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MMHS AGM Forms Centrepiece for MHV History Day

by Lawrence Klippenstein and Adolf Ens

April 18 was a big day of historical discussions and community building for Manitoba Mennonites gathered at the Heritage Village in Steinbach. Exhibits, presentations of various kinds, and a delicious lunch provided something for everyone at the all-day event. The annual meeting of MMHS added to the festivities with a special recognition of the late David K. Schellenberg of Steinbach.

A highlight of the day were the insightful reflections of Ralph Friesen (formerly Steinbach, now of Nelson, B.C.), who has just finished writing a history of the early years of his home village. *Between Earth and Sky: Steinbach, the first 50 Years* will be available later this summer. Friesen has systematically combed through thousands of early documents and newspaper items, gleaning from them not only data for the framework of his story, but also glimpses of the everyday lives of the people, his ancestors and the forebears of many of his listeners.

A second presentation by Orlando Hiebert, active member of the EastMenn Historical Committee, showed the impact of drainage projects on the development of settlements on the East Reserve. It is generally known that large portions of the Reserve were swamp lands when Mennonites first settled there in the 1870s. Hiebert's maps showed graphically how marginal and impossible lands were prepared for productive farming.

Standing committee reports to the Annual Meeting surveyed the past year's work in helpful detail. Flood waters discouraged the attendance of many western MMHS members, making for a rather small contingent at the AGM. Membership stands at 229, but many still need to renew for 2009. Plans are in place for having a short 20-page history of the Society published this year.

Elections brought several new (and a few former) members to the board. The subsequent resignation of one leaves a total of 15, as follows:

Continuing (8): Conrad Stoesz, Bert Friesen, Eleanor Chornoboy, Abe Ens, Evelyn Friesen, Lawrence Klippenstein, Alf Redekopp, Marianne Janzen.

Re-elected (1): Hans Werner.

New (6): Edwin Hoepfner, Mary Neufeld, Maria Lodge, and Adolf Ens of Winnipeg; Garry Enns, Aubigny; Loren Koehler, Steinbach.



Royden Loewen giving special recognition to the late David K. Schellenberg for his contribution to East Reserve historical work. Receiving the plaque is son Gordon Schellenberg, with siblings Arlene Riediger and Gary Schellenberg looking on. — Photo by Bert Friesen

Aerial Photo Project of the East Reserve

by Ernest N. Braun

One of the long-range goals of EastMenn Historical Committee is the publication of an enhanced East Reserve Atlas, modeled loosely on the earlier Rempel and Harms *Atlas of the Original Villages and Homesteaders of the East Reserve, Manitoba*, 1988, but expanded to include other layers of geographic, demographic, and infrastructure information. In the interests of this goal, EHC has undertaken an aerial photo project, a project proposing to acquire photographic and digital copies of the original aerial photos of Hanover Municipality, taken in about 1946 and available from Manitoba Conservation in Winnipeg. The Plett Foundation has approved a grant of \$6,000 to be applied towards this project. Further work is pending to find a systematic way of extracting the correct photos from the massive archive of photographs organized unfortunately on flight lines instead of section, township and range. The value of the project lies in the snap-shot provided of the East Reserve landscape at a point in time, a snap-shot that will be useful for verification of data collected for the atlas, and, of course, for future research of the area.

The EastMenn Historical Committee works as a Committee under the MMHS, focussing its attention on the former East Reserve. Ernest Braun is secretary of the committee.

Altona Historians 10th Annual Sessions

from reports by Elmer Heinrichs

Several dozen local historians met in March and April to complete a decade of research and reporting on a wide range of topics of interest to those involved. This year's sessions were opened by Lawrence Klippenstein's paper on "Bergthalers" moving to the West Reserve about 1880. The group went on to explore the East Reserve background of the newcomers and the impact of their relocation with Ernie Braun of Niverville. Joe and Ken Braun of Altona described the early story of the Hochstadt and Kleinstadt communities, founded by families from the East Reserve.

Hochstadt was featured at a 2007 commemoration event in Altona when, among other presentations, the Bergthaler church discussed its beginnings at Hochstadt 125 years ago. The village was founded in 1880 but disbanded already in 1885 as homesteaders moved to their individual farm holding. It had been noted by Ernie Braun that at least five of the early homesteading families of Hochstadt came from the village of Friedrichsthal in the Bergthaler colony of south Russia (later Ukraine) via Friedrichsthal on the East Reserve.

Other presenters at the sessions included John J. Friesen of Canadian Mennonite University providing a survey of Russian history from Catharine the Great to the present, noting events impacting Mennonites; Serge Kranke, formerly Soviet Union, now of Altona, recalling his life in Grishonka (Gnadenthal), Siberia; and Roland Sawatzky, curator at Mennonite Heritage Village, Steinbach, discussing house-barns which were very common in Mennonite villages both in Russia and Canada.

Correction:

The "Bethel Heritage Park" news report (December 2008) said in part that the two cairns placed there were "on in memory of the Jewish community and the other in memory of Mennonite pioneers in the area." It should read: "and the other *in memory of the Germanic pioneers in the area.*" We regret the error and thank Grace Schellenberg of the Winkler Heritage Society for drawing it to our attention.

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The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society newsletter, *Heritage Posting*, welcomes letters, reports and historical notes to society members and other readers.

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Mennonite Heritage Village News

by Barry Dyck

My introduction as new executive director at MHV struck home with the challenge of fixing a badly leaking roof on the first day of my job in February. I was quickly introduced as well to grant application deadlines, and needing to hire some new staff as quickly as possible.

Immediately I noticed that MHV has a great group of staff and volunteers who are absolutely essential to the successful operation of this corporation. We also have a substantial infrastructure here with significant potential. We must now work hard to find the right combination of vision, passion, leadership and resources – human and financial.

Our AGM on March 24 had a mood of optimism as the meeting assessed the projects of 2008, and the new business year got underway. Program director Anne Toews reported the hosting of about 4,500 children in the education program and arranging of several dozen adult tours during the 2008 period. The MHV Auxiliary raised \$45,000 through various fund raising projects. Touch of Christmas in December for the first time featured a living nativity which proved to be of interest to several hundred visitors during the two days of celebration.

Financially a challenge continues. MHV will look for just under \$800,000 to run its program in 2009. The hiring of John Milinkovic of Steinbach as half-time fund raiser is viewed as crucial in bringing in needed donations and dealing with the problem of annual short-falls which has not yet been fully overcome.

It was a privilege to host the annual Family Roots Day on April 18. Many new contacts and sharing of programs by several related historical organizations will augment the work which the museum hopes to do in the year ahead.

Glencross: 40th Anniversary of Community Centre. The celebration on the afternoon of July 19 will feature the official launch of *Remembering Glencross: Connecting Past – Present – Future*, compiled and edited by Mavis Dyck. Friends and relatives from outside of the community are invited to participate in the picnic lunch, visiting and games. The book launch is scheduled for 3:30 pm.

Begun as an English-Scottish-Irish settlement, Mennonites arrived in 1876 and helped to develop a unique community. The book includes much detailed information about settlers, school (1878–1969), church, and cemeteries as well as many photographs. A map for self-guided tours will be available.

Take Road 28 (First Street in Morden) 6 miles south and watch for the cairn on your left.





The safe purchased by the Hochfeld Waisenamt in 1912 was taken to Mexico by the Waisenamt manager during the emigration of the early 1920s. While it is no longer in use it is still functional, as Bruce discovered when he accidentally ran across the combination in the original manifest from the company.

— Photo by Bruce Wiebe, Hochfeld Waisenamt Collection, MHC Archives (Winnipeg)

More Records from Mexico Available

Bruce Wiebe, Winkler, successfully completed a trip to Mexico to copy more records relevant to Manitoba West Reserve Mennonites. Using good electronic equipment, he photographed more than 19,000 pages of information from the Hochfeld Waisenamt records. The current *Waisenvorsteher* of Manitoba Colony in Chihuahua State, Heinrich Banman of Kronsthal and Jacob Peters of Waldheim, were very cooperative in allowing Wiebe to film the books in their custody.

Some of the entries in *Waisenamt* records date back to Fuerstenland Colony in Russia in addition to covering the entire period in Canada. Much family information is found in the three main types of *Waisenamt* books.

Teilungskontrakte give detailed information on a family's economic assets, since these have to be assessed whenever one spouse of a family dies. The *Schuld* (debt) and *Kapital* (credit) books provide a paper trail of the transfer of funds, not only between a family and the Waisenamt itself, but also between member families who transfer credit between themselves.

Wiebe's project of retrieving copies of these valuable primary source documents was funded by a grant from the Plett Foundation. Copies of the records, in DVD form, can be consulted at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg. The Plett Foundation office, in care of Professor Hans Werner at the University of Winnipeg, also has a set of these discs.

Settlers of the East Reserve Now In Orbit

by Lawrence Klippenstein

The May 18 book launch at Mennonite Heritage Village this year may not have topped the Tractor Show. But it was definitely an "event" and *Settlers of the East Reserve: Moving In-Moving Out-Staying* is now out there at last. Fifty or more persons had arrived to see it happen with editors Adolf Ens, Ernest Braun and Henry Fast there to ensure the take-off and a steady course.

The slight chill and sometimes real gusts of wind with some rain, would not dampen the spirit of the 1000 Victoria Day visitors who were checking out an interesting all-day "Spring on the Farm" program at MHV. It certainly did not deter the launchers from dedicating the 20-chapter 328-page volume to John Dyck and Delbert Plett who had well begun the volume before their passing.

Nine essays on the East Reserve: Its People and Institutions (including the first published piece on the *Brottschuld* registers), three new village histories (Friedrichsthal, Rosengard, Schoenwiese), four biographies (related to Jacob T. Wiebe, Jacob D. Wiebe, Heinrich R. Rempel and Johann M. Koop), and a family history (Erdmann Penner notes) and three stories of moves away from the area (to Dakota, the West Reserve and Paraguay) form a wide-ranging set of topics not given the light of day this way before.

This is the fourth volume of the East Reserve Historical series all carried by the Mennonite Heritage Centre, the museum bookstore, and other outlets in southern Manitoba. This new source will fill in a lot of gaps that had remained with the already rich contents of the earlier three titles.

Photo Inventory of Historic Markers and Plaques

Over the years many groups, families and organizations have erected historic markers to commemorate events, persons, buildings or communities significant in Mennonite history. Some of these are widely known and have been publicized at various occasions; e.g. Cairn Corner near Gretna. Others are almost completely forgotten. The Historic Sites and Monuments Committee (in cooperation with the Local History Committee) is working to remedy this situation by creating a photo inventory of such markers.

The initial focus of this initiative is on the former West Reserve. Volunteers are needed to help create this inventory. Anyone with a digital camera and some spare time is invited to help by offering to gather photos and data for a township or smaller area. The committee will provide instructions and a few sample pages. Contact Abe E. Ens (abeens@mts.net), Winkler, or Bert Friesen (bfrie@mts.net), Winnipeg, for further information and selecting an area.

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Peter Rempel, ed., *85 Jahre Mennoniten in Mexiko* (Cuauhtemoc, Chihuahua: Museo y Centro Cultural Menonita, 2007), is a 70-page, 8.5 x 11 anniversary publication (magazine or booklet) published on the occasion of the 85th anniversary of the Canadian Mennonite immigration to Mexico in the 1920s. The text, basically in German, focuses on the decade since the 75th anniversary. All photographs (except for older archival ones), some maps, and all advertising (26 pages) are in full colour. The articles include extended reports on new developments among Mennonites in Mexico and beyond, as well as on historical and educational themes.

Ever since E.K. Frances published his *In Search of Utopia* in the 1950s, the "diaries" of Peter A. Elias have been cited as source material for the early years of Mennonite life in Manitoba, particularly among the Reinländer (Old Colony) in the western portion of the West Reserve. Copies of various versions of the Elias memoirs (they are recollections rather than diary entries) have been available in some of the Manitoba archives for some time. Fragments have been published, some in English translation.

Now a great-grandson, Abe Elias, has published a much larger amount of the Elias memoirs as *Eine Journal von Peter Elias 1843–1925*. Part 2 of this volume (155 pages) consists of a German transcription of one of the longer memoirs. Part 1 (57 pages) is an English version of lengthy excerpts of the memoir as translated by William J. Kehler, Altona, in 1990. The way in which Elias' narration of certain events is abridged in the translation frequently leaves only the outline of the story without the author's broader theological reflection on their impact of the events for the church and community. Part 3 consists of photographs of the Peter P. Elias (son of Peter A.) extended family and some of his poetry.

The just published (2009) *Ons ieeschtet Wieedabuak* is in fact the first Low German dictionary that is fully in Low German. Earlier dictionaries provided English or High German equivalents of Low German words or explanations of their meaning in English or High German. This 450-page *Wieedabuak*, compiled and published by Ed. H. Zacharias, Winkler (ezachar@mts.net), is available for \$20. With over 17,000 words, including the entire vocabulary of the Low German Bible on which Zacharias served as one of the translators, this dictionary is also probably the most comprehensive in its coverage of the vocabulary in current use among *Kanadier* Mennonites. A number of Low German speakers claim that the spelling used in this

dictionary is the easiest to read. Scholars who have promoted earlier spellings are disappointed.

Isaias J. McCaffery, *Wi Leahre Plautdietsch: A Beginners Guide to Mennonite Low German* (Goessel, Kansas: Mennonite Heritage Museum, 2008), 166 pages, \$23.99. This trilingual (Low German, High German and English) volume is self-guiding learner's book, containing some Low German grammar and basic vocabulary in context sentences focussing on a number of typical situations: introductions and greetings, numbers and values, school and work, etc. The author tries to follow the Reuben Epp spelling system (1996) consistently (significantly different from the *Ieeschtet Wieedabuak* above). A few longer reading selections and some poetry near the end of the book allows the user to gauge her/his progress. A bibliography provides a useful selection of Low German resources. The author teaches at Independence Community College in Independence, Kansas.

Readers of the *Carillon* will be familiar with the recalled memories of Maria Falk Lodge published in its pages from time to time since the early 1990s. If they read them regularly, they will also have become quite familiar with the East Reserve community of Rosengard as she experienced it in the 1940s. Now she and her family have published some three dozen of these vignettes of life and people of her home community in one slim volume. *Tales from the Gravel Ridge* (Winnipeg: Maria Falk Lodge, 2008) contains 88 pages of her memories.

Many of the short chapters deal with experiences common to most of us who grew up in those years in rural Manitoba: playing in the woods, exploring along the creek, gardening, helping with the family laundry and similar necessary chores and simple joys. These snippets of memory generally evoke a sense of well-being and nostalgia – and a recognition that living in relative poverty in those years never seemed like it.

Other chapters deal with things more specific to the author's family, like owning the first car (1929 Essex), or to the community of Rosengard. Even there the reader will find parallels in their own experiences.

Rosengard is fortunate to have had keen observers and gifted writers to tell its stories. Falk's articles for the *The Carillon* were preceded in an earlier era by Derk Ginter's regular reports to the *Steinbach Post* under the heading "*Hochrückten Neuigkeiten*" (High Ridge News). Less accessible are the "Reflections and Recollections" of former Rosengarder, retired teacher and journalist William Schroeder, written in 1994 but still unpublished.