

Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



Missionary David Hein with Moro (Ayoreo) natives. The man in centre is Jonoine who killed missionary Kornelius Isaak in 1958. Some 300 members of the Ayoreos are now Christians, the result of efforts by the New Tribes Mission. Photo: CMBS

Reconciliation, and a call to practice justice

By Dora Dueck

A moving gesture of reconciliation and strong preaching marked the first full day of Mennonite World Conference (MWC) Assembly 15 held in Asunción, Paraguay, July 14-19, 2009.

Ishmael Noko, general secretary of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), addressed the gathering with a “heavy heart,” he said, because of the “painful history” Lutherans and Mennonites share, especially the persecution – and execution – of Anabaptists in the 16th century.

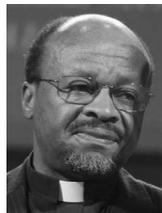
“This history of condoning persecution,” he said, “is a spiritual wound we carry around in us.” He further described the condemnations of Anabaptists, contained in the “anathemas” of the Augsburg Confession, as “the poison of a scorpion.” The Anabaptists did not strike back, he said; “we have it in us.”

“We were wrong, regrettably wrong,”

he said. “Execution was not the only choice, even then.”

In recent years, Mennonites and Lutherans have been in dialogue about these matters, and Lutherans are seeking a “healthier” continuing dialogue now, said Noko, “as we address how we condemned you.” At their next meeting, the LWF will be asked “to take action which will put us in a new position to the anathemas and express our deep repentance and regret.”

The assembled Mennonites reacted spontaneously to Noko’s words by standing and applauding.



Dr. Noko

MWC president Danisa Ndlovu also responded. “What we have heard will change our lives and perspectives,” he said.

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Moro Spear

Originally published in *No Permanent City: Stories from Mennonite History and Life* by Harry Loewen. This version adapted from the Profile Series produced by the Mennonite Brethren Historical Commission.

From the time Mennonites first settled in the Paraguayan Chaco in 1928, the Lengua Indians warned them against possible attacks from the Moros (Ayoreo), a warlike tribe living farther north. In 1935 the Mennonites established a mission to the Indians of the Chaco. This “Light to the Indians” mission included efforts to establish contact with various native peoples, including the Moros.

Years went by without any significant contact with the Moros. In 1958 the Mennonite missions committee, based in Filadelfia, decided that the time for more than passing contact had come. Two experienced missionaries were chosen for the undertaking. One was David Hein, married with six children. The other was Kornelius Isaak, also married and with three children. The two, who spoke Spanish but not the Moro language, were eager to go. A Lengua Indian accompanied them on the 225-kilometer journey into the Moro heartland.

During the last part of the jeep journey they drove only slowly for the roads were narrow and swampy. Several times they had to dig their vehicle out from the mud. At last they came to a shallow body of water in which fish were found. Suddenly the accompanying Lengua said, “There’s fire nearby.” Leaving the jeep, the missionaries discovered footprints on the ground and a few fires burning here and there. They stuck sticks in the ground, attached shirts to them and then went to an oil company camp nearby. For the next two days they returned to the same sites and each day they left more shirts. The Moros in turn left feathers, an empty wooden bowl and a bag. The meanings of the exchanges were not clear. The Lengua Indian felt uneasy about the signs.

The missionaries returned to their home community to report what they had found and to confer with the missions committee and their families. The mission committee counseled caution. In view of the unclear signs and danger, they were not prepared to send the missionaries to the Moros. If they decided to go on their own, however, the committee would support and stand behind them. The families of Hein and Isaak were fearful. But the two men, while concerned about their safety, were eager to continue their mission, come

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Moro Spear

(cont'd from p. 1)

what might. On September 10, 1958, together with another Lengua companion, they had driven only a few kilometers into the Moro territory when the Indian guide said, "There they are."

Ahead was a group of some fifty men, scantily clad and apparently without weapons. The missionaries stopped their jeep, got off, and waved to the strangers. The men seemed friendly, came closer and accepted gifts from the missionaries. A tall Moro man approached Cornelius. Looking over the Moro's shoulder, Cornelius noticed those standing farther back were carrying weapons. Things did not bode well.

What happened next was sudden. The men shouted insolent words at the missionaries and demanded more gifts. Then one tried to wrestle the Lengua Indian to the ground. The Lengua sought to grab the hunting rifle in the jeep but



Cornelius Isaak and David Hein, 1950. Photo: CMBS

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Editors: Alf Redekopp (MHC)
Doug Heidebrecht (CMBS)

Associate Editor: Conrad Stoesz
(CMBS/MHC)

All correspondence and manuscripts should be sent to the editorial offices at:

600 Shaftesbury Blvd.
Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4
P: 204-888-6781

E: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

W: www.mennonitechurch.ca/programs/archives
or

1310 Taylor Avenue,
Winnipeg, MB R3M 3Z6
P: 204-669-6575

E: dheidebrecht@mbconf.ca

W: www.mbconf.ca/cmbs

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David Hein with Moro spear that killed Cornelius Isaak. Photo: CMBS

was unable to reach it. David Hein grabbed the rifle and waved it high in the air. When the Moros saw this they retreated, but not before one of them had pointed an arrow at David. He did not release the bow, however.

While all of this was going on, Cornelius Isaak felt an intense pain. In the next moment he pulled out a thin spear from his side. No one had seen how it had happened. From all appearances the wound did not seem that serious. Turning the jeep around, Cornelius at the wheel urged that they return to the oil camp as quickly as possible. But after driving only a short distance, Cornelius became so weak that David had to continue driving. From the oil company camp Cornelius was taken by airplane to Filadelfia and admitted to the hospital. The doctors found that his spleen and kidneys were



Kornelius & Maria Isaak Family with children: Korni, Rudolf & Rita, 1958. Photo: CMBS

badly damaged. The next day, with his wife Marg, his parents, and many friends at his side, Kornelius died. His last words were a prayer for the Moro Indians whom he had tried to reach.

The New Tribes Missions and Catholic missionaries continued to work among the Moros. The tribe became more open and eventually individuals accepted the Christian gospel. In 1961 Mennonites learned that the Moros had attacked the missionaries as revenge for an epidemic that had broken out among them after the oil company camp had been established.

During the 1980s some of the Moros encountered the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.¹ After learning to read, and having received a New Testament, a man from the Guidai-Gosode (a territorial group of the Ayoreo nation) visited his relatives and shared his discovery: "If Jesus calls us to love our

(cont'd on p. 9)



In a moving gesture, marking the 50th anniversary of the death of his brother Kornelius, Helmut Isaak embraces Jonoine. Photo credit: Ray Dirks.

Genealogy and Family History

By Alf Redekopp

Recent Books

The Living Saga of Jacob J. and Helena (Peters) Fehr (Portage la Prairie, MB: Fehr Family History Committee, 2000) 196 pp.

This book includes the family history of Jacob J. Fehr (1886-1961) and his wife Helena (Peters) Fehr (1889-1968) who lived in the Mennonite school district of Shoenu, five miles northwest of Altona, Manitoba. Besides farming and raising a family of twelve children, Fehr served as secretary-treasurer of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference Mission Board, and as treasurer of the Elim Bible School in Altona. Helen cared for the family and was active in community and church life.

Contact: Carol Zacharias, 6 Lincoln Avenue, Portage la Prairie, MB R1N 3T2.

Kim MacLeod, et. al. *A Tree Transplanted: From the Russian Steppes to the Canadian Prairies: The Story of Johann H. Epp & Helen Unrau and their Descendants* (Pilot Butte, SK: Epp History Book Committee, 2009) 704 pp.

This book includes the family history of Johann H. Epp (1874-1932) and Helena Unrau (1881-1959) born in Rosenheim, Schoenfeld and Liebenau, Molotschna, respectively, who came to

Canada in the 1920s and settled at Wiedefeld, Manitoba. The Epp ancestry is traced back to Aeltester (Bishop) Peter Epp (1725-1789) of Danzig and the Unrau ancestry is traced back to Heinrich Unrau (1795-1878) who became the first mayor of Liebenau, Molotschna. The book denotes a chapter to each of the children and their descendants. It has numerous photographs, maps and reproduced documents relevant to the family's history.

Contact: Epp History Book Committee, Box 822, Pilot Butte, SK S0G 3Z0.

New Resource

Adolf Ens, Ernest N. Braun and Henry N. Fast, *Settlers of the East Reserve: moving in, moving out, staying* (Winnipeg, MB: Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, 2009) 328 pp. Price: \$30.00 (\$40.00 with CD ROM).

This research tool includes homestead application data, complete assessment records for 1885, 1891 census data by village and much more. There are three new village histories, autobiographical materials by five pioneers, plus a section containing essays on three significant departures from the East Reserve within the first 50 years of settlement.

Plett Family History Essay Contest 2009 Winners

The Genealogy Committee of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society is pleased to announce the winners of this year's Henry E. Plett Memorial Award for writing a family history.

The winners are both Grade 11 students from Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute (MBCI) in Winnipeg. First prize was awarded to **Meaghan Giesbrecht** (left), for her family history paper which focused on her paternal grandmother's Martens family who left Landskrone, Molotschna, South Russia for Canada in 1926.

Second prize was awarded to **Holly Goossen** (right), for her paper which investigated what happened to her paternal grandfather John Goossen when his personal commitment to Christ interfered with his loyalty to Canada and found himself imprisoned for wanting to claim status as a conscientious objector to war in 1942.

This annual essay contest, open to any Manitoba high school student, aims to promote and encourage research and writing in family history. Students are encouraged to interview grandparents or older relatives, find original family sources such as old family Bibles, diaries and letters; and to visit specialized Mennonite libraries and archives.

MBCI teacher Paul Doerksen introduced this year's winners to the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, where they learned about archival resources and had the opportunity to examine some family documents.

The competition details can be found on the web at: www.mmhs.org/plett.htm for any students who wish to enter next year.



Holly Goossen

Meaghan Giesbrecht



Does anyone recognized this building and place? A Gothic German hand-written note on the reverse says that "we settled here on 6 May 1925...taken 1929... to remember us..."
Contact: Nelly Rempel, Box 4, Port Robinson, ON L0S 1K0; e-mail: nellyr@vaxxine.com.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or e-mail: aredekopp@mennonitechurch.ca

Abram J. Thiessen (1910-2002)

by Conrad Stoesz

Abram J. Thiessen, Manitoba Mennonite entrepreneur and businessman was born on December 12, 1910 to Abram A. Thiessen (1887-1960) and Susanna Braun (1882-1945) on a farm south east of Rosenfeld, near present day Altona. Abram's maternal grandfather Johann Braun (1858-1941) was a mill owner in Niverville and later in Altona. Abram's paternal grandfather, Abram B. Thiessen (1861-1935), was a school teacher in the village of Chortitz.



Abram attended school in the village of Rosenfeld and took further schooling at Mennonite Collegiate Institute (MCI). Some of his early employment experiences included working for the CPR replacing railway ties at 25 cents an hour, and later at Ogilves, with the grain elevator repair gang. In 1928 he returned to school in Rosenfeld.

Abram J. Thiessen (or AJ, as he was often called) was baptized by bishop David Schulz on May 21, 1928, joining the Bergthaler Mennonite Church. This event implanted a desire to become a missionary which stayed with him for a number of years, but in the end he had little money to go to the necessary college. "This was very disappointing to me...this missionary desire burned in my heart until 1933."¹

In 1931 AJ began to sell used clothing and groceries in partnership with George Fast. AJ also picked up extra work by selling insurance for the Wawanesa Insurance company and teaching English classes to new immigrants and helping them prepare for citizenship. In 1932 Thiessen began his trucking business by using his grandfather's car. He removed the back seat and transported eggs and chickens to Winnipeg. He took passengers for 75 cents one way. Soon a trailer was needed and in 1934, a 1929 Chevy truck with a homemade cab was purchased and they received a license to transport livestock and freight.

AJ married Lenora Friesen (1914-2007) on July 28, 1935 in the Edenberg Bergthaler Mennonite Church. Together AJ and Lenora had five children, Ronald (1936-), Bernhard (1939-), William (1941-), Irvin (1944-), and Carolyn (1948). The early years of their family life were especially difficult for Lenora. AJ

worked long hours, six days a week and was often away from home. In addition to looking after the children, Lenora was also responsible for the hogs, cattle and chickens. AJ credits MCI where all the children attended for high school in helping raise his children. Eventually all the children became involved with the business making it truly a family business.

The Fast and Thiessen Company delivered cream to Winnipeg for the farmers and returned from Winnipeg with Eaton's orders. The business expanded in 1936 by becoming a Chrysler dealership and in 1948 the Massy-Harris dealer. In 1952 they had the highest Massy-Harris dealer sales in the province. They kept the Chrysler dealership until 1957. In the end it was not profitable.

The Fast Thiessen Company of Rosenfeld continued to invest in the trucking enterprise. In 1942 they bought Wiebe Brothers Transport of Plum Coulee. In 1943 Hiebert Trucking of Altona was purchased. In 1943 they expanded into the retail business with a general store they purchased from William Colblentz.

On January 1, 1945 George Fast and Abram Thiessen divided their business operations, keeping the dealerships together but with Thiessen taking the trucking business and Fast retaining the store. In 1946 AJ was one of the 4 applicants for the franchise to operate a bus service. After the license was granted, Thiessen Bus Lines was born and headquartered in Rosenfeld. The service ran between Gretna, Altona, Rosenfeld, Winkler Plum Coulee and Winnipeg.² By 1950 Thiessen had 5 buses in service.

In 1947 the Western Canadian bus industry was revolutionized with the first bus tour which took 23 people from Southern Manitoba to Mexico to visit relatives, with AJ as the bus driver. In 1948 another tour was organized taking Mennonite clergy to the Mennonite World Conference in Newton, Kansas. The tours included lively singing of hymns and gospel songs. "Circle Tours", which officially started in 1966, developed out of these early tours.

In 1955 the Thiessen family moved from Rosenfeld to a farm in the Gnadenfeld school district, south of Altona where the younger three children attended a one-room country school. AJ continued buying land until 1956 when they farmed 640 acres. In 1965 the farm was sold to cover a bad business purchase and the family moved permanently to

Winnipeg.

In 1961 the company began to expand again with the purchase of Grey Goose Bus Lines which operated in Western Manitoba and North Western Ontario. In 1962 Western Flyer, a manufacturer of buses was purchased. In 1969 Manitoba Motor Transit of Brandon was added to the fleet and Western Flyer was sold. To continue to expand, more capital was needed and so in 1970 Grey Goose Company went public. In 1971 AJ exchanged controlling interest in Grey Goose for equity stock in Laidlaw Transportation, headquartered in Hamilton, Ontario. In 1971 Acme Sanitation Services was purchased, launching the company into the waste management industry. In 1974 and 1976 Grey Goose acquired Yellow Cab in Edmonton and Calgary.

In 1977 A.J. Thiessen gave up day-to-day management of Grey Goose and just retained the chairmanship of the Grey Goose Corporation. This was a difficult transition for the man who started the company from the ground up. By that time Bernie managed the Manitoba bus operation, Bill managed the waste management division in Manitoba and Ron, in Edmonton, headed the waste management and taxi cab operations in Alberta.

Family and close friends had always been important to AJ and many of them worked with AJ for Grey Goose.

Thiessen was a man with vision and energy, and spent time with his family. In 1973 a cottage was purchased at Clearwater Bay, Ontario where the Thiessens enjoyed hosting family and friends. Fishing became a passion for AJ and Lenora.

While A.J. Thiessen was operating his business, farming and raising a family he also had energy and interests in politics and other community development projects. In 1953 Thiessen planned to run in the federal election for Provencher as an independent but party leader George Drew convinced him to run as a Conservative. With light voter turn out, Thiessen lost by a wide margin. He garnered 2141 votes while the liberal candidate 6,542.³

In 1962 Thiessen was encouraged by Conservatives and Liberals to run against incumbent Jake M. Froese of the



Social Credit Party. This time there was more energy and publicity poured into the campaign. Thiessen's campaign was linked to the successful record of the then Premier Duff Roblin of the Progressive Conservatives. In the end Thiessen narrowly lost by 17 votes.⁴ In reflecting on his forays into political life Thiessen said he learned a lot about human nature and was glad for the experience. He later realized that if he had won, it would have negatively affected his business.⁵ Thiessen held no ill feelings towards J.M. Froese who later became one of the early leaders in the bid to establish a Mennonite radio station.

Perhaps as result of his earlier visions of becoming a missionary, coupled with his role as member of the Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba Radio Committee in 1955, AJ conceived the idea that the Mennonite community needed a radio station. In March 1956, Thiessen brought together in his home Rev. J.M. Pauls, John Brandt, Dennis Barkman, Dave Fehr, J.A. Penner, D.K. Friesen, T.E. Friesen, and C.W. Thiessen to discuss "... a station that would provide good programs and could be a witness to others in the listening area".⁶ By the next meeting on May 18, 1956 the group had grown to 21 men.⁷ By May 1956 A.J. was elected as chairman of the board⁸ and by March 13 1957 the station in Altona was on the air.⁹

Soon after the station started tensions became evident, and by November 1957, Thiessen had resigned from the CFAM Board and sold his shares.

AJ served on the Elim Bible School building committee, and was involved with the Altona and Winkler Senior Citizen's Homes. He was on the MCI board the longest of any committee or board – 1950 to 1967, serving as chairman from 1960-1965.

The MCI board continuously dealt with grumbling in the constituency over issues such as the location of the school. After a decisive vote to keep the school in Gretna, AJ was elected chair of a building committee for a new residence for the school. Although AJ later resigned before the completion of the project, he continued to be a strong supporter. In 1981 he was able to honor his long time friend and fellow board member, Paul Schaefer, with funding for building the Paul J. Schaefer library at MCI.

The MCI was not the only educational institution he served. He was on the Rosenfeld school board as early as 1942.



A.J. Thiessen's first bus, 1946.

After 1955 he was on the Gnadenfeld school board. In 1947 he was elected a director of the Manitoba School Trustees Association (MSTA). At various times he served as director, president and vice-president. One year he served as president of the Canadian School Trustees and was made an honorary life member. His involvement with MSTA drew him to be involved with a Government Advisory Board on Education, the Teachers' Pension Fund Board, a Teachers' Discipline Committee and the Municipal Assessment Committee.

Seeing a need for a unified voice against the formation of larger school divisions, Thiessen organized the Mennonite School Trustees Association. It was made up of the trustees from the Rhineland (Altona area), Stanley (Winkler area), and Hanover (Steinbach area) school divisions. They were opposed to the formation of larger school divisions in fear that that larger school divisions meant larger schools with less input and supervision from parents. In the end, larger school divisions were legislated by the Province of Manitoba and the Association discontinued.¹⁰

In 1973 Thiessen was brought into the Manitoba Development Corporation headquartered in Winnipeg. The corporation operated as a lending institution and worked with economic development in the province on behalf of the Manitoba government. Thiessen served on the board of directors and on the loan committee. In 1973, 87 loans worth \$40 million were approved and in 1974, \$23.5 million. In addition to providing loans the organization helped businesses apply for other federal and provincial funds. In 1974 the board of directors met 18 times and the loans committee 8 times. The organization employed 46 people.¹¹ Thiessen served in this capacity until 1976.¹²

Abram J. Thiessen died at his residence at Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, Winnipeg on March 7, 2002. His funeral was at First Mennonite Church in Winnipeg and he was laid to rest in the Rosenfeld cemetery. Lenora died

December 13, 2007 and was also buried at Rosenfeld cemetery.

Like his father and both grandfathers AJ Thiessen was involved with education, business and politics and slightly with farming – perhaps the reverse of many of his local peers. AJ Thiessen's circle of influence was large. He served the Mennonite community and the wider public through his business ventures, his forays into politics, and service on church and secular business and educational committees. The amount of volunteer time he poured into the various committees and boards was possible only through the support of his wife and children.

Through his experiences he remained a committed Mennonite church member, content with simpler things in life. "I have felt that in the social and business establishments in Manitoba... looks askance at all ethnic groups... unless you are willing to deny your own Mennonite background and become avid members of their churches, legions and clubs... We have rather been happy to socialize with our family and friends from our Rosenfeld background."¹³

Endnotes

1. A.J. Thiessen, *My Background and Life's Experiences* (A.J. Thiessen: Altona, Manitoba, 1982), 35.
2. Gerhard Ens, *The Rural Municipality of Rhineland* (R.M. of Rhineland: Altona, Manitoba, 1984) 187.
3. "Jutras Wins Fourth Consecutive Election", *Red River Valley Echo*, Altona, Manitoba, August 12, 1953, 1.
4. Thiessen p.62. Other sources such as Wikipedia, "Manitoba general election, 1962", give the difference as 32 votes. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manitoba_general_election,_1962 accessed August 12, 2009.
5. Thiessen, 62.
6. "First Meeting of Persons Interested in Establishing a Radio Station in Altona", March 15, 1956.
7. "Minutes of the meeting of shareholders of the proposed Radio Station at Altona", May 18, 1956.
8. "Minutes of the meeting of shareholders of the Southern Manitoba Broadcasting Company", May 25, 1956.
9. Esther Epp-Thiessen, *Altona the Story of a Prairie Town* (D.W. Friesen: Altona, Manitoba, 1982), 249.
10. Thiessen, 97.
11. "Manitoba Development Corporation Annual Report 1974", 5-6.
12. Telephone interview with Mr. James Kilgour by Conrad Stoesz May 2009. Mr. Kilgour is the current manager of the Manitoba Development Corporation.
13. Thiessen, 90.

Conrad Stoesz is Archivist at the Mennonite Heritage Centre and Centre for MB Studies in Winnipeg.



MHC News

Mennonite Heritage Sunday Resource

This year's worship resource for Heritage Sunday (Oct. 25, 2009) was prepared by Laureen Harder Gissing, Archivist-Librarian at the Mennonite Archives of Ontario/Conrad Grebel University College. It was distributed to Mennonite Church Canada congregations in the Equipping distribution and may be downloaded from www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1134.

Echo Historical Series

This series of monographs is now available for purchase from the Heritage Centre. There are a total of eleven (11) titles which were translated and published in English between 1989 and 2001 in a joint project of CMBC Publications and Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society. The original German publication first became available between 1945 and 1965 through the efforts of a group of alumni of the Chortitza Zentralschule in Russia. The series of booklets on Mennonite colonies and leaders in Russia often cover the history of settlements that had ceased to exist in the 1940s and the authors would write out of their own first hand experience. The booklets are available for only \$10.00 each, except for the one on the Molotschna Settlement. Orders online at: www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1094 or contact the Centre.

Bergen-Peters Papers Received

The Jacob Peters fonds and the Anna Peters fonds are related collections which the Centre recently added to his holdings.

Jacob Peters was born in 1908 in Neuendorf, Chortitza, South Russia to Abram and Margaretha (Derksen) Peters. Jacob received his early education in Neuendorf, followed by attending the Zentralschule in Nikolaipol (1923-1924) and the Chortitza Teachers' Institute (1925-1927). In 1928, he told his parents that he was not coming for the summer, as he and his friend were planning to go to the Caucasus to study plants. It was discovered later that Jakob's real plan was not to study plants, but to escape from Russia. The family found out when they got a letter from him from Persia (Iran).

Eventually Jacob and his friend made



The completion of *Der Bote Index* Project was celebrated on Sept. 2, 2009 with the publication of *Der Bote Index Vol. 6: 2001-2008*. L-R: Peter Rempel compiler and editor of volumes 1 & 2 covering 1924-1963 (published in 1976, 1991); Adolf Ens, managing editor for most volumes, Helene Warkentin (formerly Friesen) indexer for volumes 3, 4 & 5, covering 1964-2000 (published in 1999, 2000, 2005); and, Bert Friesen, indexer for the final volume. The indexes may be ordered from the Centre or on-line at: www.mennonitechurch.ca/tiny/1137. Photo credit: Alf Redekopp

their way to Germany and from Germany to Brazil in 1930. Jakob Peters lived in Brazil until 1933, when he returned to Germany to study in Berlin. In Brazil he had begun a teaching career. In 1939 he had almost completed his Ph.D. in Education and was hoping to return to South America to teach in Paraguay, when the war broke out.

When Germany invaded Russia in 1941, Jakob was enlisted as an interpreter on the eastern front and stationed in Orel, Russia. Jakob visited his father Abram Peters in Burwalde, Ukraine three times between 1941 and 1943. In 1942, he brought his sister **Anna Peters** (1919) to Berlin.

In 1943 Jakob's parents and other siblings were evacuated by the retreating Germany army and became refugees in Oberschlesian, Germany.

In 1944 his sister Anna Peters received word that Jakob had gone "missing in action" and she was given his last effects.

Anna Peters emigrated from Germany to Canada in 1948 and lives in Abbotsford.

Margaret Bergen of Winnipeg compiled the extant letters, transcriptions and translations, and donated them to the Heritage Centre in July 2009.

One group of letters were written by Jakob Peters (1908-1944) to his sister Anna Peters (1919-) between 1942 and 1944, after he had accompanied her from the Ukraine to Berlin where she remained to work in a German household. Anna had had little schooling in German, with her father exiled to Siberia when she was 11 and her mother dying when she was 13, and the family being classified as kulaks (tight-fisted landowners). As her German was so poor, Jakob would correct her letters and return them to her so that she

would improve her German. There are 24 letters in this group.

The another group of letters were written by Jakob Peters to relatives in Canada, specifically his sister and brother-in-law, Maria (Peters) and Jakob Bergen and her son John Bergen (1922-), who settled at Graysville, Manitoba after coming to Canada in 1923. These letters begin in 1928 from Persia and then from Brazil and Germany. In Jakob's letters to his nephew John Bergen, who was studying at Mennonite Collegiate Institute in Gretna during the late 1930s, Jakob Peters often writes about how wonderful it would be for him to come and get an education in Germany after completing his high school in Gretna.

The other main group of letters consists of the correspondence between Anna Peters in Germany, her sister Maria (Peters) Bergen in Canada and her nephew John Bergen, at first in Oldenburg, Germany, later back in Canada, and her niece, Margaret Bergen in Canada. Anna's first letter to her sister Maria Bergen after the war was sent along with a Canadian soldier stationed in Wiesmoor, who was returning to Canada. No correspondence had yet been allowed between Germany and Canada. Maria was able to send a letter to her son John Bergen, who was in the Dental Corps, as a member of the occupation forces stationed in Oldenburg, Germany, and through him contact could be made and letters received. For several months all letters from Anna Peters (Germany) to her sister Maria (Canada) were forwarded via John Bergen in Oldenburg, Germany.

The Centre is grateful to Margaret Bergen and other family members for preserving and making these letters accessible.

A.R.

High School Students make Discoveries in the Archives

“Who has been in an archive before,” was one of the first questions posed to 60 Grade 11 students coming for a tour of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies this past June. Only one hand went up. “What is the difference between a library and an archive,” was the second question put to them. Over four days, four classes from MBCI’s (Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute) Church History course came to the Centre to learn about archives. The course, taught by Dr. Paul Doerksen, includes a significant amount of Mennonite history and introduces students to the skill of reading primary and secondary documents. Preserving a collection of primary documents is what sets archives apart from libraries.

In his introductory comments, Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches executive director, David Wiebe stated, “The past helps us understand our identity which helps us move into the future. And the Centre here aids us in both discovering our identity and turning our face to the future.” He then led the students on a tour of the Mennonite Brethren Ministry Centre highlighting current programs of the Conference.

Back on the main floor, the students were ushered into the climate-controlled vault where they learned about technology and climate and how they impact archival collections. They were given an orientation to periodicals, primary materials and finding aids. Then students were split into pairs and given a research task mirroring a “real life” research request. They varied from reading a midwifery diary from Russia in 1910 to analyzing correspond-

dence from WWII conscientious objectors, to examining the architecture of 1920 immigrant churches in Western Canada, to reading letters to the editor related to worship styles during the 1980s. Doerksen commented that the visit “...provided a terrific exposure to the value of archives generally, and Mennonite archives specifically in understanding the shape of the Anabaptist/Mennonite faith and experience.”

The students were given unique access to the archival vault and were guided and encouraged by archival staff each step of the way. The students treated the materials with care and respect, understanding what they were holding were “one-of-a-kind” priceless documents. “It was fun to watch the discovery unfolding in front of us,” reflected Centre director, Doug Heidebrecht. Paul Doerksen noted, “Along the way, there were some nice moments - students recognizing authors of books they saw in the library; a student finding his dad’s 20 year old letter to the editor in the MB Herald; and a student running across several boxes of her grandpa’s papers.”

When asked why the Centre invested so much time into this event, Director Heidebrecht replied, “Activities such as this opens the Centre to a new user group and gives these students a glimpse into the significant role historical materials can have in relating to current questions.”

After two and a half hours everyone met around donuts and discussed their experience. Two of the students who visited the Centre, Meaghan Giesbrecht and Holly Goossen, went on to win first and second place prizes in the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society’s Plett family history essay contest (see p. 3 for additional details). *Conrad Stoesz*



Theological Resources Now On-line

A task of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies is to give access to the rich resources it houses. The Centre and its staff answer numerous requests for information daily along side processing and acquiring new materials. In addition to the finding aids on the Centre web site we have begun to post content – digital versions of archival documents. The first project is the posting of Mennonite Brethren study conference papers 1956-2003 and the theological journal *The Voice* in pdf format. For this project Janelle Hume was hired thanks to a financial contribution from the Canadian Council of Archives.

Mennonite Brethren have always tried to live faithfully in their context. As the culture around them changed, new challenges were encountered. One way Mennonite Brethren dealt with these new realities was to hold regular study conferences where position papers were presented and issues debated. Vigorous debate also took place in the Bible Schools of the day such as MBBC (Mennonite Brethren Bible College) located in Winnipeg. Some of this debate can be seen in its theological journal *The Voice*, which ran from 1951-1971. These conversations also informed the Conference in setting direction.

These resources constitute a history of ideas regarding how Mennonite Brethren have struggled with maintaining identity, relevancy and meaning within a rapidly changing North American context. Some of the issues debated are still current today, making the study conference papers and *The Voice* relevant to churches today. This project is not yet completed; we are still waiting for permission from some authors before we can post all the articles.

To download these resources go to www.mbconf.ca/cmbs and then click on the tab “Theology.”

Conrad Stoesz



MBCI students Chris Baldoke (left) and Danny Budzak enjoying photos at CMBS. Photo credit: Kyle Thomas.

Mennonite Faith and Learning Society Signs Historic Agreement with University of the Fraser Valley

The University of the Fraser Valley (UFV) signed an agreement on June 24, 2009 with the Mennonite Faith and Learning Society (MFLS) with the intent of establishing a Centre for Mennonite Studies, as well as a Chair, a certificate, and possibly a minor in Mennonite Studies.

The goal of the partnership is to jointly create an opportunity for students to study the rich heritage of the Mennonites and their contributions to the Fraser Valley and beyond.

“The Mennonite community has played an incredible role in developing the Fraser Valley,” said UFV president and vice-chancellor Dr. Skip Bassford. “UFV’s partnership with MFLS is a natural fit as we strive to remain an institution whose studies reflect the communities in which we live and serve.”

With approximately 25 percent of the population in the Abbotsford area alone identified as Mennonite, either religiously or culturally, the partnership is long overdue, according to Bassford.

“We are thrilled about this partnership with UFV,” said Dr. John Redekop, co-president, MFLS. “We have long sought to provide the community with access to Mennonite studies at a public university, and this is our chance to create greater awareness and enhanced presence in the community.”

The signing of the agreement is an historic occasion, concluding a year of

discussions about the nature and direction of such a Centre and how it can best serve the university, the Mennonite community, and the Lower Mainland.

“This agreement establishes a framework for what we hope will become a source of Mennonite knowledge and new ideas for our communities. We are excited to move forward on the next steps in this partnership, including raising the funds to make this vision reality,” added Ed Janzen, co-president, MFLS.

As resources permit and community interest warrants, the Centre will undertake research and education related to history, religious studies, ethno-religious culture, philosophy, literature, fine arts, political studies, international development, peace and reconciliation, agriculture, music, and other disciplines of interest to the Mennonite community.

To learn more about this initiative, please contact UFV Acting Director of Development Ryan Koch at 604-851-6326, 1-888-504-7441, local 6326 or ryan.koch@ufv.ca.

About the MFLS: the MFLS is a registered society of Mennonite business people, academics, clergy, and others who developed a vision for such a centre. The intent is to engage teaching, research, and preservation of Mennonite beliefs, traditions and contributions in Canada and beyond, but especially in the Fraser Valley and the Lower Mainland.

--News Release



Ed Janzen, Dr. Skip Bassford, and Dr. John Redekop sign the official agreement between the Mennonite Faith & Learning Society and the University of the Fraser Valley.

Dick Epp (1927-2009)

Saskatchewan Mennonite historian, author, photographer and former teacher died in Saskatoon on June 28, 2009. In the early 1970s, Epp became a founding member, and later, long-time president of the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta. He played an active role on various boards, committees, and organizations. Dick and his wife Betty (nee Berg) were charter members of Nutana Park Mennonite Church. He wrote and published *From Between the Tracks 1927-1952*, a volume of personal stories related to his family history. He was awarded the Saskatchewan Centennial Leadership Award in 2005 for his outstanding contribution to our province. In 2006 he was honoured by Saskatchewan Mennonite Historical Society for his eleven years of service as the editor of the *Saskatchewan Mennonite Historian*. He was also a long-standing member of the editorial committee of *Der Bote*, seldom missing a meeting. He lived a fully and productive life. May he rest in peace.



Reuben Epp (1920-2009)

Author of numerous works in Plautdietsch (Mennonite Low German) died in Kelowna, BC on June 20, 2009. Educated as a mechanic and working primarily as a vocational educator and master mechanic, Reuben Epp is best known in the international Mennonite Community for his poems and stories. His publications include *Biem Aunsiedle: When the settlers came...* (Winnipeg, Canada 1972), *Plautdietsche Schreftsteckja...* (Steinbach, Manitoba 1972), *Onse Lied Vetahle [Audio Archive]: Stories our people tell...* (Winnipeg, Manitoba 1973), *The Story of Low German and Plautdietsch...* (Hillsboro, USA 1993), *The Spelling of Low German & Plautdietsch...* (Hillsboro, USA 1996), *Dit un jant opp Plautdietsch...* (Hillsboro, USA 1997) and *Dit un Jant opp Plautdietsch* [CD, 17 pieces by Reuben Epp, recorded live on October 7, 2000 in Lage/Lippe, Germany] (Plautdietsch-Freunde e. V. (Detmold 2006).



Mennonite/s Writing: Manitoba and Beyond

October 1-4, 2009

University of Winnipeg, Convocation Hall

Free Admission – No pre-registration required

The fifth international conference on Mennonite/s Writing since 1990 features scholarly papers on the work of individual “Mennonite” writers, on Mennonite writers’ inscription of Winnipeg or Manitoba landscapes, and on other subjects related to Mennonite/s writing across North America. Writers who have grown up within the Mennonite communities of Manitoba have made a huge contribution to Canadian literature over the course of the last half century. Their work is read around the world. This conference celebrates and analyzes their work, and that of authors from other parts of North America. The conference program includes readings by Rudy Wiebe, David Bergen, Di Brandt, Patrick Friesen, Armin Wiebe, David Waltner-Toews, David Elias, Sarah Klassen and others.

Co-chaired by Royden Loewen (Chair of Mennonite Studies, University of Winnipeg) and Hildi Froese Tiessen (Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo)

For more details and a complete schedule see:

<http://mennonitestudies.uwinnipeg.ca/events/writing/writingprogram.php>

Mennonite Historian 1975-2008 Available On-line

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Mennonite Historian website. At the top left is the logo for "Mennonite Historian". Below it, text identifies it as a publication of the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for MB Studies in Canada, and lists the ministries of the Mennonite Church Canada and the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches. The page is divided into several sections: "Editors" (Alf Redekopp and Doug Heidebrecht), "Associate Editor" (Conrad Stoesz), "Editorial Offices" (600 Shaftesbury Blvd. and 1310 Taylor Ave.), "Subscription rates" (\$13.00 for 1 year, \$24.00 for 2 years, and \$34.00 for 3 years), and "Periodical number" (ISSN 0700 8066). There are also "MHC Order Form" and "CMBS Order Form" links. A "Search Options" section includes a search box with "Google" and "Custom Search" buttons, and a link to an "Author Index (1975-2008) (for quicker results)". A "Current Issue" section highlights "Vol. 35, No. 1 (Mar. 2009)". At the bottom, there is a "Back Issues" section with a "Format: Standard (8.5 X 11) Acrobat PDF. Click here to download a free Adobe Reader" link, and a row of four thumbnail images for "Vol. 34, No. 1 (Mar. 2008)", "Vol. 34, No. 2 (Jun. 2008)", "Vol. 34, No. 3 (Sep. 2008)", and "Vol. 34, No. 4 (Dec. 2008)".

All issues of the *Mennonite Historian* except for the most recent issue can now be read and searched on-line at www.mennonitehistorian.ca. Check it out!

Reconciliation at MWC

(cont'd from p. 1)

“We are witnessing the breaking of walls,” he continued. “We are ready to receive the words we have heard.” The two men then embraced.

Ironically, these representatives of Anabaptists and Lutherans are both from Zimbabwe. Ishmael Noko’s mother, in fact, was a Brethren in Christ woman who married a Lutheran. Said Larry Miller, MWC general secretary, “Divine providence has brought these [two men] together.”

Moro Spear

(cont'd from p. 2)

enemies, then we have to go and find our old adversaries, the Totobie-Gosode (another territorial group of the same Ayoreo nation), who are hostile to any contacts from outside their group and of whom we have killed so many.”

They chartered a small airplane to find their old enemies. After locating them from the air, they decided to pay them a visit on the ground, even though it required a long walk through the bush.

“Let’s not use any arms,” said the leaders. “We have killed so many of them, and it might be that some of us will have to give our lives so they might understand that we come in peace and that Jesus has given us love for our enemies.”

The first minutes of the encounter were very violent. The Totobie-Gosode killed five of the visitors and badly injured four others from the the Guidai-Gosode peace delegation. But when they noticed that their visitors behaved in a completely nonviolent way, the killing stopped, they made peace, and together they returned to the village of the Guidai-Gosode to live and learn with their former enemies.

In 1988, thirty years after the tragic death of the Kornelius Isaak, a group of Moros also came to the Fernheim Mennonite Colony for a visit. Among the group were members of the warrior band that attacked the missionaries. Now, however, they came as friends and not enemies.

This reconciliation was symbolized again at the Mennonite World Conference Assembly 15, which took place in Paraguay in July 2009. Jonoine, who had killed Isaak, is now chief of the indigenous Ayoreo people. He was invited to the closing worship service where Isaak’s brother Helmut read a statement of forgiveness: “More than fifty years ago, your clan and tribe were resisting us, but now we aren’t enemies anymore, but brothers in Christ.”²

Endnotes

1. This story is adapted from Alfred Neufeld, *What We Believe Together* (Intercourse: Good Books, 2007), 96-97.
2. Dick Benner, “Forgiving the Murderer,” *Canadian Mennonite*, August 17, 2009, 11.

The John and Margaret Friesen Lectures
in Anabaptist/Mennonite Studies presents

Mennonite Women in Canada

Featuring **Dr. Marlene Epp**, who teaches History and Peace and Conflict Studies at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo

November 17-18, 2009

Canadian Mennonite University

Laudamus Auditorium

Free admission

Nov. 17, 7:30 p.m.; Nov. 18, 10:30 a.m.

Nov. 18, 7:30 p.m.

Book Notes

by Adolf Ens

Doreen Reimer Peters, *One Who Dared: Life Story of Ben D. Reimer, 1909–1994* (Steinbach: by the author, 2005), 307 pages, is a tribute to her father by the eldest daughter of a family of eleven children. As is the case in many Mennonite families where the father was a minister, the story of public ministry seems to eclipse the story of family life. Reimer was first and foremost an evangelist. But he also played a major role in the development of the Kleine Gemeinde (later Evangelical Mennonite Church), the Steinbach Bible School (Academy, Institute, now College), and the Western Gospel Mission, founded in 1946, largely at his initiative. While the author selected the anecdotes and shaped the story, most of the tributes come from the people deeply influenced in their faith by Reimer.

Gerhard Ratzlaff and Philip Roth, *Robert and Myrtle Unruh: A Legacy of Christian Service and Goodwill in Paraguay, 1951–1983* (Morgantown, PA: Masthof Press, 2009), 269 pages, is the product of a collaboration of a Mennonite historian in Paraguay and an American former MCC PAXman who served in Paraguay in the 1950s. Translated from the German original by Erwin Boschman, this is a richly illustrated story pieced together from archival documents and a host of oral sources. Robert served in applied agricultural research under the umbrella of the Fernheim Experimental Farm and later as agricultural advisor to the three Mennonite colonies in the Chaco. Myrtle taught home economics in the Fernheim high school (now *Colegio Filadelfia*). Both collaborated in the Indian Resettlement Program. The book becomes a personalized history of economic development of the Chaco Mennonite (and Indian) community with strong undertones of ecological foresight and an emphasis on social justice.

Mary Regehr Dueck, *The Good Stock: Siemens . Peters . Regehr . Korolkov* (Abbotsford, BC: by the author, 2009), 217 pages, is a kind of biography of the author's parents who immigrated to Manitoba from Russia in 1924. Many readers will recall Regehr's Printing (North Kildonan) operated by Jakob Regehr and his children. What makes it quite unusual is that the author traces the "good stock" from which she and her four siblings derived by identifying all lines of their biological ancestors (not just the paternal one), in most cases to the GGG Grandparent level, and in some well beyond that. Far from being a primarily genealogical book, however, it consists of quite substantial narrative and many archival documents for most of the lineages, including that of her Russian Orthodox mother, Evdokia Korokova (where the usual sources for researching Russian Mennonite families don't apply).

Isaac Reimer's hand-written German manuscript about his home village in Chortitza Colony, Russia, remained largely closed to the

general public since 1973 when he completed the story of Einlage. It now becomes much more widely accessible thanks to its translation by Esther Patkau, Saskatoon, and published as Isaac Reimer, *The Old Colony: The Village of Einlage in South Russia, 1789–1945*. Translated by Esther Patkau (Saskatoon, SK: by the translator, 2009), xvi + 483, pages, 8½ x 11, Cerlox bound. Reimer combines enormous amounts of detailed information and data on the history of Einlage with his own personal recollections of its latter years. It is a rich source of social history (e.g. butchering pigs, winter recreation, sport, a Jewish wedding, etc.), local economy (cattle industry, beer trade, factories), data and descriptions of church and civic offices and leaders, schools and educators, etc. For many readers his detailed account of the final years of the village and of the fate of its inhabitants will be of greatest interest. Mennonite research libraries and archives should get this book.

A paper entitled "Four letters to Susanna from Johann Bartsch, A Danzig Mennonite land scout, 1786-87" was recently published in *The Polish Review* (volume LIV, No. 1, 2009:31-59) by Lawrence Klippenstein. While these somewhat personal letters do not reveal anything significantly new regarding the substance of the negotiations by Bartsch and Hoepfner, Klippenstein does some fine tuning on the chronology and travel route of the deputies. The paper probably also represents the most comprehensive review available of the material published on this very important preparation for the Mennonite migration to Russia. A copy of the paper is available at the MHC Archives.

One additional book note of an item at the Centre for MB Studies (by Doug Heidebrecht): *Tagebuch: A Diary of Katherina Janzen Enns, 1920-1924* (Rosseta Projects, 2008), 132 pages. The diary entries by Katherina Enns reflect a poignant account of daily life and weather conditions set alongside the trauma and struggle she experienced during the Civil War in Russia. The original diary was in such fragile condition that its contents were read in German onto audiocassettes by her daughter-in-law, Katie Enns, and then transcribed and translated into English by her grandson, Victor Epp. Copies can be ordered from Irmie Pauls, #122 – 16350 14th Avenue, Surrey, B.C., V4A 8J9 or by email at eipauls@shaw.ca.

Additional Book Review

Helmut T. Huebert.
Mennonites in the Cities of Imperial Russia. Vols. 1 and 2 (Winnipeg, MB: Springfield Publishers, 2006, 2008), pb., 456, 430 pp., \$40.00.

Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein

Mennonites began their life in Russia as villagers and before long as estate owners. Since research on their life in cities

began, it has been obvious that significant urbanization came next. The extent of the latter development has not been clear, but these volumes dramatically highlight that aspect of Mennonite life under the tsars.

In the first volume, the author covers eight cities of what is now Ukraine: Barvenkovo, Berdyansk, Melitopol, Millerovo, Orechov, Pologi, Sevastopol, and Simferopol. In Volume 2 the cities of Alexandrovsk (with Zaporozhe), Ekaterinoslav (today Dnepropetrovsk), Kharkov, Nikopol, Odessa, and Tokmak, all also in today's Ukraine, as well as the Russian cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg (Leningrad in the Soviet period) and Omsk in Siberia are added. If this research were extended to the Soviet period, a number of other names, notably from Central Asia, would undoubtedly appear in the list.

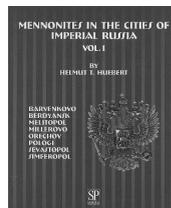
The range of source material (mostly in Western languages) includes maps, many photos, genealogical information, memoirs, contextual historical data, dozens of short biographies, and other miscellaneous information. It is surprising how much relevant material can come from what are mostly secondary publications, and oral interviews. Russian language archival information would naturally enhance the picture, but even as it is these volumes achieve a significant place in the growing literature on Mennonites in Russia and the Soviet Union.

City life often began with family business initiatives that emanated from the agricultural base which formed the bedrock of economic administrative and even social life for the Mennonites of Russia in the early years after 1790. In due time interests in higher education took young people to urban centres. These and related moves naturally brought questions of congregational organization with them. City churches were often relatively small in membership but would grow in time. Often these were home oriented worship groups with people coming and going to some extent, especially where students were a major component of the Mennonite community (as in St. Petersburg, for instance).

There may be more data that needs collecting on Huebert's theme, but the current data base is already massive. The stage is set for other related topics to be investigated. One of these would be the reciprocal impact of urbanization, i.e., how did this move affect urban Mennonites, and in return their much more numerous rural kinfolk, who remained in their village communities. Other issues would be social questions such as life style and intermarriage, the development of church life, and thoughts about the future of the Mennonite community as a whole in Russia.

The author will undoubtedly applaud such ongoing historical research, and we are all indebted to him for inspiring similar and other research enterprises on Russian Mennonite life and thought underway.

Lawrence Klippenstein is the former director of the Mennonite Heritage Centre.



Book Review

(cont'd from p. 12)

as with the relevant German government offices. One focus of his work was the temporary accommodation of refugees unable to move on to Canada.

The crisis situation of the Mennonites (and some others) stranded in Moscow in their attempt to leave the Soviet Union in 1929 brought about Unruh's passionate participation in a movement to rescue them that swept all Germany and resulted in the escape of over 5000 persons. He was centrally involved in the transfer of the Mennonites among them to Canada, Paraguay, and Brazil.

Meanwhile, Unruh and his family struggled with need, since he—not a German citizen until 1942, but living with a League of Nations-sponsored Nansen Passport designed for stateless persons—could not be given a professorship. He delayed seeking German citizenship on the advice from the *Auswärtiges Amt* that this would be advantageous for representing his Russian Mennonite people. To support his large family, he had to rely on term appointments at the Karlsruhe Technical University, on lecturing on Russia in many places, on aid from his wife's relatives, and on meagre and irregular support from MCC and the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. In spite of these sacrifices he worked tirelessly, to the point where a health crisis almost led to his death in 1936.

This poverty and suffering stands in ironic contrast to the great appreciation and the many honours that came his way; for example, the awarding of the highest order of merit of the German Red Cross in 1932, and an honorary Doctor of Theology degree from the University of Heidelberg (1937). It is even more amazing that he carried on a massive amount of academic research and publication, which the bibliography in this work documents.

At first very sceptical of Hitler's ascent to power, Unruh was gradually persuaded to a more positive view by the general upturn of hope in defeated and inflation-ridden Germany. Like many others in and outside of Germany, he saw the earlier developments of the Hitler era in light of Hitler's firm resistance to atheist Communism, while other western nations, especially the USA, took compromising approaches. He never joined the National Socialist Party, but he continued to work

with the *Auswärtiges Amt* (largely with the same civil servants as before Hitler, among them especially his friend Dr. Kundt), and later also with the *Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle* (Central Office in matters concerning Germans outside of Germany), firmly holding to two principles: to represent the needs of his Mennonite people, without political motives; and not to deny his faith in Jesus Christ.

Failing health, and then death (in 2003) prevented Heinrich B. Unruh from continuing his father's biography beyond this point (ca. 1936). Dr. Peter Letkemann, upon the invitation of the Unruh family, valiantly and impressively fills in the remaining life story of Benjamin Unruh (pp. 362-443).

Letkemann summarizes Unruh's activities in the years 1933-1938 in five key areas: relief for Russia, transfer of the "Harbin group" to the West; Paraguay; Brazil; and the *Mennoheim* (Mölln). Most important in Letkemann's Postscript is his treatment of Unruh's attitude toward and activity within the "Third Reich," a subject of great complexity in need of further research, complicated by the loss of most of Unruh's archive in the chaotic events surrounding the end of World War II. Letkemann provides sufficient documentation and perspective, however, to make it clear that the Western tendency to see only "collaborators" of, or "resisters" to Hitler is far too simplistic, and that the sidelining of Unruh by various Mennonite church and MCC leaders (because of his refusal to adopt the "Dutch ethnicity" approach and his continuing to work on behalf of Mennonites from Russia under the Hitler regime) is, in retrospect, sad and regrettable. One can hope that Letkemann's own promised biography of Unruh will clarify these issues.

Unruh's wife, Frieda, died in 1946. Somewhat over a year later he married Paula Hotel. Benjamin Unruh died on May 12, 1959.

Understandably, Heinrich Unruh sees his father's life and work in a positive light, but he does not eulogize without solid basis. Especially impressive is the broad historical context he provides for Unruh's life and work. The author delineates the positions of the various feuding parties and the resulting strategies of governments, ideologues, army leaders, and bandit groups with amazing clarity. And again, without diminishing the sufferings of the refugees before Moscow

in 1929, he presents the amazingly intricate diplomatic efforts by the German government to come to their assistance. In a sense, the book moves along three lines, tracing the world events, the Mennonite experience, and the life of Unruh and his family. Some overlapping can hardly be avoided, but the end result is a very rich tapestry capturing broad movements as well as rich detail.

Controversial issues, though not resolved, have been elucidated for me, like the theological/moral thinking underlying the *Selbstschutz* and the strategy based on it. It is especially gratifying for me that the frequent North American Mennonite bias--an if ever so slightly judgmental tone that makes the victims of Anarchist, Bolshevik, and Soviet brutality co-guilty of their fate--which frequently (not always) colours much North American writing on the issues treated, is absent from this work.

This is an exceptionally rich and rewarding work on Mennonite history, but prospective readers not fully fluent in German should be warned: Although written in excellent German, it may prove a challenge for them! I am most grateful for this outstanding work, and I thank the family of B. H. Unruh as well as Dr. Peter Letkemann for giving it to us.

Finally, a personal note: In January of 1944, in a Polish village in West Prussia, my mother and I--refugees from Chortitza, Ukraine--knew that the advancing front made a further flight westward imminent. Shortly before setting out, my mother had me write an address into my little brown pocket booklet: "Prof. Dr. B. H. Unruh, Karlsruhe Rü[ppur], Baden, Holderweg." If we should be separated during our flight, here was an address we would both have, and a man who would try to help me. Thank you, for having been there for us refugees, Benjamin Unruh!

Editor's note: This book may be purchased from the Centre for MB Studies or Mennonite Heritage Centre for \$35.00.

Researcher seeks public input

Collecting stories about Mennonites in and around Winnipeg, Kitchener-Waterloo, Abbotsford, and Vancouver and their involvement in and attitudes toward work and religion, I hope to interview Mennonite workers, pastors, business owners and managers, and academics, and/or their children and grandchildren.

Please contact: Janis Thiessen, Post doctoral student, Department of History, University of Winnipeg, 515 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, CANADA, R3B 2E9; P:204-282-0785; E: ja.thiessen@uwinnipeg.ca or Janis.Thiessen@unb.ca

Book Reviews

Heinrich B. Unruh, *Fügungen und Führungen: Benjamin Heinrich Unruh 1881-1959* (Detmold: Verein zur Erforschung und Pflege des Russlanddeutschen Mennonitentums, 2009) 509 pp., including a long postscript by Dr. Peter Letkemann.

Reviewed by Professor Dr. Waldemar Janzen, Canadian Mennonite University, Winnipeg.



The pivotal role of Professor Dr. Benjamin H. Unruh as a Mennonite leader in the first half of the 20th century is hard to overstate. His biography is told here by his son, Dr. Heinrich B. Unruh (henceforth

“the Author”), up to the year 1936. When the author died in 2003, he left an unfinished manuscript of almost 1000 pages. Family members collaborated with Dr. Peter Letkemann, Winnipeg, to prepare this shortened version for publication, and Letkemann provided an overview of B. H. Unruh’s remaining years, 1936-1959.

After his childhood and early school years in the Crimea and his secondary education in Halbstadt, Molotschna, B. H. Unruh continued his education in Basel, Switzerland (1900-1907), graduating with a Licentiate (then approximating a doctorate) in theology. Refusing some attractive position offers, the brilliant young scholar returned to his Mennonite homeland with his young wife, Frieda (Hege), a South German Mennonite, to serve his people.

From 1908-1914 he taught in the *Kommerzschule* and the *Maedchenschule* in Halbstadt, winning the respect and love of his students and the community through his competence, dedication, and deep Christian faith.

During World War I and its chaotic aftermath of instability and terror, however, Unruh was increasingly drawn into the service of the wider Mennonite community. In various leading roles, he became a key representative in Mennonite negotiations with the successive governments: the dying monarchy, the Kerenski Interim, the warring army splinters and roving bandits, the short-lived Ukrainian state, and the ascending

Bolshevist power. Complex questions needed to be addressed, such as the relationship of Mennonites to other Germans in Russia, the formation of the *Selbstschutz* (Self Defence Corps), the question of Dutch ethnicity, and increasingly the advisability of emigration from Russia. Unruh’s advice and leadership were sought again and again.

Meanwhile he and his family--his wife and their eight children--experienced many personal threats, dangers, and narrow escapes; times in which Unruh demonstrated exceptional courage, wisdom, selfless concern for others, and a deep faith. Frieda stood by him and managed the home while Benjamin attended countless meetings or was away on missions to Moscow, Kharkow, or Berlin.

Unruh’s life-defining call came when a regional Mennonite congress in Rückenau created a *Studienkommission* (study commission; henceforth StK) consisting of A.A. Friesen (chair), B.H. Unruh (secretary), and Cornelius H. Warkentin. Its mandate was to rally help in the West for the suffering Mennonites (and others) in Russia and to explore emigration possibilities to North America.

The StK left on December 31, 1919 and reached Germany, via Constantinople, after an arduous journey. Visa difficulties delayed it for several months, a time it used effectively to connect with German Mennonites and the German government. Tangible results were the establishing of the *Mennonitische Flüchtlingshilfe* (Mennonite Refugee Aid), later renamed *Deutsche Mennonitenhilfe* (approximately: German Mennonite Aid), supported by all Mennonite congregations in Germany; and the procuring of permission from the German government to establish the *Durchgangslager Lechfeld* (Transition Camp Lechfeld) for the temporary reception of emigrants from Russia refused admission to Canada for medical reasons. These gains proved crucial in making the Mennonite migrations of the 1920s possible.

When touring the USA and Canada, the StK quickly realized that these countries, in that order, would be most desirable goals for Mennonite immigrants from Russia, but for the time being, immigration policies in both countries closed the doors. Therefore the StK concentrated on its second mandate, namely to work toward creating a united Mennonite support base in North America to assist the fellow believers in Russia

suffering severely from famine and oppression, and to facilitate emigration to North America when the doors would open. Unruh’s passionate appeals proved especially powerful and contributed crucially to the co-ordination of relief efforts by various existing Mennonite organizations under the umbrella of the Mennonite Central Committee. In Canada, the transport and reception of the expected immigrants would be handled by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, under the able leadership of David Toews. Unruh would continue to collaborate with, and at times represent, both of these organizations.

When Unruh returned to Germany, he found himself without citizenship and passport, due to the demise of an independent Ukraine and the disenfranchisement of émigrés by the Soviet Union. Unable also to rejoin his family, he accepted the hospitality of his wife’s relatives and established a base for his further activities in Karlsruhe, where he would remain a resident until his death.

From here, Unruh continued energetically to promote Western concern for the sufferings of Mennonites (but also others) under Bolshevism by soliciting help wherever it could be found. Besides close association with the German, Dutch, and Swiss Mennonite conferences and relief organizations, he developed contacts with other relief agencies, among them the International and the German Red Cross, the refugee representative Fridtjof Nansen of the League of Nations in Geneva, the Lutheran World Federation, and others. Of special importance for future relief and emigration efforts were his good relations with the German *Auswärtiges Amt* (Department of External Affairs), where, in advocating his causes, he largely dealt with *Legationsrat* (senior official) Dr. Ernst Kundt, who became an especially important helper and friend.

It was through German diplomatic channels that he was able to procure Soviet permission for his family to leave Russia for Germany. The author includes Frieda Unruh’s fascinating account of the family’s five-month odyssey to rejoin the husband and father in Karlsruhe.

Throughout the 1920s Unruh actively furthered the emigration of large numbers of Mennonites to Canada, working closely with David Toews, Harold S. Bender and the MCC, and various German Mennonite and non-Mennonite organizations, as well

(cont’d on p. 11)