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Participants of the Austin/MacGregor bus tour visit the new MacGregor Evangelical Mennonite Church.

— Photo by Bert Friesen

Austin/MacGregor Area Church Histories

Compiled and excerpted by Sarah Schwab

The following church histories were presented at the Austin/MacGregor tour on 16 April 2005.

Austin and MacGregor Sommerfeld Mennonite Church

Services and Sunday school classes were held in homes until 1949, when a school just west of Austin became the new home of the first Sommerfeld church. The church's first minister was Peter Loepkky; he was ordained in a home. In 1959, Abe Neufeld was ordained as pastor. In 1960, the church building was moved to Austin, but was torn down during that same year. A new church, which accommodated 285 people, was built in MacGregor later in 1960. Sunday school enrollment during that same year

was forty-five. Ladies Aid began in 1964. The church began using the organ in 1988.

The present Sommerfeld church was built in 1992-1993, and was opened officially on 18 March 1993. Popular activities in the church include Christmas, Easter and *Kinderfest* programs, bible studies, young peoples' events, youth sings and D.V.B.S. Larry Kehler, elected in 2005, currently serves as the church's pastor.

Austin E.M.M.C.

In 1940, three families moved to Austin. Because their home church was so far away, they conducted a Sunday school program in their homes. The group was served by different pastors from the surrounding area. For five years,

(Continued on page 2)

(Continued from page 1)

services were held once a month. Highlights included *Kinderfest*, *Jugendverein*, Summer Bible School, and baptism *Unterricht*.

In 1944, C.A. Thiessen was ordained as the minister of the group. By 1945, the group's numbers had increased significantly and it became necessary to build a church. Funds were scarce, and therefore it was primarily by voluntary labour that the church was constructed. The land was donated to the church by the P. J. Giesbrecht farm, and four hundred dollars were donated from other E.M.M.C.s. Due to poor weather conditions, the building was not actually completed until 1948. Sunday school was organized in 1950 and a choir was formed shortly thereafter. The congregation continued to grow and by 1957 they decided that the church ought to be located in town. The last service was held on New Year's Eve of that year and in January 1958, the church relocated into Austin. John Bergman served as pastor from 1963 to 1965. Rev. Cory Harder arrived in 1965 and has remained ever since. In 1974, an addition was built, but in 1980 the congregation decided to build again. The old church remained on the same location until just last year.

Bagot Community Chapel

In the spring of 1967, a number of families moved into the Portage area, and began meeting together for Bible studies. Having no church of their own, they rented a space in the United Church in Bagot. Almost two years later, they purchased the Elsmith School along with six acres of land. On 21 September 1969, the church organized, took up membership and became a charter member of E.M.M.C. The church had twenty-six members in all. The church's first minister, Isaac Dreiger, was elected on 19 August 1970 and the ordination service was held 6 February 1972. Between 1972 and 2004, the church was served by a number of different pastoral couples. Currently serving the congregation are Harley and Rhonda Porter. At present, the church continues to grow and the size of the congregation ranges between approximately 110 to 125 individuals.

Evangelical Mennonite Church in MacGregor

The Evangelical Mennonite Church (E.M.C.) in MacGregor can trace its beginnings back to 1943 when seven families in the MacGregor area began a Sunday school program. Classes were taught by Mrs. Elizabeth Fehr in her home. At around the same time, *Jugendverein* programs began as well, and were held twice a month on Sunday evenings. These events generally took place in homes, granaries and machine sheds. In the absence of regular Sunday worship services, these programs served to connect the families in the area with one another, strengthening their sense of community and providing them with a source of spiritual enrichment and encouragement.

The mid-1940s brought an influx of Mennonite families to the area. These families were attracted to the region by

the availability of lower-cost farmland. Growing numbers prompted the group to purchase the Presbyterian church in MacGregor from the Orange Lodge. Since the families in the group belonged to a number of different denominations, a system was developed by which ministers from four different denominations rotated in coming to preach on Sundays.

In 1950 the church experienced a division when a large portion of the group left to form the MacGregor Bergthaler church under the leadership of Rev. Jacob Loewen of Bagot. The remaining families continued to hold services and the church experienced gradual growth. The church was officially organized in 1952, with Elmer Hamm elected as minister and Henry Thiessen as deacon. During the following year it became affiliated with the E.M.C., then known as the *Kleine Gemeinde*. A larger church building was constructed in 1956. Additions were built in 1977 and 1984 in order to accommodate continuing growth. Currently, Dan and Sandra Sawatzky are serving as the pastor couple of the church.

Gladstone Christian Fellowship

The beginnings of the Gladstone Christian Fellowship can be traced back to 1937 when a number of Mennonite families moved into the Gladstone and Mayfield area. As the number of families increased, a need was seen for spiritual input. In 1939 the first services were held in the home of Abram Schellenberg Sr. This group was served by ministers from southern Manitoba who represented a

(Continued on page 3)



Four participants got a view of the original MacGregor Evangelical Mennonite Church. — Photo by Bert Friesen

(Continued from page 2)

number of different denominations. In 1940, Rev. Jacob Loewen became the group's minister and served them faithfully until 1956, when he moved to Carman.

As the group's numbers increased, the need for more room became evident. In 1946, the group decided to establish the church on the Bergthaler form. The new building was constructed on land donated by Abe Schellenberg and was completed in 1947.

During the 1950s, the church struggled. By 1958, membership had dwindled to six families. The winter of 1959 was especially rough, and services were cancelled a number of times due to poor weather conditions. The 1960s, however, brought a new wave of optimism to the church. Numbers began to increase and the church became more organized. In 1963, the church began to conduct services entirely in English. By 1967, membership had increased to 40. Steady growth caused the question of relocation to be raised. In 1971, the congregation decided to relocate to Gladstone. The first service at the church's new site was held on 7 October 1973. Throughout the 1970s, the church continued to experience growth. In 1976, Cornie Martens, formerly the Sunday School superintendent, was elected to serve as pastor.

Changes and developments continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1990, Randy Fehr became the first pastor to be fully salaried by the church. During the early 1990s, space became an issue once again and a new facility was built in 1992. The congregation decided to change the name from Gladstone Mennonite Church to Gladstone Christian Fellowship. At this time, the congregation also decided to leave the Mennonite conferences and to become affiliated with the Associated Gospel Churches. Since 2000, new ministries have been added, another full-time pastor was hired, and membership reached 100 families.

West End Community Church

The West End Community Church in MacGregor was formerly known as the MacGregor Bergthaler Mennonite Church. During the 1940s, Mennonite families began settling in the MacGregor-Austin area, and at this time gathered for worship in homes. The group was served by visiting ministers who represented various denominations.



A tour participant browses the church history displays.
— Photos by Bert Friesen

In around 1947, the group purchased a building in MacGregor and continued to worship there together. In 1950, however, the group split. At this point, the differences of the various church affiliations came to the fore and had to be dealt with. The group that split off organized as the Bergthaler Mennonite Church, and the group that remained joined the E.M.C. (see MacGregor E.M.C. above).

The first Bergthaler Group was held on 26 November

(Continued on page 6)



Presenters shared their church histories at the Austin/MacGregor tour.

Into the new Northwest

Historians hear about Austin-MacGregor history

by Elmer Heinrichs

Fifty amateur historians took part in the spring history workshop sponsored annually by the Local History committee, an active arm of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS). This spring's topics centered on the MacGregor-Austin area of Manitoba.

Here, in the MacGregor EMC meeting house, the historians heard church and family history reports and learned about early settlement and farming in the Bagot, MacGregor and Austin-to-Gladstone area where Mennonites began settling in the 1930s through the 1940s and early 1950s.

A body of local historians organized the day-long MMHS workshop. Representative Bert Friesen says "it was a good effort to expose MMHS to the MacGregor area, and us to them."

"I think contacts such as these need to be fostered and I hope we can build on it by inviting their participation in other MMHS events, and perhaps we can hold a genealogy workshop there," he said.

According to Henry Gerbrandt in *Adventure in Faith*, the 1920's migration from Russia and the dust bowl experience in Saskatchewan brought land-hungry Mennonite settlers into the general area of McCreary and Arden as well as to the Mayfeld-MacGregor area.

During the morning sessions of the workshop, church

reports from Gladstone, Austin, MacGregor and Bagot detailed the quick beginning of church life once settlers moved into this new region - the new Northwest, to Mennonites. Glen Sawatzky chaired the meeting with representatives Tina Giesbrecht, Menno Hamm, Pete Friesen, Bill Rempel, Tina Wieler and Pastor Randy Fehr reporting for the churches.

One church, Gladstone Christian Fellowship, traced its beginning to 1937. The MacGregor churches, the EMC, the Sommerfeld and the West End Church date to settlement here in the 1940's, and Reinland Mennonite to a Sommerfeld split in the 1950s, while Bagot Chapel began in the 1960s.

Following the church presentations, Mary Bueckert of Austin, Menno Hamm of MacGregor, and Mavis Dyck of Morden introduced family stories. Other family displays were by Martha Martens of Winkler, Diane Unrau of MacGregor, John Wieler of Austin and Glen Sawatzky and Tina Giesbrecht, both of MacGregor.

At noon, historians from Steinbach, Morden, Winkler and Altona mingled with people from the larger MacGregor, Austin, Gladstone and Bagot area while enjoying a delicious meal.

In the afternoon, Glen Sawatzky presented a report on farming in the region, noting that many of their parents came to the area to establish a land base. It was a new opportunity and many were able to buy land for between \$10 to \$30 an acre, including farm buildings.

(Continued on page 5)



The tour included a visit to the Sommerfeld Mennonite Church Cemetery.

— Photo by Bert Friesen

Book Notes

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The Chortitzer Mennonite Conference has published its history with the title **Chortitzer Mennonite Conference 1874 - 1990** (Steinbach: CMC, 2004), hdc, 122 pp. \$30.00 plus shipping. The writer is Gustav Dueck. For further info or to order call the CMC office at 1-204-346-6320. Most of the families in the Manitoba part of the conference have their roots in the Bergthal colony of south Russia (Ukraine).

A history of the Halbstadt community southeast of Altona is just off the press. It has been edited by Dave

(Continued from page 4)

Initially large portions of land were used for pasture and cattle, with seeded acreage in oats for feed and wheat as a cash crop. Soon new farming methods were introduced along with new crops such as sunflowers and corn.

Agriculture has been the backbone of the community, and by working the straw back into the land the lighter-textured soil has been improved through the years. The sand ridges at the edges of fields were removed and deposited back on the land.

Since the 1960s, when the Simplot Company came to the region, many growers have started growing potatoes, and along with cereal crops they have developed a good crop rotation. As a result, many farmers in the land-poor West Reserve pulled up stakes to settle in the Austin-MacGregor area where they were able to begin farming with a more adequate land base.

An afternoon Mennonite historical bus tour of MacGregor and district took historians to see many of the Mennonite churches, noting cemeteries, MCC thrift stores, health centres, Valley View Bible Camp, Pine Creek Church and School and the Manitoba Agricultural Museum.

Refreshments back at the church and fellowship concluded a pleasant and eventful day.



— Photo by Bert Friesen

Sawatzky and is titled **The Halbstadt Heritage: Strassberg, Houston and Halbstadt S.D.** (Altona: Halbstadt Heritage Book Committee, 2005), hdc., 400 pp, \$50.00. The book will be launched at a picnic to be held in Halbstadt on July 2-3. For further information contact the editor at dsawatzk@mts.net

Dr. John J. Friesen of Winnipeg has recently completed the book **Creating Community: The Changing Face of Manitoba Mennonites**. It is to be published by CMU Press, Winnipeg, in collaboration with the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. For further info on the volume contact the author at jfriesen@cmu.ca

Mennonite Heritage Village Review appeared in April 2005 with Vol. 1: No. 1, as a follow-up to an earlier newsletter from MHV, **Preserving Our Heritage** which ceased publication some time ago. The new periodical is edited by Doris Penner of Steinbach, Manitoba. For further information, contact Jim Penner, director of MHV at jpenner@mennoniteheritagevillage.com

The Spring 2005 issue of **Neubergthal Notes** announces the performance of a drama tour entitled "Mennonite Journey" at the Sunflower Festival in Altona on July 15-17. It will be directed by Marilyn Houser Hamm of Neubergthal. If interested in sharing the experience contact phild@mts.net (Rose Hildebrand) or call 1-204-324-1612.

The 2005 issue (Volume 23) of **Journal of Mennonite Studies**, published by the Chair of Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg and edited by Dr. Royden Loewen, includes book reviews of the following Manitoba authors: David Elias, **Sunday Afternoon** (2004), John Weier, **Stand the Sacred Tree: Journeys in Place and Memory** (2004), Armin Wiebe, **Tatsea** (2003), Miriam Toews, **A Complicated Kindness** (2004), Lawrence Klippenstein (with Jacob Dick, Ontario), **Mennonite Alternative Service in Russia: The Story of Abram Dueck and his Colleagues, 1911-1917** (2002), Adolf Ens, **Becoming a National Church: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada** (2004), Edith Elisabeth Friesen, **Journey to Freedom: One Family's Real Life Drama** (2003), Rudy P Friesen with Edith Elisabeth Friesen **Building on the Past: Mennonite Architecture, Landscape and Settlements in Russia/Ukraine** (2004), and Ted Friesen, **Memoirs: A Person Autobiography of Ted Friesen** (2003). For further information contact the **Journal** editor at roy.loewen@uwinnipeg.ca

A new biography written by Doreen Reimer Peters, entitled **One Who Dared: Life Story of Ben D.Reimer, 1909 - 1994** (Steinbach, privately published, 2005), pb., 307 pp., is just off the press. It sells for ca 18.00 plus shipping. For precise information and further data on the volume, contact the author at jpablo@mts.net.

Name Scramble

How well do you know Mennonite names? See how long it takes you to figure these out...

1. snferel
2. weenol
3. ipleknniep
4. tbdnar
5. hbeiestcg
6. feosre
7. ermire
8. ewebi
9. rtpsee
10. hsicnhie
11. gereh
12. engru
13. pdekepro
14. epeordk

Answers on Page 12

(Continued from page 3)

1950 in the home of Jacob B. Unrau, since the E.M.C. now occupied the building that the two groups had formerly shared. However, it soon became evident that the Bergthaler group needed more space, and the construction of a new church building was undertaken in 1951. On 15 July 1951, about twenty families took part in the first service in the new church. It was not until 1966, however, that the church was fully integrated into the Bergthaler Conference.

Today, the church's most popular activities include Sunday school, D.V.B.S., Young Peoples, Youth for Christ, the MCC Thrift Store and Furniture Store, the Ladies Mission Group and, of course, the choir. In September of 2000, the MacGregor Bergthaler Mennonite Church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary. Until 2002 the church was associated with both the Manitoba and Canadian Conference of Mennonites. In 2003 the church's name was changed to West End Community Church.

Reinland Mennonite Church

The Reinland Mennonite Church of Manitoba was founded in 1958 and churches were built in Altona, Winkler, Blumenfeld, Grunthal and Austin. Peter and Maria Loepky served as the first pastor couple at Austin's Reinland Mennonite Church. The Reinland Church has eleven ministers, along with the bishop, who serve all five churches in rotation. Each church is visited by a different minister every Sunday. The ministers also serve a number of care homes.

By 1981, Reinland Mennonite Church had outgrown its building and a therefore a new church was built. Abe Guenther was ordained as a minister in 1986, and he and his wife Mary continue to serve as the church's pastor couple. Services are conducted primarily in Low German in sensitivity to the individuals from Bolivia and Mexico who often attend services.

Plett Awards



Derek Bueddefeld



Janelle Hoffman

The Henry E. Plett Memorial Award for Family Histories were awarded recently. The first prize was awarded to **Derek Bueddefeld** for his paper entitled "*Peter Krahn*," The winner of the 2nd prize was **Janelle Hoffman** for her paper entitled "*Jacob J Froese: 1885-1968*."

The contest, aimed at Manitoba high school students, seeks to encourage research and writing on a family history subject. The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society "Genealogy Committee" administers the competition. The Plett Award papers are on file at the Mennonite Heritage Centre for those wishing to read them.

Altbergthal 125th Anniversary

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The community of Altbergthal, on the former West Reserve (and three miles west of Altona), continues to celebrate its 125th anniversary, 1880-2005. Some Mennonite families from the East Reserve appear to have settled in the area already the year before. The new Sommerfeld Gemeinde Buch includes the church register entries of a large number of early Altbergthal families, and the 1880 Village Census of the Mennonite West Reserve includes a listing for the families of 1880 in Altbergthal and Lichtfeld which became one school district, we believe, before 1900. Much of this data is now included in an Altbergthal families album which has been prepared by Martha Martens of Winkler, MB.

Significant funding progress has been made in the past year. Two former residents, Diedrich Reimer, now of Florida, USA, who was born in Altbergthal during the time of his father's teaching term there (Peter D. Reimer, 1914-1918) and Walter Koop, a student during the time of his father's teaching term there (Jacob Koop, 1939-1942) have recently contributed a total of 1150.00 US to boost the fund now on hand to around 3000.00 CAD. We are thankful for the receipting arrangement with MMHS which helps to provide tax deductible acknowledgements to our donors (Bert Friesen has details).

We have had several important anniversary events at the present site of the school, and elsewhere in Altona. One was the gathering of former pupils of Jakob Koop for a reunion to host Walter Koop with his wife, and others of his family at a supper at the Emerald Restaurant in Altona on September 21, 2004. A group of nearly two dozen persons gathered for the occasion. Items on the program included a commentary by Helen Koop Johnson on the life and work of her father as teacher of Altbergthal, and elsewhere in the West Reserve. Another event was a "history day" at

which Myrna Reimer of Altona, a teacher at the New Hope S.D., took her class there to experience the days of the one-room school in the building at Altona. It is also significant for the anniversary that Martha Dyck Martens of Winkler was invited to share stories of Altbergthal at one of the History Seekers lecture evenings held in Altona in March and April of this year. Adolf Ens was in charge of the evening. Lawrence Klippenstein and Martha Martens continue to gather historical material for further writing on the history of the community. Harold Sudermann has been writing about the life and work of his father Jacob Sudermann, who taught at Altbergthal from 1930-1934.

Alvin Klippenstein, a current Altbergthal resident, has been working hard on keeping the old Altbergthal cemetery cleaned up and has prepared a map of all known burials at the site (on Buffalo Creek at the north end of the village). He is looking for more information on burials not noted on the remaining headstones. The headstone of Aeltester Johann Funk and his wife, Louise Dueck Funk, have been located, and are still visible on the cemetery grounds. The 90th anniversary of the death of Aeltester Johann Funk will take place in 2007, two years from now.

Discussions with the town of Altona are underway regarding the relocation of the school building to a site elsewhere in town, or outside in another community perhaps. No decision is forthcoming so far. The idea of a larger Altbergthal community reunion is also being kept alive. Further information about these items and others related to the Altbergthal projects and the anniversary may be obtained through contacting klippensteinL@aol.com or Ray Klippenstein, at 1-204-324-6026.

MMHS Historic Sites Committee
Morris, Manitoba
June 21, 2005.



Walter Koop (centre) with his wife Barbara from Bend, Oregon at the 125th Altbergthal anniversary reception in Altona on September 21, 2001. Walter is the son of the late Jacob Koop who taught at Altbergthal in 1939-1942.

— Photo by Lawrence Klippenstein

New Home for Mennonite Brethren Studies

By Conrad Stoesz

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has a new home at 1310 Taylor Ave. On April 25, 2005, the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches national office along with the Manitoba Conference office opened its doors to the public in a brand new two-story building consisting of over 20,000 square feet. The archival component includes a 1645 square-foot vault, with humidity and temperature controls, and mobile shelving throughout. The 1241 square foot public area includes a spacious reading room, library, and plenty of space for researchers. The 388 square foot office area as well as the public area is an open design concept with good sightlines to see the activity in the Centre. New furniture and décor make the Centre an inviting and welcoming place to read and do research.

The vault contains over 1200 boxes of archival material consisting of conference, congregational, institutional and personal papers; 23,000 photographs; 100 architectural drawings; and 700 periodical titles. Maps, audio recordings, a hymn book library and video collection round out what is in the vault. The J.A. Toews historical library, the conference yearbook collection and the Katie Peters genealogical collection are in the public research area.

The Centre documents the changes in the lives of members of the Mennonite Brethren constituency over a lengthy period of time. During this time the Centre has also changed considerably. It was founded in 1969 by the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. Its mandate continues to be to collect and preserve historical documents relating to the Mennonite Brethren church, focusing on Canada. In 1969 the Conference owned and operated the Mennonite Brethren Bible College (MBBC) and the Centre was given a small room above the library. Herb Giesbrecht, the librarian of MBBC, administered the Centre. Soon the Centre outgrew this space. When the college undertook an expansion in 1979, space was built for the archives in the basement of the building at 169 Riverton Avenue, in Winnipeg's Elmwood



Centre for MB Studies reading room entrance.

— Photos by Conrad Stoesz

district. Here a total of 1,500 square feet was allocated to the Centre for all its activities. Ken Reddig was appointed archivist. In the mid 1980's mobile shelving was purchased which almost doubled the storage space. Some environmental controls were installed at this point but they never worked properly. Staff joked about working in the catacombs. The advantage of larger space was offset by the fact that the location was not the best for researchers because it was hard to find and was some distance from the offices of the sponsoring body.

In 1991, Abe Dueck was appointed Director. The Centre continued to function in the basement until 2000 when the College (then known as Concord College) amalgamated with Canadian Mennonite Bible College (CMBC) along with Menno Simons College to form Canadian Mennonite University (CMU) on the campus at 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. At this time the Centre moved to the former administrative area of Concord College, and the vault occupied part of the former library. Some of this space had originally been used by the archives several decades earlier.

Other recent changes include library automation, which was implemented in 1992. On August 8, 1993, during a heavy rain, the sewer backed up causing serious flooding which resulted in significant damage. Support from the CCA by way of grants from the mid-1980s to the present allowed for extra staff to be hired to work on electronic finding aids and collection descriptions that increased its usefulness.

The Centre has seen the number of visitors increase. The scope of research done has also grown. Researchers with varied interests continue to visit the Centre. We are excited about our new facility and hope it can continue to serve the Conference and the wider public.



Centre for MB Studies reading room.

Spotlight on . . .

Donovan Giesbrecht

(Treasurer, Oral History Committee)

How did you get interested in Mennonite history and genealogy?

Like for many of us, it was my grandmother's storytelling. She came to Canada in the 1920's as girl of twelve, losing family members, and nearing starvation in the process. I'll never forget the night our extended family rented a VCR just so we could watch "And When They Shall Ask" with Grandma and Grandpa. Grandma left the room within minutes; it was too much for her to take. My University of Winnipeg Mennonite Studies classes with Roy Loewen solidified my interest. Few teachers engage their students or subjects with such vigour.

How did you get involved with MMHS?

Conrad Stoesz, of course. He's probably responsible for connecting many of us with MMHS. I did a number of summer projects at the archives with him as my supervisor. During this time he put out the invitation.

How long have you been a part of the organization, and what is your favourite part?

I guess this is my fourth year on the board, although it feels like I'm just beginning to get a sense of how things work. Certainly my favourite part is the brainstorming, discussing new ideas, visioning, dreaming of new ways to pass on our story.

If you could meet one historical Mennonite person, who would it be?

Good question. Hans Denk has always struck me as one of the most lovable - the kind of guy that you'd want to spend an afternoon chatting with over a cup of coffee. Yah, Denk would do just fine.

Here's what everyone wants to know - where is your family from, and are you related to anyone in MMHS?

My mother is Hilda Dalke (father John Dalke, mother Helen Epp) from north of Morden, and my father is Menno Giesbrecht (father Jacob Giesbrecht, mother Barbra Stoesz) of Plum Coulee. I'm a good mix of Russlaender and Kanadier blood. My father's side is full-on Kanadier, with Sommerfelder and Rudnerweide (EMMC) roots, while my mother's side brings in a Russlaender and Kanadier draft dodger from Kansas, both with General Conference roots. And yes, I am related to Conrad Stoesz through my grandmother Barbra.



Donovan Giesbrecht in the new vault area.

— Photo by Conrad Stoesz

Notes From The Board

Over the last few years, the Board has held its meetings in a number of different places, in order to become more aware of its Mennonite constituency and also to give MMHS visibility in different contexts. For its May 11th meeting, the Board met at Steinbach Bible College, where Abe Bergen from the College gave a much appreciated historical overview of the school's beginning and development as well as a quick tour of the building. In addition to hearing reports from the standing committees, the Board considered the role and status of the Finance committee after its one year of operation, received the 2004 audited financial statement, approved a protocol regarding cheque writing and signing authority, talked about questions surrounding the Mennonite History Essay Contest Plett Award, explored possible MMHS involvement at future Chair of Mennonite Studies symposiums at University of Winnipeg, and briefly discussed the processing and ownership of MMHS records at MHCA.

Submitted by Anna Ens, Secretary

Historic Sites and Monuments Committee

The committee is looking for help with documenting Mennonite historic sites in Manitoba by using a form and photos. A number of people have told committee members about long-forgotten cemeteries, and cemeteries threatened with demolition. Once-permanent landmarks such as grain elevators are now gone, and historic houses have been dismantled or gone up in flame. With information such as descriptions and photographs, these locations will become more widely known and valued. If a site should be destroyed, there will at least be information about it in our files. We see this job as a significant one.

What constitutes a historic site? Some sites, already marked, are obvious, such as the Schantz monument in Schantzenfeld, the Bergthaler Weisenamt building, and marked cemeteries and parks. Others are less obvious, such as unmarked cemeteries, locations of significant events, and homes of former leaders such as Klaas Heide. In general, it is better to have more sites marked and more information about these sites available rather than not enough. The committee is looking for one or two people to spearhead this project - people who will do some of the documentation and get others involved. As you can see, this is an important project, one with lasting impact. Would you like to be involved?

Submitted by Conrad Stoesz,
Board Representative

Publication and Marketing Committee

Publication and Marketing Committee activities include three projects:

1. We are involved in a joint publication venture with Canadian Mennonite University Press to publish John J. Friesen's manuscript "Mennonites in Manitoba".
2. A draft for processing MMHS publication copyright requests has been prepared, and should be ready for the consideration at the Fall Board meeting. This also includes some guidelines for producing Society publications.
3. The publication page on our MMHS web site is being reviewed with the aim of making the page more attractive to our visitors and, hopefully, increasing our publication sales.

Submitted by
Jake Peters, Chair

Finance Committee

Finance Committee met in May, and welcomed new committee member Tim Epp. Items under discussion include:

- 1) Investment policy
- 2) A policy regarding the depreciation of books. How can we represent the depreciation of our inventory in our financial statement? Auditor David Pankratz is helping us work something out.
- 3) How should the Plett awards be funded? Should the awards be increased?

Submitted by Donovan Giesbrecht, Treasurer

Oral History Committee

We continue to meet quarterly. Marg Neufeld and Katharine Martens continue with interviews. Other committee members provide feedback and guidance.

Submitted by Donovan Giesbrecht

Storm Damage at Neubergthal

by Frieda Klippenstein

Early in the morning on 19 June 2005, a wind storm struck the village of Neubergthal. A National Historic Site, the village is renowned for its housebarns and for its lovely century-old cottonwood trees that line both sides of the single village street. A large number of these trees came down at one time on Sunday morning. No one was injured, but property damages were significant. Damages caused both by wind and water were reported. The most significant damage was cause when a huge tree crashed through the roof of the barn on the Schmidt/Klippenstein housebarn, built in the late 1870s and recognized as the oldest barn in the village. Area residents are helping each other with cleanup, donating their time, chain saws and other equipment. The hard-hit village will recover with time and hard work. But for the volunteers on the Neubergthal Heritage Foundation, the storm interrupts the momentum of this year's heritage projects. And only time will tell whether the lovely canopy of trees that graced the village road will ever be recovered.

Book Review

Henry Unger, Martha Martens and Adolf Ens, eds.
**Sommerfeld Gemeinde Buch:
 Registers of the Church at West Lynne 1881-1935**
 (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2005),
 pb. 530 pp., \$32.00

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

Church registers have always been seen as most important documents for Mennonite congregational life, as it has been and as it is now. This volume, which includes the data from the first five congregational registers for the church body known as the Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, is no exception. The originals remain in the possession of this Gemeinde, as the group was called in the beginning, but their contents are now fully in the public domain. This church has taken strong ownership of the project, together with the MMHS, and this has been a very positive feature of its success.

The first of these registers emerged in 1881 under the direction of Franz Dueck, a minister in the Chortitzer (Bergthaler) Mennonite Church of the East Reserve. It was a forthright effort to find and bring together as one church community, all Mennonites of the West Reserve (first settled in 1875) interested in joining what the register called "Die Gemeinde zu West Lynne". That generally meant those who had recently moved to the region from the East Reserve and retained strong church and family ties there. However the register also has the names of a number of families who came with the influx of the Reinlaender from 1875 on, but did not wish to remain members of the body of Mennonites from south Russia's Chortitza and Fuerstenland, now calling itself the Reinlaender Mennoniten Gemeinde. This Mennonite church body had reconstituted itself on the West Reserve a year earlier under the leadership of Aeltester Johann Wiebe. The introduction to the published volume provides a helpful description of the relationship of the original registers to each other.

Several crucial aids to accessing the information are included as well, for example an index by surname of the husbands of families and an index by maiden name of the

wife in each family. A bibliography and ministerial list of the Sommerfelder Mennonite church as the West Lynne Gemeinde ultimately came to be called, are found here too. One would have found a detailed map showing the location of all West Reserve villages very useful too, especially since the residence localities of many of the families are mentioned in the family lists. Indeed a somewhat more extensive history (with a photo or three) of the early years of the West Reserve and the "Gemeinde zu West Lynne" would have been good to do. It would have required a few more pages, but providing a somewhat fuller context might well have been worth it.

We are given a very readable text (though some words and names are a bit compressed) and the book is well edited and published. Very careful checking and rechecking of the data took place before the book went to press. Cross-referencing to other church registers and giving data of dispersal, as to Didsbury, Rosthern, etc., are other positives here. With spelling of surnames one is sometimes uncertain: Did John Hilbrant spell his name that way when his father was Hildebrand (p.146), and Ana Banmann use only one "n" (p. 147)? What about Maria Buekert when the father is Jacob Bueckert (p.45)? In the entries for my own clan, I wonder about Sara (Klippenstein) when the mother was Sahra (Friesen) (p.390).

With the very wide dispersment of the West Lynne church descendants, as one might call them, through many further immigrations to western Canada, Mexico, Paraguay and elsewhere, the volume can look forward to a demanding market once the word gets out, and the book becomes widely available in book stores and elsewhere. This is a fine contribution for the study of Manitoba Mennonite family and personal heritage. One will now look forward to a similar volume for those who under Aeltester Johann Funk chose to leave the West Lynne group and strike out on their own as the Bergthaler Mennoniten Gemeinde, officially in existence from ca 1892 to ca 1972. But that is another story.

Reinlaender Gemeinde Buch update. . .

The first draft is nearing completion, and should be completed by this summer. However, the publication date is still uncertain. This will be a revised edition, and will therefore have more information than the original edition, which came out in 1994. As a tool, it will be most effective if used with volumes 2, 3, and 4 in the West Reserve Historical Series.

Letters to the Editor

Editor's Note: We appreciate the comments and letters. Please feel free to submit your comments and we will publish all letters that are relevant to the mandate of *Heritage Posting* to *Heritage Posting* Editors 1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6 or e-mail: editor@mmhs.org

State of the Society

by Gilbert G. Brandt

According to the calendar, we are fast approaching summer. As I write this, however, many of us are likely wondering what happened to our usual sunny weather. We hope that the many wonderful festivals and family events planned for this summer will be successful. Some of these events are connected to the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society—an agency that promotes a greater knowledge Manitoba's colourful history.



The Society cannot, of course, be involved in planning the host of events that fill our summer days. Nor would we want to be the organizer for each event. The involvement by many individuals is far too significant. What the Society prefers is information about the events. This can be done in several ways.

First, the organizers, whether of a family event or a community festival, are encouraged to inform the Society of the event. The best route is to contact the editors of Heritage Posting in advance of the festival. They then are able to inform the readers of the event.

Second, the Society seeks to provide liaison persons connected to the various agencies throughout Manitoba. These individuals help the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society keep a listening ear to the activities around Manitoba. These liaisons keep the MMHS attune to other agencies and their respective activities. They also are to bring the concerns and dreams of the MMHS to the various Manitoba agencies. Keeping informed helps the MMHS be a good "corporate" citizen within the many historical groups around the province.

How are you connected? We trust you are continuing as a member of the MMHS, but also as a member of the

Meeting Schedules

The following dates have been set for both Executive and Board meetings. Please take note. If anyone has items for discussion contact: editor@mmhs.org. The Executive and Board are here to serve all the members.

Executive Meetings

Sept 20
Nov 29
Jan 10, 2006
Feb 7

Board Meetings

Oct 20

Annual General Meeting (AGM) March 4, 2006

Scramble Answers

- | | |
|----------------|---------------|
| 1. Friesen | 7. Reimer |
| 2. Loewen | 8. Wiebe |
| 3. Kippenstein | 9. Peters |
| 4. Brandt | 10. Heinrichs |
| 5. Giesbrecht | 11. Regehr |
| 6. Froese | 12. Unger |
| 7. Reimer | 13. Redekopp |
| 8. Wiebe | 14. Redekopp |

Co-editors

Colleen Epp and Sarah Schwab

Editorial Committee

Elmer Heinrichs (chair), Gilbert Brandt, Colleen Epp, Bert Friesen, Marianne Janzen, Sarah Schwab

Layout

Ted Barg

The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Newsletter, Heritage Posting, welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members.

Correspondence can be mailed to the Heritage Posting editors, 1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3M 3Z6, or e-mailed to the editor at: editor@mmhs.org
Website: www.mmhs.org

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