

MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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An interior view of an immigration train (1923) with a family of Mennonites from Schoenwiese, Old Colony, Ukraine. They are leaving Russia for Canada. Photo: Courtesy of A.W. Schlegel from Mennonite Archives, Goshen, IN USA.

The First Canadian Mennonite Central Committee 1920-1924

by Peter H. Rempel

The first Canadian Mennonite Central Committee was formed on 18 October 1920 in response to the same need which led American Mennonites to establish a Mennonite "Central Committee" several months earlier: relief for the Mennonites in Russia. The Canadian committee, created at a meeting in Regina, Saskatchewan, was attended by fifteen representatives from several Mennonite groups in western Canada. H. A. Neufeld, minister of the Mennonite Brethren congregation in Herbert, Saskatchewan, chaired the meeting.

The group quickly agreed "that it is absolutely necessary that the Canadian Mennonites should establish a Central Committee in order to provide our people in Russia with the best possible aid." Peter P. Epp (Altona, MB), Abraham Loewen (Acme, AB), Cornelius K. Unruh (Hepburn, SK), P. M. Schmidt (Drake, SK) and Johann Thiessen (Greenfarm, SK) were elected to form a "Central Committee". Subsequently

this committee designated Epp, from the Bergthaler Church, as chair; Thiessen, a Mennonite Brethren member, as treasurer, and Unruh as secretary. (*Mennonitische Rundschau*, 24. November 1920, 5, and *Der Mitarbeiter*, December 1920, 84-85.)

The founding group also decided that "our Central Committee should establish contact with the Central Committee of the American Mennonites". On 21 October the secretary wrote to Levi Mumaw, the secretary of MCC located in Scottdale, Pennsylvania, to report the formation of the Canadian committee and to declare its readiness to cooperate. Mumaw welcomed the offer of cooperation and outlined two options: the Canadian committee could collect funds independently and receive information from MCC or it could be represented on MCC and have the same status as the other member organizations. However, "concerning the work on the field, we think it is very desirable to have only one organization there."

The Canadian committee did not become a member of the American MCC though Epp did attend its meeting in Chicago in December 1922. Nor did it fully centralize the collections of cash or clothes by Canadian Mennonites. An undetermined amount of funds flowed from Canada to MCC directly from the donors or via the relief committees of the binational conferences.

The Canadian MCC recruited two dozen local representatives, including several from the "Old" Mennonite Church. Its treasurer investigated different channels of sending funds to Russia but nothing seemed more practical than sending funds via MCC in the U.S. Thus MCC received separate contributions from various communities in Canada. By the end of 1921, \$30,450 had been forwarded. One year later the total reached \$54,347, which amounted to about 10% of MCC's total income to that date. Less than \$3,000 was sent in 1923 and the final tally of MCC's income in March 1927 listed \$57,101.86 from the "Canadian Mennonite Central Committee."

The members of the Canadian MCC were quite keen on sending clothing to Russia, either directly, or with a Mennonite agency in Germany or via MCC, though the latter had advised against them because of the freight costs and customs complications. Indeed, those items sent to MCC caused some frustration because of inadequate documentation.

In the fall of 1921 Peter Epp obtained information from A. A. Friesen, one of the Russian Mennonite *Studienkommission* delegates to North America, on the prospects of sending Mennonite workers into Russia. Epp indicated that the Canadian committee was considering sending a representative to Russia, someone who was familiar with the language and the culture. He named C. J. Andreas, employed at the Herbert *Waisenamt* Union, as a qualified person and asked Friesen, who was writing from Philadelphia, to present this suggestion to MCC. Friesen did so but not until the following April. By then the Canadian branch of the Save the Children Fund had stated its readiness to facilitate the entry of a Canadian Mennonite worker who would then be free to select any

(cont'd on page 2)

Canadian Mennonite Central Committee (cont'd from page 1)

area in Russia in which to work. Thereupon the MCC Executive Committee meeting of 24 June invited the "Mennonite Central Committee of Canada" to recommend a worker for this purpose.

Andreas' primary purpose for going to Russia was to monitor the distribution of clothing purchased in Europe. A. A. Friesen wrote several letters of introduction for him. However, in August, 1922, Andreas withdrew his willingness to travel to Russia, stating that he wanted to end rumours that his trip was to be a pleasure trip. Eventually Friesen instructed Andreas to send the funds collected for clothing to his office in Rosthern.

After a meeting in August, 1921, Epp wrote to the Save the Children Fund to inquire about the possibility of sending flour and clothing via this organization. However Friesen, now secretary for the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, had already written to SCF on this matter. His request had been forwarded to the London SCF office with the comment that the Mennonites in Canada had been contributing substantially through the MCC in the U.S. but that "they are anxious that Canada should have the credit for the relief work they are prepared to do." SCF London was also informed that "the Mennonite people are prepared to pay the expenses for one of their members to the Russian areas."

In a letter to Epp dated 6 October, Friesen acknowledged that this matter was actually the responsibility of the relief committee and assured him that "we do not want to intrude in the work of this committee in any way." Epp requested Friesen to continue the negotiations with SCF in order to simplify communications and to present a united position. Friesen soon received a positive response from SCF regarding flour shipments from Canadian Mennonites. The flour, ground from donated grain, would be shipped to SCF's field of operation along the Volga with the freight to Liverpool paid by the Canadian government and from there to Russia by SCF. In return SCF would pur-



chase the equivalent amount of flour in Rumania and ship it at its own expense to Ukraine for distribution in the Mennonite districts.

However, the communication between Friesen and the relief committee faltered.



After hearing that the collection of flour had already begun in Saskatchewan, Epp chided Friesen for not informing him of the agreement with SCF. On the other hand, Epp neglected to forward instructions to other communities. Epp and the other members of the relief committee were relegated to promoting the grain collection in their local areas while Friesen assumed responsibility for communicating with SCF.

During the winter of 1922-23 carloads of flour totalling 324,328 pounds were shipped from Herbert and Rosthern in Saskatchewan, as well as from Steinbach, Altona, Gretna, and Winkler in Manitoba. On 5 December 1922 Friesen emphasized for SCF the "express desire" of the donors that the flour should reach the Mennonite people. He also notified SCF that a worker would not be sent to supervise the distribution. He requested that the flour be turned over to American Mennnite Relief if SCF did not have a representative in the target area.

From the outset of MCC's relief efforts Friesen had protested AMR's refusal to direct its aid primarily to the Mennonites. Thus AMR was not the preferred agency for Friesen. Nevertheless SCF transferred 297,356 pounds of flour to American Mennonite Relief. Eventually it was the Canadian Mennonite Colonization Board which received reports, with thanks, from Russia on the arrival of the flour.

By 1924 the projects initiated by the Canadian Mennonite Central Committee had been taken over by the Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization, in particular, its secretary, A. A. Friesen. The Canadian MCC had terminated its own work at that point.

Primary Sources

Canadian Mennonite Board of Colonization files, MHC Archives: See files for C. J. Andreas, American Relief Administration, Peter P. Epp, Mennonite Central Committee, and Save the Children Fund.

MCC files, Mennonite Church Archives. See Levi Mumaw General Correspondence.

Peter H. Rempel is currently the COM secretary for personnel, Africa and Europe and a former archivist at MHCA.

GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY

by Alf Redekopp

Queries

Braun - I am looking for information about the siblings and ancestors of Katharina Braun (1846-1872) who married Abram Friesen (1844-1867) and had a son born to them in Osterwick, Chortitza Colony, Russia. Was Helana Braun (1839-1862) who married Isaak Ens (1839-1912) a sister to Katharina? Was the second wife of Isaak Ens, Susanna Braun (1841-1912) also a sister? Contact: Erika Enns, Box 153, Tugaskie, SK S0H 4B0.

Funk - Looking for information about the descendants of Maria Funk (1866-1920), daughter of Aron Funk, and married to Heinrich Klassen (1862-1933) lived in Nikolaithal, Borosenko. Heinrich Klassen was born in Steinau. Some of the relatives may have settled in the Snowflake, Manitoba area. Contact: Erika Enns, Box 153, Tugaskie, SK S0H 4B0.

Krahn/Giesbrecht/Ens - I am looking for information on Jacob Krahn b. ca. 1840 in Chortitza Colony and who moved to Fuerstenland. I also am seeking information about Sarah Giesbrecht (1838-1919), daughter of Abram Giesbrecht and Sarah Dyck (1838-1919), who married Johan Isaac Ens (1837-1921). They also originated in Chortitza Colony. Are there any early church records in existence for the old Chortitza Mennonite Church and the Fuerstenland Mennonite Church? Contact: Agatha C. Enns Ratzlaff, 31861 Beech Avenue, Abbotsford, BC V2T 1G8.

Kroeker/Abrams - I am looking for information on the descendants of Johan Kroeker b. 3 Jan. 1841 (d. prior to 1883) and Katarina Abrams b. 4 Feb. 1852, who came to Canada from the Crimea in 1883 with their 3 children: Liese b. 2 Oct. 1872, Johan b. 17 Oct. 1875 and Peter b. 17 Mar. 1881. Liese's obituary states that she was born in Ekaterinoslav. Where are the descendants of Peter and Johann? Contact: Judi Bowers, 131 Gladmer Park, Saskatoon, SK S7J 2X3.

Loewen - I am looking for information about Wilhelm Loewen (1876-1945) born in Jeljenowka, who lived in Grigorjewka, first married a Maria Penner who died in 1914, then married a Justina Friesen, moved from Grigorjewka to Alexanderkrone, Molotschna in 1926 and died in Aktyvbinsk in 1945. Contact: Elsie Klassen, Box 321, Virgil, ON L0S 1T0.

Martens - I would like information to confirm that a Franz Martens married to a Maria ? with children: Wilhelm (Crimea), Johann (1839-1899) (Wiesefeld near Pawlograd), Franz (Memrik), Lena (Mrs. Johann Friesen - Kuban), Tina (Mrs. Neufeld - America), Maria (Mrs. Epp - Kuban), Cornelia (Mrs. Fast - Tiegierwiede) is the Franz Martens b. Feb. 14, 1796, with siblings: Katharina (b. Aug. 17, 1777), Wilhelm (b. Dec. 31, 1781), Jacob (b. Feb. 16, 1784), Eva (b. Feb. 20, 1786), Jettchen (b. June 10, 1788), Maria (b. Aug. 30, 1790), Helena (b. Dec. 23, 1798) and parents: Aron Martens (1754?-1801) and Anna Janzen (1758?-1807) (Source: *Aron Martens 1754-1977 Genealogy Book*). Contact: Gert Martens, 701 Patricia Ave., Winnipeg, MB R3T 3A8 or via e-mail: martens@ee.umanitoba.ca.

Neufeld - Can anyone help us find information on Johann Neufeld (b. between 1810 and 1820) of Ohrloff, Molotschna, the builder of a new church in Neuhalbstadt, designed in 1852 and which resulted in a major dispute leading to his excommunication from the Orloff Church in 1861? Who are his descendants? Contact: John and Irmie Konrad, 4805 Meadfeild Rd, West Vancouver, BC V7W 3E6 or e-mail: jkonrad@direct.ca

Recent Books

Benjamin Dueck. *The Descendants of Paul Schellenberg 1634-1995* (Steinbach, MB: Private publication, 1995), pb., 82 pp.

This compilation consists primarily of the descendants of Abraham R. Schellenberg (1839-1924) and Margaretha Esau (1848-1895) from Tiede, Molotschna who migrated to Canada in 1875 with the Mennonite Kleinegemeinde and settled in Grünfeld (Kleefeld), Manitoba. It traces the ancestry of Abraham R. Schellenberg back to his great great grandfather Paul Schellenberg 1634-1719 who died in Danzig, West Prussia. Contact: Benjamin Dueck, Box 20191, Steinbach, MB R0A 2T1.

Shirley Funk, et. al. *A History of the Peter F. Rempel Family* (Shafter, CA: Private publication, 1995), pb., pp. ; \$12.00 US.

This family history was compiled and printed for the fifth family reunion of the descendants of Peter F. Rempel held in August, 1995. Peter F. Rempel (1875-1967) was born in Russia, married in Jansen, Nebraska in 1894 to Sara J. Friesen (1876-1923) and moved to Meade, Kansas around 1906. Nine-

teen children were born to this marriage. In 1924 Peter F. Rempel married Aganetha H. Reimer (1882-1972). This book includes pedigree charts showing the ancestors of this family, an historical overview written by Kevin Enns-Rempel (archivist at the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Fresno), a bibliography and address list. Contact: Shirley Funk, 314 Bree Drive, Shafter, CA 93263.

John Froese. *Rev. Jacob Janzen Family Celebration 1904-1995* (Laird, SK: The Jacob and Margaret Janzen Family, 1995) pb., 95 pp.

This book was prepared in conjunction with a family thanksgiving celebration which occurred July 7-9, 1995 in Laird, Saskatchewan. It begins with a short history of Jacob Janzen (1859-1931) who was born in Schönwiese, Russia, first married to Barbara Klassen, and then married to Margaretha Martens (1862-1942). Jacob Janzen was ordained to the ministry in 1894 and served the congregation in Schönwiese, Russia until 1904 when the family migrated to Canada and settled in Saskatchewan. Here he was welcomed as a minister in the Eigenheim and Laird districts with the *Rosenorter Gemeinde*. The book contains short biographical sketches of the families of each of Jacob Janzen's children followed by photographs and genealogical data on the descendants.

Marjorie Hildebrand. *The Oak Tree: The story of the ancestors and descendants of Peter and Margaretha Wiebe 1797-1945* (Steinbach, MB: Private publication, 1995) pb., 85 pp.

This book contains the history of the family of Peter Wiebe (1891-1968) and Margaretha Thiessen (1892-1977) who were married in the Schoenthal Sommerfelder Church in Manitoba in 1918. The book has sections on their parents, grandparents and children. Peter and Margaretha Wiebe were first generation Canadians, whose parents had come to Canada as young people with the *Berghthaler Gemeinde* during the 1870s. The book contains vignettes of early farm life in Canada for this family as well as some favourite recipes. It concludes with the genealogical data. Contact: Marjorie Hildebrand, P.O. Box 1420, Steinbach, MB R0A 2A0.

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, CMBS, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5.

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Peter Rempel - Researcher in Moscow

by Lawrence Klippenstein

During a recent visit to Moscow, I was able to meet with Peter Rempel, a recent MA graduate of historical research. Rempel has had extensive contacts with Russian archival centres and is hoping to pursue Mennonite topics in future research. Recently he sent us a lengthy article on "Germans (Mennonites) in the Gulag" which we hope to publish in translation.

Right now he is proposing the preparation of an index to all former Mennonite estates in the FSU, based on archives in Moscow. He showed me some of the preliminary listings already printed out. He is looking for help to complete the project - a Notebook computer and ca \$1000 US to cover expenses for a two-month project.

Please write us if you would like to know more about Peter's work or if you would con-



Irma Penn with a painting on Hebrew calligraphy. Irma's exhibit at the Mennonite Heritage Centre closed on November 15. Photo: Courtesy of Jewish Post and News, Winnipeg, MB.

sider giving financial assistance to him in his endeavours. He is e-mail "connected" and we would supply his address to anyone interested.

NEED HELP? I can help you translate documents written in German Gothic script (longhand). Write to Kevin Dyck, MLA, Bethel College, N. Newton, KS 67117.

Assiniboine Travel Services Ltd.


April 29 - May 19 Leader: Dr. Abe J. Dueck, Centre for MB Studies, Winnipeg, MB. See page 5 for details.

June 1-21 Leader: Dick Epp, Saskatoon, SK. Russia - Ukraine - Poland.

July 15-29 Visit some of the places where Menno Simons lived including Witmarsum, Pingjum, Emden, Bad Oldesloe, Danzig and Cologne. The tour will also stop at Amsterdam, Hamburg, Berlin, Wittenberg, and Muenster. **Leader:** Dr. John J. Friesen, CMBC, Winnipeg, MB.

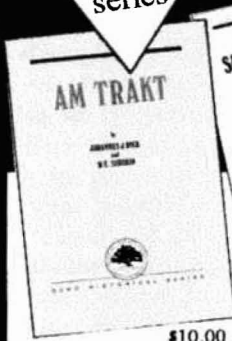
August 1-21 Visit the Former Soviet Union (FSU) including stops at Orenburg, St. Petersburg, Moscow, Kiev, Zaporozhe (with day trips (we hope) to the former Chortitza, Molotschna, Bergthal, Fuerstenland and Sagradowka settlements), Odessa, and several places in The Netherlands (Amsterdam, Witmarsum, Pingjum). **Leader:** Dr. Lawrence Klippenstein, Mennonite Heritage Centre, Winnipeg, MB.

For further information call ATs at 1-204-775-0271 or 1-800-262-8863.




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Delegates at the annual Mennonite Brethren Conference in Tiege, Zagradovka in 1910. The two officials in the front middle, Stanovoi Pristov and Semen Dmitrievich Bondar, were representatives of the Russian Department of the Interior and attended conferences to provide surveillance on the activities of groups which were regarded as "secretarian".

Conference Minutes of MB Churches in Russia.

Although the Mennonite Brethren Church in Russia was the first to organize as a conference in 1872 and met annually in spring, the minutes of most of these conferences have disappeared.

Abe Dueck has been attempting to find as many as possible and plans to translate and publish those that have been found, which include the minutes of 1882, 1903, 1910, 1912, 1913 and 1918, as well as some related statistical and other reports.

The minutes of the *Allgemeine Konferenz* were published by Heinrich Ediger under the title, *Beschlüsse der von den geistlichen und anderen Vertretern der Mennoniten-Gemeinden Russlands abgehaltenen Konferenzen für die Jahre 1879 bis 1913* (Berdiansk, 1914).

Most of the minutes of the *Kirliche* Mennonite Conference in Russia and the All-Mennonite Congresses held between 1917 and 1926 are included in *The Mennonites in Russia from 1917 to 1930: Selected Documents*, edited by John B. Toews (Winnipeg, 1975).

News from CMBS

Computer Cataloguing of J.A. Toews Library

Computer cataloguing of the approximately 4000 volumes of the J.A. Toews library was begun this fall. Tamara Dyck, who is a library technician, is working approximately two days per week to catalogue the items. The other three days are spent working in the Concord College library, which is also proceeding to catalogue its holdings.

Expanded Historical Committee Meeting

On January 19 and 20 the Historical Committee, which is responsible for the operation of the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, will meet to do some long-range planning. Most of the members are from the Winnipeg area, but Dave Giesbrecht from the Mennonite Archival Centre of British Columbia, has been invited to participate in this special meeting to give the Committee broader representation.

Coaldale Bible School Records

Most of the records of the Coaldale Bible School have apparently been lost. Recently, however two booklets of Bible School com-

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mittee minutes (1952-1961) were discovered in the home of a Coaldale resident, Mr. Peter Regehr, whose father was active on the committee for a number of years. Anyone who may have information regarding other records is asked to contact the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg.

New Book on Mennonite Experiences in the early Soviet Era, during World War II, and the Migration to Canada

The CMBS has released a book entitled, *Durch Trübsal und Tod* by Helene Dueck. The author participated in the "Great Trek" from Ukraine to West Germany and was part of a group of young women who studied in a *Lehrerbildungsanstalt* under the German instructor, Karl Götz. The teachers' college moved from place to place as it fled the advancing Soviet forces. The account is a very vivid and moving one. The book can be purchased from the CMBS for \$14.95 (plus \$2.00 postage and handling).

MBBC Photographs Processed

Through the assistance of a Canadian Council of Archives (CCA) grant, the Centre has processed the photographs and slides associated with the Mennonite Brethren Bible College, 1944-1992. Alvina Block, who was hired to do this project, sorted, culled, organized and described approximately 1700 out of 2400 photographs, and 2100 out of 4800 slides. All items have been entered into a computer database.

Menno Simons Tour

The Centre for MB Studies will be sponsoring a Menno Simons study tour in cooperation with Concord College April 29 to May 19, 1996. Abe Dueck, director of the Centre, will be the host. After touring Holland, the group will also visit northern Germany and Poland with stops in Berlin, some *Aussiedler* churches, as well as Worms and Strassburg.

University credit is available. Write to Centre for MB Studies, 1-169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5 or call 1-204-669-6575.

A Chip Off Which Old Block? (Conclusion)

by Margaret Kroeker

This is the concluding part of Margaret Kroeker's article on the Blocks begun in the September, 1995, issue of Mennonite Historian. A few footnotes have been added to her original text.

For those researchers who have been unable to connect to the Kronsgarten Peter Block, I would like to list a few Block families who settled in the Molotschna Colony. Any additional information, corrections, or comments from the readers would be appreciated.

The following data should serve to distinguish the Peter Block in Klein Lubin from the Kronsgarten Peter Block, (b. April 29, 1797, in Montau). The Peter Block who lived in Klein Lubin had the following children: Heinrich, b. March 17, 1792; a daughter, b. July 8, 1795; and Peter, b. August 20, 1797.

This Peter Block who was born in the same year as the Kronsgarten Block, could be the Peter Block in the 1835 census in Franzthal with children as follows: Heinrich, b. d?; Peter, who went to Konteniusfeld and married Katarina, b. 1807¹¹; Johann, b. ca 1801; David, b. ca 1801; and

Jacob, b. ca 1812 and married to Anna Ratzlaff.¹²

The Dietrich Block family listed as residents of Franzthal, Molotschna in 1835 came from Reichenberg, Kreis Danzig. David was the son of David Block, b. 1779. He married Katharina Braun, b. 1779. Their children were: Katharina, b. 1799; Dirk, b. 1802; Maria, b. 1804; Heinrich, b. 1808; David, b. 1811; Sara, b. 1815; and Wilhelm, b. 1817. This family moved to Russia in 1818.

Another Block family is listed in the Tragheimerweide Mennonite Church, Prussia records. The name Martin is prominent in this family. Martin Block (1740-1813) lived in Rudnerweide, Kreis Stuhm. His son, Martin, b. 1782, was married first to Maria Tjahrt (1780-1813) and then to Maria Block, b. 1791. Maria Block was the daughter of Gerhard Block (1742-1811) from Klein Schardau. Martin Block, b. 1782, was *Ältester* of the Rudnerweide Gemeinde (1807) and went to Russia in 1819. His family is listed in the Großweide census of 1835. His children were Heinrich, b. 1806; Martin, b. 1811; Maria (1815-1816); Gerhard, b. 1816; and Peter, b. 1818.

The Lutheran Church Record of Culmlists a Hermann Block, b. 1823, residing in Dorposch, Schwetz, and married in 1847 in Schönsee to Elizabeth Buller, b. 1820. We

have no record of this family moving to Russia, but the names seem to fit the Hermann Block line that lived in the Molotschna and later in Memrik. Hermann Block (1821-1912) in the Molotschna was the son of Hermann Block and was still living in Prussia in 1855. His brother Johann Block went to the Molotschna earlier since his son Heinrich was born in Liebenau, Molotschna in 1852.

The poet, Alexander Blok, who died in St. Petersburg in 1918 and who has been viewed by some as a possible descendant of the Kronsgarten Peter Block's brother, may have been confused with the Mennonite teacher and poet, Theodor Block, b. 1885. Theodor Block's poems were published in the 1920s and he is remembered in particular for writing the *Hungerlieder*.¹³

Although I was unable to connect the line of this talented writer to the Kronsgarten Peter Block, his ancestry may be of interest to our readers. Theodor Block's great-grandfather was Gerhard Block,¹⁴ b. 1778, and married to Ewa Kliwer, b. 1804. At the age of 79 years he moved from Poland to Russia taking his belongings with him on a two-wheeled cart, with son Peter in the harness. Because of family connections, he settled in the Molotschna Colony.

The following children were born to Gerhard Block and Ewa Kliwer: Peter, b. 1827, married Katarina Jantz in 1850; David, b. 1829, married Marianna Rose in 1850; Andreas, b. 1831; Helena, b. 1841; and Sara, b. 1843.

Their son, Peter Block, married to Katarina Jantz had the following children: Heinrich, b. 1851 in Mentnau twelve miles from Warsaw, and father of the poet, Theodore Block, b. Nov. 9, 1885 in Rueckenau, Molotschna; Kornelius, b. 1854 in Kicin (lived in retirement in Goessel, KS); and Peter, b. 1856 in Kicin.¹⁵

Endnotes:

1. Another story has it that this second Block is the predecessor of Alexander Blok, the poet who died in the famine of 1918 in St. Petersburg, Russia. On Blok's life cf. James H. Billington, *The Icon and the Axe. An Interpretive History of Russian Culture* (London, UK: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), 474, 476-8, 480-81, etc.

2. His ancestry goes back several generations in the Montau church records.

3. His wife's family probably resided in Gross Lubin.

4. Our birth date for the Kronsgarten Peter Block is April 17, which is a difference of 12 days. This agrees with the variation in the calendar between the Gregorian calen-

dar used in Prussia and the Julian calendar used in Russia around the year 1800.

5. David still resided in Montau in 1845. This is the only son who had a son besides Peter, which agrees with the *Rundschau* letter.

6. According to the writings of Peter Block, his father had only one sister, Anna in 1819, so Maria and Katharina must have died before 1819.

7. Jacob is not listed in the Montau birth records. In the year 1836 we find the death record of a Jacob Block, age 28, in Deutsch Kazun. He is the son of Salomon Block and Eliesabeth Unruh. Four brothers and one sister are noted as survivors, but no wife. We therefore assume he was single.

8. Peter Block wrote that he had received word of the death of all his uncles except Johann. Perhaps he was still alive in 1895.

9. On the Kronsweide Mennonite Church cf. I.P. Klassen. *The Kronsweide Mennonite Church in Russia: Its Villages and Elders*, translated from a German original by Edward Enns (Winnipeg, MB: Mennonite Heritage Centre, 1993), pb., 89 pp. See also Peter Isaak. *Stammbaum meiner Voreltern*, p. 78.

10. Cf. Delbert Plett. *Pioneers and Pilgrims. The Mennonite Kleine Gemeinde in Manitoba, Nebraska, and Kansas, 1874-1882*. (Steinbach, MB: D.F.P. Publications, 1990). See index.

11. Their children were: a daughter, b. 1825, Anna, b. 1829, and Heinrich, b. 1831.

12. Jacob, a son of theirs, was born in Franzthal on January 5, 1838 and married Susanna Toews (1838-1885) from Fuerstenau. They had twelve children. This family settled in Kansas, USA.

13. Theodor Block. *Hungerlieder* (Bad Hamburg, Germany, 1922). Available in the MHC Archives, Vol. 4323, File 10. This file also has other Block-related material in it. Cf. also Harry Loewen, "Mother, give me something to eat!: Theodor Heinrich Block and His *Hungerlieder* (1922)", *Journal of Mennonite Studies*, Volume 6, 1988, pp. 152-164.

14. On Theodor's life and work cf. Ernst Crous, "Block, Theodor Heinrich", *Mennonite Encyclopedia* Vol. 1, p. 363. Cf. also *Deutsch Kazun Vital Records and Church Records*.

15. He moved to Nebraska, USA in 1884. His descendants went to Saskatchewan, Canada, in 1908.

Margaret Kroeker is the director and head researcher of Mennonite Genealogy, Inc., Winnipeg, MB.

The Niebuhr Family Gathering

by Bill Klassen

After more than a year of planning by a committee dedicated to finding Niebuhr descendants in Canada, the gathering in Winkler on August 4-6, 1995, was a pleasant and rewarding experience. A total of 192 guests, some from as far away as Marienheide, Germany, registered for a weekend of sharing a common ancestry in the Niebuhr name. Of special interest, and concern was the fact that only one family with the Niebuhr name was present: Peter and Susan Niebuhr from Vancouver, BC. In the province of Manitoba there is only one Niebuhr name recorded in the 1995 telephone directories.

The theme chosen for the weekend was taken from Joshua 24:15, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

The process that culminated in this large number of people assembling in Winkler was started three years ago with a small, rather insignificant notice placed in several Mennonite publications. The notice simply stated, "Looking for Niebuhrs" and included an address and a telephone number. That little notice was the first step. It was followed by a small group meeting in Winnipeg on several occasions, and a meeting of 32 people in Donwood Manor, Winnipeg, MB in March of 1994.

All of the Niebuhr descendants at the meeting in Winkler discovered that they had

one common ancestor in a Jacob Niebuhr (1766-1835), who was born in Prussia, came to Russia in 1789, had four children from a first marriage and ten more from a second marriage to Aganeta Wiebe (1780-1848). Of these fourteen children, four died at an early age, and of the remaining ten, only eight are known to have descendants: Anna B. 1797, Jacob b. 1801, Maria b. 1803, Aganeta B. 1806, Abram b. 1807, David b. 1813, Gerhard b. 1818, Katharina b. 1822, and Aron b. 1826.

The Abram and Gerhard lines produced several generations of factory and mill owners in Russia, but the affluence that these Niebuhrs experienced came to an abrupt end following the Russian Revolution. Some of the Niebuhr descendants who gathered in Winkler for this occasion had never even heard of these affluent ancestors; with others it was just a memory. Most of those who came for the Niebuhr gathering were more interested in hearing of God's mercy in the lives of our ancestors as well as in the lives of present-day Niebuhr descendants.

According to the registration at the Niebuhr gathering, all four western provinces, as well as Ontario, were represented, but 75% of those present came from Manitoba, mainly from Winnipeg and the Winkler area. Four people had come from Germany and a family of five had arrived from the state of New Mexico.

A desire was expressed at the Winkler gathering by some to have another assembly in the future and have a book prepared about the Niebuhrs. A decision regarding those wishes is pending.

Murky Depths Examined - The JMU Conference in Winnipeg

by Irma Penn

"Before a bridge can be built," said Helmut Harry Loewen, "the sometimes murky depths below have to be probed". Loewen, head of the Anti-Racist Network of Western Canada said that only the sufferer or victim can make the decision to forgive. Examining, and probing at "hot issues" was exactly what was done at the three-day conference entitled "Building Bridges", the first-ever Jewish-Mennonite-Ukrainian conference held at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg August 28-30, 1995.

Lawrence Klippenstein, archivist for the Mennonite Heritage Centre stated that many people emigrated to Canada from Ukraine and Russia in the 1800s and 1920s for various reasons. Their descendants form the "Russian" Mennonite community in Canada today.

"Each group sees itself as victims and in each there was a victim," said Dr. Fred Stambrook in his summation remarks. "It is time to give up the 'we had it harder than any other' syndrome. There should be jointness. The three groups should work together. We have a lot of things to do together, if we only have the will."

All three groups have faced suffering while living in former Czarist Russia and the Soviet Union. In Canada, new generations assimilated but there are few contemporary issues that unite them. It is time to repair the past, for the betterment of new generations in "das neue Land". It is time to give up old myths and stop blaming others. It is time to look inward and ahead.

Questions and comments from the floor indicated an intense interest in the continuation of this type of dialogue. A follow-up conference was suggested.

The conference was sponsored by the Jewish Historical Society of Western Canada, the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the Manitoba East European Heritage Society (Ukrainian section).

Irma Penn is a journalist, artist and teacher residing in Winnipeg, MB.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Toews, J.B. *The Autobiography of a Twentieth Century Mennonite Pilgrim* (Fresno, CA: Center for MB Studies, 1995), pb., 218 pp., \$15.95 US.

by Harry Loewen

J.B. is not a weeping is not a weeping Jeremia - he is much too rational and realistic for that - but like the Old Testament Job, whose name resembles Toews' initials, J.B. asks questions, reflects on the ways of God, and struggles with God and colleagues about his own life and that of his denomination. The burden this MB patriarch carries is evident in every chapter of this autobiography - even in his writing style.

"As I reflect on my years in various levels of conference leadership," he writes, "I continue to grieve over the relentless move toward greater professionalization of the ministry . . . it has resulted in the institutionalization of the church. From a covenant people . . . we have drifted to become a mere association of independent churches. This is partly due to the influence of American evangelicalism with its emphasis on the benefits of salvation without a consistent biblical theology . . ." (pp. 191-92).

Born in 1906 in Ukraine, J.B. escaped from the Soviet Union as a young man and then went to Germany, Holland, England and eventually to Canada. Unlike many other Mennonite young men in the 1920s, Toews had begun to study liberal arts and theology in Europe. In Canada he had to help his family with farming, but his quest for knowledge, education and purpose in life left him restless and unfulfilled.

The thought of serving his church was always present, but he resisted it, for he did not want to remain poor all his life. It was his future wife, Nettie, who assured the struggling young man that, "it was alright to be poor". This put J.B.'s mind at ease and together with Nettie he devoted all his energies to the building of the Mennonite Brethren Church in education, missions, and conference work.

This autobiography of a Mennonite leader is different from other Mennonite memoirs. Toews does not merely record the various stages in his and his church's pilgrimage. Like a true prophet he expresses great love for his church and points out the direction for its future. But he also criticizes the MB conferences and their present leadership.

"Throughout my ministry I have been troubled by the absence of historical perspective among Mennonite Brethren. Esteemed leaders and colleagues, though deeply committed to the Scriptures, do not connect our theological heritage to our Anabaptist origins in the sixteenth century." Even the MB "Distinctives" of 1966, according to Toews, "made no reference to our historic origin so distinctly focused in the 1860 founding documents of the Mennonite Brethren" (pp. 120-21).

While recognizing his leadership gifts, Toews throughout his book expresses humility and modesty and readily acknowledges his own failures and weaknesses in ministry. With regard to his late wife Nettie and his three sons, J.B. becomes attractively human. His deep love and respect for them and his regret for having neglected them so often due to his many absences from home, are most touching.

The book includes numerous photographs of J.B.'s life and work. Mennonite Brethren would do well to heed the voice and pointing finger of one of their very best leaders.

Dr. Harry Loewen is the recently-retired holder of the Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, Winnipeg, MB.

Book Notes

Peter Kroeger has published a number of his German poems in *Ausgewählte Gedichte*, appearing in two different slightly varying editions (pb. 36 pp., 1995). Contact the author for copies at: 409-1060 Kimberly Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2K 4J7.

A Christian Response to Hunger. A History of the Canadian Foodgrains Bank (pb., 146 pp.) was researched and written by Betty Dyck. A research draft is available from the Canadian Foodgrains Bank at: 400-280 Smith, Winnipeg, MB R3C 1K2.

Isaac Tiessen of Aylmer, ON has published *Why I do Not Take the Sword* (Pathway Publishers, 1991, pb., 158 pp.). For copies write to the author at Route 4, Aylmer, ONT N5H 2R3. Includes an interesting section on the *Selbstschutz*, and parts of a diary by Tina Hildebrand (1919, Eichenfeld).

A major study of the Church of the Brethren titled *Brethren Society. The Cultural Transformation of a "Peculiar People"* (pb., 491 pp., 1995) has been written by Carl F. Bowman and published by Johns Hopkins University Press. Write to: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2715 North Charles St.,

Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218-4319.

In conjunction with the 70th anniversary of Mennonite immigration (1925-1995) to this area the Essex-Kent Mennonite Historical Association has published a book entitled *Biographies of our Late Leaders and Histories of the Mennonite Churches in Essex and Kent Counties*. It was edited by Gisela Schartner and Astrid Koop. The publication contains reports from the 14 Mennonite congregations in Essex and Kent counties, Ontario, and features the life stories of 27 deceased ministers. The 8" x 10 1/2" book consists of 150 pages of easy-to-read print and 41 photos. To order write to: EKMHA, 31 Pickwick Drive, Leamington, ON N8H 5C3. Cost: \$14.95 with \$3.50 extra for postage and handling.

Walfried Goossen has written *Anabaptism. A Dying Candle* (Winnipeg, MB: Henderson Books, 1994, pb., 79 pp.) as a searching critique of currently-practised applications of Anabaptist thought and ideas.

Plough Publishing House now offers its readers *He is our Peace. Meditations on Christian Nonviolence* (pb., 169 pp., \$10.00 US incl. postage). From the writings of Howard Goeringer, Eberhard Arnold, Christoph E. Blumhardt, and others. Order from: Plough Publishing House, H.B. Service Committee, Spring Valley Rd. 2, Box 446, Rt. 381 N., Farmington, PA USA 15437-9506.

Many people will be interested in Abram B. Giesbrecht's list of the first Mennonite immigrants moving to Paraguay. The book is entitled, *Die ersten mennonitischen Einwanderer in Paraguay* (pb., 84 pp., \$10.50). The lists include names of immigrants, age, place of birth (country), date of birth and place of origin at time of moving. Order from Loma Plata in the Menno Colony, Paraguay.

Just off the press is *Orenburg. Die letzte mennonitische Ansiedlung in Osteuropa* by Karl Fast with editorial help from Gerhard Ens (pb., 225 pp., \$25.00). Another new book on Orenburg Mennonites is Jacob Rempel's *Dolinowka Zur Geschichte eines deutschen Dorfes in Russland* (1995, pb., 88 pp., \$20.00). We also noted recently that an older but still very useful book *Orenburg am Ural* by P.P. Dyck has been reprinted. Another very new book is *Memories from My Life - Heinrich J. Friesen* edited by Rudy and Irwin Friesen (1995, pb., 192 pp.). All items may be ordered from the Mennonite Heritage Centre.