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Mennonite
Historical
Society



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NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 1988



Reinhard and Eira Friesen enjoy a busy life of retirement in Winnipeg. Mr. Friesen spends much of his time in research and writing.

A Mennonite Odyssey: searching for roots

— by Doris Penner

What motivates a man - an obstetrician - to become at age 60 a researcher and writer of Mennonite history? The answer is not completely clear even to Dr. Reinhard Friesen of Winnipeg, who recently published *A Mennonite Odyssey*, the story of one family's struggle to survive on the harsh Canadian prairie after immigration from Russia.

Friesen *does* know he was 60, eight years before his retirement from the medical profession, when he became vitally interested in discovering his roots. It was as if the time had come to take heed to stories his mother had told him, first during his growing-up years in Gretna and later when he was already practicing medicine - stories of his grandparents, Margareta and Jacob Friesen, who left a comfortable Mennonite settlement in Russia to come to a forsaken prairie wilderness in southern Manitoba. There were stories of their struggle to physically survive the fierce winter with limited

supplies, stories that illustrated their unshakeable faith in God in spite of adversity and disillusionments.

Dr. Friesen also knows it wasn't long after he began to delve into archives, and the diaries and memoirs kept by people during the era particularly those of his own bloodline, that he developed a keen desire to pass on this fascinating history to his children and grandchildren. He could *tell* the stories, which he did first to his four children, then to his grandchildren (he has two granddaughters), but he realized the accounts would eventually be lost unless he put them down in writing. "It was a labor of love," he says simply.

Friesen says to make the characters come alive, he fictionalized them - taking "poetic liberties" as he calls it - always portraying as authentically as he could the background against which the drama of their lives were being played out.

An interesting thing happened in the process of his writing. What at first was a collection of stories

for his children became a full-fledged published book - what's more it became a sociology book of sorts. "That's almost too big a word for my book," says Friesen, "But the story became a telling of much more than the physical journey of the Mennonite people in quest of a friendly land and climate." He points out it became the account of the spiritual wandering of a people struggling to preserve their values and establish a utopian way of life they believed was God's design for them.

Although Friesen gives a guarded answer when asked whether he will continue writing of Mennonite history, it seems he's made too good a beginning to stop now. With *The Odyssey* taking shape as he wrote, it was almost as if his objectives also changed, leading him further down the road of discovery. Having acquired through careful research some solid information of the Mennonites and their history, it is likely his next book will take a more direct route from pen to press.

The Mennonite Odyssey was published in June, 1988 by Hyperion Press, Winnipeg. It sells for \$12 and is available from Mennonite Books as well as select book shops.



*In Him was life;
and the life was
the light of men,
And the light
shineth in dark-
ness. John 1:4-5.*

Book Review

Atlas of East Reserve published

Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages on the East Reserve, Manitoba by John Rempel and Wm. Harms.

(Publishers: John Rempel and Wm. Harms)

Reviewed by Abe Warkentin

There is a great deal of exciting Canadian Mennonite history still waiting to be written and it is always gratifying when bits and pieces are published by people who see this as their contribution to their heritage.

Completely unheralded and unexpected to me was the publication this fall of the *Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages on the East Reserve, Manitoba* by John Rempel and Wm. Harms.

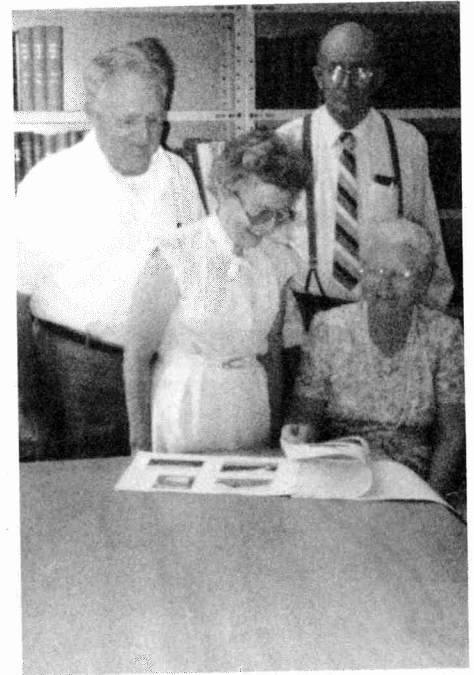
These two elderly gentlemen have devoted over a year to present us with a treasurehouse of information regarding the approximately 49 original villages founded in what is today the RM of Hanover.

Original homesteaders on the nine townships are clearly marked on large pages in the atlas and capsule information on each village accompanies the maps. Additional photos from various villages and information regarding cemeteries is also included.

Though there is little written information — a page of introduction would have been appropriate to explain why these Russian Mennonites came to Canada — the atlas is a steal for anyone at \$10 from the authors or even \$15 in a bookstore.

Hiebert and Harms have printed only 140 copies so these are bound to become collector's items if more are not printed. Admirably, they have already begun work on their next project: a similar atlas for the West Reserve.

It is hoped after this is in print, some researchers will provide us with more detailed histories of the various villages, many of which have long since disappeared.



William and Trudie Harms and John and Tina Rempel of Altona browse through the newly published atlas on the East Reserve.

- Photo credit:

Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives

Report on the Years Activities of the Society

— by Ken Reddig, President

The Manitoba Society is blessed with a diverse, talented and energetic membership of some 195 men and women. This has necessitated a division of labour in order to provide opportunity for the various members to engage in their specialized interests. Therefore, the Society is broken up into a number of committees, each of which engages in projects of benefit to the larger society. A new wrinkle this year has been the formation of a regional society in the Hanover-Steinbach (East Reserve) region. It means that over the next year or two the way in which the Manitoba Society relates to this society, and possibly other regional societies, will need to be rethought.

Early in the new year our society was stunned and saddened by the passing of a very faithful member, board member, treasurer and historian, Jakob Rempel. He was tireless in his devotion to the society and he constantly displayed his genuine interest in Mennonite history. He was very much involved with keeping records and maintaining membership lists. He has been sorely missed.

Over the past years the Research and Scholarship Committee has been engaged in two publishing projects. The first is the editing and publication of the complete works of Arnold Dyck. This project is now nearing completion with the third volume having been published in October. Volume four, the final volume, is nearing com-

pletion and is slated for publication towards the end of 1989.

Another project of this committee is the translation of the Echo-Verlag series. By now some four books have been translated with their publication being targeted for early 1989. In addition several books not part of the original Echo-Verlag series have been suggested for translation and are being considered.

This year the Arts Committee sponsored a Composer's Competition. In May a winner was chosen. First prize was awarded Keith Hagerman of Toronto for his vocal composition.

One of the more successful ventures of the Society has been the formation of a book club several years ago, now simply known as Mennonite Books. The focus has changed from a club format to that of a mail-order distribution service of books by and about Mennonites. Last year sales totaled \$15,000 and it appears this year sales will be well above that figure. Mennonite Books is operated by two volunteers, Karen Dirks and Susan Froese, and is completely self-sustaining. Over six hundred people from across North America, Europe and South America purchase books via this service.

Perhaps the most active committee, in terms of sponsoring events and workshops, is the genealogy committee of the society. It is divided into three regional committees, namely the East Reserve, West Reserve and Winnipeg. Each region sponsors separate events and together they sponsored

a main event this fall, to which they invited Allan Peters of Fresno, California, who spoke on the subject of Prussian Mennonite records and promoted the idea of developing a databank of Mennonite Genealogical information.

The Local History Committee also sponsored several events this year, among them being a workshop in Altona, Manitoba on the subject of the restoration of historic buildings. The speaker was Dr. Bill Thompson of the University of Manitoba. In addition this committee is publishing the manuscript of John Dyck, Society Treasurer, which is the biography of Jakob Peters, the East Reserve Oberschulze. John Dyck is also in the final stages of preparing the biography of Isaak Mueller, the West Reserve Oberschulze. Both biographies were sponsored by the Local History Committee of the society, and remunerated with government grants.

As with most historical societies, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is plagued with too many busy people, with too many ideas, and a lack of time and money. However, it is a real joy to work with members who come from the many Mennonite churches in Manitoba. Through working together one cannot help but appreciate the distinctiveness of each church. If History is a process of understanding others, then this year's activities of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society can be declared an unqualified success.

The MMHS Newsletter is published twice a year by the Publicity and Membership Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. Editor: Doris Penner. It welcomes letters and reports pertaining to the historical interests of society members. Correspondence should be mailed to the MMHS Newsletter, Box 3, Landmark, Manitoba, R0A 0XC

News Briefs

In preparation for the Mennonite World Conference (Assembly 12) in 1990, the faith and life committee has announced a worldwide process of study. One source for the study will be *Witnessing to Christ in Today's World* by Helmut Harder of Winnipeg. Two books to be published in conjunction with Assembly 12 are *Mennonites in Winnipeg* by Leo Driedger and *Tour Guide of Manitoba Mennonites* by Ken Reddig and Lawrence Klippenstein. The first book will be published especially for the conference in various languages and will be included in participants' packets. The other one will be an ongoing market.

In June of this year, the Bethel Mennonite Church in Winnipeg commemorated its 50th anniversary with a weekend of celebration. The opening session included a review of the history of the congregation with a release of the book *Bethel: Pioneering in Faith*, written for the occasion. The church began in 1938 as Bethel Mission under the direction of Rev Benjamin Ewert. Over the 50 years of its existence it has itself been the parent of three other churches in Winnipeg.

The Village of Gretna History Committee was the recipient of a heritage award from the Culture, Heritage and Recreation minister Bonnie Mitchellson for its community history *Gretna: Window on the Northwest*. "This publication is an outstanding example of a local history that blends chronological history, archival research, photographs and family details into a coherent and enjoyable whole," Mitchellson said. The Prix Manitoba Award is presented to individuals and organizations that have enriched the lives of Manitobans through achievements in the area of culture, heritage, recreation and multiculturalism.

Victor Peters, professor emeritus at Moorhead State University, was the guest speaker at the Mennonite Heritage Village fund-raising banquet in Steinbach Oct. 28. Peters, a former teacher in various schools throughout Manitoba and author of a number of books spoke about the importance of keeping the Mennonite heritage and Low German language alive. Just over \$10,000 was raised in support of the Village operations for 1988 and for the expansion project to be completed in 1990.

Delbert Plett is the president of the newly-formed Hanover-Steinbach Historical Society. Other charter members are Henry Fast (vice-president), Roy Loewen, Hanover school board chairman Art Rempel, Steinbach mayor Ernie Friesen and John Dyck. MMHS has given the manuscript of the biography of *Oberschultz Jacob Peters* over to the society.



At the Altona workshop members of the Gretna Book Committee received the MMHS award for *Gretna: A Window on the Northwest* from Lawrence Klippenstein (see also News Briefs.)

- Photo credit: Abe and Marg Loewen

Restoring Historical Buildings

West Reserve Hosts Workshop

— by Ken Braun

A west reserve History Workshop was held in Gretna Saturday, November 5, 1988. The Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI) chapel provided a good setting for bargain basement books for sale as well as vintage books of greater value to historians on another table. Add to that a giant map of the east reserve, information on the Old Bergthal school project, projectors and microphones and you knew an enriching day was in store for the 30 participants.

The theme for the morning session was *Restoring Historic Buildings*. Dr. Bill Thompson of the University of Manitoba gave us a crash course on conserving architectural relics. He showed how the MacDonald House in Winnipeg had been restored to its original splendour so the building and the landscaping around it show how Hugh John MacDonald lived at the turn of the century.

Important historical buildings locally are the old church in Reinland, now a community centre, the Schwarz House and the Old Bergthal School at the Pioneer Centre grounds in northwest Altona. An important question for the day was, "How can these buildings become museums that will draw the public instead of being an albatross or a white

elephant?"

The afternoon was devoted to books and the writing thereof. Both the Gretna and the Horn-dean book committees were officially recognized with a presentation from Lawrence Klippenstein on behalf of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.

Garry Enns who wrote the Gretna History book showed us the importance of waiting for data to accumulate until he had stories about Gretna from all over North America.

A special look into MCI history was given by Elizabeth Bergen through an exclusive discovery of the J. Linscheid diaries. We learned there were some real conflicts between the youthful, single Mr. Linscheid and Mr. Ewert.

Local mapmakers John Rempel and Bill Harms who have become professional without knowing it reported on their east reserve map and showed us the work on the township east of the principal meridian on the west reserve.

The afternoon was capped with a charming presentation by Dr. Rhinehart Friesen of Winnipeg recounting stories and horrors of pioneer life in Gretna as told him by his grandmother. Just as he has been incisive as a medical doctor, he shows a wonderful discipline and incisiveness as a writer.

Recent and upcoming Mennonite Publications

In addition to the publications listed in the June Newsletter, here are the most recently published works. Also listed are publications which will be out in early winter of 1989.

I. Recent Publications

Dyck, Betty, et al., **Bethel. Pioneering in Faith, 1937-1987.** (Winnipeg: Bethel Mennonite Church, 1988), hdc., 148 pp., \$12.50.

Enns, Garry, and Gaile Whelan, **Gretna. Window on the Northwest.** (Gretna: Gretna History Committee, 1987), hdc., 343 pp., \$32.50.

Epp, Peter, **Ob Tausend Fallen. Mein Leben im Archipelgulag.** (München: Memra Verlag, 1988), pb., 205 pp., \$12.00. Available from Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Man.

Friesen, Rhinehard, **A Mennonite Odyssey.** (Winnipeg: Hyperion Press, 1988), pb., 124 pp., \$12.95.

Friesen, Ted, **Altona Mennonite Church 25th Anniversary, 1962-1987.** (Altona, Man.: Altona Mennonite Church, 1988), hdc., 175 pp., \$20.00.

Hamm, Oscar, **Memoirs of Ignatevo in the Light of Historical Change.** (Saskatoon: The author, 1984). Translated by Marg Neufeld. Pb., 320 pp., \$15.00. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Man.

Klassen, Peter P., **Die Mennoniten in Paraguay.** (Emden, W. Germany and Asuncion, Paraguay: Mennonitischer Geschichtsverein, 1988), pb., 370 pp., \$15.00. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Man.

Klippenstein, Lawrence, Adolf Ens and Margaret Franz, eds. **Resources for Canadian Mennonite Studies. An Inventory and Guide to Archival Holdings at the Mennonite Heritage Centre.** (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, 1988), pb., 136 pp., \$7.50.

Latter, Walter F., **I Do Remember. The Recollections of Helen Frey Latter.** (Morden, Man.: The Author, 1988), pb., 128 pp., \$6.00. Helene came originally from Neuhalbstadt, Ukraine.

Peters, Victor, and Jack Thiessen, **Mennonitische Namen/Mennonite Names.** (Marburg: N.G. Elwert Verlag, 1987), pb., 245 pp., \$25.00. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Man.

Ratzlaff, Gerhard, **Deutsches Jahrbuch für 1988. Geschichte, Kultur, Unterhaltung.** (Asuncion, Paraguay, 1988), pb., 112 pp., \$5.50 US.

Redekopp Alfred H., **Jacob Thielmann and Helena Kroeker. A Family History and Genealogy of their Descendants.** (Winnipeg: 1987), pb., 314 pp., \$22.50.

Rempel, John, and Bill Harms, **Atlas of Original Mennonite Villages and Homesteaders of the East Reserve, Manitoba.** (Altona, Man.:

Privately published, 1988), pb., 25 pp., \$12.00. Available at Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Man.

Loewen, Harry (editor), **Why I am a Mennonite: Essays on Mennonite Identity.** (Herald Press, 1988).

Dyck, Arnold, **Collected Works, Vol. III.** (Winnipeg: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 1988), hdc., 604 pp., \$30.

Regehr, Ted, **For Everything a Season. The History of the Alexander-krone Zentralschule.** (Winnipeg: CMBC Publications, 1988), hdc., 180 pp., \$24.

Toews, John B., **Perilous Journey.** \$12.95.

Friesen, T.E. (editor), **Genealogy of Bernhard Krahn (1847-1930) and Helena Peters (1849-1919).** (Altona: Private Publications, 1988), Loose-leaf, 100 pp.

Wiens, Jake, ed., **Index to Mennonite Historian, 1975-1986.** (Winnipeg: Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives, 1988), pb., 12 pp., \$2.

Winter, Heinrich, **Ein Hirte der Bedrängten. Heinrich Winter, Der Letzte Älteste von Choritzta.** (Leamington: The Author, 1988), hdc., 255 pp., \$12.

II. Upcoming Publications (Fall, 1988 or winter, 1989)

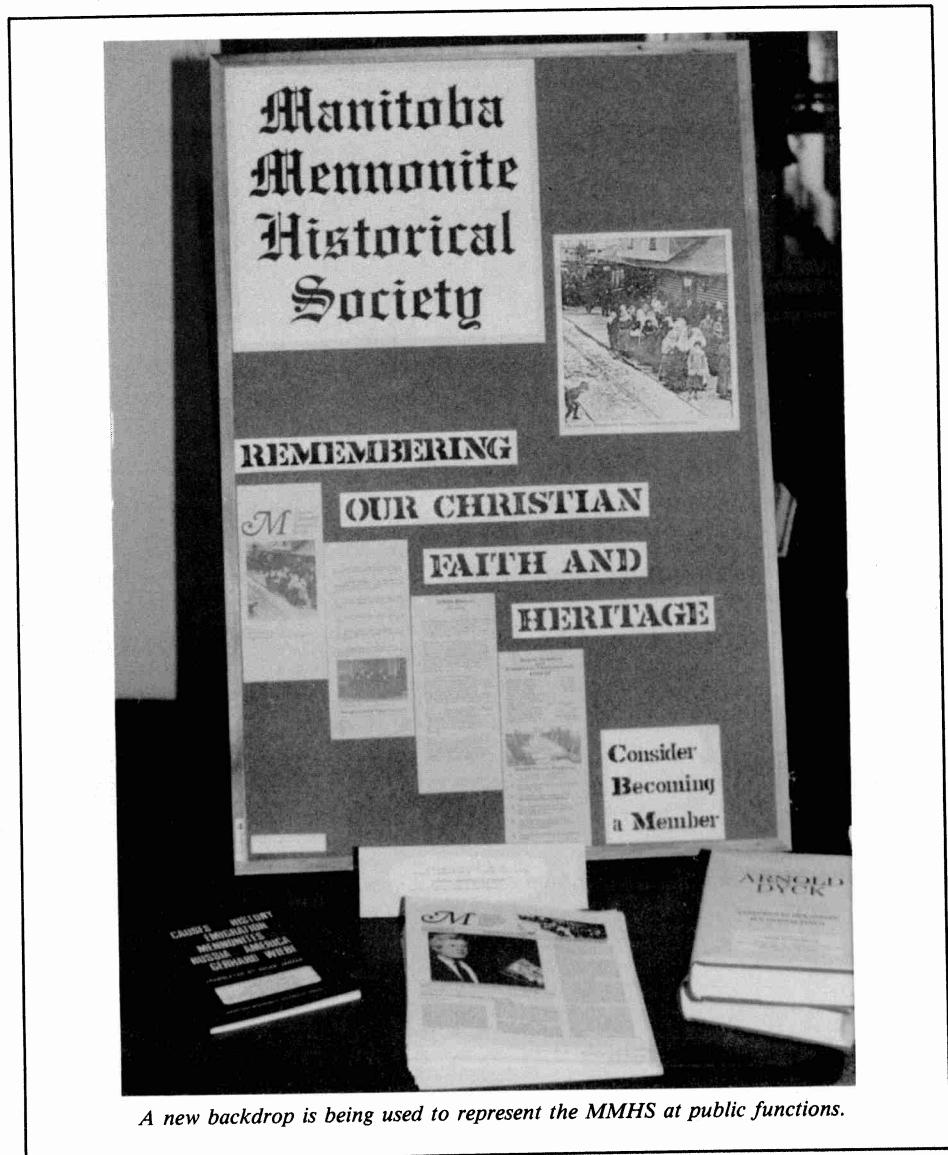
Derksen, Peter, **Und Es Wurde Wieder Ruhig. Die Lebensgeschichte eines mennonitischen Predigers aus der Sovetunion.** (Winnipeg: 1988).

Nickel, John, ed., **Hope Springs Eternal. The Life and Sermons of Johann Nickel of Rosenhof, Molotschna.** (Nanaimo, B.C., 1988).

Urry, James. **None But Saints. The Transformation of Mennonite Life in Russia, 1789-1889.** (Hyperion Press, Winnipeg, Man.) Hdc.

Klassen, Doreen, **Singing Mennonite Low German Songs of the Mennonites.** (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press), 300 pp., \$30.

Note: Please feel free to write or phone the editor about research or writing projects you are working on in the field of Mennonite life and history.



A new backdrop is being used to represent the MMHS at public functions.

Report on Board Meeting, September 30

— by Doreen Klassen

Although the Membership and Publicity Committee reported an all-time high MMHS membership of 195 at its September 30 meeting at the village of Reinland Community Centre, it was Lawrence Klippenstein's announcement of Winnipeg's Jewish Historical Society's 20th anniversary celebrations which evoked a dynamic discussion, as board members recalled memories of Mennonite-Jewish relations in past decades.

It was a more subdued board which reported on its own equally interesting events and projects. In his executive committee report, MMHS president Ken Reddig, announced plans for a male quartets program to be held in Winkler in February or March. He noted committee appointments are presently made in January, but need to be changed to coincide with the committee working year beginning in September. Reddig also reported that Dennis Stoesz has agreed to work on membership recruitment, and that treasurer John Dyck is using a computerized bookkeeping system.

Doreen Klassen, Arts Committee announced Keith Hagerman of Toronto was awarded first prize in the choral/vocal category of the 1988 Composer's Competition. Hagerman submitted a cappella choral composition called *Praise the Lord, O my Soul* based on the tune of *Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele*.

Reporting for the Education and Resources Committee, Henry Ens articulated their primary goal as encouraging the teaching of Mennonite history at the high school level.

The Genealogy and Family History Committee has concentrated its efforts on organizing the October 15 *Sources for Prussian Mennonite Roots* workshop with Alan Peters of Fresno, CA. The "Mennonite Historian" now features a genealogy and family page written by Alf Redekop.

The Local History and Historical Sites Committee is planning an October 22 workshop in Altona on local history and restoring old buildings by Bill Thompson. This will be sponsored jointly by the University of Manitoba and Centennial Committee of Altona. At this workshop, they will present an MMHS life membership to Elizabeth Bergen, Altona, writer of the "Recalling past days" column in *The Red River Valley Echo*, in recognition of her interest in and contributions to the study of Mennonite history.

The Local History Committee is also involved in several publications. It has given the Jacob Peters manuscript to the newly-formed Hanover-Steinbach Historical Society, and asked CMBC publications to publish the Isaak Mueller manuscript, which is in final stages of preparation. The committee is also monitoring two other books: a book on early Mennonite leaders and a history of Altberghal.

The Membership and Publicity Committee asked if the Newsletter should be continued in view of the MMHS page in the Mennonite Historian? They have purchased a new backdrop for displays representing MMHS at public functions.

According to the Research, Scholarship and Publications report written by Harry Loewen, Volume III of Arnold Dyck will be published in

the fall of 1988, and funds are already in hand for Volume IV. The Echo Verlag publications are also progressing well.

Ted Friesen reported on publications in preparation for the 1990 Mennonite World Conference in Winnipeg. Ken Reddig and Lawrence Klippenstein will prepare a brief guide to Manitoba Mennonites for conference participants.

And Mennonite Books is still growing. In fact, personnel are negotiating for new storage space, publishing a new catalogue and recommending several self-serve sales outlets.

Board Chairman Adolf Ens closed the meeting with the announcement that the annual MMHS membership meeting will be held in Winnipeg, January 21, 1989.

Steinbach Genealogy Committee Outlines Plan

— by Nettie Neufeld

On Oct. 13, the Steinbach Regional Genealogy Committee met to plan their program and activities for the year.

Nine people interested in genealogy and Mennonite history were present. After some discussion on length of term and method of election/appointment the following committee was chosen: Al Hamm as chairman, Nettie Neufeld and John Klippenstein. Evelyn Friesen and Carol Janzen were asked to be members at large. Doris Penner, *Carillon* reporter and Wilmer Penner, Education committee member of the Historical Society, offered their services and assistance.

Our committee feels encouraged because these new members offer rich and valuable resources and

bring a new dimension to the work and program plans.

Some ideas for the future were discussed. The committee needs a computerized mailing list which will be worked on. Some ideas for public meetings that were discussed were to hold a workshop for teachers on how to teach Mennonite history, hosting an evening with the topic of Mexican Migrations or an evening of story telling on the Mennonite life (focusing on the pioneer eras). The committee will also offer their services to public schools to provide speakers to talk to students about Mennonite family history.

We are looking forward to a year of growing awareness of our rich heritage among adults, children and youth in the Steinbach area.

Education Committee offers Mennonite History Course

— by Wilmer Penner

The Education Committee is seeking ways to foster interest in Mennonite History study in the public school system. At present, Department of Education policy encourages school and student initiated courses.

The East Reserve Committee (Cornie Martens, Henry Fast, Paul Reimer, Wilmer Penner) has accordingly targeted the late elementary grads and parents are the most promising groups.

Accordingly, with the sponsorship of the Museum, a Mennonite History course covering the whole period from the 16th century to the present was offered by the SRSS Adult Education Evening School. The instructor was Wilmer Penner. Twenty-two museum volunteers participated, and the ten 20-hour course was judged a success. It is hoped that this will provide increased interest in the whole community.

A seminar for elementary teachers, where resources available for teaching in regular classroom will be presented, is being planned for the middle of this winter.

Everyone is busy, and we need to make Mennonite History an attractive option for teachers and students.

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society Annual Meeting

January 21, 1989

4:30 p.m.

Mennonite Brethren Bible College Auditorium
169 Riverton Ave., Wpg.

6:30 - banquet

Guest speaker - Doreen Klassen who will give a dramatic presentation on *Singing Mennonites: Low German songs from SE Manitoba*.

All MMHS members and the public are invited to attend.