

M *Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society*



NUMBER 5

NEWSLETTER

JUNE 1987

MMHS Annual Meeting & Banquet

— Doreen Martens

Victor Peters' vivid and often amusing recollections of his early teaching career in rural Manitoba were the highlight of the annual fund-raising dinner of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, held January 17 at Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

Peters, who graduated from Normal School in 1937, told of his first school in Lister East, on the fringe of the Mennonite East Reserve. He stayed that year with the Bzoveys, a Ukrainian family who owned the only home in the area big enough to accommodate a boarder. The road passed right under Peters' window, he recalled, because Wassy

Bzovey had mistakenly built the house on the road allowance.

"The traffic, however, was no problem. As far as I can remember there were only two cars in Lister East. One was owned by a Penner family, who were impoverished refugees from the West Reserve. Penner had cut a trail into the bush where he built his house. He had cut the trees low enough so that he could maneuver his Model T, which had a high chassis, right up to his doorsteps. Most people did not have horses either. They walked."

Mennonites were still confronted by a strongly Anglo-Saxon culture in those days, Peters said, recalling how an RCMP officer taking his application for citizenship had asked for signatures to prove the English-sounding "Peters" was not an assumed name. The man who vouched for him was Winkler police chief Jack Felde.

"I still don't know why he was called 'chief'," Peters said, "as Winkler had only one constable and Felde's main duty took place in spring when the flood floated away all the wooden sidewalks. It was Felde's duty to retrieve and replace them."

Peters' early fears that there would not be enough desks in the classroom to match the enrollment came to naught since, as he soon discovered, "in the fall and spring about one quarter of my pupils took turns digging Seneca roots, and in the winter many of them were setting snares. The Seneca roots were sold in Winnipeg, and the rabbits that were caught were either for food at home or were sold to fox-farms. This provided practically the only cash-flow in the local economy."

Peters' second school was in Landmark, which offered him a \$10. raise from his former \$55. per month salary. Everything went well until the first board meeting, when he was abruptly asked by its chairman, C.K. Plett, "Du best doch nijch en Russlenda?"

When he admitted that he was indeed a newcomer to Manitoba from Russia, Plett explained the problem that posed for the board. It turned out that the last two teachers had used excessive corporal punishment.

"Since both of them had been 'Russlenda', they had passed a resolution not to engage one in the future. I had not used the strap in Lister, nor so far in Landmark. . . . Plett was confused what course to follow, when wise and bearded Abram Penner came up with a solution. 'The parents like

Peters,' he said. 'It will take at least until Christmas until many will find out, and by that time they won't mind.' This satisfied the other two board members, and in the next four years of my stay in Landmark the issue was never raised again."

During the annual meeting that preceded the
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Upcoming Events

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| July 4 | In Search of the Renewal , the history of the EMMC authored by Jack Heppner will be released in Bergfeld, Manitoba. |
| May-August | Prof. Ted Regier will be researching for volume three of the MENNONITES IN CANADA series. Writing of the volume is to commence next summer. |
| September | Mennonite Books Catalogue to be published. |
| October | MMHS Board Meeting in Altona |
| October | Prof. Abram Friesen of California will speak at the University of Winnipeg on his work on a biography of Menno Simons. |
| October | Kleine Gemeinde History Symposium II covering developments in theology, church structure, missions, education and geographic dispersement from 1920 to 1987. |
| October 27
7:30 p.m. | West Reserve Village Seminar to be held in the Rhineland Hall. |
| December | Look for MMHS Newsletter #6 |



Carol Thiessen, a grade 12 student at the Steinbach Bible College has been awarded the MMHS Genealogical Research Prize for High School Students. The prize of \$100.00 was issued to Miss Thiessen at the SBC graduation exercises on June 28. The prize paper was based on the Thiessen family which, as part of the Kleine Gemeinde, moved to Nebraska in the 1870s and then to Blumenort, Manitoba in 1889. The genealogical paper was written as an option to fulfill the requirements of a Grade 12 Mennonite History course taught by Mr. Henry Fast.

East Reserve Villages Symposium

— Dennis Stoesz

Some 35 people recently gathered at the Niverville Chortitzer Church, on April 28, 1987, to hear local historians talk about six East Reserve villages: Reichenbach, Vollwerk, Chortitz, Osterwick, Hochfeld and Hochstadt. Featured on the program sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society were Orlando Hiebert, Peter Wiebe, Peter Peters, Henry Fast and John Dyck. While some farmers were making use of the lovely Tuesday evening to plant their fields outside, this group was inside enjoying historical accounts of those fields where villages once stood.

Reverend Wilhelm Rempel, of the Niverville Church, opened the evening. He said that a look at some of these old diaries and village documents builds us up in the faith. We can see God at work in our forefathers. He then read passages from Psalm 103 and 104, and led in prayer. Diedrich F. Wiebe, of Ste. Anne, led the congregation in singing "Faith of Our Fathers."

Reichenbach and Vollwerk

The first speaker, John Dyck of Winnipeg, concluded from his research that the many Peters families were the mainstay of Reichenbach and Vollwerk in the early years. Three families, Cornelius Peters, son Peter Peters, and son-in-law John Rempel, founded Reichenbach in 1875, after several other families, Lempyk, Hoepfner and Dyck, had left. Other families in the village included Franz Sawatsky, Heinrich Hiebert and his son, and Jacob Funk.

In 1879, 27 children between the ages of six and 14 were registered in the government school. This was the third highest in the East Reserve for that year. In 1884, the diphtheria epidemic claimed the lives of ten children. Today only mounds mark basements of houses which were located in Reichenbach.

The three families in Vollwerk around 1876 was Oberschulz Jacob Peters and his two sons, Jacob and Peter. It seems that some of the families were quite well to do, with fire insurance rates as high as \$1,780. on an individual property; others had \$275. Dyck has been working on the biography of Oberschulz Jacob Peters, which should be out in fall.

Chortitz (Randolph)

The second speaker, Orlando Hiebert, a local farmer at Randolph (originally Chortitz), explained the evolution of the village of Chortitz from its founding in 1875 to the present. He had interviewed many people and also brought with him a map of the village and homestead diagrams of the area. The village was established by 12 families, among them Elder Gerhard Wiebe. There were a number of Wiebe families in Chortitz through the years, Gerhard, Diedrich D., Henry D., John D., Jacob D., and Peter D. Wiebe. Other families included Heinrich and Peter Klippenstein, A. Goertzen, J.S. Rempel, P. Giesbrecht, Jacob Penner and Jacob Stoesz.

The village had a wooden church building. The original building was probably moved to the David F. Doerksen farm at Eigenhof after a new one was built in 1896. The children went to Tannua for school for the first number of years until a school was built in Chortitz in 1890. Teachers included Died. Wiebe, J.S. Rempel, J.R. Funk, Peter S. Wiebe, George Wiebe, Peter S. Guenther, and



Speakers who shared their research on six East Reserve villages, from left to right: Peter Peters, Peter D. Wiebe, Henry Fast, Chairperson Reverend Wilhelm Rempel, Orlando Hiebert and John Dyck. The villages were Reichenbach, Vollwerk, Chortitz, Osterwick, Hochfeld and Hochstadt. The meeting was held at the Niverville Chortitzer Mennonite Church on April 28, 1987, and sponsored by the MMHS.

Peter J.B. Reimer.

The Hanover Municipal government was based here from 1917-26 and at least two municipal secretaries lived in the village, Peter Klippenstein and J.S. Rempel. Rempel also operated a bank in the village. The village had a post office by 1884 and a store by about 1915. The village remained unchanged until the move to Paraguay in the 1920s, although not that many moved there from Chortitz. Some significant events in the village were the 1918 flu epidemic and the many violent thunderstorms which seem to have hit this village.

Hiebert was not sure the village disintegrated since there are some 16 residences in the area. There is also a post office, repair garage and church on the village site.

Osterwick

Peter Wiebe, of New Bothwell, was the third speaker. The average size of Osterwick was about eight families from 1881-1922, and the village included sections 25, and 34-36, of T7, R4E. It was located between Provincial Road #311 and Crown Valley Road. An 1883 tax assessment listed 116 cultivated acres and over 1,000 acres in pasture, \$698. worth of buildings, 10 horses, 16 oxen, etc. Many of the families were related. Names on an 1891 tax roll included Cornelius T. Friesen, Peter Friesen, Jacob Loewen, Abram Friesen, Julius Toews, widow Friesen and Isaak Funk. Prominent people in the village included Reverend C.B. Friesen and Waisenam administrator, C.T. Friesen.

An official village agreement was drawn up in February 1894 because of land ownership problems. It ensured the continuation of the village system. In 1922 another agreement was signed, which nullified the 1894 agreement; this marked the end of the village. There was a private school in Osterwick which continued after 1919 when the public school of Arran was erected. The private school later became a Saturday school and then discontinued. A well-marked cairn marks the site of the village today, and 41 people are mentioned on it.

Hochfeld

The fourth speaker, Peter Peters, a teacher living in Mitchell, shared his information on the village of Hochfeld. It seemed to Peters that half of the people in this village were related to him in some way or another. It was located two miles east of Provincial Road #216 and 311, and one-half mile southeast. It was organized in 1874 and had 18 inhabitants, 63 cows, and a cheese factory by 1883. It also had a store, operated by Johan Krause.

Peters had a map of the 16 households of Hochfeld in the early 1900s (in order): Heinrich Falk, Reverend David Friesen, Aaron Schultz, Peter Harder, Gerhard L. Kehler, Gerhard Kehler,

Peter Gerbrandt, Mrs. Jacob Kehler, school, Bernhard Wiebes, Peter Hieberts, Peter Doerksens, Reverend Heinrich Friesen and Johan Hieberts. On the south side of the village was Johan Ungers, a cheese factory, and a house for the cattle herder.

Significant events in the village included the 1919-20 diphtheria epidemic, where about 70 people died, and the exodus to Paraguay in 1927. Only a cemetery indicates the village site today.

Hochstadt

The final speaker, Henry Fast, a teacher at Steinbach Bible College, spoke on the village of Hochstadt. This was a Kleine Gemeinde village, as compared with the Bergthaler villages mentioned above. The village land was located in sections 3, 4 and 9 or T6, R5E. It seems that in the early years the village was also referred to as Gnadenort. It was not a large village with about four families in it in 1876-78. It had a post office by 1884, with Peter Loewen as postmaster, a store by 1888, with Cornelius Giesbrecht running it, a cheese factory by 1893, and a cement and gravel factory by 1898.

Hochstadt had a school, and the teachers included a Mr. Toews and an Otto Hansen who taught in 1892. The school was located on section 4, and later on section 9. The Church of God in Christ, Mennonite (Holdeman) met in private homes in Hochstadt, and had a new church built there in 1907. The church moved to Kleefeld in 1917, when many Holdeman moved to Alberta. Very little is left of the original village today, and the old cemetery is moving into the gravel pit.

Jacob Fehr, of Plum Coulee and member of the Local History Committee (MMHS), gave the closing to the program and led the congregation in a final song. The evening was sponsored by the MMHS, with particular leadership coming from Delbert Plett, Steinbach. The program was hosted by the Niverville Chortitzer Church and they also served coffee and cookies at intermission.

Researching East Reserve villages

Villages were the mainstay of Mennonite life from about 1874 to the early 1900s. After that the Mennonite community went through many changes, and most of the village sites are no longer marked or recognizable. All five speakers at this meeting added to an understanding of the early village as well as the changes which have taken place in those communities. A lot of the information came from sources such as tax rolls, homestead diagrams, and personal recollections. Much of this research material needs to be put into a book on East Reserve villages and communities, with accompanying maps.

Before this symposium, only a few of the approximately 40 villages on the East Reserve have received major attention: for example, Steinbach,

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East Reserve

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Grunthal and Blumenort. Three persons who have contributed a lot to the research of Mennonite villages are John H. Warkentin, E.K. Francis and John C. Reimer, but more information on individual villages is needed.

If you know anything more about the villages mentioned, the speakers would be more than happy to hear from you: John Dyck, 48 Coral Crescent, Winnipeg, R2G 1V7; Orlando Hiebert, Box 8, Tourond, R0A 2G0; Peter D. Wiebe, Box 102, New Bothwell, R0A 1C0; Peter Peters, Box 278, Kleefeld, R0A 0V0; and Henry Fast, Box 378, Steinbach, R0A 2A0. This evening was tape recorded and can be ordered from Reverend Wilhelm Rempel, Box 367, Niverville, R0A 1E0.

If you want to keep posted on the various events sponsored by the MMHS, please mail your \$10 membership fee and address to Jacob Rempel, 76 Mattinee Bay, Winnipeg, R2G 1X8. Plans are to have a fall meeting devoted to the West Reserve villages.

(Note: The author takes responsibility for all errors in spellings, dates and information which may have occurred upon writing this article.)

MMHS Annual Meeting

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dinner, society president Adolf Ens paid tribute to several who have made a meaningful impact on Mennonite thought and who passed away during 1986: Gerhard Lorenz, Frank H. Epp and Henry Wiebe.

He also expressed appreciation to departing board members Margaret Kroeker, John Dyck and Ed Schellenberg, as well as to outgoing chairman Delbert Plett. Plett reflected on his years of involvement in the society and emphasized the importance of local history projects, expressing his hope that more such projects would be encouraged in the future.

Elected to the board were: Anne Unruh, Bill Schroeder, Harry Loewen, Lawrence Klippenstein, Adolf Ens and Jacob Rempel, all of Winnipeg, Brian Petkau (Altona), Wilmer Penner and Doreen Klassen (Steinbach), Royden Loewen (Blumenort), and Henry G. Ens (Reinland).

Members present later voted to send a letter of appreciation to D.W. Friesen and Sons printers for their fine work and generous donation of \$13,750. toward the publishing costs of Volume II of the Arnold Dyck series.

Gratitude was also expressed to Susan Froese and Karin Dirks, who have given much time to maintaining the Mennonite Book Club. It was announced that a new steering committee composed of Roy Vogt, Victor Doerksen and Ken Reddig will work together with Froese, Dirks and Jacob Rempel in building up this service.

Gerhard Ens informed members that money left over from the monument project at the Steinbach museum will be used for landscaping around the monument as well as for a bilingual brochure explaining its background.

The budget for 1987 was presented and received, with one question being raised about an accumulating surplus that might eventually present problems for the society's charitable status. One item that received broad attention was the possible use of Heritage Funds derived from lotteries. Several members expressed their misgivings about using such grants, and George Epp mentioned a survey that had shown strong church opposition to lotteries. The society's finance committee plans to study the issue further.

Committees At Work

The **Executive Committee** reports that it is seeking a closer working relationship with the *Journal of Mennonite Studies* and will seek official representation on the JMS board. It is also reported that MMHS Vice-President, Dr. Victor Doerksen, will be meeting with the provincial Minister of Culture, Judy Wasylicia-Leis to discuss criteria for funding Mennonite projects.

The **Research, Scholarship and Publicity Committee** chairman, Victor Doerksen, reports that the Arnold Dyck Project is on schedule, with volume three nearing completion. Al Reimer has put in several years of hard work on the two Low German volumes. He is also willing to go on the road promoting this edition along with his novel, with trips to central and western USA planned as well as BC and possibly Ontario. The editors are also at work on volume four.

The **RS&P Committee** also reports that an agreement with CMBC publications has been reached on the translation of the ECHO series of books. Translators have been lined up for most of the 14 volumes and several translations are seriously underway. The editorial committee will meet soon to arrive at some general guidelines for editing and for the make-up of the books.

The Committee is also considering the publication in the future of biographical work featuring early Manitoba Mennonite leaders.

The **Mennonite Books Committee** reports that the name of the Mennonite Book Club has been changed to Mennonite Books and that this name has been registered with the government. It also reports that sales of books have been relatively brisk. The months of February and March saw sales in the range of \$1,600. for each month. Since the office is open only one day a week, this represents a significant total of books sold.

Lawrence Klippenstein of the **Membership and Publicity Committee** reports that present (April, 1987) membership stands at 167. Publicity of the MMHS has been undertaken via reports in the CARILLON NEWS and RED RIVER ECHO; brochures being placed at the museum; and the publication of a biannual newsletter.

The **Genealogy and Family History Committee** reports that it is now well organized with a central committee overlooking the activities of three regional (Winnipeg, West Reserve and East Reserve) committees. Each of the regional bodies hosted a genealogical workshop this spring.

MMHS treasurer, Jacob Rempel, reports that as of April 1987 the society had a balance of \$11,454. During the past year it had expenses of \$3,842. of which the Isaac Mueller Project was the largest recipient.

Arts and Interdisciplinary Committee chairman, Doreen Klassen, has announced that the **Arts and Interdisciplinary Committee** has coopted the Winnipeg Creative Writers' Support Group which is planning a writer's conference this fall. The Arts Committee is continuing to plan for a second music composer's competition.

Ted Friesen reports that the **World Conference**

Liaison Committee is considering the publication of three books; a photo guide on Canadian Mennonites, a tour guide Manitoba Mennonite sites and a short history of the Mennonites in Canada.

The **Local History and Historic Sites Committee** chairman Delbert Plett, reports that the committee has received a \$4,200. Ethnocultural Heritage Grant to fund John Dyck's research for the Isaac Mueller book.

Dr. George Epp of the **Mennonite Monument Committee** reports that the committee is undertaking a few auxiliary projects in the next year or two. They include benches for monument visitors and a pamphlet describing the monument.

Steinbach Genealogy committee hosts meeting

About 25 people gathered at the Steinach Regional Secondary School library Thursday to hear four speakers on the general topic, "Sources of Genealogical Research."

This was the first public meeting organized by the newly-formed Steinbach Regional Genealogy Committee.

John Bestvater, a member of an editorial team publishing a family history book *The Family of Abram P. Martens* (1875-1985) discussed sources, procedures, problems and joys of preparing and publishing their family history book.

Nettie Neufeld spoke from the vantage point of Berghalers (including Sommerfelders, Chortitzers, etc.) on genealogical sources available for researchers of similar background.

Henry Fast offered a list of sources available for genealogy-interested persons of Evangelical Mennonite Conference background. He related numerous experiences that made the hours he had spent in research worthwhile and rewarding.

Peter Goertzen, manager of the Mennonite Village Museum, of Old Colony background, referred to many personal highlights and sources of information in the search for his 'roots' and relatives.

Several members of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society were in attendance to support and encourage the local genealogy committee. Members serving on the Steinbach Regional Genealogy Committee are chairman Al Hamm, secretary Nettie Neufeld, Carol Janzen and Ed Schellenberg.



Sketch by Arnold Dyck

Organizational Chart Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society 1987



Gemeinschaft at MMHS Annual Banquet

A. Executive Committee:

Ken Reddig, President; Victor Doerksen, Vice-President; Doreen Klassen, Secretary; Jacob Rempel, Treasurer; Adolf Ens, Board Chairman.

B. Operating Committees:

1. **Membership and Publicity** - Lawrence Klippenstein, Royden Loewen, Doreen Martens, Jacob Rempel

2. **Finance Committee** - Ted Friesen, Ken Reddig, John Dyck, Delbert Plett, Jacob Rempel
3. **Nominating** - to be appointed by the executive committee
4. **Program Committee** - Wilmer Penner, Lawrence Klippenstein, Adolf Ens, Henry K. Friesen

C. Standing Committees:

1. **Arts and Interdisciplinary** - Doreen Klassen
2. **Local History and Historic Sites** - Delbert Plett
3. **Research, Scholarship and Publication** - Victor Doerksen
4. **Education and Resources** - Allan Dueck, Henry Ens
5. **Genealogy and Family History** - John Dyck, Margaret Kroeker, Ann Unrau, Al Hamm

D. Special Projects Committees:

1. **Mennonite Monument Committee** - G.K. Epp, Harry Loewen, Jacob Rempel, Gerhard Ens
2. **Mennonite Book Club** - Ken Reddig, Roy Vogt, Victor Doerksen
3. **Arnold Dyck Project** - Victor Doerksen, Harry Loewen, Ted Friesen, Roy Vogt, Al Reimer
4. **Mennonite World Conference Liaison** - Ted Friesen, Ken Reddig, Adolf Ens

E. MMHS Representatives:

1. Mennonite Historical Society of Canada: Ted Friesen
2. Manitoba Historical Society: Adolf Ens
3. Manitoba Intercultural Council: Bill Schroeder

MMHS Newsletter
600 Shaftesbury Ave.
Winnipeg, Manitoba



HENRY THIESSEN
1 REINHARD PL
WINNIPEG, MB

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