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Manitoba
Mennonite
Historical
Society



NUMBER 2

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1985

Editor's Note

— Royden Loewen

Why another newsletter? Although the MMHS Newsletter is still shrouded in tentativeness and has not yet acquired the status of an institution positive feedback has been received concerning last year's venture. It is hoped that the reports from a variety of the society's committees will increase an awareness and participation in Mennonite historical undertakings. In order to facilitate this objective a column describing projects of individual members is featured in this newsletter. Any news on planned or completed publications by MMHS members will be welcomed for the next newsletter. Keep the reports short and mail them to our address below. The newsletter could not have been completed in the time squeezed days of late December without the gracious assistance of Dennis Stoesz (Heritage Center). A happy and blessed New Year to all readers.

President's Reflections

— Adolf Ens

After an absence of two years from the Manitoba scene and three years from active involvement in the Society, this year has been one of finding my way back into the stream. Much of what I have discovered has been encouraging. On some things I have not yet found my orientation.

The Society appears to be in excellent health. Membership, at around 180, is higher than ever. The financial condition is unusually good for organizations of this kind. The Board has grown to its constitutional maximum size of eighteen members. There are more active committees than ever before. The projects of some committees are very large and significant, as reports elsewhere in this issue show.

In addition to the direct work of committees of the Society, a number of significant projects were carried out "under our umbrella," so to speak. The impressive obelisk

erected at the Mennonite Village Museum in honour of Mennonite martyrs and the monument to Aron and Anna Friesen at the site of the family cemetery south of Niverville are two examples of this. The expenditures of these projects, made from funds entirely raised by the respective ad hoc committees, come to more than \$38,000. This compares to slightly over \$7,000 spent by the Society itself for its projects during the current year.

Two areas still perplex me. One is our relationship to the multicultural scene in Manitoba. On the one hand the Society has applied for and accepted government funding through this channel. On the other, the Board and Executive are at a loss to know where we fit in organizationally. The amount of paper generated by government offices and para-governmental agencies in this area is considerable. Meeting time, if we were as involved as we could be, would be comparable.

The second area is in our activities as a Society. We have good projects, with quite specific goals - publishing specific works, compiling data or information brochures, sponsoring contests, etc. But we have been far less successful in providing a forum for the "working" historians in our Manitoba Mennonite constituency to come together for live interaction, mutual stimulation and encouragement, exchanging of research sources - in short, helping to make the preservation of our history to be a more communal task.

Members at Work

Ted Friesen of Altona is working with others on a Genealogy of Bernard Klippenstein. He reports that the Genealogical Table for Bernard's sons, Johann (Friesen's grandfather), and Heinrich (great-grandfather to Lawrence Klippenstein), are completed. The genealogies of Peter, Bernhard, Katherina and Margaretha are in the process of being completed. A Klippenstein reunion is being planned for July, 1986 with the publication of the book some time thereafter.

Delbert Plett of Steinbach is in the pro-

cess of completing his third volume on the Kleine Gemeinde experience in Russia. The book entitled *Storm and Triumph* covers the years 1849 to 1874 and the bishoprics of Johann Friesen, Peter Toews and Abram L. Friesen. The manuscript is expected to go to press shortly.

Helen Janzen of 604 Renfrew, Winnipeg has completed a book entitled *Memories*. It describes her life experiences from her childhood in Gretna to her career as Department of Education supervisor for Home Economics. Her memories include Christmas as a child, teaching primary school in Gretna, and the pains of illness and death in the family.

Henry Fast, instructor at the Steinbach Bible College, has recently been collecting archival material on the Kleine Gemeinde in the U.S.A. Originally this group consisted of about 35 families who settled in Janzen, Nebraska. Here they were joined the following year by a number of their brothers from Manitoba. In 1906-1908 the entire church moved to Meade, Kansas where it eventually disintegrated.

Early church documents of this group include the voting list and part of the church register as kept by Aeltester Abraham L. Friesen, and a more extensive collection of church records and diaries belonging to Aeltester Jakob F. Isaac. Fast is in the process of writing the story of the U.S.A. Kleine Gemeinde but has no publishing plans at the present time.

Lawrence Klippenstein who recently completed a PhD dissertation on church and state relations within the context of the Mennonite Commonwealth in Russia, is continuing his foray into the topic during his period of studies in the United Kingdom and the Soviet

Upcoming Events

January 4 — Mennonite Historical Society of Canada banquet and concert at MBBC, 77 Henderson.

January 18 — MMHS annual meeting. Watch for further details!

Union. In conjunction with his studies he has written an article describing the status of conscientious objectors in Russia and East Germany. "CO's (in Russia) are in trouble from the moment they publicize their peace convictions," he writes. Despite the fact that the "exercise of a free conscience is a privilege of high cost, a growing number of Christians, including Mennonites, have made their convictions known in recent years."

Dennis Stoesz of Winnipeg recently completed *The Story of Home Street Mennonite Church, 1957-1982: Responses to the Urban Environment*, 318 Home Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba. It sells for \$15.00. The book which was started three years ago at the time of the church's 25th anniversary, took until this year to be researched and written. Naturally maps, interviews, 100 photographs, charts, and statistics had to be gathered for this. It also took some time to print and distribute the book.

Garry Enns from Aubigny is writing a history of Gretna. He is working under the auspices of the Gretna History Committee which was formed in 1982. Its job was to assemble and publish a history of the Village of Gretna. The committee organized a successful Centennial Homecoming celebration in the summer of 1983. The Homecoming provided the impetus so vital to the research requirements of such a history project. Miles of microfilm have been read and the Gretna community at home and abroad has submitted a lot of information and over 1500 photographs. The result is an impressive archival collection as well as a completed manuscript which describes a Gretna quite different from the one the committee expected to find. Publication of the Gretna history is planned for the late spring of 1986. For further information call the Gretna Village office.

The Mennonite Book Club

— Al Reimer

After a year of operation, the Mennonite Book Club appears to be a viable operation and growing steadily. Membership as of December 10, 1985, stood at 204. So far, most of our membership comes from rural areas, probably because bookstores are not readily available to most rural Mennonites. The Club now ships books all over Canada and to some points in the U.S. We have members in such diverse places as Lynn Lake, Manitoba; Spiritwood, Saskatchewan; Didsbury, Alberta; Toronto; Midwest City, Oklahoma; and Normal, Illinois. We even have a member in Mexico.

Our part-time staff consists of Susan Froese and Karin Dirks, who do a very capable job of ordering and shipping our books to members. The Book Club is open for business every Tuesday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. in Room 208, 818 Portage Avenue (in the same building and floor as the *Mennonite Mirror* and Assiniboine Travel). Susan and Karin welcome visitors on Tuesdays to come in and browse and chat

about Mennonite books.

The Club's most popular selection thus far is Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Jasch Siemens*. Other books moving well include Jack Thiessen's *Predicht fier haite*, the Low German anthology, *A Sackful of Plautdietsch*, and Herman Rempel's Low German dictionary *Kjenn jie noch Plautdietsch*.

The Club is looking forward to further growth in its second year of operation. The enthusiasm and dedication of Susan Froese, Karin Dirks and Business Manager Roy Vogt are the keys to future success, not to mention a steady flow of interesting new books and other materials.

Echo Verlag Publications Translated

— Bert Friesen

The major effect of this committee continues to be the publication of the Arnold Dyck works.

Another project has been the English translations of the Echo Verlag publications. Two are nearing completion. They are *Flug ueber den Amur* and *Unser Auszug nach Mitelasien*. These are being translated by Elisabeth Peters and should be ready for publication in 1986.

This committee, on behalf of the Society, continues to co-sponsor the publication of the 'Journal of Mennonite Studies'. Volume three appeared in 1985.

We continue to be open to considering new projects. We would welcome suggestions.

Second Composers' Competition Underway

— Doreen Klassen

The MMHS Arts Committee is planning to sponsor its second Composers' Competition, after a successful first-run of the competition last spring. Composers were invited to submit entries in two categories: Vocal-choral music with texts based on historic Anabaptist-Mennonite themes, and instrumental music based on traditional Mennonite tunes. Winners in the vocal-choral category of the 1985 Composers' Competition were: Leonard Enns, of Waterloo, Ont., 1st prize for "Prayer for Peace", and Harris J. Loewen, of Winnipeg, studying in Iowa, 2nd prize for "Jubilee Canticle". In the instrumental category, only one prize, second prize, was awarded to Leonard Enns of Waterloo, Ont. for "Duo for Oboe and Piano" incorporating the tune "So Nimm Denn Meine Haende."

The Arts Committee is also planning to publish a two-piano version of Victor Davies' "Mennonite Piano Concerto". The premiere performance of this arrangement of the concerto is scheduled for the annual banquet of the Canadian Mennonite Historical Society to be held in Winnipeg, at MBBC on January 4, 1986.

Letter to the Editor

December 10, 1985

Dear editor:

It is with some regret that I have seen our Historical Society become a top heavy bureaucracy and an amalgum of self-interest groups, which keep on feeding the "masses" propaganda.

As a member I have not had a chance to talk with fellow historians for some two years now because the fall seminars and winter annual meetings are chalked full of entertainment and reports. One would think sharing of what each other is doing as far as research goes is unimportant.

Secondly, as a member of the publicity committee, I have felt increasingly uncomfortable generating committee reports and program to the masses out there. It seems that the society has become little more than an umbrella organization for many self-interest groups and a private board making decisions. What then keeps the society together, the membership or the bureaucracy?

Dennis Stoesz
206 Lipton St.
Winnipeg, MB.



MMHS Board Meeting in December at The Mennonite Studies Centre, University of Winnipeg. Clockwise from upper right: Rhinehart Friesen, Bill Schroeder, Al Reimer, Ed Schellenberg, Adolf Ens, Harry Loewen, Abe Dueck, Delbert Plett and Vic Derksen. John Dyck and Roy Loewen, present at meeting, are not on photo.

Fall History Symposium

Fall History Symposium

— Royden Loewen

The Fall Program of the MMHS was held at the Steinbach Bible College on November 29, 1985. The program began with a panel discussion of the seminal work of Delbert Plett on the Russian Kleine Gemeinde. It was followed with readings from *Arnold Dyck's works* by Al Reimer and Harry Loewen. Doreen Klassen sang some of the Low German songs she has transcribed. They included such "Leeda" as "Aus etj jink met de Hoakj oppe dael" and "Ons Noba es mie doll jeworden." The readings and songs were well executed and highly entertaining.

The discussion of Plett's book, however, was the central feature of the evening. Three panelists, Dr. Harry Loewen and Dr. Al Reimer of the University of Winnipeg and Gerhard Ens, editor of the *Mennonitische Botschaft* presented their views on the book. Harvey Plett, history instructor at the SBC moderated the exchange of views. Each of the panelists agreed that the book, entitled the *Golden Years* and dealing with the first 35 years of the Kleine Gemeinde history, 1812-1849, is a work of great significance for Russian Mennonite historiography. They noted that Plett's thesis that the Kleine Gemeinde was a legitimate reform movement in the Anabaptist tradition is a revisionist view and that it is argued forcefully and persuasively. They concurred that Mennonite historians will have to deal with Plett's thesis whether they agree with it or not. This is because the views of nineteenth century historian Abram Friesen, that the Kleine Gemeinde was a narrow-minded reactionary group, are still prevailing.

The panelists, however, raised certain objections to the methodology Plett employed in arguing his case. Loewen questioned whether Anabaptism, as defined by Harold Bender and appropriated by Plett, was normative and could have informed the Kleine Gemeinde. Anabaptism was not always peaceful and evangelistic, espousing the ideals of discipleship and brotherhood. Ens on the other hand wondered whether it was possible to differentiate Pietism and Mennonitism as Plett did. He pointed out that most modern Mennonite groups bear some pietistic influence. Reimer suggested that Plett had possibly gone too far when, in resurrecting the Kleine Gemeinde, he argued that it was superior to the other Mennonite groups in Russia.

While the panelists raised several intriguing points, more time would have allowed other important questions to have been addressed. Just how will Russian Mennonite historiography be affected by Plett's work? How will Plett's book affect the way in which other non-pietistic bodies, such as the Grosse Gemeinde, are viewed?

To what extent is the Evangelical Mennonite Conference the true successor of the

Kleine Gemeinde, and to what extent has it accepted the very teachings its predecessors opposed? Is James Urry's thesis that the Kleine Gemeinde epitomized the closed order in Russia valid?

The discussion, however, even within its

restricted time frame was interesting and valuable. The organizers of the symposium, Wilmer Penner and H.K. Friesen, need to be commended on a job well done. The success of the discussion points to the need for regular historical forums of this nature.



From left to right: Harry Loewen, Al Reimer, Harvey Plett and Gerhard Ens.



Doreen Klassen singing "Plautdietsche Leeda".

Aaron and Anna Friesen Pioneer Memorial Erected

— Rhinehart Friesen

Pioneer Mennonite families in Manitoba commonly created private cemeteries in their gardens. Through the years many of these have disappeared, especially when farmsteads were deserted as a result of farms being combined into larger holdings. About a year ago, Ernie A. Friesen, John K. Friesen, Henry Kliewer, Jake Kliewer, and Erdman Friesen, all grandchildren of Aaron S. Friesen (1848-1923) resolved to prevent this from happening to their family plot. An appeal to other family members for funds, a great deal of work by the self-appointed committee, and friendly help and encouragement from the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society led to a successful completion of their project. A memorial stone inscribed with the names of ten family members known to have been buried there has been erected to mark the site of their last resting place.

To celebrate the occasion nearly 100 members of the extended family of Anna and Aaron Friesen attended a service of dedication at the Golden Friendship Centre in Niverville on October 6, 1985. John K.

Friesen acted as Master of Ceremonies. Ernie A. Friesen gave the devotional. Delbert Plett, President of MMHS, brought greetings from the Society and a report of research of the 1883 minutes of the R.M. of Hanover listing the tax-payers in the village of Strassberg, Aaron Friesen's property at that time, and the taxes he paid in that year. Members of the third generation gave short outlines of each of the children of this pioneer couple. Rhinehart F. Friesen presented a biography of Aaron and Anna including notes of more distant forbears.

Recognizing Local Pioneers

— Delbert Plett

The Monuments and Local History Committee is in the process of initiating, among others, the following projects:

(1) To recognize century farms but with the difference from the Manitoba Historical Society program in that the ownership of a village farm would be considered part of the ownership period for those descendants who presently farm a portion of the former village area.

(2) To constitute prizes for books, essays, and studies pertaining to local history.

(3) To promote more extensive research of early Manitoba Mennonite history, 1874-1924, through the collection and publication of diaries, family records, sermons, and village records.

(4) To encourage a better understanding of Old Order Mennonite theology and history in light of prevailing negative stereotyping of conservative Mennonites by New Order groups.

We welcome suggestions regarding the above and also solicit other ideas. Anyone interested in any of these projects or serving on the committee is asked to contact one of the members. The committee presently consists of Peter Zacharias, Jacob C. Fehr, Gus Dueck and Delbert Plett.

MMHS Honorary Members



Elisabeth Peters, second from left, and Ted Friesen, third from left, were installed as honorary members in March for their contribution to the preservation of history in Manitoba.

M.M.H.S. Donors Gratefully Acknowledged

— Jacob Rempel

Dec. 1, 1984-Dec. 1, 1985

The MMHS gratefully acknowledges all gifts and donations received between December 1, 1984 and December 1, 1985. All recorded donations are recognized in the following categories: Donor \$20 to \$49; Sustaining member, \$50 to \$99; Supporting member, \$100 to \$199; Patrons \$200 to \$499; and Benefactor (life members) \$500.

Benefactor - D.W. Friesen & Sons, Kroeker Farms. **Supporting Members** - T.E. Friesen, Ch. Loewen, Elmer Hildebrand,

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Arnold Dyck Volume Appears

— Vic Derksen

The first volume of the planned edition of the works of Arnold Dyck appeared this fall, containing the major novel, *Verloren in der Steppe* and a previously unpublished autobiographical essay, "Aus meinem Leben." Meanwhile, work has been proceeding on the other three volumes. Al Reimer is editing the Volumes II and III, which will contain the whole of Dyck's Low German work. The second volume will include the three *Koop enn Bua opp Reise* books and the third the other Low German prose and plays, as well as the early *Koop enn Bua* dialogues, the "Belauschte Gespräche".

Work is also proceeding on the last volume, which will be a collection of unpublished and published works, his one poem, "Keine Heimat", essays on various topics, letters and a portfolio of his art work. Elisabeth Peters and George K. Epp are editing this volume.

The first volume has received very good reviews and, at its subsidized price of \$25. (Mennonite Book Club) is an excellent value, especially since it is only a limited edition. Subscriptions for the whole set at \$95. are still available.

Order from: The Mennonite Book Club, 818 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3G 0N4.

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