



MMHS Altona Workshop April 25, 1992

Elmer Heinrichs has summarized the proceedings at this workshop in an excellent series of articles in *The Red River Valley Echo*. Three of these articles deal with West Reserve communities, the fourth with an unusual theological deviation on the part of the early Mennonites.

The first details the establishment of Altbergtal on the Buffalo Creek southwest of Altona. The settlers (ancestors of our own Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein) originated from the Bergthal Colony in the Ukraine. By 1884, its population consisted of 31 adults and 40 children. The unilingual schools created by the 1915 Public Schools Act created the odd situation where the teacher raised the mandatory flag for 200 days without a single child appearing for instruction. It seems the community was teaching its children in a log cabin in the vicinity. Normality returned in 1919 under new regulations and a greater willingness to compromise on the part of the Mennonites, and it is recorded that 19 pupils attended that year. This historic battleground of state intervention and community conscience is now preserved as a school museum at the Rhineland Agricultural Grounds in Altona. (Source: Lawrence Klippenstein. Published May 12, 1992.)

Hoffnungsfeld, a mile south of Winkler, was founded in 1876. Stately trees in parallel half-mile rows mark the location. These settlers came from Kronsthal/Neu Osterwick in the Chortitza colony under the leadership of Jacob Wiens. Its theological passions ran strong, as four churches vied for influence in this "field of hope". A Chortitzer stronghold, the Bergthalers established a Bible study leading to a church founding by 1880. The first MB ministers organized a study group by 1884, while dissenting members in the community identified with the Reinlaender Church when that split resulted from Chortitzer church tensions. (Source: John Dyck. Published 19, 1992.)

Sommerfeld, set on the highest point of section 30 southeast of Altona, illustrates the conflict between the traditional village ways imported from the Ukraine and the ways of the new land we found ourselves in. The original families fully intended to farm the land in common, and accordingly the farm divisions consisted of 13-16 acre strips. By 1892 - a scant 12 years - the original settlers began selling their homesteads. In addition, the list of Mennonites [Peter Bergen (1888, 1889) and Abram Doerksen (1889-1891)] who served on the council of the RM of Douglas suggests an early weakening of reliance on traditional village govern-

ment, including the Lehrdienst. (Source: Peter Bergen. Published June 2, 1992.)

Church schism is no new adventure for Mennonites, but the Swedenborgian incursion which came with the first ship of 1874 must surely be one of the most exotic. Following the mystical teachings of Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), they taught that the Second Coming of Jesus was a spiritual event occurring when humanity accepts

their teaching on the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. Even a Holdeman congregation in Edenberg became interested, and by 1902 two congregations - in Rosenfeld and Rosenort - had been founded. By the '20s interest in the Church of the New Jerusalem had waned, but even today groups meet in Winnipeg and Roblin. (Source: Adolf Ens. Published May 12, 1992.)



Bill Kehler, Jake Krueger, and Ann Kehler take a coffee break at the workshop on April 25. About thirty people attended the workshop, where they were told that the MMHS will focus its research efforts over the next few years on the West Reserve. Chairman John Dyck stressed the urgency of gathering historical materials now. "Material declines annually. Parents' and grandparents' stories and memories need to be documented." Are we listening?

Print Culture of the East Reserve 1874-1930

by Delbert F. Plett, Steinbach, Manitoba

Detailed research on a particular topic can sometimes result in a revised understanding of the past. A recent assignment to write a paper on the 'Print culture of the East Reserve' affirmed the foregoing.¹ After combing archives and talking to local historians a total of 56 titles were listed for the period 1874 to 1930 for the East Reserve presently known as the R.M. of Hanover in Manitoba.²

The Kleine Gemeinde (KG), of course, had been the pioneers in publishing in Russia with seven titles to its credit and another four by KG land reformer Abraham F. Thiessen. The first publication in the East Reserve came in 1891 when former KG elder Peter P. Toews (1841-1922) of Gruenfeld published Heinrich Balzer's *Faith and Reason*. This 1833 treatise was referred to as "one of the most stimulating statements in Mennonite literature" by Dr. Robert Friedmann.⁴

Subsequent publications included the efforts of church elders such as Abraham L. Friesen and Peter P. Reimer of the KG. Bishop Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer wrote *Ursachen und Geschichte der Auswanderung der Mennoniten* . . . undoubtedly the most important book published in the East Reserve. A number of devotional booklets were published and also written by community leaders such as Jakob R. Dueck, Peter B. Goossen, Rev. Wilhelm Giesbrecht, Klaas F. Penner, Heinrich Rempel and Rev. Heinrich R. Reimer.

The *Stammbuch Meiner Voreltern* published by former Kleefelder Peter P. Isaac in 1916, still stands as a benchmark for social and family history at its best. Other books such as *Die Bergthaler Mennoniten* by Klaas Peters and *Aufzeichnungen aus meiner Jugendzeit* by Johan F. Toews were biographical and reminiscent in nature. Institutional publications were prominent in the field of Brandordnung and Waisenordnung with 13 titles listed.

Magazines and newspapers always provide an important barometer in any society. The East Reserve pioneers were already familiar with the *Herald der Wahrheit* of Johan F. Funk of Elkhart, Indiana before they left Russia. They were also closely connected with *Die Mennonitische Rundschau* founded in 1880. In 1897 Peter P. Toews was co-founder and co-editor of the *Botschafter der Wahrheit* the denominational paper of the Church of God in Christ, Mennonite. This is put into perspective by the fact that the first paper among the Mennonites in Russia was not started until 1903.⁵ In 1913 one of the Toews' co-religionists Jakob S. Friesen founded the *Steinbach Post* which would eventually replace the *Rundschau* as the main vehicle of communications among the Manitoba Mennonites or 'Kanadier' as they came to be known.

Interestingly enough songbooks played an important role in East Reserve print culture. In 1902 and 1918, respectively, Heinrich W. Reimer, a wealthy Steinbach merchant, put out the second and third American editions of the Heinrich Franz *Choralbuch*. In 1906 Peter P. Toews edited and published the *Unparteiische Leiderbuch* a 430 page songbook for his denomination. The work contained some 50 songs written by East Reserve pioneers.

It is fair to say that elder Peter P. Toews dominated publication on the East Reserve during the

1890's and the first two decades of the 20th century just as Arnold Dyck would be a leading figure during the 1940's. Patrick Friesen, a well-known Winnipeg poet, is the great-great nephew of Peter P. Toews.

In a recent paper on Mennonite print culture in Russia Dr. Al Reimer listed 70 titles.⁶ This included the 11 KG publications referred to above; if these are subtracted the actual number of Russian Mennonite publications is reduced to 59. If these 11 titles are added to the East Reserve listing the total for the latter is increased to 67.

These statistics become more significant when it is recognized that the East Reserve population in 1910 was only 4,000 compared to 100,000 Mennonites in Russia. Compared to their former homeland the East Reserve was a pioneer society during the period in question.⁷ The print culture which the settlers created remains as a lasting monument to their faith and perseverance. The fact that a pioneer community devoted such resources towards the maintenance of its spiritual and intellectual foundations speaks well for their tradition of religious literature which has continued uninterrupted since the time of the Reformation.

Notes

¹ To be published in John Dyck editor, *Historical Sketches of the East Reserve, Volume Three of the East Reserve Historical Series*, Hanover Steinbach Historical Society Inc., Steinbach, Manitoba, publication forthcoming.

² I acknowledge with thanks the assistance of John Dyck, Henry N. Fast, Irene Enns Kroeker and David K. Schellenberg.

³ Plett, *The Golden Years*, Steinbach, 1985, 318-334.

⁴ Dr. Robert Friedmann, *Mennonite Piety Through the Centuries*, Sugar Creek, Ohio, 1980, 259.

⁵ Dr. Al Reimer, "The Print Culture of the Russian Mennonites 1870-1930", in Dr. John Friesen editor, *Mennonites in Russia*, Winnipeg, 1989, 229.

⁶ Dr. Al. Reimer, 234.

⁷ The foregoing information would indicate that the Russian Mennonites during the period 1874 to 1930 were relatively backward in terms of their 'print culture'. The social and theological reasons for this are deserving of further study.

MMHS board meeting

Hornean
April 14, 1992

Presentations of Low German drama and a meeting on the relationship of the Jewish and Mennonite people in Southern Manitoba were well attended. A follow-up meeting discussing the relationships between Mennonites and their neighbors is planned.

The Education Committee reported a plan for a symposium on Canadian Mennonites and Nationalism involving the MMHS with the MCC, the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada, the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Evangelical Mennonite Conference and the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg.

Research Committee: A History of Mennonites in Manitoba is projected, with Roy Vogt having been contacted as possible author. Other prairie provinces may be included. Further consultation on the style to be adopted is being carried forward by chair Harry Loewen.

Genealogy Committee: Reported a Winnipeg meeting on "Working with the Living and the

Dead", with thirty in attendance.

Also proposed was the need for a better textbook on Mennonite History for high school students. The Education and Research Committees were invited to look into the feasibility of commissioning such a book.

Financial: The Executive will come up with a recommendation on the future use of the MMHS Newsletter for the fall board meeting. The membership fee has been raised to \$15.00 for 1993.

Alf Redekopp volunteered to look after the membership lists. Lawrence promised to look for a person to edit the June issue of the newsletter, but a longer term arrangement is needed. (Since that time Wilmer Penner has accepted the June assignment.)

Committee chair for 1992:

Genealogy: Martha Martens; Fine Arts: Henry Ens; Research and Scholarship: Harry Loewen; Education: Peter Rempel; Local History: John Dyck; Publicity and Membership: to be reconstituted.

Next meeting: October 13, 1992. Place TBA.

The board thanked Martha Martens for her gracious hospitality in her home.

Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg

Many of the recent activities have been routine, but the acquisition of two new computers has not been. These accessions provide all offices in the archives with computer equipment. This will greatly facilitate archival work in the future.

Among other accessions are several large lots of used Mennonite books which will become available to customers in the near future. We continue to distribute *Mennonite Historian* of which two CO-related issues were published in 1991.

An exhibit of paintings by Henry Fehr and Terry Widrick, a native from the Selkirk Christian Fellowship (Manitoba) was mounted about a month ago. Readers of this column may be interested in an English work entitled *Memoirs of Ignatevo in the Light of Historical Change* (1984). Contact: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4. Lawrence Klippeinstein.

Mennonites in Canada Project

by Ted Friesen

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was formed in 1966. The Provincial Societies, Ontario and Manitoba met together to plan the writing of a history of the Canadian Mennonites. Shortly thereafter, the two other Provincial Societies, namely the Saskatchewan-Alberta and the British Columbia Mennonite Historical Society joined the national society. Mennonite Central Committee and all of the Mennonite Conferences in Canada were then asked to join as well. MCC and several historical societies and church conferences are now members.

Shortly after the Project (the writing of the History of Mennonites in Canada) was decided upon, Frank Epp was chosen Editor/Author. In 1974 the first volume of *Mennonites in Canada* was published covering the period of 1786-1920. In 1982, Volume II covering the period 1920-1940 was published. Frank Epp was working on Volume III when he died in 1986. Dr. Ted D. Regehr was appointed by the Society to be the new author of Volume III, with Marlene Epp as the Assistant Writer and Research Associate. Since that time Marlene has resigned her position in order to pursue doctoral studies. Volume III is now being written with publication being projected tentatively for 1993 or 1994.

The publication of these volumes has been made possible through grants by the Federal Government, Mennonite Central Committee, Mennonite Conferences and private contributions. The So-

ciety has sponsored other projects in the past, like the history of Jacob Y. Schantz. It also serves as a liaison among the five Provincial Historical Societies and the historical societies of the Mennonite Conferences which are members.

The author, Dr. Ted D. Regehr, recently concluded an arrangement with the University of Saskatchewan, his employer, for a reassignment of duties for him beginning in the summer of 1992, for the duration of the academic year '92-'93. This would hopefully give him time to complete the manuscript for Volume III of *Mennonites in Canada*. Dr. Regehr will continue to draw his salary from the university. However, the university requires the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada to pay for the cost of hiring someone to teach the courses that Dr. Regehr would have taught had this arrangement not been made.

This, as well as the subsidy fund for the publication of the new volume requires substantial new funding. We are appealing to the public to consider donations towards this Project.

For each \$40.00 contributed, the Society will send a copy of either Volume I or II of *Mennonites in Canada* and issue a receipt for \$25.00. Receipts will be issued for the full amount donated where books are not requested. If you already own a copy, these books make attractive gifts for others, especially the younger generation.

Ted E. Friesen is the President of Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Mennonite Historical Society of Canada

Enclosed is \$_____, a contribution to The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada. (For each \$40.00 contributed, the Society will send a copy of either Volume I or II of *Mennonites in Canada* and issue a donation receipt for \$25.00.)

Please send me _____ copy(ies) of:

_____ *Mennonites in Canada, 1786-1920, Volume I.*

The History of a Separate People.
by Frank H. Epp
416 pages - Hard Cover
Maps, Tables and Figures, and 18 Original Drawings.

_____ *Mennonites in Canada, 1920-1940, Volume II.*

A People's Struggle for Survival
by Frank H. Epp
640 pages - Hard Cover
Maps, Tables, Charts

Make cheques payable to: Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Send to: Ted Friesen, P.O. Box 720, Altona, Manitoba, R0G 0B0.

Tax deductible receipts will be issued for the full contribution where books are not requested.

Name: _____

Address: _____

May meeting for Conference Historians

The Historical Committees of the Mennonite Church and General Conference Mennonite Church co-sponsored a meeting for Mennonite heritage interpreters and conference historical committees and historians. The conference, "The Church Historian As Interpreter," was held at Goshen College, May 21-23.

A prospectus stated: "The goals of the meeting include providing an opportunity for conference historians who do interpretive and educational work to connect with each other. Several speakers will also help conference-based historians do authentic interpretation based on sound research, while others will focus on inspiration and motivation for the conference historians. Much of the emphasis will be on sharing successful experiences rather than theoretical formulations."

Each session began with worship lead by Lawrence Klippenstein, Director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. John L. Ruth of Harleysville, Pennsylvania, delivered the keynote address on the "roles of the 'super' church historian." Ruth is a film-maker, writer, and minister at the Salford Mennonite Church. Scholars Rachel Waltner Goossen, University of Kansas, and Theron Schlabach, Goshen College, spoke on interpretations of the Dutch Russian and Swiss Mennonite experiences, respectively. Sharing and brainstorming sessions focused on three areas: a) collecting and preserving; b) celebrations and programs; and c) exhibits. The meeting also included a tour of Menno-Hof at Shipshewana and presentation by its director, Tim Lichti.

The conference was followed by the first joint meeting of the two denominational historical committees.

Book review

Knoop, Hedi. **Wenn die erde bebzt.** Sonnentau-Verlag, 3079 Uchte. Herstellung: Druckerei J. Hoffmann GmbH & Co., 3070 Nienburg, Germany, 124 pp.

Reviewed by Wilmer Penner

For those who have been following the Arnold Dyck publications by the MMHS, this book is very timely. His daughter presents us a new insight into the life of the Dyck family during those formative years when the author was growing up in Steinbach (here Anderbach), with flashes back to the horrors of the Russian civil war they had fled. Arnold Dyck, father and husband, lives here in the descriptions of a sensitive woman who knew him intimately. The enormity of the effort he made to bring us the literary treasure now being restored to Mennonite culture is given a very human dimension.

But this book is much more than a background for an author's life. Hedi has a fine gift for recreat-

ing the terror and joy of growing up. The deep feelings she brings to our universal experience is reflected in the title. "Ich erlebe viel, sehr viel. Manchmal meine ich, ich werde platzen . . ." How deeply significant to children are the experiences recorded on these pages! The little pet dog run down by a car. The uncertainty of making friends in a new neighborhood. The memories of the lost uncles left behind in the unknown of revolutionary Russia. The terrors inspired by the grim preachers of Anderbach. The deep and long-standing ties to Germany that bring the family back to the Old Country again. She noticed what was happening around her with a passionate intensity, and has brought it back to us in a style that, in capturing the childlike simplicity of this period of life, is also very accessible to those of us whose German has grown a bit rusty.

A reading "must", both as story and history.

M.M.H.S. Update

by Bert Friesen

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society continues to be active in its various historical endeavours.

It co-sponsors the publication of the English translation of the monographs published by the Echo Verlag about life in Russia. Three titles have been published to date and another two are planned for this year. One of these is the longest one of the series, *The Molotschna Settlement*, by Heinrich Goerz, translated and edited by John B. Toews and Al Reimer.

The genealogists in the society remain active. This was demonstrated at a recent seminar when

many ideas and projects were discussed.

Local historians were also stimulated at a seminar held in Altona. They heard a number of papers on local history in that part of the province. In particular, their interest is in recording village histories of the area.

MMHS also maintains contacts with other historical societies. In March it held a joint evening meeting to discuss the interaction of Jews and Mennonites in the Altona area in this century. This joint meeting was sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society, the Manitoba Historical Society, and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

New (1992) books on Germans from Eastern Europe

Dr. Edward Brandt, A.G., and his son, Bruce, have compiled or written three very different books on Germans from Eastern Europe.

Bruce's book, **Where to Look for Hard-to-Find German-Speaking Ancestors from Eastern Europe**, has fully indexed 16,372 surnames appearing in four German-language books which genealogists without a knowledge of Germany may find difficult to use and one completely unindexed English-language book. Buyers may obtain information about any surname(s) appearing in these books. (96 pp., \$15.)

Ed's book on the **Contents and Addresses of Hungarian Archives**, with supplementary information for research on Germans in Hungary, reprints, with permission, part of the 1976 **Guide to the Archives of Hungary**, which is out-of-print, and lists the current (1992) addresses for some 70 Hungarian archives.

It also summarizes information available from LDS on genealogically important archival data. Appendices, statistical tables and maps deal with the number and location of Germans in both pre-

World War I and post-World War I Hungary, with a map showing the boundary changes. (68 pp., \$10.)

Where Once They Toiled: A Visit to the Former Mennonite Homelands in the Vistula River Valley in Poland is an account of Ed Brandt's participation in a 1991 tour to where most North European Mennonites lived until at least 1789, when many started moving to Eastern Ukraine. Many others stayed until 1945. It is a very readable report, amply illustrated with photos. (published by Mennonite Family History, April 1992, ca. 30 pp., \$4.50.)

Add a mailing cost of \$2. for the first book and \$1. for each additional book. Customers ordering books and services from both Ed and Bruce should write separate checks to each, splitting the mailing charges evenly.

Genealogical organizations ordering five or more copies of any book are eligible for a 20 percent discount.

Send all orders to the authors at 13 - 27th Ave. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414-3101.

Notes on new books

A special issue of **Mennonite Quarterly Review**, "Symposium of Mennonites in Poland and Prussia" papers read at a symposium held at CMBC, July 1990, 288 pp., \$6.00 (plus G.S.T. and postage).

Elfrieda Toews Nafziger. **A Man of His Word. A Biography of John A. Toews**. 183 pp., pb., \$13.95. Order from Centre for MB Studies, 1 - 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R2L 2E5.

Elsa Redekopp. **Two Worlds for Jash**. (Windflower Communications). 166 pp., pb., \$7.95.

Felix Kuehn, ed. **Jottings from a Buckboard**, by J.F. Tennant. (1881). Reprinted from **Southern Manitoba Times**. Describes a trip through the West Reserve. 50 pp., pb., \$12.00.

Anne M. (Stoesz) Neufeld. **Mika and David**. 160 pp., pb. Letters and diary entries from the family of Mika and David Stoesz of Niverville, Manitoba.

Unless otherwise indicated, all books listed may be ordered from the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB, R3P 0M4.

West Reserve Mennonite Genealogy Meeting

Altona
April 10, 1992
Chair: Hans Werner

Highlights

- The committee is looking for an accessible no-cost local office space for genealogical research.
- Harvey Dueck is carrying on the work in the Odessa Archive begun by Dr. Epp, who is now concentrating on studies of the St. Petersburg archive.
- Under discussion was the idea of constituting a West Reserve Committee similar to the Hanover/Steinbach Mennonite Historical Society. The April 25 meeting in Altona will determine possibilities.
- the theme of the Winkler Harvest Festival will be the Mennonite Heritage, so Hans will check with the Festival director to see if an offering of a genealogical display is practical.
- Monday, either October 19, 26 or November 16, will be the date to carry through the program of the postponed October meeting. Place remains the same.

The MMHS Newsletter is published twice a year by the Publicity and Membership. It welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members. Correspondence should be mailed to the MMHS Newsletter, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4.