

M

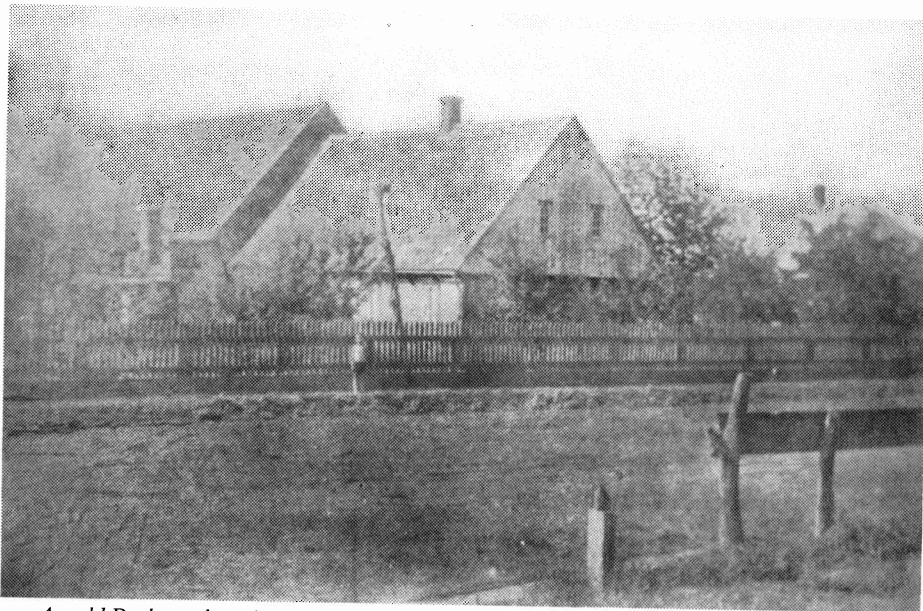
Manitoba
Mennonite
Historical
Society



NUMBER 10

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1989



Arnold Dyck was born in Hochfeld, Jasykowo in Russia. The picture of his birthplace was taken after World War II.

My memories of Arnold Dyck

— by Elisabeth Peters

To have known Arnold Dyck not only as the greatest Mennonite prose writer in German and Low German, but also as a person and friend, has been a great privilege for our family. My parents had been acquainted with him in Russia; in fact, Arnold Dyck was born in the same house my father was born in, since my grandfather sold the "Wirtschaft" to his father in Hochfeld, Jasykowo.

My husband and I met him for the first time in 1944 at the founding meeting of the *Echo Verlag* in Winnipeg. We became very good friends and in 1966 he came to live with us for a year in our home on Queenston Street in River Heights.

It was a rented house, to be sure, since the eccentric Scottish owner would not part with it, but it was European in architecture and appointment, and it was surrounded by a lush English lawn with sixteen huge trees and several French lilac bushes on it.

Mr. Dyck, as we always called him in both High and Low German, simply revelled in the setting and location. I can still see him today on his daily morning walk, allowing Bella, our springer spaniel, to follow him up to the path on Wellington Crescent, where he would stop, shake his finger at her,

and send her home. She came trotting back sadly while the aging white-haired man with the slight limp due to an accident he had sustained in Europe, walked briskly all the way to the City Park. Neighbours on the street would phone to ask, "Who is the distinguished looking gentleman living with you? We see him walking to the park every day, rain or shine. He looks like a writer or artist." "He is both," we would tell them, although at that time he rarely applied himself to the art of painting, which was his first love. Unfortunately we could not introduce our Anglo-Saxon neighbour to his writing because at that time none of his works had been translated into English.

Planned carefully

Mr. Dyck planned his days carefully, so the everyday banalities of life could be discharged with minimal waste of time and energy. One had to eat, but he was never a heavy eater. Occasionally he

'Dyck's most important novel, *Lost in the Steppe*, was translated by the late Dr. Henry Dyck in 1973 and published by Derksen Printers of Steinbach in the same year. Subsequently some of his Low German short stories have been translated, as well as parts of the *Koop onn Bua* series.

ate supper with us at 6:30 when he was home, but he preferred to be free of all social constraints and generally stayed with the rigid diet he had found to be most conducive to his well-being. This "diet" consisted simply of a mixture of rolled oats, honey, and whatever fruit he felt like eating. He had carefully experimented with the amount of food he needed to supply him with the necessary energy throughout the day, and adhered to it fairly rigidly.

On weekends, however, when my husband, the children and I were all home from school, he enjoyed eating meals with us especially Mennonite dishes, although he often mentioned it was the company he needed, not the food. Because his appetite left so much to be desired, I tried to find out his favourite dishes, but he only chuckled playfully. "One time you did serve the dish I like best of all, but I won't tell you what it is, so you won't go to a lot of trouble to make it." I search-

continued on page 2



Old English Blessing

God bless thy year!
Thy coming, thy
going out,
Thy rest, thy
travelling about,
The rough, the
smooth,
The bright, the drear,
God bless thy year!

continued from previous page

ed my memory for our menu on the last three weekends, and concluded he must have meant *Runde Koake*, those tricky fritters that brought Jeat Jeatze's culinary efforts down to defeat in the short story of that title.

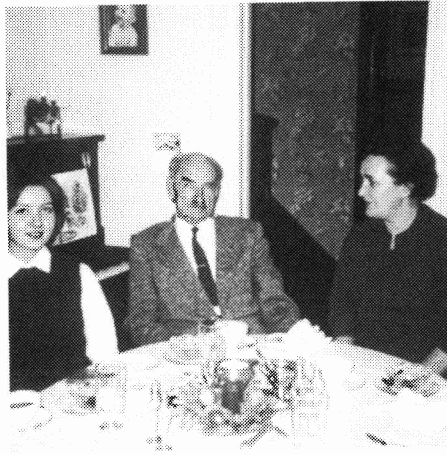
Our family has always been known for its propensity to drop everything at a word from my husband, scramble into the car, and start out on an exciting jaunt into the blue. Our house-guest fitted right in. At the time he lived with us he had no car, and enjoyed nothing more than these excursions to Winkler, Altona, Steinbach and even Bemidji.

Longer journey

One summer he came with us on a longer "planned" journey to Ontario to the Mennonite Conference in Leamington, together with another well-known Mennonite writer, Dr. Walter Quiring. On Mr. Dyck's suggestion, we did not attend the conference full time, but made a most interesting side-trip to Montreal and Quebec. I remember at one point my husband stopped the car to buy a huge watermelon which a vendor offered at a roadside stand. "We'll never manage to eat it all," he said, as he ripped through the juicy melon with his pocketknife. But he was mistaken. Both Mr. Dyck and Walter Quiring came from the sandy Bastanfields of the southern Ukraine, and the watermelon vanished in an astonishingly short time. Sitting comfortably on the soft grass by the shoulder of the Quebec country road we were travelling, Mr. Dyck remarked, "*Wann die Mennoniten emol eeni Flag haben wellen, dann sull doabowen eene Arbus mett Schmettji sennen.*" (If the Mennonites ever want to have a flag of their own, it ought to bear a picture of a watermelon and [Mennonite] biscuits.)

Sunday was always a day that must be distinct from the other days of the week. At ten o'clock, Mr. Dyck would join us at the garage door, ready to accompany us to church. He never commented much on the sermons unless they offended his sense of ethics or aesthetics, but how he enjoyed the congregational singing which at that time was at its best in the Schönuieser Church where we attended. Mr. Dyck had a beautiful smorous speaking voice, and a pleasant, deep singing voice, and joined in the singing of the "Chorale" with "heart and soul and voice."

Like so many of us, Mr. Dyck suffered from the deadly *Sindag jähin Owint* syndrome. I remember how he complained right after *Vaspa* one Sunday, when the autumn sun dejectedly sank out of sight at five o'clock, "*Sindag haulf-fiew woat eenim so wehgaulich to mod, aus eenim der-chjiprijelden Hund.*" But after darkness had set in and my husband had started a cheerful fire in the huge fireplace in the living-room, his mood changed. Sometimes, after we all had enjoyed Mozart or Beethoven recording, our children entertained us with piano music. Mr. Dyck would sit to the right of the fire in a small easy-chair which he had adopted as his during his stay with us, and listened as discerningly to the children's performance as he had to the classic records. "This is art in the making," he said one time when my husband suggested perhaps we had heard enough, "It is so rewarding to hear young people expressing themselves in their music. The mistakes are really of little consequence - they will go away in time."



In the mid-sixties, Arnold Dyck stayed with the Peters in Winnipeg where he often enjoyed vaspas with Elizabeth Peters and her daughter Rosemarin.

"Expression" was of prime importance for Arnold Dyck. I vividly remember the day when he was arranging the manuscript of *Das Steppendorf im Bürgerkrieg* on the sofa in his room. "I have spent many hours trying to express the inexpressible - the horror of revolution and war - and yet retain the level of hope which carried through the bitter agony of so many who were caught in the turmoil he remarked, and I sensed his satisfaction with a task well done. (At the present time, this manuscript is not available for publication).

Twilight hours

The most memorable times of Arnold Dyck's year in our home were the twilight hours - the fire, the music, Mr. Dyck in his chair. It was then that he began to reminisce in his deep voice, bringing to life the figures of those whom he immortalized in his writings. He particularly enjoyed talking about the scrapes of "Isaak Hoarms", the likeable, jolly village boy with whom Dyck attended school in Hochfeld in faraway Russia, in faraway days, whose antics entertain the reader in *Last in the Steppe*.

One evening Mr. Dyck came in very late and walked up to his room with only a curt "good night" to us from the hallway. Several evenings

elapsed with an empty chair by the fire - he was out walking. Saturday night, the evening he liked best, he wearily sat down in his usual place. After a while he asked my husband to play Beethoven's Third Symphony, the Eroica. Only then could he tell us of the death of Isaak Hoarms which a friend from Germany had reported to him. "They beat him to death in his own yard with cudgels - like a dog," he said very quietly. That was his only comment, but it spoke eloquently of his grief.

In the summer of 1968 Arnold Dyck went back to Germany with his daughter, the German *Heimatschrift-stellerin*, Hedi Knoop, who had come with three of her children to visit him. We also went to Germany that year on my husband's sabbatical; needless to say, there was a great deal of visiting back and forth between the Knoop household in Uchte in the moors of Lower Samy, and ours in Goettingen. We were invited to Mr. Dyck's birthday on the 19th of January, when he turned 80. Many neighbours, especially the older ladies whom he met on his walks in the lovely heath, had sent flowers for the occasion. When we admired them, he wistfully remarked, "*Jo dout senn sone schmoecke Tjrietkis, onn etj frei mie uek doarau. Oba noch mea woudd etj mie freie wann daut mennische Mumtjis jewast weare, dee dee Blomi jischetjt haude.*"

Arnold Dyck was first and last a Mennonite. When we told him in spring that we were returning to Canada that summer, he said, "I'll miss you, but maybe it's a good thing you're going. I too must go back to my Mennonites, for I can never be without them very long. I'll join you in Winnipeg in the fall."

But he never returned. Arnold Dyck died the next summer and did not see his "Mennonite" Canada again. He is buried in the beautiful Darlaten Cemetery, a country church yard, not far from Hedi's home. A large natural stone marks his grave.

Elizabeth Peters, a retired University of Manitoba professor, is one of the editors of the collected works of Arnold Dyck now being published. She has written many articles for Mennonite publications.

Genealogy Committee Report

— by Hans Werner

The arrival of the longer evenings of fall and winter also mean increased activity for the genealogy committee of the historical society. The central committee met in Morris in September to lay the groundwork for a Genealogy Seminar in connection with the World Conference being held in Winnipeg in July of 1990. Keep watching for further details. The Committee also reviewed the judging procedure for the Harvey E. Plett Memorial Awards to high school students. The awards are given annually to high school students completing a family history project. It was decided to publicize these awards to a wider audience to encourage an interest in Mennonite Family History among high school students in all Mennonite areas.

The East Reserve Committee sponsored a genealogy evening on September 25 with Bill Schroeder displaying his maps, Margaret Kroeker

from Mennonite Genealogy with a book display, and a presentation from Lawrence Klippenstein of the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

The West Reserve Committee was also busy with displays in the Altona Mall and the Southland Mall in Winkler, on two successive weekends in October. The displays included the working maps for the West Reserve Atlas by John Remple and Bill Harms, and various genealogical source material from private collections and the M.B. and Heritage Centre Archives.

The Winnipeg Committee had a seminar in late October on the relationship of community and genealogy with Jake Peters as the featured speaker.

The events were all well attended with good interest shown. The winter is off to a good start with these excellent opportunities to learn about genealogy and family history. Hopefully the months ahead will also give opportunity to spend more time on personal projects. Good luck!

Genealogists hear about Fuerstenland

— by Alf Redekopp

On October 24, 1989 over 20 individuals attended a Genealogy and Family History Workshop at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. The main feature of the evening event was guest speaker, Jake Peters, a graduate history student from the University of Manitoba, who shared some of the results of his research on the *Fuerstenland* Mennonite Colony in Southern Russia.

Fuerstenland was a daughter colony of the Chortitza Colony and was founded in 1864 on

rented land. Peters pointed out how the population in this colony was in perpetual flux and that the people never developed any strong sense of community. Due to the inability to own land, economic growth was stifled. The residents who did well quickly moved on to places with better economic conditions. Those residents who did poorly due to bad crops for a few years in succession, would try to sell what little they had and start over somewhere else. Peters said this was especially true for the residents of *Fuerstenland* between 1889-1914, resulting in what he described as "an absence of community." He added that the iden-

tity of the residents of *Fuerstenland*, even those who had been raised there was often still with the mother colony and its villages.

In addition to the feature presentation, participants were also encouraged by Anna Ens, to reflect on the role genealogy can play in fostering a sense of community today which crosses many boundaries. Participants involved themselves freely in the formal and informal discussions, resulting in a profitable evening for most.

This workshop was planned by the local Winnipeg Genealogy Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

Historic Marker Proposal

— by Jacob Y. Shantz

Background:

Jacob Y. Shantz was an Ontario Mennonite who played an important role in the settlement of southern Manitoba by the Mennonites in the 1870s. He was born and raised in Berlin (presently Kitchener, Ontario) and made his first trip to the Northwest in November of 1872.

The next ten years were years of intensive involvement in the settlement of Manitoba by Mennonites from Russia. Jacob Y. Shantz was involved in supporting this settlement through his lobbying efforts to obtain a loan from the federal government as well as his efforts in organizing financial aid from Ontario Mennonites.

In addition he made numerous additional trips west to secure provisions, build immigration sheds, and to check on the settlers well-being. His many efforts for the settlers from Russia resulted in two villages being named after him, Schanzenberg near

Niverville (no longer in existence), and Schanzenfeld south of Winkler. (For further information see: *Vicarious Pioneer: The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz*, Samuel J. Steiner, Hyperion Press, Winnipeg, 1988)

Proposal:

A group of interested people would like to propose a historical marker to commemorate the assistance of Jacob Y. Shantz and to remind future generations of this assistance to the areas original settlers. It is proposed a sizeable stone with a bronze plaque and inscription be erected on the grounds of the Southwood School near the village of Schanzenfeld. The inscription would draw attention to the contribution of Jacob Y. Shantz to the settlement of Manitoba by the Mennonites as well as drawing attention to the nearby village named after him.

The school yard site would be most suitable as it is already public property and the design and loca-

tion of the marker could be incorporated into normal school ground maintenance.

Participants:

- Garden Valley School Division - To give permission to erect the marker on School Division property and given satisfactory design and location to maintain the site under regular school yard maintenance procedures.

- Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society - To be the official sponsor of the erection of the marker and provide a vehicle for collection of funds and issuing of charitable receipts.

- Ad hoc committee consisting of: Frank Suderman, Winkler; Abe Ens, Reinland and Isaac L. Friesen, Schanzenfeld will undertake to provide the materials and arrange the construction of the monument as well as raising adequate funds for its completion.

Report on MMHS Board Meeting, October 25

— by Lawrence Klippenstein

Twelve members of the 18-person MMHS board were present at the fall meeting held October 25, 1989, at the Southwood School (Schantzenfeld), near Winkler. The board noted with sadness the very recent passing of Jacob Fehr of Plum Coulee, Manitoba, who had served on the board during the last several years.

Adolf Ens noted in his executive committee report it favors participating in an exhibit booth at MWC, as a partner of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. It also agreed to appoint a nominating committee to help fill vacancies and needed re-appointments to the Board for 1990. The program committee will meet to prepare for the annual meeting, scheduled for January 27, 1990.

Genealogy meetings have been sponsored by branch committees in Steinbach and Winnipeg. Some attention is being given already to planning a one-day workshop for July at the time of the Prussian Mennonite symposium. The Local History Committee planned to initiate a Mennonite Studies workshop in Boissevain on November 25. It was also asked to become involved in the plans to erect a marker for Jacob Y. Shantz at the Southwood School grounds. The village of Schanzenfeld was named in honor of Shantz, who gave

a great deal of help to Mennonites who first settled the East and West Reserves in the 1870s.

In the area of research it was reported Vol. IV of the Arnold Dyck's *Collected Works* is ready for the press. * A total of \$19,000 or so will be needed to publish the work. A part of it has been raised by sponsoring Low German reading evenings in places like Winnipeg, Steinbach and Altona (still to come). Interest has been good on the whole. The question is raised whether Winkler will be put on the readings schedule as well.

It is reported Andreas Schroeder and Jim Braun are working on "coffee table" type albums for Mennonites in Canada and Manitoba respectively. The book on Winnipeg Mennonites by Leo Driedger is expected to come off the press (Kindred) shortly.

The Education Committee is trying to get local school division curriculum committees to consider working Mennonite historical materials into their outlines. Someone suggests a kit for teaching Low German needs to be developed also.

Mennonite Books reported a good response to its mailing of 17,000 catalogues through *Mennonite Reporter* and *Mennonite Mirror* channels. It hopes sales can gross at least \$20,000 this year.

In other reports it is stated Rev. John D. Friesen has published a new book entitled *Holding Forth*

the Word of Life. The launching for Jim Urry's book on Mennonites in Russia is being planned for late November.

Members of the Society are urged to check their renewal files to make sure they have renewed membership for 1990. The cost is \$10.

*Vols. I-III are available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Annual Meeting

January 27, 1990, 5 p.m.

Mennonite Brethren
Bible College Auditorium
169 Riverton Ave., Wpg.

6:30 p.m. - banquet
Guest speaker - James Urry

Private lives and public image: Mennonite
popular culture in historical perspective
All MMHS members and guests are
invited to attend

Overview of Symposium: Bicentennial of Mennonites in Russia

From Nov. 9 to 11 a symposium on the Bicentennial of Mennonites in Russia was conducted in Winnipeg with sessions at the University of Manitoba, Canadian Mennonite Bible College and Mennonite Brethren Bible College. **Adolf Ens**, professor at CMBC gives an overview of the event.

They came from Vancouver and St. Catharines, from California and Europe: students and professors, retirees and young people from all walks of life. Well over a hundred persons spent the weekend of November 9-11 in Winnipeg discussing two hundred years of Mennonite experience in Russia and the Soviet Union.

The scene in college chapel and university lecture theatre couldn't match the hundreds gathered under the old oak tree in Chortitza a few months ago to celebrate the same event. Most of the Winnipeg audience had not lived in the Soviet Union for at least forty years. Many of the historians who presented papers had never lived there at all. But the discussion was intense as interpretations were tested and events from as much as 200 years ago were reconstructed.

Not all of the 152 registered sat through three papers in the morning and three more in the afternoon; but many did, and then came back for another one in the evening!

College and university professors gave most of the papers (Len Friesen, Waterloo; Peter Klassen, California; Harvey Dyck, Toronto; Harry Loewen, Adolf Ens, George Epp, and John Dyck, Winnipeg; James Urry, New Zealand) but other historians with recent contacts in the USSR (archivist Lawrence Klippenstein and MCC staff person Walter Sawatzky) and persons who had lived in the Soviet Union more recently (Anna Janzen, Johannes Reimer, and Johannes Dück) contributed equally significantly to our understanding of past and present.

Professor Dan Stone of the University of Winnipeg served as an "outside" listener and made helpful interventions from time to time. His invited counterpart, Prof. Iurii Zamoishkin of the USSR Academy of Sciences, unfortunately had to return home just prior to the symposium.

The banquet evening on the final night featured Al Reimer, author of *My Harp Is Turned to Mourning*, speaking on the culture of the wealthy estate owner class in pre-WWI Russia. The CMBC Singers, directed by Prof. Leonard Enns in a selection of typical songs performed by Russian Mennonite choirs at the turn of the century, climaxed the symposium, stimulating the audience almost to experience some of that life they had been discussing so vigorously.

Topics addressed during the symposium:

Mennonites and the fissuring of the New Russian society, 1860s to 1905 by Len Friesen, Conrad Gröbel College.

Historiographic Perspectives: Through Different Eyes by Peter J. Klassen, University of Southern California.

The Prussian Mennonite views of those who emigrated to New Russia by Adolf Ens, Canadian Mennonite Bible College.

Variety and change in external and self-images of Russian Mennonitism, 1840-1914 by Harvey

Dyck, University of Toronto.

State service among Mennonites by Lawrence Klippenstein, Mennonite Heritage Centre.

The struggle for self-understanding: Two conceptions of Gemeinde among Russian Mennonites 1914-1923 by John Dyck, University of Manitoba.

Prolegomena to the study of Mennonite society in Russia 1880-1914 by James Urry, University of Wellington, New Zealand.

Church developments by Abe Dueck, Mennonite Brethren Bible College and John Friesen,

Canadian Mennonite Bible College.

Mennonite experiences during the 1930s and 1940s by George K. Epp, Menno Simons College.

Soviet reference points for Mennonite identity by Walter Sawatzky, MCC Canada.

Personal reflections of life in the USSR by Anna H. Janzen, Hamburg, Germany.

Peasant Aristocracy: the Mennonite Gutsbesitzerum in Russia by Al Reimer, University of Winnipeg.

Reflections

— by Ken Reddig

Being part of an Historical Society is one way to link up not only with ones past, but often with world events as well. This year was an exceptional year in this regard. With many relatives and friends in eastern bloc countries, many of our members were absolutely astounded this year when the crack in the Berlin Wall became a normal border crossing. When relatives and friends, and in some cases almost entire congregations, moved to West Germany from the Soviet Union. When the communist party, the party which has often been responsible for shattering many of our fellow Mennonite families and congregations, actually relinquished its control in some countries. Who ever would have thought it possible?

This year, 1989, will be a year we will not soon forget. The changes in eastern Europe have forced significant global changes. The way we have always thought about eastern bloc Mennonites no longer fits the political reality. It has tipped the balance for some Mennonite denominations. For example, there are now more Mennonite Brethren in Germany than there are in the United States. It is a shift which will eventually be felt throughout that denomination. It is very likely it will take years for us, particularly in North America, to come to terms with some of these significant global shifts.

While these exciting world events were brought to us each evening via television and radio, closer to home the society was involved in other meaningful activities. We held a wonderful evening of Gospel Quartet music in spring with the kind of music that has inspired and continues to inspire many of our church members. A responsive group of 300 showed up for that concert.

The genealogy committee sponsored numerous events around the province, proving once again that the study of ones own family can be exciting and full of surprises. The Arnold Dyck project came close to completion. All that remains is the gathering of sufficient monies for publication of the final volume, which is now edited and ready to go to press. To help gather funds for this project three wonderful programs in Low German, were held in three different communities in the province.

The first translation of the Echo Verlag series also came off the press. With more to come in the next few years this first volume has already shown how important this translation project is for the non-German speaking Mennonite community. And finally, though not officially a function of the society, a major bi-centennial conference

celebrating the coming of the first Mennonites from Prussia to Russia was conducted in Winnipeg in November. Well attended, it was one of those events where the enthusiasm and meaningful debate stressed the importance of interpreting past Mennonite experience.

Besides these "official" projects, numerous other local publishing projects and historical events kept Manitoba Society members busy with a broad range of activities. It was exciting to see congregations take their own history seriously, families work hard at providing an accurate story of their historical pilgrimage and to see business and service organizations attempt to come to terms with their historical past.

While 1989 was an unusual year, it is certain that the next year will be every bit as exciting. Many fine projects will reach publication stage, the Mennonite World Conference will bring a unique excitement of its own to Manitoba in late July, and already many families are planning large get-togethers to coincide with the Mennonite World Conference. Therefore, as we look back on 1989 and deem it a good year, the prospect of 1990 brings with it every opportunity for another fine year.

Here's wishing all of you a very joyous and productive New year.

Ken Reddig is president of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

Boissevain Mennonite Studies Workshop

A dozen persons attended a workshop for genealogists and congregational historians held at the Whitewater Mennonite Church in Boissevain on Saturday, November 25. Art Hildebrand read a paper on writing the history of the Crystal City Mennonite Church and Ernie Dyck did one on *Ups and Downs of Preparing a Genealogy*. Both papers were well received. Henry Albrecht was in charge of local arrangements which were excellently carried out.

It is hoped another event like this can be held for western Manitoba communities next year. Bert Friesen and Lawrence Klippenstein served as visiting resource persons for this year's meeting.

The workshop was sponsored by the MMHS Local History Committee and the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Recent Mennonite Publications

Fast, Karl. **Lass dir an meiner Grade** genügen. Canzona Publishing. Pb., 138 pp., \$11. About a Mennonite mother from Orenburg in the Soviet Union.

Friesen, John, ed. **Mennonites in Russia, 1789-1989. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz.** (1989) Hdc., 387 pp., \$22.50. Fifteen essays and an extensive bibliography included.

Klassen, Peter J. **A Homeland for Strangers. An Introduction to Mennonites in Poland and Prussia.** Pb. 94 pp., \$18.

Klippenstein, Lawrence, ed. **Es wurde wieder ruhig. Die Lebensgeschichte eines mennonitischen Predigers aus der Sowjetunion.** (Peter [Isaak] Derksen) autobiography. (1989) Pb., 183 pp., \$11.00. An Umsiedler minister tells his life story.

Nickel, John, ed. and trans. **Hope Springs Eternal. A Legacy of Service and Love in Russia During Difficult Times.** (1988) Pb., 304 pp., \$16.00. Sermons and papers of Johann J. Nickel, 1859-1920.

Reimer, Doug. **Older Than Ravens.** (1989) Pb., 158 pp. \$10.95. Short stories in the setting of a small southern Manitoba Mennonite village.

Toews, C.P., Heinrich Friesen, Arnold Dyck. **The Kuban Settlement.** Trans. H. Giesbrecht. (1989) Pb., 93 pp., \$10.00. From the Echo-Verlag Series.

Urry, James. **None But Saints. The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia. 1789-1889.** (1989) Pb., 328 pp., \$20.

Books are available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftsbury Blvd., Wpg. R3P 0M4.

A Genealogy Workshop

will be held at
Mennonite Heritage Centre
600 Shaftsbury Blvd.

March 13, 1990 at 7:30 p.m.

Guest Speaker: James Urry

For more information call
Margaret Kroeker at 772-0747

Notice

The 1990 membership fees
for the MMHS are now due.

Please send \$10 to:
Ken Reddig
Centre for M.B. Studies
169 Riverston Ave.
Winnipeg, MB R2G 2E5



The Dietscha Sposs, the Ens Family Singers, entertained with a variety of songs at the Low German evenings in Winnipeg, Steinbach and Altona.

Low German evenings feature Koop enn Bua

— by Doris Penner

It was an evening of sumptuous Low German fare and the capacity crowd at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School October 21 relished every minute of it.

It was an evening of story-telling, sparkling with lively good humor - sometimes wit - and filled with a warmth and ambience not often felt in an audience composed of strangers.

But then all these "strangers" understood Low German - spoken by a small minority of the population in our country - and all had the same history which instigated a chuckle, outright laughter or even a tear at exactly the same places.

The featured stories were those written by Arnold Dyck, sometimes known as the beloved *Heimatsdichter* of Canadian Mennonites ("their own writer").

Segments of his well-known *Koop enn Bua* were read by Al Reimer, editor of many Low German works and an author in his own right, and Henry Ens, teacher and Low German performer. As Dyck had intended, these characters - who thought of themselves as world travellers after they saw Niagara Falls - took on a life of their own as both Reimer and Ens performed with clear diction and dynamic expression.

The two men also did a dialogue entitled *Nofädmasch* which depicted the way Mennonites spend hours piecing together complex family relationships.

Preparing the audience for the evening was

chairman Elizabeth Peters, who reminisced about her acquaintance with Dyck. After her spirited opening remarks one couldn't help but feel she made a fine storyteller herself.

Adding to the humor of the evening was the *Dietscha Sposs*, the Ens family singing group. They entertained with Low German courting songs, a clever translation of *If I Were a Rich Man* from Fiddler on the Roof, an adaptation of *Do a Deer* from the *Sound of Music* and several popular Low German "hit-parade" songs.

Erica Ens, a member of the group, read her own composition, *Prisoner's Base*, an account of a young Mennonite girl newly immigrated from Russia adjusting to Canadian society.

Low German evenings were also held in Winnipeg, October 20 and in Altona, October 27.

The evenings were sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, which has been working for several years with compiling Dyck's works for publication. Volume 1 contains his classic autobiographical *Verloren in der Steppe (Lost in the Steppes)* as well as his personal memoir *Aus Meinen Leben*. Volume 2, published in 1986, contains the complete text of Dyck's comic novels, depicting the travel adventures of *Koop enn Bua*.

The third volume contains the rest of a collection of ethnic experiences in Russia and Canada. Volume four, to be published in the next year, will complete the publication of Dyck's works.

Reprinted by permission from The Carillon.