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# Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

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## An Evening on Rare Books

On December 3, 1997, a group of about 30 individuals gathered at the Mennonite Heritage Centre to hear an expert, Richard Spafford, talk about how to determine the value of rare books. Spafford is a rare book dealer and appraiser who lives in Regina, Saskatchewan. He travels across Canada and the United States to appraise books. He was in Winnipeg to do some appraisal work for the University of Manitoba. The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society took advantage of this opportunity to receive some expert advice from him.

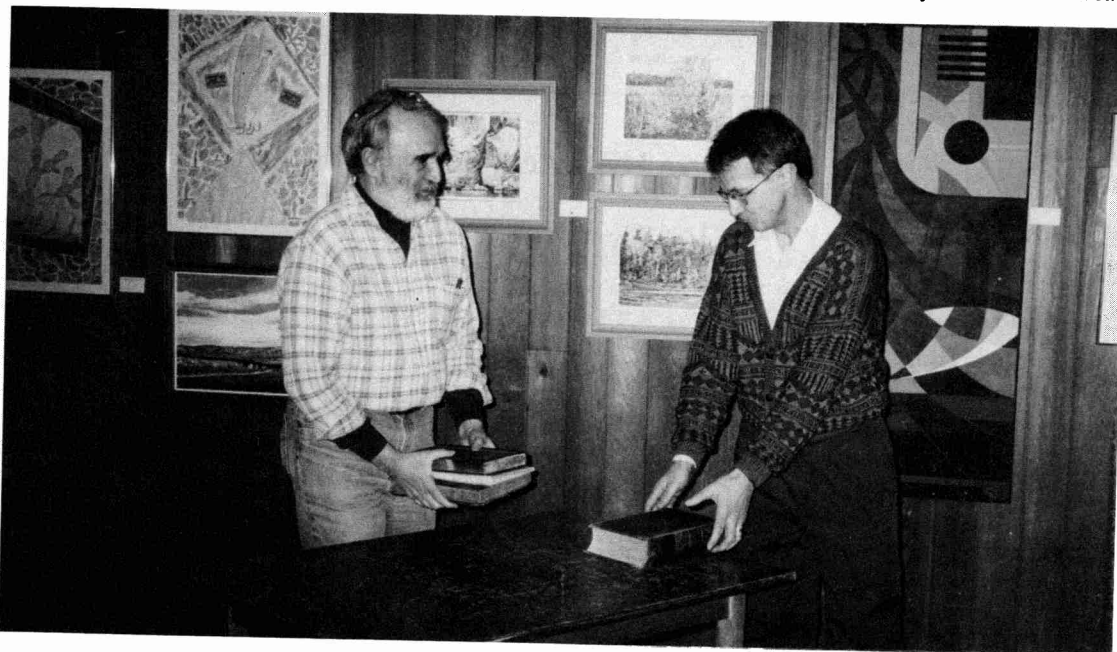
Spafford made it clear that assigning value to a book is not an exact science but is often based on very subjective criteria. The age of the book is only one of many criteria. Any book that changed the way people perceive the world is likely to be in demand (e.g., the writings of Karl Marx, Charles Darwin, etc.) Other factors include such matters as the condition of the book, maps and illustrations in the book, limited editions, etc.

Quite a number of individuals brought items for evaluation by Spafford. Some books had

an estimated value of up to \$800. Others, such as a 1683 edition of the *Colloquies of Erasmus*, were deemed to have relatively less value because they were printed in substantial quantities and were used as textbooks in many schools or universities. Spafford compared the book to a modern paperback edition.

The evening was very much appreciated by those in attendance.

*Abe Dueck, Director  
Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies*



Richard Spafford and Alf Redekopp  
with rare books, December 3, 1997.

Photo courtesy of Abe Dueck

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The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter is published annually. It welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members. Correspondence can be mailed to the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter, 169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg MB R2L 2E5, or e-mailed to the editor, Richard D. Thiessen, at [editor@mmhs.org](mailto:editor@mmhs.org).

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## Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Board Activities for 1997

### MMHS Board for 1997

The executive board of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was comprised of the following individuals in 1997: Adolf Ens (Winnipeg), Henry Ens (Reinland), Bert Friesen, Vice-President (Winnipeg), Helene Friesen (Winnipeg), John A. Friesen (Winnipeg), Otto Hamm (Morden), Elmer Heinrichs (Altona), Marianne Janzen (Winnipeg), Vic Janzen (Steinbach), Lawrence Klippenstein (Winnipeg), Irene Kroecker, (Steinbach), Martha Martens (Horndean), Matthew Neufeld (Winnipeg), Alf Redekopp, Treasurer (Winnipeg), Ken Reddig, President (Winnipeg), Conrad Stoesz (Winnipeg), and Richard Thiessen, Secretary (Winnipeg). John A. Friesen, Elmer Heinrichs, Vic Janzen and Matthew Neufeld were new to the board, having been elected at the annual meeting in Steinbach early in the year.

Unfortunately, John A. Friesen passed away suddenly on July 18, 1997 in Zaporozhe, Ukraine, while on a tour. He was the author of two books, *Against the Wind: The Story of Four Mennonite Villages in Southern Ukraine* (1994) and *Field of Broken Dreams*:

*Mennonite Settlement in Seminole, West Texas* (1996).

The board met twice during 1997, March 19 at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and October 15 in Winkler.

### MMHS and the Comite Pro Archivo Historico y Museo Menonita

At the board meeting held in Winkler on October 15, 1997, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society accepted in principle the invitation to work in partnership with the Comite Pro Archivo Historico y Museo Menonita in the development of an archives and museum for the Mennonite community in Mexico. The formation of this partnership comes on the heels of events held in Mexico to commemorate seventy-five years of Mennonites in Mexico.

The society was approached by George Rempel, a representative of the Mexican group. In the discussions that followed, the Manitoba society agreed that it could provide expertise and information, and assist in the raising of funds. For its efforts, the Manitoba

society would retain 10% of the funds raised for this project for administrative purposes. Following board approval, a committee was struck to draft the final agreement and to manage the funds.

### Translation of St. Petersburg documents

During the summer, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was awarded a Summer Career Start grant to hire a student who could help to translate some of the Russian language documents recently acquired by the two Mennonite archives in Winnipeg. Serge Chneiderman, a recent emigré from Ukraine, worked for eight weeks on a number of items. The bulk of his work revolved around the compilation of a detailed inventory of twenty-nine microfilm reels of documents held in the St. Petersburg Historical Archives.

Chneiderman, who has a Jewish background, had no knowledge of the Mennonites before he began the project. However, by the end of the eight weeks, he was quite interested in what he had translated. The inventory has been made available to several Mennonite archives in North America.

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## West Reserve Historical Series, Vol. II

Volume II of the West Reserve Historical Series, entitled "1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve" is scheduled to be release early in 1998. The 500 page volume, retailing for \$30.00, will be divided into six sections.

The first and second sections will be a reproduction of the original census carried out by the West Reserve officials in 1880, along with the inclusion of individual text records pertaining to each village, covering the years 1880-82.

The third and main section of the volume is a listing of all families in the 1880 census, along with supplemental data. This data, provided by a number of researchers and genealogists, includes information on the origin of the family in Russia, the names of parents and siblings, additional family information, and cross-references to other records and publications containing additional information.

The last three sections contain profiles of bishops, ministers and deacons in the West

Reserve, a reproduction of the 1891 federal census of the West Reserve, and a detailed list of ship passenger lists for Mennonites arriving in Quebec in the years 1880-1896.

This volume compliments the first volume in this series, which was a reproduction of the Reinländer Gemeinde Buch, and will be an invaluable source for anyone whose ancestors settled in the Mennonite West Reserve in the 19th century.

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## MMHS Website (<http://www.mmhs.org>)

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society's Internet website, first launched in 1996, has become a popular place for certain web surfers to visit, especially if those web surfers are interested in learning more about Mennonites. The most popular files are those associated with the Prussian-Russian Mennonite

Genealogy pages. These files, described in more detail in the December 1996 issue of the MMHS Newsletter, contain the names of thousands of Mennonites found in church and civic records of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries. Many of these files have been contributed by Adalbert Goertz, a well-known

Mennonite genealogist, although others from throughout Canada and the US have also contributed. At certain points during the year, the site has been averaging around 40 hits (visits) a day. The society's homepage can be found at: <http://www.mmhs.org>.

# The Rhineland Agricultural Society: Its Cultural and Educational Contribution

David Schroeder

## Introduction

To my knowledge no separate history has been written about the Rhineland Agricultural Society. Many histories and studies have been made of the Southern Manitoba Mennonite communities where the society is at least mentioned in passing,<sup>1</sup> but the full impact of the society has yet to be documented. Perhaps this essay can pin-point some of the issues that need to be considered in coming to terms with the impact of the Rhineland Agricultural Society on the southern Manitoba communities.

## A Community in Crisis

Many things had conspired over the years to put the Southern Manitoba communities into a deep crisis. Years of successful growing of cereal crops had weaned the farmers away from mixed farming to become dependent on cereal crops.<sup>2</sup> They were ill prepared to meet the fluctuating nature of the cereal crop market when the depression of 1929 hit the community. They had already suffered the failure of the *Waisenamt*<sup>3</sup> and the buying clubs<sup>4</sup> of Southern Manitoba and were now plunged deeply into debt.<sup>5</sup> The drought of the early 30's and the grasshopper plagues only made matters worse. To this was added the upheaval of emigration to Mexico and immigration from Russia.

The war years had also had its effect on the people. They had suffered the stigma of being opposed to war and had been pressured to contribute to the war effort through the red cross and through the buying of war bonds.<sup>6</sup> As a result the people were loath to respond to the efforts of the Department of Agriculture when it advised the farmers to diversify their crops.<sup>7</sup> The fear of being overly influenced by the surrounding society caused the church leaders to veto most of the programs related to cultural and civic activities. But this could not be sustained in this time of crisis.

## A Community Self-help Answer

Something needed to be done. The beginnings of a kind of self-help approach to the crisis can be found in three of the southern Manitoba communities. In Lowe Farm the people got together to find out why the buying clubs had

failed and how they could be organized so as to assure greater success.<sup>8</sup> In the Gretna area the farmers were responding to the Department of Colonization and Agriculture and the CNR's Community Progress Competition.<sup>9</sup> In Altona the people came together to see how they could address the needs of the farmers that were basic to the welfare of the whole community. We will be concerned here mainly with the latter.

In Altona five men came together at the beginning of January 1931 to discuss how the needs of the community might be met.<sup>10</sup> They represented the interests of the entire community as they searched for some kind of action they might take to help the community. This group decided that they needed to focus on agriculture and that they needed to forge a better link between the community and the Department of Agriculture but that they would need a bigger support group to organize such action. Such a meeting was called for Jan. 17, 1931 at which time the Rhineland Agricultural Society was born. The meeting of Feb. 7 named the members of the executive committee and the board.<sup>11</sup>

The purpose of the Rhineland Agricultural Society was as follows:

"to study farm problems and work towards solutions to alleviate the distressed economic conditions of the area farmers; to encourage proper crop rotation for increased yields; to request the Manitoba Department of Agriculture to provide for and station an Agricultural Representative in the municipality to assist farmers with know-how on the latest and practical farm practises; to work towards crop diversification beyond their one crop economy; to encourage the testing for suitability of crops and growing of different crops for economic stability; to improve and expand their livestock for an alternate income; to establish young people's agricultural clubs to teach good farming practices and produce quality fruits, vegetables, registered grain, registered poultry and breeding stock and pure-bred livestock; to promote educational efforts through study clubs; to communicate agricultural reform, a regular publications to be known as the *Rhineland Agricultural Society Quarterly* was to be initiated; to hold an annual fair to show quality products

produced by club members and farmers and share the expert knowledge that their combined efforts had obtained."<sup>12</sup>

These were not idle projections because most of them were actually implemented.

The RAS drew on many different resources to accomplish its tasks. First of all it was not hesitant to use the personnel of their membership and members of the community. Many persons were represented on two to three committee and organizations at the same time.<sup>13</sup> Effective communication was established with their members and with the teachers in the schools through the *RAS Quarterly* edited by P. D. Reimer who reported not only on the projects of the organization but used it as the means to educate the public on changes of attitudes needed and on the philosophy of the RAS and its various projects. Above all the RAS was able to draw in the help of the many teachers who were only too glad to have some concrete things to suggest to help students and parents meet the challenges of their day.

A new relationship of trust and mutual help was established between the Manitoba federation of Agriculture, government departments such as the department of Agriculture and the Extension Department, Mr. J. E. Crawford, the agricultural representative, and experts on various topics brought in from far and wide to speak and to teach. The various field men of the RAS worked in close co-operation with the government departments.<sup>14</sup> There was general agreement that the agricultural efforts of the farmers would have to be made economically viable.

## The Work of the Rhineland Agricultural Society

The work of the society consisted of those things that were stated in their original objectives. Given the limited travel means, there were an incredible number of meetings called to inform farmers of their best options for seeding crops, raising livestock, poultry, pigs, and methods of farming.<sup>15</sup>

The Extension Department had encouraged the organization of boys and girls clubs through

the Rural Municipality of Rhineland. These were now given solid administration through the RAS. The 4-H clubs were both popular, varied, inspirational and educational.<sup>16</sup>

The agricultural fair was a success from the beginning. It began in 1931 and has been carried on ever since in some form. Its purpose was expressed in the RAS motto: show what you grow and share what you know. The second year the businesses of Altona declared a half day holiday to make room for the event and to participate in it. A prize list was made available to the public well in advance of the fair.<sup>17</sup> The fair was a gathering point to see what had been accomplished, to get new ideas, to accept congratulations, and to be further informed.

The Rhineland Agricultural Institute was called into being in 1937. It was the result of the study sessions with E. T. Howe who advocated the idea of a two month course in agriculture for men and the same for women in home-making to be held each winter.<sup>18</sup> He also was its first principal. The Manitoba Federation of Agriculture together with the RAS introduced the Folk School in 1940 and 1941.<sup>19</sup> These courses were of shorter duration but covered some of the same subjects. More attention was given to worship, singing, instrumental music, public speaking, debating, socializing and recreation.

J. J. Siemens had called for the establishing of a youth forum<sup>20</sup> where you could wrestle with the problems of the day.<sup>21</sup> This came into being early in the work of Menno Klassen as representative of the RAS. Youth met regularly to discuss topics related to the community, to their personal lives, their vocations, as well as art, music, literature and recreation. An attempt was made to have these activities be a part of the Bergthaler Church program and to have the meetings in church but permission was denied. These activities were more formally organized in 1944 as the Young Peoples Association.<sup>22</sup>

The RAS later also participated in using the Farm Radio Forum of the CBC for discussions in the various schools. Groups were organized to listen to and discuss the CBC programs in their forum meetings.<sup>23</sup> In a similar way the 4-H work was augmented with a program designed for farm-hands, farmers and their adult children. It was called the Farm and Home Improvement Club.<sup>24</sup>

The study groups soon created a need for appropriate materials. In many areas appropriate materials were available from government agencies, universities and other

public institutions. In the area of Mennonite history and thought the RAS, funded by the Rhineland Consumers Co-operative, created their own materials in getting Paul Schaeffer to write the volumes of *Wohin, Woher Mennoniten*. These writings became the curriculum for the discussion groups or clubs and the local teachers were the discussion leaders. Arrangements were made for essay contests, debates, and public speaking but it was held that the study group discussion method was the best way for adults to learn.<sup>25</sup>

The RAS was revolutionary in the way it included women in its organization. Women were not only present at the RAS meetings but participated in the discussions. The Women's Institute was on the drawing board from the beginning.<sup>26</sup> Women were present at the organizational meeting and, at the June 5, 1931 meeting of the RAS, women from Edenthal, Halbstadt, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld and Altona were in attendance and elected Helene Siemens president and Nita Hamm secretary of the "Women's Section" of the organization.<sup>27</sup> The Women's Institute had its own program but worked hand in hand with the RAS. On December 31, 1936 the women decided to run a short course parallel to the short courses for the men.<sup>28</sup> The Women's Institute, as reorganized in 1936, was also instrumental in starting the public library in Altona.<sup>29</sup>

The involvement of the teachers in so much of the work of the RAS naturally led to the forming of the Altona-Gretna Teachers' Local. It was organized to deal with matters from the teachers perspective and their leadership role in community activities.<sup>30</sup>

The work of the RAS was augmented by the institutions that were created to address the financial problems of the community. The RAS actively promoted the organization of co-operatives.<sup>31</sup> The Rhineland Consumers Co-operative was created on Jan. 24, 1931 in the same month that the RAS was organized. The Co-op Store was started in 1937.<sup>32</sup> Equally important were the Credit Unions. After a year or two of deliberations the Altona Credit Union was called into being in 1939.<sup>33</sup> Gretna, Halbstadt, and Winkler too soon had Credit Unions. The people were able to supply their own fire insurance through the Red River Valley Fire Insurance. Always more agencies were organized to address the needs of the people.<sup>34</sup>

#### **Cultural and Educational Contribution of the Rhineland Agricultural Society**

The work of the RAS proved to be much more

important than even its most ardent early supporters could have thought. I know this from the way our family was affected by it. After father took a short course on bee-keeping we were never again out of honey.<sup>35</sup> We supplied the whole community with honey for years. My bother Jac K. Schroeder devoted his life to 4-H clubs, RAS programs, the fair, co-operatives and finally was the educational director for the B. C. Credit Union. Many other families were similarly affected.

#### **Psychological Impact:**

One of the most significant effects of the RAS and its related organizations was that it changed the mood of the whole community. In the midst of the depression a note of optimism was sounded. There was hope for the future. There were things you could do that would make a real difference.

Some people in the West Reserve did lose hope and returned to the East Reserve. This meant that they were returning to subsistence farming which was more of an effort simply to survive then to move forward. It was not a move of great hope for the future.<sup>36</sup> The West Reserve placed its hope on diversified crops, new technology, control of buying and selling produce, etc.

There was a sense of progress in the air. It could be sensed in a most public way at the annual fair. People took pride in their livestock, cereal and garden crops and took note of what more they could do to improve their lot. The people were proud of what their children had produced through their many and varied clubs activities.

Important also was the feeling that you were true to your heritage. Not only did the youth study about peace and service, they sought to live it out in the community. The studies on peace and non-resistance in the youth forum were extremely important for those who were about to be called into service. It helped them to take a C. O. position. All of the efforts of the RAS, Credit Unions and Co-operatives were undergirded with the mutual aid theology as espoused by J. Winfield Fretz and others.

The encouragement and help of speakers from the U.S.A., Europe and other countries strengthened the hands of the leaders and gave them further ideas. But we also had something to show to the visitors. This was the case when Lieutenant Governor McWilliams came to the Altona fair. He showed genuine appreciation for the southern Manitoba Mennonites.<sup>37</sup> We had not been marking time.

There was a wholeness about the varieties of agencies that served the community. Businessmen, teachers, farmers and day labourers were working together. They were working together on projects that affected all of life--worship to economics. For most of the people in these organizations, the traditionally sharp line between religious and secular was erased. All of life was sacred and all of life was a stewardship under God.

### Economic Benefits

There is no doubt but that the diversification program paid off for the farmers. There was a return to solvency and the farmers did not feel they were constantly being taken advantage of by forces they could not address or control.

Prices were brought under control. They lowered the prices of oil and other essential products; they benefited through bulk buying; and they benefited again in the sale of their products because of the improvement to the product and through better marketing.

Loans could be repaid and loans could be made. They could set terms favourable to the borrowers, which had not been done by the banks. If there was a surplus it was returned in patronage dividends to the producers or borrowers. Loans could be made from the Credit Union without gilt-edge securities.

Many more people stayed in the community than would have been possible without diversification. At the same time their average income was higher than in other areas.<sup>38</sup> More of what the community needed was produced within the community itself. The capital of the various businesses stayed within the community.

The southern Manitoba community owes a great debt to J. J. Siemens who was the driving force behind the agricultural and economic organization that addressed the economic needs of the people. Whether they liked it or not, he was working for their interests. He was:

"a model community development worker of unusual ability and influence. His charismatic leadership, his vision for a wholesome humane community, his ability to inspire others, to instill confidence in the ability of a whole community to undertake the impossible, combined with his ability to carry through and run many sound co-operative businesses, is a combination of human character traits that are very rare in this world."<sup>39</sup>

### Educational Values:

Of greatest importance was the educational impact of the Rhineland Agricultural Society. From the beginning the leaders recognized that the whole program of diversification and crop and livestock improvement would depend on education. Farmers, teachers, and businessmen became the teachers of a community, not just a classroom. They educated themselves first and then the people.

The leaders of the agricultural reform movement were exemplary educators. They taught people in their conversations on the road and on the farms, in meetings called to give information, in judging produce and livestock at fairs and in the local clubs, in mass meetings called to start a new venture, and in the classroom. The subject matter was related to everyday life on the farm and in the community. They learned and taught the technical language related to the different crops, animals, and farm management. But most significant, they acted on what they taught in their own farm practices. They lived what they taught.

Not enough can be said about the impact of the 4-H clubs. Here the local school teacher was helping the student with their farm work! The teacher was not now subtly weaning the student away from the farm but inspiring them to become better farmers. Parents, teachers, field representatives and club members worked together in hands-on learning situations.

The Rhineland Agricultural Institute was a school that profoundly affected the lives of the participants. A wealth of information was provided on every conceivable topic that would affect the farmer and the housewife. They learned also where to go and what resources to draw on when livestock was sick, grains were diseased, the soil unproductive and when what had been tried did not work.<sup>40</sup> Here persons learned to hold their own in discussions, learned to debate and to speak in public, sing folk songs from many lands and relax together in different forms of recreation.

The annual fair was a profound learning experience for the whole community. People learned to judge good livestock, pigs, grain, garden produce, flowers and arts and crafts. The best, the winners, would go on to provincial competitions. It was a time for new ideas and new resolve to try things for yourself. So often you would hear the remark "I can do that too!" and went home to try it themselves.

The Youth Forum, the study sessions, evening meetings and other occasions provided the participants with the opportunity to discuss relevant topics. They were discussed both in theory and with respect to their practical application. There was always the thought that this could be immediately beneficial.

As was said, the RAS brought in speakers from all over the world. Some of the speakers I heard during those years were unforgettable. I think especially of J. W. Fretz, Wm. Stauffer, and McLeod from the Iona Community in Great Britain. These men and a few women were specialists in their fields.

### Cultural Benefits:

Through the work of the RAS and its related organizations, the people were engaged in constructive work in and for the community. This kept many people away from "idle pursuits" and was more effective than the warning about such things from the pulpit of the church. Nowhere else in the community was there such a unity of purpose and work.

The world awareness of the people was greatly increased through the educational work of the RAS. People received information from many different sources. I learned to know the writing of Harry Emerson Fosdick, a pacifist minister in New York, and I read all his books while still in High School. People had knowledge of and contact with the various government departments from which they could benefit.

The community as community became important. It was not the farmer against the businessman or teacher, but all were servants of the total community. It was not agriculture against education but both were seen as serving the community. There was a healthy concern for the material, social and spiritual well being of the community.

There was one link missing, however. The church, especially the Berghaler Church, was more often against the work co-operatives and as a result also against the RAS. It began very well in that the church allowed the RAS to use its tent for the first fair. But when things happened in town during the fair that the Church did not condone they withdrew the use of the tent in future years, even though the incidents had nothing to do with the fair.<sup>41</sup> In the same way, when P. D. Reimer strongly supported the co-operative movement in his editorials in the *RAS Quarterly* the behind the scene politics was such that he was dismissed as a teacher by the school board.<sup>42</sup> J. E. Dyck who organized a band to play at the fair played marches and for that was disciplined by the

church. Rev. J. N. Hoepfner at first would speak to the Youth Forum but then was told that that was not desired. The worst was that some leaders in the church together with business persons who felt threatened by the consumer co-ops, linked the co-ops with communism.<sup>43</sup> I will forever be grateful for D. W. Friesen who, as a deacon in the church, never yielded to these tactics and continued to help us with the Youth Forum and other educational projects.

In my mind there was no need for this dichotomy between religious and civic affairs. It was also not shared by the Sommerfelder and other churches. It seemed to us to have its roots in the personal differences between J. J. Siemens and Rev. D. Schulz. It should not have carried over into the work of the community. Perhaps both were at fault. This conviction grew on me later when I entered the ministry. Only in the Bergthaler church was I asked how I could combine co-operatives with ministry in the church.

### Conclusion

My sense is that much of what was learned about community building through the sheer necessity of survival during the thirties will be lost. Through the work of the RAS and the other organizations people learned to be there for each other and to work together for their common good. Now in more prosperous times these lessons are not only being lost but overtly negated. This means that they will have to be learned all over again when there is a new crisis. The more we remember the lessons of the thirties and the forties the more we will seek to preserve that which will benefit us in the future.

*This paper was presented at a Local History Committee workshop held in Winkler on April 27, 1996 by David Schroeder, Professor Emeritus, Canadian Mennonite Bible College.*

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> E. K. Francis, In Search of Utopia, Altona: D. W. Friesen and Sons, 1955, p. 214-222; John Warkentin, The Mennonite Settlements of Southern Manitoba, Unpublished dissertation, University of Toronto, 1960, Vol. 2 p.326-347; Robert Meyer, Spirit of the Post Road, Altona: The Federation of Southern Manitoba Co-operatives, 1955, p. 11-22; Esther Epp-Thiessen, Altona: The Story of a Prairie Town, Altona: D. W. Friesen and Sons, 1982, p.150-165; Henry J. Gerbrandt, Adventure in Faith, Altona: The Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Manitoba, 1970, p.271; Jac. K. Schroeder,

unpublished memoirs, 1996; Henry Dyck, Jacob John Siemens and the Co-operative Movement in Southern Manitoba 1929-1955, Unpublished Master Dissertation, University of Manitoba, 1982.

<sup>2</sup> Francis, p.13;

<sup>3</sup> Gerbrandt p.60-84.

<sup>4</sup> Lowe Farm had organized a buying club early in the 1900's. They were the outgrowth of the United Grain Growers and the United Farmers of Manitoba programs but they had not been sustained. (Meyer, p. 24). There was also a buying club organized in Gretna. Here the oil companies found a law prohibiting oil to be pumped directly from train cars on the siding to stop this bulk buying by the farmers. (P. F. Penner, Community Progress Home-Made, District No.2 Co-operative Public Relations Federation, 1960 ?; Dyck, p. 67-68).

<sup>5</sup> Meyer indicates that of the 1,240 farmer in Rhineland 626 had lost title to their farms and 455 were heavily in debt (Meyer p.11). In Manitoba 2% of the farmers in 1900 were tenants but by 1936 it had risen to 20% (Pioneers in Poverty: Some Facts for Western Canadians Today, published by the Winnipeg Branch of the League for Social Reconstruction, Winnipeg: Garry Press, 1938, p.13).

<sup>6</sup> See the Echo adds in the years 1941 and 1944.

<sup>7</sup> A Rural Municipality of Rhineland minute in 1902 indicates that they did not accept the stationing of a representative of the Department of Agriculture in the municipality.

<sup>8</sup> A study group soon determined why the buying clubs had failed (Meyer p.24) and that if they applied the Rochdale principles (Meyer p.25-27) basic to the co-operative movement, they would have better success. They then organized the Lowe Farm Farm Consumers Co-op in 1930-31 with the help Mr. Hinton from the newly formed Manitoba Co-op Wholesale (1927) and against severe opposition. (Meyer, p.23-33; Dyck, p. 67-68).

<sup>9</sup> On October 23, 1930 a group was organized to help the community respond to the Community Progress Competition. The agenda of the first considered the work of the Red Cross, the Women's Institutes, Swine clubs, Literary Societies and a Co-operative Buying Association. All of these items were of importance in the further development of the community. They won third prize and \$250 for their efforts that year. The next years list in which they won first prize and \$1000 was even more impressive: sugar beet growing; organization of the Rhineland Consumers Co-operative; organization of the United Farmers of Manitoba local; three sewing circles; junior Red Cross work; literary societies; the baseball league; display of arts

and handicrafts; improvement of schools and playgrounds; sewing clubs; garden clubs and improvements in livestock (Community Progress Home-Made p.4-7).

<sup>10</sup> Present were two farmers J. J. Siemens, B. H. Sawatzky, two teachers, J. G. Neufeld, P. D. Reimer and a businessman C. C. Bergman (Epp-Thiessen, p.160). Represented also were the members of the Farmers Oil Company, the buying club from Gretna-Altona (Dyck, p. 70-71).

<sup>11</sup> The 73 persons present at the organizational meeting came from Gretna, Halbstadt, Horndean, Lowe Farm, Plum Coulee, Rosenfeld and Altona. By the end of February they had 85 members. J. G. Neufeld was the first president, J. J. Siemens, vice president and P. D. Reimer secretary-treasurer (Epp-Thiessen, p.160-161; Meyer, p.12-16).

<sup>12</sup> Schroeder Memoirs p. 92

<sup>13</sup> J. J. Siemens was represented on any number of committees and organizations: B. J. Klippenstein was on the RAS board, the Hospital Board and the School board as well as on the MCI and MEI board; P. D. Reimer was on the RAS executive, the editor of the *RAS Quarterly* etc.

<sup>14</sup> The field men were: Menno Klassen (1942-1946), Died G. Reimer (1946-48), Jac K. Schroeder (1948-1952 and Jake Fehr (1952-1954). See also Dyck, p. 59-60.

<sup>15</sup> An undated list of services offered by the RAS lists the following: organization and supervision of club work; sponsor the agricultural fair; agricultural training; short courses; demonstrations; veterinary service and advice; agricultural library and general advisory service; farm management assistance; economic surveys; soil survey and zonation; farm record assistance; general agricultural planning for the Rhineland Municipality; clearing house and mediation; assistance to improve crops and livestock; and establishing markets.

<sup>16</sup> J. J. Siemens in his address to the Convention of Co-operatives held at Altona on June 10, 1939 indicated that there were 75 clubs with 700 participants (see Epp-Thiessen, RAS folder, MHC Archives). In 1941 there were 100 clubs with 1098 participants.

<sup>17</sup> The prize list listed the executive officers of the fair; the board of director, the committee members in charge of the various competitions and the members of the Ladies's Section as well the rules and regulations for the various exhibits. It also listed all the classes and the subclasses together with the prize to be won in each category. See e.g. Prize List for the fair at Altona, Friday, September 14th, 1945. It lists 22 pages of prizes.

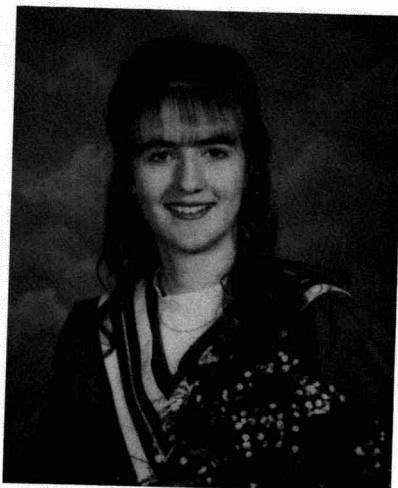
<sup>18</sup> Courses in agriculture consisted of soil

(continued on bottom of p. 8

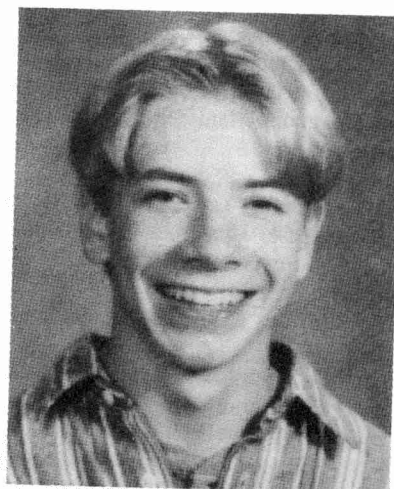
## Henry E. Plett Memorial Award

The Genealogy and Family History Committee awarded the Henry E. Plett Memorial Award to two high school students this spring. The first prize of \$250 was awarded to Pamela Plett of Steinbach Christian High School for her essay entitled "My Family History: From Abraham Klassen to Pamela Plett." The second prize of \$100 was awarded to Mark Schaan of Westgate Mennonite Collegiate for his essay on the Loewen and Schaan families entitled "Intersections: Cross-sections of a Family History."

The Plett Award has been made possible through the generous contributions of Delbert and Doreen Plett of Steinbach, Manitoba. It is awarded annually to two Manitoba high school students for research and documentation in the area of genealogy.



Pamela Plett  
Steinbach Christian High School  
Photo courtesy of SCHS



Mark Schaan  
Westgate Mennonite Collegiate  
Photo courtesy of Westgate

## GRANDMA CD-ROM Volume 2 Released

The California Mennonite Historical Society recently released the second volume of its GRANDMA CD-ROM project. This new version of GRANDMA (Genealogical Registry and Database of Mennonite Ancestry) includes all genealogical data from volume one, which was released in September, 1996, and adds about 133,000 new individuals, for a total of approximately 268,000 linked individuals. The second volume includes much better coverage for Low German Mennonite families that migrated from the Soviet Union to Canada during and after the 1920s.

Other files included in volume 2 include a shareware version of Brother's Keeper (for

those who do not yet have this program); scanned photographs for some of the persons appearing in the database; scanned maps of Mennonite settlements and villages; an index to Mennonite settlement and village names; and scanned revision lists from B.H. Unruh's book *Die niederländisch-niederdeutschen Hintergründe der mennonitischen Ostwanderungen im 16., 18., und 19. Jahrhundert.*

GRANDMA Volume 2 sells for US \$30.00 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling. It can be ordered from: California Mennonite Historical Society, 4824 E. Butler, Fresno, CA 93727-5097.

The Genealogy Project Committee encourages persons who purchase any version of the CD-ROM to also purchase a copy of the Handbook for the Low German Genealogist Using Brother's Keeper 5.2. It is very important that anyone doing data entry that will be contributed to the GRANDMA project uses this manual, because it explains how data should be entered. Nonconforming data submitted to us for GRANDMA causes extra work for us, because we must adapt that information to our standards before it can be added to the database. To obtain a copy of the handbook, please send check or money order for US \$5.00 plus \$1.00 for shipping to the California Mennonite Historical Society.

## 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Mennonites in Western Canada

In the years 1999 and 2000 the Mennonites of Manitoba may commemorate the 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their coming to Western Canada. The first families to arrive in the East Reserve came in 1874 and those who opened the West Reserve arrived in 1875. Their landing places were at the junction of the Red and Rat Rivers, and Fort Dufferin near Emeson, respectively.

It has been suggested that a major historical work on Manitoba Mennonites be prepared for the anniversary. The Research and Scholarship committee is thinking that publishing a book of essays would be one good and practical way to go.

The committee is looking for some feedback on this idea. Please send your views and

comments on this proposal to Abe Dueck, Centre for M.B. Studies, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg MB R2L 2E5 (Phone: 204-669-6575), or Lawrence Klippenstein, 584 Berkley St., Winnipeg MB R3R 1J9 (Phone: 204-895-4421). Time is of the essence. The committee needs to make a decision soon. Thank you for your help.

## George K. Epp (1924-1997)

The passing on October 25, 1997 of Dr. George K. Epp of Winnipeg, Manitoba, has left a significant gap in the areas of ministry and scholarship among Manitoba Mennonites and beyond.

Epp and his family came to Manitoba from Paraguay in 1954. His family had immigrated to Paraguay from Germany in 1947, after making the long trek from the Soviet Union in 1943. George was 19 years old at that time.

George did his post-secondary studies at the University of Manitoba where he obtained a B.A. in 1965, an M.A. in 1968 and a PhD. in 1976. During this time he taught at Mennonite Brethren Bible College from 1968-73 and at the University of Manitoba from 1973-78.

Later appointments of service included Canadian Mennonite Bible College from 1978-1983, during which time he served as president, and at the Mennonite Studies Centre which became Menno Simons College from 1985-1992, where he served as founding president from 1989-92.



Many Manitobans met him in other places like the Mennonite German Society of Canada, the East West Advisory Group of MCC Canada, the Mennonite Benevolent Society and the committees of the Mennonite Heritage Society as well as *Der Bote*.

As well he gave significant leadership in a project which led to the erection of a large cairn at the Mennonite Heritage Village in memory of Mennonite victims of Soviet repression. During

his retirement he then completed two volumes of a projected series of three dealing with the history of Mennonites in Russia before the Revolution. Some copies of volume I have been sold already in Manitoba and the second volume is expected off the press in spring.

Other involvements included his work in helping to edit the complete works of Arnold Dyck (Vols. I-IV), co-editing bilingual anthologies of Canadian Mennonite writings titled *Harvest* (1974) and *Unter dem Nordlicht* (1977), and translating into German David Schroeder's *Learning to Know the Bible* (1984) and Helmut Harder's *Guide to Faith* (1982).

George will be much missed as a major contributor in the German literary world and historical endeavours, as he will be in the life of the congregations at Douglas Mennonite and Springfield Heights Mennonite.

*Tribute by Lawrence Klippenstein, Former Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Centre. Photo courtesy of Conference of Mennonites in Canada.*

(continued from bottom of page 6)

studies, dairying, farm engineering, livestock management, animal diseases, field crops, specialty crops, welding woodwork, hog production, poultry, entomology, genetics, co-operatives and citizenship. For the women the courses were on sewing, cooking, child care, handicrafts, home management, home furnishing, home nursing, and joining the men in horticulture, poultry, co-operatives and citizenship. A total of 378 persons attended these courses (Schroeder Memoirs, p.2 notes). D. G. Reimer notes that the RAI offered courses to 251 persons in the 5 years from 1939 (1937?) to 1944 (1942?).

<sup>19</sup> Dyck, 146-47.

<sup>20</sup> Dyck, p.144-145.

<sup>21</sup> In this speech Siemens indicates the need for the study of Mennonite history, the study of health problems, citizenship and agriculture and home economics.

<sup>22</sup> A detailed list of activities relating to the period of 1944 is given by Jac. K. Schroeder in his Memoirs p.450-457. It lists items such as talent nights, public concerts, the Y.P.A. Sentry, a Y.P.A. band, etc.

<sup>23</sup> Schroeder, Memoirs, p.333, 449; Dyck, p.145-146.

<sup>24</sup> Schroeder, Memoirs, p. 317.

<sup>25</sup> See the article in the *Altona Echo* Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 1 on "The Study Club way of Adult

Learning." The programs were later promoted through *The Community Builder*, edited by Jac K. Schroeder (Dyck, p. 154).

<sup>26</sup> It was listed as one of the items in the first Community Progress Competition in Gretna in 1930 and was noted also in the founding objectives of the RAS.

<sup>27</sup> *RAS Quarterly* Vol. 1, No.1

<sup>28</sup> J. W. Fretz wrote: "...of genuine significance is the way in which the women of the community share in the development and activities of Altona. Their contribution to the local economic renewal has been of great value." (in "The Renaissance of a Rural Community," *Mennonite Life*, 1946:14-17, 39).

<sup>29</sup> The Rural Municipality of Rhineland provided them with a room on the second floor of the Bergthaler Waisenamt building (RMR minute book 1936-41 for Jan. 7, 1936, p.3).

<sup>30</sup> Schroeder, Memoirs, p.336.

<sup>31</sup> Dyck, p. 140ff.

<sup>32</sup> Gretna established a store in 1938, Plum Coulee in 1940 and in Winkler in 1942. The Stanley Consumers, a bulk oil station was started in Winkler in 1941. Altona added a lumber department and a machinery repair shop (Warkentin, p.335). From 1930 to 1975 there were 27 co-operatives started in Southern Manitoba (Dyck, p. 176).

<sup>33</sup> Epp-Thiessen, p.171-173.

<sup>34</sup> We could speak here of canneries, Co-op Vegetable Oils, the Co-op Farm, burial

societies, publications etc.

<sup>35</sup> Schroeder, Memoirs, p. 109-112.

<sup>36</sup> Francis, p.224

<sup>37</sup> See the write up of the events and the speech made by the Lieutenant Governor in *The Altona Echo*, Vol. 1, No. 22, p. 1. Mrs McWilliams said "You have great teachers in our midst. I saw imagination in your displays to a degree seldom seen; I was impressed with the orderly pattern of the villages and observed with keen interest the panorama of the Mennonite Settlement of the Red River Valley shown this evening." (As printed in the Centennial Supplement issue of *The Altona Echo*, Nov. 25, 1970.

<sup>38</sup> Francis, p. 225.

<sup>39</sup> Menno Klassen in a letter written to the family after J. J. Siemen's death.

<sup>40</sup> The persons attending the courses learned to take samples of soils and send them to the provincial laboratories. Dead chickens too were sent for analysis.

<sup>41</sup> Schroeder, Memoirs, p.

<sup>42</sup> Meyer, p. 47; Dyck, p. 73-75, 147-149.

<sup>43</sup> D. G. Reimer received a letter from A. Friesen of the Grimsby S. D. indicating that I had not received permission to show some of the RAS films in school with the words "it not the films as such but the co-op propagandist they object to."