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Manitoba
Mennonite
Historical
Society



NUMBER 4

NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1986

President's Reflections

— Adolf Ens

1986 has been a year of getting the fruit of our research out to the public. At well attended meetings sponsored by the local history committee and the program committee, 14 presentations highlighted the careers of early leaders among Manitoba Mennonites and the history of several communities. The Research, Scholarship and Publication Committee got another volume of Arnold Dyck material off the press. The Genealogy and Family History Committee hosted informative and stimulating meetings on research methodology and procedures. In addition to these official activities of the Society, a number of members have individually been involved in publication. These included board members Delbert Plett and Bill Schroeder who had books published in 1986.

The Mennonite Book Club expanded its distribution network, and is significantly helping to get many good books on Mennonite themes out to the reading public. Wilmer Penner and a group of actors prepared a recording of Arnold Dyck's *Wellkom oppi Forstei* for radio broadcast.

Much of this "reaching the public" was aimed primarily at Mennonites in Manitoba, as is appropriate for our provincial Society. With the next meeting of Mennonite World Conference planned for Winnipeg in 1990, the Society has already begun to consider appropriate ways of sharing from the past and present of Manitoban and Canadian Mennonite life with the thousands of anticipated conference guests. We hope that many of you will plan to be involved in hosting these international brothers and sisters. Ideas on how the Society might participate in that are most welcome.

Volume II of Arnold Dyck Edition Now Ready

— Al Reimer

The second volume of MMHS's definitive four-volume edition of Arnold Dyck's Collected Works is hot off the press and available to readers.

Volume II contains the three travel adventures of the author's inimitable comic characters Koop enn Bua. Originally published in six separate booklets, these superbly entertaining comic works were published under the titles *Koop enn Bua opp Reise* (1942-43), *Koop enn Bua foare no Toronto* (1948-49), and *Koop enn Bua enn Dietschlaund* (1960-61).

In these delightful Koop enn Bua novels Dyck showed that his beloved **Plautdietsch** could rise to a high level of literary art. Printed in a standardized new Low German orthography closely resembling Dyck's own mature spelling system, this new edition will give old readers a chance to relive the **opp Reise** adventures and hopefully gain many new readers for this great comic pair. Volume II has the same handsome design as Volume I, with large readable print, Dyck's own illustrations, and analytical introductions in English to all three works by editor Al Reimer. There are also footnote glosses for difficult words and allusions.

This is an edition of Arnold Dyck's works such as the author himself would have wanted to produce if he had had the financial and technical means to do so. Volume II is a big book of 508 pages available from the Mennonite Book Club for \$25.00. It is also available at other Mennonite outlets. If you are looking for an interesting Christmas gift, here it is!



Upcoming Events

- January 17 MMHS Annual Meeting and Banquet at MBBC with Victor Peters as guest speaker.
- March 13 & 14 Kleine Gemeinde History Symposium at SBC
- March 19 Steinbach Area Genealogical Committee workshop. Watch for further details.
- April 28 East Reserve Village symposium in Niverville sponsored by the Local History Committee
- July * Prof Ted Regier to begin work on Volume 3 of MENNONITES IN CANADA
- September Look for the publication of John Dyck's study of Oberschulz Jacob Peters of the East Reserve
- November Volume 3 of Arnold Dyck's Low German Short Stories and Plays including "Koop enn Boa Sent Tüs" will be published.

Renew your 1987 MMHS membership today. Mail \$10.00 (students \$5.00) to MMHS, 139 Riverton, Winnipeg.

Notes from the committees

— Brian Petkau

1. **Finance Committee:** Ken Reddig reports a total balance of \$11,434 as of September 11, 1986. Of this, the monument committee reports a balance of \$2,424. Reddig expresses appreciation for the very fine work done by Jacob Rempel.
2. **Program Committee:** Adolf Ens reports that the recording of "Wellkom oppi Forstei" has been completed. Gerhard Ens will use the recording on his radio program. Lawrence Klippenstein has agreed to be a member of the Committee.

The MMHS Newsletter is published twice a year by the Publicity Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. It welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members. Correspondence should be mailed to the MMHS Newsletter, RR 1, Box 1, Steinbach, ROA 2A0. Editor: Royden Loewen. Assistant Editor: Dennis Stoesz. Other committee members: Dr. Rhinehart Friesen, Ruth Bock, Doreen Martens, Jacob Rempel.

3. Local History Committee: John Dyck reports that he has completed the first draft of the Oberschulz Jakob Peters research project. A small booklet will be published. The Committee has also sent a letter to the Manitoba Historical Society regarding its Manitoba Century Farm program. The letter asks that the Manitoba Historical Society recognize Mennonite ownership of land in Manitoba when the land was held in common and hence to recognize some 100 farms as Centennial Farms.

4. Research, Scholarship and Publications Committee: Bert Friesen reports that the Committee has "worked out an arrangement with CMBC Publications for a joint publication of the translation of the ECHO-VERLAG monograph series." The translated monographs will be published as they become available. The Board has approved the appointment of Victor Doerksen as the series editor.

5. Education and Resource Committee: Bill Schroeder reports that the Committee will promote the SETTLING MANITOBA THE MENNONITE WAY kit in the different Mennonite publications. An annotated bibliography of Mennonite audiovisual materials is being prepared to assist educators. If possible, a mailing list will be compiled of Mennonite teachers in the Manitoba public schools to whom this information can be sent. A bibliography of children's books would be another project the Committee might wish to consider.

6. Genealogy and Family History Committee: John Dyck reports on three of the Committee's three projects: cemetery listing on both the East and West Reserves; administering the Henry Plett Memorial Award; and developing regional committees in Winnipeg, Steinbach, and Altona. A meeting of the three regional committees is being planned for 1988. The three regional committees which have been formed are the following: WINNIPEG: Margaret Kroeker, Alf Redekop, Frank Giesbrecht, Anna Ens. WEST RESERVE: Dick Hildebrand, Bruce Wiebe, Mary Neufeld, Theodore Martens. EAST RESERVE: Al Hamm, Nettie Neufeld, Ed Schellenberg.

7. Membership and Publicity Committee: Roy Loewen reports that MMHS membership now stands at around 160 members. The Committee is set to publish two newsletters each year.

8. Book Club Committee: Al Reimer reports that membership of the Book Service has risen to 375. Members are ordering more and more books and represent regions throughout North America. Volunteers Susan Froese and Karen Dirks are working hard from the Club's new premise at 1317 Portage Avenue.

Sommerfelder Program well attended

— Delbert F. Plett

An enthusiastic crowd of close to 300 people attended the "Pioneer Leaders of the West Reserve" seminar held at the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church in Altona on October 23, 1986.

Jac C. Fehr of Plum Coulee, the evening's chairman, introduced the speakers and opened the meeting with a scripture, Deuteronomy 32:7. He pointed out that "Our leaders of old were just as fallible as we, what distinguished them perhaps, was that they allowed themselves to be led by God."



Sommerfelder Church in Altona

Dr. John Friesen, Professor of History at Canadian Mennonite Bible College spoke on Heinrich Wiebe (1839-1897), who was elected as a deacon in 1864 and as a minister in 1865. In 1873, Wiebe was selected as one of the two delegates to America for the Berghthal Colony. Since his brother Gerhard Wiebe, the Aeltester of the Berghthaler Gemeinde, remained in Russia until 1875, Heinrich Wiebe had the responsibility to lead the first group to Manitoba and served as their leader during the first winter.

After his brother moved in 1875, Heinrich Wiebe was involved in outside contacts for the group and as he knew John F. Funk, publisher of Elkhart, Indiana, he sent reports which were published in the *Herold der Wahrheit*.

He was also closely involved with negotiations pertaining to the loan with the Ontario Mennonites, which was possible because he knew Jacob Y. Schantz in Berlin, Ontario.

Dr. Friesen concluded that Heinrich Wiebe was a "memorable pioneer leader; Manitoba Mennonites of various church groups are indebted to him for his boldness in coming as a delegate, in proposing to come to Manitoba, in his insight, his concern for peace; and especially his concern that the best in his heritage be carried on by future generations."

Dr. Adolf Ens, Professor at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, Winnipeg, outlined the biography of Isaac Mueller who came to Manitoba with the Furstenlandt/Chortitz (Old Colony) group. Mueller was elected as Vorsteher (chairman) of the West Reserve by this group at the immigration sheds in early July of 1875.

Dr. Ens noted that the decision was made to avoid the term Oberschulz because of the imperious connotations which the name had acquired from its usage in Russia.

The task involved in being Versteher was not easy. Mueller negotiated the changes to the homestead Act which allowed the Mennonites to enter their homestead duty in the village even though they did not live on the actual quarter section for which they were registered.

He dealt with the railroad lands, and with the matter of "pre-emptions". He negotiated for a land office in Nelsonville. He sometimes had to write government officials, such as John A. McDonald, Minister of the Interior at the time, giving detailed explanations for the solution of a particular problem.

Mueller was in charge of the \$100,000.00 loan negotiated with the Canadian government in Ottawa. He also looked after the construction of the first church built in Rhineland. In 1878, he instructed the village leadership that all school children were to be in school.

Mueller accomplished an astounding amount in 10 years of leadership. He was an excellent ad-

ministrator, resourceful and official. On the negative side it must be said that he perhaps became somewhat arrogant over the years, and in fact, was sometimes referred to as Kaiser (emperor) Mueller. But in his own stubborn way, Mueller was an earnest Christian who looked after the common good.

Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, spoke about Johan Funk (1836-1917). Funk was elected as minister on the East Reserve in 1877, moved to West Reserve in 1880 and became Aeltester of the West Reserve Berghthaler in 1882.

Jacob Peters, Winnipeg Historian, spoke about Abraham Doerksen (1852-1929). Doerksen settled in the East Reserve in Manitoba moving to the Village of Sommerfeld in the West Reserve in 1879/1880. He was elected minister in 1893 and as Aeltester of the Sommerfelder Mennonites in 1894.

Peters categorized the tremendous accomplishments of Abraham Doerksen as Aeltester under four headings:

(a) the extension of the church to the new settlement in Rosthern and Herbert, Saskatchewan; Didsbury, Alberta, and elsewhere. Doerksen travelled extensively on this account shepherding and encouraging his flock.

(b) Doerksen was inseparably involved in the educational issue. In 1902 he agreed to a plan for public schools and in 1903 printed a school Verordnung and saw to the collection of funds for the private school system.

(c) Doerksen also fulfilled a leading role in World War I. His responsibilities here included being a senior delegate to Ottawa relative to the 1873 Privilegeum and assembling an offering of \$44,000.00 for the Red Cross.

(d) Abraham Doerksen was closely involved in the emigration and himself moved to Mexico in 1921 together with 500 others. Here he was replaced as Aeltester by Heinrich Friesen.

Jacob Peters provided the following conclusion of Abraham Doerksen: (1) He was brotherhood oriented. (2) He had strong principles but pragmatic. (3) He was a dynamic person and gifted preacher. (4) He had broad involvements beyond his own community.

The final presentation was by Rev. Peter Zacharias, who spoke on Johan Wiebe (1837-1906).

Johan Wiebe was elected as a minister in the Chortitz Colony in Russia in 1865 and in 1879 as Aeltester of the Furstenlandt settlement at the young age of 33. In 1875, he led his Gemeinde to America where he was again elected as Aeltester of what became known as the Rhineland Gemeinde which included many Chortitz or Old Colony Mennonites.

In 1876, he dedicated the first Mennonite House

of Worship at Rhineland. Aeltester Wiebe had settled in the village of Rosengard.

Wiebe was a man of strong character who had high expectations of the church, but he included himself among the fallible. History has frequently been harsh on Aeltester Johan Wiebe and other early leaders who have been seen in the role of the "narrow-minded, obstinate tradition bound villains" by these progressive Mennonites who opted for new forms of religiosity.

Zacharias emphasized the importance of people listening respectfully to the history and background of each group. "If we look back into our own histories, we have all hurt each other, sometimes grievously."

This is illustrated by a particular Mennonite Encyclopedia article which refers to one Southern Manitoba Mennonite group as "extremely conservative" as if this was the touch stone for dismissing any further contribution which this Gemeinde may have made to the Church of Christ.

Rev. Zacharias noted that the least we can do is try to see Aeltester Johan Wiebe as he saw himself. Wiebe did not see himself as conservative but as a reformer, "to recover the New Testament vision of the church".

Mennonites had gone on the wrong track in Russia by abandoning spiritual oneness and discipline, by imposing governmental authority against each other.

Wiebe held a holistic view of the Christian life of Christ's community in which everything was ordered according to the Gospel.

Rev. Zacharias concluded his presentation by quoting from a letter of condolences written by William Hespeller, the Canadian government emigration agent.

When Hespeller heard of Wiebe's death he wrote to his family as follows:

"With sadness of heart I received the painful news that your father (Johan Wiebe), who was close to me, had gone to his Creator. Please accept my deepest sympathy, and also express my condolences to the church he left behind on its irreplaceable loss. He was a faithful shepherd, and spent his energy, indeed his whole life, for the welfare of his flock and as its example.

The seminar was sponsored by the Local History Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. Tapes of the Sommerfeld program as well as the Chortitzer program (all in English) held in Mitchell on April 22, 1986, are available at \$15.95 (two tapes per program) each from the Chairman, Local History Committee, P.O. Box 1960, STEINBACH, Manitoba, ROA 2A0.

Recent Family Histories

— Alf Redekopp

The following books may be found in the holdings of at least one of the following institutions: The Centre for M.B. Studies at 169 River-ton Ave., Mennonite Genealogy Inc., 790 Wellington Ave., Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. They are listed alphabetically according to the male surname.

The Ancestry and Descendants of Maria Regier Abrams and William Abrams, by Clifford Schink, 1984. 65 pp.

The Bartel Reunion, a genealogy compiled by Annie Janzen, Winnipeg. 1986. 128 pp.

Descendants of Peter Buhr (1816-1887), by Net-tie Neufeld, Steinbach, Man. 1984. 135 pp.



James Urry conversing with EMMC History Book author Jack Heppner.

Stammbuch u. Chronik der Ewert Familie, by Heinrich Ewert, Germany. 1984. 55 pp.

Descendants of Cornelius Friesen, by John Friesen and Rudy Friesen, 1986. 250 pp.

Abraham & Johanna Funk Family Album, 1985, by Sylvia Regier, Laird, Sask., 1985. 228 pp.

Peter P. Hiebert Family Tree (1841-1984), by Peter & Tina Hiebert, Steinbach, Man. 1984. 208 pp.

In Search of a Home: The Janzen Family Story, by Irene Friesen Petkau, Winnipeg. 1984. 207 pp.

The Klassen Clan from Kaump to Canada, by Helena Braun, Sardin, B.C. 1984. 184 pp.

The Dietrich Loewen Family: History and Genealogy, 1820-1985, by Susan F. Suderman, Prince George, B.C. 1986. 117 pp.

The Neufelds of Waldheim (1744-1985), compiled by William Neufeld, Winnipeg. 1985. 204 pp.

The Family of Abram P. Martens (1875-1985) by Bestvater, Harder, Martens & Peters, Steinbach, Man. 1984. 624 pp.

The Redekop(p) Book, by Freda Pellman Redekop, Waterloo, Ont. 1984. 323 pp.

Peter R. Reimer (1845-1915), by Abe R. Reimer, et.al, Blumenort, Manitoba. 1984. 176 pp.

The Story of Jacob and Helena Siemens (Peters), by Henry J. Siemens. 1984. 211 pp.

Family Record: Heinrich Schroeder & Maria Kehler, edited by David Schroeder, Winnipeg. 1984. 111 pp.

Bartholomaeus Tiessen: 359 Jahre Familien-tradition, by Frank Tiessen, Hameln, West Ger-many. 1986. 615 pp.

Klaas Wiebe Family History (1840-1904), by Wiebe Family Committee, Steinbach, Man. 1986. 230 pp.

Urry lectures insightful and entertaining

— Roydan Loewen

On November 25 and December 3 MMHS members attended lectures given by Dr. James Urry of New Zealand. Urry, an anthropologist who specializes in the Russian Mennonites was in Manitoba to speak at a conference sponsored by the Center for Mennonite Brethren Studies. The MMHS was fortunate, thus, to have Dr. Urry

speaking at two of its own meetings. The first meeting was organized by the Genealogy Committee and was held at the Canadian Mennonite Bible Col-lege. It saw Dr. Urry speak on the topic "Genealogy, Pedigree and Mennonite Social History." The second meeting, organized jointly by the Local History Committee and the Steinbach Bible College was held a week later at the college, and focused on "The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia." Both meetings were well attended, and judging from the activity during the question period and coffee breaks, were also well enjoyed.

In his first lecture Urry urged his audience to see genealogical studies as more than merely finding out who one's ancestors are or establishing the purity or prestige of one's family line. Genealogical study, argued Urry, is an invaluable tool in doing social history. Kinship ties in Russia, for instance, proved to be crucial factors in the formation of villages, the founding of new churches like the Mennonite Brethren, in migration patterns from Prussia to Russia, and in the founding and maintenance of the wealthy "Gutsbesitzer" settlements. Such ties allow historians to look past events and rhetoric and begin to understand the values of the people they study. Genealogy often provides the key to seeing how things really were and points to the fact that normative views are often flawed. It can reveal varieties in family cycle, the mobility and transience of people, the rates of birth and death and their relationship to the industrialization or to climatic changes.

In the second lecture given in Steinbach, Urry outlined how the Kleine Gemeinde developed in response to the changes in Imperial Russia. This tiny, reformative Gemeinde was very much the product of the particular circumstance of living in Russia. Urry speculated that one of the factors leading Klaas Reimer to leave the main church was that he was not chosen as Aeltester in the new land. As the senior minister in the colony and as a member of the prestigious Peter Epp family he should have been a natural choice. Two other factors peculiar to Russia led to Reimer's dissatisfaction with the main line church; one was the presence of a Mennonite civil government and the other the threat posed by Napoleon to Russia and the Mennonite's compromising response to it. Once the Kleine Gemeinde had been formed other factors like inability to leave and form their own



The Society thanks Ruth Bock for her years of service as society secretary and treasurer's assistant.

colony, their proximity to pietistic groups, the reforms of Johann Cornies, the social transformation of Russia during the 1860s and 70s forced them to change. Throughout these changes the Kleine Gemeinden saw themselves as upholding the truth and preserving the values of a golden past and developed different means of maintaining that truth. They published widely, engaged in debate, cooperated with agricultural reforms which they did not consider fundamental, and eventually left Russia to sever their relations with liberal Mennonite groups and reestablish an idealized past on the North American frontier. Ironically, the ideals were often more the product of their Russian sojourn than actual 16th century Anabaptist ways

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of living.

Through his entertaining style, well articulated insights, and extensive knowledge of the Russian Mennonites Dr. Urry has contributed to the rising interest among Manitoba Mennonites of their history and for this we thank him. Video tapes of the Steinbach lecture are available for \$19.95 and can be ordered from either John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg or Delbert Plett, Box 1960, Steinbach.

Donations gratefully received

— Jacob Rempel

Sustaining - \$25.00 to \$99.00

Ken Braun, Altona; Arthur Baerg, Steinbach; Jake Banman, Steinbach; Christian Press, Winnipeg; Art DeFehr, Winnipeg; John P. Dyck, Springstein; Frank Enns, Winnipeg; Dr. Georg Epp, Winnipeg; Abram Enns, Winkler; Henry Enns, Winkler; David Friesen, Altona; Margaret Fast, Winnipeg; John Friesen, Winnipeg; Garner Goertzen, Regina; Peter Goertzen, Winnipeg; Peter Hiebert, Steinbach; Dr. Jacob Isaak, Winnipeg; Hedy Janzen, Winnipeg; Helen Janzen, Winnipeg; Margaret Kroeker, Winnipeg; Doreen Klassen, Steinbach; Heinz Kampen, Winnipeg; Karl Klassen, Kelowna; Mary Loewen, Winnipeg; D. Langeman, Winnipeg; Mennonite Village Museum, Steinbach; Joseph E. Miller, Winnipeg; G.O. Martens, Winnipeg; Aganetha Neufeld, Winnipeg; Delbert Plett, Steinbach; Glenn Penner, Plum Coulee; Irene Peters, Winnipeg; Dr. Paul Peters, Steinbach; Ken Reddig, Winnipeg; George Rempel, Steinbach; Dr. Al Reimer, Winnipeg; David Rempel, Menno Park U.S.A.; P.K. Reimer, Steinbach; Wilhelm Rempel, Niverville; Erwin

Siemens, Winnipeg; Levi Schellenberg, Kleefeld; G. Sickert, Winnipeg; Walter Thiessen, Winnipeg; Peter Thiessen, Winnipeg; Frank Wiens, Grunthal; Peter Wiebe, Winkler; Frank Zacharias, Gretna.

Supporting - \$100.00 to \$499.00

Ted Friesen, Altona; Dr. R.F. Friesen, Winnipeg; Ed. Friesen, Steinbach; Dr. Bernhard Fast, Winnipeg; Raymond Friesen, Altona; Royden Loewen, Steinbach; Reimer Agencies, Steinbach; Peter J.B. Reimer, Rosenort; John Schellenberg, Headingley; Abe Unger, Landmark; Willmar Windows, Winnipeg.

Life - \$500.00 and more

Neil Dueck, Teulon; D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., Altona; Charles Loewen, Steinbach.

The Monument Committee completes its task

The Monument Committee has completed its task in general. At the last meeting on March 3, 1986 it was resolved, however, not to dissolve the Committee yet, as there are a few items to be looked after, and to be on hand, should something come up in the future, in regard to the Monument.

Up to Oct. 1, 1986 a total of \$40,985.62 has been collected for the Monument. \$38,740.58 has been spent, leaving a bank balance of \$2,245.04.

Members of the Monument Committee are: Gerhard Ens (chairman), Dr. Georg Epp, Henry Dahl, Karl Fast, Prof. John Friesen, Otto Klassen, Prof. Harry Loewen, Dr. Peter Mierau, Prof. Elisabeth & Irene Peters, Frank Penner, Peter Regier, and Jacob Rempel (secretary-treasurer).

Dr. Gerhard Lohrenz and Dr. Henry Wiebe passed away in 1986.