



MMHS Annual Meeting Notes

— Royden Loewen & Dennis Stoesz

The annual meeting of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society was held on January 18 at the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. After hearing a devotional based on Hebrews 12 from Adolf Ens, president, and optimistic reports from the board chairman, Delbert Plett, and treasurer Abe Dueck, attention was turned to the diverse historical projects in which members were involved in the last year. These included local histories, church histories, family studies, translation and editing work, photograph rehabilitation, cartography, film shooting, and personal reading.

Detailed reports on four special projects were heard in the afternoon session. The first report came from Henry Fast, Steinbach high school teacher, who provided an update on his research for a history of the Southeastern Mennonite community of Kleefeld. Kleefeld, formerly known as

Gruenfeld, was the first Mennonite village to be founded in the Canadian West.

It, along with Blumenort, Blumenhof, Rosenfeld, Blumenfeld, Steinbach and Gnadenort was founded by Kleine Gemeinde settlers on the East Reserve in the months following July, 1874.

He noted that his main sources thus far have included Mennonite newspapers like the *MENNONITISCHE RUNDSCHAU*, the fire insurance records for the Manitoba Molotschna group, and the extensive personal papers of Gruenfeld settlers Abram L. and Jacob L. Dueck. Important early dates for the community were 1881 when the Holdeman/Kleine Gemeinde schism shook the village settlement and 1896 when Gruenfeld acquired a post office and changed its name to Kleefeld.

John Dyck, of Winnipeg, was the second speaker and he reported on his research into the Oregon migration of the 1880s. Basing his findings on the *MENNONITISCHE RUNDSCHAU*, the papers of Gretna businessman Isaac Loewen, and the registers of the Reïnlaender Church he concluded that a small but significant migration of Manitoba Mennonites to Oregon had occurred. Early settlers who influenced the Manitobans included a John Gerber of Kansas who reported extensively in the *RUNDSCHAU*, David Peters, a well to do miller, and a Polish Bishop by the name of Schrag. The move from Manitoba appeared to

have been precipitated by a land squeeze on the West Reserve, where land prices were reportedly ranging from \$1,000 to \$2,000 a quarter by 1887. A typical migrant was the member of a family which Dyck traced from Chortitz on the East Reserve, to Rosenfeld on the West, to Oregon in 1890. Dyck noted, however, that a number of families moved to the western state directly from Russia or from Kansas.

The third report came from Henry Dueck, editor of the *RECORDER*, who spoke about the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference history book project in the absence of author Jack Heppner. According to Dueck, the book, which will be published in 1987, will celebrate the EMMC's 50th anniversary. The EMMC church started in the summer or 1936 but a bishop was ordained only in February 1937; thus the reason for the 1987 date. Dueck reported that Jack Heppner has finished 10 chapters covering the period from 1936-59. The main watershed from the EMMC's history came during the bishopric of J.H. Friesen when there was a move to localization, a shift to English and a major change in Conference structure. Dueck noted that one of the most difficult aspects of EMMC history to write will be the relationship of the EMMC and the Sommerfelder Church because in some aspects the EMMC was split off of that group. Then too the more recent period in the EMMC will pose difficulties as many

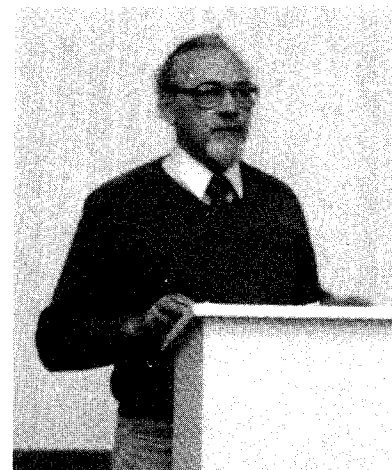
Student wins MMHS Award



Helga Unrau, a grade 12 student at the Steinbach Bible College has been awarded the MMHS Genealogical Research Prize for High School Students. The prize of \$50.00 was issued to Miss Unrau at the SBC graduation exercises on June 29 by MMHS chairman Delbert Plett. The prize paper was based on the Abram Froese family which, as part of the Sommerfelder Church, moved to Paraguay in the 1920s. The genealogical paper was written as an option to fulfill the requirements of a Grade 12 Mennonite History course taught by Mr. Henry Fast.



Henry Fast



John Dyck

of the participants are still very active.

Jacob Fehr, farmer and writer from Altona, was the fourth speaker of the afternoon. He spoke about the historical sketches which he published in the RED RIVER VALLEY ECHO over the past years. He wrote about the area presently making up the Rural Municipality of Rhineland, an area making up 10 townships. All of this came about when, in 1983, he was asked to sit on a book committee in preparation for a book to be published on the Municipality. The idea was to feature one of the various rural districts, often a boundary encompassed by the old school districts, in the local paper, the ECHO, every week. Since Fehr was a farmer and said he had some time in winter, he agreed to write these articles.

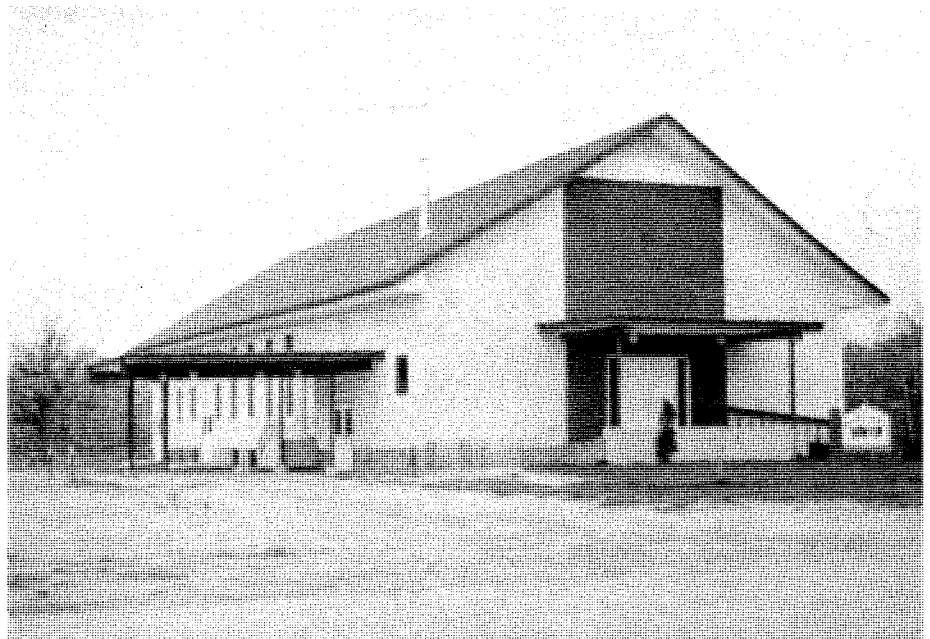


Henry Dueck

Fehr said he tried to write one history sketch a week. He took a map of the municipality and started phoning people who lived in the area to ask for information about the area. Of course, as a farmer, he could 'read' the section numbers in the telephone book and know where the people lived. More often than not he would usually be directed to people who knew the history of the area. He would then go visit and interview them. Fehr would then write the information down and form it into an article later in a quiet place like a restaurant in Winnipeg. He also found that each district was different (e.g. some areas had had villages, others not). He would usually include a photograph with each article.



Jacob Fehr



CMC Church in Mitchell

Chortitzer History Symposium

— Delbert Plett

Some 230 people attended a Conference on April 22, 1986 dealing with the history of early leaders of the Bergthaler/Chortitzer Gemeinde. The evening was hosted by the Chortitzer Mennonite Church at Mitchell, Manitoba and was chaired by local pastor Cornie J. Martens.

Keynote speaker Adolf Ens set the tone for the program with his analysis of Gerhard Wiebe (1827-1900) who was elected as the second Aeltester of the Bergthal Colony in 1866 at the age of 39. Wiebe led the Bergthaler people out of Russia in 1874 and organized their resettlement in Southern Manitoba. He resigned from his office in 1882.

Dr. Ens was of the view that these accomplishments must be seen in light of three principles which Wiebe held to be fundamental to Christianity, namely:

(1) That the true church since the time of Christ has been non-resistant. This belief resulted in Wiebe's decision to lead his people out of Russia.

(2) His high concept of the church and the unity of God's people. Wiebe made consistent efforts to work in unity with other church leaders even when some of these, such as the Pietist Mennonite bishops from the Molotschna, looked down on him. His view of unity in the church also meant that the rich had to provide for the poor as in the case of the emigration.

(3) Wiebe had a high view of the offices of the church and the sacred duty which was entrusted to the Bishop and other leaders. This view was evident when Wiebe met with the Russian Czar in 1874 who offered to fulfill any wish that he might make if only he would leave his Gemeinde in Russia. After toying with the idea of asking for a large estate with perpetual military exemption for his own descendants Wiebe realized that this was not a viable option for him as he had chosen a higher calling, that of serving God and his people.

Professor Ens concluded his analysis by noting that too many historians have judged Wiebe in light of his later fall and resignation from office. Wiebe himself confessed his shortcomings and was forgiven by his church, and this should not cloud the fact that he had very successfully fulfilled the task to which he was called.

John Dyck discussed some of the findings of his research on the life of Jakob Peters (1813-1884) who was elected as Oberschulz or District Mayor of the five village Bergthal Colony in 1854. He held this position until the formation of the Rural Municipality of Hanover in 1882. In this position Peters was also instrumental in the decision to leave Russia and emigrate to Manitoba. In 1873, Peters personally served as a delegate to inspect the land available here in Manitoba. As Oberschulz Peters was responsible for the organization of secular life and the resettlement of a large part of the Bergthaler group to the West Reserve in the late 1870s.

In the view of Dyck the significance of the Oberschulz could be seen in light of three factors:

(1) The widespread authority which he commanded allowed him to implement his decisions. Under Russian law he exercised legal authority by virtue of his high office. But he held no comparable legal status in Manitoba exercising authority because the people had chosen him, and they respected and loved him dearly.

(2) The Oberschulz was a man of great compassion for the poor and outcasts of society. On at least three occasions, he welcomed orphans into his home, as told in the well known story of Das Verstoszene Kind, an abandoned Russian child whom he adopted as his own.

(3) Peters was a man of keen discernment who held that the civil government was subservient to the church and worked in a close rapport with Aeltester Wiebe. Dyck closed his remarks by stating that the career of the Oberschulz exemplified the Christian ideal of humble servanthood.

The meeting was also advised that the Oberschulz Jakob Peters research project was proceeding well and that the Board of Directors of the MMHS had expressed its thanks to the Rural Municipality of Hanover for its contribution of \$1,000.00 to this project. The Board also acknowledged the gifts of Eugene Derksen and Harry Peters of Steinbach which enabled the society to implement the project in January of this year. It was noted that the Oberschulz had settled and lived in Vollwerk, today known as Mitchell, and that his remains were buried here.

The next speaker was Dennis Stoesz who talked about the career of David Stoesz (1842-1933) who was elected as a minister of the Bergthal colony in Russia and who commenced serving as Bishop in 1881. It was noted that Stoesz had left a rich legacy of writings including an extensive diary as well as some 40 handwritten sermons. In 1874, Stoesz settled in the village of Bergthal about 4 miles north of Mitchell.

Dennis Stoesz noted that the Bishop had responded to various issues throughout his career:

(1) Emigration from Russia which he had supported.

(2) Establishment of the pioneer schools.

(3) Organization of the Bergthalers who moved to the West Reserve as a separate Gemeinde in 1882 by ordaining Johan Funk.

(4) His ministry also extended to Minnesota and Saskatchewan where he travelled to minister to the Bergthalers who had moved to these locals.

(5) At the time of the succession of Bishop Funk on the West Reserve, Bishop Stoesz shepherded those who could not accept Funk's leadership and helped to organize this group as a separate Gemeinde under Abram Doerksen of Sommerfeld.

The next speaker was Rev. William Rempel who discussed the life and ministry of his great-grandfather Rev. Heinrich Doerksen (1855-1933). One of the more significant aspects of Doerksen's ministry are his voluminous writings which are still extant. Doerksen received a good education in Russia and had written in Greek, Dutch, English, German and Russian. He kept meticulous record of his activities and opinions.

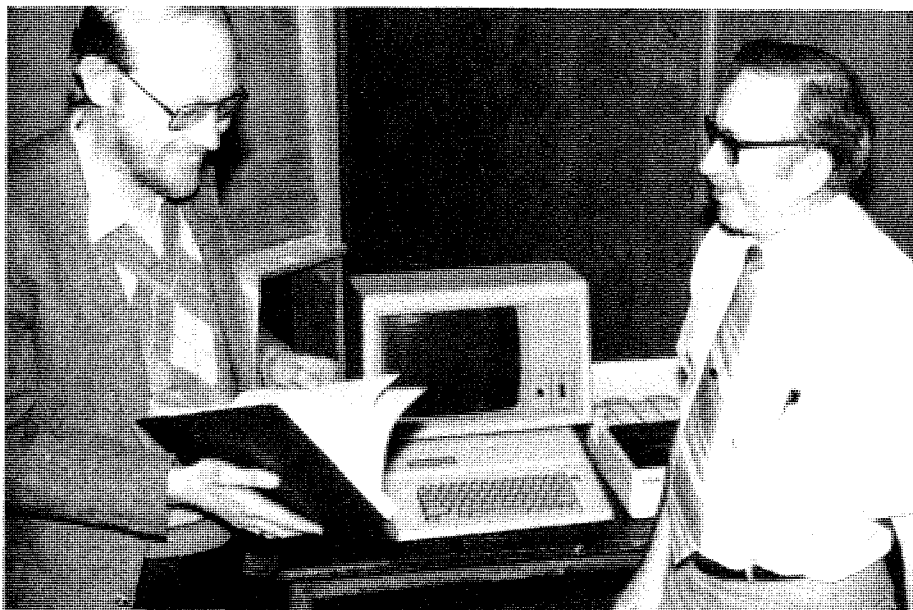
Doerksen was an important leader during the First World War when he was sometimes called upon to retrieve the young men who had failed to carry their military exemption certificates with them. In his diaries Doerksen describes the many journeys which he made in the course of his duties including representations made to the higher authorities in Ottawa.

During the time of the private schools Doerksen had served as an inspector and was very much loved by his children. Doerksen also represented the concerns of his constituency to the Provincial school authorities.

The last speaker of the evening was Gus Dueck who spoke about the book which he is completing on the history of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church. Much of the research has been done and some reports are still coming in. Mr. Dueck noted that the history of the church started from the time of Christ.

Throughout history those committed to the truths of the New Testament church suffered persecution for their beliefs. During the Reformation these teachings were once more put into practice through the dedicated ministry and service of men such as Menno Simons.

The story of the Chortitzer Conference has more immediate roots in the Bergthal Colony in Russia which was founded in 1833, and continues with the emigration to Manitoba. The book will include



Edward P. Falk (right) speaking with Paul Redekopp about the use of a computer in doing family history.

Family History and Genealogy Workshop

— John Dyck

On Tuesday, April 29, the Winnipeg area Genealogy and Family History committee held its annual workshop at the Mennonite Heritage Center. The evening, chaired by Winnipeg teacher Alf Redekopp, featured two resource people, Dennis Stoesz, Winnipeg archivist and Edward P. Falk, Winkler teacher. About 28 people showed up to fine tune their family history skills and interact with other researchers.

Edward Falk provided an informative session on the use of the computer in family history research and writing. Having used a computer for his own family genealogical records for the past three years, Falk was in a good position to give first hand information on this topic. His computer is an *Apple* and the program is *The Genealogist's Right Hand*, available from User Friendly Systems in Ohio. This program is designed to hold up to 30 fields of information for each person with a capacity of 221 persons per disk. Printout can be in the form of a pedigree chart, a family tree, alphabetically ordered list of names or a listing of all information for specified names. A considerable amount of interest was evidenced in the computer package and, no doubt, there will be more of these in the next few years.

Dennis Stoesz spoke on the use of archival materials in family history writing. As the archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Center he was able to give useful information on this topic. He spoke of the different church records housed at the Heritage Center and how these registers often contain vital information on church members. Other records include school attendance registers and the Quebec Passenger Lists of the years after 1874. He also noted the usefulness of secondary sources such as existing family genealogies, the *MENNONITE ENCYCLOPEDIA*, Frank Epp's two volume *MENNONITES IN CANADA* and specialized genealogy books such as J. Conrad's *GERMAN FAMILY RESEARCH*. Then too, he noted the importance of extant Mennonite newspapers, like *DER BOTE* and current periodicals like the *MENNONITE FAMILY HISTORY*. The 800 maps held at the Center can also be very helpful. The two other Winnipeg archives, Mennonite Genealogy Inc. and the Mennonite Brethren Archives house invaluable genealogical materials as well.

After the meeting, participants enjoyed coffee and dainties while they engaged the speakers in further discussion. The Winnipeg area committee which organized the workshop consists of Frank Giesbrecht, Anna Ens, Margaret Kroeker and Alf Redekopp.

the history of each of the congregations of the present Chortitzer Mennonite Conference. Other sections will consider services and ordinances and some of the dramatic changes which have taken place in the past 20 years.

Bill Hildebrandt, the present Bishop of the Chortitzer Mennonite Church, closed the meeting with a short devotional in which he underlined the importance of historical knowledge in the lives of

individual Christians as well as to the church as a whole. But in his view the greatest significance of the men who had been studied was that they themselves would have prayed that the testimonies of their lives would direct people to the one whom they served, namely, Jesus Christ, the redeemer of mankind.

The Conference was sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.



April board meeting in Steinbach.

Organizational Chart Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society 1986

A. Board of Directors Photograph

Back row: Brian Petkau, John Dyck, Victor Doerksen, Ken Reddig, Bert Friesen, Adolf Ens, Allen Dueck, Bill Schroeder, guest SBC present Ben Eidse.

Front row: Ted Friesen, Wilmer Penner, Doreen Martens, Margaret Kroeker, Delbert Plett.

Not on photo: Ed Schellenberg, Henry G. Ens, Royden Loewen, Jake C. Fehr, George Epp.

B. Executive:

Adolf Ens, President; Victor Doerksen, Vice-President; Delbert Plett, Chairman; Brian Petkau,

Secretary; and Ken Reddig, Treasurer.

C. Operating Committees:

1. **Membership and Publicity** - Roy Loewen, Ruth Bock, Dennis Stoesz, Doreen Martens

2. **Nominating** - Adolf Ens, Victor Doerksen, Delbert Plett

3. **Finance Committee** - Ted Friesen, Chairman; Ken Reddig, John Dyck, Delbert Plett

4. **Program Committee** - Wilmer Penner, Chairman; Adolf Ens, H.K. Friesen, Lawrence Klippenstein

D. Standing Committees:

1. **Arts and Interdisciplinary** - Ed Schellenberg, Doreen Klassen, Henry Ens, George Epp, Chairman; Elizabeth Peters

2. **Local History and Historic Sites** - Jacob C. Fehr, Chairman; Delbert Plett, Gus Dueck, Peter D. Zacharias, Dennis Stoesz, Jake Peters

3. **Research and Scholarship** - Victor Doerksen, Bert Friesen, Chairman; Harry Loewen, Al Reimer, Elizabeth Peters, Al Reimer

4. **Education and Resources** - Bill Schroeder, Chairman; Brian Petkau, Henry G. Ens, Allen Dueck

5. **Inter-Mennonite Faith and Unity** - not active

6. **Genealogy and Family History** - John Dyck, Chairman; Margaret Kroeker, Henry Fast

E. Special Projects Committees:

1. **Russian Mennonite Monument Committee** - Gerhard Ens, Chairman; George R. Epp, B.D. Wiebe, Otto Klassen, Earl Fast, Harry Loewen

2. **Mennonite Book Club** - Al Reimer, Chairman; Victor Doerksen, Roy Vogt, Harry Loewen, Bert Friesen

3. **Arnold Dyck Project** - Editorial Committee: Victor Doerksen, Elizabeth Peters, Al Reimer, Harry Loewen. Finance Committee: Ted Friesen, Ken Reddig, Roy Vogt, Victor Doerksen

F. MMHS Appointments and Representatives:

1. MUSC: Ted Friesen and Helmut Huebert.

2. Manitoba Intercultural Council: John Dyck, Wilmer Penner, and Bill Schroeder

3. Manitoba Historical Society: Adolf Ens

4. Mennonite Encyclopedia: Ted Friesen

5. Assistant Treasurer: Jacob Rempel

6. Membership Director: Ruth Bock

7. Newsletter Editor: Roy Loewen

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