nature when he balked at what he saw as fancy, disingenuous harmony singing, the very kind of singing we enjoyed in this church as teenagers under the choir master Cornie Janzen. But David was not only reactionary. His voice is almost persuasive: “I cannot understand that we really need it. If we wish to praise the Lord in simplicity [we should do so] in our living and [with] spiritual songs in our heart, for I believe the Lord will look more into our hearts, than at our elaborate, [rehearsed] singing.” On that score who can disagree? But whether we agree or not is not the point: here was a person with feeling,

a person of principle, and a person who gave us a sense of history, of place and destiny.

The 'flesh and blood' humans in Delbert's books are not only caring and thinking. They are also hearty, earthy, farm folk of the Low German culture. Delbert was an historian with an ear to the ground, an eye for the everyday, a nose for the sensual. He wrote "social history," the life stories of ordinary folks, of our grandfathers and grandmothers. Like Delbert, one sensed that they knew whose accomplishments were worthy and whose were merely boasts. These people knew pedigree; they had those they respected and those they dismissed. They were also people of the pen: young men keeping the diaries, young women writing heart-felt poetry, elderly grandfathers copying 'morality literature.' They were people who loved to work with their hands and express their artistic senses. Notice their fine pottery, exquisite calligraphy, tender wood carving, solid furniture, beautiful *Frakturmalen*, and their colourful hand-drawn paper-cut art. Listen to their Low German stories and know them as folks with an appreciation for the ironic, people who reveled in "earthy folklore and ribald humour."

There are numerous stories indeed, too colourful to repeat in a service such as this. But there is one that Delbert enjoyed telling me, one no

doubt originating with the Plett clan at Pattehof, a half mile south of here, less than a mile from our historic Loewen farm. In this story Delbert's grandfather, big muscular, burley Heinrich E. Plett works alongside my grandfather, the small-statured, fine-boned Isaac P. Loewen. As young men, the two neighbours have been assigned the digging of a grave. Together they begin the task. After only five or so minutes of deep digging, strong-as-an-ox Heinrich turns to look "up" at little Isaac still seemingly just scratching the surface on his side of the grave. What did Heinrich say – hurry up Isaac, dig, dig! No, Heinrich said slowly, "seems as if the ground is much harder on your side of the grave, why don't we change places." The two men did just that and after another five minutes, Heinrich again said to Isaac, "seems as if the ground of your side of the grave is much harder. Why don't we change places?" Story has it that burley Heinrich made this generous offer to my grandfather a number of times, thus ensuring that Isaac kept his pride and that the grave was ultimately dug.

Of course these stories of the everyday often had a moral. My own moralizing has it that Delbert was like his grandfather Heinrich. He would publish relentlessly, expending energy beyond description, but as hundreds of local

writers, lay historians and family tree buffs will testify, Delbert was especially skilled in helping (some might say cajoling and manipulating) other historians to write their own side of the story of faithfulness. He would make it seem as if it was their idea, he would offer them the richest of historic materials and then allow them to pen their name to the story.

Delbert's love for the people of God cannot be dismissed. I know he was moved by their commitment to follow Christ daily, by their rock-firm faith in God, their quiet and meek hearts, their sense of belonging, and their earthy everyday enjoyment of the ironic. They left a powerful testimony. As Delbert shared on numerous occasions, perhaps his faith had been weakened in his early years as a "rich, young lawyer." What brought him back to the faith, what led him to meditate on God's word, what sent him to the fields to contemplate God's mercies, was the testimony of these our ancestors; simple followers of Christ. At the end of his life Delbert could attest that "things were right between him and God." He had come to know a deeper side to life. The path was clear. It was quiet obedience. It was coming to be still and knowing that a merciful God calls his children to his side to live as branches of the true vine.

Meditation at Delbert Plett's viewing

November 9, 2004, Blumenort EMC Church
Abe Rempel, minister, Winkler Manitoba

Today we have come together for a solemn occasion. We are sorrowing for the loss of a dear friend, of a person who had a love for church history, who spent countless ours in writing and setting up articles and publishing the *Preservings*, and published books like *Diese Steine*, and many others. He will be remembered for many years for his dedicated work to this cause.

He had a special place in his heart for the conservative people especially the Old Colony in Canada, Mexico, etc. He and I had many discussions about church history and other issues. But that has now all come to an abrupt end. He is gone now, but he will be remembered in history for the work he has done, and for the time and money he contributed toward this course.

Today we ask ourselves, why did he have to pass on so soon? He was only 56 years old. Why was his life so short? But by God there is a time to be born, and a time to die. And as Job writes, "For everyone of us, our days are determined and we will not pass that time." Delbert's life was complete at 56, and his work was to be terminated at that time. We would probably think there was so much more that he could have done in another 25 years or so, but his life as determined by God was complete now. And God's thoughts and ways are different than our ways. In Isaiah 55 the Lord says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. It has been the will of the Lord that he should leave us at this time, and we must now accept the fact,

that he will not be with us any more, even though he will be missed by many. He will now rest until that day of resurrection, when all the dead shall rise again.

John 5:28 tells us "Marvel not, at this for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice." Delbert will not stay in the grave, he shall rise again and body and soul shall be re-united. Not this body, but a body incorruptible. I Corinthians 15:42 says, "So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption."

Even though Delbert was very sick, especially during the last days, we can say that God granted him a time of preparation for death. He knew that this could be the result of cancer, and he had time to prepare for it.

Delbert had a simple, humble faith in Jesus Christ. And because of this faith, and not of his works, we place our trust and hope that he, through God's grace and mercy will receive a better life after this life. In Thessalonians 4 we read, "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died." With these words we want to comfort ourselves. We sorrow today, but not as such that have no hope as we read in verse 13, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have not hope."

May the Lord grant that even though we mourn this death, we are also reminded that we are all going in the same direction, from life to death. Amen.

Heavenly father, we come to thee in prayer and we pray for comfort in this solemn time. Be with us and comfort our sorrowing hearts, especially those who were close to Delbert. We pray, grant him a heavenly home in eternal glory. Remind us that we all have to leave this earth at one time, and that we are to be ready when the time comes. Be with all those that take part in the funeral tomorrow, and especially with the pastor conducting the service. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.



Norman Plett with the headstone at his brother Delbert's grave, Steinbach.

Tribute to Delbert Plett at the viewing service

Tuesday, November 9, 2004, Blumenort EMC Church

John J. Friesen, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Family, friends and community. We mourn today the loss of someone who died far too young. Delbert Plett was a dear friend. A number of weeks ago, he called and said he was planning his funeral. Would I be willing to make some comments about his work and interests? I was sad to hear him make this request, and wished deeply he could continue to write for many more years. But yes, of course, I would be honoured to be involved as he requested. Little did I realize how soon this day would come.

A week ago, Monday morning, I phoned Delbert. I was going to Steinbach, and asked whether we could meet, maybe even go for lunch. He said his health would not allow him to go out for lunch, but maybe I could come over and he would stir up some soup. Realizing he was weak, I offered to see him in the afternoon, and not during a meal time. When I later came to the door, he had been taken to the hospital.

Delbert and I spoke many times, in person and by phone, about issues related to Mennonite history. Often he asked me to write an article, or a book review, or to share his vision for another book. He would fax the outline, and our discussion ensued. Or he would share an article, and ask for my opinion of the tone and content. More often than not, I replied that I liked what he said, but could he change the tone a little. I thought it would communicate better. He heard me out, but said that with his style he was making a point. His articles indeed were clear and focused. I know many of you have similar stories about phone calls and meetings with Delbert. He had the capacity to work on numerous issues simultaneously, and to connect with many people, all the while keeping up with his law practice and real estate development.

What was dear to Delbert's heart and soul? What were his interests and contributions? Maybe above all, he gave voice to those who he felt had

become voiceless. He began with his own tradition, the Kleine Gemeinde, which he thought had been treated unfairly by Mennonite historians. He set about to correct that. He published book after book of articles, letters, memoirs, diaries, sermons, family histories, and social histories until the Kleine Gemeinde became the best documented Russian Mennonite group. After he had told the Kleine Gemeinde story, he turned to other groups who he felt had not been given adequate voice: Old Colony, Chortitzer, Sommerfelder, Reinlaender, and Hutterites. He believed passionately that each group's stories needed to be told, its contributions acknowledged, and its vision for being Christian respected.

Delbert had the ability to inspire people, and drew many into writing and research. He helped interest people in their family history, in the history of their church group, and encouraged them to look again at the Anabaptist biblical faith heritage. He wanted his readers to catch a vision - not only learn more about their history. He wanted people to recognize and claim the richness of their own spiritual heritage.

He gave voice to many women. He published articles about women and by women. I remember the series of articles in *Preservings* on burial customs. A whole issue of *Preservings* was devoted to Kleine Gemeinde matriarchs. He had women write about wedding traditions. He was inclusive.

Delbert was generous. He sent his books to many people free of charge. For example, the two recent publications, *Old Colony Mennonites in Canada* and *Diese Steine*, were distributed in large numbers to various communities in Canada, Mexico, and beyond. Often these were gifts, sometimes he asked for donations. Basically, he was interested in getting the message out.

Delbert was a missionary. He had a vision for being Christian, and was tireless in promoting

it. His vision was primarily shaped by Harold S. Bender's Anabaptist Vision, and included a biblical faith built around community, discipleship, and peace.

He was critical of some aspects of the evangelical and pietist movements. His responses to the letters to the editor in the *Preservings* were often biting. And yet, when I spoke to him about this, I also felt a different spirit. He wanted the conservatives' faith and life to be respected as biblical and fully within the Anabaptist Mennonite heritage. He opposed any attempt to narrow the gospel so that it denigrated or excluded the faith of a large portion of the Anabaptist Mennonite family.

Did he have weaknesses? Of course! We all do. He was so consumed with his projects that he had little time for family, social relationships, and church life. There were moments when he lamented this, but he felt the projects were too important to leave undone. About regular church involvement, he said we can't all do everything, and he would leave church work to the rest of us.

I believe Delbert has left a profound legacy - one that has enriched us all, and one that will continue to enrich through his writings. He had a vision for the Christian faith that is biblically based, that is grounded in Christ and expressed in daily living, that is inclusive and respectful of others, and that is non-resistant and does not bow to nationalisms and war.

Menno Simons famous statement sums up Delbert Plett's vision well:

True evangelical faith cannot lie dormant.

It clothes the naked,
It comforts the sorrowful,
It shelters the destitute,
It serves those that harm it,
It builds up that which is wounded.

Delbert, we will miss you. I'd love to have soup with you again.

A Tribute To Delbert Plett

Henry Shapansky, British Columbia

My very dear friend, colleague, and a major Mennonite historian of our time, Delbert Plett, passed away in November, 2004. The immense contribution made by Delbert to Mennonite history, and to Mennonite family history, will, as is so often regrettably the case, be more fully appreciated by future generations than by his contemporaries. He had a complete and accurate overview of the entire history of the Mennonites which gave him the facility of grasping and retaining details of that history that was truly astounding. His published work was astonishingly detailed and accurate, an achievement that will not be surpassed.

A proper tribute to Delbert would, of necessity, involve a severe condemnation of the Mennonite academic world of contemporary North America.

By academic world, I mean those connected to Mennonite institutions purporting to promote cultural, historical or educational endeavours, not necessarily restricted to colleges and the like, supported by or mainly serving the Mennonite community. This academic world has continued in the footsteps of the 19th century historian and educators, such as P.M. Friesen, Franz Isaac, D.H. Epp, producing little work that is new, original or insightful. That this group continues to repeat the myths and judgments of the earlier historians is bad enough, were it not that untruths, misrepresentations, mistranslations, and suppression of historical facts under the auspices of this body are continued to this day. I am reminded of the story of an editor of *Der Bote* who had come across new information and data on the activities of some

Mennonites in Russia during the 1920s. He consulted with an eminent Mennonite historian, who advised the editor to suppress the information on the grounds that currently living family members might be offended.

Why this state of affairs should remain so appears to be somewhat based on economic grounds. Many promoters and financial supporters of such institutions are themselves descendants of the "Progressive/Orloff" school of thought, which includes most of the historians and educators of 19th century Russia, and the Mennonite Brethren in general. The relationship between pietistical movements, such as the Templers and the Brethren, and the desire for and/or acquisition of personal wealth and social status, is an interesting topic in itself, as is the domination of institutions

of higher learning by Templers and Brethren. These topics are dealt with in detail in my soon to be published book.

Economic reasons may also underlie the various mergers of General Conference and Mennonite Brethren institutions. This itself reminds me of the union of the Danzig Flemish and Frisian Gemeinden in 1808 in West Prussia, which also occurred for economic reasons, and ended any relevance of the Danzig city Mennonites in the overall Mennonite world.

That is not to say that works of great insight and importance have not been published in recent times. But they have been produced outside this Mennonite academia, and generally physically far removed from any Mennonite centre. I speak here of J. Urry (New Zealand), D.G. Rempel (California), and J. Staples (New York State). Those works by Mennonites with something original and meaningful to say, have generally been published at the writer's expense. Here I refer to B.H. Unruh, J.J. Hildebrand, and Delbert Plett himself. If Delbert had had to wait for the support of the Mennonite academia, I fear he might never have seen a word in print.

Future generations will remember Delbert as a prolific writer, an editor/publisher, and a warm human being. Among the most remarkable of his writings is his seven volume Kleine Gemeinde (KG) series. This was an outstanding achievement for several reasons. Firstly, it presented a new overview of Mennonite history, with a unified approach based on the fundamentals of the faith. Pietism, in whatever form, was the main manifestation and cause of the erosion of Mennonite beliefs, a theme which he developed at length. This recurrent manifestation is perhaps the most prevalent theme in Mennonite history, realized as the conflicts between Menno Simons and David Joris, the Flemish and the Frisians, the traditionalists and the progressives, the General Conference and the Mennonite Brethren, and the Kanadier and the Russ länder. Although expressed with differing labels, the struggle between these two opposites is essentially the same, but not, unfortunately, perceived as such by most historians. I think for this reason, Delbert began to think more in terms of Flemish, as opposed to KG ideology, and for this reason, went from a more specific to a more general view.

The KG series is remarkable for the profound depth of coverage given to a relatively small but important group in the Mennonite community. Some persons have derided this as too much focus on too small a group. What, however, is often overlooked is the great importance of this group as a paradigm for the other traditionalist groups, which are very large indeed. The KG history speaks for all traditionalist groups, including the Bergthalers, the Sommerfelders, the Reinlanders, and so forth. The KG, while carrying the ideal of no compromise to perhaps an extreme extent, was nevertheless, in my view, only one of the many traditionalist groups. As with conflicts among siblings, more friendliness is sometimes displayed towards outsiders than amongst themselves. In understanding the thoughts and history of the KG, we can better understand Mennonite history in general.

Another reason that the KG series is important is that the detailed history of any well-defined group of people is valuable and worth preserving. Had Delbert not assembled the various documents and shaped these into a coherent whole, much would have been lost or sunk into irrelevance forever. Delbert's own translations are of themselves outstanding, capturing the spirit and essence of the originals. As Delbert once told me, he used the "armchair" approach, that is, he attempted to put himself into the armchair of the person doing the writing. Not all translators, particularly of Mennonite documents, are able to do this.

The inclusion of a great deal of family history in his writing and in the series was yet another perceptive and valuable contribution. For many,



this provided a connection with Mennonite history, and gave an alternative point of interest. That Mennonite history cannot be well studied without reference to individual families and family connections is a point understood by all except some historians. The family is indeed a key factor in Mennonite history. Nor did Delbert neglect to point out the very important role played by women in that history.

Aside from the KG series, Delbert produced many other fine works. Although, even if he had only completed this series, it would have been sufficient to mark Delbert as a leading historian. The *Johann Plett Family Saga* is the best family history that I have read. One does not need to be a family member to appreciate the book. Many of Delbert's *Preservings* articles, particularly in the later issues, are outstanding and insightful.

Delbert's writings may not have been without some shortcomings. His style was sometimes abrasive and vitriolic, sometimes offending some readers. His attacks on the American Fundamentalist Right, while seemingly justified, may have been excessive and may have turned away some of his readers. Some of the photo images presented in *Preservings* too, while eye-catching, may not always have been appropriate. Delbert and I had

several discussions on this aspect of his work. My view was that a more moderate handling of some themes might be better. Delbert argued that getting the reader's attention was paramount, and that any reaction was better than no reaction. I myself have observed that a subtle and modest approach often results in the central point being missed entirely by many readers, for various reasons. Perhaps after all, Delbert was right.

As an editor/publisher, Delbert was again outstanding. *Preservings*, in my opinion, is the best journal on Mennonite history currently being produced. Delbert was able to attract leading scholars in their fields to submit original and fresh pieces, some of which can truly be described as ground-breaking. Nor were these all only historical. The selection of a wide range of pieces was also brilliantly done. For instance, a recent piece on Pope John Paul II, while apparently outside of Mennonite culture or history, nevertheless enables the reader to draw parallels between the Mennonite and Catholic faith, between adherence to the faith and compromise with worldliness (to gain an ephemeral popularity). *Preservings* had something in it for everyone: faith, history, culture, and often, humour. In sheer quantity of large sized pages, quality photographs, and interesting layout, this journal surpassed all others. We will remember too the double issues that were required by the volume of material. All of this was done almost single-handedly by Delbert himself. Some readers have told me they spend weeks going through every article. *Preservings* rendered like journals and publications insipid by comparison.

We remember Delbert as a warm and generous human being. His cheery welcome and friendly tone in discussions, either in person or over the telephone, were always inspiring. He was generous too with his research, as well as making a large financial outlay to provide many readers with useful books at his own cost, his own books included, as well as those of other worthwhile (and out-of-print) authors. His idea was that the history of the Mennonites should be made more available to those still living in the Mennonite tradition, but unable to afford these books.

Delbert had a very positive and forward-looking approach to life and his own historical work. Even when he became aware of a life-threatening illness, he looked forward to the next aspect of his publication efforts, attempting to do as much as he could in the time allotted to him. What could he have yet accomplished had he been given more time!

I was recently working on some aspects of family history that I know would have been of interest to Delbert. It is exactly at times like this that I most miss Delbert, as in past times I would simply talk to him and ask for his advice or comments, and share my enthusiasm. In tribute, therefore to Delbert Plett, I offer two pieces. (Please see "Peter Neufeld" and "A New Plett" in the section under biographies.)

Endnotes

¹ I can substantiate, and have already in part substantiated these remarks in *Preservings* and elsewhere (perhaps with too much subtlety and moderation (?), as some readers seem to have missed this).

D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation

The D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. is a not-for-profit private charity founded in 1996 by the late Delbert F. Plett, Q.C., of Steinbach, Manitoba. It supports and promotes history research projects related to the cultural background, the migration and settlement, and descendant communities of the conservative Mennonites who came to Manitoba from Imperial Russia in the 1870s.

These groups included the Bergthaler (later Sommerfelder, Chortitzer, West Reserve Bergthaler and Saskatchewan Bergthaler), Kleine Gemeinde, Old Colony (or Reinlaender) and other church groups. Today the descendants of these early immigrants to Canada live in Canada (especially in Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta), the United States (especially in Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas), Mexico, Belize, Bolivia, Paraguay and Argentina. They have also divided into numerous church congregations. The Plett Foundation is governed by a Board of

Directors that sets policy and is responsible for the final decisions on grant requests. It meets twice a year to evaluate applications and decide on the grants.

Board Members:

Chair: Royden Loewen,
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Mission Statement

The D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, Inc. believes that a sound knowledge of their history can strengthen the Mennonite people's faith and culture, their church and community, and their sense of peoplehood. It aims to fulfill this vision by offering financial resources and leadership that will enable historical research and aid in the dissemination of historical knowledge.

As the board of the Plett Foundation we wish to nurture meaningful research, encourage new historians, and raise the interest in and passion for historical knowledge. We desire to build understanding and unity among all descendant groups of the 1870s migrants. We especially support a respectful approach to the history of the conservative or so-called old order Dutch-

Russian Mennonites.

Research Themes

The primary areas of interest are the Dutch-Russian immigrants who came to Manitoba in the 1870s, including:

- their historical background in Russia, Poland-Prussia and the Netherlands
- their history in Manitoba and Western Canada

- the history of their descendants spread throughout the Americas

Types of projects or programs that will be considered for funding:

- Publication of books or essays
- Research, including travel expenses, communication, writing materials, document copying, a portion of equipment and research assistants
- Grants that cover modest living costs of principal researchers where necessary
- History conferences or workshops
- Graduate student fellowships
- History teacher training
- Museum exhibits or historical sites
- Media productions, including film, newspaper columns, website and radio productions
- Other projects consistent with our mission

Additional information about the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation, including application deadlines and instructions, is available at www.plettfoundation.org.



Naomi Doerksen, secretary for the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.



The board of the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation. l-r: Kennert Giesbrecht, Steinbach, John J. Friesen, Winnipeg, Abram Rempel, Winkler, Royden Loewen, Steinbach, Ralph Friesen, Nelson, B.C., Leonard Doell, Aberdeen, Saskatchewan.

The Delbert F. Plett Historical Research Foundation Inc. is seeking a part-time Executive Director to help build and manage an innovative history research centre located either in Steinbach, Manitoba or Winnipeg.

- The Executive Director will facilitate and initiate research and publication in the history of the conservative Mennonites who immigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s.

- The Director will manage the Foundation's website, Preservings magazine, investments, office and day-to-day business.

- The Director should be conversant in both English and German, and have training or experience in the craft of historical research.

- This is a salaried position. Applications will be accepted until January 15, 2006 and should be sent to the following address:

D.F. Plett Foundation
Box 1960
Steinbach MB R5G 1N5

Delbert Plett's Final Words

Articles written by him in preparation for this issue.

Religious Predators

The negative and condescending tone established by Redekopp and Sawatzky has been adopted and magnified as a strategy of cultural imperialism by various predators targeting the Old Colony people for conversion to Evangelical religious culture and Calvinistic tradition.

Even more damaging to integrity and truth regarding the story of the Old Colonists are the views of radicalized Evangelicalism being promoted among Russian Mennonites by certain misguided zealots to the present day. In a letter written by Rev. Harold Jantz on January 2, 2002 and informally distributed in Winnipeg, my writings are described as follows: "Plett believes that the Pietist movement - which largely birthed the modern Evangelical movement - is a source of all manner of ill and has brought virtually only harm to Mennonites, while what we now know as the Old Colony Mennonites and the Kleine Gemeinde represent true "evangelical Christianity" and virtually all that is good in Mennonite Christianity. He uses every writing for which he is responsible to drive home this idea..."

religious culture.

As historian Henry Schapansky has convincingly established, the post-Napoleonic War immigrants to Russia, such as the Gnadenfeld Gemeinde, were typically heavily influenced by Separatist-Pietism and did much to spread these false and unbiblical teachings among the Mennonites. In the face of all the facts, Harold Jantz characterizes the Gnadenfeld community as a "...powerhouse of renewal..." choosing to close his eyes to the incredibly destructive impact they had on the traditionalist *Gemeinden* and the debris of family and church divisions invariably left in the wake of such predator religious cultures.

Jantz criticizes me for describing leaders such as Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) as a Moses of the Berghaler people and makes jest of my view that: "Presumably, it was the faithful, true followers of Christ who left for Canada in the 1870s and the ones willing to make compromises who stayed behind." Jantz objects to my references to the conservatives who immigrated to Latin America as "pilgrims" and chastises me for not comparing them with

skills in the language of the countries they've lived in Latin America is so poor that they cannot adequately deal with the society around them and its institutions." This claim is nonsensical! Practically every Old Colonist by now is well versed in Spanish and often may also know English as well as High and Low German and reflecting the tri-lingual discourse which has characterized the Flemish Mennonites since the Reformation (see *Pres.*, No. 21, page 125).

It is a standard strategy of hyper-aggressive cultures to denigrate those whom they seek to dominate. Jantz seemingly manifests the same tactics starting from the premise that "The social problems among the conservative groups are great." Jantz seems to forget that the same problems are rampant among Evangelicals who, according to the Evangelically based Brana Research Group, are not even distinguishable from the general North American population in 70 moral and behavioural categories (*Pres.*, No. 17, page 79).

Jakob Funk, Winnipeg, also uses his calling as an Evangelist to spread similar false views. In a press release entitled "Mexican Mennonite churches in crisis" and widely distributed in the media of assimilated Mennonites, he makes the following untruthful statements: "Weak ethics result in widespread immorality and spiritual confusion...families are in crisis, marriage problems are huge. The most common problems are drugs, alcohol and marital infidelity," (*Pres.*, No. 18, page 39). Although the untruth of his statements have been brought to his attention, Evangelist Funk has not yet publicly apologized nor recognized how harmful the dissemination of such false information can be upon a community often already severely disadvantaged as immigrants.

In reality the vast majority of conservative Mennonites live in contented, functional

"Scofield and his supporters actually believed that the teachings of Christ were not applicable in the present time..."

families manifesting life of daily Christian discipleship and piety in the Flemish monastic tradition. Presumably statements such as those made by Jantz and Funk are intended to feed and nurture the booming cottage industry of those aggressively seeking new converts for Evangelical Fundamentalism among conservative Mennonites and actively disrupting and interfering with the peaceable and biblical functioning of their congregations.

If Jantz and Funk were truly concerned with the social problems among Mennonites, they might well wish to start with those who have become converted to Evangelical religious culture. Divorce rates in Manitoba, for example, far exceed those among Mennonites



Delbert on a visit to Mennonite settlements in Mexico, 1999. (D. Plett collection)

Like P. M. Friesen (see *Pres.*, No. 21, page 94) and to some extent Frank Epp (*Pres.*, No. 15, page 15), Jantz seems to subscribe to a belief that conservative and traditionalists Mennonite life, faith and culture was a corrupted essence, which can only be redeemed by mass conversion to the Evangelical Fundamentalist

the "people like the Claas Epp or Abraham Peters' followers" who trekked to Turkistan in the 1880s to await the coming of Jesus Christ in the east.

Jantz demonstrates a rather simplistic understanding of the situation of the conservative Mennonites in his claim that "Their language

in Latin America and police raids for drugs are an almost daily occurrence in areas of the Province where Mennonites are in the majority, or is this somehow also the fault of the Old Colonists?

Mennonites and Evangelicals

An editorial column in the July 4, 1998, *Globe and Mail* referred to the immense hatred against gays and lesbians spewing forth from the religious right, the so-called Evangelicals. The article brought forth the imagery of promiscuous homosexuals indulging in wanton behaviour noting that the *glossolia* manifestations of charismatics such as the so-called Toronto Revival and/or the Vineyard Movement frequently displayed on National Television, are equally obscene and distasteful in the eyes of the general public.

At the same time, the religious right, often portrayed in the media as a spiritual support group to the ultra right-wing political movement, takes itself extremely seriously, claiming not only to be the exclusive purveyor of truth but also the sole arbiter of salvation, decreeing all others, including other Christians, to be “unsaved” heathen and damned to eternal Hell fire.

Nothing is more fascinating than the study of the origin, evolution and development of religious ideas and cultures. Mennonites have had an ongoing love affair and fascination with the Evangelical movement for the past decades, and prior to that, a flirtation with American Fundamentalism, Revivalism and German Separatist-Pietism, in that order. It is an eye-opener to examine these religious cultures with all their variant subspecies, in an attempt to understand their appeal.

Before going any further, there are always those who say, the critical point is to separate scripture from culture and, therefore, we must abandon the Mennonite faith as it is articulated by culture and not by scripture.

Such a statement is nonsense. No one, not even the Apostles, could or can read the scripture divorced from a historical and/or experiential context. Typically such claims are made by Evangelicals, and what they really mean is, you can only get the “correct” understanding of

“The anti-communal premise of Patrick Friesen’s “Shunning” is only one small drop in this raging storm surge of anti-communitarian thinking.”

scripture by reading it from the perspective of my particular cultural and historical heritage, namely, Calvinist triumphalism.

To say that faith and culture can be separated and experienced on two separate tracks is about as valid as saying that faith and works are separate and divisible entities.

What is it that has attracted so many to the religious cultures of Fundamentalism and

Evangelicalism which are often seen as fanatical by main stream churches such as Catholic, Anglican, United, Orthodox, etc? Certainly Mennonites who have joined and/or adopted the religious language and culture of Evangelicalism tend to share one commonality, a great ignorance both of the faith they have rejected as well as the religion culture and language they adopted.

It is important to distinguish here between “evangelical” as in the sense of a faith articulated by scripture, and “Evangelicalism” as in a particular historical social movement and religious culture which arose out of American Fundamentalism during the 1950s and 60s.

Part of the difference between the two religious cultures is explained by the ways Mennonites and Evangelicals read and inter-

“Calvinist religious ideas dovetailed nicely with the concept of *laissez faire*,...”

pret scripture. So-called Evangelicals trace their interpretation to Calvin in Reformation times where Paul was read as superseding the Gospels. Fundamentalists held to a “flat” Bible where all scripture had equal authority, thus allowing for unlimited proof-texting--decide what you want the Bible to say, and then find a line-up of verses which can be massaged into supporting that view. The decision is made, for example, that the words in the Bible “Thou shalt not kill” cannot be taken literally, and then the Calvinist gurus go to work dreaming up some contrivance to circumvent something inherently foundational to the teachings of Christ.

Mennonites, on the other hand, read the Bible as “progressive revelation”, essentially as documenting the unfolding of history, with the Gospels, and Christ as the focal point. In the case of apparent conflict, the Gospels were accepted as paramount.

The two interpretations have resulted in very different religious cultures. The Pauline interpretation has resulted in a Calvinist triumphalism as reflected in the Scofield Bible which was the “Bible” of the Bible School movement of the 1930s and 40s. As odd as it may seem from today’s more tolerant perspective, Scofield and his supporters actually believed that the teachings of Christ were not applicable in the present time (Scofield called it the “church age”) and that in fact any attempt to practice these teachings was sin, a form of works-righteousness.

Scofield arrived at this startling conclusion by a teaching called “dispensationalism”, the result of which was that the Gospels were dispensed with and only applicable in a future age, after Christ’s Second Coming. Anyone doubting this is referred to the 1967 edition of the Scofield Bible published by Oxford University Press, page 996. When Christ preached (Matthew 4:17) that the “Kingdom of Heaven is at hand”, Scofield explained it by stating

that “The Bible expression ‘at hand’ is never a positive affirmation that the person or thing said to be at hand will immediately appear...” What is most amazing is not that someone would write things like that, after all a crackpot is born everyday, but that so many thousands of Mennonites flocked to these teachings in the 1930 and 40s, as if Scofield had received new tablets of stone on Mount Sinai.

The difference between Evangelical and Mennonite religious culture can also be understood in terms of a communitarian ethos versus individual freedom. In the latter half of the 19th century, the small “l” liberal philosophy of John Stuart Mills and others permeated Western European academia. Although initially an economic teaching, as in the *laissez faire* economy, these ideas were transferred to and applied to other areas of life, including political, religious, etc.

Any emphasis on individual liberties was seen as a positive extension of *laissez faire* and, in the converse, any attempt to promote communitarian values was seen as evil and sinister. Because the individual profit motive was seen to be the best engine to drive the economy, presumably the same concept would be equally valuable in other areas.

This unstated premise of Patrick Friesen’s “Shunning” is only one small drop in this raging storm surge of anti-communitarian thinking which enslaved the English-speaking world in the 19th century. It was certainly a startling concept for students of history, as the expanse

“The two religious cultures are fundamentally and inherently incompatible and in conflict with each other.”

of time has demonstrated over and over that the nations and communities that continued to operate on a communitarian ethos, were the most successful.

The obsession with individual liberties and values has resulted in lawlessness and a victim orientated society starting in our public schools, glorifying disrespect for authority. As libertarian ideas continue to eat away at the core values of Western Civilization, the role of communities is once again on the rise with law-abiding citizens seeking refuge in gated suburbs and even criminals flocking in gangs for mutual protection.

Another difference between Mennonite and Evangelical teachings is found in the view of salvation. Calvinist religious ideas dovetailed nicely with the concept of *laissez faire*, fostering and accommodating the idea that salvation was a subjective, internal and individual matter between penitent and Saviour. Because the Mennonite faith was articulated by a communitarian ethos, they saw salvation as something taking place through the community of saints, namely, between God, His/Her people and the penitent, within the context of a communitarian

ethos or standard of behaviour. (According to some historians this may reflect the influence of Renaissance thinkers such as Erasmus).

To say that Mennonites and Evangelicals differ in terms of their understanding of history would be an understatement, they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Mennonites see history "as the study of God" while Evangelicals are inherently uncomfortable with the idea of history which they find inconsistent with their concept of God's revelation for man being more fully revealed in each succeeding generation.

Allow me to explain: each new generation of Revivalists, Fundamentalists and Evangelicals believe they possess not only the fullest revelation of Christian truth, but, indeed, the only valid revelation. Each succeeding genera-

"In fact, Scofield devised a clever scheme to circumvent such a teaching, by dispensing entirely with the Gospels...."

tion seems to add another layer of legalistic requirements to that of its precursor. I think some Pentecostals are already up to the third and fourth baptism, and, no doubt there's more coming. What this means, though, is that each new generation looks down at the old--or better said, tries to avoid looking back at the old--sadly recognizing that their parents and/or antecedents in faith did not have the full truth, given that all the previous millennialist scenarios had in the meantime turned out false, Deuteronomy 18:22.

The emotional internalized paradigm of Fundamentalist religious culture was well suited to dovetail precisely with the lowest common denominator in the spiritual expectations of the North American religious consumer. This also resulted in a lower literacy and intellectual level compared to other confessions.

To be Evangelical and Mennonite at the same time is an oxymoron, a logical impossibility. The two religious cultures are fundamentally and inherently incompatible and in conflict with each other. They are diametrically opposed to each other in terms of their very concept of what it means to be Christian.

To be a Mennonite, to be a Christian, is to accept the centrality of Christ and the Gospels within scripture, the idea of discipleship.

By comparison, Fundamentalists and later Evangelicals, went to great lengths to avoid the teachings of Christ. In fact, Scofield devised a scheme to circumvent such a teaching, by dispensing entirely with the Gospels through dispensational hermeneutics whereby the teaching and work of Christ was postponed to a future age! In short, to the Evangelical, to be a Christian was to meet and come within the parameters of certain prescribed threshold criteria, such as "conversion experience", "assurance of salvation", "a certain form of immersion baptism", etc. Successful Christianity was measured by the achievement of a certain

feeling of inward euphoria. By this logic the more you jumped and shouted, the more saved you were. By the same reasoning, people suffering from depression evidently would be under a horrible curse!

The "isms" of the 20th century--fascism, communism, nationalism, Maoism, fundamentalism--all shared the desire to eradicate traditional cultures which they viewed as inherently in conflict with their demands of undivided loyalty and absolute commitment. The 20th century could also be called the century of euphemisms, where a word was used to describe a social movement but meaning the opposite of its common usage. For example, Communists claimed to represent the will of the people, to hold all things in common, but inflicted the tyranny of a cynical elite upon a terror-stricken population.

Fundamentalists claimed to be evangelical, but specifically took the Gospels out of the Bible, out of their faith. In this sense they (the proto-Evangelicals of the 1920s and 30s) were not evangelical at all, and could only be considered Christians in the most general sense of the word. Since Scofield taught it was a sin to follow the teachings of Christ, how could his adherents be considered Christians?

The sad reality is that if so-called Evangelicals should ever be successful (and may God forbid) in their enunciated program for world domination and conquest, the level of piety and good works in the world would likely not change by one wit, the number of wars would not lessen by one iota, and there would still be just as many people starving in Africa.

Admittedly Evangelicalism has revital-

"One of the hallmarks of Revivalist, Fundamentalist and Evangelical religious culture has been extreme intolerance."

ized many lives with its message of hope and personal renewal. But the same can be said for practically every social and religious movement of the 20th century, including Farrakhan's Moslem pride movement.

Evangelicals have done compassionate acts of charity for others in need and for this all should be grateful. But what segregates Evangelicals from other Christians, Christians of the Mother Theresa variety, is that these acts of charity are invariably preformed as part of an agenda--if you (poor slob in Africa) come to my denomination, I will accept you as a brother/sister--or, if you (destitute person in Russia) accept my religious culture, I will accept you as "saved". A real Christian, in my estimation, sees a need and fills it. If the life and conduct of the giver is such that the recipient is moved to change his or her lifestyle or faith, so be it. True charity--Christ-imagined charity--does not come with an agenda.

I make the forgoing statements with all due respect to many friends who are good Christians notwithstanding they subscribe

to Evangelical dogma, and its language and culture. Those who bomb abortion clinics and spread virulent hate literature against gays and lesbians are certainly only a small minority. Not nearly all Evangelicals are viper-baiting Neanderthals who refuse medical treatment for their children: "Faith or Healing?" *Time*, Aug 31, 1998, Vol. 152, No. 9, pages 48-49.

One of the hallmarks of Revivalist, Fundamentalist and Evangelical religious culture has been extreme intolerance. John Calvin, the 16th century Reformer who was the direct spiritual antecedent of modern-day Evangelicals, simply executed and exterminated those who disagreed with him. It was a good thing for Evangelicals that Di Brandt and Pat Friesen were not born Pentecostals or Baptists, as they would have been REALLY upset at a religious culture that treated its non-conformists so mean.

In decades past many American Fundamentalists followed the spirit of the Salem witch trials and exercised discipline and shunning so fiercely and tyrannically as to make traditional Mennonites look pathetic by comparison. Similar practices evidently were adopted by Mennonite denominations articulated by Separatist-Pietist and American Revivalist teachings, as seen in the book "Peace Shall Destroy Many" by Rudy Wiebe. For traditional Mennonite communities, discipline was a carefully measured response to admitted and confessed offences, such as wife abuse, or dereliction of moral obligations to neighbours in socio-economic matters implemented only after due process and democratic debate before the membership. This was a procedure that had nothing in common with the psychological terror used by many Fundamentalists and some Evangelicals to establish total mind control over adherents.

Such a divergence in interpretation was to be expected since Calvinist triumphalism focused on the Pauline Epistles, whereas Mennonite theology was focused in the life and work of Christ as set forth in the Gospels. Shunning, hatred of gays and subjugation of women, for example, are ideas derived from the teachings of Paul and not Jesus.

This points to the real problem that Calvinist reformers never fully completed "their" Reformation. They never found their way back to Christ and the Apostolic church, choosing instead the more tempting option of consolidating patriarchal power within a theocracy. For this reason they also required a multitude of add-on doctrines to assure themselves, that "yes", they really were "saved". Had Calvin completed the Reformation according to Biblical authority all these fancy teachings wouldn't be necessary, would they?

Certainly there are millions of Evangelicals who don't run around with psychotic attitudes disparaging all others. There has been considerable moderation in the legalism, intolerance and egocentric arrogance within the Evangelical movement in the past several decades. Perhaps, in time, so-called Evangelicals may surpass their Calvinist roots and embrace other Christian cultures and treat them as brothers

and sisters in Christ. Perhaps in time, they may even join Mennonites in adopting and embracing Christ and the Gospels as their reigning paradigm. It's not likely, but miracles do happen. Much has changed in the Evangelical movement in the last several decades that once seemed impossible.

From the outside, the so-called Evangelical movement sometimes looks like a giant cult, where people surrender their intellect and reason, becoming enslaved to a religious culture and language comparable to that of Islamic Fundamentalism. Often times so-called Evangelicals are whipped into war hysteria or into a feverish frenzy for some political cause which can have erratic and dangerous implications for world peace because of the political clout in Washington of the religious right. This was illustrated by the recent appearance of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell on "Larry King Live"

in September 1998, frothing at the mouth over the prospect of dealing a mortal blow against their sworn enemy, President Bill Clinton. The image of Baptist ministers coming on CNN during the week of October 26, 1998, openly encouraging the murder of pro-choice doctors such as Bernette Slepian was spine chilling.

To the outsider, it often appears as if Evangelicals are more concerned about expanding the hegemony of their religious culture, by whatever means necessary, than about living the teachings of Christ. Too often Evangelicals have been prepared to sacrifice truth in order to advance their cause. For example, in the past they have condemned my ancestors as "unsaved", a stark testimony to their ignorance and arrogance.

The dictum seems to be, the cause is just, the means do not matter. Many people have been destroyed by the psychological terror

employed by some Evangelicals to control their young and others within their domain.

This is not to suggest that we should not love and appreciate our Evangelical friends and neighbours, just as we do Catholics, Orthodox, Lutherans and Jews. But I have yet to see any particular advantage to associating with the Evangelical movement.

Why would anyone want to switch over to a religious culture which was responsible for the slave trade, whose paradigm is based on superficial "pop" culture, and which has been about 100 per cent wrong in its prophecies over the past century? In the converse, why would anyone want to abandon a religious culture whose tenets are just as valid today as five hundred years ago?

Why not simply stay with the faith heritage of your own ancestors?

Faith and Culture

The Interaction of Faith and Culture and its Implications
for Conservative Mennonites and Hutterian Brethren

Blue Ribbon Faith.

In 1995 a gravel contractor accidentally dug up the unmarked graveyard of the village of Schönfeld, East Reserve, just west of Steinbach, Manitoba, founded by the wealthy Groening family from Bergthal, Imperial Russia, in August, 1874, see *Carillon News*, May 3, 1995, page 1A, and May 31, 1995, page 18A.

RCMP investigators and anthropologists from the University of Manitoba studying the skeletons were nonplussed by the ribbons still clearly visible around their necks.

Conservative Mennonites were traditionally buried in a white shroud with blue ribbons around their neck and sleeves. The white shroud symbolized the purity of the virgin, ready to meet the Lord. It was the adornment of the saints, the bride in her wedding garment prepared to meet her bridegroom, Jesus in eternity, Matthew 22:1-14.

But what about the blue ribbon? The answer came recently while re-reading J. C. Wenger's *Separated Unto God*, page 16. In a discussion of Old Testament teaching on the topic, Wenger referred to Numbers 15, 37-40: "...put upon the fringe of each border a chord of blue; ...that ye may remember and do all my commandments, and be holy unto your God."

The blue ribbon or chord was an allegorical prefiguration of New Testament creed that the teachings of Christ would be inscribed in the hearts of His followers. The adorning with blue ribbons of the neck and sleeves of the white funeral shroud became a signature manifestation of Mennonite religious culture. It became a cultural ritual but one founded on sound biblical teaching and exegesis.

The practice illustrates the issue of interaction between faith and culture and the

questions that arise from its various manifestations.

Definition.

Faith is always expressed in some kind of context. With our lives and actions we create a culture. We do not think nor can we ever act without a context. That contextual embryo and the historical continuation thereof is culture. Culture is defined as "the sum total of ways of living built up by human beings and transmitted from one generation to another" (*Random House*, 2ed., page 488).

Faith relates to culture like wine in Biblical wineskins. Culture is the clay vessel which holds the wine, like the physical body which holds the spirit.

This paper will review various aspects of how faith and culture interact in the world of many religious denominations and faiths and explore the impact these manifestations and dynamics may have for modern-day conservative Mennonites and Hutterites.

Apostolic Church.

The Apostolic church quickly developed a culture within a culture. Early Christians were aliens in the world of the Roman Empire as well as that of the wider Jewish community. The Apostle Paul had an insight into the nature of the Gospel in that he judged a believer need not become a Jew through circumcision in order to come to Christ. A gentile could come directly to Christ.

And so the early church had Jewish Christian communities as well as Gentile Christian communities. The cultures which the two represented did not interact or meet in the general society. The blending of these Christian groups created a culture unique for its day.

Even within the early Christian church

there were cultural differences between different *Gemeinden* or communities. The Corinthian *Gemeinde*, for example, was very much a Roman/Gentile community and affected by the immoral practices of temple worship in Corinth. By contrast, the Jerusalem *Gemeinde* was more focused on keeping the Hebraic Law. James is reported to have kept the law more rigorously than the Jews.

Reformation, 1517.

Differences in Biblical interpretation also led to different churches or Christian Confessions (*Gemeinden*) which developed their own cultures. The Catholic Church became dominant in western Europe (centred in Rome) and the Orthodox Church in the east (centred in Byzantium, later known as Constantinople).

When Luther broke away from Catholicism in 1517 and started the Protestant Reformation, he founded a new church community with its own culture.

The same held true for John Calvin and the numerous modern-day denominations tracing their historical roots and spiritual ethos from him. In France they were the Huguenots, in Holland they were the Reformed, and in Scotland the Presbyterians (John Knox). In England the Calvinists were known as the Puritans and those who abandoned hope of reforming the Church of England were the Pilgrims.

One of the results of the Reformation was years of religious wars as the Protestant reformers endeavoured to establish new churches within their territories. The population of Germany, for example, was reduced from 15 million to less than five million by 1648.

An important development in the Dutch Reformed Church was the development of Arminianism around 1600. Where Calvin

preached predestination (or eternal security), Arminius taught it was possible to fall from grace. This teaching was adopted by John Wesley (1793-91) in England and became part of the Methodist Creed.

From George Whitefield (1714-70) and John Wesley came the "Holiness movement" in England, from which developed American Revivalism in the 19th century, also known as "the great awakening". Fundamentalism developed in 1900 as a reaction against theological liberalism which originated with the European "enlightenment". By the 1950s this movement has become a synonym for bigotry and intolerant legalism, so that Protestant Fundamentalists in North America reinvented themselves as so-called Evangelicals.

These developments were paralleled on the European continent by Separatist Pietism which came out of Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy in the 18th century. Both American Revivalism and German Separatist Pietism adopted the dispensational teachings of Darby later popularized by Scofield and the American Bible school movement of the 1920 and 30s.

Biblical Interpretation.

Each confession has its own way of interpreting the Bible. The reason is that possibly neither is wrong, but emphasize a particular truth over against other truths. For example, Anabaptists rated believers' baptism highly, Luther stressed grace, Methodists favoured holiness, while Mennonites emphasised discipleship. Dispensationalists denied the Gospels, focusing instead on end-times speculation and a mania to spread their dogma throughout the world.

Christ was the foundation stone of faith for conservative Mennonites and Hutterites and the Bible was interpreted accordingly. Their faith was manifested by following in Christ's footsteps; they believed in living out His teachings and emulating His life as set forth in the Gospels--referring to Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Hence conservative Mennonite faith and religious culture can be characterized as "Gospel-centric."

As already mentioned, American Revivalists, Fundamentalists and about 80 per cent of modern-day Evangelicals adhere to Scofieldian or dispensational thinking that the Gospels do not apply in the current time period, only coming into force in some mythical future 1000 year reign. Consequently there exists a huge chasm between the religious cultures of so-called Evangelicals and that of conservative Mennonites. The faith of the latter is specifically predicated on the Gospels, while that of the former specifically denies the Gospels in the present time.

In this sense conservative Mennonites and Hutterites have more in common with their Catholic, Orthodox and traditional Protestant brothers and sisters in Christ, as none of these groups have officially denied the efficacy of Gospels.

World-View.

The underlying world-view or *Weltanschauung* of a particular faith or confession, will to some degree articulate and define its religious culture.

The Calvinist/Revivalist/Fundamentalist stream of religious culture, propounds a negative view of man's place in the universe. Man-kind was evil from creation, and completely damned. In their view only by taking certain legalistic and precisely defined "steps" could a relationship ever be established with God. The idea of a climatic conversion experience which evolved in this context supposedly responded to the question of how such a relationship could be established.

Conservative Mennonites, in contrast, had a more positive view of man's place in the universe. They believed man was essentially good, being created in God's image. Individuals at birth were seen as fully redeemed and wholesome beings. Upon reaching the age of mental accountability, believers needed only to claim, affirm and appropriate the grace and mercy of God. There was no need for an artificial dramatic conversion experience, nor was the necessity of such an entrance ritual taught anywhere in scripture. Individuals, at least those from Christian homes, were raised in God's kingdom and always part of it.

Conservative Mennonite religious culture was fundamentally literate as each believer was called to read and study scripture. History was seen as the record of God working among His people. It was important to document God's goodness through the centuries, the record of which illuminated the way into the future.

American Fundamentalism, by comparison, had significant anti-intellectual, anti-literate and anti-historical elements, being largely articulated by futuristic end-times speculation. The personal history of individuals and even communities were perceived as obstacles to full and unequivocal integration into their "superior" religious culture and manifest destiny for world hegemony.

Such variances in world-view have created parallel differences in the religious cultures of the two streams of Christian thought. Revivalists/ Fundamentalists created a series of legalistic procedures and steps that the individual needed to complete successfully before being recognized as a fully redeemed human being.

Conservative Mennonites believed the only precondition for salvation was a penitent heart. This was well expressed in 1882 by Kleine Gemeinde *Aeltester* Abraham L. Friesen (1831-1917), Jansen, Nebraska, who wrote, "In simplicity of mind we hold that a true heartfelt remorse and repentance is a presentable reformation upon which we are promised salvation, and which is the foundation of every conversion," *Leaders*, page 569.

Cultural Interaction.

Each perspective needs to be respected by those who interpret the Bible differently. Each religious sub-culture within Christianity has at

some point been led of God to its particular theological and cultural formation.

For the most part--at least in the last century, Christian confessions have conducted themselves honourably with respect to each other as well as towards religious cultures of other faiths.

But this has not always been the case. While so-called Evangelicals like to posture in the media as a persecuted minority, their treatment of other religious cultures has often been heartless and cruel, premised on a belief in a divine destiny as the dominant religious culture, and often as the "only" religious culture of worth and validity. An example of this sort of myopic attitude is seen in Bob Jones III, President of Bob Jones University, a southern Baptist Bible seminary, who has characterized Pope John Paul II, undoubtedly among the greatest Christian leaders of our time, as an "Anti-Christ."

The traditional argument of American Revivalist-Fundamentalist-Evangelicals to conservative Mennonites and Hutterites was that culture impeded/hindered salvation. There may be some truth to this assertion to the extent that it inhibited them from abandoning their Gospel-centric faith and succumbing to the separatist message of so-called Evangelicals.

What the predators were really saying was, "your culture impedes salvation according to the legalistic creed of our religious culture." Or to put it another way, "abandon your culture--ours is good, yours is bad, or even invalid and evil."

Faith over Culture.

Of course, this is not to say that believers should not be willing to re-evaluate their culture and traditions. Jesus re-evaluated the Jewish culture of His time in the Sermon on the Mount. He criticized the scribes for their interpretation of the Old Testament and then deepened the tradition by raising the standard of moral conduct among those who would follow Him.

Conservative Mennonites and Hutterites are sometimes held up as examples of how culture can be stifling, inhibiting a vigorous faith. How important can it be that the buggies are of a certain construction or that clothes are of a particular fabric and colour?

It appears self-evident that community protocol such as those of the Amish and Old Colony Mennonites manifested in the objective or material realm are much less damaging psychologically and less traumatizing than the insidious internal or subjective mind control techniques commonly used by American Fundamentalists during the 1950s to establish absolute dominance over adherents.

All religious cultures, nonetheless, should realize that traditions even though inspired and wrought of God will not place believers into a relationship with God. Traditions are important but should not be over emphasized. Culture like money is unavoidable but should not become the reigning paradigm.

One sees this in religious cultures such as

Revivalist-Fundamentalist-Evangelicalism. By denying the foundational truths expressed in the Gospels, they neatly excise Christ's teaching about non-violence and treatment of the oppressed. Thus Fundamentalist/Evangelical Bible Schools and media empires often seem to echo more about American secular culture than genuine Biblicism.

Believers should respect the people that made the traditions and study and understand why they evolved and came about in the first place. Traditions should be carefully evaluated and decisions made to reform them should be informed decisions to avoid throwing out the good with the bad, the baby with the bathwater.

Culture Sustains Faith.

In the never-ending tension between faith and culture, faith should articulate culture not the other way around. This statement might be true in the ideal world. But there are many instances where genuine faith has survived because of the cultural platform in which it was carried.

The Hutterian Brethren in the 19th century are a good example. Hutterites in Reformation times were highly literate and articulate with a sound intellectual understanding of their theology and faith. Over the centuries they were persecuted and driven from one place to another. By the time they arrived in Imperial Russia in 1842, near the Mennonite Molotschna Colony, they were poverty stricken. They were no longer practising community of property, one of the primary tenets of their faith.

In 1874 Hutterites immigrated to the United States and from there to Canada in 1917. During at least part of this time they followed their faith by rote, through the replication of practices which had become cultural norms. But notwithstanding the "frontier" pioneering experience and the onslaughts of predator religious cultures, Hutterites did survive where other Anabaptist based groups and numerous "old-line" Protestant denominations failed and disintegrated.

The Hutterian Brethren have an enviable record of growth, from 1500 at the time of emigration in 1874 to some 30,000 today. They serve as an example where faith survived because it was sustained by a religious culture that was thoroughly Christian (Gospel-centric) and Bible-based in its historical formation.

Culture and Salvation.

What are some other positive features of a culture? A culture tends to hold people and communities together. A culture preserves the proven ideas and practices of the past. Why reinvent the wheel at every turn, every time a decision or interpretation is needed.

Pentecostals do not agonize each time they want to speak in tongues. The heathen practice is firmly enshrined as the trademark of their religious culture and a sophisticated liturgy and ritual has developed around it.

In some so-called Evangelical denominations it is required to clap hands, undulate the

body, sing jingoistically, and take part in other rituals, all designed to establish zombie-like control over adherents. In some T. V. religious programming adherents are seen in spasms on the floor, succumbing to trances and fits of hysterical laughter, reminiscent of Voodoo and other heathen practices. Through repetition common usages such as these become integral to a religious culture.

Over the centuries, for example, God may lead His people to adopt various styles of worship and piety which can and should become sacred to that community--at least if they have a biblical foundation.

Past decisions over time become the practices and rituals which guide and inform the decisions of the future. Although individuals may disagree with various protocol adopted from time to time by conservative Mennonite and Hutterian *Gemeinden*, it is important to acknowledge that these decision were adopted democratically by majority vote by genuine believers who did so in a prayerful and soul searching process. As such these protocol legitimately inform and articulate the lives of community members.

It is evident that culture can play an important role by serving as a vehicle sustaining faith through periods of internal decline and decay or stress from the outside.

"Pop" Religious Culture.

While faith can articulate culture, the reverse can also be true, namely, culture can articulate faith. This can have positive as well as negative manifestations, as already seen above in the case of so-called Evangelical religious culture.

The dominant culture in North America is very much controlled by the media. Through TV, radio and print media, young people are influenced and socialized by a constant bombardment of ideas and cultural mores passed on in the form of music, advertising, and news reporting.

In the religious sphere charismatic leaders frequently arise capitalizing on the techniques of mass media merchandising to create mega-churches and powerful "ministries". These movements use the popular culture of wider society as a vehicle or platform upon which to build and inject their particular religious creed. The goal is to adopt a range of popular attitudes and beliefs in order to win as many adherents as possible. In short, they emulate popular culture, hence the term "pop" religious culture.

Many of these religious cultures are articulated by one dominant individual or personage, forming a "personality cult".

Civil Religion.

The 17th century flight from religious intolerance in Europe and the immigrant experience common to white Protestants have contributed to a notion among Americans that they are the chosen people--the new Israel, so to speak. This notion is an important underlay in making North American Protestant Funda-

mentalism its unofficial civic religion.

Religious denominations which accept the dominant themes in what has been referred to as North American "pop" culture clearly do best. Any movement offering instant sensual gratification is guaranteed popularity. Almost everyone seemingly dreams of becoming rich, a human trait exploited by certain denominations, known as "success theology". Those religious cultures thrive which emphasize competitiveness and that their adherents are better or more saved than others. These ideas are popular because they are evocative of North American society.

Free market capitalism is widely accepted as the cornerstone of North American culture. It is also the foundation of the "new" global economy. The vast majority of North Americans equate capitalism with basic Christian values.

American culture is much influenced by 19th century small "l" liberalism. Individual freedoms were glorified over corporate and community responsibilities. Such ideas dovetail nicely with the concept of salvation as an individual internal act.

"Pop" religious culture impacts negatively on conservative Mennonites and Hutterites as their ethos is based on Renaissance communitarianism and discipline. Hutterites, for example, stress the teaching of community of property as found in the Jerusalem *Gemeinde* at Pentecost, an idea which is anathema to free market capitalism. By defining salvation as a life-long experience and way of life, focused on living out the teachings of Christ, Hutterites and conservative Mennonites are swimming against stream in terms of a consumer articulated religious market place.

Religious Consumerism.

The most successful players in "pop" religious culture are those which succeed in evoking core values and beliefs which resonate harmoniously within the wider secular society.

Strategies for expanding individual religious empires are adopted from successful marketing enterprises. Promotional techniques often mirror those of door-to-door sales empires such as "Amway" or "Wal-Mart" and that of many successful social movements. The reverse is also true with some business enterprises adopting the marketing strategies of so-called Evangelicalism such as inspirational/motivational rituals frequently repeated in small groups, promotional videos, colourful literature, etc.

By defining salvation as an internalized individual act, so-called Evangelicals have successfully created a religious culture dovetailing painlessly with North American societal values. The object has become to preach that which will be the most popular with the maximum number of people, with individual sub-cultures thereby defining their own self-worth.

Subculture

Christian culture is, or at least should, also be a sub-culture in society. Actions in certain parts of our lives are more Christian-articulated than others. Sometimes we adopt the ways and means of the larger society without thought and then it is much less clearly articulated by the Christian community as to how they want to order their lives.

To the extent that conservative Mennonite and Hutterite faith was foundationally premised on the restitution of the New Testament church and, hence, upon genuine biblicalism, one would expect that their practices and religious culture would reflect the revolutionary teachings of the Gospels, namely, the paradigm manifested in the Sermon of the Mount.

The principles of grassroots democracy articulated Mennonite church and community life years before the concept was even understood in Europe. A threefold ministerial of bishop (*Aeltester*), minister (*Prediger*) and deacon provided leadership, but the final decisions for the community (*Gemeinde*) could only be made by the brotherhood by majority vote.

Conservative Mennonites traditionally believed it wrong for an individual to exercise dominion over another. Dutch Mennonite descendants were among those who signed the 1688 Germantown anti-slavery declaration. In 1804 Kleine Gemeinde founder Klaas Reimer abandoned the purchase of the 1,000,000 ruble Volenko estate in Imperial Russia when he was informed that the serfs on the estate came with the transaction which would have made them slave owners.

Conservative Mennonites practised equality for woman centuries before it became a politically correct mantra in western civilization. Mennonite women had equal rights of property ownership based on the Biblical interpretation that women, who were equally entitled to the spiritual blessing, could be entitled to no less in the material realm.

Protocols in the *Gemeinde* protected the weak and vulnerable such as widows, orphans and the handicapped, two centuries before the modern welfare state and social safety nets were even conceived. The *Waisenamt* (Orphan's Trust Office) was a way of relating their Christian values to a particular area of life. The *Waisenamt* started as a way of dividing estates among heirs and in this way it became a very ordered way of dealing with certain economic issues.

The conservative Mennonite *Gemeinden* practised community of sharing as compared to the community of property of the Hutterian Brethren. Although each member had his/her own property, the ownership was subject to the levies of the community as determined from time to time.

Aeltester Johann Wiebe (1837-1905), Rosengart, West Reserve, Manitoba, founder of the Reinländer (Old Colony) Gemeinde, had a vision of a Christian community where social and economic equality among parishioners was of great importance. In his view, the village was a vehicle within which believers

could help each other in their daily spiritual, social and economic lives.

Wiebe has been roundly criticized for implementing the paradigm of the village in Old Colony religious culture. But the measure was undoubtedly the most important factor in the rapid financial progress of the Old Coloniers, transforming them from the poorest of the three Mennonite denominations coming to Manitoba in the 1870s, to one of the richest communities in Manitoba by the time of Wiebe's death in 1905.

These are a few examples of faith resulting in unique cultural manifestations.

Predator Cultures.

In sharp contrast, thousands of "inerrancy" believing, "born again" Fundamentalists joined the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s and presumably took part in the lynching of 4742 African Americans between 1882 and 1968. Fundamentalist clergymen were prominent leaders in the Klan. In Germany in the 1930s millions of "born again" Separatist Pietists without protest joined the Nazi movement.

When the Nazis and Ku Klux Klan wanted to establish their dominance over the Jews and the Negroes, or even over Catholics in the case of the KKK, they characterized their victims as lesser human beings by various deceitful means. In this way they were able to convince their constituencies that the evil things they were doing were done in the name of a greater cause.

During WWI many conservative Mennonites and Hutterites in the United States were harassed and tarred-and-feathered by the same people. Fortunately, there were only two reported cases--young Hutterite men--who died as a direct result of such treatment. In Canada conservative Mennonites were spared the full fury of Anglo-conformity racism because they lived in geographical enclaves where they were the majority population.

The same type of strategies are employed by some modern predator religious cultures. An article by Jeanette Windle, "New life for an 'Old World'" (*The Gospel Message*, 1998, Issue 4), uses the example of conservative Mennonite parents in Bolivia disciplining their children as a lead-in to assert and imply that all Old Coloniers were unbelievers and that their leaders were sexually deviant, alcoholics and maniacal tyrants over their communities. The same sort of thing was recently implied in a press release by Evangelist Jakob Funk, Winnipeg, Manitoba, about Mexican Mennonites, who characterized them with phrases such as "weak ethics...widespread immorality...inferiority complex," see *M. B. Herald*, August 11, 2000, page 15.

Fortunately anyone with even a passing knowledge of the Old Colony people will recognize these assertions as pathetic lies, but they do speak for the particular cultural manifestations of predator religious denominations that result from their Biblical exegesis and religious faith.

Education.

Education is fundamental to faith and culture. The principle was recognized by conservative Mennonites in the 18th century. In every emigration since, they have first sought the right of educating their own children. In 1788 when the emigration to Russia occurred, the State did not even realize the indoctrination potential which control over education could provide. That all came later, with the nationalism of the 20th century.

There was also a clearly recognized danger in education, or better said certain kinds of education. Predator religious cultures time and time again used the educational system to seduce young innocent minds. Historically, Conservative Mennonites were subjected to such abuse in Imperial Russia as well as in Manitoba.

The Old Colony people came to Manitoba with the most highly developed secondary school/teacher training tradition among the three Mennonite denominations that immigrated from Imperial Russia in 1874. During the 1890s Berghaler *Aeltester* Johann Funk and Provincial Government school inspector Heinrich Ewert, hijacked this tradition and spiked it with an agenda of Anglo-conformity and the adoption of alien religious culture.

Funk and Ewert were smart enough to know that by seizing control of the educational system at an early stage they would be able to dictate the development of Mennonite life in southern Manitoba. What a simple recipe for a predator religious culture seeking to expand its dominion. Indoctrinate the children and in another generation the community will be won. The Old Coloniers recognized that they had been out-manoeuvred and retreated from secondary education.

American Fundamentalists utilized the Bible school movement of the 1920s and '30s as a device for propagating Scofieldian religious culture. In this way an entire generation of young Mennonites was turned away from the Gospel-centric faith of their elders. What a tragedy!

But education need not necessarily lead to or be focused on modernization or to influencing young minds into "converting" themselves over to a different religious culture.

Education can and should be used by communities as a vital tool to socialize and indoctrinate young people in sound theology and the wholesome mores of their own faith and culture.

Education is the primary tool of socializing the children of a community with its mores and values. This is something that our great-grandparents understood much better 125 years ago than we do today.

Immunization.

Education can also be used to teach young people about other religious cultures, particularly the predators out to expand their empires.

This can be characterized as the "immunization" strategy. The idea is to inoculate young

people against questionable theology and predator sectarians by indoctrinating them early in the precepts and conceptions of their own faith and heritage. Give young people a primer in the tactics and philosophy of religious predators so they understand how they operate and function. What are their techniques, their sales pitches? Their nomenclature and language should be analyzed and explained. What kind of lies and falsehoods do they use to denigrate the community they are targeting?

When challenged, "immunized" teenagers will be in a better position to survive the pitches of proselytizers, most of whom, it must be remembered, are modelled on the most clever sales strategies available to Corporate America and Wall Street merchandising.

For example, some so-called Evangelicals, the modern-day antecedents of Fundamentalists, claim to be non-denominational or inter-denominational and that they have no theology and/or culture, they only follow the Bible. This has been characterized as the "*nusch Gemeinde*", or church without teachings.

This claim in and of itself would typically characterize those propounding it as devout Scofieldians, it being a favourite marketing strategy. To assert that a particular Biblical interpretation and/or religious culture takes place or functions in a vacuum without historical influences or theology is deceitful. Every religious idea and practice has historical and philosophical origins. Only the very naive will be misled by such posterous claims.

A much higher percentage of "inoculated" young people will survive these onslaughts. In many cases, if properly prepared, they will turn the tables by being in a position to explain their own more genuine faith and religious culture. It will also give them a feeling of empowerment and purpose.

Education and Culture.

In 1873 the Dominion government granted Mennonite immigrants from Imperial Russia a *Privilegium* to induce them to come to Canada. This included the right to operate their schools and to educate their children.

During the ethnic-cleansing measures of the Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments of 1919 to 1926, these rights were heartlessly abrogated and abolished. Ministers and teachers such as Bernhard Toews (1863-1927), Weidenfeld, West Reserve, were imprisoned in Winnipeg on January 2, 1920, for exercising the rights granted by the Dominion government in 1873.

Some 10,000 conservatives Mennonites were "exiled" or driven from Canada, seeking refuge in Mexico and Paraguay. This was a brainless measure costing the Canadian taxpayer about 3 billion in lost annual gross national product.

The Confessional schools were replaced with district schools imposed by the force of law, penalties and jail terms. A serious decline in the literacy of Mennonites resulted, two generations literate in neither English or German and considering themselves second

class citizens.

One of the worst effects was that the symbols of conservative Mennonite religious culture could no longer be used in the schools and were replaced by the symbols of the State and dominant Anglo-Canadian culture.

Conservative Mennonite symbols were derided and its languages--the Danziger High and Prussian *Plaut*--were prohibited in the schools and even the schoolyards. An entire generation of Mennonite youths were educated to believe that the forces of Anglo-conformity were good and proper and that their own culture was inferior, narrow, confining and backward.

Ironically the Hutterian Brethren educational system in Manitoba was to encounter some of the same problems as the confessional schools of the conservative Mennonites in the 1920s.

Even though "outside" teachers in their schools were expected to refrain from proselytization, they could do immense damage by using the symbols of the majority culture and not those of the community. These symbols modelled appropriate behaviour and tastes

while simultaneously suggesting to students that their own cultural icons and paradigms were of lesser worth.

The Hutterian Brethren in Manitoba have now established a program whereby they train their own teachers at the University of Brandon. In this way they expect to enhance the level of knowledge and literacy within their communities and at the same time continue to reinforce the norms of their own Gospel-centric culture for their young people.

For the past three centuries conservative Mennonites have realized the immense effect which education can have on a religious culture. Unfortunately they have made only limited headway in developing their confessional educational tradition in the area of secondary education and teacher training.

Conclusion.

The forgoing are some thoughts regarding the ongoing dilemma and paradox of faith and culture.

Those who believe they can escape the embryo of their religious culture by abandoning

Social Control.

Humour and other more subtle forms of social control are often employed by predator religious cultures as important weapons in their arsenal.

The use of humour is best illustrated by an anecdote. After years of concerted effort, Dietrich Harms, the Rudnerweider missions director, had finally persuaded poor Abram Friesen from Cuauhtemoc to move away from the Mennonite community in Mexico and to settle in the southern Manitoba Bible Belt among his fellow Evangelicals, and away from those "unsaved" Old Colonists.

Some years later the Ohms in Mexico were discussing their former brother and wondering how he was doing. Ohm Isaak was delegated to travel to Winkler to visit him. When he returned to Cuauhtemoc, the other Ohms were very curious.

"How is Abram doing?" they asked eagerly.

"Oh," said Ohm Isaak. "They've already convinced him to quit smoking but at least he's still honest."

The foregoing illustrates the jokes sometimes heard around coffee shops in southern Manitoba. The difference being that the jokes are invariably told about the *Kanadier* returnees (especially Mexican Mennonites) by assimilated Mennonites and often by those who have converted themselves to Evangelical Fundamentalism. The jokes invariably portray the *Kanadier* as stupid, closed-minded, immoral, unsaved, crude and ignorant and their leaders as corrupt and evil. In reality such jokes are not funny - they are tasteless, absolutely false, racist in content and based on nothing less than bigoted stereotypes.

An example of social control used by predator religious cultures to establish cultural dominance over conservative Mennonites is found in obituaries of those brought to faith in conservative Mennonite Gemeinden but later induced to convert themselves to Evangelical Fundamentalist denominations. Such obituaries invariably go to considerable length to note that coming to faith by the Timothy (II Tim. 1:5-7) or Zacchaeus (Luke 19:9) models are not recognized as valid but that conversion to the man-made doctrines and Calvinistic traditions of Evangelical Fundamentalism is genuine. Each time such an obituary is published the point is painfully driven home to conservative Mennonite relatives of the deceased that coming to faith and making a commitment to follow Jesus and to obey His teachings is deemed not to be a valid conversion but that only in adopting Evangelical Fundamentalist religious tradition is real salvation to be found.

This is not to suggest that such actions and conduct are always motivated by cold-hearted spite and manipulative cultural imperialism - indeed, they are invariably camouflaged in the language of genuine pastoral concern. But to the eye of the unpartisan observer, it does appear that adherents of Evangelical Fundamentalism are so deeply radicalized by their triumphalistic religious culture that they no longer realize how hurtful and spiteful such actions can be.

The end result of such techniques is that the *Kanadier* - and particularly their youth - are made to feel ashamed of who they are and about their heritage. Many children of *Kanadier* returnees go into a denial mode relative to their background as a coping mechanism. In far too many cases, adherents of predator religious cultures are successfully able to instill animosity and disdain for their parental roots.

it in favour of an other, are sure to be disappointed. By so doing they merely substitute the culture of their ancestors echoing in their souls for the tyranny of another about which they probably know even less than the one they have forsaken and disavowed. By abandoning their religious culture they are severing a link with their primordial spiritual past, a link that can never be restored.

Differences in religious culture are determined to a significant degree by differences in Biblical exegesis or interpretation. Faith should articulate culture and not the other way around. In some cases culture has been the vehicle that enabled religious communities to maintain their faith during periods of oppression and persecution. In some Christian confessions, the cultural practices of general society have been

adopted and transformed into legalistic rituals as additional requirements for the achievement of individual salvation.

In North American civil religion, those denominations preaching that which resonates most closely with "pop" culture, experience the greatest growth. This has become a strategy for many so-called Evangelical groups. Predator religious cultures often use devious techniques to expand their religious empires.

Enemies have frequently tried to use education as a mechanism to seduce the children of conservative Mennonites and Hutterites. Education is the primary tool for socializing children in the mores and values of their community. It is important that significant cultural icons be identified and taught to children, if they are to appreciate their own heritage and

tradition, and hence, their own faith.

It is clear that no religious community or body of faith exists without a culture and without a history. The example of conservative Mennonite burial practices--the white shroud, symbolizing the wedding garment and that the deceased had gone forth to meet her/his Lord, Matthew 22:1-14, and the blue ribbon, signifying that the commandments of Christ were inscribed in the hearts of His disciples, Numbers 15, 37-40--indicates that culture can and has also been the repository of genuine biblical teaching enshrined in practice.

By allowing others to rob them of their historical heritage and religious culture, many conservative Mennonites have lost their focus on the Gospels and on the redemption work of Jesus Christ.

Springs - The Mega Church Industry

"Springs - The Mega Church Industry," by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba.

One of the fastest growing segments of the religious market are the mega churches springing in suburbs across North America. Combining the marketing techniques of pyramid schemes such as Amway and franchising strategies, with ministerial focus sharpened by public polls and marketing research, the phenomenon caters to those who want religion without commitment and virtual reality Sunday morning entertainment for the family.

The Springs Church is a Pentecostal operation that recently expanded to Steinbach, taking over the former Full Gospel Chapel which had fallen on hard times. The name "springs" apparently is an allusion to the "springs of running water" and not to the rituals and ceremonies of Pentecostal religious culture. Like all Evangelical Fundamentalist enterprises, the Springs Church is eager to expand its borders and in 2002 a brochure was distributed in Steinbach mailboxes, soliciting more attenders and claiming "a refreshing approach to sharing the life changing message of Jesus Christ." Cynically the brochure asked those readers who "are already involved in a church" to "please disregard it".

Faith Watch - The Bible School Movement

There are also reports of similar attacks on God's people in Canada. A well-informed source reports of an Ernie Fehr, leaving to work among the Mennonites in Bolivia under an organization calling itself Gospel Missionary Union. Their pamphlet apparently states that "Many of them are illiterate and they do not believe one can know if one is saved. One can only hope."

Given the pejorative and misleading provided in previous G.M.U. literature about the Bolivian Mennonites (see Jennette Windle, "New Life for an 'old World'", *The Gospel Message*, Issue 4, 1998, pages 2-5) it appears that this

pamphlet is designed to further the bigotry and prejudice against Bolivian Mennonites which has carefully been nurtured and advanced by organizations such as G.M.U. They call themselves a Christian Mission but in actuality go out to the field to attack Mennonite churches and to tear people away from their assemblies and families with all manner of deceit such as alluded in the aforementioned pamphlet that believers are only saved if they have a "Paul on the way to Damascus" conversion experience according to their exact specifications. Apparently they oppose biblical teachings such as the Timothy model of conversion. The same source reports of a certain Mr. John Banman who showed his anti-Christian demeanour in the 1980s by his outright condemnation of the Bolivian Mennonites as unsaved. Apparently Mr. Banman recently spoke in some local churches in the Winkler area spreading his untruths and lies about the Bolivian Mennonites, which I will not even give credibility by repeating them here. To the credit of the Winkler E.M.M.C. he was not invited to speak there.

Apparently Mr. Banman is still busily at work in Bolivia leading God's people away from Christ. Evidently the plan behind all of this is to score as many scalps as possible for Protestant Fundamentalist religious culture. Presumably these people are taught that if they lead enough people astray they can work their way into a favoured position in Paradise.

Winkler

Another well-informed source in Winkler tells of the Baptist church which is going around to conservative Mennonites and seeking to lead people away from Christ by persuading the vulnerable that they are not saved because they have not the right baptism. This deception was last used by the Separatist-Pietists in Russia during the 19th century. Regrettably more than a few Mennonites were taken in by

this deception.

The baptism mode is a strange one. Usually outside predators work the false teaching that conservatives Mennonites do only follow the Pauline dramatic conversion and instead take a more holistic biblical interpretation, namely, following also the Timothy.

Here is a bizarre case of a predator using a mode of baptism as a vehicle to mislead believers, i.e. that people must be rebaptised by immersion to be saved. It is clear from the Bible that affusion is THE biblical mode. But since baptism is only a symbol of what has taken place in the heart, Mennonite typically have not been too vulnerable to this particular deception. Again, it is a clear case of Protestant Fundamentalists' work-righteousness where they establish all sorts of man-made laws that they add to the teachings of the Bible, in order to control their adherents. At the same, these predators typically have no problem discarding the teachings of Jesus to follow Him and to obey His commandments. Let us redouble our efforts so that our people are not seduced by such deception.

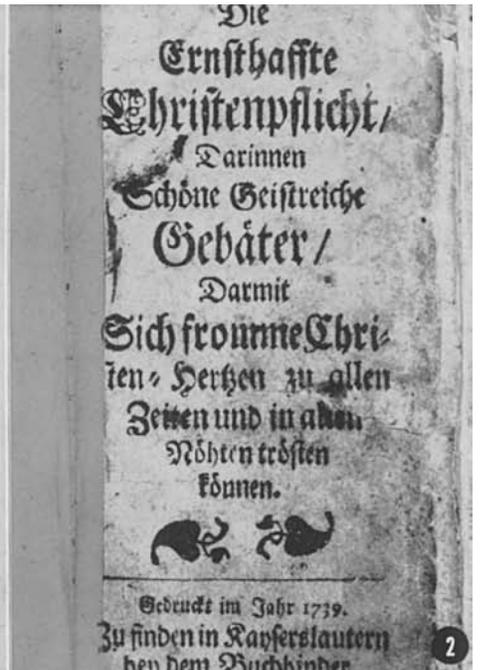
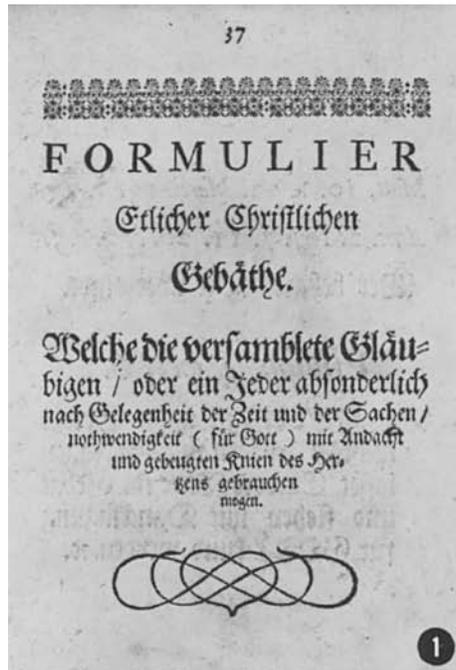
It is discouraging to see these Baptists attacking genuine believers and seeking to lead them away from the Gospel. The wonderful Old Colony "Faith Mission" sends tons and tons of relief supplies from its seven congregations in Canada to needy people in Russia and the Ukraine. Faith Mission sends these supplies to a Baptist Denomination in Europe which then distributes these materials to the needy and presumably also uses the traction this gives them to enlarge the power of their denomination. And back home in Winkler, their brethren are attacking those who provide the goods. Something seems to be wrong with this picture. Maybe Faith Mission will need to find a new European partner such as the A.G.U.M. made up of genuine Mennonite believers. Just a suggestion.

maninghe, den

volcke synen rugghe toekeerde, ende dat hy in plaetse van henlieden met den stemmelijcken ghebede (volgende syn ampt) voor te gaen, gheen gheluydt noch verstandich woort ter stichtinghe van hem en gaf. Het volck hoordemen wel zuchten, stenen ende karmen: ... Ende tghene noch aldervreemst was, dat den Bisschop syn vesel [stil] ghebedt soo zaen [zodra] niet en hadde voleyndicht, oft ziet alle d'andere ... moesten even-wel met hem wt ghebeden hebben, oft sy schoon maer ten halven waren, ende om gheen confusie [verwarring] aen terichten, wierden sy genootsaect haer ghebedt stommelinghe af te breken, ende tselfde zonder hoeft ende steert op een half woort met Amen te besluyten.

(To tell you the truth, my partners and I witnessed how Bishop Jacob Jansz, who led prayer during the worship service before and after the sermon, turned his back to his flock. And instead of leading them in audible prayer (according his profession), he neither produced any sound, nor any audible word of admonition. Instead, one could only hear his people sigh, groan and moan ... And, most peculiar of all, as soon as the Bishop had finished his silent prayer, all the others were supposed to have finished their prayers too, regardless if they were half-way finished, or not. And to prevent any confusion, without head or tail, nor even a half-word, they were forced to quit prayer immediately by a concluding Amen.)

When Franciscus Lansbergius (François van Lansbergen), Dutch Reformed minister of Rotterdam, attended a church service on 3 March 1596 in the Admonition attic of the Rotterdam Mennonites, which was led by Jacob Jansz Schedemaker, a preacher from De Rijp, in the Northern part of the province of Holland, he was totally flabbergasted as he watching this practice of silent prayer. Not suppressing any contempt, he published a full eyewitness report on this event in an accusing tract called *Van de vremde ende Onschriftmatighe Maniere der Weder-doopscher Leeraren Heymelijcke ghebeden* (On the peculiar and non-scriptural Way of the Anabaptist Preachers' Way of Praying in Secrecy), from which the previous quotation was taken.^{5a} This article started a vigorous dispute, as was the case on several other occasions when the intolerant Reformed clergy attacked Dutch Mennonites for almost a century after formal persecutions had ceased. The academically trained minister was eager to gain his scriptural victory over such a heretical practice. Although Jacob Jansz was reluctant to enter such a debate, he nevertheless delivered a defence against the 60 objections, which Lansbergius had included in his tract. Even Hans de Ries (1552–1638), the influential leader of the liberal Waterlander Mennonites at Alkmaar, who was sympathetic to the Reformed practice of audible prayer (*stemmelijk gebed*) from the pulpit, came to the defence of his colleague from nearby De Rijp in different polemical writing, which dealt with the Mennonites' views on public government.⁶ In this tract he shows that the Rotterdam



Dutch Mennonite prayer books from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: 1. *Formulier Etlicher Christlichen Gebäthe*, 1660; 2. *Ernsthaftte Christenpflicht*, 1739; 3. *Lust-Gaertlein*, 1787; 4. *Etliche Christliche Gebethe*, 1702. (Mennonite Encyclopedia IV, photo section p. 6)

church service had not been an event full of disorder and a neglect of sincerity, as suggested by Van Lansbergen.^{6a} He indicated what had actually been the liturgical setting of silent prayer in Rotterdam:

Erstelick soo is de name des Heeren door een Liedeken van drie Veerskens [coupletten] oentlick met blooten hoofde aengheroepen, van welcken het eerste [couplet] biddet om de beloofde Ghenade, ende by-wooninghe Christi, in het midden zijner vergaderinghe. Het tweede [couplet], dat hy onse herten door synen Gheest tot de ontfanckelickeyt ende

ghehoorsaemheyt zijns Woorts wil bequaem maecken. Het derde [couplet], dat hy den Mont des Dienaers, alsoo tot verbreydinge zyner eere ende waerheyt wil ontopenen, dat de tegenwoordighe vergaderinghe dat Woort vruchtbaerlick nae nooddrufft mach voorgedragen ende toeghedient werden.

(First they called on the name of the Lord, bareheaded, by means of a hymn of three stanzas. The first is a prayer for the promised grace and the presence of Christ in the midst of his gathering. The second is a prayer in which he is asked to prepare our hearts to receive and to

obey his Word. The third is a prayer in which he is asked to open the mouth of his servant, both to his glory and truth, and in such a way that the present meeting may hear and receive the Word according to each and everybody's need and benefit.)

After this had been prayed and sung most properly and modestly, with bare heads,^{6b} then Jacob Jansz had subsequently invited the congregation to enter silent prayer, using the following words:

Soo ist dat ick u even ten selven eynde, ghelyck nu al sang-wijs ghehoort is, vermane, u knieen ghelijck-moedichlijck met my, tot een teecken dat wy het oock alsoo meenen, voor Godt almachtich wilt buyghen, ende zynen Name, om de beroerde Ghenade, van herten aen-roepen.

Therefore, I admonish you for the same purpose as we already have heard in this hymn, to join me in bending your knees before God and his name as a symbol of our eagerness to call on his mercy wholeheartedly.

After having explained and introduced the reason for prayer in the congregation in this way, he continued:

heeftmen de knieen eendrachtelick ende sedichlick, met den anderen gheboghen, ende inder stilte sonder eenige confusie, oft onbehoorlick gerucht van steenen oft suchten te maken (ghelijck Lansberghe dat verkeert) de name des Heeren aengeroepen.^{6c}

(everyone, at the same time, modestly bent his knees, and called on the name of the Lord in silence, without any confusion, and without any improper groans and sighs, [as Lansbergen had falsely testified].)

The preference for silent prayer is based on a long and old Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition. It was not explicitly demanded by Scripture, but was considered a free matter. The main objection against audible prayer, which in itself was not to be rejected, was the Mennonite view that a public prayer was seen as a memorized lesson (*een gheleerde Lesse*). Since, however, prayer was principally seen as a matter of a highly individual nature, the "sound of the cold, sonorous and non-emotional voice of the man who leads prayer" during a church service was considered to be an obstacle to the "true and heartfelt emotion or devotion of the audience." Because of the silence of a common prayer, the worshipper could therefore:

dick-wils met een vruchtbaerder ghemoedt, als sy aen den Predicant vernemen, tot den Troone der Ghenaden ... opclimmen, ende Godt nae zynen woorde, inden Gheest ende inder Waerheydt aenroepen. Voor den welcken noch veel woorden, noch gheluyt der stemmen en ghelt, ghemerckt hy dat herte proeft, als oock niet de wel ghechierde of toe-ghemaecte redene, waer in het Rijcke Godts niet en besaet, maer de inwendighe hert-grondelicke begeerte inden Gheloove.

(most of the time, with a more open and ready state of mind than expressed by the preacher, climb up to the throne of grace and call upon God in his own words, in spirit and in truth. Since for God neither many words, nor

the sound of human voices are of any value, since he only tests and tastes the heart, he likewise does not appreciate well adorned or fancy speeches, since his kingdom completely abstains from that. On the contrary, he only cherishes the heart-rooted desire of belief.^{6d})

However, by 1590 the liberal Waterlander Mennonites of Hans de Ries (1552-1638) abolished the practice of silent prayer, and introduced audible prayer by the minister. The Waterlanders were followed by other moderate Mennonite groups, like the High Germans, the Young Frisians and Young Flemish, who gradually adopted audible prayers shortly after 1640, although not without resistance from conservative members. In a meeting at Leiden of 22 Flemish congregations, chaired by Tieleman Jansz van Braght, where an effort was made to tackle the modernity of Galenus Abrahamsz and his kindred spirits, who mockingly labelled this meeting as the "Leiden Synod," audible prayer was strongly attacked, describing it as "words without spirit and grace, objectionable and aggravating."^{6e} With the abolition of silent prayer, the practice of kneeling for prayer was also gradually dropped. After about 1665 the two remaining mainstream denominations, the so-called Lamists of Galenus Abrahamsz, and towards the end of the 17th century also the Zonists, adopted the practice of prayer during services quite similar to the Dutch Reformed liturgy.⁷ A major contribution to this development was made by the Middelburg preacher Adriaan van Eeghem in his historical, biblical and pragmatic treatise, *Verhandelinge van de stemmelijke Gebeden in de vergaderinge der geloovigen* (Treatise of audible prayers in the gatherings of the believers) (1685).^{7a} One of his practical considerations was the following:

De Schoolkinderen die't gebed van haar meester van woord tot woord hem na zeggen, konnen niet gezeid worden door 't luide bidden van haar meester verhindert te zijn, maar veel meer geleerd en geholpen; en zoo is 't ook gelegen met de toehoorders, die haar luide biddende Dienaar met haar aandacht, of met zijn woorden stil na te zeggen, volgen, waar in de grootste eendragt bestaat, diemen zoude kunnen bedenken. Waar tegen dat het onder 't stille bidden dikwils geschied dat de luiden voor haar zelve bidden in plaatze van voor de gemeene dingen te bidden: en dan nog wel voor zulke die daar niet passen, nog betamelijk zijn.^{7b}

(School children who are taught to reproduce the prayer of their teacher word by word, are not hindered by the audible praying of their master, but, on the contrary, are the better instructed and encouraged. And likewise the worshippers who follow the audibly praying servant [minister] in devotion, or when silently repeating his words, will achieve the utmost unity possible. On the other hand, it frequently occurs during silent prayer that people only pray for themselves instead of for common concerns, and most of the time even for topics that are neither suitable nor appropriate.)

A proper public prayer is marked by the

appropriate attitude of the preacher, Van Eeghem continues, who, inwardly devoted to and in awe of God's almighty nature, expresses his unworthiness as he stands between God and the congregation. When space in church allows, the church members must either kneel down, expressing humility and inability, or stand upright, which expresses expectation and willingness. The eyes must constantly be directed towards heaven, in which they "ad-



David Joris from Delft, Netherlands. Photo of a painting in the Catherijneconvent, Utrecht. (S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden*, p. 161).

dress God;" or they must be directed to the floor, "when confessing sin and praying for forgiveness, while being in shame or fear." Hands must be folded and raised, expressing "ones renunciation and inability." The actual prayer should be "brief, plain, in clear and dignified words, simple and not fanciful, urging and begging, and fully appropriate to the cause of prayer."^{7c}

The worship service began with a *votum* and closed with a benediction. Besides these two prayers that were short, there were two long prayers, one before and one after the sermon - so-called "free-prayers" composed by the minister.⁸ This arrangement, which is still in practice today, corresponded to the assimilation process of the Mennonites for which the religious tolerance and economic prosperity of the Golden Age offered optimal conditions. As a church group still holding a minority position, in contrast to the Dutch Reformed Church which was privileged by the state, the improvement of Mennonites' social and economic positions led to more openness in many areas. Mennonites, who originally shunned the world, started to embrace worldly benefits. Their success in economic sectors like herring and whale fishing, Baltic sea trade, food and textile industries, banking and finance, was astonishing. Their strong ethic of hard labour and modest consummation patterns

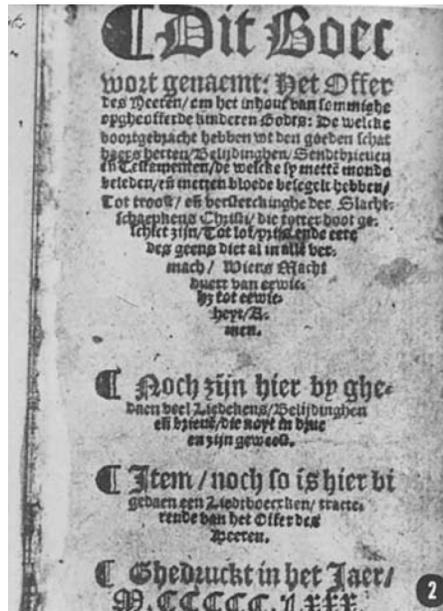
encouraged the accumulation of wealth. Even orthodox Mennonites who avoided the world became rich. With wealth came a growing demand for theological training. The result of this development, together with the inner urge to conform to mainstream Protestantism, was that the practice of lay preachers was gradually abolished by the end of the seventeenth century. The oppressed and hunted heretics of the early sixteenth century moved on to social, economic, and cultural emancipation. By the first half of the eighteenth century many Mennonites had already gained that position, and formed a substantial portion of the nation's intellectual cutting-edge.⁹

Prayer in private devotion

Prayer as an elementary and structural part of private devotion was not strongly promoted. Also family worship was never very popular among Dutch Mennonites. In most branches it was customary to offer prayer, usually silent, before and after meals. One explanation for the almost total absence of a written or printed record of a praying culture could be the individualistic nature of prayer among Mennonites. Prayer implied the highest degree of intimacy between God and the believer, and thus was generally not talked or written about. One may conclude from this that prayer remained for the most part in the hidden realm of oral tradition. The well-documented stories that were collected in the martyr books - mainly from the times of early Anabaptism, such as the very popular *Offer des Heeren* (*Sacrifice of the Lord*), published in eleven editions since ca. 1560, and the large folio volume of Tieleman Jansz van Braght, *Het Bloedig Tooneel, of Martelaers Spiegel der Doops-gesinde of Weerloose Christenen* (*The Bloody Theater or Martyrs' Mirror of the Mennonites or the Defenseless Christians*); 1660, 1685 - tell repeatedly that it was prayer that strengthened the Anabaptists in prison, that it was prayer that gave them power to endure trials and torture, and that with prayer on their lips they faced execution.¹⁰

Another source from the mystical margins of early Anabaptism indicates that prayer formed an essential part of private devotion. In the tract *Verclaringhe vant Vader onse* (*Explanation of the Lord's Prayer*) from the late 1540's, written by David Joris, a spiritualistic competitor of Menno Simons, who proclaimed himself to be a prophet, summoned his followers to consume each minute in the spirit of God:

So neempt van dach tot daghe alle uren waer, Namelijck, u ghebedt: Dan biddet in uwer herten, mitten Gheest, wt den Ghe-loove alle uren om goede sinnen ... So veel beduyden die uren, want die uren en sijn die slaghen van den hamer op die clocke niet, maer die tijdt dien in uren, halve, quartieren unde minuten etc. ghedeelt is ... Daer na als ghy ghebeden hebt, so volcht die goede inspreekingen oder ghetuychenissen van Geest of Engel, of door eenich mensch, die u geot of wel spreect.¹¹



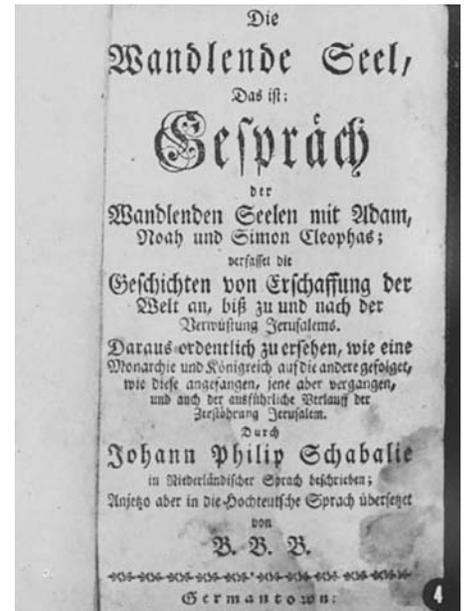
Title page of the book *Het Offer des Heeren*. 1563, includes stories of Mennonites martyred for their faith.

(Be alert by praying day in and day out, all hours of the day. Pray faithfully in your hearts to act with the best of intentions, each hour of the day and with the help of the Holy Spirit ... Each hour counts. By this I do not mean that each hour is announced by a hammer stroke that rings the bell [a clear reference to the Roman Catholic Church and monastic practice], but that the time of your life is split into hours, half-hours, quarters and single minutes ... When you are done praying, obey the inspiration or the witness of the Holy Spirit or the Angels, or the just advice of a righteous man.)

David Joris forms an intriguing case, although he was not representative of mainstream Mennonitism. Yet, one general conclusion might be drawn from his directives and from the martyrs' examples: prayer formed an essential though not dominant part of private devotion.¹² Nevertheless, there are a few other sources that have come to light which contain better clues for understanding Mennonite praying practices. Most substantial are three prayer books that were published in the early seventeenth century, all in connection with the change from silent to audible prayer in public worship. Their status is thus primarily propagandistic, presenting the case for or against public prayer. They do not represent a specific literary tradition. Nevertheless, they present a somewhat clearer picture of prayer in everyday Mennonite life. Apart from those tiny inside glimpses, Mennonites produced and used a wide variety of devotional literature in order to meet their need for prayer and meditation, as can be demonstrated from their hymnody and their spiritual emblem books. Both genres will be briefly discussed as well.

Prayer books

First, the three prayer collections. Hans de Ries, who was mentioned before as leader



Title page of J. P. Schabaelje's *Wandlende Seel*. First published in 1635 as part of *Lusthof des Gemoets*. (*Mennonite Encyclopedia IV*, photo section p.20.)

of the Waterlanders and promoter of audible prayer, was the first to publish a small collection of eleven prayers in 1610. These *aendachtighe Gebeden* (sincere prayers) formed an addition to, and supported, the Waterlander confession of faith. While rationalizing the numerous divisions among Mennonites, de Ries was also the first to reconcile various congenial branches. On the eve of the seventeenth century his efforts to harmonize Mennonites' main principles of belief into a confession of faith led to the reconciliation of the Waterlanders with three other denominations, including a group of English refugees, the so-called Brownists. The promotion of audible prayer was part of his attempt to bridge the gap with the Protestant Brownists. The de Ries collection of prayers was primarily intended to instruct lay preachers. They included examples of prayers that could be read aloud before and after the sermon, at the occasion of adult baptism, and at Holy Supper. There were also prayers for private use: morning and evening prayers, prayers for meals, and prayers for the sick. This collection was reprinted time and again, along with his confession of faith.¹³ In 1650 the *aendachtighe Gebeden* were added to a collection of sermons entitled *Vijf Stichtelijcke Predicatie* (*Five edifying sermons*) by Jan Gerritsz. Gerritsz was a former Dutch Mennonite preacher from the Vistula delta region near Danzig, Poland, where thousands of Dutch and Flemish Mennonites had settled since the early days of persecution. This reprint edition is worth noting, because it explicitly extended its intended readership to include sailors. Three prayers were added to the de Ries collection: *in Noodt-weder voor alle Zee-varende persoonen* (for all seamen in case of stormy weather) as well as a morning and an evening prayer at sea.¹⁴

The second prayer collection, containing

28 prayers for private use only, was published in 1618 by a Flemish Mennonite minister, François de Knuyt, who added them to his *Corte Bekentnisse onses Geloofs* (Short Confession of Our Faith).¹⁵ De Knuyt was an opponent of de Ries, especially concerning audible prayer. His publication is of special interest because of the lengthy preface of some 40 pages, entitled: *Een nut end noodich Onderrecht, tot de Godzalighe oeffeninge des Gebedis* (A Useful and Necessary Explanation of the Blessed Practice of Prayer). De Knuyt's prayers were also combined with a confession of faith, as was the case with de Ries. The propaganda purpose of de Knuyt's work is obvious, but now in favour of silent prayer. Nevertheless, we may assume that it reflects the actual devotional practice and tradition of silent prayer, both in worship and at home. Typically a "biblistic" Mennonite, de Knuyt opens the *Explanation* with the comment that although Christ recommended prayer, he did not ordain any particular form of prayer, with only one exception: the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:1), which in itself is perfect, exceeding any other prayer. Then de Knuyt attacks the Dutch Reformed dogma of predestination, which in his view makes man inadequate to pray while God already has determined his destiny. To the contrary, de Knuyt argues:

Soo wy God den Heere met oprechte gehoorsaemheyte begeeren te vereeren, heyligen ende groot te maken; als wy hem aenroepen, soo bewysen wy daer mede, dat hy den oorspronck ende gever van alles goets is: Ende dat wy alle goet ende salicheyt van hem verwachten.¹⁶

(When we have the intention to sincerely obey God, to honor, to sanctify and to glorify Him; and also when we call upon him, then we express that he is the origin and distributor of all things good. And therefore we may expect nothing from him but righteousness and blessing.)

They who love God most sincerely and are close to him want to speak with him most frequently and eagerly through prayer. Subsequently de Knuyt elaborates on several wrong attitudes in praying. The worldly sinners or "people of the flesh" who fail to taste the heavenly benefits will wait in vain for immediate answers and ready-made solutions. The Christian who is reborn righteously will rejoice in his heart in a simple dialogue (*'t samensprekinghe*) with God in which he asks to act according to God's will, and to keep evil and sin away from the congregation. Here de Knuyt articulates the ethical and social implications of the Mennonite faith. However, the main condition for true prayer is full self-awareness and consciousness of being unconditionally a reborn Christian. Only those who have no doubt about this in their hearts may enter the intimate and private dialogue with God.

Ick spreke van rechte ongeveynsde ootmoedicheyt, die niet alleene en bestaet in knyen buyghen, ter aerde vallen, het lichaem des daeghs wee doen, op eenen sack in den as-

schen liggen, ende het Hoof te laten hanghen ghelijck een biese ... maer in eenen ootmoedighen nedergheslaghen gheest, ende een reyn over ghegeven ghehoorsaem herte.¹⁷

(I speak of pure, sincere humility, which is not expressed by bending your knees, neither by falling to the ground, nor by daily harming your body, by lying in sackcloth and ashes, by bending your head like a reed... It can only be obtained with a meek and humble mind, and a pure, surrendering and obedient heart.)

This reminds us of van Mander's four-liner: true prayer is not a matter of words and rituals, but requires a highly qualified mentality. In fact, true prayers are restricted to the happy few who are true believers, de Knuyt continues. This also means that only believers who are meek and humble know God, and in return they know what they can expect from Him:

Een deuchdelijck Mensche wort verbolghen als men van hem begheert dat hem oneerlijck ende onbetamelijck waerte te gheven, sullen wy dan onbehoorlijck ende ongodlijcke dingen van God begeeren? Daerom moeten wy sorge dragen dat wy God bidden om het geene dat hem eerlijck is te gheven en ons Zalich is te ontfanghen.¹⁸

(A virtuous man will become incensed if somebody desires something dishonest or indecent from him. Likewise it is not proper to desire indecent and non-divine things from God. Therefore we must be watchful to pray to God only for gifts which can honestly be granted and which are blissful to receive.)

The length of the prayer is only a matter of private judgment or personal need. In the last paragraphs of the introduction, de Knuyt finally makes his point for silent prayer. In accordance with Christ's teachings in Matthew 6:6 he rejects audible, public prayer, which he considers a mere expression of hypocrisy. Like Christ, he promotes silent prayer, in bedrooms, in secrecy and behind closed doors, where the believer is together with the Heavenly Father. God will reward him in public. In de Knuyt's terminology, audible prayer in worship service is a *contradiction in terminis*: the sound of words is a sincere obstruction for true devotion through prayer, since:

voor ... [Godt] noch veel woorden, noch gheluyt der stemmen niet en ghelt: gemerckt hy dat herte proeft', als oock met de wel versierde ofte toegemaecte woorden, waer in het Rijcke Gods niet bestaet.¹⁹

(God does not care for many words, nor the sound of the human voice, since he only tests the heart. Likewise he does not appreciate well-adorned or fancy words, since his kingdom is of a different quality.)

Again an echo of van Mander's four-line motto. The prayers in this collection were intended as examples or tools for private prayer. It is no surprise that the first prayer is an explanation of the Lord's Prayer - the only prayer dictated verbatim by the Gospel. Next come several prayers for private devotion during church service, e.g., prayers for the well being of ministers, to assist overt sinners, for

married couples, also morning and evening prayers, prayers for the sick and for pregnant women. One of those prayers should be read by the husband as an act of love for his wife, asking God to relieve her pains while carrying the burden of Eve's sin through his will and to transform her sorrows into joy when giving birth.

The third collection of prayers will be dealt with more briefly. Eighteen prayers were published in 1625 as a separate booklet by the High-German Mennonite minister of Haarlem, Leenaert Clock, entitled: *Forma eenigher Christelijcker Ghebeden* (Formulary of Several Christian Prayers).²⁰ Clock was in favor of audible prayer and so his eighteen prayers, including some private ones, served primarily to instruct the ministry, in particular the Dutch congregations in Prussia and Poland. The *Forma* became very successful. In 1660 thirteen of his prayers were translated into German and published as *Formulier etlicher Gebäthe*, which was added to the first German confession of faith of the Prussian Mennonites.²¹

In 1664 the Dutch High-German minister Tieleman Tielen van Sittert made a new translation of Clock's eighteen prayers, adding them to another translation of a Dutch confession of faith from 1632, entitled: *Christliches Glaubens-bekentnus der Waffenlosen und fürnehmlich in den Niederländern (unter dem Namen der Mennisten) wohlbekanntten Christen*, which also contained seven hymns by Leenaert Clock.²² This companion for Mennonites was reprinted time and again. In 1712 an English translation was published in Amsterdam. This combination of Clock's prayers became the standard prayer book for all German Mennonites and their descendants in Russia and particularly in North America. In fact, van Sittert's manual, including Clock's prayers, still circulates among conservative Mennonite groups in North America, like the Old Order Mennonites and the Amish.²³ The Clock collection, enlarged by several other prayers, was also made a part of the Swiss Brethren devotional book, *Güldene Aepffel in Silvern Schalen*, first printed probably in Basel in 1702. A second Swiss Brethren devotional book of about 1715, *Send-Brieff von einem Liebhaber Gottes Wort*, took over twelve of the Clock prayers from the *Güldene Aepffel* and added three new prayers taken from Johann Arndt's *Paradiesgärtlein* of 1612.²⁴ These books also circulated among pietist groups, both in Switzerland and Germany, and particularly in the New World. The Ephrata cloister in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, played a key role in distributing them.²⁵

In sum, we may conclude that the output of Dutch Mennonite prayer books for private devotion was rather minimal. If the dispute about audible or silent prayer in public worship services had not occurred, even this poor harvest of only three prayer collections might never have been published. The Mennonite idea that private prayer is the highest degree of intimacy could explain this scarcity of prayer literature. Another affirmation of this attitude

towards prayer may be found in the preface of a collection of four prayers for the instruction of children published by Galenus Abrahamsz in 1677. He is of the opinion that:

het, om den Heer wel behagelijk an te bidden, niet so seer op de woorden, als wel op de welbreyde gestalte van't gemoed des Bidders ankomt; en dat haest woorden genoeg gevonden worden, om den Alderhoogsten de begeerten sijns harten voor te dragen; als maer den Bidder, hoe eenvoudig hy ook zy, in beqaemheid staet, om in *geest en waerheid*, uyt gevoel van sijn nood, en behoefte, de Goddelijke Majesteit te kunnen genaken.²⁶

(Praying to the Lord most pleasingly is not a matter of words, but rather depends on the proper attitude of the person who prays. Words can be found abundantly enough to present the needs of the heart to the Almighty. It is most essential that he who prays, regardless of how simple minded he may be, is able to approach the Divine Majesty, fully ready *in spirit and in truth*, in awareness of his sorrow and need.)

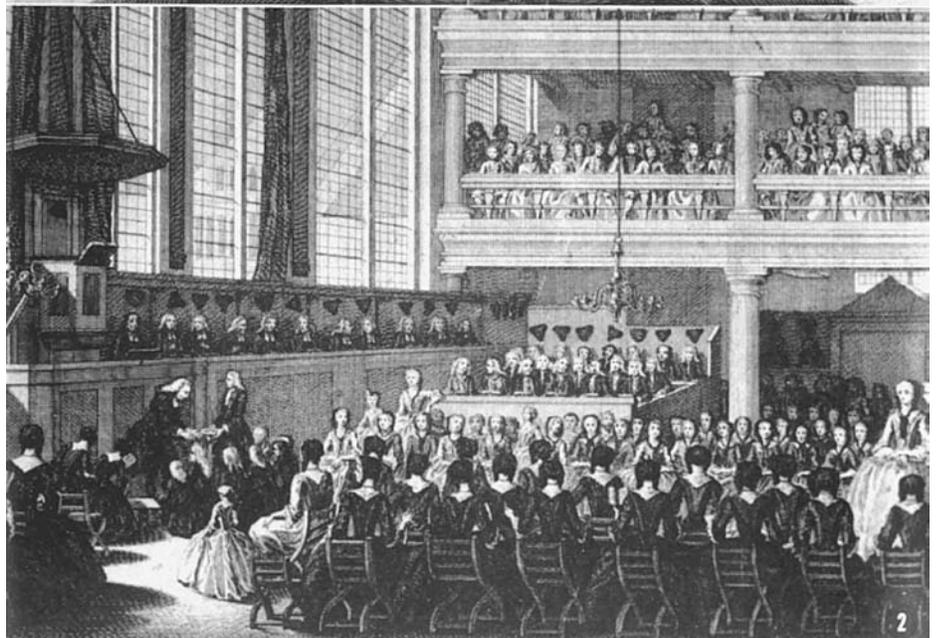
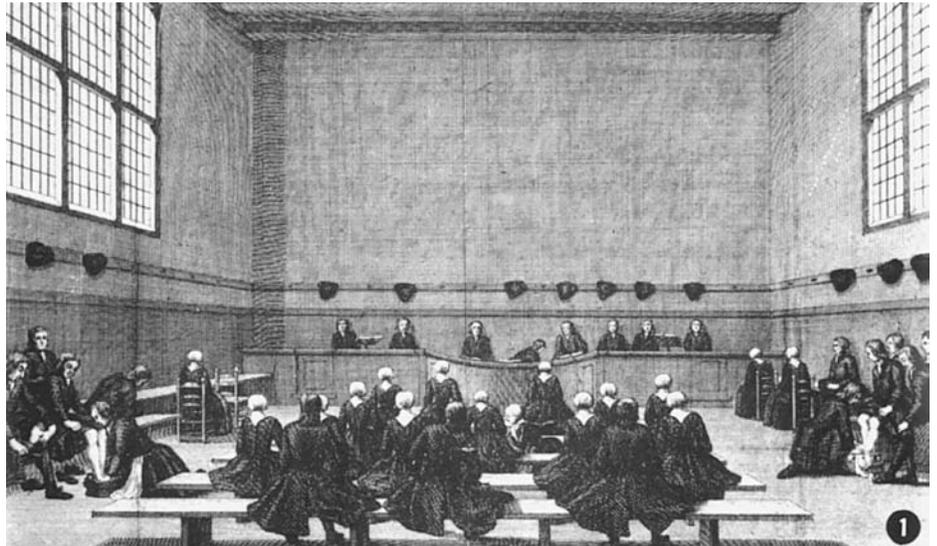
In spite of the minimal production of prayer books, the prayer collection of Leenaert Clock gained international importance. To quote Friedmann: "Leonhard Klock has thus become one of the outstanding authors in Mennonite history, although nearly unknown by name even to scholars ... His prayers outlasted his time through the activity of the Swiss Brethren who adopted and assimilated them in a particular way".²⁷

We may add to this that conservative groups like the Amish, interestingly enough, still provide the truly empirical conditions for historians of religion and literature who want to investigate the actual functioning and reception of seventeenth-century Dutch devotional literature. However, the main problem in doing so is that those rather separated communities are very reluctant and sometimes even hostile to scholarly curiosity from the outside world.

Prayers in hymnody

Dutch Mennonites shaped a remarkable hymn tradition. Unprecedented in any other Protestant denomination in the Netherlands, Mennonites appear to have produced one hymn after another. By 1800, at least 150 different hymnbooks were published, many of which were reprinted time and again. There are at least two causes for this production of at least 15 - 20,000 different spiritual songs. The first cause was the Mennonite reluctance to sing Psalms, which were usually interpreted in terms of their Old Testament, pre-Christian setting. Psalms were therefore considered to be of lower esteem. Secondly, there is an historical explanation. The many divisions caused repeated revision of the church hymn repertoire. Apart from this, Mennonites had an impressive singing culture, and for this there are many indications.²⁸

Most hymnals served double purposes and were meant for more than one locale. A majority of hymnbooks were intended for public service as well as private use, and hymns



Ordinances in the Netherlands: 1. Footwashing 2. Baptism. (Mennonite Encyclopedia IV, photo section p. 4)

were not only meant for singing but also for reading, silently or aloud. This multipurpose functionality made them an adequate vehicle for prayers, since hymn singing was primarily considered as speaking with God. Hans de Ries was a key figure in seventeenth-century Mennonite hymnody, together with Carel van Mander and Leenaert Clock. In 1582 De Ries edited a hymn book, entitled *Lietboek, Inhoudende Schrifruerlijcke Vermaen Liederen, Claech Liederen, Ghebden, Danck Liederen, Lofsangen, Psalmen, ende andere stichtelijcke Liederen* (Hymnbook, comprising scriptural admonitions, laments, prayers, hymns of grace, songs of praise, psalms and other edifying songs). In the preface de Ries classified the hymns and added explanations about the religious applications and forms he had in mind.²⁹ The main category are *vermaanlieden* (songs of admonition), which are intended to encourage penance and an improvement of Christian behavior. This category forms the bulk of the

Mennonite hymn repertoire.³⁰

For our purpose, the second category of *claechlieden ende ghebden* (songs of lamentation and prayer) is of main interest. As de Ries explains, reading or singing a hymn of prayer requires a special devotional and mental condition. Songs of prayer communicate with God about particular needs of both the congregation and the individual believer, and can be said or sung only when such a particular need is manifest. Anyone who intends to sing or read a prayer must be convinced of his own serious intentions and religious goals. With all his heart and soul he must be completely convinced of his own humility, prostration, repentance and grief over his sins before using a song of prayer. Subsequently he must be convinced that he truly wants God's assistance and that he is at the same time aware of God's capability to give what he is praying for. Finally, he must be unconditionally ready to act immediately according to God's will. Again, like his opponent

Francois de Knuyt, de Ries also articulates a special state of mind for prayer songs, which also applies to the other categories of hymns. Therefore each spiritual song in this volume opens with the imperative motto: "Singhet met aendacht" (sing it with sincerity).

Prayer in spiritual emblem books

The second illustration of a more literary and artistic context for prayer deals with edifying emblem books. Mennonites developed a rich tradition of devotional literature that began with the martyr books in the late 1550's. Another favorite form of devotional literature was the spiritual dialogues of which Jan Philipsz Schabaelje's *Lusthof des Gemoets* (Pleasure Garden of the Mind), published in 1635, is a fine example, judging from its almost unprecedented success.³¹ In the opening section of the book Schabaelje instructs the reader to gain the right attitude for meditation and contemplation. Of primary concern is the *stilheyt der gemoeds* (solitude of the mind or soul). This is mystically visualized as sucking the breasts of the Divine Being which opens the soul to communicate through the Holy Spirit as the true medium for direct inner communication with, and enlightenment by, God. Schabaelje, a Waterlander Mennonite, held mystical and spiritualistic views, denying in fact all outer rituals including audible prayer. Nevertheless, his book served many generations as a vehicle for meditation and prayer. It is used to this day by Amish and Old Order Mennonites.

Another genre, though not typically Mennonite, that accommodated similar goals was the spiritual *emblemata*. They were neatly printed and illustrated emblem books that became fashionable among Dutch Mennonites in the second half of the seventeenth century. Jan Philipsz Schabaelje was one of its main initiators with a huge folio volume entitled *Emblemata Sacra*, published in 1653-54.³² Other Mennonite authors of this genre were Claas Bruin, Frans van Hoogstraten, Govert Klinkhamer, Jan Claesz Schaep, Adriaan Spiniker and Jan Luyken, the famous engraver of the *Martyrs' Mirror*, whose immensely popular spiritual emblem books, like *Jezus en de Ziel* (Jesus and the Soul), published in 1678, and *Voncken der Liefde Jesu* (Sparks of the Love of Jesus), published in 1687, were drenched with the German mysticism of Jacob Boehme.

Pieter Huigen was an almost forgotten representative of this genre. His *Beginselen van Gods Koninkrijk in den Mensch uitgedrukt in Zinnebeelden* (The Essentials and Beginnings of God's Kingdom embodied in mankind by means of emblems) was first printed in Amsterdam in 1689, and at least nine reprints followed until the middle of the eighteenth century.³³ From the third edition of 1700 onwards Pieter Huigen's *Beginselen* were published together with the *Stichtelyke Rymen* (Edifying Poetry) of his elder brother Jan Huigen. We know very little of Pieter Huigen, except that he sympathized with the Collegiant movement in Amsterdam, a mainly Mennonite and Remonstrant dominated group

of intellectuals that organized free-speech meetings, discussing all kinds of theological and religious issues.³⁴ He was a friend of Jan Luyken, who designed and engraved the title print and twenty-five emblems of his *Beginselen*.³⁵

Important for the topic under discussion here is the fact that Huigen's main intention was to provide the simple reader with adequate lessons and meditations for gaining access to God's wisdom. Following the traditional scheme of the emblematic genre, the first page of each section has a rhymed motto placed above the Luyken picture and a Bible quotation at the foot of the page. Next, all three elements are combined into an explanatory poem, which in Huigen's case has the form of a hymn, each with its proper tune. So far this scheme meets the standards of the genre, and there is no doubt that Jan Luyken served as his prime example. However, unlike Luyken but not unprecedented, Huigen added a third section of prose, a couple of pages in length, enabling him to be more explicit and to elaborate on each subject. These texts may be considered as mere meditations, dealing with inner spiritual concerns. They are well structured throughout the book. In two times twelve steps there is an accumulation in growth of religious wisdom, that runs from ignorance of the newly reborn Christian to the unification of the soul with God. A majority of the meditations turn, though hardly noticeable, into prayer. Exclamations at the beginning of the final paragraphs "Oh Lord, Oh eternal Lord, Oh great Redeemer, etc.," the subsequent address "You", "Oh Lord", etc., and the conclusive "Amen" make us aware of the formal aspects of a prayer monologue.

Conclusion

Prayer as a structural part of private devotion among Mennonites remains for the greater part in the realm of invisible, oral traditions. Mennonite prayer was a matter of individual concern and implied a highly qualified mental and devotional attitude. This was considered far more important than its formal and verbal requirements. Only the shift from silent to audible prayer in worship service offered an opportunity to get a keyhole view of this element of devotional intimacy. The few prayer books that have survived are by no means part of a distinct Mennonite literary genre. On the contrary, they should be considered as a means of propaganda as well as a codification of an accepted type of audible prayers, rather than a literary expression of, and an instruction tool for private devotion. In the latter sense, the impressive hymn tradition of the Mennonites constituted a more suitable platform for "formalized" prayers.

Another observation can be made with regard to the adaptation of prayers in an emblematic setting. May this development be considered a more modern literary expression of what was still a rather hidden need? Its development since the last quarter of the seventeenth century coincides with the Mennonites' social

emancipation and self-awareness. Whether this new form of devotional *art* matched a changing spiritual demand, or should primarily be considered a new expression of social and cultural awareness, remains unanswered. However, it should be noted that at about the same time, in 1685, van Braght's *Martyrs' Mirror* was reprinted once more, on large paper and for the first time illuminated with 110 fine etchings by Jan Luyken. From then on this monument of Mennonite devotional literature would become an object of luxury rather than a book of historical reflection and a source of inspiration and meditation.

Finally there is one last point to make. In many of the cases discussed, a dominance of mystical and spiritualistic input is apparent. People like de Ries, Schabaelje and Huigen are quite outspoken and enthusiastic representatives of a multi-colored Mennonite faith in this respect. Remarkably enough, a substantial part of this heritage, except for the emblematic works, which might be indicative of my earlier observation, has survived to this very day in the conservative setting of the American Old Order Mennonites and Amish.

Endnotes

¹ Carel van Mander, *De Gulden Harpe* (Alkmaar: J. de Meester [pr.] / Haarlem, P. van Wesbusch [publ.], 1605), 371. See for Van Mander as a poet: R. Jacobsen, *Carel van Mander (1548-1606). Dichter en Prozaschijver* (Utrecht: Hes Publishers, 1972). For van Mander's relevance as a Mennonite author see: M. Spies, "Mennonites and literature in the seventeenth century", P. Visser et al., *From Martyr to Muppy. A Historical Introduction to Cultural Assimilation Processes of a Religious Minority in the Netherlands: the Mennonites* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1994), 83-87. For van Mander as a painter see: H. Miedema, ed., *Karel van Manner. The Lives of the Illustrious Netherlandish and German Painters. Preceded by The Lineage, Circumstances and Place of Birth, Life and Works of Karel van Mander, Painter and Poet and likewise his Death and Burial*. (Doornspijk: Davaco, 1995), 11-168.

² In Dutch historiography the concepts of Anabaptism and its polemic derivative *wederlopers* (German *Wiedertäufer*) are generally applied to the radical phase of its history, including the Münster episode and its aftermath. After that Mennonitism is commonly applied to label the adherents to the movement's further developments, whereas *doopsgezinden* (lit. "baptism minded", referring to adult baptism: German *Taufgesinnten*) has survived as the generally accepted name for the Dutch Mennonites since the late 16th century. *Doopsgezinden* was preferred because this group did not want to found their faith upon men, but upon the Word of God.

³ How lamentable such developments may have been at that time, those quarrelsome moments are blessings for the historian as will also be the case for this subject.

⁴ For Dutch Anabaptists and Mennonites see: C. Krahn et al., eds., *The Mennonite Encyclopedia*, (Scottsdale, Pa. / Waterloo, Ont.: Mennonite Publishing House / Herald Press, 1955-1990), 5 vols. III, 824-831 (here after: *ME*); A. Hamilton, "The development of Dutch Anabaptism in the light of the European Magisterial and Radical Reformation", and S. Voolstra, "The colony of heaven: The Anabaptist aspiration to be a church without spot or wrinkle in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. Visser et al., 3-14, resp. 15-29. See for Joost van den Vondel in a Mennonite setting: M. Spies, "Mennonites and literature", *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. Visser et al., 87-91 and 98.

⁵ Mennonites in Balk, in the province of Friesland, maintained silent prayer until 1853, in Giethoorn (Overijssel) until 1865, and in Aalsmeer (Noord-Holland) until

⁵⁴ F. Lansbergius, *Van de vremde ende Onschriftmatige Maniere der Weder-doopscher Leeraren Heymelijcke ghebden. Mitsgaders Eene grondelijcke Wederlegginghe van Iacob Iansz Bisschop der Waterlantscher Wederdoopers Antwoorde* (Rotterdam: J. van Waesberghe, 1596), 'Voorbericht' (Preface), A2v-A3r. See also F. S. Knipscheer, 'Geschiedenis van het stil en het stemmelijck gebed bij de vaderlandsche doopsgezinden' I, *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 37 (1897), 80 - 81, and W. J. Kühler, *Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Doopsgezinden* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink & Zoon, 1932-1950) I, 373-74.

⁶ Hans de Ries, a former Calvinist from Antwerp, became a formative force for the Waterlanders as an *Oudste* (Elder) in Alkmaar. About de Ries see *ME* IV, 330 - 332. De Ries's views were included in: Jacob Jansz., "met hulpe van een zijnder mede Dienaren" (with the help of one of his co-bishops, Hans de Ries), *Nootwendige verantwoordinge der verdructer Waerheyt. Nu Anno 1591. Door Pieter Cornelisz. Predicant binnen Alckmaer met seshien Argumenten bestreden* ([Amsterdam: Nicolaes III Biestkens, 1596?]) (A necessary explanation of the oppressed truth, which was attacked in sixteen arguments by Pieter Cornelisz, minister of Alkmaar, A.D. 1591).

^{6a} Van Lansbergen had little sympathy for the Waterlander Mennonites, whose nicknames he revealed with great pleasure: 'Franikers, Eykenplancke[n], Voetwasschers, Hans de Rijs volc ... ende meest by den name van Dreckwaghen ofte Vuylnis-karre, bekendt' (People from Franeker, the town where the Waterlanders were excommunicated by the main Mennonite body in 1555, oak boards [??], foot washers, Hans de Ries scum, but most generally known as dung cart, or garbage wagon); *Van de vremde ende Onschriftmatige Maniere*, A2r. Surprisingly enough, in later years van Lansbergen converted to the so-called Remonstrants, who, in Rotterdam in particular, had close contacts with the Waterlander Mennonites! See *ME* III, 292; J. P. de Bie e.a., *Biographisch Woordenboek van Protestantsche Godgeleerden in Nederland* ('s-Gravenhage: Martinus Nijhoff, 1943) V, 555-561; *Biografisch Lexicon voor de geschiedenis van het Nederlandse Protestantisme* (Kampen: Uitgeversmaatschappij J. H. Kok, 1998) IV, 292-293.

^{6b} This was stressed time and again, since Mennonites accused the Reformed of great neglect in this respect: 'the Calvinists do not take the effort to raise their hats, even worse: they hardly listen to the preacher's prayer!'. Knipscheer, "Geschiedenis van het stil en stemmelijck gebed", I, 81, footnote 3.

^{6c} *Nootwendighe verantwoordinghe*, **5r-v; cf. Knipscheer, "Geschiedenis van het stil en stemmelijck gebed", I, 81-82.

^{6d} *Nootwendighe verantwoordinghe*, **6r.

^{6e} Kühler, *Geschiedenis* III, 26; *ME* III, 317-318.

⁷ Initially the names of the separate groups referred to regional origin, but gradually the geographical distinctions faded away, while different theological and ethical views and practices were articulated. After a merger of various groups towards the middle of the 17th century, dominated by the Flemish, a new schism arose, forming two main parties, the Lamists and Zonists. They were called after the names of churches who met in two former warehouses in Amsterdam where the split had occurred in 1664: *By 't Lam* (Near the Lamb) and *De Zon* (The Sun). The schism therefore became known as "The War of the Lambs" (*Lammerenkrijgh*).

^{7a} *ME* II, 158-159; Knipscheer, "Geschiedenis van het stil en stemmelijck gebed" II, *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 38 (1898), 56-60.

^{7b} Van Eeghem, *Verhandelinghe van de stemmelijcke Gebeden*, 35.

^{7c} *Ibid.* 39-40.

⁸ For the history of Mennonite prayer, see: F. S. Knipscheer, "Geschiedenis van het stil en stemmelijck gebed bij de Doopsgezinden", *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 1897, 77-120 and *idem* 1898, 55-77; *ME* IV, 210-211.

⁹ P. Visser, "Aspects of social criticism and cultural assimilation: The Mennonite image in literature and self-criticism of literary Mennonites", and M.

Sprunger, "Waterlanders and the Dutch Golden Age: A case study on Mennonite involvement in seventeenth-century Dutch trade and industry as one of the earliest examples of socio-economic assimilation". *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. Visser et al., 67-82, resp. 133-148.

¹⁰ See the articles "Martyr Books", "Theology of Martyrdom" and "Martyrs' Mirror" in: *ME* III, 517 - 529, and "Offer des Heeren", *ME* IV, 22.

¹¹ D. Joris, *Verclarinche vant Vader ons* (Rotterdam: D. Mullem, ca. 1590), A2v. This is the second edition of the tract that originated about 1545. In an apology to Countess Anna of Oldenburg in 1540, *Onschuldts Davids Jorisz Gedaeen unde gepresenteert an die Wolgeborene Vrouw, Vrouw Anna* (Rotterdam: D. Mullem, ca. 1590), Joris states: "We teach and counsel them [the 'children', i.e. his followers] to pray the prayer of Christ frequently every day", *The Anabaptist Writings of David Joris 1535-1543*, G. K. Waite, transl. and ed. (Scottsdale, Pa. / Waterloo, Ont.: Herald Press, 1994), 283. For Joris' life and thoughts, see: G. K. Waite, *David Joris and Dutch Anabaptism 1524-1543* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfred Laurier, 1990).

¹² So far only Robert Friedmann has briefly dealt with this topic in his still outstanding study: *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries. Its Genius and Its Literature* (Goshen, Indiana: The Mennonite Historical Society, 1949), *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History*, No. 7, 176: "Presumably it was the vigorously debated controversy about silent and audible prayer which sped the change from spontaneous and free prayer to the use of written and printed prayers. However, it should be emphasized that the use of prayer books, whether in Holland, Germany, or Switzerland, never became an exclusive custom among Mennonites."

¹³ *ME* I, 681; Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 178-180.

¹⁴ Jan Gerritsz (1561-1617): *ME* II, 504, still stated that the prayers are of "authorship"

whereas Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 178, had already correctly ascribed them to Hans de Ries.

¹⁵ François de Knuyt was an Elder in Zierikzee (Zeeland) in the first half of the 17th century. The *Confession*, published without place and name of printer/publisher, including the prayers, was reprinted in 1623, 1635, 1642, 1648, 1684 and 1709. See *ME* 111, 209-210.

¹⁶ De Knuyt, *Nut end noodich Onderrecht*, 130. The preface, with a pseudo title page, follows the *Confession* section on 119-163.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁰ Leenaert Clock was a native of Germany who settled in Holland before 1590, and became an Elder of the High German Mennonites in Haarlem. He encouraged reconciliation with the Waterlanders of Hans de Ries. He was a prolific writer of devotional hymns. See *ME* I, 628-629

²¹ Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 119.

²² *Ibid.*, 118-122 and 181-184. The rather conservative confession of faith, drawn up by 17 Flemish Mennonite churches at Dordrecht in 1632, would become the most accepted confession among the Mennonites of Europe and America. It also became the authoritative confession of the German, French and North-American Amish. *ME* I, 682-683.

²³ Also noteworthy is the fact that one hymn by Leenaert Clock, a song of praise "Gott Vater, Herr, wir loben dich", is the well-known hymn no. 131 of the *Ausbund*, and to this day is the second hymn of every Amish worship service.

²⁴ *ME* IV, 211. Clock's prayers were also included in later editions of the most outstanding German Mennonite prayer book, *Die ernsthafte Christenpflicht* (Kaiserslautern, 1739) with at least 40 reprints in Europe and North America.

²⁵ Ephrata was a Protestant monastic community established by the Seventh-day Baptists in 1735, who since 1745 ran one of the first German printing presses in America. A.G. Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune. An Early American Counterculture* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pittsburgh UP, 1985), 128-130, 154-155 and 164-170.

²⁶ G. Abrahamsz, *Anleyding Tot de Kennis Van de*

Christelyke Godsdienst, By wijze van Vragen, en Antwoorden, tot Onderwijs der Jeugt (Amsterdam: P. Arentsz, 1677), 230. The "Na-reden" (Epilogue) also contains 18 examples of "bevindelijke Genade, ofte Geestelijke versterkingen" (Mystical Grace, or Spiritual Powers) of Mennonite martyrs which Galenus considered far more important than formal prayers. For Galenus Abrahamsz (1622-1706), an outstanding leader of the Lamist Mennonites, see: *ME* II, 431-435.

²⁷ Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety*, 184.

²⁸ P. Visser, *Het lied dat nooit verstomde. Vier eeuwen doopsgezinde liedboekjes* (Den IJp: Doopsgezinde Gemeende Den IJp / Landsmeer, 1988); L. P. Grijp, "A different flavour in a psalm-minded setting: Dutch mennonite hymns from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries", *From Martyr to Muppy*. Ed. Visser et al., 110-132; *ME* II, 873-875.

²⁹ The preface, consisting of two parts, is edited by Ph. Wackernagel, *Lieder der Niederländischen Reformierten aus der Zeit der Verfolgung in 16. Jahrhundert* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1965, repr. of 1867), 66-71.

³⁰ *Vermaanliederen* were particularly intended for young adults who had not yet been baptized. Leenaert Clock even regarded *vermaanliederen* as the new Psalms of the Gospel. Therefore he rejected their replacement by "regular" Psalms, a practice favored by Hans de Ries. This was one of the issues that created yet another schism in 1613. See P. Visser, *Broeders in de Geest. De doopsgezinde bijdragen van Dierick en Jan Philipsz Schabaelje tot de Nederlandse stichtelijke literatuur in de zeventiende eeuw*, Deventer Studiën 7 (Deventer: Sub Rosa, 1988), I, 195-202.

³¹ At least 80 editions appeared in the Netherlands whereas another 40 editions were published in German and American translations as *Die wandlende Seele* and *The Wandering Soul*. See P. Visser, "Jan Philipsz Schabaelje (1592 - 1656), a Dutch seventeenth-century Dutch Mennonite, and his *Wandering Soul*", *From Martyr to Muppy*, ed. P. Visser et al., 99-109. An 1860 edition of *Die wandlende Seele* was printed in Stuttgart by commission of the Old Colony and Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites in Russia. In a recent article, "Schabaliana. Een bibliografische na-oogst van het werk van Dierick en Jan Philipsz Schabaelje", *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 28 (2002), 173 - 210, I present an update of the remarkable printing history of this book. The total number of Dutch editions can now be determined at 96. Almost every copy that was missing when I wrote my dissertation in 1988 [see the previous note], has since been purchased at auction sales by the Mennonite Library in Amsterdam). Another chapter must be added to the unprecedented success of Schabaelje's book, in that it was published in England in an anonymous translation as *Dialogues of a Pilgrim*. Between 1769 and 1825 this translation appeared in at least 17 editions. It goes without saying that this book must be considered as the most successful Mennonite book ever.

³² Visser, *Broeders in de Geest*, 379-390 and 424-448.

³³ Only a few lines are devoted to him in: J. G. Fredericks & F. J. van den Branden, *Biographisch Woordenboek der Noord- en Zuidnederlandsche Letterkunde* (Amsterdam: L. J. Veen [1891]), 383; J. te Winkel, *Ontwikkelingsgang der Nederlandsche Letterkunde*, V/III (Rpt. of ed. 1922-27) (Utrecht: Hes Publishers / Leeuwarden, De Tille, 1973), 52. More extensive biographical data can be found in: P. C. Molhuysen & F. K. H. Kossman, eds., *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, X (Leiden: A. W. Sijthoff, 1937), I, 397. There he is described as "een vlot, doch niet zeer belangrijk dichter uit de sfeer van Jan Luyken" (a skillful, though rather unimportant poet from the circle of Jan Luyken). None of the post-War anthologies, compendia, handbooks and encyclopedias on Dutch literary history mention him. Cf. *ME* II, 868.

³⁴ See A. C. Fix, *Prophecy and Reason. The Dutch Collegiants in the Early Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1991).

³⁵ P. van Eeghen & J. Ph. Van der Kellen, *Het werk van Jan en Caspar Luyken* (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller & C^o, 1905), 171 (no. 165) and 750 (no. 465).

Affirming the Old Fundamentals

A Survey of the Danzig Old-Flemish Congregations in the Netherlands

Willem Stuve, Hellevoetsluis, The Netherlands

Dutch Mennonite historiography has paid little attention to the Danzig Old-Flemish. Until recently all eyes were focused on the Waterlanders. Historians like De Hoop Scheffer, Kühler, Van der Zijpp and Meihuizen judged them to be the “true” Mennonites.³ They considered the Waterlanders to be more progressive, tolerant, open minded, economically thriving and culturally more advanced.⁴

At the end of the 20th century this picture changed. In 1988 Piet Visser showed that the image that was given of the Waterlanders was in some aspects incorrect: although tolerant, their confessions were more binding than earlier historians had thought.⁵ After him Zijlstra again altered the image. According to Zijlstra, in the year 1650 the Waterlanders made up only 20% of the Dutch Mennonites, whereas the United Flemish topped with 60%. The remaining 20% went to the stricter groups of Old-Frisian (Jan Jacobsgezinden), Groninger Old-Flemish and Danzig Old-Flemish. Zijlstra also agreed with Visser on the binding nature of the Waterlander confessions. In the title of his book Zijlstra further acknowledged two important focal points in the study of the more strict groups: “Of the true *Gemeinde* and the old fundamentals.”⁶ In researching these groups, both the nature of the *Gemeinde* and the old teachings have to be taken in account.

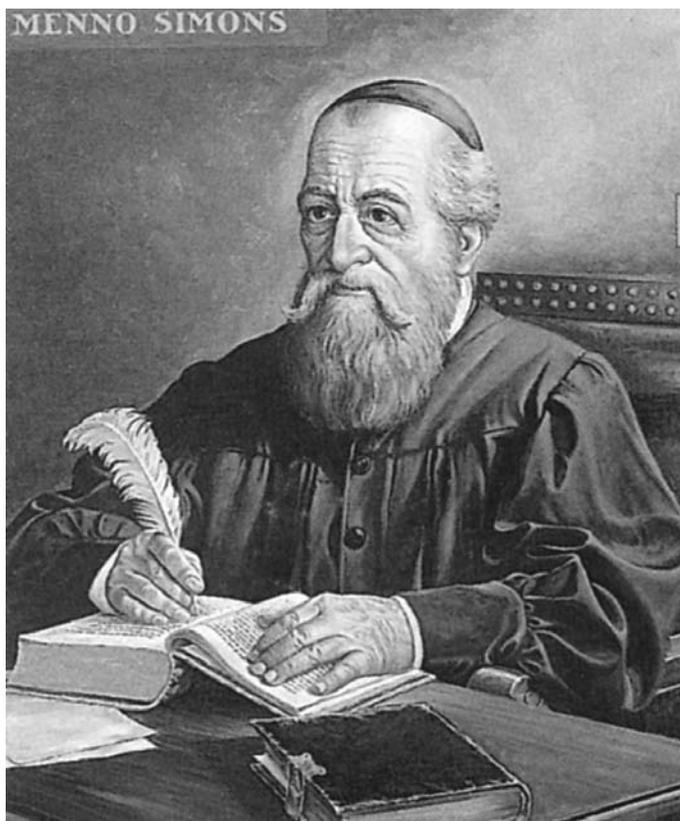
Another Dutch historian with interest in the Old-Flemish was Sjouke Voolstra. In an article in 2002 he expressed as his opinion that he considered the Old-Flemish to be the true heirs of the Mennonite tradition, a remark directly opposite to that of the early liberal Dutch historians. Voolstra stated that in investigating early Mennonitism, the historian should not use the Enlightenment as the means of understanding their motives, but turn to the groups on the right side of the spectrum. His unfortunate early death in 2004 put a halt to his desire to do more research in this direction.⁷

Sources concerning the Old-Flemish in the Netherlands

The prime textbook of the Old-Flemish was the Bible, as it was for all Mennonites. Though they used books and wrote down what they believed, most of what they taught was passed on verbally. This lack of a written heritage was caused by a number of factors. At first Mennonites were persecuted in the Netherlands. After the institution of the Dutch Republic they were only tolerated. Persecution caused a certain fear of the outside world. In addition, fear was also

instilled by the Mennonite view of the world and the state as something other than the *Gemeinde*. Their position as a silent people (*die Stillen im Lande*) caused Mennonites to refrain from too much interaction with the outside world. Even their letters were mostly kept by private persons. It was easier to lose important documents, than in an organized church bureaucracy.

On the level of church records the search for sources is disappointing. The only records that survived are those of the Amsterdam congregation, and they are from a young date.⁸ It



Menno Simons

is possible, though, to derive information from the archives of other Mennonite congregations and from public records (marriage and burial records) in general.

Besides church records, correspondence can also be used as a source. This is especially true of the so-called inventory of De Hoop Scheffer. This inventory contains the archive of the Amsterdam Mennonite Church. Due to its central role in the Dutch Mennonite world, the Amsterdam church and its predecessors collected important material pertaining to Mennonites in and outside of the Netherlands. The archive of the Amsterdam Mennonite Church has been divided into two parts; one part at the Amsterdam Municipal Archive and the other at the library of the Amsterdam University.⁹

The first important outside source on the

Old-Flemish is that of the German Lutheran preacher Simeon Frederik Rues. On a tour through the Netherlands in 1742, Rues did research on the Mennonites. Later he published a book on them in the German language. This book was translated into Dutch in 1744 by the Old-Frisian preacher Marten Schagen under the title of *Tegenwoordige Staet der Doopsgezinden of Mennoniten in de Vereenigde Nederlanden* (Amsterdam, 1745). The first chapter of the book dealt with the Old-Flemish. It gives an exact and unbiased description of their church life. It also provides a fine account of the way the Old-Flemish conducted baptism and communion.¹⁰

Another outside source is that of Foeke Sjoerds, *Kort Verdoog van den Staat*. He wrote his book in 1771 and gave special attention to the Old-Flemish in the introduction. Though he dealt mostly with the Groninger Old-Flemish, some important remarks concerning the Danzig Old-Flemish can also be found in his treatise.¹¹ Enlightening is also a letter sent to Marten Schagen. The writer provides information about the Old-Flemish congregations at Haarlem and about several events in the Flemish congregation.¹²

In a broader sense the *Christelijk Huysboeck* of Jan den Buyser is an important source for our knowledge of the Old-Flemish. It reveals historical events, but it also gives insight into the world of their ideas and customs. Copies can be found both in the library of the University of Amsterdam and in libraries in the United States.¹³

Virtually the only inside source about the congregational life of the Danzig Old-Flemish is the so-called *Memoriaal* of Eduard Simons Toens. This son of the elder Simons Eduards

Toens described the events in his family and in the congregations of Haarlem during the years 1735-1749. To a lesser extent, events from other Old-Flemish congregations were also noted. Fortunately for scholars, this unique source has recently been published.¹⁴

Pieter Simons Toens, brother of the above mentioned Eduard, also wrote a biography. Especially the first chapter is important, because it deals with events in the Haarlem congregation at the end of its existence.¹⁵ After the downfall of the Haarlem Old-Flemish congregation, Toens joined the Flemish congregation. Later on he moved to the province of Groningen where he became involved in politics. At the end of his political career he became one of the first substitute chairmen of the Dutch States General in 1798.

A list of the confessions used by the Dutch



J. G. de Hoop Scheffer (1819-1893) (Mennonite Encyclopedia IV, photo section p. 14, No. 2.)

Old-Flemish congregations follows. As can be seen, especially the Haarlem congregation played an active role in expressing the faith.

V[incent] D[e] H[ont], *Korte bekentnisse des geloofs* (Haarlem, 1626).

Louwerens Willems, *Kakebeen* (Rotterdam, 1636), pages 1-111.

J[an] D[e] B[uyser], *Christelijck Huysboek* (Haarlem, 1643).

Roelof Agge Joncker, *Mennoniste Vrageboek, Behelsende de twaelf Artijckelen des Geloofs / in sodanigen order als deselve in de Vergaderinge der Doops-gesinden: genaemt de Huys-kopers geleert word: 't Samen gestelt in Vragen / en Antwoorden* (Steenwijk, 1708).

Pieter Boudewijns, *Onderwijzinge des Christelyken Geloofs, Volgens de Belydenis der Christenen die men de Oude Vlaamsche Mennoniten noemt. Waar in derzelve Lleere en Gemeentelyke Huishouginge, Schriftmatig voorgesteld en bewezen word: Opgesteld by Vragen en Antwoorden* (Haarlem, 1743; reprint Sneek, 1825).

Pieter Boudewijns, *Korte schets van de onderwijzinge des Christelyken Geloofs, voor de Jeugd* (Haarlem, 1744).

The Frisian-Flemish conflict

To understand how the Old-Flemish branch began, it is necessary to explain the different factions preceding the Old-Flemish. Within the scope of this article it is of course impossible to deal with the Frisian-Flemish conflict in detail, but it is important to have a general overview of the dynamics of the events and of the values at stake.

The Dutch Mennonites had broken in two parts in 1557 over the usage of the ban. This conflict first arose in the big congregation of Franeker, in the province of Friesland, the native province of Menno Simons. Those in favor of

a more strict practice of the ban and shunning were named Flemish. The more lenient party was named Waterlanders or Franekeraars. Their name was derived from a region in the province of Holland, where they had a considerable number of followers.¹⁶

More important for our story is the second breakup, namely, between the Flemish and the Frisians. When the persecution in the southern provinces (present Belgium) of the Netherlands became fierce, many refugees fled to the northern provinces. They settled at Amsterdam, Haarlem, Leiden, but also in the province of Friesland.¹⁷ The refugees from the south were different from the locals in clothing, habits and what they considered proper or not. Soon frictions arose.

Four towns – Leeuwarden, Harlingen, Franeker and Dokkum – had made a secret covenant (*het Verbond van de Vier Steden*), a sort of regional church council. This gave them the possibility to intervene in each of the towns. When a Flemish refugee, Jeroen Tinnemaker of Henegouwen, was called to office at Franeker, this election was opposed by Ebbe Pieters, elder of the Harlingen congregation. Jeroen acted thereupon by withdrawing the congregation of Franeker from the covenant in 1566. He gained support from other Flemish congregations.

The conflict, based on cultural, ideological and personal differences, soon ran out of hand. At first a compromise (*Compromis*) was reached in December 1566, but this failed because the Flemish thought they were treated unfairly in being blamed for the greatest role in the conflict. One of those agreeing with the compromise was elder Hans Busschaert. When the compromise fell apart, Busschaert, among others, was temporarily asked to step down from office. We will meet him again in the next paragraph.¹⁸

Eventually Dirk Philips, at that time elder at Danzig, was invited, to come to the Netherlands to mediate and help solve the differences. Philips was biased in his actions, because he felt overlooked as senior elder. He sided with the Flemish and condemned the Frisians. Although he initially had agreed with the covenant, he later called it a human institution, not backed up by Scripture. Soon after he had played his part, Dirk died in East-Friesland, Germany. He was later, posthumously banned by the Frisian.

Jan Willems and Lubbert Gerrits, elders from the province of Holland, asked to mediate, acted unwisely, and blamed the Flemish more than the Frisians. It is not possible to describe all the events, but eventually both parties banned each other, starting with the Flemish. A group of congregations in the province of Overijssel had kept out of the dispute, but were asked for their opinion. In 1569 they decided during the so-called *Stichtse Presentatie* that the Frisians were the most to blame, and sided with the Flemish party.

At first Frisians and Flemish differed little in their opinion and practice of the church, its boundaries and its government. Later on, when both factions divided again, more diversity was created. The Frisian branch split in 1581 into “Young or Soft” and “Old or Hard-Frisians.” The points of conflict between Young and Old

were marital avoidance, outside marriages (*buitentrouw*), the prohibiting of business with the Flemish and the re-baptizing of Flemish members. Some years later the Hard Frisians had another split; the so-called *Jan Jacobsgezinden* named after their leading elder. It was a very strict branch. This group was especially strong in the province of Friesland.¹⁹

The genesis of the Old-Flemish branch

The occasion of the schism later known as the *Huiskopertwist* was that elder Thomas Byntgens²⁰ of Franeker bought a house in 1586.²¹ A few months after the purchase, he was accused of irregularities by the Diener Jacob Keest and two other Diener.²² According to Keest, the irregularities were that Byntgens had paid a lower amount of money than he had stated in the bill, and that by doing so had diminished the opportunities of his fellowman. Keest was of the opinion that Byntgens should confess his wrong deed, but the latter was unwilling. The first act was considered a lie by Keest and his adherents, and the second was seen as theft and deceit. Both were thought of as conduct unbecoming for a Christian.

After dealing with the matter several times in the Franeker congregation, it eventually remained unsolved. It has to be said that Byntgens had confessed his wrong deed, but was kept on by the brethren to serve anyway. Keest was set on bringing Byntgens down. He tried to do so by bringing up a complaint against Byntgens' wife. Keest also looked for help from the neighbouring congregation at Harlingen. Apparently some members of Harlingen held a grudge against Byntgens.

The row was still a local church matter, but when the Franeker congregation failed to settle the quarrel, other congregations became involved. At first Jan Abels and neighbouring congregations were asked to solve the dispute. Abels was elder of the Flemish congregation of nearby Dokkum. He dared not do it on his own, so decided to wait for the expected delegates from Holland. Both Byntgens and the three Diener were asked to continue in their service. Letters were written to invite delegates from other congregations and probably delivered by Byntgens himself.

During Byntgens' absence, the three Diener laid down their service. By doing so, they harmed the poor of the congregation, for they were no longer taken care of. With Byntgens still absent, the three Diener picked up their service again, and tried to get Byntgens' wife, Sasken, convicted. But the brethren refused to treat her case. They replied to the Diener that she had not been properly admonished. Angry, the three laid down their service for a second time. When Byntgens returned and saw the agony of the poor and the congregation, he asked that their dispute be brought before the brethren again. It was judged that the three should confess their ill intent towards Byntgens, and that Sasken should ask forgiveness for the wrong words she had spoken of the three Diener. Subsequently the peace was restored with a handshake and the brotherly kiss (*hand en mond*). All these events took place in the year 1586.

In the same year the elders from Haarlem came to Franeker. With them came Jan Alberts and representatives from several other congregations. In this context the names of the congregations at Dokkum, Sneek, Harlingen, Leeuwarden, Vlieland, Amsterdam, Haarlem, Dordrecht, Rotterdam, Vlissingen, Groningen, Emden, Cologne and Danzig are mentioned. They found the congregation in great "sadness." The three Diener presented their case, as did Byntgens. The conclusion of the elders and the other visitors was that the restored peace should be continued and that they couldn't improve it. The three Diener refused, but after they had been threatened with expulsion, they withdrew their objections. They agreed voluntarily to step down from their office, and Byntgens remained as elder of the congregation. Four new Diener were elected.

After this, Hans Busschaert and his party traveled to Leeuwarden, Sneek and other towns in Friesland to proclaim the good news of the restored peace. The three Diener sent messengers after him to persuade him to take their side. Busschaert refused and warned them not to separate from the main body. But this is exactly what the three Diener and their adherents did. They set up their own meeting place and did not allow others to come to their gatherings. In 1587, when the three Diener refused to return, all three were banned. Busschaert was in agreement with this decision. This action was later considered to be a mistake by Jacob Pieters van der Meulen, and Busschaert himself denied at Harlingen that the three had been banned.

Nine months passed. Still in the year 1587, a meeting at Franeker was organized, where representatives of Amsterdam, Dordrecht, Haarlem, Vlissingen, Dokkum and the surrounding Frisian towns met. After the three Diener had been chided for leaving the main body, they returned to the congregation. But even this peace did not last. After the refusal to accept their offering to give the goods for the poor back to the congregation, they again separated from the congregation of Byntgens. The three Diener were ordained by a "backslidden" person from Bolsward.

It was during a meeting at Franeker from January 9th until January 24th, 1588, that the conflict ran totally out of hand. Until that moment it had still been possible to reach an agreement between the parties. But during the meeting something unexpected happened. Haarlem elder Jacob Pieters van der Meulen expressed as his opinion that the matter not be decided by the brethren, but by the elders. Busschaert, Roelants and Byntgens concurred. The conflict headed in a new direction. More and more the main subject of the discussion shifted from the events at Franeker to the question: who had the authority to decide. In my opinion, Van der Meulen deviated from the teachings, practice and customs among the Flemish. Busschaert was too weak to oppose him. Representatives from Amsterdam, Haarlem, Dokkum and others disagreed fervently with Van der Meulen and company.

The matter still being unsolved, again a meeting was held at Amsterdam in January 1589. It decided to invite all congregations to a general

conference. The elders of Groningen, who were also present at the meeting, were summoned by Haarlem to appear before the elders and brethren. Because of the circumstances, the Groninger elders refused. Thereupon the elders of Haarlem accused them of unwillingness (arrogance) to listen to their congregation.

In January 1590 the congregation of Thomas Byntgens invited all congregations to Franeker for a general conference. Byntgens wrote that he was willing to hear all opinions. If others could prove by Scripture that he had done wrong, he would submit himself to Scripture. At that time at least, the churches in the province of Groningen, Amsterdam, Dokkum and some delegates of Haarlem were convinced of the wrongdoing of Byntgens. Some persons at Haarlem let their elders be known that they intended to accept the invitation. The Haarlem elders were furious and put the case before the brethren. There upon Jacques Outerman, Cornelis de Cuper, Jaques Gerrits of Haarlem, Willem Jans Buys and Cornelis van Tongerlo of Amsterdam and elder Laurens Verniers were banned. This was done against the warning of several congregations not to be overzealous.

The above-mentioned persons arrived at Franeker on May 13th, 1590 and stayed there until May 20th. Notwithstanding his invitation, Byntgens refused to talk with them. He not only refused to listen to the banned persons, but also to those that hadn't yet chosen sides. Instead, Byntgens summoned Jan Alberts, elder of Dokkum to appear before the brethren of Franeker. He was not allowed to take any company with him. When Alberts refused, he banned him on Sunday May 20th, 1590. By these acts the assembled delegates understood that further attempts would be futile, and left Franeker. On September, 3rd, 1590 they wrote down the events and their experiences in a *Cort en warachtich Verhael*.

A group of Flemish congregations in the northern Province of Groningen had taken a neutral stance. Their leading elders Brixius Gerrits, Pieter Cornelis and Claes Ganglofs disagreed with Byntgens acts, but they also disagreed with the pressure that Vermeulen and Busschaert applied to them to take sides. They were summoned by the congregation of Emden, Germany, and delegates of the Haarlem congregation to appear at Emden. The Groninger elders and preachers refused to show up. As a result, these congregations, numbering ten to eleven, as well as the congregation of Leer, Germany, were banned by the Old-Flemish on September 8th and 6th, 1592.

What conclusions can be drawn from this account? The simple conflict could have been solved by the Franeker congregation. Even when other churches became involved, peace could have been restored. The breach between Flemish and Old-Flemish had nothing to do with a supposed difference between natives and persons of a Flemish background. The key players all shared the same background. The conflict also cannot be explained by more or less strictness. Both Flemish and Old-Flemish wanted to protect the *Gemeinde*. Both rejected all that could harm the "pure Bride of Christ." It

would take some forty years before there would be a noticeable difference on strictness between the two branches.

The buying of the house was nothing more than an occasion. On this point most historians agree. So, what caused the division? On the level of the local Flemish congregation of Franeker, personal animosities played an important role. At another level, the doubting attitude of elder Hans Busschaert made it possible for Jacob Pieters van der Meulen to play a key role. Van der Meulen introduced a "novelty" by reserving the decision in the Franeker case to the elders. By this he "ruled" over the congregation and diminished the democratic character of decision-making. Fortunately, this new policy was not made general by the Old-Flemish. Van der Meulen, and his adherent Jan Roelants were overzealous in banning and shunning those who disagreed with them.

Those in favour of Byntgens became known as *Huiskopers* (*Hauskäufer*) or Old-Flemish. Their adversaries went by the name of Contra-Huiskopers, Young-Flemish or simply Flemish.²³

The spread of the Old-Flemish congregations at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th centuries

In the period from 1598 to 1632, about thirty congregations belonged to the Old-Flemish branch in the Netherlands. In the Province of Holland, Alkmaar, Amsterdam, Landsmeer, Haarlem, Leiden, Gouda, Rotterdam, Delfshaven, Dordrecht, Gorkum, Zaltbommel, Brielle, Oud-Beyerland and Bommel/Ooltgensplaat belonged to the *Hauskäufer*.²⁴ The Province of Zeeland had Vlissingen and probably Sommelsdijk on the border with Holland. In the Province of Utrecht the village of Vianen and the town of Utrecht can be counted. A concentration of congregations could be found in the Province of Overijssel: Blokzijl, Giethoorn, Oldemarkt and Zuidveen. These places had played an important role in the Frisian-Flemish conflict. There further were congregations in Arnhem, Breda, Leeuwarden, Franeker and on the isle of Vlieland. The town of Haarlem had three Old-Flemish congregations: the *Vermeulenfolk* or *Bankroetiers* had their meetinghouse at the Bakkenessergracht. The *Lucas Philipsfolk* or *Borstentasters* gathered at the Helmbrekersteeg, and the *Vincent de Hontsfolk* had their meetinghouse at the Oude Gracht.²⁵

In Germany there were *Hauskäufer* congregations at Emden, Hamburg, Emmerich/Kleef, Danzig and Friedrichstadt.²⁶ The Prussian congregations of the Mariënburger Gross Werder, Elbing and Heubuden at this time can probably also be counted to belong to the Old-Flemish, but they could not be ascertained as such in the period under discussion.

The first cracks

Already ten years after the beginning of the branch, the first cracks in the Old-Flemish building appeared. It was a quarrel over boundaries between the founding fathers of the movement. Most probably it also was a clash of personali-

ties. In the year 1598 a member of the Haarlem congregation went bankrupt. Bankruptcy was considered a major transgression, both by the ruling Reformed church and the Mennonites. It was considered theft and an affront of God. Usually bankruptcy resulted in banishment or being withheld from communion. The local elder Jacob Pietersz. van der Meulen, or Vermeulen, disagreed with his fellow elder Hans Busschaert about what should be done. Van der Meulen was willing to accept the wrongdoer. Unfortunately we know nothing about his motives. Perhaps, being a merchant himself, he considered bankruptcy an occupational hazard. Hans Busschaert wanted the person banned. Busschaert and the other elders and preachers tried to convince the Haarlem elder, but in vain.

The result of the quarrel was that van der Meulen, his supporter Jan Roelants, and their followers were banned by the other Old-Flemish congregations. They were nicknamed the *Vermeulensfolk*, *Jan Roelantsfolk*, *Jan de Haansfolk* or *Bankroetiers*. According to the *Successio Anabaptistica* this congregation was only small (*klein hoopje*). Although the initial conflict was about boundaries, the *Vermeulensfolk* was no less strict than the other Old-Flemish congregations. They continued using the ban, shunning, marital avoidance (*echtmijding*) and re-baptizing (*wederdoop*) persons from other Mennonite congregations.

Later on – the precise time or occasion is unknown – Vermeulen sided with Thomas Byntgens and banned Hans Busschaert. In the years 1601-1605 an attempt was made by Vermeulen to unite with the *Bevredigde Broederschap* of Waterlanders, Frisians and High-Germans.²⁷ Besides these parties, also the Flemish elder Jacques Outerman was asked to take part in the negotiations. Eventually the discussions broke off because Vermeulen remained with his strict opinions.

After the death of Vermeulen, his congregation was led by Jan de Haan. In 1634 – shortly after the *Dordrecht* Confession – he corresponded with two of the Amsterdam Flemish elders that had written the *Olijftacxken*. The *Vermeulensfolk* probably merged in 1635 with the United Flemish congregation *De Blok* at Haarlem.²⁸

The Old-Flemish at Vlissingen, Province of Zeeland, had broken away from the Flemish congregation sometime around 1602. Besides being called the usual *Hauskäufer* they were also known as Footwashers (*Voetwassers*) or *Hans Busschaertsfolk*. In 1621 the Flemish congregation at Vlissingen and the other Flemish churches in Zeeland had begun peace negotiations with them. The Flemish had written a letter in which they had asked for the opinion of their fellow believers. From a letter of June 19, 1622, it is clear that they received a positive response.²⁹

As early as 1610 the Amsterdam congregation got into trouble. One of its preachers, Hero Jans, no longer held the Old-Flemish to be the one true *Gemeinde*. He stepped down from of-

fice. The leadership did nothing to punish him, not when he stepped down nor when he returned after a short period. The actions of the leaders and of Jans were opposed by a member called Lieven de Buyser.³⁰ The leadership asked other congregations for help and advise. Especially the neighbouring Haarlem congregation became involved. The gathering of elders chided the attitude of the Amsterdam leadership for their slackness towards Jans, but the leadership rejected the accusations. The events caused much friction between the congregations of Amsterdam and Haarlem.

In the years 1619/20 a new conflict arose



The Mennonite church in Witmarsum, Menno Simon's home village. (MHC)

at Haarlem. Sometime in 1618/19 elder Lucas Philips moved from Woerden to Haarlem. As seen above, the leaders of the Haarlem congregation had been heavily involved in the ongoing disputes in the Amsterdam congregation. Jan Willems, elder of the Haarlem congregation, had died the year before. Maybe Philips had taken his place. Anyway, Lucas Philips and Vincent de Hont started arguing over a few items. One point of dissent had to do with the attitude of the leadership of the Amsterdam congregation, but also with the slackness toward a sinner. The discord also had something to do with indecent behaviour of a groom towards his bride. The conflict erupted and soon ran out of hand. Most Old-Flemish congregations became involved, even as far away as Prussia. De Hont was on the strict side and Philips on the lenient side, but personal differences must have played a role. Thirdly, something in the attitude of De Hont must have irritated the other Old-Flemish leaders. One of the persons instrumental in banning De Hont was Adriaan Cornelis, later elder of the Dordrecht congregation. After several meetings, De Hont was banned on April 6th, 1620.

Unification and dissent

In 1610 the Flemish and Frisian congregations at Harlingen in the Province of North-Holland merged. This caused a stir among the Flemish. No longer sure of their own identity as true church of God (*ware Gemeente Gods*), some Flemish opened the door to the other Mennonite branches. Others, for instance the Flemish congregations in the Province of Groningen, fervently opposed the tendency to unite. They were

led by elder Jan Luies of Kloosterburen.

The supporters of unity had the important elders Jacques Outerman of Haarlem, Claes Claes of Blokzijl and the Dordrecht elder Adriaen Cornelis to back them up. Outerman had already voiced his desire for restored unity in his *Verclaringhe met bewijs* (s.l., 1609). The same was true of Claes Claes. In this period, a lot of discussion went on between supporters and opponents. Meetings were organized at Hoorn in 1622 and at Middelstum in 1628. On both sides, books were written and the ban was used. In 1626 this discussion was given a boost by the publishing of a letter by four Flemish elders from Amsterdam. This letter called the *Olive Branch (Olijftacxken)* asked its readers three questions:

- 1) What distinguished the church of God?
- 2) Could these characteristics only be found with the Flemish, or perhaps also with the Frisian party?
- 3) On what grounds could a peace offer be denied?

Though these questions were posed by the Flemish, they were first answered by the Old-Flemish. Adriaen Cornelis, elder of the Dordrecht congregation picked up the challenge. It started with dissent in the Rotterdam congregation.³¹ A Diener, Hendrick Dircks Appeldoorn and two deacons were asked to step down in

1625. The Diener had to withdraw from his service because he was thought to be worldly; the two deacons because they had not fulfilled their task properly. The three were dissatisfied with the decision and went to Dordrecht and Utrecht to look for support. They also gathered a group of discontented persons around them Adriaen Cornelis backed them up. Although peace was restored in 1627, the fire of discontent burned on. At some point the *Hendrick Dircks Appeldoornsfolk* withdrew from the main body, and Cornelis kept supporting them. The elder and Diener of the Rotterdam congregation asked him to stop, but the Dordrecht elder did not stop. Instead, he organized all those in favour of uniting with the Flemish. Cornelis ordained likeminded elders at Arnhem and Utrecht. He also supported dissatisfied members of the Haarlem congregation of Lucas Philips. When they withdrew from the main body and organized their own gatherings, Cornelis ordained preachers and deacons.

Meanwhile Cornelis had also begun peace negotiations with the Young-Flemish congregation at Dordrecht. In coordination with the Amsterdam Flemish congregation Cornelis arranged for a peace gathering to take place. Letters were sent to Flemish and Old-Flemish congregations to ask their opinion about unification. Some were enthusiastic, others hesitant and still others opposed unification.

During this period (1627-29), Holland was visited by Gerrit Claes, elder of Danzig. Aware of the ongoing troubles at Rotterdam, Gerrit tried to reconcile both parties. He agreed with the Rotterdam leaders that they had every right to punish Appeldoorn. Gerrit disagreed with the acts and

attitude of the Dordrecht elder. When Gerrit visited Dordrecht, Cornelis dared not bring the case before the brethren. He did not invite Gerrit Claes to speak with them about the matter. Having no success, the Danzig elder eventually left, addressing the following words to Cornelis “Your words differ from your acts.”

With the Danzig elder gone, Cornelis celebrated communion with the followers of Appeldoorn on October 14th, 1629. The Rotterdam leaders summoned him to appear before the brethren, but Cornelis didn’t show up. Eventually the Rotterdam congregation banned the Dordrecht elder as well as preacher Mels Ghysbrechts. Later on, a preacher from Haarlem was also banned. All these actions only led to more harm. On July 27th, 1631 the followers of Appeldoorn occupied the meetinghouse of the Rotterdam congregation. By taking legal steps they also tried to get possession of the goods for the poor.

Having consulted most congregations, a date was set for a gathering of Flemish and Old-Flemish *Gemeinden*. At first the meeting was supposed to be held in February 1632, but it was later postponed to April 1632. The Flemish congregations of the Province of Groningen under the leadership of elder Jan Luies, as well as those under elders Cornelis Jans and Tonnis Gerrits were opposed to the union. Prior to the meeting, the congregations in the Province of Zeeland had also asked for a delay, though they eventually signed the treaty.

On April 21st, 1632 seventeen Flemish and Old-Flemish congregations appeared at Dordrecht. Added to them were delegates from the Old-Flemish at Amsterdam, Haarlem and Rotterdam who had been punished. The merger between the Flemish and Old-Flemish congregations of Dordrecht was finalized, after which all delegates signed the treaty. For this occasion Adriaen Cornelis had drafted a new confession, the so-called *Dordrecht Confession*.³²

From Old-Flemish to Danzig Old-Flemish

The signing of the *Dordrecht Confession* in 1632 left the Old-Flemish branch severely diminished. Dissatisfied members of the congregations of Amsterdam, Haarlem (*Lucas Philipsfolk*), Leiden and Rotterdam had sided with the United Flemish. The same was true of the entire congregations of Arnhem, Utrecht and Emmerich/Kleef. During the years following 1632, the Old-Flemish congregations of Amsterdam and Rotterdam had to fight a legal battle over their meetinghouses and their budget for the poor. No wonder they called their adversaries “Housethieves” (*Huisrovers*) instead of *Hauskäufer* (*Huiskopers*)!

Small congregations like Zaltbommel and Bommel/Ooltgensplaat perished around 1635. Other small congregations like Vianen and Gorkum could only survive by accepting help from the neighbouring bigger congregations of Utrecht and Dordrecht. By doing so, they were eventually drawn into the United Flemish camp. About the congregation at Frieddrichstadt, Germany, it is known that the *Hauskäufer* merged in 1631/32 with the local Old Frisians (*Pieter Jans*

Twiskfolk) and the High Germans.³³

A year after the unification between the Flemish and the Old-Flemish took place, the hand of peace was offered to Vincent de Hont and his congregation in a letter, the *Vredeboede*. It was wisely signed by former Old-Flemish representatives of the congregations of Arnhem, Dordrecht, Haarlem, Leiden and Utrecht. They expressed their sorrow over the breakup of 1620 and asked for reconciliation.³⁴ De Hont did not respond, nor did he react to the peace offer of Claes Claesz. in: *Propositie ofte voorstellinghe* (Haarlem, 1634).

The other Old-Flemish congregations tried to aid each other as best as they could. The elders of Rotterdam, Haarlem and Leiden assisted the Amsterdam congregation in regaining their meetinghouse. Although the congregational nature of their movement remained, the Old-Flemish formed a close fellowship. Only a few examples of their connection can be given. Of course, congregations that had no elder were assisted by elders from elsewhere with baptism and communion. Quarrels within the community were settled, and standards for behavior and conduct were upheld. For instance, the Rotterdam congregation wrote in 1666 to the congregation of Amsterdam that they considered persons who participated in marriage parties (*wereldse bruiloften*) were not eligible as elder or Diener.³⁵ Also other events happened. In 1662 the Leiden congregation was in trouble. The Amsterdam congregation invited all other churches to come to Leiden to deal with the matter. In a letter of March 21st, 1662 the Rotterdam congregation responded to the invitation by stating that they were not willing to send delegates because the Leiden congregation should have invited them.³⁶

The number of Danzig Old-Flemish congregations in the Netherlands

Around 1680 there were eleven Danzig Old-Flemish congregations left: Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Delfshaven, Brielle and Oud-Beyerland in the Province of Holland and Blokzijl, Giethoorn, Oldemarkt and Zuidveen in the Province of Overijssel, and two at Haarlem. The Leiden congregation had perished shortly after the death of elder Jan Rose. The former Haarlem congregation of Lucas Philips was about to perish, and the same was true of the small Landsmeer congregation.

Of the remaining congregations Amsterdam and the Haarlem Oude Gracht congregation were still strong, both perhaps having about three hundred members. Except for the small Oldemarkt congregation, the Overijssel churches were also strong. Within the next two or three decades they launched a new Old-Flemish congregation in the vicinity of Sappemeer. Peatworkers from Blokzijl, Giethoorn and Zuidveen left Overijssel to work in the peat settlements in the Province of Groningen, and later formed a new congregation.

Rotterdam seems to have lost a lot of its member through outside marriages (*buitentrouw*) and conflict. At the beginning of the 18th century it had to rely on the elders of the

Amsterdam and Haarlem congregation for baptism and communion. One of the few remaining preachers moved to Amsterdam in the 1630s. Though the church tried to extend its life, it was perishing by that time. Delfshaven, Brielle and Oud-Beyerland were only small congregations. Their end also came sometime in the thirties or forties of the 18th century.

The connection to Danzig

As early as the Middle Ages, Dutch and Flemish traveled East, set up their business and sometimes remained in the land. There was extensive ship travel between the Netherlands and the Baltics and Prussia. Prussia was the granary for the Netherlands, which included present-day Belgium and the Netherlands. Because of this dependency on grain, everything was done to keep the narrow sea-passage of the Sont, the gateway to the Baltic Sea, open for merchant-vessels.

Many refugees from Flanders went to the Netherlands. Others fled to Emden or Cologne in Germany. As noted earlier, some Flemish and Dutch refugees went directly to Prussia, others lived elsewhere and later arrived in Prussia. Heavy persecution by the Duke of Alva from 1568 on only increased the stream of travelers eastward. The Dutch were experts in milling, land reclamation and farming, so they were – even though they were Protestants or Anabaptists – more than welcome to settle in the marshy lands of the Vistula River.

That the refugees considered the East as the “Promised Land” can be seen from the following. In a play performed in 1638, the famous Dutch writer and poet Joost van den Vondel described the Prussian land in terms of the “Promised Land,” where the refugee could forget all his sorrow and enjoy the richness of the land.³⁷

Within the space of this article there is no room to divulge any details of the rise of the Mennonite congregations in Prussia. Suffice it to say that during the time of Menno Simons there was already a congregation at Danzig. His great successor, Dirk Philips, is even considered to be the first elder of this congregation. In the early years there were also congregations at Elbing and in the Gross Werder area.

When the first conflicts among Mennonites in the Netherlands arose, the congregations in the East were automatically involved. As soon as the conflict between Flemish and Frisian erupted, elder Dirk Philips was commissioned to go to the Netherlands to resolve the matter. But Dirk did not succeed, and died in 1568, shortly after the first battles had been fought. Dirk had strongly sided with the Flemish party, but it seems that the congregations in the East tried to maintain the peace in their own communities for as long as they could. They received letters concerning the conflict from the Netherlands. In 1582 delegates from Danzig participated in a gathering at Haarlem where attempts were made to heal the breach. Among them was Quirynd Vermeulen, elder of the Danzig congregation. Eventually the conflict that had broken up the congregations in the Netherlands also split the Prussian church. Quirynd was banned by elder Hilchen Smit of the Montau congregation.³⁸ In approximately 1590,

Danzig had both a Flemish, a Frisian, and almost certainly also a Waterlander, congregation. The Flemish gathered at Alt-Schottland, just outside of the jurisdiction of the town of Danzig. The Frisian had their meetinghouse at Neugarten. As indicated earlier, there were also Flemish congregations at Elbing, in the Gross Werder area, and later also in Heubuden. The Frisians had congregations at Montau and Schonsee. Although the time of settlement is uncertain, the Groninger Old-Flemish later had their congregations at Kleinsee (Jeziorka), Konopath (Przechowka) and Alexanderwohl.

Because of this origin, the Danzig Flemish congregation considered itself to be the true *Gemeinde* (*ware gemeente*). In its opinion the Frisians had departed from the faith, but they still upheld the truth. They simply designated their church as Flemish, though apparently also the term “*Klerken*” was used. Not only did they have this self-understanding, but the Danzig church was also considered by others as the true *Gemeinde*. As a result, the Dutch Old-Flemish congregations assumed the name of Danzig Old-Flemish.

Throughout the 17th and the 18th century the Flemish congregations in Prussia stayed in contact with the Dutch Old-Flemish congregations. The journey of elder Gerrit Claes to Holland in the years 1627-29 has already been noted. The Old-Flemish

community, in much distress, was glad that the elder visited them. Afterward they thanked the Danzig congregation for sending him. Besides trying to solve the differences as we have already told, Gerrit also tried to bring Vincent de Hont back into the Old-Flemish camp. He admonished him for his headstrong attitude, and for this writings that had done harm to his fellow-believers.

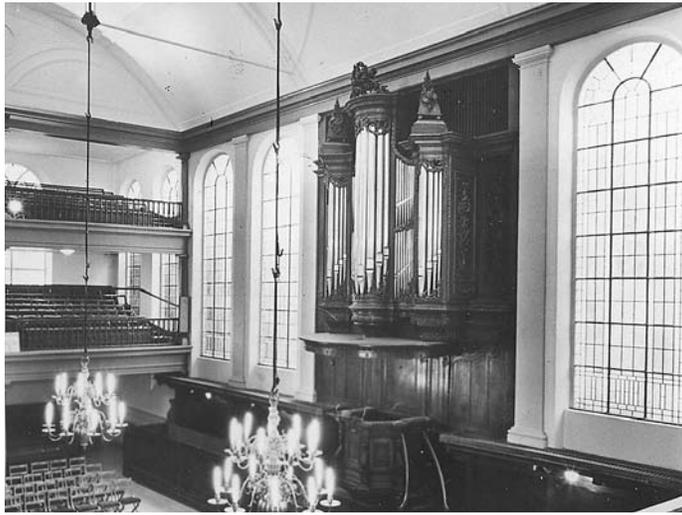
From the church records of the Danzig congregation it can be seen that several persons were baptized in the Netherlands. Probably not all persons are mentioned, because baptism was not the only reason to travel from Prussia to the Netherlands. As Mannhardt writes: “Wealthy families eagerly sent their sons to Amsterdam, Rotterdam or Harlem in order to learn a trade. Frequently they were also baptized there, and later returned.”³⁹

Although there was contact between the believers in Prussia and the Netherlands, there were also many obstacles. Prussia was frequented several times by war, lost harvests, famine, black death and other diseases.⁴⁰ As a result of the black death in 1709-10 the Danzig congregation lost more than four hundred persons, including the elder Georg Hansen.

When the Amsterdam congregation lost its elder Abraham van Gammeren in 1725, both Amsterdam and Rotterdam wrote letters to Prussia asking for help. The other congregations in Prussia were not able to help, so the Danzig congregation decided to send Dirk Jans, brother of its elder Anthoni Jans, to the Netherlands. The Danzig congregation must have regretted

their decision because soon after sending him, Anthoni Jans died.

During his stay in Amsterdam Dirk Jans accomplished an important feat. He managed to re-unite the Dutch Old-Flemish and the Prussian congregations. He also succeeded in reconciling the Amsterdam and the Haarlem congregations. Since the days of Vincent de Hont, the two congregations had been in discord. As a binding factor for the union between the Dutch and Prussian congregations, the confession of Georg Hansen (1678) was used. This confession



The Singel Mennonite Church in Amsterdam, the largest Mennonite church in the Netherlands. (MHC 246.48)

was sent to the Netherlands and signed by all congregations. Seventy signatures can be found on the document, among them the signatures of four Dutch and four Prussian elders. When the Dutch send it back to Isaac de Veer, elder of the Danzig congregation, they wrote: “Even though we have been separated from each other for more than 100 years, nevertheless, the Confession has remained unaltered in all its articles and parts. We have accepted it with great love and joy, and have unanimously signed it; not one Diener abstained or resisted. All signed their name to express their unity in faith, and their desire to live together with us in love and peace.”⁴¹

When Dirk Jans returned to Danzig in 1733, he left behind a united body of Old-Flemish congregations in the Netherlands. It is uncertain whether the Dutch congregations used the name Danzig Old-Flemish before this time, but after the union they could use the designation proper.

Two more things have to be said. The Prussian Mennonites used the Dutch language. As Friedmann has noted, it took them more than two centuries to adopt the German language of their surroundings in their church life. The first German sermon in the Danzig Flemish church was held in 1771.⁴² Georg Hansen already noted that younger people used German more and more, while the services were held in Dutch. But the Prussian Mennonites had not only the church language in common with the Dutch. According to Friedmann, they were also solely depending on Dutch devotional literature.

Practicing and teaching the faith

The central question of this section is what the Old-Flemish believed, how their beliefs affected their actions, and vice versa. As we have already seen, the Bible was the main textbook for the Old-Flemish. Their thoughts and actions were filled with, and guided by, the Word. While most Dutch, including Mennonites, used the so-called *Statenvertaling* of 1618, a translation made by order of the Dutch States-General, the Old-Flemish still used the older Biestkens Bible.

The *Memoriaal* records the usage of this version as late as 1740.⁴³

We have already seen that the Old-Flemish used confessions, but these confessions were always considered to be subordinate to the Bible. An early confession is that of Vincent de Hont, but because he was not accepted by the rest of the Old-Flemish, it is doubtful that it had much influence. It is uncertain whether the Prussian confession of Georg Hansen was used in the Netherlands, even though it was translated into Dutch. The first widely used confession by the Danzig Old-Flemish was that of Pieter Boudewijns.

Besides the Bible, the early writers like Menno Simons and Dirk Philips were widely read. This can also be seen by inspecting the popular *Christelijck Huysboeck* of Jan de Buyser. He used material by the

above-mentioned founding fathers and added writings by Hans van Dantzig, Brixius Gerrits, Vincent de Hont and several others.

A third source were the customs, habits and rules of the Old-Flemish. We know too little about them to call them an *Ordnung*, though Piet Visser did compare the rules of the Old-Flemish with the Amish *Ordnung*.⁴⁴

Central in the Old-Flemish belief system was their understanding of the church as the pure Bride of Christ without spot or wrinkle. This Bride was protected against sin, fleshly works and heresy by the boundaries of the ban, avoidance and shunning, and brotherly admonition. The elders, preachers, deacons and the meetings of the brethren were responsible for maintaining the discipline. All members could address any other, even elders, on conduct unbecoming. In doing so the rule of Matthew 18 was followed. In case of stubbornness or repeated sin, the case was put before the brethren. It could result in the already mentioned measures. According to Rues, the Old-Flemish considered as ban-worthy the following conduct: public works of the flesh, carrying arms, transporting goods on an armed ship, showy furniture and “worldly” clothing, shaving the beard, lawsuits, and going before a court of law.

If a member of the congregation had been banned, he was shunned by the congregation, including his own spouse. This was the so-called marital avoidance.

There were other ways to keep the congregation pure: marrying outside persons (*buiten-*

trouw) was prohibited. Members were banned if they did so, and could only return to the congregation if they brought their spouse with them. Members from other churches – even if they were Mennonites of a different branch, were baptized again. The Old-Flemish considered there to be only one true baptism: theirs.

The door to the congregation was baptism. Candidates let their desire to be baptized known to the *Diener* or elder. The brethren were asked if there were objections. If there were objections, baptism was withheld or delayed. If there were no remarks, the person was baptized. Usually baptisms took place twice a year. Persons from other congregations, for instance from Prussia, had to wait a certain period (a year) before they were baptized. These persons always had a written testimony from their *Gemeinde* with them.

Communion was held twice a year. Usually the whole confession was read before the celebration took place. The Old-Flemish also practiced foot-washing. The Groninger Old-Flemish practiced it in conjunction with communion, but the Danzig Old-Flemish used foot-washing with visiting elders, preachers and members.

At first the Danzig Old-Flemish distinguished themselves from the outside world in their plain clothing and plain houses. When the Netherlands experienced wealth in the Golden Age, Mennonites also became wealthier. A process of assimilation began. In this process the Old Orders were the last to adapt: Jan Jacobsgezinden, the Swiss, Groninger Old-Flemish and Danzig Old-Flemish. Among these Old Order groups there were also differences between the Netherlands and Prussia, between the city and the countryside. The *Memoriaal* gives a good view of the ongoing process among the Old-Flemish at Haarlem.

Endnotes

1 The authors mentioned above spoke of “Doopsgezinden” (thereby following the Waterlanders) rather than of “Mennonites”. Because of its widespread use this article only uses the latter.

2 S. Zijlstra, Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden. Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675 (Hilversum and Leeuwarden, 2000), 14-21. Cf. the Book Review by H. Schapansky in: *Preservings* 24 (2004), 119-126.

3 P. Visser, Broeders in de geest. De doopsgezinde bijdragen van Dierick en Jan Philipsz. Schabaelje tot de Nederlandse stichtelijke literatuur in de zeventiende eeuw (Deventer, 1988), part I, 102-109.

4 Zijlstra, Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden, 434 and 278.

5 S. Voolstra, “Huiskeepers of Danziger Oude Vlamingen”, in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 29 (2003), 111-124. See also the interview on pages 251-264 of the same issue.

6 Amsterdam Municipal Archive, PA 877, inventory number 266 and K. Kauenhoven, “Das Kinderbuch der ‘Danziger Oude Vlamingen’”, in: *Mitteilungen des Sippenverbandes Danziger Mennoniten-Familien* (1943), 50-57.

7 Amsterdam Municipal Archive, PA 565 and University of Amsterdam, Hs. XVII A. For an indication of the find-spot of specific inventory numbers: E.M. Lavooij-Janzen, *Indexen op de Inventaris der archiefstukken berustende bij de Verenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente te Amsterdam* (Amsterdam and Hilversum, 2004), 185-197.

8 S.F. Rues, *Tegenwoordige Staet der Doopsgezinden*, 14-73.

9 F. Sjoerds, *Kort Vertoog van den Staat en de Geschiedenissen der kerke des Nieuwen Testaments, van Christus geboorte tot op den tegenwoordigen tyd, Vergeleken met de*

voornaamste Geschiedenissen. Voorzien met een Voorrede van den Heer F. Brandsma, V.D.M. te Oostrum en Jouswier. Tweede Druk. Vermeerdert en verbeterd ... In de Voorrede vind men een nader vertoog aangaande de Sociëit der Doopsgezinden, Oude Vlamingen genaamt (Leeuwarden, 1771).

10 K. Sybrandi, “Een onuitgegeven brief van het jaar 1740 over de Doopsgezinde Gemeente in Haarlem”, in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 3 (1863), 125-164.

11 R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries. Its Genesis and Its Literature* (Eugene, Oregon., 1998), 152-153.

12 M. Gravendeel, W. Stuve and S. Voolstra, *Bezweegen Broederschap. Het wel en wee van de Danziger Oude Vlamingen te Haarlem in de eerste helft van de achttiende eeuw opgetekend door Eduard Simonsz Toens in zijn Memoriaal (1735-1749)* (Hilversum, 2005).

13 P.E. Toens, *Mijne overdenkingen waarbij gevoegd is: een beknopt verhaal van de voornaamste gevallen mijns levens; als mede Alleenspraak op 76st. verjaardag in 1800* (s.l., 1800).

14 Zijlstra, Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden, 270-272.

15 Within the scope of this article it is impossible to shed light on the background of the refugees. In a wider sense this is done by: J. Desreumaux, *Leidens weg op. Zuid-Nederlandse immigranten 1576-1608* (Roelare, 1992) and G. Asaert, 1585. De val van Antwerpen en de uittocht van Vlamingen en Brabanders (Tiel, 2004).

16 Zijlstra, Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden, 286-298.

17 Zijlstra, Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden, 304-310.

18 Byntgens was not a Lehrer, as Schapansky states in his book review of Zijlstra. He is mentioned in the so-called *Copia der oudsten*. This list was made by an adherent of the Frisian party, because it names all elders who fell away from them. Byntgens was probably ordained shortly before 1568. At first he repaired roads and later he was a brewer.

The house in question can be seen on a map of Franeker by Pieter Bast (1598). Byntgens had rented the house a year before from miller Joos Oliviers.

19 See my forthcoming article “Herrie rondom een huis. De Huiskopertwist kritisch bekeken” in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* (probably 2006).

20 Keest originated from Kortrijk in Flanders. At Kortrijk he was a cloth merchant, but shortly after 1553 fled from his native town, suspected of heresy. Keest became a citizen of Franeker on December 22nd, 1567. He was inn-keeper of the Unicorn. They were neighbours.

21 The rise of the Old-Flemish branch is recounted in the following sources: N.N., *Een cort ende warachtich Verhael van die geschiedenis tot Franeker, anno 1588. doen die van Amsterdam daer waren* (s.l., 1590). N.N., *An die Dienders ende Broeders der Gemeente Godts tot Haerlem* (s.l., 1590). P[rieter] H[ans] V[er] Kindert, *Een korte ende seer grondighe historische Vertellinge belanghende den twist tot Franeker Anno 1587. Gheschiedt / ende d' afdeelinghe die daer uyt gevolcht is; tegens seker Boecxken / geintituleert: Een Corte schuld-bekentnisse ende afstandt over eenighe mishandeligen, die uyt twistighe saecken ghevolgt zyn. Ghedaen door I.I. met eenighe zyner mede-hulpers. Mitsgaders een clare verantwoordinghe des bans over T.B. Wt liefde der waerheynt int licht gebracht* (Haarlem, 1628). J. Outerman, *Schult-bekeninghe* (s.l., 1628).

22 W. Stuve, *Menno's volk op Flakkee. De geschiedenis van de Doopsgezinde gemeenten op het eiland Flakkee* (Hellevoetsluis, 2004), 5-11 and 55-84.

23 W. Stuve, “De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem. Personen en hun achtergrond,” *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 28 (2002), 11-100. Further reading: W. Stuve, “Geschiedenis van de Danziger Oude Vlamingen” in: *Bezweegen Broederschap*, 9-45.

24 Preacher Claes Jans de Beer of Friedrichstadt originated from the Dutch Province of Zeeland. He died in 1631.

25 Mennonite Encyclopedia, I, 320.

26 University of Amsterdam, Hs. XXVII A, inventory

numbers 598-599.

27 Mennonite Encyclopedia, IV, 839. S. Voolstra, *Voor-trekkers en stilstaanders. Vijftien generaties dopers leven in Zeeland* (Middelburg, 1975), 76. The letter is found at Amsterdam Municipal Archive, PA 565, inventory number A559.

28 L. de Buyser, *Verklaringe van den droevigen handel der ghemeente Gods tot Amsterdam* (s.l., 1620).

29 For a discussion of the events, see: W. Stuve, *Schuil-en in de Ark. De Danziger Oud-Vlaamse Doopsgezinde gemeenten te Delfshaven en Rotterdam* (Hellevoetsluis, 2004). Extended version 2005; and Louwerens Willemsz., *Ezelinnen-Zoon* (Rotterdam, 1633, 3rd ed.) and his *Kakebeen* (Rotterdam, 1636).

30 The Dordrecht Confession is still in use by the Old Order Amish and the Old Order Mennonites, thereby accepting a confession that was rejected by the Old-Flemish congregations. I.B. Horst, *Mennonite Confession of Faith* (Lancaster PA, 1988). For the usage of the Dordrecht Confession by American churches: I.B. Horst, “Dordrecht Confession of Faith: 350 Years”, in: *Pennsylvania Mennonite Heritage* 5 (1982), 2-8. For the text, see www.bibleviews.com/Dordrecht.html.

31 Amsterdam Municipal Archives, PA 565, inventory number A578.

32 The *Vredeboode* (Peace-messenger) can be found in: J. de Buyser, *Chistelijck Huysboeck, ende het eendrachtigh gheluyt in den geestelijken tempel Salomons, oft Gemeente Iesu Christi: over de volghende artyckelen des christelijcken gheloofs, die daer in ghelooft, gheleert ende onderhouden moeten worden* (Haarlem 1643), 839ff.

33 Amsterdam Municipal Archives, PA 565, inventory number C441.

34 Amsterdam Municipal Archives, PA 565, inventory number C439.

35 With acknowledgment to Peter J. Klassen, Fresno, Cal. for the quote from Vondel.

36 J.S. Postma, *Das Niederländische Erbe der preubisch-rubländischen Mennoniten in Europa, Asien und Amerika* (Leeuwarden, 1959), 78-79; *Mennonitisches Lexicon* (1913-67) IV, 80; *Mennonitisches Lexicon*, III, 163; *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, 661-62 and III, 744.

37 H.G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde. Ihre Entstehung und ihre Geschichte von 1569-1919* (Anzig, 1919), 89, “Die wohlhabenden Familien schickten ihre Söhne gern nach Amsterdam, Rotterdam oder Harlem um dort die Handlung zu erlernen. Häufig wurden sie dann auch dort getauft und kehrten später hierher zurück.”

38 Note the following wars: First Swedish-Polish war 1624-30, Second Swedish-Polish war 1655-60, Third Swedish-Polish war 1698-1715, the Nordic war between Sweden, Poland and Russia 1700-1721 and the siege of Danzig in 1734.

39 J. van der Smissen, “Fortsetzung der Geschichte der Mennoniten in Preußen,” in: *Mennonitische Blätter* 4 (1857), 39-43: “Dab ob sie zwar mehr denn 100 Jahre gerentt gewesen, dennoch die Confession in alle Stücken und Artikeln unverändert geblieben, deswegen sie selbe nicht allein mit viel Liebe und Freude angenommen, sondern auch einmüthiglich unterzeichnet; ja so, dab auch nicht ein Diener sie dessen geweigert, oder sich dem entzogen hätte, sondern alle einträglich, zum Beweis von ihrer Einsgesinntheit im Glauben, und mit uns darin in Liebe und Friede zu leben, ihre Namen mit eigener Hand freiwillig unterschrieben.”

40 R. Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety through the Centuries. Its Genesis and Its Literature* (Eugene, Oregon., 1998), 127-140. This fact is affirmed by H.Ch. Hulshoff, “Bezoekreis van Hendrik Berents Hulshoff aan de doopsgezinde gemeenten der Oude Vlamingen in Pruisen en Polen in 1719”, in: *Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap* 59 (1938), 32-82.

41 *Bezweegen Broederschap*, 89 and 93.

42 *Bezweegen Broederschap*, 88, 104, 105 and 109.

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Saved From Oblivion

A Portrait of the (Danzig) Old-Flemish Elders in the Netherlands
Willem Stuve, Hellevoetsluis, the Netherlands

What is true of the Old-Flemish in general is also true of their leaders. Until recent times little has been written about the elders (*Aeltesten*), preachers (*Diener*) and deacons of the Old-Flemish. A few prominent leaders, like Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen and Vincent de Hont, have drawn the attention of historians, but most elders remain unknown.¹ It therefore seems appropriate to shed some light on the background of the Old-Flemish elders. Due to space limitations, the elders from Prussia are excluded from this portrait.

Founders of the Old-Flemish branch

The first elders of the Old-Flemish branch were Hans Busschaert, Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen and Jan Roelants. All three played an important part in the genesis of the Old-Flemish branch. Hans Busschaert, also known as Hans de Weaver, originated from the Flemish village of Dadizele. He was born sometime between 1520 and 1530. Busschaert was ordained as elder before 1555 by Leenaert Bouwens. He probably lived at Antwerp, but as of 1565 Busschaert lived at Cologne in Germany. He frequently visited the congregations in Flanders. Among others he was active as elder at Antwerp. When the Frisian-Flemish conflict broke out, Busschaert became very much involved and sided with the Flemish. Because he agreed with the so-called *Compromis*, he temporarily had to lay down his service in the period 1567-70.² After this interruption, he extensively traveled through Flanders, Brabant and the Dutch provinces of Holland and Gelderland.³ When the Reformed ministers of Emden challenged Mennonites to a dispute in 1578, Busschaert was one of the representatives. He was considered a weak opponent by both his fellow Flemish respondents and the Reformed. We have already seen that Busschaert was banned by the “Bankroetiers” in 1598. According to the Dutch historian Wagenaar, in 1591 Busschaert was in favour of the *Concept van Keulen*. This confession was drafted at Cologne in the year 1591 between High-German and Dutch Mennonite leaders.⁴

Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen came from Flanders. There is still some dispute, whether he came from Antwerp or from the important textile centre of Menen. By profession he was a merchant. His nickname was “the rich bleacher.” The merchant activities of van der Meulen reached as far as Riga in Latvia. As a preacher he was involved in the Frisian-Flemish conflict. Shortly after its outbreak van der Meulen was probably ordained as elder.⁵ He moved from Flanders to Haarlem where he became the leading elder of the Flemish congregation. The author of the *Successio Anabaptistica* chides him for his strict and zealous attitude, and called him unforgiving, stubborn, obstinate and haughty.⁶ The author was probably biased in his judgment, because he defended the Ro-

man-Catholic Church that was at that time under attack by van der Meulen.

As mentioned above, van der Meulen sided with the Flemish. Besides his role in the “Huis-kopertwist” Jacob also played a part in banning the congregations in the Dutch province of Groningen.⁷ Together with Hans Busschaert, he banned Quiry van der Meulen, elder of the Danzig congregation and elder Paulus Bussemaker, leader of the party called the “Heilsamen” or the “Salutary.” Quiry van der Meulen, no relative of Jacob, had long kept the church in Prussia united. After Quiry van der Meulen was banned, the church in Prussia fell apart into Frisian and Flemish factions.

Around 1600, Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen became involved in combating the Roman Catholic Church. When the Dutch provinces broke away from the reign of the Spanish king, the Roman Catholic Church went underground. Only the Reformed Church was allowed to meet in public. The town of Haarlem had many Roman Catholics and Mennonites. Van der Meulen challenged the Catholic priests to debate, and wrote several treatises against them.⁸

Trapped in an isolated position, van der Meulen sought to unite with the more liberal Waterlander branch. During the years 1601-1605, negotiations were conducted between him and Hans de Ries, the famous Waterlander elder from Alkmaar. A few Flemish leaders, like Jacques Outerman, also took part in these peace talks. Finally the negotiations broke off because Jacob insisted on a stricter view of the *Gemeinde* and its boundaries.⁹

Between 1581 and 1631 Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen wrote some sixteen books. Kühler calls him a “well read and discerning self-taught

man.” His daughter Catharina was responsible for the reprint of his *Verclaringe wt de Godtlijke Schriftuere* (1645).

About Jan Roelants we know very little. The time of his election as preacher or as elder is unknown. We do know that he took an active part in the *Huiskopertwist*. He is usually mentioned together with Jacob Pietersz van der Meulen. Both were chided for being over-zealous and strict in banning persons, and by this attitude caused a split in the large Flemish congregation of Haarlem.¹⁰ In 1598, at the time of the conflict on bankruptcy, Jan sided with his co-elder. After him the congregation was also known as “Jan Roelantsvolk.”

Elders at the end of the 16th and beginning of the 17th century

Among the elders known at the start of the 17th century are Pieter van Beersel, Gerard van Bylaert, Isbrand Feckes, Lucas Philips, Heyndrick Jans, Cornelis van Male, Jacques or Jacob Verbeeck, Jan Willems, Hendrick Ghuyten and an unknown elder from Oldemarkt. All these elders took part in the 1616/19 conference and discussions about the Amsterdam congregation. Of Feckes and Jans we know little other than that they were elders of the churches of Vlieland and Leeuwarden. About van Beersel, or van Bersel, it is known that he signed the *Dordrecht Confession* on behalf of his congregation at Emmerich, thereby departing from the Old-Flemish branch. Van Beersel died shortly thereafter, in November 1635.

About elder Gerard van Bylaert we know considerable more. He originated from the Dutch village of Barneveld, a village with virtually no Mennonites. The name van Bylaert can



Mennonite church in Pingjum, the town where Menno Simons began his ministry as Catholic priest. (MHC 492.632)

be found in *The Bloody Theatre, or Martyrs' Mirror*.¹¹ According to the account, van Bylaert and twenty fellow believers were imprisoned in 1575 in London, England. Hendrick Terwoort and Jan Pietersz, both Flemish refugees, were subsequently executed. Two persons died in prison, fifteen were expelled and two others eventually survived prison. Among the latter was van Bylaert. Later, van Bylaert lived in the Dutch merchant town of Dordrecht, where he became elder of the Old-Flemish congregation sometime before 1611. Besides governing the local church, van Bylaert was a silversmith by profession. He was a coin-maker at the Dordrecht Munt, and also became one of the first coin-makers in 1586 for the States-General of the Netherlands.¹² Gerard van Bylaert died October 12th, 1617.

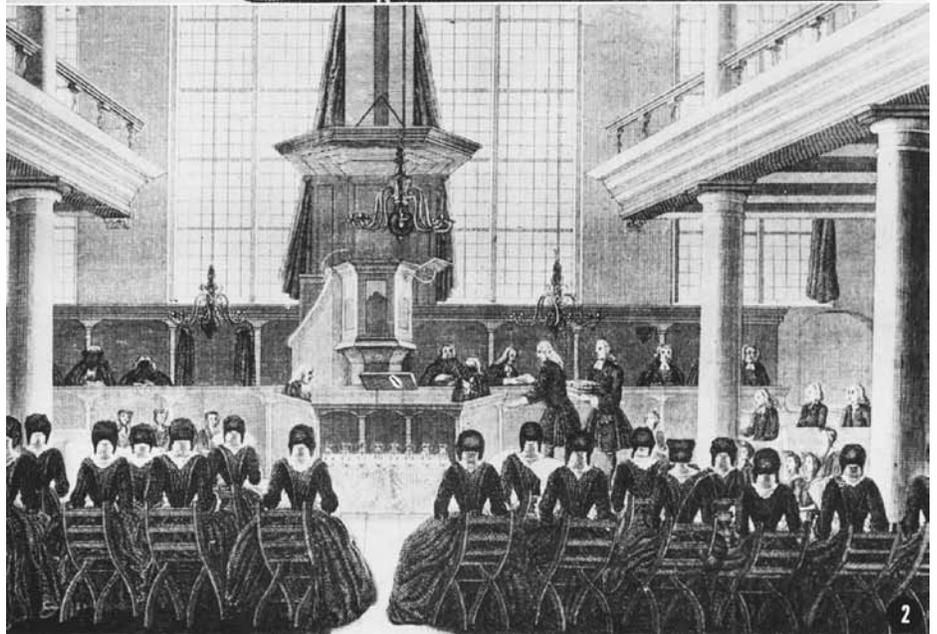
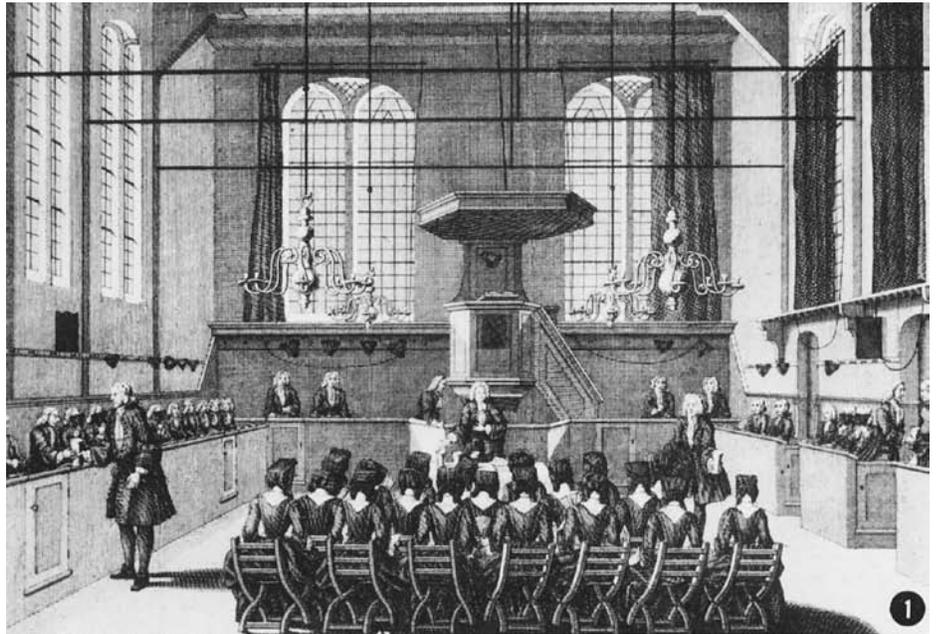
Jacques Verbeek worked alongside van Bylaert. Both elders seem to have been irenic men. Verbeek was elder of the Utrecht congregation as early as 1611. His name hints at his Flemish origins. By profession Verbeek was a silk merchant. He was married to Segerina Caffa. Verbeek died shortly before the unification of the Flemish and Old-Flemish at Dordrecht in 1632, namely December 23rd, 1627.

As we have already seen, Lucas Philips argued with Vincent de Hont in 1619/20 over the ban of a groom who had treated his bride indecently. Philips was a hatter by profession, and probably resided at Woerden until 1618, a town in the province of Utrecht. He led his small Haarlem congregation until his death, sometime after 1640. One would perhaps think that Philips belonged to the progressives among the Old-Flemish. To be true, the congregation of Philips was no less strict about the ban and shunning (*mijding*) than the congregation of his adversary Vincent de Hont. When asked in 1675 what he thought of the latter congregation, Abraham Tack, then the preacher of the congregation of Philips, answered that they should be considered branches that did not belong to the vine of Christ. They should be thrown into the fire.

Jan Willems was elder of the Haarlem congregation as early as 1611. He must not be identified with the Frisian elder at Hoorn or the Waterlander elder at Haarlem of the same name. His profession was that of a cloth maker. As stated above, he played an important role in the ongoing quarrel with the Amsterdam congregation in the years 1616-17.¹³ He gives the impression of having been a firm, but peace-loving, man. Jan Willems died at Haarlem on October 13th, 1617.

Cornelis van Male probably came from Cologne, which was for a time a major refuge for Mennonites and Reformed. He was elder of the Amsterdam congregation. In 1615, when first mentioned, he was already an old man. From the narrative of the Amsterdam quarrel we get the impression that he did not hold much authority over his preachers.

Near Rotterdam lay the harbour of Delfshaven. To citizens of the United States the name of this harbour should sound familiar, because the Pilgrim Fathers began their journey at Delfshaven. The elder of the small local Old-Flemish congregation was Hendrick Ghuyten.



Ordinances in the Netherlands: 1. Communion with wine; 2. Communion with Bread. (Mennonite Encyclopedia IV, photo section p. 3)

Like most inhabitants of Delfshaven, he was a sailor, a helmsman to be precise, on a herring ship. Already a preacher in 1609, Ghuyten was ordained as elder shortly after 1617. As such he not only served his own congregation, but also those of neighbouring Rotterdam and Dordrecht. He was instrumental in electing Adriaen Cornelis as elder of the Dordrecht congregation. Ghuyten died October, 16th, 1624.¹⁴

Old-Flemish elders from 1620-1670

This section provides a survey of the elders serving from the 1620s to the 1670s. We have already come across Lucas Philips, so it is now time to pay attention to his opponent, Vincent de Hont. Like many refugees, his father fled from the Flemish town of Rumbeek to Haarlem. Haarlem was a centre of the textile industry and

drew many Flemish fugitives. De Hont was born in Roesselaar in 1561.¹⁵ By profession he was a merchant who had dealings as far away as Spain and France. De Hont was already a preacher of the large Haarlem congregation in 1606. After the breakup of the congregation in 1620, de Hont served his church as elder until his death. Vincent de Hont was the author of several books: *Vertooninghe en verantwoordinge tot dienste van allen onse medegenooten des geloofs* (Haarlem, 1619, authorship probable), his confession *Korte bekentnisse des geloofs* (Haarlem, 1626) and *Een korte en grondige verklaring van de vrede Godts* (Haarlem, 1632). Van der Zijpp depicts de Hont as having an “implacable attitude.” This estimate seems unreasonable, because the largest part of the congregation and most of his fellow ministers followed de Hont after the

split in 1620. He must therefore have been appealing to many Old-Flemish members.

Alongside de Hont served Philips van Casele as elder. His roots also lay in Belgium, namely Ghent. By profession he was a merchant. Already a preacher in 1606, perhaps even as early as 1602, he was mentioned as an elder after the breakup in 1620. With de Hont, he wrote an important letter in 1622, in which they expressed their faith and rejected the desire of the *Borstentasters* to reunite.

Another Haarlem elder was Jan Winne. He probably became elder after the death of de Hont and van Casele. He is mentioned as elder before 1640. Besides serving his own congregation, he also aided the small Leiden congregation.¹⁶ Reynier Saskers originated from Leeuwarden and was a merchant by profession. Already a deacon in 1637, he was probably ordained elder in the 1640s.¹⁷ Unfortunately there is a gap in our knowledge about the Haarlem congregation between 1660 and 1696.

Jan Gerritsz Rose, a cloth maker, was born at Haarlem and resided at Leiden. Of Flemish descent, Jan Rose is mentioned as a preacher in 1626 and probably became elder around 1632. Together with Lourens Willems, he tried to persuade his fellow believers not to unite with the Flemish. Rose served the Leiden congregation until his death in September 1661.¹⁸ This congregation was also called “Jan Rosensvolk.”

After a rough period during the 1630s when the congregation had to re-obtain its meeting house, the Amsterdam congregation “bij de Zes Kruikjes” was first led by Claes Gysberts de Veer and later by Pieter Cornelis Haring. De Veer had strong family ties with the Flemish congregation at Danzig. As a merchant he was active in the Baltic Sea trade. Haring lived at the Anjeliërsgracht in Amsterdam. He is included in a tax list of the year 1631, a sign of some wealth. Haring has to be mentioned because in 1644 he wrote a book on the subject of non-affiliate marriages.¹⁹ He was elder of the Amsterdam church from 1632 until after 1665.

After the death of the above-mentioned Hendrick Ghuyten, the Rotterdam congregation elected its own elder: Jacob Ariens van Blenckvliet. This grain merchant was ordained as elder shortly after 1624 when he was already an old man. Van Blenckvliet originated from the small village of Zuidland on the isle of Voorne, just below Rotterdam. Van Blenckvliet was one of the elders – together with Lucas Philips and Jacques Verbeeck – who ordained Adriaen Cornelis as elder of the Dordrecht congregation. During van Blenckvliet’s service, the Rotterdam congregation split.²⁰

The Rotterdam congregation was deprived of its elder sometime at the end of the thirties.



Memmonite Church in Rotterdam. (MHC 360.57)

Alongside van Blenckvliet the elderly Joost Verschuyre de Oude had served as co-elder, but he died soon after. Some of his children remained loyal to the congregation of their father, but others left the Old-Flemish congregation. One even became mayor of the city of Rotterdam.²¹

Both Adriaan Leenderts van Blenckvliet and Michiel Heymans later served the Rotterdam congregation as elder. The first was a relative of elder Jacob Ariens van Blenckvliet, who was mentioned earlier, and like him a grain merchant. Adriaan Leenderts, a ship owner, was elected deacon in the thirties and elder in 1662.²²

Michiel Heymans was a sailcloth maker by profession and lived at neighbouring Delfshaven. His descendants used ‘Van der Haven’ as last name.²³

About the elders of the congregations in the province of Overijssel during this period, virtually nothing is known. This is strange since the congregations of Blokzijl, Giethoorn and Zuidveen must have been strong and large congregations.

Another influential elder has to be mentioned. Jan de Buyser originated from Haarlem, where he was born in 1591. Later on he moved to the German port of Hamburg-Altona where he was a merchant. He was married to Maicken Joos Cousijn, who was of Flemish origin. De Buyser served as elder of the Old-

Flemish congregation from before 1635 until 1670. He was the author of *Christelijck Huysboeck*, published in Haarlem in 1643 - a book widely read among the Old-Flemish. The *Christelijck Huysboeck* consisted of a confession, a catechism and important treatises and letters. De Buyser made use of earlier works by Menno Simons, Dirk Philips, Hans van Dantzich, Harmen Timmerman and others. He used Vincent de Hont’s works extensively. Shortly after de Buyser’s death, his Hamburg congregation ceased to exist. In the period 1669-72, a number of *Hauskäufern*, among them some of the de Buyser family, joined the united Flemish congregation.²⁴

One person with great influence, although not an elder was Louwerens Willems. He was a deacon and perhaps also preacher of the Old-Flemish congregations at Alkmaar (1621-26) and at Rotterdam (1631-35). A hosiery by profession, he wrote several books during the ongoing struggles in the Rotterdam congregation, just before the appearance of the *Dordrecht Confession*.²⁵ As such he acted as the voice of those Old-Flemish that were unwilling to unite with the Flemish. Kühler characterized Willems as overzealous, but this does not do him justice. By designating him in this way, Kühler clearly sides with the United Flemish. Although the Old-Flemish lost the fight, Willems

served as their Samson.

Elders at the turn of the century and in the 18th century

At the end of the 17th century – probably as early as 1694 – the Amsterdam congregation was served by elder Adriaan van Gammeren. He was married to Hendrina van Greuningen. They had a linen shop at Noordzijde Voorburgwal, close to the meetinghouse of the Old-Flemish at the Oudezijds Voorburgwal. (Nowadays it is close to the red-light district of Amsterdam). Van Gammeren not only served his, but also the Rotterdam congregation. When he died in 1725, both congregations wrote letters to Danzig, asking for a replacement from the east. As already noted, Danzig replied in the same year by sending Dirk Jans to Amsterdam. Jans served the congregation until 1733, when he returned to his place of birth. From then on the congregation was mostly served by elders of the neighbouring town of Haarlem.

In 1756 the Amsterdam congregation obtained Pieter Boudewijns from Haarlem as their elder. Boudewijns had retired a few years before, but while living at Haarlem, served the Amsterdam congregation until his death in 1761. After him Pieter Jans van Dijk was elected elder on March 29th, 1761. He had been a preacher since 1754. He was married to Pietertje Bootsmann of Giethoorn. Because he forgot to mention

the twelfth article of the *Dordrecht Confession* in a sermon before communion, he withdrew from office in 1786.²⁶ He and his wife were very much opposed to the negotiations with the Mennonite congregation De Zon. These talks ended in the unification of the Old-Flemish congregation with De Zon in 1788. Van Dijk and his wife would rather go to Giethoorn each year to celebrate communion than be part of the unification. His descendants gave the written sermons of Pieter Jans van Dijk to elder Bene Gerrits Mussche of Giethoorn.

At Haarlem the Old-Flemish congregation of Lucas Philips had ceased to exist, so that only the congregation at the Oude Gracht remained. In 1696 Gerrit Poulus Jonkheer was elected and ordained as elder. He served until his death on June 4th, 1749. His wife probably came from the province of Overijssel. Gerrit lived at Groot Heiligland, a street close to the meetinghouse of the Flemish congregation. The *Memoriaal* tells the sad story of the suicide of his daughter.²⁷

Simon Eduards Toens became preacher in 1696 and was elected as elder of Haarlem in 1713. He married three times: twice with women from the province of Overijssel and once with a woman from the Dutch isle of Ameland. By profession he was a textile worker. His sons Eduard and Pieter both became preachers of the Haarlem congregations. Eduard Simons Toens was author of the *Memoriaal*. When the Old-Flemish congregation split in 1758/59 he joined the Klein Heiligland congregation. Out of deference to his status as elder, this congregation gave him a seat in the bench of its preachers.²⁸

Pieter Boudewijns became preacher of the Haarlem congregation before 1737. He was elected as elder on June 16, 1743 and ordained on September 22, 1743. The ordination was performed by Simon Eduards Toens and Bene Gerrits Mussche and Hendrik Simons, elders of Giethoorn. Boudewijns served the congregation until his retirement in 1753. After a brief period he was asked to serve again as elder. From 1756 until his death, Boudewijns served the remaining Old-Flemish at Haarlem and the Amsterdam congregation. After this they were nicknamed "Pieter Boudewijnsvolk."²⁹ Boudewijns was author of a catechism, which was not only used by the Danzig Old-Flemish, but also by some Old-Frisian congregations. The Old-Frisian congregation of Balk reprinted the catechism almost a century after its appearance.³⁰

As we have seen, the Rotterdam congregation had only preachers, but no elder. The congregations of Amsterdam and Haarlem assisted it. The congregations at Brielle, Delfshaven and Oud-Beyerland also had no elders, though it is unclear who aided them with baptism and communion.

The spread of peat workers from the province of Overijssel to the province of Groningen, had resulted in the rise of a small Old-Flemish congregation at Sappemeer. The *Memoriaal* informs us that this congregation was led by elder Harmen Jans de Lange. About this elder little is known, other than that he died on June 14th, 1739.³¹ The Sappemeer congregation was later served by preacher Jan Panneman.

As we have seen, the province of Overijssel

had four Old-Flemish congregations: Blokzijl, Giethoorn, Oldemarkt and Zuidveen. We don't know the names of the elder(s) of the Oldemarkt congregation, but one of its preachers was Rolof Agge Joncker (preacher 1699-1712). He was the author of a catechism and a songbook.³² Both his father and grandfather had served the Oldemarkt congregation as preachers. Joncker later served the congregation at Aardenburg, and was expelled because of his unchristian behaviour.

Of Blokzijl several preachers are known, but no elders. Perhaps the congregation was aided by the neighbouring Giethoorn and Zuidveen. The last preachers, before the congregation united with the local Flemish congregation, were Wieger Thomas Smit, who served until 1782, and Pieter Mol, who served from 1766-1782.

The village of Giethoorn – called "small Venice" because of its abundant water supply – had two congregations: a Flemish one on the south side and an Old-Flemish one on the north side. Bene Gerrits Mussche served as elder at the north side congregation from 1727-1783 and Hendrik Simons from before 1739 until his death after 1743. Later, its elders were Gerrit Jans Hooze (1796-1812), Gerrit Simons Bakker (1838-1875) and Hendrik Simons Bakker (1834-1852). The north side congregation united with the south side in 1890. Of elder Bene Simons Mussche it is known that he corresponded with congregations in Danzig, Elbing and Petershagen. It seems that in 1767 Mussche was willing to rebaptise a male person from Danzig, even though the elders and preachers in Prussia had doubts about the wisdom of this action.³³ The Giethoorn congregation was the last remaining Old-Flemish congregation in the Netherlands.

Zuidveen lay close to the town of Steenwijk. The location offered Mennonites greater freedom than living in Steenwijk itself. What is said of Blokzijl is also true of Zuidveen. Almost no written accounts of the Old-Flemish congregation have survived. Most church books and the meetinghouse were destroyed during a flood in 1825.

Endnotes

- 1 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, III, 660-661 and II, 803.
- 2 See my forthcoming "Herrie rondom een huis. De Huis-kopertwist kritisch bekeken" in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*.
- 3 K. Vos, "De Doopsgezinden te Antwerpen in de zestiende eeuw", in: *Bulletin de la Commission Royale d'Histoire de Belgique* (1921), 382-85.
- 4 *Mennonite Encyclopedia* I, 663-665.
- 5 Vos, "De Doopsgezinden te Antwerpen in de zestiende eeuw", 383.
- 6 V.P., *Successio anabaptistica*, dat is Babel der Wederdopers, eensdeels in Duysland, maer principael in Nederlandt, in welke de ophgeworpen oorsprong, de rasende voortganck, ende bittere verstroyinge in 't cort verhaelt wort (Cologne, 1603), 65, 69 and 74-75.
- 7 *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, II, 693 and III, 661-662. See also *Successio Anabaptistica*, 70.
- 8 For instance his *Successio Apostolica* (Alkmaar, 1600); *Vertoogh aen de successoors des Jesuys D. Francisci Costeri* (Alkmaar, 1604) and *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Haarlem, 1614).
- 9 University of Amsterdam, Hs. XXVII A, inventory numbers 495-497, 507, 510-512, 514 and 516.
- 10 Hoe de Vlaminghen hebben gepresenteert omme met de Vriesen wederomme te vereenigen ende vrede te maken. Anno 1578 (Haarlem, 1634), 7.
- 11 T.J. van Braagt, *Het Bloedig Tooneel of Martelaerspiegel der Doops-gesinde of weerlose Christenen*

(Amsterdam, 1685, 2 vol.), II, 694-712.

12 The craftsmanship of van Bylaert can be admired in: K. Zandvliet, *Maurits Prins van Oranje* (Amsterdam and Zwolle, 2000), 214-224.

13 His role is described in *Vertooninghe en verantwoordinge tot dienste van allen onse medegenooten des geloofs* (Haarlem, 1619).

14 W. Stuve, *Schuilten in de Ark. De Dantziger Oud-Vlaamse Doopsgezinde gemeenten te Delfshaven en Rotterdam* (Hellevoetsluis, 2004), 20-28 and 143-148. Page numbering slightly different in the extended version of 2005.

15 W. Stuve, "De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem. Personen en hun achtergrond", *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* 28 (2002), 34, 62-63, and 93-100.

16 J. de Buysser, *Christelijk Huysboek, ende het eendrachtigh gheluyt in den geestelijcken tempel Salomons, oft gemeynete Iesu Christi: over de volghende artyckelen des christelijcken geloofs, die daer in ghelooft, gheleert ende onderhouden moeten worden* (Haarlem, 1643), 921.

17 W. Stuve, "De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem", 64-65.

18 W. Stuve, *Mennist in Leiden. Beknopte geschiedenis van de Oud-Vlaamse doopsgezinde gemeente te Leiden* (Hellevoetsluis, 2004), 34-42.

19 Pieter Cornelis Haring, *Tot dienst van alle Godtvruchtighe en onderrichtighe uyt des Heeren onbedriegelicken Woort Als dat de ware geloovigen niet en mogen trouwen onder alle Doopsgezinde oft verscheide volcken / of zy schoon den naem van Mennisten voeren / maer moeten haer houden by de leeden / en aen het Lichaem daer Christus selve het hoofd van is / te weten binnen de eenige onverdeelde G[e]meente G[odts] als Paulus leert. I Cor. 7: 39* (Rotterdam, 1644).

This book also contains a reprint of Dirck Philips, *Van die Echt der Christenen hoe sy van Godt bevolen / ende van den Geloovighen nae der Schrift moet ghehouden ende gebruyckt werden / een Schriftuyrick bewijs / ten dienste aller Geloovigen: Tegen alle wedersprekers der waerheyt / geschreven door D.P. Met een APPENDIX, in desen tijt daer achter by gevoegt / door een Liefhebber der Waerheyt.*

20 Stuve, *Schuilten in de Ark*, 72-74.

21 Stuve, *Schuilten in de Ark*, 95-97.

22 Stuve, *Schuilten in de Ark*, 71-72.

23 Stuve, *Schuilten in de Ark*, 149-151.

24 B.C. Roosen, *Geschiede der Mennoniten-Gemeinde* (Hamburg, 1886), 29 and M. D. Driedger, *Zuflucht und Koexistenz. 400 Jahre Mennoniten in Hamburg und Altona* (Weierhof, 2001), 32.

25 L. Willems, *Korte en eenvoudige waarschouwinge aan onse medegenooten des geloofs op een brief sonder namen in druk uytgheghaen anno 1628 van de afgedeelde Vlaminghen tot Amsteldam* (s.l., probably 1628); L. Willems, *Aarons Roede* (Rotterdam, 1633, 3rd edition). This edition also includes Aarons Staf, *Bileams Ezelinne* and *Ezelinnen Zoon*; L. Willems, *Ezelinnen Zoon* (Rotterdam, 1633); L. Willems, *Kakebeen* (Rotterdam, 1636).

26 It is strange to find out that the Old-Flemish used a confession that their fore-fathers had rejected. The twelfth article dealt with outside marriages (buitentrouw).

27 Stuve, "De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem", 77 and *Memoriaal*, 95-96.

28 Stuve, "De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem", 78-79 and *Bezweegen Broederschap*, 16-17.

29 Stuve, "De dienaarschap van de Oud-Vlaamse gemeenten te Haarlem", 81-82.

30 P. Boudewijns, *Onderwyzinghe des Christelyken Geloofs, Volgens de Belydenis der Christenen die men de Oude Vlaamsche Mennoniten noemt. Waar in derzelver Leere en Gemeentelyke Huishoudinghe, Schriftmatig voorgesteld en be-wezen word: Opgesteld by Vragen en Antwoorden* (Haarlem, 1743; reprint Sneek, 1825); P. Boudewijns, *Korte schets van de onderwyzinghe des Christelyken Geloofs, voor de Jeugd* (Haarlem, 1744).

31 *Bezweegen Broederschap*, 12-18.

32 R.A. Joncker, *Mennoniste Vrageboek, Behelsende de twaelf Artijckelen des Geloofs / in sodanigen order als deselve in de Vergaderinge der Doops-gesinden: genaemt de Huys-kopers geleert word: 't Samen gestelt in Vragen / en Antwoorden* (Steenwijk, 1708).

R.A. Joncker, *Enige Psalmen Des Propheeten Davids. Op sodaenige Wijsen / als by de Boeren en Zeeluy veel bekend zijn / nieuwelijcks in dicht gestelt* (Steenwijk, 1709).

33 A.J. Bijl, "De scheuring in 1774 onder de Doopsgezinden te Zuidveen," in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen* (1878), 14-15.

Dirk Philips: Early Leader of Dutch Anabaptists

William Kenney, *Mennonite Life*, April 1958, 70-75 (Reprinted with permission)

In the opening years of the turbulent sixteenth century a man was born who was to have considerable significance for the Mennonite movement. He was a close friend and colleague of Menno Simons. He was the only major figure in the movement who stood by and labored with Menno despite persecutions, the loss of Obbe Philips by defection, the heresy of co-laborers such as David Joris and Adam Pastor, and the moral failures of brethren such as Gillis van Aken. He entered the Anabaptist movement before Menno and labored in it for the remainder of his life, outliving Menno by seven years.

Dirk Philips, the brother of Obbe Philips, was the man. He was born in 1504 at Leeuwarden in the Netherlands. Not much is known about his family or his early training. Perhaps this was because he was the son of a priest named Philip. Although priests were not allowed marry, according to the regulations of the Roman Catholic Church, it was rather common in this northwestern corner of Europe. Such laxity was only one indication of the church's corruption and weakness in general, but especially in the northern Netherlands at that time.

This laxness in morals was one of the reasons for Dirk's departure from the Roman Church. He may already have been a serious seeker after true Christianity prior to the break, since he was connected with the Franciscans, a monastic order that had a large house in Leeuwarden. His association with the Franciscans may also account for his better than average education and his knowledge of Latin, and probably some acquaintance with Greek and Hebrew.

Conversion

Dirk never wrote about his own religious experiences as did Menno. For that reason we must rely on the reports of others. Fortunately Dirk's brother Obbe wrote a "Confession" many years after his break with Rome, in which he related the rise of the Dutch Anabaptists, and included a brief account of Dirk's baptism.

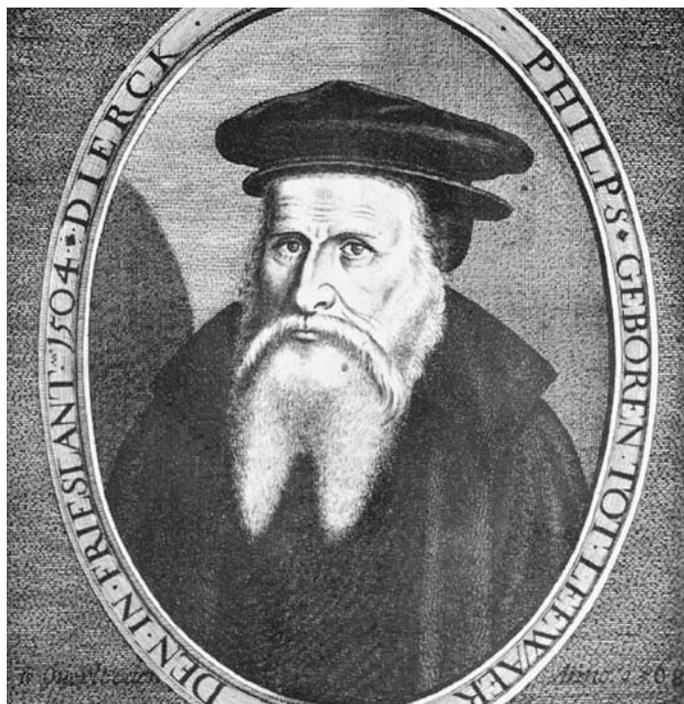
The Reformation had started in Germany with Martin Luther in 1517, when Dirk would have been only thirteen years old. There was much unrest and dissatisfaction in the Netherlands with the Roman Church during the twenties. Nevertheless, the first real break and organized movement did not appear until 1530, and later. Melchior Hoffman was the key figure in capturing the loyalties of the people. Through Hoffman and his followers an extreme form of Anabaptism spread rapidly across the Netherlands.

The future of the movement seemed to be in question when Hoffman was apprehended and imprisoned in Strasbourg in 1533. It gained new

impetus when Jan Matthys, a former baker from Haarlem, gained control of the movement in Amsterdam. In order to further the organization, he appointed twelve apostles to go to various cities and to begin baptizing adult followers.

Two of the apostles, Bartholomeus de Boekbinder and Willem de Kuiper, traveled to Leeuwarden. Among those they baptized was Obbe Philips, a barber and, therefore, according to the custom of the day, a surgeon. Furthermore, Obbe and a fellow barber-surgeon, Hans Scheerder, were ordained and sent through the surrounding countryside to preach and baptize.

While Obbe and Hans were absent, another



Dirk Philips (1504-1568)

of Matthys' apostles, Pieter de Houtzager, came to Leeuwarden. Among those whom he baptized was Dirk Philips, who then forsook the Catholic Church and became an ardent Anabaptist. This took place between Christmas of 1533 and January 2, 1534.

The Struggle with the Muensterites

Obbe and Dirk were disillusioned very early with the movement under Matthys' leadership. Pieter de Houtzager's visit to Leeuwarden ended in a disturbance when he quarreled with others in the city who wanted a reform. This aroused the attention of the authorities and resulted in a search for the Anabaptists. Shortly afterward, in March 1534, the three leaders who had been in Leeuwarden demonstrated in Amsterdam by running through the streets, waving swords and calling for repentance. They were arrested without resistance and executed as a warning to others.

Obbe gradually separated from the group headed by Matthys. He also says that only Dirk helped him in opposing the group that abandoned nonresistance and eventually established a "kingdom" in the German city of Muenster. These Muensterites compelled others to join them and resisted by armed force the attempts of the government to expel them.

Obbe became the leader of a group of saner, more Biblically inclined Anabaptists. He ordained Dirk as a bishop in Appingedam, David Joris as a bishop in Delft, and Menno Simons, whom he had baptized a short time before, as a bishop in Groningen. David Joris departed from a strictly Biblical view so that he was soon separated from Dirk and Menno, and gained some following of his own.

Later Obbe seemed to become further disillusioned, feeling that his baptism and ordination were not valid because of the men who had performed them. He was also influenced by certain spiritualistic teachings of Sebastian Franck. Obbe withdrew from the movement about 1540 and urged Menno and Dirk to do the same.

Reorganization and Disputations

When Obbe renounced his office of bishop or elder and withdrew, Menno and Dirk became the natural leaders of the group. The following years were ones in which the movement was reorganized and purified by the addition of new leadership. In a series of debates, Anabaptists hammered out concepts and practices by a constant comparison of individual views with the teachings of the Scriptures. The new leaders included two additional elders, Gillis van Aken and Adam Pastor, who were ordained in

1542, and Leenaert Bouwens, who was ordained sometime between 1551 and 1553.

Dirk did not participate in the debates that Menno had with the leaders of the Reformed Church in Emden in 1544, as far as we know. He did share in the debate with Nicolaas Meynertsz van Blesdijk, a former friend of Menno who became convinced that David Joris had received special revelations equal in authority to the Bible. This debate took place in Lubeck, Germany, in 1545.

Out of the debate with Nicolaas it became apparent that Adam Pastor was inclined to anti-trinitarian views. A conference was arranged at Emden in 1547, where Menno and Dirk attempted to "blow out the spark," as an early account puts it.¹ This meeting was not conclusive in its results, so a further conference took place at Goch, near Cleve, Germany, in 1547. A number of followers of both groups were present. When it became obvious that

Pastor had accepted anti-trinitarian views and denied the divinity of Christ, Dirk, with the approval of Menno, formally pronounced the ban against Pastor. Pastor continued to labor and acquired some following. Dirk wrote a poem, or hymn, of twenty-two verses to counteract these teachings.

Internal disagreements also required conferences in 1547 and 1554 where Dirk undoubtedly took a leading part in helping to affirm the position of the church. At the meeting held in 1547, seven ministers arrived at a common understanding on the use of the ban and marrying outside of the church (*buitentrouw*). Menno and Dirk both referred to this decision many years later in their writings. Again, in 1554, seven ministers gathered at Wismar to discuss many of the same issues, and additional ones. At the conclusion of this conference a set of nine articles was issued, covering such matters as the ban (the main item), marriage outside the church, the carrying of weapons, the use of courts, and the activities of unauthorized itinerant ministers.

Later in the same year Dirk, Menno and other leading elders gathered in a "secret meeting" in Mecklenburg. Gillis van Aken had been guilty of a serious moral breach. He repented and promised to improve, so the group decided not to ban him.

The Beginning of Divisions

The conference at Wismar represented a shift from largely personal disagreements and opinions, to a movement acting more or less as groups or organizations. This change was to bring much bitterness into the closing days of Menno and Dirk's labors.

The first major incident that led to a division occurred the year following the conference at Wismar. Leenaert Bouwens banned a man in Emden. No one seemed to question this action, but a disagreement arose when the man's wife, Swaan Rutgers, would not shun him. Though she was a pious woman otherwise, Leenaert Bouwens proceeded to ban her also. Certain men from Franeker and Emden opposed this action.

Menno traveled to Franeker and reached an understanding with the dissenters there. He proceeded to Harlingen for a meeting with Dirk and Bouwens, hoping to effect a reconciliation. Instead, he found that Dirk and Bouwens were in accord on a stricter position and were unwilling to change. Apparently to avoid a split with Dirk and Bouwens, Menno went along with their harsher decision. This action resulted in the withdrawal of the so-called Waterlanders, who were named after the marshy areas of North Holland from which most of them came.

This dispute had far-reaching consequences as word of it reached South Germany. Important conferences were held at Strasbourg between 1554 and 1557, where attempts were made to unify the Mennonites of Europe. After the 1557 meeting, the South German brethren sent a delegation of two, Zylis and Lemke, to northern Germany to discuss the use of the ban. In response to this visit Menno and Dirk wrote

treatises to state their position. This was unacceptable to the South Germans, and it resulted in their being banned by the Dutch and North Germans, a split that lasted for another half century. Menno died shortly after this controversy.

Prussia and Utrecht

About this time, probably between 1555 and 1560, Dirk moved his major field of activity from the Emden and Hamburg district of Germany, to the Prussian area. He probably located in Schotland, a suburb of Danzig. Menno had traveled through this area as early as the summer of 1549. A large colony of Dutch Anabaptists had fled to this region as a result of persecutions. A quarrel had arisen among them and Menno sought to bring peace. Some have suggested that Menno made additional trips in the fifties, and Dirk Philips may have accompanied him.

It is certain that Dirk was active in this area and it is likely that he produced his major written works in the relative peace and quiet of his Prussian haven. Dirk had already published writings in 1544 or 1545. In the period that may have coincided with his move to Prussia, 1556 to 1559, he wrote and published several short works.

After Menno's death in January of 1561, Dirk no doubt felt a greater burden of responsibility laid upon his shoulders. He also knew that he was aging rapidly. As a means of counteracting various threats to harmony and unity within the church, and to give a more systematic and comprehensive statement of the Anabaptist position, he re-edited all his major writings and added some new ones. This was issued in 1564 as an *Enchiridion oft Hantboecxken van de Christelijcke Leere...* It was widely used and reprinted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Even as recently as 1910 the Amish had it translated into English and published. This edition is still available. F. Pijper, a Dutch church historian, writing an introduction to Dirk Philips' writings in 1910, makes the following statements:

It was for the Mennonites (and the majority of the Anabaptists followed him as their true leader), what the *Loci Communes* of Melancthon was for the Lutherans, Calvin's *Institutes* and the *Confession* of Beza, for the Calvinists, and the *Leken wechwyser* (*The Layman's Guide*) for the early Dutch Protestants.²

Dirk did not confine his labors to the Prussian area entirely during these years. As late as December, 1561, testimony found in court records shows that Dirk was as far south as Utrecht. He was present at a meeting of a small congregation gathered in the basement of Cornelis van Voordt's house. Dirk conducted a communion and baptismal service. In the spring of 1562 the group was discovered and several were arrested. The court records contain the only first-hand descriptions of Dirk's long stay in Germany that caused him to speak with an accent which Beatris mistook for a dialect spoken in the southern Netherlands.³ Another witness, Anna Emkens, described him as "... an old man with a gray beard, with white hair, a medium built man. . . ."⁴



Melchior Hoffman, founder of the Anabaptist movement in Northern Europe, in prison, Strassburg (etching by van Sichem).

The Frisian and Flemish

If Menno lived to regret the controversy over the ban and the Waterlander split, an episode that was even more painful awaited Dirk. About 1560, four congregations in Friesland: Franeker, Dokkum, Leeuwarden, and Harlingen, entered into a covenant among themselves. It was arranged by the church councils and ministers, and was kept a secret so that the exact details are not known. We do know that it contained nineteen articles covering areas of cooperation, such as the settlement of disputes which could not be handled locally, a financial aid program which was needed for a large influx of refugees from the severe persecutions in Flanders, and the service and choice of ministers.

In 1565 two events occurred which involved Dirk Philips, and were the prelude to a bitter division in the church. Jeroen Tinnegieter, a refugee from Flanders, was chosen as a minister at Franeker. Under the terms of the covenant Harlingen objected. A gathering of ministers, including Dirk, was called to discuss the matter. In the course of the controversy, the covenant became known. Dirk objected to it on the basis that it was a human addition to the Scriptures.

It seems, however, that a deeper cause of the conflict arose from a difference in disposition between the refugees from Flanders, known as the Flemish, and the local people, called Frisians. The Frisians were stiff, somewhat cool, and preferred to hide their feelings. They wore sober and simple clothing, paying little attention to the fashions. On the other hand, they were elaborate and decorative in their linen and household goods. On the contrary, the Flemish were boisterous and exuberant by nature, expressing their feelings quickly, easily upset, but shifting rapidly from one mood to another. They cared little about their household goods or their food, but did like stylish and fancy clothing. As a result, this incident was settled temporarily

but bobbed up again.

Another event which contributed to the division happened in Emden as Dirk was on his way back to Prussia. Leenaert Bouwens was at odds with his congregation there. They thought that he made too many trips to Friesland. He was also accused of being a drunkard. Seven ministers, including Dirk, sat in judgment on the case. It was decided to suspend Bouwens from the office as elder, but not to ban him. He accepted the judgment at that time, probably out of fear of the ban. He moved to a place near Harlingen. There was not complete agreement on the judgment since one minister abstained, and another later retracted his judgment.

After Dirk was back in Danzig, further events resulted in a growing antagonism between the



David Joris, spiritualist Anabaptist (etching by van Sichen)

Frisians and the Flemish. Various attempts were made to reconcile the groups, but even with outside assistance, the efforts only deepened the resentments. Word reached Dirk about the events. He responded with a "Letter to the Four Cities" on September 19, 1566. An appendix on the appointment of ministers, which had been drawn up when Bouwens was suspended, was included. This leads one to believe that Dirk thought Bouwens to be involved in the difficulties.

Dirk's appeal was as futile as were the other attempts to heal the breach. The Frisians finally felt constrained to invite Dirk personally to assist as a last possible hope for unity. The letter of invitation was sent on April 17, 1567. Dirk, accompanied by two companions, proceeded to Emden. He requested the parties involved to appear there, and to air the grievances before him and in one another's presence. The Frisian ministers were reluctant to comply but did send a delegation. When Dirk remained adamant and refused to see anyone except the major disputants, and only in the presence of the other party, these leaders finally came to Emden. However, they still refused to do anything other than attempt to see Dirk alone.

It is not clear as to exactly who banned whom first, but it is known that both the earlier

delegation and the later group of ministers from the Frisians met on July 8, 1567, and pronounced the ban against Dirk. Four days later they made it public by announcing it to the Groningen congregation. This was the final serious attempt to effect a reunion. The subsequent years were to see further splitting before a trend toward unity came about.

These events grieved Dirk deeply. He remained at Emden and wrote a defense of his actions in the controversy, and another tract on Christian matrimony. His strength was failing and he became ill during the last days. The writing on Christian matrimony was completed on March 7, 1568. Shortly thereafter in the same year, he died near Emden at a place called Het Falder, and was buried in the *Gdsthuis Kerkhof* in Emden.



Anabaptists demonstrate in Amsterdam.

Dirk's Personality and Significance

Little has been written about Dirk Philips by himself or others from the period. What we do have points to a person who tended to be withdrawn and reserved in his relations with people. In the early days of the Anabaptist movement he followed his brother Obbe, and only gradually emerged as a prominent leader. Even in later years we have practically no record of controversies that he may have had with those outside the Anabaptist group. This is in contrast with Menno who engaged in written and personal debates with Reformed leaders. Menno was often antagonistic in his written disputes, but Dirk reflects less of this characteristic of the times. He preferred to deal with ideas and issues rather than with personalities.

Dirk was noted also for steadfastness and tenacity in holding to an ideal. In his activities and his writings he insisted on a high standard of purity in the life of the Christian and the fellowship of the church, a characteristic that proved to be both a strength and a weakness.

Menno was apt to hesitate and vacillate under the pressure of forceful personalities, but Dirk was firm and sure of his position, and so gave Menno some needed stability. Without Dirk's aid it is doubtful whether Menno would have been able to do as much as he did to gather, organize and establish the brotherhood that survived the crises of those early formative years.

When, however, Dirk was pushed into leadership, and more particularly into controversy, his firmness often became rigid and brittle. This tendency was heightened after Menno, with his

greater warmth and moderate inclinations in the use of discipline, was no longer present. Dirk did attempt, even in the conflict between the Frisians and the Flemish, to rise above personal animosities by following the Scriptural pattern given by Paul under similar conditions. The weakness of the flesh rather than the failure of intent prevented him from achieving this goal.

If this sketch is accurate, it is not difficult to understand why Menno is better known and considered more significant. Dirk was not the aggressive leader and organizer, but the one to give stability in the midst of stress. He was a man whom many could respect and admire, but not one to win the affections of the people so that he could become the embodiment of their hopes and ideals. Perhaps Dirk's writings and



MENNO SIMONS

Engraving of Menno Simons by Abraham de Cooge (around 1620)

thought, in contrast to his leadership, had a more significant part to play in the continuing life of the church. Certainly he cannot be ignored if we are to understand the beginnings of the Mennonite church. There is also much in his writings that can aid us today in understanding and living a life of fuller Christian discipleship.

Endnotes

¹ See "Successio Anabaptistica" in *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol. VII, 50.

² *Bibliotheca Reformatoria Neerlandica*, Vol. X, 4; Dosker, Henry Elias, *The Dutch Anabaptists*, 1921, 105. Pijper, does not include Calvin's *Institutes*.

³ See reprint of the court records in an article by Samuel Cramer, *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen*, 1903, 39.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 22, 42.

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Connected by Seas, Windmills and Faith

Peter J. Klassen, Fresno, California

Long before the Reformation forged various religious bridges between the Netherlands and northern Poland, Amsterdam and Danzig (Gdańsk) had built strong commercial and cultural ties between these two port cities and their surrounding areas. Both cities were international centers, characterized by cosmopolitan and prosperous upper and middle classes. Each city, although part of a larger political entity, had a large measure of self-rule, and developed an extensive diplomatic network that reflected its wealth and status. When Reformation movements arose in their regions, this penchant for local independence again demonstrated its resilience. In each instance, efforts to impose religious policies by external authorities met with resistance and eventually, defeat.

At the same time, as movements of reform arose, adherents soon found that without strong regional political support, their lot would be a difficult one. Most of Europe viewed a close state-church relationship as a normal and necessary part of civic life and order. Thus, when the Anabaptist-Mennonite movement challenged this assumption and introduced religious beliefs and practices at variance with traditional faith and observance, efforts to suppress such sentiments led to persecution, expulsion or death. The quest for a home where Mennonite beliefs would be accepted became a matter of survival. The strong ties between the Netherlands and the most important port on the Baltic now provided at least the possibility of finding such a place. Economic and political conditions, including lands left waste by flooding and war, provided a setting for refuge along the banks of the Vistula, especially in the Vistula-Nogat Delta.

From the beginning of Mennonite settlement in the lands along the Vistula, bridges of faith, kinship and economic interest spanned the geographical distance between Mennonite fellow-believers in Polish or Royal Prussia and the Netherlands.¹ Indeed, the ties between these Mennonite communities in different societies were, of course, only a part of much larger connections that united two regions intimately associated with maritime commerce. The extensive dimensions of that commerce are demonstrated by the fact that early in the 17th century, the number of Danzig ships sailing through the Sound at Elsinore (Helsingør) annually exceeded one thousand, and most of these ships were bound for Amsterdam.² Grain was by far the most important cargo and made Amsterdam, with Danzig, the “granary of Europe.”³

These important commercial relations were only part of the warp and woof of the fabric that bound Amsterdam and Danzig together. Indeed, the image of creating a “new Holland” in the Vistula Delta remained remarkably vibrant over centuries. Early in the 17th century, Joost van den Vondel, then the most noted literary figure of the Netherlands, dramatically portrayed the strength of this aspiration when he created his remarkable drama, “Gijsbrecht van Aemstel.”⁴ Early in the



*Almost all windmills that once dotted the landscape in the Vistula-Nogat delta have disappeared. This one, situated in the Wikrowo (Wicherau) immediately south of the Ellerwald area, was used for milling. It recently burned down. (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, p. 30)*

21st century, some aspects of Gijsbrecht’s dream are still alive as a new housing and commercial development in the heart of the Werder, now known as “uB awy,” is called MaB y (Little Holland).

While other countries were creating New Spain, New France and New England, Vondel wrote a drama in which his main character, Gijsbrecht van Aemstel, was called to build a New Holland where Polish water nourished fertile lands.⁵

By the time Vondel wrote his remarkable drama, Mennonites from the Netherlands were already well established. Indeed, there in uB awy, or the Werder, they had lived for close to a century. They had begun coming in the 1530s and 1540s, and in the 1560s were given long-term leases for land in the area today called Nowy Dwór, earlier Tiegenhof. These early arrivals occurred at a time when this region, like much of the Vistula Delta, had suffered from heavy flooding as well as from the devastation of war that had ravaged much of the land and many of the villages. In addition, local authorities tried to increase the volume of the Vistula as it flowed through the delta. With the intent of improving shipping conditions, the entrance to the Nogat was restricted in order to divert additional water to the commercially more important river. The increased volume, combined with a heavy runoff, led to the breaking of the Vistula dikes and extensive flooding in the lower elevations in the area. Therefore, the welcome accorded Mennonite immigrants was at least in part occasioned by the prospect of their bringing flooded and neglected lands into productivity by developing a reliable drainage system of dikes, dams, water runways and windmills. And so they came, seeking religious freedom and economic

opportunity, and offering landowners the possibility of a better return on their lands. As these new settlers established homes on lands owned by the king, lords, cities or the church, they soon became known for significant contributions to the economic prosperity of the region. King WB adysB aw IV expressed a commonly-held view of the Mennonites when he declared:

We are well aware of the manner in which the ancestors of the Mennonite inhabitants of our Marienburg islands [Werder], both large and small, were invited by the Loysen brothers with the knowledge and by the will of the gracious King Sigismund Augustus, . . . to areas that were barren, swampy and unusable places in those lands. With great effort and at very high cost, they made these lands fertile and productive. They cleared out the brush, and, in order to drain the water from these flooded and marshy lands, they built mills and constructed dams to guard against flooding by the Vistula, Nogat, Drusen, Haff, Tiege and other streams.⁶

Among the strongest ties forged between the new settlers and the Mennonites in the Netherlands were those of faith and religious practice. Erich Göttner, the last pastor to serve the Mennonite congregation in Danzig, expressed the close interdependence of Mennonite congregations in the Netherlands and in Royal Prussia. In 1937 he wrote,

For two centuries Mennonites in the Vistula area maintained close bonds with their fellow-believers in the Netherlands. Many elders were called from their Dutch congregations. Thus, Jan Gerrits from Emden, who served as a preacher in the Groningen and Haarlem churches, came to Danzig in 1607 to serve as the first elder of the Frisian Mennonite Church there. Until 1760,

a continuous stream of candidates for baptism traveled from Danzig to the Netherlands to be baptized there. For more than 200 years sermons in the Danzig Mennonite Church were preached in Dutch, while Dutch hymnals and Dutch catechisms were also used. Similarly, in times of material need, as in times of war or flooding in the Vistula and Nogat areas, Dutch Mennonites did not forget their brothers and sisters in the faith. From another perspective, some Old Flemish churches in Amsterdam, Haarlem and Rotterdam felt spiritually so close to the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church that they called themselves Danzig churches.⁷

Although Polish kings reiterated statements of welcome and support for Mennonites, nature was not always kind. The Vistula and its tributaries often played havoc with the intentions of those trying to create arable land from marshes and flooded lowlands in the Vistula delta. Letters sent to the Netherlands witnessed to the ongoing distress created by ravaging waters. Thus, in 1677, the church in the large Marienburg Werder wrote to the Mennonites in Amsterdam asking them to provide financial assistance in response to flooding that had robbed them of their livelihood.⁸ The letter, specifically directed to the congregation *bij het Lam*, elicited strong support.⁹ Such pleas for assistance came from various congregations. Another letter sent from the Montau (M tawy) congregation reported that members had had to seek new shelter because of flooding. This time both the *bij het Lam* and the *bij de Zon* congregations were approached by the distressed church along the Vistula, asking for a response for this critical need.¹⁰ In another instance a decade later, the Mennonite congregation in Elbing (Elbl g) wrote to Amsterdam, explaining that the devastation of war coupled with flooding, had placed the Elbing Mennonites in a precarious situation.¹¹

Even though Dutch Mennonites were very generous in their support, they were careful to follow procedures that recognized the congregation, not an individual, as the appropriate channel for distribution of material aid. When the noted

Ältester (Elder) Hendrick Donner of the Orloferfelde (OrB owskie Pole) congregation wrote that he personally had suffered greatly because of flooding, and would very much appreciate some direct financial assistance, the commission's response was that it felt aid should be channeled through the congregation for distribution. Writing directly to Donner, the commission stated that it did not feel free to help individual persons, restating that the congregation must be the recipient and the distributor of aid.¹² At the same time, the commission expressed its enthusiasm for working directly with congregations. This policy had proved workable and sufficiently equitable.

Challenges posed by flooding were by no means the only difficulties experienced by the Mennonites. Intolerant policies in the neighboring kingdom of Prussia added to the distress of the Mennonites in Royal (Polish) Prussia. Thus, when the king in Prussia in 1724 expelled Mennonite settlers, Mennonites in Royal Prussia faced the challenge of providing homes for the displaced fellow-believers. It was a joint effort between Mennonites in the Netherlands and in Hamburg that provided funds to help the homeless Mennonites to acquire new lands and dwellings in Royal Prussia. The letter from the Dutch Mennonites expressed concern for those expelled because of their belief, and asked that the funds be used to help those in need.¹³

It should be noted that help and counsel did not necessarily flow only one way, and sometimes involved issues of faith and practice. As early as 1615 several churches in Prussia wrote to the Mennonites in the Netherlands and urged them to resolve divisions and disputes among themselves.¹⁴ Apparently the Dutch Mennonites were less than enthusiastic about the spiritual counseling received from Royal Prussia; they now chose representatives to go to the Mennonite congregations in the Vistula delta to enlighten them about the real situation in Amsterdam. Clearly, the Dutch congregations were not always eager to accept advice and discipline from congregations in Royal Prussia.

Fraternal relations between Dutch and Royal

Prussian Mennonite congregations sometimes helped the latter to cope with local religious restrictions. At that time Danzig prohibited the rebaptism of those who converted to the Mennonite faith from Catholic, Lutheran or Reformed churches. In response to this restriction, those wishing to join the Mennonites frequently went to Amsterdam to be baptized on profession of their faith.¹⁵ This practice was followed well into the 18th century,¹⁶ and sometimes aroused the wrath of political authorities. In 1736, Johann Nabel, a Danzig Catholic, chose to join the local Mennonites and went to be baptized in the Netherlands. On his return, he was imprisoned in Danzig.

In few areas of Danzig's life did the Netherlands exert so great an influence as in the arts, especially in painting and in architecture, most notably in designing important civic structures and patrician homes. Artists such as Vredeman de Vries, Isaac van den Block and Wilhelm Hondius, all from the Netherlands, made their reputations in cities such as Danzig. Hondius created portraits of King Wladyslaw IV, other members of the royal family, Polish magnates and Danzig patricians. He also gained fame through maps, engravings of cities and title pages of books. At the heart of Danzig's civic life, the Red Room in the city hall, regarded as Danzig's most beautiful room, was adorned by ceiling panels. In these Isaac van den Block allegorically depicted the grandeur of the city, while de Vries graced the walls with seven paintings. A strikingly graceful and beautiful fireplace, created by the Dutch sculptor Wilhelm van der Meer, as well as the Dutch fourteen-bell carillon in the city hall's tower, showed that Danzig relied on the Netherlands to provide artistry that would reflect the pride of the city. Indeed, one of the foremost authorities on the history of Danzig's art and architecture concluded that "the dominance gained by Dutch builders and sculptors in Danzig's construction during the last two decades of the 17th century gave that city a Dutch appearance."¹⁷

Like other rich Renaissance cities, Danzig took pride in expressing its self-portrait in terms of classical mythology and biblical imagery. Artistic creativity portrayed the city's grandeur and sought to inculcate civic virtue and religious belief. The inscription above the portal of the Golden Gate, which opened onto the "Royal Route," reflected this mixture of civic pride and biblical allusion: "They shall prosper that love you. Let there be peace within your walls and prosperity within your palaces." Designed by Wilhelm van den Block's son Abraham, the gate depicted the self-assurance and confidence so characteristic of Danzig's society. Abraham also provided a new façade for the Artushof, Danzig's most important business center. Corinthian pilasters, gold ornamentation, images from classical mythology and likenesses of prominent Danzig families evoked a spirit of optimism that seemed natural in a city that dominated the Baltic trade.

Other Dutch artists and architects added to this dominant influence from the Netherlands. Anthony van Obbergen designed the city hall built in the Altstadt (old city; *Stare Miasto*). The sculptures, corner towers, gables and entry portal demonstrate Obbergen's sensitivity to artistic



An arcaded house, formerly used by Mennonites. (P. J. Klassen, *A Homeland for Strangers*, p. 31)

harmony. As city architect, he worked on the city's wall fortifications and incorporated many beautiful gates into the earthen walls.¹⁸ Van Obbergen also built a new armory, one of Danzig's most impressive Renaissance monuments. Not surprisingly, his fame brought him invitations from other cities and countries, but he chose to devote most of his time to Danzig, his adopted home where he died in 1611.

Danzig's dependence on Dutch expertise continued. Early in the 17th century, Adrian Oldbrantsen and Wilm Jansen Bennigen, both from Alkmaar, came to rechannel the Mottlau River and build a lock where the river entered the city.¹⁹ Another Dutch engineer, Cornelis van dem Bosch designed fortifications for the right side of the stream.²⁰ Then, when Danzig was threatened during the Polish-Swedish war in the 1620s, the city decided to strengthen its fortifications. Again, a Dutch engineer, Peter Jansen de Weert, came to ring the city with a wall and numerous bastions. De Weert died before he could finish his assignment; once more, the city fathers turned to an expert from the Netherlands. This time the Mennonite Adam Wiebe from Harlingen, who had earlier come to develop a water system for the city center, continued the building of the earthen walls and bastions. In the process he developed a suspended cable-car system to transport earth from a nearby hill to the new walls.²¹

Such interaction between the Netherlands and Danzig seemed to extend to virtually all aspects of life. By 1600, the city was alive with the activity of reportedly 3,150 guild masters, many of whom came from or had learned their skill in the Netherlands.²² Sometimes, Mennonites introduced new trades. In one instance, the new immigrants introduced the making of exquisite trimming such as gold and silver lace and braid. Polish nobles and urban patricians provided a ready market for what soon became a flourishing industry. It is interesting to note that after this industry became well-established, Danzig guilds tried to create a monopoly which would exclude the Dutch Mennonites and their descendants from a craft they had introduced. In the ensuing *Bortenmacher* (lace-makers) quarrel, Danzig guilds asked the city council to stop the Netherlands from "snatching the bread from the mouths of [Danzig's] citizens."²³ When their formal protests failed to sway both the city council and the judiciary, some members of the general populace launched a pamphlet attack on the Mennonites, and accused them of being nothing more than the remnants of the Anabaptists who had been followers of Jan of Leyden, a revolutionary who gained control of the German city of Münster during the reformation. Mennonites were now described as weeds that were being protected and cultivated by the city council.²⁴ For decades, the city council rejected the demands of the guilds and the pressures of pamphleteers, but eventually the king intervened. In a significant departure from past royal policy, King Augustus III in 1750 issued a decree imposing new financial obligations on Mennonites and barring masters from teaching the skill of making braid and lace to any Mennonite boy.²⁵ A few years later, Gottfried Lengnich, syndic

of Danzig, deplored this irony: those who had introduced a specialty into the city were now barred from practicing it.²⁶ Even then, however, more than two centuries after Mennonites had begun leaving the Netherlands to find a new home in Royal Prussia, it was the intercession of the Dutch that brought forth some justice. On the urging of Dutch Mennonite congregations, the government of the Netherlands appealed directly to the Danzig city council. The Dutch commissioner there, Dirk van Bleyswyck, successfully urged the council to take action to ameliorate unjust treatment of the Mennonites.²⁷

The Dutch-Danzig ties also included development of social and cultural institutions. When Danzig decided to explore new avenues in treatment of crime, it looked to Amsterdam. There the Rasphuis, a prison for men and boys, provided a setting where they could learn a skill while incarcerated, thus demonstrating Dutch experientia-



This church, built in 1768, situated in the village of Baerwalde (now Niedzwiedzica), served the Fuerstenwender congregation. The building has since burned down. (P. J. Klassen, A Homeland for Strangers, the fourth page past 47)

tion in social engineering seeking to combine retribution with rehabilitation. A similar facility, the Spinhuis, was later constructed for girls and women so they could learn trades associated with spinning wool. These institutions became models for Danzig and patterned a code of regulations after the one developed in Amsterdam.²⁸

The scope of Dutch influence in Danzig and environs in economic, social, civic and cultural arenas was significant indeed. In virtually all of them, Mennonites played a role, even if sometimes a small one. But for those Mennonites who left the Netherlands to seek a new home along the Vistula, it was the religious ties that long remained central. For Mennonite congregations in the Vistula Delta and along the Vistula River, ties between the two regions remained strong throughout the existence of Royal Prussia. It is thus not surprising that when Frederick seized most of Royal Prussia in 1772, then also Danzig in 1793, there was considerable misgiving in the Mennonite community.

Sometimes religious dissension expressed

itself in rather extreme forms. In 1739, a group of 24 members of one of the Danzig churches sent a letter to the Netherlands, asking that a minister be sent to celebrate the Lord's Supper, since the Danzig minister, *Ältester* Hendrik van Duren, had unilaterally decided to exclude all men wearing wigs.²⁹ It should be noted that this practice had also created problems in Dutch Mennonite congregations, but the more tolerant and pragmatic Netherlanders concluded that wearing wigs might be a matter of maintaining one's health, and should thus not be prohibited.³⁰ In Danzig, however, the dispute became so heated that some members of the congregation asked the Senate of the city to intervene. The response affirmed the autonomy of the congregation: no minister could unilaterally exclude anyone from communion unless the congregation formally adopted such a prohibition.³¹ Subsequently, some members of the Danzig congregation sent another

letter to the Amsterdam Mennonites, asking them to send an *Ältester* who would be able to install a new *Ältester* in Danzig; Johann Donner had been chosen for this office,³² but he died before action could be taken.³³ Eventually, Jacob Ouwejans, a minister from the Netherlands, succeeded in restoring unity, and on October 2, 1740, a united congregation observed communion.

Social ties between the Netherlands and immigrants from there to the Danzig region also remained strong. Marriages frequently involved partners from both regions. Records show that in the 17th century, at least 145 brides and 601 bridegrooms from Danzig came to Amsterdam to marry their partners.³⁴ Unfortunately, the documents do not always list the religious affiliation of the participants. At the same time, the association between the terms "Dutch" and "Mennonite" must have been close; one historian contends that in Royal Prussia the two were often regarded as synonymous.³⁵ A contemporary Lutheran historian, not sympathetic to the Mennonites, noted that many Netherlanders

had fled Alva's persecution in the Netherlands, had found a new home in the Vistula Delta, and then began spreading their Mennonite "errors" among the general populace.³⁶ Not surprisingly, he championed efforts to bar Mennonites from settling in the city of Danzig.

The strong ties between Mennonites in the Netherlands and in Royal Prussia enabled them to share various aspects of their congregational life. Church leaders exchanged visits; sometimes ministers from one country would be invited to come to the other to assist in dealing with church problems, or simply to strengthen doctrinal and fellowship ties. It should also be noted that the influence on Dutch Mennonite congregations by Mennonites from Royal Prussia was considerable. Several Dutch congregations referred to the Danzig church as the "mother church," and did not hesitate to seek an *Oudste* (Elder) from the Prussian congregations. These congregations responded by selecting Dirk Janssen and sending him to Danzig, where he served for eight years.³⁷

Fraternal visits occurred frequently. One of the more noted of these is a visit of Elder Hendrik Berents Hulshoff, of the Old Flemish Church in the Netherlands, to Old Flemish congregations in Royal Prussia. His description of the trip provides many insights into the relationship between the Dutch and Prussian Mennonite congregations, especially the Old Flemish groups, and also describes many aspects of life in Royal Prussia.³⁸

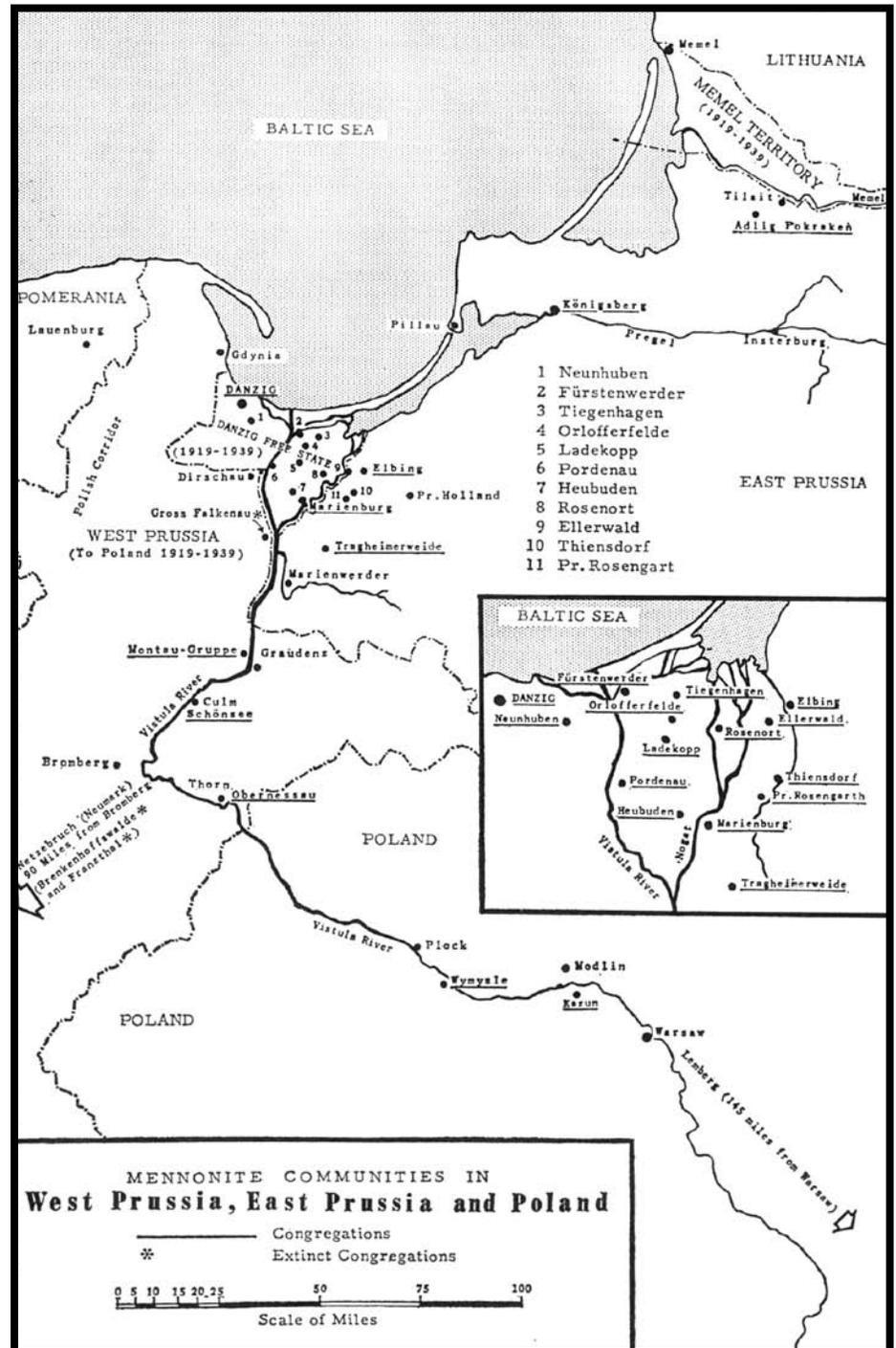
On May 22, 1719, Elder Berents Hulshoff, accompanied by his brother, began his journey. When he set sail, he found that one of the passengers on the ship was a Mennonite, Freerik Luetzner, from the Schottland church in Danzig. Berents soon learned that Luetzner had a most remarkable story. A former soldier, Luetzner had observed the life of Mennonites in Danzig, and been impressed with their values and daily living. Despite the jeers of his fellow soldiers, he had decided to live with the Mennonites, and share their faith.³⁹ On May 29th, 1719 the ship sailed into Danzig harbor, and Berents soon arrived at the home of the elder in Schottland, Anthonij Jansen.

Berents and his brother found a warm reception here. Jansen insisted that his guests remain for the night, and also secured a wagon so that his friends could later move on to other members of the Flemish congregation. Berents continued up the Vistula, visiting several congregations; at Przechowka (Wintersdorf) he preached several times, presided at the selection of ministers of the word, officiated at a baptismal service and the celebration of the Lord's Supper, and welcomed 31 new members into the church.⁴⁰ After a rather extensive visit, Berents crossed to the right side of the Vistula, called on Mennonites in Wolz, then continued on to Schönsee. Here he conducted the rite of footwashing, and preached at services of both Flemish and Frisian congregations.⁴¹ Throughout the visit, as the report indicates, visitors constantly called on him, and demonstrated a measure of love and interest that he found overwhelming. A number of the local church members also indicated their intention of coming to Danzig to visit the churches there. As the two brothers left their friends, they were escorted by a

four-wagon entourage as these Mennonites along the Vistula showed their respect for the guests from the Netherlands. Then, as the Berents continued their journey down the river, they arrived in Montau, where Pieter Balster, the minister of the Frisian Mennonite congregation welcomed them. At last, Elder Hendrik Berents returned to his home, having carried out his mission of strengthening unity in faith and practice, and fostering bonds of mutual support and fellowship between Mennonites in the Netherlands and those in Royal Prussia. Such demonstrations of shared spiritual ministry continued throughout the Polish period and on into the Prussian time.

Thus, in 1774, when Elder Hendrick Donner was confronted with a question of doctrinal practice, he appealed to the model of the Dutch Mennonites.⁴²

Ties between Dutch and Prussian Mennonites sometimes led to efforts to enlist political support to help co-religionists. At that time, efforts by the Mennonites in the Netherlands to gain their government's support on behalf of persecuted Swiss Mennonites were well-known and occurred frequently.⁴³ The much more tolerant attitude of authorities in Royal Prussia gave Mennonites there a measure of relief from the persecution inflicted on their Swiss fellow-believers, but



Mennonite Encyclopedia IV, p. 921.

sometimes action taken by authorities in Königsberg, or by hostile guilds in Danzig, led Dutch Mennonites to intervene through diplomatic channels. When the king in Prussia ordered the expulsion of Mennonites in 1732, Dutch Mennonites not only approached the States-General directly but also persuaded *bürgermeisters* and city councils to join efforts to assist Mennonites threatened with expulsion as well as those actually expelled.⁴⁴ Governments of Dutch provinces joined the effort to halt Prussian persecution of Mennonites. It is significant to note that the Prussian king did withdraw his order of expulsion of the Mennonites.

Similarly, when in the mid-18th century Danzig guilds pressured the Danzig City Council to impose tighter restrictions on Mennonite craftsmen and merchants, Dutch Mennonites responded with an appeal to charters of privileges and a vigorous defense of the principle of free trade.⁴⁵ Such actions indicated that Mennonites in the Netherlands had remained well informed about the political and economic situation of their fellow-believers in Royal Prussia.

During the 18th century, however, the situation became more complex, for the king of Saxony had been elected king of Poland, and the Dutch Mennonites had to direct their requests to the king in Dresden. In one such instance, Dutch Mennonites offered to send representatives to Dresden to present their concerns to the king.⁴⁶ Both Saxon kings, August II the Strong, and August III, who reigned during almost all of the first three quarters of the 18th century, were determined to strengthen royal power in Danzig and the rest of Royal Prussia. In Danzig, their strategy involved weakening the power of the political elite, who were the most ardent defenders of Danzig's traditionally large measure of autonomy. Conversely, the kings endeavored to support the guilds. In 1750, August III rejected the position of the City Council, which supported the long-established Mennonite liberties, and approved the petition of the guilds. There would be no special consideration of Mennonite concerns; instead, the "Hollanders," should not have rights equal to those of the citizens of Danzig, since they did not accept as many responsibilities.⁴⁷ In gratitude, the guilds erected a monument to the king.⁴⁸

City champions of the old order tried to alert the citizenry to the danger of allowing royal authority to erode such long-established city freedoms. Ironically, they appealed to the Dutch model of resisting the Spanish Hapsburgs during the Dutch War for Independence. By now, however, the champions of royal absolutism and corrosive nationalism were already plotting the dismemberment of not only Royal Prussia, but of the entire Polish state. In the cauldron of rival nationalisms surrounding Poland, there was little room for the traditions of relative autonomy and local freedom. Like other members of the populace in Royal Prussia, Mennonites found that the somewhat disorganized and inefficient structures of the Polish state were being replaced by a determined Prussian authoritarianism, and in this new world, long-established ties to the Netherlands would not offer much promise.

Endnotes

1 Royal Prussia was under the Polish crown. Sometimes it was also called Polish Prussia, to distinguish it from East, or Ducal Prussia. The term "West Prussia" came into use after the first partition, when most of Royal Prussia was seized by Frederick II.

2 Elizabeth Harder-Gersdorff, "Lübeck, Danzig und Riga. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der Handelskonjunktur im Ostseeraum am Ende des 17. Jahrhunderts," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, 96, (1978), 24.

3 *Ibid.*, 121. See also Aksel Christensen, *Dutch Trade to the Baltic About 1600* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1941), 405.

4 Joost van den Vondel, *Gijsbrecht van Aemstel*, trans. by Kristiaan P. Aерcke (Ottawa: Carleton University, 1991), 53-120).

5 It is remarkable that Vondel's biographer, G. H. de Wilde could write in 1867 that this drama had been performed every year in Amsterdam since Vondel wrote it (G. H. de Wilde, *Gysbrecht van Aemstel* [Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1867], v).

6 Archiwum Państwowe w Gdańsku (APGd), 358/132 (Gdańsk State Archives), translated by the author.

7 Erich Götner, "Predigt . . . 31 Juli 1937, Danzig Mennonitenkirche," 3. Sippentag in der Mennonitenkirche zu Danzig (1937), 154.

8 "Orloff int groote Marienburgsche Werder, 2 Martin 1677...ande werde dienaren...tot Amsterdam," *Gemeente Archief, Amsterdam* (GAA), A1552; see also de Hoop Schefker, J.G., *Inventaris der archiefstukken berustende bij de Vereenigde Doopsgezinde Gemeente te Amsterdam*, Amsterdam, 1883-1884, I, 291.

9 From the church in Danzig to the church "bij het Lam" in Amsterdam (9 March 1677), GAA, PA 1553; from the church in the Great Werder to the church in Amsterdam (24 November 1677), PA 1554; circular from the church "bij het Lam" to the churches of the Doopsgezinde in the Netherlands (24 November 1678), GAA, PA 1560.

10 Letter from the "kerkeraad bij het Lam" stating that the congregation "bij de Zon" is also requested to respond to the need (30 January 1680), GAA, PA 1566.

11 Pieter van Rickstel, Elbing, to the church in Amsterdam (26 May 1709), GAA PA 1569.

12 Letter from the Dutch Mennonite Commission to "oudste" (Elder) Hendrick Donner (6 May 1788), GAA, PA 1744.

13 Letter from the Commission in the Netherlands to David Penner, Jacob Bestevader, Jan van Hoek and Lodewijk Rump in Danzig (24 May 1726), GAA, PA 1572; see the reply from Jan van Hoek et al. to Danzig (22 June 1726), GAA, PA 1573.

14 Letter from four congregations urging the Waterlander and the "High German" churches to resolve their differences (15 July 1615), GAA PB 2626.

15 Letter from Jacob Kinn in Danzig to Galenus Abrahams in Amsterdam (7 August 1696), GAA, PB 2630.

16 Letters from the Danzig Mennonites asking that two men, baptized as infants but now wishing to join the Mennonites, be baptized in Amsterdam so that the conflict with Danzig statutes might be avoided (5 July 1730), GAA, PB 2636.

17 Georg Cuny, *Danzigs Kunst und Kultur im 16. Und 17. Jahrhundert*, (Frankfurt/Main: Keller, 1910), 25. The extent to which they were Mennonite is uncertain.

18 Edmund Cie lak and Czesław Biernat, tr. Bożenna Blaim and George Hyde, *History of Gdańsk* (Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Morskie, 1988), 164.

19 Cuny, *Danzigs Kunst und Kultur*, 51.

20 Paul Simson, *Geschichte der Stadt Danzig bis 1626* (Danzig: Kafemann, 1924), II, 457.

21 Cuny, *Kunst und Kultur*, 56; Reinhold Curicke, *Der Stadt Danzig Historische Beschreibung* (Amsterdam und Dantzig: Johan und Gillis Jansson, 1687), 348, 349.

22 Maria Bogucka, "Danzig an der Wende zur Neuzeit: von der aktiven Handelsstadt zum Stapel und Produktionszentrum," *Hansische Geschichtsblätter*, (1984), 93.

23 APGd., 300R/Vv 29, 177-198.

24 APGd, 300, R/vol. 5, folios 311, 13b.

25 Biblioteka Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Gdańsku (BPANGd), Gdańsk, MS Ortmann, folio 34a, 53.

26 Gottfried Lengnich, *Ius Publicum Civitatis Gedanensis, oder der Stadt Danzig Verfassung und Rechte* (Danzig, 1769), 557.

27 APGd, 300, 10/82, folios 22ff., 40-41a.

28 Olfert Dapper, *Historische Beschryving der Stadt Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1663); see also Thorsten Sellin, *Pioneering in Penology: The Amsterdam Houses of Correction in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1944); Curicke, 173; A. Hallema, "Wat was eens in Dantzig . . . Amsterdamsch?" *Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant* (2 September 1939), 3.

29 Letter from Danzig members requesting Dutch assistance (4 July 1739), GAA, PB 2643.

30 Copy of a letter from the Dutch Mennonites, meeting in de Zon, to the church in Danzig (May 1726), GAA, PB 2632; see also the Mennonite Encyclopedia, IV, "Periwig Dispute," 146, 147.

31 Extract from Danzig Senate minutes (11 September 1739), GAA, PB 2643.

32 Letter from twenty-one members in Danzig requesting speedy action (October 1739, GAA, PB 2647).

33 Letter from the church council in Danzig (13 July 1740), GAA, PB 2660.

34 Simon Hart, *Geschrift en Getal. Een keuze uit de demografisch-, economisch- en sociaal-historische studien op grond van Amsterdamse en Zaanse archivalia, 1600-1800* (Dortrecht, 1976), 170.

35 F. Dekker, *Voortrekkers van oud Nederland* (Den Haag, Boucher, 1938), 31.

36 Christoph Hartknoch, *Preussische Kirchen-Historia* (Frankfurt am Mayn: Beckenstein, 1686), 717.

37 H. G. Mannhardt, *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* (John & Rosenberg, 1919).

38 "Bezoekreis van Hendrik Berents Hulshoff aan de Doopsgezinde Gemeenten der Oude Vlamingen in Pruisen en Polen in 1719;" edited by H. Ch. Hulshoff, *Bijdragen en Mededeelingen van het Historisch Genootschap*, LIX (1938), 32-82. The original is in the Mennonite Archives, Library of the University of Amsterdam.

39 Bezoekreis, 52.

40 *Ibid.*, 64.

41 *Ibid.*, 65.

42 Hendrick Donner, "Chronik," APGd, 358/301, 18. The dispute centered on rebaptism of someone who had been baptized as an infant. Donner declared that "die Taufe der wichtigste Punct unserer Vereinigung wäre auch noch bey allen unseren Gemeinen in Holland...."

43 See, for example, the letter on behalf of persecuted Swiss Mennonites, sent from the city authorities in Rotterdam to the government of Bern, and at the urging of the Mennonite church in Rotterdam (19 February 1660; GAA, PB, 1746); the letter from the Amsterdam congregation "bij het Lam," with a similar request to the Dutch government (23 September 1687), GAA, PB, 1747; another letter from the Dutch States-General to the government in Bern (15 March 1710), GAA, PB, 1759.

44 Letter from Pieter Adriansz. Houttuyn from Hoorn to Teunis Blok of Amsterdam reporting that Mennonite preachers have received the support of local burgermeisters in urging the States-General to request that Prussian authorities cease their persecution of the Mennonites (19 April 1732), GAA, PB, 1787. Similar developments are described in various other letters, such as one from the council of the Rotterdam church, noting that the city council is urging Prussian authorities to change their policy (20 April 1732), GAA, PB, 1788. Churches in Middelburg, Utrecht and others joined these efforts, as did various local government bodies.

45 Dutch Mennonite request to the States-General (September 1750), GAA, PB, 1828.

46 Letter of C. van Gemert, The Hague, to Dutch Ambassador van Calkoen, Dresden (14 August 1751), GAA, PB, 1846.

47 (15 October 1751), GAA, PB, 1849.

48 Karin Friedrich, *The Other Prussia* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 99.

Four Centuries of Prussian Mennonites

Bruno Ewert, *Mennonite Life*, April 1948, 10-18 (reprinted with permission)

Soon after the establishment of the Anabaptist movement in Holland, it reached Danzig, Thorn, the Schwetz Niedrung (lowlands) and the regions of the present city of Preussisch Holland. That several congregations existed in West Prussia as early as 1549 is evidenced by a letter of Menno Simons which he wrote during that year to "The children of God in Prussia." In 1550, according to ancient Polish documents, Mennonite farmers and laborers were asked to come from Groningen to Kulm and the Schwetz-Neuenburg Niederung. Congregations were established in these areas and by 1562 the lowland areas surrounding the present-day city of Tiegenhof were settled by Mennonites. These settlers drained the swamps and in a few years produced from the sedge country and the willow thickets fertile pastures and arable land. Much work had to be done by hand. Immense energy and patience were required to build water mills, dig endless numbers of ditches, construct dams, and improve the already existing German built dams on the Vistula and Nogat Rivers.

The church of Danzig, first mentioned in 1569, is in all likelihood the oldest of the West Prussian Mennonite churches. By 1600, we already hear of the Grosswerder congregation, whose first elder was Hans Siemens, ordained in 1639. Ministers visited the various homes in the villages to hold meetings. In one of the old reports we read: "For their meetings, these wandering ministers chose large rooms, or in the summer made use of machine sheds and cow barns, which were thoroughly cleaned and decorated with green foliage for the occasion." Until 1700 the meetings were conducted entirely without music. This can perhaps best be explained by the fact that religious freedom was not granted to them by the King of Poland until 1694. In 1695, the Mennonites in West Prussia were granted full religious freedom. At about his time the Frisian congregation, Tragheimerweide, was established in the Stuhm Niederung near the older and smaller Flemish settlement.

Along the Vistula River

Many of the people from the Thorn congregation left around 1700 because of the almost inevitable yearly flood damages. As a result, the Mennonite congregations, Deutsch Kazun and Deutsch Wymisle, were established near Warsaw, Poland. At this time also the church of Memelniederung at Tilsit, East Prussia, originated, its members coming from the region of Preussisch Holland and Thorn. Exiled Swiss Mennonite also joined these East Prussian congregations. By 1720 we hear of a Mennonite congregation in Koenigsberg. The town of Elbing and adjoining lowlands, called the Ellerwald, as well as the low-lying swamp areas of the Drausensee, must have been inhabited by Dutch Mennonites prior to 1700. Here the congregations, Elbing Stadt and Elbing-Elberwald, originated as well as Thiensdorf

and Preussisch Rosengarth. In 1720, the church Elbing-Elberwald chose its first elder, Hermann Janzen. The Heubuden congregation also chose its first elder, Jacob Dyck, in 1728.

In 1735, the Grosswerder congregation divided itself into four sections. Thus originated the congregations: Rosenort, Tiegenhagen, Ladekopp, and Fuerstenwerder. In 1768, these four churches received permission from the Bishop of Kulm to build a church, provided it did not distinguish itself from other houses (with a straw roof and protruding chimney). Many petitions and deputations were necessary so that these Mennonites could secure religious freedom, possession of their land, and be secure in their vocations and occupations. Often they were threatened with exile, confiscation of goods, punishment, and brutality.

Economically, too, they had many disappointments. Often, after decades of work and strenuous effort to make these lowlands arable, everything was ruined over night when the ice-pack of the Vistula flood waters would break the dam. These icy waters would flood the spring landscape for miles and miles and cover the most fruitful fields with sand. Tremendous effort was required to rebuild these dams, repair the ruined buildings, and dig new ditches. Often the crops were completely ruined. If there had not been so much co-operation in helping those greatly afflicted, it would have been impossible for many to build anew. They remained faithful, however, to their chosen home, hoping for better times.

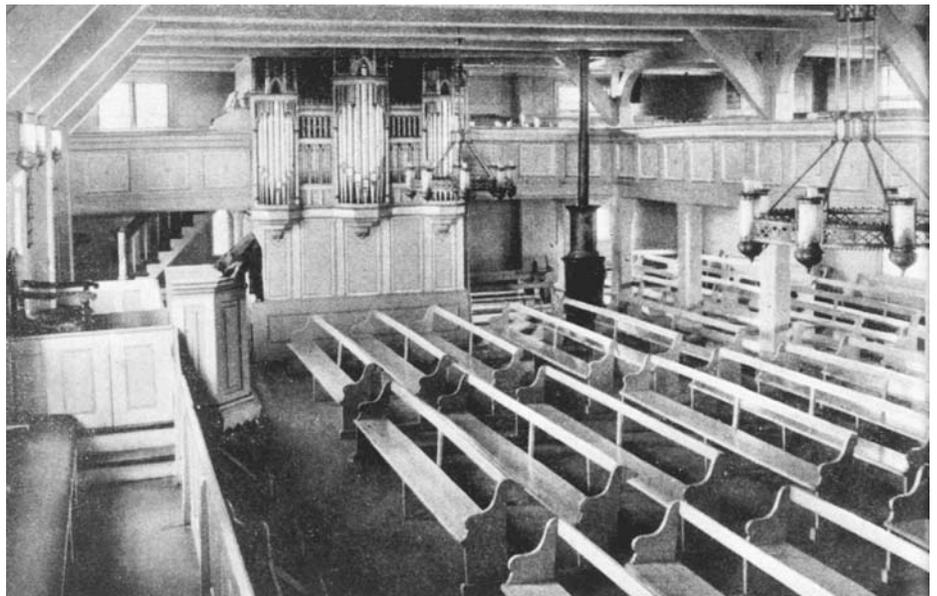
After the Polish division in 1772, the Danzig region with about 13,000 Mennonites was given to Prussia as the province of West Prussia. At the feast of homage in Marienburg, on September 7, 1777, Mennonites sent a petition to King Frederick II, asking for a confirmation of their

special privileges which they had been able to enjoy for two hundred years under the kings of Poland. The petition was granted. The birth rate among the Mennonites was so high that in spite of re-divisions of their farm property, the land was insufficient to maintain a family. This is clearly indicated from statistics taken in 1774 which show that in the congregation of Tiegenhagen, with a membership of 1836, only about 4.5 acres of land was available per person. In 1788, a deputation was sent to Berlin to buy land which, however, was unsuccessful.

In addition, through unfair means and through false information from the evangelical church authorities, the King sent out an edict to the Mennonites in 1789 which made it extremely difficult for the Mennonites of West Prussia to buy new land. Only those Mennonites who at the time of the edict were in possession of land were free of cantonment, i.e., the men of military age were free from conscription. If the Mennonites, however, bought any land from Evangelicals or Catholics, then their sons would be subject to conscription. Since Mennonites wished to remain a non-resistant people, the surplus of the people emigrated to Russia, starting in 1788.

Economic and Cultural Adjustment

Mennonites in West Prussia tried to conduct themselves as the "quiet people" (*Stillen im Lande*), wanting nothing more than to live true to the Bible, follow their Lord, and serve God and their fellowmen. Yet this complete isolation from all the worldly activities could not be carried through. In addition to holding offices in the church, which were executed in greatest faithfulness, Mennonites were soon elected into political offices, yes, even assigned by the government to administrative offices such as



Interior of the Heubuden Mennonite Church near Marienburg. The church was destroyed in World War II.

mayors and magistrates. After the Revolution in 1848, the diets in Prussia were dissolved and a parliament was chosen. It was then that our forefathers were really drawn into political life. They came into closer contact with other denominations, especially through the farm-unions, credit and milk associations, breeding-unions, dike-societies, and flood-control agencies. In this way many Mennonites came to take leading roles in industries such as horse-breeding, cattle and swine-breeding, and ranked high in the great success of increased milk and fat values of pure-bred cattle. The fire, hail and liability-insurance, which had been cooperatively established by and for the Mennonites of Tiegenhof, were soon opened to all who sought insurance. Gradually the denominational differences were erased. Marriages also occurred between Mennonites and Lutherans as a result of their neighbourly associations.

A great loss resulted when the prosperous Mennonites gave their children a higher education. Only a few returned; while most of them obtained positions away from home. They married away from home, had no affiliation with Mennonite churches, and were thus lost to their people. This was all the more tragic since it involved young people of greater intelligence who could have been such a help and service to the Mennonites.

Because of the above-mentioned development and a growing lack of intelligent leadership, there was very little resistance in the church against militarism when the Prussian government in 1868 removed by law the privilege of non-resistance. This was the cause for another migration, this time to America. The brother of my grandfather, Elder William Ewert and family, from the Thorn congregation, who was among these emigrants, later established the Brudertal church at Hillsboro, Kansas. Part of the Heubuden church with its ministers under the leadership of Elder Gerhard Penner, also migrated to the United States. They were not satisfied with the compromise as passed by the Order of the Cabinet of King William I in 1872, which permitted the Mennonites to serve in a non-combatant service such as hospital attendant, ambulance driver, or office secretary. Most of the remaining Mennonites took advantage of this privilege.

After 1900, however, many of the Mennonite boys joined the army, especially the cavalry. The Hussars with their appealing uniforms proved a strong attraction to the boys. In the First World War, many boys still served according to the Order of the Cabinet as non-combatants. When peace was declared and Germany was allowed only 100,000 in her professional army, we thought that the problem of non-resistance would be solved for us Mennonites. Yet

the future was to teach us otherwise.

After the First World War

The lost war resulted in a completely new picture for West Prussia. According to the Treaty of Versailles, almost the entire province became Polish territory and so the Mennonite churches of Obernessau at Thorn, Schoensee at Kulm, and Montau-Gruppe at Graudenz came under the Polish administration. In 1920 Danzig became a Free City attached economically to Poland by a customs union.

Two-thirds of all Prussian Mennonites were



The Tiege River near Tiegenhagen. In the sixteenth century Mennonites dug canals to drain the surrounding farmland.



On the dikes along the Vistula River.

now located within the limits of the Free City of Danzig. They composed the congregations of Danzig, Fuerstenwerder, Ladekopp, Orloff-erfelde, Tiegenhagen, Rosenort, and Heubuden. The other congregations, now belonging to the province of East Prussia, were: Marienburg, Elbing Stadt, Elbing-Ellerwald, Thiensdorf-Preussisch Rosengarth, Tragheimerweide, Koenigsberg, and the church of Memelniederung near Tilsit. The Mennonite congregation located at Kiernicza, near Lemberg in the province of Galicia, had been Austrian but now belonged to Poland. Together, these congregations of Danzig, Prussia, and Poland, formed the Conference of East German Mennonites.

The representatives of these churches met annually on the second Thursday after Pente-

cost for discussion of common problems and questions concerning their spiritual life. This conference of fifteen churches was represented by fifty to sixty brethren. It was always a time of joyful fellowship. The discussion together, with the joint dinner, usually took place in the spacious house of the elder or some other minister of the church. Those were blessed and refreshing times of brotherly fellowship. The minutes reveal that almost all decisions of the conference were unanimously reached. Special meetings were called only for specific purposes, such as the consideration of non-

resistance and the acceptance of the Articles of Faith of the Flemish and Frisian congregation in 1895. A common catechism was to follow this, but the work was interrupted by the war. Matters that concerned the Conference but required more prompt decision were taken care of by a committee of four elders of which the writer was the last chairman. After the First World War, the Conference was always held at Kalthof, on the Nogat, near Marienburg, where all the churches could send their representatives without visa difficulties. Many important sessions have been held, and important decisions reached here since 1920, as, for example, concerning joint youth work, the appointment of a youth secretary, and various other activities. Many a dear guest from afar has spoken to us and served us also in our congregations. A few of the outstanding guests were Benjamin H. Unruh, Christian Neff, Abraham Braun, Michael Horsch, W. Fellman, David Toews, P.C. Hiebert, P.R. Schroeder, Ernst Crous, H.H. Ewert, A. Fast, and many others. These were never-to-be forgotten hours where we felt the inner ties that bind us together, especially in considering subjects such as "Brethren in need" and foreign missions. This work of the kingdom, together with the work of the local church, remained our commission and responsibility until our flight brought all further work to a sudden termination.

Even though the prosperity of the people increased until the close of World War I, and continued in the Danzig area for sometime after the founding of the Free City of Danzig, a strained economic condition developed, because the tariff-union of the Free City and Poland created a hardship for the farmers of the Free City area. Much needed farm machinery could be obtained only from Germany, but the high tariff made it almost prohibitive in price and difficult to procure. Wages rose from year to year, taxes increased, but the incomes became smaller, so that the farmers faced bankruptcy. Because of continued pressure from the creditors, a number of farms were foreclosed. Poverty stricken, the farmers were forced to leave their

homes, making way for the new owners. Some farmers sold out earlier, and could thus make a new beginning in some foreign country with their rescued possessions. For others, no matter how they economized, the load of debt became more and more pressing. Grains, cattle, and milk had to be sold at ridiculously low prices. The situation was somewhat more hopeful after Germany promised to buy a certain amount of sugar beets, wheat, beans, rape-seed, cattle, and butter. But the load of debt remained, and measures of relief from the banks did not provide the desired benefits. The situation was similar in the Province of East Prussia. Separated from the Reich by the "Corridor", subject to high freight and sea tariffs, Prussian land shrank in value so that many farmers became paupers, leaving farms that had belonged to them for generations. Financial measures of relief followed but were inadequate to save all of them. Inflation and deflation, too, had been destructive, the consequences of which are well known.

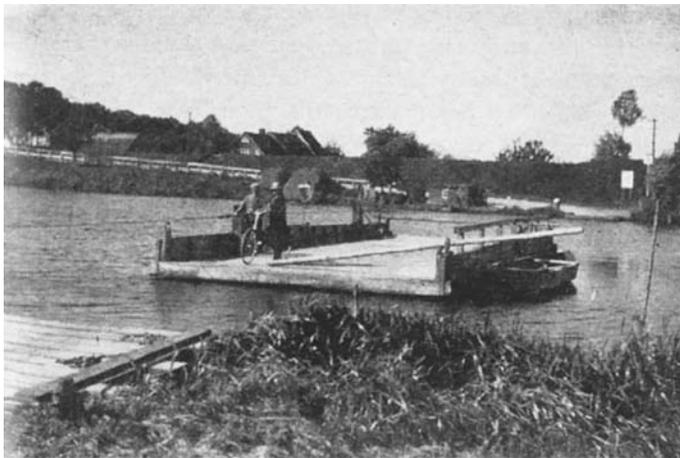
Situation under Hitler

This was the situation when Adolf Hitler came to power and introduced extraordinary measures to save Germany from economic ruin. Many statesmen had tried unsuccessfully to revive employment and to overcome the economic crisis. Government assistance to the unemployed did

not suffice to cover the bare necessities of a livelihood; begging was beyond control; crime increased; and the country was threatened with anarchy, starvation, and misery. Forty different political parties claimed their own to be the only right party to restore order, but the people became more confused than ever. It is, therefore, not surprising that not only ordinary laborers, but also skilled workers, as well as farmers, joined the Hitler movement. A solution was promised through firm and just social measures. These people supported the National-Socialist movement in many elections, and finally, when the National-Socialist party gained leadership in 1933, large numbers of them wanted to be accepted as members. This trend was seen as a check against the radical elements that would have governed public affairs by placing its men in power. That explains why so many Mennonites entered the party, especially those who held responsible positions. Even elders and ministers, who were really sincere, and honestly strove to proclaim the glad tidings of Christ, and were examples of their churches, joined the party.

At first everything went smoothly; the ascent had begun, all who desired employment received work again and with it bread; beggars disappeared from the streets, and social misery was averted. Millions of worried people in all walks of life could breathe freely once more. Business and industry flourished. Agriculture was newly organized, a steady market introduced, and the stock exchange method

removed. Steady prices for grains, cattle, and milk enabled a sure calculation of the budget. The interest on debts was reasonably lowered and large debts were sufficiently liquidated by the state that a pretty good management of one's property was made possible. According to the new farm inheritance law (*Erbhofgesetz*) property up to 125 hectare could not be sold, and all farm debts were liquidated by long-range government loan programs so that a man could become free of debt. The farmers in the Free City of Danzig also received indirect help from Germany. This contributed to the majority which the Free City of Danzig gave



Ferries were used, and still are used, in the Danzig and Elbing region.

Hitler's party in the new election. The prevailing sentiment was: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake." Yes, we were even proud of the fact that Mennonites who were idealistically minded and strove to do the best, were given responsible positions such as chief magistrate, district leader, district officer of the farmers, etc.

We discovered our grave error only when it was too late, when the war, and even earlier, when the struggle against the Jews and the Christian church opened our eyes. Now warnings against this trend were disregarded and open criticism was silenced through the threat of concentration camps. In the years immediately following 1933 we were quite ignorant of the fact that the Fuehrer possessed dictatorial power, and that a new philosophy (*Weltanschauung*) was to be imposed upon the people. Did not Hitler in his book *Mein Kampf* speak of a "positive Christianity"? Upon this we based our faith. I remember when at a ministerial meeting in 1932, Rev. Gerhard Fast said, "This is the only party which we as Mennonites can support."

A skilful propaganda system veiled the true intentions of the party. Gradually all the youth of all ages were instructed by anti-Christian leaders who criticized everything that was traditional and despised everything that was Christian. This had a degrading influence upon the family and religious life in general. However, this program was not as successful as was expected, or as our foreign brethren thought it

was. A Canadian brother asked in 1936, "Are you permitted to preach Christ"? We could in truth answer, "Yes, thank God, we are permitted to do that!"

Most of our youth continued to attend our worship services with their parents, to take catechetical instruction, to attend baptismal services, and to partake of the Lord's Supper. There were, of course, also some who tried to raise their status in the party by avoiding the church. Some, who had good positions in the party, expressed official denunciations of the church. From our congregations at Heubuden, which comprised a membership of 1,500, only eight families, or a total of 32 people, left us. Within the church there was increasing dissension, for in our midst also there were a number of nominal Christians, who believed in a human and heroic Christ who had died for his convictions. They agreed that he had spoken wonderful words and had left good ethical teachings, but He was not for them a Savior from sin and death, and could not give eternal life to those who believed in Him as the Son of God and Savior of the world.

Naturally, the so-called "enlightenment" of the party which presented Christ as merely another founder of religion, like Moses, Buddha, Mohammed, and Confucius, and claimed that Christianity with its "inferiority complex" of sin and built

had to be replaced by a new philosophy, was back of this inner conflict. The Jewish religion especially was severely attacked by the party and since Christianity developed within the Jewish religion, it too, was cast aside. These destructive propaganda sessions led by party leaders, were usually carried on during our worship services. Attendance at these meetings was patriotically urged, in order to keep young and old from attending church. Under these conditions, it was often difficult for the minister to proclaim the Word of God uncompromisingly.

Christians spent much time in prayer to the end that they might remain firm in their loyalty to Christ and His Church, that God's spirit might save the youth from disaster, and that the faith of their fathers might be preserved. That God answered their prayers has been the experience of many. Even though some remained defiant, the majority of the young people came to the Youth Bible Meetings which had been established for some time at Thiensdorf-Pr. Rosengarth, and Elbing in connection with the Sunday school. The Conference appointed Aron Mekelborger to be youth worker. His visits to all the churches proved a great blessing. We also gratefully remember Ernst Fellman, who served jointly the South German Conference and the West Prussian youth.

During the war a monthly bulletin of four pages was sent to our soldiers on the battlefield and to the garrisons by the Heubuden congregation. This paper contained a short

sermon and news of the church. In return we received many letters of appreciation from our 200-250 members in uniform. For many of our young brethren this bulletin provided comfort and encouragement even to the end. Just how great our loss has been we will never be able to determine accurately – our Heubuden congregation claimed casualties of approximately one hundred deaths by the end of 1944, and about as many prisoners and missing. The majority of these have remained in Russia; not a trace can be found of many of them.

The Battle Front Approaches

Weeks before Christmas, 1944, it had been impossible to entertain the right Christmas spirit: there was a fearful dread of what might happen. During the month of October long processions of refugees had come from East Prussia, going towards the west. The battle front came even closer, proclaiming its approach by the thunder of canons. Some people were inclined to hide while the battle front passed on, and then continue with their work. Yet the incoming refugees related stories of the fury of the Russian soldiers even against civilians. We no longer remonstrated, but obeyed the evacuation orders. That we had done right we soon discovered.

Imagine millions of people in the streets at the same time, in the bitter cold, snow and storm. A plan had been devised so that the evacuation should proceed in orderly fashion, but because of the retreating German troops and the traffic of the mobilized columns all plans were overthrown. Whoever has not had the experience of being thrust into the midst of over-crowded streets, and squeezed between army transport vehicles, cannot visualize the indescribable confusion an air-raid can create. Everywhere there were sorrowing women and children. Many froze to death. The congestion at the bridges caused endless delay. Many old people caught a fatal cold in the blizzard. We spent the nights on our covered wagons and it is indeed amazing that so many people survived the hardships of the flight.

The great snowdrifts along the streets and the impassable country roads made progress a torturous procedure for man and beast. Thousands from the cities walked pulling a little wagon or sled, loaded with their few belongings which in their haste they had gathered. There was so much weeping, despair, and discouragement that many even committed suicide on the way.

Thus many of our Mennonites, together with many other refugees, fled across the Oder River, pursued by the Russians, and were taken to various occupational zones. The largest number is now in the British Zone, where they survive in a meagre existence. They are in a land of refugees where they sigh and hope for better days. Looking across the ocean for help, they

are eagerly awaiting the time when they will be able to embark for a new home.

A large number of the refugees, who had taken the road to Pomerania were overtaken by the Russian Front. They have suffered the most horrible experiences. They were plundered, the women of all ages were dishonored, many were taken captive, others suffered affliction and death. Families were brutally separated, nearly all men below the age of 65, as well as the able-bodied girls and women, were forcefully taken away and assembled in camps where already many other before them had died of deprivation after days of questioning. The largest number



Windmills were widely used, and were reminiscent of the Mennonites' homeland in the Netherlands.

were placed in cattle cars and taken to Siberia, a journey of several weeks, there to do forced labor. Broken in health, only a few of these people have come back, one of these being the Reverend Otto Bartel from Grunau near Elbing. We may never know the circumstances surrounding the death of these people and how hard their lot has been.

The fate of those who were sent home, mostly women and children who came back afoot, hungry and cold, was similar to that of the others. They were able to remain here for only a short time. When the Poles took possession they had to move into worse shelters and huts. They received no food ration cards; only those who were ordered to work received food. All the estates were completely plundered; not a living animal was left in the village except cats and dogs; no grain was available, and only once in a while were potato scraps or unthreshed grain found. It was but a meagre existence. Added to this were the constant annoyances suffered by the women at the hands of the Russians and Poles. Very few men were left. The men and women were frequently beaten by terror commandos as they drove through the villages in their cars. Many have starved and perished of sadistic treatment. Since medical aid was not available, many people died of typhus, and of starvation. There were, of course, a few sympathetic Poles who helped some of these Germans; but on the whole, the misery of the Germans was indescribably great.

By and by the Germans were sent to Western Germany. Hatred following them as far as the boundary. They were robbed even of the little they did possess, so that many crossed the border without shoes or overcoats. There are still some German people over there, Mennonites as well, who are able to work. Those who have escaped tell us of the most horrible things they have experienced. They tell us that the *Werder*, once so well taken care of, is unrecognisable. The fertile soil lies barren, many estates are burned, the beautiful gardens lie waste, the fruit trees are hewn down for fuel – it is no more our home.

In the hope that the battle front would not reach Danzig, a large group from the *Werder* gathered in the Danzig region. Later these were gradually taken by boat to German harbors and to Denmark. Carrying only what we could hold in our hands, we were taken aboard ships. Many perished with thousands of others never reaching their goal because of torpedoes and air-raids. We Mennonites, too, sorrow for beloved relatives and friends who were on these ships, but who have never been heard of again. We shall never know when they died or where they rest at the bottom of the Baltic Sea.

We are thankful that we are able to continue our worship services in camp. They are well attended and have been a source of great strength and comfort in the monotony of life

in the barracks, a life that often seems so aimless to us. And when I think of our first camp – without order, without any necessities, only heaps of straw on a concrete floor, no tables, no chairs, irregular attention, much sickness, many deaths – we have much to be thankful, for now everything has been greatly improved. When arrangements were made by the *kirchendienst*, Copenhagen, to hold worship services for all denominations, Elder Enns, Brother Epp, and I received permission to leave our own camps to conduct services in other camps. During that time there were over one hundred camps in Copenhagen alone, all of which we visited. In each camp we inquired after Mennonites, making a list of all of them. Thus we were able to give C.F. Klassen, representative of the Mennonite Central Committee, when he surprised us with a visit in August of 1945, a list of nearly 2,000 Mennonites among 200,000 German refugees. And then, when Reverend Walter Gering, Elma Esau, Dr. and Mrs. P.S. Goertz and others came to us as Mennonite Central Committee workers, and served us in word, deeds, and much love, we became more conscious of the inner ties that unite us in Christ. It was so overwhelming that many a hard burden became lighter and many a denial became easier to bear.

Thus I close with heartfelt thanksgiving for all kind thoughts and sacrificial love, which we have received from you brethren and sisters in North America. To you go the words of the Apostle, as found in I Thess. 1: 2, 3.

George Hansen 1636-1703

Harvey G. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba

Delbert Plett, editor, *Leaders of the Kleine Gemeinde in Russia, 1812-1874* (Steinbach, 1993), 18-24. (Reprinted with permission)

Just prior to the middle of the 16th century, Mennonites from the Netherlands and northern Germany moved to Poland.¹ The move to Poland was occasioned by two reasons. First, they found escape from religious persecution by migrating to Poland. Poland was the only country that had religious toleration during the 16th century. As a result many Mennonites, especially from the Netherlands where persecution was intense during the 1550s and '60s, found their way to the country of freedom.

A second reason for migrating to Poland

subject of this article, was a key leader in the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Gemeinde during the latter half of the 17th century.³ His teachings, which have been well preserved in his writings, have influenced the thinking of the traditionalist (*Kirchliche*) and conservative Mennonite denominations.

Background and Career

George Hansen was born in 1636.⁴ One may assume his birth-place was Danzig, though the first recorded evidence of a Hansen

able to date about his marital status, family if any, or parental lineage. Grudgingly we leave those questions unanswered hoping that as the various libraries are being searched for documents concerning the Mennonites some more information will be found.

Many people are not aware that the Mennonites lived under Polish rule longer than under Prussian rule. When the last vestige of Poland disappeared with the final partition in 1792, the migrations to Russia were in full swing. Mennonites had lived in Poland for 250 years before the German Prussians annexed the Vistula Delta region. In comparison the Mennonites lived under Prussian rule for some 150 years, 1792-1945.

The distortion that the Prussian rule was the Golden Era for the Mennonites in Poland needs modification.⁶ During the long Polish rule Mennonites were tolerated and usually protected. When the Danzig merchants wanted to get rid of them the town council or rural representatives came to their defence. When the land estates wanted the Mennonites banished the Church landholders came to their rescue. The Mennonites were required to pay for their stay and freedom with extra levies but they were never persecuted, that is arrested, jailed, executed, or banished by a Polish Monarch. The Mennonites could have their own schools, their own church services, and live according to their understanding of Scripture. True they were always in an ambivalent situation because they were not granted citizenship because of their refusal to swear the oath of allegiance. In addition, they were frequently levied special fees due to the fact that they were foreigners. There seems to have been a love-hate relationship going.

In 1665, the Danzig Flemish Mennonite Church was in need of a deacon and so proceeded to elect one from their own brethren as was customary. Georg Hansen, being 28 years of age, was elected deacon on March 16, 1665.⁷ It was only three months later when there was need to elect a minister. Again the church followed their custom of electing ministers from the candidates which were always deacons. On June 29, 1665, Hansen was elected minister. Since a minister was always elected from the deacons it was necessary to have enough deacons. Also the one elected minister would have to be replaced. And so often a deacon election preceded the minister election. At times these elections, depending on the circumstances, were separated by a lengthy time span while at other times the two elections were conducted at the same meeting.

In March, 1690 the Flemish *Ältester* Dunkel died. Consequently a new *Ältester* had to be elected. Whereas ministers were elected from the deacons, *Ältesters* were elected from



The church at Heubuden, just north of Marienburg. Built in 1768. (G. Lohrenz, *Heritage Remembered*, p. 32)

was economic opportunity. Mennonites settled in the urban center of Danzig (present-day Gdansk) where they engaged in the textile industry, brewery business, as well as running small stores. Many also settled in the rural agricultural lowlands of the Vistula Delta. Landholders were happy to employ Mennonites for land reclamation for much of the lowlands, which is six to ten feet below sea level, lay under water due to allowing the drainage system to fall into disrepair. The expertise of the Dutch farmers in building drainage canals, windmills and working the land made them desired tenants.

The Polish Mennonites maintained close connections with the Dutch Mennonites.² As a result when a split occurred in the Netherlands it was exported to Poland. One such major split was Frisian-Flemish division. The Frisian group by and large may be described as more liberal while the Flemish group, the larger of the two groups, was more conservative. All three Mennonite denominations emigrating from Russia to Manitoba in the 1870s had their roots in the Flemish group. Georg Hansen, the

in the Flemish Danzig church is 1657. It is also most probable that Hansen's family, probably not of Dutch or German origin, joined the Mennonite church either in the Netherlands or northern Germany. It is possible they were of Scandinavian origin.

The few definite facts we know about Hansen are his date of death, 1703, his election as minister and deacon, 1665, and *Ältester* in 1690. We know that he wrote his *Ein Glaubens-Bericht fuer die Jugend* in 1671. This was followed by a short confession of faith in 1678. The shorter Confession was submitted to Bishop Sarnowski who was investigating the orthodoxy of the Mennonites. In 1678 he wrote an expanded version of his answers to the interrogation he had been subjected to in 1678. *Erforscher der Wahrheit* was written in 1680. His final work entitled *Spiegel des Levrens* was written in 1699. In addition, one of his letters has been preserved. There were other materials written by him which have not been located to date.⁵ It is also most probable that he carried on a more prolific correspondence than only one letter. No information is avail-

the ministers. Hansen was elected *Ältester* in August of the same year though his ordination took place in November. The church was without an *Ältester* for some four and a half months and an unordained *Ältester* for some three more months. At the time of election Hansen was 54 years of age. Since the *Ältester* whom Hansen was replacing was already dead, a guest *Ältester* Niefeld officiated at the ordination service. Hansen served as *Ältester* for nearly 13 years. He died in office in January, 1703. During Hansen's tenure as *Ältester* they elected a co-*Ältester* in 1694. The reasons for this are not clear but it may be due to the heavy work load. The ministerial brethren all served without remuneration and so at times it appears it was decided to have co-*Ältesters*.

Leadership

Hansen was a shoemaker and in this capacity was well suited for the task. It is known that many leaders for social reform, whether as a revolutionary or peaceful person, in the 16th and 17th centuries were articulate craftsmen, including cobblers.⁸ Thus Hansen stands in a tradition of leadership.

Georg Hansen was a very active and successful leader. Not only did he preach but he also wrote a number of lengthy books. This very literate man forces us to ask, "Where did he obtain the learning? How did he become so literate?" The answer lies in two directions. First, it is quite obvious that he had considerable personal abilities that he used well. He had a keen mind which he used under God to articulate and successfully defend the faith of himself and the church.

Secondly, he received some schooling. He must have attended the Mennonite school where he grew up. The evidence is beyond dispute that one of the first things Mennonites did when they moved to a new area was build a church which usually doubled as a school.⁹ Mennonite interest in schooling was a logical development of their insistence on believer's baptism. A baptismal candidate would have to know the catechism and the Bible since candidates were taught and examined prior to baptism. This naturally required ability to read which in turn resulted in a strong emphasis on schooling. That reading was a common ability of both men and women as well as young and old is evidenced by the fact that Hansen wrote a German statement of faith to meet the need of the young people who by then could read the German better than the Dutch.¹⁰ That women in

the Mennonite churches could read is clearly indicated by Menno Simon's letters to a widow in Poland in 1549, the wife of Leonard Bowens 1553, and a letter of comfort to the wife of Ein Edes in 1557.¹¹ Interest and support of education among the Polish Mennonites is further illustrated by the Mennonite boys attending the non-Mennonite Elbing Gymnasium as early as 1600 and as young as 6 years old.¹² Some of these boys were from Danzig. At times boys were sent to the Netherlands to obtain a better education.

Hansen was well read. In addition to the Bible, one can identify at least 34 books that Georg refers to in his *Antwort zum Erforscher*.¹³ Among these books are five hymnals, the writings of Menno Simons and Dirk Philips, the *Martyrs' Mirror*, the writings of Peter Twisck and *Die Wandelende Seele*. In addition, Hansen refers to books which Mennonites had written disputing issues among themselves and warned against reading them. He advised his readers not read such books as Obbe Philips' tract and *Das bekuemerte Herz*. Georg's familiarity with these many books gives us a clue as to the source of his thinking as well as to the depth and breadth of his knowledge.



One of many windmills built by Mennonites that carried water from lower places into canals and rivers. (G. Lohrenz, *Heritage Remembered*, p. 8)

A further clue to the influence and ability of Hansen is seen in the nine books and letters he wrote himself. As noted above we know only of one of his letters, in all likelihood he wrote many more. As one reads Hansen's writings one cannot but be impressed at his biblical knowledge. He quotes the Bible profusely in such writings as *Glaubensbericht*, *Spiegel des Lebens*, and *Antwort zum Erforscher*. Not only is the Bible quoted but he uses it to establish his position on various issues. This is well illustrated by his argument for baptism by pouring. Among other points he argues that water was handled at Cornelius' baptism and therefore it could not have been immersion. This is also an indication of his hermeneutics and biblicism. Hansen sought to follow the Bible.

By 1671 the Mennonites had been in Poland for over a century. Despite their isolation from the rest of society, both by design as well as by the society, acculturation was taking place. One of the signs of this acculturation was the fact that by 1670 most of the young people could read German better than Dutch. Mennonites had come with a Dutch language. The areas they moved into, though under Polish rule, was largely German speaking. This language shift, so well known to the various migrating Mennonite groups, created its unique problems. One of these problems is that of teaching the faith. In which language will you do it? The mother tongue or the newly acquired language. As has happened in Canada with the acceptance of English, so the acceptance of High German and Low German among the Mennonites in Poland was well under way by the second half of the 17th century.

As a result of the language shift the request for a German statement of faith was gaining momentum. Hansen, though not the bishop, took it upon himself to write a confession of faith to meet that need. The result was his 1671, *Ein Glaubens Bericht fuer die Jugend*. The Confession contains 22 articles covering all the key doctrines held by Christendom generally but he also focuses on the Mennonite emphases such as: the Church, ministers in the Church, baptism, communion, foot washing, the bann, separation from the world as well as State, no swearing of oaths, the free will of man, and Christ's coming. Quoting many Scriptures he elaborates the 22 articles in some 318 pages. His theology is essentially the same as what we find in Menno Simons and Dirk Philips.

The *Glaubens Bericht* served

as book for instructing people in the faith for over a century. This speaks of the thoroughness of the writing. Any brief perusal of the Confession will support the extensive coverage found in it. It is of interest to note that Hansen's writings were taken along to Russia and later to Canada and the United States. Klaas J. B. Reimer, a member of the Kleine Gemeinde and descendent of founder Klaas Reimer, donated a copy of Hansen's *Fundamentbuch* to the Steinbach Bible College. Hansen's statement of faith was printed in Cuauhtemoc, Mexico as late as 1963 when Ältester Johann Friesen from Reinland, Manitoba, requested that a copy be published. This strongly suggests that the theology of several of the Mennonite groups now living in North America have been significantly influenced by Hansen's material.

1678 Interrogation

In 1678, the Catholic Bishop of Danzig with the blessing of the king invited representatives from the Flemish and Frisian churches to appear before him and a panel of theologians to explain their faith.¹⁴ Each group was given a set of questions. The Flemish received 48 questions while the Frisians received 40. The reason for this interrogation seems to have been the fact the Mennonites had had some contact with the anti-trinitarian pacifist Socinians. The Socinians had made very direct advances to the Polish Mennonites, especially the Frisians, hoping to amalgamate with them.¹⁵ Due to theological differences and disparate social class the proposed union never materialized. Then in 1658 the Socinians were expelled from Poland. This connection was not forgotten and so those opposing the Mennonite economic competition charged the Mennonites with the Socinian heresy.

In preparation for the interrogation Hansen wrote a short confession of faith so that the Catholic leaders could examine the Flemish faith. In addition he wrote brief answers to the 48 questions. Later these answers were enlarged and published with the briefer statement and answers under the title *Fundamentbuch*. Hansen was not the Ältester but appears to have been the more articulate. He was given the task not only of writing the answers but also leading the defence at the hearing. Ältester Dunkel signed the statement of faith indicating that it had official Flemish sanction. Hansen as writer and spokesman signed it as well.

On January 20, 1768, almost to the date, 243 years after the founding of the Anabaptist movement in Zurich, Hansen stood before King and Bishop defending the faith that had cost many their life. Hansen handled the situation well. He was courteous, diplomatic, and forthright. In answer to the question, "Do you recognize the Pope?" He answered we leave the Pope his value. When the interrogation was finally finished, the Flemish were declared as not being heretical. However, they were again required to pay a sum of money to remain in Poland. This payment was not considered a bribe to be declared free of heresy but rather

a tax on foreigners. Hansen at the end of his report about the interrogation says:

As a result of the examination we were fully exonerated from all suspicion. However it cost a large sum of money again. It was hard to raise the amount but God helped us do it.¹⁶

The Ban, Erich Seeman

One of the teachings of the Flemish church as well as other Mennonite bodies was the teaching about the ban or excommunication. There is one incident during Hansen's Ältestership that created some tension. It was the excommunication of Erich Seeman.¹⁷ Seeman was a painter in the employ of the city of Danzig, 1683-1698. He had been able to obtain permission to paint without joining the Painters Guild. The permission was for painting portraits. Hansen was opposed to painting portraits largely on the basis of the second commandment which forbids making any images. Consequently he encouraged Seeman rather to paint landscapes.

Seeman responded favourably and began painting landscapes only to find that the Guild opposed this and gave him opposition. He also noted that the various Mennonite shops had a variety of painted signs advertising their wares. When Hansen approached Seeman concerning his return to painting portraits, Seeman responded that as soon as the various shop signs would be removed he would stop painting portraits. The signs did not come down and neither did Seeman stop portrait painting. Hansen, with the backing of the *Gemeinde*, put Seeman under the ban. Seeman protested but to no avail. As a result, Seeman moved to Warsaw pursuing his skill there until 1704 when he moved to London, England, where he ultimately died. Of the seven children born to the Seemans, only the names of two appear in the Danzig church records. As happens again and again, by the mid-18th century portrait painting was no longer an issue. A pastel drawing of Danzig Flemish Ältester Hans von Steen has been found, dating from mid-18th century. This is, of course, the nature of things as one lives in a dynamic culture.

High View of Scripture

Mennonites hold to a high view of Scripture. It is their goal to follow the teachings and precepts of Holy Writ as closely as possible. Hansen was no different in this. However, as one reads his *Glaubens Bericht* one is quickly made aware that Hansen was very familiar with the Old Testament Apocrypha. He quotes them as supporting data for points of faith just as he cites Biblical texts. However, when he refers to the canon he says only those books are canonical that are ordinarily accepted but fails to list those books. The position on the Apocrypha is not clear. Hansen certainly followed the principle that the Apocrypha is helpful literature. The evidence could easily be interpreted that he accepted them as authoritative as the other Scriptures. Certainly his use and free citing of them without any indication

that they are of less authority leaves it open to conjecture.

Conclusion

Georg Hansen, Flemish church leader, left his mark on the Danzig Flemish Church during the last half of the 17th century. His leadership was effective both within the church as well as to those outside. His theology stands in close continuity of Menno Simons, Dirk Philips and other early Anabaptists. His writings perpetuated those doctrines and left a Godly heritage for the years to come. His writings have been used until the latter half of the 20th century. This is a good witness to the effectiveness and enduring quality of his writings. Many of the traditionalist (*Kirchliche*) and Conservative Mennonite teachings find expression in what Hansen taught. There is evidence that our forefathers did use his writings. We have our faith today, thanks to the efforts of men such as Georg Hansen.

Endnotes

¹ Horst Penner, *Ansiedlung Mennonitischer Niederländer in Weichsellmündungsgebiet von der Mitte des 16. Jahrhunderts bis zum Beginn der preussischen Zeit* (Mennonitischer Geschichts Verein, 1940), 5-17; Herbert Wiebe, *Das Siedlungswerk niederländischer Mennoniten im Weichseltal zwischen Fordon und Wissenberg bis zum Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts*, *Wissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Geschichte und Landeskunde Ost-Mitteleuropas*, no. 3 (Marburg a.d. Lahn: Gottfried Herder-Institut, 1952), 3-4.

² This close connection is evidenced by the correspondence between the Polish and Dutch Mennonites. See *Inventaris der Archiefstukken Berustende by de Vereendige Doopsgezinde Gemeente Te Amsterdam*, Items A-1552 to A-1570, Items B-2925 to B-2941, Items C-693, C-694, C-698 to C-701.

³ Harvey G. Plett, "Georg Hansen and The Flemish Danzig Mennonite Church: A Study in Continuity" (University of Manitoba, unpublished doctoral thesis, 1991), 394 pages.

⁴ Most of the personal information about Hansen is based on my thesis.

⁵ Herman G. Mannhardt *Die Danziger Mennonitengemeinde* (Danzig: Selbst Verlag, 1919), 78.

⁶ John Friesen, "Mennonites in Poland: An Expanded Historical View," *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, 4 (1986), 95-108.

⁷ For the elections of Hansen see the Danzig Church records. Microfilm copies are available at the Mennonite Heritage Center, 800 Shaftesbury Boulevard, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

⁸ Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels* (Manchester: University Press, 1959), 108-125.

⁹ Wiebe, *Siedlungswerk*, 10-13.

¹⁰ Hansen, *Glaubensbericht*, 1-2, 160.

¹¹ Simons, *Complete Writings*, 1028-1029, 1038-1040 and 1052-1054.

¹² Kurt Kauenhoven, "Mennonitensöhne auf dem Gymnasium in Elbing, 1600-1784," *Mennonitische Geschichtsblätter*, 18 (1961): 17-19.

¹³ Hansen, Antwort zum Erforscher, 125-128.

¹⁴ Georg Hansen, Interrogat Trif Mennonisten soman Clarchen nennet Beantwortet von Georgen Hansen Ihren Vermahner 20 Jan. in 1678, MS 694, Biblioteka Gdanska, 373-374.

¹⁵ *Inventaris*, B-2928, B-2932.

¹⁶ Mannhardt, *Danzig Mennonitengemeinde*, 78.

¹⁷ For a discussion on the Seeman case, see Harvey G. Plett, Doctoral thesis, 213-218.

Maritime Trade and Shipbuilding in Danzig

“Danziger Schifffahrt und Schiffbau in den Jahren 1450 - 1490,” *Danziger Hauskalender* 1994.

Used with permission. Translated by Reuben Epp, Kelowna, B.C.

Trade, 1400

The voyages of so great and worthy a ship as the “Peter of Danzig” can only be appreciated when sea voyages during those times are considered in the light of conditions as they existed in the 15th century. This ship was frequently loaded with valuable cargo at a time when peace and security on the seas did not exist and the threat of piracy was ever-present.

Countries of the east and west in Europe, on the shores of northern seas, depended upon sea trade to acquire necessities of life for their people and to participate in all manner of exchanges with other countries. In the early history of merchant shipping, a mixture of unregulated trade came into being, from which several dominant activities and trade routes eventually evolved.

The fact that large volumes of cargo could be carried over long distances by ships at sea determined sea transport to be superior to overland transport. This stimulated sea trade among nations bordering northern waters. Danzig capitalized on the advantages of sea transport and mightily boosted its seafaring trade activities. Salt from the west coast of France needed to be delivered to the salt-starved east, as did wines and oil; whereas grain, surpluses of wood, flax, ashes and tar in the east awaited transportation to the west.

Among the various wares in the cargoes of sea trade, most of those from the east were offloaded and reloaded in Dutch ports, whereas western goods generally reached ports in Prussia and Livland (Esthonia) without need of transfer.

The salt trade from the “Baie” in France attained highest rank in the west-east sea trade; the 15th century was later referred to in commercial circles as the “Age of the Baie Trade.”

Flanders and Danzig

Because of Danzig’s advantageous location in relation to trade in wood and grain from the east, that city was able to draw east-west trade unto itself to the extent that its trading fleet soon held top rank in long-distance sea trade. The tolerable sailing conditions on waters of the northern sea route determined that ships did not need to carry heavy loads of ballast, thus increasing their capacity to carry more profitable cargo.

On most such sea voyages in either direction, harbours of Holland and Flanders became ports of call for the transfer of cargo destined for other countries, to take on supplies and fresh water or to join the safe company of large fleets travelling in the same direction. The dangers of piracy in those days were so real that no unarmed ship dared venture out alone on a lengthy sea voyage.

So it came about that, regardless of final destinations of trading ships, the port of Brügge (Belgium) and others of the Rhine river mouth served as assembly ports for merchant fleets which then engaged the services of armed guard ships or

convoy ships for mutual protection at sea.

Numerous reports state that in winter months, when shipping came to rest, such fleets, particularly those of the salt trade, assembled in Swin and in Wielingen, on the Flemish coast. Annual sailings usually included the following itineraries: from the beginning of spring, probably in March, ships would leave Flemish ports and run for the French salt ports of the Baie or the Brouage. After loading cargo there, the return summer journey would be undertaken, usually with calls at English and Dutch North Sea ports, through the Skagerrak and Kattegat straits and into the Baltic Sea leading to Danzig, Riga and Reval. When eastern grain was harvested in late

108 ships, of which 50 vessels were those of the Hanseatic League, among them 14 from Danzig and 16 from Lübeck.

In addition to ships from Danzig, there were also those from other countries and cities, mostly members of the Hanseatic League. From 1474 until 1476, 400 to 600 ships annually visited Danzig, from 1490 to 1492 about 700 ships annually, and in the summer of 1481 as many as 1100 ships sailed from Danzig. As quoted by Weinreich, they were, “large and small, westward bound, loaded with grain for Holland, Seeland and Flanders.”

The sea trade turned a good profit, for after a few years of service the costs of the ships could



Three granaries (Speicher) that handled part of the extensive trade that flowed through Danzig. (Lech Krzytanowski, *Das Schoene Alte Danzig*, photo 4)

summer, the shipping of it began and lasted through the fall. Since most ships unloaded their cargoes of grain in Flemish and Dutch ports, the unloaded ships were then freed for winter shutdown without interrupting planned sea travel, after which they could again plan for the next year’s voyages. This schedule determined that a trading ship on lengthy journeys would make only one round trip per year. Similar journeys, although undertaken less often, were to Spanish and Portuguese salt and wine ports, as reported by Paul Beneke and Hans Nieve.

The volume of trade in which traders of Danzig extensively participated was of great importance to that city. The registers of ships passing through the straits to and from the Baltic Sea at that time, show that in some years more than one hundred ships passed through, of which more than half were from Prussian or Livland (Esthonian) home ports. In the city of Reval, the count was between 20 and 50 ships, in Danzig, often even more; in the year 1474 alone 73 ships were counted from the Baie and Brouage. In 1449 the Baie fleet captured by the English numbered

be written off. There may have been exceptions to such profitability among shippers due to necessary occasional loadings of unprofitable ballast, damage at sea, sinkings and losses of ships through capture, all of which could cause significant losses.

Risk Protection

The overall insecurity of sea trade of the Hanseatic League and of the merchants of Danzig, caused shipping companies to band themselves together for protection. Since no shipping insurance companies existed as we know them today, merchants and ship owners covered themselves against losses by forming partnerships. This was done by dividing ownership of a ship among several partners, including directors and captain. Thus came into existence “multiple-owner-ship-ping-firms” in which two to four partners participated, usually including the initial owner. This seems to have been the organizational pattern adopted by most shipping companies engaged in sea trade in Danzig in those days. In the case of smaller ships, the ship owner was almost always

sole owner. The sale of the “Peter of Danzig” to three merchants of Danzig was an example of a “multiple-owner” business arrangement. In cases where none of the partners were shippers, an alternate would be chosen.

In addition to spreading risk upon more shoulders, it was also necessary to take steps to meet unfriendly attacks. The merchants themselves, possibly with support of the home city, would provide armed convoy ships or privateers to larger fleets of merchant vessels to protect them and their mercantile interests from possible piracy or capture. The “Peter of Danzig” served as a convoy ship or privateer when needed. Its captain, Paul Beneke, a well-experienced seaman, as reported by Caspar Weinreich, undertook the role of privateer as early as 1469 on assignment to Danzig merchants.

Privateers.

A sketchy picture of the extent of this warlike trade and the personalities of those in whose hands the sea trade of Danzig lay, are revealed in documents of that time, copies of which are stored among the “Missives” of the archives of the Hanseatic city of Danzig. Thirty-eight captains of Danzig privateers and their ships in the years 1457/58 alone are named. Some details regarding their ships are also listed.

Texts of letters-of-order given to privateers were usually similar. They received permission to stop all unfriendly ships and to escort them with personnel and cargo to Danzig. But ships

of the Hanseatic League or other friendly ships wishing to visit Danzig with their wares, were not to be harmed or hindered so long as they were not from and had not visited unfriendly ports. The privateers were on orders to help friendly ships, permit them to acquire supplies and to escort them as needed. Their orders ended with the following words: “In sulker Wyse hebben wy nu de schippers breve uthgegeven, dewelke up unse finde uth willen trecken in de sze.” (In this way we have now given out letters to those shippers who wish to move out against our enemies at sea.)

Aside from such letters-of-instruction to privateers, guard ships of the port of Danzig received further additional detailed orders, as follows:

After clearly identifying friends and enemies, your orders are to bring to Danzig all goods seized from enemy ships and to place them on public sale for four days. Goods belonging to friends that may be found among enemy goods are to be returned to their owners.

All friends who wish to visit the port of Danzig are not to be hindered in their approach or departure from Danzig.

All prisoners are to be held and handed over to the local “Rat” (city council).

All captains and quartermasters are to declare an oath before city council, the commoners before their captains and city council.

Captains and quartermasters shall have authority to pass judgement “over hand and neck.”

English Competition

From these facts and occurrences it becomes obvious to what extent merchants of Danzig exerted their power over mercantile trade and shipping by sea. Their prime intent was to bring down England, Danzig’s main opposition in sea trade, even by resorting to force of arms if necessary. A most important representation made by Bernt Pawest to the main office of the Hanseatic League in Brügge in the name of Danzig city council signified that Danzig on its own was prepared to accept any consequences of sea battles against England.

In all history this is a singular example of the courage of German citizenry when a city such as Danzig was willing to deny British merchants those very rights that the Hanseatic League had enjoyed in the Steelyard in London, at a time when English merchants were frequently forced to depend upon mediation by merchants of Danzig to protect English interests there. The long war between the Hanseatic League and England was in fact a Danzig war.

Shipbuilding

In comparison to the attitude of merchants of Danzig toward matters of trade at home and abroad, Danzig shipbuilders assumed a more modest position. Yet, it could not be denied that they were determined to remain independent of foreign shipbuilding. For that reason, merchants of Danzig supported development of shipbuilding there, not only for their own good use but also



A view of the Long Bridge in Danzig (Gdansk) along the Motława River leading up to the famous Crane Gate (Krantor). (Lech Krzytanowski, *Das Schoene Alte Danzig*, photo 3)

to engage in the profitable trade of shipbuilding under foreign contracts.

Danzig's location was clearly advantageous for shipbuilding because of its proximity to large quantities of necessary supplies such as shipbuilding wood, tar, pitch, hemp and flax, in quantities sufficient to permit Danzig merchants to export such goods, as evidenced by the cargo of the "Peter of Danzig," which included masts and shipbuilding lumber. Building ships under foreign contract was a profitable undertaking for Danzig and was pursued vigorously even though the Hanseatic League forbade shipbuilding for customers outside of the Hansa.

Until the introduction of the new caravel shipbuilding design in 1462, as exemplified in the "Peter of Danzig," the main construction style of larger ships built in Danzig was that of the single-masted hulk, with capacities of up to 100 tons in customary clinker-built style; with occasional hulks of up to 200 tons in capacity. In addition, several types of smaller vessels were also built. Shipbuilders of Danzig early recognized the advantages of construction design employed in the large caravel. The master shipbuilder Hans Pale and his people would have most carefully studied the innovative construction techniques embodied in these new caravels. At that time, master shipbuilder Peter Engelke was assigned to the "Peter of Danzig" during its journey to the west, as mentioned by Bernt Pawest, to carry out extensive repairs in Sluis (sic) and to purchase necessary shipbuilding materials (wood).

So it came about that in the 1470s large caravels were built in Danzig, for ship owners in Danzig as well as under contract with foreigners. The large ship mentioned in history for the year 1473, with a keel length of 51 ell (107 feet), built for a Lombarden, was probably a three-masted hulk. For the year 1475 two caravels are mentioned. The ship mentioned for 1488 was a caravel with dimensions almost identical to those of the "Peter of Danzig," apparently a copy of the original.

Lastadei.

In good times there might be a dozen or more ships standing under construction at one time in the Danzig shipbuilding yards in the space stretching along the banks of the Mottlau from the double suburban canal in the city's suburbs, currently part of the "Winterplatz," and beyond the "Aschbrücke," which then did not exist. This distance of some 400 metres, with a width of approximately 70 metres, was covered by shipbuilding yards along the waterfront, adjoining the plank yard and the "Markenfeld," and ending with the "Kahnfeld" at the "Aschbrücke." That half of the yards lying farthest from the waterfront was stacked with lumber, stored there for years until needed for shipbuilding.

The name "Lastadei" probably comes from the words "Ballast" and "Last" (load), but at that time simply designated a shipbuilding yard. In the vicinity of those yards lay other workplaces related to shipping and shipbuilding. The Ankerschmiedegass and the Röpergasse of today testify to former activities there in the skilled trades of

forging anchors and making ropes.

Near the shipbuilding yards were repair and overhaul workplaces on the "Bragebank," stretching from the waterfront street "Brabank" into the "Schuittensteg." The name "Brabank" stems from the word "Bragen" which indicates caulking or sealing of ships, for which ships would be laid on their sides on mostly wooden platforms. Such workplaces covered areas of some 200 metres in length and 50 metres in depth. To prop up ships during this process, ferryboats were fastened to their sides. Smaller vessels would be drawn onto land via skid roads.

For the installation of masts, ships were moved from the shipbuilding yards to the "Great Crane" at the portal known as the *Kran-tor* (Crane gate). This crane served its purpose

well with its ability to reach to a height of 34 metres, the hook being 29 metres above waterline. This famous crane served not only seagoing ships but also Vistula river boats which, after unloading cargoes of grain in Danzig, prepared for the return journey back up the Vistula river by resetting mast and sails, which they had taken down for the downstream run so that the sails could be used as protective coverings for cargoes of grain.

Aside from shipbuilding yards within the city of Danzig, history of that time mentions two other shipyards in the Vistula region. In 1486 such a yard existed on the Vistula river above Marienburg near the old castle of Zantir, and in 1488 another between Kielau and the village of Gdingen in Danzig Bay.



The influence of Dutch architecture is clearly evident in many of the buildings in Danzig. In the background is the famous Marienkirche. (Lech Krzytanowski, Das Schoene Alte Danzig, photo 78)

Mennonite Artists in Danzig and Koenigsberg

Kurt Kauenhoven, *Mennonite Life*, July 1949, 17-23, 45-46. (Reprinted with permission)

Now that four hundred years of Mennonite history in northeastern Germany have come to a tragic end, it seems appropriate to remind ourselves that the cultural achievements of the Mennonites of those parts included other fields of interest than reclaiming the marshes of the Vistula and building up model farms. Their urban communities at Danzig and later at Koenigsberg contributed considerably to the economic development of those cities by introducing new branches of trade and craftsmanship. In comparatively recent times they also occupied themselves with the fine arts.

One of the first Mennonite pamphlets ever published at Danzig bears witness of the controversy of the Danzig Mennonite painter, Enoch Seemann the Elder, with George Hansen, elder of the Danzig Flemish Mennonites, on account of his profession. George Hansen, who died at Danzig in 1703, had, in obedience to his interpretation of the second commandment, banned Enoch Seemann because he had painted portraits. Thereupon the artist emphatically defended himself in 1697 in a lampoon directed against the elder, but with little success. He had to give up portrait painting and restrict himself to landscapes and decorations. Unfortunately, his works no longer exist; only four engravings, copied by other artists from Seemann's portraits for Danzig celebrities, have been preserved in the Danzig Municipal Library.

However, he had a son of the same name, Enoch Seemann the Younger, who was born at Danzig about 1694 and died in London in 1744. He became a well-known portraitist in London – he even painted several members of the royal family. The excellent quality of his work may be judged from the portrait of the artist by himself, which was to be seen in the Dresden Gallery.

For many years we hear of no other painters among the Danzig Mennonites. We see them exclusively engaged in trade and commerce. But it may be pointed out in this connection that in the eighteenth century the Mennonites became the object of a famous Calvinist artist of that city-Daniel Chodowiecky (1726-1801)-whose work as an engraver won European reputation. He made a drawing of a well-known Mennonite banker of Danzig, called Dirksen, and he engraved one of the most telling scenes of the domestic life of the Mennonites of his native city in his charming copper plate, "The Mennonite Proposal for Marriage."

I do not think it likely that the aversion against portrait painting was maintained for any considerable time among the Danzig Mennonites, as they were in frequent contact with the Dutch Mennonites who no longer held such views. It certainly did take a long time to overcome the traditional aversion of the Prussian Mennonites against art as a profession. At last this tradition was shaken when the Danzig Mennonites finally gained full citizenship in 1800 and particularly after the Napoleonic wars during which Danzig suffered so much. At that

time it was still considered to be a violation of an established practice when a young man of the rural and urban Mennonite communities of northeastern Germany wanted to take up a calling other than that of a farmer or businessman. If a young Mennonite had some artistic talents, he still had to exercise them as an amateur and not as a professional.

We do not know for certain whether the Danzig Mennonite painter Heinrich Zimmermann (1804-1845) was a professional artist or not. He came from a widespread Danzig Mennonite family, his parents being the Danzig distiller Wilhelm Zimmermann (1781-1822) and Elizabeth Focking (1778-1836), of Stolzenberg near Danzig. Of the artist's life we know but little. He remained a bachelor and died at the early age of 41 years. He had six sisters, five of whom



Self-portrait by Enoch Seemann the younger (1694-1744), Danzig. He painted members of the royal family in London, England.

were married. We do not know where he got his artistic training and where he received his chief inspiration. As one of his paintings shows an Alpine landscape with a large number of figures, we may assume that he had been traveling in Austria. It is a canvas, which has found its way into the Danzig Municipal Museum; it may, therefore, be supposed that Heinrich Zimmermann must have enjoyed some local reputation as a painter during his lifetime. However, his chief artistic merits seem to have been more the line of portrait painting. This is corroborated by the portrait of Magdalene Zimmermann, nee van Kampen (1797-1872), who also belonged to the circle of the Danzig Mennonite families. In its technical workmanship and meticulous finish of detail it certainly indicates professional skill,

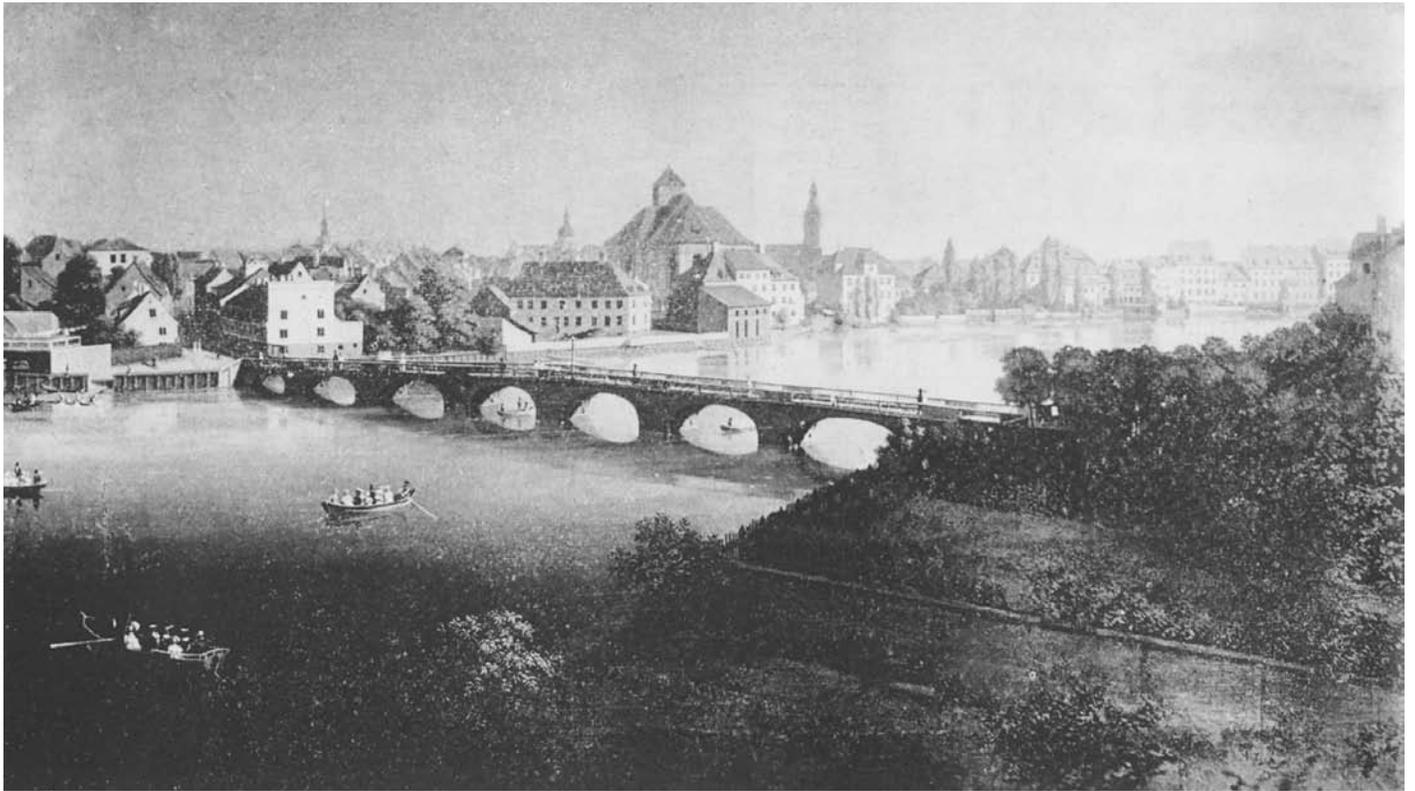
besides giving a good idea of the appearance of a Danzig Mennonite woman in the first half of the nineteenth century.

It is not before the second half of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century that we hear of two who undoubtedly were professional Danzig artists, both of whom came from old Danzig Mennonite families. Strange to say, both of them died at the age of thirty, long before their art could reach its full maturity. The few works they left show the true quality of their talents and make us regret deeply that they were called away so early in their careers.

Richard Loewens was born at Danzig in 1856, the son of Eduard Loewens (1826-1899) and Berta Henrietta Loewens, nee van Duehren (1827-1891), both of them belonging to well-known Danzig Mennonite families. Richard Loewens studied at the academies of Berlin and Munich. He soon had to struggle with his weak health, for he was suffering from tuberculosis, and, in 1885 he prematurely succumbed to his deadly affliction. If we look at the few works he left us, we must say that he certainly was a promising artist. His portrait of his sister, Anna (Mrs. Anna von Bockelmann, nee Loewens, 1859-1930), shows a rare technical ability and a deep human understanding. All that is best in the Mennonite tradition - simplicity of soul and garb, truthfulness and devotion, and a marked spiritual refinement - seem to be embodied in this convincing example of his art. That he was an excellent "townscapist" too, may be seen from his study of a courtyard near the church of St. John at Danzig. Here we see following the delicate play of the sun in the old alley, making us feel the atmosphere of the peace and seclusion which was hidden in so many places in the center of that once beautiful city.

Hans Mekelburger, whose life was also brief, came from a rural Mennonite family in the neighborhood of Danzig. He was born in 1884 and died in 1915, being killed in action during the first World War. Hans Mekelburger studied at the academies of Koenigsberg and Munich. He then lived at Danzig and here the Society of Danzig Artists arranged an exhibition in his honor after his early death. It showed in oil paintings and drawings the high standard his work had reached in his brief career. Due to the war it has been impossible to procure photographs of his works.

Let us now pass over to Koenigsberg, where the Mennonite colony was much younger than at Danzig, dating from 1722 and flourishing during the reign of the tolerant Frederick the Great. The Koenigsberg Mennonite congregation has always been very small, it's members interrelated by many marriages. We find among them the names of. Reineke, Spronck, Zimmermann, Wiens, and Kauenhoven. All of these families had formerly lived at Danzig and had gone to Koenigsberg because, soon after 1740, they were allowed to obtain civic rights, which were denied them at Danzig until 1800.



The painting "The Castle Lake of Koenigsberg" by Johann Wientz (1781-1849).

At Koenigsberg some members of the Wiens family developed marked artistic gifts. The best known of them is Johann Wientz (this is the spelling of the family's name at Koenigsberg). He was born April 16, 1781, at Langfuhr, near Danzig, of Mennonite parents; Hermann Wiens and Sara Epp. In his early youth he went to Koenigsberg, probably about 1800, because it is mentioned that he became a student at Koenigsberg University. Perhaps it was at that time that he also left the Mennonite church because of the prejudice still existing against art as a profession for young Mennonites. A contemporary writer who must have known Johann Wientz personally tells us: "As an artistic career is contrary to the views of the Mennonite congregation, Wientz made the sacrifice of leaving the religion in which he had been educated."

Wientz received his artistic training in Berlin. After 1826 he was a drawing-master at Koenigsberg University and at the Cathedral Grammar School, also at Koenigsberg. His artistic work soon gained much recognition, for he was a member of the committee of the Koenigsberg Fine Arts Society in the thirties and forties. He died August 18, 1849, at Elbing, where he had made an excursion.

His works comprise portraits in oil and in miniature, general paintings and views of Koenigsberg. He seems especially to have excelled in miniature portraits. One of his earliest works, a portrait of the Koenigsberg writer, Johann George Scheffner, dated 1812, was evidently a miniature. Scheffner himself praises it for its remarkable likeness. But Wientz also painted many portraits in oil, two of which will be found with this article; the Koenigsberg distiller

Heinrich Kauenhowen (1797-1878), and his wife Elisabeth, nee Sprunck (1801-1878). Unfortunately the originals of these paintings were lost in the late war in Silesia. The two pictures are a convincing example of good craftsmanship and of the type of the thrifty and honorable Koenigsberg Mennonites of that time.

Of Wientz' genre painting the example reproduced with this article conveys a good idea. It also shows good workmanship, although it cannot be denied that it lacks in individuality. The painting with the artist's nameplate, no doubt, depicts a young girl taking leave from an older one, but it certainly has some relation to a literary theme of the time.

The artist likely achieved his best work in his views of Koenigsberg. One subject which attracted him again and again was the Castle Lake situated in the heart of the ancient city and affording a fine view of some of its characteristic churches.

He painted these views several times, both in oil and in watercolors. They show a careful and delicate execution and their coloring is mentioned as particularly tasteful. Of the scene depicted in these paintings almost nothing remains but rubble.

Johann Wientz was not the only talented member of his family. His brother Wilhelm Wientz seems to have been especially interested in architecture, for he showed a cardboard model of the Koenigsberg *Burgkirche* at the 1833 exhibition of the Koenigsberg Fine Art Society.

His brother, Hermann Wientz, who married Catharina Kauenhowen, became the father of Emilie Wientz, who showed the artistic talent of her uncle in a marked degree. She was born

at Koenigsberg December 21, 1813, and died at Elbing January 12, 1900; she remained unmarried. Two of her drawings had been preserved in the Koenigsberg Historical Museum. They show Alexander Kauenhowen and his sister Jenny, whose father was Heinrich Kauenhowen, a cousin to Emilie Wientz. The pictures illustrate the same carefulness and delicacy of treatment to be noticed in the work of her uncle. It seems to me that they show more psychological penetration than the former. Look at the somewhat sombre



Magdalene Zimmermann, nee van Kampen, by Heinrich Zimmermann (1804-1845). Shows Mennonite costume in Danzig at that period.

and sullen expression of the boy, just the kind of face a youngster of thirteen will make when he has been asked to sit still and doesn't want to. Did not Emilie Wientz succeed in depicting the cherry-like freshness of a girl in her early teens in the portrait of Jenny Kauenhowen?

Let me conclude this survey on the artistic achievements of the Prussian Mennonites by directing the reader's attention to the successful career of a Koenigsberg member of the previously mentioned Danzig Mennonite family of Zimmermann. The Koenigsberg branch of this family has been particularly fortunate in its enterprises and several of its members have become noted for the active part they played in the economic and cultural life of that city.

Among them we must mention the painter, Franz Theodor Zimmermann, who was born at Koenigsberg June 11, 1807, the son of the Mennonite couple, Jacob Zimmermann (1769-1819) and Agnetha Kroeker (1775-1841). As it was the custom in Mennonite urban families at that time the young man was apprenticed to a businessman for six years. By that time he had become assured that his real talents pointed in another direction. He therefore, left his original career in 1827 and began studying drawing at the local Provincial Arts and Drawing School. In October 1829, Franz Theodor Zimmermann left Koenigsberg and went to Berlin with an attestation of the Elder Johann Penner. In Berlin he took up his studies at the Berlin Academy of Arts, and in 1832 he was able to leave with a diploma signed by the director of that institution, the famous sculptor, Johann Gottfried Schadow. The young artist then lived in Berlin and gave lessons in drawing and painting; in 1837 he started on the usual tour to Italy. But he did not get to Rome, for on his way there he stayed in Vienna where a brother of his had already found an occupation as a technician.

Here, in 1848, Franz Theodor Zimmermann married Ida Ziegler, daughter of the painter Josef Ziegler and settled down for the rest of his life. He set up as an independent artist and soon spe-



"Alpine Landscape," by Heinrich Zimmermann. The painting was in the Danzig Municipal Museum.

cialized in portraits and animal painting. In this capacity he made the acquaintance of Hungarian and Slavonian magnates who invited him to their estates. He acquired an intimate knowledge of animal life which made him famous and later on formed the chief subject of his works. He had been exhibiting paintings at Koenigsberg since 1833, a year after he had left the Berlin Academy. He continued to do so in Berlin and Vienna until 1877, as may be seen from the catalogs of the societies of art at these places. They were chiefly genre and animal pictures, with titles as "Horses Grazing," "Back from the Hunt," "The Reaper," "Grandfather and Grandson," etc.

I should like to point to the "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man," as an example of his early work. Most of his later paintings seem to have found their way to the halls and galleries of Austrian and Hungarian aristocrats. What made him widely known at his time were the illustrations for the natural history books by Alfred Brehm which have become standard works in their field. If we look at these pictures now, we can easily understand why a naturalist like Alfred Brehm chose Franz Theodor Zimmermann as his most intimate collaborator. Zimmermann must have been a keen observer of animal life—Brehm remarks of his illustrations: "Zimmermann's drawings have been directly taken from life without any exception, and as such they deserve the praise of the expert too." Indeed, if we look at the illustration: "Polar Lynxes" we can understand the high opinion which Brehm held of the artist, and it almost seems that in this case the scientist in Zimmermann has gotten the better of the artist.

Though he lived far away from his birth place, Zimmermann maintained his connections with Koenigsberg. After the death of his wife in 1855, he married his niece Johanna Zimmermann in 1862. Later, in 1877, he sent some of his works to an exhibition at Koenigsberg. As a result of the influences he experienced at Vienna, he did not remain a member of the Mennonite denomination. However, he retained characteristics of his Mennonite heritage throughout his

works: soberness, simplicity, and veracity.

This may also be said of all the artists mentioned in this survey. Thus we come to the same conclusion concerning the contribution of the Mennonites to the fine arts, as stated in *Mennonite Life*, April, 1948; it consisted in their "insistence upon directness, simplicity, and integrity."

The list given above is by no means complete. There are other Mennonite artists or artists of Mennonite descent in northeastern Germany who equally deserve to be mentioned. It must be borne in mind that most of the work of these artists, and the literary material concerning them, has either been destroyed by the war or has become inaccessible. It seemed necessary to save from oblivion at least some of what has been left to us of this field of Mennonite activity and to give voice again to works which lie covered by silence and darkness.



"Girl Taking Leave," Johann Wientz. This painting may have some relation to a literary theme of the day. The artist painted many subjects from everyday life.



"Jenny Kauenhowen," by Emilie Wientz (1813-1900), the niece of Johann Wientz

Biographies

Ältester Martin C. Friesen 1881-1968

Recollections by members of his family
compiled and edited by John Dyck, 1928-1999

Introduction

Martin C. Friesen (1881-1968) was the son of Cornelius T. and Katharina Friesen. He grew up on his father's farm at Osterwick on the East Reserve. On July 18, 1911, Martin married his step-sister, Elizabeth D. Wiebe. Martin and Elizabeth had been brought together in one home when his widowed father married her widowed mother.

Both Martin and Elizabeth grew up in the shadow of prominent community leaders. Martin's father served the Chortitzer Church as *Waisenman* or administrator of the Orphan Care Society. Elizabeth Wiebe Friesen was a daughter of Heinrich D. Wiebe and the granddaughter of Ältester Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900, who led the *Gemeinde* in the emigration from Russia to Manitoba.

Martin C. Friesen was elected to the ministry in the Chortitzer Mennoniten Gemeinde in Manitoba on 16 July 1924 and as Ältester on 9 October 1925. He served the church during the emigration to Paraguay in 1926 to 1927 and continued to serve there until 1966 when, at the age of 85, he resigned his leadership position.

The following lines written by Martin C. Friesen in January of 1928 tell something about his faith, his personality and his leadership qualities. His words seem to echo Joshua's call to Israel to be strong and courageous as they settled in a new land: "When we look back, we have to say with the patriarch Jacob 'I am unworthy of all the kindness and faithfulness you have shown your servant.' Genesis 32:10. We are frequently too concerned, too afraid. We have the promise in Mark 10:29-30, '...who has left [all]...for me and the gospel will receive a hundredfold...' To this day, nobody has served the Lord in vain when he has served in faith. There is much work to be done here. Our greatest difficulty stems from the delay in getting the land survey completed. But what does it help to complain or even to blame; we need only see how we can move forward each day with new hope and fresh courage. Our solution is: Forward! for the world belongs to the courageous. We know that the reports emanating from here are often contradictory. In comparison with Canada we have disadvantages, but also advantages."

In keeping with his humble disposition, Martin C. Friesen has remained largely unknown. His son Martin W. Friesen, in his book *Kanadische Mennoniten bezwungen eine Wildnis* (Altona, 1986), rarely mentions his name, even though he describes the emigration to Paraguay and the Mennonite settlement

there, in which Martin C. Friesen played such an important role.

Martin C. Friesen was the patriarch of a large family. The legacy of a man's character is best described by those who knew him best - his children and grandchildren. Here, in their own words, members of his family describe some of the fond memories which they have of him as a parent and their reaction to the controversies that befell a long time church leader. Their devotion to this kind and loving father and grandfather is unmistakable. By John Dyck (1928-1999).

Granddaughter Maria Friesen.

Our grandfather Martin C. Friesen was born to Katharina and Cornelius T. Friesen, who immigrated from Russia to Canada as young people in the 1870s. *Opa* Martin C. Friesen was born 6 October 1881 in the village of Osterwick in Manitoba where he was also raised.

Little is known of his childhood. He spent his early years on the farm in Osterwick, Manitoba. He frequently went to distant neighbours to pick up mail that his older cousins brought from Winnipeg. Once he set out on this chore at night in a dream and woke up at the neighbours. He quickly returned home before anybody would notice him. Here in Osterwick he attended the local school and grew to adulthood.

As a young man he was tall of stature, strong and enjoyed good health. His mother died when he was 18 years-old and sometime later his father married a widow with seven children. *Opa* Martin C. Friesen, the fifth of 10 siblings, lived for a short while in the parental home with his Wiebe step-siblings, among whom was also his friend Elisabeth Wiebe. After several months these two were married and continued to live on the same C. T. Friesen farm during the early years of their marriage.

Already as a young man he was called to serve the church. On 8 October 1925 the Chortitzer Church installed him as their leader. With his blue-grey eyes he observed his family, his congregation, and the entire community with love and with considerate care (*liebepoll und mit grosse Fuersorge*). Even today he is still referred to as "the good shepherd" who conscientiously led his sheep.

In 1927 he, alone from his siblings, moved to Paraguay where he undertook the leadership of a new settlement. His father, C. T. Friesen, apparently had much contact with him by correspondence. Twenty years later one brother followed him (he is still living today). However, he settled 650 kilometers from where *Opa* lived. Other siblings emigrated to Mexico and

Saskatchewan.

In Paraguay, *Opa* Martin C. Friesen lived as a simple farmer together with his family of seven children, again in the village of Osterwick. Here he settled down giving counsel and active assistance to the congregation and the colony. His travels were accomplished with a horse and a small buggy which he had brought along from Canada. *Oma* Friesen accompanied him a great deal as he travelled to serve the community. Often he took grandchildren along. I remember that he frequently dropped in at our place in the village of Ebenfeld when he was on his way to preach in distant villages. We gladly went along with him. After those worship services he frequently visited parishioners in the community.

He fed his horses well. Before he left home, early in the morning, he gave them a hearty breakfast. Later, when the cars came and *Opa* got older and his strength diminished, members of the church often drove him to distant villages where he was called to preach.

He loved to drive comfortably rather than speeding. On one occasion, when they were stopping on the way to a ministers' conference in South Menno, he is to have said very seriously to the driver, "Do you think the guardian angel could keep up with us?"

David Fehr, one of his grandsons, likes to tell about the time, when vehicles were still rare, and *Opa* Friesen had been invited by the youth to speak at the weekend youth meeting in Osterwick. After the presentation one of the youth showed him his new motorcycle and offered to drive him home. Since this was the only vehicle there, many youth were naturally curious to see this new driver and to admire his motorcycle. David stood aside and waited anxiously to see whether *Opa* would accept his offer. Finally *Opa* settled into the seat behind the inexperienced driver. The motorcycle promptly, but unintentionally, raised its front end into the air and *Opa* landed on the ground behind it. The curious youth were scared and could not believe what they had just seen. While they were waiting for *Opa* M. C. Friesen to admonish them, he quietly stepped into the uncommon two-wheeled vehicle and this time everything went in an orderly fashion. The audience even dared to laugh.

Grandfather was a frugal but well-to-do and never stingy person - as was *Oma* also. His two-storey home served as a shelter for many a visitor from the community, from other countries and even, for several years, refugees. *Oma*, who was hospitable, never let anyone leave hungry. She knew how to serve appetizing meals to many people.

When I think of *Opa's* Vesper (snack time),

then I get hungry even today.

His grandson, Martin Giesbrecht, who as a child spent many years on grandparents' yard, asked one day, "Grandfather, why do you pick up all those bent and rusty old nails?" *Opa* replied, "Some day I will need exactly those." Martin says later he used many of those nails and learned much from him.

Martin remembers that one time *Opa* laughed heartily as he came out of the machine shed with hands cramped in his pockets. Astonished at what might have caused the outburst, Martin stood in front of him until he took his hands out of his pockets and a compressed mouse fell out of his pant leg.

I remember our *Opa* as a wise, good-natured but serious man. He enjoyed singing with us whenever we were at their place or they at ours. Some songs still ring in our (grandchildren's) ears. *Wir warten auf den Heiland bis er kommt!, Nur mit Jesu will ich Pilger wandern... Ist's auch eine Freude...* and others.

Opa never forgot to admonish us before he left our yard. It was his great desire that we would be ready when Jesus comes! His calm demeanour in all circumstances in which he found himself has been a great moral instruction to me.

Daughter Elisabeth Siemens.

In my opinion we had a good father. He never treated us children harshly. At the table he frequently read from the Holy Scriptures and warned us about sin. I often felt sorry for my father when people came and put blame on him. Sometimes good people came and consulted with him; at other times people came to blame him.

We lived in a house where we children frequently heard things that were not intended for our ears, but then father would tell us not to repeat outside of our home any of the things we had heard. I cannot recall that I ever repeated any of those things outside of our home. I did not want to hurt my father because he already had a difficult enough time in the church. Sometimes he would be away from home for a couple of weeks at a time. He baptized in all the meeting places of the *Gemeinde* and also conducted all communions. His means of transportation for this was always with horse and buggy.

While we still lived in Osterwick, perhaps in the 1930s or 1940s, we had a young minister visiting in our home. The man related how my father had come to Gnadenfeld one Saturday on his way to conduct a worship service somewhere on Sunday morning. Then on Sunday morning that man, as a 17 year old youth, had accompanied father to his destination. I don't recall whether it could perhaps have been Bergthal, at any rate farther east. The young man had only heard negative stories about father, for in Gnadenfeld and Weidenfeld many people opposed him. As they had travelled father had related spiritual incidents from the New Testament and Bible. Then the young men had started thinking that father was not such a bad person. He came to love father and learned many good things from him and held him in high esteem.

On one occasion when father was invited to Filadelfia for a conference or a meeting, he said, among other things, "You have rejected many things. We Mennonites immigrated here as conscientious objectors and now you have spoiled it with your violence." It was because of Hitler. In 1995 we older people took the bus to Filadelfia. There an older gentleman greeted me; he was 90 years old. When he asked me who I was I told him that he would not know me but my father had been Bishop Martin C. Friesen. "I knew him well," he said, "Then you have had a very good father. I valued him highly." He was a man by the name of Born. His father was manager of the Mennonite Home in Ascuncion.

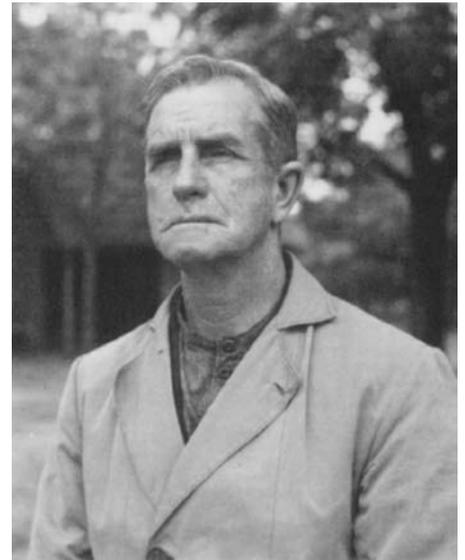
Things were different in those days. Even before we were grown up, we children had to work in the garden. Father would go by horse and buggy to serve the churches with baptism and communion. Often mother would go along. We did not have as much freedom as many children have today. Father said we would never regret remaining obedient.

Evenings when we sat outside we frequently sang the song *Nur mit Jesu will ich Pilger wandern* and *Lasst uns den Weg durchs Thal der Zeit*. Once at the table father said, "We are getting old and will be leaving this world but you and the grandchildren and great grandchildren still remain and dark clouds loom on the horizon." But we want to trust in Jesus and pray.

Granddaughter Liesa Toews.

My earliest recollections of my grandfather Friesen are from the year 1950. We, my parents Corn. W. Friesens, lived in North Menno in the village of Kleinstädt. My parents (like many other people) planned to start a new settlement on Leg. 63. This settlement lay some 120 kilometers from North Menno. My parents had five children: Peter age 8, Lena 7, Liesa 5, Andreas 3 and Hein 1 year old. In a predetermined week, a group of these people, including my parents, drove to Leg. 63 in order to inspect the land. They went with horses and wagons and it took about a week. Lena and Hein went along, Peter stayed with grandparents Thiessens in Kleinstädt and Andreas and I stayed with grandparents [Friesens] in Osterwick.

That was the first time we stayed elsewhere for a whole week. Oh, we were overjoyed. I still remember how we stood on the yard (at grandparents) and watched our father as he drove off the yard with the wagon and disappeared down the street. Yet we were glad to be able to stay here. On that first day, at the supper table, tensions developed between *Oma* and three-year old Andreas. *Oma* was extremely particular to keep everything neat - and Andreas' greatest enemy was, in Low German, 'de Schlaub' [the bib]. *Oma* wanted to hang a bib around his neck in order that he would not dirty his clothing. The little one did not take a second to consider his response, "No. I do not need that." "Yes, you need it," *Oma* said. "No, I won't let you," said Andreas as he slid along the bench towards the wall in order to better defend himself. At that *Opa* expressed himself and said to *Oma*, "Leave



Aeltester Martin C. Friesen, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 136.

the boy alone so he can eat." By this time *Opa* was naturally eating already. But *Oma* said, "If he won't let me, he will simply go without supper. "I don't care, then I will do without but I do not need the bib," the youngster responded from his corner. "Alright, that's enough," *Opa* said to *Oma*, "just sit down and eat, Andreas will get along without."

I had not eaten anything to this point. My appetite was gone. I felt sorry for my little brother - to stay without supper? and I was very angry at *Oma*. I went outside because I did not want them to see the battle this created within me. It was dark outside, mama and papa were far away, and already we had a quarrel with *Oma*. I cried - all the while thinking how nice it was that *Opa* was so loving. At that *Oma* appeared outside and said, "Liesa, where are you and what is wrong, why are you crying." "Oh, I have a severe toothache," I replied. I did not want to tell her how I felt because I knew that she meant well. "Then come to bed right away," she said and went to get me an aspirin.

I still remember exactly in which bed I lay as I sobbed. Soon I fell asleep. Andreas ate his supper anyway, together with *Opa*. The next day everything was well again, no toothache, no quarrel, no bib, good food, good appetite, and good harmony. It was beautiful.

My last recollections of him are from the year 1967-68. For that year-end, grandparents were here at Leg. 63. I had already been married for a few years. They came to our place. Our second child was seven weeks old. He took the baby on his lap and observed it. All at once he spoke up, "How lovely it is to have small children. I wish you a lot of wisdom in the raising of your children. My great desire is that our children, grandchildren and great grandchildren might all be raised for the Lord Jesus."

That was the last time I saw or heard him. On 7 April 1968 he died.

I have many more memories of him and they are all positive. I am grateful to have had such a grandfather.

Grandson Andreas T. Friesen.

When I think of my *Opa* in Osterwick, several things come to mind.

1. His ability to laugh: *Opa* never laughed heartily or loud (as I remember it). A light soft, smile was etched into his face.

2. His ability to be. As I see it today, *Opa* was severely tested through his diligent work in the church. As I remember him, he never threw his arms around his children and said, I love you, as for example, *Opa* Thiessen did. Nobody, however, ever doubted his love for his grandchildren. In any event I have always been fond of him.

3. My last visit with him. I will never forget the Sunday, while I was studying at the Teacher's College in Philadelphia, and on Sunday I went to Loma Plata for a communion service. What really impressed me were his last words: "I am a marked tree, I will not live much longer." Then he spoke briefly about his weaknesses and asked the congregation to stand if they were willing to forgive him for mistakes he had made. The entire congregation stood.

What especially impressed me was this sentence, quoted approximately (I do not recall it word for word). "In what I have offended people in the name of God I do not retract. Only in those matters where I have dealt in my humanity."

Opa died that Sunday, a few hours after having served communion.

Greta Siemens de Hiebert.

I would like to write something about my grandfather, Martin C. Friesen. We lived near my grandparents and we helped there a lot, herding cattle, cutting maize, weeding the garden, and much more, because grandfather was away from home so much. I greatly appreciated my grandfather. He was a great friend of children. Whenever they had a family gathering he would always make a big pail full of orange juice and

give us all a drink.

Once a week we went to visit them. We always sang some songs. I also frequently went along with him when he went to preach. Then we would sing a lot: *Nur mit Jesu will ich Pilger wandeln, Bis hierher hat uns Gott gebracht . . . , Gott wird dich tragen . . . , Gehe nicht vorbei o Heiland . . .* and many more. Sometimes he would quote from the Bible or talk about how wonderfully God had created nature.

After we were married we moved to a place 35 kilometers from Osterwick. Then grandparents stopped in frequently when he had to preach or conduct Bible studies. I recall one time after a Bible study, we walked to the buggy and somebody had mixed weeds and sand and strewn them on the seat. Grandfather calmly removed the stuff from the seat and dusted it off without scolding. He had to frequently experience similar behaviour because so many people were opposed to Bible studies.

Once he spoke at a wedding in Schönfeld, 15 kilometers west of Osterwick, then they came to our place late in the evening in order to preach here Sunday morning. He accomplished these travels with horse and buggy. That night we heard him moan out of sheer tiredness.

Granddaughter Helena Giesbrecht.

When I think about my grandfather Martin C. Friesen, several statements, which he tended to repeat frequently to us grandchildren, soon come to mind.

1. "Child, you cannot go through life like that" when one of us was dissatisfied.

2. "Make a list of everything for which you can be thankful," and promptly started the list.

3. "Contentment brings great riches." This he said at every opportunity. I never saw him upset or discontented.

Once while grandparents visited us, he helped us see miracles. During morning de-

votions we read about Jesus' miracles. We children suggested that miracles do not happen anymore.

"What?" he said, Come with me and I will show you one of many different miracles." We followed him into the fruit garden. There he pointed to two very similar-looking seeds. One was a lemon seed, the other an orange or maybe, mandarin, I cannot recall for certain. He also pointed out how those two trees were so similar in appearance.

Then he said, "What becomes of these seeds if I store them in a cabinet? Or what if I store them under the wash? Or what if in the ground?"

"Then they grow into fruit trees."

"Right, and how do they taste?"

"One is sweet and the other sour."

"Right, and would you not consider that a miracle?"

Similarly he explained much more to us.

The strongest recollection I have of my grandparents can be found in *Der kleine Sänger*. [tr. *The little Singer* was a small book of gospel songs.] How often we sang together with them from that booklet. They never seemed to tire of singing and in the process I learned many songs. I remember them with gratitude.

Further Reading:

Katherina Friesen Wiebe, "Bishop Martin C. Friesen," in *Pres.*, No. 7, pages 12-13, and *Diese Steine*, pages 605-606.

Martin W. Friesen, "Martin C. Friesen in Paraguay," in *Pres.*, No. 7, pages 13-14, and *Diese Steine*, pages 606-609.

Endnotes)

1 see *Pres.*, No. 8, Part One. P. 36-40.

Installation of Kleine Gemeinde Aeltester Rev. Jacob F. Isaac

Acceptance Sermon at Meade, Kansas, November 29, 1914. Translated by Peter R. Dueck, Manitoba

Submitted by Merle Loewen, grandson, Ellinwood, Kansas.

(A biography of Jacob F. Isaac is planned for the next issue of *Preservings*.)

Jesus Words: Matthew 7:7

"Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

The grace, mercy, and forbearance of the great God; the love and right perception which our redeemer Jesus Christ wants to grant us, who has loved us very much and washed us from our sins with His blood; yes, also the Holy Spirit who comes from the Father to all who are thirsty for righteousness. I a weak servant want to challenge us with words that will result in our uplifting. Yes, may the Lord try the hearts of all of us and see how we respond to the One to whom thanks, honor and adoration belong eternally. Amen!

Follow along with the words of a certain poet:

1. I must complain to you my heart's deplorable condition, even though you are more familiar with my complaints than I am. I show great weakness in times of testing - when Satan wants to rob me of my faith.
2. Nothing is hidden from you, God. I have nothing good within me - my worries help nothing. Whatever good I find in me, that have I alone from you. . . faith you give to me as you wish.
3. O my God before whom I come now in my great grief, listen how I pray with great yearning. Let me not come to scorn. Bring

to naught the works of the devil. Strengthen my weak faith that I never more will despair, constantly bearing Jesus in my heart.

4. Jesus, the well of all grace who drives no one away though laden with weakness, but you comfort your followers. Were their faith even so small as a tiny mustard seed, you want to consider them worthy to remove big mountains.

Let me find grace with you for I am full of sorrow. Help me to overcome each time I enter a conflict. Increase my faith daily and honor the Spirit's sword wherewith I can slay the enemy. Send your help to me, O you noble guest of the heart, and finish the good work that you have

begun. Rekindle the small spark until the finished race when all the chosen ones are One, and I reach the goal of my faith. Amen!

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters in the Lord, I come before you today for the first time as the one who should strengthen you in God's word and try to encourage you. But how sorrowful I call out with the words of David in Psalm 109, "but you, Lord, be with me for your name's sake because your grace is my comfort. Save me for I am poor and miserable, my heart is broken within me. Yes, stand by me, my Lord and God, and help me according to your grace." When I weigh and consider the importance of this office, at the same time recognize the ruined nature of my flesh – how much it is inclined toward evil, how contrary, how slow and sluggish to do good. I find myself incapable, powerless and unqualified for such an important and holy work. Yes, for the service and office that was given to me by God and His church, to be a watchman and laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. With much () sorrow, I shall take this highly important position to lead as a watchman. Yes, with serious thoughts in the present and those I see in the future.

I can hardly shield you – knowing I now must warn other souls; having so much concern for myself because I know I am a very great sinner – that I have often failed very badly! Wherefore, I ask the dear brothers and sisters for forgiveness. Beloved, I feel myself very young to be a shepherd of the flock. O Lord, I feel too young to preach. Yes, both in years and understanding. I ask pleadingly that you who understand, dear brothers and sisters, come to help me, remember me in your prayers so that the God of all of us will grant grace and strength to be acceptable to Him – help this poor and weak one with untiring eagerness, Godly wisdom and understanding in order that I may fulfill this position and service clothed in simplicity and represented correctly.

It is very important, dear ones, when we read in II Moses in chapter three, how the Angel of the Lord appeared to him in his time from a fire in a bush. He saw that the bush was burning, but was not consumed. And Moses said, "I will go and see this great sight why the bush is not consumed." But when the Lord saw that I was going to see it, God called out of the bush and said, "Moses, Moses, I replied "here am I." He said "Don't draw near, take off your shoes from your feet, for the ground you are standing on is holy ground." I may not take this calling and occasion lightly, but remove my sinful shoes and thus enter the holy place which may well be our gathering place – as sanctified we may all appear there. O my loved brethren and sisters, how badly I feel that I am so ill prepared for the task, for God's sake and for myself – to warn, awaken and challenge. I cannot with my walk and words do it without

the Lord's help. For it is of greatest importance, yet I will and can hope that the same God and the same Lord who has placed this call upon me, will help and carry me. Therefore, I want to become obedient even though I feel so unclean and unworthy; I would gladly with an excuse release myself, but since God's word cannot bring it about, there is no way out at hand. What does it profit me by making excuses?

In searching the Holy Scripture, we can read of holy men in times past who declared themselves not ready, unworthy, yes too young and what else? As Jonah's follower seeking a way out – a way to excuse themselves for disobedience. His word says "you shall go where I send you and preach what I will tell you." Jeremiah 1:7. I am a poor, weak man, yes, dust and ashes. Who am I that I should withstand the Lord's advice, or try? But with David I call out, "O Lord be merciful unto me according to your goodness and cleanse me from my sins for I acknowledge my offenses and my sin is always before me. Against you alone have I sinned and done evil before you. Cleanse me with hyssop that I will become clean, wash me that I shall become white as snow. Hide your face from my sin and cleanse me from all my offenses. Create in me, O God, a clean heart and give me a new spirit." Psalm 51, and in Psalm 38 he comes another time pleading with words, "Lord don't punish me in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath, for your arrows

stick in me and your hand presses me, there is nothing whole nor healthy in my body, because of your indignation, and there is no peace in my bones because of my sins, for my sins go over my head, like a heavy burden they have become too heavy for me." Say with a poet, "Dear, loving Jesus teach me with your Spirit to live rightly – to come humbly and worthily before you with genuine love; long for, really sigh from the heart and hope in you. It must be an earnest plea, such as presses through the clouds. You must not show any hypocrisy to bring to this sacrifice; with a truly penitent heart that feels the burden of sin and pain - cannot find comfort - and seeks God without ceasing. With angst and worry it has no rest day and night. . . it is deeply ashamed because it has saddened the one who loved you from the beginning and redeemed you with His blood. When one seeks from the heart, earnestly seeks the Lord, then comes the evil, wicked foe. Cruel through his many thousand tricks, he scares the souls at this time and wounds them severely.

This the Lord allows when He wants to train His child to see if he will in battle heartily love the Father. The Father presents Himself as if He cannot help and has cast him away. The soul suffers great pain that no tongue can express. The soul seems to be forsaken by God; it must battle with Satan. The sorrow endures until God refreshes the soul so that she will remain true to Him. O Holy God! Help me through it and be gracious to me. There is so much angst, grief and worry to travel the heavenly way. O dear Father! Refresh me and don't let my anxious soul languish. So pleads the soul's voice to God for His grace – she complains and complains to Him, begging for comfort on this journey. Then the Father's heart breaks because of the child's fear and pain. He cannot contain Himself – He comes to dwell in the soul; is gratified. He takes the oppression, and lights it with love which no foe can extinguish – no sorrow, no angst and pain. When God dwells in the heart, no enemy can singe the Spirit. It seeks to refract the lust of the flesh. When God embraces the soul, He carries the load, therefore the yoke is not heavy.

So God brings us into rest. Because He loves us, He frequently strikes us heavily that He can delight in us and comfort us. Those who are pressed by the burden of the cross; who have tasted the angst of Hell, won't regret it there [heaven]. Oh, how important, beloved brothers and sisters, is the assignment, and how responsible. Yes, how very important is the way which I, or also we, shepherds and messengers of the gospel have, not only with fear and trembling, to work out our soul's salvation, but the Lord also makes us responsible for the souls entrusted to us. Yes, how earnestly the Lord speaks to His servants through the prophet Ezekiel, Chapter 33:7-8. "And now you son of



Aeltester Jacob F. Isaac, wife Maria, and sons Lee and Al. 1940. Photo: Merle Loewen.

man, I have set you as a watchman over the house of Israel; whenever you hear something out of my mouth, you shall warn them for me. When I now say to the godless, you godless must surely die, and you don't warn them to turn from their wicked ways, they shall die in their iniquities, but their blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked to turn from their ways, and they do not turn from their ways, the wicked shall die because of their sinfulness, and you have saved your soul.

We don't preach only with words, but also with our walk. In I Cor. 9 and 27, the Apostle Paul says, "I tame my body so that I don't preach to others and I myself become a castaway." Yes, whoever as shepherd and messenger of the Gospel has not already looked at himself, observed his weakness and has sighed – so I must with sighs call out with Isaiah, "Woe is me for I am of unclean lips and live among people with unclean lips." Isaiah 6:5.

If I had looked only at myself to the work I'm now beginning, dear ones, then I would truly despair, but the Lord be praised that I am not relying on my own strength, but pleadingly look up to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and pour out my heart to Him, for He is the author and finisher of our faith. Where we feel weak, there He is strong and where we feel poor He will make us rich. O beloved brothers and sisters, let us always look up to our Lord Jesus Christ, and learn only from Him. When He says "Come unto me all ye who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take up my yoke and learn of me for I am meek and humble in heart, so you find rest for your souls" Matthew 11:28-29. Shouldn't we take it to heart much more because of the promises of the Lord, and learn more and more, know His promises and walk in faith and honesty with Christ so that your faith will be more genuine and found to be more precious than the perishable gold which is kept through fire to the praise and honor of the Lord. Christ whom you have not seen, but yet loved and believed, will be revealed. Although you do not see Him now, you will rejoice with inexpressible and precious joy, and obtain the goal of your faith, namely the One who is our soul's salvation. I Peter 1:7 & 8 "Walk in love just like Christ has loved us and has given Himself for us as a gift and offering to God as a sweet smelling savor. Walk as children of light. The fruit of the Spirit is all kinds of goodness, righteousness and truth. So be careful to walk, not as the unwise, but as the wise." Eph. 5.

O Lord, I am a poor sinful man and come before your Holy face with a weak prayer while I am stirred in my mind, convicted of my many sins. . . totally crushed in spirit, for your hand presses me day and night. Therefore I come now in true repentance and acknowledge to you my sins that are not hidden from your Holy face. I'm sorry that I so oft offended you with my sins, gracious God and Father! Don't punish me in your anger and don't cast me, a poor sinner, away, but look at me graciously with the eye of your fatherly mercy according to your great goodness; blot out my sins according to your unsearchable riches, show me grace and mercy according to

your Word, cleanse me from my offenses through the precious merits of your dear Son who innocently shed His blood. Now let my stirred-up conscience and my soul be comforted – also give me a new true spirit that I in newness of life be a faithful servant in true obedience to your glory and according to your good pleasure, in holiness and righteousness walk by faith and become a child and heir of eternal salvation. Amen.

Now dearly beloved, in order to further edify, in order to be really on guard, so that our soul's welfare will result in a truly acceptable walk, so that the words of our text give us occasion – while we however by ourselves are not in a position to do good, to speak or to think, so let us first of all ask the giver of all the good and perfect gifts. . . Come to Him in a sincere prayer that I a poor and weak servant learn, as well as you listeners; so He may give His Godly blessing, and that this may be to His honor and result in our salvation. So join with me in a sincere prayer.

Now in the hope that the Lord has heard the request we made from Him, I want to turn to the words of my text which we find written in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 7:7 reads thus. "Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you." Brothers and sisters, I will seek the One in my great weakness with these words of our dear Lord – and add an additional point, how we in honest prayer plead in order to receive His gift, to be constantly seeking in order to find Him, and by striving and knocking it will finally be opened to us.

Much loved ones, certainly when Sunday after Sunday we in the congregation hear God's word, consider it, this alone is not enough that we draw to God in general formality by hearing the Holy Word. Rather we must all direct our thoughts and our whole mind to God whose word we listen to and whose Holy characteristics we eagerly inhale, to always think more keenly, and to better recall the wonder of the great mercy which He shows us in the work of redemption – and still daily show us. Yes, what a loving and generous Father we have, how He has done many good and Holy things for us which through His word were permitted to be announced and promised long ago.

Loved ones, it is highly important that we have contact often with God, with His word, and when our service to God is upright and honest, and is according to the context of the Word, then God is everywhere. and with us. For when our Lord sent His disciples to preach, He also told them at the same time, "I am with you all the days unto the end of the World." Matthew 2:20 and in Matthew 18 the Lord Jesus says "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there I am in the midst of them." But if our conscience and failings toward that which was just mentioned are slack, let us go to the words of our text and compare; with heads look up and look at the text's words. Ask and it shall be given you, take them to heart and we will find that all the promises we can trustingly claim. For the one who asks, receives, and the one who seeks, finds, and whoever knocks it shall be opened unto him. Oh, could we always take God's overly big grace

and goodness, and consider how he permits them to flow to us out of pure love and mercy. We are so often ungrateful in spite of the fact if He should withdraw His hand, we are not in position to do any good – not to speak nor to think.

Oh, how will we survive with our weak and lazy faith? So often we have gone against His commandments and are so seldom concerned with seeking the Lord as our text teaches us. (Seek and ye shall find.) Let us try to prove whether our faith is genuine before God. Isaiah says, "Seek the Lord while he can be found, call upon Him while he is near." Isaiah 55:6 "The godless forsake his way and the evildoer his thoughts, and be converted to the Lord; then He will have mercy upon you, for by Him is much forgiveness." Isaiah 53:6 & 7.

So let us honestly repent before Him and seek the Lord. For with God it depends on the heart whether it has been cleansed and made righteous. Yes, what else does His teaching demand? That we be converted and that we give ourselves whole heartily to God. Then through our Christianity, we find Him to be our reconciled Father whose love is fatherly and inexpressibly loving toward us in that He spared not His only dear Son, but gave Him for us.

Let us with full earnestness begin to show in word and deed. In II Peter 1, where He speaks to His every kind of godly power (which serves for the godly life and walk) given to us with the assurance that the One who has called us through His glory and virtue, through which we have been given the most holy promises, namely that we through these become partakers of the godly nature, that you will flee the perishing lust of the world. But if we do not heed nor flee from them, then we cannot comfort ourselves with these precious promises. If God the Lord didn't spare the angels who sinned, but has with everlasting chains cast them into hell, reserved them for the judgment, nor spared the ancient world, except He spared Noah the preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly, and turned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes, condemned them with an overthrow – making them an example unto the ungodly who come thereafter, who live ungodly lives. II Peter 2. The apostle helps us understand that the previously mentioned destruction happened as an example to unbelievers – so that we consider and cleanse ourselves from evil things. All that is written in the Word of the Lord is written for our learning. Romans 15:4.

Dearest friends, our text embraces in its entirety how souls seeking God can through His rich gospel and through His word in this Holy domain, come to Him by asking, seeking, and knocking. They can receive and arrive! Our loving Savior says in the same chapter as our text, "if you being evil can give good gifts to your children, how much more will our heavenly Father give good things to them that ask Him, and what you will ask in my name, that will I do so that the Father will be honored in His son." John 14:13.

Calling God in quietness through prayer, can and will, give us new strength and help us walk virtuously – we will remind ourselves of

our responsibilities. From whom do we seek help? From a holy and righteous God who has promised help. But if we do not walk before Him in humility we cannot expect help. We can be comforted knowing He hears us and we ask Him for blessings and fulfillment. It is the omniscient, the omnipresent, and all-seeing God who sees through every false and honest heart and notices everything exactly. That is why He doesn't hear the sinner, but the one who is God-fearing and does His will; him He hears. John 9:31. We pray according to the prescription of God – Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done. These words do not apply when they are not spoken in truth, nor taken seriously, nor when our walk is not according to our conscience.

The kingdom of this world too often has occupied our life, and therefore many of us unwisely seek treasure and riches here on earth, clinging to our own so tightly that we poor people become slaves to sin. John 8:3,4. Oh that your name through a virtuous walk (and also by me) be made Holy, that your kingdom of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit fill my young heart and mind, indwell me so that my mind and thoughts in everything become subject to your wise and gracious will. Yes, all this reminds us when we seek God in the quietness of our heart, search our responsibility, and we are earnestly seeking, then we will finally come to fully trust and be led to His help like our text teaches us: Ask and it will be given you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you.

Therefore, I say once again, everyone participates in my imperfection and great poverty of spirit. When you in your concerns complain, then in your prayers remember me before the Lord so that we together with united effort come together in love and peace, and in one spirit serve God and labor in the vineyard of the Lord as truly right servants, so that at the great judgment before the Lord Jesus we can hear the delightful voice of the Lord say "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, thou has been faithful over few things, I will make you ruler over many things, enter thou into the joy of the Lord." Matthew 25:21

In Colossians 1:9, it says, don't cease to pray for me so that I may be filled with knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding so that we may be true lights on Mt. Zion and proclaim the truth, purely, and audibly, and impress it upon the heart of each one so that the souls of many may find salvation through us weak and poor servants, and by grace obtain the eternal rest for the soul.

Oh, all those who with the whole heart seek God and find Him, a glorious and blessed condition. Then you will find that which you have been seeking and learn that which the heart needs. Yes, we will learn that which is most essential in order to be eternally happy - to be saved. Above all, it is so very important that we direct our honest prayer to God. Oh most beloved, when we consider how much trouble and concern our forefathers, yes, the Lord Himself had, that He remained in prayer day and night, how much more should we poor people, wherever we find ourselves, not neglect the opportunity to pray in quiet solitude. We



Meade, Kansas, Bible School students, 1936-1937. Photo: Merle Loewen.

should not pray like the hypocrite, like it says in Matthew 6:1, who likes to stand in schools and on the corners of streets in order to be seen of men. "Truly, I say unto you they have their reward already. But when you pray go into your closet, close the door behind you, and pray to your Father in secret, and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly." In Isaiah 65:24 the Lord says, "Before they call I will answer and while they are yet speaking I will answer."

Oh almighty God and Father, you in your unsearchable wisdom command us to take that which is unknown to us but known to you in prayer. Therefore give to all of us such hearts that we in all our nakedness and wretchedness can stand before you, and in such acknowledgment will always go further until we are fully convinced that our sins are forgiven and covered, and call confidently with the words of a poet: You poor sinners, come in large numbers, come hurrying. Awaken you who are weary and heavy laden and see that the Lord's heart opens for all who in repentance and pain acknowledge their need. It says He receives sinners, therefore come to Jesus. He can and will save you and enfold you – come crying in true repentance and in faith fall at His feet. He will have pity on you.

A shepherd does not forsake a little lamb that has been trapped in a deep gulf. He seeks it with longing and leaves the ninety and nine in the wilderness in order to retrieve that one. That's how the dear Jesus Christ seeks the lamb that is lost until He has found it. Oh, let yourself be found by the Lord. Come to Him, he gladly helps you. Now the hours of grace are still here.

Jesus, your love is great. I come weary, poor, and destitute – let me find grace. I am a sheep that has gone astray from you, having been absent from you. Oh let me return again – take me good shepherd, make me free from the curse and the ban. That Lord, is my desire. Let me be your lamb; you alone be my dear shepherd in life and in death. That Lord is my desire. I will be your lamb eternally. You alone my dear shepherd in life and in death. Let me depart from the world, and as God's child go into life and inherit your heaven. I want from now on to deny the lust of sin until my grave. In the new life I wish serve you in the brief time granted me. Oh take your poor little dove and let it be safe in you - hid in

the cleft of the rock. Keep me from the work of sin, and give your Spirit's strength for the body and the soul. Amen!

If that is our mind and will, beloved brother and sisters, we can come humbly and in faith and take. Nothing will be withheld by our heavenly Father, and our heavenly Father will not be stingy. No! He knows what we need, and His dear Son, our highly promised Savior and Lord has given us the promise: he who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and the one who knocks it shall be opened unto him.

Oh God, seal these humble prayers in all our hearts and let us at all times keep in mind our vows, and be gracious for Christ's sake Amen in Jesus name! Amen!

Now I recall the words of warning which I have spoken with great imperfection. I have seen it as God's Word and don't want to consider it as trifling. The honest one will eventually succeed, be eternally happy, blessed, and saved. Yes, this can be a comfort for us all, and for me especially, since I am the one who is to lead, and to warn us, and to emphasize that one thing which is so very necessary: to strive for the way of the cross. For only those who strive have been promised the victory - the eternal crown of life. In this confidence that has great reward. I can do no other than be obedient and become subservient, and upon the Word of the Lord, "I will not fail you nor forsake you." Joshua 1.

I comfort myself with this, and recommend myself, a poor and weak servant, that you remember me with intercession at the throne of grace, so that it will be given to me to speak the words of the cross with joy, and as I open my mouth that I make known the mystery of the gospel whose servant I have become. Yes, and pray that I will be happy and courageous in it.

Next, we are obligated according to the admonition of Paul, to pray and to make intercession for all people and for all government so that the Lord may give them peace-loving hearts. We therefore, may be under their protection as obedient subordinates, and live our faith before those who have erred from the truth, and have hardened and unrepentant hearts. We are obligated to pray to God to ask whether He would want to strike down with the hammer of His Word, so that they would turn around and repent.

Peter Neufeld of Neukirch

Which Peter Neufeld? And (more importantly) which Neukirch?

Two biographies written in tribute to Delbert Plett by Henry Schapansky, British Columbia

Peter Neufeld (12.11.1697-17.8.1769)

Families of West Prussian origin whose ancestry go back to the 17th century, with relatively complete documentation to the present day, are not altogether very common. One such family, well-researched and documented by Delbert Plett, is that of Peter Neufeld (12.11.1697-17.8.1769) of Neukirch.¹

This is indeed an interesting and important family, whose members played leading roles in the cultural and economic life of the Russian Mennonite settlements, and the descendants of which can be found throughout the United States, Canada, elsewhere.

There are, nevertheless, some unresolved questions relating to Peter Neufeld, the patriarch, which require further clarification. The family records, gathered and researched by Delbert, indicate that Peter Neufeld lived at Neukirch, that his son Gerhard lived at Hege-wald, his son Hermann at Junfer, his daughter Katherina (and Peter's widow Katherina) at NeuteichHinterfeld, and his daughter Anna at Reinland.

Neukirch, at least the one normally associated with West Prussia, was located in the extreme west of the Grosses Werder, whereas all the other place names above are in the north-east portion of the Werder. This indicates that the Peter Neufeld family may have been widely dispersed.

Now, just as there were several Peter Neufelds existing at that time, so too, place names were often duplicated. For instance, there were two Rosenorts, one in the Grosses Werder, and one just across the river in the Kleines Werder. There were also two Neukirchs relevant to this discussion, the larger well-known Neukirch, in the west, near the Vistula river, the other, the often forgotten Neukirch, in the east, across the Nogat river in the Kleines Werder near Ashbuden (the region is marked the Neukirch Niederung on some old maps). The two Neukirchs are in fact very far apart.

It is the smaller Neukirch which was the home, I believe, of Peter Neufeld, the patriarch. This idea has an immediate intuitive appeal, implying that Peter Neufeld's children lived in close proximity to their ancestral home. Is there evidence to support this claim?

Experienced family historians are aware that the West Prussia Lutheran and Catholic church records, when containing dated references to Mennonites, often lag behind by a few days what is generally believed to be the correct date. The reason for this is quite simple. In some districts, the Mennonites were pressured into reporting vital statistics to the locally recognized church, and more importantly, paying the required fee. That Mennonites often failed to do so is not surprising, nor that the date(s) were recorded inaccurately and late. After all,

the correct data was entered in the Mennonite church records themselves.

Sometimes, however, the other church records are all that exist today, and are therefore used by family researchers. Many of the dates used will lag 2-4 days behind the correct dates, and Mennonite church records, where available, are always more accurate. In Peter Neufeld's case, there are two such references in the Lutheran records of Elbing/St. Annen.² These references correspond with the known family of Peter Neufeld, allowing for the lag already described.

I would like to summarize the family of Peter Neufeld as follows, using the information from Delbert's work, adding a speculation or two of my own, and indicating the Lutheran dates in square brackets [].

Peter Neufeld (12.11.1697-17.8.1769) [d. 20.8.1769, Ashbuden]

m1) X (unknown)

m2) 19.5.1750 Gertruda Rogalsky (no dates)

m3) Katherina X (16.2.1729-12.12.1806)

The widow Katherina Neufeld is listed at NeuteichHinterfeld in 1776

(single), likely living near the Daniel Fast. She came to Russia with the Daniel Fast in 1804.

Children:

Bernhard (?) (1745-1821)

m1) X (unknown)

2)m2) Katherina X (b. 1768)

Lived near Robach/ Zeyer. Came to Russia in 1819.

Peter (?) (1749-1.5.1812)

m1) Maria Riediger (no dates)

m2) Anna Gräwe (no dates)

Lived at Zeyerskampen and Neudorf.

Katherina (20.2.1751-10.8.1811)

m. 25.4.1779 Daniel Fast (14.12.1752-3.9.1829)

Came to Russia in 1804.

Anna (21.3.1752-20.2.1753) [a daughter, d. 22.2.1753]

Anna (7.8.1753-15.3.1836)

m. Dirk Wiebe (b. 1764)

Came to Russia in 1803.

Johann (3.12.1755-24.3.1763)

Gerhard (17.1.1758-6.1.1817)

m. Eleonora Neufeld (b. 1762)

Came to Russia in 1803.

Hermann (3.8.1760-10.12.1835)

m. 30.10.1785 Susanna Boschmann (29.1.1763-11.8.1841)

Came to Russia in 1803.

Barbara (6.2.1763-10.12.1771)

Gertruda (4.2.1768-3.3.1768)

This conclusion as to the real home of Peter Neufeld, does I think, assist in understanding the family background, and in searching for new information. It would indeed be wrong to look at the opposite end of the country for additional clues. Undoubtedly, as well, the above list of children may not yet be complete.

A New Plett

A new Plett? Well, perhaps not. The Plett in question is in fact perhaps one of the oldest Pletts connected with the Mennonite Plett family, and with the patriarch Johann Plett. The evidence regarding this new Plett is almost entirely circumstantial. Had there been stronger evidence, the unbounded energy of Delbert would undoubtedly have uncovered it.

As this material is almost entirely deductive, I would first like to tell the story as I see it, and later give the circumstantial evidence.

Johann Plett (no dates) the patriarch, was listed in the 1776 census with 3 sons, and 6 daughters.³ He was of middle-class economic status, which meant exactly what it does today, rather well-off. No doubt, he was a man of influence and status within the Mennonite community. Elisabeth Plett (b. 1757) may have been his eldest daughter. Although she may not have had any surviving children herself, she played a role in the continuation of the Plett name which deserves to be remembered.

The 3 sons of Johann Plett were as follows.

—Michael (16.3.1761-8.3.1836)

—Johann (1765-25.3.1833)

—Heinrich (1.9.1769-7.10.1843)

The 6 daughters were as follows:

—Eliesabeth (b. 1757) [my deduction]

—Sara (15.10.1759-24.1.1813)

—Helena (b. 1763)

—Anna (23.2.1766-27.11.1807)

—Maria (b. 1767)

—Margaretha (b. 1771)

As well, an additional daughter, Katherina, was born 1777, however, she would not have been in the census.

We know from Delbert's outstanding work, The Johann Plett Family Saga, that son Johann had a troubled early life.⁴ He may have been somewhat rebellious and did not get on well with his father. He married three times, and his second wife was not a Mennonite, although she was in fact accepted into the Mennonite church in 1786. From his second wife, he had at least 4 children, namely, Johann (1788-1820), Elisabeth (b. 1790), Michael (b. 1792), and Katherina (no dates). Johann had joined the army at some time, and his economic problems may not have been unimportant. When the Mennonites again began thinking of emigration to Russia, it seems that Johann and his older

sister got together, and for whatever reasons, the older children, Johann Elisabeth and Michael were to go to Russia with Elisabeth and her husband Nicholas Friesen. And indeed they did go along with Nicholas and Elisabeth Friesen to Russia.

In the early Russian years, Nicholas Friesen died. Elisabeth then remarried Wilhelm Wiens (1748-1833) who had come to Russia as a widower. Wiens' first wife, Elisabeth Dyck (1752-5.4.1799), had died in West Prussia before the immigration. Wilhelm and Elisabeth Wiens lived at Orloff, Molotschna, where they are found in the 1808 list. Of the Plett children who came to Russia with Elisabeth and her first husband, Johann was living at Halbstadt, Molotschna in 1808 with his wife Gertruda (née Epp) (b. 1785), and Elisabeth was with her uncle Michael Plett at Halbstadt, Molotschna. Michael may have died young. The (youngest?) daughter Katherina (who remained at home) was poorly treated by her step-mother, Johann's third wife, and ran away from home. In later years, son Johann (1765-1833) also came to Russia (1828), and from Delbert's account, the

step-mother who accompanied her husband, suffered extreme pangs of remorse over her treatment of the unfortunate Katherina.

Such then is the story as I have reconstructed it. The supporting evidence includes the following. Firstly, we know from Delbert's account and fragments of information from the prior generation, that the name Elisabeth was prominent. Elisabeth may perhaps have been the name of the patriarch's mother, or possibly, wife.

Secondly, Peter Rempel's book which compiles a partial list of Russian immigrants from official documents, lists the family of Nicholas Friesen, wife Elisabeth, children Johann, Elisabeth, and Michael.⁵ Now the dates in Rempel's book are notoriously inaccurate. This may indeed be the fault of the source documents themselves, rather than of the author/compiler. Adjusting the ages, by 2 years, of all the family members, gives the ages recorded above. It also gives a year of birth of 1763 for Nicholas Friesen instead of 1761. Neither date, however appears correct to me at this point in respect of N. Friesen. There

is no subsequent trace of this family in Russia. Elisabeth herself may not have had any children, excepting an Elisabeth (Friesen?) (b. 1798) listed with the Wilhelm Wiens family at Orloff in 1808.

In providing for her brother's children, she gave them a chance for a new beginning in Russia. Delbert Plett himself was a descendant of Johann Plett and his third wife.

Endnotes

1 D. Plett, *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America*, Volume VII of the Kleine Gemeinde series (Steinbach, MB: Crossway Publications, 2000), 339-379.

2 Glenn Penner. Mennonite Deaths in the Evangelical Church records of Elbing St. Annen manuscript.

3 B.H. Unruh. *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Östwanderungen* (Karlsruhe, 1955).

4 Delbert Plett. Johann Plett; A Mennonite Family Saga (Steinbach, 2002).

5 Peter Rempel, *Mennonite Migration to Russia, 1788-1828* (Winnipeg, 2000), 75.

Joseph Nowitzky, the Jewish Mennonite

Tim Janzen, Portland, Oregon

In 1999 I was contacted by Edith Fransen of Waltrous, Saskatchewan regarding my Peters ancestry. Edith had discovered that her sister-in-law Martha (Rempel) Fransen of Sherkston, Ontario was distantly related to me after reviewing information about my ancestry which I had placed in the Grandma Mennonite genealogical database. Edith, Martha, and I began exchanging information with each other about our families' ancestry at that point. Prior to being contacted by Edith I had no concrete information regarding the ancestry of my great great grandfather Jacob Peters (b. 9 Jul 1823) or his wife Helena Bergmann (b. 3 Dec 1826).

Martha Fransen shared with me a copy of an Ahnentafel (ancestral chart) that had been created by her brother Alexander Rempel in 1942 that includes information about our mutual ancestors, Jacob Peters and Helena Bergmann. This Ahnentafel was likely prepared from information that Alexander Rempel gleaned from family records and from Chortitz Colony Mennonite church records. A portion of this Ahnentafel is reproduced below.

The Ahnentafel identifies Joseph Nowitzky (b. 5 Feb 1776, d. 13 Feb 1844) as a grandfather of Helena Bergmann. I knew very little about Joseph Nowitzky when I first received this information, but my interest in him was sparked by the following story that Martha Fransen sent to me. It was written by Heinrich A Dyck (b. 20 Nov 1906, d. 1985) of Warman, Saskatchewan. In 2001 this story was translated from German into English by Jake Wiens, Winnipeg, Manitoba and has been slightly edited. I have also added some information in brackets that does not appear in the original document.

A short description of how we came to have a Jewish great grandmother
by Heinrich A. Dyck.

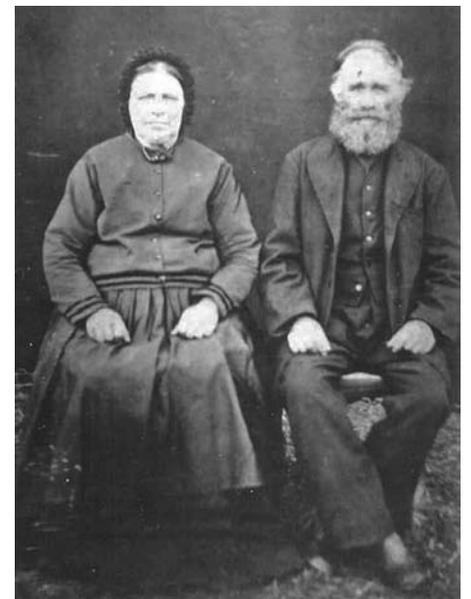
A Heinrich Dyck was born in Prussia in 1754. When his parents emigrated to Russia he went along. It happened that Heinrich Dyck married and settled down to make a home in that so-called Russia.

At that time a businessman lived there by the name of Joseph Nowitzky. He sold cloth and whatever else was involved with this. Since his sales territory stretched over a wide area, he looked for places where he could stay for night. He found such a place by Heinrich Dyck. From here he went from place to place to bargain, as it is said today. The reason he stayed for night in such places was because it would take too much time to go home every night. It would take too much time, and he would not sell as much.

One day Joseph Nowitzky come again. He had a child with him - this had not happened before. These people took both of them in, in a friendly manner and welcomed them since they were very hospitable people. They could stay overnight and eat with them. He was also asked why he had the child with him, since it is so cumbersome to have a child along all the time. He gave them the reason. "Look, dear people, my wife has died and I cannot leave my daughter (her name was Maria) alone. That is the reason."

The next morning he asked the Heinrich Dycks if it would be possible to leave the daughter with them while he was making his usual sales trips in the area. When finished he would come and take his daughter home again. (The writer of this story does not know the

distance to his home.) However, while on his business travels the thought struck him - would it be possible to leave Maria with the Dycks permanently? When he had finished his rounds he came back to the Dycks. The next morning he asked the Dycks whether it would be possible to leave Maria with them. This was discussed and agreed to. Joseph then drove off in a joyful mood, knowing that his child was in a good place. He came back as before, but since his daughter was here, he had a very close bond to



Jacob Peters (b. 9 Jul 1823) and Helena Bergmann b. 3 Dec 1826). Photo courtesy of Heinrich Mantler of Bielefeld, Germany.

this place. However, one other thing has to be mentioned. The Heinrich Dycks insisted that she come along to church. This was done. Maria always went along, listened to the sermons, and was happy to do this, even though she was a Jew and did not understand everything. However, with time she understood more and more.

Maria matured, became older, and reached the age where she had to go to school. She was a diligent student and thus the teachers and the people were satisfied with her. Maria did not stop with her school years. O no! She grew up to be a fine young lady. When she reached the age where it was time to be part of the church membership procedure, she decided to take this step with the help of the Dycks. Joseph, Maria's father, came again and again to visit Maria. When the membership classes were completed Maria asked to be baptised. When father Joseph came again after Maria was baptised, Heinrich Dyck said to Maria she should come to him. She was obedient and came. Then Dyck said to Maria that she should tell her father what she had done. Maria did as Dyck had asked her and told her father Joseph what she had done - that she had been baptised. Her father was displeased, spat in his child's face, and said, "From now on you are no longer my daughter!" He drove away and never came back again. One can imagine how Maria felt about this!

Maria was not the only child in the family. O, no! These Heinrich Dycks had their own children. (The writer does not know how many.) However, there was a Peter among them. When Maria Nowitzky came to the Dycks, Peter felt sorry for Maria and had sympathy for her. Who would not have had sympathy for her? When the time came, that they were of the age for each of them to choose whom they wanted as a partner for life, Peter chose Maria. He took her as his wife. (The writer does not know the date and year when this happened. He hopes to find it.)

The dear God blessed them with 6 children

Aron Peters, geb. 2.2.1783, Kopf. Mennonit Helena, geb. 1771, Kopf. Mennonit Copuliert den 20.10.1809.	Anna, geb. 1771, Kopf. Mennonit Peter Stamm, geb. 1766, Kopf. Mennonit Copuliert den 6.9.1832.	Anton Bergmann, geb. 1.4.1801, Kopf. Mennonit Fushina, geb. 18.4.1803, Kopf. Mennonit Copuliert den 28.8.1824.
Jakob Peters, geb. 9.7.1823, Kopf. Mennonit Helena, geb. 3.12.1826, Kopf. Mennonit Copuliert den 29.12.1846.		

- Peter, Jacob, Heinrich, Johann, Helena, and Katharina. After Maria Nowitzky died, Peter Dyck looked for another wife and found Maria Regier. From this marriage another 2 children were born - Barbara and Abraham.

From this we conclude that Heinrich P. Dyck comes from the first marriage. He was born April 8, 1832 and married Maria Epp, born August 23, 1833. They were married on October 15, 1853. Unfortunately the writer does not know where this marriage took place. These Heinrich Dycks are my grandparents. Thus we can see how we came to have a Jewish great grandmother.

This is how Heinrich A. Dyck [b. 20 Nov 1906, d. 1985] told the story, and it is how his father Heinrich H. Dyck [b. 21 Jun 1878, d. 1962] had told him. This story was written by Heinrich D. Dyck [b. 2 Nov 1905], a cousin to Heinrich A. Dyck of Warman, Saskatchewan. He is a son of Abram H. Dyck, who was born February 6, 1880.⁷

In recent years many documents that are stored in the Odessa Regional State Archives in Odessa, Ukraine, pertaining to Mennonites, have been microfilmed.¹ Copies of these microfilms are available at many major Mennonite archives. Various documents found in these microfilms mention Joseph Nowitzky and his family. The first mention of Joseph Nowitzky I have been able to find thus far in records of any type is in the List of Single People and Families who were not Landowners in the Chortitza Colony, which was compiled on 25 April 1801.² In this list Joseph Nowitzky's family is listed in Neuenburg as follows: Josep Nowitzki, his wife Hellena, his son Heinrich, and his daughter Hellena.

The next appearance of Joseph Nowitzky and his family in early records is in the September 1801 Chortitza Colony Census, where he is listed at Chortitza #32, a homestead said to be owned by Herman Neufeld.³ The following is the September 1801 Census data for him: Joseph Nowitzke, age 26; wife Helena, age 25; son Heinrich, age 2; and daughter Helena, age 4. The census indicates that he owned 2 horses, 10 cattle, and 1 wagon. The birth of Joseph Nowitzky's daughter Christina is recorded in the 1801 Chortitza Colony Vital records as having occurred in the village of Chortitza in October 1801.⁴ In the 1802 Chortitza Colony Homestead (Feuerstellen) List, Joseph Nowitzky is listed at Chortitza #31, where he is said to have been given the homestead after the death of Herman Neufeld, who previously received it from Heinrich Dyck.⁵

In the 1803 Chortitza Colony Heads of Households List, Joseph Nowitzky is listed as residing at Burwalde #6, where his name is spelled as Josef Nowitzki.⁶ In May 1805 his homestead in Burwalde was transferred to Johann Harms.⁷ He is not listed in the 1806 Chortitza Colony Census, likely because he did not own a homestead in 1806. In March 1807 he requested a passport to leave the Chortitza Colony to work as a miller at a water-powered mill in Fedorovka.⁸ In October 1814 he was arrested by the Ekaterinoslav city police for not having a written residence permit.⁹ In December 1814 he was given a three month passport to

go to with his business partner Johann Peters to Ivanovka, Lgov District, Kursk Province to help make butter and cheese for Highness Bariatinsky.¹⁰

In the October 1816 Chortitza Colony Census, Joseph Nowitzky is listed in Neuenburg among the landless families. The following is the October 1816 Census data for him: Joseps Nowiezky, age 49; wife Helena, age 38; son Heinrich, age 18; daughter Helena, age 17; daughter Cristina, age 13; daughter Catarina, age 9.¹¹ It should be noted that this census incorrectly gives Joseph Nowitzky's age as 49, when in reality he would have been 40 in October 1816. His daughter Helena's age as given in this census is also somewhat inconsistent with her age as given in the 1801 Census. In the Orphan Office (Waisenamt) records compiled January 16, 1820, Joseph Nowitzky is listed as being a resident of Neuenburg and is stated to have borrowed 30 Rubles, 14 Kopeks from the Waisenamt.¹²

The available documents give us some insight into the movements and activities of Joseph Nowitzky, but do not tell us everything we might be interested in knowing about his life. Heinrich Dyck's story, as noted earlier, seems likely to be a somewhat fanciful, and at least partially incorrect, account of what actually took place. The story suggests that Joseph Nowitzky was a Jew, but it also suggests that he never became a Mennonite. However, in all of the available documents from the Odessa Archives Joseph Nowitzky is referred to as being a Mennonite. It seems improbable that his ancestors were Mennonites given that Nowitzky is not a Mennonite surname found in Prussian Mennonite church records. No other Nowitzky family that was Mennonite has been yet identified in any early records. The information that Joseph Nowitzky was of Jewish ancestry as given in the story written by Heinrich Dyck above seems likely to be true. It seems probable that Joseph Nowitzky became a Mennonite sometime before early adulthood. His wife Helena Boschmann was likely of Mennonite ancestry since Boschmann is a Mennonite surname.

Heinrich Dyck's story says that Joseph Nowitzky's wife died while his daughter Maria was still a child. However, Alexander Rempel's Ahnentafel states that Helena Boschmann didn't die until 1858. While Joseph Nowitzky could have been married to someone else who died prior to when he married Helena Boschmann, this seems improbable given that no daughters named Maria appear in Joseph Nowitzky's family in the 1801 or 1816 Censuses. Maria may have been born after the 1816 Census was compiled, or it is also possible that she wasn't listed in Joseph Nowitzky's family in the censuses for one reason or another. The precise identity of Maria Nowitzky's husband Peter Dyck and his father Heinrich Dyck has not been determined up to this point. The above story says that Heinrich Dyck was born in 1754, but no Heinrich Dycks known to have immigrated to the Chortitza Colony were born in 1754.

Joseph Nowitzky may well have been a traveling cloth salesman as suggested by Heinrich Dyck's story. However, the story about him

spitting on his daughter Maria and abandoning her after she was baptized into the Mennonite church seems likely to be untrue given that Joseph Nowitzky is himself referred to as having been a Mennonite in many early documents mentioned above.

No information has yet been uncovered concerning the ancestry of Joseph Nowitzky or of his wife Helena Boschmann. In the West Prussian Land Register of 1772-1773 there were a number of families with the surname Nowitzky and Nowatzky listed.¹³ Perhaps he was related to one of these families. Hopefully, additional information about Joseph Nowitzky and his ancestry will come to light in the future.

The following is a summary of the genealogical information currently known about Joseph Nowitzky and his family:

Joseph Nowitzky (b. 5 Feb 1776, d. 13 Feb 1844) married on 18 Sep 1798 Helena Boschmann (b. 12 Jun 1777, d. 28 Feb 1858)

Children:

1. Helena (b. ca 1797) married Peter Harder

2. Heinrich (b. ca 1799)

3. Christina (b. Oct 1801 in Chortitza, Chortitza Colony, South Russia, d. before Nov

1803)

4. Justina (b. 18 Nov 1803, d. 7 Apr 1867) married on 28 Aug 1824 1. Anton Bergman (b. 1 Apr 1801, d. 23 May 1832)

married ca 1833 2. Peter Peter Wiebe (b. 26 Oct 1808, d. 1 Jan 1855)

5. Katharina (b. ca 1809)

6. Maria married Peter Dyck

This article is dedicated to Delbert Plett (b. 6 Mar 1948, d. 4 Nov 2004), who encouraged me to write an article about Joseph Nowitzky when I visited with him in 2002 and 2003. Delbert was a strong supporter of my research efforts in Mennonite genealogy and I am indebted to him for all he did to disseminate Mennonite historical and genealogical information.

Endnotes

1 Tim Janzen, "Recent Microfilm Acquisitions from the Odessa Archives and Related Mennonite Research", *Journal of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia International*, Vol. 26, No. 3 (Fall 2003), p. 17-19.

2 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 92, p. 2 (microfilm frame #5).

3 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 67, p. 8 (microfilm frame #170).

4 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond

6, Inventory 1, File 65, p. 34 (microfilm frame #47).

5 Benjamin H. Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Karlsruhe, Germany: Heinrich Schneider, 1955), p. 247.

6 Unruh, *Die niederlandisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe*, p. 213.

7 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 201, p. 70-72 (microfilm frames #143-147).

8 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 356, p. 29 (microfilm frames #39, 40).

9 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 879.

10 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 607, p. 186, 187. Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 919, p. 25, 26 (microfilm frames #41-43).

11 October 1816 Chortitza Colony Census; transcription on file at the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Fresno, California.

12 Odessa State Regional Archives, Odessa, Ukraine; Fond 6, Inventory 1, File 926, p. 329 (microfilm frame #572).

13 West Prussian Land Register 1772/73; transcribed by Rueben R. Drefs; published 21 Jun 1999 by the Odessa Digital Library online at <http://pixel.cs.vt.edu/library/odessa.html>; data downloaded in 2001.

Abram Schroeder (1880-1960)

Ray Schroeder, Steinbach, Manitoba

Abram Schroeder exemplified the life of a solid conservative Chortitzer. He was raised in the pioneer atmosphere of the post-migration period of the East Reserve, Manitoba, and died in the modern post-World War Two era. His lifespan saw unprecedented change and yet he retained a consistency and ease that withstood the challenges and pressures of his time. He was active in his community and exhibited the desired traits of charity, decency, and prudence. His entire lifetime was spent within a few miles of where he was born. Not a worldly man, Abram appreciated the simple things in life and yet he did a remarkable amount of work to make sure his fellow citizens could live reasonable lives within that world. His story is simple but in no way ordinary.

Abram Schroeder was born to Gerhard and Margaretha (Penner) Schroeder on December 6, 1880 in Eigenhof, East Reserve, Manitoba. His parents had both been previously married and Abram thus had half-siblings on both sides. Abram's father, Gerhard, had previously been married to Anna Harder (1848-1876) with whom he had two sons, Johann (1870-1956) and Franz (1872-1971). Abram's mother, Margaretha, had previously been wed to Jacob Doerksen (1836-1873) which led to the birth of six children (Jacob, Margareta, Katarina, Helena, Maria, and Heinrich). Both previous unions produced children only in Bergthal Colony, Imperial Russia. Margaretha's husband died in Russia and Gerhard's wife died shortly after homesteading in Manitoba. Consequently, Gerhard and Margaretha married shortly after their arrival

in Canada, most likely in 1876, and had five children: Gerhard (1877-1858), Peter (1879-1906), Abram (1880-1960), Anna (1882-1935), and Aron (1886-1936).

Abram Schroeder grew up in Eigenhof, Manitoba, under fairly extraordinary circumstances. His father, Gerhard, was an ambitious and able man (Gerhard's biography is located in *Preservings* No. 19, 2001, pp. 93-97). While financially well-off and politically connected, Gerhard was also very demanding. Those under his charge were careful to avoid his stern approach to business and family life. Abram grew up in this context alongside his siblings and half-siblings. In essence, three groupings of children co-existed on the yard for some time before the elder children moved on to begin their own families. Abram's half-brothers Johann and Franz played important roles in his life. Johann was a minister and the two of them worked together for the bulk of their lives as members of the church ministerial (Lehrdienst) as well as brothers and neighbours. Franz and his sons, Gerhard and Franz, also kept family relations alive. Abram maintained good relations with his half-siblings on his mother's side as well and even had two of the Doerksen sisters living on his property for some time. An apparent rift in later years created some tension between the remaining Doerksen siblings and the Schroeder family. The rift demonstrates the very human element of these ostensibly humble and religious people.

Abram had four full siblings. A brief outline for each is included as they relate to Abram's

life. His eldest brother, Gerhard, remained a bachelor. He was briefly a school teacher at Ebenfeld and later dealt a fair amount with accounting and investment interests. Gerhard lived on the original homestead until his death. He died penniless and his brother Abram en-



Abram and Maria (Funk) Schroeder around 1910.

sured that Gerhard received a proper casket and headstone. Some of the rift that developed with the Doerksen family had to do with Gerhard's financial circumstances. Abram's second oldest brother was Peter, who married Maria Stoesz in 1901. Peter was a hard worker and gained notoriety in a horrific fashion. He was a powerful man and one day he tried to lift a heavy object which caused an internal rupture from which he later died. Peter and Maria had four daughters all of whom married and had families in the Hanover area. The existing families are the children of Maria and Cornelius Friesen: Margaretha and Heinrich Hiebert, Agnetha and Johann Friesen, and Anna and Jacob Neufeld. These families and their offspring kept considerable contact with Abram and his family. Abram had only one sister, Anna, who in 1908 married Abram Dueck. They had four children and also stayed in contact with Abram. Part of this family moved to Paraguay in the post-World War Two emigration from the East Reserve. Abram's youngest brother, Aron, was mentally challenged but functioned as a farm hand. All five of these siblings are buried in the Randolph cemetery though Peter's gravestone cannot be located.

Abram was educated in the traditional conservative Chortitzer system that is readily discussed in many *Preservings* issues. He was therefore literate and well versed in scripture. His diaries contain the typical markings of this time frame: they are neat, accurate, well documented, and in a lovely script. They also suggest a sophistication in marked contrast to the sometimes unfair assessment of conservative Mennonites as backward and static. He was clearly conservative in his outlook, suggested in part by the fact that he never learned to speak English, but he was deeply involved in his community and cared a great deal about the well-being of others.

As Abram grew up, he apparently did not fit in well with his father's system of management. It has been suggested that Abram's tempo was not in accordance with his father's brisk pace. In comparing the men, their histories bear out the contrasts: Gerhard valued material wealth, power, structure, and order, whereas Abram valued creativity, duty, and patience. Both men seem remarkable, but for entirely different reasons.

On January 6, 1907 Abram Schroeder married Maria Funk (August 7, 1885 - May 17, 1951), eldest daughter of Abram and Anganetha (Kehler) Funk of Bergthal who lived at se23-7-5E. Funk descendants still occupy the original

home site. Abram and Maria may have lived on his parents' yard for some time but eventually they moved to nw35-6-5E. As late as 1910, Hanover tax roles show that piece of property under

2002, and Peter 1928-2005). They lived in the traditional house barn where their children were born. Eventually a house was built, completed in 1937, but by this time, his eldest son George had already married and established a home on the same yard. The rest of the family lived in the house until they too started to leave home for new lives with their own families. Abram farmed with his sons and worked to procure an income for his family. However, his heart was not in agriculture. He preferred to work as a blacksmith and made a number of inventions and improvements to existing agricultural implements. He was also very good at working with leather and canvas. As his sons grew older, Abram became less involved in farming and more involved in his workshop. The original house barn no longer exists but the house and Abram's last blacksmith shop still stand on the family homestead. The property is no longer in Schroeder hands.

Abram became a deacon in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church in 1926. His half-brother Johann was already an ordained minister, elected in 1910. Abram was elected the same year Peter F. Wiebe was elected minister (not to be confused with Peter S. Wiebe, the future *Aeltester* of the CMC). An important window into Abram's life is provided by the diary he kept. In actuality, it is more of a chronicle. Entries are usually made every seven days, which means they are Sunday entries. He recorded who was preaching and always recorded the scripture texts used. He made other observations, but there are no expressions of emotion or insight. Another diary, the one recorded by his nephew Johann who happened to be the son of Johann the minister, is at times more useful. The diary covers the years 1927-1954. While not explicitly revealing, Johann does provide a glimpse into what the everyday rhythm of life was like for people living in Eigenhof, Ebenfeld, and Chortitz. He also dutifully recorded where church meetings were held and what the primary topics of discussion were. A great deal of the church business was conducted in Abram's home. The ministerial had monthly meetings and they were almost always in the Abram Schroeder home. The *Aeltester*, Peter S. Wiebe, lived nearby as did some of the ministers. Abram's home was chosen not only for its central location but also because Abram was held in high esteem by his equals.

Some people have suggested that Abram contributed a great deal of his own income to help people that were less fortunate especially



This Gerhard and Margaretha (Penner) Schroeder family photo was taken around 1888. Included (from left to right) are children Peter, Abram, Anna, Gerhard, and Aron.



Abram and Maria (Funk) Schroeder with their sons (from left to right) George, Aron, Abram, Jake, Peter, Henry, Frank, and John. The photo was taken c. 1950.

his father's name but by that time Gerhard had died so it would seem appropriate that Abram inherited the land at that time. Here they raised eight sons (George 1909-1971, Abram 1911-1998, Aron 1913-1990, Jacob 1916-1995, Johan 1919-2003, Henry 1921-1999, Frank 1923-

during the 1920s and 1930s. He had inherited money from his wealthy father, and he also generated his own income so the family never had real financial woes. During the Great Depression of the 1930s, Abram contributed money and food to people. Since he was a deacon, it was partly his responsibility to ensure the physical survival of his neighbours. The church at Chortitz was designed in the traditional Prussian style and the upper portion functioned as a larder which was filled with grain, hams, and other foodstuffs for those in need. But it seems that Abram went considerably beyond his duty as a member of the *Lehrdienst*. Many older people,



Abram and Maria Schroeder shortly before her passing in 1951.

including his oldest grandchildren, fondly recall the method in which he handed out grain or other foodstuffs whether for charity or for sale. He was honest in his dealings and always added just a little more product than the deal had required. Abram was known for his generosity towards others even if it meant less for his own family though they were never threatened by hunger and privation. In this fashion, Abram stands in contrast to his own father who seemed a little more market oriented.

World War Two provided a major challenge for Abram's family. His chronicle, written in the traditional German script of the time, translates as "France and Britain declared war on Germany" for the date September 3, 1939. The entry is nearly eerie for its starkness. He gives no hint about how he felt when the war began. Certainly he retained memories of World War One and the rabid anti-German sentiment expressed in the province. The Manitoba Schools Act (1916) eventually led many families from the East Reserve to move to Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s. These were huge events in the post-World War One period and Abram would have been in the middle of the debates pointing out the merits of leaving or staying. Therefore, as war was declared in 1939, Abram must have

been aware that his community would again face devastating divisions. Threat of conscription must also have played a major role in Abram's life because he had eight sons, many of whom were eligible for service. In the events that followed the declaration of war, Mennonite churches of substantially different affiliations banded together for many meetings with each other and with the government to deal with the issue of whether to send Mennonite men to fight. Again, there is no emotion in Abram's entries. Eventually, acceptable terms were reached between the government and the Mennonites. Abram's son Abram found alternative service on the David Doerken farm. Sons Jake and Henry did service in northern Ontario, and son Johan served his time in Clear Lake at Wasagaming. After the war, many people saw the worldliness of the Canadian system as untenable, so many Mennonites migrated to Paraguay just as they had done after World War One. Many of Abram and Maria's relatives made the move, but the Abram Schroeder family remained in Manitoba. For a number of years Maria had wanted to make the move as well, but it was ultimately Abram's decision to stay.

In his later years Abram lived a simple life. He was a renowned tinkerer, but also spent much time harvesting watermelons and berries. Though he was quiet, he had a warm sense of humour and was known for his thoughtful wit. His wife was a considerable contrast to him. Maria was outspoken and liked to stay on top of what people were doing. She was a good cook and seamstress and loved to sing. As a younger woman, Maria took considerable pride in her appearance but she gave up wearing fancy clothing after Abram became a deacon. As deacon, Abram wore only dark clothing and Maria had to wear simpler fashions. Thereafter, she wore only black as was befitting her new role in the humble atmosphere of the time. Unfortunately, Maria was ill a great deal. In her last years she often sequestered herself and did not partake in meals with the rest of the family. In the last few months of her life, Maria was hospitalized in Winnipeg, and finally died of cancer in 1951. Since she had no daughters, domestic work during her illness and after her death was done

by some of the sons as well as by her granddaughters and female relatives. Her death left a void in the family, but Abram survived her for another nine years, dying August 28, 1960.

Of Abram and Maria's eight sons, only half of them married and had families of their own. George married Katarina Loeppky and they had three children. Jacob married Elisabeth Wiebe, daughter of Aeltester Peter S. Wiebe, and they raised eleven children on a dairy farm near Kleefeld. Johan married Eva Hildebrand and they raised four children on a small farm north of Randolph. Henry married Anna Hiebert and they raised four children on a hog farm south of New Bothwell. The remaining boys, Abram, Aron, Frank, and Peter stayed on the family farm until old age forced them into various retirement homes. Until the family property was sold, the Schroeder farm was a place where a great number of people stopped in on a daily or weekly basis. It appears as though people had always been made welcome when Abram and Maria were alive and even after their passing, that tradition continued. Many people stopped in at the corner of PTH 52 and PTH 206 to visit with the boys and there were often reminiscences dealing with Abram. In that manner, his reputation and memory was kept alive. Incidentally, the graveyard at Randolph is a good place to conduct Schroeder family research. Abram and Maria are buried there as are his parents, all of his siblings, some of his half-siblings, and all of his sons except George.

It is relatively easy to record what a person did in their lifetime. It is much more difficult to define a person's character or accurately capture the essence of a person without another researcher's disagreement. Abram Schroeder is one of those people who is not difficult to assess. Everyone who met him says good things about him. There are never harsh words used to describe him. For those that never met him, such reverence for a character seems exaggerated, or at the very least, contrived. Furthermore, aside from all the first hand accounts of him, old photos of him show a man that is revered and respected, but who at the same time is both familiar and kind. It is justifiable then to honour a good man whose legacy deserves celebration.



The Abram Schroeder farmstead at nw35-6-5E. The photo looks towards the northeast. At the top of the very top of the photo lies the southern boundary of Eigenhof. The road is currently PTH #12 near where it joins PTH #206.

Siberian Diary: Aron P. Toews (1897– 1941?)

An abridgement from the book *Einer von Vielen*
by Peter Pauls, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Siberian Diary of Aron Toews was translated by Esther Klaassen Bergen from the original *Einer von Vielen* (CMBC Publications, 1979), 201 pages, a biography of Aron Toews written in German by his daughter, Olga Rempel. The translated version was edited by Lawrence Klippenstein and published by CMBC Publications in 1984.

What follows is an abridgement of this translation by Peter Pauls, University of Winnipeg. Brief italicized comments have been inserted wherever necessary to link the excerpted passages.

In the editor's "Foreword," Lawrence Klippenstein states:

A diary kept during 1936-1938, the years of exile in Goltjavino and elsewhere in Siberia, provides the centerpiece for this portrait of "Aron Petrovich," as he was affectionately called. This document has a story and a significance all its own. Written in solitude, and often after long hours of toil, its entries set forth the deep feelings of a father and husband separated from his loved ones, but also [note] the daily happenings and the struggle to "keep the faith" and carry on.

In her "Preface," the author, Olga Rempel, daughter of Aron Toews, writes in part as follows:

It makes me happy to know that young people are asking about their forefathers; in order to understand ourselves as Mennonites among fellow Mennonites, we must know our origins. Only when we know about the past and apply this knowledge in the present do we receive strength to build for the future.... Solzhenitsyn presents an old truth: "Let us not forget that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (*The Gulag Archipelago*: Paris, YMCA Press, 1975, p.263). The call to live to the glory of God is valid whatever the times we live in.... May the following pages and the diary of my father be a blessing to many.

In her account of her father's life, Olga Rempel says relatively little about Toews' childhood and early youth except to point out that he "made many friends at the High School in Halbstadt" and "spoke highly...of his teachers."

Toews originally chose the teaching profession as his life's work: "After completing his pedagogical studies he went to Simferopol where he took his state examinations....

He was now ready to look for a teaching position. He found one on the David Sudermann estate at Alexeevka in Ukraine" (Rempel, p.7). This estate was approximately 25 kilometers from the town of Nikopol (Rempel, p.10).

Later he held two other teaching positions, one at Neuendorf, Old Colony and his last at Niederchortitza.

With the outbreak of World War I, Toews' life took the first of many unexpected turns. In 1915 he joined the Sanitairdienst [medical corps] along with approximately 3000 other Mennonite young

men (Rempel, p.17). Olga Rempel recalls a story her father shared with the family at this time:

On a cold day in December we received orders to go quite close to the battlefield in order to rescue the wounded. During the day we heard loud artillery fire interrupted by the thunder of cannons. We waited till dark and slowly went closer to the battlefield.

Everything was ready in the train: a dressing room with all the necessary equipment for operations such as removing bullets. All the lights had to be extinguished on the train. We disembarked and made our way to the battlefield with stretchers. Such a scene was heart-rending. The icy north wind whistled over the scattered bodies. Children, do you know what I thought of when I knelt beside a man to [see] whether he was alive or dead? I thought that he too has a mother somewhere who is praying for him and hoping that he will come home safely and well. There they lie and we don't know where to begin. I hear a groan and we hurry over to see that someone is still alive. Thank God!

That evening we found a good number of wounded who all had the same kind of abdominal wound. They had been standing, weapons in hand, ready to make a charge, when they were all hit from the side with shrapnel. Some were dead; others unconscious and half frozen. They had lain there many hours. The blood was frozen onto their torn clothes. It took hours of labor to bandage the injured and bring them to the train. The wounds had to be cleansed later inside the train. Only after we had removed the clothes and cleaned up did we see how serious the wounds were. There was something else that made the work more difficult. That was the unbearable stench of filth and excrement. Many of our medical personnel who ordinarily didn't smoke reached for a cigarette, and I did too.

Among the wounded on this particular day was a big, strong man who had a severe head wound. He was lying on the operating table after the bullet had been removed and the wound was ready to be sewn up. The doctor wanted to give him chloroform, but the man gritted his teeth and said, "Do your work doctor, I can stand it. I am a blacksmith" (Rempel, p. 19).

The period immediately following the war was a time of anarchy. The Mennonite colonies were often raided by Machno's bandits. Olga Rempel remembers her father's response to several incidents at this time:

One day when Father came home from work he saw a man lying on the path, a man later identified as one of Machno's gang. He was unconscious. Father carried him to a house and laid him on a bench. That same evening he found lice in his shirt. After a few days Father developed spotted typhoid. One night when the fever was at its height we thought he would die. Unexpectedly the [local] Jewish doctor knocked on our window [and asked] about Father's well being. When he

saw how seriously ill he was, he ran to get some coffee beans for Mother to make into a strong cup of coffee. This was to stimulate the heart.

I would like to mention another unforgettable event. Someone knocked on our door one winter evening. As Father opened up we saw Grandmother standing there in only her petticoat, a vest and a kerchief. We could hardly believe what we saw. Her face was bloody with many round marks caused by being hit with a pistol. She stammered two words, the names of her two daughters. They had become the prey of the bandits while she had tried to protect them. After that Grandmother and the aunts moved in with us. Now all the women



Aron Toews, teacher on an estate, 1909.

and children slept in one room. Father literally slept on the doorstep since bandits were continually coming around to demand things. Women and girls were in constant danger.

Naturally under these circumstances mail service was irregular. One day Father received a letter with the news of the death of his brother Gerhard. At the last minute he had joined the self-defense units (the "Home Guard" set up to protect Mennonite villages from Machno's bandits) and had been murdered by the bandits on his first scouting sortie. His wife had waited for him at home. His son Gerhard was born after his death. He is still living in Russia today (Rempel, p. 27).

Another encounter with bandits took place in the village of Friedensfeld:

It was Christmas Day, 1920. Many people had gathered in church for the service, among them Father, Mother and the two smallest children. My little brother Kolya, who was already four but still couldn't walk, sat as usual on Father's knee. The choir had just begun the first song when the people heard the sound of horses' hooves outside; through the window appeared several riders stopping in front of the school. Then the church door was flung open and several armed men rushed in, their guns pointed at the people. They shouted that the singing should stop immediately and

that everyone should be quiet because they had something to say.

A paralyzing fear gripped the assembly. Then Father got up, carried my brother over to where Mother was sitting, and went to stand behind the pulpit. In a loud voice he spoke to the people: "Let us not become discouraged; remember how our forefathers suffered for their faith. Let us not be afraid, for we are in God's hands." Then he went over to the bandits and in a calm, friendly voice asked them in Russian what they wanted.

Because of his quiet friendly manner the congregation and also the bandits calmed down. They asked for a sum of money and, after discussing the matter with Father, they agreed that a few men and Father would collect the money in the village. One of the riders accompanied them from house to house.

After they had collected the money they went back to the church, passing along the broad village street. The blacksmith had a shotgun and was unaware of what was going on. Wanting to help Father, he hid behind a bush and fired a shot. Luckily the shot hit only the bandit's horse which reared up. Father instinctively raised his hand and shouted, "Don't shoot!" Another bandit came running out of the church to see what had happened. Hadn't Father promised that no resistance would be offered? However, when the bandits realized that everything was in order and that they would get their money they settled down. God had intervened and helped. The Christmas program was resumed and turned into a celebration of praise and thanksgiving. Later at the dinner table Father showed us his hand which had taken a few pellets of buckshot. He had also been spattered by the horse's blood, but otherwise he was unharmed (Rempel, pp.29-30).

The Revolution and the anarchy that followed soon brought famine to the Mennonite colonies. Olga Rempel recalls the effects of the famine on the Toews household:

There is a saying that a drowning man will grasp at straws. That is the way it is with starving people. It is unbelievable to hear what people ate in those times: cats, dogs, gophers, hedgehogs, crows etc.

Fortunately, help eventually came through American Mennonite Relief. Aron Toews was active in distributing the food that was sent from America. It was his duty to travel throughout the region as an inspector in order to find people with the greatest need. Rempel relates one of Toews' experiences while he was doing this work:

Father told us the following about one such inspection trip: He had stopped at an old mud hut in one of the villages and knocked on the door. A gaunt, half-starved woman appeared in the doorway and in amazement asked the men what had

brought them there. In one corner of the darkened room stood a couch. Father could not believe what he saw; a child's head was sticking out of each corner of the ripped-open feather bed. They were covered with feathers and as they looked at Father with their big eyes and starving faces he thought they reminded him of birds rather than children. The woman stood there stunned. Finally she said that she hadn't known how else to keep them warm. She had long ago exchanged all bed linens and other belongings for bread. Help had

since he was the only one of the Toews family remaining in Russia. But life went on and Father struggled along. Deep in thought he strode along the dusty street from the Chortitz [train] station towards home in Rosental (Rempel, p.46).

Rempel sees the hand of Providence in these events:

But God had other plans for Father. He had had trachoma as a child and, although his eyes had healed, he had scars from the treatment" (p.44). Aron Toews, like so many of his compatriots would remain in Russia and pay the ultimate penalty for his faith.



After completion of the teachers' examinations in Halbstadt, 1906-1907. Left to right: Johann Enns, later Aeltester, Aron Toews, later minister, Johann J. Harder, and Heinrich J. Wiebe.

come at the last minute (Rempel, p. 33).

Rempel describes the importance of this food program:

According to statistics, 10,000 persons were fed daily in the Molotschna colony. I have been unable to determine how many there were [who were given this aid] in the Chortitz colony (Rempel, p. 43).

At this time Toews was corresponding regularly with his brothers in America, reporting on the famine and the plans that many Mennonites were making to emigrate. Rempel describes her father's emotions on the occasion of the emigration of his brother Heinrich:

In the summer of 1924 Father's brother Heinrich P. Toews and family emigrated. Father was not ashamed of his tears as he [bade] farewell,

On the 6th of January, 1925 Toews was ordained as minister of the Chortitz church. Rempel writes:

The decision had been made. For Father and the family this meant putting the idea of emigrating completely aside. Father knew this path would not be easy (Rempel, p. 50).

One of Toews' responsibilities at this time was to represent young Mennonite draftees in court. This was particularly difficult since Toews and other Mennonite leaders had been disenfranchised and were thus looked on with contempt by the governing authorities at that time. Rempel singles out 1926 as an especially difficult year:

During this year twenty-two Mennonite men had been executed, fourteen of them after eight months of jail. Another four died of typhoid brought on by malnourishment. In Kiev nineteen were arrested, some receiving a two-year prison sentence and three years' loss of all rights. Others were sentenced to two years of prison and a 300-ruble fine. Seemingly, after 400 years of Anabaptist existence, history was repeating itself, since our people were again experiencing persecution, suffering and death for the sake of faith in Christ. (p. 59).

This year [1926] was a troubled time for our villages. Hearts were filled with gloomy forebodings. There was talk of forced resettlement. All those who had had 60 dessiatins of land or more [were threatened with expropriation and resettlement.]

The question of emigration was frequently raised during the 1920s. Rempel cites the opinion of a visitor from Germany in 1927:

I want to come to the heart of the matter: Do our Mennonites have to emigrate or ought we rather to conclude that God has prepared a way for us in the Soviet Union? I want to say that I have held to the latter view, that we should not leave our homeland merely because of an uncomfortable system or passing difficulty. This view has been strongly [questioned] in discussions about the future of our children....Will these turbulent times help our children become strong? Only if parents

transmit to them these inner strengths by God's grace. All our material treasures have been taken. The question, "What does God want of us?" has troubled me even more. Shall we, despite everything, be brothers to the Russian people? I repeat, I am taking the question of emigrating or staying rather seriously. I have been deeply impressed by the quiet heroism which I have found among the Mennonites, especially among the teachers and the ministers (Rempel, p.61); from *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 1922)

Toews had decided to stay in spite of the deteriorating conditions. He describes the situation in a letter to his brother Heinrich in Arnaud, Manitoba:

It seems the specter of starvation which we saw in 1921 is showing itself again. All we have is some rye flour and some wheat flour for dumplings. We cannot reduce any of our debts this year; they are only growing. Isn't that the American way? Yet I see God's sovereignty in the events of the times. I seem to hear the verse again and again: "Looking to Jesus the author and finisher of our faith." In the spiritual realm many things are praiseworthy. We had a very good baptismal service and many were in attendance at communion (Rempel, p. 62).

Toews would soon experience persecution for his faith as well as starvation. Many Mennonite men were being condemned to hard labor. Rempel quotes the report of one of these men:

On a certain Sunday, when we had met for worship, the commander disrupted our gathering and forbade us to have further meetings. He wrote down all our names. In the evening we were again confronted with the threat that we would be arrested if we held any more services. So this precious hour was taken away from us (Rempel, p.62).

Rempel cites Dietrich Bonhoeffer:

The true freedom of the congregation.....is found only where the Holy Spirit, in his own power, blazes new trails [when] here on earth, from the human point of view, all doors are closed" (Rempel, p. 62).

In 1928 Toews wrote as follows to his brother Peter in the U.S.:

We have no flour for bread unless we buy it. We stand in line for hours before we get it. In one village there are 65 families totally without bread. The Red Cross is opening kitchens for the poorest and the schoolchildren. Many people eat "makucha," the waste from sunflower seeds after they have been processed for oil. However, we do not despair because we trust in God (Rempel, p. 64).

Living conditions seemed to rapidly worsen as the Communists took control. Rempel notes that in 1929 many people, especially children, died of starvation. (Rempel, p.64).

Added to this suffering was the constant threat of resettlement. This punishment was imposed on kulaks or landowners who were deemed a threat to the new regime. Rempel cites a particularly

touching example:

On a beautiful spring morning in 1930, the inevitable happened. Nature was at its best: the trees were green, larks were singing and seemed to say: Dear people, it's time to do your seeding. You were always so diligent. It's spring, the earth is warm, the winter wheat is swaying in the wind. [But] already the hayracks in the yard were waiting to take the kulaks away. They were allowed to take only a few possessions, no horses or cows. Many couldn't grasp what was happening. They had still hoped that something would intervene to change the situation. There I see an elderly, faithful farmer's wife going back into her house once more to say farewell. Here she was born, here she married and lived in the summer room with her husband. Later she became a widow and took over the farm. Now she is old and has to move to a strange place. She stands humbly watching her things being loaded. When they try to help her onto the wagon she faints. They simply place her on the straw, the driver cracks his whip, and away they go into an unknown future....(Rempel, p. 65).

The author continues:

In theory, we had religious freedom, but the publication of Christian periodicals such as *Unser Blatt* ["Our Paper"] was forbidden. Many ministers were arrested or burdened with such heavy taxes that they were forced to sell everything. Father had to sell the old house on the street and was obliged to look for a new dwelling. At that time it was definitely not an honor to have a minister as a tenant. And yet there were dear people in Rosental who rented us a few rooms in their house (Rempel, p. 66).

Olga Rempel quotes a letter her father wrote to his brother Heinrich in Canada, July 23rd, 1931:

The stormy springtime has subsided somewhat and things have become relatively quiet. We don't know where our many dear brethren have been sent. People from the Molotschna have written from Chelyabinsk. They are now to work in the coal mines after having been imprisoned for a [time]. They had to sign documents signifying that they went there voluntarily. From here 800 persons went with that group, among them seven ministers with their families. The very old and feeble, those not fit to work, were released after being in prison for a while. They were in high spirits, with no hatred in their hearts, resigned to the Heavenly Father's merciful will....(Rempel, p.68).

*Toews wrote numerous letters to relatives and friends in America. One of these letters, in which he pleaded for material support, was published in *Der Bote*. It read in part as follows:*

Until the new year we will get along with the \$5.00 the Board sent us. However, if we judge the situation correctly, very hard times are ahead [for] us beginning in February and March. I know a lot of families in all the villages who already are suffering from malnutrition and who don't know what the next day will bring. Many children from Burwalde and Lower Chortitza go begging for their livelihood. (Rempel, p.69).

In spite of these difficult conditions, Toews also continued to minister to his people's spiritual needs:

Father often walked to the nearby villages to conduct worship services or give baptismal instruction. Sometimes people going the same way by horse and wagon gave him a lift. Twice he was brought in for questioning by the police right after [a] sermon. They wanted him to promise to stop preaching. He insisted that he had religious freedom" (Rempel, p. 71).

Another example of Toews' pastoral care was provided years later by Mrs. K. Janzen (nee Pauls) who had immigrated to Paraguay. Mrs. Janzen wrote as follows:

In August 1934, my little one and a half year-old brother became sick and died. Your father offered to [conduct] a funeral service in our home. My father warned him that it was forbidden. Then your father said, "It doesn't matter to me whether I go [into exile] today or in a week. I must go regardless." So the service was held in our house behind close doors and windows with many friends in attendance. Your father helped carry the little coffin to the Rosental cemetery (Rempel, p. 78).

Such courageous actions in defiance of repeated warnings could only lead to his eventual arrest. Rempel describes that fatal day as follows:

The 28th of November, 1934, was a day the same as any other, but for father and [for] us it was a very special day. In the afternoon Mother was patching stockings. The little iron stove was doing its best to keep the three rooms warm.... Father was carving a toy for little three-year-old Theresa, his first grandchild. It was the time of Advent, and Christmas was [just] around the corner.

At twilight there was a loud knock on the door. Father hurried to the window, gave one glance, and turning around gave Mother a look that seemed to say: "This is it; the time has come." When Father opened the door and two men entered we all knew who they were and what they wanted. Slowly Father took off his old [cloth] apron and told the men he was the one they were looking for. We all had to stay inside [as] the house search began. Father had to give them everything he possessed such as sermons and other writings which they stuffed into a sack. Then the arrest warrant was produced and he was told to get ready to go with them.

Father had a loving word of farewell for each of us. Then he stepped across the threshold of his little house for the last time. But before the door closed little Theresa clung to his leg and cried out, "I won't let them take my Opa (Grandpa) away." Very gently Father released her hands, kissed her once more, and the door closed.

We all ran to the window in order to see him once more and wave to him. With tearful eyes we watched him go until dusk hid his form from our view. He didn't look around again; a completely new phase of life had begun for him. How many times he must have relived this moment in his thoughts! My father was 47 years old when he was arrested (Rempel, p.79).

From that day on, Toews was a prisoner of a police state and as such had to endure endless interrogations and torture:

At Dnepropetrovsk there were new trials and examinations in store for Father. Other means were also used [such as] lighting strips of paper between the toes, pulling off fingernails, or, what was worse, being placed in a cell with young criminals (Rempel, p. 80).

Before he was sent into exile he was allowed a few brief visits with his family. The first was with the author's youngest sister, Maria, who was fourteen at the time. Maria Toews wrote an account of this visit:

My first meeting with Father was in the visitors' room of the prison.... I was brought through the large gate into a big room which was divided in the middle by two wooden barriers. On one side stood the prisoners, on the other side the visitors. In the walkway between the barriers a guard paced back and forth. As I entered I looked for Father until I saw him coming through a door in the back. He joyfully waved his cap in the air as he approached. But, oh, how pitifully lean and gray he looked. With [his] toothless mouth he spoke encouraging words to me and asked about Mother and the family. He had been told that his family was already dead. He was so happy and thankful to hear that his loved ones were still all at home (Rempel, p.81).

The author's last meeting with her father is recalled in minute detail. She was not permitted to bring her fiancé into the prison for this final leave-taking:

It seemed strange that I had been brought into this room which was not the one normally used for visiting. What had happened? While I was thinking about it the door opened and I saw two attendants in white uniforms leading my father in. He looked weak and very ill. I flung my arms around him and felt his frail body shaking as we both broke into sobs. Was this my father? The attendants had left; only one guard remained. We could sit and talk; what a blessing!.... I told him how disappointed I was that "Jasch," [my fiancé] could not come in. I had always hoped that Father [would] officiate at our wedding. Now all I could do was ask him for [his] blessing and a few thoughts for our new life together. He gave us Ephesians 3: 14-21 which is a prayer, not for outward gifts and possessions, but for awareness of God's Kingdom and His great love.... Naturally, he had no idea that [our] marriage bonds would be forcibly dissolved after two years. That happened in November, 1937, when mass arrests were resumed with full fury (p. 82).

This last visit with her father was especially memorable for the author because he gave her his private notebook on the condition that she would destroy it after reading it. This was done but it is obvious that the author later drew on this source as well as the preserved diary and letters when she wrote this biography.

Rempel also gives an account of her parents' last meeting, based on her mother's later recollection

of the event: Aron Toews' deportation to Siberia was obviously still an excruciatingly painful memory for her mother many years later. The author describes the event:

It was a very hot day in August, 1935. A little group of people, mostly women, stood before the gate of the great prison in Dnepropetrovsk. They had been waiting there since early morning in spite of the oppressive heat. They were waiting for the big iron gate to open. A group of prisoners was taken to the Railway Station where a train was waiting to take them to Siberia. All those waiting were very anxious to see their loved ones once more, to give them one last friendly word or encouraging smile. Each woman carried a pack containing necessary items, a final token of love which she hoped to be able to give to her loved one.

Finally the sounds of shouted commands, barking dogs and coarse swearing erupted from the prison yard. The bolt was thrown back and the gate opened, revealing a troop of prisoners lined up in ranks of four abreast. Heavily armed soldiers and dogs stood guard on each side. The prisoners all had to carry a lot of baggage tied in bundles. Many had been arrested in winter and thus had all their warm clothing with them. Some had been sentenced to five, others to ten years of forced labor in Siberia.

The little group of relatives stood tightly pressed together, each person looking anxiously for a well-beloved face among the prisoners. One of them was my mother. She waved her hands, trying to attract Father's attention. Some called out the names of their loved ones but were brutally driven back by soldiers and ordered to be quiet.

Yet none of those waiting gave up hope. They remained standing on the path waiting for something to happen. Then a command was given and the troop of prisoners began to move. At my father's side was a young lad of 16 to 17 years who helped Father carry his pack. Slowly they moved forward. Those on the path kept pace with them, fervently hoping to be able to communicate with their loved ones at the station. On the way both Father and Mother prayed earnestly for grace to take all from God's hand and to be a support for each other in this difficult time. I shall never forget how Mother told us about this when she came back.

Arriving at the station, all the prisoners had to go through a barricade behind which the train was waiting. An officer called the names until all had passed through the barricade. Slowly the victims climbed into the freight cars.

Mother stood at the barricade, praying, "Lord, give him the assurance that you are there and that no one can separate us from you." Was it true or was she mistaken? Father suddenly came to the barred window, and with outstretched hand showed five fingers and spoke two words in Russian: "Ya spokoyen." (I am at peace.) A smile crossed his face and Mother smiled in return. They never saw each other again!

From that time on there were only letters and a diary. Olga Rempel concludes her personal recollections as follows:

Thus life went on for him in this distant, lonely

place, far from loved ones and fellow Christians. But his letters and meditations on the Bible were a sign that we remained inwardly united, in spite of the great distance.

Early in 1938 all our letters came back marked "Addressee moved, residence unknown." Many long months of uncertainty followed. We made inquiries at the head office of the concentration camp. A long time later, we received an answer with the news that Father had committed further crimes (a lie, of course) and had been exiled for another ten years to the remotest northern part of Siberia. In addition, he had lost the privilege of correspondence. (Rempel, pp. 84-85)

Diary of Aron Toews in Exile, 1936-1937

April 18, 1936: On April 7, 1936 I received this notebook and a somewhat thinner one with three pens from my dear friend and brother in faith, J. Wiebe. Today, praise and thanks to God, I finally have a room to myself. For one and a half years I was forced to live with other people who were inwardly strangers to me. A wise proverb [states]: "The eagle flies alone, the raven in a [flock]." Now I don't want to boast and say that I am an eagle and the others ravens. O, no! I just want to emphasize that a person who has other than animal desires and ideals needs to be alone. Incidentally, the great works by [the] great masters were created in solitude. Remember John on Patmos where he wrote Revelation and Martin Luther at the Wartburg where he translated the Bible. I thank God that I can be alone in my little room and can rest undisturbed, or read, pray and work. Today I want to write to my dear family.

April 19, 1936: Today I meditated on 1 Corinthians 13: 12b; "Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood.".... The ways God bids us go often seem dark and unclear. Many times we feel things could have been different and better. Our knowledge is imperfect i. e. incomplete. We know neither God nor ourselves. But in eternity we shall know and see. We will comprehend clearly how God has known us. Even the dark entangled paths, the shadowy valleys were necessary for us to come to God and to abide in Him. All of life from cradle to grave will be clearly shown. This is the way it had to be. Here we shall be satisfied to know that we have been known and that God loves us. There we shall know as we have been known. "So lead me Savior, day by day; on unknown ways, yet blessedly."

April 21, 1936: Today I read 2 Peter 3: 1-13, a wonderful and glorious chapter.

This scripture passage and a number of other passages inspire a lengthy meditation similar to others in the diary. Some of the entries provide interesting accounts of his life in exile. During his first months in exile, Toews served as accountant at the camp:

May 1, 1936: All day I have been in my room working on monthly records. In the evening I was



Aron and Maria Suderman Toews as a bridal couple in 1910.

invited to a banquet in the collective. It was a first of May celebration. There was soup, mashed potatoes, homemade beer and brandy, then pastry and tea. The women sang songs loudly and disharmoniously. The cook was dressed as a musician. His son played the drums; someone else played the clarinet, and later an accordion was added. The music was loud, but some of it was good. The girls performed some pretty dances. Everybody was happy....and I was too. [Yet] I thought to myself: May God be merciful to them and grant them higher ideals and deeper joys.

May 2, 1936: All day again at my worktable! Have accomplished quite a lot – Thank God. I heard the first hoopoe bird [wood hopper] today. In spite of snow and ice the messengers of spring are arriving. The snow is disappearing noticeably. Another few days like this and spring will be here.

May 3, 1936: An important day. I received lovely letters from Oli, Klaus and Mother. Will answer immediately.

May 7, 1936: I rode to Listwenaja to the G.P.U. [Secret Police] headquarters. I came home dead tired. The snow is disappearing [quickly]. The summer birds are all here. Today I saw thrushes, ducks and green plovers. Cattle are browsing on the [green] ridges. I sent several letters....

May 17, 1936: [On this day Toews reflects at length on the history of the Mennonites, their past migrations and their sojourn in Russia]: Was the emigration from the Netherlands to Holland, from Holland to Poland and Prussia, then to Russia not divinely ordered? And hasn't God planted this vineyard in a good location here?.... In the first decades has He not brought forth wonderful fruits of loyalty, honesty and virtue?.... [When] I reflect on the last fifty years of our story, of which I am a part, it seems to me that it is the vineyard of the Mennonite churches which should have rendered the finest quality of fruit, but which instead bore wild grapes. Take note that in the 1880s and 90s the passion to acquire land began, not only among the landless but especially among the rich. This passion increased from year to year till 1914. Others endeavored to acquire more by industrial means. Factories, brick kilns, stores and

banks sprang up. Our own schools weren't good enough, so our youth attended Russian schools. Non-Christian teachers obtained positions in our Mennonite schools. Simple wooden houses were replaced by brick and stone buildings, each with a smaller house and a summer kitchen nearby. One spring wagon wasn't enough – there had to be two. And, later, cars were added. [Wealth and poverty in stark contrast.] Some had one, two, and even three farms. [Others] had no land.... By 1905 non-resistant Mennonites had become landlords, guarded by Cossacks. The bank manager had placed native [Cossack] guards before the door of his idol. What's more, entire villages hired armed Cossacks to guard their possessions, their mammon. The landless workers, poor widows, and orphans remained!.... Then remember our home defense "Selbstschutz", our simple, brave Mennonites mounted on proud steeds with hand grenades and weapons, the "defenseless" in self-defense!.... Notice the bands of Machno.... The rubble heap of burned villages, mass graves of the murdered victims bear witness to what we read in v.24 [Jeremiah 5]....Our deeds follow us. It is the terrible consequence of serving God and Mammon....

May 22, 1936:.... Moses has shown us what a servant of God should be like. [Exodus 32:32] The Apostle Paul also says much the same of his people.... Those who have known God's love and faithfulness will also be concerned about the Christian church. Had the servants of God [Mennonite leaders] and the church taken that attitude, I think many things would be different....

May 23, 1936: A resolute commitment to Christ and His salvation, through faith in Him, His suffering and death, shall be more to us than wife, child and household. The meaning of this is shown clearly in the martyr stories of the Anabaptists. Even today many a one could be at home with his wife and child if he had denied his Lord.... Our claims on the Kingdom of God must be based on a profound conviction, a faith for which we are willing to die, to give up everything: land, houses, even wife and child.... We know from the history of the Christian Church that the Lord has never failed His own, and in the midst of persecution has richly blessed them. The Anabaptist refugees from Switzerland emigrated by way of Hall [a city in Austria], where they were supported by their brethren, to Pennsylvania, North America. How much more in the way of land, houses, children, etc. did they receive in exchange.... Of course, we are mistaken if we think that in living for Christ we will necessarily live better and have more possessions. Jesus never promised earthly wealth for His followers.... So when He speaks of recompense, it still means that land, household, wife and child are in His hand. He can give them to us; He can take them away.... Let us then firmly grasp the pilgrim's staff, shoulder our little burdens and know that each day brings us closer to that glorious time when tears, sorrows and cares will be no more.... Amen.

May 27, 1936: At a meagre breakfast, inspired by a letter from my dear wife:

With tears I often ate my bread,
Cried to the Lord in fear and dread.
O Lord, Thou seest my wife and son;

Their souls, dear Lord, are Thine alone.
To [the] sick and widows Thou art near,
The deaf and dumb to Thee are dear,
As where a woman cried to Thee,
Or Bartimaeus begged to see.
O loving Savior, dearest God,
Forget our tears and troubles not.
Our ardent pleas and prayers attend,
Thy Holy Spirit to us send;
And may His presence daily give
Us comfort, help and strength to live.
O Jesus, help our cross to bear,
Keep us from sadness and despair.
Dear Jesus, we would build on Thee,
And in Thee trust eternally.

In June, 1936, Toews and a number of other prisoners were suddenly transferred to another more distant location. In the June 25th entry, Toews describes a rare scene of idyllic beauty that he witnessed on the way. The scene he describes here contrasts sharply with his otherwise drab surroundings:

June 25, 1936: It was raining when we arrived at the head office at 12 midnight. After two hours we moved on to Seri, about eight kilometers further. It was still raining. There were seven exiled men on two vehicles. The road was muddy and rough. We had to walk all the way. In the early morning we drove into the wide, deep valley of Seri, beside a stream. In all my life I shall never forget this scene: On the east side of the steep slope were thousands of the most beautiful begonias, meter-high bushes of large violets and blue flowers the like of which I haven't even seen at Ariadna in the Crimea. There were also forget-me-nots, lilies, orchids, "Nasenfärber" (nose-painters) as we call them....

June 27, 1936: They woke us at 2 a.m. We walked on to Daurisk, forty kilometers away in the direction of the harbor. Our belongings were put on 23 vehicles. Only the old and sick rode. Everything went [well] till 10 a.m. Soon more became tired or had sore feet and could go no farther. I developed a pain in my left knee and so could ride for eight kilometers. After resting I could walk again till 4 p.m. There were three kilometers more to the harbor. After a rest near the big watermill we walked on, arriving at our destination at 6 p.m. However, we learned that the ship would arrive only [after two or three days]. So we had to wait. We encamped on the yard of the Sagotserno on the shore of the Yenisei. A large samovar was put up and we drank tea. We received bread for two days. Women from another village brought us eggs and milk. I chose Alexei Valtschkov as my partner and so we kept house together.

Two women from Moscow arrived and offered us their services. How little moral sense; how much shamelessness. The whole group except for four or five men and women were morally unclean and unchaste. They feel sorry for themselves. They believe in permissiveness. Their circumstances [they believe] justify everything. Egoism is the driving force. At the slightest provocation one hears swear words and abusive language. How one pities them.

June 29, 1936: At 4 p.m. we boarded a freight ship which carried coal and had two barges in tow.

We had to sit on the coal. Since it was downstream, the trip went fairly quickly, about 20 km per hour. At 11 p.m. we arrived at Krasnojarsk, but certain maneuvers held us up till 3 a.m. We were able to lie down on the pier. We stayed on these dirty gangways till July 2. Once we received bread (750 grams), but the rest of the time we had to fend for ourselves. Food was expensive. From here I sent a telegram and two cards to my family.

July 2, 1936: In the evening we boarded the large ship "Lenin." We were placed in the lower deck where there was little room. Each person had to sleep on his belongings. In Krasnojarsk we were allowed to go into town [and] also to the market place. I had to buy a pair of pants here since mine were completely torn. I had to pay 117 rubles for good pants. Several prisoners drank away their last money.

July 5, 1936: On July 4 and 5 we waited in Strelka for a freight ship to take us to Bogutshane, 350 kilometers up the Angara River. At 3 p.m. on July 5 we boarded the ship "Weinbaum." Fifty-six persons took their places on the lower deck. Our long journey began towards evening....

On our way to Bogutshane we passed four or five small villages, close to the water. Several passengers embarked. The banks were beautiful – steep rocky cliffs, 20 to 30 meters high. Then [we passed] flats with lovely green meadows. The water was crystal clear – one could see several meters below the surface to the riverbed.

July 8, 1936: Finally at about 10 a.m. we arrived at Bogutshane. After [approximately] two hours, our belongings were taken to the local N.K.V.D. We were billeted near the prison. We were to receive our papers here [and then] be [billeted in] the villages. The prison was [infested with] bedbugs and lice which I already had.... K. Wiese, a Caucasian prince, a Russian couple and I were assigned to Goltjavino.

July 11, 1936: On August 2nd we arrived in the village Saimka. It was a difficult trip with many rocky cliffs and rapids. We had to walk long stretches. I had to walk the last four or five kilometers, but it was dreadful, so many fleas and towards evening, mosquitoes. Even my net was of no use. I was tired and hungry. [Then] I noticed a woman who had bought two sacks of flour. She asked me [and a man named] Radianov to carry them to her house. [For this] she sold us eggs at half price. I paid her three rubles and ran to the riverbank to make a fire, cook the eggs and smoke out the mosquitoes. Half a liter of clabbar milk, an egg and a piece of bread [made] a good supper. Then I was tired and wanted to sleep but, alas, the mosquitoes bit [me] through the shoe-string holes. I wrapped my feet with newspaper and put my shoes on again. Then I tied up my pantlegs, covered my head with a shawl and a net and slept for a few hours. Early next morning there was tea again, two eggs and a piece of bread, after which we took to the boat for the last 30 kilometers to Goltjavino.

July 12, 1936: We arrived at Goltjavino on the 12th at 4 p.m. This village has 68 residences. We went to the village council [to ask for] lodging. The chairman wasn't there. His helper told me that they [had] no accommodation. "Go and look for yourselves," he said. We were allowed to leave

our things there for the time being.

[After I had] done this, a Russian clergyman beckoned me....and said to me: "Come with me Petrovitch." He led me to a room to be shared with another man. I accepted and made arrangements for one month – four rubles for each [of us]. But the Russian clergyman wanted his reward – some brandy. He was thirsty and since there was no vodka available, he wanted some "spiritus." [However], we found it too expensive. These Russian clergymen are all alike. What the Lord says of the Pharisees in Mark 7: 6 applies also to them.

We moved in with Karl Wiese. [Our] first discovery – bedbugs; the second – lice; the third – filth, filth and more filth. We bathed, changed clothes, went to bed and slept until the sun was high.

July 13, 1936: On the 13th I cleaned my blankets and belongings, patched my pants and tried to find work. Nothing! [Nothing to do but] wait. "The Father knows."

July 17, 1936: "As the hart longs for flowing streams, so longs my soul for Thee, O God." I can join in this Psalm with my whole heart. In a strange land, among strange people, in strange uncultured conditions where there is no appreciation for higher ideals and interests.... How my soul [cries] to God, to the living God! No news from my loved ones, no steady work, no earnings. How empty life is, how meaningless! In addition one hears cursing and obscene, abusive talk daily.

When I recall the time [when] I was still with my loved ones, the time when we could still go to church, I think of all those wonderful times of blessing: the choir songs, Bible studies, worship services, Harvest Festivals. Then I pray verse 3 of Psalm 42: "My tears have been my food day and night." And yet I know all this happens according to the will of God, the Father. What He does is good, absolutely good, and therefore I can [also] say with the Psalmist (v. 5): "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, my help and my God." (Psalm 50: 14, 15, 23)....

July 20, 1936: Today we went out to work, to pound in posts for a granary. Unfortunately, local workers had already taken over. We were offered the work of hauling stones on a boat four or five kilometers downstream, unloading them and taking them by wagon another two or three kilometers farther. We had to make our own shovels from boards.... By hauling stones you don't even earn the salt for your bread.

July 21, 1936: We gathered wood on the riverbank and [piled it up]. There were [some] large heavy pieces. A hard wearisome task. We don't know how much we earned.

July 23, 1936: I didn't go to work today. My shoes needed fixing; then I want to write some letters. My friend, Wiese, [gives me some sound advice]: "To eat in faith and not starve in disbelief."

Longing for Letters:

A letter from home!
What a comfort, what cheer!
But when there is none –
how lonely, how drear.
Far from my loved ones,

from friends so apart,
A greeting from them –
how it blesses my heart.
What joy as I languish
in sorrow and pain;
This treasure, I'll read it
again and again.
And greetings from friends!
What courage they give;
I'll never forget them
as long as I live.
My home and my friends,
my loved ones so dear,
My heart cries for longing
for you to be near.
I yearn for your sympathy,
faithfulness, love;
Forsaken, there's nothing
but help from above.

July 24, 1936: I couldn't sleep last night because of the bedbugs. This is a result of the uncleanness here. The people [here] do nothing about vermin. I have sent a letter to my dear wife.

July 25, 1936: Psalm 53: 6: "O that deliverance for Israel would come from Zion."

July 27, 1936: We sawed and chopped wood today: five cubic meters. A very difficult and unpleasant task, but I am thankful that I can work. We earned one ruble, 93 kopecks.

July 31 and August 1, 1936: Hauled cables from the riverbank to the storeroom. Hard and dirty work. They tell us we have earned well: 10 to 12 rubles per day.

August 2-9, 1936: The third week at Goltjavino. Sawed and chopped wood on the banks of the Angara from early Monday till Saturday noon. It was very difficult and unpleasant work and often I felt discouraged and disheartened. But the Lord gave strength beyond measure. At first we barely finished five cubic meters, but lately we managed six. Our wages were averaged at two rubles, 34 kopecks per day – not enough for one day's needs. Saturday we got a five-ruble coupon to buy bread. There is no money in the cash account. While chopping and sawing wood my thoughts were centered on an old friend. So today I had to think of "Schönhorst".... of the many people there, of the many wonderful blessings I experienced there....

In a lengthy meditation on Psalm 79 he writes in part:

When we think of the closed churches, we have to lament with Jeremiah: "O Lord, Thy altars are broken down." Oh, why did this have to happen? Why has the Almighty God allowed His people, His inheritance, His temple to be broken down and demolished? Whose fault is it, and what is the reason for such an event?....

We are to blame, not God the Lord. And we have to confess: our iniquities are the reason, our attitude to the God-given inheritance. Our people have fallen deeply, ethically and morally. Even during the war, or perhaps a decade earlier, this decline already existed. "Land, land, money, money, business and education" were [the] corrupt catchwords of the time. The old, staunch steadfastness gave way to a puffed-up enlightenment.

The quiet Mennonite has become a contentious faction-monger and [in part] a supporter [of] ideas he doesn't understand.... Our faith in God's defence which through centuries has protected our people, our fathers, is replaced by "Self-defence." Our youth spend their leisure in dancing and other frivolous [activities]....

With this I would say: May God restore our old congregation, our services, instruction classes for youth, our gatherings, so that we could again proclaim God's Word freely and be edified. Might He also grant that all those imprisoned and exiled could be reunited with their families; that we could again have the opportunity to bring up our children and grandchildren in the fear of the Lord. We must prepare them spiritually for worse times yet to come. May God grant this. "But we, Thy people, and sheep of Thy pasture, will thank Thee eternally and proclaim Thy glory for ever and ever."

August 15, 1936: Watchword: Psalm 91: 1-2: "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High, who abides in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to the Lord: My refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust!"

It is a year today since we left Dnepropetrovsk in a "Stolpyn" wagon and began our long journey into exile which we reached on October 17. One year has passed since I looked into the eyes of my dear wife. She stood on the platform, I in the steel-barred wagon.

When, oh when, will I see her again? When will I look into her eyes again? And yet, what grace, what wonderful divine providence that she was able to be there on that particular day! She [was able] to accompany me to the railway station, though from afar, exchange a few words with me, and say farewell. God be praised! Yes, my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust. Be Thou my shield and buckler; under the shadow of Thy wings I will find refuge. There my dear wife and children too shall rest securely. Lord, bring us [all] together to Thee. Abide in us and let us not turn from Thy love. As Thou hast been with me during this long, hard year, and also with my loved ones, and hast helped beyond what we can ask or think, mayest Thou so continue to do. Amen.

August 16, 1936: Last night and today we had a slow drizzle, dark sky; [it was] dismal outside, dismal inside, hopeless and comfortless, as if the sun doesn't want to shine anymore. How useless is a life that consists only of animal instincts and feelings. That is the way most people live here and we also to a certain degree are being forced by circumstances to think only of food, drink and clothing. We dream of freedom which can only be described on paper. It can never be realized as long as factional purposes and goals are the highest motives. Where one party rules, or a single individual, it is evident that the result is absolutism which is the greatest enemy to freedom. "If the Son shall make you free, you are free indeed." Without the Son, Jesus Christ, life would not be worth living....

In his meditation on Psalm 4:4 & 2 Corinthians 1:8-12, he asks: "Why is it thus?"

It is good if we ask this question in order to gain clarity and understanding about this matter. Psalm 4 gives us the answer: "But know that the Lord leads the godly marvelously." Not in the usual but in a special way. He leads to heights and depths, through darkness and troubles, in dangers



Aron Toews in the office of the medical train, #194, 1914-15.

and trials. Blessed is he who knows that being led "marvelously" is typical of God's children. Think of Job. God, so to speak, exposed him to the will of the devil. What calamities [befell] this servant of God as well as Paul, Peter and John. One is led differently than the other, yet always "marvelously." The forces of evil are evident also in the [lives] and experiences of God's children [today]....

Oh, how glorious and marvelous this is. The daily difficulties, troubles, sickness, crosses and sufferings about which so many of us complain, are often our redemption. [These] are the tokens of love, helping us on to heaven.

Remember, dear Mary and children, that the Lord leads his children marvelously. This is the God-given pathway and [it] is the one that is good for us, Hence the watchword: "Lord Jesus, lead us day by day./ Amazingly and blessedly." Amen.

Nov. 15, 1936: [This entry consists of a lengthy Christmas meditation.] My dear family, my beloved wife, beloved children in Christ! What does Christmas give us? To us as adults? Consider what has happened! This is the third Christmas that I am not in your midst. How many cares and problems lay before us! Remember my journey, Kolya's illness, the worries about bread and money which loomed before us like an unsolved riddle, [like] steep impassable mountains. Who was it, my beloved, that stood by mightily with counsel and deed?

When all my efforts are in vain,
I know not how my goal to win,
When all my weakness I confess,
My feeble mind and helplessness:
Then Christ, Thou art my mighty tower,
Who giveth counsel, strength and power.
His name is Counsellor, mighty God,
Who Christmas now to us has brought.

How often you and Kolya were sick; how often you were discouraged and weak. I too was

often at wit's end, powerless and depressed. One thinks that one cannot go on. But today is Christmas day, and you and I can participate because His name is the Mighty God. He can and will give us strength again and again.

Though all my inner strength has left,
My soul of all its sap bereft,
Though life's vitality is spent,

And weak and languishing I faint;
[Yet] do I feel Thy mighty power,
Fill me with strength this very hour....

Therefore, my dear ones, come to the Christ-child, for through Him you have an eternal Father in heaven who never forsakes His own.

This is the third Christmas of separation from my loved ones. Oh, how restless and disturbed one often becomes! What will the future bring? What will become of us? These questions often fill our hearts. Added to this are the mistakes, the sins we commit: the flaring up of emotions, impatience, dishonesty, indignation, dissatisfaction and many other things which rob us of our peace and cause us to be disturbed. Oh fearful heart, crushed spirit, troubled soul: Look to the Christ-child, hear the angel's song: Peace on Earth! Peace to you!

Throughout these last difficult years Toews had a staunch friend, a non-Mennonite named Karl Wiese who provided much needed spiritual support. There were other non-Mennonites whose friendship Toews recalls in his diary:

Goltjavino, March 13, 1937: [Long ago], my friend, Severin Sergi Danilovitsch, gave me a book called *Smotritie na Svieste* ("Look at the Stars"). I have forgotten who the author was, but the content of the book became very important to me. I read the book during a trip from Nikopol to Zaporozhe. Then I gave it to a passenger. Today, whenever I look at the stars at night, I think of that book.

What majesty, what glory, what godly quietude and splendor, what calmness and tranquility, what magnificence! The starry sky is surely much more beautiful here up north than [it is] in the south.

Yesterday between 8 and 10 o'clock I saw a wonderful light in the north. Above the horizon a bright half-circle rose up, crisscrossed by innumerable rays of various hues beaming up from the horizon into the heavenly dome. These lights flickered, [first] brighter, then dimmer. Finally, around the first semi-circle appeared a second and gradually both vanished. Was it the so-called *Severnoie sianie*, the Northern Lights, or was it something else? Nevertheless, it was a spectacular sight which demanded worship. Then I thought of the book, *Look at the Stars!*

Exalt Him ever, O my soul,
His Holy Name laud and extol.
Praise God, the Father, o'er again,
Let all the world repeat, Amen.
Let all the world sing thanks and praise,
And trust and serve the Lord always,
For He is worthy to be served!

Goljavino, March 30, 1937: Beloved Marusja: I wanted to fill the notebook but not with just anything. Now it is time to send this package, and I cannot think of anything else to write so I will close. Sorry about the empty pages. Pretend that they are filled with things one cannot express: with love and thanks to you and to God, the heavenly Father, and our Lord and Savior. Later, God willing, I shall write more.

Regarding the contents of the notebooks, I cannot say very much, except that you will realize that it is done with coarse unrefined stone [that] I took out of the stone quarry.

Very often I wrote by candlelight. Whenever my passionate yearnings grew too strong, my hand trembled so much that I couldn't control it. There is really nothing valuable in it, but it contains threads of thought and reflections, what was important to me; here and there perhaps also expressions of what moved me deeply.

Much has been left unsaid of that which I would like to have said, but could not for reasons beyond my control.

If you will receive as many blessings reading this as I have had in writing it, then God be thanked and praised. The Lord bless you all!

I remain in unchanging love and faithfulness,

Your old Arndt

The following are excerpts from some of the last letters received by family and friends:

June 20, 1937: Beloved friends and brother and sister Regier: First of all I wish you and your household the peace of God, health and well being in body and soul. Thanks to God I am feeling better again. Some time ago I had a cold and had to cough quite a bit. The weather is very changeable here: hot during the day, and cool at night, sometimes even [with] frost. Also, we have east and west winds because of the mountains and the great woods. Seldom do we have north winds. The mosquitoes and flies are a real plague. For instance, now all the workers have nets over their heads and wear mittens. It stays this way till winter....

The following letter was written to the author of Siberian Diary, later Olga Rempel. It is apparent from this letter that Olga's husband Jake has been arrested and taken away:

January 14, 1938: My dearest Oli! Grace and Peace! Your letter with the sad note is before me. You would like to hear words of comfort. I believe I gave you those in the letters I sent you.... Oh, how well I understand you, dearest Oli. But "patience is a virtue," to know God's will and then act accordingly. Then pray without ceasing, sincerely and continuously as [did] the prophets in the Old Testament. It is certainly a harsh blow for me too, and I walk around all day like a drunk[en] man. I am so fond of Jake, and deep down I kept thinking, "If things go hard materially, I will write to Jake, and when all else fails, he will know what to do." Also I respected him so highly, the way he cared for Mother. And your parcels, how much they have meant to me! Yet we do not want to murmur or complain, but set our hopes on God the Lord; He will do all things well.

Firmly believe that you will receive
The best the Lord has meant for you.

Perhaps they will soon come home. I believe so.... Have more young men from the village been sent to Saper- or Dneprovsk? Where are the uncles?....

My life goes on as usual. I saw and split some wood, take a walk in the woods when it isn't too cold, read or write. But when the days grow longer, I will no doubt, have to work in the woods, that is, if there is any work. There are strong, young men here who do nothing, because there is no work; yet they always have something to sell, and [they] also receive things. However, I do not complain since I have enough to live on, and your gifts will keep me till February. I do not need to be pitied, [and] yet "my weak faith goes up and down."

Excuse my scribbling, but when I am excited my hand trembles so much that I cannot control it! May God take care of you, my dear Oli! In my mind I caress your soft hair and give you a goodnight kiss: sleep well!....

Kiss Mother, the children and grandchildren. Also greet your parents-in-law and Abram, [as well] as neighbors and friends. With a warm kiss and hug for both you and the lad.

Your grateful father

In the same posting Toews includes a letter to his wife. This letter must have been written earlier, on Christmas Eve:

Dear Marusja, my dearest wife, and children! How dearly I would like to tell you all this personally – but it must be better thus, or else things would be different. On the evening of the 24th, God willing, I will have a little tree with seven candles, according to the number of....lamp-stands in Revelation 1: 12. I have invited a beggar and an exile, such as I am also.

In my spirit I will be with you, give you each a hearty kiss and say: "Seek thou Jesus and His light, for all else is darkest night.".... The big storm, "Purga," lasted two days and now there are hard frosts at –38 to –40 and [colder]!

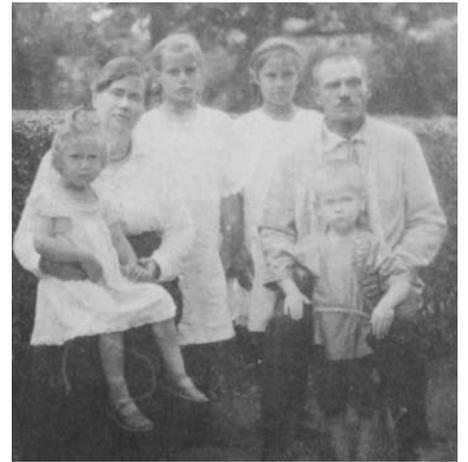
Many thanks for your Christmas presents for me! I will open them on the 24th. May God, the Lord, protect you! Yes, the Lord bless and keep you, and let His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you, and give you peace! Amen.

With a loving hug and kiss,
Your grateful father.

The following is Toews' last letter to his family:

February 6, 1938: Beloved wife and children! Grace, mercy and peace be with you richly! Mary and Oli: I would like to give you God's words which held deep meaning for me this morning: John 14:1: "Let not your hearts be troubled, believe in God and believe in me!" [Also] John 14: 27: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." [Also] Lamentations 3: 26: "It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." [Finally], Like 21: 19: "By your endurance you will gain your lives."

I believe I wrote Oli about not forgetting to be thankful. The word in Psalm 59: 20 is special: "He



Aron and Maria Toews family photo taken for an emigration passport.

who brings thanksgiving as a sacrifice honours me; to him who orders his way aright, I will show the salvation of God." Therefore, there must be a very calming strength in thanksgiving!.... Yes, even in sorrow and affliction there is hidden.... salvation; sadly, we do not always recognize [it] or find it....

Wednesday is my birthday; then I shall write again. May God protect you! Please kiss the children and grandchildren....

I enfold you in my undying love, Your Arndt.

At one point in the book, the author quotes the poem, "In the Fiery Crucible." It could serve as a suitable conclusion to the story of Aron Toews:

In the Fiery Crucible

Once more into the scorching heat,
O Master, Thy pity I now entreat.
O Father, I fear the flames of fire,
No longer the pain I can endure.

The heavenly smelter in calm repose
Is watching the fire, its heat He knows.
He blinks not an eye, and steady His hand,
As He fixes His gaze on the smelting-stand.

He tests the silver against the light,
It seems so pure, without a blight,
Yet still He sees impurities and dross,
Which cloud the mirror and dull its gloss.

Again it is bathed in the fiery brine,
In seething billows its sheen to refine,
Till the Master's reflection at last is seen
In the shining silver so pure and clean.

Then soon from the smelting-pot He takes
The silver; an elegant form He makes,
A beautiful vessel, to give with joy
To the heavenly Father to use and employ.

O Savior, through life's fiery trials I face,
When courage grows dim, sufficient your grace.
O heavenly smelter, refined in Thy love,
Present me thus pure to the Father above.

Cornelius T. "Rawleigh" Toews (1891-1972)

of Greenland and later Steinbach, Manitoba,
by grandson Jim Doerksen, Santa Rosa, California,

Family Background

"Cornelius T. "Rawleigh" Toews was the son of Peter B. (*Grote*) Toews (1859-1945) and mid-wife Anna Toews (1868-1933), of Greenland, Manitoba.¹ Peter B. and Anna Toews moved from Blumenort to Greenland shortly after 1890. In 1911 they joined the move to Needles, B.C., but returned to Manitoba the following year, settling on a River Lot west of Ste. Anne.²

Grote Toews was the son of Blumenort pioneer and *Brandältester* Peter W. *Grodtofoda* Toews (1831-1922). Anna was the daughter of the well-known delegate Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908), which made them second cousins.³

Biographical Sketch

Cornelius T. Toews was born in Greenland (or Blumenort ?). He grew up on his parents' farm on Section ? 8-6-E. After completing grade eight and spending a couple of months at Gretna's "normal school," "Rawleigh" Toews became a teacher in the Greenland area. It appears qualifications were a little slack in those days.⁴

He also did some farming which nearly all of my relatives did and many still do. He bought a steam threshing outfit with brother Peter, and Peter A. Penner. His teaching career lasted three years, farming a little longer, before his long career with Rawleighs. He even had a stint as a cheese-maker. No one seems to know why he gave up these careers, but it may be just his great urge to roam.

Since his wife Marie died at the young age of 44 in 1936, it put considerable pressure on the rest of the family. There were eight children living at home, the oldest being Alvin, age 22. While "Rawleigh" was on the road, the older children became parents of the younger ones. While this may have been a great hardship at the time, the end results turned out very good. They all became great parents and have wonderful families. What can I say, I am one of them.

Rawleigh's Dealership

Cornelius T. Toews, alias C.T., Cornelius, "Rawleigh" Toews, the Duke, Neil, and to me, Grandpa. Mostly he was known as "Rawleigh" Toews. He lived an illustrious life and was somewhat of a family black sheep, though gentle and kind. We always got along great. Nearly everyone in Steinbach, Greenland, Blumenort, Giroux, Richer, Ste. Anne, and the surrounding areas knew him because of his successful Rawleigh's business.

Rawleigh's was a huge conglomerate that

sold a large variety of wares. It would be difficult to list the hundreds of items they sold as there were so many different types of products. Rawleigh and their competitor Watkins each had thousands of salesmen and huge warehouses in Winnipeg and most other Canadian and U.S. cities. They were the predecessor to the big chains such as Wal-Mart. Before the malls and modern highways, everyone used them. Yes, Rawleighs still exists, but barely. It is called downsizing.

When "Rawleigh" Toews, the consummate salesman, drove into a yard, the children each

turncoat and went to work for Watkins. Maybe my Grandpa was difficult to work for.

Anecdotes

The story of neighbour Abe G. Toews' "still" is still (pun intended) well remembered by our family. It apparently wasn't Abe's still but he leased the land for some extra dough. This was during the depression and prohibition was still in effect in the U.S., so some easy money could be made. A lot of "booze" was manufactured in this area and shipped to the U.S. Abe Toews had an alarm system, but he eventually got caught. Maybe it was an inside job.

"Rawleigh" had a few strange quirks and one of them is mine to this date—the love of very old ripe cheese, especially limburger. My uncle Levi Barkman had proposed to Aunt Laura, "Rawleigh's" youngest daughter, and approached his future father-in-law for his daughter's hand in marriage. To this day, and that was 49 years ago, he remembers the strong smell of limburger cheese (some prefer to say his socks). I always remember how good it was, and so last year while we were near Frankenmuth, Michigan, my wife and I stopped at the limburger cheese factory. After four hours in our R.V., it was either me or the limburger. It needs to be eaten in a wide open field far away from a residence.

"Rawleigh's" daughter Annie remembers that he spoke six or seven languages and parts of others. The languages were high and low German, French, sign language (his son Alvin was deaf), Ukrainian, and English. My uncle Len has a single page document in beautiful gothic script German done by "Rawleigh", also known as C.T., when he was 6 years old. "C.T."s children, grandchildren, great grandchildren, and great great grandchildren are spread throughout

western Canada and the U.S. and are noted for their successful endeavours.

Death

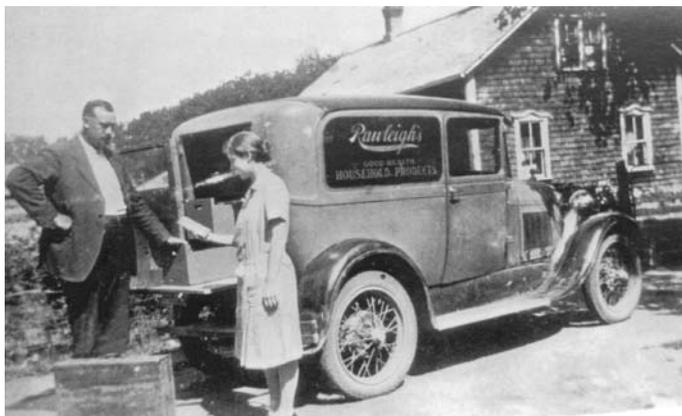
Mennonites usually have great dying stories with tragic scenes and family at the bedside etc. What about "Rawleigh"?

Anna and Grote Toews

Grote Toews (Peter B.'s) wife Anna, who was also a Toews and a second cousin to her husband, was a well renowned midwife.⁵ She kept meticulous records of many deliveries which is said to exceed over 1,000. Unfortunately, these records fell into the hands of Henry Giesbrecht and were not made available to those who wished to see them. Anna B. Toews



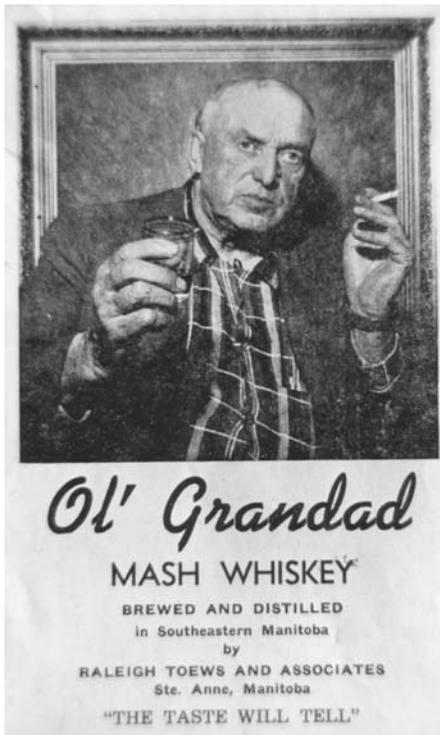
"Rawleigh" Toews selling his wares in winter.



Toews selling from the back of a car in the 1930s.

received a stick of gum. My great uncle Harry Toews remembers that "Rawleigh" Toews would extend credit during difficult times, even barter for wood or moonshine. As a matter of fact, I am writing this historical family article on a beautiful oak dining table that "Rawleigh" Toews took in trade for a customer's Rawleigh's debt.

Great uncle Harry also remembers "Rawleigh's" Model T with a self-starter. No one had seen one of these before, and it was a great novelty. In winter he used a horse drawn top *schlieh'de* (or *Kabit schliehd'de*) with a woodstove. I surely remember the great buffalo coat he wore. One time when business was going well, "Rawleigh" Toews hired a man who happened also to be named Cornelius Toews. Unfortunately, shortly thereafter, he became a



Toews advertising his products.

had 10 siblings and for those who wish to be overwhelmed with details, one should consult Chapter 17 of *Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874* by Delbert Plett.

Recently, an absolutely beautifully handwritten book of medicinal recipes by Anna, which had been given to daughter Susie Giesbrecht, has been returned to Manitoba from B.C. Hopefully, this important book, which is written in German script, will be translated into English resulting in a future article for *Preservings* by one of our family members. It appears to be written in 1892 and 1893 when Anna was 24 or 25 years old, and was probably training for her midwifery career. This book will then be given to the Mennonite Museum in Steinbach for all to see.

Siblings

“Rawleigh” Toews had eleven brothers and sisters:

- 1) Katherina, Katherina married Peter G. Toews who oddly enough was nicknamed “kleine” (or small) Toews. They farmed in the Greenland area and later moved to Main Street in Steinbach, south of the “southend” church.⁶
- 2) Peter T. took over the telephone system in Steinbach from his father Peter B. Toews and later sold it. To us “oldtimers” we understand why everyone called him “Central” Toews;
- 3) John T. farmed in Greenland, then went to work for Imperial Oil where he retired;
- 4) Jacob T. was an auto mechanic for J.R. Friesen and died at age 34.
- 5) Anna T., married Henry Penner who was my grandma Doerksen’s uncle and who was my grandma Toews’ brother and, therefore, was both my great uncle and my great great uncle.
- 6) Mary married Henry Giesbrecht.
- 7) William “Bill” T. worked for Dominion Motors, Winnipeg, a Ford dealership. He married Minna Reimer.
- 8) Susie T. married George Giesbrecht



Maria Toews, married to “Rawleigh”.

who farmed in Ste. Anne and retired in B.C. 9) Diedrich “Dick” had a successful career with the RCMP. He married Margaret Friesen. 10) Margaret died at the young age of 16. 11) Eva, the youngest who died December 6, 2000, was the state health nurse for Michigan and an advisor to the government on health related issues. During World War II she was a captain in the Canadian Army Nurses’ Corp.

Children

Son Alvin, who was deaf, married Beatrice Tisdale, and died at a young age from appendix complications. Anne married Stanley Penner and they were farmers in the Whitemouth area. Anne now lives at the Resthaven Towers in Steinbach, Manitoba. Susan, my mother, married Bert Doerksen a contractor. I call him Ethelbert. Susan was deceased November 26, 1997. Selma married Martin Barkman, a Holdeman minister/farmer, and they live in Bredenbury, Saskatchewan. Len married Mitzie Reimer and they are retired farmers in St. Anne, Manitoba. Eddy, a welder/contractor, married Ione Wilson and they are both deceased. Laura married Levi Barkman of the Barkman dynasty and they are retired farmers living in Steinbach, Manitoba. Ron married Tina Unger and they own the Home Hardware complex in Killarney, Manitoba.

Conclusion.

The extended family could be considered to be massive and would fill a genealogy book in itself. “Rawleigh’s” heritage is a colossal “who’s who” of the extended Mennonite family. I cannot possibly go into all the interesting details of my past relatives, but will only touch upon the highlights. For those who wish much greater detail, I will add footnotes. Delbert Plett’s *Saints and Sinners* contains “mucho grande” information about the Toews and I surely will not say if they are saints or sinners.

For perspective, remember this is only one small branch on my mother’s side of the family tree and should you wish more detailed historical information on Cornelius Toews

(1737-1800), then one should read Chapter 17 of *Dynasties of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia and North America*,⁷ Chapter 17 of *Profile of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde 1874*,⁸ and Part 10 of *Leaders of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Russia 1812-1874*,⁹ all by Delbert Plett, as well as *Blumenort* by Royden Loewen. Cornelius Toews’ descendants probably number in the thousands.

If anyone can help with identifications, corrections, additions, or comments please feel free to contact me at: Mr. Jim Doerksen, 7125 St. Helena Road, Santa Rosa, CA, 95404; Phone/fax: (707) 539-7004.

Endnotes

- 1 *Preservings*, No. 10, Part Two, pages 50-53.
- 2 *Preservings*, No. 8, Part Two, pages 30-31.
- 3 *Preservings*, No. 9, Part Two, page 48.
- 4 Genealogy of Cornelius P. Toews (1836-1908).
- 5 Delbert Plett, *Saints and Sinners*, page 172.
- 6 *Preservings*, No. 17, pages 89-90.
- 7 Published in Steinbach, Manitoba by Crossway Publications, 2000.
- 8 Published in Steinbach, Manitoba by DFP Publications, 1987.
- 9 Published in Steinbach, Manitoba by Crossway Publications, 1993.

Ste. Annes, 1946.

I also remember during the “great war” we got to know a Japanese family that was placed in an abandoned farm across the Seine river from Rawleigh’s farm. As I remember it, there were two boys about my age and three older girls that attracted the interest of my uncles. The Yazumatus were wonderful and friendly people and I always feel bad about not finding out what happened to them when the war ended.

We used to swim in the Seine when we were young but, of course, since the Seine River diversion, things have changed. The river no longer floods each year and one wonders if this is a good thing. My father tells me they used to install a small dam on the Seine for swimming using left-over planks from a local sawmill.



Daisy and Tommy Yazumatus with Jim Doerksen, author of this article, and his sister Jeny during World War II.

Articles

Borosenko - A Traditional Mennonite Home

Schöndorf-Nikolaithal (Nowosofijewka), Borosenko, Ukraine, Russia

Adina Reger and Delbert Plett

Introduction

Ever since my first visit to the Mennonite settlements in the former Soviet Union in 1995, I have wanted to do an article about a traditional Mennonite house-barn (although the barns were dismantled during collectivization in the 1930s and no longer exist). What I mean is, I was hoping to get an opportunity to visit and inspect the inside of one of these magnificent structures and to document such a visit with photographs. To my pleasant surprise several prize specimens are still standing in the Borosenko Colony, 30 km northwest of Nikopol. I say "to my surprise" because until recently relatively little has been known and written about Borosenko.

Borosenko Colony, 1865

The colony was founded in 1865-66 by the Kleine Gemeinde from the Molotschna and Old Colonists from Chortitza on the Dnjepr. An Old Colonist, Jakob Fehr (1859-1952), Haskett, Manitoba, wrote that "Many Old Colonists wanted to join the Kleine Gemeinde in establishing a new settlement where they could institute a better Ordnung for the Gemeinde."

The tract of 12,000 desjatien was purchased from the nobleman Boros, hence the name Borosenko. The Old Colonists founded the villages of Schöndorf, Nikolaithal, Ebenfeld, Felsenbach, Eichengrund and Hochstadt. The Kleine Gemeinde acquired 6137 desjatien for 184,110 ruble and established the villages of Blumenhoff, Heuboden, Annafeld, Steinbach, Rosenfeld, and Neuanlage, later adding Grünfeld and Friedensfeld (5400 acres) to the north and the estates Hochfeld and Sawitzky.

By the early 1870s, 120 Kleine Gemeinde families lived here, and the Borosenko Colony and surrounding area had become its heartland. In 1874-5, the Kleine Gemeinde emigrated en masse to America in 1874-5. Seven families from the village of Steinbach along the Basavluk River founded the modern City of Steinbach in the Province of Manitoba, making it one of the few cities in Canada that can claim a European community as its birthplace and direct predecessor.

The residents of Steinbach and Ebenfeld were massacred by the Mahknovsky on November 17, 1919, a tragedy documented by several articles in Preservings. Felsenbach is known for the large Froese flour mill once proudly serving the region. In Heuboden is found the stately home with its green-painted window frames featured on the cover of *Diese Steine*. Eichengrund, which belonged to the Colonists (as the German Catholic and Lutheran settlers were known), still has an elegant worship house with Gothic windows now used for storage. South, across the

Soljonaja River, are the hills from which iron ore is being mined. The 12 villages of the settlement had 600 residents (120 families) in 1915.

Vistas

The Borosenko Colony is distinguished by several striking vistas, reminiscent of the picturesque valleys and elevated plateaus of the Chortitza Colony. The traveller driving north along Highway 56 from Nikopol is encouraged to stop for a moment at the peak of the hill just before the Soljonaja River, gaining a spectacular panorama from this vantage point.¹

Humbly one stands on these heights, breathing the fresh clean air, gazing over the distant vistas, the hayfields, enjoying the aroma of the legendary region with its many varieties of flowers and grasses. One dreams about the days when our ancestors traversed these hills with their horses and wagons. Underneath to our left, the waters of the Soljonaja River weave their way among the ravines and fields severing the landscape like a silver scalpel.

Nikolaithal-Schöndorf.

After turning east, enroute from Ebenfeld or Felsenbach, the road traverses a distinct rise in elevation and then - suddenly - Nikolaithal-Schöndorf lie before the traveller, sprawled out in the gentle valley swale below. The twin villages are dissected only by a small brook meandering its way south to meet the Soljonaja River. On all my tours, the farmers in the group have been unanimous that the quality of farmland in Borosenko exceeded that of the Molotschna Colony. Nikolaithal-Schöndorf is located in the middle of some of the finest ground in the area.

Nikolaithal was the seat of the Nikolaithal Volost founded in 1872. This event had threatened the loose alliance between the Old Colonists and Kleine Gemeinde. The Old Colonists, under their leader, minister Gerhard Ens (1828-88), Schöndorf (the great-grandfather of Professor Adolf Ens and Rev. Gerhard Ens of Winnipeg), were in favour of the formation of a separate Volost for the Mennonites of the region. The Kleine Gemeinde, on the other hand, objected, as they would be obligated to serve as jurors and judges - meaning they would have to impose punishments against offenders. In September, 1871, the two Kleine Gemeinde *Ältesten*, Abraham L. Friesen, Heuboden and Peter Toews, Blumenhoff, travelled to Ekaterinoslav, to make representations regarding their concerns. A mediator-judge ruled in favour of the Kleine Gemeinde, exempting them from obligations regarding such offices. The first Oberschulz of the Borosenko Colony was a Rempel.²

Founding

Some information about the founding and early history of the village of Schöndorf is found in *The Penner Family* book by Katy Penner:

"Because of limited land available to the Mennonites of Chortitza, and the rapid population growth, many young people were left without land. Search for new settlements resulted in founding new colonies. These colonists were required to purchase their land. One of these colonies was Borosenko in 1865-66. A description of this is given by Jakob Klassen, from Blumenort, near Gretna, Manitoba, and placed in the archives by his grandson Ben Sawatsky.³ He writes: 'Together with 12 other families, my father migrated out of the Old Colony Schönhorst and purchased 800 desjatien of land for 23 rubles per desjatien, including all the properties, as well as a large number of sheep. Since the land owners name was Borsa, this new colony was named after him, Borosenko. The first year they lived communally in the existing buildings. Then they built a village and called it Schöndorf, because some of them came from Schönhorst, and other settlers came from Neuendorf. Combining the two names they came up with Schöndorf.'

"The settlers built their houses in one row in the following order: Aron Funk, Johann Funk, Jakob Klassen, (author's parents), Dietrich Rempel, Bernard Rempel, (he was the father to Franz Rempel from whom the author bought his farm), Gerhard Enns, (the author's wife's parents), Heinrich Penner and Kornelius Peters lived in one yard, each having 1/2 a farm, Aron Rempel (grandparents to the teacher, Peter Rempel), Kornelius Penner, Klaas Krahn, Wilhelm Wiebe (who is here in Blumenort, grandparents to Jakob Rempel) and Gerhard Funk. These villages had great success with their farming and were able to terminate their debt well ahead of the designated term. The former owner, through an irresponsible life style became very poor, became mentally ill, was hospitalized in a mental hospital where he was supported by the farmers from Schöndorf until he died."

"The layout of Schöndorf along one side of the street (given in 1867 and in 1910):

1867	1910
Gerhard Funk	Gerhard Funk
Wilhelm Wiebe	Kornelius Wiebe
Klaas Krahn	Klaas Krahn
Kornelius Penner	Aron Rempel
Aron Rempel	Dietrich Rempel
Kornelius Peters	Johann Penner
Heinrich Penner	
Gerhard Enns	Abram Wiebe
Bernard Rempel	Kornelius Penner
Dietrich Penner	David Loewen

Jakob Klassen Isaac Enns
 Johann Funk Jakob Funk
 Aron Funk Gerhard Funk

The Funks were related. They with Kornelius Penner had four yards built alike with a typical L-shaped complex.⁴

Reminiscences

Although Borosenko cannot claim any famous writers like Arnold Dyck from the Jasykowo Colony, the writing talent was not unknown among its inhabitants. In 1900 teacher Johann W. Dueck (1865-1932), Rosenort, Manitoba, who spent his growing up years in Friedensfeld and then the village of Blumehoff in Borosenko, wrote his memoirs of the old country under the title of "History and Events", published in *History and Events* (Steinbach, 1982), pages 85-137, and republished in *Prairie Pioneer: The Writings of Johann W. Dueck* (Rosenort, 1995), pages 11-52. "History and Events" was a fascinating look at the old country, through the eyes of a 10 year-old boy.

Reminiscent of these writings are the recollections of Martin Hamm who grew up in the neighbouring village of Schöndorf. Both of these writings reflect on the day-to-day life of the colonists and not about theological and ecclesiastical issues which dominate so much of Mennonite letters. The memoirs of Martin Hamm provide a further insight into life in the village of Schöndorf prior to the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917:

"Schöndorf lay three verst (two miles) north of Blumenhoff. That is were my beloved grandparents, Kornelius Penners and grandmother, M. Hamm lived. How gladly and often we drove with our parents to visit them. Grandfather Penner was rich; apparently he had the finest *Wirtschaft* in the village. The dwelling house was large with many windows, and attached to the front door a porch consisting of window, and behind which stood the finest geraniums and other flowers, blooming year round. A large summer kitchen served during the summer for the preparation of the food for the large family, and many guests and also workers. It often smelled of *Borscht* and *Rollkuchen*. We were lucky when it came to pass that we were driving through the village to the doctor or on business somewhere. If it was in summer, we boys were allowed to run in the large gardens and pick up apples which had fallen off and to take them along home. A creek flowed through the middle of the gardens in the village in which geese and ducks swam. Small bridges for each *Wirt* (farmer) led across to the other side of the garden or woods and onto the fields.

When so many uncles and aunts with their many children came home to grandparents for Easter or for special occasions, then we young boys were a large enterprise. During one such occasion, uncle Johann Penner, at that time the only one who had a photo apparatus, took a picture of the huge family. I have seen it and held it - there



A Mennonite house in Schoendorf, May 2000. Photo Diese Steine, 397.

were 72 persons large and small, taking part. Many also lived farther away. Unfortunately, no picture of this has been preserved. But another photograph is available, with grandfather and many uncles and aunts at a funeral.

What we boys did not all discover when it was Easter - we barged around, stormed through the gardens, marvelled at doves, took out sparrows nests. During the hot summer, we bathed in the cattle reservoir (*Fiehränke*) (called a *Stawok* in Russian). There was such a *Stawok* at each end of the short village.

While we were still smaller, playing wolf in the long, huge barn was one of our most pleasant games, especially during the winter times. And oh, the Christmas festivities always brought much joy. At that time not only the parents received presents - either a stack of cups or the like - but also we grandchildren received something, e.g. such a four-sided box filled with a beautiful picture on it and filled with bonbons. Naturally it was not so simple to furnish such a meal for so many guests. As a rule they had fruit "*mus*" and cold cooked ham. We children were the last to be allowed to the table. This sometimes got to be quite late, and the patience of our youngest aunt Anna sometimes ran short.

"Now boys, now you are satiated," she would say, and then started to clean up the table, when we were just getting nicely started. What was the reason? Finally we figured it out - soon her fiancée, Heinrich Klassen from Nikolaithal, came at the agreed time, to take her out.

Not everyone, however was able to enjoy the Applemus. One time cousin Franz Penner screeched that he wanted Applemus. Then his father went with him to the barn and klopt him. "Ahas, kregst mit de Schlorr Aupelmus!" he had to hear forever thereafter.

Grandfather Penner was born in 1842 and died in 1935. He had three wives, and with the marriage of one or two widows, he brought children into the marriage. Consequently there were Wiebe and Peters children in his family in addition to his Penners. He was not only a steadfast Mennonite, a good farmer, but also a preacher....

Now something also about my grandmother M. Hamm. I know nothing - so to say - about my grandfather Martin Hamm. He died very young.

But we really loved grandmother Hamm. She lived with her children Johann Penners. She bestowed us richly with gifts for Christmas, so that she won us completely. She was a Cornies' daughter. Johann Cornies, so famous in the Mennonite story, was her uncle. She had a very loving manner in telling stories and knew many verses and proverbs. At that time, my father's older brother David Hamm lived in Felsenbach, somewhat further away, but later moved to Barnaul, Siberia, together with his family prior to 1910. As I remember, we only went visiting once in Felsenbach. During that opportunity, their Susie, my cousin, fell into the garbage barrel (*dranktonne*) while taking out eggs.

Nikolaithal was immediately behind Schöndorf toward the north. Only one *Stawok* divided these two villages. We often drove here visiting since Johann Funks, mother's older sister, Margaretha, lived here. They also had a large family. Their youngest boys were our play comrades. Uncle Funk was an honourable minister in the Kirchliche Gemeinde. Our parents interacted even more with Franz Penners. Uncle Franz was my mother's brother. But ever since their youth, uncle Franz was also my father's best friend, even before they were brother-in-laws.

One of our fellow school students was struck by lightning. It was Liese Regehr. She sat by the open window of her rich dwelling while it was gently raining outside, and sang the song to herself, "Es regnet, Gott segnet...." The lightning struck unexpectedly through the chimney.

A small fleck from the lightning could be seen on the wall, where the lightning had struck. A funeral train of the village marched along the middle street of the village. They came past the school. The coffin was carried in front by men. They were followed by the parents and relatives and then the others taking part in the funeral. The cemetery was behind the windmill, where the coffin was to be lowered into the opened grave. Then a *droschke* came up to the funeral train from the opposite direction. It was the surgeon (*Feldscher*), who had the responsibility to examine the corpses. He stopped the coffin and had it opened. Then he held a burning match before the mouth and nose of the deceased, in order to see if perhaps she was still breathing, and whether she only appeared to be a dead. Yet, there had been no sign of life in her for several days.....,traurig tönt das Glöcklein nieder...Hirtenknabe, Hirtenknabe, dir auch singt man dort einmal," which is how we later also learned the poem, "Droben stehet die Kapelle."

The long hill to the south of the village offered a beautiful picture in the evening dusk. Then the many lights in the mine quarries went on. The diggings contained very valuable iron ore, the so-called "Margenetz". When we wanted to drive to Nikopol, we had to drive over this hill. It occurred sometimes that we drove exactly parallel to the small train which hauled the iron ore from the quarry to the station. The railway gauge was very narrow and the small wagons

looked like a toy train. A horse pulled this entire miniature train. But behind the hill there was a deep deserted valley. The road went through it. In this valley robbers had once stopped vehicles and robbed and beaten the people. How glad we boys were when we had finally passed through this valley and were on our way to Nikopol. Closer to Nikopol, we drove through a German leasehold village called No. 1. Father had a friend there, Peter Enns. Sometimes on our return journey we stopped there for coffee and also watered the horses.

One time we were standing on the schoolyard, and someone pointed towards the west, on the precipice of the hill behind old Penner's last yard. A gypsy caravan with wagons, loose horses and riders was approaching the village. They were gypsies with stolen horses. But they had not made it to the market with the horses before being exposed. How had they managed to bring it to pass that they had actually been able to steal the horses? Every farmer (*Wirt*) locked practically every barn and shed door, and naturally also the house. Stealing was common in Russia. The Russians also stole geese, poultry, horses, grain, and other goods, which were not brought under roof for night, even the fruit from the gardens was sometimes taken during the night.

Since one could not always trust the Russian servants, the farmer (*Wirt*) bolted the barn doors with iron bolts. In addition many *Wirthen* had a mean guard dog chained in the barn. This included the old Penners. But the gypsies had first fed the dog sausage through a barn window. As a result the dog had not raised any alarm and in this way it was possible for the gypsies to steal the horses. But the consequences for such thieves were not always that severe either. When they paid some fines the Gendarme could live better also. A good many gypsies lived in Nikopol in winter in the outskirts of the city but as soon as it got nice in spring, they wandered from village to village begging and stealing. In general the people gave something to the poor in order to get rid of them, either bread, flour, eggs, or old items of clothing, for they went about very scraggily. They were different than the barrel-organ man, when he came with his fine music and with his parrot (*Papagie*) on it, which could even speak, for example, "Popka Durak!" and distributed lottery tickets (*Glückzettel*). Another time when there was a monkey or an acrobat, then we children were sometimes actually allowed to go along to the next yard. Gladly the barrel-organ man was given a few money pieces. But we were scared of gypsies. They sometimes also stole children, it was said. Perhaps it was only a warning for us.

When one plumbs around in one's mind, more and more pictures from one's childhood come to light. But now it is enough from that time. Now also a little about my first world tour from that time. The world trip was not very far, only 80 verst (km). The goal of the journey was Chortitz. My father had a sister Margarete there. She was the wife of the renown Volost secretary, J. Klassen from Chortitz. Father wanted to visit her and my brother Franz and I were allowed to go along. I was apparently in my ninth year. In



Likely this building was the school in Schoendorf, May 2000. Photo Diese Steine, 397.

order to really make the trip interesting for us, father had planned it as follows: someone was to take us to the city of Nikopol with the droschke. From there an auto - a vehicle without horses, something like this we had not seen before - was supposed to take us to the train station. From Nikopol to the Chortitzer station we travelled by railway. After we had visited there at the beloved aunt and uncle for a number of days, we went to Nikopol by steamship on the Dnjepr and then homewards. What an adventurous journey. The last night before our departure we could hardly fall asleep because of the excitement: auto, railway, steamship with the shrill tone, the way we had seen them on the wide Dnjepr. And we were now to experience all this! That morning, long before departure time we were already awake and anxious. Mother packed our food: we were to eat fried fish on the railway. We had caught them ourselves. How good that would taste. We had many other treats as well!

And in this manner we got to Nikopol on time, where the borscht smelled so good in the guest houses. Upon our arrival we could already hear the shrill steam tone of the steamship. Unfortunately we now had a disappointment. The auto had a defect and was not usable at the moment. But the travelling on the railway was fantastic. How fast it went! Trees, telegraph poles and houses, they just rolled past the window. Presently we were already very hungry, and how good the food tasted! Indeed, Mama had looked after us so well. But she had had to stay at home. Grandmother Hamm had come to keep her company and to help her with the little ones. We, however, were on the way to visit aunt Greta. We got off at Kanzerowka or Kitschkas. Chortitz is really already half a Mennonite city with its businesses and factories. Here was also the Volost offices were uncle Klassen officiated.

We were received very heartily - exceedingly hospitably - in their dwelling house, as if by prominent people. The two of us, Franz and I, were allowed to sleep in the *große stube*, which was reserved for guests. The large bed was taken apart for father. We were allowed to sleep on thick featherbeds, on the floor with double pillows and warm blankets. We slept like the children of kings, tired from the long journey and the experiences of the day and the previous - such a short - night. The new morning with new

expectations came only too soon. Unfortunately, Klassen boys were older than we, and we only got to see them during the meals. They attended higher schools. One was studying to be a naturalist, and the other one actually had a uniform. For that reason the girls - Katja and Margareta - played with us. They had a doll house and played extensively with dolls. Neither of us two thought much of that. Had they not been so neat and loving, the time would have become long for us. But evidently, uncle Klassen had noticed this, and therefore he always again sent the girls together with us to the bakery (*Piroshnaja*), in order that we should get some treats. Such things we did not know.

Much was different in the city. We went with uncle Klassen and father into the large Colonial garden, where there were different fruits, some which we had never seen before. After a number of days we travelled homewards. To our great disappointment there was no ship going to Nikopol at exactly that time. Thus we set out by foot on our way to the station. Father carried the suitcase and we ran in order to keep up. Then a youth, somewhat around our age, came running up from the side, calling out repeatedly and begging, "Uncle give me a few kopeken for bread! Uncle give me..."

"Father, can you not hear? He wants a few kopeken for bread!"

But father kept striding along as if he did not hear, until the boy fell behind. We could not understand father. Then he explained it to us, "He did not want to buy bread. He only wanted to have money so he could buy tobacco."

We were amazed! How could someone be so cunning, and father so wise, to see through him. We got home safely. We had experienced much. This was how the big world appeared from the outside.

Blumenhof - the home of my childhood, how beautiful you were! To me it was as if we had lived in a wonderland. Is it any wonder that I have sometimes been so homesick after we had moved away? How deeply moved I was when I saw it again after some five years. The dwelling house, the middle street, each path, the school diagonally across the street and the meadow ground and the old oak, and the neighbouring village of Schöndorf were our grandparents still were living. Grandmother Hamm had died. Johann Penners, aunt Netje, with whom she then



A beautiful vista, the welcome to Borosenko. On May 25, 1999, a visit to the Borosenko Colony, founded by the Kleine Gemeinde and Old Colonists in 1865. L.-r: our driver, Harold Janz, Winnipeg, pastor Frank Dyck, and Dr. Royden Loewen, stop at the crest of the hill on the south side of the river to gaze at the beautiful sight, view towards the northwest. To the rear are the fertile escarpments, fields once tilled by our Kleine Gemeinde and Old Kolony forebears. Photo Preservings No. 15, p. 76.

lived, had built a new very fine house. Yet, many things had already changed. The old held the charm for us. Yet, we children too had become older and different.

By Martin Hamm, *Aus der alten in die neue Heimat*, pages 11-17.

Frank Dyck Recollections - Soviet Russia, 1917.

We read about additional experiences of the village of Schöndorf in *The Penner Family* book by Kathy Penner:

“Until the time of the revolution in 1917, life in Russia for the Mennonites had been very good. With the special privileges given them upon arrival, and again reaffirmed later, they had a large measure of freedom, not only in their religious practices and beliefs, but also in managing their own civil affairs, education, industry and welfare. The religious leaders usually also became the civil leaders and had power over moral issues. As they became wealthier, there was some conflict for power between the religious leaders and the progressive industrialists. To maintain their freedom, a network of schools, hospitals and welfare institutions was established.”

“If things were going so well for the Mennonites, why then this massive exodus in the 1920s? The driving forces were the revolution in 1917 followed by the continued civil war and the harsh enforcement of Communism. The Ukraine was seen as counter revolutionary by the new Bolshevik government, hence special pressure was put upon them to avoid separation from Russia. The area became the battlefield for different armies every few months. The era of mass killings began with the Machnov bands in October, 1918. They were driven by a spirit of revenge against some of their former employers or leaders, but also attacked whole villages randomly, killing the heads of households, raping the women and burning the homes. In October,

1920, the Red Army occupied the area for the next two years.”

“The revolution in 1917 and the repeated raids of murderous bands and various armies, resulted in the destruction of homes, furniture, factories, and mills, leaving them all equally poor. Horses, cows and pigs were reduced so there was not even one per farm. The widespread drought in 1921 decimated even the little they had been able to seed. Anything and everything was included in their meagre menu: dried leaves, chaff, corncobs, cats, dogs and gophers. The deaths by starvation deaths were only reduced when the American and Mennonite Relief started to come. The famine cut across all social and economic lines, and the relief responded to all. The extreme poverty, poor hygiene and starvation gave rise to the typhus epidemic, which also took its toll. It was a terrible chain of calamities.”

“Institutions were robbed, closed or taken over by the government for their cadet schools. Schools no longer were free to teach as before. Religion became a burning issue. By 1927, arrests and exile of all religious leaders became alarmingly common. If there was a possibility of economic survival, there would be no religious survival. The main reason for leaving was the survival of the soul. What about those who remained? They, often in exile, knew no family, security, community of spiritual brotherhood, but died secure in their faith in God. Stories given by family members, only give us a small glimpse of the pain of separations, the hard labour in Siberian work camps, without adequate clothing and food. Truly they displayed faithfulness through adversity.”

Source: Kathy Penner, *The Penner Family*, pages 10-13.

Lunch.

Whereas some villages in the region de-

clined, the villages of Schöndorf and Nikolaithal grew and eventually were amalgamated as one village, known in Russian as Nowosofijewka. It is also the headquarters of the local collective farm (Kolchoz) called Thälmann. It encompassed much of the territory of the former Borosenko Colony. Thälmann was a famous East German communist and many Kolchozes founded among German people were named after him.

During his tours of the area, Delbert Plett had always hoped to make contact with the local Collective as it was of great interest to members of his groups to meet with and talk to those farming the land that once belonged to their forebears. In June of 1999, Plett, together with Rev. Frank Dyck, at that time Mennonite pastor in Zaporozhe, met with Mr. Kanoba Vadim Valentinovich, Chairman of Thälman Collective Farm and made arrangements for such a visit.

With this approval in hand Ukraine Tours in Zaporozhe was able to arrange a visit by the 2002 tour group including lunch on June 8. Unfortunately we were unable to meet the chairman who was away on business. We were, however, enthusiastically welcomed by the chair of the village Soviet, Pjotr Nikolaevic Belinkij. We were treated to a magnificent repast of borscht with bacon, pork roast, hamburger, many kinds of sausage, tomato salad, chives with bacon, bread, vereniki with cheese, various beverages, and much more. The tables were very well appointed.

Since our group consisted mostly of farmers, they had the floor in this case, and also had many questions to put to the leaders of the village Soviet. This resulted in a vigorous discussion. It became apparent that farmers in Ukraine faced many of the same problems as in western Canada, only worse. Not the least, was competing against the U.S.A. and its massively subsidized agricultural economy.

We reiterated how impressed we were with their beautiful village and the five or six original Mennonite houses. Delbert Plett mentioned that in 1999 his group had been invited into the home formerly owned by the Cornelius Penner family (Pres., No. 15, page 78).

To this Mayor Belinkij jumped up and said he could show us a much nicer Mennonite home in mint condition if we wished. Of course, everyone was excited about the chance to see what one of these homes looked like after all these years.

60 let Oktjabrja Street.

Mayor Belinkij accompanied the group for a tour through his village. We turned west along the former village street of Schöndorf, now called "60 let Oktjabrja," meaning 60 years since the October Revolution in 1917. At house number 48 he stopped the bus and we were introduced to its owner, a gracious gentleman by the name of Wladimir Fedorowitsch Menschelej. He had acquired the house in 1945 at the end of the war and has resided here ever since.

The house was built in 1884. We were invited to inspect it from the inside and outside and to look at whatever we wished. The lot (*Hauskagel*) remained the size that it was in former times. The fence along the street, the fruit garden in the front yard and the "Laube" along the driveway were almost covered with vines by the beginning of June, and the delicious red Gruschjhe berries in the backyard, were much like in former days.

It quickly became apparent from the magnificent condition of the premises that this man was a motivated worker as possibly no one else in the village. He was a collector and purchased everything possible, storing these treasures in the attic - including salt bags over 20 years old.

The brick house and brick gables remained in their original glory. The brown weathered bricks contrasted starkly with the vivid green foliage enveloping the premises. The red roof tiles (*dachpfanne*) were still original, looking a mite tattered but still serviceable after almost 120 years. No wonder Mennonite-made bricks are still such a popular commodity here. The inside layout and appurtenances were in the order of the Mennonite house-plan with the exception that he had removed the central oven and pietsch from the middle of the house, relocating the Hollander oven into the wall between the master bedroom (*Eckstube*) and the dining area (*Hinter Haus*).

Even the smoke chamber is still intact, including the chimney that extends up through the attic and roof. Hams and sausage were once hung in the chimney through a door in the attic. But the heating was done below on the main floor. The basement, really a large pantry (*Kohma*), was built from bricks with an arched roof. Here the Mennonite farmer (*Bauer*) stored barrels of pickled cucumbers, bags of potatoes and shelves upon shelves full of fruit preserves, quass and jam (*wreng*).

The living room (*Wohnzimmer*) featured a magnificent Mennonite clothes closet and a settee (*Ruhebank*). If only one had more time, one could easily discover more such treasures.



The village street in Schoendorf, view to the west. A well preserved sample of a Mennonite housebarn, although the barn was no longer there. Most impressive was the beautiful Vorgarten, the front yard orchard, maintained with a sense of order and evoking a definite Mennonite aesthetic. How beautiful a typically Mennonite village must have looked when there were 20 - 40 such Wirtschaften, framed by rows of shade trees and front yards beaming with colourful flowers and fruit trees in bloom. Photo Preservings No. 15, p. 77.

Mr. Menschelej was a genuinely hospitable man. He insisted that we all share a glass of his special homemade wine before we left.

Also along 60 let Oktjabrja Street is the former home of Cornelius Penners, the grandparents of Harold Janz, former editor of the M. B. Herald (see Pres., No. 15, page 78). We were told that the stones from the Mennonite graveyard in Schöndorf had been dragged away in 1998, and no one knew where.

Conclusion.

The traditional Mennonite houses still standing in Schöndorf certainly speak for the early prosperity of the Mennonites in the Borosenko area. It seems that Jasykowo, founded north of Chortitza three years later in 1868, must have shared some of the well-being, probably based to some degree on the favourable purchases of these lands in the immediate aftermath of the emancipation of the serfs in 1861.

An interesting comparison between the Jasykowo and Borosenko colonies is the resonances of the names of several of the villages: Hochfeld and Hochstadt; Eichenfeld and Eichengrund. The colony seats or Volost offices were located in Nikolaital and Nikolaifeld.

It is readily evident that a sizable body of writings exists regarding the history of the Borosenko colony and its picturesque villages. Who will have the will to work to gather it into a book as a heritage for our descendants?

References.

A pictorial history of the Borosenko Colony, with a short report on each village, is found in *Diese Steine*, pages 375-407. For a modern road map, see Pres., No. 12, page 45, and *Diese Steine*, page 376.

Kathy Penner, *The Penner Family: Faithful Through Adversity* (217-489 Highway 33, West, Kelowna, B.C., V1X 1Y2, 1997), pages 10-13.

Martin Hamm, *Aus der alten in die neue*

Heimat: Lebensgeschichte eines schlichten Mennoniten (Winnipeg, 1971), pages 10-17. Courtesy of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Ave., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4.

Endnotes

- 1 see Pres., No. 15, page 76 for photo.
- 2 D. Plett, *Saints and Sinners* (Steinbach, MB., Crossway Publications, 1999), p. 301.
- 3 MHCA Vol.1081.
- 4 Hamm, *Die Alte Heimat*, p. 174.

Visitor's Route.

There is only one way to successfully tour the Borosenko Colony and that is by coming through Nikopol, and then turning north on Highway No. 56, to the Soljonaja River. Turn left - west - crossing the bridge over the Soljonaja, and then proceed left again passing through the village of Tawritscheskoje, three km. to Heuboden and another 3 km. to Blumenhof.

Ebenfeld is some 10 km. northeast of Blumenhoff. Nikolaital-Schöndorf is some 6 km. directly north of Blumenhoff. Having completed the tour of Borosenko proper, many visitors will want to complete their visit with stops in Grünfeld (located some 10 km. north just off Highway 56) and Friedensfeld some 10 km north east of Grünfeld. They may then wish to head northeast and east for the return journey to Zaporozhe - which is both shorter and traversing some beautiful farming country (see *Diese Steine*, pages 375-407, for maps, photos and details of the Borosenko Colony and individual villages).

Critic and community:

John Howard Yoder among the Mennonites

Steven Nolt, *Christian Living*. April-May 1998, 4-8. (Used with permission)

In the spring of 1952, seven American Mennonites gathered in Amsterdam, Netherlands, for a two-week theological retreat. All seven were living in different parts of Western Europe serving as missionaries or relief workers or engaged in graduate studies. Their experiences had exposed them to a world of hurting people, new ideas, and big questions about the role of the church in society. From their Amsterdam perspective, they looked across the Atlantic to the American Mennonite communities they still called home and admitted disappointment and frustration with what they saw. Their teachers and church leaders had inspired them with stories of heroic Anabaptist martyrs who had challenged the status quo and brought a message of radical reform to a society hungry for change.

They compared that Anabaptist vision with the complacent congregational life and efficient church bureaucracy in North America. The preaching didn't match the practice. What to do about this situation was another question, though perhaps that wasn't really the purpose of the retreat, some thought.

The youngest participant, however, had other ideas. Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) field administrator John Howard Yoder would not be content to passively watch his denomination drift into what he considered mainline mediocrity. He summarized the group's analysis of American Mennonite church life under the title "The Cooking of the Anabaptist Goose."

Then, to the surprise and consternation of several other retreat participants, Yoder actually mailed a copy of the critique to top denominational leaders back in the States. He challenged them to live up to the Anabaptist message they proclaimed.

It would not be Yoder's last attempt to urge his church toward greater integrity. Nor was this his last confrontation with the Mennonite community, even though his ideas, writing, and influence eventually transcended the bounds of that denomination. At the time of his death at age 70, John Howard Yoder was the best known Mennonite in non-Mennonite church circles. His books especially *The Politics of Jesus* were widely read by Christians of all stripes and were quite influential among academic theologians and ethicists.

There was something identifiably Mennonite – something very Anabaptist – in Yoder's writing even though his message was directed to the universal body of Christ. He insisted on defining the church as a separate, called-out people whose corporate life as a fundamentally new community gave witness to God's transforming grace.

Yoder urged everyone who claimed the name of Christ to look to Jesus and the early

church for their model, method, and message. In the years following World War II, many Christian theologians had begun talking about the church's "responsibility" to the larger world and its need to be relevant to modern society. Yoder, on the other hand, insisted that the church's only real responsibility was simply to be the church.

The early followers of Jesus had initially lived by a very different moral order than that of their pagan neighbors, John Yoder liked to explain. But within a few hundred years, the church had warmed up to the power and wealth of the state and made peace with the Roman Emperor Constantine. Seduced by the claims of alternate loyalties, the church was now a part of rather than apart from evil forces within society.

The church lost its prophetic ability to condemn violence and injustice and to call people to a radically new way of life. By caving in to the pressures of surrounding society, the church had blessed violence and failed to incarnate Christ's message of peace in a broken world. Since that time, Yoder argued, most of church history had been marked by such compromise, although from time to time groups of Christians recaptured the life of the "messianic community." The Anabaptists of the Radical Reformation were among those faithful few.

But Yoder could also bring his critique of the church to the doorstep of his own denomination making Mennonites who thought of themselves as heirs of those same Anabaptists quite uncomfortable. In a direct and unsparing essay on "Anabaptist Vision and Mennonite Reality," Yoder criticized Mennonites for squandering their theological communities whose membership passed along predictable

genealogical lines.

Too rarely was faith the result of real decisions on the part of young people, he reported, and too often it proved impossible for "outsiders" to break into the group. Turning a memorable phrase, Yoder argued that as a content and self-sufficient denomination, modern Mennonites had ironically replaced "corpus Christianum" (the medieval union of church and state) with a culturally enclosed "Christian corpuscle". The typical North American Mennonite congregation "is not like the New Testament church and it is not like the Anabaptists," he insisted.

Ethnicity, family, and culture were all good gifts of God to be cherished and thankful for, Yoder noted elsewhere. But they could too easily become ends in themselves and short-circuit the mission and message of the church. Mennonite community, then, was something of a problem for Yoder, part tragic flaw and part catch 22. On the one hand, Yoder insisted that the faithful church was more than a collection of spiritual individuals; it was unidentifiable group of people committed to living together, deeply caring for and sharing with one another so that how they lived was a sign of God's reign.

At the same time, the more committed a group was to its own members, the more it ran the risk of self-absorption and losing sight of the divine purpose that had originally moved it. Community was necessarily concrete and specific, but in its specificity lay a troubling temptation.

John Howard Yoder had grown up in just such a specific church context the Amish Mennonite community of Wayne County, Ohio, and its Oak Grove Mennonite Church. The progressive Amish turned Mennonites who made up Oak Grove were a rather remarkable group, known for their strong support of intellectual pursuits and mission.

In the early 1900's, for example, half the faculty and staff of Goshen (Ind.) College hailed from Oak Grove alone. Other members headed up a short lived but influential Mennonite newspaper, *The Christian Exponent*, which during the 1920's offered a progressive alternative to the official denominational weekly, *Gospel Herald*.

Oak Grove Mennonites also held strong convictions about the proper definition of the church, insisting that the local congregation was the essence of the gathered body of Christ. They resisted hierarchy and the geographically more abstracted notion of the church as a diffuse conference of congregations.

In 1927, in fact, the year John Howard was born to Howard C. and Ethel Good Yoder, Oak Grove refused to join a new district conference that was uniting Ohio's Amish Mennonites and (Old) Mennonites. Oak Grove members feared



John Howard Yoder. Photo: *Christian Living*, 1998.

the new conference would limit congregational decision making and substitute bureaucracy for the daily, face-to-face work of Christian community. When Yoder was 10 years old, Oak Grove did join the conference, but it remained a member for only a decade.

Its commitment to congregational authority did not rest easily in a denomination that was just then hard at work creating national church structures, bureaucracies, and institutions that seemed to suggest a single definition of what it meant to be faithfully Mennonite.

John Yoder left Wayne County in 1945 to attend school at one of those denominational institutions Goshen College and handily completed the four year program of study in only two, then stayed on for an extra year of theological work at Goshen Biblical Seminary. By 1949 he was working with MCC postwar European reconstruction efforts. Several years later he married French Mennonite Anne Marie Guth.

While in Europe he also spent time in Algeria, where growing resistance to and finally outright revolt against French colonial rule raised difficult questions about political culture, society, and the role of the church in legitimating injustice. When John Yoder began graduate study in theology at the University of Basal, his thinking about the church was primed with contemporary problems of war and peace crying out for some sort of Christian response.

Returning with his family to the United States in the late 1950s, he worked at his father's greenhouse business, held an administrative position with Mennonite Board of Missions, and then began teaching at Goshen Biblical Seminary where he also served as president from 1970 to 1973.

By that time his penetrating and persuasive writing on peace, the church, and Christian ethics was drawing increased attention in wider religious circles. After the publication of his 1972 book *The Politics of Jesus*, a book that argued that Jesus' life and teaching provided a sound and solitary basis for determining how Christians should live in the world, Yoder received a barrage of invitations to lecture and teach in a host of non-Mennonite settings.

Indeed, by the mid 1970s Yoder was on the theology faculty at University of Notre Dame, a Roman Catholic school. Again, as he had been in Europe, Yoder was on the margins of American Mennonite institutional life. While outsiders considered him the quintessential Mennonite, his relationship with his church was almost always characterized by a critical distance across which Yoder and the Mennonite community eyed one another with both admiration and suspicion.

For example, Yoder stressed the need for the church to assume a humble servant-like quality in its witness to the world. Yet he contended that Mennonite humility could easily become a cover for inaction on behalf of others or even subtle arrogance. In 1951, while still in France, he chided the smugness with which many American Mennonites regarded the postwar relief efforts he was overseeing. In an article

in *The Mennonite Community* (forerunner of *Christian Living*), Yoder noted that "by now we are accustomed to hearing of the help American Mennonites have been offering" to war victims, "but a fact less familiar to Community readers is that there are two sides to this concern."

He suggested that European Mennonites, despite small numbers and having experienced unprecedented suffering during the war, now expressed a generosity that challenged North American charity born of wartime profits safely out of harm's reach. While the American Mennonite community assumed that it was saving the helpless abroad, Yoder wrote, "one can't avoid sometimes thinking that (they) are the ones who have something to teach us."

From the mid 1950s through the early 1970s, Yoder also served as something of a denominational gadfly as an active member of the Concern movement, which published a series of essays in the interest of church renewal. Rooted in the 1952 Amsterdam retreat that had provoked one of Yoder's earlier Mennonite critiques, Concern supporters questioned the ethics that drove denominational institutions, wondering whether they truly incarnated agape love or simply imitated habits from the larger world of commercial administration under a Christian veneer.

"The point [is]...not that people should feel morally guilty about not being perfect," he explained in 1996, "but [people]...should be aware of the dissonance between their rhetoric and their policy decisions. There is a qualitative difference between the 'falling short'...and the self-deception of actually doing something else than what one said one was doing."

John Yoder was also an early and articulate advocate for direct Christian witness to government. Although he repeatedly called on the church to sharply separate itself from the corrupting influence of state authority and coercion, he disagreed with many in his denomination. Some Mennonites concluded that the church had nothing to say to the state. However, Yoder said, Christ's lordship extended over the state, even if the state did not recognize that claim.

Yoder rejected a "strategy of withdrawal" as fundamentally unfaithful. He insisted that peace had implications beyond those that traditional Mennonite communities had been willing to acknowledge or risk.

Through the years those same communities were not without their own criticisms of Yoder. Some conservative Mennonites rejected his more activist interpretation of the gospel of peace. Other Mennonite theologians insisted that Yoder's criticism of the church for failing to consistently live up to his highest ideals was utopian. That agape love was the only ethical norm was unrealistic.

Any community, they argued including the Mennonite community, its institutions, and ordinary congregations needed to focus on issues of raising children in the faith, living successfully in the world, and making decisions that invariably hurt some people in the process of helping others. In fact, some claim,

Christian mission itself often required ethical compromise.

Serving a world undoubtedly involved the church in complex if not sometimes impossible situations in which pastoral care amounted simply to a search for the least of all evils.

The sharpest criticism, however, came from outraged women and men who pointed to a series of situations in which Yoder violated sexual boundaries and betrayed associates' trust during the 1970s and 1980s. The church was rather slow to respond to these criticisms, but in 1992 Indiana-Michigan Mennonite Conference suspended Yoder's ministerial credentials, recommending a program of restitution and counselling. The four-year process resulted in some reconciliation and healing, though some people remained disillusioned and highly critical of the church's pre-eminent critic.

John Howard Yoder's life and the scope of his work represent many things to many different people. But what do they say about communities and their critics-critics who walk the borders, presenting the community's best ideas to outsiders while chastening those within? The critic is a prophet who poses questions about purpose, ideals, and truth in any community. Not everyone agreed with Yoder's prescriptions, but his description and analysis revealed areas in which the community's strengths were also its greatest weaknesses.

In contrasting Anabaptism and Mennonitism, for example, Yoder highlighted the problems that surface when a historically conscious group appeals to history for easy answers in other contexts. Pointing to the church's institutional identity, he revealed the way in which groups that try to become less sectarian and separatist can unwittingly remain largely closed systems.

For their part communities need prophets as much as priests-people who provoke thought and demand a reply as much as people who lead and comfort. Some Mennonites may have read Yoder with vicarious enjoyment, otherwise unable to muster the courage to expose flaws they sensed in a church they loved. Others who may have been uncomfortable with his message continued to listen to him precisely because they knew so many non-Mennonites did, and they wanted to try to see themselves from another perspective.

In the end, the bond between community and critic was not easily broken. If the community needed the critic's challenge, the critic relied on the hope of community. The church remained essential for one who was uneasy with the status quo, one who agitated to replace what is with what could be. It had to be so, Yoder explained, since the church even the flawed church always held the possibility of becoming the true messianic community with which 'God could work the unimaginable. In God's economy, he wrote, only "the existence of a human community dedicated in common to a new and publicly scandalous enemy loving way of life...can change the world."

The Missional Church¹

Titus Guenther, Winnipeg, Manitoba

“A missional church is: *all* of God’s people demonstrating and proclaiming, *all* of God’s gospel throughout, *all* of God’s world.”²

Introduction.

Even if you are not a student or a teacher of mission studies chances are that you have noticed the expression “missional church” being used in your congregation, conference reports, and church papers. You may be asking if we need this expression or what advantages the term holds over the expressions like “missionary church” or “church with a mission.”

Some historical background is needed for a better grasp of its innovative intent. Most church families have used mission agencies to administer their missionary work for a long time. When the Protestant missionary movement started early in the 19th century, these agencies were called “missionary societies.” The birth of missionary societies provided a chance for lay Christians to become involved in foreign missions in a time when the leaders of historic Protestant churches generally opposed mission outreach.

These mission agencies found it hard to subordinate themselves to their denominations, even after the latter rallied to the task of missions. Perhaps more seriously, the agencies served as an excuse for congregations from having to concern themselves directly with missions. Were they not supporting the agencies precisely so that these should carry out the missionary task for them? Christian churches saw themselves as having many tasks, most of which served to build up the home congregation. Mission was merely one task alongside others.

The Great Missionary Movement emerged during the 19th century in a time of colonialist expansion of the Western powers. Having a church-centred understanding of missions, the latter became a means for expanding the Western church in foreign lands. But when colonialism collapsed after World War II, this Christendom concept of mission fell into a crisis. Mission-founded churches rapidly became independent and engaged in vigorous mission work of their own. They prospered so much that today the majority of Christians live in the Third World.

The crisis in Western missions forced a re-examination of our concepts of both church and mission in the light of recent experiences and the Bible. Biblical mission studies revealed that mission does not belong to the church but is God’s mission. God already revealed this to Israel in the Old Testament but more fully still in Jesus Christ. Jesus came to do God’s mission in the world. After starting God’s new humanity (the church) Jesus sent the church into the world to continue the mission God had given him.

Suddenly the nature and purpose of the church look completely different. Its mission then is not its own expansion, but rather to help expand God’s kingdom through the church’s

faithful witness in word and life. **Its main or only reason for being is missionary witness.**

To say it with Emil Brunner, “God’s Word creates the community in order that the community might communicate God’s Word. ‘Mission work does not arise from any arrogance in the Christian Church; mission is its cause and its life. The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning.’”³

The early Christian church understood itself in this way: it did not “have a mission” but rather its whole reason for being was to witness to the mission of God. Like us today, the early church also did many different things: worship, teach, help the poor, heal the sick, pray for the world, eat together, and proclaim the gospel. But all activities were put in the service of the kingdom of God as revealed in Jesus’ life, work, cross and resurrection; all served to witness to God’s loving deeds “in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). Thus the early church was what we now call a “missional church.”

Therefore, in contrast to the Christendom church’s idea of conquering the heathen world chunk by chunk, the “missional church” sees its existence-for-mission as grounded in the triune God and his reign over the world. Western culture is then not self-authenticating nor is it the standard for measuring other cultures. Rather, the reign and mission of God or the Spirit and gospel of Jesus Christ are the criteria by which all cultures, including ours, are measured.

For the missional church the reign and mission of God come before church; and as we are learning from Third World churches, missiology comes before theology, or rather the two cannot be distinguished. Martin Kähler once wrote: “mission is the mother of theology.” Western churches and universities, both Catholic and Protestant, says David Bosch, are only starting to learn this lesson.

The missional church is thus rediscovering from the early church and Anabaptism the insight that the church is not the owner but rather God’s instrument of mission;⁴ that our missionary witness is directed toward “people outside the community of faith [both] in the neighbourhood and around the globe.” That is, while the task of foreign missions remains, the missional church must live in “missionary encounter” with the culture that surrounds the church.⁵ This culture/society is never fully Christianized (as was formerly assumed) and no community of believers is ever fully identical with God’s kingdom. That is why our missional witness must be ongoing in the congregation itself, in the neighbourhood and in growing circles around the world.

In closing then, the missional church is, like its founder, a pilgrim church, a “resident alien” whose calling is to be in perpetual missionary

encounter with peoples in their cultural contexts, including Western ones. The foundation and content of its witness is Jesus Christ who empowers his community of disciples with his Spirit. Outwardly, the missional church may not seem that different from one that is lacking in missional engagement. James Krabill characterizes the missional church thus:

“Certainly there are greeters, worship leaders and Christian educators within the congregation, but each from their position of responsibility sees it as their task to participate somehow in extending Christ’s kingdom to people outside the community of faith in the neighborhood and around the globe.

Congregations that smell this strongly of mission will give missions education and motivation a high priority in the classroom, in Sunday School openings, in the church’s worship patterns, in the narthex [foyer?], in the library, in discussions about budget, and in the general atmosphere that characterizes the quality of human relationships and pervades every aspect of life within their faith community.”⁶

Therefore, in a missional church nothing, yet everything is different. We will probably continue to use mission agencies for mission outreach. But local congregations will likely become more active participants in various forms of service and mission. Perhaps the two most decisive differences are a) that a missional church places a greater premium on congregations being missionaries by the way its members live and work together in communities of disciples and b) (related to this) since the missional church must be in ongoing missionary encounter with its “home culture,” it needs to study this culture as lovingly as formerly we studied foreign cultures in order that its gospel witness may both transform Western culture while being contextualized or incarnated in it.

A missional church is: “a church that understands its purpose in light of God’s invitation to participate in aligning all human activity with the intentions of God”⁷

Endnotes

1 First published in *The Grapevine: Charleswood Mennonite Church Newsletter*, December 2001; later in *Focus: Foothills Mennonite Church Newsletter*, November, 2002. The author presented it as the opening reflection at the Missional Church Framework Planning meeting in Winnipeg, Dec. 13, 2001.

2 James Krabill, ‘Does your Church “Smell” Like Mission?’ *Reflections on Becoming a Missional Church*, No. 17 (2001), 18. In *MissionInsight* series, Mennonite Board of Missions.

3 Cited by Wilbert Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 124.

4 *Ibid.*, 107.

5 *Ibid.*, 122.

6 Krabill, *op. cit.*, 3.

7 *Ibid.*, 18.

Mennonite Conference in Steegen

Delightful and a bit irritating, Peter J. Foth,
translated by Dorothy Friesen, Winnipeg, Manitoba

From June 14 to 16, 2002 our Hamburg group touring Prussia was able to participate in the third Mennonite conference since 1991 organized by Polish people. It took place in the Stegna, the former Steegen on the Baltic Sea. These conferences were conceived together with Helmut Reimer, our former Hamburg Church member. Reimer was born in the Werder region and was in many respects an outsider. But thanks to his tenacious nature, the clean-up of the former cemeteries in the Werder got underway shortly after the "turning point" [the fall of the Communist regimes]. Reimer died in 1991 during the first clean-up session in Heubuden, which is also the place he is buried. For the Polish people, he became, somewhat to our surprise, an example of a Mennonite and a "good German." Nevertheless, in the future references to him will disappear, and as far as the project was concerned, he played no further role.

The conference was held in the Krakus holiday centre. It was primarily organized by the present *Heimatverein* [an association of former residents of the area] in Nowy Dwor, formerly Tiegenhof, club Nowydworski, and the local gymnasium (high school). Official co-organizers were a number of Polish mayors from the surrounding area, the Mennonite churches from Alsmeer, Netherlands and Hamburg [Germany], and the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association from the United States. Participants numbered approximately 150, about one third Polish, German, and Dutch.

The sessions began with five presentations by Polish teachers who had obtained grants to write papers about Mennonites. Peter J. Klassen from Fresno, California discussed the relationship between the Danzig and Dutch Mennonites. Edmund Kizik from the Danzig University spoke about the Mennonites in the Danzig and Vistula regions from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. During the coffee break, photo displays and studies by Polish students about Mennonites could be seen. Prof. Januszajtes from the Technical University of Danzig lectured about three Mennonites who made significant contributions to local culture and scientific knowledge, including the famous inventor of the cable railway, the dike construction engineer Adam Wiebe. The pastors Arno Thimm, Haarlem and Peter J. Foth reported more personally about the experiences of the collapse of Germany in 1945, and why it has been possible since 1970 for Mennonite bus tours to travel into their former homelands. Besides providing the opportunity to return, these tours are also intended to develop new relationships between German and Polish people.

This was followed by an astonishing number of short reports about local initiatives by representatives of the region, or from tourist and cultural organizations from the Danzig and Thorn areas. These indicated the extensive interest in Mennonites, but also the uncoordinated nature of many of the initiatives. After the evening meal on Friday, the sessions concluded with an ecumenical worship service in the church in Steegen, an organ demonstration, and a performance by a noteworthy children's flute ensemble from the village of Drewnica/Schoenbaum.

On Saturday the participants visited the three former cemeteries. The one in Baerwalde, usually referred to by Mennonites as Fuerstenwerderfeld, has been restored beautifully since 2001 with local Polish initiative. The next visit was in Rosenort where just recently the cemetery was cleaned up at the initiative of the Tiegenhof mayor and the local school children. The third visit was to Heubuden, which since 1991 has been organized and kept in good condition as a result of western initiatives. Here a short religious memorial service was held. Everywhere we were given greetings by the official local representatives.

In the afternoon there was a further stopover at the poorly maintained arcade house (*Vorlaubenhaus*) which belongs to the Bruchs family of the former Marienau. Professor Ratajezak from the University of Thorn informed us about the problems related to the preservation of these houses. The program for Saturday evening indicated a huge barbeque and folklore performance. In its stead there was simply a social evening, and by then we were unable to further participate in the round trip through the small werder (Klein Werder) with its cemeteries and church buildings in Thiendorf-Markushof, Pr. Rosengart, Wickerau, and Thiergart.

Nevertheless, major changes have taken place. While the Mennonite, and therefore also the German presence, was totally silenced during the communist era in order not to endanger the Polish claim to the land, today these people have an active interest in the scholarly, as well as the local history aspects of the people who lived there prior to 1945. They address issues like memorial plaques, dike construction, and agriculture, but also the day-to-day culture of the former German residents.

For us it was surprising, and slightly irritating, to observe that the Polish researchers are singularly and capriciously concentrating on the Mennonites. They set Mennonites apart from other Germans - in a distinct category. This makes it somewhat uncomfortable for some of us, since at the time Mennonites quite naturally

understood themselves to be German. For example, the mayor from Koszlawy, the former Gottswalde in the Danzig area, reported that they had found old gravestones, and had hoped they would be Mennonite. However, they happened to be "merely" of evangelicals. Does this mean that a certain type of bridge is being built for us Mennonites? Nevertheless, it is exceedingly gratifying that this interest has been awakened and we should be capable and open partners in the research of our separate, and also partly shared, history.

I repeat the proposal, that we respond to these Polish initiatives by appointing a person or a committee that can serve as a discussion partner with the Poles. It can include a West-Prussian and a Polish person, both of whom would be authorized to maintain and coordinate the contacts. The scope of the task is broad enough. It should include this Mennonite conference which is very important for the Polish people, the repair and maintenance of the cemeteries, produce school material about Mennonites for Polish schools, be discussion partners, for example, about the everyday life before 1945, and assist in the establishment of local museums. Even in a Polish matter related to the grounds at the former Danzig Mennonite Church, the Polish people asked for a Mennonite opinion. We could not ask for anything better than such openness.

Tim Allen "Tool Time"

Delbert F. Plett

Tim Allen of "Tool Time" was born TIMOTHY ALLEN DYCK in Denver, Colorado, on June 13, 1953, one of seven brothers. At age 13, he with his family moved to the Detroit, Michigan suburb of Birmingham.

In High School, Tim's favourite subject was shop (naturally) and he played the role of class comedian. He attended Western Michigan University graduating in 1975 with a degree in television production.

Tim was arrested for dealing drugs in 1978 and spent two years in prison. During his time in prison, Tim got a new attitude. Upon his release in 1979, he started his stand-up comedy act at the Comedy Castle in Detroit on a dare from a friend.

On an interview on the "Tonite Show" with Jay Leno on September 22, 1998, Tim Allen stated that his parents were German. He also referred to Detroit as his home town. He lives in California and the family apparently has a cottage on Kern Lake.

Material Culture

The Klaas Reimer Bible

Henry Fast, Steinbach, Manitoba

Klaas Reimer

Klaas Reimer (1770-1837) was the founder and first *Aeltester* of the Mennonite denomination known as the *Kleine Gemeinde*. He was born in Prussia, where he also was ordained into the ministry in 1801. His concern for the purity of the church led him to emigrate to Russia in 1804. Here he and his wife (nee Maria Epp) and daughter, Anganeta, settled in the Molotschna village of Petershagen. In 1812 Klaas and a few like-minded families separated from the *Grosze Gemeinde* and began their own services. This small group elected Klaas Reimer as their *Aeltester* in 1814.

A few years after their arrival in Petershagen, Klaas's first wife and young child passed away. Klaas remarried in 1807 to Helena Friesen. Ten children were born to this union. Of these children: Abraham (1808-1892) emigrated to Manitoba; Margareta (1819-1874) and husband Martin Barkman moved to Jansen, Nebraska; son-in-law Peter W. Friesen and daughter-in-law Maria (Klaas) Reimer also moved to Jansen.

The Bible

The Klaas Reimer Bible was printed in 1664 in *Frankfurt am Main* by the Publishing House *Verlags und Drucks Balthasar Christoph Wusts*. Presumably the Bible was printed as a two-volume set since this particular Bible does not include the historical or poetry sections of the Old Testament. Rather it begins with the Prophetic books and continues with the Apocrypha and the New Testament. Each of these sections is introduced with generous displays of woodcuts. The New Testament section again begins with page number one.

Detailed maps of the Mediterranean Sea area and the Holy Land are displayed on facing pages in the Bible. The Holy Land map is oriented in such a manner that the top is facing east (The Sea of Galilee is drawn to the left of the Dead Sea). The Mediterranean map is displayed in the regular orientation.

The text, according to Martin Luther's translation, is presented in two columns with some cross-references to the left of each column. Explanatory notes are imbedded in the text. Many of the Old Testament books are preceded by lengthy introductions. For instance, the book of Daniel has over eleven pages of small-print notes.

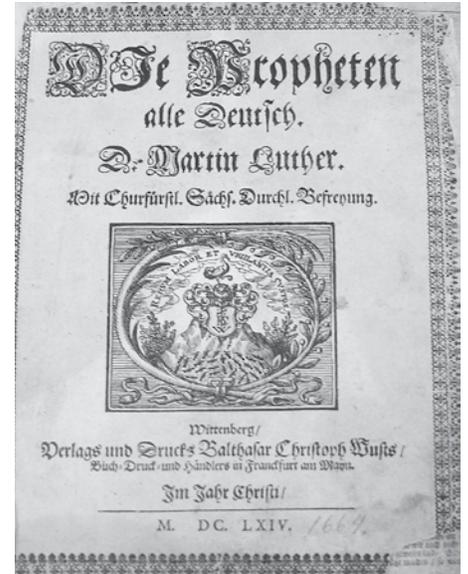
Two pages in the Bible contain the hand-written record of the Klaas Reimer family. The

death of Klaas is recorded by his widow and the following half page has likely been written by daughter Margareta. Klaas, with some exceptions, used the Latin script to record proper names. The rest of the family history, as well as the personal notes written in this Bible are recorded in the Gothic script. For some unknown reason the dates of Klaas's birth, his marriage and the birth date of his daughter Anganeta are crossed out and corrected. Also of interest is the omission of the birth date of his first wife and the death date of his young daughter Anganeta. Klaas did, however, record the death date (November 6, 1806) and age (46 years, 6 months and 13 days) of his first wife.

Ownership

Klaas Reimer has not indicated when he bought or received this 1664 edition of the German Bible. Neither is there any indication that he also owned the first volume of this Bible. The pages in the Bible in which he has recorded the family register list Petershagen as his place of residence. Also, he noted that all dates given are based on the Julian Calendar. This at least suggests that he began the register after he arrived in Russia in 1804 since Prussia at that time was already using the Gregorian Calendar. After Klaas's death in 1837 the Bible remained with his widow, Helena, until 1846. An inscription in the Bible indicates that Martin Barkman, son-in-law of Klaas and Helena Reimer, took possession of this Bible on January 10, 1846. On the same day he also received Klaas Reimer's 1773 edition of the *Gesangbuch*. Evidently the widow, Helena, transferred these family books to her daughter and son-in-law on that date. The widow of Klaas Reimer died later that year on October 22, 1846.

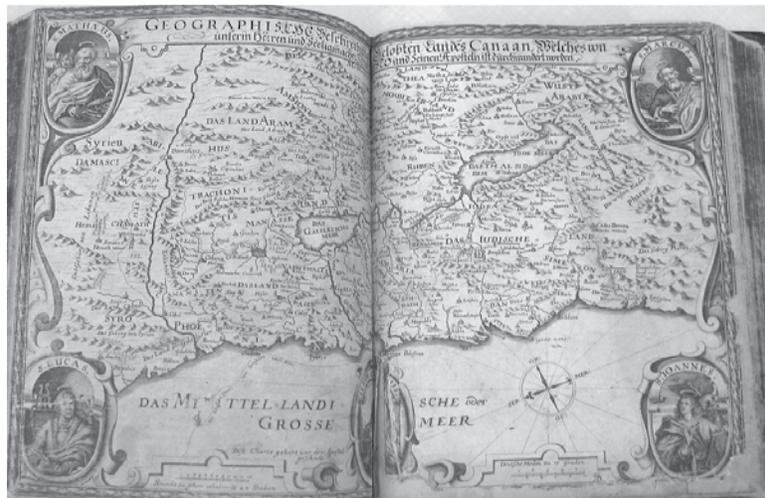
Martin and his wife, Margareta (nee Reimer),



emigrated to the USA in 1874 and settled in the Jansen, Nebraska area together with other *Kleine Gemeinde* settlers. A few months after their arrival, Margareta died. Though Martin remarried, he left no heirs and after his death in 1894, the Bible came into the possession of his nephew, Klaas R. Friesen. Klaas R. Friesen was the son of Peter W. and Helena (Reimer) Friesen.

The Bible remained in the Klaas R. Friesen family for nearly a century. Son, Klaas (Nick) E. Friesen inherited the Bible after the death of his parents. Following the death of the Klaas E. Friesens, their daughter Hilda had custody of the Bible for about ten years, and finally after Hilda's passing the Bible was brought to the home of Hilda's sister, Olga Friesen Bast, of Washington, Kansas.

At the funeral of Anna Dueck Friesen of Jansen, in 1991, Olga chatted with Larry Peters of Kleeefeld, Manitoba and told him of the Bible. In the course of the conversation my name (Henry Fast) was mentioned as someone who would be interested in seeing the Bible. A trip south in April of 1992 confirmed that the Bible had belonged to our common ancestor, Klaas Reimer. After much thought and discussion with her brother, Don Friesen, of St Paul, Minnesota, Olga decided to donate the Bible to the Mennonite Heritage Village. I picked up the Bible in early July of 1992 and delivered the same to the museum where it has since been on display.



Brommtopp

Introduction

The *Brommtopp* was made from leather with horsehair sticking out of the top. When the hair was greased with resin and stroked or pulled, the drum vibrated making a low humming sound. On New Years Day groups of young men would go in costumes from to house, with an earthy New Year's wish. The practice was preserved particularly among conservative Mennonites in Manitoba, such as the Old Colony and Sommerfelder. It was an ancient custom going back a thousand years or more. In England the practice was known as "mumming" and the participants as "mummers". Thomas Hardy in *Return of the Native*, refers to mumming.

Das Brommtop-Lied (The Brommtop song):

Einleitung (der Frager)

Wir haben uns die Freiheit genommen

Und sind hier angekommen / zu fragen ob wir können mit dem

Brommtop herein.

Sie dürfen antworten, ja oder nein.

1. Wir kommen hier an, ohne Furcht und ohne Schand'
Einen schoenen guten Abend, eine froechli-

che Zeit,

Den Brommtop haben wir uns selbst bereit't

2. Dem Hausherrn wuenschen wir,

Ein'n gedeckten Tisch.

Eine Kanne mit Wein

Dammit unser Herr kann froechlich sein.

3. Die Hausfrau wuenschen wir,

Eine Kueche mit Geschirr

Einen Hof mit huebsche Braut, dazu ein trautes Heim,

Darin sie beide koennen gluecklich sein.

4. Dem Braeutgam wuenschen wir,

Eine Kutsche, eine Zier

Eine schoene huebsche Braut, dazu ein trautes Heim,

Darin sie beide koennen gluecklich sein.

5. Die Braut, die wuenschen wir,

Eine goldene Kron'

Auf's andere Jahr, einen jungen Sohn.

6. Dem Sohn, dem wuenschen wir,

Ein gesatteltes Pferd

Dass er kann treiben die Herde durch's Feld.

7. Die Tochter wuenschen wir,

Ein par Schuhe mit Schnellen

Auf's andere , Jahr einen Jungesellen.

8. Dem Knecht, dem wuenschen wir,

Eine Geraupe und Geschirr,

Das er kann putzen dem Herrn seine Pferd'.

9. Die Magd, die wuenschen wir,

Eine holzerne Kann

Auf's andere Jahr, einen puckligen Mann

10. Dem Schweinejung wuenschen wir,

Eine Knutte in der Hand,

Das er kann treiben den Eber durch's Land.

11. Den Gauern hoerten wir,

Wohl mit der Flasche klingen

Wir gedachten, er wurde uns ein Schnapchen bringen

12. Wir stehn auf einem Stein,

Auf einen breiten Stein,

Und unsere Reise soll noch weiter sein,
(nach Hause sein).

Letters

Dear Preservings,

I'm writing this letter out of concern for some Mennonite people who receive these magazines free of charge. They're placed free of charge in churches.

My father-in-law (who has passed away) had subscribed for these magazines a few years ago. I have those books new. I have reviewed them. All five books that I have examined are in some way encouraging or promoting Catholicism. One book has a 6 page article on "Mother" Theresa. (No. 22, June 03.) She was no true Christian! She did lots of good works. They are as filthy rags in God's eyes. Next there is a long article on the Pope, or some priest who died, and people are supposed to believe that they're Christians? Not if they're not born again! "Ye must be born again." John 3:7.

Do you want to "preserve" false religions; a history that leads people to hell? That sounds strong, but it's true. Do we want Religion or Christ? Christ and Him Alone.

Something about these magazines seems strange. They're printed to preserve the "Mennonite" faith – following Menno Simons' teachings, but at the same time going exactly against what he believed! Menno hated the Roman Catholic Church's false teaching. He came out! Menno was hunted for being a true believer.

God protected him. It was only the Roman Catholics that wanted to get rid of him. Why then now are we walking back to Rome? Are we reading the Bible? Is it following a man? I feel sorry for ministers who are trying to bring the gospel to their people. They're often lacking in knowledge of the scriptures. They need a lot of help. I go to a conservative Mennonite Church, so I know its true. Let's not hinder the gospel by mixing truth with error – that will never work. It's the whole church of Revelation 17, which the world is looking to.

I have been religious and very sincere all my life, but I was lost in my sins. I was saved from all my sins when I realized Jesus' work on the cross was enough. I trusted in Him (Jesus) alone plus nothing for salvation. Now I am free. If Christ shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed! Christ + nothing = salvation. We work because we love Christ.

Thank you for reading my letter.

Sincerely,

Helen Braun

Dear Helen Braun,

Thank you for your letter. You raise a good question: What is salvation? The answer, as you indicate, is to be found in Christ. As you rightly point out, the Bible also teaches that faith results

in good deeds, in a life of discipleship. That is exactly what "Mother" Theresa did in her work for the poor. She lived out her faith in Christ. I think that is also what Pope John Paul II did. He lived during difficult times in Poland, under a communist regime, where to be Christian meant to live a life of sacrifice, danger, and possibly death. In this context he was a committed, faithful, believer in Christ.

Both "Mother" Theresa and Pope John Paul II were not part of your church. But I think the spirit of God is greater than any one of our denominations. God's spirit moves people to faith in many contexts, and in many forms and patterns. Let us not make God too small. You speak about being born again. It is good that you found faith in Jesus in this way. But not everyone has to have exactly the same experience in order to have genuine faith in Jesus. There are many ways. The way that your parents and grandparents found faith was different from what you describe for yourself, but nevertheless, it was just as authentic as your experience. We do violence to the spirit of God, and dishonour the witness of the Bible, if we try to force everyone's faith experience into one mold. Let us rather rejoice that God moves people in many groups and cultures to faith, discipleship, peace and love.

Reviews

Adolf Ens, *Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada* (CMU Press, Winnipeg, Manitoba, 2004), 258 pages.

Reviewed by John H. Peters, Steinbach, Manitoba

In 1999, the Heritage Committee of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada began the important work of publishing the biographies of two of its long serving leaders, J.J. Thiessen and David Toews. Following the publication of those works in 2001 and 2002 respectively, it commissioned this book in order to document and preserve the story of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba from its inception until its evolution into the Mennonite Church Canada in 1999.

Ens has done a masterful job of telling the story. As he states at the outset, the problem was not one of lack of material – there exists a vast body of information about the Conference and its member churches – it becomes instead a matter of determining what should be used. Even with what must have been a difficult selection process there is an immense amount of information in this book.

The Heritage Committee's direction from the outset was to have "this be as much about the congregations that make up the Conference as about the Conference as an institution." He has done this effectively throughout the book. This in itself will make interesting reading for anyone who is a member or has connections to the Conference. There is some risk in telling the each congregation's story. Not all of them are happy ones. Ens does not avoid the delicate or uncomfortable situations. He handles them objectively and sensitively and offers little editorial comment. Even serious differences of opinions between congregations are handled head-on but with gentleness. Especially notable are his observations about the tensions between the 1920's immigrants and those who were already in Canada, the debate about alternative service during the Second World War and the more recent discussion about abortion or sexual orientation. He probably understates some of the intense debate and dissension which has been generated over these and other issues, but he certainly does not avoid them.

While the bulk of this book deals with historical figures, dates and statistics, it is much more than just dry information. His wisdom and genuine understanding of how organizations function and how people interact, seems to permeate the pages of this book. He shows empathy for the Bishops and Elders of the early conference who felt their influence slip away as the congregations moved toward more democratic decision-making rather than the hierarchical structure they were used to. He is able to dispassionately, yet accurately, describe the turbulent period of the late 1960's when most of society's (and the Church's) beliefs and structures were being challenged. The description of the growing influence of women in the Conference and the challenges they faced is given prominence. So are aboriginal and justice issues.

Above all there is an optimistic tone to this work. One senses the author's joy as he describes the positive way in which the conferences joined together. It was done with a great deal of planning, discussion and prayer. While he expresses some sadness in reporting the loss of congregations who have withdrawn from the conference for various reasons, there is also hope that the remaining congregations will be unified in furthering God's Kingdom in a powerful way.

This is a history book, certainly, but it is more than a simple compilation of facts and figures. It is a scholarly, insightful telling of who we are as congregations striving toward the same end. Much has happened since the first conference session at Hochstadt in 1903 and this work documents it well. It will serve, no doubt, as an invaluable resource to Mennonite scholars, historians and those who are simply interested in learning more about their past.

Rudy P. Friesen with Edith Elisabeth Friesen, *Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine* (Winnipeg: Raduga Publications, 2004), pp. 742 plus index; \$45, pb. Reviewed by Adolf Ens, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Readers familiar with Friesen's 1996 book *Into the Past* will be delighted with this greatly enlarged and improved new volume. In photographs and concise writing it tells an often neglected part of the story of Mennonite life in fourteen former colonies in Ukraine, as well as on numerous estates and several forestry camps and urban centres. In addition, Friesen has compiled perhaps the most comprehensive directory of former Mennonite settlements in Ukraine available.

After providing a brief historical context for Mennonite life in southern Russia and the USSR, Friesen identifies five stages in the development of Mennonite architecture and building practises. The "settlement" stage (1789-1835) ends with the arrival of the last larger group of immigrants into Chortitza and Molotschna colonies. The division between the "progress" and "flowering" stages is slightly more arbitrarily set at 1880 – the end of the first major emigration of Mennonites from Russia and the end of a decade of significant reforms within Russia. The long "disintegration" stage begins with the outbreak of World War I and continues until the end of the century with a "recovery" stage – "remembering and rebuilding" – beginning in 1999.

An overview of each of the colonies is provided before the more detailed identification and description of significant buildings in many of the villages. The photographs cover a wide range of buildings: homes, schools, churches, business and factory structures, medical and welfare institutions. Earlier books, such as Gerhard Lohrenz's *Heritage Remembered* and Walter Quiring's *Als Ihre Zeit Erfüllet War*, had preserved many building photos. But they provided little more than a bare bones identification of each. Friesen's training as archi-

tect and understanding of building styles provides a wealth of insight into function and aesthetics of this aspect of Mennonite history in Russia.

A good number of the photos were taken in the early 1900s, or even late 1800s, when the buildings were relatively new. Many more were taken in the 1990s, deep into the period of "disintegration." A considerable number are even later, in the present century. Many of the later pictures are taken with high quality optics and focus on aspects of detail lacking in earlier collections. The reader thus gets a "depth perception" of how Russian Mennonites built: materials used, architectural styles, function and durability. In many cases Friesen also traces the changes in use to which a building was adapted over time.

In addition to its main focus on buildings, the book will prove very helpful to "tourists" visiting Russia to look for remnants of their forbears' past. To aid in finding a place, Friesen provides lists of former Mennonite villages and their current Russian or Ukrainian names. Lists of cemeteries, with names and "tombstone data" of persons for whom a gravestone survives, will aid many in making personal family connections.

Published historical information on Mennonites who lived in urban centres or on estates is still relatively sparse and anecdotal, although several new publications in this area are in progress. Friesen describes thirty plus estates and provides some building photographs for most. The chapters on urban Mennonites and on the forestry camps are quite short. However, the links he makes between these two Mennonite "communities" and the main body of "colony" Mennonites, is very helpful.

Thirty pages of sources and credits allows readers to track down most of the photographs and other illustrations used, although it takes a bit more effort than the more familiar footnote/endnote system does. The index similarly allows readers to find what they are looking for, but inconsistencies in its structure make it awkward. For example, under "mills" a sub-list identifies almost 20 individual photos. Each of these mills also has its separate entry by owner. Under "school buildings," on the other hand, only special schools are listed. For secondary or elementary schools, one has to find the appropriate entry ("village schools" for elementary) to find a list that provides only page numbers without the name of each school. But these are minor technical criticisms.

This is a significant volume in the slowly growing number of books dealing with social and economic history of the Mennonite experience in Russia and the USSR. Anyone travelling to Ukraine to visit former Mennonite areas should consider this book a must. But the enormous popularity of the picture books of Lohrenz and Quiring in an earlier generation suggests that *Building on the Past* will appeal to many who made such a trip before these good new resources were available or who cannot go. It also moves Mennonite historiography forward in considering the various influences on the Russian Mennonite community in their architecture and material culture.

George K. Epp. *Geschichte Der Mennoniten In Russland*. Band I. *Deutsche Täufer in Rubland*. Logos-Verlag, Lage, 1997. Band II. *Die Gemeinschaft zwischen Fortschritt und Krise (1820-1874)*, Logos-Verlag, Lage, 1998. Band III. *Neues Leben in der Gemeinschaft "Das Commonwealth der Mennoniten"* (1871-1914). Logos-Verlag, Lage, 2003.

Reviewed by Henry Schapansky, British Columbia

This is a three-volume history of the Russian Mennonites, written in German, and published in Germany, although the writer, George K. Epp (1924-1997) was a Canadian. It covers the period from the first settlements to about 1910. The Volhynian and central Polish Mennonite settlements are not included, though they were under Russian control for most of the period covered by this work. On the other hand, the Volga and daughter colonies are included. Written in German, its main appeal will be to German academics. In view of the rather high cost per volume, it is doubtful whether it will appeal to German *Umsiedler*, or to Latin American Mennonites. Nor, perhaps does this work have much of importance to say to them. Indeed, the three volumes could have been combined into two or even one. That this was not done likely had to do with logistics, since the writing took place over an extended period of time with the last two volumes appearing posthumously.

Each volume is a rather slim, attractive, well-bound book, with a good layout, useful heading, and a clear and concise use of language. Tables are used to present some of the data. The Old Colony and the Hutterites get good coverage, which is rare in works of this kind, and the Mennonite Brethren are viewed from a neutral stance. Epp seems to favour a pluralistic Mennonite religious society. Nonetheless, he continues in the footsteps of the nineteenth century writers and historians, and therefore the work is somewhat lacking in insight and originality. The author relies heavily on past generations of writers and historians, on Russian as well as Mennonite academics. Thus events are viewed in terms of the values of contemporary and past academics. The nature of the *Gemeinde* and the role of Mennonite faith in the historical context of Russia is not explored nor taken into consideration. A main theme of this work is that religious and civil spheres should be completely separated for progress and advancement. Although this is a necessary good, it is an ideal perhaps not shared by all Mennonites.

A positive feature of this work is that the political and social conditions forming the background to the Russian Mennonites are explored. Mennonites are given a context within the historical events, something not found in some earlier works. Thus Russian government's policies and changes are related well to the Mennonites.

Volume I covers the early Russian period to about 1820. A very brief outline of earlier Mennonite history is followed by a much lengthier exposition of Russia's colonization policies in respect of the newly annexed territories of New Russia and the Volga region. The Potemkin settlement projects are given a full chapter. In describing the early years of the Old Colony, Epp closely follows the accounts of Peter Hildebrandt and D.H. Epp,

disappointingly so. Epp points out that *Ältester* David Epp was opposed by a significant group in the Old Colony on the grounds that leadership characteristics and a good example were wanting. Likely so, but the struggle between "progressives" and traditionalists transcended the personalities involved. As with Jacob Ens in the Molotschna, a poor choice in the selection of *Ältester* did not mean the idea of *Gemeinde*, or Mennonite faith and ideals as applied to community life, were discredited. Both Epp and Ens should likely have been dismissed from office. There was in fact a movement in the Old Colony to remove Epp). However, given the existence of a Co-*Ältester*, a relatively strong *Lehrdienst*, Epp's long absence of two years, and his early subsequent death, the issue of suitability was less critical in Epp's case than in the case of Ens.

A lengthy chapter on the early Molotschna follows. The author's overall unconcern with *Gemeinde* issues is reflected in the uncritical use of material from other writers. For instance, perhaps a minor point, Epp again repeats a mistake in regard to the election of Jacob Fast, incorrectly named as Jacob Vogt (p. 147), as *Lehrer* in 1805 (later second *Ältester* in the Molotschna).¹ The volume concludes with an overview of economic and social progress in this early period.

Volume II covers the period 1820-1870, a time of crisis and "progress"—the "Cornies era" and the Crimean war, and the aftermath of both. The strength of this volume lies in the connections made between external events and the Mennonite colonies. The crises themselves are introduced in table form, and include Cornies' dictatorship, the forced breakup of the traditionalist *Gemeinden* in the Molotschna, the landless crisis, the formation of alien groups within the Mennonite community, and changes brought about by the Crimean war. The early influence of the Württemberg Pietists is well described, but perhaps not followed to its logical conclusion. The pietist bent of Cornies himself is not observed by the author. The subsequent analysis of the various crises favours the "progressives", and indirectly the Pietists, as it seems that "progress" in material terms is, in the author's mind, a superior goal. One could view, alternatively, all subsequent crises as provoked by Cornies, the Cornies era, and the Pietists. One might also have hoped that the author would have investigated the opposing and majority views of the traditionalists with some sympathy or neutrality. Needless to say, Epp gives Cornies almost unrestricted praise.

Coverage of the Crimean war may be the most interesting part of this volume. Here Epp's talent for tying external events, political considerations, and the Mennonite community together is displayed to advantage. Epp's pro-Russian stance however, fails to consider that Russian aggressive imperialism was partly to blame for the war, and that the indigenous people of the Crimea, at the time of the war, were of Turkish/Asiatic ethnic origin. A good portion of the remaining part of the volume deals with the landless crisis, the additional divisions in the community represented by the Templers and the Mennonite Brethren, and changes brought about by the Crimean war—the abolition of serfdom and universal state service.

The five chapters of Volume III, while ap-

parently covering the period after 1871, actually contain a discussion of five somewhat separate topics. These are: civil/ Russian government administration, economic development, education, alternative service, and the daughter colonies. The first of these topics is covered with excellent reference to general Russian policy, particularly towards the foreign colonies. The chapters on economic growth and education, are unfortunately, in my view, too biased towards the "Cornie's" school of thinking, and are rather uncritical of the negative effects of the Cornie's era on the Mennonite community. With regard to education, one could validly question the so-called higher education that was made available under the auspices of the "progressives". In the Molotschna for instance, the four *Zentralschulen* (High Schools) were completely dominated by persons of Templer/MB/ Pietist background, or persons with close family connections to Templers and Brethren. There is even evidence that the best qualified teachers were not always selected over poorer candidates, whose main qualification was politically correct (pietist) thinking. One could ask, was the traditionalist reaction to "higher" education shaped by this circumstance, or did the Pietists come to dominate the schools because higher education was abandoned by the traditionalists. In view of the early presence of pietists in the higher schools, one could conclude that the former was the case.²

The author's individual treatment of these five topics in the last volume, as opposed to integration into the general history of the prior volumes, may be a result of circumstances beyond the writer's control. Nevertheless, by compartmentalizing these topics, rather than relating and connecting them to the crises of the prior volume, I think Epp misses a very important cause and effect relation between Russian/Cornies intervention, "higher" education, economic change, and the crises themselves.

This work invites comparison with other works of this kind. Examples which come to mind include the work of James Urry, the one-sided volume of P.M. Friesen, the book *Mennonites in Russia*, which is really a compendium of many articles, not all of which are equally useful, and the writings of Cornelius Krahn, as summarized in Smith's *History of the Mennonites*. Epp has drawn on many of these sources. P.M. Friesen is extensively used, which is not surprising, since, Friesen's prejudices apart, his work contains much valuable and untapped material and data. In respect of data, Friesen's work is perhaps more useful. Urry's work is perhaps more neutral. Epp's work gives more coverage to the Old Colony and to the relationship between external politics and the Russian Mennonites.

Endnotes

1 Fast and Vogt are often confused in the handwriting of the times. An original misreading has led to the perpetuation of this error.

2 As an aside, an example of the erosion of Mennonite fundamentals through the "progressive"/Orloff school of thinking was the Orloff *Ältester* Johann Harder. As a supporter of religious pluralism in the manner of Cornies by helping to break up the traditionalist majority, and as a supporter of so-called "higher" (pietist) education, he

gets good press from many historians, including Epp. Delbert Plett himself, mistakenly I believe, viewed Harder's role favourably, because he defended the Kleine Gemeinde on occasion. His defense was really only a defense of pluralism. Harder's family history reveals this destructiveness, relative to the Mennonite faith. His oldest son Johann was a Mennonite Brethren, and his oldest son Johann, in turn, was a Seventh Day Adventist.

Peter P. Klassen, *The Mennonites in Paraguay*, Vol. I (Steinbach, MB: Mennonitische Post, 2003), revised and updated edition. translated by Gunther H. Schmitt, MD

Reviewed by Abraham Friesen, Fresno, California.

Mennonites, arriving from different countries and at different times, settled in Paraguay in essentially three waves. The first to arrive were the Canadian Mennonites in 1927, consisting primarily of Manitoba and Saskatchewan Sommerfelder and Berghaler congregations. The second were the Russian – largely Siberian – Mennonites who fled the country via Moscow over Germany and arrived in Paraguay in 1930. The third were those Russian Mennonites who escaped the Ukraine with the retreating German armies after 1943 and were then caught in a devastated country where Communist agents tried to recapture and repatriate them. The first settled in the Menno Colony; the second in the Fernheim Colony (and later also in Friesland); and the third in the Neuland Colony. Klassen prefaces the story of their settlement with an extended, but melancholy, recitation of the earlier failure of European settlements in the country, perhaps in order to contrast the eventual success of the Mennonite settlements. But even for the Mennonites, success was slow in coming. Not until the 1970s did success crown their efforts, and then largely through the introduction of a system of co-operatives that helped them market their products.

Klassen discusses the various trips Canadian Mennonite delegates made to Paraguay, their negotiations with McRoberts and the "Intercontinental Land Company" and with Paraguayan government officials; their negative and positive impressions of the land – depending largely on the time of year they arrived there – and the privileges offered the Mennonites by the law of July 26, 1921. Paraguay was the only South American country to offer the Mennonites everything they asked for. Of particular interest in the latter regard is Klassen's extended discussion of the debate that took place in Paraguay regarding these Mennonite privileges, a debate in the various branches of government, the press and the public at large. Klassen even makes a passing reference to Heinrich J. Braun's 1924 privately funded trip to South America (Argentina, Uruguay, and Paraguay), though he does not know the background to the trip nor has he seen the relevant documents regarding it in the A. A. Friesen papers (MLA) or the B. B. Janz papers in Winnipeg (MB Centre). (This reviewer, being the great nephew of H. J. Braun, was offered all of the latter's papers on this trip back in 1965, but turned them down for lack of interest in Russian Mennonite history at the time. They were subsequently burned!) Given

the problem of Mennonite privileges in Russia just prior to and during World War I, one could have expected a thorough discussion of the role of privileges in Mennonite history – as there was between A. A. Friesen and Benjamin H. Unruh in the early 1920s – but there is none to speak of.

Klassen goes into considerable detail regarding the 1929/1930 exodus of the Mennonites from Russia: the roles of B. H. Unruh and Otto Auhagen, the agricultural attaché in the German embassy in Moscow; the diplomatic maneuvering between Germany and Russia, as well as Canada's less than exemplary part played in the whole affair; and the difficulties they experienced in the early years, with some of the disillusioned eventually settling in Friesland on the "greener" side of the Paraguay River or leaving the country completely. By the time the post World War II Mennonites arrived, a certain amount of progress had been made in the older colonies that made it easier for those arriving after the war. Of the earlier group of Russian Mennonites Klassen observes that failure was not an option, for they had no alternatives. Klassen also discusses other immigrant groups in Paraguay such as the Hutterites, the Amish, and other Sommerfelders coming from Canada after 1948.

Of particular interest in Klassen's discussion of these settlements is his argument that since there was no governmental interference in how the Mennonite colonies structured themselves, they were able to reconstitute the colony system they had enjoyed in Russia. Based primarily on the "mir" system of communal land ownership in which land could only be "owned" by church members and sold only with the consent of the ruling leaders. It had been on the basis of these land laws that the Russian Mennonites had been enabled to constitute their "closed communities" that they prized so greatly and sought to re-establish where ever they went after leaving Russia. Even Unruh, already in the early 1920s, had argued that Paraguay could one day become important for larger Mennonite settlements precisely for this reason, Unruh being a great advocate of these "closed" Mennonite communities. And he was certainly influential in establishing the Fernheim Colony in Paraguay in the 1930s. Klassen himself, in the concluding pages of his book, asks whether such communities – in which spiritual and temporal concerns overlapped and became intertwined – was not a *Fehlentwicklung*, a wrong development (not just an "undesirable trend" as the translator would have it) given the original Anabaptist commitment to a "believers' church." Klassen, of all people – like Alfred Neufeld – should have hazarded an answer to his question. Having visited and lectured in Paraguay about a year ago, I can only agree with Neufeld that the "Russian" system of closed colonies, so beloved by the Russian Mennonites, is becoming increasingly problematic in the Paraguayan context, as it did in Russia after 1860.

Klassen rightly recognizes the importance of the Russian background for the Paraguayan Mennonites, even to their use of the term *Mennonitisches Volk*. Actually they spoke of themselves primarily as a *Völklein*. But he misinterprets H. H. Schroeder's (the Mennonite Nazi's) objection to the term. Schroeder only objected to the use of the term because he argued that Mennonites were a part of the German *Volk*, not a separate people.

Klassen also addresses the "Dutch/German" debate in Russia during the war, but once again he is not familiar enough with the issues involved, or with Unruh's role in opposing the "Dutch argument" already during the war and his advocacy of "*das Deutschtum*." He does, however – especially in his book on *Die Deutsch-Völkische Zeit* (1990) – place the blame for the National Socialist influence in the Paraguayan Mennonites colonies primarily at the doorstep of Benjamin H. Unruh (p. 36).

A better understanding of Reformation/Anabaptist history would also have stood Klassen in good stead in his treatment of various aspects of Paraguayan Mennonite history. For example, he calls Melchior Hoffmann the "father of Dutch Anabaptism" and Menno Simons only the "reformer" of the movement. But if one reads Menno's own works, it becomes apparent that the latter opposed the Münsterites from the very outset, even before the collapse of the revolt, and for a long time after. It was Menno's conversion at the height of the crisis (Easter 1525) that then laid the foundation for an entirely new movement, as the reports of the Dutch martyrs recorded in the *Martyrs Mirror* make eminently clear. It was Van Braght's attempt to free Menno from the accusation of being a Münsterite that led him to create a long unbroken line of "baptizing upon faith Christians" – from the time of Christ to the sixteenth-century Anabaptists, into which he could place Menno, that robbed the latter of the critical role he played in the Dutch Anabaptist movement and turned him into a mere "reformer" of that ancient tradition which the Münsterites had sought to undermine. This Van Braght interpretation was recovered by Ludwig Keller in nineteenth-century Germany and brought to Russia by David H. Epp (cf. the addendum to his 1897 Mennonite catechism) for the Russian Mennonite Church and by Heinrich J. Braun (from the Hamburg-Horn German Baptist Seminary) who wrote Keller directly in 1897. This whole phenomenon, so critical to the Russian Mennonite understanding of their Anabaptist past, is as yet unknown (but will be explained in chapter IV of Friesen's *In Defense of Privilege* now going to press in Winnipeg). Klassen has apparently inherited this Russian Mennonite interpretation of Anabaptist/Mennonite history, that is why he leaves the question of Anabaptist/Mennonite origins hanging in mid air in the opening paragraphs of his section on "The Kingdom of God."

Of considerable interest in this last section is also Klassen's assertion that whereas at the outset the three distinct immigration groups had their differences, those have begun to dissipate, especially with regard to church structure and usages. He sees this in contrast to the differences that still exist in North America especially between "General Conference" Mennonites and "Mennonite Brethren." This was a Russian heritage carried over to the North American world. But the fact that only post Russian Revolution Mennonites came to Paraguay, Mennonites who had experience great suffering and Christian renewal that transcended confessional animosities, has led to a church atmosphere in Paraguay where reconciliation could – and did – more easily take place. Indeed, Klassen asserts that a uniformity in virtually all matters religious based on a Mennonite Brethren model is gradually becoming the norm.

One could draw the reader's attention to other matters, but enough has been said. For anyone interested in Paraguayan Mennonite history (and this reviewer certainly was since his grandparents and all of his mother's family were forced to migrate there), this book is indispensable. As a first comprehensive history of those Mennonites, this is a creditable job. And there are many aspects to the study that are new and warrant serious consideration. But, aside from those things already alluded to, there is one negative aspect that should be noted. For it is a fault common to most Mennonite histories. If one inspects the bibliography one will find that the overwhelming number of books listed are written by Mennonite authors. This points to a clear "in-group" perspective as well as to the absence of the larger context within which the history of every people takes place. Just as the history of the sixteenth-century Anabaptist movement cannot be written without reference to the larger history of the Reformation, Mennonite history – whether Russian or Paraguayan – cannot be written without reference to the greater history of those countries. To do so anyway leaves everyone with false perceptions of the truth.

As to the translation, having read the original several years ago, I was disappointed with the translation. Though it is workmanlike it lacks any sense of good style. At times three or four sentences begin with exactly the same words or phrases; at other times the syntax is flawed. The term "immigration" is nearly always used for "emigration," and one is told that there is a "parliament building" in Winnipeg. The conclusion one is forced to draw is that "MDs" do not necessarily make good translators. Like so much else in the world of letters, translation is an art that must be assiduously honed and practiced over a long period of time.

Doreen Reimer Peters, *One Who Dared*, Altona: Friesens, 2005, 307 pages.

Reviewed by Ralph Friesen, Nelson, B.C.

One Who Dared is a labour of love by an eldest daughter for her father. Doreen Reimer Peters did extensive research and interviewing for this book and she has clearly tried her best to honour her father, Ben D. Reimer, and what he stood for, in writing it.

Which makes the book almost impossible to review critically, since one does not take a labour of love to task. Yet, in the spirit of her father, Doreen Peters includes material that requires some kind of critical response. It's as if Ben D. Reimer had come back to life and, in typical fashion, asked the reader, "Are you *sure* you are saved?" Any answer other than a resounding and joyful "yes!" would of course be suspect, and would represent an opportunity for Mr. Reimer to witness for Christ. Not that he necessarily waited for opportunities in his active days, preferring to create them.

Ben Reimer (1909-1994) was the eighth child of school teacher Heinrich R. Reimer (1876-1959) and Helena Dueck (1878-1950). His paternal grandparents, Abram R. and Maria Reimer, settled in Blumenort after the great migration of the Kleine Gemeinde from South Russia in 1874. His

great-grandparents were the legendary Abraham F. ("Stargazer") and Elisabeth Reimer and his great-great grandfather was Klaas Reimer, founder of the Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde. Having come from such a rich Kleine Gemeinde legacy, Ben Reimer was a sort of spiritual pioneer himself, but in a different direction; his passion for evangelizing and work in developing mission-consciousness were instrumental in moving the Gemeinde away from its traditional roots and toward the mainstream of evangelical Christianity.

From the point of view of his daughter, this was only a good thing. Doreen Peters essentially opts to sing a hymn of praise in honour of her father, a controversial individual who did not shy from confrontation. Peters presents this confrontational style as a virtue, necessary for prophets and radicals who are possessed of a truth to which others are oblivious.

There is something to that. Reimer would probably not have accomplished what he did, had he been less forthright in his approach. Despite church opposition, he, along with his brother-in-law Archie Penner, attended the Winnipeg Bible Institute in the late 1930s. He battled some of the church elders in initiating Christian youth meetings in his home community of Prairie Rose (Landmark), in breaking the conservative dress code (he offended some by wearing a necktie when preaching in the Blumenort church), in working with non-Mennonite denominations in evangelizing campaigns, and in establishing the Western Gospel Mission in 1946. Always, his emphasis was on the experience of personal salvation.

Reimer had a conversion experience at a revival meeting in the Bruderthaler (EMB) Church in 1929, led by the American evangelist George Schultz. As Peters puts it: "He experienced something he had never known: that a person could be converted *in one night*." He now had assurance of salvation; he knew he was "a child of God on his way to heaven." This experience defined the battle that Reimer was to fight with the conservative members of the Kleine Gemeinde, and informed his passion for evangelizing that he carried for the rest of his life.

One Who Dared, through interviews with Reimer's contemporaries, memories of the writer and her family, letters and other archival material, documents the story that followed, of a brave soldier for Christ who took the good news of salvation to those who were perceived not to have it, whether they were fellow Mennonites, Aboriginal people, Greek Orthodox Ukrainians of south eastern Manitoba, Catholics—Reimer believed that the gospel applied to all regardless of denominational or ethnic boundaries.

Peters provides many proofs of the power of her father's teachings—individuals were converted, remote communities started churches, alienated youth were brought into the fold. From the perspective of those for whom the individual, unique salvation experience is a core Christian belief, it is a "good news" story, of the positive impact of a passionate man.

But there are also "bad guys" in this story. They are the unnamed conservatives among the Kleine Gemeinde and, later, the Sommerfelder churches who objected to Reimer's approach. Peters presents these traditionalists as benighted

("the heavy-handed, dour legalistic element") and even capable of being rather vicious (Ben Reimer's father warned his son that he would be "used as a floor-rag" by those who opposed his mission efforts).

This polarized view—evangelicals good, traditionalists bad—has been popular among many Mennonite evangelicals for a long time. Ben Reimer, it should be acknowledged, held some conservative views himself, and did not have a desire to break away from the Kleine Gemeinde; he wanted to see it renewed from within. But in celebrating her father, or perhaps in some cases justifying him, Peters perpetuates the old polarizing myth of enlightened evangelicals versus benighted conservatives.

This seems, well, . . . disrespectful. Peters describes a visit by Ben Reimer to the small West Reserve community of Neuberghal. Seeing a young man on a tractor Reimer asks him for directions. Upon receiving the answer, he follows immediately with the question, "Are you a Christian?" The man replies, "I'm supposed to be one"—which told Reimer that "the person did not know Jesus Christ." This breath-takingly arrogant presumption on the part of Ben Reimer (however well-intentioned) is bad enough without the writer reinforcing it 50 years after the fact. Surely we can understand that answer differently today as the humble reply of a person who recognizes that it would be presumptuous to declare his own salvation to others—who knows, instead, that salvation does *not* happen in one night, but is a life-long process, worked out in terms of one's relationship to God and to others, particularly to one's community.

My own father, Reverend Peter D. Friesen, was one of Reimer's contemporaries among the ministerial of the Kleine Gemeinde/Evangelical Mennonite Conference, and as far as I know, essentially sympathetic to Reimer's theology and mission, though perhaps not capable of carrying it out himself. He was not one of the "young Turks" along with Ben Reimer and Archie Penner, but they had his blessing. Whatever good came from this evangelizing movement, there needs to be some accounting for the fact that harm occurred, too. It was not only traditionalists who were offended by essentially impersonal, blunt interrogations about the state of one's soul; such questioning was experienced by some young people as spiritually invasive.

In reading *One Who Dared* I have the sense of being challenged again, on two fronts: as an amateur historian with an appreciation for the traditional life, and as a former "rebel" whose "soul" was targeted by many an evangelist. Doreen Reimer Peters deserves credit for re-opening what is really a core subject for us all, and a continuing bone of contention in the differences between traditionalists, "liberals," and evangelicals—i.e., the nature of salvation. Who were the "dour" traditionalists who opposed Ben Reimer in the Kleine Gemeinde? What was their point of view, specifically in response to his initiatives? That would be a worthy subject of another book. Who were the young hitchhikers Reimer picked up, some of whom struggled to work out more complex answers to his simple questions? That, too, might be worth a book.

There is no questioning Ben Reimer's sincerity, or his fundamental decency as a human being. With uncommon zeal, he zeroed in on one of the great human problems, which Tolstoy expressed as, "How then shall I live?" Reimer thought he had the answer. So does his daughter. And I would respond with what seems self-evident to me: there is more than one answer.

James Urry, *Nur Heilige—Mennoniten in Russland, 1789-1889*, übersetzt aus dem Englischen von Elisabeth L. Wiens (Steinbach, Manitoba: Crossway Publications Inc. n.d. [2005]). Paperback, 356 pp., \$20.00

Reviewed by Harry Loewen, Kelowna, British Columbia

Nur Heilige is a German translation of James Urry's *None But Saints*. The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia 1789-1889 published by Hyperion Press, Winnipeg, in 1989. The German translation and publication was commissioned by the late Delbert Plett QC (1948-2004) and is being distributed by the D.F. Plett Historical Research Foundation.

When the book first appeared in English it created a stir in Mennonite historiography. Written by a non-Mennonite anthropologist-historian, the book gives evidence that the author not only knows Russian-Mennonite history thoroughly, but treats his story objectively and comprehensively, unlike most Mennonite minister-historians' work of previous decades. I myself heard one participant at a symposium in Winnipeg tell Urry after his lecture, "I have never before heard such an objective presentation of Mennonite history."

The German version has been ably translated by Elisabeth L. Wiens of Paraguay, a professional translator in four languages, German, English, Russian and Spanish. Her German is clear and easy to read; the more academic style of the English original has been clarified for the less academically inclined German readers.

Since the original *None But Saints* was published in 1989, much new work on Mennonite history has appeared in print. In an extensive new Foreword (pp. 17-30), Urry refers to and comments on the most important new publications in the field.

Russian Mennonites have been writing their story for some time. Historians such as David Epp and Dietrich Epp, P. M. Friesen and Franz Isaac, to name just a few, had published their works already in Russia. Their histories, however, were limited and one-sided in the way they portrayed the Mennonite world. Almost all of them were clergymen whose main concern was the spiritual-religious history of their people, something no doubt expected of them by their communities. The varied social, economic and political aspects were thus considered of less importance, hence not emphasized.

There was another concern that the preacher-historians wrestled with. Since the Tsarist government expected Mennonites to be model farmers and business people, Mennonite historians were inclined to stress the positive achievements of their communities and left out, even suppressed,

the negative aspects such as their relationship with their non-Mennonite neighbors and the tensions and struggles among their own poor and more well-to-do.

The academically trained historian David G. Rempel (1899-1992) writes in the Foreword to the book: "Our minister-historians were all too prone to view past events through the prism of the Bible and the tinted lenses of their ministers' spectacles. It was too easy to sweep difficult issues and those things considered to be derogatory to the congregation or to the prominent people under the proverbial rug." (p. 13)

Professor Rempel also points out that the older minister-historians did not have access to archival material available to modern historians. In some cases, according to Rempel, "There is no real evidence that the pre-revolutionary historians made use of the Russian archives, even in their local areas, or that they bothered to consult the many Russian sources on Mennonites published in the journals of Russian ministries [and] economic and agricultural societies...." (p. 13)

James Urry's book does not exclude the religious life of Mennonites, but it emphasizes especially the secular world in which Mennonites lived and how this world affected them. The following, among others, are just a few chapter headings which indicate the rich and varied content of the book: "Migration and Settlement," "A Land of Opportunity," "Strangers and Brethren," "The Prophet of Progress [Johann Cornies]," "Commerce and Community," "Pedagogy and Piety," "Dissent and Division," "Reform and Reaction," and "The Emergent Commonwealth."

Urry's main thesis is that when the Prussian Mennonites came to Russia they were a more or less "closed" community. The first settlers were mostly craftsmen and small farmers who sought to make a new beginning in the Chortitza colony along the Dnieper River. In their social and religious orientation they were more inward oriented than outward. At the beginning of the 19th century the Molotschna colony was founded by settlers who were more well-to-do farmers, but their cultural-spiritual world remained limited. Eventually this world became more "open" through the influences from outside their community, including education, increasing prosperity, and openness to new ideas.

In the first half of the 19th century it was especially Johann Cornies who helped to advance his people's social, agricultural and educational activities. As an appointed official of the Russian government, he developed and promoted Mennonite education, modernized agriculture, planted forests and orchards, and encouraged the establishment of model farms.

The energetic and progressive Cornies was not appreciated by all segments of Mennonite society. While the more liberal and progressive members welcomed his transforming activity, the more traditionally-bound, especially some ministers and elders, regarded his innovations as something negative and harmful to the spiritual life of the community. Those who resisted Cornies' work were at times severely disciplined, even exiled.

In the 1870s one third of the Russian Menno-

nites, predominantly those who wished to maintain their traditional values such as non-resistance and independence in education, left for Canada and America. Those who remained were further subjected to changes and modernization, especially in areas of industry, education and politics. Mennonites began to send their young people to Russian and foreign higher educational institutions for the purpose of equipping them for service in their communities and the wider world. At the beginning of the 20th century, the Russian-Mennonite world was no longer a closed one but open to future possibilities.

The new century dawned, however, with dark clouds on the horizon. The Russian neighbors began to envy the success and progress of Mennonites, and the so-called Slavophiles (lovers and defenders of things Russian) spread rumors about how Mennonites and Germans had gotten rich at the expense of disadvantaged Russian peasants. The book concludes at the end of the 19th century, but the reader is made aware that for Russian Mennonites the 20th century will be one of profound social, religious and political upheavals.

It is to be hoped that with the publication of this important translation many German readers will avail themselves of Urry's historical insights. The late Delbert Plett, who financed the translation and publication of this book, was much concerned that especially conservative Mennonites have access to their history. To that end he made provision to have this and other of his historical works distributed, often free of charge, to Mennonites in South and Central America. This and his other many historical works are thus a lasting monument to his love of Mennonite history and his people.

The book is available at all Mennonite bookstores as well as from Derksen Printers, Box 1209, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada R5G 1A5

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Tribute

Adina Reger

5 May 1950 – 6 November 2005

Johannes Dyck and Katharina Neufeld

chair and vice-chair of the *Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums*.

Adina Reger was born May 5th 1950 in the Karakalpak village in the Kustanai region of northern Kazakhstan to Kornelius and Katharina Reger (nee Reimer). The parents of Adina were deported here from the Black Sea region during World War II. She was the oldest daughter in a family of five.

In Kustanai, in 1968, Adina completed training as a pharmaceutical laboratory assistant, and worked in the Soviet Union for 19 years in a pharmacy. In 1972 Adina married Anatoly Reger, and a year later a daughter was born to them. Shortly after the wedding ceremony, Anatoly was severely injured in a car accident and since then was bound to a wheelchair. Adina lovingly cared for him for the remaining 32 years of their marriage.

From Kazakhstan the Reger family moved to the Republic of Moldova where they hoped emigration to Germany would be easier. They arrived in Germany in 1987 and settled in Darmstadt. The family moved to Weissenthurm in 1993, a city on the Rhine River near Neuwied. Here Adina attained her certification as a translator for Russian and German. In Weissenthurm a granddaughter Kim was born.

Baptized in 1974, Adina was a member of different churches in northern Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Germany. During the last years she was a member of the Mennonite Brethren Church in Neuwied, Germany. Adina was a very active person. She decorated the church building, and her hospitality knew almost no limits, even when she was seriously ill.

In Germany Adina discovered a passion for the history of her own people, the Mennonites. Already in Russia she had begun to collect materials about everything pertaining to Mennonites. The first book she published in 1996 consisted of the memoirs of Nicolai Reimer (1900-1977), a widely known Mennonite Brethren elder in the post-war Soviet Union, and Adina's grandfather. A voluminous book on the Reimer family followed in 1998.

Adina Reger's best-known book was *Diese Steine*, published together with Delbert Plett in 2001. The cooperation with Delbert Plett was very fruitful. Adina and Delbert planned to publish more books on Mennonites in the Soviet Union, but their death stopped them. Adina handed all materials she collected to the *Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Kulturerbes des russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums* in order to produce the next volume of *Diese Steine*. The work on this project continues, but without Adina.

Besides collecting materials and producing

books, Adina Reger frequently traveled in the former Soviet Union as a tour guide. She knew everything about the traces of Mennonite life in the Ukraine and inspired people who accompanied her on the trips. Adina Reger passed away in Weissenthurm on November 6, 2005, after a

long and painful illness.

We may conclude with the words Adina wrote in the epilogue to her grandfather's biography: "Her life was an example to us that could give off warmth and light like the Sun even without words - in silence."



Adina Reger 5 May 1950 - 6 November 2005



Top left: The martyr Pieter Beckjen, Netherlands, teaching in a boat. (*Martyrs' Mirror* p. 739)

Top Right: Dirk Willems, Holland, saving his captor's life. 1569. (*Martyrs' Mirror* p. 741)

Middle left: Two young girls being led to execution. 1550. (*Martyrs' Mirror* p. 501)

Middle right: Ursel van Essen, Amsterdam, whipped before being burned. 1570. (*Martyrs' Mirror* p. 843)

Bottom left: Willem Janss, Waterland, burned at the stake. 1569. (*Martyrs' Mirror* p. 831)

