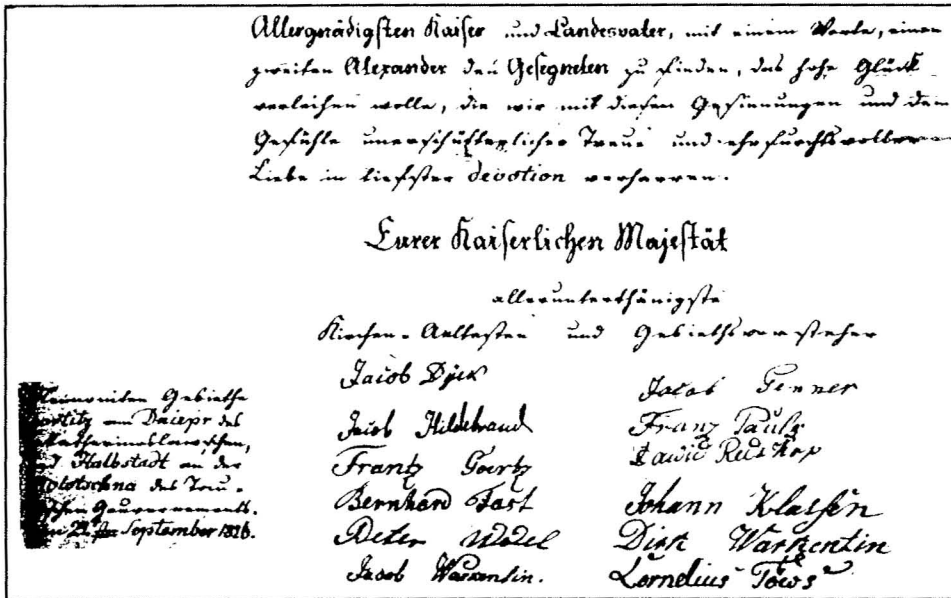


MENNONITE HISTORIAN

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Photocopy of the final page of the 1826 letter with signatures

Once Again - The Privilegium - A Letter from 1826

by John B. Toews

Mennonites residing in the absolutistic states of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe could not guarantee their continuity by appealing to their democratic rights, citing constitutional guarantees or raising the issue of religious toleration. New rulers often altered existing agreements or redefined past guarantees. Confronted by constant political flux, Mennonites living in countries like Poland, Prussia and Russia became rather adept at renegotiating "perpetual rights" with each successive autocrat. Protected by variant charters of rights and privileges subject to due democratic processes, it is difficult for us today to appreciate the ongoing tensions of a dissenting community surrounded by an official religion often given to intolerance. We may be tempted to criticize or even ridicule the nineteenth century Mennonite preoccupation with the *Privilegium* which

governed their settlement in Russia. Their anxiety had a factual basis in the politics of that day: autocracies easily lost track of what had happened in the past.

The letter which follows graphically illustrates the problem.¹ Tsar Alexander I died in 1825. He was succeeded by his younger brother Nicholas, whose ascension was marked by the so-called Decembrist Revolt. While a complete failure in political terms, the uprising confirmed Nicholas as a reactionary and absolutistic ruler. His predecessor, Alexander I, seems to have known the Mennonites well. He visited the Molotschna colony on two occasions, once in 1818² and again in 1825.

Memories of the 1825 visit permeate the letter. The circumstances of the visit were personal rather than official. Tsarina Elizabeth became ill in the spring of 1825 and doctors recommended a milder

climate. Eventually the imperial couple ended up in Tagenrog on the Sea of Azov. Alexander made several journeys in the vicinity of the city in late October. On November 1 he set out on an inspection tour which took him nine hundred miles in a seventeen day period. His visit to the Molotschna Mennonite settlement was documented in some detail by A. Fadeyev, a chancery official in the province of Ekaterinoslav.³ Fadeyev's account reflects Alexander's obvious affection for the Mennonite settlers, an impression confirmed in the letter drafted by the elders and district leaders.

This letter, amid its verbosity, has one recurring theme. Will the new tsar reaffirm old privileges? It is essential to obtain the good will of the autocrat of the Russian Empire. Appropriately, the letter is effusive and filled with repeated assurances of Mennonite submission to the new ruler. There are words with multiple, flattering overtones -- "most August, most illustrious, most serene highness." The pious memory of Nicholas' deceased brother is evoked again and again. As foreign emigrants only recently settled in a new land the signatories of the letter display considerable political savvy. Perhaps they learned their art in Poland or Prussia.

Most August, All-powerful Tsar, All-gracious Tsar and Ruler

Since our arrival in South Russia, we Mennonites have settled in fifty-seven villages along the Dnieper and Molotschna [rivers]. We have lived quietly and peaceably under the wise, good and benevolent government of the former most illustrious tsar and all-gracious regent. We cannot praise and thank our all-good God enough -- the all-gracious Ruler of all human destiny -- for the anointed [ruler] he placed over Russia's people. The high

(cont'd on p. 2)

Letter from 1826

(cont'd from p. 1)

worth of such good fortune daily fills our hearts with joyous and deep feelings of sincere subservience. The nature of our submissive thankfulness is such that we feel confident in expressing our felt concerns to your imperial majesty in deepest humility and with the confidence that you will graciously accept them.

Most illustrious, all-gracious Tsar and lord! Since Tsar Alexander of blessed memory passed on to a better life we, the Mennonites living in Russia have been plunged into deep sorrow through the loss of our eminent tsar and ruler, whose protection, good will and benevolence we have had the good fortune to experience in great measure. Now we are overwhelmed with a growing uneasiness which oppresses the hearts of each of our coreligionists. In this our sorrow we feel compelled humbly to present our concern to your eminence.

Some forty years ago her majesty the blessed Empress Catherine II--of fond remembrance--sent an imperial invitation to our coreligionists in Prussia. It declared that families who migrated to South Russia would receive settlement loans for their new settlement as well as additional rights and privileges. [The content] of this imperial invitation deeply impacted would-be migrants and many families. Once they received their passes a considerable number of families left their homes in Danzig and the Kingdom of Prussia. They hastened to their designated settlement areas in New Russia where they now live in fifty-seven well ordered villages. Until now they have had the good fortune fully to enjoy the rights and privileges so graciously granted them.

His majesty, Tsar Paul I of blessed memory, graciously reaffirmed all the articles of the agreement by granting a charter of privilege. This inestimable act of imperial grace ensured our tranquility of mind and sense of well-being.

His glorious, unforgettable and blessed majesty Tsar Alexander, who now rests with God, visited our colonies on two

occasions. His benevolent gestures, his passionate speeches filled with warmth and wisdom and finally, his assuring declarations of his good will [to us] filled our hearts with a joy never before experienced. As a gesture of our inexpressible thankfulness to the Lord's anointed we made no request which might have burdened or distressed him, though we were certain he would have graciously granted it.

In the unfathomable providence of the all-ruling God, the precious life of his blessed anointed ended prematurely. Now we orphaned strangers have been deeply and overwhelmingly perturbed in our minds and spirits. For the reasons just cited we neglected to request the imperial confirmation of our privileges, a state of affairs which causes us considerable anxiety. Unfortunately we were not able to [officially] secure the exalted benevolence and grace from his [former] imperial majesty. Now when we here [in Russia] as well as those in Prussia who wish to join us look into the distant future we fear the complete invalidation and elimination of [our special privileges]. We therefore plead for your all-gracious confirmation of them.

This, illustrious tsar and benevolent father of our land, is the sole reason for our anxiety. We therefore request the highest and most gracious affirmation of our privileges which were drafted on September 6, 1760. In the name of all of our coreligionists, we the undersigned elders, ministers and heads of our two districts, humbly lay our concerns at your feet and plead for a most gracious hearing and resolution of the same. We hope that our afflictions will be alleviated and that the merciful God will hear our fervent prayers and intercessions. May He grant us orphaned foreigners the good fortune to find an all-gracious tsar and father, a second Alexander the blessed. Your imperial majesty in this frame of mind and with feelings of devoted loyalty and respectful love we want to persevere in [our] deepest devotion [to you].

The church elders and district heads:

Jacob Dyck
Jacob Hildebrand
Franz Goerz
Bernhard Fast
Peter Wedel
Jacob Warkentin
Jacob Penner
Franz Pauls
David Redekop
Johann Klassen
Dirk Warkentin
Cornelius Toews

Mennonite districts of Chortitz on the Dnieper in the Ekaterinoslav Region and Halbstadt in the Molotschna in Taurida Province on September 22, 1826.

Endnotes

¹ The letter is preserved in Fond 383, Opis 29, Dielo 0439 in the State Archives of St. Petersburg University.

² Some reference to the 1818 visit can be found in "Ein hoher Besuch," *Christlicher Familienkalender*, IV (1900), pp 112-113.

³ See "Czar Alexander I Visits the Molotschna Colonies," *Mennonite Life*, vol. 29, no. 3 (September, 1974), pp. 57-59; P.M. Friesen, *Alt-Evangelische Mennonitische Bruderschaft* (Halbstadt, 1911), p. 159; Franz Isaac, *Die Molotschnaer Mennoniten* (Halbstadt, 1908), pp. 13-14.

John B. Toews is currently Professor of Church History at Regent College, Vancouver, B.C.

Mountain Lake Research

A newly organized family research centre in Mountain Lake, Minnesota has been established to discover and preserve genealogical records and to share these records with present and future generations.

Researchers wishing background information on the Mountain Lake area can direct their inquiries to Family Research Centre, Box 113, Mt. Lake, MN 56159, phone 507-956-2644 or e-mail: djstoesz@juno.com

GENEALOGY AND FAMILY HISTORY

by Alf Redekopp

Queries

Enns/Wiebe/Wiens: Searching for information and descendants of Franz Enns born 1751 at Czattkau, died 18 February 1806 at Czattkau, married (1) Anna Wiebe, born 16 April 1776, died 28 February 1802 at Czattkau, married (2) Maria Wiens 12 August 1804. Children: Johann Enns born 1785 who married Anna Thimm. Contact: LaVida J. Lyda, Box 211, Whitehall, MT 59759.

Lempke/Lempe: Searching for information and descendants of Abraham Lempke - Lempe, born 1782 as son of Jacob Lempke, and died 1829 at Tiegenhoff. His daughter Justina Lempke (10 April 1815-1 March 1857) married (1) Franz Peters, and (2) Franz Enns. Her children were: Gerhard Peters born 28 February 1838, Abraham Peters, born and died in 1841, and Frank Enns born 17 May 1854 in Schoenau, Molotschna. Son Abraham Peters stayed in Russia. Son Frank Enns married Anna Ratzlaff in Mountain Lake, Minnesota in 1882 and died in St. James, Minnesota 16 April 1917. Contact: LaVida J. Lyda, Box 211, Whitehall, MT 59759.

Groening: Searching for information on Jacob Groening, father of Peter Groening born March 12, 1888 in Bergfeld, Manitoba, married Maria Martens born Dec. 20, 1889. Both died in Mexico, 1966 and 1959 respectively. Her parents were Johan Martens and Margaretha Peters born in Russia. Please contact Margie Sawatzky, 44 Clarence St., Aylmer, ON N5H 1T7.

Dyck/Dueck: I am looking for information on Diedrich Dyck born Oct. 1872 in Schoenhorst, South Russia. He came to Canada in 1897 with his grandparents Peter and Maria Esau on the S.S. Polynesia No. 30 and was registered as "Heid Duck". His father Peter Dyck planned to come later but never did. Soon after arriving in Manitoba Peter Esau died. I want to know why Diedrich's father never came, and if

he had other family members in Russia besides his widowed father, Peter Dyck b. Nov. 14, 1844 in Schoenhorst and married on Oct. 10, 1871 to Elisabeth Esau b. July 13, 1849 in Schoenhorst. Diedrich Dyck who was raised by the Esaus in Manitoba married first Helena Krahn (Dec. 3, 1872-Dec. 4, 1946) who also was born in Schoenhorst South Russia. Diedrich remarried two more times after Helena. He died in Mexico. Please contact Margie Sawatzky at 44 Clarence St. Aylmer ON. N5H 1T7.

Krahn/Wolf: I am searching for descendants of Jacob Wolf and Anna Krahn (b. ca. 1865, a daughter of Jacob Krahn) of Fürstenland, Russia. Jacob and Anna's daughter Sara Wolf married Johann Sawatzky, and their daughter married an Epp. Apparently Sara died in Hague, Saskatchewan. I would very much appreciate hearing from any descendants or relatives, or anyone who could direct me to them. Contact: Agatha C. Enns Ratzlaff, 31861 Beech Avenue, Abbotsford, B.C. V2T 1G8 or e-mail: banner@uniserve.com.

Peters: I am searching for the descendants of Daniel Daniel Peters of Petersdorf. Please include all pertinent data: birth dates, date of death, marriage, parents' names, place of birth, residence, etc. Please include the maiden name of the women. I hope to publish my lists in the near future. Contact: Herbert D. Peters, 20 Faulkner Crescent, Saskatoon, SK., S7L 3R4

Recent Publications

Violet Lowen. *Martin and Helena Hiebert* (Winnipeg, MB : Private publication, 1997) 76 pp.

This book traces the family history of Martin Hiebert (1858-1944) and Helena Sawatzky (1867-1952) who emigrated from the Bergthal Colony in Russia in the 1870s and settled in Manitoba, Canada. Contact: Vi Loewen, 174 Howden Road, Winnipeg, MB R2J 1L5.

Margaret (Klassen) Neufeld. *Klassen-Bergen Family History* (Winnipeg, MB : Private publication, 1997) 56 pp.

The book traces the ancestors and

descendants of Abram Klassen (1883-1973) of Tiefengrund, Saskatchewan (near Laird) who first married Anganetha Bergen (1889-1918) and then Helena Bergen (1898-1997). Contact: Margaret Neufeld, 152 Barrington, Winnipeg, MB R2M 2B2.

Bill Klassen. *The Descendants of Margaret, Jacob and Aron Pauls* (Winnipeg, MB : Private publication, 1997) 146 pp.

This book traces the descendants of three children of Cornelius John Pauls and Margaret Froese who lived in the village of Burwalde, Russia. These children are: Margaret Pauls (1875-1932) who married Peter Neubuhr (1875-1932), Jacob Pauls (1891-1949) who married Maria Grunau (1896-1986), and Aron Pauls (1894-) who married Maria Pauls (1895-). Contact: Bill Klassen, 120 Roselawn Bay, Winnipeg, MB R2G 1W6.

Irma Jupp. *Descendants of Bernard Warkentin* (Ottawa, ON : Private publication, 1997) 70 pp.

The compiler primarily traces the descendants of her grand-father Bernhard Warkentin (1857-1916) and the descendants of his siblings John, Jakob (1859), Gerhard, Heinrich, Anna (Mrs. Heinrichs), Maria (Mrs. Braun) and Katharina (Mrs. Derksen). Bernhard Warkentin (1857-1916) was born in Waldheim, Molotschna and died in the Kuban settlement in Russia. Contact: Irma Jupp, 126 Clearbrook Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Y 2L2.

Irma Jupp. *Descendants of Gerhard Schellenberg 1725-1802* (Ottawa, ON : Private publication, 1997) 50 pp.

This compilation traces some of the descendants of Gerhard Schellenberg (1725-1802) who was born in Tiegenhof, Prussia. Specifically it focuses on the descendants of a David Schellenberg (1856), Abram Schellenberg (1857-1913), Katharina Schellenberg (Mrs. P.P.

(cont'd on p.6)

Send inquiries to Alf Redekopp, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, MB R3P 0M4 or 169 Riverton Avenue., Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5.

E-mail: aredekopp@confmenno.ca

Can You Identify?

Recently this granite cairn in the form of a branchless tree was found by descendants of the Johann Schroeder family while on a heritage tour in Russia. The cairn, which has been moved from its original location, was part of the family cemetery on the Schroeder/Dick estates known as Neuhoof/Rosenhof, near the present day town of Wesseloje.

The Schroeder family would like to know whether anyone has information relating to this cairn. At one time there was a plaque on the cairn, but that has now been lost. A photograph of the cairn in its original location, or information regarding the inscription on the plaque, would be appreciated by the family. If you have any information relating to this cairn please contact the Mennonite Heritage Centre.



Heritage as Transformation

By Robert J. Suderman

The historian is one who recuperates lost memories and then distributes them – as though they were a sacrament to those who have lost the memory.

In truth, what better communitarian sacrament could there be than the memories of a common past, a past marked by the existence of pain, sacrifice, and hope?

To gather in order to distribute. The historian is, thus, not simply an archeologist of memories, but is a sower of visions and therefore of hope.

Rubem Alves

Alves, a historian/theologian from Latin America, captures with these words, the energizing, dynamic, and creative function of recuperated memory for the life of a people. He speaks out of a context of oppression, poverty, and violence. Memory, a fuller understanding of who we have been, harnessed for the task of forging a vision of who we might become, is a powerful tool for transformation.

Could this insight hold for Canadian Mennonites? I reflect on the work of our Heritage Centre in Winnipeg. Many may see this centre simply as archives: a place where dusty documents get filed and stored so that they can yellow with age and lie in dignity. Could not Alves' vision of the historian's task also hold true for the archivist's work? The goal of heritage is not archival, but trans-formational. Heritage is not simply the documentation of the old, but providing vision and direction for what could yet be.

The archivist too reaps in order to sow, harvests in order to plant, garners in order to distribute. The archivist is a guardian of memory produced by vision. And in returning this memory to the people becomes the catalyst for new energy and creative hope.

Robert J. (Jack) Suderman is Executive Secretary, Resources Commission Conference of Mennonites in Canada.

Recent Acquisitions

Rev. A.H. Born and Rev. Heinrich Born. Donated by Anna L. Schroeder are photographs, books, sermon notes, and diaries of both men.

Rev. William Falk. Elizabeth Falk has donated his library of books and pamphlets.

A.A. Friesen. Helen Wieler, daughter, has donated photographs pertaining to the 1920s immigration and the *Studien Commission*.

Wiens Family Record. Donated by Don and Gloria Dyck, this notebook contains family records covering the period from 1748-1903. The notebook begins in the early 1800s.

Maria (Friesen) Pauls. Helen Friesen (Calgary) has donated a box of letters from the USSR. The letters cover the time period of 1945-1982.

Epp Family Diaries. Donated by Dennis Epp, the two boxes of diaries cover several generations and include diaries of David Epp (1781-1843), and David G. Epp.

George Neufeld Diaries. Donated by Helen Neufeld these diaries describe his work with MCC in Europe (reconstruction) following World War II (1946-1947).

George K. Epp 1924-1997

Historian, teacher, administrator, minister and friend are some descriptions one could use to identify George and his sojourn among us. Within the Mennonite historical and literary community he was very active. He was a long time member of various historical societies and was intimately involved in numerous research and writing projects.

Sadly, his untimely death took him away from what was certainly to be his most significant project, a three volume history of Mennonites in Russia written for *Aussiedler* living in Germany.

George will be greatly missed and his contributions long remembered.



Paul Doerksen (left) and Lanna Chau (right)

P. M. Friesen Essay Contest Winners

Two Manitobans, both at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute, were declared winners of the 1997 P. M. Friesen History Essay Contest. The award is presented by the Historical Commission of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

Paul Doerksen, a teacher at Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute in Winnipeg, is the winner of the Graduate School/Seminary division. Lanna Chau, also of Winnipeg, is the winner of the High School division.

Doerksen's paper-- "Anabaptist Resources for Ecclesial Identity"--was written for a class taught by Professor Abe Dueck in the Winnipeg Theological Consortium.

Chau's paper-- "One Will Never Fall Too Hard: The Vietnamese Mennonite Church--As A Challenge in Ethnic Churches"-- was written for a Mennonite history class taught by Mary Friesen at the Mennonite Brethren Collegiate Institute.

Both Doerksen and Chau will receive a \$100.00 award for their winning entries.

The P. M. Friesen History Essay Contest was established in 1992 by the Historical Commission to encourage original research and writing by students. The members of the Commission are the judges of the entries.

50 Years Ago -- New Churches Dedicated

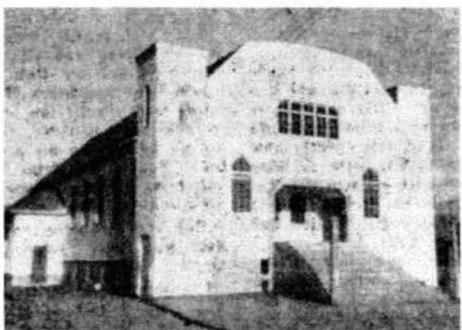
Fifty years ago a number of Mennonite Brethren congregations were building new

sanctuaries. A glance at some of the issues of the *Mennonitische Rundschau* and the reports of dedications of new sanctuaries indicates that the number of sanctuaries built may have been unsurpassed in the decades since that time. On November 16, 1947, the Steinbach Mennonite Brethren Church dedicated its new sanctuary. Rev. A. H. Unruh was the guest speaker at the dedication. Additions were later made both to the front and the rear of the building. Then a new sanctuary was completed adjacent to the former building (1987). The former building is still used for Sunday School and other purposes today. On December 7, 1947, the Chilliwack (Broadway) Mennonite Brethren congregation dedicated its new facility. This marked the emergence of a new city congregation. The East Chilliwack (Central) Mennonite Brethren Church had been established only two years earlier in 1945. The new building served the Broadway congregation until 1969 when another larger sanctuary was built on the same site.

On December 21, 1947, the Winkler Mennonite Brethren Church dedicated its new sanctuary. This sanctuary has also been replaced more recently (1988) by a modern building further from the centre of town.



Steinbach M.B. Church (1947)



Chilliwack (Broadway) M.B. Church (1947)

C Centre for
M Mennonite
B Brethren
S Studies in Canada
1 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Canada R2L 2E5

New Publication - For Sale

David Ewert, *Honour such People*. Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies, 1997. pb., 140 pp., \$14.95.

This volume consists of the biographies of eight leaders in the Mennonite Brethren Church during the past approximately seventy years.

Order from: Centre for M.B. Studies, 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, MB R2L 2E5 (204-669-6575)

New Volumes in *Perspectives on Mennonite Life and Thought*

The Historical Commission of the General Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches and Kindred Productions have published twelve volumes in this series since 1977 and an additional volume is about to be released. In 1997 the following volumes have been released:

Peter Penner, *Russians, North Americans and Telugus: The Mennonite Brethren Mission in India 1885-1975*; Jacob Loewen, Wesley Prieb, *Only the Sword of the Spirit*; and Marvin E. Kroeker, *Comanches and Mennonites on the Oklahoma Plains: A.J. and Magdalena Becker and the Post Oak Mission*.

A fourth volume will be released early in 1998. It is by Abe J. Dueck and is entitled, *Moving Beyond Secession: Defining Russian Mennonite Brethren Mission and Identity 1872-1922*.



Winkler M.B. Church (1947)

Grandfather's Clock

by Henry J. Funk

In Volume XVII, No. 2, June, 1991 you featured a clock in the **Mennonite Historian** as submitted by a Tony Funk of Hague, SK.

Here is one more article of memorabilia so typical of Mennonite tradition that may be of interest to someone steeped in Mennonite history.

This clock was manufactured by P. Lepp, Kolony Chortitz, N 121, 1843, as imprinted on the outermost cogwheel of the movement.

It has only one hand, the hour hand, and is driven by gravity (cord, weight and pendulum).

The history of the clock goes something like this:

My great-grandfather, Jacob Klassen (1808-1862), purchased it from the manufacturer in 1843. He moved to Bergthal, one of the five villages formed during the years 1836-1852, about 100 miles ESE of Chortitz. In 1875 his widow, Justina Kroeker (Peters) (1816-1878), moved to Canada with her family, settling on the East Reserve. In 1879 Johann K. Klassen, (1857-1934) my grandfather, the youngest member of the family, was granted ownership of the clock as a wedding present by the other brothers and sisters. In the early 1880s my grandfather with his young family moved to Hochstadt, near Altona, Manitoba. In 1899 he repainted it and put his initials and the year on the face of the clock. During all these wanderings and emigrations the clock has ticked and tocked away the time and has steadfastly remained in the possession of the Klassen family, and still is to this day. By this time it is truly a grandfather's clock. And it has kept accurate time with normal care throughout the years. The mechanism looks like new and is none the worse for wear. But it never "stopped short never to go again when the old man died" in 1934.

Eventually the clock came to rest with my Aunt Aganetha Klassen (Peters), who passed away on May 11, 1995 in her 102nd year of life, the only remaining member of her parents' family.

Several years before she died, she felt she could no longer cope with the upkeep



P. Lepp clock built in 1843

of her house in Altona by herself (her husband had passed away in 1965). She decided to sell everything and move into a senior's housing suite. I then asked her what had happened to that dear old clock which I, among many others, had come to cherish so much over the years. She led me by the hand into her bedroom, and there hung the clock, as stately as ever. She said it did not work anymore; ten minutes, and then it would stop. She added that it would have to go on the auction block because she had no place for it in her new surroundings. But she expressed the wish that it not fall into foreign hands. I then and there vowed that I would do everything in my power not to let that happen. She then warned me that I could expect the clock to go as high as \$500, a price others of similar status had fetched in the neighborhood in recent years.

At the auction the clock was put on the agenda as the very last item. At first the bidding was fairly brisk, but when the bids went to \$400 all bidders dropped out except the antique dealer and myself. He hung on tenaciously until the bid went to \$800, when he finally gave up the ghost, so to speak.

Neetyemum (as everybody always called her, even non-relatives, probably in deference to her age and ever-pleasant disposition) was always quite anxious about the famous clock. Quite frequently when

we went to see her she inquired about it. I informed her that as long as it was precisely leveled it worked perfectly.

The clock by itself looked kind of bare and lonesome. So a short while after I had it in my possession I built a mahogany cabinet around it, as you can see. The two extra weights and counterweights are fake. They were added to make the whole look more sophisticated as well as more like the regular grandfather's clocks of that time.

I have numerous watches and clocks: wrist watches, pocket watches, alarm clocks, wall clocks and what have you, not all in working order, yet all collector's items.

But, of course, the most prized of all is my dearly beloved grandfathers clock, an heirloom held in honor by my people ever since it was purchased in Russia in 1843.

Henry J. Funk lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Recent Publications

(cont'd from p. 3)

Heiebrecht (1859-1934), Heinrich Schellenberg (1860), Jakob Schellenberg (1862) and Johann Schellenberg (1864). This book includes short biographical sketches, photocopies of some original letters and postcard, as well as photographs.

Contact: Irma Jupp, 126 Clearbrook Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Y 2L2.

Justina Peters. *Wiens Family Keepsakes and some remembrances of Mom & Dad* (Saskatoon, SK : Herbert D. Peters, 1997) 84 pp.

This family history book is a tribute to John J. Wiens (1891-1971) and his wife Helena J. Wiens (1899-1984) who both died in Morden, Manitoba. The book includes an ancestry chart documenting this couple's common ancestry in Johan Janzen (1752-1823) and Maria Bergmann (1758-1808) who emigrated in 1804 to Petershagen, Molotschna. It continues with this couple's own stories and descriptions of their experiences in Russia prior to 1926, and then in Canada, as well as translations of various family keepsakes such as personal poems and a love letter. Contact: Herbert D. Peters, 1420 Faulkner Crescent, Saskatoon, SK S7L 3R4.

The Unruh Umbrella: a resource for genealogists researching the Unruh family name (Winnipeg, MB : Private publication, November 1997) 16 pp.

This item is a newsletter edited by Peggy Regehr of Winnipeg for persons interested in gathering and sharing information on the Unruh / Unrau family. The first issue contained a survey of over a dozen Unruh families as well as contributions from a number of genealogists with Unruh connections. Other features include inquiries, pedigree charts, lists of descendants, short articles and translations of original source material. Contact: Peggy Regehr, 55 Pleasant Bay, Winnipeg, MB R2K 0E2, phone 204-661-1721 or e-mail: pregehr@escape.ca.

Book Reviews

(cont'd from p. 8)

official English tone, presents the reader with a world as peaceful and secure as can be imagined. Plett's, raucous and raw, undaunted by conventions of propriety in literature, disturbs the reader at every turn. Plett's strength lies in his ability to disturb and still entertain; Yoder's lies in his great mastery of literary style and moral appropriateness. Yoder's book has sold hundreds of thousands of copies. Plett's will be lucky to sell two thousand. Why? The world does not like to be disturbed. It longs for, pays for, an affirmation of permanence, hope, love and faith of a pure sort.

Doug Reimer is a lecturer in the English Department at University of Manitoba.

Book Notes

by Ken Reddig

Books recently received span many different topics. Of interest to readers with roots in local communities will be the *The Avery Years: 1909-1957* by Dick H. Epp. The book is a good treatment of the story of the Avery school district near Glenbush, Saskatchewan. Replete with photographs, maps and a wonderful colour illustration on the cover, the book is available from Episode Publications, 2326 Cairns Avenue, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7J 1V1.

Two books on the Reesor community in

Ontario have appeared. *Only A Cairn Remains: The Story of the Settlement of Reesor 1925-1967* has been written by Karen Seidemann. In 60 pages she traces the history of this community and closes with the comment, "Reesor will be remembered even though the forest reclaims the meadows and fields and the log houses have long ago crumbled." The book is available from White Mountain Publications, Box 5180, New Liskeard, Ontario P0J 1P0. The second book on Reesor is *Reesor: The Story of a Northern Ontario Settlement 1925-1967*. Written by Paul Siemens, this book of 88 pages includes maps, photographs and, of particular interest, the Township Concession Lots, names of owners and dates when patents were granted. The book retails for \$ 12.00, including mailing costs and can be obtained from the author at 2301 - 155 Marlee Avenue, Toronto, Ontario M6B 4B5.

John A. Hostetler's book, *Hutterite Society*, is now available in paperback. Copies can be ordered from John Hopkins University Press, 2715 N. Charles St., Baltimore, Maryland, 21218-4319 or through your local bookstore.

Hilda Lohrenz Bergen has written a personal account entitled *Immigrant's Daughter*. Hilda is the daughter of Gerhard Lohrenz, Mennonite educator and historian, and she writes about her early years in the communities in which her father taught. The book is available from the Mennonite Heritage Centre for \$ 9.95 plus tax and shipping.

Recently received is the first volume of Dr. Gerge K. Epp's three volume history of the Mennonites in Russia, *Geschichte Der Mennoniten in Russland: Deutsche Täufer in Russland*. This first volume recounts the Mennonite story up to 1850. The publisher, Logos Verlag in Germany, informs us that the second volume will be published early in 1998, and the third volume, unfinished at the time of the authors untimely death, will be completed by another author and hopefully published within the next few years. The book retails for \$ 38.99 in Canada and is available from Mennonite Books, 844-K McLeod Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba R2G 2T7.

A large illustrated book has recently been published in Germany recounting the

story of *Das Dorf Zentral: Unser plattdeutscher Heimatort im Gebiet Woronjesh, Russland*. Written and compiled by Susanne Isaak, the book retails for approximately \$ 75.00 Canadian. The book is amply illustrated with photographs, maps (several in colour) and copies of original documents. The volume is currently sold out. The Centre for MB Studies and the Mennonite Heritage Centre each have a copy.

The history of the Mennonite Brethren Mission in India 1885-1975 has just been published by Kindred Publications. Extensively researched by Dr. Peter Penner, presently of Calgary, Alberta, the book is entitled *Russians, North Americans, and Telugus*. Combined with a selection of photographs and thorough endnotes, the text comprises 300 pages in this 413 page book. Mennonite Brethren should be interested in this book since it tells the story of the largest Mennonite Brethren conference in the world. The book is available in Canada from Kindred Publications, 169 Riverton Ave., Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2L 2E5.

Helmut Harder, General Secretary of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada, has recently had his study guide *Understanding the Faith From a Mennonite Perspective* published by Faith and Life Press. Based on the confession of faith accepted by the General Conference Mennonite Church and the Mennonite Church the book retails for \$10.00 and is available from the CMBC bookstore, 600 Shaftesbury Blvd., Winnipeg, R3P 0M4.

Peter Brock has published a booklet on *Testimonies of Conscience sent from the Soviet Union to the War Resisters' International 1923-1929*. This small booklet retails for \$ 5.00 Canadian and is available from the author at the Department of History, University of Toronto, Ont. M5S 3G3.

Honouring Peter Brock's pioneering leadership and scholarly attainments on peace history is *The Pacifist Impulse in Historical Perspective* edited by Harvey L. Dyck. Containing twenty-three essays, which include both Christian and other religious and philosophical surveys of peace history, this 444 page book is published by the University of Toronto Press.

BOOK REVIEWS

Yoder, Joseph, W. **Rosanna of the Amish** (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995), pb., 320 pp. and Plett, Delbert. **Sarah's Prairie** (Winnipeg, MB: Windflower Communications, 1995), pb., 349 pp.

Reviewed by Doug Reimer

I was recently asked why I thought Joseph W. Yoder's historical fiction **Rosanna of the Amish** (Herald Press 1995) had sold as well as it had since it was first published in 1940 (375,000 copies). One way of thinking out an answer is to compare Yoder's novel to another Mennonite novel, Delbert F. Plett's **Sarah's Prairie** (Windflower Communications 1995).

Rosanna of the Amish, set in Pennsylvania in the second half of the nineteenth century, tells the life story of an orphaned Irish Catholic girl adopted by an unmarried Amish Mennonite woman who successfully raises her in the faith and traditions of the Amish people. Rosanna resists pressures from members of her family to repudiate the Amish religion and to return to her Catholic roots and triumphs over the forces of selfishness and change. This victory of the conservative and good greatly satisfies the readership's appetite for heroic loyalty.

Sarah's Prairie similarly tells the story of a sincere young Mennonite, regaling its readers with the quirky adventures of Martien Koep, son of Isebrandt and Liesabet Koep, son and daughter-in-law of Sarah Koep after whom a particular fictional region of the Mennonite East Reserve in Manitoba takes its name. Martien's life initially develops along less loyal and proper lines than Sarah's, but by the end of the novel, his newfound devotion and faith equal Sarah's in ardency and respectability. Martien at first rebels with a certain degree of local notoriety, then experiences conversion, and after a few trials of his faith including a brief flirtation with the evangelical Morsavian bride of Christ, thankfully adopts the humble "Old Laender" faith of his fathers.

If these two books have this

faithfulness in common, why will Yoder's novel outsell Plett's ten times over in the course of their existence? I want to suggest two reasons. The obvious one is the style of writing. Yoder's writing flows and meanders like a brook through the *hortus conclusus* of our pastoral English minds. It's prose, sophisticated and suave, understands or presents itself as understanding, the complex conventions of the literature which the British once assumed every subject in its commonwealth, and in the English-speaking world for that matter, would have fully incorporated. Rosanna says:

"Before he drifted off to sleep, he pondered the simple, efficient life of this plain woman. Again and again, the words "quiet simplicity, peace, and contentment" floated through his mind. What a supper! What cleanliness! What piety! What freedom from strife and rivalry! And what joy and gladness Rosanna showed in obeying Elizabeth's every wish!" (p. 71)

Compare this with a passage from **Sarah's Prairie**. "It still shuddered Martien to think about that day. He remembered how scared he had been: Zoop Zak was lying in the coffin so still and white and all dressed up in his pin-striped soakj suit. There was the smell of formaldehyde embalming-fluid which they were just starting to use at the time. The substance created a distinctive odour of death which nauseated Martien even years later. It was awful to think that the Morsavians in Salem were saying that Zoop Zak had died in a state of unrepentance and would have to spend eternity in the lake of fire." (p. 37)

All conventions of English literary learning are flouted in the latter paragraph: it uses non English words; it employs awkward verbs, being inattentive to careful choice, because careful choice doesn't suit its purposes; it introduces into sadness the worst, least uplifting information (one doesn't speak of formaldehyde in a description of funerals if one is writing serious English fiction); it allows very funny names for characters, and in this funeral context humour disturbs the peace that serious English fiction would attempt to achieve, like a preacher at such a funeral himself would do.

All of English literature's technology combine to create the first passage. See

here the standards of classic English literature and rhetoric, inherited from the whole history of Greek and Roman writing: well-chosen verbs, effortlessly appropriate to the tone and intent of the passage; varied sentence structure to keep the prose alive and pleasing, a series of persuasive exclamatory statements which decorously coerce the reader's emotional agreement with the author's sententiae about Rosanna's refined obedience. Every possible resource of language – all of language's subtle powers – are engaged by Yoder to deliver his message. Such a marriage of language and message we may call the "major" imagination.

Plett's linguistic imagination is "minor". But please don't assume that the minor is insignificant or less valuable somehow than the major. The very opposite, in fact, is true if the claim of Gilles Deleuze is taken into account (and it should be; he is the author of over thirty acclaimed books on the thought of the world's most important philosophers, including Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kant and many others). It is exactly the "minor", Deleuze argues, which effectively brings about change in language and literature. The major actually hates change and prefers always to pretend to endorse change while actually resisting it with a grip on the permanent as tenacious as a drowning girl's grip on her lifeguard's arms and legs. No, the minor is that which, by one means or another, forces major language to examine its own assumptions and agendas and to reluctantly change how it thinks about the (moral) universe. Deleuze says about the power of the minor that it creates slowly, imperceptibly; that it grows like grass within the boundaries of the major (**Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature**). The minor (Plett's novel) rebels, disturbs, stomps slipshod over the sacred, refuses to understand the accepted conventions of major language and literature, and all in all makes so many *faut pas* in its imitation of major language that it forces the unspoken assumptions of the major language (for our purposes, English) to the foreground.

Both novels have much going for them. Yoder's, with its smooth and

(cont'd on p. 7)