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Manitoba
Mennonite
Historical
Society



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JULY 1990



A Mennonite village in Manitoba in the 1870's

MMHS at Mennonite World Conference

(Assembly 12)

The MMHS will be deeply involved at the MWC Assembly 12 sessions in July. Three projects are at the centre of this activity.

To begin with, MMHS is co-sponsoring an historical exhibit on Mennonites in Canada. The other participant is Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. Gerald Loewen is designing this exhibition.

The MMHS is also helping to host a special meeting of Mennonite historians from around the world, which will take place July 27 from 4 to 6 p.m. More information on this will be

forthcoming.

In the third place, MMHS is sponsoring a visual art exhibit entitled *Mennonite Artist: The Insider as Outsider*. A number of persons of Mennonite heritage will be taking part. This exhibit will be open to the public from July 6 to 29 at the Main Access Gallery, 100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg. A special thanks goes to The Manitoba Arts Council, the City of Winnipeg, the Manitoba Department of Culture, Heritage and Recreation and other donors for helping to fund this project.

Visual Art Exhibition an Event of Conference

MENNONITE ARTIST: THE INSIDER AS OUTSIDER

*An Exhibition of Visual Art by
Artists of Mennonite Heritage*

July 6-29, 1990

MAIN/ACCESS GALLERY

100 Arthur Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba

As recently as 30 years ago it would have been possible to exhibit the work of all contemporary North American artists of Mennonite heritage in one place.

The Mennonites emerged as a distinct religious group during the Reformation of the 16th century. The iconoclastic nature of that movement predisposed them to reject visual imagery of any kind. Consequently, they brought with them a tradition of modest, unadorned dress and simple, unpretentious church buildings, when they came to Manitoba in the 1870's.

In recent years, however, there has been a veritable explosion of productivity by artists of

Mennonite origin and this exhibition features 14 of them. It coincides with the 12th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference in Winnipeg, July 24 to 29, 1990.

In the following article, Priscilla Reimer, curator of the exhibition, describes how Mennonite Artist: The Insider as Outsider was put together.

The making of an art exhibition

Mennonite Artist: The Insider as Outsider was motivated by the meeting in Winnipeg of the 12th Assembly of the Mennonite World Conference in July, 1990. This every-six-year event has become a 'global family gathering' and the focus for international, inter-Mennonite discussion. It could not be allowed to pass without the involvement of contemporary Mennonite artists and a review of current art practice among artists of Mennonite descent. This conviction presented the Project Steering Committee with a formidable challenge.

In order to be representative, the exhibition should be international in scope because Mennonitism has spread worldwide, crossing both territorial and cultural boundaries. And, if such a project were undertaken would it be possible to embrace, in a single exhibition, the diverse approaches to art and aesthetics that would inevitably characterize work from a variety of cultures? It quickly became apparent available resources would not allow for such an ambitious undertaking. The valuable cultural and aesthetic exchange that such an international exhibition would generate awaits another opportunity.

For practical reasons, therefore, the artists in this exhibition are North Americans and all are Mennonites of Dutch-Prussian-Russian or Swiss descent.

Not a conscious feature

When the Mennonites came to North America they brought with them a strong ethno-religious tradition, but the visual arts were not a conspicuous feature of Mennonite life and culture. If the net is cast widely enough, it is possible to identify visual traditions — fraktur, quilting and other forms of decorative design — that have been assimilated into current art practice but there is no identifiable tradition of Mennonite art. Artists of Mennonite extraction contributed to the "Golden Age" of Dutch art in the 17th and 18th centuries but there is no recognizable, historic continuity which links contemporary Mennonite artists to their Dutch predecessors.

Thus, as recently as 30 years ago a representative, if not comprehensive exhibition of contemporary North American art by artists of Mennonite

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heritage would have been a plausible undertaking. That is no longer the case. In recent years there has been a veritable explosion of productivity in the visual arts and increasingly artists who are nurtured in the Mennonite tradition are distinguishing themselves — Gathie Falk, Will Gorlitz, Aganetha Dyck, Wanda Koop, Paul Soldner, Erma Martin Yost, Grace Nickel.

The actual number remains indeterminate, but initial research indicates there are more artists of Mennonite descent than the Steering Committee anticipated. The People's Place Gallery in Intercourse, Pennsylvania which is committed to "Mennonite-related" artists has a mailing list of approximately 350 artists and friends of artists.

Mennonite Artist: The Insider as Outsider profiles only 14 artists, at least 10 of whom are Manitoban. Some of them are just beginning promising careers and others are already nationally and internationally established.

Call for artists

Needless to say, the selection process was imprecise. A call for professional Mennonite artists was circulated in Canada. "Mennonite" refers to any artist who was nurtured in the Mennonite tradition whether or not that heritage is a prominent theme in their work and whether or not the artist is now a member of a Mennonite church.

A variety of criteria were applied to the section of art works. First, the work had to be recent and there was an attempt to include the variety and range of media employed by artists of Mennonite heritage. The pieces selected are works of art that function primarily as aesthetic objects; objects that is, which express and communicate an aesthetic vision of the world and life in the world. All of the artists are included because they had vigorous and pertinent work to view and assess.

We have resisted the inclination to ethnicize the work of these artists: either to make it more palatable for a popular Mennonite audience or to appropriate it to a program of multiculturalism, "a process whereby living cultures and popular culture have become legitimated in a multicultural society." On the other hand, we have not refrained from forging a connection between the artwork and Mennonite experience where such an interpretation seemed warranted.

What is the effect of a strong ethno-religious tradition on its visual artists? While we have not gained the historical distance necessary for a decisive answer, the underlying curatorial premise has been that Mennonitism will have a discernible influence and effect upon the work of artists. The exhibition and the catalogue published in conjunction with the exhibition begin, or continue discussion of the question: does art by Mennonites leave traces of what might be considered a Mennonite sensibility?

Another question we wish to pursue is: why is it that a group which espouses values of community and social justice finds it difficult, if not impossible, to embrace its artists? Therefore the subtitle: *The Insider as Outsider*.

Artists included in the exhibition are Dale Boldt, Les Brandt, Margaret Doell, Aganetha Dyck, Helene Dyck, Leonard Gerbrandt, Milly Giesbrecht, Lois Klassen, Ernie Kroeger, Grace

Nickel, Susan Shantz, Jean Smallwood, Al Toews and Erma Martin Yost.

This is a special project of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

New MMHS Sub-Committee Forms

An Arts and Interdisciplinary Subcommittee has been formed and consists of the following members: Lawrence Klippenstein (Winnipeg-chairperson), Ken Braun (Altona), Tim Buller and Peter von Kampen (both from Winnipeg). The committee intends to sponsor a Mennonite art exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Village during Pioneer Days in August.

Studying Grunthal

- by James Urry

During a years sabbatical from my University in New Zealand I have attempted to make a study of the coming of the Russländer, the Mennonite immigrants who arrived in Canada mainly during the 1920's.

I have particularly focussed on the village of Grunthal in southeastern Manitoba. My original intention had been to examine the relationships between the new Russländer immigrants and the remaining Kanadier Mennonites, the descendants of those who had originally settled in the area in the 1870's many of whose relatives had left for Paraguay during the 1920's. The Russländer had occupied the vacated farms of those who left. But although the interaction between local Kanadier and Russländer remains one aspect of my study I have become more concerned with how the Russländer attempted to rebuild their lives and interacted with each other.

To investigate the Russländer in Grunthal has required a number of visits to the town to talk to members of the community including some of the surviving original immigrants and their children. People who were born and raised in the village but who now live in Winnipeg have also been contacted. I have also examined land and tax records in the RM of Hanover Office in Steinbach, consulted manuscripts in the Manitoba Provincial Archives and at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in Winnipeg.

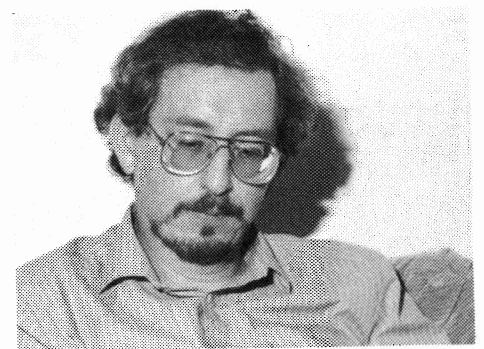
The study of one Russländer community, however, is but part of a larger examination of how the new immigrants of the 1920's came to terms with settlement in Canada in the period between 1923 and the 1950's. In fact to understand the Russländer one has to go even further back and look at their experience in a broader context. This includes their Russian background in late Imperial Russia, the war, revolution and civil war which shattered the old Mennonite Commonwealth and Mennonite attempts to reconstruct their lives in the early Soviet period (1922 to 1929).

The Canadian side has involved an attempt to understand the way in which the immigrants attempted to rebuild their old way of life: their congregations, cultural institutions and political struc-

Exhibit Booth Planned for Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite Historical Societies

The Manitoba and Canadian Mennonite Historical Societies have agreed to jointly sponsor a booth at Assembly 12, Mennonite World Conference. The focus will be on Mennonites in Canada. The back wall of the booth will feature a map of Canada, showing concentrations of Mennonite groups throughout. Two triangular columns will be placed in the booth. The one will feature a graph of all Mennonite groups and scaled to size. There will also be spare for handout brochures.

The other column will feature books that have been published by both Societies, and other books on Mennonites in Canada. Gerald Loewen, Winnipeg, is the designer. The booth will be attended by members of the Society throughout the Conference. The booth has a good location, near the bookstore and to the left of the walkway.



Dr. James Urry

tures. The impact of the depression, the crisis of Mennonite identity in the 1930's when many became pro-German and even pro-Nazi has also been investigated. The impact of the Second World War and the reconstruction following it finally reconciled many Russländer to the loss of their beloved "homeland" in Russia and they came to accept Canada as a new home. Even so the struggle between the use of English and German in worship, the end of the old political hierarchies in congregations, conferences and committees and the acceptance of a broader democratic institutional structure still took time to develop.

Research for this broader understanding has required work in the archives mentioned above and in newspapers and journals held in the Manitoba Provincial Library, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Canada and in University collections. I have also spoken to Russländer, Kanadier and their descendants from outside Grunthal.

I will be returning to New Zealand with many notes, piles of books and fond memories of my year in Winnipeg and Grunthal. Over the next few years I will have to work through all I have collected and attempt to make sense of what I have heard and read. If all goes well I hope to write a book on the Russländer, focussing particularly on the people of Grunthal, but also including the broader context which helped shape the lives of the first and second generation of immigrants.

Mennonite Books: a viable business

Mennonite Books began as Mennonite Book Club (MBC) in 1984 with 40 members. Members were required to purchase three books a year for a two-year period. About three years later it was decided MBC would become Mennonite Books, selling books at a discount. It is presently under the jurisdiction of MMHS and run on a voluntary basis by Susan Froese and Karin Dirks out of a small office on Portage Avenue in Winnipeg. At the April board meeting, the women reported on their work. Following are excerpts from their presentations:

Susan Froese: We have moved twice — always worked out of one small room. The workers are volunteers. We began with one — now are three regulars, with extra volunteers to help us cope with the Christmas rush.

Sales — mostly by mail order — were approximately \$24,000 in 1989. We send mail mostly to Canadians. Many Mennonites in out of the way places are happy to be able to receive Mennonite books and cassettes. We also sell many books to the U.S.A. — and have also sent books to Mexico, Paraguay, Germany, England, Japan and Holland.

We are open to the public on Tuesdays from 10 to 2 o'clock. We do not have many walk-in customers, but sometimes visitors to Winnipeg come in and place large orders. Just the other week a man from Paraguay came in and bought \$140 worth of books.

We (Susan, Karin and Margaret) enjoy meeting all the people that come by. In true Mennonite fashion we often find we are related or we have friends in common. We often get little notes from our customers, and these we try to answer. Sometimes when we recognize old friends we enclose a quick letter and sometimes a correspondence results, or old friendships are renewed.

One of our favorite customers who was delighted with *My Harp is Turned to Mourning*,

brought many to give to friends and relatives. She would hand out our brochures to her banker and doctor and more. She would always send a little extra money and told us to have a coffee on her.

We have letters from a Mennonite in the U.S.A. expressing awe at the amount of excellent writings flowing from Mennonite Canadian authors. Why is this he asked and we try to answer or send the question on to an expert on Mennonite Literature.

We have never censored, but we choose books that are well written and would be of interest to many. Our readers are sometimes offended by some of the modern writings and we do refund the money if this happens. On the whole we have had little criticism. *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* was a run-away best seller for a few years and still sells well. *My Harp is Turned to Mourning* has been our best seller since its publication and now Jamis Urry's book, *None But Saints* is enjoying popularity. The German books sell well, and so do the cassettes. These are items not available in out of the way places.

There always are new books. We try to be aware of all new books and put them on our list. Sometimes authors send us a book they have written of their own experiences. We have found these do not sell well as they are often of interest only to people that know the author. So we decide not to put them on our list. Sometimes these decisions are difficult.

Altogether we enjoy the work.

Karin Dirks: For Susan and me the work with Mennonite books is most fulfilling and rewarding. It can be frustrating however, especially during the Christmas rush, when we are extremely busy, and very cramped for space. We spill out into the hallway and have to use the Mennonite Mirror office for overflow. Customers who come by are surprised to see our little place — they are expecting a store, but instead we work in a tiny stockroom, use recycled Safeway bags and expect people to pay us either by cheque or in exact cash, since we

don't have Visa or even a cash register. Of course most of our trade is by mail order.

Somehow it's *working* — we have a steady clientele. We welcome every customer with friendliness and try to be helpful. We really enjoy our customers. I think that's the essence — our rapport with our readers either in person or by mail. We consider them our friends and often receive little personal notes that we acknowledge.

The other day an order arrived addressed to "Susan and Karin Books." We have an elderly reader in Vancouver who asks for extra brochures, which she leaves with the nurses at her doctor's office and with the tellers at her bank. No wonder the word spreads! As you know our readers are from all parts of Canada, the U.S. and other parts of the world. Often we wonder how have they heard of us? Once we got an order from Russia — a relative from Germany had sent them the brochure. It's always exciting to open the mail.

Last fall we printed 16,000 brochures and placed them into *The Mennonite Reporter Der Bote* and the *Rundschau*. Previously we have put our brochure into the *Mennonite Historian*. A supplement went into the *Mennonite Mirror* this spring. We have to continually advertise to remind people that there are *Mennonite Books*.

We carry about 180 titles, some are in German, all are written by Mennonite authors or are about Mennonites. We also have a good selection of cassettes. We work on a small margin of profit. None the less we always manage to pay our suppliers, our rent and telephone.

We appreciate our mentors — Ken Reddig, Roy Vogt and Victor Doerksen and share a warm, wonderful relationship with them. We also appreciate all the volunteers especially Margaret Bergen.

For more information write Karin and Susan at Mennonite Books, 208 1317A Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB R3G 0V3 or phone 786-2289.

Low German Event a Success in New Hope

- by Edwin Dueck

The people of the New Hope School District and Community thought they needed a group of people that should petition for some of the needs of their Rural school district. Some of the items were playground equipment, tennis court and baseball equipment. Consequently, the New Hope Home and School Committee was formed in 1986. One of their first fund-raising thoughts was performing a Low German fun evening. They found a Low German play, practiced it, memorized, invited the community, and performed it only one evening. They generated approximately \$300 and a great experience.

Next year they tried similar venture, but went for two evenings. Again there was success.

Every year they added one evening to their performances. This year, 1990, they performed four evenings of Low German fun and entertainment. Skits, singing and a play called *De Traechtmoaka* by Ben Dueck were on the agenda followed by coffee and dainties. Almost 700 people were entertained and over \$2,000 was collected. Yes! Low German is here to stay in New Hope!

MMHS in 1990

- by Lawrence Klippenstein, President

At our January board meetings we were again able to fill all 18 positions in the Board. A number of new persons are now included. We welcome Mary Harder, Gretna, Evelyn Friesen, Steinbach, and Jacob G. Heppener, Altona, to our ranks — and are glad for all the others who are also involved.

This year we have enlarged the Publicity and Membership Committee and reactivated the Fine Arts and Interdisciplinary Committee. Special tasks have fallen to the Genealogy Committee as it seeks to deal with the growing involvement of Mennonite genealogists in the province.

The Research Committee is pleased to report the Vol. IV of the A. Dyck *Collected Works* has gone to press. It should be ready for the MWC sessions in July. The Local History Committee is working with an interest group setting up a cairn in honour of Jacob Y. Shantz, near Winkler (see article elsewhere in this issue).

The Executive is attempting to monitor several projects connected with Mennonite World Conference. Sessions will be held in Winnipeg from July 24 to 29 (see article elsewhere in this issue).

We are trying now to complete renewals for 1990. Nearly 150 members have paid up for the year. Can we get 50 more? Your renewal notices were in the mail some weeks ago.

Under discussion as other projects are: a book on West Reserve Mennonite leaders (12 essays), a special genealogy conference related to the Polish/Prussian symposium (all readers received a brochure in our previous newsletter mailing, and more information on the genealogy conference is forthcoming), preparing a directory of Manitoba artists of Mennonite heritage, helping to host an artists' exhibit at the museum this summer, and providing heritage education material for Manitoba schools.

We appreciate your interest in the program and encourage inviting others to join MMHS in all these enterprises.

At Landmark

Laughter, Tears Brought by Low German Evening

by Doris Penner

Moakt junt tussijch (make yourself at home) said the program handed out at the third annual Low German Variety Night in Landmark one Friday night in March.

That's exactly what the 200 people did who flowed into the school auditorium — each one quickly found a seat and waited with obvious anticipation for the curtain to rise. And everyone knew they had come to the right place when MC Peter Suderman issued his first humorous Low German words of welcome. Suderman definitely made an important contribution to the spirit of the evening with his introduction to the items on the program, and his anecdotes which admirably filled the gaps.

Highlight of the program was a playlet written and directed by Anne Funk of Grunthal. *De Learasche, daut Fensta en ein Jewesse* (The Teacher, the Window and a Conscience) had all the elements of a good story — distinct characterization, direct clear dialogue, a bit of humor, some tension which was nicely resolved at the end. And it worked on stage because the acting was free and unstilted. Anne Funk played *de Reimasche* (Mrs Reimer), mother to *Kjnals* played by Hildegard Toews), who are continually taunting each other as children will *Kjnals* gets into trouble at school and the Reimer household is "favored" by a visit from *de Learasche* (the teacher) played by Elfrieda Unger. As it turns out, *de Learasche* has come for quite a different matter, but unaware of this, *Kjnals* confesses to his misdemeanor.

The Low German dialogue was well written, and if there was a star of the evening it would be Elfrieda Unger, who was superb in her role as the overbearing and stern yet kindly teacher.

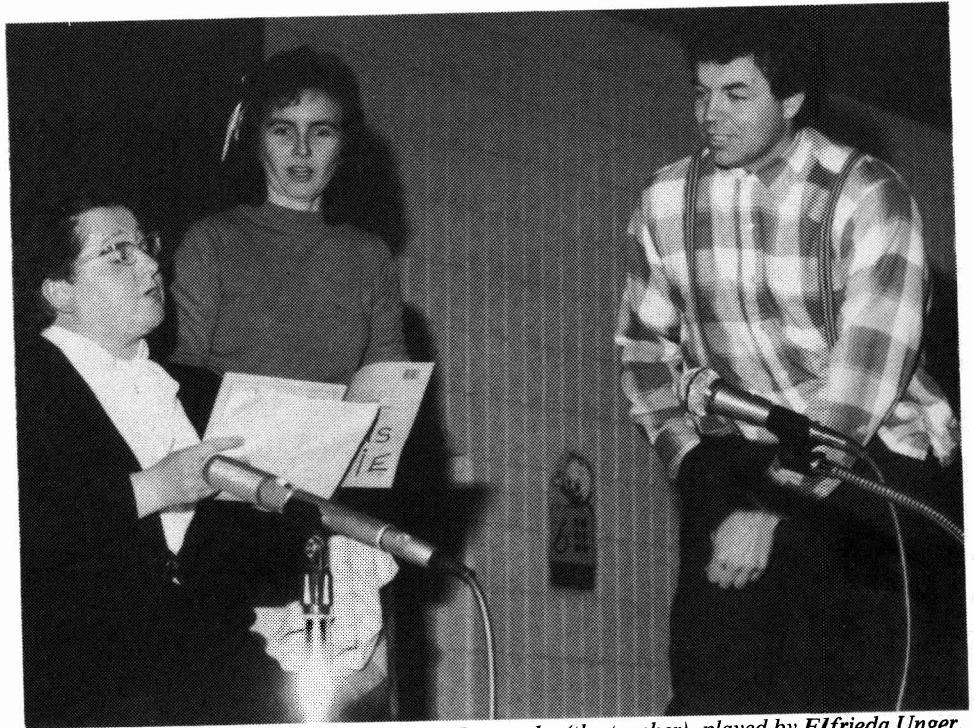
Romantic triangle

Kornelius de Boajch, the second drama written and directed by Wilmer Penner of Steinbach, focused on the common theme of a romantic triangle, and the joys and sorrows that come from working this out. Bashful Fredrich (Gerald Reimer) and jaunty, well-spoken Kornelius (Brent Froese), two members of *Drascha* (thresher) gang, are in love with the same sweet young maiden played by Deborah Reimer. Other members of the *Drascha*, Reima (Gordon Penner), Krone (Ben B. Dueck), and Fritz (Herman Kasper) through their banter which helped set the scene of the story, contributed some of the most rich and colorful Low German lines ever spoken (the playwright's mind must have worked overtime to put the dialogue together).

Still in the dramatic vein were several skits performed by Peter Suderman and Edwin Wiebe, both Veterans of the Low German stage. Focusing on the theme of Mennonite Low German culture in conflict with English society, the skits were good for some hearty laughter — almost offering a chance to laugh "at yourself."

Most serious note

The most serious note of the evening was a reading entitled *Daut Witte Hus* (The White House) written by Kay Friesen and read by Herman Kasper. It was a gentle, nostalgic poem bring-



In a playlet written by Anne Funk *de Learasche* (the teacher), played by Elfrieda Unger, visits the Reimer household which includes Leena (Hildegard Toews) and Kjnals (Lena Neufeld).

ing to mind the "old homestead" that is somewhere in everyone's back-ground. If there was a tear or two glistening on anyone's cheek, it was at least partly due to the haunting strains of the harmonica (played by Gordon Penner) in the background.

A refreshing change of pace were *De Heischratje en Willa Honig* (Locusts and Wild Honey) who sang particularly well perhaps because they were on home turf. Although not many of their numbers were new, people never seem to tire of songs like *Wie wone hia in Mussdarp* (literally, We Live In Mouse Village) and *Faspa* (lunch-time)

which portray Mennonite culture and values, and *Dit Sied - Jant Sied* (This Side - That Side), which brings out the distinct nature of the East and West Reserves. Their repertoire was rounded out by a few love songs both in English and Low German.

The Low German Variety Evening was also presented in Winkler, Rosenort, Steinbach and at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg.

It was sponsored by *De Plaut-dietsche Jeselschoft*, an organization dedicated to the promotion of the Low German language, culture, music and drama.

Jacob Y. Shantz Cairn Set Up Near Winkler

By Mennonite World Conference a cairn in honor of Jacob Y. Shantz should be ready on the Southwood School grounds near Winkler. That's the hope of the local Schantzenfeld S.D. committee working on the project. The village and district were once named after Shantz who did a great deal to help Mennonites settle the East and West Reserves in the 1870's.

Jacob Shantz was a Mennonite businessman from Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario. He first visited Manitoba on behalf of government immigration interests in 1872. When the first immigrants came from Ukraine in 1874 he went with them to build immigration sheds near Niverville.

In 1875 he investigated settlement possibilities

in the West Reserve. In the course of time he acquired more than 30 quarter sections of land in the two reserves. Many homesteads deeds, owned by present-day farmers, make reference to Shantz's holdings in those days.

An unveiling program was held Friday, June 29, at Southwood School grounds where the cairn is located. The school choir participated in the program.

Readers may be interested in Sam Steiner's recent book *Vicarious Pioneer. The Life of Jacob Y. Shantz*, available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre (600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4).

Report by Research and Scholarship Committee

- by Harry Loewen

As reported previously, this Committee intends to complete two ongoing projects before planning new work. The Arnold Dyck collection is nearing completion. With the first three volumes published in 1985, 1986 and 1988 — the first by Derksen Printers and the other two by Friesen — Volume 4, to be printed by Derksen, is scheduled to be released just prior to the Mennonite World Conference this summer. This is good news indeed!

The other project is the translation and editing of the Echo Verlag series, a number of historical

booklets written in German under the editorship of Arnold Dyck. The first to appear was the *Kuban* story, translated by Herbert Giesbrecht and published by CMBC Publications. Three additional volumes will appear within the next two years. The editorial committee of the series consists of Victor Doerksen (Chair), John Friesen and Harry Loewen.

The Research and Scholarship Committee also reports on the *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, published by the Chair in Mennonite Studies, the University of Winnipeg. MMHS is one of the supporting institutions of the *Journal* and Ken Red-

dig represents the Society on the Editorial Board. To date eight volumes have been published (Vol. 8, 1990), all with monies from subscriptions, donations and grants. Last year's issue cost \$7,500 to print. There are at present approximately 450 subscribers. Six hundred copies are printed. There are still back-copies of all issues which can be purchased at a substantially reduced price.

Committee members are Victor G. Doerksen, George K. Epp, Bert Friesen, Harry Loewen (Chair), Elizabeth Peters and Al Reimer.

Symposium on Mennonites in Poland and Prussia, July 21

A symposium on Mennonites in Poland and Prussia will be held July 21 to 24 at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) in Winnipeg.

Peter J. Klassen from California State University in Fresno will speak on the topic *The Polish-Prussian Context: A Homeland for Strangers and a Troubling Legacy* at the opening banquet Saturday evening (held at the Canadian Nazarene College).

Sunday afternoon Edmund Kizik from the University of Gdansk (*Crisis in the Danzig Mennonite Community in the mid-Eighteenth Century*) and John Friesen from CMBC (*Education and Mennonites in Nineteenth Century Prussia*) will address the audience. Reinheld Janzen from Kauffman museum will present a paper on *Sources and Styles of Vistula Delta Material Culture Life*: (an illustrated lecture) on Sunday evening.

Monday morning will feature two papers presented by Adalbert Goertz a genealogist from Waynesboro, PA (*Mennonites in Obernessau and Przechowka*) and Wojciech Marchlewski (*Mennonites, Catholics and Evangelicals: Nineteenth Century Interconfessional Relationships*).

If the afternoon Lawrence Klippenstein from the Mennonite Heritage Centre will speak on the topic *Interchurch Relations in the Chortitza Colony: The Prussian Mennonite Connection, 1788-1802* and

Harvey Plett, Steinbach Bible College, on the topic *George Hansen*, while that evening presentations will be given by Arkadiusz Rybak from the Bureau of Historical Preservation and Elblag Reimer from the Hans Denk Fellowship. Their topic is *Remembering the Mennonite Story in Poland*.

The symposium closes Tuesday morning with papers by Horst Gerland Gerlach from Heimschule, Weierhof (*The Final Years of Mennonites in East and West Prussia, 1943-45*) and Ted Regehr from the University of Saskatchewan (*The Polish and Russian Mennonites 1944-50 — Reichsdeutsche? Volkdeutsche? Refugees? Expellees? or Dutch Migrants?*)

For a brochure and further information please contact: John Friesen, Canadian Mennonite College, 600 Shaftsbury, Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4.

Mennonite genealogy seminar planned

On July 21 (Tuesday) from 9:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. — just prior to the symposium — Dr. Adalbert Goertz, Waynesboro, PA will be the featured guest speaker at a Mennonite Genealogy Seminar on the theme of *Tracing Mennonite Roots in Prussian and Eastern Europe* at the CMBC.

Goertz was born in 1928 in West Prussia, moved to West Germany in 1945, and emigrated to the

United States in 1960. He has authored a number of articles on the topic of church records from Prussia in such journals and periodicals as *Mennonite Quarterly Review* and *Mennonite Family History*.

The seminar is designed to present a survey of the sources for doing research in Mennonite family history and genealogy in Eastern Europe. Some of the topics which will be discussed include: Mennonite church records, pre-1780, 1780-1800, 1800-1974, 1875-1945; Mennonites in Catholic records, pre-1773; Mennonites in Lutheran records, pre-1773 and 1800-1874; and Mennonites in Reformed records in Danzig pre-1800. In addition to surveying the use of church records for genealogical research, the seminar will also focus on the civil records such as the census list of Prussian Mennonites in 1776, the census list of Mennonite farmers in Prussia in 1789, records of Property transactions and court records.

For further information contact: Alf Redekopp, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1-169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg R2L 2E5 (669-6575).

The seminar is sponsored by the Genealogy and Family History Committee of MMHS.

Mennonites and Matheson Island: a history book project

- by Neil Funk-Unrau

The Metis fishing community of Matheson Island, located at the narrows of Lake Winnipeg, appears to be a quiet, peaceful and relatively isolated settlement to the casual observer. Under the surface, however, a rich and exciting history lies waiting to be explored.

Residents and former residents of the island remember a time when Lake Winnipeg was alive with ships and boats of all sizes, many of which had to stop at the island for freight, fuel or passengers on their way through the narrows. Community members also remember the many fishing stations scattered across the island and along nearby bays and inlets. The history of Matheson Island provides a window into the story of life and industry all along Lake Winnipeg.

For Mennonites, the history of the island com-

munity is especially significant. Matheson Island was the first aboriginal community to receive Mennonite missionaries sent by the churches in southern Manitoba. Since 1948, representatives of Mennonite Pioneer Mission sponsored by the Berghthaler churches of southern Manitoba (and more recently sponsored by the Conference of Mennonites in Canada), have worked closely with the community and developed many strong relationships with its members. Mennonite teachers at the island school have also left a major impact over the years. The relationship between Mennonites and this one Metis community has profoundly affected both sides in the last 40 years.

Other aspects make the Matheson Island story a unique one. This community was one of the first in Manitoba to develop its own fishing co-op, one which is still very successful. Also, the historical relationship between the island settlers and near-

by Indian communities deserves further attention as well.

The process of collecting the history of the community has begun with a project to tape oral histories of the local area. This is being accomplished with the aid of a grant from the Oral History Grant Program of the Provincial Archives of Manitoba. The next step is to supplement the oral histories with documented information and to begin preparing a written history of the community.

More financial assistance is needed to continue work on this project. For further information, contact: Neil Funk-Unrau, c/o Native Ministries, Conference of Mennonites in Canada, 600 Shaftsbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba. Telephone: 888-6781 or 783-9070.

Book Reviews

Dyck, John. *Oberschulze Jakob Peters, 1813-1884* (Hanover Steinbach Historical Society: Box 1960, Steinbach, MB, 1990). 138 pp.
Reviewed by Royden Loewen

Here is a fine little book about one of the Steinbach area's first leaders. It is the biography of Jakob Peters, the first "Oberschulze," or district mayor of the East Reserve. The East Reserve, presently known as the Rural Municipality of Hanover, was a block of land between Niverville and Steinbach reserved for the Mennonites in 1874. In that year two groups of Mennonites came here; there were 300 families of the Bergthaler Mennonite congregation (the forebear of the present day Chortitzer Mennonite Church), and about 100 families of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonite congregation (the forerunner of the present day Evangelical Mennonite Conference).

Peters was a Bergthaler who lived near present-day Mitchell. As Oberschulze it was his duty to oversee the building of roads and canals, confer with provincial and federal government authorities, and coordinate the activities of the "Schulzen," mayors, of each of the many villages on the East Reserve.

The book, however, is much more than the narration of a political leader. It tells the vivid story of Peter's life, from the time he was a boy in Russia, through his rise to the position of Oberschulze in the colony of Bergthal in Russia and one of the leaders of the 1874 migration to Canada, and pioneer life in the new land. It describes the difficult pioneering years between 1836 and 1874 in the Bergthal colony in Russia.

Perhaps the most interesting part of the book is the story of "the rejected child." A whole chapter is dedicated to describing how, in Russia, the Peters family adopted a Russian boy who, as a baby had been abandoned by his mother in a pigpen and who was later severely mistreated by his first foster parents and the village school teacher. The book also tells how Peters was honoured by the Russian Czar for providing material aid during the Crimean War in the 1850's and exhibits a photograph of the watch that the Czar gave Peters on that occasion. And it describes how Peters peacefully saw the transition from a Mennonite "Gebietsamt" type of government on the East Reserve to a Manitoba municipal government.

The author of the book is John Dyck, a retiring Winnipeg businessman. Dyck has become a noted genealogist and showed an acumen for historical research. Dyck has used his research skills in this book, examining newspapers from both Russia and Manitoba, interviewing old timers, translating German-language material and drawing materials from largely ignored government records. He has previously researched and written about the Mennonite migration from Manitoba to Oregon and is presently an historian-in-residence at the Steinbach Bible College where he is editing a detailed study guide of 12 of the more important Bergthal/Chortitzer villages in the East Reserve.

The book is attractively laid out with photographs, a useful index, a number of appendices relating to the genealogy of Peters, and a helpful bibliography. Members of MMHS will find this book useful as it describes an important Manitoba pioneer leader.

Rempel, John, and William Harms. *Atlas of original Mennonite Villages on the East Reserve, Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: The Authors, 1988). 25 pp., pb., \$12.00, and *Atlas of original Mennonite Villages, Homesteaders, and Some Burial Plots of the Mennonite West Reserve, Manitoba* (Altona, Man.: The Authors, 1990). 191 pp., pb., \$26.00
Reviewed by Jim Suderman

These two volumes contain a superb compilation of data on early Manitoba Mennonite history. Relying heavily on official sources, as well as living memory and present-day physical remains, these atlases are valuable reference works for family and regional historians.

The East Reserve *Atlas* has an alphabetized village and cemetery index (unlike the West Reserve *Atlas* which has a page labelled "Index" but is actually a table of contents). The "Hamlet Privilege" article, present in both atlases, provides a tantalizing introduction to Mennonite settlement in the larger Canadian context.

Township maps for each of the townships reserved for Mennonite settlement detail the names of the homesteaders in each quarter section and are supplemented by lists of inhabitants. The source for these maps appears to be an amalgamation of the township survey maps (dated 1872-1875) and the Rural Municipality of Hanover (East Reserve) 1881 assessment list and the "Gemeinde Buch worin den Reinländer Mennoniten Gemeinde" (West Reserve).

Helpful notes are provided on each village, often supported by reprinted documents in the West Reserve *Atlas*. Some commentary on how discrepancies, if any, between the two sources were resolved would have been a useful addition.

The sources for the atlases include the Manitoba Crown Lands Office, the Land Titles Office, the Provincial Archives of Manitoba and Municipality offices. Records held in the National Archives of Canada augment the sources of the West Reserve *Atlas*.

The supporting, reprinted documents used in the latter publication, along with notes on the settlers' Russian villages of origin, Low German names, and church affiliations give a much more colorful rendition of the local history than is present in the East Reserve *Atlas*.

The physical production of the two atlases are their greatest drawback. The wealth of data is presented in a tiring, photocopies dot matrix typestyle, improved by larger type in the West Reserve *Atlas*.

Furthermore, data such as the Homestead number, present on the township survey maps, is absent from the East Reserve *Atlas* maps and appears sporadically in those of the West Reserve *Atlas* (but the number is not defined in the *Atlas* legend). Nevertheless, the level of consistency is high throughout the two publications and the information is readily accessible and legible.

It is my hope that the computer diskettes have been preserved so future reprints can be made on a higher quality printer, thereby reflecting the quality and detail of the work of John Rempel and William Harms.

Jim Suderman is archival assistant at the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, Winnipeg.

List of Recent Books

We are listing a number of titles which may interest our readers. A few are earlier publications which have been hard to get in our circles. All titles may be obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4 Ph. (204) 888-6781.

Driedger, Leo. *Mennonites in Winnipeg* (Winnipeg and Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Press, 1990). 95 pp., pb., \$6.00. A brief history.

Dyck, John. *Oberschulze Jakob Peters, 1813-1884. Manitoba Pioneer Leader* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 1990). 138 pp., pb., \$10.00.

Epp, George K., ed. *Unter dem Nordlicht. Anthropologie des deutschen Schrifttums der Mennoniten in Canada* (Winnipeg: The Mennonite German Society of Canada, 1977). 292 pp., hdc., \$10.00.

Fast, Karl. *Gebt der Wahrheit die Ehre. Ein Schicksalsbericht* (Winnipeg: Canzona Publishing, 1989). 324 pp., pb., \$14.00. An account of a Mennonite soldier in the German army of World War II and his imprisonment in the Soviet Union.

Fast, Karl. *Lab dir an meiner Gnade genüden* (Winnipeg: Canzona Publishing, 1989). 138 pp., pb., \$11.00. The story of the author's mother in Orenburg, Soviet Union.

Fast, Peter. *Wie räden en läsen Plautdietsch* (Winnipeg and Hillsboro, KS: Kindred Press, 1987). 22 pp., pb., \$2.00. A low German primer.

Friesen, John, ed. *Mennonites in Russia, 1788-1988. Essays in Honour of Gerhard Lohrenz* (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1989). 387 pp., hdc., \$22.00. Fifteen articles and bibliography by scholars in the field.

Hamm, Oscar by *Memoirs of Ignatyev in the light of historical change* (Saskatoon, SK: Ruth F. Hamm, 1984). 321 pp., pb., \$20.00. History of the Ignatyev colony, S. Russia.

Hildebrand, Jacob. *A Backward Gance* (Crystal City, MB: The Author, 1982). 136 pp., pb., \$8.00. Author's memoir from Andreasfeld, Ukraine, to Crystal City, Canada.

Thiessen, Gerhard. *Diary from the Years 1907-1912* (Lemington, ON: The Family, 1988). 227 pp., hdc., \$25.00. Day-to-day experiences of a Mennonite estate owner in Ukraine.

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