



Looking at Mental Health from a Broad Range of Perspectives

by Maria Lodge

On October 14 -16th Dr. Royden Loewen, Chair in Mennonite Studies, hosted the annual public conference at the University of Winnipeg. This year's theme was *Mennonites, Melancholy and Mental Health*.

Two aspects of this year's Conference were especially notable: the broad range of subjects considered by the various presenters and the age range of those presenting papers which easily bridged a three generation span.

The topics considered during the Conference, twenty-six in total, included a review of several literary works by Mennonite women. The influence of British Quakers on the treatment of mental illness, as well as the influence of the State, was explored. It quickly became apparent that British Quakers brought a spirit of compassion to this difficult subject, which regrettably was a long time coming within the context of the state in Western Canada.

The Conference further looked at mental illness in Europe both from the perspective of Anabaptist radicals and from the approach of Mennonites in Ukraine and various other parts of Russia, the latter focusing on Bethania Mental Hospital established in 1910 in the Chortitza Colony.

Some of the presentations concentrated on the experiences of specific individuals and their families, and others on the relationship between a person suffering from mental illness and the community as in Margaret Loewen Reimer's presentation "Murder, Suicide and Mental Illness in a Manitoba Mennonite Village, 1902."

The experiences of Mennonites from various faith perspectives were also considered with reference to "Old Order Mennonite Mental Health Care," and "The Meaning of Suffering and Mental Well-Being among Low German-speaking Mennonites," as well as the effects of the trauma of war.

An overview of the influence and effect of "Canadian Conscientious Objectors and the Mental Hospital, 1939-1945" was presented on Friday evening, as well as a paper "The Mennonite Mental Health Movement and the Wider Society, 1942-1971."

All presenters brought with them a sensitivity and passion for the topics they were bringing to the Conference. They ranged from students to academics at



Informal discussions - a vital part of the conference.

the height of their careers, to those who were in other professions, and included individuals in various stages of retirement who were speaking from a long history of engagement in various aspects of mental health subjects.

The tone throughout the conference was one of respect and compassion with regard to this sensitive and complicated subject matter. Some presenters related intensely personal and painful experiences, and it was apparent that they felt the environment provided them the freedom to do so.

While the majority in attendance came to the Conference from a Mennonite perspective, there were both presenters and attendees who did not fit into that category. From my observation it appeared that all felt welcome and at ease in that environment. The setting was welcoming and the refreshments provided during morning and afternoon breaks were much appreciated.

A selection of the papers presented will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *Journal in Mennonite Studies*, published annually by the Chair.

The Chair in Mennonite Studies at The University of Winnipeg was established in 1978 to give students an opportunity to study the rich heritage of the Mennonites and their contribution to society.

Mennonite Heritage Village Dedicates Historic Tombstone

by Maria Lodge

The dedication of a tombstone is a memorable event and provides an opportunity for recognition and commemoration of one or more individuals. It may also have the effect of creating awareness of important events by bringing certain historic connections and occasions into focus.

The dedication of the tombstone of Jacob David Reimer and Wilhelmine Agustine (Strauss) Reimer at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach, Manitoba on July 25, 2010, was such a

memorable event.

Jacob and Wilhelmine Reimer were among the early members of the Mennonite Brethren Church, and Jacob was one of its founding leaders. Wilhelmine, while not acknowledged as having an active role in its founding, nevertheless assumed such leadership roles when, during her husband's frequent travels, she made decisions to host meetings of the group in her home, even when doing so placed her at risk from those who were opposed to such gatherings. Wilhelmine also took a leadership role by inviting women to her home for prayer and for making items for the poor.

During a tour in Ukraine in 2006, Gert and Katherine Martens made a remarkable discovery in Oktaybreskoe. Although they had attempted during a previous trip to locate the village of Wiesenfeld, established by Gert's great-great-grandparents, Jacob and Wilhelmine Reimer, they had been unsuccessful in doing so. On the occasion of the 2006 trip, they were informed by some workmen that their neighbour had a tombstone. When their guide spoke with the man, he went to a wall, removed some planks, and revealed the tombstone located there. Nikolai, the farmer, had been told by his grandfather to look after it because he was a good friend to Jacob David Reimer. The man had obviously taken the request seriously, and when, many years ago, the cemetery had been converted into a grain field, he brought the stone to his yard to save it.

It seems to me the very fact that Nikolai was keeping the tombstone hidden is revelatory on several levels. Apparently he was concerned that it might be damaged, or possibly removed by others for their own purposes. It may be too that he feared serious repercussions for his actions and concluded that it was advisable to keep it out of sight. In any event, he obviously honoured his grandfather's wishes.

Descendants of Jacob David Reimer and Wilhelmine (Strauss) Reimer arranged for the tombstone to be brought to Canada, and today, after its long journey both in time and distance, it holds an important place at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach.



Altbergthal School Building Needs New Home

Some 30 years ago, a few alumni of the Altbergthal elementary school rescued its decaying building and moved it to the Rhineland Agricultural Society land in Altona. The goal was to develop some kind of program to promote historical understanding of aspects of Mennonite history.

Over the years since then the committee in charge of maintenance of the building (erected in 1904) and development of a program dwindled in size, leaving Lawrence and Ray Klippenstein to try to revive the process. A decision by the Town of Altona to demolish the building if nothing was done with it speeded up the process.

During the past year negotiations with interested parties in Horndean, Neubergthal, and the Altona area have to date not resulted in anything concrete. Some talks are still ongoing, but no definitive plan emerged as the Town's deadline for demolition approached.

Those factors prompted the MMHS Board at its September 20 meeting to discuss the issue at some length and then to pass a motion "that the MMHS reaffirm our continuing support of the restoration of the Altbergthal School and hope that the historical significance of the building can be preserved at an appropriate location in the area." Town council responded by granting a reprieve to June 30, 2011.

Board member Lawrence Klippenstein of Steinbach: lawrenceklippenstein@mts.net and Local History Committee member Joe Braun of Altona: owltree@snet.ca represent the Society in the new round of discussions to find a solution. Your comments can be made directly to either one of them.

President's Corner

by **Conrad Stoesz**

Guess what's new!

A while ago I was listening to the radio in my vehicle. I heard a well known radio program announce a new service now available thanks to new technology and their own creativity. "Call this number," the announcer said, "... and you will be enriched by an inspirational message from our pastor." The excited voice went on to say that you could sign up for a daily inspirational message sent to your hand held device.

As I heard this I smiled at this "new" and wonderful service. I thought of William I. Neufeld, a Mennonite Brethren pastor in Winnipeg, who had what he called, "dial a message." I don't know where he got the idea from or if he came up with it on his own. A person could call his number and hear a special inspirational message on an answering machine. This was 1970-1972 – almost 40 years ago!

The daily unique messages deal with a variety of topics, are encouraging in nature, and are about 1 minute in length. Many of the messages end with an invitation to leave contact information to receive further help, guidance, prayers, or materials.

Very few things in our world today are truly original ideas. Most of the ideas we have are modifications or an old idea in a new context. Our thoughts and ideas are based on past concepts. I don't mean to stifle creativity or to say we should not strive for brand new ideas and concepts. However we should not hold ourselves in too high regard. We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before us. Chances are they were not as primitive or backward as we sometimes think. They too had good ideas.



Family History Essay Contest Winner

Winnipeg, October 13, 2010. The Genealogy Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is pleased to announce the winner of the 2010 Henry E. Plett Memorial Award for writing a family history. The winner, **Morganna Abraham**, a Grade 11 student from Sanford Collegiate was recently honoured with this award. The essay which she submitted last April was entitled "Some Things (or People) Never Change." In her research she discovered that some of the characteristics of her five times great grandfather Deputy Jacob Hoepfner, helped her own understanding of herself and extended family. This annual essay contest, open to any Manitoba high school student, aims to promote and encourage research and writing in family history. Competition details can be found on the web at: www.mmhs.org/plett.htm.

Interim Editors – Adolf Ens, Loren Koehler, Maria Lodge

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

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Steinbach, MB R5G 2C9

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Website: www.mmhs.org

ISSN 1491-2325

**Next Board Meeting:
17 January 2011 on the
"East Reserve"**

Chortitz Mennonite Church Closes

by Lawrence Klippenstein

About 500 worshippers gathered on August 29 for the closing service of the Chortitz Mennonite Church located at Randolph, some miles west and north of Steinbach. Many of those present had been baptized and married in this building though no longer resident in the area. Some were there in deference to ancestors who had lived there and for whom this was the home church.

Congregational hymns, prayers and preaching made up the service. Among the speakers were Deacon Jacob Klassen, Minister Cornie Ginter, Jacob Doerksen and Ältester (Bishop) Frank Unrau. A large tent had been set up to seat the overflow worshippers, and for serving a meal after the service.

Chortitz was one of the first villages to be established by Bergthal families, and was always a main centre of worship and community activity for the large membership of Bergthaler, later called *Chortizer Mennonitengemeinde*. From the outset of settlement in the area in 1874, this fellowship of believers used over a dozen meeting places scattered among the thirty or more villages which they established on the East Reserve. Chortitz in the northern part of the Reserve and Grünthal in the southern sector, were the main meeting places for many years.

The first church building at Chortitz was erected in 1876-77 and is said to have had a thatched roof. The second building, used till present times, was constructed in 1896-97, making the building now closed more than a century old. The first two *Ältesten* in the *Gemeinde* were Gerhard

Wiebe of Chortitz who served from 1874 to 1882 and David Stoesz of Bergthal who succeeded him and served till 1903. The latter became quite involved in helping a large group of members who had moved 1878-82 to re-establish on the West Reserve, and in founding the West Lynne *Mennonitengemeinde* there. This new church soon divided to become the *Bergthaler Mennonitengemeinde*, led by Ältester Johann Funk and the *Sommerfelder Mennonitengemeinde* led by Ältester Abraham Doerksen.

A large community cemetery established at the beginning of community life in Chortitz is located to the south of the church building. It has recently been upgraded to improve the markers and the general appearance of the layout. It is assumed that the cemetery will retain its place indefinitely, of course, but the question of what will happen to the church building is now under discussion. Shall it remain where it is or be moved? What new uses can be found for it now that regular worship services have ended there?

A church building whether in use or not has a value in proclaiming something about the faithfulness and devotion to God of people who once met there as a Christian community. That is certainly true of the building here. Perhaps it will be possible to refurbish the building to keep that message clearly to the fore in the months and years to come. It has been an outpost for God's Good News, and one hopes it will not lose that function even in the years to come.



Chortitz Church decommissioning with tents set up to accommodate overflow.

— Photo by Karen Peters

Heritage Home Open For Tours: Ens Homestead Dedicated

by *Elmer Heinrichs*

A significant step in preserving the Mennonite history of southern Manitoba took place early last month in the village of Reinland south of Winkler. Some 150 to 180 people, sitting in the shade of ash and apple trees, witnessed the dedication ceremony of the 100-year-old Ens heritage homestead on August 8. It is the first municipal heritage site declared by the Rural Municipality of Stanley.

Adolf Ens presented a brief history of the West Reserve and spoke a prayer of dedication. In his remarks, Ens remembered the sense of community that existed in the Mennonite villages, including Reinland. Everybody knew their neighbours. They shared a faith that found expression in worship and mutual care. "They believed that God had led them here."

Abe Ens, the former owner of the homestead, spoke about the history of the heritage site. The original home was built by Isaak and Susanna Dueck soon after their arrival in the newly established village of Reinland in 1875.

In 1910, the Abram Rempel family, originally from the Halbstadt district, dismantled the home and constructed a new home - the present home. When the Rempel family

left Canada for Mexico in 1923, the property was purchased by the Gerhard G. and Margaretha Ens family.

During this second wave of immigration in the early 1920s, the Gerhard and Margaretha (Rempel) Ens (grandparents of Abe and Adolf) family, refugees/immigrants from the Ukraine, with son Heinrich and wife Helena, nee Redekopp, purchased the property. Gerhard and Margaretha, parents of Abe and Adolf, lived on this homestead until their passing in 1949 and 1955, respectively.

Abe and Helen Ens moved into the house in 1956, living together with a widowed aunt for a period of two years. They purchased the home in 1996, and in 2009 donated it to the Community Centre at Reinland Inc.

The unveiling of the official plaque was performed by Henry H. Enns and Marlin Froese. The inscription on the plaque, mounted on a large, smooth granite boulder, tells the story of the home and includes a quote from scripture: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name, make known among the people what he has done." Isaiah 12:4. All guests were invited to tour the newly dedicated heritage homestead, now a museum.



Great-great-grandson Marlin Froese and Henry Enns (son of the co-purchaser of the land) unfurled a veil of old canvass grain bags bearing owner Gerhard Ens of Reinland's imprint.

— Hinz PhotoMoments



Linden school reunion participants celebrate and reminisce.

Linden School Re-union

by Ken Plett

On July 9th and 10th, 2010, some 150 former students gathered to celebrate and commemorate their experience at Linden Elementary School over the years of its existence. Attendees, some in their 90s, came from Ontario and all the western provinces, as well as California. Tears and much laughter characterized the event as many anecdotes and stories were shared. Former students (John Dyck, Edwin Plett, Myrtle Reimer), teachers (John Stoesz, John G. Reimer, Harvey Plett) and a board member (Arnold Reimer), made presentations, and there were the usual skits and songs, as well as a performance by the *Heischraje*. The reunion was the "brain child" of Warren Kroeker, who chaired the planning committee.

When Mennonites came to Manitoba in 1874 they settled on the East Reserve, currently the R.M. of Hanover. The area known as Prairie Rose lay north of the Reserve and was primarily used for haying as it was swampy land and not considered that good for farming. Originally it was called the *Brittestap*, (half breed field). However, no Métis were living there when scarcity of land on the East Reserve pushed settlers into this region. From 1906 to the early 20s, a number of Mennonite families moved in and began to develop the area.

A Kleingemeinde minister, Henry R. Reimer, located to this new settlement in 1920 and was instrumental in the formation of schools. On July 5th, 1920 the Linden School District, No. 2051, was established. Rev. Reimer taught

there for six years when a new school was built approximately 2 miles west of the original location (corner of P.R. 210 and M.R. 26E), and Mr. Peter J.B. Reimer was hired as the teacher. Some 16 teachers subsequently taught at the school.

By the 1960s the school was crowded and an additional classroom was added. With the introduction of the Unitary Division in 1968 the small schools were closed and students transported to larger centers. Linden students were bussed to Landmark. After 1968, kindergarten to grade 2 was taught in Linden but in 1981 the school was closed, and the building sold and dismantled.

A plaque at the site and our memories are all that remain of the former Linden School. We acknowledge those who have gone before and give thanks for our educational heritage.

Book Review

This Hidden Thing — Dora Dueck

CMU Press 2010

A Review by John E. Martens

Dora Dueck is a captivating story-teller. Her characters are developed through thought-provoking, sometimes profoundly deep, narrative and dialogue, often terse and pithy. "You're not wanted" opens the tale of 19-year-old Maria Klassen, newly arrived immigrant from the Soviet Union, on a cold January 1927 morning. Maria, competent and stubborn as it appears all the Klassens were, has always been wanted, so this is a shock to her. But as the eldest daughter, she needs to help her family financially, so she does not take 'no' for an answer and her employment - where she is not wanted -- begins.

Dora sees to it that the reader remains engaged with Maria. At times we love Maria, at other times we may be angry with her, because of her willful stubbornness; but stay with us she does.

Maria may be a fictional character as a person, but she represents the universal world of immigrant women employed as domestics in well-to-do homes, often beginning employment knowing little or even nothing of their new country's language, as was the case for Maria.

To pique our interest, Dueck refers to establishments well known to Winnipeggers -- Redekop's Grocery, where Maria casually mentions that two of her brothers have acquired cottages at Victoria Beach, becoming among the first Mennonites to break into an exclusive English enclave; the Norvilla Hotel, where Peter Konrad, Maria's uncle, meets friends for coffee and sometimes stays to watch the girlie shows to help him review the female form; and the Mary-Martha home in Winnipeg's North End, a weekly haven for young Mennonite domestics, offering fellowship with peers as well as guidance and mentorship from the stern-looking, but wise 'Sister' Anna.

At the beginning of WWII, the German/English issue becomes controversial in the Klassen household. Maria's father remarks on the 'importance of Mennonites resisting integration and keeping up the German language.' Maria's brother Hans announces "Our real world is German." But Wilhelm, six years younger than Hans and the one who already has a reputation for asking too many questions, states, "With Canada in the war . . . against Germany, we should make every effort to speak English."

Maria's father disdains doubt and challenge to authority. To him, his son's questioning means he is wayward. And when Wilhelm changes his name to 'Bill' and enlists, his father's response is unrelenting. "Our church's position is, we don't bear arms." His disapproval pains Maria greatly. Since her mother died, Wilhelm has become her special mission, her love for her young brother "like a funnel . . . intensely focussed." She believes that if the "hidden thing in her life had any redeeming features at all, it would pour here, as a balm, into her brother. . ."

Thirty years later, Maria pays a visit to Bill's fiancée, Grace, and learns that Bill was not a gung-ho soldier -- that he was too "Mennonite" to fit that image. And that he was

not used to drinking, but when he drank too much, he spoke German! This brings to a head many of Maria's questions. Was Maria's father wrong when he thought his son too questioning and wayward? Had 'Bill' not dealt with hard issues of faith and conscience more deeply than his father had? And had he paid too dear a price for his questions?

Through Wilhelm, then, Dueck weaves into this story a poignant example of the struggles new Mennonite immigrants faced regarding their Mennonite beliefs in the face of war and how interwoven it was with the issue of language.

Other issues encountered by immigrants are raised through Peter Konrad, Maria's uncle, who had come to Canada two years before the Klassens, single, and unbaptized. Though by the time Maria arrives, he has a rudimentary knowledge of English. Maria hears him speak "like a long day of planting potatoes, a trudge from one hole to another," when he introduces her to Edith Lowry, her first employer, on that cold January morning, his ever-present cap twirling in his hands.

Peter occupies a significant place in Maria's life and heart when they are old and finally, while drinking instant coffee at his place in Kildonan, she reveals to him her hidden thing, but challenges him not to tell.

After Maria is buried, many long-stem roses and a card appear on her grave. The irreverent and careless groundskeeper bags the wilted roses but the card flutters down and leans against the headstone, until an August wind blows it away. No member of the Klassen or Konrad clan sees the roses or the card. If you, the reader, wish to know what 'hidden thing' was blown away, and what cultural, religious, and family beliefs influence what she has done with it, you'll need to read the book, or look under Peter Konrad's ever-present cap. You'll be in for a good read.

Publication notices

Pandora Press, Kitchener, recently released *At the Forks: Mennonites in Winnipeg* by sociologist Leo Driedger. The author previously wrote *Mennonites in Winnipeg*, published by Kindred Press in connection with the Mennonite World Conference meetings in Winnipeg in 1990.

Ronald Friesen, *Pioneers of Cheese: A Social and Economic History of the Cheese Factory in Southern Manitoba* (Steinbach: by the Author, 2010).

Look for reviews of both books in a subsequent issue of *Heritage Posting*.

Book Notes

by *Lawrence Klippenstein*

Elizabeth Reimer Bartel, who published her first novel, based on Steinbach, in 2002, has now published *About Those Reimers: A Memoir* (Rosetta Projects, 2010, pb., 220 pp, \$15.00). It focuses on the Reimer family which built up and for fifty years till the early 1960s operated H.W. Reimer Ltd. At its peak in 1925 it was one of the largest retailing stores in rural Manitoba. The author tells her story from childhood on through her family experiences till the time of her marriage to Bruno Derksen, who with his brother Eugene and his nephew Rick, have published *The Carillon News* in Steinbach till present times.

A celebration of the Canadian MB conference centennial this year includes the publication of *Leaders Who Shaped Us: Canadian Mennonite Brethren 1910 – 2010* (Goessel, KS, and Winnipeg, MB: Kindred Productions, 2010, pb., 323 pp., \$29.95), edited by well-known writer and publisher, Harold Jantz, also of Winnipeg. Twenty five men and women have been discerned here as “shapers” whose contribution to the conference and its churches have left their mark for the years to come.

A number of books by persons from Hutterite communities have appeared in recent years. Another one now is Rebecca Hofer's *Removing the Hutterite Kerchief*, written with the help of her daughter, and published by the Independent Publishing Collegium in Kelowna, BC (pb., 192 pp). It purposes to speak to the question: Why did half the people of a Hutterite colony leave their livelihood, culture and heritage?

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Calendar



Ferry crossing the (Red River?) with cars and people. 1927.

2011 HISTORIC CALENDAR

Now available from Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is a 2011 calendar depicting scenes from Mennonite life in the prairie region from about 1910 to 1950. The calendar continues the Society's commitment to fostering interest in Mennonite heritage and exploration of past and present Mennonite experience.

The Calendar draws on rare images from the collections at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, both located in Winnipeg. In addition to featured archival images, the wall calendar includes historic “Dates to Remember” as well as details about the MMHS and “Upcoming Events” in the Mennonite calendar.

We hope that this project will not only provide a compelling historic backdrop to monthly activities, but that it will also create an awareness of the Society. MMHS is run by volunteers and welcomes those with an interest in Mennonite history to become involved.

The MMHS 2011 Calendar is available from the Society at 1310 Taylor Avenue, Winnipeg, and the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. and sells for \$7 each.

For more information, please contact Conrad Stoesz: by email: cstoesz@mbconf.ca or phone 669-6575.