

ABORIGINAL-MENNONITE CONFERENCE

by Leonard Doell

A conference on the history of Aboriginal-Mennonite relationships was held at the University of Winnipeg on October 12-14, 2000. The purpose of the conference was to look at the places where the paths of these two peoples had intersected and to examine the successes and failures of that meeting.

The weekend was a very full one, with a wide range of topics represented. Metis author and historian, Maria Campbell, opened the conference with her reflections on her relationships with her Mennonite neighbours in Saskatchewan. She also reflected on her midwife grandmother's relationship with a Mennonite midwife who lived nearby. A powerful story of two women who spoke different languages but shared a bond and love for each other that went beyond words.

U. of W. professors Jennifer Brown and Brian Rice helped to create the historical context of aboriginal peoples contact with the Christian Church. They shared some sobering and sad stories of strained and broken relationships, as well as stories of harmony and friendship.

In his keynote address on the evening of October 13, Rudy Wiebe presented his thoughts on *Becoming a human being, Mennonites encounter Aboriginal Peoples*. He noted that every human being has a story to tell and that in telling that story we learn about ourselves and our neighbours. Wiebe also spoke about the adventure of writing, a common theme being his relationship with native peoples.

So, throughout Friday and Saturday, many stories were told. While some told oral stories, others presented their stories in a more academic form. A wide cross section of papers on topics ranging from spirituality, land claim issues, mission activities, residential schools, and the historical interactions of both peoples. These papers looked at the contact in various communities of southern and northern Ontario, southern and northern



Aboriginal-Mennonite Relations Symposium participants. (L-R) Adolf Ens, Donavon Giesbrecht, presenter, Royden Loewen, Chair of the Symposium, U. of Winnipeg. Photo Credit: Conrad Stoesz

Manitoba, central Saskatchewan, northern Alberta and southern British Columbia.

An average of about 200 people attended the conference. Many of these guests travelled for some distance to be part of this gathering. They were given opportunity to ask questions of the presenters and to talk informally with them as well.

Royden Loewen, the chair of Mennonite Studies at the U. of W., was the host for the conference. In his opening remarks, he referred to this conference as a unique meeting, where two distinct peoples with different theologies and world views could meet. He also saw two peoples seeking reconciliation, two neighbours, two lovers of the land. Mennonite and aboriginal peoples have met before and that this was a good time to examine the nature of that meeting. This was also a good time for people to renew friendships and partnerships and see how they have evolved over time. Royden Loewen also talked about the risk involved in having a conference like this, but that understanding and friendship could also be deepened by learning more from each other. Following a bannock and bultje lunch with Bothwell cheese, the closing keynote address was given by Menno Wiebe. Wiebe worked for 25 years as the Director of the MCCC Native Concerns programme. Wiebe saw this conference as an opportunity to give attention to relationships. He described mission as either an intersection of people or it is nothing, it is a two way meeting of people. The quality of this intersection though, became the subject of this symposium.

Rev. Stan McKay, a Cree pastor and former moderator of the United Church, affirmed Wiebe's emphasis on relationships. McKay questioned the priorities of people, including the church people present, when he asked how much do we need to live? Much of the marginalization in society in the 20th century is that things or acquiring material possessions is more important than people or relationships.

Rev. McKay challenged those whose lives had been transformed by their interaction with native peoples to tell their story. Be a storyteller and visionary where you are. He quoted the words of Australian elder Lila Watson who said, "If you have come to help me you are wasting your time, if you have come because your liberation is tied up with mine, then come." A relationship of mutual learning and mutual understanding has lasting value.

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Aboriginal

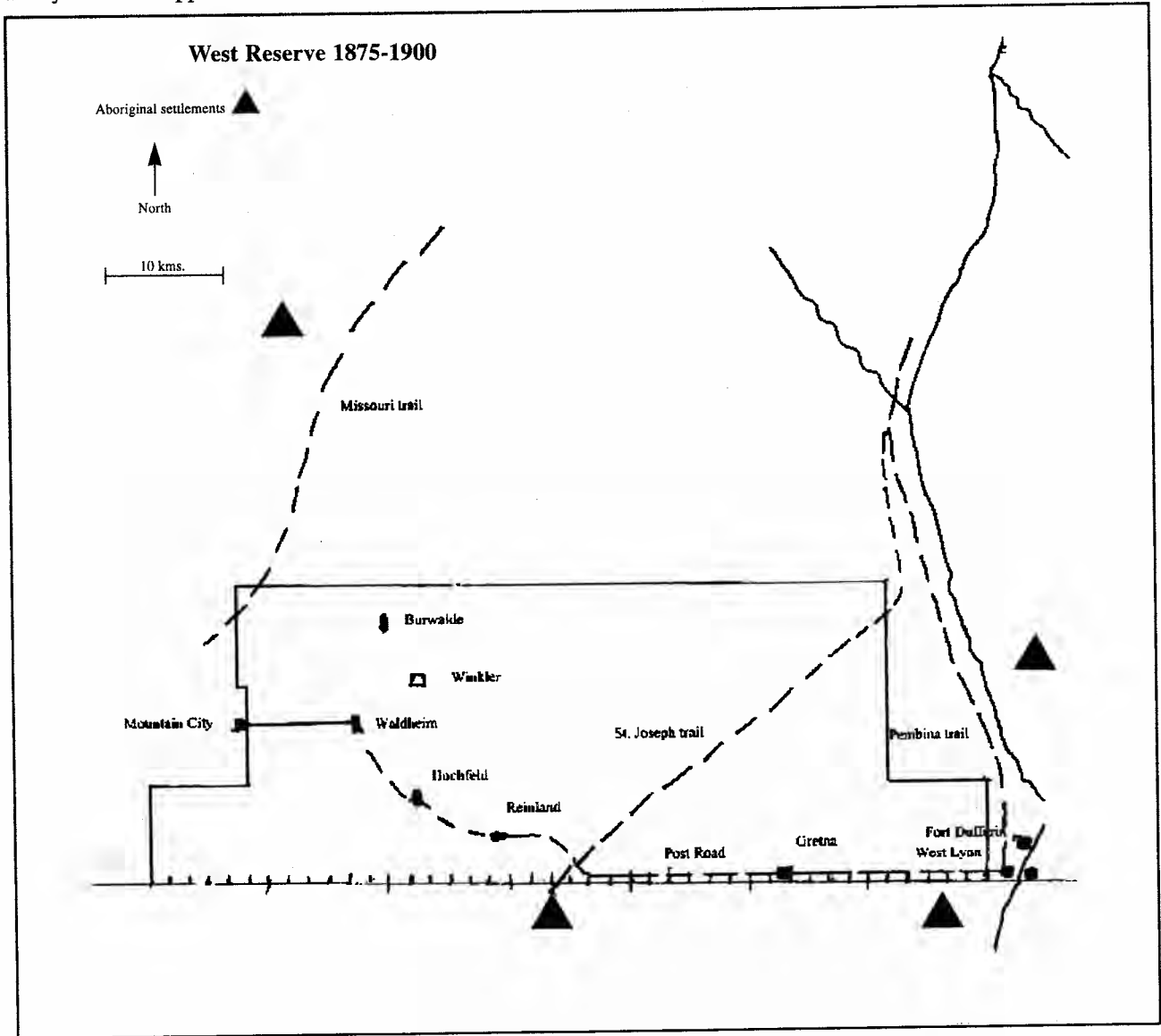
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Richard George, a presenter from Port Hardy challenged the conference participants to walk alongside each other as equals, not walking ahead or behind but as equals walking together in a spirit of learning.

This conference was a step in that direction. There is much work to do and

much to learn but conferences like this can inspire hope as people work for change. There was encouragement to learn from the failures and to build on the positive relationships of the past. The proceedings of this conference will be published in the Journal of Mennonite Studies.

Map courtesy of Ed Hoepfner and Bert Friesen



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David Dyck, a tireless church builder

by Harold Jantz

Few people exemplified the spirit of the young Mennonite Brethren movement better than David Dyck. Called to lead the church in no fewer than seven places, he kept on responding to opportunities to witness to his Saviour wherever they arose - and for him they never seemed to cease.

He is best-known as the early leader of the Winkler Church and the first moderator of the Northern District (later the Canadian M.B. Conference), which he was for 13 years. But more than anything he was a tireless itinerant minister at conference request. He certainly slept in hundreds of beds during a long life of ministry.

Dyck was born in Nieder Chortitza, in the Old Colony, on 25 January 1846. The winds of spiritual renewal awaft in the Mennonite colonies touched David early. He heard about the conversion of others, including some cousins, when he was a young teenager. He has a personal encounter with the Saviour at the age of 16.

On 17 September 1867 he was married to Helena Rempel of Rosenthal, a marriage that lasted over 65 years and brought 15 children into the world, nine sons and six daughters. Three children died in infancy. During these first years of marriage he struggled with the question of sin and trust in Christ. The turningpoint came after a cholera outbreak. In 1873, both David and Helena were baptized and joined the young Mennonite Brethren church.

A few years later, in the summer of 1876, the Dycks joined the movement to America, arriving in New York aboard the *Anchovia* on 19 July [Hiebert, 295] to begin a new life. Only a few Mennonite families were on that ship, but they included the Bernard Pauls family, who became partners in the work of the church for years to come. David was 30, his wife 28, and their three children under 10, ready to face the challenges of their new life.

Like many of their fellow Russian Mennonite immigrants they started out in Kansas. After a winter in Marion County, they moved a hundred miles east to Woodson County, where land was cheaper, and there started a church. About 20

families moved with them, built a schoolhouse, and in 1878 Dyck and Pauls were elected as ministers. At Woodson, Pauls, who was Dyck's senior by 13 years, was the presiding minister and Dyck his assistant. David writes that the church prospered, all but one of the adult children of the families were converted. In 1881 Elder Abraham Schellenberg visited the Woodson church and ordained Dyck as minister.

Though he was in America only a few years, David wanted training for church work. He decided in 1883 to go to the Baptist Seminary in Rochester, N.Y., but after just six weeks there he was called back home when his eldest daughter was bitten by a rabid dog. Happily she survived, his studies however never resumed. Though Dyck had a lively and inquiring mind, he seems to have taken the experience as a sign that his first duty was to his family.

Dyck's family was growing but the Woodson settlement wasn't doing very well and in 1884 the Dycks accepted an invitation to come to the Goessel area where a group of ten families out of the Alexanderwohl Mennonite settlement had formed a Mennonite Brethren group under the leadership of Cornelius P. Wedel and Abraham Schellenberg [Friesen, II, 14]. The gifted evangelist missionary Peter Wedel came from that family as did Cornelius H. Wedel, who became president of Bethel College. Dyck was asked to take charge of a group in Lehigh where some of the Alexanderwohl members had settled. A church was built the same year. Dyck was ordained an elder by Abraham Schellenberg in 1884.

Bernard Pauls followed Dyck to Lehigh a year later. In 1883 Dyck was the first person assigned by Mennonite Brethren in America to collect and publish reports about the work done by the churches [Harms, 263]. A year later his work was taken over by John F. Harms, who became editor of the *Zionsbote* until 1906 and played a very large role in given cohesion to the conference through his publishing activity.

The Lehigh church had the distinction of being the first Mennonite Brethren church in North America to be located in a town. For Dyck as church leader, the years at Lehigh were the happiest, he wrote at the end of his life. As a practical necessity, however, Dyck always had to think about land for his children. In 1888 he had taken a look at lower California, but decided it was too far from other Mennonites.

So it was in 1892 that Dyck followed a group who had already made a move to eastern Colorado where new land was being opened up. The group became the Kirk Mennonite Brethren Church and Dyck its leader. Again they built a meetingplace and experience vigorous growth, notably after an evangelistic visit by Peter Wedel. But poor crops, especially in 1894, put a lot of pressure on the church and on the Dycks too. Their time in Kirk lasted only three years.

In 1895 he accepted the urgent request of the Winkler Church to come to Canada to give leadership within the growing Canadian Mennonite Brethren Church. They loaded nine of their children onto wagons and drove to Winkler, arriving there on 17 July 1895, after a two-month journey. Some of the family were already there.

Dyck was no stranger to Manitoba or Canada. He had been asked as much as a dozen years earlier to visit Manitoba in an itinerant ministry and in 1884 he and Heinrich Voth had come to the West Reserve to survey the needs. They found, as they said, "devout and seeking souls" [Unruh, 491]. Helena Dyck's own parents, the Rempels, lived there, and the man who would become the heart of the Manitoba Mennonite Brethren after Dyck moved on, was a teacher in Hoffnungsfeld where Heinrich Voth did some of his most effective evangelistic work when he returned following the initial visit. His name was Johann Warkentin and he too came from Nieder Chortitza [Neufeld, 33]. He will certainly have known Dyck from the old homeland.

When the Dycks arrived in Winkler, the church was still out at Burwalde, a few miles north of town. Membership stood at 84. Three years later, in 1898, it was moved into town and in preparation for the convention which would take place in Winkler that year, a new much roomier building was erected. When the Dycks moved on to Saskatchewan 11 years after coming, the membership of the church stood at 225.

The years in Winkler were important to Dyck's ministry in several ways. First,

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Dyck

(Cont. from p.3)

he brought gifted people into work of the church. A few months after coming he ordained Johann Warkentin to the ministry, and when he left Warkentin would begin a 25-year very fruitful ministry as leader in Winkler.

Secondly, it was during those years in Winkler that Dyck really began his itinerant ministry. He had often been asked before, but probably because of his family needs and more local responsibilities, he declined. But now he agreed. He travelled widely in southern Manitoba, Saskatchewan, into the Dakotas, and elsewhere. His reports appeared frequently in the conference paper, the *Zionsbote*, beginning with the first report in the 15 April 1896 issue.

One gets the impression of a person who gladly accepted the rigours of difficult travel, strange beds, and inconveniences to share the gospel he had come to hold so dearly among people he truly loved. His reports are filled with expressions of affection. On a trip to the Rosthern area he comments that as he stepped from the train "I spotted several familiar faces as soon as I disembarked, ones I had come to love ..." When he sees little children peering through train windows to see if they recognize a familiar face, he says, "How the human heart longs for reunion with those one grieved to leave." And as he celebrated communion with the brothers and sisters before leaving, he expressed the hope that they could fulfill the Apostle's wish, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

He could enjoy himself with people in a variety of ways. He describes how he went down to the North Saskatchewan to join others fishing and caught two sturgeon, one a 33 pounder and the other 17 pounds. When the weather turned bad as he was fishing, he went to the Peter Hoepfners where they enjoyed a good fish fry together.

During the trip, which began June 20 and ended July 5, with 12 days in the Rosthern area, he conducted nine services and made at least 15 visits and appears to have slept in four different beds. He made a point of visiting the bishop of the Rosenorter Mennonite Church, Peter Regier, as well.

In a report which describes the

beginning of Dyck's itinerant witness after arriving in Winkler, he reviews the work he did between mid-November, 1895 and the end of February, 1896. During that time he made extended visits to Plum Coulee, the Blumstein-Hoffnungsfeld area close to Winkler during Christmas and the prayer week, Morden and places south of it, and finally the East Reserve.

He says that during this time he experienced many opportunities to be strengthened in the faith with the other believers and was met with much "friendliness and support." He commends those whose work preceded his.

It was this kind of work, usually involving conversation around the spiritual experiences of people, singing, study of the Bible and prayer, that Dyck carried on all the years of his stay in Winkler. Most of it was done in homes. It laid the foundation for Mennonite Brethren churches that grew up around Winkler and in northern and southern Saskatchewan.

In addition, he was active in the leadership of the conference. From 1903 to 1906 he was a member of the first constitutionally structured Board of Foreign Missions. He was part of the group that began the work which led to the formation of three district conferences, a Southern, Central, and Northern District, and which opened the way to vigorous expansion of the churches. When the reorganization process was completed in 1909, Dyck began his 13-year stint as Northern District moderator.

After 11 years in Winkler, Dyck was ready for another move. In 1906 the Dyck family moved to Borden, Saskatchewan. There he was instrumental in the formation of another congregation. Dyck was 60 years of age. A few years later he moved to Brotherfield, Saskatchewan, and again gave leadership to the church there.

In 1917 Helena and David celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary. In 1918 they moved into the town of Waldheim, Saskatchewan where he became leader of another new congregation in the town, the third town congregation he began after Lehigh and Winkler.

Yet it is interesting that in July, 1921, Dyck was the spokesperson for a group who had met in the Rosthern area to discuss what they ought to do about Mennonite brothers who were trying to flee Russia in the wake of the revolution. Their decision was not to support a group already in Constantinople who had fled Russia, not to lend financial or material support nor support an effort being made to send a delegation to Ottawa who would negotiate for opportunities to immigrate to Canada [Epp, 72]. He clearly cannot have sensed the desperate struggle many brothers and sisters in Russia were enduring and the importance of working together to bring them to safety. When the first immigrants came in 1923, the Mennonite Brethren were at first conspicuous for their absence from the lists of those who welcomed the newcomers into their homes [Epp, 143].

Dyck's last years were lived in Waldheim and there he died on 6 January 1933, at the ripe age of 87. He left a good legacy, despite his shortsightedness toward his Russian brothers and sisters. His tireless church building - both of the living body and the meetingplaces to house them - was a testimony to his conviction that people could come to new life in Christ and become lively, witnessing communities of believers. His sermon notes reveal a preacher who loved to lay a good foundation for faith and who could address the practical struggles which believers encountered. He preached a strong message of the grace of God and of the work of the Holy Spirit. He deserves a good deal of the credit for setting Mennonite Brethren in Canada onto a path of sturdy and healthy growth.

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(cont. on p.6)

MMHS News & Notes

The Society has had a very active year. As *HP* has reported, there have been many 125th year celebrations of the coming of Mennonites to the West Reserve.

Other activities are ongoing. The Manitoba Mennonite History publication project is underway. Fundraising has begun and more designated donations for this project are welcomed.

The annual general meeting of the Society is being planned for Saturday, 10 February 2001. It will be followed by a fundraising banquet. See details in the box below.

Local History Workshop

Saturday 28 October 2000 saw over 60 people gather at the Pembina Threshermen's Museum for a West Reserve Local History workshop.

John Penner presented the story of Chortitz. The village was established in 1875. 27 families settled in this village. The Schellenberg family was well represented but by 1890s families were moving to Saskatchewan and in the 1920s some moved to Mexico and others to Swift Current. The English school started in 1922 but no students attended the first year but by 1923 they had 18 students. A constant land mark is the Old Colony Church which has stood in the village since 1875 up to



Plett award winner for 2000 was Andrew Braun of W.C. Miller Collegiate, Altona.
Photo credit: W.C. Miller Collegiate.

this day. In recent years about ten families have lived in Chotitz.

Waldheim was situated two miles west and three miles north of Osterwick. This is where 10 Heoppner families settled. Several descendants of the original villagers told part of the story. Isaak Hoepfner, a Sommerfelder church minister, was instrumental in beginning the Rudnerweider Mennonite Church.

Allen Warkentin related the history of Kronsfield, which is situated four miles south and half a mile east of Osterwick. Mr. J. R. Walkof was a teacher in Kronsfield. Gruenfeld village was just south of the corner of the Hasket road and Highway #32. 1876 saw 22 villagers at this site. Both villages had a short history.

All four leaders presented us with a lot of material to ponder. Whoever is connected to these villages should contact the presenters for more detailed information.

by Martha Martens, Winkler



Mavis Dyck at her display of photos, chart data, and artifacts of Waldheim, where she grew up and currently resides with her family. Photo credit: Elmer Heinrichs

Genealogy Open House

Thirteen exhibitors responded to the open invitation to get their historical material viewed at the Mennonite Heritage Centre on 18 November 2000. The result was a lively networking session. Information was shared re using the internet. Experienced researchers shared their genealogy records, helping others find new branches for their family tree. Others showed creative ways to tell their story. Recently published books were available. Some were able to put faces and stories to their list of names. New friendships were formed and old ones renewed. This Family Research Workshop was truly a time for memories. Unfortunately, many family tree enthusiasts missed this wonderful opportunity to broaden their base of information.

by Shirley B. Bergen, Brandon

Annual General Meeting & Fundraising Dinner

2001 February 10, Winkler Senior Centre, Winkler

AGM: 5:00 p.m. & Dinner: 6:30 p.m.

Featuring a Manitoba music group

Dinner: \$20.00

Hoffnungsfeld Pioneers Remembered

by Bert Friesen

The Winkler Heritage Society, recently organized, sponsored a project to remember the villagers of Hoffnungsfeld. These villagers' homesteads were on sections which make up the town of Winkler today. To recognize their contributions, a project was begun this year. It is a park, Prairie Green, in the southwest part of Winkler. Earlier, one tree was planted here for each family who settled in Hoffnungsfeld. On 17 September 2000 a cairn was unveiled with the inscription opposite:

.....

About 75 people, many direct descendants of these pioneers attended the unveiling. Among the dignitaries were local civic officials representing all levels of government as well as members of the Winkler Heritage Society and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. A reception followed in the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church. Here many stories were told, new relationships were begun, and genealogical data exchanged. The project is a proud remembrance of these pioneers.

Dyck

(Cont. from p.4)

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J.F. Harms, *Geschichte der Mennoniten Brüdergemeinde, 1860-1924*, Hillsboro, KS, Jubiläums-Komitees, Mennonite Brethren Publishing House, 1924.

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PRAIRIE GREEN

ROAD OF REMEMBRANCE

IN 1876 A GROUP OF MENNONITES LEFT RUSSIA FOR CANADA, FULL OF HOPE AS THEY LOOKED FORWARD TO A NEW LIFE IN A NEW COUNTRY. THE FAMILIES NAMED BELOW, AS LISTED IN THE 1880 CENSUS, SETTLED IN A VILLAGE THEY CALLED "HOFFNUNGSFELD" (FIELD OF HOPEFULNESS), APPROXIMATELY ONE MILE WEST OF THIS SITE. WHEN THE C.P.R. OPENED THE WINKLER SIDING, SOME OF THESE SETTLERS MOVED CLOSER TO THE RAILWAY AND WERE AMONG THE FIRST ENTREPRENEURS IN A NEW COMMERCIAL ENDEAVOUR. PRAIRIE GREEN, PART OF THE ROAD OF REMEMBRANCE, IS ESTABLISHED IN COMMEMORATION OF THOSE HOFFNUNGSFELD PIONEERS.

(CEMETERY)

ABRAHAM HUEBERT
JACOB FAEHR
GERHARD DUECK
ISAK DOELL
JACOB WIENS
ISAK WIENS
JACOB WIENS

JOHANN PETERS
HEINRICH VAEHR
KLAS QUIRING
ISAK VAEHR
BENJEMIN VAEHR
PETER HOEPPNER
ABRAHAM KROEKER
DAVID DRIEDGER
DAVID WIENS

JOHN KLASSEN (SCHOOL)

LUDWIG ESAU
MRS. JACOB FEHR
JOHANN HOGE
DAVID FRIESEN
FRANZ SAWATZKI
GERHARD SAWATZKI
ABRAHAM NEUFELD
DAVID DOELL

(CHURCH) REV. HARMS
JACOB ENSS
HEINRICH ENSS, JOHN ENSS
CORNELIUS ENSS
WILLHELM HARMS
ISAK KEHLER
DAVID VAEHR
ISAK DUECK (CEMETERY)



Jake Hoepfner, M.P. Portage-Lisgar, and Abe Suderman at the cairn unveiling in Winkler
Photo credit: Bert Friesen

The Bergthalers of the West Reserve: Arrival and Early Development

by Lawrence Klippenstein

Emigrating families from the Bergthal Colony in south Russia (later Ukraine) began to arrive in southeastern Manitoba in late July of 1874. Abraham and Barbara Klaassen were on the passenger list for the S.S. Austrian No.40 which had docked in Québec City on 17 July 1874. The first two large contingents of families arrived only ten days later, when the S.S. Nova Scotian No.46 and the S.S. Peruvian No.47 docked at Québec City on 27 July.

All but six percent (34 according to one count) of the 527 households from the Bergthal settlement would be in North America by the end of 1876. Of these, 440 families, or about 3000 persons moved to Manitoba. Except for a small still undetermined number, these families began their sojourn of Canada life in one or the other of the villages of the first land reserve given to the Mennonites east of the Red River (hence the "East Reserve").

Others who travelled with the Bergthal settlement groups came from the Chortitza and Fürstenland settlements under the leadership of the Ältester Johann Wiebe of Fürstenland. They settled on the West Reserve beginning in 1875.

Those from the Bergthal settlement who settled on the East Reserve soon began moving to the West Reserve. By 1876 the Friedrich Wall family is listed as resident in Waldheim and the Esau family in Hoffnungsfeld (see p.6), both Bergthalers.

An East Reserve Bergthaler "emigration" began as early as 1875 when twenty-eight families moved to Mountain Lake, Minnesota, U.S.A. to look for better land. By 1877 other families were considering a move to the West Reserve. In the next four years as many as half, if not more of the Bergthaler families in the East Reserve moved to the West Reserve to establish new villages there.

More than twenty village sites were laid out in the eastern part of this reserve although only fifteen or so became functioning village communities. These included Halbstadt, Edenburg, Neuanlage, Sommerfeld, Neuberghthal, Old Altona, Altberghthal, Schönthal, Gnadenfeld, and several others. Five of these are still in existence as easily-recognized villages today. They are Neuberghthal, Sommerfeld, Old Altona, Altberghthal, and Schönthal. Remnants of several others can be found at their original locations.

The formation of the village of Altberghthal may be typical of several others in the way these communities arose. A group of sixteen farmers homesteaded for land in this district around 1879-1880. The great majority, if not all, came from the East Reserve at that time. A village was laid out along the east side of Buffalo Creek. All the homesteaders lived in the village at first, cultivating their land as allotted by homestead patents.

A school was opened around 1884. Enrollment soon rose to about 40 pupils. It operated as a private school at first, but under pressure from the government converted to a public school in 1904 when a new building was erected. The nearby rather smaller village of Lichtfeld, founded to the west about the same time, was incorporated into the Altberghthal school district early on. In 1897 the villagers signed a document of village dissolution and some of them began to move out to the acreage which they owned in the area. A core of families always remained on the original location, with five remaining there at present.

One of the homesteading villagers was Johann Funk who had moved in from Bergthal on the East Reserve around 1880. He had been ordained a minister a few years earlier and after several years, in 1882, was also ordained as Ältester of the whole Bergthaler community on the West Reserve. He retained this position till 1911 when he retired. Altberghthal never had a church building of its own. Nearby worship centres included those of Rudnerweide, Schönthal, and Hochstadt northeast of Altona.

One of his fellow-ministers was Heinrich Wiebe who had moved to Edenburg a few miles east of Gretna, also from the East Reserve and remained a loyal supporter

of Funk till his (Wiebe's) death in 1897. The Edenburg church was the first one to be built on the West Reserve and remained one of the main worship centres for several decades.

The Bergthal ministers were early supporters of public education, including advanced training for teachers. That led them to promote establishing a "normal school" at Gretna which opened in 1889. West Reserve Bergthalers were divided on the issue of education, leading to a schism several years later. The 1892 division reduced the followers of Johann Funk to a small minority, with the rest regrouping in 1893 under a new Ältester, Abraham Doerksen. Their group would take the name Sommerfelder not much later.

The Bergthal group obtained considerable support from families who did not originate in the Bergthal Colony of south Russia. A number came from the Old Colony, Chortitza, and places like Puchtin and some Molotschna communities also. New ministers were elected after the division and additional places of worship were opened not long afterward. Hoffnungsfeld became a centre of vital church activity in the Winkler area which brought other important leaders like Jacob Hoepfner into leadership around 1900. Hoepfner took over the position of Ältester in 1911.

The Bergthaler congregations formed a significant element of the West Reserve population after 1880. They took a lead in education, and were soon involved in municipal and other civic aspects of life as well. Non-Mennonite movements like the Swedenborgians found quite a few members in Bergthaler circles also. It seemed that open-mindedness worked both ways. It brought a readiness to adapt to the culture of the land and progressive thinking, but offered acceptance of non-Mennonite ideas and ways as well.

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Book Review

Jack Thiessen *Mennonitisch - Plautdeutsches Woerterbuch / Mennonite Low German Dictionary* (Steinbach, MB: Hanover Steinbach Historical Society, 2000), pb., 518 pp. C\$25.00

Reviewed by Ted E. Friesen

Albert Schweizer once wrote: "man denkt in seiner Muttersprache". Plautdietsch wea miene Muttasproak. When talking in English I sometimes cannot find the right word and come up with the Low German word. Was that word lodged in the subconscious?

Low German is the language of the North German people. Many lived on the Baltic Sea littoral. When Luther opted for High German as the official language, Low German was relegated to be the daily unwritten language of the common people. That it survived, and is growing today in Northern Europe attests to its vitality and resilience.

To paraphrase Dr. Thiessen, it is the mirror of a particular (peculiar) people. It was the common language of the Mennonites in the Low Countries. They carried it with them on their wanderings to Germany, West Prussia, the Ukraine, North and finally South & Central America. It is in the last named area, where the language is still the lingua franca of the Mennonites.

Today many consider it a dead language. English is the language of the larger society, especially in urban areas. Yet both there and in the rural areas, performances in Low German are sold out. Sometime ago in Altona the Landmark group performed in their inimitable ways the songs in Plautdietsch for which they are renowned. Several Englishman remarked on the quaint language and what might its origin be? I explained to them that it was the language of the Anglo Saxons who occupied Britain late in the 5th century A.D., and that consequently it became a building block of the English language.

There has been a conscious and dedicated effort by many today not only to preserve but to renew this unique dialect of the Mennonites. One of the most committed has been Dr. Jack Thiessen, Professor (Emeritus) of German at the University of Winnipeg. In 1977 his first volume of the "Mennonite Low German Dictionary" was published by Elwert Verlag in Germany. It was a slender volume in which the Plautdietsch was translated into High German and English. Then in 1979 Herman Rempel published a more comprehensive dictionary with translations from Low German to English and English to Low German. Its popularity was attested by the fact that it went through several editions and is still available.

But Dr. Thiessen has worked on a complete and authoritative dictionary. The first part of his magnum opus has now appeared. It is the translation of Low German, first to High German and then to English. The 6 x 9 format, and its 518 pages gives one an idea of the comprehensiveness of the work. I am going through it, work for word, relishing those words that I know, and appreciating with delight every new one. The second part of the dictionary, i.e. English to Low German. I understand is ready to be published.

In his guidelines to a Low German Orthography, Dr. Thiessen states that it is "of a fairly strict phonetic nature, and follows the basic principles of High German Orthography". This makes for easy and understanding reading of the words. Definitions are clear and precise. In numerous instances he will illustrate a word by citing a folk or children's rhyme. This enhances the meaning of many words. Like no other book before, it reveals the vigor and strength of the language, rich in meaning and nuance. Truly to quote Dr. Thiessen the language is "a mirror of the mortal soul". It is a monumental work, providing new evidence of Low German as a living language. Mennonites, and others owe Dr. Thiessen a huge debt of gratitude.

This hc. book includes good photographs and detailed family and community history. Contact Dora Hildebrand, Box 32 R.R. 1, Lowe Farm, MB, R0G 1E0.

■ *Penner Family History Book 1680-2000: The Descendants of Peter O. Penner (1832-1910) and Margaretha Friesen (1832-1891)*. This hc. 684 page book was inspired by John Dyck's book *Three Hundred years of Penner History*, which followed Peter O. Penner's cousin's genealogy. This book is well done and packed with information and photographs. For copies of the book contact Don and Gladys Wiebe, 311 Qyill Crescent, Sakatoon, SK, S7K 4V3. Email: dgwiebe@home.com.

■ *The Peter Peters Family Book 1855-2000*, by Margaret Bergen is a 124 page book written in English and German following the Peter Peters family in Russia during the difficult Revolution communist era and world war and then many families coming to Canada. For copies contact Margaret Bergen 405-246 Roslyn Rd., Winnipeg, MB, R3L 0H2.

■ *The Hermann Heide Family 1748-2000* is a 284 pp. hc. book complete with lots of color photographs and data. It covers the Heide family in Russia and their immigration to Manitoba in the 1870s and to Mexico in the 1920s. Contact Harms Publishing, Box 681 Winkler, MB R6W 4A8.

■ *The George Krahn Family 1839-1999*, by Isaak Bergen in 1999, is a 390 pp. hc. book written in English and German. It follows the George Krahn and Justina Thiessen family in Russia and the scattering of descendants to Germany and Canada. Contact Isaak Bergen 1675 Gladwin Road, Abbotsford, BC, V2T 5Y5.

■ *Rempel Ewert*, 1998, 192 pp. It documents the Peter Rempel and Margaretha Heppner and Katherine Ewert family in their immigration to the Kronsweide district of Manitoba and subsequent generations. Contact Tina Rempel, Box 141 Lowe Farm, MB, R0G 1E0.

■ *Abraham & Kornelia Bergen Driedger Family Tree*, by Anton "Tony" Driedger was published in June 2000. This 99 page book records the earliest Driedger relative and then follows Driedger line who emigrated to Manitoba in the 1870s. Contact Tony Driedger at 62 Mahonee Drive, Winnipeg, MB, R2G 3S2.

Book Notes

■ *Kane, The Sprit Lives on 2000*, is a community history of the Kane, Manitoba area.