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NEWSLETTER

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Singing Mennonite: Plautdietsch meent doch waut

— by Doris Penner

*Daut ha wie doch aul lang jewisst
daut Plautdietsch nijch fal meent . . . **

Any Low-German speaking Mennonite who believes that will certainly be enlightened by *Singing Mennonite*, a book just off the press. Author and ethnomusicologist Doreen Klassen (alias *Plautdietsche Klosche*) demonstrates Low German is indeed a language of consequence by the mere fact she found 140 songs to record. This was a surprise even to her. "When I began collecting Low German songs . . . I expected to find a few," she writes. "I assumed if Low German song tradition ever existed it would be a thing of the past . . ."

After brushing up on her own conversational Low German skills, then probing, visiting, dusting off, listening and gathering, Klassen revised all Low German spelling in the songs according to standards set in 1987 by the publishing of *Daut Niehe Testament*. Yes, Low German is now a written language and can be deciphered by anyone who speaks Low German fluently. Klassen includes English translations (direct).

Low German is also a language of consequence because since it was the language spoken in the home and in daily affairs of life, it is the best vehicle to give us a true insight into Mennonite lifestyle and culture "as it was" and partly "as it is". And music is the enduring medium that carries information from our generation to another. Klassen's songs cover a time frame from the late 18th century to the present (although some are a part of Germanic tradition several hundred years old). Some speak of life in Russia, others depict life in the villages of southern Manitoba. There are songs of village life and farming, of love and faith and conflict. There are tender lullabies sung to children at bedtime and singing games they played on the street. Through these songs we see how Mennonites viewed themselves, each other and the larger society.

Klassen who collected the songs over a period of 12 years, concedes that to understand the music of a people one must study their folklore in its entirety. While she would not have considered herself an authority on Mennonite culture she was born and raised in the West Reserve - a bastion of Men-

*We've already known for a long time, that Low German has no value.



Plautdietsche Klosche has recently published *Singing Mennonite* which proves her native language meent doch waut.

- photo by Marlene Fast

nonite settlement - and heir to a strong oral tradition religiously passed on by her family's older generations. Thus she had a firm base from which to launch her study and as she collected the songs, speaking to more than a hundred people, she gained a much deeper insight into the mores, values and faith of her own people. This will no doubt happen to others who read the brief history of the Mennonites she has included and study the songs with her comments.

Plautdietsch, which has seen a renaissance in the last 15 years, is sure to gain in importance as a written language and musical idiom. And part of this will be a spin-off from Klassen's book - the only major collection of Low German songs to date. She sees the possibility of a songbook being published drawing from her compilation for use by family groups and entertainers. She can also visualize how some of the songs could provide the

basis for the composition of serious choral music (Klassen points out in order to retain a musical tradition you need to express it in a classical art form). Information in the book could well be incorporated into educational materials for children such as history, music, language, social studies and art.

The final song in Klassen's book is almost an admonition: now that "we've been enlightened" - *Plautdietsch meent doch waut* - (Low German does mean something) Mennonites need to use that language to truly express their ethnicity.

From the Education and Resources Committee

(chair - Wilmer Penner)

We have not taken any new initiative since our report in January. Our committee is planning to sponsor another Mennonite History Course in conjunction with the Mennonite Heritage Village during the fall evening classes at the Steinbach Regional Secondary School.

MMHS Local History Committee report

— by Lawrence Klippenstein

The 1989 Committee includes the following people: Cornie Rempel, Reinland, Bill Schroeder, Winnipeg, Bert Friesen, Winnipeg, Peter Zacharias, Gretna, and Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, J.C. Fehr from Plum Coulee may be joining too.

Plans for 1989 project a workshop for Mennonite historians and genealogists in the Brandon-Boissevain area, quite possibly in fall. The committee is also considering giving assistance to cemetery plotting projects and doing some work on a publication regarding early West Reserve Mennonite leaders, and helping with Mennonite World Conference tours. The committee would also welcome suggestions on plaques or cairns that should be put up in Mennonite communities.

First of Dyck's books released in English

— by Margaret Franz



Ron Loeppky (CMBC Publications Committee), Victor Doerksen (Echo Historical Committee), Herbert Giesbrecht (Translator) and Adolph Ens (CMBC Publications Chairperson) examine *The Kuban Settlement* - the first of Arnold Dyck's books to be translated into English.

- photo by Rudy Regehr

Arnold Dyck would be pleased! A whole new generation of readers will be able to read a set of books which he originally edited and published in German.

On April 27 CMBC Publications celebrated the release of a new book, *The Kuban Settlement*. This English translation of *Die Kubaner Ansiedlung* marks the first in an historical series published jointly by CMBC Publications and the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society (MMHS).

The book launching celebration was an occasion to thank Herbert Giesbrecht, translator of *The Kuban Settlement*, for his work. Also recognized at this event were Arthur DeFehr and Edwin Redekopp. Through their generous donations, the retail price of the book could be kept at a reasonable level of \$9.

The book event was also a time for CMBC Publications and MMHS to invite those present to subscribe to a whole new series of books.

The Kuban Settlement forms part of the Echo Historical Series, a set of 14 books on Russian Mennonite history. Between 1945 and 1965 Arnold Dyck, through his publishing company, Echo Verlag in Steinbach, Manitoba, had published these monographs in German.

Translators have been found for each book in the series. CMBC Publications and MMHS are planning to release two or three of these translations per year. Plans include finding interested donors to provide subsidy money for each volume. *The Kuban Settlement* recounts the difficult

beginnings of a colony in the Caucasus region of Russia. It tells about Johann Claassen's negotiations with the tsarist government and the beginnings of the Mennonite Brethren Church in the Kuban colony; about the agricultural and industrial achievements of the Mennonite colonists; of war and revolution and famine, and finally emigration to Canada.


Seven of the books in the Echo Historical Series are stories about colonies in Russia; several are stories about significant Mennonite persons. As Victor Doerksen, general editor for the series, states in his introduction to *The Kuban Settlement*:

The Echo Verlag histories are not scholarly or professional in nature. They are written mostly from the standpoint of informed participants who saw and heard about the founding, the life and the destruction of a particular colony or settlement . . . such stories are important for an understanding not only of who and what our grandparents and parents were, but also of what we and our children are and will become.

Members of the editorial committee of the Echo Historical Series are Victor G. Doerksen, John Friesen and Harry Loewen.

Note: The MMHS is planning to sponsor three Low German evenings - on the West Reserve, the East Reserve and in Winnipeg - featuring the works of Arnold Dyck. Watch for announcements on times and places.

THE
**KUBAN
SETTLEMENT**
by
C. P. Toews, Heinrich Friesen
and Arnold Dyck



First translated volume in the
Echo Historical Series

Available at your local
Christian bookstore
or order from
CMBC Publications
600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
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*Read about
the early
MB Church
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\$9.00

(\$1 postage and handling charge per
book when ordering directly.)

*Now in
English*

Notes from the Board and Executive 21 April 1989

— by Lawrence Klippenstein

Both the MMHS executive and board held meetings at Landmark on 21 April 1989. Nine board members (of eighteen) sent regrets.

It was decided first of all that potential relationship of MMHS to regional societies such as the Hanover Steinbach Historical Society will be given attention soon. Some discussion was given to Mennonite World Conference involvement. Peter Rempel from the MWC office in Winnipeg is willing to keep in touch on this and to offer suggestions.

Among reports was information that MMHS records for 1979-1989 are being archived, that a collection would be held at the Mennonite Gospel Quartets evening on 28 April, that a local history workshop for the Brandon-Boissevain area is being considered and that Vol. 4 of the A. Dyck *Collected Works* series is almost ready to go to press. Funding remains a challenge, for Vol. IV especially.

The Kuban Settlement is projected as the first of the English Echo-Verlag series being published by CMBC Publications and MMHS.

The next meeting is scheduled for 23 October and planned for Schanzenfeld, south of Winkler (details will be forthcoming).

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 0X0.

News briefs

A Platdietsche Ovend was held in three locations in early spring with a good response. Featured was a drama *Aules Goot wann Latste Goot* by Plautdietsche Jesallschaft. Henry Ens spoke about teaching from Jantsied to Cuauhtemoc and Dietsche Sposz entertained with musical selections. The programs were held in Altona, Steinbach and Winnipeg.

A church member profile in which 4,000 Mennonites will be questioned about lifestyles, morals, religious experiences, beliefs, church membership and social issues will be conducted shortly. Prof. Leo Driedger from the University of Manitoba is one of the committee members working on the survey - the second one of its kind. The first one was conducted in 1972.

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society received two grants from the Manitoba Heritage Federation in their 1989 allocation totalling over \$7,000. The larger grant of \$3,750 will go towards a publication on Oberschultz Jacob Peters while \$3,500 will be used to publish a work on the pioneer villages of the East Reserve.

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg received a grant of \$85,850 to complete the indexing of the Mennonitische Rundschau. The grant awarded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada under the Canadian Studies Research Tools Program will be spread over three years and includes money for new computer equipment. It is expected the project will be completed in November 1991. Indexer is Bert Friesen of Winnipeg.

Rhinehart Friesen, a retired Winnipeg obstetri-

cian, has been awarded an honorable mention in the popular book category of the Margaret McWilliams Medal Competition of the Manitoba Historical Society for his book *A Mennonite Odyssey*. Hoping to make history accessible to everyone, he has written a fascinating account of the struggles and joys experienced by a Manitoba pioneer family. His story is based on journals, diaries and oral history. This is Friesen's second book. His first was a picture book for children entitled *Almost an Elephant*.

Elizabeth Isby Bergen from Altona was given special recognition at the annual meeting of the MMHS January 21 for her contributions to Mennonite studies in writing a series of Prairie Profiles describing pioneer families. The articles appeared over a period of time in the *Echo*, an Altona newspaper. Bergen was also involved in producing the prize-winning book on the history of Gretna.

Al Reimer of Winnipeg recently gave readings from his historical novel *My Harp has Turned to Mourning* at Tabor College in Kansas. He also discussed techniques involved in writing historical fiction. Reimer is an authority on the Low German language and culture, and serves as Low German editor of *The Mennonite Mirror*.

The Radicals, a newly released movie graphically telling the story of the roots of the Anabaptist movement, received good response in Winnipeg. Produced by Sisters and Brothers of Indiana it focuses on the lives of Margaretha and Michael Sattler who were martyred for their faith in 1527. The movie is based on the book *Pilgrim Aflame* by Myron Augsburger.

Genealogy Committee has busy schedule

— by Martha Martens

Family roots, are they important? Yes, family roots are important because they give us a sense of belonging.

During the past year Genealogy committee has been involved in different things. A year and a half ago we had the privilege to listen to Mr. Allan Peters of California on the sources of our Prussian roots. These videos and tapes are available from the C.M.B.C. archives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. If you are interested in renting them, please contact Mr. Lawrence Klippenstein at the Archives.

The West Reserve had a public meeting May 29, 1989 in Altona, which was well attended. The East and West Reserve Atlas was presented by John Rempel and Bill Harms. Ed Falk of Winkler was on hand to describe and illustrate what he had done to put his family tree on the computer disc. It was followed with coffee and dainties and lively discussions. What I found interesting was we

had young people attending the meeting full of questions. The East Reserve is planning a public meeting later in fall.

As we look into the future we are presently looking at three items. Firstly, we have a committee in the West Reserve, East Reserve and in Winnipeg but no representative from the Brandon area. If there are people in that area who are interested and I am sure there are, please contact us and we would be glad to help you get started and assist you in whatever way we can.

Our next issue is, what do we do at the Mennonite World Conference, do we have a booth where people can get information? We would like to have input from the public.

Our third project is a workshop for 1990. When and where should we have it? What topic would you like us to present? We are looking to you for suggestions.

A genealogy workshop
will be held at
Mennonite Heritage Centre
Tuesday, Oct. 24
For more information call
Margaret Kroeker at 772-0747

Well-known Mennonite quartets featured

— by Ken Reddig

Mennonite communities across Manitoba have often prided themselves on their quartets. Some thirty years ago local quartets were quite common. But today, it seems, the tradition may be dying out. Quartets of young people are rare, and few stay together more than a few years.

This spring the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society sponsored an evening featuring three well-known Mennonite quartets. The event drew some three hundred people to the Winkler Bible School auditorium on April 28. The crowd was enthusiastic, mostly grey-haired and proud of each quartet featured.

The first quartet was the Hochstadt Quartet. Distinguished as the oldest quartet at the event, they may very possibly be the oldest in Canada - they have sung together for some 57 years. The selections, sound and vibrancy gave no indication of age. Many in the audience fondly remembered the quartet from years back and it was a nostalgic trip into time for these people.

The second quartet was the Spencer Quartet, obviously from the "other" side of the river, so they said. This quartet, almost thirty years old, produced a lively and dynamic sound. Their joy in singing and in presenting their faith in Jesus was inspiring. This past year they had spent a month in South America singing in a wide variety of Mennonite communities. They shared the joy of these experiences with the attentive audience.

The last group was most familiar to the people in the audience. It was the old "Gospel Light Hour" quartet, today known as MB Communications quartet. Having sung on the radio for a span of some 32 years, their mellow harmony brought back memories of listening to them on the radio.

The amazing part of the evening was though none of the groups had been in contact with each other, their choice of music was quite different. The audience never heard the same gospel song twice.

The evening once again confirmed the rich variety of musical traditions within our Mennonite communities. After the program the oft-repeated phrase was, "Why don't we do this again?" Perhaps we will, and hopefully we can attract more young people to such an event. The common consensus was that quartets should not just be remembered as groups of yesteryear, but should have a place within our communities and churches today.



John C. Reimer of Steinbach, curator emeritus of the Mennonite Heritage Village planned the layout of the traditional Mennonite village. Manager Peter Goertzen plans for future expansion.

- Carillon file photo

MHV expansion project well underway

— by Doris Penner

The expansion project of the Mennonite Heritage Village just north of Steinbach is well underway with completion date expected to be June 1990.

The main part of the project, estimated to cost \$2.7 million, is a 20,000-square foot village centre which will include two exhibition galleries. This building will provide space to display artifacts and ensure the collection is stored and preserved in environmentally-controlled conditions. Presently the museum has 8,000 pieces including traditional costumes and other textiles, tools, and equipment, Mennonite Fraktur writings, private school material and traditional furniture. The oldest item

in the collection is a book dating back to 1580.

The existing artifacts building, constructed in 1967 will be renovated to become a public meeting place for drama and film presentations on Mennonite faith, heritage and culture.

Behind the artifacts building is the Village itself, laid out in traditional Mennonite village style by John C. Reimer, one of the founders and today curator emeritus. It has grown from one log cabin moved to the site in 1964 to 34 structures. Peter Goertzen, manager of the museum envisions the development of land behind the farmyards with the addition of barns and granaries.

A focal point of the Village and a landmark

feature for the town of Steinbach is a windmill, an original heritage structure from eastern Europe. It has been partly restored and partly rebuilt, and today actually functions as a mill, creating a great deal of interest for visitors to the grounds.

Thirty core staff and over 300 volunteers work at the Village, open from May to October. About 50,000 visitors from around the world entered the gates in 1988, with Pioneer Days, an annual four-day festival attracting 15,000 of these. It is expected many of the participants in the Mennonite World Conference in Winnipeg next year will visit the museum.

New books in print 1988-89

Peter Derksen, *Es wurde wieder ruhig. Die Lebensgeschichte eines mennonitischen Predigers aus der Sowjetunion*. Edited by Lawrence Klippenstein. (Winnipeg, 1989), pb., 183 pp., \$12.00.

C.P. Toews, et al., *The Kuban Settlement*. (Winnipeg, CMBC Publications, 1989). English translation of 1953 publication by Echo Verlag. Pb., 91 pp., \$9.00.

George Dyck and Verne Ediger, eds., *Kornelius Ens, 1819-1884. A Record of his Descendants in Canada and the USA*. (West Valley City, Utah: By the editors, 1988), pb., 180 pp.

Heidi Froese Tiessen, *Liars and Rascals. Mennonite Short Stories*. (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1989), pb., 227 pp.

Theron Schlabach, *Peace, Faith, Nation. Mennonites and Amish in Nineteenth-Century America*. (Scottsdale, PA and Kitchener, ON: Herald Press, 1988), pb., 415 pp.

Hans J. Wiens, *Das die Heiden Miterben seien. Die Geschichte der Indianermision in paraguayischen Chaco*. (Filadelfia: Konferenz der Mennoniten gemeinden in Paraguay, 1989), pb., 238 pp. Includes photos and maps.

Burghart Regehr, et al, eds., *Wer die Hand an den Pflug legt Delta, 1955-1988*. (Delta, Uruguay, 1988), pb., 101 pp.

Gerhard Thiessen, *Diary from the Years, 1907-1912* (in Ukraine). Trans. by Helen Epp and Marie Hiebert, and edited by Rudy Wiens. (Leamington: The Family, 1988), hdc., 228 pp., \$25.00.

Doreen Klassen, *Singing Mennonite. Low German Songs Among the Mennonites*. Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press, 1989. hdc., 330 pp. \$30.

Inquiries about and orders for these books may be sent to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4.

Notice to all MMHS members

If you have not paid your 1989 membership fee, please mail immediately to:

MMHS Membership and
Publicity Committee
Box 3
Landmark, MB. R0A 0X0



Colleen Brandt (r) of Blumenort was the recipient of the Henry E. Plett Award presented annually by the MMHS to a high school student for excellence in writing a Mennonite family history. Heidi Plett of Steinbach won second place. Both are grade 12 students at Steinbach Bible College and the award was presented at their graduation exercises June 23.

Russian Mennonite symposium in November

A Russian Mennonite Bicentennial symposium will be held in Winnipeg from Nov. 9 through 11. Sponsors include all Mennonite colleges of the city (Conrad Grebel College), and the University of Winnipeg Chair of Mennonite Studies. Presenters and themes of papers are as follows:

- Len Friesen: *Mennonites and the fissuring of the New Russian Society, 1860s-1905*
- Peter J. Klassen: *Historiographic Perspectives: Through Different Eyes*
- Adolf Ens: *Prussian Mennonite views of those who emigrated to New Russia*
- Harry Loewen: *Intellectual Developments among Russian Mennonites*
- Harvey Dyck: *Economic conflicts and issues of the 1860s and 1870s*
- Lawrence Klippenstein: *State Service Among Mennonites: The Soviet Period, 1917-1937*
- John Dyck: *The struggle for self-understanding: Two conceptions of Gemeinde amongst Russian Mennonites 1914-1923*
- Jim Urry: *Changes in Mennonite Social Struc-*

ture: Social and Geographic Mobility from 1880-1914

- Abe Dueck and John Friesen: *The Church in Russian Mennonite Communities*
- George K. Epp: *How Mennonites Experienced the 1930s and 1940s*
- Walter Sawatsky: *Mennonite Life in the Soviet Era*

It is hoped that several Soviet scholars will be able to join the symposium. Respondents to the papers will include Dr. Dan Stone (History Dept., University of Winnipeg), Dr. Theo Stavrou (Professor of Russian History, University of Minnesota) and Anna Janzen (a graduate of Associated Mennonite Seminary and pastoral assistant from Luebeck, West Germany). The symposium will conclude with a banquet to be held at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg.

Inquiries may be sent to Lawrence Klippenstein, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Canada, R3P 0M4.