



*Aeltester Aron Thiessen with his wife and family, including grandchildren. The photo was taken during their residence in the Urals region (probably Severouralsk), around 1973. Source: Horst Gerlach, *Bildband zur Geschichte der Mennoniten* (1980), p. 102.*

## Notes on Mennonites From the Soviet Union

by Lawrence Klippenstein and Jim Suderman

Aeltester Aron Thiessen passed away a year and a half ago in Espelkamp, Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). He had emigrated some years earlier from the Soviet Union to this community where he continued to serve in a local Mennonite congregation as long as he was able. He expressed a continuing concern nonetheless for fellow believers in the Soviet Union. Often he wrote to those who had remained in the congregations after he had left the country.

In his final months Aeltester Thiessen also wrote about his experiences in the post-war rehabilitation period of Mennonite communities and rebuilding of congregations. He was one of just a few ministers of the Old Colony (Chortitza) who had lived through the time of the German occupation of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic during World War Two, the difficult ensuing years of dislocation and exile, and the earliest phases of a renewal movement which occurred in the Soviet Union during the 1950s.

This excerpt from his memoirs recalls some of those events, and adds reflections upon their significance for those who surviv-

ed to talk about it as he did.

Footnotes were added for this English version. The translation is by Jim Suderman, MHC Staff. Franz Thiessen of Espelkamp provided the original manuscript.

When the German army occupied our region in the late summer of 1941, only one minister remained in the Chortitzer Mennonite Church - Brother Heinrich Winter<sup>1</sup> of Neuenburg. He had returned from five years of exile. So many husbands and fathers were missing since their exile and disappearance in 1937-38. Also, many men and families were displaced during the collectivization period.

Ministers and deacons were elected early in 1942 and regular worship services were begun again. Youth groups and Bible studies were organized. Baptisms and communion services were also held. Nikolaipol joined our congregation. Of twenty-one ministers chosen, three did not accept appointment. Some of those displaced earlier came back and so we had twenty-three ministers for twenty-one villages. Brother Heinrich Winter

was chosen as *Aeltester* (elder). Two assistants were appointed to help him.

Elected were: 1) For the Chortitza area (*Kirchspiel*)<sup>2</sup> with Rosental and Rosengart: a) Jakob Pries, Rosengart, as minister, b) Gerhard Hildebrandt, Chortitza, as deacon. 2) For the Einlage area, the workers' settlement, Kronsweide: a) Jakob Froese, Einlage, as minister, b) Franz Froese, Einlage, as minister, c) Hans Rempel, Einlage, as minister (later *Aeltester* in Paraguay.<sup>3</sup> 3) For the area of Neuendorf, on February 8, 1942: a) Abram Niebuhr, Neuendorf, as minister, b) Aron Thiessen, Neuendorf,<sup>4</sup> as minister, c) Peter Martens, Neuendorf, as deacon, d) Jakob Wiebe, Schönhorst, as minister, e) Peter Letkemann, Schönhorst<sup>5</sup>, as minister, f) Heinrich Penner, Schönhorst, as deacon, g) Peter Klassen, Rosenbach, as minister (still in the Soviet Union, serving as *Aeltester* in Alma-Ata) Neuenburg, Schönhorst and Neuhorst also belonged to this area. 4) For the area of Osterwick with Kronstal and Schöneberg: a) Jakob Neudorf, Osterwick, as minister, b) \_\_\_\_\_ Rempel, Osterwick, as minister,<sup>6</sup> c) Isaak Toews, Osterwick, as deacon. 5) For the area of Burwalde, with Nieder-Chortitza and Blumengart: a) Johann Friesen, Burwalde, as minister, b) Peter Thiessen, Nieder-Chortitza, as minister, c) Johann Epp, Blumengart, as minister. The Nikolaipol (Jasykovo) congregation (*Gemeinde*), as an area: a) Kornelius Epp and Gerhard Dyck, Varvarovka, in addition, a) Johann Penner, Nikolaipol, as minister, and b) Dietrich Pauls, Hochfeld, as minister.

Now we could enjoy a relatively normal, although poorly regulated, congregational life, with baptism, communion and weddings. In the various areas and congregations, all those who had been married without regular services were properly registered. Burials were formally recorded also. In the Chortitza Mennonite congregation thousands were gathered for the one special ceremony. However, there was a great lack of Christian literature, Bibles and hymnals.

It is noteworthy that the Molotschna congregations, formerly much stronger and numerically much larger than the Chortitza congregations, were now more scattered and exhausted than we were.<sup>7</sup> This was true especially of the men, so reconstruction proceeded more slowly and with greater difficulty. So much was this the case that the settle-

ment asked us for assistance in the form of visitation, that some vigour might re-develop there. The visits were promised, but before they could take place, our westward flight had begun in the fall of 1943.

In the various resettlement camps of Germany, we first visited the Lutheran services but soon we organized our own meetings. We were supported by local west and east Prussian Mennonite congregations.<sup>8</sup> In the summer of 1944, many camps were broken up and the refugees were settled in the regions of the Warthegau, where Christian services were organized as well as possible. Since the Soviet front was coming nearer, many of the returning men were now inducted into the German army. This was due to our hesitation about settling down on Polish farms and to take them over as our own. Moreover, Hitler's orders demanded total employment.

In January, 1945, we had to move on again. Many families were overtaken by the advancing Soviet army. Many on this flight experienced the worst of terrors and very dark hours. Some made it to the west and later moved on to Paraguay, Brazil, Argentina and Canada. Those remaining in the eastern zone were transported back to Russia and arrived in small groups in the forests of the frozen north, scattered from the Ural mountains to Siberia.<sup>9</sup> Some were settled in central Asia, in forced relocation areas. Few families were completely intact. Hardly any husbands and family leaders were about. Some were missing in the war, some had stayed in the west, some were now prisoners in the Soviet Union and were repatriated in the "sorting" camp. Some were condemned to labor camps. Very few groups had any men; only some under-age youths remained.

Then the searching began. The fact that people were scattered throughout the huge territory of the Soviet Union was a difficult problem indeed. It was many years before people found each other. I finally located my family after three years, in April of 1948. My beloved wife had already passed away. She had died in January of 1948. Then it took two more years until the rest of us met in April, two years later.

Many hunted for fragments of the Word of God. Mostly the groups were made up of the mothers and wives. Almost all Bibles and hymn books were lost. What we had needed had to come from memory, and here we realized the wisdom of early learning by memorization in the school. There was no paper to be had. Anyone that had kept a book learned those songs and could render them by memory. They would repeat them for everyone in the group so we could sing together. That was very blessed. Then other songs were given back.

As the first books were received, every

group had reasonably similar song books. I received, over the course of several years, the New Testament and the Psalms as loose pages in letters sent to me. That was all I had as Christian literature and yet I counted myself very rich. Only a few ministers had that in freedom, only a very few, and they were plagued with requests for sermons. How many such sermons were copied to send on to others I cannot tell.

After 1956,<sup>10</sup> when one could change one's residence, larger groups gathered in central Asia. Congregations began to emerge, to elect ministers and elders, and, if possible, to acquire premises. Many meeting groups joined together. Several broke off through the move to warmer regions in the south. The Brethern congregations were stronger, much stronger. Most of them joined with the Baptists, who were administered, supported and conducted by the Moscow Central office. Many accepted the rules of the Baptists about where to listen and what part to take in communion.<sup>11</sup>

Others objected to that because they could not agree with the Baptists about rebaptizing. They were taken in by the Baptist congregation, but could not become members of it nor did they participate in Holy Communion.

Questions about rebaptizing, fear of persecution, abuse in the places of employment, were some of the reasons that sometimes no meetings took place even when it was numerically possible ("They sat behind closed doors for fear of the Jews." John 20, 19). There should be no condemnation. We have all hidden and all too often not acted,

not done, what we had to do. This concerns us as church congregations more.

Of danger, of threats and of persecution there was truly no shortage. There can be praise for no one, whether he holds meetings or does not hold them. Concerning this: "One owed 500 pennies, the other 50. But they did not have the money to pay, so he forgave them both." (Luke 7, 41-42)

#### Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Rev. Heinrich Winter later emigrated to Germany and then Canada. There he remained active as a leader in the Leamington United Mennonite Church, Leamington, Ontario, till his death several years ago.

<sup>2</sup>*Kirchspiel* refers to a group of communities (not all of whom had their own church meeting houses) who were grouped together under one Aeltester in the Mennonite colonies.

<sup>3</sup>Hans Rempel later moved to Ontario, Canada. He is co-editor of the book *Waffen der Wehrlosen: Ersatzdienst der Mennoniten in der USSR*, published by CMBC Publications in 1980.

<sup>4</sup>The author of this article. Rev. Thiessen was born on December 23, 1898 in Neuendorf, of the Old Colony, and died on April 22, 1985. For an obituary cf. Isaac Thiessen, "Aron F. Thiessen", *Der Bote*, May 22, 1985.

<sup>5</sup>Members of the family were able to bring a church register from that community to Canada - one of the few original Russian Mennonite church registers available to researchers today.

<sup>6</sup>"\_\_\_\_\_ Rempel" of Osterwick may not be the right name. H. Neudorf lists the second minister elected at this time as being Cornelius A. Pauls, Cf. H. Neudorf, et al, *Osterwick, 1812-1943*. (Clearbrook, British Columbia: n.d. ), p. 89.

<sup>7</sup>A great many of the Molotschna residents had

(Cont. on next page)



A baptismal group in Schoenhorst, Chortitza, Ukraine. The picture includes Rev. Jakob Wiebe (left) and Aeltester Heinrich Winter (right) in the centre of the front row. The baptismal service was held in 1943 during the time of German occupation. Source: F. Thiessen, *Neuendorf in Bild und Wort* (1985), p. 77.

## Footnotes

Continued from page 2

been forcibly evacuated to areas further east by the Soviet army retreating before the Germans at this time.

<sup>8</sup>These Prussian Mennonite congregations dissolved shortly afterwards, when hundreds of families fled to Germany before the advancing Soviet army in 1944/45.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. family experiences shared in Johann Epp, *Freuden und Leiden der Familie Olga Wiebe und Johann Epp*. (Espelkamp, 1984); and a treatment of the repatriation as a whole in Nikolai Tolstoy, *Victims of Yalta*. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1977).

<sup>10</sup>After World War II, persons of German descent, Soviet citizens and others, were kept under strict surveillance by means of a special residence "regime" known as *kommandantura*. This meant reporting their presence regularly to a local commandant's office wherever they happened to be residing during that period. Travel was extremely restricted. This "regime" terminated around 1956.

<sup>11</sup>The reference here is to Mennonite Brethren, many of whom joined the All Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, in the beginning simply as individual members, and later officially as whole congregations. The AUCECB had its central office in Moscow, as it does to this day.

<sup>12</sup>A copy of the original German version of this article is in the files of *Mennonite Historian*. It was provided by Franz Thiessen, Espelkamp, Federal Republic of Germany.

## Archival Staff Changes

Jim Suderman began his duties as secretary/receptionist/archives assistant at the Mennonite Heritage Centre in mid-August. He brings to this position experience in various areas of archival work. His most recent employment was at the Transcona Historical Museum.

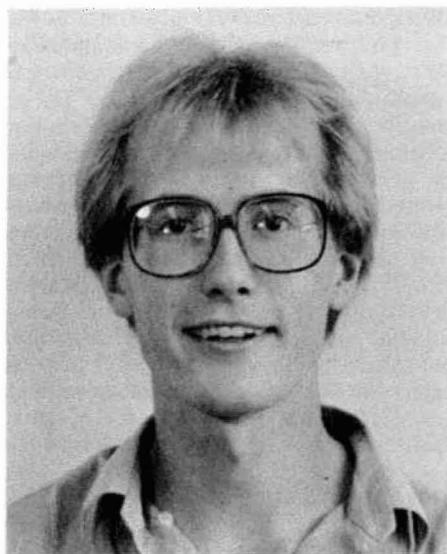
Jim has a keen interest in history. He has completed both Bachelor and Masters degrees in history at the University of Manitoba in medieval and twentieth century history.

Jim is married to Cheryl Adams and they are the parents of an infant son, Michael. The family resides in St. Norbert, Winnipeg.

The position of secretary/receptionist/archives assistant has been revised during the past few years so that more time can be devoted to archival assistant work. A major portion of this position involves helping researchers who come to the archives.

The archives is pleased to welcome Jim as part of its team. He will be assisting Lawrence Klippenstein who has returned to the office after a two-year term of service with MCC in Europe. Lawrence has been with the MHC archives program since 1974.

The efforts of two former staff members, Dennis Stoesz and Bev Suderman, have been a major contribution to the program of the archives. The committee deeply appreciates these services. Dennis terminated his work in mid-July to continue his MA studies. Bev



Jim Suderman.

will be serving on the pastoral staff of the Vineland United Mennonite Church in Ontario. Her work at the archives ended on August 1.

We also appreciated the part-time help, in August, of Deb Funk Kuhl of the Home Street Mennonite Church, Winnipeg, and Jerry Klippenstein, also of Winnipeg. Both were able to fill in while staff recruitment was being completed for the new term. Deb helped with typing, and Jerry assisted the archivist in sorting newspapers, photoduplicating, and other duties.

Jake Wiens is back as volunteer, completing a register for the papers of the late D.D. Klassen, which were deposited in the archives about a year ago. Anne Harms will also continue her volunteer work in filing and other related tasks.



Peter H. Rempel.

Give a *Mennonite Historian* subscription as a Christmas gift this year.

## New Grant Given to MHCA

The Heritage Centre archives will benefit tremendously from the aid of a new grant of \$8750.00 recently awarded by the Canadian Council of Archives.

The grant is part of a \$100,000 funding pool made available to the province of Manitoba for 1986-87 under the designation "Arrangement and Description Backlog Reduction Cost-Shared Cooperative Program".

The MHCA project application asked for the grant to deal with major deposits from the Conference of Mennonites in Canada offices and the Conference of Mennonites in Saskatchewan, personal papers deposited by John P. Dyck, Mary J. Loewen and the families of D.D. Klassen, D.P. Neufeld, Gerhard Lohrenz and Peter Brown (four persons recently deceased), along with other related collections that have needed attention for some time.

Peter H. Rempel, recently back from an MCC assignment in Europe, is coordinating the project. Peter is a graduate of CMBC, Winnipeg, and Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo. He has done graduate work in history at the University of Waterloo, and is co-editor of *Der Bote Index*, Vol. 1, 1924-1947 published by CMBC Publications in 1976.

Peter began his work at the archives on September 15, 1986. The project is to be completed by the end of March, 1987.

## Guide - Inventory Project - Phase II

The first phase of the *Guide and Inventory of the MHC Archives* project has now been completed. Jake Peters, director of the project since September, has researched about 35 manuscript collections and record groups in order to describe their contents for researchers.

The publication of this information is a further feature of the enterprise. Marg Franz, librarian at Canadian Mennonite Bible College, has agreed to coordinate this part of the work. It is expected that a published document of the results will be available sometime in 1987.

### Archives Working Hours

**Regular:** Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.

**Summer** (July and August): 8 a.m.-4 p.m.

**For appointments:** Call 1-204-888-6781.



## Diary...Jottings From The Archives

by Lawrence Klippenstein, MHC staff

**July 10** - Last night I returned from our two-year sabbatical/leave of absence serving with MCC in Europe (mainly England and West Germany). I popped by late afternoon to see what I was coming back to (at the Heritage Centre, that is). I'm still very impressed by the accomplishments of Dennis and Bev who looked after archival matters during our time away.

In the archives vault I see an unfamiliar imposing stack of bulging paper cartons which I suppose will have to be tackled sometime . . . It's good to be back though, and some things haven't changed that much . . . phones still ringing, visitors stopping in, genealogists pouring over church records, collections coming in to be accessioned, etc.

**July 12-13** - Our family joined about 800 other Klippenstein relatives in Altona, Manitoba, for a first-of-its-kind reunion. The Heritage Centre archives had an exhibit there. I "discovered" that a rather massive Klippenstein genealogy book project is underway.

In West Germany I had learned not long before about a branch of the family which did not leave the Soviet Union in the various emigrations of the 1870's, the 1920's, the 1940's, or the more recent 70s and 80s. Somewhere in Central Asia (Soviet Union) someone has very extensive records about this branch. I hope I can get to see these materials sometime . . .

**July 14** - This was the "first official day" back at my office in the Mennonite Heritage Centre. Fortunately Bev was still around (and Dennis on call) to get me "reoriented" to my duties.

**July 16** - I've been noticing three rather regular and pleasant young people sitting at a reading room table, usually working (to the sound of singing sometimes, or a radio playing) at something. I discover in due time that they are regular researchers with summer projects before them.

Erland Teichroeb is assisting Dr. Paul Redekop of the University of Winnipeg, who is doing a study on Mennonites in North Kildonan (Winnipeg). Mark Epp works with Dr. Adolf Ens and Dr. David Schroeder, both of CMBC, in researching articles for the upcoming Volume V of the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. Anita Ens is doing research for a volume on the history of the MEI and MCI of Gretna, Manitoba, to be written by Gerhard Ens, Junior, of Edmonton, Alberta.

All three will be returning to CMBC studies in the fall.

**July 30** - At noon I was introduced to Jeffrey (Jeff) Lehman Stoesz. He is the three-and-a-half week old son of Dennis and Rhoda Lehman Stoesz of Winnipeg. The occasion is a barbecue at the CMBC campus celebrating Dennis's successful completion of a two-year term of work at the archives, and the family's happiness generally, I should think. Since Jeffrey's parents represent two of the three major traditional Mennonite "streams" (Canadian and Swiss Mennonite), we are planning already to bolster our holdings of Swiss Mennonite newspapers and related periodicals. That way Jeffrey can carry out his genealogical studies more effectively when he digs into that around the year 2000 or so.

**August 1** - About forty members of a Bartel "clan" visited the archives as a part of their week-end gathering events in Winnipeg. Annie Janzen, formerly of CMBC, and now working at Walnut House Receiving Home, made arrangements for the tour. She also presented the archives with a copy of the family book prepared for this occasion.

**August 4** - Our son Jerry and I took a quick stroll through the grounds of the Steinbach Mennonite Village Museum on the last day of Pioneer Days, 1986. The crowds really began to arrive around noon. I heard later that more than 18,000 people walked through during the four days of the event.

On our return from Steinbach we detoured to see Mr. Norman Wittick in St. Vital. As a former resident of Niverville Mr. Wittick was deeply involved in the production of a local history book. He proudly gave me a copy which I had ordered for our library (see notice elsewhere in this issue). I recalled that we have similar volumes coming from Horn-dean and Gretna, (both Manitoba also) but I'm not sure where it's at with these projects at the moment.



*Jerry Klippenstein on the ruins of the old wall in London, England. Taken in April, 1986, a few months before his return to Canada.*

**August 5** - Jake Peters and Don Harms returned from a trip to Saskatchewan, where they picked up *Waisenamt* records of the Bergthaler churches in that province. Leonard Doell of Warman helped to arrange for deposit of the materials in the MHC archives. We hope we can meet the expectations of good custody held by the depositing congregations.

**August 13** - I am really getting down to preparation of more copy for the September issue of *Mennonite Historian*. This column is part of the effort . . .

## A New Mennonite Historian

The directing committees of the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and the Centre of MB Studies, both of Winnipeg, Manitoba, have been discussing the merging of their respective newsletters. Details for a proposed new *Mennonite Historian* to replace the two are to be finalized in the next few months.

The new version might appear as early as March, 1987. Readers are invited to share their thoughts on this idea.

## History-Archives Committee Update

It may be useful to note some changes in the way History-Archives Committee relates to other aspects of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

A by-law covering the History-Archives Committee's function now reads as follows: The committee shall be responsible to the General Board, which shall appoint five members and designate one of them as chairperson. Up to three of the five are to be nominated by the Canadian Mennonite Bible College Board.

The committee's responsibility shall be:

- a) To promote the historical concerns of the Conference, and
- b) together with members appointed by other Mennonite churches/conferences to manage the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives and its program.

Other Mennonite conferences/churches, as specifically designated by the General Board, may appoint one member each to the committee, with full voting privileges.

The members of the committee are currently the following: Adolf Ens, John Friesen and David Schroeder (all of CMBC), Vera Fast and Ed Hoepfner. As of July 1, John Friesen is serving as chairperson of the group.

Contacts have already been made with some other conferences to discuss adding committee members from other groups than CMC. The first meeting of the full committee in the 1986-1987 term was scheduled for mid-September.

## Osler Mennonite Historical Committee Report

by Jacob Guenther

The Historical Committee of the Osler Mennonite Church recently published a 60 page book, **Stories of our People**. The work includes contributions from individual families and different writers, some of them involved with the Historical Committee itself. The submissions are an expression of thanks to our parents and grandparents who helped open the west. We believe it was their toil, their foresight, their courage and hope that allows us to now live in comfort.

To keep our history alive we encouraged individual families to submit articles on incidents about their family, stories of their ancestry, stories of faith, of school and church events and forms of worship of varied denominations in the area.

Within these pages readers will also find articles not prepared specifically for this volume and presented on other occasions. In these cases we have allowed the original setting to remain. This means that the volume lacks a certain stylistic uniformity. Still it puts us in touch with people from almost every walk of life, with varied ethnic and cultured background.

We hope that this book will help readers to gain a better understanding of the town and farm folks who have experienced dramatic changes in their lives. From their once exclusively agriculture occupation, many parents have seen their children move into practically every profession, from teaching, to music, medicine and the law.

The Historical Committee is now pursuing the idea of starting a pictorial record of the Osler church. We are looking for photos of past and present ministers, committees, baptisms and other church events. Although we haven't saved all our tapes of church services we plan in the future to retain tapes of special occasions, namely of baptisms, Christmas concerts, prayer week and music.

Over the years the Osler church has submitted material of church records to the Heritage Centre Archives at Winnipeg. Much of it is microfilmed and we are very thankful for this. We are pleased that we have a duplicate of all material well preserved at the archives. We also want to thank our minister, Rev. David Friesen, for his help in retaining a careful file of all records.

The Historical Committee would also like to express its appreciation for the encouragement, advice and cooperation we have received from the Heritage Centre. We recognize the invaluable resource of the archives which has provided us with much information on Mennonite history through various publications.



*The pupils named with this souvenir picture were: Peter F. Schellenberg, Peter P. Schellenberg, Netha Wiebe, Henry Wiebe, Agnes Schellenberg, John Harder, Jacob Schellenberg, Anna Harder, Sarah Harder, Aganetha Schellenberg, Peter Wiebe, Gerhard Wiebe, Lena Wiebe, Maggie Schellenberg, David Schellenberg, David Wiebe, Maria Harder, Anton Schellenberg, Henry Schellenberg, Justina Wiebe, Agatha Wiebe, Gerhard H. Wiebe, and Henry H. Wiebe. We would be glad to hear from any of these persons who see this photo.*

## Happenings

**Symposium:** The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, Winnipeg, is organizing a November 14th-15th symposium - "Dynamics of Faith and Culture in Mennonite Brethren History". Featured speakers include James Urry and Katie Funk Wiebe. For information on registration and sessions, contact Ken Reddig, Centre for MB Studies, 169 Riverton Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 2E5. Ph. (204) 669-7675.

**Anniversary Celebration Planned:** First Mennonite Church of Winnipeg, Manitoba, is celebrating its 60th anniversary on October 5th, 1986. The church was formerly identified as the *Schönwieser Gemeinde* and had many meeting places throughout Manitoba. A committee has been formed to prepare a history book for the occasion. Its members include Ernie Enns as chairperson and coor-

inator, Hilda Matsuo as congregation historian, Irmgard Lehn, Marlies Friesen, Dora Giesbrecht and Wilf Schaefer.

A new exhibit entitled "Mennonite Migrations from Southeastern Pennsylvania: 1703-1920" has been opened at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, 24 Main Street, Souderton, PA.

The exhibit depicts "the lifestyle and culture of Mennonites who migrated to Virginia, South Carolina, Western Pennsylvania, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Oregon and Canada (Ontario) since the 18th century".

The exhibit is open Wednesday through Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. and Sundays, 2-4 p.m. It will run through the summer and into the fall, closing on Sunday, October 26.

Ian Wilson, provincial archivist for Saskatchewan, has accepted the equivalent position for Ontario beginning in September this year. He and his wife, Ruth, are members of the Grace Mennonite Church in Regina. In British Columbia Rick Klumpenhauer, formerly of Winnipeg, is enrolled in a Master of Archival Studies program at U.B.C. Several years ago Rick spent a number of months as a volunteer at the MHC archives.

**Family reunions** have again abounded this summer. The Klippenstein reunion held at the Rhineland Pioneer Centre in Altona, Manitoba, was one of many. Over 800 people are alleged to have participated at one time or another in the July 12-13 event. A genealogical book covering the eight "branches" of Berend Klippenstein (1781-1841) is being researched, and another reunion is being planned for 1991. Ted Friesen of Altona, Manitoba very competently headed the planning committee for the project this year.

In Clearbrook, B.C. the Paetkaus (about 150) of the world gathered for fellowship and kinship fun. Their July meeting led to a decision to prepare a book which will bring the various branch studies together. Esther Patkau of Saskatoon is coordinating the research and writing.

A group of persons met on July 12, 1986 in the Red Deer Mennonite Brethren Church, Red Deer, Alberta, to discuss plans for setting up a **provincial Mennonite Historical Society**. Prior to this Saskatchewan and Alberta have worked together in such a society. With some expressed concern about over-organizing and duplication, the group decided nevertheless to elect a committee to explore further the ramifications of organizing provincially, and to set a date for a future meeting to discuss the matter further. (See photo elsewhere in this issue.)

The committee includes Henry Goerzen, Carstairs, Harry Stauffer, Tofield, and a third member to be chosen from a selected list. Interested persons are asked to contact members of the committee for more details.

## Book Notes

The Niverville Historical Society has recently published *Niverville - A History, 1878-1986*. The book is a hardcover volume of 230 pages with many photos. Fred Kaita, Norman Wittick, and others of the local committee have given major impetus to the project.

For a copy of this book write to P.D. Enns, Niverville, Manitoba, R0A 1E0, or Norman Wittick, 58 Regal Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R2M 0P3. Enclose \$25.00 (Can.) plus \$3.00 for postage and handling. Orders from the U.S. should enclose \$6.00 for postage and handling (Canadian funds).

*Mennonitisches Jahrbuch, 1986*, published by the **Arbeitsgemeinschaft der deutschen Mennoniten (AdM)** in West Germany, is available now from Christian Bookstore, 266 Hawthorne Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2G 0H4. The current issue features a number of articles on different conferences of Mennonites found in the Federal Republic of Germany today. The edition has 168 pp. and appears in paperback only.

The Mennonite Historical Library (CMBC) has also received *Neuendorf, in Bild und Wort. Choritzzer-Bezirk, Ukraine 1789-1943*, edited by Franz Thiessen, of Espelkamp, Federal Republic of Germany. The limited edition sold out quickly, but persons interested may write to the author, Brandenburger Ring 16, 4992 Espelkamp, West Germany to have their name put on a list for reprinting. Thiessen is working on a further volume related to his personal experiences in the Soviet Union prior to his immigration to West Germany about ten years ago.

The Mennonite Bicentennial Commission of Ontario has published *Mennonites in Ontario* in a beautifully-illustrated, 176-page, hardcover coffee-table edition which is now available to the public for \$29.95. Write to Provident Bookstore, 50 Kent Avenue, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, N2G 3R1. Include \$3.95 to cover postage and handling.

**Mennonite Your Way** is planning to publish *Mennonite Your Way Directory V* in March, 1987. This issue will focus on international travel.

If you would like to be listed as a host in this issue, please write for an application form to:

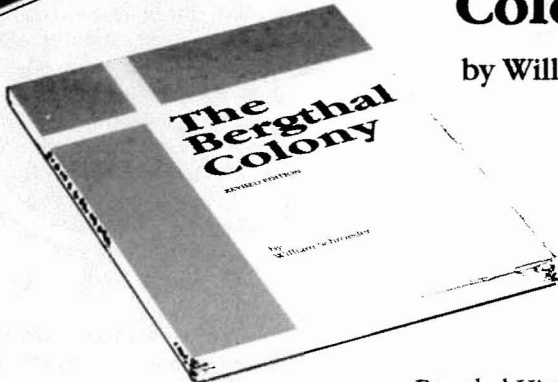
Nancy and Leon Stauffer  
Mennonite Your Way V  
Box 1525  
Salunga, PA  
U.S.A. 17538

You would be joining nearly 2000 North American families now listed as interested in hosting visitors who may be travelling through their communities.

NEW RELEASE

## The Bergthal Colony

by William Schroeder



Bergthal Historical Series No. 1

*A revised and enlarged edition of Schroeder's 1974 book describing the oldest Mennonite daughter colony in Russia and its mass immigration to Manitoba 1874-76.*

142 pages with maps and photos

**\$10.00**

*The Bergthal Colony* is a publication of CMBC Publications, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4. Copies of the book may be ordered from this address. A free list of other publications for sale is available upon request.

## MMHS Symposium Coming Soon

**"Pioneer Leaders of the West Reserve"**

**Place:** Sommerfelder Mennonite Church, Altona, Manitoba

**Date and Time:** Thursday, October 23, 1986, 7:30 p.m.

### Presentations

**Heinrich Wiebe - The Delegate** Dr. John Friesen, CMBC

**Isaac Mueller - The Oberschutz** Dr. Adolf Ens, CMBC

**Johann Funk - The Bergthaler**

**Aeltester**

Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein  
Mennonite Heritage Centre

Coffeebreak

**Abraham Doerksen - The Sommerfelder**

**Aeltester**

Mr. Jacob Peters, Winnipeg

**Johann Wiebe - The Reinlaender**

**Aeltester**

Rev. Peter Zacharias,  
Rosetown/Blumenort

**Question Period**

**Closing**

**Rev. Abram Wiebe, Winkler**

**Chairman:** Jacob C. Fehr

**Sponsored by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society.**



## Book Reviews

Horst, Isaac R. *Close-Ups of the Great Awakening*. Mt. Forest, Ontario: The Author, 1985. Pb., 331 pp., \$7.95. Available from the author at R.R. 2, Mount Forest, Ontario, NOG 2L0.

Reviewed by John Friesen, CMBC, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The years from the late 1840s to the early 1890s were the most important in the history of the Swiss Mennonites in both Canada and the U.S.A. It is during these decades that revivalism exercised both a destructive and a renewing influence. Above all, revivalism rent Swiss Mennonites into three major factions, each believing that it henceforth possessed the truth more fully than the others.

The three factions which emerged were the Old Order Mennonites, the Old Mennonite Church, and the New Mennonites. The Old Order Mennonites felt that they were the ones who had continued the traditional Mennonite faith and practices most consistently. When they formed in 1889 in Ontario and in 1893 in Pennsylvania, they felt the others had departed from them. The others had compromised the ways of Scripture by building on human judgement.

The New Mennonites, primarily the Mennonite Brethren in Christ, who later took the name Missionary Church, as well as the General Conference Mennonite Church, consisted of Swiss Mennonites who believed that the various aspects of revivalism provided for renewal. Sunday schools, prayer meetings, protracted meetings, evening meetings and use of the English language in worship services were not only good, but a sign of new spirituality. To oppose these innovations they took to be a sign of spiritual deadness.

The major portion of the Swiss Mennonite community joined neither option. This faction absorbed new ways too slowly for those who left to form the Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church and the General Conference, and absorbed too many of the new ways for those who continued the Old Order.

In this volume, *Close-Ups of the Great Awakening*, Isaac Horst lets the reader peer into these controversies within the Swiss Mennonite churches by quoting extensively from letters and diaries. The letters and diaries he quotes were written by bishops and ministers in various churches in the U.S.A. and Canada. He quotes not only from a few prominent leaders, but also from a host of less well known ones. As he moves through the controversies from the 1840s to the 1890s, Horst is careful to quote from the different sides of the discussion. The reason for the even-handed approach is due to his conviction that "in most cases when a church division takes place, both sides are prone to be at fault."

This self-critical view is very generous to Isaac Horst. Personally he stands within that wing of the Swiss Mennonite church which

was critical of many of the innovations. He is not willing, however, to sit in judgement, but rather is concerned that readers be able to see the real issues which were discussed during those controversial years.

Horst keeps his comments and introductions to a minimum. For the reader who is not familiar with the history of this era, somewhat more extensive commentary would have been helpful. Readers can, however, quite easily overcome this deficiency by consulting readily available histories.

With this volume, Horst makes a very valuable contribution to a better understanding of the tensions and conflicts within the Swiss Mennonite communities during the last half of the nineteenth century. This book will be of great benefit for Swiss Mennonites of all three streams to help them understand their history better. It will be very valuable for Mennonites of non-Swiss background.

The book also provides important documentation for the study of American and Canadian revivalism and the impact it had upon immigrant churches. As such it makes an important contribution to the study of American and Canadian Christianity.

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Schroeder, William. *The Bergthal Colony*. 2nd rev. ed. Winnipeg, MB: CMBC Publications, 1986. Pb., 141 pp., \$10.00. Available from publisher at 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P OM4.

Reviewed by Ken Reddig, Centre of MB Studies, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Initially conceived of as a social experiment to find land for an ever-increasing population of landless Mennonites, Bergthal was founded in 1836, some 212 kilometers east of the Chortitza Colony in Ukraine. It held the status of being the first daughter colony in Ukraine, and its success paved the way for additional colonies to be founded in czarist Russia over the next 40 years.

In recounting the story of Bergthal, William Schroeder notes that daughter colonies was only a temporary solution for the large social and economic problems Mennonites were facing. While some 132 families eventually moved from Chortitza to Bergthal, settling in five villages within the space of a dozen years, Bergthal again was facing the same population problems which had led to its own founding.

Schroeder's statistics reveal that by 1874 some 350 families in Bergthal were again landless. Since land was considered vital for proper community life and represented the basis for social and religious status, the possibility of immigrating to Canada, where land was readily available for all, became a very attractive option for the colony.

Within the space of several years, in the 1870s, the entire colony of Bergthal was transplanted from one continent to another, and a new life began for the Bergthal Mennonites on the plains of Manitoba.

Detailing the Russian years, and the first few years in Manitoba, Schroeder ably tells the story of this colony. Notably, he sets the story within the context not only of north European Mennonite history, but within the context of the geographical and political history of Ukraine. Providing this broad context enhances the perspective that Mennonites were a transient people, more concerned about the welfare of the community than with a particular piece of geography. Yet, at the same time, the private ownership of land was continually the central issue within the colony, both in Russia and Canada.

Schroeder's book is a new edition of his earlier book on Bergthal, first published in 1974. Much expanded and improved over the first edition, both in content, layout and writing style, one of the chief strengths of this edition lies in its ample use of illustrations. Photographs and maps are dominant in the book. They provide a dimension of space to the story, that is not always considered important in other historical accounts.

One has to admire researchers who diligently work on village histories, particularly those villages that ceased to exist over a hundred years ago. Schroeder, beginning with relatively little available documentation, has proved that diligent research and constant inquiry can result in the acquisition of sufficient resources to compile a book such as this. Descendants of the original Bergthaler families should be pleased with this volume.

As the preface notes, this volume is the first in a projected series on the Bergthaler people. Soon to come is a history of the Bergthal church in Saskatchewan, and other studies are already underway.

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Plett, Delbert F. *Storm and Triumph. The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde (1850-1875)*. Steinbach, Manitoba: D.F.P. Publications, 1986. Pb., 337 pp., \$25.00. Reviewed by Lawrence Klippenstein, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

With *Storm and Triumph*, his third volume in a trilogy (Cf. also *History and Events [1982]* and *The Golden Years [1985]*) Plett has brought the early story of the Kleine Gemeinde to its "farewell", that is, the exodus from Russia. In the late 1870s, the entire church community, now divided under two *Aelteste*, left for Canada and the U.S.A. The author now sets forth three further major topics in the portrait of the *Gemeinde's* experiences under the tsars: lifestyles, expansion and division and the emigration itself.

The broader context of contemporary Mennonite life in Russia is brought into focus on two additional themes, i.e. the conflicts within the Molotschna settlement (mainly religious and economic), and the crisis of conscription in a non-resistant community.

A lot of living and a remarkable bit of

(Cont. from page 7)

local community color are reflected in a few diaries and related materials which provide the essential data for comments on daily life, travel, correspondence, poetry, and faith and practice (Part One). Some important hitherto little known material (indeed most of it has not surfaced at all till now) makes its appearance here. *Kurze Aelteste Geschichte der Taufgesinnten Mennoniten* published in Odessa in 1852 (no author given) is a case in point.

Here, too, the controversial situation of Abraham Thiessen, the excommunicated "rebel" who championed the cause of the landless and was then exiled (and eventually received back into the church, Plett points out) is revisited and found "not guilty" in the court of analysis held amidst the translation of his booklets and brochures. Strangely enough, little attention has been given to Thiessen, apart from an essay published in *Mennonite Life* by Cornelius Krahn some years ago. The same thing, a rehabilitation, if you wish, happens to Aeltester Gerhard Wiebe of the Bergthal colony. His courageous leadership in the emigration is viewed with great sympathy and affirmation by the author in this presentation.

From Plett's treatment one can now get a far clearer picture of what it was that shook the Kleine Gemeinde to the point of a split only a few years after the 1860 break that brought the Mennonite Brethren on the scene. There were other break-aways in the 1860s. These were the turbulent post-war years after the Crimean conflict, a time of social and economic reorientation which coincided with (caused?) religious realignments in the churches. More work still is needed though, to put the fifties and sixties into clear perspective as far as the latter conflicts are concerned.

Then came the emigration, a crisis brought on by new universal military service laws, and other legislation which loomed darkly over the Mennonites struggling through these years. The Kleine Gemeinde part in the delegations that visited St. Petersburg in the quest for military exemption, and the details of their preparation for departure from Russia usefully supplement what was known about the Russian Mennonites in the early 1870s till now.

This book, along with the previous two must now take the stand at the bar of scholarly debate and criticism, a process which has already begun for the earlier volumes. Can half a dozen diaries, someone may ask, and the (possibly) selective collection of Peter Toews, from which Plett has again selected only some of the documents, adequately carry the generalizations which he has put forth so far? Some will wish that the untranslated documents also accessible to the author, could become available as well. One may want to look also at what has been omitted, and to inquire about the reasons why.

In view of the fact that so much of the picture outside of the Kleine Gemeinde "world" has not been treated in a comprehensive and objective manner (the "biases" of the author are, after all, no secret by now), and the obvious fact that an almost larger-than-life Kleine Gemeinde portrait has been provided of only several hundred members, would it not have been better to have provided only the documents, all of them, and to proceed with discussing them altogether? To walk the gangplank, as some may suggest the author has done with his very bold assertions, pro some and against others, can be a risky enterprise.

To read this volume (like its predecessors) is a formidable task. The print is really too small for comfortable progress, and there is not a clear enough difference between comment and documentary text at times. Many typographical errors and other editorial slip-ups unfortunately mar the text as a whole. We miss the author's name on the title page.

Perhaps a carefully outlined bibliography of all related materials in a final projected volume of this series. An index will be invaluable to make the massive collection of data more easily accessible to readers. The present volume, with an important section on the geographical expansion of the Kleine Gemeinde groups, would have benefitted greatly from several maps. Where were the Borsenko villages, and the places mentioned in the diaries? Some readers will want to know.

Unfortunately too, there are no photographs or other visuals (photos of original texts, for example, or title pages of old Kleine Gemeinde booklets, etc.) to relieve the stress of reading the fine print on and on. Perhaps Volume IV will catch up on that dimension as well.

Right - we have over 800 pages by now. Why ask for more, indeed? We look forward to anything that's left. One must not begrudge the author the accolade in the Foreword: *Plett has to be commended for the creative contribution he has made to the understanding of Russian Mennonite history.* Who of us will now follow in his steps to plumb other depths in that realm as well?

Haury, David A., (comp. & ed.), *Index to Mennonite Immigrants on United States Passenger Lists 1872-1904*. North Newton, Kansas: Mennonite Library and Archives, 1986. Pb., 224 pp.

Reviewed by Dr. Adolf Ens, CMBC, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Many genealogists and family historians have found the ships' passenger lists reproduced in Clarence Hiebert's *Brothers Indeed to Brothers in Need* most helpful. The present compilation by David Haury incorporates much additional research on Mennonite immigrants and includes names from seventy-six ships' lists not reported by Hiebert.

The new *Index* includes 14,242 individuals

taken from the passenger lists of 205 ships. The name, age at immigration, and occupation are given for each of these persons.

The core of the book consists of a 118-page master list of ships known to have carried Mennonite passengers, arranged in chronological order of their arrival in America. Under each ship the passengers believed to be Mennonite or Hutterite are listed in the order of their appearance on the ship's list. This is followed by a 94-page index of all Mennonite passengers arranged in alphabetical order and indicating for each the person's age at immigration and the ship on which she/he arrived.

An additional helpful feature is an alphabetical index to all the ships which includes the date of arrival of each and identifies the microfilm number of the (USA) National Archives and Records Administration holdings. Unfortunately, the address of the National Archives is not included.

Anyone who has worked with the original passenger lists is painfully aware of the difficulty in deciphering the spelling of many names. The *Index* reflects this in the generous sprinkling of question marks behind many of its notations.

Since many Mennonite surnames are spelled in a variety of ways, the editor has sought to combine all of the variations of a particular name under one spelling. Since this has not been done consistently, however, the researcher will need to look under all possible spellings to ensure not having missed an entry. For example, both Classen and Klaassen appear; so do Huebert and Hiebert, as well as Neumann and Newmann. On the other hand names such as Inns and Enos appear under Enns.

The editor is overly modest in the length of his preface to the *Index* and in the table headings. Thus, it is nowhere explicitly stated that Hutterites are included, though one assumes so from the large number of Hofers and Kleinsassers in the list. None of the table headings indicates whether the dates given are for the departure or the arrival of the ship, though one assumes it is the latter.

The compiler does not claim to have produced a "comprehensive" list of Mennonite immigrant arrivals, but feels that the present *Index* is a "relatively complete" list for the time period indicated. As such, all serious American Mennonite genealogists will want to own a copy and anyone whose Mennonite ancestors immigrated to the USA from Russia during the years indicated will find it a useful reference.

Delbert Plett's three volumes on the **Kleine Gemeinde, History and Events, The Golden Years, and Storm and Triumph** can be purchased as a set for \$49.95. Write to the author, c/o D.F.P. Publications, Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada, R0A 2A0.