

# MENNONITE HISTORIAN

Published by the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for MB Studies in Canada

Volume XIII, No. 2, June, 1987



*Girls from the Mary-Martha Home with Anne Thiessen (centre, second row). Taken in the 1920s. Can anyone help us identify members of the group? Photo: Courtesy of the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg.*

## The Baptism Issue: An Episode in the History of the Ontario Mennonite Brethren Churches

by Ed Boldt

In today's generally more tolerant religious environment, it is somewhat difficult to understand how deeply certain issues, which we would classify as "form," were vital issues of our spiritual forefathers. Yet, it is the duty of the historian to attempt to portray the intense reality of those convictions if we are to understand and remain honest in our record of the past.

One of these issues was the matter of accepting "non-immersed" applicants into membership of the Ontario M.B. Churches. The issue reached a climax of concern during the period from 1936-1939 when the Ontario Conference of M.B. Churches applied for membership, as a district, into the General Conference of M.B. Churches of North America.

What created the problem was the nature of the Ontario Conference application.<sup>1</sup> It requested permission to maintain their position of accepting non-immersed applicants into full membership. The origin of this position was directly related to the situation of the pioneer churches of Ontario.

When Russian Mennonites arrived in Waterloo County in 1924, they desired fellowship among other Mennonites of Russian background, rather than join with the Mennonites of Old Order, Pennsylvania Dutch, background.

The first Mennonite Brethren church was organized on May 25, 1925 in the home of Rev. Jacob P. Friesen in the village of St. Jacobs on the outskirts of Kitchener. In its articles of organization we discover the seeds of the later controversy.<sup>2</sup> Clearly stated provisions for full acceptance of non-immersed charter members are included, although it also clearly states that baptism by immersion was to be regarded as Scriptural and to be the sole mode to be used in the future by the congregation.

To understand these articles we must understand the background of the people involved. Included in the small group of eighteen charter members were both Mennonite Brethren and members of the *Evangelische Mennoniten-Gemeinden* (better known in Russia as the "Allianz Gemeinde.") This lat-

ter group had been formed in Russia in 1905 and tried to serve as a bridge between the Mennonite and Mennonite Brethren Churches in Russia.<sup>3</sup> While it practiced baptism by immersion, it did not demand it and accepted all believers into its fellowship irrespective of baptismal mode. The group also objected to celebrating communion with the unconverted, yet practiced open communion with believers from other Protestant congregations.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the essential difference between the two churches was in practice, not in teaching.

As new immigrants, driven together by the winds of adversity, both groups were represented in the organization of the Kitchener church. To give visible evidence of their more "liberal" stance the church was incorporated with the name "Molotschna" rather than Kitchener, since it was in the Molotschna colonies in Russia that this more open practice had been followed.

As more congregations were organized in places such as New Hamburg, Hespeler and Leamington, they followed the Kitchener model. When the Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches was founded in 1932, its constitution included the more liberal stand on acceptance of new members.<sup>5</sup>

But a new chapter was to be written on this issue. The first full-time pastor of the Kitchener church was Rev. H. H. Janzen (also the first moderator of the Ontario Conference), a polished and capable preacher, teacher and administrator. It was through his influence that the Ontario conference had been organized, and he further proposed union with the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches in North America. The motive for this proposal was Janzen's great interest in Foreign Missions, an interest already reflected in the Kitchener congregation where activities relative to foreign missions flourished under his leadership. He hoped that Ontario's entry into the General Conference would foster a more direct relationship and contribution to the Board of Missions which supported Mennonite Brethren missionaries in various parts of the world.

And so it came about that in 1936 the General Conference received the Ontario application for affiliation. At the convention that year was also a proposal to accept a revised Constitution. This revision had been prepared after much labour and debate over

(cont'd on page 2)

the past six years and clearly spelled out the terms of affiliation of any new "District Conference", particularly in Article XXI, Division C: "Only such persons may be accepted who have received the Biblical baptism (by immersion) upon their confession of faith and are leading a Christian life."<sup>6</sup>

The results of the 1936 debate are most interesting. The new Board of Reference and Counsel was instructed to write a letter to the Ontario Conference welcoming Ontario into affiliation but with "limitations" to full acceptance because of Ontario's "conditions", which failed to conform to the new revised Constitution. However, in spite of these conditions what appealed to those proposing affiliation in Ontario was the fact that if they would become fully affiliated they could become more involved in the Foreign Missions program of the General Conference of MB Churches.

One can imagine both the consternation and excitement that this letter created in the Ontario churches. For the next three years - from 1936 to early 1939 - the whole issue became the leading topic of discussion and debate in the churches and on the floor of the Ontario Conventions. Eventually, when the issue led to a division in one of the Ontario churches, a decision was reached. At the next General Conference, convened in Corn, Oklahoma, in 1939, a letter of application was again received from Ontario, but this time accepting the full terms of the 1936 Constitution, i.e. not to accept into membership in the future non-immersed applicants. Yet within their application the Ontario churches pleaded that the existing non-immersed members in their midst be granted full membership status.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious when one looks back and tries to analyze the situation that although the mode of baptism issue was a critical one, at this time the excitement for "Missions" exceeded even that. The 1939 Convention did accept the Ontario Conference into full affiliation, but stipulated that non-immersed members still could not play a full role in organizational matters. The Ontario Convention accepted this latter stipulation reluctantly, but enthusiastically supported full affiliation. Upon reflection of this event Isaac H. Tiessen describes the results in this way: "Our membership with the General Conference proved to be a blessing. The numerous visits from missionaries and reports . . . stimulated us to increased activity in the work for the Lord."<sup>8</sup>

Today the issue has sunk into the background. Full acceptance of non-immersed members has long been practised in a large majority of M.B. Churches.<sup>9</sup> But the past again reveals that such a matter can



*Katherina and Heinrich H. Janzen (1901-1975).*

be of great significance when tested in the fires of constitutional debate.

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Yearbook of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (1936), p. 68.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Kutz, "History of the Kitchener Church," *He Leadeth: History of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ontario 1924-1957* (Kitchener: Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1957), pp. 62-63.

<sup>3</sup> Christian Neff, "Allianz Gemeinden," *Mennonite Encyclopedia*, Vol. I, p. 62.

<sup>4</sup> John B. Toews, *Czars, Soviets & Mennonites* (Newton: Faith and Life Press, 1982), pp. 25-26.

<sup>5</sup> Isaac H. Tiessen, "History of the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ontario," *He Leadeth: History of the Mennonite Brethren Churches of Ontario 1924-1957* (Kitchener: Ontario Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches, 1957), p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> *Constitution of the Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches of North America* (1936), p. 45.

<sup>7</sup> *Yearbook of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches* (1939), pp. 57-58.

<sup>8</sup> Isaac H. Tiessen, "History . . .", p. 22.

<sup>9</sup> In 1963 the General Conference of M.B. Churches gave official permission to local congregations to accept into fellowship "believers who have been baptised . . . with a mode of baptism other than immersion." See General Conference Yearbook (1963), pp. 38-39. Later, in 1972, this article was amended to also permit local congregations to allow the transfer, by letter, of non-immersed members to other M.B. churches. See General Conference Yearbook (1972), pp. 14-15.

*Ed Boldt is a retired history teacher from Kitchener, Ontario. He has been active for many years in the Canadian Conference of MB Churches Christian education program.*

## Heritage Spectrum - TV

*Heritage Spectrum* introduces viewers to a full range of heritage topics: from archives and museology to environmental and cultural history.

The program is designed to give leaders in the heritage community a forum for expressing their views and concerns on issues of local and provincial interest.

*Heritage Spectrum* is produced and co-hosted by Diane Haglund and Peter Walker. It is telecast on alternate Saturdays on Channel 11 at 9 p.m. The program is sponsored by the Manitoba Heritage Federation Inc. Viewers are invited to share their comments and suggestions. Write: The Producers, *Heritage Spectrum*, 434-167 Lombard Ave., Winnipeg, MB, R3B 0T6, or call 943-4568.

## Horndean Heritage - The School Registers

A large stack of school registers once used in the Horndean school arrived at the MHC recently. These have joined a growing collection of such materials, which are being gathered at the Centre archives. We are glad to know that some other sets, from other southern Manitoba districts of Mennonite families, may be on the way.

A copy of *Horndean Heritage*, published in 1984 came with the collection. It quotes a short essay by Esther Giesbrecht (student for Agnes Wiebe in 1950) to tell the story of the Horndean school. Esther wrote: "Steinrich School District No. 820 was organized in about 1892. It was then a one-roomed school, and was one mile south of Horndean. Between Christmas and New Year of 1932 the school was moved to Horndean. In 1936 a second room was opened. Then in 1938 the High School room was added. In 1942 the name of the school was changed to Horndean School. The teachers now are Miss Wiebe, Mrs. (Elizabeth) Peters and Mr. (Victor) Peters".

We want to thank the Horndean Reunion Committee, and Cleo Heinrichs of Altona, Manitoba, who forwarded the material, for caring enough to hold the records, and to put them in preservation at the archives. We trust it will encourage other school districts to gather and send in their records too.

If there are any questions on this, write to: The Archivist, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R3P 0M4.

# The Mennonite Girls' Homes - New Research

by Frieda Esau

Mennonite history is traditionally a story of faith, of flight and settlement, of hardship and martyrdom. It is a lineup of great preachers, great missionaries and great government negotiators. It is a story of divisions, of waves of immigration and of successful churches, hospitals, schools and other institutions. But there is a certain quiet spot in the Mennonite histories and archives when it comes to the lives and experiences of "ordinary" people, particularly Mennonite women. It is a very recent phenomenon for even the most remarkable Mennonite women to be noted and written about. Who are these people standing in the background? Were their lives so ordinary? What was their contribution?

In order to gather some materials on Canadian Mennonite women, the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Canada has applied for and received a grant from the Manitoba government to conduct taped oral interviews. The project is focussing on the experiences of those many Mennonite women who had some connection to one of the two **Maedchenheims** (girls' homes) that were open in Winnipeg between the mid-1920's and late '50's.

The most common story is that of large families of Mennonite immigrants coping with poverty and the burden of travel debts by leaving their daughters (as young as 13 or 14) in the city to work as live-in domestic servants in wealthy English and Jewish homes while they went on to establish homes in the country. For these women, the **Maedchenheims** were an "oasis," a "home away from home." For a great many of them, it was their only source of help in getting a job, their only connection with Mennonite community, and their only safeguard against becoming lost in the strangeness and loneliness of the city.

The wage in the 1920's and '30's was as low as \$3 to \$5 for the youngest of the girls, but generally started at \$10 to \$15 per month. The money usually went towards paying the families' **Reiseschuld** (travel debt) and farm and living expenses. The women wore maid uniforms, answered to bells, learned English (often from the children they cared for in the homes), learned kosher and English cooking, and adjusted to new customers, manners and lifestyles. People all over the city phoned to the two homes requesting Mennonite girls for maids. Their reputation, explains one woman, was that they "didn't complain, they were very clean, they were shy, they wouldn't talk back and they did what they were told."

The typical pattern was for the young women to work as live-in maids, then, perhaps, domestic day help or assembly line workers in sewing and other factories. Some

worked as domestics for 20 or 30 years. Others found their way to Bible school classes, nurses' training or teachers' college. For many, marriage brought them back to the country onto farms of their own, though many of them eventually came back to the city to retire.

Associated with both the "Mary Martha Home," sponsored by Mennonite Brethren churches, and the "Eben Ezer Home," sponsored by General Conference churches, there are stories of life-long commitment. Miss Anna Thiessen was a very young woman in the 1920's when she left her home in Herbert to work for the Winnipeg City Mission. She began meeting Mennonite immigrants at the CPR station and matching young women with employers who gathered there looking for domestic servants. She offered her home as a meeting place for these women on their time off. In very little time, she found herself occupied as a full-time employment agent, a big sister, a mother, and a spiritual leader to hundreds of girls. At a time when there were few if any labour laws protecting domestics in Winnipeg, she looked out for the girls and often served as a mediator between them and their employers. Schwester Anna worked as matron of the home until 1951 and continued her presence there until the home closed eight years later.



Anna Thiessen and girls from the Mary-Martha Home. Can anyone identify the persons on the photo? Photo: Courtesy of the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg.

In a very similar way, the Eben Ezer Home came to serve the needs of young women largely of General Conference Mennonite background. Miss Helen Epp and her sister Neta ran the home for some 25 years. They, too, were role models of service and devotion, values that were surely impressed upon the young women who gathered there. The women recall the warm welcome, the coffee and mounds of hot **zwieback** that always waited for them when they met for Bible studies at the home on Thursday evenings (officially "maid's day off" in Winnipeg). Between 1933 and 1960 there were 2039 women who received jobs through the Eben Ezer Home, a number probably matched at the Mary Martha Home.

What can be found from interviewing these women? Once past their initial response to the suggestion of an interview ("Oh, I didn't do anything special!") there are wonderful stories to record. As remarkable as the fortitude of the women, was their contribution, which, for many, included being the sole example of what a Mennonite is to Winnipeg society people, finding time to do youth and Sunday school work in the newly established Mennonite churches, and ending what were often 12 to 14 hour days alone in their rooms doing needlework for church fund-raising auctions. One woman notes that some people looked down on the girls who were "only" maids. She remarks, "What's a maid? A maid is a person that another person trusts. And that is important."

How do these women look back on their experience? One woman declares, "It didn't do anybody any harm. I think it made people out of us." Others call it, "A good learning experience," and a time when, "We learned to stand on our own feet." Typically they report, "As a whole I was treated just fine," and, "They were good years, no matter how hard it was sometimes." One woman admits that she is glad she doesn't have to go back to being young again, but, instead, looks forward to her future.

The oral history project will continue until the end of July 1987. Any contributions or suggestions of people who would be available for an interview should be brought to the attention of Frieda Esau at the Archives. (Ph. 1-204-669-6575)

*Frieda Esau is a researcher for Parks Canada and the Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg. She recently completed an MA in history at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg.*





## One Map Among Many

by Peter Rempel

Maps are indispensable sources of information, especially if they provide first-hand information on places and events. The map entitled *Itinerarkarte zu den Reisen der Mennoniten in Mittelasien* in the Heritage Centre map collection is uniquely valuable in this respect.

It traces the famous trek of the early 1880s from the settlements on the Volga into Central Asia and then the return to Orenburg by a group disenchanted with the initial enterprise. The original version (scale 1:2,100,000) is supplemented with a written account detailing the route, dates and distances of the trek. Overall it is a fine, hand-drawn piece of work by a lay cartographer, H. Bartsch.

The map was recently donated to the Heritage Centre by Rev. and Mrs. Henry T. Klaassen of Rosthern, Saskatchewan. Earlier, members of the Klaassen family participated in the trek in the early 1880s and then several emigrated to United States. During World War I, the families moved to Canada. One of them presumably brought along the map. For all its travels and despite its size (ca. 80 cm x 100 cm) it is good condition - framed and under glass. We are grateful to the Klaassen family for preserving it.

This is only one of the 230 maps now in the Heritage Centre collection. There are good general maps of the areas of Mennonite settlement, such as Prussia, Russia and Canada. There are also detailed maps of Mennonite communities themselves, mostly of villages in Russia. A Backlog Reduction Grant from the Public Archives of Canada has allowed us to prepare a list of specific descriptions and an index of these maps.

Another 670 maps relevant to Mennonite history and copied from a variety of sources have been listed and indexed for quick reference by researchers.

## Conservation News

by Jim Suderman

On April 24, Neil Putt, of the Manitoba Heritage Conservation Society, visited the MHC Archives and loaned us a hygrothermograph (a continuous monitor of high temperature and relative humidity [RH]), a psychrometer (for spot checks of temperature and RH), a UV monitor (for measuring Ultra Violet light) and a Luxmeter (for measuring visible light). We had the use of this equipment until May 15.

The hygrothermograph was stationed in the vault for that time and the charts it generated indicated that, at least in summer conditions, the environment control systems in place at the archives are doing their job. Significant fluctuations in temperature or

RH damage documents, but there was no significant fluctuations registered.

The psychrometer was used, twice daily, to check the temperature and RH in the three main areas of the Archives. The readings fell within the optimum range for archival storage.

The luxmeter and UV monitor were used to make a "light map" of the Archives. It was found that UV and light levels in the vault were satisfactory while those in the reading room and part of the gallery area are very high (due to the large windows in these areas). Steps are being taken to ensure that documents present in these areas are protected or exposed for only a very short time.

Maintenance of documents requires that certain environmental conditions exist in order to prolong the life of a document indefinitely. Too much humidity or aridity gradually destroys a document just as does too much visible or UV light.

By striving to maintain the necessary conditions, the archives staff is ensuring the continued existence of that part of the Mennonite heritage contained in the documents held in the MHC Archives.



Grace Rempel (left) at the "Recent Paintings" Exhibition.

## Exhibition "Recent Paintings"

The Mennonite Heritage Centre hosted a new art exhibition in the spring term. "Recent paintings", prepared by Grace Driedger Rempel of Winnipeg, Manitoba could be seen by visitors from April 4 to May 21 in the Heritage Centre gallery.

Over a hundred people attended an open house reception on the opening night (April 4) of the exhibit. Many others came to see the paintings during the Mennonite Art and Music Festival which was held on May 3 on the CMBC campus this year. Several items were sold during the time of the exhibition.

We invite artists to inquire about possible future exhibits. Write to Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg,



Manitoba, R3P 0M4, or call 1-204-888-6781 for details about arrangements.

## Summer Staff Addition

Sheila Klassen Wiebe recently joined the MHC staff as a summer archival assistant. Her hiring was made possible with receipt of a Manitoba Career Start grant providing one employee full support for 10 weeks.

Sheila is a graduate of CMBC and recently also a student at Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary. Several years ago she researched and wrote a manuscript on the Bethania Personal Home in Winnipeg. The manuscript is awaiting publication.

Backlog cataloguing, research assistance, document typing and related archival tasks are part of the job description which this grant has made possible.

## Backlog Reduction Grant Renewed

The Canada Council of Archives has recently extended its grant to the Mennonite Heritage Centre archives (MHCA) for the purpose of reducing backlog cataloguing of the MHCA collection. The initial grant of this kind was received in the fall of 1986. The continuation will mean that work can continue in this program at least to the end of 1987.

Peter H. Rempel of Winnipeg, who completed the first phase of this work, will continue under the terms of the grant extension, which provides about \$12,000 to the program. In this phase of backlog reduction attention will be given to cataloguing the growing photo/slide collection, as well as the maps in the archives' holdings.

Complete finding aids now exist for the materials which were processed in the first term of the grant. Among them were major deposits from the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Conference of Mennonites in Saskatchewan, as well as the extensive personal papers deposits of D.P. Neufeld, Gerhard Lohrenz, D.D. Klassen, John P. Dyck, Mary J. Loewen, Jake and Trudy Unrau, and A.D. Stoesz.

## Letter to the Editor

May 19, 1987

Dear Editor

It was with interest that I read the feature about the Toews Lake in Saskatchewan in the March, 1987 issue of the *Mennonite Historian*. It is a fitting tribute to the late Rev. David Toews.

Bishop Toews was a cousin of my grandmother Anna Claassen Regier. They were neighbours on farms near Newton, Kansas after emigrating from Markenburg, Prussia area. David and Anna were deeply rooted in the Flemish heritage. They loved the open

(cont'd on page 6)

## Mennonite Brethren Celebrate Centennial

Next year, 1988, Mennonite Brethren will celebrate a century of worship and service in Canada. Begun in 1888 with some 16 men and women, the first M.B. congregation had its roots in the mission activities of American Mennonite Brethren among the Old Colony Mennonite immigrants in southern Manitoba. As early as 1886 these mission efforts resulted in a nucleus of people who were baptized by immersion. Some two years later, together with Mennonite Brethren families who had recently emigrated from Russia, they formed the first congregation.

To celebrate a century of Mennonite Brethren in Canada, both the Manitoba M.B. Conference as well as the Canadian M.B. Conference, have planned a series of celebrative events, and several new publications.

Beginning with publications the Manitoba Centennial Committee will be publishing a commemorative book of photos, poetry, anecdotes and stories remembering God's grace for 100 years. With the Winkler congregation being the first established in Canada, that church is preparing a history of the congregation. A history of the Manitoba M.B. Conference has been written by Rev. William Neufeld.

In terms of scheduled events, only a few will be listed below:

**October 23, 1987:** An evening of music in Winkler featuring two former residents, Karen Redekopp-Edwards and Ingrid Suderman.

**February 19-20, 1988:** Seventy-ninth Provincial conference at Portage Avenue M.B. Church.

**February 21, 1988:** "All Manitoba Service" at the Winnipeg Convention Centre, morning and afternoon.

**July 8-11, 1988:** Canadian Convention of M.B. Churches in Winkler. A Winkler homecoming is being planned in conjunction with the convention.

**November 3-6, 1988:** Deeper Life Services at the Winkler M.B. Church with Rev. J. H. Quiring.

With some 27,000 members in Canada, worshipping in nine different languages, these events are focused on helping us to appreciate our commonality in Christ and at the same time our different ethnic origins and stories. An open invitation is extended to all interested in participating in this special year of celebration.

### Who is the Oldest?

The Manitoba Centennial Committee, in preparation for the 1988 Celebration of Mennonite Brethren in Canada, is looking for the person who has been a member of a Manitoba M.B. Church for the longest

period of time. If you know of someone whom you think might qualify, please send the name, address and the date of when that person first became a church member to the Centre for M.B. Studies, 169 Riverton Ave. Wpg. Man. R2L 2E5.



*Maids of the Girls' Home were usually required to wear uniforms at work. Can anyone identify the persons on this picture (and their home)? Photo: Courtesy of Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg.*

### Summer Student Assistance

This summer the Centre for M.B. Studies was awarded a grant under the Federal Government "Challenge '87" program to hire a university student to assist in archival tasks. Hired for the summer is Joanne Klassen of Winnipeg.

Joanne comes to her tasks of computerizing the *Mennonitische Rundschau Index* and creating "finding aids" for several large Canadian M.B. Conference collections with previous computer experience. The summer of 1986 she worked at Donwood South as a data-processor.

Heavily involved in her local congregation,

River East, Joanne is the chairperson of the Day Camp program and will be the Associate Choir Conductor. A music student at MBBC, Joanne will be completing her B.A. and B.R.S. degrees next spring.

### Centre Receives Three Grants

The Centre for M.B. Studies has received three separate grants from the Public Archives of Canada to assist in the arrangement and description of three collections of materials. These collections are the MEDA files, donated to the Centre last fall, the Board of Management of the Canadian Conference files as well as the Board of Evangelism files. All three collections are continually used for reference by conference executives.

Special thanks are extended to the Manitoba Council of Archives for its assistance in obtaining these grants.

### New Church Membership Records Book

Kindred Press in cooperation with the Centre for M.B. Studies has put together an improved record-keeping system for congregations. In order to make the system more complete, several new forms have been added. Besides the membership register, there are pages for marriages, anniversaries, funerals, baptisms, births, child dedications and a "Special Events Journal."

Perhaps of most interest and very useful to the congregation's statistician, is an "Incoming Members Journal" and an "Outgoing Members Journal" utilizing a chronological numbering system. Based upon the old church registers available 50 years ago, a simple mathematical calculation will always give the statistician the exact number of members in the congregation.

The Centre encourages congregations to use this system if they are not already doing so. It provides a simple way to keep accurate records of the church family and will give a clear, brief summary of events and trends within the local congregation.

The system can be ordered for \$35.00 from Kindred Press, 4-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 2E5.

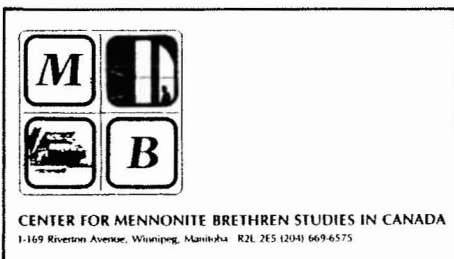
### Letter to the Editor

May 1, 1987

Dear Editor

The picture of the young people (MH, March 1987), in the Needles settlement was of interest to me. My grandfather (Peter B. "Groti" Toews) and his large family were part of the group. If and when I meet some of my Manitoba friends, I may be able to get some facts about the picture.

Andrew Toews  
Abbotsford, B.C.



## B.C. Discipleship Centre Underway

Representatives of the Conferences of Mennonites and Mennonite Brethren congregations in B.C. have formed an inter-mennonite society for ministering to college, university and graduate students in the Vancouver area.

The Pacific Centre for Discipleship is intended "to explore, clarify and promote Christian discipleship as it grows out of our evangelical and Anabaptist heritage," according to the board of directors.

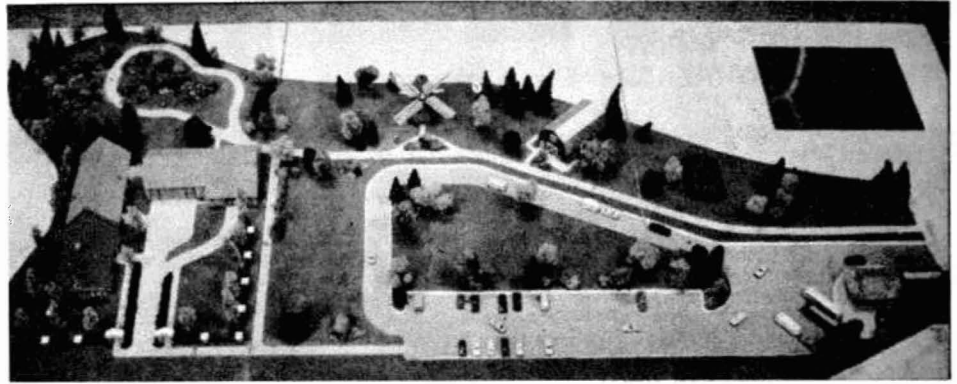
The centre began operations in September, 1986 with two courses offered through Regent College and the opening of the Menno Simons Student Centre, a former convent which is located at 4000 W. 11th Avenue in Vancouver.

The intermennonite group purchased the convent from the Catholic Sisters of Charity of Halifax in August, 1986 for \$605,000. Fundraising is now underway to support the mortgage payments.

Walter and Janet Bergen of Abbotsford are serving as head residents for the student centre. An intermennonite congregation, Point Grey Fellowship, is leasing the centre's chapel for Sunday morning worship.

The Pacific Centre for Discipleship has its roots in informal meetings of a group of individuals beginning in 1984. In 1985, the Columbia Bible College board of directors appointed a committee to explore possibilities and direction. Preliminary discussion with Regent College led to an invitation to explore the establishment of an Academic Chair of Anabaptist Studies.

The board of directors includes chairperson Alfred Heinrichs, administrator of Clearbrook Community Centre; vice-chairperson Edwin Hintz, a Vancouver public school administrator; Palmer Becker, pastor of Peace Mennonite Church in Richmond; Tim Castle, a Vancouver graduate student; Erna Friesen, a Richmond lawyer; Henry Hildebrand and John Krahn, both



*The proposed development is located on the TransCanada Highway at Luckakuck Rd., about five kilometers west of Chilliwack.*

Vancouver medical doctors; A. J. Klassen, board secretary-treasurer, a former pastor and now Regent College professor; and Evan Kreider, a UBC professor of Music History.

**Information:** *Christian Life* (Sept. 14, 1986) and *In Search* (April, 1987).

## CoMBC History Book Commissioned

Cornelia Lehn, a long-time curriculum editor of COE in Newton, Kansas, has been asked to write a history of the Conference of Mennonites in B.C. Cornelia is now residing in British Columbia.

The conference was founded under the leadership of persons like Jacob H. Janzen, one time of Waterloo, Ontario, who was also involved in beginning the First Mennonite Church in Vancouver.

Earlier related projects dealing with Cornelia's topic are the recent unpublished paper by Arnold Froese entitled "Joyful Jubilee: A History of the Conference of Mennonites in B.C., 1936-1985", and a special anniversary yearbook edition of *Echoes*, published by Bethel Bible Institute in 1964.

## The B.C. Heritage Centre Proposal

A display model shows the proposed Mennonite Heritage Centre, to be built on Luckakuck Road, about three miles west of Chilliwack, B.C., under sponsorship of The Mennonite Historical Society of British Columbia. The model was fashioned by Werner Koop of Penumbra Design, Abbotsford, B.C.

The complex will be built on approximately eight acres, donated by the Municipality of Chilliwack for the specific purpose of assisting the society in developing the center. The complex will feature a replica of a Mennonite farmhouse in southern Russia, with a feedshed housing a museum. Part of the barn will be used as an assembly hall.

The society says the Mennonite Heritage Centre will serve as a visible testimony of what God has done and as a symbol of the British Columbia Mennonites' gratitude to God for his goodness. It is also intended to serve as a visible and living symbol for future generations of the determination of their forebears to make the soil productive.

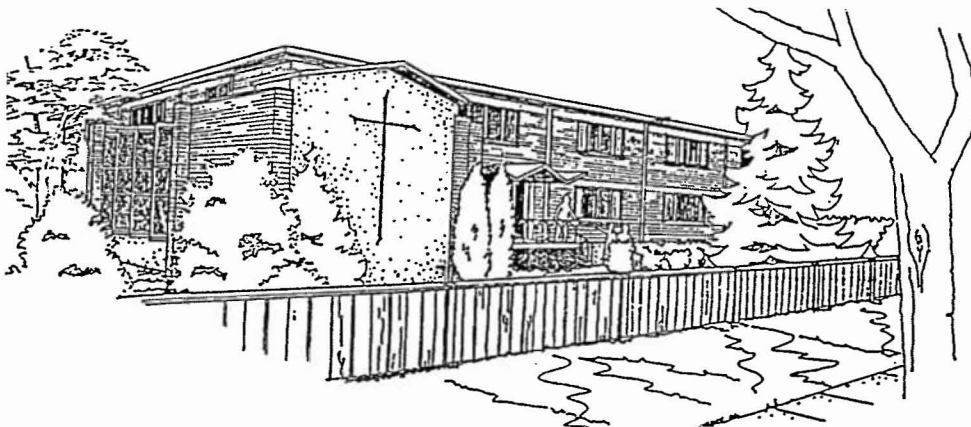
Donations to support this project may be sent to MHS BC, Box 2032, Clearbrook, B.C. V2T 3T8.

## Letter to the Editor (cont'd from page 4)

prairies (Wiese), the wild flowers, and they had a deep reverence for God's creation. Their parents did not plow up all of the prairies to plant wheat but made every effort to maintain the native habitat for birds and wildlife.

The Toews Lake is a fitting tribute to David's Flemish heritage. It is sad to see so many lakes, rivers and farmland poisoned with chemicals and toxic wastes. I hope that the Toews Lake can be kept free from such pollution and that future generations can enjoy the beauty of God's creation as a symbol of our Mennonite peace heritage.

Arnold Regier  
Newton, Kansas



*The Menno Simons Centre located at 4000 West 11th Avenue, Vancouver, B.C. Postal code: V6R 2L3.*



## Russian Mennonite Bicentennial Dates (Part II)

by Lawrence Klippenstein

*This is the second part of a chronological look at the Mennonite emigration from Prussia/Poland to New Russia in the late 18th century. Sources of date information will be included with the final section of the series.*

### 11 November 1786

Johann Bartsch, one of the two deputies investigating South Russia, sent a letter home to his wife. It also informed the churches about the progress of their land scouting journey.

### 29 November 1786

Hoepfner and Bartsch arrived at Dubrovna in White Russia. Two days later Bartsch wrote another letter to his wife.

### 22 April 1787

The two deputies spent the winter and early spring of 1787 in a careful inspection of the region along the lower Dnieper River, even going as far as the Crimea and the Molotschna River to the east. On April 22, 1787, they submitted a 20-point list of conditions of settlement to Vice regent Potemkin at his capital in Kremenchug. Potemkin was very busy preparing for a state visit from the Tsarina (whose favorite he was) and so could not tend to the offer till several months later that year.

### 24 April 1787

Frederick William II of Prussia confirmed the *Gnadenprivilegium* of his father, Frederick the Great, but added that Prussian Mennonites would not be able to purchase more lands because they were exempt from military service.

### 13 May 1787

Potemkin introduced the deputies, Bartsch and Hoepfner, to Catherine II at Kremenchug. Both men were obligated to remain with the royal tour group, headed for Crimea, till it was completed.



Vice Regent G. A. Potemkin

### 5 July, 1787

Vice Regent G. A. Potemkin confirmed the immigration arrangements set forth by the delegates in April.

### Summer, 1787

The first Mennonite families from West Prussia moved to New Russia. The fathers were Hans Hamm, Kornelius Willems, Peter Regier, Jacob Harder, Diedrich Isaak and Franz Barkmann. Abraham Krahn, a certain Behrend Janzen family and Abraham Epp were also among those who moved already in 1787.

### 7 September, 1787

Catherine II approved these arrangements through a special edict which was signed and publicized by Count Alexander Bezborodko.



Prince Alexander Bezborodko

### 29 December, 1787

Georg von Trappe publicized the printed invitation of the tsarina among the Mennonites in Danzig.

### 1 January and 13 January, 1788

Georg von Trappe handed out the invitation of the tsarina to members attending the Neugarten Mennonite Church in Danzig.

### 19 January, 1788

Von Trappe distributed additional copies of the invitation to Mennonites of Danzig, and arranged a gathering of hopeful, would-be emigrants in the premises of the Russian embassy in Danzig. Members of the embassy also signed a special contract made personally with the delegates.

### 23 February, 1788

Four Danzig Mennonite families left for New Russia: the Gerhard Rempels, Heinrich Claassens, Hans Sawatzkys, and Peter Reimers (some sources list Neufelds instead of Rempels).

### 10 March, 1788

Hoepfner and Bartsch joined a group of seven Mennonite families enroute to New Russia.

(to be continued)

## Donations to Mennonite Heritage Centre

by Jim Suderman

We would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude and appreciation to all those who have made generous donations to the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives since the beginning of 1987. Donations to date total \$889.00. We need \$3,900.00 for the year.

### January

C. Blake Friesen - Calgary, Alberta  
Delbert Plett - Steinbach, Manitoba  
Ingrid Lamp - Swift Current, Saskatchewan

### February

A. B. Hoock - Aldergrove, B.C.  
Mrs. H. Ross - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Beverly Suderman - Beamsville, Ontario  
Mrs. Maria Naeser - Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario  
Etta S. Schmidt - Goshen, Indiana  
John Thiessen - Newton, Kansas  
David C. Peters - Stillwater, Oklahoma  
Sherrell Eckstein - Kerville, Texas

### March

Jacob Doerksen - Ile des Chenes, Manitoba  
H. W. Enns - Winkler, Manitoba  
Ernie A. Friesen - Steinbach, Manitoba  
Dieter Roger - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Erwin Siemens - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Jake Wiens - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Antonia Krahn - Saskatoon, Saskatchewan  
Hazel Hassan - Rockford, Illinois

### April

Mrs. Evelyn Kathrens - Courtney, B.C.  
Katherine H. Loewen - Maple Ridge, B.C.  
Mrs. Mildred Neufeld - Ladysmith, B.C.  
Henry Schapansky - Burnaby, B.C.  
Henry Dick - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
John W. Enns - Winkler, Manitoba  
Henry F. Wiebe - Winkler, Manitoba  
Henry C. Janzen - Ottawa, Ontario  
Noble C. Hiebert - Whispering Pines, North Carolina  
John Neustadter - Vernon, New York

### May

David D. Duerksen - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Ed Funk - Rosenfeld, Manitoba  
H. Schirmacher - Winnipeg, Manitoba  
Frank Klassen - St. Catharines, Ontario  
Peter Funk - Lucky Lake, Saskatchewan  
Herman Thiessen - Burgdorf, West Germany

### Wanted

Photos of the migrations (1870s, 1920s, 1940s) of Mennonites to Manitoba. If you have some, please contact Jim Suderman, Mennonite Heritage Centre, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, R3P 0M4.

## Books

Friesen, Martin W. **Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis**. Published by D.W. Friesen & Sons Ltd., Altona and Chortitzer Komitee, c.d.c. 883, Asuncion, Paraguay. 1987. 502 pp. Hdc. \$19.95, pb. \$14.95 Can.

Reviewed by Helmut Harder.

In 1981 I had the opportunity to visit Martin Friesen in the room where most of the accounts and documents which form the background to **Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis** were stored. He was sitting at his desk pen in hand, painstakingly and faithfully crafting a historical record of the origins of Menno Colony. Today we have the fruits of his labors in hand. **Neue Heimat** is a veritable mini-archive, reflective of the storehouse of information in Friesen's workroom in Loma Plata.

The book begins with a detailed narration and documentation of the events and deliberations which led up to the first exodus of Mennonites from Canada to the Chaco of Paraguay. It then continues with a rather graphic description of the exploratory journey into Paraguay's "green hell" by a few chosen leaders. Next follows the story of how the first group of settlers came. The book ends with an account of settlement and colonial organization up to 1936. All of this is contained in 502 pages - in German.

This is the author's largest contribution to the history of Menno Colony, but not his first. In the 1970s he was commissioned to prepare a volume for the 50th anniversary of the founding of Menno Colony. This produced a book entitled, **Kanadische Mennoniten bezwingen eine Wildnis** (1977). He has also written several editions of **Mennonitische Kolonisation im Paraguayischen Chaco** (second expanded edition, 1984), a booklet which highlights the various agreements made between Mennonites and the government of Paraguay. It remains for someone to take up the task of completing what Friesen has begun, namely to document with the same depth of insight and with detail the history of Menno Colony from 1935 to the present.

The most striking general characteristic of **Neue Heimat in der Chaco Wildnis** is the author's style. He moved back and forth between substantial sections of narrative account and extensive quotations from documents, letters and newspaper articles. While one may be tempted to prejudice the effect as somewhat non-readable, this is not the case. The story carries its own built-in dramatic movement, ensuring an engaging reading experience. Furthermore, the author's own inextricable involvement in the story provides a subtle dynamic to the account.

One pleasing feature of the book is its honesty. More specifically, the author tells both the positive and negative sides of the story. He does not hesitate to expose some

of the questionable sides of the exodus. He also asks his own penetrating questions about the enterprise. Nonetheless there is a positive strain throughout the book that transcends the negative side. He belongs to those people who remained faithful to the move even when it appeared that the difficulties were unsurmountable.

Hopefully this volume will soon be translated into English.

*Dr. Helmut Harder is Professor of Theology at Canadian Mennonite Bible College in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.*

## A Good Deal from Mennonite Books

There is a rapidly expanding mail order enterprise, **Mennonite Books**, based in Winnipeg. Founded in the fall of 1984, under the auspices of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society, it soon became evident that the organization was filling a gap within the Mennonite book trade. With some 500 regular customers across North America and Europe, **Mennonite Books** is one place from which recently published books by or about Mennonites can be ordered from anywhere in the world.

This service began as the **Mennonite Book Club** and operated successfully under that name for several years. But the managers of the club noted the reluctance of some Mennonites to join a "club." It became clear that people wanted a book service rather than a club. Therefore "club" was dropped from the name of the organization.

Managing this service are Karen Dirks and Susan Froese. Both volunteer every Tuesday in the office of **Mennonite Books**, filling orders, writing letters to customers and ordering new books. Tuesdays are also the days when local Manitoba customers drop in at the office to browse and catch up on the latest published titles.

Perhaps unique to **Mennonite Books** is the fact that it will sell almost any kind of "Mennonite" book, memoirs, genealogies, congregational histories, biographies - as long as it is given at least a 25% reduction from the retail price. Of this reduction 10% is passed along to the customer ensuring that everyone who purchases a book is getting a "good deal."

**Mennonite Books** invites authors, history committees and genealogists to notify them of books they have for sale. It is the intention of this organization to develop a wide mail-order sales network for the many books Mennonites are publishing.

For more information and the latest listing of books for sale please write:

Mennonite Books  
208 - 1317 Portage Ave.  
WINNIPEG, Manitoba  
R3G 0V3

## 'Mennonite' Writers Featured by Winnipeg Publisher

A recent brochure released by Turnstone Press features "Great Books from the Mennonite Community." Not all of the seven authors listed may consider themselves Mennonite and not all of them deal with Mennonite themes. Yet there is enough in the background of the writers and/or in their material for the publisher to advertise these books as 'Mennonite' in a very broad sense.

The following writers/books are included:

Sandra Birdsell, **Night Travelers**;  
Di Brandt, **Questions I Asked My Mother**, (forthcoming);  
Lois Braun, **A Stone Watermelon**;  
E. F. Dyck, **The Mossbank Canon**;  
Patrick Friesen, **Flicker and Hawk**;  
Audrey Poetker, **i sing for my dead in german**;  
Armin Wiebe, **The Salvation of Yasch Siemens**.

Birdsell, Braun (who was on the short list for the recent Governor General's literary award), and Wiebe write prose. The other four are primarily poets.

To the latter should be added John Weier, whose volume of poetry entitled **After the Revolution** was released since the brochure was published.

## Notes

Kindred Press recently released Prof. John H. Redekop's **A People Apart. Ethnicity and the Mennonite Brethren**. (\$11.95) A full review is planned for the next issue.

\*\*\*

**Palatine Mennonite Census Lists, 1664-1793**, a new book compiled by Hermann and Gertrud Guth and J. Lemar and Lois Ann Mast, lists Swiss-German Mennonite and Amish families who appeared on census lists taken by the government in the Kurpfalz area of West Germany.

This is a unique source for genealogical researchers, as it lists where many of these Swiss-German immigrants lived in Germany prior to emigrating to America. Usually, the head of the household is given, the number of sons and daughters, farmhands, and maids, for each village or estate.

Orders for the 116-page book at \$12.50 (U.S.) plus \$1.50 shipping can be mailed to **Mennonite Family History**, P.O. Box 171, Elverson, PA 19520-0171.

## Flash!

The long-awaited book on the history of the Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference of Canada is just off the press.

We hope that a review of Jack Heppner's *Search for Renewal, History of the Rudnerweide/Evangelical Mennonite Mission Conference 1937-1987* can appear in *Mennonite Historian* soon.