

Mennonite Historian



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Recently-published congregational histories and church directories include: *A History of the Hague Mennonite Church, 1900-1975*, by John D. Rempel; *A History of the First Mennonite Church, Greendale, B.C.*, by Gerhard I. Peters, as well as a 1976 directory of the Altona Bergthaler Mennonite congregation, and the North Kildonan Mennonite Church in Winnipeg. In 1974 Henry T. Klaassen of Rosthern, Sask. wrote and published *Birth and Growth of the Eigenheim Mennonite Church 1892-1974*. Esther Patkau edited *Nordheimer Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan 1925-1975* for its publication in 1975.

Church Records: Handle with Care

Church records are important. They should be thoughtfully created and carefully preserved. Their usefulness may not always be immediately obvious, but there is ample evidence that such efforts can pay off in the end.

We should bother about church records in our congregations for several reasons. They tell the story of how our programs and ministries arise and grow. We need this information to understand what is happening in our midst, to evaluate past experiences, and to see what is still to be done.

Records, both written and oral, help us to appreciate the contributions of our church leaders and fellow-members. Such documents are indeed a part of the record of the work of God. The Bible is packed with recorded accounts of how God met His people in days gone by, while saying also that He will do so in future times.

What should a congregation store away in its record files? Through the careful preservation of worship bulletins and minutes of all meetings a great deal of significant data will be retained. Annual congregational and

council meetings, indeed all other committee and group work, should be documented in this way.

Treasurers' accounts, membership guidelines and detailed permanent listings of baptism, marriage and deaths should be properly kept as well. Official correspondence needs to be filed and permanently stored. Constitutions, deeds, mortgages and other legal papers should be placed in a congregational record file after their purposes have been achieved. (If there must be a burning ceremony, let it be a duplicate, and not the original!)

Much valuable information about congregations appears in local newspapers, obituaries of members, census records, vital statistics, and similar documents. A newspaper clipping file is not difficult to make, and should be considered a "must." (Always make sure a clipping is marked as to source and date.)

It is possible nowadays to create taped records of special programs, sermons, related community events, etc. Tapes can be easily duplicated and conveniently stored.

No church should be without a fireproof vault, even if only small in size. There are too many stories of churches losing their records in a fire — something which no one expects will happen, of course. Lost records frequently cannot be replaced, creating gaps of information that can be awkward and disconcerting to members later on.

From time to time every congregation should deposit older records in our Conference archives where they will be sorted, if necessary, stored and held in trust. Many congregations are already preserving much valuable material in this way. Important documents should always be filed in duplicate as insurance against loss.

The work of a congregational historian can begin with checking if proper attention is being given to the care of congregational records. He or she may help to sort what has accumulated over the years, and suggest appropriate methods of preservation.

The congregational historian also becomes the contact person with the Conference archives. This includes mailing or otherwise delivering records to be deposited there, and also to receive needed information from the historian-archivist.

Some historians take the further step of collecting material for writing a history of the church, or even to write the story itself. This is an excellent way of introducing the group to new members, and a way of witnessing to God's grace to those outside the fellowship.

This takes more time and energy than simply filing documents in storage. But it is also something much-needed in our communities today. Such stories need to be written up, and the first move is for someone to begin.

Some say they don't have the gift for writing history in this way. But we should do what can be done. Much can be gained by talking about the project with someone who does have some history-writing skills, as well as knowledge about the way to publish a book. Persons directing our Conference history-archives program are prepared to offer advice and suggestions at any time.

Who is in fact qualified to be a congregational historian? One could say firstly, both young people and adults. Certainly one does not have to be retired, though it can be a most interesting kind of work for persons whose time is free in that way. (Cont. on page 2.)

Peter Regier

Part II

Ältester Peter Regier and his family of Rueckenau, West Prussia, reached Gretna, Manitoba, Canada on July 1, 1893. Warmly received by the Heinrich Ewert and other Mennonite families, they soon felt quite at home. They were encouraged to settle down, and make this growing Manitoba community their own.

But it was not to be. As Regier noted later on, "That same month I travelled to the new settlement at Rosthern, Saskatchewan, the goal of our desires. I preached there on July 23; the dear people, hitherto without spiritual nurture, eagerly received the Word of God." This service was held in the Aron Friesen home, and the group gathered there also urged him to consider their area for a permanent home.

However, Regier's general impression of the dry and treeless prairie was not too favorable, and he was not certain what his family would think of such a move. He returned to Gretna and brought his wife, Anna, with him when he made a second trip in October. Again he preached, this time in the homes of Abram Friesen and Isaac Dueck. Then the Regiers took leave, headed for Manitoba again.

That winter the families of the Rosthern area which Regier had visited prepared a petition which they forwarded by letter, inviting him once more to become their spiritual shepherd. This time the request was not in vain. "I knew it to be the voice of the

CHURCH RECORDS (Cont.)

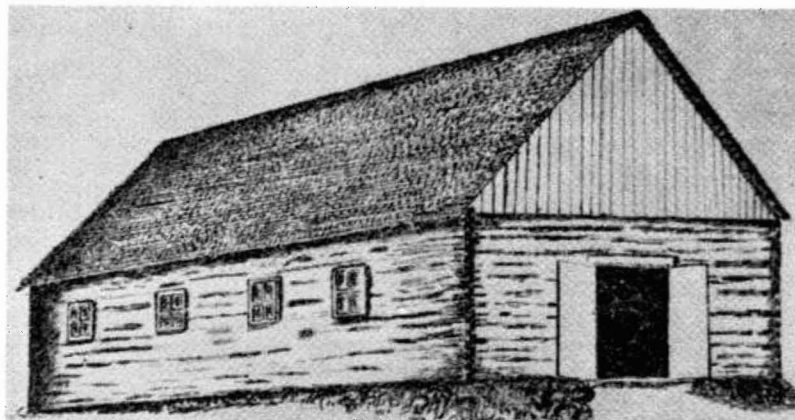
What matters essentially is to have an interest in this phase of ministry in the congregation. Such a person needs to have some appreciation for the value of church records. Manuals and other directives are available to get actual training on the job.

A number of Conference congregations are presently taking a new look at the question of record care. Some have begun to sort through papers that have lain in large cartons for years, but need better storage. Others are improving facilities to make better record care possible.

More than half of our congregations have already appointed historians for this kind of work. Hopefully the rest can make similar arrangements in the coming year.

Congregational record-keeping is not merely an option. It should be a priority matter, dealt with conscientiously, and properly carried through.

Your congregational experience should not remain hidden, or even be lost altogether. Preserve your records to help make sure that won't happen! *LK*



A sketch of the first log church built by the Mennonite community of Eigenheim, Saskatchewan, under the leadership of Ältester Peter Regier.

Lord," wrote Regier. "In April, 1894, we moved as a family to settle eighteen miles from Rosthern on Sec. 18, T. 44, R. 4 where I now own a wonderful home" (*Der Mitarbeiter*, October, 1906, p. 7). In the community that was named Tiefengrund they purchased the Carter farm for about \$1000.00.

Regier continued to preach regularly in various homes of the pioneer community. Quite often they met with the John Andres family, and later also in the home of the Heinrich Enns'. The coming of Abram Friesen a brother-in-law and minister from West Prussia, provided welcome aid for Regier whose responsibilities of homesteading and pastoral leadership soon became a heavy load. Also assisting in the work now was Gerhard Epp who had recently emigrated from Russia where he had served as a deacon for twenty years.

The question of a more formal congregational organization quickly came to the fore. With opinions on this matter differing, Ältester Regier took leadership. On July 2, 1894, he asked all those who wanted to become a congregation to hand him their family registers. These names were entered in a church register, forming the foundation of an organized group. Most of those who joined had recently come from southern Russia, but there were others from West Prussia as well as southern Manitoba.

Meetings were often memorable occasions. "On July 23 we held a communion service in the Johann Andres' home," Regier reported later. "There were 54 persons present. God was visibly among us there." Later that month Gerhard Epp was elected as minister and Johann Dueck as deacon. They were ordained on August 11, and the work of the congregation moved ahead.

The need for a church building now became very apparent. Willing hands were offered, but there was little money to be had.

Finally the congregation decided to erect a small building, a *Notkirche* (temporary church). From an island in the Saskatchewan River they hauled poplar logs to a spot on twenty acres donated by the Canadian Pacific Railroad for that purpose. "I was the fortunate person to unload the first logs at the building site," relates Regier.

The first meeting house, a log building measuring 24 by 40 feet was thus constructed in the spring of 1896. It stood on Sec. 3, T. 43, R. 4. It was hoped that a roof of shingles might be placed on the building, contrasting with the sod and straw roofs of the settlers' homes. Regier now wrote to acquaintances in West Prussia for help, but was advised to contact the Dutch Mennonite churches through Heinrich v. d. Smitten of Hamburg-Altona in Germany. Regier had signed personally for lumber purchased on credit at the small lumber yard of Peter Neufeld in Rosthern.

The response to these inquiries abroad was not heavy, but still helpful. "I received the first gift of \$5.00 from Gerhard Hoeppner. Then came a gift from W. Fast of the Heuboden church in West Prussia, totalling \$49.75." Two other larger gifts came from Heinrich v. d. Smitten himself, and from J. Viers de Haan in Haarlem, Holland. A few additional local contributions brought the total to \$257.55, enough for a roof but not boards for a floor. Aron Friesen's loan of \$40.00 covered that need. Rough planks on blocks had to do for pews.

"In deepest gratitude to God I was able, on July 14, 1896, to dedicate to Him this simple building as a worship centre. In a service attended by more than 200 persons I baptized 24 young people on the confession of their faith and served them with communion." A small addition completed the building in 1899, with further gifts from the Tiegenhagen church in West Prussia helping to pay the costs. (*Cont. on page 3.*)

More members were added to the congregation which now felt constrained to call others to the ministry. On August 2, 1899, Johann Dueck was elected to serve as minister, and Heinrich Warkentin as deacon. Both were ordained on August 27. The passing of Abram Friesen in 1901 kept the need for other workers alive.

As the Mennonite settlement in the Rosthern area expanded, Regier's church responsibilities also increased. Eigenheim, with its meeting house, emerged as the main centre of activity and worship. In 1897 the congregation chose its official name — Rosenorter Mennonite Church of Saskatchewan (then still North West Territories). The name clearly recalled Regier's own congregation in West Prussia.

New ministerial elections were held in 1901. Those now called, on August 4, included Heinrich H. Warkentin, deacon till then, along with a teacher of the Tiefengrund area, David Toews.

The latter had come originally from West Prussia to Kansas, and then to Manitoba where he taught in the Gretna public school from 1893-1895. He had continued his teacher training in Winnipeg, had taught a short term in the Burwalde school district northwest of Winkler, and eventually decided to move west to the Rosthern area. Toews and Warkentin were ordained together with David Epp, Laird, a new deacon, on Aug. 18, 1901.

Under Ältester Regier's guidance these men sought to minister to the various smaller congregations that were assembling regularly in nearby areas. Worship centres had by now developed not only in Eigenheim, but also in Tiefengrund, Waldheim, Rosthern, Bergthal, Hague, Osler, and Aberdeen. Eventually church buildings arose in most of these places. Meanwhile, as historian John Rempel put it, "the ministers needed to travel long distances on Sunday." (*To be concluded*).

Lawrence Klippenstein

Sources: Peter Regier, "Kurze Geschichte unserer Rosenorter Mennoniten Gemeinde bei Rosthern, Sask., *Der Mitarbeiter* I, Oct.-Dec., 1906; Heinrich H. Friesen, "Lebensbeschreibung" Winkler, Man., 1958 (?), handwritten manuscript; John G. Rempel, *Die Rosenorter Gemeinde in Sask. in Wort und Bild*, Rosthern, Sask., 1950; J. G. Rempel, *Fünfzig Jahre Konferenz Bestrebungen, 1902-1952*, Rosthern, Sask., 1952; Henry T. Klaassen, *Birth and Growth of the Eigenheim Mennonite Church, 1892-1974*, Rosthern, Sask., 1974.

Corrections: a) The initial "K" was not used by Peter Regier as intimated in *Mennonite Historian*, Sept., 1976. b) The reference to Rev. Abram Toews in page 3 of that issue should have read "Rev. Aron Toews." Our apologies!

Document Acquisitions

A. A. Friesen correspondence re: Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization. Donor: John P. Dyck, Springstein.

Dedication of new Glenlea Mennonite church building, Dec. 15, 1975. Two cassette tapes. Donor: Frank F. Enns, Winnipeg, Man.

Interview with J. J. Guenther, Gretna, Manitoba, 1974-5. Three 90 minute cassette tapes. Taken by Titus Guenther. German.

Interview with Abram J. Epp, St. Catharines, Ont. Taken April 27, 1976 by L. Klippenstein. German. One - 60 min. cassette.

Program of the Rhineland Mennonite Studies seminar, Altona, Man., Nov. 6; 1976. Prepared by Gerhard Ens, Gretna. three cassette tapes of 60 min. each.

Microfilm copy of Mennonite Trust Co. (earlier Waisenamt) of Waldheim, Sask. 1917-1975 minutes, some reports, etc. Done by Ken Funk, CMBC student.

Brandbuch zum Jahr 1880 vom 7. Jan. der beiden Kolonien Rosenhoff und Rosenort. Handwritten notebook by David Klassen. Deposited on loan by Dick B. Eidse, R.R. 1, Morris, Man.

Letters from Russia in German. Written to Canada 1929-1930. Donor: Maria Wiens, Coaldale, Alta.

Aus den ersten Tagen der Ansiedler bei Rosthern Herum, duplicate typewritten ms., author possibly Peter Klassen, Waldheim, Sask. (Carmen school district). Secured from Mennonite Library and Archives, North Newton, Kansas.

Harvey Toews, "The Bergthaler Mennonites. A Brief Examination of Some of the High Points in Their History." Unpublished term paper, Goshen College, 1951. Duplicate.

D. Wiebe, "Forstedienst, 1920-1922, bei den Sowjets", unpublished typed ms. Winnipeg, 1975. 12 pp.

Peter Rempel, **Schreibebuch**. Rosengart (south Russia), 1866. Contains names of bishops, ministers, and deacons (Old Colony). Donor: Ed Falk, Winkler, Man. Rev. J. J. Klassen sermons. Donor: H. T. Klassen, Winnipeg, Man. Typed duplicates.

Conference of Mennonites in Manitoba records. Six cartons. From Winnipeg (1483 Pembina Highway) office files, Faith and Life Committee, etc.

W.W. I alternative service notes and letters. (Russian Mennonites). Donor: Hans Rempel, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. Memoirs, etc.

Mennonite files re: Old Colony education problems in Saskatchewan. 2 folders — secured in duplicate from Saskatchewan Archives, University of Saskatchewan, Saskatoon, Sask.

Two diaries from the David Epp family of Chortitza, south Russia. 1820's on. Donor: David G. Epp, Eigenheim, Saskatchewan. Handwritten originals.

Adventure in Faith research files, including back numbers of *Bergthaler Gemeindeblatt*. Donor: Henry J. Gerbrandt, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Interview with A. D. Friesen, Altona, Man. A 60 -min cassette. Taken by Lawrence Klippenstein, German.



Heritage Resources

The following items can be loaned from the Resource Centre of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

- 1) **Menno's Reins** — a 60 minute color film which offers a historical portrayal of the Mennonites, beginning with Anabaptism in the 1500's and moving to the present day. Its focus in the current scenes is primarily Canada and Manitoba.
- 2) **The Ninth Mennonite World Conference** — a 30 minute film depicting the changing picture in the world of Mennonites as viewed at the MWC in Curitiba, Brazil in 1973.
- 3) **Faith of our Fathers** — a set of 240 slides with script, on Mennonite themes, particularly the Anabaptist story. Photography has been done by Jan Gleysteen, Scottdale, PA. A shorter version of 160 slides is also available.
- 4) **Heritage Series Slide sets** (with script) — 5 slides in each set: The Life of Menno Simons, Fraktur Writing, The Life of Conrad Grebel, The Life of Georg Blaurock, Habaner Pottery, The Life of Felix Manz, and Mennonite Meeting Houses.
- 5) **Mennonite Beginnings in Manitoba** — about 40 slides with brief script.
- 6) **Rosenort: A Mennonite Community** — an elementary school study kit (Grades 5-7) on a Mennonite community in Manitoba. Rosenort is near Morris, south of Winnipeg. The kit includes three readers for students, a teacher's manual with teaching suggestions, and other related resources.

Inquiries should be directed to Sharon Sawatzky, the director of the Resource Centre at 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Man. R3P 0M4.

Recent Publications

DeFehr, C. A. **Erinnerungen aus Meinem Leben**. Christian Press, Winnipeg, Man. 1976. 245 pp. Paperback. \$5.00

Dueck, Mary Regehr, "Arnold Dyck: Non-Conformist", *Mennonite Life* XXX (December, 1975), 20-24.

Dyck, Ernest J. "Resources on Mennonite History in the Public Archives of Canada", *Mennonite Life* XXX (December, 1975), 26-28; XXXI (March, 1976), 19-22.

Epp, Frank H. "Kanadische Mennoniten, das Dritte Reich, und der Zweite Weltkrieg", *Mennonitische Geschichtsblaetter* XXXI, (No. 26, 1974), 91-102.

(Continued on page 4.)



*The Rhineland Mennonite studies seminar met at Altona, Manitoba, on November 6, 1976. Here Peter D. Zacharias is presenting a paper on the writing of his book, **Reinland: An Experience in Community**. The book can be ordered from Abe Ens, R.R. 1, Box 218, Winkler, Man.*

Book Review

Reinland: An Experience in Community. By Peter D. Zacharias, Reinland Centennial Committee, Winkler, Man. 1976, 350 pp., \$15.00. Reviewed by Abe Warkentin, Steinbach, Manitoba.

If one of the true tests of the calibre of a community history is the interest it generates among people who have no ties with the community concerned, then **Reinland: An Experience in Community** should be a great success.

The name of the book, it should be pointed out at the outset, is in a sense misleading. This is more than a community history. It deals, significantly, with the entire Mennonite West Reserve and goes back more than the 100-plus years of Manitoba Mennonite history to the very beginning of the Mennonite movement.

One is constantly surprised at what is contained in this book. A map of the Netherlands at the time of the Reformation, for example. Or a map of the Chortitza and other colonies in Russia, as another. Mr. Zacharias has done thorough homework in regards to the local history of the community, as well as the broader history of the reserve where he could benefit from previous publications.

In total, the 350 pages of the book are profusely illustrated with 400 illustrations, diagrams and maps covering almost every conceivable aspect of life affecting the tiny community of Reinland. The result is a readable, extremely attractive book, well bound and beautifully printed.

The photographs are outstanding, particularly those of G. G. Sawatzky, of Winkler, and Harold Funk of Winnipeg. There are a number of gems, including the picture of the little girl on page two, the village store scene on page 115, the village herdsman on page 153 and Mrs. Frank Suderman at the organ on page 282.

The unusual format, with an exceptionally large amount of white space bordering most

pages, accentuates the photography and quality printing. The extra expense while necessarily reflected in the cost of the book, is well worth the effort.

Community events and the history of the Reinland community are covered in detail. It's unlikely that there is another community with such a small population (around 200) that can boast such a comprehensive history.

Reinland, once the administrative and church centre of the West Reserve, is still a busy community located about 10 miles south of Winkler, Manitoba.

The author is a native of the community and his twenty years there have given him the insight necessary for a book of this calibre. He is presently vice-principal of the Green Valley Collegiate at Grunthal, and worked on the book since 1974 when the Reinland Centennial Committee was formed.

Research Inquiry

Helen Harder Hiebner of Edmonton, Alta., writes: "I am presently compiling the family trees and history of the following people: 1) Heinrich Harder (1828-1901), and his wife Sarah (nee Klassen, 1931-1910) with descendants. They came to Canada in 1876 and settled in the East Reserve, later moving to the West Reserve. 2) Abram Neufeld and his wife Catherine, nee Unger, with children Abraham, Jacob, Cornelius, Anna, Herman and Henry as well as Helen who died March 23, 1941 at Herbert, Sask. 3) Jacob Klassen and wife Katherina, nee Unrau from Russia. One known son Wilhelm Jacob (1860-1923) came to Canada to Herbert, Sask.

I would like to get in contact with Harders, Klassens and Neufelds who are also interested in this heritage. Please write to: 9743-64 Ave., Edmonton, Alta. T6E 0J4."

Epp, Peter. **Die Mennoniten in Russland**, Derksen Printers, Steinbach, Man., 145 pp. Paperback. \$5.00

Hein, Gerhard, ed. Ufa. **Die Mennonitische Ansiedlung bei Ufa am Uralgebirge. 1894-1938.** (Winnipeg, Man., 1975). 157 pp. Paperback. \$7.00. Order from Mrs. H. F. Klassen, 54 Noble Ave., Winnipeg, Man.

Klassen, Henry C. "The Mennonites of Namaka Farm," **Mennonite Life** XXX (December, 1975), 8-14. Concerns Mennonite settlement in Alberta.

Klippenstein, Lawrence. "Aeltester David Stoesz and the Bergthal Story: Some Diary Notes," Part I, **Mennonite Life** XXXI (March, 1976), 14-19.

..... "A Visit to Manitoba in 1873. The Russian Mennonite Delegation," **Canada III** (September, 1975), 13-18.

..... "Manitoba Settlement and the Mennonite West Reserve, 1875-1876," **Manitoba Pageant** XXI (Autumn, 1975), 13-18.

..... ed. **Love God and Your Neighbor Too.** (Winnipeg, Man. 1976). 30 pp. Paperback. \$1.50. Excerpts from the writings of Rev. Heinrich R. and Helena Reimer, Prairie Rose, Manitoba.

(To be continued)

News and Notes

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta and Saskatchewan has arranged to acquire archives facilities at Rosthern Junior College in Rosthern, Sask.

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The film, **Prairie Pioneers: Mennonites of Manitoba** was shown at the University of Winnipeg on Nov. 12 to about 250 viewers. It will be shown to several rural communities in January and February.

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Ed Krahn, of Steinbach, Manitoba, has been engaged as full-time curator of the Mennonite Village Museum of Manitoba. A recent grant of \$19,000 to the Museum is being used to catalogue books and archival material, as well as for making improvements of facilities.

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The B.C. Mennonite Historical Society, recently re-organized, has received a grant from the federal government to set up a Mennonite historical library for the province. It may be located at Columbia Bible Institute in Clearbrook.

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The Burwalde Reunion Committee of the Burwalde School District (northeast of Winkler, Manitoba) recently published the first issue of a newsletter called **Burwalde Album**. The editor is Isaac Froese, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, Manitoba.

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Can anyone offer information about a small community of Mennonite families who moved to Renata, B.C., around 1908? They apparently came from Rosthern, Saskatchewan, and earlier from Manitoba.