

MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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Inter-Mennonite Cooperation and Promises to Government in the Repeal of the Ban on Mennonite Immigration to Canada 1919-1922

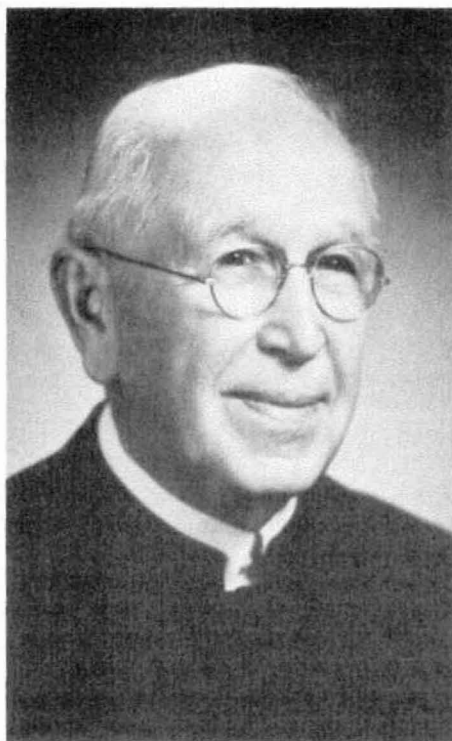
by Peter H. Rempel

From May 1919 until June 1922 Mennonites were barred from immigrating into Canada. In response to widespread public sentiment against alien groups, the Canadian government had passed an Order-in-Council on May 1, 1919 prohibiting the immigration of Doukobours, Hutterites and Mennonites. This order was repealed, at least with regard to Mennonites, on June 22, 1922 after a campaign coordinated by three Mennonite leaders from quite different backgrounds: Heinrich Ewert of Gretna, Manitoba, Samuel F. Coffman of Vineland, Ontario and Abram A. Friesen of Halbstadt, U.S.S.R. Their combined efforts marked a new phase in inter-Mennonite cooperation in Canada and illustrated the readiness of Mennonites to declare their loyalty to Canada as a nation.

S. F. Coffman (1872-1954), as bishop in the Mennonite Conference of Ontario had already petitioned the federal authorities to exempt visiting American Mennonite preachers from the prohibition against Mennonite immigrants. Through these contacts, and others arising from his role as secretary of the Non-Resistant Relief Organization, he had acquired insights and relationships in government circles.

A. A. Friesen (1885-1948), was a member of the study commission dispatched by the Mennonites in Russia to investigate emigration possibilities and to solicit material relief. This commission entered Canada in January 1920 and quickly determined that this country was the best destination for their people. There was however, the Order-in-Council obstructing such an immigration. The delegates of the Russian Mennonites turned to their fellow Mennonites already residing in Canada for support in persuading the Canadian government to revoke the Order-in-Council.

H. H. Ewert (1855-1934), principal of the



S.F. Coffman

Mennonite Collegiate Institute and a leader in the Conference of Mennonites in Central Canada, became the head of a committee to facilitate the mass immigration of Mennonites from the U.S.S.R. to Canada. At the conference sessions in June 1921, Friesen proposed the sending of a delegation to Ottawa. Ewert was selected to accompany him. The conference expressed the wish that the Mennonite Brethren churches also send a representative. Thus, H. A. Neufeld, minister of the MB church in Herbert, Saskatchewan joined the delegation.

The Mennonites in Ontario had also considered the need to intervene on behalf of the Russian Mennonites. However from their perspective, the conflict between the conservative Old Colony Mennonites and the government in western Canada over schools would affect attitude of the Canadian government toward Mennonites generally and also jeopardize the prospects of lifting the immigration ban. Already in 1920 their conference had resolved "that we regard it as expedient to use our influence on behalf of the misunderstanding between a certain branch of the Russian Mennonite church and the government, to adjust the difficulties."

(cont'd on p.7)

A Comparison of Early Mennonite Settlements in Southern Manitoba and South Russia

by John Friesen

There are a number of reasons why Manitoba was chosen by about one-half of the Russian Mennonite immigrants to North America in the 1870s. One was that they believed that the Manitoba prairie was comparable to the Russian steppe, which would assist them in making adjustments to their new environment. They were confident that it would be possible to transplant their traditional settlement pattern from South Russia to southern Manitoba. It was important to them to have a land area specifically reserved from them (i.e., the East and the West Reserve) and the form of settlement would take place in traditional *Strassen dörfer* (single street villages). They were granted this right through the "hamlet privilege" modification to the Dominion Lands Act whereby they could settle in a nucleated village pattern rather than on individual homesteads.¹ They would not forfeit the right to a 160-acre free land grant given to every male over twenty-one years of age. The three-year residency requirement was also waived.

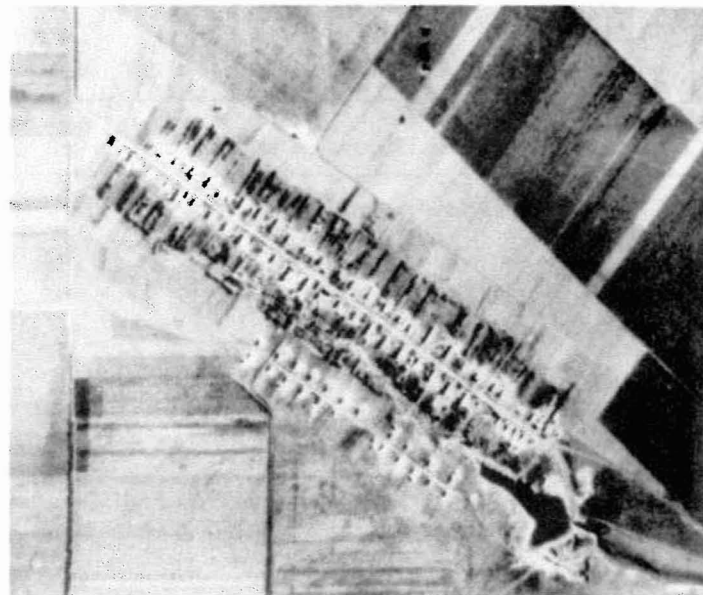
The Russian Mennonite immigrants, therefore, were granted the right to transplant their traditional way of life and settlement pattern from New Russia to southern Manitoba, including block settlement which would provide the much sought after isolation they were accustomed to in Russia. Over time, these first Mennonite immigrants created a total of fifty-nine villages in the East Reserve and seventy villages in the West Reserve.

The two aerial photographs below depict the similarities in the settlement forms of the Mennonites in South Russia and the transplanted Russian Mennonites in southern Manitoba. Photo ¹² represents the village of Gnadental in the West Reserve created in 1880 when the Mennonite leaders in Manitoba recognized the need to establish additional opportunities for settlement for the

(cont'd on p.2)



Gnadental, 1975



Neu Chortitza, 1943

Early Mennonite Settlements (cont'd from p.1)

young families.³ Photo 2 shows the Mennonite village of Neu-Chortitza of the Barataw daughter colony (near Krivoi-Rog), established in 1872. It too, was established because of the need for more land for the young couples of the Old Colony. Not only was Neu-Chortitza (and other villages in daughter colonies established by the two Mother Colonies) a clone of the villages of the original two settlements but Gnadental, and other Mennonite villages in both reserves in Manitoba were clones of the Russian Mennonite villages in South Russia. "Settlers in both Reserves came with fond hopes of re-establishing the pristine communities which they had lost in Russia".⁴

While both villages (Gnadental, latitude 49°6' and Neu-Chortitza, latitude 48°3') were established on the open prairie (steppe) landscape with a smooth to level topography, the general land forms, soils, and climate were quite different. Both villages are located within the Black Earth (the Chernozem) soil zone. The Neu-Chortitza soils, classified by Russian soil scientists as the Ordinary Chernozem, were formed from loess parent material, while the soils farmed by the Gnadental villagers were formed from parent material deposited by Lake Agassiz and the alluvial deltaic deposits from natural drains that flowed into the lake.⁵ The Gnadental soils have a textural range from clay to fine sandy loam with the humus layer varying from 6" to 20" in depth. The Neu-Chortitza soils have a uniform clay texture

with a humus layer of over 16" in depth. Both soils are well suited for the production of a variety of cereal and special crops.

A cursory investigation indicates substantial differences in climatic conditions in the villages as indicated by climatic charts showing average monthly temperature and precipitation at Winnipeg and Zaporizhzhya. Some general observations can be made when comparing the two charts: 1. Winnipeg has a greater annual range of temperatures, ranging from an average of -18°C in January to 20°C in July. Zaporizhzhya average temperature range (-6°C in January to 24°C in July). 2. Winnipeg's average temperature in March is still below zero (-8°C) whereas Zaporizhzhya's temperature is approximately 3°C. It was not unusual for spring field work to begin by the end of March in Neu-Chortitza. Similarly the temperatures are considerably higher in November and December in South Russia. 3. In terms of rainfall, the total is about 80 mm. greater in southern Manitoba and a larger percentage of the total falls during the growing season.

The frost free period in the vicinity of Neu-Chortitza is approximately 200 days, which allows a greater range of crop selection, including fruits such as peaches. In comparison, southern Manitoba's frost-free period approximates 120 days, putting a greater limitation on the range of crops that can be grown.

Hot, dry winds called 'sukhovii', originating from the south east with air temperatures exceeding 27°C, relative

humidity below 30% and velocities over 15 ft./sec. sweep over southern Russia during the growing season.⁶ The frequency of such winds in the Neu-Chortitza area is 15-20 days between April and October. Such winds can do severe damage to crops by desiccating both plant and surface soil.

In Neu-Chortitza, water for human consumption was obtained through five wells located within the village. Six wells yielded water high in salt content and was suitable only for cattle.⁷ An auxiliary water supply for the village was established by placing a dam across the adjacent creek creating a catchment basin for the run-off waters. Well water in the Gnadental village also was high in salt minerals. The first settlers had to rely on an alternative water supply including the use of cisterns to catch rain water from the roofs. As in Neu-Chortitza, the Gnadental villagers utilized the waters in the nearby creek for their cattle. The dam was kept in good condition by community effort.⁸

One of the more obvious differences in the two aerial photographs is that of land boundaries and system of land survey. In Manitoba, the location of villages ignored the legal surveys. Natural features such as waterways, ridges or well-drained sites were factors taken into consideration. In southern Russia, the siting of villages also considered natural features such as streams or rivers; preference was given to locate in a fairly deep valley or glen to make the settlement less visible to roving Cossacks or Noga bands.

(cont'd on p.6)

FAMILY HISTORY AND GENEALOGY

by Alf Redekopp

QUERIES

Dyck (Dueck) - Wishing to make contact with someone who lived in Sparrau, Molotschna, and remembers the people from the 1920s. In particular, I am searching for information about Herman Dyck and his wife, a Maria Neufeld born in the late 1840s or early 1850s. Contact: Waldie N. Neufeld, Box 99, Sexsmith, AB T0H 3C0.

Wiebe - Hiebert: Wishing to make contact with descendants of Klaas Wiebe and Elisabeth Hiebert, who lived at Hoffnungsfeld, Borden, Saskatchewan in 1906. Elisabeth Hiebert was first married to Abraham Klaassen of Schönau by whom she had one son. Elisabeth's marriage to Klaas Wiebe produced three sons and one daughter. A son, Nicholas, died young, one son was born ca. 1896, and another ca. 1901. Elisabeth corresponded with relatives at Goessel, KS. She emigrated to Canada ca. 1886. Contact: Peggy Goertzen, 302 So. Wilson, Hillsboro, KS 67063.

Cornelsen (Kornelsen): I would appreciate hearing from anyone researching the Cornelsen family. My grandfather, Jacob Cornelsen, married Katharina Wiebe. My grandfather's siblings were Gustav, who remained a bachelor; Cornelius, who married Tina Bergen; Katharine, who married Johann Penner; and Hemann, whose second wife was Maria Unger, and third wife was Anna Dyck. My parents lived in Kusmitzki village. Contact: Helen Kornelsen, Box 1194, Watrous, SK S0K 4T0.

WIEBE: Brothers Johannes C. and Eduard C. Wiebe came with their families to Winkler, MB from the Ukraine in 1893. Johannes C. was born 6 April, 1850 in Danzig, W. Prussia. His wife was Katharine Friesen, daughter of mill owner Abraham Friesen, Nikopol, S. Russia, born 19 August 1851 in Nikopol. Johannes and Katharina had at least one daughter, Katherine, with them when they came to Canada, born 13 April 1876. Johannes C. became a blacksmith in Winkler. Eduard C. Wiebe was born 8 Dec. 1856, also in Danzig, W. Prussia. His wife, Anna, a sister to Katharina Friesen, was born 28 Nov. 1856. They came to Canada with two children: Olga, aged 8 years; Anna, aged 6 years. Eduard and Anna also settled in Winkler. Eduard took up tinsmithing. Later this family moved to Herbert, SK. I would like a passenger list and name of ship they came on. Did they come directly to Winkler,

or did they stop in U.S.A. temporarily before immigrating to Canada? Contact: Helen Kornelsen, Box 1194, Watrous, SK S0K 4T0. **Olfert** - Peter Olfert b. June 15, 1848 (ca. 1850), married to Helena Kehler b. Nov. 12, 1852, came to Canada from Russia in 1876, and had 7 children: Isaac, Justina, Abraham, Jacob (1876), Peter (1878), Helena 1885, and Heinrich (1888). Helena (Mrs. Johann Fehr) and Heinrich moved to Swift Current, SK. Peter lived near Gruenfeld, MB, before he moved to Wacheham, MB. Jacob was a resident in Numedahl, N. Dakota in 1903. When and where did the parents of these children die? Seeking additional information on all of their descendants. Contact: S. Beaulieu, General Delivery, Livelong, SK S0M 1J0.

Penner - Looking for the address of a Ronald Penner, age 57, who is a descendant of an Abraham Dircks who migrated from Russia to Kansas during the 1870s. His grandfather was Tobias Penner born in Antonovka, Russia and came to America at age 6. Contact: Cal Redekopp, 104 Flint Ave., Harrisonburg, VA 22801.

BOOK NOTES - Family Histories

Dyck, George, Annie Klassen and Helen Hiebert (compilers), *Schmidt : A family genealogy of Solomon and Maria Schmidt and their descendants*. (Aberdeen, SK : Private publication, 1991). 702 pp. \$60.00.

This book traces the family history and genealogy of the descendants of Solomon Schmidt (1818-1886) and Maria Fehr (1824-1997), who immigrated to Canada in 1876, settling in the village of Blumenfeld, south of Winkler, MB. Contact: George Dyck, Box 118, Aberdeen, SK S0K 0A0.

Martens, Queenie and J. Vernon Martens. *The Jacob Martens Family History 1812-1992*. (Vernon, BC : Private publication, 1992)

This compilation begins with Paul Martens b. 1812 in West Prussia and his wife Helena Fehr (b. 1812). It includes primarily the descendants of their grandson, Jacob Martens (1866-1931) who married Maria Reimer (1867-1947). This family came to Manitoba in 1875. Jacob and Maria Martens were part of the "Old Colony" Mennonite Church, and lived at Schoenfeld and Glencross, Manitoba before moving to Hague, Saskatchewan just before the turn of the century. Contact: Queenie Martens, 4435 Cascade Dr., Vernon, BC V1T 8J7.

Zacharias, Mary. *Elias Heritage 1766-1989*. (Winnipeg, MB : Private publication, 1990) 176 pp.

This book traces the Elias ancestry back to

Peter Elias (1766-1841) who married Maria Penner (-1819). Specifically, the descendants of a grandson, Peter Elias (1819-1903) and his wife Aganetha Rempel (1821-1915) are traced. This family immigrated to Manitoba, Canada in 1875 and settled in Blumenfeld. Contact: Mary Zacharias, 35 Merrill Cresc., Winnipeg, MB R2K 3J9.

Dyck, John et.al. *Descendants of Jacob Dyck and Elisabeth Jaeger, Kronrihal, Choriitza, Russia* (Winkler, MB : Jacob Dyck History Book Committee, 1992) 303 pp.

This book tells the story of the descendants of Jacob Dyck born 1800, and Elisabeth Jaeger born 1807. Included in the book are some of the facts about the ancestry of Jacob and Elisabeth, but the primary focus deals with the story of their descendants who migrated to Canada between 1875 and 1902. Contact: Jacob Dyck Family Book Committee, Box 1053, Winkler, MB R6W 4B1.

Braun Family Reunion

A reunion of the entire Jacob & Katharina (Funk) Braun (1826-1919) family will take place at the Steinbach Bible College, Steinbach, MB from July 31-Aug. 2, 1993. Contact: Henry J. Braun, Box 1192, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0 or (204) 326-4742)

NEW SOURCES OF INFORMATION ON RECORDS AND RESEARCHERS IN THE EX-USSR by Ed Brandt, Minneapolis, MN

Genealogists who are interested in obtaining the latest information about records and researchers in the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Baltic countries which is available in Germany may obtain a copy of *Ratgeber '92: Familienforschung GUS/Baltikum* from the Zielke Verlag, Postfach 8031, W-4400 Münster, Germany, for DM 20. Irina and Rainer Zielke are also planning to publish a 1993 edition of the *Ratgeber*, which may be ordered for the same price.

Although there are no experienced genealogists in the former Soviet Union, the *Ratgeber* provides the names and addresses of numerous historians or other researchers familiar with the content of Russian and Baltic archives who are willing to do archival research, indicating in each instance whether they know English, German or other foreign languages. Most of these are in Moscow or St. Petersburg, but that is where most government records would have been kept. The *Ratgeber* also specifies some of the records which are available, e.g., censuses and military records, in some detail.

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MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE
 600 Shaftesbury Blvd. Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3P 0M4

NEWS FROM THE CENTRE...

by Peter H. Rempel, Acting Archivist

Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada

This issue of the *Mennonite Historian* is the first one to be sent to all member congregations of the Mennonite Conference of Eastern Canada. The congregations of the former Mennonite Conference of Ontario and the Western Ontario Mennonite Conference are now associate members of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. We welcome them to our readership. We hope to include more articles and reports about this important Mennonite heritage in future issues.

The Peter J. Braun - Russian Mennonite Archives

On January 28, at a celebration at Conrad Grebel College, Menno Epp, chair of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, received the Heritage Centre's copy of the microfilms of the recently re-discovered archival collection. The recovery of this archive is a project of the University of Toronto/Conrad Grebel College Research Program in Russian Mennonite Studies and has been supervised by Dr. Harvey Dyck. The Heritage Centre shared the costs of the project equally with these two institutions and therefore received one set of the microfilms.

The 32 microfilms received in January cover the years 1850-1920. Since their arrival several researchers have made forays to find information on villages, ancestors and broader topics. Of most immediate interest have been attendance reports for the village schools in the Molotschna colony which list school children along with their ages and fathers' names.

At the annual meeting of the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society on April 3 at the Heritage Centre, Dr. George Epp will present an overview of these archives as a source for Russian Mennonite history.

The remaining 46 microfilms covering the period 1803-1850 will be received during a special presentation at the annual sessions of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada in Waterloo, Ontario, July 7-11.

Exhibit of Sculptures by Jake Goertzen

Jake Goertzen's sculptures depict needs of children for compassion and intimacy as well as the pain of children when these needs are not met. They are an expression of the artist's personal journey toward healing from his "crucified childhood" as described in his articles in the *Mennonite Reporter* (September 4, 1989 and March 9, 1992). The exhibit opened on February 9 and will be on display until May 15.



Mother's Hug

Kronsweide Mennonite Church Manuscript

Rev. Is. P. Klassen of Winnipeg has written a reminiscence of the Kronsweide Mennonite Church in Russia. The manuscript gives an overview of the villages which were part of this congregation and of the elders and ministers who served it. It concludes with some personal reflections on its theology.

The manuscript was translated by Edward Enns, a volunteer at the Heritage Centre. Copies of the translation are available from the Heritage Centre for \$12.00.

The Berghthal Gemeinde Buch

The Hanover Steinbach Historical Society has just released this transcript of the *Berghthal Gemeinde Buch* of 1843-1876 annotated by John Dyck. The volume also includes *Chortitzer Gemeinde Buch* indexes, Passenger Lists for 1874-1880 cross-referenced with the church registers and Federal Census Data for 1881. The book is available for \$20.00 plus GST and handling from the Mennonite Heritage Centre.

Friends of the Archives

At the end of 1992, fourteen "Friends of the Archives" completed their five-year commitment to contribute \$100 annually to the Mennonite Heritage Centre Archives. A scroll with their names is posted in the Heritage Centre reading room. We express our hearty thanks to them and to our other "Friends".

Heritage Celebrations: A Resource Book for Congregations

Congregations anticipating the celebration of their anniversaries or other historical events will be helped by this resource book. Its chapters cover the why, when, how, who and what of heritage celebrations as well as of preserving and writing congregational histories. The 75-page resource book was prepared by the Historical Committee of the General Conference Mennonite Church and is available from Heritage Centre for \$12.00.

New Staff at the Heritage Centre

The new secretary/receptionist at the Heritage Centre since November is Connie Wiebe. She is married to Kurt Wiebe and commutes from their farm south of Springstein. The Wiebes have three children.

In January, Robb Nickel was hired on a short-term basis to accession the backlog of photographs and slides.

Additional Shelving for Archives

With a grant from the Canadian Council of Archives, about 450 linear feet of shelving have been added in the archives vault. This grant was facilitated by the Association for Manitoba Archives of which the Heritage Centre is a member. We are grateful to both organizations.

New Microfilm Reader/Printer

Since August researchers at the Heritage Centre have enjoyed the use of new Canon microfilm reader/printer. Its capabilities include enlargement of the image, copying onto bond paper and producing positive copies from negative or positive microfilms. This purchase was made possible through the John K. Schellenberg endowment fund.

**CANADIAN
 MENNONITES
 AND THE
 CHALLENGE OF
 NATIONALISM**

AN INTER-MENNONITE SYMPOSIUM

May 6-8, 1993

Winnipeg, Manitoba

Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society
 1-169 Riverton Ave.,
 Winnipeg, Manitoba R2L 2E5

J.H. EPP: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

by George Geddert

On January 12, 1993, Jake H. Epp, a formative figure in the development of Bethany Bible Institute, passed away.

Jake Epp was born in Waldheim, Saskatchewan, June 23, 1910. He spent five years (1916-1921) in China, where his parents, the Henry M. Epps served one term as missionaries under the China Mennonite Mission Society (CMMS). During those years in China he received a strong desire to return to China as a missionary. Later, to prepare for this envisioned work, he attended both Prairie and Bethany Bible Institute.

Upon graduation in 1936 he applied to the CMMS and was accepted for a Bible School training ministry. Failure to get support during the depression led him to accept a teaching position at Bethany. During the summer months he served as Field Director for Western Children's Mission (WCM), an outgrowth of the Bethany Prayer League. During this time he met Alvena Kruger. They were married at Aberdeen October 18, 1939.

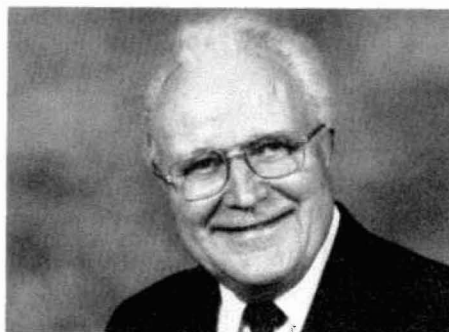
In 1941, with daughter Carol, the first of five girls the Lord would give them, the Epps left Bethany to head for China. While they awaited passage in Vancouver, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour closed that door. The Lord opened another door - a three-year teaching ministry in the Yarrow Bible School, and then a return to Bethany in 1944 for another twenty years of teaching, nineteen as principal, a position he accepted "temporarily." For the first ten years Epp again served in leadership roles for the WCM.

In addition to his valued work in the classroom and as an administrator who strove for consensus in decision making, Epp was, as his sister Margaret states in *Proclaim Jubilee*, "Jake-of-all trades." Humbly and sacrificially he did whatever needed to be done.

Unable to minister in China, the Epps found it a continual joy to help shape young people for God and to see them enter full-time Christian ministries at home and abroad.

After Bethany, the Epps served fifteen years with the MB Board of Missions and Services, eleven as Secretary for Asia, Africa, and Europe and four teaching in Linz, Austria. Then followed various interim pastoral positions, including West Portal, Saskatoon, the place the Epps had chosen for retirement.

From 1984 to 1987 Epp served as Dean of Students at the Graduate School of



Jake H. Epp

Missions in Korntal, Germany, under direction of G.W. Peters. Then followed another interim pastorate in Lustre, Montana. In 1988 he bought a residence in the West Portal Manor and continued teaching and preaching. He died after a short bout with pancreatic cancer, during which he ministered through his pain to those who attended him.

(Bethany Contact; used by permission)

Recent Accessions

1. A transcript and English translation of a cassette tape interview entitled *Besuch mit Rev. David D. Durksen by Harold Jantz*, 1972. Courtesy of John M. Thiessen, Winnipeg.
2. *Strangers in Maharashtra: Mennonite Brethren Historical Foundations* by Rufus K. Vedulla. A Master of Theology Thesis submitted at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois, 1992. (Bound by CMBS volunteer Bill Schroeder)
3. Proceedings of a symposium, entitled, *De taal der Mennonieten* held in Groningen, The Netherlands, 24. Oct. 1992 on linguistics as it relates to the Low German dialect of the Mennonites in Siberia. (The papers are in the Dutch and German languages.) Courtesy of Reuben Epp, Kelowna, BC.
4. Ca. 38 German books of theology from the library of Mennonite Brethren Minister David D. Derksen, Boissevain, MB. (Courtesy of the Derksen family)
5. Ca. 30 German books of pertaining to the subject of Germans in Russia. (Transferred from Concord College Library)
6. *The Hispanic Mennonite Church in North America (1932-1982)* by Rafael Falcon (1986); *Partners in Service. The story of MCCC 1963-1982* by F.H. Epp, editor, researched and written by Bert Friesen; *Family Life Today (1974-1980)* (bound in 3 volumes); *Youth Worker (1975-78)* (bound); *Meet...The Mennonite Brethren* (1984) Board of Chr. Lit. of Gen. Conf of MB Churches. (Transferred from the Christian Education Office of the Canadian Conference of MB Churches)

C Centre for
M Mennonite
B Brethren
S Studies in Canada
1-189 Riverton Ave. Winnipeg, Canada R2L 2E5

COALDALE REVISITED!

When? May 21-23, 1993

Who? Everyone presently or formerly associated with the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren community.

What? * Story-telling

- * Music
- * Analysis and interpretation
- * Worship and celebration
- * Renewing acquaintances

Registration: Begins at 5:30, Friday, May 21.

Accommodations: Each guest is responsible for own arrangements.

Recommended Motels: Lethbridge Lodge (328-1123); Heidelberg Inn (329-0555); Motel Magic (327-6000); Coaldale Motor Inn (345-2555)

Sponsored by: the Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies.

Cost: \$20.00 Registration and meals (except banquet)

\$10.00 Saturday banquet

Contact: Coaldale Revisited

Coaldale Mennonite Brethren Church
2114-18 St., Box 1266
Coaldale, AB T1M 1G2

Book Notes by Adolf Ens, Associate Professor of History and Theology, Canadian Mennonite Bible College

The approaching quincentenary (1996) of the birth of Menno Simons is beginning to generate new research on his life and theology. Eastern Mennonite College and Seminary preempted that milestone by convening a conference on Menno in 1990, the 450th anniversary of the publication of his *Fundamentboek*. The conference papers have now been published in Gerald R. Brunk, ed., *Menno Simons: A Reappraisal* (Harrisonburg: Eastern Mennonite College, 1992).

Dietrich Dyck's memoirs, *Mein Weg durch dieses Leben* (Tempelgesellschaft in Deutschland, 1992), give another perspective on Mennonites who became Templers in Russia during the religious upheavals of the 1860s. It supplements Heinrich Sawatzky's more formal account of *Mennonite Templers*, recently published in English translation by the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and CMBC Publications.



Arkadiusz Ryback, in the cemetery near the former Heubuden Mennonite Church, explaining his restoration project to John Friesen, tour leader.

Mennonites Return to their Roots in Poland and Prussia

by John Friesen, CMBC

This past summer, early morning on July 6, a tour group of 31 people pulled up to the former Mennonite Church in Gdansk. This was our first stop on a fascinating tour of the areas which Mennonites called home until 1945.

The local tour leader was Arkadiusz Ryback, a Polish agriculturalist living in Stare Pole, a village southwest of Elblag (Elbing).

The building formerly used by the Danzig Mennonite Church is now being used by a Polish Pentecostal church. The pastor was present and welcomed us warmly. The group noted the plaque placed on the inside wall of the church in 1991 by the Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association. After spontaneously singing a number of hymns in the church, we were on our way into the countryside.

There was a buzz of excitement in the group as we travelled from one historic site to another. For a few moments we were becoming part of a four hundred year Mennonite experience in this region. As we drove along on the elderly bus which threatened to die at any moment, we noted the high dikes around the Vistula River, the raised farmsteads, long rows of trees along the roads, small drainage ditches, former Mennonite *VORLAUBENHAEUSER*, ducks on the farm yards, groups of curious children, horse drawn wagons, and grave stones in abandoned cemeteries. We could imagine Mennonites riding on buggies and carriages, ploughing the fields, planting gardens, and digging the dikes to drain the marshy land.

In Elblag, Arkadiusz Ryback showed us the former Mennonite church which is now being used by a Polish Catholic, but not

Roman Catholic, Church. Ryback commented that this was the first time he had ever been able to contact the local priest to open the church for a tour group. The priest welcomed the visitors warmly, and prayed a blessing over the group.

Ryback also showed us a former Mennonite windmill, and then stopped at the former Mennonite church at Pr. Rosengart. This was the only Mennonite church in the former West Prussia to have a bell tower. The church is being used by a Roman Catholic congregation at present.

At the agricultural centre which Ryback heads, he described the work he was doing in promoting dairy farming. His lament was that because other cash crops were more lucrative, dairying was diminishing, and he felt this would be to the long term detriment of the area.

After dinner at the hotel, the group went on a walking tour of the inner city of Gdansk. Although most of the city was destroyed in the war, much of it has been restored in the old style.

On the following day Arkadiusz Ryback took the group to the site of the former Mennonite church at Heubuden. Near the site where the church used to stand, there is now a modest Catholic church. Near the church is a large cemetery containing many gravestones with Mennonite inscriptions. Restoring this cemetery, enclosing it with a fence, and bringing to it other gravestones with Mennonite inscriptions, is one of Arkadiusz Ryback's projects. The Mennonite-Polish Friendship Association, with an international membership in North America and Europe, has provided Ryback with funds to assist him in this restoration and preservation project.

After an all too brief visit to the old Teutonic castle at Marienburg and a mad

dash to the airport to catch the Aeroflot plane to St. Petersburg, this part of our tour came to an end. We all felt we had caught a little bit of the spirit of the Mennonite people who had lived in this area for four centuries.

Early Mennonite Settlements (cont'd from p.2)

The preferred locations for a village was some distance from a Ukrainian settlement to make pilfering less likely. Much emphasis was placed on locating where a ready source and good supply of potable water could be found. In both localities the village was located so that it would be more or less central to the land owned by the farmers to minimize the travel distance between the farmers' headquarters and their fields.⁹

There were many similarities between the early Mennonite settlements in Manitoba and those in southern Russia. These included farm yard site dimensions, location of main buildings, building architecture, village local government and village institutions such as the *weisenamt* (orphans' administration), fire insurance, schools, and churches. The Manitoba Mennonite settlements were really "daughter colonies" transplanted into a totally new environment.

Endnotes

1. *Mennonite Settlement: The East and West Reserves* (Historic Resource Branch, Manitoba Government, 1981).

2. Aerial photograph 1 (1975) was obtained from Surveys and Mapping Distribution Centre, Manitoba Natural Resources. Photograph 2 (1943) was obtained from the Centre for Cartographic and Architectural Archives, Washington, D.C., U.S.A. The photographs were taken by the German army photographers during the Second World War.

Persons interested in obtaining aerial photography coverage for Mennonite settlements in southern Russia should order from Robert E. Richardson, Assistant Chief, Cartographic and Architectural Branch, Room 2-W, National Archives, Washington, D.C. 20408. The following information should be provided: the name of the village (the German, Russian, and Soviet name) and the location in terms of latitude and longitude. The Archives can provide 4 X 5 inch black and white negatives for \$4.75 each and 8 X 10 inch black and white prints for \$6.25 each (1992 prices). If you want a print you must purchase the negative and the print.

3. Peters, Elisabeth (editor), *Gnadenhof: 1880-1980*; (Winkler, Manitoba: Gnadenhof History Book Committee, 1982), p.8.

4. Peters, 6.

5. Ehrlich, W.A. et al., *Report of Reconnaissance Soil Survey of Winnipeg and Morris Sheet Areas*, (Manitoba Soil Survey, University of Manitoba, 1953).

6. *Ukraine Concise Encyclopedia*, Volume 1, p.101.

7. Dorfbericht - Neu-Chortitza, CGWD.

8. Peters, 10.

9. Warkentin, John; *Mennonite Agricultural Settlements of Southern Manitoba*, *Geographical Review*, Vol.XLIX, No.5, 1959, p.348.

John Friesen is a retired Manitoba government rural town planner.

Inter-Mennonite Cooperation (cont'd from p.1)

Further action was referred to the Non-Resistant Relief Organization.

Thus S.F. Coffman and D.M. Reesor joined the delegates from western Canada and A.A. Friesen. Indeed, due to his experience and the positive reputation of the Ontario Mennonites, Coffman became the official leader of the delegation. He introduced the delegates in their meeting with the Acting Prime Minister, Sir George Foster on July 19, 1921 and presented the opening petition.

The petition addressed several points of particular interest to the Canadian government. It noted "the needs of the suffering brethren in Russia" and also "the industry, honesty and worth of these people." Their "rural nature" would be an asset and not "a burden on the social and labour problems of our cities." Coffman indicated that these people believed in the "non-resistant faith" and that they would expect some consideration concerning these matters. However they would not disregard the language and educational interests of the country.

A.A. Friesen was more effusive in his petition. After pointing to the love for order, sobriety and unlimited loyalty of the Mennonites in Russia, he asserted that his fellow Mennonites would consider it not only "a duty but a privilege to know perfectly the language of the country where they found homes and enjoyed all civil rights, thus bringing themselves into close touch with the culture, the fate and the history of the country." On their behalf, he promised they "would certainly be willing to conform to the Canadian ideals and to support the laws of the country, they would be peaceful, loyal, and industrious citizens of the country of their adoption." His conclusion was framed in a benediction upon Canada: "And God, the Almighty, will recompense the Government of Canada and its people for having given refuge, protection and justice to those people, persecuted and deprived of their rights, when they pleaded for admission."

Another petition was presented by H.H. Ewert on behalf of his conference. He conveyed the loyalty and devotion of the Mennonite people to Canada "which they wholly regard as their permanent homeland." He also wanted to assure the government that Mennonites would "do all in their power, but within the limits of their conscience, that would likely promote the welfare...of this country." More pointedly, the Mennonites "are of a deeply religious character...and

social agitators have found no fertile field among them to work in." Ewert was quite deliberate in distinguishing these Mennonites from Russia and his own progressive community from the conservative Mennonites now threatening to emigrate. S.F. Coffman strengthened this distinction by emphasizing that among the Ontario Mennonites there was no thought of departing and that his people had adopted public schools from the beginning.

The delegation also met W.L. Mackenzie King, the leader of the Liberal Party, currently in parliamentary opposition. He promised that a government under his leadership would rescind the Order-in-Council. King was elected as Prime Minister in fall of 1921 and soon thereafter the Russian Mennonite leaders, again asked Coffman to arrange meetings with the government. Ewert even suggested that the Ontario Mennonites could attend to this matter without the participation of representatives from the west.

In their preparatory correspondence both Coffman and Ewert acknowledged that the exodus of the conservative Mennonites could present a problem. Ewert's approach was to emphasize the more open attitude of the majority of Mennonites including those wanting to enter Canada as distinct from "the conservative brethren." Coffman, on the other hand, advised his colleagues in Western Canada that "there should be some reconciling influence between the local governments and the Old Colony people."

Nevertheless, Coffman proceeded to request an appointment of Mackenzie King with the attitude that "we cannot change men or governments, but it is in the providence of the Lord to bring things to pass that will help His children in the time of their distress."

On March 29, a delegation of Ewert, Coffman and Friesen and two others, S. Goudie, representing the Mennonite Brethren in Christ of Ontario and Gerhard Ens, a Saskatchewan politician of Mennonite background, met the Acting Minister of Immigration and Colonization, Charles Stewart. This time, at Coffman's advice, one common petition was submitted. It began by recalling the favours granted to the Mennonite people residing in Canada and reporting their special efforts in relief work. It noted that "the peculiar relationship which our people have sustained to the problems of the nation in the past have been misunderstood...and has resulted in unfounded prejudices and unwarranted opposition."

The petition also stated that the Order-in-Council of 1919 was passed after the

entering into Canada of "the communistic people, called the Hutterites" and asserted that these principles had never been held by Mennonites. The petitioners also dissociated themselves from those "sections of our people in the west" who were in dispute with Canadian education and language policy.

Then the petition focused on the Mennonites in famine-stricken Russia, noting that "these people racially and religiously are of the class and type as those who comprise the majority of the citizenship of Great Britain and Canada." Their reputation as ambitious, progressive and successful people was again stressed.

The following day Ewert, Friesen and Ens met the Prime Minister and on April 3 Ens and Friesen met the Minister of Immigration one more time. In this meeting the Minister raised the question of exemption from military service for the first time in relation to the immigration of Mennonites from the U.S.S.R. The delegates had decided beforehand not to request any specific commitment for the immigrants regarding this point. Stewart indicated that the laws would be applied equally to all Mennonites and that no restriction would be connected to the lifting of the order. The delegates left Ottawa fully satisfied.

The cabinet delayed the repeal of the ban until June 6, 1922, and it was officially announced on June 22. For Coffman the leadership he gave to the effort to re-open the door to Canada led to the organization of the Ontario Mennonites for hosting thousands of Russian Mennonite immigrants.

A letter of gratitude by David Toews, who assumed the leadership of the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization to Prime Minister King restated the patriotic sentiments of the Mennonites in:

"We are again on a level with others with whom we will gladly cooperate in service to Canada which we have learned to love as our home and in which we hope that for many generations to come our children will with heart and soul sing 'My own Canadian home.'"

Sources

Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization files, MHC Archives, Files 601-604, 1165.

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Ewert, H.H. "Bericht über die Reise der Deputation nach Ottawa," in *Der Mitarbeiter*, 14:71 (September 1921) pp.75-76.

Friesen, Bert. *Where We Stand: An Index of Peace and Social Concerns Statements in Canada, 1787-1982*. (MCC Canada, 1986).

Weber, John S., "A History of Samuel F. Coffman, 1872-1954: The Mennonite Churchman," (University of Waterloo, 1975).

BOOK REVIEWS

Nolt, Steven M. *A History of the Amish*. (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 1992). 318 pp. \$9.95

This year marks the 300th anniversary of the beginnings of the Amish. This book, by Steven Nolt, is the most comprehensive history of the Amish written thus far, and it is a very laudable effort.

The book also comes at a time when the former Western Ontario Mennonite Conference (which has Amish roots) has become an associate member of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada. Thus it provides Mennonites in western Canada with an opportunity to become more familiar with a group which many congregations now have formal ties with.

Nolt's book is very informative, yet very readable. There are vignettes of various kinds scattered throughout the book--short biographies, human interest stories, excerpts from primary documents, etc.--that readers can choose to read or not as they move through the main text. There are also many graphs, charts, maps and pictures throughout the book. It is unfortunate, however, that there is no list of maps and charts, etc., at the beginning of the book.

The book follows a clear chronological rather than geographic or thematic approach. Canadians may be disappointed that there are no separate sections on Ontario. In fact, the maps are of the U.S., with a few dots identifying Amish congregations outside the northern boundaries of the U.S. (see e.g., pp. 250-251). Membership statistics are also not comprehensive. One graph cites the number of Old Order Amish church districts in Ontario as seventeen, but no memberships are given.

Nolt encounters the usual problem of distinguishing between the conservatives and the liberals, or the traditionalists and the progressives. By and large the more conservative Amish groups are treated with empathy. One finds very little, perhaps too little, critical comment.

Steven Nolt is a young historian (born in 1968) who obviously is at the beginning of a very promising career. Apart from certain stylistic problems (e.g. countless split infinitives), the book is very well written and is a must for anyone interested in Amish history and identity.

Reviewed by Abe Dueck, Director of the Centre for M.B. Studies, Winnipeg

Ens, Gerhard J. *Die Schule Muss Sein; A History of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute*. (Gretna, MB: Mennonite Collegiate Institute, 1990). Hdc., 286 pp.

In this fascinating story of the one hundred-year history of the Mennonite Collegiate Institute, the reader experiences conflict, intrigue, hardships and struggles, and gains valuable insights into the educational and cultural development of the Mennonites of southern Manitoba. Gerhard J. Ens, a graduate of the school, deserves much credit for a meticulously written history, prodigiously researched and clearly and analytically presented. Having used primary sources extensively, the author conveys a very good understanding of the spiritual, social and political influences that came to bear upon the development of the private school in Gretna, Manitoba.

Ens builds his history around the work of the various principals of the school, skilfully showing the step by step change from leadership and authority resting primarily with the principal of the school to one resting largely within the school board. The title, *Die Schule Muss Sein* emphasizes the convictions of the founding principal, H.H. Ewert, that the school was desperately needed and must unequivocally continue despite the Great Economic Depression, low enrolments, stiff opposition, and changing times and values.

A brief but adequate summary of educational developments in Russia, particularly as it applies to the three main groups of Mennonites that came to Manitoba in the 1870s and the 1920s, provides the reader with a sufficient basis to understand some of the main reasons for the conflict in Mennonite education.

For the first two decades of the history of the M.C.I., Ens portrays the school as an agent of change and then adeptly reveals how it gradually became an institution that strongly attempted to preserve cherished Mennonite values. Toward the end of the story the reader is led to feel that the school is moving in new directions, seeking to meet the challenges of the 1990s as it is led by a group of "baby-boomers."

Regardless of how thoroughly a person writes an illustrated history, people may wonder why a certain person's picture was not included, or why the fine biographical sketches in the margins did not include others. Some may feel that Ens should have presented more thoroughly aspects of the educational rights given to the Mennonites by the federal government prior to their emigration in the 1870s. Information now

available from once secret documents reveals that the federal government left the Mennonites in a lurch in their struggle with Manitoba government authorities over promised educational autonomy. Such information would help the reader understand why thousands of Mennonites left Manitoba after World War I and opposed the work of H.H. Ewert as public school inspector. Some might also feel that more than one student's views should have been given regarding the evangelistic work of Rev. Abram Neufeld at the M.C.I. Others might feel that the author should have presented more reasons as to why the Mennonite Brethren withdrew their support from the school at a time when about half of the students were from mostly rural M.B. homes.

I whole-heartedly recommend *Die Schule Muss Sein* not only to students, alumni and friends and supporters of the school but also to all those interested in history of education. This history is a very valuable contribution to the history of education in Manitoba and belongs in university, college, public, and church-school libraries.

Reviewed by Peter G. Klassen, retired Professor of Education at Brandon University.

Book Note by Richard Thiessen, Librarian at Concord College, Winnipeg

van der Smitten, Johannes. *The History of the Church in Chortitza: Towards an Understanding of the History of the Church in the Mennonite Colonies in South Russia*. Translated and edited by William Schroeder. (Winnipeg: A.D. Schroeder Typesetting, 1992). 48 pp.

Johannes van der Smitten (1808-1879) was a pastor of the Danzig Mennonite Church. His article provides a detailed chronology of the migration and settlement of the Mennonites from Prussia to Chortitza in the late eighteenth century. He focuses on the establishment of the church in Chortitza, and includes contemporary accounts in the form of letters and diary entries by Cornelius Warkentin, a minister who travelled to Chortitza in 1794. The appendix provides several other contemporary accounts of the early years of the Chortitza settlement, also in the form of letters to Prussia. Schroeder has provided the reader with several end notes for clarification, and also gives suggestions for further reading. His work is a welcome contribution to a growing body of translations of German works into the English language.