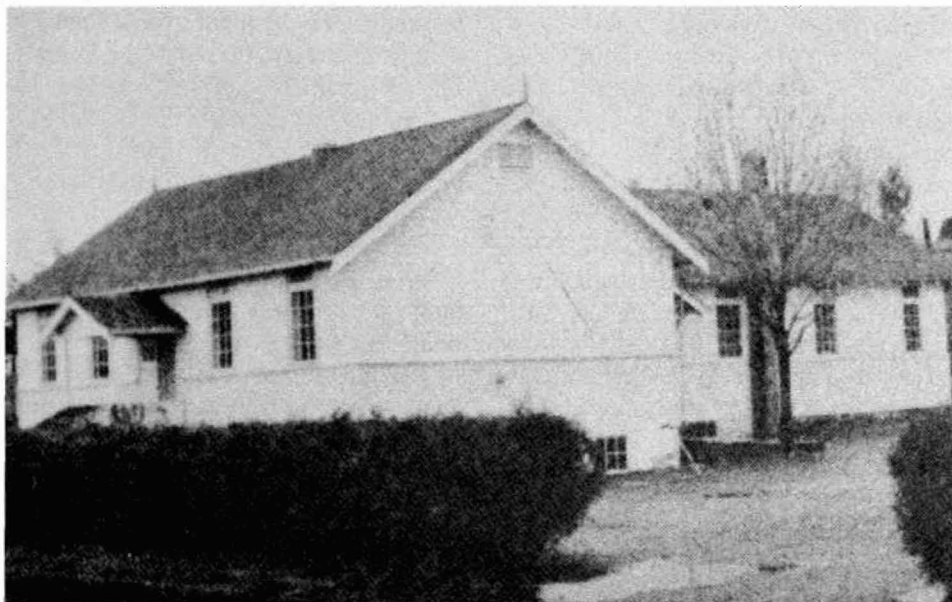


Mennonite Historian

A PUBLICATION OF THE MENNONITE HERITAGE CENTRE and THE CENTRE FOR MB STUDIES IN CANADA



Building used by Mennonite Educational Institution from 1944-1946.

A Brief History of Mennonite Schools in British Columbia

The following article is the first of a series on Mennonite educational institutions which is being planned for upcoming issues of the Mennonite Historian. Each province will be featured in turn. David Giesbrecht has contributed the article on British Columbia Mennonite institutions. Part I, in this issue, features Mennonite high schools. Part II, in the September issue, will feature Mennonite Bible schools.

Early Mennonite Settlements in British Columbia

In February 1928 fifteen families arrived in Yarrow to begin the first permanent Mennonite settlement in BC. During the next several decades the development of local congregations

paralleled the establishment of Bible training centers and Christian high schools for both the United Mennonites (later Conference of Mennonites or COMs) and the Mennonite Brethren (MBs). The Yarrow MB congregation was organized in February 1929 while the first COM congregation began worship services in Sardis the following year. The energy of these young churches was such that by 1936 both denominations had organized into provincial conferences and embarked upon a growth pattern that continues to this day. From these very modest beginnings have emerged BC's fastest growing denomination in membership growth and in number of churches established (MBs),

(cont'd on p. 6)

Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno, 1941 - 1956

PETER LETKEMANN

The years 1941 to 1956 represent the darkest years in the turbulent and tragic history of Germans in the Soviet Union. In this, the last in a three-part series, I offer a brief summary of Mennonite experience during these years. Beginning in the 1930s, hundreds of Mennonite families had been exiled from their villages as "kulaks", and thousands of men (and women!) had been arrested and executed as "enemies of the people." But in the years after 1941, tens of thousands of men, women and children - almost one-half of the entire Mennonite population of European Russia (excluding Orenburg) - were branded as "saboteurs and spies" ¹, stripped of all civil rights and deported from their homelands; a tragic fate which they shared with seven other Soviet ethnic minorities. ²

Within days of the German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941, thousands of Mennonite men and women in Ukraine were mobilized into work battalions to dig trenches, repair roads, even build air strips. Mennonites, and other Soviet-Germans, serving in the Red Army were initially sent to the front lines, where casualties were high; but as suspicion of potential espionage set in, they were all dismissed from the ranks of the Army and sent to work in the labour camps of the *Trudarmia*.

Beginning in July and culminating in early September, hundreds of Mennonite men aged 16-60 were taken from their villages and sent "East" to serve in the *Trudarmia*. Instead of death on the battle field, these men were consigned to a slow and painful death in the mines and forestry camps of Siberia.

In early August, as German forces advanced towards the Dnieper, hundreds of young men and women, even teenaged children, were enlisted to evacuate livestock and machinery to safety in the "East." Many never returned to their homes.

Finally, in mid-August, the order was given for all Germans to evacuate the villages of the Chortitza region. Congestion on the bridges over the Dnieper hampered the execution of this order, but some 1,000

(cont'd on p. 2)

residents from the villages nearest the river - especially Chortitza, Nieder Chortitza, Rosengart and Osterwick - were evacuated. Over 400 were able to hide and eventually return to their homes. By 18 August German troops had occupied all Mennonite villages west of the Dnieper and saved thousands of residents from deportation.

During the two month period of July-August 1941, a total of 1,132 men and women were taken from the villages of the Chortitza and Zagradowka region alone³:

| Jul-Aug 1941 | Taken | Returned |
|--------------|-------|----------|
| Chortitza | 1281 | 450 831 |
| Zagradowka | 460 | 159 301 |
| | | 1132 |

At the same time as residents of the Chortitza region were celebrating their "liberation", German residents of the Crimea were ordered, "for their safety", to prepare for evacuation. In reality, it was merely the final step in a process of ethnic cleansing - the removal of all Soviet Germans from European Russia - which had begun with the "dekulakization" campaign and the mass arrests of the 1930s.⁴

Beginning on 16 August and continuing until mid-October, over 640,000

Germans were forcibly deported from their homes in the Crimea, Ukraine, Caucasus and Volga regions to Siberia or Kazakhstan. Thousands perished along the way from disease and starvation - especially children and the elderly, with deaths estimated at 30%.

In Mennonite villages east of the Dnieper - Molochna, Memrik, Ignatyev, etc. - all remaining able-bodied men aged 16-60 were taken in early September and sent directly to labour camps [*Trudarmia*]. For example, in Grossweide [MOL], 62 men were taken, only 30 survived; in Steinfeld [MOL] 27 men were taken of whom at least 9 died in the camps.

Beginning in early October all remaining Molochna residents were ordered to the nearest train station for immediate deportation. The southern villages, stretching from Altonau to Pastwa were the first to be taken. In Grossweide, 8 elderly men, 84 women and 247 children were loaded onto wagons on 4 October and taken to Stuljnevo train station, their village was then burned to the ground by retreating Soviet forces. In Steinfeld, 150 women and children were also taken to Stuljnevo and shipped to Kazakhstan - some died en-route, and 29 are known to have starved within the first year. In Pordenau, Mariental, Rudnerweide, and Franztal about one half of the population were able to avoid deportation. The quick advance of the German forces, who arrived in the Molochna region on 6 October, spared well over one-half of the villages and their residents from this terrible fate.

In total, an estimated 28,000 Mennonites were "verschleppt" [deported] from July to October, 1941⁵:

| | |
|--|--------|
| West of Dnieper | 1,500 |
| [Chortitza, Zagradowka, Baratov, etc.] | |
| Crimea | 4,000 |
| Molochna | 8,000 |
| Memrik-Ignatyev-Borissovo | 7,000 |
| Caucasus | 4,000 |
| Arkadak / Zentral | 1,500 |
| Volga Region | 2,000 |
| [Am Trakt - 1500, Alexandertal -500] | |
| TOTAL: | 28,000 |

Mennonites in the Orenburg region, in Siberia and in Central Asia were not deported, but for the next 15 years all were virtual prisoners under the *Kommandatura*. They were not allowed to leave their settlements, and consigned to slave labour

in collective farms, factories, lumber and mining camps.

Within weeks after their arrival in Siberia or Kazakhstan, thousands of the deported men and women were again taken from their families and conscripted for slave labour in the camps of the *Trudarmia*. Those who survived were not released until after Stalin's death in 1953.

The final tragedy in this chronology of suffering was the forced repatriation (with Allied assistance!) of some 23,000 Mennonites to the USSR after the end of World War II. The cattle cars were called into duty one last time to transport thousands of tired and frightened refugees from Germany and Poland to the forests of Siberia or the barren steppes of Kazakhstan. Again, hundreds died of cold, disease or starvation (including my own grandmother). The casualty rate is estimated at up to 30%.

Those who survived were forced to labour in mines or forests, virtual prisoners until 1956, when the *Kommandatura* finally came to an end.

No government has ever offered an apology and no officials have ever stood trial for these crimes against humanity. Yet none of the individuals whom I interviewed or corresponded with called for revenge. All seemed willing to forgive, and leave the judgement up to God.

Endnotes

1. These are the words used in the infamous decree of 28 August 1941, announcing the deportation of the Volga Germans. Alfred Eisfeld and Victor Herdt, *Deportation, Sondersiedlung, Arbeitsarmee* (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1954).
2. Robert Conquest, *The Nation Killers - The Soviet Deportation of Nationalities* (London: Macmillan, 1970).
3. Karl Stumpp, *Bericht über das Gebiet Kronau-Orloff* (Berlin, 1943), and *Bericht über das Gebiet Chortitza* (Berlin, 1943).
4. See Terry Martin, "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing," *Journal of Modern History* (December, 1998).
5. These are only approximate figures; full details will be provided in my forthcoming publication: *Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno, A Chronology of Suffering*.

Peter Letkemann is an organist and historian living in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Mennonite Historian is published by the Mennonite Heritage Centre of the Conference of Mennonites in Canada and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies of the Canadian Conference of Mennonite Brethren Churches.

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Genealogy and Family History

by Alf Redekopp

Queries

Goertzen - I am looking for anyone who may know or be related to Suzanna Goertzen, believed to be from the Molotschna colony and probably born between 1860-80. She married Peter Voth and had 5 (known) children: Mary, Suzanna, Helena, Peter and John. Mary married John Fleming in Konteniusfeld in 1924 and emigrated from Russia to Alberta in 1926. All others are believed to have perished in Russia. Descendants would like to know the story. Contact Kathy Sullivan, #8 - 133 West 13th Street North Vancouver BC V7M 1N5 or e-mail: sullivanka@yahoo.com.

Halbstadt Days 1918 - On 16 February 1918 a band of sailors arrived from Sevastopol and terrorized Halbstadt for three days. They seized hostages and killed six innocent people. The dead were a young Russian, the teenager Heinz Johann Willms, Jacob J. Sudermann of Apanlee, teacher Peter Loetkemann, Heinrich Neufeld, and August Hamm. Other hostages were released after five days. They were Wilhelm Martens, Franz Thiessen, Hermann Neufeld, Jacob H. Schroeder, Jacob J. Schroeder, L. Schilling, and a person named Froelich. The leader and perhaps executioner was named Victor Jaworsky. To compile a new history to commemorate this event, I am seeking any and all information about the event — eyewitness reports, oral stories, information about the hostages or about the murderers, and photos. Contact David P. Sudermann, 118 S. Orchard St., Northfield, Minnesota 55057. Telephone: 507-663-1097. E-mail: dsuder@rconnect.com.

Recent Books

William and Diane Unrau. *Heide Family Heritage* (MacGregor, MB : Private publication, 1998) ca. 500 leaves.

This family history and genealogy is presented in a binder with over 500 pages of family information. It is an update

of the first "Heide Family Book" compiled by David D. Heide of Mountain Lake, Minnesota. In the past 26 years this family has held 10 family reunions. It was the most recent "1998 Heide Reunion Committee" that promoted the current volume. Much of the book was produced using the Brothers Keeper computer software. Sections of photocopied photographs were also added. This compilation will be of interest to any one with the "Heide" family name in their genealogy. Contact: William and Diane Unrau, Box 718, MacGregor, MB R0H 0R0. (See MHC Volume 4699)

Helmut A. Epp. *Selected Genealogies: Descendants of Gottlieb Boese (b. ca. 1790)* (Fonthill, ON : Private publication, 1998) 34 leaves plus chart.

This compilation begins with the family of Gottlieb Boese born around 1790, who had a 9 children from three marriages. It includes the data from a 1931 chart compiled by J.A. Boese of Springfield, South Dakota with substantial additional information on the descendants of granddaughter Katharina Boese (1853-1937) who married Jacob H. Epp (1850-1919), and grandson Martin Boese (1888-1973). A reproduction of the 1931 chart is included with corrections and new explanations, particularly with regards to the geographical location codes of the chart. Contact: Helmut A. Epp, 7 Concord St., Box 1016, Fonthill, Alberta L0S 1E0.

Johann Epp. *Gedenke des ganzen Weges...: Die Geschichte der Familien Epp, Fröse, Unger, Lepp u.a.* (Lage : Logos Verlag, 1998) 476 pp.

This work is the culmination of over 35 years of research the author. The Epp family is traced back to a Peter Epp born around 1690 in Danzig. In one of the chapters the author presents the history of the villages of Rosental, Einlage, Kronsweide and Andreasfeld including various lists, tables and reproductions of

some primary sources. The book also includes maps, village plans, genealogical charts, photographs and a name index. Contact: Logos Verlag, Ehlenbrucher Strasse 96, 32791 Lage, Germany.

Menno Martens, compiler and editor. *Footprints of Jacob and Susie Martens* (Swift Current, SK : MartensHouse Publishing, 1998) 515 pp.

This compilation consists of excerpted material from the writings of Jacob H. Martens (1904-1980) and his wife Susie Nickel (1904-1998). Jacob and Susie were both children of immigrant families who came from Russia during around the turn of the last century (1902 and 1904) and took up homesteads in Saskatchewan. They were married in 1928 and farmed at Main Centre until 1973 and then retired to Swift Current. This book includes translations of many family letters, reproduction of various documents such as the application for a homestead, certificate of Canadian citizenship and Bible School Diploma, photographs of pioneer life, diary excerpts and a listing of their descendants and the descendants of their siblings. Contact: Menno Martens, 838 10th Avenue N.E., Swift Current, SK S9H 2T7

Russian Archival Collection

Both the Mennonite Heritage Centre and the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies (Winnipeg) have recently received translations and translation summaries of the Russian content on reels 1 to 5 of the St. Petersburg Microfilming Project (29 reels filmed in St. Petersburg in 1996-97). Some of the content relates to the migration of Prussian Mennonites to Russia between 1788 and 1828. The translations were done by Andrey Ivanov, a student at Fresno Pacific University from Zaporozhye, Ukraine and received courtesy of the Center for MB Studies, Fresno, California.

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.

Summer Assistance

This summer the Heritage Centre has received a number of grants enabling the hiring of two students and a contract worker to work on processing collections of documents.

Through the **Summer Career Placement Program**, a division of **Human Resources Development Canada**, Aileen Dyck was hired to work on data entry as well as processing donated materials. Aileen is a university student from the Charleswood Mennonite Church. Aileen will be working at the Heritage Centre for ten weeks.

Back for a few weeks this summer is Iris Hiebert. Iris worked in the Heritage Centre last summer and has since graduated from the Department of Education. In late June Iris will be traveling to Paraguay where she will be teaching grade three in the Asuncion Christian Academy--an inter-denominational school started by MCC workers. Funds for hiring Iris were provided by a private donor.

Also returning from last year is Conrad Stoesz. Conrad is working on a redescription project whereby the Mennonite Heritage Centre *Inventory and Guide to Archival Holdings*, produced in 1988, will be reworked into current format and archival standards enabling it to be more easily placed on the Heritage Centre web site. Finances for this project are provided by the **Canadian Council of Archives**, a section of **Canadian Heritage**.



Conrad Stoesz, Aileen Dyck, Iris Hiebert

We are grateful to have received these grants. We appreciate the dedicated efforts of the people we have hired for this summer.

Anabaptist Display to Come to Heritage Centre

A group of young people from the U.S. have created a large visual display on early Anabaptist/Hutterian history which will be coming to the Mennonite Heritage Centre July 13 to 18. This display will be set up in the auditorium of the Canadian Mennonite Bible College. It will be open during the day 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. as well as selected evenings.

Describing the rise of Anabaptism in south Germany, the display features wall length murals of the regions such as the Tyrol. Included are brief biographical sketches of leaders such as Felix Mantz, Georg Blaurock, Jacob Hutter and Peter Riedeman. Unique is a life-size model of a dungeon among other creative displays.

Following the week-long showing in Winnipeg the display will move to South Dakota where it will be set up in the Freeman area. The planners hope that the display will help viewers gain a renewed understanding of Anabaptist history.

Through Cuban Eyes

Canadians seldom see Cuba through any eyes other than politicians and tourists. The Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery hopes to change that beginning June 25, 1999. Curator Ray Dirks has announced that from June 25 through September 4, 1999 an exhibition entitled "Through Cuban Eyes: Artists, Art, Faith and Culture" will be hosted at the MHC Gallery.

Sponsored by the Martin Luther King Centre in Havana, Cubana Airlines, MCC Manitoba, Carisun Travel of Winnipeg and the National Association of Writers and Artists of Cuba this exhibition of some 50 pieces of art will run concurrently with the Pan American Games this summer. Curator Ray Dirks notes that, "This is a tremendous opportunity to highlight the real people and culture of Cuba, including a glimpse into the world of faith in Cuba, through the eyes and talents of its artists."

Few Canadians know about Cuban art and artists. Even fewer know anything at

all about religious expression in Cuba. Over the last number of months the international news has broadcast an increasing number of stories out of Cuba regarding religion in general. "Besides principally highlighting the art and culture of the country," Dirks notes that, "We would like to give Cubans a further opportunity to tell the world something about religious life and expression in Cuba."

The exhibition will be accompanied by photo and text panels. The photographs will show the artists at work and general scenes of daily life in Cuba; revealing work, family, faith and education. By seeing these images the public will better understand, respect and appreciate where the art is coming from.

Ray Dirks traveled to Cuba on May 3 and spent two weeks visiting artists and collecting art for the exhibition. The opening program of the exhibition will be at 7:30 PM on Friday, June 25. The public is invited to attend.

Touring Art Program

The Mennonite Heritage Centre Gallery announces the beginning of its new "Touring Art Program". Art reflecting themes of worship, heritage and scripture will be created or acquired to tour church sanctuaries across Canada. The first pieces have been selected from the Peter Martens exhibition. Peter has recently concluded a very popular exhibition at the Heritage Centre Gallery. These three works sensitively reflect key Biblical concepts. Accompanying the art are suggested scripture passages and worship aids created by CMBC professors Adelia Neufled Wiens and Waldemar Janzen.

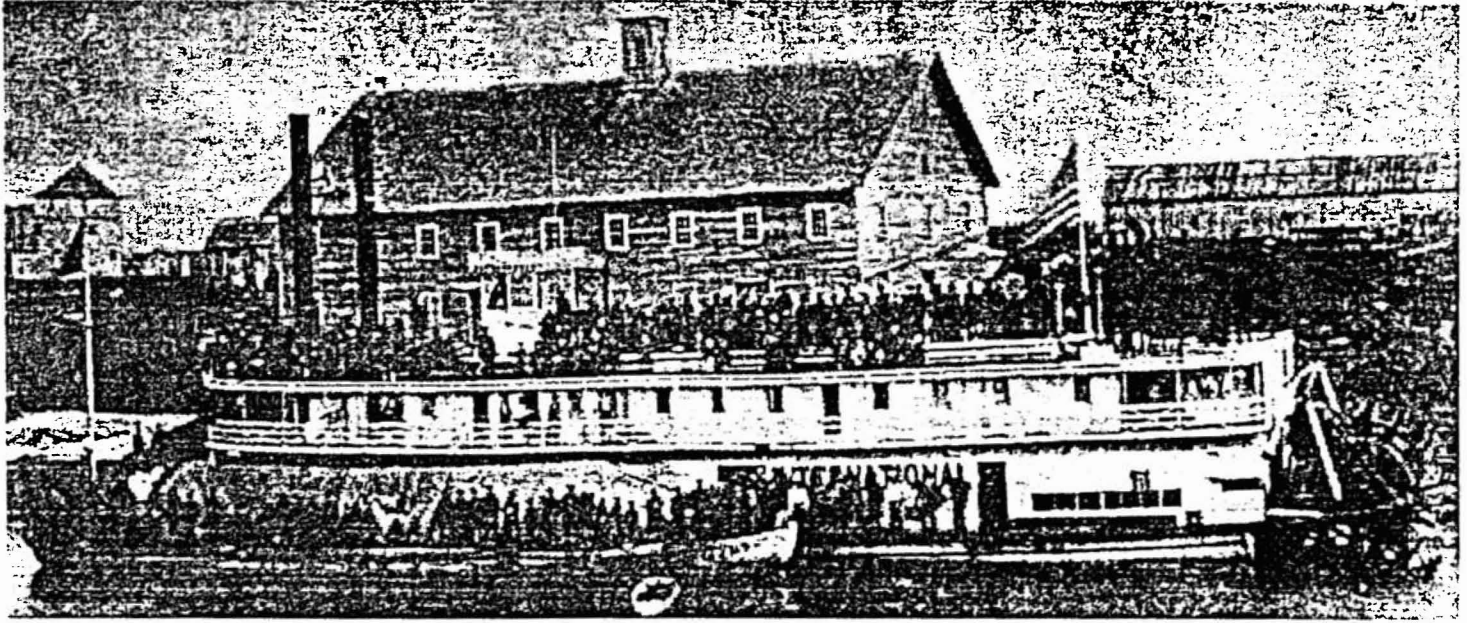
Congregations may use the art for one month without cost. The only cost is that the congregation must repack the art in the specially designed crate and pay the cost of sending the art to the next congregation. Congregations interested in receiving art should make arrangements by contacting the Mennonite Heritage Centre at (204) 888-6781.

The first congregation to receive touring art will be the Osler Mennonite church.

The next set of paintings to go on tour in early fall will be three images of Christ created by Gallery Curator Ray Dirks.

DON'T MISS THE BOAT!

August 1, 1999 at the Forks - Winnipeg



The SS International arriving at "The Forks", July 31, 1874. Courtesy of Manitoba Provincial Archives.

The years 1999 and 2000 represent the 125th anniversaries of the Mennonites' arrival in Manitoba (1874 for the East Reserve and 1875 for the West Reserve). You and your friends are invited to the Forks port on Sunday, August 1, 1999, at 8 am to commemorate this event. Come and witness the reenactment of this historic event. The worship service will include singing and expressions of thoughts and feelings these brave people wrestled with as they began a new life.

After the service, descendants of the 1870s migration will have the opportunity to board the Paddlewheel where a group picture will be taken. This picture will replicate the photo taken on July 31, 1874 as the Mennonites stepped off the *International* at the Forks port.

Time: 8:00 am, Sunday, August 1, 1999

Place: The Forks port, Winnipeg, Manitoba

To Bring: Lawn chairs, camera, friends

Who Can Come: Anyone and everyone

In Case of Rain: The service will be held on board the Paddlewheel

For Further Information Contact: Ken Reddig at 888-6781
Sponsored By: The Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society

Historical Commission Contemplates the Future

The Historical Commission of the Mennonite Brethren Church met in Fresno, CA, April 23-24. In addition to the usual agenda, the Commission discussed the implications of the dissolution of the General Conference (MB) for the Commission. The delegates at the convention in Wichita in July will vote on whether the General Conference is to be dissolved. If so, the Commission plans to meet in October to plan for the future. The consensus was that a new structure could emerge on a binational basis with funding and membership coming from the two national conferences. Presently the Commission operates under the mandate of the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary in Fresno.

Mennonite Brethren Choir?

The March issue of the *Mennonite Historian* included a photograph of a choir which the editors presumed might be from Lichtfelde. We received several responses, for which we are grateful. Ted Regehr suggested the identity of several individuals and suggested we also contact Anne Kornelson of Coaldale to see whether her elderly mother might be able to identify the choir. It appears likely that the photo relates to Lichtfelde, although Ted Regehr rightly states that the church there was Allianz rather than Mennonite Brethren. There was also agreement on the identity of several individuals (John J. Dick, 2nd row, 4th from left, and Susan Klassen, 1st from right, long white dress). The identities of others are uncertain.

Significant Archival Records Obtained from Saskatchewan

The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies recently acquired important records from several southern Saskatchewan Mennonite Brethren congregations. These records had been in storage at the Bridgeway Community Church in Swift Current and at the Herbert Mennonite Brethren Church. Included were membership registers and congregational minutes from several churches that are no longer in existence, such as Flowing Well, Reinfeld and



Franz W. Martens (1869-1942)

Greenfarm, as well as those of the Swift Current and Herbert congregations. Most of the early records of these congregations had been microfilmed in 1978.

The most interesting and significant acquisition was the membership register of the Blumenort Mennonite Brethren congregation. Little information has been available about this congregation thus far, although there is a brief reference in the *Mennonite Encyclopedia*. It is not listed in any of the tables in Frank Epp's *Mennonites in Canada* (Vol. 2).¹ J. A. Toews mentions it briefly in *A History of the Mennonite Brethren Church* (p. 163). It was sometimes referred to as the Blumenhof MB Church, but the register clearly identifies it as Blumenort.

The Blumenort congregation was established south of Swift Current by Russlaender immigrants on August 22, 1926 under the leadership of Franz Martens. The church register lists 19 charter individuals who joined the church on that date. At least 14 individuals left the congregation to join the Swift Current congregation on August 3, 1934. The Swift Current congregation (Sykes Farm) had been organized less than a year earlier on November 23, 1933. Thus the Blumenort congregation was virtually the parent congregation of the Swift Current congregation. The Blumenort congregation became extinct in 1948. The last members transferred to Reinfeld in 1948, a congregation which also became extinct less than twenty years later.

Franz Martens, the leader, was the



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founder and elder of the Ohrloff (Altonau) Evangelical Mennonite Church (1907) in Zagradowka, Ukraine. The family left for Canada in 1924 and soon settled in Blumenort where they farmed. In 1942 Martens moved to Kitchener, Ontario where he died in January, 1943. The Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies has a journal by Franz Martens which contains brief entries for the period from 1869 to 1934, as well as a family register.

Endnote

1. See Table 22, p. 210 of Frank Epp, *Mennonites in Canada*, Vol. 2. The table lists Blumenhof, which was not far from Blumenort, but it is not clear whether the reference is to another Mennonite immigrant congregation in Blumenhof. The Reinfeld congregation does not appear in the table either.

Recent Accessions

The following are a small selection of some items recently acquired by the Centre.

1. *Liederperlen* (8 volume set) published in Russia between 1895 and 1912 and recently rebound. This set was used by Peter Koslowsky Sr., (father to Peter Koslowsky, the late Winnipeg singer) both in Russia and later in Niverville, Manitoba. Donated by Irene Enns, Edmonton.
2. *Memoirs of Aron Warkentin* (1903-) written in the former U.S.S.R. between 1967 and 1977 totally 710 pages. Donated by Johannes Reimer.
3. "Autobiography of our Father and Grandfather Heinrich Unruh Teacher, and Preacher and Elder of the Halbstaedter Mennonite Church (congregation) South Russia", originally written in 1917-1918 and consisting of 35 pages. (Received from Conrad Grebel College, Waterloo, Ont.)
4. Bertha Klassen Collection of Concert Programs from 1981-1997 consisting of 7 binders. This collection represents events in and around Winnipeg in which Bertha was a performer, organizer, or attender. (Donated by Bertha Klassen, Winnipeg)

Mennonite Schools

(cont'd from p.1)

the largest local congregation (Northview Community Church), the largest independent school, (Mennonite Educational Institute) and the largest Bible College (Columbia Bible College). It is the strong congregational support base which was and is critical to the maintenance of Mennonite schools and affirms that in Mennonite thinking the local church bears a vested responsibility for the training of young people.

MB/COM Membership in BC

| Year | Total | Year | Total |
|------|-----------|------|--------|
| 1931 | 300 (est) | 1971 | 8495 |
| 1941 | 443 | 1981 | 12,491 |
| 1951 | 4653 | 1990 | 15,352 |
| 1961 | 7046 | 1998 | 20,416 |

Although Bible schools have to a considerable extent preoccupied BC Mennonite educational endeavors, Christian day schooling has also been a major concern. In both Yarrow and Abbotsford, the church community endorsed the need for Bible school as well as high school education, and initially in both communities, these two kinds of schools operated out of the same buildings and began operations within a year of each other.

Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute: In Yarrow a *Schulkommittee* (school committee) under the chairmanship of J. A. Harder began to plan for a Christian high school in the early 1940s, no small undertaking given that the country was in the midst of a devastating war and that this Mennonite community was already operating a Bible school. Chilliwack District Provincial educational authorities only reluctantly granted such approval contingent on conditions that the prescribed curriculum was to be taught, that teachers be paid on the Chilliwack salary scale, that compulsory attendance was to be expected of students and that no public money be spent on this school.

Official discouragements and very limited economic circumstances notwithstanding, Sharon Mennonite Collegiate Institute began instruction on September 24th, 1945 with six full-time teachers and 150 students. In view of the

promising beginnings, the Greendale and East Chilliwack MB churches now aligned themselves with this school, although as was soon evident, with less than sustainable enthusiasm. A new school building was erected and an elaborate transportation network was set up to bus in students from the outlying communities.

The joy of this new school was to be short-lived. The massive collapse of the raspberry industry in 1948 together with a devastating flood in that year and the growing disenchantment of the East Chilliwack and Greendale churches mitigated against the survival of SMCI. When in the Spring of 1949 it became evident that the three churches could no longer carry the operational costs, the school was closed and the building sold to the Chilliwack School District.

Sharon Mennonite Collegiate: The death of SMCI did, however, not kill the vision for Christian education in Yarrow. Although the Chilliwack authorities had tried to insist that another private school should not be attempted in the district, by 1952 members of the congregation began a second high school, called Sharon Mennonite Collegiate. Once again this community gathered its resources and commenced building a new school, together with a fine playing field and a gymnasium. This school emphasized a Christ-centered education and considered its primary mission to give its students "a practical Christian missionary outlook on life." While the beginning seemed promising, the base of financial support as well as the source of students was much too restrictive to ensure its survival. By 1969 it had become painfully obvious that the central concerns of this faith community to pass on to their children "the thinking, the spirit, the mind and the way of our forefathers" could not be sustained. Accordingly SMC was closed and the building sold to the Christian Reformed denomination.

Mennonite Educational Institute: The vision for a Christian high school in Abbotsford must be credited to the South Abbotsford MB Church and its beloved teacher, F. C. Thiessen. The question this church asked was how much the children were worth. Of great concern to the church was the spiritual nurture of young people together with the inculcation of a Mennonite heritage.

After some difficult negotiations with

the provincial authorities and an agreement in which the Bible school and the high school would share the same building, the Mennonite Educational Institute opened for instruction in the 1944-45 school year with 43 students in grades 9 to 11. Following such an auspicious beginning several Abbotsford area Mennonite churches joined the MEI Society. It was now possible to purchase prime property near the center of Clearbrook and commence construction of a separate high school building. The new MEI was occupied in December 1946 amidst euphoric community support. At the dedication ceremony both the building and its new occupants were celebrated as "frisch, frei, froh und fromm." (rejuvenated, free, happy and pious). With a succession of able principals such as I. J. Dyck, David Neuman, Bill Wiebe, Hugo Friesen, Wally Sawatsky and Leo Regher, the school has continued to flourish.

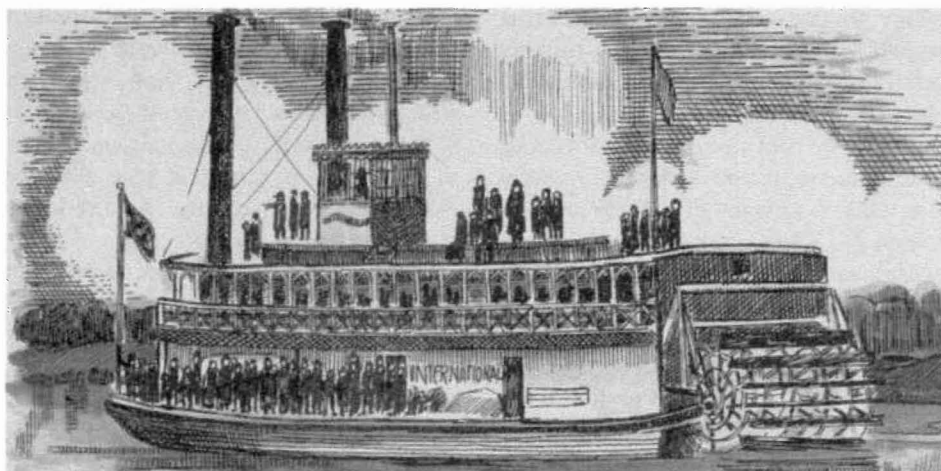
In 1976 overcrowded and dilapidating facilities required serious attention. With generous assistance from the Friends of the MEI Society, some choice property was purchased in Abbotsford and a state of the art building erected. At the time of writing (1999) MEI is the largest independent school in BC with over 1100 students in elementary and high school, and it is again anticipating expansion.

MEI has earned an enviable reputation academically, as evidenced by numerous provincial scholarships students have received. Given its student population compared to some of the largest provincial high schools, MEI has achieved notable athletic success as well. In recent years both senior and junior boys and girls basketball teams have captured provincial basketball championships. At the same time the school has endeavored to maintain its Christian identity. Chapels, spiritual emphasis weeks and student mission trips are a regular part of the school cycle.

David Giesbrecht is librarian at Columbia Bible College, Abbotsford, BC.

The "Turkestan Mennonite"

The March issue of the *Mennonite Historian* carried an article by V.G. Wiebe on "An Unknown Turkestan Mennonite." According to Ida Toews, this Mennonite was none other than Herman Jantzen, whose story is told in *Im Wilden Turkestan*.



SS International 1874

1874 Reenactment

To celebrate the 125th anniversary of Russian Mennonites coming to western Canada, a number of events are being planned this year. The first will take place at the Forks (junction of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers) on August 1, 1999, exactly 125 years and one day after Mennonites first landed at the Forks.

The event will begin as those in attendance will gather in the port area. At 8:00 AM the Paddlewheel Princess will enter the port and dock. A group of period dressed (1874) Mennonites will step ashore. A number of them will briefly tell their story of why they have left Russia and why they have chosen to come to Canada. After a number of stories have been told a minister will lead them in a prayer and they will break into song. Later another minister will give a brief meditation. The one-hour worship service will end with group singing. In case of rain the service will be held on board the Paddlewheel Queen.

Immediately after the service descendants of 1870s immigrants will be able to board the Paddlewheel and have a group picture taken. This picture will replicate (125 years later) the photograph taken on July 31, 1874 as the Mennonites stepped off the International steamship at the Forks port.

In addition to this service, and the group photograph, the Forks is providing space in their main building for a display on Mennonites coming to Canada. Breakfast will be available from local vendors before 8:00 AM and following the service. People in attendance are also encouraged to participate in the festivities

planned later in the morning at the Mennonite Heritage Village in Steinbach.

It should also be noted that on October 1 & 2 the Manitoba Mennonite Historical Society and the Chair in Mennonite Studies will co-host a symposium entitled, "1874 Revisited." Scholars and local historians will present papers on topics relating to the coming of the Mennonites in the 1870s. The keynote speaker will be Dr. John Warkentin who wrote his landmark dissertation on "The Mennonite Settlements of southern Manitoba."

Apocalypticism and Millennialism Conference

A conference responding to renewed interest in issues related to millennial and apocalyptic thought is being hosted by Bluffton College on August 8-10, 1999. It is entitled, "Apocalypticism and Millennialism: Shaping a Believers Church Eschatology for the 21st Century." Keynote speakers will be Paul Boyer, University of Wisconsin, and James VanderKam, University of Notre Dame. There will also be various other speakers and respondents. For more information contact Loren L. Johns at 419-358-3280, e-mail, johnsl@bluffton.edu. Registration materials are also available on the web site at <http://www.bluffton.edu/~johnsl/ApocMill.htm>

Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta Revived

The Mennonite Historical Society of Alberta has been revived during this past year. It issued its first *Newsletter*

(Second Series, Vol. I, #1) in October, 1998 and the second (Vol. I, #2) in March, 1999. The first annual meeting was held November 14, 1998 in Coaldale. The executive consists of Henry Goerzen as the chair of the society, Peter Penner vice-chair, Judi Rempel secretary, Harold Friesen treasurer, and David Wiebe-Neufeld. The last report indicated a membership of 40 persons.

Ontario Happenings

by Sam Steiner

Three congregational histories are currently being written. Alice Koch is writing the history of Nith Valley Mennonite Church, Laureen Harder is writing the Stirling Avenue story and Karl Kessler is writing the history of Erb Street Mennonite.

The earliest Mennonite settlement in the Grand River Valley in the Cambridge area (Hagey/Preston, Wanner) is planning bicentennial celebrations for the settlement in the year 2000. Also looking forward to bicentennial celebrations is First Mennonite of Vineland. In 2001 it will celebrate the distinction of being the first organized Mennonite Church in Canada.

The Mennonite Historical Society of Ontario is holding its annual meeting on June 12 in Markham, Ontario. The focus of the meeting is on the early history of MCC Ontario through its earlier organization the Non-Resistant Relief Organization. Guest speaker at the event is Lucille Marr who has been contracted to write the history of MCC Ontario. Publication of her book is anticipated in 2001.

The Detweiler Meetinghouse, the last Mennonite stone meetinghouse in Waterloo County, (constructed in the 1850s) has been undergoing reconstruction during the past few years. It will be completed this summer. A dedication/celebration service will be held Sunday afternoon, September 26. Guest speaker for the event will be John Ruth of Harleysville, Pennsylvania. The Detweiler meetinghouse is in the small town of Roseville, which was at the edge of the Mennonite community.

The Mennonite Archives of Ontario plans to begin processing the Frank H. Epp papers in the fall. Linda Huebert Hecht will undertake that project with the help of a variety of grants received for this purpose.

Book Notes

A sequel to the book *Prairie Pioneer* has just been published by the John W. Dueck Book Committee. Entitled *Prairie Pilgrims* this book consists of recollections of three members of the Dueck Family, Peter L., John W. and Maria Kroeker Dueck. Spanning both the Russian and early Manitoba scene the book provides some fascinating glimpses into early Manitoba life during this year of the 125th anniversary. The 255-page book is available from Mennonite Books for \$22.49.

Set in the Joseph Schneider Haus in Waterloo county Ontario, *The Tramp Room* is a young adult fiction story by Nancy-Lou Patterson. Set against the background of Mennonite life in the mid-nineteenth century, the book celebrates ordinary rituals from cookie cutting to flax breaking. The book is published by Friends of the Joseph Schneider Haus and Wilfrid Laurier University Press. The book retails for \$14.95 and is available in many bookstores.

Tracing the story of an inter-Mennonite mission that has existed for most of this century is the recently published *CIM/AIMM: A Story of Vision, Commitment and Grace* written by Jim Bertsche. The author reviews the colonial period of the Belgian Congo and then traces the exploding events of the post-independence era in Congo/Zaire as well as expansion into southern and western Africa. The book can be ordered from Africa Inter-Mennonite Mission, 59466 CR 113, Elkhart, Indiana 46517. Cost is \$35.00 US.

More information is becoming available on the story of Mennonites imprisoned during the Stalinist period in the Soviet Union. A recent book *Aber wo sollen wir hin* describes the experiences of these people through the letters they wrote during their imprisonment. Edited by Julia Hildebrandt, Heinrich Klassen and Gerhard Woelk the 300-page book is available from Verlag Hirtenstimme in Frankenthal, Germany. No price is given.

Summarizing some 20 years of research and writing on the story of the Kleine Gemeinde Mennonites, Delbert Plett has written *Saints and Sinners: The Kleine Gemeinde in Imperial Russia 1812-1875*. A more extensive review will

follow in our next issue. The book is available for \$20.00 from Crossway Publications, Box 1960, Steinbach, Manitoba R0A 2A0.

Not to be confused with the Winnipeg Peter Letkemann who writes elsewhere in this issue is another Peter Letkeman of Robson, BC. In his recently published book entitled *As I Remember It* he recounts the story of his family who moved to BC in the early part of this century. Peter's father, also called Peter, brought his young family to Renata, BC in 1917 and settled in the Arrow Lake valley, north of present day Castlegar. There in the heart of this mountain region they carved out a life for themselves in true pioneer fashion.

As a person who made a living by hunting, trapping, fishing, fruit farming and numerous other jobs, he writes in quick anecdotal style that jumps from topic to topic in rapid fashion. What readers will find of interest is that this community was comprised of a number of Mennonite families who joined the local Swedenborgian "New Church." Peter has a brief chapter devoted to this church. It is of interest that throughout the book he makes no reference to Mennonite roots, though many of the people mentioned have Mennonite names and come from communities such as Rosthern or Waldheim, Saskatchewan.

The book covers events such as the Dirty Thirties, army life, farming, fire-fighting, fishing and travel. It is full of everyday accounts and should be of interest to social historians. The 191-page book is available from the author for \$20.00 including postage. To order please write Peter Letkeman, Box 132, Robson, BC, V0G 1X0.

Just as we are going to press we have received a copy of *Mennonite & Nazi? Attitudes Among Mennonite Colonists in Latin America, 1933 - 1945*. It is written by John D. Thiesen of Newton, Kansas. John, as many of our readers will know, is the archivist of the Mennonite Library and Archives at Bethel College. The book describes this sensitive and emotional issue as it developed among some Mennonites in Latin America. The tension they felt between faith, culture and politics during the Hitler era in Germany was very real. As Cornelius J. Dyck has noted, "Christians in every nation and culture have faced this problem since the time of the Roman Empire. This book will surely stimulate

readers to reflect on their own synthesis of faith and politics." As volume 37 in the *Studies in Anabaptist and Mennonite History* series this 330-page book retails for \$28.00 and is available from Pandora Press in Kitchener or from Herald Press in Scottdale, Pennsylvania. A full-length review will be in our next issue.

In recent years a number of books on Mennonites in Russia and the former Soviet Union and about sixteenth-century Anabaptists have been published by Logos Verlag in Lage, Germany. Most of these are by Johannes Reimer, who was visiting professor at Concord College in Winnipeg in 1998-99. Books by Reimer include *Menno Simons: Ein Leben im Dienst* and *Kein Anderes Fundament: Beitrage zum Menno-Simons-Symposium* published in 1996. This latter book, edited by Reimer, consists of fourteen essays on the 500-year anniversary of the birth of Menno Simons by various authors, all from Europe with the exception of George Epp. Other books by Reimer include *Auf der Suche nach Identitaet: Russlanddeutsche zwischen Baptisten und Mennoniten nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg* (1996), *Seine letzten Worte waren ein Lied: Martin Thielmann, Leben und Wirken der Kirgisen Missionars* (1997), and *Bis an die Enden Sibiriens: Aus dem Leben und Wirken des Ostjaken Missionars Johann Peters* (1998). Most of these books are available from the Centre for Mennonite Brethren Studies in Winnipeg.

Der Bote Index (Volume 3)

Now Available

This 372-page volume covers the years 1964-1976 during which Peter B. Wiens was the principal editor. Helene S. Friesen is the *Index* editor, working under the auspices of the staff of Mennonite Heritage Centre.

The *Index* comes in coil-bound, 8½ x 11 inch format and sells for \$30 plus taxes and shipping.

A limited number of copies of the earlier volumes is still available: volume 1, 1924 - 1947, at \$12, and volume 2, 1948 - 1963 at \$30. A special price of \$60 for the set of three volumes applies while stocks last. All prices include GST.

BOOKSTORE FOR SALE

Mennonite Books And...More, a mail order house, with a retail outlet in Winnipeg, with total sales of \$138,000 (1998). Immediately available; price negotiable. Call Gil at 204-668-77475 (days) or 204-669-4429 (eve).