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Mennonite Historian



This statue of Catherine II (the Great) is allegedly the only one of the tsarina existing in Leningrad today. It is set in a public garden just opposite the Public Library. Catherine issued a new manifesto of foreign colonization in 1785, leading in 1786 to the work of Georg von Trappe in Danzig, and the emigration of nearly 300 Mennonite families to New Russia (Ukraine) in 1787-1789. Photo: Courtesy of Lawrence Klippenstein, Winnipeg, Man.

Stevensville: The First General Conference Mennonite Congregation in Canada, 1887-1917

by Reginald Good

"The (Stevensville, Ontario) congregation is now fully organized and numbers, if I am not mistaken, 17 members," reported Jacob Krehbiel, Jr. (1835-1917) in the *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 1 April, 1887, p. 6. He went on to recount this historic event, which represented the official founding of the first General Conference Mennonite congregation in Canada. "May the Stevensville congregation of our denomination stand as a shining light and as a city on a hill," editorialized an enthusiastic onlooker.¹

Stevensville was located on the Ontario side of the Niagara River, and its two sister congregations - Niagara Falls and Clarence Centre - were on the New York side. All three were under the care of Jacob Krehbiel, who had started out pastoring these congregations in 1872 as an Old Mennonite minister, but had been confirmed a General Conference Mennonite bishop in 1881.²

Krehbiel's congregations were originally

part of the Old Mennonite conference in Ontario, but they informally affiliated with the General Conference in 1884. At that time they numbered less than twenty members each. Worship services were conducted in Krehbiel's home congregation of Clarence Centre twice a month and in Niagara Falls and Stevensville once a month.³

A ten-year period of prosperity for Stevensville, which outstripped that of Clarence Centre and Niagara Falls, began in 1886. The congregation invited Allen M. Fretz in March of that year to inaugurate new worship facilities at the Stevensville music hall, by conducting a series of English revival meetings. Fretz was a General Conference pastor at an English-speaking congregation in Deep Run, Pennsylvania, who had in-laws in the Stevensville area and was probably known to some members.⁴

Fretz spent about a week in Stevensville beginning March 16, leading twelve services

of "preaching, song, prayer, and testimony."⁵ Six persons requested baptism as a result. These were instructed in the Mennonite faith, baptized, and welcomed into the Stevensville congregation by Krehbiel later that spring. Three other persons transferred their memberships into the church at the same time.⁶

Fretz returned to Ontario in January, 1887 to assist Krehbiel in organizing Stevensville into a more autonomous congregation. For eleven days, beginning Monday, January 10, Fretz held revival and prayer meetings in the Stevensville area. During this time a congregational meeting was held for the election of a minister and deacon. The choice for minister fell on Abraham Johnston, that of deacon on Jacob Danner. On Friday, January 21 - the last day of Fretz's services - these persons were ordained to their offices by Krehbiel.⁷

Fretz reported in *The Mennonite* that the congregation now expected to have weekly worship services, organize a Sunday School and build a church. Steps were immediately taken to fulfill the last of these goals because the Stevensville music hall no longer met their needs. On February 15, 1887, two-fifths of an acre in downtown Stevensville were transferred to Peter Eberley, Joseph W. Johnston and Benjamin Johnston, "trustees of the religious denomination called Mennonites" for fifty dollars.⁸

Stevensville formally joined the General Conference at the sessions of November, 1887 in the West Swamp Church, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. Allen M. Fretz accepted the credit for this action, thanking the Conference for acknowledging his evangelistic efforts in Stevensville by inviting the congregation he had gathered, into their union.⁹ The Conference took the unprecedented step on this occasion of voting funds to complete construction of a church building for Stevensville, which was dedicated the following month.¹⁰

Membership at Stevensville continued to rise steadily, surpassing that of Clarence Centre in 1893, for the first time, when it reached 38. It peaked in 1896 with 40 members, stabilized, then began to decline.

At the request of the congregation, the Middle District Home Mission Board of the General Conference sent a mission worker, Elmer F. Grubb, to Stevensville in May, 1901.¹¹ Krehbiel had turned 60 in 1895 and

his involvement in the congregation was being curtailed for health reasons. Apparently, Abraham Johnston did not have the talents to fill the leadership vacuum.

By the close of 1901, membership at Stevensville stood at 35. Worship services were held there every Sunday morning and in nearby Black Creek every other Sunday evening. But Grubb had a falling out with the congregation and in 1903 the Board withdrew its support. Grubb moved on to Wadsworth, Ohio and Stevensville requested that another pastor be sent to assist them.

The Mission Board did not act on this request until 1906. In that year Abraham Johnston was voted out of the pastorate, creating "deplorable confusion" within the congregation. M.G. Oberholtzer, who had earlier served with the American Sunday School Union, was recruited and sent to Stevensville in January, 1907. But the members did not seem to appreciate Oberholtzer's efforts, and within a year, he was called to another field. This marked the end of the Mission Board's support of ministry in Stevensville and heralded the death of the congregation.¹²

The Niagara Falls congregation closed its doors permanently in 1908, freeing Krehbiel to travel to Stevensville for Sunday services once or twice a month, as his health permitted. By 1911 membership at Stevensville had slipped to 33. In November of that year the last congregational report from Stevensville was printed in the *Christlicher Bundesbote*.¹³ After that point Stevensville disappeared from Conference statistical records for several years, although it was still listed on Conference books as an affiliated congregation, and Krehbiel continued preaching there occasionally.

Finally in 1916 a representative of the Home Mission Board visited Clarence Centre and Stevensville to collect information on the status of those congregations. He reported back that in the former place "a congregation really doesn't exist anymore, and there is no hope of rebuilding one." He was slightly more optimistic of Stevensville, indicating that "a possibility still remains to do something (in terms of reorganizing a congregation) in the future."¹⁴ The Conference did not take steps in this direction, however, and when Krehbiel died in December, 1917, the Conference books on both Stevensville and Clarence Centre were closed forever.

Obviously the major reason for the demise of the Stevensville congregation was its dependence on Jacob Krehbiel for leadership. We do not know all the dynamics that initially brought Stevensville into the General Conference, but loyalty to Krehbiel probably took precedence over commitment to Con-

ference. This would explain, in part, Stevensville's withdrawal from Conference participation as Krehbiel became less active. But there were other factors as well, including lack of capable leadership to replace Krehbiel as his health deteriorated, internal disunity, possibly resulting from diverse ethnic backgrounds, geographic isolation from other General Conference Mennonite churches, and competition from other denominations.

There is need for more extensive research to be done on Mennonites in Western New York and Welland County, Ontario, generally. This article is the first attempt to tell one part of that story, that of the General Conference Mennonite congregation at Stevensville.

NOTES

¹Allen M. Fretz, "Evangelistic Work: A Visit to New York and Canada", *The Mennonite*, March, 1887, pp. 90-91.

²M.S. Moyer, "Reisebericht", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, March, 1882, pp. 94-95.

³*Verhandlungen der Allgemeinen Konferenz - Zwölfte Sitzung*, 1890, statistic sheet. All subsequent statistics are taken from the records of General Conference sessions held every three years.

⁴Obituary of Allen M. Fretz, *Mennonite Yearbook and Almanac*, 1944, pp. 21-23.

⁵"Clarence Centre", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 15 April, 1886, p.6.

⁶"Clarence Centre", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 1 July, 1886, p. 6.

⁷Allen M. Fretz, "A Visit to New York and Canada".

⁸Copy of the deed, Conrad Grebel College Archives.

⁹Allen M. Fretz, "Die Stevensville Gemeinde", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 15 December, 1887, p. 6.

¹⁰Allen M. Fretz, "Ein Anruf!", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 15 December, 1887, p. 6.

¹¹"Bericht der 14. Mittleren Distriktskonferenz", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 31 October, 1901, pp. 4-5.

¹²"Verhandlung der 20. Mittleren Distriktskonferenz", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 3 October, 1907, pp. 6-7.

¹³Jacob Krehbiel, "Clarence Centre", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 23 November, 1911, p. 5.

¹⁴"Bericht der 29. Sitzung der Mittleren Distriktskonferenz", *Christlicher Bundesbote*, 2 November, 1916, p. 5.

The author and his wife, Kathy, drove the Mennonite from coast to coast as a part of the Mennonite bicentennial celebrations in 1986.

Bergthaler Lehrdienst Reunion

by Lawrence Klippenstein

A Bergthaler *Lehrdienst* reunion - why hadn't someone thought of it before? The group of seventy-five persons who met in the Gretna Mennonite Church on October 16 quite enjoyed the occasion. When the main speakers couldn't attend, representatives from former Bergthaler congregations (there were at one time twenty locals altogether) gave brief reports on past and present activities in their present assemblies. Most of them are now members of larger conferences - Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba (CMM), Conference of Mennonites in Canada (CMC) or the General Conference Mennonite Church (GCMC). One (Morris) is today with the Evangelical Mennonite Brethren conference and another (Steinbach) is independent. One (Arden) was closed.

The Bergthaler churches can in fact trace their history right back to the 1836 beginnings of the Bergthaler colony in southern Russia, exactly 150 years ago, almost to the month. The Canadian chapter took a dramatic new turn with the founding of the Sommerfelder Mennoniten *Gemeinde* on the West Reserve in 1892-1893. Both *Gemeinden* had a common rootage with the Chortitzer Mennoniten *Gemeinde* of the East Reserve.

The moderator of the program, David F. Friesen of the Gretna Mennonite Church, helped the participants to recall amusing and also serious aspects of at least the past fifty years - the rotation system of preaching (where a minister's turn could be forgotten, even if he showed up to speak!), the place of women in the churches (mostly behind the scenes), experiences of the total *Lehrdienst* when it still met as a body regularly.

In those times the *Lehrdienst* meant all the ministers and deacons of a congregation. Before the time of full localization all the *Lehrdienst* members of the twenty churches would meet from time to time to discuss common concerns.

The process of localizing the churches ended essentially with the formal closing of the Central Bergthaler office and organization in 1972. The group in Gretna learned that legal matters had been totally cleaned up only in 1984, when all business with titles, etc., was finally taken care of, and the Business Committee could terminate its work completely.

A recently published booklet, *Postscript to Adventure in Faith*, written by Henry Gerbrandt, long-time minister in Altona, chronicles this final chapter of the Ge-

(cont. on p.4)



The choir of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute as it served in 1936. John K. Friesen of Altona was the director at that time. The MCI will be commemorating its centennial in 1989/1990.

A history of the school is being written by Gerhard Ens, Jr.

The 1947 graduating class (Grade XII) is planning a fortieth anniversary reunion in July, 1987. For details write to Mrs. Anne Voth Doerksen, 114 Mossdale Avenue, Winnipeg, Man., R2K 0H5. Ph. 1-204-661-2376. Photo: Courtesy of Henry Funk, Winnipeg, Man.

Church Registers of the MHCA

by Dennis Stoesz

Editor's Note: This is the last in a series of four articles describing some of the special collections available for research at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives. Feel free to call or write the Heritage Centre for further information about these materials.

A much-used resource at the archives are church registers. Various kinds of people ask to use them: ministers, senior citizens, genealogists and students. Ministers search church registers for baptism dates to certify a person's membership in a church. Rev. Edward Funk from the Plum Coulee Bergthaler Mennonite Church, for example, phoned recently asking for a baptism date of a member transferring to a different congregation. The person joined in the 1930's and his records were incomplete for those earlier years. That information can be found, however, in the older Bergthaler Gemeinde church registers, 1893-1954, found at the archives.

These nine registers were used until the mid-1950's when congregations became independent and started keeping their own records. Senior citizens often use these registers for official certification of birth, marriage or death dates.

Family historians and genealogists are the ones who ask most frequently to see various church registers. John Dyck, Margaret Froese and David Schroeder are recent researchers who have visited the archives. Dyck was looking in the Prussian Mennonite Church registers for information on the Oberschulze Jacob Peters. Froese has again

and again examined the Schoenhoerster church records from Russia for data on the Klassen and Froese families, and Schroeder has been going through the Sommerfelder Mennonite records of Manitoba for dates on the Kehler family.

Students and professors from such disciplines as history, sociology and family studies have used the records to analyze population statistics, migration of people from one area to another, size of families, intermarriage between different social groups and movement of people in and out and between Mennonite denominations.

Thus, for example, Paul Redekop, a sociology professor at the University of Winnipeg, dropped in one day to see what church registers we had for Winnipeg congregations. He is doing a study of Mennonite acculturation and movement between churches for several congregations in North Kildonan. Using church records for these purposes needs to be encouraged. Ministers, scholars as well as others could find this information useful for their work.

Various kinds of church registers are presently available for research at the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives. Most of the registers are from Canada and date from 1874 to 1982.

Registers from *Gemeinden* (groups of congregations) forming the Conference of Mennonites in Canada include the Rosenorter Mennonitengemeinde (Saskatchewan-five books, 1893-1961); the Bergthaler Men-

nonitengemeinde (Manitoba-nine books, 1892-1954); the Ebenfelder Mennointengemeinde (Saskatchewan-2 volumes, 1925-48); the Nordheimer Mennonitengemeinde (Saskatchewan-1925-80); the Blumenorter Mennoniten gemeinde (Manitoba-1923-81); the Whitewater group (Manitoba-1927-79); the Schoenfelder group (Manitoba-1927-80); and the Schoenwieser Mennonitengemeinde (Manitoba-1924-75).

Other Mennonite church registers at the Centre include those from the Sommerfelder Mennonitengemeinde (Manitoba-12 volumes, 1894-1984); the Chortitzer Mennonitengemeinde (eight volumes which include two from Russia, 1836-1927); Reinlaender (Old Colony) Mennoniten gemeinde (one volume, 1875-1922), as well as individual village church registers from Rosenort, 1880-1984; Gnadenthal, 1879-1925; Osterwick, 1875-1975; and Reinland, 1875-1923; the Old Colony Church, Manitoba (three volumes, 1936-76); the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference (six volumes, 1936-81); the Northwest Mennonite Conference, Alberta and Saskatchewan, from the Mountview (1910-49), Mount Calvary and West Zion (1908-74) congregations; Evangelical Mennonite Conference (Kleinegemeinde, one volume, 1874-79); the Sommerfelder Mennonitengemeinde (Herbert, Saskatchewan, 1908-47) as provided by Jake Peters; and the Bergthaler Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan (1893-1926) as compiled by Leonard Doell.

The Centre has also microfilmed the Mennon Colony, Paraguay, church registers, 1927-80.

Only a few church registers from Russia (now the Soviet Union) are available for research. Registers that have been collected include those from the Bergthal Colony (two volumes, 1836-76); Fuerstenland Colony (one volume, 1880-1926), Shoenhorst village in the Chortitza Colony (one volume, 1820-1939), and Alexanderwohl village in the Molotschna Colony (1785-1874).

We are fortunate to have microfilm copies of records of some fifteen churches in Poland, parts of which were formerly West Prussia. Most of these registers span two centuries and were used until the period of World War II. These include Danzig (1667-1943), Deutsch Kazun (1843-1945), Elbing (1825-1942), Fuerstenwerder (1800-1943), Grosswerder (1782-1840), Heuboden (1773-1900), Königsberg (1794-1845), Ladekopp (1775-1873), Markushof (1754-1911), Ohrlofferfelde (1772-1900), Montau (1782-1945), Peter-shagen (1780-1831), Rosenort (1857-1943), Tiegenghagen (1796-1944), and Tragheimerweide (1766-1943).

Leads to secure other similar material are much appreciated and we invite anyone still holding such registers to deposit them at the archives if at all possible.

MHC Donors List

by Jim Suderman

July-November, 1986

We want to warmly thank all donors who have so generously supported the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives program in the past five months. Donations for the period July-November totalled \$2,741.59. This figure brings the 1986 donations to ca. \$3,600.00.

These gifts will help a great deal to maintain the regular archives programs, and also our commitments to the "Backlog Reduction" shared-funding grant received from the Canada Council of Archives earlier this year.

We look forward to your continued support in 1987, as we begin to celebrate the bicentennial of the Mennonite presence in Russia and the Soviet Union. Thank you again.

July

H.J. Siemens - Victoria, B.C.

August

Gordon Born - New Westminster, B.C.

October

Joanna Buhr - Calgary, Alberta
 John P. Nickel - Nanaimo, B.C.
 Henry Schapansky - Burnaby, B.C.
 H. J. Siemens - Victoria, B.C.
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 Marjorie E. Bangs - Prairie Village,

The New Mennonite Historian (1987-)

The first issue of *Mennonite Historian* was designated Vol. I, No. 1, September, 1975. We weren't sure whether the fledgling newsletter would "float" or not. No other issue appeared till Vol. II, No. 1 came out in March, 1976. By then we seemed to be sailing, and travelled on.

Now, eleven years later, we've reached a new phase of the enterprise. The Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for MB Studies, both in Winnipeg, have agreed to merge their respective newsletters in one periodical, and to carry on the project together. The next issue - March, 1987 - may be the first in the period of joint publication for the *Mennonite Historian* and distribution to this enlarged constituency.

We began the *Historian* - and the Centre for MB Studies started their newsletter - with the hope of sharing helpful information about the two fledgling archives programs. The two publications aimed as well to stimulate research on Mennonite themes and

to publish notes and articles of historical interest to the constituency served by the Centres.

If all goes well, these objectives will continue as the heartbeat of the joint publication. Perhaps it will also be a small gesture of working together which can point the way to more ventures of a similar kind. Certainly it will reach a larger group of readers now as the congregations of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren churches, the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference go on a "bulk mailing" list and as more individuals subscribe to the new publication.

We trust the March, 1987 issue will be well received. A run of 4,000 copies is envisioned and we hope that you, as a reader of this note, will continue to get yours as you have till now.

-The History Archives Committee

Kansas

Dr. Erwin N. Hiebert - Belmont, Massachusetts

November

Dr. John J. Bergen - Edmonton, Alberta
 Henry Hiebert - Airdrie, Alberta
 William Pauls - Calgary, Alberta
 Lloyd Penner - Stetler, Alberta
 Hermann Janzen - Clearbrook, B.C.
 W. R. Braun - Winnipeg, Manitoba
 Jacob Doerksen - Ile des Chenes, Manitoba
 David K. Friesen - Altona, Manitoba
 Raymond C. Friesen - Altona, Manitoba
 Dorothy Hildebrand - Altona, Manitoba
 Dr. Jacob E. Isaac - Winnipeg, Manitoba
 Helen Janzen - Winnipeg, Manitoba
 Abe Loewen - Gretna, Manitoba
 Wilmer Penner - Steinbach, Manitoba
 Dr. Paul Redekop - Winnipeg, Manitoba
 Dr. Al Reimer - Winnipeg, Manitoba
 Jacob Rempel - Altona, Manitoba
 John Schellenberg - Headingley, Manitoba
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 Historical Committee of United Mennonites - Ruthven, Ontario
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 Heinrich Bergen - Regina, Saskatchewan
 Peter Funk - Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan
 Helen Kornelsen - Watrous, Saskatchewan
 Eric Schroeder - Waldheim, Saskatchewan
 Ernest Hiebert - Gainesville, Florida

Bergthaler Lehrdienst (cont. from p.2)

meinde's story. It was "premiered" at this gathering. *Adventure in Faith* itself appeared in print in 1970, also authored by Gerbrandt. Henry and Susan, it was learned at the reunion, were about to leave for another assignment abroad. They are now working with Mennonite *Umsiedler* churches in West Germany. Many purchased the *Postscript* at the gathering.

Appropriately, a number of senior members in the congregations were also recognized in the program. Among them were the Peter U. Giesbrechts of Morden (formerly ministering in Homewood and Carman), Mrs. J. N. Hoeppner, also of Morden, at one time with her husband in Altona, Mrs. D.D. Klassen, whose late husband spent his less active years of ministry in Homewood also, Dr. C.W. Wiebe, for Florida, one of the first members of the Bergthaler *Fuersorgekomitee* (Chairman from 1934-40), Isaac Loewen, long-time deacon of the Winkler Bergthaler Church, the D.H. Loewens of Clearbrook, B.C., formerly Altona (long-time secretary-treasurer), and John Driedger, now in Winkler, but long active as deacon in the Gretna congregation.

A luncheon prepared by members of the Women's group in Gretna added a very pleasant and quite traditional touch to the day as a whole. Someone remarked in leaving, "Why say it's over? Let's have another reunion in 1992, and invite all those who have been with the Bergthaler churches at one time or another. After all, it has been a good thing going." Would you, if you are one of those, join in?

**Tell others about the
Mennonite Historian!**



The Jacob A. Rempel family in a photo dated ca. 1925 - perhaps taken in preparation for emigration. Sasha (Alexander) is standing on the extreme right of the group. Photo: Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Alexander Rempel (1915-1985): Reflections on His Life and Work

by Peter H. Rempel

In October, 1934 *Der Bote* published a set of letters from Aeltester Jacob A. Rempel and his son, Sasha (Alexander), written from an undisclosed location in Soviet Central Asia.¹ The father, a prominent leader among the Russian Mennonites in the 1920s, had escaped from his place of exile in Siberia and his eldest son, born in 1915, had travelled from the Ukraine to be with him. Sasha and his father had written to a relative in Canada, with an appeal for material assistance and the relative then shared these letters with the readership of *Der Bote*.

The letters reveal the joy of father and son at being re-united, as well as their plans to remain together so that the father could be restored in health and the son might benefit from his father's wisdom and knowledge.

The respite of both men from persecution ended in 1936 when first the father and then the son were arrested and imprisoned. Jacob Rempel perished, probably in 1941 through execution. Alexander Rempel was released after three years but was not able to return to his home in Chortitza until 1942.

By this time this settlement was under German occupation and after a short stay, Alexander moved on to Berlin where he took up studies in engineering to begin a promising academic career.

After the end of the war, Rempel's academic commitments and then severe illness interfered with his plans to immigrate to Canada. As a result, he remained in Germany until 1963. Throughout the time in Germany and thereafter in Canada, until his

death in 1985,² he pursued an ambitious range of academic and research goals related to Mennonite history.³ Most of his manuscripts remain unpublished so that his potential contribution to Russian Mennonite historiography has been only partially realized. It seems appropriate nevertheless to acknowledge the contribution of his published writings and the value of his unpublished projects.

The two major articles which Rempel published are unique and important reports on events about which little or no information would otherwise be available. They deal with Ak Metchet, an isolated Mennonite community in Soviet Central Asia, and, in a brief biography, the life and work of his father, Aeltester Jacob Rempel.

Ak Metchet, not far from the desert city of Chiwa, was the settlement of Mennonites who had remained loyal to Claas Epp's leadership and vision of meeting the returning Christ in Central Asia. Alexander and his father lived together in the vicinity of this community from 1934 until 1936. Here they found fellowship and support but also observed the forcible deportation and resettlement of the village population in 1935.

Rempel published his description of this community in *Der Bote* in 1947⁴ and his eyewitness report has remained the basic primary source for all subsequent accounts of its demise.⁵ Rempel's report, together with other, hitherto unused contemporary reports, could form the basis for a deeper look at the Mennonite communities which

preceded the present ones in Soviet Central Asia. There may be significant points of continuity and contact between these two which would increase our understanding of the present Soviet Mennonite situation.

The other major article by Rempel was a biography of his father, Jacob Rempel, published in *Mennonitisches Lexikon*.⁶ Aeltester Rempel had become one of the most prominent and articulate leaders among the Mennonites of the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Soon after his arrival in Germany, Alexander Rempel began to collect materials in the hopes of writing a book-length biography of his father. The life story sheds much light on the Soviet Mennonite experience.

Jacob Rempel was born in 1883 in the colony of Borsenko. He taught in several Mennonite communities (1901-05), and then studied at the seminary and the university in Basel (1906-15). Upon his return he taught at the Central School in Chortitza and later also lectured at the university in Jekaterinoslav (1916-1919). In 1920 he was called to the eldership of the Neu-Chortitza *Mennonitengemeinde* which he served until 1929.

At a meeting in October, 1922, the conference of representatives from the three Mennonite church groups in Russia ("Kirchliche", Mennonite Brethren and Allianz) in Russia elected Jacob Rempel as chairman of its executive body. The Commission for Church Affairs (KfK) represented the Mennonite churches to the state, and this involved petitioning the state on matters of education, exemption from military service, religious literature and permission to assemble as a conference. Aeltester Rempel served as the chairman of this commission until the next (also the last) all-Russian conference in Moscow in 1925.

The Moscow conference also asked Jacob Rempel to represent the Russian Mennonites at the celebration of the 400th anniversary of the beginnings of the Anabaptist movement in Switzerland. This celebration became the first assembly of the Mennonite World Conference. Unfortunately, Rempel was not permitted to enter Switzerland and could not attend in person.⁷

Though no longer chairman of the Commission after the 1925 Conference, Rempel ably assisted his successor in that post, edited the new Mennonite paper *Unser Blatt* (1925-1928) and sought to establish a Bible School for which permission had been granted. As well he continued his pastoral and teaching ministry in the congregations.

All of this ended when he and his family were forced to leave their home in September, 1929. In November he was arrested in Moscow while trying to emigrate with his family.

In the biographical article, Alexander provides these and other details about the life

(cont. on p.6)

Alexander Rempel (cont. from p.5)

and activities of his father. The account of the activity of the Commission of Church Affairs, especially for the period from its reconstitution in 1922 until the conference in 1925 provides information not available elsewhere in published form. An elucidation of the role of the Commission on Rempel's research and materials would yield further insight on two broader issues in Russian Mennonite history.

1) the division of roles for Russian Mennonite organizations into civil and religious organizations and

2) the cooperation among the several Mennonite church groups on common religious concerns, especially as these were affected by the government. Securing exemption from military service was a significant dimension of the latter theme.⁸

Alexander Rempel was devoted to his father and identified closely with him. He shared with his father the difficulties and struggles of the early Soviet era. The work he did has helped us to understand these settings more clearly, and further insights will grow as the fruits of his scholarly research and writing reach the general public.

NOTES

¹"Aus der Alten Heimat", *Der Bote*, 31 October, 1934, pp. 3-4.

²"Heimgangen: Alexander Rempel", *Der Bote*, 29 May, 1985, p. 6.

³An unpublished paper entitled "Ein Forschungsbericht" by Alexander Rempel, 1972.

⁴Serialized in *Der Bote*, 5 November - 17 December, 1947. Cf. also excerpts in the appendix of Franz Bartsch, *Unser Auszug nach Mittelasien*, (Steinbach: Echo-Verlag, 1948). 1948).

⁵"Ak-Mechet" in *Mennonite Encyclopedia* I, pp. 29-30 and Fred Belk, *The Great Trek of the Russian Mennonites to Central Asia* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1976).

⁶A. Rempel, "Rempel, Jakob A.", *Mennonitisches Lexikon* III, pp. 470-474. Cf. also P.A. Rempel, *Aeltesten J.A. Rempel's Lebens und Leidensgeschichte* (1946).

⁷Lawrence Klippenstein, "J.A. Rempel and the Mennonite World Conference, 1925", *Mennonite Historian* III, No. 4 (December, 1977), p. 1 and IV, No. 1 (March, 1978), pp. 2-3.

⁸Cf. John B. Toews, *Lost Fatherland* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1967), and also his article "The Russian Mennonites and the Military Question, 1921-1927", *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, XLIII (April, 1969) pp. 153-168, as well as Lawrence Klippenstein, "Mennonite Pacifism and State Service in Russia - A Case Study in Church-State Relations: 1789-1936", unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1984.

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Canadian Mennonite Symposium Plans

The Mennonite Historical Society of Canada is planning two symposia on the influence of World War II on the experience of Mennonites in Canada.

The first symposium, planned for May 21-23, 1987 will focus on the years 1939 to about 1955. It will include analyses in the disciplines of history, theology, education, immigration, emigration, role of women and peace.

The second symposium, tentatively planned for May, 1988, will generally focus on the years up to the mid-1960s. Topics will include the themes of urbanization, the development of literature, secularization, the influence of increasing wealth and prosperity and theology.

Both symposia, consciously planned to be inter-disciplinary, are designed to provide additional resources and research for the writing of *Mennonites in Canada*, Volume III. The scope of the project is 1939 to the mid 1960s. The writers for this volume are Dr. Ted Regehr, Saskatoon, and his assistant, Marlene Epp, Waterloo.

Below is a tentative program for the first symposium. The Conference will be held at the University of Winnipeg. All interested people are invited to attend. Registrations and requests for information should be sent to: Dr. John Friesen, CMBC, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., R3P 0M4.

Thursday, May 21, 7:00-9:30 p.m. - Opening Session

Keynote Presentation: "The influence of W.W. II on Mennonites in Canada" by Dr. Ted Regehr, University of Saskatchewan, SK.

Friday, May 22, 9:00-12:00 noon

Presentation: "Influence of W.W. II on Agricultural policy and practise in Canada" by Dr. Ian MacPherson, University of Victoria, B.C.

1:30-4:30 p.m.

Presentation: "Influence of W.W. II on Russian Mennonite Theology" by Dr. Rod Sawatsky, Dean, Conrad Grebel College

Presentation: "Influence of W.W. II on Swiss Mennonite Theology" by Mr. Ken Bechtel, Scarborough, Ontario.

7:30-9:00 p.m.

Presentation: "The Emigration of Mennonites to Latin America (Mexico, Paraguay, Bolivia) caused by W.W. II and the impact this had on Mennonites in Canada" by Dr. H. Leonard Sawatzky, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg.

Saturday, May 23, 9:00-12:00 noon

Presentation: "The Impact of W.W. II on Education among Mennonites in Canada" by Dr. John Bergen, Dept. of Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton.

Presentation: "The Changing Role of Mennonite Women in Canada" by Ms. Marlene Epp, Waterloo, Ontario.

1:30-4:30

Presentation: "The Immigration of Mennonites to Canada as the result of W.W. II, and their influences on Mennonitism in Canada" (by Dr. G.K. Epp, Mennonite Studies Centre, U of W.)

Presentation: "The influence of W.W. II on Mennonite Peace Thinking, especially as it applied to the development of alternatives to military service" by Mr. Dave Fransen, Ottawa.

7:00-9:00 p.m.

Development of major interpretive themes based on the presentations.

This page has been provided, and paid for, by the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Organizes

by John Friesen

On November 1, 1986, the Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta was launched in Red Deer, Alberta. About fifteen people from various Mennonite churches were present at the meeting. Dr. John Friesen of Winnipeg, Manitoba, represented the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada.

A number of years ago it became evident that the Mennonite Historical Society of Saskatchewan and Alberta covered too large an area. Communication was difficult. It was suggested that Alberta should organize its own Society. Henry Goerzen, Carstairs, a member of the Berthal Mennonite Church in Didsbury, volunteered to give some time to help plan the formation of a new Alberta society.

Henry Goerzen, along with a group of interested people, spent the last number of months working toward this goal. The most impressive step was the publication of a newsletter, entitled *Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta*. Among other features it included an article presenting the rationale for the existence of the Society. Goerzen, the editor, concluded, "With the newsletter, we make an open invitation to all our friends in the Mennonite Community and observers about us to join us in looking into the mirror of the past and observing some of the reflections of it."

The newsletter was mailed to all the known Mennonite churches of Alberta. With this newsletter the Alberta Society has provided a new link of communication between the seventy churches of various Mennonite conferences and *Gemeinden*.

At the Red Deer meeting, the people present elected an executive, and appointed persons to head up four committees. The com-

mittees are expected to promote Mennonite historical writings, collect artifacts, foster genealogy, and develop an archives as well as promote publications. The executive of the newly formed Society is Henry Goerzen, chairperson, Harry Stauffer, vice-chairperson, and Erna Goerzen, secretary.

A unique dimension of the Alberta Society is that it decided to become an affiliate of MCC Alberta. The reason for the affiliation was the hope that thereby the inter-Mennonite nature of the Society could be emphasized.

It was evident at the organizing meeting that people present were energetic and enthusiastic about the contributions which hopefully would be forthcoming from the new Society.

MHSC Annual Meeting Convenes in Waterloo

The annual meeting of the Mennonite Historical Society of Canada was held on December 5-6 at Conrad Grebel College in Waterloo. All western provinces except B.C., as well as Ontario, MCC Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in Canada were directly represented at the sessions. President Ted Friesen of Altona, Manitoba, and John Friesen, of CMBC, chaired the Board meetings on Saturday. Three archivists, Ken Reddig, Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg, Sam Steiner, Conrad Grebel College Archives, Waterloo and Lawrence Klippenstein of the Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, held a separate meeting later in the day.

Special reports came in from the provincial Mennonite Historical Societies (Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, now also Alberta, and B.C.), from the archivists and from the writers of *Mennonites in Canada*, Vol. III. Dr. Ted Regehr and Marlene Epp brought the latter reports. They are well into further planning on the volume and ready to pick up where Frank H. Epp, recently deceased, left off. A Memorial Fund has been established in memory of Frank and the various concerns which he carried, including historical research and writing for MHSC.

A Task Force looking at future activities recommended setting up a number of committees to pursue continuing and new tasks of the Society. These included: an archives standing committee (which has functioned on an ad hoc basis since the Society began), a standing committee to plan Mennonite Studies conferences and a Data Base committee (to coordinate data bases of the three major archival centres and the Mennonites in Canada project).

It was also decided to open membership in the Society to Mennonite colleges, Bible Schools and Institutes, as well as historical societies such as the MB Historical Society of Canada. The incumbent executive was re-elected, and a budget of \$47,000 was accepted for 1987.

Book Review

Rempel, Olga, and Lawrence Klippenstein, *Siberian Diary of Aron P. Toews*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1984. Pb., 177 pp., \$10.95. Available from CMBC Publications, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Dyck, John P. ed. *Troubles and Triumphs: 1914-1924*. Springstein, Manitoba: The Author, 1981. Pb., 265 pp., \$10.00. Available from Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

Reviewed by Jim Suderman.

Diaries are always fascinating because they are supposed to contain secrets. The reader of either of the two books mentioned above will not be disappointed. A diary, as a personal record, holds secrets about its author; it cannot do otherwise.

Sadly, the diary of Aron P. Toews is very short consisting only of part of 1936 and 1937. However, Olga Rempel has filled in the gaps to a considerable extent by providing a biographical sketch of her father in the first of the three sections in the book.

The second part contains the actual diary excerpts, with a short introduction by Rev. Isaak P. Klassen. The diary itself consists of about 50 pages of material, pleasingly translated and supplemented with two maps and some pictures. In the last entry before he sent his diary to his family, Toews wrote to his wife saying that there

is really nothing valuable in it, but it contains threads of thought and my reflections, what was important to me; here and there perhaps also expressions of what moved me deeply.

Toews was not composing his diary to be a source for future historians; he wrote it for his personal satisfaction. It was his way of communicating his perceptions of his life in Siberia.

Troubles and Triumphs, consisting of selected excerpts from the diary of Peter J. Dyck, stands in stark contrast to *Siberian Diary*. It covers the decade from 1914 to 1924, ending twelve years before the brief Toews diary begins. Perhaps the only point of similarity between the two diaries is that they were both written during times of great unrest and duress for the Mennonite communities of South Russia.

Dyck's diary has more regular entries and is replete with detail. Such a diary is an historian's dream in spite of the frustration of discovering that much detail was, nevertheless, left out.

Troubles and Triumphs, focuses on everyday life in Ladekopp, a town in the Molotschna colony. Dyck not only commented on village life but also added his view of some of the world events that affected him. Indeed, the first entry deals with reservists being called up and leaving Ladekopp, indicating immediately that the Mennonites

were entering a time of change and unrest.

Like Olga Rempel, John Dyck begins the books with a biographical sketch of the author. This helps orient the reader and makes it very easy to identify with the troubles and triumphs of Peter Dyck.

Troubles and Triumphs focuses on the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period from late 1917 to early 1923. The events leading up to the anarchy under Makhno, the formation of the *Selbstschutz*, and the ebb and flow of the battles between the White and Red armies are all described from a contemporary and "little man's" viewpoint. The famine of the early twenties is especially poignant as the entries begin to deal almost exclusively with the food supply of the Dycks.

The endings of the two diaries reflect something of the authors. Toews began his last entry on March 30, 1937 and wrote: "Beloved Marusja (his wife): I wanted to fill the notebook, but not with just anything. Now it is time to send this package, and I cannot think of anything else to write, so I will close." The ending seems artificial as there is no change in his life.

Troubles and Triumphs is quite different. Peter Dyck decided to emigrate from Russia with his family and his last entry is about the final border check before he left Russia. Again two aspects of the Mennonite experience in Russia are represented: that of the emigrants and that of those Mennonites that remained.

Troubles and Triumphs could have had better proof-reading to remove typographical errors. In addition, the maps could have been more professionally done, although they are servicable.

The two diaries complement each other. *Siberian Diary* leans more toward the spirit and emotions of a man in exile, while *Troubles and Triumphs* leans more toward the physical and social aspects of a member of a persecuted minority. Thus, together the two diaries are able to communicate, very comprehensively, a part of a very dramatic and trying period in the history of the Mennonites in Russia.

Both original diaries are available at the Mennonite Heritage Centre, although Peter Dyck's diary (the source for *Troubles and Triumphs*) is only available on microfilm. *Siberian Diary* is a translation of *Einer von Vielen*, published in 1979.

Book Notes

Falcón, Rafael, *The Hispanic Mennonite Church in North America 1932-1982*. Translated by Ronald Collins. Scottdale: Herald Press, 1986. Hc., 223 pp., \$25.25 in Canada. By Adolf Ens, CMBC.

In forty pages of lucid prose Falcón sketches the first fifty years of Hispanic Mennonite history in North America from its

1932 beginnings in Chicago to the celebration in 1982 of some fifty congregations with a combined membership of 1837. Falcón limits his account to the (Old) Mennonite Church, with the Mennonite Brethren (25 congregations with 575 members) and General Conference Mennonite (3 congregations with 60 members) work summarized in brief appendices.

The MC work "happened" because, just when Spanish-speaking people were being attracted to its Chicago Mission, workers on furlough from the Argentine mission were in the vicinity and were able to provide initial leadership. The slow and decentralized growth of the 1940s and 1950s received a significant impetus through the civil rights movement of the 1960s, leading to a first gathering in 1969 of representatives of Hispanic Mennonites from across the U.S.A. At the 50th anniversary celebrations in 1982, the Mennonite Hispanic Council had its sixth convention.

The first Canadian congregation was organized in Edmonton in 1975 followed by Calgary in 1982. Later congregations in Montreal and Winnipeg are not included in the book.

With more than twenty million Spanish-speaking people in Canada and the U.S.A., the Hispanic Mennonite Church has ample opportunity for service and witness. Falcón's book contains much helpful information about how congregations have emerged - and sometimes died - (pp. 71-139), as well as suggestions for future developments in a chapter on "Growth and Challenge".

Several years ago Derksen Printers brought out two books by Elizabeth Peters of Winnipeg, Manitoba. One, *The Cherryhedge* (pb., 96 pp.), is really a Low German drama, published in Low German and English. It has been performed with considerable success, again, not long ago, in Leamington, Ontario. The other is a collection of several Low German books by Arnold Dyck. It is an English translation of *Twee Breew*, *De Millionae von Kosefeld* and *Runde Koake* (pb., 70 pp.). Both books may be obtained from the Mennonite Heritage Centre for \$6.00 a copy.

Dr. Helmut Huebert has just published two books with Springfield Publishers in Winnipeg. *Kornelius Martens, Our Skillful Advocate* (pb., 56 pp.) is a biography and collection of Martens' poetry and other writings. It costs CAN \$9.95. The second book is entitled *Hierschau: An Example of Russian Mennonite Life*. It is priced at CAN \$24.95 and US \$19.95. Send orders to: Kindred Press, 4-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2L 2E5.